

**ISRAEL'S ADVANCEMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY, MEDICINE, AND
SCIENCE BENEFIT ALL HUMANKIND**

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WHAT CANADA CAN LEARN

FROM ISRAEL'S ENTREPRENEURIAL ETHOS

Rick Spence

Financial Post, Nov. 21, 2017

In the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem sits a ruined citadel called David's Tower. Fought over by King David himself, Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, Ottomans and Israelis, it's now a museum spanning 4,000 years of history. But the castle is soon to assume another identity: as home to a startup accelerator specializing in virtual reality.

High tech/Old City is a fitting symbol for today's Jerusalem. Since the publication of the 2008 best-seller *Startup Nation*, Israel has revelled in its reputation as an innovation power. But with most of that activity in Tel Aviv, Israel is now creating an innovation cluster in Jerusalem. It's a city divided by history, faith and politics. But Israel's innovation leaders hope this ongoing culture clash is a creative cauldron from which edgy, innovative ideas can emerge. Think Austin, Tex., or Boulder, Colo., but with more edge. (And hummus.)

Proof? Three months ago, Silicon Valley goliath Intel acquired Jerusalem-based Mobileye for US\$15 billion (equivalent to the combined market cap of Canada's Shopify and BlackBerry). A leader in computer vision and artificial intelligence for autonomous vehicles, Mobileye spun out of the computer science department of Jerusalem's Hebrew University — an institution founded in 1918 (30 years before Israel itself) by such visionaries as Einstein and Freud. (So there's Lesson 1: To become a Startup Nation, put education first.)

To defend its title, Israel annually selects entrepreneurs from around the world to visit the country to study its startup secrets and meet its coolest entrepreneurs. It

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also sponsors a journalist from each of those countries to cover “their” entrepreneur’s journey. I joined the tour this month along with Toronto entrepreneur Maayan Ziv, founder of an accessibility app called AccessNow. Although the propaganda was predictably heavy-handed, I came away convinced that Israel has much to teach Canada about innovation. And seeing Israel through Ziv’s eyes revealed how Canadians can better compete.

On Day One of our five-day tour, my group of 22 journalists got some startling stats from Ran Natanzon, head of innovation and brand management (Lesson 2: Marketing matters!) for Israel’s ministry of foreign affairs. Natanzon said Israel ranks first in the world in R&D spending as a percent of GDP. And it’s third, behind the U.S. and China, in the number of companies it has listed on NASDAQ. In 2016, venture capitalists invested US\$6 billion in Israeli deals. That’s twice the US\$3.2 billion invested last year in Canada (even though our GDP is five times Israel’s). Clearly, Israel breeds aggressive entrepreneurs the way Canada produces hockey players. Natanzon listed numerous reasons for Israel’s entrepreneur surplus. Among them:

Israel has few natural resources, which means entrepreneurs have to create new value; A limited domestic market means Israelis have to focus on exports; Israelis display can-do attitude and a culture of challenging authority. They also have *chutzpah*, a unique confidence that Merriam-Webster defines as “flagrant boldness.”; The flip side of Israel’s small market size means it’s easy to connect with influencers, because you already know someone who knows them; Every Israeli youth is required to serve in the military (or another form of national service). Forced exposure to team-building, shared purpose, mission-planning and execution produces focused leaders at an early age.

The rest of our week in Jerusalem was a whirlwind of meetings and open houses. We visited a rehab hospital that’s now commercializing its breakthroughs - such as a \$100 wheelchair made of plastic; Hebrew U’s tech-transfer office; and an accelerator that is bringing entrepreneurship training to a downscale neighbourhood, with special programs for primary schools, women and the oft-

neglected Arab and ultra-Orthodox populations.

We met with such companies as Mobileye and its spinoff firm, OrCam Technologies, which uses Mobileye's vision systems and AI to create an eyeglass-shaped device that reads signs, text and money, reading everything aloud to the wearer, giving new mobility to the visually impaired. (An IPO is in the works.) We also met Jon Meved, the founder of OurCrowd, an equity crowdfunding platform for global startups and accredited investors. And within the stone walls of the Tower of David, we met virtual-reality entrepreneurs who are out to revitalize the museum experience and change the way you shop.

