

Letters To The Editor – January 2, 2026

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A Pre-State Religious Zionist Icon in America

I was deeply touched by Rabbi Aaron I. Reichel's narration of the life of his eminent grandfather, Rabbi Dr. Herbert S. Goldstein, in his opinion piece, "A Model of Pre-State American Zionism" (Dec, 26, 2025). Espousing Torah values and a religious way of life as a *sine qua non* to the Zionist dream, Rabbi Goldstein effectively mounted a strong resistance to the prevailing views of Zionism in the first half of the twentieth century wherein secularity took precedence over religion.

Responding to the currents of those times, his grandfather presciently transformed his shul, later known as the West Side Institutional Synagogue, into a major center for Jewish life. He did so by bringing in a multitude of athletic, social, and literacy "clubs," which drew large numbers of Jews to his shul and prevented them from slipping into the perilous anonymity of secular life. In essence, the shul served as the greatest weapon against the forces of assimilation that washed over much of American Jewry at that time, while imbuing community members with a Zionist zeal that had so remarkably shaped the lives of his illustrious grandfather and his children.

I can relate. My mother was a lifelong friend of Herman Wouk, whom she came to know as a fellow camper up in Milton, Vermont in the late 1920s. According to my mother's account, the camp director, Sam Borowsky, who served as president of the Borough Park Zionist Organization, instilled in the campers both religion and Zionism as inextricably tied. Herman Wouk was a great admirer of Rabbi Goldstein, principally because he was able to so persuasively infuse Zionism, religion, and a balanced form of secularism into all those who came within his orbit. Rabbi Reichel's illuminating op-ed captures the passion of his grandfather's unflagging commitment to Zionism – including enduring a long and difficult nautical voyage in the 1950s which he made into a yearly occurrence – which enabled him to serve as a role model both during his time and for generations later.

Commitment and zeal never fade with time. And neither will the name "Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein."

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