Lekh Lekha

The Jewish Young Adult Journey of Discovery From Home to Self

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Chapter 1 - Jewish Young Adult Journey

Introduction

In the 1940s and 1950s, Jews adapted to the American culture and began to enjoy living like other Americans. They moved out to the suburbs leaving a lot of their Jewish communal life behind. In the 1960's and 1970's, political and social issues kept Jews active. Being a good American was being a good Jew. Jews were disproportionately involved in issues such as the Vietnam War, Civil Rights and Feminism (Heilman, 1995). Consequently, "less and less of the life of American Jews [was] derived from Jewish history, experience, culture and religion. More and more of it [was] derived from the current and existing realities of American culture, American politics, and the general American religion" (Heilman, 1995, 49).

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, Jews generally moved away from actively Jewish lives (Cohen and Eisen, 2000; Heilman 1995). Ironically, membership in Jewish organizations declined, partially due to the success of organizations in achieving their goals (Heilman, 140). Having achieved many of their policy goals, Jewish organizations had a more difficult time attracting members on a continuing basis. By the 1980's and 1990's, American Jewry was divided. The majority of American Jews were what Heilman termed "Heritage Jews." Heritage Jews did not participate much in Jewish life, but believed that their feeling of commitment was enough to ensure the preservation of Jewish heritage. On the other hand, "Active Jews" were more involved in the Jewish community and Jewish practice, and were committed to a particular Jewish content. In recent years, as Heritage Jews have continued to move further away from Jewish practice and organizational involvement and Active Jews have become more active, the American Jewish population has grown polarized. It is from this polarized Jewish community that today's Jewish young adults have emerged.

Current Situation for Young Adults

From the standpoint of a future religious leader in the Jewish community, promoting Jewish practice and involvement in the Jewish community is a worthy goal. While Judaism does have a rich heritage that should not be overlooked, and while being able to enjoy the freedoms in the United States should not be taken for granted, embracing Jewish heritage and American freedoms do not have to come at the expense of -leading an active Jewish life.

The polarization between the Heritage Jew and the Active Jew is representative of the tensions that many contemporary Jewish young adults experience. Finally out on their own, young adults have to determine how much of "home" they will bring with them and how they want to engage in Jewish life and with the Jewish community. Typically, young adults have enough independence to make life choices that will have enduring ramifications for their lives. However, at what is possibly the most critical time in their lives, these young people have low affiliation rates (Cohen & Eisen, 2000) and are overlooked and underserved by the Jewish community. At the time when Jewish young adults are faced with the decision of determining the role of Judaism in their life, they are least likely to be Jewishly acknowledged or involved.

The initial intent of this thesis was to look at an educational program and determine if there was a relationship between the development of the young adult participants and their later connection to the Jewish community. What was the impact of the experience? Could there be a generative relationship between education and later communal involvement? Is there a way to promote an active Jewish life through education? However, while conducting research, what stood out was not the medium of education, but the issues and concerns that Jewish young adults handle today. The educational program became a backdrop to the issues they wanted to address or were already in the process of addressing.

If trying to increase the participation of Jewish young adults in the community is a priority, then gaining an understanding of Jewish young adults and the issues they face may be instructive for determining what types of programs and education might serve that purpose. This thesis therefore will consider the issues that Jewish young adults need to address in order to develop a more sophisticated perception of themselves as Jews and as members of the Jewish community. Several factors are involved in addressing this. General developmental tasks and needs; issues specific to Jews and Jewish young adults; and American society, pop culture and media influence all play a role in shaping the lives and identities of Jewish young adults. While the area of Jewish young adult identity and communal involvement has not been researched directly, research has been done in three areas: young adulthood, Jewish identity, and involvement in the Jewish community.

Young Adulthood

Young adulthood is becoming a discernable life stage in the field of human development. The term 'young adult' is modern. Previously it was thought that a person's development proceeded from adolescence to adulthood. A person (man) finished his schooling, began working, started a family, and adult life commenced. It used to be thought that many young adults were going through an extended adolescence or they just had not become adults yet. Today, however, there is a population of young adults that has moved out of adolescence but has not entered adulthood. Young adulthood is not just a transition; it is a place to be.

Unlike stages in childhood, when it is known generally at what age a child will walk or when she will be able to think abstractly, there is a broader age range for when young adulthood begins and ends. From a developmental standpoint, the term young adult can

include ages 17 to 30, 18 to 25, 18 to 29, 20 to 29, 21 to 35, 22 to 35, 20 to 39, etc. (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Commission on Synagogue Affiliation, 1997; Howe & Strauss, 1993; Parks, 2000; Robbins & Wilner, 2001). Some researchers even differentiate within the stage between adolescence to adulthood– emerging adulthood, generally considered ages 18 to 25, and young adulthood (Arnett, 2000). The variety of delimiters is somewhat reflective of the nature of the stage. The process can begin as early as 18 and possibly extend to the late thirties. However, some may begin at 22 and others at 27, and some may have already moved on by age 25 and others not until 35. Age alone is not an indicator. For the purposes of this thesis, the term young adulthood will refer to be people between the ages of 18 and 29.

Another area of research that applies to young adulthood is the study of generations (cohort research). However, identifying young adults by generation creates a mixture of definitions and descriptions of today's young adults. Some consider today's young adults to be the end of Generation X and others consider them the beginning of the Millennials. This is problematic because these two generation have very different characteristics attributed to them. Generation X has a reputation for selfishness and slacking (Neil and Howe, 1993) and Millennials are known for authenticity, diversity and closer relationships with their parents (Leo, 2003; Oblinger, 2003). More difficulties arise when trying to determine who belongs to Generation X and the Millennial generation. Additionally, the labels of Generation X and Millennials are two of over a score of labels to identify varying age cohorts among those born between the 1960's and the year 2000 (Kick, 2002)[1]. Generation X can refer to a variety of ranges within the 1960's and 1970's and the term Millennial has been used to refer to various ranges between 1980 and 2000. In recognition that there is some overlap of these two

[1] Other common names for these generations include Post-Boomers, Thirteenth (or 13ers), Baby Busters, Echo Boomers, Generation Y, Nintendo Generation, Generation Next and Boomer Babies.

generations in reality, the terms Generation X (Gen X) and Millennials will be used and characteristics of both will be considered.

Young adulthood is usually a time when decisions are made that shape the future adult life of an individual (Arnett, 2000). Young adults are making decisions about where they will live, whom they will live with, what type of career they want and what kind of life they will lead. The decisions they make create a tremendous amount of change, so much so that, according to Arnett, there is nothing demographically normal about them. Young adults have the highest rate of residential change with 70% of them moving out of their homes after high school (Arnett, 2000). This activity makes young adulthood the appropriate time for developing perspectives on the issues of career, lifestyle, ideals of a partner/marriage, religious identity, and a sense of personal meaning.

Young adulthood is primarily a Western phenomenon and according to Arnett (2000) is more cultural than national. Arnett gives the example of American Mormons, who have a shortened young adulthood compared to the general American population due to their marrying and starting families at a younger age. In the United States, young adulthood is generally a stage of development for those who are white, middle to upper class, college educated people. This description is representative of the Jewish young adult population in American.

Jewish Young Adults

One of the largest influences on most America Jewish young adults is American culture and values. Jews have learned the American way and been absorbed into the mainstream culture. Jews are in the media, in the government, on sports teams, in country clubs, in boardrooms and even in space. Additionally, the 2000 -2001 National Jewish

Population Survey (NJPS) reported that, "Relative to the total U.S. population, Jews are more highly educated, have more prestigious jobs and earn higher household incomes" (United Jewish Communities [UJC], 2003, 6). American Jews capitalized on the American dream of working hard and becoming financially successful. Jewish young adults are part of a Jewish population that has success, freedoms and communal acceptance that are unprecedented in Jewish history.

Two of the consequences of the success of American Jewry have been increasing intermarriage rates and declining birthrates rates. While the changes affect the entire American Jewish population, young adults are directly accountable for the decreasing and increasing rates respectively. Young adulthood is usually when the choices about a life partner and having children are made. However, more Jewish young adults are postponing marriage and family because of their increase in education. Of those Jewish young adults who do marry, 47% of the men and 37% of the women are intermarried (UJC, 2003).

56% of Jews attain a college or graduate degree compared to 29% of the general American population (UJC). While 70% of American ages 18 to 24 and 44% of Americans ages 25-29 are childless, the numbers jump to 90% and 70% respectively for Jewish Americans (UJC). There is a connection between birthrates and level of education. Jewish women who have been to college have comparable birthrates to non-Jewish women with the same education level. Since the percentage of Jewish women with college educations is much higher than the general population, the Jewish birthrate is lower overall than that of the total American population.

Young Adults and Community

Individualism, which is a large part of American culture, has influenced the relationships between Jews and the Jewish community. One result of the emphasis on the individual is that success is becoming an individual rather than a communal achievement (Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., Tipton, S. M., 1996). Americans seek personal success, personal meaning and personal happiness. Additionally, American Jews speak the language of individualism, which is not outstanding within the American culture, but is a departure from Jewish culture (Cohen & Eisen, 2000; Bellah et al). The language of community, which is the primary language of Judaism, has now become a second language.

The idea of the melting pot represents another core value in the United States. The United States is predominantly a pluralistic, or at least tolerant, culture. Universal ideas, "Judeo-Christian" values and the "golden rule" create a culture that teaches, "We are equal in the eyes of God." Based on a study of moderately affiliated Jews, Steve Cohen and Arnold Eisen (2000, 93) concluded that Jews are comfortable in the mainstream American culture and need to be convinced why they should differentiate themselves by participation in Jewish practice. To participate in Jewish life is to be particularistic in a universal environment; it is "counter-cultural." Judaism has its own holidays, calendar, rituals values and beliefs. Additionally, following the traditions of a religion is a submission to authority in a culture that considers it the individual's choice, in fact the individual's right, to decide what is right and wrong to be the authoritative voice.

Studies of the religious affiliation of young adults show them to have fewer affiliations than other Jewish adults. Cohen and Eisen (2000) found that young adults have a sharp decline in association, singles even more so than the married. The National Jewish Population

Survey (UJC, 2003) indicated that those under 35 have lower affiliation rates and give less frequently to philanthropic causes than other age cohorts. While family life is an issue of concern, young adults more often seek personal spirituality. They want to find themselves, and typically their search for a religious identity does not translate into looking for a religious affiliation.

Methods

Learning about the issues that Jewish young adults need to address necessitated identifying a group of young adults to study. Due to my initial interest in how an education program would affect Jewish young adults, I conducted interviews with participants in an educational program —the Brandeis Collegiate Institute (BCI). BCI is part of the larger Brandeis Bardin Institute (BBI) located in Simi Valley, California. BBI is a year-round institute that provides other programs such as sleep over summer camp for children, arts and music performances, weekend retreats and various educational programs. BCI is a three and a half week "camp" for young adults. The participants (BCIers) work, relax, celebrate Shabbat, dance, eat, hike, participate in various art workshops, and study Jewish texts, history and traditions together.

The study of BCI was conducted through observations of a BCI program in progress, research about the institute, and interviews with past participants. A doctoral thesis by Bruce Powell (1979) about the educational philosophy of Shlomo Bardin, one of the founders of BCI, was an invaluable resource for understanding BCI. Observation of the BCI program included conversations with participants, the staff, the artists and the education director as well as observing the activities of the program for a few days. Chapter 2 will review the history of

BCI, its philosophical foundations, its operational structure, why it was chosen for research and the research methods used.

The interviews with the past participants were the central element of the research. The interviews were analyzed in light of the areas outlined above: young adulthood, Jewish young adulthood, and young adults' relationship with community. The analysis of the interviews unearthed many issues that face Jewish young adults, but three themes emerged and became the focus of this thesis: exploration, leaving home and belonging, and self-invention. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 will each address one of these three issues of Jewish young adulthood.

Overview

Developmental issues of young adults, sociological views of America and American Jews, and BCI are each worthy of further independent research. However, this thesis is not intended to address any one of those areas in particular. Instead, this thesis draws from each of these areas of research, as well as from observations, interviews, and the teachings of the Jewish tradition, and asks what Jewish young adults need to develop a more sophisticated perception of themselves as Jews and as members of the Jewish community.

Young adults have new freedoms that allow them to explore and experiment with experiences of their own choosing. Having left home, Jewish young adults are looking for a sense of belonging, coming to terms with their own identity and accepting responsibility for their own lives. It is hoped that a better understanding of Jewish young adults can assist the Jewish community to work with young adults as they develop their Jewish identity and their relationship with the Jewish community.

Chapter 2- Brandeis Collegiate Institute

History - Goals

Brandeis Bardin Institute, where BCI takes place, was founded in 1941 as the result of a long series of conversations between Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis and Shlomo Bardin that began in 1931. Aware of assimilation and a lack of Jewish identification, Brandeis was concerned about American Jews leaving their heritage, culture and people. Concerned about the decline of the quantity and quality of Jewish education, Brandeis wondered how to develop an educational program that would make Judaism meaningful and relevant to young Jews (Powell, 1979).

The Brandeis Collegiate Institute's objective is to be a pluralistic community that engages Jewish young adults in study, the arts, community and the outdoors in order to promote Jewish life and culture.[2] BCI describes itself as a post-denominational institution that welcomes young adults from every stream of Judaism.[3] BCI participants are primarily North American, but there are also BCIers from Europe, the former Soviet Union, Israel and many other countries. BCI wants to provide participants with the opportunity to explore themselves and Judaism in a safe environment that helps them define who they are and who they can become by envisioning their adult Jewish life.

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[2] These descriptions are based on BCI's own marketing materials found on its website www.thebbi.org

[3] According to the BCI website, a "Post-denominational" institution "draws upon the best of the various expressions and observances of Jewish life without adhering to any specific theological ideology."

