

Focus On Israel

By Kenny Gross

The "Gush" is the most vibrant movement in Israel today. It has been described by critics as the great "demon" in Israeli politics. I hope to contribute to its demystification.

The Gush was founded in 1974 as a sect of the National Religious Party - a moderate member of the religious bloc. It has, however, operated in an "extra" parliamentary style. "It does not accept the framework of the law nor is it confined to the rules of the political game." It has distinguished itself from protest movements by practical day to day action, such as establishing unauthorized settlements. In order to understand its virility we must examine its political profile and the reasons why it succeeds more than any other "extra" parliamentary group in achieving its political goals.

Its birthplace was Kfar Etzion, a resuscitated religious settlement, which in 1948 had been overrun by Arabs duly assisted by British "protectors," with the slaughter of all its members. It is situated close to Hebron, the burial place of Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca and Leah, and revered as a shrine - a center of bitter dispute between Jew and Muslim. The choice of its

birthplace is in line with the underlying philosophy of the Gush.

The first members were, in the main, former students of the Yeshivat Merkaz ha-Rav, founded by the spiritual father of the Greater Israel Movement, the famous "Rabbi Kook." He was the first Chief Rabbi of the Jews of Eretz Israel and who in his original religious thinking inspired all who followed their national destiny - the underground fighters at the time of the British mandate and later the redeemers of the land in Judea and Samaria. He is considered to this day as the greatest Rabbi in Israel by Israelis of varying religious and political beliefs.

His philosophy starts off with the conception of "redemption" according to divine plan. This is witnessed "by the rise of modern Zionism, the political gains of the Zionist movement, the Balfour Declaration and the entire Zionist enterprise." Since the Zionist movement was largely secular, this view does not make a fundamental distinction between religious Jews who observe the mitzvot (religious injunctions) and secular Jews who do not. How does the Orthodox Rabbi promote such an idea?

This is explained in his Kabbalistic Mystic approach according to which "more is hidden than is seen." There is a predestination of events and some of the players (the secular Jews) are not fully aware of it. Accordingly the six-day war in which Judea and Samaria were conquered was no chance event. It was another stage in the long process of the unraveling of his promise. And thus the establishment of each settlement is a link in the chain which began at the first Zionist congress at Basel and continued on its inevitable tortuous way.

This also explains why the Gush do not display animosity to the Peace Now movement which is their political opponent. Rather they regard it with "paternalistic solicitude" as a movement which lives for the moment, not for history. Rabbi Kook propounded the concept that the Jewish people and the Land of Israel "in its entirety" are one. This fulfills Israel as the Land of Israel of the Covenant and the promised borders - *Genesis Chapter XV, verse 18*.

"In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto

the great river, the River Euphrates."

Just as the followers of Ze'ev Jabotinsky have not pressed for both sides of the Jordan, so, for the time being, the Gush concentrates on Judea and Samaria. But they are secure that he who never slumbers will in its appointed time, advance the process.

This also explains the determination of the Gush never to relinquish what has been attained despite apparent weakness or faint-heartedness. It is a sacred duty to stand firm, to oppose pressures from the U.S.A. and others, to prevent the establishment of any Arab entity within the boundaries of the land of Israel.

Herein lies Prime Minister Begin's dilemma! The "emunim" are the darlings of his soul but he has been chosen as the millstone to be ground down by opposing forces. His role is to satisfy the demands of the world political powers while the "emunim" fulfill their destiny for the Whole of Israel. He is under constant pressure by both sides. Sinai was only one passing phase. Perhaps the presence at this time of this leader of such resilience, is also a part of destiny.

The Gush has acquired a

powerful following of secular people who are not attracted by its fervent religious spirit but by its clear and honest policy. There are many former supporters of the Greater Israel Movement who were not enamoured of the Camp David agreement. There are those whose pragmatic Jewish nose tells them they have given up too much, too easily.

The Gush has no formal membership, no membership cards, and does not call on its supporters to carry out any particular concrete task which could set them apart. This enables them to claim support of large numbers which cannot be checked. Similarly sympathizers could participate in specific activities with which they identify, without being obliged to support other activities or to identify with any broad platform. Opponents could, of course, also declaim them as a marginal group of fanatics.

Whatever is one's view, all must agree that the Gush Emunim will influence the course of Israel's history.

I acknowledge with admiration, the article "Gush Emunim - The Tip of the Iceberg" by Ehud Sprinzak of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I have used portions set in "quotation marks" (*The Jerusalem Quarterly Fall 1981*).

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