



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן

IDEAS FOR TODAY

ESSENTIAL TEXTS OF ZIONIST THOUGHT AND MODERN JEWISH IDENTITY

Herzl—Between Theodor and Benjamin Ze'ev

Regev Ben-David

May 9, 2023

In this three-part series, *Essential Texts of Zionist Thought and Modern Jewish Identity*, **Regev Ben-David**, Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute's Beit Midrash for Israeli Rabbis, explores the ideas of three highly influential Zionist thinkers of the early 20th century: Herzl, Ahad Ha'am, and Rav Kook. Together, we will examine their views on what it means to be a Jew in the modern world and the impact of their philosophies on the discourse about Jewish identity today.

This session is part of Ideas for Today, curated courses by Hartman Institute scholars on the big Jewish ideas of this moment.



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Series Outline

- *May 9th: Herzl—Between Theodor and Benjamin Ze'ev*
- *May 16th: Ahad Ha'am and Cultural-Secular Judaism*
- *May 23rd: Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook and the Religious-Zionist Aspiration*

Contemporary Israeli Context

- **Surface Level:** Political Debate; “Judicial reform/overhaul”, parliament vs. Supreme Court
- **Undercurrent:** Clash of Israeli-Jewish “tribes”—worldviews, identity politics, mutual suspicion and accusations.
- **“Background Conditions”:**
 - pre-state *Labor/Revisionist* struggles (33’ Arlosoroff assassination, “saison”, Altalena);
 - *Ashkenazi/Sephardi* historical tensions (integration of 50’s Sephardic ‘olim);
 - *Religious/Secular* clashes (draft exemption, Orthodox monopoly, liberal reality);
 - *Right/Left* debates (93’ Oslo, 95’ Rabin Assassination; 2005 Disengagement)

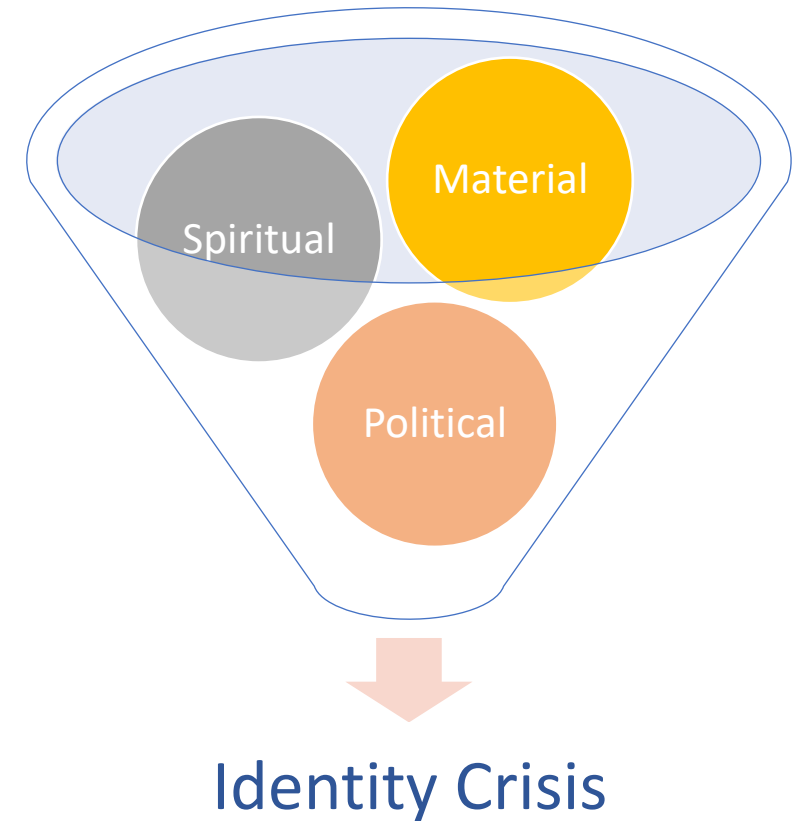




Zionism & Modern Jewish Identities

Challenge of Modern Jewish Identity

- Enlightenment
 - Socialism
 - Industrialization
 - Urbanization
 - (Proto-)Individualism
 - Nationalism
 - Democracy
 - Nation State
 - Emancipation
- Collapse of Rabbinical authority, of communal autonomy and supervision.
 - Earthquake for traditional Jewish identity, self understanding, and belonging.



