

*Personal Statement*

At its core, Zionism is the revival of the Jewish individual; on its surface, Zionism is the revival of the Jewish nation. This modern struggle for the survival of the Jewish people as a free nation in our historic homeland has laid the groundwork for the continuation of my people's existence. The Zionist movement seeks to break the millennia-old shackles that have bound global Jewry to our persecutors, and to ensure the thriving future of the Jewish people.

My parents were born and raised in the Soviet Union, under a regime that stifled their Jewish identities and wholeheartedly promoted anti-Zionist activity. In Soviet media, Zionism was presented as the Jewish desire to racially dominate non-Jews, and was seen as an evil entity seeking to destroy the "real" Soviet people. Thus, Soviet Jews like my parents were forced to hide their Jewishness and barely exist under the radar of the authorities. In 1991, as the collapse of the Soviet Union was imminent, my parents cowered in their Moscow residence as talks of impending pogroms swept the city. Leaving everything they owned behind – books, photographs, family heirlooms – my parents escaped to Israel, where they were welcomed to the Jewish homeland as long-lost children.

Israel, the realization of the Zionist dream, had given my parents a second chance at a Jewish life, and was the place where I was brought to existence. I grew up cruising on my scooter through the streets of Jerusalem on Yom Kippur, singing HaTikvah on the podium following athletic competitions, and standing silently with a bowed head during the annual Yom HaZikaron siren. I was born into a collective identity of a people who had suffered together and were healing together, a people who valued freedom and were actualizing national liberation.

When I was nine years old, at the conclusion of the Second Intifada, my family chose to leave the bleeding Holy Land and settle in the Land of Opportunities. Over the course of the last 12 years in America, my strong Jewish identity has morphed from simple cultural appreciation to

firmly rooted Zionism. My love for the land of Israel and passion for defending the Jewish state against a daily barrage of international fire – something my parents had been unable to do a generation ago – has allowed me to engage my community and shape its relationship with Israel and Zionism. Simple acts I had taken for granted as a child in Israel, like singing HaTikvah or observing national days of loss and miracles, have turned into conscious acts filled with national pride and purpose.

During the last three years on my university campus, I have been exposed to a plethora of lies surrounding the roots and goals of Zionism, and have fought tooth and nail to reclaim the narrative of my people's story. Leading Tikvah, the Zionist voice at UC Berkeley, I was able to host renowned speakers, moderate panels, and challenge the double standards against my people and my identity by fighting against the delegitimization of the Jewish state and its people. In addition to organizing programming and conferences with visiting Israel and Jewish studies faculty and professionals, I developed and taught a student-led course titled "What is Israel?" during my last semester as a student, to bring awareness of and education about the Jewish national liberation movement to my campus community.

It is vital for the next generation of Zionist leaders to stand fearless in the face of global attacks against our movement and people. Educating leaders in both Jewish communities and other ethnic/religious communities will ensure that our narrative and story of Jewish revival in our national homeland, Israel, continues to protect our people's future and inspire other persecuted minorities across the world to throw off their chains and achieve self-determination. Israel may be seventy years young, and the Zionist movement merely a century old, but our roots dig deep and will never be displaced again.