מיכה
TEMPLE MICAH
Vine
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I Do Not Know How to Not Love Israel

By Rabbi Daniel Zemel

Dear Friends,

I do not know how not to love Israel.

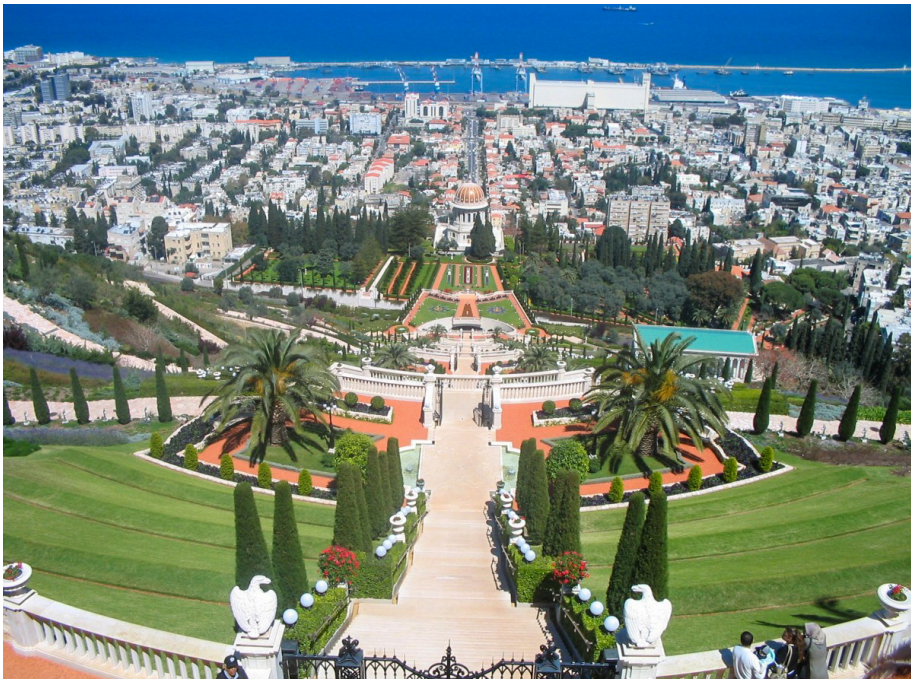
The very street names sing the song of the Jewish story: Hillel, Shammai, Bialik, Ben Yehuda. Louise and I once lived in an apartment on Ahad Ha'am and was thrilled to be living on the street named for the early twentieth-century founder of what is considered cultural and secular, yet spiritual, Zionism. The street ran into Jabotinsky Street, forcing me to reconsider my attitudes towards the founder of the ideological right wing of political Zionism.

The highway signs show me why the Bible remains the best guidebook to Israel. Are we merging onto the Ayalon Highway? "O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Ayalon." (Joshua 10:12)

Because I do not know how to not love Israel and because I was raised as a Zionist, I find myself questioning whether Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the government he has assembled truly are Zionist.

What is Zionism?

It is the simple idea that the Jews are a people who have a homeland. Zionism is both Jewish peoplehood and Jewish home. This, after all, is how our mythic Jewish story begins. God calls to Abram to leave Mesopotamia and go to the land that God would show him. God's promise to Abram is that he will be the "father of many nations" and create a home where he would be a pillar of "righteousness and justice." The entire biblical saga unfolds from there, as does Jewish history. The Babylonians exile us from our home, but Ezra and Nehemiah lead a return. Our home is conquered by the Greeks and then the Romans, who destroy our Temple and ultimately drive us from our home with the final defeat of Bar Kochba in the early second century C.E.



A view of the Bahai Gardens in Haifa, Israel, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea

The notion of home never left our people through centuries of exile. How else to explain our liturgy and its customs of facing Jerusalem, praying for rain or dew in the Land of Israel or ending the Passover Seder with the cry, "Next year in Jerusalem?"

We also never forgot that though we were scattered far across the Middle East, Northern Africa, Europe and beyond, we remained a people. How else to understand the rabbinic dictum, "Kol Yisraeil arevim zeh ba-zeh—All Israel is responsible for one another?" (B.Shavuot 39a)

By the late 19th century in Europe, unrelenting murderous antisemitism had some Jewish thinkers exploring an idea of rescuing our people from a 2,000-year exile. That idea came to be called Zionism, a solution to the "Jewish problem" of Europe.

