

SUMMARY OF SYMPOSIUM

ARMY EDUCATION AND WORLD-OUTLOOK

A Symposium*

What has an Israeli intellectual magazine to do with Army Education? And what moved us to convene Army Officers, with important duties, to come to Jerusalem to join in a symposium on the subject with members of the Editorial Board? We certainly need *them*, for what is the use of discussion on Jewish Thought – an apparently abstract subject – if it is not related to practical life; and in our life at present, the Army unfortunately takes a central place. But we thought that the Army too might be helped in this way: for no education – even military education – is possible without a world-outlook; and that is *our* main business. Our conjecture was fully confirmed in the symposium, in which eight high-ranking officers (on active duty or in reserves) took part. Most of them admitted that the Army, in its training, should pay more attention to discussion and thought; and they made practical suggestions in this direction. Perhaps the most striking expression, quoted by Michael Gratz, was that of a Tank Officer, who was conversing with an Army Chaplain when the Syrians began shooting on Yom Kippur: “War can wait. Theology cannot wait. What are we – animals or human beings?”

This is a serious subject, particularly in these days, marked by widespread doubts and perplexity on the political and social problems of our State. Weakness is felt, which can affect the Army with serious consequences. There is urgent need of Civic-Zionist education, – not only in the Army, – to strengthen public morale and sense of duty.

Awareness of the Situation

Israel is in a state of war. And this is not a dynastic war – as European wars in past centuries, leading to changes of boundaries or of national sovereignty at most. Our war is *a fight for existence*. The Arabs want to exterminate the Jews, or drive them out of “their country,” just as they exterminated or expelled the Crusaders in the Middle Ages. When to open fire – is for them a question of tactics only.

And this is not a war between Jews and Arabs only. It is merely part of a World War, as with Hitler; only this time it is between Russia together with the “Third World,” against the Western powers – a “Holy Alliance” of Communist ideology, together with feelings of revenge, of peo-

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ples exploited in the past, against Western civilization. The Jews of Israel are regarded as a branch of Imperialism, like the French in Algiers, the Portuguese in Angola, the whites in Rhodesia and South-Africa. Israel is merely an outpost in a global war.

Israel is an outpost also of the whole Jewish people, fighting a rear-guard action against assimilation. If Israel falls, then in 2-3 generations not much of the Diaspora will remain. Individual Jews will survive, but the Jewish people will disappear.

Some people say there is nothing new in this: the Jewish people always had to struggle for its existence. But here one must be aware of misuse of words. The struggle of Jews in the Diaspora against discrimination and persecution must not be confused with actual *war*, a war of life and death, which is our fate today.

The trouble is that this awareness is not common to Israeli society as a whole. Most Israelis continue their daily lives as though in times of peace, seeking money and entertainment, with demonstrations, strikes, etc. During and after the War of Independence, people were more serious, because they realized that they were at war. But now? Should the Army perhaps, with a stronger awareness of the situation – and most soldiers are reservists who will return to civil life – serve as a backbone for the whole society?

Recognition of the Function of the Jewish people

The outlook underlying Army education today is based on *Zionism*, recognition of our right to the Land, love of the Land, etc. Some point to social values also, democracy, care for the poor. But these formulations of *Zionism*, which were accepted in the early years, are no longer sufficient for a young man today, required to face serious dangers, even to give his life if necessary.

Many young men ask – to themselves if not openly – “What is all this for? Better to be alive in America – where there is also democracy and care for the poor – than to die in Israel.” And what are we to say to a young Jew living in America in comfort – why should he “come up” to Israel, to die for “his country,” which is not his native soil? “The State of Israel is in danger; it may be destroyed.” So what! he will reply, “I can get along without it. Many peoples have disappeared from history; if the Jewish people disappears too – what matter? From among the 100 nations of the U.N., there will be one less – and the world will continue as usual.”

