

Survival, Struggle, and Statehood: The Fight for Life and Livelihood in the Warsaw Ghetto and Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

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Abstract

The topic of this paper addresses the environment and cyclic lifestyle of the Warsaw Jews that eventually led them to rise up. It also addresses the reasonings behind this uprising, the main ones being their survival, their Zionism, and their future. There is a great deal of literature on the Warsaw Ghetto and its Uprising, however most do not focus on the goals that drove the Jews and how this combined with their need to survive as their motivation to fight. This paper will argue that the life in the Warsaw Ghetto and the motivation of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising were a result of the mixing of the need to survive and what the future might hold if the Jews survived the horrors of the Nazis. This paper will examine memoirs, personal interviews, and scholarly literature.

When asked about his thoughts and impressions about the Warsaw Ghetto and its Uprising by Claude Lanzmann, Simcha “Kazik” Rotem¹ said that if Lanzmann could lick his heart, it would poison him.² The Warsaw Ghetto was a district within Warsaw where the Nazis placed the Jews of Warsaw in 1939. Concrete walls with barbed wire on the top of it surrounded the Jewish District as well as armed guards at every exit and entrance to the ghetto.³ The point of the Warsaw Ghetto was to separate the Jews from the Aryan Germans and the Poles in the rest of Warsaw, but also to keep the Jews in one place so that the Nazis were easily able to deport them to the concentration camps for extermination as part of *The Final Solution to the Jewish Question*.

Within this paper, numerous primary and secondary sources will be used to support the argument presented. Some of the secondary sources used were *Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles Under German Occupation 1939-1944*, written by Richard C. Lukas, which contributed to the understanding of the reaction and attitude of the Poles towards the Jews. *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*, by Timothy Snyder, and *Resistance: Jews and Christians who Defied the Nazi Terror*, by Nechama Tec, are both used to give descriptions and analysis of the Jews, their lives, and their reactions within the Warsaw Ghetto that led to the Uprising. There are more that will be used, but these were among the most useful sources. For primary sources, numerous ones were used as well, but one of the most impactful ones was *Shoah*, directed by Claude Lanzmann, which contributed to the understanding of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising through the interviews of some who survived, including leaders of the Uprising. Two others are *A Cup of Tears*, by Abraham Lewin, and *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, by Emanuel Ringelblum, which both give very detailed descriptions of life in the Warsaw Ghetto prior

¹ Simcha Rotem was the head courier of the ŻOB and took part in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. He survived both and helped European Jews emigrate to Palestine/Israel and then lived there.

² Simcha “Kazik” Rotem, “Kazik,” *Shoah*, directed by Claude Lanzmann (1985; New York City, NY, The Criterion Collect; 2013), DVD.

³ Martin Dean, Mel Hecker, Geoffrey P. Megargee, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Warsaw,” *vol. 2, Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945*, 1st ed (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), 456.

to the Uprising. Another is *Shadows of Survival: A Child's Memoir of the Warsaw Ghetto*, by Kristine Keese, which gives a child's perspective of what was happening within the Warsaw Ghetto. These sources along with some others will be used to illustrate that the Warsaw Ghetto and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising were a mixture of survival and what the Jews will do if they can survive the horror that the Nazis were doing to them. Along with this, this paper will argue how this mixture affected both of them as a whole with the attitudes of the leaders, its people, and the hope/desires that they possessed for a new nation state.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 was a military resistance by two groups in the Warsaw Ghetto who fought back against the Germans. These groups were the Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa⁴ (ŻOB or otherwise known as the Jewish Combat Organization) and the Żydowski Związek Wojskowy⁵ (ŻZW or otherwise known as the Jewish Military Union). The ŻOB was a coalition of left-winged Zionist groups, such as Hashomer Hatzair⁶ and Dror⁷, that banded together and coordinated their resistance with the High Command of the Armia Krajowa⁸ (AK) who supplied them with weapons and training in return. According to Marek Edelman,⁹ their purpose was simple: 'They will try to survive the fight, but if they must die to the Nazis, then they will die honorably in their fight.'¹⁰ They were able to do this as they gave the German forces a hard time in an uprising that lasted for twenty-eight days in total. On the German side, Jürgen Stroop¹¹ reported 110 casualties, 17 dead and 93 wounded, however, it is unknown if this is the actual number. On the Jewish side, Stroop reports that 56,065 Jews were either killed in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising itself or deported to concentration camps such as Treblinka.^{12 13}

⁴ The ŻOB was a left-wing Zionist underground resistance group founded in the Warsaw Ghetto. They were founded by members of Zionist youth groups such as Hashomer Hatzair and Dror. They also had connections with the AK who supplied them with weapons and supplies. Their main political aim was to defend the Warsaw Ghetto, to teach a lesson to the Jewish police and informers, and to send Jews to Palestine to help create Israel as a state. The main commander was Mordechai Anielwicz who died in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

⁵ The ŻZW was a right-wing underground resistance group founded in the Warsaw Ghetto. Their original members were mostly former officers of the Polish Army as well as members from other parties such as Betar, Hatzohar, and the Revisionists of the Polish Zionist Party. They are close with the AK and their main political aim was to restore the Polish government in exile to power in Poland itself. The military leader was Dr. Paweł Frenkiel and its political leader (Zionist Revisionist) was Dr. David Wdowiński. Frenkiel was killed in the Uprising.

⁶ The Hashomer Hatzair was a Zionist-socialist pioneering youth group whose goal was to educate the Jewish youth in the Ghetto for kibbutz, or communal, life within Israel.

⁷ Dror was a Zionist youth movement that helped establish the ŻOB after forming from a wing of the Zion Youth study circle. Dror participated in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising as well as in two underground factions in the Białystok Ghetto.

⁸ The AK, known as the Home Army, was an underground armed force under the guidance of the Polish government-in-exile whose goal was to usurp the Germans from power in Poland and restore the Polish government.

