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# ISRAEL INSTITUTE MAGAZINE

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Zionism: The Unfinished Task

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## **ELECTION SEASON, AGAIN**

Israel's electoral structure helps explain frequent returns to the voting booth

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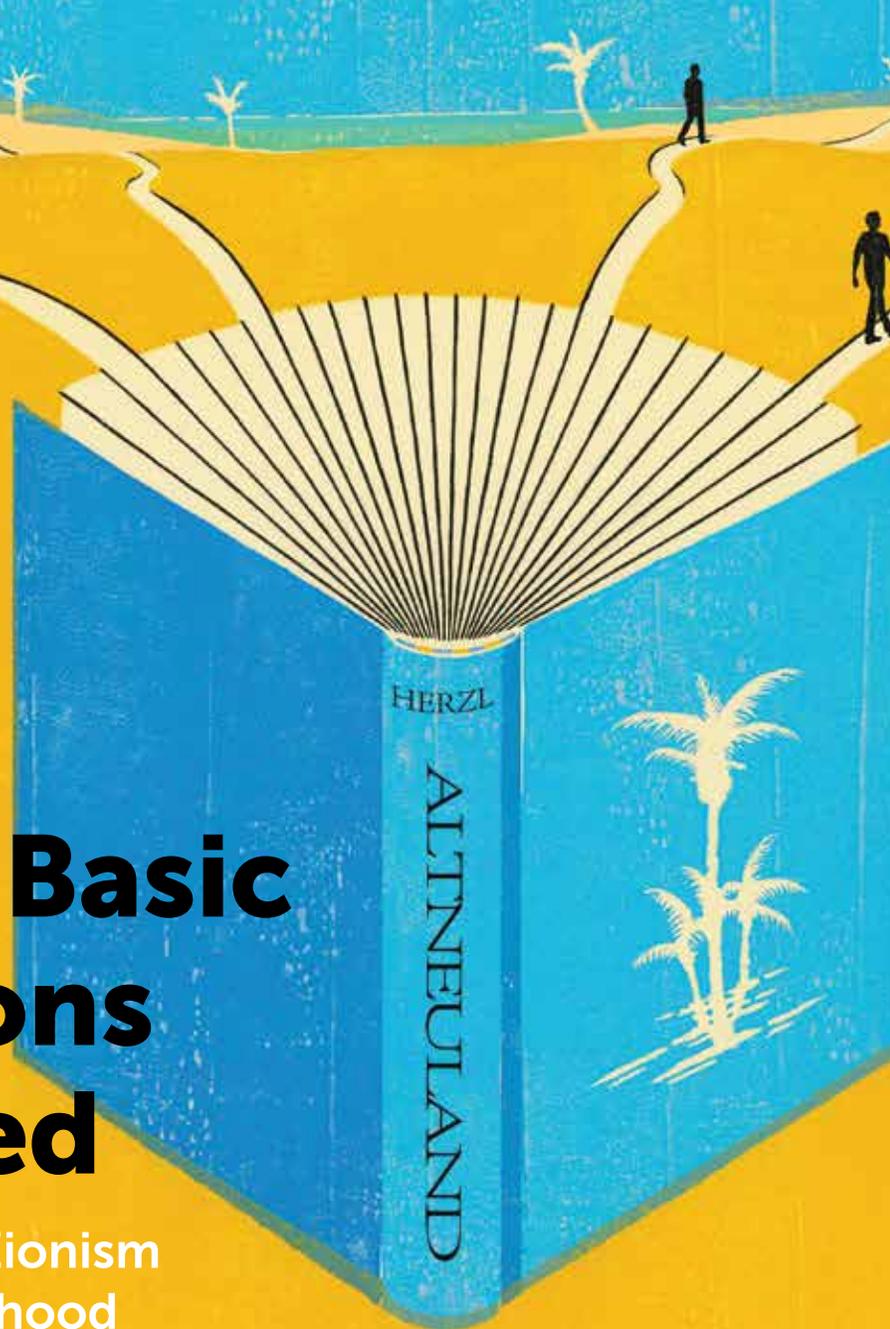
## **ECHOES OF REVISIONISM**

The history and legacy of Menachem Begin

IN THIS ISSUE:

# Israel's Basic Questions Revisited

Experts discuss Zionism and Jewish statehood





**It is a great pleasure to be able to offer this second issue of *Israel Institute Magazine*.**

We are very excited to be able to share with you insights from the work of the Institute over the last several months. In this issue of the magazine, you will be able to read about our ongoing discussion on Zionism, a topic that has been the focus of many of the Institute's recent activities and the research of many of its affiliated scholars.

