

ISRAEL AT SIXTY

From Modest Beginnings to a Vibrant State

1948–2008

- *web extra* -

Herzl and Zionism

*Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 20, 2004
(In Honor of the 100th Anniversary of Herzl's Death)*

“In Basle I founded the Jewish state ... Maybe in five years, certainly in fifty, everyone will realize it.”



Poster of the 1947 Jubilee of the World Zionist Organization (Central Zionist Archives)

Theodor (Binyamin Ze'ev) Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism, was born in Budapest in 1860. He was educated in the spirit of the German-Jewish Enlightenment of the period, learning to appreciate secular culture. In 1878 the family moved to Vienna, and in 1884 Herzl was awarded a doctorate of law from the University of Vienna. He became a writer, a playwright and a journalist. Herzl became the Paris correspondent of the influential liberal Vienna newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*.

Herzl first encountered the anti-Semitism that would shape his life and the fate of the Jews in the twentieth century while studying at the University of Vienna (1882). Later, during his stay in Paris as a journalist, he was brought face-to-face with the problem. At the time, he regarded the Jewish problem as a social issue and wrote a drama, *The Ghetto* (1894), in which assimilation and conversion are rejected as solutions. He hoped that *The Ghetto* would lead to debate and ultimately to a solution, based on mutual tolerance and respect between Christians and Jews.

In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was unjustly accused of treason, mainly because of the prevailing anti-Semitic atmosphere. Herzl witnessed mobs shouting “Death to the Jews”. He resolved that there was only one solution to this anti-Semitic assault: the mass immigration of Jews to a land that they could call their own. Thus the Dreyfus case became one of the determinants in the genesis of political Zionism.

Herzl concluded that anti-Semitism was a stable and immutable factor in human society, which assimilation did not solve. He mulled over the idea of Jewish sovereignty, and, despite ridicule from Jewish leaders, published *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*) in 1896.

Herzl argued that the essence of the Jewish problem was not individual, but national. He declared that the Jews could gain acceptance in the world only if they ceased being a national anomaly. The Jews are one people, he said, and their plight could be transformed into a positive force by the

establishment of a Jewish state with the consent of the great powers. He saw the Jewish question as an international political question to be dealt with in the arena of international politics. Herzl proposed a practical program for collecting funds from Jews around the world by an organization which would work towards the practical realization of this goal (this organization, when it was eventually formed, was called the Zionist Organization.) He saw the future state as a model social state, basing his ideas on the European model of the time of a modern enlightened society. It would be neutral and peace-seeking, and secular in nature.

Herzl's ideas were met with enthusiasm by the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe, although Jewish leaders were less ardent. Still, Herzl convened and chaired the First Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, on August 29-31, 1897 – the first interterritorial gathering of Jews on a national and secular basis. Here the delegates adopted the Basle Program, the program of the Zionist movement, and declared “Zionism seeks to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured under public law.” At the Congress the Zionist Organization was established as the political arm of the Jewish people, and Herzl was elected its first president. In the same year, Herzl founded the Zionist weekly *Die Welt* and began activities to obtain a charter for Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael).

After the First Zionist Congress, the movement convened annually at an international Zionist Congress. In 1936 the center of the Zionist movement was transferred to Jerusalem.



Herzl with Zionist delegation en route to Israel (1898) (Israel Government Press Office)

In 1902, Herzl wrote the Zionist novel, *Altneuland* (Old New Land), in which he depicted the future Jewish state as a social utopia. He envisioned a new society that was to rise in the Land of Israel on a cooperative basis utilizing science and technology in the development of the Land. He included detailed ideas about how he saw the future state's political structure, immigration, fund-raising, diplomatic relations, social laws and relations between religion and the state. In *Altneuland*, the Jewish state was foreseen as a pluralist, advanced society, a “light unto the nations.” This book had a great impact on the Jews of the time and became a symbol of the Zionist vision in the Land of Israel.

Complete article from MFA archive:

www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2004/7/Herzl+and+Zionism.htm

ADDITIONAL WEB SITES- ZIONISM

[*The Centenary of Zionism*](#)- Historical articles, timelines and analytical essays prepared for the 100th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress (1897).

[*The Jewish State-Theodor Herzl's Program for Zionism*](#)

[*Historical Source Documents of Zionism*](#)

[*The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel*](#) - Eng

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