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בנימין זאב הרצל - בהקשר לציונות - 80790						

: Power is not a sin: The Zionist answer to history

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Herzl envisioned the state – Jabotinsky gave us the spine

• By ADAM SCOTT BELLOS

We do not honor Theodor Herzl and Ze'ev Jabotinsky by placing wreaths in their memory. We honor them by asking whether the Jewish people still dare to live by what they taught.

Herzl died on July 3, 1904, having given his life to a people that did not yet fully understand him. Jabotinsky is remembered days later on 29 Tamuz, the date Israel set aside to honor his life and vision.

Their memorial days arrive together like a warning. Not because they were the same man. They were not. Not because they offered the same politics. They did not. But because both understood the same truth before comfortable Jews were ready to admit it.

Jewish survival cannot depend on the goodwill of others.

That was the Zionist rupture. That was the scandal. That was why so many Jews thought Herzl was a dreamer and Jabotinsky was a madman. Herzl looked at Europe and saw that emancipation had not solved the Jewish question; it had only dressed it in better clothes. Jabotinsky looked at Jewish vulnerability and understood that pity was not protection, sympathy was not security, and moral innocence would not stop those determined to destroy us.

They were not prophets because they predicted every detail. They were prophets because they understood the

pattern before polite society was willing to see it.

We are living through another moment in which that pattern is impossible to ignore. For decades, much of the Jewish world allowed itself to believe that Diaspora security had become stable, elite acceptance was permanent, Holocaust memory would restrain civilized societies, Israel's strength would be respected, and antisemitism could be managed through education, alliances, statements, and better public relations.

October 7 shattered that illusion.

In major Jewish population centers, the clock has been pushed backward. Jews who were told they were fully at home now gauge how visible they can be. Jewish students weigh the cost of speaking. Synagogues require guards. Israeli restaurants become targets. Zionism becomes a slur.

Governments that once spoke endlessly about Jewish safety now reward Palestinian statehood, even as the wounds of massacre, hostages, and more than two years of war remain central to Jewish trauma. This is not only rising antisemitism. It is the reversal of Jewish leverage.

Herzl would have recognized it.

Jabotinsky would have recognized it faster.

Herzl did not ask Europe to love the Jews. He asked Jews to stop outsourcing their future to Europe. His genius was not merely that he dreamed of a



PRIME MINISTER Benjamin Netanyahu attends a memorial ceremony for Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem, last year. (Chaim Goldberg/Flash90)

state. Dreamers are not rare. His genius was that he understood Jewish dignity required instruments: congresses, diplomacy, capital, law, land, institutions, and sovereignty.

In *The Jewish State*, published in 1896 as a modern solution to the Jewish question, Herzl made a claim polite Jews did not want to hear: the Jewish problem was political, and therefore the answer had to be political.

That is why Herzl still matters. He did not sentimentalize Jewish suffering; he organized it. He took Jewish humiliation and turned it into a program.

He took the scattered anxieties of a people and turned them into a congress. He took the dream of return and dragged it out of prayer and into statecraft.

Herzl gave Jewish longing an address.

JABOTINSKY GAVE Jewish longing a spine.

He did not teach Jews to worship force. That is the lazy caricature. He taught Jews that weakness does not become moral because it is Jewish. A people that cannot defend itself becomes an object of negotiation by others. A people that

power the modern Jewish world still struggles to say aloud.

We are comfortable with Jewish memory. We are comfortable with Jewish grief. We are comfortable with Jewish achievement, philanthropy, trauma, and moral witness. But Jewish power still embarrasses too many Jews.

We want Israel to rescue us, but resent the hardness required for rescue. We want governments to protect us, but shrink from building the leverage that makes protection politically unavoidable. We want the world to understand us, while Herzl and Jabotinsky taught that a people that needs to be understood before it is safe is already in danger.

Power is not a sin.

Power is not domination. It is not brutality. It is not the worship of force. Power is the ability of a people to make its survival non-negotiable.

That is the Zionist answer to history.

Herzl gave that answer instruments. Jabotinsky gave it discipline. Herzl taught Jews that sympathy was not a strategy. Jabotinsky taught Jews that security was not a favor. Together, they shattered the most dangerous Jewish illusion: that goodness alone could protect us.

Goodness is not enough. Memory is not enough. Victimhood is not enough. Being right is not enough. The world does not reward Jews for being innocent. It respects Jews when Jewish innocence is backed by Jewish power.

That lesson cannot remain trapped inside Zionist history. It must shape Jewish life now: not only in Israel, but across the Diaspora. Not an army in every community. Not paranoia. Not domination. But a civic, cultural, political, and physical seriousness that forms Jews before the crisis arrives.

Herzl and Jabotinsky did not give us a museum of Zionism. They gave us a doctrine of Jewish adulthood.

A child begs to be protected. An adult builds power.

A frightened community asks why the world has abandoned it. A serious community makes abandonment costly.

A weak people pleads for sympathy. A sovereign people builds instruments. A proud people builds spine.

That is what they taught. That is what we forgot.

So yes, place the wreaths. Say the prayers. Mark the dates. Quote the speeches. Teach their names to children. But do not turn Herzl and Jabotinsky into marble men whose lessons are too dangerous to live by.

Herzl did not die so Jews could become better beggars. Jabotinsky did not die so Jews could become better victims. They left us a doctrine: build power, wield it with discipline, and never apologize for surviving.

That is not extremism.

That is Zionism.

The author is founder and CEO of The Israel Innovation Fund (TIIF). His upcoming book is titled *What Is Zionism?: Why Never Again Is Not Enough*.