Rabbi Yehuda Alqalai (1798-1878) and Modern Zionism

Rabbi Yehuda Alqalai was one of the first rabbis (or Jews) in modern times to formulate the idea of a return to Zion. Following the footsteps of Rabbi Yehuda Bibas, he did not envision the return to Zion just as a solution for the eternal problem of anti-Semitism but essentially as a way to fulfill the Jewish aspiration of political normalization: i.e., Jews living in their Jewish homeland. He understood that the nation of Israel needs not wait passively until the Mashiach comes to realize this aspiration. Rather, it should actively seek the reestablishment of an independent Jewish state in the forefather's land as a way to advance the coming of the Messiah.

Rabbi Alqalai formulated his plan and ideas for the restoration of the Jews in Israel in his book Goral lahaShem, published in Viena in 1857. In this book, rabbi Alqalai designed a comprehensive plan with the religious foundations and the practical steps to be taken in order to reestablish the Jewish nation in Israel. The book was published in three different editions and translated into many languages, including English. The correspondence between the practical ideas of this book and Theodore Herzl's: "The State for the Jew" (*Medinat haYehudim*) is so similar that it is not improbable that Herzl was familiar with his book and had internalized its concepts which were later on formulated in his famous book. Simon Loeb Herzl, Theodore Herzl's paternal grandfather, attended the Alqalai's synagogue in Semlin (Serbia) and the two frequently visited each other. Grandfather Simon Loeb Herzl "had his hands on" one of the first copies of Alqalai's work Goral lahaShem prescribing the "return of the Jews to the Holy Land and renewed glory of Jerusalem." Many contemporary scholars conclude that Herzl's own implementation of modem Zionism was undoubtedly influenced by that relationship.

Rabbi Alqalai made Aliya to Israel in 1874. He established

himself in Yafo and together with other Jews from the Ottoman empire and North Africa founded the community Mikve Israel of the Old Yeshub of the city. He died four years later and he is buried in the Har Hazetim (Jerusalem).

I present to the readers the book ***GORAL LAHASHEM*** *by Rabbi Yehuda Alqalai. It is very interesting to see the haskamot (Letters of support) he had from many prominent rabbis. to me, the most interesting haskama was the first one, which seems to have been written originally in Hebrew, by Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885) a contemporary of rabbi Alqalai.*