ONE

The Mystery of Theodor Herzl

"Perhaps a fair-minded historian will find that it was after all something that a Jewish journalist without means, in the midst of the deepest degradation of the Jewish people, in a time of the most sickening anti-Semitism, was able to create a flag out of rag-cloth and a nation out of a foundering rabble—a nation that flocked to this flag with straightened backs."

—HERZL IN HIS DIARY, JUNE 1, 1901[1]

Theodor Herzl in 1897

NOT SINCE MOSES LED the forty-year Exodus from Egypt did anyone transform Jewish history as fundamentally as Theodor Herzl did in seven years—from the publication in 1896 of his pamphlet *The Jewish State* to his historic pledge about Jerusalem at the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903. Then he died suddenly in 1904, at the age of forty-four.

In 2017, on the centennial of the 1917 Balfour Declaration—Britain's promise to facilitate a Jewish national home in Palestine—Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Declaration resulted "largely thanks to Herzl's brilliant appearances in England."

> Herzl created something out of nothing. He turned Zionism into a mass movement. He created the organizational and economic tools for the World Zionist Organization. Perhaps above all, he gained access to kings and counts . . . and this was no small thing [because a Jewish statesman] did not exist at the time, . . . certainly not one who was a journalist and playwright, and who was only thirty-six years old. It was unthinkable.[2]

An early Zionist and later historian, Oskar K. Rabinowicz, described the situation of the Jews at the end of the nineteenth century as follows:

> Jewry politically and nationally was a disorganized conglomeration of individuals, an amorphous, leaderless mass, oppressed in this or that part of the world, and despised in almost all strata of society in others. On the other hand, Great Britain, at the time, was the most powerful empire on earth. . . . And there he stood, Theodore Herzl, unknown in the English-speaking world, an individual, a Jew from Budapest, a man without a State behind him, without an organized people, without . . . [any] . . . of the

> means of power with which practical politics are made, dreaming of cooperation between Britain and Jewry.[3]

How did a young writer with no political connections, no ties to Jewish organizations, and no financial backing beyond his own resources, negotiate with leading figures in the Western world's ruling empires, engaging in what Netanyahu called "inconceivable diplomatic actions" that were, more than a century later, still "astonishing," and which would lead to the Balfour Declaration and eventually the creation of the modern state of Israel?[4]

How did a man opposed by Orthodox rabbis (who believed a Jewish state should await the messiah), Reform rabbis (who wanted a Jewish state relegated permanently to the past), assimilated Jews (who feared accusations of dual loyalty), Jewish socialists (who considered any type of nationalism reactionary), and Jewish public figures (who thought the whole idea absurd) create a worldwide movement?

Moreover, why did Herzl do all this, given his minimal ties to Judaism and the Jewish people during his early adulthood? He had a bar mitzvah and attended a predominantly Jewish high school, but he had sought assimilation ever since his days as a university student in Vienna.[5] Nor was he religiously observant as an adult: When his son was born in 1891, he did not have him circumcised. On December 24, 1895, six weeks before the publication of *The Jewish State*, Herzl was at home lighting a Christmas tree for his three children.[6]

For many years, the common belief was that Herzl became a Zionist as a result of covering the Dreyfus trial in 1894 in Paris for a Viennese newspaper. More recently, scholars have shown that Herzl's embrace of Zionism had nothing to do with that case.[7]

The story of Herzl thus presents a mystery. He came, seemingly, out of nowhere. At the beginning of 1895, no one would have predicted that the thirty-five-year-old literary editor of Vienna's *Neue Freie Presse* would propose the formation of a Jewish state; present the idea to London's Jewish elite; publish his historic pamphlet; establish the political, financial, and intellectual institutions for a state-in-waiting; negotiate with emperors, kings, dukes, ministers, the Pope, and the Sultan; hold six Zionist congresses attracting hundreds of delegates from more than twenty countries and regions around the world (their numbers increasing each year); produce two remarkable diplomatic achievements in 1903 that set the stage

David Ben-Gurion reading Israel's Declaration of Independence, May 14, 1948

for the Balfour Declaration—and then die heartbroken and impoverished in 1904, less than a decade after he began.

In 1897, a few days after the First Zionist Congress concluded in Basel, Herzl wrote in his diary that he had "founded the Jewish state":

> If I said this out loud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. Perhaps in five years, and certainly in 50, everyone will know it.[8]

In 1947—fifty years later—the United Nations endorsed a Jewish state in Palestine. Six months after that, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed its independence in Tel Aviv—a city that did not exist in 1897—under a massive photograph of Herzl, flanked by two flags identical to the one Herzl hung in Basel.

Ben-Gurion later wrote that Herzl, in the final years of his brief life, had "transformed a pulverized people."[9] He single-handedly turned Zionism—a movement that was, in the words of the early American Zionist Richard J. H. Gottheil, "[f]or the Reform Jews . . . too orthodox; for the Orthodox . . . not sufficiently religious; for the No-nothings . . . too Jewish"—into a movement that commanded the attention of every world power with an interest in the Middle East.[10]

In the long history of the Jewish people since their formation in the barren wilderness of the Sinai, no one had done so much, of such consequence, in so little time.

How and why did that happen?

At the First Zionist Congress in 1897, Herzl's principal ally, Max Nordau—one of the leading public intellectuals in the world—devoted his opening address to a worldwide survey of the condition of the Jewish people.[11] In Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East—where Nordau said "the overwhelming majority dwells, probably nine-tenths of all Jews"—Jewish life was "a daily affliction of the body; anxiety about the next day, an agonizing struggle to maintain a bare existence."

For the remaining ten percent of the Jewish people, living in the West, Nordau said there was a different, but no less serious, existential distress. Although they generally had food, shelter, and security, the Western Jews suffered from what he called a "distress of the spirit," one even more debilitating than physical deprivation:

> It consists in the harsh repression of [the Jews'] pursuit of higher satisfactions, the striving toward which no Gentile ever need deny himself. . . . This is the moral deprivation of Jews [in the West]. . . . The emancipated Jew is rootless, insecure in his relationship to his neighbors, fearful in his contact with strangers, distrustful of the secret feelings even of his friends.

For the Jewish people, the nineteenth century was ending at a low point, after a very recent historical high. The nineteenth century was the best century Jews had experienced since the destruction of the Temple.[12] They had been given equal rights throughout Europe; universities and professions were opened to them; even life in Russia had improved, as the enlightened Tsar Alexander II freed the serfs in 1861 and allowed Jews significant new personal and professional freedoms.[13]

But in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a new political movement, with a new name—"antisemitism"—appeared in Germany and spread throughout Eastern Europe.

Growing up, Herzl was the quintessential product of the new Jewish age. Indeed, he embodied the assimilationist ideal.[14] Born in 1860 in Budapest to cultured, upper-middle-class Jewish parents, he grew up in the decade that saw emancipation of the Jews enacted into Hungarian law. His family was, in historian Carl Schorske's words, "economically established, religiously 'enlightened,' politically liberal, and culturally German."[15] Young Jews living in cities such as Warsaw, Berlin, and Vienna had unprecedented opportunities in European society. In 1878, at eighteen, Herzl entered the University of Vienna to study law.

In early 1881, Herzl was admitted to Albia, a selective dueling fraternity that was part of the German nationalist student movement. At the time, German nationalism was not a threat for a Jewish student such as Herzl, but rather an attraction. The movement endorsed liberal values; it was a brand of progressive politics, opposed in Austria to the conservative rule of the Hapsburg Empire—although anti-Jewish elements were present that would eventually overwhelm the movement. A number of illustrious Jews in the 1870s and early 1880s belonged to German nationalist student societies, including Gustav Mahler, Sigmund Freud, and Arthur Schnitzler.

With his admission into Albia, Herzl was joining the sons of aristocrats and professionals in a distinctive elite, its members wearing special insignia.[16] Herzl's entry into the top echelon of student society was the kind of achievement Jews had sought for their children for more than a century.[17] Dueling was an important social institution, a ritual for students to demonstrate their courage. After joining Albia, Herzl took fencing lessons for four hours a day (two from Albia and two privately); in his initiation duel, he received a small scar on his cheek as his badge of honor.

Herzl took "Tancred" as his fraternity name—the title character of Benjamin Disraeli's novel, *Tancred, or the New Crusade*. In 1881, Disraeli had just completed his service as the first Jewish-born British prime minister. In his novel, Tancred is a young Christian aristocrat who studies at Oxford and then travels to the Holy Land, where he meets Eva, a young Jewish woman, who defends "the splendor and superiority" of the Jews, and changes Tancred's view of them. *Tancred* was Disraeli's effort to express his view that the ideal faith was one that recognized both Christianity and Judaism.[18] In taking the name "Tancred"—an enlightened Christian who learned firsthand about the Jews and came to admire them—Herzl chose a name to make a point.[19]

Over the next two years, however, things began to change for both the Jews as a people and Herzl as an individual.

