

"The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind"

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

- Rabbi Zemel: Thank you all so much for being here. I want to thank our panelists for being here. I also want to thank all of you that so generously contribute to the Temple Micah Innovation Fund that makes programs and discussions of this sort possible in our community. As a year ago at some point, as I began thinking about what Temple ... what we as a congregation, a community might do to observe and celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel, we came up with a series of activities and programs and events and speakers that we've had over the last several months.
- Rabbi Zemel: I thought we needed to do something that felt important and different ... to culminate our spring of activities and speakers, and so that led to the panel we have before us. I'm going to invite my dear friend, colleague, Temple Micah member, not a complaining congregant, the wonderful congregant to introduce our guest speakers who are with us. But I just want to welcome my dear and longtime friend, Rabbi Eric Yoffie to Temple Micah and I'll say my new friend, Bari, to Temple Micah. So, a warm round of applause as we begin this wonderful afternoon.
- Esther Lederman: So yes, I'm Rabbi Esther Lederman, member of this beloved congregation, and was very excited when I was asked to moderate this panel. With me this afternoon is Rabbi Eric Yoffie, former president of the Union for Reform Judaism and actually a former boss of mine many, many years ago. And we have to his left, Bari Weiss, journalist and editor at The New York Times, formerly at The Wall Street Journal. If you haven't had the opportunity to read some of her work, I encourage you to do so. Writes beautifully. They both write beautifully in different places.
- Eric Yoffie: A rabbi visits Israel. When he returns, a friend asks him, "What's the situation in Israel?" The rabbi says, "In a word, good." "Okay," the friend says, "in two words. What's the situation in Israel?" The rabbi thinks. "In two words? Not good."
- Esther Lederman: Not good.
- Eric Yoffie: This is a good news/bad news afternoon and good news/bad news topic. Let me begin with the good news. Israel is a miracle. Almost exactly 70 years ago, the Jewish State was proclaimed. 600,000 Jews were in the land of Israel. They were surrounded by enemies. They had an army with primitive weaponry. They had a tiny struggling economy. Ben-Gurion proclaimed the State. He would then not go out into the street and dance with the young people to celebrate that proclamation. Years later when he was asked, "Why not?" He said, "Because I knew what was going to happen the next day."
- Eric Yoffie: What he feared did happen, all of Israel's neighbors invaded. We sometimes don't remember this, but 1% of the population was killed. 1%. In American terms, if we were to lose 1% of our population in the world, it would be three million dead. But then in the next 70 years, Israel built a state out of nothing, out of nothing. They started with a defense capability, which was most important in the first 25 years. They invested in a nuclear reactor. They also created conventional deterrents. 25

"The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind"

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

years after that, they turned to building a thriving economy, a high tech economy. In the year 2008, Israel was one of the only modern industrial democracies that was barely impacted by the economic collapse of that year.

Eric Yoffie: Where are we today? Country of eight million people, six and a half million Jews, a regional military power, the 26th richest country in the world. There's also a happiness index, World Happiness Index that measures the personal comfort and satisfaction of individuals. Israel is 11th. We think of Israelis as running around looking over their shoulders for bombs and terrorists, keep this in mind. Israelis are happier than Americans and they live longer than Americans. Not only that, I look at Israel as a Jew. I see two things.

Eric Yoffie: First, Israel is a country with power. American Jews have influence, which is important, very important, we work hard at that. But Israeli Jews have power. In the absence of power, all other Jewish values can be turned to dust. So look, that means that there's a Jewish army. That means that there's a Jewish government that can provide refuge to any Jew seeking refuge at any time, for any reason, no questions asked. And sometimes I talk about that and young people, not only young people, say, "It's Holocaust thinking. That really isn't relevant anymore." Not true.

Eric Yoffie: In Europe, there are between two and two and a half million Jews. I want to suggest that there's not a single one of those European Jewish communities that is truly secure, not one. In a survey released just about four to five weeks ago, 51% of European Jews said that they are afraid to wear any jewelry, adornment, or ritual object that will identify them as a Jew. In other words, a kippah or a Jewish star. 27% of European ... and this is just a month ago, 27% of European Jews said that they fear today for their physical safety in the places where they live. In 2015, you had the wave of bombings and attacks and so on. 14,000 French Jews picked up and went to Israel.

Eric Yoffie: Here's the question. Where would they have gone if Israel was not there? Who exactly in our world today when we're building walls and attacking immigrants, who exactly would have taken them in? When there's a crisis in France or England or Russia or Poland or Hungary and the Jews are impacted and it will come, who is going to open that door that those Jews are going to need? And the answer is Israel.

Eric Yoffie: There's another kind of power that Israel offers, religious and spiritual power. Israel has a lot of religious problems. I'm going to get to that in a minute. But it also has a vibrant and creative and diverse Jewish culture. In Israel, the public square is dominated by Jewish arguments. It is a Jewish public forum drawing on Jewish sources and tradition. In Israel, I can do in the land of Israel what Moses could not do. I can walk there. I can visit there. I can live there if I want. I can plant there. I can build there. I can speak in the language of the Bible revived at last as a spoken tongue. How extraordinary is that?

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

Eric Yoffie: But if things are so good, what are we doing here? Why are we asking this question because it wouldn't seem to be much of an issue? Why are we worried about Israel and the American Jewish imagination? For the answer, I'm going to turn to Ronald Lauder, who wrote an op-ed in The New York Times on March 18th. Who's Ronald Lauder? He's an American Jew. He's president of the World Jewish Congress. He is also a conservative, a Republican, a Likud supporter, and a friend of Netanyahu. All things that I am not. He's a man of the Right. I know Ron Lauder. Lauder's a good guy, done extraordinary things in preserving Judaism here. That's extraordinary.

Eric Yoffie: He's a man of the Right, so that's the way he's seen in American politics and also in Israeli politics. Lauder wrote that, "Israel is doing two things that are alienating Jews around the world and distancing them from Israel. The first ... " You should look this article up if you haven't read it. "The first is settling large number of settlers throughout the West Bank outside of the major settlement blocks that Israel will retain in any peace agreement. The second is leaving control of religious affairs of a coercive state-sponsored Chief Rabbinate. This is a Rabbinate that proclaims that Reform and Conservative rabbis are treif. That Reform and Conservative synagogues are houses of harlotry and that hundreds of thousands of Israeli Jews do not meet their standards and cannot even be married in the Jewish State. Israel's the only democratic country in the world where a substantial number of its own citizens cannot be married within its borders. We must change," Lauder wrote. And indeed we must.

