

Chapter 9

THE MORAL POSTULATES OF KIBBUTZ CULTURE

Melford E. Spiro

This chapter will focus on *Kiryat Yedidim*, a kibbutz in modern Israel. The strength of the kibbutz, according to official federation principles, lies in its essential social nature which strives for the complete harmony of the individual and the group in every sphere of life, for the maximum development of each individual, and for the constant deepening of human ethical relations and social values.

To have begun this chapter on economic democracy in the usual fashion, with a description of the natural environment or of the subsistence economy of Kiryat Yedidim, would do violence to the inner meaning of its culture. Kiryat Yedidim, to be sure, is an agricultural village consisting of men and women who inhabit a common geographic area and who make their living by tilling the soil in a cooperative fashion. But Kiryat Yedidim is also and primarily, a fellowship of those who share a common faith and who have banded together to implement that faith. To live *in* Kiryat Yedidim means to become a member of a kibbutz, and membership in a kibbutz entails more than voting at town meetings, or driving a tractor in the wheat fields, or living in a lovely village. It means, primarily, becoming a *chaver kibbutz*, a comrade of the kibbutz, that is, a person who is dedicated to the social, economic, and national ideals for which the kibbutz stands. These ideals were formulated before Kiryat Yedidim came into being and, indeed, it was founded with the purpose of bringing these ideals into being. Hence, these ideals must be understood, if the kibbutz is to be understood.

Probably the single most important ideal upon which the entire kibbutz culture is based is what might be termed the moral value of labor. It is no accident, for example, that today, when the entire kibbutz movement is experiencing a profound crisis, it is this principle of *avodah atzmit*, or self-labor, which has become the measure of the devotion of a kibbutz to its original ideals. The founders of Kiryat Yedidim, in many instances, were intellectuals for whom labor was a calling rather than a habit. For them, labor was not merely a means for the satisfaction of human needs; rather, labor itself was viewed as a need, probably man's most important need, the satisfaction of which became an end in itself. *Ki ha-avodah hi chayenu* is the way the kibbutz expresses it, "For labor is the essence of our life." This phrase may be said to be the very essence of kibbutz living.

This attitude toward labor did not, of course, originate with the early Kibbutz pioneers, the founders, of Kiryat Yedidim. Emphasis on labor had long been integral to the pioneering tradition in Zionism. As early as 1882, when one of the first contingents of Russian Jews migrated to Palestine, the ideal of labor on the land was already in process of formulation. As one pioneer put it:

Farmer! Be a free man among men, but a slave to the soil... Kneel and bow down to it every day. Nurse its furrows-and then even its stony clods will yield a blessing! And in this "slavery" remember that you are a tiller of the soil! A tiller of the soil in Palestine! This must become a badge of honor among our people.

THE RELIGION OF LABOR

But the most important influence came from the pioneers of the Second Aliya (1904-1914) and, specifically, from the seer of the Palestinian labor movement, Aaron David Gordon (1856-1922). It was Gordon who invented the term, *dat ha-avodah*, “the religion of labor.” For him labor was a uniquely creative act, as well as an ultimate value. Through labor, he taught, man became one with himself, society, and nature. But, he warned, it would not be easy:

A people that has become accustomed to every mode of life save the natural one—the life of self-conscious and self-supporting labor—such a people will never become a living, natural laboring people unless it strain every fibre of its will to attain that goal. Labor is not merely the factor which establishes man’s contact with the land and his claim to the land; it is also the principle force in the building of a national civilization. Labor is a great human ideal for the future, and a great ideal is like the healing sun. We need fanatics of labor in the most exalted sense of the word (Gordon, 1938).

Gordon’s “religion of labor” not only influenced his own generation of Zionist pioneers, but it served to shape the subsequent history of Jewish labor enterprise in Palestine. Hence, the stress in Kiryat Yedidim on labor as a calling is an ideal which it shares, not only with other collective and cooperative settlements, but with the entire labor movement in Israel.

