

**JEWISH OUTDOOR ADVENTURE
EDUCATION:
AN EXEMPLAR OF SUCCESSFUL
EXPERIENTIAL JEWISH EDUCATION**

By

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Jewish Communal Service in cooperation with the
School of Social Work at the University of Southern California

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

April 2010

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HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
LOS ANGELES SCHOOL

SCHOOL OF JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Experiential education is a philosophy of education in which educators engage with students through direct, hands-on experiences to build knowledge and a practical skill set that these students can use in their lives (Bryfman & Reimer, 2008). Jewish experiential education takes the principles of experiential education and applies them to the goal of “providing an overall blueprint of Jewish experience...where participants can breathe in the air of Jewish values” (Chazan, 2003). Building on experiential Jewish education, Jewish outdoor adventure education uses adventure-based learning to enhance the elements of recreation, socialization, challenge. Jewish outdoor adventure education uses the foundation of experiential Jewish education to build community and infuse the outdoor experience with layers of spirituality and Judaic learning (Comins [Interview], 2009).

This thesis examines four case studies of previously existing Jewish outdoor adventure programs: *TorahTrek*, *Outdoor Jewish Adventures*, *Shalom Institute*, and the *Adventure Rabbi* program. The founders of each of these programs were interviewed to ascertain their reasons for founding these organizations, their desired impacts for the populations served, and their vision of the broader Jewish community. Each program promotes Jewish outdoor adventures as a way to allow the individual to experience Judaism in a new way, strengthen his/her Jewish identity and participate in the Jewish community. Attesting to the success of these programs, a questionnaire of more than 50 participants of Jewish outdoor adventures from these four organizations showed a 30% increase in participation in Jewish communal and cultural activities and a heightened personal spirituality as a result of participation in these programs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND FOREWORD

I feel truly blessed to have had the opportunity to attend the dual-masters program in the School of Jewish Communal Service at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion and the School of Social Work at the University of Southern California. Throughout my tenure in this program, I have been challenged and have grown in ways I never thought possible; I was introduced to concepts and ideas that have fostered my growth both personally and professionally. I am touched by the amazing people I have met during the program and am thankful to them for broadening my understanding of the world, while pushing me to be my best and supporting me along that path. I appreciate the opportunity to learn with my peers; it has been a pleasure to study and work with such a caring and talented cohort of people. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support, love, and dedication to my education, which enabled me to complete this program and receive my master's degrees.

I would like to extend a special note of appreciation to those who were instrumental in helping me put together this thesis. Richard Siegel, the Director of the SJCS, served as my thesis advisor and helped me throughout this project, from its conceptualization to its completion. He was incredibly supportive while challenging me to expand my knowledge of this topic, encouraging me along the way, and being patient with me throughout this process. I have truly enjoyed working with him as we embarked upon this intellectual journey together.

I would also like to thank everyone who contributed to my body of research. The leaders of the Jewish outdoor adventure education programs who allowed me to use them as case studies were generous with their time and filled with enthusiasm. I am grateful to

all the participants in Jewish outdoor education programs who took my survey and whose feedback was integral to fully researching the organizations. Overall, I hope that this research will contribute to broadening the field of Jewish outdoor adventure education as a dimension of experiential Jewish education, which can help build Jewish identity and communal involvement.

I have written my thesis on Jewish outdoor adventure education because the outdoors is my passion. My background includes 13 years at Jewish summer camps, which I believe have impacted my Jewish identity and Jewish communal involvement as an adult. I am certain that there is endless potential in these types of experiences to nourish Jewish individuals and communities. This thesis will hopefully serve as a resource for existing programs and as an impetus for the development of future programs. Jewish outdoor adventures introduce Judaism in a new and meaningful way, while offering fun and a sense of adventure to an age-old religion.

INTRODUCTION

Needs Assessment

By many accounts, the Jewish community is declining in terms of population and involvement nationally at an alarming rate (United Jewish Communities [UJC], 2001). According to the National Jewish Population Survey in 2000-2001, the most common reasons for this decline in Jewish participation are intermarriage, assimilation, and fragmentation of the Jewish community due to ethnic and ideological barriers, lack of Jewish engagement, and the international trend of decline in religion in general (UJC, 2001). Furthermore, the National Jewish Population Survey indicates that Jews who belong to Jewish institutions are substantially more engaged in other forms of Jewish life than Jews who do not participate in such institutions; although, the NJPS indicated a trend that many Jews in the United States discontinue their synagogue membership or are not actively involved in Jewish communal life (UJC, 2001).

Reform affiliated Jews are statistically amongst those least engaged in the broader Jewish community. Among the causes are individualism, cultural assimilation, and lack of innovation in programming. Of current Reform Jews who were raised Jewish, fewer than six in ten were raised Reform (UJC, 2001). The total Reform Jewish population is slightly younger than the total U.S. Jewish population. Of the total Jews in the United States, 20% are children, 61% are adults 18-64, and 19% are elderly; of those who call themselves Reform Jews, 23% are children, 59% are between the ages of 18-64, and 18% are 65 and older (UJC, 2001). The study shows that congregants in other Jewish denominations have stronger social and attitudinal connections to Israel than Reform synagogue members.

Additionally, intermarriage rates among Reform synagogue members have grown to as large as 46% (UJC, 2001). All of this has implications for Jewish continuity, ritual observance, synagogue attendance, activity within the community, and decisions about children of intermarriages being raised Jewish.

Sociologists Steven Cohen and Arnie Eisen examine the lack of Jewish involvement in the general population and conclude that personal meaning is the arbiter of many individual's Jewish involvement: they are focused on the self and its fulfillment rather than focusing outward to the group, as has been the case in the past (Cohen & Eisen, 2001). The NJPS indicated that maintaining a strong social connection to other Jews is very important to communal participation and meaningful Jewish continuity (UJC, 2001).

Despite this trend of decline, there are some movements and programs that have become popular amongst Reform Jews including experiential programs such as trips or retreats, travel programs, and social justice programs that often have a volunteer component (Bryfman & Reimer, 2008). This thesis explores experiential Jewish education programs, particularly Jewish outdoor and adventure programs, as a means to counter the communal and personal decline in Reform Jewish life.

Methods

To fully examine and understand the complexities of Jewish outdoor adventure education, a mixed method of research was employed using literature review, ethnographic research, personal interviews, and a survey of more than 50 participants who experienced a Jewish outdoor adventure program. The goal of the interviews and survey was to understand the design of the Jewish outdoor adventure education programs from the leaders' perspectives and to assess how these programs were perceived by the participants. This information collected from the interviews, questionnaire, and literature review was then distilled into a summation of findings at the end of the thesis. The information acquired from each of these sources is intended for use as an analytic tool for the Jewish outdoor adventure education programs, as well as a guide for those who may pursue their services.

Research for this thesis began with the following questions:

- What is "Jewish outdoor adventure education?"
- What lasting effects do these types of activities have on Jewish identity and Jewish communal involvement?
- What is experiential Jewish education and what role does it play in Jewish outdoor adventure programs?
- How can Jewish outdoor adventures play a role in countering the decline in the Jewish community and communal activities?
- What programs are most successful and why?
- What are the individual and communal benefits of using these programs?

OVERVIEW

This thesis is divided into three parts to fully examine the dimensions of Jewish outdoor adventure education. The first part of this study is a review of the field of experiential education, experiential Jewish education, and Jewish outdoor adventure education. It addresses the philosophical underpinnings of experiential education and its history, looks at the field of experiential Jewish education and defines experiential Jewish education and Jewish outdoor adventure education, and examines the various scholarly theories in this field. It also identifies the individual and communal benefits of participating in programs that apply these elements.

The second section of this thesis examines the methodology including a presentation of four case studies of previously existing programs that fall under the bracket of Jewish outdoor adventure education and a participant questionnaire. These case studies include Rabbi Mike Comins of *TorahTrek*, Josh Lake of *Outdoor Jewish Adventures*, Bill Kaplan of the *Shalom Institute*, and Rabbi Jamie Korngold of the *Adventure Rabbi* program. This segment discusses the background, structure and content of the programs, identifies the Jewish communal need that each of the founders' perceived, and summarizes their explanations of how Jewish outdoor adventure education programs address these problems. The questionnaire was designed to show how the programs from the case studies are perceived by participants to determine if there are lasting impacts on Jewish identity and communal involvement as a result of participation.

The final segment summarizes and synthesizes the findings from the literature review, case studies, and participant questionnaire.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential Education

Defining the Field

The Association for Experiential Education, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership association, regards experiential education as “a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, and develop skills and clarify values” (Association for Experiential Education, 2010). Traditional formal education is based on a transmission and absorption model of teaching and learning. In this process, the learner passively takes in what is told to him or her by an authority, most likely the teacher. Experiential education, by contrast, requires that the learner interact with the activity and its subject matter, the environment, and his/her peers in an active process. In experiential education, therefore, the student becomes more actively involved in the learning process than in a conventional learning environment (Bryfman & Reimer, 2008).

Experiential education influences many educational practices both in schools and in out-of-school programs. Many forms of teaching employ experiential education techniques to provide a context and a framework for hands-on learning. Outdoor education is an extension of experiential education because it uses the natural environment as a catalyst to learning and provides participants with a meaningful experience (Bryfman & Reimer, 2008). The experience of ‘learning through doing’ has an impact on a number of levels for the participant. The principles of experiential learning emphasize participants’ subjective experiences that can lead to an authentic self-exploration and long-lasting learning.

Theorists and Theories of Experiential Education

There are many different theories as to what is necessary for a successful experiential education experience, all built on the foundation laid by the educational pioneer, John Dewey. This section explores the different theories and defines the goals and objectives of experiential education.

John Dewey

John Dewey (1859-1952), an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, influenced educational practice in the United States and around the world (Carlson & Maxa, 1998). As the first advocate of experiential education, he is often referred to as the ‘father of experiential education.’ Dewey’s book, *Democracy in Education*, published in 1916, served as his curriculum theory in the context of historical debates about school organization. His reputation grew as he tirelessly critiqued public education for its “authoritarian, strict, and frontal approach to teaching” (Dewey, 1916). Dewey was passionate about changing the structure of the school system and the way traditional education was approached.

Dewey’s educational theories were outlined in *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897), *The School and Society* (1900), *The Child and Curriculum* (1902), *Democracy and Education* (1916), and *Experience and Education* (1938). The common theme throughout these books was the need for educational reform as a means for transmitting meaningful learning and fostering democratic values. To Dewey, democracy was not a political system, but rather a belief that each individual could be a free and productive member of society: experiential learning was the vehicle to transmit these values and social norms. In *Experience and*

Education, Dewey asserted that the educational system, at that time, was not meeting its objectives, which were to foster educated and civil members of society (Dewey, 1938). Dewey emphasized that the way traditional teaching delivered knowledge needed to be balanced with a much greater concern for the students' actual experiences and active learning. Dewey identifies two main components of experiential education: continuity and interaction. Continuity is the notion that people's lives are directly affected by their personal experiences; interaction explains the context of those past experiences and relates them to the present. Dewey sees the process of socializing children both formally, in the classroom, and informally, outside the classroom, as a balanced education that could lead to a more democratic society (Dewey, 1897).

For him, school was a special environment for learning, about which he said, "We should never educate directly, but indirectly, by means of the environment... Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference" (Dewey, 1916). The social environment, he believed, consisted of any condition that contributed to beliefs, emotions, and knowledge of students, even if this is an indirect causation. The teacher, then, has the opportunity to use the environment as a teaching agent if it is designed correctly. Indirect education, or what is today called informal education, he thought, was more effective because it used the whole body (Dewey, 1916). He believed that when children participate in physical activities, they are able to bring their natural impulses into play. Of indirect education, he said "learning becomes joyous and less of a strain" (Dewey, 1938). This became the foundation for studies of informal, experiential education and many other studies, including this thesis.

Carlson and Maxa

Carlson and Maxa, experts of informal education, believe that experiential education programs promote a non-formal approach to learning (Carlson & Maxa, 1998). The model of non-formal education placed higher expectations upon leaders to facilitate youth experiences with formative processing upon completion. According to Carlson and Maxa, there are five stages in effective experiential education:

- 1) The experience and the doing of the activity;
- 2) The ability to share and communicate the results and observations with others;
- 3) The capacity to process or analyze and reflect on the experience;
- 4) The capability to relate this experience to a real-world paradigm;
- 5) The ability to apply what was learned in a similar or different situation

(Carlson & Maxa, 1998).

These five stages of experiential education require both active cooperation of the learner as well as leadership and supervision from the teacher or leader. Providing experience alone does not create experiential learning; it is the partnership of experience and process that allows the learner to take what was learned and to apply it to other situations. Processing open-ended questions allows the learner to surmise his or her own hypotheses about a situation. Through questioning and self-reflection, the individual is able to make meaning from an experience and engage with it. It is precisely this process of the raw experience coupled with the learner's understanding of the experience, which allows the learner to begin to generalize and apply the lessons to countless life situations (Carlson & Maxa, 1998).

