



## TRANSCRIPT

Wednesday, November 12, 2014

RENEE ALBERT: I'm Renee Albert, a member of Hadassah's UN team where we monitor issues relating to Israel, to women, and to health. The news from Israel is often fraught with reports of conflict and also stories of heroism. As always, Hadassah is ready to do whatever we can to assist the land we have helped build, and the people, our sisters and brothers. Here we are, session six in the series Defining Zionism in the 21st Century. In our audience today we have Marlene Post, a past national President of Hadassah, and a number of Hadassah friends. Everyone is invited to submit questions via Livestream or by E-mail. It's not too late for you to register for Livestream. If you want the E-mail address, here it is. One word, [DefiningZionism@Hadassah.org](mailto:DefiningZionism@Hadassah.org).

Our speaker is Rabbi Joshua Weinberg, President of ARZA, the Association of Reform Zionists of America. Rabbi Weinberg was ordained in Jerusalem from the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion. He directed Israel programs at the Rabbinical Reconstructionist College, and was faculty for a high school in Israel program. Currently, beside his Presidential duties, he's a reserve officer in the IDF's spokesperson's unit. Rabbi's education spans Chicago, his birthplace, to Wisconsin to Hebrew University, collecting a BA and an MA on the way.

Joshua is a teacher, an environmentalist. He loves biking, hiking,

music, Storah telling -- in other words, a renaissance man. He's married to Mara Sheftel Getz, their lovely children are Noa and Ella. Welcome, Rabbi Joshua Weinberg.

RABBI WEINBERG: Thank you so much for that.

RENEE ALBERT: The topic is Living Here, Loving There; is American Zionism an oxymoron? Rabbi, what do we mean by American Zionism?

RABBI WEINBERG: The answer is no, I think it's not an oxymoron and now we can all go home. First of all, I just want to thank the Hadassah leadership for inviting me to join you this evening. I want to commend you on this series and I'm truly honored and really humbled to be part of it and to share this platform with so many great scholars and activists. I've been following the series myself and have been very engaged and impressed with the high level of content, and only hope that I can live up to that level.

What is American Zionism really? I want to share just on a personal note that it was for me growing up in the reform movement here in the United States, it was Zionism that was really the answer to my Jewish identity. I was very experimental, crossing the boundaries of movements. And it wasn't until I made aliyah in 2003 that I really found this complete Jewish existence which led me then to really try and explore and define what my Zionism was going to be. And I'm one of those people who think that Zionism did not end in 1948. I think I am among friends here in that -- with that perspective. And it was really a quest to understand what is Zionism going to be now? And how are we going to understand this relationship not between the exile and the land of Israel, or even between the Diaspora and

the land of Israel. But rather between the two largest Jewish communities on the face of the earth. That is Israel and the Jewish community of North America. In order to do that and help frame the discussion, I think we need to do what the title of the series calls for and define the terms. I think we need to define Zionism first, look at some historical examples, some that didn't make it into the

mainstream understanding of what it means to be Zionism, and then help apply those to our situation today. And please feel free to interrupt or write in with any questions.

There are textbook definitions of Zionism, and we've gone through some of those, being the aspiration of the Jewish people or the homeland or the Jewish people's nationalist movement, the expression or the desire to create a political sovereign entity in the land of Israel are sort of classic textbook definitions. Like many philosophical contexts, those have changed over time as of course the circumstances have considerably changed. We're in a very different situation in the world than we were in 1897, for instance, when the first Zionist Congress took place.

We are a people that take words very seriously. So let's first examine a little bit of where this term comes from. Many Jews followed very closely the nationalist movements of Europe in the second half of the 19th century. We watched the Czech nationalist movement, we watched Italy, we watched Greece all come together as the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire and what was going on in Europe at the time, and we said wait a second. We too want a nationalist movement and we were motivated by the persecutorial or adversarial experiences we were having in eastern Europe at the time, namely anti-Semitism, Pogroms. And we said we want to have a Jewish nationalist movement. What would it look like? Where would it take place? What would happen? And we know by the way at the time this was a fringe movement. A fringe and revolutionary movement that I would say encapsulated the minority of Jews where I think most of our ancestors fled Europe for the shores of this country. During that crucial time period of 1880

to 1920 as we're streaming through Ellis Island, a few crazies as it were decided no, they were going to take a different course, and they were going to change the course of Jewish history. Obviously it's more complicated than that. But they came up with this term. And the first time that we ever hear this word Zionism was in a pamphlet called Self-Emancipation, written in German, by a guy called Natan Birnbaum in 1890. He was an interesting character as a side note, by the way. He lived in Austria. And went through different phases of his life, the Post-Zionist phase. He was a Zionist for a short period of time. And at the turn of the century he became highly observant, what we'd call today ultra Orthodox, and totally rejected Zionism after coining the term, by the way. He ends up being a champion of the Yiddish language, not Hebrew, and he died in the early part of the 20th century totally rejecting Zionism. But he left us with this highly charged term that carries with it the weight of our collective existence.

