

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From the Early Middle Ages up to the late 1700s, Jews were restricted in their freedoms in Christian Europe. In cities, they were forced to stay in special areas called ghettos and many professions were forbidden to them.

This situation changed in the late 18th century. Starting in France in 1791, Jews were freed from these restrictions and given full citizenship. These freedoms gradually extended to other states in Europe, (though not to Tsarist Russia, which largely maintained its laws against Jews).

Jews became highly successful citizens of the countries in which they lived. They became professors, lawyers, writers, bankers, and men of industry. Grateful for their newfound freedoms, they also began to assimilate; that is, to integrate into their surrounding societies. They played down the idea that they belonged to a separate Jewish nation, and began to define themselves as German, English, French or Italian, albeit of the “Mosaic faith.”

But Jewish success, and Jewish attempts at assimilation, did not make anti-Semitism disappear. The hatred reemerged in the 19th century. Prominent anti-Semites included politicians, writers and composers.

Assimilated Jews, like Dr. Leo Pinsker in Russia, and later Theodor Herzl in Vienna, recognized that emancipation was not enough to allow the Jews to escape from the hatred that pursued them. Their observations led them to conclude that the only solution to the problem was the creation of a Jewish state, which would again put the Jews on an equal footing with other nations.

Vocabulary

Anti-Semitism: discrimination against or prejudice or hostility toward Jews.

Emancipation: the act of freeing or state of being freed; liberation

Document A: “*The Third Redemption*”, Rabbi Yehudah Alkalai (1843)

The redemption will begin with efforts by the Jews themselves; they must organize and unite, choose leaders, and leave the lands of exile. Since no community can exist without a governing body, the very first new ordinance must be the appointment of the elders of each district, men of piety and wisdom, to oversee all the affairs of the community. I humbly suggest that this chosen assembly – the assembly of the elders – is what is meant by the promise to us of the Messiah, the son of Joseph. ...

I ask of our brethren that they organize a company, on the mode of the fire insurance companies and of the railroad companies. Let this company appeal to the Sultan to give us back the land of our ancestors in return for an annual rent. Once the name of Israel is again applied to our land, all Jews will be inspired to help this company with all the means at their disposal. Though this venture will begin modestly, its future will be very great.

Source: “The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader”, Arthur Hertzberg, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1997, p. 106-107.

**Document B: “Seeking Zion”, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer
(1862)**

The redemption of Israel, for which we long, is not to be imagined as a sudden miracle. The Almighty, blessed be His Name, will not suddenly descend from on high and command His people to go forth. He will not send the Messiah from heaven in a twinkling of an eye, to sound the great trumpet for the scattered of Israel and gather them into Jerusalem. He will not surround the Holy City with a wall of fire or cause the Holy Temple to descend from the heavens. The bliss and the miracles that were promised by His servants, the prophets, will certainly come to pass – everything will be fulfilled – but we will not run in terror and flight, for the Redemption of Israel will come by slow degrees and the ray of deliverance will shine forth gradually.

My dear reader! Cast aside the conventional view that the Messiah will suddenly sound a blast on the great trumpet and cause all the inhabitants of the earth to tremble. On the contrary, the Redemption will begin by awakening support among the philanthropists and by gaining the consent of the nations to the gathering of some of the scattered of Israel into the Holy Land.

Source: “The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader”, Arthur Hertzberg, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1997, p. 111.

Document C: “*Rome and Jerusalem*”, Moses Hess (1862)

We shall always remain strangers among the nations. They may even be moved by a sense of humanity and justice to emancipate us, but they will never respect us as long as we make *ubi bene ibi patria* our guiding principle, indeed almost a religion, and place it above our own great national memories. Religious fanaticism may cease to cause hatred of the Jews in the more culturally advanced countries; but despite enlightenment and emancipation, the Jew in exile who denies his nationality will never earn the respect of the nations among whom he dwells. He may become a naturalized citizen, but he will never be able to convince the gentiles of his total separation from his own nationality.

