

Across The Aisle

A DIALOGUE OF ZIONIST ISSUES

by Rabbi Robert Binder

Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, brought about the establishment of the State of Israel, and views a Jewish, Zionist, democratic and secure State of Israel to be the expression of the common responsibility of the Jewish people for its continuity and future.

– The Jerusalem Program of 2004

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Across The Aisle

SCENE: An airplane bound from Los Angeles to Zurich. We see two sides of the aisle, three passengers on each side (in simple set terms, six chairs facing the audience, with an aisle between the two sections.) As the passengers are settling into their seats for take-off, we hear the Flight Attendant's voice over the intercom system.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Swissair flight 1897 from Los Angeles to Zurich. On our aircraft today we have several distinguished guests. I hope that you'll have a chance to get to know them in the course of our flight. In the window seat is Mr. Theodor Hartz... or... I don't think I can pronounce your name, sir...

THEODOR: That's all right. Everyone knows me.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Would you like me to take your hat or hang up your coat?

THEODOR: No, thank you. I don't care for the air-conditioning; I may be cold.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Very well, sir. Next to Mr. H. is Mr. Jacob Stewart. Would you like to tell us something about yourself, sir?

JACOB: I'm a third-year student at Stanford University. I'm majoring in French literature and psychology... I'm going to visit cousins in Switzerland and feel rather uncomfortable here, as everyone around me seems to be Jewish, and I'm not... well...

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: You're not Jewish? Not to worry, sir, there are many non-Jews in the world, too...

JACOB: No, that's not what I meant... I am, I guess, Jewish... by birth. It's just that I don't identify much with all that... you know, bagels and lox stuff.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: In any case, sir, I hope you enjoy your flight. Next to Mr. Stewart is Ms. Aviva Jones...

AVIVA: That's *Jonas*. I'm a *shalichah* – an emissary – for Conservative Judaism. I've been posted in Los Angeles for the past year-and-a-half in order to recruit young people for programs in Israel, and I'm going to Basle to celebrate the anniversary of the First Zionist Congress. I'm just so exci...

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FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Thank you. Across the aisle from Ms. Jonas is Mr. Yuval... *Manor?*

YUVAL: *(With Israeli accent.)* No, Man-or.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: May I see your passport, please?

YUVAL: Which one? My American or my Is...

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Your American passport, please.

YUVAL: *(Taking a passport from his jacket pocket.)* Here... You see? All up-to-date. Nothing to worry about. *Lo lid'og.*

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Are you continuing on to Tel-Aviv?

YUVAL: Yes, to see my mother. I go every year... Not that I'm a Zionist, you understand. I was born in Israel, but I live in Los Angeles already thirty-five years. And the synagogue I *don't* go to is Orthodox.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: *(Returning his passport.)* That's fine, thank you. Then we have Mr. Sanford...

SANDY: Sandy!

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: *Sandy* Forrest. Mr. Forrest is... would you explain for us, sir?

SANDY: Certainly. I am a junior project manager for the West Coast Jewish Federation on my way to check up on our humanitarian projects on behalf of Israel's Arab population. I feel very deeply that Israel should be the state of all its citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish alike,

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Thank you, sir. And next to Mr. Forrest is Ms. Meira Klepkov, an American rabbinical student on her way to Israel for a year of Jewish studies...

MEIRA: I visited Israel for the first time two years ago on birthright Israel and am looking for religious and spiritual fulfillment in the Holy Land. Naturally, I am distressed by the Orthodox monopoly on religious affairs in Israel...

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FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Now then, ladies and gentlemen, information about the aircraft and emergency instructions will be found in the pocket in front of your seat. Please fasten your seatbelts prior to take-off.

JACOB (*Passenger #2, a third-year student at Stanford University, to THEODOR [Passenger #1], seated next to him*): Say, Mister, would you like to take off your hat?

THEODOR (*Passenger #1, a bearded man in formal attire and top hat*): Why? Is it bothering you?

JACOB: Uh, no... I just thought that you might be more comfortable without it.

THEODOR: I am quite comfortable, thank you.

JACOB: Okay by me. (*Turns to AVIVA, on his other side.*) Takes all kinds, huh?

AVIVA (*Passenger #3, a young emissary [shalichah] for USY*): I wouldn't pay any attention, if you were. Maybe he knows something that we don't know.

JACOB: Is this your first trip to Europe?

AVIVA: Oh, no, I've been several times, but this is my first visit to Switzerland.

JACOB: Oh, yeah?

AVIVA: I'm going to attend a celebration of the Zionist Congress in Berne, Switzerland. It's very exciting.

JACOB: Oh, yeah? I thought the Zionists lobbied Congress in Washington – you know, like those people in AICUP.

AVIVA: Do you mean AIPAC?

JACOB: Whatever. I really don't get too involved in these things.

AVIVA: Do you live here in LA?

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JACOB: No, I'm from Denver, but I'm studying at Stanford. I'm taking time off from my junior year to visit relatives in Basle.

AVIVA: Oh, really? That's where the first Zionist Congress was held.

THEODOR: Did someone mention Basle?

JACOB: Yeah, but I was talking to her...

THEODOR: That was in 1897. Two hundred delegates came from all over Europe. The opening, in formal attire, was most impressive...

JACOB: You've really read up on all this, haven't you?

THEODOR: I keep it under my hat. "Were I to sum up the Basle Congress in a word - which I shall guard against pronouncing publicly - it would be this: At Basle I founded the Jewish State."

AVIVA: That sounds familiar...

JACOB: I thought the Jewish state was in Florida – or New York.

AVIVA: You must be kidding! Those are states that have a large percentage of Jewish residents, but they aren't *Jewish states* per se.

THEODOR: "Zionism seeks for the Jewish people a publicly recognized legally secured homeland in Palestine."

JACOB: I'm not so sure that that's such a great idea. The way my friends on campus talk about the denial of rights in Palestine...

AVIVA: Don't tell me you've been reading all that anti-Israel propaganda...

JACOB: I haven't read that much, but I saw some of the movies they showed during Israel Apartheid Week.

AVIVA: I don't believe this! Have you ever been to Israel?

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JACOB: No, I haven't, and I don't think I want to, either... All those concrete fences and humiliating checkpoints to keep Arab workers out...

THEODOR: "It being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine..."

JACOB: That's exactly what I mean! Why do Jews have to go to the Middle East and stir up trouble for the entire world?

AVIVA: Don't you think that Jews have ancestral rights in the land of Israel?

JACOB: Sure, if you believe all that stuff written in the Bible. Where did your family come from – Tel-Aviv?

AVIVA: No, actually my great-grandfather came from Poland.

JACOB: See – that's just what I mean!

AVIVA: Where is your family from?

JACOB: I told you, Denver.

AVIVA: No, I mean, before that...

JACOB: I don't know... Milwaukee, maybe... or Louisiana.

AVIVA: Didn't any of your family come from Europe?

JACOB: No – just these cousins that I'm going to visit. They originally came from Hamburg.

AVIVA: When did they move to Switzerland?

JACOB: Oh, a long time ago... Probably in the 1930's or thereabouts.

AVIVA: Refugees?

JACOB: No, they liked the mountains – for skiing.

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AVIVA: Skiing?

JACOB: Yeah, they're in the business. They manufacture skiing equipment: Rouben Ski International.

AVIVA: I see.

JACOB: It's kind of clever, actually, 'cause the family name used to be Rubinsky... get it?

AVIVA: Got it.

THEODOR: "...or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

JACOB: I guess we're going to have this the whole trip.

AVIVA: If we're lucky!

(Our attention switches to the other side of the aisle.)

SANDY (*Passenger #5, a young volunteer in a West Coast Jewish Federation on his way to volunteer in humanitarian projects on behalf of Israel's Arab population, seated in the window seat*): Do you mind if I get out for a minute? I have to go to the...

MEIRA (*Passenger #6, an American rabbinical student on her way to Israel for a year of study, in the middle seat*): I think you'll have to wait...

SANDY: (*Unfastening is seat belt and starting to get up.*) I'll just be a minute...

YUVAL (*Passenger #4, a former Israeli who served in the Israel Defense Forces in 1967 and who subsequently moved to Los Angeles to build a fast-growing electronics company, in the aisle seat*): *Rega, rega, rega...* You can't go now. The plane is about to take off.

SANDY: So am I...

YUVAL: You wait till red light is switched off, then try to get through the crowd of Hassidim who pray outside the toilet.

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MEIRA: They won't be praying now.

YUVAL: Is always praying. Every time I want to go back there, they try to grab me for a *minyan*.

MEIRA: Maybe they're short of a tenth... You shouldn't stereotype an entire group just because some...

YUVAL: Listen, *Hamuddeleh*, you don't know them like I know them. I grew up in Bnei Brak. Before the War, we lived in peace and quiet. Then they started to take over. Today, entire city is black.

SANDY: Like an inner city?

MEIRA: You mean Ethiopians?

YUVAL: No, you don't know Israel. "Black" means *them* – black hats, black coats, black... (*He interrupts his sentence.*) What's the use? Even here in LA we have them.

MEIRA: Has your synagogue been subject to Haredization?

YUVAL: What is that?

MEIRA: You know, the turn to the right... The intolerance of Orthodoxy in modern communities...

YUVAL: I wouldn't know. I am not so Orthodox.

MEIRA: But the synagogue you attend is Orthodox.

YUVAL: Not exactly. Is better to say, the synagogue I *don't* attend is Orthodox.

SANDY: You mentioned the War... Was that the Second World War?

YUVAL: *Mah pitom?* It was the Six Days War. Back then I was in... how you say it, communications? I invented a little electronic device that practically save the War.

SANDY: You did?

YUVAL: Sure. That's why I come to California, to manufacture it. I have big factory outside Monterey.

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SANDY: Do you manufacture in Israel, too?

YUVAL: No, market is too small... and too much bureaucracy. You know how it is.

SANDY: No, I don't, really.

YUVAL: My brother has factory for knitwear in Druse village, but who needs all that headache.

MEIRA: What headache?

SANDY: He's probably helping the Druse community to build their own economy. I'm working on a project like that for the Jewish Federation...

YUVAL: That is just philanthropy. My brother is a manufacturer.

SANDY: We're interested in getting local manufacturers involved in supporting projects in Israel. Perhaps your company would like to...

