

The Rothschilds – separately and together

Israel's most consistent supporters fund a myriad of projects, including to children traumatized by war

By Greer Fay Cashman

THE BEST-KNOWN Jewish family inside and outside the Jewish world are the Rothschilds, who separately and together have given thousands of millions of dollars for agricultural, industrial, medical, legislative, judicial, social welfare, educational and cultural causes in the various countries in which they live, with the State of Israel as their most common beneficiary in all of the above spheres.

Moreover, members of the Rothschild family have been consistently funding projects in Israel for more than 140 years, and continue to do so to this day.

Not everything they do is visible. Much of their work in education, promotion of excellence, social entrepreneurship and training of people with leadership abilities is done in conjunction with partners, and the Rothschild involvement, while known to project administrators, may not be generally known to the recipients of their goodwill. But there are also brick and mortar projects such as the Knesset building, the Supreme Court building, the Caesarea Golf Club, the Caesarea National Park with its Visitors' Center, the reconstructed ruins of the ancient Caesarea Port, the Center for Educational Technology, and more recently, the impressive new National Library in Jerusalem, due to be completed in 2022.

All that is just the tip of the iceberg. There are so many areas in which projects would never be completed, let alone started, without the Rothschilds' initiative or their coming to the rescue.

Prime examples include Israel's wine industry, which received a huge boost with the import of French grape varieties from Baron Edmond de Rothschild's Chateau Lafite-Rothschild estate and prompted the establishment in the 1890s of Carmel Winery which currently exports to more than 40 countries; and Educational Television, which preceded public and commercial broadcasting, and went to air in

1965, as a joint project of Israel's Education Ministry and the Rothschild Foundation.

Not only do the Rothschilds sign checks, but take a hands-on role in projects that specifically speak to their hearts and minds.

Baron Edmond de Rothschild from the French branch of the international banking family, was the first of the Rothschilds to take an interest in the Jewish homeland. In 1880, he and his brother Alphonse began supporting Russian Jews who were targeted for pogroms. In 1882, he reached the conclusion that the best place for them to start their lives anew, was Palestine.

An ardent Zionist, Baron Rothschild bought up land in Palestine, and founded and/or supported settlements such as Metulla, Rosh Pina, Zichron Ya'acov, Mazkeret Batya, Rishon Lezion and others.

In 1923, he founded the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association (PJCA) through which he entrusted his son James Armand Rothschild to carry on his work. As a result, the map of Israel is dotted with places such as Pardes Hanna, Binyamina, Givat Ada and more named for various members of the Rothschild family.

Because of his unstinting generosity, Baron Edmond de Rothschild was known as HaNadiv – the Benefactor.

The Edmond de Rothschild Foundation (IL) which operates within the framework of the international network of Edmond de Rothschild foundations that support causes worldwide, was established by another Baron Edmond de Rothschild, who had been named for his grandfather, and who can be credited with helping to create the underpinnings for various Israeli industries, without which, Israel would not have reached the status of "Start-up Nation."

Following the death of the younger Baron Edmond de Rothschild in 1997, the joint chairmanship of the Foundation was passed on to his son and daughter-in-law Baron Benjamin de Rothschild and Baroness Ariane de Rothschild.

The Baroness has been active with hands-on involvement in all aspects of the Foundation's

work, but most particularly with the Caesarea Development Corporation.

In January of this year, Baron Benjamin de Rothschild died of a heart attack at his home in Pregny, Switzerland. He was regarded as a visionary entrepreneur and together with his wife, was an active and supremely generous philanthropist in continuing the family legacy of closing social gaps and promoting excellence in Israeli society.

At the height of the coronavirus crisis in 2020, the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation gave the Hebrew University of Jerusalem a donation of NIS 15 million (\$4.2 million) for funding 60 Hebrew University teams working in coronavirus research with the aim of finding a more effective vaccine and introducing faster and cheaper methods of testing for the disease and arriving at results.

At around the same time, the Foundation donated NIS 50m. (\$13.6m.) to 22 Israeli hospitals for the purchase of respirators, monitors, ultrasound devices, and safety gear for doctors, nurses, and other hospital workers.

It also launched a NIS 5m. emergency fund for basic needs such as hand sanitizer, face masks and food, plus another NIS 5m. for humanitarian needs.

In March, 2021, on International Women's Day, the Peres Center for Peace and Innovation, honored Baroness Ariane with its inaugural Medal of Distinction. She was one of 11 women from diverse backgrounds whose contributions to Israel's society were recognized.

Notwithstanding her bereavement, and the double load of business and philanthropic activities which has fallen on her shoulders, the Baroness continues to perpetuate the Rothschild heritage, and is in regular contact with the Foundation's staff in Israel, to be briefed on developments and to present them with new ideas.

