My connection to Zionism began in high school. I attended Gann Academy, a Jewish High School in the greater Boston area with strong Israel connections. We were always told the same narrative; that Israel was the essential and vital homeland of the Jewish people and it was our generation’s responsibility to defend its existence. During that time, I had not yet been to Israel and could only dream about the incredible desert that could grow trees and the ancient wall where one could feel the presence of G-d.

I became eligible for Birthright the summer after my freshman year of college. At the time, I was a political science major still trying to find my passion. This trip changed my trajectory. My transformational experience happened at the Western Wall. I was able to feel the presence of my Jewish ancestors, and my Jewish and Israel education really came into focus for me. The next summer, I traveled to Israel for three months on the Onward Israel Internship program. I lived in Jerusalem while interning at the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI). This experience was crucial to my Israel journey. I had the opportunity to meet people from the north to the south who shared their unique stories. I was not only able to learn about the landscape of Israel, but also the politics inside the country.

I returned to school energized, wanting to educate others about my experience. I became president of Israel Council, the Israel advocacy group at the University of Rochester. Our accomplishments included a successful mock election around Israel election time, and a campus-wide celebration on Yom Ha’atzmaut. I became a consulting board member for Hillel, often advising their Israel programming.

My experience on campus inspired me to be a Jewish professional and a full-time advocate for Israel. I have been working at the Israel Consulate as the Director of Community Relations for the past two years. This experience has both informed my view of Zionism, and transformed the way I think about effective Israel advocacy.

I believe that broadly, Zionism means defending Israel from critics and protecting its sovereignty as a Jewish State and as the eternal home of the Jewish people. I also think it is vitally important to make Israel relevant to those who may be uninformed, both Jewish and non-Jewish, in order to ensure Israel’s continued existence. I have a message for this particular group. For those people who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming, Israel will welcome you with open arms. For Syrians fleeing one of the deadliest civil wars in history, Israeli hospitals and army volunteers will heal you and your families, provide you with supplies, clothes, and food. For those on a spiritual journey, from Israel’s historic old city to the Kabbalist city of Tsfat, come re-ignite your soul and connect with your inner spirituality. Finally, for all innovators, come to Israel to pursue your passion and transform it into a thriving start-up. From Apple to Intel, the brightest technological minds of this generation are waiting to collaborate with you.

Theodor Herzl stated, “We are organizing Jewry for its coming destiny.” The concept of Zionism will always remain the foundation for the State of Israel, but it must be adapted for the modern era. As Israel nears its 70th anniversary, we must not only remember the country’s roots, but also acknowledge its incredible strides in technology and innovation, humanitarianism, and equal rights, just to name a few. By promoting Israel’s relevant and heroic accomplishments, we can effectively combat critics, educate the greater population, and ensure Israel’s prosperity for generations to come.