

# Einstein, Zionism and Israel: Setting the Record Straight



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## ABSTRACT

*The Zionists, particularly political Zionists, are too quick to claim and label Nobel Laureate Albert Einstein as a Zionist. How valid or accurate is this claim? This paper examines that issue drawing on Zionist as well as Jewish sources and attempts to set the record straight.*

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Did Albert Einstein support the political Zionism that led to the establishment of the State of Israel? Did he later politically support the Zionist state of Israel until his death? Popular answers to these questions might be inaccurate. Indeed the answers make up a common **MYTH, or at least, a misperception.**

What? Are we talking about the same Einstein? Did he not identify himself as “a strong devotee of the Zionist idea” in 1929? While addressing a meeting, did he not begin with: “Ten years ago, when I first had the pleasure of addressing you in behalf of the Zionist cause ...”? Didn't Einstein deliver a speech entitled “Our Debt to Zionism” in 1938?

The answer to all these questions is “yes”. Then, how can it be a myth or misperception? Well, that is the topic of this essay. I only request that conscientious and inquiring minds defer judgment, until they peruse this essay completely.

The subject of this essay is important and relevant not merely for historicity, but also for an overriding reason. Einstein's greatness and impact as a scientist are all too well known. However, his views and contribution as a human being and a philosopher on a myriad of major issues of our time are still worth exploring and pondering. There is another special relevance of this subject to the ongoing Middle East conflict. Even if we desire to look beyond what has transpired in the past, we all (Jews and non-Jews, Arabs and non-Arabs, Muslims and non-Muslims, western or eastern) can benefit from the insight, vision and values of this great humanist and a servant of, in his own words, “truth and justice.”

## The Propaganda<sup>1</sup>

That Einstein was a Zionist, plain and simple, is a myth perpetuated by the pro-Israel media. Their motive behind an unqualified portrayal of Einstein as Zionist and pro-Israel--to distort public perception of him, is understandable. The tactics and methods of such distortion of reality in regard to Israel, and its allies or adversaries, are quite well-known. Since Einstein was undeniably one of the most towering figures of the 20th century's scientific community, his endorsement for political Zionism and Israel is an enormous political capital to pass up. But more importantly, if he was not portrayed as a pro-Israel Zionist, people most likely would be curious about his real views. Such curiosity—and follow-up knowledge--could incur significant liability against political Zionism and Israel. To prevent this, exploitation of the mighty Zionist media seemed most convenient, to propagate ad nauseam what is contrary to the truth, create a MYTH about the connection between Einstein and Zionism (political, to be specific) and suppress all information contrary to that which is put out by that media. It's a fortress almost impossible to break through.

In this age of internet, try searching ("all the words" option) for Einstein and Zionism or Einstein and Israel; you'll find that almost all relevant entries at the top<sup>2</sup> (until this essay was available online) present Einstein as pro-Zionism, pro-Israel, with no distinction among types of Zionism. If the searcher did not seek beyond customarily available data, if he did no additional due diligence, he would easily remain outside of the fortress. For example, if you did that search using Google, the top entry would be something like "Albert Einstein on Zionism". If you click on it, you would be at<sup>3</sup> and it would flash a quote by Einstein saying: *"Zionism springs from an even deeper motive than Jewish suffering. It is rooted in a Jewish spiritual tradition whose maintenance and development are for Jews the basis of their continued existence as a community."* Notable is the absence of a citation or reference, which is unusual. It is possible they want you to read the quote but not see its context. It is also likely the context might have information damaging to the bulwark of Zionism.<sup>4</sup>

Below are some samplers from online and other sources:

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<sup>1</sup> No one should be shocked at the mentioning of "propaganda" in this context. The circle of political Zionists that blindly support the State of Israel is intoxicated with propaganda. That's the view of Nahum Goldmann, one of the leading Zionists, who was the president of World Zionist Congress (later combined with World Zionist Organization) during 1955-1977. In understanding the position of Einstein, where in his characteristic way of a non-politician, Einstein was measured and tactful in issues pertaining to his Jewish people, Goldmann was a Zionist leader and blunt in sharing his wisdom and observations for the interest of his own people. We will be referring to him to better understand some of the things that Einstein had said with almost prophetic insight, which later were realized as expressed in words of some Jewish/Zionist leaders like Goldmann. In regard to propaganda, Goldmann writes in *The Jewish Paradox*:

[T]he Israelis overestimate the importance of propaganda and 'public relations'. The Israeli press keeps saying: 'Our propaganda is badly handled, we have a poor image', and so forth. I am familiar with the subject, since the World Zionist Organization has spent millions of dollars on propaganda. Well, I regret that, because it is worth very little. The decisive factor to influence world opinion is the character of Israel's policies, and if those policies are criticized by the majority of the states, the best propaganda is helpless. The Israelis have inherited this misjudgement and this infatuation for slogans from the Americans. In the United States, everything is sold by what they call 'Madison Avenue' methods, from the street where their biggest advertising firms are based. This technique may be terrific for launching a brand of soap or toothpaste, or even a new newspaper, but not when it comes to disseminating a political idea by distorting it." [p. 62]

<sup>2</sup> This has changed since the writing and availability of this article online [January 2000]

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Quote/einsteinq.html>

<sup>4</sup> The citation has been added recently. It wasn't there when this essay was originally put online. Possibly someone pointed out the lapse and it has been addressed.

"Another important aspect of Einstein's politics during the 1920s was a strong belief in [Zionism](#). Einstein was drawn to the Zionist cause as a result of the influence of Chaim Weizmann, a Russian Jew who had recently persuaded the British government to issue the famous Balfour Declaration, declaring its full support for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine." [Spark Notes: "[Pacifism and Zionism](#)"]

"The two social movements that received his full support were pacifism and Zionism. During World War I he was one of a handful of German academics willing to publicly decry Germany's involvement in the war. After the war his continued public support of pacifist and Zionist goals made him the target of vicious attacks by anti-Semitic and right-wing elements in Germany. ... While continuing his efforts on behalf of world Zionism, Einstein renounced his former pacifist stand in the face of the awesome threat to humankind posed by the Nazi regime in Germany." [Samuel Zwetchkenbaum, [Albert Einstein, 1879-1955](#)]

"When the greatest scientist of our age died on April 18, 1956, at the age of seventy-six, the [New York] Times in the course of its eulogy referred to 'Israel, whose establishment as a state he had championed.' ... In late March 1972 the *New York Times* published ... a three-column photograph of Einstein with Israeli Premier David Ben-Gurion, and the caption read: 'Einstein papers tell of scientist's efforts toward the creation of Israel.' [Lilienthal, p. 340]

But if the impact of Einstein's scientific thought on the general ideas of his time is in some doubt, there can be none about the relevance of his non-scientific views to one of the most positive political phenomena of our time. Einstein lent the *prestige mondiale* of his great name, and in fact gave his heart, to the movement which created the state of Israel. Men and nations owe a debt to those who help to transform their realistic self-image for the better. No Zionist with the least degree of self-esteem can refuse to pay him homage if the opportunity of doing so is offered to him." [Isaiah Berlin, "Einstein and Israel," in Holton and Elkana, eds., p. 283]

Thus, it's hardly surprising that many Muslims in general and Arab Muslims in particular not only endorse that media-touted distortion/myth, but some would go even further to condemn Einstein. On one hand I was prompted to add a little bit more to my personal research on the relationship between Einstein and Zionism, attributed by those who seek to capitalize on his fame for their partisan/nationalist agendas; on the other, between Einstein and racism flung by those who'd like to condemn him as "racist," due to his ties to Zionism.

I was disturbed by some messages on several Bangladeshi forums, except [Shetubondhon](#) (meaning, bridge-building), pointing to him as "racist" and "Zionist". Regardless, characterization of Einstein as "racist" or "Zionist" may simply showcase the Zionist media's effectiveness in sustaining the MYTH.

As a Muslim I seek no misinformation, ill-information, or ignorance about my faith. Of course, I have a better chance of expecting it from others, if others can expect no less from me as a Muslim. As a Muslim I am also duty-bound to act consistently in regard to others - Jews, Christians, Hindus, Agnostics, or Atheists.

*O ye who believe! **stand out firmly for justice**, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. **Follow not the lusts (of your hearts)**, lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do. [al-Qur'an/4/an-Nisa/135]*

Hence I wanted to avail of this opportunity after seeing recent discussions referring to Einstein, by contributing some material online to set the record straight. I did not find any well researched material online that challenges persisting distortions about Einstein. Yet based on my previous readings I remembered him differently.

I am no expert in this field. However, to update this essay I have gone beyond what others have said about Einstein. Einstein's own words and actions should be the most relevant basis, to help us understand what Zionism was to him and how he was linked with it. His own words are faithfully presented in this essay.

### **Zionism and its many shades**

Toward understanding the connection between Einstein and Zionism, it is worthwhile to note that more than Einstein being drawn to Zionism, there were some key Zionist figures that attempted to gradually utilize his name for the Zionist cause.

"It is demonstrably unfair, yet still perfectly true, to claim that the Zionists seized upon Einstein's fame from 1919 onwards and exploited it to their advantage." [Clark, p. 374]

No one was more instrumental in bringing Einstein closer to the Jewish/Zionist cause than Kurt Blumenfeld, the secretary general of the Executive of World Zionist Organizations during 1910 to 1914. However, it is important to note how he delicately and effectively handled Einstein for the cause.

"Utilizing him [i.e. Einstein] for publicity purposes was thus a delicate matter and 'was only successful if I was able to get under his skin in such a way that eventually he believed that words had not been put into his mouth but had come forth from him spontaneously.'" [Clark, p. 381]

At the insistence of Chaim Weizmann, Blumenfeld was successful in persuading Einstein to visit America for the Zionist cause. "... [T]he journey to America meant a great deal to Einstein. His commitment to Zionistic ideas was enormously strengthened and his sense of being a Jew took on a new profundity. From now on, guided by Blumenfeld, he spoke and wrote frequently in support of Zionism. No longer did he object that the Zionists were using his name." [p. 239]

But let's first explore the concept and movement of Zionism and its various shades. Zionism is a catch-all label, which lends itself to misuse and misrepresentation.

"There are many 'Zionisms' - religious, political, and cultural - all of which have in common the desire to see Jews from around the world settled permanently in a homeland in Palestine, the historical land of Israel. Religious Zionists believe that the gathering together of world Jewry into the land of Israel will fulfill biblical prophecy and bring on the millennium. Political Zionists seeks to build a nation state for the Jewish people, and cultural Zionists seek to strengthen Jewish cultural identity within their historic homeland. Jews who are not Zionists either oppose the existence of the Jewish state for religious reasons (they believe that Israel cannot come into being before the Messiah arrives) or for political reasons (as citizens of various nations they cannot give their primary allegiance to a Jewish state, or do not wish to be associated with an expansionism that drives the Palestinians from their traditional home)." [\[Link\]](#)

As an agnostic, there is scarcely any room for arguing that he was a religious Zionist. But was he a political Zionist or a cultural Zionist? Before addressing these questions, establishing specificity of meaning for both political Zionism and cultural Zionism would seem critical.