Two of the most famous Zionist leaders were Theodor Herzl and Ahad Ha'am. Their ideas differed but they share the belief that the notion of peoplehood is critical to understanding what being Jewish is. Being Jewish is more than a religious identity. They understood that Jews are a people with a shared history, literature, and culture. Both understood that Jews would

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3 ▶

"Every person shall sit under his grapevine or fig tree with no one to make him afraid."
MICAH, CHAPTER 4, VERSE 4

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

TOWARD THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

By Rielle Miller Gabriel

No one in my family has ever been to Israel. Is that weird? It feels weird to admit that to you—a congregation that sponsors trips to Israel almost every year, reads Israeli poetry and has an Israeli-style dancing group.

I of course knew people who had gone to Israel; knew kids in class who had lived in Israel, even. But not my family; not my parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles, siblings or cousins. Though many of us have had the means to travel outside the U.S., none have set foot in the land of milk and honey.

If my family ever discussed Israel, it was only ever to talk about how dangerous it was. Their fear seemed incongruous with what I was learning about Israel in school. Then, just as I was becoming eligible for a teen Birthright trip, Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated, and my family's fears became my own. And yet, year after year, we ended our seders with "Next year in Jerusalem." Why? I don't believe it was just because the Haggadah said to do so. We made all sorts of changes to our seders over the years. Jerusalem, Israel, meant something to my family—still means something. But it felt as if Israel existed as a duality to us: the modern-day, democratic nation of Israel—a scary, confusing place—and the ancient Israel of the Torah, our people's home and birthright.

I had the luxury of coming of age at a time when college campuses were not yet overrun by the false dichotomy of 'with' or 'against' Israel. I was able to discuss Israel, and Judaism, openly with Jewish professors and other Jewish students. Through that dialogue, I was free to chart my own path to embracing the complexities of both ancient and modern Israel. This freedom allowed me to bring the two formerly incongruous versions of Israel together in my mind. It let me bring my love for ancient Israel to modern Israel and still give myself space to feel the fear and insecurity. I can see the flaws in both "versions" of Israel and temper that with an awe for the people and culture we were and are now.

Raising my daughter in this Micah community has enabled her to develop an interest in Israel as it is today, warts and all. Hearing stories of friends of have travelled to Israel in preparation for, or celebration of, their b'nai mitzvah has inspired her to make her own journey there.

It's very likely, sometime soon, we will be the first members of my family to visit Israel. While my fear is still there, I am excited, too. Not just for my daughter but for myself. "Next year in Jerusalem!" I look forward to fulfilling our claim, and taking the next step in my relationship with Israel.

The Good Rabbi Relaxes

What's got Rabbi Zemel smiling and enjoying a delicious iced coffee? Why, a trip to Israel, of course! For more photos, flip to page 5.

Photo by Louise Zemel

Israel FROM PAGE 1 ▶

forever be outsiders to the European experience. Herzl's concerns were political: how could Jews be part of governance? Ha'am's concerns were spiritual: how could Jewish culture flourish when the dominant society imposed such a negative self-image? They shared a view that Zionism was about Jewish peoplehood and that returning to the people's ancient homeland, Israel, was key to Jewish renewal.

The main takeaway here, though, is that Zionism is bigger than the State of Israel. It is a fundamental Jewish idea that predates the founding of the state. Zionism is that constellation of propositions and concepts that sees Jewish peoplehood as integral to the Jewish story, the land of Israel as our people's ancient home and Jewish flourishing and survival is dependent on a return to that land. Israel's Declaration of Independence (Megillat Atzmaut) captures it with these words: "The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish People."

Zionism as an idea is testimony to the notion that an idea can change history. Its success has been staggering. The Hebrew language was revived. Jewish culture has flourished in the land of Israel and, through archaeology, we have rediscovered long-buried secrets about our ancient past. The economy has soared and, most important, exiles have been reunited: there are no Jewish refugee camps in the world today. All this in a thriving democracy.