YUVAL: Is enough that I travel to Israel once a year to visit my family. I have no time for...

MEIRA: Do you have family in Jerusalem? That's where I'm going to study for the year.

SANDY: Really? What are you studying?

MEIRA: I'm in rabbinical school. This will be my third year of...

YUVAL: Women rabbis?

MEIRA: Yes. We've seen women's ordination in the Movement for some years now. In fact, most of my classmates are women...

YUVAL: Is not Orthodox.

MEIRA: Are you Orthodox?

YUVAL: I said, "not Orthodox."

SANDY: Didn't you say that the synagogue that you *don't* attend is Orthodox?

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YUVAL: Is not the same. Women rabbis cannot be Orthodox.

MEIRA: Well, not just now, of course, but in a few years, I'm sure that there will be...

YUVAL: Will never be. Not Orthodox.

MEIRA: How do you know so much about something that you know so little about?

YUVAL: You don't know what is like in Israel.

MEIRA: I've been to Israel! I went on a birthright trip two years ago.

SANDY: Oh, we're very interested in birthright at the Federation. We've been promoting it among young people in their 20's and 30's.

YUVAL: How long you spend in Israel?

MEIRA: We were there ten days. We saw everything, from the north to the south.

YUVAL: In ten days? You don't know Israel.

MEIRA: It gave me a tremendous insight into the land and its people.

SANDY: Did you visit any Arab or Druse villages?

MEIRA: We spent one evening in a Bedouin tent.

YUVAL: You don't know Israel.

MEIRA: Listen, maybe I didn't see all there is to see, but I got a wonderful feel for the culture.

SANDY: Are you going through Switzerland on your way to Israel?

MEIRA: I'll be participating in a conference on Jewish women's rights in Zurich. They're bringing together Jewish feminist organizations from all over the world to discuss major issues, such as *agunot*...

YUVAL: But not Orthodox.

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MEIRA: As a matter of fact, there are two women rabbis coming from Israel, one from the Masorti movement and the other from the Progressive Judaism movement.

YUVAL: Like I said, not Orthodox.

MEIRA: We have to start somewhere!

YUVAL: Start in Los Angeles. We have largest concentration of Israelis in North America – maybe as many as in Haifa or even Tel-Aviv. They all want to be not Orthodox.

SANDY: You mean they're interested in Conservative and Reform?

YUVAL: No, just not Orthodox. They are not religious.

MEIRA: But they're Jews!

YUVAL: You don't know Israel.

(We switch to the other side of the aisle.)

THEODOR: You know, when I was young, I thought a lot about what a Jewish state might be. I called it an *Altneuland*, a country that would be a combination of the old and the new. At the time, of course, there was just a trickle of Jews from Eastern Europe who went to Palestine to farm the land.

JACOB: Jewish farmers?

THEODOR: Yes. Some of them were given help to plant vineyards and develop a wine industry.

JACOB: Like in California?

AVIVA: They make kosher wines right in the Napa Valley.

THEODOR: The idea was to produce *Jewish* wine by Jewish workers – and encourage Jews in Europe to buy it.

JACOB: Was the wine any good?

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THEODOR: Some times yes, sometimes no. It didn't matter. We wanted to build up the land and make it a thriving center of Jewish life... but it was very difficult to convince European Jewry that they had a future in *Eretz Yisroel*.

AVIVA: Didn't they see the danger in remaining in Europe? I mean, couldn't they see the Holocaust coming?

JACOB: Holocaust?

THEODOR: This was long before anyone even conceived of a Holocaust, when Germany was the leading country in the world in science and civilization.

AVIVA: Until the rise of the Nazis in the 1930's...

THEODOR: That was probably around the time that your relatives left for Switzerland.

JACOB: How do you know that?

THEODOR: They could have gone to Palestine.

AVIVA: They probably couldn't get into America.

JACOB: Maybe they just preferred the Alps...

THEODOR: We needed farmers to revitalize the soil of *Eretz Yisroel*.

AVIVA: Have you ever been to Israel?

JACOB: No. But my grandmother offered to send me there after high school.

AVIVA: Why didn't you go?

JACOB: I wasn't particularly interested.

THEODOR: Like 87% of all North American Jews.

JACOB: Where do you get these statistics from?

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THEODOR: (*Points to his hat.*) It's all up here.

JACOB: Well, anyway, I'm on my way to Switzerland – obviously – and not to Israel.

AVIVA: You could always make a side trip...

THEODOR: Every Jew belongs in Israel.

JACOB: Do you really believe that?

THEODOR: I do.

AVIVA: Well, not every Jew is going to pick up and move to Israel. We still have to support a solid Jewish community here at home.

THEODOR: Where is "home"?

AVIVA: Well, let's say in the United States. If all the Jews moved to Israel, who would be left to support the Jewish state?

THEODOR: Didn't you say that you were attending a Zionist Congress in Berne?

AVIVA: Yes, but...

THEODOR: Then you should be a Zionist!

AVIVA: I am, but...

THEODOR: To be a Zionist means to live in Israel.

AVIVA: Not necessarily; to be a Zionist also means to help strengthen the State of Israel and the preservation of Jewish identity everywhere through the fostering of Jewish and Hebrew education...