What does it mean, first of all? The word Zionism comes of course from Zion in Hebrew which refers directly to Jerusalem or the Temple Mount. Why would we name our nationalist existence after the Temple Mount in Jerusalem? First of all, it symbolizes the last time Jews had sovereignty in the land of Israel, which ended tragically in the year 70 CE. It was that memory that we commemorate, now with a fast day. And it's the memory of the Temple in Jerusalem that kept our people alive for 2,000 years -- for 1870 years or so, of existence outside the land of Israel. What more is that the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem was not really just -- was much more than the destruction of a physical structure or a building. It was the demise of an entire Jewish society where we had this complete and

all-encompassing Jewish society, which by the way is what we try to recreate -- what we're trying to recreate in the land of Israel. And Zionism was seen as this national movement, first of all, to play on the echo of that memory of sovereign Jerusalem, and then of course as we said to recreate it. If we learn a little bit about second Temple Judaism, they didn't all get along to put it mildly. And there were many different sects or streams or factions or identity groups or political affiliations. And we look at that as an example to see something that we have -- and we're very familiar with today.

In addition, during those second Temple years there was also this back and forth relationship with the other major Jewish community which lived in Babylon. And it became really the center of Jewish life up until about a thousand years ago, up until about the tenth century and I'm going to get to that later with the writings of one particular Zionist philosopher.

Creating the term Zionism, we didn't call it Jewish nationalism, and we sure didn't call it Ugandism even though that was one of the options for creating a state. There were about 21 different countries listed as possible temporary really homelands or temporary political entities. By the way, when we talk about American Zionism, a lot of people don't know there was something in America as well. In 1825, a guy by the name of Mordechai Manuel Noach, we know about him - he suggested that possibly we could have such a Jewish refuge or state in a place up in upstate New York in a place called Ararat, near Niagara, just to think about how life might have been different, how our existence might have changed had we gone with that model. For better or for worse, we did not. And we're able to create the foundation of a state and eventually a state in of course the land of Israel for

all that's included.

Let's examine it today, especially from our modern and the perspective of living here in North America. Zionism has to go through -- has to be laid out on the operating table, and go through a rehashing and a reinvention. And we also see that it has a possibility of being highly problematic and highly controversial and highly divisive. With all that happens in Israel, and as long as Israel is ensconced in war, I'll say it that way, the rhetoric and the dialogue is going to be problematic here. And it's going to be divisive. And it's going to be a hot topic for everyone sitting here. And I think that the last series on Defining Zionism really targeted what I thought to be helpful discussions on how to bridge that with Rabbi Melissa Weintraub. I'm going to not speak about that today and speak about some more over-arching and what I'd call internal discussions of what we look to to be Zionist today.

And I am hopeful that that can be a helpful suggestion or helpful way to approach the subject that can be less divisive and more bridging, and encompassing for our community. So I think -- according to one of my teachers, Professor Derek Penslar who has been writing on this for a long time, there are really about eight types of Zionism, what we call hyphenated Zionism. Labor, socialist, all those kind of things we're familiar with. There are really about eight that we should be looking at and I'll address four of them.

