



# GUIDE TO REFORM JUDAISM 30 STORIES

## IX. IDENTIFYING WITH ISRAEL

### RJ: Is the State of Israel important to you and to your Jewish identity?

**Judy Fisher:** In the summer of '74, right after 11th grade, I went to Israel on a 7-week trip that changed my life. I walked through Jewish history, my history. I touched stones thousands of years old at the Wall, my history. I visited archaeological digs, swam in the Dead Sea, worked on a kibbutz, visited Yad Vashem. I felt the connection to my people, my history, my homeland, and I knew that we had to have this Jewish homeland to prevent the Holocaust from ever happening again.

When I grew up, got married, and had children, we sang Theodor Herzl's words, "*Im tirtzu, ein zo agadah*" ("If you will it, it is no dream") every night to our kids during bedtime songs. We've now taken them to Israel a number of times, to feel that sense of love and connection and being "part of something." Israel's also my homeland—the one place I feel fully comfortable being Jewish. I always wear my necklace with the Star of David there. In the U.S., I often tuck it under my shirt.

True, I don't always like the political decisions Israel makes. But Israel is a sovereign country, and they are her decisions to make. Israel will always be my homeland.

**Joan Pines:** Israel is *very* important to me. After the experience of the Holocaust and years of other persecutions, it is vital that Jews have a home-

identity, both spiritually and emotionally. Much of my daily life is now devoted to efforts of strengthening ties between the Diaspora and the people of Israel.



A father and son pray at the Western Wall, c. 2000, courtesy of Washington Hebrew Congregation.

**Dawn Mollenkopf:** This past summer, at the age of 41, I visited Israel for the first time. Oddly, everywhere I went, things seemed strangely familiar; I felt an unexplained sense of being "at home." The climax of my experience was celebrating my birthday on a kibbutz and making bricks out of mud and straw in the same manner Jews would have done millennia ago in Egypt. Touching the clay made me feel completely connected to my history, people, and land. It was a bittersweet experience because it was not a birthday that my twin sister and I would celebrate together. In our spiritual journeys, she has chosen to remain true to her Christian upbringing, while I have chosen to return to my Jewish roots. That day, while I was building bricks with Jewish soil, my sister was leading the bell choir in the church school where she teaches. I was keenly reminded of my decision to follow the path less taken and the difference it has made in my life.

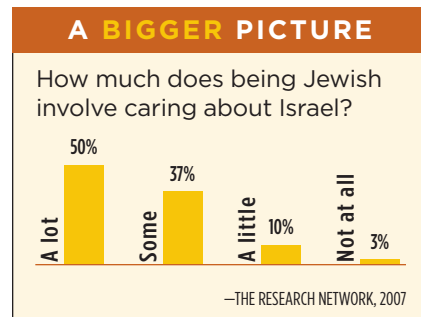
**Dana Jennings:** Judaism is not Zionism. It is a good and wonderful thing that the modern Israeli state exists, but worship of that modern Israeli state is not a good and wonderful thing. Many modern Jews have turned Israel into our Golden Calf in which the existence of the Israeli state supersedes Torah, prayer, and *mitzvot*.

Our truest homeland is not a swatch of earth in the Middle East, but Torah. And it's important to remember that the mythological Israel that appears in our Tanach is not the Israel that appears in

land, a place where we are masters of our own destiny. Beyond that, I feel so proud of the Israeli people's social, material, and cultural accomplishments—all despite their having to live in a country surrounded by a sea of enemies.

**Steve Arnold:** Even before I was a Jew, I was a Zionist. Israel represents both a global apology for the Holocaust and the final refuge of all Jews from the evil of the world.

**Nancy Ruth:** The evolution of the importance of the land of Israel in Reform thinking has, perhaps, become the most significant part of my Jewish



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