

**REPORT of the WORKING GROUP
Long Term Subcommittee
ARZENU/WUPJ YOUTH and YOUNG ADULT
TASK FORCE (YYATF)**

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March 3, 2008

**ARZENU/WUPJ Youth and Young Adult Task Force
(YYATF)
Long Term Content Subcommittee**

Background

At its February, 2008 meeting, the YYATF determined that it would be a useful exercise to review the content of the Israel long term programs – both substantial (substantive) and programmatic elements. Towards that end, it was agreed to establish a subcommittee that would examine the subject and submit a report to the YYATF.

The following principles will govern the work of the subcommittee:

1. That a Reform Zionist gap year program in Israel is the centerpiece of an educational process which, ideally, precedes it. The working assumption of the Israel long term programs should be that participants are motivated to continue within a Reform Zionist educational and action program upon their return to the Diaspora;
2. That inputs from various disciplines – social-psychology, education and Jewish-Zionist education, Jewish cultural anthropology - are necessary for a holistic rationale for a Reform Zionist education that would serve the objectives of the long term Israel programs - the "gap year" in particular.
3. That the goal of long term programs is to establish and sustain long term commitments to Israel, Reform/Progressive Judaism and its approach to Zionism.

Purpose:

The purpose of the subcommittee is to:

1. Review the existing long term content models in place;
2. Make recommendations for changes and enhancements.

Terms of Reference

The subcommittee will deal with all aspects, affective and cognitive, of the programs' structure and content. The programs to be reviewed are those currently in operation as well as those being planned.

WORKING GROUP SUMMARY

Long Term Content Subcommittee

ARZENU/WUPJ YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT TASK FORCE (YYATF)

Background

The Working Group of the YYATF Long Term Content Subcommittee consists of Dr. Michael Livni, Rabbi Hank Skirball, Amos Katz and Shelley Kedar. It was formed with the approval of Mark Anshan on the request of Michael Livni, chairperson of the subcommittee, in order to formulate ideas and suggestions as per the terms of reference for the subcommittee itself.

The Working Group is a volunteer group all of whom worked with youth in the Reform Zionist context and all of whom have had continuing contact with RZGP participants over the years.

The RZGP Memo was prepared by the Working Group. It was distributed to the Long Term Content Subcommittee in October 2008. Subcommittee member, Andrew Gilbert, submitted a critical response. As a result of the November meeting of the subcommittee, the Working Group concluded that it was necessary to canvass responses "in the field". A random sample of RZGP graduates was sampled (common denominator – availability, level of interest, commitment and potential leadership). Six out of seven graduates approached responded. In addition Maoz Haviv submitted names of current Mazkirei Netzer – of six names he submitted two responded. On January 29th an inconclusive meeting was held with the paid team (Gadi, Amy and Lior) to discuss the responses.

In the process, major differences of opinion emerged with regard to the legitimacy of the Working Group's efforts as well as the identity of the stakeholders in the work of the subcommittee.

In the view of the working group there are different stakeholders but surely the future leadership of Reform Zionism (and quite likely of the Reform Movement) as reflected by the respondents are the ultimate critical group of stakeholders.

Tentative Conclusions on the Basis of the Responses

1. There was a general expression of appreciation and interest among those canvassed that this process is taking place. The respondents were divided in their opinion on the "accessibility" of the RZGP Memo. A number of respondents expressed their desire to continue personal involvement in the process.

Two central working conclusions stem from the above.

- A) The memo and the responses to it constitute a useful basis for further discussion by the "delivery team" of the programs as well as all WUPJ/ARZNU stakeholders.

B) An independent movement advisory committee can serve a useful function in stimulating discussion. The on-going encounter of such an independent committee with young adult leadership and the "delivery team" can be fruitful.

2. Foci for Discussion Emerging From the Responses

The Working Group identified the following major areas that appear to necessitate further discussion (not necessarily in order of importance)..

- A) Aliya – Are all options being presented? How and by whom should the options be presented? In what context should the options be presented. What is the practical meaning of Reform Zionist *aliya nimshechet*?
- B) Diaspora Activity – post RZGP – There is considerable feeling that this question is not being dealt with adequately. This expresses itself in the response to "MEET WITH ORGANIZATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES" as well as the felt lack of attention in the Memo to the obverse of Aliya – those who choose to remain in the Diaspora. In North America this would appear to be a particular problem.
- C) The Level of the Educational Program – the responses were passionate – and sometimes irate. The issue expressed itself both in the response to the paragraph on "the upper third" as well as the reactions to Andrew's "Reform Judaism 101". Who are we trying to reach? How? Are the "motivated" being "dumbed down"?

It seems to us that the ideological question of elitism has become confused with questions of social psychological process. Where is the balance between educational responsibility to all and educational efficacy for the purpose of Reform Zionist leadership..

(In this context see also: "Questions that Netzer Chanichim asked").

There were many responses to all questions concerning IMPLICATIONS and FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS such as meetings with IMPJ and comprehensive intentional communities, teachers/role models, self-government. All constitute subjects for further discussions.

In particular, there are remarks that either imply or state outright that participants are not exposed to all aspects of Israeli reality.

There were also responses (particularly Benjy A-R) which dealt with issues outside of our frame of reference but are possibly within the frame of reference of the NORT report.

3. Conclusions on the Basis of Subjects not Raised by Respondents..

- a. A major challenge that faced the working group was that of defining Reform Zionism for the purpose of the Memo. In the section on COGNITIVE we did so. We note some criticism (as well as the opposite) regarding our wording. **However we also note that**

substantively/ideologically respondents did not disagree with our formulation. We feel that this is of major significance. One respondent did disagree on our basing the memo on the assumptions of the New Jerusalem Platform (p.10)..

- b. A major limitation in respondents' ability to input is that if there are aspects of the Israeli reality which they have not encountered in their RZGP program, then they cannot relate to it.
- c. There is probably a need for an independent educational advisory committee for the RZGP based in Israel (we emphasize the word "advisory). There is currently no Reform Zionist lay advisory oversight for the RZGP.

Our Memo seems to have generated some controversy. We view this positively. We would like to quote Leo Baeck Rabbinical Student Benji Stanley's response: "...the difference in emphasis between the Draft (Memo) and Andrew's response is crucial and should not be papered over."

The current mandate of the Working Group (and the subcommittee) ends with the YYATF meeting of February 23, 2009. We feel it to be our responsibility to distribute the contents of this memo to all the respondents.

Many thanks to Mark Anshan for his support for this work during the past year.

Submitted by the Working Group - B'Hatzlacha L'Kulanu

Dr Michael Livni
Rabbi Hank Skirball
Amos Katz
Shelley Kedar

October 8, 2008- Erev Yom Kippur 5769

Draft Five

Memo: Reform Zionist Gap Year Programs (RZGP)

This memo is being submitted within the terms of reference of the Long Term Content Subcommittee of the ARZENU/WUPJ Youth and Young Adult Task Force. (Terms of Reference, p. 2). This memo deals with **core elements making the RZGP meaningful and relevant as a REFORM ZIONIST program**. It is not a comprehensive description of the over-all Israel experience during that year. We do **PRIORITIZE** the inculcation of a Reform Zionist outlook within that Experience as an integrative principle leading to a **COMPREHENSIVE RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE RZGP**.

DEFINITIONS

1. Within the frame of this Youth and Young Adults subcommittee, GAP YEAR refers to the long-term (generally 10 months) Reform Zionist programs in Israel, mostly between high-school and college.
2. "Zionist Gap Year Program" refers to group programs based on the assumptions of the Jerusalem platform of the World Zionist Organization (Appended). The components of such an Israel based gap year program include Hebrew study, Jewish and Zionist history and culture, studying Jewish and Zionist sources, Israel travel, acquaintance with contemporary Israel society and the challenges it faces.
3. Reform Zionism is an interpretation of the Jerusalem Platform by bodies affiliated with the institutions of ARZENU. Educational implications of a Reform Zionist interpretation are detailed below.

AIMS:

Over and above providing an Israel experience (components outlined above), the purpose of the RZGP is to provide an experience both cognitive and affective which will encourage and enable young people to make personal and group choices regarding their future Reform Zionist commitment including options of Reform Zionist *aliya*.

Therefore, there will be two central emphases in the RZGP

- 1) Integrating a maximum of experiences and knowledge relevant to options of Reform Zionist *aliya* as well as Reform Zionist commitment in the Diaspora.
- 2) Providing knowledge and methodology which enable participants to promote the ideas and ideals of Reform Zionism and represent Reform Zionism to others both in Israel and the Diaspora.

Pursuant to these central goals, this initial paper discusses the aspects and components specific to a Reform Zionist gap year in our view, without entering into the logistical implications for the programs.

COGNITIVE:

What is Reform Zionism?

For educational purposes Reform Zionism involves cognitive understanding and ability to contend with the following value clusters on which Reform Zionist action programs should be based :

1. INTENTIONAL (purposive) COMMUNITY, "KEHILLA KEDUSHA", ideally – a community of "torat chaim" that learns and works together (as distinct from mass society)

2. TOGETHERNESS in the HOLY. Creative integration of the Jewish-Zionist narrative and its symbols (as HOLY and DIVINE) in the ritual of community. Rites of passage for the individual and in the cycles of time marked communally – weekly and annually. (as distinct from absence of "kedusha" and denial of the Divine as a unifying symbol)

3. SHLICHUT – Mission – Tikkun Adam – Tikkun Am – Tikkun Olam. Community of *shlichut* based on the assumption that the community is POLITICAL with outreach locally and impact (with other Reform Zionist communities) nationally. Community of Shlichut operates under the proposition that: "Everything is foreseen yet freedom of choice is given..." (Avot 3:19)

SHLICHUT will express itself within two interrelated parameters

- A. SOCIAL JUSTICE WITHIN COMMUNITY and SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (*Zedek V'Tzedaka*) within the world outside of one's community. A paradigm for what we wish Israeli society to be – a spectrum which extends from equal worth of all to equal opportunity for all. (as distinct from current normative neo-liberal society)
- B. CREATION AS DIVINE – our functions as stewards of the Earth and partners in Creation, its ongoing utilization and preservation - *L'Ovda U'Leshomra*. (distinct from domination/exploitation)

TO BE TAUGHT CREDIBLY, a significant part of this Value World must be taught by ROLE MODELS who in their personal lives already attempt to realize it (even if only in part). This probably means utilizing some resources outside of the Reform movement.