⁹ Marek Edelman was a Polish social and political activist as well as one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. He was one of the founders of the ŻOB, survived the Ghetto Uprising, fought in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, and survived that. After the war, he settled down in Poland near Łódź.

¹⁰ Marek Edelman, *The Ghetto Fights* (1946), in *The Warsaw Ghetto: The 45th Anniversary of the Uprising* (Warsaw, Poland: Interpress Publishers, n.d.), 17-39.

¹¹ Jürgen Stroop was an SS-Oberführer, or senior leader, as well as the commander of a police unit. He was put in charge of the total liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943.

¹² Treblinka was a forced labor camp, which would turn into an extermination camp that executed the 265,000 Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto after the Uprising failed.

To understand the problems within the Warsaw Ghetto which led to its Uprising in 1943, life in Warsaw under the occupation by Nazi Germany and life in some other ghettos besides Warsaw require examination. Conditions that made life difficult affected the Jews and their lives in the ghetto. There were policies enacted by the Nazis that forced the Poles to capture the Jews, just like in other countries, including Nazi Germany. One of the policies was that posters were put up that explained that any Pole who gave refuge to a Jew, especially food, shelter, or a hiding place and especially if that refuge was outside of the Jewish Quarter (the Warsaw Ghetto), needed to die.¹⁴ However, overall, this was not a large problem for the Germans because a majority of the Poles did not have benevolent feelings towards their Jewish brethren, or they were just too afraid to disobey the Germans.

A majority of the Poles were not too friendly towards their Jewish brethren and this is reflected in their attitudes towards the policies enacted by Nazi Germany. According to Stroop, the Polish population overall welcomed the measures that were implemented against the Jews.¹⁵ This was due to a rising Polish nationalism, which threatened the Jews, even though the majority of Jews were a peaceful people. Poland, at the time, had the largest Jewish population of any European country, and so if the Polish were starting to turn against the Jews, then this would affect them greatly. According to Nechama Tec,¹⁶ the Poles thought that the Jews were cowards.¹⁷ Was this actually true? As the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising later proved, it was not. However, if the Poles thought that the Jews were too cowardly to fight, then it would make it easier for them to disconnect mentally from what the Nazis were about to do to the Jews, which was to put them into ghettos. The AK, whom the ŻOB had aligned with, even looked down upon them. According to Yitzhak Zuckerman,¹⁸ the AK, though aligned with some of them, did not want the Jews on Polish soil, even if they were good fighters.¹⁹ This would play into their attitude and life in the Warsaw Ghetto. To understand what went on in the Warsaw Ghetto, it is useful to understand that they were not the only ghetto going through the suffering that they did.

In the Łódź Ghetto, otherwise known as the Łódź Ghetto, life was also terrible. Like the Warsaw Ghetto, the people of Łódź suffered through many health conditions and deaths. According to Lucjan Dobroszycki,²⁰ some of the common ones that the Jews suffered in Łódź were dysentery, abdominal typhoid fever, spotted typhus, meningitis, diphtheria, scarlet fever, and

¹³ Jürgen Stroop, *The Stroop Report: The Jewish Quarter of Warsaw is no More!*, English ed., (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Nechama Tec is a Jewish Holocaust scholar and survivor who survived the Holocaust under an assumed Christian identity along with her family due to Catholic Poles hiding them out in homes.

¹⁷ Nechama Tec, *Resistance: Jews and Christians Who Defied the Nazi Terror*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 80.

¹⁸ Yitzhak Zuckerman was a Polish Zionist youth leader who founded the ŻOB. After the failed revolt, Zuckerman was active in the Jewish National Council and led a ŻOB unit during the Polish Warsaw Uprising in 1944.

¹⁹ Yitzhak Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, English ed., (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1993), 363.

²⁰ Lucjan Dobroszycki was a Polish historian who put into the Łódź Ghetto in 1939 and sent to Auschwitz in 1944. His family was executed in Auschwitz, but he survived at a satellite camp.

tuberculosis.²¹ The Jews of Warsaw also suffered through these diseases and conditions as well because of how the Germans forced them to live in a Ghetto, especially due to starvation, malnutrition, and lack of hygiene. Another example of the life in the Łódź ghetto is that in January 1942, 216 people died in a matter of four days and from January 1st-January 14th, the death count rose by about 46 deaths per day.²² This is important because it illustrates that the Warsaw Ghetto was not the only ghetto going through major health problems during that time. The mistreatment of the Jews was rife throughout all the ghettos. One of the Jews' only desires was to survive the horror that the Nazis were putting them through and this survival, together with the rising Zionism and unity, led to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943.

The Jews struggled to survive the Warsaw Ghetto as the Nazis mistreated them, lacking hope each day. Simcha "Kazik" Rotem describes his experiences in the Warsaw Ghetto as being horrors that the human tongue could not describe and that the Jews were completely isolated from the outside world.²³ The Nazis made sure to keep the Jews weak and hopeless so that the control over them would be easy, or at least they thought that. If the Jews remained weak and hopeless, then the Germans would have no problems with them and wiping them out would be easy. The horrors that Kazik speaks of ranged from deportations to starvation and malnutrition to being murdered by other Jews or the guards themselves to the diseases and other health conditions, due to the lack of hygiene.

These were things that the Jews were unable to defend against, no matter how hard they tried. This was important because they needed to survive for themselves and for the unification of the Jews, and so that they could think of that unification. They could not think freely of the far future when the near future is so bleak and worrisome. Each day was a battle to conquer so that they could see the light of the next day. Abraham Lewin,²⁴ in his memoir, describes the days as being full of radiance and light, illustrating the glorious and sun-filled days at the end of autumn which Poland used to be very proud of. He then describes that the days for the Jews in the Ghetto were instead gloomy, black, desolate and with a tedium that was almost deadly.²⁵ They lacked the hope to go on, merely living each day as if it were their last and as if they themselves were ready to die. They would not gain the hope to fight back until 1942, and so they struggled for three years with this feeling of gloom and pain.

