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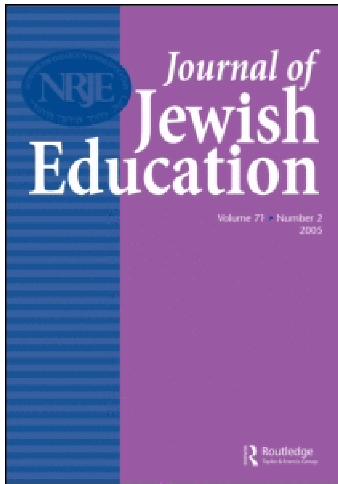

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THE ROLE OF MENTORING IN ENHANCING EXPERIENCE OF A CONGREGATIONAL ISRAEL TRIP

LISA D. GRANT

INTRODUCTION

She asks me if I'm here on a pilgrimage. I'm about to say, "Of course not," but I catch my wife's eye. "Maybe it will turn out that way," I say. (Jacobson, 1994, 283)

Many adult American Jews travel to Israel, at least in part, to try to understand how it fits into their own life story. Most of them have a story of religious and or ethnic identification, involvement or non-involvement that shapes what they explicitly or subconsciously expect from a trip to Israel. The stories are varied and complex. For some, an Israel trip represents the fulfillment of a long-time dream. Others go out of a sense of curiosity or obligation. Some go to mark a family life cycle event such as a child's bar or bat mitzvah or their own adult bat mitzvah. For others, it serves as a benchmark — a way to measure personal growth from one stage of adulthood to another. For others still, it is part of a newly discovered or reawakened interest in Judaism. Though they may seek out and encounter vastly different experiences of Israel, many are after an answer to the same questions: Where do I belong? What is my place in this story of the Jewish people?

In this paper, I explore how the religious experiences of mid-life adults on a congregational Israel trip might be developed into lasting and meaningful life change after returning home through a process of mentoring or spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is a concept more commonly used in Christian circles than Jewish ones. It was originally designed as a process of dialogue and exploration for the development of priests and others actively pursuing religious ministries. In recent years, however, the practice has broadened somewhat to include lay people who are also considering questions of ultimate meaning and the place of God in their lives. While most American Jewish adults would not readily describe their plans to travel to Israel in terms of a spiritual quest, in practice, their trips frequently take on the form and substance of a religious pilgrimage. Spiritual direction might be one way to help travelers recognize religious experiences on the trip, and then identify or explore how those experiences influence their perceptions and life choices in terms of their evolving beliefs, behaviors and commitments.

Relatively few scholars have explored the question of the potential for a trip to Israel to stimulate reflection and/or change at mid-life. What we find in this limited literature is that adult programs, like those for adolescents, are geared more towards promoting Jewish identity than they are towards raising or addressing questions about Judaism or core values. Opportunities to explore Jewish values and religious practice on most of these trips are limited and lack focus (Breakstone, 1987; S. Cohen, 1995). As a result, participants may develop a more intensified relationship with Israel, but the trip has relatively little impact on their relationship with Judaism (Breakstone).

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These results suggest that there may be unmet potential in adult Israel trips to explore issues of personal and religious meaning. Reisman (1993) notes that many American Jews travel to Israel in response to a general sense of postmodern malaise and disconnection. Sensing a void in their lives, they come to Israel seeking a stronger bond to community, transcendence, meaning, and purpose, and a deeper rootedness within Jewish tradition. They are looking for and can find in an Israel experience, transformation. Participants in the trips he studied:

> ...experience a rare sense of synergy— things come together in a way which leads them to see new possibilities in how they define their lives. The recognition that the catalyst for the trip's impact is its Jewish rationale is a critical ingredient of the Israel trip. The people realized that the sense of personal fulfillment they have experienced has come about through the transforming power of their Jewish heritage, as this has been activated by their Israel experience (Reisman, 46).

