

SUMMARY:

HISTORICAL CONTINUITY  
AND THE VALUES OF TRADITION

A symposium by correspondence among members of the  
"Hashomer Hatza'ir" Kibbutz Movement\*

Readers were asked to give their opinion on the following four questions:

1. Manifestations of religious awakening among adults, and a turning towards religious faith and the values of tradition among youth within the kibbutz movement – are these a passing fad, a substitute for the loss of faith in secular ideals, or a search for national-cultural roots?

2. A breakaway from the historical continuity among some of Israeli youth (as many argue) – is this indeed a fact; what are its reasons; is the Hebrew education in Hebrew schools to blame, or the Zionist ideology?

3. Diaspora and Israel in the ideology of Hashomer Hatza'ir: was the Zionist-pioneer-socialist rebellion of Hashomer Hatza'ir in the Diaspora, with all its negative manifestations, indeed at that time an alienation from the mass of the Jews in the dispersion, and from the cultural and spiritual traditions of the Jewish people?

4. What are the desired directions and ways for a genuine Jewish-Israeli continuity within the framework of the secular-nationalistic-socialistic method of transmitting values of Jewish tradition, wisdom and culture through the ages?

We will group the answers according to the questions.

1. RELIGIOUS AWAKENING

*Mordekhai Amitai* (Kibbutz Sarid)

To my mind, the longing for a return to tradition and faith in circles brought up on the values of the Hebrew labour movement hinges first of all on ignorance and a false image of the status of religion. The truth of the matter is that even the religion which we, the older generation of over-fifty, remember with nostalgia, was already a corroded kind and not a simple faith in the Almighty. If there was anything to keep off this corrosion it was Zionism and the hope it held out of an old-new homeland being rebuilt. Therefore there is no reason to accuse the Zionist ideology, with its negation of the Diaspora, of "severance, alienation, and negation of the whole historical tradition and continuity".

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The fanatic emphasis on the Hebrew language, the elements of Chasidic lore enthusiastically adopted by the movement, and its tragic fate in the Holocaust together with all of European Jewry, these certainly don't point to alienation. A spiteful atheism and heresy for the sake of heresy were not typical of our movement.

The confused neo-religious nostalgia is in many ways misdirected. It wants to be a religiousness for the sensitive, without practical commandments.  
*Mordekhai Razin* (Kibbutz Shamir)

We are looking for a fresh "Jewish consciousness". Is it to be a sentimental nostalgia or one which sees the kibbutz as a genuine expression of contemporary Judaism? In the state, the kibbutz embodies the continuity of historical, social and moral values of the Jewish community. Viewing the modern Jewish state as an embodiment of messianic expectations is easier for us than for the orthodox Jew.

*Ya'akov Rabi* (Tel-Aviv)

"The search for God" in circles like ours seems to me an act of retreat. Before rejecting the ideals one has believed in all his life, he would do well first to check his own deeds and see if he himself hasn't gone astray. No social or moral ideal, even the purest, is in itself a guarantee for its complete realisation. There is always "freedom of choice" to do good or bad.

The fact that there are still things we don't know, notwithstanding modern man's great steps forward in science, cannot and may not lead to a flirtation with religion. A conscious obscurantism of this kind is today more dangerous than ever in light of the gap between scientific achievements and human limitations. The real challenge is to overcome those limitations – certainly not by religious meanderings, but by a heightened consciousness of man's responsibility to himself and his world.

The selectivity with which some commandments are followed and others not, and the ignorance generally displayed by kibbutz members even about the commandments they have chosen to fulfil, are insulting to the Jewish religion. The saying here is appropriate that "an ignoramus cannot be devout".

I am not denying the human need for symbols and ceremonies and I am of the opinion that the kibbutz has developed a very nice system of symbols and festive events which draw upon present-day reality and ancient cultural sources. It would be a pity to water these down with all kinds of customs and manners which are strange to our spirit.

*Yecheiel Qadmi* (Beit Alpha)

Is there a religious awakening in our kibbutzim? No, not yet. Not yet, I say, as a hint that anything can happen, even to us. We, the older generation, built this country on the principles of justice, not in heaven, but on earth; not in the days of the Messiah, but in our day; not as a

supernatural miracle, but a miracle anchored in tangible reality. No wonder then, that that generation isn't easily persuaded to follow the quasi-attractiveness of the religious fad.

