

Defining Zionism Today

For Habonim Dror youth movement bogrim/madrachim

Goals:

- Connect with 2010 Yom Herzl theme of dealing with racism based on Herzl quote “Fellow man, you are my brother” to reach world youth movement madrichim with Herzl-based Zionist content, and be part of creating common language across Habonim Dror in the world
- Understand that we are struggling on two levels to define Zionism: internally among Jews, and externally in the world, and this struggle has the tendency to make us doubt or retreat from embracing the moral Zionist ideal that Herzl envisioned and described
- Choose to take an active part in shaping a moral, humanistic, just understanding and expression of Zionism in our hadracha and in our Jewish communities, and not allow other forces in society to define Zionism for us or for the Jewish people

Peula:

1. Zionism according to Herzl

Present Herzl Quote about 7-hour work day: (Appendix 1)

“The seven-hour day will be the standard working day... I am convinced that the seven-hour day is entirely feasible. The experiments in Belgium and England are familiar. Some advanced social thinkers even go so far as to claim that a five-hour day would be quite sufficient...

We need the seven-hour day as a worldwide rallying cry for our people, all of whom are to come voluntarily. Ours must truly be the Promised Land ...

Just as we shall institute the seven-hour day as an experiment for the good of humanity, we will lead the way in all humanitarian activities and build the new land as a land of experiment and a model country.”

Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 1896

Discussion:

- What can you understand about who Herzl is – ideologies, beliefs, cultural background, etc. – based on this quote? (secular, humanist, connected to Judaism but in a non-religious way...)
- Why is this his vision for *Jewish* society in Israel, when this is the trend generally in Europe at that time?
- What’s the Zionism/Zionist approach that’s being presented here?
- Is this Zionism?

We’re going to keep this definition in mind as we examine how it’s being challenged in different spheres today...

2. Herzlian Zionism today

Explain a bit about the Kaadan case (see text box), and then read from an interview with Aharon Barak, the chief justice ruling on the case (Appendix 2)

Discussion:

- Do you agree with his conception of Zionism? And the way he relates it to Herzl?
- Why would someone call him a “post-Zionist”? How would a person that says this define Zionism, and what interest would they have in labeling Barak in this way?
- People who disagree with his ruling could say a lot of things about him – why would they choose to attack his Zionism?

Explain: There is an ongoing struggle for defining Zionism – internally among Jews, the struggle is between people who define Zionism like Herzl and Barak – based on equality, secular and modern but inspired by Judaism/Jewish values, who want

Israeli society to be according to these ideas; vs. people who view Zionism as a nationalist idea based on holding territory, and holding racist views against Arabs, and who use Judaism to justify these beliefs. By attacking Barak’s Zionism, this camp is essentially calling him a traitor, and are trying to undermine him using his (our) view of Zionism against him.

This is a pretty serious internal debate, and has a lot of bearing on how public discourse in Israel today looks, and how the nature of Israeli society is being shaped. We’re going to talk more about this, but first we want to talk a bit about the debates on defining Zionism that are taking place externally (outside Jewish discourse).

3. Examining the statement “Zionism = Racism”

Read the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379 (Appendix 3)

Discussion:

- Is there truth in this resolution?
- Why was the connection made between Zionism and racism?
- This is so radically different from how we understand Zionism – how did this connection come to be made?

This is a sweeping statement – doesn’t mention anything about the State of Israel’s policies, what its doing, occupation, etc. – doesn’t say that if Israel changes certain unjust or racist policies then Zionism or Israel can be okay or even good – just makes a blanket statement expressing that Zionism can never be anything but racist.

- How can you reconcile that with what we discussed earlier – Aharon Barak’s view of Zionism as his guide to preventing racism and promoting equality in Israel?
- Why would the countries that sponsored this resolution at the UN choose to equate Zionism with racism, and not attack specific Israeli policies as racist? What purpose does this serve?
- How can our humanist views of Zionism fit into a world where this is the world’s definition of Zionism?

Background: (<http://blog.abrahamfund.org.uk/2007/08/14/the-kaadan-family-to-begin-building-their-home-in-katzir/> and <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=341000>)

Arab family from Baqa El Gharbiya wanted to build a new home in the nearby town of Katzir, in 1994. The Kaadan family’s request was denied on the grounds that as Arabs they do not fit in with the Jewish nature of the town. In March 2000, in a panel of five judges, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled against the Israeli Land Authority (ILA), which leased the land to the Jewish Agency to establish Katzir as a Jewish-only community, had acted illegally. The court argued that government resources cannot be allocated separately to a single group and in particular to a group or an agency that discriminates against non-Jewish citizens of Israel.

As former Chief Justice Aharon Barak wrote in the majority opinion in the case: “...Equality is among the fundamental principles of the State of Israel. Every authority in Israel, beginning with the State of Israel, its institutions and employees, must treat the various elements in the state equally. This is requisite from the Jewish and democratic character of the state and it is a function of the principle of rule of law, which is in force here. Thus, the state must honour and protect the fundamental right of every individual in the state to equal treatment”

Construction finally began in 2007.

- Do the external definitions affect how you/we define Zionism internally?

Read Abba Eban's (Israeli diplomat) statement from November 1975:

"Classical anti-Semitism denies equal right of Jews as citizens within society. Anti-Zionism denies the equal rights of the Jewish people to its lawful sovereignty within the community of nations... All that has happened is that the discriminatory principle has been transferred from the realm of individual rights to the domain of collective identity."

- Do you agree with this statement?
- Does this affect how you/we define Zionism internally? (should we just give up on using this term?)

4. Sikkum

Our challenge is twofold – we are struggling for defining the internal and external definition of Zionism, and we are also struggling for the nature of Israeli society – such that it will be closer to ours and Herzl's vision, and not allow racist practices, policies, or attitudes.

