

the news each day. That ancient world only lives in Torah.

Barbara D. Holender: I grew up in an ardently Zionist family. My mother was president of Hadassah (as were my aunts), organized the Women’s Division of Israel Bonds, and was acclaimed as a Woman of Valor for selling \$100,000 of Israel Bonds in the course of her career.

As a teenager I belonged to Young Judea, played *Hatikvah* on the piano at Zionist meetings, and taught Hebrew songs and led dances at local Jewish schools. In 1947 I wanted desperately to make *aliyah*, but my parents absolutely forbade it. It took me a long time to understand why they wouldn’t let their daughter go into a war zone alone.

I did not get to Israel until 1983, the year after my husband died. I decided to take my daughter after she finished law school. “You know, dear,” I said, “next year...” “Mom,” she said, “I was going to take you.” “No,” I said, “that’s your graduation present.”

That was the total conversation. We knew where we were going. “Just promise me you’ll come home with me,” she said.

Laurence Kaufman: Zionism is one of my most important inheritances as a Jew. I still have vivid memories of going at a young age to New York in 1946 to meet the boat returning my mother from Basel, where she was a delegate to the

first postwar World Zionist Congress.

I see Zionism and the centrality of Israel as integral to Jewish life. Those who want to classify Judaism as only a

Jew. What Israel needs is a separation of synagogue and state that somehow still preserves its Jewish character.



NFTY in Israel participants greet the sun over the Dead Sea after a predawn hike up Masada, Summer 2007.

religion are in denial. I expect Torah to come forth from Zion, and I believe that Diaspora Jews have an obligation to support and defend Israel, which is a bulwark for Jews throughout the world. Only when Israel becomes a residence of choice rather than refuge for Diaspora Jews and ends Orthodox control over religious life can it fulfill its mission as the cultural nexus and spiritual center for the Jewish people.

Ellen Morrow: I believe that making Israel central to Jewish identity is dangerous. In our history we have had more time without a state than with one. If, God forbid, Israel were to cease to exist, given its current centrality, what would happen to Jewish identity? Let me add that I have serious reservations about a country that claims to be of my religion but only recognizes my legitimacy in small, hard-won steps. I have been disillusioned ever since 1976, when I went on a 6-month NFTY Israel program. Having been raised with a vision of Israel as a super-religious (with a small “r”) country where Jewish ideals could be lived, I found instead a male chauvinistic mentality, an Orthodox presence at the Wall that negated my Jewish value as a woman, and negation of who I am as a Reform

Jennifer Warriner: Israel is incredibly important to my identity as a Jew. Whenever my thoughts turn to the State, I have three simultaneous responses: 1) a tangled web of free associations about people and places runs through my mind; 2) a knot of love

and respect wells up in my chest; and 3) I begin to wonder about the health and safety of my Israeli friends I know and love, who have taught me, nurtured me, and taken me into their homes.

My mental journey usually starts at Mount Carmel, where Elijah challenged the prophets of Ba’al, where Baron de Rothschild bought land and planted vineyards that became wineries at Zicharon Ya’akov, and where Sarah Aaronson and her friends in NILI died helping England eject the Ottoman Empire from *Eretz Yisrael*. Then my mind travels down the mountain to the Mediterranean shore at Caesarea, where Rabbi Akiva was tortured to death for his role in the Bar Kokhba revolt of 132–135 C.E. That beach was also the inspiration for Hannah Senesh’s poem that we know as the song “Eli, Eli.” My mind then flies

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THE RABBIS SPEAK

“We are committed to the State of Israel and rejoice in its accomplishments. We affirm the unique qualities of living in the land of Israel and encourage *aliyah*.... We are committed to a vision of the State of Israel that promotes full civil, human and religious rights for all its inhabitants and that strives for a lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors.”

—A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism, CCAR, 1999

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