



HOPES AND FEARS: WHAT I'D LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN IN ISRAEL OVER THE NEXT 70 YEARS

A SELECTION OF ESSAYS BY YOUNG BRITISH JEWS
AND ISRAELIS



Published by We Believe in Israel

BCM Box 5708
London WC1N 3XX
www.webelieveinisrael.org.uk

Copyright © We Believe in Israel 2018

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the publisher of this book.



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION BY LUKE AKEHURST	2
ROBIN MOSS	4
HEN MAZZIG	8
JUDITH FLACKS	10
SAM GOLD	12
AARON KALMAN	14
RACHEL KAYE	16
RICHARD VERBER	20
ASAF YUSUFOV	22

INTRODUCTION

2018 marks the 70th anniversary of the birth of the State of Israel.

As part of the celebration of Israel 70, we wanted to pause, take a breath, and look forward, thinking about our hopes and fears for Israel in the next 70 years.

This booklet brings together five essays by young British Jews who hold positions of responsibility in Jewish or pro-Israel organisations, and three essays by young Israelis of the same generation. The three Israeli essays were originally published in Fathom, BICOM's quarterly journal.

We are proud of the thoughtfulness of these essays by young British and Israeli Zionists, and the range of opinions and perspectives they represent.

We hope they will set you thinking about your own hopes and fears for Israel's future.

Thank you to all the authors and to Fathom's Editor, Professor Alan Johnson, for their contributions to this publication.

Luke Akehurst
Director, We Believe in Israel



ROBIN MOSS

Mirror-Images of Israel: Optimism and Pessimism

It is uncontentious, I think, to say that Israel has succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of its pre-state visionaries and its early founders. Economically Israel is booming, with standards of living matching that of Europe and North America rather than its neighbours. Culturally it is a powerhouse, infinitely creative, blending tradition and modernity, Jewish and non-Jewish, Western and Eastern. Militarily it has a qualitative edge over any other army in the Middle East and technologically Israel is the “start-up nation” of 21st Century innovation. Societally, Israel is much more open and liberal than it ever was, with increasing (though still far too little) representation of LGBT+ people, women, Arab-Palestinian citizens, Mizrahim, disabled people, Ethiopians, Haredim and so on within the public discourse. Israel has made peace with Egypt and Jordan and the conflict with the Palestinians today is far more bark than existentially-threatening bite. Israel has withdrawn from Gaza and most Palestinians in the West Bank have day-to-day autonomy of governance. Israeli democracy has survived times of war, crisis and profound ideological disagreement and the public square is a constant conversation of competing claims. For all of this, and much more, I marvel, I am inspired and I am thankful.

It is uncontentious, I think, to say that Israel faces enormous challenges, many unimaginable to its pre-state visionaries and its early founders. Economically Israel is profoundly unequal, with gaps between rich and poor that would have been stomach-churning to many of the socialist Zionist pioneers. Culturally it has succumbed to consumerist decadence and globalised homogeneity, with the Hebrew lettering on “McDonalds” masking the 60% share that this foreign import now has of the Israeli burger chain market. Militarily, Israel’s high-tech army has proven to be impotent against the increasingly low-tech threats of stabbings, rock-throwing and campaigns of international delegitimation, and technologically Israel has created a small class of super-rich entrepreneurs supported by a vast number of low-paid, dead-end jobs. Its rising population has caused (and is still causing) enormous ecological damage and many olim [aliyah immigrants] return home or live hand-to-mouth existences because of the difficulty of integration into Israeli society. Societally, Israel has fragmented into blocks or as President Rivlin has put it “tribes” that seem to be in perpetual and destructive conflict with one another. Israel remains at war (mostly cold, sometimes hot) with much of the Middle East, and young israelis still need to go to the army and risk their lives amongst a hostile population. Israel is castigated as an occupying power in the West Bank and Israeli civilian settlements provoke the ire of much of the world. Israeli democracy is severely undermined by corruption, short-sighted decision-making and some illiberal tendencies from populist politicians, whose intolerance is stifling debate and demonising dissent in the public square. For all of this, and much more, I agonise, I am worried and I am fearful.

Israel is complicated, like all countries, and Israeli society is complex, like all societies; but Israel’s complications and Israeli society’s complexities are unique as well. Israel is a Western liberal democracy (at least in institutional design, and often though not always in political culture) in a region almost devoid of this form of governance. Israel’s economy is largely service-based and knowledge-focused rather than extractive or industrial and this leaves it vulnerable to “brain drain” and to the rise of the

knowledge economies of China, India and so on. Israel finds itself caught in a century-long national-religious-sociocultural narrative struggle played out in a strip of land barely 260 miles by 75 miles. Israel's society is transitioning from one with a secular Zionist majority which hegemonically defined the mainstream into one with no majority and arguably no bases of collective social solidarity, in other words no easily-identifiable "Israeliness". The great experiment that is Israel is simultaneously vibrant and vital and fractured and fragile.

This is the context in which Israel turns 70. So where now? What would I like to see happen in Israel over the next 70 years, in order for it not just to survive but also to thrive? I would suggest that there are two essential ingredients to give Israel the best possible chance of continuing its remarkable successes and beginning to address its fundamental challenges.

1. Work to create a truly inclusive society that allows equal access to advantage for all

Israelis are divided along many axis - religiously, ethnically, socioeconomically, linguistically etc - and these divisions weigh heavily on the society. Just as the USA traditionally had its ruling class, the so-called WASPs (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants), so in the early years of the State did Zionism create its own WASPs, the "white Ashkenazi seculars with protectzia". In recent decades, their power and influence has been exposed, attacked and, in some cases, dismantled from many directions. Yet the claims of the many non-WASP groups within the society (as well as of women, LGBT+ people, disabled people etc) have not been fully fed through into the distribution of societal benefits and burdens, and as such Israeli society remains uninclusive for many.

