

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
California School

GROWING UP LABOR ZIONIST: THE EFFECT OF  
HABONIM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF JEWISH ADULTS

A Thesis submitted in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
Jewish Communal Service

by

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August 1978

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE -  
JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A review of Zionist literature shows certain charismatic personalities who have in one way or another molded or altered the Zionist movement. The Viennese journalist, Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), was outstanding in his ability to inspire hope in so many ("If you will it, it is no dream.")<sup>1</sup> The Russian-born British scientist, Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952),<sup>2</sup> considered a master diplomat by some, was highly respected for the part he played in the issuance of the Balfour Declaration. The American jurist, Louis D. Brandeis (1856-1941), gave Zionism

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<sup>1</sup>Theodor Herzl, Altneuland, 1902. Herzl, considered the father of political Zionism, was educated in the spirit of the German Jewish "Enlightenment" of the nineteenth century. As Paris correspondent of the Vienna Neue Freie Presse, he attended the trial of Alfred Dreyfus. This experience, coupled with his witnessing the riotous anti-Jewish behavior of the Parisian mob when Dreyfus was publicly stripped of his military rank, convinced Herzl that only resettlement of Jews in a territory of their own would solve what Europe called "the Jewish problem." He spent the rest of his life working towards this goal. Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Macmillan Co., 1971), Vol. 8:407, vol. 16:423-27.

<sup>2</sup>Chaim Weizmann was the first president of the State of Israel. As a young scientist and Zionist living in England, Weizmann developed important contacts and laid the groundwork for British support of Zionist programs that

unprecedented respectability in the United States and attracted thousands to the cause.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps no one has been so visionary a personality as the Russian-born scholar, Nachman Syrkin<sup>4</sup> (1868-1924), who saw particularism in and of itself as too narrow a point of view, but who realized the impossibility of achieving a universalistic utopian society without first having a specific place to begin, a national homeland. Blending Zionism and socialism, Syrkin developed an ideology attractive enough to win the loyalty of people who were to become prominent in the creation of the state of Israel and who would be Israel's first leaders. The people who joined him as socialist-Zionists were primarily Yiddish-speaking East European Jews. With the large influx of East European Jewish immigrants to the United States in the

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eventually led to an official governmental statement of sympathy for Zionist aims known as the Balfour Declaration. Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol. 16, pp. 423-27.

<sup>3</sup>Louis D. Brandeis, a prominent labor lawyer and later United States Supreme Court Justice, believed that American and Zionist ideals reinforced each other. His rise to leadership brought into the movement great numbers of people who had previously believed their loyalty as Americans would be questioned if they supported Zionism. In Melvin Urofsky, American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), pp. 246-98.

<sup>4</sup>Nachman Syrkin was one of the first ideologists and organizers of Socialist Zionism. Although Ber Borochov (1881-1917), another socialist-Zionist leader is considered one of the movement's foremost theoreticians, Syrkin's ideas more than Borochov's established the organizational

early twentieth century, the Jewish community here created a medium for the influence of this dynamic group of people.

The East European immigrants formed fraternal and political organizations within which they could enjoy sociability, discuss issues of common concern, and take action where and when they felt it appropriate. A youth movement associated with the Poale Zion, the political arm of socialist-Zionism, was established in two stages, the first stage extending from 1928 to 1935, and the second stage beginning in 1935. Eventually the movement incorporated young people aged ten to twenty-two. The development of this youth movement, Habonim, was significant not only for the socialist-Zionists for whom it became a means to transmit the socialist-Zionist ideology, but also for the young people who would become involved in the movement.

Adolescence is a crucial time in the development of personal identity. During this time the individual is confronted with a myriad of choices--often conflicting--regarding the various roles he or she is to play. As a result, the adolescent's self-image may be different.

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basis for Labor Zionism as it is known today. In Marie Syrkin, Nachman Syrkin, Socialist Zionist (New York: Herzl Press, 1961).

Whereas parents play an important role in the development of identity during earlier periods in a person's life, peers tend to play a more crucial role during adolescence. Peer-run groups, then, may also play an important role in an adolescent's life as they provide a milieu in which the adolescent can experiment with a variety of individual roles. At the same time adolescents may use this experience as a step towards adulthood, developing a sense of loyalty and allegiance to something beyond themselves, beyond their own individuality, in this case the group. If the group is oriented towards some specific activity or set of values, these, too, can become an important part of the individual's make-up.

Habonim served and continues to serve in such a capacity for its membership. Its ideological base is Labor Zionism and it incorporates the values of this movement. It also provides an intensive group experience in which human values can be lived as well as learned. In order to become clearer as to whether the processes involved in this experience--inculcating the values of Labor Zionism and having people grow up as competent, decent, idealistic beings--do, indeed, affect the membership, interviews were conducted with an accidental sample of twelve people who were or are involved in Habonim, currently living in Los Angeles.

This issue of the influence of the socialist Zionist youth movement, and of youth movements in general, has been of interest to me primarily for two reasons. First of all, I believe that the central values of Labor Zionism are sound ideologically and provide a firm base for a strong values system. Secondly, I was in high school during the late 1960s, a time of confusion when many of the pre-established "givens" appeared to have vanished without being replaced with anything stable or meaningful. All around me friends sought meaning in life by "dropping out" and "turning on." Adolescence was an isolated, lonely time in my life as I am sure it is for many others. Yet I do not believe it need be that way.

It is my hope that a study of Habonim members may yield some understanding of how young people achieve purpose and meaning early in life, having role models close to them in age and experience who could easily be ego-syntonic so that they grow up with a sense of direction and become vital, contributing members of society. Furthermore, anticipatory socialization is a lot simpler when the goal to which one is aspiring appears achievable. As my interest in social work tends to the clinical aspect, I believe much can be learned from a model of "mental wellness" as opposed to illness.

During the course of this study I had the opportunity to spend some time in the national Habonim office



in New York. When I talked with members of the current national leadership and when I observed a national planning meeting of individuals in leadership positions in the eight Habonim camps, I was struck by the intensity of feeling and the serious sense of commitment to the movement shown by each person. Each and every one of them was respectful of the others' opinions; the leadership group operated in a democratic manner while discussing issues of rights and democracy at camp. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for offering their assistance and allowing me to observe them in process, thereby making this study all the more meaningful for me.

I am also grateful for the time, concern, and enthusiasm of all those who agreed to be interviewed. Without their participation, this study would not have been possible.

To my thesis advisors I owe much gratitude for their constant support during this project:

Dr. Rosa Kaplan, who helped me clarify my often muddled thoughts, and whose strong values, oriented towards working for the good of humanity, helped me keep clear on the purpose of this study;

Dr. Norman Mirsky, who helped me extend my boundaries of creative as well as critical thought;

Dr. Stanley Chyet, whose knowledge and interest in Zionism helped put me on my way, and whose editorial assistance has been invaluable.

Thanks also go to Dr. Michael Signer and Ms. Rita Lowenthal, whose friendship and caring helped me past many trying times during the school year.

Much respect and appreciation are due Professor Gerald Bubis, Director of the School of Jewish Communal Service. Jerry is said to wear many hats, but his hats all have the common thread of commitment--to the students, to the school, to the Jewish community. He has repeatedly demonstrated that it is a strength to struggle with issues, to deal with their inherent ambiguities and tensions, and he rarely misses an opportunity to point out the various gray areas of any issue that arises.

Special thanks go to Bert Goldberg, my field instructor during the academic year 1977-78, whose belief in my abilities frequently surpassed my own. As my friend and my mentor, Bert strongly influenced my professional and personal growth. It was under his guidance that I gained the necessary confidence in myself to undertake a project such as this.