THEODOR: I'm sure that at the First Zionist Congress we spoke specifically of fostering Jewish national sentiment and taking preparatory steps to establish a Jewish state, as a place of ingathering of all Jews.

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JACOB: Would you say that yours is an orthodox interpretation of Zionism?

YUVAL: (*leans across the aisle and breaks into the conversation*) Is not Orthodox! Most Jews in Israel are *not* Orthodox!

SANDY: Wait a minute! Let's see what we agree on, rather than what we *disagree* on.

JACOB: Who asked you? I just want to enjoy a quiet flight to Zurich!

MEIRA: Oh, in other words, you just came along for the ride.

JACOB: That's right.

MEIRA: Well, let me tell you something, buddy: we're all in this together; we're all Jews. You know, when it came to entering the gas chambers, they didn't ask if you were Conservative, reform, or Orthodox.

YUVAL: Again with the Orthodox!

AVIVA: I don't think that any one of us is what you call Orthodox. Mr. Top Hat over here (*indicating THEODOR*) may be the closest we have to tradition, but...

THEODOR: What tradition? I am *opposed* to tradition! I want to break the shackles of the *Galut* and create a secular Jewish state where Jews can live proudly, unburdened with the weight of the "tradition".

MEIRA: You're not a black hat?

THEODOR: My hat may be black, but what has that to do with it?

YUVAL: He's not Orthodox!

AVIVA: Okay, let's go back to the beginning. As originally formulated in Basle back in 1897, Zionism was intended....

THEODOR: ...to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine.

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JACOB: But that was accomplished long ago.

SANDY: Only in 1948.

MEIRA: What about Jews who *don't* live in Israel – or who aren't prepared to move there.

YUVAL: Like who?

MEIRA: You know what I mean.

THEODOR: Zionism is also meant to unite world Jewry in order to strengthen and foster Jewish national sentiment and national consciousness.

YUVAL: You see? No religion.

MEIRA: As a matter of fact, most Orthodox organizations shied away from Zionism, until an Orthodox Zionist party, *MIZRACHI*, was established in 1902. Officially speaking, the Reform movement opposed Zionism, as it ran contrary to their ideology. On the other hand, one of the first committed Zionists in the Conservative movement was Solomon Schechter, who headed the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in the early years of the twentieth century.

SANDY: Is he the one who established the Schechter day schools?

MEIRA: No, but the schools are named for him. In 1906, Schechter publicly advocated allegiance to the Zionist cause. He saw Zionism as the great bulwark against assimilation, proving a tower of strength and unity not only for the remnant gathered within the borders of the Holy Land, but also for those who shall, by choice or necessity, prefer what now constitutes the *Galut*...

JACOB: What's that?

MEIRA: The "Exile" – Diaspora – the dispersion of the Jewish people outside Israel.

SANDY: Like us?

YUVAL: No.

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MEIRA: Schechter described the *Galut* as a place of tragedy — where synagogues don't hold the same meaning as sacred institutions and the holy language of Hebrew is lost.

YUVAL: Is like I said...

MEIRA: He was frustrated by the fact that most people are so unfamiliar with Jewish literature and thought, and described it not only as a *Galut* of the Jews, but also as a Galut of Judaism.

AVIVA: Zionism is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. It is the common responsibility of the Jewish people for its continuity and future to ensure a Jewish, Zionist, democratic and secure State of Israel. It was Zionism that brought about the State of Israel's establishment.

JACOB: National liberation – I could subscribe to that.

AVIVA: Most of us feel a sense of pride and joy over Israel's existence and its significant accomplishments over the past sixty-plus years. Israel is reflected in our hopes and in our prayers. We say *Am Yisrael chai* ("The nation of Israel will live") and "Israel is our homeland."

YUVAL: Is Israel; your homeland? You live in Los Angeles!

AVIVA: So do you! But in my heart...

YUVAL: Your heart may lead you astray. It is in your *mind* that counts...

SANDY: Or in your *words* – or in your pocket! Jews have to support the work of ingathering the Exiles, integrating new immigrants, building the economy...

THEODOR: But we did all that! We still have to concentrate on shaping an exemplary society with a unique moral and spiritual character, rooted in the vision of the prophets, striving for peace and contributing to the betterment of the world...

JACOB: You sound like a prophet yourself!

THEODOR: If you will it, it is no dream!

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JACOB: I'll go for that!

YUVAL: (to AVIVA) And do you know who makes *aliyah* today? Only the Orthodox! Do you think any of your Conservative Jews will move to Israel?

AVIVA: I think that there are some who will actually consider what *aliyah* would mean for their lives. In my mind, the challenge is not to pressure people to make *aliyah*, but instead to encourage them to consider it as an opportunity or an alternative...

MEIRA: Do you tell them about the army?

AVIVA: Of course! We have to support Israel's security by reminding Washington that...

MEIRA: No, I mean, that their sons – and daughters – will have to serve in the army.

AVIVA: Well...

YUVAL: Americans do not want their sons to fight anywhere in the world. That's why the Jews here will vote "with their feet" – and stay at home.

SANDY: Were you in the army?

YUVAL: What you think? I had to. But not my sons...