National Society for Experiential Education(NSEE)

The National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) is a nonprofit membership association for educators, and business and community leaders that serves as a national resource center for the development and improvement of experiential education programs (National Society for Experiential Education [NSEE], 2009). The NSEE's mission is to "foster the effective use of experience as an integral part of education, in order to empower learners and promote the common good" (NSEE, 2009).

The NSEE published *Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities* that has become widely accepted as the foundation for experiential education programs across the United States (NSEE, 2009). The article highlights the eight most important elements of experiential education. These best practices are defined as:

- 1) Intention;
 - 2) Preparedness and planning;
 - 3) Authenticity;
 - 4) Reflection;
 - 5) Orientation and training;
 - 6) Monitoring and continuous improvement;
 - 7) Assessment and evaluation;
 - 8) Acknowledgment
- (NSEE, 2009).

In summary, the article states that teachers as well as learners must be clear as to:

- Understand why the experience is chosen and what are its intended goals,
- State their focus and purpose of the activity placed into a real-world context,
- Offer ample reflection time after the experience for all parties to process the activity and connect it to the individual's life.

In addition to allowing time to reflect, facilitators or educators are instructed to monitor, assess and evaluate students, and then to re-challenge them with new material for their continual growth (NSEE, 2009). The NSEE article notes that “regardless of the experiential learning activity, both the experience and the learning are fundamental.” It proposes that in the learning process there is a special relationship between the learner and the facilitator(s) based on empowerment at the individual's level. The facilitator is expected to take the lead in ensuring both the quality of the learning experience and of the work produced and, in supporting the learning, to use the principles which underlie the fundamentals of experiential education; while the learner is expected to fully participate and be open to new experiences (NSEE, 2009).

Learning Theory

Learning Theory brings together cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences and experiences that affect the process of experiential education (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2006). Learning Theory focuses on the process of what happens to the individual when learning takes place in order to explain how people learn. This theory aims to understand the inherent complex process of learning which, in turn, helps educators to design their curricula.

Learning Theory uses three main philosophical frameworks to comprehensively examine how human beings learn (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2006). These three categories include:

- 1) Behavioral – thinking processes that theorists believe explain the observable aspects of learning;
- 2) Cognitive – constructive brain-based learning, or thoughts;
- 3) Constructive – how the learner actively constructs new ideas or concepts.

Learning Theory is based in Systems Theory of psychology, which emphasizes the interdependence and interaction of the various internal and external factors that are parts of life for the individual. Associating the learner within the context of other arenas of his or her life is integral to experiential education because it tailors the learning experience for the individual and requires educators to interact with the learner's environment and surroundings. Furthermore, Learning Theory affirms the importance of observable behaviors and stresses that positive behaviors can be developed through examination (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2006).

Flow Theory and I-Thou

Flow Theory, developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, is a psychological state in which the person is fully absorbed in what he/she is doing by a feeling of energized concentration, complete involvement, and a sensation of achievement in the process of the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In Flow Theory, the learner's emotions are not only contained and focused, but charged and aligned with the task at hand. Csikszentmihalyi described *flow* as “being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls

away. Time flies...Your whole being is involved and you're using your skills to the utmost" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Experiential education aims to achieve *flow* with students as much as possible. Csikszentmihalyi proved that when youth become engaged for extended periods of time, they access long-term memory and unlimited mental capacity (Carlson & Maxa, 1998). As they construct new meaning, they lose track of time and discover that learning is fun. Additionally, challenges that seek to stretch one's mind lead to *flow*. Flow Theory helps the learner to understand what to expect as well as how to select and process incoming information that enables the learner to develop knowledge structures and application capabilities that are more complex, abstract, and powerful than the ones used with traditional educational approaches. Csikszentmihalyi asserts that as a result of achieving *flow*, learners can become independent and self-motivated in their activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Flow is useful in experiential education because many experiential activities involve movement and the body (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In fact, many sports psychologists have accepted Flow Theory because the individuals are completely absorbed in what they are doing and lose track of everything else; their bodies simply act and react, without much thinking, and this, in turn, builds muscle memory. One sports psychologist claimed that "when challenges and skills are simultaneously above average, a broadly positive experience emerges" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This *flow* state becomes a sense of control and mastery of an activity that transcends 'normal' awareness.

Flow is also about the connection. When a person is in *flow*, he is connected to other participants, the teacher, the curriculum, and the physical setting. This is similar to

what Martin Buber describes as an *I-Thou* relationship that transcends the separation human beings often have from the ‘other’; Buber calls this relatedness (Buber, 1970). In *I-Thou*, the ‘I’ is not experienced as singular or separate, but involves a sense of being a part of the whole and interconnected (Buber, 1970). Not surprisingly, the *I-Thou* ebbs and flows, because the ‘I’ separates and connects itself from what it encounters. In *flow*, however brief, *I-Thou* is a moment of feeling completely connected (Buber, 1970). It is in *flow* that people internalize things, and Buber believes that if teachers could achieve *flow* they would be able to make an impression upon their students that would not only teach the desired material, but expand the student’s understanding of community, society, and relationships to other people (Buber, 1970).

Buber, like Dewey, asserts that “the purpose of education is to develop the character of the pupil, to show him how to live humanly in society.” For one to be wholly alive, he or she must be able to achieve *I-Thou*, or *flow*, moments, because connection to others is what Buber believed life was all about (Hodes, 1972). Buber, a deeply religious man, also considered that in those moments of *I-Thou*, the result is an encounter with God on earth (Hodes, 1972). Hence, he declares that life is about connectedness to one another, which leads to connection with God. Csikszentmihalyi also claims that *flow* can lead to a heightened level of spiritual awareness in moments of connectedness that seem to improve a person’s capacity for attention, motivation, and often accomplishment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Experiential Jewish Education

Defining the Field

While many Jewish adults identify the experience of their own Jewish education as a turn-off from Jewish involvement, they often marvel at the sophistication and variety of what is being offered to their children, grandchildren, and the broader Jewish community today (Woocher, 2001). Jewish educators are working hard to find the most effective ways to provide a Jewish education that are composed of innovative and effective models for learning (Woocher, 2006). Many educators have turned to experiential education to accomplish these goals (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). Experiential Jewish education builds on the values of experiential education, adding the components of Judaism and Jewish identity. Jewish experiential education “is rooted in a belief that the experience is central to the individual’s Jewish development” (Chazan, 2003).

For more than a century, Jewish education in North America has proceeded along two parallel tracks: formal instruction in schools and informal socialization through contexts such as settlement houses, summer camps, Israeli trip experiences, and others (Reimer & Bryfman, 2008). As the field has matured, these parallel tracks have come to be known as ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ education. Experiential Jewish education is defined by Joseph Reimer and David Bryfman, scholars of Jewish education known for their writings on experiential Jewish learning, as “any context in which educators seek to challenge participants to build Jewish knowledge and commitment from the basis of their experiences in this world” (Reimer & Bryfman, 2008).

Experiential Jewish learning has become an accepted form of Jewish education because of the direct encounters with religious life and values that allow students to actively participate in thoughtful Jewish experiences, find personal meaning, and engage in Jewish and congregational life as a result (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). Reisman and Bryfman's study on experiential Jewish learning defines it as a blend of experiential learning and Jewish learning. Experiential learning is grounded in authentic experiences and calls for reflection and discovery of personal relevance and meaning. Jewish learning infuses a Jewish context with texts, tradition, culture, or values. This type of learning is more process-oriented, where it is more important for a student to process and experience something rather than simply gain an intellectual knowledge of a skill or concept, which is the goal of traditional Jewish learning (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008).

The Institute for Informal Jewish Education at Brandeis University

With a grant from the Covenant Foundation, the Institute for Informal Jewish Education (IIJE) at Brandeis University set out to understand how experiential Jewish education works. The IIJE was interested in studying how Jewish educators understand and plan their lessons to incorporate Jewish experiential education. It created a Jewish experiential learning seminar for gifted educators to reflect on their teaching methods and create a program together to accomplish two main objectives:

- 1) Better define informal/experiential Jewish education;
- 2) Create a program to test the educators' methods on a group of students.

This became the *Genesis Program* with the aim of digging deeply into the process and nature of effective Jewish experiential learning programs and to understand why they

are effective in leading participants to greater understanding of and deeper engagement with Jewish living (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). One of the common problems was that educators and students were having a hard time putting their experiences into words. The challenge and strength of exceptional experiences are that they often cannot be captured well into words. The IIJE *Genesis* study notes that “teachers found a consistent ritual for debriefing field trips so that students could express what they were thinking and formulate thoughts” (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). It is important for a student to convey what he/she gained from the experience so that he/she can then assimilate the learning and apply it in other situations (Chazan, 2003).

The IIJE’s *Genesis* study on experiential Jewish learning took on the project of finding out what kind of activities led to the most effective Jewish learning. The study generated four criteria of experiential education that lead to Jewish learning:

- 1) Context,
- 2) Content,
- 3) Community,
- 4) Common values

(Reisman & Shavelson, 2008).

Context is important because it provides a larger historical framework for an activity and directly correlates it to Judaism, a Jewish event, or the Jewish people. Content is important in order to engage with Jewish resources and open the mind to learning in a different way about the context of Jewish religious and cultural history. Community is important because the feeling of communal support often leaves the individuals wanting to pursue this in their daily lives and, subsequently, to become more involved. Common

values are important because they lead people to use their Judaism as a filter of their identity and to ask the question “how can my Judaism be a source of alternative values for me and my loved ones” (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008)?

Barry Chazan and Bernard Reisman

Bernard Reisman and Barry Chazan are both well known theorists and practitioners in the arena of experiential Jewish education. In 2003, Chazan built upon Reisman’s work in identifying four key points to further define experiential Jewish education:

1. While informal Jewish education takes places in many distinctive settings and is identified with the well-known methods of educational practice, it is best thought of as an approach to Jewish education rather than being identified with any particular settings or methods.
2. Informal Jewish education is poorly named because “informal” suggests both a high degree of informality and an opposition to formal education. Clearly, many informal educators are informal in their approach, though do not deny the importance of a formal education.
3. Informal education is often identified with feeling rather than with cognition and with fun rather than serious learning. While Chazan embraces the role that fun and feelings play in informal education, he also believes that serious cognitive learning has its place.
4. Informal education is often thought of as taking place spontaneously as the educator seizes on a teachable moment to impress participants with his/her deep Jewish commitments. While informal educators do need the skills to seize upon such moments, Chazan emphasizes that much of the work of informal educators involves serious preparation to structure the environment so that the spontaneous can occur. What appears as magic moments result from good educational planning by seasoned professionals. (Chazan, 2003)

At the heart of Chazan’s approach is an integral dedication, derived from John Dewey’s philosophy, to learn from experience. Informal education uses the learner’s experiences to increase his/her capacity to be an active and contributing member to society;

Jewish experiential education, too, provides a blueprint of how to act in the Jewish community, much like Dewey envisioned about transmitting a democratic society (Chazan, 2003). Jewish sociologists, Steven Cohen and Arnie Eisen draw connections between Jewish experiential education and civil Judaism, where participants learn about Jewish traditions and rituals, Jewish identity, and Jewish community through an array of activities (Cohen & Eisen, 2000). Regardless of what one calls it, the experience for participants provides an environment where they can “breathe in the air of Jewish values” (Bryfman & Reimer, 2008).

Necessary Components for Successful Programs

Experiential Jewish education is a blanket term that encompasses informal Jewish education and mainly refers to settings outside schools (Chazan, 2003). The concept also refers to experientially-based Jewish learning, as provided by educators (Chazan, 2003). Bryfman and Reimer hypothesize that experiential Jewish learning involves three initiatives, each with its own set of goals: recreation, socialization, and challenge (Bryfman & Reimer, 2008):

1. Recreation – As recreation, experiential Jewish education aims to provide its participants with social comfort, fun, and belonging in a Jewish context. Experiential Jewish education operates primarily as a set of leisure-time activities. Participants voluntarily choose to participate in the programs that are offered. They must enjoy these activities or they will cease to attend. As recreation, Jewish experiential education provides safe space for Jewish students to enjoy the company of other Jews in pursuing common cultural activities.
2. Socialization – As socialization, experiential Jewish education aims to provide the knowledge, skills, and attitude to be an active member of the Jewish community. When people feel part of a social unit, they begin to identify with its procedures, rules and world view. They want to belong and become an identifiable “member” of that unit. We call that process of

identification “socialization.” In the Jewish world, we encourage participants to identify with a Jewish group and to internalize those behaviors, attitudes, and feelings that characterize members of that group. We also encourage their identifying with the Jewish people in some broader sense.

3. Challenge – As experiential educators, Jewish educators aim to encourage participants to undertake the challenge of stretching themselves and growing toward a more complex participation in one’s Jewish life. Because there is a lot more to Judaism than participating skillfully in activities of one’s Jewish camp or youth movement, experiential educators need to motivate individuals to stretch beyond their comfort zone and creatively explore a variety of Jewish modes of expression. The goal is to deepen and personalize individuals’ Jewish experiences so they feel they are on a Jewish journey and are not simply a member of a Jewish club.

