

# In His Own Words

What did Albert Einstein think of Zionism, Jewish nationalism?—review

By NEVILLE TELLER

PHOTO: AI

Albert Einstein (1879–1955) was one of the greatest scientists of all time. His theories changed how people understood time and space, matter and light, gravitation and the universe.

Einstein's genius made him world famous. In 1921, he won the Nobel Prize for Physics (פיזיקה). However, Einstein wasn't just a scientist. He wrote letters, shared his thoughts on politics, and cared deeply about human rights. Many years after his death in 1955, Einstein's ideas and writings stay important. His life and work are still studied and appreciated.

## Einstein's connection to Israel

When Einstein died, he left all his papers—scientific and personal—to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The university was not a random choice. Einstein had helped establish it in the 1920s. He wanted it to be a place where Jewish people could learn and grow.

In 1977, the university teamed up with historians and scientists to publish all his papers. The big task of organizing, processing, editing, and publishing Einstein's papers has been led by the *Einstein Papers Project*, which is based in the California Institute of Technology (Caltech).

This project is massive. The team is publishing Einstein's writings in a series of books, one volume at a time. Each book includes scientific papers, personal letters, and other writings. The books also offer explanations and context to help readers understand Einstein's thoughts and work.

The latest book, Volume 17, was published in 2024. It focuses on papers written between July 1929 and November 1930. There are 499 documents in this volume, most written in German.

## Understanding Einstein's writings

Each volume of the *Einstein Papers Project* is carefully planned. The documents are organized chronologically, showing the progression of Einstein's ideas and personal life. Volume 17 is no different. These books include Einstein's political writings, letters to friends, and even his personal thoughts. Together, they give readers a full picture of Einstein as both a scientist and a person.

## Einstein and a Nobel-winning poet

One very interesting part of Volume 17 is Einstein's relationship with Rabindranath Tagore, a famous Bengali poet. Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, was also a writer, philosopher, composer, and painter.

Einstein had met him in 1926, and in July 1930 invited him to Caputh, his summer house near Potsdam, Germany. A few weeks later, they met again in Berlin.

Their conversations from both meetings were published in the *New York Times* and *Asia* magazine and are now included in Volume 17. Their talks covered deep topics like the nature of reality. Einstein believed the universe

exists on its own, independent of humans. Tagore, however, believed the universe becomes real only through human perception.

Interestingly, Einstein and Tagore did not speak the same language. When they met, Tagore spoke in English, and Einstein answered in German. A translator helped them communicate. When their first conversation was published, Einstein felt that some of his ideas were lost in translation.

## Einstein's views on Zionism

Another key part of Volume 17 is Einstein's support for Zionism. In the 1920s, Einstein strongly supported this idea. He believed the Jewish people needed to have a safe place where they could live without fear of persecution.

One important document in Volume 17 is a letter Einstein wrote in 1929 to Willy Hellpach, a German politician. Hellpach had criticized Zionism in an article, and Einstein felt the need to respond. In his letter, Einstein explained why he supported Zionism. He wrote that religion was not the only thing that connected Jewish people. He felt that anti-Semitism and persecution had played a part in bringing them together.

"I only discovered I was a Jew when I came to Germany 15 years ago," Einstein wrote. "And this discovery was communicated more by non-Jews than by Jews."

Einstein was inspired by Theodor Herzl's vision. Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, inspired Einstein to believe in the idea of a Jewish "homestead" in Palestine. However, Einstein did not support nationalism in general. He believed in universal humanity, where all people are equal. Still, Einstein felt that persecution left Jews no choice but to come together as a nation.

## The importance of Einstein's papers

The *Einstein Papers Project* is discovering much interesting information about Einstein's life and work. Volume 17 is just one part of this project, but it shows the depth of Einstein's thoughts and the fact that he had many interests.

Through this project, we see Einstein not only as a great scientist but also as a person who cared deeply about the world. His support for Zionism, his conversations with thinkers like Tagore, and his thoughts on life show a man who cared about much more than just science.

The project is far from finished. Many more volumes will follow, covering the rest of Einstein's life. When done, it will be a key resource for understanding one of history's greatest minds.

