

Preface

My first encounter with Herzl occurred sometime during the 1950s. It was in the morning hours of a Jerusalem Shabbat. I walked with my grandfather from the Kerem Avraham neighborhood to Ohel Sara synagogue in the Mea Shearim neighborhood for the Shabbat prayers. On the way my eyes caught a glimpse of a big *pashkevil* (poster) on the wall. On it, printed in large bold letters, was the headline “Herzl yimakh shemo” (“May his name be erased”).

The text in the *pashkevil* accused Herzl of attempting to push the Jewish people to convert from their faith. Since then, my curiosity regarding Herzl and my desire to understand his most inner motivations and the reasons of his success as a leader of the Jewish people has not waned.

I read and studied Herzl’s writings and the writings of others. In all of these I found no answer to the question: What was Herzl’s secret? How did he succeed in less than nine years, against all odds, in changing the history of the Jewish People? How did he succeed in instigating the process that led to the Balfour Declaration, the UN vote in 1947, and the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948? How did he succeed in transferring to future generations the vision of the Jewish, Zionist and democratic state – all in such a short time?

I could not decipher Herzl’s secret, but the book deals extensively with some of his personality traits that undoubtedly formed part of the secret components:

Herzl’s physical beauty: In my research of Herzl, I noticed that those who described him, both during his lifetime and after his death, noted his physical appearance with great admiration, from the pragmatic and rigid Ussishkin to Rabbi Shlomo Cohen, the ultra-Orthodox rabbi of Vilna. The book extensively discusses Herzl’s iconography and its contribution to the success of the Zionist campaign.

The Mysteries of his Charisma: In addition to the beauty of the “Assyrian prince” many observers described the power of Herzl’s charisma by which he was blessed. Thus, so many good and prominent people received his authority with love. The book discusses in detail the effect of Herzl’s charismatic power on both his immediate and distant surroundings.

Unity of Opposites: Surprisingly, I found that those who described Herzl’s beauty and charismatic power, also described him as a humble man. In this book I try to explain the harmony inherent in the unification of opposites.

Although blessed with these and other qualities such as total devotion and uncompromising honesty – Herzl was forced to fight forces of opposition, emanating both from home and from the outside. The chapters of this book will lead the reader along the path of Herzl’s Zionist activities, from writing “The Jewish

State” through the administration of the first six Zionist Congresses until his death.

The book will deal extensively with three issues: the issue of *kultura*, the *Altneuland* affair and the Uganda affair. In all three, I argue that Herzl was right in terms of substance but erred in terms of management. For this he paid a heavy price.

To what extent can it be assumed that Herzl drew his power from his perceived resemblance to Moshe Rabbenu (the Prophet Moses)? A special chapter addresses this issue in detail.

The last chapter of the book discusses two questions: Was Herzl already a legend in his lifetime, or did the legend of Herzl form after his death? Was his untimely death a blessing because he had reached his climax from which he could only have declined, as *Ahad Ha'am* believed, or was his early death a huge loss, as Rabbi Binyamin believed?

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