

**Document A: “*Ben-Gurion: A Biography*”, Michael Bar-Zohar (1977)**

David was a sickly child, short and thin like his mother. He did not make friends with children of his own age and rarely went out to enjoy a run in the back yard. His head was disproportionately large, and the worried Avigdor took his son to the neighboring town of Plotsk to consult a specialist, who ran his fingers over the boy’s head and assured Avigdor that his son would be a great man. Sheindel, a pious Jewess, concluded proudly that her “Duvcheh” would grow to become a great rabbi, learned in the Torah.

Source: *Ben-Gurion: A Biography*, Michael Bar-Zohar, Adama Books, New York, 1977, p. 3.

**Document B: “Ben-Gurion: Prophet of Fire”, Dan Kurzman  
(1983)**

When David was ten, his dream began to take concrete shape.

“There was a rumor,” he would later reminisce, “that the messiah had come. He was said to be a tall handsome man with a black beard, a doctor. We heard his name too, Dr. Herzl.”

Theodor Herzl, a reporter for an Austrian newspaper, had covered the treason trial of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army officer, in Paris, and was so appalled by the anti-semitism underlying the charge that he wrote a political booklet, *The Jewish State*, urging the Jews to set up a country of their own.

Although the idea was not new, the repercussions were explosive, for unlike earlier Zionists with their penny-ante fundraising campaigns and gradualist aliya schemes, Herzl would grandly negotiate with the great powers of the world to provide a Jewish home and finance it with millions of dollars from a Jewish international bank. His visionary plan swept the Jewish world with its dazzling detail and audacity. “The messiah had come!”

A year later, in 1897, Herzl imperiously summoned the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, and, like a monarch dealing with his mesmerized subjects, masterminded the conversion of his idea into a political resolution: The aim of the new Zionist movement was “a publicly recognized and legally secured Jewish home in Palestine.”

Like other Zionists, the Greens were ecstatic. Suddenly the vague longings of three generations had crystallized into a hard political pledge. The meetings in the Greens’ house and in the *Beth Hamidrash* grew even longer, louder and livelier...

Source: *Ben-Gurion: Prophet of Fire*, Dan Kurzman, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1983, p. 52-53.

### **Document C: “Memoirs”, David Ben-Gurion (1970)**

With two older boys, Shmuel Fuchs and Shlomo Zemach (the latter became one of the finest Israeli writers of my time), I helped establish a group to teach Hebrew. We called it the Ezra Society after the great teacher who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the Temple. There seemed to us marked affinity between Ezra’s mission and time and our own newly born hopes for Palestine.

I joined Zemach in teaching Hebrew to the poor. All children went to the Cheder but the poor, as is usually the case, for one reason and another received the thin end of the cultural heritage. Our activities met with success and we expanded operations by having the first pupils teach others. We went through the Jewish quarter teaching Hebrew to our contemporaries until the entire youth had a feel for the language. Then, the younger generation took on their parents and soon Plonsk was one of the few cities of the Diaspora where almost every family had basic fluency in Hebrew.

Source: *Memoirs, David Ben-Gurion, World Publishing Company, New York, 1970, p. 39.*

**Document D: “Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948”, Shabtai Teveth (1987)**

David came of age as a revolutionary in December 1905, when he attended his first clandestine Poale Zion conference in Warsaw. ...

There was an unbridgeable ideological gap between Poale Zion and the Bundists, who denied the nationhood of the Jews and claimed that there was no basis for the revival of a Jewish nation in Palestine. In their parlance “Jewish nation” meant simply those Jews living within the boundaries of the Russian empire as one nationality among many others, such as the Poles or Ukrainians. Since they sought a world revolution and a classless society, which would solve all national problems, they fought Zionism tooth and nail as a tool of the bourgeoisie that was drawing human resources into a particular national struggle and away from the general revolution. When David and the Bund clashed in Plonsk, it was a fight to the finish.