"Political Zionism was emancipated West European Jewry's response to the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism and to the failure of the enlightenment to alter the status of the Jew. Its objective was the establishment of a Jewish homeland in any available territory--not necessarily in Palestine--through cooperation with the Great Powers." [Library of Congress\_1]

Gradually, Political Zionism became identified with Theodore Herzl. By 1897 World Zionist Organization was established and it had a new focus. Political Zionism wasn't interested in a Jewish homeland just anywhere in the world, but in Palestine only. [Library of Congress\_1] Political Zionism was nationalistic in essence.

Cultural Zionism is another form of Zionism.

"The counterpoint to Herzl's political Zionism was provided by Asher Ginsberg, better known by his pen name Ahad HaAm (One of the People). HaAm ... was the son of a Hasidic rabbi. ... His views on Zionism were rooted in the changing nature of Jewish communal life in Eastern Europe. HaAm realized that a new meaning to Jewish life would have to be found for the younger generation of East European Jews who were revolting against traditional Jewish practice. Whereas Jews in the West could participate in and benefit from a secular culture, Jews in the East were oppressed. While Herzl focused on the plight of Jews alone, HaAm was also interested in the plight of Judaism, which could no longer be contained within the limits of traditional religion.

Ahad HaAm's solution was cultural Zionism: the establishment in Palestine of small settlements aimed at reviving the Jewish spirit and culture in the modern world. In the cultural Zionist vision, a small number of Jewish cadres well versed in Jewish culture and speaking Hebrew would settle in Palestine. Ahad HaAm believed that by settling in that ancient land, religious Jews would replace their metaphysical attachment to the Holy Land with a new Hebrew cultural renaissance. Palestine and the Hebrew language were important not because of their religious significance but because they had been an integral part of the Jewish people's history and cultural heritage." [Library of Congress\_2]

After Herzl's death in 1904, "the mantle of Zionism was carried by the cultural Zionists led by Ahad HaAm and his close colleague, Chaim Weizmann." [Library of Congress\_2]

"... the centrality of ethics to Judaism was made an intellectual staple by the widely read Hebrew essayist writing under the name Ahad HaAm (Asher Ginzberg, 1856-1927). His Zionism envisioned the Jewish homeland serving as a 'spiritual center' for worldwide Jewry. By 'spiritual' he meant nothing religious since he was a committed secularist. An uncompromising elitist, Ahad HaAm believed the human spirit could only be fulfilled in high cultural creativity. He therefore wanted the Jewish people to return to their land to revive an authentic Jewish culture. In this, Jewish ethics would have to play a vital role since he insisted that the Jews had a special national gift for ethics, one their reestablished cultural independence would clearly make manifest. In equating Jewish nationalism with high ethical attainment, Ahad HaAm was exceptional among the early theoreticians of Zionism -- the reason, observers suggest, that he is no longer considered relevant by most Israeli intellectuals." [Borrowitz, 1991]

HaAm [d. 1927] was known as the icon of "spiritual Zionism" or "cultural Zionism" and opposed to political Zionism of Herzl. Except for some orthodox non-Zionist (or even anti-Zionist) Jews, as represented for example by [Neturei Karta International](#), all shades of Zionism (religious, political, cultural, spiritual) converged to secure a homeland or settlement for the Jewish people, to which a Jew from anywhere in the world could migrate. That's the common denominator for all the Zionists.

Einstein's affinity to Zionism was of this cultural shade.

"While he had long supported the Zionist cause - first visiting the United States in 1921 on a fund-raising with its leaders by urging cooperation with the Arabs. Einstein often clashed with its leaders by urging cooperation with the Arabs. He considered himself primarily a cultural rather than a political or territorial Zionist. In 1930, while Zionist policy called for a Jewish state in Palestine, he proposed a power-sharing arrangement for the nation-to-be (a Joint Council of four Jews and four Arabs, modeled after the Swiss Constitution) ..." [Jerome, p. 110]

"Einstein's views place him squarely in the tradition of German cultural Zionism.

Cultural Zionism, first espoused by Ahad Ha'am and Martin Buber ... emphasized the cultural and spiritual renewal of the Jewish people. It saw itself in opposition to political Zionism, as espoused by Herzl, which focused on the establishment of Jewish state." [Stachel, p. 68]

As Einstein underwent his personal awakening toward Jewish identity, "by 1938, he decisively rejected any taint of racism in his concept of Judaism." [Jerome, p. 68]

I have conceived of Judaism as a community of tradition. Both friend and foe, on the other hand, have often asserted that the Jews represent a race; that their characteristic behavior is the result of innate qualities transmitted by *heredity* from one generation to the next. ... The Jews, however, are beyond doubt a mixed race, just as are all other groups of our civilization. Sincere anthropologists are agreed on this point; assertions to the contrary all belong to the field of political propaganda and must be rated accordingly." ["Why do They Hate the Jews?", in Einstein, 1986, p. 196]

Thus, his understanding of who is a Zionist was also quite distinctive. According to him, "A Jew who strives to impregnate his spirit with humanitarian ideals can declare himself a Zionist without contradiction." [Stachel, p. 66, quoting "Botschaft." *Judische Rundschau*, vol. 30: 129. French translation in *La revue juive*, vol. 1: 14-16]

### **Einstein, Zionism and Israel: Excerpts from the work of Dr. Alfred Lilienthal and others**

Before we explore what Einstein himself has said, let us take a look at what others have to reflect on this. One of the persons who has written extensively about distortions regarding Einstein's connection with Zionism and Israel is Dr. Alfred Lilienthal. He was an American Jewish scholar. His book "[The Zionist Connection: What Price Peace?](#)" is a monumental and authoritative work on Zionism and Israel. The book also deals with Einstein's connection with Zionism and the Israel.

In this segment excerpts from Dr. Lilienthal's book are reproduced, which also contain some quotes from Einstein. The 850+ page book is a must read for anyone seeking to understand the Zionism, Israel, modern media, the Middle East, US political apparatus and much more. Lilienthal thoroughly documented all references.

According to Lilienthal, many American Jews did not envision Israel as an exclusivist Zionist/Jewish entity. Point of note and also in contrast, despite his wholehearted support for the Jews to reclaim their dignity and security, Einstein was a universalist.

"For their part, American Jews have sincerely believed they were safeguarding the very existence of their coreligionists in Israel, never dreaming it was Zionist exclusivism for which they were giving their dollars, political support, and moral aid, and betraying their single loyalty to their own country.

And today, when the thesis of binationalism is raised by Arabs in advancing their rights to a Palestinian state and in calling for a secular pluralistic Israel, the Jews in America see this only as a threat 'to destroy the State of Israel.' They see no reason why there should be, nor do they believe there can be, a de-Zionization or restructuring of the Israeli state, in line with the universal thesis of Judaism and the thinking of **universalists** such as Magnes, Buber, Einstein, and others." [p. 152]

Despite being an eminent newspaper, the New York Times' Zionist bias is all too well known. Lilienthal provides a detailed account of NYT's role in "kidnapping of Einstein for Israel."

"I also personally endeavored to set the *Times*' record straight on one rather important matter--the exploitation of Dr. Albert Einstein by the Zionist movement. When the greatest scientist of our age died on April 18, 1956, at the age of seventy-six, the Times in the course of its eulogy referred to 'Israel, whose establishment as a state he had championed.' This 'kidnapping' of Einstein for Israel was one of the most extraordinary coups ever perpetrated by any political group anywhere, but with the help of the omnipotent *Times* anything is possible. The great mathematician had vigorously opposed the creation of the State of Israel, but a myth to the contrary has been widely spawned by the media, and was repeated sixteen years later.

In late March 1972 the *New York Times* published a series of articles dealing with the life and thought of Albert Einstein as allegedly revealed in the collection of his manuscripts, letters, and other papers, which were to be published by his estate. The third of the series included on the front page a three-column photograph of Einstein with Israeli Premier David Ben-Gurion, and the caption read: 'Einstein papers tell of scientist's efforts toward the creation of Israel.' The article further referred 'to his long efforts in behalf of the creation of a Jewish national state and of his sad refusal' to accept the Presidency upon the death of Chaim Weizmann.

Einstein, despite the Time's incessant recitals to the contrary, clearly opposed the creation of the State of Israel. A clear understanding of the position taken on Palestine by the great mathematician, himself a refugee from Nazi Germany, will not only set the record straight and correct journalistic inaccuracies, but is most relevant to the continuing quest for a just peace in the Middle East." [pp. 340-341]

What was really Einstein's view regarding the creation of the State of Israel? Dr. Lilienthal went to Princeton to see Einstein and pose the question directly to him.

"Then, in 1952, in a message to a 'Children to Palestine' dinner, Einstein spoke of the necessity of curbing 'a kind of nationalism which has arisen in Israel if only to permit a friendly and fruitful co-existence with the Arabs.' When this portion of the Einstein message was censored in the organization's press release so as to impart the impression of all-out support Israel, I went to Princeton to seek the Professor's views on the incident. **Einstein then told me that he had never been a Zionist and had never favored the creation of the State of Israel.**<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> There were other notable people of among the Jews who were not involved in the struggle for establishing the state but later had to contend with the state of Israel. One such person was Henry Kissinger. Their hindsight is quite revealing. Nahum Goldmann, the long-time president of World Zionist Organization, wrote: "He [Kissinger] used

It was then that he also told me of a significant conversation with Weizmann. Einstein had asked him: 'What of the Arabs if Palestine were given to the Jews?' And Weizmann replied: 'What Arabs? They are hardly of any consequence.' " [p. 341]

Einstein may have lent himself to the Zionist cause, worked with Zionist leaders, traveled to America to raise funds for the Zionist projects, such as establishing Hebrew University of Jerusalem. However, his statement that he had never been a Zionist can't be properly understood, if it is not put in the context of what Zionism meant to those who have been on the frontline for the struggle to establish Israel as a Jewish state and then led it. Here are some samplers.

**"Ben Gurion declared. 'Why should the Arabs make peace? If I was an Arab leader I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural: we have taken their country. Sure God promised it to us, but what does that matter to them? Our God is not theirs. We come from Israel, it's true, but two thousand years ago, and what is that to them? **There has been antisemitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault?** They only see one thing: **we have come here and stolen their country.** Why should they accept that? They may perhaps forget in one or two generations' time, but for the moment there is no chance. So, it's simple: we have to stay strong and maintain a powerful army. Our whole policy is there. Otherwise the Arabs will wipe us out.' "** [Nahum Goldman, *The Jewish Paradox*, p. 99]

"There is no such thing as a Palestinian people... It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They didn't exist." [[Golda Meir](#), statement to *The Sunday Times*, 15 June, 1969]

"How can we return the occupied territories? There is nobody to return them to." [[Golda Meir](#), March 8, 1969]

"We walked outside, Ben-Gurion accompanying us. Allon repeated his question, What is to be done with the Palestinian population?' Ben-Gurion waved his hand in a gesture which said 'Drive them out!' [[Yitzhak Rabin](#), leaked censored version of Rabin memoirs, published in the *New York Times*, 23 October 1979]

"[The Palestinians] are beasts walking on two legs." [Israeli Prime Minister [Menachem Begin](#), speech to the Knesset, quoted in Amnon Kapeliouk, "Begin and the 'Beasts,'" *New Statesman*, June 25, 1982.]