In 1881–82, two seminal books appeared, only one of which the twenty-one-year-old Herzl read. The unread one was *Auto-Emancipation: An Appeal to His People by a Russian Jew,* written anonymously by Leo Pinsker, a well-educated Jewish physician in Odessa.[20] Pinsker wrote it after pogroms swept through Russia in more than a hundred towns following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II by an anarchist group that included a Jew.[21]

Pinsker argued—in a book Herzl would not discover until after he wrote *The Jewish State*—that the "Jewish Question" could be solved only by national independence. The book had both intellectual force and literary grace, and it would become, in David Ben-Gurion's words in 1953, "the classic and most remarkable work of Zionist literature."[22] But it was not treated that way at the time. Pinsker wrote it in German, seeking to appeal to the educated Jews of the West. He traveled to Austria and Germany in search of Jewish leaders to support his ideas—and found none. The chief rabbi of Vienna dismissed him as crazy.[23] Faced with no Western support for his book, Pinsker concluded dispiritedly in 1884 that it would take the messiah—or "a whole legion of prophets"—to arouse the Jews. He called them a "half-alive people."[24]

What Herzl did read in 1882 was Eugen Dühring's highly influential book, *The Jewish Problem as a Problem of Race, Morals, and Culture*, which was an extended pseudo-scientific argument for antisemitism—a word first coined three years earlier by Wilhelm Marr, a German agitator who believed "the Semitic race" was trying to destroy Germany.[25] But unlike Marr, Dühring was a renowned intellectual and philosopher, who drew on Charles Darwin's influential ideas about the role of "favored races" in "the struggle for life." Dühring argued that Jews were an inferior race that must be purged, and his book was widely read not only by intellectuals and students, but also by the wider Austro-Hungarian public, making antisemitism broadly acceptable in Central European society.[26]

Herzl was stunned by the book.[27] It was, he wrote in his diary, "so well-written, [in] excellent German" by "a mind so well trained," and he even agreed with some of Dühring's criticisms of Jewish manners and social characteristics—although, unlike Dühring, he thought they were the re-

sult of centuries of social segregation rather than inherent Jewish qualities. He described Dühring's claims about the "Judaization of the press" as the "ancient accusation of Jewish poisoning of wells" expressed in "modern talk," and he believed Dühring had fundamentally misjudged the Jews: They had survived, Herzl noted in his diary, "1,500 years of inhuman pressure" through the "heroic loyalty of this wandering people to its God."[28]

Herzl later said his concern about the Jewish Question began when he read Dühring's book, more than a decade before the Dreyfus affair.[29] At the time, however, Herzl was confident that antisemitism was a passing phenomenon. He predicted "these nursery tales of the Jewish people will disappear, and a new age will follow, in which a passionless and clear-headed humanity will look back upon our errors even as the enlightened men of our time look back upon the Middle Ages."[30]

Herzl's progressive assumptions about the ineluctable progress of European morals, however, would be dispelled by something that soon took place in his own fraternity. It was there, in the heart of the society that had nominally accepted him, that Herzl would have his world turned upside down.

Herzl was among the last three Jews admitted to Albia, reflecting the growing influence of antisemitism. On March 5, 1883, the issue came to a head for Herzl after a memorial for the antisemitic composer Richard Wagner, held by the League of German Students, attended by 4,000 students. Several speakers gave, in the words of a contemporary press report, "coarse anti-Semitic utterances."[31] One of them was a representative of Albia.

After reading the newspaper account of the tirades, Herzl resigned from Albia. He wrote to the fraternity to protest the "benighted tendency which has now become fashionable," called it a threat to liberalism, and upbraided the fraternity's failure to oppose racial antisemitism.[32] Affronted by Herzl's letter, the fraternity instructed him to surrender his insignia at once. In his reply, Herzl wrote that "the decision to resign has not been an easy one."[33]

It was also a lonely one: Albia had several Jews among its members and a significant number of Jewish alumni, but only Herzl resigned.[34]

The new antisemitism, backed by pseudo-science, would be politicized in the following decade, resulting in opposition to any Jewish participa-

tion in public or social life.[35] It was fundamentally different from the old religious hatred. Racial antisemitism considered Jews literally a lower form of life and a biological threat to society, which could not be expunged merely by renunciation of Judaism, embrace of Christianity, or devotion to secular society—and certainly not simply by demonstrating personal honor through dueling.[36] It was an antisemitism based on blood.

Herzl received his Doctor of Laws degree in May 1884 and was admitted to the bar in July. He clerked in the courts for a year, grew bored with the work, and decided to pursue his real interest: playwriting. He would go on to write eleven plays—mostly light comedies—in the decade before he published *The Jewish State*. Some were produced on the stages of Vienna, Prague, Berlin, and in one case a German theater in New York. But most received disappointing reviews, or did not find a theater interested at all, and Herzl supported himself instead as a journalist. He became an accomplished writer of *feuilletons*—the short ironic essays that were one of the principal journalistic genres of the time—and he traveled throughout Europe seeking material. In 1887, he traveled to Rome, visiting the Jewish ghetto there (which remained in existence until 1889) and wrote about seeing the "pallid and worn-out faces" of the Jews:

> With what base and malicious hatred these unfortunate people have been tortured and persecuted for the sole crime of loyalty to their faith. We have traveled a long way since. Nowadays Jews are harangued only for having crooked noses, or for being rich even when they are poor.[37]

In 1889, at the age of twenty-nine, Herzl married Julie Naschauer, eight years his junior, the daughter of a wealthy Jewish businessman. The marriage was troubled from the start, and as success as a playwright eluded Herzl and relations with his wife worsened, he suffered from depression. But his *feuilletons* were widely admired, and in 1891, the *Neue Freie Presse*—one of Vienna's most respected newspapers, owned by two assimilated Jewish editors—asked him to become its Paris correspondent.

In Paris, Herzl did not personally experience antisemitism, but he remained troubled by the Jewish Question. In 1883, he considered challenging prominent anti-Semites to duels to demonstrate the honor of the Jewish people. In his diary, he wrote about an idea he thought could "solve the Jewish Question, at least in Austria, with the help of the Catholic Church."[38] He would meet the Pope and propose a "great movement

for the free and honorable conversion of [young] Jews to Christianity," in ceremonies "in broad daylight, Sundays at noon, in Saint Stephen's Cathedral, with festive processions"—in exchange for a papal promise to fight antisemitism. His editors not only rejected the idea, but told him he had no right to suggest it.

At the end of 1894, Herzl addressed the Jewish Question for the first time in a play he ultimately called *The New Ghetto*, which he wrote in what he called "three blessed weeks of heat and labor." It featured a young liberal Jewish lawyer named Jacob Samuel—a stand-in for him—who rejects both Jewish materialism and Christian antisemitism. Samuel tells a rabbi that while the "outward barrier" of the Jewish ghetto is gone, Jews still had "inner barriers" that "we must clear away for ourselves." He dies defending Jewish honor in a duel with an Austrian nobleman, and his dying words are: "O Jews, my brethren, . . . get out! Out—of—the—Ghetto!"[39]

Despite months of effort, Herzl was unable to find a theater to stage the play. It would not be produced until three years later, after he had achieved fame as a Zionist, and even then it received only modestly favorable reviews. But after writing it, Herzl told a friend it had opened a "new path" for him—and "something blessed lies in it." In his diary, Herzl wrote:

> I had thought that through this eruption of playwriting I had written myself free of the matter. But on the contrary, I got more and more deeply involved with it. The thought grew stronger in me that I must do something for the Jews. For the first time I went to the synagogue in the Rue de la Victoire and once again found the services festive and moving. Many things reminded me of my youth and the Tabak Street Temple in Pest.[40]

The following year, Herzl wrote *The Jewish State*, after an extraordinary experience in June 1895 that both consumed and confounded him. The experience had an unmistakably biblical echo from the Book of Samuel—one that Herzl seemed to recognize near the end of his life. But it did not involve the trial of Alfred Dreyfus.

Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army, was arrested for providing secret documents to Germany on October 15, 1894, the week before Herzl began writing *The New Ghetto*. Dreyfus's four-day closed court-martial ended in late December with a unanimous conviction by

military judges after an hour of deliberation. They sentenced Dreyfus to life imprisonment and "degradation" (public shaming by stripping his insignia and breaking his sword). Only in 1898—nearly four years after the trial—when Emile Zola published "*J'Accuse*," accusing the government of framing Dreyfus to cover up a senior officer's treason, did the affair become the subject of public debate.

