

# **Ronen Shoval / HERZL'S VISION 2.0**



# **HERZL'S VISION 2.0**

*IM TIRTZU*

**A MANIFESTO FOR RENEWED ZIONISM**

**Ronen Shoval**

Rubin Mass Publishers, Jerusalem

# **Herzl's Vision 2.0**

*Im Tirtzu*

**Ronen Shoval**

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Rubin Mass Ltd, Publishers and Booksellers

P.O.B. 990, Jerusalem 91009, Israel

Tel. +972-2-6277863

Fax. +972-2-6277864

[rmass@barak.net.il](mailto:rmass@barak.net.il)

[www.rubinmass.com](http://www.rubinmass.com)

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**Ronen Shoval** is the founder and chairman of the *Im Tirtzu* movement, which works towards renewal in Zionist thinking, culture and ideology in Israel. He is a graduate of the Young Leadership Forum of the Institute for Zionist Strategy and was an instructor and lecturer at the Ein Prat Social Leadership Academy.

Born in Ramat Hasharon in 1980, Ronen Shoval holds a B.A. in International Relations, an M.A. in Jewish Philosophy from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He is currently completing his doctorate in Jewish Political Thought at the Sorbonne - University of Paris, Nanterre. In 2013, Ronen was chosen by the *Algemeiner* as one of the top 100 people positively influencing Jewish life. Ronen is married and the father of three.



To the members of *Im Tirtzu*

Renewing our belief in the justice of our path,

And not allowing our nation to withdraw from its lifeline

“A star shall step forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel”

**Numbers, 24:17**

“..When they saw that the goal was remote and difficult and that the means were close at hand and simple, they substituted the remote and difficult for the close at hand and simple.”

S.Y. Agnon, *T'mol Shilshom*





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## Foreword to the English translation

The 2013 English edition of *Herzl's Vision 2.0* was edited for the English reader outside of Israel. There are cultural and linguistic references, historical figures and certain religious references that require additional footnotes. These have been added for the reader's convenience to ensure the deepest possible understanding of the text.

It should also be noted that this book is meant to be read and understood as a whole. The chapters are interdependent, and while linear in form, should be viewed rather as interlocking pieces of a larger whole.

This foreword also provides an opportunity to bridge a potential cultural gap. Many Jews outside Israel, and some within Israel, define "being a Jew" as a strictly religious definition. Thus a Jew in America is a citizen of the United States, whose religion is Judaism, in the same way that a Protestant in America is a citizen of the United States, whose religion is Protestantism. This is not the definition within this book. "Being Jewish" is much more than a religious definition. It is connection to a history, a heritage, a nation, a people. English does not have an adequate vocabulary to fully translate the deep meaning of *Am Israel*. *Am* means both a people and a nation. *Israel* is both the name of the modern state and the name given to Jacob after he wrestled with the angel (Genesis 32:29). So in the translation of *Am Israel*, we have both the modern state of Israel and the people of Jacob, including all the families and descendants of Jacob's twelve sons that constitute the twelve tribes of Israel.

The history of the Jewish people is written in the five books of Moses, the Torah. And while this can be viewed as a religious text, it is also the story of a people. Throughout the book of Exodus, the people are known variously as the Hebrews, the people, the children of Israel, Israel, and other names. As a people they are enslaved, as a people they are freed, and as a people they enter into a covenant with God at Sinai. It is only after Sinai that the Jewish religion truly begins.

The people wander in the desert for forty years learning how to be a free people. Only then can they enter the land that was promised to the descendants of Abraham, Jacob's grandfather. When this occurs, the people are bound to each other by a common history, by a common religion and by the land. At this point they become fully the nation of

Israel. From this history we can see that religion is only one element of a larger story. That is why we do not refer to *Am Yehudi*, the Jewish people, but rather *Am Israel*, the nation of Israel.

A more accurate comparison would be to list Jewish-American alongside Italian-American, Irish-American, Greek-American, French-American, German-American, etc. All of these have a history, heritage, language and often religion that tie them to another nation besides the United States.

Modern Israel, as a both a democratic and Jewish state, protects the rights of the minority while maintaining Jewish rhythms of life. The work week revolves around the Jewish Sabbath. National holidays are Jewish holidays. But modern Israel has not devolved into a theocracy. The citizenry are not required to abide by religious laws. However, the citizenry do have an innate understanding of what it means to be Jewish in a way that someone raised apart from the Jewish rhythms of life may not have. Superficially, it seems religious, and on some level it is indeed religious, but it is also a shared heritage, a shared history and shared rhythms of life that are far beyond the single link of religion.

Keeping in mind this broader definition while reading this book will help to clarify the concept that a Jewish state does not require a theocracy, instead it requires a shared history, heritage, language and vision for the Jewish people, the nation of Israel.