The eight are as follows. There's religious Zionism, which of course predated Theodor Herzl and all the political Zionist movement. With religious comes number two, this sort of fulfillment of Yeshuva Eretz Yisrael, or settling in the land of Israel as a deeply Zionist religious obligation. The

third being Diaspora involvement both on the philanthropic level and on the political level. And that's a very active form of Zionism today for Diaspora Jews. When we talk about philanthropy, first of all we have to look at it from the beginning of the state. I'm not sure many people are aware of this but in 1948, 40 percent of the budget of the State of Israel was based on donations from abroad. That is an astounding figure. Wow. Thankfully it's gone down. Okay? But look around the Jewish world and look at all the American friends of -- and the high level of involvement of philanthropy that says we Diaspora Jews must do our best to support these institutions in Israel. And I applaud Hadassah for everything it's been doing and I'm involved in that with my own organization. And if I can be critical for a second, I think it set up a culture in which Israelis see the United States as an ATM sometimes. Yes. They come and say okay, Uncle Sam or a rich uncle in America will support each endeavor. I think it's fascinating to watch the growth of Israeli philanthropy which is still in its infancy. And on a political side we are very involved in what happens politically both in the United States and North America, and organizations that start with the letter A, the letter J, that are very involved in galvanizing American support to influence United States foreign policy for what each organization feels should be the best outcome in Israel. And those are also very, very significant. And those are also easy to say I'm an American Zionist because I'm active in fill in the blank, J Street, whatever it is, that help to influence my government, the United States Government, for what should happen in Israel. Not without controversy.

The fourth form of Zionism is what I call Hebraic nationalism. That started in the late 19th century in Europe with this revolution of the Hebrew



language. Ben Yehuda, and all these people who started -- the first Hebrew novel was published in 1850 by a guy called Abram Nahu. It was called Hava Zion. And that ignited this world of using the Hebrew language as a textual unifier for the entire Jewish people. It did so before in religious contexts. When a Jew from Poland would write to a Jew in Yemen, they would do so in Hebrew, usually on matters of legal Jewish issues.

Number five is political Zionism or Israeli state craft. That was of course the father of the -- the founder of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl who really came to that as a last resort we know. A lot of people say, especially if you go on a tour of Mount Herzl or visit Herzl's grave, a lot of people would say if Herzl was alive today to see the fruits of his labor, what would he say? I want to change it actually and ask the question if Herzl were alive today and he came to the United States of America, what would he say? Because remember this was the answer to the Jewish problem. And that's why he founded this World Zionist Congress to be a Parliament of the Jewish people which would answer that question or that problem. If Herzl came today and saw the level of acceptance of Jews in North America, I wonder if he would have come to the same conclusion, that this would have been such a dire need for the Jewish people to come and have to seek out that political sovereignty and the political entity. And Ben Gurion followed suit, by the way. He came and said only political independence would rescue Jews from their perverse existence as a religious community in exile, and ensure their normalization as a modern people, and then restore their place as active participants in world history. There was only one option here, and that was political independence. A state. And he very much wanted to call it Yisrael.

Which by the way, there were other options. We could have called it Yehuda, or Judea. Then all the cynicisms of the state would be called Yehudim, or Jews, which is problematic. But he wanted to call it Yisrael because that was the term -- remember Zionism, same theme here -- that was the term used throughout our textbook tradition to refer to the entire people. Those who are synagogue goers know how it works. There's first a Cohen, then a Levy, then a Yisrael, a member of the Jewish people. And he wanted to use this term to refer to the entire people. And Jews living outside would frankly not be worthy of the title. It's a very strong and deliberate statement about you're either in or you're out.

The sixth form of Zionism is transformative Zionism. That was this idea to create what we know as the new Jew, to shed the -- how should we say -- the pains and some of the stigma of the Diaspora, or of the exile specifically, and leave that behind, and create this new Jew that could work the land and defend him or herself. This great Utopian, egalitarian movement that I think was one of the first movements in Judaism -- I'm proud of that along with the reform movement, that took pride in egalitarianism, and women's rights even before the United States of America thought that women could be counted or should vote. It was our Jewish movements that revolutionized that and said yes we can.

The next form is what I'll call catastrophic Zionism, or the Zionism with the existential fear that we need this specifically because of persecution. Of course, those who are Zionist because of the Holocaust, or because of Pogroms or because of anti-Semitism, that feeds into the need to be strong and be able to identify, defend ourselves.

The eighth and final form of Zionism is the Zionism that uses the symbols of Israel as our ethnic identity. It's a very powerful form actually. And uses Israel as a tool to fuel Jewish identity. And I think all the movements in the United States -- most of the movements in the United States are both proud of that and guilty of that one and the same. And that's been really the center and the goal of one of the major movements or the major experiences of the past 14 years of Birthright Israel. This is not an Israel program -- it's a program that we use Israel as a tool for Jewish identity, why Israel -- I even had the opportunity to ask staff members the other day why Israel, and it wasn't obvious to them why we're using Israel. Stop and think about it. Really because Israel offers that encompassing and full and complete Jewish society. Doesn't mean there are nonJews in Israel. That's not where I'm going. But to say that -- by the way, that's why Jewish summer camps are so successful. Because everything you do is part of your Jewish existence there. So paying taxes in Israel is a Jewish experience. Waiting on line at the bank and at the Post Office, all those things are a Jewish experience. Forget about the fact that the ATM wishes you Shabbat shalom and all these sort of cliché superficial things.

