

SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLE:

BETWEEN NECESSITY AND WILL -
KIBBUTZ YOUTH DISCUSS THEIR JEWISHNESS

by

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Bein Tse'irim has now appeared as a sequel to *Siah Lohamim* (Talks of Fighters; published in English under the title, *The Seventh Day*).

If only these conversations contained a real dialogue! Unfortunately the participants express their opinions without any serious attempt to come to grips with opposing views. Too often, we find only an effusion which reveals immaturity and irresponsibility with regard to what is being said. Here we shall discuss only the main subject of the conversations: the attitude of the speakers towards Judaism.

They all confess that the impetus to their reflecting aloud on this subject came from the shock of the Six-Day War, and especially its results. For most of the fighters, this was a "Jewish" (rather than an "Israeli") war, bound up with a deep identification with the Holocaust and with Jewish destiny as a whole. For some of them, the very struggle for physical survival symbolizes their main tie with Judaism.

We find frustration and disappointment that despite the victory peace is as remote as ever, The war did not solve the problems of Jewish survival. The danger of annihilation still exists. The realities of the unending struggle willy-nilly give us the complex of Galut Jews - an indication of the crisis of classical Zionist theory which saw in the return to Eretz Israel a solution to the tension between the Jew and his gentile surroundings.

The identification of the young people with the Jewish destiny is almost complete. But this very identification again brings up the riddle of the survival of the Jewish people in history. What makes it unique? What power has enabled it to survive?

The age-old question as to whether Jewish existence is a matter of necessity or of will (a fate imposed or free choice) also exercised the great Zionist thinkers. The political Zionists (Herzl, Pinsker) regarded the external factor of anti-Semitism as the force that unified the Jewish people; the cultural Zionists (Ahad Ha-Am, Buber) considered that approach negative and maintained that only positive factors, like the cultural heritage, could keep the Jews a

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united people. The views of these young people will be better understood against this background.

Their reaction is one of "assimilationist intellectuals". Many of them never gave a thought to their Jewish identity. The existence of the Jewish State apparently made possible a process of unrestrained assimilation. The striving for normalization had almost succeeded when along came the war and turned everything topsy-turvy: if they hate us, then there must be something special about us. True, this uniqueness is more a curse than a blessing. But, *ein brera* – we have no choice: our identification with the Jewish people is automatic, with no questions asked. In other words, a restatement of the principal thesis of "negative" Zionism: "We have not remained Jews because of our values. They simply haven't let us assimilate". Jewish existence is grasped as a tragic fate from which there is no escape. There is, then, something mysterious and irrational about Jewish existence, but few of the participants attempt to draw any spiritual or practical conclusions from that fact.

We thus see the spiritual confusion into which these young people were thrown by the war. They recognize the tragedy of the Jewish fate, but most of them refuse to admit that this fate imposes some mission or ideal on them. Hence, the spiritual content of their Judaism remains vague, and their searchings appear superficial.

In brief, we are still far from any real change in the attitude of the kibbutz youth towards the world of Judaism. A crack has been opened to a return, but prejudice and ignorance are still decisive factors in determining one's spiritual position. "Why am I a Jewess? I don't know, it's a kind of necessity . . . I don't know enough about what Zionism is and about what Judaism is . . . I only know that God is not with us."

Summary by Aryeh Rubinstein