Within academic political philosophy, there is an ongoing debate often called "equality of what?" In other words, what is the "currency" that those seeking inclusive societies ought to be equalising? Only the totalitarian communist would say this is financial resources, at least on a whole-societal level. More promising is something like opportunity, but even this is limited, because structural factors stretching back to childhood and the mechanisms that turn theoretical opportunity into actual outcomes are rarely straightforward. The late, great Jewish philosopher G A Cohen therefore argued in the late 1980s that we should seek to equalise what he terms "access to advantage". This means that a bottom-up and top-down approach, whereby both the individual life circumstances of individuals and families are made as irrelevant as possible to their life chances and the system itself (what John Rawls calls the "basic structure") is reorganised so as to not reward the already-rewarded. Opportunities for advantage in a society should not be limited to those born with the metaphorical silver spoon in their mouths.

Within the Israeli society, this might mean dismantling the stranglehold that certain subsets of Israelis have over control to the wellsprings of advantage. The army is a classic example of this. Firstly, half of Israelis no longer go to the army at all, be that for religious (Haredi), national (Arab-Palestinian) or medical (disability) reasons. And within the army, the elite units, which open up a path after service into lucrative careers, essentially cherry-pick the best and the brightest, who inevitably are disproportionately from WASP or similar households. The solution is not to deprive the army of talent or indeed to end compulsory military service (though this may happen naturally anyway, depending on broader political developments). Rather, a multitude of other paths need to be opened that lead to advantage and that are more inclusive in their potential intake. The obvious outlet for this would be a national service programme required of all Israeli 18-year-olds, but one that has different options. I would propose that any option would have to fulfil two of the following three conditions: 1) you must live away from home; 2) you must serve others; and 3) you must have meaningful encounters with Israelis not like you. Of course the army would count, but so would community-based service, foreign development volunteer work and possibly other frameworks too. This would open up that critical 18-21 year old period from being a privilege-reproducing funnel to an advantage-spreading fan. And hopefully, it would begin to address the real and genuine sense of injustice and grievance felt by many sectors of the Israeli society towards others.

2. Come to some accommodation with the Palestinians and "unwind the narrative double-helix"

Whilst the Iranian nuclear threat is a real danger, Israel no longer faces the prospect of the "Arab armies coming over the hill". Its national security concerns have evolved and changed, and the regional situation is kaleidoscopic but, if anything improving from Israel's perspective. Yet the nagging sore of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains. In my view Israel must at some point confront it head-on if it is to truly thrive to age one hundred and beyond.

To be clear - this is not because I think Israel is imminently threatened by the status quo. Despite the alarmism of some commentators, the truth of the matter is that Israel's military presence in the West Bank is over half a century old (its civilian presence not much younger,) and it can continue for a long time yet if it needed to. But three other considerations weigh on Israel.

First, the best demographic projections - by the Central Bureau of Statistics, the IDF and demographic academic experts - are that the number of Jews and the number of non-Jews between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River has already, or will very soon, equalise. Israel's withdrawal from Gaza certainly helps in this regard, but nonetheless the fact remains that Israel finds itself in direct or indirect control of territories that contain a substantial minority of Arabs, most of whom identify as Palestinian and only some of whom have a democratic voice and vote within the Israeli political system. For many Israelis, and for many Jews around the world, (as well of course as international opinion), this is an uncomfortable reality.

Secondly, Israel's moral standing around the world is continually challenged by its seeming domination of the Palestinians, and no amount of hasbara or flashy infographics about high-tech innovation can make this go away. Anyone who cares about Israel and wants it to be seen as a "light amongst the nations" should be concerned that for much of the world, it is the image of the IDF soldier arresting the Palestinian in the middle of the night, or firing rubber bullets and tear gas into the crowd of seemingly-peaceful protesters, that dominates much of the world's imagined conception of Israel.

Finally, Israelis and Palestinians are caught in a battle of narratives that is detrimental to the self-understanding and long-term flourishing of both. Academics have sometimes described this as the "double-helix", whereby each side is in a constant struggle to counter the political machinations of the other; and more than that, it creates a pair of identities that almost by definition need to negate each other. Much like in the Cold War, where to be American meant, at least in part, to be "not communist" and to be Russian meant, at least in part, to be "not capitalist", the Israeli-Palestinian conflict transcends the day-to-day violence or the year-to-year politics. It has become an identity-constraining chain preventing either people from reaching their full potential. It must not be allowed to become a noose around either or both peoples' necks. (It also creates a major challenge for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, whose "country is at war with their nation", and as such find themselves in a deeply ambiguous identity trap that plays out societally as deleterious in many ways.)

So, for the sake of both Israelis and Palestinians, I hope an accommodation can be reached between the two sides that allows them to unwind this double-helix and pursue their destinies independently, without the constant need to look over each other's narrative shoulders. This might be in a two-state separation, a one-state autonomous integration, a semi-detached federation or some other political arrangement. Ultimately, nobody but Israelis and Palestinians themselves can find a way out of the narrative double-helix maze. But I hope they do, sooner rather than later.

Israel at 70 is colourful, complex and cacophonous. My hope for Israel at 140 is that, having opened up its society to harness the potential of all its citizens and resolved its existential narrative conflict with the Palestinians, it can serve as the exemplary society that Herzl envisaged. Given the journey Israel has

been on from 1948 until today, this hope surely cannot be seen as mere blind optimism. I - and we - believe in Israel.

Robin Moss is the Head of the UJIA Centre for Israel Engagement. He is writing in a personal capacity.