The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein, Vol. 17: The Berlin Years Writings and Correspondence June 1929 – November 1930

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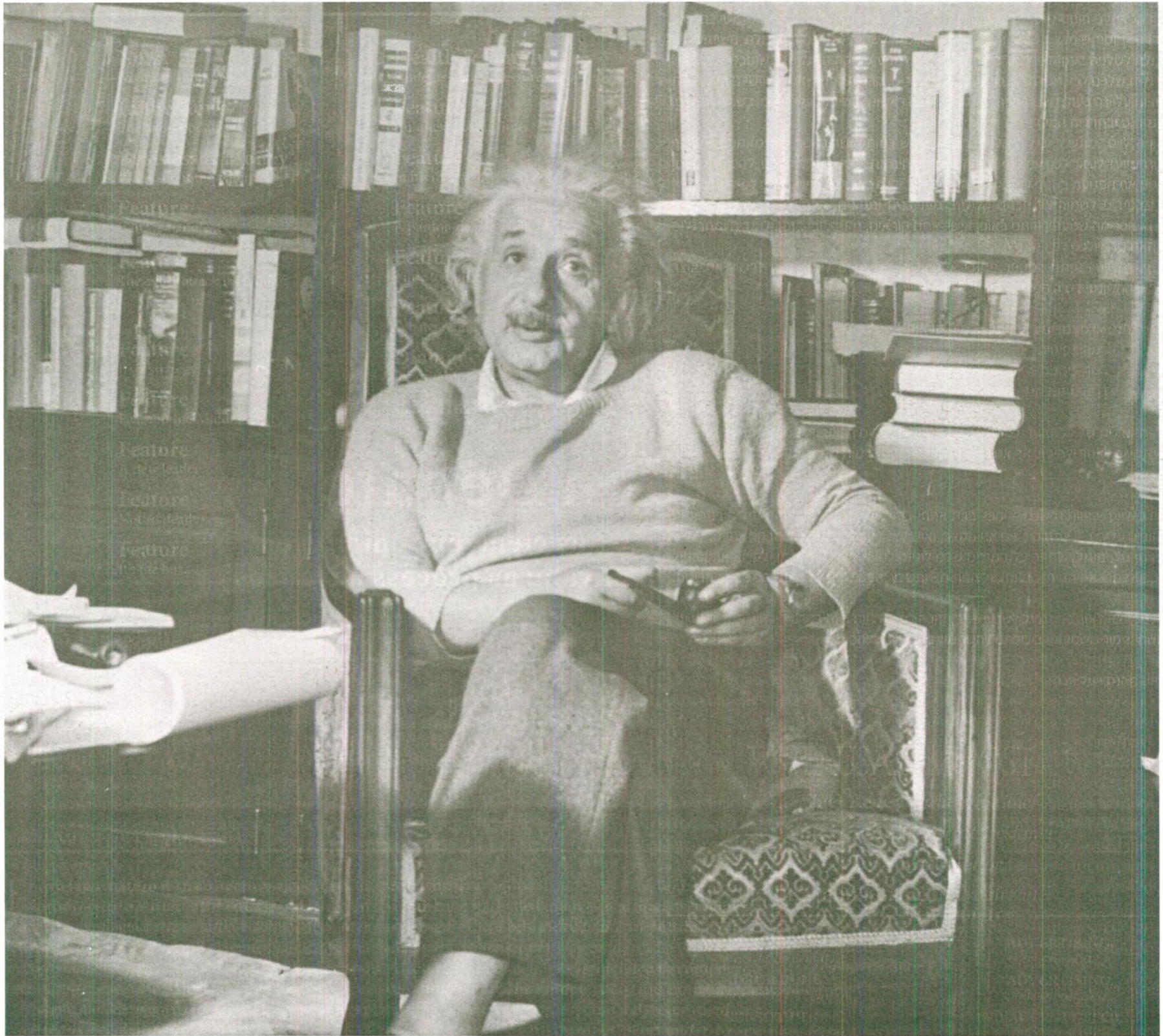


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