

Leading thinkers look
at Zionism & Judaism



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Zionism is becoming the anchor of Judaism



Theodor Herzl and his famous statement: 'If you wish it, it is not a dream,' by artist Michel Cohen.
(Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

Recognizing this shift could address
the existential threat of Israel bashing and
unleash tremendous opportunities

By GOL KALEV

We are in the midst of a historic transformation of Judaism. Whether one likes it or not, Zionism is becoming the organizing principle of the Jewish nation-religion. It is the primary conduit through which both Jews and non-Jews relate to Judaism, whether positively or negatively. It is the one aspect of Judaism that evokes emotions, passion, anger, pride and engagement.

Zionism, the national expression of Judaism, is becoming its organizing principle (Judaism 3.0) in the same way that Rabbinic Judaism, the religious expression of Judaism, was during 2,000 years of exile (Judaism 2.0), and the Temple and physical presence in Judea prior (Judaism 1.0). This in turn only strengthens the religious aspect of Judaism.

The robust conversations that were sparked by the publication of my book *Judaism 3.0 - Judaism's Transformation to Zionism* are a testament to the broad interest in Zionism. In recent weeks, the America-Israel Friendship League hosted a Judaism 3.0 webinar with more than 13,000 participants, the Begin Center reported its highest attendance since COVID when it hosted its second Judaism 3.0 event, and the Brazil Jewish Academy even initiated a curriculum course to study the intricacies of Judaism 3.0 and Herzl. I am pleased that *The Jerusalem Post Magazine* decided to develop this conversation and invited leading thinkers to share their insight on the issue. The president of Israel, in his special message to the *Magazine's* readers, states it clearly: Reclaiming Zionism is the mission of our generation! (Full text available online: <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-719587>.)

Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism, wrote: "How can we tell the power of an idea? When we see that nobody can ignore it – whether he is for it, or against it." Zionism today is the one aspect of Judaism that cannot be ignored, including, as Herzl acknowledged, in opposition. Indeed, for

many American Jews, criticism of Israel has become the No.1 Jewish-related activity. Facebook posts such as "As a Jew, I am embarrassed about Israel" are indicative that it is Zionism, just as Herzl envisioned, that brings Jews back into their Judaism.

In Chicago, Zionism did something that was unthinkable till recently: It brought unaffiliated Jews to synagogue! They came to declare that they are anti-Zionist. The debates, resolutions, and votes created unprecedented engagement with Judaism. Once in synagogue, the under-engaged Jew is more likely to consume other Jewish experiences, including cultural and religious.

The power of the Zionist ideal is also expressed through the Jewish value of *tikkun olam* – repairing the world. Israeli innovations and medical breakthroughs have turned the Jewish state into the *tikkun olam* state.

Tikkun olam has been identified as a primary Jewish connector for Jews in America, home to about 80% of Diaspora Jewry. But the vast majority of Jews engaging in *tikkun olam* do not do so through Jewish organizations but individually or through community-wide charities, alongside non-Jews. With Zionism as the anchor of Judaism, an American Jew can now partake in the collective Jewish mission of *tikkun olam* simply by centering his Jewish identity around Zionism – by recognizing that we are in Judaism 3.0.

Indeed, an organic connection to Judaism, whether in positive, such as through Israeli wine, Israeli Netflix series and *tikkun olam*, or in negative through criticism of Israel, has replaced a reluctant connection through duty and guilt that characterized much of American Jewry outside the religious Orthodox minority (estimated to be 10%). The connection to Judaism through Zionism is now initiated by Diaspora Jews themselves, and not by "Jewish authorities." Hence in Judaism 3.0, the connection to Judaism is not only organic and natural but also sustainable.

And still, it has yet to be broadly recognized that Zionism is the organizing principle of Judaism. This is both since, as

Herzl stated, transformations of such magnitude take a long time and because there were insurmountable hurdles in Israel's first 70 years.

Hurdles to the transformation of Judaism now removed

These hurdles include Zionism evolving in the 20th century to be over-associated with secularism and even rejection of religion (not by Herzl's design), the initial objection of the haredim (ultra-Orthodox), Israel's association with socialism, as well as its financial and security difficulties. This while across the sea in America, fears of dual-loyalty and adherence to the homogeneous American ethos deterred Jews from centering their Jewish identity around Zionism.

Those hurdles are now removed. In Israel there is a long-term shift of power and ethos from the secular minority to the religious/traditional majority, a religious rapprochement among the seculars (the rise of the *Datlaf* – the "Sometimes Religious" – as the predominant stream of Israeli secularism), the haredi objection is gone, and so is Israel's socialism and survival challenges. In America, there is now a broad embrace of heritage-identity and cultural-pluralism anchored in common American values. For example, US Vice President Kamala Harris celebrates her Jamaican and Indian national heritage, and Sen. Marco Rubio his Cuban. In today's America, the American Jew who wishes to be like his neighbor would accentuate, not suppress, his Jewish national identity – Zionism. This does not mean agreement with Israel's policies, nor citizenship (Rubio is not a Cuban citizen nor agrees with the Cuban government's policy). It means a closer alignment to the consensus American ethos. Zionism is an expression of the American Jews' Americanism, even before it is an expression of his Judaism.

This while the outside world continues to look at the Jews as it always has: in a national context. As there is a global

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shift away from “gray,” centrism and ambiguity toward clarity, the polars and bluntness, recognizing that Zionism is now the anchor of Judaism would lead to a more genuine relationship of the world with the Jews. It would provide Jewish clarity.

But recognizing that we are in Judaism 3.0 has much further implications than answering the question of “What is the state of Judaism?” It would also help counter contemporary threats to Judaism. First and foremost, the existential threat of Israel-bashing.



