

# WHY I AM A ZIONIST

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## About AEN

The Academic Engagement Network (AEN) is an organization of faculty members, administrators, and staff members on American college and university campuses across the United States. We are committed to opposing efforts to delegitimize Israel, affirming academic freedom and freedom of expression in the university community, promoting robust discussion of Israel on campus, and countering antisemitism when it occurs.

AEN promotes more productive ways of addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In place of one-sided sloganeering reinforcing simple binaries, we advocate open debate acknowledging complexity. In place of aggressive, antidemocratic tactics galvanizing deep inter-group suspicions, we advocate respectful exchanges of ideas. We insist that the heckler's veto has no place in the academy – there is no free speech right that permits blocking free speech by others. We are committed as well to addressing antisemitism often found in anti-Israel narratives.

Network members serve as resources for reasoned discussion about Israel on campuses. They advise campus presidents, provosts, deans and other administrators on Israel, academic boycotts, antisemitism, and related issues; organize faculty forums and public education programs; mentor students in their efforts to advance dialogue about Israel and oppose Israel delegitimization on campus; encourage universities to forge and enhance U.S.-Israel academic ties, including student and faculty exchanges and research collaborations; and speak, write, participate in discussions, submit essays, and publish op eds.



## About AEN's Pamphlet Series

The Academic Engagement Network (AEN) pamphlet series is an occasional series that addresses the primary concerns of the organization: championing academic freedom on American college and university campuses, opposing the BDS movement, encouraging a robust and sophisticated discussion of topics related to Israel and the Middle East, and combating antisemitism. Authors include AEN members and other noted scholars and thinkers who contribute to the discourse on these subjects. Certain pamphlets may also be accompanied by discussions with the author in the form of recordings or podcasts. For more information on this and any other AEN-sponsored material, please visit: [academicengagement.org/](http://academicengagement.org/)

# WE NEED A NEW ZIONIST VISION – AND CONVERSATION

On campus, in North America and beyond, many students and professors take a perverse joy in attacking Zionism, the movement of Jewish national liberation. The assault is so intense that many Jews skulk away from the conversation – and the label. **But Zionism is more than Israel advocacy and far more than its enemies believe. It is a movement at the core of Jewish identity because Judaism offers Jews both a national affiliation and a religious faith.** This essay invites us all, Jews and non-Jews, into a new conversation about Zionism. This conversation is aspirational and inspiring, not defensive or apologetic. And it is rooted in what Zionism actually is and was, while imagining all that it can be: a constellation of history, values, and visions; a model of constructive, democratic, liberal nationalism that not only mobilizes Jews to build a better world but helps individuals associated with the movement find deep meaning amid fulfilling communal affiliations – as I did.

## My Herzl Moment

“I am a Zionist.” I have been saying that phrase my entire life. Yet, on Israel’s Independence Day in 2001, when I published those four words and 796 others in the Montreal Gazette, it changed my life. Although I lack a beautiful black beard, piercing eyes, or his historic impact, this was my Theodor Herzl Moment – the life-changing turning point named after the formal founder of Zionism – when I came out of the closet with my identity, not just as a proud Jew, but as a vocal, Israel-supporting, Zionist.

Twenty years ago, the Jewish world was reeling. It was the first Yom Ha’atzmaut – Israel Independence Day – since the master terrorist Yasir Arafat led his Palestinian rejectionists away from negotiations and back to terrorism. Buses and cafes were blowing up in Israel, attacks in the media and the UN against Israel were mounting, and fights among Jews about why this was happening and who was to blame were intensifying. Frustrated that everyone was so defensive and despairing, infuriated that so many fellow Jews were so quick to ask, “what’s wrong with us” without asking, “what’s wrong with them,” I decided to celebrate how lucky we were to be living in a world with a Jewish State – putting our problems in perspective.

I did not focus on the Palestinians – beyond hoping for peace as I ended the essay. I didn’t want to

knock them down; I just wanted to build our people up. I explained: **“A century ago, Zionism revived pride in the label ‘Jew’; today, Jews must revive pride in the label ‘Zionist.’”**

This was April 2001 – four months before the UN’s 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, turned against Jews and Zionism and five months before the mass murders of 9/11 – when most American Jews started noticing the violence against Israel, as part of a tragic awareness of terrorism worldwide. I was a Professor of History at McGill University, with a name “Gil Troy.” I got great reception at Greek restaurants, more than my share of Helen-of-Troy and Sparta jokes, and – because my last name could be a first name – a high-five from a fellow Teaching Assistant back at Harvard who said, “there are so few WASPs like us around here nowadays.” (I responded with my heaviest New York accent: “Even fewer than ya tink!”)


By writing the essay, I expected to be attacked for outing myself as a Zionist. And I was. Someone actually wrote a clever if evil parody, “I am a Racist.” What I didn’t expect was how many emails (and back then actual letters!) I received from people saying, “thank you, finally, someone is saying something positive about Israel, and even about Zionism!”

That’s why it proved so life changing. From a full-time American historian with little to do publicly with the Jewish world, I became a Zionist activist too – trying to trigger a broader communal conversation about what Zionism can mean to us in the 21st century.

It starts with an awareness, to be explained more fully, that there are multiple Zionisms. Every school of thought envisions a democratic-Jewish state for the Jewish people; each offers slightly different formulas for ultimate fulfillment. Central to my message – then and now – was that if Political Zionism’s great twentieth-century success was establishing a functional, democratic Jewish State, today’s great opportunity for Identity Zionism is helping individuals find meaning from connecting to that State and to our people. If Theodor Herzl in the 19th century offered Political Zionism as the solution to the most pressing Jewish problem then of anti-Semitism triggered by homelessness and weakness, Identity Zionism seeks to solve today’s pressing Jewish problem of anomie and aimlessness.

This essay “I am a Zionist,” became my manifesto of Identity Zionism, which I expanded into the best-selling book *Why I am a Zionist: Israel, Jewish Identity and the Challenges of Today*. Before that, I had written books on presidential history, which, when I was lucky, were well-reviewed. Occasionally, students would thank me for writing something interesting or illuminating. Suddenly, I wrote something that to this day (some) people say prompted them to change their lives.

I like to think I would have been brave enough to write all this if I were untenured. **I’m honest**



**enough to admit I was lucky – I was already a full professor. Some of my colleagues denounced me; many more shunned me.** Still, I have no regrets. My academic career suffered, but my soul blossomed.

I wrote the essay and the book with my students in mind. For many of my peers, identification with Israel and the Jewish people was instinctive. Members of the next generation (and now, their younger siblings), needed to be invited into this conversation – and empowered to make it theirs not just ours, to consider Israel as the central location in their Jewish journey – no matter where they live – and learn that Zionism is not just a prompt for an Israel-advocacy guilt trip.

