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REFORM ZIONISM

AN EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

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

The Meaning of Zionist Education in Our Generation¹

Resources for Jewish-Zionist Education

We have become accustomed to hearing that \$2 billion is spent each year on Jewish education in the Diaspora. In 1992, only \$34.7 million of this amount was budgeted via the Joint Authority for Jewish-Zionist Education. This sum undoubtedly leverages additional sums, which amount to at least \$60 million (authenticated) if not \$100 million.

But what, really, is Jewish-Zionist education? In the absence of a consensus as to the criteria of Jewish-Zionist education, who can guarantee that the Authority's expenditures are indeed channeled to Jewish-Zionist education? Conversely, agents other than the Authority may also be investing in Zionist education.

The truth is that much of Jewish education recognizes, directly or indirectly, the centrality of Israel as the national home of the Jewish people. One might say that a considerable portion of Jewish education is "pro-Israel." Does that mean it is also Zionist education? Moreover, is the money spent by the Authority disbursed on the basis of a rationale espousing pro-Israel Jewish education or Jewish-Zionist education?

Jewish-Zionist Education and Pro-Israel Jewish Education — What's the Difference?

To bring the criteria into focus, let us compare Jewish-Zionist education and pro-Israel Jewish education. I am aware that nothing in reality is black or white, that there are shades of gray. Thus I propose to sharpen the contrast, since our public norm is to blur them; a habit that does not further meaningful discussion.

1. Unpublished Mimeo Circular, Department of Jewish Education and Culture in the Diaspora, Joint Authority (World Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency for Israel) for Jewish Zionist Education — JAJZE, August 1992.

Comprehensive Long-term Planning

First and foremost, Jewish-Zionist education means formulating a long-term strategy starting in preschool and extending to university and beyond. To implement such a plan of action, an agreed-upon community strategy is required — with the community being either geographical (i.e., a locality) or affiliational, e.g., associated with a religious stream.

In this comprehensive strategy, Jewish-Zionist education integrates formal and non-formal education and embraces education for parents, educators, and youngsters. The Israel experience (and optimally, experiences) with its cognitive and emotional components, is a major link in the entire process of Jewish-Zionist education. The Israel experience, however, must be part of an ongoing process. Preparation precedes the experience, and the experience serves as a basis for future learning. Pro-Israel Jewish education, by contrast, rarely functions within the context of an overall strategy. There is no coordination between levels of education and the educational authorities and agencies. The Israel experience is an isolated event, rather than part of an ongoing process.

Education that Uncovers Contrasts in Values and Principles

Values are preferred positions based on overt or covert beliefs (vis-a-vis other possible positions) in any given situation in which one must take a stance. For example, one group of values is related historically to the Greece-Israel dichotomy. In ancient Greece, determinism prevailed; values were governed by the belief that the individual's fate was predetermined. The Jewish belief affirmed predestination but asserted the existence of free will (i.e., free will can prevail over fate). Another example: in Greece, the concept of beauty was an aesthetic value and a goal to be achieved, as symbolized by the Olympic Games and contests held in the nude. The Jews regard beauty as an internal, qualitative concept, one connected with justice and ethics.

A value such as *Tikun Olam* — mending the world — cannot be implemented without a belief in our ability to fashion our world. It also assumes a commitment to that which is just and ethical.

It is not enough to take a position that rests on values. This alone cannot guide us in behavioral norms, i.e., principles. For example, one may embrace the value of *Tikun Olam* on the basis of belief in free will. However, those who believe in the dictum "Justice, justice shall you pursue" would not necessarily agree on what particular personal commitment this entails. Likewise, on the socio-political plane, the question of how to implement values may elicit fundamental

differences of opinion. For example, Gush Emunim and Ha-shomer ha-Tsa'ir share the vision of *Tikun Olam*, but, as we know, they disagree profoundly on the way to bring it about.

Jewish-Zionist education is based on exposing contrasting values and principles between Judaism and surrounding society, and within Judaism itself. There are also different methodological emphases between formal and non-formal education as to how to achieve this objective.

The objective of any formal program of Jewish-Zionist education is to make the student aware and create tension with regard to the value alternatives that arise when s/he seeks a way to Zionist *Tikun* for him/herself, the People Israel, and the world. Jewish-Zionist education does more than clarify cognitive values from a Jewish-Zionist point of view; it also provides an experiential continuum based on role models who represent a certain tension between the realization of the norms (principles) of an existing society and those of some other society.

