



## From October 7 to Zionist Renewal

**Michal Zur**

“פתאום קם אדם בבוקר ומרגיש כי הוא עם ומתחיל ללכת. ולכל הנקרה בדרכו קורא הוא – שלום”

“Suddenly a man wakes up in the morning, And he feels he is a people, and he starts walking And everyone he meets, he greets with “Shalom”

Amir Gilboa, *Song of the Morning* (Shir Baboker Baboker)

Dorit, Doron, Benny S, Hedva, Davidi, Ofira and Benny F, are all Israelis in their late 60's and early 70's, with a rich professional career behind them, empty nesters, who took a year off and moved to Ofakim. They immersed themselves, to help and show their support for the residents of the small southern town who suffered major loss and pain on October 7th. Over fifty residents were killed by Hamas terrorist that day, bravely protecting their families and community. The trauma was huge, on a personal and communal level. And the act of these modern pioneers symbolizes to me the new form of Zionism.

The unbelievable and unbearable events of October 7, 2023 redefined Zionism. Understanding that the vision of having a safe home for all Jews in Israel was challenged and made us realize that the existence of Israel should not be taken for granted. At the same time Jewish lives outside of Israel also face danger as the world identifies Jewish life and Zionism as one.

October 7 also triggered a massive wave of activism, giving and volunteerism that left us in awe. Billions of dollars were raised, rallies and massive gatherings were quickly organized. An inspiring long list of support actions were taken globally and locally in Israel.

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Zionist movement had gained thousands of supporters worldwide, including members of organized Zionist groups, political activists, and contributors. Estimates suggest that by the early 1900s, there were tens of thousands of Zionist supporters across Europe, North America, and other parts of the world.

The 50+ *Shnat Sherut* (year of service) initiative demonstrate the relevance of Zionist principle to today's reality; their volunteer work helped the Ofakim residents re-build defence and resilience. Their encounters and conversations strengthened cultural and Jewish pluralism discourse, many times through deep, stormy, yet friendly disagreements. The program was supported mainly through global Jewish support, which follows the same historic patterns of early Zionist stages.

I live on one of the Kibbutzim by the border with Gaza. On the morning of October 7th, we were there alone. When we came out of the safe rooms, we realized that there is a strong, proud and most capable civic society of Israelis and Jews around the world, waiting for us. Committed to healing by doing. Ready to hug and build. Asking the most difficult questions about our political leadership but at the same time feeling part of a bigger movement and spending time, energy, and resources in actions.

Serving one of the most Zionist Jewish Federations, I feel that 'healing by doing' is the modern version of Zionism. We are inspired by the vision of our founders in connecting with communities in Israel and supporting them in good and in bad, in sickness and in health – as it also strengthens the community abroad. The support, empathy and activism brings the community together.

Zionism was and stayed a collective act of faith by individuals, who established and built communities by extensive dialogue but also by doing. I believe that Zionism today and future forms of Zionism are in many ways, the same. We lost trust in so many institutions and frameworks, but we trust each other. Israelis and Diaspora Jews, Israelis from the Center and those who live in the wounded bleeding north and south, will be there for each other. I hope to see many of my Diaspora friends join the group of volunteers in Ofakim, and I hope to see my friends from Ofakim go out and volunteer in any Jewish community in the world that needs them.

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