

Israel in Adult Education

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Part 1

As we approach the twenty-first century, our notion of Jewish education is changing dramatically. [!] We are beginning to realize that such learning can no longer be for kids only; rather, it is a process encompassing all Jews at all stages of their lives. The campus of Jewish education is not limited to elementary and secondary schools; it now includes all places where Jews live and learn.

This revolution in the nature of Jewish education is a result of several dynamics. First, adults are living longer and, as the great theoreticians of identity development Erik and Joan Erikson have so poignantly told us, people have the potential for very creative and productive lives well into old age. Second, leisure now occupies a greater place in the lives of adults than ever before. There is much more time for recreation and for new preoccupations. Third, learning has become more user friendly and accessible than in previous times. The growth of mega bookstores, e-mail, web sites, cable TV, and travel make learning attractive and available for all interested adults. These new realities of adulthood have great significance and promise for Jewish life. They suggest that the Jewish world has the possibility of significantly widening an entire new "campus" of activity - the sphere of adult learning.

New developments in the Jewish world also point to exciting new possibilities for adult Jewish learning. Many graduates of the new day schools, intensive summer camps, and supplementary schools are now adults with a taste for Jewish learning who want to continue to learn. Second are the adult Jews who reflect the "Rabbi Akiva" syndrome: they did not have adequate Jewish education during their youth and now seek to address their Jewish "illiteracy." These two dynamics create an important potential population for exciting Jewish learning and an exciting and important new frontier of Jewish life.

As for the contents of adult Jewish learning, contemporary Israel is clearly a potential subject of central interest. Israel surfaces daily - on radio, television, and in the press. People travel to Israel. Jews have relatives and friends in Israel. Thus, the subject of Israel is one of the most immediate and "in one's face" aspects of Jewish life. As such, it is potentially a subject of central importance for those involved in adult Jewish learning.

However challenges still remain. Many North American Jewish adults today lack a strong relationship with Israel, and many have no connection at all. The relationship between American Jews and Israel has been impacted by the growing differences between the two communities. In the comfort and security of North America, distant in time and place from the threat of antisemitism, the strong need for Israel as a refuge from persecution has lost its urgency; political Zionism has achieved its ends.

Recent years have been marked by changes in the world balance of power and the peace process. American Jews can no longer relate to Israel as a nation in crisis. Israel is less and less the poor relative dependent upon our contributions. We are now challenged to view Israel in new ways. During this time of transition, it especially behooves Diaspora Jews to become as well-informed as possible about Israel and the issues that define our relationship. Effective, up-to-date learning opportunities about Israel for adults can help us to harvest our potential. They can aid Jewish adults in discovering new ways of understanding Israel, in exploring the place of Israel in their Jewish identity, and ultimately in strengthening the bonds between our two communities of Jews.

Part 2

Although Israel is rarely taught on an adult level in a substantial, systematic way, the opportunities for adults to study Israel have grown in recent years due primarily to an increased number of sponsors of adult learning. These institutions offer primarily formal classroom experiences, lectures, and organized travel to Israel. It should be kept in mind, however, that knowledge of Israel is also attained through community celebrations and commemorations, individual study projects, and self-initiated travel. Newspapers, popular literature, and the media provide other venues for learning that impact an individual's relationship to Israel.

The last decade has seen the emergence of several national Jewish organizations devoted exclusively to the education of adults. The Wexner Heritage Program, The Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL), and the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School introduce participants to Israel both directly through travel and indirectly through lecture series and classroom study. The latter integrates the study of Israel into its two year program and culminates with a graduates' study seminar in Israel. All of these programs seek ways to show their participants that Israel is not only part of the international Jewish community's identity today, but also a piece of the identity of each individual Jew.

A second category of purveyors of adult learning are those national organizations that have expanded their educational services for adults. The Jewish Community Center Association has placed new emphasis on adult education, both within the Centers and through the Israel Seminar Project which is central to the professional and leadership development of Center executives, staff and lay leadership. Membership organizations such as Hadassah and Na'amat Women have deep ties to Israel reflected not only in their fundraising efforts, but also by their growing commitment to Jewish learning. The same is true of United Jewish Appeal and Federations which sponsor numerous missions to Israel as a part of their fundraising efforts. Learning about Israel also takes place in organizations such as B'nai Brith, American Jewish Congress, and American Jewish Committee. The Elderhostel movement encompasses many Jewish organizations sponsoring Jewish content classes, some of which include the study of Israel. In addition they sponsor travel in Israel for the over-fifty-five crowd.

