

# Zionism and the History of Israel - Source document texts

Zionism



On The Web

Achad Ha'am (1856-1927) (Ahad Ha'am, Ehad Ha'am or Echad Ha'am according to various spellings) meaning "one of the people" is the pen name of Asher Ginzberg, an ardent Russian Zionist who was the founder of cultural or moral Zionism. Ginzberg was a friend and supporter of Leon Pinsker, and a leader of the Hovevei Tsyion (lovers of Zion) movement. Hovevei Tsyion began as independent study circles in the late 19th century, and formed a confederation called Hibbath Tziyon. Their practical aim was settlement of Jews in Palestine, and they produced the settlements of the first Aliya (immigration wave). See also - (History of Zionism and the Creation of Israel). The Zionist settlement program of those days was, however, beset by nearly insurmountable practical difficulties, so that many of these settlements failed or were failing.

Unlike Pinsker, however, Echad Ha'am did not believe in political Zionism or in settlement of Palestine before conditions were ripe. Conditions would somehow ripen, he thought, by spreading enthusiasm for the idea of returning to the Land and nationalist sentiment and culture among Jews in the Diaspora. He split from the Zionist movement after the first Zionist congress, because he did not believe that Herzl's program was practical. He would have laughed had he known that Herzl wrote in his diary after the first Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, in August, 1897:

Were I to sum up the Basle Congress in a word- which I shall guard against pronouncing publicly- it would be this: 'At Basle, I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. If not in 5 years, certainly in 50, everyone will know it.'

Achad Ha'am wrote Jewish State Jewish Problem just after the Zionist Congress of 1897. He repeatedly ridiculed Herzl's obsession with a political solution, a national home secured in accordance with international law - *völkerrechtlich*. That German word appears again and again in Achad Ha'am's article below:

Let us imagine, then, that the consent of Turkey and the other Powers has already been obtained, and the State is established -- and, if you will, established *völkerrechtlich* [in accord with international law], with the full sanction of international law, as the more extreme members of the Congress desire. Does this bring, or bring near, the end of the material trouble?... we may prophesy with perfect certainty that home competition in every branch of production (and home competition will be inevitable because the amount of labor available will increase more quickly than the demand for it) will prevent any one branch from developing

as it should. And then the Jews will turn and leave their State, flying from the most deadly of all enemies -- an enemy not to be kept off even by the magic word *völkerrechtlich* : from hunger

Achad Ha'am traveled frequently to Palestine and published reports about the progress of Jewish settlement there. They were generally glum. They reported on hunger, on Arab dissatisfaction and unrest, on unemployment, and on people leaving Palestine. He believed that rather than aspiring to establish a "National Home" or state immediately, Zionism must aspire to bring Jews to Palestine gradually, making it a cultural center. At the same time, Zionism must inspire a revival of Jewish national life abroad; that would help to bring about a Jewish majority in Palestine. Then and only then will the Jewish people be strong enough to assume the mantle of building a nation state, according to Achad Ha'am. He simply could not believe that the impoverished settlers of his time, ignored by the majority of Jews, would ever lead to a Jewish homeland. He saw that the Hovevei Tzion movement of which he was a member, was a failure, in that the new villages created in Israel were dependent on the largess of outside benefactors.

Achad Ha'am's ideas were popular at a very difficult time for Zionism, beginning after the failures of the first Aliya. His unique contribution was to emphasize the importance of reviving Hebrew and Jewish culture both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, and this was recognized only belatedly and became part of the Zionist program after 1898. Herzl did not have much use for Hebrew, and many wanted German to be the language of the Jewish state. Achad Ha'am is in some ways responsible for the revival of Hebrew and Jewish culture, and for cementing the link between the Jewish state in the making and Hebrew culture. However, Achad Ha'am's historical view both of the settlement movement and of the future of political Zionism were incorrect:

It needs not an independent State, but only the creation in its native land of conditions favorable to its development: a good-sized settlement of Jews working without hindrance <sup>[1]</sup> in every branch of culture, from agriculture and handicrafts to science and literature. This Jewish settlement, which will be a gradual growth, will become in course of time the centre of the nation, wherein its spirit will find pure expression and develop in all its aspects up to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable.

The British Mandate ban on Jewish immigration and settlement in 1939 was to prove precisely that only an independent state could provide the the Jews with the ability to work without hindrance in Palestine. Herzl too was proven wrong, since the ban on immigration and settlement was imposed despite the very *völkerrechtlich*, legally recognized mandate to create a Jewish national home. However, it was not Achad Ha'am whose ideas were vindicated but rather the practical Zionists who believed in settling the land, regardless of laws.