## CHAPTER II

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF ZIONISM AND LABOR ZIONISM

The marvel of modern Zionism lies not in the spontaneous birth of a new movement which appealed in the main to East European Jewry. It lies rather in the organic nature of the movement which, drawing from current trends and movements in nineteenth-century Europe, created a unique and vibrant force that would radically alter world Jewry. Zionism expanded the concept of nationalism by introducing it to a group like the Jews, united neither by land nor by language. The problem of "enlightened Jewry" of this time, the tension between Jewish life and the life of the larger host society, was addressed in a new manner.

The two Jewish philosophies which dominated the first half of the nineteenth century were assimilation to the host culture and reform of Judaism to relegate it solely to the province of religion. Once defined in this limited way, the Jewish "religion" was modernized and formalized so that it would not differ visibly from a Protestant sect. These philosophies, which had grown in the wake of the Jewish Enlightenment, tended to be shunned by the Zionists. Assimilation and reform had promised an

end to anti-Semitism but the Russian pogroms of 1881 and the Dreyfus Affair in 1895 proved this not to be the case at all.

Moses Hess, a man of German birth, was among the first assimilated Jews to turn to Zionism. His book, Rome and Jerusalem (1862), makes a statement of Jewish nationalism, but it was Leo Pinsker, a Russian who, nineteen years later in his 1881 pamphlet, Auto-Emancipation, made the historic assertion that anti-Semitism was a modern phenomenon which would not be eradicated by any victories of "humanity and enlightenment" in the total society. Anti-Semitism was not rational and hence would not be uprooted through rational means. Pinsker defines three causes of anti-Semitism which all point to the Jews being a people apart from others:

The Jews are a "ghost people," unlike any other in the world, and therefore feared as a thing apart; they are everywhere foreigners and nowhere hosts in their own national right; and they are in economic competition with every majority within which they live.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, Pinsker asserts, Jews

should seek their own salvation in the struggle for independence and national unity. . . . The Jewish societies already in existence . . . should call a national congress to purchase a territory for the

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Hertzberg, ed., The Zionist Idea; A Historical Analysis and Reader (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), p. 43.

settlement of several millions of Jews.  
At the same time the support of the powers  
should be obtained to ensure the perpetual  
existence of such a refuge.<sup>2</sup>

Pinsker's work went virtually unnoticed at the time. Fifteen years later Theodor Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian intellectual, reiterated many similar proposals in Der Judenstaat. He stated that "all efforts [should be] concentrated upon a charter, the internationally sanctioned acquisition of Palestine."<sup>3</sup> This time the call to Zionism did not go unheeded, particularly in Eastern Europe, by the intellectuals, the mass populace, and young students.

On August 29, 1897, Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress in the form of a "Jewish Parliament" in Basle, Switzerland, and dominated it almost single-handedly as a messianic figure. Though many Zionist leaders (including Herzl) were Central or West European, the movement soon became dominated by East European Jewry, and was viewed by them as, inter alia, a means to achieve modernization, otherwise impossible under the czars. In any event, the Congress was a milestone in modern Jewish history as the existence of Zionist groups and the coming together of such groups became worldwide public knowledge.

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<sup>2</sup>Walter Laqueur, A History of Zionism (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972), p. 73.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

Previous attempts to organize Zionist groups had not met with much success. As early as 1881 associations had been founded to promote Jewish emigration to Palestine. The most active of these groups, founded by high school and university students in Kharkov, called itself Bilu (Bet Yaakov lechu ve necha--'O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us go,' Isaiah II, 5). In this group of three hundred members, one hundred set out for Odessa on the way to the Holy Land and sixteen eventually reached Palestine. The efforts of the Biluim were further hampered by lack of funds and equipment as well as inadequate preparation for work in the strange new climate.<sup>4</sup>

Other local Lovers of Zion (Hoveve Zion) groups also existed in Russia at this time. A central organization was established at a conference held in Kattowitz in Upper Silesia, a German territory, in 1884. Thirty-six delegates met but, though there was general agreement that something should be done, no plan was adopted. Organizationally and politically the effort was a failure, but it provided the ferment necessary for Herzl's able leadership thirteen years later.

At this time also some Jews joined their Russian brethren in Socialist movements in their fight against the

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

Czarist autocracy. Conflicts arose for Jews interested both in Jewish nationalism and in "the call to destroy a corrupt society and build a classless utopia."<sup>5</sup> The socialists viewed nationalism as linked to capitalism and therefore dismissed Zionism as a means of solving the Jewish problem. They believed that "capitalism had created anti-Semitism, and the triumph of the classless society would eradicate this evil."<sup>6</sup> However, the participation of Russian Socialists in the 1881 pogroms and the inattention of these comrades to the problems of the Jewish poor, who were neither peasants nor industrial workers, awakened many Jewish socialists to the fact that the fulfillment of the socialist dream might not solve the Jewish problem. One month after the first Zionist Congress in 1897, the Bund, the "General Jewish Workers' League in Lithuania, Poland and Russia," was formed.<sup>7</sup> A Jewish Socialist organization, the Bund believed in Diaspora non-territorial nationalism, and rejected both Zionism and complete de-Judaization and amalgamation with non-Jewish society.

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<sup>5</sup>Melvin Urofsky, American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Laqueur, A History of Zionism, p. 273.



There were, however, others who held Socialist ideologies but would not abandon the idea of a Jewish homeland. Led by such men as Ber Borochov and Nachman Syrkin, they formed a different sort of synthesis of nationalism and socialism. Borochov, the more Orthodox Marxist of the two, believed that the Jews would not truly be able to join in the class struggle until they had their own economic base in their own homeland. He emphasized, "We must understand once and for all that one who has no national dignity has no class dignity,"<sup>8</sup> and cited sociological and economic reasons rather than religious or historic ones as to why this nationalizing process would take place in Palestine.<sup>9</sup>

Syrkin, not as strict a Marxist, saw the thread of the class struggle woven throughout Jewish history. Vehemently opposed to assimilation, he asserted that "A classless society and national sovereignty are the only means of completely solving the Jewish problems."<sup>10</sup> Socialism would reduce economic abuses but Zionism was necessary for spiritual redemption. At Bern, in 1898, Syrkin published the first Socialist Zionist manifesto; it was titled Die Judenfrage und der Socialistische Judenstaat (The Jewish Question and the Socialist Jewish

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<sup>8</sup>Urofsky, American Zionism, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Marie Syrkin, Nachman Syrkin, Socialist Zionist (New York: Herzl Press, 1961), p. 54.



State).<sup>11</sup> He then embarked on an intensive campaign to recruit people for the cause, and his "social democratic views, as well as his synthesis of Jewish ethics and social economic justice ultimately shaped both Socialist Zionism and the Jewish state of Israel."<sup>12</sup>

In America, too, Zionism and socialism were initially viewed as mutually exclusive causes. Jewish labor organizations were the immigrants' introduction to this country and they expounded the viewpoint that Zionism was anti-labor. However, there were people committed to both causes (particularly after the Kishineff pogrom in 1903 when forty-five Jews were killed), and Poale Zion (Labor Zionist) groups were established in some large Jewish communities in the early twentieth century. The platform of the Poale Zion Branch of New York, the largest and most important of these groups, stated, "The national struggle and the class struggle, far from being mutually exclusive, are two branches of the same tree,"<sup>13</sup> thus marking the way for the growth of the Labor Zionist movement in this country.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-43.

