

**makōm** מקום

Israel. In Real Life.

## From Herzl to Herzliya

### Notes Towards Recasting Israel Education

By Yonatan Ariel, Executive Director

*“From Herzl to Herzliya” seeks to analyze the need for a new direction in Israel Education. It suggests that there is a profound shift in the Jewish People’s circumstances brought about by some remarkable successes in the last two generations. It argues that Israel education should be built as a sub-field of Jewish education, with significant possibilities for engagement that we have yet to explore.*

The challenge of rethinking Israel education has been troubling educators for a long time, and I suspect that it troubles others too. Although some of the symptoms are clearly identifiable, such as the decline in attachment to Israel amongst younger Jews, the articulation of the underlying problem and the search for a solution is fraught with both difficulty and possibility.

We, the Jewish People, are heirs to a tradition of intellectual vitality, cultural fidelity and social activity. And we are poised on the threshold of a new era. Two generations of remarkable collective achievement have secured a vibrant State of Israel, nurtured the shared memory of the Shoah, and rescued Jews from many parts of the world. The

measure of power and influence, in addition to their long-held resilience and agility.

The State of Israel, as a core element of Jewish civilization, will soon be home to a majority of the world's Jewish population. Already it is home to thriving scientific innovation and to the dazzling revival of Hebrew and Jewish cultural life. Around the globe, Jews have created voluntary communities characterized by care, devotion and steadfastness in the welcoming conditions of freedom. These are changed circumstances. For the first time in two thousand years the world's Jews live as free people. They have the highest-ever levels of Jewish and general education, an independent Jewish state, extensive experience as a global people and the economic and technological wherewithal to face the future with

confidence. It is an exhilarating time to be a Jew - or so we would think.

At the very moment when the Jewish People's sovereign stage has a sturdy foundation and the era of collective creativity stands poised to unfold, the pertinent data suggests mass disinterest. Many young Jews are unaware of their generation's potential to make a shared Jewish contribution to the world. Too few Jews around the world have experienced the dynamics of Israel as a cultural reservoir, rather than as a political battleground. Too few Israeli Jews have experienced voluntary Jewish communities overseas as creative playing fields, rather than as dark graveyards. Too many are alienated by cultural, political and organizational factors and too few have the opportunity to explore their heartfelt concerns with regard to Israel and Jewish life, without pressure to adopt a specific position. Jews today do not sense that the global Jewish conversation is inviting, enthralling and challenging.

Just over a hundred years ago, Theodor Herzl had a powerful and romantic vision. In the pamphlet *Der Judenstaat* he wrote:

"Under present conditions the Jews have three roads before them: one is apathetic submission to insult and poverty; another is revolt, outspoken hostility to an unjust social system. Ours is the third road. We want to

amount to a higher grade of civilization, to spread well-being abroad, to build new highways for the intercourse of peoples, and to forge an opening for the coming social justice."

A sober assessment would compel us to conclude that in spite of the remarkably successful transformation in the status of the Jews, the lofty sentiments of Herzl's third road still beckon. In *Altneuland*, his famous novel that outlines his hopes for Israel, Herzl writes: "I say to you, therefore, that you must hold fast to the things that have made us great: to liberality, tolerance, love of mankind. Only then is Zion truly Zion." We work hard to realize Herzl's dream. Many innovative and noble causes are pursued by the authorities and the emerging third sector in Israel, often with the vigorous support of Jews the world over. There is concern too for education in all Jewish communities and growing attempts are made to develop the most significant resource - a cadre of personnel who are both inspired and inspiring. And yet the evidence signals that Herzl, or any of the alternative, competing, visions of Zion just do not ring true to the present generation. There is indeed real work to be done to re-imagine Israel and Zion in Jewish life for a global, technological world. And there is also a need to renew our assumptions and conceptions as to which content, modes and arenas should guide our educational endeavors. This is an attempt to

sketch out some fruitful avenues for investigation.

One of my favorite definitions of education comes from Richard Peters, the distinguished philosopher who taught at London's Institute of Education. He defined education as "the initiation into worthwhile pursuits, whilst respecting the autonomy of the learner". He stresses that any substantive education requires deep layers of cultural residue, as expressed in insights, values, habits and stories. But he also stresses that education must also offer its students the tools to be autonomous and critical of what is being offered as a cultural heritage. With that in mind, I want to raise three main challenges for Israel Education:

**INITIATE** - the need to induct young people into a web of understanding that gives them anchors in Jewish civilization, Jewish Peoplehood and the place of Israel in Jewish life.