A central affective element of the RZGP should be that Jewish peoplehood is experienced within the context of a world-wide Reform Zionist youth experience.

It is important to note that it is the SYNERGY BETWEEN ALL THESE CLUSTERS which defines Reform Zionism and a Reform Zionist activist outlook . (Other Zionist movements surely subscribe to one or another of these value clusters).

The cognitive value study should PRECEDE learning and experiencing PRINCIPLES (norms) for realizing the values. *(This general statement does not negate the desirability of multi-layered, simultaneous experience throughout all aspects of the program. The undersigned feel that this particular point and its implementation is a focus for further discussion).*

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROGRAM

VALUES WITHOUT PRINCIPLES FOR THEIR REALIZATION ARE INCOMPATIBLE WITH JEWISH-ZIONIST EDUCATION.

In the field, program participants must be exposed to different ways of realizing the values. Some implications for the program are:

1. MEET A SPECTRUM OF URBAN IMPJ COMMUNITIES:
Suggested Venue: Erev Shabbat Worship + Shabbat Dinner with families.
Session on IMPJ with panel of LAY members.
2. MEET WITH INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES of the new URBAN KIBBUTZ MOVEMENT as well as the REFORM KIBBUTZ communities.
3. MEET WITH ORGANIZATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES
Learn how the Jewish-Zionist political world functions (WZO, JAFI, Federations) internationally and in the local Diaspora community. (There should be the expectation that all will continue in some kind of semi-autonomous junior ARZA framework upon their return to the Diaspora).
4. GROUP EMPOWERMENT
Each RZGP framework should have a degree of elected "self-government" with which the staff works. This will inculcate patterns of involvement and develop leadership which hopefully will find further expression when participants return to the Diaspora.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

5. TEACHERS/STAFF
It is essential that cognitive content be delivered in significant part by knowledgeable lay people. Over-utilization of professionals projects a message that only they (professionals) can embody (personify) Reform Zionist commitment. This is a negative message for future volunteer leadership.
6. THE FOCUS IS THE UPPER THIRD OF THE GROUP
As a rule of thumb, at age 18 only about a third of the participants are mature enough to contend with content of the program and to consciously internalize (or consciously reject) the messages being projected in the Reform Zionist outlook. These are usually the "sociometric stars" who must be mobilized to pull the majority behind them. There will always be a few who will not be significantly affected by the gap year.

7. OPENING and CLOSING SEMINARS

The heterogeneous background of participants from various countries necessitate a joint opening seminar in order to achieve a minimal joint base line of understanding regarding the purpose of the RZGP. This is necessary not only for social reasons but also for coordinating expectations – especially with regard to core elements in the curriculum. Points 4 and 5 above must also figure in the content and staffing of the opening seminar.

A closing seminar should enable participants to summarize what the year has meant for them personally as well its implications for their continued Reform Zionist involvement. (We make this statement in full awareness that in the future the ARZENU/WUPJ Task Force will have to contend with the challenge of recommendations for forms of such involvement.)

8. THE OPTIONS WITHIN THE GAP YEAR

We hope that the Gap Year will reach such numbers that different options will have to develop within it in addition to the core program. It is a matter for separate discussion. An educational rationale should be developed for each option. However, some experience already exists.

- A. It is desirable that options be developed in places where on-going contact with IMPJ congregations is possible.
- B. The core cognitive program must precede the options. In particular, it is not realistic to expect that a kibbutz module built on a work and community experience will deal in a systematic way with a core cognitive program.

THE REFORM ZIONIST "PRODUCT".

What is the long-term educational result for Reform Zionism that we seek from the RZGP program ?

We want young adults, self-starters, personally knowledgeable and committed to the Reform Zionist values above and motivated to be *shlichim*, together with like minded others, in propagating our ideas. To do so credibly they must also show that in their personal lives they are continuing to contend with the Reform Zionist challenge of seeking a way of life which expresses the Reform Zionist synthesis.

There is a clear understanding on the part of those signing this document that the educational investment in the Gap Year will surely enrich the individual participant but will be lost in terms of movement Reform Zionist impact if there are no suitable frameworks to which Gap Year graduates can return.

Signed

Dr. Michael Livni - Chair
Rabbi Hank Skirball
Amos Katz
Shelley Kedar

Appendix

The New Jerusalem Program

Adopted June 2004

Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, brought about the establishment of the State of Israel, and views a Jewish, Zionist, democratic and secure State of Israel to be the expression of the common responsibility of the Jewish people for its continuity and future.

The foundations of Zionism are:

The unity of the Jewish people, its bond to its historic homeland Eretz Yisrael, and the centrality of the State of Israel and Jerusalem, its capital, in the life of the nation;

Aliyah to Israel from all countries and the effective integration of all immigrants into Israeli Society.

Strengthening Israel as a Jewish, Zionist and democratic state and shaping it as an exemplary society with a unique moral and spiritual character, marked by mutual respect for the multi-faceted Jewish people, rooted in the vision of the prophets, striving for peace and contributing to the betterment of the world.

Ensuring the future and the distinctiveness of the Jewish people by furthering Jewish, Hebrew and Zionist education, fostering spiritual and cultural values and teaching Hebrew as the national language;

Nurturing mutual Jewish responsibility, defending the rights of Jews as individuals and as a nation, representing the national Zionist interests of the Jewish people, and struggling against all manifestations of anti-Semitism;

Settling the country as an expression of practical Zionism.

Oct, 2008

Andrew Gilbert's Comments on the RZGP Memo

I have read the gap year programme subcommittee report and I totally reject its direction.

I do not believe it to be consistent with the ideological emphasis of either Netzer Olami or the World Union and its constituents.

I consider it a massively damaging document.

Shnat Netzer needs to be a mass programme dealing with the reality of the current generation of Reform Jewish teenagers, who are variedly educated generally at a low Jewish level with little Jewish or Israel experience.

Shnat Netzer needs to be Reform Judaism 101 through as far as possible and needs to be challenging, experiential and more than just cognitive.

For us Reform Judaism should include Reform Zionism and commitment to it not vice versa.

It should not be an elite programme where you are a Jewish failure unless you make aliyah.

I thought we were past these sort of Zionist ideological pieces trying to artificially pin us into a classical Zionist youth movement.

This is why Habonim year scheme is in terminal decline from most of the Diaspora and why the > group was specifically asked to reflect not on that but on YJ/FZY year > scheme.

First it has been long agreed that the purpose of Shnat Netzer is to be an intensive Reform Jewish programme taking place in Israel allowing participants to (something more akin to the following)

- a) develop their Reform Jewish Identity
- b) intensify their commitment to Reform Jewish Values
- c) equip them for Reform Jewish life on campus
- d) bring "them up to speed" with Judaism, Reform Judaism, Zionism, Reform Zionism - as many of them will have had little form Jewish > education.
- e) increase their knowledge of Hebrew and giving them a sense of its importance as the living language of the Jewish People >
- f) spend time in Israel and to experience more about Israel and to challenge all participants with the serious option of living their adult lives in Israel.

Second the language is legalistic and formal and seems

inappropriate > for a Reform Jewish or Zionist values document.

Third in chairing the commission on the future of Netzer, it was rejected, to see Netzer as an elitist "Reform Zionist Cadre" but Netzer needed to be the Youth Movement of both WUPJ and Arzenu. Recognising that this needed great resources it was vital not to narrow the ideological remit.

However the bottom line is that in focusing on Reform Jewish development effectively and including for as many Reform teenagers as possible long term programmes in Israel we will not only create Reform Jews but also Reform Jews who have been exposed to Israel and can better make decisions and plan for adult Reform Jewish Life whether that will be as a Rabbi, a Leader or just a participant or whether in Israel or elsewhere in the Jewish world.

Annoyed, concerned - cannot believe this document

rgds, moadim lsimcha Andrew

Responses from the Field – Participants

(Responses to the Working Group Memo)

Emma Peabody: Graduate of Carmel Program 2006/7, currently studying at the Interdisciplinary Center at Herzliya.

Mari Gordon: Carmel participant – 2005/2006.

Rebecca Fiala – Australian Shnat Netzer Participant – 28th February 2008 – 14th December 2008. Tochnit: Etgar Program –

Aaron Press Taylor, first Carmel Program, Sept. 2004-June 2005 Brandeis U. '09

Channa Reisin – German Shnat Netzer 2006 –2007. Machon leMadrichei Chutz La'aretz —. Aliyah: November 2007, currently Israel Defense Forces

Benjy Aarons-Richardson (Benjy A-R) Shnat Netzer 04/05, LJY-Netzer Movement Worker 08/09 (See also comments at end)

Jeremy Bliss – Federal Merakez Netzer Australia – Shnat 2006 – comments 3/2/09

Benjy Stanley - Shnat Netzer 01-02, RSY Netzer Movement Worker 05-07

Trainee Rabbi 08-13, currently on HUC Year-In-Israel- (See comments at end)

Memo: Reform Zionist Gap Year Programs (RZGP)

This memo is being submitted within the terms of reference of the Long Term Content Subcommittee of the ARZENU/WUPJ Youth and Young Adult Task Force. (Terms of Reference, Appendix A.) This memo deals with **core elements making the RZGP meaningful and relevant as a REFORM ZIONIST program.** It is not a comprehensive description of the over-all Israel experience during that year.

Mari Gordon:

Is someone working on creating a description of the over-all Israel experience?

We do **PRIORITIZE** the inculcation of a Reform Zionist outlook within that Experience as an integrative principle leading to a **COMPREHENSIVE RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE RZGP.**

Jeremy Bliss:

Firstly this is a great document and I think it is going to be helpful to have a collective understanding of the basis for WUPJ/ARZENU centric programmes. That said, if the document is going to be useful it needs to be less lofty in terms of definitions and conceptions of how the programmes should run. That's not to say that the actual logistics of the tochnit should be touched on but rather if we agree (and I assume we do) that Reform Zionism is going to be a touchstone for our programming it is prudent to properly define the RZGP Subcommittee's conception of it (Reform Zionism being something that many participants of Shnat Netzer never really grasp due to the loftiness in its explication) rather than explaining it is an interpretation of Zionism per Jerusalem Platform.

With this in mind I think that this document is inaccessible. I doubt the purpose of the Sub-committee is to create a new text open for interpretation vis-à-vis Talmud. I think the more clearly and plainly that these concepts can be explained the better the chance that your hard work will filter down to the people actually planning and forming these programmes.