Ideology and Educational Philosophy

In his doctoral dissertation, Bruce Powell analyzed the educational philosophy of Shlomo Bardin as it related to the Brandeis Bardin Institute. He showed that Bardin, who developed the actual program of BCI, had an educational philosophy shaped by many thinkers and educators both Jewish and non-Jewish. In the 10 years following his first conversation with Brandeis, Bardin took part in many educational endeavors. He learned from prominent educational thinkers and observed various educational models abroad. Bardin was influenced by men such as John Dewey[4], William Kilpatrick and George Counts as well as Jewish educators such as Alexander Dushkin, Hillel Gamoran, Leo Honor, Judah Pilch, Samson Benderly[5] and Mordecai Kaplan.[6] Bardin subscribed to the experientialist view that people learn from what they live. He thought that Jewish texts, rituals, values and historical perspectives all played a role in education and that educational approaches should focus on the Jewish people, Jewish living and the worldwide Jewish community. The social pluralism and democracy Bardin experienced in the United States as well as developments in American recreational camps shaped his approach to Jewish education as well.

One of BCI's goals from the beginning has been to help young Jews feel comfortable with their Jewish identity (Powell). Bardin was concerned that young adults were not interested in learning about or participating in Jewish life and his main interest was in teaching

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[4] The "cultural-progressive" school of thought and the views of Yiddish progressives that influenced Bardin were hybrids of Dewey's thought with a demand for participation in American life and a combination with Jewish culture, respectively. (Powell 118-119)

[5] Dushkin, Bamoran, Honor, Pilch and Benderly were of the communal-Hebraic-progressive" school of thought. It focused in five areas: the worldwide Jewish community, the rebirth of Israel, Hebrew in education, Jewish community and progressive (experiential) education. (Powell p115)

[6] Powell suggests that Kaplan's "communal-Hebraic-reconstructionist school of thought was *also* the most influential on Bardin. (119) (*** describe this a bit)

young adults to want to know more about Judaism so they would want to live a Jewish life. To assist this process, Bardin also thought that young adults in a pluralistic society needed to develop a comfort with the particularistic nature of Judaism. In order to address these goals, Bardin shaped BCI to include experiential learning, activities that tapped into the cognitive and affective domains, moral and ethical issues, and role model teachers. This is still very much the approach of BCI today as described in their publicity materials:

> It seeks to "touch and teach" Jews, to inspire them through their intellect and emotion, to enhance their connectedness to the Jewish people through the arts as well as academics, and to make a contribution to the advancement of Jewish culture as a means of Jewish identity.[7]

For Bardin, success depended more on the underlying assumptions that inform the program than the specific techniques used to implement it. Slanted towards the affective, the Jewish values that Bardin thought were the basis of how BCI "touches" its participants are (Powell, 193):

1. Joy and Celebration – as seen in Jewish folk culture and Shabbat
2. *Eretz Yisrael* – the land, not the state
3. Self Reflection – encouraged in free time and religious services
4. *Avodah* (work) and *Menuchah* (rest) – manual labor and Shabbat
5. Life and Nature – Bardin saw these as sources of blessing
6. Knowledge – through lecture, discussion and self-study

[7] www.thebbi.org, December 2003

7. Community – the communal living experience

These seven values were intended to shape the daily life and programming at BCI completely and were played out through staff guidelines and the daily schedule. Understanding BCI's values is necessary for analyzing the findings in the observations and interviews. It is also important to consider how BCI embodied these values. One analysis of Bardin's work led to the creation of the following list of how that was done (Powell, 74).

1. The philosophy of the camp was clear; there was no confusion about goals.
2. The camp employed a competent resident staff.
3. The campers were surrounded by healthy adult role models.
4. Programming was open with the only limiting criterion being that it had to be Jewish.
5. The camp used "emotional charge" in music and dance.
6. All stimuli were Jewish.
7. The tone of the camp was organized, not pressured.
8. Campers were accepted as people by the staff.
9. The camp did not "dare" anyone.

Most of these are possible because BCI is a wholly controlled "closed system" – participants *live* at BCI. There is an inherent tension between the control imposed by the closed system and the freedom of expression that the program encourages. BCI tries to take

advantage of the control by creating a positive and joyful atmosphere and by focusing that tension on the relationship between Judaism and self (Powell, 77).

The resident artists, teachers and staff are to be role models representing ways of living a "good" Jewish life. The artists are expected to reflect expertise in their field, vibrant Jewish culture, and an integration of Judaism into artistic expression. In addition, " the teacher was to be an 'experience' in what it meant to live as a good Jew, and a good human being, as well as being able to communicate these concepts in a manner that was acceptable to the youthful mind" (Powell, 185-6). The role of the artists, teachers and staff in the participants' experience is as complex and unique as is each one of them. Analyzing their impact as artists and their relationships with the participants could be a thesis by itself.

Romance issues also have a significant impact on BCI participants. BCI has a rule of "no pairing off" – participants are explicitly told not to date each other during the program in order to allow each person to have his or her own individual experience and to promote inclusion of each person in the BCI community. This rule in particular raised issues about the philosophy of BCI and its implementation. Romance and gender concerns are deserving of research; however, they will not be directly addressed in this thesis.

A Day in the Life of BCI

The BCI program is staffed by resident artists, teachers, a rabbinic intern, a program director and an education director. Every summer has two 26-day programs that each are referred to as an *aliyah* and currently average around 50 participants with a maximum of 65. In addition, a few past participants serve as advisors and are available to the participants to answer questions or to discuss their experiences. Advisors are also in charge of most of the

logistical arrangements such as organizing the work activities, preparing for meals and assisting with program setup. A young adult may attend BCI only one time, but may work as an advisor multiple times.

BCIers do not leave the grounds of the Brandeis Bardin Institute for the entire *aliyah*. Communication and news from the world outside of BCI is minimal. BCI has six-days with a regular schedule of work and study and a separate schedule for Shabbat. Participants share hotel-like cabins and are able to walk to almost all activities. Every BCIer spends at least one night camping out with the wilderness program. BCI has swimming pools, tennis courts, nature trails and other recreational facilities available for participants to use during their free time. A typical weekday schedule is on the following page.

The schedule for Shabbat is markedly different. After lunch on Friday, the rest of the afternoon is free time. The evening consists of a prayer service, Shabbat dinner and dancing. Saturday starts with services and a Torah seminar before lunch and the rest of the day until dinner is free time. Shabbat is concluded with a *havdalah* service and a variety/talent show held by the participants.

Sample Daily Schedule of the Brandeis Collegiate Institute

7:15 a.m.	Flag raising – American and Israeli flags. Participants take turns each day raising the flags and sharing something personal[8].
7:30	*Avodah* – work such as picking vegetables, construction, cleaning the camp
9:00	*Hafsakah* – break, shower, prepare for breakfast
9:30	Breakfast
10:15	*Beit Midrash* – studies such as Jewish philosophy, history, culture, politics, traditional and contemporary theology[9]
12:00 p.m.	Arts workshops – art, drama, music, theatre or creative writing
1:30	Lunch
2:15	Free time – hiking, sleeping, socializing etc
4:30	*Chugim* – (study groups) as requested by the participants e.g. trope, prayer...
5:45	Flag lowering
6:00	*Shira/rikud* – singing/dancing lead by resident artists
7:15	Dinner
8:15	Evening Program – social and cultural arts programming[10]
9:45	End of the day

[8] During flag raising BCIers did things such as tell a personal story, share their thoughts, or present a poem or reading. There were no restrictive guidelines per se. Presentations covered the whole spectrum from simple to extraordinarily personal.

[9] Forums are intended to be appropriate for all participants regardless of an individual's Jewish background or knowledge. They are taught by BCI staff member as well as guests and range in interaction with the participants.

[10] These include guest speaker, presentations, performances and dialogues with Jewish cultural professionals. Interaction with participants varied, but generally questions about the program as well as the presenters themselves are encouraged.

Rationale & Methodology

There were several reasons why BCI was chosen to use for interviews and observations. As mentioned earlier, BCI is a closed system. Each *aliyah* lasts for three and a half weeks, the participants do not leave the premises during the program, and can only attend once. This creates an experience that is consistent from summer to summer and puts the participants on an equal level of (or a lack of) familiarity with BCI and generally with each other. It was also hoped that the discrete nature of the program would make it easier for interviewees to identify the impacts of the program.

BCI had advantages over local programs such as Friday Night Live[11] or Makor[12], which have counterparts in other cities. Attendance at these is not consistent and the programs do not have clear enough goals to be evaluated for their impact on the participants. The educational program at BCI is more comprehensive, the experience is focused, and the impact is more easily discerned. Federation leadership programs, classes for newlyweds or social action groups can have a significant impact on their participants, but the experience is intertwined with another specific purpose - leadership development, making a successful marriage, or supporting a particular cause respectively. These programs could teach a lot about young adulthood and are worthy of study. BCI, however, focuses on the individual's personal development without any other specific agenda.

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[11] Friday Night Live is a special monthly service at Sinai Temple in Los Angeles geared towards young adults that includes social activities after the service. The service is led with 'contemporary' Jewish music and the sermons are usually specifically focused for a young adult and single audience.

[12] Makor is actually an outgrowth of a study group of BCI alumni. Groups of young adults meet once a month in several different homes for Shabbat dinner and study. There is often a social gathering after the meals and once a year a weekend retreat is held at the Brandeis Bardin Institute.

There are leadership programs that do offer extensive educational experiences and promote the individual's involvement in the Jewish community. However, many of these programs are not geared toward the general Jewish young adult population. For example, the Wexner Heritage Foundation program[13] is specifically looking for future leaders between the ages of 30 – 45, in other words, adults who are for the most part beyond the stage of young adulthood.

The last reason BCI was chosen is its reputation of success. Other programs are not able to accomplish what BCI does because they do not have the same goals, resources or comprehensive environment as BCI. Studies done in the 1970's about the long term impacts of BCI showed that sixty seven percent claimed that it affected what they taught their children and fifty percent said it affected their religious beliefs and practices (Powell, 95). Personal and professional interactions with BCI staff and past participants revealed a considerable presence of past participants involved in the Jewish community and a strong loyalty among its alumni.

Observations, Interviews and Research

The fact that BCI is a one-time program with a fixed duration simplified the process of observing the program and defining a specific group for interviews. The consistency of BCI from summer to summer made it possible to observe the program and interview past participants at the same time with the idea of obtaining a "during and after" perspective. In order to see the development of the participants during the program, observations were conducted over a few days, with one visit near the beginning of the *aliyah* and another towards the end.

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[13] The Wexner program is a two-year program that offers 18 classes and 3 weekend institutes each year. The program aims to

With little prompting, participants shared information about their lives and their experiences at BCI. Each visit lasted at least one full day in order to observe the different activities that occurred. There was no observation of Shabbat. In addition, marketing materials and historical data were reviewed and the artists and staff provided information and perspectives. Bruce Powell's dissertation was also an invaluable resource for understanding the foundation of BCI.

Those interviewed were participants in a BCI program during the summers of 1999, 2000 and 2001 that had not been on the staff. Letters requesting interviews were sent out to qualifying alumni and six interviews were conducted either in person or on the telephone. Interviewees were asked about their motivation to attend BCI, their experience of the educational and communal aspects of BCI, its perceived impact on their lives and their current involvement in Jewish activities. Comments from five interviews are presented in this thesis. The questions for the interviews and more details about the participants can be found in the appendix.

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promote continued study and leadership involvement in the Jewish community.

Chapter 3- Discovery

A major element of young adulthood is independent discovery of the self, the other and the world. Through young adulthood, some of the exploration is about finding a final destination such as a home, an identity, a job, or a family while some is exploration for its own sake. To learn where they fit in the larger world, young adults seek opportunities to encounter new people, places and experiences. At times, their exploration may appear random and at other times, it actually is random. Because they have adult independence without necessarily the consequent adult responsibilities, young adults pursue a variety of opportunities and they have a tendency to take risks along the way. The process of discovery will be reviewed in this chapter as well as how it was manifest in the experiences of the past BCI participants.

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וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֶךְ־לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ
אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ (בראשית יב:א)

God said to Avram, "Go forth from your land and your birth place and from your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Genesis 12:1)

When the Holy One said to Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred" (Genesis 12:1), what did Abraham resemble? A vial of scent with a tight-fitting lid put away in a corner so that its fragrance could not go forth. As soon as it was moved from that place [and opened], its fragrance began to go forth. So the Holy One said to Abraham: Abraham, many good deeds are in you. Travel about from place to place, and the greatness of your name will go forth in My world. "Get thee out... and I will have thee acclaimed a great nation" Gen R. 39:2

When Avram was told to leave of his country, he was not told specifically where to go. He was given the ambiguous destination of "a place that [God] would show him." Like the bottled up fragrance in the midrash, he would become nothing unless he was released. Reaching the destination was not the entire purpose. Avram needed to set forth from his life in Haran to become Abraham, the man who joins in covenant with God. As he drifted from place to place, regardless of where he eventually ended his journey, his essential nature would come forth, he would *become*.

Exploration

So too, young adults sometimes needs to wander. Recognizing that there will eventually be a destination and accepting that it may be unknown at the moment, young adults set out "to become." For most American Jewish young adults, this begins during college. College provides young adults opportunities to explore new people, lifestyles, ideas, and

beliefs. Because young adults are extending their years of education and delaying marriage and parenthood until their late twenties and early thirties, they possess the freedoms that adulthood affords without consequent responsibilities to a family. Even for young adults who do not attend college, rather than a time of settling down, young adulthood is typically a time of change and exploration, a time of becoming. Like Avram, part of a normal young adult's life is to set out into the world, experience what life has to offer, and move from place to place.

