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I have faith in the future

ABOVE THE FOLD

• By MICAH HALPERN



Despite the dire predictions about the future of the Jewish state and the future of Judaism – and there are many – I know that our future will be bright and infused with creativity and dynamism. I know that our future leaders will be moral, righteous, and courageous visionaries. I know that we need not fear for our future.

I know that because I know the youth of today. October 7 brought out the worst in our enemies, and it brought out the best in us. When the call to arms went out, when the pleas for help were heard, and when the world seemed to be collapsing all around us, young Israelis leaped into the fray. Eyes open and hearts pounding, they responded to the needs of our nation demonstrating a drive and dedication way beyond their years. A drive many did not know they had.

Israel became a nation of young heroes. Military heroes. Volunteer heroes. Heroes at war and heroes maintaining the home front. In a horrific time of need, Israel's young generation rose to the challenge – and they are continuing to rise far beyond the challenge.

Israeli youth demonstrated that they were not just like all other youth in today's Western world. They joined the ranks of youth who have, historically, been the force behind movements that have changed the world.

The anti-war movement against the Vietnam War was a youth movement. The sexual revolution was begun by youth. The rock and roll revo-

lution that transformed music and culture was spurred on by young people: "Make love not war," it was all young people.

Organized youth have power. Hitler's Nazi Germany understood that power all too well. It indoctrinated and motivated young Germans, using them and called them "Hitler Youth." The movement became the breeding ground for leadership in Hitler's Germany.

THE ZIONIST movement was created by Jewish youth.

The Warsaw Ghetto uprising was young Jews. Young men and women who were willing to give up their lives, to die in the sewers of Warsaw, in the hope of making a statement and saving Jewish lives.

It was Zionist youth who rejected the lives of their parents and left Europe. They built the settlements, drained the swamps, and established towns and cities. Young Jews organized Zionist groups in Europe and in the United States. They taught themselves Hebrew, created practice farms to learn agriculture, and then went off to British Mandate Palestine. Years later, it was young Jews behind the Iron Curtain who smuggled in books and taught other young Jews to read and write Hebrew and how to become "Jewish Jews."

Theodor Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism, died in July 1904 at the tender age of 44. In 1894, at 34, he had witnessed the Dreyfus Affair. That experience, that scandal, that libel, transformed his life. And as a young man, Herzl began his revolution to create



VOLUNTEERS HELP a local raspberry grower in Moshav Avnei Eitan, on the Golan Heights, last December. The youth of Israel today are walking in the footsteps of the founders of Zionism, volunteering to keep agricultural communities alive, says the writer. (Michael Giladi/Flash90)

a Jewish state.

The "old man of Zionism" was Aharon David Gordon. Everyone called him A. D. Gordon. The "elder" statesman of Labor Zionism, Gordon left Europe to come to Palestine in 1904 – at the age of 48. Hardly an old man.

Gordon firmly believed that working the land was a spiritual and transformative experience. He believed that the Jewish people in the Diaspora had been removed from the world of toil and labor, from working their land.

Labor and work were not Marxism to Gordon. He rejected socialist and Marxist ideals. Instead, once living in Palestine, he created a youth movement called Hapoel Hatzair, The Young Worker. His movement was a break from Ber Borochov and Nahum Syrkin and their Poel Zion because they were ideological, they

were socialist-Marxist.

For Gordon, work was a religious experience and, while not religious, he formed a very good relationship with Rav Isaac Abraham Kook, one of the fathers of religious Zionism. For Gordon, the primary objective was "the work." Work, working the land, would transform the Jewish people and create a society and organic healthy happy spiritual society. For Gordon, it was not about statehood. He believed in an organic community based on family, values, and labor.

After his death, young people created a youth movement called Gordonia, promoting his philosophy of Hebrew labor. They were dedicated to learning agriculture and Hebrew, and then coming to Palestine. The movement spoke to young Jewish people – especially those who did not embrace the Marxist ideals of Hashomer

Hatzair. Gordonia even had a presence in the United States, especially in the Washington DC-Baltimore area. They created a summer camp on the banks of the South River, just outside Annapolis, MD. Eventually, Gordonia merged with Habonim.

The youth of Israel today are walking in the footsteps of the founders of Zionism.

Conscripted soldiers and reservists, elementary and high school students volunteering to keep agricultural communities alive or to teach displaced children living in hotels are showing verve and dynamism that will keep the Jewish spirit and the Jewish nation alive. Their presence makes a difference in the world. Because of them, I have great faith in the future.

The writer is a columnist and a social and political commentator. Watch his TV show Thinking Out Loud on JBS.