

CHAVRUTA NEWSLETTER No. 11 – February 2008/ Adar Aleph 5768

(Translation from the Hebrew – Shaul Vardi)

CHAVRUTA - CHAZON L'ISRAEL, is an independent national chartered society for spiritual-cultural and social-political reform.

Editorial Board: Editor: Dr. Michael Livni, (Kibbutz Lotan). Board Members: Rabbi Ofek Meir (Leo Baeck, Haifa), Osnat Elnatan (Kibbutz Tamuz - Beit Shemesh), Rabbi Silvana Kandel (Kvutzat Shacharut - Yokneam)

*A Statement by the Editorial Board***THE ISRAEL MOVEMENT FOR PROGRESSIVE JUDAISM AND ZIONISM**

The Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) is in crisis - both financial and ideological. For a number of years the IMPJ has stood at a crossroads and must decide regarding its path.

“For the children are come to the birth and there is not strength to bring forth”, Isaiah, 37:3.

Is the “Movement” first and foremost an organization of congregations offering Reform religious services to its members and others? Or, alternatively, does the Movement give expression to a unique comprehensive Zionist approach with an action program to reform the individual, the people and the world?

Today the trends in the Movement stand in contradiction one to another. In general, the professionals in the Movement, most of the Executive and many of the rank and file wish to adopt a movement definition (a “brand”) which sees the IMPJ not as a movement but as a religious stream only.

“The IMPJ is a religious stream offering contemporary Jewish identity to those who wish to renew their Judaism while maintaining a freedom of choice in their way of life”. (IMPJ, “M'Erech L'Derech, 2006)

Chavruta has a wider and more comprehensive vision. The proposed Movement identity quoted above is a throwback to classic Reform, the *Kultusgemeinde*, the ritual congregation of the Diaspora. Here in our national home, we cannot limit the potential inherent within Reform with its roots in prophetic Judaism to the ritual congregation. Our point of departure must be a **Zionist** one - Judaism is not only the religion of the Jewish people but also its nationality and culture. Without negating the congregational ritual functions, the IMPJ should offer those joining it progressive social and cultural identity and identification and commitment to initiatives furthering Israel as a Jewish and democratic State. Above all we see the calling of the IMPJ as an educational movement educating to Jewish-Zionist democratic commitment.

We note with satisfaction that the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC) furthers Zionist democratic reforms in Israeli society. The Center utilizes mainly judicial action and within that area it has indeed made its mark on Israeli society. To a large extent, however, IRAC functions like a battery of artillery which prepares the ground within Israeli society for “foot soldiers” to move in. But in fact, there are no “foot soldiers”. It is not within the power of purely legal activity to change basic social order and values in Israeli society. This would necessitate a movement and not only submission of petitions to the Israeli High Court of Justice.

Only a movement in the essential meaning of the term, i.e. a body with ideas, ideals and an action program can constitute the base for the “foot soldiers” so necessary today. The current budget of the IMPJ serves the needs of congregations and not the needs of national movement activity.

"Halukka"* Funding for the IMPJ until When?

Much of the ongoing expenses of the congregations are subsidized by Diaspora Jewry. This situation is problematic both financially and morally. True: Israel discriminates against the non-orthodox religious streams. Nevertheless, it would be an illusion to believe that even after this injustice has been rectified that the State will fund congregations at their current level.

Admittedly, funding from the Diaspora is necessary for investments in infrastructure and the development of the national work of the Movement. However, is it credible that the financing of the ongoing expenses of the congregations of the IMPJ should be comparable to the way in which pre-Zionist "Halukka Jewry" was financed and whose mode of existence was challenged by Zionism at its outset?

Chavruta sees itself as a Reform Zionist lobby both within the IMPJ and without. For this purpose we are renewing publication of the "Chavruta Newsletter" which was published in the years 2000 – 2002 (you may find these newsletters on line at www.chavruta.org.il.) The **Chavruta** general meeting held on 30th January 2008, decided to further our principles (see below) not only to the general public but in particular among those who may in any case be close to our point of view.

*Halukka – the system of charitable distribution of Diaspora money to 19th century Jewish communities in pre-Zionist Palestine.