This attitude to labor is particularly significant and, in a profoundly psychological sense, explicable only in view of the *petit bourgeois* backgrounds of the pioneers. Before their immigration to Israel, they had not engaged in physical labor; moreover, they were reared in a culture that demeaned labor, as well as the laborer. The persons who were looked down upon in the *shtetl*, the Eastern European villages in which the pioneers were born, were the *prost*. “Prost” is the Yiddish equivalent of “crude” or “vulgar,” and the attitude towards unskilled workers on the part of the *shtetl* is revealed most clearly in its appellation of these workers as the *prost*. In such villages, according to Zborowski and Herzon (1952)

It is better... to be a salesman than to be an artisan. A salesman works with his brain, an artisan merely with his brawn. For a man who “comes from *yikhus*” (a respected family) to engage in manual labor, even under stress of economic necessity, is a calamity for manual labor has come to symbolize the antithesis of the social ideal—a life devoted entirely to study (p. 247).

Hence, the ideal of work as an ultimate value represents, in the case of the pioneers, a cultural revolution. To achieve it they had to overcome the resistance of both their trained values and their untrained muscles. It is little wonder that one of their first goals was *kibbush ha-avodah*, the conquest of labor.

Kiryat Yedidim, then, is not a worker’s community in the same sense that many of the utopian societies of Nineteenth-Century America were. This is a community which was founded, for the most part, by middle-class intellectuals who deliberately chose to be workers. By so choosing, they reversed both the traditional prestige hierarchy and the historical aspiration of upward mobility. Instead of aspiring to rise up the social ladder, they aspired to descend. For

the comrades, then, it is not business, as in European bourgeois culture, or scholarship, as in the shtetl culture, but labor which is the highest vocational goal. This goal, it must be stressed, is primarily a spiritual goal, it is a means to self-realization. As the folk-song has it: "To Palestine we have come, to build and to be built in it (the land)." This Tolstoyan attitude toward work could be evolved, it is not hazardous to say, only by romantic, urban intellectuals.

The "moral value of labor" stresses not only the latter aspect of the principle of self-labor, but the former aspect, which emphasizes the self is equally important. This general principle of the labor movement, when applied to the kibbutz, means that no one may be employed from the outside to work in the kibbutz, and that all work must be performed by the members of the kibbutz. Exceptions might be made in certain kinds of labor for which members may have had no training, such as house construction or language instruction in the high school, but no exception may be made in the case of other kinds of labor, no matter how difficult or repulsive it might be. The opposition to hired labor is based on three ethical considerations. First, there is the *mystique* of labor, already hinted at, which stresses the dignity and creativeness of labor and the need to strike roots in the soil. Then, there is the fear, which first arose when the Arabs were the majority group, in Palestine, that the introduction of hired labor would open the way to the employment of cheap Arab labor. If this happened, it was thought, the kibbutz would eventually become a plantation, worked by Arab labor for the benefit of what would then become the leisure class of kibbutz owners. The socialist ideology of Kiryat Yedidim, with its abhorrence of "surplus value" and its notion that all wage labor entails exploitation, is the third ethical opposition to hired labor and the insistence on self-labor.

The early pioneers, in short, constitute a class-conscious proletariat, *par excellence*; and it is not surprising that one's prestige in Kiryat Yedidim is determined primarily by excellence in and devotion to one's work.

Not all work, however, is equally valued. Physical labor enjoys the greatest prestige. The further removed it is from physical labor, the less prestige a job confers. This means, of course, that pure intellectual work does not confer great prestige, despite the fact that Kiryat Yedidim is a highly cultured community, one which is devoted to intellectual and artistic experience. Of the various categories of physical labor, agricultural labor is valued the most. Even among the agricultural branches, however, differential stereotypes have arisen. Those who work in the orchards and vineyards are thought to be intellectual, easygoing people, who are not particularly energetic. Shepherds are supposedly romantic, and inclined to be a bit lazy. On the other hand, the *falachim*, those who work in the grain fields, are presumably hard, energetic workers. They enjoy a national reputation, moreover, for the stereotype has it that the field workers of the past have become the country's leaders, and have built the important labor institutions.

It is difficult to assess the relative physical difficulty of these various occupations. It is probably true that, in many respects, the *falach* has the hardest job. There are certain periods, such as the harvest, when the combines work almost twenty-four hours a day, demanding almost superhuman effort. But there is another, and probably more cogent, reason for prestige which has little to do with the difficulty of his work. The kibbutz distinguishes between "productive" work and "services." The former enjoys the greater prestige, and, or, perhaps, because, it yields a cash income. Hence, *falcha*, the cereal crop, is the most important agricultural branch in the

kibbutz economy, for it historically has yielded the highest economic return. The economic importance of the branch has been generalized to the social importance of the person who works in that branch.