Since 2001, I have updated and expanded the essay twice. But the message essentially remains the same. It's surprising – and depressing – how similar the issues are. The hatred has grown. But thanks to various initiatives, from Birthright Israel's free Israel trips for students to Masa's subsidized Israel internships to various Israel-positive campus organizations that didn't exist in 2001, the awareness that we should celebrate Israel – not just defend it – has grown too.

## Why I Am A Zionist (Updated Fall 2021)

Tragically, today, too many Jews avoid the “Z-word,” because so many Jew-haters demonize and delegitimize Jews, Israel, and Zionism. Zionists must not allow their enemies to define the movement. We are not just anti-antisemites or anti-anti-Zionists. Jews should reaffirm their faith in Zionism; the world should appreciate this gutsy, visionary movement which rescued a shattered people by reuniting a scattered people.

Zionism is the Jewish national liberation movement, reviving a once-broken community guided by three assumptions:

- that Jews are a people, not just a community of faith – the Jewish people, the Nation of Israel, Am Yisrael;
- that Jews have ties to a particular homeland – the Land of Israel, Eretz Yisrael;
- and that Jews have the right to establish a state on that homeland – the State of Israel, Medinat Yisrael.

If antisemitism is one of the world's oldest social diseases, anti-Zionism proves that Jew-hatred is a particularly adaptable and potent virus. **This year alone, Israel has been falsely accused of training**

**American police officers<sup>1</sup> to brutalize African-Americans<sup>2</sup>, of withholding vaccines<sup>3</sup> from Palestinians<sup>4</sup>, and of exploiting the Coronavirus – illustrated by the meme “Covid1948”<sup>5</sup> based on Israel’s birth-year of 1948.** For decades now, Zionism has served as the modern bogeyman, seducing extremists Left and Right. Despite centuries of Western Jew-hatred, Zionism stands accused of every major Western crime, be it racism, imperialism, colonialism, or now, white privilege – negating the many Jews of color, including about half of Israel’s Jewish population, among many other falsehoods.

No nationalism is pure, no movement is perfect, no state ideal. But today Zionism remains legitimate, inspiring, and relevant to me and most Jews. Zionism offers an identity anchor in a world of dizzying choices – and a road map toward national renewal and personal meaning.

A century ago, Zionism revived pride in the label “Jew”; today, Jews must revive pride in the label “Zionist.”

I am a Zionist because I am a Jew – and without recognizing Judaism’s national component, I cannot explain its unique character. Judaism is a world religion bound to one homeland, shaping a people whose holy days revolve around the Israeli agricultural calendar, ritualize religious concepts, and relive historic events. Only in Israel can a Jew fully live in Jewish space and by Jewish time.

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<sup>1</sup> Tufts Students for Justice in Palestine, “Op-ed: Vote YES to End the Deadly Exchange at Tufts,” *The Tufts Daily*, November 23, 2020. Retrieved from <https://tuftsdaily.com/opinion/2020/11/23/op-ed-vote-yes-to-end-the-deadly-exchange-at-tufts/>

<sup>2</sup> JINSA, “Open Letter: Campaign at Tufts University on Banning Police Exchanges With Israel,” January 7, 2021. Retrieved from <https://jinsa.org/open-letter-campaign-at-tufts-university-on-banning-police-exchanges-with-israel/>

<sup>3</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, “Israel’s vaccine success can’t hide a deeper divide,” *The Washington Post*, January 12, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/01/12/israel-palestine-coronavirus-vaccine-disparity-analysis/>

<sup>4</sup> Gil Troy, “Daily Blood Libel: Jews won’t vaccinate Palestinians – NOT!,” *The Jerusalem Post*, February 17, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/daily-blood-libel-jews-wont-vaccinate-palestinians-not-opinion-659194>

<sup>5</sup> Abuzar Royesh & Shelby Grossman, “#Covid1948: The Spread of an Anti-Israel Hashtag,” *Stanford Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies*, August 13, 2021. Retrieved from <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/covid1948-hashtag>



I am a Zionist because I share the past, present, and future of my people, the Jewish people. Our nerve endings are uniquely intertwined. We know we are Never Alone. When one of us suffers, we share the pain; when many of us advance communal ideals together, we – and the world – benefit.

**I am a Zionist because I know my history: after being exiled from their homeland more than 1,900 years ago, the defenseless, wandering Jews endured repeated persecutions<sup>6</sup> from both Christians and Muslims – centuries before this antisemitism culminated in the Holocaust.**

I am a Zionist because Jews never forgot their ties to their homeland, their love for Jerusalem. Even when they established autonomous self-governing community structures in Babylonia, in Europe, in North Africa, these governments in exile yearned to return home.

I am a Zionist because I want to continue our living-streak. Those ideological ties nourished and were nurtured by the plucky minority of Jews who remained in the land of Israel, sustaining continued Jewish settlement throughout the exile. Wherever we wandered, wherever our people lived, whenever we prayed, we turned toward Jerusalem, Zion, our forever-home.

I am a Zionist because in modern times Europe's promise in the 1800s became a double-edged sword, only offering Jews acceptance if they assimilated, yet never fully respecting them when they did assimilate.

I am a Zionist because in founding the old-new Jewish-democratic state of Israel in 1948, the Jews modernized a relationship with a land that anchored them since Biblical times. Just as Japan or India established modern states from ancient civilizations, Israel updated our ancient language Hebrew, created new cutting-edge cities like Tel Aviv, and retrofitted the Jews' 3,000-year-old capital, Jerusalem.

I am a Zionist because in building that Jewish Altneuland, old-new state, the Jews returned to history as active participants not just victims – with all the responsibilities and dilemmas power provides.


I am a Zionist because Israel worked, giving Jews a home after millennia of bruising homelessness<sup>7</sup>. Israel welcomed Holocaust survivors and refugees from Arab Lands, Ethiopians and Russians, those Jews who fled in fear and those who came by choice. And every day Israel navigates the many messes which

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<sup>6</sup> Raphael Israeli, *Muslim Anti-Semitism in Christian Europe: Elemental and Residual Anti-Semitism* (Routledge, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Arbesman, "The Long Data of European Jewish Expulsions," *Wired*, March 6, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.wired.com/2013/03/the-long-data-of-european-jewish-expulsions/>





inevitably resulted while delighting in the diversity, creating a modern moral society from an astonishing array of Jews – living democratically with Israeli-Arabs too.

**I am a Zionist because I wake up every day looking forward to joining others in working through our long, society-improving, to-do list, starting with Israel's unfulfilled promises of full equality to Arabs, Ethiopians, Mizrachim, the poor.** But I also go to sleep every night looking backward, appreciating how far we have come, and how much better off we are in 2021 than we were in 2001 or 1981, let alone 1967 or any year before 1948.

