



Herzl and Zionism



Binyamin Ze'ev Herzl (1860-1904)

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

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 antisemitism 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



Herzl at Basle (1898)
(Central Zionist Archives)

In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was unjustly accused of treason, mainly because of the prevailing antisemitic atmosphere. Herzl witnessed mobs shouting "Death to the Jews". He resolved that there was only one solution to this antisemitic 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 antisemitism 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



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

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.



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

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



Herzl's book, **Der Judenstaat** [The Jewish State] (Central Zionist Archives)

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.

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.



Herzl with Zionist delegation in Jerusalem (1900)
(Israel Government Press Office)

Herzl saw the need for encouragement by the great powers of the national aims of the Jewish people. Thus, he traveled to the Land of Israel and Istanbul in 1898 to meet with Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. When these efforts proved fruitless, he turned to Great Britain, and met with Joseph Chamberlain, the British colonial secretary, and others. The only concrete offer he received from the British was the proposal of a Jewish autonomous region in east Africa, in Uganda.

The 1903 Kishinev pogrom and the difficult state of Russian Jewry, witnessed firsthand by Herzl during a visit to Russia, had a profound effect on him. He proposed the British Uganda



Herzl's Tomb on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem
(Central Zionist Archives)



Poster for the 1935 film **Terre Promise** [The Promised Land] that was screened in France
(Central Zionist Archives)

Program to the Sixth Zionist Congress (1903) as a temporary refuge for Russian Jewry in immediate danger. While Herzl made it clear that this program would not affect the ultimate aim of Zionism, a Jewish entity in the Land of Israel, the proposal aroused a storm at the Congress and nearly led to a split in the Zionist movement. The Uganda Program was finally rejected by the Zionist movement at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905.

Herzl died in 1904 of pneumonia and a weak heart overworked by his incessant efforts on behalf of Zionism. But by then the movement had found its place on the world political map. In 1949, Herzl's remains were brought to Israel and reinterred on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

Herzl coined the phrase "If you will, it is no fairytale," which became the motto of the Zionist movement. Although at the time no one could have imagined it, the Zionist movement, just fifty years after the First Zionist Congress, brought about the establishment of the independent State of Israel.



The Zionist Congress: From the Diaspora to Israel



Herzl at the First Zionist Congress (1897)
(Israel Government Press Office)



Convening of the 27th Zionist Congress in Israel (1968)
(Central Zionist Archives)



Zionism

Zionism is the national movement that espouses repatriation of Jews to their homeland - the Land of Israel - and the resumption of sovereign Jewish life there

Yearning for Zion and Jewish immigration continued throughout the long period of exile, following the Roman conquest and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. This yearning took on a new form in the nineteenth century, when modern nationalism, liberalism and emancipation caused the Jews to contend with new questions, which the Zionist movement tried to answer. The Hibbat Zion movement began to coalesce in the second half of the nineteenth century, advocated revival of Jewish life in the Land of Israel, and began establishing agricultural settlements there. But later, Herzl energized and consolidated Zionism into a political movement, convening the First Zionist Congress in 1897. Herzl was the first to bring the Jewish problem to world attention, and make the Jewish people a player in the world political arena. The Zionist movement which developed from his initiative also created organizational, political and economic tools to implement its vision and ideology.

The Zionist movement enunciated its goals - a national home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel - in the Basle Program. Apart from the movements that rejected the idea of national revival, Zionism included diverse groups, from Religious Zionism to Socialist Zionism. All of them worked towards the aim of the Jewish National Home, an enterprise that culminated in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

A Modern Rendition of an Ancient Motif

The origin of the word "Zionism" is the biblical word "Zion," often used as a synonym for Jerusalem and the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael). Zionism is an ideology which expresses the yearning of Jews the world over for their historical homeland - Zion, the Land of Israel.

The hope of returning to their homeland was first held by Jews exiled to Babylon some 2,500 years ago - a hope which subsequently became a reality. ("By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion." Psalms 137:1). Thus political Zionism, which coalesced in the 19th century, invented neither the concept nor the practice of return. Rather, it appropriated an ancient idea and an ongoing active movement, and adapted them to meet the needs and spirit of the times.

