



24.66x31.12	1/2	12 עמוד	the jerusalem post - magazine	08/2019	69822508-0
בנימין זאב הרצל - בהקשר לציונות - 80790					

COVER



On the 70th anniversary of Mount Herzl – the national temple

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For hundreds of years, since the Jewish people were violently exiled from the Land of Israel (70 CE), they remained faithful to it in the lands of the Diaspora and never ceased to pray and hope to return to the ancient homeland and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. This yearning was expressed in prayer and religious ritual, and all Jews were committed to realizing this dream one day.

Over the generations, Jews ascended to Jerusalem and stood in front of the stones of the Western Wall, the last remnant of the Temple, trembling and pleading, their prayers filled with yearning for the day when the Jewish people would return to Zion. Some 1,800 years later, the national immigration to the Land of Israel began and the Zionist movement was established. The immigrants who arrived in the Land of Israel replaced religious yearning with national yearning, and in the process abandoned the dream of returning to Jerusalem and establishing the Temple there. They chose to redeem their homeland in the coastal plain and the Galilee, to replace the prayer book with the plow, and replace the dream rebuilding of the Temple with the establishment of a Jewish state. During this process, Jerusalem became a distant dream, and the longing for it became increasingly intense.



AN HONOR GUARD stands next to Herzl's coffin on August 16, 1949, when his remains were brought to the Land of Israel for burial. (Wikimedia Commons)

Nevertheless, over the years, among the leaders of the Zionist movement, the notion that Jerusalem and no other city could be the national capital of the state took form. The religious yearning for Jerusalem became a national yearning and the story of King David, who made

Jerusalem the capital of his kingdom, became a national story with no theological characteristics.

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 181 on the partition of the Land of Israel into two states for two peo-

ples and the transformation of Jerusalem into an international territory under the auspices of the United Nations. It was clear to the heads of the Jewish Yishuv in the Land of Israel in general and to David Ben-Gurion in particular that making Jerusalem the capital of the Jewish state would now be much more complex and problematic. Therefore, Ben-Gurion began to formulate steps that would enable the de facto establishment of Jewish sovereignty and its symbols in Jerusalem. In the period under discussion, Ben-Gurion's proposal to relocate the Knesset building and the seat of government from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was accepted. The decision to bury Herzl in Jerusalem was another step in this campaign.

ON NOVEMBER 24, 1948, the provisional government decided to set up a joint committee with the Jewish Agency to deal with bringing Theodor Herzl's remains to the State of Israel. This was the first step that paved the way for his reburial on a hill at the entrance to the Bayit Vagan neighborhood of Jerusalem on August 17, 1949. In his will, Herzl did not refer to his burial place in the Land of Israel. Over the years, two sites were suggested as appropriate: Mount Carmel and Jerusalem.

Those who supported Herzl's burial on Mount Carmel relied on the testimony of David Wolffsohn, Herzl's personal friend and president of the World Zionist Organization. According to them, while Herzl did not explicitly state the desire



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to be buried there in his will, he often mentioned it in personal conversations. They also relied on a quote from Herzl's book, *Altneuland*. Nevertheless, most of the committee members felt that the most appropriate burial place was Jerusalem. Herzl's burial in Jerusalem symbolized the full realization of the Zionist idea, the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish kingdom from the time of King David.

After Jerusalem was agreed upon, the question arose of where in Jerusalem. The most appropriate place according to Jewish belief was the Mount of Olives, but this area and the other places holy to Judaism were in Jordanian hands. Therefore the committee recommended choosing the hill opposite the entrance to the Bayit Vagan neighborhood in the western part of the city.

Ben-Gurion envisioned Mount Herzl as the national pantheon that would symbolize Jewish national fulfillment and be a place of pilgrimage for citizens of the state. Mount Herzl was the national answer to the Western Wall, which symbolized the holy place and during this period was outside the borders of the state. In the planning of Mount Herzl, the emphasis was placed on integrating into it the national cemetery, in which the heads of state would be buried alongside the fallen soldiers of Israel, the silver platter of the State of Israel. At the top of the mountain would be the tomb of Theodor Herzl, the visionary of the Jewish state.

Ben-Gurion's vision was partially realized when he chose to be buried in Sde Boker in a plot overlooking the Zin River. Some other heads of state also chose not to be buried on Mount Herzl. Only after the Six Day War and the liberation of the Old City was a symbolic connection forged, like an umbilical cord, between the Western Wall and Mount Herzl. The events of the Memorial Day for the Fallen of Israel's Wars open with a ceremony at the Western Wall Plaza, while the opening ceremony of Independence Day celebrations take place at Mount Herzl. Over the years, the ceremony at Mount Herzl symbolized the unity and integration of Israeli society, which each year marks the realization of the Zionist idea and its success. In recent years, political disputes have arisen around the ceremony, symbolizing the fissures in Israel's social unity and sense of partnership. Mount Herzl, the national temple, which was supposed to symbolize national redemption and the fulfillment of the Zionist vision, became a place from which to trace the cracks and splits that characterize Israeli society. ■

The writer is a professor of the history of the Zionist movement and leadership; he published a series of articles and books dealing with issues related to these subjects. In recent years he has been researching the shaping of Theodor Herzl's image in the collective memory.