



Proud of my religion



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My name is Tali, and I am proud. I am Jewish and proud to be. I am a Zionist and proud to be. I wear my Haï and I am proud to wear it and show it. I love Israel and I am proud to love this country. And if I wear the flag of Israel, I am very proud to show that it is on my shoulders.

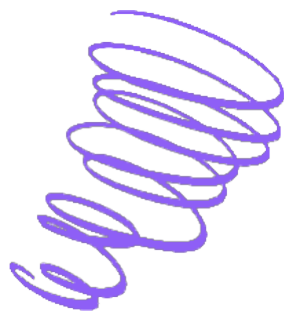


My name is Tali. I was born in Brussels on August 19, 2005, into a Sephardic Jewish family. My father comes from a religious family, while my mother had almost no connection to religion during her childhood. I am the eldest in my family, with a younger sister and a younger brother who make me proud every day.

Why specify my date of birth? Because it coincides with Tu B'Av, the Valentine's Day of the Hebrew calendar. This is very symbolic for me as it gives me a true connection to two dates in two different calendars.

My origins are very important to me, and it is essential for me to trace back to the time of my great-grandparents when I speak about them. I am, therefore, a Jewish woman of Iranian, Egyptian, Turkish, Greek, Moroccan, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian heritage.

I have always grown up surrounded by religion and the Zionist Jewish youth movements of Brussels. I have always felt deeply Jewish, whether it was during Saturday lunches when I would celebrate Shabbat at my grandparents' house, Jewish holidays, my Jewish primary school, youth movements, or trips to Israel with my family, school, or youth movements. I have always needed this connection to religion. This connection has allowed me to hold on to something meaningful in my life and in this world.



At the age of six, I joined Jewish youth movements. I spent eight years at Hashomer Hatzair, and at 14, I made one of the best decisions of my childhood: switching to Habonim Dror, whose three main values are Zionism, pioneering (halutzim), and socialism. Dror gave me a role in religion, the role of passing it on to the haverim (children) for whom I was a madriha (leader). Once you belong to a movement, it is very hard to cut the cord, which is why, when I learned I would be studying in Paris, I immediately decided to contact Dror Paris to see if it was possible to become a bogeret (leader responsible for the movement) alongside the other bogrim. My years as a madriha helped shape me, strengthen my character, and better understand who I am and what I'm capable of. Being a madriha brought me so much on a personal and relational level. I was fortunate to have amazing co-leaders who always supported my ideas, even the most crazy ones, while maintaining a connection to religion and the movement's values. Even though Dror is not a religious movement, it never stopped us from practicing traditions and passing on Jewish culture. I will always remember the Shabbatot during maha kaitz (summer camp), whether with Dror Belgium or with Dror Paris and Marseille, where the Dror spirit was stronger than ever, where we all sang Shabbat songs together. Habonim Dror is a part of me. It has shaped me and even made me proud at times. I'm still involved as a bogeret, and I'm not ready to leave it anytime soon.

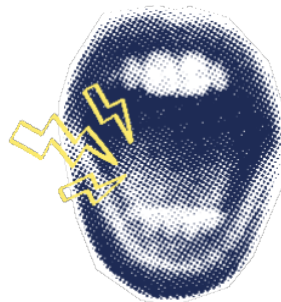
One of the most significant moments for me in religion was my Bat Mitzvah. Thanks to my parents, I had the Bat Mitzvah of my dreams. First, I took lessons to better understand the religion I belong to, and when I was asked to choose an important woman in Judaism to write a biography about, I immediately chose Ruth, to create a connection with my aunt Ruthy.



In June 2017, I proudly read this biography at the synagogue in Waterloo, and in November 2017, it was my party, the party to celebrate my Bat Mitzvah. My family from Israel, Paris, and beyond came to Brussels for me, to celebrate my coming of age in Judaism. It was at that moment I realized that one of the most important things in my life is family and that they will always be there for me, no matter where in the world they are. I will never be able to thank them enough for everything they have done for me and continue to do for me.