The Zionist dream that is referred to in this book is imbued with pride in the history, heritage, language, culture, values and strength of the Jewish people.

Ilana Brown

Editor, English edition

Jerusalem

May 2013

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## Introduction

*“Sitting in the café*

*I order some cheesecake;*

*What did we fail to do,*

*Where did we go wrong -*

*There goes the country.”*

Kobi Oz, “Sitting in the Café,” 2001

These words, revealing feelings of apathy, escapism and especially disappointment, reflect the genuine state of mind in the State of Israel today. Many Israelis would probably agree that since the Six Day War, they have increasingly felt a profound feeling of discomfort. Problems compounded by crises in many areas of society have created a general feeling that something essential has gone wrong in the country. The outright failures and lack of success on the security-political level, including the Yom Kippur War, the First Lebanon War, the First Intifada, the Oslo Accords, the Second Intifada and the Second Lebanon War, are major factors behind this feeling.

Beyond Israel’s immediate security issues, in other areas such as politics, education and society, there are difficulties, crises and deep rifts. Examining each issue on its own merits, we can understand it as a discrete problem relating to its own particular sphere. But the profusion and intensity of troubles, their wide range seeming to touch every facet of Israelis’ lives, and the fact that most of these problems are existential in nature, impacting the very roots of Israel’s being, combine to create an understanding that something has gone critically and fundamentally wrong with Israeli society and the State of Israel. Israelis are facing an acute crisis that must be addressed with all due seriousness.

This essay was written on the assumption that the crisis now facing Israeli society is indeed substantial and serious. The following pages are addressed to those who feel the weight of the crisis and the distress in Israeli society, those who comprehend the gravity of these questions and are searching for solutions, and those who fear for the fate of the Zionist enterprise. For all of you, this essay offers ideas, solutions and a new direction.

Nonetheless, I wish to clarify from the outset that this essay is not intended to be a systematic, irrefutable effort to prove the existence of the crisis. Nor is it my intent to present an immutable philosophical methodology. Nor is the goal of this essay is to refute other philosophical approaches regarding the condition of the State of Israel.

Rather, this essay hopes to serve as a conceptual and ideological platform for addressing concrete problems, and attempts to present goals and objectives for change. In this sense, this essay does not seek merely to describe reality, but to change it, to shape and renew reality, and to impart a contemporary meaning to the ideological foundations of the Zionist movement. Such change will enable the people of Israel to continue the historic process of returning to their land, the Return to Zion, and establishing their lives there.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge my intellectual debt to several great philosophers, foremost among them Franz Rosenzweig, Karl Popper, Allan Bloom and Eliezer Schweid. I also want to note the contributions of Yehezkel Dror, Avi Saguy, Dimitri Radishevsky, Motti Karpel, Micha Goodman and Erez Tadmor in shaping the ideas expressed herein. While what I have written here does not purport to be original, the overall responsibility for this essay and the methodology presented here is my own. Nor do I suggest that the aforementioned philosophers would agree with the positions expressed here. I used the thoughts of others in order to formulate my own positions. Accordingly, if my words are pleasing to the reader, they are the result not of my thoughts but rather of those of my teachers; and if not, then the fault lies with me.

To Chamutal and my family, I am grateful for your inspiration and your support.

**Part One:**  
**The Crisis**

## The New Israeli Rift

*“Israel cannot survive in this region... unless it has... political and military leadership... and is socially robust.”*

Winograd Commission, press release, January 30, 2008

When we regard the accomplishments of Zionism we cannot help but be amazed. It is difficult to imagine another revolution in human history that not only achieved so much in so short a time, but also succeeded in attaining a major portion of its goals. Comparing the condition of the Jewish people in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to their state today reveals the extent of Zionism’s revolutionary accomplishments. A nation once scattered to the four corners of the earth is now gathered in its homeland, and the largest Jewish community in the world is now located in the land of Israel. The Hebrew language has been revived and a modern, multi-faceted Hebrew culture has been created. On the basis of the infrastructures whose development began even before the state was declared, including land settlement, agriculture, industry, medicine, social assistance, security, and science and technology, robust systems have been established and Israel has become one of the most developed countries in the world in all of these fields.

These successes were achieved despite the fact that circumstances, both internal and external, were almost always difficult. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Zionist movement grew in spite of opposition from the Arabs in the region and the shadow of the threat of the Holocaust. The State of Israel, the result of the Zionist effort, operated in a world that was often hostile and unfriendly. Nevertheless, it overcame the difficult challenges it faced, from creating favorable conditions for the social, economic and cultural integration of tremendous waves of immigrants, to fighting recurring wars and overcoming severe economic and social crises.

Indeed, even someone who is not a Zionist, or who is anti-Zionist, would be hard pressed to belittle the achievements of Zionism.

