

# Young Zionist

## Should FZY Actively Promote Machon?

*Ilana Kosky and graduates of Machon – Ed Bergen, Josh Marks*

Machon, or *Madrachei Chutz La’Aretz* (Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad), for those who are not familiar with the programme, has been running for sixty years and consists of four months worth of compulsory classes in Jewish History, *Hadracha* (Leadership Skills), *Ulpan* (Hebrew learning), Judaism and Zionism, with the option to study each of these in more depth. The teaching methods used centre around the concept of leadership, training its students how to harness the information gained and pass it on to future generations. Elective courses are also on offer, the most popular last year being Israel Advocacy and *Torah L’Am* (Torah Study). Special features of the programme are the regular *tiyulim* (trips) and opportunities for peer leadership, with optional sessions of (often controversial) speakers and Israeli bands. The uniqueness of combining several movements on one programme is a huge selling point, encouraging ideological debate at its most stimulating level.

An immensely successful programme, it has always been very popular amongst its FZY representatives. To quote a graduate of the programme, “*The Machon is a distinctly ‘youth movement’ programme: [it] is concerned with ideology and what it means to be in a youth movement; to achieve such an aim, the programme is built around hadracha [...] The Machon does not only encourage learning, but learning how to teach whilst being taught how to learn. On a personal level, being with people passionate about Progressive Judaism, challenged me to consider my own more Orthodox beliefs, as what I was defending and saying did not correlate with what I was doing. This mismatch motivated me to re-evaluate my beliefs and practices, forcing me to consider many personal aspects of my own Jewish identity. The Machon challenged us to discover what it means to be a Jew, a Zionist and a leader, providing new and thought-provoking ideas in an atmosphere of tolerance and intellectual exploration.*”

To quote another, “*Many of my madrichim (leaders), the ones that I remember, were those that attended the Machon. I believe the reason for this is because they were the confident ones, the ones who could think on their feet and use the things that they were taught. It’s no coincidence that the Mazkirim of FZY have mostly been graduates of Machon*”.

As one who did not participate in the programme, I cannot comment from personal experience, but it seems to me that one of the most valued aspects of Machon teaching is the atmosphere within which topics are taught. The coming together of several different youth movements creates a melting pot of opinions and beliefs that makes it impossible not to question and debate views at their most base levels. Add this to the immense variety of teaching methods used, where participants are not only taught to know the facts of the subjects with which they are engaging, but to use them as well, in such a way that method and meaning share equal weight.

**In recent years, Machon has suffered a decline, and has not been advertised by FZY in the same way that it used to be, and in the same way that other, FZY-run options are.** It is given very little attention at Year Course Orientation, a seminar traditionally used to inform pre-Year Course *chanichim* (participants) of their options and to allow them to build their programme of choice for the year. It is of

course true that less *madrachim* returning from the Machon will result in less *madrachim* being able to properly advocate for the Machon, and this may have led to the resulting lack of attention given to it, but it has been noticed by some *madrachim* that those who have not partaken in the programme have, on occasion, given descriptions that are misleading to the potential candidates, and that even senior *tzevet* (staff) members who themselves experienced the Machon have been less than forthcoming in their promotion of the programme.

There are several possible reasons as to why this state of affairs has come into being, including that FZY is keen to increase numbers on its own programmes, several of which are still in their first years of inauguration, and that FZY is only allocated a maximum of ten places on the Machon, meaning that this is not a viable option for the large total numbers of FZY *chanichim*. There are also financial motivations, in that Young Judaea, on whom we rely heavily to run the Year Course programme, are not keen for too many participants to leave Year Course to be at Machon for a period as long as four months.

The original question being asked in this article is whether FZY should actively promote the Machon programme. The reasons given above would indicate no. However, in my opinion, these reasons are not sufficient to justify the current lack of advertising, and often outright dissuasion that FZY currently gives to potential Machon participants. Whilst Machon is clearly not for everyone, it will be for some, and in face of each of the reasons proposed above as to why Machon should not be advertised, FZY ought to practise what it preaches and put its ideology first. Having always stated that FZY prides itself on being able to cater for each individual with the right programme, FZY should be encouraging *madrachim* on Year Course Orientation, when asked about tracks that they have not personally taken, to point *chanichim* in the direction of someone who knows more, and make sure that they get enough information to make an informed decision. I would even go as far as to suggest that FZY make Machon information sessions compulsory on Year Course Orientation, just as FZY-run programmes are, as opposed to continuing to offer an optional, and thus very poorly attended session, which not only results in *chanichim* not choosing Machon, but also in them not even being adequately informed to be able to consider it.

In recent years, youth movements have been gradually pulling out of the Machon programme. If FZY follow suite, the end of this programme will almost certainly be nigh. If we consider those testaments given above as to the value of offering the Machon programme to Year Course participants, I would urge FZY to seriously reconsider its standpoint. **Ideology should always come before practicality, and the Machon represents a unique learning opportunity, the lack of which would be a huge loss to those future participants who will not even be given the chance to consider experiencing it.**