

Excerpt From:

# **REFORM ZIONISM**

**AN EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE**

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**Section 4 - Aspects of  
Zionist Jewish Education**

# Education to Zionism (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

All Zionist education is, perforce, Jewish education. However, Jewish education as such is only potentially Zionist education — even if it includes Hebrew language study, Israel study and even an Israel experience. The substantive content of Jewish education and Zionist education may at many stages of the educational process be similar, but the rationale of Jewish/Zionist education — from preschool through college age — is distinctive.

A prominent Zionist educator has summed up the interdependence of Jewish and Zionist education: “Judaism without Zionism has no root; Zionism without Judaism will bear no fruit.” This paper subscribes in a large part to the differentiation between Zionist education and Jewish (including pro-Israel) education made by Professor Simon Herman of the Hebrew University. The most relevant chapter from his book, *Jewish Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1977, is “Zionism and Pro-Israelism: A Distinction with a Difference.”

The development of a comprehensive model of Jewish/Zionist education is the natural responsibility of the Zionist movement. Ultimate public responsibility to this end is vested in the Zionist Actions Committee (Vaad HaPoel) and the Zionist Congress.

For some time now there have been ongoing discussions regarding reform in structure and function of WZO/JAFI in the field of education. An overall body for education has been posited and in the meantime, a coordinating committee of just the WZO educational departments has been established...

...Unfortunately, much of the thinking evidenced on the subject of any posited overall body has been the attempt to formulate structural reform without relating to essential function. This stems naturally from the absence of an agreed theoretical model of what Zionist education is and how it should function. This absence of agreement does not mean that there is disagreement; it simply means that no comprehensive model has been posited in the position papers presented...

1. Booklet published by Department of Jewish Education and Culture in the Diaspora (World Zionist Organization), April 1989.

## ...A RATIONALE FOR JEWISH/ZIONIST EDUCATION

A viable rationale for Jewish/Zionist education must relate to the following considerations:

### ***1. The multi-disciplinary nature of the Jewish/Zionist educational rationale***

#### ***a. Social Psychology — Field Theory***

Zionist education takes place in a dynamic field in which all factors in the field relate to and influence each other. This is the basis of our rejection of the over-departmentalization of Zionist education.

Kurt Lewin, the founder of field theory, is often quoted as having pointed out that “there is nothing as practical as a good theory.” Simon Herman, a student of Kurt Lewin, has applied concepts of field theory to Zionist education (see “The Social Psychology of Zionist Education,” *Forum*, WZO, January 1962).

Jewish/Zionist education takes place in five major “fields” represented by the diaspora communities of North America, continental Europe, Britain and the former Dominion countries, Latin America and the communities behind the now radically changing Iron Curtain. Since these communities differ greatly in character, resources and needs, it is beyond the scope of this paper to detail the application of the proposed educational rationale in each of them.

#### ***b. Cultural Anthropology of Judaism***

“Judaism stands or falls with the concept of the ‘Holy Community’” (Jacob J. Petuchowski, “Toward a Modern Brotherhood,” *The Reconstructionist*, Vol. 26, No. 16, 1961).

Jewish culture has always developed in structures of intentional community. Martin Buber (*Paths in Utopia and Other Essays*, Am Oved, 1982, ed. A. Shapira) and Uriel Tal<sup>1</sup> have informed this viewpoint regarding the centrality of intentional community to the Zionist endeavor. The recently emphasized relevance of purposive community to questions of Jewish demography (see proceedings of 31st Zionist Congress) have given added weight to this viewpoint.

1. Uriel Tal, from “Structures of Fellowship and Community in Judaism,” *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Winter 1974, pp. 3-12; also in Langer, Michael, ed., *Reform Zionist Perspective*, UAHF Youth Division, New York, 1977, p. 304.