"The settlement of the Land of Israel is the essence of Zionism. Without settlement, we will not fulfill Zionism. It's that simple." [[Yitzhak Shamir](#), *Maariv*, 02/21/1997]

"It is the duty of Israeli leaders to explain to public opinion, clearly and courageously, a certain number of facts that are forgotten with time. The first of these is that there is no Zionism, colonialization, or Jewish State without the eviction of the Arabs and the expropriation of their lands." [[Ariel Sharon](#), Israeli Foreign Minister, addressing a meeting of militants from the extreme right-wing Tsomet Party, *Agence France Presse*, November 15, 1998]

The sense in which these leading Zionists (consistently held core views of political Zionism), who later assumed the leadership of Israel, Einstein was not a Zionist.

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to say: 'Given that there is a state, it would be immoral to allow it to be destroyed, but if **I had been asked for my opinion before it existed, I would have said that it was not a solution to the Jewish problem.**' " [The Jewish Paradox, p. 162]

Einstein continued to remain engaged with enterprises and activities, including in Israel, which were akin to cultural Zionism.

"In subsequent years he vigorously supported many Israeli cultural activities, in particular the Hebrew University and the Weizmann Institute, to which he was deeply dedicated. According to biographer Dr. Philip Frank, the professor had a 'good hearted weakness' and was hesitant to rebuke Zionists for their frequent manipulations of his views and unauthorized use of his name in order to enhance their prestige and fill their political Zionism helped confuse the American press.

In his modest manner, he publicly declined the Israeli Presidency, as Weizmann's successor, on the given grounds that he was not qualified in the area of human relationships. But, in fact, that acceptance of high office in nationalist Israel was hardly in keeping with the basic philosophy of this great humanist and universalist." [pp. 341-342]

Misrepresentation of Einstein by news spinners of the American media was all too common.

"Attempts to tie the renowned scientist to political Zionism continued. First there were the welter of public tributes from Israeli and Zionist leaders, published at the time of his death. And two weeks later in a story prominently published by the *Times*, the Israeli Consul in New York claimed that Einstein had been preparing a laudatory speech for nationwide television in commemoration of the seventh anniversary of Israel. Not only was the evidence of Einstein's Zionist intent scarcely substantiated, but it was in direct conflict with the professor's last statement about the Israeli state, given in an interview with Dorothy Schiff, pro-Israel publisher of the New York Post. She quoted him as saying: **'We had great hopes for Israel at first. We thought that it might be better than other nations, but it is no better.'**" [p. 342; quoting *New York Post*, March 13, 1955]

Einstein's ideas about the creation of Israel were similar to Dr. Judah Magnes', President of Hebrew University.

"In the third of its articles on Einstein, the *Times* nevertheless repeated the myth of his support of the creation of Israel without indicating any new proof. Were the good professor alive today, there is every reason to believe that he would be in the forefront of those condemning the deprivation of the rights of the Palestinian Arabs. As far back as January 28, 1930, Einstein had warned in the Palestinian newspaper Falastin that 'oppressive nationalism must be conquered' and that he could 'see a future for Palestine only on the basis of peaceful cooperation between the two peoples who are at home in the country . . . come together they must in spite of all.' And from the outset he had fully supported the idea of Dr. Judah Magnes, President of Hebrew University, of an Arab-Jewish binational state. In a letter to the *Times* with Rabbi Leo Baeck of Germany, he wrote: 'Besides the fact that they [Magnes and his followers] speak for a much wider circle of inarticulate people, they speak in the name of principles which have been the most significant contribution of the Jewish people to humanity.' Such statements are hardly consonant with the *Times*' allegation of the scientist's support of the creation of a Zionist state." [p. 342]

Lilienthal's encounter with New York Times in exposing the myth about Einstein's support for, and championing of, the creation of the Zionist State of Israel is quite revealing.

"The *Times*' revival of this Einstein mythology led me to call Op-Ed page editor Harrison E. Salisbury and suggest that it would be appropriate for him to run a piece presenting the true views of the learned scientist on this subject. Although every type of opinion has been presented on this important page. Salisbury refused to commission such an article,

as is customarily done. He stated he would be happy to look at the finished product if it were written on speculation.

Even this I did, and here is his letter rejecting the article, the substance of which has been set forth in the above pages: 'I'm sorry to say that we decided against your article concerning Professor Einstein. As I told you when we discussed this matter on the telephone, I was dubious about the idea of elaborating on this particular aspect of Dr. Einstein's career, and I confess on reading the article my feeling was strengthened. You may feel that I overstate the case, but it would seem to the casual reader like myself that Dr. Einstein's views, as one might expect, underwent a series of changes over the years and the picture does not come out so strongly in your article as to compel its publication.'

How possibly could any subsequent Einstein 'change over the years' -- and his basic attitude toward political Zionism never altered an iota--affect what he did or did not do about the creation of Israel, an act which took place in 1948? **The cultural Zionism in which Einstein believed** was a far cry from Jewish nationalism embodied in the Zionist State of Israel, which he decried to his very death in 1956." [pp. 342-343]

Lilienthal's work definitively exposes the myth about Einstein's "championing" of or support for the creation of Israel as a Jewish state. Though facts stand on their own merit, some people might remain unconvinced, because after all Lilienthal was an anti-Zionism Jew. By the way, not all Jews are for Zionism or the State of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

### **Einstein's own words regarding Zionism and Israel**

Einstein was a Jew, deeply proud of his heritage, and empathic toward the Jewish struggle and suffering throughout the history. His personal experience of this struggle and what he observed especially in Europe reawakened his Jewish identity, brought him closer to the collective struggle for a Jewish solution.

In *A Letter to Professor Dr. Hellpach*, Minister of State (1929), published in his *Ideas and Opinions*, Einstein wrote:

"I have read your article on Zionism and the Zurich Congress and feel, as a strong devotee of the Zionist idea, that I must answer you, even if only shortly. ... I realized that salvation was only possible for the living society to which he as an individual might rejoice to belong and which might enable him to bear the hatred and the humiliations that he has put up with from the rest of the world." [P. 171]

"Then I realized that only a common enterprise dear to the heart of Jews all over the world could restore this people to health. It was a great achievement of Herzl's to have realized and proclaimed at the top of his voice that, the traditional attitude of the Jews being what it was, the establishment of a national home or, more accurately, a center in Palestine, was a suitable object on which to concentrate our efforts.

All this you call nationalism, and there is something in the accusation. But a communal purpose without which we can neither live nor die in this hostile world can always be called by that ugly name. In any case it is a nationalism whose aim is not power but dignity and health. If we did not have to live among intolerant, narrow-minded, and violent people, I should be the first to throw over all nationalism in favor of universal humanity." [p. 172]

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<sup>6</sup> Some Links: [Neturei Karta International](https://www.neturei-karta.org/); [JewishSpeak](https://www.jewish-speak.com/); [Self-Hating Jews](https://www.self-hating-jews.com/).

In the above letter, Einstein seems to identify with Herzl. He even seems to assume a nationalistic tone. However, please note that he unreservedly declares his preference for "universal humanity" against anything "intolerant, narrow-minded, and violent." In 1929, Jews were still at the receiving end of that intolerance and violence.

By that time struggle to secure a homeland for the Jews was crystallized, and the campaign intensified. However, to Einstein, this struggle or campaign was not to be at the expense of the Arabs or Palestinians. He wasn't envisioning an exclusivist, racist national entity that would be a colonial settlement, dispossessing of the Arab Palestinians, the overwhelming majority of the natives at the time. He became keenly aware of the problem and spoke his mind.

In a *Letter to an Arab*, March 15, 1930, (Ideas and Opinions) he wrote:

"What make the present position so bad is the fact that Jews and Arabs confront each other as opponents before the mandatory power. This state of affairs is unworthy of both nations and can only be altered by our finding a *via media* on which both sides agree." [p. 173]

By the early 1930s the issue of Arab-Jewish tension and the critical need for an amicable and just resolution became a dominant theme in Einstein's writings and speeches. Point of note: he was actively involved in the early 1920s with a project to establish some sort of an intellectual/scholarly/spiritual center for the Jewish renaissance in "Palestine." He was particularly campaigning and fundraising for a world class Jewish university in that part of the world. He was also actively supporting and promoting development works in Palestine that would utilize the skills of the Jewish migrants, for the benefit of everyone in Palestine--Jews and Arabs.

In *Addresses on Reconstruction in Palestine* (Ideas and Opinions), Einstein articulates his view in no unclear terms that the solution must be a "just" and "advantageous partnership" involving the Arabs. This speech was given in 1931.

"Ten years ago, when I first had the pleasure of addressing you in behalf of the Zionist cause, almost all our hopes were still fixed on the future. Today we can look back on these ten years with joy; ... The latest pronouncements of the British government indicate a return to a juster judgment of our case; ...

But we must never forget what this crisis has taught us—namely, that the establishment of satisfactory relations between the Jews and the Arabs is not England's affair but ours. We—that is to say, the Arabs and ourselves—have got to agree on the main outlines of an advantageous partnership which shall satisfy the needs of both nations. A just solution of this problem and one worthy of both nations is an end no less important and no less worthy of our efforts than the promotion of the work of construction itself." [pp. 176-177]

By then, he was still referring to Herzl, but more in line with Ahad HaAm's cultural Zionism, seeking to establish "a spiritual center ... in Palestine."

"A decade or two ago a group of far-sighted men, among whom the unforgettable Herzl stood out above the rest, came to the conclusion that we needed a spiritual center in order to preserve our sense of solidarity in difficult times. Thus arose the idea of Zionism and the work of settlement in Palestine, the successful realization of which we have been permitted to witness, at least in its highly promising beginnings." [Ideas and Opinions, p. 177]

Even by the late 1920s, toward the end of his life, HaAm was already disillusioned.

"Toward the end of his life, when he had made it to Palestine but was unhappy at what he found there, he wrote, 'Are we really doing Zionism only to add in an Oriental corner a small people of new Levantines who vie with other Levantines in shedding blood? If this is to be the Messiah, then I do not wish to see his coming.'" [Sicherman, 2002]

Einstein was close to HaAm in pursuit of cultural Zionism and never embraced the idea of nationalism. He apparently believed: "**Nationalism is an infantile sickness. It is the measles of the human race.**"<sup>7</sup> [Link] Before the next excerpt, it is worth pointing out that in 1929 in *A Letter to Professor Dr. Hellpach*, Einstein seemed to use some nationalistic tone. By now, his thoughts have become unmistakably clear of any nationalism as well as political Zionism.

