



THE JERUSALEM POST



# Celebrating Zionism's Big, Bold, and Visionary Young Leaders

By JNF-USA Staff



The World Zionist Village will bring together Zionists from around the world for a new conversation, one where they will celebrate all that unites them (Courtesy JNF-USA)

One hundred years before Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok, a young journalist achieved something unimaginable: He reignited our Jewish People's 2,000-year-old dream of coming home to Israel. Of course, we are talking about the original Zionist "influencer," Theodor Herzl. It is hard to imagine someone so young having such an impact. Yet, his powerful words and clarity of mission inspired future generations to connect with their heritage and ancient Homeland.

In this inaugural *Jerusalem Post* Top 25 Young Vizionaries list, we see incredible young people following in Herzl's footsteps as they inspire millions worldwide to stand up, support, and celebrate our Jewish Homeland. This list is an important reminder that our People's best days are yet to come.

Our next generation has different needs, aspirations, and desires than the generations that

came before them. Our young leaders are more energized than ever – yet they want a seat at the table, and they want it now.

We see the irrepressible ambition of our future leaders in the 20,000 students from kindergarten to grade eight who participate in Jewish National Fund-USA's annual Zionist education programming; in the 1,500 students who attend Alexander Muss High School in Israel (Muss), of which 51% are from non-Jewish schools and 70% of their parents have never been to Israel; and in the thousands of Israeli teenagers in the Negev and Galilee who we support through outdoor education and community service initiatives.

We also see it in our JNFuture members – our fastest-growing donor society for 22-40-year-old young professionals. In fact, we do not just promise our JNFuture members a seat at the table; we mandate it. From our national board to our local chapters and



Jewish National Fund-USA supports young Zionist Pioneers in Israel's Negev and Galilee (Courtesy: JNF-USA)

committees, they are part of every critical decision our organization makes.

## Be Bold. Our Future is Bright

We cannot only see the world through the lens of "ov vey." We must see the opportunities and boundless possibilities – many

of which, or more specifically, whom, are right in front of us. If you are blessed with grandchildren or children, let us acknowledge that they are our community's future leaders. Bring them along to your next board meeting at your federations, JCCs, and synagogues. Show them the magic (and hard work) that goes





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into bringing our Zionist community together.

Travel with your children to Israel and show them their heritage. Or better yet, enroll them in one of the many high school study abroad experiences. Whether it is through programs like the Conservative Movement's Ramah TRY, the Reform Movement's Heller High, or Muss, there's no better way to strengthen their connection to our Jewish Homeland than experiencing 4,000 years of their heritage right where it happened.

Perhaps most importantly, involve them in your discussions about philanthropic giving. Show them the impact they too can have - not just on our tomorrow, but on today.

And through initiatives like Dream Israel, where teenagers can earn up to \$7,500 towards their study abroad in Israel experience by fundraising for a specific project, they can learn firsthand about the power of giving.

### Turning Words Into Action

Let us embrace our young people who want to lead - and respond to their passion with action. Over the past decade, Jewish National Fund-USA has invested \$250 million in Zionist education and engagement as part of our recently achieved one billion dollar fundraising campaign. At Jewish National Fund USA, we call our strategy: "From Birth to the Boardroom," and it is a methodology that other organizations in our Zionist world can emulate.

Our strategy is powered by our Israel Continuum, Zionist educational programming that supports our kids every step of the way. From preschool to eighth grade, we engage students through fun and dynamic programming like Blue Box Bob, Tu BiShvat in the Schools, B'nei Mitzvot Programs, and Plant Your Way to Israel. Then, our Sababa Society compliments these efforts with tweens and teens, connecting them to Israel through education, engagement, and fundraisers.

If we do not educate Jewish teenagers on how to become informed and proud advocates for Israel before they get to college, it is sometimes too late. That is why during their critical high school years, we bring students to Muss where they are immersed in an environment of academic excellence and excel in everything from AP Calculus to English Literature. Yet, they also walk in the footsteps of our Jewish heroes.

They see that they are a part of a winning team called the Jewish People, and they learn to take pride in their connection to the land and people of Israel and to their respective Jewish communities.

There is a story of a young woman who graduated from Muss and went on to study at Harvard. Yet, that is not the most impressive part. Rather, her father who sits on his local synagogue board faced a crisis with other board members seeking to disassociate the congregation from anything to do with Israel. Her father did not know what to do so turned to his daughter for advice. Based on her own experiences in Israel and at Muss, she had the tools to identify the misinformation behind the board's proposed action. She then gave her father the necessary talking points and arguments to defeat the anti-Israel motion.

Wow! Talk about leadership. There are countless other examples of our young people who feel empowered to stand up for Israel and become informed advocates because of the firsthand experiences they gained on a long-term program in our Jewish Homeland.

### Backing Pro-Israel Students and Faculty on Campus

College is a time when students explore their identities, affiliations, and passions. However, it is also a moment in their lives when they are confronted with hate and disinformation about Israel and the Jewish People.

It is important that we bring like-minded students together to find camaraderie in each other and pride in their Zionism. Our JNF on Campus Leadership Program supports highly networked students from all over the United States who are passionate about Zionism and want to share it with their friends, classmates, and communities.

Our Leadership Program trains, mentors, and supports extraordinary students as they play a critical role in recruiting for our two major programs: Alternative Break and College Summit.

Complementing our work in universities are organizations like the Israel on Campus Coalition, Students Supporting Israel, and Yavneh on Campus which are supported with grant funding from the JNF Boruchin Center.

And it is not just Jewish students that are finding their voice for Israel.

Our Caravan for Democracy initiative and Faculty Fellowship



The Zionist world's future leaders are being inspired today at the Alexander Muss High School in Israel. (Courtesy JNF-USA)



JNFuture young leaders explore Israel's rich heritage while visiting many of their philanthropic investments.

Program in Israel have sent thousands of college students and faculty members beyond the Jewish faith to Israel to see what's really happening on the ground. Unsurprisingly, they return home with a new perspective and appreciation for what Israel and Zionism have contributed to the world. They also become powerful allies and advocates for our Homeland as they call out and confront those who seek to delegitimize Israel.

### Sparking New Conversations

The future of Zionism depends on all of us to be a part of the conversation. Our Zionist community is blessed to have numerous supporters from different backgrounds and perspectives, yet if we are to continue to succeed, we have to be talking with each other. That is why our planned \$350 million 21-acre World Zionist Village will spark new and exciting conversations about leadership, unity, and our shared destiny.

Importantly, the Village will bring young Zionists from every corner of the globe together to meet and plan for our movement's future prosperity. It will

also support efforts to bridge the growing divide between Diaspora Jewry and Israel.

Imagine a place where Jewish high school teenagers from around the world will come and meet with their Israeli peers just before their army service. Think about the powerful conversations that will be sparked between these two groups. They will talk about their unique backgrounds, beliefs, and hopes for their futures, and our Village will support them in celebrating what truly unites them.

### Looking to the Future

As we celebrate this year's Top 25 Young Vizionaries, what truly stands out is the depth of diversity, level of creativity, and overwhelming pride in our Zionist movement represented by those included on the list.

Whether they are involved in grassroots advocacy, have tens of thousands of social media followers, or are proudly showing their support for Israel in the arts, sports, media, and elsewhere, they all represent the millions of young Zionists around the world who are ready to embrace their destiny and be the torchbearers of Zionism's future.