### c. *Jewish History from a Zionist Viewpoint*

Zionism is a part of Jewish history. In particular, it is the major response of the Jewish people to the impact of modernity. By their structuring, many curricula (including those of Israel's Ministry of Education) imply that modern Jewish history and the Zionist idea can be studied as discrete topics. On the one hand, the position of this paper is that there can be no separation between Jewish history and Zionist history. On the other hand, Jewish history, and modern Jewish history in particular, can be taught from a Zionist point of view. For example, Achad Ha'am's paradigm of "Priest and Prophet" (1893)<sup>1</sup> as archetypes and the ongoing tension between them relates to the essence of the Zionist interpretation of Jewish history. It is a model for an historical/educational interpretation of the element of "movement" in Zionism.

### d. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*

Who can be educated to what? How and when do we educate to Jewish symbols? How and when do we introduce the context of Jewish/Zionist values? How do we reflect a Zionist outlook, cognitively and effectively to the child, adolescent, young adult, and adult? While these questions must be related to, a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

Dr. Michael Rosenak has raised fundamental questions regarding Jewish education in his *Commandments and Concerns* (Jewish Publication Society, Phila., 1987). Although his focus is the question of religious education in secular society, the problematics mooted apply equally to Zionist education. For example: To what degree should Zionist education be explicit or implicit at given stages in Jewish/Zionist education? Is Zionism to be presented as a normative idea or is it to be a subject on which educator and pupil "deliberate" together? There will be variables in educational approach stemming from differing Zionist ideologies as well as those stemming from differing socio-cultural environments. Furthermore, the way in which youth movements relate to such issues may well differ from the way in which a formal educational network relates. In general, youth movement education in any given environment will be relatively explicit in educating to specific Zionist norms.

This paper does take a clear stand on the philosophical roots of our educational approach — humanistic, pluralistic, democratic. It also reflects a bias in

1. Leon Simon, ed., *Selected Essays of Achad Ha'am* (1912), Jewish Publication Society, Phila., 1962, pp. 125-138.

favor of explicit education to Zionist norms at some stage in the Jewish/Zionist educational process.

## ***2. An Outline of the Rationale***

The basic model of the ideal progression of Zionist education takes place in a “field” of community. Formal education constitutes an educational learning community (*beit chinuch*) and not just an organizational framework for learning (*beit sefer*).

Informal education — camps and, classically, the youth movements — are perceived as frameworks of community within which socialization is accompanied by acculturation to Zionist norms.

Critical to the inculcation of Zionist norms is the process of identification with relevant Zionist role models. This paper identifies the absence of young adult Zionist role models indigenous to the Diaspora communities as a “missing link” in the continuum of role models from preschool teacher, school teacher at various levels, junior leader, young adult leader to adult graduate necessary for the emergence of adult Zionist commitment. (We do not rule out the possibility of Zionist commitment via personal search, but not all of us are made of the stuff of Herzl!)

Experiential education within community is to be complemented by cognitive education regarding the centrality of community to Jewish continuity.

The relationship between formal education, informal education and a necessary tension between them is seen as a *sine qua non* for Zionist “movement” as distinct from mere “organization.” This tension is the heart of the dynamics of Judaism, lying at the core of Jewish existence and purpose. The systole of the prophetic drive for *Tikun Olam* alternates with the diastole of priestly continuity. Zionist education is committed to their mutually fructifying interdependent coexistence and seeks to replicate this tension in the personal lives of all young Jews. It constitutes the matrix within which Zionist value clarification and confrontation take place while on the educational path of acquiring Zionist norms.

### ***a. The Tension Between Movement and Organization***

Jewish/Zionist education posits itself as being in constructive tension with the Jewish community as a whole. Nevertheless, Zionist-oriented schools are perforce institutions for Jewish education and continuity. As such, they are charged with the formal transmission of the Jewish people’s heritage. However,

the Jewish/Zionist schools are expected to be open to Zionist movement process — in particular by cooperation with Zionist youth movements and by integrating properly structured long-term Israel programs as part of the curriculum.

The tension between formal education and informal (movement) education in the Zionist context should not be resolvable. To be more precise, it is resolvable only by the elimination of movement. This can take place in one of two ways.