SANDY: We must be concerned about Israel's security, but we must be equally concerned about Israel's social fabric. The fact that so many Jews immigrate to Israel from distressed conditions puts extraordinary pressures on Israeli society. Plus, absorbing hundreds of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia taxes Israel's resources. Because Israel is our homeland, we have a responsibility to help these new Israeli citizens reach their educational potential and develop their innate ability to contribute as full members of Israel's society.

JACOB: How often do you make that speech to would-be Zionists?

SANDY: It's not a speech! Well, okay, so I use a lot of these terms in Federation addresses, but it's true that we can make a difference by participating as Israel's partners in investing in her future.

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YUVAL: *L'shanah ha-ba'ah b'Yerushalayim.*

SANDY: That's the idea!

JACOB: What did he say?

MEIRA: He expressed the prayer that Jews all over the world say at the end of the Passover Seder: Next year in Jerusalem!

AVIVA: (to YUVAL) Do you make a *Seder* each year?

YUVAL: I am always *b'seder*.

AVIVA: No, I mean at *Pesach*.

YUVAL: Of course! Everybody makes.

AVIVA: Then you're religious!

YUVAL: No, is *national* holiday – how did you say it, “liberation”?

AVIVA: But it's a religious ceremony!

YUVAL: But not Orthodox!

JACOB: (to THEODOR) Is what they're talking about the same as the Zionism that you espoused so many years ago?

THEODOR: There have been significant changes over the years. For one, Israel was then a dream – a vision of the future; today, it is a reality. I thought that it would come about in fifty years, and I was right; but what happened in the next fifty years was quite beyond my expectations.

YUVAL: Is no more Zionists. We live in post-Zionist era.

AVIVA: That's not true! Zionism is needed more than ever! Look at the anti-Semitism we face all over the globe!

THEODOR: There should be no more anti-Semitism once the State is established.

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MEIRA: They hate us more than ever.

SANDY: It's because we've been so successful. Look at the miracles of making the desert bloom, the economy flourish!

AVIVA: Absorbing waves of new immigrants!

YUVAL: Holding our own against hostile enemies.

JACOB: I'll have to discuss this with my cousins in Basle. I think they have a daughter who's living in Israel...

AVIVA: Why don't you take this sourcebook with you? It outlines all the changes that have been made in the Zionist platform over the years.

JACOB: I'm not sure that I'll have time to read all that...

AVIVA: You have the long trip home – and you just may be curious enough to make a side trip to Israel and see for yourself.

JACOB: Oh, I don't know about that...

MEIRA: *(Handing him a card)* Here's my address in Jerusalem this year. I hope you'll look me up.

JACOB: Well...

AVIVA: *(Referring to the audience)* There may be other people here who want to learn more about Zionism in the twenty-first century...

SANDY: *(Standing up)* Let me tell you about the projects we're doing with communities in the North of the country...

FLIGHT ATTENDANT'S VOICE: Please take your seats as we are experiencing some turbulent patches...

MEIRA: What could be more turbulent than an argument about Zionism 12,000 miles above the earth?

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THEODOR: It seems heavenly to me.

JACOB: Heaven help us!

THEODOR: *(with a knowing wink)* He will.

(The passengers unbuckle their seat belts and begin distributing copies of the Sourcebook that follows [The Zionist Platform, 1897-2004] to members of the audience. The FLIGHT ATTENDANT takes the role of moderator, inviting questions from the audience and referring them to the appropriate participant in the “across the aisle” dialogue for discussion and debate. The audience should be encouraged to respond with their own opinions.)

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Ladies and gentlemen, our participants in the “across the aisle” dialogue are distributing copies of source material about the Jerusalem Platform as it has evolved over the years and will be shortly be available to answer questions you may have about their respective opinions and positions. Some of these questions may be:

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1. Which of these six “passengers” represents a Zionist position with which you can identify? Where do you agree or disagree?
2. Do you think that any one of the six “passengers” expresses ideas that should (or should not) be incorporated into the next draft of the Jerusalem Platform?
3. How important is Zionism in your life, or in the life of your children? What does that say about the current state of support (or criticism) of Israel in North America?
4. How do you envision the future of the Israel-Diaspora relationship? Should Jews in North America have a role in determining Israeli foreign policy?
5. How can young people develop a sense of “belonging” to the Jewish state and express their loyalties? Is there a contradiction between being “loyal” to your own country and at the same time “committed” to helping Israel?

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6. The passengers have minimized or omitted consideration of several major issues. How would any one of them relate to questions of security, economy, the culture clash, religion, foreign policy, censorship and future ties with neighboring states?

7. Ask each passenger to name an individual in either Israel or in North America with whom he/she could identify and who provides some measure of inspiration for facing the Jewish future. (The individual may not necessarily be someone currently alive; the writings of an author, essayist or politician may have influenced his/her views.

8. The journey is scheduled to end in Zurich, with most of the passengers continuing on to Israel. Imagine a group activity that they might share in Jerusalem or Tel-Aviv: a birthday celebration for Herzl, the planting of trees in a Jewish National Fund forest, the dedication of a new Masorti synagogue, entertainment in a Bedouin tent, etc.

9. Ask Herzl to evaluate his fellow passengers in terms of Jewish commitment, Zionist activity, identification with Israel's past, and realization of Israel's future. Then ask the passengers to counter his evaluation with their own estimation of his own plan has succeeded – or failed (or both.)