Replies to these doubts can be given only by an officer who is imbued, not only with love of the Land, but with deep recognition of the *mission of the Jewish people and the necessity of its continued existence. Zionism without roots in Judaism will not survive.*

The Jews are not just one people among many others. They have inherited a special function. What is that function? Here there may be different views. The religious Jew will say: "We have been given the Torah, a *Torah of Truth*, and it is our duty to preserve it and live by it. 'Ye are my witnesses.'" From the religious point of view, our war is a *war of Mitzvah*.

The secular Jew will not use these religious terms (though Ben Gurion often spoke of a "peculiar people"). But he will probably translate into common speech the concepts behind them. To ignore all Jewish values, to ignore the whole history of the Jewish people as an "abnormal" people – to say the least – is impossible.

I would suggest that in Army education such questions can be submitted for discussion, and men should be allowed to voice their views and doubts. The true educator, who wishes to impart values, does not dictate his own views, but offers them, together with alternative views, for discussion, hoping that his pupils will recognize the good and accept it from free conviction. In this way only will the values be *internalized*, becoming an integral part of their thought and behaviour. Education in this form is much needed in the Army today.

Colonel Ya'aqov Hisdai (Army Officer)

I can teach only those things that I believe in. I often have to talk to soldiers; I can give you the substance of my talks, and you will judge if they are good education.

I open with three questions:

- a) Is the existence of the State of Israel assured?
- b) How long must we continue to fight?
- c) What justification was there for setting up the State of Israel?

That is, I take the three most important questions which are being asked in practice, as relevant to each man; and each talk is an attempt to give answers to them.

First: Is the existence of the State of Israel assured? Of course it is not *assured*. Its continuance depends chiefly on ourselves, on our will and on our readiness to fight for it. The failures in the Yom Kippur War were due not to Arab superiority, but to our own internal weaknesses and lack of preparedness. These things we can mend, and that gives us hope for the future. I firmly believe that if we are awake and united, we shall be able to withstand all our enemies around.

How long must we continue to fight? So long as there is a need. To fight means of course to suffer casualties and all that these entail. But I try to show that we are fighting for great and important matters.

And so to the last question: What justification was there for setting up the State of Israel? I should explain that our people has been characterized by three facts: first, that we are a people with a history longer than others; second, that we have always been at the centre of events of the

history of mankind; third, that we have always excelled in our ability to link the needs of life with adherence to spiritual values. And so the existence of the Jewish people is of universal significance.

During the thousands of years of our existence – even from ancestral days – we have wandered from one country to another, but always at the centre of human action and civilization; and wherever Jews went, they always took an important place in material and spiritual creativity – often hated and persecuted, but never ignored.

When the needs of existence compelled the Jewish people to be in exile, they kept Israel as a spiritual and cultural value in all their wanderings. Now it has become possible to unite needs of existence with values and faith; and so the Jewish people have realized their ancient hope and have returned to Israel.

But even with our return our historic destiny has remained unchanged. The whole world is interested in our existence in this small corner. The world dispute concerning us is evidence for the human importance of our existence. Our struggle for existence is a symbol of the struggle for culture and values, and is of significance for the whole of mankind.

Major (Reserves) Yoav Gelber (Army Officer)

I suggest a formula for what may serve as a consensus underlying Army education. *Zahal is the Jewish and Zionist army of the State of Israel, serving the Government of Israel.* The order is not accidental. Government serves the State; the State serves the Zionist cause; Zionism is the solution to the problem of the Jewish people. The final link, which seemed so obvious after the Holocaust 30 years ago, is obvious no longer. The maintenance of the Jewish people in the Land, offered then as a solution of this problem, would seem now to be more problematic – for themselves, for their neighbours, for the whole world – than the emancipatory solution in America, Europe, and even Soviet Russia. This difficulty has to be faced. The submitting of such questions for open discussion is a first condition for the establishment of strong motivation. The realization of the purpose of Zionism and the State of Israel can create a sense of mission, which must underlie Army education generally. There has to be a recognition of the need of personal sacrifice – material and even physical – for the nation's sake; and here there can be no place for relaxation or tolerance.