Achad Ha'am saw what was in front of him - the impoverished settlements and the pitiful conditions in Palestine. Herzl looked down from the mountain and saw the promised land. Achad Ha'am could not have foreseen the first World War or the Balfour declaration, nor the Holocaust. He should have understood however, that

while few Jews would come to Palestine as long as conditions were what they were under the Ottoman Empire, increasing numbers of immigrants would be attracted by improving conditions and by statehood. Like Herzl, Achad Ha'am was apparently blind to the potential of Jews of the Arab countries. For him, and for everyone else at the Zionist congress, "the East" was Russia.

Achad Ha'am's "cultural Zionism" and his writings have been widely distorted however, or misunderstood and quoted out of context to imply that he thought Jews should not settle in their land, or that he thought it was impossible to ever establish a Jewish state.

In 1889 his first article criticizing practical Zionism, called "Lo Ze ha-Derekh" (This is not the way) appeared in "Ha - Melitz." The ideas in this article were the basis for the Bnai Moshe (sons of Moses) group that he founded that year. The Bnai Moshe lasted until 1897. It occupied itself with the improvement of Hebrew education, with the dissemination of Hebrew literature, and with the interests of the Palestinian settlements. In 1898, the Zionist congress adopted the idea of disseminating Jewish culture in the Diaspora as a means of advancing the Zionist movement and the revival of the Jewish people. The Bnai Moshe founded Rehovoth, as a settlement that was to be self sufficient, as well the Achiasaf Hebrew publishing company. Achad Ha'am died in Tel-Aviv in 1927.

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*See also:*

[Achad Ha'am - An Open Letter to my Brethren: Pinsker and his Pamphlet, Auto-Emancipation](#)

[Achad Ha'am - This is not the way \("The wrong way"\)](#)

[Back to source documents and texts for history of Zionism and Israel](#)

## **Note**

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Some months have passed since the Zionist Congress, but its echoes are still heard in daily life and in the press. In daily life the echoes take the form of meetings small and big, local and central. Since the delegates returned home, they have been gathering the public together and recounting over and over again the wonders that they saw enacted before their eyes. The wretched, hungry public listens and waxes enthusiastic and hopes for salvation: for can "they" -- the Jews of the West -- fail to carry out anything that they plan? Heads grow hot and hearts beat fast; and many "communal workers" whose one care in life had been for years -- until last August -- the Palestinian settlement, and who would have given the whole world for a penny donation in aid of Palestine workmen or the Jaffa School, have now quite

lost their bearings, and ask one another: "What's the good of this sort of work? The Messiah is near at hand, and we busy ourselves with trifles! The time has come for great deeds: great men, men of the West, march before us in the van." -- There has been a revolution in their world, and to emphasize it they give a new name to the cause: it is no longer "Love of Zion" (*Hibbath Tsiyon*), but "Zionism" (*Tsioniyut*) [Tsyonut in modern Hebrew]. Nay, the more careful among them, determined to leave no loop-hole for error, even keep the European form of the name ("*Zionismus*") -- thus announcing to all and sundry that they are not talking about anything so antiquated as *Hibbath Tsiyon*, but about a new, up-to-date movement, which comes, like its name, from the West, where people do not use Hebrew.

In the press all these meetings, with their addresses, motions and resolutions, appear over again in the guise of articles -- articles written in a vein of enthusiasm and triumph. The meeting was magnificent, every speaker was a Demosthenes, the resolutions were carried by acclamation, all those present were swept off their feet and shouted with one voice: "We will do and obey!" [*Na'aseh Venishmah*] -- in a word, everything was delightful, entrancing, perfect. And the Congress itself still produces a literature of its own. Pamphlets specially devoted to its praises appear in several languages; Jewish and non-Jewish papers still occasionally publish articles and notes about it; and, needless to say, the "Zionist" organ [*Die Welt*, the German newspaper founded by Herzl] itself endeavors to maintain the impression which the Congress made, and not to allow it to fade too rapidly from the public memory. It searches the press of every nation and every land, and wherever it finds a favorable mention of the Congress, even in some insignificant journal published in the language of one of the smaller European nationalities, it immediately gives a summary of the article, with much jubilation. Only one small nation's language has thus far not been honored with such attention, though its journals too have lavished praise on the Congress: I mean Hebrew.

In short, the universal note is one of rejoicing; and it is therefore small wonder that in the midst of this general harmony my little Note on the Congress sounded discordant and aroused the most violent displeasure in many quarters. I knew from the start that I should not be forgiven for saying such things at such a time, and I had steeled myself to hear with equanimity the clatter of high-sounding phrases and obscure innuendoes -- of which our writers are so prolific -- and hold my peace; But when I was attacked by M. L. Lilienblum, [The first secretary of the *Hovevei Zion*, and an opponent of the cultural Zionism of Achad Ha'am] a writer whose habit it is not to write *apropos des bottes* [idiom meaning essays about nothing, for the sake of form] for the sake of displaying his style, I became convinced that this time I had really relied too much on the old adage: *Verbum sapienti satis* [a word to the wise is enough]. It is not pleasant to swim against the stream; and when one does something without enjoyment, purely as a duty, one does not put more than the necessary minimum of work into the task. Hence in the note referred to I allowed myself to be extremely brief, relying on my readers to fill in the gaps out of their own knowledge, by connecting what I wrote with earlier expressions of my views, which were already familiar to them. I see now that I made a mistake, and left room for the ascription to me of ideas and opinions which are utterly remote from my true intention. Consequently I have now to perform the hard and ungrateful task of writing a commentary on myself, and expressing my views on the

matter in hand with greater explicitness.

