

## Generations and Layers of Society in Israel<sup>1</sup>

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Professor Dinur, minister for education and culture in Israel, stated recently that the pedagogic reality in Israel is a dynamic reality and that one cannot be too cautious in presenting the pertinent facts.

Individual Psychology has taught us to be particularly aware of that cautiousness, since we deal not only with a presentation of reality, but also with the need of solving many actual and dynamic problems arising daily in Israel. Seldom during the history of mankind has the population of a country more than doubled within the short period of only seven years. The concepts of Individual Psychology may provide us with the proper approach in our attempt to reach a sound psychological understanding which the situation in Israel demands.

One of the most important problems, perhaps *the* most important problem, is the assimilation of the different layers of society (perhaps we had better call them *tribes*) into a homogenous society.

During the years following the first world war up to the beginning of the Nazi domination of European countries and the start of the second world war, there was a sharp and deep contrast between the younger generation in Israel (called Palestine at that time) and the older generation which had remained in Europe; a contrast much sharper than usual between generations. Sons and daughters left their native countries, frequently without the consent of their parents. They left well established, mostly middle-class homes, for the ancient land of the future. The fact of that emigration in itself exaggerated the conflict between the generations beyond the usual extent. Yet the conflict was still more aggravated since these young people chose a form of living which was in complete contrast to that of their parents: they went into the *Kibbuz*, an agrarian community, which represented a form of living entirely strange and incomprehensible to the older generation. These immigrants of that period were culturally very advanced, emotionally strong in spite of intense inner conflicts which arose in some of them as the result of the changes in their living conditions as described above.

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Today the problem of the sharp contrasts between the generations is not as acute as it was at that time. Wherever it still exists, though manifesting itself in different ways, it is based upon different causes which will be discussed later.

During the years since the restoration of Israel, the population has doubled and changed altogether in structure: one half of the Jews living in Israel today come from the Orient—from Yemen, Irak, Morocco, Tunis, Turkestan, Iran, India, etc.

How, then, does the Oriental Jew who became a citizen of Israel during the last years adapt himself? The triangle "Love-Occupation-Fellowman," that is to say, his relationships towards his family, his work, his position within society, his way of thinking—all this is altogether different! The position of the man within his family in the Orient is that of a little king; that of the woman is a mixture of work-horse and sex-object, while the children know only a patriarchal relationship towards the father, sometimes also toward the mother. They know only absolute obedience, and are frequently beaten severely. In many families the child is sent to work far too early; girls in particular know little of playing, dancing, etc. Work, as well as meeting the needs of the people in their native countries was frequently on the most primitive level. The Oriental works slowly, as he has plenty of time on hand. Advantage is taken of every opportunity to celebrate. It is characteristic of the primitive man that he projects his ego upon his family which signifies, among other things, his relationship toward the world around him. These people, now, come to Israel. There they meet an entirely different environment, and are forced to adjust themselves to the new ways of living in a short time, mostly without any opportunity for a gradual acclimatization. Much, perhaps everything, has to be changed: interfamilial relationships, the relationships between the sexes, the attitude toward children, the tempo of work, the attitude toward occupations, the concepts about hygiene, etc.

Emigration by necessity is accompanied by great emotional tensions and a great deal of suffering; the process of becoming uprooted from the familiar surroundings and of taking new roots in the new way of living frequently causes disturbances of an emotional nature. How much more difficult is that process when the contrasts are so great. For instance: the Jews from Yemen came to the promised land "on the wings of the eagle" (airplane) as they described it. They

imagined that the time of the return of the Messiah had come. But, how did reality appear to them? It is true that they came to *their* land, the Jewish state. They found, however, that much was demanded in work and sacrifice. And as example of the overpowering contrasts they encountered on their arrival in Israel (and not all of these Oriental Jews were of a low cultural level), the status of men and women could be mentioned as most significant. It is well known that in their home country there is no equality between men and women. The woman remains within the home, does not speak to another man, is often beaten by her husband. In this new country, however, the newcomer from the Orient finds women free and with equal rights and on a par with men as to occupation, family, military service, etc. I know of cases where serious differences arose when a woman was placed above an Oriental who had to accept orders from her.

The marriage of children is widely spread in Yemen. Naturally it is forbidden by law in Israel. We witnessed a case of a twelve-year-old child, already married by his parents in Yemen, who came to a Rabbi in Israel and said, "I want to be like all the other children; I don't want to be married any more. I want to go to school."

What is a Jew from the district of Kotszin to think when he finds such different attitudes of men toward any kind of work as it exists in Israel? He listens to a speech by a member of parliament at an election campaign. Later he takes a walk on the Sabbath and arrives at a *Kibbutz* in the neighborhood. And there he finds the very same member of the parliament performing duties like any other member of that community: he may be working his turn on the day of rest as a dishwasher in the kitchen, or cleaning the sanitary facilities. In India work of that kind belongs to the lowest pariah.

It is apparent that with such contrasts in ideas prevalent the problems of assimilating these layers of society into a homogeneous population are very difficult and varied.

Is there a solution and is this solution at all possible in our lifetime? With some provisions, the answer to this question is: Yes.

First, those in charge will need to be aware that they must proceed very slowly in every respect. A superficial acceptance of extrinsic aspects without an inner acceptance leads only to Leviathanism and consequently, to emotional tensions. The adjustment of a family, now taking place along these lines, has been under observation. The wife was working as a maid for a family immigrated from Europe, and

saw there more equal relationships among the members of the family. As is to be expected, she first noticed the outward manifestations and tried to introduce some of these aspects into her own home. What were the results? Her husband saw himself threatened as the kingly head of the family. He responded in the way people usually react in such a situation. He did not permit any changes, tried to hinder the children from attending school, and longed to be back in his former home. The mother, however, felt that she could profit from the new ways of living, accepting thus what her husband rejected. The older daughter sided with her mother, was a good student at school, made friends with other children and tried to help her mother with her hard work. (She, too, felt subconsciously that she could gain as a woman and human being in this country.) The younger daughter sided with her father (as the youngest, she was her father's pet from birth, as is the case in many families.) This child had difficulties in school, terrorized the teacher and classmates, often remained isolated among her peers, and projected her love, aside from her father, upon dogs and cats.

The main avenues for bringing about a healthy assimilation of all these groups are naturally the schools and kindergartens, youth organizations and the youth-*aliya*, the army and the *Kibbutz*. In other words, situations where the community helps the individual!

*Kindergarten and School:* A short time after the settlement of a community in any agricultural location, the kindergarten teacher and the school teacher begin to function. In most cases they have to call for the children, as the family is seldom familiar with the concepts of systematic teaching and knows nothing about the modern institution of compulsory school attendance. Moreover, the family frequently can be found resisting because they see in these institutions a threat to their traditional ways of living. How, then, does one go about bringing the children into the schools and convincing their parents that school attendance is not a waste of time, but, on the contrary, of great benefit for the development of the child? To use force is out of the question. The school has to be "good"—that is to say, the school has to function in accordance with Individual Psychological concepts. The children themselves will have to advocate their own attendance. Those who are students will prove to be the best propagandists as they are envied by those who stay at home.

*The Influence of the Kibbutz:* What is a *Kibbutz*? It is an agrarian community of working people without private property; everything belongs to the collective which in turn is responsible for providing for the mental and physical needs of the individual. Today there are 90,000 people in Israel who live in the *Kibbutzim*; among them there are 30,000 children and adolescents.

What is the particular feature of the kindergarten education in the *Kibbutz*? The *Kibbutz*, in its totality, carries the responsibility for the child, his development and his education. The *Kibbutz* is considered to be the unified source of all the influences reaching the child and the adolescent. From the day of his birth, the child is taken care of by professionals in a planned program. Thus, the care of the child by professional educators is the characteristic feature of education in the *Kibbutz*. It goes without saying that the *Kibbutz*-child, too, is in need of his father and mother for a healthy emotional development (emotional fixation). Such institutions as kindergarten-home, infant's-room, nursery-school, etc., are the means for avoiding many conflicts which appear in the family education in daily life.

Is it possible to speak today of the results of the *Kibbutz* education? Certainly not. There are within the *Kibbutz* itself differences of opinion about many of its institutions, e.g., is it better for the small child to sleep in dormitories or with his parents? However, those who live in the *Kibbutz* are inclined to speak about definite positive results of the childhood education in the *Kibbutz*. There are far less difficulties, less cases of neurosis, almost no criminal tendencies, etc. As a whole, the consensus of opinion is that *Kibbutz* education is healthy, that the community exerts good influence, and that the schools are on a high pedagogic level. Since many *Kibbutzim* had been established thirty years ago, there are today third generation children living in the *Kibbutzim*. The ethical and intellectual structure of Israel cannot be comprehended without the awareness of the structure being inseparably tied up with the *Kibbutz*.

However, not many of the new immigrants live in the *Kibbutz*. The majority live either in new agricultural settlements or in the cities. Yet there, too, the immigrant has to face radical emotional changes. We have already mentioned that the primitive man projects his "ego-feeling" upon the whole of the family. This is not possible, however, in the city. Thus he lacks the protection of the family. In the native land, when a son married, a small hut was set up in the

court of his home, thus keeping him within his parental family. In the city, however, there arises the necessity of replacing the protection as provided by the family with inclusion into the community (through labor unions, health insurance, etc.).

The intelligence quotient of children of immigrants in general has risen. We observed children who arrived from Yemen shortly after the establishment of Israel. Their I.Q. on an average was lower than that of the population in general, but the I.Q. of these children increased. It is uncertain whether this is the result of the influence of the new surroundings or the result of these families having fewer children.

Much has yet to be done to lessen the feeling of inferiority of the people composing these layers of society. Those in responsible positions need to be fully aware that no differentiation should be made as to gifted or ungifted, good or bad individuals, on the basis of their native origin or the color of their skin. Rather these masses should be considered simply as people coming from backward countries with differences in their concepts, who need to be helped into a healthy assimilation.

In the early days of immigration the newcomers were accompanied for a short time by "old-timers" (instructors) into the settlements; that system has been further developed. Young people from old-time families leave their home towns to resettle themselves, together with the newcomers. In accordance with this idea, the cities are planning their new districts in the form of common housing projects for the old and new immigrants. Thus many possibilities for contacts are created. Also, in this way, the isolation of the newcomer diminishes in the cities. If there are only a few avenues for contact in the beginning, this changes in the course of one to two years. As is to be expected, the children are the ones who are bringing about the closer relationships. They play and attend school together, observe each other, notice and try to understand strange costumes and habits in their surroundings. The adults, too, meet their neighbors in their daily routine. In this way, the newcomer by necessity is lifted out of his narrow family-circle even if his contacts are only superficial. Slowly he changes his concepts, adjusts himself, progresses emotionally as well, and little by little he becomes a healthy member of the community. We even learned of many instances where young people of Oriental families found partners in marriage among the families coming from Europe.

Among the Jewish people, the problem of the youth led to a particular educational program, the youth-*aliyah* (youth immigration). There were many factors which stimulated the establishment and development of that project. Twenty years ago, hundreds of Jewish children had to leave their families and go to Israel. At the end of the second world war they were primarily the abandoned young people in the concentration camps. Today, they are children who came from the Arabic neighbor countries or from the northern part of Africa. (To a large extent the parents of these children are still living in their home countries.) The young people, who are subject to the work of the youth-*aliyah* are rallied into a specific educational framework within the *Kibbuzim*.

The educational work within the youth-*aliyah* is carried out by trained educators and psychologists. The program of that work includes training for physical work, education for community living with the aim of creating a healthy small-town people, cultural training, and co-responsibility of the youth. Why, then, are these children educated within the *Kibbuz*? Originally there was the opinion that the *Kibbuz* presented the best place for living and education. These youths had lived for ten to twelve years within well established families and came to Israel without their parents. Thus the *Kibbuz* was the best place for them to stay (preferable to some family home) because these children could not bear a substitute for their parents. Many of them subconsciously harbored guilty feelings—"I saved myself and left father and mother behind." Psychologically it seemed to be the healthier solution to provide them with the opportunity to live with children of their own age. That opportunity was given in the *Kibbuz*.

It was the aim of those in charge of the youth-*aliyah* to realize yet another ideal; to educate the children of the small-town community to become the future farmers and members of the community. This seemed to be facilitated by the fact that this ideal of a collective way of living did not create any opposition on the part of the elder generation. The elder generation was not alive any more.

Today this problem is somewhat more complex in its solution. The children who came under the youth-*aliyah* during the last few years still have their parents with only a few exceptions (the parents are living in Israel or are about to arrive.) Under these circumstances, is it advisable to bring about a rift between the generations? In view

of the strong emotional ties with the family, is it advisable to break the tie between the generations by force?

Up to the present, the youth-*alijah* perhaps represented the best attempt in bridging the ethical, cultural and social differences. It was the youth-*alijah* which contributed a great deal towards mutual stimulation with the aim: to accelerate and standardize the process of the integration of the populace into a nation which returns to a normal life in its own country.