

The ultimate proof of partnership

• By RAN SEGAL

Would the State of Israel have been established without philanthropy, a social justice form of giving? Independence Day, Holocaust Remembrance Day and Remembrance Day for the Fallen of Israel's Wars are the times to reflect and remind ourselves of the people who gave everything on behalf of Israel. The old Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish population) and the new - those who acquired and settled the land: HeHalutz, HaShomer, the Notrim, the Zionist movement, the Hagana, the Irgun/Etzel, Lehi, the founding leaders of the State, and all those who perished dreaming of, and fighting for, the State - all of these people, movements and organizations are partly responsible for the existence of the State of Israel.

I've spent the last year examining and cataloging an exorbitant amount of material on the subject from the Ottoman and British Mandate Palestine era. The lot of paperwork, documents, receipts of contributions, stamps from Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund, stocks and shares, letters from philanthropic individuals and organizations, letters beseeching monetary and other contributions, left me utterly dumbfounded and fascinated. Of course, there were several factors that led to the state's establishment, but the weight of

philanthropy, specifically, in transforming the land into a state, is immense.

Let us take a very brief journey through the various philanthropic organizations, Jewish communities and individuals that played such a heavy and honorable role.

The Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) was created by Baron Maurice de Hirsch in 1891. Its mission was to expedite the mass emigration of Jews from Russia and other Eastern European countries, by settling them in agricultural colonies on lands purchased by the committee, particularly in North and South America. In 1896, the JCA began offering support to Jewish farming communities newly established in Ottoman Palestine.

Baron Edmond James de Rothschild (1845-1934) played a major role by transferring his colonies ("moshavot") in Palestine in 1899, along with fifteen million francs, to the JCA. The following year, the JCA restructured the way colonies received financial and managerial support, with the effect of making them more profitable and independent.

Baron de Rothschild, one of the two French contingents of the prominent banking family, was a staunch supporter of Zionism, and his contributions to the fields of industrialization and economic development directly played a role in the movement's success toward

establishment of the state. He became known as *HaNadiv HaYadua*, "the known benefactor."

The First Zionist Congress was the inaugural congress of the Zionist Organization (ZO), later the World Zionist Organization (WZO), held in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897. It was summoned and chaired by Theodor Herzl, the founder of the modern Zionist movement. Among other accomplishments and advances, it adopted "*Hatikvah*" as its anthem (already the anthem of Hovevei Zion and later, as we know, the national anthem of the State of Israel).

It was at this congress where the idea was launched (and consequently brought to fruition and formed in 1899, at the Second Zionist Congress in Basel) for the Jewish Colonial Trust, a people's bank that became the financial instrument of political Zionism. The Jewish Colonial Trust went on to become the Anglo Palestine Company and then to what we now know as Bank Leumi.

Also at the First Zionist Congress, the idea for a national land-purchasing fund was expressed. By the Fifth Congress, in 1901, it was established as KKL-JNF. By 1909, the JNF played a crucial role in establishing Tel Aviv. The JNF, from its inception, also focused on the partnership between Israel and the Diaspora, making the efforts to build funds and support. Everyone

recognizes the classic blue charity box (*pushke*, in Yiddish) which really is the perfect symbol of partnership between the Jews of Palestine/Israel and the Jews of the Diaspora.

HENRIETTA SZOLD visited Israel in 1909. She returned to America with a mission to raise money to build a hospital for the Yishuv, wanting to ensure the health and education for its people. Szold, along with six other women, founded Hadassah. She also was a staunch supporter and advocate for a binational solution.

This steady monetary support was a real expression of ideological support, and more importantly, of a partnership between the Zionists in the land and Zionists abroad.

At the beginning of WWI, the Joint (The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) was established, initially to aide Jews living under Turkish rule in Palestine. It began by sending 900 tons of food and medicine but eventually, after the war, was sending various kinds of help for the establishment of economic, social and cultural reform.

PICA was founded in 1924 (reconstructed from the JCA), and run by Baron de Rothschild's son, James Armand de Rothschild. By 1930, PICA had acquired 5,200 hectares (about 12,000 acres) in different areas. It had set up 50 settlements of different types - villages, kibbutzim, moshavim and towns. PICA

assisted rural settlements as well as developing or financing economic enterprises such as wineries, the Palestine Electric Company and Nesher Cement. PICA also drained swamps, giving the land thus redeemed to existing or newly founded rural settlements there. In 1934, PICA purchased the Hula Valley. After the foundation of the state, PICA gifted all of its land to Israel's government.

Keren HaYesod was established at the World Zionist Congress in London in 1920. Its purpose was to provide the Zionist movement with resources needed for the Jewish people to return to the Land of Israel. It was meant to help plant the financial seeds needed to create a national homeland for the Jewish people. Keren HaYesod established fund-raising organizations all around the world. Some of the many fruits of its labor include the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Bank HaPoalim.

The United Jewish Appeal (UJA) was established as a Jewish philanthropic umbrella organization in 1939, in order to help Jews abroad and in Palestine.

There are of course plenty other examples of philanthropy during this pivotal time, of organizations, movements and individuals. In trying to understand the mold and pattern of such Jewish philanthropy, one can simply look at how

philanthropy and *tzedaka*, or charity, are rooted so deeply in the history of the culture and religion of the Jews. It is more than just a good deed (which Jews and non-Jews alike value). It is considered a basic mitzvah, an obligation according to Jewish law, halacha: "Tzedaka is equal to all the other commandments combined" (Baba Batra, 9a). Tzedaka is not only what makes the world go round; it is what makes the world stand: "Great is tzedaka, for since the day that the world was created until this day the world stands upon tzedaka" (Midrash Tanna d'Veil Eliyahu Zutta 1).

Tzedaka, or philanthropy, is a form of social justice, bridging the giver and receiver. As is generally the case with social justice, this significant civil responsibility cannot simply be done to someone or for someone. Rather, it must be done with someone. There is no better example of this than the example of the State of Israel. As I survey this mass of fascinating documents, I am bearing witness to the ultimate proof of partnership. Using the funds and support of generous philanthropists, we were able, together, to build a state, and with that, a future.

The writer is owner of MDLD Auction House. Mdl.co.il and [facebook.com/MDLDAuctionHouse](https://www.facebook.com/MDLDAuctionHouse). The upcoming auction at the end of May will feature many items related to this article.