Even after having achieved such great things, many Israelis experience fundamental feelings of discomfort, indeed, dissatisfaction with both the condition and the image of Israeli society. Undoubtedly, there is an



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essential contradiction between the gratification experienced in light of Zionism's historic achievements and the somber mood of Israeli society. I would argue that admiration of Zionism's path, or alternatively, frustration with the current condition of the State of Israel, result not from looking at the cup of the Zionist enterprise as being either half empty or half full. Rather, I believe that the feeling of crisis has a substantive cause: after everything it has achieved, Zionism has reached a dead end. I further believe that the task of rescuing the State of Israel from the crisis rests with Israelis living in Israel today.

During the last century, the world was shaped both positively and negatively by ideological movements. History teaches that enterprises that cannot renew themselves are destined to die, and that the power of inertia alone is not enough to keep an ideological movement alive. I believe that the Zionist movement has been the most important and most positive force in the last one hundred years. Therefore, I feel that our generation must revive the Zionist ideology in order to preserve it for the future.

In this essay I contend that contrary to conventional wisdom, the controversy presently raging in Israeli society is not between right and left; rather, the cultural conflict tearing Israeli society apart is between Zionist forces on one hand and post-Zionist and anti-Zionist forces on the other.

Let me begin by clarifying the terminology. The abstract terms "post-Zionism" and "anti-Zionism" are not the same. "Post-Zionism" refers to the concept of "after Zionism." Generally speaking, one could say that a post-Zionist world view claims that Zionism has completed its task and it is now necessary to find an ideological alternative. In essence, post-Zionism represents a search for a substitute. In contrast to this approach, "anti-Zionism" reflects opposition in principle to Zionism.

According to these definitions, one could argue that this essay is "post-Zionist" in the sense that it appears after classical Zionism has achieved much of its mission and at a moment when it finds itself in crisis. But this is not the case. Rather, this essay represents a neo-Zionist approach, which recognizes the crisis that classical Zionism is undergoing and attempts to resolve it by using Zionist wisdom and the lessons learned from its past. We do not seek a substitute for Zionism and we are

certainly not expressing opposition to Zionism. The ideas presented here express the aspiration to “renew our days as of old.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us now take a new look at the schism in Israeli society between the neo-Zionist forces on one hand and the post-Zionist and anti-Zionist forces on the other. What is immediately clear is that two phenomena in Israel make it difficult to draw the lines clearly. First, both the political right and the political left contain post-Zionist and anti-Zionist elements. Even parties defining themselves as centrist have elements buried within them that are no longer Zionist. Second, because the message of classical Zionism has been blurred, there are numerous entities that identify themselves as Zionist, but actually promote goals contradictory to those of Zionism. Let us examine these two phenomena using prominent examples in order to illustrate the substance of this essay.

The most blatant occurrences of anti-Zionism and post-Zionism are those on the left side of the political spectrum. They advance several claims, two of which I will address. The first is that the Zionism's success was achieved at the expense of the Palestinian people, and that one cannot legitimize the national rights of the Jews when these endanger the rights of the Arabs. Therefore, they conclude that the establishment of the Jewish state was a crime requiring atonement.

The second claim is that the political framework of the nation-state is obsolete and that the world is developing new frameworks. Accordingly, Israel, as a distinct nation-state, is an anachronism. Another variation of this assertion is that the only option for the survival of the Jewish nation-state surrounded by an Arab-Muslim population is to co-exist with the Arabs and to establish joint political frameworks based on agreement and acceptance of the other.

In both of these claims one can identify post-modern sources that refuse to acknowledge any absolute truth or justice, and choose instead to give equal weight to different narratives. Additionally, these claims, by reflecting an argument that the Jewish people must forgo their idea of Jewish-Israeli nationality, effectively put an end to the ideology of Zionism.

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1 Book of Lamentations, 5:21.

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Overt anti-Zionism and post-Zionism from the left are threats that have received serious intellectual consideration. In his important book, *Post-Zionism, Post-Holocaust*, Elhanan Yakira brilliantly analyzed and dissected these phenomena. Other worthwhile treatments of these issues can also be found in two other books, *An Answer to a Post-Zionist Colleague* and *Israel and the Family of Nations*. Because these works thoroughly examine the issue of post-Zionism and anti-Zionism on the left, I need not do so here. Certainly my writings are not aimed at people who believe in these philosophies.<sup>2</sup>

The low levels of support for movements on the extreme Left and the revulsion felt by most of the Israeli public towards Israel's various detractors and objectors indicate that left wing post-Zionists and anti-Zionists are a minority. However, the more serious threat from these groups appears to be their impact on centers of power and influence in Israel. Anti-Zionists and post-Zionists hold key positions in Israeli culture: in the media, academia and the worlds of literature and the arts. They are thus able to advance their ideas within elite circles and in the centers of power. This, in turn, causes decision-makers to set new goals, objectives and definitions for the Jewish state. This type of implicit anti-Zionism, which blurs and obscures its differences with classic Zionism, poses a danger to the continued path of Zionism.