We in "Chavruta - Chazon L'Israel" Believe That:

The State of Israel was established as a Zionist state constituting the National Home of the Jewish people. The state was founded as a result of the physical and spiritual distress of the Jewish people in the modern age. It has given an answer to the physical survival of the people. However we have not yet related to the spiritual and cultural dimensions of our lives.

Potentially, the Jewish state is the beginning of our redemption. In order to realize the prophetic vision, we need reform (*tikkun*) of our values in the following areas:

1. A Genuine Peace between Ourselves and Our Neighbors

2. The Equal Value of all Humankind and the Sanctity of Human Life.

This value grants all citizens of the state of Israel equal rights before the law and imposes obligations of equal value on all to the State. The educational and economic gaps existing in Israel at present are incompatible with the equal value of all citizens.

3. Protecting the Environment

The sanctity of the Land of Israel demands intensive action in order to fulfil the injunction "do not destroy". At present, our way of life, the way we produce and the way we consume, desecrates and befouls the holiness of the land and the people who inhabit it.

4. Creative Commitment to the Jewish Heritage

Every generation stands before Sinai. It is its right and obligation to interpret the heritage and its symbols by means of democratic process in order to ensure the continued creative existence of the Jewish people wherever it may be in our time.

"But the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). In a democratic Zionist state no one has the right to impose a particular way of interpreting the heritage. We must obey the injunction - "tell your children" (Exodus 13: 8) through experience and learning, in a manner that will ensure mutual respect between different attitudes.

The idea of the Divine expressed in its many forms by holidays and feasts, by the Sabbath and in everyday, in the life of the individual and the life of the community, is an ever-present bond focusing the Jewish people in its infinite mission for the reform (*tikkun*) of the individual, the Jewish people and the World

CHAVRUTA and the Arrangements Law

At its meeting on Wednesday, 30 January 2008, **Chavruta** decided to join the **Forum of Organizations to Abolish the Arrangements Law**. The Arrangements Law constituted a milestone in the worship of the individual and materialism that led to the emergence of social gaps over the present generation. This newsletter was written close to *Shabbat Ki Tisa*: "And all the people took off the golden rings which were in their ears ... and made it into a molten calf; and they said: 'This is your god, O Israel...'" (Exodus 32:3,4). See the comments by H.N. Bialik below. **The Forum of Organizations to Abolish the Arrangements Law** is organized by **Shatil** - The New Israel Fund's Empowerment and Training Center for Social Change Organizations in Israel. We reproduce here sections from the information material of the Forum as published on its website: www.hesderim.social.org.il.

The Forum of Organizations to Abolish the Arrangements Law was established in September 2007. The Forum includes approximately 50 civil organizations that have come together to secure the joint objective of abolishing the "Arrangements Law," beginning from the next financial year (2008). The Forum emphasizes the antidemocratic and anticonstitutional nature of this law, and urges the government to transfer the hundreds of articles it includes into regular legislation.

About the Arrangements Law

The Economic Arrangement Law was first passed in 1985, as a one-time measure (an emergency law) complementing the economic plan to stabilize the economy. Since then, each year's Budget Law has been accompanied by an Economic Arrangements Law. The Arrangements Law differs from other laws in that it includes a wide number of laws and legislative amendments on different issues. These are passed by the Knesset as a single unit, without meaningful and orderly discussion in the Knesset committees and in the government as is usual in the case of ordinary legislation.

Over the years, the Arrangements Law has expanded considerably; it now comprises some 200 articles. As mentioned, the law is passed by an accelerated procedure described by the Israeli Supreme Court as "**a procedure inconsonant with the democratic legislative procedure.**"

The Arrangements Law has come to be used by the Ministry of Finance as a tool for imposing its neo-liberal approach on the economy and on the Knesset.

Examples of the problems inherent in the Arrangements Law

✎ Authorities are usurped from the earmarked parliamentary committees and transferred to the Finance Committee: According to practice, the Arrangements Law is discussed by the Knesset Finance Committee, despite the fact that many of the laws it includes should be discussed by the specific Knesset committees according to each committee's fields of expertise. In recent years, some of the articles in the Arrangements Law have been separated and discussed by the specific committees. This process of separation is limited and partial, however, and the influence enjoyed by the specific committees is still limited.

✎ Inadequate discussion: The short period of time allocated for discussion of the Arrangements Law as a whole, and of its different articles in particular, makes it difficult for the Members of Knesset to engage in full discussion and to ensure proper control of the legislative and budgetary process.