"The difficulties we have been through have also brought some good in their train. They have shown us once more how strong is the bond which unites the Jews of all countries in a common destiny. The crisis has also purified our attitude to the question of Palestine, purged it of the dross of nationalism. It has been clearly proclaimed that we are not seeking to create a political society, but that our aim is, in accordance with the old tradition of Jewry, a cultural one in the widest sense of the world. That being so, it is for us to solve the problem of living side by side with our brother the Arab in an open, generous, and worthy manner." [Ideas and Opinions, p. 178]

By 1929, a number of Arab-Jewish clashes made Einstein was fully aware of the problem, and justice and peace inclusive of Arabs became a central point of his understanding and approach to the Palestine project for Jewish revival. He categorically warned his fellow Jewish people:

that [the Zionist] movement [must] avoid the danger of degenerating into a blind nationalism. In my opinion, we must endeavor above all that psychological understanding and an honorable will towards cooperation take the place of resentment towards the Arabs. The overcoming of this difficulty will, in my opinion, be the touchstone that our community has a right to existence in the higher sense. I must unfortunately openly acknowledge that the attitude of our [Zionist] officialdom, as well as the majority of public expressions in this connection, appear to me to leave much to be desired." [Stachel, p. 72, quoting memo of Einstein to Heinrich York-Steiner, 19 November 1929]

Einstein recognized the problem of growing Arab resentment due to migration of Jews that was emerging like a colonial settlement by outsiders. As he foresaw the fundamental problem, he dealt with not just as a matter of true and higher interest of the Jewish cause in the long term, but also as a matter of principle. He insisted on "complete equality." The world is familiar with Einstein's famous  $E=MC^2$  equation. This message of "complete equality" might have been his  $1=1$  equation: 1 Jew = 1 Arab. A rather radical, principled position.<sup>8</sup> "Considering the unrestrained

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<sup>7</sup> This is one of the popular quotations attributed to Einstein. However, quite remarkably, there is no source provided. At least, I have not come across any. To verify this quotation, I contacted the [Official Einstein Archive](#) at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Here is what Barbara Wolff of the Archive wrote to me (July 5, 2006): "The quote was published as one of the statements Einstein made in an interview with G.S. Viereck in 1929, an interviewer I do in no way consider a reliable person. However, asked many years later if Einstein indeed had said it, his secretary replied that while she cannot find a reference, Einstein was of the opinion that he might have said so, and therefore the quote could be considered authentic."

<sup>8</sup> This  $1=1$  equation is particularly important to me as a Muslim and a human being. Just like Einstein desired equality between Arabs and Jews, I also affirm the same from the Islamic perspective. How God is going to deal with us in the Hereafter is a different issue. However, in this world, we must value and respect lives of all as equally sacrosanct. Just as the Jews must recognize and respect the Arab or Muslim life equally sacrosanct, the same is expected of Arabs and Muslims regarding the life of Jews or others. In respect of the entire humanity, all from the Islamic viewpoint, all human relationship should begin with the principle of non-hostility: "Let there be no hostility except against those who practise oppression." [The Qur'an 2/al-Baqarah/193] Thus, as a Muslim, I must not have any hostility against anyone, whether Jews, Christian, Hindus, animists, atheists, or whatever, except against those who practice injustice and oppression. That's a fundamental principle of common ground toward which the entire

racism ravaging the Middle East today, it's important to note that until the end of his life, Einstein insisted:

"The most important aspect of our [Israel's] policy must be our ever-present, manifest desire to institute complete equality for the Arab citizens living in our midst ... The attitude we adopt toward the Arab minority will provide the real test of our moral standards as a people." [Jerome, p. 111, quoting Einstein letter to Zvi Lurie, January 5, 1955]

Looking beyond Arab rejection of Israel, Einstein saw then and was afraid of what was to come due to Israeli policies and attitudes. As Nahum Goldmann, the president of World Zionist Congress during 1951-1977 and one of the leading Zionists through the thick and thin of the Zionist movement leading to the establishment of Israel, reminded the Jewish people, especially in Israel, in an article "Zionist Ideology and the Reality of Israel" in 1978:

"The Zionist movement had always been convinced that the Arabs would receive it with open arms, and be happy for its bringing the values, the ideas and the know-how of West European and American civilization into the Middle East. Because of this illusion—a result of the lack of political experience of the Jews during 2,000 years of Diaspora life—Zionism committed the unintentional error of ignoring the importance of the Arab attitude for the realization of Zionist aspirations. The leadership of the Zionist movement, to which I belonged for several decades, concentrated primarily on winning the sympathy and the support of the great powers and of world public opinion, and in this it was successful, as the U.N. decision of 1947 proves. Attempts were made occasionally to try to win over the Arabs to agree to the establishment of a Jewish state in their midst, but these efforts were never intensive nor flexible enough. ...

The tragedy of the situation is that, although Israel won all the wars—more or less decisively—nothing definite was achieved by the victories. ... [However,] instead of leading to peace, the victories only aggravated the conflict: the Arabs felt more humiliated and insulted with each defeat, and the Israelis acquired a feeling of superiority and the conviction that they need not worry too much because of the Arabs' refusal to recognize them. Characteristic of this attitude is Prime Minister Begin's statement that Israel does not require Arab acceptance because its existence is the affirmation of God's promise and Jewish tradition. ...

One of the objections is that in many cases peoples have kept territories conquered in war. This in fact occurred when the conquerors were strong enough to impose the territorial changes on their defeated opponents and to achieve peace, but the past 30 years have proved that the Arabs cannot be forced to yield. ..." [*Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1978]

Goldmann, a leading Zionist leader, was acknowledging this reality and reminding the State of Israel in particular in 1978, long after Einstein, a problem of Israeli intransigence against seeking any peace.<sup>9</sup> In introducing Goldmann, Leon Abramowicz writes:

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humanity can converge.

<sup>9</sup> This is not to suggest that the Arab neighbors themselves did not have any part in contributing toward the Palestinian diaspora. David Fromkin, in his book *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* [Owl Books; 2nd Rep edition, 2001], is one of the best sources on how the imperialist powers connived and conspired to divide and shape the Middle East. The emergence of the Zionist movement seeking a Jewish state, and such a state only in Palestine, coincided with the colonial powers' design for shaping the post-colonial Middle East. Various Arab leaders played into the hands of this design. Of course, there are two dimensions of the story here: the problem involving the Palestinians who were dispossessed and displaced, and

“After resolving to create a Jewish state at the age of sixteen, Nahum Goldmann did not rest until that goal has been achieved. But his own conception of the Jewish state has often been at odds with the reality. By giving priority to the spiritual development which alone, in his view, is capable of assuring the continuity of Judaism and a special place among the nations for a Jewish state, he is in opposition to the rulers of Israel who, preoccupied by the state of war, have exaggerated the importance of military power.” [Goldmann, Paradox, p. 4]

The problem would continue to haunt Israel.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, just a few years earlier in 1974 Goldmann made an observation that would remain on one hand a devastating moral blow to Israel, and on the other hand, a critical insight, along the same line of Einstein, into any effort toward future solution to the problem in the Middle East conflict.

“... If we had invested in the Arab problem a tenth of the energy, the passion, the ingenuity, the resourcefulness which we developed in order to gain the support of Britain, France, the US and Weimar Germany, our destiny in the development of Israel may have been quite different. ... We were not ready for compromises: we did not regard it as a major problem. ... We did not make sufficient efforts to get, if not the full agreement of the Arabs, at least their acquiescence to the Jewish state, which I think would have been possible. **That was the original sin.**” [Lilienthal, p. 7, quoting New Outlook, November-December 1974]<sup>11</sup>

Einstein's view about the emerging "[Military Mentality](#)" is noteworthy in this context. He was opposed to the Military Mentality, as was already being displayed by America during and after the WWII. He believed that America already succumbed to this "Military Mentality" like "Germany under Kaiser Wilhelm II". "The characteristic feature of the mentality is that people place the importance of what Bertrand Russell so tellingly terms 'naked power' far above all other factors which affect the relation between peoples." [Ideas and Opinions, pp. 133-134] Einstein was aware of this problem all along, just as it was borne out and acknowledged by Goldmann in the 1970s, in the context of the Arab-Israeli problem. Just as he was concerned about the Arab animosity, he was even more concerned about Israel as powerful country with the "military mentality." In February 11, 1953 he wrote to a correspondent in Italy:

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the broader Arab-Israeli relationship in the Middle East. The issue of the dispossessed and displaced Palestinians is easy to understand. But how much difficult is it to understand the reaction of the Arab-Muslim world? Henry Kissinger writes in White House Years: "The Nazi holocaust added moral urgency to the quest of a Jewish state. But no sooner was it established and blessed by the international community in 1948 than it was forced to defend its independence against Arab neighbors who did not see why they should make sacrifices to atone for European iniquities in which they had had no part." [p. 342]

<sup>10</sup> Kissinger writes: "It naturally saw in the territories occupied in 1967 an assurance of the security that it had vainly sought throughout its existence. It strove for both territory and recognition, reluctant to admit that these objectives might prove incompatible." [p. 343]

<sup>11</sup> That the establishment of Israel in the heartland of Arab-Muslim world would bring about serious consequences was all too well known even to the American leaders, such as President Roosevelt. Nahum Goldmann describes the pressure from a powerful Zionist American, Stephen Wise, on the American government. "Before Yalta Roosevelt came under pressure from American Jews who wanted him to accept the idea of participation. ... [after exchange with Ibn Saud and learning about the vehement rejection, Wise was asked] 'So how could you live there as a tiny minority among Arab fanatics?' Roosevelt concluded. 'They would exterminate you.' Wise was at a loss, and Roosevelt went on: 'Stephen, I'm going to ask you a personal question: you are a rabbi, with religious and moral obligations. Will you take the responsibility of getting millions of Jews killed if you do eventually get there (i.e., have the state of Israel)?' Wise was shaken, but stated that he stood by the official programme of American Jewry. Then Roosevelt concluded: 'I agree that the majority of Jews want partition. But I'm warning you, you may be committing a crime.'" [Goldmann, Paradox, p. 32]

"It is quite true that our [Israel's] situation has once again become perilous and that we lack all power to check the danger. But when I look at Russia and America, I cannot help wondering whether we [Israel] would behave more sensibly if we were as powerful as they are." [Nathan, p. 574]

The kind of problem Einstein anticipated subsequently became a sad reality as Israel gained territory as well as a military with a reputation of "invincibility." It didn't want any meddling by outside powers, even the United States, except to back it up for direct handling with the Arab world on its own terms.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Israel has been consistently ambivalent about any "comprehensive settlement"<sup>13</sup> and would not even give a clear term for peace that its own patron, US, could work with. As an indulgent patron, US had to advise Israel to come up with such terms.<sup>14</sup> And, once it did come up with a definition or term of peace, it wasn't really ready to follow up.<sup>15</sup> It became reckless, even by the standard of its own closest patrons.<sup>16</sup> The problem has been acknowledged by many supporters and advocates of Jews, Zionism and Israel. Leon Abramowicz writes in the Introduction to Nahum Goldmann's *The Jewish Paradox*:

"By giving priority to the spiritual development which alone, in his [Goldmann's] view, is capable of assuring the continuity of Judaism and a special place among the nations for a Jewish state, he is in opposition to the rulers of Israel who, preoccupied by the state of war, have exaggerated the importance of military power." [p. 4]

Einstein's support for the Jewish cause, association with the Zionist movement, and yet ambivalence about some of the core issues and ideas were vindicated by subsequent development. That would explain, why even though Einstein closely identified with the Zionist cause, quite frequently his position was at odd with the principal tenor of the movement. As Clark explained:

There were two other things which tended to make him qualify his support of Zionism. One was his belief that a first priority should be agreement with the Arabs. He was not alone in this opinion. 'A few Jewish leaders, particularly Magnes, Hugo Bergmann, Ruppin, and Calvaresci, were convinced that the first political aim should be not maximum immigration, but understanding with the Arabs,' Norman Bentwich has written.