In my opinion, one of the strengths of Judaism is that it can be interpreted however one wishes. I don't follow the religion 100%, but I respect the parts I choose to in the way that suits me. I've never eaten pork, shellfish, or similar foods. In 2022, I started separating milk and meat, yet I still buy my meat from a regular supermarket. When I lived in Barcelona for three months, I went to Chabad every Friday night, but afterward, I'd go clubbing—and I still do that now in Paris. For me, it's very important to respect Shabbat traditions, but I also want to go out like other people my age on Friday nights. The most important thing for me is not to force myself and to do what I feel comfortable doing, and that's something my parents have always encouraged. I've always wanted to fully respect Yom Kippur, Passover, and similar holidays, but not to respect Shabbat 100%, so I don't.

My Judaism is deeply connected to Israel personally, and I am increasingly questioning whether I want to live in Israel. However, I immediately think about the future, and for me, it is impossible to force my children to join the army. I want them to have the choice, even if I'm not sure I would agree with their decision. Judaism has always been very important to me, even more so now, and even more since October 7th. I am even prouder to be Jewish. On October 7th, I was in New York with my religious American family. I woke up at 11 a.m., so it was already 6 p.m. in Israel, and everything had already happened. I woke up, turned on my phone, and saw what had happened. I called my father, who was in China. The call kept dropping, and I couldn't stop crying. My father told me I had to tell my family. I went downstairs to the living room and had to announce it to my great-aunt and her seriously ill husband. It was very hard for me since I wasn't with my parents. I hadn't heard from my grandparents, uncles, or aunts, who are religious and live in Israel. Since the beginning of the war, I have felt an even stronger urge to shout from the rooftops that I am Jewish, even though I should be hiding it more. I post a lot on social media for Israel because I feel it is my duty as a Jewish woman living in the diaspora and having attended a non-Jewish high school to show what is really happening. Since October 7th, I have lost almost all of my non-Jewish friends because they disagree with my point of view. Some have simply unfollowed me to make their point, while others have gone as far as to criticize me behind my back. At first, it affected me, but I quickly realized that it helped me sort out who my true friends are, and in the end, I am better surrounded this way. Surrounded by people who love me and understand my views, even if they don't always agree with me. Since the war started, I have found it harder to make non-Jewish friends. I tend to seek out Jewish people around me, as a sort of security. Even though I tell everyone that I am Jewish, I feel the need to maintain this protection and know that wherever I am, there is someone Jewish I can turn to if I face any problems.



In my senior year, I had to write a work of last studies, and there was no question about it, I chose the Holocaust as my main topic, even though I was in a non-Jewish high school. My research question was, "Does Anne Frank's testimony reflect the living conditions of most hidden children in Europe during the Holocaust?" This project allowed me to meet Marcel Zalc, a former hidden child in Belgium. He was one of the most impactful people I've ever met in my life. The encounter that made me understand the importance of our religion and also the importance of passing on the history of the Holocaust was with Marcel Zalc. Before meeting him, I would have never considered going to Auschwitz, but after our first meeting, I felt it was my duty to go in order to transmit the history. One day, the survivors of the Holocaust will no longer be with us, and it will be up to us to pass on to future generations what happened so that it is never repeated. As the saying goes, "Never again, Never forget." So even though I didn't think I was capable, on November 24 of 2024, with the Habonim Dror of Paris, we went to Auschwitz. I can say that I am proud to have made this journey, and I am also sure now that it is my role to pass on everything I learned there. Every time I have the chance to choose a topic, I will choose the Holocaust because the history of the genocide is being forgotten more and more, but we cannot forget. And I am already starting this year by choosing for my civic service to focus on a project about the Holocaust.



In the future, I hope to always be able to continue sharing my religion and what I know about it. I hope I never have to hide it and that it will always be a part of my life, just as it has always been.

Today, I define myself as a Jewish woman, proud of my religion. As a bogeret at Habonim Dror, it is my duty to pass on my religion as well as the values of the movement. And as a student at the Cours Florent, it is my duty to try to make people understand what is happening in Israel.

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