Reisman's findings point to the importance of the trip curriculum and educators as the most critical factors in realizing this transformational potential. Klein-Katz (1990) also focuses on the trip curriculum. She observes that personal backgrounds, world views, and questions, whether articulated or unformed, contribute to how individual participants interpret the experience of their trip. Trip planners therefore, need to build upon this in designing a program that will challenge participants to rethink their contexts by facilitating opportunities for exploration of issues relevant to their lives. Her research showed that central to the experience was providing regular opportunities for reflection before, during and after the Israel trip so that participants could consider key questions such as: What does this mean to me? What are the implications for my work? and What does this mean to me as a member of the American Jewish community? (Abrams, Klein-Katz and Schachter, 1993)

SCOPE OF STUDY

This paper describes how a form of mentoring that focuses on the individual's personal growth, might enhance critical reflection about one's Israel experiences and the subsequent reshaping of one's Jewish beliefs and behaviors. Investing in the resources to develop such an educational role presumes that simply exposing someone to stimuli in the form of observations and experiences on the trip may be insufficient in facilitating the questioning of meaning that may lead to growth and change. Ongoing dialogue, questioning, and reframing of assumptions are necessary to produce lasting life change.

The study concentrates on the experiences of thirteen adults in their forties and fifties who participated in three different Conservative congregational trips to Israel in 1998. The trips ranged in length from twelve to fourteen days. Each trip was led by a tour guide and tour educator. The congregational rabbi accompanied each group and provided informal leadership, and substantial input into the program itineraries, as well as ongoing commentary on the varied experiences. There were families on each trip who were celebrating either the bar or bat mitzvah of a child, or an adult bat mitzvah as part of their Israel experience. In each case, these religious ceremonies included and were enhanced by the active involvement of all of the participants.

I accompanied Congregation B'nai Jacob (CBJ) as a participant observer during their twelve-day trip in December, 1998. This group consisted of six different family units. In addition to the Rabbi and his family, there were three families with b'nai mitzvah as well as other children, and two single women in

their 50's, one of whom was traveling with her 31-year-old son. My observations of this group were augmented by a number of additional data sources. Three women kept journals which they agreed to share with me. Follow-up interviews were conducted with these three women, plus three men and one other woman from the trip, approximately six weeks after the trip concluded. Second interviews were also held with the three women and two of the men about six months later.

A second pool of respondents consisted of six people from two other congregational trips. Three women from a trip in July, 1998 kept journals and were interviewed one and six months after completion of their trip. Two men and one woman from an August, 1998 trip were interviewed six months after their return home. Table 1 shows the age and gender breakdown and notes how many Israel trips each participants in the study had taken previously. Table 2 presents their age as well as number of times each participant was interviewed and who kept journals.

This paper focuses on an unexpected finding of a larger study that was undertaken to better understand what happens to mid-life American Jewish adults when they travel to Israel. The purpose of that study was to conduct an open-ended exploration of a series of questions about why people travel to Israel and how their experiences might influence their religious development. As a result of the conversations I had with trip participants during, but more significantly *after* their journeys, I realized that my involvement had the unintended effect of helping people articulate, clarify, and make deeper meaning out of their feelings and experiences of the journey. Hence, the question emerged as to the possible role spiritual direction or mentoring may have as a follow-up to a congregational Israel trip.

ADULT DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

Most theories of adult development posit that growth and change is a part of natural human development (Merriam and Carafella, 1991; Goult, 1978). At midlife, Erikson (1964) writes that we face a choice between "stagnation and generativity." Self-actualization or achievement of one's full potential is preconditioned on growth (Maslow, 1964; Knowles, 1980). In writing about faith development, Fowler (1993) goes so far as to say, "we stand under an imperative toward ongoing growth." Based on these theories, the role of adult education, therefore, is to facilitate growth and change (Lindeman, 1926; Knowles, 1980; Tennant, 1993). However, most people resist change, especially when it threatens to disrupt their routine, their habits, and their carefully constructed systems of values and beliefs. Further, a variety of internally based, as well as social factors can inhibit the change process (Daloz, 1986; Kegan, 1995). As Daloz writes: "Most adults

