

CHAVRUTA NEWSLETTER 14 – July 2008/ Tammuz 5768

CHAVRUTA - CHAZON LISRAEL, is an independent national chartered society for spiritual-cultural and social-political reform.

A Statement by the Editorial Board

The New Executive Must Move Quickly to Initiate a Process THE IMPJ MUST REORGANIZE

The Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism must reorganize in order to spread the message of liberal Judaism in Israeli society. The practical manifestation of this reorganization should come during the discussions concerning the movement's budget for 2009. The reorganization must address ideological, organizational, and financial aspects – in all these areas we are at a decisive crossroads.

The Ideological Crossroad

Do we see ourselves exclusively as a religious stream, or are we a Zionist movement with our own opinions regarding the national home of the Jewish people? The question relates particularly to the social and cultural/religious spheres.

The Strategic and Organizational Crossroad

Are the congregations the main venue for spreading Progressive Judaism among broad sections of the Israeli public or should the strategy be based on educational frameworks?

What is the desirable balance between local and national activities?

The Financial Policy Crossroad

Financial policy for 2009 will be the product of the conclusions (or at least the interim conclusions) with regard to the above ideological and organizational questions. The decisions on these matters have ramifications in terms of the **foci to which we allocate resources**. The central issue at stake here is how to plan a process enabling the congregations to operate without subsidies within two or three years.

Time is running out!

Unfortunately, the discussions on these questions should have begun years ago. They must now take place against the backdrop of dwindling financial resources. It would have been logical and proper to address these questions one at a time, beginning with the ideological question. **Today, the IMPJ finds itself in a situation in which it must simultaneously cope with all the questions outlined above.**

Is it even possible to arouse the movement to embark on such a process? We have to believe that it is possible, and that the executive board can lead this move. If it is impossible; if the movement is incapable of this difficult process of self-examination – is it worthy of support??

The IMPJ Conference – Some Comments

Amos Katz*, Congregation Achvat Israel, Rishon LeZion

In the 60th year of the State of Israel, the IMPJ held its 18th conference. There was talk of budgetary difficulties, but on the part of the organizers, in particular, there was an orgy of self-congratulation. There was something admirable about this, and after all there are things that are worthy of praise. But for the sake of Judaism and for the sake of this precious and important movement, it is also proper to add a critical viewpoint, in keeping with the verse: "Surely rebuke your neighbour, and bear not sin because of him" (Leviticus 19:17).

The Conclave of Professionals and Activists

The conference began with a conclave for professionals and activists of the IMPJ. An anthropologist gave an entertaining lecture about voluntary organizations, and those present then divided up into several discussion groups. One of these groups examined the process of "branding" implemented in Mevasseret Zion Congregation. In the event, the fascinating discussion that developed touched only marginally on the "branding" process in Mevasseret, but discussed the IMPJ in great depth. In the final analysis, the most basic point that emerged was, perhaps, that all the movement's talk about the dynamic growth of the IMPJ over the past decade is slightly amusing. After all, we have "jumped" from a movement of 2,500 members to a movement of 3,500! For all the media noise we manage to produce, we do not constitute even one in a thousand Israelis.

The Decision-Making Process in the Movement

The meeting raised once again the issue of the decision-making process in the IMPJ. After all, the convention used to be the decision-making body, but now it serves as a kind of cultural circus or "team building" experience for the movement. This is an opportunity for the board and leaders of the organization to come on stage and bow as the audience applauds, and perhaps also to demonstrate their strength in the presence of politicians. OK. But if the movement conference is not going to make decisions on matters of principle, who will? The idea of establishing an ideological committee in the IMPJ is raised periodically but has never materialized. Well, we have a board and a national committee, right? And they were both duly elected, right? So why don't they make decisions on issues of principle? The problem is that they don't quite manage to do this.

In recent years, the IMPJ has made the de facto decision that we are a **religious stream**. How was this decision made? Well, the professional staff of the organization, with the approval of the board, hired marketing executives in order to "brand" the movement. They reached the conclusion (based in part on polls of a sample of congregational members) that the IMPJ is a religious stream whose vision is "to revive the Jew in you." The professional staff simply conveys (or attempts to convey) these professional and marketing conclusions to the congregations as if they did not, in fact, reflect decisions of principle.

So the conference is more or less a cultural bread and circus event, interesting and enjoyable though it is. The decisions of principle are made by marketers, and the only consolation is that the percentage of Israeli society influenced by these decisions is negligible.

A.B. Yehoshua's Speech

So was that all? Far from it. It was a fascinating conference. The keynote opening speech was made by the writer A.B. Yehoshua. His main message was that nationhood restricts the universalistic Jewish religion, while religion restricts nationhood; accordingly, the two should be separated.

Another time I will respond fully to this nonsensical claim by the respected writer. What is alarming, however, is that almost all the members of the religious movement to which I belong rose up and applauded the author's call for the Jewish people to unilaterally nullify its Covenant with its God. Did someone mention the phrase "religious movement?"

