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Revered Rabbi Preaches Slaughter Of Gentile Babies

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Nazareth: A rabbi from one of the most violent settlements in the West Bank was questioned on suspicion of incitement last week as Israeli police stepped up their investigation into a book in which he sanctions the killing of non-Jews, including children and babies.

Rabbi Yitzhak Shapira is one of the leading ideologues of the extreme wing of the religious settler movement. He is known to be a champion of the “price-tag” policy of reprisal attacks on Palestinians, including punishing them for attempts by officials to enforce Israeli law against the settlements.

So far the policy has chiefly involved violent harassment of Palestinians, with settlers inflicting beatings, attacking homes, throwing stones, burning fields, killing livestock and poisoning wells.

It is feared, however, that Shapira’s book *The King’s Torah*, published last year, is intended to offer ideological justifications for widening the scope of such attacks to include killing Palestinians, even children.

Although Shapira was released a few hours after his questioning last Monday, dozens of rabbis, as well as several members of parliament, rallied to his side, condemning the arrest.

Shlomo Aviner, one of the settlement movement’s spiritual leaders, defended the book’s arguments as a “legitimate stance” and one that should be taught in Jewish seminaries.

But in a sign of mounting official unease at Shapira’s influence on the settlement movement, the Israeli military authorities also threatened last week to enforce a decade-old demolition order on Yitzhar’s seminary, which was built without a permit.

Dror Etkes, a Tel Aviv-based expert on the settlements, said the order was unlikely to be carried out but was a way to

pressure Yitzhar's 500 inhabitants to rein in their more violent attacks.

He said the authorities had begun taking a harder line against Yitzhar only since Shapira and several of his students were suspected of torching a mosque in the neighbouring village of Yasuf last December.

"Shapira is trying to redefine the conflict with the Palestinians, turning it from a national conflict into a religious one. That frightens Israel. It doesn't want to look as though it is fighting the whole Islamic world," Etkes said.

He added that the rabbi and his supporters were closely associated with Kach, a movement founded by the late Rabbi Meir Kahane that demands the expulsion of all Palestinians from a "Greater Israel". Despite Kach being banned, officials have largely turned a blind eye as its ideology has flourished in the settlements.

"It may be illegal to call oneself Kach but the authorities are more than tolerant of settlers who hold such views and carry out violent attacks. In fact, what Kahane was doing in the 1980s seems like child's play compared with today's settlers."

In the 230-page book, Shapira and his co-author, Rabbi Yosef Elitzur, also from Yitzhar, argue that Jewish law permits the killing of non-Jews in a wide variety of circumstances. The terms "gentiles" and "non-Jews" in the book are widely understood as references to Palestinians.

They write that Jews have the right to kill gentiles in any situation in which "a non-Jew's presence endangers Jewish lives" even if the gentile is "not at all guilty for the situation that has been created".

The book sanctions the killing of non-Jewish children and babies: "There is justification for killing babies if it is clear that they will grow up to harm us, and in such a situation they may be harmed deliberately, and not only during combat with adults."

The rabbis suggest that harming the children of non-Jewish leaders is justified if it is likely to bring pressure to bear on them to change policy.

The authors also advocate committing "cruel deeds to create the proper balance of terror" and treating all members of an "enemy nation" as targets for retaliation, even if they are not directly participating in hostile activities.

The rabbis appear to be offering justifications in Jewish law for collective punishment and other war crimes of the kind committed by the Israeli army in its attack on Gaza in the winter of 2008.

Pamphlets similarly calling on soldiers to "show no mercy" were distributed by the army's rabbinate as troops prepared for the Gaza operation, in which 1,400 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians, were killed. Religious settlers have come to dominate many combat units.

An investigation last year by Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights group, found Shapira's seminary had received government funds worth at least \$300,000 in recent years. American and British groups have also contributed tens of thousands of dollars in tax-deductible donations.

According to the Jerusalem Post newspaper, the Yitzhar settlers have responded to the demolition order against their seminary by threatening to publish documents showing that the housing and transport ministries were closely involved in the project too.

The settlers have repeatedly rampaged through nearby Palestinian villages, most notoriously in September 2008, when they were filmed shooting at homes in Assira al-Kabaliya, smashing properties and daubing Stars of David on homes. Ehud Olmert, the prime minister of the time, termed the settlers' actions a "pogrom".

The same year a religious student from Yitzhar was arrested for firing home-made rockets at Palestinian villages close by.

In April, Yitzhar's settlers marched through the village of Huwara and pelted a Palestinian family's home with stones in "reprisal" for the arrest of 11 of their number.

A settler from Yitzhar was questioned last month over the fatal shooting of a 16-year-old Palestinian, Aysar Zaban, in May, reportedly after stones were thrown at the settler's car. The teenager was shot in the back.

Last week, the settlers attacked Burin, shooting at villagers and burning fields.

In most of these cases, the settlers who were arrested were released a short time later either by the police or the courts. In January, a Jerusalem judge freed Rabbi Shapira for lack of evidence in the arson attack on the mosque.

Yitzhak Ginsburg, an authority on Jewish law and a mentor to Shapira, was questioned by police last Thursday over his endorsement of the book. In the past Ginsburg has praised Baruch Goldstein, a settler who opened fire in Hebron's Ibrahimi mosque in 1994, killing 29 Palestinian worshippers.

In 2003 Ginsburg was accused of incitement for publishing a book that called for the expulsion of Palestinians from Israel and the occupied territories, but the charges were dropped after he issued a "clarification statement".

A group calling itself "Students of Yitzhak Ginsburg" recently distributed a leaflet urging Israeli soldiers to "spare your lives and the lives of your friends and show no concern for a population that surrounds us and harms us".

What is Kach?

Kach was founded in 1971 by the late Meir Kahane, an American rabbi who immigrated to Israel. He won a seat in the Israeli parliament in 1984 on a platform of expelling all Palestinians from Israel and the occupied territories. As an MP, he drafted legislation to revoke the Israeli citizenship of non-Jews and ban sexual relations between Jews and gentiles.

The political party was banned from running for the Israeli parliament in 1988 and the movement was outlawed six years later. Although the group is considered a terrorist organisation in the United States and most of Europe, its ideology has been allowed to thrive in the settlements.

Today, dozens of rabbis espouse an interpretation of Jewish religious law identical to or worse than Kahane's.

Michael Ben Ari, a former Kach leader, was elected as an MP last year for the far-right National Union party, which holds four seats in the 120-member parliament.

Avigdor Lieberman, who leads the parliament's third largest party and is foreign minister, briefly joined the party before it was banned. His own party's anti-Arab "No loyalty, no citizenship" programme includes echoes of Kahane's ideology.

Jonathan Cook is a writer and journalist based in Nazareth, Israel. His latest books are "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jkcook.net.

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