HEN MAZZIG

'THE STATE OF ISRAEL will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture...' - The declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel, 14 May 1948

We Israelis have much to be proud of as we approach the 70th anniversary of our young country, which has made great progress in many areas since its establishment. Equality, freedom and social justice are integral parts of our country's DNA. We discuss issues openly, we work to change them and when there's doubt about the upholding of these values, it makes the front pages of our newspapers.

As a Mizrahi in Israel, I know the challenges faced by people who are considered minorities. Although we see Israeli politicians of Mizrahi descent and Mizrahi intellectuals and influencers serving as leaders in different industries, we are yet to see a Mizrahi Prime Minister. I hope that sooner rather than later a leader will emerge who will be of Middle Eastern descent to lead this Middle Eastern country.

In terms of gender equality, Israel has always been a force to be reckoned with. Starting with Prime Minister Golda Meir in the 1960s to the present day, women have received equal opportunity in most fields including both military and civilian positions. Israeli leaders and society do need to work together to promote gender equality even more, but for a young country we have come a long way. Being part of the LGBTQ community, I am very proud of my country. I was able to serve as an openly gay commander when the policy was still 'don't ask don't tell' in the US military. Tel Aviv keeps on topping the charts for being the friendliest city for gays in the world. However, we need to move beyond recognising same-sex marriages to allowing them to take place in Israel. Unfortunately, the state institution controlling marriage is run by people with the mentality prevalent in the dark ages.

Regarding the military service: after my five-year military service I had a disadvantage compared to most young people around the world. It wasn't pleasant to live in a base in Hebron, skipping the important years of my development to protect my country. However, it was necessary and was a pivotal part in making me the man I am today. Nevertheless, approximately 13 per cent of eligible young Israeli men are exempt from military service to study Torah and the IDF estimates that number will increase to 20 per cent by 2020. In short: it's just not fair. There are several alternatives that have been suggested to allow Haredi men to contribute to our country, but also to stay true to their values. One suggestion is allowing Haredi men to enlist for partial service and another is to serve in military positions and units that will not impede on their religious studies and their way of life. This is yet another example of the power that the rabbinical authority holds over Israel and Israelis, something which must be curtailed in the interest of our country's future.

Looking at other free countries around the world, I am immensely proud of Israel's achievements and

development. Thinking of where other countries were 70 years into their existence and where Israel is now, it's night and day. We have come so far, but we have so far to go. We must keep marching.

Hen Mazzig is an Israeli writer, international speaker, social media activist and advocate.

JUDITH FLACKS

When one thinks about Israel's past 70 years, it is quite remarkable to note how much has been achieved. It is somewhat more remarkable to think how much more there still is left to do. At times such as birthdays or anniversaries, when we look to reflect on past achievements and form future goals, I think it is helpful to be reminded of the saying "You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it". There is no saying more apt to describe what the Jewish diaspora's attitude should be towards Israel today. The next 70 years in Israel are all about committing to the task ahead.

When people talk about Israel and Palestine, they often talk about them in relation to the conflict; how it started, who's done what, how they reach a resolution etc. However, diaspora communities around the world are increasingly taking a keen interest in Israel's domestic policies, and not just in relation to the conflict. Within British Jewry, just this year we have seen petitions circulated by established organisations about how African asylum seekers are treated in Israel, we pay attention to articles on corruption, on conscription, on settlements and on social issues. When we put Israel under the microscope, there is much to be examined, but there are three things in particular that I believe will make Israel stronger moving forward for the next 70 years.

Diaspora Jewish communities have to keep caring about Israel's future and keep future generations interested in its wellbeing. Critical friends, advocates, commentators, future Olim [aliyah immigrants], and anyone else who genuinely cares about Zionism and Israel's future has to continue to make the case for it. We have to be sure that we see Israel building a society in a name that we can be proud to share.

Today, there is much to be critical of in Israel. Delegitimisation campaigns, international bodies, and media do not let us forget that. Not because of this, but in spite of it, we have to ensure that our communities want to engage and build up a sustainable relationship with Israeli society rather than disengage, disassociate and abandon a connection to it. We must remind everyone why Israel exists, why it still has to exist, why it has a right to exist. Israel's next 70 years will depend on those who want to see it thrive and who want to keep improving it for future generations.

Secondly, Israel must remember that it is a country largely made up of and founded by immigrants. It remains to this day, a place for Jews who faced and fear persecution in their home countries. Israel cannot now turn its back on its African refugees and asylum seekers also fleeing persecution. Israel cannot continue to plan for mass deportations and send asylum seekers, who are not economic migrants, back to their countries of origin or relocate them to third countries, in some cases to face further persecution or even certain death.

We know that no country is able to absorb unrestricted numbers of refugees and asylum seekers without knowing that it can deal with the economic, social and welfare implications of migration.

However, there are several other problems that need to be rectified when addressing how Israel treats African asylum seekers.

To provide some context, according to the Israeli Interior Ministry, there are approximately 38,000 African migrants and asylum seekers in Israel. At the moment, African asylum seekers in Israel could face anything from denial of work visas to unfair working conditions even when they are granted permission to work. These conditions include measures such as withholding a percentage of the worker's wages, which will only be given back to them at Ben Gurion Airport after agreeing to voluntary deportation. An article by the Times of Israel published in February 2018 said that there are no official reports about where deportees are actually sent to however, it is widely understood through anecdotal evidence that voluntary deportation is usually to a third country, often Uganda or Rwanda, with whom Israel has struck deals to accept departing migrants on condition they consent to the arrangement.

I do not claim to know what resolution best suits this situation, but I do know that looking forward to Israel's next 70 years, when it faces new challenges such as this, Israel cannot simply turn its back on those fleeing persecution, or treat them with contempt and subject refugees and asylum seekers to unfair laws and regulations. Some of the current quick fixes and Band-Aid solutions will not create a sustainable or morally equitable Israel, which is essentially what I believe it must continuously strive to be.

