



A Peoplehood Derech: Establishing an Irbutz

Rose Clubok and Ian Rosenrich

Rose Clubok: When I was nine, I came home from summer camp and asked my parents if they were socialists. When they asked me to empty the dishwasher, it reminded me of *avodah*, labor at camp, so I assumed my parents were kibbutzniks, like we were at my camp. My parents were confused. They continued to be confused when I was fifteen and cried that the *kibbutz* movement was dead, and when I was twenty and started talking about “starting a commune” with Ian.

RC & Ian Rosenrich: The fact that as adults we still desire to actualize values learned at Habonim Dror Camp Tavor, a Labor Zionist summer camp in Three Rivers, Michigan, speaks to the longevity of our summer camp moral education. Although we were sent to camp from entirely different states, we both felt we were being taught something that our formal education clearly lacked. Camp felt like a return to some sort of primal values system we had always known was true, of kindness, and relationship building, of sharing resources, of learning in earnest. These things seemed obvious in their goodness, because they are a community system extrapolated from day one preschool values like “Is it true?”, “Is it necessary?” or “Is it kind?” combined with the ideals of American equality and freedom we had learned starting in elementary school history.

At camp we were taught the particular kind of socialism of *kibbutzim* through a structure called *kvutzah*, group. This idea of *kvutzah* was taught originally so that the campers would be prepared to join *kibbutzim* with their *kvutzah* when they grew up. However, people had largely stopped making aliyah from Camp Tavor decades ago, which created a problem. What happens when a group of people are trained for a world that no longer exists? The answer is that they create their own.

Many graduates of Habonim Dror of North America desired and still desire to actualize the Jewish socialism taught at its summer camps. Some have tried the movement’s *garin aliya*, moving to Israel with their *kvutzah*. But with the *kibbutzim* being privatized, downfall of the kibbutz movement, rising costs of living of Israel, and Israel’s political turn to the right, the movement’s historical life path has failed to meet the needs of most of our movement members. For those who stay in North America, many are building

intentional communities amongst friends and families to meet the needs of our time. Our question is whether we can build a more expansive structure like the kibbutz movement of old. Could we pool our resources democratically to the point where we could buy property, live together in *kvutzah*, and support members of all stages of life?

In addition to a general desire to do things differently in the midst of a rapidly changing world, we feel that the mandate to build this kind of community arises from the moral, cultural, and religious underpinnings of our people and beliefs. We are invested in working toward a better world based on values defined and redefined from the Torah and centuries of Jewish tradition. We see organizing this drive to build intentional community as *tikkun olam*, our effort to repair the world. Martin Buber saw the envisioning of this perfect world as something that would allow us to dream in a way where we can take the many millions of steps towards “perfection—in the light of the Absolute... as something towards which an active path leads from the present.” The “active path,” or the *Derech*, is our way as the Jewish people of working towards the age-old dream of Judaism: a partnership between God and humanity which forms a more perfect world.

RC: Practically speaking, me and my *kvutzah* are building an *Irbutz*, a kibbutz in a city. This will be a flexible model of living that guarantees needs and resources being shared amongst a community. This will begin in the fall, when I, along with a group of recent college graduates will move to join Ian, along with an already existing group of young Jewish adults in the same neighborhood. We will move into multiple apartments which will function like *kvutzah* units and establish our *Irbutz*.

RC & IR: As we age and grow, some of these *kvutzah* units may look more like nuclear family units, while some may be structured like coops, or even just individuals who like their space but want to be a part of a greater community. Through this experience of collective living, we will manifest our highest ideals of Jewish peoplehood.

RC: All the *kvutzot* will be connected to each other by contributing an amount of weekly *avodah*, labor and monthly dues to the community. An elected governing body and various committees, made up of members of the *kvutzot*, will organize this money and *avodah* to provide social services to the entire community of *Derech*. For example, we might use the money to purchase a Sam’s Club membership or pay for gas for the people whose *avodah* is to deliver groceries to others. Another person’s *avodah* could be cooking and hosting Shabbat dinner or delivering soup to sick community members. One day, as our community grows, we hope to provide more extensive care, to raise each others’ children and care for each others’ parents. The goals of these services are to make the cost of living cheaper, provide opportunities for social interaction, build

support systems for community members, and organize together to benefit our wider community. The vision of our *Irbutz* builds on the experiences I had at Camp Tavor. I hope this becomes a model for how others might similarly experiment with, connect to, and manifest the ideas and ideals of Jewish peoplehood and repairing the world.

IR: We know we aren't the only people today thinking this way. I keep meeting people who are involved in starting a commune, compound, co-op, or homestead. The more the merrier. This intentional community will be built on our values, the *Derech*. The essential functional premise of the *Derech* is this: If one person can guarantee safety, freedom, joy for another, they can help with the material baseline needed for other people, and even communities, to do the same.

RC& IR: We're certain a lot of people reading this have a community, but some have not found one that truly matches their values. Others like us fell in love with the intentional community built around core values that can be uniquely found at camp. However, most have not found a manifestation of this beyond Jewish summer camp.

With a yearning for the Jewish people, we encourage you to get involved, be it with us in Chicago, or in other ways. Ask yourself: what structures would make living in my community easier, more affordable, and more fun? Think about the community you fell in love with at camp, find other people who share that passion, and build or thicken your community. And if that is too tall of an order, maybe just ask your children to pitch in and empty the dishwasher.

Ian Rosenrich was Education Director of Camp Tavor in 2023 and now lives and teaches in Chicago.

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