Many have mentioned this notion of post Zionism. The fact is -- some people say we've achieved our objective. The state is created. Now let's just get on with it and let's be normal. Or some people say it is sort of -- in an era of I'm a citizen of the world, no longer part of the Zionism movement, I live in Israel and we're going to move on with that. And I want to put that aside because that's not really important to our discussion tonight. What I really want to get to is what is this -- having all that background, we know what

Zionism is, we know the different kinds of Zionism. What could be American Zionism?

What I offer in terms of three sort of perspectives, and I want to touch on four of these eight that I mentioned. First of all, I want to highlight the religious, the philanthropic and political, the Hebraic nationalism, and the ethical identity aspect. The first thing I want to do is American Zionism has to be about Jewish peoplehood. If it was the enlightenment of western Europe that separated a Jewish religion from the Jewish people, which really led on to the American existence as very much a product of western Europe, even though most of us are of eastern European descendants. And Judaism in Israel is very much a product of both eastern European Jewry and north African Jewry, where the two things they have in common are that Jewish was always part of their national identity, and they always spoke a Jewish language. Even those that didn't still spoke a Jewish language. And that's why there's a bit of a culture clash in Israel between some of the liberal movements, namely reform conservative, and Israeli Judaism which is not secular, by the way. Don't make that mistake. Israeli Judaism is very much what I would say for the majority who call themselves secular is very much -- they're very much nonpracticing orthodox Jews because that's the culture in which the state was created. I'll get to that in a bit.

So when I think about Jewish people, especially in the United States, really a few people come to mind that I want to highlight some of their philosophies. The first of course is Mordechai Kaplan. I think that Kaplan is really the translation of what became known as cultural Zionism. Of course the spiritual figurehead there being Achadam. Kaplan is really the American

adaptation for Achadam for his time, which is really the entire 20th century practically. In February 18, 1939, Kaplan wrote in his diary the following. He said the main task which confronts Jewish leadership today is to define anew the meaning of a nationality, and national consciousness in terms that will not only render tenable but will invest with purpose and dignity the status of the Jews who must indefinitely remain scattered among the various nations of the world. They must point the way to a conception of Jewish nationhood that would make it compatible with unquestioned loyalty that whatever Jewish nation cast their lot with. Even though he wrote those words in 1939, I think they resonate one hundred percent, and are exactly fitting for the situation today.

The Jewish leadership is faced with this task of trying to define anew the meaning of our national existence that will give us deep meaning and purpose. For Jews no matter what happens, we will remain living as Jews among a nonJewish culture, even sitting in New York, which is still the majority of the people living in the United States are nonJews. I checked. I found out.

Now, Kaplan said first of all that we have to -- akin to our peoplehood, our collective narrative, our language, adopting what also Ralph Cook used as this framework of Am Yisrael, the nation of Israel, the Torah of Israel, both meaning collective narrative and law. And Eretz Yisrael. It's hard to have one without the other even though many people do so.

The second model I want to suggest to you is one of a somewhat lesser known philosopher, his name is Shimon Rabidovitch. I remember at the end of the last series of Defining Zionism it came up in a question in passing the

book by Noam Piankov, *Zionism, the roads not taken*, which features both Kaplan, Rabidovitch, and Hans Cohen, the great nation state political scientist and philosopher. Rabidovitch is a very fascinating character. He died tragically in 1957, and only began writing about this state for a short time after the state was in existence. He came from Germany, and was really swept with the Zionist movement, and actually came to Palestine to live in the 1930s, but for financial reasons relocated back to the United States. A familiar story for some. And began to write. Towards the end of his life he published this 900-page book called *Jerusalem in Babylon*, where he talks about his plan of global Hebraicism. What's the problem? He wrote this 900-page tome in Hebrew so that very few people actually read and digested it. Thankfully Professor David Myers from California wrote a book about Rabidovitch and his book, which is fascinating. Rabidovitch comes and says unlike modern nation states the Jewish nation was united by language and texts -- here's the kicker -- rather than by territory and citizenship. He says that Babylon in Jerusalem should be used -- remember the dichotomy that we talked about in second Temple times -- he talked about it as this sort of symbolic alternative to constructing national myth around a territorial nation state. And really it should be an ellipse with two sort of focus at either end, now he wanted it to be the United States and he wanted the United States to replace Babylon symbolically. I think we're kind of far from what Bavel was, and really Bavel became the authoritative position for all Jewish literature and law and the creation of the Babylonian Talmud, even though there is a Jerusalem Talmud, the Babylonian Talmud really takes the chair for the authoritative say in anything that was to come after that. In addition,