<sup>12</sup>Urofsky, American Zionism, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup>Charles Sherman, Labor Zionism in America; Its History, Growth and Program (New York: Labor Zionist Organization of America, 1957), p. 9.

The first national Poale Zion Convention was convened in April 1905, but delegates immediately split into "Territorialists" and "Palestinians." The Territorialists were willing to accept land other than Palestine for the homeland to be while the Palestinians demanded that the homeland be in Palestine. The Palestinians left the convention and reformed the Poale Zion in Baltimore in December of the same year. The Territorialists continued on as the "Socialist Territorialists."<sup>14</sup> In October 1909, a "Reunion Convention" was held in the course of which the two groups came back together.<sup>15</sup>

During the first decade of its existence Labor Zionism stressed two major tasks: "(1) furthering Jewish colonization in general and cooperative settlements in particular in Palestine, and (2) struggl[ing] against assimilation in this country."<sup>16</sup> To achieve their goals with regard to Palestine two means were employed. First of all,

They actually supported all Zionist funds which were devoted to the acquisition of land, settlement of Jewish immigrants in agriculture, and promotion of industrial enterprise. In addition, they also established their own financial agencies in

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<sup>14</sup>Syrkin, Nachman Syrkin, p. 133.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>16</sup>Sherman, Labor Zionism, p. 14.

order to support the labor movement in Israel.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, it encouraged Aliyah by "initiat[ing] a number of measures and form[ing] several organizations with a view toward aiding the settlement of American Jews in Israel."<sup>18</sup> With regard to the fight against assimilation, the Poale Zion

established a number of institutions for the purpose of strengthening Jewish consciousness, enriching Jewish culture, consolidating Jewish community effort, and reinforcing the bonds between the Jews of this country and the Jews in the rest of the world. Chief among these institutions was the Labor Zionist school system for the education of Jewish children which was introduced in 1910 under the name of National Radical Schools, and [was later] known as Jewish Folkshulen.<sup>19</sup>

Poale Zion affiliated with the Federation of American Zionism and tried to make its voice heard through this organization as well. The Poale Zionists helped organize the People's Relief Committee, which later became part of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and pushed for the organization of the first American Jewish Congress. The purposes of the Congress were

- (1) to organize the American Jewish community on democratic principles; and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

- (2) to present to the Versailles Peace Conference proposals for Jewish post-war reconstruction that would include, in addition to measures to protect the political and civic status of Jews everywhere, the granting of national minority rights to Jews in lands where such rights were enjoyed by other ethnic groups, and the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.<sup>20</sup>

This was one activity in which the American Poale Zion movement really pulled its weight.

The issuance of the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917, was the second milestone in Zionist history, and the Labor Zionists took it as a call to action. When the Jewish Legion was organized around this time, many Labor Zionists joined and, though they did not see much military action on the Palestinian front, "hundreds of legionnaires remained as halutzim, and . . . made a considerable contribution to the formation of the Jewish labor movement in Palestine."<sup>21</sup>

The Labor Zionists continued their support for Palestine--and later the state of Israel--in much the same manner as was described above. They furthered their struggle against assimilation by forming a Young Poale Zion Alliance for people aged seventeen to twenty-two. This organization was seen as an extension of the Party,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

with study circles forming to discuss such issues as political economy, socialism, trade unionism, Jewish history and literature. The organization also served the social needs of these young, primarily Yiddish-speaking immigrants, although it soon was enlarged to include American-born children of the Socialist Zionists. After much debate and discussion, at their 1935 Convention, the Young Poale Zion Alliance approved the formation of Habonim as their children's organization, to include people from the ages of ten to eighteen.

Today, Habonim includes the entire youth movement with people ranging in age from ten to twenty-three. It maintains a close affiliation with the Labor Zionist Alliance (of which the Poale Zion is a part) but functions autonomously. Its purpose remains largely to educate its membership to the Labor Zionist ideology.

The purpose of this study is to examine the real--not merely the claimed--influence of Habonim on its members! ip.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE NATURE OF YOUTH GROUPS AND THEIR INFLUENCE--AND HABONIM WITHIN THIS CONTEXT

Groups and associations proliferate in all societies, some are more formal such as clubs or membership organizations and others more informal such as street gangs. Whether formal or informal, however, those groups bound to have most influence upon the individual members are primarily groups in which, Cooley states, there is

. . . a certain fusion of individuality in a common whole, so that one's very self, for many purposes at least, is the common life and purpose of the group.<sup>1</sup>

Within these groups, both Northen<sup>2</sup> and Shepherd<sup>3</sup> have stressed the significance of cohesiveness, the quality that binds a group together. Shepherd<sup>4</sup> has even linked cohesiveness with productivity, the ability of a group to work to ether effectively and successfully. Lewin, too, states succinctly that "the essence of the group is not

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<sup>1</sup>Harleigh B. Trecker, Social Group Work, Principles and Practices (New York: Association Press, 1972), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

the similarity or dissimilarity of its members, but their interdependence."<sup>5</sup> Berelson and Steiner noted,

The more people associate with one another under conditions of equality, the more they come to share values and norms and the more they like one another.<sup>6</sup>

Groups have several functions in which this study is expressly interested. Two such functions are (1) providing opportunities for social contacts and (2) providing means for expressing one's cultural or other personal interests. A less obvious, though equally important, function of groups is aptly described by Coyle:

In all self-governing organizations there is constant experimentation with leadership, social responsibility and sacrifice for the collective good. This gives a great many citizens daily first-hand experience with democratic values and democratic methods. It is from this soil that leaders achieve their stature by a process in which they will have been tested through minor leadership roles.<sup>7</sup>

Eisenstadt notes another function of group relevant to this study when he states that societies transmit their culture from one generation to the next generation through the formation of peer groups.<sup>8</sup> Related to this, Adelson

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>7</sup>Grace Coyle, Group Experiences and Democratic Values (New York: The Woman's Press, 1947), p. 17.

<sup>8</sup>S.N. Eisenstadt, From Generation to Generation - Age Groups and Social Structure (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1956).



has suggested that

. . . we can venture some generalizations about those youngsters intense about politics and striving toward ideology. The most apparent common denominator is their origin in families which are politically active and for whom politics are morally passionate. The youngster takes not only the direction of political thought from his parents, but also their moral intensity.<sup>9</sup>

Group experiences play a particularly important role in the development of the adolescent as the teen years are a period when a youngster seeks to "gain some autonomy from parents while gaining peer support through conformity to the teenage or youth culture norms."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, adolescent groups

are characterized by a close bond of intimacy, a sense of belonging, a security which arises from acceptance and a loyalty to the group itself.<sup>11</sup>

More specifically, group experiences serve certain distinct needs of the adolescent: (1) the need to develop mutuality described as "affectional relationships involving both giving and receiving,"<sup>12</sup> (2) the need to come to terms with

<sup>9</sup>Joseph Adelson, "The Political Imagination of the Young Adolescent," Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences 100:4 Twelve to Sixteen: Early Adolescence (Fall 1971), p. 1031.

<sup>10</sup>Chad Gordon, "Social Characteristics of Early Adolescence," Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences 100:4 Twelve to Sixteen: Early Adolescence (Fall 1971), p. 945.