Eric Yoffie: Prime Minister Netanyahu a while back said that he intended to build in every area of Judea and Samaria. Let me say this very clearly. This is lunacy. It only makes sense if you intend to keep the territories, which will lead either to apartheid or to a single state with an Arab majority. He has built. He became prime minister for the second time in 2009, so in the last nine years the number of settlers outside of the blocks, outside of the blocks, has risen from about 65,000 to about 110,000. This isn't going to work. Trying to control a foreign people through military means is national suicide. The British couldn't do it in Ireland or India. The French couldn't do in Algeria. Israel can't do it in the West Bank either.

Eric Yoffie: You also can't get away with it politically. I spent much of my adult life working in interfaith forums and on campus to make the case for Israel. By the way, it's not true you can't make the case for Israel on campus. You absolutely can make the case for Israel on campus. You can convince people of the miracle of Israel's existence and the justice of her struggle against terror and rejection. You can convince people that it makes demographic and political sense for Israel to keep some settlements in exchange for land elsewhere in their territory. But you cannot convince people that if the prime minister of Israel says that he supports a Palestinian state alongside a Jewish state, and he has said that, that it then makes sense to expand a large settler population in the heart of the West Bank where that Palestinian state must come into being. You can't convince them because it doesn't make sense and Israel needs to stop doing it.

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

Eric Yoffie: Even if peace is not possible, even if peace is not possible, Israel needs to separate not settle. Separate not settle. And Israel should do this not for the sake of the Palestinians, many of whom hate us. And not for the sake of the BDS forces who are anti-Semitic. And not to please the international community, which is too often hypocritical and prejudiced against Israel. And not to win over the self haters in our own community who see the rights of every group but their own. Israel should do these things because they're the right thing to do as Mr. Lauder pointed out. Because every alternative is worse. Because they might work and because they might eventually give us the Jewish and democratic state that Israel's founders envisioned and that Israel was meant to be. I'm just about done here.

Eric Yoffie: And what also doesn't make sense, of course, is leaving power over religious matters in the hands of the fundamentalist fanatic Chief Rabbinate. I defy anyone here to give me a single example in all of human history where a state-sponsored religious monopoly actually advanced the values of the tradition it was meant to serve. What happens is the opposite. Those values are brought into disrepute. Why should we think that Israel would somehow be different here? Israel was created to bring about a moral and spiritual Renaissance of the Jewish people. And this means that a message of Torah that is inclusive and morally compelling must emanate from Jerusalem to the whole Jewish world and the Chief Rabbinate is incapable of that, now and always.

Eric Yoffie: Let me sum up my message. First, the right of the Jewish people to self determination in its ancient homeland, to live with recognized, secure borders is one of the most just and moral causes of our time. Second, to occupy and control the lives of millions of Palestinians living in the West Bank and to negate their right to create their own state and future side by side to the state of Israel is not just and it's not moral. Third, the failure to achieve peace with two states as its foundation is far more the fault of the Palestinians than of Israel. We haven't talked about that, but I want to stress that. There's no moral equivalence here. That's not what I'm saying. Nonetheless, there are things that Israel needs to do and that hasn't done, beginning to separate from the Palestinians is foremost among them.

Eric Yoffie: Fourth, we need as American Jews to speak up on these matters. We do so remembering that our love for Israel is unconditional but not uncritical. Unconditional but not uncritical. And remembering, too, that just as we need Israel, Israel needs us, needs our voices and our energy and our experience with bridge building and with confronting change and applying humane values to society.

Eric Yoffie: And fifth and finally, to take us back to where we started, we need to remember to rejoice in the miracle of Israel, the miracle of her founding, the miracle of her victorizing in the Six-Day War, the miracle of her survival against the plotting of Hezbollah and Hamas, Syria and Iran. To be sure, Israel has her extremists, largely due to the work of these enemies, and they continue too these enemies to pour their hatred. But Israel is also a country where most of the time it is the positive ideals and the best impulses of her leaders and her people that determine the direction of the state. And it is these impulses that we must harness, all of us, to

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

build a just, progressive and tolerant Israel where Jews of every sort have their rightful place and where Reform Judaism in particular both enjoys the full equality of the State and does its full share to promote the wellbeing of Zion.

Esther Lederman: Thank you. Thank you. So let's hear from you Bari.

Bari Weiss: Thank you so much for having me. Happy Mother's Day. I'm thrilled to be here. Like Eric, I'm starting with the same word which is miracle, which is that the greatest miracle in Jewish history since the exodus from Egypt, whether or not you believe in it literally or figuratively, happened 70 years ago tomorrow on the English calendar. The founders of the modern Jewish State gathered in Tel Aviv under a giant portrait of Theodor Herzl and affirmed to the world that Eretz Israel is the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here, their spiritual, religious, and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal book of books.

Bari Weiss: Thus they declared to the world that their grassroots movement of repatriation was now being made official. "By virtue of our national and historical right," they said, "and on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, we hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz Israel to be known as the State of Israel."

Bari Weiss: I went back and I looked at how The New York Times covered this event and I was really, really struck by the language. This is what the news article the next day said: "The declaration of the new State by David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the National Council and first premier of reborn Israel, was delivered during a simple and solemn ceremony at 4PM and new life was instilled into his people. But from without, there was the rumbling of guns, of flashback to other declarations of independence that had not been easily achieved."

Bari Weiss: Reborn Israel. Those two words get it exactly right. Not an alien outpost in a strange land, but a historic tikkun, a fixing, a restoration of something with deeply ancient roots. Israel reborn as we've heard in books like Start-up Nation is a sight to behold. China and India are beating down the door of the Jewish State to do business. There's a burgeoning and extremely strange love affair between Israel and the Sunni Arab powers, which was unthinkable just a decade ago. Tomorrow the US Embassy is moving to Jerusalem. And last night, Netta Barzilai won Eurovision with beatboxing and a chicken dance and a song about body positivity. So as Israelis would say, Halevai.

Bari Weiss: By many, many metrics, it appears that Israel reborn is thriving and thank God. But I'm not telling you anything you don't know to suggest that Israel's also facing a deep existential crisis or I would suggest a few crises. One real and very immediate and tangible crisis, of course, is the fact that Israel is still surrounded by enemies. Hamas, Hezbollah, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, and so forth that want to see it obliterated. Another front of the crisis Israel faces and one that I think Eric talked

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

about beautifully is the conflict between Israel's ideals and its policies, chiefly I'm thinking of the ongoing occupation of the Palestinians. The threat that controlling the lives of millions of people poses to a state that is supposed to reflect the values and morals of the Jewish people.

Bari Weiss: And secondarily, the fact that the keys to Judaism in a state that's supposed to represent all of us have been handed over to a small slice of Jews. These are subjects that I hope we'll talk about in a bit. But the topic for today is the future of Israel and the American Jewish imagination. So I want to talk about that crisis, the crisis in our imagination. I think that that crisis is about that we've sort of forgotten to tell or worse, that we've stopped believing in the Zionist story and the fundamentally just nature of that story, and that we are failing to inculcate younger Jews with a sense of awe in the face of that ethic.