Rabidovitch tried to neutralize the Diaspora homeland dichotomy and support these nonspatial boundaries for Jewish collective life. He came up with all sorts of various metaphors. He liked to use Talmudic metaphors, he came up with one that talks about the eruv that we use on Shabbat to say this symbolic boundary that joins all of the Jews, whether fair living in a particular geographical location or not. And he came up with more. He's a really fascinating character. He very much was in line with Achadam, in the importance of culture and language. Here we have to be careful because sometimes we are guilty of using the same words, the same terminology but with vastly different dictionaries.

For instance, when we say -- this gets me in New York every now and then -- when we say that we are cultural Jews, my inclination is to go right to Achadam, and say that's what it means to be a cultural Jew. Many some are thinking along the line of the Manhattan Rebi, Woody Allen, Jerry Seinfeld, for instance. That's our cultural existence. We have to define the terms that Rabidovitch very much thought that a Jewish national Zionist existence should be dependent on the Hebrew language, the correspondence, the writing, the creating, the use of the Hebrew language. In that he was very much in line with Achadam. He just differed and opposed it very strongly when it came to the discussion of center versus periphery. He really rejected that. It's interesting for us to think about here in the United States whether or not we see that as part of our own discourse. Is there a center? And are we on the periphery? Is it like a bicycle wheel with a center in the middle and spokes coming out to all of the communities? Or is it more fluid in which we exist as national and ethnic Jews regardless of where we live? I want us to

just imagine for a second what life would be like if every American Jew had the tools of the Jewish language, Hebrew, was writing and creating in Hebrew, would go outside to their front stoop every morning and pick up the New York Times in one hand and the Hebrew language newspaper in the other hand. What would it mean for us? How would we relate back and forth to our Israeli brothers and sisters? Because we know the importance of language is that it's a carrier of culture. And I've spent the past ten years living in Israel collecting various examples which I'll spare you for the moment. But it's what people often miss when they visit Israel. The revival -- it's a problem. But the living Hebrew language which carries the culture of the evolution of Hebrew literature up until this point starting from the Bible going through rabbinic literature, middle ages, Yiddish literature. That's what it means to have a Jewish language, as Michael Wecks put it in his book, to schlep the gullus with you. Israelis made an attempt to disconnect that. Another reason to call it Zionism is you're allowed to go back 2,000 years and skip over everything in between. If you ask Israeli kids especially who are their great Jewish historical heroes, they might tell you Samson, the hero, or King David, or -- and then skip all the way to Joseph Trumpeldor and other players on the scene today. Few Israeli Jews will say my Jewish hero is the Bolshemto or the Rambam. I'm talking about nonorthodox Israelis. And there was a deliberate attempt here to bypass 2,000 years of history and culture even though it makes its way into the Hebrew language whether we're conscious of it or not.

Now, point three here is if we looked at Jewish peoplehood, we looked at global Hebraism, we now have to look at what I call liberal religious



Zionism. I'm the head of the Association of Reform Zionists of America. And that's what I deeply believe in. And I want to transition to that point with another quote by Kaplan. This is a leader quote. One of his later books was published in 1970, called the religion of ethical nationhood. I highly recommend it. Sometimes he's not the easiest writer to get through but very, very important. He says the following. Now that Herzlian Zionism, namely political Zionism, has fulfilled its goal with the establishment of the State of Israel, Jews must create a greater Zionism to reconstitute themselves into a living interactive and creative people. He didn't say Israelis have to do or citizens of that Jewish state. He said specifically Jews. This is upon all of us. Not just those who live in the State of Israel. And that's what I see -- my own sort of reform Zionism to be the logical continuation of that early Zionist revolution, to restore the Jewish peoplehood by recreating a Jewish national culture. But to allow Jews to be free and liberal citizens of the world. Essentially what we're saying is we want to be deeply rooted in our particularist identity, and through that we branch out to the universalist. And that is really important. And too many of my peers and my generation bypass that particularism in order to go straight to the universalism.