DEFINITIONS

1. Within the frame of this Youth and Young Adults subcommittee, GAP YEAR refers to the long-term (generally 10 months) Reform Zionist programs in Israel, mostly between high-school and college.

Benjy A-R

How many?! We've got 8 for next year.

Mari Gordon:

I think that it is important to distinguish the term GAP YEAR from academic, study-abroad programs. The mixing of the two terms was confusing and problematic during my year on Carmel. For the intended purposes expressed in this document, it is important that the programs for Reform Jewish youth after high school be explicitly GAP YEAR programs.

Channa Reisin:

Keep in mind that participants are coming from different countries and backgrounds, where the concepts of high-school and college might be different. I know this is meant as a general definition of an age group, still, consider that educational systems are very different in different parts of the world.

2. "Zionist Gap Year Program" refers to group programs based on the assumptions of the Jerusalem platform of the World Zionist Organization (Appendix B).

The components of such an Israel based gap year program include Hebrew study, Jewish and Zionist history and culture, studying Jewish and Zionist sources, Israel travel, acquaintance with contemporary Israel society and the challenges it faces.

Benjy A-R:

...and a heavy emphasis on social activism

Emma Peabody:

Acquaintance with contemporary Israel is the most important part of a gap year. Participants need to get out of their comfort zone. Also, more tiyulim are important.

Mari Gordon:

Also developing community- and self identity, leadership, and maybe most importantly a sense of community- and self-efficacy?

Becky Fiala:

It is imperative that a realistic encounter with Israel is encouraged, rather than an encounter through rose tinted glasses, as in order for Aliya to be a success, the new oleh must desire to live in the country, not simply replicate their gap year experience

3. Reform Zionism is an interpretation of the Jerusalem Platform by bodies affiliated with the institutions of ARZENU. Educational implications of a Reform Zionist interpretation are detailed below.

Aaron Taylor:

I am immediately struck by your presentation of the New Jerusalem Program (2004) as the basis for your work and this discussion and I am curious about your political and ideological reasons for employing it as such. I think that most of my comments herein will in some way reflect my ambivalence about the NJP as stated in Appendix B. The fundamental adoption of the NJP as the Reform Zionist Gap Year Program's premise ultimately undermines the program's (and our movement's) ability to critically engage the NJP's positions at a time when those positions must be subjected to serious inquiry, discussion and debate. I believe there is no better movement than ours to practice fundamental criticism regarding the relevance of such concepts as nationalism, Jewish distinctiveness and others that the NJP dictate. You will find that my comments reveal the things that, because they are missing from it, render the NJP inadequate as a definitive point of departure for a Reform/Progressive program in 2008. I think that a RZGP must in some ways deviate from the dogma of the NJP.

AIMS:

Over and above providing an Israel experience (components outlined above), the purpose of the RZGP is to provide an experience both cognitive and affective which will encourage and enable young people to make personal and group choices regarding their future Reform Zionist commitment including options of Reform Zionist *aliya*.

Benjy A-R:

*Good – we need to make sure it doesn't become a dirty word, even if the reality is that *aliya* isn't a serious option for many of the participants. Currently there's very much a feeling of 'it's all equal really – Israel/Diaspora'. Work needs to be done to make sure the Israel option isn't ignored, but I'm not sure if this means restoring *aliya* to its former position ahead of Galut.*

Emma Peabody

*Try not to force the idea of *aliyah*, this might turn some participants off to the idea. However, I do think that any Reform 10 month program in Israel is going to be inherently Reform Zionist because of the nature of the gap year.*

Mari Gordon:

If this purpose is over and above providing an Israel experience, then can such a program happen in a place outside of Israel?

Therefore, there will be two central emphases in the RZGP

- 3) Integrating a maximum of experiences and knowledge relevant to options of Reform Zionist *aliya* as well as Reform Zionist commitment in the Diaspora.

Mari Gordon:

When I was on Carmel, I longed for this type of knowledge, and that longing was not fulfilled. I did not develop a sense of how I could make my experience useful to me or to my community. We were told repeatedly that we were leaders of the Reform movement, but there was no follow-up or contact by anyone or any organization after the program. I was excited to at some point receive a letter from the IMPJ and was quickly disappointed to find that it was a fundraising request. The Progressive/Liberal/Reform movements need more than money, and while on Carmel I was given the misperception that I would be sought out as someone with the

potential to make unique, non-monetary contributions to our communities. I cannot stress enough how important it is that what was for me a misperception be a reality for RZGY participants.

On a different topic—While on Carmel, I considered aliya and struggled to find resources about what that would entail. Though the RZGY programs should never emphasize aliya as superior to other valuable commitments, participants should have access to the tools necessary to make that decision if it is appropriate for them.

Channa Reisin:

Yes, it is very important to insist on a MAXIMUM of experiences so that every participant can find relevant parts.

Becky Fiala:

From my experiences, too much emphasis on participants making aliya has led to participants on the Shnat Netzer program feeling as though they are being brain washed and turning them away from the idea of making aliya. Participants should not be made to feel as though they are failures simply because they do not desire to make aliya.

- 4) Providing knowledge and methodology which enable participants to promote the ideas and ideals of Reform Zionism and represent Reform Zionism to others both in Israel and the Diaspora.

Pursuant to these central goals, this initial paper discusses the aspects and components specific to a Reform Zionist gap year in our view, without entering into the logistical implications for the programs.

Jeremy Bliss:

For example here, these seem great concepts but without a working definition of RZ they mean relatively little.

Also, this may be relevant only to NETZER-NFTY but I think the concept of Hagshama of Netzer ideology is central to our Shnat year and whilst Aliyah (Nimshechet) is the highest expression of this, these aims are too reductive in terms of our actual ideological and thus programming goals.

COGNITIVE:

What is Reform Zionism?

For educational purposes Reform Zionism involves cognitive understanding and ability to contend with the following value clusters on which Reform Zionist action programs should be based :

4. INTENTIONAL (purposive) COMMUNITY,
"KEHILLA KEDUSHA", ideally – a community of "torat chaim" that learns and works together (as distinct from mass society)

Benjy A-R

*Tricky if there are 8/9 different options at any given stage in the programme.
Less is more.*

Emma Peabody

Very, very important. Chevruta works!

Mari Gordon:

YES! I think one key to making this successful is a careful balance between the roles of staff and participants. I think that in order for the community to be meaningful and long-lasting, participants must feel that it is their community—created by and for them.

Becky Fiala:

the Shnat Netzer Etgar program could be made be an effective manifestation of this idea, should the participants (not just the tzevet) hold education as a priority. (or even aim). Participants should be aware of what this is before arriving at their intentional community.

Aaron Taylor:

It is unfortunate that, with the exception of Kibbutz Lotan, the international Reform movement does not practice or preach collectivism in any kind of serious way. On Carmel, our Rabbi, Saar Shaked, pushed us to create a communal "kupah" as a basis for collective spending, investment and community building. Admittedly, we did not take very easily to this idea and ultimately adopted it only in part. It was nonetheless very important that the program exposed us to this radical community model which most of us Westerners had never really explored before. I think that collectivism, as a dying Israeli value, but one that rooted Israel's early development, must be emphasized in any RZGP. Additionally, any intentional community relies on self-criticism and group dialog and introspection. Set times, as frameworks for this type of thinking and communicating, are critical to the cognitive development you seek.

5. TOGETHERNESS in the HOLY.

Creative integration of the Jewish-Zionist narrative and its symbols (as HOLY and DIVINE) in the ritual of community. Rites of passage for the individual and in the cycles of time marked communally – weekly and annually. (as distinct from absence of "kedusha" and denial of the Divine as a unifying symbol)

Channa Reisin

I don't think this paragraph is comprehensible at all. What does it mean? Why not say: communal celebration of Jewish holidays and rituals? (for example)

Jeremy Bliss:

Firstly – this means very little on face value – perhaps your process in creating this documents gives you an understanding of how 1 and 2 are actually distinct but for an outsider it seems a useless (or inaccessible) distinction. Secondly – the fact that this seems so lofty means that it probably won't be actioned...

6. SHLICHUT – Mission – Tikkun Adam – Tikkun Am – Tikkun Olam
Community of *shlichut* based on the assumption that the community is POLITICAL with outreach locally and impact (with other Reform Zionist

communities) nationally. Community of Shlichut operates under the proposition that:

"Everything is foreseen yet freedom of choice is given..." (Avot 3:19)

Becky Fiala:

I believe that it is important that the idea of shlichut is related to the idea of a messianic era (or related concepts) and that Aliya Nimshechet is explored, as opposed to simply aliya, as a form of shlichut.

Aaron Taylor:

This quote doesn't really resonate with me and I don't really understand how it resonates with your concept of community of shlichut as stated.

Jeremy Bliss:

What does the Political assumption mean? Do you mean that the community has outreach locally and national impact or the 'shaliach'. Also A and B below seem to neglect Zionism & do you mean Shlichut to our communities? Do you just mean Tikkun Olam and that you would like our bogrim to practice it?

SHLICHUT will express itself within two interrelated parameters

- C. SOCIAL JUSTICE WITHIN COMMUNITY and SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (*Zedek V'Tzedaka*) within the world outside of one's community. A paradigm for what we wish Israeli society to be – a spectrum which extends from equal worth of all to equal opportunity for all. (as distinct from current normative neo-liberal society)

Benjy A-R:

Great

Emma Peabody

In regards to a Tikkun Olam project, make sure that there is a variety of things participants can do. While on my Carmel year, the only Tikkun Olam that was available to us was to work with Children, for me, this was not the type of Tikkun Olam that I was looking for. I would rather have been able to do something more hands on.

Mari Gordon:

Volunteering with PDD students at Leo Baeck was one of the most important components of my year. Unfortunately, projects of social justice and responsibility were not as successful for all of my peers. There were several Carmel participants who were frustrated by the lack of stability in their tikkun olam project arrangements. Most Carmel participants did not build relationships with specific organizations. Because I know how much I gained from building such relationships, I think that it is imperative that all RZGY participants have the opportunity for long-term volunteerism.