Bari Weiss: Sure, we tell young Jews sort of the blinkered story that begins in the fires of Europe and ends with the establishment of the State in 1948. But I think that we don't tell enough the one in which the people of Israel driven, as Moshe put it, to the farthest parts under Heaven would in fact come back to their ancient land from the corners of the earth after 2000 years of exile, of persecution, of destruction and finally, of near elimination. Not the story in which the language of the Bible would be revived, modernized, and used by politicians and prostitutes alike. Not the story that is deep and broad enough to explain why Jews in Ethiopia walked weeks through jungle and desert in a modern exodus to try and reach Zion, Jews that had frankly never heard of the Holocaust until they reached the Holy Land. We don't tell them the story of Israel that sees the State as an earthly miracle, even if you don't believe in it as a religious one.

Bari Weiss: And as a result, my generation is falling speechless when confronted, and as we are increasingly, with very stark questions by those largely on the Left who would seem to be our natural political allies. A few of those questions: Is Israel's story the story of Jewish restoration, the repatriation of an indigenous people? Or is it, as we increasingly are told, another variation of white European colonialism, a historic injustice that can only be remedied by its dismantling? Is Israel an outpost of liberalism in a region overrun by theocracies and dictatorships? Or does its ongoing occupation overshadow its progressive values? Is Judaism fundamentally a people with a faith or is it a faith in which its adherence can opt out of a connection to place and tribe and not eschew a Zionist project? Is Israel a phenomenon borne out of the Holocaust? Or does it represent the fruition of an ancient longing and promise?

Bari Weiss: These are the sorts of questions that I have been confronting my entire adult life since I arrived at Columbia University in 2003. There, in a sort of hotbed, I learned in my classroom and also in a politicized campus culture that it was very, very hard if not impossible to be a progressive and a Zionist. It was a rude lesson, but it was a lesson that woke me up to what I think is one of the key challenges facing the Jewish people.

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

- Bari Weiss: I'll tell you a quick story to give you a sense of what I mean. During my sophomore year, I took a lecture course in the history of the Middle East taught by a professor named Joseph Massad, who's now tenured. This was a professor who had proudly published pieces with sentences like: "The Jews are not a nation and the Jewish State is a racist state that does not have the right to exist." The only book we read about Israel was called *Israel: A Colonial Settlers' State?* by the French Marxist scholar, Maxime Rodinson. Suffice it to say that the question mark in the title was superfluous.
- Bari Weiss: One day on a subway ride downtown I ran into a classmate that I had known from a literature seminar during my freshman year. We were friendly and she was sort of a California blonde WASP, the last thing from an activist or a rabble rouser and she clearly knew nothing about the Middle East before taking the class, as she told me. She confessed that she had a question for me. "You're a reasonable, good, moral person," she told me. "So how can you possibly be a Zionist?" Her question was entirely sincere. She was simply curious how I, certainly no obvious racist, could support the last standing bastion of racist colonialism in the Middle East, which was exactly what she was now learning about Israel.
- Bari Weiss: Now without going into the whole story, suffice it to say that Columbia made headlines for this sort of thing and the takeaway largely from our community was that Columbia was terrible and that it was sort of singular. Given its history of radical student politics, a little excess was to be expected on the controversial subject of the Jewish State. I hoped that this was right. That these questions are ones that would fade away as I made my way into the world. That they were a reflection of this radical campus environment and a particularly interesting Middle East Studies department. But in fact, more than a decade later, it seems to me that Columbia was the canary in the coal mine.
- Bari Weiss: Intersectionality was not a word that I knew yet and BDS had just started to become a thing. Back then it was apartheid walls on the quad. But the terms that the hard Left was setting out for Jews was extremely clear. You can be part of the progressive coalition and be a Jew. No problem. But you cannot believe in the Jewish right to self determination and political sovereignty. To be a Jew on the Left, you have to disavow the power of the Jewish State and pledge your allegiance to the Palestinian cause. If you want to be part, in other words, of the coalition of the oppressed, you have to sever your connection publicly from the oppressor.
- Bari Weiss: We see this strategy now bearing fruit across the country. This is why Jewish lesbians holding rainbow flags with Jewish stars were kicked out of the Dyke March last summer in Chicago. To be a Jewish dyke, let alone ones that deigned to support Israel, is a categorical impossibility. It's oppressor and oppressed in the same person. It is why Starbucks decided to oust the ADL from its upcoming anti-bias training. Never mind the ADL is an expert in that training. According to activists like Tamika Mallory, the group support for Israel made it unsuitable and she lodged this amazing accusation that the group was racist. The truth, of course, is that the ADL had criticized Tamika Mallory for her close relationship to Louis Farrakhan. But it is not

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

Mallory that has been made radioactive by that association, it is the ADL's association with the Jewish State.

Bari Weiss: This is the reason why in London this year Amnesty International pulled out of an event with the Jewish Communal Organization, because it had ties to Israel. It is why right now at the University of Virginia, Jewish student activists who want to join a minority student coalition to fight white supremacy have been barred admission because of their ties to Israel. I could go on with similar examples, but I will spare you. The insistence that Israel is on the wrong side of history, the insistence that to identify as a Zionist is to identify as a racist, these are ideas that have increasing resonance on the American political Left. These are ideas that have leapt far beyond the campus and into our culture.

Bari Weiss: We are, it seems to me, at least in largely liberal educated circles in which I travel and I'm sure all of you do, too. We are scared to engage with these questions and we are convinced that if we ignore them, they will go away. What I hear time and time again is, young Jews are going on Birthright, Hillels are thriving, why should we focus on some marginal figures? Tamika Mallory and Linda Sarsour don't have power, Trump and Steve Bannon do. Let's focus on what really matters. I think that this is naïve and dangerous thinking. 20 years ago, those people that sounded the alarm about the future of Jews in Europe were dismissed as hysterics. Those people sounding the alarm were right.

Bari Weiss: To fail to see how this threat from the political Left right now culturally not yet politically poses an existential threat to the Zionist project represents, I want to suggest to you, a failure of the imagination. Israel and the Jewish American imagination is scary territory for too many American Jews because it is not easy. It forces us to confront hard, uncomfortable truths about people that we think are supposed to be our political allies. And it forces us to return ourselves to first principles. But I really believe that this is the next major battle. The question is only if we can get ahead of it.

