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: Zionism as a forerunner to MAGA

Zionism as a forerunner to MAGA?

Herzl in 1895: 'Make Jews great again'

• By GOL KALEV

A little-known showdown in a Paris Champs-Élysées mansion in June of 1895 had a profound impact on the evolution of Judaism and renewed relevance today, as the assault on Judaism from Europe is intensifying. Theodor Herzl, a journalist, had a stunning revelation: Contemporary Judaism is not organic Judaism but a reaction to European persecution: "We are what the ghetto made us."

Herzl fathered an ideology, Zionism, that would transform Jews from being timid and weak, living in constant fear of "what will Europe do to us next," back into being a proud, confident nation. At its core, a switch from a Jewish society based on charity to one based on excellence.

Once Jews are back home and free, Herzl posited, they would advance humanity in unimaginable ways. So much so that Europe would need the Jewish state to exist and therefore would finally accept the Jews: "Peace through Strength."

Herzl encountered fierce resistance from Jews, aware of the recurring pattern: the more successful Jews become, the more lethal European opposition to them.

After fine-tuning his ideas, Herzl was ready for the pivotal moment: an audience with the richest and most influential Jew of the time: Baron Maurice Hirsch.

Hirsch, one of the richest people in Europe, used his wealth for generous support of Jewish philanthropy, providing relief and hope for

Jews in misery.

Herzl had a better idea for the baron's money. He asked for an hour of the baron's uninterrupted attention, when he planned to drop the bombshell: convince Hirsch to lead a 180-degree pivot of Judaism, from "welfare" to "MJGA" – from keeping the Jews poor and miserable to making Jews great again.

Judaism defined by European persecution

Herzl compared Judaism to a lion thrown into the sea. The lion is forced to develop fins in order to survive and becomes a sea lion. Jews were thrown 2,000 years ago into the sea of European persecution and hence developed certain types of behavior, thinking, and even physical attributes, such as being bent down, in order to survive.

While both Hirsch and Herzl agreed that European persecution of Jews is permanent and there is no use to "fight antisemitism," they had widely differing views on what to do about it. Hirsch wished to alleviate the suffering of the "sea lion" through charity. Herzl sought to do so by transforming him back into a lion – a process that will occur through the infinite ideal of Zionism (Judaism 3.0). He told the Baron: The Jews "must be made strong to fight a war, eager to work, and virtuous."

Herzl scolded Hirsch about the uselessness of his life project, sending a clear message: stop funding Jewish philanthropy, and start funding Jewish excellence. He told Hirsch: "Instead of buying up the Jews one by one, you could



THEODOR HERZL rides aboard a ship on his way to the Land of Israel in 1898. He fathered an ideology that would transform Jews from being timid and weak to a proud, confident nation, says the writer. (GPO National Photo Collection/Facebook)

offer huge prizes in the chief antisemitic countries for noble deeds."

From charity to greatness

Herzl was specific. He asked the Baron to redirect his wealth to fund a series of rewards carrying an enormous pay: "[A prize] for deeds of great moral beauty, for courage, self-sacrifice, ethical conduct, great achievements in art and science, for physicians during epidemics, for military men, for discoverers of remedies and inventors of other products contributing to the public good."

Herzl summarized the prize categories: "In short, for anything great." Leading the Jews back home will take decades, but incepting the Jewish transformation can happen imme-

diately! All it takes is a decision by one man – Hirsch.

Herzl told Hirsch that the Jewish excellence prize would accomplish two things: First, it would make Jews great again – what Herzl called "a general improvement." Herzl explained: "The individual annual prize-winners do not really matter; I am more interested in all the others who try to outdo themselves in order to win a prize. In this way the moral level will be raised."

Second, it would address Europe's opposition to Judaism, as Herzl explained: "Because the prize endeavor will be so unusual and glorious, it will be talked about everywhere. Thus people will learn that there are good Jews too, and many of them."

Years before the Nobel Prize

was established, Herzl was implementing his "peace through strength" vision: first, restoring the greatness of Jews. Then, the infinite greatness of the Jewish state.

Hirsch argues not to anger Europe, instead stay low

Herzl recounts a receptive Hirsch at first, but then it all turned.

The Baron interrupted Herzl: "No, no, no! I do not want to raise the general level [of Jews] at all. All our misfortune comes from the fact that the Jews want to climb too high. We have too many intellectuals. My intention is to keep the Jews from pushing ahead. They should not make such great strides. All Jew-hatred comes from this."

Herzl left the Champs-Élysées mansion emotionally

stirred. In the coming weeks, he obsessively wrote down what he would tell Hirsch if he had an opportunity to prove him wrong. Herzl never got that opportunity. Yet, those notes matured to a book: *The Jewish State*, which led to the creation of the Zionist Movement.

Fifty years later, in 1948, the Jewish state was established, and some other 70 years later, in the 2020s, the transformation Herzl seeded is becoming evident: Zionism is becoming the anchor of Judaism (Judaism 3.0). As said, "October 7 turned Judaism 3.0 from a thesis to a depiction of day-to-day reality."

Yet, the Herzl-Hirsch divide of 1895 is getting renewed relevance in our days:

On the one hand, Herzl's MJGA movement (a.k.a. Zionism) is an unbelievable success: the Jewish state is indeed making astonishing innovations that advance humanity. It just helped save Europe from a nuclear Iran and from Iranian ballistic missiles that could take down hospitals and residential buildings throughout Europe.

On the other hand, just as Hirsch predicted, this Jewish success led to an unprecedented European assault on Judaism – manic opposition that, as explained in my book and this column, is turning into a strategic threat to the US and to global stability.

Once again, the question arises, how to counter this threat from Europe?

The Herzl vs Hirsch feud is back

Some urge the Jewish state to go the Hirsch way:

bend down, accept Europe's demand for a suicidal "two-state solution," surrender to Hamas, and, in the words of one untransformed American Jewish senator: stop being a "pariah that is opposed by the rest of the world."

Yet Israelis clearly choose the Herzl way: spread the crisp light unto the nations. This is the reason Arab nations seek to make peace with Israel – indeed, peace through strength. However, something changed since that Champs-Élysées showdown. Back in 1895, Europe dominated the world. Since then, there has been a shift of power and greatness to the United States – something Europe has yet to internalize.

Indeed, this week, as European leaders escalated their attack on Judaism by rewarding Hamas's October 7 murder of 1,200 Jews with an imaginary Palestine state, American leaders, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio, were in Jerusalem, at the City of David, celebrating the greatness of Judaism that dates back 3,000 years.

While some Jews in America remain sea lions, Israelis, in great gratitude to President Donald Trump, are sending a clear message: The nation of Israel has risen like lions.

The writer is the author of *The Assault on Judaism: The Existential Threat Is Coming from the West. He is chairman of the Judaism 3.0 think tank and author of Judaism 3.0: Judaism's Transformation to Zionism (Judaism-Zionism.com). For more of his analyses: EuropeAndJerusalem.com*