Thirdly, gender equality in Israel still needs addressing. It is widely known that women are treated equally in the IDF and can serve in about 90% of the same roles as men, there are outspoken female Members of Knesset and there are strong female leaders all over the county. However, Israeli society still suffers from misogyny and high profile cases of sexual harassment. Recent examples that reached international audiences include journalist Ari Shavit and former President Moshe Katzav.

There are still issues to be addressed around equal pay, around representation and all of the issues that face the rest of the world with regards to gender inequality, sexual harassment and everyday sexism, Israel faces too. It should be an impetus to act faster, to lead the way and set the example of being a society that treats women equally in every regard; that is something that every country in the world should strive for.

The things I want for Israel are the same things I want for Britain. They are things that are morally and ethically essential to any society's future. Compassion and social responsibility, gender equality, a proud identity and commitment to building a strong sustainable future; all of these things are what we should expect of Israel over the next 70 years. But we should not just expect this of Israel, we should expect it from the UK and we should expect it of every country that describes itself as democratic and liberal.

So when we celebrate Israel at 140, we may very well be looking at how it resolves similar issues, and we will certainly be looking at addressing some new ones. But one thing is certain, if we are not obligated to complete the task but are not free to desist from it, we must always work to improve things, and not just simply say that the task ahead of us is not our responsibility or is too far out of reach.

Judith Flacks is Head of Campaigns at the Jewish Leadership Council

SAM GOLD

My biggest fear and my biggest hope for Israel over the next 70 years are actually the exact same thing. On the one hand, my biggest hope, which will be portrayed here, is that Israel will overcome its 'status quo' mentality that consistently has won Benjamin Netanyahu successive elections. The conservative nationalism now employed by Donald Trump promises to keep everything the same and, with an ever-changing region, who can blame the Israeli electorate for buying into such a brand? I would hope to see Israel escape this ideology, and move into a far more pragmatic approach to finding peace both within the region and domestically. However, as a Jew in the diaspora who cares so much about the preservation and the existence of the State of Israel, the thought that the current conservative policy could change is also my biggest fear for the next 70 years. Ultimately this essay will demonstrate that what I would like to see happen in Israel over the next 70 years and what will actually happen are vastly different.

Netanyahu is not a man who avoids controversy, whether it is presenting the United Nations with a bomb cartoon to refer to the Iranian nuclear situation, or the multiple corruption charges being levelled at him. Fascinatingly this tendency does not seem to be affecting his position in the polls, with the most recent poll result showing 35 seats for Likud, should an election be held now. The explanation for this is simple; the experiences of the Israeli population are unfathomable especially to those in the diaspora who have a heartfelt and deep connection to Israel. During a trip I led for the Union of Jewish Students in December 2017, a leading Israeli journalist convincingly told us that politics and ideology died in Israel after the second Intifada. The death toll on both sides was over 4,000, and the population of Israel was frightened of the freedom of movement from the West Bank into pre-1967 Israel. Ariel Sharon was adamant he had to do something about it, and so he commissioned the building of the West Bank barrier. Since then, the average Israeli has not been interested in economic systems or housing, rather they were focused on staying alive and protecting their loved ones. Government policy mirrored this, and despite all of the problems related to Bibi, there was one thing that made him stand out amongst his opponents; the fact that Israel has stayed exactly the same in a region infamous for its volatility.

Egypt has had three leaders from vastly different backgrounds in seven years, Syria is fighting a civil war with unprecedented numbers of casualties, the Islamic State at one point in 2014 controlled more than 34,000 square miles in Syria and Iraq, and Hezbollah continues to be a strong player in Lebanon. These are just snippets of what happens in the land surrounding Israel every day, often just tens of miles away from Israeli borders. As a result, it is no surprise that the Israeli electorate sees it fitting to elect a man and a party who promise to maintain the status quo and keep Israel running exactly as it has for the last decade.

One should be under no illusion that nowadays Israel does not stand in the same place in the public eye that it did in, for example, the 1970s. Israel is constantly under a microscope and supporters around the globe are consistently under intense scrutiny as a result of the actions of the Israeli government.

This essay tackles what I hope to see happen in the next 70 years, and to be honest, I do not know what will happen, because as I said earlier, the region springs up so many surprises that Israel never know what challenges they face. This uncertainty is the exact reason why the conservative policy will never change, and because of the end of classic political ideology in Israel after the second Intifada, it seems increasingly likely that in 70 years' time we will see Israelis voting exactly the same way.

As a diaspora Jew with a vastly different experience to an Israeli, I cannot wholeheartedly relate to their motivations. An existential threat creates a siege mentality, meaning that when push comes to shove, you vote to stay alive, not to change any other laws which are ultimately irrelevant if your existence is threatened. As a result my biggest fear is the political landscape, and the hard-line security policy changing.

The problem with conservative nationalism and maintaining a status quo is that despite Israel seeming safer to those living within it, it makes it far harder for an advocate outside of Israel. The debate in the United Kingdom regarding Israel and the two-state solution is not one that is held domestically in Israel. The J-Street/AIPAC arguments are ultimately redundant because nobody wants to see anything change. With the disparity between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, along with the fact that a handing over of the West Bank would reduce Israel's width at its narrowest point to just 9 miles, it is no surprise that the Israeli people do not trust those who they are tasked to make peace with. The conflict itself therefore seems to be at a crossroads where no one seems to want to take a turning.

The conclusion to this essay is bleak. The birthday of Israel is something I celebrated, and the Jewish state is something I am so blessed to have as a home away from home. I stated in the introduction that my biggest hope was that Israel escapes its paradoxical conservative policies, but I am afraid it has gotten to such a point where I do not see this happening. Citizens vote on their safety in Israel, and rarely anything else, and until something drastically changes, that won't either. I want an Israel that votes on prosperity, on peace with its surrounding countries, that accepts everyone and treats everyone as equals, but unfortunately these aren't the topics people care about. All we can say for certain is that Israel will exist in 70 years and whether the internal politics change it will still be a beacon of democracy to the rest of the Middle East, and lead the way for technological advancements for the world to sit in awe.