Nordau's address on the general condition of the Jews was a sort of introduction to the business of the Congress. It exposed in incisive language the sore troubles, material or moral, which beset the Jews the world over. In Eastern countries their trouble is material: they have a constant struggle to satisfy the most elementary physical needs, to win a crust of bread and a breath of air -- things which are denied them because they are Jews. In the West, in lands of emancipation, their material condition is not particularly bad, but the moral trouble is serious: They want to take full advantage of their rights, and cannot; they long to become attached to the people of the country, and to take part in its social life, and they are kept at arm's length; they strive after love and brotherhood, and are met by looks of hatred and contempt on all sides; conscious that they are not inferior to their neighbors in any kind of ability or virtue, they have it continually thrown in their teeth that they are an inferior type, and are not fit to rise to the same level as the Aryans. And more to the same effect.

Well -- what then ?

Nordau himself did not touch on this question : it was outside the scope of his address. But the whole Congress was the answer. Beginning as it did with Nordau's address, the Congress meant this : that in order to escape from all these troubles it is necessary to establish a Jewish State.

Let us imagine, then, that the consent of Turkey and the other Powers has already been obtained, and the State is established -- and, if you will, established *völkerrechtlich* [in accord with international law], with the full sanction of international law, as the more extreme members of the Congress desire. Does this bring, or bring near, the end of the material trouble? No doubt, every poor Jew will be at perfect liberty to go to his State and to seek his living there, without any artificial hindrances in the shape of restrictive laws or anything of that kind. But liberty to *seek* a livelihood is not enough: he must be able to *find* what he seeks. There are natural laws which fetter man's freedom of action much more than artificial laws. Modern economic life is so complex, and the development of any single one of its departments depends on so many conditions, that no nation, not even the strongest and richest, could in a short time create in any country new sources of livelihood sufficient for many millions of human beings. The single country is no longer an economic unit: the whole world is one great market, in which every State has to struggle hard for its place. Hence only a fantasy bordering on madness can believe that so soon as the Jewish State is established millions of Jews will flock to it, and the land will afford them adequate sustenance. Think of the labor and the money that had to be sunk in Palestine over a long period of years before one new branch of production -- vine-growing -- could be established there ! And even to-day, after all the work that has been done, we cannot yet say that Palestinian wine has found the openings that it needs in the world market, although its quantity is still small. But if in 1891 Palestine had been a Jewish State, and all the dozens of settlements that were then going to be established for the cultivation of the vine had in fact been established, Palestinian wine would be to-day as common as water, and would fetch no price at all. Using the analogy of this small

example, we can see how difficult it will be to start new branches of production in Palestine, and to find openings for its products in the world market. But if the Jews are to flock to their State in large numbers, all at once, we may prophesy with perfect certainty that home competition in every branch of production (and home competition will be inevitable because the amount of labor available will increase more quickly than the demand for it) will prevent any one branch from developing as it should. And then the Jews will turn and leave their State, flying from the most deadly of all enemies -- an enemy not to be kept off even by the magic word *völkerrechtlich* : from hunger.

True, agriculture in its elementary form does not depend to any great extent on the world market, and at any rate it will provide those engaged in it with food, if not with plenty. But if the Jewish State sets out to save all those Jews who are in the grip of the material problems, or most of them, by turning them into agriculturists in Palestine, then it must first find the necessary capital. At Basle, no doubt, one heard naive and confident references to a "National Fund" of ten million pounds sterling. But even if we silence reason, and give rein to fancy so far as to believe that we can obtain a Fund of those dimensions in a short time, we are still no further. Those very speeches that we heard at Basle about the economic condition of the Jews in various countries showed beyond a doubt that our national wealth is very small, and most of our people are below the poverty-line. From this any man of sense, though he be no great mathematician, can readily calculate that ten million pounds are a mere nothing compared with the sum necessary for the emigration of the Jews and their settlement in Palestine on an agricultural basis. Even if all the rich Jews suddenly became ardent " Zionists," and every one of them gave half his wealth to the cause, the whole would still not make up the thousands of millions that would be needed for the purpose.