Esther Lederman: One of the themes of what you just said I think accurately is this idea that to be ... for example, you talked about on Columbia's campus but in many cases having to check your Zionism at the door if you want to be a progressive. I want to take that premise and add a complicating picture to that. There is that argument. I think there's also an argument happening in this country that in order to be a Zionist, you have to check your progressivism or liberalism at the door and I believe also in the ... there had been a piece in The New York Times a number of months ago, Is Liberal Zionism Dead? that Michelle Goldberg wrote in response actually to the Jerusalem embassy move, which we'll get to later.

Esther Lederman: I'm just curious what the two of you think. Is there still room for liberal Zionism in North America? The question of whether there's room for liberal Zionism in Israel's a different question. But I specifically want you to answer the question about, is there room for liberal Zionism among American Jews today in the United States?

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

Bari Weiss: I'm letting Eric start because I just went.

Eric Yoffie: I'm an American. I'm a Jew. I'm a liberal. I'm a Zionist. No contradiction. Until fairly recently in this country, you could have people like me and you could also have people who would say, "I'm an American. I'm a Jew. I'm a conservative. I'm a Republican. No contradiction." And being pro-Israel was kind of a bridging identity. In fact, the whole thrust of the political activity of the American Jewish community was to maintain commitment to Israel as a bridging identity. In a political sense, to be pro-Israel was bipartisan and it was seen as essential that that should be so. Both because in terms of the values, the values spoke to all Americans. We believe Brandeis laid that out a long time ago. And also in very practical terms, the pendulum swings.

Eric Yoffie: We have a Republican Congress and Republican president. There's going to be a Democratic Congress and a Democratic president at some point. We don't want to create a situation where that president and that Congress is going to somehow feel that they can't or won't relate to the state of Israel. Sadly and unfortunately, we now live in a deeply partisan time. The right can't talk to the left. There is a void there in the middle and instead of Israel being a bridging identity, it's gotten sucked into the void.

Eric Yoffie: Bari has appropriately talked about the problems on the left. Are there problems on the left? Absolutely and you mentioned them and I agree with virtually everything that you said in that regard. I would simply point out that there are also problems on the right and there are a whole range of other problems that come into play and that have to be dealt with if we're going to maintain the bipartisan character of support for Israel. Now I talked about some of those things, of course, during my remarks. Natalie Portman. If we're reading Natalie Portman out of the Jewish community because of her views then we're destroying the base of our support for Israel because there are a lot of American Jews who see her as kind of a model at least in terms of what she articulates as her commitment to Israel.

Eric Yoffie: She rejects BDS. She defines herself as a Zionist. Of course, she's an Israeli citizen. She's a Hebrew speaker. She supports the Jewish State. Now it's interesting. We talk about you mentioned problems on the left. Let's talk about some problems on the right. What was the response to Natalie Portman? Not that I may have disagreed with your view on accepting the prize or not accepting the prize. The voices that said-

Bari Weiss: Rescind her citizenship.

Eric Yoffie: ... rescind her citizenship. She, by virtue of being a critical voice, is a BDS supporter. So in other words, it's not just a matter of I'm offering criticism. Any criticism almost by definition becomes joining in with the forces of BDS.

Eric Yoffie: if we want to keep liberals in the camp and liberals Jews in particular in the camp, we need to be able to be open to reasonable criticism from people who are in fact on

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

our side even if they offer a critical voice. It seems to me, we haven't ... and this is a perfect example of we haven't always done a very good job of succeeding in that respect.

Bari Weiss: Yeah, I would say when I talk ... I spoke earlier this week to a Jewish community in Scarsdale that I would say is right wing. I talked to them about the importance of passing the Natalie Portman test. Do you want Israel to become a right wing Conservative Republican issue? Or do you want to maintain it as a bipartisan one? Then you cannot say that Natalie Portman should be written out of the Jewish people. This is a community of people that once Lorde came out, once Lorde was boycotting Israel, they no longer listen to Lorde's songs. I got to sort of play therapist for a while.

Bari Weiss: The point is, is that I think it is extremely important to draw distinctions between those who are genuinely, I don't know, ideological enemies of the State and those who are ... we would never say to someone who's refusing to go to the White House to shake Donald Trump's hand, "Rescind their citizenship." We shouldn't say that about Natalie Portman either.

Bari Weiss: The other thing I would say is, and this has to do I guess more with a question of education, and something I've been thinking a lot about in terms of the Jewish community. The number of Jews that I know who grew up going to Jewish day school, Jewish camps, and then arrived on campus and all of a sudden found out that there was this thing called the occupation and then felt like every adult and educator in their life had lied to them. Those people are no longer coming to events like this. They've checked out of the Jewish community by and large. That's a problem.

Bari Weiss: I really think that we are not preparing Jewish students to go into environments where there's going to be really challenging questions and know how to grapple with them. Obviously, that's not something that should start in kindergarten but I think that, frankly, I didn't know that much when I arrived on campus and I grew in an extremely identified Jewish home, Camp Ramah, Schechter, all of it. I think that that's also a problem and I think we really need to talk honestly about Israel's warts.

Eric Yoffie: First, I agree 100%. Let me on that last point, it seems to me educationally there are two issues here. We're talking about Jews. We all understand there are different kinds of Jews and people who come from different backgrounds and have different outlooks. I want to suggest there are two primary kinds of Jews and we're not talking Reform and Orthodox. The two primary kinds of Jews are serious Jews and non-serious Jews. By and large, if again these are broad generalizations which don't always work, the serious Jews tend to be people who either belong to synagogues or at least they belonged to synagogues at some point in their life. About 30 to 35% of Jews belong to synagogues. About 30 to 35% on top of that have belonged to synagogues. They tend to be the more serious ones.

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

Eric Yoffie: But the point is, the 30% who are not serious Jews and we're not going to forget them. We're not going to write them off. We're going to reach out to them if we possibly can. But those who've had no education, no exposure to Jewish tradition, have no observance in their life, they are very likely either to be indifferent to Israel or to be open to the kind of anti-Israel propaganda that you're talking about and we all know is a factor on campus.

Eric Yoffie: The second thing is, of course, what you've just mentioned. If we educate people about Israel and we don't tell the truth, we have to tell it with love. We have to tell it with a sense of Israel as a miracle, with this understanding that Israel is a refuge, with this understanding of vibrant Judaism that can exist there in a way it can't exist anywhere else. But if we don't tell the truth about issues of occupation and also about issues of religious freedom ... one second on that.

Eric Yoffie: I was at a think tank, it's really not important. It's under the auspices of the Israeli government. It was run here. You had Americans, you had Israelis who were sitting around the table and there were two professors there. One of them was an Orthodox Jewish woman. The rules were we weren't supposed to mention names, so I won't mention the name. You'd know the name if I were to tell you. She said, "You know, as important as the Palestinian issue is, and it's very important with my students in terms of their problems with Israel. It's very important." But she said, "There are answers to that." She said, "I know how to answer that." She said, "What I don't know how to answer is the religious stuff." She was mostly here talking to the Israelis around the table and saying American Jews ...