"You start exploring the things *you* want to explore." (Dena)

Judaism today is particularly conducive to exploration without destination. Due to the limited knowledge of denominational beliefs, many Jews do not see significant distinctions between denominations. Jewish identity is not primarily informed by Jewish philosophy or theology. Cohen and Eisen found that in general Jews are "content to experience what is there to be experienced and to take the meaning as it comes." (Cohen & Eisen, 2001, 177 – 178) Allegiance to a specific denomination has become less important for those who want to experience Judaism.

From his studies of Generation X young adults, Beaudoin (1998) suggests that the disinterest in affiliation stems from young adults' desire for a lived theology. Experience has a powerful influence on young adults' religious beliefs that cannot be gained through traditions and doctrine. Generation X generally does not accept the authority of religion as it is passed down to it. The authority to determine religious beliefs comes from each individual's experience. Even though Millennials are known to have closer connection to their parent's values, the tendency to explore and build their own independent understanding is still present.

Trial and Error, Hit or Miss

Part of exploration during young adulthood is intended to determine the final destination. While there is actual intention behind it, sometime discoveries are made using a "hit-or-miss" approach. Based on their study of young adults, Robbins and Wilner determined, "the only way they will find out what matters to them most has to be through trial and error." (2001, 30) A study of learning tendencies concluded that Millennials followed a pattern of learning that "more closely resembles Nintendo than logic. Nintendo symbolizes a trial and error approach to solving problems; losing is the fastest way to mastering a game because losing represents learning. This contrasts with previous generations' more logical, rule-based approach to solving problems" (Oblinger, 2003).

Young adults are willing and able to keep looking until they find what is right for them. While they may make mistakes at this stage of life when they have a lot of freedom, they believe there will be fewer repercussions for errors made now than later in their lives. This makes exploring easier and more appealing. In addition, their choice making is conscious and the process itself helps instill purpose in their lives.

Career Passion

This general attitude of trial and error influences young adults' approach to building their personal and professional lives. Young adults do not want to just settle down and find a job, they want to explore and find their true passion. They are searching for personal meaning in their lives and are willing to keep trying until they find it. Mike spoke of this during his interview in reference to his situation in law school.

> "I was working. I didn't like what I was doing. The one positive aspect about working was that I became absolutely certain that I wanted to go to law school. And doing what I was doing didn't seem like a lot of fun. I figured I'd rather be learning and I've enjoyed law school. I hope I like lawyering as much as I like law school.

It was important to Mike that he enjoyed his work. Since he was not enjoying what he was doing, he felt strongly about trying something new. As he continued through law school, he was concerned if the path would continue to be enjoyable. Perhaps the concern is that if "lawyering" was not for him, he would have to continue exploring until he discovered what did suit him.

Intrinsic Exploration

While young adults explore in anticipation of better understanding themselves, others, the world and God, an element of the exploration is also just for its own sake. Young adults explore because they can. "The scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people [during young adulthood] than it will be at any other period of the life course" (Arnett 2000, 469). A career, life partner, or home may be in their future, but exploration also occurs in young adulthood just to have more depth and breadth of experiences to draw on as they stabilize their lives. Discovery may lead towards a specific outcome or accomplishment, however, at times it is enough that new experiences expand young adults' perspectives and augment the context within which they understand their lives. A desire to explore is a normal orientation for young adults.

Many BCI participants did not attend BCI to achieve a particular goal. In fact, a few of the interviewees said that they were partially motivated to go to BCI just because it was

something to do. Even though BCI served as a place for self-reflection and exploration of their relationship to Judaism, that was not necessarily their primary reason for attending. In a large part, BCI was just something to experience. For example, even though she already knew she wanted to work in the Jewish community eventually, Stacy did not want to get a job right away after missing the graduate school application deadline. "I wanted to do something fun with my summer and so I went to BCI." Her motivation was to have an experience. It is important to notice that young adults learn something from their experiences, even if it is not their intention.

> The formal learning dimension just kind of flew over my head because I saw this as a retreat, a summer camp, something for me as a person, not necessarily growth as a Jew because I felt I was already there, committed to Hillel work, committed to Jewish communal life... [But] I would say that I learned about my relationships with other people, with God.

Even though Mike recognized that he wanted to explore his Jewish identity, he also took the perspective that BCI was just something to do. "I just kind of thought, 'You know, I just graduated and I have some time before I start working or studying to enter law school.' So I did BCI." Lisa, who was very Jewishly active growing up and in college said, "I thought I was getting lucky, because for one last time I was going to get to go back to camp." She was not expecting much more than something that made for a fun summer.

Travel

In addition to having the time and inclination during young adulthood to explore, today's young adults also have a much larger arena in which to do their exploration. Until recently, the idea of a commons was a place where community gathered, shared and worked

out how they lived together like a town hall, general store, community center, or park. Today, however, the commons has expanded far beyond even the borders of the United States. "Today the commons is global in scope and personal in impact. Travel, communications, and entertainment technologies, along with the emergence of a global market and growing awareness of our interdependence within the natural environment, have cast all of us into a new global commons. In this new commons, society has become yet more complex, diverse, and morally ambiguous" (Parks, 2000, 10). Young adults exploring and experimenting to find their relation to the other and the world have to learn how to become part of this global commons.

One way young adults do this is through travel. From study abroad, to backpacking through Europe, to trips to Israel, young adults move beyond the boundaries of their childhoods to become part of the larger commons. Learning to navigate the larger commons can help in the formation of a more spacious faith, whether the travel takes the person across town or down the hall (Parks, 2000). Travel gives young adults experience in a larger community where they can tell their stories, discover, ask questions, and process thereby restructuring their own sense of meaning and faith based on this new view of the world, the other and the self.

BCI exposes Jewish young adults to the larger world of Jewry. In a short period, it creates a new commons for a group of Jews from different backgrounds. For a variety of reasons, BCIers recognized that the experience was a different form of community than they had previously experienced. For Mike the all-Jewish environment was unique. When asked what stood out about the experience, Mike responded that at BCI he "lived in a close-knit community of people around my age that were learning about Judaism and talking about it. I

just never had anything like that." Dena was very aware of how people, coming from an individualistic society, had come together in a situation that allowed them to learn how to be part of a group. She said there were many conversations about *lashon hara* (gossip) and some people tried not to gossip for twenty-four hours. "I didn't think that would happen somewhere else." BCIers learn to navigate through a new commons, and more specifically, the commons of Jewish community.

Risk

In early young adulthood, behavior that poses potential harm to self and/or others, i.e. risky behavior, is prevalent (Arnett, 1999). As mentioned above, young adults enjoy flexing their freedom and recognize that the consequences are not as great during young adulthood as they will be when they gain more responsibilities. Risky behavior usually decreases significantly as young adulthood progresses, but the inclination to experiment is still manifest. In a similar vein, though not necessarily considered risky behavior, young adults sometimes outright push themselves to try new things. Engaging in experimental behavior was prevalent at BCI. For example, Dena described a game called "Yes, let's," that created a culture of experimentation and she said it "sums up the experience of BCI." The rules of the game are that participants cannot say no, and if they do not like what the group is doing, they must come up with an alternative activity, to which everyone responds "Yes, let's." For example, one person would suggest pretending they all were eating peanut butter sandwiches. Everyone would say "Yes let's" and pretend. Someone else might then say that everyone should form a conga line. Everyone responds "Yes, let's" and begins a conga line and so forth. For Dena's group it became a catch phrase and whenever someone would suggest something to do, they

responded "Yes, let's" and they would do it. "Yes let's" became a trigger to encourage BCIers to expand, risk and try new or different things.

Part of what made risk taking possible at BCI was that it was encouraged and considered normal by BCI staff. The interviewees said that they felt they were in a safe environment where they knew that others were pushing themselves and trying new things as well. They described the environment as one that was "safe to express yourself," "open," "flexible," "nobody will be critical or criticize," and "non-judgmental." The BCI staff specifically encouraged them to try new activities when choosing their art workshop, which considering the expressive nature of the workshops, could be a considerable risk to take. Stacy said that when picking her elective, she challenged herself to try something she had not done before. She very consciously chose to do art rather than music or theatre, in which she had some experience. During the workshop, she thought, "I don't know why I'm here, like I'm not a good artist. I should be in the music workshop, but I figured to myself, let's stretch it a little." This was her opportunity to do something different, "because that's what I thought BCI was there for." Lisa was initially angry with herself for not trying something new. She chose the dance workshop because she is a dancer and then thought she should have done something different. Rick remembered being encouraged to take what was scariest to him and he therefore chose art, which was a challenge for him. However, afterward he had second thoughts. "I should have done drama, because that definitely is the most scary to me." The participants were not only willing to risk and try new activities, they felt regret when they pulled away from taking risks.

The Self and The Other

> He who learns from his companion a single chapter, a single *Halakhah*, a single verse, a single expression, or even a single letter should treat him with respect. For we find that although David, king of Israel, learned only two things from Ahithophel, yet he called him his teacher, companion and familiar friend: "But it was you, a man my equal, my companion, my familiar friend." [14] (Ps. 55:14) And is there not in this matter an inference a fortiori? If David, king of Israel, who had learned only two things from Ahithophel, called him teacher, companion and familiar friend, how much more should one pay honor to one's companion from whom one has learned a single chapter, a single *Halakhah*, a single verse, a single expression, even a single letter." Avot 6:3

David's praise of Ahithophel demonstrates that every encounter with another person has the potential of opening up a world of learning. During the first quarter of a century in the average Jewish American's life, just over two thirds of those years are spent in school. Hebrew school, sports teams, clubs, or other extra-curricular activities included, by the time an American Jew reaches young adulthood, she could easily have more teachers, coaches, or advisors she they can recollect. Nevertheless, when considering learning experiences, encounters with others are what shape our way of being in the world. Just one interaction, one story, one discussion or just one comment from a peer can teach a young adult a profound lesson. When young adults open themselves up to experience the other, they are potentially exposing themselves to an entire new world. For young adults, the other is a way to the self.

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1 Psalms reads: וְאַתָּה אֱנוֹשׁ כְּעָרְכִּי אַלּוּפִי וּמְיֻדָּעִי There is a wide variety of translations to this phrase. The roots of both וּמְיֻדָּעִי and אַלּוּפִי can be connected to teaching or learning. and

Parks (2000) defines communities that allow for exposure to the other as diffuse communities. The difference between a conventional community and a diffuse community is that the conventional community is made up mostly of people "like us" and a diffuse community expands to experience the other people who used to be "them." On the surface BCI does not appear to be a diffuse community that is part of the larger commons. BCI is a community that consists solely of Jewish young adults. However, for many Jewish young adults, Judaism and Jews are other. Some BCIers have never met Orthodox Jews before, others have no understanding of Reform Judaism, and some are only now thinking of themselves as Jewish. Few BCI participants have previously been in an all-Jewish environment where the people, time and activities are Jewish. Bringing together Jews from different backgrounds creates a unique environment for the BCIers to tell their stories, ask their questions, and discover self and other.

BCI employs a dedicated staff of artists and teachers and provides extensive educational and cultural programming, yet the interviewees unanimously agreed that their contact with other people taught them more than any formal learning experience at BCI. For Mike, the opportunity to meet Israelis was highly informative. Lisa said she learned the most from other people and their reactions in general. As she grew better acquainted with other BCIers, she found she had something in common with everyone and gained from the growth of her relationships. She also mentioned how she related to the teachers more as peers than as teachers. For her, the teachers did not represent an authority figure or an expert, although they might have been. Rather, Lisa saw them as other people to learn from and related to them on a personal level.

These exposures to the other were central for integrating the BCI experience into the interviewees' own lives. Through interpersonal contact, the participants began to see the other in relation to their own selves. Mike mentioned enjoying talking in groups in general and that his favorite part was when individuals addressed the entire group. "It made you sort of challenge your own assumptions about what other people accept or don't accept" Seeing other perspectives influenced him to analyze his own perspectives.

An important aspect of making it possible for participants to open up and learn from each other was building a safe environment. Creating a non-judgmental, "safe-to-express-yourself" environment took some work. Through their drama community, BCIers were challenged to explore themselves and in doing so discovered the other. Dena thought the drama workshop in particular facilitated building trust and opening people up to each other:

> Really [it was] us taking our lives and our stories and interweaving them. We were not always playing ourselves - although we [actually] were.... We were dealing with each other's lives and building a drama community and a lot of trust. People came with different experiences. For some people it was hard to share the deepest darkest and even joyous part of them. Then there was a mutiny when people wanted to show who they really were. When you were done, you knew who the people were through the art they had done. (Dena)

Acting provided the participants with a temporarily mask to shield them from too much personal exposure. However, acting also made the participants reach deep within themselves in order to "expose" the characters they were playing. Eventually their comfortable level grew to the point that their masks were inhibiting rather than protecting and needed to be removed.

The activity that most promoted exposure of the self and experience of the other was the daily flag-raising ceremony in which participants took turn raising the flag. During the ceremony, participants could share a personal story, a poem, reflections about their experiences, a joke, artwork etc. There were no stated restrictions on what could be said. Some people shared poems or other readings. Others briefly confided very intimate, personal stories of their lives and their struggles. Some laughed at themselves. Some cried. Despite having known each other for only a few days, the participants exposed who they were and who they were becoming and watched as others did the same.

> A constructive encounter with others who are significantly different from oneself is key to the development of a capacity for trustworthy belonging and confident agency in a diverse and complex world, a capacity that transcends the traps of individualism and tribalism and enables people to become at home in the new commons (Daloz et al, 1996).

