

Hans Herzl – A Jew finally comes Home



By Judith Rice

The Jews are not a living nation; they are everywhere aliens; therefore they are despised... . The proper, the only solution, is in the creation of a Jewish nationality, of a people living upon its own soil, the auto- emancipation of the Jews; their return to the ranks of the nations by the acquisition of a Jewish homeland.

Help yourselves, and God will help you!

Leon Pinsker - Auto-emancipation 1882

The Jews who wish for a State will have it. We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and die peacefully in our own homes.

The world will be freed by our liberty, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness.

And whatever we attempt there to accomplish for our own welfare, will react powerfully and beneficially for the good of humanity.

Theodor Herzl - Der Judenstaadt – the Jewish State

Resolved: That we totally disapprove of any attempt for the establishment of a Jewish state. Such attempts show a misunderstanding of Israel's mission, which forms the narrow political and national field has been expanded to the promotion among the whole human race of the broad and universalistic religion first proclaimed by the Jewish prophets....

Central Conference of Reform (American) Rabbis - 1897

My father was a great man, whom I loved... But I've come to see that he made a great historical error in his attempt to rebuild the Jewish State.... My father did not realize the true mission of the Jewish people, which has proven that the living and fertilizing spirit does not need territorial boundaries, and that a people can live and exist even when fortifications and borders have disappeared.

I would ask them not to attempt to add to the decadent civilizations but to remember their true identity and work for the cultural reconstruction of their homeland – and this homeland is the entire world.

Hans Herzl to Marcel Steinberger – 1929 – Princes Without A Home¹

The Bordeaux coroner's announcement was plain and simple. "Dead on September 15, 8p.m., at 31 Rue de la Gare Hanns (sic) Herzl, born in Vienna, Austria June 10, 1891, son of Dr. Theodor Herzl, Privatord Herzl and Julie Naschauer, without occupation, single". The death report did not discuss the method of his suicide – some say he shot himself. Hans had referred to that possibility once as he reflected on his failed life.

At age 39, he had never married, successfully established a home, identification, education or a career. His life had been lived as a ward of the Zionists for support, a wanderer without a home. Intensely sensitive, he sought normalcy for himself and for the Jewish people whom he cared deeply about. His choices in life were almost always wrong and he came to tragically understand that. A suicide note was found with the body bequeathing his simple modest possessions. His only true request was to be buried with his older sister Pauline who had died a few days earlier. Together their bones, he hoped, would be reunited with their beloved father.

Hans was a ward of the Zionist caretakers who honored his father. He was buried, quietly, by the Zionists. They were deeply ashamed and embarrassed by Hans's life. His tombstone was erected almost secretly. The Zionists quickly obscured his life. He was wishfully forgotten.

Trude, Herzl's youngest daughter, eventually married and had one son – Stephan. Trude was mentally crippled with repeated bouts of depressive illness until she was finally murdered and her body burned in Thereisienstadt, during the Holocaust. The return and reburial of Pauline and Hans Herzl was completed in near secrecy and obscurity. They were brought to rest with their family only out of the deepest respect for their father. None of Herzl's children were Zionists. None had ever been to "Palestine"

Hans Herzl was the middle child, of three, born to Theodor and Julie Herzl. The Herzl children were raised in a highly assimilated, viscously dysfunctional pseudo aristocratic Jewish household. The parents despised each other. The children, isolated from other children, ostensibly for health reasons, were virtually raised by governesses and strangers. By the time of Theodor Herzl's death in 1904, Hans had little background in Jewish social, cultural or religious education. It was only in the relatively few years before his father's death that Hans was episodically and superficially introduced to Judaism.

Vienna, in the 1890's, was viewed as the cultural center of the world. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was a shining example of cross cultural amalgamation and hope for the disparate groups of peoples living under the Emperor. The Herzl family fully accepted and adopted the principles of Jewish liberation, acceptance and normalization through assimilation, modernization and national identification. After two thousand years of the Jewish Diaspora, European liberalism and an enlightened, educated public would finally bring an end to Jewish isolation, rejection and irrational anti-Semitism.

