
A Mega-Experiment in Jewish Education: The Impact of *birthright israel*



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About the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies

The Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University is a multi-disciplinary research institute dedicated to the study of modern American Jewry. Our mission is to enhance understanding of the Jewish community and the development of religious and cultural identity. The Center's faculty and staff includes psychologists, sociologists, and Jewish studies scholars, whose interests include Jewish identity, Jewish culture, family life, religious expression, and Israel-Diaspora relations. A broad range of research is conducted by Center faculty, spanning studies of individuals and institutions. Our research applies cutting-edge methods and theories to the study of modern Jewry and our work is disseminated to both public and academic groups.

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Research Reports and Program Information About *birthright israel*

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Research reports may be obtained by contacting:

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Program information about *birthright israel*:

Expanding the Vision: A Pre-Post Educational Program

Revised Educational Standards 2001

Program information may be obtained by contacting:

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A Mega-Experiment
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We may be on the threshold of a new era in our understanding of Jewish education and Jewish identity. Former myths are being reconsidered and new visions are being created.

Older notions of Jewish education saw it as aimed at children, housed in schools, and focused on either cognitive transmission or communal solidarity. Newer notions see it as lifelong, taking place on a campus that extends beyond classrooms, and focused on shaping the total, holistic self. The clients of Jewish education are, increasingly, Jews of all ages — from preschoolers and their parents, to adolescents, university students and young adults, to adults and senior citizens. The venues of Jewish education are, increasingly, not just in school buildings in the local community, but in the larger Jewish world — learning takes place in day and supplementary schools, Jewish community centers, summer camps, college campuses, and on trips to Europe and Israel. The emerging aim of Jewish education, regardless of age level or setting, is to touch the inner soul and to affect the Jew within.

Older notions of identity focused on the influence of Jewish schooling, measured it in terms of ritual behavior, and divided the emerging populations into "the identified" and "the unaffiliated." More recently, researchers are beginning to look at other influential factors beyond schools. They are seeking new measures of Jewishness beyond ritual and are questioning the validity of the affiliated-unaffiliated dichotomy.

Nowhere are these emerging metamorphoses being more creatively studied and described than in the unfolding body of research on *birthright israel* being conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. This research was initiated because of a desire on the part of the founders of the *birthright israel* program to closely examine the impact of the experience on participants. What started as straightforward input-output analysis is emerging as potentially breakthrough social science research with powerful educational policy implications.

Four significant hypotheses are beginning to emerge from the work of Leonard Saxe, Charles Kadushin, and their colleagues:

- 1) The so-called unaffiliated, about which organized Jewry is so distraught, may not be a "lost tribe" after all. They may be neither lost nor unaffiliated. Rather, they may simply have been waiting for us to reach out and talk to them. *birthright israel* trips seem to initiate such a conversation.
- 2) Jewish identity may best be viewed as developing through an extended journey, and a critical element of this journey may simply be to get young people started on a personal trajectory. If properly supported, travels on this journey could lead to increased levels of Jewish commitment, and a *birthright israel* trip seems to be a very important stop.
- 3) Young Jews may be hungry for peak Jewish experiences, and a *birthright israel* trip seems to satisfy this hunger. The trip is not experienced solely as a once-in-a-lifetime "banquet," but instead seems to whet participants' appetites for more Jewish nourishment.
- 4) A *birthright israel* trip uncovers, often unexpectedly, the power of the experience of Jewish collectivity for many young Jews. They discover the magic of being with other young Jews — and they enjoy it. This may provide significant clues about appropriate directions for Jewish communal life in the months and years after the trip.

The Cohen Center team is not only doing the job it was engaged to do, it may also be charting entirely new directions. Its numbers and findings are obviously gratifying to the founders of *birthright israel*, but more significantly, its findings may be generating a new understanding of the next generation of youth and young adults in American Jewry. This new research is particularly innovative since it is the start of what we hope will be a major longitudinal study of young North American Jews. Our intent is to track them and learn from them for years to come.

The rhetoric of *birthright israel* has always emphasized that the ten days that participants spend in Israel are the beginning of a lifetime journey. With the help of our Cohen Center colleagues, the *birthright israel* Education Committee hopes to track, understand, and ameliorate this journey in the decade ahead.

We may be on the threshold of a new era in the fields of Jewish education and Jewish identity. Read this report — and stay tuned — to find out what is ahead!

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A Mega-Experiment in Jewish Education: The Impact of *birthright israel*

Leonard Saxe, Charles Kadushin, Shaul Kelner, Mark Rosen, and Erez Yereslove

During the last two years, more than 20,000 young Jewish adults from North America received the gift of a trip to Israel. The sponsor, *birthright israel*, developed this ten-day educational program for those young adults who had not been to Israel on a prior educational program, but who identify themselves as Jews. This large-scale experiment was conceived with the hope that engagement with Israel would strengthen participants' Jewish identities and counter the threat to Jewish continuity posed by assimilation and intermarriage. The present study assesses the extent to which *birthright israel* has succeeded in affecting the lives of participants from the perspective of more than a year after the program's launch in December 1999.

The study is a follow-up to a set of investigations that were conducted during the program's launch and three months after participants returned (see Kelner et al., 2000; Saxe et al., 2000b). These initial investigations, in which participants were both observed during their trips and surveyed afterward, confirmed anecdotal reports that the trips had been extremely successful. Descriptions provided by participant-observers accompanying the trips indicated that the program touched participants both cognitively and affectively. Surveys of participants indicated that the trips were experienced as meaningful, educational, and fun. More significantly, in comparison with a similar control group of those who had applied for the program but had not been selected to go, participants were more Jewishly engaged and had more positive attitudes about engagement with the Jewish community and Israel.

Although these preliminary findings validated many of the assumptions of the program's developers, three months was not a sufficient period of time to determine if the program has had meaningful effects on participants' identities and if such effects would be lasting. The present study, conducted more than one year after the first set of trips concluded, was initiated in order to evaluate the program's medium-term impact. Surveys of both participants and non-participants were analyzed to assess whether the initial positive feelings were sustained over time, and whether behavioral change occurred and was maintained.

The current report summarizes these survey findings based on a total of more than 1,500 participants and more than 150 non-participants from the United States, who completed questionnaires via the Internet between twelve and fifteen months after the launch trip. These young adults were contacted initially via e-mail, and those who did not respond received a telephone reminder. Data from the surveys were statistically weighted to ensure comparability with the initial survey.

Launch trip participants ranged in age from 18 to 26 at the time of the program and were Jewishly diverse. Some were committed Jews with strong Jewish backgrounds, while many others were not affiliated. More than four out of every five participants had some background of formal Jewish education and nearly three out of every four have had a *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony. Their denominational affiliations closely paralleled the North American Jewish community. Four out of every five were students, and almost three out of every five were female.

The follow-up study demonstrated that the initial impact of the program was sustained over the course of more than a year:

The trips continued to be seen as fun, meaningful, and educational.

More than a year after the trip, participants continued to describe their experience very positively. The percentages of participants who described it as fun, meaningful, and educational were virtually identical to the percentages obtained three months after the trip. Participants' strongest memories were, almost exclusively, of the key historical sites and activities with religious significance: the *Kotel*, Masada, Jerusalem, *Shabbat*, the Dead Sea, and *Yad Vashem*.

Participants had a stronger sense of Jewish identity.

Responses to the question: "How important in your life is being Jewish?" indicated a stronger sense of Jewish identity among participants in comparison with non-participants. Before the trip, there were no differences between these two groups. In addition, the percentages twelve to fifteen months after the program were almost the same as those obtained three months after the trip, indicating that the trip's positive impact on Jewish identity remained strong.

Participants were more likely to want to marry a Jew and raise their children as Jews.

Participants were more likely than non-participants to indicate that marrying a Jewish person and raising Jewish children were important. Again the percentages remained consistent over time.

Participants were more likely to feel it was important to remember the Holocaust, to care about Israel, and to support Jewish organizations.

When asked about various "ways of being Jewish," participants were more likely than non-participants to indicate that it was important to remember the Holocaust. Participants were much more likely to care about Israel than non-participants. Participants were also more likely to indicate that supporting Jewish organizations was important. Both participants and non-participants gave low ratings to dimensions relating to Jewish ritual.

Participants had a stronger sense of connection to the Jewish people and were more likely to indicate they were exploring their Jewishness.

In contrast with non-participants, participants developed a stronger connection to the Jewish people as a result of the trip and their sense of connection remained strong a year after the trip. They also were more likely to indicate that they were exploring their Jewishness.

Participants felt a stronger sense of connection to Israel.

Participants' sense of connection to Israel, which was not strong prior to the trip, became much stronger after the trip and remained strong a year later. Non-participants were much less likely to indicate a sense of connection. There were no differences between participants and non-participants on attitudes toward Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Some participants returned to Israel and many others wanted to return.

Several hundred participants visited Israel again after their *birthright israel* trip. Most returned for educational programs or vacation. When participants were asked whether they intended to return within the next two years, almost half said a return was likely.

Concern about finances was the most significant obstacle to an Israel visit.

Respondents indicated that the greatest obstacle to traveling to Israel was financial, with almost four out of every five participants and more than two-thirds of non-participants indicating finances made it difficult to plan a visit. About three out of every five participants and two out of every three non-participants said that safety concerns of family and friends affected their intention to go.

Almost everyone who went encouraged others to go.

Almost all of the participants encouraged friends or relatives to apply for a *birthright israel* trip, and over half said that at least one person they talked to ended up going.

Most participants stayed in touch with friends from the trip.

Most participants had some contact with at least one person who had been on their trip after they returned home, with nearly half indicating they had contact once a week or more.

Whether participants were Jewishly engaged after the trip depended upon their student status and the setting to which they returned.

Among students, participants engaged in more Jewish activities on-campus than did non-participants. Among participants, undergraduate college students were more likely than graduate students or non-students to be aware of and participate in *birthright israel* follow-up activities. Post-trip engagement was greater at some schools, even though the backgrounds of students did not differ. This suggests that something that took place at the schools may have affected their engagement.

Participants showed more interest in Israel and engaged in more Jewish study.

Participants were more likely to show interest in news about Israel after the trip and engaged in higher levels of Jewish study when compared with non-participants.

Participants were most Jewishly engaged after the trip when certain conditions were present.

Post-trip engagement was most likely to occur when participants had positive feelings about the trip, were in regular contact with others from the trip, and had Jewish friends.

Overall, the present study found that *birthright israel* participants became more Jewishly engaged as a result of their trip to Israel. From the perspective of more than one year after the launch trip, participants continued to view the experience as extremely meaningful. It appeared to have a very positive impact on their Jewish identity and their attitudes toward Israel, Judaism, and the Jewish people. Participants have changed. More than a year after they returned home, their attitudes and their engagement in the Jewish community were clearly different than that of non-participant peers. Changes in Jewish identity were the most pronounced. Actual involvement in Jewish ritual and activities did not increase as dramatically.

More than three-quarters of the participants returned to college campuses after the trip, and this enabled many to maintain contact and connections with fellow *birthright israel* alumni. Older participants returned to workplaces and geographic locales where opportunities to connect with peers from the trip were not as frequent. Participants' subsequent engagement with Judaism and the Jewish community appeared to be linked, not surprisingly, to the type of setting to which they returned. Those who returned to campuses were most likely to continue their involvement, primarily through Judaic studies coursework and campus religious organizations. However, not all students returned to campus environments that captured them. Post-trip engagement varied across schools.

Given the breadth of religious and cultural diversity among these young Jews, a variety of programs need to be developed to provide ways for them to continue their Jewish engagement. Since a significant component of the experience involved the connections that participants made with other Jews on their trip, efforts to enhance post-trip engagement will be more successful if they operate through these newly-created Jewish networks.

The impact of *birthright israel* on participants' Jewish identities appears to be profound. However, the success of the program poses a challenge for the Jewish community. The community now needs to find ways to transform participants' inspiration and motivation into Jewish commitment.

Introduction



In December 1999, the first *birthright israel* flights left North America with several hundred young Jews who were traveling to Israel for a ten-day educational experience. For each traveler, this was his or her first educational encounter with Israel and, for almost all, it was their first trip to Israel. The participants looked like the North American Jewish community — some described themselves as “just Jewish,” while the majority claimed affiliation with either the Reform or Conservative movements, and less than 10 percent identified themselves as Orthodox (Saxe et al., 2000b). Perhaps the most unique element of the trip, aside from the fact that it heralded the subsequent departure of tens of thousands of similar participants, was that the trips were being provided at no cost. This was the start of a bold educational experiment, funded by a partnership that included the government of Israel, the Jewish Agency and federations, and a consortium of private philanthropists.¹

This initiative, a large-scale experiment in informal Jewish education, was designed to test the proposition that providing an opportunity for young Jews to “reclaim their birthright” and experience Israel as part of a peer group would alter their trajectory of Jewish engagement. As an integral part of the *birthright israel* experiment, a careful study of the impact of the program was designed and conducted. In two preliminary reports (Kelner et al., 2000; Saxe et al., 2000b), we described this research.

The preliminary results made clear that the program had achieved its short-term goal of providing an extremely effective educational program. It also demonstrated that those who went had become more Jewishly engaged. When compared with those individuals who had applied but did not go (“non-participants”), participants had significantly more positive attitudes about engagement with the Jewish community and Israel. These findings were based on observations of the trips and a three-month follow-up. Although this research suggested that the program was successful in placing participants on a different Jewish journey, the real test was whether the program’s impact would be sustained over time. The present report is designed to answer that question from the perspective of more than a year after the trip.

Program Theory

The program that came to be known as *birthright israel* was started by philanthropists Charles S. Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt, who embraced the idea of a “birthright” proposed by Yossi Beilin, former Minister of Justice for Israel (Beilin, 2000). Concerned that assimilation was taking a heavy toll on Jewish life in the Diaspora, both philanthropists sought to transform the landscape of involvement with Israel by generating a dramatic initiative. These two individuals provided initial funding, created the program’s organizational structure, and organized a means of financing the program that would allow up to 100,000 young adults to participate.

Judaism and Jewish culture do not seem to have engaged a significant number, perhaps the majority, of a generation of Jewish young people. Although many Jewish children receive some type of Jewish education and experience a *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony, for a majority, involvement in Judaism

¹Specifically, the partners include the people of Israel through their government, local Jewish communities around the world (through the United Jewish Communities in North America, Keren HaYesod outside of North America, and The Jewish Agency for Israel), and leading philanthropists from North America.

appears to wane during adolescence (Saxe et al., 2000a). Moreover, rising intermarriage rates have sparked fears over the future of American Jewry (Fishman, 2001). It was against this backdrop that *birthright israel* was conceived.

The *birthright israel* experiment hypothesizes that a well-structured and exciting experience of contemporary Israel might have the power to counteract these trends of diminished Jewish connection. Specifically, *birthright israel* aims to promote caring for the State of Israel, a new understanding of the significance of Israel, and a feeling of love and unity for the entire Jewish people. It aspires to be an impetus for lasting change.

Under *birthright israel's* aegis, it is planned, over a five-year period, that up to 100,000 young Jews will take advantage of the free gift of an educational experience in Israel. The program's sponsors believe that engagement with Israel is so potentially powerful that even relatively brief exposure can offset the forces in society that distract young Jews from being Jewish. So compelling is this belief that they have pledged over \$210 million toward this initiative.

The target group, as the sponsors conceived it, consists of those young Jews who are at greatest risk of being lost to the community. As Marlene Post, Chairperson of *birthright israel* North America, characterizes the program, it "was conceived chiefly as an outreach to young people who have not been drawn into existing Jewish frameworks and may therefore soon be lost to the Jewish people (1999, p. 54)."²

Mindful of the brief nature of the program, the *birthright israel* experience was not designed as an end in itself, but rather as a catalyst for more fundamental transformations in participants' Jewish identities and behaviors. The hope was that participants would return home and be inspired to engage in more activities that have a Jewish component, such as reading Jewish books, engaging in Jewish study and spiritual pursuits, attending Jewish social events, or volunteering in a Jewish setting. Ultimately *birthright israel* "alumni" would end up living lives that were more Jewishly engaged and would assume their place in the larger Jewish community.

Although *birthright israel's* developers were extraordinarily hopeful about the potential impact of the program and were able to organize a group of partners that spanned the Jewish world, critics raised a number of pointed questions. Spending several thousand dollars per individual to provide ten-day educational trips to Israel seemed risky and, to some, misguided. The Chair of the Governing Board of the World Jewish Congress, for example, called the program idea "bizarre" and the possibility of it enhancing identity as "unthinkable" (Liebler, 1999, 2000). Such critical views make systematic evaluation of the program's impact even more important. Positive assessment of the program's near-term impact only goes part of the way toward addressing these concerns, since there is the real possibility that the effects are temporary and fade over time.

This report describes the attitudes and behavior of participants more than one year after their experience in Israel. Over time, what effect does a visit to Israel with peers have on young people, many of whom would not otherwise go? Do they become engaged with Judaism and the Jewish community as a result of their journey and do they stay engaged? Is *birthright israel* just a short-term,

² The three-month follow-up study revealed that only some of those who went on the trip could be characterized in this fashion. In summarizing the findings, the authors wrote: " *birthright israel* brought together a remarkably diverse group of young people... The program did not exclusively engage either the already committed or those at risk of being 'lost to the Jewish people', but a mixture of the two — and everything in between" (Saxe et al., 2000b, p. v).

enjoyable experience, or does it have a desired long-term impact on the attitudes and behaviors of young Jews, Jews who are the future of the Jewish people?