The Bundists’ first appearance there had been welcomed by many. In early 1905, when pogroms were expected daily, it seemed that only the revolutionary movement, which promised redemption from anti-Semitism and class oppression, offered a safe future for the Jews. David was horrified at the Bund’s initial success in his town, and when he returned there in October he threw himself into the fight to rescue its Zionist youth from the Bund heresies. He battled on two fronts – organizational and ideological. The main street in Plonsk became the site for organizing trade unions and the Great Synagogue the stage for ideological discussion.

David’s success in converting Ezra into a branch of Poale Zion had alarmed the Bundists. A series of discussions was arranged, and from Warsaw they sent “some of [their] best speakers to storm Plonsk,” including their star orator, Shmulik the Bundist. The legendary Shmulik, three years younger than David, was in such demand that he had to return to Warsaw directly after each of his performances in Plonsk. The debates aroused extraordinary interest. Shops were closed, and the large hall of the synagogue was placed at the disposal of the antagonists. The verbal exchange was staged like a duel.

David and Shmulik entered with their bodyguards, all flaunting handguns which, out of respect to the synagogue, were placed on the table. David

was quite at ease on the dais; his Ezra experience and reputation as a lucid and witty speaker gave him confidence. Socialist theory was unknown in Plonsk, but Jewish learning and tradition were the stuff of daily life, so that David, reveling in the situation, scored a hit with this story: Once upon a time the people of Chelm wanted to build a magnificent new house. To do so they had to carry a beam from one side of the street to the other. But the beam was much wider than the street, so the people of Chelm pulled down all the houses in the street in order to get the beam across. That, he said, was what the Bund was doing.

Playing in this manner to his home crowd – some of his speeches sounding more like vaudeville sketches – David ridiculed the stranger, and Shmulik the Bundist's arguments fell on deaf ears. Finally Shmulik was licked. Plonskers said that David had hacked him to pieces, and David's name became a byword for a Bund-hater who would stop at nothing.

*Source: Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948, Shabtai Teveth, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1987, p. 30-33.*

**Document E: “Ben-Gurion: Prophet of Fire”, Dan Kurzman  
(1983)**

In October 1906, Poalei Zion held its first conference. About ninety members straggled into Jaffa from all parts of Zion, their faces caked with dust, their only shirts soaked with sweat, to officially found the Palestine branch of the party. ...

David was elected to the party’s ruling central committee and to a special committee formed to draw up a party platform. ...

“During those three days,” [Israel] Shochat would write, “[David] revealed himself ... as a dynamic force with an extraordinary ability to express himself, capable of bridging the gap between the two distant worlds – nationalism and socialism.” ...

David stayed in Jaffa to add a few more bricks to the national edifice he was helping to build. As in Plonsk, he set up a string of about a dozen mini-unions in tailor, shoemaking and carpenter shops. Then, in March 1907, he thrust himself into an explosive labor dispute at the winery in Rishon LeZion, south of Jaffa, where the manager, a man named Gluskin, had fired “troublemaking” workers. A Rostovian-led work force went out on strike, standing at the winery gate with pistols and sticks to prevent anyone from entering.

Both labor and management gathered sympathizers for a showdown, and Israel and David rushed to the scene. While David supported the strikers, he opposed violence. At a tense meeting with Gluskin, Israel sat armed with a pistol. David with “arguments and proofs.” The result was a compromise: The strikers would return to work and the dismissed employees, while denied reinstatement, would receive financial compensation. Shochat was again impressed. Thanks to David, he would say, “we got out of the business honorably.”

But not everybody thought so. The extremists saw the deal as a sellout, and the moderates, including Hapoel Hatzair, viewed it as confirmation that the strike was unjustified and jeopardized the entire Zionist enterprise. Even Shochat, despite his admiration, began to edge away from David, apparently sensing that he was not a man who would play a secondary role to anyone.

The Poalei Zion's central committee crumbled under the tension of the strike, and David was blamed. He was angry and hurt. His foes didn't yet realize that one must be neither too provocative nor too pliant in an explosive situation if Zionism was to triumph in the end. One had to know how to tell principle from pragmatism. Regrettably, he might have to delay his grand plan after all – until his comrades came to their sense and listened to him. And he returned to Petah Tikvah, his ego in tatters, apparently deaf this time to the braying of donkeys and the croaking of frogs.