Sam Gold is a former Campaigns Officer at UJS.



AARON KALMAN

Our daughter is learning to walk. In ten years time my wife and I will be planning her Bat-Mitzva. What kind of country will she live in? Israel's 70th Independence Day provides an opportunity for young Israelis to imagine and to decide how we want to shape our children's future home.

During its first seven decades, Israel has progressed tremendously in almost every imaginable aspect. Our population has grown from less than a million to nine million. Once beset by shortages and rationing, our economy is now a modern, high-tech powerhouse, exporting its know-how to all corners of the Earth. Israeli medical and agricultural innovation is world-leading and bettering the lives of many millions of people around the world. And yet we still face such huge challenges.

The biggest challenge facing Israeli society is the lack of trust between its social sectors and political camps. This isn't to say everyone needs to agree all the time. We all know the cliché 'three Jews have four opinions' and we can take pride in the Jewish state's healthy culture of debate and critical thinking. However, the suspicion – stoked by a few, shared by many – that others are 'stealing' their country and 'destroying' their home, needs to be dealt with: I want my daughter to grow up in a society that is respectful of others and their opinions.

This feeling of disappointment is not restricted to one sector of the population or one political camp. The ultra-Orthodox genuinely think there is a secular agenda to change their religious beliefs. The secular and traditional communities feel the Orthodox wish to run the country according to stringent interpretations of Jewish law. The dichotomy between the Left and Right political camps has turned the word 'leftist' into an insult and those holding views right-of-centre into 'fascists'.

Israel needs to take a collective breath and calm down. We must regain faith in our politicians and in their commitment to Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. Regardless of who we vote for, we need to respect the other side. Yitzhak Rabin and Yitzhak Shamir were fierce and bitter political rivals with very different worldviews. At the same time, both were Zionists, dedicated to Israel and the Jewish people. On Right, Left and Centre you can find politicians acting for what they feel are Israel's best interests. But too often we witness mudslinging between Members of Knesset, and frequently they criticise the secret, hidden motives of their opponents – instead of the policy proposed. This must change. The Israeli public needs to appreciate leaders who advance a principled agenda and reject name-calling.

For the next decade Israel will continue to deal with the same questions it has dealt with for the past 70 years. We will continue our search for the best formula to balance Israel's democratic values with its Jewish character. Citizens will continue to demand the government take action to reduce the cost of living, while complaining the government is over-involved in our life. Steps will be considered, and some might be taken, to reduce tensions and pave the road for a better future with the Palestinians and our Arab neighbours. Tension between Israel's domestic affairs and our relations with Jews around the world will continue as we try to define the relationship between the Jewish State and Jews who are not citizens but have a stake in Israel. Our challenges will not disappear and our problems won't be

repaired that quickly, so we must decide how to manage ourselves when dealing with them. At age 70, the book of Proverbs teaches us, a person reaches the age of wisdom; at age 80 he reaches the age of courage. What is true for people is also true for countries - they grow and mature over time. Israel's 70th anniversary is yet another milestone in our altneu history. Ahead of Israel's 70th birthday I wish us all to be granted the wisdom needed to make our country flourish. I wish us to be blessed with the wisdom to elect constructive leaders and hope they are blessed with wisdom when making hard decisions with people's lives in the balance.

But wishing is not enough. We must also act. So I call upon everyone, from all walks of life, to work together and create an atmosphere of critical and civil debate. Changing the discourse is a daunting task. However, such change is also capable of uniting in our mission to strengthen Israel, and is done one person at a time.

Arron Kalman is Diplomatic Adviser to Education Minister Naftali Bennett

RACHEL KAYE

Happy 70th birthday Israel! You have achieved so much in such a short time and you should be proud. As a British Jew, I am proud.

During the past months, We Believe in Israel has been marking Israel's 70 years of independence both by looking back and celebrating Israel's achievements but also looking to the future and predicting its next 70 years. This is what we hope to achieve through this compilation of essays.

70 days before Yom Ha'atsmaut, We Believe in Israel launched a social media campaign entitled '70 achievements in 70 years' highlighting one of Israel's many achievements every day. The achievements fell into a number of broad themes: Israel has provided a state for the Jews where they can be free from persecution; Israel has been home to a renaissance of Jewish culture; Israel is a free, democratic, and multicultural country; Israel is a leader in technological innovation Israel's contribution to medicine is phenomenal; Israel practices Tikkun Olam (the Jewish concept of doing good in the world) through humanitarian aid, disaster relief and environmental solution; Israel are experts in self-defence; Israeli women have achieved so much for themselves and country; Israel is an agricultural powerhouse and environmentally friendly; and Israel's food and drink, especially hummus (I am biased) is exceptional. To check out our detailed list of achievements visit <http://www.webelieveinIsrael.org.uk/2018/04/19/70-achievements-70-years/>

Israel has achieved much in such a short time and my biggest hope for the next 70 years is that Israel continues to achieve, flourish and excel. I want it to still be the 'start-up nation' driving innovation in technology, I want it to still be a world leader in science and medicine and I want it to still be at the forefront of Tikkun Olam (the Jewish concept of 'repairing the world').

Peace

One achievement We Believe in Israel mentioned was that "Israel survived an attack by 4 neighbouring armies when it declared Independence in 1948." Israel was also victorious in the Six Day War and Yom Kippur War, both of which represented an existential threat to Israel's survival. Whilst the days of massive state-on-state wars involving Israel are hopefully behind us, I unfortunately have no doubt that in the next 70 years Israel will be faced by outbreaks of asymmetric conflict involving terrorism and missile attacks. I also have no doubt that Israel will be able to defend itself through the capable IDF and perpetual innovation of defensive measures like the Iron Dome missile defence system. My hope though, is that Israel not only wins at war but wins at peace.

