

ISRAEL & ZIONISM

The Lone Wolf

The 70th *yahrzeit* of Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky (1880-1940) was marked on July 11, at Mount Herzl cemetery in Jerusalem. There was nary a mention of it in the Israeli media—an extraordinary omission given that Jabotinsky was not only a founder of the Haganah and the supreme commander of the Irgun but also a towering Zionist theoretician and leader.

Jabotinsky was unwavering in his insistence that Zionism's immediate and uncompromising goal had to be Herzl's original vision of an actual Jewish state. His emphasis on ethnic pride and regard for military discipline made liberals uncomfortable and led enemies to slur him as a fascist, an odd charge against a passionate 19th-century liberal and advocate of women's rights.

Do Jabotinsky's uncompromising views, including on the territorial integrity of the Land of Israel, enjoy a 21st-century constituency in the Jewish state? Not in the Likud, which claims his political legacy. Even in death, it seems, Jabo remains a lone wolf.

—Elliot Jager

Read more: <http://jidaily.com/jabo/w>

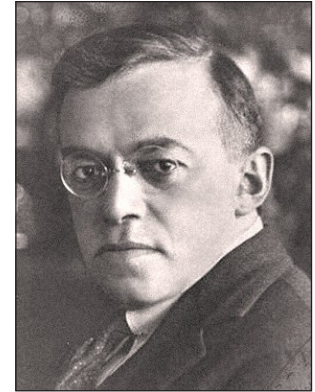
Further Reading

Sacrifices

Hillel Halkin, *New Republic*.

<http://jidaily.com/sacrifices/w>

In the end, the most remarkable thing about Jabotinsky's novel The Five (1937) is not that it was written by a man who, the year before its publication, was occupied day and night in leading his Revisionist party out of the



World Zionist Organization and founding a rump Zionist body after a negotiated truce between him and Ben-Gurion was voted down by the Histadrut, the Jewish labor federation of Palestine. The most remarkable thing about this novel is how good it is.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

The Conversion Conundrum

Narrowly averting a looming crisis within world Jewry, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu secured a postponement of prospective Knesset legislation making the Chief Rabbinate the arbiter of conversion in the Jewish state.

The Knesset bill itself was introduced by David Rotem of the Yisrael Beiteinu party, whose chief constituency is Israel's large group of recent Russian immigrants. Some 300,000 of these are not Jewish by religious criteria, and it has not been easy to settle on a conversion process attractive to them.

Until now, conversion, along with other flammable religious issues, has been dealt with through a longstanding status quo that has made the Supreme Court the final arbiter, as it was in 1988 when it ruled that non-Orthodox converts would be considered Jewish under the Law of Return if



New immigrants, 1999.

they were part of a recognized community abroad.

At one time the assumption was that peoplehood and religion were obviously and inextricably entwined. But now this

very assumption is being challenged from two directions: by Russian Jews who, living in Israel and serving in the army, have undeniably thrown in their lot with the Jewish people whether or not they are technically Jewish according to religious law, and by a significant current in American Judaism that has increasingly decoupled religious and spiritual life from a strong commitment to nation and people.

—Yehudah Mirsky
Read more: <http://jidaily.com/conv/w>

Further Reading

How To Fix a Broken System

Seth Farber, *Forward*.

<http://jidaily.com/fix/w>

Whatever the putative pluses and minuses of the Rotem bill, none of this is worth alienating Diaspora Jews, who feel as if their Judaism is under attack.

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ARTS & LITERATURE

In the Cage of Feeling

Last week marked the hundredth birthday of Natan Alterman, one of the greatest and most dramatic of modern Hebrew poets.

Born in Warsaw in 1910, Alterman arrived in Tel Aviv at the age of fifteen. There, in the 1920s, a circle of younger poets was consciously seeking to move away from the regnant Hebrew model of naturalism and classicism set by Chaim Nahman Bialik.

