

Excerpt From:

# REFORM ZIONISM

**AN EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE**

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**Section 5 - Educating  
for Reform Zionism**

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# Educating for Reform Zionism

## Introduction

1. A Zionist Youth Movement for Reform Judaism
2. Reform Zionist Communities and Values
3. What is the Meaning of Your Aliyah\* Framework?
4. ARZA\*\* and Reform Zionist Youth Programming
5. A Reform Zionist Policy for the Hebrew Union College

\* Aliyah — “Going up” to settle in Israel

\*\* ARZA — Association of Reform Zionists in America

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## *Synopsis of the Section*

The articles in this section synthesize between Reform Zionist ideology (Sections 1 & 2) and Jewish Zionist educational principles (Section 4) and seek to apply them to the youth frameworks of Reform Judaism, both in the Diaspora and in Israel. They represent active advocacy for Reform Zionist Education — in particular within the framework of informal (youth) education.

Logic would have dictated that the writings in this section would constitute the outcome of the theoretical bases established in Section 4. In fact, the confrontation with actual situations and challenges in many cases triggers the process for formulating more general statements.

It was a primary purpose of my *shlichut* to the UAHC in North America to lay the groundwork for a Reform Zionist Youth Movement. In forming the “*Garin Arava*” framework (see Introductory Preface) I felt that the infrastructure for such a movement was being laid. It was not to be. The lack of suitable *shlichim* and in particular the resignation of Rabbi Stephen Schafer, the Zionistically oriented head of the Youth Division, led to the substitution of Pro-Israel programming for the Reform Zionist orientation introduced by my *shlichut* and continued by Gidon Elad of Kibbutz Chatzerim until 1979.

A ZIONIST YOUTH MOVEMENT FOR REFORM JUDAISM (1977) was a call that was ignored in North America. However, the more Zionist orientation of the Reform communities in England, Australia and South Africa resulted in the formation of Netzer (Noar Zioni Reformi) as a Reform Zionist Youth Movement. Unfortunately, these small communities could not fill the gap left by the absence of North American participation in such an enterprise. My participation in the symposium REFORM ZIONIST COMMUNITIES AND VALUES (1984) and my 1987 letter to the then *Mazkira* of Netzer in England (WHAT IS THE MEANING OF YOUR ALIYAH FRAMEWORK?) were attempts to relate to the Netzer graduates’ search for a meaningful role. The dearth of Netzer graduates’ involvement (those who have, made *Aliyah*) with the IMPJ indicates that this problem, reflecting fundamental defects in the Netzer educational process, remains open.

My memo, ARZA AND REFORM ZIONIST YOUTH PROGRAMMING constituted a renewed attempt to raise the issue of Reform Zionist (as distinct from Reform Pro-Israel) youth education within the UAHC framework (see also Section 1:7). The great harm done to the IMPJ by the lack of Reform Zionist *Aliyah* was, in my opinion, a direct result of ARZA’s unwillingness to advocate a Reform Zionist youth education program and to challenge the Youth Division’s minimalist pro-Israel approach. However, into the mid-Nineties, ARZA remained

primarily committed to political action on behalf of Reform Judaism in Israel. Nor was the approach of the Hebrew Union College to its Year in Israel program for American (and Israeli) Rabbinical students conducive to promoting Reform Zionism. A REFORM ZIONIST POLICY FOR THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE was written in response to Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman's request for input by Reform Jewish educators in Israel at a meeting held in July 1996.