Eric Yoffie: First of all, the notion of religious pluralism is deeply embedded in their consciousness. Second of all, they see themselves as Jews by virtue of their connection with the rabbi, and connection with the synagogue, for most of them, an identity as a Reform Jew or a Conservative Jew. The idea that they are not accepted in Israel, we can talk to them about different cultures and so on and so forth, doesn't make any difference. They just don't get it. Not only that, they're angry. They're angry. So talking to the Israelis here among the many things we have to do, we need to convey to our friends in Israel is, these issues are not marginal. They are not marginal.

Eric Yoffie: If they want an enthusiastic, committed Zionist oriented American Jewry, they need to help us on the religious issues. And they can't be telling us after three years of negotiating on the Kotel that, by the way, never mind. They can't do that. They need to help us because the Jewish people requires an answer to these questions if we're going to do our job.

Esther Lederman: Bari, do you have anything to say about this religious issue? I know you've covered it. You wrote a beautiful piece about the three ... there was a piece in December of 2017 about these three wonderful Israeli couples who came to Temple Emanu-El, the mothership of the Reform movement in New York City. 1300 people witnessed these weddings because these couples cannot get married legally in terms of their identity

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

as either progressive or there was a same sex couple. So I don't know. You wrote a beautiful piece about it.

Esther Lederman: Actually, there was a quote I took from that piece. You wrote the following so I wanted to give you an opportunity also to talk about this issue. You wrote, "More than 70 years since its founding, Israel can no longer expect the unconditional support of diaspora Jews if the love remains unrequited." Very powerful statement. If you could, can you talk a little bit more about that?

Bari Weiss: Thank you so much. My sensitivity towards this issue, I grew up the oldest of four daughters, very feminist home. My dad is a conservative Republican, but very feminist home. We learned how to read Torah when we were 10 years old so we could get our ears pierced. We were into it. It was very disorienting for me when I went to the Kotel for the first time and I had been told it was supposed to be this transcendent experience and this homecoming and I cried, not out of tears of joy, but feeling of dislocation and alienation. I had gone to Women of the Wall. I've really been involved in this issue personally for a long time, so that piece came from a very personal place for me.

Bari Weiss: I feel, frankly, like as someone who has spent a lot of my social and political capital arguing to defend the Jewish State, it's sort of the least they can do to give us that. That's why I edited that Ron Lauder piece that Eric was talking about before. I think that it's very, very important obviously that liberal and progressive Jews are going to push the Netanyahu government on this. But that when you see Jews like Ron Lauder and Natan Sharansky and others pushing them, I think it's really important.

Bari Weiss: But I'm hopeful. Yeah. I guess that's all I'll say for now.

Esther Lederman: So Eric, you were president of the Union for Reform Judaism for 16 years, correct?

Esther Lederman: And in that position, you had the opportunity to speak personally with political and thought leaders all over Israel. You're clearly still doing it today. Today, it feels like Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu has written off 70% of American Jews who are either center left or left. He has shown us in a number of ways ... this is a broader question not so much about the politics but really about the recognition of Israeli leaders towards the voice of American Jews.

Esther Lederman: To what extent do you think Israeli leaders are interested in American Jewish life and American Jews? Could you imagine any Israeli forum having this type of conversation, the topic being of the future of American Jewry in the Israeli imagination? Or is this simply a one way street? Is this something that really just concerns us but doesn't really concern Israeli leaders?

Eric Yoffie: Well, almost all the polling that's done in Israel if you ask the question, do you see yourself as a member of the Jewish people? Overwhelmingly the answer to that is yes. So in an abstract sense, it is important to them to be part of this broader people,

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

the people Israel. Having said that, there is amazing ignorance on both sides for a whole variety of reasons. There are a corps of people who go back and forth and have the kind of connections that we might wish but, look, the religious issues are, of course, the perfect example and our movements are small in Israel. Nobody would suggest otherwise.

Eric Yoffie: They're growing and we have an infrastructure now, but still, they're small. So the number of Israelis who have exposure to Reform and Conservative Judaism is rather minimal and the truth is they just don't get it. They really don't get it. So if you try and talk to average Israelis about these conversations, it's enormously frustrating. Enormously frustrating. What's different, of course, is the leadership. In other words, until fairly recently, the leadership did get it. They got it in the sense that when there was a crisis, the notion was we find an answer to the crisis.

Eric Yoffie: So, for example, first of all, these issues didn't come up through the '70s. Beginning in the '80s, there was a change having to do with what was going on in the Orthodox world. First we had the Law of Return issue, which mostly was generated by Chabad actually. People don't necessarily know that, but that's the case. Then we have the conversion issue. Now we've moved into the Kotel issue. For the first two times, what happened? Israeli leaders operated on the assumption that it's very important that we have American Jewish support. So we set up a committee. Best way to delay any problem is to set up a committee and go on for years.

Eric Yoffie: You put an important person in charge of that committee and then you come up with an answer. None of the answers that they came up with really did very much for us in terms of the substance of the issue. They gave us a little something and they gave us a sense that they cared about our concerns. And that was the model until the Kotel. Then with the Kotel, it was not only that after three years they simply got up and said, "By the way, never mind. We have coalition problems." That's happens. It's what happened afterward. Two things happened afterward.

Eric Yoffie: First of all, there were all these reports started coming out of Israel from the top journalists in Israel, Nahum Barnea, Ben Caspit, writing about how the prime minister was saying that this was all the fault of Reform Jews. Then others in the government started saying the same thing, "They were looking to advance their own interests." Oh my heavens. Can you imagine? That's exactly what we were looking to do. We were also looking to advance our religious cause.

Eric Yoffie: Second of all, the second round of responses was ... this was stunning. "It doesn't make any difference what they think because of they're disappearing." Again, these are our quotes, some for the record, some off the record from Israel's top leadership. "They're disappearing." Then a whole series of articles about our real allies are the evangelicals, the conservatives, and Orthodox Jews. That was ... we have never experienced that in our history.