However, within the Ghetto itself, there were times that were peaceful, but were also painful for its inhabitants. Lewin describes that "on the surface, [in the Ghetto], everything is quiet, and it seems that [the Jews] do not want to disturb the peace of those who have been left alive." Right after that, though, he describes that "deep in [their] hearts. [the quiet] is gnawing away the perpetual dread that never lets up for one moment and eats away at [them] like a moth."²⁶ The inhabitants knew that everyone was in the same fight as them: the fight to survive. They were suffering mentally,

²¹ Lucjan Dobroszycki, *The Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto 1941-1944*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

²² Ibid., 119.

²³ Simcha Rotem, *Shoah*.

²⁴ Abraham Lewin was an educator and a member of the Oneg Shabbat underground archives who kept secret records in the Warsaw Ghetto as well as his own diary. He was captured and executed in the Warsaw Ghetto 1942 or 1943.

²⁵ Abraham Lewin, *A Cup of Tears: A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto*, ed. Antony Polonsky (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 193.

²⁶ Ibid., 233.

physically, and spiritually. They faced isolation and loneliness. Most of their family were, more than likely, executed or in a concentration camp awaiting their fate. It was difficult for them to have hope in these times. They tried to forge hope through community, through education, and through the sharing of pain with others. They were desperate and fighting every single day to have the ability to just wake up the next day and be able to go through the same thing as the previous day. Kristine Keese²⁷ said that poor, half-starved Jews filled the marketplace in the Ghetto, rushing there in pursuit of foods, buyers, and sellers who possessed that which they needed for their immediate survival.²⁸ This was the life that they knew at the time. However, they had other struggles that they had to tread through, like disease and disunification, in order to survive the ghetto and live the life they wanted with the freedom they desired.

A former Nazi by the name of Franz Grassler²⁹ describes what the Jews had to go through within the Warsaw Ghetto and why he himself tried his hardest to avoid going back into the Ghetto. He describes his experiences within the Ghetto as being awful and that he did not freely go back into the Ghetto, unless he had to, due to what he saw.³⁰ This illustrates that even he knew that what was going on inside of the Ghetto was a horror and was difficult to accurately describe the gravity of such. If he had thought of the Ghetto as being horrible, then it illustrates how bad the Jewish people had it since they lived within the Ghetto itself. Grassler went on to describe some of the horrors of the Ghetto that the Jews had to struggle with. Grassler says that they, the Commission of the Warsaw Ghetto,³¹ attempted to maintain the Ghetto as best as they were able to, for they needed the Jews as laborers. At the same time, the Nazis had to prevent epidemics such as typhus within the Ghetto.³² However, the Nazis themselves did not worry about the Jews suffering from these problems.

Their main worries were that they would not be able to use the Warsaw Jews for their labor, but also that if an epidemic were to break out, it would spread beyond the wall and affect and kill the Germans and the Poles, especially if the epidemic was typhus. This is important because it illustrates the attitude that the Nazis had towards the Jews and how they provided the minimum care to protect their own interests. However, this also provides a picture of how the Jews struggled with daily life because their captors treated them as low as they could without massive Jewish deaths. Essentially, they were forcing the Jews to be as close to death as they could while making sure of the benefit from the Jews. This affected the Uprising itself due to the Jews eventually decided that it was time to revolt before their final extermination at the hands of the Nazis.

When it came to the starvation of the people, Grassler says that there was no decision to starve the ghetto and that they did their best to feed the ghetto so that it would not become an incubator for epidemics, especially due to the conditions present.³³ Whether this is true or not is

²⁷ Kristine Keese was a Polish Jew, a scholar and a professor, who escaped the Warsaw Ghetto as a child with the help of her mother. She survived the Holocaust.

²⁸ Kristine Keese, *Shadows of Survival: A Child's Memoir of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 27.

²⁹ Franz Grassler was an assistant to Heinz Auerswald, the German Commissioner over the Warsaw Ghetto from 1941-1942.

³⁰ Franz Grassler, "Franz Grassler", *Shoah*.

³¹ The Commission of the Warsaw Ghetto was the office of the German Commissioner over the Warsaw Ghetto.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

unknown, but it created a weak people who physically could not fight back, at least for the moment. This would not work indefinitely as people within the Ghetto did gain back enough strength to fight back.

Another struggle the Ghetto faced on a day-to-day basis was death, whether at the hands of the Nazis or just by other factors such as disease or starvation. Abraham Lewin describes that it was rare for a day to go by in the Warsaw Ghetto without Jewish blood being spilled on the street and the stones of the Ghetto.³⁴ If the Jews disobeyed their Nazi overlords, then they were shot, but they also bled and died from the diseases of the Ghetto and their loss of strength from starvation and their loss of hope. This illustrates that the Jews were surrounded by death essentially every single day and that they witnessed it each day. They knew that they could be in that same position one day if they did not put all of their strength into their survival. Along with this came an emotional struggle for the Jews as well.

Through all of this death, they became hardened and desensitized to the loss of life in the Ghetto, but even then, the shedding of blood and of human tears sometimes choked the Jews with sadness as they mourned for the loss of their people overall, but also of those close to them.³⁵ No matter how many people died and no matter how much the Jewish numbers dwindled, the people still suffered emotionally because their people were suffering overall. They were one people, and the Jews had a personal and blood relation to the deceased. The living Jewish people could also relate to the situation because there was a possibility that they would end up in that same position and have people mourning over their death as well. However, through all of this, there was still a possibility of survival and being able to rise up against the Nazis. They had to try to survive the Ghetto in different ways, and 56,000 or so did manage to survive until the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943.

Survival in the Warsaw Ghetto was difficult, but this difficulty would be useful in the Uprising because it taught the rebels lessons about surviving under heavy pressure and gave them hardened souls. According to Timothy Snyder,³⁶ within the Ghetto itself, especially if overpopulated, deaths generally outnumbered births by a factor of ten.³⁷ This is due to a number of factors: Women losing their husbands, women being so unhealthy due to the treatment by the Nazis that they became sterile and could not give birth, and women not wanting to bring children into the horror that they lived.