Source: *Ben-Gurion: Prophet of Fire*, Dan Kurzman, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1983, p. 86-87.

**Document F: “*Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948*”,  
*Shabtai Teveth (1987)***

He withheld from his father even longer the fact of his frequent bouts of malaria. In a letter of December 18 David denied reports that he had been very ill as a “total lie,” making light of the fact that three weeks earlier he had been sick with malaria and a doctor had visited him at midnight, leaving him a prescription, but that “on the morrow, before I even had time to get it, I was absolutely cured.” In fact, Dr. Menachem Stein had advised him to go back to Plonsk, advice David had rejected out of hand. As malaria continued to weaken him, his workdays decreased and his hungry days multiplied. But he believed he could conquer malaria with will power and faith.

*Source: Ben-Gurion: The Burning Ground 1886-1948, Shabtai Teveth, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1987, p. 43.*

**Document G: “Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948”, Shabtai Teveth (1987)**

When he received a note from [Yitzhak] Ben-Zvi inviting him to join *Ha-Achdut*, David expressed no joy, feigning surprise and claiming he had neither experience nor talent for such a job. ...

To mark his new status on the editorial board, David assumed a new name – Ben-Gurion – in conformance with the Poale Zion members’ custom of taking names of national heroes and rebels. [Israel] Shochat’s secret society was named after the military leader Bar-Giora; Ben-Zvi added to his arsenal of pseudonyms the name of Avner, King Saul’s army chief; Golda Lishansky finally settled on Rachel Yanait, after Alexander Yannai of the Hasmonean dynasty. Jacob Vitkin became Zerubavel, a Judean prince and scion of the royal house of David. David, wanting to preserve the phonetics of his family name, began with Ben Gruen, from which it was only a short step to Joseph Ben-Gurion, the renowned defense minister in Jerusalem at the time of the great Jewish rebellion against the Romans, an aristocrat with an uncrushable yearning for democracy, an honest man to whom freedom was priceless. This was greatly to David’s liking, especially because his own middle name was Joseph.

His decision to take a new name was remarkable only because Ben-Gurion stuck to it, unlike so many of his friends whose name changing was difficult to keep up with. The plethora of bombastic pen names might well have led the casual *Ha-Achdut* reader to think that the old kingdom of Judea had come back to life. ...

In the first year with the paper, Ben-Gurion wrote fifteen articles, all dealing with organization or political matters....

One theme recurred in Ben-Gurion’s articles and speeches: the need to lay down foundations on which the Yishuv could develop into a “force.” He argued that it was impossible to direct the implementation of Zionism from the outside, that it could be done only by the Yishuv itself. Therefore he insisted that the power vested in the Zionist organizations of the world be transferred to their analogues in Palestine.

*Source: Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948, Shabtai Teveth, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1987, p. 70-73.*

**Document H: “Ben-Gurion: A Biography”, Michael Bar-Zohar (1977)**

Since his days in Sejera, Ben-Gurion had been developing the idea of “Ottomanization”, namely, that the Jews of Palestine should renounce their foreign citizenship and become subjects of the Ottoman Empire. This would enable them to work toward the realization of their aims within legal and governmental channels. Accordingly, it was essential to establish a leadership that spoke Turkish and knew Ottoman law, and Ben-Gurion decided that the next step in his life must be the study of law and of the Turkish language. Within two months, two of Ben-Gurion’s closest friends, Israel Shochat and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, also decided to study in Constantinople. ...

Ben-Gurion and his companions still did not grasp that they were living through the last days of a dying empire and clung to the idea of “Ottomanization”. They persisted in their efforts to acquire Turkish citizenship and even adopted the latest Turkish fashions. Ben-Gurion took to wearing a flattened *tarboush*, clipped his moustache in the Turkish style and had a new suit made in the fashion of the *effendis* – a black tailcoat and buttoned waistcoat whose pocket held a watch on a glittering chain. ...

On 28 July [1914] he and Ben-Zvi set sail for a vacation in Palestine. Three days later, while still at sea, they learned of the outbreak of the world war when two German warships engaged in pursuing the ramshackle Russian vessel that was carrying them. ...