Phases of Jewish hopes in Modernity

1. Traditional, segregated communal exilic life;
Traditional Messianic hopes.
2. 18th—19th c. Europe: Enlightenment and Emancipation.
Equal membership *as individuals* in the non-Jewish nation state. Equality and acceptance as Redemption.
3. Late 19th c.: *Auto*-Emancipation
Equal membership *as a Jewish collective* among the family of nations.

Autonomism (“*here*”)Territorialism (“*somewhere, anywhere*”)Zionism (“*There*”)

Zionism as Response to the Identity Challenge—1/4

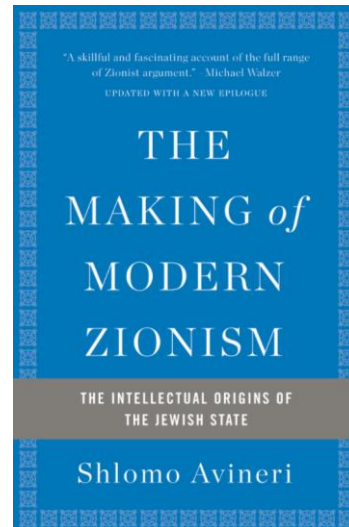
“At the root of Zionism lies a paradox. ... An active movement for Jewish return to Palestine does not appear until the second half of the 19th century. ...

The most common explanation, in textbooks and political propaganda (both Zionist and anti-Zionist), relates the emergence of Zionism in the nineteenth century to the **outbreak of anti-Semitism...**

From any conceivable point of view, the nineteenth century was **the best century** Jews had ever experienced, collectively and individually, since the destruction of the Temple. ... to what dilemma could Zionism then address itself and try to provide an answer?...

Secularization and liberalism opened European society for Jews **as equals**. ...

Yet it was **precisely this opening up of non-Jewish society which created a completely novel set of dilemmas and problems** for which the traditional framework of the *kehilla* was wholly inadequate ...



Zionism as Response to the Identity Challenge—2/4

“With Emancipation Jewish parents could now send their children to the general schools which became secularized. ... But this apparently reasonable, decent, and liberal solution left some **very basic problems of identity**. Since the state schools were obviously open on Saturday (Sunday continued to be the public day of rest even in a secularized Christian society), Jewish parents and pupils were immediately confronted with the problem of coping with an educational system that conflicted with Jewish tenets about the Sabbath. ...

the problems of Jewish identity had not been solved by liberalism and tolerance but, in a way, had been exacerbated. Being Jewish no longer meant a single, sometimes heroic, decision to stand by one’s conviction and not succumb through conversion to majority pressure. Rather, it now became a series of innumerable daily decisions, bringing out the difference and distinction *within equality* in hundreds of individual decisions.

Zionism as Response to the Identity Challenge—3/4

“To this specifically modern dilemma of identity in the context of liberalism must be added another set of predicaments brought about by nationalism. ...

If people ceased to view themselves primarily as Christians and their neighbors as Jews in the religious sense, they began to view themselves as Frenchmen, Germans, Russians, Poles, Hungarians. ...

Still there remained the question whether the Jewish person could regard himself, and be regarded by others, as French or Polish or German. When French children learned in school that their ancestors were the Gauls, could a Jewish child truly identify with Vercingetorix, and would his schoolmates truly view him as a descendant of the ancient Gauls? Would German students really view a Jewish colleague as a true descendant of Arminius? ...



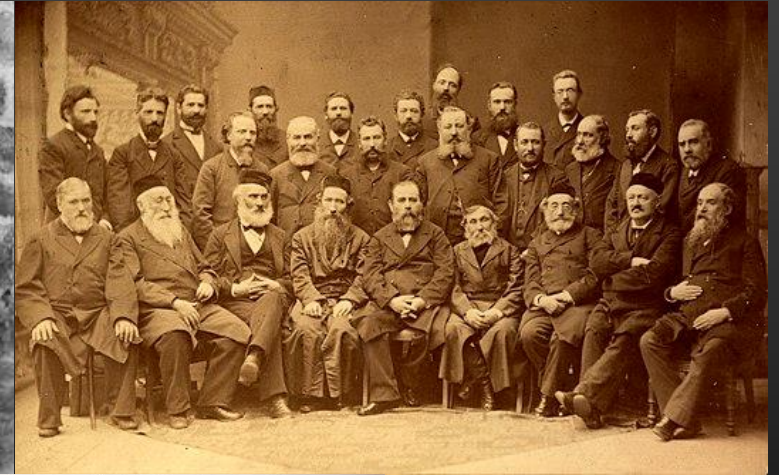


Zionism as Response to the Identity Challenge—4/4

“Secularized, modern Jews began to ask for the origins of their culture, for the roots of their history; to extol the glories of Jerusalem; to ask whether they should not look into their own past just as members of other groups were doing. ...