Conclusion

Exploring possibilities, discovering the other and having a variety of experiences is necessary for the young adult to be able to leave home and navigate the world on their own. The young adult's departure from home, while freeing the young adult to discover, also creates a need for building a new sense of belonging. This tension between leaving home and belonging will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Chapter 4- From Home

In the previous chapter, the young adult inclination to explore and experiment was analyzed. One major impetus identified for this inclination was the extension of time between leaving home and beginning a family. Whether young adults physically or metaphorically leave home, their "departure" launches the formation of an identity and the development of a worldview separate from that of their parents. Young adults begin a balancing act between being on their own and maintaining a sense of connection. Recognizing that they are not at home (neither their past home or a newly founded home) young adults start to wonder what "belonging" will mean. This chapter focuses on the tension between young adults' growing independence and their search for belonging in the larger world. Analysis of the interviews will show how this tension was played out as the BCIers came to a new understanding of what it meant to be part of a group. The interviews also showed how young adults' developed the language of community. Lastly, this chapter will look at how the young adults without children relate to the family orientation of Judaism.

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וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֶךְ־לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ
אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ (בראשית יב:א)

God said to Avram, "Go forth from your land and your birth place and from your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1).

In her interpretation of this verse, Aviva Zornberg noted that "For the first time, a journey is undertaken not as an act of exile and diminution ([as in the journey of] Adam, Cain, and the dispersed generation of Babel), but as a response to a divine imperative that articulates and emphasizes displacement as its crucial experience" (1995, 74). Avram is not being punished or banished; his departure is a necessary part of his growth. God does not command Avram where to go, but where to leave – home. There are implications on a personal level about where Avram was going. The words used in Hebrew literally mean, "Go to yourself." He needed to leave the life that he knew in order to discover his identity and develop a new relationship with God and the larger world. At this point, destination unknown, leaving home was necessary for Avram to create a new community based on his covenant with God.

Leaving Home

As it was for Avram, it is important for young adults to leave home in order to find their place in the world, indeed studies show that they do leave. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett's studies of adult mobility showed that the 18 – 25 cohort has the highest rate in change of residence (2000). Currently, in the United States, 70% of young adults move out of their parents' homes after high school, and 60% enroll in college. During these years, two thirds of young adults will live with a romantic partner, but the majority will marry at a later age. In other words, young adults are on the move.

While leaving home typically is an actual physical relocation, even if young adults do not physically leave home, their boundaries include a wider range of dwelling. To leave home is to leave one's childhood identity and perspectives behind. Leaving home represents the beginning of becoming autonomous and becoming part of a larger community. It signifies the process of redefinition, which in turn invokes the process of "letting go."

Figuratively, for a young adult, leaving home is also to leave the worldview of his or her parents. By the time most young adults who attend college graduate, they have developed a worldviews different from the one they had when they started. Their priorities, attitudes, ideals, values, beliefs and even their way of thinking may change. "Research on emerging adults' religious beliefs suggests that regardless of educational background, they consider it important during emerging adulthood to reexamine the beliefs they have learned in their families and to form a set of beliefs that is the product of their own independent reflections" (Arnett 2000, 474).

A new worldview does not require that young adults discard their parents' values. It is possible that the path to a new worldview could lead them back to the view they left. Nevertheless, even when a cohort of young adults shares the values of their parents, each new generation needs to learn how to apply those values to its world. Comparative studies of Generation X and Millennials shows that Millennials have much better relationships with their parents than Gen Xers did and more than 90 percent of teens today say they are very close to their parents (Leo, 2003). However, the majority of young adults still think that deciding on personal beliefs and values independently of parents is a criterion that must be achieved in order to move into adulthood (Arnett, 2003).

Additionally and perhaps counter-intuitively, physical distance from parents often keeps young adults in a close relationship with their parents. Studies have shown an inverse relationship between proximity to parents and quality of relationship. Those who had frequent contact or who lived at home, tended to be the least close to their parents. Autonomy and relatedness are complementary rather that opposing dimensions of the relationship between parents and young adults (Arnett 2000, 475). This delicate balance of distance and closeness, autonomy and relatedness is a recurring motif in the young adult's life.

For young adults, leaving home is beneficial in many ways. Young adults need the space to explore, develop their own understanding of home and to learn about themselves. "Becoming is not all about leaving home but changing the meaning of home. In order to grow and become, we need both holding on and letting go, staying and leaving, home and passage" (Parks, 2000, 51 – 52). Like Avram's journey, the young adult's journey from home and the journey towards self are intertwined.

Building Community

Because they are looking for a sense of belonging, young adults become involved with a variety of communities. Entering new communities and meeting new people, whether it is a community of friends, classmates, neighbors, or people with shared interests, builds a sense of home. "Development of critical thought and the growing strength of the inner authority of the young adult create readiness to transcend tribal norms and revise one's own boundaries outwards" (Parks, 2000, 201). A Jewish young adult's development includes both expanding within the Jewish experience and expanding outward beyond the Jewish experience. It also includes developing a relationship with the Jewish community beyond that of his or her family.

When young adults are in an environment with peers experiencing similar changes, the environment not only allows them to address their issues but it also promotes their growth and sense of belonging. Learning to be part of a group, participating and reacting to the group culture, recognizing the connection between members of the group, and building community make an inviting package to Jewish young adults. They can exercise their independence and belong at the same time.

The interviews with past participants of BCI indicated that they were aware of how BCI exposed them to a community-building process. In his journal during one of the first few days, Rick noted how the community was starting to cohere, with some people finding closer bonds with certain participants over others. He was aware of how everyone in the group was getting along. Dena observed others in her *aliyah* specifically learning what it meant to be part of a group. While she had already dealt with establishing boundaries in her life, Dena thought others were still learning their boundaries and were struggling with giving things up for the benefit of the group. In her view, some BCIers had issues with privacy, being on time, and attending programs that were not of interest. Those participants may have thought that privacy, timeliness and attendance were only the concern of the individual and did not recognize that their choices also affected the community.

The environment at BCI was designed to address issues such as these and teach about Jewish community through being part of a community. Bardin wanted young adults to experience Jewish culture in a living environment. He intended for BCI to provide affective learning experiences in a "charged" environment full of joy and celebration. Samuel Heilman (2002) calls this approach to building community "sentimental education." Sentimental education lets participants express their spirit of their culture and to respond to it. Seeing

Jewish culture played out and seeing their own reactions to it helps the participants form and be formed by their surroundings. They not only learn about Jewish tradition, they say it, reenact it and react to it themselves. In the process, they build themselves and the community.

Sentimental Education

By design, the sentimental education used to build the BCI community commences on the first day. Interviewees recalled a Torah unrolling ceremony on the first day and said that it had an instant impact on their connection to Judaism and their connection to the community. The Torah was unrolled across the legs of all of the BCIers and introduced as the center of their community, the connection that tied them all together. Many of the participants had never seen this done before and it was a very powerful experience. Lisa commented:

> The first thing they did [was] we all sat in a long row of chairs and they took out a Torah and they unwound the whole Torah on top of all of us... When they rolled it back up, it was very symbolic that we were all together. We were one thing. You know, we all had to – we couldn't, the Torah would not - it would have fallen, it wouldn't have been able to support itself unless all sixty of us were there supporting up the Torah.

Mike had an experience at BCI of learning about himself, Judaism and the Jewish community. He observed people bringing up the names of people who were sick and who had died during the prayer services. His grandfather had died recently and he decided to mention him. He commented that it was very comforting to share his name with everyone else.

Contributing to the Community

Another influence on building community was that participants were expected to do some kind of teaching during the *aliyah*. They were put into small groups to plan collaboratively what they wanted to teach to the rest of the BCIers. Rick remembered the time when his group discarded their planned lesson due to the shooting at the Northridge JCC. They led a discussion about anti-Semitism and he learned the rate of anti-Semitism his peers had experienced, which was shockingly more than he had thought. Rick realized that in addition to planned lessons and having participants teach and learn from each other, there was teaching even when the BCI staff was not trying to teach. The learning experiences invested the participants into the community – they both formed and were formed by the experience and by each other.

On a different level, Stacy felt that the work they had to do each morning was a large part of building community. One day in the agriculture work group, Stacy's work group got caught up in laughing and, without paying attention, they ended up picking an exceptionally large amount of zucchini. For the next three days, the group ate some form of zucchini at every meal. Initially, she recognized that the fun she was having with her workmates showed the connection she had built with them. In addition, she saw the connection between her work and the effort it took to make BCI function. They had literally worked to sustain the community. She recognized herself and her workgroup as integral parts of the community, both contributing and benefiting.

Forming, Norming, Storming and Reforming

In the field of group dynamics, the phrase "forming, norming, storming and reforming" is used to describe the process of group development. Groups typically go through an initial process of introduction before they settle into a normal pattern of function. As issues arise or the group experiences growing pains, the group "storms" and works its way through the issue or changes. When the issue is resolved, the group emerges anew and begins to settle into a normal pattern again. In his observations of Talmud study circles in Jerusalem, Heilman (2002) described a related group phenomenon he called "fellowship." Each study group he observed was a world of its own with its own culture that operated in a certain way and eventually developed a status quo. When the members of the group came, they had an expectation of what the experience was going to be like and the kind of interactions they would have with each other. There were times when an incident would occur that challenged those expectations or disturbed the relationships between the members. It could be anything from someone not sitting in his usual seat to an intellectual power struggle with the rabbi. When the social order was disturbed, the group would experience a crisis (a storm). To an outsider, the situation causing the crisis might not make sense or seem to be of significance. However, the members of the group were intimately aware of the group's social dynamics and would be affected by behaviors or actions that disturbed them.

At BCI, each *aliyah* develops such a group dynamic, and each group has unique issues that could lead to the kinds of social crisis Heilman depicted. For example, Rick described what happened when a few of the BCIers expressed their discomfort with the use of recorded music for dancing on Shabbat. The music led to the exclusion of some BCIers who were Orthodox. The attention drawn to the differences among the BCIers created a social crisis

because the group had internalized BCI's stated value that participants would become a pluralistic community. Someone suggested that those who felt uncomfortable should sit out, which Rick did not think was acceptable. For him, that did not reflect the culture of inclusion. The dance instructor proposed a compromise of having the BCIers sing the music for the first few songs so that everyone could dance together. The crisis was resolved because an effort was made to include everyone and everyone was able to participate for some of the dancing. Rick thought the experience had brought the group closer together, which it most likely did. The group was showing its identity, its cohesion, in resolving a situation that disrupted its social order.

It may not have been a conscious link on his behalf, but immediately after telling this story, Rick added, "apparently our group was a lot more confrontational than, at the time they were saying, than anybody else. In fifty years that's hard to believe." The memory of the crisis and the resulting community building of the dance incident triggered his feeling of fellowship, of loyalty, to his group. He later reflected that there were definitely some negative experiences during the *aliyah*, but they had actually brought the group closer together.

BCI's focus on pluralism, creation of a "charged" environment, and the opportunities for fellowship generally created a culture of loyalty among the participants, a need to protect the community and its own social order. Stacy mentioned how someone explained to her that her *aliyah* was 'different' because there was a gender imbalance. "For some reason I felt like the staff felt that we were a little different, a little off. And that kind of demeaned the experience for me because, it's like, I want to be normal." Stacy was affected by this because it went against her perception of the social order - it was critical versus loyal. Perhaps Stacey would have reacted differently if it were something within her or the group's control.

Criticism is not inherently bad; however, the gender balance of the group was completely out of Stacy's control. Because of that, whatever social order the group did establish would still been "abnormal." In a different situation, the alienation could prevent a young adult's feelings of belonging. Stacy, however, was able to resolve the crisis herself and enjoy the people in her *aliyah* because she already felt a strong sense of fellowship, of belonging.

In her studies of mentoring environments, Parks (2000 154 - 156) identifies three communities of practice that lead to group norming. They are hearth - comfortable places to linger, pause, and reflect; table - a place where things are shared, there is a place for each person, and there are obligations; and commons – a place where people meet by happenstance and intention and have a sense of a shared and interdependent life. These practices allow young adults the space for dialogue and reflection, support and challenge, recognition and inspiration, and a sense of belonging. Not only are they critical for forming meaning, purpose, and faith, they play a large part in creating community. These practices were seen during observations and interviews. BCIers stayed up late at night talking for hours in their rooms, in the Bet Midrash, or outside on the patio. Morning lectures spilled over into lunch and sometimes on to dinner and the next day. Participating in every activity as a group or in small groups, BCIers' entire experience was being part of a commons. They worked, prayed, hiked, danced, and learned together, connecting their stories and their lives.

Parks (2000) makes the point that these practices are not sound byte interactions, but lingering and often informal. However, one of the activities that had a significant impact on the BCIers was flag-raising, which was formal, communal and brief. Those who took part in the flag-raising were give a few minutes to share something personal with the entire group – a poem, a story, or something about their lives. Some of the presentations were extraordinarily

personal revealing past tragedies, struggles or current issues in their lives. While it was not a dialog at the time, the sharing was received with support, recognition and sometimes moved into further discussion. Sharing engendered a sense of belonging at a very intimate level, while at the same time being "public" within the BCI community.

Developing a Common Language

Each BCIer develops his or her own relationship to the other BCIers and to the group as a whole. Heilman (2000) terms the relationship between member and community "inter-subjectivity" – an ongoing relationship between each group member's personal experience and that of the others in the group. This relationship "allows a great deal to remain tacitly expressed...references may be and often are made to common culture by means of dicta half-spoken yet fully understood. The apparently obscure becomes effectively obvious. All this makes communication and concerted action within the group possible" (Heilman, 2002, 82). These relationships develop their own forms of communication and create their own language.

Part of communication is the acquisition of "technical" language. For example, in the Talmud study groups that Heilman observed, they may have used technical terms such as *kal vhomer* or *teiku* or references to ritual practices. Beaudoin relates a similar idea of how popular culture has influenced Generation X. Phrases such as "Where's the beef?" or "We are the world" and references to Schoolhouse Rock or Rubic's Cubes are part of the GenX vernacular that needs no further explanation to members of that group. To reinforce communication between members of the group, the language needs to be exercised and publicly demonstrated.