The importance attached to work is in constant evidence in Kiryat Yedidim and almost everyone responds to it. Work has become almost a compulsive habit, so that absence from work, even for good cause, elicits feelings of guilt. For three months, for example, I had been working in the fields with a companion whose work was characterized by drive and great energy, and who seldom took a break. I was amazed to discover somewhat later that this labor was tortuous to her; she could not tolerate the heat, and she suffered constant pains in her arms and hands. In another case, a kibbutznik donated one day a week to work in an immigrant camp. She became quite ill, and was ordered to bed by the doctor. She complained, however, that she must return to her work, and when she heard that there was no one to take her place in the camp, she insisted on rising from her sickbed and returning to the camp. It is interesting to note in this connection that, according to the kibbutz nurse, there are no cases of malingering or of “gold-bricking.” How compelling this drive for work can become, even for an outsider, is illustrated by another experience. During my onsite research it was mutually decided that I would pay for my expenses by working half a day, and by paying the kibbutz for the other half-day. Toward the end of the study, it became apparent that it would be impossible to complete my projected research aims, unless I had more free time for research. I obtained permission from the Secretariat of the kibbutz to work only one-quarter time for two months, and to make up the difference in cash payments. As soon as I started my quarter-time schedule, however, I realized that I would accomplish little work. My own guilt feelings were too great. No one mentioned the fact that I was not working regular hours, and probably few knew of it; nevertheless, I felt that I was shirking my kibbutz responsibility. I stayed away from public places during the day, trying to avoid my comrades. The influence of this dominant attitude is so great, that a complete stranger becomes acculturated to it within a few months.

Since labor is of such great importance, it follows that the individual who shirks his work responsibilities, or who is inefficient in his work, does not enjoy the respect of his fellows. Regardless of his other talents the lazy person occupies the position of lowest prestige in the hierarchy of Kiryat Yedidim.

COMMUNAL OWNERSHIP

A second moral principle of kibbutz culture is that the property used and produced by the entire community rightfully belongs to the entire community as a communal asset. Hence, the economy rests on the public ownership of property. The land inhabited and worked by the kibbutz is not owned by any individual or by any family, nor even by the kibbutz itself. It is owned, rather, by the entire nation, having been acquired by a national agency, the *Keren Kayemet*, the Jewish National Fund, by funds raised through voluntary contributions. The Keren Kayemet rents the land to the kibbutz on a ninety-nine year renewable lease, for which the latter pays an annual rent starting only after its fifth year of two percent of the original cost of the land, plus improvements. National ownership of land is an ethical imperative, it is believed, because it precludes such “evils” as land speculation, absentee ownership, and “unearned” income through rent. Moreover, it prevents the rise of a society composed, of a landed gentry and a disinherited peasantry.

Although its land is owned by the nation, all other property in Kiryat Yedidim is owned collectively by the members of the kibbutz. Ideally, the individual owns nothing with the exception of small personal gifts and those personal effects which he may buy with his annual vacation allowance a few Israeli pounds. Hence, the house in which he lives, the trucks and tractors he operates, the cattle he cares for, the clothes he wears, and the food he eats are owned by the kibbutz. Since private property has been abolished, the individual receives no wages for his work; since he lives in a house owned by the kibbutz, he pays no rent; and since he eats in the kibbutz dining room, he has no food bills. Moreover, he receives his clothes, like everyone else, from the kibbutz clothing room while smaller articles, like combs and toothbrushes are obtained at the kibbutz communal store. Should he be ill, his medical and hospital bills are taken care of by the kibbutz. In short, the individual has no money, nor does he need any, because his economic needs are satisfied by the kibbutz.

The principle of public ownership derives, of course, from the emphasis placed on the moral value of equality. Private property, it is felt, together with the profit motive and the competitiveness that accompany it, destroy the bonds of brotherhood. The kibbutz insists that only in the absence of private property is it possible to establish an economic system in which economic classes and economic inequalities are abolished and, consequently, in which greater brotherhood can be achieved.