There is no doubt, then, that even when the Jewish State is established the Jews will be able to settle in it only little by little, the determining factors being the resources of the people themselves and the degree of economic development reached by the country. Meanwhile the natural increase of population will continue, both among those who settle in the country and among those who remain outside it, with the inevitable result that on the one hand Palestine will have less and less room for new immigrants, and on the other hand the number of those remaining outside Palestine will not diminish very much, in spite of the continual emigration. In his opening speech at the Congress, Dr. Herzl, wishing to demonstrate the superiority of his State idea over the method of Palestinian settlement adopted hitherto, calculated that by the latter method it would take nine hundred years before all the Jews could be settled in their land. The members of the Congress applauded this as a conclusive argument. But it was a cheap victory. The Jewish State itself, do what it will, cannot make a more favorable calculation.

Truth is bitter, but with all its bitterness it is better than illusion. We must confess to ourselves that the "ingathering of the exiles " is unattainable by natural means. We may, by natural means, establish a Jewish State one day, and the Jews may increase and multiply in it until the country will hold no more: but even then the greater part of the people will remain scattered in strange lands. "To gather our scattered ones from the four corners of the earth" (in the words of the Prayer Book) is impossible.

Only religion, with its belief in a miraculous redemption, can promise that consummation.

But if this is so, if the Jewish State too means not an "ingathering of the exiles," but the settlement of a small part of our people in Palestine, then how will it solve the material problem of the Jewish masses in the lands of the Diaspora?

Or do the champions of the State idea think, perhaps, that, being masters in our own country, we shall be able by diplomatic means to get the various governments to relieve the material sufferings of our scattered fellow-Jews ! That is, it seems to me, Dr. Herzl's latest theory. In his new pamphlet (*Der Baseler Kongress*) we no longer find any calculation of the number of years that it will take for the Jews to enter their country. Instead, he tells us in so many words (p. 9) that if the land becomes the national property of the Jewish people, even though no individual Jew owns privately a single square yard of it, then the Jewish problem will be solved for ever. These words (unless we exclude the material aspect of the Jewish problem) can be understood only in the way suggested above. But this hope seems to me so fantastic that I see no need to waste words in demolishing it. We have seen often enough, even in the case of nations more in favor than Jews are with powerful governments, how little diplomacy can do in matters of this kind, if it is not backed by a large armed force. Nay, it is conceivable that in the days of the Jewish State, when economic conditions in this or that country are such as to induce a government to protect its people against Jewish competition by restrictive legislation, that government will find it easier than it is now to find an excuse for such action, for it will be able to plead that if the Jews are not happy where they are, they can go to their own State.

The material problem, then, will not be ended by the foundation of a Jewish State, nor, generally speaking, does it lie in our power to end it (though it could be eased more or less even now by various means, such as the encouragement of agriculture and handicrafts among Jews in all countries); and whether we found a State or not, this particular problem will always turn at bottom on the economic condition of each country and the degree of civilization attained by each people.

Thus we are driven to the conclusion that the only true basis of Zionism is to be found in the other problem, the moral one.

But the moral problem appears in two forms, one in the West and one in the East; and this fact explains the fundamental difference between Western "Zionism" and Eastern *Hibbath Tziyon*. Nordau dealt only with the Western problem, apparently knowing nothing about the Eastern; and the Congress as a whole concentrated on the first, and paid little attention to the second.

The Western Jew, after leaving the Ghetto and seeking to attach himself to the people of the country in which he lives, is unhappy because his hope of an open-armed welcome is disappointed. He returns reluctantly to his own people, and tries to find within the Jewish community that life for which he yearns -- but in vain. Communal life and communal problems no longer satisfy him. He has already grown accustomed to a broader social and political life; and on the intellectual side

Jewish cultural work has no attraction, because Jewish culture has played no part in his education from childhood, and is a closed book to him. So in his trouble he turns to the land of his ancestors, and pictures to himself how good it would be if a Jewish State were re-established there -- a State arranged and organized exactly after the pattern of other States. Then he could live a full, complete life among his own people, and find at home all that he now sees outside, dangled before his eyes, but out of reach. Of course, not all the Jews will be able to take wing and go to their State; but the very existence of the Jewish State will raise the prestige of those who remain in exile, and their fellow citizens will no more despise them and keep them at arm's length, as though they were ignoble slaves, dependent entirely on the hospitality of others. As he contemplates this fascinating vision, it suddenly dawns on his inner consciousness that even now, before the Jewish State is established, the mere idea of it gives him almost complete relief. He has an opportunity for organized work, for political excitement; he finds a suitable field of activity without having to become subservient to non-Jews; and he feels that thanks to this ideal he stands once more spiritually erect, and has regained human dignity, without overmuch trouble and without external aid. So he devotes himself to the ideal with all the ardor of which he is capable; he gives rein to his fancy, and lets it soar as fit will, up above reality and the limitations of human power. For it is not the attainment of the ideal that he needs: its pursuit alone is sufficient to cure him of his moral sickness, which is the consciousness of inferiority; and the higher and more distant the ideal, the greater its power of exaltation.