The movement becomes unable to withstand the tension between itself and the adult Zionist organizational establishment and becomes youth *organization* rather than youth *movement*. The dynamics involve the replacement (for whatever reason) of indigenous semi-voluntary movement leadership by educators and/or quasi-educators from Israel (*shlichim*) or “professionals” from the Diaspora. In both cases they are not responsible to *movement* and are responsible to *organization*. (It is quite irrelevant if organizational headquarters are in New York or in Tel Aviv.) Thus organization co-opts movement. The re-introduction of indigenous semi-voluntary *movement* leadership is central to the rationale presented here. There cannot be responsible autonomous movement without this “missing link.”

The other possibility by which movement can eliminate the tension between itself and organization (normative society) is by cutting itself off from society. It becomes a sect. It may attempt to “convert” vulnerable individuals but it no longer sees itself engaged in the outreach of an educational/political action program to change existing society.

The commitment to the rationale of necessary tension between organization and movement, between formal education and informal movement education must be shared by educators in both sectors. The development of indigenous leadership among Jewish/Zionist educators is likely to facilitate the process of a shared Jewish/Zionist rationale.

A particularly problematic focus of Zionist education, in particular Zionist *movement* education, is the role of the professional educator (*shlichim* or local educators). On the one hand, the professional may be capable of raising standards both in terms of affective and cognitive education. On the other hand, because of the absence of an organized body of knowledge regarding the educational methodology of *movement* education, the professional is likely to become an agent of *organization* rather than *movement*.

### ***b. The Rationale for Pluralism in Informal Zionist Education***

The question of pluralism in both formal and informal education has been dealt with by the Zionist Congress.



There are differing interpretations of Zionist realization. “Harbei Petachim Lamakom” (many paths to the Divine).

Formal Zionist education will take the differing interpretations of Zionism into consideration in the process of inculcating Jewish knowledge from a Zionist point of view. It is then obligated to give free access to different viewpoints in Zionism which seek to recruit young people into their processes of socialization.

Does this mean that formal Zionist education should tolerate “political indoctrination” of youth? Those who put the question in this fashion betray either a misunderstanding of the concept of movement or wish to co-opt it within the framework of organization.

Education is politics. Our sages knew it. Plato knew it. *Tikun Olam* means politics. (*Tikun Olam* is not to be confused with *Gemilut Chassadim*. *Gemilut Chassadim* commits one to social responsibility in the here and now. *Tikun Olam* commits one to changing the here and now.) After Bar/Bat Mitzva the teenager is intellectually and emotionally capable of confronting differences in values and norms in Judaism and Zionism. This is also a vital part of the youngsters’ experiential education to democracy and pluralism in Judaism and Zionism.

In return for access to pupils, formal Zionist education must make one educational demand of the youth movements — mutual respect and tolerance. If the leadership in informal education has itself graduated from a democratic pluralistic educational approach in the Diaspora, this constructive interplay will doubtless be facilitated.

### *c. The Israel Experience*

Ideally, the properly structured long-term Israel experience constitutes the centerpiece of the process of Zionist value clarification and confrontation. But as in the case of any other centerpiece, it has little meaning in terms of Zionist process unless there is a “before” and “after.” In fact today the Israel experience often initiates the Zionist process.

Within the context of this rationale of Jewish/Zionist education, the elements of proper structure in the long-term Israel program, regardless of ideology, are:

- 1) Group organization and some group norms influenced by role models embodying a more evolved focus of Zionist commitment within the process of Jewish/Zionist education.
- 2) Cognitive and experiential consideration of additional Israel experiences and/or personal Aliyah options.

- 3) Imparting an acceptable (to the participant) intellectual rationale for his/her emotional affinity to Zionism.
- 4) Exposure to differing interpretations of *Tikun Olam*.
- 5) Projecting an expectation regarding the participants' continued involvement in Zionist educational process and providing skills and attitudes which can be utilized to this end upon the return to the Diaspora — i.e., some "leadership training" for all participants.