Meanwhile, my designated entrepreneur, Maayan Ziv, was on a mission of her own. She is still trying to monetize her AccessNow app, which enables users to rate buildings and locations anywhere in the world on their accessibility to people with disabilities. Ziv herself lives with muscular dystrophy, which has left her needing to get around in a wheelchair. With two Israeli-born parents, she speaks Hebrew and knows the culture, so she was eager to meet potential Israeli partners or investors. Ziv says she was truly impressed by Israel's entrepreneurial ecosystem. "The thing that struck me most is the way they think globally from day one. They are constrained; even if they want to trade with their neighbours, they can't. I think that's why they're so successful."...

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WHY YOU SHOULD SUPPORT CANCER RESEARCH IN ISRAEL

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Benjamin Brafman

[*JTA*](#), Nov. 15, 2017

As a busy criminal defense attorney with a roster of high-profile clients, I am not known to shy away from a fight. It doesn't hurt that I grew up in Brooklyn, the scrappy son of immigrants and Holocaust survivors. But nothing could have prepared me for the fight of my life, when my wife, Lynda, was diagnosed with breast cancer early on in our marriage. We had two young kids at home, and Lynda had to undergo a radical mastectomy and a year of chemotherapy before she was declared cancer-free and cleared for reconstructive surgery. I credit her oncologist, Dr. Yashar Hirshaut, with saving Lynda's life.

What I did not realize at the time was that Lynda's lifesaving treatment was made possible by the yeoman's work of scientists working long hours in unglamorous labs trying to understand the biological forces that drive cancer - and how to stop them. So when God blessed me with professional success, I resolved to join the fight against this scurrilous disease. I turned to Dr. Hirshaut for advice on where to direct my support. His answer surprised me: Israel.

Though a tiny state with a population of just over 8 million, Israel has made disproportionately large contributions to the fight against cancer. A breakthrough in the 1980s by an Israeli scientist, Eli Canaani, was critical to the development of Gleevec, a drug that has saved the lives of millions diagnosed with leukemia. Velcade, a drug used to treat bone marrow cancer, was based on the research of two Israeli professors, Avram Hershko and Aaron Ciechanover, and their collaborator Irwin Rose, who went on to win the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 2004.

Israeli scientists discovered the role that mutations in the p53 gene play in causing cancerous tumors, and how a minor mutation in the RAD51 gene increases the risk of breast cancer in women with the BRCA2 gene mutation. It was ICRF-supported scientists at Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Hadassah Medical

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Center who contributed to the platform science that resulted in the development of Doxil, the first drug encapsulated in a microscopic fat bubble for direct delivery to a tumor site. In case after case, significant advances in the science of cancer began in Israel. And then there is this important fact: Because of a lower salary structure and overhead costs, research dollars go much further in Israel than in almost any other developed nation.

So if you want your support to have maximal impact, Dr. Hirshaut told me, invest in Israel. This, too, animates my support of Israeli science. Despite a spirit-rending campaign in some quarters to isolate the Israeli academic and research community, Israelis continue to make remarkable advancements in technology, medicine, and science - advancements that accrue to the benefit of all humankind.

Want to know what goes on at Israeli institutions of higher education? Learning. Insight. Imagination. Discovery. Healing. The best way to improve Israel's image around the globe? Support its life-saving science.

For me, the question wasn't whether to invest in Israel, but where? So many Israeli institutions are doing promising cancer research. How could I choose? Put me in a courtroom and I know my way around. A research lab, not so much. Dr. Hirshaut introduced me to the Israel Cancer Research Fund (ICRF), which raises funds to support the most promising scientific and medical research at institutions across Israel.

The idea for the fund came in 1975 from a group of American and Canadian researchers, oncologists and supporters looking for ways to bolster the fight against cancer while combating the problem of "brain drain" from Israeli research institutions. In the four decades since its establishment, ICRF has distributed more than \$60 million through 2,300 research grants to scientists at 24 Israeli institutions — from post-doctoral fellows to Nobel Prize-winners.

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To identify the most deserving recipients, several dozen esteemed scientists and doctors from throughout North America meet annually in New York for a rigorous two-day proposal review. The decision-making can be wrenching because life and death hangs in the balance. That's because every year, dozens of promising proposals go unfunded for one simple reason: We don't have enough money. Who knows whether one of those deserving, unfunded requests could have yielded clues to overcoming the early-detection problem of lung or ovarian cancer, or the stubborn lethality of pancreatic cancer?