Israel has made peace with both Egypt and Jordan but has a long way to go before it makes peace with the Palestinians. (I am glad this essay is not on the peace process as I don't have the answer, and if I did, other people more qualified than I would too, and there would be peace). The status quo cannot continue for the next 70 years. Demographics are changing (according to COGAT's 2018 figures, the

Palestinian population in the West Bank is estimated between 2.5 million and 2.7million, with 2 million Palestinians in Gaza. If you include the 1.84 million Arabs citizens in Israel this totals 6.5 million - not far from the Jewish population within Israel's pre-1967 borders and the West Bank); the world continues to change; Israelis and Palestinians need peace.

I have been to Israel on numerous occasions and have a great love for the country - Tel Aviv beach, Jerusalem, the rich Israeli culture and beautiful scenery. A piece of imagery that stands out amongst all others is the children's playground I once visited in Sderot. Just like all other playgrounds, the equipment is full of bright colours and patterns and the park full of entertainment. However, there is one major difference. The playground includes a bomb shelter. The children's tunnel, shaped and decorated like a giant snake and runs across the playground is in fact a bomb shelter. That's a lot to take in. I am extremely grateful and humbled that Israel protects its children so well but it is such a sad reality that a bomb shelter exists in a playground. Children in both Israel and the Palestinian territories are growing up with violence and conflict being normal. It is not normal. Bomb shelters in playgrounds are not normal. A bomb shelter in every house is not normal. Hearing a siren and having seconds to run to a bomb shelter is not normal. My principal hope, my principal wish, is that children can be children and that they can grow up full of love and without fear.

Peace needs to be made. If not for adults, then for the children.

Societal gaps and rifts

Domestically, I hope to see societal gaps in Israel narrow in the next 70 years. I hope gaps narrow between rich and poor, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, Jews and Arabs, and that there are fewer rifts between the religious right (Hareidim) and left (secular).

Rich and poor:

Of course, all countries and democracies have gaps between rich and poor but it does not mean Israel cannot be a beacon of example and put resources and funds into changing the current landscape.

Ashkenazim and Sephardim:

Although the gap has narrowed, there are significant disparities in wage between Ashkenazim and Sephardim/Mizrahim in Israel. In a report 'Israel: A Social Report 2017' published in January 2018 by the Adva Center, it notes that in 2016 first-generation Ashkenazi men (who immigrated to Israel pre-1989) were the top earners in Israel earning an average wage of NIS 17,640. Second-generation Ashkenazi men then followed with an average wage of NIS 15,099, compared to second-generation Mizrahi men with an average wage of NIS 14,406 and first-generation Mizrahi men with NIS 12,761.

Second generation Ashkenazim and Sephardim are more on par with each other but there is still a way to go until wage equality and that is without mentioning women.

Jews and Arabs:

The Israeli Declaration of Independence codifies 'complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex.' Although in principle there is equality in Israel with Arabic being an official language, Arabs serving on the Supreme Court, as Knesset members, and in the IDF; in reality, Arab citizens do not always feel equal.

According to the Israel Democracy Institute '2016 Israeli Democracy Index' 91 per cent of Arab Israeli citizens feel they are discriminated against compared to Jewish citizens. 53 per cent of Jews also recognise this. This needs to be overturned, mainly by Jewish citizens helping and allowing Arab citizens to inte-

grate more. Cultural projects, university, and even social media provide outlets for the two to meet and learn/build friendships with one another.

Figures show they are on the right track, especially in the healthcare system with 42 per cent of all nursing students in Israel being Arab. A study by the Council for Higher Education in 2018 revealed that the number of Arab-Israelis pursuing bachelors' degrees at Israeli universities grew by 60 per cent from 2010 to 2017. We need these figures to continue to grow, with equal opportunity for all.

Religious right and left:

Israel was born to fulfil the need of national self-determination for the Jewish people. After thousands of years of persecution, the Jewish people finally have a modern state to call their own and a safe haven if needed. There is an age-old debate whether Israel is a state for the Jews or a Jewish state. It is most definitely a state for Jews, providing them with a homeland, and a Jewish state, in some ways yes (e.g. marriage, Shabbat as a day of rest, national holidays for the major Jewish festivals), and in others no (non-Kosher restaurants, some shops open on Shabbat.)

How Jewish the state of Israel should be causes a great divide between the left and the right. In a Pew Research Centre Survey from October 2014-May 2015, 86 per cent of Hareidim (defined here as ultra-orthodox) and 69 per cent of Dati (defined here as orthodox/modern) believed that religious law should be state law, compared to 32 per cent of Masorti (traditional) Jews and 5 per cent of Hiloni (secular Jews).

In the same survey, 96 per cent of Hareidim were in favour of shutting down public transport on Shabbat in the entire country, 85 per cent Dati, 44 per cent Masorti, and 6 per cent Hiloni.

The problem is, is that some extreme Hareidim (the minority) take Jewish law into their own hands over the law of the land (and other Jewish laws) and try and implement 'punishment' for those who break Jewish law (Halacha) such as throwing stones/dirty nappies at people who drive through their area on Shabbat or women who dress immodestly.

Secular Jews also mistrust Hareidim as they are not fully integrated into society especially as there is currently no enforced conscription for Hareidi men in the military. The vast majority of Israeli society favours conscripting Hareidi men with 90 per cent of Hiloni, 70 per cent Masorti, and 54 per cent Dati all in favour. This is compared to 13 per cent of Hareidim in favour of conscription and 83 per cent opposing conscription.

