

The Guardians of the City

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Rabbi Yehudah the Prince sent Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Yossi and Rabbi Ami to tour the towns of Eretz Israel to establish there teachers and sages. They came to one place and found there, neither teachers nor sages. Thus, they spoke unto them: "bring us the guardians of the city". They went and brought the policemen of the city. The Rabbi's asked: "are these the guardians of the city? nay, these are the destroyers of the city". "Who than are the guardians of the city?" - "The teachers and sages" they answered, for the Scripture says (Psalms 126): *If the Lord build nor a house, in vain have its builders labored for it.* (Yerushalmi, Chagiga, Ch. 1, 7).

This Talmudical episode, repeated several times in the Midrashim, has certainly inspired the way of thought of the Jewish people. The Sages of Israel were always regarded as the true "Guardians of the City" and it is they who have guarded it throughout the generations.

"Guardians of the City" or, in the language of the above Talmudical quotation, "Neturei Karta" - in the spirit of this quotation, is also the name that has been chosen by a movement in Jerusalem, and here the stress is both on the "guardians" and on the City - the Holy City of Jerusalem, of course.

To many, "Neturei Karta" is a synonym for the bogey man. To others, the name conveys the idea of fanaticism, bigotry, and what-not. To others

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He is a linguist of renown and has translated some of the writings of Rabbi Hirsch from German into Hebrew, the essays of Nathan Birnbaum, the poems of de Haan from German into English, and the Tanya from Hebrew into Yiddish.

He has traveled widely on the European Continent, including Turkey, and also in Latin-America. In 1946 he visited many of the D.P. camps, and was associated there with active rescue work. He was a co-founder of the first branch of the Agudist Youth Movement in Haifa in 1938.

Uriel Zimmer has had the closest personal contacts with many of the sages and thinkers of independent Orthodoxy, and is persona grata with many of the Gedolim of our days. He is closely affiliated with the activities of the "Chabad" (Lubavitch) movement. He was a close friend of the late Rabbi Moshe Blau, Dr. Isaac Breuer and Dr. Pinchas Kohn. He was born in Vienna in 1921 and settled in Jerusalem in 1934. He is the United Nations correspondent of several newspapers.

again, it is the Enemy No. 1 of the Jewish People and of the Holy Land. Very few, however, are even aware of the meaning of the name, and less still are those who have any amount of actual knowledge about the movement carrying that name.

"Neturei Karta" can be fully understood only against the background of the picturesque scene of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem, in turn, has something in it that cannot be conveyed in words, that cannot even be grasped by seeing, but that must be lived in to be understood. It is therefore only an external description that can be expected here.

It is a well-known rule of logic that every definition consists of two parts: statement of the group to which the object belongs, and description of the specific characteristic by which the particular object of definition differs from the other parts of its group. In an attempt to find a definition for "Neturei Karta," therefore, let us try to follow the same narrowing-down pattern, and subsequently dwell upon each of the two parts.

Neturei Karta is part of the non-Zionist trend within Orthodoxy, and it is the Jerusalem brand of that trend. In other words: the specific trait of Neturei Karta consists of its local Jerusalemite color. This coloring marks it out from the far larger trend of which Neturei Karta is part. Let us therefore first present the trend as a whole, and later refer to its specific Jerusalem brand.

Orthodoxy and Zionism

Opposition to the modern Zionist movement on the part of important segments of orthodox Rabbinic leadership is as old as the Zionist movement itself. Some orthodox quarters nowadays may not feel very comfortable about it, but it is a fact that while some segments of Orthodoxy supported Zionism from the first, some outstanding Rabbinic personalities ranked foremost among the opponents of Zionism from its inception, and this opposition was shared throughout the Jewish world, across the boundaries of Chasidim, Misnagdim, etc. - Rabbi Chaim of Brisk, the Lubavitcher rebbes, the Rabbinic and Chasidic leaders of Poland, Galicia and Hungary, the rabbis of German Orthodoxy were all equally opposed to Zionism from its very beginning.