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

- Eric Yoffie: My response is first of all, anger. Second of all, we need a strategy. Third of all, we need to convey to our people in the midst of this because they're very, very unhappy. We're not giving up. And we're not turning our back on Israel because we have to keep in mind that's exactly what these fanatics want. The most fanatic elements want to make us angry so we turn away, we leave Israel to them. That's not going to happen. But we need to understand on religious issues, let's ask the question, has Netanyahu just written us off in a way that no Israeli government ever has before? There's substantial indication that that may be the case.
- Eric Yoffie: Then the other question that I won't take too much time. The other question I won't take the time to answer. People are asking that about political issues as well. Have they said that, "We don't need the liberal Jews"? Look where we are. We have a Republican president. We have a Republican Congress. We have an Orthodox community that's supportive. We have a liberal community that is diminishing. So even in terms of political liberalism, and most American Jews remain Democratic-voting liberal-oriented people, maybe we don't really need them either.
- Eric Yoffie: Israel has to be bipartisan and has to speak to the whole community, it doesn't turn its back on any Jews. That's what they have to think and that's what we have to advocate for.
- Bari Weiss: There's so much to say. A few points. One is that I think that we're going to continue to see this disconnect because basically largely speaking, there is no Israeli left anymore. There just isn't, politically. They can't win elections. It's between Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett. That is the real game. Will we maybe have ... I'm not saying, of course, that activism doesn't matter, that there aren't progressive Jews in Israel, I'm simply saying that Labor's not going to win the next election or any parties to the left. I see that disconnect only growing actually, if anything.
- Bari Weiss: The other thing I would say is that I'm pissed as Eric is also, if we're allowed to say that here. But the whole thing is that the Zionist narrative, the whole Zionist idea hinges on the idea of us being a people with a faith, not just that we're these people all over the world that like bagels and falafel and we happen to pray to the same God. So if you want us to buy into that idea that we are a people, you have to act like it and treat us like we are members of that family.
- Bari Weiss: The last thing I would say is that I don't know how to say this. Partly it's true. It's painful to hear it, but part of what Bibi is saying is true. Liberal diaspora Jewry, if you just look at the numbers, is disappearing. We don't want that to be leaked out. We don't want our prime minister to go around saying that. But that is a reality if you just look at the numbers. That's something that we need to look in the mirror about.
- Esther Lederman: Do you want to respond to that?
- Bari Weiss: Just demographically, it's true. Look at the intermarriage rates.

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

Eric Yoffie: Look, everybody acknowledges that the American Jewish community is shrinking and that it's going to be smaller than it is now and that there's more shrinkage among Reform and Conservative Jews than among Orthodox Jews and so on. Are we disappearing? I would like to suggest to you, we're not.

Bari Weiss: No-

Eric Yoffie: Second of all, I'd like to suggest, let's not suppose that this is only a Reform and Conservative problem and not an Orthodox problem. The truth of the matter is they have their own issues here in that regard. The key point is, if you ... big picture. Despite diminishing numbers, it's not diminishing radically. There's going to be a large powerful influential Jewish community here in America. A substantial majority of which is going to be Reform and Conservative Jews for the foreseeable future. So that's the reality.

Eric Yoffie: For Bibi and anyone else to build a political scenario based on something else seems to me crazy and by the way, I would point out, look, the hard right sort of pro-Israel position of evangelicals while you had it among leadership, it really emerged in a significant way post-9/11 when you had fear of terrorism. You had anti-Islamic feeling. The notion that it's a given, for example, as some Israelis think that the evangelicals are always going to be hard line pro-Israel people is a bet that they could conceivably lose because there's also a-

Bari Weiss: But they're not going to stop believing in the Second Coming. That seems like a good bet to ... By the way, I'm not endorsing Bibi. I'm just trying to explain why that does seem like if you're just from a crude political perspective, a good bet to make.

Eric Yoffie: Well, what I'm suggesting, in the last 20 years we've seen a change in one direction. The next 20 years, maybe it'll be in the other direction. My fundamental point is Zionism does not turn its back on Jews. Zionism does not say we're allying ourselves with this particular segment of the political community and we're going to turn our backs on Jews because the truth is they're not that important. The fact is that that's what we've been hearing over the course of the last 12 to 18 months pretty much in that language. Pretty much in that language. That's new. That's scary.

Eric Yoffie: You said all right, look, all Jews were at Sinai. We all were at Sinai and the notion that the Jewish State is going to say that the State of Israel is the possession of one segment of the Jewish people and not another segment of the Jewish people is totally contrary, it seems to me, to everything that Zionism has always been about. Whether it's for a practical reason or a religious reason, we need to be speaking to them and connecting to them and they have to be doing the same to us.

Bari Weiss: I agree.

"The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind"

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

Esther Lederman: I'm going to ask two related questions from the audience. Thank you. Although one was directed at you, specifically to you, I'd like you both to tackle both questions. So here are the two questions.

Eric Yoffie: Both to Bari?

Esther Lederman: Well, one said to Bari, the other said neither. What is the source, in your ... what is the source of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism at the left? If you have thoughts about where that comes from.

Bari Weiss: Light questions.

Esther Lederman: That's what we're known for. This is a little bit more specific about the ... it's connected to the anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism of the left. How should we counter the Tamika Mallorys and Linda Sarsours of the world? Remember that they're two of the leaders of the Women's March and Bari had spoken a little bit about Tamika and Linda already. So how should we counter the Tamika Mallorys and Linda Sarsours of the world while still maintaining our connections to the progressive groups they are aligned with?

Bari Weiss: Okay so I'll start with that one. I think it is very ... I know a lot of people that have given up, I would say, on being publicly feminist, if that's a way to phrase it or have said, "I regret going to the Women's March" because these people were in charge of it. I don't like that as a general strategy. I think it is very important for proud Jewish Zionists to show up in progressive places and say exactly as Eric did before, there's no contradiction between these parts of my identity. I'm happy to talk to you about the injustice, or however you want to think about it, of the occupation. I'm happy to talk to you about X and Y and Z issues but fundamentally, I am here as a lover and a supporter of Israel.

Bari Weiss: That's where I see groups like Zioness. I don't know if you guys are familiar with it. It's a very, very new group and I think they're doing amazing work at showing up at places like women's marches and showing up with T-shirts saying Zioness and say, "I am unapologetically a feminist and a Zionist." That's, I think, an important strategy. Force the question. Why do you think that these two things are in conflict?

Bari Weiss: Yeah. Look, for the question about the anti-Zionism on the left. This is a deep question that goes back to Russian propaganda and Zionism is racism resolution. We could talk about this all day. I think largely what's happening is that BDS has become just one of a checklist of 20 other things that most people that are going along with it, don't really know what they're going along for. Most young people are just saying, "Okay, I'm for Black Lives Matter. I'm for feminism. I'm for the Women's March. I'm for BDS. All right." It's part of the water now and it's our job to extricate it and force the question of, why are you not boycotting China which is occupying Tibet?

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

Bari Weiss: I could talk about this forever. This is what I talk to college students about. But I think a lot of it is anti-colonial postmodernism that is really, really not fringe at all in the academy anymore. That's what's being taught in all the classes. It just is a natural outgrowth of that.

Eric Yoffie: Again, we could spend a lot of time talking about where it came from and there are a number of thoughts that one might have but I think the strategy in responding is what's most important. I agree 100% with what Bari said. We fight back here. We do not let them drive us out of coalitions. We don't let them drive us out of anything. We don't let them distance us from issues that we care about and that are important to us as Jews and Americans. We go there and fight always, always, always, always every time. I think that's the only possible way that we can approach this.

