



Zionism 2025: Israel as National Liberation Movement

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The Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) teaches that man attains “at seventy, fullness of years, at eighty, the age of strength, at ninety, a bent body, and at one hundred, as good as dead and gone completely out of the world.” (5:21). Zionism in 2025 celebrated Israel’s 77th birthday and must now look forward toward its 100th birthday. It is time to use the “fullness of years” and “strength” to ensure that the State of the Jews will still be here (!) and able to confront new challenges with vigor and creativity. To that end, I propose that the State of Israel must re-adopt its original mission as a national liberation movement of the Jewish people and push the boundaries of its imagination about the future of the Zionist project.

After October 7th, the primary rationales for Zionism as a place where Jews could find safe haven and self-determine within the boundaries of their own state were once again reified. For better and for worse, the past 18 months have proved to be a re-litigation of the old historical themes of the Zionist idea — can and will a state truly provide a refuge from global antisemitism? Does HAMAS (and allies of the Palestinians around the world) fully recognize the legitimacy of a Zionist entity anywhere between the river and the sea in 2025? Are the current boundaries of the State of Israel viable in light of the violent threats on its borders? Is Israel still a part of the family of nations or on the road to becoming a pariah state? These are all pressing questions — one that I argue can be answered by resurrecting another strain of Zionism that seems to have been lost to history when the State of Israel was born in 1948.

What does it mean to live as a national liberation movement after fulfilling the dream of statehood? Once again, it requires asserting the right for the State of Israel to thrive in harmony and security alongside its neighbors. It necessitates liberating Israel from its enemies without, but also from outdated paradigms from within that have prevented Zionists (and sometimes “capital Z” Zionism itself) from making peace. [It should go without saying, but to be clear, national liberation for the Jewish people does not and should not compromise the ability for peaceful and law-abiding Palestinians to also

achieve their own dreams of statehood within viable borders.] National liberation is also an invitation for collective unity — to overcome the profound ruptures in Israeli society between Jews and Arabs, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi (and other Jews of Color), religious and secular, rich and poor, native-born and immigrant. Mostly, it is a call to action to restore the original intentions, energies, consensus, and even arguments for the sake of heaven behind Zionism that have often ossified as the State of Israel has entered its Golden Years.

Many states suffer difficult transitions from national liberation movement to statehood — Israel is not the only country that has seen territorial disagreements, unstable or corrupt governance, internal schisms, kleptocracy, and a dissipation of the spirit of “if you will it, it is no dream!”. Unfortunately, some of these nations have become failed states or ceased to exist when swallowed by their neighbors in their weak condition, a true cautionary tale for Zionism. Yet, Israel has also seen progress beyond all historical imagination — Herzl could not possibly recognize the state he pondered looking over the Danube in the 19th century. Yet, one of the main tenets of Herzl’s national liberation aspirations was to bring into being a State of the Jews — not a Jewish State. As Israel looks towards its 100th birthday, it must resolve this internal contradiction between a self-conscious state of Jewish religion, or a nation that will retain the character of being the expression of self-determination of the Jewish people while also remaining a democracy.

By reclaiming the original pillar of Zionism as a national liberation movement, the State of Israel and her allies can imbue the State of Israel with a new imagination of its vision, mission, and boundaries as it both looks backward toward the past but also forward toward a bright future.

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