Being part of the Jewish communal setting necessitates that the Jewish young adult speak the languages of both Judaism and community. Judaism is a communal religion and

culture, but often American Jews, like other Americans, speak the language of individualism. Thus, for many Jews, the language of community is a second language (Cohen & Eisen, 2001; Bellah et al). Furthermore, American Jews tend to have a limited vocabulary of Jewish life.

At BCI, developing the language of the Jewish community allows participants to become part of its "world of meaning." Each *aliyah* has its own language and worlds of meaning that evolve through shared experience. Lisa experienced the sense of shared meaning through celebration of Shabbat. "There's a bond and there's something that you share with anybody who has spent a Shabbat at Brandeis that you cannot share with anybody in the world." Rick and Dena mentioned the game "Yes, let's," which was a game that promoted experimenting and group participation, and how it became part of the groups' language. "So it (Yes, let's) ... will come out of me every once in a while and [others] will say, "Huh? What are you talking about?"" Rick recognized how the shared language of the *aliyah* reinforced his sense of belonging in the group.

BCI specifically lets the participants know that they are going to learn a new language. The staff explains that new traditions put all of the participants, who came from various backgrounds and levels of observance, on equal footing in familiarity with ritual practices. To an observer, it is easy to see references being made that are understood by everyone in the group even though the meaning is not clear to an outsider. This familiarity does have a drawback; after BCI, the melodies used for blessings at meals may not be familiar to anyone other than past BCI participants. In looking back on BCI, Rick said that the melodies brought back fond memories, but they also reminded him that his current community did not speak the BCI language and was not part of that world.

In reality, much of the experience at BCI is actually not that distinct from the rest of the Jewish world. While some of the melodies made Rick aware that he was no longer in the BCI community where he felt a sense of belonging, much of the meaning and language does transcend BCI. Although they may or may not recognize it at the time, the language of Jewish communal life creates a group at BCI and connects participants to the outside Jewish world. Through daily activities such as *beit midrash*, Shabbat, and the like, the BCIers are socialized into both the BCI world and the Jewish world. Even if the practices are not exactly the same outside of BCI, the participants develop an awareness of the existence of these practices and their role and meaning in Jewish life.

An interesting reaction occurs when young adults learn a new form of meaning or develop a connection to a community. Parks (2000) reported that when young adults who traveled together returned home, rather than sharing the experience with others, they tended to form a new community among themselves. The travelers developed a new way of seeing and knowing and, similar to finding people who speak the same language; they were drawn to people who understood it. Parks found that adults with a strong sense of who they are and what is meaningful to them gravitate to those who also shared their sense of meaning.

This has many implications for how Jewish young adults go about developing Jewish relationships in their lives. After BCI Stacy felt, with a bit of guilt, that Shabbat with her friends was better than with her parents. Stacy was interested in being with people who understood Shabbat the same way she did more than she was interested in bringing the experience back home to her family. This may also have implications on patterns of dating and marriage. Cohen and Eisen said that the importance of finding a Jewish partner was in

part a matter "of shared language and experience with the fellow Jew who understands that sentiment immediately" (2001, 121). This is an area for future research.

Transition and Tension

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אִם אֵין אֲנִי לִי, מִי לִי. וּכְשֶׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אֲנִי.
וְאִם לֹא עַכְשָׁיו, אֵימָתָי (אבות א:יד)

> Hillel said: If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when? (Avot 1:14)

Hillel's famous dictum identifies the responsibilities people have to themselves and to their community and calls on us to take action on both charges. Parks considers this the fundamental tension of young adulthood. Young adults must balance two great yearnings, "the yearning to exercise one's own distinct agency (one's own power to make a difference) and the yearning for belonging, connection, inclusion, relationship and intimacy" (Parks, 2000, 49 & 91). For young adults, inherent tension exists in how to define where the balance lies between the self and the community. Jewish young adults getting their first tastes of freedom have to determine the balance between that freedom and their responsibility and commitment to the Jewish community.

Balancing the tension comes into play when young adults deal with moving from their parent's home. Young adults have to learn the balance between separation from and connection with their parents, which relates to the separation from and connection with their parent's religion. Rick discovered ways of approaching these situations through an insightful piece of wisdom one of his teachers shared with him. The teacher said that her home is kosher and her parent's home is not; however, "It's more important to her to keep the peace

in the family than to keep kosher." Rick considers himself more observant than anyone in his family. For Rick, keeping kosher represented an independent identity and personal connection to Judaism. However, to exercise such autonomy could possibly threaten his sense of belonging in his own family. The teacher clearly identified the values in conflict and how she dealt with it by prioritizing what was ultimately more important to her in the situation. Approaching the situation in that manner, eating in her parent's home was showing respect to her parents and not a destabilization of her Jewish identity. It was a way to balance the relationship with her parents with her own identity and religious preferences.

The tension between self and community was a recurring theme for Rick, both at BCI and to some degree in his current life. His journal entry on July 26th read:

> I like the idea of putting my thoughts on paper. So far, I really like BCI. There are some aspects of it that I don't really like. I don't like the fact that it is so close to communism. Some of the people really annoy me. Although, with some of the people, once I get to know them, they're not so bad.

The communal aspects of BCI were fascinating to Rick. He soon after noted in his journal how, while everyone appeared to get along on a superficial level, he also thought, "the group is starting to bond, and there will be many long friendships."

Perhaps some of the people continued to annoy him, but he became part of the community nonetheless. There were parts of the community that felt like "communism" to him, but he also recognized appealing aspects about it. Rick was impressed by how well planned the program was at BCI and how they were able to get sixty people to cooperate. This of course was due for the most part to the communal effort to keep the program running, each person doing what was asked of him or her.

> So that's what I miss probably the most. I miss having the built in community. While I was there ... it felt like communism. But that's just a critique of, well it's a program so I don't know how they can get around that, but that's my big problem. I have trouble finding community where there's that much...participation.

In fact, Rick was looking to find some of that sense of community again in his life after BCI. On some level, he has a better understanding of his own relationship and responsibility to the community.

> And I yearn for, yeah, yearn for having that kind of environment again one day. Although I guess if I really wanted it, I could create it. But it's just, in my current job and really who I am I guess, I don't really want it at this point in my life. But it is something I would like to, if I were in the right community, I would like for it to be a part of my life again, like that.

A common concern about young adults is their lack of institutional affiliation. Furthermore, when they do become involved in organized Judaism, they do not relate to it in the same way that the general Jewish population does. In Cohen and Eisen's research, people generally did not associated Jewish organizations with friendship, socializing or community (2001). This did not appear to be the case for the young adults interviewed[15]. Lisa, Dena, Mike and Stacy noted that all or most of their friends were Jewish and, in many instances, Jewish organizations had created or were the center of their community or social circle. Rick, who was is not currently active in the community, mentioned his interest in becoming more Jewishly active and was interested in a synagogue that sounded appealing to him. The only

[15] To a degree, BCIers and the interviewees are not necessarily representative of young adults. BCIers are a self-selected group of Jewish adults. Additionally, Lisa, Dena and Stacy are employed in Jewish organizations. However, the search for friendship, socializing and community in Jewish institutions was noted by participants observed and both Rick and Mike mention Jewish institutions when discussing their relationship to the Jewish community.

disparaging remark about institutional Judaism mentioned was by Rick, who did not like the idea of joining an affiliated synagogue. He wanted -

> "A non-denominational synagogue that tried to make everybody comfortable like they do at BCI, even though they aren't completely successful."

This is not to say that Jewish young adults often affiliate with Jewish institutions; in fact, the opposite is true. "It is in this spiritual life stage – the years between leaving the nest and building one's own – that adults are the most likely to experiment with religion, and the least likely to commit to one church or synagogue" (Wellner, 2001, 52). Jewish young adults are developing their relationships with other people and the Jewish community in a unique way. Not only do they associate Jewish organizations with friends, socializing and community, but also, when they are interested in becoming involved with Judaism, it is an important motivation. As Stacy described her BCI experience:

> I wasn't there to learn, I was there really be part of a community and have some fun.

Making Home... someday when I have a family

Young adulthood is a time of freedom and exploration; marriage and family bring obligations. Judaism is associated with family, and hence is laden with commitment. Between young adulthood, Judaism, and family there may be an unavoidable collision between freedom and commitment (Cohen & Eisen, 2001, 25 & 39). A common result is for young adults to view Jewish practice and involvement in the Jewish community as something to do when one gets married and has a family.

Young adults do not identity parenthood as a necessary indicator of reaching adult status, but individuals who are parents often think parenting was the most important marker of their transition (Arnett, 2000). Cohen and Eisen (2001) discuss how young parents begin to build their connection with the Jewish community. They give an example of a man who, though identified as Jewish, was not a practicing Jew outside of attendance at Passover Seders. When his daughter turned five, he and his wife joined a congregation that he said was the key element of his adult Jewish identity. Furthermore, parents are much more likely to be religiously involved than those without children (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). They are motivated to affiliate and celebrate Jewish holidays in order teach their children while they are young.

Since Jewish institutions focus so much on children, childless young adults can feel that they do not fit into the community. "Many observers have noted that in subtle and not-so-subtle ways Jewish institutions often send the message that they are 'private club' for those who meet certain criteria of commitment, life circumstances (i.e. being a family with two Jewish spouses and children), or ability to pay" (Wertheimer, Leibman & Cohen, 1996, 48). Celebrating holidays is also easily put on the back burner because, unlike parents anxious to teach their children, young adults know that the holidays come the next year and they can celebrate the next time around. They often think that when they are married they will do more, but there is no hurry at that moment (Cohen & Eisen, 2001). The result is that after leaving home young adults temporarily take an affiliation hiatus, which often ends when they start a family. As Mike comments:

> I read Jewish history texts just for fun and as far as my views on my future as a father; I think that has had a huge impact. Like I don't want to sound so typical, but I guess what I'm going to do is what a lot of American Jews do

> which is to do nothing much Judaically for most of my life and then when I have kids I will send them off to Jewish Sunday school. Light candles every Friday night. Try to keep the few laws of *kashrut* that actually make sense to me.

Single young adults, especially those who live alone, may find Jewish practice, particularly holidays, difficult to observe. Some holiday themes and practices are family focused and leave the young adults feeling left out. It is hard to find people they want to share holidays with and so they often do not celebrate holidays. This creates a distance from Judaism and the Jewish community (Cohen & Eisen, 2001). When asked about her current communal life, Dena, the only married interviewee, noted rather matter-of-factly, "I'm married to a Jew and so that kind of enhances the whole thing."

Conclusion

People are interdependent by nature and therefore an adult is best served by learning how to maintain autonomy and connection at the same time. Through their explorations, young adults become involved in new communities and learn what it means to belong. They leave home and develop their "communal selves." Being on their own also compels young adults to become independent and self-sufficient. The development of this self is what ultimately brings the journeying young adult home.

Chapter 5- To The Self

In the previous two chapters, young adults' departure from home, exploration, and search for home were discussed. At the same time that young adults are exploring the world, they are creating their identities. Although identity formation occurs throughout the life cycle, during young adulthood there is a particular focus on creating meaning and developing self-sufficiency (Arnett, 2000). The authority of the young adult's inner-voice grows as his or her understanding of self, other, and world is established. During these years, young adults take apart who they know themselves to be and try to re-create themselves. The processes of "decomposition" and" "re-creation" involve addressing authority, facing fears, doing it alone, making choices and accepting accountability. This chapter reviews how decomposition and re-creation in young adulthood occur, some issues these processes entail and how they affected the BCI participants.

* * * *

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֶךְ־לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ

אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ (בראשית יב:א)

God said to Avram, "Go forth from your land and your birth place and from your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Genesis 12:1)

"Go to the land that I shall show you – where I shall make you visible, where your potential being will be realized in multiform and unpredictable ways." (Sefat Emet)

Avram set forth towards an unidentified destination, leaving his father's home and the life he knew, to explore and to become. However, his journey was not just to a new place, it was to a new self. His destination was a new life, a new identity. His journey was a transformation of being. This is the journey of young adulthood. Young adults depart from home, traveling to unknown places and accepting new challenges, and they begin anew. Young adulthood is a process of self-revelation.

A Modern Example

One of the resident artists, Lindy, served as a modern day role model for Jewish self-discovery. Lindy was BCI's theatre specialist who began a journey the eventually led her to convert to Judaism. With respect to the process of self-definition, Lindy's story concretely reflected the young adult's idea of how this process takes place. Lindy examined herself and determined how she viewed herself and the world. She decided to find herself and then went and did it. BCI participants perceived in Lindy an important role model. Rick noted:

> She converted; I think 10 or 15 years [ago]. And to be so knowledgeable about Judaism. Just ... [how] she went and shopped for a religion--and how she settled on Judaism was just an amazing, really insightful.

In addition to being a model of self-invention, Lindy used theater to propel the BCIers on their own journeys of discovery. She modeled a responsible, self-sufficient and self-defined person, and helped the BCIers in their process of becoming. According to Dena, Lindy's workshops motivated BCIers to explore their own lives and to share deep parts of who they were becoming. She encouraged them to express who they were through their art. In Dena's view, by then end, each BCIer's identity was revealed through their participation in Dena's activities

The Process of Becoming

The stories of Abraham and Lindy exemplify the movement towards a new self. However, a significant part of the process of becoming is the transforming from who one started out being. One must "unlearn" old definitions of the self:

"To a great extent it requires people to reexamine critically much of what they have learned. This becomes a process of unlearning, of breaking bad habits and acquiring good ones. Individuals not only have to rearrange their mental furniture, but they must acquire new pieces. They must clean out psychic and intellectual closets, discarding cherished mementos that have become warped and twisted, moldy and mildewed...and the new décor may leave one feeling bewildered and longing for the traditional. This process of unlearning demands careful reflection." (Queen 1996, 492)

The process of becoming is not linear and it is not easy, however young adults who leave home to explore are trying to find themselves and their place in the world. Through a process of decomposition and recreation, they strive to define themselves and their religious stance in the context of a pluralistic society where religious identity is a matter of individual

choice. In their effort to become, they are challenged by two key tasks: making meaning and developing self-sufficiency.

