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JUDAISM 3.0
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The day that changed Zionism

The untold story of Zionism's breakout point, and of Herzl's attributing it to prayer

On February 14, 1896, Herzl published *The Jewish State*, a book he understood would transform Judaism. But two months after publication, it had made only a limited impact.

That was okay, since Herzl believed the road to success runs through the Jewish establishment. He wrote it with the Rothschilds in mind, and had his big hopes set on Baron Hirsch. Now that the book was out, Herzl was waiting for the optimal time to send a copy to Hirsch and lure him in.

In the meanwhile, Herzl collected some unusual supporters, such as an antisemite fan. Then a reverend showed up at Herzl's doorstep, "with the long gray beard of a prophet." Rev. Hechler showed Herzl his biblical prophecy-based calculations indicating the Jews were about to return to Zion.

When Herzl told Hechler about his aspiration to meet German royalty – a game-changer that would give his nascent movement enormous credibility and open doors – Hechler claimed he could arrange it. Herzl, who referred to Hechler as "a peculiar person," was skeptical about the reverend's ability to deliver an audience, but agreed to sponsor Hechler's trip to Karlsruhe, home of the Grand Duke of Baden. After a few days of Hechler being in Karlsruhe and not delivering, Herzl concluded that Hechler was in "illusions."

Bulgarian Jews give religious credibility to Zionism

While the overall reach of Herzl's book was narrow at the time, there was one place in which *The Jewish State* was received with enthusiasm – Bulgaria! Sofia's Chief Rabbi Bierer, along with 600 congregants, gathered to pray for Herzl's success and passed a resolution of support, giving Herzl's movement religious validation. On April 17 (4th of Iyar), while waiting for Hechler's response from Karlsruhe, Herzl received a letter from Rabbi Bierer saying they were praying to God for the success of his endeavor.

Encouraged, Herzl finally set in motion the path to such success – Hirsch! He asked his friend Max Nordau to test the water with the baron, prior to sending the book to Hirsch. After two days of drafting specific instructions, on the morning of April 21 (8th of Iyar) – a day that would become monumental – Herzl sent the letter to Nordau.

One hour after sending the letter, Herzl received shocking news: Hirsch died last night. "What a strange coincidence," he wrote in his diaries. "The pamphlet has been finished for months. I gave it to everyone except Hirsch. The moment I decide to do so, he dies."

Herzl acknowledges the brutal setback to his life project: "His participation could have helped our cause to success tremendously fast."

At this low point, Herzl decided to leave Vienna for Budapest, his childhood home (and where Hirsch died). "Perhaps I ought to have written that letter to Nordau two weeks ago," he wrote. "It seems to me as though our cause has grown poorer this day."

'I gave it to everyone except Hirsch. The moment I decide to do so, he dies'

Defeated, Herzl was about to go to sleep, planning to take the 7 a.m. boat to Budapest the following morning, but then a telegram came from Karlsruhe in the middle of the night: Hechler got the audience!

In the morning, instead of heading east to Budapest by slow boat, Herzl rushed west to Karlsruhe by the fast Orient Express train.

"Now begins a new book of the Jewish cause," he wrote as he started a new diary on the train. Stating that he is now getting closer to switching "from dream to reality," Herzl knows to what to attribute this unexpected success.

Not yet knowing if the meeting will truly occur, Herzl writes a seemingly benign statement in his diary that has been ignored by Herzl researchers: "If it is true, it will affect the world like a thunder-clap and will be the 'success' which Bierer is praying for in Sofia."

Herzl linking his success to God is reminiscent of Jacob linking his own dream to God: "And Jacob awakened out of his sleep, and he said: Indeed there is a God is in this place; and I did not know"

Both Herzl and Jacob do not explicitly attribute their endeavors to God at first. For Jacob, this is the first time he mentions God, except indirectly when pretending to be Esau. Then his father Isaac asks him how he

found prey so fast, and Jacob answers: "Your God" sent it to me.

Herzl is warned early on that he might be perceived as Shabtai Zvi, the 17th century false Messiah, and so he is extraordinarily cautious about making Godly and messianic references, except opaquely or in code.

Herzl's Iyar miracle

Herzl proceeded to meet the grand duke of Baden. Receiving a prolonged audience of two-and-a-half hours, Herzl charmed the German duke into Zionism. The "coincidences" of that day in Iyar triggered the rapid ascend of Herzl and Zionism (that would peak two years later in Herzl's visit to Jerusalem). The meeting with the grand duke eventually led to an audience with the kaiser, who agreed to lobby the Ottoman Sultan for a charter for a Jewish state.

The death of Hirsch, along with the rejection from Rothschild, led Herzl to take his message directly to the Jewish masses – to convene the Zionist Congress and build the Zionist institutions. "The Jews have lost Hirsch, but they have me," he wrote. "And after me they will have someone else."

Indeed, 52 years later, the prayers for Herzl's success were answered: the Jewish state was established – a new book of Judaism begins!

The writer is the author of an upcoming book Judaism 3.0: Judaism's Transformation to Zionism, available for pre-order in late November. See: Judaism-Zionism.com.

Deciphering Isaac's error in choosing Esau

Twice does Avimelech, the king of Gerar, use success as an indicator that God is with Abraham and Isaac. Both arrived as refugees – Avraham seemingly due to Sodom carnage spillover, and Isaac due to hunger. Once the two become enormously successful, the Kking concludes that God is with them and hence asks for a covenant.

When Rebecca is pregnant, God tells her privately that Jacob is the chosen one. But Isaac is not privy to that, and hence has to resort to the Avimelech "success test" to determine which one of his sons God is with. After all, Isaac was raised in Gerar and likely observed Avimelech's governance practices.

Esau is a successful hunter. It specifically stated that this is the reason Isaac likes him. Therefore when the "pretend Esau" explains the surprisingly fast delivery of prey as an act of "your God," it only reaffirms Isaac's original conclusion that Esau is the one to be blessed. But when the real Esau shows up later, delivering the prey in a slower "normal" time frame, it inevitably triggers a doubt – maybe God is not with Esau?

Somewhere around then Isaac changes his mind. It is possible that Rebecca then discloses to him her earlier prophecy or that he reaches the conclusion through the above logic. Isaac then doubles down on his blessing to Jacob, before sending him off. Once bestowed with the blessing, Jacob, for the first time, acknowledges God.

THE SCHLOSSPLATZ, at Karlsruhe – home of the Grand Duke of Baden. (Wikimedia Commons)