I am a Zionist because I celebrate Israel's existence. Like any thoughtful, self-critical, patriot, though, I might denounce particular government policies, I do not delegitimize the state itself.


I am a Zionist because I live in the real world of nation-states. I see that Zionism is no more or less tribal than any other Western nationalism, be it American, British, Canadian, or Dutch; if bonding as Zionists makes us inherently racist, every citizen in a nation-state is. In fact, we all express the eternal human need for some internal cohesion, some particularism; solidarity among some historic grouping of individuals, and not others.

I am a Zionist because we have learned from North American multiculturalism that pride in one's heritage as a Jew, an Italian, a Greek, a Latinx, an African American, roots you, orients you, plunges you into a conversation deeper and more lasting than the empty, trendy ones we keep falling into in our me-me, my-my-my, more-more-more, now-now-now world.

I am a Zionist because Jewish heritage and Zionist thinkers teach that a country without a vision is like a person without a soul; a big-tent Zionism represents liberal nationalism at its best. Only by working together can we solve the biggest problems facing us, from hostile neighbors and environmental decline to poverty and bigotry. Constructive, open-minded, big-hearted nationalism, dedicated to lifting us all up, not building more walls, can inculcate values, fight corruption, reaffirm national unity, and restore a sense of mission.

I am a Zionist because in our world of post-modern multi-dimensional identities, we don't have to be "either-ors", we can be "ands" – a Zionist AND an American patriot; a secular Jew and a Zionist. The socialist Zionists of yesteryear refused to choose between their two central passions, so, too, we can be all kinds of hyphenated Zionists, synthesizing different identities: Liberal Zionists and Settler Zionists, Gay Zionists and Feminist Zionists, Eco-Zionists and Religious Zionists.

In the same spirit, just as some people living in Israel reject Zionism, meaning Jewish nationalism,



Jews in the Diaspora can embrace it. To those who ask, “How can you be a Zionist if you don't make Aliyah,” I reply, “How will anyone make Aliyah without first being a Zionist?”

**I am a Zionist because I believe in democracy. Fusing liberalism with nationalism produced free, prosperous, always-improving democracies, including Israel, despite terrifying attacks often testing its egalitarian values and freedoms.**

I am a Zionist because I am an idealist. Just as a century ago, the notion of a viable, independent, sovereign Jewish state was an impossible dream – yet worth fighting for – so, too, today, the notion of a thriving, independent, sovereign Jewish state living in peace with all its neighbors appears to be an impossible dream – yet worth seeking.

I am a Zionist because I am a romantic. The Jews rebuilding their homeland, reclaiming the desert, renewing themselves, was our grandparents' great adventure. The story of the Jews maintaining their homeland, reconciling with the Arab world, renewing themselves, and serving as a light to others, a model nation-state, could be ours. Yes, it sometimes sounds far-fetched. But, as Theodor Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, said in an idle boast that has become a cliché: “If you will it, it is no dream.”

So, I am a Zionist because there is still work to be done – and I'm ready, we're ready, to do it.


## **Identity Zionism: Seeking Zionist and Jewish Renewal**

The great Zionist anomaly of 2001 is even more intense in 2021: Initially, Israel was fragile, but the Zionist conversation was robust; today, Israel is robust – but the Zionist conversation has turned fragile.

For two decades, I have been trying to “take back” Zionism from its critics. Many advise me to retire the term, because the “Z-word” doesn't poll well. But its unpopularity is due to a decades-long worldwide campaign of “Zionophobia.” Building on traditional antisemitism, it treats Israel as the Jew of the world, singling out one form of nationalism – Jewish nationalism – as unacceptable in a world still organized around hundreds of nationalisms, including Palestinian nationalism. Too many Blame-Israel-Firsters join the delegitimization derby, escalating from criticizing Israeli policy to rejecting Zionism.

**I'm sorry. I won't surrender. We cannot let the enmity of our enemies define us.**

Retreating from “Zionism,” which has inspired millions over generations, just because it's attacked, violates Zionism's main mission of nurturing Jewish dignity. Such submissiveness disregards the feminist example of “taking back the night” and the African American community's defiant use – among insiders – of “the N-word.”



At the same time – without striking false moral equivalences – we must “take back” Zionism from some fans, too. Israel’s defenders sometimes become so defensive, they quash the open, critical discourse all democracies—and ideological movements—need to mature. Denying any wrongdoing, even any dilemmas, has alienated Zionist critics of Israeli policy, polarizing the community unnecessarily. Those who let every conversation about Israel be about “the conflict,” fall into the Palestinian propaganda trap. It was Yasir Arafat’s great conceit – he wanted it all to be about him and his people; but Zionism is about us and our people.


Zionism is more than Israel advocacy. This broad-based movement does not belong to the Right or the Left. Zionism is not a monolithic movement marching in lockstep with the Israeli policy of the moment. Nor is it the insecure movement of yesteryear. Good Zionists do not need to negate the Diaspora or limit Zionism, meaning Jewish nationalism, to those who make Aliyah (move to Israel).

So foes have done great damage – while too many defensive friends have not helped. Even Jews who accept the Zionist trinity of peoplehood, land, and statehood, recoil at the use of the word. But if once-abandoned Jerusalem could be reclaimed, Zionism can be, too.

**Zionists should follow their own playbook. The late-nineteenth-century Zionist revolution resurrected symbols and changed images, pulling off an epic Jew-Jitsu: negatives became positives. From the new cult of the Maccabees to the rediscovery of Masada, Zionists scoured Jewish history, rediscovering muscular role models as a tikkun, a healing, to the internalized, debilitating, stereotype of the beaten, hunch-backed, European ghetto Jew. Today, the term Zionism needs a similar makeover.**

Bypassing today’s polarization, we need a Zionist vision rooted in the past, relevant to the present, and inspiring for the future. Zionism is more than pro-Israelism. Good Zionists don’t have to approve of every Israeli government policy or any prime minister. But they do have to be open to tapping into the grand adventure of belonging to this extraordinary forever-people, the Jewish people, who remain tied to the same ancestral homeland that has been their anchor – and compass – for more than three thousand years.

If Zionist triumphalism overlooks Israeli imperfections, a creative, intelligent, supple Zionist conversation should acknowledge problems—and tap Zionist ideas to fix them. To a West increasingly skeptical about liberal nationalism, Zionism offers its constructive democratic nationalism—that nations should stand for something, bound by a sense of the past that enriches the present and builds a better future. To a West that increasingly regards particularism as merely selfish, Zionism offers its understanding of particularist national identities as value anchors and launching pads for communal good



works to benefit others. And to a West increasingly addicted to false choices, Zionism offers its mix of identity and freedom.

