Mohilever, Shemuʾel Encyclopedia Article

Mohilever, Shemuʾel

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Mohilever, Shemuʾel

MOHILEVER, SHEMUʾEL (1824–1898), a leader of the proto-Zionist movement Ḥibbat Tsiyyon. Born in Lithuania, Mohilever served as rabbi in various communities in Lithuania and Poland. In the 1860s and 1870s, he wrote articles in the religious periodical *Ha-Levanon*, in which he advocated cooperation between the Orthodox and the *maskilim*, the followers of the Jewish Enlightenment. Relations between these two groups were extremely bitter, and Mohilever's attempt to create a bridge between them remained ahead of its time.

Like some of the *maskilim*, Mohilever was attracted to the idea of settlement of Jews in the Land of Israel even before the pogroms of 1881. Following the pogroms and the beginnings of mass emigration, he joined with others in creating the Ḥibbat Tsiyyon movement to divert the emigrants to Palestine. Mohilever was the honorary president of the Kattowitz conference of 1884, and his closing speech became a classic Zionist sermon. Ḥibbat Tsiyyon was torn from the outset by tensions between its religious and secular members, and these ultimately led to a withdrawal of support by many Orthodox Jews who had initially favored the movement. True to his belief in working with the *maskilim*, Mohilever remained in Ḥibbat Tsiyyon. However, in order to further religious interests in the movement, Mohilever suggested establishment of a "spiritual center" (*merkaz ruḥani*) which, following his death in 1898, became the foundation for Mizraḥi, the religious Zionist faction within Theodor Herzl's Zionist movement.

Mohilever worked intensively on developing Jewish colonies in Palestine and influenced Baron Edmond de Rothschild to contribute money toward this end. He also headed a tour of agricultural colonies in 1890. These settlement activities, although small and often failures, laid the groundwork for the later Zionist settlement.

Mohilever joined Herzl's World Zionist Organization when it was founded in 1897, but because of his infirm condition, he played no role in its activities. Nonetheless, he made an important contribution to the later Zionist movement with his insistence on an alliance between religious and secular Jewish nationalism.

See Also

Zionism.

Bibliography

Appraisals of Mohilever's life and work can be found in David Vital's *The Origins of Zionism* (Oxford, 1975), chapter 6. Additional biographical information on Mohilever appears in *The Zionist Idea*, edited by Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia, 1959), pp. 398–405.

New Sources

Hovav, Yamimah. *Ha-Rav Shemuʾel Mohiliver*. Jerusalem, 1999.