However, people became optimistic on occasion. Emanuel Ringelblum³⁸ states that even though there was a massacre on that Friday (when this section was written), people became a bit more optimistic, believing that the war would be over in a few months and their lives return to normal. However, this optimism was partially due to false announcements that were spreading like fire because of witness accounts of the massacre coming to an end.³⁹ This illustrates that people were grasping onto anything they could in order to have some sense of hope that things will get

³⁴ Lewin, *A Cup of Tears*, 70.

³⁵ Ibid., 110.

³⁶ Timothy Snyder is a historian specializing in Central and Eastern European history as well as the Holocaust. He is also the Richard C. Levin Professor at Yale University.

³⁷ Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*, First ed. (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015), 113.

³⁸ Emanuel Ringelblum was a historian of the Warsaw Ghetto, forced to live inside of it. He escaped the Ghetto with his wife and son and returned during the Uprising. However, he was betrayed by a man named Jan Lakinski and he and his family were arrested and executed.

³⁹ Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* (San Francisco: Normanby Press, 2015), 260.

better. If they truly lost their sense of hope, then death was imminent. This hope, whether small or false, gave them a reason to continue marching on, eventually ending in a major uprising against the Nazis.

When people are in true desperation, they make sacrifices to continue on and those in the Ghetto were no exception. Ultimately, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943 was the ultimate act of desperation as some of the Jews put everything they could into going out in a blaze of glory against the Germans, but also had the desire to survive afterwards if possible. They knew they had really no chance of defeating the Nazis, but they tried anyway. Even before the Uprising, people had to resort to desperate acts in order to continue their survival. Abraham Lewin describes one of the ways that people did this in his diary. He describes that some people who returned from the *Umschlagplatz*⁴⁰ told of women freed from seizure after they sacrificed their children for their own personal survival. According to Lewin, many women saved themselves in this way.⁴¹ They had given birth to these children, raised them, and loved them, but their own survival was more important. They sacrificed the things that they loved most in the world for a chance to continue living.

However, there were also mothers who did everything they could to protect their children, even if it meant abandoning old ways. Keese, in her memoir, describes how some Christian organizations arranged mass baptisms for children and others who were willing to convert from Judaism to Christianity. Her mother thought that if the Church baptized them, the Church would try to save the children and so they baptized Kristine.⁴² The mother sacrificed her daughter's faith and heritage in an attempt to save her. The mother abandoned Jewish religion in a desperate act for her daughter possibly to survive. People do not sacrifice their way of life easily. It illustrates that the Ghetto was so horrific that people tried to abandon who they were down inside in an attempt to make it through. They changed themselves or changed their children to stay alive. Changing one's self is one of the biggest sacrifices that a person can make. Everything had to change for them to survive. Although generally not through conversion, the desperation of survival would eventually lead to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising with many factors leading up to Uprising, both internal and external.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising happened due to a desperate need for survival and a rising Zionism. However, for the majority of the Uprising's inception, their needs and desires came from survival as different events were happening that would lead to the Warsaw Jews' immediate and complete annihilation if they did not act. The Uprising happened because of mass deportation from the Warsaw Ghetto. Up to this point, it was mainly smaller deportations. In fact, in the beginning, the Germans promised the Jews bread and jam if they reported to the *Umschlagplatz* for deportation to a concentration camp, more than likely Treblinka.⁴³ This illustrates that the Germans did not immediately start with the massive deportations that led to the Uprising itself but started with voluntary extermination to try to keep the Jewish people at peace and make the Germans' jobs easier. However, this voluntary extermination would not last as Jewish attitudes changed.

⁴⁰ The *Umschlagplatz* was the area that separated the Warsaw Ghetto from the Polish part of Warsaw where all goods, including Jews being deported to extermination camps, were handled and transferred.

⁴¹ Lewin, *A Cup of Tears*, 157.

⁴² Keese, *Shadows of Survival*, 31.

⁴³ Snyder, *Black Earth*, 201.

The Germans had problems, such as conquering new lands and exploiting them, and were uncertain whether they needed more food or more labor to carry this out. As a result of this, the Jews could have some hope that the Germans would not execute some of their numbers during a period of time, but the opposite was also true. They could have hope for the day, but the Germans execute them the next day. Due to this uncertainty, there was a division between those who were productive and those who were not that broke down from the hope and morale of the people. Right before the beginning of the Uprising, the Ghetto had become a labor camp, so those not seen as productive were a burden on those who were working. As a result of this, the hope of survival by the individual created rifts within the community of the Warsaw Ghetto.⁴⁴ This illustrates that the Germans were able to keep the Jews from being a real threat since there was no real solidarity between the people, at least until later. They attempted to support each other, especially when it came to death, but there was no unification yet. As a biblical parable states, a house not built on solid ground will fall. However, in the middle and late parts of 1942 and the beginning part of 1943, everything would change as the mass deportations would begin.

The resistance started in April 1942 when a large number of Jews resisted the Germans coming in for more deportations. Some of these Jews came from the Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, which included representatives from the major Jewish parties of the Ghetto such as the Bund,⁴⁵ but it also included left-wing Zionists and Communists. Other Jews fought within the Żydowski Związek Wojskowy, which the revisionist Zionists of the Betar Movement⁴⁶ dominated.⁴⁷ These Revisionists flew both the Polish and the Zionists flags when the fighting started. However, both groups knew that there was no risk to them rebelling against the Germans since they had already lost everything. Their families were dead, and it was their turn next. This illustrates that they had gained the confidence and recklessness to fight against the Germans. However, even with this, more deportations would not start until the Uprising itself.