**If we do it right, Zionism in the twenty-first century will be what it was for so many in the nineteenth-century – a solution to the Jewish Problem, tackling pressing communal and individual needs.**

The “problem,” however, has evolved: this generation needs Zionism to help revitalize Judaism much more than we need a defense against antisemitism. And this generation needs Zionism to find community, meaning, a sense of purpose and perpetuity amid our increasingly individuated, selfish, throwaway, and soul-crushing Western culture. True, Jew-hatred persists. And we do occasionally need to rally around the blue-and-white flag during times of trouble. But in going from Gevalt or Crisis Zionism to Identity Zionism, this marvelous, mystical, and complex idea of Jewish nationalism helps make us better Jews and better people.

This is counter-cultural in many ways. Donald Trump’s populist nationalism soured many Americans on any nationalism. The word “nationalism” usually appears poisoned by “first names” like “white” or “extremist” or “xenophobic.” But nationalism is a neutral term. In the 1940s, Jews endured nationalism at its most xenophobic, bigoted, lethal, in the form of Nazism, while delighting in nationalism at its most inspiring, empowering, and liberating in the form of Zionism. As an American historian, I cannot explain many of America’s greatest achievements, from winning World War II to creating the first mass-middle-class civilization, without crediting nationalism. Identity Zionism is not a self-absorbed nationalism knocking others down or building-up walls; it’s a liberal nationalism that by building us up, individually and collectively, builds others up too.

Liberal nationalism infuses democratic ideals into the natural tendency for people to clump together with those like them. In the 1950s, the British philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin described this constructive nationalism as “awareness of oneself as a community possessing certain internal bonds which are neither superior nor inferior but simply different in some respects from similar bonds which unite other nations.” Jews often find one another, when traveling. We Troys call that “Bageling”; when we find fellow Israelis, it’s “Kremboing” – a reference to a popular Israeli sweet. The click isn’t about looking down our noses at anyone else but looking up at a seeming stranger in a strange land – and finding a shared language, common associations, that family feeling.

Today, this nationalist vision is not just politically incorrect: it resists the prevailing cultural tide. Young Americans’ “radical individualism” creates what the sociologist Robert Bellah calls a “negative”

process of “giving birth to oneself” by “breaking free from family, community, and inherited ideas.” By contrast, the bar and bat mitzvah define maturation as accepting communal responsibilities not shirking them. The Zionist reality demanding that young Israelis enlist in the army makes the communal commitments of national service the defining step toward adulthood.


Zionists get hit from both sides. Many liberal cosmopolitans brand any distinctions between humans as illegitimate, while favoring some, nevertheless. Some categories are politically protected, immune from criticism, from feminism and LGBTQ identity to blackness and Palestinian nationalism. Some are not, especially Jewish nationalism, meaning Zionism. “Intersectionality” – allegedly linking forms of oppression – blocks Jews and antisemitism at the intersection, proving to be antisemitic. **Calling Israel a bastion of “white privilege” ignores Israel’s delightfully dizzying ethnic diversity, while crudely viewing Israeli society through an overly-simplistic American racial lens.** These racial categories are not just sloppy but suspicious: those who celebrate whiteness, claim Jews aren’t white; those who denigrate whiteness, claim Jews are.

Humans are tribal; distinguishing isn’t always discriminating. By definition, a community needs boundaries, otherwise there is nothing to belong to. Jews survived for millennia by having boundaries, preserving “our” people. Some white nationalists mischievously call themselves “White Zionists.” The Alt-Right activist Richard Spencer explains: “Jews exist precisely because you did not assimilate to the gentiles... I want my people to have that same sense of themselves.”<sup>8</sup> When he made this claim at Texas A&M University in 2016, a local rabbi sputtered, unable to explain the difference.

White nationalists seeking legitimization and anti-Zionist leftists seeking to delegitimize Zionism insisted the rabbi’s silence affirmed Spencer, exposing Zionism as “illiberal.” Actually, the rabbi’s silence reflected a scandalous educational failure on the part of his particular rabbinic seminary – and American Jewry. Today, most involved Jews can explain why Zionism is not racism and Israel doesn’t practice South African apartheid, noting that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is national, not racial, involving some dark-skinned Israelis and light-skinned Palestinians. Israel has no legislation based on race, meaning appearance, blood, presumed biology or skin color. Security-based distinctions may keep Israelis and Palestinians apart but that’s not apartheid, a race-based, skin-color-driven form of legal discrimination.

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel J. Solomon, “Speechless Rabbi Admits Losing Argument Over Racism and Israel to White Supremacist Richard Spencer,” *The Forward*, December 7, 2016. Retrieved from <https://forward.com/news/breaking-news/356363/speechless-rabbi-admits-losing-argument-over-racism-and-israel-to-white-sup/>



Walk down any Israeli street to see radical inclusion at work. Jews come in all colors and are united by common stories, values, and beliefs. **The four-term New York senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan explained that because Jews link peoplehood with religion, and that by converting religiously you join the Jewish people, Zionism was the least race-based and most biologically diverse form of nationalism.**

In fairness to this rabbi, few American Jews could explain why Spencer’s “White Zionism” lie slurred Zionism – and nationalism. Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa discredited race-based nationalism, especially for whites. Zionism, however, sprouts from an ancient synthesis of ethnicity and religion which yielded a democratic state that, like America, is defined, yet porous.


Jewish nationalism is as valid as the other identity cocktails underlying modern democracies. Many national flags have crosses or crescents, because religion remains relevant, even for European democracies.

Zionism and white nationalism are forms of nationalism but are not the same: ham and gefilte fish are both foods, but they too are not the same – only one is kosher. **Jewish nationalism revolves around life-affirming values and is intertwined with liberalism.** Remove liberalism or nationalism from Zionism – and you don’t have Zionism. Israel’s Declaration of Independence makes the duality clear.

A resurrected, refreshed, Zionist conversation might help Jews see liberal nationalism as a constructive vehicle that can unite a divided community and make us more determined, more purposeful, and more fulfilled than we can be individually. That is why, with all due respect to President John F. Kennedy, I say: yes “ask what you can do for your country – but also ask what your country – our eternal homeland Israel – can do for you, for us?”

## Zionism as Countercultural

Zionism has always been countercultural. Before Israel’s establishment in 1948, the small, marginal, Zionist movement had to convince the world—and the skeptical Jewish supermajority—of essential Zionist assumptions: Most dramatically, the European Enlightenment’s attempts to reduce Judaism just to a religion failed. We were always an “Oreo cookie” – both nation and religion corresponding to the cookie and the crème; just as the synthesis itself makes the Oreo an Oreo, the mix makes Jews Jewish. That explains why the Jewish people always needed more than a synagogue as communal space; Judaism cannot be contained within four walls. As the world organized itself around nationalisms, Jews’ unique national-religious fusion earned them collective rights to statehood, somewhere.