Even with this great success, a danger has lurked in the shadows, an internal danger that has been willfully ignored by the diaspora for too long.

Now, new brands of Jewish extremism have surfaced and the vigorous debate that was long a hallmark of Zionism is threatened. Diverse voices are in danger of being silenced. For too many, there is no longer a commitment to Jewish peoplehood nor a deep understanding of our shared history and our shared destiny.

Officials with this narrow vision are now running the government of Israel. And it feels to many of us as if Israel as a Jewish democracy is hanging by a thread.

Rabbi Zemel with Mohammad Darawshe of Givat Haviva, the grassroots organization creating peace between Jewish and Arab Israelis.

For the first time in Israel's history, there is an anti-Zionist government led by Netanyahu and others who care nothing for Jews who are not like them. The Jews they like are Orthodox, straight, and illiberal. They despise the diversity represented by Jews like us, let alone the twenty-one percent of Israel's population within the country's original 1948 border who are Palestinian Arabs.

Netanyahu, the once and current prime minister, abandoned the great North American Diaspora years ago. He demonstrated this most emphatically when he reneged on the agreement he signed in 2016 to create a full and equal egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall. Since then, he has engaged solely in self-serving, craven politics. He has made common cause with evangelical Christians while snubbing his nose at American Jews. He has cultivated friendships with such figures as Pastor John Hagee ("Hitler was sent by God") and Pastor Robert Jeffress ("Jews are going to Hell.") His inclusion in this government of the Itamar Ben-Gvir, Bezalel Smotrich and Avi Maoz triumvirate personifies this government's disdain for women, the LGBTQ community, non-Orthodox Jews, secularism, liberalism and minority rights—in sum, democracy.

Our question now is how to respond.

There is, for me, but one critical response that we dare not overlook. Even as we speak out by supporting American Jewish organizations that we think best represent our Zionism, I believe that we must double down and do everything that we can to strengthen the institutions in Israel that represent our values and are under severe attack from this new government. These institutions include the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), Givat Haviva: The Center for a Shared Society, and the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, among others. These are the institutions that our Temple Micah Israel Fund supports. If there was ever a time to contribute to that fund, it is now.

I grew up on stories of the early yishuv and the Zionist dreams of its founders. David Ben Gurion would not recognize the Israel of today. Nor would Menahem Begin or Yitzhak Rabin, whose assassination was a tragic foreboding of what was to come.

Those of us who do not know how not to love Israel must step forward like never before.

This is the only choice for those of us who still wish to sing Hatikva's inspiring words, "od lo avda tikvateinu—we have not yet lost our hope."

Shalom.

MY JOURNEY TO A POST-RETIREMENT CAREER IN JEWISH ADVOCACY

By Randy Tritell

Half a year after leaving my job as Director of the Federal Trade Commission's Office of International Affairs and embarking on a new phase of life misleadingly called "retirement," I find my Jewish identity playing a central role in providing direction and meaning in a way I never would or could have anticipated.

Despite having two Jewish parents, my early connection to Judaism consisted mostly of holidays at homes of relatives and a perfunctory bar mitzvah to please grandparents. Having fled Germany in 1938 and losing half of his family in the Holocaust, my father spurned religion as a source of grief and division. My mother, an intellectually and culturally curious young woman, had fled an Orthodox upbringing that she found suffocating. As the lone Jew in my school on Long Island, I checked the "None" box on religious identification.

Contact with the Jewish world in college and beyond led me to explore and discover my Jewish heritage, from intellectual and ethical to musical and gastronomical. In parallel, I learned of the miracle of the rebirth of Israel as the eternal Jewish homeland, its critical role as a refuge, its vibrancy, and its existential fragility. My first trip as a kibbutz volunteer and tourist in 1974 sealed my attachment to the land and my heritage. My commitment to a Jewish life was cemented by meeting my wife, Harriet, and, upon returning to the Washington area, joining Temple Micah.