<sup>11</sup>Coyle, Group Experiences and Democratic Values, p. 116.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 118.



authority as "real authority rests ultimately on the willing renunciation of certain personal advantages in the interest of common concerns that require collective action,"<sup>13</sup> (3) the need to reevaluate values previously given unquestioning compliance as "the values established in childhood must be rethought and reaccepted in forms suitable to a developing generation,"<sup>14</sup> and (4) the need to move from narcissism in relation to the world to a more open stance with regard to relationships, that is, "the expansion of the self outward to take in larger areas of experience,"<sup>15</sup> the development of a consciousness of "we." Through the group experience, then, the adolescent can gain a sense of fidelity, the virtue which, Erikson posits, is associated with successful resolution of the fifth epigenetic crisis in the individual's psycho-social development, identity versus identity confusion. Erikson defines fidelity as "the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>16</sup>Erik E. Erikson, Insight and Responsibility (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1964), p. 125.

Habonim, as the youth movement associated with Labor Zionism, transmits the culture of the Labor Zionist Alliance to its members. It is a movement which has a social-educational-political orientation and

which strives to give Jewish youth a feeling of identity with the Jewish people and with Israel . . . [Its] aim is to upbuild the State of Israel, based on a pioneering cooperative society, as the physical and spiritual center of the Jewish people. [The movement] educate[s its] youth toward Jewish values, Hebrew language, Jewish culture, and social justice for all people.<sup>17</sup>

Besides maintaining a high Jewish consciousness, Labor Zionism is a highly political movement both in the narrow sense of affiliating with a political party and in the broader sense of being "concerned with the making as distinguished from the administration of governmental policy."<sup>18</sup> The political nature of Habonim does not express itself solely through education to a particular political party or system of government, rather it is reflected in a system of attitudes fostered within the movement. The commitment to democratic principles so forcefully adhered to within the Labor Zionist Alliance is closely paralleled within Habonim.

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<sup>17</sup>Pamphlet, "Ichud Habonim Labor Zionist Youth Movement."

<sup>18</sup>Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Springfield, Mass.: G. and C. Merriam Company, 1971), p. 1755.

Habonim is a youth-led youth movement, the current mazkir (secretary) being twenty-three years old. Individuals can join when they are ten years old, belong to one of the Habonim clubs in the city during the school year, and go to one of the seven regional Habonim camps in North America during the summer. Though differences do exist between the city clubs and summer camps, the principles of democracy and responsibility prevail in both structures. These values are manifest in the members being given as much autonomous responsibility with regard to issues of the community as the leaders deem appropriate at each level. For example, at camp a group will be established to determine how money in the kupa (collective fund) will be spent. There are also particular programs designed to encourage discussions as well as programs that are both initiated and run by the members rather than the madrachim (counselors). In the city clubs, Habonim members are the major determinants of what kind of club they will have. Activities usually include one fund-raising event, frequently a neshef (party), for which members spend months planning, preparing, and producing a show. Thus, this framework provides both means and the opportunities for experimentation with leadership.

Habonim has a strong organization structure which can be readily understood by even the youngest members. An individual can easily see where he or she fits in, and that

his or her current status is important to the functioning of the group. Though the young person understands the importance of this current status, he or she also knows that if he or she remains active within the group, this position will yield and give way to one with even greater significance. Role models within the group are the older, more experienced members, old enough and knowledgeable enough to engender respect among the younger members, yet not so far removed in age that their position and knowledge are seen as unobtainable.

National leadership in Habonim is drawn from the ranks of the movement itself. Generally people who become leaders have been active both in the city and in camp, have attended Machaneh Bonim, a national Habonim camp which is primarily a leadership training seminar, and have attended the Habonim Workshop Program, a year of intensive living on a kibbutz in Israel following high school graduation. There is an adult camp committee associated with each camp, but their intervention is minimal as is the Labor Zionist Alliance's with Habonim in general. Habonim is considered an autonomous youth movement, and though the camps are largely subsidized by the Labor Zionist Alliance and Pioneer Women, the movement is run in an autonomous manner.

Habonim, then, exists separate and apart from the adult society from which the growing adolescent will soon

want to establish his independence. As it is an autonomous youth movement, participant members can dissociate themselves from the adult society at large and find their own meanings and values within their new reference group. Since people within Habonim associate with one another under conditions of equality, the values and norms of the movement, democracy, social consciousness, and Jewish consciousness, can grow and flourish. In addition, in sharing these norms and values with others in the group, personal friendships have fertile ground in which to grow and the group's cohesiveness and interdependence can grow as well.

Besides sharing norms and values, Habonim members have a part in the decision-making process of establishing goals. As mentioned previously, advancement in leadership in the movement is a foreseeable process. These two factors together may foster the growth of initiative and decrease anomie, the state Merton has described as not having the means to achieve one's goals, frequently resulting in normlessness and/or alienation.<sup>19</sup>

Habonim, then, serves as a vehicle to transmit the culture of Labor Zionism, its norms and its values. It provides a positive structure within which the members

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<sup>19</sup>Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (New York: Free Press, 1957).

can grow. It is a group which attempts to imbue each individual with a sense of his or her own importance, both as an individual and as a group member, through responsible participation in the movement.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory study about the effect of Habonim membership on individuals who live in the United States. In view of the fact that many individuals enter the movement prior to a time when they would make autonomous choices, this might in fact reflect a commitment to Labor Zionism and its principles on the part of their parents. Because they spend so much time with the group and because the process is a comfortable one, they then become readily socialized into the Habonim movement. Even when people separate themselves from Habonim, there are certain things which they have internalized and which have become part of their lives. These things include a strong commitment to social justice and a respect for human dignity. The people for whom this is not the typical pattern may very well be those for whom socialization patterns at home were not in concert with those of Habonim.

In order to get some information on this, an accidental sample of individuals ranging in age from seventeen to sixty-three currently living in the Los Angeles area was interviewed. The sample was obtained by asking individuals who were known to be or to have been Habonim



members to suggest others. Ten of the twelve people interviewed had been members of Habonim; one is currently a member of Habonim, and one, a Labor Zionist before Habonim came into existence, helped form Habonim. One interview was with a married couple, of which both people had been involved in the movement. Eight interviews were conducted in the interviewees' offices and four in individual's homes.

A semi-structured interview guide was used (see Appendix). The areas covered included demographic information, the individual's career as a Habonim member, and philosophical issues associated with Labor Zionism. Whereas people were encouraged to "tell" the story of their Habonim affiliation, the researcher made sure that certain areas were addressed. Among these were: family background and its association with Labor Zionism (though no questions regarding the individual's relationship with his or her family were asked), motivation for joining and remaining in or leaving the movement, attitude towards Israel, attitude towards issues of social justice, and present relationship to the movement. Many of the questions were answered spontaneously without their being asked.

All the interviews were tape-recorded and notes were taken. Most individuals contacted were most cordial and expressed a great deal of interest in the project, stating that they were really glad to have the opportunity



to reflect on their Habonim experiences so as to put them in perspective in the context of their present lives. One individual even mentioned having wanted to write a book on the Habonim Movement, and being glad to have an opportunity finally to express herself on the matter. Another individual suggested that information might be more adequately presented in the literature, but when he was interviewed he turned out to have much information which could not be found in the literature. He also contributed very meaningful information in terms of his own personal perspective. One person did not make herself available for an interview.

Following completion of all interviews, the tapes were reviewed and gaps filled in. Not only the words, but the tone in which they were said and the context in which they occurred were seen as meaningful. Thus the significance of the Habonim experience could be extrapolated from the enthusiasm with which the people spoke as well as from statements regarding the important part the movement played during adolescent years. There appeared to be a fairly high level of consistency among the respondents; this consistency suggests that there is a modal type of active Habonim member who provides a summary for the findings.

#### Limitations

This consistency, however, also suggests a limitation of the study. The sample was obtained by contacting

people who either worked in the Jewish community or whose friends did. As a result a group may have been selected whose values are most ego-syntonic with those of Habonim, and in whose lives Habonim was most central.