- Of these two challenges – which comes first: struggling to redefine Zionism, or struggling for Israeli society? (in other words, is the only way to justify our definition of Zionism changing Israeli society?)
- Can you do one without the other?
- What is our role in shaping the definition of Zionism with our chanichim? How can we, together with our chanichim, affect the way our Jewish community perceives Zionism?

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Appendix 2:

Secular and Zionist - Interview with Aharon Barak

By Ari Shavit, Haaretz, April 14, 2008

It is alleged against you that you are a secular person who promoted secular causes in court and did not show sufficient sensitivity toward the religious beliefs and traditionalist sensibilities of a large proportion of Israel's citizens.

I am a secular person. I do not believe that God exists. In my view the Holocaust is irreconcilable with the existence of God. Like Haim Cohn, I do not think that God created man, but that man created God. At the same time, I consider myself a Jew, and not only because my mother and father were Jews. I am a Jew in the national sense, a secular Jew.

It is clear to me that if we are to live here together, secular with religious, we must compromise. I am ready to compromise. I do not demand my hundred percent. I proposed a compromise on the issue of Bar-Ilan Street [in Jerusalem]. I am not very rigid in the matter of drafting yeshiva students. I understand that both the Sabbath and yeshiva study are the most cherished values of the religious public. But I expect that just as I acknowledge what they hold precious, they must acknowledge what I hold precious.

Regrettably, many of them believe that [according to an old parable] their cart is full and mine is empty, so my cart has to make way for theirs on the bridge. I cannot accept that. My cart is not empty.

I endorse the state's support for religion, for example, as long as it is on the basis of equality. It does not bother me if the public space possesses a certain religious cast. But I insist that in exchange, the religious public recognize my most cherished values: equality, freedom of the individual. A striving for that balance characterized my judgments in all my years on the Supreme Court.

It is alleged against you that you are a post-Zionist, that your rulings in the Kaadan case [which enabled an Arab family to build a home in a Jewish community] and on the Citizenship Law were post-Zionist in character.

To the best of my knowledge, there is not one post-Zionist justice on the Supreme Court. Of myself I can attest that I am a Zionist with all my 248 organs and 365 sinews. And not a Zionist of the Ahad Ha'am school [cultural Zionism]. A Herzlian Zionist. A Zionist who believes in a Jewish nation-state that is intended to solve the Jewish problem. A Zionist who thinks that a binational state would be a disaster. A Zionist who thinks that the Law of Return is not discriminatory, but a just law that provides an answer to the historic outcry of the Jewish people. To pogroms, to suppression, to the Holocaust.

I am a Zionist at the personal level as well. Believe me, I had many opportunities not to reside in this country. The best universities, a salary of millions, even a judgeship. I rejected all those offers without even considering them, because I am a Zionist. I have four children. One of the greatest calamities that could befall me is for a child of mine to emigrate. And they are all here. All of them absorbed their mother's and my Zionism.

But the question is what Zionism is. My lesson from the Holocaust is that Israel has to be the state of the Jewish people but also the state of all its citizens. Israel is a home to which a Jew, as a Jew, is given a special key with which to enter. A golden key, which is not given to others. But once you enter the home, all those who reside in it are equal. Non-Jews, too. That is why the Kaadan judgment is not post-Zionist but Zionist. The principle of equality is obligatory not only because we are a democratic state but also because we are a Jewish state...

Appendix 3:

November 10, 1975

3379 (XXX). Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 1904 (XVIII) of 20 November 1963, proclaiming the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and in particular its affirmation that "any doctrine of racial differentiation or superiority is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous" and its expression of alarm at "the manifestations of racial discrimination still in evidence in some areas in the world, some of which are imposed by certain Governments by means of legislative, administrative or other measures",

Recalling also that, in its resolution 3151 G (XXVIII) of 14 December 1973, the General Assembly condemned, *inter alia*, the unholy alliance between South African racism and zionism,

Taking note of the Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women and Their Contribution to Development and Peace 1975, proclaimed by the World Conference of the International Women's Year, held at Mexico City from 19 June to 2 July 1975, which promulgated the principle that "international co-operation and peace require the achievement of national liberation and independence, the elimination of colonialism and neo-colonialism, foreign occupation, zionism, *apartheid* and racial discrimination in all its forms, as well as the recognition of the dignity of peoples and their right to self-determination",

Taking note also of resolution 77 (XII) adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity at its twelfth ordinary session, held at Kampala from 28 July to 1 August 1975, which considered "that the racist regime in occupied Palestine and the racist regime in Zimbabwe and South Africa have a common imperialist origin, forming a whole and having the same racist structure and being organically linked in their policy aimed at repression of the dignity and integrity of the human being",

Taking note also of the Political Declaration and Strategy to Strengthen International Peace and Security and to Intensify Solidarity and Mutual Assistance among Non-Aligned Countries, adopted at the Conference of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Non-Aligned Countries held at Lima from 25 to 30 August 1975, which most severely condemned zionism as a threat to world peace and security and called upon all countries to oppose this racist and imperialist ideology,

Determines that zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.

(<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/000/92/IMG/NR000092.pdf?OpenElement>)

This resolution was repealed via United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/86 on December 16, 1991 in one of the shortest resolutions in UN history:

The General Assembly

Decides to revoke the determination contained in its resolution 3379 (XXX) of 10 November 1975.

(<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r086.htm>)

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Photos from protest rally on the first day of "Durban II" – the UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban (Aug-Sept 2001):



AP Photo/Karel Prinsloo



Rabbi Mordecai Weberman (R) and Massoud Shadjareh (L) (REUTERS/Mike Hutchings)