

May 2015

Our Zionism - Our Hope

Israel and the concept of Zionism have been everywhere in the news lately. Even teenagers are talking about Zionism. Recently, in my daughter Ellie's 9th grade honors Ancient Civilizations class, the teacher asked the students to offer their thoughts on how much land Israel should have. Recent studies show that most Reform Jews (and three-quarters of secular Israeli Jews) believe in a two-state solution. When Ellie gave her answer, some students in the class called her a Zionist. Ellie proudly and enthusiastically responded, "Well yes I am!" As this is Ellie's first year at a public high school after eight years in Jewish day schools, she didn't understand why they were accusing her, or from where the accusation stemmed. She didn't understand why the label "Zionist" was, in that context, an insult. If Zionism means the desire for a Jewish homeland then for her, being a Zionist is something she had never questioned. "I'm Jewish, so I must be a Zionist," she responded when I asked her about it. For her, and for many of us, the two go together.

Most Reform Jews (among others) are proud Zionists, meaning that we support Israel as the Jewish homeland. This doesn't mean that we accept or agree with everything the government does, just like we Americans don't support everything our government does here in the United States. We are Zionists because Israel is the one secure place for us to have our own nation. We are Zionists because we want a land of our own, a geographical place that holds our history as a people. We are Zionists because we want a place that is home to Jews from all over the world, where Jewish children can learn and grow up safe and protected, singing their national anthem at school with pride. And as Zionists, we can still believe that people of different religions can exist alongside one another in peace, in freedom, and in dignity.

On that last note, I strongly encourage you to read a [Washington Post commentary](#) by URJ President Rabbi Rick Jacobs, in response to the recent document produced by the Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church.

One of the ways we Jews can support our own Zionism is by going to Israel. As many of you know, 11 of us are going on Temple Etz Rimon's first congregational trip to Israel. This trip represents a communal milestone for the congregation as well as a personal milestone for many of our travelers. Our trip has been organized by ARZA (American Reform Zionist Association), and our guides have scheduled meetings with political, military, and history and social experts who will bring us closer to the issues Israel faces today. We are sure to gain a deeper understanding of what it feels like to live in a nation with hostile borders. We will connect with parents who live there with their families and who, like us, are doing everything they can for their growing children and their aging parents. We will interact with citizens who are leading the world in technology and medicine, and who, like us, are working hard to make meaningful contributions to their communities and to maintain their economy.

For a full year, Israel was home to me and my family. Some of our fondest family memories took place in Israel's parks, schools, museums, synagogues, beaches, waterfalls, doctors' offices, shopping malls, restaurants, bakeries and supermarkets. I don't agree with all the government's decisions or actions. Like Ellie, I am proud to call myself a Zionist. I remember standing on Yom

Ha-Atzma'ut (Israel's Independence Day) and singing Israel's national anthem—Hatikvah (the Hope). Zionism represents our hope that Israel will remain a place where all Jews can call home, regardless of whether they have even visited.

Join us on Friday night, May 22 as we wish "N'siah Tovah" (a good trip) to our Israel travelers and offer a blessing for safe and meaningful travel. On that evening, paper and pens will be available outside the sanctuary, and all are invited to write personal prayers that we will bring with us to the Kotel—the Western Wall. We will place our collective prayers in the cracks in the wall, and we will no doubt cry tears of joy and pride as we connect with three thousand years of history and hope.

Our congregational trip to Israel begins May 26; some of us return June 5, and some are extending their stay with a trip to Petra and returning June 7. Watch your emails for updates and pictures from Israel!