This is the basis of Western Zionism and the secret of its attraction. But Eastern *'Hibbath Tziyon* has a different origin and development. Originally, like "Zionism," it was political; but being a result of material evils, it could not remain satisfied with an "activity" consisting only of outbursts of feeling and fine phrases. These things may satisfy the heart, but not the stomach. So *'Hibbath Tziyon* began at once to express itself in concrete activities -- in the establishment of settlements in Palestine. This practical work soon clipped the wings of fancy, and made it clear that *'Hibbath Tziyon* could not lessen the material evil by one iota. One might have thought, then, that when this fact became evident the *'Hovevei Tsiyon* would give up their activity, and cease wasting time and energy on work which brought them no nearer their goal. But, no: they remained true to their flag, and went on working with the old enthusiasm, though most of them did not understand even in their own minds why they did so. They felt instinctively that so they must do; but as they did not clearly appreciate the nature of this feeling, the things that they did were not always rightly directed towards that object which in reality was drawing them on without their knowledge.

For at the very time when the material tragedy in the East was at its height, the heart of the Eastern Jew was still oppressed by another tragedy -- the moral one; and when the *Hovevei Tsiyon* began to work for the solution of the material problem, the national instinct of the people felt that just in such work could it find the remedy for its moral trouble. Hence the people took up this work and would not abandon it even after it had become obvious that the material trouble could not be cured in this way. The Eastern form of the moral trouble is absolutely different from the Western. In the West it is the problem of the Jews, in the East the problem of Judaism. The one weighs on the individual, the other on the nation. The one is felt

by Jews who have had a European education, the other by Jews whose education has been Jewish. The one is a product of anti-Semitism, and is dependent on anti-Semitism for its existence; the other is a natural product of a real link with a culture of thousands of years, which will retain its hold even if the troubles of the Jews all over the world come to an end, together with anti-Semitism, and all the Jews in every land have comfortable positions, are on the best possible terms with their neighbors, and are allowed by them to take part in every sphere of social and political life on terms of absolute equality.

It is not only Jews who have come out of the Ghetto: Judaism has come out, too. For Jews the exodus is confined to certain countries, and is due to toleration; but Judaism has come out (or is coming out) of its own accord wherever it has come into contact with modern culture. This contact with modern culture overturns the defenses of Judaism from within, so that Judaism can no longer remain isolated and live a life apart. The spirit of our people strives for development: it wants to absorb those elements of general culture which reach it from outside, to digest them and to make them a part of itself, as it has done before at different periods of its history. But the conditions of its life in exile are not suitable. In our time culture wears in each country the garb of the national spirit, and the stranger who would woo her must sink his individuality and become absorbed in the dominant spirit. For this reason Judaism in exile cannot develop its individuality in its own way. When it leaves the Ghetto walls it is in danger of losing its essential being or -- at best -- its national unity: it is in danger of being split up into as many kinds of Judaism, each with a different character and life, as there are countries of the Jewish dispersion. [see my essay *Imitation and Assimilation*]

And now Judaism finds that it can no longer tolerate the Diaspora form which it had to take on, in obedience to its will-to-live, when it was exiled from its own country, and that if it loses that form its life is in danger. So it seeks to return to its historic centre, in order to live there a life of natural development, to bring its powers into play in every department of human culture, to develop and perfect those national possessions which it has acquired up to now, and thus to contribute to the common stock of humanity, in the future as in the past, a great national culture, the fruit of the unhampered activity of a people living according to its own spirit. For this purpose Judaism needs at present but little. It needs not an independent State, but only the creation in its native land of conditions favorable to its development: a good-sized settlement of Jews working *without hindrance* [1] in every branch of culture, from agriculture and handicrafts to science and literature. This Jewish settlement, which will be a gradual growth, will become in course of time the centre of the nation, wherein its spirit will find pure expression and develop in all its aspects up to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable. Then from this centre the spirit of Judaism will go forth to the great circumference, to all the communities of the Diaspora, and will breathe new life into them and preserve their unity; and when our national culture in Palestine has attained that level, we may be confident that it will produce men in the country who will be able, on a favorable opportunity, to establish a State which will be a Jewish State, and not merely a State of Jews.

This *'Hibbath Tsiyon*, which takes thought for the preservation of Judaism at a time

when Jewry suffers so much, is something odd and unintelligible to the " political" Zionists of the West, just as the demand of R. Jochanan ben Zakkai for Yavneh was strange and unintelligible to the corresponding people of that time.[2] And so political Zionism cannot satisfy those Jews who care for Judaism: its growth seems to them to be fraught with danger to the object of their own aspiration.