Making Meaning

Making meaning begins with self-awareness. Young adults search for meaning when they are able to sustain some objectivity and take a perspective on their own life. They take an inventory of their identity and determine what they accept, what they reject, what needs to be examined more thoroughly and what is missing. Their experiences and their relationships come under review. During this introspection, many questions arise and they must ultimately find their own voice, find answers, find meaning, and find themselves and their place in the world. According to Parks (1969), "The power and vulnerability of young adulthood lie in the experience of the dissolution and recomposition of the meaning of self and world and its challenges to faith." (p. xii)

During adolescence and sometimes through college, much of Jewish young adults' lives are predetermined. This is especially the case in the United States where college or graduate school is the norm for most in this age group. However, as they enter young adulthood and begin to navigate life on their own, young adults begin searching for a new home, which raises a new set of life questions. Who do I want to become? What are my fears? What kind of person would make a suitable life partner? What is my work? Is there a master plan? What difference can I make in the world?

There are also Jewish questions that perplex this age group. As Cohen and Eisen (2001) reported, for many Jews in the United States, being Jewish is tribal or cultural and not necessarily religious. In their research, these authors found that two-thirds of American

Jews do not think being Jewish makes them any different from any other Americans. At the same time, however, most felt that there was something about being Jewish that non-Jews cannot understand (2001, 107-108).

Being Jewish can be an inherited adjective recognized as significant and still not bear a conscious influence on one's life. The questions of meaning, identity and faith are inherently intertwined, but Jewish young adults do not always make the connection. For many, the religious aspects of Judaism are something separate from their own identity. However, young adulthood is the natural time for meaning, faith and Jewish identity to merge. Taking a personal inventory and questioning meaning prompt young adults to inquiry about their Jewish background and the meaning of being Jewish

Through these questions, Jewish young adults search for truth about the world and themselves. They are the way this group develops meaning, purpose and faith in their lives, the way they compose their reality. At BCI, they confront questions about their Jewish identities--questions involve internal struggle and are tested by the BCI experience. Mike described the role of questioning during his *aliyah*: "I felt like it was good to let all of these questions come up to the surface and deal with them."

> [Someone said,] Israel means one who struggles with God and that was the really attractive point of the whole learning process. It was okay to ask questions. It was okay to challenge and question and struggle. (Mike)

*****

Mike also described how uncertain he was about his Jewish identity:

> I didn't know much about Judaism when I was growing up except that people didn't like me because of it. And at one point in my life I wanted to know more because I thought it was important.... I didn't want to define myself simply because some people didn't like me for of it.
>
> I knew that I was Jewish and was proud of it in a way but I didn't know what the heck I was proud of and... it was like a huge chunk of my identity was just missing, just waiting to be filled.

*****

Making meaning also entails expanding one's scope of understanding beyond the self and recognizing the interdependence of each individual with the world. While introspection is important for young adults, so too is being able to transcend the self and develop one's unique relationship with the world. This is where meaning making and self-sufficiency merge. To make meaning, young adults need a self that is strong enough to have authentic encounters with the "other" and the world.

Creating a strong enough self is the bridge between adolescence (which is more focused on the self) and adulthood (which is more focused on other). According to Erikson, adolescence is a time to develop ego identity (Crain, 2000). Adolescents are generally self-centered and develop relationships that are focused on themselves and their own reality.

According to Erikson, the transition from adolescence to adulthood is marked by the young adult's capacity to develop intimacy (Crain, 2000). When young adults build strong enough identities, they can enter into relationships of mutuality. Having developed the capacity to love, they can successfully form intimate ties. Young adults eventually strike a healthy balance between self and other and are then able to focus on a meaningful future.

Self Sufficiency

Many young adults equate having a strong sense of self that leads to the capacity for deep and lasting relationships with being self-sufficient. They see self-sufficiency as an indication of maturity. In studies of young adults in the United States, demographics such as age and life status are not considered primary benchmarks of adulthood. While marriage, children, career, education and home ownership, may be considered adult accomplishments, these are not what make a person an adult. Some of the factors young adults consider important for a transition into adulthood include having an equal relationship with parents, being financially independent, being able to decide on personal beliefs and values independently, and becoming less self-oriented and more considerate for others. (Arnett, 2003) Studies show that young adults see an adult as someone who is able to accept responsibility for herself and make independent decisions. (Arnett, 2000)

Most young adults realize they are on the way to adulthood. When asked if they feel that they are adults, eighteen to twenty-five year olds most often respond yes in some respects and no in others. (Arnett 2000, 2003) This is in part due to having accomplished some of the demographic benchmarks and not others. It is also due to having gained some independence but still not feeling self-sufficient. According to Parks (2000) self-sufficiency, like meaning is created throughout the process of decomposition and re-creation. Facing fears, developing an inner authority, making choices and accepting responsibility all play a part in helping the young adult become self-sufficient.

Decomposition- Disillusion

Once young adults begin questioning, nothing is sacrosanct. Love, work, lifestyle, values, worldviews – everything is fair game for scrutiny, including (and especially) anything that defined one's childhood identity. When the separation occurs between the young adult and his or her previous life, the process of decomposition begins. One's identity is picked apart and one's view of reality is scrutinized for meaning and relevancy. For example, in recalling his time of disillusionment, Mike remarked:

> When I graduated, I was just confused in general about... I thought I had it all figured out and then I realized that I didn't. And I didn't know what I was going to do next.

While young adults are determining who they are becoming, they are also learning what made them who they were. As the meaning of self, other, home, religion and world are decomposed and reexamined; some of the views learned in their childhood are kept. In other cases, meaning needs to be redefined based on the young adult's new experiences. Whether new perspectives or old views, it is important for the young adult to choose what stays and what goes. In his research of young adults ages 18 – 25, Arnett found that young adults think it is important to reexamine the beliefs of their families and determine their beliefs from their own experiences and reflections. (2000) In the process of decomposition, young adults shed the layers of previous beliefs and views in order to create their own definition of meaning.

This does not necessarily mean that young adults rebel against their families or disregard their beliefs and values. In fact, current commentators observe that the Millennial generation is more likely than not to identify with their parents' values (Howe and Strauss,

2000; Oblinger, 2003). However, as young adults are gaining perspective on what is influencing them, they generally want to control their own perceptions of themselves and the world. For some this means wiping the slate clean and starting fresh. Regardless of the resemblance of their values to their parents' values in the end, young adults reach their views by scrutinizing the beliefs of their family and coming to their own conclusion. Ultimately, they take apart who they know themselves to be. They also change in fundamental ways that permanently influences how they construct meaning.

Lisa described how BCI affected her decomposing process:

> It's impossible to go back to be the person you were before you went to BCI.

Inner-voice & Authority

The model of a successful American is of someone who leaves home and religion, redefines himself and determines his own sense of meaning. (Bellah et al, 1996) Like other Americans, Jewish young adults value the self-defined and self-made individual. During the period of decomposition and questioning, previous influences lose their hold, individuality emerges, and young adults begin to recognize the authority of their own voices. "The developmental movement in to inner-dependence occurs when one is able self-consciously to include the self within the arena of authority. In other words, other sources of authority may still hold credible power, but now one can also recognize and value the authority of one's own voice." (Parks, 2000, 77) Because of this, young adults often resist what they perceive to be external authority. Young adults become anti-institutional because they are learning to hear their own voices, are gaining a sense of personal authority, and are eager to guide their own beliefs and worldviews. This is not the anti-establishment notion from past generations. In

fact, Millennials in particular are known for trusting parents and respecting the law. (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Leo, 2003)

Typically, religion is associated with the family and childhood the young adult is trying to stretch past. For many, organized religion is perceived as an ideology that is passed down and accepted completely as given. This perception is in direct contrast to young adults' need to create an understanding of the world based on their own experiences. In his studies of Generation X, Beaudoin (1998) concluded that the reaction to the perceived external authority is to deconstruct of religion and replace it with mysticism and "spirituality." Young adults often combine practices, symbols, rituals and values from their own religion, other religions, even from non-religious traditions, and combine it with their own "spirituality" to create a highly individualized belief system (Beaudoin; Arnett & Jensen 2002). "The need to honor inner as well as outer demands while finding the right relationship to a wider and more complex world is manifest in today's parlance as a hunger for things 'spiritual' in contrast to 'religion'" (Parks, 2000, 79) Religion is a communal understanding of meaning; spirituality is a personal meaning. In the development of their religious beliefs, "spirituality" gives authority to the young adults own life experiences rather than to religious institutions.

The way young adults relate to institutional religion varies greatly. Some leave it behind completely in an attempt to find an entirely new personal religion. Others deconstruct their religion in order to understand its meaning. Childhood religious beliefs may be ruled out as a viable destination in the end, but by decomposing religion, it is possible for the young adult to reintroduce to themselves to it on their own terms.

Before coming to BCI, Mike questioned his Jewish identity and the meaning of Judaism. In retrospect, he thought would eventually choose what resonated with him as he began putting the pieces together. However, Mike recognized he needed to start at the beginning and sort through his experiences.

> I remember her teaching us some of the basics about you know what is torah, how Jews see it. And what is Talmud and what are the different parts of the Talmud. I learned most of that stuff in greater detail when I took Jewish law in law school. But the seeds were sown at BCI. Other parts of learning, I don't know, I had my favorites and some things that I sort of did because I had too.

The seeds that Mike sowed were the beginnings of his own voice. In his interview, he expressed an appreciation for being exposed to both the basics and a variety of Jewish perspectives. He had taken ownership of the journey to create his Jewish identity. His distinguishing between his favorite activities and the things he had to do was his inner-voice becoming the authority of what he deemed important and meaningful.

Facing Fears, Facing Self

The amount of new experiences the young adult may encounter is limitless. This is a time of new cars, new homes, new jobs, new friends, new romances, new cities, new responsibilities, new bills, new restaurants, new stressors, new challenges, new obstacles... With the available opportunities, young adults eventually question what they are actually capable of doing. Their experimentation contains an element of self-testing. Part of decomposition is stripping down to one's essence, facing fears, and finding the inner-strength to deal with what is found. When they face their fears, young adults hope to understand what

they have to lose and how far they can push themselves. By facing their fears, young adults learn what is meaningful to them, which helps them become more self-aware and self-sufficient.

To faces one's fears is to challenge one's self and to take risks, something all of the interviewees talked about happening at BCI. Sometimes this challenge was felt, but may not have been perceivable to others. However, some of the challenges were very visible. Dena thought that most of the activities at BCI could be considered personal challenges that led to growth. She gave the example of how the dancing at BCI was not just learning to dance, but was also about facing fears. Mike happened to be one of those people who had just that experience:

> "I kind of have a fear of [dancing] so I tried to face [it] and tried to fix [it]. I didn't really succeed. But I succeeded at challenging myself."

Mike recognized that success was not only about learning to dance. Success also came from the act of facing his insecurities and challenging himself.

So much of decomposition happens internally. By sharing their fears publicly, young adults expose themselves to the possibility of rejection, disapproval or not being understood. On the positive side, just by identifying their fears young adults can remove the hold the fears have on them. It becomes a test of strength and builds the foundation of self-sufficiency. Some of the BCIers used the flag-raising ceremony as the forum for facing their fears. They did this both by voicing their fears and just in the act of exposing themselves to the group. Not everyone used flag-raising in this manner, but for most their fears eventually bubbled up sometime during the aliyah. Thinking about moments of self-disclosure at BCI, Lisa recalled,

"I don't think there's anyone who didn't speak up and didn't share things about their personal goals and fears."

Doing It Alone

"How can you give yourself to another person being with them if you're not for yourself first? And that is what BCI is all about, the individual experience." (Stacy)

Beyond self-sufficiency, becoming involves learning how to do things on one's own. The process of "getting there" is done individually. In addition, while this can lead young adults to greater independence, it can also lead them to loneliness. Having left home, they "pursue their identity explorations on their own, without the daily companionship of either their family of origin or their family to be." (Arnett 2000, 474) Alone does not necessarily mean lonely. However, the introspective drive towards self-sufficiency, combined with the young adult need for belonging and meaning accentuate the potential for loneliness.

Recognizing that they must do this for themselves by themselves can be both exciting and scary for young adults. The changes in their lifestyle, the array of options for their life's direction, and the decomposition of their childhood identity can be overwhelming for some young adults. The changes may be tentative; some of the options end in failures or broken hearts. Young adults can also become disillusioned when childhood beliefs are dissolved without a compelling replacement under construction. (Arnett 2000) It has the potential of being a very profound experience; however, the decomposition of the self and the world can be complicated, confusing, and exhausting. Young adults can feel like they are returning to the primordial chaos that precedes order in the world.

Mike described the confusion he felt when he attended BCI:

> I remember actually, and maybe it was just part of the general confusion, and right now when I think back to it I smile, but I actually considered becoming a rabbi. And looking back at several years from now I have to wonder what the heck was going on in my head. Because I... didn't have, I mean at the time, it felt like, it was all just very confusing as I stated earlier. I left even more confused about what I wanted to do and who I was and so on. But I didn't feel any bitterness or this was a bad experience. It was just sort of.... Wow. It was overwhelming. It was a lot of stuff happening at once."

