

THE ZIONIST IDEA

A Historical Analysis and Reader

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION
AND BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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FOREWORD BY EMANUEL NEUMANN

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MOSHE LEIB LILIENBLUM 1843-1910

GHETTO CULTURE and talmudic piety, religious reform, secularization, the revolutionary movements struggling against the tsar, and the new nationalism—these were the major clashing values of Jewish life in Russia in the turbulent years between 1860 and 1900. Except for spiritual nationalism, which he opposed in the versions of both Smolenskin and Ahad Ha-Am, Lilienblum ran the gamut of these ideas in a career which, more than any other, exemplifies the history of this seminal age.

Born in Keidany in 1843, he became a sufficient scholar of the Talmud to spend five years (1864-1869) teaching in the yeshivah in Vilkomir. During this period he read considerably in the current literature of the Haskalah, which was heavily opposed to the rigors of talmudic legalism. Lilienblum became convinced that moderate religious reforms were necessary in order to harmonize religion with the spirit of the age. The publication of these views brought down upon him the inevitable anger of the orthodox, who could not allow their children to be influenced by such heresies. His friends avoided him and his family was little help. His only moral support came from an "enlightened" young woman in Vilkomir, in whom he became romantically involved, but that merely complicated his situation, for, as was the custom of the ghetto, he had been married since the age of sixteen.

Like Smolenskin a few years earlier, in 1869 he fled to Odessa, the mecca of the modernists, in the hopes of acquiring a thorough secular education. He soon came under the influence of the Russian positivists, D. I. Pisarev and G. G. Chernyshevsky, and completely lost his religious faith and all interest in abstract ideas. Nothing mattered now except the destiny of the individual in the most practical terms. The transition from such ideas to socialism was not a great step, and so, by the end of the 1870's, Lilienblum had passed from complete despair of the Jewish people to utter devotion to his secular studies in the

high school, in which he was preparing himself for entrance into the university, and to a belief in the class struggle as the only hope of a better future for all mankind.

The determining break in Lilienblum's life came with the pogroms of 1881. Lilienblum devoted the rest of his life to the Zionist movement. He was a significant figure in the practical labors of the Hibbat Zion organization, the group which came into being under the impact of the events of 1881 to foster Jewish colonization in Palestine. When political Zionism arose with the appearance of Theodor Herzl, Lilienblum became one of his most active supporters in Russia.

It is regrettable that Lilienblum is almost entirely unknown in English. Within the framework of this volume, we could include selections representing only his last thirty years, i.e., his Zionist phase. Lilienblum appears here in quotations from his diary of 1881, under the shock of the pogroms which led to his nationalist resolve; in the broad-gauged views which asked all shades of opinion and belief to compromise in order to join in the labor of creating a nation in Palestine; and in his analysis of anti-Semitism, which convinced Lilienblum that outside his own land the Jew would have no future even in any liberal new world order of the morrow.

THE WAY OF RETURN (1881)

MARCH 20. The local periodical reported that the masses are ready to attack the Jews during the approaching Easter holiday. Apparently the anti-Semites are not satisfied with the famine that is ravaging the Jews in their Pale of Settlement¹ and are inciting the masses to loot and pillage. But why do they labor in vain to bring back their beloved Middle Ages, for that age will never return!

April 10. The disturbing rumors about anti-Jewish outbreaks are growing stronger, and the governor has seen fit to post notices throughout the city to the effect that if any one tries to disturb the peace and order of the city, he, the governor himself, will immediately cut off all services and have the agitators court-martialed.

April 17. Shocking reports from the city of Elizabethgrad. Riots, pillaging—the heart fails. What is this?

April 28. Reports as shocking as those from Elizabethgrad now come from Kiev and other cities.

May 5. Terrible! The situation is terrible and frightening! We are virtually under siege. The courtyards are barred up, and we keep peering through the grillwork of the court gates to see if the mob is coming to swoop down on us. All the furniture is stored in cellars, we all sleep in our clothes and without any bedding (also stored in the cellars), so that if we are attacked we will immediately be able to take the small children, who also sleep in their clothes, and flee. But will they let us flee? What does the future have in store for us? Will they have mercy on the youngsters—who don't even know yet that they are Jews, that they are wretches—and not harm them? Terrible, terrible! How long, O God of Israel? . . .