- D. CREATION AS DIVINE – our functions as stewards of the Earth and partners in Creation, its ongoing utilization and preservation - *L'Ovda U'Leshomra*. (distinct from domination/exploitation)

Becky Fiala:

Perhaps a tikkun olam project that actually changes something, which the participants on the program choose could be effective. For example, during the options period of Shnat Netzer, I and another Shnat Netzer participant felt passionate about the situation of the unrecognized Bedouin villages and designed a program that allowed us to use the skills we had learnt on the first part of the program (etgar) to teach Hebrew and hadracha (leadership) skills in the villages in order to assist with Bedouin integration into society and to empower them a little. This allowed us to feel that the skills we had learnt were useful and that it was possible (and thus our role) to create a change in the political landscape of the nation. The design of the project empowered us and allowed us to feel like we actually did something.

Aaron Taylor:

I'm not sure where this comment belongs because it's a general statement related to parts 2 & 3. It's my view that when the Reform movement warmed up to Zionism it sort of forgot its most valuable gift to Judaism and perhaps religion more broadly which is its particular-transcendent, universally concerned orientation towards religious thought and behavior. It is understandably difficult to integrate that universalistic, Classical Reform view with Reform's contemporary embrace of Zionism. But I think the pursuit of such a synthesis is the chief task of Reform Zionism. So, for a RZGP, the integration of the Jewish-Zionist narrative you suggest relating to Holiness and Shlichut must accompany an integration of that particular narrative into a much larger and ultimately more significant human narrative which plays out in the site of our program, Israel, and of course across the globe.

TO BE TAUGHT CREDIBLY, a significant part of this Value World must be taught by ROLE MODELS who in their personal lives already attempt to realize it (even if only in part). This probably means utilizing some resources outside of the Reform movement.

Benjy A-R

Tricky. Either there aren't many good role models, or many of the good role models are in the diaspora – depending on how good a role model aliya is.

Emma Peabody

I really like this ideal! It's great to branch out.

Mari Gordon:

YES! People with stories to tell and experiences to share are often the most motivational. People who live by their values inspire others to decipher their own values and then figure out how to live by them.

Becky Fiala:

It is important not to underestimate the value of using people of a similar age group to participants as teachers. Firstly, because they have the closest understanding of the way participants live and understand. Secondly, it empowers participants with the knowledge they are not too young to make change occur.

Teachers from outside the movement allow participants to challenge and thus confirm their ideologies, whilst allowing them to develop new ideas, and the movement as a whole.

Channa Reisin:

I think that it is very good that you say "attempt to realize", because it expresses the idea of a continuous process. I also believe that it is very good to use educators from other denominations, since it provides participants with a different angle.

Jeremy Bliss:

The use of Dugma is essential – again however these ideas are lofty and the prose is verbose. Practically what does experiencing the RZGP mean in the context of 'a world-wide Reform Zionist youth experience'? To me this means really very little unless it is implying that we should be having Netzer World Tours as a component of Shnat Netzer (which I assume it does not).

A central affective element of the RZGP should be that Jewish peoplehood is experienced within the context of a world-wide Reform Zionist youth experience.

Aaron Taylor:

Given the myriad challenges facing the world in 2008, particularly those relating to climate and sustainability issues, the RZGP must present a tension between emphasizing global community of purpose (which the world Zionist community has always been) and local community of place. The imminent need to re-localize many of the things that humans do presents a serious challenge to the globalized Jewish community of the 21st century and the RZGP ought to confront this issue which I believe will become increasingly important in coming years.

It is important to note that it is the SYNERGY BETWEEN ALL THESE CLUSTERS which defines **Reform Zionism** and a Reform Zionist activist outlook. (Other Zionist movements surely subscribe to one or another of these value clusters).

The cognitive value study should PRECEDE learning and experiencing PRINCIPLES (norms) for realizing the values. (This general statement does not negate the desirability of multi-layered, simultaneous experience throughout all aspects of the program. The undersigned feel that this particular point and its implementation is a focus for further discussion).

Mari Gordon:

The Torah says that we accepted the Torah by saying "na'aseh v'nishmah," we will do and we will hear (or maybe understand?). If this is the case, then maybe the cognitive comes second. In order for learning to be most meaningful, first we need tangible experiences. (Of course, I agree that there should be a multi-layered, simultaneous doing and learning experience.)

Aaron Taylor:

This is interesting. Returning to my earlier comments about the NJP and the importance of self-criticism; the process of learning and experiencing the cognitive value world laid out here must reflect the principles. One doesn't necessarily precede the other. On Carmel, we spent a considerable amount of the first weeks coming up with a mission statement that was to guide our year. Similarly, on any RZGP there must be an initial democratic, group process of setting communal standards and ambitions. The staff should certainly guide the group towards the values raised in this memo because they should define a Reform Zionist Program. But, since collective

group process is ultimately the means we believe to be consistent with Reform Zionism for "realizing values", the cognitive value study must happen as a first step in each RZGP group's employment of the most basic principles for specifying and solidifying its values and setting its course for the year.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROGRAM

VALUES WITHOUT PRINCIPLES FOR THEIR REALIZATION ARE INCOMPATIBLE WITH JEWISH-ZIONIST EDUCATION.

In the field, program participants must be exposed to different ways of realizing the values. Some implications for the program are:

1. MEET A SPECTRUM OF URBAN IMPJ COMMUNITIES:

Suggested Venue: Erev Shabbat Worship + Shabbat Dinner with families.

Session on IMPJ with panel of LAY members.

Emma Peabody:

Host families can be a gamble, maybe it will be easier to meet with different families from different congregations throughout the year. It could be better and take less stress of participants if they were doubled up to meet the families.

Becky Fiala:

Host families that one meets more than once would allow for continuing connections and responsibilities that would encourage a continuing relationship with the state and its communities

Aaron Taylor:

I agree, this is very important. I would also recommend short homestays with these families to ensure maximum exposure to those families' ways of life in Israel.

Important to reflect on contrast between "average" Israeli way of life and that which participant grew up with.

Channa Reisin:

As to Shabbat dinner with families – This is a very nice idea and should be done because it is important for participants to connect with Israelis, but general experience shows that people will hardly discuss Jewish/Zionist values during a first private meeting. Maybe there should be a joint discussion activity for this purpose (for example on Saturday afternoon, for Seuda Shlishit, after a service etc.).

Jeremy Bliss:

EXCELLENT

2. MEET WITH INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES of the new URBAN KIBBUTZ MOVEMENT as well as the REFORM KIBBUTZ communities.

Emma Peabody:

This is great and also very important.

Mari Gordon:

Without a doubt in my mind, I know that the component of Carmel that had the greatest impact on me was my time on Kibbutz Lotan. On Lotan, I saw for the first time a group of people who together lived by an ideology. I saw people who ate, prayed, went to school and work, and spent time with family—just like I did. But unlike any community that I had ever been a part of, the members of the Lotan community did all of those things with unique intention. I found this incredibly inspiring and comforting. All RZGY participants should have the opportunity to see the power and beauty in true community because revitalizing community is and will continue to be an essential part of healing our world.

Becky Fiala:

In my experience time spent on kibbutz (Lotan) was an important section of the year as it enabled me to experience the ideology in practice and thus see it is possible to live this way.

Aaron Taylor:

YES

Channa Reisin:

I agree that this is very important. I suggest adding the Moshav community of Har Halutz to this list – while I was on Shnat we had a week long seminar in Har Halutz and I learned a lot and thoroughly enjoyed it. Consider that some participants might not find the idea of Kibbutz lifestyle so attractive and will want to learn more about other models of communal Reform Zionist life.

Jeremy Bliss:

Intentional?? This may make sense but this sort of references to practical realities makes the document impractical.

3. MEET WITH ORGANIZATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Learn how the Jewish-Zionist political world functions (WZO, JAFI, Federations) internationally and in the local Diaspora community.

Emma Peabody

Yes! This will open participants up to different Reform and Zionist things that they can be involved with.

(There should be the expectation that all will continue in some kind of semi-autonomous junior ARZA framework upon their return to the Diaspora).

Emma Peabody:

This is difficult upon return. I would have wanted to be sought out rather than having to seek out these programs.

Mari Gordon:

A central component of these meetings should always be on how the RZGY participants can engage in and contribute to the organization in the future.

Becky Fiala:

Participants need to be taught not only about how the Jewish-Zionist political world functions, but also how they are able to participate in it on their return.

Aaron Taylor:

After-program engagement has already proved challenging basically everywhere. As you go about this process of updating the RZGP and envisioning this kind of post-program engagement, ARZENU and its constituent organizations should be thinking about concrete ways of opening space for interested program graduates to directly engage with these bodies.

Channa Reisin:

I understand that there need to be Shnat bogrim who get involved in their Diaspora communities. But this sentence ("There should be the expectation...Diaspora.") makes it difficult for people to make Aliyah soon after Shnat. While not everyone might see this as an option for himself, I have met several Shnat participants from different Netzer sniffim, who expressed their desire to make Aliyah, but wouldn't do it straight away because they felt obligated to be involved in their sniffim for a certain amount of years. As I said, I understand that this involvement is important, but since making Aliyah gets more difficult the older you are and the more you get involved in your new own life in another country (university, job, partner, apartment etc.), it seems like this obligation excludes Aliyah as a serious option. There should be a second focus on ways to be involved with the Reform movement after making Aliyah.

Jeremy Bliss:

EXCELLENT – maybe the Netzer framework should be explored in regard to these where there is a post-Shnat Netzer commitment to serve in the sniff.

4. GROUP EMPOWERMENT

Each RZGP framework should have a degree of elected "self-government" with which the staff works. This will inculcate patterns of involvement and develop leadership which hopefully will find further expression when participants return to the Diaspora.

Aaron Taylor:

I sort of touched on this idea of self governance already. But point #4 seems to imply that the participant group and staff group should represent two separate poles. I don't think that's as effective.

The participant group should not be engaged in "fighting the power" represented by the staff.

Participants concerns must therefore have significant bearing on policy and final decision making for the group and program.

Channa Reisin:

I strongly disagree. A "self-government" will lead to elitism, and create the feeling that there are some participants who are more worthy of being on the program. All participants are equal, peer-leadership can be practiced in activities that the participants run for each other.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

5. TEACHERS/STAFF

It is essential that cognitive content be delivered in significant part by knowledgeable lay people. Over-utilization of professionals projects a message that only they (professionals) can embody (personify) Reform Zionist commitment. This is a negative message for future volunteer leadership.

Mari Gordon:

More important than a teacher's title or lack thereof is his or her knowledge experience, stories, and ability to connect to the program participants.