**ELEVATE** - the need to craft Jewish narratives that build on what has gone before, but that inevitably critique what is and point to some wonderful challenges ahead that the Jewish People needs to meet in order to be true to its mission.

**LIBERATE** - the need to enable young Jews to find their own way, to climb their own mountain, to realize their potential, to be *not* like us.

**Initiate - The Challenge: Connection and Conviction**

It used to be far less complicated - the task of initiating young people into a Jewish way of life was carried out in the home, the *shul*, the school and the street, which all neatly reinforced each other. Today how different it is - we talk of blended families, hybrid identities, globalization and an unparalleled mobility. The well-documented decline of Jewish involvement across a range of indicators leads to the dawning understanding that identification with Israel is not what it was. The existential conditions that drew many of us into a relationship with our people and our homeland were the precariousness of Israel's existence, the waves of *aliya*, and the political fight for Israel's good name and for the freedom of Soviet Jewry. This was such an overwhelming success that the Zionist's activist sense of history looks less compelling today for young people as the causes become less stark, the clarity dissipates, and the moral qualms continue to fester.

The response to this challenge is often "they don't understand." "They don't understand, because they don't know. If only they knew then they would understand and then they would be active." I want to suggest that this line of thought inverts the logic of the voluntary educational process. Do people feel the way they feel because they know what they know, or do they rather know what they know because they feel what they feel? What we lack in the young Jewish world is not access to knowledge - even though knowledge is a cultural

and pedagogic imperative; what we lack is the motivation to find the knowledge that is readily available in copious amounts in courses, libraries and on the internet. What we lack is the initiation into a world of concepts that make Western, Israeli and Jewish cultures part of the life world of the young. These three narratives - the Western, the Israeli, and the Jewish - have to embrace each other, challenge each other, and jostle with each other as we induct another generation into a web of association. That web celebrates the word Israel in all of its suggestive and aromatic ambiguity - as *medina, eretz, am, clal, kneset, ahavat, torat, tzur* and *netzach yisrael*.

A central part of the initiation process of any culture is the events and ceremonies surrounding the lifecycle. How might we infuse the lifecycle rituals of birth, bar/bat mitzvah, wedding, and death with a new sense of Israel and Jewish Peoplehood? Consider by way of illustration of the kinds of question that we will have to ask and answer: that in the 1970s there was an active twinning of *Bnai Mitzvah* in the west with Soviet Jewish youngsters who were forbidden from such celebration - what might the contemporary version of such Peoplehood engagement look like that is not based on crisis? Or reflect that despite the traditional understanding of the breaking of the glass at the wedding ceremony as a powerful symbol of attachment to Jerusalem, many rabbis now report that the sentiment lacks resonance.

What could be a renewed ritual that recaptures the imagination of a lifelong involvement with Israel in every Jewish family? What might make the yearly cycle celebrations and commemorations - Pesach, Yom HaShoah, Yom Hazikkaron, Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim - become potent, robust moments of meaning and creativity, not for the few, but for the many? Initiatives in Israel Education will require us to speak in different cultural idioms, not necessarily the ones with which we were acculturated. These idioms will vary from generation X to generation Y; from one continent to another; from one milieu to another. The educational challenge is to nurture young Jews' convictions to core values, ideas and symbols and to cultivate connections to their peers and to the stories of those who have gone before.

#### **Elevate - The Challenge: Move from Zionist Hardware to Jewish Software**

The big theory of Zionism was designed to solve the Jewish problem. While it has profoundly succeeded in eliminating the words "Jewish refugee" from the international vocabulary, it has not brought respite from Jew-hatred and physical and verbal antagonism. Additionally, it has yet to develop a form of Jewish culture that can readily sustain Jewish life outside of Israel, and there are many questions surrounding the kind of Jewish experiences that Israel has forged for its own youngsters.