Two senior staff members of the Foundation recently spoke to *The Jerusalem Report* about the Foundation's goals and partnerships.

The meeting with Tal Sagi, the Foundation's



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Rothschild Foundation Director of Philanthropy, Elli Booch

managing director and Elli Booch, the director of philanthropy, took place on the rooftop patio of Rothschild House in Tel Aviv, which is located on the legendary Rothschild Boulevard, one of Tel Aviv's main streets, dating back more than a century.

In a nutshell, the Foundation's goals are the promotion of equality, diversity and excellence in higher education, the arts, impact entrepreneurship and leadership. It works in partnership with 37 academic institutions and six government ministries.

The Foundation has been particularly effective in peripheral towns, helping to build emergency centers together with young college students who add thousands of volunteer hours for programs funded by the Foundation, said Booch, stressing the need for understanding community needs in order to facilitate successful intervention.

In the field of higher education, the Foundation works towards an inclusive society to enable residents of all communities in Israel to get a university degree which will help them in their quest for employment. During the pandemic, it participated in emergency programs providing computers, scholarships, food and long-distance learning equipment.

Sometimes, the socio-economic background of young people has hampered their progress in education, and ultimately in job finding. Regardless of religion or race, the Foundation conducts a "hand-holding" project whereby students are tutored to reach university and college entrance levels, and are subsequently taken on as interns in the various professions they choose to enter, so that they can get hands on experience, and be professionally equipped when applying for jobs. The internships are



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Rothschild Foundation Managing Director, Tal Sagi Faran

conducted in tandem with their studies, a factor that helps them to discipline themselves and to budget their time.

The Foundation has donated NIS 70m. in scholarships for army veterans from underprivileged backgrounds to enable them to pursue a degree at an institution of higher education, with the proviso that every student who gets a scholarship must make a commitment to community involvement.

This results in many more thousands of volunteer hours while simultaneously promoting concern for the less fortunate, the closing of social gaps and emergence of leadership abilities.

"We're always looking for new means of sustainable philanthropy," said Sagi.

Turning to impact investment, Booch explained how it helps to reduce the drop-out rate in schools and colleges by 30%. "You don't bring in money to fund a project – and there it ends," he said.

In working with academic institutions, if a program succeeds, the institution pays back the money invested so that it can be used for other projects. This is the social impact effect, and it paves the way for ongoing partnerships that help to improve the quality of life of individuals and entire families.

In some of these programs, members of the Foundation or volunteers meet with parents to help them understand the importance of encouraging their son or daughter to embark on and continue with university studies. In many cases, their children are the first members of their families to earn a university degree, which Sagi said, will enable them to give their children what their parents were unable to provide them.

Special preparatory programs are held for

Arab and ultra-Orthodox students whose grade school studies were inadequate with regard to core subjects. Arab students often need to catch up with Hebrew and ultra-Orthodox students with English and math.

Here too, it is important to involve the parents to ensure that the students maintain their interest in progressing and don't drop out.

The Foundation's staff noted that there is a lot of interest by Arab parents who are particularly keen on their children entering the world of hi-tech.

Sagi emphasized the importance of parental involvement in projects, because when something became a joint effort, the results were much better, and there was also an improvement in family relationships.

The Foundation also runs mentor programs in which mentors take students to job interviews.

Looking back at the history of the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation, Sagi commented: "Edmond de Rothschild invested in young motivated pioneers who had a dream but did not have the funds to make it real. We are investing in pioneers of the 21st century who are becoming leaders in their communities and Rothschild ambassadors for emergency action."

It goes without saying, that budget notwithstanding, the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation, in response to the emergency situation created by the most recent conflagration between Hamas and Israel, looked to see where its help was most needed and contributed NIS 1m. to NATAL, the Israel Trauma and Resiliency Center, which specializes in trauma prevention and intervention during periods of crisis and during periods of calm in cases of people who cannot cope with any kind of mental stress. Children living in cities, towns, villages, kibbutzim and moshavim in Israel's southern region suffer untold traumas.

Parents report that children who have long been toilet trained, are once again wetting their beds, are frightened to go kindergarten or school for fear of a red alert when they are away from home and parental protection, and in general are very nervous. As the negative early experiences of children tend to accompany them either consciously or subconsciously for the rest of their lives, unless properly treated when they are still very young, immediate intervention is essential. Not only very young children are suffering from trauma, but also those in elementary and high schools. The Rothschild emergency gift will make it possible for nearly all such children to be treated so that they can confront their fears and overcome them. ■