This opposition was voiced in various styles and versions, varying according to individual and local background. They all regarded the philosophy of Zionism as diametrically opposed to the most basic principles of Judaism. This author has made an attempt elsewhere* at analyzing this ideology in detail. Space does not permit more than a brief summary of its principles here:

Secular Zionism or Jewish Nationalism represents an attempt at transforming the Jewish people to a new identity, to "a nation among the nations" instead of "the Chosen People" of G-d. Hence, all the basic definitions become forcibly molded into the pattern of non-Jewish nationalism. Torah, the soul, *the raison deter*, the condition *sine qua non* for the existence of the Jewish people, nay of the entire world becomes a "religion" which, under modern concepts, is the private domain of each individual. Eretz Israel, the Holy Land, becomes the "national home", and the State or - in former years - the striving to achieve the "Judenstaat", is also part of the general trend of secularization and transformation of the hallowed idea of Messianic redemption. This trend, therefore, is seen as diametrically opposed to Torah, hence the fierce objection to Zionism. No one denies that there have been other orthodox Jews who - with more or less justification - held different views and some even regarded Zionism - and later the State of Israel - as "the dawn of the Messianic era." It is not the intention here to go into that controversy, but it remains a fact that there has always been an orthodox anti-Zionist view, and that such views have been adhered to by very outstanding Rabbinic leaders.

When the State of Israel came into being, very few among these high-ranking orthodox leaders, if any, changed their views. The State of Israel being the realization, the implementation of Zionism, there could be very little done to change the objection in principle. Neither did the reality of the State warrant any such change of view or disprove the original negative attitude towards Zionism. There could, in the view of this trend, be only a question of what tactics should be applied, in light of the fact that what had formerly been an organization built on voluntary membership has now become a State with means of law-enforcement, etc.

On the other hand, it is a fact that very few among these Rabbinic leaders have spoken up for their own view since the inception of the State of Israel. Whether the reason was a lack of courage, a fear of the loss of funds for the institutions led by them, or otherwise - the fact remains. This has created the erroneous belief among the masses of Jews that non-Zionism on the orthodox side is confined to a small sect of fanatics. To put it very mildly and carefully, non-Zionism in Orthodoxy is still a quite powerful trend with a considerable following, although there may be differences of opinion as to the practical steps to be taken in demonstrating that view. This, in general outlines, is the world-picture of which Neturei Karta, basically, constitutes a local cell.

The "Old Yishuv"

Let us now turn to the local Jerusalem scene. Many people take Neturei Karta as synonymous with the "Old Yishuv." This is very inaccurate. There are many active followers of Neturei Karta who could not easily be classified as being part of the "Old Yishuv," and there are lots of members of the "Old Yishuv" who are in no way "Neturei Karta." Yet, one might say with some accuracy that Neturei Karta considers itself as the defender and spokesman of the Old Yishuv, and it is on the soil of the Old Yishuv that Neturei Karta came into being, and it is only, against this background that it can be understood.

The Old Yishuv is the realization of a movement which came into being some 150 years ago, a movement which swept throughout European Jewry of that era. The sources of the movement are to be sought entirely in the spiritual field; although the turmoil of the Napoleonic era may, have had some indirect bearing on the environments in which it was born. The disciples of the Gaon of Vilna, the disciples and followers of the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid of Mezritch - headed by Rabbi Mendel of Vitebsk the adherents of the Chasam Sofer of Pressburg, sent groups of selected scholars and pious men to dwell in the Holy Land and devote their lives there to the study and pursuit of the Holy Torah.

There was no outward stimulus, no general movement of Jewish emigration existing at that time in Central or Eastern Europe. The journey to the shores of the Holy Land entailed many perils, taking many months and often years. The homes these emigrants left behind were snug and warm, however modest. The new land was a harsh undeveloped land. Settling in this new environment entailed countless hardships, trials and travails. Ardent love of the Holy Land made it possible for them to overcome all these hardships. Plagues, diseases, often hunger and distress could not deter them. It was not, as is so often erroneously stated, in order to die and be buried in the sacred soil, but in order to live there a saintly and devout life, that these people had come to the shores of Palestine.

When an earthquake of 1837 in Safed - then the main center of the Old Yishuv - killed a comparatively large number of the immigrants, these pious Jews only asked themselves: What sin had they committed to deserve such punishment? And they found their fault in that they had concentrated only in the Holy City of Safed which at that time - as a crossroad of camel caravans - offered more economic stability, and had neglected her older sister Jerusalem which, accessible only through a hazardous journey through the Judean hills on donkey back, offered but little security. It was then that the European ("Ashkenazi") part of the Old Yishuv in Jerusalem was founded, first inside the ancient walls of the Old City; and later outside the walls to the North and West.