Jewish experiential education is built on the idea of recreation where the individual can feel socially comfortable and have a sense of belonging in a fun, Jewish context (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). Recreational activities provide participants the opportunity to enjoy the company of other Jews in common cultural activities. Socialization, similarly, is a goal of Jewish experiential education because Jewish values lead toward community. Bryfman and Reimer state that when people feel part of a social group, they can begin to identify with its procedures, rules, and world view. The Jewish engagement involves identifying with a Jewish group and internalizing those behaviors, attitudes, and feelings with the idea that it will lead to life-long participation and identification. The final goal of challenge allows individuals to grow and learn with the intention that this will lead to a more complex, and perhaps deeper, participation in Jewish life (Bryfman & Reimer, 2008).

Challenge is, perhaps, the most important component, but it can only exist if recreation and socialization have preceded it (Reisman, 1993). Challenge is a learning process where the environment must first be established and only then can people take risks and trust one another (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). Bryfman hypothesizes that

experiential education can be more powerful than youth group participation or religious school because of the added level of challenge. He says that in order for “us [educators] to understand what experiential Jewish education is, we must recognize that an absence of challenge often ensures that it is only recreation and socialization that are taking place” (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). It is thus the educator’s goal to stretch the person beyond his or her comfort zone and creatively explore the boundaries of their Jewish expression, so that they have greater depth in their Jewish journey.

Experiential Jewish education builds on the pedagogy of experiential learning, but it is grounded in Jewish text and uses a Jewish lens in every activity (Chazan, 2003). Experiential Jewish education “provides a Jewish framework for meaning and *tikkun olam* (*repair the world*) and you know if you succeed is how the person engaged in vibrant, Jewish living” (Woocher, 2001). With Jewish identity constantly in question, the challenge becomes to create Jewish programs that give meaning and intimacy to those who seek it. Jewish educator and nature specialist, Josh Lake believes that as a Jewish community, “we [Jews] need to open our eyes to the miracles that are all around us, yet we are involved in pursuing passions that close our eyes” (Lake [Interview], 2009). Education provides the individual with socialization and problem solving skills that are integral to be successful in society. Experiential education is an interaction with the environment as a source of learning, socialization and meeting the psychological needs (Chazan, 2003). Furthermore, the goal of Jewish experiential education is to create a holistic approach that is cognitive and affective, reaching the mind, body, and soul of the participant.

Role of the Educator

The educator is essential to having an effective educational experience. Experiential Jewish educators serve not only as professionals, but as Jewish role models (Charendoff, 2001). Educators have the challenge of creating fun Jewish learning, establishing a safe environment, providing appropriate levels of individual and group challenge, and having the knowledge to shape the experience of others. These educators' authentic awareness in the students' lives and their willingness to share their own dedications forms the foundation from which experiential Jewish education can grow.

The IIJE *Genesis* study in experiential Jewish learning identifies three primary roles for educators in leading experiential Jewish learning (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). The first is to create an environment where each participant feels safe and comfortable. The second is to create a sense of group purpose and set the norms that guide everyone to accomplish the stated purpose within the given boundaries. The third is to challenge individuals within the group to grow and maximize their effort, or perhaps take a risk. These three charges contribute to the group's process and student participation, which inevitably have an impact on the Jewish identity formation and communal involvement of participants. The educators most likely to succeed are those with dynamic leadership skills who are able to facilitate an experience, rather than teach frontally, and are able to link real-world experiences with Jewish content to help others find personal relevance in Jewish tradition (Charendoff, 2001). Similarly, the educator must meet the students 'where they are at' by providing appropriate levels of challenge for growth and offer multiple points of entry into Jewish life (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). Most importantly, the educator must be flexible, as experiential education can have many surprise outcomes.

The IIJE *Genesis* study concluded that the educator need not design every activity to be challenging. In fact, it is appropriate to design some activities designated specifically for pleasure or relaxation (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). They did, however, put together five guidelines for educators in their experiential Jewish education lesson planning:

- 1) Objectives are important and every educational activity must be intentional and well articulated to incorporate the intended outcomes of the program, and incorporate cognitive, behavioral, affective and spiritual elements for participants' growth and challenge;
- 2) Exploration allows participants to take risks in order to discover something for themselves and make the connections to the material as well as other people in the group. IIJE *Genesis* study makes reference to a statement by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist Jewish movement in Judaism and well-known essayist and Jewish educator, who observed that exploration will allow "Jews to creatively engage with their Judaism";
- 3) Struggle is inherent as participants wrestle with new ideas, traditions, stretch their comfort zones and examine what issues come up for them and why. These struggles will ultimately add layers of complexity to a participant's understanding of Judaism and his or her Jewish identity;
- 4) Reflection is necessary so that students can process their experiences in an intelligible way and find their personal and meaningful connections to the experience itself as well as the larger context it sits within;
- 5) Growth will occur as each of the other guidelines is championed.

(Reisman & Shavelson, 2008).

Benefits of Experiential Jewish Education

As societies become more complex, the need for formal teaching and intentional learning increases (Horowitz, 2000). However, as formal teaching and training grow, there is a danger of creating an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school (Putnam, 2000). Informal education, then, becomes essential to bridge what is learned in school with that which is not by

demonstrating its practical application (Chazan, 2003). Experiential education is not meant to replace formal education, but rather to compliment and enhance what is learned in the classroom.

The IIJE *Genesis* study stated that experiential Jewish education is important for the Jewish community because this “brings more meaning to students’ otherwise secular lives through the experience of living authentically as Jews” (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). Experiential Jewish learning has been shown to open participants’ eyes and capture their attention from other activities. Experiential Jewish education can go beyond trips to Israel and Jewish summer camp attendance by engaging students throughout the year with direct personal experiences that will capture learners’ attention to the activity at hand.

Experiential Jewish education builds relationships and is designed to be community based by bringing people together (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). Csikszentmihalyi said that people are more relaxed and enjoy themselves when they are learning among friends (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This could have enormous benefits for the continuity of the Jewish community and the interpersonal connection that the Jewish community strives for between its members.

Jewish Outdoor Adventure Education

Jewish Outdoor Adventure Education Defined

Jewish outdoor adventure education combines the elements of experiential Jewish education with adventure education (Comins [Interview], 2009). Adventure education usually refers to organized learning that takes place in nature (National Outdoor Leadership School [NOLS], 2010). Adventure education programs, usually synonymous with outdoor education, involve residential or journey-based experiences in which students participate in a variety of adventurous challenges in the form of outdoor activities such as hiking, climbing, trekking, canoeing, ropes courses, and team building games and activities. Slight distinctions arise in the terminology of outdoor education and adventure education: Standard outdoor education often refers to the “outdoor” side of this education, whereas adventure education focuses on the challenge and wilderness side (NOLS, 2010). Both outdoor education and adventure education draw upon the philosophy, theory, and practices of experiential education and environmental education.

Outdoor adventure education is successful because the participants are ‘stripped’ of many of the conveniences of modern life (Kaplan [Interview], 2009). Participants can become increasingly aware that they are part of a greater ecosystem and are not as bound by social customs and norms (Goldman, 2009). Simply put, participants can learn how to be better people through these intense and impactful experiences with people of different races, classes, religions, etc. Adventure education helps instill the basic elements of teamwork because participants often need to work together and rely on others. For example, a high ropes course or an outdoor activity may stretch a person’s comfort zone

and cause them to challenge themselves physically, which in turn can lead to challenging themselves mentally or spiritually (NOLS, 2010). Jewish outdoor adventure education aims to achieve this through socialization of the individual to the Jewish community by controlling the environment to allow safe exploration – emotional, spiritual, and physical – and by creating a balance of bodily activity through interaction in a variety of different forms (Korngold, 2007). Jewish outdoor adventure education builds on experiential Jewish education in terms of its theoretical underpinnings and adds the elements of heightened awareness and the necessity of teamwork and community to infuse the experience with layers of spirituality and Judaism (Comins [Interview], 2009).

Jewish outdoor adventure education presents Judaism in a unique way. Learning about Judaism through nature can be a powerful experience for students (Kaplan, [Interview], 2009). Because much Jewish life, from prayers to Biblical stories to rituals, originally took place outdoors, it is easy to connect the present day with ancient Judaism and with traditional Jewish values. It can connect participants to one another as each feels like they are part of a community, which has lasting impacts outside of being on the trail (Korngold, [Interview], 2009).

Participants develop a spiritual and physical relationship with the environment (Goldman, 2009). When framed within a Jewish context, the physical environment can be an entry point into Judaism, and participants can develop an impactful relationship with each other, the broader Jewish community, and with their Judaism and Jewish identity as a result of a Jewish outdoor adventure. Dr. Gabe Goldman believes that “Whether teaching about Jewish history, Jewish holidays, or eco-Judaism, we have a far better chance of engaging students in active learning that leads to changes in their attitudes, beliefs,

behaviors, and skill levels if we attend to developing our students' relationships to each other, to their teachers, to their curriculum, and to their learning environment" (Goldman, 2009). Jewish outdoor adventure education provides an effective way for educators to achieve the ultimate goal of empowering and enabling participants to discover for themselves the powerful role Judaism can play in their lives.

METHODOLOGY

Case Studies

There is something about being outdoors, about really needing each other...that creates these *I-Thou* relationships that only partially get created sitting around a table studying Talmud for an hour. We are taking these traditional Jewish pieces of Mishnah, Talmud, etc. and not only studying them for three hours, we are going away for a 24-hour retreat to “do Jewish.” The participants, particularly unaffiliated Jews, are giving me so much more time than they would give to a synagogue. It’s not that they won’t give the time to Judaism; it’s that they will only give their time to something they really value – and this is Judaism in a way they really value.
-Rabbi Jamie Korngold, *Adventure Rabbi*

The following section describes four case studies of professionals in the field of outdoor Jewish adventures. The founder of each of these organizations was interviewed in-depth in order to understand the intentionality behind the design of these programs. The organizations were chosen as case studies to explore the field of Jewish outdoor adventure education through these programs’ various types of activities offered, geographic location, size of the organization, and intended audiences in their respective arenas. The interviews served to identify each leader’s approach to outdoor Jewish education and experiential education. Discussions with the founders of these organizations also revealed what they saw as the most pressing needs of the Jewish community and how they believed their programs addressed these needs. (See Appendix A for interview questions.)

Each of the four case studies provides anecdotal evidence and insight into the field of Jewish outdoor adventure education and its importance in the Jewish community. The information and insight gleaned from these individuals, as well as the literature review of this subject, were invaluable in developing the summation section at the conclusion of this thesis.

Rabbi Mike Comins and TorahTrek

About *TorahTrek*

TorahTrek, founded and run by Rabbi Mike Comins, is a for-profit business offering trips that “explore the connection between inner and outer geography, between the journey into the wilderness and the path of the soul” (Comins, 2007). As Rabbi Comins describes his trips: “With laughter and song, through learning and discussion, our programs dance between the practice of Judaism, the written word of tradition and the exhilarating embrace of the natural world” (Comins, 2007). *TorahTrek*’s programs include hiking, kayaking, skiing, and other outdoor adventures (Comins [Interview], 2009).

About Rabbi Mike Comins

When Rabbi Mike Comins was finishing rabbinical school, he recounts that he experienced a spiritual crisis and felt distant from God (Comins, 2007). At this same time, he had resumed his childhood love for hiking, and toward the end of his rabbinic training in Israel, he found the answer he had been looking for outdoors (Comins [Interview], 2009). He began reading books on Jewish mysticism and Buddhism, as well as Christian spirituality that came out of the Israeli and Egyptian desert. He says, “I realized what I loved about the wilderness all along. No one succeeded in teaching me *how* to connect to God in a personal way – in this space, I was able to come up with it myself” (Comins [Interview], 2009).

Types of Programs Offered by *TorahTrek*

Rabbi Comins is currently the sole leader of his wilderness programs. He is, however, creating a leadership training program in a wilderness adventure context to train future professionals in his craft (Comins [Interview], 2009). When asked about the practical steps to designing his programs, he reported that it involved “the process of discovering what works spiritually for me, and then sharing that with others” (Comins [Interview], 2009). Rabbi Comins leads a variety of trips from day hikes to week-long spiritual journeys. He was trained as a Reform rabbi and mainly works with Reform Jews; however, he also guides Renewal, Spiritual, and Conservative Jews on his programs (Comins [Interview], 2009). Rabbi Comins leads trips for local Jewish day school students and synagogue youth in Los Angeles, although he mainly works with adults.

Audience and Outreach

Rabbi Comins does not reach as large an audience as he would like. As the sole employee of *TorahTrek*, guiding and marketing for trips is extremely time consuming. *TorahTrek* has a website, www.torahtrek.com, and a mailing list where Rabbi Comins communicates with more than 1000 people (Comins [Interview], 2009). From years of programs, he has clients from all over the country with whom he is in contact; however, he muses that there are always more people to reach. He also utilizes the rabbinic network for additional contacts (Comins [Interview], 2009).