If those are our biggest problems, then okay. If everyone is streaming to go to a soup kitchen because it's their universalist Jewish identity and they're less interested in the peoplehood aspect, I think we can live with that. There are really worse things. But I think there's an opportunity here for much, much more. And that's particularly true when it comes to Israel. And that's what we're trying to create here. Because what I learned very quickly after making aliyah was that Israel definitely needs liberal Judaism. We now

have to provide a need that's not being answered by this polarizing dichotomy between religious or secular. And I think more and more Israelis are coming to realize that having a Jewish state doesn't necessarily mean having a Jewish community. And I think we in the United States, in addition to sharing our dollars, we need to -- if we were in the business world we would pose ourselves as community based consultants. And that we have a long, rich history of creating Jewish communities independent of whatever -- or separate from the state that we can now offer as an example to help translate into what are the needs of Israelis. I see it within our own movement that Israelis are hungry and thirsty for content as I think American Jews are as well.

I think we're looking for meaning in life. That's why I think people go to synagogue. We're looking for both community and an expression of some sort of meaning. And Israelis are looking for it as well. I can't tell you how many Israelis I've met who have returned from their trips in Thailand and India and said gosh, it's too bad we don't have any spirituality in Judaism. Well, we do. And we as partners in this endeavor need to work to make that accessible. We need to put the right people into place. And then we as Diaspora Jews need to learn from the Israeli experience. And we need to understand what it means to live a full Jewish life. And if you remember back a few years ago, it was the Israeli author Yoshua who made some contentious and I think hurtful comments accusing Diaspora Jews of being essentially wishy-washy on their national identity. And I think that he's really the last of the remnants of the negation of the Diaspora, what we mentioned with Ben Gurion earlier. But I think that we as American Zionists must fight

against two current trends. One trend here is of I would say wild spreading or rampant individualism where we say look, if we don't like something we can disassociate. And we're coming up on a generation of people for whom that primordial experience or that particularist experience, let's say the generations previous experience during 1948, during 1967, is not really a main factor for the under -- even under 50 crowd today who didn't grow up with that. We say okay, that's the reality today. Do we lambast them for saying yes, you should feel this what we felt in 1967? I'm excluding myself because I was not born in 1967. Or should we say wait a second, there's more to Jewish life than religion -- not that religion is bad. Religion is a part of it. But we want to look at our all-encompassing Jewish existence. And then it goes back to the calendar year, our collective narrative, the Hebrew language, which for some -- and some of my critics tell me I'm fighting against gravity here in telling American Jews they need to learn Hebrew. I think it's at the core of what we believe.

And the last point -- with this we'll sum up -- is that if we care about these issues, we have to be politically active. If for you the right avenue is to be aligned with some of the organizations that are politically active on the American political scene, that's one way to go. But the other way is to say wait a second, we still have a mechanism in which we can influence and impact what happens in the State of Israel. That's the world Zionist Congress. It still exists. Fortunately we're coming up on the timing where the world's Jewish communities is coming together to say wait a second, how should we spend the money of the Jewish people? What issues are important to us? How does this reflect back upon this relationship? I encourage everyone to

go and vote in the world Zionist Congress starting in January. You'll be able to do that. A lot of people forgot that it still exists. But it does. It's actually quite meaningful. And quite impactful.

So to sum up, I want to say that Zionism was one of these great revolutions that was in its inception a revolution of those for whom the status quo was no longer acceptable. When we look at the world today, I think we can look at many aspects of life and say that the status quo is not acceptable to us both in Israel and in the Diaspora Jewish community. That aspect I invite us all to say let's be Zionists here. Toda.

RENEE ALBERT: Apropos of that -- thank you, Rabbi. I would like to back track a little and think about the American Zionist. Am I correct in saying that there's a mosaic here where people might pick and choose from the menu to make -- or you think that's wrong?