Communal ownership, then, is related to another moral principle underlying kibbutz culture, that of social and economic *equality*. In the event that Kiryat Yedidim does not have enough goods or services to supply all its members equally, distribution is regulated according to seniority of arrival in the country. For example, the new housing development, consisting of two-room, instead of the usual one-room apartments, is open only to those persons who have been in the country for at least thirty years. Except for such special cases, however, economic distribution is formally equal such as the distribution of clothes.

In the past, the emphasis on formal economic equality was taken much more literally than it is today. Clothes, for example, in earlier years of the 1920s, were not marked in the laundry, on the principle that all clothes were publicly owned. Hence, a person did not receive from the laundry the same clean clothes that he had previously worn. Instead, he was given the first pair of pants, dress, or socks that happened to be on top of the laundry pile. This, of course, created highly ludicrous situations, such as tall persons having to wear short pants, or slender persons being forced to wear large dresses. This system, known as the first commune, was soon modified at the insistence of the women, who demanded that they be fitted for dresses. The sizes of the clothes were marked, so that a member, when he came for his weekly laundry, would not necessarily receive the same clothes he had worn the week before, but he would, at least, receive his own size.

In the middle 1930s, the second commune was instituted. It was becoming apparent that the members were not entirely careful with the clothes they wore, and there was a high percentage of torn and soiled clothes. It was felt that if the clothes were marked, and if each person were to receive the same clothes from the laundry, he could then be held responsible for their care. This is the system that is still in operation. All clothing, like everything else, is technically owned by the kibbutz. But each individual receives his clothing allowance for the

year, and the clothes he receives are “his,” in the sense that they are marked with his name, he wears them, and he is responsible for them.

Despite this formal equality in the basic necessities, certain inequalities in luxuries have arisen due to conditions not provided for in the formal structure of the kibbutz. Some people receive presents of food, clothing, and furniture, from relatives who do not reside in Kiryat Yedidim, while others do not. Some individuals, moreover, work outside the kibbutz during their vacations, and purchase what they please with the extra money they earn. Some have relatives or friends outside the kibbutz with whom they can stay when they go to the cities, which enables them to save from their annual vacation money, what others must pay in hotel and restaurant bills. This saving enables them to purchase small personal objects. As a result of all these factors, the complete economic equality that once characterized the kibbutz has been slightly qualified.

It may be stated as a general rule, however, that all individuals receive the same clothing allotment, eat the same food in the communal dining room, and enjoy the same housing conditions, regardless of their economic skill, their economic importance to the kibbutz, their prestige, or their power. For, despite having awareness that people differ greatly in ability or in skill, the kibbutz insists that such differences should not be used as a basis for differences in privileges. All individuals have an equal right to the good things of the community, although they do not contribute to it equally.

This observation serves to remind us that the equality principle of kibbutz culture is qualified by another ethical consideration, that of need. The kibbutz believes in the principle “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need,” an idea which conflicts at times with its principle of equality. In resolving this conflict, it is usually the need, rather than the equality, that prevails. A field hand, whose relative productivity is great, eats the common austerity fare of the dining room, even though he has worked strenuously in the hot Israeli sun. But an office worker of low prestige in the kibbutz value hierarchy, whose productivity is low, may receive a special diet, comparatively sumptuous, because of some physical condition. A man with children works no harder than a man without children, but the kibbutz provides not only for his wants, but also for the care of his children. In effect, those with no children, or with few children, subsidize those who do have children.

SOCIAL EQUALITY

Not so obvious upon first arriving in Kiryat Yedidim, but just as important for an understanding of kibbutz culture, is the social equality which exists, and of which one becomes acutely aware whenever one leaves the kibbutz, even for a short time. There is no class structure in Kiryat Yedidim, and there is no differential reward system for different kinds of labor based on some ranking technique. Some kinds of work, as has already been observed, are valued more highly than others; but those who occupy the more highly valued jobs, receive no greater reward than the others. The important psychological fact about kibbutz culture is that everyone, regardless of their work, is viewed as a worker, with the same privileges and responsibilities as anyone else. Menial work, which in capitalist society might mark one as a social inferior, does not carry that stigma in Kiryat Yedidim. The general manager, the highest elective officer in the kibbutz, is not the social superior of the janitor cleaning bathrooms. Hence, there is no work

which a person is ashamed to accept because it would demean him socially. There is, thus, little, if any subordination of one group of individuals to another; there is no polarization of society into those who command and those who obey, those who are respected and those who respect. There is no need for some to be subservient before others, or to be nice to them, for fear of losing their jobs. In short, many of the social inequalities existing in a stratified society do not exist in Kiryat Yedidim (Rosenfeld, 1957).

