



Unapologetically Bold

Danielle Ames Spivak

Envision 2050. When my children have children what will it mean to be a Zionist? I have the audacity to suggest that Zionism can and will be a universal movement of Jews and Allies. And for Jews specifically, Zionism can be the pride movement individuals crave.

With five children, I often wonder what I should focus on as a parent to ensure my kids are committed Zionists as adults. Let's start with the basics, all five of my children are enrolled in Religious Zionist Jewish day school in Los Angeles, CA. Hillel Hebrew Academy embodies our values educationally and religiously. Over the years, they have attended Zionist day and sleep away camps and local Bnei Akiva programming. I have taken my young children to Israel three times already, and a fourth trip is planned for January 2026. Our trips have focused on fun experiences so the kids can discover the land of Israel from the prism of joy and wonder.

But to me, none of the above is enough.

I have devoted my career to working to further the interests of the people and State of Israel. My kids have witnessed me make personal and professional sacrifices for the sake of my Zionist identity and beliefs. They have seen me cry when a tragic event happens in Israel. In short - they see and know I'm not sure a fair weather friend. Zionism and support for Israel is a commitment that requires grit. Some aspects are utterly delightful, some are taxing and trying. Regardless, being a Zionist doesn't fade when the going gets tough. I learnt this lesson from my grand parents and great grandparents, ardent Zionists who experienced pogroms, antisemitism, discrimination, World Wars, and much more. Their Zionism didn't fade when they were threatened, it only grew stronger.

The next generation must watch us lean in to our Zionism, even in the most excruciating challenging circumstances. Zionism isn't just camp fire songs, folk dances, and flag waving. It is a movement of national liberation for Jewish people in our indigenous homeland. Let's teach our kids to be bold, brave, relentless and unabashedly proud, even in the darkest moments. That type of love and loyalty makes a lasting impact and is unforgettable.

So how do we make Zionism the “the ride or die” BFF of our young people? Make it a non-negotiable of family culture, school curriculum, youth group programming and community and civic engagement priorities. I once asked my incredible mother (who has a doctorate in Jewish studies and earlier in her career was the Executive Director of the Canadian Zionist Federation), “why did we rarely go on cool activities every Sunday?” (My question alludes to an American custom of taking kids to activities as a family on Sunday like museums, etc.) and my mom answered “because I was completely and singularly focused on raising (religious) Zionist children. I understood what she meant. Zionism can’t be an afterthought, or even only one part of one’s upbringing. Zionism must be an intrinsic aspect of one’s identity from birth, through thick and thin. That is the surest way our kids will follow on our steps.

My baby brother, twelve years my junior, made Aliyah in the months following Oct 7. You see, when you raise kids who lean in even during the most trying times, they get the memo and act. I hope my kids follow in their uncle’s example. My thirteen year old already plans to join the IDF and go to college in Israel. We will see what she decides when the time comes, but I know that we are raising her to understand what we stand for and what life is about. Israel Gap years have become very popular over the last two-three decades.

The next frontier will be 4 year college experiences in Israel and making Aliyah at higher rates than the diaspora has seen in recent memory, maybe since the Soviet Jewry immigration wave to Israel. That’s because when kids are taught to run towards Israel, anything is possible.

Zionism in 20 years has the potential to be cool (again). The grit, strength, pride, pioneer spirit will prevail and their identity and community connections will carry even more weight. Simply put, in an AI world - who someone is will be even more about where one belongs. Zionism = belonging, ingenuity and pride. That’s the future.

Danielle Ames Spivak is the Chief Strategy Officer of Eighteen as well as a strategic consultant for other clients, and previously served as CEO and Executive Vice President of the American Friends of the Israel Philharmonic. An activist at heart, Danielle has done extensive research and work in the area of combatting online hate and antisemitism. Danielle coaches executives, community leaders, philanthropists and early career professionals. Articles by Danielle have been featured in numerous publications.