Joseph Vitkin was a precursor of the Second Aliyah, a teacher, and a communal worker. He was born in Mogilev, Belo-russia and immigrated to Ereẓ Israel in 1897, where he worked as a laborer. Later he became a teacher and headmaster at a Gederah school, where his reforms led to his being invited to become headmaster of the school in Rishon le-Zion. In 1904 he became headmaster of the school at Kefar Tavor (Mesḥah), and two years later he returned to teaching in Rishon le-Zion, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Vitkin was the precursor of the Second Aliyah, both chronologically and in his ideological contribution to the pioneering movement in Ereẓ Israel. His influential 1905 pamphlet, entitled *Kol Kore el Ṭe'irei Yisrael*
Asher Libbam le-Ammam u-le-Ẓiyyon ("A Call to the Youth of Israel whose Hearts are with their People and with Zion"), signed Ḥavurat Ze'irim me-Ereẓ Israel ("A Group of Young People from Ereẓ Israel"), contains all the principles of the labor movement of the Second Aliyah. He forcefully rejected "diplomatic" Zionism and condemned a Zionism that merely entailed shekel- and share-buying by Jews in the Diaspora. He demanded that Diaspora youth unite for aliyah and sacrifice for their homeland, as other nations do for their countries. He even outlined plans for a new type of settlement based on self-employed labor on nationally owned land. He ended the pamphlet with the appeal: "Hasten, Heroes of Israel, renew the days of the Biluim with even greater strength and vigor, for otherwise we shall be lost."

When the *Ha-Po'el ha-Ẓa'ir Party was formed, he became a member and was the first to demand that, in addition to "conquest of labor" by Jewish workers as wage earners
on Jewish-owned farms, the party should advocate "conquest of the soil," i.e., agricultural settlement by Jewish worker-pioneers. He developed a theoretical and practical educational system uniting Jewish values with love of nature.