



1920's & 1930's:

- Yitzhak Rabin in Tel Aviv
- Tel Aviv of the 1920's and 1930's

Overview

Yitzhak Rabin was born on March 1, 1922 in Jerusalem. As a child growing up in Tel Aviv during the '20s and early '30s, he experienced the immense changes that took place transforming it from a minor settlement to the most populous city in the country. Major institutions were founded to provide organized leadership in establishing a Jewish homeland including: the National Council, Jewish Agency, Histadrut labor federation, Hagana and various political parties. Rabin studied at the School for Worker's Children and learned from a young age to embrace the values of the Labor movement, including, love for the homeland and cultivation of its land, contribution to society, and the equality of human beings.

Yitzhak Rabin in Tel Aviv

Yitzhak Rabin was born on March 1, 1922 in Jerusalem. His father, Nehemia Rubitsov (who subsequently changed the family name to Rabin), was born in the Ukraine and immigrated to Palestine in 1917. Yitzhak's mother, Rosa, was born in Russia, and immigrated to Palestine in 1919. Rosa and Nehemia met in Jerusalem, and married in 1921. When Yitzhak was still a baby, the Rabins moved to Tel Aviv, where Yitzhak was enrolled in the School for Workers' Children. Sand dunes, barren desolation, camels, extreme heat in the summer and dank winters were the conditions in which Yitzhak Rabin spent his childhood.

Yitzhak's mother was active in the Hagana, and served as a Mapai delegate on the city council. Yitzhak's younger sister Rachel was born in 1925.

An atmosphere of volunteerism, social action and concern for the general welfare of the community prevailed in the Rabin home. From his earliest years, Yitzhak was raised on the values of the Labor movement, including love for the homeland, Jewish labor, security of the Jewish settlement in Palestine, and social equality.

Beit Hinuch

Beit Hinuch School for Workers' Children was founded in 1924 by the Histadrut – the General Federation of Workers in Palestine. The school was little more than a U-shaped hut situated in a desolate area surrounded by sand dunes. In addition to their formal studies, the school children spent their days preparing their own meals, working in the school's carpentry shop or garden, or performing a variety of other chores.

In keeping with the Rabin family values and lifestyle, in 1927 at age five, Yitzhak naturally was enrolled and completed his studies eight years later, at age 13. He then continued his education at the middle school at Givat Hashlosha, a kibbutz near Tel Aviv, and later at the Kadoorie Agricultural School in the Lower Galilee. At the time, schools were identified with a range of socio-political belief systems: some represented the bourgeois-capitalist line; while others represented the socialist creed with which the Rabin family identified. All the schools Yitzhak Rabin attended provided an education geared toward knowledge of the Land of Israel, agricultural work and social activism.

Years later, Yitzhak Rabin described the school as a special place where he spent his most beautiful childhood years, notwithstanding the unpleasant physical conditions of the school. For example, Yitzhak recalled the walk to school: “First of all, getting to school on a rainy day was a major operation in itself. After a night of rain, we would find a large lake surrounding the hut. Staying dry in the classroom itself was a no less complex feat...”

Leisure Time

The plentiful work and the constant activity did not end when Yitzhak Rabin came home from school. His parents, Nehemia and Rosa, cultivated in their children the values of independent labor and gave them a great deal of autonomy in managing their own lives, including the choice of school they would attend.

On Friday nights, the Rabins would spend time together at the regular Sabbath dinner. The family would sing, although Yitzhak admitted that he was “not a great singer”, and the parents would relate past memories. On Saturdays, the family would take walks outside the city and in the afternoon Yitzhak and his father would attend soccer tournaments. Yitzhak would also go on outings with his school friends, which instilled in him a strong affinity for the nature and history of Israel.

Tel Aviv of the 1920's and 1930's

The Early Years – Ahuzat Bayit

Jewish settlement outside the city walls of Jaffa began in the late 19th century. Jews abandoned the Old City's narrow alleyways in favor of new neighborhoods that were intended to solve severely overcrowded conditions and dependence on Arab Jaffa's infrastructure. However, the narrow streets of the new neighborhoods, such as Neve Zedek and Neve Shalom, were not much better than the suffocating atmosphere from which the new residents were fleeing and were incompatible with their desire for a more European lifestyle, complete with fresh air and shaded boulevards.

Given the limited success of the first two neighborhoods outside the walls of Jaffa, the idea of a “garden city” developed among a group of Second Aliya immigrants, some of whom had belonged to the Hovevei Zion movement. They established Ahuzat Bayit, a neighborhood that would be built around planted gardens and tree-lined boulevards. The founders were mainly from the middle class - doctors, merchants, clerks and academics; and neighborhood affairs were administered by a council headed by Meir Dizengoff. In 1910, the name of the neighborhood was changed to Tel Aviv - the Hebrew title of “Altneuland,” the book by Theodor Herzl, which had been translated by Nahum Sokolov.