In 1894, almost everyone thought Dreyfus was guilty, an opinion Herzl shared—as evidenced by the articles he filed at the time. Herzl never suggested in his press reports that he thought the case had any particular significance, nor did he make any reference to it in his diary during June 1895, when his historic transformation into a Zionist occurred. Indeed, in the four volumes and 1,631 pages of his Zionist diaries, covering the nine-year period from 1895 to 1904, there are only twelve brief mentions of Dreyfus, none suggesting that the case played any role in Herzl's conversion to Zionism.

What happened to Herzl in June 1895, leading him to reject the assimilation to which he had, to that point, devoted his life, came from a different source.

In early 1895, Theodor Herzl was living alone in Paris at the Hotel Castille. When he became a foreign correspondent in 1891, his parents had moved to Paris to be near him. But they disliked the city (and his wife), and they moved back to Vienna in mid-1894. Herzl's tempestuous marriage had worsened even further, and in November 1894, Julie moved back to Vienna with their children.

At the age of thirty-four, Herzl was at a personal crossroads. After his initial, modest success as a playwright, his literary career had declined. He was a journalist and writer of light essays for a respected newspaper, but the work did not strike him as meaningful. Neither his plays nor his journalism had brought him the kind of success he had craved since his student days in Vienna. A third path, however, would open before him. He was about to become—in the words of his first English biographer, Jacob de Haas—"the chief actor in a world drama." Herzl himself would be mystified by how it happened.

At the end of March 1895, Herzl spent four days in Vienna visiting his family, and there he witnessed Vienna's April 1 municipal elections, in

which Karl Lueger's Christian Social Party finished first. Lueger's movement wasn't simply anti-Semitic; its antisemitism was a central plank of its platform. It was the beginning of a process by which Vienna would soon become the first major European city with an overtly anti-Semitic government.

Vienna was Herzl's home, the capital of the Hapsburg Empire, the heart of Central Europe's high culture, the place where a Jewish population nearly twice as large as that of all of France flourished. In Vienna, political antisemitism could not be dismissed as "a salon for the castoffs," as Herzl had described the Parisian version. Austrian Jews were being accused of polluting the culture they had longed to join for a century, and not simply by a benighted clergy but by politicians and the population at large, in a democratic election.

Later that year, Herzl would witness Lueger's party win an even greater electoral victory, recording in his diary that he had observed "the hatred and the anger" at a polling station, when Lueger had suddenly appeared and been met with thunderous acclaim:

> Wild cheering; women waving white kerchiefs from the windows. The police held the people back. A man next to me said with loving fervor . . . "That is our *Führer*." More than all the declamation and abuse, these few words told me how deeply anti-Semitism is rooted in the heart of the people.[41]

Returning to Paris after his visit to Vienna, Herzl was overwhelmed with thoughts about the Jewish Question. They came to him while he was "walking, standing, lying down; in the street, at table, in the dead of night when I was driven from sleep." He wrote innumerable notes to himself, feeling a mystical compulsion to do so: "How I proceeded . . . is already a mystery to me, although it happened in the last few weeks. It is in the realm of the Unconscious."[42]

At first, Herzl thought he would write a novel about the Jewish situation. The French novelist Alphonse Daudet encouraged him to do so, suggesting it could galvanize readers in the way *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had. But Herzl decided instead to send a letter to Baron Maurice de Hirsch, one of the wealthiest men of the era, who had been financing settlements in Argentina for Russian Jews after the pogroms of 1881–82. As of 1894, however, the project had proved a failure, producing a total of four col-

onies and 3,000 settlers. In his letter, Herzl asked Hirsch—twenty-nine years his senior, whom he had never met—"to discuss the Jewish Question," assuring him that:

> I do not want to interview you nor to talk about a disguised or undisguised financial matter. . . . I simply wish to have a discussion with you about Jewish political matters, a discussion that may have an effect on times that neither you nor I will live to see.[43]

Herzl received a polite but dismissive reply, with Hirsch saying he would be in London for the following two months and thus unable to meet Herzl. He suggested Herzl tell him "in a letter what you were going to say to me in person." The response offended Herzl, who wrote back that "at the moment I am too busy to be brief, as the old saying goes," but "[a]s soon as I find the time, I shall submit to you a plan for a new Jewish policy." Then Herzl added a paragraph that apparently caused Hirsch to change his mind about meeting Herzl:

> What you have undertaken till now has been as magnanimous as it has been misapplied, as costly as it has been pointless. You have hitherto been only a philanthropist. . . . I want to show you the way to become something more.[44]

Two days later, Hirsch wrote to Herzl that in fact he would be in Paris for forty-eight hours during the coming week, and that they could meet on Sunday, June 2, at 10:30 a.m., at Hirsch's palatial home at 2 rue de l'Élysée.[45]

Herzl prepared twenty-two pages of notes for the meeting. He began by asking Hirsch to commit to "at least an hour" for the conversation; Hirsch smiled and said, "Just go ahead." Herzl told Hirsch that pure philanthropy was a mistake—"it debases the character of our people"—and that small-scale colonization was ineffective. Asked what he advised instead, Herzl said the morale of the Jewish people "must first of all be uplifted," and that then they would have to emigrate—whereupon Hirsch terminated the meeting.

Herzl had covered only the first six pages of his notes. He wrote to the Baron the next day, blaming himself for the truncated meeting:

> I still lack the aplomb which will come with time and which I shall need in order to break down opposition, shatter indifference, console distress, inspire a craven, demoralized people, and traffic with the masters of the earth.[46]

It was a single-sentence description of what the thirty-five-year-old Herzl would proceed to do over the next eight years.

Shortly after the meeting with Hirsch, Herzl began to keep a diary devoted to his new project. The first paragraph recorded how an all-consuming idea had taken over his life, a "work of infinite grandeur" that "accompanies me wherever I go, hovers behind my ordinary talk, looks over my shoulder at my comically trivial journalistic work, overwhelms me and intoxicates me." He felt he was in the grip of something beyond himself, writing in his entry on June 12: "Am I working it out? No! It is working itself out in me."

In that initial diary entry, Herzl recorded his fundamental ideas: (a) the new antisemitism "is a consequence of the emancipation of the Jews"—a reaction by those who perceived the Jews' new political and economic rights as a threat to their own; (b) it was a mistake to believe "that men can be made equal simply by publishing a law to that effect"; and (c) the Jews were still psychologically "Ghetto Jews," even though they had physically left the ghetto. They needed, Herzl believed, to change their minds—to recover their honor as Jews, to recognize that assimilation in Europe could not succeed, and to embrace a new Exodus.

The initial phase of Herzl's intellectual frenzy ran from June 5 to June 16, with about 150 diary entries during that time, covering eighty-three pages in printed form. He wrote every day (except Thursday, June 13), composing between eight and fifty-seven entries each day, ranging from single sentences in length to several pages each.

Herzl's diary entries would eventually become the basis of *The Jewish State*, the pamphlet he published eight months later. They covered every aspect of a planned and orderly exodus. He outlined new economic and political institutions ("the Jewish Company" and "the Society of Jews," the forerunners of what would become the Jewish National Fund and the Jewish Agency). He proposed large-scale public works, education "for one and all," creation of inspiring songs ("a *Marseillaise* of the Jews"), and an

enlightened seven-hour workday (with two shifts, so each workday would have fourteen hours of work by two sets of workers). He noted that his project had aspects that were not only "moral-political" and "financial," but "technical, military, diplomatic, administrative, economic, artistic, etc." He wrote in his diary that he had made plans for them all.

At several points in these entries, Herzl noted both the simplicity of his idea and the magnitude of his concept: "It took at least thirteen years for me to conceive this simple idea. Only now do I realize how often I went right past it." But its execution would be a world-historical event that would eclipse its predecessor: "The Exodus under Moses bears the same relation to this project as does a [minor play] to a Wagner opera."[47]

Herzl's friends and acquaintances worried that he had gone mad. He confessed in his diary that he sometimes shared their concern:

> During these days, I have more than once been afraid I was losing my mind. This is how tempestuously the trains of thought have raced through my soul. A lifetime will not suffice to carry it all out. But I shall leave behind a spiritual legacy. To whom? To all men. I believe I shall be named among the greatest benefactors of mankind. Or is this belief already megalomania? . . . I think life for me has ended and world history begun.