It would go too far beyond the scope of this article to give even a brief outline of the fascinating history of the unsung heroes of the Old Yishuv. It is important, however, for our topic, to define, however briefly, the ideology animating them: By coming to the Holy Land they had not only sought self-perfection through and on the sacred soil, but they also felt they were carrying out a certain mission for the entire Jewish people, and particularly for the Jewish communities whence they emanated. Those communities, in turn, regarded them as their representatives and considered it a duty of honor to care for their livelihood. There was no need for vociferous fundraising, but "Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes" was a popular institution to which practically every Jewish man and woman contributed voluntarily.

The sons and grandsons of those first founders of the Old Yishuv were already born on Holy Land soil. It is true that their idealism may not have displayed the tension, the dynamic force inherent in every "first" effort. On the other hand, their roots in the soil of the Holy Land were even deeper. To them, the Judean hills, the magic blue of Lake Kinneres, the frowning, mysterious mountains of Galilee around Safed were not only the Holy Land - but *home* in the most simple and literal sense of the word. These mountains and hills resounded not only with the voice of the ancient forefathers, but also with the memories of their own childhood.

The Clash

The turbulent era of the 19th and early 20th centuries in Eastern Europe had its equivalent also in Jerusalem, though less fiercely. There could have been no serious clash with such elements as the Maskilim, since there were so few of them amidst the walls of Jerusalem, but they did occur occasionally.

With the advent of Zionism, a new element entered the scene of the Holy Land.

It is an almost forgotten fact that the first agricultural settlement outside Jerusalem - Petach Tikvah - was founded by sons of the Old Yishuv. The by-laws of the Association organized for the founding of that "colony" - as it used to be called then - would now sound like a "fanatic" and "extremist" code.*

The later "colonies," however, were founded by an entirely different element. The young Zionists had come to Palestine for a purpose precisely opposite to that of the old Yishuv: to create on the soil of the ancient Jewish "homeland" a *new* type of Jew, a Jew not dominated and governed by the Torah, but a Jew aiming to build a "nation among nations."

The people of the Old Yishuv were opposed to these tendencies. But, what is more, they saw in these tendencies not only an effort to change the identity of the People, but also the identity of the *Land* which was so dear to them. In other words, their opposition was based not only on their religious views in general, but also on their particular attachment to the Holy Land. No wonder, therefore, that the clash on the soil of the Holy Land was more vehement than elsewhere.

After World War I, the Zionist Organization and its affiliate institutions gained a certain degree of official recognition by the British authorities who had in 1917 issued the Balfour Declaration, and later appointed Sir Herbert Samuel as High Commissioner for Palestine. These were the results of efforts made by world Zionism, particularly by those of its leaders who had influence in London.

The Old Yishuv saw itself in danger of being forced to give up its own independent way of life. To combat that danger, it sought the support of another Jewish world organization, Agudath Israel, which was then outspokenly anti-Zionist, and which had been founded in 1912 as a combined effort of Rabbinic leaders from Poland, Lithuania, Russia, and Germany - for the explicit purpose, of combating Zionism. The present leaders of Neturei Karta were at that time active members of Agudath Israel. Rabbi Amram Blau, for instance, was the editor of Kol Israel, then the official organ of Agudath Israel in Jerusalem.

To fully describe what the battle was actually about would require much local detail, yet at least the major points are necessary to obtain an idea. The British authorities, in the "Palestine Order in Council" - which served as a sort of constitution for the Mandatory territory of Palestine - recognized a "Jewish Community" - Knesseth Israel - of which every Jew above the age of eighteen had to be a member. This "Jewish Community," (whose governing council was the "Vaad Leumi") was practically a unit of the Zionist Organization. In other words, this in effect meant a compulsory affiliation with the Zionist movement. Agudath Israel successfully achieved the right not to be a member of the Knesseth Israel. An "Orthodox Community" (*Eda Charedith*) was founded which, at that time, was regarded a synonym for Agudath Israel. The Chief Rabbinate, recognized by the British, was also part of the Knesseth Israel. The Agudah founded its own Rabbinate, headed by the late Rabbi Sonnenfeld.