The core of the Zionist idea appears in the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel (May 14, 1948), which states, inter alia, that:

"The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom."

The idea of Zionism is based on the long connection between the Jewish people and its land, a link which began almost 4,000 years ago when Abraham settled in Canaan, later known as the Land of Israel.

Central to Zionist thought is the concept of the Land of Israel as the historical birthplace of the Jewish people and the belief that Jewish life elsewhere is a life of exile. Moses Hess, in his book *Rome and Jerusalem* (1844), expresses this idea:

"Two periods of time shaped the development of Jewish civilization: the first, after the liberation from Egypt, and the second, the return from Babylon. The third shall come with the redemption from the third exile."

Over centuries in the Diaspora, the Jews maintained a strong and unique relationship with their historical homeland, and manifested their yearning for Zion through rituals and literature.

Antisemitism as a Factor in Shaping Zionism

While Zionism expresses the historical link binding the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, modern Zionism might not have arisen as an active national movement in the 19th century without contemporary antisemitism

preceded by centuries of persecution.

Over the centuries, Jews were expelled from almost every European country - Germany and France, Portugal and Spain, England and Wales - a cumulative experience which had a profound impact, especially in the 19th century when Jews had abandoned hope of fundamental change in their lives. Out of this milieu came Jewish leaders who turned to Zionism as a result of the virulent antisemitism in the societies surrounding them. Thus Moses Hess, shaken by the blood libel of Damascus (1844), became the father of Zionist socialism; Leon Pinsker, shocked by the pogroms (1881-1882) which followed the assassination of Czar Alexander II, assumed leadership in the Hibbat Zion movement; and Theodor Herzl, who as a journalist in Paris experienced the venomous antisemitic campaign of the Dreyfus case (1896), organized Zionism into a political movement.

The Zionist movement aimed to solve the "Jewish problem," the problem of a perennial minority, a people subjected to repeated pogroms and persecution, a homeless community whose alienness was underscored by discrimination wherever Jews settled. Zionism aspired to deal with this situation by effecting a return to the historical homeland of the Jews - the Land of Israel.

In fact, most of the waves of Aliya (mass immigration to the Land of Israel) in the modern age were in direct response to acts of murder and discrimination against Jews. The First Aliya followed pogroms in Russia in the 1880s. The Second Aliya was spurred by the Kishinev pogrom and a string of massacres in the Ukraine and Belorussia at the turn of the century. The Third Aliya occurred after the slaughter of Jews in the Russian civil war. The Fourth Aliya originated in Poland in the 1920s after the Grawski legislation infringed on Jewish economic activity. The Fifth Aliya was composed of German and Austrian Jews fleeing Nazism.

After the State of Israel was established in 1948, mass immigrations were still linked to



David Ben-Gurion declares Israel's Independence (May 14, 1948)
(Israel Government Press Office)

discrimination and oppression. Holocaust survivors from Europe, refugees from Arab countries escaping the persecution which followed the establishment of Israel, the remnants of Polish Jewry who fled the country when antisemitism reignited at the time of Gomulka and Muzcar, and the Jews of Russia and other former Soviet republics who feared a new spasm of antisemitism with the breakup of the Soviet Union.

The history of the waves of Aliya provides strong proof for the Zionist argument that a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, with a Jewish majority, is the only solution to the "Jewish problem."

Rise of Political Zionism

Political Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, emerged in the 19th century within the context of the liberal nationalism then sweeping through Europe.

Zionism synthesized the two goals of liberal nationalism - liberation and unity - by aiming to free the Jews from hostile and oppressive alien rule and to reestablish Jewish unity by gathering Jewish exiles from the four corners of the world to the Jewish homeland.