The audience for his trips varies depending on the activity and length of each trip (Comins [Interview], 2009). Rabbi Comins enjoys helping participants to see value in their Judaism and to gain what is spiritually possible for themselves on these trips and his

programs are geared to different types of people. He best enjoys the week-long trips, and leads a few of these each year, although day hikes are designed for and open to anybody. Rabbi Comins' groups are usually 2/3 women in their 40s or older. However, when he leads the more serious hikes, he finds that his numbers are more balanced between men and women (Comins [Interview], 2009). Fitness is a minor consideration for him because he has not designed his programs to be particularly strenuous. His programs are more about the spiritual growth than physical challenge. He says, the programs work pretty easily because they are not dependent on the terrain, but more about spirituality, noting that his trips are flexible and personalized to each group he works with, depending on their objectives or spiritual goals. For each program, he reportedly plans three times the amount of exercises so that he is always ready for the trip to go in any direction (Comins [Interview], 2009).

Impact of the Program

TorahTrek has had a significant impact on participants. When asked what people get from his activities that they cannot get indoors, he responded that wilderness provides a space to re-energize and a place to have fun (Comins [Interview], 2009). Rabbi Comins talked about how he sees the benefits of the wilderness over a classroom setting because students are able to connect with one another. When a group does not get along and work together, the participants suffer, he said, and the experiential lesson is so much more impactful than learning this in a typical classroom. This experience, he asserted, can shape a community (Comins [Interview], 2009).

Measure of Success

Rabbi Comins defines success as when a person comes to him and says: “I am closer to my true self and I am closer to God” (Comins [Interview], 2009). He also conducts formal evaluation processes following the longer trips and does follow up with his participants to measure the impact of the experience. He shared a story of running into one of his participants, ten years after the program, who remembered one of the exercises Rabbi Comins facilitated on the trail.

Creating a Meaningful Jewish Experience

Rabbi Comins has worked with all populations, but prefers working with adults because he believes that working with adults is integral to supporting Jewish education for the entire Jewish community (Comins [Interview], 2009). His philosophy is that adults will have the biggest impact on their children; therefore, much of the resources should be spent on the adult population. “Adults are quite aware of their process in life,” he said, “and Jewish spiritual life is quite impactful when you can relate to the issues people have going on in their lives... Adults experience and appreciate awe and wonder consciously and they are able to articulate their experience” (Comins [Interview], 2009). He also thinks that adults are in a place where they can understand spiritual education and its relevance to life, death, and adaptation to change at a deeper level than youth can.

Rabbi Comins sees the benefits of outdoor experiential education for the individual and the community (Comins [Interview], 2009). He thinks that spirituality plays a large role for the individual in everyday life and in coping with stress. A challenging part of his work, he says, is getting people to decide that it is worthwhile to ‘get spiritual’ rather than

do any other secular activity. He said, “It is much easier for people to go to a Dodger game than a Jewish activity. Once they do ‘get spiritual,’ though, they find the answers they are looking for” (Comins [Interview], 2009). He considers that Judaism can offer adults long-term benefits and fulfillment.

For the community, he sees using the wilderness as an arena for communal growth. Wilderness can aid this communal challenge because it provides a religious system, a philosophy, and an innovative set of practices for the Reform Jewish community (Comins, 2007). Individual development goes hand-in-hand with communal benefits, he said, because the more you get from programs individually, the more reason you have to be with the community (Comins [Interview], 2009). Jewish outdoor adventures, he believes, can enhance communal life and nurture the individual. For example, Rabbi Comins deems the feeling of praying simultaneously in a synagogue with 100 other people has a great power that one person cannot have alone; but, if the individual were then to say the same prayer in nature, alone, he/she would have a different and powerful experience with the prayer. In essence, he believes having communal and solo experiences with prayer compliment one another because, “It’s more of an emotional thing... People who realize how important spirituality is in their life will realize how important it is to have community in it as well as nature” (Comins [Interview], 2009).

Perceived Need in the Jewish Community and Future of the *TorahTrek*

Rabbi Comins perceives that Jewish life is designed around the synagogue and, in Diaspora Jewish life, the synagogue is designed around services (Comins [Interview], 2009). One of the greatest challenges Rabbi Comins has is to create materials that allow participants to

capture and experience the awe and wonder of larger-than-life concepts in Judaism. Of experiencing and struggling with the meta-questions of Judaism, Rabbi Comins said:

Judaism is a religion, where one has to come to some kind of understanding of God and some kind of relationship with God, which is hard. It is much harder to do than almost anything else in Judaism... Those who we want to hang out with are usually the secular part of our society, and in many cases, those who have a relationship with God often repel us (Comins [Interview], 2009).

Years of leading spiritual treks have taught him that people find it easier to understand God and Creation through direct experience. He alludes to the challenges he has with finding a way to present his material and not ‘turn people off’. As an educator, he said, it is very difficult to come up with a program that uses the word “God” and connects people with God. Rabbi Comins explains that he has personally grappled with God and how best to find a way to teach about God and prayer to people (Comins, 2007). Simply, he said, “you can’t think God, you have to experience God” (Comins [Interview], 2009). This idea remains at the core of *TorahTrek*.

The wilderness becomes a ground where people can connect with divinity in a real and personal way. Talking about God, he said, is not as far fetched in the wilderness where people want to talk about the awe and wonder and where God’s creation is just before them, versus in an indoor setting where it is all conceptual (Comins [Interview], 2009). The prayer *Maariv Aravim* (*Who brings on the evening*), for example, could bring someone closer to God through nature, because the individual experiences the beauty of nature as he or she reads the words of the prayer (Comins, 2007). Rabbi Comins believes that the “wilderness is the best place to work out one’s relationship with God. In a synagogue, you open up the prayer book that can access God, but can also put up a wall between the person and God” (Comins [Interview], 2009). Because most of the American Jewish community

live in urban areas, going into nature has a powerful effect on people: Being away from the everyday things that people encounter liberates the individual from the daily stressors and puts life into perspective.

Rabbi Comins appreciates but also struggles with the synagogue setting and prayer model that has primarily been adopted by North American Jews today (Comins [Interview], 2009). He references brain science where the left part of the brain is the analytical part that is engaged with a prayer book. Various religious movements try to balance this orientation by adding music during services to engage the right side of the brain, which is creative, artistic, and intuitive. This is a good start to ‘getting spiritual’ although, he believes, this coupled with experiential practice is exponentially more powerful (Comins [Interview], 2009). “If I want prayer to be heartfelt, if I want to be inspired,” he said, “I want the right side of my brain to be working. Any time you get into a mindful state, you get into a state where you can get attached to God” (Comins [Interview], 2009). Nature is able to engage the right side of the brain by engaging the body. Thus, the same prayer service can be performed in nature, and people commonly report enjoying it much more because they can more easily connect to it. He warns, however, that Jewish practice in the wilderness must be part of a larger practice. According to Rabbi Comins, if an individual wants to have a relationship with God in the synagogue, this individual has to have a relationship with God out of the synagogue as well, so he or she learn how to do spiritual things with or without a prayer book in hand. “God,” he says, “has many modalities, as does Judaism, which remains ever present for individuals, be they in the city or the outdoors” (Comins, 2006).

Rabbi Comins has developed a strong base of supporters in Los Angeles and has expanded to other programmatic areas not previously offered by *TorahTrek*. He continues

to lead the day hikes, although he prefers to guide the longer trips (Comins, 2006). He has shifted much of his focus to leadership development and passing the torch to teach younger leaders his methods of trail guiding. Alone, he says, he can only reach so many people, but by teaching others to lead similar style trips, he can access a larger audience and offer them the spiritual tools he feels so strongly about (Comins, 2006).

Josh Lake and Outdoor Jewish Adventures

About Outdoor Jewish Adventures

Josh Lake began offering Jewish nature programming for children and young adults throughout the United States and Israel through his company, *Outdoor Jewish Adventures*, almost a decade ago. Mr. Lake offers programs that integrate outdoor living skills with Jewish traditions and practices. He creates fun, memorable, and safe experiences, which enable learners to develop Jewish identity and pride. Mr. Lake formally started his work as a guide when he was afforded the chance to visit Israel. In Israel, he began working for the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, whose purpose is to foster a greater appreciation for the natural beauty and resources of Israel. Mr. Lake developed a wonder for his surroundings when he first took young adults on hikes to explore that area of the world. As he was walking the land, he had a revelation hit him and exclaimed, “Wow, this is where our ancestors explored and developed their own beliefs and identity. And that I was walking...where Moses and Abraham came from and I am stepping on the very land they are stepping on and seeing the same stuff they are seeing” (Lake [Interview], 2009).

Simply stated, this is how Mr. Lake became passionate about Jewish outdoor adventure education.

Mr. Lake contracts mainly with Jewish day schools in and around Southern California and creates programs, on a hiking the trail, which he believes will connect people to Judaism in a way they are not used to (Lake [Interview], 2009). While he does not have formal training in outdoor education, he has carefully designed a curriculum and mastered the art of weaving Judaism and nature into his programs to leave his participants hungry for more. To support him, he has put together a team including wilderness experts and guides, song leaders, biking experts, a canoe expert, and a cook, who are called to work these trips as requested by the client. All of these staff are part-time employees and trained to the appropriate degree for their roles in the wilderness trip. Mr. Lake, however, is always the leader of the trips and does much of his own administrative work. This way, he says, he can assure the quality of the trips (Lake [Interview], 2009).

About Josh Lake

Mr. Lake joined this field because he had a passion and desire to share his love of the Jewish outdoors with other people. He received his master's in Jewish Education from the Jewish Theological Seminary. Before finding his connection with the outdoors, Mr. Lake had been connected to Judaism from his upbringing, but often found it dry. In Israel, he says, "I got involved with walking around and saw that it was Jewish. It directly connected me to who I am. And if it can ignite me this way, then it can ignite other people this way" (Lake [Interview], 2009).

Types of Programs Offered by *Outdoor Jewish Adventures*

Mr. Lake's programs are tailored to his clients, who are mostly children and teens of Jewish day schools, Jewish camps, and youth groups. His guided trips may last for a few hours or for several days but always include Jewish engagement. On the shorter trips, he tries to integrate the *parshat ha shavua* (Torah portion of the week); on the longer trips, the participants experience a walking *shacharit* (morning prayer service) and follow a more traditional prayer service (Lake [Interview], 2009). His longest programs are conducted for four to six days and combine trekking with canoeing. He has led Bar/Bat Mitzvah classes where the activities on the trail included reading Torah, hiking, serious Torah study, and wilderness exploration. On all of his trips, Mr. Lake explores the idea of *baal tashchit* (*not to destroy or waste the earth*), for instance by comparing a decomposing mushroom with lines of Torah (Lake [Interview], 2009). Exercises such as these help the participant to actualize Judaism and provide a reference point, where participants are able to make meaning out of tradition and integrate it into their daily lives. "If we can say this is what our tradition is and this is what it means to me, this is so much more powerful because we understand Judaism in our own language...Not to discount Hebrew or Yiddish, but I believe Judaism needs to be in our heart language" (Lake [Interview], 2009).

Audience and Outreach

Mr. Lake adapts his programs depending on the needs and abilities of his audience. He is constantly writing new lesson plans and strives to be fresh with material. Mr. Lake's programs are trans-denominational and designed so that all participants can gain something, regardless of their knowledge of Judaism. He would like to be able to reach the

unaffiliated to give them an entry point into Judaism and help them find out about their own religion; however, he does not do much outreach. It is mainly through word of mouth that he finds his clients (Lake [Interview], 2009).

Impact of the Program

When asked about what he saw as the impact of his programs and activities, Mr. Lake replied that participants get “real Judaism they can live through, rather than just studying it... I think they get real Jewish living skills by seeing how the Torah is made, seeing the animal parchment that it comes from... and seeing a real tree as *etz chayim* (*Tree of Life*)” (Lake [Interview], 2009). From his experience, he claims that it is much more impactful to study the metaphor of the Torah as a *Tree of Life* by studying actual trees. “Even the Talmud,” he says, “came from real life somewhere, but it can be hard for people to relate to because it is so flat on paper. Just by being outside, we are forced to use our senses that can be turned off in a classroom; by using the sense of touch, smell, sight, etc.” (Lake [Interview], 2009). Nature, he believes, will enhance any experience and add dimension to many concepts and stories within Jewish traditions.

Measure of Success

Mr. Lake measures his success by the feeling he gets and from how people look at the conclusion of each trip because he maintains that impact is intangible and cannot be measured on paper. Instead he relies on anecdotal feedback, most commonly through thank you letters from customers. “It is a level of *kavod* (*honor*) that you just can’t measure” (Lake [Interview], 2009). To satisfy formal evaluation, he has each participant complete

written evaluation forms and follows up with a debrief phone call to the chaperones or directors of the children.