May 7. I am glad I have suffered. The rioters approached the house I am staying in. The women shrieked and wailed, hugging the children to their breasts, and didn't know where to turn. The men stood by dumfounded. We all imagined that in a few moments it would be all over with us. . . . But, thank God, they were frightened away by the soldiers and we were not harmed. I am glad I have suffered. At least once in my life I have had the opportunity of feeling what my ancestors felt every day of their lives. Their lives were one long terror, so why should I experience nothing of that fright which they felt all their lives? I am their son, their sufferings are dear to me, and I am exalted by their glory.

Undated. In September I discontinued my studies at the Gymnasium.²

Those intoxicated with *haskalah*, of whom there are still many among us, will taunt me with my letter of August 4, 1877, in which I said: "I solemnly swear . . . to the last drop of blood in me that I must complete some course of studies. Even if the doctors tell me that because of all the work involved I will come down with tuberculosis, and that within two days after completing my studies I will die—I still will not stop." *And now I have abandoned the cause*—for no apparent reason, out of what the "enlighteners" would regard as womanish timidity. But I say to them: In 1877 I thought: "My life is meaningless; for I cannot live like a human being if I lack high culture and formal education." At the end of 1881 I was inspired by a sublime ideal, and I became a different man, full of a sense of purpose and spiritual satisfaction, even without secular schooling.

When I became convinced that it was not a lack of high culture that was the cause of our tragedy—for aliens we are and aliens we shall

remain even if we become full to the brim with culture; when my eyes were opened by the new ideal, and my spirit rose to a new task, in which, if all goes well, lies our eternal salvation—all the old ideals left me in a flash. Disdainfully I forsook my studies and threw myself completely into preparing myself to serve this new lofty ideal, though I did not yet know how I would serve it. For, basically, I could not then consider any other *métier* than writing articles, and the well from which articles are drawn does, after all, run dry. But how sweet and dear this idea became to me! All my life I had grieved over the decline of Jewish nationality and the thought that Jewry's existence as a nation was doomed. And now there lies before me a straight and sure path to the everlasting salvation of our people and its nationhood, a path to which the imperatives of life have brought me; and the salvation—I did not know whence and how it could come to us—stands before me in all its glory!

LET US NOT CONFUSE THE ISSUES (1882)

THE AUTHOR of the essay "Our Redemption,"³ whose words are followed avidly by all who know him, was in this case beside the point. In speaking of the ingathering of the exiles and the settlement of Eretz Israel, which is our only haven in this time of trouble, he confused this issue—which is plainly and simply a matter of life and without whose solution we are doomed as a people—with a relatively minor side issue, that of religious reform. For all the importance of this question, I cannot for one moment regard its solution an indispensable condition for settling the question of Eretz Israel, which, in other words, is: Are the Jews to be a living people or not? In face of this question all the others pale into insignificance.

The nation as a whole is dearer to all of us than all the divisions over rigid orthodoxy or liberalism in religious observance put together. Where the nation is concerned there are no sects or denominations, there are neither modern nor old-fashioned men, no devout or heretics, but all are Children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! Any one of Jewish seed who does not forsake his people is a Jew in every sense of the word. It has been well said that just as people do not have identical

faces so are they not of one mind. There is no logic in any desire for all the future Jewish settlers in the ancestral land to belong to the exact same sect. Let each man there follow the dictates of his conscience; let the *Hasidim*⁴ there put on two sets of *tephillin*,⁵ and let the more liberal recite the *Shema*⁶ and say the prayers where they will without *tephillin*; let the orthodox send their children to the *hadarim* they will establish there in the image of the *hadarim*⁷ of Lithuania and Poland, and let the *Maskilim*⁸ set up schools patterned after the secular schools of Europe. But let no man oppress his fellow. *Within our autonomous political life everything will find its place.*