Vocabulary

ubi bene ibi patria: Wherever it is good, that is our homeland.

Source: “*The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*”, Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1997, p. 121.*

**Document D: “A History of Israel”, Howard Sachar
(1976)**

By the late 1870s, several years before the outbreak of Alexander III’s pogroms, Zionist study circles and clubs had begun to function in hundreds of the Pale’s cities and towns. Some called themselves “parties” or “assemblies.” A number adopted such titles as Ezra or Maccabi. But all were generally known as Chovevei Zion – Lovers of Zion. Their common ingredient was acceptance of the credo “that there is no salvation for the People of Israel unless they establish a government of their own in the Land of Israel.” In the classic pattern of other European nationalist movements, a few of these early groups simply offered courses in the Hebrew language and history. Others established choirs or gymnastic and self-defense organizations. The meetings were conducted secretly, for Zionism, like other varieties of minority nationalism, was quite illegal in the tsarist empire. More inhibiting yet, there was no central direction to the Chovevei Zion cause.

Source: “A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time”, Howard M. Sachar, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2007 (First Published 1976), p. 16.

**Document E: “Auto-Emancipation”, Leo Pinsker
(1882)**

The essence of the problem, as we see it, lies in the fact that, in the midst of the nations among whom the Jews reside, they form a distinctive element which cannot be assimilated, which cannot be readily digested by any nation. Hence the problem is to find means of so adjusting the relations of this exclusive element to the whole body of the nations that there shall never be any further basis for the Jewish Question. ...

The struggle of the Jews for unity and independence as an organized nation not only possesses the inherent justification that belongs to the struggle of every oppressed people, but it is also calculated to attract the sympathy of the people to whom we are rightly or wrongly obnoxious. This struggle must be entered upon in such a spirit as to exert an irresistible pressure upon the international politics of the present, and the future will assuredly bear witness to its results. ...

The proper, the only remedy, would be the creation of a Jewish nationality, of a people living upon its own soil, the auto-emancipation of the Jews; their emancipation as a nation among nations by the acquisition of a home of their own.

Source: “Auto-Emancipation”, Leo Pinsker, Scopus Publishing Co., New York, 1944 (First Published 1882), p. 75-105.

**Document F: “*The Jewish State*”, Theodor Herzl
(1896)**

The idea which I have developed in this pamphlet is a very old one: it is the restoration of the Jewish State.

The world resounds with outcries against the Jews, and these outcries have awakened the slumbering idea. ...

The Jewish question still exists. It would be foolish to deny it. It is a remnant of the Middle Ages, which civilized nations do not even yet seem able to shake off, try as they will. They certainly showed a generous desire to do so when they emancipated us. The Jewish question exists wherever Jews live in perceptible numbers. Where it does not exist, it is carried by Jews in the course of their migrations. We naturally move to those places where we are not persecuted, and there our presence produces persecution. This is the case in every country, and will remain so, even in those highly civilized — for instance, France — until the Jewish question finds a solution on a political basis. The unfortunate Jews are now carrying the seeds of anti-Semitism into England; they have already introduced it into America.

I believe that I understand anti-Semitism, which is really a highly complex movement. I consider it from a Jewish standpoint, yet without fear or hatred. I believe that I can see what elements there are in it of vulgar sport, of common trade jealousy, of inherited prejudice, of religious intolerance, and also of pretended self-defense. I think the Jewish question is no more a social than a religious one, notwithstanding that it sometimes takes these and other forms. It is a national question, which can only be solved by making it a political world-question to be discussed and settled by the civilized nations of the world in council.

Source: “The Jewish State”, Theodor Herzl, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1988 (First Published 1896). p. 69-76

**Document G: “*Diary Entry*”, Theodor Herzl
(Sept. 3, 1897)**

If I were to sum up the Congress in a word – which I shall take care not to publish – it would be this: At Basel I founded the Jewish State.

