

Theodore Herzl, the man credited with being the founder of modern Zionism, was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1860. Herzl was educated in the spirit of German-Jewish 'Enlightenment.' And whilst his parents were Jewish, Herzl had no religious sentiment. In 1902 Herzl adapted his creative and writing skills in a novel called *Altneuland*, (Old-New Land). The book was a nineteenth century "utopian blueprint for a modern state of Israel."<sup>1</sup> Although there were already Jewish settlers in Palestine and Zionist ideals had existed in Eastern Europe previously, Herzl made Zionism into a cultural and political movement that was to be accepted by Western governments and intellectuals. Herzl, along with other Jewish European leaders formed the World Zionist Organization, which aimed at promoting Jewish migration to and settlement in Palestine.<sup>2</sup>

Theodore Herzl studied law at the University of Vienna, and later became the Paris correspondent for the 'Vienna Free Press.' It is was in France, the home of the French Revolution, where Herzl first encountered the anti- Semitism that would shape his life, his writings and more importantly the fate of the Jews in the Twentieth Century.

In 1894, due to the prevailing anti-Semitic atmosphere in France, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was falsely accused of passing military secrets to the Germans. He was unjustly charged with treason and sent to exile in the infamous penal colony on 'Devil's Island'. Herzl witnessed mobs shouting "Death to the Jews!" and resolved that the only solution for the Jewish people, was mass exodus from their present environment, to a resettlement, establishing a territory of their own – a Jewish national state. The Dreyfus Case became one of the key catalysts in the genesis of Political Zionism.

The central goal of Herzl's Zionist movement was to advocate mass migration of European Jewry to Palestine. In an attempt to achieve this, Herzl aims at instilling national pride back into the secularised and pain stricken Jewish people. *Altneuland* aims at promoting the idea of 'National Self Determination.' - the creation of national governmental institutions by a group of people who view themselves as a distinct nation.<sup>3</sup>

In an attempt to instill national pride back into the Jewish people, Herzl promotes nationalism as the "the desire to preserve or enhance a people's national or cultural identity when that identity is threatened."<sup>4</sup> This idea of Nationalism is based no only on the notion of creating a physical Jewish homeland, but also of creating a new kind of Jew to build and maintain this homeland. Herzl felt that centuries of persecution had robbed the Jews of their pride and strength. Early in the document Herzl alludes to the exploited situation the Jews find themselves in; Friedrich miserably contends, "If this is our homeland...then it has been brought just as low as we are." Herzl argues that an independent and self governing nation is a necessary step on the path to reuniting a fragmented and oppressed People. He contends that the migration of Jews to Palestine is

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wzo.org.il/en/resources/view.asp?id=1604>

<sup>2</sup> Michael Adas, Peter Stearns and Stuart Schwartz, 'Turbulent Passage' pp128-129

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bartleby.com/59/13/nationalself.html>

<sup>4</sup> Eugene Kamenka, 'Nationalism the nature and evolution of an idea' Canberra 1973 p. 23-24

essential in preserving and enhancing the Jewish cultural identity. “What this land wants is water and shade... It might have an undreamed of future!”

Furthermore, Herzl maintains that although Jewish tradition and the communal way of life appear to be vacant in many communities throughout Europe, “nobody can be deader than the Jewish people,” and despite the fact that Palestine appears to be a bleak and barren country a “picture of desolation and neglect,” the Jewish nation can be revived and reformed. Herzl paints a very optimistic account of Jewish traditions in Russia, and alludes to traditional Jewish customs, “If you came to us in Russia, you would see that there is still a Jewish nation...love for our past and belief in our future.”

Theodore Herzl’s call for Jewish nationalism was motivated by the modern Western Enlightenment period. The emergence of modern, secular nationalism among the general populace meant that Jewish communities of Eastern and Central Europe were to be secularized.<sup>5</sup>

The enlightenment saw the liberation of all Jews from the ghettos with the opening of the ‘pale of settlement’.<sup>6</sup> This meant that by the late 19th century, European Jewry who had previously been economically and physically marginalized, and locked out of any trades and professions, were now allowed and welcomed into all phases of European society.<sup>7</sup> The Jews modernized and adapted quickly, leaving behind their traditional communal way of life. Herzl alludes to the secularization of the Jewish people; Freidlich encounters sudden emotions when he recollects old customs “Was it a memory of forgotten words heard in childhood?”

The new freedom granted to the Jew’s enabled them to rise to the top quickly. Their fast progress and achievements caused them to gain prominence and wealth. The document alludes to the wealth that Jew’s were experiencing, “In our days you must judge the Jewish nation neither by its papers nor by its plutocrats.”

Many Jews went along with the spirit of liberation and modernity and dropped their traditional customs. The prevailing anti Semitic atmosphere caused many Jews to assimilate; they were forced to turn to Christianity in order to pursue their career in a secularized society. An estimated quarter of a million Jews converted to Christianity during this time.<sup>8</sup> The document illustrates the low religious state of many Jewish citizens and consequently their loss of self identity. “We have indeed died a thousand deaths – nobody can be deader than the Jewish people.”

The early political Zionist movement that Herzl established was rather secular. The enlightenment gave way for little yearning for a homeland rooted in tradition and custom. The need to regain the pride and productivity that they had lost throughout Europe was

---

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Kamenka, ‘Nationalism the nature and evolution of an idea’ Canberra 1973 p.108-109

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/html>

<sup>7</sup> Eugene Kamenka, ‘Nationalism the nature and evolution of an idea’ Canberra 1973 p.108-109

<sup>8</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Search?search=jewish+assimilation>

the essential aim.<sup>9</sup> In the document, Herzl promotes the land of Israel as a place where the Jewish national potential could someday be fulfilled. He quotes a famous Jewish sentence “Leshanah habah BeYerushalyaim” - Next year in Jerusalem...”

---

<sup>9</sup> Eugene Kamenka, ‘Nationalism the nature and evolution of an idea’ Canberra 1973 p.110