On a local level, Jewish community colleges and universities, Judaic studies departments of colleges and universities, and the seminaries of the religious movements, offer classes and lectures on subjects related to Israel as part of degree programs or continuing education. Hillel Houses also provide Israel study sessions and informal programming for the student population. Jewish museums and libraries feature exhibits that effectively teach about Israel of yesterday and today. In addition to these long-standing local Jewish institutions, new community organizations dedicated to serving the adult Jewish learner have emerged. Joining the Bay Area's Lehrhaus Judaica (California), one of the oldest of these institutions, are others such as the Dawn Schuman Institute in Chicago and the Community Kolel in Toronto.

Bureaus of Jewish Education across the country offer resources and classes on teaching Israel that frequently focus on a teacher's knowledge of and relationship to Israel. Each year, hundreds of teachers

travel to Israel with their colleagues on programs specifically designed for them. The numbers reach the thousands when the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education holds its conference in Israel. Inspiring and guiding those who teach about Israel can have far-reaching effects; it can impact the children in Jewish classrooms and, if planned systematically, can influence the relationship of the next generation of Jews to the State of Israel.

With all of these possible vehicles, the synagogue remains the institution that does the most educating about Israel and consistently takes large numbers of adult American Jews on study tours each year. Supported and encouraged by the denominational Zionist groups - Association of Reform Zionists in America, Mercaz, and Mizrahi - synagogues offer classes and lectures through their adult education programs, Sisterhood, Men's Clubs, and other congregational groups. Rabbis organize tours of Israel for their congregants, the best of them incorporating study before, during, and after the travel experience.

When cataloguing the opportunities for adults today, we must include computer learning on CD ROM and the Internet. The World Zionist Organization's "Jewish University in Cyberspace" (JUICE), for example, makes Israel and Jewish studies courses for adults available to thousands of participants the world over. Jewish studies on the Internet is also available through Jewish Theological Seminary, Boston Hebrew College, Bar Ilan University, and others. Modern technology has placed great stores of knowledge literally at the fingertips of anyone who can operate a computer. Its potential has yet to be realized.

Israel education received an unusual amount of attention during the 1995-96 celebration of Jerusalem 3000, with an increase in classes on the subject of Jerusalem for all populations, and a plethora of new educational materials produced by many organizations including the Association of Reform Zionists of America, Hadassah, and the Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education.

The American Jewish community has shown itself to be responsive to the encouragement to teach Israel - particularly when resources and resource people are made available - however precise numbers of participants have yet to be gathered for most programs.

Opportunities to learn about Israel are abundant. When we juxtapose these opportunities with what we know to be standards for good adult learning, the shortcomings of the field become clear. We would point to the following:

- * Virtually each local organizations offers the same things as everyone else; there is no product differentiation.
- * Most efforts to motivate adults to participate fail to take into account that today's potential learners are no longer drawn by the old avenues that connected them to Israel; new ways of connection have yet to be developed.
- * Most programming is "entry level" without attention to development of learning levels.
- * Evidence of thoughtful planning with goals in mind is lacking; indeed the process of identifying suitable goals and objectives for adult learning about Israel today has hardly begun.

* Materials and resources are lacking.

Money is another critical factor that influences what is available. With the exception of subsidies for teachers, almost no community funding is available to subsidize adult educational travel to Israel. Although communities and private foundations help parents send their children to Israel, they do not seem to realize that by helping deserving, needy adults (according to criteria established by each community) to study in Israel they would impact the nature of our Jewish community and our Jewish homes.