Creating a Meaningful Jewish Experience

Josh Lake believes that participants gain a positive Jewish experience from being on his trips. Individuals can learn differently than they can in a classroom because it is a “total experience” when one is outdoors: “You can feel the heat of the sun, the cold of the snow, etc. and use all of your senses – and that is the advantage. We can use our experience for a much more full and *shalem* (*whole or complete*) experience” (Lake [Interview], 2009). The community can gain a more realistic experience of the Judaism we came from, he says:

Because the people who wrote the Torah were a collection of people living outdoors, in nature, so when we go back there, all these things become much more poignant. Experiencing Creation through nature is a beneficial way for our community to learn about our people (Lake [Interview], 2009).

Perceived Need in the Jewish Community and Future of the Program

Mr. Lake has created a vision for his company that both excites and challenges him to meet the needs he perceives in the Jewish community. In the future, Mr. Lake wants to broaden his program to more schools, youth groups, and day schools both geographically and communally. In five years time, he dreams to help other people gain the expertise to lead their own trips in an effort to reach more Jewish children and teens. When asked how he believes Jewish outdoor adventure education can aid the Jewish community, he answered that nature brings solace in life, within and outside of the Jewish community. Mr. Lake quotes Maimonides: “‘What do people need to live? Water, air, and food, and yet what do we pursue? Gold, silver, and diamonds.’ So, the Jewish community especially now

is starting to chase after things that are real” (Lake [Interview], 2009). Mr. Lake concludes with a reference to Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of the leading Jewish theologians and philosophers of the 20th century: “If we can see the world as Rabbi Abraham Heschel suggests, to open our eyes to the miracles that are all around us, rather than pursuing passions that close our eyes, we [the Jewish community] will be awed and awakened again; and Jewish outdoor adventures can do this” (Lake [Interview], 2009).

Bill Kaplan and the Shalom Institute

Background of the *Shalom Institute*

Bill Kaplan is the director of the *Shalom Institute* in Malibu, California. Mr. Kaplan has worked at Camp JCA Shalom for more than two decades and has held many different positions throughout his tenure there. When he was completing his MBA degree at the University of Judaism (now the American Jewish University) from 1992 to 1999, he wrote his thesis titled the “Shalom Nature Center,” a blueprint to create a year-round Jewish environmental camp and trip center, which would include an outdoor and travel component. This eventually became integrated with the existing Camp JCA Shalom to become the *Shalom Institute*. Mr. Kaplan’s main focus is the environment, to “connect Jews to Jewish issues, tradition and Jewish values, and how we can fix the world based on that” (Kaplan [Interview], 2009).

Camp JCA Shalom is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and a beneficiary of the Los Angeles Jewish Federation. It began as a summer camp and off-season retreat site, but in

the last five to six years, it has become more independent with new, creative programs that connect with the nature center. JCA Shalom currently has approximately 50 to 60 program partners and a variety of programs, including staff education trainings, school retreats, a ropes course and leadership programs for Jewish day schools and Jewish youth groups, Tu B'Shevat programs, Passover programs, and many more. Participants of these programs are both Jewish and non-Jewish, as all people are included in the mission of the organization (Kaplan [Interview], 2009).

The highly skilled staff of *Shalom Institute* includes a program director, ropes center director and staff, a nature director, a farmer/gardener, and a year-round experiential Jewish educator. Each of these staff members works with his/her respective staff to carry out the programmatic goals and skillfully deliver individualized programs built around the request of the population they are working with (Kaplan [Interview], 2009).

About Bill Kaplan

Mr. Kaplan has no formal training in education, but has experience in leading trips resulting from his years as a guide in Israel and in the United States as well as personal experience in backpacking and hiking. He became involved in the Jewish outdoors when he was in Israel, although he was not involved in the Jewish community while growing up, nor during his college years. It was not until he participated in a year-long trip to Israel toward the end of college, where he led hikes in the Galilee for kids and religious officers who did not go into combat, that he felt a connection to Judaism, to Jewish history, and to Jewish life (Kaplan [Interview], 2009).

Types of Programs Offered by the *Shalom Institute*

The *Shalom Institute* collaborates with many synagogues and schools looking for a variety of outdoor experiences to balance their indoor education because they recognize the power of it to reinforce Jewish learning and values. Mr. Kaplan explains that the *Shalom Institute* is trying to help these synagogues and schools fuse indoor and outdoor learning. Rather than debate between indoor versus outdoor education, the goal is to combine traditional with experiential learning. Local synagogues are rethinking religious school programs and are suggesting they conduct classes as often as once per month at the *Shalom Institute* instead of in the typical weekly religious school. Religious schools have found better short-term and long-term benefits in attendance and future participation in religious schools as well as a shift in the community's attitude and team building amongst classes as a result of one day at the Camp JCA Shalom and Shalom Institute (Kaplan [Interview], 2009). Mr. Kaplan recounts that a principal from a Jewish day school in Orange County said: "What you guys do in three days, we have a hard time doing during in a whole year" (Kaplan [Interview], 2009). The programs conducted by Camp JCA Shalom and the *Shalom Institute* are varied in scope. Most programs are three days and two nights. Mr. Kaplan "firmly believes this is a highly impactful Jewish educational model. If it's done right, this could be the future of Jewish education, to complement the typical model" (Kaplan [Interview], 2009).

Camp JCA Shalom and the *Shalom Institute* go to great lengths to instill Judaism into the programs for the Jewish groups they work with (Kaplan [Interview], 2009). The camp is flexible and can adapt Judaic content depending on religious preference. The *Shalom Institute's* programs frame Jewish environmentalism with concepts of Creation,

baal tashchit (do not destroy or waste the earth), taking care of animals, interconnectedness, and teaching mitzvot and principles of being *Shomrei Adamah* (keepers of the earth) as instructed in the Mishnah and the Talmud. Additionally, the programs relate the Jewish holidays with the seasons and to the environment and nature. The staff uses these principles for each trip, but develops curriculum depending on whatever the client requests without duplicating programs (Kaplan [Interview], 2009).

Measure of Success

Mr. Kaplan explained that, based on anecdotal evidence and formal evaluations, the summer camp programs and the retreats offered by Camp JCA Shalom have been extremely influential in impacting Jewish identity and positive views toward Judaism (Kaplan [Interview], 2009). Most of the clientele return to use Camp JCA Shalom and the *Shalom Institute's* services again because the schools, in particular, see the value the students gain from these experiences. Mr. Kaplan shared his belief that a meaningful Jewish experience can be gained from the Camp JCA Shalom programs. The programs they offer, he says, are “so meaningful and impactful that people remember them for a lifetime because people in nature are maybe out of their comfort zone, but this can become a another whole comfort zone, and people open up and are able to build community here” (Kaplan [Interview], 2009). Mr. Kaplan recounted at the conclusion of a retreat for elders, a participant in her 70's exclaimed that the experience was the greatest day of her life and she wished she had been to summer camp when she was a child. “You saw her soul from that experience,” he remembers, “and soulful, deep experiences are positive, most of the time, and life changing” (Kaplan [Interview], 2009). It was noted that people do not always have

positive experiences in the Jewish community, but Mr. Kaplan explained that he believes these types of outdoor programs “go a long way for most in terms of Jewish identity, continuity, and all the things the Jewish community hopes for” (Kaplan [Interview], 2009).

Perceived Need in the Jewish Community and Future of the Program

Camp JCA Shalom and the *Shalom Institute* recently completed a strategic plan that includes increased outreach to serve more populations, from children to older adults, year round with its array of programs. It also intends to create more partnerships with local synagogues, Jewish day schools, and other Jewish organizations. Camp JCA Shalom would like to expand its services to include ‘out of the box’ retreats, such as social action experiences and leadership programs (Kaplan [Interview], 2009).

Mr. Kaplan believes Jewish outdoor adventure education can benefit the Jewish community because the components of travel and environmental learning in nature are extremely powerful. “There is a need in the community and people are looking, even though they may not know they are ‘looking’. I believe it is good for their well being,” he says, “from spiritual to health to community building, there is a tremendous value to the outdoor retreat experience” (Kaplan [Interview], 2009). The idea of the retreat model takes elements from Jewish camping and the overnight experiences because they have proven that they work. Mr. Kaplan sees the outdoors and nature as a great way to connect Jews in Jewish life in a comfortable way, no matter what their level of engagement. Mr. Kaplan aims to always “engage people to take care of our world, our earth, and be a little mindful in our awareness – this leads to another level of spirituality that is fun, painless, and educative” (Kaplan [Interview], 2009).

Rabbi Jamie Korngold and Adventure Rabbi Program

About *Adventure Rabbi* Program

The *Adventure Rabbi* program offers a unique approach to Judaism and the Jewish community as it is centered on retreat programs (Korngold [Interview], 2009). Jews of all ages, from all walks of life, and from all over the country come to the *Adventure Rabbi* program to experience Judaism in a new way. While the majority of the programs, as well as the main office, are located in Boulder, Colorado, the *Adventure Rabbi* program conducts programs and events all over the United States. The *Adventure Rabbi's* use of Jewish experiential education in programming has been highly effective in terms of Jewish identity formation and inspiring future participation (Korngold [Interview], 2009). "As a congregational rabbi, the challenge is to find a way to bring people in," said Korngold, "We want to have adventures on our weekends. So many people find the outdoors to be a spiritually charged place. That experience can also be Jewish" (Draper, 2010).

The *Adventure Rabbi* program began as the brainchild of Rabbi Jamie Korngold (Adventure Rabbi, 2009). It is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that is largely supported by the Natan Fund, a philanthropic network of young Jews who fund innovative projects that help effect change within the Jewish community in the United States and Israel. Rabbi Korngold created the *Adventure Rabbi* program with the mission to engage participants "using the outdoors as a spiritual springboard" to bring new meaning to the prayers and use teachings from the words in everyday life (Korngold [Interview], 2009). Today, some of the activities include retreats for Rosh Hashanah, a Passover seder in Moab, destination Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies, ski retreat weekends, walking tefillah (*prayer service*), baby

naming ceremonies, adoption ceremonies, weddings, and other life cycle events (Adventure Rabbi, 2009). In between retreats, the *Adventure Rabbi* program holds monthly outdoor Shabbat programs, holiday ceremonies, and informal events.

About Rabbi Jamie Korngold

Rabbi Korngold has always had a link to the outdoors and has found spiritual and emotional stability and health in nature (Korngold [Interview], 2009). The connection between Judaism and the outdoors started for her when she began leading services as a lay leader in a small congregation in Vail, Colorado, where services were held outdoors because that was the custom of the congregation (Korngold, 2007). She then attended rabbinic school at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio after finding her passion in leading her congregation in Vail. After her ordination, Rabbi Korngold took a trip to the base of the Grand Canyon and truly discovered the magic that the Jewish outdoors can have on someone. On this trip, she noted how the concept of Judaism “out-of-doors,” let alone “out-of-a-synagogue,” was foreign to many people; however, an “out-of-doors” Jewish experience could be unbelievably powerful (Korngold [Interview], 2009). She explains her reasoning for the *Adventure Rabbi* program:

People in their 20s, 30s, and 40s have such limited time, so when giving them the choice of sitting in a congregation or going skiing on a Saturday, Judaism is going to lose every time. I say, ‘Ok, so you want to go skiing. I’ll go skiing with you. That’s fine. Just give me 15 minutes’ (Korngold [Interview], 2009).

Types of Programs Offered by the *Adventure Rabbi* Program

Institutionally, the *Adventure Rabbi* program has no denominational affiliation, although Rabbi Korngold is trained as a Reform rabbi, so many of her programs derive

from her Reform training (Korngold [Interview], 2009). The *Adventure Rabbi* program is a community-based organization and not a formal congregation. In fact, Rabbi Korngold jokes that she only has seven real members who pay annual dues of \$1000, because she created a system which she calls an “all access pass” for the activities offered, borrowing the concept of an “all access” ski pass (Korngold [Interview], 2009). She thinks that paying annual dues hinders synagogue participation, thus she has adopted a system to “pay as you go” for each activity. There are 4000 people involved in the *Adventure Rabbi* “congregation” with a core group of 300 regular participants. The *Adventure Rabbi* program holds four big retreats each year for 150 to 200 people with roughly a 65% return rate for participants (Korngold [Interview], 2009). She claims that she has access to and services a segment of the Jewish community that statistically does not affiliate. Her heaviest concentrations of participants are single, male Jews in their 20s, 30s and 40s; a population that most synagogues have trouble reaching. Furthermore, the *Adventure Rabbi*’s board is largely composed of single, adult males (Korngold [Interview], 2009).

The *Adventure Rabbi* program explores Judaism and Jewish issues in a different style from a traditional synagogue. Rabbi Korngold says:

“As a congregant, I always felt like the rabbi was talking at me and that the cantor was talking at me. After services that did not engage me, I was then expected to go to an *oneg* full of people, and I did not know what to say to them. I am a private person, and I did not want to be talking to these people. So, what I do is take this situation and place it on a trail: I direct the conversation and program activities for participants to explore Jewish issues and give people the tools to take their conversation to the next level” (Korngold [Interview], 2009).

