From the age of 4, I attended Jewish schools in the Metropolitan Detroit area. The term “Zionism” hadn’t even occurred to me yet, but I was already learning the importance of the movement and connecting with its principles internally. I’ve always known a deep love for Israel, for my Jewish community, and for the acceptance and love with which I was treated as a first generation American. Being a Latino Jew in a Caucasian dominated city, I had many differences with my peers and superiors that added to the growing pains of a young adolescent. In spite of that, my Jewish identity helped me connect with some of the most fascinating and admirable people, young and old, whom I still consider friends and mentors.

 My first time in Israel, I was 13 years old, traveling for my class graduation trip, and I don’t believe I fully grasped the significance of the ease with which we could now travel to the land of our Jewish ancestors, free of persecution or peril. My sister was three years married to an Israeli and more than anything, I was just extremely excited to visit the places he told me stories about. In high school, I started to learn more about the importance of advocating for Israel and the firm opposition Israel faces to this day from many nations around the world. I became an advocate and attended the AIPAC Conference in Washington D.C. in order to learn more about the importance of standing strong for positive relations between the United States and Israel. My ability to speak Hebrew, my experiences getting to know Orthodox Jews in my neighborhood and at the summer camp Mogen Avraham began to contribute greatly to the forming of my identity. I was always interested in learning the Gemara, the Talmud and more. As a result, Zionism, to me, is the protection of my identity. I’m proud to have been blessed with a Jewish upbringing, to be welcome in a part of the world as a citizen no matter where I grew up originally, and the connections that are forged in that country by so many who make Aliyah. In my subsequent experiences visiting Israel, as a Magen David Adom overseas volunteer and with a Birthright trip, I felt more at home in Israel than anywhere else in my life. It is a wonderland of spirituality and innovation alike, with Jews from all walks of life that accept each other as brethren. This is a type of acceptance and love that is incredibly difficult to find replicated outside of the international Jewish community. This is the true Zionism definition of Zionism and why it is so important. The forging and protection of a home for the international Jewish community, so that any Jew in the world may find an accepting and loving community. It is this sense community, in my belief that has resulted in the immense successes of Jewish leaders, Nobel prize winners and innovators alike.