RABBI WEINBERG: There's a hundred percent a mosaic. No one is being voted off the island, by the way. It doesn't have to be an either or. It should be an and. This should be all inclusive. Look at Israel. There are 33 different political parties on the list in the last elections, or something like that. So there has to be an answer for everyone. Yes, there are people for whom I would say are not part of the discussion. And there are people who staunchly reject the notion of peoplehood in a Jewish state. And there are people who came to this country, whether it was some years ago, 100, 150 years ago and said actually America has replaced Zionism. That America is the promised land. It's a fascinating chapter in our history I think. So I think absolutely, there shouldn't be a question about that, that people should hook into different avenues that help meet their needs.

RENEE ALBERT: I think most people are not scholars, and don't have the background. But they still would like a name, they still want to say I'm an American Zionist, and they're able to do so because as you pointed out there are at least eight different avenues.

RABBI WEINBERG: Right. It's a great example to look at the Jewish community of Warsaw Poland on the Eve of World War II, on the Eve of the Holocaust. There were about 60,000 Jews living in Warsaw, a healthy percentage of the population there. And there were over 33 different Jewish newspapers at the time. Okay? I think 31 of them in a Jewish language. So I'm not saying we all have to have Ph.D.s or be all Rabbis or whatever. No. I want as the Torah teaches, I want us to be a kingdom of Priests. I want us to be a community for whom this is at the basis of our identity. How do you say a person in Yiddish, by the way? Mensch. But if you say how are you in Yiddish, we say how is a Jew? Being a Jew and a person was really interchangeable. For many American Jews, being Jewish is one of the many let's say windows of their identity or many aspects of their identity that we're dealing with.

RENEE ALBERT: We have a few questions. Does being a Zionist allow an American Jew to be considered as living Jewishly?

RABBI WEINBERG: I think so. Absolutely. Absolutely. I think -- again, it depends what it means by being a Zionist. I think -- look, I'll come back here and say that I think being Jewish comes down to three things. Being involved with the people of Israel, the Torah of Israel, and a connection to the land of Israel. I think being a Zionist can encompass all of those.

RENEE ALBERT: People have all kinds of feelings when they write in

their messages.

RABBI WEINBERG: Feelings are good.

RENEE ALBERT: American Zionists must exist since there is still a stream of olim, saying (Hebrew) as well as lone soldiers despite the bad neighborhood.

RABBI WEINBERG: It's amazing to me people are still making aliyah. I have to say when we talk with some organizations involved in both aliyah and absorption in Israel, the age of mass waves of immigration is over. It's over. It's finished. There may be a handful of Jews in the countries or even thousands coming from France, and groups like -- and the Jewish agency are dealing with also in the four digit annual figures for American Jews coming to Israel. I'm constantly inspired by -- I just saw today two of my former students are featured prominently in those kinds of activities in Israel. I myself made aliyah and people thought I was crazy. However, if you zoom out and look at it in a mass movement, the majority of the 6 million American Jews living in the United States today are not going to make aliyah. Someone asked me if I think everyone should make aliyah, I said look, before you can have a second meaningful experience in Israel you need to have a first meaningful experience in Israel. I think that should be our first goal, to get -- I think you have to be there. You have to see it. You have to visit Israel to understand. And it has to be a two way street, by the way. I'm in favor of Israelis visiting Jewish communities in the United States as well.

RENEE ALBERT: This says how do we reach those who do not positively identify with Zionism but are proIsrael?

RABBI WEINBERG: There's a very fine line. It used to be that a

Zionist went and lived in the State of Israel. And who didn't was sentimentally proIsrael. I think today those distinctions are largely distorted. Little difference between an American Zionist or an American proIsrael person. I think at the end of the day titles and terms are less meaningful, and what speaks are actions.

RENEE ALBERT: Here is a very interesting question. Is Israel's existence as a Jewish state today an obstacle to peace? Should Israel consider complete secularization to hopefully obtain peace with the Palestinians?

RABBI WEINBERG: If that were the magic answer, if we forget about our Jewish identity then peace will break out, I'm not convinced. I don't think so. I think there are a lot of actually fascinating organizations that are bringing people together in Israel -- Israelis, Jews, Palestinians, along religious lines. So if the question is -- there's a few questions packed into one of those questions. Is Israel's existence an obstacle to peace? For some it may be. For some there are some who I think would be constituted as our enemies who see Israel's existence as an obstacle to peace or as an obstacle to their ceasing to accept our existence there. Unfortunately with them it's increasingly challenging to have meaningful dialogue. But I think there's a great majority, and I think both Israeli Palestinians -- Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and Palestinian Palestinians who have completely acquiesced with the fact that Israel is existing as a Jewish state. I don't find particularly helpful the constant -- it comes up every now and then, you have to accept us as a Jewish state in order to resume negotiations. That's a controversial concept. If we want to go into that we can. But I think Israel's very existence as a Jewish state? No, I don't think we have anything to do about that. And I

