JEWISH SERVICE LEARNING:
RELEVANCE FOR THE AMERICAN SYNAGOGUE

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FOR THE HUC LIBRARY: ABSTRACT

Jewish Service Learning: Relevance for the American Synagogue is a three-chapter review of the field of Jewish service learning as well as an investigation into its relevance for the American synagogue's efforts towards Jewish identity education, moral development, and civic engagement. The goals of the thesis are threefold: to synthesize the existing research on Jewish service learning with research on Jewish identity formation, experiential education, reflection, service and civic engagement, and peer community formation; to gather original data from three focus groups conducted with three distinct populations in order to gain new insights into JSL; and to create a thorough set of recommendations and suggestions stemming from this research for starting a Jewish service learning program in the synagogue setting and discussing its many potential benefits considering the presented research.

The thesis begins with a foundation in Jewish texts, firmly rooting Jewish service learning and all its components within Jewish tradition. A brief history of social justice in the Reform Movement connects the field of service learning with the specific movement in which the intended audience synagogues are a part. The reader is then presented with a model for understanding Jewish service learning in all of its permutations. Each component that creates a successful Jewish service learning experience is then examined, using research from primary resources in the form of interviews and formal studies. It also examines a range of secondary resources in the fields of Jewish service learning, identity, religious education, experiential education, moral development, generational research, and more. The section concludes with a look at some criticisms of service learning and recommendations for avoiding the same pitfalls.

From the examination of JSL's components, the thesis takes a look at the report and

findings of three focus group interviews, much of which reflects research done in the broader field of Jewish service learning in addition to some new insights. The summary of the research revisits the original model of Jewish service learning and explores further the ways in which the components overlap and influence on another. It offers one set of criteria for measuring success as well as a look at the problems and possible solutions for the issue of continued engagement.

Finally, the thesis attempts to look forward within the field of service learning, providing some possibilities for future research and advancing the field. It goes into depth on the question of applicability within a synagogue, offering recommendations for starting a JSL program within the synagogue, an abstract for a comprehensive religious school curriculum, and sample reflection sessions for before and during a service learning trip. The thesis ends with a bibliography, an annotated bibliography, resources and references, actual testimony from Jewish service learning participants, and a model for experiential learning. These recommendations are a mostly original materials but include secondary resources where cited.

In summary, the thesis conveys that Jewish service learning may be the next phase in Jewish education, identity formation, and moral development. It could be an important factor in revitalizing the religious educational program of a synagogue, as well as playing a role in shaping the culture of the entire community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Each thesis has a story behind it. The story of this thesis is one that begins with a student filled with curiosity and a passion for justice. But she lacked the experience in shaping her own research into (what she hopes is) a coherent argument. The remaining chapters find within them an intrepid and loyal guide that helped her find her direction, kept her motivated and inspired, and ultimately became a trusted advisor and mentor in realms inside and outside of the world of the thesis. Dr. Steven Windmueller has been such a guide for me – my gratitude is immense for the time and energy he put into helping this thesis come to life. The Windmueller, thank you.

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Finally, I'd like to thank Dan Medwin, fellow rabbinic school and life journeyer, whose never-ending patience with computer questions and wording have enriched my thesis and whose never-ending love has enriched my life and the life of our family.

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INTRODUCTION

The meaning of Jewish existence is to foster in ourselves as Jews, and to awaken in the rest of the world, a sense of moral responsibility in action. *Mordechai Kaplan*

With these words, Mordechai Kaplan provides an answer to one of the greatest challenge we face as modern Jews: the relevance of Judaism to Jews of the twenty-first century. While the question of relevance has existed since the beginning of modernity, we have arrived at one of those critical junctures in history that necessitates a renewed examination of how Judaism can speak to its current adherents. In a world in which the definitions of identity, community, and Judaism are becoming increasingly complex, the arguments that call for "survival of the people" alone are not enough to convince this generation of Jews to remain Jewish. Hitler's posthumous victory is a reason that no longer sustains a young person's close connection to their Judaism over a lifetime. It is not that they are completely disinterested in living Jewish lives. We know that religion can play a central role in the lives of young Jews. As they figure out who they are, Judaism can help them carve out the images they want of

Young Jews lack a model for the translation of religion and its ancient texts into modern terms that speak to their concerns.

themselves. It can also provide "the social and political networks in which they make friends, find lovers, think about civic and political issues, and develop a political world view."[1] However, the relative priority of religion in a young Jew's life varies. I believe that part of the reason that Judaism does not speak to more young Jews is that they lack a model for the translation of religion and its ancient texts into modern terms that speak to their concerns. As Jewish professionals, a large part of our job is to uncover these concerns and to create this translation, so that the richness of our tradition can be revealed for and by our youth. The translation must speak to the needs and concerns of young Jews while retaining its integrity to the original texts. It must act as a bridge between the modern American reality and the Jewish universe of thought and deed. Jewish service learning is a model for that translation.

Jewish service learning (JSL) is one answer to Kaplan's call to action, and a new and growing trend in Jewish education and engagement. It combines elements of community service, Jewish education, and self-reflection within the context of a peer community. According to one analysis of the Jewish service learning landscape, almost 6,000 teens, university- and post-university-age individuals participated in immersive Jewish service learning experiences in 2006.[2] This means that almost 6,000 teens and young adults took a week away from their school year or summer and volunteered, together with a group of their Jewish peers, to serve others and engage in Jewish learning. This figure does not include episodic service learning opportunities – the equivalent to drop-in volunteering in cooperation with some form of Jewish learning. Although there has been no formal research

[1] Reboot. OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era (2003): 5. Web. 19 Jan 2010.
[2] Irie, Ellen, Jill Blair. "Jewish Service Learning: What Is and What Could Be." *BTW Informing Change* Prepared for: Schusterman Family Foundation, Jim Joseph Foundation, and Nathan Cummings Foundation Fall 2007 9. Web. 20 Jan 2009. 16

on the exact number of participants involved in Jewish service learning, estimates range into the tens of thousands of participants.[3] Jewish service learning has even been named by the Jewish Federation's Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA) as one of the picks for the best of the decade in Jewish Education.[4] But although the field enjoys so many participants and such dynamic modes of learning, little has been formally researched and written on the field. So what is Jewish service learning? The paper that follows will seek to define Jewish Service learning and its main components. Then it will examine measures of success within the field and the question of maintaining post-trip engagement. The paper will examine the JSL experiences of three focus groups and analyze the results of the findings. Finally, it will offer some recommendations for integrating Jewish service learning into a synagogue setting, along with helpful literature, references, and resources to get a program off the ground. Additionally, actual testimonials can be found in the appendixes that allow the participants themselves to speak on their own behalves to the relevance of their experiences.

The goals of this thesis are twofold. The first goal is to uncover the elements of Jewish service learning that make it such a compelling model of Jewish learning and moral development. The second goal is to dream about what such a model might look like if it were embedded within the context of a synagogue. On multiple levels, the thesis seeks to both educate and to provide material for a clergy team or lay leader board to make informed decisions regarding Jewish service learning's potential relevance to the life of their synagogue.

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[3] ibid.

[4] http://jesna.org/component/k2/item/626.

In terms of the question of relevance, it is no surprise that service learning is beginning to be of interest to the Jewish world. Jewish service learning can be considered a "low-hanging fruit" in terms of relevance, helping to elucidate the fact that our ancient traditions can guide our actions and our lives today. It is not difficult to understand that serving for the sake of social justice is a Jewish thing to do. It is, after all, a core element of being a Jew in general and a Reform Jew more specifically.

TEXTUAL FOUNDATIONS

The foundation of Jewish civilization, some would say, is grounded in its demand for the just treatment of the powerless and the vulnerable. It is woven into the very fabric of the Jewish tradition. From the moment of God's call to Abraham of "*lech l'cha*," from the moment that there was such a thing as the Jews, we have had to struggle with the questions: How should we treat the "other?" As Jews, we have known what it means to stand on both sides of this question, both as the "we" and as the "other." Our unique history makes the question of the "other" relevant at all times. Not surprisingly, then, there is no lack of references to the ways in which we, as Jews, are obligated to treat the needy. Deuteronomy (15:14) says it quite simply: *There shall be no needy among you.* What does this mean? Should we force the needy to disappear from our sight? While this solution is too often part of the problem, Jews tradition does not accept this answer. In fact, the emphasis in Judaism is not to push the needy out but instead to bring the needy, as Isaiah (58:7) points out "...into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe him; and not to ignore your own kin." This is one of the first rationales for service learning – bringing the participant and the stranger face to face. The participant is not only unable to ignore the people with whom they are working, they are also asked to witness the conditions in which the person lives. Jewish service learning has its participants come out of their comfortable lives where it is easy to forget about the needy, and engage with them in *their* neighborhoods and homes.

After we realize the true face of the "other," how do we go about "bringing the poor into our homes?" Whether we understand this command literally, by inviting our less fortunate neighbors over for a house meeting to discuss matters of communal concerns, or figuratively, by including them in our life experiences so that memories of those experiences

inform our actions, the question remains: what values guide our thinking in regard to the powerless and vulnerable? Jewish tradition answers by teaching as one of its main tenant the value of empathy – of seeing the humanity in the face of the "other" in a way that leads to a responsiveness to that "other" with gentleness.[5] One of the most often repeated verses in Torah is (Exodus 22:20) "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." This emphasis on caring for the stranger springs directly out of an imagined communal experience of slavery. Because every generation is required each year at Pesach to consider themselves as if they had come out of slavery in Egypt, every generation should acquire a sense of empathy for those who remain enslaved in different ways and in different places today. And Jews are required to act on that empathy either by refraining from harmful practices or through acts of צדק (righteousness), דין (justice), and רחמים (mercy). Service learning reinforces this sense of empathy by instilling a more direct experience of bitterness and strife through getting a small taste of the difficult conditions in which poor people live.

The development of empathy is only one of many Jewish values that call us to address the position of the vulnerable in our world. Being made בצלם אלהים, *in the image of God*, also obligates us to take responsibility for one another. In the Jewish imagination, each human being, no matter his race or creed, was created around a divine spark that enlivens and animates. When we stand up for the powerless, when we protect the vulnerable, when we enable the unable, we serve God and offer our gratitude to the Creator of all. We imitate God in holiness, thereby drawing holiness down into our world for the benefit of both the lifted and the lifter.

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[5] See Levinas' "Totality and Infinity", p.150 for a more complete description of the effects of truly "seeing the other."

This is the reason that the rabbis placed פיקוח נפש, *the saving of a life*, above all other mitzvot. In doing so, they were telling us that life and its preservation is more precious than almost any other religious consideration. It is the ultimate act of worship to protect what God has created. Therefore, the ultimate act of worship is to serve others. Jewish service is based on this foundation. When done in combination with Jewish text study and reflection on the connections between the study, the service, the self, and the community, the result is Jewish service learning. After Jewish service learning experiences, Jews are better prepared to develop their ever-evolving Jewish selves as well as their sense of empathy and their identities as agents of change.

But this is not a new call to action, especially within the Reform movement. The Reform movement, in fact, boasts a long commitment to social justice as a core principle, a principle that has enjoyed many different manifestations and has addressed a broad range of issues pertinent to each time period. The section below is a brief summary of the history of social justice within the movement as a precursor to the trend towards service learning today.

BRIEF HISTORY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN REFORM MOVEMENT

Reform Jewish volunteers of today join a long tradition of service and social justice within our movement. From the official inception of the Reform Movement with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) in the 1870s, its founders emphasized the movement's commitment to be an agent in the struggle for social justice. Against a background of the urbanization and industrialization of American society, and through the chaos of two world wars, leaders in the Reform movement played ever larger and more prominent roles in the fight for Jewish survival, civil rights, economic injustice, and other issues pertinent to the day. Understanding the place of service learning within the local Jewish communal context requires an examination of the general direction of social justice efforts within the Reform movement.

During the formative years of the UAHC, questions of social justice, and the amount of involvement in social justice on the part of Reform Jews, were in debate. It was during the UAHC Convention of 1878 that the Reform movement first articulated its commitments to social justice issues in an amendment to the constitution:

> It shall be the duty of the Union to keep a watchful eye on occurrences at home and abroad, concerning the civil rights and religious rights of Israelites, and to call attention of the proper authorities to the fact, should any violation of such rights occur, and to keep up communication with similar central Israelite bodies throughout the globe.[6]

The focus on the civil and religious rights of the Jewish people guided the early thinking on social justice in the Reform movement for the first thirty plus years of its existence.[7] Through this amendment, the Union created the Board of Delegates on Civil

[6] Kohler, Max. "The Board of Delegates." *UAHC Proceedings.* X. 1922: 9188.

[7] Although Jewish civil rights was the foremost concern for Jews of this time, the Central Conference for American Rabbis expanded this perspective with its 1885 Pittsburg Platform: "In full accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation which strives to regulate the relation between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to

Rights, which helped advance the causes of Eastern European and Russian Jews both in America and in Russia. But the board also included discussions of global law and an international police force.[8] It is interesting, therefore, that though this concern with Jewish civil rights was the central theme, the focus also began to include a broadening interest in areas of justice outside the Jewish world.

After the turn of the century, the American people, rabbis included, began to take up arms in defense of social rights. The first substantive issue with which the rabbinic arm of the Reform movement, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), dealt was the Jewish working man who lived in the squalor of the large cities. It was in response to this social problem that the CCAR created is first real social justice committee. Created in 1910, the Committee on Synagogue and Labor "failed in its first attempts because it was divided between those who espoused purely religious objectives and those who wanted to broaden the scope of the concerns of the committee."[9] This is a debate that would surface again and again in Jewish communal life, depending on the level of perceived threat from the majority culture. The early twentieth century was not without its anti-Semitism, especially for those new immigrants recently arrived from Eastern Europe. Some segments of American Jewry were facing legitimate concerns, causing some Jewish leaders to feel a sense of urgency to respond only to Jewish issues. Yet others felt it necessary to expand the Reform agenda to

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participate in the great task of modern times, to solve on the basis of justice and righteousness the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society." Despite the utopian declarations, the CCAR made few actual efforts to act in broad sweeping terms on this platform at the time, passing only two social pronouncements – one was to join the Golden Rule Brotherhood for Peace and the second was to publically condemn child labor. There is some speculation as to why the CCAR was relatively inactive on issues of social justice in the late part of the 19th century and into the 20th. (see Foster, Steven. *The Development of the Social Action Program of Reform Judaism,* 1878-1969. 3.) The lay arm of the Reform movement would continue to find priorities that often differed from those espoused by the rabbinic arm of the movement.

[8] Foster, Steven. *The Development of the Social Action Program of Reform Judaism, 1878-1969*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1970. Print. 3.

[9] Foster, 4.

include the needs of under-served non-Jewish populations. But despite the tension, this committee served as a role model for organizing to address social ills that faced both Jews and the greater community.

The major issue facing the Jewish community in the decade leading up to and into World War I was immigration, in particular Jewish immigration. The Board of Delegates, led by chairman Simon Wolf, fought for medical care for new immigrants, assistance in the naturalization process, and representation for Jews threatened with deportation. For these years, the Union was not concerned with the overall policies on immigration as much as it was concerned with aiding those who needed the on-the-ground help of the Board of Delegates.[10]

Simultaneously, the CCAR began to get serious about its commitments to issues around labor and management. Even before the Columbus Platform of 1937, the CCAR saw fit to recognize "the right of labor to organize and to bargain collectively."[11] It also stated its stance on laborers' rights of remuneration. "We advocate workmen's compensation for industrial accidents and occupational disease, a fair minimum wage, and regulation of industrial conditions with particular reference to the special needs of women."[12]

These statements, later developed into the Columbus Platform,[13] resulted in the establishment of the Commission on Social Justice. Its first chairman, Horace Wolf, tried to

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[10] Foster, 8.
[11] Marvis, Leonard. "The Social Justice Movement and the American Reform Rabbi." *American Jewish Archives*. VII:2. June, 1955. 177.
[12] Ibid.
[13] "Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings to the economic order, to industry and commerce, and to national and international affairs. It aims at the elimination of man-made misery and suffering, of poverty and degradation, of tyranny and slavery, of social inequality and prejudice, of ill-will and strife. It advocates the promotion of harmonious relations between warring classes on the basis of equity and justice, and the creation of conditions under which human personality may flourish. It pleads for the safe-guarding of childhood against exploitation. It champions the cause of all who work and of their right to an adequate standard of living, as prior to the rights of property. Judaism emphasizes the duty of charity, and

breath life into these statements, though he had a tough start. Wolf's first report contained a bibliography of relevant materials and reprints of certain articles, which proved to be less than inspiring in terms of action plans.[14] The Commission would function into the 1920s as a group that created statements and platforms that would be entered into the public record on a civic level. It became interested in aligning its views with those of their Protestant and Catholic neighbors as a part of their interfaith work. By 1923, they were cooperating with their fellow ministers and bishops on the function of economic factors in international relations. They discussed and recommended sanctions against those countries that practiced legalized discrimination.[15]

Meanwhile, the UAHC's Board on Civil Rights had been acting mostly as free counsel for individual Jews who couldn't afford legal advice and representation in court. In 1918, the board decided to push for broader platforms, which would include the rights of laborers to organize and unionize, the humane treatment of African Americans and anti-discrimination efforts, and the rights of immigrants to come to the US as a refuge from their persecutory county of origin.[16] In regards to both the Conference and the Union, a trend emerged throughout the 20s and 30s that bespeaks their comfort at broadening social concerns to areas outside of the Jewish world, and in some cases, to places far away from the United States. But, in general, their talk was not met with a great flurry of action; most of their efforts were focused on issuing platforms and positions, conducting meetings, and taking on small, individual cases.

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strives for a social order which will protect men against the material disabilities of old age, sickness and unemployment." (see Columbus Platform 1937, CCAR)

[14] Foster, 11.

[15] Foster, 14.

[16] Foster, 11-12.

By the mid-1940s, both the Union and the Conference housed social justice committees that were effectually dead in the water. The Commission on Social Justice was no longer even entered into the UAHC's meeting minutes and the CCAR was making a lot of pronouncements but wielding no real power.[17] But in 1946, under the directorship of Maurice Eisendrath, the UAHC joined with the CCAR to form the Joint Commission on Social Action (CSA).[18] There should be special attention pointed to the word "action," as the emphasis of this commission was to see more action taken on the local level by congregations towards correcting the social ills of the US and abroad. Lauding this new perspective on social justice, Eisendrath points to its necessity:

> In so far as Reform Judaism in concerned, very little has been done about social action...in the day to day, year in and year out tasks of social justice and of building a peaceful world, we in the Reform movement have done very little other than pass resolutions..."[19]

The CSA came to be instrumental in diffusing important and timely information about social issues to Reform synagogues and the National Federation for Temple Youth (NFTY). By 1959, the CSA had helped to organize 275 local committees on social action, "making social action a household term and a routine aspect of congregational life."[20] On a national level, the CSA fought hard for the civil rights movements, even sending representatives to the South in order to provide support and resources for the African American communities struggling for their rights. On local levels, the CSA offered advice on how synagogues could implement their programming and work within their communities for social justice. A sample of activities included "alerting our congregations in California, New Jersey, Washington, and Minnesota on the dangers of certain humane slaughtering bills

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[17] Foster, 40.
[18] Foster, 37.
[19] *UAHC Proceedings*, XIV (1947) 272.
[20] Foster, 55.

in their states; meeting with representatives of the Larchmont Temple about their new "Religion in Everyday Life" program; counseling a congregation in Long Island on a Lord's Prayer crisis in the schools; and assisting a struggling interracial Christian Settlement near Poughkeepsie."[21]

The tensions between social justice advocates who wanted to focus on the needs of Jews and those who wanted to focus on the needs of the greater population were lower by this time within the ranks of the Reform movement. But a new tension grew out of a 1956 symposium entitled "Do Synagogues Belong in Politics" presented in the periodical *American Judaism*. The argument sparked a debate around two main issues: 1). Can Reform Jewish principles really be applied to social issues of the time? and 2). Does the central body of Reform Judaism have the right to set forth those principles as the representative voice for all Reform Jews? This debate continued through 1962 and only subsided as a result of the establishment of the Reform Movement's Religious Action Center (RAC) in Washington, D.C. The newly formed RAC would quickly become the Jewish voice in the Washington political arena,[22] though its stated functions also included "serving the UAHC by supplying materials that are best researched in Washington, which would suggest programs of education and action for the local congregations; housing a library on Judaism and social action for study by government personnel and other interested persons; setting up seminars and institutes; and providing pertinent Jewish religious information to requesting agencies and individuals within government and non-government spheres."[23]

During the next decade, the CSA would see a major decline in activity and support, as it was weakened by its long battles over racial discrimination and Vietnam protests, and

[21] Foster, 56.
[22] Foster, 76.
[23] Foster, 66.

backlash in the form of black anti-Semitism, among other factors. As the American public looked to a world that was more stable, it turned its attention away from civil rights and towards more conservative viewpoints. Reform Jews followed this majority trend and the CSA limped along for years without the same confidence and assuredness it had enjoyed in the past.[24]

However, throughout the next few decades, the CSA found new issues and new ways of engaging Reform Jews. The Reform Movement took yet another look at its social justice platform in 1976, the centenary anniversary of the establishment of the Conference.[25] Until the 1970s, the horrors of the Holocaust had been largely unspoken. This new platform alluded to this tragedy and other Jewish-specific social justice needs as a necessary consideration in terms of attention and resources. But it also reflected a deep desire to be involved in working for justice on a universal level. In synagogues and youth groups across the United States, committees for social action and social justice continued their work with varying degrees of tenacity and effectiveness. They were guided by the CSA and inspired by the RAC as they continued to apply the teachings of Reform Judaism to their civic and political engagement.

Throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and into this past decade, the Reform movement has been involved in helping to rescue the Jews of the former Soviet Union, as well as standing up for the rights of gays and lesbians to marry. They have taken a stand against capital punishment, as well as lobbied for legislation for comprehensive health reform. Leaders

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[24] Foster, 90.

[25] This is the "Centenary Perspective, San Francisco, 1976" version of Reform Judaism's social justice platform, produced by the CCAR for a third time in its history. "Until the recent past our obligations to the Jewish people and to all humanity seemed congruent. At times now these two imperatives appear to conflict. We know of no simple way to resolve such tensions. We must, however, confront them without abandoning either of our commitments. A universal concern for humanity unaccompanied by a devotion to our particular people is self-destructive; a passion for our people without involvement in humankind contradicts what the prophets have meant to us. Judaism calls us simultaneously to universal and particular obligations."

such as Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, understood the need to make explicit the connection between Jewish study and tradition and social justice:

> "Serious Jewish study inevitably leads to the soup kitchen; that serious prayer, among other vital things, is a way of preparing to do battle with injustice, that social justice without being grounded in text, without a sense of God's presence, is ephemeral and unsustainable. The heart of the argument is that there is no such thing as 'Social Action Judaism,' that the thread of social justice is so authentically and intricately woven into the many-colored fabric we call Judaism that if you seek to pull that thread out, the entire fabric unravels, that the Judaism that results is distorted, is neutered, is rendered aimless."[26]

These leaders see, now more than ever before, that one of Reform Judaism's greatest strengths is its ability to work inside and outside of the Jewish world for the benefit of those in need. The tension between those who thought Jews should focus solely on the justice issues involving other Jews and those who took the more universalistic view of justice work continues to some degree into the present. But it is clear from the increased visibility and capacity of organizations such as the RAC, American Jewish World Service, and Avodah that Reform and, more generally, younger non-Orthodox American Jewry (and a small part of younger Orthodox Jewry) leans towards more progressive social views,[27] including a universalistic over particularistic mentality. For many Reform Jews today, especially young, involved Reform Jews, the questions posed in the late 50s/early 60s have been satisfactorily answered: yes, Reform Judaism has principles that can guide our thinking on current social issues and, yes, a Reform Jewish voice should exist within the political world in Washington and in our local communities.

One of Reform Judaism's greatest strengths is its ability to work inside and outside of the Jewish world for the benefit of those in need.

[26] Saperstein, Rabbi David. www.rac.org. You can find out more about current issues addressed by the RAC by going to its website.
[27] Reboot. OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era (2003): 7.

Currently, a growing number of Jewish organizations are taking the prophetic word seriously, through organizations like the Reform Movement's Just Congregations, an organization that trains and supports religious leaders in employing the community organizing model to achieve justice in their communities, and newest reincarnation of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism.[28] They tackle local issues such as fixing up a neighborhood park, as well as national and international issues like "human rights, world peace, civil liberties, religious freedom, famine, poverty, and intergroup relations, as well as other major societal concerns."[29]

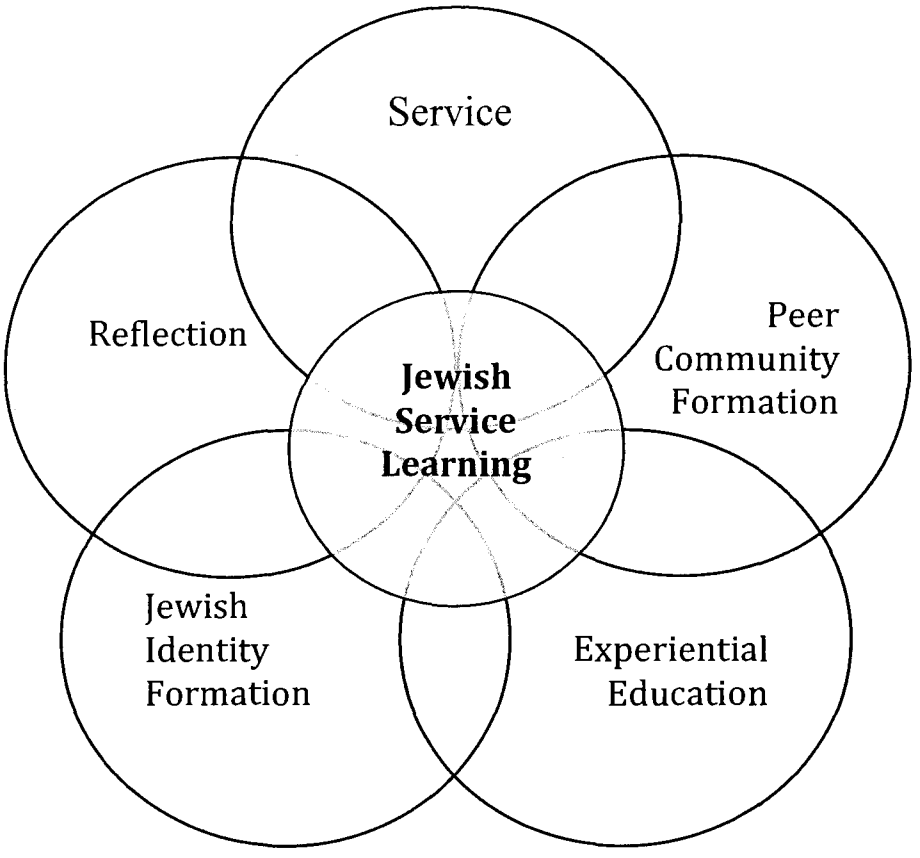
Therefore, Jewish Service Learning as a trend should find a natural home within the Reform Movement, as it also seeks to tackle issues within the context of Jewish study, prayer, community, and sacred encounters. JSL circumvents some of the more polarized issues that face social justice work, such as the issue of one small body of leaders taking sides on an issue in the name of the entire Reform movement. While this technique has its place in the world of politics, it can sometimes turn other Jews off to the important work of social justice in general. Jewish service learning, however, places the conversations and their related responses in the hands of local Jewish communities. This allows more Jews to enter into the conversation without turning them off before they arrive to the table. It speaks to the current generation of Jews in universal terms, yet addresses questions particular to Jews

[28] These groups are loosely guided by the newest set of social justice principles laid out by the CCAR: A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism, Pittsburgh, 1999. We bring Torah into the world when we strive to fulfill the highest ethical mandates in our relationships with others and with all of God's creation. Partners with God in *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, we are called to help bring nearer the messianic age. We seek dialogue and joint action with people of other faiths in the hope that together we can bring peace, freedom and justice to our world. We are obligated to pursue *tzedek*, justice and righteousness, and to narrow the gap between the affluent and the poor, to act against discrimination and oppression, to pursue peace, to welcome the stranger, to protect the earth's biodiversity and natural resources, and to redeem those in physical, economic and spiritual bondage. In so doing, we reaffirm social action and social justice as a central prophetic focus of traditional Reform Jewish belief and practice. We affirm the mitzvah of *tzedakah*, setting aside portions of our earnings and our time to provide for those in need. These acts bring us closer to fulfilling the prophetic call to translate the words of Torah into the works of our hands.

[29] www.urj.org/socialaction

along the way. It assumes that Judaism has a great deal to say about current events and issues in the non-Jewish world, for the benefit of Jews and non-Jews alike. Through JSL, Reform Jews can continue their deeply held conviction that Jews can be אור לגוים, *a light unto the nations*.

DEFINING THE TERM "JEWISH SERVICE LEARNING"



The field of secular service learning began in the mid-1980s with the establishment of organizations like Campus Compact and Youth Service America, whose mission was to spur national service efforts among youth. Currently, most colleges and universities incorporate service learning in their curricula, and some departments require at least one course; for example, Tulane made a service learning course part of the required core curriculum in the fall of 2008.[30] No one knows how many students participate in secular service learning nationwide, but 1.2 million students and 22,000 community organizations are involved in

[30] Strom, Stephanie. "Does Service Learning Really Help?." *New York Times* 29 December 2009: 3. Web. 18 Jan 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/03/education/edlife/03service-t.html?pagewanted=1&emc=eta1>.

programs with grants from the Corporation for National and Community Service, a government agency that is perhaps the largest funder of programs.[31]

Taking cues from the secular world, Jewish service learning is a new and relevant tool in the task of education and identity building within the Jewish world. Jewish service learning is defined as direct service that responds to community needs with structured Jewish and secular learning and time for reflection within a community of peers, all of which are placed in a rich context of Jewish education and values.[32] JSL can be understood as the confluence of many components, the five major of which are displayed in the graphic above. Jewish service learning can be broken down into these basic parts: experiential learning, peer community formation, reflection, Jewish identity, and service. These components can all act as points of access into the service learning experience; different participants will be drawn into a JSL trip through one or more of these factors. During the course of a trip, each component interacts with the others, having greater and lesser effects on the participants depending on their receptiveness and the quality of the component's framing or delivery on the trip. After the trip has concluded, each component can be assessed to observe the trip's impact on that factor in the participants' lives. If one or more of these factors has changed in a positive way, the trip can be regarded as successful. Therefore, not only do these components act as motivational factors, they might also be used as measurable factors in order to gauge the success of a JSL trip.

JSL is direct service that responds to community needs with Jewish and secular learning and time for reflection within a community of peers, all of which are placed in a rich context of Jewish education and values.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Irie 2. This definition is based on the only complete survey of Jewish service learning currently in existence.

Although each JSL trip differs depending on the needs of the participants, research shows that similar amounts of time are spent on each component during an average trip.[33] In terms of the service, the participant is challenged to see him or herself as a Jewish actor involved in the issue, as both a participant in the system that causes the problem as well as a part of the solution. The participant engages in activities that help, in small part, to relieve the severity of the issue. This takes up the bulk of the time in the current model of a JSL experience at approximately 60%.[34] Interspersed with the service is Jewish learning and structured self-reflection, which serves to frame the experience within a Jewish context and to explicitly connect the service to Jewish values (occupying 21% of the participants' time[35]). In addition, the participant learns about the issue with which he or she is involved, through lectures and tours of the areas in which they are serving (occupying 12% of the participants' time[36]). In doing so, the participant begins to view him or herself as part of the larger world in addition to acting in that world as a Jew. Thus, Jewish service learning becomes a porthole through which young Jews learn more about their identities as Jewish individuals, as members of the Jewish community, and as a part of their local, national, and global community.

Jewish service learning can be organized in a multitude of ways to fit various timeframes and levels of intensity. It can be immersive and involve traveling long distances to reach isolated communities, such as the American Jewish World Service (AJWS) trips that can last from one week to one year. Short-term (1-3 weeks) programs see the most participants, followed by medium-term (1-3 months) and long-term programs (10 months – 1

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[33] Irie 11. The following percentages apply to immersive, university-age Jewish service learning programs from 2007 through 2008.
[34] Irie 11.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

year)[37] at this point. In addition, those programs with service sites in the United States enjoy the most participants, followed by Israel and then other international destinations.[38] Service learning can also be episodic and local, such as a synagogue Mitzvah Day that lasts just a few hours. Or, it can be periodic, such as the Jewish Funds for Justice religious school curriculum in which students visit a home for the elderly every other week and study Jewish texts together with the residents on the alternate weeks for an entire school year. Each of these models is appropriate for different times, places, participants, and available resources, making Jewish service learning a dynamic experiential learning option.

The goals of JSL programs are to "strengthen the life-long connection to Jewish communal life within an age cohort who places a high value on social justice and community service."

The goals of JSL programs are to "strengthen the life-long connection to Jewish communal life within an age cohort who places a high value on social justice and community service."[39] This process enhances the participant's sense of connection to the Jewish people and seeks to bring about a view of "commitments to service and social change as core parts of his or her Jewish identity."[40] JSL also helps participants make a distinction between their American values and their Jewish values, which they are mostly unable to do at this time in history.[41] This distinction helps them to sharpen the definition of their Jewish identities by calling those values into action and then identifying them immediately in reflection sessions.

In order to accomplish these lofty goals, we must first get a better idea of how the

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[37] Irie 10.
[38] ibid.
[39] Chertok, Fern, Nicole Samuel. "Learning to Do Good: Evaluation of UJA-Federation of New York's Break New Ground Jewish Service Learning Initiative." *Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies* Brandeis University October 2008 5. Web. 20 April 2009. <http://ir.brandeis.edu/bitstream/handle/10192/23070/BNGFinal11%2011%2008.pdf?sequence=1>.
[40] Chertok 29.
[41] Reboot. "Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam..." Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices (2005): 29. Web. 20 Jan 2010.

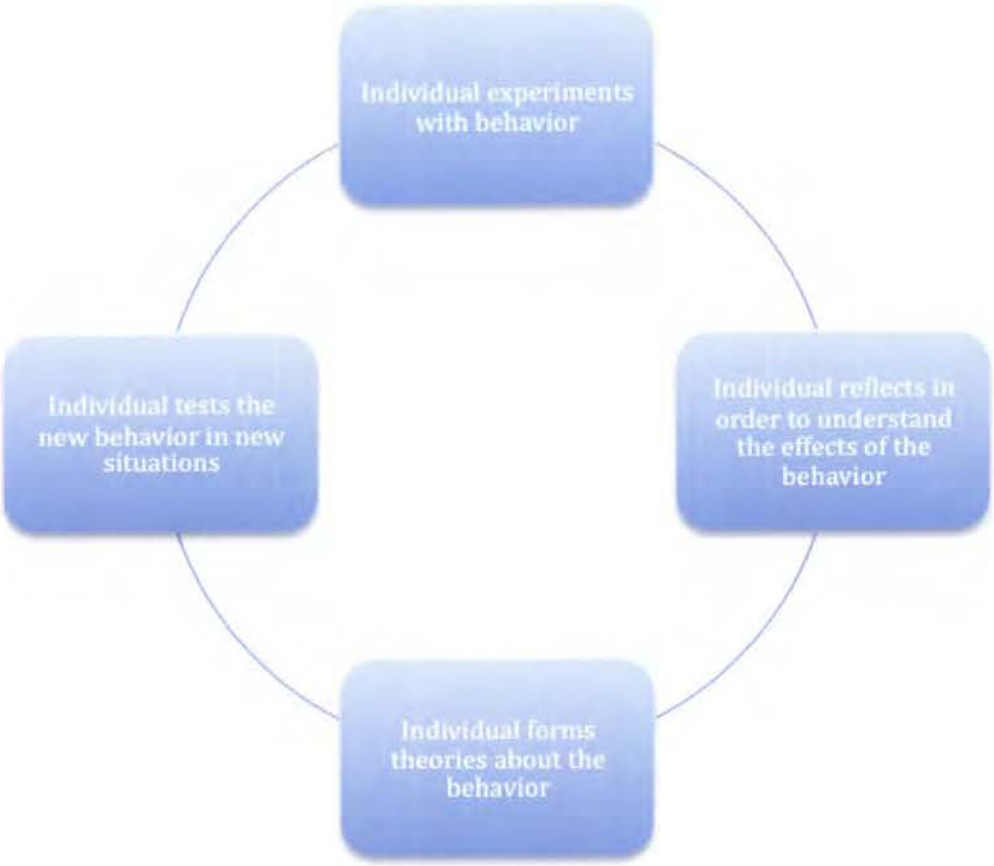
components of Jewish service learning – experiential education, peer community formation, reflection, Jewish identity, and service – work individually. Only then can we understand better how they work together to affect participants on multiple levels.

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

A. Experiential Education on a Cognitive Level

Since the time of John Dewey, educators have theorized that one of the best ways of learning about a subject is by experiencing the subject first hand. This idea has been the motivating factor for field trips to museums and show-and-tells that create memorable lessons for the students. Many models have been created to explain the reasons for its success. David Kolb's model of experiential learning offers a clear explanation of this process. Kolb, a professor of organizational behavior at Weatheread School of Management, created his model out of four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts, and testing in new situations.[42] Kolb (1975) argues, "the learning cycle can begin at any one of the four points – and that it should really be approached as a continuous spiral." However, the model suggests that the learning process begins with the individual experimenting with a particular behavior and then acting on that behavior in a given situation. Next, the individual seeks to understand the effects of the behavior so as to determine the possibility of replicating it. In this way, we generalize our learning in order to apply the general principle in another concrete experience.

[42] "David A. Kolb on Experiential Learning." *Infed Search*. 2005. Web. 4 March 2009. <http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-explrn.htm>.

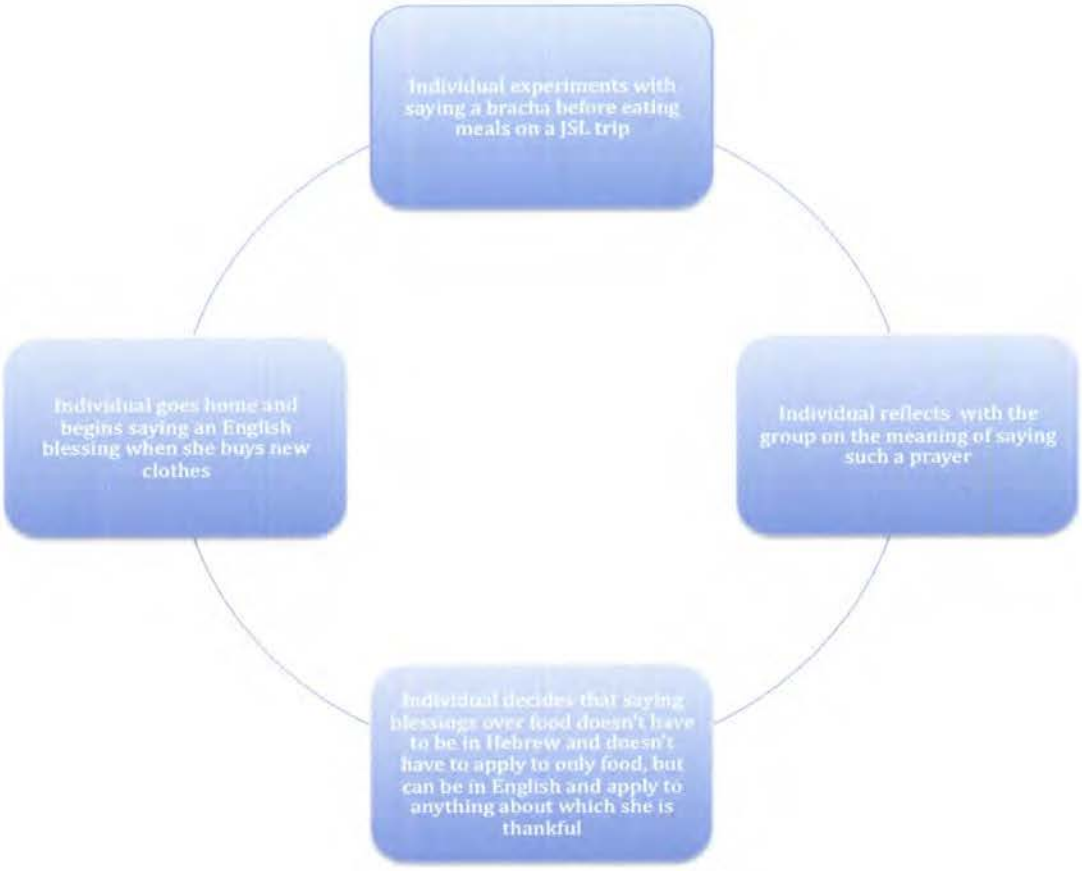


Since Kolb proposed his theory, other researchers[43] have found Kolb's cycle of experiential learning too simplistic, citing that the learning cycle involves many more multidirectional influences such as emotion, action, and thought/reflection, in addition to the learning. The experiential learning cycle should also include some place of stasis in a part of the person's whole; only part of the person changes while the majority of the person remains the same.[44] (For a more complete picture of how experiential learning functions, see the graph in Appendix B.)

Still, I believe that such a model is helpful in understanding the mechanics of experiential learning for JSL: On a service learning trip, the participant spends the majority

[43] see Jarvis, P. *Adult Learning in the Social Context*. London: Croom Helm, 1987.
[44] Jarvis, Peter. "Religious Experience and Experiential Learning." *Religious Education*. 103.5 (Fall 2007): 553-569. 559. See Appendix B for Jarvis' more complex model.

of his time simply experiencing moments of interaction between himself and the world. The group takes time each day to observe and reflect on their own behaviors, assumptions, and reactions to their unfamiliar surroundings. They share with one another their perception of self and of the situation, enlarging the number of permutations that each person might have of the situation. They form abstract concepts from this reflection in combination with their Jewish learning to form new ideas of themselves and the world. The participant then tests the new behavior through continued service soon thereafter, reinforcing the new behavior. Depending on the quality of the experiences and learning, an individual could gain many insights about him or herself as a result of these experiences. This, in turn, can have major effects on the Jewish identity of a participant (as discussed more fully in the section of this paper entitled "Jewish Identity"). If a participant engages repeatedly in a given behavior, each time with the recognition that it is understood as a 'Jewish' act, the participant will begin to assign him or herself a stronger Jewish identity as it emerges in the forefront of her consciousness.