Alterman's first book was marked by dense vocabulary and enigmatic imagery. A second book has struck many readers as an uncanny prophetic imagining of the destruction of Jewish life in Europe and its

renewal in Zion. As Alterman's work progressed, the urgently implicit connections he was drawing between the Jewish past and his own time became increasingly evident.

All along, Alterman had also been creating another body of poetic work. In "journalistic" verse columns, he recorded his vigorous response to the events of his times in a voice balancing unfeigned sincerity with satiric acerbity.

—Yehudah Mirsky

Read more: <http://jidaily.com/cage/w>

Further Reading

Where Is the Silver Platter?

Israel Harel, *Haaretz*.
<http://jidaily.com/silver/w>

An event billed as featuring Alterman's work omitted any of the national symbols invoked by the poet who more than any other poet was identified with such symbols (see his "Song of the [Army] Companies" or "The Silver Platter"). There was no mention whatsoever of the Alterman of "This is my land and its fields, this the Jezreel Valley."



ISRAEL & ZIONISM

On Peace, Freedom, and Democracy

An excerpt from Natan Sharansky's letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, May 2, 2005:

I am writing to inform you of my decision to resign as Minister of Diaspora Affairs and Jerusalem.

In my view, the [Gaza] disengagement plan is a tragic mistake that will exacerbate the conflict with the Palestinians, increase terrorism, and dim the prospects of forging a genuine peace. Yet what turns this tragic mistake into



a missed opportunity of historic proportions is the fact that as a result of changes in the Palestinian leadership and the firm conviction of the leader of the free world that democracy is essential to stability and peace—a conviction that is guiding America's actions in other places around the world—an unprecedented window of opportunity has opened. Recent events across the globe, whether in former Soviet republics like Ukraine or Kyrgyzstan,

or in Arab states like Lebanon and Egypt, prove again and again the ability of democratic forces to induce dramatic change. How absurd that Israel, the sole democracy in the Middle East, still refuses to believe in the power of freedom to transform our world.

Alongside my concerns about the dangers entailed in a unilateral disengagement from Gaza, I am even more concerned about how the government's approach to disengagement is dividing Israeli society. We are heading toward a terrible rift in the nation and to my great chagrin I feel that the government is making no serious effort to prevent it.

Read more: <http://jidaily.com/sharansky/w>

HISTORY

Mainline Protestants and Israel

Politically, the institutions of mainstream Christianity have embraced much of the Left's antipathy toward Jewish national self-determination and a view of the Arab-Israel conflict in the black-and-white terms of oppressors and victims.

At a recent meeting of the policymaking body of the Presbyterian Church, a plank defaming Israel as an "apartheid" state failed to pass. But, while condescending to endorse Israel's right to exist, the Presbyterians simultaneously approved "for study" the disingenuous Kairos document, which labels the Jewish presence in Jerusalem and the West Bank as "aggres-

sion," "evil," and a "sin" that must be "resisted and removed."

This "Presbyterian answer" to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has left church leaders boasting that they may have "stumbled upon a way of building peace." In fact, what they have done is to place the Jewish state unjustly in the dock and to single it out for undeserved opprobrium—an occasion not for self-gratulation but for soul-searching.

—Elliot Jager

Read more: <http://jidaily.com/main/w>

Further Reading

The Religious Left and Israel

Mark Tooley, *American Spectator*.
<http://jidaily.left/w>

In the 1940s and 1950s, liberal mainline Protestant elites were typically ardent Zionists. The radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s shifted them to pro-Palestinian under the guidance of liberation theology, which portrayed Israel as the colonial oppressor. Such extreme anti-Israel stances do arouse the vocal ire of some liberal Protestant voices, who cherish Jewish interfaith ties and who also remember Israel's early history, when America's Protestant elite were enthusiastic boosters.