In a recently published article in the *Denver Post*, she commented, “There is something about being out there, hiking along, that leads to a deeper conversation... and bond” (Draper, 2010). Furthermore, Rabbi Korngold applied an idea that Torah should be

placed at the center of all of our decisions, particularly the really challenging decisions confronted by Jewish organizations in these economic times. Rabbi Korngold brought this idea to her members to explore the issue of “Why do we exist? And, what is our purpose?” referring to the *Adventure Rabbi* program (Korngold [Interview], 2009). The answer they came up with, she explained, was “community.” For the *Adventure Rabbi* congregation, community provides an outlet for inherent spirituality and a space to rediscover the power of prayer. Therefore, to ensure that the community was represented, they designed a worship component within the outdoor activity, which consists of a few songs, a couple of prayers, and an engaging dialogue to bring the community to a higher level. Interestingly, Rabbi Korngold mentioned that they use a lot of Debbie Friedman melodies, a well-known American composer and songwriter, particularly in the Jewish camping movement, because these are the tunes that her participants are most familiar with and can typically remember, even after as much as a 15-year absence from Jewish worship.

Building community is the ultimate goal of the *Adventure Rabbi* program. When asked how she defines a meaningful Jewish experience, she answered: “When we get to the end of the program, if people scatter right away, then it was not a meaningful experience. If people stay and exchange contact information, then I have done it” (Korngold [Interview], 2009). The *Adventure Rabbi* program regularly receives feedback about participants feeling reconnected to Judaism in a way they have not felt since childhood. About this, she comments that “through these programs they begin a process, and they come out the other side as proud and happy to be Jewish. Now, they make decisions of who to marry, where to live, and where to work with a Jewish backdrop” (Korngold [Interview], 2009). When asked about the benefit of using the wilderness, she explains that the community is forced

to become real. In doors, the idea of creating community and depending on each other is all a metaphor. Once a group is on the trail, people have a different awareness of one another. Suddenly the idea of offering your neighbor a hand instantly becomes real, rather than metaphorical. Rabbi Korngold calls this an “authentic community” (Korngold [Interview], 2009).

Additionally, the *Adventure Rabbi* program offers private trips (Korngold [Interview], 2009). One example of this is the B’nai Mitzvah Shabbaton. On this Shabbaton, the group explores the idea of responsibility differently from a typical class would because they do it on the trail. She explains that if one kid forgets his/her rain coat, for instance, the whole group goes together back down the mountain because it would be unsafe for one member of the community. The kids learn to be responsible for the whole community and support one another. Similarly, if one kid is struggling on the hike, the leader poses the question “What should we do?” to the community. The kids are then asked to decide how to support the struggling member to ensure the safety and success of the entire group. After such an experience, she explains, if someone is struggling in the classroom and the other students are getting frustrated, she reminds them of the lesson they learned on the trail of caring for one another in their times of struggle and asks them to imagine “hiking behind him or her right now” and to support him or her in this challenge (Korngold [Interview], 2009). The metaphor on the trail can transfer back to the classroom and give a fresh meaning to the concepts of responsibility and community for these participants.

When asked if this program would work anywhere else in North America, Rabbi Korngold has observed this interest from people all over the U.S. so the model could work

in many locations. The question becomes if it is feasible in terms of the environment. The weather, she says, can be the biggest stumbling block because certain environments change so rapidly that it is hard to plan programs and be certain they will be able to run in a financially sustainable fashion. Despite this concern, Rabbi Korngold travels as a ‘scholar in residence’ and leads programs for individuals, congregations, and Jewish organizations all over the country (Korngold [Interview], 2009).

Audience and Outreach

The *Adventure Rabbi* program uses many methods of outreach, relying heavily on the media and the internet for recruitment and marketing. *Adventure Rabbi* program has an easily navigable website, a Facebook page, a blog, and is always adopting the latest social media sites to reach its audience. Similarly, the *Adventure Rabbi* program has gotten a lot of attention in the press, including the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Denver Post*, *Good Morning America*, and even *Ski Magazine*. For celebrations from B’nai Mitzvah to the High Holidays services, many people have come seeking the services *Adventure Rabbi* organization provides (Adventure Rabbi, 2009).

Creating a Meaningful Jewish Experience

When posed the question of what she does to create a meaningful Jewish experience, Rabbi Korngold uses the example of their wildly popular program, the Passover Seder in Moab, Utah (Korngold [Interview], 2009). This program is a weekend retreat that combines prayer, the Passover Seder, hiking, camping, and outdoor exploration (Adventure Rabbi, 2009). At the Passover Seder, participants will “sing, dance and pray

under the sun and arch [Arches National Park]... They will read Exodus out of a Torah scroll” (Draper, 2010). Rabbi Korngold leads the hikes during the Moab trip and stops every so often to ask the group an engaging question. She explains that “halfway through the hike, we pause for a brief but meaningful service accompanied by nature readings from Jewish tradition” (Korngold [Interview], 2009). Toward the end of the service, she explains, “we take a few moments of quiet introspection. It is a chance for each of us to contemplate the sounds, smells and sights of the wilderness around us” (Adventure Rabbi, 2009). This way she is able to create a learning environment and foster community by provides a structure for people to talk and share their thoughts with one another.

Perceived Need in the Jewish Community and Future of the Program

“The interest in Jewish adventure is there,” Rabbi Korngold asserts, and she believes Jewish outdoor adventures “are an exciting and innovative avenue for meaningful Jewish experiences” (Korngold [Interview], 2009). The *Adventure Rabbi* organization welcomes anyone who is ambivalent about or feeling alienated from their Judaism, and her programs have formed a Jewish consciousness and pride within many of these participants. Rabbi Korngold, in reflecting on the success of the *Adventure Rabbi* program, observed:

“It doesn’t make any sense by any metrics of comparison that we exist so strongly because we don’t demand any commitment...and yet, people come for 24 hours and they make best friends of their community, and even if they don’t come back for a year, they maintain that sense of community” (Korngold [Interview], 2009).

When asked what she dreams of for the organization, Rabbi Korngold replied: “What we do now is magnificent. If we were to do nothing more than what we do now, *Dayeinu* (*It would have been enough*)” (Korngold [Interview], 2009).

Jewish Outdoor Adventure Education Participant Questionnaire

Meeting other like-minded individuals and learning about Judaism in a way that was meaningful to me.

-Survey participant's answer to the question: *What was the most memorable part of your Jewish outdoor adventure?*

Building on previous research and the findings from the interviews conducted with the leaders of the case studies, a survey was distributed to measure the impact of Jewish outdoor adventure programs on the participants' Jewish identity and involvement in the Jewish community. (See Appendix B.) The survey questioned participants about their background, their Jewish outdoor adventure program experiences, their perception of the experience, and the impact the experience had on them.

The survey elicited responses from 56 individuals who participated in either a Jewish outdoor adventure with *TorahTrek*, *Outdoor Jewish Adventures*, *Shalom Institute*, *Adventure Rabbi* program, Jewish summer camp, or a trip provided by another leader or program not discussed in this thesis. This survey assesses the impact of these programs on participants and measures long-term effects on Jewish identity or communal participation. Because the focus of this study is not on Jewish summer camp, those responses were filtered out, leaving 46 responses for analysis. The survey was distributed using a snowball sampling method from this author's personal network, as well as offering the online link to the survey for the case study organizations' members to complete on a voluntary basis.

Overall, this survey did not prove to be as effective a method to assess the power of Jewish outdoor adventure programs as intended. However, the information received from the survey was helpful to support the perceived value of these programs and generated

additional anecdotal evidence. The objective of the survey was to have at least ten to 15 respondents from each of the four case study programs in order to see trends within each program and make comparisons between them. As such, the link was distributed to the four organizations to locate respondents for the survey. Biases in the results developed because the completed surveys did not provide an equal distribution from the four groups, as more surveys were received from some programs' participants than others. It would thus be inaccurate to report the survey findings as trends in Jewish outdoor adventures, in general; rather these can perhaps be viewed as informal indicators of the impact of these particular programs.

Questionnaire Findings

Biographical Information

Biographical information regarding age, gender, and denomination was gathered from respondents to determine which programs attracted certain audiences and to identify the various types of participants who were likely to attend each program. Of the participants who responded to the survey, 43% were 45 years of age or older, 22% were between the ages of 29 to 35, 17% were between the ages 23 to 28, and 11% were 36 to 45 years of age. For this sample, most participants of these programs are older than 45 or between the ages of 29 to 35. Perhaps this indicates the market of people interested in these types of programs. This survey showed an equal participation of men and women. Typically, however, trends indicate there are higher concentrations of women than men who participate in synagogues and Jewish organizations (UJC, 2001).

Most of the survey participants are concentrated in the Pacific and Mountain regions of the United States. This is in part due to the location of the programs. More than half, 52% of participants, are from the Pacific region (including Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, and Hawaii) and 28% are from the Mountain region (including Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico). The survey reported that the plurality, or 47%, of participants are affiliated with the Reform community, 13% affiliated Conservative, and 17% chose “other,” which is comprised primarily of Renewal and Modern Orthodox Jews. Interestingly, however, participants were split equally between synagogue members and non-members. This could be indicative of the national trends of the Jewish community in membership.

Trip Information

Table I: Type of Jewish Outdoor Activity(s) Participated In.

Type of Activity	Response Percent	Response Count
Light Hiking	59%	27
Trekking (moderate to strenuous hiking)	30%	14
Backpacking (Tent Camping)	11%	5
Car Camping	4%	2
Canoeing	7%	3
Rafting	4%	2
Rock Climbing	0%	0
Low Ropes Course	9%	4
High Ropes Course	7%	3
Horseback Riding	4%	2
Outdoor Sports (Soccer, Basketball, Baseball, etc.)	7%	3
Skiing/Snowboarding	4%	2
Surfing/Swimming	2%	1
Yoga/Meditation	24%	11
Running	2%	1
Cycling	9%	4

Table I indicates the activities that were the most popular among participants on their respective Jewish outdoor adventures. Light hiking is the most popular of the activities at 59%, trekking is the second most at 30%, and yoga/meditation at 24%. Perhaps, these activities are the most popular among participants because they are relatively inexpensive and low intensity. Light hiking and yoga/meditation, in addition, are very low-risk activities that can attract a wide audience for various lengths of time. From the case study interviews, one can conclude that hiking is popular because it is an easy activity to implement and one in which most people can participate.

When asked about the length of the trips, 30% of respondents reported their trip was of one-day duration and 20% answered their trip was two to three days long. When asked about the fee, 39% of participants paid \$100 or less for the trip they participated in, while 17% of participants paid \$501 or more. The survey indicated that 24% of participants learned about these trips through their prior affiliation with a Jewish organization, 18% heard about their trip from a colleague or friend, and 13% heard through e-mails/e-blast. Some of the case study organizations are extremely proactive about their marketing, but this survey shows that perhaps this is not the only way to attract participants to their programs.

Table II: Importance of Program Elements to Participants' Participation.

	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Jewish Content	39% (14)	36% (13)	14% (5)	11% (4)
Physical Challenge	28% (9)	38% (12)	28% (9)	6% (2)
Cost	22% (7)	37% (12)	34% (11)	6% (2)
Location	47% (15)	34% (11)	19% (6)	0% (0)
Size of Group	9% (3)	31% (10)	34% (11)	25% (8)
Participant Activities	20% (7)	50% (17)	20% (7)	10% (4)
Reputation of Program	9% (3)	56% (18)	28% (9)	6% (2)
Leader	45% (14)	35% (11)	13% (4)	6% (2)
Length of Trip	9% (3)	53% (17)	31% (10)	6% (2)

Table II shows that Jewish content, location, and trip leader were all very important to the survey participants. Other considerations including physical challenge, cost, activities, reputation of the program, and length of the trip were considered as “important.” This information is helpful for future Jewish outdoor adventure programs because it ranks the importance of what participants are looking for when they attend a Jewish outdoor program.

Perception of the Experience

Respondents’ “perception of the experience” provided an important indication of customer satisfaction. Overall, 93% of participants found their trip to be “right priced.” Similarly, 86% of people rated their experience as the “right length,” with a few responses reporting it was “too short.” 73% of participants rated the physical activity as “just right,” while 27% rated it as “too easy.” When asked about the quantity of Judaic activities, 83% of survey takers rated the amount as “just right” and 17% rated it as “too little” with 0% rating it as “too much.” These statistics show that overall, customers, or participants, are satisfied with the trips they participate in as a product they purchase.

When asked to comment on their favorite part of the experience, many people expressed that they found it “inspirational.” One participant answered that the most memorable part of the trip was, “Seeing the sun set and rise from a high summit (14,000 feet) and conducting a summit service.” Many participants enjoyed being outdoors and having a Torah service in an outdoor chapel. Other responses included: “feeling connected to everything,” “the quiet time hiking,” “outdoor services,” and the “scenic views that led to a spiritual connectedness.” When asked what could have made the experience better,

there was very little feedback given, save for “more time on the trail with their respective leaders.”