There may have been some groups of erstwhile Habonim members who were not reached. For example, no one interviewed admitted to having joined Habonim out of a sense of rebellion against his or her parents. Neither was any individual interviewed for whom Habonim served only as a brief interlude of Jewish activity. This skewing of the sample, no doubt, had an effect on the study's findings, as had the limited size of the sample.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PEOPLE SPEAK: INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Since Habonim is seen as having the potential for affecting the lives of the people involved in the movement, twelve people were interviewed. The individuals involved in this study range in age from seventeen to sixty-three, the youngest still in high school. Except for him and for one other individual who has a Bachelor's degree, all of the interviewees had achieved a Master's degree level education. Aside from the high school student, all eleven people were or had been engaged in professions working in the Los Angeles community. One individual who has retired had worked within private industry as is still done by two other people interviewed. Three more people work as governmental employees, and five of the individuals interviewed work within the Jewish community. Five of those interviewed hold memberships in the Labor Zionist Alliance today.

No information is available regarding synagogue affiliation since no questions regarding this area were asked. In almost every home or office visited in connection with interviews, there were symbols or objects identifiably Jewish, and each individual indicated that Jewish was important to him or her.

### Family Background

All but one individual came from families with a Labor Zionist orientation, most had at least one parent who participated in the Farband (Jewish National Workers' Alliance), the Poale Zion, or the Pioneer Women.<sup>1</sup> The one person whose family was not Labor Zionist had himself been involved in "all" of the Jewish activities in his community while growing up, and his general involvement in Habonim was an extension of his involvement in the Jewish community at large. This individual stated that he could not isolate his Habonim experiences from other "Jewish" experiences, and therefore his experience remains uniquely different from that of all of the other people interviewed.

### Involvement in Habonim

No matter how similar or different the experiences of the individuals interviewed were, one common thread running through all of the interviews is the function Habonim played for its members. Almost everyone interviewed entered Habonim about the age of ten, and in one way or another everyone stated that, initially at least, the importance of Habonim lay in its satisfying the social needs of its members:

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<sup>1</sup>The Poale Zion and the Farband joined together and are now the Labor Zionist Alliance.

It was fun for me and because that became the base, then I was more willing to assimilate the ideology of the movement. But if I didn't have my friendship needs met, I wouldn't have touched it.

Each person interviewed found acceptance in the movement, and several people had much to say about the difference in attitude of Habonim people:

[This was a] group of adolescents and peers where one was judged not by the usual criteria one encountered in high schools and in adolescent peers . . . what was important was you as a person, what you could contribute to a group, using your wits and your mind.

Yet the impression conveyed to the researcher was that contributing to the group is a broadly defined concept including any kind of participation. One person spoke of a member who everyone else knew was "crazy" (a fact she validated by saying he is now in a mental hospital in school); though no one was a close personal friend of this individual, he was always considered and included.

That Habonim did not stay strictly social for these people is important to note. For some, the Jewish aspect was most important because "the temple just did not speak to [them]." For another, being a part of kvutza (group), "where [the adolescents] were learning some of [the] ideas of group work, group cooperation, and group spirit by living and not just talking about it," was most important. For someone else, "it provided an idealistic focal point . . . something very real, something very tangible, a cause

that was in harmony with my home, and yet there were areas in which I could rebel . . . " And for another person,

It gave me a direction in the 1960s when most people were somewhat directionless. It was a good way of channeling my radical tendencies and humanitarianism and all that into a cause that I felt comfortable with. . . . In general my primary identification was in the context of Labor Zionist ideology and wanting to make aliyah, and wanting to educate others towards aliyah, strengthening Jewish identification, [all of] which gave me a purposeful 1960s.

In general, then, though young people came into and stayed in the movement because their social needs were met, one cannot underestimate the fact that "the centrality of Zionism, Judaism, and socialism were the basics of Habonim . . . because without those particular items, Habonim is just another youth movement out there."

Everyone interviewed for this study was involved in Habonim in the city in which he grew up, and almost everyone interviewed had some experience with Habonim camp, the one exception being the person who did not come from a Labor Zionist home. As mentioned earlier, one interviewee helped form Habonim in Los Angeles. This individual was the director of the first Habonim camp in Los Angeles, and has remained active as a Labor Zionist his entire life. Another interviewee never attended a regional camp as a regular camper, though he was at camp as a youngster before he became active in Habonim. (His parents were instrumental in the founding of Habonim nationally and his



father was business manager of the Los Angeles camp during its initial years. He did, however, attend Mahaneh Bonim, the national Habonim camp maintained as a leadership training seminar. One other individual interviewed did not attend camp officially, but he spent all his summer weekends there and helped open and prepare the camp for the summer each year. This individual said he felt very much a part of the camp, even though he was not a "full-time" camp member. These latter two people as well as the person with no Habonim camp experience all ended their involvement in Habonim when they went to college. All other interviewees (except the current Habonim member who is still in high school) maintained their involvement in the movement during at least their first two years of college. The influence and importance of the camp experience seem to keep these people committed to the movement and they stay in it for a longer period of time. As one individual said, "Building things brings you closer to camp." The uniqueness of the Habonim camp was aptly described by someone else:

I think what set our camp apart from every other camp in the whole world was that at our camp we did everything. At most camps there's a format and a staff and the staff is professional. They see to it that certain things happen, that you learn certain things by the end of the summer, that you learn certain songs, you're supposed to have certain activities, certain friendships, and you have good experiences and



those things all happen for sure. But at our camp it was like there was a chemistry between the staff and the kids and the events of the summer and things didn't necessarily happen unless we made them happen. It was really up to us. There was tremendous freedom and room for creativity and that was the best thing about it. . . . The staff is not professional and that's why it's catch as catch can.

Many of these people who stayed in Habonim for an extended period of time rose to leadership positions. They themselves became madrichim as well as directors of the camp or city programs; some became active on the national level. Leaving the movement then became difficult as "once you get in it's almost impossible to get out. You feel very responsible for the other people within . . . no matter what goes wrong . . . it's incredibly secure." One individual told the researcher,

I had a very tough end for a few years. I had all of these loyalties inside me, and I guess I still have. But I had outgrown it. I felt this responsibility in one way that said help the movement and keep going and this other responsibility to myself that said start growing in some other ways.

In the end, one's conflicts about leaving the movement become moot points as

Once you've lost your peer group the next group up wants you out so they can take over. It's their time and they want it. Even if they're not ready for it, they want it.

## Attitudes - Where They Are Now

One issue addressed in the interviews in which a changing philosophical base suggested itself was the issue of secularism. One person indicated the historical viewpoint:

There was a time when ideological secularism was one of the banners [of Labor Zionism], but I don't know that there are an awful lot of people around to whom it means that much.

Still, one of the strengths of Labor Zionism (and Habonim) commented on by several people was that, "It gives one a tie to Jewish life that is not necessarily religious at its core though it has traditions connected with it." However, the same individual who made the statement, "It catered to my cultural ethnic form of Jewish identification which is easier for me than ritualistic Judaism which I tend to get turned off by," also made the statement: "I think pure secularism is nonsense anyway. I'd like to hear someone expound on what is pure secularism." This individual (and others) enjoyed the relaxed form of cultural Judaism which typifies Habonim, but he did not see this as necessarily devoid of all ritualistic Jewish expression. Another person interviewed stated well what seems to be the movement's current stand on secularism: "It's secular in that its primary function is not religious . . . it's not religious at all. It's culturally Jewish and that includes a lot of ritual." Interestingly, three people

feel that, though the religious component may not be the most salient part of the movement, education about what the Jewish religion is and stands for is necessary and perhaps should be addressed more in the movement. The three people who indicated this point of view ranged in age from the oldest to the youngest individual interviewed.

