

Why, I am a Zionist!

To be perfectly honest I was not sure about my Zionism until I had been living in Israel for a few weeks. My academic studies of it left me with an objective, educated point of view which lacked the cultural ties that make Zionism what it is. I am a Jewish student from Calgary on a semester abroad at the University of Haifa, and only having lived here for six weeks I finally understand what Israel means to me, why it is so important to learn the Jewish language and most of all why it is so important to come here.

Not much more than a few weeks ago, my Zionism was limited to the belief in the Jewish state. To have only a foundation instead of a completed house is equally as useless. So what has changed? Being here has made me realize that Israel is so much more than just a Jewish state, and furthermore that there is so much more to a Jewish state than we realize on the surface. Israel is one of the most multicultural places on earth. Israel is home to Jews, Arabs both Christian and Muslim (of many streams), the Druze, the Bahai and more. Within these groups there exists so much diversity, especially within the Jews who will be the focus of this essay.

There are Sabras and immigrants, Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Mizrachim, Persians, Indians, Russians, Ethiopians, French, Argentineans and so much more. Obviously there is overlap in these descriptions but the point is to illustrate how amazing it is that in general all these groups get along and that despite all their drastically different background they all have one thing in common- they are Jews, they speak Hebrew and they live in the Jewish state.

This is the legacy of Zionism, which I once believed was of no use in the modern world. The movement of Jewish national revival is still alive and well and is still flourishing to this day! You can see it on the streets of Israel every day. The project of Jewish national revival is not over- the history books are not yet closed. They did not close when independence was declared,

or when the state was won, or when Jerusalem was captured. It is an ongoing history and an ongoing process, the outcome of which is still yet to be determined precisely. What can be determined is that Israel attracts Jews from all over the world and is serving its purpose. It doesn't matter if you are Argentinean escaping economics, French escaping anti-Semitism or Ethiopian escaping poverty and hunger, all Jews around the world are heeding the same call.

The question still stands- how do we see this happening? What difference is evident on the street? The answer is on the tips of everyone's tongue. It is the Hebrew language. This is the true sign of Jewish national revival. We went from being a spread-out, divided, multilingual people to being one people united under one flag with one language. Hebrew is the language of our religion and of our ancestors and it is both sad and appropriate that in this day and age it has replaced Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic and so-on as the language of the Jewish people. It is the true sign that we as a Jewish people are still experiencing a revival. I sat in a room with people born in France, Argentina, Ethiopia, Israel, the United States and Russia and we were all chatting in Hebrew. This is Jewish national revival in action. This is the source of my inspiration as a Zionist and this is why I have fallen in love with Israel. I can see with my own eyes and hear with my own ears that our people are still undergoing a significant change and this change is characterized by the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland, the return of the Jews to their ancient language, and the unification of a common Jewish culture which revolves around Israel.

The saddest fact in modern Jewish history is the destruction of all the various Jewish cultures that existed in the world. The Soviets and the Nazis destroyed Yiddish civilization which despite efforts of revival is still a mere memory. The Sephardi and Mizrachi cultures which at a time spread across the world are now blended into mainstream Israeli culture- their languages all but lost. This fact is sad but it does not leave us in despair because we have

something better. We have the very thing that we and our ancestors before us have prayed for daily and cheered for at every holiday. We have our land, language and culture. It exists and it is still consuming Jews of all stripes every day. We can move past this page in our history with the Magen David raised high singing Israeli folk songs because it represents the idea which we all believe in. This is the State of Israel.

There are forces out there which aim to delegitimize and destroy Zionism. If only they understood and cared what Jewish national revival means to the Jewish people they might be as willing to compromise as most of the Israelis that I have met. I am a Zionist and I do very much believe in our revival but I also recognize Palestinian nationalism as it is a similar struggle in which we have been fortunate enough to have more success. If we are to deserve the continuation of our project then we are required to allow theirs to flourish.

To be a Zionist does not mean “support Israel.” It is this movement that contributed to my discontent with Zionism in the first place. After an incredible Jewish Agency program that was held at the University of Calgary last Fall, I spoke with the representatives about the subject matter. The program put us in the shoes of various types of Israeli citizens and we had a discussion, based on our characters’ points of view, about the war. I told them how happy I was that it wasn’t the same old message this time and that how refreshing it was to actually get into the idea of what it means to be Israeli. They were very appreciative and included my comments in their final report.

Since I have been here I have realized that most Israelis don’t support their government, so why should we? So long as we are supporting the mission, the national project of revival of the Jewish people- then we are doing what is required of us. This is the true spirit of Zionism. Debate on Israel’s policies is healthy, and it really does not help or hurt the citizens of Israel at

all if Canadian Jews support one action or another. What really counts is whether or not we support Jewish national revival. Teaching your children Hebrew is probably the single best way to support Israel and our people. Tied with this is a Jewish education which is so fundamental and so important to the survival and continuation of our project. What has been very interesting for me to see since I have been studying in Haifa is the Hebrew class of people who just started. A month ago, they couldn't read nor did many of them have Hebrew names. Now Hebrew is included as a part of their everyday chit chat. They sit at the table with the Argentineans, the French, the Ethiopians and so on and they speak with them- Jew to Jew, in the Jewish language. There is no better representation of the success of our revival.

The next best way to support Israel is to actually become a part of it. Live here, work here, study here, and travel here. Whatever it is- the most important thing is to do long-term programs here. This way every Jewish citizen of the Diaspora can see with their own eyes, as I have, the Jewish national revival in action. It is very difficult to appreciate the scope and scale of it without actually becoming a part of it. Most of all you can see with your own eyes what a wonderful country this truly is, despite all of its problems. This isn't to say that every Jew must come here and make aliyah but I truly feel that every Jew should feel like they are a part of this country and that they should feel like they have a stake in it. The reason why is because every Jew in this world has a stake in the survival of the Jewish national revival, in Zionism. We depend on it the way so many people here have depended on it. Our survival as a people depends on Zionism. If not for this unifying force in the Jewish world our people would have long withered away with our old cultures. Zionism, when defined as the movement of Jewish national revival, is not just a symbol. It is our strength, our pride; it unites us and provides for us whenever we need it, where ever we will need it. The Jewish people have come a long way since

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our dream was initially fulfilled and it is clearer to me now more than ever that as our movement is still in progress we still have quite a way to go.