Impact of the Experience

One of the main objectives of this survey was to assess the impact Jewish outdoor adventures have on participants’ Jewish identity as well as on their Jewish communal participation. Notably, for a significant number of participants, the experience of a Jewish outdoor adventure had a powerful impact on their lives, which left them with stronger Jewish identities and/or with greater communal participation. According to survey respondents’ feedback, Jewish outdoor adventures also have an effect on community building and relationship building, which is important to the success of the programs and impacts on Jewish communal continuity.

Table III: How Participation in the Following Jewish Activities Has Changed as a Result of Participation in a Jewish Outdoor experience.

	Increased	Somewhat Increased	Stayed the Same	Somewhat Decreased	Decreased
Involvement in Jewish Organizations	15% (4)	15% (4)	65% (17)	0% (0)	4% (1)
Participation in Jewish Communal Events	15% (4)	15% (4)	65% (17)	0% (0)	4% (1)
Observing Jewish Rituals	15% (4)	15% (4)	66% (18)	0% (0)	4% (1)
Attending Synagogue	12% (3)	8% (2)	76% (20)	0% (0)	4% (1)
Participating in <i>tikkun olam</i> Activities (Mitzvah Day, etc.)	12% (3)	15% (4)	73% (19)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Reading Jewish Books	12% (3)	26% (7)	58% (15)	0% (0)	4% (1)
Listening to Jewish Music	4% (1)	23% (6)	69% (18)	0% (0)	4% (1)
Attending Jewish Summer Camp	8% (2)	8% (2)	79% (19)	0% (0)	4% (1)
Attending Other Jewish Outdoor Retreats	29% (7)	13% (3)	50% (12)	4% (1)	4% (1)
Donating Money to Jewish Causes	12% (3)	18% (5)	70% (18)	0% (0)	0% (0)

Table III shows that involvement in Jewish communal life mostly “stayed the same” or “somewhat increased” after participation in a Jewish outdoor adventure. It is important to note that there was no decrease in activity. There was a slight increase in Jewish communal involvement, participation in Jewish communal events, donating to Jewish causes, and Jewish culture such as reading Jewish books or listening to Jewish music. For these people, to the extent that they are more fulfilled and spiritually connected as a result of participation in a Jewish outdoor adventure, the impact can be expected to carry over into their subsequent Jewish lives and identities.

Table IV: Participation in Outdoor Activities Changes as a Result of Participation in a Jewish Outdoor experience.

	Increased	Somewhat Increased	Stayed the Same	Somewhat Decreased	Decreased
Light Hiking	23% (6)	17% (4)	60% (15)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Trekking (moderate to strenuous hiking)	20% (5)	13% (3)	67% (16)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Backpacking (Tent Camping)	13% (3)	4% (1)	83% (20)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Car Camping	16% (3)	6% (1)	78% (18)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Outdoor Retreat	6% (2)	28% (6)	66% (15)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Canoeing	4% (1)	9% (2)	87% (20)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Rafting	5% (1)	5% (1)	90% (18)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Rock Climbing	5% (1)	10% (2)	85% (17)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Low Ropes Course	5% (1)	0% (0)	95% (19)	0% (0)	0% (0)
High Ropes Course	5% (1)	0% (0)	95% (19)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Horseback Riding	5% (1)	10% (2)	85% (17)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Outdoor Sports	5% (1)	5% (1)	90% (19)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Skiing/Snowboarding	0% (0)	10% (2)	90% (19)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Surfing/Swimming	0% (0)	10% (2)	90% (18)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Yoga/Meditation	5% (1)	23% (5)	72% (16)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Running	5% (1)	5% (1)	90% (20)	0% (0)	0% (0)

It is evident that these experiences are having an effect on some of the participants’ outdoor activities. Table IV measures whether participation in outdoor activities has

changed as a result of participation in a Jewish outdoor experience and shows that participation in outdoor activities largely “stayed the same.” There were, however, a few increases that are noteworthy, including hiking and yoga/meditation. Hiking and yoga/meditation are core activities on nearly all of the Jewish outdoor adventure trips. Perhaps individual participation in these activities is important because it can serve to reconnect the individual back to the experience, or perhaps that person has been enabled to find a spiritual connection in nature for himself/herself.

Research Summary of Participant Questionnaire

Responses to the questionnaire indicated how the Jewish outdoor adventure was perceived by those who participated in these various experiences. Having more participant responses would have strengthened the questionnaire and provided stronger evidence to evaluate the four Jewish outdoor adventure programs cited in the case studies, as well as other existing programs. This information, however, was useful in evaluating the experiences and the impact of these programs on participants’ Jewish lives.

For some participants, the impact of Jewish outdoor adventure participation was clearly greater than for others. The survey directly asked how participants thought their Jewish identity had changed as a result of their Jewish outdoor adventure education. Of those who answered the question, 56% believed their Jewish identity got “stronger” as a result of participation in one of these programs. A central goal of these case studies is to attain meaningful Jewish continuity and to make a difference in participants’ personal and spiritual lives, which has been accomplished. When asked whether they thought their

change in involvement with a synagogue or other Jewish organization was a result of participation in a Jewish outdoor adventure, 38% said “yes!” This is a startling statistic for a population where approximately 70% are unaffiliated. It is proven that Jewish outdoor adventures made a profound and lasting impact for more than 1/3 of the participants who answered this questionnaire, as they have increased their participation in the overall Jewish community.

Clearly, these Jewish outdoor experiences had an impact on many of the participants’ Jewish journeys. One participant wrote that the experience was impactful because it allowed “the ability for my son to explore his roots in an environment he loves.” Another participant said that “embodying Kabbalistic text by creating movement activities while at the beach” was something he would never forget. When asked if participants would attend a similar activity in the future, 50% said they are “very likely” to attend again and 100% said they would recommend Jewish outdoor adventure trips to a friend. It is challenging to assess if and how people will be changed by their participation following a Jewish outdoor adventure; however, it needs to be recognized that no matter what change participants see in themselves afterward, they are choosing to participate in a Jewish activity and are very likely to contribute to the Jewish community in the future. Whether it be *TorahTrek*, the *Outdoor Jewish Adventures*, the *Shalom Institute*, *Adventure Rabbi* program, or other programs around the country, it is certain that participants not only enjoy the experience, but find themselves involved in Judaism in a way they had not previously experienced.

SUMMATION OF FINDINGS

Recreation, Socialization, and Challenge

It is apparent that Jewish outdoor adventure education is a prime exemplar of Jewish experiential education. The summation of findings of Jewish outdoor adventure education is compiled using a mixed method that consisted of literature review, qualitative research from interviews, and a quantitative survey. The literature review helped to place Jewish outdoor adventure education in the context of theories of experiential education and experiential Jewish education. The qualitative interviews with the leaders of *TorahTrek*, *Outdoor Jewish Adventures*, *Shalom Institute*, and *Adventure Rabbi* program provided the methods these individual leaders considered when designing an organization that brings Judaism, spirituality, and nature together to create a meaningful Jewish experience. The following summation of findings identifies the elements that make a successful Jewish outdoor adventure education a subsection of experiential Jewish education.

Experiential Jewish education is a blanket term that encompasses a variety of modalities, including Jewish outdoor adventure education. One of the reasons experiential learning is so effective is because it is grounded in authentic experience (Bryfman & Reimer, 2008). Instead of merely teaching *about* Judaism or nature, participants get to experience it hands-on. Bryfman and Reimer's hypothesis of three initiatives that experiential Jewish learning must include are exemplified in Jewish outdoor adventure education. Recreation, socialization, and challenge each contain its own set of goals and have been demonstrated in *TorahTrek*, *Outdoor Jewish Adventures*, *Shalom Institute*, and the *Adventure Rabbi* program:

Recreation

In order to capture participants' interest and increase levels of Jewish engagement, trip leaders must strategically design programming around the trail experience. It is important to have a framework for the experience that relates directly to Judaism, and offers participants purpose and connection. Recreational activities provide participants the opportunity to enjoy the company of other Jews in common cultural activities. Learning objectives are important for every activity in order to guarantee cognitive and behavioral elements for participants' growth and challenge (Bryfman & Reimer, 2008).

Hiking is an extremely popular activity because it is low-cost and the degree of difficulty can be easily adjusted for any age or ability level. Rabbi Jamie Korngold mentioned, "hiking is a good activity because the rhythm of the hike is very natural for the body and allows for other senses to kick in" (Korngold [Interview], 2009). It seems the most popular length for these programs was a two to three day trip, where the experience provided participants a break from every day life, but did not entirely disrupt their lives for more than a few days. The case studies demonstrate that two to three day trips seem to be sufficient to allow for community to solidify. By spending isolated time together, without distraction, the participants can form trusting relationships.

Structured time is important to establish early-on in order to facilitate an environment where people feel comfortable talking with one another. Early bonding activities help participants identify commonalities and give participants something in common to talk about at first, until they are able to make a more intimate connection. While not every activity needs to be challenging, and it is appropriate to have some activities designed to be just for fun, it is always important to have structured time. The

National Society for Experiential Education included “intention, preparedness, and planning” amongst its best practices for experiential education (NSEE, 2009). Rabbi Mike Comins also noted that he plans three times the amount of activities he believes he will actually need so that he will always be prepared (Comins [Interview], 2009). Content of the program is important to engage with Jewish resources and open the mind to learning about Judaism in a different way.

Socialization

The Institute for Informal Jewish Education at Brandeis University’s *Genesis* study concluded that a strong community experience can leave the individual seeking more in his/her personal life (Chazan, 2003). As socialization takes place, individuals gain the knowledge, skills, attitude, and desire to be an active member of the Jewish community. In the Jewish world, Reimer and Bryfman remind us to encourage participants to identify with a Jewish group and to internalize those behaviors and attitudes which characterize members of that group, as the overall goal is for a meaningful Jewish experience that leads to a fuller life in Judaism (Reimer & Bryfman, 2008). Engagement with peers and others on the trip creates connection and makes it more impactful (Chazan, 2003). Rabbi Korngold said that wilderness forces a community to become real. Inside, the idea of creating community and depending on each other is all a metaphor, she says, but “Once a group is on the trail, people have a different awareness of one another. Suddenly the idea of offering your neighbor a hand instantly becomes real, rather than metaphorical (Korngold [Interview], 2009). Rabbi Korngold calls this an “authentic community.” Similarly, Rabbi Comins concurs about the benefits he sees in Jewish outdoor adventure programs, as he also believes the wilderness allows people to better connect with one another.

There is interest in all age groups for Jewish outdoor adventures (Korngold [Interview], 2009). These activities are more available to children and youth; however, young adults, families, and retired adults should not be discounted from these programs, as the interest and participation is there when these options are made available. In fact, Rabbi Comins said, “Jewish spiritual life is quite impactful when you can relate to the issues they have going on in their lives... Adults experience it and appreciate it a lot more in terms of awe and wonder and are able to articulate their experience” (Comins [Interview], 2009). Jewish outdoor adventure education can be used as a tool for individual and communal development. Rabbi Comins said he believes Jewish outdoor adventures can enhance communal life and nurture the individual because of the power each has (Comins [Interview], 2009). Outdoor experiences can offer a balance to formal education because it reinforces Jewish learning and values, as it combining traditional and experiential learning in a way that is incredibly impactful for participants.

Csikszentmihalyi wrote, “the most positive experiences people report are usually those with friends...People are generally much happier and more motivated when with friends, regardless of what they are doing” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In a safe environment, the learner can let go of himself/herself and experience *flow*, where he/she truly feels connected to other participants, the teacher, the curriculum, and the physical setting, which can simultaneously lead to a heightened level of spiritual awareness.

Challenge

As experiential educators, Jewish educators aim to encourage participants to undertake the challenge of stretching themselves and growing toward a more complex participation in one’s Jewish life. Jewish outdoor adventures allow self-exploration and

individual growth by providing challenging scenarios for participants. Challenge is a learning process that is important for the growth of the individual (Reisman & Shavelson, 2008). Josh Lake says he challenges participants on his trips so that they are pushed to grow, which leads the individual a more complex and deeper participation in their Jewish life (Lake, 2009). Mr. Lake tailors his programs to the needs and abilities of his audience to help each participant actualize his/her Judaism so each person is able to make meaning out of Jewish tradition and integrate it into their daily lives.

Rabbi Comins, however, does not design his programs to be particularly strenuous. In fact, he focuses his programs more on the spiritual growth than physical challenge, which pushes participants to grow in a different way. Rabbi Comins said he enjoys helping participants see value in their Judaism and gain what is spiritually possible for themselves on his trips. By the out of the box activities on a Jewish outdoor adventure, such as a social action program, experientially discussing Creation, or performing the Passover Seder at Arches National Park, participants' bodies, minds and souls are stretched. Jewish outdoor adventure education aims to encourage participants to undertake a challenge – physical, emotional and spiritual – leading toward a more complex participation in their Jewish life.