Although the emphasis in the present report is on new findings, for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with the earlier research, the present report describes the background of the program and reviews some of our prior research on the social-demography of participants and applicants.³

birthright israel: The First Wave

In December 1999 and January 2000, nearly 6,000 young North American Jews went to Israel on the launch program of *birthright israel*. Most participants were college students, and more than half went under the auspices of Hillel: The Foundation for Campus Life, Inc. Other sponsor organizations included groups from various religious denominations, communal and national agencies, independent and nonprofit educational organizations, and private tour groups. Since there were more applicants than the trips could accommodate, organizing groups engaged in some form of a selection process, with criteria varying from group to group. Most relied on a lottery, typically stratified so that groups could be balanced according to gender and interests.

Eligibility requirements for trips were prescribed by *birthright israel*. Participation was open to any self-described Jew between the ages of 18 and 26 who had not previously been to Israel on a “peer educational program.” Thus, young people who had visited Israel simply as tourists were eligible, while those who had been on a youth program (such as a high school summer in Israel) were ineligible. Participation was entirely free, although applicants had to provide a deposit of \$250, which was repaid if they took part in the full program.

The trip was designed to be an educational experience, not just a tour of Israel. Each group had an elaborate pre-planned itinerary, and participants heard talks and visited sites based on three themes: a) the narrative of the Jewish people — the landmarks of Jewish history; b) values of the Jewish people — the core ideas of Jewish life; and c) contemporary Israel — modern Jewish society.⁴ Although there was some variation depending upon the trip organizer, all groups visited certain places, for example, the *Kotel* (Western Wall), Masada, *Yad Vashem*, and the Golan Heights. In addition, all groups spent at least one *Shabbat* in Jerusalem and met Israeli peers in a program called “the *mifgash*” (encounter).

Underlying the itinerary designed for each trip was a carefully planned set of experiences designed to influence participants both intellectually and emotionally. Participants traveled in groups of 30-40 on buses, often with students from their own college campus, but sometimes with young people from all over the country. In most cases, they arrived in Israel on flights shared with hundreds of other participants. All of the participants had an opportunity to take part in *mifgashim* (encounters) with Israelis and several groups included Israeli young adults as actual *birthright israel* participants. Although, for all of the groups, the sites were the central focus of the program, participants also benefited from their interpersonal interactions — with everyday Israelis, tour guides, *madrichim* (tour staff), and most importantly, with each other.

³ Readers familiar with our earlier report (Preliminary Findings) may wish to skim from page 5 through page 7.

⁴ More detail can be found in *birthright israel* publications describing program requirements.

Research on Jewish Identity and the Israel Experience

Although *birthright israel* is a unique initiative, both in scope and vision, the idea behind it is neither new nor untested. It arose out of a deep concern that Jewish identity, and the connection of Jews to the land and people of Israel, needed to be strengthened in Jewish communities throughout the world (e.g., Beilin, 2000). Jewish identity is developed and sustained by many things, including Jewish education and Jewish practice at home. Recently, recognition of the role played by transnational ties between Diaspora Jews and Israel is increasing. Ties with Israel are seen as an increasingly salient factor among those who are interested in promoting Jewish identity. Goldstein and Goldstein (1996), for example, have noted that Israel has played a central role in Jewish identity development.

Yet, even though Israel is considered to be an important element of Jewish identity, recent research suggests that it is becoming less important among contemporary Diaspora Jews (Cohen & Eisen, 1998, 2000). Only about one-third of Jews in the United States who are moderately affiliated have visited Israel, and there are signs that these numbers are decreasing. Cohen and Eisen, who conducted survey research as well as in-depth interviews with American Jews, found that ties with Israel were relatively weak among mainstream Jews and that many were ambivalent. They attribute weakening ties to the ways in which American Judaism has become an increasingly individual experience. One consequence of this trend is that Israel is not a high priority for many American Jews.

Why should Israel play a strong role in Jewish identity? Or, in consideration of the focus of this report, the more appropriate question is: How might trips and engagement with Israel play a role in the development of Jewish identity? Given the current nature of American Jewry, with Jews who are more and more removed from their ancestors' countries of origin, David Mittelberg (1999), an Israeli sociologist, argues that visits to Israel can lead to the "re-ethnification" of those who have lost their ethnic identities. Mittelberg advocates that Israel become "a truly integral part of their lives," a state of affairs that is now practical because of advances in travel and communication. Using data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (Kosmin, et al., 1991), Mittelberg found positive associations between visits to Israel and measures of Jewish identification, community affiliation, and religious practice, irrespective of denomination, level of Jewish education, age, gender, or region. In other words, regardless of a Jew's background, a trip to Israel was found to be associated with an enhanced sense of Jewish identity. A strong advocate of visits to Israel, he contends that an Israel trip "is a unique experience that connects American Jews to their past, to Israel's present, and by virtue of its Jewish contribution to Israeli society and culture, to the future well-being of the Jewish people" (1999, p. xiv).

There is some evidence that traveling to Israel during college is an important predictor of later engagement with Jewish communal life. Researchers Israel and Mittelberg (1998), drawing on the 1995 Boston Jewish community demographic study, found that those who took their first trip to Israel in college were more engaged in Jewish life than those who went at a younger age. Similarly, in focus groups organized by the American Jewish Committee, college-age visits to Israel were found to have a more lasting impact on students than family visits around the age of *b'nai mitzvah* or high-school programs (Ukeles, 1994). This finding is, perhaps, surprising. Those who begin visiting Israel at a young age would be expected to have stronger ties.

Nevertheless, these findings are parallel to more general findings that compare the effects of early and later experiences on Jewish identity development. Horowitz (1993), in analyzing data from the New York Jewish Population Survey, found that "voluntary" Jewish experiences in the teenage and adult years were better predictors of affiliation and practice than "involuntary" experiences earlier in

life. These data are consistent with evidence from surveys of those who have had a *b'nai mitzvah* ceremony (see, e.g., Saxe et al., 2000a) that document how poorly young U.S. Jews evaluate their Hebrew school education.

Given that trips to Israel “matter” in developing Jewish identity, although their impact may depend on the person’s developmental stage, the key question is to understand the mechanisms that explain how Israel experiences affect young people. Chazan (1997) proposes three possible models as explanations. The first, a *domino* model, suggests that an Israel visit is a critical step in a series of educational experiences. The second, a *cluster* model, argues that the Israel experience gains impact in conjunction with parallel educational experiences. And the third, an *independent* model, makes the case that an Israel trip may have its own separate impact on Jewish identity.

The available research is compelling, but it suffers from methodological limitations. Mittelberg (1999) notes that an association between a visit to Israel and an interest in Israel and the Jewish people is just that — an association. As one example, it is almost universally the case that Jewish community leaders have visited Israel (e.g., Cohen & Eisen, 2000), but no one would make the argument that the Israel trip generated their community commitment. Similarly, most of those who apply for rabbinic training in the United States have been to Israel on study abroad or similar programs (Wertheimer, 1993). So it is likely that those who go to Israel are already interested in Judaism and the community. Most of the extant research does not allow one to establish whether the Israel visit caused the interest or if the interest was already there before the trip.

As described in our previous report on *birthright israel* (Saxe et al., 2000b), there have been a number of evaluative studies of Israel trips (e.g., Cohen, 1994; Cohen, 1995; Sales, 1998, 1999). These studies provide important information, but focusing on the trip does not provide information about the subsequent impact of the trip. In addition, there is a critical selection issue. To the extent that those who participate in Israel experiences are different from those who don’t participate (with respect to Jewish motivation and other factors), understanding trip impact becomes difficult. In studies that involve follow-up assessments (e.g. Cohen, 1994), it is therefore a problem to determine how much of the change was a product of who went and how much was actually a result of having been in Israel (Chazan, 1997).

Present Study

In the initial report assessing the impact of the launch program on participants, we presented substantial evidence that the trip had a “profound impact” on participants and we suggested that participation in *birthright israel* had “placed [them] on a different Jewish trajectory than their peers” (Saxe, et al., 2000b, p. 28). The purpose of the present report is to assess whether *birthright israel* alumni have continued on that trajectory and to establish whether the initial changes we observed appear to be enduring.

From the outset, our program of research has been carefully designed to overcome the key methodological limitations of previous studies on the Israel experience (Saxe et al., 2000b). Along with studying large numbers of trips and participants, multiple types of qualitative and quantitative data were collected, and comparisons were made between participants and non-participants. The research design included several features to enhance validity:

- Both participants and non-participants were surveyed using e-mail and the Internet one month, three months, and twelve to fifteen months after the trip period.

- Since the non-participants who applied to go on *birthright israel* trips had motivations that were similar to those of participants, and since those who went were, for the most part, selected at random, the non-participants served as an effective control group (allowing us to isolate the effects of the trip from prior interest in Israel).
- Participant-observers, part of the evaluation team, accompanied a number of the groups throughout their time in Israel to provide an ethnographic component that allowed us to triangulate findings through multiple research methods.

The present report focuses on the findings from a survey completed by United States participants and non-participants between 12 and 15 months after participants visited Israel. ⁵ Three months after the trip, nearly 2,500 participants and 531 non-participants completed our web survey. Twelve to fifteen months after the trip, 1,676 participants and 153 non-participants completed the survey. In order to ensure that the samples are comparable, the follow-up sample was weighted on unchangeable factors such as gender, whether they had a *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony, and whether or not their families lit candles Friday night and observed *kashrut* when they were growing up. This weighting procedure enabled us to make the follow-up group look like the original respondents on factors that are known to be well-correlated with various outcome measures. In addition, a variety of techniques were employed to ensure a high response rate. Yet another methodological contribution to this report is the ethnographic field research, which enriches and informs these results. The ethnographic findings themselves are described in a separate report (Kelner et al., 2000). Methodological details of the design of the present study can be found in Appendix B.

Our research questions concerned the following:

- What do participants remember of their Israel experience and which experiences had the most powerful and the most lasting effect? Are some participants more likely than others to have been affected?
- What was the impact of the trip and how has it changed over the year since participants arrived home? What attitudes did participants have about Judaism and Israel before the trip, immediately after the trip, and more than one year later? Were there any post-trip changes in participants' involvement in Jewish activities? Can we attribute these changes to the program?
- What characteristics of participants and trip organizers appear to be related to post-trip changes in attitudes and activities pertaining to Judaism and Israel?
- How does the program achieve impact?

⁵ Data were collected from both U.S. and Canadian participants. However, no comparison group was available for Canada and, thus, the analyses focus on the U.S. participants/non-participants. Appendix A on page 43 highlights the differences between the two samples.

Findings



Participant Profile

Any self-described Jew who had not previously been on a peer educational trip to Israel and was between the ages of 18 and 26 was eligible for the trip. For the launch program, the majority of participants were at the younger end of this range. Two-thirds of those who went on the trip were between the ages of 18 and 20 at the time of their travel (see Figure 1). Typical of participation rates in many aspects of Jewish life, *birthright israel* attracted more women than men — 59 percent were female and 41 percent were male.

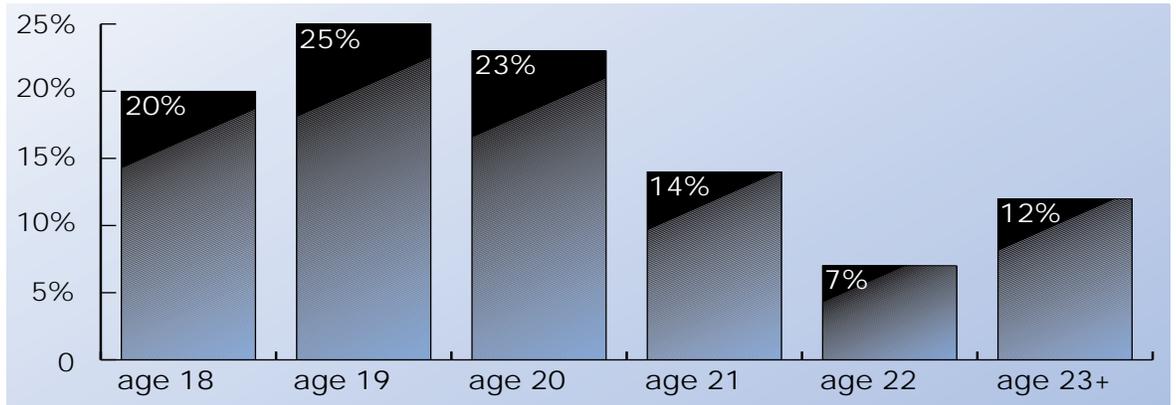


Figure 1: Ages of U.S. Participants at Time of Trip

One year after the trip, 70 percent of the participants were still full-time undergraduate college students. Another 9 percent were full-time graduate students, and a very small percentage (3 percent) were part-time students. Less than one-fifth were not in school (see Figure 2). About 90 percent of these were college graduates. Among those who were not attending school, 84 percent reported working full-time. The remaining 16 percent were either working part-time or were engaged in a job search.

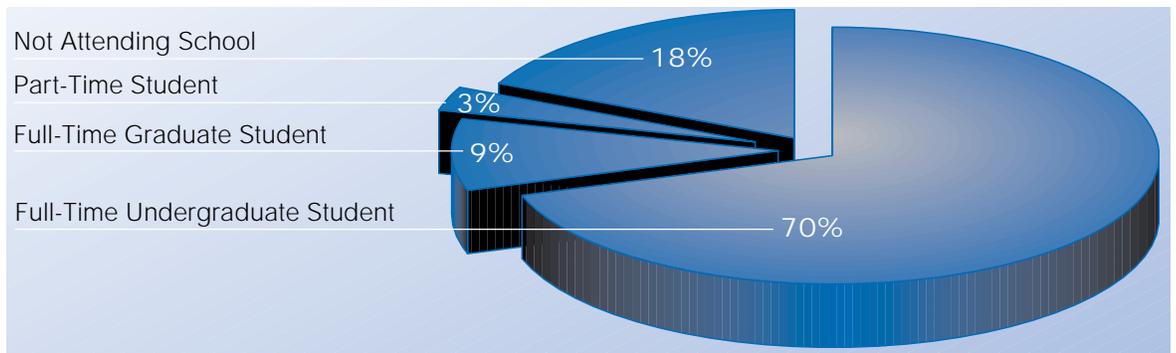


Figure 2: Student Status of Participants One Year After Trip

Attitudes Before the Trip

As reported in the initial evaluation, those who accepted the “gift” of a trip to Israel were as diverse as the North American Jewish population. They varied in religious background, Jewish education and commitment, and their motivations for applying to the program.

Jewish Affiliation and Upbringing

The *birthright israel* experience was designed, in particular, to attract those who had become “disconnected” from Judaism and the Jewish community. Was this group, in fact, disproportionately drawn to *birthright israel*? Responses to a question about denominational affiliation suggested that while *birthright israel* did attract a group whose profile resembled the broader American Jewish community, it also attracted a sizable number of young Jews who claimed no denominational affiliation. As indicated in the preliminary report on the 1999-2000 cohort (Saxe, et al. 2000b, p. 7), equal percentages, around one-third, identified themselves as Reform or Conservative, while only 5 percent said they were Orthodox (see Figure 3). However, 21 percent described themselves as “just Jewish,” a proportion considerably higher than the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey figure of 5 percent.⁶

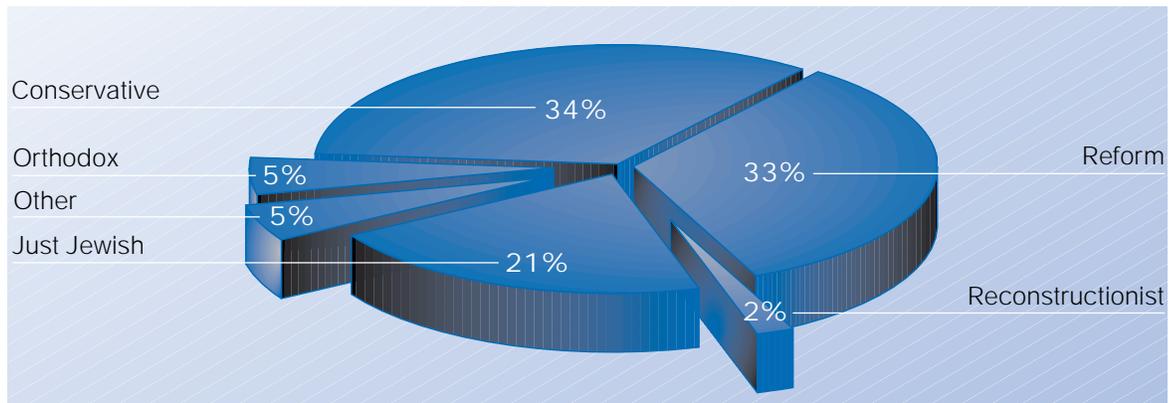


Figure 3: Participant Denomination Prior to Trip

Also in line with what we know of the make-up of American Jewish families, approximately 81 percent of participants came from households where both parents were born Jews. Another 9 percent came from households where one (or perhaps both) of the parents were Jews by choice, and the remaining 10 percent were raised in interfaith households (see Figure 4).

⁶The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey found that, among born Jews, 7 percent considered themselves Orthodox, 40 percent Conservative, 41 percent Reform, 2 percent Reconstructionist, 5 percent just Jewish, and 4 percent Traditional or Miscellaneous (Kosmin, et al., 1991).

