

## Young Zionist

### **Tarbut: The Dark Side of our Most Practiced Aim**

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FZY HAS FOUR equal aims, but in the words of George Orwell, "some are more equal than others". Since joining the movement I have become increasingly aware of the marginalisation of Tarbut. That is not to say that as a movement, our fulfilment of aspects of Israeli and Jewish culture is lacking. On the contrary the tnuva engages in activities that fall under the heading of Tarbut as much, if not more than any of the other aims. In the space of a weekend residential, the amount of culture we see, particularly in Onegim, our Friday night meal and Rikkud, will generally far outweigh active tzedakah or Magen content. On any given day you can bet FZYnikim are listening to Israeli music, eating kosher or Israeli food and throwing in the occasional Hebrew or Yiddish word into their speech. So what is the problem?

Doing things that fall under the heading of Tarbut is very easy. In order to fulfil this aim at its current status, an FZYnik would not need to change their life. There is nothing to strive for in the current fulfilment of Tarbut and therefore nothing to aim for. Though FZY has not achieved its aim fully of celebrating Jewish and Israeli culture to the maximum, we have reached a plateau where there is no change in the level of 'observance'. As a result Tarbut is pushed to one side in favour of projects focusing on Tzedakah, Magen or Aliyah. These projects tend to produce more tangible results; it is easy and rewarding to total up the value of a tzedakah project, so why bother pursuing improved culture when the difference is unseen?

Furthermore, the aspects of Israeli culture that are most prominent in FZY peulot, particularly in the chavurot, are the 'light-hearted' areas such as schwarma (a middle-eastern food enjoyed in Kebab shops across the UK) or Rikud. It is not that we should stop celebrating these aspects of culture and using them to our advantage for informal peulot. However, we need to be aware of the other side of Israeli culture that we neglect when we only attribute Tarbut to food, dancing and language. There are meaty issues for discussion, such as Jewish identity, the wealth of history surrounding the development of Jewish culture, and, in Israel, issues like multiculturalism, the growing wealth gap and the affect of the army on society. We should not shy away from running challenging and intellectually stimulating peulot on these issues.

In-depth peulot are one solution, but there are many more. Ambitious Tarbut projects need to be undertaken such as the forthcoming standardisation of Rikud throughout the movement (with teaching video and cds!!) and the book group being undertaken by two active bogrot. Also, when we are going through our routine fulfilment of Tarbut at FZY events, we should not only be aware of this ourselves but also endeavour to inspire chanichim by highlighting the cultural roots and content of what we are doing. However, the biggest change required is a mental one. For Tarbut to improve its status in the tnuva we must all increase our valuation of it and enthusiasm towards its fulfilment. The reason we should strive to do this is simple. Tarbut is a constant reminder of our heritage and of Israel; it is not only fun but also engaging and interesting and ensures active Jewish and Zionist continuity.

If an aim becomes marginalised or loses its significance, the solution is not to ignore it. The solution is to rethink your attitude towards it and look at new ways to extract benefit from its fulfilment.