

Zionist Profiles: The Lives & Labors of the Founding Fathers of the State of Israel

יום א' לחג השבועות תשע"ז

Young Israel of Jamaica Estates – Shavuot May 31, 2017



Part 4 Menachem Begin (1913-1992)



Ze'ev Dov Begin (1868-1942)



Chasya Begin (1883-1942)



Begin Family, 1933

1) Begin, *The Revolt* (trans. 1951) describing his father

From my early youth I had been taught by my father – who, as I was later told, went to his death at Nazi hands voicing the liturgic declaration of faith in god and singing the Hebrew national anthem, “HaTikvah” – that we Jews were to return to Eretz Yisrael. Not to “go” or “travel” or “come”

- 1913-** August 16. Menachem Begin born in Brisk (Brest-Litovsk in what is modern day Belarus) to Ze'ev Dov and Chasya Begin. Ze'ev Dov was a communal leader and proud Jew. His children were raised to be fluent Hebrew speakers and active Zionists already in childhood.
- 1923-** HaShomer HaTza'ir, the secular labor Zionist movement opens a chapter in Brisk and Ze'ev Dov Begin serves as its chairman and all the Begin children join. Later that year, Ze'ev Dov's 10-year old son Menachem gave his first public speech about the heroism of Bar Kokhba.
- 1923-** Vladimir Jabotinsky founds the Betar youth movement at a meeting of Jewish youth in Riga, Latvia.
- 1926-** Begin leaves HaShomer HaTza'ir along with his siblings due to its Marxist philosophy and eventually finds Jabotinsky's nascent movement, Betar.
- 1929-** Begin attends a lecture by a Revisionist Zionist, Moshe Steiner. Begin spoke to Steiner after and became fascinated with the movement and began recruiting other local youth to join.
- 1930-** Begin hears Jabotinsky speak publicly for the first time. He sees Jabotinsky as the greatest Jew since Herzl and remains an unflinching devotee for the rest of his life.

2) V. Jabotinsky, “The Idea of Betar”

The idea of Betar... is very simple though difficult: to create that type of Jew which the nation needs in order to better and quicker build a Jewish state... The greatest difficulty is encountered because, as a nation, the Jews today are neither “normal” nor “healthy” and life in diaspora affects the intelligent upbringing of normal and healthy citizens. [...]

There are two sorts of nationalism: If a nation dwells in its country but also desires to annex the land of its neighbors – that is bad nationalism. On the other hand, when a nation is entirely homeless and demands for itself a portion of God's earth, it is a good nationalism about [which] there is nothing to be ashamed of. The same applies to “militarism.” If a power, unharmed by anybody, begins to arm in order to attack its peaceful neighbors, it is a bad militarism. In, however, the case of Jews, who are being beaten everywhere, and even in Palestine are being threatened with destruction – it is certainly proof of good nationalism to arm for the defense of our lives, property and future. We may then well be proud of it.

- 1931-** Begin graduates high school in Brisk and matriculates into the law school of the University of Warsaw.
- 1932-** Begin is appointed the head/commander of Betar in Brisk where he spoke weekly recruiting Jews old and young to join the movement.
- 1933-** June. Haym Arlosoroff meets with representatives of the Third Reich about the emigration of German Jews to Palestine and the transfer of their wealth. Upon return to Palestine, he is murdered on a Tel Aviv beach. A childhood friend of Begin's is convicted for the murder and then acquitted on appeal.
- 1935-** January. Begin is openly critical of Jabotinsky's conciliatory attitude towards the British forces in Mandatory Palestine. Jabotinsky's formal written response vaults Begin to even more fame within the movement.
- 1935-** June. Begin graduates law school in Warsaw and becomes involved in Betar activity. He begins to clash somewhat with Jabotinsky over the military philosophy of Betar and Ezel (VJ's military organization in Palestine).
- 1937-** Begin leaves Poland for Czechoslovakia where he continues his work for Betar. He meets a young Betar recruit in Galicia named Aliza Arnold.
- 1938-** September. Only 25, Begin has achieved great fame as a leader in Betar and is seated at the dais alongside Jabotinsky.



Begin joining Betar, 1929

3) V. Jabotinsky, "Shir Betar", 1932

Betar -
 From the pit of decay and dust
 Through blood and sweat
 A generation will arise to us,
 Proud generous and fierce.
 Captured Betar
 Yodefet and Masada
 Will arise in strength and majesty.