A community can promote and support young adults as they face their fears and attempt to build meaning. However, because of what they are trying to accomplish, young adults must ultimately do this individually. When young adults consider this, it sometimes has an impact on how they view their romantic relationships. When asked about the issue of participants pairing off during BCI, the interviewees acknowledged that they understood why relationships were a potential hindrance to the individual's process of learning about themselves. Stacy commented:

> "Even though we see BCI as such a safe environment for us to express ourselves individually, when you pursue a romantic relationship you don't, you're not expressing yourself individually. You express yourself as a couple."

Each young adult has to go through the deconstruction process, learn to depend on their self, make meaning, face their fears and find their inner-voice for themselves.

Re-Creation

When something is broken down to its fundamental components, a choice has to be made about how to reassemble it. That is the opportunity of young adulthood. At some point

while young adults are becoming self-sufficient and finding themselves, they begin to act on behalf of the self. They start putting the pieces back together and reconnecting to others and the world. Each works to create a more committed and responsible individual.

Independent Decisions and Choice

In the United States, freedom is enacted as freedom of choice. The American way is the way each individual chooses it to be. However, adolescents living with their parents do not have the ultimate choice over many facets of their lives. In college, the ability to choose expands. Young adults' early exploration and experimentation reflect their choices to do what they want to do. When young adults are on their own, being able to make choices reflects their growing self-sufficiency and independence and builds their responsibility and identity. This was discussed earlier in chapter 3 when referring to the hit or miss approach to trying new experiences. The choices may lead to mistakes, which can be painful setbacks, but it is part of the process of building identity and learning to be self-sufficient.

In the religious realm, choice is a relatively new phenomenon. Historically, religious identity was ascribed socially and culturally. The experience of religious decomposition, which is a natural part of development today, previously led to monumental upheavals— such as those during the late Hellenistic period and the Reformation. (Queen, 1996) Today, however, religious identity is a matter of choice. Wade Clark Roof found that the majority of Americans think one should arrive at his or her religious beliefs independent of any church. (Roof, 1993)

The belief that the choice of religious identity is a given has been called the "heretical imperative" by Peter Berger. He identifies the root of the word heresy as "to choose." In a society where one religion has an unchallenged authority, choosing to assume a different

perspective would be deviant, hence heretical. However, in the United States today, religious options abound and no one particular religious perspective can claim to have dominance. Berger claims that we are all compelled to choose where we stand. Hence, committing 'theological heresy' is no longer something done by a deviant few; rather, it is an imperative mandated for everyone. (Berger, 1980, 25-26)

Cohen and Eisen's (2000) research shows that this is the case for Jews as well. Institutionalism is out; people prefer to choose, to experience what is out there and find meaning as it comes. American Jews are driven to reject or recast traditional beliefs and behaviors. The demand to choose and re-choose identity is inescapable in Jewish life. Cohen and Eisen present the example of a woman who had become alienated in young adulthood and renewed her commitment to Judaism as a parent. "The Judaism to which she is currently attached is not one that she has simply grown into or inherited, but one that she herself has fashioned from the large repertoire of possibilities available" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, 14)

Beaudoin (1998) sees the World Wide Web as an example of how pervasive choice is in the lives of Generation Xers. He points out that the Web is a pluralistic medium that levels the playing field for different religions. Individuals can access information about religion as they choose, and the choices today are far more expansive than ever. For current and future generations, the Web has created an environment where religious institutions are forced into marketing in order to keep up with individuals' demands to learn individually and choose independently. As the Millennial generation continues to come of age, young adults will only know a world where this expansive array of choices exists.

The interest in flexing the power of choice varied among the Jewish young adults interviewed, but it was clearly present in all of them. On one end was Rick, for whom choice was an imperative, so much so that he had a hard time adjusting to following a schedule. He commented, "If somebody tells me to do something, just generally, I'll do the opposite, on principle." Towards the other end of the spectrum, Mike and Dena both expressed a balance between enjoying being able to choose some things and understanding that they "have to" do certain things. Stacy and Lisa, in the middle, expressed an excitement about being able to make choices. For Lisa in particular, making choices was part of her move towards adulthood. She felt that her parents had done most of planning for the Jewish programs she had previously attended. Then when she was on her own for the first time, she went to Hillel just because it seemed like the next logical step. "It wasn't choices that I was actively making." However, since BCI she thinks, "As an adult it's much harder to just take the next step. So it's definitely, everything I do now is completely a choice."

Responsibility, Accountability & Commitments

> Know where you came from, where you are going, and to who you are destined to give an account and reckoning. - Avot 3:1

In addition to being able to make choices, young adults acknowledge more accountability for the consequences of their actions. They enter into more enduring commitments and accept additional responsibility in their personal and professional lives. However, not everything they do is direct preparation for adult roles. Before committing to a relationship, lifestyle, or worldview, they try out a variety of options. Dating, internships and first jobs are often a "commitment training ground" for young adults who want to gauge the amount of responsibility that they can manage. There is an indirect relationship between the

growth of responsibility and the young adult's participation in risky activities. As they widen their exploration and face their fears, their self-sufficiency grows and they understand better the limits of their capabilities.

Community provides a means for young adults to develop responsibility. As discussed in Chapter 4, young adults balance the tension between exercising their own agency and gaining a sense of belonging within a community. There is an applicable expression from modern pioneers in Israel - "*livnot u'lehibanat*," which means to build and to be built. Working to build a community brings the young adult into something that is bigger than him or herself. Building community is a way of doing hard and meaningful work, which in addition to self-support, is critically important for self-identification for most Americans in general. (Bellah et al, 1996, 56) Essentially, when young adults work to build community, they gain responsibility to that community which in return builds the young adult.

Stacy's story in chapter 4 about collecting zucchinis during her agricultural work is an example of the mutual building relationship. In seeing the fruits of her labor provide meals for a few days, she came to see how she was an integral part of making BCI function. Her contribution affected the community and helped to sustain it. She was responsible to the community. All BCIers were given the responsibility of providing education for the rest of the group.

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There is a legend about Rabbi Akiva that illustrates personal accountability and commitment.

> It has been said that Rabbi Akiva learned nothing until he was forty years old. After he married the daughter of the wealthy Kalba Savu'a, she urged him to go to Jerusalem to study Torah "I'm forty hears old," he said to her. "What can I accomplish? They'll laugh at me because I know nothing."
>
> "Let me show you something, "his wife said "bring me and ass whose back is injured." When Akiva brought the ass, she covered its sore back with dust and earth and herbs so that it looked ridiculous. The first day they took the ass to market, people laughed at it. They laughed the second day too. But on the third day, nobody laughed any more. Go and study Torah," said Akiva's wife, "Today people will laugh, tomorrow they will not laugh, and the day after they'll say, 'That's his way.'" - Legend

Rabbi Akiva's wife taught him to be resolute. Although trying new things may cause initial embarrassment, given enough determination it becomes less difficult. Akiva's wife predicted that the people would eventually say, "That is his way," because she recognized that if he was persistent and took himself seriously, so would other people. Young adults are also learning this lesson when they make more commitments and accept more responsibility. BCI creates an environment that rewards those who are able to take responsibility and commit to pursuing their personal interests. Additionally, Stacy pointed out that the staff was very flexible about meeting people's needs – when they were brought to their attention. For example, on one occasion, the staff was unaware of the needs of some of the more traditionally observant participants, but when they were informed about it, it was addressed at once.

When the follow through was in the hands of the participants, however, the resolve and responsibility were not as consistent. The education director often observed BCIers straddling the fence between advocacy and complaining. When he was approached with an

idea, usually the education director's response was supportive. For example, a participant approached the education director with the request that there should be a daily prayer service. The education director offered to provide the resources needed such as prayer books and an appropriate room. Since she requested it, leading the minyan was in her hands. The minyan did not occur. The participant was not able to sustain the commitment and responsibility needed to have a minyan. Even though the education director indicated that the minyan example was not an isolated incident, there were also several other examples of BCIers making changes, organizing activities and creating programs.

Mike's experience in the dance workshop is a good example of successful advocacy. For Mike, the dance workshop served as a forum to face his fears. As the class progressed, Mike was not showing significant improvement in his dance abilities. However, as he explained it, he took responsibility and followed through on his commitment to learn to dance.

> The dancing teacher was, he kind of gave up on me pretty soon. And I kept going even though he gave up on me. And I think I surprised him when I confronted him about it. You know like, "I'm still putting in the effort but you're not teaching me." And he was appreciative of the fact that I sort of reminded him not to give up.

Even though he did not consider himself a natural dancer, Mike accepted the responsibility to learn to improve. Not only was he successful in advocating for himself, he even thought that he had become a graceful dancer as a result. At least, "the few nights we had to perform those dances I remembered those steps long enough."

Dena had a poignant experience at BCI that reflected the evolution of her accountability and responsibility. She began her interview explaining that she found the BCI

experience more reassuring than challenging. It solidified who she already knew herself to be. However, at the end of her interview, she was asked the open-ended question if there was anything she wanted to tell about BCI and she shared a story that she indicated was something she was most proud of in her life. She was not sure why she was sharing the story, but felt it could not go unsaid.

Dena had said something very hurtful to someone and decided the flag-raising ceremony would be her opportunity to apologize. In what she termed the most intimate act she had ever done in front of that many people, which is considerable in light of the fact that she is professionally involved in theatre, she apologized. She reflected that if she had just apologized to the person it would not have made the difference. It was very significant to her that, in front of the entire aliyah, she took responsibility for what she did and admitted "what a jerk" she had been.

While Dena was not consciously aware it, she actually had revealed the reason for telling the story. For the most part, Dena did not see the BCI experience as a catalyst for self-awareness, feelings of belonging or independence; she was already evolving in these areas. However, this experience lifted her to a new height of accountability. She recognized that her actions not only affect her and the person she hurt, but they also affect the larger community. She was accepting her responsibility to herself, to the other and in a manner of speaking, to the world.

All of the interviewees in one way or another exemplified the process of decomposition and re-creation. They examined themselves, faced their fears, developed personal authority, made decisions and become individuals that are more responsible. They

faced the dissolution and loneliness of young adulthood as they searched for meaning and strove for self-sufficiency. They are all on the way to developing a relationship with their selves, the other and the world.

Chapter 6- DISCUSSION

The journey of exploration, leaving home and finding the self frames the major issues and tasks young adults need to address in order to develop a more sophisticated perception of themselves as Jews and as members of the Jewish community. Young adulthood is a time of tremendous change. Among other things, young adults are exploring options for careers, life styles, worldviews, beliefs, and life partners. They are exploring the world, who they are, what they are capable of doing, and where they might belong. Who they were during adolescence will be transformed during young adulthood through leaving home, having new experiences, making choices and accepting responsibility. After Jewish young adults set out on their own, they primarily, and often intentionally, continue their development outside of the context of institutional religion.

The observation of the Brandeis Collegiate Institute program and interviews with past participants helped identify and analyze several issues of Jewish young adulthood. As a three-and-a-half week "camp" for young adults, BCI has the capability to provide an exceptional quantity and quality of opportunities for Jewish young adults to explore. However, it is not the only approach by far. While the medium of BCI may be unique, this thesis has shown that many of the issues of young adulthood are to a certain extent universal. Future research into the specifics of how BCI addresses the issues young adults face and its impacts on the identity and the communal involvement of its alumni could be instructive for groups seeking to engage Jewish young adults.

Although this thesis is a limited study of Jewish young adulthood, the findings are in line with studies of the general young adult population and of other groups of young adults

(Arnett, 2000, 2002; Beaudoin; Howe & Strauss, Oblinger, Parks, Robbins & Wilner). At the Biennial Meeting of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism) in 2003, a new track for young adults was included. This group of Jewish young adults in their 20's and 30's, called Striking Sparks and Raising Ruach, very explicitly exemplified the findings in this thesis. A brief review of some of the issues raised within that group can be found in the appendix.

Understanding the issues of young adulthood elucidates ways for the Jewish community to assist Jewish young adults in developing their Jewish identity and finding their place in the community. The recent inclusion of young adults (Striking Sparks, Raising Ruach) in the Outreach Department of the Union for Reform Judaism is an indication of the need for comprehensive approaches to engaging Jewish young adults in Jewish life and community. The identification of these issues and tasks of young adulthood and the analysis of their presence among past participants of BCI indicate a number of frameworks to consider when reaching out to Jewish young adults. Below is list of priorities to consider when defining the goals of young adult programs and when planning young adult events. A discussion of each item follows.

1) Be meaningful – balance providing social outlets with ways of becoming aware of the self, the other, the world, and God.

2) Challenge and empower – address some of the difficult subjects and give young adults responsibilities within the Jewish community.

3) Build community – recognize the demographics of young adults, plan accordingly for constant change and focus on welcoming them and including them in the community.

4) Be Experiential – provide ways for young adults to live a Jewish life rather than just learn about it.

5) Integrate – Involve various aspects of young adults' lives with their Jewish identity.

This list is based on two assumptions. First is the assumption that living a Jewish life and being involved with the Jewish community are good. While those may seem obvious, it is worth explicitly stating because these dynamics influence what is considered meaningful, what gets integrated and what type of community is built for young adult Jews. Living a Jewish life makes the development of Jewish identity and a connection to the Jewish community a priority for this population.

The second assumption is that the list of priorities can be useful when shaping almost any young adult program. In my view, these priorities are relevant to congregational endeavors, special interest groups, *chavurot*, leadership development, communitywide programs and educational groups. Any group whose goal includes promoting Jewish identity or young adult involvement in the Jewish community will affected by the issues of young adulthood and therefore could benefit from considering the priorities (and associated strategies for practice) presented here.

Be Meaningful

Young adulthood is the time when critical decisions about such things as a career, a belief system, and a life partner are made. While providing social outlets for young adults to build community is important, meaningful content is needed in order for young adults to understand how Judaism plays a role in making these decisions. In the American culture of individualism and spirituality, Judaism can offer young adults a sense of connection and

meaning through a communal religion. As Parks states, "A religion is a shared way of making meaning" (197). Judaism has volumes to say about how to make a difference and have a meaningful existence in the world. It can provide a context for creating awareness and shaping the understanding of self, other and world.

