

Youth Movements

Youth movements provide an opportunity for teenagers to put their feelings and ideals into action; to make an impact on the world around them, by helping others and by building their land; and, not least in importance, to form connections with other young persons around the globe whose ideals match or complement their own. Members of Zionist youth movements, more than most, try to meet these challenges.

In Israel today, youth movements as in many other countries and throughout the Jewish world, are an extensive, organized phenomenon. Most Jewish youth movements were established in Eastern Europe towards the beginning of the twentieth century, motivated by the desire for the national revival of the Jewish people in their homeland. Like other European youth movements, they were critical of established society and idealized a return to nature and a simpler - rural - way of life.

During and shortly after World War I, the social climate in the streets and schools of many European countries became extremely nationalistic and anti-Semitic. The German youth movements took a nationalist turn, and most barred Jews. The Jews of Eastern Europe were engulfed in a sense of crisis after the war, heightened by the pogroms which erupted at this time, and this fostered the Zionist national consciousness of Jewish youth.

The first Zionist youth movement was Blau-Weiss (Blue-White), established in Germany before World War I. The Jewish youth movement with the largest membership and most significant impact, though, was Hashomer Hatza'ir, with its Zionist-socialist ideology.

Youth movements played an important role in the history of Jewry between the two world wars. Their influence greatly exceeded their numerical importance in community organization, education, political awareness and Zionist consciousness. Practically speaking, they were also the builders of the kibbutz movement. Their special inner strength became apparent, tragically, during the Holocaust. They remained active throughout this catastrophe, and their leaders orchestrated Jewish organization and resistance in ghettos and camps. They also helped plan and implement the Beriha (escape from Europe) movement after the Holocaust. Most of the surviving members eventually settled in Palestine. The destruction of the Jewish communities of central and eastern Europe also marked the end of the Jewish youth movements there.

Most of the youth movements that originated in Eastern Europe established worldwide organizations but these had much less impact. The main movements founded in Eastern Europe have branches in the United States, but young people there tend to join social organizations that are less emphatically political. American Jewish teenagers, thus, mostly belong not to Zionist youth movements but to organizations such as B'nai B'rith, associations of synagogues, or local and countrywide community organizations which also impart Jewish-Zionist consciousness.

Youth movements in the Diaspora today play a large part in raising Jewish consciousness among youth. Activities focus on Jewish subjects and encourage members to congregate at Jewish institutions such as synagogues; ties with other

young Jews are thus strengthened. Most youth movements encourage their members to spend time in Israel, and some have programs in Israel, ranging in length from a few weeks to a year, for their members. Many new immigrants to Israel from the free world have been influenced by youth movements in their countries of origin.

Youth movements in Palestine began to organize in the 1920s, chiefly under the influence of movement alumni who had come from the Diaspora. They stressed togetherness, pioneering and personal fulfillment, especially on the kibbutz. Here, as in Europe, their public impact and influence on young people was immense.

Most of the movements were affiliated with political entities or even established them. Only the Scouts movement defined itself as nonpartisan, but it also educated its members in a national pioneering spirit and established agricultural training groups that founded their own kibbutzim.

The establishment of the State of Israel marked the fulfillment of many of the goals toward which the movements had educated, and state institutions now took over national tasks such as education. Over the past two decades, the social scale of values of Israeli society has changed, and to some extent, the competitive and materialistic climate has crowded out the pioneering ideals and romanticism of the youth movements. They have, however, continued to cope with social change and are attempting to adjust to changing goals.



BETAR (the initials of Brit Yosef Trumpeldor, Joseph Trumpeldor Alliance), the educational youth movement of the Revisionist Zionist Organization and, subsequently, the Herut movement, was established in December 1923 in Riga, Latvia. The ideology of Betar included the establishment of a Jewish state in all of the territory of Mandatory Palestine, ingathering of the exiles, Zionism without a socialist component, a just society, military training for self-defense and a pioneering spirit.

The first members of Betar who settled in Palestine established a kvutza (forerunner of the kibbutz) called Menora in Petah Tikva, and were active in settlement enterprises around the country. Betar spread to other countries, and established a world organization with Ze'ev Jabotinsky as its head (1931). The movement solidified and expanded its membership vigorously in the 1930s, playing an influential role in organizing clandestine immigration in the years before World War II.

It is active today in Israel and in the Diaspora, with a membership of 14,500 in Israel and 8,500 around the world.

BLAU-WEISS (Blue-White) was the first Jewish youth movement established in Germany (1912) after German youth movements refused to accept Jewish members. Its nucleus was comprised of Jewish youngsters who were inspired by the German youth movement culture of outings, hikes and togetherness. Blau-Weiss adopted an official Zionist platform at its convention in 1922, stressing emigration to Palestine, retraining for agricultural and manual labor and rural settlement. The movement members who went to Palestine joined kibbutzim. Blau-Weiss was disbanded in 1929.