10. Each of the passengers is fairly committed to his/her own interpretation of Zionism. How would you try to convince each one to alter his or her views?



Across The Aisle

SOURCEBOOK ON THE ZIONIST PLATFORM, 1897-2004

The Basle Program

Zionism seeks to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured under public law. The Congress contemplates the following means to the attainment of this end:

1. The promotion by appropriate means of the settlement in Palestine of Jewish farmers, artisans, and manufacturers.
2. The organization and uniting of the whole of Jewry by means of appropriate institutions, both local and international in accordance with the laws of each country.
3. The strengthening and fostering of Jewish national sentiment and national consciousness.
4. Preparatory steps toward obtaining the consent of governments, where necessary, in order to reach the goal of Zionism.

Approved on August 31, 1897, at the First Zionist Congress, in Basle.

The Jerusalem Program, 1951

The task of Zionism is the consolidation of the State of Israel, the ingathering of exiles in *Eretz Yisrael*, and the fostering of the unity of the Jewish people.

The program of work of the World Zionist Organization is:

1. Encouragement of immigration, absorption and integration of immigrants; support of Youth Aliyah; stimulation of agricultural settlement and economic development; acquisition of land as the property of the people.
2. Intensive work for *halutzit* (pioneering) and *hachsharah* (training for *halutzit*).
3. Concerted effort to harness funds in order to carry out the tasks of Zionism.
4. Encouragement of private capital investment.
5. Fostering of Jewish consciousness by propagating the Zionist idea and strengthening the Zionist Movement; imparting the values of Judaism; Hebrew education and spreading the Hebrew language.
6. Mobilization of world public opinion for Israel and Zionism.

Approved on August 10, 1951 at the 23rd Zionist Congress, the first to be held in the State of Israel.

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The Revised Jerusalem Program of 1968

The aims of Zionism are:

- The unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life;
- The ingathering of the Jewish people in its historic homeland, Eretz Yisrael, through aliyah from all countries;
- The strengthening of the State of Israel, which is based on the prophetic vision of justice and peace;
- The preservation of the identity of the Jewish people through the fostering of Jewish and Hebrew education and of Jewish spiritual and cultural values;
- The protection of Jewish rights everywhere.

Adopted at the 27th Zionist Congress, held in Jerusalem, June 19, 1968.

Jerusalem Program of 2004

Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, brought about the establishment of the State of Israel, and views a Jewish, Zionist, democratic and secure State of Israel to be the expression of the common responsibility of the Jewish people for its continuity and future.

The foundations of Zionism are:

1. The unity of the Jewish people, its bond to its historic homeland Eretz Yisrael, and the centrality of the State of Israel and Jerusalem, its capital, in the life of the nation;
2. Aliyah to Israel from all countries and the effective integration of all immigrants into Israeli Society.
3. Strengthening Israel as a Jewish, Zionist and democratic state and shaping it as an exemplary society with a unique moral and spiritual character, marked by mutual respect for the multifaceted Jewish people, rooted in the vision of the prophets, striving for peace and contributing to the betterment of the world.
4. Ensuring the future and the distinctiveness of the Jewish people by furthering Jewish, Hebrew and Zionist education, fostering spiritual and cultural values and teaching Hebrew as the national language;

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5. Nurturing mutual Jewish responsibility, defending the rights of Jews as individuals and as a nation, representing the national Zionist interests of the Jewish people, and struggling against all manifestations of anti-Semitism;
6. Settling the country as an expression of practical Zionism.

Adopted at the Zionist General Council/Vaad HaPoel, held in Jerusalem, June 2004

MERCAZ and Masorti

The Conservative Movement, from its inception, embraced Zionism and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life. Originally, it did not have a separate Zionist organization because the ideals of Zionism were central to Conservative Judaism. However, as the modern State of Israel developed, the very powerful Religious Affairs Ministry did not sanction Conservative/ *Masorti* Judaism, and disqualified its institutions from recognition, authority, and funding. In order to help these institutions enrich the lives of those Israelis who have been disenfranchised and alienated by the “religion of the state”, it became necessary to create a new entity that would represent the interests of Conservative/ *Masorti* Judaism and allow it to make its unique contribution to the quality of religious life in Israel.

Thus, in 1979, the leadership of the Conservative Movement founded *MERCAZ* as the Movement’s official Zionist organization and its entry point into the international arms of the Zionist Movement: The World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency for Israel. *MERCAZ* is the Zionist organization that serves the interests of the Conservative/*Masorti* Movement around the world. It is the Zionist conscience of our Movement and the guarantor for proper recognition and funding for Conservative/*Masorti* programs and institutions around the world. Among other things, *MERCAZ* is the advocate and the force which guarantees religious stream funding, more than \$2 million annually from the WZO and Jewish Agency, that is so vital to our Movement.

In the United States and Canada, *MERCAZ* must serve as the Zionist conscience and Zionist resource for all arms of our Movement. Since the Conservative Movement believes that Israel and Zionism are essential components in Jewish life, we maintain an organization whose mission is the promotion of Zionist education and activities, Hebrew language study, Israel programs for youth and adults, and *aliyah*.