Herzl comforted himself with the thought that "[t]he man who pointed to the cover of a teakettle lifted by steam and said, 'This is how I shall move people, animals, and freight, and give the world a new appearance,' was derided as a lunatic."[48] He wrote that his project "would be an obsession if it were not so rational from beginning to end," and he suggested that the better term for what he was experiencing was "inspiration." His continual fear, he wrote, was captured in a poem he copied into his diary by Paul Johann Ludwig von Heyse, a German writer who later received the Nobel Prize: "*I shudder to think that I could depart overnight / Depart before I have completed this work*."[49] Herzl was concerned not only because of the magnitude of his project, but because of something he had disclosed to no one outside his family: He had a serious heart condition.

On June 17, Herzl wrote to the chief rabbi of Vienna to assure him that he was "neither completely nor even partially mad":

> My plan is actually as serious as the situation of the Jews itself, and I feel that the Jews in their torpor do not realize this seri-

> ousness clearly enough. . . . [Y]ou cannot even suspect the degree of heat which this interest has reached [in me]. . . . [J]ust as antisemitism forces the half-hearted, cowardly, and self-seeking Jews into the arms of Christianity, it powerfully forced my Jewishness to the surface. . . . I have the solution of the Jewish Question. I know it sounds mad; but in the initial period people will often think me mad until they realize with deep emotion the truth of all I have been saying. I have found the solution, and it no longer belongs to me; it belongs to the world.

Herzl told the rabbi he could not account for the derivation of his idea or its hold on him:

> How did I discover it? I do not know. . . . I consider it a great good fortune that I have found it. . . . I confess to you that I have tears in my eyes as I write this; but I shall carry it through with all rigor.[50]

On June 14, Herzl wrote of acquainting the world "with something that has not been considered possible in 2000 years: Jewish honor." He recounted weeping while writing about "the misfortunes of my people" and his vision of a new land for them. He resolved to "take along all beggars, all peddlers"—and also the wealthy, "who are well advised [to] build their palaces over there," in a new Jewish home:

> The Rothschilds have no idea of how endangered their property already is. They live in a phony circle of courtiers, servants, employees, papers, and aristocratic spongers. . . . I will satisfy all: Poor men, rich men, workers, intellectuals, governments, and anti-Semitic peoples.

What possessed Herzl to imagine that he would be leaving a legacy not only to the Jews, but also "to all people everywhere"? How would he be an actor not only in Jewish history, but "world" history? He gave what we may deem his answer in another diary entry the same day:

> [T]he Jewish state will become something remarkable. [It] will be not only a model country, . . . but a miracle country in all civilization. . . . The Jewish state is a world necessity. . . .

What Herzl had in mind was not only to lead the Jews out of Europe, but also to take European liberalism with them—to use it in a land where the Jewish spirit could flourish, as Europe began to destroy liberalism (and eventually itself) with its Jew-hatred. He wanted not only to save the Jews, but also to save liberalism itself, with a single idea: a Jewish homeland that, through its existence, would (i) address the problems of the Jews, (ii) solve the issues the world had with the Jews, and (iii) avoid the emerging threat to European liberalism of antisemitism—all at once.[51]

While Herzl was dreaming of an "experimental land for [all] humanity," some regarded him as mad for dreaming of a state for a minuscule (and powerless) part of humanity. But a case can be made—particularly in light of what came to pass in the following decades to Europe, to European liberalism, and to the European Jews—that Herzl's call for a Jewish state to ward off a world catastrophe affecting all three, and doing so three decades before Adolf Hitler took power in Germany, was a prophetic message.

In mid-June of 1895, Herzl drafted a long address to the Rothschild Family Council, the forum of the other immensely wealthy Jewish family of the time. He outlined his vision of the "Promised Land"—a place, Herzl wrote, where:

> at last we can live as free men on our own soil and die in peace in our own homeland. Where we, too, can expect honor as a reward for great deeds; where we shall live at peace with all the world, which we shall have freed through our own freedom. . . . [W]e shall move out to the Promised Land, the Land of the Seven Hours, the land which God has promised us in His inscrutable goodness, under the bright banner which we shall fashion for ourselves.[52]

But he was unable to elicit any interest from the Rothschilds.

Herzl published *The Jewish State* on February 14, 1896, analyzing antisemitism as a "national question" that could "only be solved by making it a political world-question."[53] It was translated that year from its original German into English, French, Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Romanian, and Bulgarian.[54] In an essay in November 1896, entitled "Judaism"—by which Herzl meant something closer to "Jewish identity" than to the religion

itself—Herzl supplemented his argument, writing that Judaism was the key to the "lost inner wholeness" of the Jewish people:

> The atrocities of the Middle Ages were unprecedented, and the people who withstood those tortures must have had some great strength, an inner unity which we have lost. A generation which has grown apart from Judaism does not have this unity. It can neither rely upon our past nor look to our future. That is why we shall once more retreat into Judaism and never again permit ourselves to be thrown out of this fortress.[55]

The Jewish State received a cool reaction from the *Jewish Chronicle*, then as now the leading Jewish newspaper in London, which printed Herzl's long prepublication summary of his pamphlet in its issue of January 14, 1896. In an adjoining editorial, the *Chronicle* called it "a scheme hastened, if not dictated, by panic," saying it was notable for coming from "a man of Dr. Herzl's type," one who "does not lay claim to a deep loyalty to [religious] Judaism," and upbraided him for his "dark and discouraging view." The *Chronicle* concluded that "We hardly anticipate a great future for a scheme which is the outcome of despair."[56]

Undeterred, Herzl organized the First Zionist Congress virtually singlehandedly, underwriting the cost out of his own pocket.[57] In mid-1897, however, two months before it was scheduled to begin, he faced a professional crisis that almost derailed the entire effort.

Herzl had decided to start a newspaper devoted to the Zionist movement, calling it *Die Welt* ("The World"), and he published the first issue on June 4, 1897.[58] When the publishers of the *Neue Freie Presse*—both vehement anti-Zionists—learned of his endeavor, they urged him to shut it down, complaining that it was a source of "great embarrassment" to them.[59] Herzl realized they were threatening to fire him, but he wrote in his diary that "I face this possibility with composure":

> My heart is pounding, to be sure, but this is only a weakness of the muscle, not of my will. Should the *N. Fr. Pr.* [Herzl's abbreviation for the *Neue Freie Presse*] drive me out, I shall have lost my position, which I acquired through twenty years of hard work, [but] in a manner of which I need not be ashamed.[60]

Herzl told the publishers that "I certainly don't want to cause embarrassment to the *N. Fr. Pr.* I am devoted to the paper . . . I have put part of my life and health into the *N. Fr. Pr.*" But he was unwilling to cease publishing his Zionist newspaper. Two days later, one of the publishers, Moritz Benedikt, called Herzl into his office and again urged him to give up *Die Welt,* and not play a prominent part at the Zionist Congress. In his diary, Herzl wrote, "Of course I remained inflexible."

Proceeding in the face of opposition from his employers carried both professional and personal risks for Herzl. He owed much of his reputation to the *Neue Freie Presse*, with its wide readership not only in Vienna but throughout Europe.[61] He was jeopardizing both his personal finances and his intellectual influence at the same time. But he was undeterred.[62]

The opposition to his Zionist Congress came not only from his employer but also from various elements of the Jewish community. Herzl had planned to hold the Congress in Munich, a city convenient for delegates to reach, with a significant Jewish population and many kosher restaurants. But the Jewish leadership in Munich protested, and Herzl and his organizing committee had to shift the location to Basel.[63]

Herzl worked simultaneously on the Congress and *Die Welt*, in addition to his *Neue Freie Presse* work, "exhausting all my strength." The amount of work, he wrote in August, has been "enormous."[64] On August 23, with the Congress only a week away and the outcome still uncertain, he wrote in his diary that if the Congress did not produce serious results, he would "withdraw from the campaign and confine myself to keeping the flame alive in the *Welt*."

The First Zionist Congress attracted 204 delegates from twenty countries and regions.[65] About half came from areas within the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires (where 80 percent of the Jews in the world then lived). The rest came from Germany, Italy, Switzerland, England, France, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Serbia, Belgium, Sweden, Palestine, and the United States.[66]

The Congress lasted three days and adopted the platform (the "Basel Program") that would govern Zionist efforts for the following twenty years, culminating in the Balfour Declaration. The Basel Program defined the goal of Zionism as "establishing for the Jewish people a publicly and legally assured home in Palestine."[67]

Herzl insisted the delegates dress in formal attire to reflect the dignity of the event, and he hung a flag in the conference hall with a white field (symbolizing a new Jewish future), two blue strips (resembling a *tallit*), and a Star of David at the center (reflecting the centrality of Jewish identity to the movement).[68] Herzl had spent considerable time working on the flag with the Russian Jewish businessman-turned-Zionist activist David Wolffsohn, since he viewed the flag as extremely important. In his letter to Baron Hirsch in 1895, Herzl had written, "Men live and die for a flag; it is indeed the only thing for which they are willing to die. . . . Visions alone grip the souls of men."[69]

Herzl's appearance on the first morning of the Congress caused, according to the annotated translation of the official proceedings, "prolonged and forceful clapping, cheering, foot-stomping, and cane-pounding."[70] In his address, Herzl described the situation of the Jewish people in terms that could have been a summary of his own experience:

> [I]n this era, which is otherwise so sublime, we see and feel ourselves everywhere surrounded by the old hatred. . . . The first reaction the Jews of today had . . . was surprise, which then changed to pain and anger. . . . The feeling of group solidarity, for which we have been so frequently and fiercely reproached, was in the process of complete dissolution when we were attacked by antisemitism.