Pro-Israel Jewish education, by contrast, strives to inculcate Jewish values (including identification with the People Israel and the State of Israel). The objective is active integration into an existing Jewish community and an emotional link with the Jewish people and the State of Israel. Pro-Israel Jewish education does not expose or pinpoint the basic contradictions inherent in the attempt to realize values. Similarly, pro-Israel Jewish education has no fundamental, conscious interest in exposing students to the tension between different ways of realizing given values.

Educational Staff: Permanence versus Transience

As a result of the nature of role models in Jewish-Zionist education, there may be a high turnover of educational staff. This will be true both for *shlichim* and for local youth counselors.

Role models in pro-Israel Jewish education, by contrast, identify with a particular cross-section of an existing community. For them, educational work is probably a career, which takes place within the community's norms. Thus one would expect less turnover in pro-Israel Jewish education than in Zionist education.

Senior Educators versus Direct-Contact Staff

For Jewish-Zionist education to succeed, a large number of counselors and educators must come into direct contact with the youngsters — in classes, in summer camps, and in youth groups. This is because Jewish-Zionist education

conveys complex value messages not only through the curricula themselves but by means of direct, face-to-face contact — in class, in the youth group, in summer camp, or in the Israel experience.

Pro-Israel Jewish education places more emphasis on senior educators who can build and strengthen stable, permanent educational systems, formal and non-formal, in the Diaspora.

An example of the distinction is the controversy concerning the involvement of Jewish-Zionist education in financing and training senior educators. One could claim that since these senior educators are likely to assume leadership in pro-Israel Jewish education systems, it is unfair to finance them with the small reserves earmarked for Jewish-Zionist education. What remains to be asked, however, is how much Jewish-Zionist education should contribute to courses in Israel for senior educators, and who should be responsible for such contributions. As complex as this controversy is, one should not flinch from confronting it in a practical and civilized manner.

Naturally, there is a paradox here, one that attests to the close relationship between pro-Israel Jewish education and Jewish-Zionist education. For example, there may be a consensus that the best candidates for senior positions in pro-Israel Jewish education are precisely those who received a Jewish-Zionist education.

The Political Aspect

Jewish-Zionist education leads automatically to *political* education in the *Jewish* domain, i.e., personal involvement on behalf of some particular vision of a Diaspora community and a Jewish state in Eretz Israel. It is an education that posits the People Israel and the Land of Israel as values, with the addition of principles that point to a particular way of implementing these values. The student must cope with the alternative ways of realizing the values.

Pro-Israel Jewish education regards itself as neutral in the field of Jewish politics. It strives to find and make full use of the common ground and to blur that which is particular to a specific point of view. It teaches that the People and Land of Israel are values but avoids dealing with specific principles for realization that may overstep the general community consensus.

Democratic Processes in Education

As one component of political education, Jewish-Zionist education promotes democratic involvement in Jewish and Jewish-Zionist institutions. Zionist

education that strives to achieve *Tikun Olam* almost always requires the principle of democracy in order to influence undemocratic, oligarchic community systems.

Pro-Israel Jewish education does not deal actively with democracy in Jewish and Jewish-Zionist community institutions, even if it ostensibly supports the concept. Neither are the educational institutions themselves always open to public, democratic criticism. At the present time, for example, the institutions of the Joint Authority for Jewish-Zionist Education have not solved the problem of accountability — either that of the representatives of the fundraising organizations or that of the representatives of the World Zionist Organization.

1. The Israeli political establishment is content with the undemocratic administration of Zionist institutions because this permits it to maintain control of these institutions and utilize them for partisan needs. Democracy (e.g., special elections for the Zionist movement in Israel) would be a threat to the current situation.
2. Abroad, an alliance between big donors and “professionals” is the present incarnation of the alliance that characterized the traditional community — between wealthy lay leaders (*parnassim*) and the rabbis (*talmidei chachamim*). The professionals, sometimes wearing the mantle of academe, act as “gatekeepers” for the big givers; from these positions of power, they can screen out anything incompatible with their conceptions and, *ipso facto*, anything that challenges their institutions’ financial interest.

One may hope (although there is no guarantee) that, by means of democratic processes, we can ensure that at least the funds spent and/or influenced by the Joint Authority for Jewish-Zionist Education will be utilized according to criteria of Jewish-Zionist education. It may also become possible to arrange further funding for Jewish-Zionist education from community resources.

Ideological Processes in Jewish-Zionist Education

In the past 20 years we have witnessed the accelerated decline of ideological Zionism as represented by the World Zionist Organization, and the ascendancy of the fundraising “appeals” (UIA/Keren Hayesod) as expressed in the Jewish Agency for Israel. Furthermore, the influence of private foundations with no a priori commitment to public systems (e.g., the Jewish Agency) is on the rise. Accessibility to these private foundations is carefully guarded by professionals who have gained the confidence of their wealthy patrons.