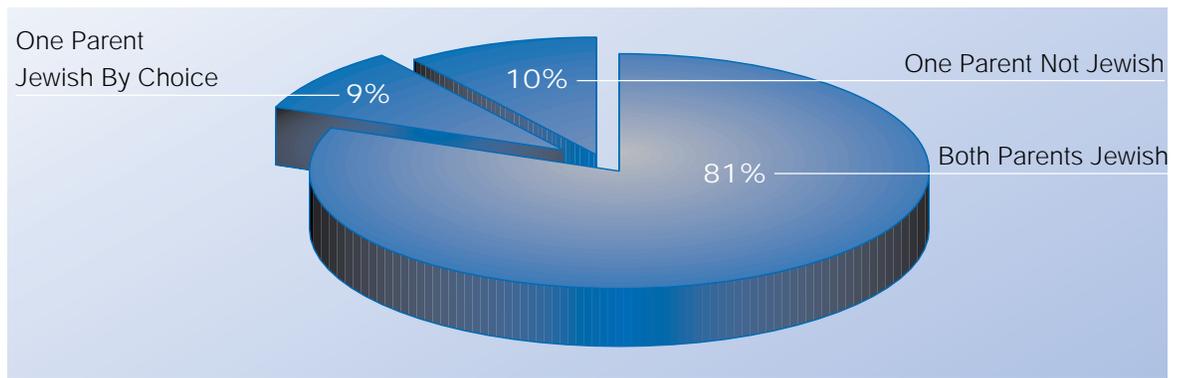


Figure 4: Family Background of Participants

To determine what types of Jewish practices participants' families engaged in when they were growing up, the survey had several questions about *Shabbat* candle lighting and *kashrut* during their high school years. One-third of participants and non-participants (33 percent) came from families where *Shabbat* candles were lit regularly on Friday night. Almost the same proportion, 32 percent, came from households that kept kosher.⁷ In short, over half of participants came from homes with relatively little Jewish observance, where neither *Shabbat* candle lighting nor *kashrut* were observed.

Despite the low level of Jewish observances at home, the vast majority of the participants experienced some type of participation in Jewish life. As shown in Figure 5 below, 84 percent reported that they had some form of Jewish education, either Hebrew school, day school, yeshiva, or private tutoring. Almost as many (79 percent) had a *bar* or *bat mitzvah* ceremony.⁸ Seventy percent belonged to some type of Jewish youth group, and exactly one-half attended or worked at one point in time at a Jewish overnight camp. There is, as Chazan and Cohen (2000) have noted, a myth about the "totally unaffiliated" Jew. The majority of young Jews have had at least some Jewish education and a ceremony marking their becoming a *bar/bat mitzvah*.

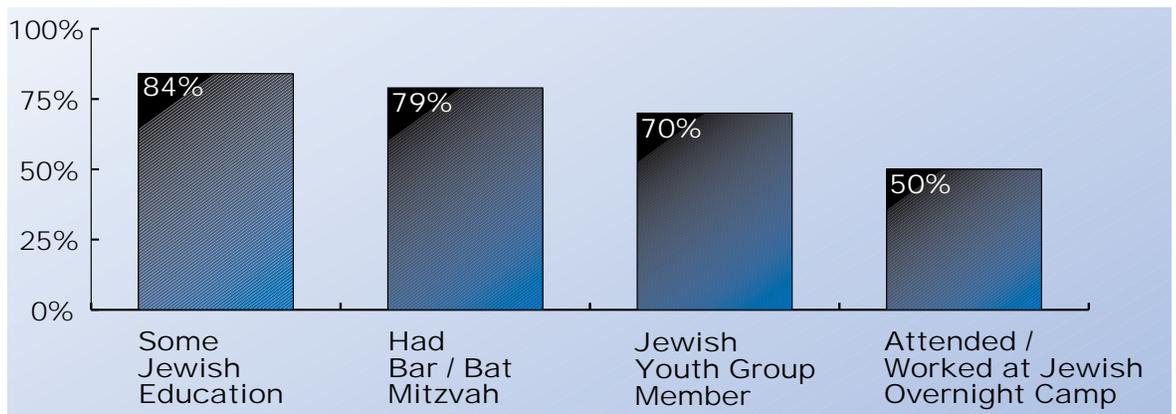


Figure 5: Participants' Jewish Activities in Childhood

⁷ These proportions were used as the targets for post-stratification weighting (see Appendix B).

⁸ This proportion was used as a target for post-stratification weighting, and represents an improved estimate rather than the preliminary figure of 67 percent that had been initially reported (Saxe et al., 2000b, pp. 7-8). For more information, see Appendix B.

In spite of the fact that virtually all participants had some form of Jewish education, 86 percent had never been to Israel prior to going on *birthright israel*. As noted in the preliminary report (Saxe, et al. 2000b, pp. 10-13), there were a sizable number of young Jews who had some Jewish involvement and would have liked to have gone to Israel, but said that the cost had prevented them from doing so. In addition, there was another segment that had not been Jewishly involved but wanted to be. Participation in *birthright israel* provided both segments with just the sort of opportunity they had been seeking.

Experiences During the Trip

Launch participants' evaluations of their trip were a critical part of our initial assessment of *birthright israel* and, as summarized earlier, were extremely positive (Saxe et al., 2000b). The present follow-up study considers whether these initial positive evaluations remained stable more than one year later and inquired about participants' retrospective views of their *birthright israel* experience.

Feelings About the Trip

Indeed, even after a year or more, participants overwhelmingly felt the trip was worthwhile — that it was fun, meaningful, and educational.

"It is an experience I will cherish always."⁹

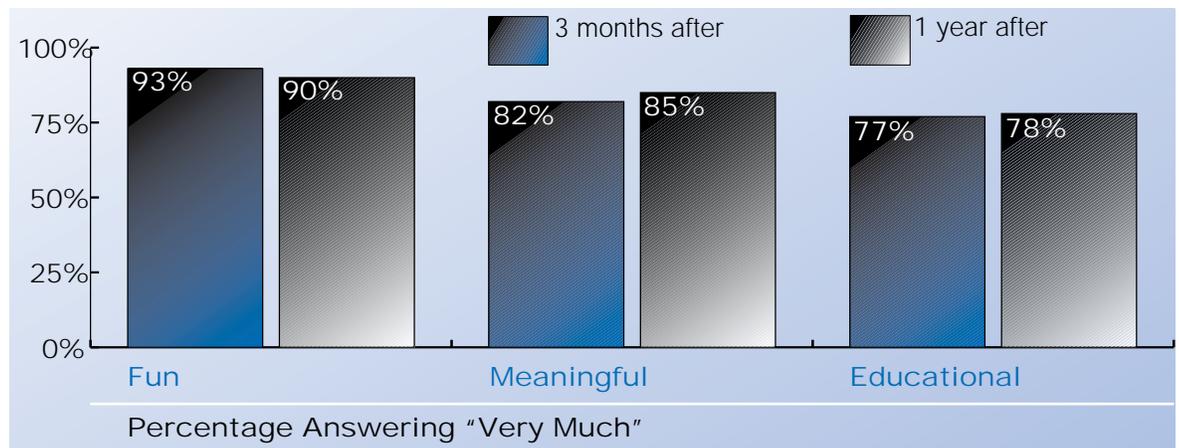


Figure 6: Participants' Reactions to the Trip

What is particularly striking is that over time the ratings of meaningfulness and educational value remained essentially stable. As shown in Figure 6, three months after the trip, over 90 percent of the participants responded "very much" when asked if the trip was fun, more than 80 percent responded similarly regarding its personal meaning, and more than 75 percent indicated a similarly positive rating for the trip's educational value. Over one year later, when asked the same questions, participants' responses are statistically indistinguishable. What is clear is that the trip remains vivid for participants and remains an important experience.

⁹ This quotation from a *birthright israel* participant, and subsequent quotations in this report, were taken from responses to a series of open-ended questions.

Strongest Memories of the Trip

As part of an effort to “unpack” the experience, in our one-year post-trip survey we provided participants with an opportunity to answer an open-ended question about their “strongest memory” of the trip. Despite the fact that each of the trip groups had a slightly different itinerary and different group dynamics, the similarities among respondents’ answers were striking. Thus, the most prominent memory described by respondents involved the *Kotel*, mentioned by 25 percent of those who answered this question.

“I would have to say [my strongest memory was] going to the Kotel for the first time. It was late at night and our supervisor brought us there but we were led with our eyes closed. When we were all there we opened our eyes. It was one of the most impactful moments of my entire life.”

Fifteen percent mentioned Masada, 14 percent mentioned Jerusalem and/or the Old City, 7 percent mentioned *Shabbat*, 5 percent mentioned the Dead Sea, and 4 percent mentioned *Yad Vashem* (see Figure 7). Fewer than 4 percent mentioned other sites. For most respondents, each site was the setting for some other memory — of making friends, being with peers, connecting with other Jews, appreciating the beauty and culture of Israel, and learning.

“I think the thing that impressed me the most was my sudden capacity to love the land in a way I hadn’t loved a place before and the equally stunning realization that even though we speak of Israel as our land, we belong to Israel more than it belongs to us.”

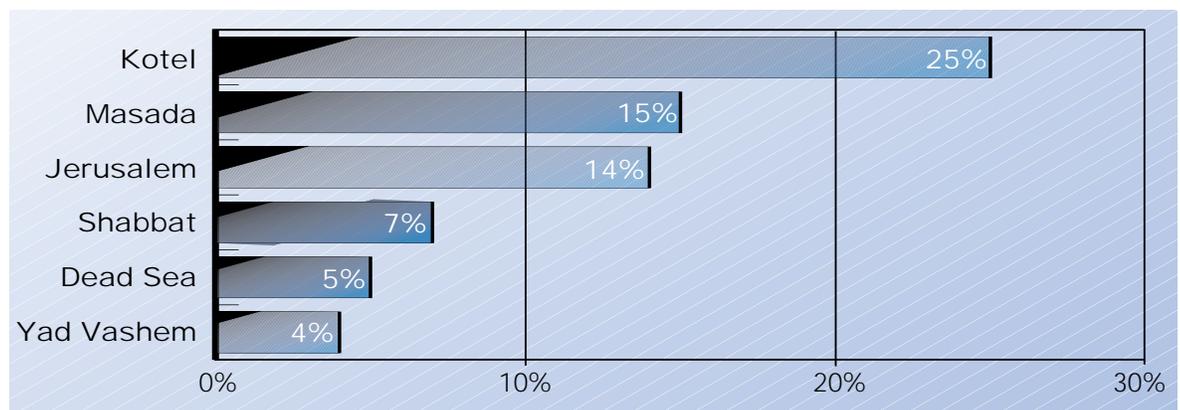


Figure 7: Strongest Trip Memories

What was particularly striking is how vivid the memories remained. Many of our respondents mentioned that they continue to think about their trip (see quote below).

The memories reported after a year are also consistent with the data we collected from participants shortly after the trip. Participants’ memories of the trip seem to be enduring.

“Though over a year has passed, there is not a week in my life when I don’t think about what I experienced in Israel.”

Holiness in the Holy Land: Spiritual Experiences of Participants

Israel affected participants in many ways. Some were moved simply by the natural beauty of the country. Others were taken with the excitement of modern Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Still others responded to the historical and archaeological sites. And then there were those who encountered something intangible, something not easily described, which can be classified as spiritual. For some, the Holy Land was indeed holy.

Specific questions about spirituality were not asked on our surveys of launch participants, although we did ask questions about spirituality on subsequent surveys given to participants on later trips. In these latter surveys, more than half of the participants described their experience as spiritual.

For the launch participants, we looked for references or allusions to spirituality in their responses to open-ended questions. Along with the query about their strongest memories, there were also questions about their biggest disappointments and about activities that they would have liked to have done but did not have a chance to do. At the end of the survey, there was an opportunity for them to respond to the question: "Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your *birthright israel* experience?"

To explore ways in which participants invoked notions of spirituality to describe their *birthright israel* experience, all of the written comments from surveys were analyzed. We found that the majority of references to spirituality, variously expressed, fell into one or more of five associative categories: Jerusalem, the *Kotel*, *Shabbat*, *Yad Vashem*, and Masada.

A simple reference to a given place or activity was not considered "spiritual" unless the participant provided further elaboration, as we could not otherwise determine what specifically he or she found meaningful. Thus, a recollection of "being at the *Kotel*" would not be categorized as a spiritual experience, whereas "being at the *Kotel* and knowing over three thousand years' worth of my ancestors have stood there" would be. As an additional criterion, any comment that contained only elements of aesthetic or material appreciation, lacking a spiritual or religious component, was excluded. As an example of the spiritual, we would include the feeling of fulfilling serenity and solitude at the summit of Masada, but we would not categorize as spiritual a simple recollection of the beauty of a Masada sunrise.

"...when I was in high school my mother had breast cancer and I sent a prayer to be put in the wall that she would be OK and 7 years later I stood at that wall and put in a note from my mother who was cancer-free. I have never felt so connected to God in my entire life."

Those participants who provided such responses, which consisted of either positive or negative feelings towards spirituality, indicated that for them it was a force on the trip.

Positive reactions to key sites and events varied from feelings of connectedness with the Jewish nation to those of divine communication. Many participants described religious epiphanies at places of particular Jewish significance, especially the *Kotel*. Visits to *Yad Vashem* were often marked by moments of somber contemplation about the Jewish people's place in the world. For numerous participants, sunrise at Masada provided a spiritual high, and some of those who chose to pray atop the desert peak said they experienced sensations of unity with God.

Participants were asked: “What would you like to do in Israel that you did not have a chance to do during your *birthright israel* trip?” Very often, they listed one of these “spiritual sites” as the response. Many wished they could have spent more time in Jerusalem or at the *Kotel*. Some felt not enough time was allotted to truly absorb the impact of *Yad Vashem*. Some groups were unable to climb up Masada due to time constraints and ascended via cable car, which they felt detracted from the overall experience. And, on one of the trips, groups were unable to ascend the mountain altogether due to local flooding, which left a number feeling that they had truly missed out on something special when they returned home.

Apparently, even with limited or no firsthand exposure to these sites, these participants had a sense that they should expect to feel more fulfilled or connected at them than at other sites. They seemed to have an idea of where to expect sanctity and wanted the opportunity to find it there. These descriptions confirm earlier conclusions drawn from ethnographic field work (Kelner, et al., 2000).

“I remember davening Shacharit one morning and being in the middle of Shmoneh Esreh and thinking to myself that the Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaacov who I mention in my prayers were in this land and bursting into tears.”

A minority complained when they did not find the sanctity they sought. For example, there were several who expressed a letdown after their first experience at the *Kotel*. This may be expected, as specific events or sites do not inspire everyone. Another group wanted more spiritual content in their program and were disappointed when it was not present. In contrast, others felt religion was being “crammed down [their] throats.” Although spirituality certainly seems to be a presence, its acceptance as an important part of the trip was not uniform among launch participants. Nonetheless, all of these comments were in the context of extremely positive reactions to the trip.

Impact: How Did the Trip Affect Participants?

Based on the evaluative data, there is substantial evidence that the trip was exceedingly well-received by participants and the one-year follow-up findings suggest that it was more than a halo effect generated by a novel experience. However, the most important test of the *birthright israel* “experiment” is whether the program produced any sustained change in participants’ attitudes and behaviors. More specifically:

- Did their identities as Jews change?
- Did they feel more connected to the Jewish people?
- Have they revisited Israel since their initial trip?
- Did they become more interested in Israel and did they develop a desire to return?
- Did they stay in touch with other participants and sustain a sense of community?
- Did they become more involved in Jewish activities at home?

Two types of comparisons were made, wherever possible, to answer these questions: comparisons over time (i.e., at three months and one year post-trip), and comparisons between participants and non-participants (i.e., those who applied but for various reasons did not go). All differences reported between participants and non-participants are statistically significant ($p < .05$) unless noted otherwise.

The Program's Impact on Jewish Identity

Salience of Jewish Identity Could a ten-day trip to Israel actually be sufficient to generate changes in participants' Jewish identities? The findings described below strongly suggest that it was.

"I was raised... without any real motivation to marry a Jewish person or learn more about Judaism. I didn't think Israel would be any different or more special than visiting Italy. The birthright trip changed everything for me. Upon my return I began exploring my own Jewish identity and the role I want Judaism to play in my life."

To answer this question, responses to a series of questions in two time periods were compared, contrasting participants and non-participants.¹⁰ Three months after the trip, 74 percent of participants responded "extremely important" to the question "How important in your life is being Jewish?" and more than one year after the trip, an almost identical percentage (76 percent) responded in the same fashion (see Figure 8 below). The corresponding percentages for non-participants (66 percent and 65 percent respectively) were also consistent over time but were lower than those of participants. Participants not only had stronger Jewish identities than non-participants, these feelings were sustained over time and did not dissipate.

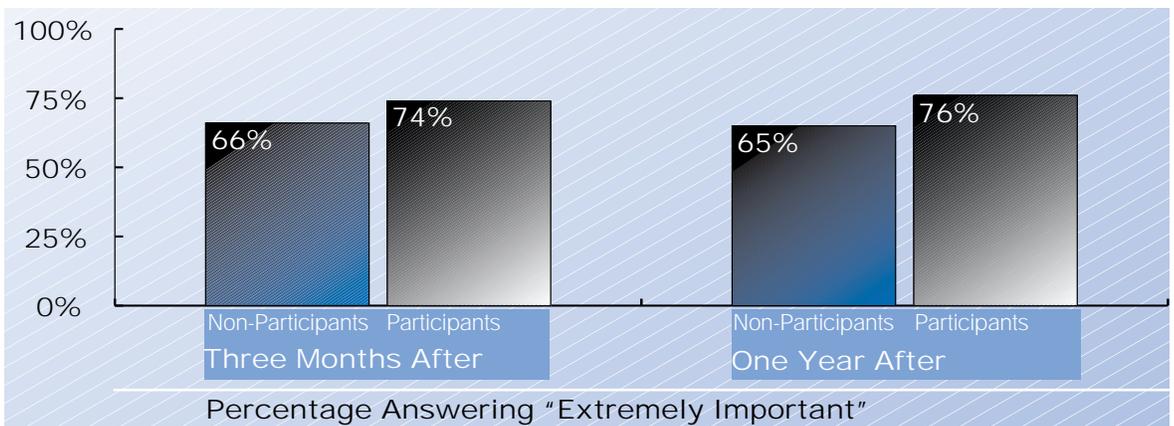


Figure 8: Importance of Being Jewish

A similar pattern emerged for a question about marrying Jewish.¹¹ Three months after the trip, about half of the participants (51 percent) responded "extremely important" to the question "How important in your life is marrying a Jewish person?" More than one year after the trip, the percentage was virtually identical (52 percent). Among non-participants, the percentages were 47 percent and 41 percent respectively (see Figure 9).