Those Jews who ... went to Palestine did not just flee from pogroms nor were they bent on economic safety and success—Ottoman Palestine was hardly an economic paradise. **They were seeking self-determination, identity,** liberation within the terms of post-1789 European culture, and their own newly awakened self-consciousness. ...

It was a response to the challenges of liberalism and nationalism much more than a response merely to anti-Semitism, and for this reason it could not have occurred at any period before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”



“Zionism is a Surname”: Zionist Agendas & Schools



Zionist Tendencies

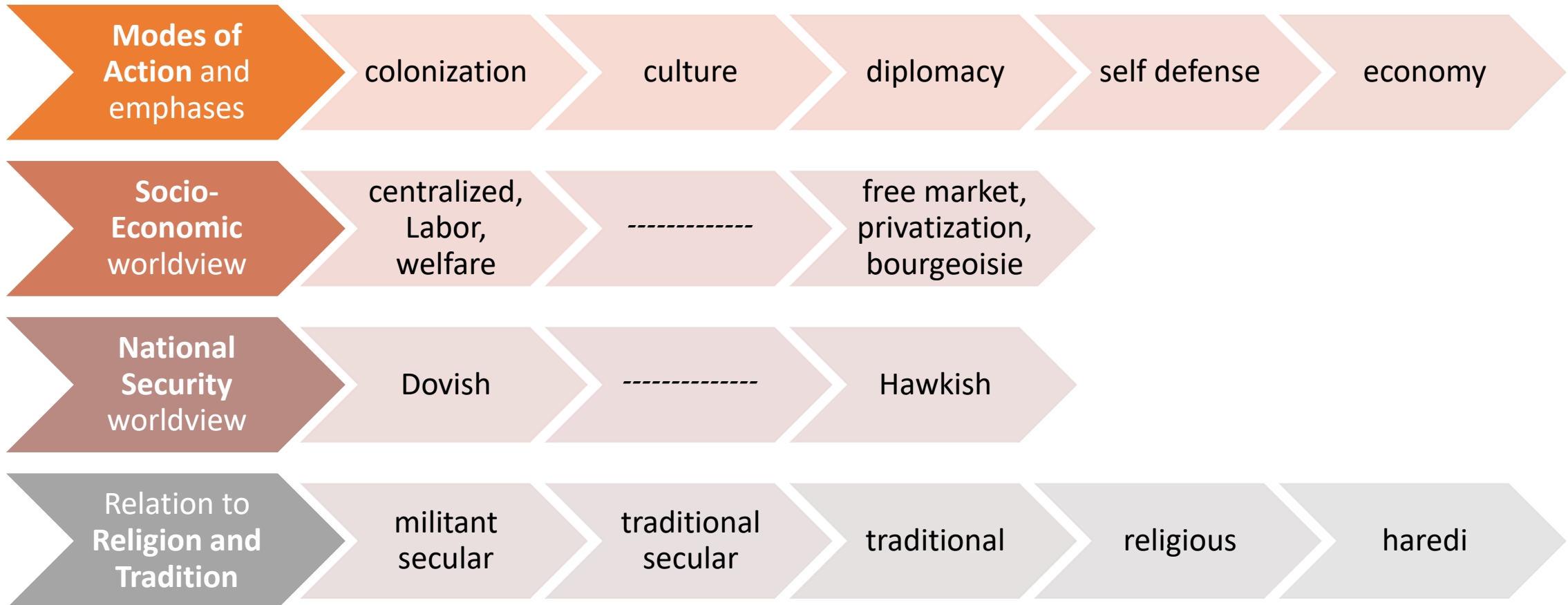
- Traditional passive longing for Zion; 4 “holy cities”; local *‘aliyot*
- Mostly-Traditional (“religious”) Zionism:
 - Consciousness of continuity, commandment to settle the land
 - Challenges: “three oaths,” Divine (non-human) redemption; secular Zionists
- Mostly-Modern (“secular”) Zionism:
 - Modern nationalism, self-determination; failure of emancipation
 - Consciousness of some break with the past



