

RABBI ZVI HIRSH KALISHER.

**(Of the most prominent fore-runners of the Lovers of Zion,
during the nineteenth century)**

Yahrzeit date: 5th of Heshvan, 5635 (1,874)

The family name Kalisher apparently is from the city of Kalish (Poland) however he dwelled for a period in Prussia (then Germany) and was one of the most prominent students of the world renowned Gaon Rabbi Akiva Eiger (of the city of Posen). He was born in 1,795 (three years before the demise of the Wilna Gaon, whose dedicated effort to make Aliyah to Israel, made its impact on him) and studied under the tutelage of Rabbi Haim of Lissa, the author of "Netivot ha-Mishpat". These biographical points outline that he was a major Talmudist, proficient in all of Chazzalic literature. This mastery is evident from his copious quotes in his masterpiece "**Drishat Zion**".

Not only was he a great Talmid Chacham, but he was extremely pious. He was offered many a lucrative Rabbinical position, yet he denied all offers, since he wished not to profit from his Torah knowledge, as taught by the Rambam (Hilchot Talmud Torah, chapter three, paragraphs 10-11). As Rabbi Maimon notes ("Midei Hodesh be-Hodsho", volume one p. 203; and so too in Hebrew Encyclopdia, volume 29, p. 760) he pored over Torah study all day and was supported impecuniously from his wife's storekeeping. This of course is not a sporadic decision of piety, for short duration, but is a lifelong decision, accompanied by much privation and physical difficulties, which proves deep bred religious faith. Even more so when one knows that the great majority of Rabbis permit accepting professional positions which are accompanied by profits (as permitted in Shulchan Oruch, Yoreh Da'oh, chapter 246 paragraph 21, Rama) this negation by Rabbi Kalisher is remarkable.

But what was most outstanding in his activities was his organizing the "Eretz Noshevet" group, who dealt in programming the resettling of Jews in Eretz Yisrael. Contrary to the opinions of the great majority of Orthodox Jews in his period, he taught that the Jews should learn agricultural methods and earn their livelihood by manual labor. He proposed setting up an agricultural school so to teach youth how to efficiently till the lands and culture orchards. Of course, in his day the major income of the Jewish community was by "Halukka" (charity monies collected in the diaspora, for the name of the famous Tanna Rabbi Meir ba'al ha-ness). The Jews then in Israel

owned no lands, had no business connections, and subsequently were indigent. The aforementioned approach by Rabbi Kalisher was a great innovation and aroused great antagonism by those who feared the curtailing Torah study. (Many of those who opposed him were those who feared that this competition for gathering funds from philanthropists would cause less income to the Halukka recipients.)

Another novel thought engendered by Rabbi Kalisher (way before the innovation of Herzl's Zionist movement) was the organisation of Jewish self defense squads.

Throughout the generations, Arab marauders have been mishandling Jewish dwellers of the Holy Country. That the persecuted community vend to the local Turkish police force was of little or no avail. Jews had to suffer, wipe off the blood stains, and continue silently. It took great inventive genius to conceive the thought that Jews cannot ever rely on any foreign power, but must protect themselves, as we are adjured to do by the Torah, to do all that is humanly possible, and not rely on miracles. This practical approach was considered a great novelty and certainly impractical, since the prevalent conception was that a Jew had not the courage to be a fighter. The Jews themselves never considered it to be a feasible possibility that they protect themselves. The psychological fear "what will the Gentiles say about us?" was just too great for them. For this idea too Rabbi Kalisher was censured.

Much of this was due to his outlook on Jewish religious thought, that the impending Redemption of the Jews would take place due to human efforts. Here he had to combat those who taught that only by miraculous action of the Messiah, could we hope for relief. He brought proofs from the words of the Ramban (to Shir Hashirim, chapter 8, Ha'elef lecha shlomo) that the redemption will occur according to natural means. So too the words of Radak (Tehillim' 146) So too the words of Tosfot Yom Tov to Mishna (Ma'aser Sheni' chapter five' based on the Jerushalmi there, that the erection of the Temple will be even before the arrival of Meshiach). Rabbi Kalisher added to this many Scriptural proofs, and so too from the Zohar. Of course Rabbi Kalisher's opinion was later on corroborated by the Wilna Ga'on, as quoted by the book "kol ha-Tor". (See on this subject the material collected by the historian Prof. Mandelkorn in his Hebrew book "Geula Brought About by Natural Means"). So too Rabbi Teichtal elaborates this point in his Hebrew work "Em Habonim Semecha" (pp. 130-134). But Rabbi Kalisher in his day was nearly alone in his opinions, but was brave enough to stand pat on his beliefs.

