

# Young Zionist

## Groundbreaking Moments

*Tash Kalmanson*

In my experience there are ground breaking, life altering moments, where you have to take stock and reflect on what has just happened. These are the moments where you feel that nothing will ever be the same, where you seriously have to reconsider the priorities in your life and address what is really important to you.

Five days ago I returned from leading tour. This was one of those moments. It reminded me not only of the importance of FZY in my life but how the movement has the potential to change the lives of so many others. **Tour is an experience which I shall never forget; one that has challenged me as a leader and a person.** A truly unbelievable month thanks to my *tsevet*(staff) and my forty *chanichim* (participants). These *chanichim*, who were at first just forty names on a sheet, are now so important to me. Tour 5, for all of us, became our second family. They are not just the people who made me smile each morning and laugh each night, but young, passionate British Jews who never ceased to amaze me at various points throughout our journey and who inspired me, just as I had hoped to inspire them.

Despite wishing I could write my dissertation on this past month, my Tour experience is not the sole purpose of this article. However, I felt that I had to set the scene before another groundbreaking moment occurred; one that interrupted my euphoric feelings from such an incredible month in Israel.

As it is with old school friends, you meet up at intervals in the holidays and have a good catch up; at least that is the plan. That was the plan for the evening when I had arranged to meet up with one of my closest friends. Naturally we were engrossed in conversation, chatting away happily, content to be in each other's company, reminiscing about shenanigans from school.

Suddenly Israel came up in discussion. Fine. Having never been to Israel, my friend's only source on this subject was a TV documentary. **After many Israel advocacy classes and Israel updates throughout my FZY journey, I felt confident enough to hold my own in this potential battlefield of conversation.** However, it is ridiculous that, from having a laughing fit with my friend about an old teacher, a switch clicked and the next minute I was feeling increasingly uncomfortable about what I was hearing. I felt as though everything I believe in was being challenged. As time passed I felt that this was becoming more of an attack on Israel's actions, my ears pricked, this innate animal instinct, ready to launch into defensive mode. *Magen* (defence of Jewish rights). I never thought I'd be putting this into use in my own home. The debate had now turned into more of an argument and I could feel myself getting simultaneously angry and upset. All I could hear are Michael Freeman's words ringing in my head, "Do not lose it". Yet, as an emotive person, it is still hard for me to keep a cool head. Then, the question which triggered this whole article and has had my insides spinning ever since was uttered: "Do you think that Israel should have been created?" My first instinct, right or wrong, was to throw my friend out of my house. I didn't. I was very tempted but I didn't. In that pause I looked down at my silver pendant, the map of Israel, hanging round my neck. I sat there and answered in a surprisingly calm voice. I

reminded my friend from which country I had just returned, which country I had spent the best year of my life and which country my brother has been living this past year. I reminded my friend that I am a Zionist. Nothing else needed to be said.

Around 480 sixteen year old *chanichim*, from twelve FZY tours have just had a month in Israel that, like me, they will never forget. For some, it was their first time in the Holy Land, yet for all, they left with a greater understanding, connection and love for the Jewish State. We shared with them the importance of *Magen*, and taught them to relay their experiences of a country which they have now grown to love, yet the world media still loves to hate. Despite this, I never thought I would need to defend Israel so soon upon my return.

Unfortunately at Nottingham University, it is customary to have to combat the ‘Zionism is racism’ slurs erupting from ignorant students but, being caught unawares and challenged by someone close to you, in your comfort zone, suddenly means so much more. The impact of the debate is magnified.

Sentences kept running through my head. The anger and upset was beginning to be overshadowed by a deep worry. If my friend who has grown up with me, knows me and loves me can think that, as an intelligent person, then surely everyone in England is of that mindset? Never before have I felt so ill at ease in the safety of my own home.

I began by stating that after these epic moments, you do not feel the same and you need to rethink what is important in your life. **Whilst other friends have focused on getting on the career ladder and fighting over internships, I now feel that the work of FZY is more important than ever and am proud that it is an integral part of my life.** Being a leader in FZY and taking Tour is something that I have always wanted to do. My Tour *madrich* (leader) greatly inspired me and I wanted to share my love and excitement for Israel with the next generation of FZYniks. It is something I strongly believe in. The sense of achievement which I now feel is unparalleled, as I reflect on the rollercoaster of a journey that my *chanichim*, my co and I made together. Watching the group bond through the heat of the desert, the mountainous hikes, the refreshing splash of the waterfalls, the heart beat of Jerusalem, the rush of Tel Aviv, the breeze by the Kinneret, the ruach at the Maccabiah, the silence at Har Herzl, the laughter in the *onegim* (Friday after-dinner activities), the tears at the Kotel... has taken my love for Israel to a new level.

Both these groundbreaking moments, though they could not have been more different, reminded me of the priorities in my life. Yes, I want to get a good degree. Yes, at some stage I want to join my friends on the career ladder. But for now, I know that what I am doing, what I did this past month and what I will continue to do is the right path for me. Even if I only affected one *chanich* this summer, just like our beloved starfish story, “I made a difference to that one”.

Tash is the current Tzedakah Officer.