A friend's suggestion led me to check out the local chapter of the American Jewish Committee in 2010, elevating my involvement with the Jewish community and culminating in my becoming president of the DC region. AJC's agenda of fighting antisemitism and all bigotry at home and abroad, standing up against delegitimization and demonization of Israel—while criticizing government policies when appropriate—and supporting democratic values and pluralism closely matched my own priorities. I was particularly attracted to AJC's international focus, on bridge-building with faith and ethnic partners, and nonpartisanship. In the course of my work with AJC, I have met with numerous members of Congress to advocate, for example, supporting the Abraham Accords, enacting the NOHATE Act (improving reporting of hate crimes to the FBI), supporting humane immigration policy (harkening to AJC's founding in 1906 to save refugees) and protecting voting rights (building on AJC's work in the civil rights movement).

AJC also provides a platform for meetings with ambassadors to advocate, for example, designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organization and combating antisemitism. AJC works against discriminatory boycotts and double standards applied to Israel while advocating for equal treatment of all forms of Jewish worship and practice through the Jewish Religious Equality Coalition.

Locally, it has been rewarding to participate in building and strengthening partnerships through AJC's Latino-Jewish Leadership Council, Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council, and interfaith Community of Conscience, as well as with the Black community through the Greater Washington Urban League. And while it is hard not to be depressed by evidence of declining Jewish involvement and even identity among younger Jews as well as the often toxic climate on campus and social media, my spirits are lifted by seeing how AJC's Leaders For Tomorrow (LFT) program empowers high school students to meet these challenges.

Not long ago, fighting antisemitism focused on Europe and elsewhere outside the United States. But sadly, AJC has had to combat a surge of antisemitic incidents and hate crimes including in the DC region. AJC works nationally with social media companies to fight online hate, and with DEI officers to recognize and oppose antisemitism. Locally, our antisemitism task force has conducted training on identifying and combating antisemitism for the FBI, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, city and county governments, and religious and media organizations.

Most recently, we worked closely with mainstream Jewish organizations including the Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Community Relations Council on a Montgomery County Council resolution against antisemitism that incorporates the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition, which has been embraced by dozens of governments (including the U.S.) and private sector entities. The resolution raised some sensitive and controversial issues, but we worked with council members and groups with disparate views to address concerns, leading to the council's unanimous adoption of the resolution in December 2022.

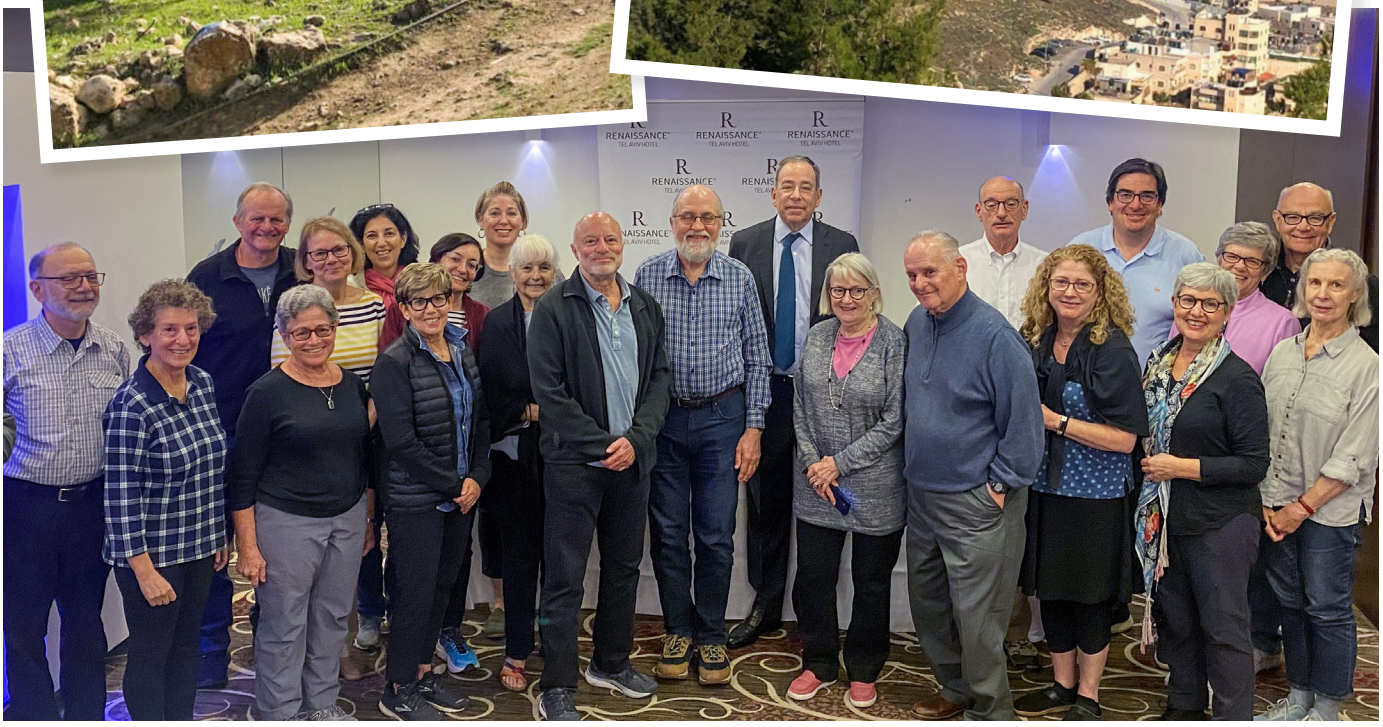
I feel fortunate that the seeds of my Jewish heritage, left fallow for many years, have been nourished by my involvement in Jewish life. My engagement with AJC, locally and nationally, now constitutes a major part of my retirement, providing a crucial sense of purpose. Looking forward, I worry about the future of American Jewry, the security of Israel, and the health of American democracy. But, now decades into my Jewish journey, I derive deep satisfaction from having two sons dedicated to living proud Jewish lives, and I look forward to enriching the next phase of my life through deepening my Jewish learning, advocacy to advance the well-being of the Jewish people, and involvement in the Temple Micah community.