Becky Fiala:

Young people are NOT the future, we exist in the present and are able to and do form a current leadership body. The last sentence in this statement in itself is a negative message to participants as they DO embody Reform Zionist commitment, of now and of the future.

Channa Reisin:

Good point, although I don't think there is an issue with that in the current Shnat Netzer curriculum.

Jeremy Bliss:

An important aspect of this is that Madrichim and those running the programme must also be Reform Zionists. Too long have we settled for someone to fill the job rather than fulfill it in a way that will also augment our ideological goals.

6. THE FOCUS IS THE UPPER THIRD OF THE GROUP

As a rule of thumb, at age 18 only about a third of the participants are mature enough to contend with content of the program and to consciously internalize (or consciously reject) the messages being projected in the Reform Zionist outlook.

Channa Reisin:

Surely that is a problem of the program, not of the participants. If this is the case, the program needs to be changed. If we assume that anyone is unalterably too young/too uneducated/too ignorant to understand, then what is the point of education (which is one of the rather important parts of Netzer).

These are usually the "sociometric stars" who must be mobilized to pull the majority behind them.

Channa Reisin:

Again elites?

There will always be a few who will not be significantly affected by the gap year.

Channa Reisin:

I doubt that. The gap year affects everyone in one way or another, whether it's from an educational or a personal experience point of view.

Benjy A-R

I am genuinely horrified by this elitist and exclusive claptrap. Reform Zionism should be about bringing people in and empowering people to be a part of something exciting. I wholeheartedly reject the contention that only our most gifted participants can realistically be expected to engage with the content on the level we want them to. If there are people who are not significantly affected by gap year, it is because they only have access to poor educational opportunities that don't reach out to them, wherever they may be. That's not to say that shnat is for everyone – but there's certainly a level for everyone. -- Disgusting

Mari Gordon:

This (whole) paragraph makes me uncomfortable. A community can't be a community if focus is always on the same intellectually elite few.

Becky Fiala:

As a past participant in a RZGP I believe this is very important. I would divide a group firstly into two groups – those who care to learn and those who don't. Perhaps those who don't should not be on the program, however they are. I would then divide the group that cares into two groups, those who already have a basic knowledge of Reform Zionism and those who don't. If education is aimed at those without the basic knowledge, those with the basic knowledge join the group that doesn't care. If it is aimed at the upper third, the others will gain the basic knowledge through necessity. Their enthusiasm may also encourage the group that doesn't care, to hold an interest in the topic. This upper third will already be the upper leadership body and therefore will continue to mobilize the movement.

Aaron Taylor:

I tend to agree with this and totally disagree with Andrew Gilbert's vision for a mass program (later, please see my comments on the document with his response to the memo and Becky's response to him). But, if the program goes to considerable lengths to make its process and experience communal, a vast majority if not all participants will find an avenue within the program to gain from and to contribute to. As long as the program demands investment and is intellectually and experientially rigorous, most participants will emerge affected and satisfied even if they complain throughout. I know this from personal experience.

Jeremy Bliss:

WRONG. Firstly, I doubt there will ever be a person not significantly affected by the year – even if the effects are unintended by us. The focus should be on making sure EVERYONE is catered for so they may glean as much from the year as possible. The upper third is very important but no more important than the other two-thirds. Such distinctions are unproductive and don't allow for the strengths of those who are not in the 'upper-third' (for reason of false categorisations) to have their own journey facilitated. There is nothing wrong with mobilising the natural leaders in a group but the emphasis should be on creative education and leadership rather than focusing on a binary learning models.

7. OPENING and CLOSING SEMINARS

The heterogeneous background of participants from various countries necessitate a joint opening seminar in order to achieve a minimal joint base line of understanding regarding the purpose of the RZGP. This is necessary not only for social reasons but also for coordinating expectations – especially with regard to core elements in the curriculum. Points 4 and 5 above must also figure in the content and staffing of the opening seminar.

Channa Reisin:

This is very true. It is also important for the staff to be prepared for the different backgrounds the participants come from. When I was on Shnat, I felt a lot of the time, being the only participant who wasn't from a British sniff, that none of the staff members knew anything about the way Netzer Germany functions. That's a shame because even though I learned a lot, it was not very relevant to my sniff a lot of the time.

A closing seminar should enable participants to summarize what the year has meant for them personally as well its implications for their continued Reform Zionist involvement. (We make this statement in full awareness that in the future the ARZENU/WUPJ Task Force will have to contend with the challenge of recommendations for forms of such involvement.)

Emma Peabody:

The closing seminar is very important to wrap up your year and begin to reflect on the changes that you have made.

8. THE OPTIONS WITHIN THE GAP YEAR

We hope that the Gap Year will reach such numbers that different options will have to develop within it in addition to the core program. It is a matter for separate discussion. An educational rationale should be developed for each option. However, some experience already exists.

Emma Peabody

I really hope that Kibbutz is part of the program. It was the best part of my year personally. IF Kibbutz is an option, it would be good if the participants could become more integrated with kibbutz life by maybe living with other people than the ones on their program.

- A. It is desirable that options be developed in places where on-going contact with IMPJ congregations is possible.

Benjy A-R:

Essential

- B. The core cognitive program must precede the options. In particular, it is not realistic to expect that a kibbutz module built on a work and community experience will deal in a systematic way with a core cognitive program.

Benjy A-R

Debatable – but probably I agree.

Mari Gordon:

I am not sure that I agree with this. See above description of the importance of my time spent on Kibbutz Lotan.

Becky Fiala:

It is important that the theory is connected with the practice and participants live the theory once they learn it or it will seem irrelevant

Aaron Taylor:

Not sure that a kibbutz module necessarily has those limitations. Carmel's Arava Seminar on Lotan involved a significant cognitive program.

Channa Reisin:

Very True!

Jeremy Bliss:

I agree with A but re B – an ongoing 'cognitive' programme should exist alongside the options...theory then action means that connections are maybe less likely to be made...

THE REFORM ZIONIST "PRODUCT",

What is the long-term educational result for Reform Zionism that we seek from the RZGP program ?

We want young adults, self-starters, personally knowledgeable and committed to the Reform Zionist values above and motivated to be *shlichim*, together with like minded others, in propagating our ideas.

Mari Gordon:

In propagating THEIR ideas?

To do so credibly they must also show that in their personal lives they are continuing to contend with the Reform Zionist challenge of seeking a way of life which expresses the Reform Zionist synthesis.

Becky Fiala:

Participants should be challenged to find their place within the Reform Zionist ideology. Assuming most participants will accept the ideology, I believe it is important that some form of involvement in the community on their return be encouraged, if not compulsory to continue the way of life they have learn about. I strongly recommend that returnees be contacted by related organizations on how they can be involved in the community.

Channa Reisin:

I do not see Aliyah mentioned in this conclusion. I know that there is a general feeling that there shouldn't be too much "Aliyah talk" on Shnat because it pressures people etc., but Aliyah Nimshehet is – after all – one of the values of the Netzer platform, and should not be disregarded completely.

Jeremy Bliss:

This is obviously poorly written but I don't like the idea of idea propagation being an aim. I prefer acting on our beliefs – since when are we proselytizing??

There is a clear understanding on the part of those signing this document that the educational investment in the Gap Year will surely enrich the individual participant but will be lost in terms of movement Reform Zionist impact if there are no suitable frameworks to which Gap Year graduates can return.

Signed:

Dr. Michael Livni - Chair
Rabbi Hank Skirball
Amos Katz
Shelley Kedar

GENERAL COMMENTS

Aaron Taylor:

Just some general points to add. I would like to see a little more emphasis on critical engagement with the quagmire in which Israel finds itself today. Dealing with the situation and the many problems Israel faces should be CENTRAL to the program. The program ought not to gloss over these things because they might spoil Israel's appeal to participants. If they do, so be it. My understanding of Israel is that it desperately needs more dedicated people who can deal with its complexity, not more people who view Israel's challenges through lenses which turn everything into black and white. So, the RZGP should include ongoing opportunities for serious and ongoing thinking about the Reform Zionist vision for Israel's ultimate redemption from the crises it faces. As Reform Zionists, how can we most effectively lend our hands to dealing with Israel's many challenges? Also, and this is certainly related to the last line or two, the RZGP must develop meaningful relationships with Israel's non-Jewish populations.

Becky Fiala:

Subject: Re: RZGP for comments

Hi Michael,

I have included my comments, I very much agree with your document, however Andrew Gilberts disregard for the potential of young people and the effectiveness of a RZGP made me very angry.

Lehitraot

Becky

Mari Gordon:

Hi Michael,

I appreciate that you contacted me for input. This certainly seems like a very interesting project and I'm curious to see where things end up.

I eagerly read through the documents that you sent me and commented on them. I am attaching two documents-- one which is comments on the draft itself and the other which is comments on Andrew's letter.

Be in touch,
Mari

Benjy A-R

Michael,

– I wanted to make sure I at least got that bit done today before the 10 day deadline. I didn't reply all as I wasn't sure how you wanted this all to be used, so it's in your hands if it's going to go out.

Andrew's comments were probably a bit on the over the top side, but I could see what he was getting at. Other than that I didn't read the other ones properly yet.

Please see my attached comments on the draft I received. I've scanned some of the other comments people have made too.

I'm sorry if what I have to say is a little off track in places, but I wanted to give a general overview of a couple of key concerns for the sniffim.

Benjy

(Mazkir – LJY-Netzer)

Thank you for including us as a part in this discussion – we're very pleased to see that it is taking place and that the future is being looked at in a serious way. I felt that the most useful way I could contribute is by giving a broad overview of a Netzer sniff perspective, and at a few comments to the document throughout as appropriate. I'll look to briefly outline our interests as LJY-Netzer, though I presume them to be similar to the things other Netzer sniffim are looking for in a Reform Zionist Gap Year.

I want to outline a few key premises.

- 1) The target audience for any RZGP is progressive Jewish youth in the Diaspora.

The places where we find strong and concentrated groups of young progressive Jews are progressive Jewish youth movements around the world – i.e. the sniffim of Netzer Olami. For there to be any RZGP at all, it must be able to attract participants from these organizations and the organizations themselves.