In discussing attitudes towards Habonim as a movement today, three distinct responses emerged. Three people were sufficiently remote from the movement themselves and have had no contact with other people in the movement for a sufficiently long time so as to have no opinion at all.

The second response was an attitude characterized by an optimistic sense of the potentiality of Habonim to connect Jewish young people to their cultural roots. It was also seen as an educational resource and an instrument for political involvement which focuses on issues relating to the Jewish community. This attitude was shared by three individuals who currently have an active involvement in the Labor Zionist Alliance as well as the individual who is currently a member of Habonim.

The third attitude which emerged was that Habonim has deteriorated and no longer demands or commands the commitment it previously did, and that this is negative in value. This view was expressed by people who had held leadership positions within the last ten years. They

seemed to feel that they would be more effective leaders in the movement now with what they have learned since leaving the movement, and they seemed to believe that the current leadership must be as incompetent as they themselves feel they were when they were in those leadership positions. They point to "Americanization" as an indication of the movement's deterioration, citing the introduction of American songs and dances as an example of this Americanization. This criticism by recent past leaders may indeed be a result of a continuing sense of responsibility to the movement and a way of dealing with the sense of loss and the cognitive dissonance<sup>2</sup> they experience as a result of leaving the movement and no longer having any involvement with it.

Though everyone interviewed felt a strong relationship with Israel, this consensus must be looked at somewhat more analytically as the complexity of this issue may not be readily apparent. One of the primary goals of Habonim is to educate its members for aliyah and any person no longer in Habonim who is living in the Diaspora is doing so with the awareness that he or she has not realized this goal of the movement. For two of the individuals who left Habonim when they entered college, this posed no

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<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of cognitive dissonance, see Leon Festinger, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1957).

problem. Most of the other people, however, had and/or continue to have some conflict regarding this issue. The current Habonim member indicated the weightiness of the decision he will have to make. One other interviewee who had made aliyah and then returned to America "for personal reasons" indicated that his returning did not mean a final decision had been made. For others, too, the fact that they were living here now did not mean that this conflict had been resolved, nor that a final decision had been made. Most of the people who have not made a final decision (including the person still in Habonim) have spent a year or more in Israel, either in the Habonim Workshop Program or some other comparable living/learning program. One of the currently active Labor Zionists stated that she had had much conflict about this issue and had resolved it only with the support of her husband, himself a former Habonim member, and with the feeling and knowledge that she was working actively and creatively within the Jewish community. One individual who left Habonim after graduating from high school did seem to have some conflict. He had a different point of view on the issue:

There was a lot of pressure on you; they were conditioning you all the way, it's clear to me now. As much fun as we had, their job was really to create aliyah, and the pressure was always there. . . . They taught you how to influence your parents to let you go. My parents didn't buy it . . .

This person speaks of "they" rather than "we." The whole issue thus appears to be out of his control: they pressure you, but his parents wouldn't let him go (even on Workshop). This reluctance to be autonomous and accept responsibility for his own actions may be a means of reducing cognitive dissonance and another way of dealing with this conflict. The words of one other man who was himself faced with this conflict and who has since become involved in the maintaining and the furthering of the Habonim movement are particularly poignant:

I used to have very serious qualms about organizing kids and educating them to something that would be a source of conflict, but I long since discovered that everybody has conflicts anyhow and very often they have conflicts about nothings. So let us offer them significant conflicts and in the resolution they will grow. And occasionally, for some it is not a conflict, it is a revelation and they go.

When questioned about supporting Israel today, the individual mentioned above who resolved his conflict by externalizing the precipitating pressures offered unqualified support for Israel being "a shining example of the most positive value systems carried out in day to day government." Although he did not express criticism of the current government as the others did, he joined the Labor Zionist Alliance in May 1977, when the Likud came to power. In reality, though not verbalized as such, his attitude does not appear to be that different from the attitude



prevailing among the other people interviewed. As stated by one young person:

I don't see my role as a Zionist as supporting Israel and that's all. There's a lot more to it like creative support of Israel . . . I think the idea of an Israel should be supported because that's basic. But after that, I don't think you have to support everything Israel does.

As stated by an older person:

[It depends] if you mean by support of Israel just support of Israel in a general manner or if you mean things that we created such as the Histadrut, the Kupat Holim, the kibbutz movement, the moshav movement, the way of life we created in Israel. If you mean that, yes, I think it's important. If you mean just politically support Israel per se, I can do that in any[way]. . . . We support a way of life in Israel, too, the establishment of Israel on the basis of social justice.

For these people, then, support of Israel means support of an ideal, an ideal that must be continually strengthened and upheld, for once the relationship has begun, it lives:

Look, I'm always going to have a relationship with Israel. I mean, personally, emotionally, intellectually, culturally, historically, politically, spiritually, whatever, I'm always going to have that identification. It's part of me.

Democratic socialism is another philosophical issue frequently associated with Labor Zionism and Habonim. Though many people said they subscribed to the principles of democratic socialism, they described what these principles meant to them by using such phrases as "fair system" and "social justice rather than economic socialism." As



one person put it, "Habonim taught me to take everyone's job, no matter what they do, as an important part of the system." And as someone else stated:

I express it in terms of its basic values, in terms of its humanistic values, in terms of the human being and the dignity of the human being and of people having the right to live with as much human dignity as possible under economic circumstances that allow for at least the covering of the basic minimum of life.

Thus, in the value systems of the former Habonim members, economic considerations are not important apart from their effect on human beings: "The reason to make equality is to make people socially equal and economics is a part of that."

The value systems of these individuals seem to be primarily oriented towards the worth and dignity of human beings, and towards the principles of equality and social justice. Understanding issues and being well informed also seem to have high priority and contribute to status within the organization. As stated by one young person, "People should be informed so they can make really informed choices."

Most people seem to hold highly democratic principles which may very well have been a value reinforced by their Habonim experience. One individual disagreed with this position vehemently. She contended that Habonim was run on charisma rather than democracy. To some degree that

might be true, but one must also take into account that two of the experiences that led her to leave the movement when she did were a bad summer at camp which she attributed to the irresponsible behavior of the camp director, a very charismatic person, and the rejection of a progressive resolution that she proposed at a biennial convention. On the whole, though, the people interviewed were neither rigid nor alienated.

One person commented that "Habonim wasn't so fanatic in its ideology that it would turn my stomach . . . Habonim never forced me to deny my Americanism . . ." The individuals interviewed also acknowledge the validity of different points of view on particular issues. A frequent response to questions regarding various types of problems was that there must be alternatives.

Habonim is also oriented towards action as reflected in the comment, "What you did as your activities basically decided your policy." This value, too, becomes internalized and is held by many of the people interviewed. One man articulated this viewpoint in his statement, "If I believe in it I ought to do something about it."

When asked whether they would want their children or grandchildren to join Habonim, most of the interviewees' responses ranged from an unqualified yes to, "It depends on the leadership." In general, the same people who felt that the movement had deteriorated were somewhat more

hesitant. Another view some people held was stated concisely by one man:

I would want my kids to at least be exposed to Habonim. I would also want them to be exposed to synagogue and I would like them to be exposed to Jewish Community Centers.

The person who stated that he could not isolate his Habonim experience from other experiences was rather indifferent. He was eager that his children and grandchildren have a Jewish experience and he was not opposed to this experience being within the framework of Habonim. And one man made a rather practical statement:

If I really want my children to be Labor Zionists I think I should live in Israel and bring up my children in a completely Labor Zionist milieu.