Implicit anti-Zionism has several features. Often there are entities that profess to be Zionist, but knowingly advance an anti-Zionist agenda. These entities, aware of the strong national consciousness of Israeli citizens, mask their true message in order to be accepted by their listeners, who consider themselves Zionists. For instance, there are arguments claiming that by advancing Zionist interests, Israel can advance Palestinian interests, even though it is obvious that these two interests oppose each other. An excellent example of implicit anti-Zionism can be found in the New Israel Fund organization. Despite its ultra-Zionist name, it in fact promotes movements such as "Adalah" and "Musawa," which aim to transform Israel from a Jewish state into a state for all of its citizens. A converse example is the Jewish Leadership movement within the Likud party, whose goal is to impose a faith-based post-Zionism agenda on the Likud. I will return to the ideology of this latter movement further on.

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2 See the annotated bibliography for further information about these books.

At times implicit anti-Zionism is a phenomenon that spreads among people or groups that are not aware that they are promoting anti-Zionist perceptions. In such cases it is even harder to prove anti-Zionism, because these people hold ostensibly Zionist positions and emphatically identify themselves as Zionists. Yet, notwithstanding this self-identification, they advocate positions that contradict Zionism. A good example of this can be found in the activity of former Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami,<sup>3</sup> who considers himself a Zionist, but who advocates internationalization of the military-political conflict.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Ben Ami promotes an idea that entails having the international community impose a solution on Israel, thereby trampling on Israel's sovereignty and undermining the authority of the Jewish people to determine their own future. People who are influenced by implicit anti-Zionism are not even aware that the ideas they espouse are actually anti-Zionist, and they find ways to resolve the conflict between their universalistic and Zionist perceptions by redefining the principles of Zionism.

It is important to make this very clear. Sometimes implicit anti-Zionism is a phenomenon that manifests itself in people who consider themselves Zionists and are convinced that they are promoting Zionist interests. But an examination of the significance and ramifications of their words and deeds makes it clear that they are actually promoting positions that repudiate Zionism, and even aim to destroy it. In reality, this approach enables many people who identify themselves as Zionists to act contrary to Zionism's formative principles and against the major interests of Jewish nationalism. For example, former Knesset speaker and Jewish Agency Chairman Avrum Burg<sup>5</sup> has called for an end to Israel as the Jewish nation-state and has recommended that its citizens obtain foreign passports.<sup>6</sup> This is an example of a leader who considers himself a Zionist, but is prepared to dismantle the very foundation upon which Zionism stands: the idea of establishing independent Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

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3 Shlomo Ben Ami (b.1943). Author of the book *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli Arab Tragedy* (2006) that challenges what he calls the "national myths" surrounding Israeli war and especially the War of Independence.

4 Shlomo Ben Ami, "Test of Syria's Intentions," *Haaretz*, February 4, 2007.

5 Avrum Burg (b. 1955). Former Member of Knesset, former Speaker of the Knesset and former Chairman of the Jewish Agency.

6 Uri Shavit, "Burg: Defining Israel as a Jewish state is the key to its end," *Haaretz*, June 7, 2007.

7 Uri Shavit, "Bill of Divorce," *Haaretz*, June 6, 2007.

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I contend that the phenomenon of implicit anti-Zionism poses the greatest threat to Zionism, because it seeps into the consciousness of many Israelis and makes them think that Zionism is dead. One of the goals of this essay is to re-identify the Zionist interest in simple terms, and try to clear away the fog and confusion caused by implicit anti-Zionism.

The most surprising post-Zionism is the one found on the right side of the political map. It is immediately identifiable on the practical level. Following the Gaza disengagement in 2005, post-Zionist religious bodies sought to stop reciting the *Prayer for the State of Israel* in various synagogues. (It should be emphasized that this does not refer to the overt anti-Zionism of the ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) community, which never recites this prayer as it neither attributes any importance to the State of Israel nor even considers it to be their state.) I refer here to a segment of the national-religious community that was deeply wounded by the Gaza disengagement and the Oslo process and therefore felt it difficult to recite a prayer that blesses the leaders of the state and wishes them success. This group now believes that the State of Israel as a democratic one should end and be replaced by a theocracy. Such positions are examples of a post-Zionism approach from the right that is also essentially anti-Zionist.

