

The Pioneer at the Head of the Camp

Buber and Trumpeldor

(Activity for High School Students)

From: "Renewal of the Life of a Nation" / Martin Buber

The genuine pioneer, the initial pioneer is a man, with whom people identify as an activist engaged in releasing the nation and releasing oneself. For the first time in the Diaspora, we'll provide a response over the entire essence of a personality – of a Jewish man. Since the pioneer realizes the fate of the people from his own fate and expresses the decision of the nation, with his own decision, the principle he goes by is that the national foundation and the human foundation are inseparable anywhere. "In this way this movement may differ", said B. Katznelson justifiably (back in 5678) regarding pioneering, "that wishes to create the national future by creating personal lives, which is a major difference between this and the other contemporary movements... Perhaps this is the only practical movement in our times, which does not focus on leadership, nor - the program, rather – on man's lifestyle and his work. The member himself is the goal. His life – his experiences, his failures, his victories, his weakness and his bravery – they in themselves comprise the movement. "The possibility that this will be the case is dependent on the fact that the idea is not added to the personal experience as a general factor – its entire being is none other than the cooperative nature of this experience. The shared dream, a united call, going together.

Nonetheless, the human entity is connected by an indivisible attachment to the social one. The meaning of "life" for this person is not the huge and inconceivable collective, in which individuals are placed near one another, without actually being acquainted with each other, and not a group, in which the egoism of the individual is replaced by the egoism of the public, to the extent that the "we" voiced by each member, is no more than "I" with no guilty conscience. For him "society" draws its right and nature from the direct relationships between man and his comrade that comprise it. And "nation" for him is the society, which by sharing the assumptions and goals, sharing the language and fate, it contains the best conditions conducive to the creation and existence of these relationships.



Chagim Center

Home for the holidays

A Soul Has Gone/ Rachel Bluwstein To A.D. Gordon

The day was gradually getting darker
The day faded out.
Heavens were covered with dim gold
and high mountains.

Around me an expanse of fields turned black
A dumb region;
My path is far – my path is isolated,
My path is desolate,

Yet I shall not disobey the word of fate,
Fate rules,
I'll greet with joy - all that comes,
I'll be thankful for all!

Gordon's Response to Rachel

Go in your path –
You shall truly ascend
No one shall stop you,
He shall not say: Go up!

And as you go up
The day shall give you light-
And lo! You are not
alone in up above.





Chagim Center

Home for the holidays

He told me about the simple, yet sublime idea of "pioneering" "pioneer", means "to take the lead".

I asked: In which aspect, as laborers?

No, this is a much wider concept. Naturally, workers are also necessary. But that is not the definition of the word, Halutz (pioneer). We will have people ready for "anything". For anything the Land of Israel may demand. A worker has his own worker's interests. Yet we must raise a generation that would not have interests nor habits. A plain iron bar, flexible but one that is made out of iron. Metal, from which it is possible to form anything necessary for the national "machine". If a tire is missing – I'll be the tire. If what's missing is a nail, a screw, a flywheel - take me. Is it necessary to dig in the ground? I am a ploughman. Is it necessary to shoot, to be a soldier? I am a soldier. Police, a doctor, a lawyer? Teachers? Water carriers? Please, I do everything. I am the pure idea of service, ready for anything. I am not attached to anything. I know only of a single order! To build.

"Your letter has given me great joy. I immediately felt you were my friend. Also I, dear Grisha, set high goals for myself; not only over the question of the Jews, do I intend to solve via my communists colonies. The idea of the colonies began to take shape in my mind years ago, when I was far from contemplating Zionism. Depressed and disillusioned with this capitalistic regime I could not console myself as others did - in a kind of war, which both sides fought while engulfed in corruption.

I learned that it is difficult for man to battle and struggle as long as he is surrounded with a rancid swamp by all sides, as long as all of the cells of his body absorb the poison filling the entire environment...

I have decided, that in this huge swamp I would create a solid ground, an oasis within the desert. It's difficult to materialize, but I know, I'll find faithful friends, and hard work and suffering will not scare me".

Joseph Trumpeldor, The Root of the Controversy, page 13.



My Dear Father and Mother,

I've already written you the postcard, that a group of 11 men have arranged to put up a colony in the Land of Israel. This may come to you as a surprise, but if you pay attention to what my life contained in the past, you will conclude that what had occurred, would occur one of these days, sooner or later -- -- --

Almost everywhere, Jews have been pursued, generations upon generations, with hatred and contempt. The Jewish language is on a low standard. Jewish culture is almost extinct. There is merely oppressive subjugation, which with all of its power, delays and obstructs real life. The time has come that we become an independent nation. We are weary of being dispersed among other nations, serving them as a simple pawn in a game. We must unite and become a single body. There, in the Land of Israel, we will not be dependent on others. There, we'll do good and bad. We'll live on our own!