Micah Travelers Explored Israel in December

Here is just a glimpse at what our group, led by Rabbi Zemel, enjoyed together as Micah returned to the land we love. We wish our March 2023 participants safe travels, and look forward to our next Israel trip in 2024 — watch our website for more details!

Clockwise from center: an eggplant sandwich in Jerusalem (we always start with food!); the beach, Tel Aviv; a hilltop view of Jerusalem; our group meets with U.S. Ambassador Thomas R. Nides; an olive tree thrives in Hebron.

Photos: Geri Nielsen



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This list reflects donations received October 1–November 30, 2022. Every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy, but if there are any errors or omissions please accept our apologies. For corrections or clarifications, please contact Hannah Ruth Wellons in the temple office or at Wellons@TempleMicah.org. Thank you.

Between Bavel and Yerushalyim

If there is no word for history in Hebrew, then what have I lived?

Did my people's history begin again with a partition plan and a war?

Did my family fall in and out of existence -
dormant from 70 to 1948?

Did we exist before Ben Gurion declared the State to be?

What of my lineage?

What of the Yiddish and German and Polish and English we picked up on the way?

And if I can not sing my God's song in this strange land
Then what do I make of these notes that float out of me?

Am I allowed to be at home in my exile?

For my exile is full of home,

and my home is full of exile

And am I allowed to feel at home in my homeland?
I reach for apples and peanut butter before
palm dates and hummus

Is it mine? Is it home, too?

Can sea to shining sea mean both the Atlantic and the Galilee?

It must be - because it is.

I am from Babylon and I am from Jerusalem.

I am born from history that was but also is.

I am woven from the scholars of Bavel and the mystics of Tzfat.

I am sewn together with threads of Pushkin and Lazarus.

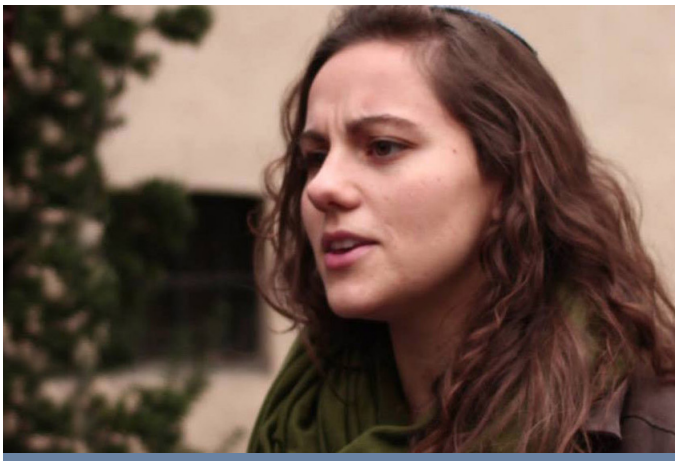
My veins flow with Baltic rivers and muddy Mississippi waters.