Part 3

When we speak of involving North American Jewish adults in learning about Israel, what are our starting points today? Research indicates that the potential students are adults who already exhibit a concern for and connection to Israel by affiliating with a Jewish community organization; lacking some connection, they simply do not enroll. The relationship may not be a completely positive one, but we can safely say that our constituencies are aware of Israel as part of their Jewish identity and its unique role in the life of the Jewish people. Among those who already have a relationship with Israel, our task is to deepen and shape it, and thereby increase the numbers of those whose lives are enriched by the knowledge and experience of Israel. What are our opportunities for nurturing relationships? In what dimensions of Jewish life can Israel play a more significant role?

Before attempting to "educate" adults about Israel, we must be cognizant of the complex nature of our quest. The concept "adult education" is itself controversial and even problematic, because the term "education" implies a hierarchical relationship: there are those who are the educators and those who are educated. Typically in this hierarchy the teacher is the knowledgeable authority and the student desires to learn. However, when education seeks to transmit values, the relationship between teacher and student is blurred. Who is to say that the teacher's values are more important or on a higher level than those of the adult student? This question is particularly relevant when studying about Israel, a subject in which religion, politics, and different perspectives on Jewish history and peoplehood can all come into play. The problem becomes even more complicated when the adult participant is invited to enter an educational process on the premise that knowledge will be conveyed, but the teacher or institution has a hidden agenda involving the transmission of values as well.

A second important difference between "adult education" and "children's education" is that with adults, participation is totally voluntary. Thus the ability of institutions and programs to "educate" depends on their ability to attract and retain the adult learners (Knowles, 1980). As a result, the motivational dimension of adult learning becomes highly important.

Thus, the focus belongs on the learner when educating adults. In the first case, there is a moral imperative to respect the learner and his or her values; in the second, there is the practical question of how to motivate learners to enter and remain involved in the learning process.

Part 4

The adults with whom we have contact are all voluntary participants in the organized Jewish community who have willingly identified themselves as Jews and have put themselves within reach of educational programs and activities that will link them to Israel. Those responsible for Israel programming for adults should consider what motivates them to take advantage of the opportunity to learn about Israel, to enroll in a class, to attend a special program or lecture, or to travel to Israel. The reasons that they have for making the choice to enter into such a learning experience can serve as a guide for planners towards avenues for increasing both the numbers and the satisfaction of participants.

Cyril Houle in *The Inquiring Mind* provides a framework that we find useful for categorizing the data on Jewish adults' motivation to study Israel. After an extensive survey of adult learners in the general community, he categorizes them according to three orientations to learning. His typology describes learners who are 1) activity-oriented, 2) learning-oriented, and 3) goal-oriented. We will apply his approach to Israel learning that takes place both in the home community and in Israel.

Activity-oriented individuals who choose to learn about Israel do so for reasons intrinsic to the activity itself. These learners want to study about Israel primarily because they perceive this process as an active expression of belonging to the Jewish people. Traveling to Israel is acting out their membership in *klal yisrael* (the Jewish collective), and is considered by some to be a *mitzvah*, a religious obligation. As Jews, their identity would be incomplete without the informed recognition of Israel's role in Jewish life and its potential role in their own lives.

Through these activities, learners frequently feel more connected to their synagogues, organizations, and the Jewish community. The activity can help define the person's relationship with a larger body: an active member of the Federation is a person who takes courses about Israel or travels on missions to Israel. Rabbis encourage congregants to participate in congregational tours of Israel, not only because the congregants will learn from them, but because their affiliation with the synagogue is strengthened and their relationship to other congregants and to the rabbi is cemented - important consequences of the activity.

Similarly travel to Israel is something meaningful and sociable that one can do with a spouse, family, or friends. It binds individuals to one another. As an opportunity to make new friends, singles of all ages are attracted to Israel travel. Meeting Israeli Jews and developing relationships with them can be another motivating pursuit.

Also in this category are those who enjoy the activity of travel. They may visit Israel because they like to hike, to enjoy scenic beauty, to learn history, or to explore unique cities. Those who want to pursue creative cultural activities, view art exhibits, or attend dance or symphony concerts can find them all over the country. For activity-oriented adult learners, Israel can be just a good place to vacation.

