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WHY WE ARE SAYING YIZKOR FOR ISRAELI'S FALLEN

My father was a very proud American. I grew up in one of those American families where we went outside to pledge allegiance to the flag every holiday, and wore red, white and blue most days of our lives until we could get our own clothes.

Yet, though I was six, I can still remember my father's jubilation when Israel won the Six Day War. He cheered the same way he cheered me years later at swim meets and band contests. Loudly, with tears, and a bit embarrassing for a man who was normally quiet.

We are also proudly American, sometimes more proud and sometimes less, but we are American. So why do we honor those that fought and died for the State of Israel? One reason is because they are part of our family, children of Abraham and Sarah, and our fates are connected. Those that died for Israel include refugees from pogroms in Russian and Ukraine, ghetto fighters in Warsaw, traumatized survivors coming from DP camps after the horrors of the Shoah. By the Six Day War, they were also Jewish people fleeing violence and expulsion, coming with nothing from all over the Arab world. Those who fought Israel's early wars were refugees, just like our ancestors that came here, or to Canada fleeing from the same violence and hardship. And yet, having survived what they did they unflinchingly said, "NO MORE" and found the strength to fight for their survival. How many of us would have that courage after such trauma?

We also honor them because our lives are better because of the State of Israel. While today there is certainly a lot of negative talk about Israel, some of it deserved, some of it blatantly anti-Semitic in nature, it is hard to imagine what would have happened to the Jewish people after the Holocaust if Israel had been defeated in 1948 along with all the refugees who had made it there, refugees who were not permitted to enter legally, but were also not permitted to come to the US, Canada, Britain, or other nations in the numbers that were needed. We can't imagine our response to the Holocaust as Jews without Israel. As much as we

sometimes feel uncomfortable with Israel's power, we easily forget that power earned us new respect. Israel was there for the Jewish people, there for the Russian Jews there for the Ethiopian Jews, the Yemenite Jews, the list is long. It is easy to take that for granted, and only look at the conflict, and not the gift to each of us that it means to live in a time our ancestors could only dream and pray about.

So we honor these who have made it possible for us to live in a time where Israel exists, for all its warts and conflicts, for all its political turmoil and also for its chutzpah, it's spine, and most of all its people, who are our people as well.