My heart has chambers in the West and East and in-between.

My mother tongue is stories and songs that travel seas and centuries.

I am away, and I am home.

I am of history and I am of eternity.



Behind the Poem

Dear Friends,

A number of years ago, I was sitting in a lecture with Rabbi Donniel Hartman of the Hartman Institute. On a large easel pad, he drew a tiny dot in the center. And around it, along the edges of the paper, he drew a large circle.

This small dot, he said, is Eretz, the land of Israel. One makes Aliyah - they ascend when they come to live here. And everything else beyond this small dot is Chutz La'aretz, outside of the land of Israel. And when you go outside Israel - it is Yeridah- a descent."

He was advocating for dissolving that mindset, and instead thinking about how to expand a diaspora-Israel relationship. And still, the image is stuck in my mind. Especially when paired with the idea that there is no concept of "history" as conceived of in Western Thought in Judaism. There is tradition, eternality, and ahistorical events that are re-lived—not commemorated each year. There is an idea that one stage of Jewish history ended after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.

Yes, for a millennium we prayed for a return to Israel, to our homeland. We sang of exile and hoped for it to end. But we lived, according to Jewish historian, Simon Dubnow, "As an unbroken thread." From exile, we built a home. This home is Babylon, Chutz La'aretz.

In the words of philosopher Simon Rawidowicz, "The face of Israel has two profiles—Babylon and Jerusalem... He who denies either denies all, for Israel is not Jerusalem nor is it Babylon; it is Jerusalem-and-Babylon, Babylon-and-Jerusalem. Every Jew worthy of the name is rooted in both...Jerusalem is the point of destination, the end of the journey; Babylon is transition, the journey itself."

We belong to both Jerusalem and Babylon. We are reflected in both faces. The way forward for us Diaspora Jews is to cling to both—to know that a vibrant Judaism can only exist if there is a dynamic diaspora and a dynamic Israel, and that we are responsible for building both.

— Rabbi Stephanie Crawley

MAZAL TOV

Debbie Billet-Roumell and Jim Roumell, on the birth of their grandchild, Brooke Rosemary Christoff, child of Nina Roumell and Chad Christoff

Faith S. Snyderman, daughter of Lois Rosen and M. Mark Snyderman (z"l), sister of Rachel Snyderman, on her engagement to Jordan Berenhaus

Isaac and Caroline Sonett-Assor, on the birth of their child, Leo Sonett-Assor

Ronit Zemel and Ethan Porter and Rabbi Daniel and Louise Zemel, on the birth of their child and grandchild, Avi Zemel Porter

CONDOLENCES

The Temple Micah Community extends its deepest condolences to:

Naftali Bendavid, on the death of his father, Avrom Bendavid-Val

Jodi Enda, on the death of her mother, Eve Sparberg

Marina Fanning, on the death of her mother, Chelo Fournier

Morton Goren, on the death of his brother, Ralph Goren

Joshua, Nan, and Aaron Kaufman, on the death of their son and brother, Jay Kaufman

Stephanie Kaufman, on the death of her mother, Alice Goldman

Jonathan Kaye, on the death of his father, Robert J. Kaye

Lauren Laitin, on the death of her cousin, Aubrey Garber

Sheila Platoff, on the death of her companion, Robert Effros

Marc Rosenblum, on the death of his father, Henry Rosenblum

Judith Viorst, on the death of her husband, Milton Viorst

Allison Wohl, on the death of her mother, Suellen Hassett

May their memories be for a blessing.

ISRAEL: A STORY GREATER THAN THE STATE

By Rabbi Josh Beraha

The first time I remember longing to make aliyah, I was in high school spending a semester abroad in Israel. I lived some of the time with a family in Gilo, a neighborhood outside of Jerusalem, where conversations with my host brother, Yoav, awakened these feelings of longing that linger to this day.