Hopefully, by the end of the next 70 years, Israel will not need to conscript anyone into the army, whether Hareidi or not, but until then Israel society as a whole needs to work on integrating all denominations of Jews into mainstream society, with no place for mistrust, discrimination, and abuse.

I would like to see the divide between religious left and right heal, even if the question of how Jewish Israel should be still isn't answered. Rather, the focus should be put on what humanity has in common rather than what sets us apart.

Conclusion

The theme that runs in the body of this essay is peace, both international and domestic.

I hope that Israel can achieve peace with the Palestinians and its Arab neighbours and I hope Israel can also achieve peace domestically, bridging the gaps between rich and poor, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, Jews and Arabs, and religious right and religious left. In order for peace to be achieved, a lot of work needs to be put in, and integration, trust, and co-operation is essential.

I fear for not only Israeli children but Palestinian children, who need to be brought up in a world and a society full of love, not hate and war.

Birthday greetings

Here's to Israel's next 70 years! You haven't disappointed so far and I can't wait to see what happens next!

RICHARD VERBER

My mother-in-law turned 70 this year. She, like many in our community who reach this landmark, is able to reflect on a successful career as an NHS nurse and can enjoy spending time with her children and grandchildren. She looks forward to a happy retirement (as and when she actually stops working).

However, for a country, 70 years barely takes it out of infancy and compared to most countries in the world, Israel is still in nappies. While there is no-one in Britain who was there for the signing of the Magna Carta and not a single citizen of the USA who was around for the Boston Tea Party, there are many Israelis who will recall gathering around radio sets to listen to David Ben-Gurion's sonorous declaration of Israeli statehood back in May 1948.

It has been an eventful seven decades and Israel has achieved much. Appropriately enough for a country still in the kindergarten of nations, this success has been driven by youth.

Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism was only 36 when he published his massively influential book 'Der Judenstaat.' Soldier and later Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was 21 when as a commander in Israel's fledgling army, he played a crucial role in the battle for Jerusalem. Abba Eban was a young Cambridge-educated diplomat who before his 35th birthday had masterminded Israel's campaign to be accepted into the United Nations, with speeches so celebrated they were recorded on vinyl and became a top seller back home. Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union a young woman called Golda Meir was forging a career as an envoy. She would later become one of the world's first female leaders.

As befits a country founded and protected by its young soldiers, whose landscape was forged by young farmers draining swamps and making the desert green, Israel's innovations have been driven by young men and women fresh from their army service. These innovative young talents are the country's future. It is no coincidence that among Israel's many economic success stories, one of the biggest has been developing new technologies. The creativity that has solved many of Israel's existential issues has also made the country one of the forerunners in computer software, phone apps and other smart technologies as well as pioneers in medical research. The glass ceilings in place in more established and developed nations have not had time to form in Israel. In the can-do culture there is a lesson to all of us: if you have an idea you can make it happen. This is how the modern State of Israel came into being in the first place.

But while Israel's young people grow their country's economy, Israel needs to ensure that it takes the youth of the diaspora with it. In Britain, our Zionist youth movements remain vibrant and engagement with Israel is strong. Zionism remains at the core of our identity as Jews. However, in the USA, the picture is not so rosy. Probably as a result of the physical distance between the two countries, combined with the stalled peace process, younger Americans are less effusive in their support of the Jewish state than their parents' generation. Polls taken in the past few years see a greater opposition to Israeli Government policies among young people. Every year, the lack of progress in the peace process,

combined with negative headlines in the media, is eroding not only active support among young Americans, but also identification with Israel.

Short of a political breakthrough, which looks unlikely in the short term, we need to examine ways to re-ignite the love affair between Jewish youth around the world and a state which they should regard as their own. The Israeli government certainly has a part to play. If it wishes to represent the aspirations of world Jewry, it needs to engage and listen to the views of this admittedly diverse constituency. This is of course a two-way street - we also need to be aware of the concerns of Israelis which drives policy on security. It is easy for us to pronounce on what Israel should and shouldn't do from the comfort of our homes thousands of miles away from a rocket attack from Gaza.

Perhaps we need to make it easier for the voice of our young people to be heard. The World Jewish Congress, of which the Board of Deputies is the British affiliate, does a wonderful job of bringing together communities worldwide. Perhaps we need something similar for young people: maybe a worldwide Jewish youth parliament which would fulfil the purpose of bringing together diverse Jewish youngsters just as their own worldview is developing. It would also give the younger members of our community a genuine voice on Israel and involve them in decision making. Genuine interaction is a precursor of identification.

Of course, the key which would unlock this huge source of potential support for Israel is a genuine peace process. In the early to mid-1990s, as the Oslo Accords were signed and handshakes took place between Israelis and Palestinian leaders on the White House lawn, there was a huge increase in support for Israel and more young people making aliyah, but as the peace process has stalled so has this feeling of optimism for the future.

It is a sobering thought that while young people have contributed disproportionately to the Israeli economy, they have also given their lives disproportionately in too many conflicts. Very few developed democracies around the world have the need to train and arm their young people straight from school so that they can protect their country from those who seek to destroy it. While UK teenagers are studying at universities and enjoying some of their most carefree years, their Israeli counterparts are manning (and womanning) border posts in a constant state of readiness for war. Even fewer nations need to take workers in their most productive years away from the workplace for as much a month a year so that they can perform their military service.

Nobody knows what the effect of a country poised for war has on the collective psyche of its young. Jewish youth have forged Israel's statehood, have developed a thriving economy and have created a haven for Jews around the world who are suffering persecution and discrimination, or who simply want to express their Jewishness in the world's only Jewish state.

Now young leaders such as myself need to do as much as we possibly can to ensure that the next generation of Israeli children are safe, secure and happy, and that when Israel eventually celebrates its centenary it does so in peace with its neighbours.