There was good reason to believe that an enlightened liberalism would finally change the course of historic anti-Semitism. The American experiment across the ocean was rising like a vicious infection, spreading its ideals of freedom and toleration. Europe had convulsed under the Napoleonic and later 1848 failed liberal revolutions. The seeds of societal change were planted. Jewish emancipation was a cornerstone of the future if Jews would become Austrians or Frenchmen or Italians. God had not sent the Messiah but had sent the tool to become free – assimilation. It had worked and was working in America and it seemed to be working in Europe.

Only in Eastern Europe, the Europe of the reactionary Russian Czarist regimes, did the American infection not take hold. Instead the effect of emancipation and enlightenment led to reinvigorated anti-Semitism and oppression. Jewish scapegoatism and victim-hood knew no boundaries in

Russia. The descent into Jewish desperation and depression reached out and cried for new choices and alternatives.

In the late 19th century, it was no different. Jews were accused as being the cause of the problems in Russia. A young Jewish Russian physician saw no recourse to a normal life except by becoming a normal people. Leon Pinsker, in his short publication, *Auto-Emancipation*, illuminated the only logical future for Jewish life. He wrote,

"...we must learn to recognize that as long as we lack a home of our own, such as the other nations have, we must resign forever the noble hope of becoming the equals of our fellow-men. We must recognize that before the great idea of human brotherhood will unite all the peoples of the earth, millenniums must elapse; and that meanwhile a people which is at home everywhere and nowhere, must everywhere be regarded as alien. The time has come for a sober and dispassionate realization of our true position".

The Jewish people must have a national home.

Perhaps the timing was not right or the distribution channels were not strong. Perhaps because the message came from an East European Jew as opposed to a Western European Jew, Pinsker's cry, for Jews to take control of their own lives with their own national solution, did not resonate far in 1882.

Theodor Herzl knew nothing of Pinsker or the *Chovevei Zion* (Lover's of Zion) movement of Russian and Rumanian Jews to Palestine. He had seen and marginally confronted anti-Semitism in Austria and Europe. To him it was the passing of an age. Anti-Semitism was a vestige of the past. Individual incidents and Jew hatred were not a part of the enlightened future of Jewry. It was in that context that he was assigned the job as correspondent to the infamous Dreyfus affair in Paris.

Captain Alfred Dreyfus accused and convicted by a clearly anti-Semitic court, hate-filled public media and sharply divided public opinion. That this could happen in the most liberally advanced and socially tolerant country in Europe shocked the blinders from Herzl's eyes. It is true that the Dreyfus affair was not the only rabidly anti-Semitic incident that rattled Herzl in France. He had seen clearly demonstrated public acceptance of anti-Semitism. However what was different about Dreyfus was the very viciousness of the affair. It made Herzl rethink his life and his position as a Jew in the European world.

Herzl, in a short period of intense writing, produced his seminal booklet, *Der Judenstaat* – The Jewish State. Overnight, the elements of timing came together as Herzl's simple solution to the Jewish question electrified the Jewish world. It gave hope and belief and focus where generations of wandering, second class life, marginal toleration and scourging prayers and divine implorations did not.

"We are a people--one people - We have honestly endeavored everywhere to merge ourselves in the social life of surrounding communities and to preserve the faith of our fathers. We are not permitted to do so. In vain are we loyal patriots, our loyalty in some

places running to extremes; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow-citizens; in vain do we strive to increase the fame of our native land in science and art, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers. and often by those whose ancestors were not yet domiciled in the land where Jews had already had experience of suffering".

Herzl's response was simple and logical from his vantage as a disillusioned Jewish assimilationist. The rate of improvement in the idealistic goodness of mankind was progressing except in regards to the Jews. Herzl saw the Jews as forever being *luftmenschen*, a people who blew on the wind without a ground to call home. Europe and the world did not want Jews. They hated the Jews that were amongst them. It was illusion for the Jews to think otherwise.

The Jewish question would not go away or change. There had to be a solution to the Jewish question. The Jews must take their own fate into their own hands. If the world did not want Jews amongst them then Jews should leave. They would become a normal people in their own land. The Jews would blossom in their own land. From Israel would flow the benefits to the world that the world did not want while the Jews lived amongst them.

Herzl's simple solution to the Jewish question took hold of the Jewish and the non-Jewish imagination. For once there was a solution that seemed to appeal to all parties. Only the reality was different. Herzl mistakenly believed that the educated Jews of the West would understand, realize and support the need for a Jewish state. They would abandon their materialistic world of pseudo-cultural pluralism where they were not really wanted and anti-Semitism would remain. The cultural elites, the financial leaders and the "Court Jews" would take the lead and create the Jewish state as the solution to the Jewish question.