Esther Lederman: Thank you. So different question from the audience. Is it not possible to love and enjoy Judaism in America without having any interest in or support of Israel and her politics?

Bari Weiss: Yes.

Eric Yoffie: No.

Bari Weiss: Here's what I'll say.

Esther Lederman: That's perfect.

Bari Weiss: I'll say yes only because it clearly is the case just normatively speaking. That exists. Do I think that that ... do I think that being a bagel Jew is to be a Jew in the fullest way, in the way that our ancestors imagined being Jewish? No. Not at all. I think that it would be totally bizarre to them to even think of it that way, but I'm answering yes just because it clearly exists. But I want to hear Eric's soaring magisterial answer for why it is no.

Eric Yoffie: We are a tiny people, a tiny people. 14 million, 15 million. The demographers can argue it out. The total number of Jews in the world is less than a rounding error in the Chinese census. There are two primary communities that make up some 80 to 90% of the Jewish world and that's American Jews and Israeli Jews. The notion that either can survive without the other and that there can be a full Jewish experience without knowing, being aware of experiencing how the other part of our people is living this Jewish experience is to me impossible.

Eric Yoffie: Without Israel we are incomplete, truncated people both in terms of reality and in terms of belief and outlook. Ultimately, even if we think it'll work, my view is that it will not. My own view, again, to go back to this notion that there's serious Jews and nonserious Jews. Serious Jews, in most cases, end up struggling with Israel even if they're angry, even if it's a contentious topic, even if they think that the government has it totally and completely wrong. But the notion that they can put it out of their

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

consciousness virtually never works, maybe for Satmar it works. Maybe for what there used to be in the Reform movement a long time ago, it works. But Satmar isn't the future.

Eric Yoffie: Satmar is the ultra-ultra Orthodox-

Bari Weiss: Anti-Zionist.

Eric Yoffie: ... anti-Zionist and you'll find them in Mea Shearim and you'll find them in-

Bari Weiss: Williamsburg.

Eric Yoffie: ... in Brooklyn as well. They are anti-Zionist but really anti-Zionist. They cooperate with Iranian anti-Zionists. Those are marginal elements of the Jewish world and my view, Israel ultimately comes along with Judaism. That's the way that I see it.

Bari Weiss: I'll just add one thing which is that, again, I'm sticking with my answer yes. But I want to just say that we get to be alive for the most wild, epic thing that has happened in Jewish history. For Jews not to appreciate that and to be alive to the miracle of that, which we both spoke to, is just so sad to me. It's like you're sleepwalking through the craziest dream. I just mixed metaphors but you get my point.

Esther Lederman: I'm going to ask, we'll continue asking from the congregation, but I want to ask one that I had written. So Bari, in this March you penned an article in The New York Times in response to the anti-Semitic killing of Mireille Knoll, an 85 year old woman and Holocaust survivor. This was the article that when Temple Micah sent out the last reminder of this, it was a link to one of Eric's articles and one to Bari's and this is the one that was in there.

Esther Lederman: Without getting too much into the article, it raised the question of whether Jewish life could continue as is in France. Could France really remain a country for its Jews? And it ended with this quote from Ms. Knoll's granddaughter, Noa Goldfarb, who wrote this from Israel: "20 years ago I left Paris knowing that neither my future nor that of the Jewish people is to be found there. Anti-Semitism is also on the rise in this country as documented by places like the ADL and the Southern Poverty Law Center."

Esther Lederman: My question for you both is, if this quote had referred to life in United States, so if this had been a quote about "I left Washington, DC or I left New York or I left Chicago", how would you respond?

Bari Weiss: You want me to go first? I'd say a few things. One is that ... I'm stealing this from someone, I don't even remember who so thank you to whoever said this to me once. Israel makes Jewish life on the Upper West Side or Washington, DC possible. It gives us diaspora Jews an unbelievable sense of not just security, not just a security we

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

could go there if something, God forbid, happened here, but a deep sense of political confidence. I really think that that's true.

Bari Weiss: I think that America is singular in that the Jews here are not the Jews of exile. It's like we're at home here. I think that that's profound and real and a testament to the unbelievable farsightedness of the founders and what America is about, which is that it is based on a set of ideas and that makes it very different from a lot of these other places. I think that it's hard for me to imagine that here even with the rise that we ... even with Charlottesville and even with ... I talked about the left but of course it's very much happening on the right. I only didn't talk about that because I feel like we're attuned to that in a way that we're not as much on the left for a variety of reasons.

Bari Weiss: I don't see that happening here but there's this line from this book. There's a memoir by this guy. I don't know how to pronounce it. It's Joachim Fest. It's a memoir called Not I. His dad was an adamant Catholic anti-Nazi in Berlin. I love this phrase, which is he remembers his father urging their Jewish friends to leave Germany in the '30s and he talks about how for all of their savvy and cultural capital, they were like the crème do la crème. "They had lost," he said, and this is the phrase that I love, "their instinct for danger."

Bari Weiss: I think it is very important for us to recover that. It seems to me that Jews are often fighting our last war so we're thinking about anti-Semitism from the right for obvious reasons because it often does come from the right. But the fact is, is that I think the main ... for sure, the main threat to Jews around the world today is radical Islam. There's no question about that. It's not people in Charlottesville. Jews are being killed by radical Islamists. Sarah Halimi was thrown out of her apartment building. She was the woman that was killed in the same district before Mireille Knoll by a man screaming, "Allahu akbar." It's really hard to talk about that, but that's real.

Bari Weiss: I think that it's important that we attune ourselves to the kind of threats that we're facing and not just the ones that we faced before, that we already are sort of aware of.

Eric Yoffie: Yeah, I'm a little bit uncomfortable simply to leave it at radical Islam. Radical Islam, extremist Islam, which is anti-Semitic and is a real danger in places of the world is certainly something that we can and should talk about. If you look at the situation in Europe now, there's a threat on the right. If we look at the situation in Hungary, if we look at the situation in Poland, there's real danger there of far right parties with anti-Semitic ideologies and if there's going to be anti-Semitic outbreak in those countries, it's much more likely to come from the right than the left.

Eric Yoffie: In France, where you have a very significant Muslim population and some troubling extremist elements, so I want to, again, let's be open to real dangers as they exist. I was in Paris right after that outbreak in 2015 and I met with some French students who absolutely said that this was inflated and that there was nothing to worry about.

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

There was no question there was a future for French Jews. I remember thinking in essence as you're saying, "Have they been here so long, have they lost their instinct for danger?" I shared that very much.