The Land of Israel, Jews’ ancestral homeland, was the logical, legitimate, and viable place to relaunch that Jewish national project. Even America, the land of promise, was not the same as the Promised Land. The Palestinians’ contesting land claims do not negate the Jewish title to Israel – other nations also have conflicting land claims without invalidating one another’s essential claims to nationhood. The United Nations does not seem concerned with any of these conflicts except for the one questioning the Jewish people’s longstanding ties to the Jewish homeland.

Without negating Palestinian claims, the Jews were making history on that land millennia before Mohammad established Islam. Jews are what the Canadian human rights activist and former Minister of Justice Irwin Cotler calls the original aboriginal people, still living on the same indigenous tribal lands, speaking the same language, developing the same culture, reading the same Bible. More broadly, nationalism isn’t an exclusive land deed; it’s an identity-building process based on a shared past or present, what Benedict Anderson correctly called an “imagined community.”<sup>99</sup>

Finally, restoring Jewish sovereignty in Israel was a pressing priority, to save the long-oppressed Jews—and let them rejuvenate, spawning a strong, proud, idealistic New Jew.

After realizing this primal Zionist idea in 1948, Zionism evolved. The Jewish national liberation movement now sought to defend and perfect the state—understanding, as the Israeli author A. B. Yehoshua writes, that “A Zionist is a person who accepts the principle that the State of Israel doesn’t belong solely to its citizens, but to the entire Jewish people.” As Israel’s builders steadied the state, this second-stage Zionism revolved around the question, “What kind of nation should Israel be?” **The great miracle was not just surviving in a sea of unneighborly hostility but creating one of the world’s few democracies.** This achievement is particularly surprising considering that most Israelis hail from lands with autocratic political cultures. Israel’s communal unity and dynamic democracy reflect the legacy of Jewish life in exile, which fused communal solidarity with intellectual argumentation.

Zionophobes’ constant attacks distract from Israel’s dual mission: to save Jewish bodies and redeem the Jewish soul. As Israel’s first prime minister David Ben-Gurion said, “Israel cannot just be a refuge. . . . it has to be much, much more. **When asked if Israel had fulfilled all of Zionism’s ideals, Ben-Gurion replied, “not yet.” This not-yetism is the catalyst for Zionist can-do idealism – and some Jews’ disappointment with Israel.**

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<sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983).

## Understanding the Zionist Debate – Then and Now

Trying to change the conversation, lighten the burden, enliven our Jewish souls, I made three moves in 2018, when I was given the honor of updating Arthur Hertzberg’s classic anthology of Zionist thought from 1959, *The Zionist Idea*. These leaps illustrate how to rekindle a new, welcoming, Zionist discourse:

- First, by christening – er, renaming – the new edition *The Zionist Ideas*, I opened the conversation from right to left, religious to non-religious, Israel to the world. Hertzberg had 34 thinkers, I included 168 – inviting students into a wider conversation to find their place in this rich debate about who we are as a people, what we can be, and how that contributes to the world. The “s” also evokes a question mark not an exclamation point: that’s how we learn.
- Second, I organized the Zionist thinkers into three historic periods.
  1. Pioneers: Founding the Jewish State—until 1948: How dreamers like Theodor Herzl and A. D. Gordon, Ze’ev Jabotinsky and Rav Kook, Ahad Ha’am and Louis Brandeis, conceived of Jewish nationalism and imagined a Jewish state. The year 1948 divides the movement that might have failed—until the British mandate’s final moments—from the movement that executed a stunning historical feat.
  2. Builders: Actualizing—and modernizing—the Zionist blueprints—from 1948 until 1995: How leaders like David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, and Menachem Begin, along with thinkers as diverse as Naomi Shemer, Ovadia Yosef, Yitz Greenberg and Blu Greenberg built Israel. After Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s 1995 assassination, the Zionist conversation shifted: the campaign to delegitimize Zionism intensified as Zionists recognized a more stable, prosperous, capitalist yet controversial Israel coexisting with a more confident yet identity-challenged Diaspora.
  3. Today’s Zionists are “Torch Bearers.” Heirs to an amazing heritage, we, like runners in the Olympic relay, take responsibility for what’s been passed from the past to keep it going, growing, glowing, reassessing, redirecting, reinvigorating in the twenty-first century. Our mission involves determining how we, the next generation, following Israel’s dreamers and builders, reconcile what Professor Ilan Troen calls the Zionism of Intention with the realities of modern Israel—and the Diaspora.
- Finally, within each period, I identified Six Schools of Zionist Thought: Political, Labor, Religious, Revisionist, Cultural and Diaspora. These Zionisms open more portals into the conversation, into





the multi-dimensional identity journey not the advocate's all-or-nothing approach. Diaspora Zionism moves from a Zionism of writing checks to a Zionism of making meaning, Identity Zionism. Both Israelis and Diaspora Jews need to learn how to use Jewish nationalism, Jewish peoplehood, the Jewish state, as useful tools for finding purpose in our lives, for connecting to something greater than ourselves. Today, most Diaspora Jews seek inspiration, not salvation, from Israel.

**Organizing the debate around these six schools makes sense because most Zionisms were hyphenate Zionisms—crossbreeding the quest for Jewish statehood with other dreams regarding Judaism or the world.**

The six main streams are:

**Political Zionism:** Theodor Herzl's pragmatic yet utopian Zionism, his nineteenth-century Romantic liberal nationalism saw securing a democratic Jewish state in Palestine, the Jewish homeland, as the best way to save Jewish lives. **Paradoxically, “normalcy” would also help Jews cultivate a new, independent, proud identity, combining ancient tradition and Enlightenment ideals to save Judaism – and inspire the world.**

**Labor Zionism:** The utopian yet pragmatic Zionism of the kibbutz and the moshav championed rebuilding the Jewish self by working the land. Thinkers such as A. D. Gordon and Berl Katznelson grounded the intellectual, urbanized, ghettoized European Jew in the challenging practicalities of agriculture, while injecting dollops of Marxism and universalism. Although passionately secular, Labor Zionism fostered an enduring love for Eretz Yisra'el, the Land of Israel. Kibbutznikim became Bible-quoting amateur archaeologists.

These socialists Laborites harnessed the prophetic tradition, the messianic impulse, fostering social justice, envisioning the New Jews as a socialist vanguard. Like the secular Marxist Bundists, Labor Zionists were too conscious of antisemitism's toxicity to expect class consciousness to unite all workers. Instead, they commissioned their virtuous people to create a socialist exemplar. By saving the world, they could save Judaism and Jews.