The root cause of the ideological decline is the fact that the principal goal of political Zionism was achieved with the establishment of the State of Israel. This left people who supported the idea of a Jewish state with two options: make Aliyah to the Jewish state or accept the “demotion” of becoming a supporter of Israel. To support Israel, one need not be a declared Zionist.

My hypothesis is that today we are facing the educational implications of having embraced an obsolete and ossified political Zionism. In the free, developed Western countries (and in Israel, too, in my opinion, but that is not the issue here), *we face the necessity of basing the Zionist idea and Zionist education on an outlook of cultural, not political, Zionism.*

The Educational Significance of Political Zionism

Political Zionism is based on the model of a state for the Jews “like all the nations.” This nation-state model comes in various shades of Western political philosophy.

Classically, the assumptions of this model are:

1. We have always been an *‘am*, a people, and in today’s terms we are also a *le’om*, a nation.
2. The national home of the Jewish people is the Land of Israel. Our national language is Hebrew.
3. In the modern age, our existence in exile as an *am/le’om* is untenable because of
 - a. cultural and physical assimilation;
 - b. antisemitism, which threatens our physical and economic existence.

Note: Political Zionism *does not need to have a unique Jewish message*. Such a message can exist, but it is not essential.

An education derived from this view accomplishes two things: (a) it inculcates a *national* (not just religious/ritual) identity, and (b) it promotes immigration to Israel, at times in tandem with the negation of the Diaspora. Sometimes one encounters an attempt to integrate a political ideology (usually that of an Israeli political party) into the realization of the national cause. In the final analysis, classical political Zionism generates polarization between Israel and the Diaspora. Today, however, political Zionism usually disregards the question of content and focuses only on support for the framework.

The rationale of the model of political Zionism — a state for the Jews — is easy to comprehend. The dramatic changes in the former Soviet Union have created the illusion of a comeback for political Zionism. In principle, however, the

era of classical political Zionism as an ideological factor in the Western world has expired.

The West is not receptive to the classic message of political Zionism. Therefore, the current diluted (pro-Israel) version is characterized by the following emphases:

1. national identity (identification with the Jewish people);
2. a national home for the Jewish people (Israel) and a national language (Hebrew);
3. an undefined connection between Zionism and Judaism.

To summarize the position of this diluted political Zionism: We are Jews, one people, and as such we have a national home. We must support our national home politically and materially, in the spirit of the historical Jewish principle of shared responsibility (*Kol Israel arevim ze le-ze*). Furthermore, educationally, an experience in Israel as an educational norm for our children will ensure the survival of the Jewish identity. Hebrew, the national language, is of secondary importance.

Let us note that the Israel-Diaspora bipolarity that has always been an aspect of political Zionism still exists. However, supporters of Israel accept this situation as Jewishly “normal.” Classic political Zionism, by contrast, rejected the Diaspora on principle. It never came to terms with the “Jerusalem-Babylonia” polarization that strives to legitimize the existence of the Diaspora.

The Educational Significance of Cultural Zionism

On the other hand, *Cultural Zionism* regards Israel as a national home — a spiritual and cultural center — for the Jewish people. The center exists so as to ensure the *particularity* of the Jewish people, wherever they may be, in the modern era. The Hebrew language is an essential component of this particularity. This also means that the state of the Jews is a *Jewish* state with unique Jewish tasks. Hence the Jewish state is not strictly comparable to other national-political frameworks that came into being to manifest other people’s right to self-determination. Note: Cultural Zionism does not assume that Jews should live only in the Jewish state; it does not negate the Diaspora. However, the Jewish state is central by virtue of its giving the Jewish people a chance to express their particularity among the family of nations in the modern age.

The Problem of Models (Education)

What model, then, should give expression to the uniqueness of the Jewish state and constitute a basis for Cultural Zionism? The model cannot be based on Western ideologies; it must draw on the Jewish heritage itself.

In 1893, even before the First Zionist Congress, Achad Ha'am offered a rationale justifying the Zionist enterprise as relevant to the Jewish people in the modern age. In his essay "*Kohen ve-navi*" (Priest and prophet), he proposed a model for cultural Zionism based on the tension between the priest and the prophet in ancient times. According to Achad Ha'am, *this tension is unique to the Jewish people and is the source of our special contribution to the history of nations*. Unless this constructive tension is revived as an active force in the modern age, the culture of the Jewish people will ossify. To revive this tension, however, requires the establishment of a national home in the Land of Israel, even if a majority of Jews continue to live in the Diaspora.