¹⁰ Recall that data were weighted so that the Jewish backgrounds of the two groups, participants and non-participants, would be equivalent.

¹¹ By the spring of 2001, only 2 percent of former participants were actually married.

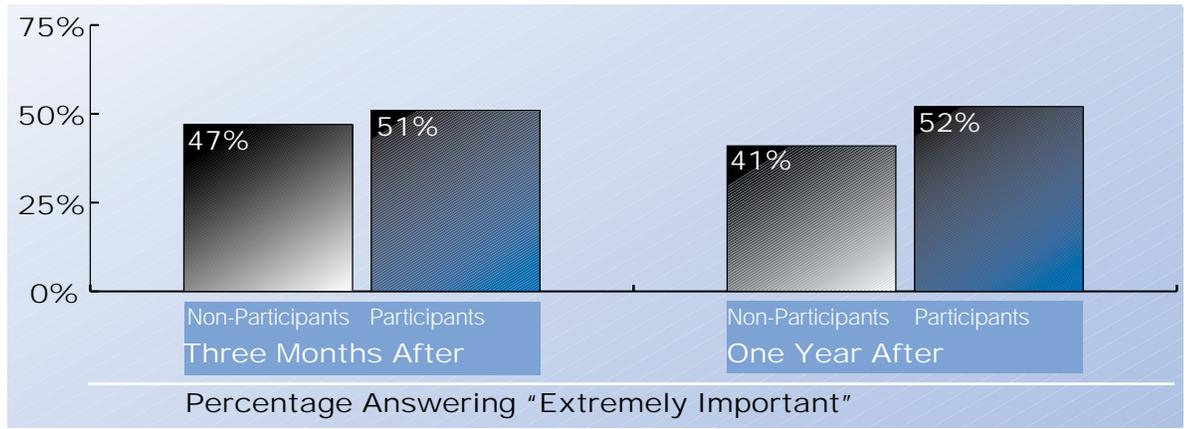


Figure 9: Importance of Marrying a Jew

The pattern repeated yet again for a question about raising children as Jews. Three months and one year after the trip, 75 percent of participants at both points in time said that it was “extremely important” to raise their children as Jews, while the corresponding percentages were 68 percent and 62 percent for non-participants (see Figure 10).

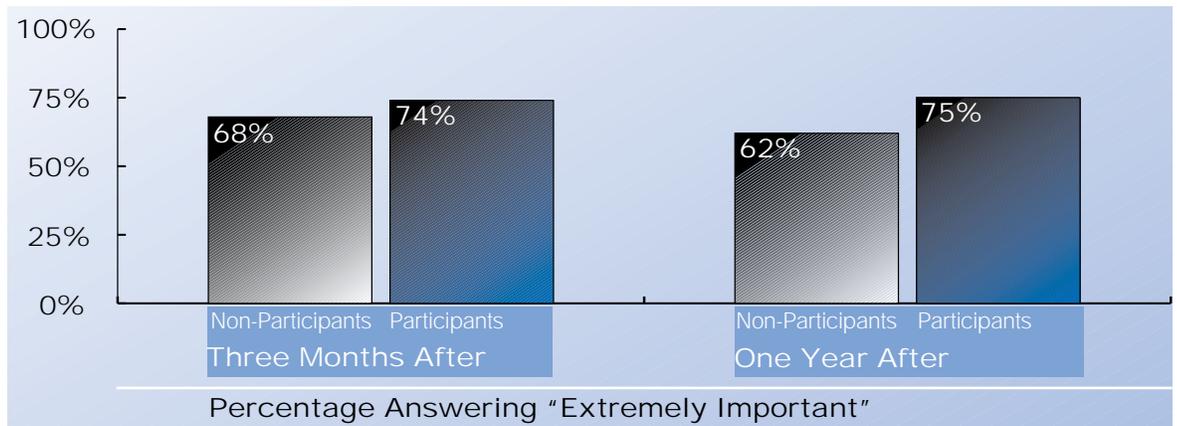


Figure 10: Importance of Raising Children as Jews

An increased salience of Jewish identity was also reflected in a greater inclination among participants to explore their Jewishness after the trip. When asked retrospectively about their feelings prior to the trip, only 22 percent selected the category “very much” in response to the question “Are you exploring your Jewishness?”¹² Three months after the trip, 40 percent selected “very much,” and over a year after the trip, 36 percent selected that category (see Figure 11). For non-participants, only 28 percent responded “very much” a year after the trip.

¹² For some questions, participants were asked retrospectively about their feelings prior to going on the trip.

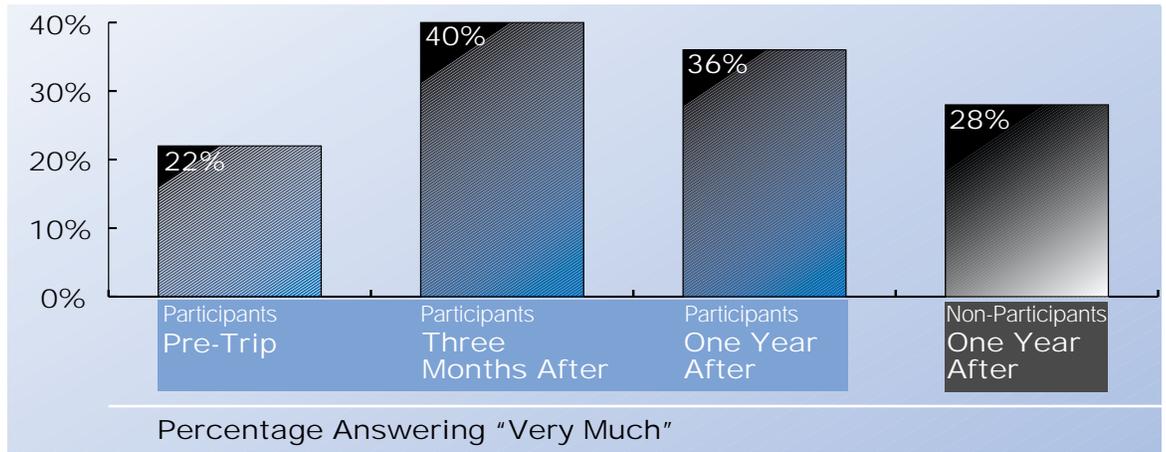


Figure 11: Exploration of Judaism

To summarize, in each case, non-participants placed less of a priority on their Jewishness and there was a decrease over time. Participants indicated it was more of a priority and their feelings were sustained over time.

Peoplehood and Religion as Aspects of Jewish Identity Prior research indicates that there are different facets of Jewish identity and that Jews do not uniformly identify with the same ones (Horowitz, 2000). Jewish identity, according to Horowitz, does not develop in a linear way and her work suggests that one should expect inconsistent relationships among attitudes and behavior.

"It was really a life changing experience... I may not follow all of the practices of my religion... but there is no question in my mind that I am a Jew first and American second and am inexplicably linked to Israel. I am a Jew and always will be and my children will be."

Participants and non-participants were asked to respond to questions about a dozen different aspects of Jewish identity. They were described on the survey instrument as "ways of being Jewish." More than one year after the trip, both participants and non-participants identified most strongly with two: remembering the Holocaust and leading an ethical and moral life. However, although only 52 percent of non-participants responded "very much" in terms of remembering the Holocaust, 67 percent of participants chose this category. It is difficult to know whether this reflects a general reawakening of participants' sense of Jewish history or the specific impact of going to *Yad Vashem* and meeting survivors as part of their *birthright israel* experience (see Figure 12).

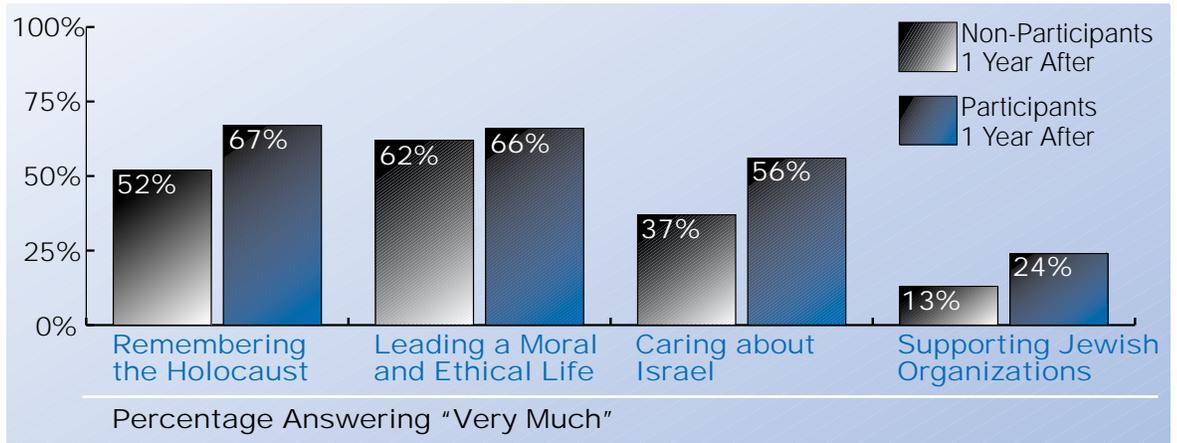


Figure 12: Aspects of Jewish Identity

In contrast, the percentages of non-participants and participants choosing "very much" on the question about leading an ethical and moral life were 62 percent and 66 percent respectively. Here, the percentage spread was much smaller, perhaps reflecting the more abstract nature of the concept and the fact that it was not a direct focus of a *birthright israel* trip as was the Holocaust (see Figure 12).

Just as there were only small differences between *birthright israel* participants and non-participants on ratings of ethics, differences with respect to religious ritual were also small. However, ethics were widely affirmed as an important component of Jewish identity, while ritual practices, such as observing the Sabbath, attending synagogue, and following Jewish law received the lowest ratings of all the aspects of Jewish identity on the survey.

The largest difference between participants and non-participants was on the identity question that had to do with a central goal of *birthright israel* — caring for Israel (see Figure 12). Here, 37 percent of non-participants and 56 percent of participants said this was very important to their own sense of what it meant to be Jewish.

Moreover, when asked about the extent to which they felt "connected to Israel," the proportion of participants responding "very much" was 55 percent three months after the trip and 48 percent more than a year later. Prior to the trip, this figure was only 22 percent. For non-participants one year after the trip took place, the percentage was 28 percent (see Figure 13 below).

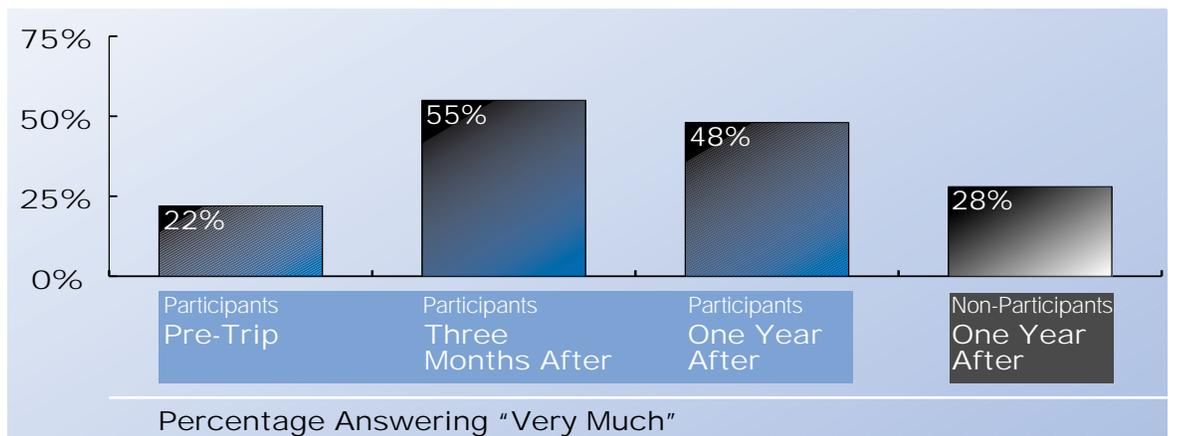


Figure 13: Connection to Israel

Interestingly, there was also a large difference between the two groups in terms of “supporting Jewish organizations.” Although only a small number of respondents saw such support as a critical part of their Jewish identity, compared to non-participants, Figure 12 shows that participants were almost twice as likely to have responded “very much” (13 percent versus 24 percent).

Taken as a whole, feelings about Israel, the Holocaust, and Jewish organizations can be considered as indicators of a sense of Jewish peoplehood. An even more direct measure of this concept was assessed by asking respondents, “To what extent do you feel a connection with the Jewish people?” Retrospectively describing their feelings prior to the trip, only 38 percent of participants responded “very much” to this question (see Figure 14). Three months after the trip, the percentage was 64 percent, and more than a year later, it was 65 percent. For non-participants one year after the trip took place, the percentage selecting the category “very much” was 47 percent.

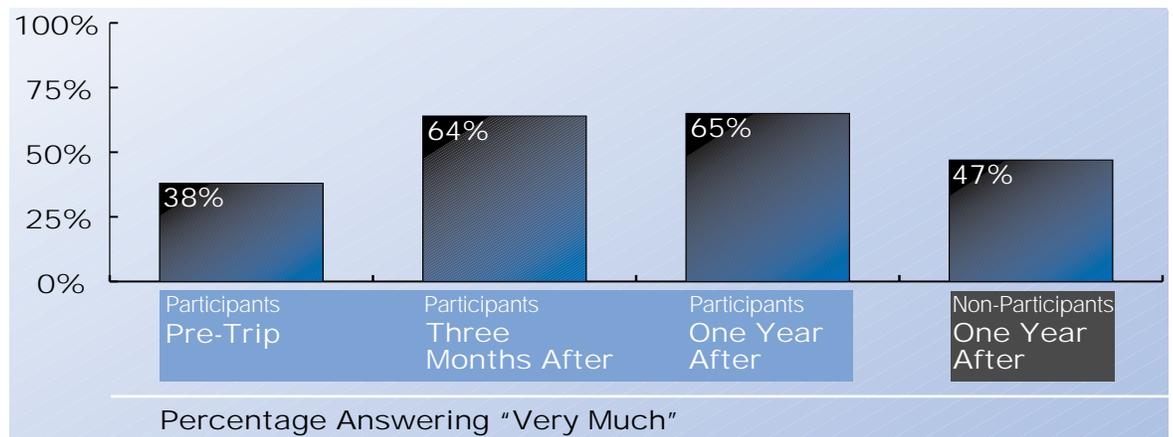


Figure 14: Connection to the Jewish People

In summary, the salience of Jewish identity can be said to have increased as a result of participation in *birthright israel*. Moreover, the program instilled in participants a heightened sense of Jewish peoplehood that remained strong more than a year after the trip. The finding that *birthright israel* had more of an impact on attitudes toward Jewish peoplehood (Israel, Holocaust remembrance, organizational support, and connection to the Jewish people) than on attitudes toward religion (ethics and rituals) is consistent with previous research on Israel experience programs (Chazan, 1997; Cohen, 1995; Isaacs & Schwartz, 1997; Kafka, et al., 1990).

Political Attitudes Regarding Israel

The increased connection and caring for Israel among *birthright israel* participants did not lead to differences with non-participants on political attitudes regarding Israeli-Palestinian relations. A question addressing this issue was asked only on the one-year follow-up survey, so it reflects the views of both groups as affected by the violence that had occurred since the fall of 2000. When presented with a set of positions about the conduct of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, 4 percent of participants said negotiations could not continue in the foreseeable future; 25 percent said they should continue only if Palestinian violence stops and if the division of Jerusalem and return of the Palestinians to Israel is not on the agenda; a similar proportion (27 percent) was content to drop the latter conditions and hold only that negotiations should be suspended until Palestinian violence stops; and 44 percent said that negotiations should continue regardless. Views of non-participants were nearly identical.

Returning to Israel: Action and Intention

Alumni Who Have Already Returned to Israel Although *birthright israel* is a one-time gift, a critical outcome is that alumni will be inspired to want to return, further strengthening their connection to the Jewish people. Over the course of the year since the trip, we found that 7 percent had indeed returned on their own. Given the size of the group participating in the launch program, it is estimated that between 300 and 400 returned to Israel. In light of the precipitous drop-off in travel to Israel since September 2000, particularly among participants in study abroad programs, these numbers seem substantial.