Herzl discussed the "raising of the people" that he saw as the critical first ingredient of Jewish nationalism:

> We have, so to speak, come home. Zionism means a returning home to Jewish identity before the return to the country of the Jews. . . . A people can only be helped by itself; and if it cannot do that, then it is quite beyond help. We Zionists want to arouse our people to self-help.

Herzl told the delegates that the goal of Zionism was public legal guarantees of "the historic homeland of the [Jewish] nation, precisely because it is the historic homeland":

> In this Congress we are creating for the Jewish people an agency they have not hitherto possessed but which it has needed most urgently for its survival. . . . And our Congress will live on eter-

> nally . . . restoring to all Jews their dignity, and making them worthy of a history whose glory, if perhaps now faded, is nonetheless imperishable.

The official record notes that "passionate applause" lasting fifteen minutes followed Herzl's address.[71]

On the final evening session of the Congress, Arthur Cohn, the thirty-five-year-old Orthodox rabbi of Basel, gave his address. He received, according to the official minutes, "a thunderous welcome." Rabbi Cohn said that "my heart swells with deep emotion" after hearing the speeches of Herzl and Max Nordau, but he said that he was concerned that, "if the Jewish state were to arise now, its party leadership, which we know does not honor [religious Jewry's] views, would attack the Orthodox." He asked for some clarification about this issue.

Herzl responded by thanking him, "our erstwhile opponent," for "the frankness of his request," and told him: "I can assure you, Zionism intends nothing that might violate the religious conviction of any orientation within Jewry," which produced another round of "thunderous applause."

Herzl concluded the Congress with this summary of what it had meant:

> We cannot say how things will turn out in the future. But we have done something significant for our people. . . . [W]e want to put a plow in the hand of the downtrodden . . . [and] on the day when the plow rests once again in the newly strengthened hand of the Jewish farmer, the Jewish question will have been solved.

Just before the Congress dispersed, Professor Max Mandelstamm of Kiev rose to praise "first and foremost . . . the courageous man to whom we principally owe our thanks . . . the highly esteemed president of the Congress, Herr Dr. Theodor Herzl." Mandelstamm asked "earnestly" that:

> the hard labor which he is performing and which still awaits him, and also the irksome things that have befallen him and are yet to befall him—that these should not keep him from bringing to a victorious conclusion the difficult work that has been initiated, in the same way, with the same spirit, and the same joyous self-sacrifice.

It is safe to say that no one guessed the magnitude of the "irksome things" that would soon befall Herzl, or that he had only seven years left to live.

Herzl had created an atmosphere—out of nothing—that made the delegates feel that they were the National Assembly of a Jewish state. One of the delegates, in a letter written soon after the Congress, observed that "attitudes toward Zionism have changed completely. This is true of the rabbis, the intelligentsia, and the community as a whole."[72]

That Zionism had transformed not only the delegates, but Herzl himself, is apparent in a tale he published in *Die Welt* later that year, about an artist who had long ignored his Jewish roots and was living comfortably when "the age-old hatred re-asserted itself under a fashionable slogan." The artist's soul is a "bleeding wound," but he experiences a "mysterious affection" for Jewish identity as the solution to Jewish suffering. A "strange mood came over him"—the memory of Hanukkah as a child. He buys a menorah and tells his children about the Maccabees. The "great radiance" of the menorah, reflected in their eyes, satisfies his "longing for beauty." The artist sees the week-long candle-lighting as "a parable for the kindling of a whole nation":

> First one candle; it is still dark, and the solitary light looks gloomy. Then it finds a companion, then another, and yet another. The darkness must retreat. The young and the poor are the first to see the light; then the others join in, all those who love justice, truth, liberty, progress, humanity, and beauty. When all the candles are ablaze everyone must stop in amazement and rejoice at what has been wrought.

Scholars and biographers have viewed "The Menorah" as a charming autobiographical story, reflecting Herzl's return to his Jewish identity, expressing what he had achieved in only two years. Herzl himself viewed it as reflecting something greater than merely his own personal evolution: He told Jacob de Haas it represented his ability to see in the Menorah the "brilliantly lit-up new Jerusalem" while others saw only melted wax.[73]

Perhaps in retelling the story of Hanukkah, Herzl was also recalling a part of *Tancred*—the Disraeli novel from which he had chosen his fraternity name—which devoted an entire chapter to Sukkot, described by the Jewess Eva as "one of our great national festivals," the "celebration of the Hebrew vintage, the Feast of Tabernacles." Disraeli wrote in *Tancred* that:

> The vineyards of Israel have ceased to exist, but the eternal law enjoins the children of Israel still to celebrate the vintage. A race

> that persist in celebrating their vintage, although they have no fruits to gather, will regain their vineyards.[74]

In 1899, in an article based on an interview with Herzl, a journalist recounted that, as she listened to his "warm, expressive voice" and "vibrant, moving words," she had been reminded of that passage from *Tancred*. Herzl had told her that:

> "you would not believe that even among the Jews my project has many enemies. Some don't understand it, others don't want to understand it, still others seek to interpret my motives, to see in them the calculations of ambition and interest, there where there is an idea which has taken possession of me. . . . But no matter; I go forward with my dream, in my dream, if you will, and for it. It is so dear to me. . . ."[75]

In two years, Herzl had taken his ideas to the major Jewish philanthropic families (who refused to support them); to the Jewish intelligentsia (who generally dismissed them); and then to the Jewish public (who were inspired in numerous countries). He had established a Zionist Congress that formally adopted the goal of a Jewish state. Now came an even greater challenge: whether to hold out for the land of Palestine or to accept a site more readily available—and in either case having to convince the ruling country to permit the Jews to rebuild their national homeland there, while simultaneously trying to persuade the innumerable Jewish skeptics that the whole effort was realistic and worthwhile.

It is frequently noted that Herzl did not originate the idea of a Jewish state—he said so himself in the opening sentence of *The Jewish State*. His contribution to Jewish political thought was rather his understanding of the intellectual transformation necessary to achieve statehood.[76]

He captured his approach in an epigram—"*If you will it, it is no dream.*"[77] Herzl's fundamental insight was that, before the Jewish people would be ready for a state, they would first have to change their character—through a process not unlike what their ancestors had undergone in the desert with Moses—and to revive their will as a people.[78] Herzl's second insight was that it was necessary to convert the Jewish Question from one of philan-

thropy supported by wealthy Jewish families to an issue of international relations in the world.[79]

Ahad Ha'am, the most prominent Hebrew-language essayist of the time, and a leader of the Russian "Love of Zion" movement that Leo Pinsker had helped to found, attended the First Zionist Congress as a skeptical observer—and he did not come away swayed.[80] Shortly afterwards, he wrote an essay asserting that a Jewish state was "a fantasy bordering on madness."[81] He argued instead for building in Palestine a "center for the spirit of Judaism" that would "breathe new life into the Diaspora." The "secret of our people's persistence," he wrote, was that "the prophets taught to respect only spiritual power, not to worship material power." In contrast to Herzl's slogan, Ahad Ha'am drew his own from the Book of Numbers (24:17): "*I shall see it, but not now; I shall behold it, but not nigh.*"[82]

It was the beginning of a fierce clash between the "cultural Zionism" of Ahad Ha'am and the "political Zionism" of Herzl—between those who wanted a spiritual center to save Judaism, and those who wanted a state to save the Jews.[83] There would eventually be other types of Zionism—Religious Zionism, Chaim Weizmann's practical or "organic" Zionism, Vladimir Jabotinsky's Revisionist Zionism, and David Ben-Gurion's Labor Zionism—each seeking a Jewish home but on different ideological grounds. The sheer breadth of these varying approaches made Zionism an ideology that could attract Jews from left to right, and the intellectual competition among and between them sharpened Zionism as a whole.

