



## BODY AND SPIRIT

Theodore Herzl was the man who transformed centuries of Zionist yearning into a practical plan. In creating the Zionist Congress, he put a Jewish dream into action, activating a series of events which turned vision into reality. It was the Dreyfus Affair that triggered Herzl's Zionism. If Jews could not be accepted by other nations without hatred and demonization, they would have to establish their own nation state.

For others, the catalyst was not antisemitism at all. It was a sense that Judaism in the Diaspora was somehow a pale representation of a greater Jewish vision. As Achad Ha'am wrote in 1897:

"The Western Jew, having left the ghetto and having sought acceptance by the gentile majority, is unhappy because his hope of an open-armed welcome has been disappointed. ...The heart of the Eastern Jews was sensitive to another tragedy as well – a spiritual one.

In the West it is the problem of the Jews; in the East, the problem of Judaism. The first weighs on the individual; the second, on the nation. The one is felt by Jews who have had a European education; the other, by Jews whose education has been Jewish... It is not only the Jews who have come out of the ghetto; Judaism has come out too. ... The spirit of our people desires further development."

The "Eastern Jews" to which Achad Ha'am referred saw their shtetl, their halachic Judaism, as limited to a private or communal existence, preoccupied with minutiae – whether one put on one's right shoe or left, the *kashrut* of a drop of milk which falls into meat. They

yearned for the breadth of the Judaism they read about in Tanach: sovereignty and government, a Land, a national culture, an army. Reflecting this, as *Ivrit* developed as a modern language, Biblical Hebrew was preferred to Mishnaic Hebrew.<sup>1</sup> Our Zionist dreamers and pioneers adopted the imagery of the Tanach. Achad Ha'am was saying that Judaism was in crisis.

This would seem like a secular repudiation of millennia of halachic life in the Diaspora. But Rav Kook agreed. In *Galut*, the nation was sick; Judaism had become distorted. Nationalism, though many of the original pioneers rejected traditional *Torah uMitzvot*, was an outgrowth of holy yearnings. A return to nationhood was a return to health:

"We dealt much in soulfulness; we forgot the holiness of the body. We neglected physical health and strength; we forgot we have holy flesh, no less than holy spirit" (Orot HaTehiya #33).

"Sanctity in nature is the sanctity of *Eretz Yisrael*. The *Shechina* that descended to *Galut* embodied the power of sanctity in opposition to nature. But holiness which fights the natural is not a holistic sanctity" (ibid #28).

Thus Rav Kook embraced the building of the Land – from agriculture to the arts, from politics to academics – as a sense of Judaism returning to its true full-bodied expression, the nation revived. For Rav Kook, the physical was not merely secular. Material and spiritual were inseparable, intertwined: "The Land of Israel has an intrinsic meaning. It is connected to the Jewish people with the knot of life... The Land

of G-d prepares the nation who lives there as an eternal inheritance that comes from a covenant, oath and trust."

On Yom HaAtzmaut we celebrate the survival of *Medinat Yisrael*; the miracle of the wars of 1948, '67 and '73; the miracle of the ingathering of the Exiles; the miracle of Israel thriving economically and culturally. This, says Rav Kook, is a spiritual process. But there is more to do. We need to address the second challenge, the spiritual. How can the spirit of G-d and the values of Judaism become more pronounced in the public sphere? Our prophets dreamed of a country that would champion a sense of G-dliness which would manifest itself in justice and compassion. We have yet to realize Rav Kook's fusion, to articulate an agenda of a Judaism that can be fully lived in a modern state, a Judaism that will appeal to the entire gamut of the Jewish people.

When we say Hallel on Yom HaAtzmaut, we will say הודו לה' כי טוב for the survival and physical flourishing of our beautiful country, and we will pray: אָנָּה ה' הוֹשִׁיעָה אֶנָּה אֶנָּה ה' הַצְּלִיחָה נָא as we commit ourselves to building a just and holy society which will embrace all Israel.

1 For example: Tanach – עֵץ; Mishnah – אֵילָן. חומה, לבנה – Mishna – שמש, ירח – Tanach.

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