Learning-oriented individuals are motivated by the pure enjoyment of studying, both at home and abroad. They would be among those who attend conferences and conventions that feature opportunities to study. Some learning-oriented people consider Israel a - if not *the* - Jewish intellectual center in the world. Israel is perceived as the place where the best scholars live and teach, where the best schools exist. For those who want to study about Israel, the ideal classroom is Israel itself, so these individuals travel there to participate in study seminars and educational tours. Such adults may also choose to study at yeshivot, colleges, and universities in Israel.

Educational tours that incorporate text study as part of the daily routine are important to learning-oriented travelers. Text study can enhance what travelers see during the day: a trip to Masada takes on a new dimension when it is preceded by an exploration of Jewish texts on martyrdom, suicide, and the value of life. The story of David and Bathsheba or the last moments of King Saul come alive when those texts are read at the locations connected to the narratives. For learners, the reality of these sites and the events they represent are crystallized creating an enduring connection between the learner and Israel.

Goal-oriented learners seek knowledge in order to accomplish a particular end. Although the specific purposes vary greatly, the goal-oriented learner acts out of an awareness that Israel itself means something in his or her life. Some of the aims that might encourage the goal-oriented learner to study about Israel include:

Jewish Observance And Identity

The increased religious observance that sometimes results from effective Jewish education can lead adults to a stronger connection with Israel. The National Jewish Population Study (1990) showed a positive relationship between feelings for Israel and religious observance. Of those who were not attached to Israel, only one quarter practiced two or three of the most observed rituals, while three quarters of those extremely attached to Israel practiced them. They also tend to be generally better informed Jews who have studied and learned about the central role of Israel in Jewish life. For some, understanding the people, the politics, and the daily life of Israelis is considered important to Jewish identity and the unity of the Jewish people.

Some who seek knowledge of Israel desire to understand Jewish tradition more fully. Israel is referred to over and over again in our life cycle events. The most vivid examples are the images of Israel and Jerusalem at a Jewish wedding: the breaking of the glass (commemorating the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple) at the end of the ceremony, the reference to the sounds of joy in the streets of Jerusalem in the *sheva brachot*. When a life cycle event - such as a bar/bat mitzvah or a honeymoon - involves travel to Israel, people are motivated to learn more about the country they are going to visit.

A trip to Israel is in itself a Jewish life cycle event. This does not mean that it should be viewed as an end in itself, but rather as an opportunity to encourage study before, during, and after the journey. The Israel visit provides one of those "teachable moments" in a person's life when he or she is more motivated to learn, and open to a deeper and broader understanding of the country and its relationship

to the individual Jew. Very often, the total experience can be so significant as to change the way a person views the world.

Civil Responsibility / Philanthropy / Tzedakah

Some Jews practice what has been called civil religion; their connection to Israel is through philanthropic work. While they have shown a willingness to support Israel in crisis, they should also be encouraged to study. Effective education could foster a new context for giving: the perception of Israel as central to Judaism, as a sustaining force in Jewish identity, and as a partner in a shared vision of what Judaism can be in the coming decades. Philanthropic work can continue to serve as an important vehicle for connecting Diaspora Jews to Israel - but with a new twist. For example, a recent Wexner fellow devised a plan to entice American business people to examine some Israeli businesses and then to invest funds in them, with the income from these investments going to support the needs of the American Jewish community. The investments strengthen Israel; the income is used here to support domestic needs. Efforts like Project Renewal and Partnership 2000 are also designed to exchange knowledge and expertise, as well as financial resources.

Personal Religious Fulfillment AND Spirituality

Much of the discussion above speaks to one of the strongest potential connections that a Jew today has to Israel. For many, a journey to Israel is a journey of self-discovery. The paths may be intellectual or spiritual; they may involve social service or philanthropy. By exploring the remnants of the collective Jewish past, by walking and touching the land, by traveling the locus of the modern miracle of a sovereign Jewish state, a Jew can discover a significant part of him or herself. Some accomplish this by discovering or rediscovering their historical roots: to know the history of Israel is to know their own history. To walk in the land of the patriarchs and matriarchs is to relive one's own family story. For many contemporary Jews, Israel constitutes the spiritual, intellectual, political, or religious means of renewing the bond that has united the Jewish people for thousands of years. For others, travel to Israel is an effort to reach out for something beyond their grasp in the belief that Israel is the place where we are closest to God. Many American Jews look to Israel as their spiritual battery charger, as an avenue to reconnect with the spiritual dimension in life.