During later years when European leaders of Agudath Israel began taking more interest in Palestine, the Eda Charedith was regarded only as a

cell of the Agudah. In the early thirties, an Agudath Israel delegation from Poland visited Palestine. The clashes between the Agudah and the Vaad Leumi had become bitter. The visitors regarded it as their duty to bring about a sort of armistice. The local leaders maintained a different attitude. To make a long story short, a compromise was finally reached, and the younger, extremist group was expelled from the Agudah. This group was to become the Neturei Karta. The name was assumed about 1940.

In the beginning, the group's activities consisted of sporadically publishing posters (much of Jerusalem's controversies to this day are being fought through a battle of pasquevilles) criticizing the Agudah leadership. Rabbi Aaron Katzenellenbogen, occasionally also Rabbi Amram Blau, in their frequent public speeches, used to criticize and sometimes poke fun at the Agudah leadership. A piquant note was added to those attacks by the fact that both had brothers who occupied leading positions with the Agudath Israel. Rabbi Aaron Katzenellenbogen's brother is Rabbi Raphael Katzenellenbogen, presently affiliated with Poale Agudath Israel, and Rabbi Amram Blau's brother was Rabbi Moshe Blau, the famous Agudah leader and representative before various political and governmental bodies.

In 1945, elections were held to the Eda Charedith, the separate Jewish Community founded by the Agudah, to which both groups still belonged. The list, or lists, of Neturei Karta won the elections, and the Agudah was practically left out of the Eda Charedith. Still, there was the person of Rabbi Joseph Zvi Dushinsky, the chief Rabbi of the Eda, who was esteemed and recognized by both.

In 1946, Rabbi Moshe Blau suddenly died in a very dramatic way, at the age of 61: He was on a boat on his way to Europe and the U.S. and died on the Mediterranean island of Messina, where he had been taken off the boat in an effort to perform an emergency operation. His body was flown to Eretz Israel. Rabbi Blau, to be sure, was a staunch and proud Agudah leader. Yet, he had been a son of the Old Yishuv, the sixth generation - on his mother's side - in the Holy Land. It was no secret that, despite the sharp and merciless criticism aimed at the Agudah by his own brother and other leaders of Neturei Karta, in their heart they loved him as "a chip off the old block." Many a Neturei Karta'nik who was among the 10,000 people who attended his funeral shed a tear when the aged and patriarchal Rabbi Dushinsky, with a shaking voice, proclaimed: "We have all sinned against him - let us all say the prayer of confession" and, at the head of the massed thousands, the venerable rabbi beat on his heart with his right fist when he pronounced the words of the Oshamnu prayer.

After the death of Rabbi Moshe Blau, the Agudah leadership went over more and more to Polish immigrants who had little understanding for the spirit of the Old Yishuv. The secession of Neturei Karta from the Agudah became more outspoken.

The establishment of the State of Israel in spring 1948 was followed by the death of Rabbi Dushinsky in late 1948. With his passing away, the last link between Neturei Karta and their mother organization was broken.

The various clashes between Neturei Karta and the authorities of the State of Israel, the refusal of the former to award even a "de facto" recognition to the other, etc., etc - are well known and have been highly publicized. It would serve no purpose to recite them here.

The ideology behind all these acts and outbreaks is obvious, on the basis of our explanations earlier: "The State of Israel is an organic part of Zionism.

Zionism is against the Torah, and so is the State which implements it - and this not only because the State happens to be governed by non-religious people, but because the very idea of a 'Judenstaat' is foreign to Torah. In the same manner as we were not members of the Zionist Organization, therefore, we refuse to have any relationship or give any recognition to the State, at least to such extent as is feasible."

Misconceptions

Instead of continuing our deliberations in the realm of theory, it might be more useful at this point to dispel several commonly accepted misconceptions about Neturei Karta, which, in a way, will render the picture more complete.

The charge that Neturei Karta "hate" the Holy Land is one of the most ridiculous ever made. These are people who, as said, are natives of the country for generations; and attached to it as one can only be to his native soil. Yet, it might be worthwhile to quote a few practical episodes, perhaps not commonly known; Meah Shearim is located on the extreme demarcation line between Israel and Jordan: In the Meah Shearim section, the so-called "Hungarian Houses" (*Bottey Ungarn*, built some eighty years ago with the aid of donations from Hungary), are the closest to the border. Jordan territory is literally a few steps away. During the siege of Jerusalem in 1948, this section was under the heaviest shell-fire. The majority of its residents then fled to the relatively safer quarters located farther off the demarcation lines. Rabbi Amram Blau, the leader of Neturei Karta, refused to abandon the Hungarian Houses where he

lives. Sure enough, he was wounded by an Arab shell, and had to be given medical care. No sooner were his wounds patched than he returned to his home, a few yards from the border, which he refused to leave.