Furthermore in light of emerging

historical evidence, many find it impossible to retell the essential stories that embody Zionism without appearing to themselves and their friends as bewilderingly naïve and sentimental. For example: Israel is a paradigm of modern rationalism, yet a significant sector of the population identifies with mystic amulets; and Israel is talked of as the embodiment of peace-seeking humanism, yet a significant part of its population demonizes its Palestinian neighbors.

I vividly recall that on my own teen seminar to Israel a generation ago, the trip to Masada was a highpoint both topographically and experientially. The early morning climb was resonant with pathos because here at last we were able to bear witness to what we had heard so much about at summer and winter camps since we were little kids. In effect we were climbing the magic mountain. Such Zionist narratives are encrusted with success and have become stagnant and are thus only partially useful in the dynamics of educational programming. Today I am one of those educators who think that the way I was told the story was distorted at best and manipulative at worst. To hold as a symbol the mass suicide of some uncompromising zealots no longer looks to me either like a moral pedagogy or like a great way to offer a vision of what Jewish life should be about for the next generation.

To add to our challenge much of the recent creativity and innovation in Jewish life has been in the realms of

learning classic texts, academic Jewish study and spiritual expression. These are very welcome and necessary, and yet they have largely occurred with a strong individualist orientation. There has yet to be a parallel burst of creativity in regard to what we might share and value as Jews across our considerable and heartfelt differences. Without new kinds of collective orientation, it is difficult to conceive that we will capture the imagination of Jews so that they may come to share a sense of fate and realize their purpose.

But this we know: the pressing problems, whether in Israel or around the Jewish world, are not amenable to the real estate solution of building buildings. The key challenges Israel confronts are many. Think of the growing social and cultural gaps; the shameful incidents of injustice and violence against women, Arab citizens and foreign workers; the environmental neglect poisoning the chances of future generations to drink the water and breathe the air; the crisis in the education system at all levels, and the alienation of many Jews from a sense of identification with Jewish culture and the Jewish People.

Likewise, around the Jewish world, the high levels of assimilation, low levels of literacy, low-birth rates and aging population, alienating institutions and lackluster programming are not necessarily solved by building physical structures.

To stand a chance of addressing these challenges we need new generations of creative people that sense a Jewish and human obligation to keep improving on the world that they have inherited. We need a response that is about education and culture - a spurt of learning and creativity so that hundreds, then thousands and then hundreds of thousands of young people will take up the energy of collective challenges that cherish humanity and embody Jewish values. Such agencies and programs will tell a complex and engrossing story of Jewish success, shortcomings and possibilities. We need to articulate more of these narratives so that they unlock further potential for collective endeavor. Compelling narratives are not amenable to being drafted by individuals in their study or on top of their mountain. They emerge to be articulated by wonderful communicators from a delicate interplay of the existential need of the hour, the wellsprings of the cultural inheritance and the momentous hopes and dreams embodied in human activity.

### **Liberate - The Challenge: to balance loyalty with liberty**

The third challenge relates to the autonomy of the learner, or to the learner's sense of liberty. One of the wonders of our era is the driving sense of liberty - to develop one's own talents, aptitudes, passions, abilities, and critical faculties. Not to do what everyone else wants you to do - but what makes the most of your uniqueness. Above all, this means to stand apart, to not just

follow the crowd. It requires a great measure of agility to figure out when to be counter cultural and when to be conservative, when to break the boundaries and when to seek their preservation.

We neither can, nor should, deny the individual character of our young people. Rather, we should furnish them with abundant opportunities to figure out the ways in which the land of Israel will mean different things for them at various times, so that they will feel the pull to engage in myriad ways throughout life. We must aim to allow each person to become him/herself, to build a life of meaningful endeavor in general, and in regard to Israel in particular. A generation ago the American Jewish leader Abba Hillel Silver called it "an errand on earth".

So the challenge to liberate asks not to operate in command and control fashion, but to open up to the possibilities of alternate ways of doing things, of empowering young people to make informed choices from sophisticated and compelling alternatives. The philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote that:

"Education is..(when).. we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it... whether we love the world enough to save it from ruin...by offering it to the new and the young...for renewal..."

The modern history of the Jewish People should give us confidence that young people can forge remarkable innovations. In a

multitude of circumstances, sometimes with the help of a guiding spirit but often without, they succeeded in political campaigns, cultural creativity, educational and social projects. So we have to do much - but not everything. Most of all we must clear some space so that we do not knock from the hands of the young the opportunity to do something different, something innovative, and something significant.