The "secret of our people's persistence" is -- as I have tried to show elsewhere [3]-- that at a very early period the Prophets taught it to respect only spiritual power, and not to worship material power. For this reason the clash with enemies stronger than itself never brought the Jewish nation, as it did the other nations of antiquity, to the point of self-effacement. So long as we are faithful to this principle, our existence has a secure basis: for in spiritual power we are not inferior to other nations, and we have no reason to efface ourselves. But a political ideal *which does not rest on the national culture* is apt to seduce us from our loyalty to spiritual greatness, and to beget in us a tendency to find the path of glory in the attainment of material power and political dominion, thus breaking the thread that unites us with the past, and undermining our historical basis. Needless to say, if the political ideal is not attained, it will have disastrous consequences, because we shall have lost the old basis without finding a new one. But even if it is attained under present conditions, when we are a scattered people not only in the physical but also in the spiritual sense -- even then Judaism will be in great danger. Almost all our great men, those, that is, whose education and social position fit them to be at the head of a Jewish State, are spiritually far removed from Judaism, and have no true conception of its nature and its value. Such men, however loyal to their State and devoted to its interests, will necessarily regard those interests as bound up with the foreign culture which they themselves have imbibed and they will endeavor, by moral persuasion or even by force, to implant that culture in the Jewish State, so that in the end the Jewish State will be a State of Germans or Frenchmen of the Jewish race. We have even now a small example of this process in Palestine. And history teaches us that in the days of the Herodian house Palestine was indeed a Jewish State, but the national culture was despised and persecuted, and the ruling house did everything in its power to implant Roman culture in the country, and frittered away the national resources in the building of heathen temples and amphitheatres and so forth. Such a Jewish State would spell death and utter degradation for our people. We should never achieve sufficient political power to deserve respect, while we should miss the living moral force within. The puny State, being "tossed about like a ball between its powerful neighbors, and maintaining its existence only by diplomatic shifts and continual truckling to the favored of fortune," would not be able to give us a feeling of national glory; and the national culture, in which we might have sought and found our glory, would not have been implanted in our State and would not be the principle of its life. So we should really be then -- much more than we are now -- "a small and insignificant nation," enslaved in spirit to "the favored of fortune," turning an envious and covetous eye on the armed force of our "powerful neighbors" and our existence as a sovereign State would not add a glorious chapter to our national history. Were it not better for "an ancient people which was once a beacon to the world" to disappear than to end by reaching such a goal as this? [4] Mr. Lilienblum reminds me that there are in our time small states, like Switzerland, which are safeguarded against interference by the other nations, and have no need of "continual truckling." But a comparison between Palestine and small countries

like Switzerland overlooks the geographical position of Palestine and its religious importance for all nations. These two facts will make it quite impossible for its "powerful neighbors" (by which expression, of course, I did not mean, as Mr. Lilienblum interprets, "the Druze and the Persians") to leave it alone altogether; and when it has become a Jewish State they will all still keep an eye on it, and each Power will try to influence its policy in a direction favorable to itself, just as we see happening in the case of other weak states (such as Turkey) in which the great European nations have "interests."

In a word: *Hibbath Tsiyon*, no less than "Zionism," wants a Jewish State and believes in the possibility of the establishment of a Jewish State in the future. But while "Zionism" looks to the Jewish State to provide a remedy for poverty, complete tranquility and national glory, *Hibbath Tsiyon* knows that our State will not give us all these things until "universal Righteousness is enthroned and holds sway over nations and States": and it looks to a Jewish State to provide only a "secure refuge" for Judaism and a cultural bond of unity for our nation. "Zionism, therefore, begins its work with political propaganda; *Hibbath Tsiyon* begins with national culture, because only through the national culture and for its sake can a Jewish State be established in such a way as to correspond with the will and the needs of the Jewish people.

Dr. Herzl, it is true, said in the speech mentioned above that "Zionism" demands the return to Judaism before the return to the Jewish State. But these nice-sounding words are so much at variance with his deeds that we are forced to the unpleasant conclusion that they are nothing but a well-turned phrase.

It is very difficult for me to deal with individual actions, on which one cannot touch without reflecting on individual men. For this reason I contented myself, in my note on the Congress, with general allusions, which, I believed, would be readily intelligible to those who were versed in the subject, and especially to Congress delegates. But some of my opponents have turned this scrupulousness to use against me by pretending not to understand at all. They ask, with affected simplicity, what fault I have to find with the Congress, and they have even the assurance to deny publicly facts which are common knowledge. These tactics constrain me here, against my will, to raise the artistic veil which they have cast over the whole proceedings, and to mention some details which throw light on the character of this movement and the mental attitude of its adherents.