Herzl's vision of Zionism through the lens of international relations stemmed from his realization that—as he told the Second Zionist Congress in 1898—Palestine was "by reason of [its] geographical position, of immense importance to the whole of Europe."[84] At the Fourth Zionist Congress in 1900, he elaborated on his view:

> Our reappearance in the land of our fathers, prophesied by Holy Writ, sung by our poets, yearned for amidst tears by our stricken nation, and jeered at by miserable scoffers—that Return is a matter of political moment to the powers that have interests in Asia.[85]

Herzl saw that a Jewish state in Palestine would be of interest to all four empires that ruled the Western world: to Great Britain, as a gateway to India; to the Ottoman Empire, as a way to secure international refinancing

of its debilitating debt; to Russia, as a solution for its large and rebellious Jewish population; and to Germany and Austria-Hungary, as a strategic asset in their competition with the other empires.

Finally, Herzl linked the nationalism of the Jews to the wave of nationalist efforts of others. As he told Lord Nathaniel Mayer Rothschild (head of the English branch of the family) in 1902:

> In our own time, Greeks, Romanians, Serbs, Bulgarians have established themselves [in independent states]—and should *we* be incapable of doing so? Our race is more efficient in everything than most other peoples of the earth. This, in fact, is the cause of the great hatred. We have just had no self-confidence up to now. Our moral misery will be at an end on the day when we believe in ourselves.[86]

In the years following the First Zionist Congress, Herzl began to establish a Jewish national bank, traveled to Palestine in 1898 to meet the Kaiser in Jerusalem, met with the president of the Austrian ministry, received an audience with the Grand Duke of Baden, met twice with Sultan Abdul Hamid II in Constantinople, and convened the Congress annually in Basel—except in 1900, when the Congress met in London as part of an effort to engage Britain. In 1902, Herzl testified in London before the British Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, which had been established to investigate the influx of Jewish refugees from Russia and Romania. The British Jewish population had risen to about 100,000, prompting alarm about the continuing inflow.

Three days before his testimony, Herzl met privately with Lord Rothschild, who sat on the Commission and saw Zionism as a threat to the acceptance of British Jews as loyal subjects. He asked Herzl to support the idea of Jews as Englishmen in his testimony—and Herzl flatly refused: "it would be a stupid piece of arrogance . . . to give the Commission a lecture on the characteristics of a real Englishman." Herzl said he would "simply tell them what frightful misery prevails among eastern Jewry, and that the people must either die or get out."[87] A stunned Rothschild asked Herzl *not* to tell the Commission *that*, because the government was already worried about excessive Jewish immigration. Herzl responded that "certainly I shall say it," and he told Rothschild, "Jewish philanthropy had become a machine for stifling the cries of distress."[88]

Three days later, Herzl told the Commission that "the state of Jewry is worse today than it was seven years ago when I published my pamphlet"; that in Eastern Europe—where most of world Jewry lived—things were "becoming worse and worse day by day"; and that the solution was "recognition of Jews as a people, and the finding by them of a legally recognized home," so they would "arrive there as citizens . . . because they are Jews, and not as aliens."[89]

During the questioning, Lord Rothschild asked Herzl to define what he meant by "Zionism"—whether it was a "movement to re-establish a Jewish state in Palestine, or whether . . . you simply mean that some great endeavor should be made to colonize some part of the world entirely with Jews." Herzl knew it was a loaded question: He was being asked whether Zionism sought to establish the Jews as a nation—which produced fears in the Rothschilds and other prominent British Jews of accusations of dual loyalty—or only to build a refuge for Jews somewhere, which Jewish philanthropists could support. Herzl responded by saying it was both:

> [T]he aims of Zionism are to create a legally assured home for the Jewish people in Palestine. . . . [That] is certainly the goal, but there may be moments where immediate help or a step forward is indispensable, and so Zionists believe that, maintaining always their principle and program, they should in the meantime try to alleviate the hard conditions of oppressed Jews by adequate means.[90]

Within that answer lay the dual nature of Zionism in 1902. It had both an ultimate objective (a Jewish state in Palestine) and an immediate need (a refuge for Jews under existential threat). It was not clear if those goals could be pursued together, or whether at some point they would necessitate a choice. Herzl was trying to keep both options open. He informed the Commission that he received "30 or 40 letters" every day from Russia, where Jews lived in "a permanent state of misery [because they] cannot better their condition; they cannot go into another town to find work; they are under a constant pressure," with no one "sure of his life tomorrow," living "in a perpetual fear with the madness of persecution." In Romania, he testified, more than 37,000 starving Jews had petitioned the First Zionist Congress for help, and their conditions had not improved; in Galicia, about 700,000 Jews were in "very deep misery," living in cramped quarters, sometimes four families in the four corners

of a single room—compared to which the worst slums in London were, he said, a "paradise."[91]

Herzl's testimony was eloquent, but he felt he had performed poorly, confiding to his diary that he had spoken and understood English badly. The next day he met the chairman of the Commission, Lord James of Hereford, hoping to "repair the bad impression which I felt I had made." Lord James told him a Jewish colony somewhere could only be achieved with the help of Lord Rothschild, and so Herzl met with Rothschild again the following day and promised to send him a plan for an immediate Jewish colony somewhere.[92] Herzl's transmittal letter read:

> You are the most effective force that our people has possessed since their dispersion, and I consider it my duty to place my humble advice at your disposal if you really wish to do something effectual for our unfortunates. . . . A great Jewish settlement in the eastern Mediterranean [such as Cyprus] would strengthen our own efforts for Palestine. . . . I cannot permit myself to turn away on grounds of principle from any source or form of immediate relief for our poorest of the poor.[93]

On July 21, 1902, Herzl wrote to Lord Rothschild once again, in an effort to present the Zionist case in terms of its benefits to British interests, telling him "you may claim high credit from your government if you strengthen British influences in the Near East by a substantial colonization of our people at [a] strategic point." He emphasized that immediate action was necessary, lest the opportunity vanish:

> Then it will turn out that we Jews, we smart but always outsmarted Jews, will once again have missed the boat. The thing can now be done: big and quick, through the [land company] of which I sent you a general outline.[94]

A month later, Lord Rothschild replied, not only rejecting Herzl's plan but also telling him he "view[ed] with horror the establishment of a Jewish Colony pure and simple." All it would mean, he said, was relief for a few thousand Jews. He preferred that Jews "live amongst their Christian brethren" as "good citizens" and warned that everyone should "beware the impossible [dream of a Jewish state]."[95] In his response, Herzl countered that the Greeks, Romanians, Serbs, and Bulgarians had all recently established themselves in their own nation-states, and that there was no

reason the Jews could not do so as well. He assured Lord Rothschild that the problems with a Jewish state would be surmounted:

> Naturally there will always be fights and difficulties, internal and external ones. But what country, what state does not have them? And we shall always produce the men to grapple with these difficulties.[96]

Two months after his testimony before the Commission, Herzl began discussions with (as he described him in his diary) "the famous master of England, Joe Chamberlain." Joseph Chamberlain was Britain's colonial secretary and the most influential member of the Cabinet (and father of the future prime minister, Neville Chamberlain). Herzl wanted him to designate territory for a Jewish colony somewhere within Britain's far-flung empire.

On October 23, 1902, Herzl spent an hour with Chamberlain, writing in his diary afterward that "my voice trembled at first, which greatly annoyed me," but after a few minutes, "I was able to talk calmly and incisively, to the extent that my rough-and-ready English permits it." Addressing Chamberlain's "motionless mask," Herzl "presented the whole Jewish Question as I understand it and wish to solve it."

> "I am in negotiation with the Sultan," I said. "But you know what Turkish negotiations are. If you want to buy a carpet, first you must drink half a dozen cups of coffee and smoke a hundred cigarettes; then you discuss family stories, and from time to time you speak again a few words about the carpet. Now, I have time to negotiate, but my people has not. They are starving in the Pale. I must bring them an immediate help."

Chamberlain told Herzl that he sympathized with Zionism. Herzl asked for territory either in sparsely populated Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean, or in El Arish on Egypt's Mediterranean coast, which was largely uninhabited. Either location, he told Chamberlain, would be "a rallying point for the Jewish people in the vicinity of Palestine." The next day, Herzl sent a memorandum, outlining a plan for a Jewish colony in El Arish. Chamberlain sent it to Lord Evelyn Cromer, the consul-general in British-ruled Egypt. Herzl noted in his diary that he had so worn himself out that his heart had been "acting up in all sorts of mysterious ways." But he thought his exhaustion might presage something historic: "Is it possi-

ble that we stand on the threshold of obtaining a—British—charter and founding the Jewish state?"[97]

Lord Cromer responded on November 22, 1902, noting political and other difficulties, but urging further study. Herzl and the British authorities reviewed the issues over the following months, and Herzl commissioned a draft agreement from the law firm of David Lloyd George. But eventually the Egyptian administration objected, and the project was dropped in mid-1903.[98]

The collapse of Herzl's efforts for El Arish coincided with a horrific pogrom in Kishinev (now called Chisinau in Moldova), about 90 miles northwest of Odessa.[99] Kishinev was not a remote *shtetl*; it was Russia's fifth-largest city, a provincial capital with 110,000 residents, one-third to one-half of whom were Jewish.[100]

The two-day rampage in Kishinev began on April 19, 1903—four months before the Sixth Zionist Congress was scheduled to convene. Forty-nine Jews (including children) were murdered; innumerable women were raped; injuries ran into the hundreds; some one thousand homes were destroyed or damaged. On April 26, in its Sunday edition, the *New York Times* reported, "Scores of Jews Killed: Details of the Anti-Semitic Riots . . . Add to the Horrors."