Any talk of a RZGP must realize that whatever stand alone aims there may be for the programme itself, these cannot be discussed or set without reference to the aims and objectives of the youth movements around the world that would feed into it. Regardless of what we might hope for, the reality is that currently participants on Shnat Netzer spend that one year as part of their journey within the youth movement they have come from, and will return to. The reason people go on the current RZGP

is not that they are avid Reform Zionists already – it is that they are committed to a community they have been a part of for some time where they make friends, learn, pray and lead. This is the movement they are passionate about and this is where (for the most part) they will see their future. Shnat for many is intended as an accessory to continued involvement within diaspora youth movements, rather than a declaration of commitment to Reform Zionism itself.

Any Reform Zionist Gap Year Programme must realize these things and work to serve the existing structures around the world as well as its own goals – of which the vast majority are shared with the movements around the world, through their affiliation with Netzer Olami as a youth movement that is not merely a gap year provider.

- 2) Any RZGP must meet the needs of progressive Jewish individuals and youth groups in the Diaspora.

If we accept that the above few paragraphs carry any weight at all then we must realize that if we want participants on a RZGP we need to build a programme that meets the interests of these parties. Here are two key criteria I see as being essential, that aren't explicitly stated within the work already produced..

Essential components of any RZGP:

1. Affordability

I've mentioned this first for a good reason – it's the first and the main thing participants think about. Regardless of the educational opportunities and experiences available, and however good your product is – people won't buy it if they can't afford it. We're in a tricky little era at the moment financially, and so this truth becomes even more pertinent to families in our communities. Yes – the product is good value for money, and yes – there are all kinds of bursaries available, but the cold facts on the ground these. That for 09-10, a Shnattie from England will have to pay £12500 to go on 'shnat' (8 months!), up a hefty 47% from the year before for 2 months less. Unavoidable as it may be, the fact is that at that price there are people who would otherwise be interested, but that now simply won't go.

If we want people to go it needs to be affordable. This can only happen if the programme is well subsidized by all parties with an interest in it.

2. Shichva Building

We want participants to go on a gap year and come back and a well-gelled and bonded unit to form the backbone of our camp and ideological leadership for the next few years. A fragmented gap year programme including too many elements of choice and individual space will not provide us with the level of cohesion and commitment we need from our madrichim upon their return.

It is vitally important that participants on a RZGP gain a strong Reform Zionist identity based on their experiences from the year, and that they bring this back to their youth movements upon their return. This can't be something that evolves in place of their individual movement identities – it must develop harmoniously alongside what is already in place within the pre-existing context.

Aside from these, the stated cognitive and experiential goals seem largely in line with what we would expect from such a draft proposal. I have added comments below where I felt it appropriate.

The challenge as I see it is this. How can the RZGP fulfill the wishes of its participants without compromising its own aims (and subsequent ability to attract funding)? The starting point simply must be with the movements around the world who cultivate potential participants over many years. If their needs are not served then there won't be the continuity to build a sustainable RZGP. Currently, I believe that youth movements around the world would continue to survive just fine without a gap year programme. Maybe not at the same level, but we'd survive. We need to build a programme that is essential for our members to participate on, but that also serves its own aims. If these purposes can't be met simultaneously then perhaps the project should be abandoned altogether.

But don't get rid of shnat – its great ☺

Benji Stanley

Response to RZGP and some of the subsequent discussion- Benji Stanley - 04.02.09

I am pleased that high-level ideological discussion about the development of Shnat Netzer is taking place. It is especially important to reaffirm the values of the programme at a time when it is growing in numbers and in the variety of the backgrounds of participants- while at the same time, resources are being stretched. The programme is at a juncture where much effort and thought must go into maintaining quality and ideological distinctness.

The thoughts that I will offer are based primarily on the RZGP draft. They are also unavoidably, however, influenced by this sense of the reality on the ground, by the subsequent response of Andrew Gilbert's and Benji Aaron-Richardson's, and by my own experience as a Shnattie.

My thoughts are prompted both by what I read in the Draft and responses and what I thought was not sufficiently stressed in them. Perhaps nothing I say will be new in this discussion but I feel that what is *emphasised* in moving forward with this process will be crucial. I have written a few of my own paragraphs rather than adding comments to the existing documents for the sake of coherence- and because it seems that already a veritable RZ Talmud has been compiled.

1. Shnat should focus on skills, knowledge and values that allow activists to lead a meaningful Jewish life, both in the Diaspora and Israel

I would like to suggest from the outset that the difference in emphasis between the Draft and Andrew's response is crucial and should not be papered over. Andrew wrote "for us Reform Judaism should include Reform Zionism and commitment to it not vice versa", and wishes to stress as an aim the development of participants' "Reform Jewish identity"; the RZGP on the other hand emphasises the need to develop "Reform ZIONIST Jewish Identity". My understanding is that Shnat Netzer must focus on offering the skills, knowledge and values that enrich Jewish living both

in Israel and the Diaspora; such as a working grasp of Hebrew, and the skills and ideas to affect communal, social and political change, at least at a modest level. Shnat Netzer did not equip me to translate the passion and learning to my years at University; the programme would benefit from having more of an eye on the life "back home" to which participants return, and how they might integrate their Reform Zionism into this. Certainly the ideal Reform Zionist "Products" would "show that in their personal lives they are continuing to contend with the Reform Zionist challenge of seeking a way of life which expresses the Reform Zionist synthesis" (RZGP draft). My thoughts below are suggestions on how to work towards this product - rather than just hoping that participants themselves will be able to tackle the extremely difficult challenge. Some of the ideas are more practical - but lying behind them is a general concern about presenting Reform Zionism as something that first and foremost is done over here in Israel, rather than something that bridges Israel and Diaspora life.

2. Shnat should provide participants with a framework to have an active relationship with the State of Israel and its policies, for the rest of their lives and all-year-round.

FZY and Young Judaea engender a commitment to Israel by, in part, teaching hasbara. Participants return with the feeling that they are shlichim standing up for Israel. Hasbara is not (for a variety of reasons that I am happy to expand upon if useful) a culture that belongs in a sacred community, at least not where it currently intractably stands. RZGP must however provide an alternative way of getting to grips with Israel's political reality and engaging rigorously with this back home. Shnat must return with a sense of mission to participate in a Nation of Prophets. RZGP should not shy away from values such as "criticism on the basis of love" and "tikun medinat" (*sic*); Shnat should offer in-depth knowledge from various perspectives on issues past and present, such as key wars, refugee issues, targeted assassinations, the variety of Palestinian voices as well as political and terrorist factions, the Israeli political spectrum etc. It should offer the skills to anticipate participants bringing these values, with this knowledge, to their lives after Shnat: how do I represent Israel with integrity on campus; how do I enrich my hadracha with a nuanced, committed relationship to Israel; how could the needs of the state of Israel impact on my movement's policies, beliefs, and actions and collective sense of hagshama? These are questions that RZGP should equip participants to answer and act upon.

3. Shnat should enable participants to build relationships with the Jewish people through long-term mifgash.

In the *Implications for the Programme* section the first three points begin by asserting that participants should "meet" someone. In deed IMP communities, Kibbutz communities and organizational representatives would all be excellent people with which to meet - and participants will come back knowing much more about the organisations of Reform Zionism than I did. However it is worth considering: are participants being brought to these meetings with anything to contribute? Is there any equality at these meetings? Are we building long-term relationships? Placements and participation in these organisations should be offered and not at some vague point in the distant future, but with immediate relevance for their gap year and life in the Diaspora.

Building relationships with Israelis is a crucial component to living Jewish peoplehood. Shnat Netzer should help its participants build these with young secular

Israelis as well as Reform Israelis- programmes could intersect where possible not only with the growing mechina but also with the growing secular educational institutes.

4. The values of the RZGP will be experienced by participants mainly through the values and commitment of the RZGP staff.

This, from the draft, is commendable: "It is essential that cognitive content be delivered in significant part by knowledgeable lay people. Over-utilization of professionals projects a message that only they (professionals) can embody (personify) Reform Zionist commitment." It does not however diminish the importance of the key staff that guides Shnatsim through their year. The principal question that will determine the ideological engagement of future participants is in fact: where is the next Colin Bulka? The Draft suggests that "the cognitive value study should PRECEDE learning and experiencing PRINCIPLES (norms) for realizing the values"- this is more or less what used to happen. Colin would not only oversee an opening and closing seminar but also the "Reform Zionism Seminar" that would fittingly precede participants spending time on Kibbutz or volunteering in the North. When Colin gave his key-note address on this seminar it is only a small exaggeration to say that everything was revealed: the ideals that had underpinned all your involvement in the movement up till now without you knowing, the values that your madrichim had at some point been trying to touch upon but again you weren't quite sure at the time, and the values with which you would now grapple with a far greater degree of consciousness for the rest of Shnat and your life. If it is impossible to find full-time Netzer staff with the level of RZ commitment and understanding of Colin we must find ways of involving similar figures in programming as much as possible- and this would involve money.

5. Especially as the numbers on Shnat increase, the internalisation and transmission of RZ by participants will depend increasingly on personal mentoring and group-building.

I agree with Benjy A-R that shichva building is a crucial aim: "we want participants to go on a gap year and come back and a well-gelled and bonded unit to form the backbone of our camp and ideological leadership for the next few years." I would add that group building across the various sniffim taking part is crucial to feeling part of an international youth movement. Many of the greatest educational moments happen within the Shnat group; fostering togetherness with appreciation for individual and cultural difference can mean the difference between providing a gap year service to an assorted bunch of ambivalent teenagers and empowering a shichva of movement activists. Group building, of the larger group and the sub-groups, is a key programmatic challenge.

I agree whole-heartedly with the Draft's emphasis on: "GROUP EMPOWERMENT: Each RZGP framework should have a degree of elected "self-government" with which the staff works. This will inculcate patterns of involvement and develop leadership which hopefully will find further expression when participants return to the Diaspora." I would like the "degree" to be large. It's worth mentioning in passing that an over-protective and slightly draconian attitude to participants' drinking belittles gap year students and can make them feel disempowered- as much as we may wish to separate these "ideological" and "practical" issues.

Participants need to be mentored, to some degree, on matters of Reform Zionism and Judaism. Individual check-ins to monitor happiness and personal growth are crucial; these should also help participants consider how they are pushing their Jewish practice and learning, and how they would like to develop. Benjy A-R may be correct in warning against giving too many personal options; participants should certainly feel, however, that they are bringing their personal goals and challenges to whatever is offered, and that they have a personal teacher, rabbi or mentor to help them clarify and pursue them.

