



ON: Zionism

Jewish links to the Land of Israel

The Zionist idea – the return of the Jewish people to its homeland in Israel – is deeply embedded in Jewish religion and culture. The Jewish people base their claim to the Land of Israel on four general premises:

1. Jewish religion, civilization and history developed there throughout the millennia
2. Jews have continuously lived on this land for nearly 4,000 years
3. Jews developed the land in the 19th and 20th centuries
4. Jews received political sovereignty to govern this land in the mid-20th century

Meanwhile, in Palestine...

At the beginning of the 19th century, nearly 100 years before the advent of modern Zionism, thousands of Jews from Eastern Europe and the Middle East began to arrive in Palestine. By 1858, Jews were reported to be a majority in Safed and Tiberias. Thousands of Jews from Yemen also immigrated to Palestine at this time, establishing communities in Jerusalem and elsewhere.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Jews, who were then a majority in Jerusalem, started a movement to make their own community in Palestine self-sufficient. These Jews began moving to the countryside, establishing farming communities in Rishon le’Zion, Gedera, Petah Tiqvah, Zichron Ya’akov and Rosh Pina.

Escaping violent pogroms in Russia, young, idealistic, secular Jews began immigrating to Palestine in the early 20th century. Many of them established collectivist settlements called kibbutzim.

Jewish Empowerment

Political Zionism began in the early 1880’s when Jews fleeing massacres in Czarist Russia immigrated to the land of Israel (Palestine). In 1897 Theodore Herzl formally established the Zionist movement, the Jewish movement of national liberation and self-determination. Its founding was nothing less than a major revolution in Jewish life.

Political Zionism aspired to deal with Jewish powerlessness by urging Jews to return to their historic homeland. The movement developed organizational, political and economic tools to implement its vision.

The impetus behind the Zionist movement was to empower Jews, who for centuries were everywhere a powerless minority. While for millennia individual Jews contributed greatly to both Christian and Muslim societies, Jews were always vulnerable to persecution and exploitation, suffering massacres, mass expulsions, forced conversions, ghettoization and humiliation. The Holocaust, Nazi Germany’s systematic murder of two-thirds of European Jewry, was the definitive, horrific symbol of this powerlessness.

From the early 1930s until 1948, modern Jewish history experienced two events of seminal importance: the extermination of 6 million Jews and, three years after the end of WWII, the birth of the State of Israel. When on May 14, 1948 Israel was established, the Zionist dream was realized.



David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, declares Israel's independence.