From Garden Neighborhood to City: Expansion of Tel Aviv from 1909 to 1934

The painter Nahum Guttman described Tel Aviv in its early years as having two arms: a blue arm and a golden arm. The former was the sea and the latter, which may now be hard to imagine, was the sand and the barren wilderness surrounding Tel Aviv. The small buildings and the thick-trunked sycamores that resembled what Guttman called “enormous primeval animals” added a charming touch to a new neighborhood that had risen from the dunes.

It didn't take very long for the character of Tel Aviv to be transformed from a small neighborhood to a collection of neighborhoods, and then to the largest city in Palestine. This process began in the years immediately following the establishment of Ahuzat Bayit, at which time new neighborhoods such as Nahalat Binyamin and Baalei Melacha were built to the north of the original neighborhood. The greatest surge in the expansion of Tel Aviv took place after the end of World War I. Between 1920 and 1934, the year that Tel Aviv was accorded legal status as a city, its population increased fifty-fold, from 2,000 to 100,000. Most of the growth resulted from the fact that many of the immigrants of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Aliyas chose to settle in Tel Aviv. During these years, Tel Aviv underwent a corresponding expansion of its land area, and by 1934 the city limits reached today's Namir Road on the east, and the Yarkon River on the north. These areas included the current site of Gan Meir, the location of Beit Hinuch, where Yitzhak Rabin attended elementary school.

The changing character of Tel Aviv was also reflected in its transformation into a modern city: shopping centers and an electricity-generating plant were built and what may be termed “the country's first bus line” began operations in the city.

Jewish-Arab Relations

The founding of Tel Aviv was of critical national importance, as one of the aims of its founders was to create a Hebrew city, separate from and independent of Arab Jaffa. Initially, despite the disconnect between the two urban entities, labor and commercial ties continued to exist between the Jews and Arabs in the region. Jewish and Arab tradesmen worked together, and Arabs from Jaffa were employed as laborers in the Jewish neighborhoods outside the walls of Jaffa.

The escalation of the national struggle over control of Palestine during the 1920s resulted in a deterioration of relations between the two populations. On May 1, 1921, the Arabs of Jaffa initiated a campaign of violence directed at the city's Jews. In the course of five days of rioting, 49 Jews were killed and over a hundred injured. Dozens of Arabs were killed or injured, as well. After these events, the extent of cooperation between the Jews of Tel Aviv and the Arabs of Jaffa was significantly reduced. For instance, work permits were only issued to those Arabs who had aided Jews during the riots.

These events catalyzed the existing trend in Tel Aviv among leaders of the Yishuv (the collective name given to the new Jewish settlement in Palestine) of working to gain independent legal status for Jewish settlements throughout the country. In the 1920s, efforts were made to promote the independent economic, administrative (including tax collection) and legal status of the Jewish communities in British Mandate-era Palestine.

Society and Culture

From the beginning, Tel Aviv was home to writers, artists and teachers, who brought a unique atmosphere to the neighborhood. The author S. Ben-Zion (the father of Nahum Guttman), the painter Aryeh Zilber (grandfather of Ariel Zilber) and the journalist and playwright Kadish Yehuda Sillman are only a few of individuals that shaped the cultural character of Ahuzat Bayit. In the '20s, Tel Aviv became a bustling cultural center with artists and authors such as Nahum Guttman, Haim Nachman Bialik, S.Y. Agnon, Ahad Ha'am, Avraham Shlonsky and Natan Alterman. Tel Aviv became not only an important literary center but also the place where ideological and literary skirmishes were waged between the different groups that formed around these charismatic and colorful individuals.

In addition to the personalities that came to Tel Aviv, institutions were established in the city to promote culture. The Eden, the Yishuv's first cinema, which had 600 seats, was already built in 1914. Subsequent years saw the inception of public libraries, musical ensembles – like the Palestine Opera and the Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra - Hebrew-speaking repertory theaters, Hebrew newspapers such as Haaretz, and the city hosted sculpture and painting exhibitions.

Another facet of local culture revolved around the hedonist image that has been associated with Tel Aviv from the '20s to the present: a rich night life, crowded coffee houses, balls and even a casino on the waterfront were all part of the Tel Aviv lifestyle. This aspect drew criticism not only because it was a source of “cheap culture, a licentious and suspicious culture,” in the words of Bialik, but also because it reflected “utter submission to the culture of the West,” as the writer Yaakov Fichman said. All of this was in complete contrast to the homegrown Israeli Hebrew culture that the founders of Tel Aviv sought to create.