Part 5

As we have seen, adult learning about and educational travel to Israel can result in such desirable outcomes as Jewish relationship building, grounding of Jewish text study in realia, strengthening Jewish identity and Jewish knowledge, enhancing philanthropic work, and facilitating spiritual searches. However, we must emphasize that in conceptualizing the education of adults, our starting point must always be seen in terms of motivation. Adults come to the learning process with an agenda that results from certain motivations, goals, and needs. The success of the learning process depends on attracting and satisfying the adult learner.

Adult learning is a voluntary enterprise.

Participation can never be taken for granted. Every learning activity must be viewed as an individual voluntary action with an incentive for joining. The quality of programs must be maintained, and constant evaluation by participants - based on interviews and written forms - must be conducted by program administrators.

The voluntary nature determines the relationship between the providers of education and the learners. Whereas in the compulsory learning environment, the principal and the teacher are the locus of authority, in the voluntary environment, the locus of authority lies with the participant. Israel learning programs should respect the authority and values of the learners.

Adult learning takes place in an environment in which other demands and activities compete for the students' attention.

Adults have many career, social, and familial responsibilities demanding their time. In addition, recreational activities compete for "spare" time. Thus learning requires a high level of motivation and commitment. In order for Israel study programs to compete successfully they must be attractive and dynamic, and must promise to contribute significantly to the personal lives of the participants.

Adult learning is a part-time activity and takes place at times which may not be conducive for study.

Very few adults have the opportunity to study on a full-time basis. For most learners, study takes place at lunch breaks or after work hours, when optimal concentration is difficult to achieve. In order to have maximum impact, Israel study programs must be engaging and focused. At the end of each study session, participants should be able to summarize what they have learned in a few sentences. We should try to entice students to participate in concentrated studying sessions which take place during quality time, i.e., day seminars, weekend seminars.

Most adult learning takes place outside of institutional frameworks.

According to the research of Alan Tough, the overwhelming majority (80%) of adult learning takes place outside institutional frameworks. This could be attributed to the following:

- * The learner has a desire to control the learning process.
- * Non-institutional learning allows for a flexible time commitment.
- * Non-institutional learning is attainable at a low cost.

The adult is therefore dependent on a number of environments and resources for learning about Israel, including the home, synagogue, Jewish Community Center, and/or other Jewish organizations. The resources could be human, such as friends, family, the rabbi, community speakers and leaders; or non-human, like Jewish literature, both classic and contemporary, Jewish newspapers, TV programs, movies, radio, and the Internet.

Adult learners expect the learning experience to mirror their feelings of autonomy and self-worth, and to acknowledge their life experience.

It is important to address adult learners as adults, recognizing their adult needs and experience. Thus:

- * We should relate to our students as mature individuals. Directors and facilitators should adopt a non-authoritarian approach and maintain a climate of mutual respect.
- * The subject-matter, however elementary, must be presented in a sophisticated manner, appealing to the adult learner. Suitable texts about Israel, both classical and contemporary, should be selected, that deal with issues which are existentially important to the learner. Care should be taken to present texts and documents in a clear, coherent, and "user-friendly" manner.
- * The physical learning environment should be pleasant and conducive to adult learning.

Conclusion

Our goal is to enhance the quality and frequency of Israel education among those involved in adult learning experiences. We would like to recommend changes in the following areas:

The establishment of substantive, sustained, systematically-planned learning experiences incorporating a variety of contexts such as classroom, retreat center, and individual learning projects. These experiences should be woven together through themes or other foci, and enable the participants to broadly comprehend and internalize the subject matter.

An Israel travel experience. There is no substitute for a hands-on, unmediated experience of Israel. It is of particular importance that the Israel Experience be carefully planned allowing for an integrated, focused program built around one or two themes. A curriculum for the trip must be developed, the basis of which should be direct contact between the participants and Israel's people whenever possible. For maximum impact, the trip should be preceded and followed by study, preferably centered on classic and historic Jewish texts.