Yes, let no man oppress his fellow. Let the orthodox know that *we are all holy*, every one of us—unbelievers and orthodox alike, we have been laying down our lives for the Sanctification of the Name for a whole year now, we are likely to continue laying down our lives for a long time to come, and we cannot see an end to it in the land in which we now live. For about a year now we have been as fish in the sea: our property has been freely looted, our homes have been booty, our honor held cheap, our wives and children put to shame, and our lives have been at the mercy of the oppressor. Every Sunday, on every Christian holiday, dread fills us. We always ask: What will tomorrow bring? Day and night we live in mortal terror. . . . All this has befallen us all, orthodox and freethinkers alike, and we have not betrayed our origins nor lost our courage; nor will we, in the days to come, swerve from the path of the God of Israel. God is in our hearts and our people is as a seal on our right arm—we will not renounce them when peace is restored. Is this not self-sacrifice for the Sanctification of the Name? Is not our entire community holy? Let the orthodox know that we are one with them in travail. All the plans and schemes that keep coming up for the salvation of our people originate with the *Maskilim* and the freethinkers. For brothers we have been and brothers we will remain for all eternity. Let each man conduct his private affairs as he sees fit, but let our national unity not be impaired.

But I must also caution our brethren the *Maskilim* and freethinkers against dividing Jewry into two camps by introducing the forbidden foods⁹ or doing away with the ritual bath,¹⁰ for the orthodox will refuse to eat in their homes or to marry among them. There is no doubt that if the liberals practice restraint, our orthodox brethren will be tolerant, and there will be peace among the Jews at this critical time. What reason cannot achieve, time will. Let all Jewry know that the true way of the Torah is not contention and civil war, and what

God favors ultimately emerges victorious. It has always been thus. There was a bitter battle between the worshipers of Baal and the worshipers of the one God, and in the end truth overcame falsehood and idolatry was wiped out in Israel. There was a long-drawn quarrel between the Sadducees and the Pharisees,¹¹ in which much blood was shed—to no avail. Finally, without any internal war, truth overcame falsehood and the Sadducees vanished. The Karaites¹² renounced the authority of the rabbis—and achieved nothing, for more than a thousand years later only an infinitesimal number remains, those whom the enemy did not kill off along with our own. Now the orthodox have a quarrel with the Maskilim. Let each and every one of them be assured that quarrel and hatred do not help truth overcome falsehood. Falsity vanishes of its own and truth is destined to win the day.

Let all special questions, whether religious or economic in nature, take second place to the general question, to the sole and simple aim that Israel be “saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” Unite and join forces; let us gather our dispersed from eastern Europe and go up to our land with rejoicing; whoever is on the side of God and His people, let him say: I am for Zion. To be sure, it is a great and complicated task, but is a nation born all at once? We must work for the development of our land, and we have no right to shirk this divine task. Let our men of great wealth immediately acquire property there with at least a small part of their fortunes. Since they themselves do not wish to leave their lands of residence, let each one of them at least invest a given sum in property in Eretz Israel, on which Jews who will cultivate the soil may settle, on terms agreeable to the investor. Let smaller capitalists, who are worth no less than ten thousand rubles, divide their money in half, half to remain here until the appropriate time and half to go into the purchase of land in Eretz Israel for themselves and for others, according to set terms. Let those with a minimum of one thousand rubles go to Eretz Israel now and buy land for themselves. All these people will be followed by masses who have nothing, and by numerous artisans and craftsmen. In due course, when conditions will have improved through agriculture, trade, and industry, prosperity will make it possible for the rest of our destitute to come there. So let us begin our labor. Our God, Who has sustained us and has not left us to the mercy of the lions among whom we have dwelt these thousands of years, will give us strength for our efforts to find rest.

Let us pay no heed to the renegades trying to lead us away from our fatherland. Let us not divide into *Mitnagdim*,¹³ *Hasidim*, and

Maskilim. This is the land in which our fathers have found rest since time immemorial—and as they lived, so will we live. Let us go now to the only land in which we will find respite for our souls that have been harried by murderers for these thousands of years. Our beginnings will be small, but in the end we will flourish.