The "priest and prophet" concept may be represented as two vectors pulling in opposite directions, with a field of tension between them. The "priest" vector is akin to existing Jewish society, which lives in a state of compromise between the prophetic ideals of *Tikun Olam* and current Western social realities. Synonyms for the priestly vector would be "organization" or "establishment."

The vector that aspires to be prophetic, to reform the individual, the people, and the world, represents a vision of another society. The prophetic vector is synonymous with "movement." A movement tries to move a society from point A to point B and formulates a plan of action to bring this about.

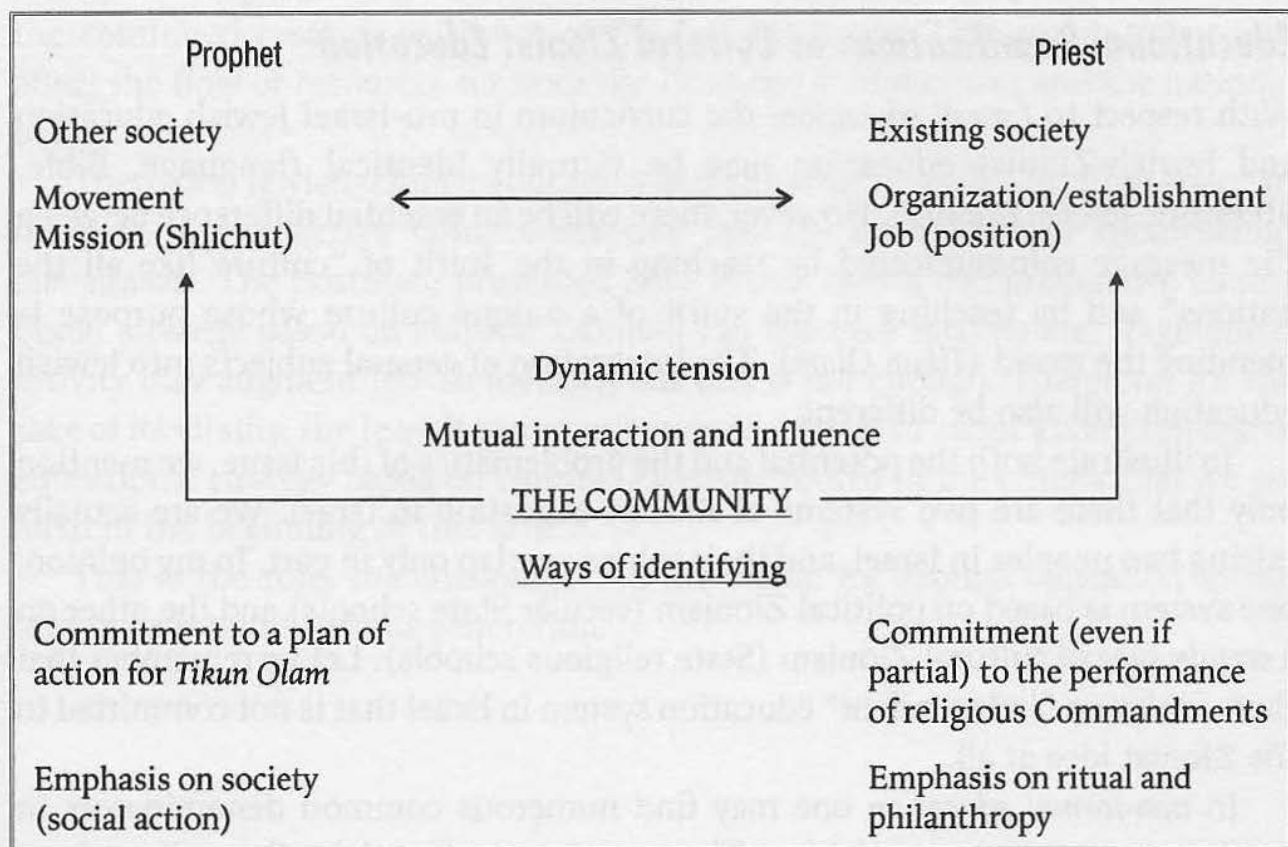
As we know, yesterday's movement is today's organization or establishment. One might say that this was the fate of political Zionism.