In Jewish outdoor adventure education, the student becomes more dynamically involved in the learning process than in a traditional learning environment (Bryfman & Reimer, 2008). Individuals develop a spiritual and physical relationship with the environment by participating in activities that stretch them out of their comfort zone (Goldman, 2009). When asked what people get from his activities that they cannot get indoors, Rabbi Comins responded that wilderness provides a space to re-energize and a place to have fun (Comins [Interview], 2009).

Conclusion

Jewish outdoor adventure education can be an avenue into Judaism, and participants can develop an impactful relationship with each other, the broader Jewish community, and with their Judaism and Jewish identity. Through Jewish outdoor adventure education individuals can deepen and personalize their Jewish experiences so they feel they are on a Jewish journey and are not simply a member of a Jewish club. Additionally, experiential education activities require supervision and assistance from the facilitator. Experiential Jewish educators serve not only as professionals, but as Jewish role models (Charendoff, 2001). Jewish outdoor adventure education provides a powerful way for educators to achieve the ultimate goal of empowering and enabling participants to discover for themselves the powerful role Judaism can play in their lives.

SUMMARY THOUGHTS

Experiential Jewish education has become a popular and effective means of teaching about Judaism and strengthening Jewish identity and communal participation (Chazan, 2003). Its value, both alone and in conjunction with formal Jewish education, has become widely recognized because of its accessibility and attractiveness to participants of all ages. When approached with careful educational intentionality and programmatic planning, it can have a lasting impact on participants' Jewish lives and values.

A major challenge to the field of experiential Jewish education is that it suffers from a lack of research. Barry Chazan, based on Reisman's earlier work from 1979, has attempted to define the field of informal and experiential Jewish education in a theoretical way. The 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey and Jewish universities around the country have increased interest in the role that experiential Jewish education can play in identifying communal participation, particularly in younger Jews (UJC, 2001). This field has been expanded to include adults, who also reap many of the same benefits as Jewish youth from this type of education. Today, given the large number of informal Jewish educational programs available to Jews of all ages and the vested interest in its success, more research on its fundamental elements, processes, and impact is necessary to enhance this growing field.

Creating more Jewish outdoor adventure programs will greatly enhance Jewish identity, involvement and, ultimately, Jewish continuity (Chazan, 2003). Today, there are only a handful of programs around the country that are designed for this purpose and use a combination of formal and experiential learning as a means to foster person-centered Jewish education. Each individual can grow and find meaning as a Jew through

contextualized activities and through building a communal experience (Chazan, 2003).

Jewish sociologist Bethamie Horowitz stated, “Identity is not a destination but a journey that is constantly evolving” (Horowitz, 2000). Jewish outdoor adventure education is a conscious expression of this concept; its curriculum is developed in order to empower the individual for Jewish exploration and engage the learner where he/she is at (Horowitz, 2000). By socializing the individual to a specific and intentional Jewish sub-community, the individual can apply this experience within the larger Jewish community (Chazan & Richard, 1992).

Jewish outdoor adventure education is a special form of experiential Jewish education. Learning about Judaism through nature can be powerful for students as it puts into practice the theoretical underpinnings of experiential education and uses the elements of heightened awareness, teamwork, and community to infuse added layers of Jewish spiritual, intellectual and cultural depth (Comins [Interview], 2009). Jewish outdoor adventure education achieves this by socializing the individual to a Jewish community through a safe emotional, spiritual, and physical exploration (Reisman, 1993). When framed within a Jewish context, the setting and environment can be a springboard into greater Jewish awareness and appreciation, impacting participants far beyond the particular program or experience (Bryfman & Reimer, 2008).

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APPENDIX A: CASE STUDY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal Background Info:

- 1) What is your background?
 - *What is your Jewish background?
 - *What is your outdoor/wilderness experience?
- 2) What led to you becoming professionally involved in this field?
- 3) How? When? Why did you decide to put the two (Judaism and the outdoors) together?
- 4) What do you perceive as the need for the Jewish community?
 - *How do you understand the Jewish community?
 - *What is lacking?

Program Information and Development/Statistics/Design

I would like to understand better how your program works....

- 5) Do you have formal training in JOAE?
 - *Do you use leaders other than yourself?
 - If not who will lead it?
 - *How do you find them?
 - *Do you provide them with any special training?
 - If so, may I have copies of your materials?
- 6) What were the practical steps to design your program?
 - *If there are any materials, may I have a copy of them?
- 7) What kinds of programs do you run?
 - *What do you do on them?
 - *How long do they last?
 - *How much do they cost?
 - *What do you do to make it Jewish?
- 8) What kind of audience do you reach?
 - *Do you gear programs toward different audiences?
 - *Denomination?
 - *Age?
 - *Gender?
 - *Fitness of participants?
 - *Are there any trends you have noticed in your participants?
 - *Does geography matter?
- 9) What do you do to adapt the program to different physical/geographical situations?
- 10) How do you handle questions of liability?
- 11) How do you recruit?

Impact of the Program

- 12) What do people get from these activities that they don't get in other Jewish events or programs?
 - *What do you do to make it Jewish?
- 13) What were some of your most successful programs?
 - *How did you measure or define success?
- 14) Have you had any "unsuccessful" programs?
 - *What about the program did you think was unsuccessful?
- 15) What is your evaluation process?

- *Do you keep in contact with your participants? Is there any follow up? How?
- 16) How can Jewish outdoor adventure education be used to create a meaningful Jewish experience?
 - *What have participants taken from these experiences?
 - *How can a synagogue use adventure education?
 - *What are the benefits in using this?
 - Individually? Communally?
 - *What do you see as the potential gains for an individual or a community to experience your program?
- 17) Where do you see your program in the future?
 - *3 years?
 - *5 years?
 - *10 years?
- 18) Can you send me any other materials that you use to prepare your participants or that you hand out during their experiences with you?
 - *Are there any other resources (human, literary, material/physical) that you use or recommend that I can check out?

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT SURVEY ON JEWISH OUTDOOR ADVENTURE EDUCATION

1. Purpose of the Study

Hello! Your feedback and reflections on your experiences as a participant on a Jewish Outdoor Education program would be extremely helpful for the researcher, Courtney Jacobson, who is writing her graduate thesis on Jewish Outdoor Adventure Education. This survey explores the impact Jewish Outdoor programs have on Jewish identity, participation in the Jewish community, and personal physical activity. This thesis project is a requirement for a Master of Arts in Jewish Communal Service Degree from Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion and a Master’s in Social Work from the University of Southern California.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your answers to this survey will remain confidential. No names or other identifying information will be disclosed.

FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY PLEASE CONTACT:

Courtney Jacobson

(303) 570-0128 or courtney.i.jacobson@gmail.com.

Candidate for Master of Arts in Jewish Communal Service, Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion (2010)

Candidate for Master’s in Social Work, University of Southern California (2010)

If you are willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview or for additional questions, please submit your e-mail address at the conclusion of this survey and I will contact you.

TIME: This survey will take 5-10 minutes to complete.

PARTICIPANTS’ RIGHTS: Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish – Richard Siegel, Director of HUC – JIR School of Jewish Communal Service: rsiegel@huc.edu, 3077 University Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90007, or toll free at (800) 899-0925.

By completing this survey, you give permission for your responses to be included in this study and any published results.

Thank you for your time and help with my master’s thesis!

Courtney Jacobson

2. Biographical Information

1. What is your age?

☐

18-22

☐

23-28

☐

29-35

☐

36-45

☐

45 +

2. What is your identified gender?

☐

Male

☐

Female

3. Which geographic region do you live in the United States?

☐

New England (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut)

☐

Mid-Atlantic (New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey)

☐

East North Central (Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio)

☐

West North Central (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri)

☐

South Atlantic (Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida)

☐

East South Central (Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama)

☐

West South Central (Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana)

☐

Mountain (Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico)

☐

Pacific (Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Hawaii)

4. With which Jewish denomination do you affiliate most closely with?

☐

Reform

☐

Conservative

☐

Orthodox

☐

Reconstructionist

☐

Just Jewish

☐

Non-Denominational

☐

Spiritual

☐

Secular

☐

I am not affiliated

☐

Other (please specify)

5. Are you currently a member of a synagogue?

☐

Yes

☐

No

3. Trip Information

For your answers to this questionnaire, please answer according to your MOST RECENT, organized Jewish Outdoor Adventure.

6. What type of Jewish outdoor activity(s) did you participate in on your organized trip? (Check all that apply)

☐

Light Hiking

☐

Trekking (moderate to strenuous hiking)

☐

Backpacking (Tent Camping)

☐

Car Camping

☐

Canoeing

☐

Rafting

☐

Rock Climbing

☐

Low Ropes Course

☐

High Ropes Course

☐

Horseback Riding

☐

Outdoor sports (Soccer, Basketball, Baseball, etc.)

☐

Skiing/Snowboarding

☐

Surfing/Swimming

☐

Yoga/Meditation

☐

Running

☐

Cycling

☐

Other (please specify)

7. Who led your trip?

☐

Mike Comins

☐

Adventure Rabbi

☐

Josh Lake

☐

Hazon

☐

Shalom Institute

☐

Jewish Summer Camp

☐

Other (please specify)

8. How long was your trip?

- ☐ 1 day
- ☐ 2-3 days
- ☐ 4-5 days
- ☐ 6-10 days
- ☐ 11+ days

9. How much did the trip cost?

- ☐ \$0 - \$100
- ☐ \$101 - \$200
- ☐ \$201 - \$300
- ☐ \$301 - \$400
- ☐ \$401 - \$500
- ☐ \$501+

10. How did you hear about the activity?

- ☐ From a friend or colleague
- ☐ From an advertisement
- ☐ From an e-mail/e-blast
- ☐ From a Jewish organization I am affiliated with
- ☐ Other (please specify)

11. How important were the following in your willingness to participate in the program:

	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Jewish Content	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Physical Challenge	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Cost	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Location	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Size of Group	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Particular Activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important

	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Reputation of Program	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Leader	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important
Length of Trip	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Important

4. Perception of the Experience

12. The cost was:

- ☐ Too High
☐ Too Low
☐ Right Priced

13. The length of the trip was:

- ☐ Too Long
☐ Too Short
☐ Right Length

14. The physical activity on the trip was:

- ☐ Too Hard
☐ Too Easy
☐ Just Right

15. The Judaic content of the trip was:

- ☐ Too Much
☐ Too Little
☐ Just Right

16. What was your favorite part of the experience?

17. What was the most memorable?

18. What was your least favorite part of the experience?

19. What could have made it better?

5. Impact of the Experience

20. How has your participation in the following Jewish activities changed as a result of your participation in a Jewish Outdoor experience(s)?

	Increased	Somewhat Increased	Stayed the Same	Somewhat Decreased	Decreased
Involvement in Jewish organizations	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Participation in Jewish communal events	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased

	Increased	Somewhat Increased	Stayed the Same	Somewhat Decreased	Decreased
Observing Jewish Rituals	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Attending synagogue	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Participating in tikkun olam activities, such as Mitzvah Day	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Reading Jewish books	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Listening to Jewish music	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Attending Jewish summer camp	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Attending other Jewish outdoor retreats	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Donating money to Jewish causes	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased

21. How has your participation in the following Outdoor activities changed as a result of your participation in a Jewish Outdoor experience(s)?

	Increased	Somewhat Increased	Stayed the Same	Somewhat Decreased	Decreased
Light Hiking	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Trekking (moderate to strenuous hiking)	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Backpacking (Tent Camping)	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Car Camping	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Outdoor retreat	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Canoeing	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Rafting	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Rock Climbing	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Low Ropes Course	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased

	Increased	Somewhat Increased	Stayed the Same	Somewhat Decreased	Decreased
High Ropes Course	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Horseback Riding	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Outdoor sports	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Skiing/Snowboarding	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Surfing/Swimming	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Yoga/Meditation	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Running	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased
Cycling	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Increased	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed the Same	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased

22. How has your Jewish identity changed since your Jewish outdoor experience?

- ☐ Much Stronger
- ☐ Stronger
- ☐ Stayed the Same
- ☐ Weaker
- ☐ Much Weaker
- ☐ Other (please specify)

23. Do you believe your change in involvement with a synagogue or other Jewish organization was a result of your participation in a Jewish Outdoor Adventure?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

24. Do you keep in contact with other participants/leader of the experience?

- ☐ Many participants
- ☐ A few of the participants
- ☐ None of the participants/leader
- ☐ The leader

25. How important do you think keeping in contact with other participants/leader is for your overall experience?

- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not Important
- ☐ Not sure

26. How likely are you to attend a similar activity in the future?

- ☐ Very Likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Somewhat Likely
- ☐ Not Likely (Please Explain)

27. Would you recommend Jewish Outdoor Adventure trips to a friend?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure