

## Personal Statement

My Zionist journey began with the soil and led me to the government. My feelings about Zionism come from a combination of my own personal journey and the historical facts as I understand them. Since I made my journey to Israel, I have been thinking a lot about how Zionism affects me. Before going to Israel, I heard the term Zionism but never fully understood how it applied to me. After having experienced living in Israel in a truly unique way - I now feel my connection and the clarity of the term has come to light for me. I participated in a 5 month MASA program called Eco-Israel where my group of participants lived on an ecological farm with basic living technology. We learned about the ecology of our surroundings and how to survive in the Israeli forests with minimal equipment. We ate seasonal fruits and vegetables on a vegan diet, made fires to keep warm at night during the winter, and worked the land to understand the ecology behind it. This humbling experience made me really feel and connect with my natural surroundings. I reflected on the thousands upon thousands of years of history that lay in the earth beneath my sleeping bag. Once I found out more history about the original Zionists who migrated to Palestine and started the kibbutz movement, I really connected to those people in a profoundly spiritual way. I understood the feeling of working the land and seeing the fruits of my labor come into being. I understood why they were so attracted to these landscapes and why they had arrived at their home. During my time in Israel I traveled from the most southern point of Eilat to the most northern points of Akko and the Lebanese border. I saw the intense diversity in vegetation. I grasped Israeli geology and ecology and I really felt like these lands were blessed with the perfect combination of sunshine and rain. On a personal level, my experience in Israel was a real revelation. I was able to truly make an incredible connection to the land and understand the historical meaning behind this movement.

The next step in my Zionist journey will involve the Israeli government. As an Israeli Government Fellow I will have the unique opportunity to add another layer to my understanding

of the State of Israel - something which I deeply long for. It will give me the opportunity to learn about the government of the Jewish people and be able to bring Zionist ideas back to my own country.

My idea of Zionism means a true and honest connection to the land of Israel. It means opening my heart and mind to the controversial issues that define life in Israel today. I now understand that Zionism is controversial in today's world. Ever since Theodor Herzl coined the term it means different things to different people. To me it denotes the historical struggle of the Jewish people for a homeland and their essential connection with Eretz Yisrael. Zionism is something close and personal to my heart and it and Israel has changed me forever.