Herzl poured his life, his fortune and his family's fate into the dream of the Jewish state. The Jewish world was astonished at the audacity and the reception of the solution to the Jewish question, assuming the debt of the bankrupt Turkish government in return for a Jewish state. Only the Jews of the West did not step forward and the governments of the West did not care to pressure the Turks to help them solve the Jewish question. The Jews of the West did not want to go to "Palestine". The Jews who did wish to go, to sacrifice, to believe, were mainly the Jews of Eastern Europe – the Russian Jews. Herzl's idea was received with overwhelming positive feelings by the Jews of Russia. To many he was viewed as a near Messiah. They responded and moved in millions to the country of their believed salvation – *America*.

Hans Herzl was 13 years old when his father died. His family's modest fortune was dissipated, his sisters left adrift and his mother incapable of managing life. The Zionist movement undertook the responsibility of looking after them.

Hans grew up expected by Zionists to become the heir of Herzl and by his family as new head. He became neither. Between 1904 with the death of his father and the start of World War I, Hans demonstrated only a remarkable sensitivity to the world, an inability to complete either education or focus successfully on any life goals. More distressing for the nescient Zionist movement was that the heir apparent did not grasp nor accept his father's vision.

Hans found himself in Britain during World War I where he enlisted and served for a short time in the home guard. He was unable to join the regular army in the great struggle. Ironically he had rejected his Austro-Hungarian roots becoming a wandering Jew. He was stateless and emotionally empty – no strong family leadership or support, no strong religious foundation, no financial security, no identity, living in the shadow of an image that he could never rise to - Theodor Herzl.

The Zionist dream continued and progressed culminating with the Balfour Declaration. Hans Herzl and the Herzl children existed only in the shadows but now as adult wards of the Zionists.

The trauma of World War I shaped a generation. The survivors of the Great War were renamed the lost generation. Adrift, searching, stunned and empty, the lost generation wandered without clarity or purpose after the war.

Hans and Pauline Herzl were no different. Pauline, the oldest Herzl child, from the end of the war until her death descended from one failed relationship to another. She probably died from drug use in 1930. Her life was a moral scandal for the family and the Zionists.

Trude the youngest Herzl married Richard Neumann, a much older businessman, and had one child – Stephan. Trude also descended into her own personal hell. Almost immediately after the birth of her son – she collapsed into long term mental illness and repeated serial hospitalizations. Her marriage was not a good one. The family life was dysfunctional and the young grandson of Theodor Herzl was raised by a governess. The father, away large amounts of time from the home, tried to cope but could not do so as a parent, husband or provider. Trude and Richard Neumann blended into the horror of the Holocaust dying in Thereisienstadt.

The one thing the Neumann's were able to do was to save their son, Stephan. Utilizing their Zionist connections they sent him to London. It was not that they were Zionists or that they raised their son, Herzl's grandson, as a Zionist but they used their connections to save his life. They sent him to Britain to go to university. It was in England that Stephan fully learned about his grandfather.

Stephan anglicized his name from Neumann to Norman and joined the British army. He became a Captain in the Royal Artillery. His studies about his grandfather led Norman to become an ardent Zionist. He was the only member of Herzl's family who was a Zionist. After the War he took the opportunity to visit Palestine to see what his grandfather's legacy had accomplished. Norman was the only member of Herzl's family to openly state his desire to return to Israel. Norman died in 1946 and is buried, forgotten and unmourned in Washington, D.C.

Hans Herzl wandered in shambles after WWI. He had wanted to go to Palestine but said he was denied admittance by the British Mandate government. Perhaps he applied but with his family name and Zionist connections if he truly wanted to go to Palestine he would have been able to do so. Hans was not a Zionist even after carefully studying his father's writings and Zionist history.

It was quite understandable. Zionism was a successful movement only a failed reality. His father's mission to the leaders of Europe to create a solution to the Jewish question had failed.

There was no state. Only a minor trickle of Jewish immigration was realized. The Balfour Declaration was an unfulfilled declaration. The British Mandate system and the ever growing hostility of the Arab population to Jewish immigration seemed to guarantee that the Herzl vision of a Zionist solution to the Jewish question would remain a failure. The Messiah did not come.