Gol Kalev: ‘Zionism today is the one aspect of Judaism that cannot be ignored.’ (Hanna Taieb)



The front page of ‘The Palestine Post,’ the forerunner of ‘The Jerusalem Post,’ announcing the establishment of the new state. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

Judaism 3.0 helps counter Israel-bashing

Like the nascent antisemitism movement in Herzl's times, Israel-bashing is an amorphous and diverse movement. Yet, Israel-bashing of the 2020s is far more advanced and poisonous than antisemitism was in the 1890s.

Back then, sectorial newspapers, like the French *La Libre Parole*, and individuals like composer Richard Wagner, argued that Jews are polluting humanity.

Today, it is credible mainstream organizations that create this global consciousness. This year alone, CNN helped instill the notion that the Jewish state assassinates journalists, and Amnesty International that the Jewish state commits crimes against humanity.

Herzl argued that in such circumstances *hasbara* (public diplomacy) is futile. He mocked “committees against antisemitism,” since one cannot change dogmatic minds. A radical solution was needed: A Jewish political movement, Zionism, that will usher in the Jewish state.

Similarly, Israel-bashing is by now too entrenched in mainstream society to be countered through rational arguments. A radical approach is needed: The change of global consciousness of what is Judaism. Once there is a broad recognition that Judaism has transformed to Zionism, Israel-bashing becomes Jew-bashing, and this alters the nature of the threat.

Judaism 3.0 extracts the hidden asset from the Israel-bashing threat

Unlike in Herzl's time, we have a latent asset: Hating Jews is no longer fashionable. While being anti-Zionist is a rite of passage in certain circles, being anti-Jewish is a career-ending taboo. This is especially so in the media and politically correct-sensitive organizations which, in addition to their positive work, are also the breeding ground for Israel-bashing.

Israel bashers must stay in Judaism 2.0. This allows them to achieve both of their objectives: pursue with vigor their age-old opposition to Judaism (through Zionism), and maintain their modern-day claim that they love the Jews. They can even claim to have a zero-tolerance to antisemitism (the threat to Judaism in the 20th century), while partaking in Israel-bashing (the threat to Judaism in the 21st century). Once it is accepted that Judaism has transformed and Zionism is its anchor, this premise is robbed from them.

Israel-bashing is not only dogmatic but also lethal. It poses both the populous retail component, grounded in Occupationism – Westerners who hijack the Palestinian cause and adapt it to their needs, and the theoretical institutional destruction mechanism, like the International Criminal Court and the United Nations. Such mechanisms were effective in handling previous pariahs such as South Africa and Ba'athist Iraq.

Israel's warm peace with its Arab neighbors and a trajectory toward de facto normalization with the Palestinians led Israel bashers to crystallize the nature of their opposition: This is no longer about the Palestinians nor about the Israeli-Arab conflict. This is about humanity!

Wagner spreading his gospel that Jews pollute humanity had devastating consequences. Today, Amnesty International, agencies of the United Nations and other credible organizations that spread their

gospel that the Jewish state “commits crimes against humanity” puts Judaism and Jews in grave danger again.

Some in our Judaism 3.0 discussions push back on this, arguing that the solid support for Israel in world governments would put such populous sentiments in check. Indeed, Israel is blessed to have unshakable relationships even with allies it has disagreements with. Yet, here too, we should look to Herzl who refuted such arguments: “Even if we were as near to the hearts of princes... they could not protect us. They would only feel popular hatred by showing us too much favor.” Indeed, we already see European governments cater to the Israel-bashing populace in bizarre manners, such as in votes on UNESCO resolutions implying that Jews have no historic ties to Jerusalem.

As long as there is an illusion that Zionism is a “passing phenomenon” that can be defeated – like Communism or Ba'athist Iraq – the populous opposition will only intensify. A broad recognition of Judaism 3.0 would end that illusion.

Shift in global consciousness

The transformation to Judaism 3.0 is simple. It does not require legislation or halachic changes. It is happening in one's consciousness, in one's basic approach to Judaism.

Such shift of consciousness of what is Judaism occurred before. Judaism's original organizing principle was centered on the Temple and the physical presence in Judea (Judaism 1.0). When the Temple was destroyed and Jews exiled, Judaism adopted a new organizing principle – Rabbinic Judaism: The synagogues replaced the Temple, the insular ghetto replaced the insular life in Judea, and the yearning to return to Zion replaced the actual presence in Jerusalem (Judaism 2.0). After some time, the terms “Rabbinic Judaism” and “Judaism” became synonymous.

It is possible that in the Middle Ages, some argued that they love the Jews – those who (used to) worship in the Temple and live in Judea – but hate the Rabbinic Jews: those who worship in synagogues, live in European ghettos, wear a kippah and celebrate Hanukkah. Once there was a global recognition that Judaism has transformed to “Judaism 2.0,” one could not hide behind this fake facade. Similarly, once there is a global recognition that we are in Judaism 3.0, one would not be able to hide behind the fake facade of loving the Jews who (used to) go to synagogue but hating the Zionists. Sooner or later, the terms “Zionism” and “Judaism” will likely be used synonymously.

Herzl predicted that the Jewish state will exist, not due to the nations' moral obligation but because it will be the necessity of the world. Indeed, Israel is becoming such a necessity – not only through its technological innovations but also through its daring social experiments and unwavering commitment to mutual assurance and to tikkun olam – committing extreme advancements for humanity.

We are in the early days of Zionism. Recognizing we are in Judaism 3.0 will unleash Judaism's great potential and carve a clearer path for the world's nations to benefit from the crisp light that is emanating from Zion.

The writer is author of *Judaism 3.0: Judaism's Transformation to Zionism* (*Judaism-Zionism.com*).