With each bus ride from Gilo to merkaz ha'ir, the city center of Jerusalem, and back again in the evenings, I became increasingly enthralled by Israeli society, seen through the variety of people on the 31 bus. If I wasn't looking at them, *studying* them, wondering who they were and how they made their way to this complex, tense, historic city, I'd be looking out at the street signs and trying to comprehend Jewish history—for how many generations of Jews was Israel only an idea, a dream, but never a reality? How many generations did Jews live without political autonomy, in lands not our own? And yet there I was, with an opportunity no Jew had had for two millennia. But I was also achingly aware that I was just a visitor: in two years I would begin university back in the United States, and Yoav would enlist in the Israeli army.

In college I was still captivated by the story of the modern state of Israel, and began to wonder if I wasn't obligated to take a more active role in the unfolding of the closest thing to a miracle I might experience in my lifetime. These feelings reached a climax when I learned about the Kishinev pogrom, the 1903 massacre of Jews in what is now Moldova, in my first-year Hebrew literature class.

The Kishinev pogrom inspired Hayim Nachman Bialik to write his shocking poem, "City of Slaughter." The shock of what Bialik wrote was not in the horrific details of the pogrom, but in his accusation that it happened because of weakness among the Jews themselves. "You are the sons of Maccabees?" he wrote, as if to say, "Where is your strength? Stand up for yourselves!"

Bialik's poem would soon become part of the ideological foundation for the "new Jew," and it would inspire emerging young Zionists throughout Eastern Europe. A century later, Bialik's poem would inspire me, too. In an alternative reality, maybe Israel could have been my home. But that was not to be because of choices my ancestors made.

My great-great grandmother, Bubbe Esther, was raised outside of Kiev and was one of nine children. When she was already grown, and married with two children, she witnessed the murder of her father, Berel Lezer, during a pogrom. I don't know what the family discussed afterward, but eventually Bubbe Esther left for Romania, then Argentina, and eventually made it to America. She settled in Chicago, and her daughter, Frances, had Lorraine, who had my dad, and here I am, five generations later.

Like Bubbe Esther, the majority of Jews who left Eastern Europe came to America. Only a small percentage immigrated to Palestine. Did my family even consider Palestine as an option? Was it ever a realistic possibility for them?

As I've gotten older, and as an American Jew, I realize that I don't need to live in Israel and serve in the army like Yoav to participate in Israel's story, because her story is greater than the state. And if there exists a tension within me, so be it. That tension is a feature of being Jewish, not a bug.

After the founding of Israel in 1948, its first prime minister David Ben-Gurion thought that every Jew should immigrate to Israel.

Jacob Blaustein, of the American Jewish Committee, disagreed: "American Jews," he said, "are profoundly attached to this, their country. America welcomed our immigrant parents in their need. Under America's free institutions, they and their children have achieved that freedom and sense of security unknown for long centuries of travail. We have truly become Americans, just as have all other oppressed groups that have ever come to these shores. We repudiate vigorously the suggestion that American Jews are in exile. The future of American Jewry, of our children and our children's children, is entirely linked with the future of America."

Blaustein was and remains right. American Jews *are* profoundly attached to this country. But the tension between American Jews and Israel continues, and with the recent rightward shift in the Israeli government, that tension is only going to grow.

Last year, a book by Yossi Shain, a professor of political science at Tel Aviv University and a former member of the Israeli Knesset, maintained that Israel "has displaced the United States as the center of global Jewry and as the long-term definer of the Jewish people's interests and identity."

My college self would have been inspired by Shain's argument, but I see the world differently now. What's most important is the Jewish story *in its entirety*, and I see it as a privilege to take part in it, as a visitor on the 31 bus or as a rabbi in Washington, D.C. What a shame, then, that many progressive American Jews are turning their backs on Israel as exemplified most recently by a prominent Conservative rabbi who announced that his congregation would no longer be reciting the prayer for the state of Israel. American Jews need to see that we have a central role to play in the future of the state. After all, we are all "the children of Maccabees," and that power cannot be held only by those who live in Israel, especially with a new government that is destroying the unity of the global Jewish community.