Bird's Eye Early Zionist Timeline

- 
- 1880's: "1st *'aliya*", colonies, *Hibat Zion*, Barons Rothchild, Hirsch
 - 1889 Ahad Ha'am's spiritual/cultural Zionism
 - 1897 Herzl's 1st Zionist Congress—Political/diplomatic Zionism
 - 1903 Uganda Affair (6th Zionist Congress)
 - 1904 Herzl's sudden death; 2nd *'aliya*; r. Kook makes *'aliyah*
 - 1917 Balfour Declaration; 1920 San Remo; 1922 British Mandate; r. Kook appointed Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi
 - 1923 Jabotinsky's Revisionist Zionism; 1935 quits WZO; r. Kook passes away

Zionist Agendas and Schools

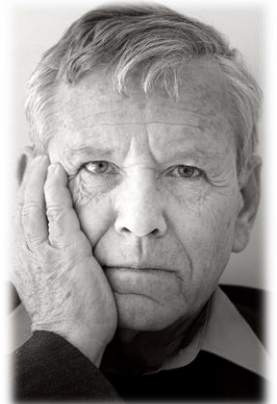


“Zionism is a Surname”—1/2

“We can all agree, without difficulty, that what Zionism means is that it is good for the Jewish people to return to the Land of Israel and it is bad for that people to be scattered among the nations. But from that point on—we disagree.

I have stated many times that Zionism is not a first name but a surname, a family name, and this family is divided, feuding over the question of a “master plan” for the enterprise:

How shall we live here? Shall we aspire to rebuild the kingdom of David and Solomon? Shall we construct a Marxist paradise here? A Western society, a social democratic welfare state? Or shall we create a model of the petite bourgeoisie diluted with a little Yiddishkeit?





“Zionism is a Surname”—2/2

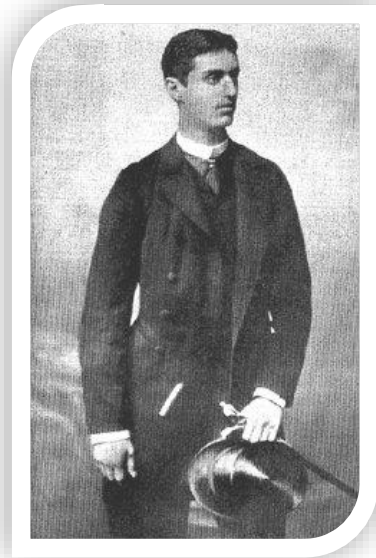
“Within the Zionist family there are some members who would be happy to be rid of me, and there are some whose familial relation to me causes me discomfort. But the pluralism is a fact... This pluralism follows from the multifaceted experience of the Jewish people and of modern Israel, regardless of whether it pleases us or worries us. I myself ... believe in spiritual pluralism as a desirable condition: an abundance of approaches, trends, traditions and opinions, life styles—including spiritual ‘imports’—is a potential source of creative spiritual tension, the proper ground for a creative life.”

Herzl's Zionism and Jewishness



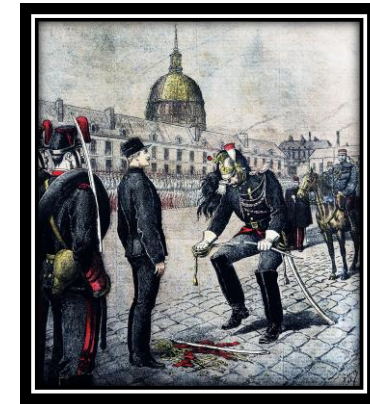
Herzl's Biographic Timeline—1/3

- 1860 born in Pest, Austro-Hungarian Empire
- 1878 family moves to Vienna, Empire's capital
- 1881—1883 studies Law. Reads the Antisemitic writings of Dühring. Quits 'Albia' fraternity on antisemitic grounds.
- 1885 begins career in journalism: *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Neue Freie Presse*. First personal antisemitic encounter.
- 1889 Marries Julie, publishes first plays
- 1891 Hans is born. Works as *NFP* reporter in Paris



Herzl's Biographic Timeline—2/3

- 1893 Ponders dueling Karl Lueger.
Also, ponders mass Christianization.
- Late 1894—1895
 - Writes “The New Ghetto”—concerned with Jewish life
 - Reports from the Dreyfus Trial
 - Interviews Baron de Hirsch, presents political action plan
 - Begins writing his diaries
 - Begins writing what will become “*Der Judenstaat*” [“The State of the Jews”] (1896)
 - Lueger elected as Vienna Mayor