This achievement can be illustrated by two examples. The recently arrived European physician, not a member of the kibbutz, asked one of the women for the name of the maid in the clinic. She did not understand to whom he was referring until he explained that he meant the woman who regularly cleaned the clinic. The woman then explained to him that there were no maids in Kiryat Yedidim, that this woman would probably be sitting next to him at dinner that evening, and, moreover, that this maid was an important official in the kibbutz. While making a survey of the various types of kibbutzim, we arrived at a certain kibbutz in order to interview a member of the Israeli Parliament. We were told, on our arrival, that he was to be found in the cemetery, for his job, when Parliament was not in session, consisted in caring for the graveyard. He came to greet us in his work clothes and kindly consented to grant us an interview in the meadow, for his wife, who worked nights in the dairy, was sleeping in their room.

It should be emphasized that the absence of social classes as conventionally conceived, does not imply the absence of either some type of ranking system in Kiryat Yedidim or of horizontal social groupings. The kibbutz is not a homogeneous concentration of persons, all of whom enjoy equal prestige and power, and each of whom interacts with all others with equal frequency. On the contrary, differential prestige and power as well as social cliques are to be found in Kiryat Yedidim; and it may be well to delineate their broad outlines.

Although the various kibbutz offices are held on a temporary and a rotation basis, those who happen to hold these offices do enjoy considerable power. Moreover, though the tenure of office is limited to two or three years, only a small number of members possess the necessary skills required to cope with the complexities of such offices as general manager, secretary, treasurer, etc., so that, in effect, these offices rotate among a small core of twelve to fifteen persons. Hence, power within the kibbutz is not equally distributed; it is, rather, concentrated within this small core. It should nevertheless be emphasized that those who occupy these offices enjoy no special privileges and receive no material rewards. Their power, moreover, is limited by the fact that major decisions are made, not by them, but by the town meeting; and that they are under the constant surveillance of the town meeting, and subject to its power of recall. At the same time this core is not a united group, but is comprised of individuals and of sub-groups who disagree, and are often in conflict, with each other. Finally, this is neither a closed, nor a self-appointed group. Rather, it is a group whose members are elected by the kibbutz on the basis of ability and demonstrated performance, and one which is always open to recruits chosen by the town meeting should it deem them capable of holding office.

Many of these same considerations apply to those who enjoy prestige. With one possible exception, prestige in Kiryat Yedidim is a function of achieved, rather than of ascribed, status; and the persons of prestige constitute a social category rather than a social group. Prestige is achieved by being a productive and devoted worker, by implementing kibbutz ideals in one's daily life, by being a synthetic personality, and by being a founder of the kibbutz. The first three

qualifications are, of course, attained only through achievement and they are open to all. The fourth, though not open to present achievement, was attained through past achievement. Moreover, it is not sufficient merely to be a founder; to merit prestige, the one must constantly validate his status by his daily behavior rather than by resting on the glories of the past. Nor, it should be noted, is prestige inherited by one's children. The latter must achieve their own prestige through the same avenues that are open to children of other members, and the status of their parents confers upon them no competitive advantage.

But Kiryat Yedidim is not only stratified by power and prestige. It may be subdivided into horizontal groups, as well; that is, into friendship groups or cliques, based on at least four factors: age, occupation, residential contiguity, and interests. Usually these criteria overlap, for friendship groups, as measured by social visiting in the evening, usually consist of individuals of the same generation. The latter, in turn, usually share the same interests; and, as a result of the kibbutz system of distributing housing, they usually live in the same living area. The kibbutz itself recognizes what it calls, four age layers, and it is rare that a clique consists of individuals from overlapping layers. Not all members of the same layer, however, comprise a single clique. Within the layers, cliques are formed on the basis of common interests-intellectual, political, discontent, and so on.

This combination of age and residential contiguity does not account for all cliques, for it is sometimes overruled by occupational interests and by power position. Those who comprise the small core which holds power are not necessarily a friendship group, but they are, nevertheless, characterized by a high frequency of interaction, since it is they who must meet, frequently over a cup of tea in the evening, to solve the many problems that are constantly arising in the kibbutz. They are not always of the same generation, nor do they live in spatial proximity.

