

May 2017 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

As defined by Garrett Ward Sheldon in the [Encyclopedia of Political Thought](#), “Political Zionism stressed the importance of political action and deemed the attainment of political rights in Palestine a prerequisite for the fulfillment of the Zionist enterprise. Political Zionism is linked to the name of Theodor Herzl, who considered the Jewish problem a political one that should be solved by overt action in the international arena. His aim was to obtain a charter, recognized by the world leadership, granting the Jews sovereignty in a Jewish owned territory.”

As we wish a Happy 69th Birthday to the State of Israel this week, I’d like to offer a bit of background to help you understand Herzl’s passion for creating a Jewish Homeland.

Born into a wealthy and acculturated Budapest Jewish family, Herzl had moved at a young age to Vienna, where he grew up with a relatively firm sense of Jewish security, subtle as it was. Young Theodor grew up in a household that faced new challenges of emancipation head-on; while not prepared to abandon their Jewishness completely, neither were they prepared to let their Jewishness hinder opportunities for newly feasible upward social mobility. Yes, they were Jewish, but they were happy to hold those cards close to the chest.

Who they really wanted to be, and who they seem to have succeeded in becoming, was a successful European family, in the model of any other successful European family. And to protect this position, even if they weren’t able to shake the last vestiges of Jewishness (and it’s not clear they wanted to, anyway), they certainly were not eager to have their Jewish identity trump their Austrian/European identity in the eyes of society at large. Theodor was raised to capitalize on every opportunity European society had to offer. It is thanks to this that he would grow up with the opportunity to pursue law school and become a lawyer, an opportunity all but unimaginable just a few generations earlier for Jewish boys. More important is the fact that thanks to this same worldly upbringing, Herzl was able to develop into one of the most prominent (and highly paid) international journalists of his time. As a result, he was assigned to cover the 1894 trial of French military officer Captain Dreyfus for the *Neue Rreire Presse*.

It was during this trial that the Zionist fire was lit. Upon witnessing the obviously anti-Semitic miscarriage of justice, Herzl’s sense of security in his Jewish identity was dashed. He was forever changed. At first Herzl surmised that mass assimilation would be the answer, but then he came to believe, quite quickly, that the only way for Jews to enjoy real safety would be in mass emigration from those countries in which they lacked control over their own destiny. In order for Jews to live in security, he concluded, they must first have the political authority to do so.

Taking his cue from political developments across Europe at the time, Herzl advocated an approach of acculturated nationalism. Again, he strove not only for emancipation, but also, in the tradition of Leon Pinsker, auto-emancipation, since real emancipation (real security) is not something that could be bestowed. Rather, Herzl believed, real national security must be created by the Jews reclaiming their right to a “normal” political existence.

To achieve his goals, Herzl recognized he would need two principal tools: money and diplomacy. Money would be necessary not only to make sure that his message would reach massive numbers of Jews, but also to secure land for the Jewish Nation. And, of course, diplomacy would be necessary since his movement would have to overcome almost two thousand years of homelessness and political disenfranchisement. For money, he turned to wealthy Jews, most notably, the French Baron Edmond de Rothschild. On the diplomatic front, he solicited leaders in the four most important countries of the time in relation to the Jewish question: the Sultan of Turkey, Chamberlain of England, the Kaiser of Germany, and the Czar of Russia.

Herzl was convinced with all his soul that if only he could procure opportunity, he would be able to present the case for the Jews with sufficient passion and skill so as to earn the granting of sovereignty, in his words, “over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the requirements of the nation.” Though he would have preferred Palestine, Herzl was prepared to accept any piece of land, so long as it was large enough to accommodate the world’s Jews and provide opportunity for the Jewish nation to create a home in which the Jews would control the mechanisms of society. The key, though, was that Herzl advocated a form of Zionism that understood political means to be the most effective driving force in his pursuit of a National homeland for the Jews.

There were -- and continue to be -- other critical forms of Zionism, but it is my opinion that without the tireless work of Theodor Herzl and his advocacy for Political Zionism, the modern State of Israel may never have come to fruition. And for this, we are forever grateful.

Yom Holedet Sameach, Israel! Happy Birthday!!!

Rabbi Dubin

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