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<sup>12</sup> "As the pace of diplomacy quickened so did domestic excitement. Within a week of the announcement of our 'favorable' attitude to Four-Power talks, Israel's supporters reacted with the vigor I would come to know so well in the years to come. They reflected Israel's own concern that outsiders not seek to substitute for direct talks with the Arabs." [Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 353]

<sup>13</sup> "Israel much preferred that the United States avoid an active role and let Jarring pursue his course. Israel was ostensibly willing to negotiate but profoundly pessimistic about prospects for a comprehensive settlement. This meant that there was no way of pursuing the course we had set for ourselves without a massive clash with Israel." [p. 360]

<sup>14</sup> "In that first conversation I could not answer his [Yitzhak Rabin] question about our policy; we had not yet settled on it ourselves. But I was reasonably certain that the President would proceed with both the Four-and Two-Power forums. My private advice was that Israel should prepare a concrete program articulating a definition of 'peace' that it could live with; only this could give us criteria by which to judge progress." [Kissinger, p. 355]

<sup>15</sup> The Arab states, with the exception of Jordan, were clearly not prepared for a real peace expressed in normal relations with Israel or any concrete definition of security. Israel was not willing to return all the territories – probably not even in return for the definition of peace it was putting forward." [Kissinger, p. 378]

<sup>16</sup> Kissinger writes about the periods of gradual escalation during 1970 that ultimately led to a war. "I did not succeed in getting such a strategy considered. Our agencies blamed Israel for the tension along the Suez Canal, arguing – not without evidence – that Israel had provoked the Soviet reaction by its deep penetration raids." [pp. 570-571]

'That conviction was expressed emphatically by Albert Einstein when I visited him in his cottage during my stay in Berlin in 1930. He would not remain associated, he said, with the Zionist movement unless it tried to make peace with the Arabs in deed as well as in word. The Jews should form committees with the Arab peasants and workers, and not try to negotiate only with the leaders.' [Clark, p. 397]

Although Einstein's identification and empathy with his own Jewish people had not changed by the early 1930s (and it never did), his primary loyalty to universal humanity kept him clear of political Zionism. Subsequently, he seems to have categorically distanced himself from political Zionism.

"We need to pay greater attention to our relations with the Arabs. By cultivating these carefully we shall be able in future to prevent things from becoming so dangerously strained that people can take advantage of them to provoke acts of hostility. This goal is perfectly within our reach, because our work of construction has been, and must continue to be, carried out in such a manner as to serve the real interests of the Arab population also.

**... For our community is not, and must never become, a political one; this is the only permanent source whence it can draw new strength and the only ground on which its existence can be justified.**" [Ideas and Opinions, p. 179]

"We nurse the hope of erecting in Palestine a home of our own national culture which shall help to awaken the Near East to new economic and spiritual life.

**The object which the leaders of Zionism have before their eyes is not a political but a social and cultural one.**" [Ideas and Opinions, pp. 179-180]

What Zionism, in terms of goals, policies, strategies and priorities, meant to the leaders and promoters of the cause often stood asynchronous to Einstein's own positions. In 1932, Einstein spoke at a meeting in Los Angeles:

"The Zionist goal gives us an actual opportunity to put into practice, through a viable solution of the Jewish-Arab problem, those principles of tolerance and justice that we owe primarily to our prophets. I am convinced that the living transmission of those principles is the most important thing in Judaism." [Hoffmann, p. 242]

This was not just because he was a humanist and internationalist, but also because he knew and affirmed based on the historical experience that the relationship between the Arabs and Jews in that part of the world was essentially one of friendship. Einstein reminded in a speech in 1939, shortly after acts of violence the new and growing Jewish presence attracted:

"There could be no greater calamity than a permanent discord between us and the Arab people. Despite the great wrong that has been done us, we must strive for a just and lasting compromise with the Arab people ... Let us recall that in former times no people lived in greater friendship with us than the ancestors of these Arabs." [Hoffmann, p. 242]

To better appreciate Einstein and his views in this context, it is important to take into account the fact that Einstein was essentially a humanist, pacifist and internationalist. As Clark, a biographer of Einstein explained:

Along with these feelings which tended to qualify Einstein's enthusiasm for Zionism there was the essentially pacifist nature of his approach to the problems of the world. Even

when it came to Zionism, a subject as emotionally close to his heart as anything ever was, he could never look on his opponents, in this case Arabs, as the deep-eyed villains which the sentiments of the case demanded. he was all for the policy of live and let live. While many Zionists - possibly the majority of them - saw a Jewish National Home essentially as a political state created for political purposes, Einstein saw it rather as a cultural center. 'For me,' he wrote as late as 1938, 'the value of the Zionist undertaking lies mainly in the educational and unifying effect on the Jews of different countries. I am not for the striving for a Jewish state, mainly because I am against the secularization (or becoming worldly) of Jewry.' Many Zionists called for mass emigration to the Promised Land, but Einstein foresaw the way in which Arab opposition would be intensified. Thus the dichotomy which runs through so much of his life showed itself here also. To the demands of *Realpolitik* he would oppose the need for idealism; when force was demanded he would respond that pacifism was essential." [pp. 381-382].

As Einstein saw the Zionist movement taking decisively political direction and the Arab-Israeli gap gradually began to be defined and pronounced, he shared his humanistic wisdom in *Working Palestine*, 1934 (Ideas and Opinions).

"It is, moreover, this working class alone that has the power to establish healthy relations with the Arabs, which is the most important political task of Zionism. Administrations come and go; but it is human relations that finally tune the scale in the lives of nations." [p. 183]

So, what about Einstein's debt to Zionism? Didn't he deliver an address entitled "Our Debt to Zionism"? Yes. On April 17, 1938 (Ideas and Opinions). By 1938 he had already distanced himself from political Zionism and in this speech, while acknowledging the debt, pride in his Jewish identity, and empathy for the Jewish struggle, he made it clear he was not supporting the creation of a Jewish state. He also stated that he didn't view political nationalism, which had by then gripped Zionism for a "Jewish state," as compatible with the longstanding legacy of Judaism.

"To be a Jew, after all, means first of all, to acknowledge and follow in practice those fundamentals in humaneness laid down in the Bible—fundamentals without which no sound and happy community of men can exist." [p. 189]

"Just one more personal word on the question of partition. **I should much rather see reasonable agreement with the Arabs on the basis of living together in peace than the creation of a Jewish state.** Apart from practical consideration, my awareness of the essential nature of Judaism resists the ideas of a Jewish state with borders, an army, and a measure of temporal power no matter how modest. I am afraid of the inner damage Judaism will sustain—especially from the development of a narrow nationalism within our own ranks, against which we have already had to fight strongly, even without a Jewish state. We are no longer the Jews of the Maccabee period. A return to a nation in the political sense of the word would be equivalent to turning away from the spiritualization of our community which we owe to the genius of our prophets." [p. 190]

Based on a joint British and American initiative, there was the [Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry](#) in 1946 to examine the growing conflict between Jews and Arabs in the British Mandate of Palestine and to seek a solution. Einstein was among those prominent Jews who gave testimony before the Committee.

"In his testimony in January 1946 before the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, and in answer to the specific question whether refugee settlement in Palestine demanded a Jewish state, **Einstein stated: 'The State idea is not according to my heart. I cannot understand why it is needed. It is connected with narrow-mindedness and**

**economic obstacles. I believe that it is bad. I have always been against it.' He went further to deride the concept of a Jewish commonwealth as an 'imitation of Europe, the end of which was brought about by nationalism.' "** [Lilienthal, p. 341]

The above statement of Einstein leaves no ambiguity about his actual position and role regarding the creation of the State of Israel.<sup>17</sup> In February 16, 2005, the Guardian published an article titled "[Einstein's other theory](#)," by the controversial Israeli historian Benny Morris. It was based on some correspondence in 1947 between Einstein and Jawaharlal Nehru, and some pro-Zionist people have tried to use this correspondence to connect Einstein again to political Zionism. The article alleged: "In 1947 Zionist leaders asked Albert Einstein to work a miracle and persuade a sceptical India to support the birth of a Jewish state." I am yet to gain access to that correspondence. Regardless, the excerpts reflect the central position of that correspondence which was Einstein's affinity with cultural Zionism, as distinguished from political Zionism. This, presuming Einstein did not totally switch his publicly stated positions prior to and after that correspondence.

That he really did not switch his position can be corroborated by letters and/or statements of Einstein from the same period. Barbara Wolff, a staff with the Einstein Archive at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, brought to my attention a letter, dated Sept 24, 1948, to Einstein's friend Hans Mühsam who had lived in Palestine-Israel since the early 1930s. They were such close friends that Einstein dedicated, and also sent the very first printed copy of original German book *On the Special and General Theory of Relativity*, to Mühsam. [See the [image](#) of the inscription]. They shared common views on many issues, including Zionism and Israel. In the following letter to Mühsam, Einstein contends that the British Mandate power had caused the two parties - Jews and Arabs - to fight one another. The original quote in German is given in the endnote.

You are quite correct in what you're saying about the underhanded posture of England and America toward us [the Jews]. All the Arabs are only poor mercenaries who must carry their skin to market for that. [...] I also think that during these last years an understanding between us and the Arabs which could have led to a bi-national administration was no longer possible. Earlier, however - actually, since 1918 - we neglected the Arabs and trusted in the Englishmen over and over again. I never thought the state idea was a good one, for economic, political and military reasons. But now there is no way to reverse it and it must be contended with. [Einstein Archive DB [#38-380](#)]<sup>18, 19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Some people either misread Einstein's testimony or distorted its content, describing it as pro-Zionist. Einstein did call for a Jewish homeland, which must be understood in the light of his consistent views articulated over the preceding decades.

In 1946, with hundreds of thousands of European Jews still 'displaced' and with the victorious allies unwilling to absorb even a portion of the refugee population, Einstein appeared before an Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine, calling for a 'Jewish homeland.' The Zionist establishment seemed to have intentionally misread this as a call for Jewish sovereignty, so with help from his friend Rabbi Stephen Wise, he clarified his position. Jews, he said, should be able to migrate freely within the limits of the economic absorptive possibilities of Palestine, which in turn should have a government that made sure there was no "'Majorisation' of one group by the other." Resisting Wise's demands for a more forceful statement, Einstein replied that a 'rigid demand for a Jewish State will have only undesirable results for us.' Radical journalist I. F. Stone praised him for rising above 'ethnic limitations.' (Einstein later became a charter subscriber to I. F. Stone's Weekly.) [John J. Simon. "[Albert Einstein, Radical: A Political Profile](#)," Monthly Review, May 2005.