If I said this out loud today I would be greeted by universal laughter. In five years perhaps, and certainly in fifty years, everyone will perceive it.

Source: “The Diaries of Theodor Herzl,” Theodor Herzl, Translated and Edited by Marvin Lowenthal, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1962 (First Published 1956). p. 224.

**Document H: “Zionism” by Max Nordau
(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.

Source: “The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader”, Arthur Hertzberg, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1997. p. 242.

**Document I: “The Founding Fathers of Zionism”,
Benzion Netanyahu (1937)**

Herzl's special stature is inherent in the teaching which was his alone, a teaching which was not known to Hess and Hovevei Zion, neither to Shabbetai Zevi and Shlomo Molho, nor was it known to any of those millions of Jews longing for redemption. Since they did not know it, since only he knew it, only his idea produced results, or to be precise results followed only the activity he undertook which emanated from this thought.

...

Herzl's unique greatness was not in teaching that the only solution to the Jewish question was a Jewish state, but rather in teaching *how to put this idea into practice*, and in explaining *the only way* in which it was possible to put it into practice. Herzl himself knew well that herein lay his entire innovation: “Because all the leaders who sought to lead you know where Zion is.” So why have you not been able to come to Zion? “Because it is not possible to arrive at the goal in a straight line.” Since one needs to choose a concrete path, and every such path involves obstacles and delays, and since all the previously chosen paths were quickly blocked, “this is a very complicated question.” “The problem is that of the path,” Herzl said, clearly defining the crux of the matter. Therefore we can say that Herzl's teaching which, as we have noted, was his alone, *was the teaching of the way to make Zionism a reality.*

The course of national revival which Herzl charted, and in which his entire greatness lies, was clearly not accepted in either his own time or after his death. During these years, Herzl's ideas stood in sharp contrast to the method advocated by those who shared, for the most part, his analysis of the state of world Jewry, but never understood the mode of operation he espoused or the means by which he sought to realize their shared ambitions. The simple and modest approach of Herzl's opponents did not require undue mental effort. They sought to proceed toward their objective in a straight line. They wanted to follow the simple laws of arithmetic, believing this was the only practical way to achieve their desired goal. They knew that one million Jews are comprised of one million individuals, that one million acres are comprised of one million single-acre plots, and they assumed that to achieve their objective, they needed only to bring to Palestine one Jew after another and to purchase acre after acre. They never imagined that in traveling this direct path, they were bound to run into

brick walls. They never paid due attention to the fact that they would encounter a government in Palestine whose opposition to the Zionist plan – an opposition they clearly felt from time to time – might take a form that would eliminate any possibility of their continued activity.

Nor did they pay much attention to the fact that there was a body of native residents in the country who formed the majority of the population and who, together with the government, could put a stop to both their immigration and settlement virtually whenever they pleased. They thought that they could avoid, or at least minimize these disturbances, by refraining from speaking openly about them, or more clearly: they wanted to proceed quietly and stealthily toward their goal. ...

Then, Herzl arose and boldly declared: No more gradual immigration! No more infiltration! For he considered the notion that the Jews could become the majority in the country through the gradual arrival of settlers, to be childish and absurd. ...

He also explained his thinking by way of a parable of someone trying to build a house of stone. “They are dragging stone after stone to the building site and assume that as a result a house will be erected. Never!” – Herzl claimed without any reservation – “The house will never be built in that way!” For there are countervailing forces whose resistance is as certain as the laws of gravity. “It’s folly to construct a house without being assured the land on which it is built. For without that, the owner of the land will come one day and raze the building or evict us from the house which we constructed for ourselves.”

Source: “The Founding Fathers of Zionism”, Benzion Netanyahu, Balfour Books, Jerusalem, 2012 (Herzl Essay First Published 1937), p. 72-78.