The picture was not entirely bleak. The lecture by Professor Ruth Gavison on the subject of "Zionism and a Jewish and Democratic State" was excellent and was received enthusiastically.

The Climax of the Conference

The conference continued calmly and pleasantly after the emotional call to abolish the Covenant. The climax came with a guest appearance by the minister of education during the closing event of the conference. Minister Yuli Tamir argued that the movement's direction in prioritizing legal action was doomed to failure. Instead, she argued, the movement should become involved in educational action – something that the Ministry of Education under her leadership does not prevent, and indeed actively encourages.

I do not necessarily agree with her assessment of the Supreme Court petitions submitted by the movement. There can be no doubt, however, that the movement's educational contribution is still very limited, and for no good reason. If we seek to define the most important objective and challenge facing the IMPJ, and the place where our contribution to the Jewish people can be central, it lies in our involvement in Jewish studies in schools. Will the movement prioritize this area as a key objective for the coming year or years? Past experience is not encouraging in this respect.

*Amos Katz served as *Shaliach* to ARZA, 2004-2005

Long-Range Sighting

Take aim on target: Range four direction zero two three, over!
Range four direction zero two three, over!
Two to the right correct target.
Two to the right correct target.
Close on target.
Close on target.
Aim: Fire. The binoculars!
What happened, what has happened?

Sir! The target – I'm sorry
We don't have the same target.

Abba Kovner

Proposal to the Board for an Action Plan Leading to Decisions on the 2009 Budget

Dr. Michael Livni

The statement by the editorial board raises the question – how and where do we begin to cope with the problem? The following proposal suggests a way for the new board to promote a process of self-examination leading to decisions on the crucial issues currently facing the movement.

Firstly – the format for discussions

Two expanded general meetings should be held in September/October and devoted to ideological and organizational discussion. The first meeting will be held on the date scheduled for the limited general assembly (the “national committee”) in September. The second meeting will take place some six weeks later. Both expanded meetings should follow the same format as the meeting of June 13th in terms of participants and timing. While the format is the same, however, the essence must be different. The above-mentioned meeting was a democratic formality necessary to satisfy the Registrar of Associations. For years there has been no real process of participation in the national institutions of the IMPJ.

How will the meetings work to advance the process?

In practice, the expanded meeting should function as an ideological committee (subsequently, the National Committee must also function as an ideological committee, and should meet every six weeks for three hours).

One option for running the meetings is to present different (and even opposing) positions on the key issues mentioned above. After the positions are presented, the meeting will divide into small groups of approximately 15 participants. Each group will summarize its position or positions. While consensus is desirable, there may be a majority and a minority opinion. During the last hour of the meeting all the participants will come together and each group will report on its positions, preferably on a large sheet of paper that can be hung on the wall. The summaries will be disseminated to the congregations. The goal should be to discuss the issues again in the National Committee on the basis of this process.

It is important to involve Noar Telem and the Mechina in these discussions.

At the same time, the board, together with the Finance Committee and the Community Development Committee, should prepare alternative contingency plans for operating the IMPJ in 2009. We must not reach December and be obliged once again to make decisions about the budget without a preliminary discussion of the movement’s objectives and without these discussions being reflected in the proposed budget.

Is it even possible to motivate the movement to embark on such a process? We have to believe that it is possible, and that the board can lead this move. If it is impossible; if the movement is incapable of this difficult process of self-examination – is it worthy of support??

The opinions expressed in the articles in this newsletter are those of the individual authors

Editorial Board: Editor: Dr. Michael Livni, (Kibbutz Lotan). Board Members: Rabbi Ofek Meir (Leo Baeck, Haifa), Osnat Elnatan (Kibbutz Tamuz - Beit Shemesh), Rabbi Silvana Kandel (Kvutzat Shacharut - Yokneam)

Chavruta – Chazon L’Israel (registered association). Mailing address: Kibbutz Lotan, Hevel Eilat MP 88855. Telephone: 054-9799055, Email: ml@lotan.ardom.co.il

CHAVRUTA – CHAZON L'ISRAEL, is an independent national chartered society for spiritual-cultural and social-political reform. Chavruta was founded in 1999 and recently decided to act as a Reform Zionist lobby inside the IMPJ and elsewhere.

Articles in the Newsletter, other than editorials, represent the views of the writer.

Mailing Address: CHAVRUTA – CHAZON L'ISRAEL
Kibbutz Lotan, D.N. Chevel Eilat 88855, ISRAEL

In Israel: Please return this form to any of the members of the editorial board by mail (see the back page) if you are interested in either or both of the options noted below for ongoing involvement.

I do not receive the Chavruta newsletter yet. Please add me to the distribution list.

I might be interested to join Chavruta. Please send me more information about the organization, including its constitution.

Full name (please write clearly) _____

Mailing address _____

_____ Zip code: _____

Email (please write in capitals): _____

Landline telephone: _____ Mobile phone: _____

(Optional) – I am a member of congregation _____