One example of this phenomenon was the reinterpretation of Jewish ritual in the context of a JSL trip, as related by practitioner and rabbi Jill Jacobs.[45] College students, many of whom indicated that they did not have strong Jewish identities, offered some kind of appreciation for food before and after each meal as a part of the group's ritual life. Whether it was the traditional formula of *motzi* or the reading of a poem or a guided meditation wherein they consider all of the different people involved in bringing them food, the participants always gave thanks for the food. The idea was that, when they returned home, they would have learned the behavior of giving thanks, found it more comfortable and meaningful, and thus had the tools to reinterpret the tradition to apply to their lives. Rabbi

[45] Rabbi Jill Jacobs. Interview 30 March 2009.

Jacobs reports that some students actually continued their giving of thanks regularly for at least a month, while others offered their prayers on consecutive *Shabbatot* for two to three months following the trip. But as with many elements of the service learning experience, further research is needed to determine the enduring impact of Jewish learning and experiential education during a Jewish service learning experience. A longitudinal study following service learning alumni might ask some of these essential and engaging questions: If participants offered thanks before each meal in some way, how often do they do so upon their return? Are memories of the trip triggered when they hear the Birkat HaMazon recited at a Hillel Shabbat dinner? How often must the participants engage in this type of behavior during the trip or afterwards for it to become a regular piece of their Jewish practice?

B. Experiential Learning on an Affective Level

Another example of experiential learning during a JSL trip includes learning on a different level. During the course of a JSL experience, participants do not just learn cognitive functions that lead to new behaviors. They also gain a deeper ability to empathize. In this example, one participant entered the JSL trip to Yosemite with certain prejudices about the people being served. She was sure that there was something wrong with someone who lived so far into the country that it took him over thirty minutes to get to the closest grocery store. "There must be something weird about him," she reported to have thought to herself. After working with this man for a week, helping him clear trails and clean campsites, she reflected on the fact that, though it was a strange feeling, she wished that the stranger was Jewish like her. What did this comment mean? After working with him for a week and seeing what he sees every day, she wished that he could understand her better as well. In other words, her facilitator reflected to her, she had been able to stand in his shoes

for a short time. In the process, she came to respect him, his work, and his lifestyle. As a result, she cared about him and wanted him to care about her in return.

The development of empathy is becoming more and more crucial to maintaining a healthy society. In our postmodern world, researchers Evending and Huffaker report, "we are daily confronted with cultural and religious pluralism. Diversity surrounds us, confronts us, and ecologically nurtures us." Our increased awareness of this diversity, on the one hand, has compelled us to respond to a greater diversity of voices finally emerging from those distant places, and from the "silence of oppression."[46] On the other hand, we are also forced to consider the relativity of our truths and their effects on the world, decentering us and causing us to reexamine our identities. Communities of the twenty-first century have to find ways to recenter our religious adherents within identities that seem relevant to our time and that speak in a language that reflects the world around us. But we must find ways to "honor the integrity of our differences, [and] empathy will be an essential quality for building bridges of understanding."[47]

From their research, they understand empathy as "one's ability to take the role of another in order to understand the others feelings, perspectives, and ideas. Empathy is an appreciative perception of the state and experience of another, including emotions and desires as well as thoughts."[48] In this light, Jewish service learning is not only an exercise in behavioral modification, but also as a powerful tool in educating participants in empathy. Facilitators "have an obligation to both challenge and support"[49] participants to

Jewish service learning is a powerful tool in educating participants in empathy.

[46] Everding and Huffaker, 413.
[47] Everding and Huffaker, 413.
[48] Everding and Huffaker, 415.
[49] Everding and Huffaker, 416.

develop their sense of empathy. Participants get the opportunity to connect with people with whom they are normally not in close contact. The experience of empathy, in combination with the reflection and Jewish learning that emphasizes themes of empathy, justice, obligation, etc., functions not only as a catalyst for the adoption of new behaviors upon the participants' return after the trip (i.e. saying *brachot* before a meal). But the combination of service, empathy, reflection, and Jewish learning can also function as a catalyst for new attitudes towards other strangers the participants may encounter after a trip. The participants can transfer their newly learned regard for the "other" to the less fortunate of their own communities or of the world, making them more inclined to act on issues of social justice as they grow older.

C. Jewish Learning

While most Jewish participants coming from Reform synagogues do not join a service learning trip because they are drawn by the opportunity to learn Jewish texts, the formal study of Jewish texts is an important part of the service learning experience. It is often through these texts that Judaism is connected most concretely to the service for which the participants are volunteering. If presented in an engaging and non-threatening manner, it can also be a first introduction to Jewish texts that seem relevant to participants' lives. The trick is that, for most participants, the text studies must be kept to a minimum for them to remain open to their presentation. Especially for Reform participants coming from text-light backgrounds, the overload of too many Jewish texts within a reflection session or within a trip as a whole can feel overwhelming and intimidating.[50] For college students, and even

[50] Chertok and Samuel, 34.

more so for high school students, the text study in a service learning context can feel tedious and disconnected from the work.[51] I would recommend two solutions for addressing these challenges. The first lies in creating the right balance of Jewish text study and personal reflection for use during the reflection sessions during the trip. This balance will ensure that the participants are exposed and introduced to Jewish texts without losing the organic, community-building conversations that ultimately lend an authentic voice to the texts. The second lies in the training of quality facilitators before the trip that know how to engage the participants during both the formal reflection times and the informal moments throughout the work itself. The facilitator must understand Judaism to a degree that he or she can translate it to the students in a language both authentic to the text as well as to the participants. Facilitators must make the connection explicit and ensure that all participants draw a direct correlation to their Jewish learning from the experience.

But text study is not the only Jewish experience during a service learning trip. Most of the trips continue through a given week into the weekend, allowing for both the preparation and eating of meals together as well as the communal celebration of Shabbat. Some of the most "memorable moments" for participants is this experience living in Jewish communal life.[52] In an ideal setting, participants get the chance to negotiate intradenominational living in terms of deciding how to pray and what the standards should be of Kashrut. As a direct outcome, they can ask questions of their Jewish counterparts and learn more about the range of Jewish tradition. As reported in the focus groups at the end of this paper, the experience of living with Jews of different denominations was enriching; it became self-revelatory and educational for many participants. But Chertok and Samuel's

[51] Ibid.
[52] Chertok and Samuel, 35.

evaluation on the New York UJA-Federation service learning initiative revealed that many facilitators are not equipped with the knowledge or maturity to properly field religious questions or guide the group through a process that led to harmonious decision-making.[53] In this case as in the one above, the solution lies in the training of quality facilitators who can help students negotiate these discussions into fruitful learning and new religious experiences for the group.

Ideas for making Jewish learning more effective during a service learning trip include: taking texts to the work sites and learning during a lunch break; allowing students to reinterpret traditional Jewish prayers their own language; and creating moments of Jewish meditation in natural settings in which they can individually explore their own Jewish spirituality. The "value-added" of Jewish service learning trips over secular service learning trips is the attention given to Jewish life, culture, and values. Bringing them directly to the work site is an opportunity that should not be missed.

[53] Ibid.

PEER COMMUNITY FORMATION

If the development of empathy helps us to accept the differences between "us" and "them" while remaining non-threatening to our individual identities, then the same interpersonal dynamic applies to the cohesion of a community. The bonding of a group "is not dependent upon identifying some 'out group' or creating a common enemy."[54] As the research above shows, individuality is developed and established through partaking in a diversity of communities and relationships. The same has been shown to be true in terms of peer community formation. "Research in cooperative learning clearly shows that group identity... may actually be diminished by intergroup enmity (Kohn 1990, 147-148)."[55]

On the other hand, groups that work together and participate in positive, empathy-building experiential learning create strong group identities. They develop what Etienne Wenger would call a "community of practice." His basic idea is that human knowing is essentially a social act.[56] We learn based on our social relationships, especially those people at own developmental stage. We adopt the behaviors of the community of which we feel a part. Jewish service learning experiences offer prime opportunities for seeing this behavior in action, as the Jewish learning and self-reflection are done more often than not as a group. During the course of the trip, participants learn best from one another, as participants repeat newly learned beliefs and behaviors for one another as they practice their new identities and behaviors. One participant can explain a concept in language and models accessible to another participant in his or her

Groups that work together and participate in positive, empathy-building experiential learning create "communities of practice."

[54] Everding and Huffaker, 429.
[55] Everding and Huffaker, 429.
[56] For more information on "communities of practice," see Wenger, Etienne. Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 45.

age cohort, thereby making the concepts acceptable to that peer. In turn, the learning can be sustained through relationships that often endure for months and years after the trip. In terms of the long-term impacts, the most highly ranked aspect of most trips is the friendships that were built. Research shows that when young Jews engage in peer-to-peer experiences, they are more likely to engage in Jewish life in ways that are meaningful to them.[57]

Though the experience of a tight-knit peer group can be transformative and educational on its own merit, research also shows that the group benefits from a strong facilitator that acts as a mentor for the group. Researcher Sharon Deloz Parks (1986), for instance, contends, "as young adults develop in their faith and spirituality, they need images and models of mature, responsible, admirable adults to imitate and incorporate into their own adulthood."[58] Young adults need advocates, guarantors, resource people, and reflective counselors to accompany them during their spiritual development, to help them mature, and to find their way as they leave behind childhood in order to become adults. "They need wise friends and mentors who can make the strange suddenly seem familiar, and the familiar suddenly seem strange."[59]

This is the task of a successful trip facilitator, lending just enough stability to the group that they feel comfortable leaving their comfort zones, while adding just enough agitation to the group to prevent a lackadaisical attitude towards the serious challenges that face those that they serve. In addition, this leader can become an important role model for

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[57] Miller, Josh. "Other Orgs Can Learn from Post Birthright Peer-to-Peer Success." *The Fundermentalist: Keeping a Third Eye on Jewish Philanthropy.* 6 Jan 2010. Web. 20 Jan 2010. http://blogs.jta.org/philanthropy/article/2010/01/06/1010048/guest-post-other-orgs-can-learn-from-post-birthright-peer-to-peer-success2.

[58] Hindman, David. "From Splintered Lives to Whole Persons: Facilitating Spiritual Development in College Students." *Religious Education* 97.2 (Fall 2002): 165-184. 168.

[59] Hindman, 168.

the participants, as long as the facilitator lives by the values he or she espouses.[60] Participants can see through an impostor leader quickly, as they are constantly looking to the leader for cues on how to react and behave. When the cues do not coincide with the values taught by the facilitator, both the facilitator and the values are lost to the participants. However, when the facilitator behaves according to the values he or she espouses, and shares his or her struggles with the values when they arise, the participants are likely to align their own behavior closer with that of the person they admire.

[60] Rose, Daniel. "The Potential of Role-Model Education." *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education*. 2004. 20 Jan 2010. www.infed.org/biblio/role_model_education.htm.

REFLECTION

> "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education that stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the person gifted with reason but no morals. We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration but worthy objects upon which to concentrate."[61]

The words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are as relevant now as they were in the 1960s. The only way to develop the morals of an individual is to encourage a habit of self-reflection, a habit not easily formed in the fast-paced, highly-demanding world of our Jewish youth. In an era in which even third graders have a few hours of homework each night, the time needed for effective and honest reflection is difficult to find. Jewish service learning builds this habit into each day of the trip, in order to think critically about the tradition, the services being offered by the participants, its effect on those being served, and its impact on the self. Reflection can involve internal struggle on the part of the participant. But it need not be a struggle to develop for the facilitator.

Researcher and church leader David Hindman, who has worked extensively with college students in the development of their spiritual lives, builds a framework for reflection that is based on the following four simple questions: Who are you? Who do you want to be? What do you do? What are your deepest hungers? "Provided with paper, pencil, quiet, time, and music to drown out other background noises, the responses are sometimes quite profound and honest. They are windows onto the personal spirituality of the participants."[62] As reflected in Hindman's framework, developing a guide for facilitation of a reflection session need not involve complicated questioning or probing. It is more a process of

[61] King, Jr., Martin Luther. *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Selected by Coretta Scott King*. New York. Newmarket Press. (1983): 41, 67.
[62] Hindman, 165.

allowing the time and space for the participants to uncover those thoughts and feelings that already exist, unacknowledged, inside of the participant. The questions, which could be developed from a Jewish text or simply asked as a part of the everyday reflection session, should be open-ended and without a preconceived answer. This allows the participant to discover feelings and thoughts within themselves, advancing the difficult but gratifying process of self-realization. Facilitators who wish to assist in developing a practice of reflection in their participants will provide occasions for "space and time to go deeply into the meaning of their relationships, their values, and commitments."[63]

The process of reflection does not just function as a mode of greater self-realization. It can also function to assist the deepening of the meaning of the participant's experience as a Jew. What gives meaning to our lives is being connected to something beyond our own ego. This is essentially a spiritual experience. Although there is plenty of talk in the culture of the United States about religion, most Jewish youth tend to restrict religion to Shabbat or the occasional Jewish holiday. They would likely identify with Jones' statement that "finding our life's meaning and purpose have little to do with creeds, rituals, or commandments." [64] So many of our youth, therefore, fail to see that the search for deeper connections, which echoes through our most intimate personal struggles, is essentially a Jewish spiritual quest. The experience of Jewish service learning can connect the participants to a greater reality that gives meaning and purpose to their lives. Participants may chose to connect this "greater reality" to their personal theology. They may chose to see themselves simultaneously as a small yet significant part of our incredibly complex and interrelated global community. In either case, JSL offers participants an experience of transcendence beyond their pre-trip view

[63] Hindman, 175.
[64] Jones, James W. "In the Middle of This Road We Call our Life." *The Courage to Search for Something More.* San Francisco, Harper (1995): 2, 25

of the world. It offers them a glimpse into a bigger picture, in which the world functions only partly by chance and, more often, as a result of the actions of individuals and communities. Through JSL, the participants learn to see themselves as important and potent actors on the world stage, with a stake in the outcome of the play. This acting on the world stage can become a part of the participants' understanding of "what Jews do" and the desired outcome of the play can develop out of a Jewish understanding of the vision for a world redeemed.

JSL can connect participants to a greater reality that gives meaning and purpose to their lives.

JEWISH IDENTITY

> "It is a social scientific truism that social, religious, and cultural identities are not simply established facts. They are produced and reproduced within a matrix of complex social, cultural, political, religious, and economic traditions and realities. Identity is embedded in life."[65]

As Rabbi David Ellenson suggests, a person's identity is an amalgamation of different experiences and influences that grants a person the ability to move in and out of many different groups with ease. People living in the modern world are marked by what W.E.B. Dubois called a "double consciousness" that refers to the sense of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (Dubois 1965, 215 and 218). This "double consciousness" arises as a result of two modern phenomena: a). the fact that the boundaries between cultures are perhaps at their most permeable in all of history and b). the knowledge that identity is very much a social construct. The second of these points is the most interesting, because it is the one upon which Jewish educators and funders can leave their mark. As Rabbi Ellenson observes, "People are no longer born and socialized into a community as if by fate. Rather, identity – including religious identity – now becomes in large measure a matter of negotiation, an expression of choice among competing modes of identity, for individuals and communities alike. There is a self-consciousness, a self-recognition and self-awareness concerning the role played by society and culture in the establishment of both personal and communal identity that was absent from the world of our ancestors."[66] If stakeholders in the future of Jewish communal life want to cast their vote in the identity choices of their Jewish youth, they are going to need to speak to their multiple identities in order to be compelling.

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[65] Ellenson, David. "Interreligious Learning and the Formation of Jewish Religious Identity." *Religious Education* 91.4 (Fall 1996): 480-491. 480.
[66] Ellenson, 482.

A. X-Gen, Y-Gen, and Millennials: Well-Suited for JSL

Today, we know that generational differences often help to define the Jewish identities of the Jews growing up within that generation. The formative cohort experiences are those that we share as a part of a generation.[67] The contexts of time and place create the habits that define and differentiate generations; they are the unifying experiences through which each us views the world. The formative and distinctively American experiences shared with cohorts are the filter through which an American youth interprets all subsequent experiences. Jewish life has always been impacted by the culture surrounding its adherents; twenty-first century America, with its many unique characteristics, is no exception.

As compared with the Baby Boomer Generation (those born between 1945 and 1969), the so-called X-Generation (born 1970 to 1979) as well as the Y-Generation or the Millenials (born 1980 and after), "grew up with uncertainty, such as the recession of the 1980's, the dangers of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, the increase in drug usage and its surrounding drug culture," [68] and events such as 9/11. They "live for today" because they do not feel they should count on the future. They are concerned with risk because they grew up seeing the good and bad in all things; living means choosing between things that are both good and bad. Diversity is definitely a positive value, because they were raised around it as a result of mere demography in late 20th/early 21st century America. They are also, therefore, more resistant to labels. They are sophisticated about information gathering and tend to be skeptical. They like to mix the old with the new, the familiar with the unfamiliar; in doing

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[67] Smith, J. Walker, and Ann Clurman. *Rocking the Ages: The Yankelovich Report on Generational Marketing.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997. 6.

[68] Smith and Clurman. 77-105. The materials found in *The Yankelovich Report* seem to represent other studies on Generations X and Y, including Jews of this generation (see the *Reboot* studies listed in the Annotated Bibliography).

so, they are not trying to foment cultural revolution. Instead they just want to find the extreme edge of what is already there. They want honesty and they want fun. They value pragmatism, which means hedging their bets and having a back up plan. They value being modular, so that they can work many different facets of identity and activity into their lives in many different ways. They value success by working smarter, not harder. They have a need to be protective and they have a need to create small, often peer-based community with distinct ethics and characters more than other generations. We also cannot underestimate their level of sophistication with technology and the ease with which they can access information and communicate electronically. We should also not forget how this dynamic changes the nature of their social interactions, which allows for instant communication and the ability to organize themselves quickly and effectively but which often lacks real intimacy.[69]

With the coming of age of these Generation Xers and Yers, American Jewish life is responding accordingly, as these Jews are taking communal life to a different level of intensity and creativity. A number of them want to create a Jewish world that speaks to them as Jews of the 21st century, seeking to synthesize their secular ideas and culture with that of the Jewish world.

B. Other Applicable Generational Models of Jewish Community

Before Jewish service learning appeared as a serious option on the Jewish programmatic horizon, other models of effective, intentional, peer-based Jewish communities existed, include Israel trips, Jewish summer camp, and small, unaffiliated *minyanim*. These

[69] Smith and Clurman. *Rocking the Ages: The Yankelovich Report on Generational Marketing*; the last sentence ends the summary of data from pages 77-105.

programs have seen a great deal of success in creating generations of proud Jews who loved being Jewish together. But these were private Jewish gatherings, particular to Jewish youth, which were difficult to explain to non-Jewish friends and peers. These models were lacking one essential piece – a deep connection to the participants' public American identities. Although JSL is a relatively new method of responding to this need, already there are many innovative organizations outside of Jewish summer camp and Israel trips that are interested in promoting certain elements of Jewish service learning, knitting together Jewish identity more tightly with American identity. The publication *Slingshot* highlights the new Jewish organizations that are pursuing distinctly American, cutting edge ways to engage young Jews. In 2006, Slingshot reviewed fifty such organizations. Of these, the four areas most heavily represented were those organizations involved with the following programming areas: community building, Jewish education, leadership development and social justice. Most of the programs represented some degree of synthesis between Jewish and American identity, whether it was a Jewish hip hop production company like JDubb or a Jewish community organizing group like Progressive Jewish Alliance. They allow Jews to engage with other Jews as well as non-Jews; they function based on Jewish values shared by Jews and non-Jews; they see themselves as a part of the Jewish and non-Jewish world, responding to issues in both arenas. Jewish service learning is in a unique position to provide opportunities for all of these elements to exist in combination; it is what people in their 20's and 30's are already programming for themselves and the community.

Another non-profit organization that represents the interests of young Jewish entrepreneurs is called *Reboot*. Founded in 2003, *Reboot* is a nonprofit organization based in New York City. *Reboot* events regularly take place in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver,

New York City and now an ever-growing number of other cities. Their goal is "to develop the mechanisms and media that allow anyone anywhere to 'reboot' among themselves and their peers."[70] *Reboot* hosts interesting, alternative Jewish thinkers and publications that are relevant to young Jews today. In one article published through *Reboot*, Steven Cohen and Ari Kelman reflect on the need for these new vehicles for Jewish thought and expression of Jewish identity. They note that single American Jews in their 20's and 30's are very proud of their Jewish identities and surround themselves with Jewish friends, but remain the most unaffiliated Jews out there.[71] They are disillusioned by what they perceive to be their lackluster Jewish education, as well as feeling limited by the too few options for expressing their Judaism. Because they remain single later in life, the old methods of inclusion in the Jewish community through young children do not reach this demographic. With their extra time and money, many American Jews are inventing new communal outlets that reflect their individuality and commitment to living meaningful Jewish lives.[72]

> But what we are seeing is not the loss of Jewish practice in North America. We are seeing young people who want to build something new that follow a different vision of what an institution can be. These institutions will cater in a different way to the needs of American Jews for meaningful Jewish engagement. In so doing, they are not simply mimicking extant communal structures. They are building on the margins where people may think it strange to support ritual theater or a salon or a record label, but where the future of Jewish life is being built. [73]

Jewish service learning could be added to this list of new institutions as they seek to provide JSL experiences or partner with JSL providers. It could also provide a forum for gathering young Jewish thinkers and authors who will pave the way towards the future of Jewish identity and communal expression, based on justice and civic duty. If JSL succeeds,

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[70] www.rebooters.net
[71] Kelman, Ari, Steven Cohen. Uncoupled: An Overview | eJewish Philanthropy, www.rebooters.net
[72] Kelman, Ari. "Op-Ed: Young People Doing Jewish their Way." www.rebooters.net
[73] Ibid.

the communities that form as a result of these trips could become one of the communal model of the future.

