



Book Review/ Kitap Tanıtımı

A Philosophy of Israel Education: A Relational Approach

Barry Chazan, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Reviewed by Muhammad Yaseen Naseem*

Barry Chazan is a Professor Emeritus at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He gives lectures at Spertus Institute of Jewish Learning and Leadership. He wrote a very brief book on Israel Education that provides very specific information about its aim, principles, content, and pedagogy. This book is based on only three papers, titled, *A Relational Philosophy of Israel Education; Making Israel Education Happen; A Culture of Israel Education*; and an *Epilogue*. The subject of Israel Education promotes national cohesion through teaching Israeli national narrative to its citizens and Jewish visitors there. Author describes the target subject by a Relational Approach with an objective for building a response to the challenge of Jewish life in 21st century, which must remain loyal to its past, conversant to its present and progressive to its future¹. The whole content of the book is written with basic ideas of Zionist Israeli nationalist approach, which calls Theodore Herzl as its hero.

Author emphasizes that relational philosophy of Israel Education is based on two Educational approaches, such as; Humanist and Culturalist.

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1 Barry Chazan, *A Philosophy of Israel Education: A Relational Approach*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1.

Humanist approach highlights the significance of the “person” as the prime focus of Israel Education. Culturalist approach highlights the “culture” as a driving force for shaping that individual in a certain social framework. Therefore, Israel Education claims as nourishing a “culture”, which gives right importance to the “person”². Relational Education is a term that highlights a point(s) of reference(s) or core values of a tradition, which shapes a life. In Israel Education, it is consisted on Hellenistic and Hebraic times. This model of Education is based on four approaches, such as; Person & Present-oriented approach, Dialogic approach, Essentialist approach and Constructivist approach while considering the Land of Israel as a significant value for Jews around the world. Proponents of this vision believe upon educating the (Jewish) students for interaction with everything that is associated with the Land of Israel. Besides of these concepts, the author specially designed some important terminologies to define this interaction, such as; Cognitive Emotions, Ethnic Education, Homeland, Identity, Israel, Teaching Israel, Jewish Education, Narratives and Relational Education³. All these terminologies revolve around the same concept i.e. the Land of Israel.

Further, the author describes eight principles of Relational Approach of Israel Education such as; first: Israel Education is person/student-centric education more than Israel-centric; second: its content (about history, religious values and story of contemporary state) connects individual with Israel; third: it aims to explore “core ideas” and meanings which connects a person with Israel; fourth: it does an effort for creating an Israeli culture in the learning process beyond classroom learning; fifth: Jewish heritage, experiences and narratives are part of Israel Education. It envisioned to achieve four tasks of Israel Education such as; to teach students for commitment to the Land of Israel, to learn that different meanings and understandings in Israel are part of Jewish life since centuries, to realize that diverse narratives in Israel are part of Jewish experience, and to help students to create their own narrative and construct about the state of Israel; sixth: person-centred Israel Education interlinks the “vision, proximate aim, content and pedagogy” with Talmud Torah; seventh: the model pedagogue is an integral part of Israel Education, who must be passionate,

2 Chazan, A Philosophy of Israel Education, 35.

3 Chazan, A Philosophy of Israel Education, 3-7.

committed, and conversant of all of the narratives of Israel. She/he must have capability to create an environment for relational learning with zeal; eighth: Israeli teacher is a force, who makes Israel Education real from abstracts⁴.

Author mentions that there are diverse texts, definitions and explanations of narratives about the value of the Land of Israel for Jews in the past and present. The Conventional Narrative is based on Biblical reference to the Land of Israel, when Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) migrated there. Then, this piece of land was blessed to them. The Spiritual Narrative is based on a post-Biblical rabbinic transformed idea of Israel from “Jerusalem-cultic-centered religion” and historical birthplace of Jews. The Emancipatory Narrative is based on conflict between Jews and Modernity, which affected their social facts and preferences in the modern age, particularly their ideas for governing and administering the State of Israel. Consequently, these social transformations led reforms, conversions, assimilations, Bundism, Ultra-Orthodoxy, Jewish Culturalism, socialism, and Zionism. The Zionist Narrative is based on Theodore Herzl’s idea of Jewish nationalism for establishing a state at the Land of Israel as the only solution to the Jewish problems in all over the world. The Jewish State Narrative is based on political, religious and spiritual stance of Jews for establishing their sovereign state, where its inhabitants may live with peace and freedom. The Peoplehood Narrative is based on historical and contemporary civilizational elements of Jews in the world. Proponents of this concept are convinced that their civilization can only flourish at Palestinian territory⁵.

Surprisingly, author is confident while writing that there is no definite explanation around these core narratives about the Land of Israel, but these are efforts of academicians, content specialists and expert educationists. Despite of lack of consensus, all of the above-mentioned narratives are alive in the State of Israel and in Jewish communities around the world. These ideas frequently interact on daily basis along with inter-personal and intra-personal Jewish interaction.

The reader of this book may feel a significant hesitation from the content of the book and subject of Israel Education, which has confidently excluded

4 Chazan, A Philosophy of Israel Education, 7-11.

5 Chazan, A Philosophy of Israel Education, 19-22.

the ideas, stances and will of non-Zionist Jews, Muslims, Christians and other significant ethnicities living in Israel such as; Behai and Qadiyanies (mostly at Haifa). Reviewer call it one of the limitations of the book, which might acquaint its readers about the views of those communities, which interact with Israel Education with or without having that level of association as Zionist Jews have at the Land of Israel.

Despite of giving a considerable space to other Jewish discourse and narratives, the content of the book is mostly conversant of Zionists perspective about Jewish Education. Therefore, this very precise book frequently acquaints its readers that the Land of Israel was awarded only to Jews by their God forever. It might be a limitation of this book that it does not talk about those civilizational credentials and claims of custodians of other civilizations than Jews, who challenge this idea. Hence, a reader of this book continuously remains in search of answers of some very basic questions, such as; Why did God award the Land of Israel only to Jews, when he did not stop sending more prophets for completing his religion on earth? How can be the claim of Jews for inheritance of Holy Land (Land of Israel) remain valid for all times? Even they establish a secular rule on Holy Land? Therefore, reviewer is uncertain to be convinced from author's limited explanation about associating the Land of Israel only to the Jews around the world. Despite of deficiencies in its content, the book has worth to be recommended to the students of Educational theories, interfaith dialogue, comparative religion studies and Middle East Studies.