Hans desperately searched for meaning for his life. He searched for his own solution to the Jewish question. The drive for the solution was his legacy from his father. For most Jews America had been and was the answer. And it was the answer until 1920. In 1920 the American doorway was firmly closed to Jewish immigration. American open immigration was shut to all people.

Hans's father's solution to the Jewish question was a threat to established Jewry in Europe. It was especially threatening in the growing acceptance of the American Jewish experience. Herzl came to believe in the fallibility of true Jewish emancipation and ultimate acceptance in the world.

From *Der Judenstaadt*:

We depend for sustenance on the nations who are our hosts, and if we had no hosts to support us we should die of starvation...

I believe in the ascent of man to higher and yet higher grades of civilization; but I consider this ascent to be desperately slow...

The majority may decide which are the strangers; for this, as indeed every point which arises in the relations between nations, is a question of might.

It is useless, therefore, for us to be loyal patriots, as were the Huguenots who were forced to emigrate. If we could only be left in peace. . . .

But I think we shall not be left in peace....

Herzl believed what the establishment could not or would not. In America, Herzl's rejection of a final solution to the American Jewish question was a direct threat to American Jewry. From the very founding of the American experience, Jewish life had been to integrate and be part of the American struggle. America was a new world, a new chance, a new opportunity to mold the future into something better. For American Jews the astonishing thing was that it was true.

As long as Jews became more American, integrated themselves into the American fabric, freedom - economic, religious, social and amazingly political was increasingly achieved. Jews experienced in America a level of acceptance that had never been known in Diaspora history.

Herzl never understood the American Jewish experience. Established America Jewry did not understand Herzl or his motives. But Herzl's suggested rejection of ultimate American integration and security remained.

The largest established Jewish organization in America in the 1890's was the American Reform Movement. American Reform Judaism traced its origins to German roots in the early 19th century. The liberal, reform movement soon transplanted itself to America taking hold in South Carolina. The basic evolution of American Reform Judaism, well into the early 20th century, was increasing emulation of the American Protestant movement characteristics. Reform Judaism

quickly renounced Judaic orthodoxy. Men and women sat together, English and the role of the Rabbi morphed into new forms. Decline in observance and outright rejection of Kashrut and Halacha became norm.

American Jews integrated and were accepted by not remaining separate. America became known as the new Zion. A new theology of the meaning of the Jewish Diaspora emerged.

American Jewish theism developed and redeveloped the "light unto the world" doctrine. The purpose of the Diaspora was not God's punishment for the sins of ancient Israel but a blessing unto the world. The purpose of the Diaspora was part of God's plan to spread Jews throughout the world as carriers of God's word. The Jews would become a blessing, enriching those who blessed Israel. The Jews would be God's tool, *the promotion among the whole human race of the broad and universalistic religion first proclaimed by the Jewish prophets....* ²

American Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis a leader in the early American Zionist movement said *every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine... will... be a better man and a better American for doing so.* Brandeis never advocated that American Jews leave America for Israel.

One year after the appearance of Herzl's *the Jewish State*, the Central Conference of Reform Rabbis in 1897 felt compelled to clearly state its rejection of Zionism. They would annually restate their rejection of Herzl and Zionism until the 1940's when the horror of the Holocaust could not be denied.

By the 1940's American Jewry had been firmly established. The children of the immigrant generation, American by birth, were in charge and support for the Zionist movement was no longer a threat. Zionism was a cultural form of charitable bonding of the Jewish people linked by a common heritage and religion.

Hans Herzl, between 1917 and his suicide in 1930, continued seeking his own solution to the Jewish question. He studied Zionist history and delved deep into his own lonely, frustrated consciousness. Hans concluded, if Zionism was not the solution then perhaps God had not chosen the Zionists. He chose a different course for the solving the Jewish question. His solution would be a universal solution not just for Jews but also for all humanity.

Hans Herzl horrified, and then disgusted the Zionist and Jewish world. He chose to be immersed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was baptized as a Protestant and became a Christian – a Baptist.