To illustrate my meaning, I would compare the recent attitude towards losses in the Yom Kippur War, with that of Jews – and Gentiles still more – in the World Wars. In the First World War, the Jews of Germany, numbering then half a million only, lost 12,000 men (!) – not for Zion, but for the “Vaterland.” This heavy price, heavier than that of Israel in all its wars, did not lead them to question the course they had chosen; even after Hitler's rise to power, most of them insisted on their right to remain

in Germany. Whereas we have made heroes of the prisoners of the Yom Kippur War, and their return – into a national holiday. Apart from the question of Army morality – whether and when surrender is to be justified – and apart from the natural joy of the families concerned, I am afraid that the toleration thus shown was a sign of weakness, of uncertainty with regard to the need of sacrifice for the national cause.

A stronger attitude was that of Ben-Gurion. With regard to our losses in the Second World War, these were his words:

“In many respects we may be superior to the Gentiles, but in some we have shown weakness. Take the matter of our losses. Many were taken prisoner. So what? And if they fell – a pity, of course. I know that the mother of the boy cannot be comforted by the thought that an Army man may have to be killed. But the public cannot approach matters in this way. We must educate ourselves and the public.” (Address in the Mapai Centre, 14.4.1941).

At the end of 1938, after “Kristallnacht,” when the question was how to rescue children from Germany, he said:

“If I knew that *all* the children could be saved by sending them to England, and only one-half by bringing them to Erez Israel, I would choose the second course; because we have to consider not the children only, but the historic reckoning of the Jewish people.” (Address in the Mapai Centre 7.12.1938).

We too have to consider the “historic reckoning” of the people, which is by no means assured, and which must continue to direct our actions, over and above personal losses and sacrifices, over and above immediate considerations of time and place.

For three things Jews are commanded to be killed rather than transgress: idolatry, murder, and adultery; but “in times of persecution” – “even for a shoe-string.” Let us recognize the fact that our time is one of persecution, and that we are fighting not for frontier-zones, but for the existence of the State, as a means for the continued existence of the Jewish people; and that we are required to live and make sacrifices in a manner worthy of the time, and not hesitate to demand the same of those around us.

Dinah Werth (Officer, Women’s Corps)

In November 1952 I was appointed Commander of the Women’s Base Camp. This was after many years of previous experience: in the *Haganah*, and in the British Army (ATC). They taught us many things there: order, democracy, human relations. After World War II, I was employed in various missions: to North Africa and in Israel itself, helping with the settlement of new immigrants from North Africa; then abroad again – this time to South America. These experiences with different communities were of help in my work afterwards in the Women’s Corps. There were delays

owing to difficulties in finding a suitable camp: and I insisted that we should be an independent unit, not subordinate to the Men's Base. At last we started.

I wanted the girls to feel that this was not just an Army Camp, but their *home*; and although they came as conscripts, I wanted to create an atmosphere of *volunteers*, as in the Haganah. We did away with punishments; Makarenko's "Pedagogical Poem" was our guide.

We set up a special training course for our NCOs. We asked them to let the girls feel that Zahal is a People's Army, based on *families*, in which the woman is not less important than the man, for she is the principal educator. We made much use of symbols as in the Haganah: the oath of loyalty - to the light of torches; and, as a verse, I chose from the Haggadah: "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt," adding: "We shall be slaves no more."

On Friday nights I used to light candles and read a chapter from the Bible - our custom, introduced even in the British ATS. Only that here we had almost a "tragedy." Rabbi Shlomo Goren, then Chief Army Chaplain, objected to our conducting the ceremony after supper; candles must be lit at sundown. I demonstrated that the girls should be allowed to wash and feed first, and so come in a festive mood. "We fought for this in the British Army, and for my girls now I am not going to give way." He objected also to our having music - a desecration of the Sabbath. I pointed out that in the Temple the Levites played instruments on Sabbath and Festivals. "But is this camp a Temple?" he asked. "Wherever Jewish youths are assembled," I replied, "is for me a Temple."