C. Jewish Service Learning For Young Jews and Jewish Identity Development

Jewish service learning could become an effective platform for meaningful Jewish experiences because of the many points of access it allows for both the American identity as well as the Jewish identity of a participant. The generational characteristics X and Y seem in line with those required by participants of Jewish service learning. JSL appeals to people who are concerned with social justice, who feel comfortable enough with travel to visit third-world countries, and who appreciate intellectuality and a certain level of Jewish identity. JSL has appeal with participants who like to take risks by traveling to unfamiliar places and meeting new people while still having a modicum of control over their environment such as the type that an organized trip provides.[74] They appreciate getting to do something meaningful and helpful, which also speaks to their pragmatism, i.e. traveling for the purpose of doing good for the world and for having fun with friends. By doing so, they can learn more about the diversity of the world and how this diversity affects their personal lives. The modular nature of a trip is considered a positive, along with the identity with a certain community of peers. Both before and after the trip, their access to information about the places they travel and subjects about which they are interested is at their fingertips and can help enrich the experience. They can also use this technology to sustain the relationships built during such an experience.

[74] Bubis, Gerald. Interview. 23 January 2009.

One young masters student in Hebrew Union College's School of Jewish Communal Service, who was included in one of the focus group included later in the paper, commented on the appropriateness of JSL to the current generation involved with Hillels across America. With their extra time and money, they wanted to visit exotic places and experience other cultures, but they also wanted to hedge their bets when it came to safety. The solution for many participants (and many of their parents) was to send them with a Jewish group, perceived as being hyper-concerned about issues of safety. In addition, they wanted to experience the exotic, but they also wanted to be accomplishing something. They wanted to travel, but they also wanted to do something good for the world or build their resumes or test out possible career paths. This young professional, a JCSC in Hillel at the time, listened to the desires of her students and decided to plan a trip with American Jewish World Service to Thailand for three weeks of serving, learning, and traveling. The parents of the students were happy that their children would be safe with an American Jewish group. As could be expected generationally-speaking, the students were happy to be traveling while still contributing positively to the world and adding the trip to their resumes for various graduate programs. And they were certainly happy, reported the interviewee, that they were on a Jewish trip that seemed a little outside the norm. Because JSL is still located on the "margins" of Jewish institutional life, participants are attracted to its "out of the box" ways of connecting to Jewish life. They were excited to be leaders, organizing and embarking on a trip that was the first of its kind in this particular Hillel. They liked the feeling of being pioneers. All of the opportunities provided by Jewish service learning are effective because they tap into the American identities of these young Jews.

But when a young Jew goes on a JSL trip, he is also provided with first-hand experience about how to be a Jew in this changing world in a way he can understand and embrace. The participant gets an immediate opportunity to engage with the tradition by acting out many of its core values. The participant's understanding of his or herself can be transformed through "expanding, deepening, broadening, and enriching the person's understanding of...the 'other' and the traditions and shaping visions of the faith communities of which he or she is a part."[75] This, in turn, has an influence on participants' identity, as their experiences allow them to reintegrate Judaism into their lives in a different way, enabling them to bring their new knowledge to new experiences.

There are Jews among this generation who want to re-imagine their relationship to Judaism. While they are dissatisfied with the established Jewish community, they are not willing to give up entirely on the notion of creating a viable and meaningful community. Jewish service learning is therefore the combination of the impulse to help those who are less fortunate and the desire to make good on the claim of Judaism as relevant to the modern world. It also seeks to engage other young Jews in the building of their Jewish identities through the creation of their own new kind of Jewish community. This community is one of shared values and experience, accomplished in large part outside of the walls of the synagogue.

While Jewish service learning trips help to reinforce both American and Jewish identity, it can simultaneously serve to create a distinction between the two. [76] During the reflection sessions each day, participants can explore the nature of our Jewish obligation towards the stranger. An American identity might inform the participant towards a more

[75] Everding and Huffaker, 416.
[76] Reboot. *Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam... Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices.* 29.

individualistic mentality that positively stresses diversity. But a Jewish identity has a more community-focused approach, with great concern given to the quality of life for the most vulnerable of society. This is just one of many distinctions that might add nuance to the Jewish identity of a young person, which could help that person develop an awareness and a means of strengthening the American *and* the Jewish identity.

Of course, young people in twenty-first century America negotiate many more than just two identities. They also create identities dependent on their gender, sex, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, race, and much more. Identity is a complex process that involves the choosing of affiliation and the ability to move from one set of cultural and linguistic norms to another with speed and ease. Jewish service learning can help participants to better navigate these many identities through the development of empathy, self-reflection, and exposure to Jewish wisdom in direct connection with application. It can also add richness to a participant's identity by adding another dimension – that of someone who is committed to serving others.

SERVICE AND JEWISH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Rabbi Akiva taught that "Study is great because it leads to action."

Kiddushin 40b

This final component of JSL is service, and the increased interest in Jewish civics as a result. Civics is the word used to describe the array of rights and responsibilities of being a citizen in a given society.[77] This sense of commitment to the society is necessary for keeping the society functioning smoothly. When this breaks down completely, it endangers the society as a whole. Unfortunately, researchers are saying that American civic commitment is at an all-time low.[78] In Rabbi Sidney Schwarz's article "Renewing Jewish Life Through Jewish Civics," he argues that the Jewish community has followed the same pattern as that of non-Jewish Americans.[79] Jewish civics includes many rights and responsibilities, but is no better off than the non-Jewish population in terms of its regard for civic engagement. Rabbi Schwarz claims that American Jews are less involved in Jewish communal life than in all of our history in America.[80] Whether or not this statement is quantifiably true, a vast majority of young Jews are unengaged in Jewish life as they reach their 20s and 30s; the jury is still out on whether or not they will be back.

Young Jews today are less likely to support institutions that organize and mobilize the Jewish community, such as federations and community relation's counsels.[81] In short, fewer and fewer young Jews are becoming a part of the organized Jewish community and are

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[77] Schwarz, Rabbi Sid. "Renewing Jewish Life through Jewish Civics." *Panim*. Spring 2000. Journal of Jewish Communal Service. 185 4 April 2009 <http://www.panim.org/files/articles/renewing_jewish_life_through_jewish_civics.pdf>.
[78] Gardner, John. *National Renewal*. Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector, 1995.
[79] Schwarz, 187.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Schwarz, 190.

instead devoting their energies to rubrics outside of Jewish life.[82] Schwarz prescribes a good dose of Jewish civics to bring these non-affiliated Jews close to their tradition, thereby ensuring an active life in the Jewish political realm and that of the outside world.[83] Young Jews need to understand that membership in the Jewish community comes with benefits: "the privilege of feeling a part of a historical community of significance that still sets for itself the goal of transforming the world into a kingdom of righteousness."[84] At the same time, there are responsibilities that include being a part of Jewish communal life, even if today that means something different than it did a generation ago.

Taking on Jewish civics requires the individual to have some exposure to these rights and responsibilities. We can expose young Jews to Jewish civics in two ways: 1. by educating them towards these rights and responsibilities as Jews, such as the right to be a part of an ancient, proud, and unique people as well as the responsibility of learning its traditions and struggling with its requirements and 2. by engaging them in a wide range of Jewish life, including prayer, study, and social justice. We must tell the Jewish story – the story of Jewish commitment to other Jews around the world; the story of Jewish commitment to social justice; the story of the galaxy of Jewish institutions and organizations that still work for the benefit of fellow Jews and oppressed people around the world; and the stories from our collection of texts that serve as the ethical foundation of the Western world. Then, we must allow them to demonstrate, for themselves and each other, their willingness to live this incredible story. "It is critical to cultivate in young Jews a sense of responsibility for the issues and institutions that occupy the American public square," argues Schwarz, "as well as

[82] Ibid.
[83] Schwarz, 188.
[84] ibid.

the Jewish one."[85] Jewish service learning serves both of these functions – participants are learning *in conversation with* the actions they've chosen to take. It is one solution to teaching a sustainable sense of Jewish civics that is critical for the future health of Judaism. But what does it take to actually change the behavior of a young Jew?

In order to truly change the behavior of a participant, they must be given opportunities not only time to think, reflect, and dialogue, as has been cited. They will have a greater likelihood of becoming active in Jewish life if they are also given opportunities to act consistently with their thoughts. Service to one another and to the larger community allows students not only to think about justice, compassion, respect for life and other, but to act on their commitments to these virtues.[86] Growth and maturation may happen as participants give their time and energy to tutor a child, repair a home, prepare and serve a meal to a homeless person, or sit by the bed of a dying woman. When these acts are connected in authentic and meaningful ways to Jewish ideas, and when a facilitator mirrors the values being espoused, participants are drawn into conversation with their decisions in new ways.

The opportunity to serve itself works within the context of the experience of diversity to change the behavior of the participant. The diversity introduced by multiple others in the context of a service learning experience can be seen as a natural stimulus for maturation. "The more numerous and diverse the perspectives one has connected with, the broader the relational context, and the more enhanced will be the sense of being both connected to and empowered to respond to a larger 'human' reality."[87]

This type of behavioral modification is thought to exist on even the most basic biological level. When a participant enacts any new behavior, it actually has an effect on his

[85] Schwarz, 191.
[86] Hindman, 178.
[87] Everding and Huffaker, 424.

or her brain. A large body of neuroscience research in recent years suggests that the brain is in a constant state of structural and functional change throughout the lifetime of an individual. "This resiliency of the brain, appropriately denominated "brain plasticity," has brought about a fundamental change in our understanding and conceptualization of brain function. Surprisingly, a number of studies have shown that motor behavior, or physical action, are one of the most potent instigators of those changes." [88] The maturation and adaptation of the self through means of physical actions are very much in alignment with recent discoveries in the area of brain plasticity.[89] In other words, the research is saying that participants' are actually informing the characteristics that will define who they are by serving others. "It is not only that a person does because of what he or she is, but more importantly, that a person is and most notably, becomes, because of what he or she does." [90]

While research on the brain is mostly outside of the purview of this paper, it does reflect a basic premise offered by the Torah. Over and over in the Torah, we are commanded with the word לעשות, "to do." We are commanded "to do" Shabbat.[91] We are commanded "to do" what is just and right.[92] We are assured that, when we feel that we might not be able to understand the Torah, it is not too far away or too complicated to comprehend. Instead, we are asked "to do," in response to the Torah being in our mouths and in our hearts.[93] The Torah exists in order to urge us to act in this world, responding to the needs that surround us.

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[88] Drubach, Daniel. "Judaism, Brain Plasticity, and the Making of the Self." *Journal of Religion and Health*, 41.4 (Winter 2002): 311-324. 311.
Daniel Drubach is Senior Consultant in Neurology and Psychiatry at Mayo Foundation and Clinic, with special clinical and research interest in consciousness and disorders of consciousness. He has studied theology at Universidad del Salvador in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Baltimore, Maryland. He is especially interested in the merging of medicine (specifically neurosciences) and religion for the attainment of a unified approach to self-improvement.
[89] Drubach, 311.
[90] Drubach, 311.
[91] Exodus 31:16.
[92] Genesis 18:19.
[93] Deuteronomy 30:14.

This "doing" is thought to make us a holy people. Thus, service is a big part of the understanding of what it means to be a whole person. Jewish service learning fulfills obligations that go beyond our time and place. It reaches back into our long and rich history and urges us to act for the betterment of our world, for the benefit of the needy, and for the development of mature and caring young people who are citizens of the Jewish people and the world.

CRITIQUES OF SERVICE LEARNING

In many institutions of primary and secondary schooling, service learning has become a standard part of the educational process. There, it has found both its critics as well as its supporters. Among those who have investigated the criticisms of service learning is New York Times reporter Stephanie Strom. Her findings echo arguments made by other researchers, reporters, and participants on both sides of service learning equation (volunteer serving and organization being served) that service learning can sometimes become a more frustrating than beneficial experience. On the receiving side of the equation is Betty Medina Lichtenstein, director of the small non-profit Enlace de Familia, who works with volunteers from a local community college. "Suddenly, droves of students were walking through my door, interrupting my day and asking, 'What can I do here?'" she says about her service learning volunteers. "A whole other crowd would send résumé after résumé expecting me to call them back. Still other ones would come in and say, 'How about some research on X?' in August and then show up in late October saying their thesis really needed to be about Y. It was total havoc."[94]

Lichtenstein's experience is not uncommon in the world of service learning. The organizations with which good-hearted volunteers want to partner are often small and under-resourced. The time it takes to train and acculturate new volunteers often strains the already overbooked schedules of the non-profit professional. The professional, in turn, does not always have the time to properly oversee the volunteers' work, leading to improper fulfillment of the given task and wasted time for both the volunteer and the professional. "It's not unusual for the task of supervising students to fall to someone who already has

[94] Strom, 1.

plenty of responsibilities," says Elizabeth A. Tryon, the community learning coordinator at the Morgridge Center for Public Service at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. "If service learning is not well coordinated by the academic institution, it can place a lot of burden on the community partner."[95] These academic institutions do not set out to fail their partners in the non-profit world. But the main task of the institution is the education on their students, which takes time and attention away from ensuring quality experiences for the organizations and the clients they serve.

It is not just the "community partners" that are sometimes dissatisfied in the service learning equation. Representing the other side of the equation, the students also have occasional complaints. New York Times' Stephanie Strom reports "some community leaders spoke of student volunteers having too little time to get much meaningful experience or to justify a significant investment of time to train them. Others reported that students arriving on the doorsteps of organizations got little guidance or preparation from their professors. They, therefore, had inflated expectations about how much they could accomplish in 20 hours a semester. This left the students feeling frustrated and often less than useful at their service learning sites.[96]

If Jewish service learning seeks to avoid these pitfalls, it will have to address some the challenges from the field of service learning within the academic world. Some strategies for ensuring higher quality experiences for community partners and serving institutions alike include careful matchmaking between student and organization, and clear and written agreements to help both parties keep their expectations realistic. Elson B. Nash, the acting

[95] Strom, 1.
[96] Strom, 2.

director of the Corporation for National and Community Service's[97] Learn and Serve America program, believes that "the relationships [built between the academic institutions and the community organizations] are key because everyone – the students, the faculty, and the community organization – needs to be involved in developing the expectations for the service learning experience. They need to talk about what it's going to address, how the students are going to be involved, how it connects to the classroom experience, how it meets the nonprofit's needs and, most importantly, how it is going to be evaluated."[98] As the field of Jewish service learning grows and expands, its organizers will have to make sure that Jewish programs and community organizations have discussions of this kind before beginning their service partnership. In this way, facilitators can ensure a quality experience for all parties involved.

[97] The Corporation for National and Community Service is a granting agency established by the Obama administration to disperse grants to individuals and organizations interested in service learning programming. It is the largest financier of the field at this time, affecting 1.1 million students and 22,000 community organizations.
[98] Strom, 3.

CHAPTER TWO: FOCUS GROUPS & SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

THREE FOCUS GROUPS: REPORTS

In order to gain better perspective on how Jewish Service Learning trips affect actual participants, three focus groups were convened. These focus groups ranged in age of the participants and length and distance of trip but shared striking similarities as some basic principles of Jewish Service Learning emerged. The first group contained four rabbinic students from Hebrew Union College (HUC) – Jewish Institute of Religion in their late twenties. Each of the students had participated in the American Jewish World Service's Rabbinic Student Delegation, with two students having traveled to Ghana, one to Senegal, and one to El Salvador. All the trips were ten-day, intradenominational group of rabbinic students led by AJWS staff members that spanned the entire Jewish religious spectrum, from Orthodox to Humanist. In some cases, up to two years had passed since their trips. This group will be referred to as "HUC."

The second focus group was composed of three Jewish Communal Service (JCS) students from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in their mid-twenties. One of these students had participated in an AJWS trip internationally with a group of college age students. The trip was a total of two weeks long and featured an intradenominational group led by Hillel staff people. The other two focus group volunteers had participated in (and later led) Alternative Spring Break trips to help in the rebuilding of New Orleans. This was a seven-day long trip, led by Hillel staff members and was also intradenominational in its composition. In some cases, four years had passed since their trips. This group will be referred to as "JCS."

The third group was comprised of four participants in their early twenties who had joined together in the same Hillel Alternative Spring Break (ASB) trip to Yosemite, CA. This was a student-led seven-day long trip, and, for transparency's sake, I accompanied them as their Jewish educator. The trip took place less than seven months prior to the focus group's convening. This group will be referred to as "ASB."

Each focus group interview was operated in the same manner. After a short introduction to the nature of this project, all of the participants were asked to share their answers to the followed questions:

1. Tell us about the trip in which you participated.
2. What motivated you to go on the trip originally?
3. How did you expect the experience to change you?
4. Which pieces stand out now after time has passed?
5. What do you think was the greatest benefit of your work to the community?
6. Did your work change you personally in any way? If so, how? How were your behaviors different upon your return?
7. What do wish had been done differently or better?
8. What do you think about integrating JSL into synagogue life?
9. How would you do it so that it had lasting impact?
10. What kinds of things would you need to look out for/things might be really difficult in a synagogue setting?

The answers to these questions are summarized in the pages to follow. Though the focus groups represent a variety of ages and destinations, their answers had a great deal in common. They reflect the themes that broadly characterize the necessary components of successful Jewish Service Learning experiences. I will therefore synthesize their answers and distinguish one group's answer from the rest only where it appears to be significant.

One of the limitations of this study is the small and highly selective nature of the focus group respondents. This does not undervalue the findings of the research, as the findings reflect a great deal of alignment with current generational studies. But the findings

should be evaluated with the knowledge that they represent three small groups of high school, college, and graduate students currently living in Los Angeles, CA.

One general observation that needs to be noted involves that of a difference in affect during the interview. Although it is not necessarily apparent in their words, the ASB group displayed the most effusive emotion about their trip. Theirs was a heightened enthusiasm in a way that separates their focus group from the rest. This could be attributed to the proximity of the trip in time to the present or to the fact that I was involved personally in their experience, but I think that part of the reason lies with their developmental stage. Catching people's attention with service learning experiences when they are younger may prove to have a more pronounced effect on participants' developing identity and values system. This observation mirrors studies that currently support the present concentration on 18-24 year olds for the scaling up of Jewish Service Learning programs.[99] It also supports the proposal that service learning, experienced during the elementary school, middle school, and high school years, could act as foundational Jewish experiences. These experiences can influence and shape identity patterns, political behaviors, and volunteering habits of young adolescent students as they enter their college years.[100] They can feel confident as well that, even as children and adolescents, their efforts can make a difference in their communities. [101]

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[99] Irie and Blair. 8-9.

[100] Spring, Kimberly, Nathan Dietz, and Robert Grimm, Jr. "Educating for Active Citizenship: Service Learning, School-Based Service, and Youth Civic Engagement." Youth Helping America. March 2006. Corporation for National and Community Service, Web. 20 Jan 2010.
<http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/06_0323_SL_briefing.pdf>.
In this study, studies show that students (ages 12-18) who participate in high quality school-based service learning are 71% more likely to volunteer again in the following year than those who do not participate in service learning. Research also finds that students who participate in high quality service learning experiences are three times more likely to believe that they can make a real difference in their communities, to take a significant interest in current events, and to talk about politics with friends and parents, among other findings.

[101] Ibid.

A. Motivations

In order to understand more about how these trips affect their participants, I wanted to know the original motivation of the participants. What draws young people to leave the comforts of their homes for an unknown destination? One theme that repeatedly lured people to such trips was travel to an "exotic" or "unique" destination. Whether it was Yosemite or El Salvador or Ghana, the fact that the destination was far away and relatively unknown by the participant and their peers provided the motivation necessary to sign up. Some participants candidly cited the bragging rights they wanted to acquire; others were in search of "really good stories" to report back to their friends. Some were fulfilling a sense of adventure; others simply wanted do to something with their break from school that was out of the range of "normal." This aspect of service learning is crucial. If the destination or the activity is not perceived as "sexy," the participants will not be as excited.

Another theme that emerged was the appreciation of the pluralistic experience. It was important to some of the participants that they get the chance to spend time with Jews with whom they have big differences in terms of practice and expression of Jewish identity. The participants enjoyed the opportunity (where available) to get to know people their age with different levels of Jewish knowledge and observance. It exposed them to the practices and beliefs of other young Jews, which aided them towards greater understanding of the Jewish concerns of their co-religionists. But more importantly, the pluralistic experience helped them to deconstruct their preconceptions of each other. The friendships created during the trips have only grown stronger since the trip, especially for those where such pluralistic experiences were seen as important. It was this experience that participants sought when they signed up for their trip.