Between July 23 and September 21 of 1942, in an operation called the *Grossaktion* Warsaw, the Germans deported massive numbers of Jews to their death. Snyder in *Black Earth* states that the Germans deported and executed about 265,040 Jews to Treblinka and another 10,380 were shot in the Ghetto itself. Only tens of thousands remained, most young men, as the Germans transformed the Ghetto into a labor camp.⁴⁸ As Ringelblum states in his diary, which sums up the attitude of the Ghetto at this time, “Why didn’t we resist when they began to resettle 300,000 Jews from Warsaw? Why did we allow ourselves to be led like sheep to the slaughter?”⁴⁹ This illustrates that they ignored the signs that their end was coming, and so they were now preparing for their final stand that would likely lead to their death, but also with a rebellion to try to deal as much damage to the German forces as they could. However, survival was not the only idea that was thought of in the Warsaw Ghetto and during the Uprising.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ The General Jewish Workers’ Union in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, a.k.a BUND, was a Jewish part founded in the late 1800s. Their political aim was devotion to Yiddish, autonomism, and secular Jewish nationalism within Eastern European. They were sharply opposed to Zionism.

⁴⁶ The Berit Trumpeldor, a.k.a. the BETAR Movement was a Zionist youth movement through Eastern Europe whose goal was to provide Zionist education, Hebrew language and culture, and methods of self-defense to the Jewish children.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 202

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, 310.

Zionism aided in the Uprising and in the motivation of the people. Zionism, otherwise known as the Jewish nationalist movement, is the ideology which set its goal to the creation and support of a Jewish national state in Palestine, which is the ancient homeland of the Jewish people.⁵⁰ This ideology had been around for decades, but really took off in World War II when the Germans were capturing Jews, deporting them, and exterminating them, or they were leaving Europe to escape from the Nazi threat. This idea led many of them to think about their future if they could survive the Nazi terror. This gave them hope for a future and helped them to fight on. Soon, different feelings would replace that. However, this Zionism had been rising for a while in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Zionism was rising for many reasons, but the main reason that this Zionism was rising was because it gave the Jews hope. This was hope for a future that they could live in peace and have their own nation-state where they would have rights. The existence of a nation-state for the Jews meant that they would have citizenship protected by a civil code where they could own property.⁵¹ This illustrates that the Jews had nothing in life to show for their hard work because of the discrimination, ostracization, and intended destruction of their people. This would give them a chance at happiness and at a life worth living if they could reach forward and grab it with their hands. When the Uprising happened in 1943, the Jews who participated knew that there was no more time to sit and await their death. It was time that they fight their hardest in trying to take down the Nazi threat. This same attitude would later be true when some Jews, who managed to escape, survived the leveling of the Ghetto, participated, and fought in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944.

A small number of Jews survived the Warsaw Ghetto and its Uprising and would later participate in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 when the Polish Underground State would finally fight back against the Nazi threat. Some Jews who participated in the Uprising did not think of themselves as joining the Home Army (some had done so), but they were fighting for their own freedom. One of the Jews said that “A Jewish perspective ruled out passivity. Poles took up arms against the mortal enemy. Our obligation as victims and as fellow citizens was to help them.”⁵² This illustrates that even though the Germans executed the rest of the Warsaw Jews only a year before, they would keep on fighting and keep striding towards their goals to beat the Nazi state and to gain their own state. This also reveals that the Warsaw Jews did not think of themselves as separate from the Polish because they had Polish loyalty. Many of the Poles refused to help them when they were being put into the Warsaw Ghetto, but the Jews would not abandon the Poles. Since their brethren were fighting against the Nazi threat, then they too must take up arms and continue the fight which had started only a year before. The Ghetto did not extinguish their fighting spirit and they would continue on their path. Even with the brutality that happened in the Ghetto, the Jews would not back down against the Germans.

In the Warsaw Ghetto and in the city outside of the district, the Jews knew that they had to fight the Nazis at some point in order to try to survive. If they stopped that attempt to survive, then the end for them would come. Even when the Germans killed their family, friends, and

⁵⁰ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v., “Zionism,” accessed April 21, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zionism>.

⁵¹ Snyder, *Black Earth*, 221-222.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 275.

acquaintances, they would stride on. According to Dan Porat,⁵³ in 1942, a poet by the name of Itzhak Katzenelson⁵⁴ lost his wife and two of his sons in the Great Deportation. After this had happened, he shouted loudly that “the Germans have killed millions of Jews, but they will not stand up to us—the Jewish nation will live on.”⁵⁵ This illustrates that even though he had lost the love of his life and the flesh of his blood, he would continue to fight on, for no matter what the Germans threw at them, the Jewish people and its nation would continue to thrive and live on. This loss did not dampen his fighting spirit but made it stronger. He was ready to continue in his struggle against the Germans and he was not the only person who felt this way. The Jewish population within the Ghetto would start to feel this same attitude.

Ringelblum, in his diary, stated that the toils and tribulations that they had to go through as well as their devotion and the constant terror that the Germans had put them in would not be in vain. They struck the Germans a hard blow to their forces, and the world was watching them now.⁵⁶ However, the nations were silent on what was happening in the Warsaw Ghetto. A young woman wrote in her diary, stating that God is silent as a sphinx in Egypt and does not reply to the desires and needs of the people. She comments and asks why the nations are silent, even though they can see that the Germans seek to exterminate them.⁵⁷ They had to fight hard and fight on their own for their nation state because not many others would help them on this journey. It was theirs to bear, even if they were the victims of the tragedy that was occurring. However, even though they had this deep desire for their nation, it was not the main idea in their mind when they were fighting against the Nazis. Their main idea was survival; however, they sometimes lost this idea as well how difficult the battle against the Nazis was. They had to keep their minds set on what was ahead of them, both in the immediate and in the far future, such as creating Israel and escaping the horrors of the Ghetto, if they had any desire to survive the fight against the Germans.

They fought for their survival, but sometimes it got very rough and they did not even know what they were fighting for anymore. Rotem says that at one point, that they were in such an emotional state that they were unable to remember and understand the meaning of why they continued to fight against the Nazi threat.⁵⁸ This illustrates how physically and mentally taxing and difficult the fight was against the Nazis. They were able to last for twenty-eight days, but it was not an easy twenty-eight days. Struggle, pain, and hopelessness filled those days, but they continued on in their fight. If they had no hope or focus, then they will lose motivation to face a threat they knew was impossible to beat in their situation. This was important because the Jews were depending on each other to be strong and be supportive as they faced their enemy in battle.

