

How The Z3 Project is helping to create a stronger and more unified Jewish future through meaningful discourse about what it means to be a Jew in the world today



“In today’s world, if we have different opinions with someone we’re on different teams and we don’t talk to each other. The way to remain one people is to learn how to be in the same room with each other, have meaningful and respectful discussions about Israel and Jewish life that involve different perspectives, and then go out for dinner afterwards.

It’s not easy — but if we give people the permission to learn and engage, we’ll be able to make progress as a people. The Z3 Project provides the opportunity to do that.”

Todd Rockoff

President & CEO
Tucson Jewish Community Center



The Zionism 3.0 (Z3) Project is an initiative of the Oshman Family Jewish Community Center in Palo Alto, California. The project's vision is for a flourishing Jewish future that stems from a relationship between Diaspora Jewry and Israel that's based in Jewish Peoplehood, mutuality, and shared destiny.

HIGHLIGHTS

Challenges

- In the last few decades, the relationship between Diaspora Jewry and Israel has not evolved to match the growth and self-reliance that both populations have obtained
- This has led to cyclical division, disagreement, and disconnection that threatens the vitality (and future) of a unified Jewish People
- While the Hamas terror invasion on October 7, 2023 did unify us, the current lack of conceptual infrastructure around a shared peoplehood makes reverting to old patterns likely
- It is clear that an evolved Zionism is needed, one that unifies around a shared Jewish Peoplehood and cultivates strong, confident, and inclusive Jewish communities around the world

Solution

- The Z3 Project is a philosophy and a platform that provides thought leadership; education and conversation; and leadership training designed to revolutionize generational perspectives on Jewish communal life and identity, and build communities that are inclusive, inquisitive, unabashedly Jewish, and proudly Zionist

Results

- Organizational and culture change within JCCs and local communities, and ultimately a mindset shift among individuals
- Deeper conversations that are inspiring understanding between groups or people with differing views
- A broader understanding of the full fabric of Jewish identity and a deeper sense of pride in being a member of the Jewish People

Challenges

Moving past an old model of Zionism and changing the contemporary understanding of what it means to be Jewish in the world today

Zionism 2.0 began in 1948 with the declaration of Israel's independence, followed by roughly five decades of establishing, protecting, and building a home for the dispersed Jewish People.

Not only did Israel need to navigate the enormous task of setting up a democracy, they also absorbed huge waves of immigrants, endured wars, overcame an economic crisis, and signed major peace treaties.

Most Jews around the world were inspired and unified around Israel's rebirth and growth, and regarded it as a source of connection and pride – while many Jews in Israel excitedly awaited the day the Diaspora would take up their place at home.

Yet as Israel was exploring its independence and building its presence as a nation, the Diaspora was strengthening its identity and independence, too.

Soon, disagreements and divisions arose on a variety of issues from both sides, which led many in the Diaspora – who were already disconnected physically – to begin disconnecting spiritually and emotionally, too.

“For people from my generation, we grew up with this notion that Israel was a ‘cool idea’ and an essential part of our Jewish Identity, so we embraced it,” said Todd Rockoff, President and CEO of Tucson Jewish Community Center.

“When the Lebanon War was starting, there had already been The Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War, and people my age started to debate or question what was happening in Israel. This may have caused some to tune out.”



As the state of Israel continued to establish itself, and the Diaspora continued to develop as well, the same divisions and disagreements only grew stronger.

By the time both populations had officially evolved to be self-reliant, each had cultivated distinct forms of Judaism. Because of this, the dialogue between them — and about them — had become more confrontational.

For many in the Diaspora, Israel had become too political, too religious, and/or too complicated.

And for many Israelis, the Diaspora's decision to continue living away from Home after all the struggle to secure our Homeland sent resentment soaring.

Fast forward, and this conflict has created layers of negative impacts among both Jewish populations, the worst of which — according to Alon — is indifference.

On the flipside, Israeli Jews didn't disconnect from the Diaspora; most had never been connected at all.

"Growing up in Israel, the Israel/Diaspora relationship was so absent from the socialization process that it wasn't until I was 22 that I met the concept of Jewish life outside of Israel," said Alon Friedman, Founding Executive Director of Enter: The Jewish Peoplehood Alliance. "I had no concept of them or their experience of being Jewish."

"Indifference is the biggest modern threat to the Jewish People," Alon said. "Indifference creates inaction, but it can also lead to impatience, antagonism, and undermining, because you think, who cares?"



“Between this and the millions of Jews who are disengaged from Jewish life and nowhere to be found, the million dollar question of the Jewish world is: ‘How do we engage the unengaged?’”