In addition to pluralistic experiences, participants sought out new friends in general. By going on the trip, they felt certain that they would develop new friendships and create a community. They wanted to strengthen bonds that already existed between friends and to make new friends along the way.

Interestingly, empathy did not rank as the most important motivator for participation in Jewish service learning experiences. Participants reported that while they cared about issues of justice, they did not see the trip as one during which a great amount of actual service could be accomplished. They were motivated more by the exotic locale and the peer friendships than by empathy for those in need. While this finding represents a fairly major concern in terms of our general societal wellbeing, there are many other positive motivators for the future of JSL work so that this lack of empathy need not deeply concern those interested in investing is JSL for the long-term. A part of the desired result of the trip is to address this lack of empathy, and thereby to heal a broken part of our society.

Among the other reasons that participants signed up for these trips were: the influence of a charismatic leader such as a rabbi or Hillel professional; the potential for ownership over some parts or the whole experience of service learning and the resulting exertion of leadership within the context of peers; and the strengthening of a resume. In some places, participants reported, service was just what the culture of the institution (synagogues, religious schools, B'nai Mitzvah Programs, Hillel's) asked of its members.

While the culture of a Jewish institution might have provided expectations for its members, the institution did not always explicitly connect this expectation with the idea that "it's what Jews do." I found this motivation lacking completely. Instead, more often, the expectation of the institution was framed as "it's what Hillel students do" or "it's what

Temple Israel members do." Framing expectations around broader Jewish ideas within the institution (i.e. a synagogue, Hillel, Federation) might help participants to make the connection of service to "it's what Jews do" more quickly and clearly.

B. Expectations:

The participants were asked how they expected the trip to affect them before they engaged in their experience. They answered that they expected to be closer with the people with whom they traveled. In each case, parts of the groups were already acquainted with one another, though no group already knew their entire cohort. They expected to become better friends with those they already knew and to make new friends during the course of the trip.

They thought that they would come back feeling re-energized after having done something so outside of their normal activities. Participants mentioned that the place and activities would be brand new to them and would have the effect of transporting them, physically and metaphorically, to another place. Upon their return, they hoped to feel as if they had spent their time in a unique way that made their time off from school feel extraordinary. They also expected to experience a great amount of exhaustive physical work. Even though their expectations for making dramatic social changes were low, their expectations for working hard were high.

C. Most Significant Pieces of the Trip:

Next, I asked the participants about the parts of their trips that they remember most clearly and have proven to be the most impactful. Again, their answers shared many striking similarities. The participants cited the pluralistic relationships and other peer relationships

that they had developed, facilitated by a structure created during the trip that would require them to remain in touch with one another. The peer group came to hold each other accountable for what they had witnessed on the trip and for what they had committed to do upon their return as a group. During the trip, participants had to deal with the tensions of living in an intradenominational setting, which brought up questions about personal Jewish identity that have been revisited upon their return. Interestingly, the participants also reported having a strengthened Jewish identity, despite the questioning that occurred simultaneously. They realized that they all shared something deeper in the relationship, namely a commitment to making the world a better place. With this realization, they were able to create an "alliance of support" because they had to celebrate their triumphs and cope with their tough moments together.

The observance of Shabbat (Erev Shabbat services, dinner, *z'mirot*, and Havdallah) was cited as one very special Jewish moment during the trips, filled with "lots of energy, respect, and joy." This time created a culminating moment for connecting to people that they didn't expect to connect with or wouldn't have made time for at home. They were surprised at the amount of fun they had with the group, whether it was stargazing and freezing together on top of a mountain near Yosemite, or sweating together in the bunks of a hostel in Ciudad Romero, El Salvador.

Participants cited that their eyes had been opened to their own privilege in ways that they had not experienced before. They reported not having realized how fortunate they were in terms of the resources afforded them – material, educational, healthcare, and otherwise. Upon their return, they were unable to take for granted their many possessions and opportunities in the same way.

The topic of privilege and the vocabulary used around it was just one of the many linguistic developments of each trip. They continued to use the shared language that was developed during the course of the trip with their co-travelers and trip leaders long after the trip ended. Still, today, when they gather with a group of participants from the same trip, vocabulary and concepts touched on during the trip are used without redefinition as common parlance. One example is the use of the term "sphere of obligation," which has stuck with many of the participants of the American Jewish World Service trips. That they each interpret this sphere in different ways and that Judaism has much to say about this sphere seems to have remained with the participants and influences their conversations about justice still today.

Another aspect of these trips that have remained significant is the feeling that the people that they helped became a part of their personal narrative. Participants reported that, after a few days, they began to feel a connection to the local leaders who directed their work and whose stories they began to hear. For the UCLA students, their connection to the park ranger/leader and his wife and group of friends began by understanding more about his lifestyle and how different it was from their own. They were impacted by the knowledge that the closest grocery store was thirty minutes away, that he had no cell phone or television, and that the little hostel in which we stayed was the only restaurant dining option for miles. These things made him seem odd to the group, at first. But as they got to know him better, they were struck by his passion for his job and by the difficulty of the work he did daily. They felt good knowing that they were his only help, and that they were really making a difference in his life. Eventually, the group began to want him to understand more about them and care about them. They told him about being Jewish and what that meant for their

work with him. They wanted him to have a positive experience with Jews, since he had never worked with Jewish students before.

The significance of these memories was a strong connection to and a sense of trust with a person who was relatively foreign to them. This feeling was then transferable to others who seemed different or odd to them in other settings, such as the other locals that frequented the lodge. Upon their return home, the participants shared the stories of their relationships with the park ranger with their other friends who did not go on the trip. The park ranger's story became their story, with which to share with others and from which to continue to learn.

From these relationships also came the feeling that participants could speak with authority about the issues that their host families and towns faced, with the ability to mention specific people and specific events. This kind of ownership over an experience allowed them to deeply understand the on-the-ground experiences of living through hardships and develop their sense of empathy for those who lived with or through them. In the case of the Salvadorans, participants were struck by the fact that civil war had marked an entire generation of children with post-traumatic stress disorder that left them ill-equipped to deal with an already challenging life situation. They empathized with those children who tried hard to avoid the almost inevitable gang violence and sought, instead, to finish high school. When they returned to the United States, the participants were able to speak during presentations, sermons, and informal reports about the systematic problems facing El Salvador's youth, with first-hand stories of the people they had met and the issues that they endured. Participants felt as though this was the most important way that they could continue

to serve their host families and communities – through telling their stories and bringing the issues that plague them into the light.

Another example can be seen in the case of the ASB students. They were surprised at how much they learned about ecology on their trip to Yosemite. They were even more surprised about the disagreements among the professions in the field regarding how best to tend to Yosemite's unique ecosystem. They became involved in the debate around caring for nature versus caring too much for nature by putting out too many natural forest fires. As they hear about future forest fires in Southern California, there is no doubt that these memories will influence their thinking in the years to come.

One piece of Jewish service learning that has come to be standard is the time each day for reflection. At first, some participants regarded this time as expendable. But by the end of the trip, every single participant with whom I spoke thought of the reflection time as necessary and even critical to his or her experience. There was a sense that the reflection was most effective if it was directly related to both the work and the issues facing the local population as discussed through a Jewish text or thinker. Sometimes, they reported, the reflection was too narrowly focused. In the case of a trip to Ghana, the participants said that the reflection was focused too much on the work of and reasoning behind the making bricks for the town's people. Yet, as they realized by the end of the trip, the larger issues that the participants were asked to consider related to the US's policy towards the African AIDS epidemic. Participants felt a large disconnect between their work and the major issues about which they were asked to care. In addition, many participants warned that too much "formal" Jewish learning, i.e. text studies or work in chevruta or even "learning" t'fillot, was detrimental to the overall experience. Finding the right balance between formal reflection

and Jewish learning and informal time for reflection through relationship building represents the key to success.

Yet another significant piece of the trip were the facilitators. Where they were successful teachers and leaders, the participants felt a sense of safety in exploring their Jewish identities and their personal beliefs during facilitator-led reflections. Good facilitators were able to guide reflection, both formally in a large group setting and informally through casual conversation during work and rest time. By setting the agenda, they could influence the direction and depth of the conversations had among participants. Participants reported varying levels of bonding to their facilitators, which ultimately either added or subtracted from their overall perception of service and its place in their lives. Some participants found that weak facilitators who did not teach the texts well or did not reinforce work ethic in students led to laziness in some students and a general weakening of the community's bonding. They stressed that leaders need to be engaging and well trained. Evidently, the leadership of a trip does not affect the fun that the participants will experience. But the long-lasting engagement in issues of social justice is at stake when the facilitator is not well prepared for the job.

Although the adventure of travel was often the first motivation for participants on a service learning trip, it was often just one of the many significant pieces of the trip, equal to the importance of the community and the impact of daily reflection. But the adventure cannot be ignored. Participants reported a sensation ranging from discomfort to thrill induced by being far from anything familiar, as well as a sense of growth by the end of the trip as a result of the adventure. Each group said that they were disturbed at first by not being able to communicate easily with their loved ones back home, but that this feeling faded

away as their environments and fellow participants became more familiar. They remembered distinctly the different kinds of physical discomforts, such as extreme heat or cold, which they now laugh off as just a part of the experience. They also remembered in great detail the incredible beauty of areas of each setting. They recalled the sense of accomplishment at the end of each day of work and at the end of the trip in total, impressed by their bodies' abilities with regards to manual labor. Without a doubt, each participant reported that he or she would participate in another service learning trip if the opportunity arose.

D. Benefits of Work to Local Communities:

In the course of my interviews, I wondered about the participants' perceptions of the actual service in which they engaged. I found that where the link between the work and its benefits was readily apparent and where the students could see the accumulated final product of their work, the participants were enthusiastic about the benefits of their work. For instance, the ASB group clearly understood that their work on the trails and campsites outside of Yosemite saved the park ranger almost a month of work. They got direct feedback from hikers, mountain bikers, and other locals about how much their work meant to the community who had missed getting to spend time on these trails during their closure. At the end of their week of work, the students were able to see the completed trail and the reorganized campsites. They could see the product of their labor, marvel at all they had accomplished through their efforts, and hear from the ranger and passersby about the effects of their work on the community. They understood the connection between access to trails and the benefits of this access to the environmental preservation of the area. The links were clearly drawn and they felt a sense of accomplishment.

In contrast, the group that visited a community in Ghana made bricks for a community building for the week. To the participants, it was not clear that the bricks were going to be used immediately. It was also not clear that they were really the best resource for brick-making; some students witnessed locals making many more bricks on their own with a much higher quality brick to show for their efforts in the same amount of time. They spent two of their six workdays touring the countryside for the sake of learning about the issues. These trips seemed important for the sake of the learning of the participants but did not seem to qualify as "service." Participants feared that if the work was not carefully picked for relevance and productivity, or the link was not made explicitly and clearly, the service component of such trips would appear far less valuable. When this piece was lost to a degree in Ghana, the frustrated participants began to question the validity of spending time and money traveling to serve these people as opposed to just sending an equivalent amount of money straight to the need itself.

E. Benefits of Work to the Participant:

In addition to the benefits of the service to the local communities, I also wanted to know more about the benefits of the service to the participants. They unanimously reported the benefits of the service component of the trip on their own appreciation of hard work and on their own self-confidence. As an example, we'll return again to the ASBers. The participants gained a great appreciation for the amount of work it takes to maintain trails. They reported that when they later visited other campsites or trails, they appreciated their elegant construction and tidiness in new ways. Each of the participants reported that she or he had gained confidence in her or his physical abilities and capabilities in nature. One girl

commented that the physical challenges she faced during the service component of the trip added to her understanding of the larger limits of her body's abilities, her belief in her own self-reliance, and her identity as "not as much of a girlie girl" as she had thought.

Another important benefit to the participant is reflected in the findings of studies on empathy and its role in identity formation. "Relational self-development theory corroborates that knowledge comes, not through separation (self from mother/world in developmental psychology, subject from object in western linguistics, knower from known in scientific method, conscious psyche from unconscious psyche in depth psychology, as examples) but through contrast." [102] The diversity introduced by service learning trips in terms of exposure to different people and new experiences can be valued as an organic and consistent "stimulus for maturation."[103] The empathy that participants develop with the hosts and their tasks provided enough contrast to the lives of the participants to cause them to stretch beyond their comfort zones and discover greater maturity and more nuanced identities.

An additional benefit of the work was the new-found ability on the part of the participants to create their own agenda for follow-up activities following the trip. With their new resources and knowledge, the participants could plan awareness-raising campaigns and fundraisers to benefit the cause that most compelled them during the trip. In some cases, it was a chance to recreate a post-trip community that could be sustained for some time after the trip.

Not only do some trip providers offer support in the form of continued Jewish learning about the issues broached on their trips, some also provide job postings in the realm of service learning and other service organizations and notify alumni of current events and

[102] Everding and Huffaker, 424.
[103] Ibid.

other issues that face our modern world. Some organizations make great efforts to continue to educate and inform its alumni, connecting the participant to larger communities and networks of alumni that share similar passions, language, and experiences. In this way, these organizations can continue to spurn interest in working in the fields of Jewish communal work or service professions of different kinds outside the Jewish world. Just as one mitzvah leads to another, reported one participant, one volunteer experience leads to another. Another participant reported that, of the fifteen or so group members on her trip to Zimbabwe five years ago, at least half of them are now Jewish communal service professionals, Jewish educators, or work in some other field of service. She suspected that her service learning trip played a big role in directing these students into a lifetime of service.

F. Challenges to Service Learning:

Besides needing a fleet of better-trained facilitators, I wanted to know about the other factors that the participants saw as challenges to the quality of their experiences. I asked them about the things they might have wanted done differently to make the trip more impactful. They agreed that there needed to be a focus during the preparation done before the trip on learning more about the work that they would be doing and its connection to the issues facing the local communities. Upon their return, they would have welcomed a little more follow-up to continue their learning and revisit their special cohort that had been formed during the trip. During the course of the trip, they wished that more of their fellow participants had been engaged during the reflections; when some of the participants were not "into" the reflection session, it became frustrating for the people who were more involved. They also thought that the facilitators had presented too much information to cover in such a

short amount of time in any depth. They would have preferred far fewer topics with greater depth into each. They were also curious as to the effects of greater discussion of Jewish identity formation during reflection time, leaving other topics of social justice issues to the informal visiting times.

Some of the favorite parts of the trips were the quiet times alone in nature or on a work site, during which the participants could relax a little and enjoy some meditation-reflection. This gave each participant time to be with his or her own thoughts during the middle of the day. They also enjoyed getting to share things about themselves during the reflections at the end of the day, using the time not just to talk in terms of Judaism or justice but also themselves and their Jewish identities. Lastly, they wished that the facilitators had encouraged partners that were not already friends or seemed unlikely fits to work and learn together. In this way, the participants thought that anyone who felt like an "outsider" would soon find his or her place in the community.

Integrating Jewish Service Learning Into Synagogue Life

After discussing their past experiences with service learning in immersive environments, I explained that I was imagining a different context for the service learning cohort and experience. I asked them to dream with me about integrating the service learning experience into many different stages in religious education, using the immersive trips to mark big passages in the lifecycle of a student and supplementing these experiences with more local, community-based long-term projects with communities nearby the given synagogue. The trips would start at a young age, perhaps elementary school student age, and the cohort would come from the synagogue religious school or day school. The trip would

be somewhere close, but far enough away to seem exciting to these young students. As they grow, their trips every four years or so would extend to more distant destinations. But the cohort would remain the same and the trips would be framed before and after with other, more local efforts, as the students became more aware of their local communities and more committed to Jewish and civic engagement. I wondered what participants of immersive Jewish service learning trips, people already experienced in the realm of service and its impact, would think of this idea.

A. Benefits for JSL in Synagogue:

The participants agreed that one of the best benefits would be the continuity of the cohort, especially within similar peer groups. These children would grow up together sharing a language around obligation and justice and community. They would get the chance to work together to create elements of change in their community and they could, therefore, be celebrated as a more important part of their larger community. They would know, from a young age, that they can be agents of change in the world so that when they left for college, they would be prepared to make a difference in the world at-large.

The participants also thought that the projects would be a great way for shy or irregularly attending students to get to know one another better. Activities make socializing much easier for many of our awkwardly-aged or less social students, as long as the projects are aligned to their developmental age groups and do not seem "cheesy or worthless." Instead, it would serve to increase the child's pride in his or her Jewish life, as direct action in the world is seen as an extension of the values derived from family and Jewish culture.

The participants found that working geographically outwards from the synagogue mirrored both Jewish principles of obligation as well as natural human development. The Kindergarten would volunteer somewhere on the grounds of the synagogue, while the sixth graders would paint the gymnasium in cooperation with a class of sixth graders from another neighborhood in the city. After B'nai Mitzvah in eighth grade, the students would travel to Washington, D.C. for the RAC's L'Taken program, which could be followed by a confirmation trip to El Salvador or Mexico with American Jewish World Service or some similar organization. For college age students and the 20s/30s group in town, a service trip to somewhere even more distant, such as India or South Africa could provide impetus for remaining active in the local Hillel or synagogue life. Even adults could organize trips to serve in various locations around the globe; with the support of one educator or clergy member from the synagogue, these adults could work on developing their Jewish identities and discover a new commitment to social justice in their own communities. One participant asked if there was room in this model for family Jewish service learning. While I think that this is a distinct possibility, research has found that the most impactful learning for teens and college-age students is with peers their own age or a little older.

Lastly, the interviewees (and I) wondered how this model might work alongside the model of congregational-based community organizing (CBCO). One way of having the two models interact is to put one in the other's context. In other words, one could find service projects for JSL through partnering with a neighboring community that is also undergoing the process of CBCO. Another way to accomplish the symbiosis of the two models is to teach CBCO as a follow-up opportunity to continue the work sparked by issues raised on a service learning trip. It is still unclear as to the final relationship between these two models,

but there is certainly a synergy that is possible between them that needs exploration through on-the-ground experimentation. At any rate, the focus groups saw the need to "sell" this idea to congregational leaders using the following argument: imagine the combination of a sustainable system of accomplishing socially-beneficial goals *and* the ability to build community both inside of the synagogue and in interfaith settings . The continued contact of congregants with social justice issues makes those issues constantly present for the synagogue, benefitting both the congregation and its surrounding community. The constant demand for processing and reflection by both models can only make the synagogue a more self-aware and focused organization.

B. Challenges of JSL in a Synagogue:

Every group of participants voiced a concern about funding. If the synagogue is requiring the students to pay for expensive trips, they worried that some students would be excluded. There would be many Jewish families who could afford such programming, but many more who could not. The ideal model for funding a JSL program would be a combination of fundraising by the rabbis and board members of the synagogue, the awarding of grant money from granting organizations invested in Jewish identity formation and Jewish educational experiences, and a small investment on the part of the participants' parents. In any model of funding, the money conversation would have to be a delicate one, prepared in detail before such a proposal went to the board.

The participants also voiced concerns about the trip being "too Jewish." Community formation, service, and experiential education – these elements need to be seen as part of the goals for service learning if it is going to be successful in a synagogue setting. Therefore,

there needs to be a balance struck between formal Jewish learning sessions and reflection sessions that focus on social issues or on the identities of the participants or on just plain fun.

C. The Ways Towards a Lasting Impact on Participants in a Synagogue:

In order to fully embed JSL into a synagogue context, work can be done on multiple levels. *Shabbatonim* devoted to issues that are explored on trips; B'nai Mitzvah projects that coincide with CBCO efforts; sermons and bulletin articles – these are all ways in which the ideas of justice can be wedged firmly into the life of a synagogue. The service learning could become just another part of "what we do," similar to the Purim Carnival and the congregational Passover seder. The costs for JSL must include funds allocated for the trip, its leaders and professionals, and the human capital it will take to organize it. As a result, leveraging resources would become extremely important. The synagogue will have to learn how to plug into other programs that already exist and link the silos, so to speak. All of the programs that synagogues need already exist; it would be more about plugging these organizations into the religious school's curriculum as well as being intentional about the educational aspects as they specifically relate to the work.

The focus groups were in favor of starting the programs with the youngest students first, for the buy-in of both the kids and the parents. Getting parents' involvement and support early in the child's religious educational career will allow the program to grow with them.

Also suggested was a rewards system that tangibly honored students and parents at services or an honorary dinner during which they can share their experiences with other

families. This will add to the cultural change of the synagogue and give כבוד, *honor*, to those who have served.

In these ways and more, the synagogue can be a hub for service learning activities. In a time when the vibrancy of synagogue life is declining, such a bold experiment may be just what a synagogue needs to reinvigorate its educational vision. It is certainly what the world needs.

THREE FOCUS GROUPS: FINDINGS

Jewish service learning is one important new way of looking at Jewish education, moral development, and Jewish identity formation. If it is well-framed, well-executed, and well-supported within a synagogue setting, it could prove to be an effective tool for producing a generation of Jewish youth dedicated to the maturation of their Jewish selves and to the never-ending task of *tikkun olam.* These focus groups have brought to light some very interesting considerations in the project to embed Jewish service learning within a synagogue context, so that we might begin to nurture our youth into these kinds of Jews.