Zuckerman in his memoir about what he experienced in the Warsaw Ghetto and in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising states that in the Jewish Fighting Organization, like the AK, they did not ask nor care about who someone was or why they were fighting. What they cared about was the

⁵³ Dan Porat is an author and a Polish Jew who fled to Palestine at the beginning of World War II, losing his entire family in the Holocaust and joining the British army.

⁵⁴ Itzhak Katzenelson was a poet and a dramatist who lived through the Great Deportation, joining the Jewish partisan organization Deror. However, he was discovered and in 1944, he was executed in Auschwitz.

⁵⁵ Dan Porat, *The Boy: A Holocaust Story* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 77.

⁵⁶ Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, 295.

⁵⁷ Porat, *The Boy*, 95.

⁵⁸ Simcha Rotem, *Shoah*.

desire and the loyalty to fight against the Nazis and not betray the Jews.⁵⁹ The battle was so tough that only the foundation and the desire to succeed was important. Names and backgrounds had no importance in a battle that would likely end their lives. This is also important because it is a sign of unity. They may not have been fighting to create a Jewish state, but they were fighting to keep their people alive and able to continue on after the Nazis fall. They were uniting the Jews in the Ghetto in order to achieve their goal. They also did not forget their past in the midst of this fighting because when figuring out their course of action and how to plan the uprising, there were a few people who looked back upon Jewish history and tradition. This history and tradition stated that they should fight to save even one soul in Israel—all of them being equally precious.⁶⁰ In this view, they were fighting for their state, but also fighting for their people. Their people were the important pieces in this war against the Nazis. Everyone's life was equally important and if even one of the Jews could survive to live on outside of the Nazi regime, then it would be worth it for them to suffer through this battle. They not only had survival to keep them going but also had the idea that they could continue even if only one of them remained in the end. They would not let the Nazis succeed in their complete extermination of the Jewish population of Europe. They would live on, even if it meant only one could do it.

This was very different from their attitude back in the Ghetto before the Uprising started, when they were struggling for hope and struggling to stay alive. Keese, in her memoir, says that there was a sense of doom that descended and blanketed those who lived in the Ghetto. This sense of doom created a feeling amongst the inhabitants that it was no longer possible to believe in their survival.⁶¹ This sense of doom did not affect everyone though as some had the hope of the importance of saving even one soul. However, the majority of the surviving Jews in the Ghetto overcome that fear and fought their best against the Nazis. This shows a transformation in a people that had come under belittlement, scapegoating, abuse, murder, and on the verge of extermination. They were weak in the beginning, but then they were able to fight for twenty-eight days against the Nazis. The rebellion as a whole may have ended in failure, destruction, and near total annihilation of the Warsaw Jews, but the Jews of Warsaw were able to show that they too were fighters and able to inspire others to fight against the Nazis.

This was their goal for the future, but whilst they were still in the Ghetto struggling to survive, a small group of Jews had a thought that if they could send a person out into the world from the Ghetto that the freed person should arouse the world to the horrors of the organized extermination that the Jews were suffering in the Warsaw Ghetto.⁶² They had thought that if they could not survive, then maybe they could inspire other groups of people to rise up against the Germans in their place. However, they were unable to send someone into the world from the Ghetto. Some people were able to sneak out of the Ghetto and tell the world of the horrors that the Jewish people were suffering. Due to this, some people did come to their aid within the Ghetto and the remaining Jews would unite to survive their likely end. This mixture would affect both the Warsaw Ghetto itself and later the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as the Jews took their final stand.

⁵⁹ Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 360.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 291.

⁶¹ Keese, *Shadows of Survival*, 33.

⁶² Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, 291.

In the Ghetto all the way to the Uprising, the Jews worried about their survival and tried their hardest to live through the horrors of the Germans. They felt alone, abandoned, and closed off. However, they also were not entirely alone in this matter. It is true that the Germans attempted to separate the outside world from having contact with the Jews, but they were also Polish, and some Poles tried to help them. According to Richard C. Lukas,⁶³ in 1942, Szmul Zygielbojm⁶⁴ published a pamphlet, titled *Stop Them Now: German Mass-Murders of Jews in Poland*. He writes that the Polish population gave all of its aid and sympathy to the Jews in the Ghetto. He writes that the walls of the Ghetto do not separate them from the Poles and that they will continue to fight together for common aims as they have in the past.⁶⁵ He asserted this because he wanted to give the Jews hope in their survival and in their Uprising which would start soon. This illustrates the unity of the Jews that were trying to survive, and that even as their numbers dwindled, they still stood strong. Their people were not just the Jews, but they were also of Polish heritage as well, so the Polish attempted to help them out. There were serious risks that the Poles took to save Jews before and during the deportation of Jews into the Ghetto.

It is estimated that anywhere between several hundred thousand and up to three million Poles risked a lot to try to help their Jewish brethren and risked everything when doing so.⁶⁶ The Poles risked being executed when doing this and usually more than one person participated in the rescue. If the Germans caught the Poles, then the Germans would execute their entire family or circles of people and a Polish historian estimates that to hide one Jew, ten or more people had to lend aid to this operation.⁶⁷ The Poles risked everything to help the Jews, but in reality, they were helping their own people to survive. They were aiding in the unification of the Jews and showing to the Jews that they had some allies in their fight. The Jews had thought of themselves as alone, but in reality, they were far from it. The Poles could not do much to aid them in their struggle, but the Jews were still Poles, although the Zionists thought differently at this point, but accepted the aid.