### Building the Field of Israel and Jewish Peoplehood Education

There is a clear and undeniable tension between these domains. If we were to excel at initiation then we undermine liberation, and vice versa. Were we to craft compelling new collective narratives and elevate Israel and Jewish Peoplehood, then we risk alienating young people who treasure their liberation. If we succeed in stimulating autonomy then we destabilize our attempts at initiation and we may end up with a barely recognizable continuity with Jewish experience. These challenges are faced by any educator and they are not amenable to easy resolution.

Indeed, an intelligent mode of encounter might well be to maintain all three domains in a delicate balance. My sense is that Israel education in recent decades has largely been "mis-educative," to use the philosopher John Dewey's evocative phrase. Dewey defined it thus: "Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of

further experience." Rather than inviting a profound engagement, Israel education has largely been about the "initiation" domain, to the neglect of the "elevation" and "liberation" domains. The ways in which we have largely "done" Israel education for both Israelis and Jews around the world has in effect stunted the growth of the students and participants. We need to investigate the extent to which our frameworks have inhibited or expanded the potential for young Jews to renew Israel in their own Jewish lives. Have the experiences that we have provided struck an appropriate balance between initiation, liberation and elevation? Or have we too readily required conformity with our understandings, mores and norms? Could our frameworks be offering fruitful new avenues of engagement for both individual Jews and as a collective?

This effort will need to place Israel as a core component in the conceptions of Jewish identity. It cannot be based on a crisis view of Israel that needs to be "saved"; but on an inviting view of Israel that needs to be "enjoined". To build the field we now understand that to engage with Israel is a multi-dimensional process that involves, at least, three overlapping arenas:

- Education - the knowledge and understandings of Israel and Jewish Peoplehood that shape lifelong experiences
- Arts - the creativity and vitality of Israeli culture that shape imaginative interaction with Israel's complexity and potential

- Travel - the transformative spiral of trips and visits that shape a maturing relationship on the personal and collective levels

Each of these arenas rests on differing assumptions as to what is desirable and acceptable in terms of knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. They "speak" in different codes that educators will have to learn to speak and create and it will be important not to artificially reduce the opportunities embedded in these codes.

Each arena has the potential to use *Tanach*, history, social studies, Hebrew and the arts as guiding content and as profound resources for creativity. For example, by exploring the *Tanach* as a text of Israel, we authenticate our efforts. It is extremely difficult (although some have succeeded) to teach *Tanach* devoid of place and Zionist symbolism. The renowned Israeli novelist S.Y. Agnon once spoke about the multi-faceted nature of Israel.

"Some say: *A land in which there will be no want*, echoing the book of D'varim chapter 8. And others say: *A land which devours its inhabitants*", as is written in the book of BaMidbar chapter 13. I said to them, it is similar to the sun - the righteous are healed by it and the evil are burned by it, and it is one and the same sun. Thus it is with the Land of Israel - the Land is but a reflection of the character of

the individual."

In history and social studies we have the opportunity to think and experience beyond ourselves. As education professor Sam Wineburg writes:

"Mature historical knowing teaches us to go beyond our own image, to go beyond our brief life, and to go beyond the fleeting moment in human history into which we've been born. History educates ("leads outward" in the Latin) in the deepest sense...it does the best in teaching those virtues once reserved for theology - the virtue of humility, in the face of our limits to know; and the virtue of awe, in the face of the expanse of human history."

In our context, its invitation to young people to enter into the story of Israel as active interpreters of the events that shaped our contemporary situation is also an invitation to refuse to settle for what older generations have bequeathed. It is to stimulate them to look at their own personal history and the origins and development of their own Jewish community as a way of gaining pride and ownership of their Jewish story. On that basis they can engage with wider circles of history to build points of connection and separation. It may also indicate the tantalizing possibility that all is not completed; that human actions can shape momentous events; and that if much of what we have today has

been made by humans, then it can be remade by them as well.