If it were really the aim of "Zionism" to bring the people back to Judaism -- to make it not merely a nation in the political sense, but a nation living according to its own spirit -- then the Congress would not have postponed questions of national culture -- of language and literature, of education and the diffusion of Jewish knowledge -- to the very last moment, after the end of all the debates on *rechtlich* ([lawful] and *völkerrechtlich* [in accord with international law], on the election of X. as a member of the Committee, on the imaginary millions, and so forth. When all those present were tired out, and welcomed the setting sun on the last day as a sign of the approaching end, a short time was allowed for a discourse by one of the members on all those important questions, which are in reality the most vital and essential questions. Naturally, the discourse, however good, had to be hurried and shortened;

there was no time for discussion of details; a suggestion was made from the platform that all these problems should be handed over to a Commission consisting of certain writers, who were named; and the whole assembly agreed simply for the sake of finishing the business and getting away.

But there is no need to ascertain the attitude of the Congress by inference, because it was stated quite explicitly in one of the official speeches -- a speech which appeared on the agenda as "An Exposition of the basis of Zionism," and was submitted to Dr. Herzl before it was read to the Congress. In this speech we were told plainly that the Western Jews were nearer than those of the East to the goal of Zionism, because they had already done half the work: they had annihilated the Jewish culture of the Ghetto, and were thus emancipated from the yoke of the past. This speech, too, was received with prolonged applause, and the Congress passed a motion ordering it to be published as a pamphlet for distribution among Jews.

In one of the numbers of the Zionist organ *Die Welt* there appeared a good allegorical description of those Jews who remained in the National German party in Austria even after it had united with the anti-Semites. The allegory is of an old lady whose lover deserts her for another, and who, after trying without success to bring him back by all the arts which used to win him, begins to display affection for his new love, hoping that he may take pity on her for her magnanimity.

I have a shrewd suspicion that this allegory can equally well be applied, with a slight change, to its inventors themselves. There is an old lady who, despairing utterly of regaining her lover by entreaties, submission and humility, suddenly decks herself out in splendor and begins to treat him with hatred and contempt. Her object is still to influence him. She wants him at least to respect her in his heart of hearts, if he can no longer love her. Whoever reads *Die Welt* attentively and critically will not be able to avoid the impression that the Western "Zionists" always have their eyes fixed on the non-Jewish world, and that they, like the assimilated Jews, are aiming simply at finding favor in the eyes of the nations: only that whereas the others want love, the "Zionists" want respect. They are enormously pleased when a Gentile says openly that the "Zionists" deserve respect, when a journal prints some reference to the "Zionists" without making a joke of them, and so forth. Nay, at the last sitting of the Congress the President found it necessary publicly to tender special thanks to the three Gentiles who had honored the meeting by taking part in it, although they were all three silent members, and there is no sign of their having done anything. If I wished to go into small details, I could show from various incidents that in their general conduct and procedure these "Zionists" do not try to get close to Jewish culture and imbibe its spirit, but that, on the contrary, they endeavor to imitate, as Jews, the conduct and procedure of the Germans, even where they are most foreign to the Jewish spirit, as a means of showing that Jews, too, can live and act like all other nations. It may suffice to mention the unpleasant incident at Vienna recently, when the young "Zionists" went out to spread the gospel of "Zionism" with sticks and fisticuffs, in German fashion. And the Zionist organ regarded this incident sympathetically, and, for all its carefulness, could not conceal its satisfaction at the success of the Zionist fist.

The whole Congress, too, was designed rather as a demonstration to the world than

as a means of making it clear to ourselves what we want and what we can do. The founders of the movement wanted to show the outside world that they had behind them a united and unanimous Jewish people. It must be admitted that from beginning to end they pursued this object with clear consciousness and determination. In those countries where Jews are preoccupied with material troubles, and are not likely on the whole to get enthusiastic about a political ideal for the distant future, a special emissary went about, before the Congress, spreading favorable reports, from which it might be concluded that both the consent of Turkey and the necessary millions were nearly within our reach, and that nothing was lacking except a national representative body to negotiate with all parties on behalf of the Jewish people: for which reason it was necessary to send many delegates to the Congress, and also to send in petitions with thousands of signatures, and then the Committee to be chosen by the Congress would be the body which was required. On the other hand, they were careful not to announce clearly in advance that Herzl's Zionism, and that only, would be the basis of the Congress, that that basis would be above criticism, and no delegate to the Congress would have the right to question it. The Order of Proceedings, which was sent out with the invitation to the Congress, said merely in general terms that anybody could be a delegate "who expresses his agreement with the general program of Zionism," without explaining what the general program was or where it could be found. Thus there met at Basle men utterly at variance with one another in their views and aspirations. They thought in their simplicity that everybody whose gaze was turned Zion-wards, though he did not see eye to eye, with Herzl, had done his duty to the general program and had a right to be a member of the Congress and to express his views before it. But the heads of the Congress tried with all their might to prevent any difference of opinion on fundamental questions from coming to the surface, and used every "parliamentary" device to avoid giving opportunity for discussion and elucidation of such questions. The question of the program actually came up at one of the preliminary meetings held before the Congress itself (a *Vorkonferenz*) [pre-conference]; and some of the delegates from Vienna pointed to the statement on the Order of Proceedings, and tried to prove from it that that question could not properly be raised, since all the delegates had accepted the general program of Zionism, and there was no Zionism but that of Vienna, and *Die Welt* was its prophet. But many of those present would not agree, and a Commission had to be appointed to draw up a program. This Commission skillfully contrived a program capable of a dozen interpretations, to suit all tastes; and this program was put before Congress with a request that it should be accepted as it stood, without any discussion. But one delegate refused to submit, and his action led to a long debate on a single word. This debate showed, to the consternation of many people, that there were several kind of "Zionists," and the cloak of unanimity was in danger of being publicly rent asunder; but the leaders quickly and skillfully patched up the rent, before it had got very far. Dr. Herzl, in his new pamphlet, uses this to prove what great importance Zionists attached to this single word (*völkerrechtlich*). [According to international law] But in truth similar "dangerous" debates might have been raised on many other words. For many delegates quite failed to notice the wide gulf between the various views on points of principle, and a discussion on any such point was calculated to open people's eyes and to shatter the whole structure to atoms. But such discussions were not raised, because even the few who saw clearly and understood the position shrank from the risk of "wrecking." And so