The most prominent example of theocratic post-Zionism can be found in the ideology espoused by Moti Karpel, one of the founders of the Jewish Leadership movement within the Likud Party. In his book, *The Faith Based Revolution: The Fall of Zionism and the Rise of the Faith-Based Revolution*,<sup>8</sup> Karpel, who is also the editor of *Nekuda*, the newspaper of the Judea and Samaria settlement movement, writes that Israelis must recognize the fact that Zionism has completed its job. In his words, “we must understand that as an ideology, it [Zionism] has exhausted itself.”<sup>9</sup> In light of this critical sentence I wish to make it clear that this essay has a double purpose. One goal is to refute Karpel’s central arguments and to propose a neo-Zionist alternative as an answer to post-Zionism from the right. The second goal of this essay is to illustrate the significance of Zionism and to draw a clear line between it and implicit anti-Zionism.

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8 See the bibliography.

9 Moti Karpel, *The Faith-based Revolution*, Alon Shvut, 5763 (2003), 16.

This review of anti-Zionism and post-Zionist declarations from the right and the left indicates that Zionism is undergoing a process of decay. Zionism has become a concept that is so abstract that the distorted interpretations rampant today include contradictory fundamental principles. Zionism is perceived so vaguely and loosely that even some of its proponents cannot grasp its essence in the cacophony of words, facts and concepts that constantly bombard their attention and consciousness. There are many people working on behalf of Zionism with great enthusiasm, but they cannot grasp what the ideas of Zionism entail, in either theoretical or practical terms. As a result, they tend to become confused when attempting to understand the meaning of Zionism's concepts while trying to incorporate other ideas. Consequently, both the central and the marginal aspects of Zionism itself are eroded and gradually destroyed.

In the last decades there has been a phenomenon of creating parties with no ideologies. Parties such as these say that ideology is suitable for the political extremes, but that the political center should be pragmatic without any ideological obligation. One example of this erosion and destruction was the creation of the Kadima Party. While this political party identifies itself as Zionist, its leaders have stated that it has no ideology.<sup>10</sup> In fact, having a centrist party is important, but such a party must have a clear and consistent Zionist ideology; in other words, the role of centrist parties is not to run away from ideology, but rather to reformulate one.

Other examples of how Zionism has become eroded within the Kadima party are the corruption that has swept the party, as well as statements made by Ehud Olmert, Israel's former Prime Minister under Kadima, contradicting the essence of the Zionist interest and ethos. Olmert stated "we are tired of fighting, we are tired of being courageous, we are tired of winning, we are tired of defeating our enemies."<sup>11</sup> He proposed the continuation of a policy of unilateral withdrawal. As Prime Minister, Olmert identified himself as a Zionist, but he advocated a policy based on what he deemed physical and mental fatigue, a policy that clashes with the Zionist ethos, which demands that Israelis take responsibility for their destiny.

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10 Ahiya Raved, "Shetreet Boasts: We have disengaged ourselves from all ideologies," YNET, March 27, 2006.

11 Akiva Eldar, "Crying and Shooting," *Haaretz*, August 31, 2008.

Let me be clear: this doesn't mean that everyone who advocates territorial withdrawal is not a Zionist. Rather, calls for territorial withdrawal must have a justification based on Zionist interests and not be the result of caving in to international pressure or, worse, capitulating to what is regarded as the fatigue of a people who are fighting for their existence and security.

In light of this danger, Israelis have three options for choosing a worldview and appropriate courses of action:

- A. To negate Zionism and develop a suitable course of action;
- B. To support Zionism but engage in actions that conflict with Zionism;
- C. To support Zionism while promoting the Zionist interest.

I support the third option, and I contend that the solution to the threats facing Zionism is simple and possible. We need to reach a clear and precise formulation of Zionism's principles, as well as define its goals, actions and interests. Once these issues have been clarified and the Zionist worldview is understood, the deterioration of Zionism that allows implicit anti-Zionism to flourish will subside. The moment that the definition of Zionism is elucidated for the Israeli public, the Zionist interest and its associated course of actions will become obvious to the entire society. Moreover, once Zionism has been clearly defined, the public will be able to identify and choose between two options: Zionism or anti-Zionism.

In this essay I claim that the significance of Zionism presently consists of two dimensions. First, Zionism's significance lies in its belief in the justice of the path of the Jewish people, the importance of the concept of the Jewish people's sovereignty over its nation, and the right of the Jewish people to a Jewish state in their historic homeland. A direct result of these precepts is the recognition of the state's right to act in order to protect and advance itself and to safeguard its interests. Damage to these interests means damage to Zionism. Zionism's second dimension involves changing the way of life in the State of Israel on numerous levels. I will elaborate on Zionism's two dimensions later in the essay.