6. RZGP should build the knowledge and skills that will allow Shnatim to live Jewishly.

If someone cannot understand a classical siddur their future involvement in Jewish peoplehood and therefore RZ will be limited. Shnat must offer intensive chances to improve Jewish literacy and appreciation be this through the Saltz, the HUC Jerusalem Campus, Pardes, or the Conservative Yeshiva.

Most importantly the main tool to really be part of the Jewish conversation, one that happens across Israel and the Diaspora, is Hebrew. I say this as someone who learnt close to no Hebrew on Shnat, and is still embarrassed by my current level. The teaching of Hebrew, be it in Diaspora religion schools or Shnat Netzer, is fraught with difficulties- but Hebrew seems to be the Elephant in the Room when it comes to the Aims and Product stated in the Draft. Shnat should prioritise and plan creatively and substantially how to offer participants the genuine possibility of reaching a working level of Hebrew.

7. It is what happens or doesn't happen in the years after Shnat that determines whether people make Aliya or not. Many people finish Shnat talking about it- but several years down the line there seems to be nobody giving advice on what to do and how to do it. If we are keen to make aliya more of an option then communities here in Israel must make it their business to offer practical help, support and exciting living and work arrangements to potential olim in their early 20s- and to insist that sniffim make these options clear to their members.

I know that many of these reflections may be more "practical" than you were hoping for. If so, please feel free to derive my bigger picture from them. There is a danger of Reform Zionism values being coherent, intricate and challenging only on paper.

More than happy to clarify anything, and to be part of any ongoing conversation.

Best Wishes,

Benji

Response to Andrew Gilbert by members of the Working Group (WG) in BOLD as well as responding participants. In order to make this user friendly, all of Andrew's comments are preceded by AG.

WG: Shalom Andrew,

Thank you for your forthright comments. We appreciate your commitment and concern. Your comments enable us to really deal with core issues. Our response to your response is in BOLD where we thought it to be relevant. We hope to continue this discussion in face to face meetings.

Andrew's Response

I have read the gap year programme subcommittee report and I totally reject its direction.

I do not believe it to be consistent with the ideological emphasis of either Netzer Olami or the World Union and its constituents.

WG: Where and in what way is it inconsistent?

AG: I consider it a massively damaging document.

Shnat Netzer needs to be a mass programme dealing with the reality of the current generation of Reform Jewish teenagers, who are variedly educated generally at a low Jewish level with little Jewish or Israel experience.

WG: No disagreement. We hope that with the integration of NFTY into the Reform Zionist Gap Year framework, we will eventually have hundreds of participants. We also agree that the generally low beginning Jewish level of participants poses a challenge.

As for the "reality of the current generation of Reform Jewish teenagers" it is indeed the challenge of the RZGP to impact on this significantly utilizing both cognitive and affective methods. (See Terms of Reference principles governing the work of the sub-committee – Appendix A)

AG: Shnat Netzer needs to be Reform Judaism 101 through as far as possible and needs to be challenging, experiential and more than just cognitive.

WG: This comment is a misreading of our Memo which deals with BOTH cognitive and affective aspects of the RZGP.

"Reform Judaism 101" is a good term to use providing that the intention is a Zionist interpretation of Reform Judaism as seen through the lens of the Jerusalem Program (which is why we appended it to the memo) and also providing that it is understood that a Zionist "Reform Judaism 101" has cognitive and affective components and that its role models are central to inculcating the material.

In our Memo we speak of a "comprehensive reconceptualization of the RZGP". This is in order for Reform Judaism 101 to fulfill the integration of Zionism into a holistic conception of Reform Judaism.

Mari Gordon: *No! I looked for a RZGY program as an escape from low-level Jewish education and I was frustrated whenever our discussions seemed to fall back to what might be called Reform Judaism 101. I agree that there is a problem in the Jewish education system and that RZGY programs need to be aware of this, but young adults are capable of learning and discussing so much more than you are suggesting here. There is a major need for reform in Jewish education, but limiting the intellectual rigor of RZGY programs is not the answer.*

Becky Fiala: *I believe that to make this program a Reform Judaism 101 course is a dangerous idea where the level of education within Netzer will never rise, because the Bogrei Tnua will know little more than its chanichim. It should be an intensive educational experience, Judaism 101 should be taught to 8 year olds, not to those who have elected to spend an entire year of their lives (and the following three as madrichim) dedicated to the future of the movement. This is an insult to the intelligence of young people. It should be intellectually stimulating so participants are capable of teaching Reform Judaism 101 on their return so the next program can be Reform Judaism 202 not 101. It is important for participants to know the basics but perhaps something can be done in the various sniffim of Netzer and other similar movements to enhance education, such as by sending shlichim, so when participants join the program they are already some what knowledgeable.*

Aaron Taylor: *I can't agree with Becky more. I understand that ultimately a program wants to reach as many participants as possible. But any program ought to start small and grow only as it is able to sustain its rigor and effectiveness. Without taking anything away from the tremendous success that is, in most ways, the EIE program, I think it has faltered as it has grown so rapidly in size. Based on careful conversations with staff members and participants on several semesters of the program after mine (Spring 2003), I understand that EIE has at least somewhat sacrificed its boldness as an institution in order to accommodate the increase in enrollment. Only 33 participants attended my semester whereas some 110+ are expected to arrive this spring 2009. The numbers demand more faculty and as I have been told, the quality of the core Jewish History course has declined as some of the several instructors simply do not meet the standards set when the program was smaller and employed only two or three premier instructors such as Baruch Krauss himself and Uri Feinberg (who is no longer with the program). Surely, the current teachers have talent, but some have been hired in order to meet the demand despite the fact that they may or may not be ready to teach solo. Rather than belaboring this point further, I mean simply that shooting for a mass program tends to compromise values and to steer focus away from mission, which must be the RZGP's greatest asset.*

AG: For us Reform Judaism should include Reform Zionism and commitment to it not vica versa.

WG: The implications of this statement are really unclear. From an educational point of view and taking into consideration the initial meager Jewish starting point of the participants, we have to inculcate identity and commitment to Jewish peoplehood, to the legitimacy of pluralism in peoplehood and where, within that pluralism Reform Judaism integrative with the Jerusalem platform fits in –both in Israel and in the Diaspora. See also the previous paragraph.

Becky Fiala: *Reform Judaism does require more of an emphasis than it gets, I can hardly tell you anything after an entire year studying it. This is the current failure of gap year programs.*

Mari's Gordon: *I think that the question here is whether or not there is a place in Reform Judaism for people who do not consider themselves to be Reform Zionists. This is certainly an interesting point for discussion and should be addressed in RZGY program curricula*

AG: It should not be an elite programme where you are a Jewish failure unless you make aliyah.

WG: There is nothing in the Memo to warrant such a conclusion. Please review the "Aims" of the RZGP as stated in our memo. It is our hope that the RZGP will be a norm in the Jewish-Zionist educational process of every Reform Jewish adolescent in the Diaspora.

Becky Fiala: *I do believe that Netzer Olami does make participants feel minority like failures if they do not entertain the idea of making aliya for a long time*

Mari Gordon: *I think everyone agrees here...*

AG: I thought we were past these sort of Zionist ideological pieces trying to artificially pin us into a classical Zionist youth movement. :

Channa Reisin: *But we need to ask ourselves: In what way are we a Zionist movement at all if we try to remove Aliyah from our active ideology more and more? Do we really have to baby everyone who is scared of making Aliyah? Yes, making Aliyah is difficult; it means getting uncomfortable; giving up some things; develop; it's scary; it's not always nice. I think it's a shame that the overall opinion today is that Aliyah is a nice option for some, but living in England, Australia or Panama is just as good and meaningful. If that's the case, then what makes us a Zionist movement? "Failure" is an ugly word because it means you are absolutely useless. Of course people who do not make Aliyah are not useless, a failure, but we should reconsider if it's really "all just as good". This seems a lot like we only believe in those parts of the ideology that don't truly challenge us.*

WG: You are using "Classical Zionist Youth movement" as a dirty word. Each "classical" movement was part, in effect of a particular Zionist party. Clearly this potentially led to abuse. However, Reform Zionism is also a political player on the Jewish-Zionist scene. We REJECT all methods that imply political indoctrination. We AFFIRM the necessity of imparting an understanding what we are, what we stand for, and the possible spectrum of implications for individuals – in Israel and the Diaspora. We suggest that you differentiate between the baby and the dirty bath water when using the term "classical youth movement"

Channa Reisin: *: Oh come on now, isn't that just a little bit naïve? Sure, no one likes the big bad I-word, but that's why we call it chinuch, hadracha etc.. Let's no fool ourselves. We want to teach our values and we want participants (of camps, programs etc.) to internalize and act according to them.*

Becky Fiala: *My "Classical Zionist Youth Movement" (Netzer) is the only connection point for young people in the community today. The movements are*

progressing and changing all the time, and its participants are more committed than most adults. Please don't slander the Zionist youth movement scene as it does not artificially pin us down, as we are the creators of our own ideology, if anything the RZGP just allows us to develop our ideas in an educational manner. What is the point of having an ideology if we are too afraid to a) confront it and b) follow it?

AG: This is why Habonim year scheme is in terminal decline from most of the Diaspora and why the > group was specifically asked to reflect not on that but on YJ/FZY year > scheme.

WG: We were asked to look into other existing Gap Year programs. We decided that, for starters, both Habonim and Young Judaea were the most relevant – especially in view of the fact that a significant percent of North American participants come from at least nominal Reform or Reconstructionist background. We asked subcommittee members to “Google” both programs for initial acquaintance. Working group reps also hope to meet with senior staff members working with these programs.

By the way, the Habonim year scheme has been steady for years at some 100 participants from “Anglo-Saxon” countries – usually half from North America. This is not “terminal decline” but neither does it compare with the numbers of YJ/FZY.

We hope to gain useful insights from both.

Becky Fiala: I suggest that readers not only acquaint themselves with the structures of these programs and their effect, but also the day to day running of the Habonim program, where madrichim do not care about their movement and do not agree with their ideology, and the movement is simply a social affair with few passionate participants. Netzer runs in an entirely different way where our ideology is debated and updated annually at a veida in each country and veida olami, leading to a body that actually believes and cares for its ideology.

