

Young Zionist

Should FZY wander over the Green Line?

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Having recently returned from Year Course Orientation and heard more about the logistics of the year, the program structure promises to be more than exciting. However, one issue stood out to me as a potential problem. We were told that as part of the Shevet track, the group would have the opportunity to visit a Jewish settlement across the Green Line, in the West Bank.

Should, ideologically, FZY promote these visits? **The debate of the Territories is turbulent in Israel; the typically secular Left opposes settlements, and the typically religious Right support them.** This has caused a growing rift between religious and secular, to the extent that it is often assumed that *kippot*-wearers and non-*kippot*-wearers are of particular political inclinations.

The issue of settlements within the Territories stretches back to their inception after the Six Day War. Amidst the euphoria of victory and the lack of Arab bodies to negotiate peace terms, the Israeli government permitted civilian settlement, on top of the unavoidable military occupation. From then on Israel's troubles began. The growth of Religious Zionism led many to believe that settlement in the Territories was a Biblical requirement, as laid down by the prescribed borders in the Torah. Religious zeal has blinded Israel's perception of the Palestinian problem, and the deepening encroachment by settlers on Palestinian land block any hope of a future Palestinian State and the ever-elusive peace.

Personal political views aside, should FZY organise visits to settlements in the West Bank? The Shevet track aims to provide its Year Coursers with an enriching experience of Jewish religious expressions. Certainly it would be interesting to hear from settlers themselves and experience their lives at first hand. You could even say that to reject their views would contradict our pluralism. **However, the very ideal which envelops West Bank settlements opposes FZY's values;**

Tzedakah (charity) – From the root *tzedeq*, *Tzedakah* is literally translated as righteousness. Do settlements convey *Tzedakah*? A military occupation of the West Bank is arguably necessary for Israel's safety, but what of settlements? Settlements no longer protect Israel's borders but rather infringe steadily onto Palestinian lands, without any benefit to Israel. They sink our moral standards lower by the day, and does barring any chance of peace resonate with an act of kindness, either for us or for the Palestinians?

Tarbut (culture) – Jewish and Israeli culture is something we are all proud of. From the literature of Amos Oz to chicken soup, Jewish and Israeli culture has often been promoted to counter anti-Israel sentiment, as we have seen in the work of the various J-Socs on University campuses. But culture alone can only achieve so much; it must be augmented by a moral innocence, something we have always retained up until 1967. Without being a power of unavoidable occupation we had an innocence which has always elevated our culture. Now the divisive settlement of land we have promised to another people only serves to weaken the innocence which has for so long flavored our culture.

Magen (defence of Jewish rights)– Settlements in the Territories do not defend Israel, neither against terrorism nor the wider world's opposition. Settlement expansion serves only to foster Palestinian hatred for Israel, and so in return Israel gain an ever-growing extremist enemy. Were Israel to dismantle West Bank settlements and retain a military occupation, Israel's security would not be jeopardised, and the job of Israel-advocates around the world would be far easier. In terms of *Magen*, Israel gain nothing from the ideals of the settlements, and would thus only stand to gain if they were dismantled.

Aliyah (emigration to Israel) – The main argument given by the settlers is religious; the Biblical borders of the Land of Israel must not be relinquished and it would be an *averah* (sin) to do otherwise. However, in his book *The Jewish State*, Herzl outlines that *sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation; the rest we shall manage for ourselves*. He specifies continually that the borders of the Jewish State are to be recognised by the international community. The Green Line is internationally recognised, and immigration east of the Line should, in Herzl's eyes, be undertaken only after the borders are fixed and agreed by all sides.

My initial question was whether FZY should organise trips across the Green Line to legally and morally-dubious settlements. By organising such trips FZY is essentially condoning their existence. One might argue that by simply visiting them, FZY make no statement of support or condemnation; we visit them because they are such an integral part of contemporary Israeli politics. However, any unnecessary presence in the West Bank sends a message to the Palestinians that Jewish settlements are at least being considered as acceptable.

I personally am no hard Leftist. I am a committed Zionist and as such hope for our State's best interests. I sadly have no hope for peace in the near future, with Hamas' radicalism growing continuously in support. However, West Bank settlements serve no positive purpose, and instead foster divide and dangerous religious zeal on our part. West Bank settlements should have no place in our *tnua* (movement).

Michael is on Year Course 09/10.