



## *The Herzl Moed And Conference Hall &*

### *The Real Theodore Herzl*

Theodore Herzl, the man credited with being the founder of modern Zionism, was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1860. His parents, though Jewish, had no religious sentiment and young Herzl was educated in the spirit of the German-Jewish "Enlightenment" of the time. He attended a Jewish grade school, then a local high school, and finally an evangelical high school. Theodore Herzl showed promise at a young age in writing, but decided to study law at the University of Vienna. He joined the Germans' student society, but left after two years in protest over anti-semitism.

After graduation with a doctorate in law, Herzl worked several years in Germany and at the same time began to produce philosophical stories and plays. During this period he married and had three children. This was not a happy period in his life, searching for meaning a social reform, he left law and became the Paris correspondent for the Vienna Free Press, a liberal newspaper. During this time his social action consciousness turned towards the Jewish problems of anti-semitism. Herzl felt that the Jewish problem could simple be eradicated by organized mass conversion of the Jewish youth fused together with affiliation with the socialist movement.

In time, however, he came to realize that this was not a practical answer. During this time the notorious Dreyfus trial began in France in 1892. Herzl witnessed a miscarriage of justice together with riotous behavior of the French mobs when the Jewish officer, Dreyfus, was publicly humiliated. With the sounds of the French mobs chanting, "death to the Jews" stinging his sensitivity, Herzl became convinced that the salvage of the Jews was mass exodus from their present environment to a resettlement in a territory of their own. To this concept he now applied his creative and writing skills.

Herzl now began a new era in his life - convincing and organizing what turned out to be the World Zionist Organization. Herzl, who was completely cut off from his Jewish roots and brethren, felt that any territory would suffice. He turned his impressive writing skills to convincing the wealthy and influential Jews to support his ideas. However a loosely confederated organization called "Hovavy Zion" or "Hebat Zion" already existed in the eastern European countries. This organization, to which Herzl was unaware, was preparing young Jews to settle the land of Israel as agriculturists. The organization had the support of many of the wealthy Jews of that period.

When Herzl began to expound his ideas of a central world organization to mass move the Jews to some as yet unknown territory, he was met with mass resentment by the eastern European Jews who regarded him either as a madman or completely off the target. Herzl was not rebuffed and continued his promulgating his ideas. It did not matter to Herzl which country or territory was given to the Jews, to Herzl, the main concern was that the Jews be given an area to which they had their own dominion and hence the phenomena of anti-semitism would cease. Herzl's genius at organization and convincing slowly began to bear fruits. He began to publish his ideas on the solution to the Jewish problems. Slowly the initial rejection by the established Zionist organization began to wear down and he began to increase in popularity amongst the masses. Many people admired his ideas on organization and financial banking that would fund the Jewish settlement.

With Jewish support, Herzl now began a new stage in his aspirations. He began making political connections to further the territorial quest. Meeting with heads of states and ministers, he began making serious inroads towards his goals. With an organized financial support, the backing of the Zionist groups and the masses, Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress in 1897. At this stage he was named the president of the newly formed World Zionist Organization.

Herzl worked hard to find a territory for the Jews. Sinai and Cyprus were two territories under consideration. Then in 1903, the British offered Herzl the area called Uganda. At this time pogroms and oppression in Russia reached a new high. Herzl felt that taking Uganda would be justified. He submitted the Uganda plan to the sixth Zionist Congress. The proposal aroused strong opposition and resentment. The eastern European Jews regarded it as a betrayal to the dream of settling in the land of Israel. So strong and hostile was the opposition, it caused Herzl to write a written commitment to abandon the Uganda plan.

The fierce struggles that he had with the executive of the Zionist organizations proved too much for Herzl's heart. He suffered from a heart ailment and died seeking recovery in 1904. Although Herzl never lived to see his dreams fulfilled, his organizational skills moved the existing Zionist organizations, from small ineffective groups to a truly worldwide supported organization.

After his death, his reputation increased to that of a legend. He is credited with being the father of the modern Jewish state.