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MERCAZ is the Hebrew word for “center” and was chosen because Zionism is central to Conservative Judaism, and because Conservative/ *Masorti* Judaism can play a central role in enhancing the quality of religious life in Israel, which is currently not embraced by a large part of Israeli society. *Masorti* Judaism offers meaningful religious alternatives which until recently were missing from the landscapes of Israeli life.

Masorti is the name of the Conservative Movement in Israel. Founded also in 1979, it is derived from a Hebrew word that means “tradition,” and represents a modern and non-coercive approach to traditional Jewish life. It considers itself pluralistic in its commitment to religious tolerance and is dedicated to Jewish tradition and *halachah* (law) with an open and positive approach to the modern world, to democratic culture and to Zionism. The *Masorti* Movement boasts more than 50,000 members and affiliates of its congregations and programs. *Noar Masorti* (NOAM) is the youth program of the *Masorti* Movement and USY’s sister movement.

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A Brief Biography of Herzl

Theodor Herzl (Hebrew: בנימין זאב הרצל, **Binyamin Ze’ev Herzl**) (May 2, 1860 - July 3, 1904) was an Austro-Hungarian journalist and the father of modern political Zionism.

Theodor Herzl was born in Pest, Hungary. When Theodor was 18, his family moved to **Vienna, Austria**, where he studied law. After a brief legal career in Vienna and **Salzburg**, he devoted himself to **journalism** and **literature**, working as a correspondent for the ***Neue Freie Presse*** in **Paris**, occasionally making special trips to **London** and **Constantinople**. Later on, he became literary editor of *Neue Freie Presse*, and wrote several comedies and dramas for the Viennese stage.

As the **Paris** correspondent for *Neue Freie Presse*, Herzl followed the **Dreyfus Affair**, a notorious **anti-Semitic** incident in **France** in which a **French Jewish** army captain was falsely convicted of spying for **Germany**. He witnessed mass rallies in Paris following the Dreyfus trial where many chanted “Death to the Jews!” Herzl came to reject his early ideas regarding **Jewish emancipation** and **assimilation**, and to believe that the Jews must remove themselves from Europe and create their own state.

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In June, 1895, he wrote in his diary: "In Paris, as I have said, I achieved a freer attitude toward anti-Semitism... Above all, I recognized the emptiness and futility of trying to 'combat' anti-Semitism." However, in recent decades historians have downplayed the influence of the **Dreyfus Affair** on Herzl, even terming it a myth. They have shown that, while upset by anti-Semitism evident in **French society**, he, like most contemporary observers, initially believed in Dreyfus's guilt and only claimed to have been inspired by the affair years later when it had become an international **cause celebre**. Rather, it was the rise to power of the anti-Semitic demagogue **Karl Lueger** in Vienna in 1895 that seems to have had a greater effect on Herzl, before the pro-Dreyfus campaign had fully emerged. It was at this time that he wrote his play "The New Ghetto", which shows the ambivalence and lack of real security and equality of emancipated, well-to-do Jews in Vienna. Around this time Herzl grew to believe that anti-Semitism could not be defeated or cured, only avoided, and that the only way to avoid it was the establishment of a Jewish state. In **Der Judenstaat** he wrote:

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The Jewish question persists wherever Jews live in appreciable numbers. Wherever it does not exist, it is brought in together with Jewish immigrants. We are naturally drawn into those places where we are not persecuted, and our appearance there gives rise to persecution. This is the case, and will inevitably be so, everywhere, even in highly civilised countries – see, for instance, France – so long as the Jewish question is not solved on the political level. The unfortunate Jews are now carrying the seeds of anti-Semitism into England; they have already introduced it into America.

From April, 1896, when the **English** translation of his *Der Judenstaat* (*The State of the Jews*) appeared, Herzl became the leading spokesman for **Zionism**, although Herzl later on had confessed to his friend **Max Bodenheimer**, that he "wrote what I had to say without knowing my predecessors, and it can be assumed that I would not have written it, had I been familiar with the literature".

Herzl complemented his writing with practical work to promote Zionism on the international stage. He visited **Constantinople** in April, 1896, and was hailed at **Sofia, Bulgaria**, by a Jewish delegation. In London, the **Maccabees** group received him coldly, but he was granted the mandate of leadership from the Zionists of the **East End of London**. Within six months this

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mandate had been approved throughout Zionist Jewry, and Herzl traveled constantly to draw attention to his cause. His supporters, at first few in number, worked night and day, inspired by Herzl's example.

In June 1896, with the help of the sympathetic Polish emigre aristocrat Count Philip Michael Nevlenski, he met for the first time with **Abdul Hamid II** to put forward his proposal for a Jewish state in Palestine. However the Sultan refused to cede **Palestine** to Zionists, saying, "if one day the Islamic State falls apart then you can have Palestine for free, but as long as I am alive I would rather have my flesh be cut up than cut out Palestine from the Muslim land."

In 1897, at considerable personal expense, he founded *Die Welt* of **Vienna, Austria-Hungary** and planned the **First Zionist Congress** in **Basel, Switzerland**. He was elected president (a position he held until his death in 1904), and in 1898 he began a series of diplomatic initiatives intended to build support for a Jewish country. He was received by the **German emperor** on several occasions, one of them in **Jerusalem**, and attended **The Hague Peace Conference**, enjoying a warm reception by many other statesmen.