Among those who returned within a year, nearly half went on a vacation or organized tour. A total of 37 percent attended either a university study-abroad program (17 percent) or a religious study program such as a yeshiva (23 percent).¹³ Fifteen percent took part in a volunteer program and 14 percent worked for pay. A total of 39 percent of responses fell under the category of “other,” including family-related events and miscellaneous educational programs (see Figure 15).¹⁴

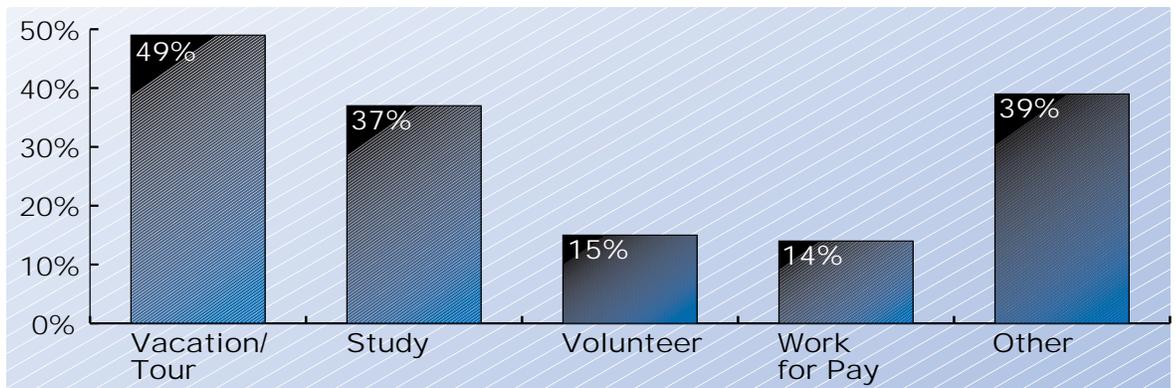


Figure 15: Participant Reasons for Visiting Israel After the Trip

The Intention to Return Participants were also asked if they intended to return to Israel within the next two years. About 16 percent said a return was “extremely likely” and 26 percent said it was “somewhat likely.” Around 35 percent said it was a “little likely,” and 24 percent said it was “not at all likely.” We also asked non-participants about their intentions to go to Israel over the next two years, and their responses were comparable to those of participants. About 17 percent said it was “extremely likely” they would go, 22 percent said it was “somewhat likely,” 34 percent said it was “a little likely,” and 27 percent said it was “not at all likely.” Non-participants, who had registered for the trip but for various reasons did not go, did not differ significantly. They exhibited the same level of motivation to go to Israel as those who actually went. Figure 16 shows these responses graphically.

“If the goal of this trip was to get people to go back to Israel, it worked. I had no desire to visit the country and now I can’t wait to go back.”

¹³ The two percentages add up to more than 37 percent because a small minority attended both types of programs.

¹⁴ Percentages add up to more than 100 percent because respondents could choose more than one reason for returning.

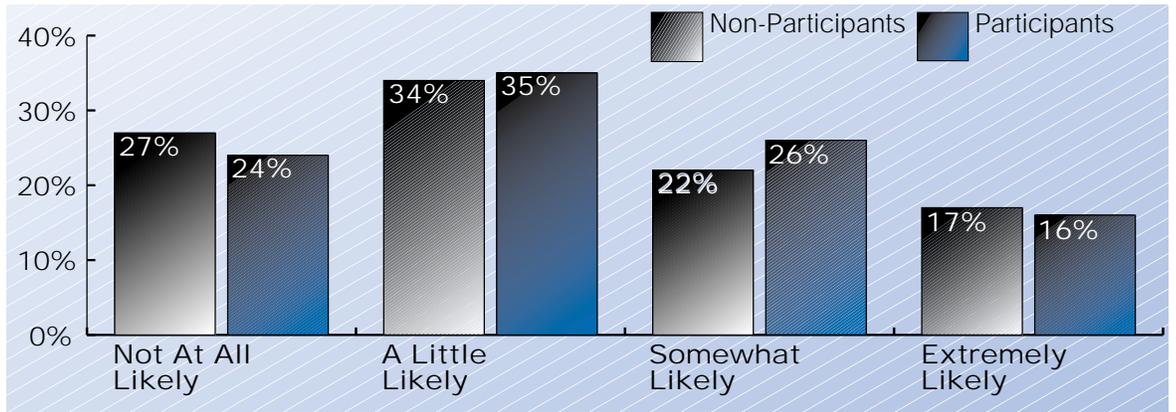


Figure 16: Likelihood of Going to Israel in the Future

Influences Affecting a Future Trip to Israel To find out what sorts of influences would affect the desire to return to Israel (or to go, in the case of non-participants), and how significant these influences were, we asked respondents about their thoughts on the current conflict with the Palestinians, safety concerns of family and friends, and financial barriers. About half of the participants said that the conflict with the Palestinians mattered either “somewhat” or “very much” in their intention to travel to Israel. The other half said it mattered either “a little” or “not at all” (see Figure 17). Slightly higher proportions of participants (59 percent) responded either “somewhat” or “very much” on a question asking about the extent to which their families’ or friends’ concern about safety made it difficult to plan a trip (see Figure 17). Differences between participants and non-participants on these questions were not statistically significant.

“It [the trip] made me want to go back and spend more time in Israel. I applied to go abroad for this semester at Hebrew University but my family would not let me go because of the violence. I hope to go back soon.”

Respondents indicated that the biggest obstacle to returning to Israel was financial, a finding consistent with the data we obtained prior to the trip. More than three-quarters of participants (79 percent) selected the categories “somewhat” or “very much” in response to a question about whether personal finances made it difficult to plan a visit (see Figure 17). This was not significantly different from the responses of non-participants.

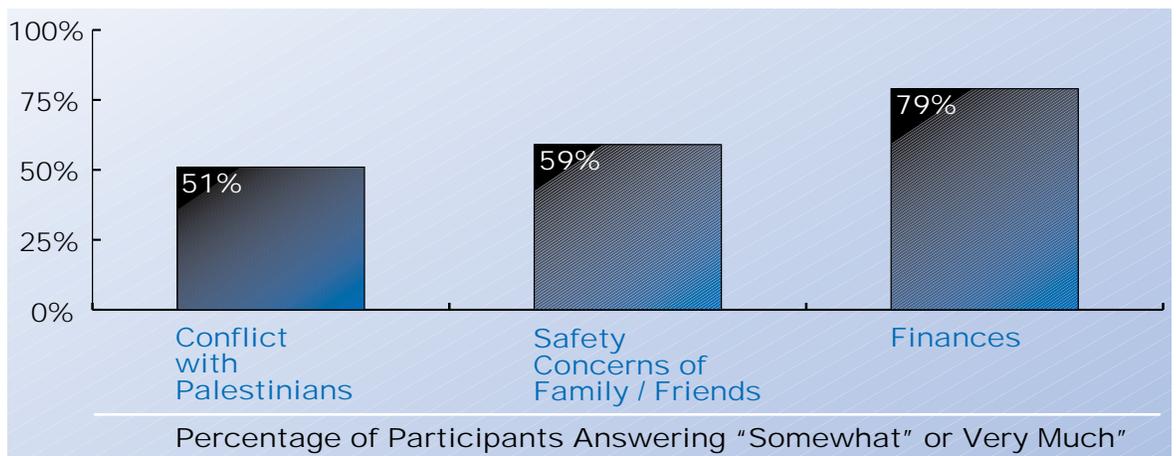


Figure 17: Factors Influencing a Future Trip to Israel

Influencing Others to Go to Israel One of the most direct ways to assess participants' sense of their experience was to ask whether they tried to influence others to participate in *birthright israel*. How "contagious" was the *birthright israel* experience and to what extent did participants tell others about their trip and encourage them to apply?

"It was one of the best experiences of my life. I have so many memories that I will treasure for the rest of my life. I have recommended this program to several people and will continue to do so as long as the opportunities continue."

The answer was unequivocal: virtually all of the participants we surveyed (96 percent) had encouraged friends or relatives to apply for a trip (see Figure 18).

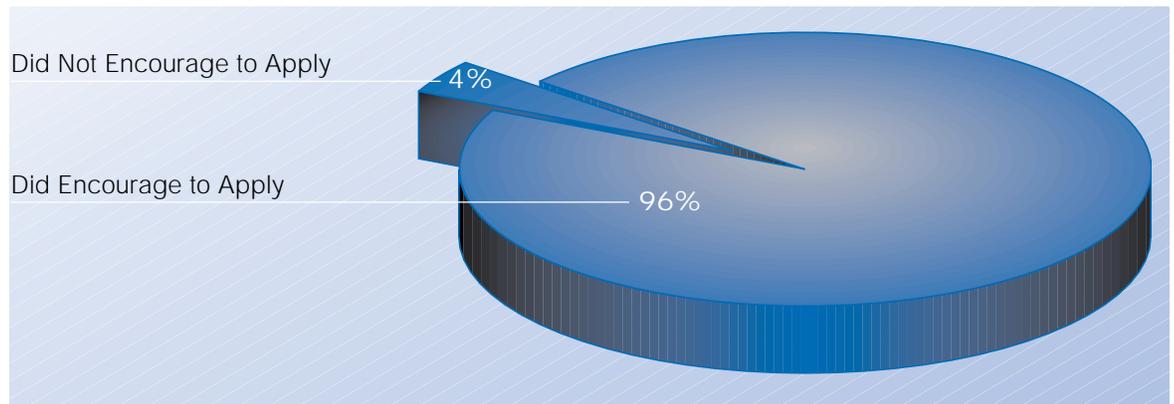


Figure 18: Influencing Others to Apply for a Future Trip

Not only did participants spread the word, they did so successfully. Around 55 percent said that at least one of the people they talked to ended up going on a trip, and another 22 percent said that at least one such person applied. Only 8 percent said that the person(s) they encouraged did not apply. About 15 percent did not know. These findings are shown in Figure 19.

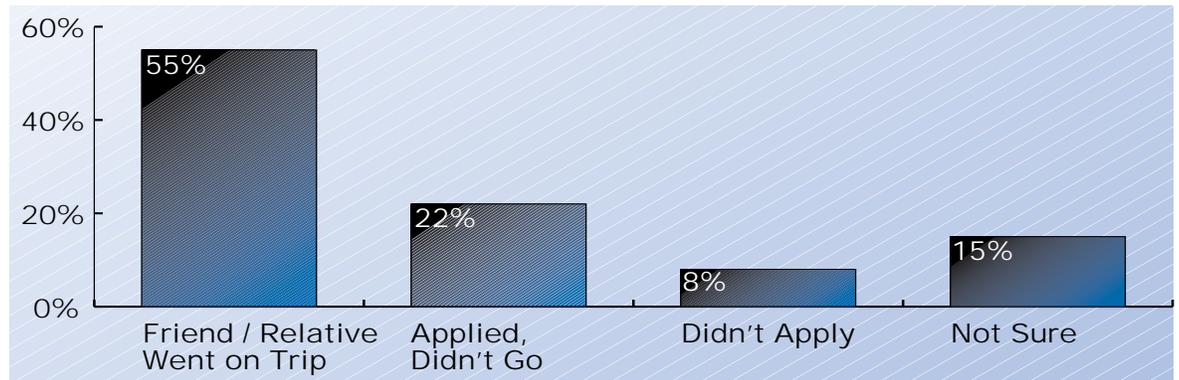


Figure 19: Outcomes of Influencing Others to Apply for a Future Trip

Jewish Life at Home: Just What Did Participants Do Differently After the Trip?

Another important set of outcomes concerns changes in specific behaviors that occurred as a result of going on a *birthright israel* trip.

Jewish Social Networks

Contacts with Others From the Trip During the trip, within virtually every group, participants bonded with others who were on their bus and in their group. The sense of community that was created was sustained after participants returned home and remained strong more than one year later. Almost 85 percent of participants indicated that they still had at least some contact with others from their group, and 40 percent said that they had contact once a week or more (see Figure 20).

"I didn't really get to make that many friends outside of my school group. I would have liked to make a stronger connection with Jewish students from other schools."

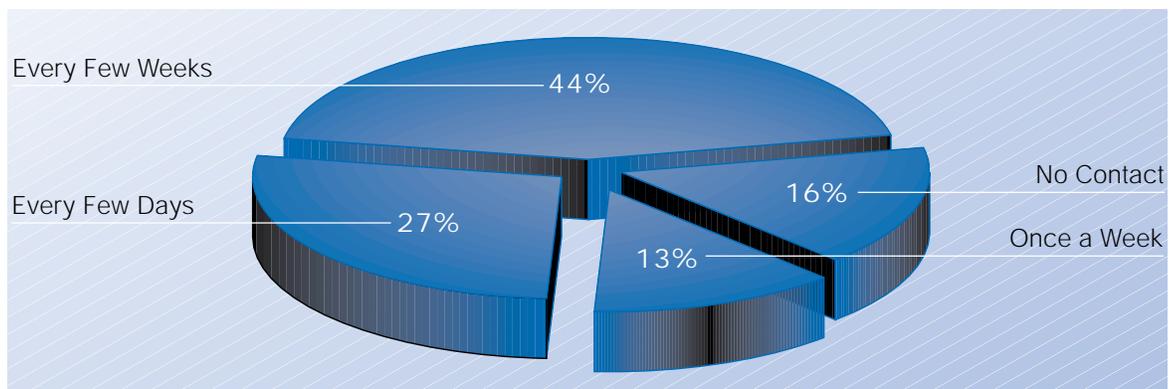


Figure 20: Contacts With Other Participants One Year After the Trip

Jewish Friendships Upon returning home, participants clearly stayed in touch with their friends from the trip, but were they also more inclined to connect with Jewish peers who had not been on the trip? To better understand participants' post-trip Jewish networks, we asked them how many of their close friends were Jewish — all, most, half, few, or none.

The program appeared to have forged Jewish friendships of enough depth that it almost eliminated the possibility that participants would have no close Jewish friends. Less than three percent reported this, compared to eight percent of non-participants (see Figure 21). Otherwise, with respect to Jewish friendships, there were no statistically significant differences between those who went on the program and those who did not.

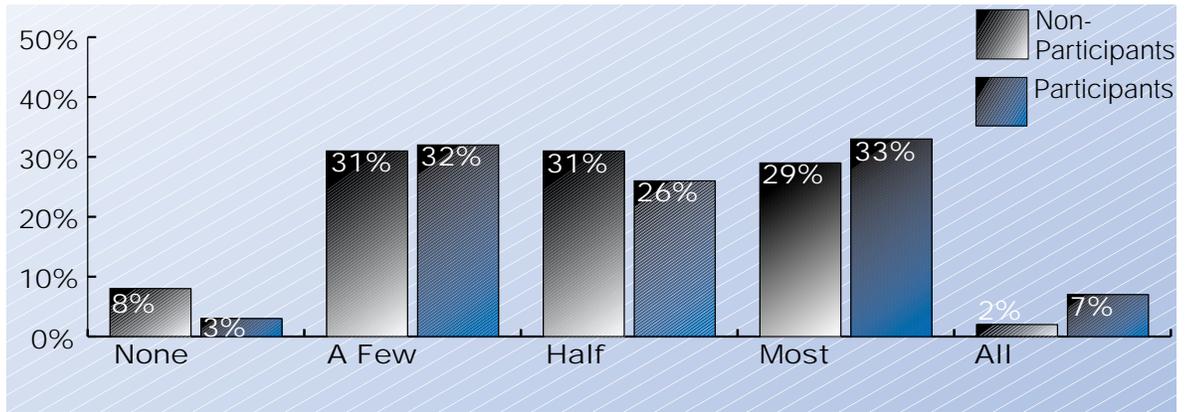


Figure 21: Proportion of Close Jewish Friends

Those participants who were more likely to stay in touch with others from their trip did, however, report having more Jewish friends.¹⁵ It was not clear from the data, though, whether staying in touch resulted in more Jewish friends, or whether those who already had more Jewish friends were more likely to stay in touch with their *birthright israel* companions. Those who did not maintain contact with other members of their group were the most likely to report having few or no close Jewish friends (50 percent) and the least likely to have most or all of their close friends be Jewish (26 percent). These proportions were reversed for those who saw friends from the trip several times a week. A quarter (24 percent) had few or no Jewish close friends, and a half (53 percent) said most or all of them were Jewish.

Should one assume from this finding that those who formed lasting friendships on *birthright israel* were also more inclined to make new Jewish friends? To do so ignores the finding that there were few significant differences in Jewish friendships between participants and non-participants. An equally plausible explanation is that participants who already had many Jewish friends prior to the trip found it easier to stay in touch with their *birthright israel* companions because they went on the trip with those same friends. Reversing the order in which the percentages are calculated, we found that the more Jewish close friends a *birthright israel* participant had, the more s/he was likely to have frequent contact with friends from the program and the less likely s/he was to have no contact. Figure 22 shows that while this relationship was found for both high and low levels of contact, it was not present at moderate levels of contact.

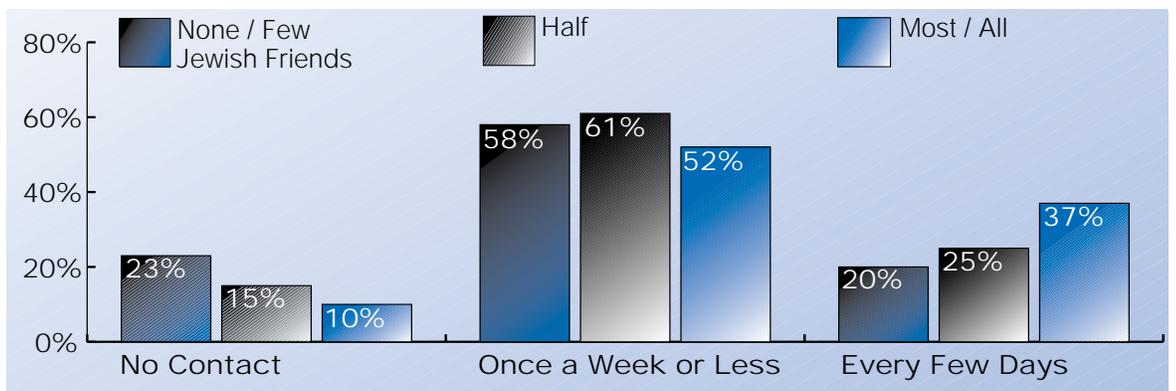


Figure 22: Proportion of Close Jewish Friends and Contact with Others From the Trip

¹⁵ Tau C = .165, $p < .001$.

Contacts with Trip Staff and Israelis Although connections were also maintained with trip staff and Israelis, contact occurred much less frequently than with peers. Slightly over one-third (35 percent) of participants had some contact with a trip leader or guide after the trip, and only 8 percent of participants had contact with Israelis they had met during the trip.

