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'A TRIANGULAR PATCH OF DIRT'

More than just a symbol of friendship



KNOW it was meant as a joke, but I must confess I was a little taken aback. Months of effort and a fair degree of expenditure had been put into securing the establishment of the Israel 75 Peace Garden in partnership with Glen Eira Council in Melbourne.

So, when ahead of its official opening last week I heard it referred to it as “a triangular patch of dirt”, I was a tad offended.

True, it doesn't occupy a huge plot of land. And also true, there's not much to see at the moment. The trees, flowers and shrubs have only just been planted. Come spring, it will be a whole different story ... but even so, “a triangular patch of dirt”?

After all, this little garden at Glen Eira Town Hall is, to the best of my knowledge, the only public monument celebrating Australia's relationship and friendship with Israel in the whole of our country. When all the parties and concerts and other assorted events marking Israel's 75th anniversary are over and forgotten, the garden, gifted by Zionism Victoria, will endure.

Moreover, in an age when there's so much anti-Israel sentiment permeating political and media discourse, how reassuring is it that a local government should so readily and proudly and publicly display its support for, and solidarity with, the Jewish State?

For all the Facebook fear-mongers in our community who preach that antisemitism is out of control and that anti-Zionism is running rampant, consider how significant the opening of this garden was last week. How many other countries have gardens opened in their honour in Australia? How many other countries receive such a public endorsement from a local government?

Likewise on a state government level. A few weeks ago, NSW's political leaders joined communal stalwarts to toast the State of Israel. And on Tuesday night,



The early Zionist pioneers arrived to “a patch of dirt”. Here, Jews attend the first auction for lots in Tel Aviv, 1909.

Photo: Public Domain

Victoria's leaders did likewise, pledging their commitment to both the Jewish State overseas and the Jewish community on these shores.

Don't be beguiled by the boys who cry wolf. Yes, there are incidents of antisemitism, but we are not about to be swept away by a tsunami of hatred.

[The garden] comprises native Israeli flora alongside native Australian flora ... commemorating the historic ties between our two nations.

Back to the garden though and where I came in. My initial umbrage at the comment soon evaporated as I realised that “triangular patch of dirt” was possibly a compliment. After all, wasn't that precisely how you'd describe the pre-state Israel that the plucky pioneers of early Zionism first encountered back in the 19th century, albeit dirt accompanied by swamp and desert?

That's what Herzl had his eye on – a triangular patch of dirt in the Middle East.

Yet just as that bloomed and blossomed in the years that followed, so too will the Israel 75 Peace Garden – its roots embedded in the soil of Australia, just

as our community's roots are now embedded in Australia.

And these aren't just any roots. For the garden isn't just made up of any old plants in fact, it comprises native Israeli flora alongside native Australian flora, a symbolic union commemorating the historic ties between our two nations.

At the centre of the garden is

as the verb to watch – ‘shakad’. Hence, when the Prophet Jeremiah tells God that he's had a vision of an almond tree, God responds that it's a sign that he's watching to see that his word is fulfilled.

And if all that Hebraic horticulture doesn't get your green thumbs twitching, other native Israeli flora featured in the garden include the poppy anemone, which is the national flower of Israel, the black pearl lily, the garden star-of-Bethlehem and the bunch flower daffodil.

Australian natives, meanwhile, include the grey cottonhead, the scaly phebalium and the rose-tipped mulla mulla.

All of which is pretty meaningless unless you know what all those flowers look like. So if you're in Melbourne, come see it. And if you're visiting Melbourne, come see it ... or better still, get your local council to do it. Why shouldn't there be an Israel 75 Garden in Bondi or Dianella? A lasting legacy of a landmark year and an embodiment of not only our solidarity with Israel, but a symbol also that our councils and our country stand shoulder to shoulder with the Jewish State.

Zeddy Lawrence is executive director of Zionism Victoria.



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