So too Rabbi Kalisher broached the tremendous project of offering a sacrificial lamb on the Temple mount, at the Pesach ceremony. Many people utter the words of prayer that the Jews will eventually re-erect the Holy Temple, and will serve as directed in the Humash of va-yikra, yet there could not an implementation further from their minds. To bring an animal sacrifice would be considered "barbaric" or even "savage" in our modern era. Especially so since not any other nation in the world still complies with this process. (We would wryly comment that all of these detractors, if they eat chicken or animal flesh, or even fish foods, have no right to criticize). Either their rationalization is that Humans are the principal citizens of the Universe and therefore may freely utilize the services of the lower specimens; or even more noble would be to explain that all of Creation are partners in the major story of existence, and one section of life donates willingly its all, for the sake of the general well being of rest of the community (This explanation is that offered by Rabbi Kook, in his "Affikim ba-Negev").

This exact reasoning permitting flesh eating is that which will justify animal sacrifices. All this of course, is additional to its being a Divine commandment, as sanctioned in the Torah. But adding to this quibble the fact that the Arabs (in his period) still had political control of Israel, makes this task well nigh impossible.

Nevertheless, this great visionary contemplated and preplanned this mitzva. He corresponded with his teacher, the great Rabbi Akiva Eiger, who in turn asked the opinion of his illustrious son-in-law the Hatam Sofer (See his responsa, Yoreh Da'oh, 236) who permitted practicing this mitzva in our day and age. Rabbi Kalisher published his book on this subject "**Shalom Jerusalem**" (1867). The gist of his words is republished in Rabbi Meir Meiseles' book "Pesach ke-hilchato" (Bnei Brak, 1967) pp. 115-139. According to Rabbi Kalisher's opinion (in Part two, of his "Drishat Zion"), after he answered the Halachic queries that Rabbi Akiva Eiger wrote in response, he was certain that the two aforementioned Gedolim agreed to his stand.

Rabbi Kalisher's book arousing public opinion to get organized so to resettle the Jews in the Holy Land, is called "**Drishat Zion**" (1,862). This book is based basically on Talmudic sources, and is sprinkled with quotations from the Zohar and kabbalistic literature. The reason why he chose this name is based on the Talmud "Rosh Hashono" (page 30a) on a Biblical verse: "I will place a healing plaster on your bruise, and I will heal you of your wounds, saith the Lord, because they called you: 'an outcast, this is Zion whom no one will ever seek' (Jeremiah 30, 17) Referring to

this derision our Sages commented "If so, certainly one must seek Zion!". Normally our sages do not quote whole and lengthy passages. It is sufficient for them to cite some scant Biblical words necessary. Here they troubled themselves to write all 17 words of the verse?! The answer is that they teach us hereby that this remembrance of Zion is the healing plaster; this in itself cures our wounds. This is the intention of the name of Rabbi Kalisher's book, to seek Zion and to heal the nation of Israel. This book was subsequently translated into several European languages.

We mentioned that Rabbi Kalisher was very studious, and was extremely careful not to lose time from his Torah studies. Nevertheless, we are startled to discover that he took the time to travel to different communities, to arouse public opinion to back his ventures. When we contemplate the primitive methods of travel in his period ("horse and wagon"); the rough situation of the (unpaved) roads, we can certainly appreciate his great "L'shem Sho'mayim". Especially so since he gained no remunerative profit. He also took the time to contribute articles to the many Hebrew periodicals extant at the time.

When we see the many books that he authored, we are impressed.

- "**Even Bohan**" (1843)
- "**Moznayim le-Mishpat**" (1855) comments on Shulchan Oruch Hoshen Mishpat.
- "**Emunah Yeshara**" in two volumes (1843, 1870) to substantiate Jewish principles of faith;
- "**Yetziat Mitzraim**" (1864) on the Haggada of Pesach.
- So too he wrote a lot of responsa, which were collected by Isaac Raphael, the son in law of Rabbi Maimon, and published under separate issue by Mossad Harav Kook, along with Drishat Zion.
- All of his Zionist tracts were collected by Klausner and re-published (1947).
- An interesting compilation, including a complete bibliographic list, is called "Petach Da'at" (1911).
- A competent biographical work was penned by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Bromberg, and published by "machon le-Chassidut", an affiliate branch of "Bet Meir" (ha-Mizrachi) in Jerusalem, 1960.

At the end of his active life, he lived to see the first blossoms of his endeavors, the founding of the first agricultural school in Israel, "Mikveh Israel" (1870). Karl Netter, who was the founder, formally requested of Rabbi Kalisher to make Aliya to Israel, so to function as the Rabbi of the school and teach there "Mitzvot hatluyot ba'aretz". However Rabbi Kalisher was at that time at the age of 75, and found the idea impractical (he died in 1874).

His lifelong valiant attempts, working against the tide because of the spiritual powers of deep heart felt faith, are to us an inspiration.