



Herzl's Vision: Theodor Herzl and the Foundation of the Jewish State

Shlomo Avineri

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Theodor Herzl had been a successful Viennese journalist and a less successful playwright with no political ambitions. That changed in 1896, when he published *The Jewish State*. In response to the wide resonance that the book received, Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897, which founded the Zionist Organization in order to establish a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, recognized and guaranteed by public international law. As he transformed himself in just a few years from fin-de-siècle writer and editor into the leader of an international political movement, Herzl learned politics and diplomacy on the run. And while he was not the first to call for the establishment of a Jewish nation-state, his activity was crucial in creating the institutional and organizational structure which helped to bring the idea of a Jewish state to the attention of world leaders and international public opinion. In his efforts to gain broad support for his vision, Herzl met with the Ottoman Sultan; the German Emperor Wilhelm II; Pope Pius X; British, Russian, and German ministers; as well as an enormous number of other government and public opinion leaders of most European countries. By the time of his early death in 1904 at the age of forty-four, Herzl had transformed Jewish public discourse and made the idea of a Return to Zion into a reality, albeit still a weak one, in world politics.

In this concise, illuminating biography, the renowned Israeli political scientist and public intellectual Shlomo Avineri portrays Herzl's intellectual and spiritual odyssey from a private and marginal individual into a Jewish political leader and shows how it was the political crisis of the Austro-Hungarian Habsburg Empire, torn apart by contending national movements, which convinced Herzl of the need for a Jewish polity.

Drawing extensively on Herzl's diaries as well as his published works, Avineri tells the story of how Herzl became, with the Zionist movement that he founded, a player in international politics, and how he harnessed the power of the word to his goals as no other statesman before him had done. Combining a visionary idea with practical action, Theodor Herzl fashioned the policies and institutions that paved the way for the Jewish state.

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