The subject of our annual conference, held this past fall, was the continuing relevance of Zionism as an organizing concept. It is no secret that Israel is undergoing a period of significant change. The founding generation is dwindling and the second generation of state leaders – those who were children when the state was created but who turned Zionism from a revolution into an established, enduring and functioning state – are themselves passing on the reins to a generation that was born after the state was created.

The Zionism that powered the transformation of the Jewish people from a diaspora nation into a sovereign nation-state must, naturally, evolve. In this issue of *Israel Institute Magazine*, we report on our annual conference and the ideas that it raised in relation to the meaning of modern Zionism for today's Israelis and for diaspora Jews. In addition to coverage of theoretical debates, you will also find insights from people who are putting

modern Zionism into action on the ground, for instance by founding new urban communities or strengthening traditional Zionist projects such as kibbutzim.

In these pages, we include not only our observations on Zionism but also those of some of our grantees. Institute post-doc, Dr. Reut Itzkovitch-Malka, working this year at

Stanford, shares her thoughts on the primary system in Israel while James Eastwood, a doctoral candidate at the University of London, writes about ethical training for IDF soldiers. Dr. Avi Shilon, who will be an Institute post-doc next year at NYU, shares his observations about Menachem Begin, the subject of a biography that he has written. Additionally, Program Director Michael Koplrow reviews a book on the early Arab-Zionist encounter written by Prof. Jonathan Gribetz, a recipient of an Israel Institute grant.

This issue of the magazine contains profiles of Prof. Anita Shapira, an Israel Prize-winning historian and member of our advisory board, and of Brig. Gen. Shlomo Brom, who is serving this year as an Israel Institute fellow at the Center for American Progress, a Washington D.C. think tank. It also has insights from the Institute's president, Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich, who writes about the challenges and changes in modern Zionism.

Finally, we have several articles about the ongoing activities of the Israel Institute and its grantees, including our "News & Notes" section, where you can get updates about what we and the scholars, artists and practitioners in the Institute network have been up to.

Putting this issue together has been fun for us both because of the joy we get from sharing great ideas but also because of the pride we feel in the work that members of our affiliated community are doing to enrich the conversation about Israel across such a broad range of areas. I hope you enjoy reading the magazine as much as we do bringing it to you!

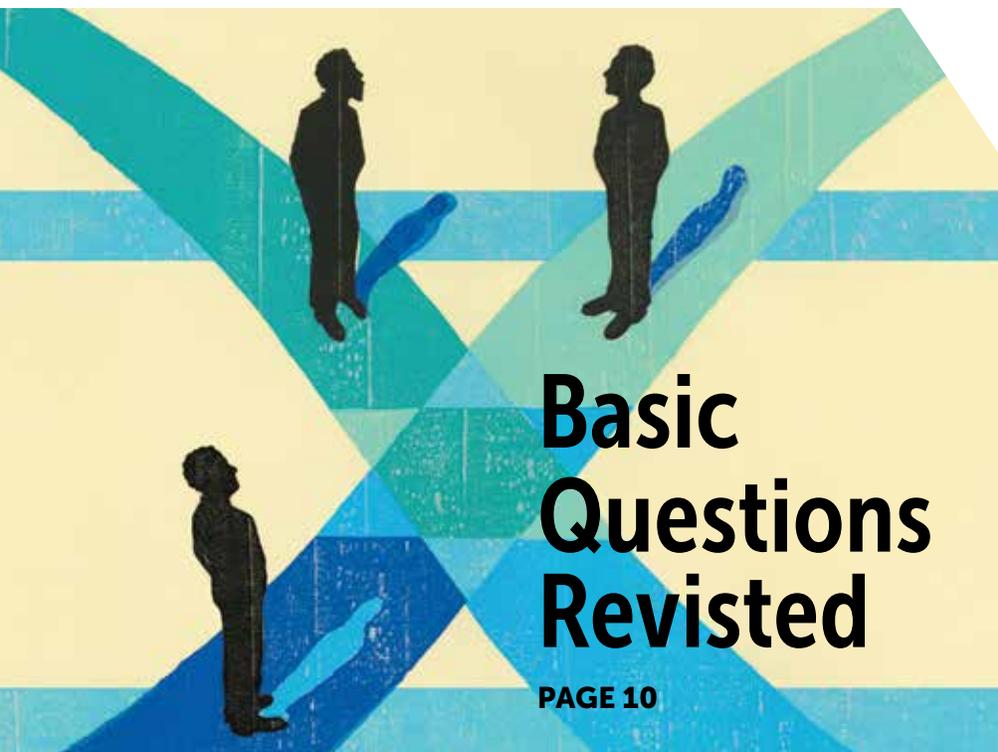
**Dr. Ariel Ilan Roth**  
*Executive Director, Israel Institute*

# Kol HaMachon

THE VOICE OF THE ISRAEL INSTITUTE

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*On the cover: Illustration by Dan Bejar*

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📌 *Amb. Itamar Rabinovich,  
Israel Institute President*

# Zionism: The

Zionism has undergone changes as an ideology and a movement since its emergence in the 19th century, particularly following Israeli statehood. The geopolitical realities in Israel and the Middle East in the 21st century present new challenges for the Zionist project.

