

Young Zionist

Should We Be Focusing On Mending Israel From Within Or From the Outside In?

Rachel Okin & Lauren Topper debate

RACH: I just got this suggestion for a Magen debate:

'Is Magen in FZY overly concerned with external hasbara when we should be focusing on mending Israel from within. Or is the existential threat to Israel's legitimacy from abroad too important to not focus on?'

- but what on earth is that meant to mean?

LAUREN: I took it to be asking whether or not we should be focussing on explaining and defending the matzav in Israel to those who hold an overtly negative opinion based upon biased news, or whether as Zionists we should concentrate on healing the problems within Israel...

RACH: Hmmmm, how interesting. Its amazing how from reading the same sentences we can both look at it from such different perspectives. I personally thought it was more concerned with aliyah and whether it would be an ideal situation if everyone theoretically was to make aliyah - or is it necessary to keep some 'magen-mouths' behind in the diaspora?

LAUREN: Good thing there are two of us - we can cover all aspects of Magen this way! So let us answer both questions. I believe that ultimately the future of the Jewish people belongs in the Land of Israel. However, realistically this would be a very long term ideal, which may not be achieved for generations. Until the time that this dream becomes a reality, whilst living in Galut, we must ensure that all Jews have the right to self-determination. This includes the right to call themselves Zionists without being deemed racist. For as long as there is a diaspora, hasbara must be in place, possibly as much as an internal focus upon Israel???

RACH: The whole discussion of whether all the Jews should move to Israel, I believe should be saved for another time - we could be here all week if we continue with it.... As for the question you posed, I most definitely believe that hasbara and the diaspora go hand in hand. Magen is defence of Jewish rights, therefore surely the activism and awareness we can raise inside the diaspora is more important than what can be done in Israel. There is no 'possibly' about it.

LAUREN: Ok! Point taken!! Just one more thing on this issue -from the end of the Second World War, with the world discovering the atrocities of the Shoah, it became generally frowned upon to express anti-semitism. However, sixty years on, threats to Jewish communities, such as those on continental Europe, have massively increased. This I believe is intrinsically linked to growing anti-Zionist sentiment, which goes further than disagreeing with Israeli governmental decisions, but questions the legitimacy of the state itself and deems the Jewish people declaring themselves as a nation, to be racist. *breathe* Therefore, I would say external hasbara is indeed too important to ignore.

RACH: I don't think the question is whether we are ignoring it, I think it is just a matter of where our priorities lie. Once again, would you believe twice in one evening, I agree with you! Although not in all cases..... it is important to state I believe anti- semitism is not anti-zionism (exemplified by the BNP!) although more and more we are moving in the direction where they are no doubt being twisted and tangled together (but we will save that for another time).

Moving on.....its all very well us saying we should be active within Israel but in reality what are the practicalities of it?

LAUREN: Wow - I'm in shock - agree with me?!! Although I love a good debate I'll ignore the whole anti-zionism versus anti-semitism malarkey! To be honest, one can't do as much from Manchester (or wherever else in the diaspora) as one could do whilst living within Israeli society. However, the beauty of FZY is that we take chanichim and educate them about their Zionist heritage and show them Israel, introducing each person to a plethora of issues and debates. The FZY bogrim are there to create a positive dugma on how to be active and do as much as possible for the Jewish people as a nation and our own homeland. It is for bogrim to create this dugma whilst living in the diaspora, and then to ultimately fulfil our ideology by making aliyah and continuing our magen ideals whilst living the dream.

RACH: In conclusion, I think one point we can take from this is that we both have very different views on varying aspects of magen. 'Tis good to have a healthy discussion every now and then!! There are many ways we can be active and be ambassadors to Israel and in this day it is most definitely imperative that we do so. Join the debate at www.fzy.org.uk/interact - be interactive! Send any hate mail to Lauren! Cheers.

LAUREN: Oy!