The pogrom inspired the most influential poem in modern Jewish history, Chaim Nachman Bialik's epic "In the City of Slaughter," translated from Hebrew into Russian by a twenty-four-year-old journalist, Vladimir Jabotinsky, and read even more widely in translation than the original.[101] Dr. Jacob Bernstein-Kohan, the director of the World Zionist Organization's press department, lived in Kishinev, and he used his contacts with the Western media to publicize the pogrom. Reaction spread throughout the United States, with continual press reports and protests.[102] There were demonstrations in 27 states; 80 newspapers published more than 151 scathing editorials; senators, congressmen, and mayors made speeches condemning the atrocities.[103] The Hearst newspapers sent Michael Davitt, a respected journalist, to Kishinev to interview survivors. His vivid reports were turned into a best-selling book.[104]

The B'nai B'rith prepared a formal petition to the Tsar, signed by 12,544 prominent American political figures, publishers, and Christian clergy,

and asked President Theodore Roosevelt to submit it to Russia.[105] Secretary of State John J. Hay at first rejected the idea:

> [N]o one hates more energetically than [President Roosevelt] does such acts of cruelty and injustice as those we deplore. But he must carefully consider all the circumstances and then decide whether any official action can be taken in addition to the impressive and most effective expression of public opinion in this country.[106]

Roosevelt eventually directed John W. Riddle, the American chargé d'affaires in St. Peterburg, to seek an audience with the Russian foreign minister and deliver the B'nai B'rith petition to him. But the Russian government refused to accept it, and the Roosevelt administration dropped the issue.[107]

It was Theodor Herzl who took Kishinev beyond protest and petition.

On May 8, 1903, Herzl published an article in *Die Welt* promising that what had happened to "our brothers in distant Bessarabia" (the province where Kishinev was located) would not be forgotten. He vowed that, unlike previous pogroms, this one would generate an effective response, and not merely the usual outpouring of distress:

> Always when Jews are attacked, a current of sympathy passes through the race. One helps, counsels, as the occasion suggests; the fugitives escape from the horde to a safe distance; the dead are buried. When the grass grows over the graves, the event is forgotten—out of mere self-love, because we want to eat our breakfast in peace and contentment, with happy children round about . . . [but] *we will not forget Kishineff.*[108]

Herzl had been seeking a meeting with Russian officials since 1896, both directly and through intermediaries, but his requests had all been rebuffed. In the wake of Kishinev, he wrote again on May 19, 1903, to the powerful Russian minister of the interior, Vyacheslav Plehve, requesting his support for an "organized emigration" of Jews from Russia.[109] Plehve was widely considered to be harshly anti-Jewish. Shortly after the pogrom, the *Times of London* published a letter—shown decades later to have been

a forgery—purportedly sent by Plehve to the Kishinev police before the pogrom, signaling government support for the coming violence.[110] Many Zionists thought it was shameful that Herzl would consider meeting with such a man.

But Herzl saw that he and Plehve had a mutual interest: Plehve didn't want Jews in Russia, and Herzl wanted them to be permitted to leave—with a place to go. He believed Russia could influence the Sultan to permit a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and he knew Plehve needed to improve Russia's image in the West. Kishinev would be discussed at the upcoming Zionist Congress in a few weeks, with the international press in attendance.[111]

Plehve and Herzl met on August 8, 1903, and Plehve agreed that Jewish emigration was the answer. He promised to make an "effective intervention" with the Sultan for a charter in Palestine and to permit Zionist activity in Russia. On August 12, Herzl received a formal letter from Plehve, confirming that Russia favored the creation of "an independent state in Palestine." Plehve told him the letter had been reviewed by the Tsar and thus was an official declaration of the Russian government. Herzl published it in *Die Welt* and considered it extremely important: It was the first formal governmental endorsement of a Jewish state, and he could use it as a diplomatic lever elsewhere.[112]

On August 14, 1903, the second major endorsement of a Jewish homeland came when the British made a formal offer of land in East Africa for Jewish settlement, to be named "New Palestine."[113] Herzl thought the British offer was another important step forward: He told his ally Max Nordau that "we have, in our relationship with this gigantic nation, acquired recognition as a state-building power." But most importantly, there had to be, Herzl thought, "an answer to Kishinev, and this is the only one" immediately available. He arranged for a draft charter to be prepared by the law firm of David Lloyd George.[114]

At the Zionist Congress in August, with 592 delegates in attendance, Herzl presented his two great diplomatic triumphs—the official recognition of Zionist goals by both Britain and Russia, two of the world's largest empires. He expected to receive praise for his efforts. But the sizable Russian delegation reacted in a fury, believing Plehve had taken advantage of Herzl and that the British offer was a dangerous diversion from Palestine. Some accused Herzl of a willingness to abandon the Promised Land altogether.[115]

Max Nordau urged the delegates to view East Africa as a *Nachtasyl*, a "shelter for the night," offered by the greatest power on earth. It would be irresponsible, he argued, not to form at least an exploratory delegation.[116] The delegates ultimately approved a committee to visit the region and report to the next Congress, but the resolution passed by only a plurality: 295 in favor and 176 against, with 143 abstentions. Most West European delegates voted yes; most from Russia and Poland voted "no." One of the journalists there, Israel Cohen, wrote that the "scene that followed the announcement [of the vote] was one that I can never forget":

> Amid a tumult of cheers and groans . . . the Russian delegates all marched into an adjoining hall. There they gave vent to indignation and grief without restraint. . . . Herzl went and begged them to return, but they shouted back a defiant "*Nein!*" A little later . . . after tempers had somewhat cooled, the Russian delegates allowed him to address them. . . . He spoke to them calmly, recalled his repeated efforts in Constantinople . . . and appealed to them to appreciate the political significance of the British offer. He assured them that he remained loyal to the Basle Program [of a homeland in Palestine]. . . . The result was that he won them over and on the following morning they returned to their places in the Congress Hall, [but] with faces more sternly set than before.[117]

In his concluding address—the last he would ever deliver to a Zionist Congress—Herzl praised the Congress as "our first institution, and I trust it may ever remain the best, highest, and most worthy until we transplant it to the beautiful land of our fathers, the land which we need not explore to love." He reminded the delegates that "[w]e cannot always follow the crow's flight," and that "if it were possible to proceed by the straight cloud-path, no leader would be required":

> For all our people know where Zion is, nor do I think that our masses need suffer more in order to make them good Zionists. But because many misunderstandings have arisen among us, I must repeat, before we part . . . that not for a single second, not for a single thought, have we departed from the Basel program. When in a difficult moment, which is not an infrequent occurrence, I thought that all hope must be abandoned at least for the

> span of [a] normal life[time], I was about to propose an expedient to you, and having learned to know your hearts I also desire to offer you a word of consolation, which is at once a pledge on my part . . .

Then Herzl raised his right hand and uttered his pledge, in Hebrew, from Psalm 137: "*If I forget thee O Jerusalem may my right hand forget its cunning.*" The gesture, the sentence, and the rendition in Hebrew produced deafening applause.[118]

After the Congress ended, Jacob de Haas escorted Herzl to the train station, where Herzl embraced him and said the next Congress would be "the Congress of the Exodus."[119] In his diary, Herzl wrote that he had told Nordau that, if he lived until the next Congress, "I will by then either have obtained Palestine or have recognized the impossibility of all further effort"—and in the latter case he would "retire from the leadership and advise the creation of two bodies, one for East Africa, one for Palestine," and let the delegates decide which way to go.[120]

The rift between the Eastern and Western Zionists continued after the Congress, and Herzl was castigated in the press for the East Africa proposal. The *Jewish Chronicle* asked editorially "whether the history of Israel was . . . to end in an African swamp [with] the suggestion that Jews are to be vomited forth from Western lands and banished into barbarism."[121] On September 3, 1903, twenty-seven-year-old Chaim Weizmann published a scathing attack on Herzl in the Warsaw Hebrew newspaper *Hatsofeh* ("The Observer"). He claimed that Herzl was not really a Jewish nationalist, but merely a "promoter of projects," who in suggesting East Africa had ignored the "psychology of the people and its living desires."[122]

Herzl left Basel in August exhausted from the extraordinarily emotional debate.[123] "Palestine is the only land where our people can come to rest," he wrote in his diary, "but hundreds of thousands need immediate help." By November 1903, he had made no further progress in his diplomatic efforts to persuade the Ottoman Empire to permit a Jewish home in Palestine. Given the continuing divisive rift in the Zionist movement, he concluded he could no longer serve as its head. On November 11, 1903, he drafted an impassioned "Letter to the Jewish People," resigning as president of the Zionist Organization.