Changes in Jewish Activities

Among students, *birthright israel* participants engaged in more Jewish activities after they returned to school than did non-participants. Figure 23 shows that only 9 percent of non-participants chose the response category “often” in describing their involvement in Jewish campus activities, while 24 percent of participants did so.

The differences were not as pronounced for off-campus activities among students. About 8 percent of non-participants chose the response category “often” in describing their involvement in Jewish off-campus activities, while 13 percent of participants chose this category.

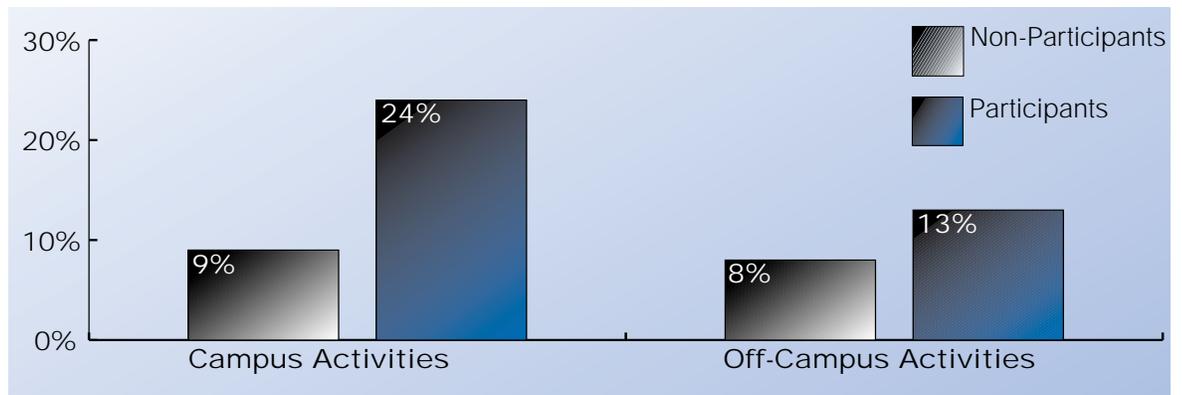


Figure 23: Student Participation in Jewish Activities

Participants seemed to show greater interest in news about Israel after the trip. Over one year later, 35 percent of non-participants and 44 percent of participants said they “often” follow news about Israel (see Figure 24).

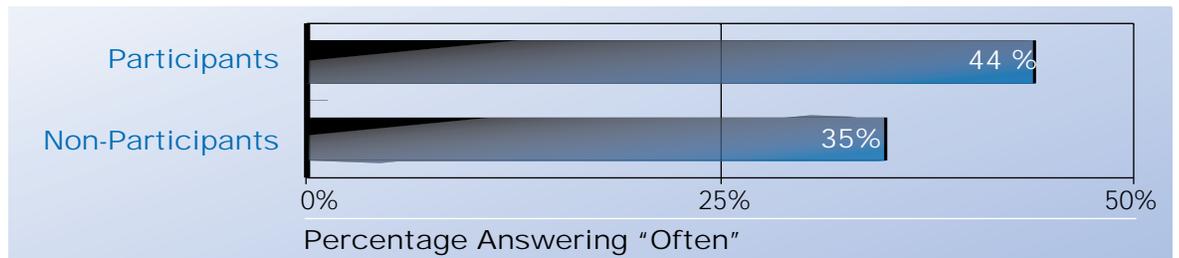


Figure 24: Following News About Israel

Participants also appeared to engage in higher levels of Jewish study following the trip. About 9 percent of non-participants chose the category “often” in response to a question about how frequently they engaged in Jewish study, while 17 percent of participants chose this category (see Figure 25).

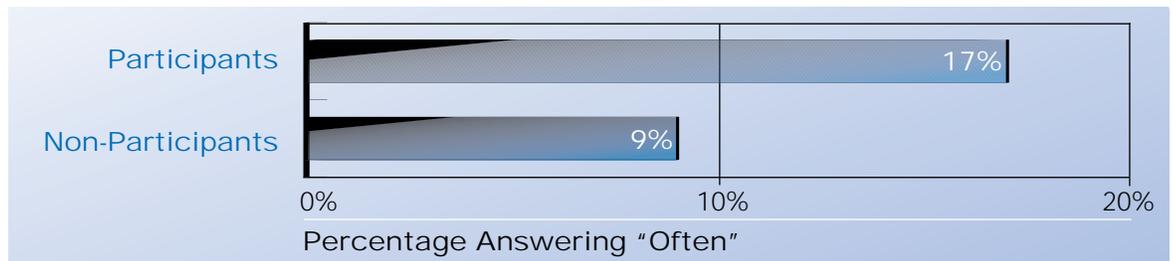


Figure 25: Engagement in Jewish Study

Ritual Observance

Ritual observance was not an emphasis of most *birthright israel* trips, although all groups had *Shabbat* services. The trips sponsored by religious movements did, however, emphasize ritual somewhat more than other groups. If going to Israel was intended to enhance participants' engagement with Judaism, then a desire to participate in more ritual observance might have naturally arisen when they returned home. Our data did not support this idea. We found that ritual observance was not significantly affected in the following four areas: attending worship services, fasting on *Yom Kippur*, lighting *Chanukah* candles, and following *kashrut*.

Both non-participants and participants were asked whether they had attended a Jewish worship service in the past month. About 58 percent of non-participants had attended once or more, while the corresponding figure for participants was 67 percent. The differences, however, were not statistically significant.

With regard to fasting on *Yom Kippur*, 74 percent of participants said that they had fasted in 1999, prior to going on the trip, and 77 percent reported fasting in 2000 after returning from the trip. The difference was not statistically significant. Among non-participants the numbers were 77 percent and 72 percent, respectively.

Similarly, no significant differences were observed in terms of *Chanukah* candle lighting. Eighty-nine percent of participants lit candles during the *Chanukah* prior to the trip, and 92 percent lit during the *Chanukah* after the trip. The figures for non-participants were 91 percent and 89 percent, respectively.

There was almost no change in *kashrut* practice over time in participants and non-participants.

Understanding Post-Trip Engagement¹⁶

The findings discussed above make clear that more than one year after the trip, participants were more Jewishly engaged than non-participants. What are the factors that affect participants' post-trip engagement with Judaism?

Accounting for Variation in Post-Trip Engagement

Although participants, in general, were significantly more likely to engage in Jewish activities than non-participants, they were not a homogeneous group. Participants differed from each other in a number of respects, and these differences might have an effect on their post-trip engagement. Differences include how they evaluated the trip, how often they had contact with others from the trip, how many of their friends were Jewish, and whether or not they spent free time in non-Jewish pursuits.

To assess these factors, a composite Jewish activities score was developed from responses to several survey items. A zero to four scale was created and regression analyses were employed to identify the individual factors that seemed to impact post-trip engagement.¹⁷ Figure 26 shows that positive feelings about the trip had a positive effect on post-trip engagement. The effect was stronger if participants had positive feelings and in addition were still in regular contact with other trip participants, and it was even stronger if both these conditions were present and the participants' friends were mostly Jews. The effect diminished if participants indicated that they went to many parties and were heavily involved in athletics. Similar patterns emerged for other composite scores that we created for feeling Jewish, the importance of dating Jews and engaging in Jewish observance, the importance of Israel and the Jewish people, and the importance of spirituality and ethics.



Figure 26: Characteristics of Participants Associated with Post-Trip Engagement

It would appear that if participants had a positive trip experience, made friends on the trip, and came back to Jewish friends, they were more likely to be Jewishly engaged. The effects were weakened, but still present, among those who spent the most time playing sports and partying.

¹⁶Data analyses presented in this section include both United States and Canadian participants.

¹⁷The Jewish activities scale consisted of the average score of going to Jewish activities on campus, going to Jewish activities off-campus, going to Jewish worship services, and engaging in Jewish study.

Students and Non-Students

As noted earlier, student participants were more engaged in on-campus Jewish activities than off-campus activities. There is nothing surprising about this finding. However, a more fundamental question is whether students were more engaged than non-students, both in terms of their Jewish identities and behaviors. To answer this question, several additional analyses were conducted by comparing the data obtained from participants who indicated they were full-time undergraduates (70 percent of all participants) with those who were not students (18 percent). For ease of comparison, the remaining 12 percent, who were either part-time or graduate students, were omitted from these analyses. All subsequent references to students refer to full-time undergraduates.

Similarities and Differences Between Students and Non-Students No significant differences were observed between students and non-students on a series of questions about Jewish identity, ritual observance, and Israel travel.

There were no student/non-student differences in Jewish identity, specifically regarding the importance of:

- Jewish peoplehood
- Ethics and spirituality
- Holocaust remembrance
- Fighting anti-Semitism

There were no student/non-student differences in ritual observance, specifically regarding:

- *Kashrut* observance
- *Shabbat* candle lighting
- Attendance at services¹⁸
- Self-described commitment to religious observance

There were no student/non-student differences in Israel travel and interest in Israel, specifically regarding:

- Ratings of *birthright israel*
- Intended or actual travel to Israel since the trip
- Perceptions regarding safety of Israel travel
- Following news about Israel

In three other areas, differences were observed between students and non-students, specifically regarding:

- Coursework in Jewish subjects
- Leadership in Jewish organizations
- Social networks

As might be expected, current undergraduate students were more likely than those not enrolled in school to have taken courses on Jewish subjects over the past 15 months. One out of every three (35 percent) undergraduate participants in *birthright israel* indicated they had taken a course in Jewish studies, while only 15 percent of non-students had taken such a course.

¹⁸A statistically significant difference, where non-students were slightly less likely to have attended services in the previous month, disappeared once we controlled for age.

Leadership in voluntary organizations, whether Jewish or not, declined as people left the university setting. It is likely there are fewer such opportunities for recent graduates. Sixty-one percent of full-time undergraduate student participants had some type of leadership position in non-Jewish organizations, compared to 38 percent of non-students. The student/non-student differential was smaller when considering Jewish activities. There, 37 percent of full-time undergraduate students who went on *birthright israel* indicated that they held a Jewish leadership position, compared to 28 percent of non-student alumni.

Although students and non-students did not differ in the overall proportion of their close friends who were Jewish, students were more likely than non-students to see their fellow *birthright israel* group members on at least a weekly basis. However, the difference between the two groups (44 percent versus 33 percent, respectively) was not as large as might be anticipated. One would expect that students inhabiting a college campus, where interactions with peers are frequent, would be much more likely to interact with fellow *birthright israel* alumni than would non-students, whose interactions with peers, overall, are less frequent.

We also found no differences between students and non-students in the proportion that had no contact with trip leaders (64 and 65 percent, respectively). However, for those who did maintain contact, it tended to be more frequent for students. Five percent of all students saw their trip staff every few days, compared to less than one percent of non-students. Particularly for those participants who were part of a campus-sponsored Hillel trip, it is likely that they had more opportunity for interaction than non-students.

Follow-Up Activities for Alumni Regression analyses indicated that students were generally more likely than non-students to be aware of and to participate in follow-up activities for *birthright israel* alumni. Models controlling for age, gender, country of residence and perceptions of the quality of the *birthright israel* trip, indicated the following:

Students were more likely than non-students to be aware of and to participate in alumni gatherings, including:

- Parties
- Reunions
- Retreats
- Orientations for new participants

Students were more likely to be aware of and to read alumni media, including:

- Newsletters
- E-mail groups

Although students, in contrast with non-students, were more aware of and more likely to participate in follow-up activities directly specifically at them, they did not participate in general Jewish communal activities any more than non-students. Students were more likely to be *aware of* activities such as celebrations of special events connected to Israel, Jewish learning programs, *Shabbat* or holiday programs, Jewish cultural activities, and political activity related to Israel. But they were no more likely to *take part in* them.

In summary, being a student made it more likely that a *birthright israel* alumnus or alumna would find out about and get involved in those activities that were specifically oriented toward keeping the group in contact. Students were also more aware of program offerings in the broader Jewish community that were not specifically oriented toward *birthright israel* alumni. But this awareness did not translate into a greater level of participation. Regardless of whether one considers the *birthright israel* groups to be “Jewish communities of meaning” or simply ordinary social groups, these networks are better perpetuated within the campus setting. However, campuses appear to have no advantage over other settings in fostering actual participation in broader communal activities.

Explaining Student/Non-Student Differences Why might campuses be better settings for fostering Jewish learning, Jewish leadership, and alumni networks?

Since colleges are structured around classroom learning, it is not surprising that people whose primary self-definition is “student” would have more of an inclination to enroll in Jewish classes. Equally important, the opportunity for such learning exists. Recent years have witnessed a substantial increase in the number of Jewish studies classes (see Cohen & Davidson, 2001). Course options are often diverse and standardized registration makes enrollment easy. The opportunity exists at a time of life when broadening knowledge is one’s primary life activity. In addition, to the extent that enrollment in a Judaic studies course fulfills a humanities, language, or other matriculation requirement, it satisfies a utilitarian motive.

Contrast this with the situation of a recent graduate. Here, the primary self-definition is as a worker, not as a student, and options for learning are not as easy to access. Beginning a program of formal study, be it through a course, with a tutor, or alone, requires more of an act of will. Most importantly, Jewish study is now relegated to a leisure-time activity, to be pursued after work hours or during a lunch break. It does not serve utilitarian goals and it competes with other activities.

Jewish leadership among students can be explained through an understanding of campus social life. Many students engage in extracurricular activities on campus, simultaneously pursuing personal interests and meeting like-minded fellow students. These activities often take place in the context of student-run organizations, where opportunities for leadership naturally arise. Students inspired by a *birthright israel* trip might be more inclined to gravitate toward Jewish organizations and assume positions of leadership.

The most likely explanation for student/non-student differences in follow-up activities stems from the dominant role of Hillel in the launch of *birthright israel*. Nearly half of the students went on Hillel-sponsored trips, and the same groups that toured Israel together returned to campus together.

Generally speaking, the presence of differences between students and non-students suggests that some post-trip effects of a *birthright israel* trip depend, at least in part, on the general lifestyle and context of participants’ daily lives. Campus life, where students are engaged in daily learning and are in regular contact throughout the day with others their own age, is more conducive to maintaining the community consciousness formed on *birthright israel* trips. In contrast, non-students are more isolated, have a more structured schedule, and have less free-time for study and to socialize with peers.

Although campuses appear to have an advantage in promoting Jewish learning and leadership, and in sustaining alumni networks, there were no differences between campus and non-campus participants on measures of Jewish identity or religious practice. It is not yet evident whether the advantages we did observe came about because participants from the same campus traveled together, or because of an influence from the campus setting itself.

The Effect of the School Attended

Were there differences from school to school in post-trip engagement? Examining the effect of the specific campus to which alumni returned, we found that participation rates in alumni follow-up activities varied by location. The university context accounted for 21 percent of the variance in participation in alumni activities.¹⁹ This relatively high percentage indicates that the school a person attends has a significant influence on their post-trip involvement. There were clear differences among colleges in the level of activity of *birthright israel* alumni.

One might assume that certain schools managed to attract *birthright israel* participants to alumni activities more than other schools because their students were somehow predisposed to involvement. It is true that schools varied in the Jewish identity and practice of their undergraduate body. Nine percent of the variance in the reported importance of being Jewish, marrying Jewish, and raising children Jewishly could be accounted for by the university attended, as could 6 percent of the variance in ritual observance. But the schools that had the most active *birthright israel* alumni were not necessarily those with most observant or Jewishly committed students.

Something other than the Jewish commitment level of the student body accounts for greater post-trip engagement. Without, however, actually studying the nature of the university Jewish communities to which *birthright israel* participants returned, we can only speculate about possible reasons. Although studies of post-trip programming efforts in Hillels and Jewish student unions have not yet been undertaken, it is likely that differences among these institutions play an important role. The demographic composition of the campus, the relationships among Jews and non-Jews there, the makeup of the *birthright israel* cohorts, and the quality of the trip itself relative to trips taken by students at other campuses may turn out to be relevant considerations.

¹⁹ See the Explanatory Note at the end of Appendix B for more detail on the Variance Components Analysis procedure used to calculate these percentages.

Conclusions



When *birthright israel* was launched in 1999, the idea was greeted with a mixture of hopefulness and skepticism. Given the many needs of the Jewish community, and the critical gaps in Jewish education programs for young people, spending millions of dollars to provide ten-day educational trips seemed a risky strategy. Still, there was a widespread perception that a serious problem existed — young Diaspora Jews were not connecting to their tradition. Before the program was launched, it was unclear whether large numbers of participants could be recruited and, even if they could, whether participation on a brief trip could be a meaningful educational encounter. We now have nearly two years of systematic data and the benefit of perspective. Our unequivocal answer is that the program has both attracted a broad range of participants and engendered a meaningful change in their Jewish identities.

Six thousand young Jews from North America went on the first *birthright israel* trips, and through the summer of 2001, 22,000 have traveled to Israel from all over the world. On one basic level, the program can be considered a success by a simple criterion — the extraordinarily high level of interest it has generated. More than 50,000 young people applied to participate in the program, most of whom would not otherwise have gone to Israel. Even in the face of continuing violence affecting Israel, interest in the program has continued. As evidenced by the very high percentage of past participants who encouraged their friends to go, it is clear that the “buzz” on the street about *birthright israel* is extremely positive.

Our task as social scientists has been to look more deeply at the *birthright israel* experiment. We have sought to understand the nature of the program's impact, the reasons for its success, and how its impact might be sustained. As part of our analysis, we have examined multiple criteria and collected data not just from participants, but also from others who are similar to them. Two central questions have been asked. First, what effects did the launch program have on participants, and second, were these effects fleeting or enduring?