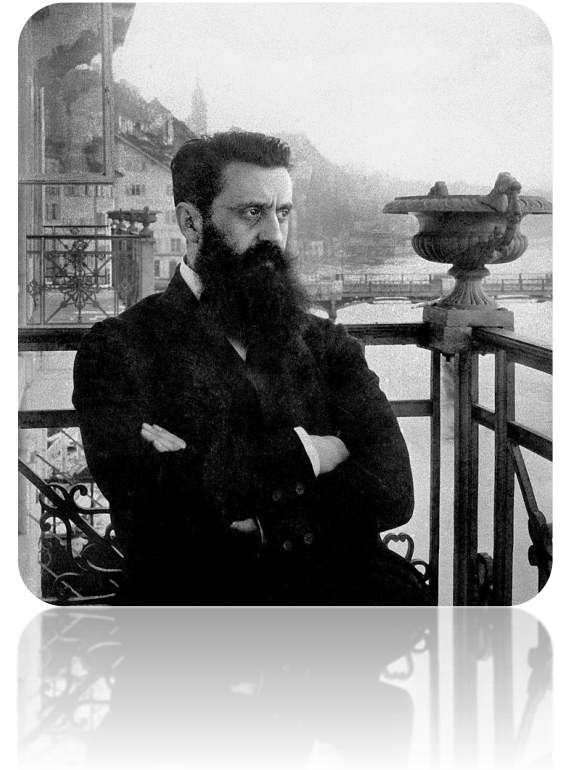
Herzl's Biographic Timeline—3/3

- 1897 First Zionist Congress; Issues *“Die Welt”*
- 1898 2nd Zionist Congress; Visits Palestine
- Meetings with Ottoman officials (1896);
German Emperor (1898); Ottoman Sultan (1901)
- 1902 Publishes *Altneuland* [“Old-New Land”]
- 1903 “Uganda Affair”, 6th Congress
- 1904 passes away at the age of 44, abruptly ending less than a decade of Jewish-Zionist activity, changing history nonetheless .



Themes in Herzl's Jewish Identity

- Modernism
 - culture, science, industry, humanistic values, global collaborations
- Jewishness
 - National basis of Jewish identity: “We are a People—*One* People”
 - Devoted to the Jewish collective
 - Acknowledges emotional connection to tradition and to Land of Israel; shows respect to rabbis—as both traditional authority and political leaders
 - Secular Jew, does not observe *halakha*, performs some traditional rituals
- Analysis of Jewish condition in Europe
 - Persistent antisemitism—takes many forms, but essentially (or currently) is a *national* question
 - Need for a place of our own; will benefit *everyone*





“The Menorah” (Dec. 31st, 1897)—1/5

“Once there was a man who deep in his soul felt the need to be a Jew. His material circumstances were satisfactory enough. He was making an adequate living and was fortunate to have a vocation in which he could create according to the impulses of his heart. You see, he was an artist. He had long ceased to trouble his head about his Jewish origin or the faith of his fathers, when the age-old hatred re-asserted itself under a fashionable slogan. Like many others, our man, too, believed that this movement would soon subside. But instead of getting better, it got worse. Although he was not personally affected by them, the attacks pained him anew each time. Gradually his soul became one bleeding wound.

This secret psychic torment had the effect of steering him to its source, namely, his Jewishness, with the result that he experienced a change that he might never have in better days, because he had become so alienated: He began to love Judaism with great fervor. At first he did not fully acknowledge this mysterious affection, but finally it grew so powerful that his vague feelings crystallized into a clear idea to which he gave voice: The thought that there was only one way out of this Jewish suffering — namely, to return to Judaism.



“The Menorah”—2/5

“When his best friends, whose situation was similar to his, found out about this, they shook their heads and thought he had gone out of his mind... He, on the other hand, thought that the moral distress of modern Jews was so acute because they had lost the spiritual counterpoise which our strong forefathers had possessed. ...