And the younger generation? Since I am not one of them, I cannot talk as their spokesman, but it seems to me that those who say that our youth has – God forbid – been bitten by the religious bug, are wrong. I agree that an ideational fermentation is going on among youth, but is that a turning towards religion? Searches and ponderings – yes. And very well it is indeed that there is a search for roots, an outstanding example of renewed national awakening. Therefore, instead of bemoaning the longing of our youth for national-Jewish identity, we had better greet it as a promise for the future.

*Shalom Cholbsky* ('Ein Hashofet)

Youths born here are hungry for more knowledge of Judaism. I wouldn't call this a religious revival, but a hunger to understand what it is that made our people willing to die in order for the idea to live on in others. I will quote a young poet, Eli Allon:

"What is this faith that Jews were willing to die for, for generations? Maybe it is a brilliant belief and a great truth, or an ugly joke, and then it is the most tragic joke in human history that devoured millions of people ... What is this faith? I feel a terrible hunger to learn about it."

## 2. BREAKAWAY FROM HISTORICAL CONTINUITY?

*Yechiel Qadmi* (Beit Alpha)

I don't think that the disconnection of "certain Israeli youths" from the historical continuity is at all possible. This is an absurd hypothesis. Even abroad, where there are more opportunities for such a disconnection, the process is difficult and heartrending. A case in point is Russian Jewry. Certainly the process for Israeli youth would be impossible. Those who argue the disconnection argue that the Zionist revolution was a breach in the historical continuity. But the opposite is true! Zionism came to strengthen the ties, not to cut them off. The real problem of Israeli youth lies somewhere else; it is its alienation from the great cultural inheritance of our people.

*Yosef Wilfend* ('Ein Hashofet)

If you ask me about the continuity of history, I ask you "what break?". In all periods of Jewish history men found a certain age in the past with which they could identify themselves. There have been times that the Bible was hardly studied at all, in spite of express commandments to do so. The Enlightenment rebelled against their times and found in the Bible their source of inspiration; Zionism still does.

We have to regenerate the nationalistic education of Zionist fulfilment and the connection with Judaism according to the philosophy of the secular

thinkers, Sirkin, Borokhov, A. D. Gordon, and others. The Jewish problem is now what it was then, notwithstanding the changes that have taken place since. These thinkers can give food for thought and serve as guides even for the New Left if only presented in the right words.

*Ben-Ami Gordon (Mishmar Ha'emeq)*

Yes, there is indeed a break with historical Judaism. Maybe it is not conscious, because we hear very often of the Jewish unity and continuity, but those are more formal declarations than meaningful truths. Our saying that we are the legitimate heirs of the historical heritage has little to lean on and is in actual fact only empty phraseology.

The reason for our youngsters' turning to extreme ideas, Canaanism on the one hand, religion on the other, is that education has failed to instil in them enough nationalistic identity which they could turn to solving the new national problems like absorption of immigrants, youth counselling, etc.

We have tried to implant in our children, with the help of textbooks, an identity with the Jewish people through pity. But this was the wrong approach. The Holocaust here is taught as a history of martyrs. But this is an historical misconception. We have ourselves created a negative attitude to the Diaspora by all this. At the same time we have failed to teach our children the cultural and humanistic values of the Jewish way of life. We also have a language and a literature thousands of years old, but we teach only very little of this wealth. Our spiritual world becomes cosmopolitan in one sense, Levantine in another.

*Daniel Ben-Nachum (Beit-Zera')*

Our history is too long for us to be pessimistic or impatient only ninety years after the first settlers came here, fifty years after the establishment of the Histadrut, twenty-five years after the establishment of the State. One of the young people said: "Judaism has existed for thousands of years, fixed and solid. The problems are ours and not Judaism's. We are strangers to Judaism. We are looking for a way by which we will be able to carry it on." Well, Judaism is not "fixed and solid". It is not something metaphysical. The halakhah and the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai are not "outside of history" (as according to Franz Rosenzweig). Judaism is the culture and tradition of the Jewish people and as such a historical process of which we are a part.