## Feeling of Discontent

*“... At this time there is no king in Israel... our leadership is hollow... Stop for a moment, take a look into the abyss. Think of how close we are to losing all that we have created here.”*

David Grossman, speaking at a rally in Kikar Rabin following the Second Lebanon War (November 5, 2006)

*“Satan then said: How do I overcome  
This besieged one?  
He has courage and talent,  
And implements of war and resourcefulness.  
So he said, I shall not take his strength  
Nor restrain him with bridle or bit  
Nor intimidate or dishearten him as of yore;  
Only this shall I do, I'll dull his mind  
And cause him to forget the justice of his cause.*

Natan Alterman, from the poem “Gone Like a Dream”

On August 29, 1897, the First Zionist Congress was convened in Basel, Switzerland, and succeeded in uniting for the first time hundreds of Zionist organizations and activists from all over the world into a single body that would represent the Jewish people in its national claims. Three days after the Congress ended, Herzl wrote the following daring words in his diary: “Were I to sum up the Basel Congress in a word, which I shall guard against pronouncing publicly - 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 realize it.”<sup>12</sup>

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12 Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish Cause*, Part 1, Jerusalem, 1997, 482.



Herzl promoted “political Zionism” as a mode of operation that would replace “practical Zionism,” and considered his political and diplomatic activities an appropriate way to achieve Zionism’s goals. He worked to gain international recognition of the fact that the Land of Israel was the home of the Jewish people and that its future state would be established on that territory. Even before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Herzl saw an opportunity for Zionism, and as early as 1896 he wrote, “If I cannot receive the Land of Israel now, I will receive it when Turkey is divided up.”<sup>13</sup> In order to attain these goals, Herzl traveled the capitals of Europe and held numerous meetings with heads of state, financiers, nobility and politicians.

In light of Herzl’s efforts, Zionism took an uncompromising path that finally led to the establishment of the Jewish State, thus making the Zionist movement one of the world’s most successful and inspiring nationalist movements. Herzl, who died in 1904, did not live to see the fruits of his labors. Thirteen years after his death, in 1917, Zionism was handed its first significant political victory with the “Balfour Declaration,” which called for the establishment of a national Jewish homeland in Palestine. The Declaration planted many hopes in the hearts of the Jews. Thirty years later, that Declaration was translated into a practical decision to establish a Jewish state in the land of Israel.

On the Jewish date 5 Iyar 5708 (May 14, 1948) the Jewish people were privileged to renew their independence in their ancient homeland after nearly two thousand years in exile. In an unprecedented historical event, the Jewish nation, which had been banished from its land and dispersed to all corners of the globe, amassed all of its national power, aspirations and abilities, picked itself up from the ruins of its exile and the Holocaust, and against all odds, established a prosperous state with power and moral authority based on thousands of years of Jewish history. The national revolution of the Jewish people, from Holocaust to revival, suddenly materialized, fulfilling the dreams of eighty generations of Jews who had prayed “Next year in Jerusalem.” Zionism had earned a place of honor in the history of humankind.

Herzl led “political Zionism,” but he actually identified the essence of Zionism by looking deep within the Jewish nation itself and recognizing its willingness to take its destiny into its own hands. “A nation can only

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13 In Benzion Netanyahu, *The Founding Fathers of Zionism*, Tel Aviv, 2006, 113.

be rescued by itself, and if it cannot do that, there is nothing to be done,”<sup>14</sup> Herzl told the First Zionist Congress. In his diary he wrote, “Our closeness to Jerusalem is the same as our desire for Jerusalem.”<sup>15</sup> The key question was what kind of desire would beat in the hearts of the Jews. Their redemption depended upon and derived strength from the depths of the national desire to turn a dream into a reality.

Today, more than a century after that formative Zionist Congress, the achievements of the Jewish nationalist movement are being questioned. Presumably, the situation should have been completely different. In material terms, the situation of the Jews has never been better. The Jewish army has tremendous power, the Israeli economy is constantly growing and the quality of life in Israel is steadily on the rise.

And yet, there is the sense that something has been lost along the way, accompanied by a feeling of crisis that cannot be ignored. Examining the causes of that crisis, we can distinguish between objective factors and subjective factors. Objectively speaking, Israeli society is in a difficult situation on a variety of levels.

The crisis has penetrated all strata of society, but as David Grossman pointed out in his quote above, it is most conspicuous at the top of the pyramid. If in the past Israel was blessed with public figures of stature with lofty morality, vision and leadership ability, at the present time, conventional wisdom holds that political leaders place narrow personal interests ahead of national interests. A considerable portion of Israel’s political leadership is motivated mainly by personal ambition and does not meet the minimal ethical criteria of a public servant. Israelis look at their public leaders and are all too often overcome by a sense of despair.

Beyond the leadership crisis, Israeli society is also decidedly fractured. Israeli solidarity has weakened and conflicts between social groups are a prominent feature of national life.

A particular aspect worth noting is the situation of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Much has been said about the weakening of the IDF or at least about the decline in its image over the past several decades. The Winograd Report, submitted in 2008 in the wake of the Second

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14 Statement by Theodor Herzl from the *Protocol of the First Zionist Congress*, Jerusalem, 5750 (2000), 13.