**Revisionist Zionism:** Ze'ev Jabotinsky's pragmatic, passionate, yet classically liberal democratic Zionism. Revisionists considered themselves Herzl's purest followers, accentuating the political goal of achieving a Jewish state as soon as possible to save as many Jews as possible. “Eliminate the Diaspora, or the Diaspora surely will eliminate you,” Jabotinsky warned bluntly, characteristically, in 1937. Jabotinsky's “monism” – his proud tunnel-vision – excluded big theories about culture, economy, religion, or society to stress the immediate political mission of state-building; his “militancy” advocated an uncompromising



strategy mixed with a martial style that occasionally flirted with fascism.

Although caricatured as lacking in vision, these European Romantics were passionate about peoplehood, their common past, and their homeland. Their politics absorbed A. D. Gordon's love of land with Ahad Ha'am's nationalist cultural revivalism. These secularists appreciated their religious traditions too. **Eventually, Jabotinskyite purists, steeped in his individualistic liberalism, would help Israel privatize, capitalize, modernize, and prosper.**

**Religious Zionism:** Harmonizing "Orthodoxy" and Zionism, this spiritual Zionism sprang from Judaism's traditional land-based nationalism. Adherents such as Abraham Isaac Kook emphasized that Jews could only fulfill all the mitzvot, commandments, in the homeland. Seeing the political state as the pathway to mystical salvation, religious Zionists accepted their secular allies. As Kook taught: "The state is not the supreme happiness of man." The typical nation-state is about as mystical or inspirational as "a large insurance company." The State of Israel, by contrast, "is ideal . . . the foundation of God's throne in the world." By saving Judaism, they could save Jews and the world.

**Cultural Zionism:** Ahad Ha'am's more secular spiritual Zionism sought a Jewish homeland as a national cultural center to revive Judaism and Jewish pride. Ahad Ha'am dismissed Herzl's state-building plans as chimerical. As a Russian Jew, he instinctively mistrusted all governments, doubting that even a Jewish state could be virtuous.

This aloofness toward sovereignty anticipated contemporary Israel-Diaspora relations. In this model, Israel would be the center of the wheel, connected to each Diaspora community by spiritual, religious, intellectual and cultural spokes. Palestine's blossoming Jewish culture would ennoble the Diaspora Jew.

**Diaspora Zionism:** Louis Brandeis and Henrietta Szold developed this philanthropic, support-oriented Zionism reconciling American patriotism with Jewish nationalism. "Zionism is the Pilgrim inspiration and impulse all over again," Justice Brandeis taught. "To be good Americans, we must be better Jews, and to be better Jews, we must become Zionists."

These early Identity Zionists emphasized Zionism's liberal democratic character while broadening the definition of a Zionist to include supporters of the Zionist idea. European Zionists were transforming themselves into New Jews; Diaspora Zionists were rescuing distressed fellow Jews. Initially, Jews migrated by the millions to America and by the thousands to Palestine. In the Diaspora, Zionism offered—and often became—a recipe for Jewish renewal the American migration lacked.

## Controversies, Challenges, and Dreams

The latest Pew Research Study, “Jewish Americans in 2020,”<sup>10</sup> offers two striking yet not surprising findings regarding younger American Jews. First, many of the youngest American Jews are “unaffiliated” and non-religious, seeing “themselves as Jewish for cultural, ethnic or family reasons....” Second, these “Jews of no religion,” a full and growing 41 percent of 18-to-29-year-old Jews, “feel they have not much or nothing at all in common with” with the only other rapidly growing group of young Jews, Orthodox Jews, who constitute 17 percent of that cohort – and also feel distant from fellows Jews across the religious spectrum.

No comprehensive cures exist, of course. **And Zionism, which is a tradition-friendly initiative despite Israel’s cutting-edge liberal democracy, faces a hostile environment.** American Jews, whose parents and grandparents were once more culturally conservative than the rest of American society, tend now to be far more liberal and less traditional than their American peers – and their Israeli counterparts. Moreover, the systematic campaign to delegitimize Zionism has done great damage, just as conservative dominance of Israel electorally since 2001 – and the misleading interweaving of the ongoing Palestinian conflict into America’s racial reckoning – has tarnished Israel’s luster among America’s most passionately liberal Jews.


Nevertheless, Israel and Zionism have great potential to speak to non-religious Jews by emphasizing the national, ethnic, cultural parts of Jewish identity, and could help the younger generation unite by celebrating their common heritage and shared peoplehood platform, regardless of theology.

Better dialogue and ultimately unity can be fostered due to a dramatic and often-under-appreciated change in Zionist ideology. Originally, most Zionists “negated the galut,” assuming that assimilation and anti-Semitism would end life in the Diaspora, leaving Israel as the only viable Jewish community. (That condescension was paralleled by an American Jewish assumption that the Jews of Israel were on the brink of destruction and American Jewry just might be the future). Today, most mainstream Zionists have more of a partnership vision<sup>11</sup>, understanding that each community has something to teach the other and that while Israelis may be great partners for Diaspora Jews in the fight against assimilation, Diaspora Jews are Israelis’ greatest partners in the fight against anti-Zionism.

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<sup>10</sup> “Jewish Americans in 2020,” Pew Research Center, May 11, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/>

<sup>11</sup> Natan Sharansky & Gil Troy, *Never Alone: Prison, Politics, and My People* (PublicAffairs, 2020).



Moreover, Israel still has a magic, illustrated by the great counterforce refuting most lamentations about the growing Israel-Diaspora gap: Birthright Israel. Young American Jews on those 10-day trips taste a thick, dynamic, 24/7 Jewish experience qualitatively different from what they often perceive to be a thin, static, fragmented, and denominationally-focused American Judaism. Seeing Jewish garbage collectors and police officers normalizes Jewish society, broadening the range of Jewish career paths and class stances, reducing the constant careerist pressure to be the next Zuckerberg, Spielberg, or Justice Ginsburg.

**Turning Israel into what the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks aptly called world Jewry's classroom, its living laboratory, demonstrates vibrant, thriving Judaism in sync with the environment.** In his classic 1994 work, *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren? Jewish Continuity and How to Achieve It*,<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Sacks insisted that “Jewish life cannot be sustained without Israel at its core.” That is why, in a less menacing but spiritually more confusing 21st century, the Jewish State's great contribution to Jewish life would shift: “Once, Israel saved Jews. In the future, it will save Judaism.”

Swimming in a pool of Jewish symbols, traditions, values, and stories, Jewish pilgrims to Israel encounter an alternate universe that reveres the past, that seeks meaning beyond the material, that is more communal than individual and is more eternal than last week's most forwarded YouTube video of cats frolicking. Israel proves Theodor Herzl right: Fitting in, not standing out, because you are Jewish is liberating.