A. Start with the Youth

Setting all assumptions aside, one important starting point for this process is with the synagogue's youth. Not only are they often more receptive of new and innovative educational tools, they are also in important identity development stages. It is during these stages that foundations are created for future understandings of the meaning and significance of being Jewish. Jewish service learning provides a concrete example of what it means to act out of one's Jewish identity in the world. It is also a time when role models, especially peer role models, are most influential. Service learning, therefore, offers a cohort the time and space to bond and learn from one another in an environment that is "out of their comfort zone" and is often physically challenging. Because they have overcome challenges and problem-solved together, and because they now have a shared language as a result of their reflection sessions, participants commonly return from their trips having become close friends with their travel companions. Some participants tend to remain close with their fellow travelers long after the trip. Many follow each other into "helping" or "serving"

professions long after their service learning experiences. Catching people's attention with service learning experiences when they are younger may prove to have a pronounced effect on participants' developing identity and values system.

B. Motivations

During the course of conducting the focus groups, a great deal was revealed regarding the motivations and expectations surrounding service learning, both in terms of the participants' pre-trip expectations and the expectations that clergy, educators, parents and students should hold of the returning participants that may also be used as measures of success. These factors can be used to help influence congregational stakeholders, such as clergy, educators, board members, parents, and students, to support the development of service learning programs and to encourage participation. Knowing the motivations and expectations of participants can also help the facilitator develop appropriate trip preparation sessions, post-trip reflection sessions, and discussions about local community engagement projects. The more we know about the reasons students participate in service learning and the more we know about the things they expect to gain from the experiences, the better we can engineer the entire experience for the students and their parents, from the first inkling of the idea in their minds to the fruition of some grand social justice project down the road.

The reasons that motivate participants vary from person to person. Though the list below is not exhaustive, it is representative of the kinds of characteristics typical of the X- and Y- Generations and the Millennials. They include:

- **Travel to Exotic Destinations** – Participants are motivated to join service learning trips in order to travel to the designated exotic destination in which the service will

take place. The definition of "exotic" changes as the student grows older and as their worldview expands to include a greater understanding of geography and geopolitics. Therefore, Yosemite might seem "exotic" to a college freshman who has never traveled without his or her parents, whereas one may need to go as far as Central America or even Africa to get the same sense of the "exotic" for participants in their mid to late 20s.

• **The Peer Experience** – Participants feel the need to create and maintain close friendships with people of their age group. Especially valued in some cases are people with which they may differ in regards to religious observance. Research is showing that when young Jews engage in peer-to-peer experiences, they are more likely to engage in Jewish life in ways that are meaningful to them.[104] The communities formed during the course of a JSL trip cannot be underestimated in terms of their implications for Jewish communal structures and funding.

• **Empathy** – Participants feel a duty to serve others out of a developing sense of empathy for those less fortunate than themselves. They know that serving "is a good thing to do."[105] This may stem in part from a deeply integrated Jewish understanding of moral obligation, but the "Jewish factor" is not an explicit motivation for most participants. This "Jewish factor" should gain more nuance and personal meaning after a JSL trip.

• **Influence of Charismatic Leader** – "No printed word, nor spoken plea can teach young minds what they should be. Not all the books on all the shelves – but what the teachers are themselves." Rudyard Kipling's words can be applied to those rabbis,

[104] Miller, 1.
[105] Everding and Huffaker, 428.

educators, and other Jewish professionals to whom our Jewish youth look for guidance and role modeling. A leader they admired, such as a youth director, a rabbi, an educator, or even an older student, influenced many of the focus group participants to join a Jewish service learning trip. This power of influence should not be taken lightly, as it is known to have great effect over adolescents when the leader lives by the values he or she espouses.[106] But it can be used to the benefit of the Jewish service learning program of a synagogue, because of the clergy's or educator's conviction that it is the best way to spend a winter, spring, or summer break.

An admired leader, such as a rabbi or Hillel director, influenced many of the focus group participants to join a Jewish service learning trip.

• **Leadership Experience/Ownership Over Experience** – Participants are often drawn to service learning because of the opportunity to engage with the group in a position of leadership. The participants are often offered the chance to plan a part of the trip, which gives them the desired sense of ownership over the program. When participants act like leaders and feel a sense of ownership, the resulting pride and sense of achievement are likely to add a measure of meaning and significance to the trip for those students.

• **Resume-Building/Perception** – Participants are motivated to join service learning trips in order to list the experience on a resume, making themselves more compelling academic candidates or job applicants. The students know that time taken out of their "normal" lives to serve others is perceived as a positive reflection on their character, for the benefit of parents, friends, and peers, as well as future employees or admissions committees.

[106] Rose, 1.

• **Institutional Culture** – Some participants are motivated to serve because it is simply the culture of their synagogue, Hillel, or other institutions in which they are deeply involved. "Everyone does it," is the reason that these participants give. In order to meet the standards of expectations of their peers and mentors, they (of course) join service learning trips.

C. Expectations

The focus groups revealed an interesting divergence between the pre-trip expectations of the participants and the most common "memorable moments"[107] from the post-trip reflections. This is an interesting contrast, as it might be said that the post-trip comments actually reflect the kinds of expectations that participants, their parents, and their educators and clergy *could* have for any given service learning trip. This divergence, then, is related to the fact that little research has yet been done on the resulting impact of these trips on the participants, as well as incomplete preparation or inexperience on the part of the facilitators, leaving the students with fewer and lower expectations than what might otherwise be possible. Below are two lists - the first list displays the commonly held pre-trip expectations of participants and the second list displays the commonly held "memorable moments" upon post-trip reflection. This second list might be used to respond to concerns that the group expressed about the need to "sell" JSl to synagogue stakeholders. These factors can heighten

[107] Current Jewish educational thinking places an emphasis on creating "Memorable Moments" for students, which are defined as planned or intentional events or activities which highlights the enduring ideas of a given lesson or curriculum, and which resides in a participant's memory as a peak or significant moment. It is the memory of these moments that serve to reconnect the participant to the experience repeatedly after the experience is over; thus, these moments can continue to reemphasize the lesson for the participant long after the lesson is over. I believe these "Memorable Moments" occur frequently during service learning experiences.

pre-trip expectations for participants, their parents, and their educators and clergy in order to bolster support for the program and encourage greater participation and pre-trip anticipation.

- **Pre-Trip Expectations:** the hope for the development of new friendships and the increased bonds between participants who were already friends; excitement about traveling in the "exotic" destination and venturing into the unknown; the feeling of returning reenergized by something new and completely different than the participants' normal "break from school" experiences; the anticipation and slight dread of a great deal of physical work.
- **Most Commonly Held "Memorable Moments":** the value of the developed relationships with people from different streams of Judaism; the closeness of the peer group and the general mutual respect shared by group members; the spiritual nature of Shabbat and other specially designated meditation moments; the surprise at the level of poverty in which some people live and renewed appreciation for participants' level of privilege; an appreciation for newly developed and shared language around issues of obligation, poverty, morality, etc., and the ability to reengage with that language even long after the trip; the sense that the stories of the people who were served were now a part of the participants' personal narrative; a feeling of deeper connection to the people who were served; the ability to extrapolate from those specific people to a greater population of people with the same nationality or populations facing similar issues; the feeling of solidarity and empathy with more people than those with whom participants came into direct contact; pride in the ability to speak with more authority about topics examined during the trip; an appreciation of time taken to reflect as a group; a bonding with good facilitators or a bonding as a

peer group against poor facilitators; a love of participants' stories of the adventures found; a sense of greater self-confidence on an emotional level because of a successful adventure undertaken and an awareness of personal physical limitations that were greater than expected; an appreciation of the difficulty of physical work on a daily basis; a sense of agitation upon return that spurs the participants to want to do something to make a change for the better, whether for the community served on the trip or on a more local level; the perception that participants can be agents of important change, if post-trip programming is done well.

D. Ensuring Success and Quality

There are, of course, a number of factors that go into creating a successful Jewish service learning experience that would engage participants at the highest possible cognitive and affective levels. Again, more research needs to be done to create an exhaustive list, but the following elements represent a step in that direction:

- **Finding good organizations in the service learning world with which to partner**. For a list of these organizations, see "References/Resources."
- **Drawing an explicit and authentic link** between the service and its benefits to the community being served.
- **Establishing a culture early in the trip of deep and honest reflection** during designated sessions. These sessions establish standards of trust, respect, and confidentiality, so that the group members feel safe enough to share deep, personal concerns and so that the group can form, norm, and storm in healthy ways.

• **Establishing high levels of sophistication in reflection session discussions** that include accessible but not pediatric Jewish learning. Some of these reflection sessions should include Jewish text studies on topics related to *tikkun olam*, obligation and moral responsibility, and issues related to the ones seen on the ground in served communities, in addition to designated and well-crafted moments of prayer or spiritual experiences. But the facilitator must know his or her group; if the group is not accustomed to confronting a great deal of Jewish text (most groups will qualify under this category), the Jewish components of the reflection must be delicately peppered into some discussions and left out of others entirely.

• **Hiring and training quality facilitators** that will engage the participants and develop personal relationships with them, as well as deliver the content in a skillful and knowledgeable way.

• **Fundraising successfully within your community and beyond**, including grant writing, in order to offset the high costs of travel and service so that everyone who wants to participate is able to do so. Funders are interested in Jewish service learning efforts.[108] As a result, the chances for at least seed money for a program are relatively high. See "Resources and References" for a list of potential funders.

• **Continuously reflecting on the measures of success** and what might be tweaked each year to make every trip better than the one before. Just as reflection is an important part of self-understanding during the trip, so too reflection on the entire service learning experience is an important part of institutional self-understanding in

[108] Irie and Blair, 21.

terms of the messages the synagogue is sending through its programming and in terms of the quality of the experience.

Jewish service learning is likely to emerge as a significant factor in synagogue and organizational programming. Its potential as a method of engaging young Jews in the questions of identity, social responsibility, and relationship/community building is great and, as yet, relatively untapped. Finding new ways of integrating Jewish service learning into the life cycles of synagogue members and into culture of synagogue institutions will not be the silver bullet often sought after by educators, clergy, and Jewish parents alike. But it does have much to offer in terms of producing a generation of young Jews who care about their Jewish future, the future of the Jewish people, and the future of the all people on our planet. In a time of great economic upheaval, there are two theories: circle the wagons and wait for the crisis to end or lay the groundwork for achieving a vision of the future. I think that laying the groundwork now for integrating Jewish service learning into our synagogues, religious schools, and youth programs is one way of approaching a vision for the future of Judaism and the Jewish people in which Judaism is relevant to the present and in which young Jews can engage and help to build the kind of future they wish to see.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

We return now to the model proposed at the beginning of this body of research. In the model, five components – Jewish learning/experiential learning, peer community formation, reflection, Jewish identity, and service – interact with Jewish service learning in different ways and at different times along the course of a participant's journey before, during, and after a trip. They were recognized as motivations for participants and funders to invest time, energy, and resources in the JSL experience. The same components were noted as being essential elements of a successful service learning experience. Finally, these same components were identified as factors that, if altered as a result of a JSL trip, would have important implications for the participant, the Jewish community, and the larger communities in which we live.

As each of the components is explore individually, it becomes clear that they naturally overlap with one another. For example, a UCLA Hillel student writes about her experience [see Appendix A, *Reflection II*] during a JSL trip to Yosemite. During the preparatory sessions, she had used the time to pick out the people with whom she had assumed she had develop friendships and even the boy she thought was the most attractive. However, during the course of the trip, she did physical work that she was not aware she could do, alongside people she had never spoken to before. She reflected during our formal sessions on her own thoughts about the environment and the importance of our involvement in it for better or for worse. She dug deep during informal conversations with new friends about romance, her future career, and other big questions of life. Through this reflection, service, and experiential learning, she developed new ideas about the meaning of Jewish community; for her, it became a group of Jewish people that cared for one another, supported

one another, and helped each other rediscover "what it meant to be human." Although she does not mention it in her written reflection, she recommitted herself to her Jewish sorority and invited her facilitator and other Jewish women to teach other Jewish ideas during their board meetings later that year. Her understanding of being in Jewish community was also touched by her JSL experience.

A. Defining Success

What is success in Jewish service learning? It might be as general as "the participants emerge from a JSL trip better people and more conscious Jews." It could also be more specific and quantifiable, defined as Jews who attend services more often, donate *tzedakah* to more Jewish organizations, become members of Jewish institutions, continue working for social justice, etc. In any case, the components explored in the pages above will help define success in JSL. As mentioned above, these five (or more) components interact with one another in infinite permutations. I believe that by looking closely at these reflections, evaluators of JSL trips can identify ways in which each of these components have been altered in positive ways. The only way that a component could be altered within the mind or behavior of a participant is if there was a measure of learning that occurred during the trip. Learning, as represented in its more complete picture in Appendix B, is a very complex process and may be defined as:

> "...the combination of processes whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical, and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs, and senses) – experiences a social situation, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively, or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the person's individual biography resulting in a changed (or more experienced) person."[109]

[109] Jarvis, 557.

The dissonance experienced by the learner can exhibit itself in one of four ways, as detailed below by researcher of learning and adult education Peter Jarvis:

> 1. It can occur as a slight gap between our biography and our perception of the situation to which we can respond by slight adjustments in our daily living which we hardly notice since it occurs within the flow of time;
> 2. It can also occur with larger gaps that demand considerable learning;
> 3. In the meeting of the stranger, the disjuncture might not only occur in the discourse between them, it might actually occur between them as persons and their cultures and it takes time for the stranger to be received and a relationship, or harmony, to be established;
> 4. In addition, some disjunctural situations—often emotive in category—just cause us to wonder at the beauty, pleasure, and so forth that we are experiencing. In these situations, it is sometimes impossible to incorporate our learning from them into our biography and our taken-for-granted. These are what we might call "magic moments" for which we look forward in hope to repeat in some way or other but upon which we might often reflect.[110]

A Jewish service learning trip participant can expect to experience all four kinds of learning as a result of his or her experience. Some of the learning will be immediately recognizable as such, while other learning may take years to integrate. Surveys provide helpful information if taken by the participants before and after the trip. In addition, longitudinal research is required to know more about the kinds of learning that take longer to internalize. But whether the learning is revealed in the short-term or the long-term, the best method of revealing this learning comes in the participants' telling of stories that involve how their trip affected their feelings and behaviors following an experience.

The trip is successful if even one of these five components has developed as a result of the Jewish service learning.

As a result of this complex understanding of learning, I would consider the trip a successful one if only one of these five components has developed as a result of the Jewish service learning. But more often then not, more than one component is affected, because of the interconnectedness of the individual components to one another. To display the ways in which components can overlap as learning happens, I will share this story. One of the participants in a service learning trip from UCLA Hillel,

[110] Jarvis, 555-556.

after returning from an alternative spring break in Appalachia, joined a Jewish fraternity as well as other Jewish service learning trips following a positive service experience. The trip caused him to consider his choice of peer community and to choose a Jewish one. It also caused him to consider his relationship to service and his heightened desire to engage in physical labor for the benefit of the needy. The possibility remains that some effects of the trip will not emerge until long after the trip is over and this young man enters into full adulthood. But in the short-term, this story tells the given evaluator that JSL was a successful venture for this young man.

Another example highlights a shy student who now considers herself a more confident person as a result of her JSL trip. She feels more capable not only in terms of physical demands, but also, and more significantly, in terms of new social situations in which she does not know anyone else. After creating such a close community of friends from her JSL trip, she feels confident that she can enter a group of strangers and make new friends whenever she wants. Her peer community experience in combination with self-reflection allowed her to deepen her understanding of her own strengths and weaknesses. Her identity now includes a new-found dimension of self-confidence in a group of strangers, which influences the stories she'll tell herself about herself and others. She developed the ability to trust the "other" to a greater degree. These anecdotes reflect pictures of success in the different components that make up Jewish service learning. While they are qualitative and tough to measure with numbers, the power of these stories leave little doubt as to the outcomes of successful JSL experiences.

B. Maintaining Engagement

As participants develop the skills and behaviors they need to engage with the work assigned them during a JSL experience, they are often challenged to think about how the experience will change them. They are asked to consider the ways in which they will sustain the commitment to Jewish community and social justice. This question is meant to prompt the participants to answer the challenge of sustainability of the effects of JSL. This means that outside of the behavioral and affective changes each person experiences, they must also think about how the group itself has changed and how they want to sustain the bond of the group. It is not always true that the entire group will feel the same level of bonding to one another. But even if smaller subgroups form and work together on some subsequent social justice or community project, the sense of community experienced by individuals is sustained and the effects of the group learning can last.

One model of sustaining the benefits of a JSL experience is that sponsored by Bronfman Philanthropies. The Bronfman-funded Birthright program[111] has helped tens of thousands of young Jews take a ten-day trip to Israel. Upon their return, they work with a number of social networking websites, helping students reconnect with one another. They sponsor regional parties, regional concerts, and Shabbat dinners for groups of students. In order to be successful, organizers know that they must create many options for engagement following a trip. These options have to be highly diverse in order to meet the needs of students who might want to be involved. The key, says the President of Bronfman

[111] Although Birthright is not considered a Jewish service learning trip because it lacks the intensive service element. it nonetheless functions well as a comparison to JSL trips as they share the community component as well as the Jewish learning component.

Philanthropies Jeffery Solomon, is to assist the participants in organizing themselves to continue some aspect of the trip in their day-to-day lives.[112]

But despite the great energy and resources spent on follow-up programming, the Birthright program has still struggled with this question of sustainability. Solomon is frustrated to see the effectiveness of the trip on participants fade too quickly in relation to the significant effects that the trip reportedly has on the participants. He sees and hears in detail about the transformational effects of these trips. But once the participants return to their previous lives, it is difficult for the funders to understand the real impact of the trip, much less to offer further direction for sustaining their commitment to American Jewish life and Israel. [113]

Still, some of the same principle used to continue to engage Birthright participants can be applied to Jewish service learning trips. Whether it is picking up litter after an environmentally focused trip, giving thanks for your food at a Shabbat dinner after a trip to a drought-stricken area of the world, or starting a Facebook group that updates your trip mates on the group's social agenda for Purim, maintaining the friendships established on the trip through continued group activity programming and cyber interaction will only further serve the purpose of the trip. Anywhere there is some assembly of the community that traveled together (even if the traveling means driving down the street to the home for the elderly together), the participants will be reminded of their experiences and their commitments to each other and their cause. And, if the structure is established while on the trip itself, there is a better chance of continued interest and involvement in the group and in a commitment to further practice of Jewish life and social justice.

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[112] Solomon, Jeff. Interview. 26 Feb 2009.
[113] Ibid.

There are two stories that illustrate this principle of continued engagement that involve both technology and joint local programming. One story begins on a trip to El Salvador as a part of the American Jewish World Service's curriculum for their Rabbinic Student Delegation in January 2007. On the second to last day of the trip, the participants were asked to choose a friend from a different seminary who would act as a "spiritual *chevruta*." Upon their return, the participants would be sent emails with commentaries on the weekly *parashah* and questions of justice for the spiritual chevruta to answer together, either in person or over the phone. In addition, there were questions that prompted the continued discussion of the some of the themes introduced during the trip. Some of these partnerships faltered and failed immediately upon return, as the participants' lives regained their normally busy pace. But many out of the group (estimated at 60%) remained in touch with their spiritual chevruta on a weekly basis for one month or more after the trip. While the "spiritual *chevruta*" no longer speak formally on a weekly basis two years after the trip, AJWS's efforts at sustaining an active alumni base has succeeded to continue connecting participants, through mass email chain discussions on relevant topics, phone calls to alumni for recommendations for future participants, and a yearly retreat for all alumni to gather, reconnect, and learn together.

Outside of these formal connections to alumni stemming from the organization, many "spiritual *chevruta*" remain friends to this day, checking in occasionally and informally with one another. The two *chevrutot* interviewed for this paper[114] continue to inquire regarding the other's efforts towards tikkun in the world, signaling their true friendship with one another (despite coming from opposite ends of the observance spectrum) and their enduring

[114] The participants in these interviews were part of the focus groups who gave their reports in the previous section.

commitment to the relationship's foundation in social justice. In sum, they are holding each other accountable for the co-witnessing of third world living standards, for the commitments they made towards addressing the issues of poverty on the global stage, and for following up on those commitments back in their regular lives. Still, though the *chevruta*-based program helped to keep people engaged in the questions of Jewish service learning, it best served those who had developed deep friendships during the course of the trip itself and who would probably continue to be in touch regardless of the type of conversation. The requirement did help to concretize these relationships by formatting their prolonged contact in the still formative stages of the relationship.

A second form of engagement in a post-trip period can be illustrated using another example from the same trip to El Salvador. On the last day of the trip, the participants were reminded that they had committed to starting a project that would promote *tikkun* upon their return to the United States. The delegation broke into groups of 4-5 people who were in communication with one another after the trip to plan and execute the project. One group had committed to promoting the use of Fair Trade Coffee at their learning institutions and synagogues. They created a resource sheet with text studies and information about Fair Trade. They persuaded their institutions, HUC-LA and Yeshivat Hovovei Torah, to change the coffee that they brewed in house, as well as the municipal buildings in the city of West Hollywood. In addition to these efforts, they also organized an information session to talk about their project and its relationship to their trip, promoting participation in the trip for the following year.