Literature and the arts offer us the remarkable educational potential for empathy. Whilst not exclusively so, novels, poetry, music, dance, theater, and the associated creative forms are notorious for giving educators headaches. Just when the gifted teacher has shaped order out of chaos in the student's mind, along come the arts to rattle the cage and protest that "out of the crooked timber of humanity, nothing straight will ever be made," as Isaiah Berlin made famous. The edginess and iconoclasm leads anthropologist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett to claim:

"What is clear...is that Jewish youth subcultures are a laboratory where new kinds of community are being formed, aided by the latest technologies, and participants are engaging in innovative cultural and artistic expression - and forming a distinctive sense of themselves in the process."

The arts scene in Israel is vibrant and things too are happening in Jewish communities around the globe. What would a Jewish Peoplehood and Israel arts education look like? In order to unravel some of these conundrums and provide some thoughtful suggestions for educators and community arts workers, teams of people will need to be assembled to build the field of Israel and Jewish Peoplehood education. The contributors will have to be drawn

from various backgrounds and countries, from Israel and around the world. As Israel Studies is itself only a generation old and much of it is concerned with the political arena, our content specialists will be drawn also from Bible, Jewish literature, philosophy and history. The second source of expertise will be those educationalists who think about ethnicity, cultural citizenship and social and collective identity. The third voice will be expert reflective practitioners from schools, camps, arts festivals, synagogues and adult learning programs. Such a group will grapple with the design of the intellectual and educational tools that are worthy of being experimented with in our era. They will challenge each other and provide the focal point for a concerted, but disparate, effort to be more innovative.

### Recognizing the Potential

The tremendous potential inherent in the Jewish State and the Jewish communities presents a responsibility to wrestle afresh with great themes of human concern: solidarity, power, liberty, justice and homecoming. These themes route the Jewish story through a perpetual dance that links Israel and Jewish Peoplehood, and can engagingly link the search for individual and collective meaning. It can galvanize educators, community workers, rabbis and cultural innovators, to unleash thoughtful conceptions of the collective future that have a moral conversation at their heart. There will be a kind of broadminded communitarianism, an open ethnicity, a liberal

peoplehood. It will be a design through which Jews can bring Zionism (as an activist orientation) to history, Israel (as a unique Jewish political and cultural laboratory) and Jewish Peoplehood (as an anchoring affinity of varied talents) into creative tension with other cultures.

Jews in Israel and around the world will rediscover a conversation that enriches them and inspires them to adopt new projects in response to their shared sense of common challenges. There will be countless and varied ways, in which they learn, live and laugh together. They will cross established lines and figure out how to celebrate and commemorate together. They will challenge each other to forge engaging links across time and place, whilst addressing matters of ultimate concern in Israel, throughout world Jewry and in other places of human need. All of this will galvanize change at the grassroots of Jewish life, and will inevitably lead to renewed communal frameworks and international configurations appropriate to the new era. The tasks are no longer the ones that Herzl accomplished; they are the ones that confront the modern city of Herzliya.

I grew up on the understanding that Yosef Trumpeldor, the valiant defender of Tel Hai, left this world with a phrase on his lips: "Tov lamut b'ad artzeinu - it is good to die for our country". Thankfully we have succeeded in establishing the sovereign state in the land and we

can now offer young people an enchanting canvas upon which to create: "tov l'chiot b'ad ameinu - it is good to live for our people." This people have a unique role in the world and the platform of the independent Jewish state is a robust one upon which to inherit our collective future.

Jacob wrestled with the angel to earn the blessing of becoming Israel. Many people around the world ask the question: what will Israel become? It is a good and important question. But it is only half the equation. We must ask not only "what will Israel become," but "when will we become Israel?" When will we have worked so hard at our future individual and collective challenges that we are worthy of the name Israel?

That is the challenge of Israel education: to initiate so that we all know of Jacob's name change, to liberate so that we each touse with our own angel and realize our potential, and to elevate so that our collective actions merit the blessing of being called Israel.

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## *MAKOM - Israel Engagement Network*

*MAKOM is the Hebrew word for place. It is also a name for God. Resonating with both the earth and the heavens, it symbolizes our efforts to renew the place of Israel in Jewish life. Through a network of labs, local leaders - in travel, education, the arts and religion - are mentored to create the compelling content needed to build the field of Israel engagement for our times. MAKOM is a collaborative initiative of the Jewish Agency's Education Department, Jewish community leadership and philanthropic partners.*

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