As researchers who have conducted evaluation studies for nearly three decades, we have seen many promising social experiments fail or yield only middling results. What we found in studying *birthright israel* has surprised us. The simple message of this report is that the experiment was, and continues to be, a huge success. From the perspective of fifteen months after the trip, participants continue to view the experience as extremely meaningful and it appears to have had a very positive impact on their Jewish identity and their attitudes towards Israel, Judaism, and the Jewish people. It is rare in social science research for attitudinal change to be sustained over time, and it is even more rare when attitudes are not only sustained but do not diminish.

“Priceless. I owe the enthusiasm of my current Jewish life to birthright. As the Talmud teaches — if one person was saved the whole world has been saved. Birthright literally saved the Jewish world.”

Participants, compared to others who applied but were not selected to participate in the program, look very different. More than a year after they return home, participants' attitudes and aspects of their engagement in the Jewish community are different than that of their non-participant peers. Although sustained changes in attitudes were observed, and we found significant changes in actual engagement, participation in *birthright israel* did not magically transform young Jews overnight. For most participants, with the exception of a small group who became *baalei teshuvah* (Jews who “return” to traditional observance), their Jewish engagement only changed in limited ways. The goal

of the program was to be a catalyst for change, so it is unrealistic to expect that participants would be completely transformed. Ten days, no matter how powerful, cannot, by themselves, make someone an inspired Jew for life.

The *birthright israel* experience gave participants an experience that was novel for most of them — being part of a Jewish community. Each bus was a community in itself, and the sense of community was further reinforced when participants traveled to and from Israel with hundreds of peers. The *birthright israel* Mega Event, an evening celebration that brought together participants from all of the various trips, enabled them to be part of a community of thousands. Ten days of togetherness can create warm and tight bonds, and our survey data make clear that participants stayed in close touch with one another after the trip. But they didn't just connect with each other — many said they realized for the first time what it means to be Jewish.

The program sponsors, including the Israeli government, Jewish communities around the world, and private philanthropists, felt strongly that providing young Jews with an opportunity to experience Israel could spark renewed commitment and Jewish engagement. Although it is difficult to separate the impact of the program from its status as a “gift,” there is no doubt that this feature of the program was important, even critical. It not only made it possible for many to participate who would not otherwise have been able to go, it was a dramatic indicator to participants of concern and interest by the Jewish community. Ironically, the affluence of contemporary America has, perhaps, made the present generation of 18-26 year olds even more sensitive to financial issues and more conscious of the value of the gift than earlier generations would have been. It is one explanation for their view of the program's meaningfulness and educational value.

Post-Trip Programming

The dramatic effects documented by the evaluation raise an important question. How can the sense of community created during the trip be maintained after the trip? A critical issue arising from these findings is how to best understand, predict, and influence post-trip engagement. What have we learned from the *birthright israel* launch program about the factors that are central to engagement?

Our analyses support the idea that experiences on a *birthright israel* trip are not the sole determinant of whether alumni become engaged in post-trip activities. If alumni have Jewish friends, and if they stay in contact with other trip participants, they more readily become involved in Jewish life. This is more likely in some settings than in others. It may be far easier to sustain engagement when one is in close contact with other participants as well as local rabbis and *madrichim* from the trip. College campuses have a decided advantage in involving people in alumni programming, but the degree of participation in these activities varies substantially across universities. Moreover, the impact of specific school settings declines when it comes to translating the *birthright israel* experience into ritual observance or active participation with other parts of the Jewish community.

Thus, the settings to which alumni return influence the long-term Jewish effects of *birthright israel*. However, the ways in which this occurs are complex and are difficult to sort out, since our data come from individual participants. It was impractical to collect separate data about the myriad schools and communities to which alumni returned. The data we do have indicate that aspects of the post-trip setting are more strongly associated with some outcomes than others, but we cannot yet determine which ones are most salient. When this information becomes available, through further research, informed efforts can be made to influence campuses and communities through thoughtful social policy. Follow-up activities in settings that appear to be most successful with alumni are essential as the program matures.

Next Steps

The *birthright israel* experiment is now entering its third year of operation. It is a time when Israel is facing a series of vexing problems that offer no easy solution. The ongoing violence has devastated the country's tourism industry and resulted in a more than 50 percent decline in visits from North Americans during the first six months of 2001, compared to the previous year.²⁰ That tens of thousands of young Diaspora Jews continue to be interested in learning about their heritage by visiting Israel is, as we suggested earlier, one of the best indications that the program is a success. Our findings make it clear that past participants are the best advertisement for the program.

Our hope, however, is that this report has stimulated consideration of more profound questions about *birthright israel*. The launch program follow-up data reported here demonstrate that the experience had both cognitive and affective effects on participants and that the program appears to serve as a catalyst for Jewish engagement. Answering the central question of whether participants are now on a new Jewish trajectory requires additional follow-up and data collection several years post-trip.

Another important question raised by *birthright israel* concerns the generalizability of the findings. The short and medium-term success of the program stands out very favorably when contrasted with a host of less-than-successful prior efforts at large-scale Jewish educational interventions in other contexts. There may be important lessons to be learned as a result of the *birthright israel* program — for other facets of Jewish education and, perhaps, education more generally. The intensity of *birthright israel*, coupled with its communal focus, may be a model for different kinds of interventions both with young adults and other age groups.

Finally, and perhaps most important for the long-term assessment of *birthright israel*, the report also raises a series of challenges for *birthright israel* about how to sustain the Jewish involvement of those the program touches. The attitude change produced by the experience is not yet matched by long-term behavior change in participants. Whether it is an issue of how the communities are prepared to deal with *birthright israel* alumni or, more simply, a question of making connections between elements of the program and participants is not clear. It seems unequivocal that *birthright israel* participants are inspired and motivated — a seed has been planted that needs to be nurtured. The participants are not a unitary group. Aside from socio-demographic diversity, they represent the breadth of religious and cultural diversity among the Jewish community in the Diaspora.

What is now self-evident is that it is up to Jewish communities to find ways to engage the diverse *birthright israel* alumni. It probably means removing a host of barriers — financial and competence-related — to participation in the Jewish community. But it is also likely to entail the creation of new programs that satisfy the need for connection and community nurtured by *birthright israel*. Being in Israel as part of *birthright israel* provided alumni with a very positive Jewish educational experience. It gave them a sense of the possibilities of Jewish communal engagement. From campus programs, to synagogues, community centers, and other community-based organizations, the challenge is to develop equally engaging opportunities — ones that capture the spirit of *Klal Yisrael* and the love of Israel. In this troubled time in history when faith is being tested by daily events, the need is unprecedented and the potential is unlimited.

²⁰ Figure based on the number of tourist visas issued. Data obtained from the Israel Consulate of Boston in August 2001, originally provided by the New York Office of the Israel Government Ministry of Tourism.

Appendices



Introduction

The data reported in the main body of the report, with the exception of Post-Trip Engagement, were taken from United States (U.S.) participants. Canadians were excluded because data from Canadian non-participants were not obtained and comparisons could not be made.

On most variables, there were no significant differences between Canadian and U.S. participants. This Appendix, based on data from 248 Canadian respondents, describes only those differences that could be meaningfully interpreted and that were statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Differences Between Canadian and United States Participants

The primary differences between Canadians and those from the U.S. had to do with participants' backgrounds. Of the few differences in post-trip attitudes and behaviors, most can be related to differences in these demographic background factors.

Canadian participants tended to be older and had a denominational profile that was simultaneously more Orthodox and more secular than the U.S. participants. In terms of the program outcomes, the few differences that did emerge were mostly accounted for by the different denominational profiles of the two groups. There were, however, several differences that could not be explained by these or other background variables.

Background of Canadian Participants

Canadian participants tended to be older than U.S. participants. Forty-four percent were age 23 or over at the time of the survey, while only 12 percent of U.S. participants were older than 23. Nevertheless, an equivalent percentage of Canadians and U.S. participants were undergraduate college students at the time of the survey. There were also no significant differences in the gender distribution of participants from the two countries, nor did the two groups differ in the proportion of participants who were born outside North America.

There were several important differences between Canadians and U.S. participants in terms of their Jewish backgrounds. Among Canadian participants, 9 percent considered themselves Orthodox, 39 percent Conservative, 17 percent Reform, 26 percent "Just Jewish," and 9 percent something else. Compared to U.S. participants, Canadians were about half as likely to identify as Reform and more likely to report affiliation with Orthodoxy, Conservative Judaism, and the non-denominational status of Just Jewish. Thus, Canadian participants were much more likely to be at the extremes of religious involvement (Orthodox or Just Jewish/Other), compared to the U.S. participants.

Overall, Canadians were less likely than U.S. participants to have celebrated a *bar* or *bat mitzvah* ceremony (72 percent v. 79 percent, respectively). The differences, however, are almost entirely a product of differences in *bat mitzvah* celebrations among women. Canadian women were less likely to have had *bat mitzvah* ceremonies than their U.S. counterparts (56 percent v. 74 percent). In both the United States and Canada, Reform girls were more likely to become *b'not mitzvah* than the Orthodox or Just Jewish, but since there were fewer Reform Jews from Canada, this propensity had a smaller impact on the overall rates. Moreover, the likelihood that Conservative women in Canada had celebrated a *bat mitzvah* was substantially lower than that of U.S. Conservative women (64 percent v. 88 percent respectively). There were no significant differences in *bar mitzvah* rates among the men.

The more traditional profile of Canadian Jewry reflected in the denominational distribution and the gender norms surrounding *bar* and *bat mitzvah* was also evidenced in higher rates of Jewish day school enrollment and informal Jewish education. Twice as many Canadian participants than U.S. participants graduated from a Jewish secondary school (13 percent v. 6 percent). Although there were no significant differences in Jewish youth group participation, the rates of Jewish overnight camp enrollment (as either a camper or a counselor) were somewhat higher for Canadians (62 percent v. 50 percent).

Effects of the Trip on Canadian Participants

Overall, there were few significant differences between Canadians and U.S. participants in post-trip outcome measures. There were, however, a few instances where differences were observed. The focus on differences should not, however, obscure the broader finding that outcomes for the two groups were essentially similar.

Effects of Student Status One behavioral indicator of trip effects in which Canada-U.S. differences were noted involved campus-based activities. Canadian students were less likely than U.S. students to have selected the response category "often" in describing their involvement in post-trip Jewish activities on campus (11 percent v. 24 percent).¹ There were no differences between the two groups with regard to off-campus activities.

Overall, Canadian participants were less likely to engage in Jewish study (24 percent said they never undertook this activity, compared to 12 percent of U.S. participants). Controlling for student status revealed that the differences were found only among full-time undergraduates. There were no differences in Jewish study between Canadians and U.S. participants who were not students.

Student status did, however, account fully for differences between Canadians and U.S. participants with regard to their frequency of contact with friends from the trip. Seventeen percent of Canadians were in touch with friends from the trip every few days, compared to 27 percent of U.S. participants. However, this effect disappeared once student status was controlled.

Effects of Denominational Affiliation on Jewish Identity On a series of measures of Jewish identity, Canadian participants were less likely than U.S. participants to indicate strong Jewish affiliation. They were less likely to have attended services in the month prior to the survey (51 percent v. 67 percent) and more likely to say that attending synagogue was not at all important to their personal sense of being Jewish (23 percent v. 15 percent). In addition, they were less likely to express a strong sense of connection to the Jewish people (56 percent said they "very much" felt such a connection, compared to 65 percent of U.S. participants), less likely to say they were "very much" exploring their Judaism (28 percent v. 36 percent) and less likely to say that making the world a better place was central to their sense of being Jewish (40 percent v. 54 percent).

Despite these differences, on most indicators of Jewish identity and behavior, there were no significant differences between the two groups. No significant differences were observed with regard to the extent that their personal sense of being Jewish involved living a rich spiritual life, caring about Israel, remembering the Holocaust, or celebrating Jewish holidays, among other things. No significant differences were observed in their responses to the question: "How important in your life is being Jewish?" Nor were differences observed in responses about opinions on interdating and intermarrying, observing the High Holidays and *Chanukah*, or keeping kosher.

In attempting to explain the differences that were observed, denominational affiliation was used as a control variable. In all cases, the inclusion of affiliation eliminated differences between the Canadians and U.S. participants who identified as Orthodox. The same was true for those who considered themselves Just Jewish. Almost all differences between Reform Jews from the two countries disappeared with the exception of the centrality to personal Jewish identity of *tikkun olam*, or making the world a better place. U.S. Reform Jews were much more likely to affirm the salience of this value than Canadian Reform Jews.

The only denomination for which Canada-U.S. differences persisted was among those who identified themselves as Conservative Jews. Canadian participants who reported affiliation with the Conservative movement were less likely to express a strong Jewish identity than the U.S. Conservative Jews.

Travel to Israel With regard to future Israel travel, Canadian participants were less likely than U.S. participants to say that their future plans would be affected by security concerns. When asked whether the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would influence their decision to go back, 18 percent of Canadians said it very much would, compared to 24 percent of the U.S. participants. Likewise, 19 percent of Canadians versus 29 percent of U.S. participants said that their parents' or friends' concerns about security would very much influence their decision.

The greater willingness of Canadians to set aside security concerns may be reflected in the fact that, while similar proportions of Canadian and U.S. alumni encouraged other people to apply for a *birthright israel* trip, the Canadians were more likely to report that the people they had spoken to actually ended up going on the program. Of those who knew what the people they encouraged eventually did, 78 percent of Canadians said that those they encouraged had gone on the trip, compared to 65 percent of U.S. participants.

Table A1: Summary of Differences Between U.S. and Canadian Participants

Variable	Summary of Statistically Significant Differences ²	Comments
Age	Canadian participants were older.	44 percent of Canadians were 23 or older versus 12 percent of U.S. participants.
Denomination	More Canadians were Conservative, Orthodox or "Just Jewish;" fewer were Reform.	Only 17 percent of Canadians were Reform, versus 33 percent of U.S. participants.
<i>B'nai mitzvah</i>	Canadians were less likely to have had a <i>bar/bat mitzvah</i> ceremony.	Overall, 72 percent of Canadians had a <i>bar/bat mitzvah</i> ceremony, versus 79 percent of U.S. participants. Among women, 56 percent of Canadians versus 74 percent of U.S. participants celebrated a <i>bat mitzvah</i> ceremony.
Jewish schooling	Canadians were twice as likely to have graduated from a Jewish secondary school.	13 percent of Canadians versus 6 percent of U.S. participants graduated from a private Jewish secondary school.
Jewish summer camp participation in childhood	Canadians were more likely to have attended or worked at a Jewish summer camp.	62 percent of Canadians versus 50 percent of U.S. participants attended or worked at a Jewish summer camp.
Student participation in on-campus Jewish activities	Canadians were less likely to have engaged in post-trip Jewish activities on campus.	11 percent of Canadian students versus 24 percent of U.S. students participated in Jewish activities on campus.
Engagement in Jewish study	Canadians were less likely to have engaged in Jewish study.	24 percent of Canadians versus 12 percent of U.S. participants said they "never" engaged in Jewish study; differences were found only among students once statistical controls for student status were introduced.
Contact with friends on the trip	Canadians were less likely to have had frequent contact with friends from the trip.	17 percent of Canadians versus 27 percent of U.S. participants had contact with friends from the trip every few days; there were no statistically significant differences once controls for student status were introduced.
Participation in worship in the last month	Canadians were less likely to have attended worship services.	Overall, 51 percent of Canadians versus 67 percent of U.S. participants attended worship services in the last month; differences were found only among Conservative Jews once statistical controls for denomination were introduced.

² All zero-order effects reported in this table are statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Variable	Summary of Statistically Significant Differences	Comments
Ways of being Jewish — attending synagogue	Canadians were less likely to have said that attending synagogue was a way of being Jewish.	Overall, 23 percent of Canadians versus 15 percent of U.S. participants chose "not at all" in response to a question about whether being Jewish involves attending synagogue; differences were found only among Conservative Jews once statistical controls for denomination were introduced.
Connection to the Jewish people	Canadians were less likely to have felt connected to the Jewish people.	Overall, 56 percent of Canadians versus 65 percent of U.S. participants answered "very much" in describing whether they felt connected to the Jewish people; differences were found only among Conservative Jews once statistical controls for denomination were introduced.
Exploration of Judaism	Canadians were less likely to have explored their Judaism.	Overall, 28 percent of Canadians versus 36 percent of U.S. participants answered "very much" to a question about whether they were exploring their Judaism; differences were found only among Conservative Jews once statistical controls for denomination were introduced.
Ways of being Jewish — <i>tikkun olam</i>	Canadians were less likely to have indicated that making the world a better place was a way of being Jewish.	Overall, 54 percent of U.S. participants versus 40 percent of Canadians chose "very much" in response to a question about whether being Jewish involves making the world a better place; differences were found only among Reform and Conservative Jews once statistical controls for denomination were introduced.
Effect of Israeli/Palestinian conflict on going to Israel	Canadians were less likely to have indicated that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians would affect a future trip to Israel.	18 percent of Canadians versus 24 percent of U.S. participants said the conflict affected their decision "very much."
Effect of safety concerns by family and friends on going to Israel	Canadians were less likely to have indicated that friends and family had safety concerns about a future trip to Israel.	19 percent of Canadians versus 29 percent of U.S. participants said safety concerns by family and friends affected their decision "very much."
Friends of alumni who applied actually went on the trip	Friends of Canadian alumni were more likely to have gone on a subsequent trip than friends of American alumni.	78 percent of Canadians versus 65 percent of U.S. participants reported that friends who were encouraged to go on a trip actually went.

Appendix B: Introduction Methodology

To assess the impact of *birthright israel*, multiple methods were employed. Participant-observers accompanied participants on a sample of trips, researchers conducted focus groups, and surveys were administered to program applicants and participants via the Internet. The present report summarizes survey data collected approximately 15 months after the first *birthright israel* trips. Below, details of the sample frame, weighting, and analysis plan are described. Although the design is straightforward, involving a comparison of participants and non-participants, constructing samples that were representative of the applicants and participants was not trivial. The challenges arose primarily from the nature of the initial *birthright israel* launch, an unprecedented large-scale social experiment that was continually evolving. Despite the challenges posed by this research setting, we are confident that the resulting data are representative, and that every possible step was undertaken to ensure the quality of the data.