Later on, we had great help from Rabbi Mordechai Firon (not Chief Army Chaplain). He gave us talks on Judaism, which were followed eagerly. I asked him to give us an officer of Religion and Welfare, and he sent us an excellent girl, Aliza. She was a disciple of Rabbi Kook, who gave us talks on Judaism, and shows us how to celebrate Sabbath and Festivals in an attractive way. The girls looked forward to this encounter with tradition. And so Judaism became an integral part of the life of the camp.

Rabbi Mordechai Piron (Chief Army Chaplain)

In the history of nations one finds long periods of what can be called "days of smallness," days in which there are no dramatic events, and everything follows almost by routine. Such periods are by no means negative, but even constructive in many ways. On the other hand, there are "days of greatness," when events follow one another in stormy drama, when people feel that the nation faces a fateful parting of the ways. There is no doubt that we are living now, in the Land and in the Diaspora, in "days of greatness," that our nation is rapidly approaching great decisions, which will determine our national future. Are we strong enough for this?

We see three central facts which have set their stamp upon our age and our people's thoughts and actions. The first is the *Holocaust*. What was so terrible was not only the great number of victims, but the manner in which, for the first time in history, a machine of destruction was set up by the State, systematically planned and executed, with all the resources of modern technology.

The second, no less striking fact, was the *Rebirth of Israel in its Land*, and the setting up of an independent *State*. The realization of this dream of 2000 years has no parallel in human history; it is a riddle for historians, and even for ourselves. The sharp turn, in a few years, from the depths of despair to the pinnacle of Redemption, was a marvel so staggering that we cannot forget it for a moment.

The third factor whose influence may be greater still, is the *secularization* of the people. The Jewish people, in all its 4000 years of history, was essentially a community of believers, devoted to the One God and to the *Covenant* with Him, which made it a "peculiar people." It was a "two-way Covenant": "Ye shall be holy because I am holy"; and God himself is dependent on Israel: "Ye are my witnesses." To this the Mishnah adds boldly: "If you are my witnesses, I am God; if not – then, as it were, I am not God." The tragedy is that these spiritual foundations have now been undermined.

How, under these conditions, can an authentic Jewish education be created? – this problem has not been systematically discussed in any State form. A serious effort of organized thought is here essential, for only by a clear solution can justification be found for our existence in the Land, and for the significance of the Jewish people in the modern world.

Three factors must here be taken into account. The first is the *personality* and mentality of those who are to be educated. The second is the *values* that are to be impaired. The third is the pedagogical *method* to be adopted.

The first is the most serious. Our generation has been defined in many ways – as the age of Science, the age of Consumers, the age of a lack of Standards. The latter seems to be the most fitting, and we can see it in our Army. The boys who risked their lives for their country and performed deeds of consummate bravery – many of these same boys, on quitting the Army, gave themselves up to fleeting pleasures, money, sex, and violence – and all this quite naturally, without a break. Such a generation, capable of great sacrifice, cannot be called bad; these boys saved Israel at the time. But they were not given any clear ideas of right and wrong. Add to this the commercialization of life, all the world over, when all that counts is material success.

The problem is: What ideal can we set up as a guide in life? It seems to me that, in spite of all the confusion, there exists a focus of

common agreement, round which all the various groups can be united: the *State of Israel*, as an expression of our *Return to the Land*. It is the business of thinkers and educators, starting from this point, to explain clearly what is the *specific Jewish character* of the concepts: *Jewish people* and *Land of Israel*. A study of our literature shows clearly that the Land of Israel was not just a territorial and geographic unit, but a mystic significance, as expressed by the term "Holy Land." Nor can the Jewish people be defined in the usual sociological terms: its significance is that of a "peculiar people."

We must recognize the fact that these concepts cannot be imparted by a "frontal attack." Perhaps we may have to compromise at first, emphasizing the national aspects; these may seem a poor minimum for the believing Jews, but a maximum for the secular public. I am aware of the fact that emphasis on natural and physical aspects may seem a desecration of sacred values. But I see no way of approach except from the point where the men stand now, with the ultimate aim of restoring to them the basic values of Judaism, centred in the idea of God.