think you also can't separate religion from this concept of a Jewish state. I don't think Herzl had it in mind. And I think we have to remember that Israelis -- I think there are a lot of Israelis who don't remember what the early Zionists cut off from. The early Zionists, Weitzman, all those guys weren't secular Jews. They were what we called formerly religious. They grew up in the world of religion, and from that they came to this conclusion. So Israelis fast forward now five, six, seven generations, and Israelis I think are seeing the world, they may be angry at the religious and orthodox establishment in Israel and it tends to be coercive. But there's an innocent curiosity about what Judaism has to say. I don't think separating religion is good.

RENEE ALBERT: This last question is current because it deals with what's going on in Israel. I believe in contemporary Israel and the Diaspora have been seriously impacted by the politics of integration and Intifada. Please share your thoughts on these like the Temple Mount.

RABBI WEINBERG: The Temple Mount is a fascinating case study almost and we're living it right now. The problem with occupation, I think too often we see Israel's existence in modern times through the prism of war. That's a gigantic distraction to the great project of creating a Jewish state. And it's just sad and tragic. When I think about why I grasped onto Zionism as a philosophy and eventually as a life style, it had very little to do with any of the military aspects or need to be strong, need to defend ourselves, it had everything to do with identity, observance, culture, all these things. Be that as it may, I think there's no question we have to end the occupation, we have to come to a two state solution. I think the real discussion is how do we get there? Everyone knows there's a light at the end of the tunnel. There's just no



tunnel there right now. That's a big problem. And sometimes I'm resigned to the sort of traditional Jewish saying, (Hebrew) we are doomed to live by our swords. I've shed a lot of tears over that thought for a long time.

The Temple Mount is fascinating because it brings us into the very notion of what Zionism is. The memory of that Temple, of that Commonwealth that used to exist on that very location. I just had this fascinating conversation with Executive Director of our movement in Israel. And I'll share his thinking on this as well. For many Zionists, the land became -- we'll finish up now -- the land became a symbol for their existence. And for many, the accomplishments and the achievements of the '67 six day war became almost a religious manifestation of the Messianic age. And that our Zionism was affirmed by our religious faith. And that we conquered this vision of the Eretz Yisrael, the vision of the greater land of Israel. A caveat, a pause, and an advertisement, if you haven't read the book about the like dreamers, I highly recommend it. It's wonderful. And it helps tell this entire story here. Starting from the conquering of the Temple Mount in 1967 when we said the Temple Mount is in our hand.

Now what we're seeing is a very I think somewhat frightening move to the right by the mainstream in grasping onto the Temple Mount as an image and as a symbol of Zionism. And you look at the failed assassination attempt of Glick of last week -- ten years ago he would have been considered way on the fringe. He was considered crazy by many of the settlers. And you see him sitting in Jerusalem with Knesset members who are well on the right of the center but still much more aligned with mainstream Israel. What's happening there? And it leads me to say that the settlers, whether it's

subconscious or whether they admit that out loud -- I think within the settlers there's a huge spectrum. I realize the generalization. The settlers have come to the realization that the dream of Eretz Yisrael, of the greater land of Israel is over.

RENEE ALBERT: This is a terrible place to stop.

RABBI WEINBERG: I'll say the last sentence there. That dream is over and we need to grasp onto the Temple Mount as the symbol of Zionism. I fear that this is going to be volatile. That's why I think we need this liberal voice so desperately, and that this is a discussion. And it's really a fight for the soul of the Jewish state.

RENEE ALBERT: You've given us plenty to think about at home here and in Israel. I want to thank you, our audience, and thank you Rabbi Joshua Weinberg for enlarging our view of ourselves as Americans in relation to the Jewish homeland. We learned some of the back story of Zionism. We discussed looking forward to a renewed and meaningful connection to Israel.

Tune in to the next session of Defining Zionism in the 21st century. Takes place on Monday, December 15th from 7:30 to 8:30, or maybe 8:31. The presenter is Jasmine Patihi. She is the high school coordinator of the organization StandWithUs. Her topic is Inspiring Zionis. See you next month. Good-bye.