THE WEEKLY PORTION: EKEV (DEUTERONOMY 7:12–11:25)

Speak, Memory

<http://jidaily.com/ekev/w>

Like last week's reading, this week's focuses on the importance of memory in the formation of human goodness. In fact, it presents four key reasons to rely less on righteous laws than on a strong memory:

1. *Memory helps overcome fear.* The Israelites, about to invade the Promised Land, are terrified. God tells them not to be afraid, but to "well remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt." In overcoming fright, no amount of abstract reasoning can uplift the spirit so well as the memory of past success.

2. *Memory motivates good behavior.* After the horrors of Egypt and the trials of the desert, Israel accepted the Ten Commandments at Sinai. "Your fathers went down to Egypt," Moses now reminds them, "with seventy persons; and now the Lord your God has made you as the stars of Heaven for multitude. Therefore you shall love the Lord your God." The key word is "therefore": the commitment to goodness begins with gratitude and the recollection of salvation.

3. *Memory gives humility.* Forgetting the humbling experiences of life, people can come to believe that they themselves are the measure of all things. Especially in times of prosperity, the temptation is to "say in your

heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' But you shall remember the Lord your God."

4. *Memory gives love.* "Love therefore the stranger," we are told, "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." This commandment, which appears so often in the Torah, is grounded in the memory of enslavement—without which, it suggests, love itself is impossible.

The central message, it seems, is that codes of law, no matter how self-evidently true, are useless unless accompanied by a rich battery of memories and experience. Without these, we can't even begin to know how to be good. —David Hazony

PICKS OF THE WEEK

Religious Life

Teaching Talmud in Moscow

Judith Hauptman, *Jewish Week*.

<http://jidaily.com/moscow/w>

Now that the government permits the practice of religion, what is happening to the Jews of Russia? I spent this past May teaching at the Moscow State University for the Humanities, and found out.

We have not lost the Jews of Russia. The students I taught may rediscover their own Jewishness, or may, if they someday teach courses on Judaism at a university, help others come back to the fold. I returned to the United States full of hope.

People & Places

Revisiting a Scandal

Yair Ettinger, *Haaretz*.

<http://jidaily.com/scandal/w>

In 1965, it was reported—with great relish—in the non-ultra-Orthodox press that the leader of the anti-Zionist Neturei Karta had married a convert named Ruth Ben-David, who was many years his junior and that, by doing so, he had chosen to ignore a ruling by Neturei Karta's supreme judicial body. He paid dearly for this action: he was deposed as leader, ostracized, and forced to go into exile with his bride.

Only now, 36 years after Rabbi Amram Blau's death, has a private archive in which he kept his important documents been discovered.

Family Trees and Pedigrees

Edmon J. Rodman,

Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

<http://jidaily.com/trees/w>

At the weeklong 30th International Conference on Jewish Genealogy earlier this month in Los Angeles, I learned that tracing a family's lineage can depend on many things: readable records, geography, spelling, and luck. The conference appeared to be a virtual hotbed of genealogical serendipity.

As a result of computer searches, sessions like "Social Networking: New Horizons for Genealogists," and even genetic tests, the convention foyer was filled with plenty of newly found cousins talking and hugging.

History

Whatever Happened to Middle East Cosmopolitanism?

Sami Zubaida, *Open Democracy*.

<http://jidaily.com/whatever/w>

When your Middle Eastern friends now say to you, in sadness and wonder, "Where has all this sectarianism and fanaticism come from? We never knew who was Sunni or Shi'ite, did not care who was Copt or Muslim!," the chances are that they are part of the educated middle class, subordinated and impoverished by the totalitarian clan regimes and their cultural apparatus, the lucky ones migrating to the green pastures of the West, where the old Middle Eastern cosmopolitanism thrives in London and Paris.

Israel and Zionism

By the Waters of Lebanon

Bassem Mroue, *Associated Press*.

<http://jidaily.com/waters/w>

The discovery of large natural gas reserves under the waters of the eastern Mediterranean could potentially mean a huge economic windfall for Israel and Lebanon, both resource-poor nations—if it doesn't spark new war between them.

Israel says the fields it is developing do not extend into Lebanese waters, a claim experts say appears to be correct. But the maritime boundary between the two countries—still officially at war—has never been precisely set.