As a man and an artist of modern sensibilities, he was deeply rooted in many non-Jewish customs, and he had absorbed ineradicable elements from the cultures of the nations among which his intellectual pursuits had taken him. How was this to be reconciled with his return to Judaism? This gave rise to many doubts in his own mind about the soundness of his guiding idea, his *idée maitresse*, as a French thinker has called it. Perhaps the generation that had grown up under the influence of other cultures was no longer capable of that return which he had discovered as the solution. But the next generation, provided it were given the right guidance early enough, would be able to do so. He therefore tried to make sure that his own children, at least, would be shown the right way. He was going to give them a Jewish education from the very beginning.



“The Menorah”—3/5

“In previous years he had let the festival which for centuries had illuminated the marvel of the Maccabees with the glow of candles pass by unobserved. Now, however, he used it as an occasion to provide his children with a beautiful memory for the future. An attachment to the ancient nation was to be instilled early in these young souls. A *menorah* was acquired, and when he held this nine-branched candelabrum in his hands for the first time, a strange mood came over him. In his remote youth, in his father’s house, such little lights had burned and there was something intimate and homelike about the holiday. This tradition did not seem chill or dead. The custom of kindling one light with another had been passed on through the ages.

The ancient form of the *menorah* also gave him food for thought. When had the primitive structure of this candelabrum first been devised? Obviously, its form had originally been derived from that of a tree... And our friend, who was, after all, an artist, wondered whether it would not be possible to infuse new life into the rigid form of the menorah, to water its roots like those of a tree.



“The Menorah”—4/5

“The first candle was lit and the origin of the holiday was retold: the miracle of the little lamp which had burned so much longer than expected, as well as the story of the return from the Babylonian exile, of the Second Temple, of the Maccabees. Our friend told his children all he knew. It was not much but for them it was enough. When the second candle was lit, they repeated what he had told them. And although they had learned it all from him, it seemed to him quite new and beautiful. In the days that followed he could hardly wait for the evenings, which became ever brighter. Candle after candle was lit in the *menorah*, and together with his children, the father mused upon the little lights. At length his reveries became more than he could or would tell them, for his dreams would have been beyond their understanding.

When he had resolved to return to the ancient fold and openly acknowledge his return, he had only intended to do what he considered honorable and sensible. But he had never dreamed that on his way back home he would also find gratification for his longing for beauty. Yet what befell him was nothing less. The *menorah* with its growing brilliance was indeed a thing of beauty, and inspired lofty thoughts.



“The Menorah”—5/5

“So he set to work and with an expert hand sketched a design for a *menorah* to present to his children the following year. He made a free adaption of the motif of the eight arms of equal height which projected from the central stem to the right and to the left, each pair on the same level. He did not consider himself bound by the rigid traditional form, but created again directly from nature, unconcerned with other interpretations which, of course, continued to be no less valid on that account. What he was aiming for was vibrant beauty. But even as he brought new motion into the rigid forms, he still observed their tradition, the refined old style of their arrangement...

For our friend, the occasion became a parable for the awakening of a whole nation. First one candle — it is still dark and the solitary light looks gloomy. Then it finds a companion, then another, and yet another. The darkness must retreat. The young and the poor are the first to see the light. Then the others join in, all those who love justice, truth, liberty, progress, humanity and beauty. When all the candles are ablaze everyone must stop in amazement and rejoice at what has been wrought. And no office is more blessed than that of a servant of this light.”



Herzl's Diaries—First Entry, Summer 1895, Paris

“For some time past I have been occupied with a work of infinite grandeur. At the moment I do not know whether I shall carry it through. It looks like a mighty dream. ...

When did I actually begin to concern myself with the Jewish Question? Probably ever since it arose; certainly from the time that I read Duhring's book. ...

As the years went on, the Jewish Question bored into me and gnawed at me, tormented me and made me very miserable. In fact, I kept coming back to it whenever my own personal experiences — joys and sorrows — permitted me to rise to broader considerations. ...

At first, the Jewish Question grieved me bitterly. There might have been a time when I would have liked to get away from it — into the Christian fold, anywhere. But in any case, these were only vague desires born of youthful weakness. For I can say to myself with the honesty inherent in this diary — which would be completely worthless if I played the hypocrite with myself— that I never seriously thought of becoming baptized or changing my name. ...