In this connection, the principle of "openness" towards the whole people must serve as a basis for all educational work. Tendencies towards the formation of closed groups, besides damaging in themselves, contradict the Torah conceptions of the unity of the people, of regarding them with love, with the sense of partnership in a single whole: *the people of God*.

Jack J. Cohen (Editorial Board, *Petahim*)

Every encounter between two persons is bound to influence them. Still more, the induction of young people into the Army, separated from their homes for 2-5 years at a central stage in their lives. And so the Army cannot divest itself of its responsibility for their education. Army education is directed primarily to preparation for combat. But this includes not only technical training, but also *morale*. Men have to understand the reasons for the fight for existence, in which the State of Israel is involved.

To begin with, this is a war of *defence* (as the name "Israel Defence Forces" implies). If there were a feeling that *Zahal* was a tool of a State bent on conquest and expansion, it would be difficult to maintain the same morale. Our strong desire and striving for peace must therefore be emphasized.

Secondly, education in our democratic and pluralistic State is more difficult than under a totalitarian regime. I was much impressed by the candour, and even differences of opinion, voiced openly by the Army officers taking part in this symposium. The Army cannot conceal the fact that it was a sign of human weakness; we have to fight, because we have not found a better, more human solution for our existence. Our right to the Land can be shown only with the same candour and openness as that exhibited by Col. *Hisdai* in his talk.

His method is the modern counterpart of that of the priest leading the Israelite army to battle in the Bible account:

“When thou goest forth to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them, for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the Land of Egypt” (Deut. 20:1).

The Mishnah goes into further detail:

“Let not your heart fail at the neighing of horses and the flashing of swords; fear not at the clashing of shields and the rushing of the tramping shoes; nor tremble at the sound of the trumpets; neither be affrighted at the sound of the shouting; for the Lord your God is he that goeth with you” (Sotah 8:1).

The simplicity of this approach is not available for Zahal today, not only because faith cannot be imparted by preaching; it can only be hewn from the hard rock of grappling with the fundamental problems of life.

Moses Cyrus Weiler (Editorial Board, *Petachim*)

I am not a secular Jew – by no means. I regard the establishment of the State as a Mitzvah, service in the Army as one of the 613 Mitzvot, and our wars for the defence of the State as wars of Mitzvah. When I was still in South Africa, I decided that my sons should join a military school. Two of them fell – to my sorrow; but they fell knowing that they were fulfilling the highest Mitzvah. As a religious Jew, I derive all this from our sources: the Mishnah and Talmud (Sanhedrin and Sotah) and Maimonides. I am not a chauvinist, but I believe that I am a tool, and that my sons were a tool, in defence of the most important thing that Jews have created in the last 2000 years.

This does not mean that our State, as it is, is free from blemish. But I believe that a great light will issue from here. First of all, the fact that three million Jews are already here, and that any Jew who wishes may join us. Secondly, for the revival of Judaism there has never yet been such a concentration of Jewish culture as in Israel – revival of the Hebrew language, schools, universities, Yeshivot and Jewish thought generally.

How should we explain in the Army, composed mainly of soldiers who are non-religious, the justice of our fight? First, I believe in our right to the Land; during 2000 years of exile we always knew that this is a Promised Land, to which we must return. Secondly, we believe that we are a special people with a mission, which we can carry out in full, only when we return to the Land and have our own independent State. Thirdly, we regard Exile as an abnormal condition; even if there were relatively bright periods, as in Spain and Germany, these were broken up; only in the Land of Israel will we cease to be “unwanted guests.” And in the free countries assimilation is rife; individual Jews can survive, but Judaism disappears. We need the Land of Israel and a strong State, not only to guarantee our own existence, but to guarantee the continued maintenance of the Jewish people.

Summarized by Joseph Bentwich, Editor of Petachim