BNEI AKIVA, a religious Zionist youth movement, was founded in Jerusalem in 1929 with a philosophy of Torah Ve'avoda - a fusion of Orthodox observance of religious commandments and Zionist pioneering. In 1947 the movement's first kibbutz, Sa'ad, was founded in the northern Negev. Later on, Bnei Akiva alumni established kibbutzim and moshavim throughout the country. Kfar Haro'eh Yeshiva, established in 1940, served as the anchor of a network of Bnei Akiva yeshivot. The movement is also active in other countries, and its World Organization was founded in 1954. Today, Bnei Akiva is sponsored by the National Religious Party (NRP).

The movement has some 70,000 members in Israel as well as 45,000 in Diaspora communities around the world.

DROR, a Socialist Zionist movement founded before World War I in Russia, promoted national and socialist values as well as Jewish culture. Its members took part in Jewish self-defense in Russia. After the Bolshevik revolution, Dror went underground, moved its headquarters to Poland, and, in 1925, joined Poalei Zion. Members who settled in Palestine joined the United Kibbutz Movement. In 1938, Dror merged with Hehalutz Hatza'ir.



EZRA, a religious youth movement named for the biblical prophet Ezra, was founded in Germany in 1919, while its first groups were founded in Palestine in 1936. Affiliated at the start with the Orthodox Agudat Israel party, it now considers itself apolitical. Its aim is to educate young Jews towards the building of the Land in the spirit of Orthodox Judaism. Its members have taken part in the establishment of a number of kibbutzim and moshavim, as well as in various community and educational enterprises. Active today in Israel and in the Diaspora, the movement has some 7,000 members in Israel and 3,000 abroad.

GORDONIA, was a Zionist pioneering youth movement named for Aaron David Gordon, a philosopher of Labor Zionism who idealized physical labor, cooperation, mutual aid and human values. Founded in 1925 in Poland, it gradually became a worldwide movement.

Gordonia became active in Palestine in 1937. It joined with the Hapoel Hatza'ir party and in 1945 participated in the establishment of the United Kibbutz Movement. By 1951, it had undergone further mergers in Israel and in the Diaspora and today it no longer exists.

HABONIM, a Zionist youth movement which aimed to foster Jewish culture, the Hebrew language, and pioneering in Palestine, was founded in 1930 in London and affiliated with the Zionist Labor Movement. In the following years it established additional branches in the United States, South Africa, India, and Israel.

The Habonim union, into which several youth movements in various countries were merged, was established in 1958, becoming the largest youth organization in the

Zionist movement with some 20,000 members. In Israel, the Habonim union helped found Hanoar Ha'oved Vehalomed while continuing as an active pioneering movement, whose members have established many kibbutzim.



HANOAR HA'OVED, a movement for working teenagers, was established in 1926 by the Histadrut (General Federation of Jewish Labor). It aimed to meet the cultural, social and economic needs of youth while emphasizing the spirit of pioneering achievement and active participation in a working society. The movement established night schools and labor bureaus for working youth. Most of its instructors came from kibbutzim, and the movement established its first kibbutz, Na'an, in 1933. Its members were founding members of dozens of additional kibbutzim. Hanoar Ha'oved merged with the Habonim union in 1959, and together they established Hanoar Ha'oved Vehalomed (Working and Student Youth).

Over the years, two additional movements for working and studying youth have been set up, Hanoar Haleumi Ha'oved Vehalomed and Hanoar Hadati Ha'oved Vehalomed. Hanoar Ha'oved Vehalomed today comprises some 80,000 members.



HASHOMER HATZA'IR, the oldest existing Jewish youth movement in the world, defines itself as a world organization of Zionist youth that strives for personal pioneering fulfillment in Israel. It developed a singular educational ideology and principles that fused scouting, personal example, socialist Zionist fulfillment through aliya and a collective lifestyle. Founded in Poland (1913-1914), it was a composite of a number of groups that merged into a united movement in 1916. The first members of Hashomer Hatzair came to Palestine with the Third Aliya (1919-1923) and founded kibbutzim. In 1927, their kibbutz movement was established in Palestine, and a strong relationship took shape between it and the world movement.

In World War II, Hashomer Hatzair members continued to operate in the Nazi-occupied areas, principally in Poland, and were among the leaders of the ghetto uprisings. Mordechai Anielewicz, leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, was a member of Hashomer Hatzair. After the war, they took part in organizing the Beriha movement.

In 1946, Hashomer Hatzair formed a political party which, along with Ahdut Ha'avoda, became Mapam in 1948. Hashomer Hatzair functions as a youth movement in towns, villages and kibbutzim in Israel, as well as in many Diaspora communities, with a membership of 14,000 in Israel and 15,000 abroad.



HANOAR HATZIONI, a pioneering Zionist youth movement, was founded in Poland in 1932. It supports different types of settlement - kibbutz, moshav and development towns - and strives to inculcate its members with a pioneering, pluralistic outlook.