In general, though, people interviewed felt that their Habonim experience was significant for them, and such an experience could be significant for their children and/or grandchildren.

Many people themselves commented on the influence they felt Habonim had on their own lives. Making Judaism a way of life and choice of profession were two common manifestations of this influence. However, some others deserve attention as well because, even though they were not mentioned by everyone, the resulting traits seemed to be characteristics common to most of the people interviewed. One woman stated that she felt that "whatever leadership qualities [she] now [has], basically developed there--

self-confidence, creativ[ity, the ability to] run things . . ." As she put it, "At camp you learned how to do things, accomplish things, how to work with other people, how to live with other people . . ." Another response amplified this aspect.

I tend to be a doer. I see myself as a doer, I tend to be impatient with the often used phrase--process--which can get worked to death, although I recognize its importance in certain situations . . . I like to see things move.

Some people commented on their perceptions of how Habonim influenced the community as well, in terms of attitudes towards Jewish education, attitudes towards strong identification with Jewish cultural life in its various aspects, and ongoing ties with Israel. One person felt, "Habonim's greatest impact probably is in terms of how the mainstream assimilates some of its approaches." This person cited the intensity of various aspects of the camping program: the Jewish component, the use of Hebrew, the group living situation, and the democratic format where the campers have a say in what happens. The interviewees' attitudes about the influence of Habonim can probably be summed up best in a few of their reflections on the matter.

It never had a great quantitative impact.  
It always had a profound qualitative impact.

It has a lot of influence, but mainly it developed my personality. Maybe I would have

turned out the same if I hadn't gone, maybe I wouldn't have. But that's where I happened to be when I did all that stuff, and I think it encouraged it.

. . . to commit that time of your life to something--I never called it an organization, we always called it a movement, and I think that's a very important distinction to make--that [to] the people who really took Habonim seriously, it was more than a social aggregate. [They] were really part of the movement.

A residual effect of this intense experience is that most of the people interviewed commented that most of their closest friends also came from the ranks of the movement, and that even beyond these closest friendships, caring and concern for others in the movement remain.

What's interesting also about Habonim graduates is [that] we all seem to know a little bit about each other. . . . There's always that connectedness. It never totally disappears. It's like once you experience Habonim for an extended period of time, it never completely leaves. In other words I'll always have concern for [them] . . . and they'll always have concern for me. . . . It's like we had a very intense bond and no one can ever take that away from us . . . there's always still that common strand . . . and what's true is that that common strand seems to exist whether people remain as professionals within the Jewish community or are selling furniture. They still seem to have some kind of linkage. It never totally disappears.

### Summary

In summary, then, the normative Habonim member in the United States has the following career:

He or she comes from a Labor Zionist home and enters the movement about the age of ten. The primary function of

the movement at this time is to meet the individual's social needs, and though the social element maintains its significance throughout the person's tenure in the movement, the basics of the movement, Zionism, Judaism, and socialism, quickly become increasingly salient as the individual's understanding grows. The individual finds acceptance among his or her peers and involvement continues on a year-round basis as he or she participates in the city as well as in the camping program. The individual goes through the ranks and eventually becomes a madrich at camp, and possibly in the city as well after spending a year in Israel in some kind of learning program. The person leaves the movement at about the age of twenty-three, though not without some conflict about leaving and about not making aliyah. By this time the individual has developed a fairly strong sense of self with a realistic goal and action orientation and an open mind to understanding alternative points of view. Social justice and a sense of fair play are important to him or her, and a strong bond and loyalty to Israel and to Judaism have been integrated into his or her being. A belief in the worth and the dignity of every human being has become a part of the person as well, and he or she is likely to go into a profession associated with the furtherance of these internalized values, often within the government or within the Jewish community. Jewish identification remains an

essential part of the person, even as he or she occasionally struggles with its manifestations. The relationships that he or she has formed in Habonim remain just as significant with the passage of time since the person has developed a sense of caring and concern about everyone with whom he or she has shared the Habonim experience.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

Peer group experiences are significant in adolescent development as they provide an avenue through which the young person can begin to establish his or her own identity separate from that of his or her family. New roles can be tried out within the context of the group, and narcissistic attitudes reflecting the primacy of ego gratification may give way to new attitudes reflecting the importance of mutuality in relationships and the importance of concern for others. Labor Zionism, as a philosophy of life, asserts the worth and dignity of the human being very highly, as it emphasizes the survival of the Jewish people. Habonim, its youth movement, perpetuates these values within its membership through maintaining a movement that operates with these basic values as its core.

A large number of Habonim members come to Habonim at a young age as a result of their parents' knowledge, commitment, and belief in Labor Zionism. The movement has a strong value-orientation, and Habonim transmits these values to the next generation. Since socialization to these values takes place within the context of the peer group, the usual inter-generational conflict is much

reduced. However, since the values of the movement are congruent with the values of the home, the movement is comfortable for its members. As a result they remain in it for an extended period of time during the crucial period of transition to adulthood. What becomes internalized is an approach to life more than a particular ideology, the greatest value being placed on people, both individually and as a group (within the movement), rather than on an idea.

Five elements appear to work together to enhance the cohesiveness of the group. First of all, Habonim is run by the young people themselves with no outside intervention. They provide leadership for intellectual and creative development, Jewish and otherwise. The second factor, an outgrowth of the first, is that the group is responsible and accountable only to itself--as a whole and to the individual members. Taking credit for successes and the achievement of goals and assuming blame for the failure to do so work together to inspire within its members dedication to the movement and its goals.

The third factor is that structured into the movement are various tests of commitment to the group, and to the ideology and principles of the movement. These range from participation in the neshef to the acceptance of simplifying one's physical lifestyle at camp. These tests serve to reaffirm the individual's fidelity to the group

and to the movement, and in so doing reinforce commitment to its principles and ideology.

The fourth factor, the transcendent value and supreme importance of aliyah, is present, whether consciously or not, in everything Habonim does or stands for from the moment the individual joins the movement. This value becomes infused within the individual and grows in significance as his or her understanding of what aliyah means within a Labor Zionist context grows. Essentially, this transcendent value takes the form of a universalistic humanistic base with a concrete goal, thus providing the adolescent with a channel for idealistic tendencies while giving him or her something steadfast toward which he or she can work during these frequently turbulent years.

The fifth factor involved in enhancing group cohesion is that the integration of particular Hebrew words and expressions into the language of Habonim members effectively creates a "Habonim dialect" which has an inclusinary/exclusionary effect. That is, if one knows and can speak this argot, one's sense of belonging to the group is heightened. These five factors, (1) youth-run, (2) responsible and accountable to self, (3) tests of commitment to the group, (4) transcendent value of aliyah, and (5) having own language, all work together to increase group cohesion and interdependence.

Though the Habonim movement cannot be "bought" on a wholesale basis for all of Jewish youth, those elements leading to cohesion suggest certain components which should be considered in fashioning a youth group or movement that will influence its membership in a positive manner, whether the group or movement is associated with a Jewish Center, a temple or synagogue, a college Hillel chapter, or any other formal or informal Jewish organization or movement. First of all, the group must not be adult generated.