בֵּית־ר
 מִגֵּב רִקְבוֹן וְעָפָר
 בְּדָם וּבְצִוָּע
 יוֹקֵם לָנוּ גִזְע
 גָּאוֹן וְנָדִיב וְאַכְזָר,
 בֵּית־ר הַנִּלְכָּדָה,
 יוֹדֶפֶת, מַסָּדָה,
 תִּרְמָנָה בְּעוֹז וְהִדָּר.

Hadar -
 A Jew even in poverty is a prince
 Though a slave or a tramp.
 You were created the son of a king,
 Crowned with David's crown,
 The crown of pride and strife.

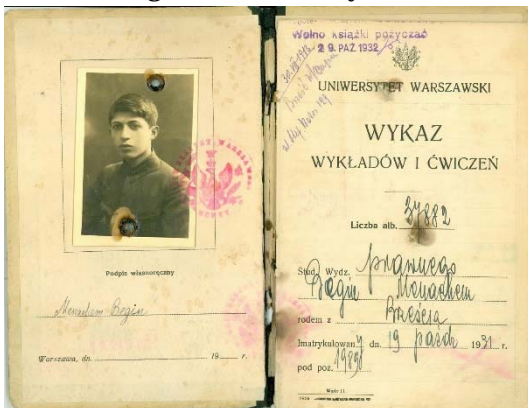
הַדָּר -
 עֶבְרִי גַם בְּעֵנִי בֶן-שָׂר,
 אִם עֶבֶד, אִם הַלְדָּ-
 נוֹצְרֶת, בֶּן-מֶלֶךְ
 בְּכֹתֶר דָּוִד נֶעֱטָר.
 בְּאוֹר וּבִשְׂתָר
 זָכַר אֶת הַכֹּתֶר-
 עֲטֻרֵת גָּאוֹן וְתִגָּר.

Tagar -
 Despite every besieger and enemy
 Whether you rise or fall
 With the torch of revolt
 Carry a fire to kindle: "No matter."
 Because silence is filth
 Give up blood and soul
 For the sake of the hidden beauty

תִּגָּר -
 עַל כָּל מַעֲצוֹר וּמְצָר!
 אִם תִּעַל אוֹ תִרְדּ-
 בְּלִהַב הַמְּרֹד
 שָׂא אֵשׁ לְהַצִּית, אִין דָּבָר :
 כִּי שִׁקֵּט הוּא רִפְשׁ,
 הַפְקֹר דָּם וְנַפְשׁ
 לְמַעַן הַהוּד הַנִּסְתָּר!
 לְמוֹת אוֹ לְכַבֵּשׁ אֶת הָהָר-
 יוֹדֶפֶת, מַסָּדָה, בֵּית־ר.

To die or conquer the mount.
 Yodefet, Masada, Betar

לְמוֹת אוֹ לְכַבֵּשׁ אֶת הָהָר-
 יוֹדֶפֶת, מַסָּדָה, בֵּית־ר.



Begin's 1932, U. of Warsaw Transcript



Avraham Stavsky



Haym Arlosoroff



At dais with Jabotinsky, 1938



Betar lineup with VJ, 1936



Reviewing Betar recruits, 1939

1939- Jabotinsky makes Begin the commander of all of Betar in Poland. By that point, there were 70,000 members of the organization in Poland alone.

1939- May 29. Begin marries Aliza Arnold whom he had courted for two years after meeting her in Galicia. Jabotinsky attends their wedding. The next day Begin returned to Warsaw to continue preparations for the coming war.

1939- September 1. Germany invades Poland from the West beginning WWII. Two weeks later, Russia invades Poland from the East. Three days after the German invasion, the Begins escape to Vilna.

1940- August 4. Jabotinsky, while on a fundraising tour in New York, dies suddenly of heart failure.

1940- September 20. As a well-known Zionist, Begin was arrested by the occupying Soviet forces in Vilna, tortured and sentenced to 8 years in a Russian gulag.

1941- June 1. Already imprisoned for a year, Begin is sent to a labor camp in Northwest Russia.

1941- July 30. Sikorski–Mayski agreement is signed freeing Soviet prisoners who were Polish nationals. Begin, upon release joins Anders' Free Polish Army which is committed to fighting the Germans. He spends 10 months in the service of the Polish army.