The simple fact is this: Israel's government alone cannot meet the needs of scientific research in Israel. Without extra support from Diaspora Jews, Israel risks losing these scientists and humanity risks losing critical, life-saving advancements in the fight against cancer. At times of crisis, Israel is often among the first countries to step up, from the 2010 earthquake in Haiti to the recent earthquakes in Mexico. Israel even extends a helping hand to Syrians, whose country is hostile to the Jewish state. We need to step up for Israel. There's no better cause, and no better place to invest in the fight against cancer. I rest my case.

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**HOW PRESIDENT RIVLIN COULD REVIVE
THE ISRAELI PRESIDENTIAL CONFERENCES**

Manfred Gerstenfeld

[Jerusalem Post](#), Nov. 25, 2017

With the termination of Shimon Peres' presidency, his initiative of Israeli presidential conferences ended as well. Five such gatherings took place between

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2008 and 2013. President Reuven Rivlin would do well to reinstate these annual conferences. The potential to benefit Israel is enormous.

To obtain the maximum benefit for Israel, the formula devised under Peres would require significant changes. In the past, the conferences included a strange mix of both topics and invitees. By far the best sessions of the past conferences were those that addressed the newest developments and expectations for the future in several advanced scientific fields. If one did not come early to the sessions there would be no remaining seats. The panels consisted of both foreign and Israeli scientists. In those that I attended, the Israeli presentations were as insightful and impressive as those by scholars from abroad.

On the other hand, there were some sessions on world Jewry in which the panelists were mainly rehashing what one could regularly read in Jewish media. There are enough other gatherings where these issues can be discussed. One also got the impression that the organizers had minimized the number of Orthodox and Center-Right speakers. Once, absurdly enough, an extreme critic of Israel, Peter Beinart, was invited.

Also, some of the goals announced were greatly overstated. Did the discussions at these conferences really - as suggested in 2013 -“engage the central issues that will influence the face of our future: geopolitics, economics, society, environment, culture, identity, education, new media and more”? It would have been much better to have been a bit more modest.

What would be the best new strategy for these conferences? First, it would be important to identify the areas in which Israel is at the world's forefront. There should be sessions on topics concerning recent advances and possible future directions. The panels should consist of leading foreign and Israeli participants. Determining where Israel is a world leader or co-leader is crucial. Some very diverse areas are obvious candidates. For instance, cybersecurity, water

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technology, trauma treatment and the setting up of field hospitals. There are, however, many others which do not immediately come to mind. Identifying those areas of knowledge and expertise where Israel is among global leaders would rapidly create a long list.

Once one has identified the fields in which Israelis are among the world leaders, the next step would be to ask the country's top experts in these areas who to invite from abroad. The conferences would be broadcast in real time to receive as wide an audience as possible. In previous conferences the speakers included politicians, writers, actors, a vulgar American comedian and so on. Such people could also attend, but there would no opening session where well-known invitees express their truisms and platitudes. Distinguished cultural performances could however be a welcome addition.

The conference core of topics in the above categories could be complemented with discussions about crucial world issues. To mention a few almost at random: the future of liberal democracy, sovereignty versus globalization, which type of multiculturalism could be viable, and truth versus fake news. It wouldn't take much effort to define a few more.

One of the huge advantages for the participants in the panels would be the greatly varied interdisciplinary character of the conference's speakers. Top people in a certain field usually participate in conferences where the attendees are mainly from professions close to their own. This diversity would increase the attractiveness of the conference for the panelists.

President Peres found generous patrons who financed the conferences he initiated. There is no reason why such a prestigious conference under the auspices of President Rivlin would not find similar donors. His international prestige would be enhanced by these gatherings as well. Regarding the technicalities of the conference, one could learn much from the experiences of staff members who were

been part of the organization of the previous conferences.

There are many potential advantages for Israel. With the right public relations these conferences would expose to the world a broad spectrum of Israeli knowledge and inventiveness, including much that was greatly beneficial to people worldwide. As Israel is frequently attacked by a wide range of enemies and opponents, the conferences could, to a certain extent, also be a counterweight to this hatred and defamation. President Peres had a preference for interviewing some leaders of science during the conferences. This however was an extra and the conference could have proceeded easily without it. The important thing is that President Rivlin take the initiative, that the invitations to the conference go out in his name, and that he presides over the conference.