Similarly, workers in some economic branches, establish a strong *esprit de corps* which may carry over to their non-working hours. Hence, though not of the same generation and though they do not share a common living area, they constitute a clique based on personal friendship which had its origin in a common occupational interest. It should be noted, moreover, that to the extent that some economic branches are unisexual in character membership in the cliques is also unisexual, so that sex becomes a criterion for social grouping.

FREEDOM AND THE GROUP

Another principle underlying the culture of Kiryat Yedidim is that of individual liberty; indeed, the kibbutz prides itself on being the freest society in the world. In the early history of Kiryat Yedidim, emphasis on freedom meant primarily freedom from the artificial conventions of all urban civilization. Once it was settled on its own land, however, and the necessity for some kind of social organization and authority arose, this earlier notion of freedom was expanded to include opposition to any system of authority. The kibbutz, it was assumed, was an organic community, and its work would somehow get accomplished without the necessity of investing any individual or individuals with power over their associates. Hence, Kiryat Yedidim had no officers, and all decisions were made in informal group discussions that included neither a chairman nor an agenda. As it grew larger, however, and as its economy expanded, it became evident that some kind of formal organization was required and that it was necessary to delegate

power. But in order to prevent any individual from acquiring personal power and/or to prevent the rise of an entrenched bureaucracy, it was decided that all offices, from the most menial to that of the general manager, should be held for a maximum of two or three years. This tenure limitation, it was hoped, would lead to a rotation of individuals in the various power positions, and would, therefore, ensure the maximum liberty of the kibbutz members.

This emphasis on freedom, it should be noted, is manifest not only in its formal structure, but in its freedom of expression as well. Any curtailment of freedom of speech, or of reading, is abhorrent to its members, and no censorship of any kind exists.

Finally, a discussion of the moral postulates of this culture must include the principle which might be termed the moral value of the group. The group, in kibbutz culture, is not only a means to the happiness of the individual; the group and group processes are moral ends in their own right. This has three aspects. It means, first, that the interests of the individual must be subordinate to the interests of the group. When the needs of the individual and those of the group come into conflict, the individual is expected to abdicate his needs in favor of the group's. This applies to vocational interests, as well as to ideological convictions. A person's vocational preferences are usually considered in deciding his work assignment; but if the kibbutz requires his labor or skill in some special branch, he is expected to recognize the paramount needs of the group. The same logic applies to ideological matters. An individual is permitted complete freedom in the process of arriving at political decisions and in attempting to convince others of his point of view. But once a formal decision is reached by the kibbutz, he is expected to acquiesce in its decision and to support it, however much it conflicts with his personal views.

A second aspect of the emphasis on the ethical value of the group involves the assumption that the individual's motivations will always be directed to the promotion of the group's interests, as well as of his own. Behavior is expected to be characterized by mutual aid. This means that every member of the kibbutz is responsible for the welfare of every other member and for the welfare of the kibbutz as a whole, just as the kibbutz is responsible for the welfare of each individual. The consequence of this principle is that no one is to suffer for lack of medical care, education for children, food, shelter, clothing, or any other need, as long as the kibbutz can provide the individual with these requirements.

The emphasis on the moral value of the group means, finally, that group living and group experiences are valued more highly than their individual counterparts. Indeed, so important is the value of group experience that those who seek a great degree of privacy are viewed as strange. The kibbutz is interested in creating a community. The ultimate criterion of either a good kibbutz, a good high school, or a good kindergarten, is whether or not it has become a community. Kiryat Yedidim is a group which is characterized by intimacy of interaction, and by mutual concern, if not by love. The kibbutz, in short, is a *gemeinschaft*, or, to use their term, an organic community. It is apparent, therefore, that the individualist, the person who cherishes his own privacy more than a group experience, constitutes a threat to the group. The desire for privacy either prevents the group from becoming a community, or symbolizes the fact that it is not one, for if it were, the individual would prefer to be with the group than to be alone.