Once the Uprising itself broke out, and the world heard about what was happening in the Warsaw Ghetto, the Jews were no longer alone. When the Warsaw Ghetto revolt started on Passover Eve, April 19, 1943, the news of the revolt spread around the world and the Jews around the world filled with pride and agony for their brethren.⁶⁸ The Warsaw Jews were no longer alone because Jews around the world were exposed to their troubles. The reason for this is the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was the first major rebellion by the Jews against the Germans. These Jews were fighting for what they believed in and so that not only they, but the Jews around the world could survive and live in peace. It was to save themselves, their people, their history, their culture, but also everyone. The Warsaw Jews would soon learn that they had allies around the world.

⁶³ Richard C. Lukas is an American historian who specializes on Polish history and relations during World War II.

⁶⁴ Szmul Zygielbojm was a Polish-Jewish Bundist leader, working for the Polish government in exile. Following news of the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto, Zygielbojm suicided on May 12, 1943.

⁶⁵ Richard C. Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles Under German Occupation, 1939-1944* (New York: Hippocrene, 1997), 140-141.

⁶⁶ Władysław Bartoszewski, *The Blood Shed Unites Us: Pages from the History of Help to the Jews in Occupied Poland* (Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1970), 222, quoted in Richard C. Lukas, *Out of the Inferno: Poles Remember the Holocaust* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 113.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

The Poles would not be the only ones aiding the Jews in their fight against the Germans. They would also have allies in the Middle East aiding them as cables were sent from the National Jewish Committee⁶⁹ in Warsaw down to Palestine. These cables notified the *Yishuv*,⁷⁰ the Jewish people living in the area of Israel before Israel became a country, that the Ghetto revolt had begun, that the Ghetto was on fire and that money was urgently needed. The Jews needed this money to buy arms and to help the Zionist activists, especially to keep them from starving. These cables were read at a very emotional meeting of the Histadrut's secretariat,⁷¹ who was the leader of the General Organization of Workers in Israel, and although not addressed to the Histadrut, they decided to help. Their reasoning was that these were their people, especially since a majority of the rebels belonged to the Zionist movement.⁷² This illustrates that all the Warsaw Jews would have communication with the Jews in the Middle East. They now had allies to aid them in their twenty-eight days of reckless fighting and were able to show that they are not a weak people. They showed that they and the rest of Israel's people are strong, especially since they lasted a long time against the German military forces. They were able to show the Germans that the beaten, broken, struggling people from the Ghetto was not the true Israeli identity, but this was.

The words of Zuckerman illustrated this feeling in his memoir. In it, he states that the Uprising went far beyond their expectations. In the beginning, they did not believe that their people would be able to last for three days against the German forces.⁷³ His fighters lasted for twenty-eight days until the Germans essentially leveled the Warsaw Ghetto down to the ground. These rebels without their own country were able to last a long time against one of the most powerful nations at the time. This would not be the last time that they would show their strength between this event and the creation of Israel, but they gave a glimpse into the world of who the Jewish people were.

The Jews knew that fighting against the Germans would likely end in only one way: death. It was only a matter of time of when this death would be. They wanted the world to know them for fighting and rebelling against the Germans. In *The Boy*, Rivkah wished that her only remaining sister, Dana, who was in the Land of Israel at the time, would know that Rivkah died resisting the Germans who fought against them.⁷⁴ Their fight was one that would not end in their victory due to the power that Germany possessed. However, they knew that if they gave the Germans too much of a problem, which they did since the fighting lasted for twenty-eight days, then the Germans would need to use more firepower. In doing this, though, Germany was essentially showing that the Warsaw Jews actually gave them trouble enough to require the extra military might against them. This illustrates how strong and unified the Jewish people were against the Germans. The Germans were not fighting mere rebels that could be easily squashed in a day. They were fighting a people

⁶⁹ The National Jewish Committee was an underground resistance group opposed to the Judenrat, Jewish-led Nazi establishment, and the Germans.

⁷⁰ The *Yishuv* was the Jewish community living in pre-Israel Palestine who fought for the national revival of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. Headed by a two-wing system: those elected by the *Yishuv* and those elected by the Zionist Organization.

⁷¹ The Histadrut, known as the General Organization of Workers in Israel is a non-partisan, non-political trade union created to organize and relay the economic activities of Jewish workers in Palestine and then in Israel.

⁷² Dina Porat, *The Blue and Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust, 1939-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). 82.

⁷³ Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 376.

⁷⁴ Dan Porat, *The Boy*, 82.

with a purpose to survive, but to save their own people and create their own nation-state. The Germans were fighting a driven and dangerous people. Zuckerman later describes how much of a problem that the Jews in the Ghetto gave the Germans. He says that when the Jews switched to guerilla warfare, the Germans did not know who they were fighting or even where to look, so they had to resort to setting fire to the Ghetto.⁷⁵ The Germans essentially had to level the Ghetto in order to deal with the Jews who proved to be so formidable and hard to deal with.

This mixture of survival, Zionism, and unification affected the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising because it inspired a broken people to keep going. They had something to fight towards. They wanted to survive and to try to get their own country where they could have rights and a life for themselves. However, they also wanted their people as a whole to survive. That is the true mixture of survival and Zionism and the reason is that their people were more than being of Jewish descent. They were Israel itself and Israel must survive. Israel was not just a country or an idea. It was a people, a culture, an ideology, families, friends, loved ones. They were Israel and if they survived, then Israel would survive and continue to thrive.

It also affected the Jewish people in the Warsaw Ghetto because it gave something to look forward to if they could survive. The Germans beat them, broke them, shot at them, abused them, starved them, and much more in the Ghetto. The Germans treated them as if they were the very dirt on the bottom of their shoes. They kept on going regardless of the circumstances. They did not let that entirely affect their outlook on what they needed to do in the end. They did not give up, even with everything that the Germans forced them to go through. They had to watch as their families were shot, as they suffered, as the Germans deported them for extermination in Treblinka and Auschwitz and other concentration camps. They were resilient, though. This mixture of survival, Zionism, and unity also illustrates that they fought for multiple reasons, all of those reasons aiding them and inspiring them further. They fought for not just themselves, but for what would eventually become their countries. In the Ghetto, they became an image of what Israel should be and what it should be founded on.

