

Young Zionist

To Inspire and Be Inspired

Josh Marks

“It’s cool to be a Keeno!” It’s cool to be a Keeno!” Six amazing words which capture the incredible experience that was *Machane* (summer camp) 2009. ***Machane* this year was FZY at its very best – one strong community working together to have fun and learn from each other.** Even the most cursory glance at Facebook demonstrates how we as *madrachim* (leaders), *chanichim* (participants) and senior *tsvatim* (staff) should be incredibly proud; and the record feedback scores from *chanichim* are the icing on our summer pudding!

After the experience of last year, we did much soul-searching as a movement to ensure that we returned *machane* to its former glory, and a massive *Kol Hakavod* must go to Jack, Slav, Rafi, Mo, Guv and Einav for their creativity, commitment and hard work over the past year. The fruits of their efforts were seen with the success of this summer. Innovations such as family time, drastic improvements to the *tochnit* (schedule), the introduction of a *Maccabiah* fun day – these are just a few of the small changes which produced a massive FZY summer high.

However, changes alone were not the source of our success. As a *madrach* on both Ofek ’08 and Keshet ’09, I strongly feel that the *madrachim* on both camp experiences were equally talented. Changes occurred to the framework in which we were operating, but the same talent, commitment and passion which shone through the rainier days of Ofek ’08 dominated the sunny two weeks of Keshet ’09. Now, why do I make this point?

The experience of *Machane* ’08 led to a crisis of faith in our own abilities. Slightly demoralised and confused, we doubted the strength of our *madrachim*, believing that the weaknesses of last year stemmed from a failure to connect with our *chanichim*. Out of this haze was born the Five Year Plan, a motion rushed through on the final evening of Veida backed by a whole host of big FZY names proposing that we imitate many of the other youth movements and start taking *madrachim* pre-Year Course, who would be better able to connect to our *chanichim*.

With the benefit of the rosy hindsight of *Machane* ’09, I think that we should seriously reconsider whether this Five Year Plan was a sensible, practical or desirable idea. The Five Year Plan was a panicked reaction to the unique circumstances of *machane* last year, and the fact that the movement has not heard anything more about this vision suggests that there is still plenty of scope to reverse this move.

Now, I suppose the question to be asked is why I would oppose a measure designed to empower young people. Is this not exactly what we as FZY are all about? Let me be very clear, I am a strong advocate of empowerment. The *chanichim* we took on *machane* this summer were both inspired by us and inspiring to us. Watching our *chanichim* lead each other on Freaky Friday – a day dedicated to *peulot* written and lead by *chanichim* – was an amazing experience, allowing us to witness the future potential of our younger members. This day convinced me that FZY will be kept in safe hands in the future. Many of our *chanichim* not only enjoyed the experience but excelled at it, and it was a gratifying

experience to see them blossom in leadership roles.

However, in the feedback after the sessions, they also explained how difficult they felt it was to be a leader. Indeed, the fundamentals of *hadracha* (leadership) are so second nature to most of us that we forget just how difficult it is to be a good leader. It takes hours of training, experience and constructive criticism to truly learn how to lead. As *madrichim*, we dedicate hours on Year Course to learning the tricks of the *hadracha* trade, and my first week on Ofek '08 was not dissimilar to my first week after learning to drive – which is a particularly apt metaphor if anyone has had the dubious pleasure of being in a car with me.

By introducing *madrichim* before Year Course, we are undermining the programme. The hours spent learning theoretical *hadracha*, practising in peer-led sessions, learning the basics of Judaism and Zionism and teaching English in the schools of Tel Aviv's Russian suburbs form a comprehensive package designed to achieve the very best out of our *madrichim*. Indeed, we are distinguished from the other youth movements as the only movement that does not take *madrichim* pre-Year Course. This makes a big statement about our programme, but also about our belief that people with life experience, maturity and knowledge make better leaders than those who are yet to enjoy these experiences.

By introducing *madrichim* before Year Course, we are undermining our own *madrichim*. The numbers speak for themselves. This year we had to reject both first and second year *madrichim*, and still had over a hundred different *bogrim* (Year Course graduates) as *madrichim*. This number is unlikely to decrease, and the potential introduction of pre-Year Coursers would place FZY in the awkward position of having to reject graduates of our own *hadracha* programme in favour of those yet to gain the experience.

By introducing *madrichim* before Year Course, we are not really solving our Kedma issues. Taking a few token *chanichim* on *machanot* does not qualify as a legitimate option for the five hundred *chanichim* we take on Tour. The failure of our current *Kedma* (sixth form) provision raises new challenges, but an approach which undermines our existing programming, *madrichim* and *chanichim* is not a path FZY should pursue.

The success of *Machane* '09 was in no small part due to the *madrichim* – the vast majority *bogrim* from Year Course. The Five Year Plan may appear to have been the silver bullet to solve the issues of *Machane* '08 and *Kedma* at the same time, but this appearance is extremely deceptive. In seeking this poor panacea to all of our problems, we lost sight of what makes FZY a truly great youth movement. **FZY should continue to invest in *madrichim* with life experience, who have dedicated a year to exploring FZY, its ideology and Israel on Year Course.** This will, in turn, give *chanichim* the best training to inspire and be inspired as fully-developed FZY keenos!

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