Now, seemingly, is the time to take real Zionist action. For this reason, dear father and mother, we have resolved to immigrate to Israel now, without delay. And my group is a quality one: Everyone, almost everyone are craftsmen, upright people, who know how to work. We shall return to Russia, to seek the necessary means, and a little while later, we'll set out to the Land of Israel to work there. We are all singles and as such, we will set out to establish the colony and we would be able to marry women afterwards. We may possibly find a few others who are honest and have good natures, who would be suitable for us and would agree to live as we wish to - the life of a commune and perhaps you and other acquaintances may also immigrate and join us.

A Letter to His Parents from Captivity in Japan

If I were asked to mention the name of a single person, a real hero, extremely upright, throughout the history of Zionism and settlements – I would not hesitate:

Trumpeldor is the man.

Thanks to Herzl's Zionism, it is well known, that sayings alone, even the most beautiful and noble ones, will not produce great things. Rather the words must be followed by deeds.

Zionism and Communism do not quarrel within me, and do not conflict each other: I am a bit of each."

"If I die, I'll do it in joy, with a light heart, since it is for something that's dear to me. Isn't it a joy to die out of awareness, that for this price my nation will receive something in return in our dear homeland, in the Land of Israel?"

In a letter to his fiancé Firah (Esther Rozov) 6/27/1915

"And now a few words about your trip (to the land of Israel). My dear Grisha!...More than you wish to give there, you wish to take, you wish to train your soul in the Land of Israel. 'A flower must be transferred and planted in new soil while it is still a bud, a soul must be empowered while it is still young'. This is what you write and I say: You cannot take something, unless it comes from a place that is very prosperous. There will be many days that we will give to the Land of Israel and we will not take anything from it, since it is totally poor and impoverished. It is not a young soul, wanting of education and care, that needs to be brought there, rather – a mature soul, full of power and strength. If a tender and fragile flower is uprooted from its original location and planted in thin soil and virgin land, it will die. Nowadays it is not advisable to go to Israel to study and train oneself, instead, if you go – it is to work and to produce...

What will be your fate in the Land of Israel? Hard menial work, you had never been used to. Let us say for a moment, that due to your aspiration, you'd be able to get accustomed to it. Yet what advantage will anyone have from this?... You'll spend all days engaged in menial work; the more you sink into this work, the more the scope of your spiritual vision will be reduced, and so you will gradually stoop all day into a dark life and trivialities... The daily hard work does not only exhaust one's body, but also one's soul...desolate and lonely you'll look at those surrounding you, and watch them drop into the same swamp that you're sinking in. Surrounded by chill and alienation, your voice may still sometimes repeat the old sayings. But these – Ah! – will be hollow and void of any contents even to you...No, Grisha, now you should not ascend to the Land of Israel! Wait a bit for us! ..."

A Letter of Response to Tzvi Shatz for his intention to immigrate to the Land of Israel

"In the past, my views were close to Tolstoyism and when I was recruited (in 1903) to the army, I also intended to avoid taking the vow. Yet I gave up this idea, mainly, perhaps out of suspicion that "they" may say: "The Jew is fallacious: he mentions philosophies, yet he actually fears the army service..." Perhaps, I didn't do the right thing, perhaps I should have not considered the opinions of people whom I do not respect, yet my semi-Tolstoyism and with my anti-militarism, there were many weak points I was aware of myself. Whatever the case may be, in my view I am not a military man and I will use arms, only when I see no other option".

Written in 1916, at the time of the prevailing controversy regarding the question of the Hebrew Legions, that Trumpeldor was an initiator of their establishment while Echad Ha'am opposed this. At that time the Jewish settlements and Zionism argued over the question of militarism.

My Dear Samusha (Samuel)

...

My thoughts are occupied with plans for founding a settlement, and if a war breaks out in the Land of Israel, I'll probably be appointed as a commander there, although I'm willing and ready to serve as a simple soldier as well. There we will be at home, not with foreigners. And you ought to know what it means "at home", not with strangers, as one who had knocked on strangers' doors all of his life, with no response, as a person who had always experienced aggression and scorn instead of support and peace. And I believe: the day will come and I, tired and fatigued of hard work, shall walk through, and inspect my fields in my own country with joy. And no one will tell me: "Go away you wretch: you're a stranger in this land!" And if there would be a man who would speak this way, I would defend myself forcedly and with a sword, I'd get up and protect my fields, my rights. Let him come! My fields are behind me, on my right and my left is my friend... and if I fall in the battle, I'd be blissful, knowing for what I have fallen... But probably we will not fight, and we will not fall. There would be no reason for this. There would be a need to work and we'll work, yet my heart is very bitter, since life is so bad, and by the time a man gets a chance to engage in a work he wishes to do, many long days that shall not return, go by.

Farewell! Your loving brother, Osiyah