An individual with an interest in a similar or related area for which the group is forming may be helpful as advisor. He or she should be only a few years older--at least in spirit--so as to be able to serve as a role-model and/or teacher, counselor, or friend for the young adolescents. The group, however, will only remain important to its members as long as they feel it is their group and not their advisor's. Responsibility for the group must rest within the membership. They must decide on their activities and how they will work to achieve their goal. As they have only their own agenda to meet, they are accountable only to themselves. Conversely, since they own their agendas, an individual who defaults on his or her responsibility, will be answerable to the group. Since no one will implement plans and programs for the group members except the group itself, it will have to learn to plan agendas and programs, and set realizable goals.

Funding of youth groups or movements is a related issue as frequently the sponsoring organization (Center, synagogue, etc.) demands accountability for funds distributed. A partial solution would be to have the group devise means to raise some of the money it needs to conduct its activities. The method of raising such funds should be consonant with the values of the group. To augment these fund-raising efforts, the sponsoring organization might possibly have to be educated to the adolescent group's need for autonomy. Then, with an eye to the group's own efforts at fund-raising, the sponsors might demonstrate their willingness to allocate funds to the group without controlling the use to which this money is put, although within the context of expectation of accountability.

The next area of related issues dealing with developing a youth group or movement that will influence the membership in a positive way regards the member's commitment as well as the goals of the group or movement. These areas are linked in that the adolescent's commitment to the group will undoubtedly correspond with the degree to which he or she feels connected with the goals and values of the group or movement. Yet it is precisely the alignment with these goals and values that will provide the adolescent with the means of transcending his or her own narcissistic world, a very necessary step in the process of anticipatory socialization.

Two types of goals are necessary if a youth group or movement is to have the kind of influence described. The first type is the central or transcendent goal around which the group is organized. This goal is transcendent in that it is sufficiently valued or prized so that commitment to it takes precedence over any individual or any incident that occurs within the group. This transcendent goal is not immediately realizable, but rather it involves a sustained commitment, and working towards it will frequently result in the growth of the individual as well as of the group.<sup>1</sup>

The other goals within a functioning youth group are those realizable purposeful actions or activities in which the group engages, coupled with a manner of relating to one another and working together. The goals are not only ends in and of themselves, but are also means of working towards the central or transcendent goal. Besides

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<sup>1</sup>The author was inclined to think that this value must be related to human relationships, but during a casual conversation on a plane, a mother of an adolescent boy related a situation which suggested an alternative. Her young son was involved in a high school music group that decided it wanted to go on a one-week music tour of Europe. To achieve this goal the group had to earn all of the money, both collectively and individually. They created schedules and broke their total group into sub-groups which would then perform concerts to earn money. Some performances were given by the total group as well. During this experience, the adolescents learned to work together and achieved a sharp sense of cohesiveness within and responsibility to the group. This group, oriented towards music, had affected the socialization of these adolescents in a very human way.



offering a sense of accomplishment when achieved for their own sake, the goals also reinforce the central value of the movement as their achievement represents growth and movement toward the transcendent goal.

The transcendent goal by definition may not ever be fully achieved. The process of working towards that goal and the ensuing personal and group growth become the most significant elements. Participation in various aspects of this process continually tests the commitment of the individual members. By their participation they affirm their commitment to the movement and reaffirm their fidelity to the group.

In order for these goals to be important to the membership, they must be clear and recognizable, and the membership must have a stake in them. This can be achieved by forming a group around the adolescents' common interests, cares, or concerns that can be articulated in the form of a transcendent goal. As stated above, the membership itself will then determine its own instrumental activities, the means of working towards this transcendent goal. Participating in the decision-making process regarding activities or actions increases the emotional investments in the achievement of these goals, and disappointment is more likely to accompany failure to achieve them.

The final component in forming a cohesive group that can be abstracted from the Habonim experience is the



importance and the value of having a special symbol of some sort that is unique to that particular group. This symbol provides not only a means of determining who is "in" the group and who is not, but also serves as a rallying point around which the group's or movement's members join together. In any event, a symbol such as a language or special terminology to which only the group's members are privy, connotes (and in some instances denotes) the group's or movement's distinctiveness.

A functionalist model has provided the framework for the above analysis of the Habonim movement. However, the danger of functionalism is that it robs a group of its uniqueness. No abstraction can really get at the essence of what makes the elements interact in the manner in which they do.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the substance of the transcendent values and goals of a group is of equal if not greater importance to the functioning of the group than the fact that such values and goals exist, as they are the core around which the group comes together and sustains itself.

The goal of Habonim--aliyah within the context of a Labor Zionist ideology--promotes the development of a strong Jewish identity as well as a humanistic orientation towards life and society both in Israel and in the host culture.

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<sup>2</sup>See Kingsley Davis, "The Myth of Functional Analysis as a Special Method in Sociology and Anthropology," American Sociological Review 24 (1959), 757-72.

The internalization of this Jewish and social consciousness produces people with great integrity who have the potential to become--and in fact often do become--leaders in the Jewish and general society. Conversely, Habonim may be seen as a potential reserve for future Jewish communal leadership. The people most influenced by their Habonim experience tend to come from Labor Zionist homes as such homes reinforce the values of the movement. Therefore, if Habonim is to continue to have the influence it has had in the past, one must be concerned with the fact that individuals leaving Habonim are not maintaining their affiliation with the Labor Zionist Alliance. This is important because affiliation with the organization reinforces the values and ideals of Labor Zionism.

Absence of a middle age group in the Labor Zionist Alliance is problematic. There are many reasons why people do not join. Though the values of socialism tend to be internalized in terms of social justice, this shift has not necessarily been clearly articulated by the leadership. Secondly, the goal of Habonim is aliyah, and the residual conflict of not making aliyah may cause individuals to avoid further affiliation with the movement. Thirdly, every youth group movement has difficulty in the transition from youth movement to that of adult group because such a movement serves in part as an adolescent moratorium. Aspiring to be adults, they need to distance

themselves from their youth so as to be taken seriously.

But Habonim is not like other youth group movements. Many individuals stay involved through their college years, and there is no reason why Labor Zionists cannot continue to be different. There needs to be increased experimentation with programming. As there seems to be a political shift to the right in progress in this country, a strong voice for social idealism needs to be heard. This would be an appropriate place for young Labor Zionists to join together to reaffirm their commitment to the ideals and values that so strongly influenced their developing into the adults they are today.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Guide

Name

Age

What kind of work are you doing? (If retired, what kind of work did you do?)

How much education have you had?

When did you become active in Labor Zionism?

Are you still active now?

When did you stop being active?

How active were you? What was the nature of your participation?

I'd like to review the history of your involvement. Do you remember why you joined?

Do you feel the same way about these things?

Does the organization remain important to you for the same reasons?

How and when did your point of view change? What were the circumstances?

Were there any outside events?

Were there any personal factors?

What was your point of view when you ceased being active?

What is your point of view about the organization now?

I would like to discuss some philosophical issues. Historically, the Labor Zionists have been associated with left-wing economic policies such as socialism. What is your point of view?

In Israel the Labor Zionist movement stands for a democratic socialism. What is your point of view?

Are you in favor of the same economic position for America as for Israel? If so, why? If not, why not?

Historically, the Labor Zionists have been associated with liberal social policy on such matters as rights of blacks or Mexican Americans or labor unions. What is your point of view?

Have there been any changes? Why?

Suppose the only LZA accomplishment was the establishment of Israel, would you still belong? Why?

Suppose its only present function was the support of Israel, would you still belong? Why?

Historically, Labor Zionism has been viewed as a secular Jewish organization. Is this important? Why or why not?

Would you like your children to be Labor Zionists? Why or why not?

If you had to convince your child (or grandchild) to join the Labor Zionist Alliance, what would you say?

Are there any matters which relate to the subject which we haven't discussed?

Are there any questions you would like to ask me?