Hans to Marcel Sternberger:

Of course there is a precondition: by giving up the outdated dogma of the historical Messiah, the Synagogue would become a constituent member of the World-Church, and the unification of the human family would be completed by the inclusion of the Jews. Then the ethical content of Judaism could attain its fullest development, and renew national "Christianity" from within. This is how I see the Jewish mission, and Jewish nationalism: a Christian Theocracy of Jewish faith... I am a Christian – but in the spirit

of the apostle Paul, in whom Judaism and Christianity were united in the worship of One God... Don't you see that the New Testament is only a continuation of the Old, just as the teachings of Jesus are but a continuation of the Ten Commandments?

The Baptists did not provide the structure and answer for the better world that Hans envisioned. He saw that they could not deliver a world wide improvement to humanity through a central fiat the way a head of state could. In short order Hans converted again and was baptized a Catholic. Hans soon left the Catholic Church and was excommunicated. He tried different forms of Christianity but found no solace in any.

In time he found himself attending the liberal synagogue in London. His life had spiraled into spiritual, emotional and personal hopelessness. Word came to him of his beloved sister Pauline's death in Bordeaux. His depression and self-absorption, his failure in protecting his sister and saving himself (hence his people the Jews) became manic.

In Bordeaux he wrote after his sister's death:

If a ritual can really calm our spirits and give us the illusion of being in the company of our beloved dead once more I can't think of anything better than a visit to the Temple: there I can pray for my parents, ask their forgiveness and repent my apostasy before God. I am destitute and sick, unhappy and bitter. I have no home. Nobody pays any attention to the words of a convert. I cannot suddenly turn my back on a community which offered me its friendship.

Without prejudice, even if all my physical and moral impulses urge me to: I have burned all my bridges... What good is the penance which the Church has ordained for my "spiritual healing"! I torture my body in vain: my conscience is torturing me far worse.

My life is ruined... Nobody would regret it if I were to put a bullet through my head.

Could I undo my errors that way? I realize how right my father had been when he once said: "Only the withered branches fall off a tree – the healthy ones flourish."

A Jew remains a Jew, no matter how eagerly he may submit himself to the disciplines of his new religion, how humbly he may place the redeeming cross upon his shoulders for the sake of his former coreligionists, to save them from eternal damnation: a Jew remains a Jew....I can't go on living. I have lost all trust in God, All my life I've tried to strive for the truth, and must admit today at the end of the road that there is nothing but disappointment. Tonight I have said Kaddish for my parents – and for myself, the last descendent of the family. There is nobody who will say Kaddish for me, who went out to find peace – and who may find peace soon..... My instinct has latterly gone all wrong, and I have made one of those irreparable mistakes, which stamp a whole life with failure. Then it is best to scrap it.

Hans Herzl took his life September 15, 1930. His final wishes were to be buried with his sister Pauline. The Zionist caretakers of the Herzl legacy and his children twisted the arms of the resistant orthodox community and had him buried in the Jewish cemetery. They recognized that he, like his sisters, his mother and his father, suffered from severe mental illness. They also recognized that it was best to bury him, move on quickly and keep his story as secret as possible.

A year later Wolf Stolpner who took care of Hans's final bequests arranged to have a stone placed over Pauline and Hans's joint grave. He bitterly noted about the Zionists:

... it seems to me that you had an elementary duty to notify the family or, if that was impossible, those who could represent them... Dr. Theodor Herzl, who devoted himself completely to the Jewish people, seems at least to have earned the right to have a few friends present when his children were led to eternal rest...

In the end Hans was a Jew. Prof. Dawnd an old friend of Hans wrote to Trude (Herzl) Neumann in Vienna:

"I first met dear Hans at the British Legation in Bern, in August 1914... I loved has as a (dear) brother, and his tragic death was a great shock to me and my family. He had changed his views: he was a true Jew, and until a few days before his death he was studying the Bible with me, and praying for the peace of Jerusalem..."

September of 2006 the Jewish Agency and the Government of Israel provided the final respectful honor to Theodor Herzl. The modest ceremonies returned the remains from France to be reburied on Mt. Herzl. The final act was done.

Only the final act is not done. The only Zionist, the only believer in Herzl, the only member of his family who truly desired to be one with Israel is left behind. Stephan Theodor Norman lies in an isolated grave in Washington, D.C. still awaiting his deserved chance to come home.

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¹ *Princes Without a Home, Modern Zionism and the Strange Fate of Theodor Herzl's Children 1900-1945.* Ilse Steinberger, International Scholars Publications, San Francisco 1994.

² *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897-1948,* Naomi W. Cohen, Brandeis University Press