BY AMBASSADOR ITAMAR RABINOVICH

**Z**ionism emerged in the late 19th century as the ideology and movement of Jewish nationalism. The Jews, it argued, were a people and a nation and as such were entitled, like all other nations, to self-determination and statehood. A Jewish national state would resolve the anomalies caused by exile and dispersion and normalize Jewish life. The quest for normalization has been a key component of Zionist ideology.

In the final years of the 19th century and during the first half of the 20th century Zionism registered a long list of impressive achievements. From a small group of visionaries it developed into a mass movement. It transformed and expanded the small Jewish community in Palestine. It obtained from Great Britain the Balfour Declaration and embedded it in the British Mandate in Palestine. Under British protection it built an embryonic state, and by 1948 it achieved statehood in part of Palestine, west of the Jordan.

But there were limits to this success story. Zionism failed to become the

gripping mass movement of the Jewish population in Eastern and Central Europe. A massive immigration to Palestine in the 1920s, when it was possible, failed to happen. The Jews chose either to stay put or immigrate to America and other attractive destinations. Zionism's dark prophecy – that the anomaly of Jewish life would end in a catastrophe – materialized during the Holocaust. Zionism failed to move the bulk of the Jewish population out of Europe and was quite helpless when its leadership found out that the Holocaust was being perpetrated.

The Holocaust played a major role in the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state in 1948. A sense of guilt and a recognition that Jewish life had to be normalized underlay the U.N. partition resolution in November 1947. Israel had yet to fight a difficult and costly war from which it emerged victorious. But victory and statehood did not lead to the normalization sought by Zionism. The Arab world, defeated in the battlefield, refused to accept Israel and has conducted a political

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campaign, rejecting Israel's legitimacy and boycotting it directly and indirectly. It took thirty years for the first Arab state, Egypt, to make peace with Israel and establish "normal peaceful relations" with the Jewish State. Egypt has since been joined by other Arab states that made full or partial peace with Israel, but large parts of the Arab and Muslim worlds continue to deny Israel's very legitimacy and, when they accept the reality of Israel, refuse to accept Zionism as a legitimate nationalist ideology.

Dealing with this hostility remains an important challenge for Israel and the Zionist movement, but it is only one of several challenges. In an entirely different context, Israel has to define its relationship with the major Jewish communities living in Western countries. These communities are integrated in free and thriving democracies, have a special bond with Israel and have no intention of making aliyah. The mantra used by Israel's leadership that all Jews should move to Israel is meaningless. Israel's political and intellectual elite, in league with their Jewish counterparts abroad, should redefine Zionist ideology and make it meaningful to diaspora Jews, the young generation in particular.

This is important but not as urgent as the need to deal with the new wave of efforts to delegitimize Israel and Zionism. To some extent it is a new incarnation of older attitudes, however it also feeds on the failure to deal with the lingering Palestinian issue. The core of the settler movement in Israel argues that it represents Zionism's second wave. (The first wave, so the argument goes, was led by secular Zionists who achieved statehood in

a portion of the historic homeland. The ongoing second wave, made possible by the 1967 war, is led by Orthodox Zionists whose mission is to add "the land of the Bible" to the Jewish state.) It should be emphasized that the settlement project is not the sole obstacle to Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation. Powerful forces among the Palestinians and in the Arab and Muslim worlds continue to reject the very idea of Israel and assume that time and numbers are on their side. If Israel is to preserve its legitimacy, it must define the nature of its polity and its boundaries. It must redefine Zionism in a fashion that turns it once again into an ideology attractive to its own population and to the Jewish diaspora, defensible against regional and international foes who are not going to go away. ▲

## Itamar Rabinovich

- Founding President of the Israel Institute
- Former Ambassador of Israel to the United States and chief negotiator with Syria
- Former President of Tel Aviv University
- Professor Emeritus of Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University
- Distinguished Global Professor at New York University
- Non-Resident Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution
- Recent books include *The Lingering Conflict: Israel, the Arabs and the Middle East* (2011) and *The View from Damascus* (2009)
- Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles



**Remaining articles from this issue of the magazine will be coming online soon.**

**Stay tuned!**