<sup>18</sup> The original quote in German: "Sie haben ganz recht mit dem, was Sie über die hinterhältige Haltung von England und Amerika uns [the Jews] gegeneinander sagen. Die ganzen Araber sind ja nur armselige Söldner, die für jene ihre Haut zu Markte tragen müssen. [...] Ich denke auch, dass in diesen letzten Jahren eine Verständigung zwischen uns und den Arabern nicht mehr möglich war, die zu einer bi-nationalen Verwaltung hätte führen können. Früher aber - eigentlich seit 1918 - haben wir die Araber vernachlässigt und auf die Engländer immer wieder vertraut. Die Staatsidee habe ich nie für gut gehalten, aus wirtschaftlichen, politischen und militärischen Gründen. Aber nun

Wolff commented in an email: "It is true that here, Einstein seems to defend that 'there was no other choice' idea: bi-national administration no more possible. But this statement, out of context, is usually quoted as Einstein's enthusiastic support of the Jewish state. Yet it expresses actually bitter resignation in the face of a *fait accompli*, and a little hope that once, the struggle ends, reason will lead Jews and Arabs to an understanding." [email dated, 7/15/2006]

Just one year prior to that letter to Mühsam [i.e. 1948] - the letter to Nehru was signed & sent [June 13 1947, to be exact], the UN had not yet voted for separation - Einstein wrote to an unidentified Mr. Brainin in the US about his viewpoint:

"[I have] long-held [...] conviction [...] that for Palestine the only fair and suitable form of government is a bi-national arrangement. However, the management would have to be substantially taken over by the United Nations for the foreseeable future, because the political life of Palestine is thoroughly muddled and, therefore, the land is not ripe for political independence." [August, 6, 1947; Einstein Archive DB #[57-685](#)]<sup>20</sup>

Wolff commented in the same email: "Compared with what the letter to Nehru says, this statement must trouble the reader who does not know who indeed drafted the Nehru letter." In another personal email in response to my inquiry [July 12, 2006], Wolff shared some illuminating information, which is helpful to put the Einstein-Nehru correspondence in perspective: "the long letter to Nehru dated 06/13/1947, an item which recently made headlines, was composed by a journalist on behalf of the Zionists, and eventually discussed and signed by Einstein. As you know, Einstein used to (co)sign appeals and letters on behalf of issues he supported in general, even when particular formulations or subtleties did not express his personal opinion. The letter to Nehru has to be read with this reservation in mind."<sup>21</sup>

Wolff's comment is consistent with the fact that for letters to be signed or speeches to be delivered, Einstein often received drafts from ghostwriters. As Ronald Clark wrote in Einstein: The Life and Times wrote about what might have happened to Einstein in certain respects, without the influence of Elsa, his wife.

"He would have ... made a fool of himself more often than he did, have issued more statements that he had to retract, signed more documents without reading them properly, and been used more frequently by men of ill will." [p. 196]

The Official Einstein Archive has an online original as proof. [see Einstein Archive DB #[28-867](#)] This pertains to the draft of an address Einstein delivered at (or sent to) the dinner for the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in 1950. Interestingly enough, some Zionists must have drafted the text

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gibt es kein Zurück mehr und es muss ausgefochten werden." [as sent by Barbara Wolff]

<sup>19</sup> I was somewhat confused about this sentence: "All the Arabs are only poor mercenaries who must carry their skin to market for that." In an email [July 16, 2006] in response to my question, Barbara Wolff wrote: "The sentence you highlighted refers to the fact that the Arabs (like the Jews, by the way) were promised a lot by the Brits, each time according to the British needs and British politics. But while the Jews had their own agenda etc., the Arabs, less versed in politics, became more easily the cue ball (?) = the victim, the mercenaries of the British politics."

<sup>20</sup> The original quote in German: "längst gehegte [...] Ueberzeugung [...], dass für Palästina eine bi-nationale Regierungsform die einzig gerechte und zweckmässige ist. Die Verwaltung müsste aber im Wesentlichen auf absehbare Zeit von den United Nations übernommen werden, da das politische Leben Palästinas gründlich verfahren und das Land deshalb für politische Unabhängigkeit nicht reif ist." (August 6, 1947) [as sent by Barbara Wolff]

<sup>21</sup> "The name of the journalist who drafted the letter after having discussed the issue with Einstein is Chaim Greenberg. He was working for the *Jewish Chronicle*. This information stems from a note Einstein's secretary Helen Dukas forwarded, with the copy of the letter, to Otto Nathan, the co-trustee of Einstein's estate." The preceding information was sent to me by Barbara Wolff in an email [July 16, 2006].

containing some eulogistic expressions for Israel the main section of which Einstein crossed out, replacing it with his own words.

The original draft contained:

"Not only is it the cultural essence of a country sincerely devoted to freedom of the creative artist in every field, but also it is the concrete manifestation of the spiritual and moral stamina of the people of Israel.

The people of America will welcome this great orchestra because it is sent to us in a spirit of gratitude for the part we have played in helping to establish a democratic state of Israel. Israel's contribution to the beauty of living, like all artistic creations, will help not only Israel, but the entire Middle East."

Einstein crossed out the above part, including the reference to Israel as "a democratic state" and replaced with his own, as following:

"The meaning of Israel lay always and still lies in the spiritual values which it creates and embodies. The new state should only be seen as a means to serve these ends efficiently, not as an end in itself or even as an instrument of political ambitions."<sup>22</sup>

The significance of this document is that it is dated almost three years after the letter to Nehru and two years after the State of Israel was founded. By now readers can draw their conclusion independently about New York Times' disingenuous claim about "Israel, whose establishment as a state he [i.e. Einstein] had championed".

### Some specific questions

#### a. Did Einstein's position or attitude change after the establishment of Israel?

By 1949, political Zionism bore its fruit and Israel as the national homeland for the Jews became a reality. In appraising the situation, as in *The Jews of Israel*, November 27, 1949 (Ideas and Opinions), he still talked about the importance for this new nation to seek the ideal of "peace, based on understanding and self-restraint, and not on violence." One has to wonder, notwithstanding the antipathy of its neighbors, what would Einstein have thought of Israel's becoming a nuclear power and a bully of the Middle East.

"When appraising the achievement, however, let us not lose sight of the cause to be served by this achievement: rescue of our endangered brethren, dispersed in many lands, by uniting them in Israel; creation of a community which conforms as closely as possible to the ethical ideals of our people as they have been formed in the course of a long history.

One of these ideals is peace, based on understanding and self-restraint, and not on violence. If we are imbued with this ideal, our joy becomes somewhat mingled with sadness, because our relations with the Arabs are far from this ideal at the present time. It may well be that we would have reached this idea, had we been permitted to work out,

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<sup>22</sup> The original quote in German:

"Die Bedeutung Israels lag immer und liegt noch immer in den geistigen und spirituellen Werten, die es schafft und verkörpert. Der neue Staat soll nur als ein Mittel angesehen werden, diesen Zielen wirksam zu dienen, nicht als Selbstzweck oder gar als ein Instrument politischer Ambitionen." [as sent by Barbara Wolff]

undisturbed by others, our relations with our neighbors, for we want peace and we realize that our future development depends on peace.

It was much less our own fault or that our neighbors than of the Mandatory Power that we did not achieve an undivided Palestine in which Jews and Arabs would live as equals, free, in peace." [p. 201]

So, did Einstein somehow reconcile himself with the exclusivist Zionist entity of Israel and soften his position toward it? Hardly. As he was an avowed pacifist and against nationalism, by now he was more than disenchanted with the extremist tendency of the core leadership of the Zionist movement that virtually monopolized the new country's government. Dispossession of the Palestinians by the extremist groups (blessed by the Zionist government) for the Greater Israel had already started and the massacre of Deir Yassin had already been witnessed.

Lilienthal explains the context of the visit of Menachem Begin to the United States for which a reception committee was organized and how the Zionist circle manipulated in listing some big names without their consent.

"Congressman John F. Kennedy from Massachusetts wired the Chairman of the Committee (that organized the reception for Menachem Begin), author Louis Bromfield: 'Belatedly and for the record I wish to withdraw my name from the reception committee for Menachem Begin, former Irgun Commander. When accepting your invitation, I was ignorant of the true nature of his activities, and I wish to be disassociated from them completely.' The office of Congressman Joe Hendricks of Florida revealed that the congressman had been out of town and thus his name 'mistakenly' had been given to the Begin Committee. Several other Congressmen could not recall later whether they, or their office, had ever authorized the use of their names. Dr. Harry C. Byrd, President of the University of Maryland, said: 'Some people I know asked me if they could use my name as a member of the reception committee and I said they could. I didn't know who he was. I am not going to New York.' And so it went--after the damage had been done." [p. 352]

A number of prominent Jewish voices of conscience rose to the occasion and sent an Open Letter to New York Times. Lilienthal discussed and presented the Open Letter in his book.

**Albert Einstein**, Sidney Hook, Hannah Arendt, and Seymour Milman were among the signatories to this letter, which appeared in the [Times on December 4, 1948](#).

"Among the most disturbing political phenomena of our time is the emergence in the newly created state of Israel of the 'Freedom Party' . . . a political party closely akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy, and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties. It was formed out of the membership and following of the former Irgun Zvai Leumi, a terrorist right-wing chauvinist organization in Palestine.

The current visit of Menachem Begin, leader of this party, to the United States is obviously calculated to give the impression of American support for his party in the coming Israeli elections, and to cement political ties with conservative Zionist elements in the United States. Several Americans of national repute have lent their names to welcome his visit. It is inconceivable that those who opposed fascism throughout the world, if currently informed as to Mr. Begin's political record and perspectives, could add their names and support to the movement he represents . . . **A shocking example was their behavior in the Arab village of Deir Yassin** . . . this incident exemplified the character and actions of the Freedom Party. Within the Jewish community they have preached an admixture

of ultra-nationalism, religious mysticism, and racial superiority. Like other fascist parties, they have been used to break strikes, and have themselves pressed for the destruction of free trade unions.

The discrepancies between the bold claims now being made by Begin and his party, and their record of past performance in Palestine, bear the imprint of no ordinary political party. This is the unmistakable stamp of a Fascist party for whom terrorism (against Jews, Arabs, and British alike) and misrepresentation are means, and a 'Leader State' is the goal.

In the light of the foregoing consideration, it is imperative that the truth about Mr. Begin and his movement be made known in this country. It is all the more tragic that the top leadership of American Zionism has refused to campaign against Begin's efforts, or even to expose to its own constituents the dangers to Israel of support to Begin. The undersigned therefore take the means publicly presenting a few salient facts concerning Begin and his party, and of urging all concerned not to support this latest manifestation of fascism." [pp. 352-353]

A scanned image of this Open Letter from the New York Times is available at this [link](#).

Einstein's joining such other prominent Jews in condemnation of the fascist tendencies by some key personalities in Israel just a month before gaining independence needs to be understood in the context of Einstein's perspective about the "military mentality." He explained: "It is characteristic of the military mentality that non-human factors (atom bombs, strategic bases, weapons of all sorts, the possession of raw materials, etc.) are held essential, while the human being, his desires and thoughts--in short, the psychological factors--are considered as unimportant and secondary." [Ideas and Opinions, pp. 133-134] Even though the Jewish homeland did not come about in the way and in an atmosphere he desired, Einstein tried all throughout his life to see that Israel tries to seek its secured future not through military mentality, but through better dealing with the human factors, as pertinent to the people dispossessed and the neighbors in the midst of which Israel would have to live.

**b. Was he not involved with establishment and advancement of Jewish institutions of higher learning in before and after 1948?**

Yes, he was. He was intimately involved with the founding and development of Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in particular. Indeed, that university is the host of official Einstein Archive as designated by Einstein. However, it needs to be recognized that, from the very earliest stage of his involvement since the 1920s, when he even toured the United States for such causes, his role was non-political. Otto Nathan and Heinz Norden in their book Einstein on Peace wrote:

"In 1921, Einstein made his first trip to the United States. He arrived in New York on April 2, 1921, in the company of Dr. Chaim Weizmann, leader of the Zionist movement. His pacifist activities were not widely known in America, and the trip had no political overtones. Its sole purpose was to raise funds for the projected Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Due in part to the generosity of the American medical profession, the endeavor proved successful." [p. 45]

Who was Otto Nathan?