Nor is this love of the native soil confined to certain sections of Jerusalem. It may not be generally known that already some thirty years ago; the very same people who now constitute Neturei Karta (as said, no group by that name had existed as yet by that time) founded a company under the name of "Ramatayim Zofim" for the purpose of acquiring a certain piece of land near the site of the Biblical town of that name (now on Jordan territory, Ramah, the site of the tomb of the Prophet Samuel) and founding a semi-agricultural settlement there. The company had been registered with the (British Mandatory) Government and practical steps had been taken, to implement the plan, which failed of execution only for financial reasons.

Another opinion frequently heard refers to their "violence." The truth is that while there is quite a lot of violence going on in Israel, Neturei Karta has practically no part in it. To quote but one example, only recently the press reported about a Moroccan immigrant who, enraged about a social worker who did not grant his wish, bit her ear off... Throughout the years, there have been a number of authenticated reports of brutal outbreaks of the Jerusalem police against orthodox Jews at large, under the pretext that they were Neturei Karta'niks. Some on-the-spot pictures were published in Time magazine and other sources. This writer has more than once been an eyewitness to those events. Once, as the readers will recall, they even resulted in the murder of Rabbi Segalov (who, incidentally, was not even a Neturei Karta'nik). Yet, on the other hand, there has never been any demonstration or outbreak of Neturei Karta accompanied by more than shouting and yelling. When a representative of the Agudah claimed several years ago that he had been beaten by some young boys of Neturei Karta, the whole thing was later exposed by one of Israel's outstanding weekly magazines (*Ayin Bi-Ayin*, certainly not affiliated with Neturei Karta) as a publicity stunt and a hoax.

Then there is the strong and sometimes poisonous language sometimes used by the various publications, pamphlets, or posters of Neturei Karta. It is certainly disgusting to many, regardless of their attitude towards the substance of the matters under discussion. On the other hand, however, one must not forget two facts: first, this is the Middle East, after all. Strong, pointed language is the general trend. During election campaigns, or other occasions, Israel's various parties - all of them - use a far worse kind of language. Secondly, has anybody ever taken the trouble to examine the language used by the opponents of Neturei Karta? Compared with this, even the most poisonous attacks by Neturei Karta are as child-play, and there is plenty of

evidence to prove this point. When one is hurt, he cries and only rarely will he chose his words.

Finally, let us mention one more point which is the source of a great number of misconceptions: Neturei Karta has become a sort of scapegoat, blamed for every evil, a sort of pretext granting a prior absolution for every sort of cruelty or violence. Let us quote only one typical example:

Back in 1949, a demonstration was held in Jerusalem against the public desecration of the Sabbath. The demonstration was organized by an ad-hoc, non-partisan committee, and at its head marched Rabbi Abraham Chaim Shag, then a member of the Knesseth (Parliament) representing Mizrachi. The Jerusalem police attacked the demonstrators, the fire brigade used its hoses, there were several injured people, etc. - quite a "usual" thing in Jerusalem. To my knowledge, Neturei Karta did not even participate in the demonstration, but if they did it was only in a very passive manner. The organizers, as said, belonged to an entirely different background. Yet, during the evening broadcast following that Sabbath, the official communiqué of the Kol Israel Radio stated that the police had been forced to disperse a Neturei Karta demonstration. . .

Conclusions

Summing up, we reach the following conclusions: Neturei Karta is the Jerusalem brand of a world-wide existing view, shared ideologically by far broader circles around the world. Others may not have the courage to speak up for their own views, in view of their non-popularity, and in view of the possible damage to their fund-raising efforts. Neturei Karta may use sharper language, they may go to extremes in demonstrating their view, but the view-itself is by far not confined to the ranks of Neturei Karta. If there exists a difference between Neturei Karta and other groups holding similar views - it is in the deeper attachment, in the more ardent love for the soil of the Holy Land by which Neturei Karta are distinct.

Whether or not the self-assumed title of "Guardians of the City" has been a wise choice, one thing remains certain: They are not giving up their watchful guard over their mother-city of Jerusalem.