Database

Contact information was obtained for participants and non-participants from the database that *birthright israel* created in the fall of 1999 when applicants first registered for the program over the Internet. This database posed a significant challenge to conducting the research. Some applicants had entered data incorrectly or did not provide all the information requested, and the database was not updated after participants returned from their trips in January and February of 2000. The latter situation was especially problematic since college-age individuals are a highly mobile population and considerable change in addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses are to be expected within this group. Consequently, many telephone numbers, e-mail and mail addresses were invalid. In addition, approximately 5 percent of the entries in the database were duplicates.

These database difficulties led us to employ a variety of strategies to ensure that we obtained a representative sample and that we understood the reasons for non-response. One significant consequence of these database difficulties was that we could not be confident, a priori, that non-response represented an unwillingness to respond. It may have instead reflected our inability to locate an individual, or it may have been the case that the same person was represented in the database more than once, and our second contact message was simply ignored. Although every attempt was made to eliminate duplicates, it was impossible to ascertain whether the duplicate entry containing the correct address and telephone number was the one that was retained. As described below, in our attempts to follow-up with non-respondents, approximately 30 percent of those we tried to reach did not have valid contact information.

Survey Procedures

Initial contact was made with all participants and applicants (non-participants) by sending a personalized e-mail to their last known valid e-mail address. The e-mail contained an invitation to respond to a follow-up survey on *birthright israel* and included a URL link that when clicked took them directly to an online survey. The text of the e-mail is presented below. As an incentive to participate, respondents were notified that they would be placed in a lottery for \$100 worth of books from Barnes & Noble.

Shalom (Respondent's Name)!

A year ago you registered to participate in the *birthright israel* gift trip. Some of you were fortunate enough to go, others were not. Now, your help is urgently needed. We don't want your money. We want your honest ideas and opinions about the current situation in Israel and your own involvement in the Jewish community. For those who participated in trips, we want to learn about your experience. Your answers will be extremely helpful to those who plan and support Jewish education and trips to Israel.

To express our thanks for your input, your name will be entered into a lottery offering a gift certificate you can spend on books or records at www.barnesandnoble.com. Your answers are totally confidential and will be seen only by researchers at Brandeis University. They will ONLY be part of a statistical report. The survey begins below - to continue, click or hit enter on the "continue" icon at the bottom of the page. If you have any questions about the survey or technical problems in responding, please respond to this e-mail at bri_questions@bostoninfosolutions.com or call our toll free number 1-888-659-8711. To insure that our survey is representative, it is very important that you respond. We — and the sponsors of *birthright israel* — are very appreciative.

Thank you,

Charles Kadushin and Len Saxe,
Co-Principal Investigators

We wanted to encourage respondents to start the questionnaire right away, so we included several topical questions on the first page asking how closely they were following news from Israel, their views of the peace process and whether they felt events in Israel were affecting the situation of Jews in North America. To verify the database information, we also asked them whether they actually went on the trip:

Did you actually go on the *birthright israel* Winter Launch in December 1999 or January/February 2000?

- Yes
- No, but I went on a subsequent *birthright israel* trip
- No, I applied but was not accepted and did not go on any further trips
- No, I applied and then decided not to go
- No, you must have obtained my name by mistake!

Table B1 shows that there was some disagreement between the testimony of respondents and the information contained in the database. Of the 1,676 respondents whose survey response indicated that they had gone on the trip, 115 were recorded in the database as not having gone. Of those 1,588 persons the database had listed as participants, 27 had not gone according to their account. Note that some survey respondents indicated that they went on the trip in the spring of 2000. For present purposes, we included them in the survey as having gone on a *birthright israel* trip.

Table B1: Trip Participation Discrepancies Between Database and Self-Reports

PARTICIPANT STATUS	According to Self-Reports		
	Participant	Non-Participant	Total
According to the Database			
Participant Winter 1999	1,424	12	1,436
Participant Spring 2000	137	15	152
Non-Participant	115	126	241
Total	1,676	153	1,829

The request to complete the survey was sent late in the day on Monday, April 9th, 2001. Chart B1 shows that of the surveys we eventually received, almost 90 percent were sent in by April 30th. On April 18th, after sending two e-mail requests to complete the survey, we initiated an intensive follow-up of non-respondents. At this point (see Chart B1) about 50 percent of the replies that were eventually received were completed. Following up was therefore important.

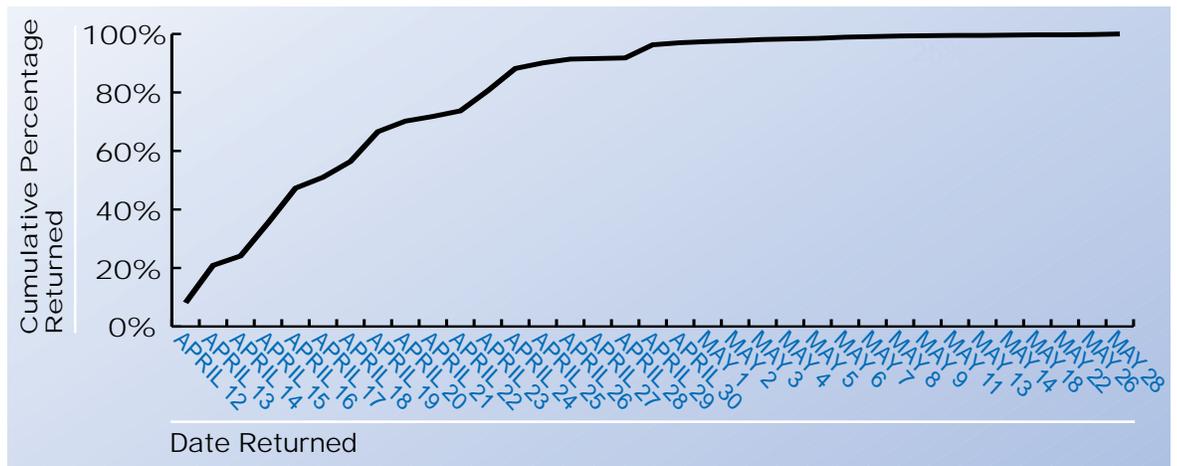


Chart B1: Survey Responses Over Time

From the 6,489 entries in the database, a total of 3,172 non-respondents (See Table B2) who had been listed by *birthright israel* as having participated in the initial 1999-2000 launch were chosen at random. SRBI, a respected polling organization with whom we had successfully worked in the past, then attempted to reach them by telephone. One year earlier, SRBI had been responsible for telephone interviews with non-respondents in the original launch program data collection efforts. This time, however, as a result of methodological experimentation, it was determined that responses could be effectively generated, at least from participants, merely by calling non-respondents' attention to the survey and asking them to complete it online. Interviewers at SRBI found that many non-respondents had treated the e-mails asking for their response to the survey as "junk" e-mails and had not even bothered to open them. Encouraging respondents to fill in the survey themselves rather than interviewing them proved more cost-effective.

Table B2: Number of Non-Responding Participants Receiving Intensive Follow-Up Categorized by Validity of Database Contact Information

Valid Database Contact Information Available?	Number of Participants Who Received Intense Follow-Up	Percentage Who Received Intense Follow-Up
No	885	27.9%
Yes	1,827	57.6%
Not Certain	460	14.5%
Total	3,172	100.0%

To encourage responses, SRBI interviewers used a standardized protocol.¹ This procedure resulted in a total of 637 respondents who would not have otherwise completed their surveys, representing over 40 percent of the eventual respondents. Recall that the yield was limited by the fact that the lists being used were inaccurate, since at least 30 percent of the numbers reached were verifiably not correct. Table B3 shows that from the halfway point of the data collection process through the end, over 80 percent of the returns resulted from these telephone calls.

¹ Available from the authors of this report.

Table B3: Responses Categorized by Date of Response and Nature of Follow-Up

Date of Response	Did Not Receive Intensive Follow-Up		Received Intensive Follow-Up		Total
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
April 12 - 15	545	100.0%	0	0%	545
April 16 - 17	206	90.0%	23	10.0%	229
April 18 - 23	86	19.3%	360	80.7%	446
April 24 - May 28	44	14.8%	254	82.5%	298
Total	881	58.0%	637	42.0%	1,518

Response Rates

Assuming the assignment of people by *birthright israel* to participant or non-participant status is correct, and that their contact information was correct, then Table B4 shows the response rates according to respondent status. About 12 percent of non-participants and 27 percent of participants completed surveys.

Table B4: Response Rates by Respondent Status

Participation According to the Database	Completed at Least One Section of the Survey		Did Not Respond to the Survey		Total
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Winter 1999	1,301	27.0%	3,512	73.0%	4,813
Spring 2000	20	13.2%	132	86.8%	152
Didn't Go	189	12.4%	1,335	87.6%	1,524
Total	1,510	23.3%	4,979	76.7%	6,489

Table B5 shows that about 40 percent of those who did not have to be encouraged responded, as compared with about 20 percent of those who received intensive follow-up. The results of the follow-up procedure, however, showed that at least 30 percent of those who were intensively followed-up could not be located. Much of this was not the result of change over the course of the year but rather inadequacies in the database. Given the difficulty of finding people, it was estimated that more than 50 percent of participants who had valid e-mail addresses or telephone numbers responded, a respectable proportion for a long-term follow-up survey.

Table B5: Response Rates by Type of Follow-Up

Participation According to the Database	Did Not Receive Intense Follow-Up				Received Intense Follow-Up			
	Completed at Least One Section of the Survey		Did Not Respond to the Survey		Completed at Least One Section of the Survey		Did Not Respond to the Survey	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Winter 1999	673	39.7%	1,022	60.3%	628	20.1%	2,490	79.9%
Spring 2000	12	12.2%	86	87.8%	8	14.8%	46	85.2%
Didn't Go	189	12.4%	1,335	87.6%				
Total	874	26.3%	2,443	73.7%	636	20.1%	2,536	79.9%

Intensive follow-ups were not attempted for non-participants. Therefore we must assume that the relatively few who did answer were more interested in *birthright israel* and Jewish matters than those who did not respond. This imparts a conservative bias and enhances our confidence in the findings, because it suggests that the control group respondents were likely to be more positive about Israel and their Jewish identity. Any differences observed between participants and non-participants were therefore more likely to be genuine and robust since the conservative bias would tend to dampen differences between the two groups.

Differences Between Respondents and Non-Respondents

Given the imperfect response rates, what were the differences between respondents and non-respondents? Age and sex were the only data available for almost all the individuals in the original *birthright israel* database, so comparisons between respondents and non-respondents could be made only on these variables. Table B6 shows that as is typical, women were somewhat more likely to be respondents than men, but this held true only for the United States respondents.

Table B6: Response Rates by Gender and Nationality

Responded	United States ^a				Canada ^b				Non-Participants (United States Only) ^c			
	Number		Percent		Number		Percent		Number		Percent	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Yes	449	599	25.4%	28.7%	115	133	25.4%	26.8%	64	109	9.7%	13.2%
No	1,322	1,488	74.6%	71.3%	337	364	74.6%	73.3%	599	717	90.3%	86.8%

^a χ^2 test $p < .02$

^b Not statistically significant

^c χ^2 test $p < .03$

Although there were some observed differences in response rate by age, there was substantial missing data so the differences could not be readily interpreted.

It is obviously difficult to know the attitudes of non-respondents. Traditionally, survey analysts have held that those who return their responses later than others, and/or those from whom greater effort is required to get responses, are likely to be more like non-respondents. If so, then Tables B7 through B10, analyzing different attitudes and attributes based on the timing of when questionnaires were returned, show that there were no differences between respondents and non-respondents on these variables. This also holds true for sex and age as measured by the respondents' own reports.

Table B7: Mean Values for Attitudinal Indices by Response Date

Attitudinal Indices	Response Date								Total	
	April 12-15		April 16-17		April 18-23		April 24- May 28			
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Good Trip Index	480	3.80	220	3.82	398	3.79	274	3.90	1,373	3.80
Safety Index	534	2.54	228	2.45	438	2.48	291	2.53	1,491	2.51
Jewish Activities Index	533	2.32	223	2.31	429	2.28	285	2.24	1,469	2.29

Note: The results of an ANOVA indicated that the mean differences were not statistically significant for all three attitudinal indices.

Table B8: Mean Values for Attitudinal Indices by Type of Follow-Up

Attitudinal Indices	Did Not Receive Intensive Follow-Up		Received Intensive Follow-Up		Total	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Good Trip Index	753	3.81	619	3.80	1,373	3.80
Safety Index	860	2.50	631	2.52	1,491	2.51
Jewish Activities Index	856	2.29	613	2.29	1,469	2.29

Note: The results of an ANOVA indicated that the mean differences were not statistically significant for all three attitudinal indices.

Table B9: Date of Response by Gender

Date of Response	Male		Female		Total
	N	Percent	N	Percent	
April 12 - 15	214	39.9%	323	60.1%	537
April 16 - 17	105	44.5%	131	55.5%	236
April 18 - 23	210	46.9%	238	53.1%	448
April 24 - May 28	122	41.9%	169	58.1%	291
Total	651	43.1%	861	56.9%	1,512

Note: Differences were not statistically significant.

Table B10: Date of Response by Age

Date of Response	Age										Total
	18 - 19		20		21		22		23 - 26		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
April 12 - 15	85	16.0%	132	24.9%	102	19.2%	93	17.5%	119	22.4%	531
April 16 - 17	39	17.0%	44	19.1%	40	17.4%	43	18.7%	64	27.8%	230
April 18 - 23	62	14.0%	113	25.5%	100	22.6%	57	12.9%	111	25.1%	443
April 24 - May 28	40	13.8%	56	19.3%	70	24.1%	53	18.3%	71	24.5%	290
Total	226	15.1%	345	23.1%	312	20.9%	246	16.5%	365	24.4%	1,494

Note: Differences were not statistically significant.

We conclude that it is reasonable to assume that those participants who responded did not differ appreciably from the population of participants. It was not as clear whether responding non-participants were a fair representation of their respective population. If any biases did exist, the effect would have been in the direction of limiting any findings of differences between the two groups.

Weighting

Given endemic vagaries in survey responses, almost all national surveys weight respondent data so that it matches the national census proportion on basic demographics such as age, sex, race, and education (Massey & Botman, 1988). In the present case, it is hard to know what variables would be best to use for weights, and what should be the “gold standard.” Given some possible remaining uncertainties about the representativeness of the sample as obtained, the decision was made to try to make the follow-up look as much as possible like the sample from the previous year, so that changes could be reasonably assessed. Obviously, only variables that could not possibly change over the year could be used, and further, these variables had to be related to key outcomes.

Analysis suggested four variables: gender (women are generally more favorable to Jewish matters, more likely to participate in *birthright israel*, and more likely to respond); whether or not the respondent had a *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony; whether or not the respondents’ families when they were growing up lit Sabbath candles; and finally, whether their families at that time kept kosher. For the U.S. participants, 59 percent of the respondents to the first year’s survey were women, 78 percent had a *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony, 33 percent of their families lit Sabbath candles, and 33 percent of the families kept kosher. For the United States, both participants and non-participants in the follow-up survey were weighted to match these figures. The weighting is done by means of “iterative proportional fitting,” (Deming, 1943) which means that in effect all the weights are applied simultaneously.

Assessment of Change

Although the assessment of change in evaluation studies has undergone major methodological innovation in the past ten years (Winship & Morgan, 1999), the design of the present study makes some of the vexing issues of change assessment somewhat moot. In the launch year, considerably more people applied for the gift of a free trip to Israel than could eventually be accommodated. In the following year, just about everyone who was selected to go did go. If a considerable proportion of those who were offered the trip had eventually decided not to go, then the statistical design of the evaluation would have been affected (see Winship & Morgan, 1999, pp. 680-685). As will be seen, this was not the case for the launch trip.

Choices as to who would go in the first or launch year were made in essentially two ways — by lottery, or by selecting persons less likely to be highly involved in Jewish activities. In some rare cases, leaders were chosen, but where there was a selection made on other than a random basis, the preponderant philosophy was to pick those who were less Jewishly involved in keeping with the desire of the funders to affect people who might not otherwise be interested in Israel. The results of the use of randomization and bias in selection were that the non-participants were either similar in their Jewish involvement to participants, or were slightly more interested. By weighting non-participants so that they had the same Jewish background factors as the participants, the non-participant tilt towards being more Jewish was controlled. In addition, the response rate virtually guaranteed that non-participants who responded would be more Jewishly involved than non-participants who didn’t respond.

Overall, non-participants were either similar to participants or somewhat more Jewishly engaged. The evaluation design focused on assessing the impact of the program on those Jews between the ages of 18 to 26 who were interested in the program in the first place. Although this group appeared to be similar to the overall population, it is difficult to tell how representative it was. In contrasting participants with those who had applied to the program but did not go, the most conservative possible comparisons were made. Weighting made respondents from the first wave of data and the second wave of data as comparable as possible.

Explanatory Note

Assessment Of Outcome Variation

The variance components analysis (VCA) function in the SPSS 10 statistical software package (1999) was used to assess how much of the variance in post-trip outcomes was attributable to the college settings to which student alumni returned. The college attended constituted the random effect in the VCA model, and was based on verbatim responses recoded for analysis. Recoding ensured that various spellings of schools (e.g. New York University, NYU, N.Y.U., NY University, etc.) would not be counted as separate entities. A minimum norm quadratic unbiased estimator (MINQUE) was used to estimate the contribution of each random effect to the variance of the dependent variable.

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