One reason many young adults may not consider religion as a way to find meaning in their lives is due to their limited understanding of Jewish ideas. For many, religion is a set of rules, a collection of traditions or something to lean on in times of trouble. The Reform Jewish website for young adults, Click On Judaism, acknowledges the skepticism many young adults have towards religion. In a section titled "Searching for God," it says:

> The old guy in the sky with a white beard pulling all the strings like a giant puppeteer just doesn't work. But what does? Knowing what we know about science and technology, can we even believe in God anymore?

The BCI participants had many questions about life, Judaism, and who they were becoming. They explored their hopes and their fears and sorted through the confusion of where life was leading them. They were also learning how to reach beyond themselves and encounter the other, the world and God.

Young adults are naturally searching for meaning at a time in their life when the resulting decisions can have a lasting impact. Many have discarded their childhood beliefs that no longer satisfy them and are looking for a more enduring sense of meaning to replace them. Jewish communities can engage young adults by providing opportunities for undertaking that task. Viewing meaning making as a goal of young adult outreach does not mean that programs for young adults must focus on philosophical, epistemological issues. It does mean that young

adults need more substance, not just social outlets. It means that young adults are capable and in need of having conversations about God, purpose and meaning.

Challenge & Empower

Whether a challenge is intellectual, physical, social, spiritual or just in fun, it expands young adults' limits and their understanding of self, other and world. Challenges promote exploration and self-sufficiency and empower the individual to assert his growing inner voice. This thesis has shown that young adults tend to take risks and want to face their fears. Young adult programs do not need to be endurance tests, but they can provide a safe and meaningful environment for them to face their fears and test their limits.

Several BCI participants commented on how other participants and teachers expressed views that challenged their way of thinking. BCIers grappled with real life issues, were encouraged to challenge themselves and unanimously felt more comfortable with who they were because of the program. The participants were coming to terms with their ability to make life decisions and chose their own future path. At the same time, they struggled with responsibility and had varying abilities of advocating for themselves.

When considering how to engage young adults, the temptation to focus on simple and fun activities is enticing. It is important that programs and events are interesting and appropriate; however, young adults also need to be challenged and empowered. In his interview, Mike expressed how BCI challenged and confused him, and this did not disturb him. In fact, it was an appealing aspect of the program.

> It was a very confusing time in my life. I would say that BCI, by providing a unique set of circumstances, it almost added to the confusion. But it was good

> confusion. I felt like it was good to let all of these questions come up to the surface and deal with them.... I left even more confused about what I wanted to do and who I was and so on. But I didn't feel any bitterness or [think it] was a bad experience. It was just sort of - wow. It was overwhelming. It was a lot of stuff happening at once.

Exposing young adults to the larger world - what it has to offer and what it is lacking - is a way to challenge them. Allowing for controversy can challenge their views. Involving them with some of their community's social issues can show them that they can make a difference and challenge their purpose. Young adults are looking to discover and consider new perspectives. It promotes their search for meaning and their ability to think independently.

Another important consideration for working with young adults is encouraging them to identify what the Jewish community can provide them. Within a given structure, letting them organize for themselves and advocate for their needs teaches them self-sufficiency and responsibility. Additionally, providing a variety of opportunities allows young adults to flex their ability to choose. Letting them choose what they want to learn and do empowers them to lead their own growth.

Build Community

One of the most difficult aspects of working with young adults is that they are moving and changing at a rate that can inhibit community building. Identifying ways of bridging that divide and creating a sense of belonging for young adults encourages involvement in the community. Even temporary communities like BCI and weekend retreats have the potential of inspiring young adults to continue connecting with the Jewish community. Stacy said that

she "left with a greater hope [of] building a community." She mentioned that since the BCI experience she was more inclined to spend Shabbat with her friends than with her family because of the sense of connection. On her own, in a temporary community, she had found a place to belong.

A major obstacle for building community for young adults is that, for a host of reasons, they feel alienated from the Jewish community. Some young adults feel that they do not know enough to fit in; others feel alienated by the child, couple and family focus of many Jewish organizations. Many young adults move to new cities and have the additional burden of reaching out to the Jewish community by themselves. Not unlike most other groups, it is important to make young adults feel welcome in the community. Part of this can be done by planning specifically for young adults while being inclusive of those who are single, married, with children, without children, professionals or students. A singles' event or a young professionals' event is exclusive.

Each of the interviewees mentioned a particular teacher or rabbi who inspired their involvement. Individual connections resonate with young adults. If possible, having the rabbi or another leader welcome the young adult to the community goes a long way in making the young adult feel that there is a way in to Jewish life and relationships.

Another barrier mentioned was young adults' level of Jewish knowledge or sense of Jewish identity. By including small amounts of teaching or using Jewish "language," the increase in Jewish vocabulary and knowledge can facilitate a sense of belonging to the particular group and the Jewish community at large. More discussion on learning will follow in the "Be Experiential" section below.

One issue missing from the BCI interviews but very important to Jewish young adults belonging to the community is finances – the cost of membership. Part of becoming self-sufficient is developing financial independence (Arnett, 2000, 2003), but being a member of the Jewish community is expensive. Repeatedly, those interviewed by Robbins & Wilner (2001) talked about their financial struggles and wanting to make it on their own, without any assistance. However, for some young adults, involvement in the Jewish community may not be a priority worthy of a financial commitment. Affordable affiliation opens the doors to young adults, is a smart "investment" for Jewish organizations and removes a barrier to those who may not see the "value" in membership yet.

Since young adults have the highest rate of change in residence, some of them may not be inclined to invest in a community where they will not remain (Arnett, 2000). Many synagogues are already addressing this with sliding scale memberships for young adults (Commission on Synagogue Affiliation, 1999). Other organizations have no membership fees and charge activity fees or vice versa, and yet in some cities, congregations are creating coalitions to allow the young adult to explore several congregations for one fee. It is doubtful in the end that there is much loss involved with letting young adults join Jewish organizations at discounted rates.

Be Experiential

Part of the suggestion for an experiential approach to young adult outreach is a bias towards an education philosophy. However, this thesis has shown that young adults lean towards personally exploring and experiencing the world. This holds true in the case of religion. Young adults want a lived theology and accept the authority of their own experience

over that of religious institutions. (Beaudoin, 52, 74; Cohen & Eisen, 179-181) Programs for living Judaism provide a different level of meaning than just practicing or learning about it. Learning about rituals and holidays are important, but young adults need a context that allows them to experience living Jewishly. Especially for young adults who are not close to their family and have not started a family of their own, living Jewishly can be difficult. To "do Jewish" is to experience Judaism in a way that it is the fabric of living, not just the actions of a Jew.

Experiential education was part of Bardin's philosophical design of BCI (Powell, 1979). The Brandeis Bardin Institute's website today reveals this in how it describes the BCI experience (thebbi.org). One description of BCI says, "Exploring and Experiencing Nature through Judaism." This does not convey direct learning about nature or Judaism but experiencing one through the other. Especially for those who may be weary of overt Jewish education, experiential education provides an enticing medium to convey Jewish learning – it can be learning Judaism through doing "something else."

An experiential approach facilitates young adults' growth in many areas at once. If young adults are given something to accomplish or experience, they are potentially discovering, making meaning, building community, making choices, facing fears, and taking responsibility at the same time. This is not to suggest that learning through experience is the only way to learn, but it does provide for the inclusion of many of the issues and tasks of young adulthood.

Integration

The Click On Judaism website makes a good argument for how young adults can benefit from integrated programs. One of its screens that list the major areas of focus for the website says the following:

> Facing Today's World (media & culture, contemporary issues, Jewish choices)- Images ideas and events bombard us from all sides...As we try to process the worlds around us in a meaningful way, Judaism can offer a prism for interpretation and reinterpretation.

Returning to the assertion that young adulthood is a critical time for facing life decisions such as marriage, career, and beliefs, the integrated approach suggests that any subject, issue or activity has a Jewish element in it. While young adults are in the process of forming their identity, they are receiving constant influence from pop culture, the media and everything that occurs during their daily activities. Young adult outreach can address their questions and issues with Jewish responses and perspectives. Judaism can address their experiences in a Jewish context, whether it is dating, dealing with the job market or understanding the impacts of terrorism. In effect, in a non-Jewish, pluralistic, individualistic environment, rather than answering the question "Should I be a Jew?" young adults can benefit from forums that help them answer, "What kind of Jew shall I be?" Because young adults are inclined to look for personal meaning, they naturally integrate what they are learning into their lives and their identity. Stacy, who did not consider learning about Judaism to be a motivation for attending BCI, thought that one of the things BCI provided her was a mix of her personal interests with Judaism. For her the learning was not about the content per se, but about how it was meaningful to her and how it integrated into her life.

During his interview, Rick said that even though BCI "wasn't completely life changing, it did definitely change my school of thought about a lot of things." This is significant especially for Rick who took exceptional control over what he accepted and rejected. During a discussion about homosexuality, one of the rabbis shared his views on homosexuality. Rather than just saying that he agreed or disagreed, Rick said, "I really like[d] that response and I could see in my Judaism, anyway, how I agree with that [perspective of it]". At issue was not just an opinion, but how Rick chose to accept it in light of how it fit into his larger understanding of Judaism.

Whatever young adults experience or do not experience has the potential to affect their identity. If something is absent from a situation, it is easy to think that it has no impact. However, the lack of something is instructional as well. Integrating the lives of young adults, their issues and needs, with Jewish living teaches that Judaism can be an integral part of life. Jewish outreach that does not integrate the needs of the young adult risks reinforcing the idea that they are mutually exclusive, that being Jewish is a descriptive reference rather than a verb. Integrating Judaism into young adult outreach transforms what could be seen as just another activity or organization into a opportunity to explore Judaism, build a Jewish identity, and become and adult member of the Jewish community.

Conclusion

Young adulthood marks an independent, self-directed entry into the larger community. There is some irony that a stage in life partially created by an increase in education and more time to focus on personal development introduces the decomposition of meaning, extended confusion, and a search for belonging. Young adulthood is a precarious balance of the related

tensions of leaving home and belonging, individual and community, and autonomy and connection. Development during this life stage has many implications for the future of each Jewish young adult and for the Jewish community. The decisions young adults make during this phase can have permanent affects on their identity and their relationship to the Jewish community. This is the danger and the power of young adulthood.

In his discussion of the relationship between the exploration of faith and ambiguity, Beaudoin (1998, 41-42) raises the question, "Must we know our identity in order to have faith?" I think that asking the converse question, "Must we have faith in order to know our identity?" reveals the interconnected nature of faith, or religion, and identity. Religion is an evolving way of understanding the self, other, world, and God, finding one's place in the world, and making life meaningful. The same description applies to the evolutionary journey of Jewish young adulthood. To know one is to have the other.

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Web Sites

http://www.thebbi.org

http://www.clickonjudaism.org

http://www.generationj.com

Appendix

Questions asked at Interviews

1. What brought you to BCI? (Background and motivation)
2. As you look back, what stands out in the experience (Look beyond, move in, repetitions? Someone else mentioned this...)
3. Could you tell me about the communal dimension of being at BCI? How was that for you?
4. Could you tell me about the learning dimension of being at BCI? How was that for you?
5. What are some things you remember learning?
6. When you were leaving BCI, what did you anticipate the impact of having participated in the program might be on your thinking, your outlook, your attitudes, your behaviors?
7. Were there any negatives or expectations unmet, something that left a bad taste?
8. What would you say has been the impact on your thinking, your outlook, your attitudes, your behaviors?
9. In what ways, if any, are you involved in the Jewish community now?
10. In knowing that we were going to have this conversation, is there anything you were thinking of telling or thought I would ask or that you wanted to mention that we have not addressed?
11. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Demographics of Interviewees

Name	Year at BCI	Age at BCI	Age at Interview
Mike	1999	22	26
Rick	1999	22	26
Lisa	2001	19	23
Dena	2001	25	28
Stacy	2001	22/23	25

Example Young Adult Program

At the Biennial Meeting of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism) in 2003, a new track for young adults called Striking Sparks, Raising Ruach was included. The group was started at the 2001 Biennial in response to address the needs of people in their 20's and 30's. These young adults were not finding a place for themselves within their own synagogues and communities. They felt that the programs at the Biennial addressed youth and adults, neither of which met their needs. They wanted to have a voice in their community, to be acknowledged by the larger synagogue community and to have a forum to discuss their needs and hopes for synagogue involvement.

At the final program of the Striking Sparks tracks, the facilitator asked, who are you? What questions do you have? Their answers were remarkably in line with the findings of this thesis. To the question who are you, the responses were:

- Both secular and Jewish - I'm one or the other and sometimes both.
- Searching for me

- Searching for community
- Searching for balance
- The Middle child – overlooked. I am not NFTY, not an 'adult'. I am not recognized.
- Struggling to be heard
- Lost. Out of place. Alone

In addition, when asked what questions they had they gave the following:

- What matters?
- Where are my boundaries with family, husband, friends, etc.?
- What's next?
- How do I address what matters?
- Where do I want my Judaism to be in my life?
- How do I overcome my fear?
- Am I happy?
- What is the "should" versus what I want to do? (Mom, teacher... expectations)
- What's in it for me?
- What are my priorities?

Similar to the BCI participants interviewed, the young adults' in the Striking Sparks, Raising Ruach program are searching for meaning and community, facing their fears, trying to discern their responsibilities, and looking for the role of Judaism in their lives. How they view themselves, the questions they are asking, and the needs they express exemplify the findings of this thesis. The suggested approaches in chapter 6 apply to - in most cases directly - the responses they gave about their identity and their questions.