

Daniella Berger

AZM Scholarship Application

Zionism has been ever present in my life. As early as I can remember, I learned about Israel and the Jewish people. Starting at age 10, I attended a Zionist summer camp where we were constantly taught the importance of Israel and the many aspects of Israeli society. So growing up, it was extremely easy for me to be Zionist. It was just something that was a given in my family and my community. Through various visits to Israel, and my increasing interest in Jewish history in high school, I fell in love with the Jewish nation. After high school, I took a gap year and studied in Jerusalem. This was when I truly began to understand the importance of the country and what it meant to the Jewish people. Israel is important even for those of us who do not live there. Jews around the world are safer because Israel exists. My year in Israel was eye opening and enlightening. Living in the old city of Jerusalem was absolutely magical, and I left wondering when I would be back.

When I returned to the US for college, I realized that I wanted to do everything I could to support Israel. For the first time in my life, my Zionism was truly challenged. No longer was I in a bubble where everyone believed the same things as I did. As a student of Middle East History, there were often times where I felt slightly uncomfortable with topics that came up in class. One of my favorite professors in the Middle East History department, while not overtly anti-Israel, most definitely had some opinions that I vehemently disagreed with on the topic. Instead, I chose to mostly avoid discussion of Israel. It was these tough moments when I would see Students for Justice in Palestine protesting on campus, or hear stories from my friends at other schools that had it much worse, that drove

me to own my Zionism and to make it my own. I took the opportunity to become involved in Israel advocacy on campus, and I joined a community of passionate young people across the country that were all fighting for the same thing – for the respect and recognition of their history and national homeland. I spent the next few years traveling all over to pro-Israel conferences, interning for AIPAC, serving as a StandWithUs fellow, and dedicating my time to one of the pro-Israel groups at the University of Maryland.

When my Zionism was challenged, I learned just how much I want to fight for it. I feel strongly that the Jewish people must work together to combat the anti-Semitism we face. Zionism is the belief that the Jewish people have a right to self-determination in their homeland. So it is not just about loving or appreciating Israel. I believe that Zionism must include an appreciation of Jewish nationhood. It is the understanding that Jews around the world are connected not just because of our religion, but because we are part of one nation and one people, which centers back to Israel. My Zionism means I will fight forever to be able to live freely as a Jew, whether that is in Israel or somewhere else. My Zionism is the purpose that will drive my career decisions in the future. My Zionism is the history and struggles of my people, and the future that I can help build for the entire Jewish community.