In Palestine they encountered a scene of despair and disintegration. After two months of hesitation, Turkey joined the war at the side of Imperial Germany, while confusion, fear, and hardship spread throughout the Jewish community. Some fled as the suspicious Turks constantly imposed the severest restrictions on the Jewish community, confiscated arms, levied heavy imports, and began to deport those Jew who were foreign nationals. The whole settlement project was in danger of destruction. In London and Cairo, Zionist leaders called upon Palestinian Jews to take the side of the Entente Powers. Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi were furiously opposed to these appeals. Above all, they feared that the Turks would wreak their vengeance upon the Jews of Palestine by deporting them *en masse*.

Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi quickly joined the Ottomanization Committee established in Jerusalem and obtained permission to recruit a Jewish militia to defend Palestine. But the militia met its end with the arrival of the Turkish vizier for the navy, Jemal Pasha, who had been appointed to command the Fourth Army on the Egyptian front. On his way south Jemal Pasha suppressed any manifestation of nationalism. First, he struck at the Arab national movement, hanging a number of its leaders in Beirut. Then came the turn of the Zionist movement in Palestine: the volunteer militia was disbanded and *Ahdut* was closed down. Jemal Pasha decreed that anyone found bearing a Zionist document would be put to death. Then came the arrests. Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi were interrogated at length about their contacts with the Zionist movement. Shortly afterwards orders were issued for their deportation from the Ottoman Empire. Manacled, they were taken aboard a boat in Jaffa harbor. On the deportation order, the Turkish governor had written: "To be banished forever from the Turkish Empire."

Source: *Ben-Gurion: A Biography*, Michael Bar-Zohar, Adama Books, New York, 1977, p. 29-32.

**Document I: “Ben Gurion: Father of Modern Israel”, Anita Shapira (2014)**

In later years, Ben-Gurion’s admirers praised his vision – his extraordinary gift for separating the wheat from the chaff and perceiving the essential reality that would guide his decisions as events unfolded. But there were quite a few exceptions to this generalization, and one of them was Ben-Gurion’s attitude toward the Ottoman Empire and the future of Palestine within it. In fact, while living in Turkey he could have seen that “the sick man on the Bosphorus” was terminally ill. Turkey’s failure in the Balkan War signaled its military and political weakness. The corruption of the bureaucracy and the students’ unwillingness to enlist in the army were sure signs that there was something rotten in the empire. Jamal Pasha’s general cruelty and specific actions – the hanging of Arab leaders in Damascus, the exile of Yishuv leaders, abuse during the expulsion from Jaffa – as well as Turkish officials’ hostility toward the Jews should have shown Ben-Gurion that Zionism’s only hope was to get rid of the imperial government in Palestine.

*Source: Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel, Anita Shapira, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2014, p. 38.*

**Document J: “Ben-Gurion: A Biography”, Michael Bar-Zohar (1977)**

While Ben-Gurion lay in the military hospital in Cairo, he received the journal *Ba'Avodah* (At Work), published by the Agricultural Union in Palestine. The outstanding item in that issue was a long, programmatic article by Berl Katznelson entitled “Toward the Forthcoming Days”. It was a kind of credo, written at the onset of a new era in the history of Zionism; and its central theme was that Palestine would be built up by the Jewish agricultural worker. Katznelson stressed that the workers – the true vanguard of Zionism – should determine the path to be taken by the World Zionist movement.

Ben-Gurion read the article with great interest and saw that “in fact, we are of the same mind”. When he rose from his sick-bed, he set out for the camp occupied by the Palestinian battalion in search of Berl Katznelson, the stocky, curly-haired mentor of the penniless socialist pioneers who had spent years roaming around Palestine from one job to another. When he found Katznelson in the camp and proposed the union of the two Labor parties in Palestine – Poalei Zion and Hapoel Hatzair – Berl said, “without enthusiasm: ‘All right, let’s go to the Hapoel Hatzair people.’ They all lived in the same tent,” which indicates how small the Jewish pioneer groups were at the time, “and the Hapoel Hatzair people agreed to the idea of unification.”

Source: *Ben-Gurion: A Biography*, Michael Bar-Zohar, Adama Books, New York, 1977, p. 41.