To insist on privacy is a serious weakness. One of the worst things you can say of a man is, "he keeps it for himself," or "he hides it from others," whether "it" is money or wisdom,

clothes or news. Locked doors, isolation, avoidance of community control, all arouse suspicion. Members should be free to come in whenever they like at any time of the day. Withdrawal is felt as attack, whether physical or psychological, and isolation is intolerable. Life is with people. Everywhere people cluster to talk, at home, in the market place, on the street. Everyone wants to pick up the latest news, the newest gossip.

The freedom to observe and to pass judgment on one's fellows, the need to communicate and share events and emotions, is inseparable from a strong feeling that individuals are responsible to and for each other (Zborowski & Herzog, 1952, pp. 225-227).

These moral postulates constitute the social ethics of Kiryat Yedidim and represent, for them, the basic tenets of socialism. But socialism is only one of the twin principles on which the historical kibbutz culture rests; the other principle is Zionism. For Kiryat Yedidim, the kibbutz is not only a means to social and personal liberation, it is a means to national liberation, as well. Socialism, as defined by the tenets described in this chapter, represents the universalistic principle of kibbutz culture. Zionism represents its particularistic, Jewish principle. It is no accident, therefore, that Kiryat Yedidim was founded in Palestine rather than in Eastern Europe, the birthplace of the founders.

ZIONIST VALUES

The Zionist convictions of Kiryat Yedidim which, for the most part, is shared with the entire Zionist movement, may be simply stated. The Jews constitute a nation, however dispersed they may have been in the last 1900 years of their history, and however lacking they may have been in the external *accoutrement* of nationhood. Every nation has not only a right, but a duty to survive, and to perpetuate its national culture. The physical survival of the Jewish nation is under a constant threat as long as the Jews remain a national minority living among other political nations. Only in their own historical homeland is it possible for them to escape anti-Semitism and to escape their anomalous minority status. But this minority status has not only made the Jews an easy target for anti-Semitism; it has distorted their psychological and cultural complexion. Being deprived of numerous channels for economic activity, the Jews have been forced into a narrow range of economic outlets—they have become "middlemen." Middlemen are not only economic parasites, but they become distorted by the very nature of their work. They have no appreciation for nature and, hence, strike no roots in the soil. They have no understanding of the essential dignity and creativity of physical labor so they develop a sterile intellectualism, a scholasticism which has no basis in real life.

Zionism can change all these characteristics. By living in their own homeland, Jews are no longer economic parasites, for they are not only middlemen, but they also work the land and run the factories. Having normalized, that is, broadened, their economic base to include the entire range of economic activities, the cultural and intellectual life of Jews will become normalized as well, since it will have its roots in the creative life of the people. And this economic and cultural normalization, in conjunction with its national normalization—escape from minority status and, hence, from anti-Semitism—will enable the Jews to take their rightful and normal place among the nations of the world.

In short, Zionism, for Kiryat Yedidim, although a particularistic movement, has as its ultimate aim a universalistic and humanistic goal. This goal is not the geographic segregation of Jews, with the intention of developing specific Jewish characteristics that will separate the Jews from the non-Jewish world. Its aim, rather, is the concentration of Jews in their homeland so that they may develop a normal national life which, in turn, will enable them to interact with the rest of the world as normal human beings, rather than as members of a dependent, parasitic, fearful minority. For Kiryat Yedidim, then, national liberation is not only as important as social and personal liberation; it is a necessary condition for their existence.

This is not to say, however, that its conception of Zionism does not contain much of the ethnocentrism that characterizes other nationalist philosophies. Like other Israelis, the kibbutzniks polarize their world into *Aretz*, whose literal meaning is “country,” but which is used to refer to *the* country, Israel; and *chutz la-aretz*, which refers to the rest of the world literally, “outside the country.” So, too, they polarize the peoples of the world into *Yehudim*, a term which includes Israeli and non-Israeli Jews alike, and *Goyim*, literally, nations, the rest of mankind. This distinction is rhetorical, inherited from an epoch in which the world was polarized into friends (Jews) and foes (the rest of mankind). Nevertheless, it does not take long for one to realize that this rhetoric expresses an important contemporary psychological attitude. The ethnocentrism of kibbutzniks is expressed, moreover, in their insistence that all Jews ought to settle in Israel, and in their expressed amazement that any Jew who has visited Israel should want to return to one’s native country.