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**AS BUILDINGS EVOLVE IN STARTUP NATION,
ARCHITECTS CREATE SPACE FOR WORK AND PLAY**

Shoshanna Solomon

[Times of Israel](#), Nov. 23, 2017

Driving up Route 4 from Tel Aviv to Ra'anana, it is impossible not to notice — especially at night when it is all lit up — a square glass box of a building with vaguely egg-shaped windows that dominates the landscape. It is the new local headquarters of SAP, the German software giant: the name, shining at the top of the structure, serves as a reminder that the so-called Startup Nation is a magnet for tech conglomerates who set up operations in Israel in a bid to tap into its technological prowess.

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There are some 286 active multinational corporations in Israel today, according to Start-up Nation Central, a nonprofit that tracks the tech industry in Israel; some 87 have opened shop over the past three years. They mainly operate research and development centers, and most started their activities via the acquisition of local startups. Giants like Apple, Google, Facebook, Samsung, Microsoft, Amazon and Intel are competing for Israeli talent. They draw inspiration from the brash Israeli can-do-it-all attitude and chutzpah, but they also infuse the local tech ecosystem with different management styles, an alternative corporate culture, and a new approach to the way they want their office buildings to look and feel.

These cash-rich technology firms are building or have built bold headquarters in San Francisco and Silicon Valley, flagship symbols of what their firms want to convey to their clients and employees. Apple workers this year started moving into their massive new headquarters nicknamed the “spaceship” in Cupertino, California. It’s designed by UK architect Lord Norman Foster, who worked closely with Apple’s legendary CEO, the late Steve Jobs, to come up with a symphony of glass, steel, stone and trees. Cloud-computing firm Salesforce has also set up a new steel-and-glass headquarters in San Francisco, while ride-sharing firm Uber has designed an entirely see-through head office.

As these multinational tech firm make homes for themselves in Israel, either through designing their own towers as SAP did or by renting office space in new structures, or renovating old ones, they bring with them their different standards, requirements and demands. And this is starting to revolutionize how office buildings are being built and designed. And it’s not only multinationals: homegrown firms, like auto-technology company Mobileye, which was acquired by Intel Corp. in March for a whopping \$15.3 billion, are also setting up new headquarters with specifications that are changing the look and feel of local office buildings. And while to some the Israel-designed structures may not embody the beauty and the boldness of London’s Gherkin tower or the Louvre Pyramid and its fellow edifices of the 1980s Grands Projets in Paris, they may be a harbinger of exciting designs to come.

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For technology firms, the architecture of their buildings needs to reflect “the spirit of the firm. The trend in general, for high-tech buildings, whether they are rented office spaces or built specifically for that corporation, is to enrich the experience of the workplace,” said Avner Yashar, owner of Tel Aviv-based Yashar Architects Ltd., whose office planned the SAP building and is working on the building that will hold Microsoft’s new office space in Herzliya. The architect was also the designer behind Apple’s R&D center in Herzliya, the US giant’s second-largest center in the world. While SAP commissioned the architect to build its project from scratch, both Microsoft and Apple decided to rent space in buildings already under construction, that were adapted to meet the US giants’ specifications, Yashar explained...

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[87 Global Corporations Flocked To Israel For Tech And Talent In Past Three Years: NoCamels, Nov. 07, 2017](#)—At least 87 multinational corporations have opened up R&D or innovation centers in Israel over the past three years, a majority after acquiring an Israeli startup. This is according to a new study showing the scale of foreign interest in Israeli technology and talent by Start-up Nation Central, an Israel-based non-profit that tracks the Israeli innovation ecosystem.

[US-Israel Fund Invests \\$4.8m in Clean Energy: Priyanka Shrestha, Energy Live, Nov. 9, 2017](#)—A programme funded by the US and Israeli Governments has announced \$4.8 million (£3.6m) for five new clean energy projects. The Binational Industrial Research and Development (BIRD) Energy programme is a joint partnership between the US Department of Energy, the Israel Ministry of Energy and the Israeli Innovation Authority.

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Israel's "Teflon" Prime Minister: Naomi Ragen, *Breaking Israel News*, Nov. 14, 2017—While the Donald Trump era has brought a new level of hysteria to U.S. political discourse, the attempts to topple Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by the seemingly weekly revelation of yet another corruption scandal have only slightly dented his popularity. According to an October 5 poll by Israeli television's Knesset Channel, when people were asked, "Have the publications on Netanyahu and his family on the various investigations against them changed your opinion of him?" 64 percent said no.