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: Remains of Herzls grandparents reinterred alongside Zionist leader



PRIME MINISTER Benjamin Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog, and World Zionist Organization Chairman Yaakov Hagoel stand in front of the coffins of Theodor Herzl's grandparents on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem yesterday. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

Remains of Herzl's grandparents reinterred alongside Zionist leader

• By ALEX WINSTON

Seventy-seven years after Theodor Herzl was reburied in Jerusalem, the founder of modern political Zionism was finally reunited with the last missing members of his immediate family on Wednesday as the remains of his grandparents, Shimon Leib and Rivka Herzl, were laid to rest beside him on Mount Herzl.

President Isaac Herzog, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, senior government officials, representatives of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), members of the Herzl family, and Serbian dignitaries attended the state ceremony, marking the culmination of a years-long effort to bring the couple from Zemun, Serbia, to Israel.

The reinterment took place exactly 77 years (in the

Hebrew calendar) after Herzl himself was reburied on the mountain that now bears his name, fulfilling another chapter of the Zionist visionary's request that his family eventually be brought to rest in the Jewish state.

Addressing those gathered, Herzog reflected on the influence of Herzl's grandfather, Shimon Leib, who served as the gabbai of the synagogue of Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai, one of the earliest proponents of Jewish national restoration.

"Dreams are not passed down through written inheritance," Herzog said. "They are passed around the Shabbat table... in the stories a grandfather tells his grandson."

The president described Shimon Leib as "the man who opened the synagogue first and locked it last," saying that while he never became a political leader himself,

the ideas he encountered in Rabbi Alkalai's synagogue helped form part of the world inherited by his grandson.

Shimon Leib Herzl was an Orthodox Jew and communal leader in Zemun who was deeply influenced by Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai, whose advocacy for Jewish national restoration predated political Zionism by decades. Together with his wife, Rivka, he is widely regarded as having helped shape the family environment in which the future founder of political Zionism was raised.

"Not every person merits becoming the founder of a state," Herzog said. "But every person can be the one who carries the vision home and places it on the family table."

Netanyahu also emphasized the connection between Jewish tradition and

modern Zionism.

"Our attention turns today to the deepest foundations," he told attendees. "Judaism as the basis of Zionism, the Torah, and the Bible as the foundation of identity, and the chain of generations as the anchor of values and heritage."

"The home of Herzl's grandparents provided the roots from which the trunk, branches, and fruit later grew," he said, adding that Herzl had "created the conditions that brought us back to the Promised Land" through "brilliance, determination, and practical action."

Speaking to *The Jerusalem Post*, WZO Chairman Yaakov Hagoel said the ceremony represented the fulfillment of one of Herzl's enduring wishes.



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“You have to understand that today marks exactly 77 years since the beginning of the fulfillment of Herzl’s will,” Hagoel said. “In 1949, the Government of Israel and the World Zionist Organization brought Herzl and his parents here. Over the years we brought his grandson, and later his children. Today, after a tremendous effort, we have succeeded in bringing his grandfather and grandmother as well.”

Hagoel described the occasion as “the fulfillment of the request made by the visionary of the Jewish state,” and added that Herzl had left “two wills.”

“One was to bring his family to Israel,” he stated. “The second – which you and I fulfill every day, every hour – is the building of the State of Israel.”

When asked about the meaning of Zionism and the ceremony, Hagoel said Zionism continues to face growing international hostility.

“Unfortunately, Zionism has become one of the most vilified concepts in the world today,” he told the *Post*. “Antisemites understand that openly being anti-Jewish doesn’t go over very well, so they play a game with words and instead call themselves anti-Zionists.

“We are Jews. We are Zionists. We are proud, and we hold our heads high. This is the time to strengthen our Jewish identity and deepen our connection to the Jewish people and the State of Israel. Only in this way will we overcome these very difficult challenges.”

The initiative to repatriate the remains was led by the WZO in coordination with Serbian authorities and the local Jewish community. The agreement allowing the exhumation was secured by Hagoel during a 2021 visit to Israel by Zeljka Cvijanovic, then president of Republika Srpska, although logistical and regional security challenges delayed the transfer for several years.

With Wednesday’s ceremony, Herzl is now buried alongside virtually all of his immediate family on Mount Herzl, with the exception of his daughter Trude, who perished during the Holocaust and whose final resting place remains unknown. •