### 3. DIASPORA AND ISRAEL

*Yechezkel Qadmi (Beit Alpha)*

Even a slight acquaintance with Zionism will make it clear that the essence of the movement is secular. This national liberation movement originated in the idea of auto-emancipation, i. e. not a liberation by divine intervention but by ourselves. In this framework the Jewish people is seen

as a subject deciding and acting for itself about its fate among the nations. Whoever takes away this idea from the Zionist movement takes away its heart and soul. Education towards a Jewish Zionist consciousness would include a knowledge of Jewish history, culture, Hebrew language and literature, the Sabbath and Jewish festivals, the communities in the Diaspora, great personalities of our people, and a thorough knowledge of the country. I think that whoever is steeped in knowledge of the above-mentioned can indeed carry the name "Jew" with pride.

*Shalom Cholbsky* ('Ein Hashofet)

The Zionist revolution was not an attempt to alienate the mass of the Jews in the Diaspora, but to save them; this is the opposite. But in the process the attitude towards the cultural-spiritual heritage was deeply harmed. This harm affected not only the Diaspora, but the heart of Zionism as well.

*Yecheiel Qadmi* (Beit Alpha)

There is a great gap between the present and the past, between the sons who were born here and those who lived there, in the Diaspora. Zionism is the antithesis of the Diaspora and we have reared our children in these theories of antithesis. Israeli youth feels contempt for its counterparts in the Diaspora. That is the price the Zionist revolution has asked. It is not an ideological failure of Zionism and not educational misstep of the Hebrew school, but the "revenge" of the antithesis. Israeli youth itself is already up in arms against this result and that is a good sign.

#### 4. DIRECTIONS FOR A JEWISH-ISRAELI CONTINUITY

*Ya'akov Rabi* (Tel-Aviv)

We have to transmit the traditional-cultural wealth of the Jewish people. We have to do this without preconditions about what we will receive and what not. To transmit is first of all to learn, to know, and to internalize the knowledge. That is our duty as sons of a certain people, the Jewish people. The fact of belonging to a certain people is an existential situation, being both fate and freedom: freedom for us is only within its framework.

The new methods of teaching mathematics have made it possible to teach higher maths to children. Why not develop new techniques of teaching Jewish tradition without infringing on other subjects taught? There is room also to start a classical-Jewish stream of study in secular high-schools to prepare those who want to go on to Jewish studies at the university. There is no way of telling to what this will lead us, it may well lead to great aesthetic experiences. It will certainly make us more secure when confronting religious fanatics. Then we will be better able to ward off their religious coercion which is assisted to no small extent by the ignorance of the mass of the people.

### *Yechiel Qadmi (Bet Alpha)*

A genuine Israeli continuity? Here the most important thing is to teach our heritage, so rich in wisdom about life in all its aspects. Such a treasure cannot and should not be left in the hands of the orthodox. It is the responsibility of the kibbutz movement to redeem the humanistic content of this heritage. Take the Sabbath for instance. Socially speaking, its idea was a revolutionary one; religiously speaking, the holiness of the day was part of an ideological war for its observance. But besides these there is the humanistic value of giving man a time to be free from work in order to become a more human being. There is also the nationalistic function of separating our people from all other peoples by our day of rest. By keeping the Sabbath our people kept its special character. In the kibbutz we can give the Sabbath and other festivals a special nationalistic-socialistic character.

### *Ya'aqov Horovitz ('Ein Hachoresht)*

Not enough is done to create a new culture and folklore on this soil. All culture begins in the village. In our country too a beginning was made by creating festivals connected with agriculture. But it is not enough. Instead of intensifying the newly created we imitate the degenerating West, especially the US. We are stuck in the middle of the road and a flirtation with old, stultified religious customs will not get us out of the impasse. The only way out is to continue creating a new and original culture.

### *Ben-Ami Gordon (Mishmar Ha'emeq)*

The festivals and the Sabbath in the kibbutz are not genuinely Jewish. There is much imported culture, entertainment. We have to fight ignorance first and foremost, but this needs study and toil. There is deep need for ceremony, the lighting of candles on Friday evening, for instance. The kibbutz movement made a start in giving the traditional festivals a new form. Our aim was to give the festivals an up-to-date significance, without losing sight of their historical significance. We wanted to see the festivals benefit our working society-in-being, as against the immovableness of the Diaspora. But this synthesis, which was still just budding, we are losing now.

Summary by Chanah Arnon

*Hashomer Hatzar (lit. "The Young Watchman") is the name of a Marxist Jewish youth organisation, which established many kibbutzim, now organised in the federation Kibbutz Artzi Hashomer Hatzar, which is affiliated to the leftist political party, Mapam.*