1942- May. Begin arrives in British Palestine with the Free Polish Army. He later discovers that, in the interim, the Nazis who controlled Brisk had murdered his parents and siblings along with the town's entire Jewish population. He remains a member of the Polish army for nearly two years while developing relationships with the Jewish military groups that had developed.

1942- December. At a meeting of Ezel (Irgun Zvaii Leumi) leaders, the first clear testimony is given about the Nazi Final Solution. Begin is in attendance and declares that it is the occupying British who are the enemy for their refusal to allow Jewish immigration to Palestine.

1943- December 31. Begin is given a 12-month leave from the Polish army. Three weeks later, he announced that he was offered and had accepted the command of Ezel.

1944- February 1. 5 days after assuming command, Begin announced the official Ezel policy of armed struggle against the British.

5) Begin's announcement of Ezel ideology (2.1.1944)

We are nearing the final stage of the war. We are facing a decision that will change the fates of generations to come. The cease-fire announced at the beginning of World War II has been broken by the British. The rulers of our land did not take loyalty, concession, or sacrifices into account; they have fulfilled and are still moving forward with their plan; the elimination of national Zionism... We shall draw our conclusions fearlessly... No more cease-fire in the land of Israel between the people and the Hebrew youth and the British administration, which hands over our brothers to Hitler.



Begin in his Polish Army uniform, June 1942



On Ezel mission in Paris, 1946



Begins on their wedding day, 1939



Soviet mugshot, Sept. 1940

4) Begin's oral description of the fate of the Jewish Brisk

500 Jews were led one day to the banks of the Bug River near Brisk... My father was among them. He started to sing the "song of faith" on the way: "I believe with unbroken faith in the coming of the Messiah". He also called on the others to sing "HaTikvah". Everybody sang. The Germans pushed them into the river and opened fire on them. The Bug River reddened from the blood of Jews. My father and teacher, my elderly father, was with them. My mother was hidden in the hospital by a doctor-friend, who was [the] director. One day all the sick were taken from their bed and slaughtered. My mother was among them.

- 1946-** Orders bombing of Jerusalem's King David Hotel, headquarters of British mandatory authorities. A total of 91 people, including civilians, are killed.
- 1945-46-** Britain declares Begin 'terrorist No. 1' and puts price of \$30,000 on his head. Begin disguises himself as law student, then a Talmud scholar to evade capture.
- 1948-** April. Members of Begin's Irgun and even more militant Stern group attack Arab village of Dir Yassein, leaving some 250 civilians killed. Arabs call it the Dir Yassein massacre. Arabs begin fleeing Israel.
- 1948-** Begin's Irgun tries to bring in arms ship, the Altalena, and Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion orders the ship be fired on. Begin has to be dragged from burning, sinking vessel. He denies he planned government takeover.
- 1948-** He dissolves the Irgun. In the independence war, Irgun fighters won the battle of Jaffa, the Arab suburb of Tel Aviv. Fifty-thousand Arabs fled the city and Israel.
- 1952-** Begin forms his Herut Party, wins election to Knesset.
- 1953-** Begin's followers have to be driven from the Knesset with teargas after they demonstrate against Israel taking reparations from Germany. Begin calls Ben Gurion a 'hooligan' and is suspended from the Knesset.
- 1967-** Begin becomes minister-without-portfolio in a national unity government on eve of Middle East war.
- 1977-** June 21. Begin sweeps into power in his ninth try for the premiership.
- 1977-** November. Receives Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in Jerusalem.
- 1978-** September. Camp David meeting with President Jimmy Carter and Sadat. Camp David accords result, forming basis for peace treaty with Egypt.
- 1978-** Begin and Sadat share Nobel Peace prize.
- 1979-** March 27. Begin, Sadat, and Carter sign peace Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.
- 1980-** July 31. Declares Jerusalem 'eternal, indivisible' capital of Israel.
- 1980-** December. Annexes Golan Heights.
- 1981-** June 7. Orders bombing of Iraqi nuclear reactor.
- 1982-** June. Orders invasion of Lebanon, vows Lebanon will be second state to sign peace with Israel.
- 1982-** December. Investigated by Israeli commission over Sabra and Shatila massacre of Palestinians. Begin says he learned of the massacre on the radio. Kahan commission exonerates him.
- 1983-** May 15. Agreement with Lebanon but it falls short of a treaty.
- 1983-** August 28. Announces intention to resign.



Altalena in flames, Tel Aviv, June 1948



Anti reparations rally, Zion Sq, Jan. 1951



Speaking after winning 1977 election

