

A MESSAGE FROM — OUR PRESIDENT —

JEFFREY E. LEVINE

THE LEGACY OF ISRAEL'S INDEPENDENCE

Independence. Perhaps no other word has come to mean so many things to so many people. For Americans, nearly 240 years has passed since our Founding Fathers pledged their “lives, fortunes, and sacred honor” on a document that serves as the common denominator in modern democracy.

It was our 33rd president, Harry S. Truman, a farmer's son from Missouri, who, after meeting Chaim Weizmann in the Oval Office in 1948, became convinced that destiny meant for him to use his office to champion for the statehood of Israel. On May 14, 1948, after Israel's own Declaration of Independence was announced to the world, the United States became the first to recognize Israel; others followed.

The road traveled since then has not always been easy. Then again, independence does not come easy, or without great rigor and pain. Fortunately, Jewish National Fund has been there every step of the way and continues to support, encourage, and invest in Israel's future so that the generations to come will have greater opportunities to succeed.

Growing up in Brooklyn, on a street named Herzl, one could say my path and connection to JNF was a matter of fate. While that may be true, it was indeed my parents, Irene and Irving Levine, themselves children of Eastern European immigrants, who early on shared the dream of Israel and displayed the JNF Blue Box in our home. That connection to Israel through JNF beckoned me to give to this great organization.

That tradition continues in my own family with my wife, Randi, a Sapphire Society member, who has hosted many events and receptions to raise awareness and funds for JNF, and with our three children, Ben, Jessica and Dara, who serve on the boards and lead programs with JNFfuture. As with many young people, they are linked to Israel because of an experience there, be it on Birthright, Alternative Spring Break, a study abroad program at Alexander Muss High School in Israel, or a family trip or JNF mission. Like most who visit, they never truly leave. The spirit of Israel - the land and its people - stays with you forever.

As we celebrate our homeland's pathway to independence, I hope you enjoy the many stories in this issue of B'Yachad that feature that spirit of Israel, the people that we call family, and the land that means so much to so many.

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