Herzl's Diaries—the Catholic Solution—1/2

“I can still recall two different conceptions of the Question and its solution which I had in the course of those years. About two years ago I wanted to solve the Jewish Question, at least in Austria, with the help of the Catholic Church. I wished to gain access to the Pope (not without first assuring myself of the support of the Austrian church dignitaries) and say to him: Help us against the anti-Semites and I will start a great movement for the free and honorable conversion of Jews to Christianity. Free and honorable by virtue of the fact that the leaders of this movement — myself in particular — would remain Jews and as such would propagate conversion to the faith of the majority. The conversion was to take place in broad daylight, Sundays at noon, in Saint Stephen's Cathedral, with festive processions and amidst the pealing of bells. Not in shame, as individuals have converted up to now, but with proud gestures.



Herzl's Diaries—the Catholic Solution—2/2

“And because the Jewish leaders would remain Jews, escorting the people only to the threshold of the church and themselves staying outside, the whole performance was to be elevated by a touch of great candor. We, the steadfast men, would have constituted the last generation. We would still have adhered to the faith of our fathers. But we would have made Christians of our young sons before they reached the age of independent decision, after which conversion looks like an act of cowardice or careerism. As is my custom, I had thought out the entire plan down to all its minute details

But one thing in Benedikt's response struck me as being true. He said: For a hundred generations your line has preserved itself within the fold of Judaism. Now you are proposing to set yourself up as the terminal point in this process. This you cannot do and have no right to do. Besides, the Pope would never receive you.”



Herzl's Diaries—Analysis of Anti-Semitism

"I understand what anti-Semitism is about. We Jews have maintained ourselves, even if through no fault of our own, as a foreign body among the various nations. In the ghetto we have taken on a number of anti-social qualities. Our character has been corrupted by oppression, and it must be restored through some other kind of pressure. Actually, anti-Semitism is a consequence of the emancipation of the Jews. ...

All this sufferings rendered us ugly and transformed our character which had in earlier times been proud and magnificent. After all, we once were men who knew how to defend the state in time of war, and we must have been a highly gifted people to have endured two thousand years of carnage without being destroyed.

Now, it was erroneous on the part of the doctrinaire libertarians to believe that men can be made equal by publishing an edict in the Imperial Gazette. When we emerged from the ghetto, we were, and for the time being remained, Ghetto Jews. We should have been given time to get accustomed to freedom. But the peoples around us have neither the magnanimity nor the patience."



Herzl's Diaries—"The New Ghetto" (Oct-Nov., 1894)

"A few months later I was sitting for the sculptor Beer who was doing my bust. Our conversation resulted in the insight that it does a Jew no good to become an artist and free himself from the taint of money. The curse still clings. We cannot get out of the Ghetto. I became quite heated as I talked, and when I left, my excitement still glowed in me. ... the outline of the play came into being. ...

The next day I set to work. Three blessed weeks of ardor and labor.

I had thought that through this eruption of playwriting I had written myself free of the matter. On the contrary; I got more and more deeply involved with it. **The thought grew stronger in me that I must do something for the Jews.**

For the first time I went to the synagogue in the Rue de la Victoire and once again found the services festive and moving. Many things reminded me of my youth and the Tabak Street temple at Pest. I took a look at the Paris Jews and saw a family likeness in their faces: bold, misshapen noses; furtive and cunning eyes."



Herzl's Diaries—June 11-12th, 1895

- “The worth of my plan obviously lies in the facts that I am using only available resources, making unutilized or unutilizable things fruitful by combining them, that I have regard for all suffering (certainly including the hurts inflicted by Jews on Gentiles), protect all acquired rights, take all human impulses into account, balance world supply and world demand, use the progress of technology, and hold tradition sacred.”
- “The ship of coffins! We shall also take our dead along with us.”
- “When I say ‘God’ I do not mean to offend the free-thinkers. As far as I am concerned, they can use ‘World Spirit’ or some other term in place of this dear old wonderful abbreviation by means of which I get across to the simple intelligences. In our academic battle of words, we still mean one and the same thing. In fact, in belief as well as in doubt we mean the very same thing: that it is inexplicable!”



The State of the Jews (1896)—1/2

“The Jewish question persists wherever Jews live in appreciable numbers. Wherever it does not exist, it is brought in together with Jewish immigrants. We are naturally drawn into those places where we are not persecuted, and our appearance there gives rise to persecution. ... Anti-Semitism is a highly complex movement, which I think I understand. I approach this movement as a Jew, yet without fear or hatred. I believe that I can see in it the elements of cruel sport, of common commercial rivalry, of inherited prejudice, of religious intolerance—but also of a supposed need for self-defense. **I consider the Jewish question neither a social nor a religious one, even though it sometimes takes these and other forms. It is a national question,** and to solve it we must first of all establish it as an international political problem to be discussed and settled by the civilized nations of the world in council.