15 Theodor Herzl, *Addresses and Essays*, edited by Benzion Netanyahu, Tel Aviv, 1937, 76.

Lebanon War, illustrates this, especially its identification of draft evasion as a major element in the weakening of the IDF. In this context, a key point concerning the relationship between the individual and society should be emphasized. The state and society are the tools that enable individuals to develop and choose their own path. Ideally, people who develop their individuality should be deeply grateful to the society that provided the framework and inspiration for their self-fulfillment. An individual develops by using the tools provided by the surrounding culture and society, and then choosing to become an integral part by contributing to them in return. Western individualism distorts this process and promotes a philosophy that produces egotism and leads the individual to care about himself at the expense of others. The individual views reality through a single prism - the prism of personal benefit.

The influence of Western egotism has indeed weakened the Israeli attitude towards military and national service over the past years, and the rate of draft evasion is steadily rising. The conflict between the individual's fulfillment of personal desires and a person's obligation as a citizen is a burning issue, and an entire generation is not sure why it should "waste its time" and risk its life in the army. Data regarding draft evasion indicate that Israel has changed from a society wherein mutual responsibility was a fundamental value into a society where the number of egoists continues to grow. This egotism extends past army service in that Israel has reached a situation in which only a small percentage of men in Israel serve in the reserves in any meaningful way, notwithstanding the fact that if Israel fails to protect itself, it simply cannot exist.

Another objective difficulty facing the State of Israel is its relationship with Arabs living in Israel. In recent years, the leaders of this group have displayed their true goals and have demonstrated to the Jews of Israel that the dream of co-existence based on recognizing the State of Israel as a Jewish state is doomed to failure. Three blatant illustrations of this process can be found in the substance of "The Democratic Constitution," "The Haifa Declaration" and the "The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel" that call for the elimination of the Jewish character of Israel.<sup>16</sup>

Concurrently, in recent decades, failed political maneuvers have plagued

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16 Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, *The Democratic Constitution*, 2007.

Israeli society. Israel has experienced constant failures not only in its attempts to bring calm to the region, but also in its efforts to shape a positive attitude towards Israel in the world. From a nation that started out with a fair amount of support and solidarity, and occasionally even genuine admiration, Israel has become a pariah among the family of nations. Even if we believe that there has been no political failure, there has certainly been a public relations failure.

From an objective standpoint, the greatest threat to the country's very existence is the Iranian nuclear threat. Radical Islam openly announces its desire to destroy the State of Israel and perpetrate a second Holocaust on the Jewish people and is actively working to realize this goal.

We can point to various other objective problems. Particularly noteworthy are: the feeling of alienation existing between the Supreme Court and large segments of the population and the subsequent tension it causes; society's indifference to the bombing of the country's periphery over many years; and the economic gaps between the weaker strata of society and a substantial portion of the public that enjoys a high standard of living.

To the objective discomfort we can add a subjective dimension. The generation that founded the State of Israel was raised in an idealistic environment. Its education was strengthened by role models who were pioneers, fighters and achievers, some of whom even sacrificed their lives for the nation's survival. Idealistic values were absorbed and inculcated in youth movements, schools and even in kindergartens, through the inspiration of battlefield tales, the spirit of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and all the other tools available to a nationalistic society for educating its sons and daughters. This idealistic atmosphere led to the spirit of volunteerism that pervaded the nation for decades. Mutual responsibility was a supreme value that encouraged people to do everything necessary to advance the nation's goals. But now it seems that all this is gone, as if it never existed. The spirit of the past has been replaced by cynicism, materialism, pettiness and lies, both big and small. There is a vast distance and disparity between the idealistic spirit of the past and the bleak reality of the present.

More than anything else, it seems that what has led to this weakening of the national spirit is Israelis' loss of belief in the justice of the Jewish-national path upon which the Zionist worldview was originally founded.

Ideas that view Judaism and the Jewish national past as expressions of something obsolete have begun taking root. Parallel to this trend, an implicit anti-Zionism has developed among a major portion of Israel's elite, who have begun turning their backs on the Zionist vision and Jewish nationalism. There are academics who are calling to replace the Jewish national state with a state for all its citizens. In the judicial arena, the Supreme Court is slowly eroding the Jewish identity of the State of Israel, under the code name of "safeguarding civil rights," while employing judicial activism both to trample the national rights of the Jewish people and weaken democracy in Israel.