Even more surprising, unlike the media's dystopic portrayal, Israelis are happy and fun-loving. **Israel's recent score of eleventh on the world happiness index comes on the heels of reports about American mass unhappiness, especially in the “blue” upper-middle-class neighborhoods where many American Jews live.** The findings that half of Yale's undergraduates at some point in their four years will experience severe psychological distress goes far beyond the anxiety produced by the crazy process of getting accepted. The anomie epidemic suggests a specific sort of soul sickness that an elite life increasingly stripped of community, tradition, nationalism, God, group responsibility, and virtue produces. As the occasionally embattled Jewish state in an old-new land, Israel remains a Republic of Something, even as too many Westerners fear they live in a Republic of Nothing. The shared past, purpose, and principles produce happier, more grounded, people.

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<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Will We have Jewish Grandchildren?: Jewish Continuity and How to Achieve It* (Vallentine Mitchell, 1994). Retrieved from <https://rabbisacks.org/books/will-jewish-grandchildren/>

## Why Israel Won

The Zionist idea proved hearty and fertile, triggering Jewish civilization's post-1948 renaissance. Zionism was the great miracle maker. It was one of the most remarkable progressive success stories of the twentieth century – an ism, that unlike Communism and Fascism, was rooted in the democratic, humanitarian, and egalitarian values of the center left and not only survived but thrived. It reestablished Jewish sovereignty in the Jewish homeland as Israel cumulatively welcomed three million refugees from the Holocaust, the Arab expulsion of the 1950s<sup>13</sup>, Soviet persecution, Ethiopian dislocation. It returned the Jews to history, transforming the world's perma-victims into robust actors on history's stage, with rights and responsibilities. It established a Western-style democracy in the hostile Middle East with a significant minority of Arabs and a majority of Jews, mostly from undemocratic countries. It empowered women, from the female pioneers to one of the world's first female prime ministers, Golda Meir. It started a Jewish cultural revolution: reviving Hebrew, modernizing the Holy Tongue into a language for blessing—and cursing. And while facilitating ultra-Orthodox and Orthodox revivals, it generated creative religious inspiration that revitalized Jewish life worldwide and offered the most viable home for perpetuating secular Jewish identity.


Today's Israel is robust. **These miracles have become routine realities in a high-tech, science, and pharma behemoth; a breeding ground for do-gooding civil society NGOs; and a laboratory for creative Jewish living whose population has grown ten-fold, as its gross domestic product has multiplied thirty-fold—per capita.**

Israel's success in becoming the West's leading vaccination-nation reflects many Israeli strengths. Political Zionists were always “bitzuists” – pragmatists focused on getting things done. Political and Religious Zionists have particularly emphasized a concern for every Israeli's life, bubbling over from Jewish values – and Jewish trauma. Socialist Zionists founded a centralized health system rooted in their commitment to equality. And Revisionist Zionists can take pride that the Start Up Nation revolution their liberal nationalism unleashed meant that Israel already had a sophisticated medical infrastructure, which included the deep-freeze pharma-freezers the BioNTech/Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine initially required.

Israeli ingenuity and innovation – fulfilling the Zionist appreciation for constructive forgetfulness

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<sup>13</sup> Carole Basri, “The Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: An Examination of Legal Rights: A Case Study of the Human Rights Violations of Iraqi Jews,” *Fordham International Law Journal*, Volume 26, Issue 3, 2002. Retrieved from <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1881&context=ilj>



amid a fruitful commitment to remembering, also offers exciting opportunities for non-Jews to thrive in Israel. The great under-reported story of Israel's Corona-scarred year was how many Jewish Israelis became aware of Israeli Arabs' centrality to Israel's medical system. Arabs, who constitute about twenty percent of Israel's population, now serve as 17 percent of Israel's doctors, 24 percent of Israel's nurses and 48 percent of Israel's pharmacists.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the May 2021 riots in Lod, Ramle, and elsewhere showed that much work remains to be done – but the violence did not negate the tremendous progress in recent decades – nor the broad-based Zionist commitment to be a Jewish state that offers full equal rights to “all its inhabitants,” as per Israel's Declaration of Independence.


Israeli normalcy risks its own laziness. But it's the complacency of an instinctive, normalized Judaism in all dimensions rather than a Judaism you need to carve out time for, picking and choosing just what to do and when to do it—while often looking over your shoulder because you don't want to look like a weirdo or a fanatic. And, Israeli Judaism has its blindspots too – all too often offering a binary “religious” or “secular” choice that a more robust Zionist partnership with the different Jewish denominations in the Diaspora might blur.

Beyond that, Zionism answers some core ideological conundrums many American Jews don't even know how to formulate. Zionism resolves the confusion whereby the Judeo-Christian connection in America makes many of these nonreligious Jews feel Jewish even while calling Judaism their “religion.” Zionism welcomes Jews through the peoplehood portal—remembering that Judaism is this unique mix of nation and religion, of peoplehood and faith. **Zionism celebrates nationalism as a force for good, cherishes religion and tradition as valuable anchors, providing meaningful “software” of values and beliefs running on the “hardware” of belonging.** And Zionism celebrates the virtues of having red lines to respect, as well as blue-and-white lines to affirm. It “rewards togetherness,” in the feminist writer Anne Roiphe's lovely phrase, and benefits from solidarity —especially considering Israel's difficult neighborhood.

With Judaism providing the background music to so much that is Israeli, with Israel instilling a strong sense of belonging in visitors, let alone citizens, American Jews encounter new ways of being Jewish. They see total Judaism, immersive Judaism, public Judaism. And, often without realizing it, they see a startling contrast, even with secular Israeli Jews who have figured out how to keep their kids and grandkids Jewish without being religious.

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<sup>14</sup> Joshua Mitnick, “In Israeli war on coronavirus, Arab doctors rush to the front,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 16, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2020/0416/In-Israeli-war-on-coronavirus-Arab-doctors-rush-to-the-front>



Finally, Israel reorients American Jews from Anatevka to Jerusalem, from what Irving Howe called yesterday’s “world of our fathers” to the lives of our brothers and sisters today. Israeli Jewish identity is about speaking Hebrew and eating cheesecake on the Shavuot holiday often overlooked in North America. It’s also, when necessary, about fighting for and defending the state. The need for American Jews as allies in that fight continues to offer nonreligious American Jews a passionate Jewish cause, a defining Jewish mission in their lives. And judging by the fact that AIPAC’s Policy Conference is the rare business-style convention that many parents attend with their teenage and twenty-something children, Zionism offers a commitment, an anchor, one generation can pass on to the next.

