

SUMMARY

"IS GOD PRESENT IN THE KIBBUTZ?"

A discussion between kibbutz members on the issue of
Judaism and tradition*

Eugenia Simchony, the well-known radio broadcaster, discovered a "scope" remarkable from its ideological-symptomatic point of view: synagogues are being built in kibbutzim! And not in the religious kibbutzim, but in those of the secular movements, those which only one or two decades ago were considered left-leftists and principled atheists. Is this only a coincidence? A neo-religious fad in a world which was thrown into turmoil since the Six Day War? Or is it a genuine spiritual revision, a revolution of ideas, of penitents in the orthodox sense?

The question "Is God present in the kibbutz" was posed to kibbutz members of different ideologies, even to members of religious kibbutzim (here the answer was predictable).

We will give some of the views express by different members.

Yariv Ben-Aharon (Givat-Chayim Ichud)

A person cannot live without some belief. Anyhow a Jew can't. Religion in its conventional frozen framework often appears as an alienating factor, being institutionalized, unknown, not communicative. Nevertheless I don't hesitate defining the spiritual quest of our generation as a quest which is essentially religious, in the truest sense of the word. We are in fact looking for God. Our search is a religious one in the same sense that the kibbutz movement in itself has religious elements in it. We're looking for Truth, for the Absolute, for God, for a centre of identification within man. Our God is not the God of our parents, the founders of the kibbutz. We have to solve the problem that they couldn't solve for us. They solved many problems for us, but to solve the spiritual problems of the present world they cannot do for us, we have to do that ourselves.

Rut Avni (Kfar Blum) says on the same topic:

Our generation was born into a void, a world without faith. I think this is a tragic condition. We don't train ourselves. Faith needs training, the practice of faith, and perpetual study. Those things are just far from us, they don't exist.

* in: Ofek le-Sifrut, le Hagut u-le-Biqoret, Volume 2 (Spring 1972), pp. 226-230.

Original Hebrew title: האם אלהים בקיבוץ?

On the question of tradition, there was this:

Eli Allon ('Ein Shemer)

We want to learn more about Judaism, to come closer. Maybe a few will come to have faith, but I don't think there will be many. I don't think many *can* be so open to something which for years was considered taboo. I don't think that that is the thing to do. But rather: coming closer to the Jewish people and its tradition. Instead of feeling contempt for religious believers, feel understanding for them based on knowledge and emotion. So that there won't be a gap between the different camps. Not a League against religious coercion, but a League of rapprochement.

Simcha Friedman (Tirat Zvi — a religious kibbutz)

One has to be careful when evaluating these things, for it doesn't seem to me that there is yet readiness to fulfill the commandments. But there is willingness to receive customs and traditions, as lighting the Sabbath candles, setting the table with white tablecloths on Friday night and more. It's interesting to note that there is a real search going on for a more authentic feeling of the Jewish festivals, however with the reservation that the negative commandments are not kept. I tried to explain once that the do's and the don'ts are interdependent, but that was not accepted. Nevertheless, one can not deny that there is a searching going on.

Gid'on El'ad (Chatzerim)

The new openness shown by the younger generation is more than openness between man and man, it is an openness to spiritual questions. And that, I think, is very important. I think it will find its expression in a return to some kind of Jewish tradition, for we have nowhere else to turn. We have to turn back to ourselves. To insure a constructive return we have to search the whole of Jewish tradition. Not only recent orthodoxy, but starting from before the Essenes and on through all periods of Jewish history. From this wealth we can choose what we like. I don't know where we have to go or what we have to reach, but we have to live our own lives and we have no choice but to be Jews.

I don't like the fact that there is a turn back to orthodoxy, if there is a turning back at all. Nevertheless we can't get away from giving our lives Jewish content *and* form. As far as content is concerned, whatever we do is Jewish because we live in Israel, speak Hebrew, we live from Shabat to Shabat and from one holiday to the next. What worries me is the *form*, because form ultimately is a very important aspect of life. I would like to see a combination of old foundations and new which would satisfy a modern person.

Some have found their way back to religion :

Yariv 'Ivri (Ayelet Hashachar)

Doubt about our way of life and justification of it were evidently too deeply buried for me to recognize them. The shock of the Six Day War was needed to show me this and make clear that I believe in something other than I had thus far thought I believed in. Can I say today what I believe? Yes, I can, even though I still can't practise. I believe in the existence of God, I believe in the Law (Torah) and its commandments, even though I still can't practise most of them because I'm not ripe for them yet and I don't want to practise what I can't identify with.

And on the philosophical plane.

Yariv Ben-Aharon:

I think that Judaism today means a renewed entry into great spiritual tension. I don't mean the physical struggle for existence in a hostile world, but a struggle with the society and the establishment and with all the socio-moral failures attendant upon the gap between the social classes. Thus I don't advocate any easy solution, but a frank confrontation with our sense of fate. It contains that eternal struggle for truth as we know it in the Jewish spirit, i. e. all obligation, not an easy retreat into religion. Essentially it is the same old question of *choice*, the people which has to choose its way in order to exist. They cannot exist without their spiritual commandments in the light of which they have to examine themselves every day. I don't have to return to something which I never left. I have to answer my life-questions. A spiritual revolution is in the ability and the daring to realise the spiritual values in man's life. That is to say: to make this world a more humane one.

Summary by Chanah Arnon