The Zionist philosophy of Kiryat Yedidim serves to explain some of its important characteristics and behavior. Its emphasis on physical labor and its choice of rural, rather than urban living, stems not only from its general social philosophy, but from its Zionist convictions. The “normalization” of Jewish national life requires that Jews return to physical labor and that they strike roots in the soil. Moreover, the very geographic location of the kibbutz was dictated by its Zionist conviction. Kiryat Yedidim was founded on what was then swamp land, in an area which was remote from Jewish settlements. This was part of deliberate Zionist settlement policy, whose aim was to drain the Palestinian swamp land so that more acreage could be brought under cultivation, and to continuously extend the frontiers of Jewish colonization so that all of mandated Palestine would be dotted with Jewish settlements.

It is this same Zionist philosophy that today motivates Kiryat Yedidim, together with other kibbutzim, to devote so much manpower and energies to non-kibbutz, nationalist goals. During, and immediately following, World War II, kibbutz members were to be found in Europe in the vanguard of those who risked their lives in order to smuggle Jewish refugees out of Europe and into Palestine. After the war, the kibbutzim loaned some of their members for work in the refugee camps that were scattered throughout Israel.

Finally, since Kiryat Yedidim viewed itself as a Zionist agency, it has opened its doors for the settlement and rehabilitation of refugee youth. When children from Hitler’s Europe and, more recently, from Moslem countries, arrived in Israel, the country was faced with the problem of how to provide for their care. The kibbutzim, in an agreement with the Jewish Agency, agreed to accept groups of adolescents who would live and be educated in a kibbutz until they were prepared to take their place in the life of the country. And when one group left, another would take its place. The kibbutzim provided them with food, shelter, and their entire education.

This is not to say that their motivations were entirely altruistic. Kiryat Yedidim, for example, derived some benefit from this arrangement in the stipend it received from the Agency for each child it accepted and in the work performed by the youths in the kibbutz economy. The fact is, however, that the financial gain was small, and was more than offset by the great inconveniences which this arrangement caused the kibbutz, all of whose facilities were already strained.

These, then, are the moral postulates of Kiryat Yedidim and, indeed, of all kibbutzim. They are important, not only because they constitute the basis for the social structure of the kibbutz, but because they provide a clue to an important premise of its living, the premise that life is serious. It is serious because the realization of these values, rather than immediate pleasure or self-seeking, is taken to be the purpose of living.

The feeling that life's primary meaning is to be sought in the realization of values that transcend one's own personal importance was best expressed by a kibbutznik who had recently returned from a visit to the United States. When I asked how long it had taken her to become lonesome for Israel, she replied that she missed it almost at once. In America, she said, "they have no values. Of course, in Israel we have austerity, but we have values. We are absorbing immigrants, building a new society. Hence, you feel that your life has meaning. But what meaning does it have in America?"

The consciousness of the seriousness of existence, which is characteristic not only of Kiryat Yedidim, but of the kibbutz movement as a whole, is emphasized at every opportunity, including festive occasions. The annual nationwide dance festival, for example, is held at Kibbutz Dahlia, and is staged by various groups throughout the country, including the kibbutzim. The year that I attended, the audience numbered more than 50,000 and the theme of the festival was the cultural contribution of each of the groups of immigrants to Israel. The dances and songs of the various countries of origin were presented by these groups which had migrated from every part of the world. But, amid the spectacle of the colors and music of many cultures, arose the feature tableau of the evening, wherein was depicted the tragedy of Jewish life throughout the Diaspora, and the struggle and eventual success of the return to the homeland. The audience was reminded that there were still many Jews suffering in the Diaspora, and that the task of all was to work for their redemption and return. It seems that even an evening of folk art cannot be enjoyed simply and for itself, without some message of social significance.

Decades ago, the founders of Kiryat Yedidim, young Jews from the villages of Eastern Europe, left their middle-class homes and emigrated to Palestine in order to found a community based on the principles of equality and community. These are indeed, the moral postulates of kibbutz culture and socio-economic organization.

REFERENCES

- Gordon, Aaron David. *Selected Essays*. New York: NY: League for Labor in Palestine, 1938.
- Rosenfeld, Eva. "Institutional Change in the Kibbutz," *Social Problems*, 1957, Vol. 5, pp. 110-136.
- Zborowski, Mark and Elizabeth Herzog. *Life is With People*. New York, NY: Schocken Press, 1952.