Unfortunately, this assignment did not produce any projects that outlived the short-term goals created by each group. It did, however, give the participants the experience of

gathering resources and of facilitating conversations around issues of justice with others outside of the group that actually traveled together. These projects may not have had deep and lasting impacts on the participants, but they did have a small impact on the orbit of people surrounding the participants. Seven classmates from HUC in Los Angeles, Cincinnati, and New York chose to join the trip for the following year to Ghana as a result of the influence of their other classmates' experiences.

Although only two are mentioned above, there are many options for sustaining both the Jewish learning and the social justice in which participants engaged during the trip. Some other ideas include: facilitating the participants in starting their own learning group at Hillel, taking a special class on a Jewish subject at university, and taking on leadership roles in various Jewish organizations across campus. The participants can also spend a semester in Israel in order to learn Hebrew and connect even more deeply to their Jewish identity and learning. They can meet with a congressperson and take political action, create a movie of the experience to show others, reunite to volunteer in a local community organization, or plan something fun to raise money for a cause. In addition to what is already being done, one way that outside funders could help would be to give financial and staff-support to allow a group to work together towards their next cause.

CHAPTER THREE: FUTURE OF JEWISH SERVICE LEARNING

WHAT IS NEXT FOR JEWISH SERVICE LEARNING?

Jewish service learning is not the only answer to Jewish engagement and education. It may not be for every Jewish individual. It seems to appeal to people with a broad range of interests, such as travel, adventure, Jewish learning, those interested in issues of justice, those interested in intradenominational community building, etc. However, there are other Jews for whom an immersive JSL experience would be too far, too uncomfortable, or too Jewish. Is the goal of service learning to each of the million and a half Jewish youth in America to participate? Perhaps not everyone is suited for the immersive experience. But what about the periodic model in which students engage with JSL on a limited but regular basis? There could be more promise in further engagement in Jewish life for youth still associated with a synagogue pre-B'nai Mitzvah. Still, there are certainly many challenges to be negotiated. Some ideas and suggestions for the field of JSL include the following:

1. **Too Jewish?** The facilitators of the Jewish education and self-reflection aspects of these programs need excellent training in order to raise the bar in many programs. One study showed that while the reaction to the service, to the group, to civic engagement, to empowerment, and to diversity were generally positive, participants' reaction to the Jewish learning and Jewish social action were sometimes negative.[115] It is not clear as to exactly what parts of the educational program were unappealing during the trips studied as a part of this report by the Jewish Federation of New York, but the same sentiment has been echoed in the anecdotes of other JSL trips in which the Jewish study component had been less than

[115] Chertok, 33

compelling. The most successful trips set standards of interactions for Jewish learning moments, such as mutual respect, careful listening, and confidentiality, during educational moments from the beginning of the experience and kept them consistent throughout the trip. Participants are placed into small groups of ten or less to allow each person to speak about their experiences. Jewishly knowledgeable facilitators are able to connect the participants' experiences to Jewish concepts in organic ways without relying on a Jewish texts. These facilitators allow the group to form their own opinions while challenging them to think ever more deeply about the addressed subjects. Therefore, there must be a method of assuring quality staff members, through recruitment of facilitators with expertise and high-quality training.

2. **Scaling Up.** There is a perceived need to scale up the field of Jewish service learning. This will more than likely pose quality assurance issues as well as increase the urgency to find a better way to evaluate participant experiences and gauge the impact of the trip on their Jewish identities. Therefore, the field needs ways of sharing information and resources, which may give them a chance to institutionalize Jewish service learning as a part of the present reshuffling of the Jewish world.[116] In contrast to so many other trends in Jewish life, this one is actually supported by popular culture,[117] so this is a good time to normalize it into our Jewish culture. As the field is becomes bigger and more varied, it will have to develop mechanisms to ensure the highest quality experience for each participant.

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[116] Phil Leif-Grieff. Interview. 26 Jan 2009. Also, see the website for Repair the World for a first-hand view of the latest development in the field towards a centralized and institutionalized organization attempting to scale up JSL as well as ensure quality leadership and resources.

[117] See section entitled "X-Gen, Y-Gen, and Millenials: Well-Suited for JSL."

3. **JSL for Adult Learners.** Jewish service learning is not just for high school or college age young adults. It can also be employed to reach unaffiliated adults in their 30s and beyond. Some factors to consider when thinking of JSL for adults include: a limited time frame; a low facility with Jewish texts in English as well as Hebrew, and a low level of tolerance (and even shame) for feeling lost or unprepared: and a very clear sense of what they want and need. Facilitators will have to be careful listeners and responsive leaders. Other than these few factors, Jewish service learning could be a powerful way to engage adults in developing the next stage of their own Jewish identities, whether that includes the creation of new sub-communities within the synagogue, a new appreciation for Jewish text and Jewish values, or a better sense of their station in the world.

4. **Think Globally, Act Locally.** The current financial crisis is certainly going to have its impact on the ways in which JSL develops. One way is that more programs will look for community-based projects instead of going abroad. A professional in the field, Rabbi Jill Jacobs, argues that working for the local community is actually the best place to focus some renewed energy.[118] As beneficiaries of this nation as a people, we have a responsibility to be active players in working for America's health and wellbeing. Our tradition tells us that we must work for our neighbor's welfare before those from faraway places. We should encourage our local Jewish communities to systematize volunteer work in their local communities so that more people can benefit from our tradition and generosity of resources and spirit.

[118] Rabbi Jill Jacobs. Interview 30 March 2009.

5. **Measurement of Influence.** There is a need across the burgeoning field of JSL for more research. This is an important and promising field, with many interesting questions to be answered. One subject in need of further research is the degree to which participants are influenced by Jewish service learning experiences. At the end of the paper (Appendix A), I've attached some first-hand accounts and testimonials from participants on a recent Alternative Spring Break trip to Yosemite in spring of 2009. One testimonial was written towards the end of the trip while the rest were written four weeks after the trip was completed. This is one way to collect information about the trips' transformative powers. But in order to get a real sense of the participants' degree of transformation, a longitudinal study must be initiated. In this way, we'll be better able to answer the question: How much commitment to their Jewish communities and to service do they feel after they come home? What impacts are long-lasting? What factors make for a trip that influence the future of its participants in terms of their professions, their choice in life partners, their choices in congregational or organizational affiliation?

6. ***Serve.gov.*** Another issue involves the fact that many individuals and communities have never heard of JSL. Community leaders should be learning more about it and the benefits it might bring their communities. One way to get the attention of these leaders is to orient JSL's goals more directly in line with those originating from President Obama's emphasis on volunteerism (find more information at *serve.gov*). It will be very interesting to see how Jewish organizations tap into President Obama's programs to promote greater civic engagement and responsibility towards our fellow Americans.[119] If JSL can offer joint programs or share interests with the programs being created within the Obama

[119] Solomon, Jeff. Interview. 26 Feb 2009.

administration, Jewish leadership and community commitment would be much easier to garner.

7. **Center for Jewish Service Learning.** Another suggestion involves the creation and strengthening of a Center for Jewish Service Learning, as recommended by Irie and Blair. This center would serve a number of purposes, including "giving voice to the value and ethic of Jewish Service Learning; defining and articulating its purpose; and securing the resources required to advance and improve the practice and impact of this concept."[120] In effect, it could identify, organize, and deliver resources (financial and otherwise) to ensure program growth and measure success. It could lend JSL a certain prestige, the capital of which will be used to garner more resources and high-quality, passionate participants and trained facilitators. Such a center could act as a testing ground for research on Jewish identity, civic responsiveness, and the changing face of community within Judaism and without. Such a center would of course face challenges. The risk of growing too big, too fast has already been addressed above. There are other issues that the center might need to address: political infighting over control of the programming by various funders; lack of variation and innovation as the system is institutionalized, thereby edging out the creativity and momentum that animates people at the present; its mission might become too narrowly focused so as to nullify its efforts towards a broader sense of *tikkun*. These challenges and others are issues that a center such as the newly created *Repair the World* will have to address.[121]

[120] Irie and Blair, 35.
[121] See "References/Resources" for more details about *Repair the World.*

8. **Bridge to Community Organizing.** There is great potential for such an institution to partner with other organizations and synagogues whose missions match those of JSL. Skill in community organizing is a good way to find those partners and work together with them to determine what populations, destinations, and projects make sense for any given group of young Jews. In this way, we fulfill the *halacha* from *mussar* that advises that we help carry the burdens of the needy not for them but with them.[122] For more information on Community-Based Community Organizing (CBCO) and ideas on how JSL and CBCO might work symbiotically, see Recommendation 9 in the next section.

9. **Embed into Synagogue Life.** The final suggestion for the application of JSL is its integration into the culture and educational curriculum of a synagogue. The sections that follow go into depth on how a synagogue leader might begin to embed JSL within the synagogue context, including ten recommendations, an abstract for an educational curriculum, and a couple of sample reflection sections that help to paint a picture of the kinds of enriching conversations possible on such a trip for synagogue youth.

[122] See Tosefta, Baba Metzia, Chapter 11.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STARTING JSL IN YOUR SYNAGOGUE

If you (like so many other Jewish professionals out there):

- Strive to create vibrant Jewish life for and with the next generations of Jews,
- Have apprehension about the negative influences present in our broader American culture with regards to the total obsession with the autonomous self and individualism to the exclusion of concern for the less fortunate,
- Dream of a generation of Jews that display care and responsibility for their Jewish communities and for citizens of our ever-flattening world,
- Fantasize of a day when young Jews will look with curiosity and commitment to their tradition and Jewish learning as a valid guide of how to act and to live in the world
- Desire for the Jewish community to be a voice for righteousness and justice within the communities across America and worldwide,
- Believe in your heart that *tikkun olam* is something that we do not have to complete, but that we cannot be free to desist from doing our part,

Then you should learn more about Jewish service learning and its application in your synagogue.

Jewish Service Learning is an important, new phenomenon in American Jewish life. It is the meeting point of Jewish identity development, meaningful and life-informing Jewish learning, peer community formation, intensive self-discovery, and reflection about the issues that face our modern world. Jewish service learning has provided participants with the opportunity to travel outside of their comfort zones, learn about the real issues that people in our communities and beyond confront daily, and live Torah through their actions. Its

ultimate aim is to bring more Jews into a living dialogue about what it means to be a Jew in the twenty first century. It can also have the effect of displaying to both Jews and non-Jews the immeasurable worth of the Jewish presence in the world.

Until now, Jewish service learning has been relatively unconnected to a broader community context. Though these organizations provide high quality programming for the participant, they lack a consistent communal context in terms of leadership, training, and follow-up activities. Thus, the participants can easily leave their experience behind with no motivation for further Jewish engagement or training in being, as Gandhi said, "the change they want to see in the world."

Its ultimate aim is to bring more Jews into a living dialogue about what it means to be a Jew in the twenty-first century.

In addition, these non-congregational programs are provided exclusively for college-age students and slightly beyond. As a result, prior to their college years, Jewish students are not offered the opportunity to benefit from the fusion of Jewish learning, peer group community building, and direct action. During the period in their development when their peers largely inform the understanding of their identities, it seems that teenage Jewish youth could be greatly impacted by witnessing their Jewish identities in action in service learning. They could enter their college years with a confidence in their Jewish learning and identity. Yet these opportunities are few and far between in the current Jewish service learning landscape.

Provided below is a list of suggestions that offers ideas for integrating Jewish service learning into the broader context of the synagogue and its religious educational program. It provides practical considerations in starting such a program within your synagogue. It includes an abstract of a religious school curriculum to provide you a sense of the way such a

vision could be implemented. In addition, there is a sample reflection session as an example of what to discuss before a trip and a sample reflection session showing a format that could be adapted for use during a trip. Appendix A includes several written reflections that the students were asked to contribute to a publication. A post-trip reflection session could include an assignment like this, plus the organization of another trip or project, such as the one that the young man alluded to in Appendix A, *Reflection III.*[123] With all of your participants still regularly attending religious school of some kind, it should be a natural outgrowth of the trip to reflect on its effectiveness and measure its success during subsequent class meetings. This reflection could be done in cooperation with the students, providing a number of fringe benefits. Their involvement will help them feel as though their voices matter to the congregation. It will help them to know that they have a measure of influence when it comes to programming at the synagogue. This, in turn, might help them to see themselves as future leaders in the Jewish community.

[123] Also see the section entitled "Maintaining Engagement."

A. Ten Things To Consider As You Implement a Service Learning Program in Your Synagogue[124]

1. **Seek the Support of the Clergy:** Do not try to start this kind of venture without the full buy-in of the clergy of the synagogue. This kind of effort could, at different points along the way, require the attention of the entire congregation, from financial support to cultural change of the institution. Having the clergy on your team will make it all possible. If your congregation is not yet ready for Jewish service learning, now may not be the time to initiate such a program. There are many conversations to be had with many different stakeholders within the synagogue that might eventually get the attention of the clergy. With patience and time in the preparation of the synagogue's culture, Jewish service learning can slowly become a normal part of your synagogue.
2. **Address the Needs of the Synagogue:** While you engage in these early conversations, ask stakeholders about their vision for the synagogue. In addition, ask them to articulate the greatest problem facing the synagogue in their eyes. The purpose of these discussions is to evaluate the needs of the synagogue to see if they can be at least partially addressed through an emphasis on service learning. For example, is apathy for both children and parents during the B'nai Mitzvah process a problem? Perhaps service learning can reengage uninterested students. Is there a problem with post-B'nai Mitzvah drop out? Maybe a really exciting service learning trip in the eighth grade will keep a few more of the kids after their big day.

[124] These points both summarize earlier material as well as add to them.

3. **Start Low (in age) and Slow (in pace):** Although service learning can and should be done with adult populations, it may be easiest to begin with the religious school at first. Changes in the educational program are not as difficult or complex for youth, and it might be easier to convince a board that the moral education of our youth should take priority. When you have the buy-in of the clergy and the rationale for how it fits into the synagogue's larger vision, start with only one trip for the first year. I recommend starting with an eighth grade trip to another city in the United States. This will be far enough away from home that it will take these post-B'nai Mitzvah students out of their comfort zones. It will also give them a chance to make good on the commitments they have just made with regards to their obligations as Jewish adults, which will include an obligation to the wellbeing of the "other" learned as a part of the B'nai Mitzvah curriculum. Still, it is close enough that the logistics will be relatively simple and there will be familiar programs with which to partner in finding service work in which to engage.

After a couple of years of successful service learning for this age group, only then would I add another trip for high school students. This second trip should be to another country, such as service project in Central America. This will create an exotic aura that is necessary for making the trip seem "cool" to the students. It will be more difficult logistically, but the impact is expected to be impressive for the participants and their leaders. Remember: these are not just stand-alone trips – they require learning and reflection before, during, and after the trip about issues of Jewish identity, social justice, and the ability of the participants to

become change agents in the world. There is a lot involved – do not attempt too much in the first couple of years so that you can firmly establish the trips as a framework for learning.

4. **Democratize the Process:** As you plan your curriculum, try to get as many stakeholders' opinions as possible. This process will be to your advantage, as it can reveal some otherwise unknown resources for your programming. It will also allow more people to take ownership over the creation and implementation process. The interest in issues of justice addressed through the trips may begin to influence other realms of the synagogue outside of the children's educational program, such as the 'social action committee' or the 'environmental committee.' This is cultural change in action and it can only strengthen your programming and your synagogue.
5. **Reflect, Reflect, And Reflect:** As we will see in the details later in the handbook, an essential component of service learning is reflection. It happens as a part of the day during the service trips, and it should happen on a regular basis within the classroom with the students. But it must also happen in small meetings and conversations with various stakeholders in the synagogue. As you reflect with your fellow stakeholders, answer questions honestly, such as: What measurable effects did the trip have on the participants? What effects are the trips having on the rest of the synagogue? Are these trips having the intended effects that we'd hoped for? What can we change for next time? Getting into the habit of reflecting will help with honest evaluation of the programming and its impact, as well as a clearer articulation of the nature and effectiveness of the trips for the

benefit of funders and critics. Reflection is an important way to make meaning out of otherwise random occurrences in our lives. It should be at the center of the culture of a synagogue to engage in meaning-making on a regular basis; it can be promoted through the process of organizing JSL in the synagogue.

6. **Spread the Word:** Whether it's a sermon from the bema, an article in the newsletter, a justice fair, a play enacted by students, or all of the above and more, the entire congregation should know about the efforts at service learning. They should know about who is being helped, about what students are learning, when the trips are taking place, where they are going, and why the students are being asked to care about these issues. It can become a point of pride for the congregation, as they feel a part of the delegations to countries far away and feel good about the impact their congregation is having within the wider world.
7. **Honor Those Who Serve:** The service learning program at your synagogue should evoke a sense of pride for its participants and other synagogue members. But sometimes it can be difficult for participants themselves to realize the full impact of these types of programs. It may also be difficult for the rest of the congregation to remain informed about the activities of its youth. Honoring those who serve will go a long way in accomplishing both of these goals. Additionally, it is a great way to get the next peer cohort excited about their service experiences to come and to send a clear message that service is an integral part of being a Jew. Ways to honor others can take a variety of forms: a dinner, an awards ceremony, a special party for participants, a new role of greater honor and responsibility during congregational *t'fillah* or during religious school represent some examples.

8. **Linking the Silos:** There is a tendency in the world of Jewish engagement or Jewish education to reinvent the wheel with each new venture. In the case of service learning, this would not only be difficult, but designing each service learning experience from the ground up would be a waste of time. There are already many organizations that run secular service learning programs that could be adapted for Jewish students by simply reframing some of the discussions of seemingly secular issues with Jewish texts and including Jewish terminology and prayer experiences. See the Annotated Bibliography for ideas and resources on how to link the silos.
9. **Connect to Community Organizing Efforts:** Many communities are now turning their social justice energies and agendas towards the Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO) model. In this model, the synagogue seeks broad-based support of an issue that affects the community through a process of listening campaigns, accomplished through one-to-one meetings and small group meetings. During this time, members learn to listen to one another and tell stories about social and public policy concerns by way of the common prompt "What keeps you awake at night?" The lead organizers of the congregation, supported by a professional community organizer, collect these stories and direct the congregation towards research on the pervasive issues. They then plan an action in the social and political realms to help to correct the problems that face the synagogue members and the community at large.

If your synagogue is one of those intrepid communities that are engaged in CBCO, you should brainstorm about the potential synergies between CBCO and

Jewish Service Learning. The JSL alumni might be perfectly primed to work with other communities and are in a position to best empathize with the challenges likely to be addressed, thereby building strengthened relationships between the two communities. On the other hand, the participants of service learning might return from a trip motivated to address a certain issue within their own community – they may need to learn how to organize their community in order to effectuate change. The benefits of participating in an immersive, intensive short-term project usually include a feeling of discomfort with the social ills that they have uncovered, and their desire to make some part of the world more whole is strengthened as a result of their service. These participants often want to engage in local efforts to relieve hardship in their own communities and cities. If the participants can be given the means to engage in episodic, local long-term projects in which they can become more familiar with those whom they are assisting and in turn can see the benefits of long-term solutions, they might be placed in a better position able to operate as real change agents. By connecting service learning with CBCO, the chances of this deep and permanent transformation are more significant.

10. **The Money Question:** The biggest question that faces any venture that incurs cost is "how will we pay for it?" Asking each family to pay their own way is not the answer, as it will add to the already high cost of full participation in Jewish life. With Jewish day school tuitions surpassing that of many universities, Jewish summer camps totally over $5,000 per camper each summer, and scholarship money running low for supporting teen trips to Israel, the cost of growing up

Jewish is approaching inaccessibility for many Jewish families. However, there are other models for supporting such a program within the synagogue. In one East Coast synagogue, the clergy are so committed to service learning that they spend time and energy finding funding from their community members for underwriting a major portion of the trips and their expenses. If your synagogue's clergy will not or cannot raise this kind of designated funding, there are many organizations that are currently searching for cutting-edge Jewish educational programming and Jewish engagement to fund. Some are specifically looking for communities interested in providing service learning opportunities. Again, look to the "References/Resources" section for granting possibilities to fund these new initiatives until you can figure out more permanent ways to incorporate the programming into your synagogue budget. Although the current economic realities make a program like this seem unlikely, now is actually the time to put such a program onto the synagogue's agenda and get it embedded into the synagogue's culture. When the economy improves again, you will be perfectly situated to add a new budget line named "Jewish service learning."

B. An Abstract for a Religious School Curriculum

In every grade, starting from Kindergarten and going through twelfth grade, the students would address some topic concerning social justice at the appropriate developmental levels. Teachers would intersperse short, regular trips to food kitchens, senior adult facilities, homeless shelters and other places of community service to accompany the learning that they experience throughout the year in class. This regular volunteer work could also be tied into the family educational programming, allowing for intergenerational volunteer opportunities. Each year that marks a transition (e.g. entering the first year of B'nai Mitzvah preparation in 3rd or 4th grade; during the B'nai Mitzvah year; during the Confirmation year; graduating from high school before leaving for college) will also mark a trip of consecutively greater length and distance from home. For the youngest students, the trip may only go to a neighboring town, while B'nai Mitzvah students could travel out of the state. The students may eventually going abroad internationally with their class. This curriculum could even extend through the college years and into adulthood, with special trips and courses designed to maximize the JSL experience.