Table 1. Age and Gender Breakdown of Participants Interviewed in Study

Congregation*	Female	Male	Firt Trip	1st Trip in > 25 yrs.	40–49	50–54	55–59
CBJ — 12/98	4	3	2	2	5	1	1
Ohavei Shalom — 7/98	3		2	1	2		1
Emanuel — 8/98	1	2	3		2		

*Pseudonyms are used for all congregations.

*Table 2. Data Sources for Each Participant**

	Trip	Age	1 Interview	2 Interviews	Kept Journal
Charles	CBJ	40–44	X		
Gloria	CBJ	40–44		X	X
Iris	CJB	55–59		X	X
Joyce	CBJ	45–49		X	X
Larry	CBJ	50–54		X	
Rachel	CBJ	40–44	X		
Stuart	CBJ	40–44		X	
Carol	7/98	55–59		X	X
Eleanor	7/98	45–49		X	X
Lauren	7/98	40–44		X	X
Audrey	8/98	40–44	X		
Daniel	8/98	40–44	X		
Robert	8/98	55–59	X		

*Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

are richly enmeshed in a fabric of relationships which hold them as they are, and many of their friends and relations do not wish them to change" (7). Nevertheless, some adults are motivated either by external necessity or internal drive, to question and ultimately reconstruct the meaning of their lives.

A distillation of the literature on adult learning and change suggests there are four key factors which determine the extent to which an individual will engage the intellectual, emotional, and relational work that can lead to the reconstruction of meaning and ultimately, behavioral change. These include:

1. The degree to which the learner is interested and willing to engage in problem-solving and to reflect critically on his or her experience;
2. The readiness of the learner to build on past experience to process new experiences and knowledge;
3. The readiness of the adult to learn in order to meet the demands of specific developmental tasks of his or her social role (e.g., parenting, aging, coping with life changes).
4. The involvement of the individual in a social context which supports and nurtures the change.[1]

Underlying all of this is the assumption that an adult must be self-directed in his or her learning. Without that motivation or perceived need, change will not occur. The role of an adult educator must certainly be informed by this limitation. In this way, the adult educator's role is closely parallel to a mentor or spiritual director. Both types of relationships can help in facilitating transformation. However, the educator or mentor cannot force change when that is not part of the learner's agenda (Daloz, 1986). What they can do is facilitate and enhance a change process for individuals who are in an unsettled mode of inquiry and re-assessment of life patterns and

choices. Such a relationship has the potential to provoke new ways of thinking and knowing about old assumptions and frames of meaning.

Mezirow (1990) describes the process of reconstructing meaning as transformative learning. His theory of transformation focuses on the reflective learning process by which adults recognize the distortions in their systems of meaning and reshape their perspective to be more inclusive, flexible, and open to other frames of meaning. He describes perspective transformation as the process by which we become:

> ...critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings (14).

Growth or learning as an adult, according to this theory, occurs through a process of critically assessing the assumptions which shape our current frame of reference. It can occur through two different routes. One is a cumulative process, "a set of progressive transformations in related meaning schemes" (Mezirow, 1991, 141). The other is more sudden, resulting from a disorienting event that challenges one to reconsider the assumptions underlying the concepts, beliefs, judgments, and feelings that shape how one makes meaning. Both the gradual process of change and the more dramatic one require critical reflection before they can be sustained and fully integrated into one's meaning structure. Only through this process of critical reflection are we able to understand how and why the presuppositions and distortions in our views "come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world." Without reflection the challenge, disorientation, or dissonance remain a momentary "leap" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) outside of one's frame or reference, but not enduring change.