"Of those at his bedside, it was Otto Nathan, Einstein's loyal friend and adviser, whom he presumed would carry out his wishes. Nathan, a former financial counsellor to Germany's Weimar Republic, had taught economics at Princeton after fleeing the Nazis and was by this time an economics professor at New York University." [Guardian; edited [extract](#) from

Possessing Genius: The Bizarre Odyssey of Einstein's Brain by Carolyn Abraham.  
Published by Icon Books in 2004]

It should also be noted that in early 1920s Einstein traveled extensively. However, as Siegfried Grundmann points out in Einstein Dossiers: "This does not mean that Einstein's interests coincided with the goals of his hosts or were *identical* with the purpose of the trips." [p. 111; emphasis is Grundmann']

As Grundmann points out:

"As a social animal, Einstein shared certain *interests* with other persons and groups. Where necessary, he was ready to serve 'as a famed bigwig and decoy-bird.' He did so for the German state, the interests of his Berlin colleagues, the World Zionist organization and other institutions inside and outside the country." [p. 113; Einstein's own words 'as a famed bigwig and decoy-bird' is quoted from Letter to Solovine, 8 mar, 1921. In Einstein, Albert: Briefe an Solovine, Berlin 1960, p. 26]

Einstein was initially not comfortable about the trip to America for the Zionist cause. He even wrote to Blumenfeld about others merely using his name. Einstein was also fully aware about his role as, in his own words, a "decoy-bird".

"He was for a *homeland for Jews* but not for an independent state. Besides he did not like the role he was supposed to play on the trip. 'One is only using my name, which is now the talk of the day,' he replied to Blumenfeld [395]. ... Finally, Einstein agreed but less out of sympathy for Zionism than out of compassion for Jews subjected everywhere to severe persecution. He had no illusions about the role cut out for him. On 8 March he wrote to Solovine: 'I don't enjoy going to America at all but I am doing so on behalf of the Zionists, who have to beg for dollars for the educational institutions in Jerusalem, for which I must serve **as famed bigwig and decoy-bird**. ... On the other hand, I am doing whatever I can for my clansmen, who are being treated so meanly everywhere.' [Grundmann, p. 120-121; note #395: Seelig, Carl (ed.): Helle Zeit - Dunkle Zeit. Zurich, 1956, p. 78]

In a letter to Haber, a German Jewish friend, who tried to dissuade him, Einstein acknowledged that Weizmann was just making use of his name for propaganda purpose during this trip to America. Einstein wrote: "I was not needed for my skills, of course, but only for my name." [Grundmann, p. 122, quoting Einstein from MPG-A, an archive: V rep. 13, Fritz Haber, no. 978].

The trip to America did bring Einstein closer to the Jewish causes, and as Zionism, in its various shades, was at the forefront of the Jewish cause, during the 1920s Einstein was *persuaded* to become active for the Zionist cause. However, even when he was most active for the Zionist cause in 1920s and he joined Chaim Weizmann in the trip to USA, Zionist leaders had no illusion about Einstein. Moreover, Zionists in America were warned about Einstein's eccentricities.

Who doesn't know about Kurt Blumenfeld in the context of the Zionist movement? What he mentioned about Einstein remains an eye-opener. The following excerpt is from the book *Subtle is the Lord: The Science and the Life of Albert Einstein* (Oxford University Press, 1982) by Abraham Pais. The author was a renowned theoretical physicist and scientific historian. He was also involved in the Zionist movement. In Pais' award-winning biography of Einstein, he wrote:

"There was one person who more than anyone else contributed to Einstein's awakening: Kurt Blumenfeld, from 1910 to 1914 secretary general of the Executive of World Zionist Organizations, which then had its seat in Berlin, and from 1924 to 1933 president of the Union of German Zionists. Ben Gurion called him the greatest moral revolutionary in the

Zionist movement. He belonged to the seventh generation of emancipated German Jewry. In a beautiful essay, Blumenfeld has written of his discussions with Einstein in 1919, of his efforts 'to try to get out of a man what is hidden in him, and never to try to instill in a man what is not in his nature' [B3] It was Blumenfeld whom Einstein often entrusted in later years with the preparation of statements in his name on Zionist issues. It was also Blumenfeld who was able to convince Einstein that he ought to join Weizmann on a visit to the United States (April 2 - May 30, 1921) in order to raise funds for the planned Hebrew University. Blumenfeld understood the man he was dealing with. After having convinced Einstein, he wrote to Weizmann, '**As you know, Einstein is no Zionist, and I beg you not to make any attempt to prevail on him to join our organization. ... I heard ... that you expect Einstein to give speeches. Please be quite careful with that. Einstein ... often says things out of naiveté which are unwelcome by us**' [B4]." [p. 315]

For political purpose, Einstein's visit was tightly monitored and controlled by his Zionist organizers of the trip. "As anticipated, Einstein served as a 'famed bigwig and decoy-bird.' Weizmann preferred to do the talking himself. The head of the World Zionist organization did not want to have his plans ruined by any undesirable *political* statements that escaped from Einstein." [Grundmann, p. 125; emphasis by Grundmann]

That was in 1920 as Einstein was about to visit America. He became closer to the movement to further the cause of cultural Zionism. As the Jewish Virtual Library comments: "Although never a member of a Zionist organization, in 1924 Einstein did become a member of a Berlin synagogue to declare his Jewish identity and he served the cause of Zionism throughout his adult life." [Judaic Treasures of the Library of Congress: [Albert Einstein](#)]

However, in the sense Blumenfeld wrote - "Einstein is no Zionist" - that is, political Zionism, did that reality about Einstein ever change?

Jessica Heckman further clarifies:

"Though critical of most political organizations, Einstein was willing to associate himself with certain causes to solve current, mounting social crises. After World War I he first became involved with Zionism to counteract the rising anti-Semitism in Germany. In the 1870s, Zionism had emerged as an international movement espousing the creation of a Jewish state. Theodor Herzl, the father of political Zionism, believed this to be the only way Jews could gain acceptance from the world. Einstein's friend Kurt Blumenfeld, a German Zionist leader,\*\* claimed credit for Einstein's 'conversion' to Zionism in 1920, ... 'Conversion' is a loaded term, implying that Einstein was inspired by Blumenfeld to place unquestioning faith in the Zionist project. If we examine Einstein's own words, however, this is clearly not the case. Rather, while affiliating himself with Zionism, he preserved a skeptical distance from it. In 1919 Einstein claimed, 'I am as a human being an opponent of nationalism, but as a Jew I am from today a supporter of the Jewish Zionist efforts.'\*\* Einstein here pointedly refers to himself as a 'supporter' of Zionism rather than a 'Zionist' or 'believer' in Zionism,\*\* thereby aligning himself with the project of founding a Jewish state and at the same time placing himself at one remove from this project. Furthermore, he counterbalances support for the Zionist cause with an abiding supranationalism. This balancing act opened up a space for skepticism that he preserved throughout his involvement with Zionism." [2005; see the link in the bibliography; asterisks represent numbered annotations]

The above account is consistent with what Ronald Clark, a biographer of Einstein, wrote:

Kurt Blumenfeld, who recruited Einstein into the Zionist cause, shrewdly noted of him to Weizmann that 'Zionism and Palestine were only peripheral concerns'; and in 1923 Einstein himself revealed his own view of the priorities when he told Weizmann that he would give his name and would talk to people in Berlin but would not 'travel around or visit congresses, since in order to preserve my rights as a thinker I have to stay quiet in order to work.' [p. 310]

Einstein's empathy and involvement with the Zionist cause, yet not being a "Zionist" is best illustrated in his own words at the Sixteenth Zionist Congress.

Thus Einstein was among those invited to attend, and to speak at, the crucial Sixteenth Zionist Congress held in Zurich in August, 1929. ...

He had been invited to the congress because, as Weizmann assured him, he would 'greatly enhance the importance of the proceedings and afford considerable gratification to all supporters.' This was so, although he also gave great support to Weizmann whose name he quite justifiably linked with that of Herzl himself and whose past work, he said, gave him a moral right to influence their future. There had been bitter talk of 'abdication' to the Jewish Agency, and it was claimed that the influential half of the new organization was concerned only with a much watered-down version of real Zionism. Little of this argument came through at the congress, although it is significant that in his speech Einstein, after speaking of 'the brave and dedicated minority who call themselves Zionists,' went on to say 'we others ...' " [Clark, p. 401]

#### c. Has the propaganda about Einstein's support for the State of Israel stopped?

Not at all. Just like Alfred Lilienthal had his encounter with the New York Times, I had a brief encounter with The Independent of United Kingdom. In a [letter](#) to the Independent [January 11, 2005], Dr. Colin Shindler, a lecturer in Israeli and Modern Jewish Studies and Chair, Centre for Jewish Studies at University of London, accused me of distorting the history about the relationship between Einstein and Zionism. He wrote: "He (Einstein) never renounced his Zionism."

The fact is nowhere on my essay did I state, or imply, that Einstein had renounced Zionism. To my surprise when I responded with the above excerpt from Pais' book, quoting Kurt Blumenfeld that "Einstein is no Zionist," the editor-in-charge of the section refused to publish it. According to the paper the refusal was due to the time lapse, after Dr. Shindler's accusation was published. Of no consequence did it seem that neither Dr. Shindler nor the paper had the courtesy to notify me of the accusation, which caused the delay.

In short Einstein is still being claimed as a Zionist and as a patron/champion of Israel, while factual remarks to the contrary are being suppressed by the media.

#### d. How in the world Einstein was offered the presidency of Israel?

In his accusation of me for distortions regarding Einstein, Dr. Colin Shindler resorted to a circular argument: "If Einstein wasn't a Zionist, it was a bit odd of Ben-Gurion to ask him to stand as second President of Israel in 1952."

It projects allusions of a sound argument only by camouflaging its circular conclusion, which would have been something like: "Therefore, Einstein was a Zionist." The offer of the presidency, though symbolic, was not a small matter, because the state of Israel, a fruit of political Zionism, stood in sharp contrast with what Einstein essentially stood for.

"Albert Einstein, the man who had always decried force, was invited to become President of Israel, that realization of Zionist hopes, the state which had successfully staked out its frontiers by force of arms and was defending them against all comers." [Clark, p. 617]

However, it was a great political stunt by the Israeli leaders. If Einstein didn't accept the offer, as he actually did not, that as great a person - one of the greatest humanists, scientists, and pacifists - as Einstein was offered this presidency would bring the state of Israel some positive publicity. Of course, then, in contrast, if Einstein did accept the offer, one might presume that it would be a greater joy for the Israeli leaders. But, ironically, what those Israeli leaders, who made the offer, thought of if Einstein did accept the offer is quite revealing. In *Albert Einstein: A Biography* (Viking, 1997), Albrecht Folsing shares the following revelation about the offer to Einstein to become Israel's president: "While Ben-Gurion was awaiting Einstein's decision, he asked his assistant, the future president Yitzak Navon, over a cup of coffee: 'Tell me what to do if he says yes! I have had to offer the post to him because it's impossible not to. But if he accepts we're in for trouble.'" [p. 735]

Thus, it is evident that while Israel was trying to recruit a good name for public diplomacy, it was not a sincere offer. Zionist leaders were in fact quite concerned if Einstein did decide to accept the offer. It seems reasonable to wonder whether Dr. Shindler didn't know about the suspicion expressed by Ben Gurion, or did he simply choose to ignore it?