THE FUTURE OF OUR PEOPLE (1883)

THE OPPONENTS of nationalism see us as uncompromising nationalists, with a nationalist God and a nationalist Torah; the nationalists see us as cosmopolitans, whose homeland is wherever we happen to be well off. Religious gentiles say that we are devoid of any faith, and the freethinkers among them say that we are orthodox and believe in all kinds of nonsense; the liberals say we are conservative and the conservatives call us liberal. Some bureaucrats and writers see us as the root of anarchy, insurrection, and revolt, and the anarchists say we are capitalists, the bearers of the biblical civilization, which is, in their view, based on slavery and parasitism. Officialdom accuses us of circumventing the laws of the land—that is, of course, the laws directed specifically against us. Indeed, the latter charge has some basis in our very Torah. Yocheved, Moses' mother, did not obey Pharaoh's law; she did not cast her son into the river but hid him from the Egyptian police in the bulrushes on the river bank, so that she could bring him back home after the search for Hebrew boys was over. We are also accused of crimes against art and music. Musicians like Richard Wagner charge us with destroying the beauty and purity of music. Even our merits are turned into shortcomings: "Few Jews are murderers," they say, "because the Jews are cowards." This, however, does not prevent them from accusing us of murdering Christian children.

Civilization, which could virtually deliver us from those persecutions which have a religious basis, can do nothing at all for us against the persecutions with a nationalistic basis. Civilization demands the right for each man to follow his conscience, thus doing away with religious hatred, but no civilization in the world has the power to demand that an alien be accepted by a strange family as if he were

a natural-born child of that family. Since all the work that an alien does and any job that he takes is no longer available to the members of the family, the latter can always say to the outsider: "You are causing me harm and I have no room for you, for you deprive me of my livelihood."

Indeed, there is, as yet, one community, the proletariat, which knows neither children nor aliens—only workers. But if this community should at some time and place gain power—then God protect us from such a day! We may be sure that when the mob is aroused—and evildoers are always trying to incite the mob—almost all of us will be put to the sword. We will be regarded as capitalists, and, as always, we will fill the role of the scapegoat, together with another role that has been bestowed upon us, that of a lightning rod. The self-appointed saviors of humanity among our youth, as well as the complacent who oppose the settlement of Eretz Israel, should take note of this.

Furthermore, not only can civilization and progress do nothing to eradicate anti-Semitic views, but indirectly they even help them along.

So that these words of mine should not appear to the reader as so much nonsense, I will clarify them.

It is evident that the over-all trend toward nationalism is not a regression, despite the assertions of the students of Roman cosmopolitanism; it represents progress which must ultimately do away with war and direct humanity, with all its nations, to the way of true unity. But this true civilization, i.e., the drive for national self-determination, is the very soil in which anti-Semitism flourishes—as nettles flourish in a green field, for there is no rose without thorns and no good without evil. Anti-Semitism is the shadow of our new and fine contemporary civilization; it will no more do away with anti-Semitism than the light will destroy the shadows it casts. That is why anti-Semitism is making such great strides.

We remember how, three years ago, when Marr¹⁴ came out with his anti-Semitic doctrine, we all jeered at him, made fun of his schemes, dubbed them an "anachronism," and said that they were about four centuries behind the times. But hardly four years have passed and the anti-Semitic trend has already swept almost all of Europe. It has shaken the world with petitions, riots, arson, congresses, speeches in parliaments, and so on. What now? In Vienna the public prosecutor asked one of the anti-Semites whether he thought it would be possible to pass a law in Austria restricting the residence of Jews and imposing a sufferance tax on them, etc. The latter replied: "In an

other ten years it will be possible!" And it seems that he has some basis for his opinion.

Needless to say, although the old barbarism has been polished and given a new gloss in our time, our situation is today more precarious than ever before. In the Middle Ages the Jews were, for the most part, persecuted at a given time and place. When they were persecuted in one place, they were quickly able to find refuge elsewhere; when, after a while, the oppressions began in the new country, they returned to their original home, for its inhabitants had already begun to feel the loss caused by the absence of the Jews, who were virtually the only merchants. Now it is different. Communication is rapid. The nations of Europe are just as adept in all branches of commerce as the Jews, so that they no longer need us. They are therefore able to apply pressure on us wherever and whenever they will—while we, where are we to flee? Is there a single European nation, France and England included, that has during the past year accepted any appreciable number of our wretched wanderers? And France and England are countries where anti-Semitism has not yet begun to flourish, for, at present, there is no place there for a nationalist movement. If those countries were truly opposed to cosmopolitanism, then France would have to renounce completely its claims to Alsace-Lorraine, and England would have to withdraw from Ireland, Egypt, etc. But cosmopolitanism is not long for this world, even in those countries. And what are our prospects in the days to come? That is too terrible even to think about.