Richard Verber is the former Senior Vice President of the Board of Deputies

ASAF YUSUFOV

Israel is a young country, still forming and shaping its character. For me, to envision the future Israel I believe we should strive for, I need to go back and offer a glimpse into my perspective on the founding ideas of Israel as it compares to the Israel I live in today.

I see the Zionist movement as one of the most successful political campaigns in history. A revolutionary idea that inflamed the hearts and inspired the minds of millions; a dream willed into existence by the hard work of so many, from every corner of the world. Zionism was a radical, far-fetched ideology that succeeded in creating a modern democratic state. But recognising and celebrating its successes doesn't mean we should ignore its flaws. It took me some time to understand that. At home and at school, I was not exposed to serious criticism of the mainstream Israeli narrative. Even though I was always a bit of a news junky, I always approached media from one point of view.

I grew up in a patriotic Israeli family. My mother is a teacher and my father was seriously injured while serving in the Israeli Paratroopers. He is immensely proud of the country he loves, even though that love came at a cost.

I also went on to serve as a commander in a special combat unit. My service took me to the northern parts of the country, to the desert in the south and to the West Bank. When I closed that chapter of my life and went to college, I had a desire to understand more. Politics was always my passion, and studying politics and social studies was both fascinating and unsettling. I came across critiques of Zionism, of my politics, of my understandings of gender – basically of just about every aspect of my life. I found myself on a collision course with the reality of Israel, a reality I had not yet really confronted with the proper theoretical, ideological and historical knowledge.

There are more than a few reasons to lose hope in Israel. Our politics have become more divisive and our politicians more corrupt. The hate that exists between segments of our population – especially between Jews and Arabs – is so tragic because it is so unnecessary. Most alarming of all is the effort underway by a small selection of politicians who wish to undermine Israel's liberal democracy and replace it with a conservative oligarchy that maintains its control over the Palestinians. And yet, as this storm rages in my mind, and as my heart sinks in fear of where we are heading, I know that I must pick myself back up, and focus on breathing new life into my visions and my dreams, in the context of my homeland.

In my personal journey towards finding that place of conviction, I came across Theodor Herzl's utopian novel, *The Old-New Land* (Altneuland). I learned a great lesson on Zionism in the course of reading the political-pop novel. In short, the book tells the story of a young Jewish Viennese intellectual, named Friedrich Löwenberg, at the turn of the 20th century. At the start, Löwenberg helps a poor Jewish boy and his struggling family. Twenty years later, Löwenberg meets the same boy again in Palestine, although he's no longer poor – he came to greatness as a businessman and family man in the 'New

Society' that the Zionist movement had built in that land. This 'New Society,' was Herzl's vision for the Jewish state. Herzl died in 1904, which means he wrote this all when a Jewish state seemed like nothing more than a utopian dream.

Herzl describes a progressive society in Palestine as a place where there is mutual respect and benefit between Arabs and Jews living together. He offers a solution to the Jewish people's lack of political power, namely independence, security, and national identity. This is a democratic society with social solidarity and strong mechanisms of social support and public service, in addition to a free and healthy private sector. But it's not a purely utopian vision – there are some problems within this new society. It's almost as if he foresaw the diseases that afflict us today: extremism and nationalism. Yet Herzl offers us hope. He details the victory of the moderates during an election. The no-longer-poor and no-longer-young Jewish boy from Vienna becomes the President of the 'New Society' by defeating an ethnocentric demagogue. The lesson he seeks to convey is clear.

Altneuland's genius lies in the fact that its vision for a future Jewish state, formatted to a popular novel, was able to unite Jews from countless communities and help set into motion a movement that spanned generations. The notion of a Jew that finds fulfilment in the old land is what brought my own family here. It is the story that gave birth to a great and successful state.

I believe that the greatness of Israel is rooted in the energy, character, and talent to be found among our people – so great that our science, technology, and culture are able to flourish despite our failing political leaders and in the storm of bad political culture. Altneuland ends on a good note; the question we must ask ourselves today is whether we are promised the same.

Israel is my home. Israeli is my nationality and culture. I will never give up on Israel nor stop fighting to make it a better place. In order to do that, however, we must change Israel dramatically, first and foremost in political terms. That's no simple feat, but I truly believe that with the proper organising and with the hard work needed to build partnerships and inspire activism, Israelis can bring the change we need. The talent is here. The passion is here. The creativity is here. It is our turn to take up the mantle of the Zionist dream and make this the country we deserve a country that benefits all of its citizens. We can make Israel the national home to Jews and Arabs that Herzl wrote about.

I am grateful for having the opportunity to make that dream become reality. With Darkenu I find myself watching a new story unfold, one where Israelis of all creeds and backgrounds come together to secure our future. These are the early chapters of the battle for the shape of our future, and I am proud to be playing a part.

Asaf Yusufov is Coordinator of Digital Activism for Darkenu

**WE BELIEVE
IN ISRAEL**

JOIN The UK's fastest growing pro-Israel network

We Believe in Israel is a UK grassroots network of thousands of people united in believing in the right of the State of Israel to live in peace and security. We are a broad-based and inclusive coalition, open to anyone, from across the political and religious spectrum.

- By joining the We Believe in Israel email network you are accessing a free "one stop shop" for everything that someone in the UK who cares about Israel needs to know.
- You will receive the latest updates and news about events in and affecting Israel.
- You will be asked to take simple actions, such as emailing your MP, which will help Israel's case be heard in the UK.
- You will get to find out about events of interest, ranging from concerts by Israeli musicians to debates, conferences and solidarity rallies.
- You will be part of a vibrant, diverse and fast-growing network of people who share a belief in Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. We can help you connect and meet up with like-minded people in your area.

**Join us by registering online at
www.webelieveinisrael.org.uk/newsletter-signup**

f We Believe in Israel @WeBelieveIsrael