The rise of Zionism as a political movement was also a response to the failure of the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment) to solve the "Jewish problem." According to Zionist doctrine, the reason for this failure was that personal emancipation and equality were impossible without national emancipation and equality, since national problems require



(Jerusalem Post)

national solutions. The Zionist national solution was the establishment of a Jewish national state with a Jewish majority in the historical homeland, thus realizing the Jewish people's right to self-determination. Zionism did not consider the "normalization" of the Jewish condition contrary to universal aims and values. It advocated the right of every people on earth to its own home, and argued that only a sovereign people could become an equal member of the family of nations.

Zionism: A Pluralistic Movement

Although Zionism was basically a political movement aspiring to a return to the Jewish homeland with freedom, independence, statehood and security for the Jewish people, it also promoted a reassertion of Jewish culture. An important element in this reawakening was the revival of Hebrew, long restricted to liturgy and literature, as a living national language, for use in government and the military, education and science, the market and the street.

Like any other nationalism, Zionism interrelated with other ideologies, resulting in the formation of Zionist currents and subcurrents. The combination of nationalism and liberalism gave birth to liberal Zionism; the integration of socialism gave rise to socialist Zionism; the blending of Zionism with deep religious faith resulted in religious Zionism; and the influence of European nationalism inspired a rightist-nationalist faction. In this respect, Zionism has been no different from other nationalisms which also espouse various liberal, traditional, socialist (leftist) and conservative (rightist) leanings.

Zionism and Arab Nationalism

Most of the founders of Zionism knew that Palestine (the Land of Israel) had an Arab population (though some spoke naively of "a land without a people for a people without a land"). Still, only few regarded the Arab presence as a real obstacle to the fulfillment of Zionism. At that time in the late 19th century, Arab nationalism did not yet exist in any form, and the Arab population of Palestine was sparse and apolitical. Many Zionist leaders believed that since the local community was relatively small, friction between it and the returning Jews could be avoided; they were also convinced

that the subsequent development of the country would benefit both peoples, thus earning Arab endorsement and cooperation. However, these hopes were not fulfilled.

Contrary to the declared positions and expectations of the Zionist ideologists who had aspired to achieve their aims by peaceful means and cooperation, the renewed Jewish presence in the Land met with militant Arab opposition. For some time many Zionists found it hard to understand and accept the depth and intensity of the dispute, which became in fact a clash between two peoples both regarding the country as their own - the Jews by virtue of their historical and spiritual connection, and the Arabs because of their centuries-long presence in the country.

During the years 1936-1947, the struggle over the Land of Israel grew more intense. Arab opposition became more extreme with the increased growth and development of the Jewish community. At the same time, the Zionist movement felt it necessary to increase immigration and develop the country's economic infrastructure, in order to save as many Jews as possible from the Nazi inferno in Europe.

The unavoidable clash between the Jews and the Arabs brought the UN to recommend, on November 29, 1947, the establishment of two states in the area west of the Jordan River - one Jewish and one Arab. The Jews accepted the resolution; the Arabs rejected it.

On May 14, 1948, in accordance with the UN resolution of November 1947, the State of Israel was established.

The State of Israel: From Dream to Realization



Herzl Addressing the Zionist Congress in Basle
(Israel Government Press Office)



The Knesset (Israel's Parliament) in session
(Yoav Loeffl)

Zionism into the 21st century

The establishment of the State of Israel marked the realization of the Zionist goal of attaining an internationally recognized, legally secured home for the Jewish people in its historic homeland, where Jews would be free from persecution and able to develop their own lives and identity.

Since 1948, Zionism has seen its task as continuing to encourage the "ingathering of the exiles," which at times has called for extraordinary efforts to rescue endangered (physically and spiritually) Jewish communities. It also strives to preserve the unity and continuity of the Jewish people as well as to focus on the centrality of Israel in Jewish life everywhere.

Down through the centuries, the desire for the restoration of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel has been a thread binding the Jewish people together. Jews around the world accept Zionism as a fundamental tenet of Judaism, support the State of Israel as the basic realization of Zionism and are enriched culturally, socially and spiritually by the fact of Israel - a member of the family of nations and a vibrant, creative accomplishment of the Jewish spirit.