AG: First it has been long agreed that the purpose of Shnat Netzer is to be an intensive Reform Jewish programme taking place in Israel allowing participants to (something more akin to the following)

a) develop their Reform Jewish Identity

WG: Reform-ZIONIST Jewish identity (we are obligated to integrate the Jerusalem program as an essential component of a relevant Reform Zionist Jewish identity)

AG: b) intensify their commitment to Reform Jewish Values

WG: We are dealing with Reform Zionist values. That is our mandate. Our concept of the synthesis of Reform and Zionist values finds expression in our section on COGNITIVE. It is up to the subcommittee members to relate to that section specifically. The working committee made a considerable effort to spell out values inherent to Reform-Zionist identity.

AG: c) equip them for Reform Jewish life on campus

Channa Reisin: Really? Is Netzer a student organization now? How about equipping them for life? We will not always be 20 something, and it would be interesting to meet adult role models who show how to lead an adult Reform Zionist Jewish life.

WG: Not only for Reform Jewish life on the campus – also in the congregations and the movement in general. In NFTY – Netzer in particular. Please note our section on THE REFORM ZIONIST 'PRODUCT'

AG: d) bring "them up to speed" with Judaism, Reform Judaism, Zionism, Reform Zionism - as many of them will have had little form Jewish > education.

Mari Gordon: It is important to remember that some of the participants will have had a good Jewish education, and/or will be knowledgeable, self motivated learners.

AG: e) increase their knowledge of Hebrew and giving them a sense of its importance as the living language of the Jewish People >

f) spend time in Israel and to experience more about Israel and to challenge all participants with the serious option of living their adult lives in Israel.

WG: d – e – f Agreed. Inherent in DEFINITIONS #2 as well as spelled out in AIMS.

AG: Second the language is legalistic and formal and seems inappropriate > for a Reform Jewish or Zionist values document.

Becky Fiala: This is untrue, in order to be seen as an actual stream of Judaism we have to present ourselves as one, this document (the RZGP document) is successful in doing so.

Channa Reisin: I agree with this (AG). It is difficult to understand and confusing. Things can be said correctly and precisely in simple language (see comment on COGNITIVE – 2).

WG: We do not know what this criticism means. We felt we had to spell out our ideas very precisely and we tried to do so.

AG: Third in chairing the commission on the future of Netzer, it was rejected, to see Netzer as an elitist "Reform Zionist Cadre" but Netzer needed to be the Youth Movement of both WUPJ and Arzenu. Recognising that this needed great resources it was vital not to narrow the ideological remit.

WG: We feel that we have related to this comment above in terms of seeing the RZGP as apart of the educational norm of all Reform youth. As stated at the YYAT meeting – our subcommittee saw itself as continuing the valuable work of the above commission on organizational matters which, in its report, specifically stated that

it had not dealt with questions of ideology and content. Please note: we did not deal with organizational implications.

Becky Fiala: You want a passionate young leadership body? Stop preventing us from being professional by dumbing down our education and hiding from our ideology. I do agree that this document has somewhat narrowed and simplified the ideology.

AG: However the bottom line is that in focusing on Reform Jewish development effectively and including for as many Reform teenagers as possible long term programmes in Israel we will not only create Reform Jews but also Reform Jews who have been exposed to Israel and can better make decisions and plan for adult Reform Jewish Life whether that will be as a Rabbi, a Leader or just a participant or whether in Israel or elsewhere in the Jewish world.

Becky Fiala: Catering for as many reform teenagers perhaps requires two programs, one for those who are in Israel because 'daddy paid for it' but will still be an Israel experience and a positive one, and one for those who are passionate and care and who will be the future leadership body and require the skills and education a successful program can offer. I believe it is better for the movement to have a smaller group of those who care and are thus educated accordingly, than to have a large group, who will have the manpower but not the knowledge to do an effective job as a madrich/a. This truly will turn us into a movement where the ideology is weak and the main point of the movement is making friends. However it is true that there is potential in all, but not at the expense of those who are participating for the right reasons

WG: That is not enough.

- 1. We are concerned with significant numbers of active and committed lay participants**
- 2. We are concerned with strengthening Reform Zionism as a political-educational movement (all education is political) in Israel and the Diaspora**

AG: Annoyed, concerned - cannot believe this document

WG: Andrew, please re-read the memo and its appendices in the light of our comments. Are we really so far apart? Nisia Tova
Lehitraot B'Aretz

Michael – Hank – Amos - Shelley

AG: rgds, moadim Isimcha Andrew

Becky Fiala: Note: I don't believe it was necessary to write this memo in such a tone, we are all aiming for the same thing.

Mari Gordon: Looking at this document from a distance, I see two key questions that are the roots of the discourse. 1) Is a Reform Jew inherently a Reform Zionist? 2) How can RZGY programs best address the educational needs of their

participants? Beyond those questions, it is my impression that everyone involved so far in this conversation agrees far more than this document would suggest.

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Reported by Michael Livni

Questions Shnat Netzer on Kibbutz Lotan asked – Oct. 10, 2008

Background

After a meeting with me, the Netzer group requested a further meeting. I told them that I would not prepare a formal presentation and requested that they sit together and prepare questions in advance. Here are the questions they prepared.

1. Are we an organization or a movement?
2. Are the aims of Reform Zionism directed at the Jewish people or just at the Reform movement?
3. What is the connection between Reform Judaism and Zionism?
4. Does Reform Zionism mean reforming Zionism or making Reform Judaism Zionist?
5. What is the difference between pro-Israelism and Zionism?

Present in the session

Five from Melbourne - 11 years in Netzer

One from Cape-town – 10 years in Netzer

One from Pretoria – 3 years in Netzer

One from New Zealand – a few months in Netzer.

Comment on the Session:

It was clear that only a certain group of the 11 Netzer participants initiated this session..

Only 8 attended. Of those, only 5 or 6 were really interested. In my experience, “par for the course”.

The group of the really interested are the future leadership. The kibbutz module is an experiential session for **all**. It's cognitive relevance is limited. This has implications – especially for the group participating in the Machon L'Madrichei Chutz L'Aretz.

Young Judaea Year Course and Habonim Workshop

At the Teleconference meeting of the subcommittee on content of the RZGP it was recommended that we glean information that might be instructive from the above gap-year programs.

I met with James Rosenstein – Whitehead, the Director of the Habonim Shnat Hachshara and Dan Krakow, Director of the Young Judaea Year Course. Both have a more than passing acquaintance with the Shnat Netzer RZGP. This report clearly deals with what I thought was relevant – not with a general description of the program. For those interested in general information on these programs, via Google they are easily accessible.

World-wide, Habonim participants in their gap year program number 80 – 100. The Young Judaea Gap Year (including FZY – UK) numbers 500. Of the latter only 200 are comparable to our public – the others are in Torah observant options and 100 are from FZY (in the UK). Both Gap Years have participants from Reform backgrounds but they are a minority. I could not get exact numbers. Both gap years are quite aware that while they expose their participants to Aliya options – most will not make Aliya.

The HABONIM Gap Year (“Workshop”).

The program is very much oriented to social justice. There is considerable tension between the role of Habonim graduates – especially from “Anglo-Saxon” countries and the veteran establishment – partly Latin-American and partly Israeli (former shlichim). It concerns the tension between “old kibbutzim” and the new city kibbutz movement. James, a dynamic Brit, is in the latter category. The educational emphasis is on an “Etgar module”, in tandem with the city kibbutzim such as James’ community – “Yovel” in Migdal Haemek. The Habonim “Etgar” module and much of the program in general is deliberately put into the hands of **movement graduates in the city kibbutzim who serve as role models**. The educational work is also one of city kibbutzim’s income producing activities. The city kibbutzim see themselves as intentional communities for the purpose of social and educational initiatives in their surroundings – the gap year participants are integrated in this activity.

YOUNG JUDAEA YEAR COURSE

The Director, Dan Krakow, impressed me greatly – he actually comes from a Reform background. The Year Course is affiliated for credit purposes with the University of Judaism in L.A. but it is unclear that this a central motivation. The YJ hostel in Malcha (Jerusalem) serves as logistical base. What I learnt from Dan concerns mainly the educational infrastructure as well as the before and after.

1/ Recruiting is actively pursued in YJ summer camps – **the staff are mostly grads of the Year Course** as well as Israeli summer shlichim from the Tzofim movement. Israel is the central emphasis.

2/ A full time staff person, assisted by Hadassah volunteers, deals with Alumnae activity both in America and Israel. Reunions are organized. There is also follow-up on summer shlichim. The better ones serve as a resource for senior Hadracha for the Year course and Merkaz Magshimim activities.(see below - 5).

3/ The Aim of the Year Course is general – CONNECT TO ISRAEL. (YJ no longer “educates” to Kibbutz. Although everyone goes through a seminar at Kibbutz Ketura – there have been no Olim to Ketura for many years).

Dan states that 15% - 20% of the graduates return to Israel – he estimates that half of those stay..

4/ Dan has a staff of nine. Various backgrounds.

5/ There is a “Merkaz Magshimim” in the German Colony which serves as initial center for returnees – temporary or Olim. They sleep 25. They have a variety of activities – there is a nominal membership fee – it serves to document the transients and follow-up. The Merkaz also channels to post-gap year programs – e.g. WUJS.

Some Concluding Thoughts

The relevance of what I learnt from my conversation depends on how we see the RZGP.

1/ Are we interested in our graduates having conscious Reform Zionist impact (a political way of life) whether in Israel or the Diaspora. (sounds like Habonim)

OR

2/ Is our main interest in simply making the Israel connection. (sounds like Young Judaea)

“Sounds like” but is not.

The Gap Year is the centerpiece of a Jewish-Zionist educational process both in Habonim and Young Judaea. The summer camps of both Habonim and Young Judaea are staffed by Gap Year graduates who serve as role models and actively promote recruitment. Both movements have created a gap-year norm. Only half the participants in the YJ year have been through the camps – but that makes for a strong enough nucleus. That norm already exists in some Netzer countries but not in North America. ..In the case of YJ there is an organized follow-up in the Diaspora **and in Israel.**

A Cross Roads of Purpose

Does the RZGP have a Reform Zionist movement purpose, in Israel, in the Diaspora OR is the Israel connection enough. Habonim seeks to have a specific impact – YJ does not but de facto encourages a kind of *Aliya nimshechet* . .

In terms of numbers, the RZGP has the potential of YJ. Will we want to orient content to specific Reform Zionist impact?

Michael Livni