

THE WEXNER FOUNDATION

From the Balcony: The Art of Zionist Thought and Israeli Identity

Session One: Running 'From' and Running 'Toward'



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**Samuel Hirszenberg (Poland & active in Palestine, 1865-1908),
1899**

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1. Leo Pinsker (Odessa, 1821-1891),

Auto-emancipation: An Appeal to his People by a Russian Jew, 1882

The essence of the problem lies in the fact that in the midst of the nations among whom the Jews reside, they form a distinctive element which cannot be assimilated, which cannot be readily digested by any nation . . . The Jewish people has no fatherland of its own, though many motherlands; it has no rallying point, no center of gravity, no government of its own, no accredited representatives. It is everywhere a guest, and nowhere at home . . . The ghostlike apparition of a people . . . without land or other bond of union. . . , could not fail to make a strange and peculiar impression upon the imagination of nations . . . To sum up . . . : For the living, the Jew is a dead man; for the natives, an alien and a vagrant; for property holders, a beggar; for the poor, an exploiter and a millionaire; for patriots, a man without a country; for all classes, a hated rival.

2. Theodor Herzl (Budapest/Vienna, 1860-1904),

"A Solution to the Jewish Question," 1896

In countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers; and often by those who were not yet domiciled in the land where Jews had already made experience of their suffering. Yet, in spite of it all, we are loyal subjects . . . Let the sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the requirements of the nation—the rest we shall manage ourselves . . .

3. Chaim Nahman Bialik (Ukraine/Palestine, 1873-1934),

"The City of Slaughter," 1904

Arise and go now the city of slaughter; into its courtyard wind thy way . . . Stifled in filth, and swallowing their blood! The lecherous rabble portioning for booty their kindred and their flesh! Crushed in their shame, they saw it all; they did not stir or move . . . Those who survived this foulness . . . How did their menfolk bear it, how did they bear this yolk? They crawled forth from their holes, they fled to the house of the Lord . . . to the Rabbi's house they flitted: Tell me O Rabbi, is my wife permitted to me? The matter ends; and nothing more. And all is as it was before . . . Concealed and cowering—the sons of Maccabees!

Reflective Question

Thinking back to the early years of the Zionist project, which of these texts do you find most compelling and why? What strikes a deep chord in you? And what challenges you?

Zionist Challenge

In regard to the modern State of Israel, what are we running from and toward today?

For questions or comments, Matt can be reached at rabbimattberkowitz@gmail.com