The continual conflict has also raised fundamental questions about the future of Jewish life.

Will there continue to be an intersection and a relationship between Israel and the

Diaspora, or will two separate and distinct Jewish populations and cultures develop over the next several generations?

What would that mean for the future of Jewish life?

What is truly necessary to evolve and support a successful relationship between two strong, self-sufficient, and unique Jewish populations?

And then came the Hamas terror invasion on October 7, 2023.

While on one hand the sheer horror of the invasion brought both populations together, it also illuminated the shattering of established concepts both in Israel and abroad.

In Israel this includes a shift in the Israeli psyche around their sense of security and social fabric. And for the Diaspora, specifically those in the U.S., this includes a reevaluation of longstanding modalities and approaches to communal life.

Without significant investment in new ideas, reverting back to old patterns of conflict, resentment, and indifference is highly likely.

Thus, new strategies and pathways that seek to answer these fundamental questions and reimagine and strengthen the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora are essential to cultivating a more secure and robust Jewish future — especially in this current environment where the engagement and motivation among Jews is high.

Solution

Evolving Zionism to focus on our shared Jewish Peoplehood and cultivating global Jewish communities that are inclusive and inquisitive

The Z3 Project exists to provide these new strategies and pathways that are so essential for our future — all with the goal of developing a relationship between Diaspora Jewry and Israel that unifies us in a new way and cultivates community and confidence among Jewish People no matter where they live.

That new way is an evolved Zionism — Zionism 3.0 — that unifies around our shared Jewish Peoplehood, a mutual respect for each other, and our shared goal for a flourishing Jewish future.

An evolved Zionism that encourages us to stop focusing first on our differences, and instead acknowledge that at the root we are the same.

An evolved Zionism that helps us see Israel in a new light — not as a political state with laws and policies we either agree or disagree with, but as a unifying concept and a very relevant part of our Jewish history and identity.

And an evolved Zionism that helps us broaden our understanding of what it means to be Jewish — for us and for Jews around the world.

Through its unique position within the Oshman Family Jewish Community Center and the Palo Alto community itself, The

Z3 Project has been working hard to make progress on all of the above through its comprehensive programming that includes three intersecting strategies:

1. Producing **thought leadership** that will nurture new thinking around an evolved Zionism rooted in Jewish Peoplehood through the Z3 Institute of Jewish Priorities
2. Providing **grassroots education and opportunities to convene** around cutting-edge conversations and ideas at the annual Z3 Conference and other events
3. **Providing leadership training to diverse groups of Jewish professionals** through Z3 Leadership Labs so that they can integrate the Z3 approach into their specific communal settings



Results

A growing understanding of our Jewish Peoplehood and deeper conversations that are inspiring connection and real change

Since its inception in 2015, The Z3 Project has convened influential voices spanning the cultural, educational, religious, and political realms, fostering dynamic debates, insightful conversations, enriching learning experiences, and personal exploration of various dimensions of Zionism.

Thanks to its positioning within the JCC movement, Z3 has served both a practical and symbolic role, offering a context for Jewish engagement in a non-religious, multi-generational public square that provides diverse services, events, and community experiences for the contemporary Jew.

For Todd Rockoff, the impacts he's seen from participating in The Z3 Project have included new knowledge, perspective, and inspiration that's reinforced his drive — and progress — to make Israel more accessible and relevant for those at his JCC.

“For my entire career I’ve felt that Israel is an embedded and important part of Jewish life and living, not ‘something else’ we only do in May or focus on for one day at camp,” Todd said.

“When I came on to lead Tucson JCC, I spent the first couple years working to increase the presence of Israel in our organization and create a deeper connection to it among our staff. I wanted to figure out how to present Israel in our community in a way that was accessible and relevant.”



“I think that Israel has been a struggle within JCCs, not because of a lack of desire but in trying to figure out where it fits, especially as Israel became less reliant and there wasn't the same need to support the poor.”

“I had been thinking deeply about Jewish Peoplehood and our connection with one another. In my view, Israel has always been to the world Jewish community what the JCCs

are to the local Jewish community — a place for all Jews regardless of your denomination and affiliation. **There's a kindred spirit that should be animated,** and when I heard about The Z3 Project, its philosophy and programming really spoke to that.”

Since 2019, Todd has attended the Z3 Conference every year as well as participated in two Z3 Leadership Labs — and throughout the years of his involvement he's seen lots of growth and change in his JCC.