In a recently published book *Einstein on Race and Racism*, some additional information is available about this offer of presidency. Two of the chapters in the book are Einstein and Robeson, I and II. Paul Robeson was an African-American with whom Einstein became a close friend. The last time they met was at Einstein's home at the host's invitation and the meeting lasted for almost six hours. Robeson was accompanied by his friend and colleague Lloyd Brown.

Understanding what happened at that meeting between Einstein and Robeson is key to appreciating the bond between the two men. Brown's account gives us some idea of the content of their discussion: they talked about everything from music ... to why Einstein had recently declined an invitation to become president of Israel: "Einstein said he had been opposed to the Jewish State in the beginning. He had been in favor of a bi-national state. He said, when you have a state then you get an army and he was sorry the bi-national state didn't happen. He said that he had written about this and it was in his book of essays, *Out of My Later Years*. [Jerome and Taylor, p. 125]

Einstein's position against political Zionism and for a bi-national state is well known and he articulated that in earlier works. In that specific context of declining the presidency, he has referred to his views against any Jewish state. Later, as he had to contend with the reality of the emerging state, he firmly advocated a bi-national state. He knew that a state would have a military, and both from his perspective as a Jew and a pacifist, he was disappointed. Once again, the comments here are not new, but the timing and the context are relevant to note.

What he wrote to his stepdaughter in this context of declining the presidency is also worth mentioning.

When he turned down the offer, Einstein told his stepdaughter Margot, 'If I were to be president, sometime I would have to say to the Israeli people things they would not like to hear.' [Jerome, p. 111; further sources given in p. 307, note #25]

Unfortunately, due to his natural weakness toward his people and to preempt any harm his views might cause the nascent state, Einstein was all along too diplomatic. The problem was that those who could talk to Israel what it needed to be told remained relatively muted. Kissinger shares an interesting observation of Richard Nixon 15 years later.

Occasionally Nixon was tempted to impose a settlement. On one of my memoranda in late 1969, informing him of King Hussein's pessimism about peace prospects in the face of Israel's tough stand, Nixon wrote in longhand: "I am beginning to think we have to consider taking strong steps unilaterally to save Israel from her own destruction." [p. 372-373]

Just as many a sympathizers who had the moral or political high ground in regard to Israel have been too diplomatic, after writing in "longhand", it was shortly forgotten. "But on further consideration [Nixon] always stopped short, ..." [p. 373]

## Conclusion

Einstein was a universal humanist and also deeply conscious and proud of his Jewish heritage. He empathized with the Jewish people that had suffered throughout history, which was only worsening during his lifetime. Parallel to his life as a scientist, he gradually became attached to the Jewish plight, active in seeking solution to the Jewish problem. As early as in the 1920s he came in close contact with prominent Zionist leaders, such as Kurt Blumenfeld, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, et al. Einstein made sincere efforts to bring his good name to the cause of his people's plight, but avoided mixing his empathy for them with the political aspirations of Zionism.

Einstein never identified with political Zionism. He associated himself with cultural Zionism instead, which was focused on a spiritual revival of the Jewish heritage. As a universal humanist and an eminent bridge-builder, he believed that such revival, especially in a designated place like Palestine, would not only help address the Jewish plight, but also serve the humanity in general and the people of Palestine in particular. He categorically rejected nationalism and the exclusivist political Zionism. He also believed in a binational solution, where Arabs and Jews would live in harmony as equals in a single, free society.

Thus, if support for any form of Zionism would be adequate to label Einstein as a Zionist, he can be labeled so. However, there is a common tendency to use Zionism and political Zionism synonymously. When it is used in that way, Einstein was not a Zionist. Of course, Einstein's own words, as documented in this essay, are sufficient to establish that point. Also, only in this perspective, one can understand and appreciate the comment of one of the leading Zionists, Kurt Blumenfeld: "Einstein is no Zionist," or as " ... after speaking of 'the brave and dedicated minority who call themselves Zionists,' Einstein went on to say '**we others**' ".  
who call themselves Zionists,' Einstein went on to say '**we others**' "

Is it a small matter, whether we should be careful and conscientious in using any label for Einstein? Well, [Israel's attack on Gaza](#) in February 1955<sup>23</sup> caused the situation in the Middle East to heat up. Einstein was deeply concerned about the challenges for Israel and the general potential for much wider conflicts. He was preparing for a speech to be delivered on the Independence Day of Israel, May 14. He died in April 1955. "Among his papers were found the hand-written pages that he had prepared for the opening of his address." [Brian, p. 156] Consistent with the views he held life-long in regard to Arab-Jews (which evolved into Arab-Israeli) relationship and its potential to cause great conflicts and tensions, even a few days before his death, he still carried the same burden of conscience and agony. He deeply loved his people and empathized with them. At the same time, his humanist soul was committed to "truth and justice" for all, including the Jews and the Arabs. Especially remarkable was his view about small or great matters in the context of "truth and justice".

"His unspoken text began: 'What I am trying to do is simply to **serve truth and justice** with my modest strength. You may think that the conflict between Israel and Egypt is a

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<sup>23</sup> For this attack, UN Security Council unanimously adopted [Resolution 106](#) condemning Israel on March 17, 1955.

small and unimportant problem. 'We have more important concerns,' you might say. That is not the case. When it comes to truth and justice there is no difference between the small and great problems. Whosoever fails to take small matters seriously in a spirit of truth cannot be trusted in great affairs." [Brian, p. 156]

It is interesting that we hear so much about the need for "peace and stability." Maybe if we paid attention to "truth and justice," peace and stability wouldn't be as difficult to achieve. Isn't there a message of enduring value in that unspoken draft that lay beside the death-bed of this great soul?<sup>24</sup>

So, was Einstein a Zionist or not? Well, for his involvement and association with well-known Zionists, all the support he has extended to the Zionist/Jewish cause, for all his "debt" to Zionism, to make a blanket claim or assertion by a person like me that he was not a Zionist would be inaccurate. However, to plainly label him as a Zionist would be even more inaccurate, if not disingenuous. Therefore, whether he was a Zionist or not a Zionist, let me defer it to the readers for their own judgment. However, the last word on this might be given to the most important organization of Zionism, the Zionist General Council. It is the supreme institution of the global Zionist movement or World Zionist Organization. "To mark the centennial of the First Zionist Congress held in Basel and the founding of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) there, and in wake of the Government decision to declare 1996-97 as the 'Year of Zionism', the Zionist General Council published a booklet [1997]. The booklet, [World Zionist Organization: The National Institutions, Structure and Functions](#), provides a synopsis of the movement and the organization's history and structure.

In that official document, it is mentioned that Einstein participated in the Sixteenth Zionist Congress in 1929. How WZO described Einstein as a participant at that 1929 Congress in a document published in [1997](#) is rather [revealing](#). They ought to know who was a Zionist and who was not.

The Sixteenth Zionist Congress (1929) decided on the establishment of the Jewish Agency for Israel, which would be a joint body of the World Zionist Organization and those known as "**non-Zionists**" in the belief that all Jews wished to participate in building the National Home. Upon conclusion of the Congress, Board of the Jewish Agency convened. Of its 224 members, 112 were Zionists (members of the World Zionist Organization) including Prof. Chaim Weizmann who was elected as President of the Jewish Agency, Nahum Sokolow, Menahem Ussishkin, Shemaryahu Levin, David Ben-Gurion, Rabbi Uziel; **the 112 "non-Zionist" members included** Louis Marshall, Shalom Asch, **Albert Einstein**, Leon Blum, and members of the Rothschild family. [p. 47; emphases are mine. However, "non-Zionists" within quotation marks is from the original document.]

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<sup>24</sup> Over the years, Einstein became quite close to Bertrand Russell. As Einstein became passionately committed toward peace in the nuclear age, he tirelessly worked to engage prominent voices among the scientists and intellectuals in a movement. Russell was one such person who became so closely associated with Einstein in this regard that "on 9 July 1955, Bertrand Russell read what became known as the Russell-Einstein Manifesto to the world's press assembled in London. He [Russell] explained that signing the appeal was the last thing Einstein had done before he died." [Russell's Autobiography, p. 27] This same Russell, a partner and confidant of Einstein in service to "truth and justice":

"Just two days before his death in 1970 in his ninety-eights year, Bertrand Russell, still fighting for justice for all peoples and particularly concerned about the fate of the Palestinians, wrote: 'We are frequently told that we must sympathize with Israel because of the suffering of the Jews in Europe at the hands of the Nazis. ... What Israel is doing today cannot be condoned, and to invoke the horror of the past to justify those of the present is gross hypocrisy.' And the famed philosopher asked this question: 'How much longer is the world willing to allow this spectacle of wanton cruelty?' [Lillienthal, p. 204, quoting Alistair Cook, "Six Men," (New York: Knopfm 1977), p. 180]

For those who are interested in labeling, WZO has the answer. For those who are not enamored with labeling, Einstein, notwithstanding his deep empathy for and commitment to his own people of Jewish background, was a humanist, a bridge-builder, a pacifist and, in his own words, a servant of "truth and justice" - "truth and justice" for all. He was an important icon of the spirit of global-belonging.<sup>25</sup>

Also, beyond any labeling, what is of even greater importance are the dreams of Einstein that still remain unfulfilled. I have to echo John Stachel:

Einstein's lifelong devotion to humanist ideals and his attempts to apply them to the complex social problems of his time demand the highest respect. In spite of any weaknesses one may find in his outlook, Einstein's call for Jewish self-respect in the lands of the diaspora, his support of a secular, humanistic Judaism, his conciliatory views on Jewish-Arab relations, and his suggestions on finding the path to peace in the Middle East are still of more than purely historical interest - particularly to his fellow Jews. Rather than unthinking adulation of his every word, or cynical manipulation of the Einstein myth, we can honor him best by reading and pondering his words, modifying or rejecting what we find to be obsolete, and using in our current struggles what we find to be of lasting value." [p. 76]

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**\*This is an updated version of [the original](#) write-up in January 2000.**

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<sup>25</sup> Mohammad Omar Farooq. "[The Spirit of Global Belonging: Perspectives from Some Humanity-Oriented Icons](#)," Unpublished essay, September 2006.

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#### **Additional reading:**

1. [The 1948 Letter of some Eminent Jews to New York Times](#) (Albert Einstein was one of the signatories condemning the Fascist and Nazi-like nature of the new State of Israel)
2. [Letter to the Editor](#) of the Palestinian Arab Newspaper "Falastin" [January 28, 1930]
3. [Excerpt](#) from 'Subtle is the Lord...': The Science and the Life of Albert Einstein.
4. Criticism of the above essay in a [Letter](#) by Dr. Colin Shindler (University of London) in *The Independent*
5. [My response](#) sent to the *Independent* on October 12, 2005