WONDER WOMAN IS JEWISH!
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A friend of mine, a mother of two middle schoolers posted a question on Facebook a few days ago. She asked:

"I am taking my kids to see Wonder Woman anything I need to know?"

Sarcastically I wrote back: "Yes, in case you haven't heard Wonder Woman is Jewish and Israeli"

She wrote back, "Yes I know".

Of course, she knows, we all know. Half the people in our shul tonight probably don't know this week's Torah portion, but we all know that Gal Gadot who plays the greatest heroine in the Superhero Universe is a proud Israeli, IDF veteran and 32-year-old Jewish mother of two. Indeed, her pride in being an Israeli is only out matched in OUR pride in her being an Israeli.

As Israeli columnist Ariel Oseran wrote. "[Gadot] represents the 'good Israeli' and does us a great service. When she talks about the army, it shows that serving in the military is not a bad thing. It's something inspiring. It makes every one of our female soldiers seem like Wonder Woman."

Being a superhero is, well by definition a big deal, a super big deal. The actors who play the part become icons themselves, imbued by their fans with the superhero powers their comic book characters take upon their shoulders in capes and spandex tights.

Christopher Reeves is inseparable from his role as superman, and when he suffered that debilitating spinal injury our shock was in part that something more than kryptonite had brought Superman down.

Adam West who died this past week, will always be Batman – though many have come after him. His late 60s groovy superhero epitomized the bifurcated persona of the caped crusader.

Gadot's larger than life Wonder Woman is no different, in fact it's something much more.

As an Israeli woman, let alone a superhero she is unabashedly Israeli and Zionistic in a world that has largely lost its empathy for the Jewish people.

As Rob Eshman editor of the Los Angeles Jewish Journal explains, "What's striking, considering how fraught the subject of Israel can be, is how fearless Gadot has been in taking it on. It was striking not just that she has been called out for being Israeli, but how Israeli she is. Most movie

heroes are deracinated totems of Middle American virtues. Just try to think of a single tent-pole superhero who speaks with a Southern drawl or Spanish accent. For generations, the same has been true of all leading men and women in most movies and TV shows — they had to grind down their noses and names and polish their accents if they ever wanted to be accepted.

But Gal is Gal. She kept her Israeli name (OK, Gadot used to be Greenstein, but the change was an Israeli, not a Hollywood, thing). And strikingly, she kept her Israeli accent. In fact, director Patty Jenkins went a step further. To make Gadot not stand out as foreign, all the other Amazons, [which is the ethnic origin of Wonder Woman] adopted variations of her accent. The ones who did it well, like Robin Wright, sound like they could be selling Dead Sea cosmetics at the local mall.

And Gadot's character acts Israeli. When her love interest, Steve, kowtows to his English commanders, she marches into their conference room, shouts them down, then turns to macho Steve and dresses him down for buckling to authority. Any polite North American Jew who has dated an Israeli has lived that moment, minus the generals.

Before Gadot as Wonder Woman the most iconic Israeli woman in the west was Golda Meir. She too was a tough Israeli woman, but more 'Bubbie with a wagging finger' than 'Badass with Bulletproof Bracelets'.

Before Margaret Thatcher Golda showed that a woman can be a tough military leader and a savvy politician. And she showed the world that Israelis have Chutzpah. But still her power was the classic caricature of the intellectual Jew, whose power was in the power of their ideas and ideals. Wonder Woman and by extension for Gal and all Israeli women, her power is physical as well as psychological.

For all the exports of Start Up Nation - perhaps the most needed around the world is the image of the Israeli Woman, confident, proud, tough, passionate and also intensely maternal and compassionate.

For generations Judaism has celebrated the feminine as the ideal. I know that it doesn't seem like that when we look at modern expressions of traditional Judaism. But the central role in women in the creation of the world and Judaism is unavoidable.

From Eve who challenged the rules, to Rebecca who took matters into her own hands and Miriam who watched over the basket our biblical heroines are themselves superheroes in our Torah.

But more than that - Rabbinic Judaism which suffers because it does not give women a voice and a vote in its texts; recognized again and again in the Talmud that women are on a high spiritual plane, are closer to being God-like than men will ever be.

When we speak of God coming down on earth it is as the *schechina*, the feminine form of God

that can transcend and bring heaven down to earth.

Similarly Israel for all of its problems with the religious and secular divide is at the forefront of female empowerment and women's rights.

- Israel has the highest rate of female entrepreneurship in the world.
- Nearly all Israeli women serve in the army, many, like Gal as trainers of male combat soldiers.
- Israel is the only country in the Middle East where women enjoy full political rights.
- Israel is the only country in the world where the wealthier it becomes, the greater the birthrate. Israeli women have an average of three children each and that number is increasing.

Gal represents all of that wrapped up in an iconic American superhero. Men and women around the world spent $100 million dollars to see Wonder Woman on opening weekend but they also saw this tough, courageous, and beautiful Israeli.

Every superhero has a mortal flaw, a weakness that when exposed renders them mere humans. But for Gal Godot as Wonder Woman her humanness, her Israeliness is also her secret weapon. Because when the credits role and the costumes and stunts are put away, what the world is left with is an Israeli Woman, who like many Israeli women is truly a Wonder Woman in real life as well as the pages of comic books and on the big screen.

I wonder what Wonder Woman's real superpower really is? More than Bulletproof bracelets and Golden Lassos of Truth - this particular Israeli Wonder Woman may have the power to change the way the world sees Jews, Israelis, Jewish women - who have long suffered from stereotypes not befitting their strength and courage. Maybe her real superpower is that some little girl somewhere, Jewish or not will see in full color that nothing can hold her back, that Israeli Chutzpah is not just for men, and not just for Jews!