Beyond that, the excitement—and, to be sure, the frustrations—of working out Jewish dilemmas and governing problems in real time with high stakes to keep this grand Jewish national project alive and thriving, is a lot more compelling than humming “Sunrise Sunset” as you enter your synagogue.

A mere six decades but eons ago in terms of Jewish potency, dignity, and stability, the philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin looked at his scattered, tattered, shattered people and praised the miracle of Israel at its most basic. **“The creation of the State of Israel has rendered the greatest service that any human institution can perform for individuals,” he avowed. Israel “has restored to Jews not merely their personal dignity and status as human beings, but what is vastly more important, their right to choose as individuals how they shall live.”** Today, even as Israel still faces lethal threats, Jews are stronger, prouder, safer—indeed freer.

If Zionism originally provided communal protection, most Zionists today would acknowledge that the Zionist future depends on helping to elevate the Israel that has been established. Traditionally most Jews struggled to survive; most Jews today can afford to seek meaning. Israel, a laboratory of authentic Jewish living, may offer the Jewish communal answer to individual ennui. In Israel, many Jews feel whole; they integrate their “Jewish” and “modern,” “secular” and “spiritual” selves; they live by a Jewish calendar; they are rooted in the Jewish home.

Many Zionists share a dream for Israel to become a vast tikkun olam project: a noble experiment in democratic nationalism synthesizing the best of Jewish and Western teachings, a Jewish force for universal good. **In pushing Israel to be a “Values Nation,” Zionism activates that Shimon Peres Jewish dissatisfaction gene—that predisposition to see what isn’t right, then fix it.**

Achieving this goal requires engaging Jews from right to left, in Israel and the Diaspora, in debate about why Jews need a Jewish state today—and what that state’s character ought to be. It’s time to reclaim the discussion from polarizing political wars and launch a robust, substantive debate about the

meanings of Zionism, the missions of Judaism, and the value of liberal nationalism. Welcoming views spanning the political and religious spectrums invites ever more people of different backgrounds and beliefs to consider what Israel is, how it should grow, and how it addresses the contemporary debate about national identities—especially when that debate roiling the Western world about how we organize and see ourselves has turned so venomous.

## Conclusion: Looking Ahead with the Essentials Intact

In 1914, Henrietta Szold's protégé Jessica Sampter launched Hadassah's School of Zionism,<sup>15</sup> because "knowledge is the only safe foundation for ideals." Considering Zionist education "our most important work," Szold agreed, cautioning, "A nation cannot be made by instinctive, vague, misty feeling, however fine the instinct may be. . . . We must bring emotion out of its obscurity into the clarification of thought." Three decades later, the 1944 Nobel laureate in physics, Isidor Rabi, became a scientist because his mother never asked what he learned in school. Instead, she always queried<sup>16</sup>: "Izzy, did you ask a good question today?" Modern Zionists would best turn some exclamation points into question marks—while preserving some exclamation points. The American Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis observed: "The great quality of the Jews is that they have been able to dream through all the long and dreary centuries. . . ." At last, Zionism gives the Jews "the power to realize their dreams."


Zionism's Jewish dream-catching and wish fulfillment is rooted in four pillars – four "Mems," Mem being the thirteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the one associated with water and other essentials for life. We start with *Masoret*, the welcome chain of tradition. Humans want to be linked to somewhere and feel deeply connected, implicated, a part of something rather than apart from everyone. We can't just float around in cyber space. The second Mem is *Moledet*, homeland, the space to live out our ideals, making tradition come alive. The Jewish ideal is lovely – whether or not you live in Israel, Israel can always live in you. The third Mem is *Musar*, an ethic. We have a Zionist ethic, we have Zionist morals, including holding our army to those morals. Liberal nationalism cannot lift up our souls if our liberal nation doesn't have a soul itself. The fourth is family, *Mishpacha*. Without that sense of love, without that sense of connectedness, without that glue, where are we, who are we?

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<sup>15</sup> Gil Troy, *The Zionist Ideas: Visions for the Jewish Homeland—Then, Now, Tomorrow* (University of Nebraska Press and The Jewish Publication Society, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Donald Sheff, "Izzy, Did You Ask a Good Question Today?" *The New York Times*, January 19, 1988. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/01/19/opinion/l-izzy-did-you-ask-a-good-question-today-712388.html>





The Zionist idea succeeded: it exists, it works. **This is a project of the Jewish head, the Jewish heart, and the Jewish soul.** Today's mission involves studying, questioning, dreaming, and fulfilling different Zionist ideas. The challenge is to look back accurately—with a dash of romance—and to look forward creatively—with a touch of rigor—weighing what Zionism can mean and become, today and tomorrow.

## About Gil Troy



A Distinguished Scholar in North American History at McGill University currently living in Jerusalem, Gil Troy is an award-winning American presidential historian and a leading Zionist activist. In the Foreword to Troy's book, *The Zionist Ideas: Visions for the Jewish Homeland – Then, Now, Tomorrow*, which was a 2019 National Jewish Book Award Finalist, Natan Sharansky writes: "This magnificent work is the perfect follow-up to Arthur Hertzberg's classic *The Zionist Idea*. Combining, like Hertzberg, a scholar's eye and an activist's ear, Gil Troy demonstrates that we now live in a world of Zionist Ideas, with many different ways to help Israel flourish as a democratic Jewish state."

Recently designated an *Algemeiner* J-100, one of the top 100 people "positively influencing Jewish life," Troy wrote *The Age of Clinton: America in the 1990s*, and eight other books on the American presidency. One leading historian called *Age of Clinton* "the best book on the man and his times." Troy edited and updated another classic, the multi-volume *History of American Presidential Campaigns*, originally edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Fred Israel. He is now writing a new essay on the 2020 election.

His new book, co-authored with the former Soviet Prisoner of Zion and human rights activist Natan Sharansky, *Never Alone: Prison, Politics and My People*, was just published by PublicAffairs of Hachette.

Troy's book *Moynihan's Moment: America's Fight against Zionism as Racism*, describes the fall of the UN, the rise of Reagan and the spread of Anti-Zionism. Jewish Ideas Daily designated it one of 2012's "best books." This summer, Koren Books will publish its first three volumes in its "Library of the Jewish People," featuring Theodor Herzl's *Zionist Writings* – edited and introduced by Troy.

He appeared as a featured commentator on CNN's popular multipart documentaries, *The Eighties*, *The Nineties*, and *The 2000s*. He has been interviewed on most major North American TV and radio networks.

Troy has published essays in the American, Canadian, and Israeli media, including writing essays for the *New York Times*' "Campaign Stops" in 2012 and 2016. For many years, he wrote a monthly column for the *Daily Beast*, "Secret Lives," putting current events in historical perspective, and writes a weekly column for the *Jerusalem Post*. Troy chairs Taglit-Birthright Israel's International Education Committee.

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