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Ze'ev Jabotinsky, his legacy and importance in Zionism

• By YAAKOV HAGOEL

Over the last century, Zionism has created visionaries who succeeded in conveying the message of a return to the Jewish homeland.

Theodor Herzl, father of modern Zionism and founder of the World Zionist Organization, of which I'm proud to be associated with today, was one of the countless people who worked tirelessly to unite the Jewish people with the purpose of establishing the Jewish State.

Sometimes it felt as if every decision taken by the official Zionist movement was agreed upon by all who believed in Zionism. However, there was one leader of the Zionist movement who took a stand for what he believed, even when unpopular. He stood up for his beliefs and did not get swept up in what was "trendy" at the time. With dignity and respect, he was able to criticize the faltering leadership of those days while warning

them of the consequences of relinquishing parts of the Land of Israel. He was a vigorous and enthusiastic young man who admired Theodor Herzl and decided to follow in his footsteps by devoting his life to the revival of the Jewish state. This young man was Ze'ev Jabotinsky.

Jabotinsky strove to continue Herzl's legacy and was honored to have met him as a delegate at the Zionist Congress of 1903. While it was Jabotinsky's first time as a delegate, it was unfortunately Herzl's last Congress, as he unexpectedly passed away the following year.

"Herzl made a huge impression on me," Jabotinsky wrote, "It is not an exaggeration... I felt I was truly standing before a chosen person, a prophet... and to this day it seems to me that his voice still rings in my ears when he swore in front of us all 'If I forget the O Jerusalem.' I believed his oath, everyone believed..."

Like Herzl, Jabotinsky suffered from public mocking at

the time but was later vindicated. The Zionist leadership called him an extremist. But today, 78 years after his death, his ideas and teachings appear in school textbooks, in literature, in plays and in mainstream political discourse.

Today, 121 years since the first Zionist Congress in Basle and 70 years since Israel's independence, we proudly look back at the amazing achievements of our country. Many of these accomplishments were achieved by people who were inspired in some way by Jabotinsky. As head of the Betar youth movement, the Union of Zionist Revisionists and co-founder of the Jewish Legion, Jabotinsky influenced many leaders over the years.

Many ideas that he wrote about in the 1920s and 1930s have now come to fruition such as the concept of individual and national pride, evident in his phrase, "every individual is a king." The revival of the Hebrew language, social justice, democratic values and self-respect which Jabotinsky

pushed for, can now be found in our modern Israeli society.

In 1923, Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall" article was published, stressing the importance of strength and deterrence in order to fulfill the rights of the Jews in their land. Those that seek to prevent the Jewish people from achieving sovereignty in their homeland, he wrote, must understand it is as futile as confronting a wall of iron.

When incitement and a denial of our very right to exist is part of daily life, it is amazing to read Jabotinsky's words and see how applicable they still are today. He was right when he advocated a policy of "no compromise" regarding the Land of Israel, while still maintaining democratic rights and freedom of worship to all religions.

Jabotinsky regarded youth education as an important component of the success of the Jewish state. Through the Betar youth movement, which is still active today, he promoted fundamental skills,

education and leadership training for the next generation.

In the 78th year of his passing, Jabotinsky will continue to be an esteemed figure in the Israeli public. A new generation is promoting aliyah, Hebrew language, Jewish pride, and high tech innovations.

Since I was a child, I have been participating the official ceremony in memory of the writer, poet, soldier and leader Jabotinsky. I am amazed each year by the increasing number of participants at his memorial service. Veterans who served in the Irgun together with the young generation who never met him but appreciate and cherish his legacy.

Jabotinsky was and will continue to be one of the most important leaders in the Zionist world and his writings and philosophy will continue to inspire us for many years to come.

The author is the vice chairman of the World Zionist Organization.