Summary

- Albert Einstein revolutionized the world with his theory of relativity. Today, his works are regarded as the cornerstone of modern physics.
- As an employee at the Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property (Patent Office) in Bern, he had enough freedom for physics and published the theory of relativity in 1905.
- In 1921, Albert Einstein was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics as Director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physics in Berlin.
- When the National Socialists seized power in 1933, Einstein emigrated from Germany to the USA. He conducted research at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton until his death on April 18, 1955.
- Einstein is considered a patron of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and supported Zionism, but he declined the office of President of Israel.
- In the interview conducted by FokusIsrael.ch with the help of the AI assistant Grok, Albert Einstein talks about questions of morality and ethics, Zionism and the anti-Semitism he was confronted with.

By Reto E. Wild

Albert Einstein, how would you describe your Jewish identity – culturally, religiously or both?

Albert Einstein: My religion is more an ethic of reason than any ritual calendar – but who says you can’t combine reason with morality? I see myself as a Jew, which for me means belonging, responsibility and universal values.

You often talk about a “cosmic religion”. What do you mean by this?

Albert Einstein: “Cosmic religion” refers to reverence for the order of the universe, to reason, ethics and humanity as central values – not to dogmas or rituals.

How do you see the tense relationship between science and religion?

Albert Einstein: Science and ethics/religion should complement each other; science explains the world, ethics guides the use of this knowledge for good. Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.

What significance did Zionism have for you in a historical context?

Albert Einstein: I see Zionism as a path to cultural self-determination for the Jewish people and a return to a spiritual and intellectual homeland. Zionism is the answer to persecution, whereby I favor cultural renewal and peaceful self-determination.

In a letter to India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1947, you wrote that you supported Zionism long before Hitler’s rise because you saw it as an opportunity to correct a grave historical injustice.

Albert Einstein: For centuries, the Jewish people had lived as a persecuted nation without rights, and Zionism strives to put an end to this vulnerability.

Did you have a specific vision of a Jewish homeland or statehood?

Albert Einstein: A democratic, Jewish homeland is more important to me than nationalistic exclusivism. Jewish self-determination is not a clipping of democracy’s wings, but a question of safe refuge, reason and cultural diversity in an open society.

In 1952, four years after the founding of the state, you were offered the office of President of Israel. Why did you turn it down?

Albert Einstein: The offer was an honor. But I am not a politician, I am a scientist. Academic freedom and humanistic values are more important than political power structures.

And you are not a nationalist.

Albert Einstein: Yes, but I realized that a people who have nowhere safe to turn are ultimately dependent on the goodwill of others. Anti-Semitism does not always wear boots and armbands. It often hides behind departmental committees, moralistic language, carefully chosen words and seemingly modern justifications.

How should universities and research institutes be organized so that science remains free, responsible and inclusive?

Albert Einstein: We need accountable, participatory governance structures, academic freedom and therefore protection from political or economic influence, ethical guidelines, diversity in teaching and leadership and, ultimately, creativity and freedom in research. The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.

You were an important supporter of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. What were the main objectives?

Albert Einstein: A university that breathes freedom is a university that shapes the future – for Jews as well as for all people, because knowledge flourishes where dialog prevails instead of dogma; an open university in Jerusalem can be both a bridge and a beacon.

How can scientists contribute to peace in conflict-ridden regions around the world?

Alber Einstein: Peace cannot be preserved by force; it grows out of mutual understanding. Knowledge comes only from experience. After the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I wanted to create a global world government in 1946.

ETH Zurich has brought you, its most famous alumnus, to life in a new way. What do you think of the animated version “Digital Einstein”, which is shown at events?

Albert Einstein: For someone who failed the entrance exam for the Swiss Federal Polytechnic in the fall of 1895, that’s not so bad. At that time, I was asked by the professor for the practical course in physics why I wouldn’t prefer to study medicine, law or philology. I replied: “Because I don’t have the talent for that, Professor. Why shouldn’t I at least give physics a try?” As a student, I was a vagabond and a loner.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the German Nobel Prize winner and physicist Philipp Lenard actively dispelled the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that modern

theoretical physics, in particular your Nobel Prize-winning theory of relativity, was a “Jewish fraud” and an attempt to corrode the “Aryan spirit” in science. How did you deal with such anti-Semitic attacks?

Albert Einstein: I strongly opposed anti-Semitic propaganda and regularly emphasized that science and universities must be free of prejudice. Look: two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity, but I’m not quite sure about the universe yet.

You left Germany in 1932 and warned in a letter from America in 1935 that hostility towards Jewish professors and students at universities was growing dangerously, even if it was expressed in a polite or hypocritical form. and students at the universities was increasing dangerously, even if it was expressed in a polite or hypocritical form.

Albert Einstein: Politeness must not serve as a cloak behind which dehumanization grows; clear lines against oppression are indispensable. Survival of research means dialog instead of walls – universities must build bridges, not erect barriers.

RemarkThis interview was conducted with the help of the AI assistant Grok. It is based on the writings and other statements of Sigmund Freud. In the coming weeks, we will be holding AI-supported conversations with other personalities from different areas of life – politics, religion, science, culture – who were important for Judaism and Israel, in order to bring them and their ideas closer to today’s audience. The The first such interview took place with Theodor Herzl the founder of modern Zionism, the second with Chaim WeizmannIsrael’s first president, the third with David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israelthe fourth with Israel’s only female prime minister to date Prime Minister, Golda Meir, the fifth with Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian presidentwho traveled to Jerusalem in 1977 to make peace with Israel, the sixth with Moses, who led the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery to freedom, the seventh with the 12th and 13th century living great Jewish scholar Maimonidesthe eighth interview was with the former former British Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacksand the ninth with Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis.