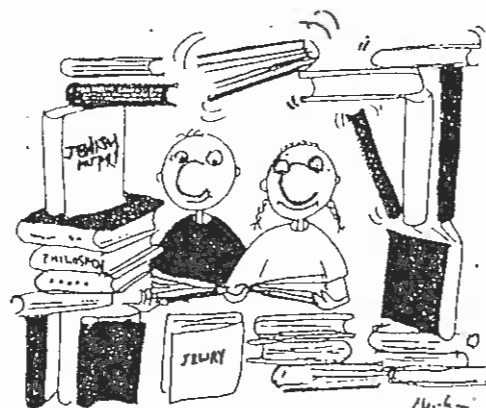


INTRODUCTION

In Book-Book I we tried to present basic Progressive Jewish Zionist ideas and values. We tried to show where these ideas are expressed in traditional and modern Jewish sources. Always the ideas were the central focus, the sources used for clarification. It is now time to turn to the sources as a subject in their own right, to try to make some sense out of what we will refer to as "the Jewish library". In this way we will be able to deepen our ideas on why and how, we in Netzer, as individuals and as a movement, can plug into this vast storehouse of Jewish knowledge.

Let's enter that library, try and gain a sense of its structure, how it is laid out, how the various shelves are divided and glance at some of the books themselves. Some libraries are dim and austere; one feels humbled walking in and self-conscious as one's every step echoes loudly in the silent corridors. Students sit silently with books in an academic posture, each individual alone, pen in hand, efficiently making important notes. We would like to present the Jewish library as a different kind of library, a cozy room with books overflowing, piled in all directions. Small groups of students gather round the books, and conversations can be heard in every corner as people gesticulate wildly, arguing and discussing.

It is to this library that we would like to welcome you. Jewish books are far from 'academic'. Jewish books are meant to be taken off the shelves and out of the library's doors. Although they may be scholarly, they are closely tied up with real life issues. Jewish books are meant to be inhaled and lived. The reading of Jewish books is meant to be passionate, involving not just the intellect but our emotions and actions as well. Reading Jewish books should lead to self-reflection and sometimes, to change.



As to the question of silence, when we read the books, we see that they themselves are all conversing with each other. The Jewish library can be seen as one big dialogue of the Jewish people over many generations, each commenting on the other, agreeing at times, criticizing at others; one generation continuing a story where it had been left off and changing the plot when considered necessary.

The Jewish Library numbers thousands of books; we chose to focus on a number of texts, some of the more central works. We realise that this is really a drop in the ocean, but hopefully it will serve as an introduction and whet the appetite for more.

So, take off your shoes, find a comfortable couch and let's try and listen to the conversation. Hopefully, once we have worked out the various characters, plots and subplots we will be able to add our own chapter...but that is for later.

Why is it important to study, use and incorporate Jewish texts in Netzer?

What are our underlying goals in doing this?

- **To constantly be in contact with the roots of our ideology.**

In Netzer, we educate towards a specific ideology. As such, we are not only conveying information but are more often than not presenting ideas, values and beliefs. Our Reform Zionist ideology is not something that we have created out of nothing; rather it is rooted very deeply within the Jewish tradition. The word "Netzer" refers to the shoot of a branch. A shoot grows out of a branch, and is sustained by it. If the shoot is severed from the branch, or the branch from the tree as a whole, the shoot will wither and die. We must constantly allow ourselves to be nourished from the roots, otherwise we will find ourselves disconnected and our strength, too, will be drained. Our ideology, and as a result, our movement, will dry out and wither.

- **To show our chanichim (young youth movement participants) the depth of the ideas expressed in our ideology, to instill these ideas with a measure of kedusha, holiness, and thus foster a sense of commitment to them.**

Although chanichim may appreciate the ideas we convey to them, they are often not aware that these ideas and values are the product of a tradition born of generations. Orthodox children are often educated towards specific beliefs and values by leaning on the authority and the weight of tradition ("the Rabbis taught us to.....our People have been doing this for generations..." etc). In Netzer, we usually focus more on showing the inherent beauty and value of specific beliefs and customs. In a way, this seems more fair; we are not using the power born by the authority of the past to convince and persuade chanichim. What we lose in this scenario, however, is a certain measure of the weight of the ideas we are conveying. We do not wish to misuse the power born by the authority of the past, but we do want to show their depth and explain that these are not simply some nice ideas we have come up with. Rather these are ideas which have developed over generations. These are ideas and beliefs which have a measure of kedusha about them. The weight of the past not only gives our ideas a measure of authority but also lets us ask the chanichim to adopt a certain attitude of seriousness towards them, and not least, allows us to request of them a commitment to examine whether and how these ideas, beliefs and customs can be part of their lives.