With JSL as a centerpiece, learning goals in many different synagogue educational components could be created that can lead to concrete and authentic assessment. For example, the Hebrew language program could focus on translating Jewish texts so that text study could be done in the original Hebrew and understood at a deeper level. As the students grow, they could learn Modern Hebrew in preparation for a JSL trip to Israel. Another example includes learning about the Jewish calendar and all of its holidays in terms of what they say about how to treat one another and the needy. Through the lens of service learning, the students could even learn about Jewish *middot* and history.

Adult education could then be focused on a more sophisticated look at the social and economic issues of their host communities, in addition to the Jewish answers and challenges. These questions might lead naturally into inquiry about related local issues of poverty and inequality. It would be a wonderful way of organizing the education program of a synagogue, always bringing the learning back to the relevance of Jewish thought and Jewish action to the participants.

C. Sample Pre-Trip Reflection Questions for Community-Building

A group that was to leave shortly on a JSL trip took a look at this short pasuk from Pirkei Avot. It was simple and yet opened the space for deep questions about the kind of community the students wanted to create together during the trip. The bullet points represent the answers that were desirable, but they were not forced on the students. The most important part of the session was to introduce the kinds of expectations that students had of one another and to familiarize them with the nature of language they might want to use as a community.

Do not separate yourself from the community. Pirkei Avot 2:4

1. Why do you think this little saying was included in Pirkei Avot?
   - community is so important to the rabbis: a means of survival and of making life meaningful – same is true today!
   - it is very easy to want to withdraw from community sometimes, especially when times get tough and it is most important to stick with the community
2. What does it mean to you to "separate yourself from the community?"
   - not care about others in the group
   - think you are better than others
   - let others do the work
   - not welcoming to the awkward person
3. What does it mean to you to "include" yourself in the community?
   - be welcoming to every person
   - volunteer to do jobs, even when it isn't your turn
   - listen carefully to what others say and feel
   - being a part of something meaningful and life altering
4. What are the benefits to staying in community?
   - get more work done
   - have more fun cause not dealing with issues all the time
   - perhaps reach a level of closeness that inspires holiness and meaning for our lives!
5. Why might people sometimes separate themselves from the community?
   - they feel shy or self-conscious
   - they are stubborn
   - they disagree with the group
   - they think they are better than the rest of the group or always right
6. What are some problems you foresee us having as a community? Fears and anticipations?
   - getting angry and impatient with one another when someone slacks on their work or is rude to someone else
   - won't agree on how to do Jewish practice or another plan made by the group leaders
7. What are some strategies/expectations for overcoming these issues so that everyone always feels included in the community?

- communication and being patient with one another
- giving others the benefit of the doubt
- trust
- everyone doing their share of the work
- trying to put yourself in someone else's shoes

8. What can each of us do individually to take responsibility for keeping ourselves included in the community?
9. What is the payoff for us for staying in community?
10. What is the payoff for our work and the environment?

D. Sample Reflection Session During the Trip

This is a sample reflection session conducted during the course of a JSL trip. This session occurred on the second day of the trip, by which time the students had come already to expect the time for reflection. The sessions were held in the bunk that housed the students at night after showering and dinner in an informal manner, with students sitting on beds and on the floor. This provided a comfortable setting for the sharing of students' thoughts and feelings.

Monday night:

(10 minutes) Group Check-in

- Each evening, we took time to see how each person was feeling. What was the best part of the day? Worst part of the day? Physical state? Emotional state? In this way, we demonstrate basic care for one another.

(10 minutes) Genograms

- Each night, two students got 3-5 minutes to explain a part of themselves to the rest of the group. Flowing from the question, "What led you to go on this trip?" the student told 2-3 formative stories about their lives in an effort to bond the participants even more and help them reflect on their own lives more deeply.

(10 minutes) Watch segment of DVD on computer: "Planet Earth: Seasonal Forests."

- This was an educational tool that I used from the BBC series entitled "Planet Earth." The students appreciated a little time to relax and be entertained, and responded positively to the use of multimedia.

(30 minutes) Ask questions:

1. How are the environment and people connected? What is the "nature" of our relationship with nature?
2. Where human needs and natural preservation conflict, how should we prioritize?
3. What are the causes of environmental distress?
4. How should we decide what to protect?
5. What do you think about the idea of putting a price tag on the resources we normally take for free from nature?

See Jewish text for some guidance:

Halacha 33: A spring belongs to the residents of a city, and both they and other people rely on the spring; the owners take precedence over the others. Between the others who rely on the spring and the owners' animals, the others take precedence over their animals. Rabbi Yosi says the owners' animals take precedence over the lives of the others.

Halacha 34: Between owners' animals and the animals of others, the owners' animals take

precedence.
Halacha 35: Between others and the owners' washing, the lives of others take precedence over the owners' washing. R. Yosi says the owners' washing takes precedence over the lives of others.
Halacha 36: The owners' washing and the washing of others, the owners' washing takes precedence over the washing of others.
Halacha 37: Between the animals of others and the owners' washing, the animals of the others take precedence over the owners' washing. Between the irrigation system of the owners and the others' animals, the owners irrigation system takes precedence over the others' animals. And everything is accounted for in the final consideration.

Tosefta Baba Metzia, Chapter 11

Discuss text for participant understanding and principles that might be drawn from it.

Final Question for Journaling and Discussion the Next Day During a Break from Work: Considering your own beliefs, along with the Jewish principles we've just derived from the text, how far does your obligation to help protect the earth extend?

ONE FINAL WORD

Our world, Jewish and non-Jewish, is changing quite rapidly. The challenges ahead involve an understanding of the impact of these external and internal transformational realities on Jewish identity and social engagement. The formation of a new American Jewish paradigm is imminent, as our communal models are altered by a new generation of young people and funders. As Jews, we are obligated to reinterpret the tradition for creative and meaningful use in the times in which we live. Jewish service learning is a bridge over which affiliated and unaffiliated young Jews can cross in order to approach and embrace their Jewish identities and sense of Jewish civics with passion and commitment. Mordechai Kaplan challenged us to "awaken in ourselves and the rest of the world a moral responsibility in action." It is through Jewish service learning that we understand just how relevant Judaism can be in our lives as moderns. We will step one inch closer to seeing our vision of a world in which there are no needy among us, a world redeemed.

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Jewish Service Learning Research – Go to the following website for JSL research. http://www.nathancummings.org/jewish/Jewish_Service_Learning.pdf This is a summary of an analysis of the Jewish service learning landscape, prepared by BTW informing change and requested by the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the Jim Joseph Foundation, and the Schusterman Foundation. It summarizes the findings of recent research on the current state of the field. It also offers some suggestions for next steps for the field, some of which are already being adopted.

Jewish Generational Studies - Two important studies that come out of research on this generation of Jews informed my thesis and offered a great window into the trends and characteristics of Jews in Generations X and Y. You can find them online through the website of their funders – the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies (*acbp.net*).

- *Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam... Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices* (2005).
- *OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era* (2003).

"Renewing Jewish Life through Jewish Civics" by Rabbi Sid Schwarz – This article and other related articles by Rabbi Schwartz influenced my thinking on the rights and responsibilities of being a part of the Jewish people. In terms of the rationales for young people to sustain their Jewish identities, I thought that this line of reasoning spoke deeply to both the necessity of participation in some form of Jewish communal life and the privileges gained from such participation.

Experiential Education - David Kolb and Peter Jarvis in the secular world, and Joseph Reimer in the Jewish world, informed my thinking about experiential education and the many ways in which Jewish service learning is one huge experiential learning experiment. Though Kolb and Jarvis look mostly at adult learners, their models still apply to high school and college students. In addition, although I wasn't able to include many details about the parallels between Jewish summer camp and JSL, Reimer's work on learning at summer camps has many applicable overlaps with the experience of an intensive JSL experience. More work could certainly be done in this area of the JSL research.

Corporation for National and Community Service – This is a federally funded national effort at promoting service learning in secular organizations and institutions. They have been working for decades in the field of service learning and have published numerous studies on the effects of service learning on elementary, high school, and college service learning experiences. There is a great deal to be learned from this organization and its immense amount of experience.

Linking the Silos - Go to *serve.gov* or *dosomething.gov* to find opportunities for secular service that could be transformed into a Jewish service learning trip. In order to transform these service learning trips, facilitators will need quality educational materials. For educational resources, American Jewish World Service (*ajws.org*) and Jewish Funds for Justice (*jfsj.org*) have what I consider the best set of texts and discussion questions for

helping you organize your reflection sessions outside of the service. As time goes by, there should be even more high-quality curricula accessible to congregations. See Repair the World (*werepair.org*) for the most current updates on the availability of Jewish service learning materials and opportunities.

REFERENCES/RESOURCES

www.justaction.org - Lesson plans, action plans, and advice for starting a Jewish service learning program with a local group of Jews.

www.ajws.org - The American Jewish World Service currently provides immersive, intensive Jewish service learning opportunities to third-world countries, mostly in Central America and West Africa. They work with local non-profits in both a funding capacity as well as volunteer capacity. The run a limited number of service learning trips per year, most recently focused on rabbinic students from all denominations. They are well-known for incredible curricula.

www.jesna.org - The Jewish Education Service of North America works to advance Jewish education in all of the newest, most cutting-edge fields, including news updates and information about Jewish service learning. Keep an eye on this organization as it engages with JSL in the coming years.

www.rac.org - The Religious Action Center contains information about the Reform Movement's burgeoning efforts in the field of Jewish service learning. These programs are currently available on the national level only and run out of PANIM: The Center for Jewish Service Learning, which seeks to help Jews "live by Torah" by providing vehicles to help volunteers reach out to those in need.

www.sulamcenter.org - The SULAM Center created by the Los Angeles Jewish Federation is an interactive website that allows high school and college students to select from a menu of options their favored population, causes, or timeframe during which to volunteer. It then helps to match them with willing participating programs that are looking for volunteers. This kind of program makes finding Los Angeles service opportunities easy, leaving only the framing, education, and reflection work for facilitators.

www.jewishjustice.org - The Jewish Funds for Justice contains under its umbrella a project called SPARK: The Center for Jewish Service Learning. SPARK seeks to inspire a commitment to service and activism through work with organizations, families, students and schools, and in developing and delivering meaningful Jewish service learning programs in local communities through engaging groups in service and learning travel programs.

www.werepair.org - Repair the World is a new non-profit based in New York City that seeks to grow the capacity and quality of Jewish service learning with the result that service learning becomes a standard part of what it means to "grow up Jewish." As a result, they will become a clearinghouse for programming, initiatives, and curricular resources in the next few years. Be in touch with them personally to get advice on how to start your own Jewish service learning program.

www.servicelearning.org - The Learn and Serve America program offers grants and facilitator training to organizations interested in initiating their own service learning

programs. They have funded Jewish organizations in the past, so check there for funding opportunities.

www.hillel.org - Hillels on college campuses have historically partnered with City Year, a national volunteer program that provides training and resources for recent college graduates to work in city organizations for a year of service. It is possible that your synagogue's high school kids could partner with similar programs in order to get training in different service areas, as well as good role models for their own college careers and beyond. In addition, Hillels traditionally run Jewish service learning programs, usually to New Orleans or through student-led trips to destinations around the country, that might be useful models for how to organize and fund your own trips.

www.jimjosephfoundation.org, www.schusterman.org, www.nathancummings.org - These are Jewish granting organizations that are often most interested in new and innovative Jewish educational programming. They may be a good resource for grants or information on where else to look for funding resources.

APPENDIX A

Reflection I:
Written while participating in a Jewish service learning Alternative Spring Break ("ASB") trip to Yosemite for an Erev Shabbat service by "Shani" on March 27, 2009:

While sitting by the river during the meditation session, I thought a lot about the rushing water, or perhaps marveled would be a more accurate description. It occurred to me that all the water passing me by would never again be in the same spot. Every drop of water passes through a point only once EVER and for whatever reason this idea blew my mind. Upon a little more thinking, I realized that the passing water was just like my life. Never will I truly by in the same place twice. Even if I came to Yosemite again (and I certainly hope I will), it will be totally different and unique experience, likely one devoid of raking and shoveling. This idea got me thinking that each day needs to be much more appreciated. Each day is its own wonder and own opportunity for fun, adventure, and growth, and wasting it is just not an option anymore. From this trip I hope to walk away with a greater appreciation for daily life and the basics. There is magic to be found in almost every task, a point proven to me by the days of digging and weed eating that did indeed make a difference. This trip has reminded me of the beauty of simple things, like the continuous fields of poppies that paint the green hills orange or, my personal favorite, the purple fluorescent red bud bushes. It is this notion of beauty and appreciation that I want to continue to carry, and I know that I will.

Reflection II:
Written one month after the ASB trip by "Sarah":
Looking back to what I expected the trip to bring me I feel foolish. At those first meetings we were all so anxious about what to wear, choosing the people we wanted to get close to, and predicting romantic connections. Oh how wrong we were about the impact and emotions that would accompany us on the trip! How could I have predicted the feeling of knowing that I could conquer the world as long as I had my spirit and my hiking boots? Who would have guessed that I would finally choose what I wanted to do with my life (go in to physical therapy)? I went on this trip because I wanted to bond with more UCLA Jews and because I wanted to have a typical college experience. I can only hope that we continue the discussions started on the trip... those talks about the intricacies of our climate impact as humans and what, if anything, we and our friends should be doing about it. We did not come up with any answers, but I know that we will not soon forget the emotion and passion behind those talks on the floor of the hostel. Our surroundings merely enforced our humanity. We were able to get away from clean sheets and lazy mornings and were able instead to be HUMAN with each other and rediscover what that means. It means the boys letting the girls shower first, eating PB&J sandwiches for a week straight, cheering each other on as we transverse mountains, and most importantly walking in silence as we watched the poppies bloom amongst the burnt hillside. This trip seems already like a dream, but I know that the connections I made there were real and that the emotions I felt were the most pure and simple that I have felt since leaving home for college.

Reflection III:
Written one month after the ASB trip by "Jacob":

In the spring of 2008, I took part in UCLA Hillel's Alternative Spring Break trip to New Orleans to help in the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts that were still very necessary. I was amazed and frustrated over the lack of relief assistance that these people had received over 2.5 years later, and upon my arrival back at school, I wanted to make it a priority to make other students aware of these problems that were taking place all around them. I wanted to bring my experience back to them and give them the opportunity to make positive changes themselves, as I had felt I had done on that trip. Therefore, I felt that co-leading an alternative spring break trip this past spring break would be the perfect opportunity to do just that. Along with my partner, we aimed to expose other students to the importance of environmental restoration and preservation. My personal goal was to bring attention to issues, in this case environmental issues, which they otherwise would be unaware of without this immersive experience.

As we began our service work along the Merced River, I began to sense a bit of frustration from the trip participants as to how we were making a difference. We were clearing trails and cleaning up campgrounds, and many felt as though we were doing this work and no one was truly appreciating it or benefiting from it. However, as the week progressed, we began to realize the impact our work was having not only on the surrounding community, but on the River Ranger who we were helping throughout the week. He explained to us that we were saving him at least two weeks of work that he would have had to do alone. Additionally, upon hearing about the work we were doing, several members of this small community told us how appreciative they were of our efforts and how important the trail and campgrounds were to their daily life. The fire this past July had made it difficult to use the trail and campgrounds, and we were now bringing a key part of this community back.

Throughout the trip, I was fairly aware of the impact we were having, but what was most important to me was that the other students were aware of the impact they were having. The daily reflections with the group were where I began to notice this. As the week progressed, people began sharing their insights into the importance of our work and what it meant to them to be taking part in something so unique, so important, yet so unknown to the rest of their community back at school. By the end of the trip, we had learned a great deal about the environment and what we could do to restore and maintain it. Just as I had wanted to share my New Orleans experience with everyone, all of my peers and I were ready to bring back what we had learned in Yosemite to our community. As a result, our group plans on pursuing other local community service projects to continue making others aware of the importance of protecting our environment.

Reflection IV:

Written one month after the trip by "Jaime":

I have had the opportunity both to participate in a student led alternative break and to lead my own. As a participant, I quickly became part of a community strengthened by our mutual sense of purpose and our shared tradition as Jews. As a leader, I learned that wonderful communities like these do not form on their own. Through Hillel's alternative spring break program, I honed some important skills: the nitty gritty organization of details, coordinating schedules, ensuring comfort in group dynamics, and motivating people are among a few. I am confident that I am well prepared to plan events and lead groups of people to serve. Beyond that, I learned that I enjoy the process and want to explore working in some capacity

within the Jewish community or in the greater realm of social work, a realization that would not have come without Hillel's alternative spring break program. The trip to Yosemite itself was an adventure. Our work had the right balance of fun and relevance. Our group discussions were sincere, provocative, and valuable to me. It was incredibly rewarding to watch my peers enjoy themselves, reflect on Jewish and environmental questions, and grow personally on a trip that I had helped plan. I am proud to have led a trip like this through Hillel and hope the opportunity for others to experience something like it will be around for a long time.

APPENDIX B

This is a graphic from Peter Jarvis' article on experiential learning entitled "Religious Experience and Experiential Learning." It represents the more complex and accurate model of learning as compared with that proposed by David Kolb in the body of the paper.

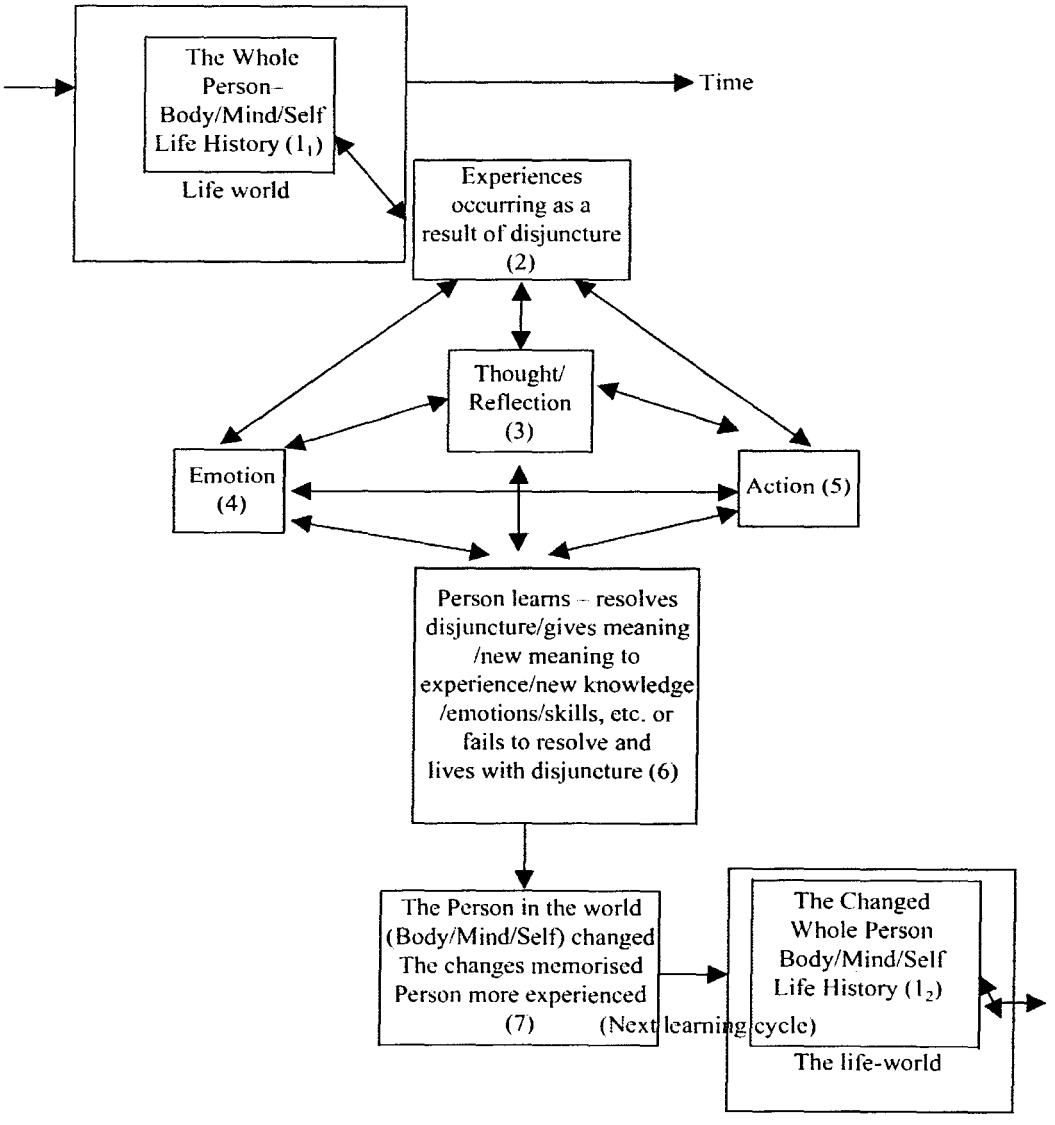

FIGURE 2. The Transformation of the Person through Learning.