✎ Political and coalition constraints: The fact that the Arrangements Law is presented alongside the Budget Law, and the dependence of the budget on the Arrangements Law, intensify political pressure on Members of Knesset and reduce their room for maneuvering. The representatives of the coalition (in the Knesset plenum and in the committees) are required to work to secure authorization

of the legislation included in the Arrangements Law, with the goal of ensuring the ongoing control of the government and the coalition in which they are members. This situation reduces the chances of raising substantive objections.

☞ Transparency and accountability toward Members of Knesset and the general public: The current format of debates, the tight schedule, and the large number of details included in the Arrangement Law all damage and impair the ability of Members of Knesset (and of the general public) to understand the true ramifications of this act of legislation. This situation is incompatible with the desire to ensure the transparency, responsibility, and accountability that may be expected in proper administrative proceedings.

☞ The dominance of the Ministry of Finance and the Budgets Division: The Arrangements Law, and indeed the budget process as a whole, underscore the power and centrality of the Ministry of Finance, and the Budgets Division in particular, relative to the Knesset and the government.

The Attorney General:

“The inclusion of numerous amendments to different laws on different subjects in a single proposed law is inconsonant with proper legal policy.”

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**CHAIM NACHMAN BIALIK REPROVES HIS PEOPLE
SURELY THE PEOPLE IS GRASS**

*Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it... surely the people is grass.
Isaiah 40:7*

Surely the people is grass, become as dry as a tree
Surely the people is a void, an infinitely heavy void;

In the clamor of a foolish people around the golden idols
God's voice is hidden, His mighty thunder suppressed.
And in the heart of scoundrel and villain, and with shameful spittle
The word of the Lord will be degraded, turned into scornful laughter.

Surely the people wither, full of levity and venom
Rotten and dissipate from head to toe!
For on a day of anguish and pain it has failed to bring forth
One that was mighty in works, a living man with a beating heart
One in whose heart a spark might burn, the spark that makes the blood boil
One from whose head a spark might shine to light the way for the people;
One who would treasure the name of the entire nation and its God
Far over wealth of gold – more than the falsehood of idols.

RENEWING A REFORM ZIONIST THINK TANK IN ISRAEL

An initiative of Chavruta – Chazon L’Israel in cooperation with Tzell HaTamar

Monday, March 31, 1:00 pm – Tuesday, 1 April 2008, 2:00 pm
Rabin Youth Hostel, 1 Avigad St., Jerusalem
Behind and below the Bible Lands Museum – bus route 17))

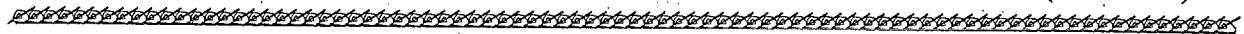
The think tank will focus on three subjects:

1. Outlines for a Reform Zionist action plan within the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism.
2. Cohesion in Israeli society – can the gulfs be mended, and if so – how?
3. **Chavruta** – Chazon L’Israel as a Reform Zionist lobby inside the IMPJ and elsewhere.

The IMPJ Conference, which will take place on May 22-24, will provide a suitable opportunity to raise formal proposals and to engage in informal contacts with rank-and-file members in order to promote Reform Zionism within the movement.

A detailed program will be distributed by email to all those who register for the event two weeks in advance. Registration: through March 10, 2008.

Please send the registration slip by snail mail, email or fax to Dr. Michael Livni (see below)



PLEASE WRITE CLEARLY AND LEGIBLY

First name and family name) Telephone

Full postal address (including zip code)

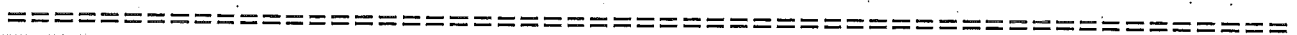
Do you require sleeping arrangement in Jerusalem? Email

~~The number of rooms in the hostel is limited. Singles will be accommodated two or three to a room.~~

Fee per person – NIS 100. Couple: NIS 150. Payment **in cash** during registration.

Travel expenses above NIS 50 by public transport will be returned to those coming from far afield.

For questions, please contact Dr. Michael Livni, 054-9799055



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