

ISRAEL@70

What Israel Means to Me: Robbie Friedmann

Here's what the GILEE founding director has to say as we celebrate Israel's 70th birthday.

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A 2014 delegation of American law enforcement officials organized by GILEE visits the Israeli police commissioner's office. The Hebrew inscription on the wall is from Deuteronomy 16:18: "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates."

Israel is nothing short of a miracle, which should not be taken for granted as Israel continues to face existential challenges where her very right to exist is being delegitimized and the country is under constant attack. Israel was established against all odds and has faced ongoing threats ever since. The foundations of the country were laid down starting in 1882, and it had all elements of a nascent state well before 1948. The War of Independence resulted in an unprecedented development in all areas, yet constant wars and massive terror attacks ensued.

Yet look at the tremendous achievements in education, agriculture, industry, high tech, innovation, space exploration, medicine, science, absorption of immigrants, influential cuisine, and the list is long. Israelis have won 12 Nobel Prizes. No other country's achievements match those of Israel in such a short time and from such a disadvantaged starting point. Indeed, it is much more than just the Start-Up Nation. Israel now is a vibrant, modern society with new and ongoing challenges, yet there is a spirit of humanity, fairness, kindness and assistance to those in need.

Israel is not perfect. No country is. But as Israel celebrates its 70th anniversary, the sense of achievement and the pride are well deserved. Above all, Israel is an island of democracy in a sea of hostile countries and groups, and its spirit soars well above matter. Israel is glad to share its experience and know-how with those who seek it and is indeed a light unto the nations.