One such change involves The Israel Center in Tucson, which has always been a partnership between the Federation (now Jewish Philanthropies of Southern Arizona) and the Tucson JCC.

The Tucson JCC lobbied to add capacity to the Israel Center by adding a permanent department director in addition to bringing a Senior Shlaliach/Shlichah to the community. They've also taken increasingly more leadership from a programmatic standpoint by integrating the work of the Israel Center into the Jewish Life and Engagement Department, so that they

can better help the Tucson community see Israel as an embedded part of their individual and collective Jewish identities.

“This has opened up the opportunity to maximize the platform and offer programs to our community at an affordable price.”

“The Federation provides the funding, and much of the programming is here with us, and because of that, Israel is a part of our conversation with our board, and we're able to do more for our community and our staff, such as taking people on seminars to Israel,” Todd said.

Speaking of the JCC staff, Todd's participation in Z3 has opened the door to so many conversations about Israel and their individual places in the Jewish Peoplehood.

They also spend professional development time learning about Zionism, Israel's history, and reading the Torah — all to acquire literacy and an understanding of Jewish Peoplehood that can allow them to have more informed conversations and stay open to different points of view.

“We had a fascinating conversation with our staff after reading the Torah portion of Chayei Sarah,” Todd said. “We talked about how this portion makes what's



happening in the West Bank so complicated because it's what the very religious are holding onto thousands of years later as a space to bury people. We can agree or disagree about the situation, but at least we all understand the background.

“This is what the platform of Z3 is helping us do — to read, educate, and talk, and to have the ability to carry on a conversation. Just because we're a peoplehood doesn't mean we can't have different opinions, and the hypothesis behind Z3 is that if we can be in the same room and we can have meaningful discussions then we can remain one people.”

Along with inspiring deeper conversations at an organization level, The Z3 Project is also inspiring impactful conversations at a local and individual level, too.

For Shai Weingarten, who sits on the Z3 Committee as well as attends events and workshops local to the Palo Alto, CA area, Z3 has helped her converse more meaningfully in her community.

“One of the biggest benefits of Z3 is the common language it provides,” Shai said. “One reason I'm a part of Z3 is to bring more people into the conversation and to put language to things we might not have known how to express so we can have a better understanding of ourselves and others, find our core values, and enhance our unity — even when we're very different in our experiences.

“What I've learned in Z3 has helped me



in my local community. For example, one of my kid's schools was having a benefit, and there were some from the Israeli community who thought the tickets were too expensive and they weren't going to go. I hosted an evening with the school principal, the school board, and the Israeli community so that everyone could share their perspectives and listen to each other.

“That conversation changed things. The Israelis understood the school better and what it meant to be part of the school community, and the school understood the Israeli community better and what they needed to participate. It was an uncomfortable conversation, but it moved us out of our “sides” and uncovered what needed to be done so we could meet in the middle.

“Those conversations make a difference, and it's fundamentally what Z3 is all about.”

A foundation to build, connect, and partner on.

Certainly, evolving to this new model of Zionism is no easy task, and requires a great deal of work.

It requires the willingness to open our minds to other perspectives, viewpoints, and opinions, and to seek to understand Jews from other backgrounds, ethnic identities, religious subgroups, and nationalities.

It requires the willingness to learn about our Jewish heritage and history; understand Israel's important place in Jewish life; and explore what makes Israel and the Diaspora powerful and unique populations.

And it requires the willingness to find safe spaces to engage with other Jews from all walks of life and actually *practice being a people*.

The Z3 Project is one of those safe spaces to practice being a people.

A place where there are no sides, just perspectives, and *everyone is welcome*.

A place where it's ok to ask questions, admit you don't know, and respectfully agree to disagree.

And a place where conversations about politics or religion aren't off-limit topics, but



opportunities to expand, learn, and grow.

The Z3 Project is truly a “third space” where Jews (and non-Jews) can gather together to do the difficult, messy, and often uncomfortable work of evolving how we engage with each other, as well as cultivate stronger, more confident communities that are rooted in their shared Jewish identity.

We believe it's through our shared identity and a stronger global community that we can collectively and successfully navigate Jewish life today — and ultimately co-create a robust Jewish future that respects and celebrates the distinct strengths of each center of Jewish life, as well as the unique individual aspects of us all.

“A rainbow isn't a rainbow without all of the colors, and you can't see a picture that is only black or only white,” Shai said. “We need contrast. It's only when we appreciate and accept people's differences that we see the full picture of our Jewish identity. It's in acceptance that we truly become one.”



To learn more about The Z3 Project, visit z3project.org.