

Published in Association of Jewish Libraries Reviews, September/October, 2014, p. 25.

Weisz, Georges Yitshak. Theodor Herzl: a New Reading. Jerusalem: Gefen, 2013. \$29.95 (9789652295873). Also available as an eBook.

“Zionism is a return to Jewishness even before there is a return to the Jewish land.” These words from Theodor Herzl’s opening address to the first World Zionist Congress do not fit in with the common perception of the man as a highly assimilated Jew who never had a deeply rooted Jewish identity and who only came up with the idea of the Jewish state because of the anti-Semitism attendant upon the Dreyfus trial in France. In this book, Dr. Weisz sets out to show that each of these elements of the commonly held image of Herzl is incorrect. Basing himself mainly on Herzl’s diaries, letters, books, and journalistic writings, the founder of the Zionist movement turns out to be a more interesting figure, one who grew up in a strongly Jewish family and whose Jewish identity deepened as he grew older after a period of despair and self-pity as a young man. The author’s case is a credible one overall. He does not duck difficult issues such as Herzl’s proposal of the mass baptism of Jews as a cure for anti-Semitism. Some of the book’s excursions into rabbinic thought, interesting in themselves, seem digressive. Still, this is an important work and a very worthwhile addition to any library collection on Zionism.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University