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What teenage wasteland?

They haven't left school yet, but today's teens already have a pretty good idea of what they want to do with their lives and how they plan to make it big. **By Elihay Vidal**



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What teenage wasteland?

It may seem like today's youth would rather spend hours on Facebook than do anything useful, but a short survey of some teens already making a big impact on the world shows that the kids may yet be alright

By Elihay Vidal Photos by Ilya Melnikov



You can bad-mouth them until the cows come home and say that they just don't make kids like they used to. You can blame television and the Internet for destroying every last bit of good in them, starting with teens' social skills and ending with their cultural world.

You can look down at them in wonder and condescension from the heights of age and complain that if this is what our future looks like, then we're in trouble.

But if we take a moment to examine a few of the trees that make up the forest, a completely different picture of the youth in our midst emerges – one a great deal more positive, vital, and optimistic.

Assuming that the handful of teenagers we spoke with in recent weeks constitutes any indication of the hundreds of thousands of teens that fill Israel, it looks like we will be in great shape in 2020. We did not presume to select a representative sample from all geographic regions, demographic strata, and the rest of the data the Central Bureau of Statistics calls for.

We simply looked for teenagers that are already doing something useful with themselves, which attests to their motivation; something that will resonate in Israel in 10 years' time.

During our search, we expected to encounter introverted teens, enslaved by the Internet to create profile pictures and Facebook status updates; kids who speak wretched Hebrew, alienated from Israeli society and culture, and whose entire world is limited to reality TV. But our preconceptions concerning teenagers turned out to be utterly wrong.

We had no trouble finding a group of teenagers; high-school students who are already seizing their destiny and their future with both hands, and doing something meaningful. This group of kids includes a young and talented entrepreneur, a budding television star and a social activist who

devotes most of her time to the community.

We found young people who do indeed spend hours in front of the computer, but know how to make the most of its positive aspects – as a work tool, a source for mining information, and a means for personal growth.

We found boys and girls who are involved in Israeli society to the point where they are capable of criticizing it harshly, on the one hand, but will not forgo their right to defend it militarily. We found teenagers who speak fluent Hebrew and phrase their opinions with a clarity that could put adults to shame.

But no less importantly, these teens are professionals at utilizing all the tools they have been given to wend their way through the complex and convoluted world we live in.

Money, for example, serves as a tool at this stage in their lives, and not as an end in itself. They do not hide behind clichés or bury their heads in the sands of ideology – they acknowledge the importance of money and its centrality to their lives, and treat it as yet another means on the path to attaining their personal goals.

They tend to use aggressive words like “power” and “influence” to describe themselves, but also want to bring those around them happiness and pleasure while they are at it.

Let us hope that this group – and the thousands of other teens they represent – will be the rule, and not exception, a decade from now. Not all of them are likely to get where they are hoping to in 10 years. A few will get a lot farther than they are planning; others will channel their skills into new and surprising directions.

Some will shine in the business arena, and others will impact society without receiving media publicity.

One thing is certain: If Israel's society and economy in 2020 look anything like this group today, we've got a pretty good future ahead of us.

'I've developed a taste for risk'

Eviatar Shoshani Gvion serves today as the CEO of the Moral Company, founded as part of a young entrepreneurs project at the WIZO Hadassim School. Moral won first place in competition for its product, Gumilon, for which an international patent has been registered.

Gumilon is a strip of reusable elastic rubber, designed for hanging up lots of balloons and other decorations simply and quickly. The initial market for Gumilon is mainly parents who hold children's birthday parties at home, and Moral hopes to introduce it to institutional clients as well, such as schools, nurseries and commercial party and event planners.

How did you enter this field?

"The project operates all over Israel, in the form of after-school clubs. What attracted me the most was the fact that the group that won nationally last year reached fourth place in the international competition with their invention. The process was fascinating from the start, even before I was chosen to lead the company. During the first stage I was surprised to see how many ideas you have to think of before you can point to the one you want to run with.

"At our first meetings the team came up with a pool of 300 ideas which we pared down to 50 for development. In accordance with the advice we received from adult entrepreneurs, we understood that people are looking for something simple, and that's why we went with Gumilon. Then the business leader presented the group with the various functions in the company: marketing, advertising, logistics, finances, human resources, public relations and development. I was chosen as company director and part of the job is to make sure everything keeps moving forward.

"Now we're in a difficult place, since the national competition is over and we aren't getting business advice anymore. The other groups ended their projects, but since we won, we have to continue to the international level, to represent Israel in Portugal in March."

What do you want to be when you grow up?

"Before the project I thought I would be a lawyer like my dad but now I'm sure I'll look for something in business or development, perhaps sales, or marketing or advertising."

What do you like about business?

"I've developed a taste for risk and the excitement of organizing everything and feeling that the business is in your hands. It was the first time I did anything that was all mine, without grown-ups involved. We had no limitations. And so I'm pretty sure I'll develop in this direction."

Who has influenced you the most?

"The CEO of the company that won the previous competition, Dikla Cohen. That group invented Prize Soap, which resembled the Kinder chocolate egg with a surprise inside, meant to encourage children to wash their hands. It was the first time that Hadassim won the national competition, and they reached fourth place internationally. And our project leader, Avinoam Epstein. He was tough but a fireball. He cut us down to size, and the results are evident in our victory."

How important to you is being socially acceptable?

"We're very tight with each other in our grade and I'm accepted; I'm very active in scouts. Once, when I wasn't the king of our grade in junior high, it was more important for me to be accepted, and when I started climbing the social ladder it was important to me. Now it interests me less because we're in groups and everyone has his own friends."

What would make you consider yourself a success in the future?

"It doesn't matter what happens with the project, [but] I'm hoping to succeed. Some people try hard to get everything; I have a tendency to leave difficult things in the middle. But this project changed me and from now on I'm not giving up. I'm convinced I'll see the fruits of this in the future, and real success, from my point of view, is learning about myself and the world."



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Eviatar Shoshani Gvion

Age: 16

Status: 11th grader, WIZO Hadassim, Even Yehuda

Occupation: Young entrepreneur and CEO of the Moral Company

Quote: "The project leader was tough but a fireball"