



32.63x17.18	1	11	עמוד	the jerusalem post - front	21/07/2024	90949460-1
בנימין זאב הרצל - בהקשר לציונו - 80790						

# The test of the two Benjamins

• By TOVA HERZL

According to the Hebrew calendar, Tuesday will be the 17th of Tammuz, the anniversary of the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem, three weeks before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE (and, according to the Jerusalem Talmud, also prior to the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE). The following day, July 24, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is scheduled to address a joint session of Congress; and Friday will mark 120 years since the death of Benajmin Zeev ben Jacob, aka Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism.

Herzl, a wealthy and charismatic writer, was a star in Vienna's social and cultural circles until he was taken with the idea that the worsening "Jewish Problem" must be solved through the establishment of a state. In almost a decade until he died at 44, sick and tired, he inspired many Jews around the world to follow him. Convinced that international support was essential, Herzl met with Pope Pius X, Turkish sultan Abdul Hamid II, German kaiser Wilhelm II, and others. Herzl also established structures which proved essential for the state-to-be, including the Jewish National Fund (JNF) and the Jewish Colonial Trust – the first Zionist bank. If a leader is judged by a vision and its execution, Herzl passed the test.

Some mocked him for what they saw as an absurd idea. Others opposed it for assorted reasons. He also faced opposition within the Zionist movement, especially around the Uganda Plan that he raised in 1903 during the 6th Zionist Congress, which was to be his last. To the best of my knowledge, no such criticism or disagreement extended to questioning his personal integrity and decency.

In *The Jewish State*, the slim volume which served as his platform, Herzl advocated for equal burden-sharing and emphasized the value of labor – the flag he envisaged had seven golden stars, one for each daily working hour. In *Altneuland*, a futuristic novel published a year before he died, Herzl describes an enlightened country that flourished thanks to advanced science and technology, and in which

a racist rabbi is defeated in elections.

Herzl spend his time and energy traveling for the cause and was effectively an absent father. He used his money, that of his parents, and his wife's dowry to advance Zionism. Although he kept up appearances, he died virtually penniless. In his will, he requested that the Zionist movement take care of his children – and a fundraising campaign was organized on their behalf.

The contrasting financial conduct of our prime minister and his family is well known. The divisiveness which serves him in Israel ("the Left forgot what it means to be Jewish"; "Arabs are flocking to vote") is exported to The United States – he embraces Republicans and criticizes Democrats, thus undermining the vital bi-partisan support of Israel. The distrust towards him is not limited to the US, but is shared by many world leaders.

Yitzhak Shamir, a Likud prime minister, always left the Knesset when extremist Meir Kahane (co-founder of the Jewish Defense League) stood up to deliver one of his racist speeches. Netanyahu entrusted Itamar Ben-Gvir, Kahane's follower, with the responsibility for law enforcement. I will not describe Netanyahu's actions regarding burden sharing and his increasing support for religious institutions while higher education is cut, with all that implies for the future of science and technology, and for the overall prospects for Israel.

Other than divine punishment, destruction of the Temples and subsequent exiles can be attributed to several factors, including corruption, extremism, personal and national arrogance, complacency, misreading the international balance of power, and ignoring warnings. As we approach the annual remembrance of the breaching of the walls, it behooves us to review the conduct of the two aforementioned Benjamins, ask where each one leads us, and then choose the preferred path.

Speaking in the Knesset in 2010, to mark 150 years since Herzl's birth, Netanyahu summarized the results of Herzl's actions by saying that Benjamin Zeev had envisaged a modern democratic country which was open to the world, had a free market and answered social needs.



A PERSON holds up a sign depicting Theodor Herzl during a protest against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's appearance at UN in New York City, last year. The writer quotes Netanyahu as saying that Herzl envisaged a modern democratic country with a free market and social needs solutions. (Shannon Stapleton/Reuters)

He added: "In the history of nations, particularly in the history of our nation, it is extremely rare to point to one individual who almost singlehandedly saved his nation. Herzl was one of those individuals." A justifiably powerful assessment.

Only the future will tell us how history will judge the

vision of the other Benjamin, his actions, and their effect on the future of the nation.

*The writer served twice as congressional liaison in Washington DC and was Israel's first ambassador to the Baltic states, as well in South Africa. She is the author of Madame Ambassador: Behind The Scenes With A Candid Israeli Diplomat.*