In 1902-03, Herzl was invited to give evidence before the British Royal Commission on Alien Immigration. The appearance brought him into close contact with members of the British government, particularly with **Joseph Chamberlain**, then secretary of state for the colonies, through whom he negotiated with the **Egyptian** government for a charter for the settlement of the Jews in **Al 'Arish**, in the **Sinai Peninsula**, adjoining southern Palestine.

In 1903, Herzl attempted to obtain support for the Jewish homeland from Pope Pius X. Cardinal **Rafael Merry del Val** explained to him the Church's policy of *non possumus* on such matters, saying that as long as the Jews deny the divinity of Christ, the Church certainly could not make a declaration in their favor.

On the failure of that scheme, which took him to **Cairo**, he received, through **L. J. Greenberg**, an offer (August 1903) on the part of the British government to facilitate a large Jewish settlement, with autonomous government and under British **suzerainty**, in **British East Africa**.

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At the same time, the Zionist movement being threatened by the Russian government, he visited **St. Petersburg** and was received by **Sergei Witte**, then finance minister, and **Viacheslav Plehve**, minister of the interior, the latter of whom placed on record the attitude of his government toward the Zionist movement. On that occasion Herzl submitted proposals for the amelioration of the Jewish position in **Russia**. He published the Russian statement, and brought the British offer, commonly known as the "**Uganda Project**," before the Sixth Zionist Congress (Basel, August 1903), carrying the majority (295:178, 98 abstentions) with him on the question of investigating this offer, after the Russian delegation stormed out.

In 1905, after investigation, the Congress decided to decline the British offer and firmly committed itself to a Jewish homeland in the historic Land of Israel.

Herzl did not live to see the rejection of the Uganda plan; he died in **Edlach, Lower Austria** in 1904 of heart failure at age 44. His will stipulated that he should have the poorest-class funeral without speeches or flowers and he added, "I wish to be buried in the vault beside my father, and to lie there till the Jewish people shall take my remains to Palestine".

In 1949 his remains were moved from **Vienna** to be reburied on **Mount Herzl** in **Jerusalem**.

Meet the Passengers

Note: *The participants portraying the passengers in the script should familiarize themselves with the following brief "background checks" and be able to elaborate on the positions they espouse.*

1. **Theodor Herzl** – see brief biography, above.

2. **Aviva Jonas**, a young emissary (*shaliachah*) for the Conservative Movement in Los Angeles. Born in Minnesota, Aviva made *aliyah* to Israel when she was eight years old and returned to North America as a representative of the Movement last year. Her primary work is in recruitment of young people for programs in Israel. On this particular trip, she is to planning to attend a celebration of the Zionist movement in Basle, Switzerland. It is actually the 150th anniversary of Herzl's birth. Aviva is a fervent Zsionist, educated in Israeli *dati mamlachti*

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(national-religious) schools and participated in the *Noam* youth movement of the Masorti Movement. She is bright, open and engaging, believes in Israel first, no matter what, but has been exposed over the years to mainstream American Jewish thinking through her parents, frequent visitors from the USA, and occasional trips to relatives in the States.

3. **Jacob Stewart**, a third-year student at Stanford University, is on his way to visit Swiss relatives whom he has never met before. He has not had a Jewish education and knows very little of the Jewish people and of Israel itself. Even his knowledge of the Holocaust is minimal. He is not even aware that his Swiss relatives originally fled the Nazis in the 1930's. He has associated with left-wing students at university and read much of the anti-Israel diatribes in the local and university press. He holds humanitarian values and is a firm believer in freedom and justice for all.

4. **Yuval Manor** (accent on the second syllable) is a former Israeli (*yored*) who served in the Israel Defense Forces in 1967 and who subsequently moved to Los Angeles to build a fast-growing electronics company. He has few Jewish connections in California, but maintains that "the synagogue that I won't attend must be Orthodox." He has knowledgeable about Israel's past history and is familiar with the current scene, particularly among the non-observant community, never having been exposed to religious life either at home or in school. His opinions have been shaped by his personal experiences in the army and in the Israeli business world. He has a sentimental place in his heart for the homeland, but is more interested in his individual needs and financial well-being.

5. **Sandy Forest** is a young volunteer in a West Coast Jewish Federation on his way to volunteer in humanitarian projects on behalf of Israel's Arab population. He had a minimal Jewish education (up to bar mitzvah), but has visited Israel several times, has close friends there, and has a strong feeling for the country, even though his historical knowledge and religious commitment are weak. Nevertheless, he feels strongly that all of Israel's inhabitants are entitled to equal rights and is keenly interested in improving the lives of all its citizens, but especially the Arabs and Druse. He is up-to-date on the various position papers of AIPAC and Federation newsletters about Israeli and American foreign policy.

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6. **Meira Klepkov** is an American rabbinical student on her way to Israel for a year of study. She attended a Jewish day school and high school, as well as Jewish summer camps. After a first experience in Israel on the birthright program, she decided to pursue a more intensive course of Jewish studies and has spent the past two years at a training school for Conservative rabbis. She is looking for religious and spiritual fulfillment and is distressed by the Orthodox monopoly on religious affairs in Israel. Her values are both liberal and feminist, and she seeks to apply the rabbinic wisdom she has acquired to current politics and policies.