the object was attained; the illusion of unanimity was preserved till the last; the outside world saw a united people demanding a State; and those who were inside returned home full of enthusiasm, but no whit the clearer as to their ideas or the relation of one idea to another.

Yet, after all, I confess that Western "Zionism" is very good and useful for those Western Jews who have long since almost forgotten Judaism, and have no link with their people except a vague sentiment which they themselves do not understand. The establishment of a Jewish State by their agency is at present but a distant vision; but the idea of a State induces them meanwhile to devote their energies to the service of their people, lifts them out of the mire of assimilation, and strengthens their Jewish national consciousness. Possibly, when they find out that it will be a long time before we have policemen and watchmen of our own, many of them may leave us altogether; but even then our loss through this movement will not be greater than our gain, because undoubtedly there will be among them men of larger heart, who, in course of time, will be moved to get to the bottom of the matter and to understand their people and its spirit: and these men will arrive of themselves at that genuine *'Hibbath Tsiyon* which is in harmony with our national spirit. In the East, however, the home refuge of Judaism and the birthplace of Jewish *'Hibbath Tsiyon*, this "political" tendency can bring us only harm. Its attractive force is at the same time a force repellent to the moral ideal which has till now been the inspiration of Eastern Jewry. Those who now abandon that ideal in exchange for the political idea will never return again, not even when the excitement dies down and the State is not established: for rarely in history do we find a movement retracing its steps before it has tried to go on and on, and finally lost its way. When, therefore, I see what chaos this movement has brought into the camp of the Eastern *'Hovevei Tsiyon* -- when I see men who till recently seemed to know what they wanted and how to get it, now suddenly deserting the flag which but yesterday they held sacred, and bowing the knee to an idea which has no roots in their being, simply because it comes from the West: when I see all this, and remember how many paroxysms of sudden and evanescent enthusiasm we have already experienced, then I really feel the heavy hand of despair beginning to lay hold on me.

It was under the stress of that feeling that I wrote my Note on the Congress, a few days after its conclusion. The impression was all very fresh in my mind, and my grief was acute; and I let slip some hard expressions, which I now regret, because it is not my habit to use such expressions. But as regards the actual question at issue I have nothing to withdraw. What has happened since then has not convinced me that I was wrong: on the contrary, it has strengthened my conviction that though I wrote in anger, I did not write in error.

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## Notes

1 The "political" Zionists generally think and say that they were the first to lay down as a principle that the settlement of Palestine by secret and surreptitious means, without organization and in defiance of the ruling power, is of no value and ought to be abandoned. They do not know that this truth was discovered by others first, and that years ago the *'Hibbath Tsiyon* of Judaism demanded that everything

should be done openly, with proper organization and with the consent of the Turkish government. **BACK**

2 Imitation and Assimilation. **BACK**

3 The phrases in quotes are taken from my note on the Congress, as my critics have misinterpreted them. I have taken this opportunity of explaining their true meaning. **BACK**

4 The fact mentioned is familiar to many '*Hovevei Tsiyon*' in all the towns which the emissary visited with a letter from the headquarters of the movement. In my note [on the Zionist Congress] I only alluded to it briefly, and I am sorry that the denials of my opponents have compelled me here to refer to it again more fully. **BACK**

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This article was originally translated from the Hebrew by Leon Simon in 1912, for the Jewish Publication Society of America. This adaptation corrects and modernizes the text.

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