"I Am an Israeli"

Jennifer Rubin, *Weekly Standard*.

<http://jidaily.com/israeli/w>

Since 2006, Christians United for Israel (CUFI) has held hundreds of events nationwide, raising \$43 million for humanitarian work and inspiring Christian support for the Jewish state.

At CUFI's annual summit, John Hagee, the group's charismatic founder, held the crowd spellbound, explaining Israel's plight and the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran. He quoted Kennedy: "Today, in the world of freedom, the proudest boast is 'Ich bin ein Berliner.'" Hagee then pivoted: "Today, in the world of freedom, the proudest boast is 'Ani Yisraeli—I am an Israeli.'" He repeated the mantra again and again until 4,000 Christians stood shouting, "I am an Israeli."

Upstart Dove: An Interview with President Shimon Peres

Benny Morris, *Tablet*.
<http://jdaily.com/dove/w>

“Let me tell you a story. Amr Moussa—formerly Egypt’s foreign minister, then secretary of the Arab League—we had good relations. One day he comes to me and says, ‘Shimon, we are friends, take me to Dimona [site of Israel’s nuclear reactor] and show me what you have there.’ I said, ‘Are you crazy? I’ll take you there, you’ll see there’s nothing there, you’ll stop being suspicious, and they’ll fire me. And I’m not interested in you stopping being suspicious. Be suspicious.’”

The Nakba Obsession

Sol Stern, *City Journal*.
<http://jdaily.com/nakba/w>

For half a century, the United Nations has administered the refugee camp of Balata, inside the city of Nablus, as a quasi-apartheid welfare ghetto. The Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas does not consider the 20,000 residents of Balata to be citizens of Palestine; they do not vote on municipal issues, and they receive no PA funding for roads or sanitation. The children go to separate schools run by the UN’s refugee-relief agency. The “refugees” are crammed into an area of approximately one square kilo-

meter, and city officials prohibit them from building outside the camp’s official boundaries, making living conditions ever more cramped as the population grows.

In Balata, history has come full circle. During the 1948 war, Palestinian leaders insisted that the Arab citizens of Haifa and Jaffa had to leave, lest they help legitimize the Jewish state. Now, the descendants of those citizens are locked up in places like Balata and prohibited from resettling in the Palestinian-administered West Bank—lest they help legitimize the Jewish state by removing the Palestinians’ chief complaint.

If Israel and the Palestinians ever managed to hammer out the draft of a peace treaty, Mahmoud Abbas would have to go to Balata and explain to its residents that their leaders have been lying to them for 60 years, and they are not going back to Jaffa. Which, to state the obvious, is one of the main reasons there has been no peace treaty.

Arts & Literature

Looking at Dura Europos

Richard McBee, *Jewish Press*.
<http://jdaily.com/dura/w>

The significance of the 3rd-century Dura Europos synagogue murals paradoxically lies less in their historical importance as the

earliest example of Jewish narrative art than in their role as a paradigm of what is possible for contemporary Jewish artists. After all, we have absolutely no other examples of Jewish narrative art on this scale.

One might argue Dura is simply an aberration, a curiosity from late antiquity, never repeated. But of course that is its power, revealing the untapped possibilities of Jewish narrative based on Torah, midrash, and individual creativity.

Art Restoration

Thomas R. Kline, *Wall Street Journal*.
<http://jdaily.com/art/w>

Museums, collectors and art-market participants have been growing increasingly cognizant of the legacy of Nazi art looting, as well as of the current-day implications of thefts during other armed conflicts.

A dispute over *Portrait of Wally*, a Nazi-looted painting by Egon Schiele that ended up in the possession of Austria’s Leopold Museum, was settled July 20 shortly before trial. The surviving family of the Jewish victim has agreed to drop all claims in return for the museum’s payment of \$19 million, its allowing temporary exhibition of the painting at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, and its recognizing the family in signs accompanying the painting in future shows.

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