But what is to be done? What remedy can we find so that the Jews will once and for all cease to be material for questions, debates, accusations, and degrading defenses. How can we make them feel completely secure about the future?

We must make a visible effort, and if we do not succeed now, which seems unlikely, then we will have to try again at the first opportunity. The main thing is that we ourselves, Jews the world over, recognize beyond doubt the need for this sacred task. Let us but begin to carry it out, and success is assured. There will be no lack of funds. I have already said that a nation of eight million people can raise ten million rubles to get the work under way. It is possible, in addition, to suggest a kopek¹⁵ collection. Whoever wants to support the national idea will contribute a kopek a week, to be saved for a given period in special boxes placed in every home, for the settlement of Eretz Israel. In a year this will add up to thousands of rubles. It is also possible to earmark given percentages of the sums donated in the synagogues, at weddings, at funerals of the rich, etc. Perhaps, too, a Jewish lottery

can be set up, so that there will be no more need for talk about the sale of shares in stock companies and the like. In a word, it is possible in some way or other to collect, with the permission of the government, huge sums to buy many large holdings in Eretz Israel from the Turkish government. The sums spent on the purchase of large holdings will be recovered from the money paid by individuals purchasing small lots and from the rent paid by the colonists. This, in turn, will make possible the purchase of additional large holdings, the building of roads, improvement of the irrigation systems, afforestation, etc.

If these ideas are not viable, there is nothing to prevent others from presenting better plans for the settlement of Eretz Israel.

We must make a beginning, and life and experience will teach us how to continue. This is certainly not a task for one year, or even for one generation. We can, however, rest assured that as we increase our efforts our strength will increase as well.

The enlightened segment of our people has become estranged from us only because our life lacks ideals of immediate appeal to them. The one modern ideal which we have had until now was petty and negative: to fight against our legal inequality. Let us only acquire high positive ideals and the best of the westernized and enlightened Jews will return to us. The masses, too, will hasten to join us. Man holds dear whatever others attempt to steal from him: In the Middle Ages our religion was attacked, so we held on to it with all our might; today, when our national identity is under attack, it will again become our most prized possession and we will shield it with the same devotion with which our ancestors defended our faith.

Work! Lay the foundation for a normal and healthy national life for the Jewish people, which has been persecuted in every time and place, but has never surrendered. Give it back its home, something which no people lacks, except the gypsies. Do not boast of stupid notions about the mission which is ascribed to us by all the sophists. Behold, we are scorned and derided, our blood is being let, we are dying of hunger, we are persecuted everywhere with unbounded barbarity, the whole world contemns us—and we are offered the consolation of a mission. We are cast in the role of teachers of all mankind—the very mankind which has been beating on us so long and so mercilessly! We have not been able to teach mankind, in more than three thousand years, not to beat poor wanderers who are bereft of a home and of protection—shall we teach mankind love, brotherhood, peace, etc?

Pay no heed to the desire for assimilation of our plutocrats in Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and elsewhere, and to the "enlightened" among us who follow after them. Do not expect them to take the lead in this holy task. When Antiochus condemned the Jewish people to death, its salvation did not come from Jerusalem, but from the Hasmonean village of Modin. The wealthy assimilationists of that capital, together with the proud Sadducees, submitted shamefully to the insolence of the Greek hangmen. It took the true sons of the people, the unbelievably courageous Hasmonean priests, to rescue Israel, and only afterward did Jerusalem, too, join with them. The eternal glory remained, however, to the vanguard of the redemption of Israel!

There are three paths open to us:

1. *To remain in our present state, to be oppressed forever, to be gypsies, to face the prospect of various pogroms and not be safe even against a major holocaust.*

2. *To assimilate, not merely externally but completely within the nations among whom we dwell: to forsake Judaism for the religions of the gentiles, but nonetheless to be despised for many, many years, until some far-off day when descendants of ours who no longer retain any trace of their Jewish origin will be entirely assimilated among the Aryans.*

3. *To initiate our efforts for the renaissance of Israel in the land of its forefathers, where the next few generations may attain, to the fullest extent, a normal national life.*

Make your choice!