

THE ZIONIST IDEA

A Historical Analysis and Reader

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION,

AN AFTERWORD AND BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

by Arthur Hertzberg



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ZIONISM (1902)

THE NEW ZIONISM, which has been called political, differs from the old, religious, messianic variety in that it disavows all mysticism, no longer identifies itself with messianism, and does not expect the return to Palestine to be brought about by a miracle, but desires to prepare the way by its own efforts.

The new Zionism has grown only in part out of the inner impulses of Judaism itself, out of the enthusiasm of modern educated Jews for their history and martyrology, out of an awakened pride in their racial qualities, out of ambition to save the ancient people for a long, long future and to add new great deeds of posterity to those of their ancestors.

For the rest, Zionism is the result of two impulses which came from without: first, the principle of nationality, which dominated thought and sentiment in Europe for half a century and determined the politics of the world; second, anti-Semitism, from which the Jews of all countries suffer to some degree.

The principle of nationality has awakened a sense of their own identity in all the peoples; it has taught them to regard their unique qualities as values and has given them a passionate desire for independence. It could not, therefore, pass by the educated Jews without leaving some trace. It induced them to remember who and what they are, to feel themselves a people once again, and to demand a normal national destiny for themselves. The principle of nationality has, in its exaggerations, led to excesses. It has erred into chauvinism, stooped to idiotic hatred of the foreigner, and sunk to grotesque self-worship. Jewish nationalism is safe from the caricature of itself. The Jewish nationalist does not suffer from egotism; he feels, on the contrary, that he must make tireless efforts to render the name Jew a title of honor. He modestly recognizes the good qualities of other nations and diligently seeks to make them his own, in so far as they can be blended in with his natural capacities. He knows what terrible harm centuries of slavery or disability have done to his originally proud and upright character and he seeks to cure himself by means of intense self-discipline.

Anti-Semitism has also taught many educated Jews the way back to

their people. It has had the effect of a sharp trial which the weak cannot stand, but from which the strong emerge stronger and more confident in themselves. It is incorrect to say that Zionism is but a gesture of truculence or an act of desperation against anti-Semitism. It is true that anti-Semitism alone has moved some educated Jews to throw in their lot with Jewry once again, and that they would again fall away if their Christian fellow countrymen would but receive them in a friendly way. But, in the case of most Zionists, the effect of anti-Semitism was only to force them to reflect upon their relationship to the nations of the world, and their reflection has led them to conclusions which would endure in their minds and hearts if anti-Semitism were to disappear completely.

THE ONE POINT which excludes, probably forever, the possibility of understanding between Zionist and non-Zionist Jews is the question of Jewish nationality. Whoever maintains and believes that the Jews are not a nation can indeed not be a Zionist; he cannot join a movement which has as its sole purpose the desire to normalize a people which is living and suffering under abnormal conditions. He who is convinced to the contrary that the Jews are a people must necessarily become Zionist, as only the return to their own country can save the Jewish nation which is everywhere hated, persecuted, and oppressed, from physical and intellectual destruction.

Many Jews, especially in the West, have completely broken with Judaism in their heart of hearts, and they will probably soon do so openly; if they do not break away, their children or grandchildren will. These people desire to be completely assimilated among their Christian fellow countrymen. They deeply resent it when other Jews proclaim that we are a people apart and desire to bring about an unequivocal separation between us and the other nations. Their great and constant fear is that in the land of their birth, where they are free citizens, they may be called strangers. They fear that this is all the more likely to happen if a large section of the Jewish people openly claims rights as an independent nation, and, still worse, if anywhere in the world a political and intellectual center of Jewry should really be created, in which millions of Jews would be united as a nation.

All these feelings on the part of assimilationist Jews are understandable. From their standpoint they are justified. The Jews, however, have no right to expect that Zionism should commit suicide for their sake. The Jews who are happy and contented in the lands of their birth, and who indignantly reject the suggestion of abandoning them, are

about one-sixth of the Jewish people, say two million out of twelve. The other five-sixths, or ten million, have every reason for being profoundly unhappy in the countries where they live. These ten million cannot be called upon to submit forever, and without resistance, to their slavery, and to renounce every effort for redemption from their misery, merely in order not to disturb the comfort of two million happy and contented Jews.

The Zionists are, moreover, firmly convinced that the misgivings of the assimilationist Jews are unfounded. The reassembling of the Jewish people in Palestine will not have the consequences which they fear. When there is a Jewish country the Jews will have the choice of emigrating there, or of remaining in their present homes. Many will doubtless remain—they will prove by their choice that they prefer the land of their birth to their kin and their national soil. It is possible that the anti-Semites will still throw the scornful and perfidious cry "Stranger!" in their faces. But the real Christians among their fellow countrymen, those whose thoughts and emotions are guided by the teaching and examples of the Gospel, will be convinced that the Jews who remain do not regard themselves as strangers in the land of their birth. The real Christians will understand the true significance of their voluntary renunciation of a return to a land of the Jews, and of the attachment to their homes and to their Christian neighbors.

The Zionists know that they have undertaken a work of unparalleled difficulty. Never before has the effort been made to transplant several million people peacefully and in a short space of time, from various countries; never has the attempt been made to transform millions of physically degenerate proletarians, without trade or profession, into farmers and herdsmen; to bring town-bred hucksters and tradesmen, clerks and men of sedentary occupation, into contact again with the plough and with mother earth. It will be necessary to get Jews of different origins to adjust to one another, to train them practically for national unity, and at the same time to overcome the superhuman obstacles of differences of language, cultural level, ways of thought, and varying prejudices of people who will come to Palestine from all the countries of the world.

What gives Zionists the courage to begin this labor of Hercules is the conviction that they are performing a necessary and useful task, a work of love and civilization, a work of justice and wisdom. They wish to save eight to ten million of their kin from intolerable suffering. They desire to relieve the nations among whom they now vegetate of a presence which is considered disagreeable. They wish to deprive anti-

Semitism, which lowers the morals of the community everywhere and develops the very worst instincts, of its victim. They wish to make the Jews, who are nowadays reproached with being parasites, into an undeniably productive people. They desire to irrigate with their sweat and to till with their hands a country that is today a desert, until it again becomes the blooming garden it once was. Zionism will thus equally serve the unhappy Jews and the Christian peoples, civilization and the economy of the world. The services which it can render and wishes to render are great enough to justify its hope that the Christian world, too, will appreciate them and support the movement with its active sympathy.