National sovereignty is under attack from some of Israel's elite, who do not consider it a meaningful value. For example, Former Minister of Education Shulamit Aloni called for cutting back on visits by Israeli pupils to Polish extermination camps and their annual participation in the March of the Living in Poland, because these raise the level of nationalist feelings among the youth: "They go to Poland ... they become nationalistic, ethno-centric, and it's unfortunate - because the time has come to teach our young people universality... and not just 'us, us, us'"<sup>17</sup> Gershom Schocken, former editor of the *Haaretz* newspaper, encouraged marriage between Jews and non-Jews in the name of "Israeliness." His son Amos Schocken underscored this when he called upon Jewish men and women to become integrated into the New Middle East by marrying spouses from Jordan, Egypt and Syria:

Israel has a mission ... Peace between the peoples ... What greater peace can there be between the peoples than thousands of Egyptian, Jordanian and Palestinian students at universities in Israel, and thousands of Israeli students at universities in the Arab states and in Palestine? And what greater peace can there be between the peoples than what is likely to ensue from this: marriages between young Israelis, both Jewish and Arab, and young people from the neighboring countries and from Palestine? This can be within Arab families, but even mixed families (one partner Jewish and one partner Arab) should not be ruled out.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Shulamit Aloni, "From victim to nationalist?" YNET, April 16, 2007.

18 Amos Schocken, "Does Israel want Peace?" *Haaretz*, May 5, 2005.

There are many people throughout the world, and worst of all in Israel as well, who perceive Israel as evil incarnate. A not inconsiderable number of Israelis have joined in the tendency to blame Israel for every regional and international crisis or problem. In this context, hundreds of Israeli academics hold a place of “honor” as they stand at the forefront of international efforts to blame Israel for perpetrating crimes and atrocities.

Voices and attitudes of change, as well as weakness and inertia are expressed by various political officials. First and foremost Israelis must heed the observations made by Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel, who also served as Israel’s eighth Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, Treasury Minister and Foreign Minister. In his book *The New Middle East*, Peres negates the concept of nation-states upon which Zionism is based and argues that, “wherever the particularistic national movement grows, the social order is upset and violent conflicts can develop.”<sup>19</sup> Peres expresses the hope that “a day will come and the self-awareness of man, his personal identity, will be based on this new reality. And when that day arrives mankind will find itself beyond the nationalist stage of its history.”<sup>20</sup>

Peres is not alone. When he was Deputy Minister of Education, Micha Goldman proposed changing portions of *Hatikva*, Israel’s national anthem, so that Arabs could feel comfortable to join in singing.<sup>21</sup> When serving as Minister of Education, Yossi Sarid decided to include poems by Mahmoud Darwish<sup>22</sup> in the Ministry’s list of literary works from which literature teachers could choose. Yuli Tamir, when serving as Minister of Education, introduced the *Nakba*, or the Day of Catastrophe, as Arabs call Israel’s Independence Day, into the curriculum. Then-Secretary-General of the Histadrut Labor Federation, Haim Ramon decided to delete the words “Land of Israel” from the organization’s official name. Other voices call for revoking the Law of Return<sup>23</sup> and

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19 Shimon Peres, *The New Middle East*, Tel Aviv 1993, 71.

20 Ibid., 78.

21 *Haaretz*, April 13, 1995.

22 Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008). Regarded as the Palestinian national poet, served in the Communist party in Israel and later in various roles in the Palestinian Liberation Organization, including on the Executive Committee, a post he resigned after the Oslo Accords.

23 The Law of Return was enacted by Israel’s Knesset in 1950 allowing Jews to immigrate to Israel and gain automatic citizenship. The Law of Return provides sanctuary to Jews around the world who are persecuted.

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stopping aliyah (the Hebrew word for Jewish immigration to Israel).<sup>24</sup> The demand to surrender the Temple Mount, toward which Jews have prayed for millennia, is now becoming acceptable among much of the Israeli public, and former Prime Minister Ehud Barak even seriously proposed implementing the idea in negotiations.<sup>25</sup>

Confidence in Israel's moral advantage and Israel's right to the land has been replaced by doubts, self-flagellation and unprecedented indecision. It should be noted that the problem is not the question of whether moral criticism is justified, but rather that the erosion of Israelis' sense of self-confidence causes them to ask in despair, "Do we have a future?!" Given this state of affairs, it is no wonder that in some years, more people leave Israel than make aliyah, and that many no longer understand why they should remain in the country that their forefathers dreamed about establishing for hundreds of years.

We reiterate: Israeli society is characterized by a deep feeling of crisis. And while the existence of such feelings is not in question, it is impossible to say that these feelings are well-developed or that their causes consciously understood. They remain vague feelings that affect much of the Israeli public, (albeit not feelings of an overwhelming crisis enveloping every aspect of life), and are not being subjected to the rational and orderly clarification they so clearly deserve.

The claim set forth in this essay is that Israel's current problems are symptoms of a general and comprehensive crisis, and their solution will only be found by exposing the one deep root from which it stems: the death of Zionist ideology stemming from its original conception based on a negative formulation.

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24 The root of the word "aliyah" contains the idea of "going up," thus immigration to Israel is not merely a change of location, but is seen philosophically as an elevation.

25 Uri Shavit, "The Day Peace Died," *Haaretz*, September 14, 2001.