Its members today number some 2,000.



HATZOFIM (Hebrew Scouts Federation) was founded in Palestine in 1919 in accordance with the views of Baden-Powell, the founder of world scouting. It educates towards allegiance to Jewish spiritual values and culture and personal fulfillment of Zionist ideals. Scouts alumni volunteered for the Haganah (Jewish self-defense organization) and established several kibbutzim.

Hatzofim, with 40,000 members in Israel, is affiliated with the World Organization of Scout Movements.

HEHALUTZ, a worldwide federation of Zionist youth, embraced various "halutzic" movements, i.e., those that encouraged young people to settle in Palestine and trained them for labor and rural settlement there. It espoused the following basic principles: membership in the World Zionist Organization; fostering of Hebrew language and culture; training for a life of labor in Palestine; and commitment to personal fulfillment through aliya, at any time and in any way possible.

Pioneering youth associations first came into being in the early twentieth century. The first countrywide convention of the Hehalutz associations in Russia, held in Moscow in January 1919, was strongly influenced by the personality and ideas of Joseph Trumpeldor. Several thousand halutzim (Zionist pioneers) managed to make their way to Palestine from Russia in 1919-1921, but the movement was repressed and emigration from Russia banned immediately afterwards.

Between the world wars, Hehalutz associations spread throughout Eastern, Central, and Western Europe; northern Africa; North and South America; and South Africa; they were strongest in Poland. Hehalutz reached its peak in 1935, its membership verging on 100,000.

World War II and the Holocaust devastated the large Jewish centers and deprived the pioneering movements in Europe of the source of their strength. Hehalutz maintained its structure in the ghettos as long as it could, and its members formed the activist core of fighters in ghetto uprisings and the Jewish partisan units, as well as in the Beriha movement after the Holocaust.

Attempts to re-establish a worldwide organization after the war proved futile. Only in South America is the movement still active.



MACCABI HATZA'IR, a pioneering Zionist youth movement, was founded in Germany in 1926 and subsequently expanded to other countries. From 1933 on, this movement, along with Maccabi Youth, formed the young stratum of the World Maccabi organization (an international Jewish sports organization), but it did not confine itself to sports, engaging also in education for aliya and rural settlement in Palestine. In 1936, it held its first convention in Tel Aviv. Members of Maccabi Hatza'ir formed settlement groups, settled in Palestine, joined settlements and established new ones of their own.

The movement has undergone several metamorphoses over the years, and today has some 3,000 members.



HAMAHANOT HA'OLIM, a pioneering movement of teenagers in Palestine, stressed defense and personal fulfillment. It initially evolved from groups in the Herzliya Gymnasium (high school) in 1926; they established Kvutsat Hahugim in Hadera in 1929 and eventually settled in Beit Hashita. After this group merged with breakaway Scouts groups in Haifa and Jerusalem, the Hamahanot Ha'olim movement was established. It affiliated itself with Hakibbutz Hame'uhad, and its alumni established kibbutzim.

It has undergone a number of mergers and splits over the years; today it has some 3,000 members.



YOUNG JUDAEA, the oldest Jewish youth movement in the United States, was founded in 1909 by the Zionist Organization of America. It promotes the Zionist idea, encourages Jewish youth in their spiritual and physical development, and fosters Jewish culture and identity. The movement, operating in conjunction with Hebrew schools, was the largest youth movement in American Jewry for many years. In World War I, some of its members joined the Jewish regiments. From 1924 on, Young Judaea developed a cooperative relationship with the Scouts organization in Palestine. In 1967, it accepted the patronage of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America.

Today the movement has some 7,000 members in the US and Canada.



MAGSHIMEY HERUT (Hebrew: "achievers of liberty") is a Zionist youth/young adult movement founded in 1999 by a group of Jewish activists who felt the need for an educational movement dedicated to the ideals of Revolutionary Zionism: aliyah, social justice and the territorial integrity of the land of Israel. In many English speaking countries it is known as ZFA (Zionist Freedom Alliance).

The membership of Magshimey Herut is drawn from both observant and non-observant Jews united under a shared commitment to Israel's future, combining support for the idea of a Greater Israel with unique social programs designed to improve Israeli society.

The movement's programs throughout the world educate and prepare young adults for responsible leadership. Magshimey Herut develops projects in conjunction with the Hagshama Department of the World Zionist Organization, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Jewish National Fund and boasts chapters in ten countries worldwide. As an educational activist movement, many chapters take a leading role in numerous social and political causes: promoting aliya, working with youth-at-risk, securing Israel's borders, training college activists fighting social inequality and fostering unity within Israeli society.

Youth movements on Internet:

[Bnei Akiva in Israel](#) (Hebrew)
[Bnei Akiva around the World](#)
[Ezra](#) (Hebrew)
[Habonim-Dror](#)

Hanoar Hatzioni B'Peru
Hashomer Hatzair
Israel Boy and Girl Scouts Federation
Magshimey Herut