We are a people – *one* people.

The State of the Jews (1896)—2/2

“We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted to us. In vain are we loyal patriots, sometimes superloyal; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow citizens; in vain do we strive to enhance the fame of our native lands in the arts and sciences, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In our native lands where we have lived for centuries we are still decried as aliens, often by men whose ancestors had not yet come at a time when Jewish sighs had long been heard in the country.”



Zionism and/as Jewish Peoplehood

“We returned home, as it were. For Zionism is a return to the Jewish fold even before it becomes a return to the Jewish land. ... Zionism has already brought about something remarkable, heretofore regarded as impossible: a close union between the ultramodern and the ultraconservative elements of Jewry. The fact that this has come to pass without undignified concessions on the part of either side, without intellectual sacrifices, is further proof, if such proof is necessary, of the national entity of the Jews. A union of this kind is possible only on a national basis.”

(1st Zionist Congress, Basel, August 29, 1st of Elul, 1897)



Altneuland: Progress, with Connection to the Past

“Those people were no worse and no more stupid than we. Or, if you like, we are neither better nor cleverer than they. Our success in social experiment is due to another cause. **We established our Society without inherited drawbacks. We did indeed bind ourselves to the past, as we were bound to do—there was the old soil, the ancient people; but we rejuvenated the institutions. Nations with unbroken histories have to carry burdens assumed by their ancestors. Not we.**”

(David Littwack)





Primitiveness in service of Progress (*ANL*)

“When the visitors remarked that the locomotive had no smokestack, they were told that this line, like most of the Palestinian railways, was operated by electric power. **There was one of the great advantages of having begun from the beginning. Just because everything here had been in a primitive, neglected state, it had been possible to install the most up-to-date technical appliances at once.** So it had been with the city planning, as they already knew; and so it had been with the construction of railways, the digging of canals, the establishment of agriculture and industry in the land. The Jewish settlers who streamed into the country had **brought with them the experience of the whole civilized world.**”



Progress, Cosmopolitanism (*ANL*)

“Kingscourt ... proceeded to ask many questions about the great edifices that surrounded the square. David replied that they housed colonial banks and the branch offices of European shipping companies. It was for that reason that the square was called "The Place of the Nations." The name was apt not only because the buildings were devoted to international commerce, but because the "Place of the Nations" was thronged with people from all parts of the world. Brilliant Oriental robes mingled with the sober costumes of the Occident, but the latter predominated. There were many Chinese, Persians and Arabs in the streets, but the city itself seemed thoroughly European. One might easily imagine himself in some Italian port. The brilliant blue of sky and sea was reminiscent of the Riviera, but the buildings were much cleaner and more modern. The traffic, though lively, was far less noisy.”

Liberalism, Humanism, Freedom of Conscience (ANL)

- "I guessed from one of your first questions," replied Littwak calmly, "that you were not a Jew. Let me tell you, then, that my associates and I make no distinctions between one man and another. We do not ask to what race or religion a man belongs. If he is a man, that is enough for us."
- "My last word to the Jews will be: The stranger must be made to feel at home in our midst." (Dr. Eichenstamm)
- "...everyone was allowed to find salvation in his own way. Religion had been excluded from public affairs once and for all. The New Society did not care whether a man sought the eternal verities in a temple, a church or a mosque, in an art museum or at a philharmonic concert."

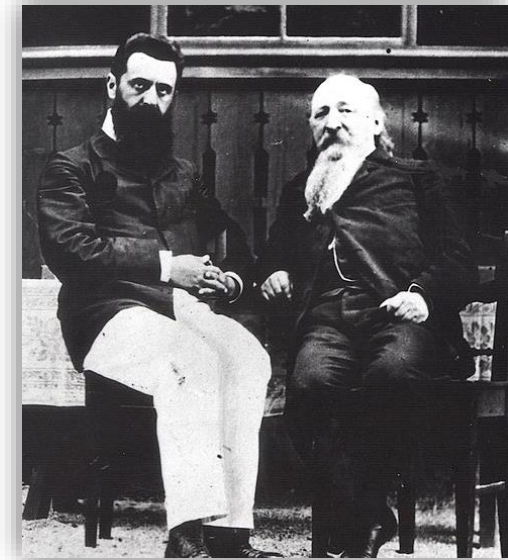


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