Eric Yoffie: Anti-Semitism never disappears from the human heart. That's the fundamental reality. It never disappears from the human heart. Everything in our experience since we were born as a people would support that. Having said that, I agree with what Bari said. America has, in fact, been different. America has, in fact, been different. I look at America now though and I look at the overall picture. The unique set of circumstances that created this haven for us in a way that we've never experienced in our long history. I wonder if the whole system is under attack from both right and left and if there are some dangers lurking there that maybe I'm not even attuned to myself.

Eric Yoffie: I don't believe that we're the immediate problem right now in America. Those who are under attack now in an immediate sense are not the Jews. But in defending them, we'll be aware of our own vulnerabilities and it's something we need to keep in mind.

Bari Weiss: One thing I'll add to that is a politics of blood and soil, which is the Steve Bannon thing. That's never good for the Jews. I don't want to dismiss that at all. I'm thinking about other things, but I very much believe that and a politics, frankly, that attacks Muslims and attacks immigrants, we're right there in that list. I absolutely see that as a threat. I just imagine that that's one that a lot of people in this room have thought deeply about.

Esther Lederman: How do we as American Jews use our imagination to create facts and therefore a narrative that works for us to advocate for a vision of Israel that can resonate for progressive Americans?

Bari Weiss: Okay. I'll take a stab at this. Which is, I think that in the main we should be focusing on nurturing our Jewish identity and nurturing our relationship to Israel. Yes, we need to fight our ideological and real, literal enemies but also we need to take joy and pride in being the luckiest Jews in human history, to put it frankly. What does that mean? I don't want to spend all my time reading myths and facts about the Jewish State. I want to read Etgar Keret's new novel. I want to read Matti Friedman's book, *Pumpkinflowers*. I want to read Yehuda Amichai's poetry.

Bari Weiss: I feel like that is something that we're not doing enough of. That's what I would say.

Esther Lederman: Thank you.

Eric Yoffie: Look, we need to build a vibrant community here, but I agree with what Bari's saying about Israel. Israel can't only be a cause. It has to be a place. As a place, the smell and the feel and the yelling and the screaming and the food and the-

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

- Bari Weiss: and the screaming.
- Eric Yoffie: Right. First of all, generally speaking, Israel sells itself. The most important thing about Israel, send people to Israel. Why is Birthright so wildly successful? Because people go to Israel and everything else aside, Israel sells itself. They have a sense of the issue from the inside. It seems to me that that's most important.
- Eric Yoffie: Look, I do believe ... when I speak to rabbis I say, "What are your Zionist principles?" I expect them to be able to articulate what those Zionist principles are. Some of them can and some of them can't. But I do believe that when we say we're Zionists and we embrace Israel, that has to mean something. It's not all alike. I'm not going to take the time now. We don't have time. I've written an article about this. I'll send you the link.
- Eric Yoffie: But we need to be able to define what those principles are, not that we turn away if those principles aren't all implemented and fulfilled immediately, but we know what we're working for and advocating for. If you can't do that, then it seems to me you're not really meeting your responsibility to embrace Israel. We know what America's about. We have to know what Israel's about as well and what we want Israel to be.
- Bari Weiss: I'll add one thing, which is that Eric had this nice division between serious and nonserious Jews. The division I've been thinking about a lot in terms of the American Jewish community is that it's separated into those who are hardheaded about the challenges Israel faces and those who are openhearted to the question of the Palestinians and the bleeding hearts among us. I think it's the challenge for all of us to marry those things together. Those things are intention and I think it's a really, really good political and I would say even spiritual challenge to try and live both of those things.
- Eric Yoffie: Steve Cohen is a demographer, professor talks about security Jews and prophetic Jews. Wonderful phrase, I think, and he defines what they are. It's fine to have your priorities. Ultimately, you have to be both. You have to be both a security Jew and a prophetic Jew and that's our challenge.
- Esther Lederman: I'm going to end with one last question. And I'm going to quote my favorite, one of my favorite rabbis because I got a lot of favorite rabbis, especially a number of them in the room. But this one, I'm going to quote Rabbi Zemel.
- Bari Weiss: That's so nice.
- Esther Lederman: In a sermon Rabbi Zemel gave last month in honor of Israel's 70th anniversary, it's on the website if you haven't had a chance to read it. It's fantastic. He reminds us of a handwritten memorial outside the Dolphinarium, a discotheque in Tel Aviv where a suicide killer detonated a bomb that killed 21 teenagers and wounded 120 others. There is a handwritten sign that reads: [Hebrew 01:16:46]. "We won't stop dancing. We won't stop singing."

“The Future of Israel in the American Jewish Mind”

with Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Bari Weiss, and moderator Rabbi Esther Lederman

- Esther Lederman: What do you hope we don't stop dreaming for, for Israel but also for us as American Jews connected and as you said it Eric, unconditionally lovers of Israel? So what do you hope we don't stop dreaming for or singing for, for Israel?
- Eric Yoffie: Look. What do we conclude? We can't simply sing Hatikvah. We can't simply engage in selective admiration for the good while ignoring the bad. But neither can we [Hebrew 01:18:17] and turn our backs on Israel because loving Israel may be a little bit harder now than it once was now that we realize Israel is not Disneyland. We need not pretend that all is well in Zion or that the dream has been fulfilled or that the redemption is at hand.
- Eric Yoffie: We have to see Israel for what she is, a country of people who are at war with their neighbors and unsure after two millennia of dependence on others of how to conduct her own affairs. But this is the final conclusion. This is the final conclusion.
- Eric Yoffie: What we end up with ultimately is this and maybe only this. Whatever else we do, now and always, we are lovers of Zion in the old fashioned way. In sickness and in health. For better or for worse. Until death do us part. That's the lesson.
- Bari Weiss: I can't top that. All right, I'll just say some stuff. But just keep that in mind. I can't top it.
- Bari Weiss: I would say two things. One, I remember an interaction I had recently with this hipster chef guy, not Jewish. He said to me, "You know, I just went to Israel. I just went on this trip to Israel. They were organizing it for different chefs. I got to go." And I was sort of, "Oh God. Am I going to have to get into a political debate? I just want to have dinner." He was like, "It was amazing. It was completely amazing. I had the best food in my life. The people were incredible. The women are gorgeous." And I'm like, "Yeah. You're right." I think that sometimes that gets lost. And especially those of us who are constantly engaged in political battles. That sort of gets lost.
- Bari Weiss: The other thing, which is what I said before, but I really try and keep this at the forefront of my mind especially when I'm writing pieces like the ones you referenced that are critical. I'm always trying to do it from a place of love. That love is very genuine. Really what I wish for everyone in this room is to have a connection to Israel complicated love, but love and real and based on what it actually is and not just of the idea of it.
- Esther Lederman: Amen.