Herzl's letter began with this sentence: "The path splits, and the split goes straight through the leader's heart." He had been only a "Jewish statist" at the beginning, he wrote, but he had eventually become a *Ḥovev Zion* (a "Lover of Zion"), and yet he remained torn between the ultimate goal of a home in Palestine and the immediate need of a Jewish refuge wherever possible:

> For me there is no other solution but Palestine for the great national question which is called the Jewish Question. But I cannot and must not overlook the fact that the Jewish Question also contains an element of bitter distress which the philanthropic organizations have proved incapable of alleviating.

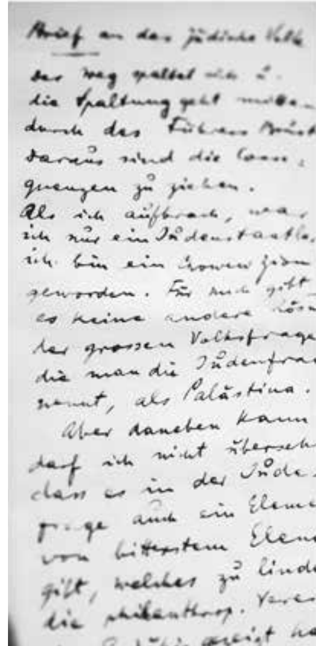
To address this distress, he needed land, and the only land on offer was in East Africa.[124] He described his dilemma in deciding whether to pursue the offer:

> I cannot go [to East Africa], because I am a *Hovev Zion.* Only if all the *Hovev* were to join us could I . . . direct [the] East Africa [project]. If there is a split, my heart will remain with the Zionists [holding out for Palestine] and my head with the Africans [urging an immediate refuge]. This is such a great conflict that I can only solve it by resigning.

Herzl ended his resignation letter with an evaluation of what he believed he had achieved in his six years of leadership:

> In accordance with my modest energies I have created some instruments for the awakened Jewish people. I shall certainly not leave embittered or dissatisfied. . . . I was richly rewarded far beyond what I merited and deserved, by the love of my people—a measure of love such as has seldom been bestowed upon individuals who had a far greater claim to such love than I did. I am not owed anything. The Jews are a good people, but unfortunately also a profoundly unhappy one. May God continue to help them.

Herzl never sent the letter. The handwritten draft was found among his papers after his death eight months later, and it was not published until 1928.[125] In 1903, Herzl remained president of the Zionist Organization even as his health deteriorated, and as further diplomatic success eluded him. In the final eight months of his life, he met with the Pope, the King



The first page of Herzl's handwritten "Letter to the Jewish People," November 1903

of Italy, the Austrian foreign minister, and others, before dying of his chronic heart condition on July 3, 1904.[126]

In a January 24, 1902, diary entry, Herzl had written that "Zionism was the Sabbath of my life," and he attributed his accomplishments to his principled pursuit of his idea:

> I believe that my effective leadership is to be attributed to the fact that I who, as a man and a writer, have so many faults and have been guilty of so many mistakes and follies, have been in this matter of Zionism pure of heart and wholly unselfish.[127]

At the beginning of 1904, concerned about Herzl's health and finances, some of his Zionist associates had offered to arrange an annuity for him, but Herzl refused, telling David Wolffsohn, "What about my self-respect? Why would I accept money [to] act according to my convictions?" Israel Zangwill assured him it would be kept secret, to which Herzl responded, "You say no one would know. One person would know. I would know."

Herzl died in poverty. His wife and three children would depend on

financial support from the movement after his death. Julie died in 1907 at the age of thirty-nine; the three orphaned Herzl children led difficult lives and died at young ages as well, one by a drug overdose, one by suicide, and one in the Holocaust.

Herzl did not live to see the resolution of the East African controversy that split his heart. At the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905, the delegates formally rejected the East Africa idea. Twelve years later, however, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, and many historians believe Herzl's efforts involving important British figures—including Arthur Balfour (prime minister at the time of the East Africa negotiation) and David Lloyd George (his lawyer and later the prime minister at the time of the Balfour Declaration)—set the essential stage for the seminal British endorsement in 1917 of a Jewish national home in Palestine.[128]

Herzl's story bears a certain resemblance to that of the prophet Samuel—one that may have struck Herzl himself, as his health began to decline precipitously in late 1903 and early 1904.[129] In the opening chapter of the Book of Samuel, Hannah prays for a child, pledging to dedicate him to the Lord. Her prayer is granted; she names him Samuel ("Sam-u-El"—"Heard by God"); and she eventually sends him to live with the high priest Eli. Late one night, Samuel hears someone calling his name; he goes to Eli and says, "Here I am." Eli tells him he didn't call him. Samuel goes back to sleep; the Lord calls again; Samuel goes to Eli, and Eli again says he didn't call. When it happens yet again, Eli recognizes it is the Lord calling Samuel, and he advises Samuel to say, if it happened again, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening." The Lord calls again; Samuel says he is listening; and the Lord tells him: "I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle." Through Samuel, the Lord will prevent Eli from passing the priesthood to his sons and will eventually crown Saul the first King of Israel.

The Book of Samuel played a role in a dream Herzl had when he was twelve years old. He recounted it for the first time about six months before his death, to his Zionist colleague Reuben Brainin. In Herzl's childhood dream, a majestic old man (the "King-Messiah") had taken him into the clouds, where they met Moses. The King-Messiah told Moses, "It is for this child that I have prayed," and then said to Herzl, "Go, declare to the

Jews that I shall come soon and perform great wonders and great deeds for my people and for the whole world." Herzl told Brainin he had never disclosed the dream to anyone.[130]

As a child preparing for his bar mitzvah, Herzl may well have learned the stories of both Samuel and Moses and unconsciously combined them in a dream. His recollection and disclosure, three decades later, reflected not self-importance but rather a certain wistfulness: His health was failing; his heart had been broken at the Sixth Zionist Congress; he was eight years into his project and a Jewish state was nowhere on the horizon; the way forward was unclear; he was thinking of stepping down; and he had already drafted his resignation letter. But at least, through him, the ears of the Jewish people had tingled.

Perhaps the story of Samuel can serve as a parable for Herzl's life: He thought he had a calling as a playwright, but he was wrong; then he thought his calling was as an essayist and reporter, but those writings left him unfulfilled. Then, in June 1895, he was possessed by an all-encompassing idea, coming from a mysterious source, like a voice in the night. On his third attempt, Herzl had found his calling. Or perhaps his Calling found him.

Herzl's life and his achievements were of biblical proportions. In an essay entitled "The Epochal Herzl," published in a collection of essays in 1929 in honor of Herzl's memory, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise wrote—at a time when a Jewish state was still two decades in the future—that Herzl had changed the world:

> We live in a world basically different from that of Herzl, for we are part of a Jewish life which Herzl remade. . . . Those of us who have lived alike in the pre-Herzlian and the post-Herzlian epochs know that this man's coming upon the Jewish scene brought another era into being. . . . After Herzl's day Jews no longer denied their Semitism or concealed their Jewishness. To the former they assented as a fact; the latter they affirmed as their distinction.[131]

As a writer, as an institution builder, and as a diplomat, Herzl bore on his shoulders the weight of the Jewish future. And his prophecy, written on the final page of *The Jewish State*, when he was thirty-six years old, came miraculously true:

> I believe that a wondrous generation of Jews will spring into existence. The Maccabaeans will rise again. . . . The Jews wish to have a State, and they shall have one. . . . And whatever we attempt there to accomplish for our own welfare will react with beneficent force for the good of humanity.[132]

The mystery of Herzl may be insoluble.[133] His appearance in Jewish history was so sudden; his age so young; his time so short; his goal so immense; his approach so new; his efforts so substantial; and his struggle so sustained, that—even a century later—the longest-serving prime minister in Israeli history would continue to describe him in terms of awe and astonishment.