It is precisely this dynamic tension between priest and prophet (establishment and movement) that makes it necessary for them to relate to and influence each other. The dynamic relationship may be severed for one of two reasons. First, the movement may turn into an organization by achieving its goals or by surrendering to "reality." Alternatively, the potency of the tension between establishment and movement may cause the movement to break away and become a "cult." It will try to convert individuals, but it no longer interacts with or influences the existing society.

The priest and the prophet express their Jewish commitment and identity differently. For the priest (today, the establishment) the emphasis is on performing religious precepts relating to the individual — generally rituals, acts

of kindness to others, and charity. The emotional thrust of activity will be in the direction of integration with the existing community norms.

For the prophet (today, the movement), the key word expressing the nature of the commitment is "mission." This term does not rule out organizational affiliation alone. When the movement agenda includes *Tikun Olam*, the emotional thrust of activity will be a plan of action intended to cause change. Every stream of Judaism with a vision (or a potential vision) of its own can develop a plan of action for the future of the Jewish people and the national home based on its interpretation of prophetic ideals.



We shall explain the priest-prophet dichotomy further by examining the educational ramifications. Above we have described a field loaded with centers of influence that have competing norms. There is a possibility of children, teenagers, and adults being exposed to a diversity of norms by processes of socialization and acculturation.

The aim of Jewish-Zionist education is to impart the priest-prophet tension as an activating factor. To live with tension within surrounding society while striving for prophetic ideals requires more than a passive Jewish identity or performance of religious commandments on the individual level. What one needs is a *commitment to the Zionist idea of Tikun Olam and readiness to act for its fulfillment*

together with others. It means being ready to undertake “mission” (*shlichut*) in the context of a movement.

In the light of the foregoing, we have highlighted the differences between pro-Israel Jewish education and Jewish-Zionist education. The former is based on political Zionism, which means, mainly, identification with the centrality of the State of Israel for the Jewish people and active support for it. The latter is based on cultural Zionism with everything this implies, including the imperative of active participation in and commitment to the realization of some Zionist vision, a vision that manifests itself both in the Diaspora and in the National Home.

Educational Ramifications of Cultural Zionist Education

With respect to *formal education*, the curriculum in pro-Israel Jewish education and Jewish-Zionist education may be virtually identical (language, Bible, literature, Jewish history). However, there will be an essential difference between the message communicated by teaching in the spirit of “culture like all the nations” and by teaching in the spirit of a unique culture whose purpose is mending the world (*Tikun Olam*). The integration of general subjects into Jewish education will also be different.

To illustrate both the potential and the problematics of this issue, we mention only that there are two systems of Zionist education in Israel. We are actually raising two peoples in Israel, and their values overlap only in part. In my opinion, one system is based on political Zionism (secular State schools) and the other on a *certain type* of cultural Zionism (State religious schools). Let us remember that there is also an “independent” education system in Israel that is not committed to the Zionist idea at all.

In *non-formal education* one may find numerous common denominators in routine summer-camp activities. The experience offered in Camp Ramah or Young Judea camps, however, differs from that provided by most camps run by Jewish community centers. Yes, some camps make sure to employ Israeli *shlichim* during the summer, but these people can only reinforce the polarization between “them” and “us.” They cannot challenge the youngsters’ set of values for the long term as can local Zionist graduates of Israel programs. The questions in non-formal education are always the same: who are the counselors, what are their values, and does the establishment give this value system the backing that it needs if it is to be presented to the youngsters as an alternative?

I conclude my remarks with a few words on the common denominator, and the mutual interests, of Jewish-cultural-Zionist education and pro-Israel Jewish education.

As we recall, cultural Zionism assumes that Diaspora Jewry will continue to exist and that its vitality must be ensured. The Zionist educator will claim that its vitality will not just be a function of passive Jewish identity but will depend on the Jewish-Zionist tension within it. This tension stems directly from the commitment, the need to act, that such tension engenders. Perhaps this commitment will not always lead to Aliyah, but it must lead to personal involvement in raising a successor generation that is motivated to play an active role in the continued creative existence of the Jewish people. This commitment will affect the flow of resources for both the Diaspora communities and the national home.

Therefore, Jewish-Zionist education and pro-Israel Jewish education share an interest in the active component that we are interested in inculcating: *commitment*. The postulate presented here is that only a comprehensive educational strategy based on cultural Zionism can succeed. Incomplete, fragmented activity may augment Jewish identity, but this is not enough. Therefore, for the sake of its vitality, the Jewish community would do well to adopt a comprehensive educational strategy based on cultural Zionism, rooted in the criteria that we set forth in the beginning of this article.

This is the role, the challenge, and the vision for Zionist education in the Jewish community of our generation.