



## A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Natan Brownstein

### Questions without Answers: The Jewish State

It is as if a relative dies, but then the next day your brother gets engaged. Changing your emotions from one extreme to another within a matter of minutes. I, for one, did not succeed, but it seems like the rest of the country does, and has been doing it like this since the establishment of *Yom Hazikaron* and *Yom Haatzmaut*.



We constantly are faced with this paradigm living here in Israel. Between acts of terror the country continues, every day appreciating the existence of a Jewish State. How can the two act simultaneously, how are they related, and how does this paradigm play out?

The night began with a *Tekes* (ceremony) on Ammunition Hill (sight of one of the most famous battles in The Six Day War) in Jerusalem, in honor of *Yom Hazikaron*. So many Americans on a year program here in Israel, dressed in white and blue, and sat in the audience while we witnessed a ceremony that left everyone with tears in their eyes. Before it started we all stood up and a siren sounded. The siren echoed throughout the entire country, every single Jew standing at attention, remembering that the land in which they live comes with a sacrifice, and to never forget that.

We heard seven stories of soldiers who had died fighting for the State of Israel. Their family members spoke of the type of people they were, and their lives before they were killed, and what they left behind. The correlation between all seven of these soldiers was that they had all lived in America at one point and made *Aliyah*. The State of Israel was so important to them that they turned their lives around and dedicated their lives to a Jewish State.

They were us. They had the dedication that we all wish to have. Despite living in America, for High School, and some College, they had the motivation and drive to choose to live in Israel. To pick up and dedicate your life to the State of Israel, takes courage; they felt so strongly they were willing to die for it. Is there anything I care so much about I am willing to die for it?

The next morning we got up and went to the Har Herzl Military Cemetery. On *Yom Hazikaron* the entire country makes their way to the cemetery, being that in Israel everyone knows someone or is close to someone who died fighting for the land.

Thousands of people walking around with flowers in their hands and tears in their eyes, and as the siren sounded the entire mountain froze. Every type of Jew at every grave, death uniting the Jewish people, the entire Jewish people taking a moment, to remember that the Land we take for granted comes with a price.

I then went around with a staff member from my summer camp and he showed us different graves of his friends; soldiers in the army who made the ultimate sacrifice. This is when I could no longer take it. People who were newly married, who had their whole lives to look forward to. People who had parents, siblings, friends and everything in between just like we did. How can I stand by and call myself a supporter of the State of Israel, without even defending it?

Then as soon as night came, a day of mourning and sorrow shifted to happiness and celebration. Black turned to White, and Night turned to Day. *Yom Hazikaron* ended and *Yom Haatzmaut* began. We *davened Maariv* that night singing and dancing all the way through *Hallel*. I sang and sang but my heart was not in it, and internally I could not change my mood along with the entire country. Going into town that night there was music and dancing through the streets, people celebrating uncontrollably. How can these two emotions sit side by side, one directly following the other?

After asking 20 Israelis what to do in order to celebrate *Yom Haatzmaut*, I really only received one answer. Have a *mangal* (or barbeque in English). So around midday a few friends and I went to Gan Sacher in Jerusalem and the scene was like nothing I had expected. Barbeque smoke is literally rising from the park. Everywhere are dozens of Israelis grilling, playing soccer, and socializing. Everyone with their families, enjoying a beautiful day here in Israel. Do we really realize how blessed we are to have a Jewish State?

When Cheryl Mandel came to speak to us before *Yom Hazikaron*, I left with all of my doubts being answered. Her son Daniel (hy"d) was killed six years ago in the Israeli Army, yet afterwards she sent two more sons into the army. She speaks of Zionism and the need to protect the State of Israel so passionately; with such emotion. She talked about how by sending her son into the army she is not doing it alone - she is sharing the risk with 600,000 other mothers. And when her son was killed, she was not alone - she was sharing the grief of 22,000 other mothers.

The more people who move here, the lower of a risk it is, because whether it is your son, your mailman's son, or your best friend's son: everyone is in it together. You have a better chance of getting into a car crash, or dying from a cause beyond your control, so why not stand up and defend something you believe in?

I don't have the answers to any of these questions. But I think about them every day, do I want to raise my children in a world where the societal norm is going to the army after high school? Do I have the dedication to make *Aliyah*, and to commit myself to the growth of a Jewish State? How can I not take this land for granted? Is the only option to live here and to defend this land? Is there another way?

---

*Natan attended Cleveland High School in Portland, Oregon where he the Captain of the Varsity Swim Team. He was the Portland Regional Student Director of the Jewish Student Union and a member of the Northwest NCSY Regional Board. Natan also spearheaded efforts to get the Portland Public School Board to change exam dates so that they don't fall on Jewish Festivals.*

*Natan's favorite part of Orayta is: The Gemara Shiurim. And ending the day every day feeling like I have been challenged intellectually to my full capacity and becoming a better person.*