Within the Warsaw Ghetto and its Uprising, the Jews changed after being put through multiple conditions that included disease, starvation, and poverty. As a result of this, they fought for survival, unification, and Zionism. They fought to be able to live freely and treated as human beings with rights, life, and ability to strive for their own life. Most of the Warsaw Jews died by the end of the Uprising, but some escaped and continued their fight for years, including in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 and Israel's fight for statehood from 1944-1948.

The bombing of the Warsaw Synagogue on the 16th of May 1943 by the Germans signaled the end of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.⁷⁶ After the bombing of the Great Synagogue, the Germans began the deportation of the remaining Jews that were still alive, but the Jews went into hiding for several days. This ended when the Germans started burning the buildings one by one to force the Jews out from their bunkers and buildings. The remaining Jews were sent to Treblinka, forced-labor camps, and the Majdanek camp.⁷⁷ However, Stroop's forces did not capture everyone as some Jews

⁷⁵ Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 376.

⁷⁶ Stroop, *Stroop Report*.

⁷⁷ Majdanek was a concentration camp that was originally a labor camp but was transformed into a death camp. Many Jews from Warsaw were sent here, and the camp is about 150 km from Warsaw.

escaped into the forests around Warsaw.⁷⁸ Some of them would reappear in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 as an aid to the Poles who were rebelling.

After this event, the Home Army's Warsaw Uprising occurred in 1944 and some remaining Warsaw Jews participated in this. This rebellion was an attempt to oust the Germans from power while the Soviets advanced and slowly took over Poland, having already taken control of Eastern Poland. The Home Army, although worried, took the Soviet suggestion and started their rebellion. The rebellion lasted for about 66 days, although the Home Army had to go on the defensive after the first three days due to the Germans advancing. Due to a lack of supplies because of diplomatic problems between countries, the Poles had to surrender to the Germans. The Germans deported everyone in Warsaw and leveled the city itself to the ground before the Soviets took control of Poland.⁷⁹ The remaining Jews were able to survive until the end of World War II and then, for many, began their journey to Israel's statehood.

Before World War II, there had been Arab-Israeli Wars as the Palestinians tried to keep the Jews from immigrating into Palestine. These confrontations would continue after 1945. The British supported the Palestinians in this matter and kept Holocaust survivors from the shores of Palestine. However, the Jewish Agency⁸⁰ and the Haganah⁸¹ smuggled Jews into Palestine from around Europe. These Jews created secret cells, some of them being the Irgun⁸² and the Lehi,⁸³ and these secret cells waged war against the British. Soon, the British gave up on Palestine and handed the Arab-Israeli problem over to the United Nations and, on November 29, 1947, the UN recommended that Palestine be split into two: one Arab state and one Jewish state. However, this did not pan out as the UN hoped because Israel would eventually take over the majority of the Palestinian land. The British Mandate ended in Palestine at midnight May 14, 1948 and David Ben-Gurion,⁸⁴ the Zionist leader at the time, proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel and the United States and the Soviet Union recognized the state of Israel. Since then, the Israelis have had to deal with constant war or threats of war with the surrounding Arab states.⁸⁵

The struggle of the Jews attempting to survive the Warsaw Ghetto and all the way up to the creation of the State of Israel tells a tale of struggle and desperation, but also a change in a people that led to the ultimate fight for survival against the Germans and the British after World War II. It

⁷⁸ "The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-warsaw-ghetto-uprising>.

⁷⁹ "Warsaw Uprising," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Warsaw-Uprising>.

⁸⁰ The Jewish Agency was created to unite and provide for Zionists and non-Zionists around the world. Once Israel was established, their focus changed to be about immigration, but expanded over the years.

⁸¹ The Haganah was a Jewish paramilitary group that operated from 1920-1948 to protest the Jewish and fight the British in Palestine. Became the basis of the Israel Defense Force.

⁸² The Irgun was a Revisionist Zionist paramilitary group that operated from 1931-1948 to fight the British in Palestine. Merged into the army of Israel in 1948.

⁸³ The Lehi was an underground Zionist paramilitary group that operated from 1940-1948 to fight against the British in Palestine. Disbanded when the Israel Defense Forces was founded.

⁸⁴ Ben-Gurion was Israel's first prime minister from 1948-1963 and was a major leader in the fight for Israel's statehood.

⁸⁵ Anti-Defamation League, "Creation of the State of Israel," *Israel Advocacy & Education*, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/creation-of-the-state-of-israel>.

was not easy for the Jewish to be able to survive the Holocaust and create their nation-state, but in the end, they succeeded. In the Warsaw Ghetto, they were a broken and beaten people, but in 1943, some who survived repression, deportation and execution gained the confidence and the strength to rebel against the Germans.

They were able to survive two battles by the Germans, one for twenty-eight days and one for sixty-three days. They were alone at first, but as time passed, the Poles and the Jews in the Middle East would send aid to them. They were no longer alone in their struggle and with the strength of multiple groups were able to achieve their goal of creating Israel. They had to go through many different battles and struggles along the way, but they remained strong during those struggles.

Their goal in the beginning was just survival, but as they were able to survive better, that survival mixed into protecting and saving Israel's people itself. Many Warsaw Jews became a key part of Israel. They became what they were fighting for and that inspired and changed them into being able to stand toe-to-toe with some of the strongest nations at the time. It also allowed them to grow and be able to lead and to create their state, albeit with a lot of challenges, especially with rejection by the British and the Palestinians. In the beginning, for some, their survival and their Zionism were separate, but by the end of the Warsaw Ghetto and its Uprising, these two things became a part of the Jewish people overall. They were no longer just ideas, but they were the blood and the mind of the Jewish people itself. They became Israel. It would be awhile before they could truly call themselves Israelis and have their nation-state, but the way they lived illustrated that they were and truly became what the people of Israel founded it on.

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