The creation of adult level curriculum on Israel. The development of curricula for the teaching of Israel is almost non-existent in the general realm of adult education. However, programs striving to offer a comprehensive approach to the study of Judaism are attempting to create such curricula for adults. The Florence Melton Adult Mini-School, CLAL, Wexner, and Derech Torah have all recently invested heavily in developing these models. Both students and teachers require a comprehensive curricular road map, dealing with Israel from historical, spiritual, cultural geographical, demographic, and political points of view. It must also take into account the changes taking place today in Israel, and the changing nature of the relationship between Israeli and Diaspora Jews.

Professional opportunities for teachers of adults. The quality of institutional adult education depends on the quality of the teachers. Yet too many adult education programs simply resort to resources which

exist in the community, rather than investing in the development of their faculties. We must provide both in-service and pre-service training for those who teach Israel. Since the teaching of Israel in an integrated manner requires a wealth of knowledge as well as educational insight, programs must be established to encourage specialization in this field.

Make Israel financially accessible to all Jewish adults interested in an Israel educational experience. For many, overseas travel is a luxury and a visit to Israel remains beyond their financial possibilities. Educational missions should enjoy the same level of subsidy as UJA missions. Communities could require community service in return for the subsidy. There is no doubt that if the experiences are successful, the community will reap the benefits from their support of such missions.

The establishment of an Israel Resource Center. Many of the needs related to the teaching of Israel stem from a lack of materials and curricula, human resources, advocacy, and support. Following existing resource center models, we propose the establishment of Israel Resource Centers in major American communities. The Centers would contain media, print and computer materials to aid in the teaching of Israel and provide guidance to youth leaders, teachers, parents, and organizers of travel to Israel. There would be brochures and computerized data on existing Israel programs and study opportunities, and human resource files containing names of tour educators, guides, teachers, and consultants. The Center would offer programs about Israel and subjects related to Israel, such as Israeli dancing, literature, current events, religious issues, etc. The Center would also provide a meeting place for those who teach about Israel to come together and share information, as well as workshops on methodology and curriculum. It would be equipped to send out "road shows" of high quality and low cost to outlying, smaller communities.

The staff of such a center would be responsible for collecting and managing the resources and planning and implementing programs, and would serve as advocates for Israel programming and educational travel sponsored by local institutions. Another important function would be Israel public-relations, letting people and institutions know what is available and how to integrate resources into existing programming.

Working towards partnership with Israel. Affording adults with more sophisticated knowledge of Israel can ready them to examine some of the concerns that Israeli and North American Jews share in the area of Jewish identity. We in North America are not the only ones concerned with assimilation and the weakening of Jewish identity. Many Israelis have moved away from Jewish tradition, embracing nationalism in its place. Mutual awareness and shared activities can strengthen both communities. Knowledge and identity with Israel's varied culture can enrich American Jewry; Jewish pluralism and democracy can strengthen the Judaism of Israel. Both communities need to bring those Jews on the periphery back to what the center of Judaism has always been. Education of Jews of all ages is the key.

There is an exciting new awakening in North American Jewish life to the Israel Experience as a potentially powerful resource for the Jewish education of contemporary teens and young adults. We would like to suggest that there is another equally important and promising arena: the adult Jewish

learner. There are adults who want to learn - and the Jewish community is beginning to develop new settings and contexts for such learning. Surely one of the most exciting subjects in the treasury of Jewish learning is Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, if we are serious about wanting Israel to play a significant role in American Jewish life, we must invest in the creation of adult learning opportunities about Israel, which take into account the motivation, goals, and aspirations of potential learners. These learning opportunities must be sequential, comprehensive, and of the highest quality; they must also be accessible in terms of finances, place, and time. We must invest in developing the needed resources, both human and other. It is surely true that the young are the adults of tomorrow and an Israel experience is of paramount importance for them. At the same time, contemporary adults are the parents and the grandparents of tomorrow, and as such they play a critical and promising role in shaping the lives of our young and the nature of our Jewish world. Let us ensure that the promise of Israel will also be the legacy of the parents and grandparents of today.

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