Spiritual direction is a form of critical reflection that is shaped and enhanced by a dialogic process. Thomas Merton (1960) defined it as "a continuous process of formation and guidance" (13). It is a one-to-one relationship in which two people voluntarily come together to focus on the spiritual life of the person seeking direction. The spiritual director is a person who helps another, through dialogue and exploration, to "recognize and follow the inspirations of grace in his life, in order to arrive at the end to which God is leading him" (17). Merton cautions that it is not guidance of one's spiritual activities or observances; rather the focus is on the *whole person* (14). As Leech (1977) writes: "Spiritual direction is the achievement of wholeness of life, an integrated personality, in which the inner and outer man are united" (108).

Mid-life adults might be particularly suited to this process of reflection. Similar to adolescence, mid-life can be seen as an unsettled period of life (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993). It is a period of questioning and challenging, of exploring choices and trying to situate oneself in a community (Erikson). Much of early adulthood is devoted to a process of building — marriage, children, careers, community, financial stability. Havighurst (1972) calls these "developmental tasks." At mid-life, these tasks may be accomplished or threatened. Some people experience a sense of satisfaction and completion about their choices; others, sensing a void, enter into a period of reflection and questioning of ultimate meanings (Bruner, McAdams). For many, this perceived absence marks the beginning of what they may call a spiritual journey (Bellah, 1985; Roof, 1993; Wuthnow, 1999). Frequently, but not always, this sense of destabilization is precipitated by an outside event, the

loss of a job, divorce, illness or other life challenge. This unsettled period may push people to reflect and re-evaluate their systems of meaning and behaviors. They may begin to pursue new interests or resume one set aside in the rush of daily life. They start to come to terms with their own mortality, looking backwards and forwards in their lives. As Pearce (1982) notes, travel at this stage of life, is oriented towards self-actualizing experiences. Thus, an Israel trip may have as significant an impact on strengthening of Jewish identity and solidifying a sense of connection to Israel for mid-life adults as it does for adolescents.

PARADOXICAL PILGRIMS — A CONTINUUM OF CHANGE

The Israel trip certainly had an impact on almost all of the participants in this study. The degree or intensity of that impact, however, seemed largely pre-determined by the underlying motivations and expectations each individual had for the trip. Whether they articulated it in advance or not, many were out to discover something about themselves and their heritage however they construe it. They were not comfortable calling themselves pilgrims and they were often, though not always, reluctant to label their experiences 'religious'. Yet, they manifested many of the behaviors of classical pilgrimage. This began in how they expressed their decisions to take this trip. *None* of the people I interviewed described their trip as a typical vacation. The only time any of them had participated in an organized tour was on this and prior Israel trips. They all consciously chose to travel with their congregational community and their rabbi. For several, the only way they had been, or would consider going to Israel was through a congregational trip. Iris, for example, went to Israel for the first time with the cantor from her congregation in 1996, and again during the summer of 1998. As she noted, when the Rabbi decided to take a group in December, 1998, she seized the opportunity to go again six months later. Gloria and Stuart went with the Rabbi on his first congregational trip in 1996 and decided then that they would ask him to organize another group trip two years later for their daughter's bat mitzvah. Laren from Ohavei Shalom said, "I think if it hadn't been this trip, it wouldn't have been this time. I mean, we weren't even thinking about going to Israel."[2] Joyce from CBJ simply stated: "I wanted to with the Rabbi as a CBJ group. That's what I was looking for."[3]

This was a first trip outside of the United States for several participants. For others, it was the first time they had taken more than a one week vacation. Some, like Carol, referred to the trip as "an educational experience."[4] Eleanor contrasted it from her usual "lie on the beach and read" vacation. Three participants were returning to Israel after more than 25 years, and were anxious to reconnect with the land and their own pasts as well. Another told me that Israel was the only alternative her husband would consider to his annual ski trip.[5] Thus, they were paradoxical pilgrims in search of a center they may not have been able to define, but that they yearned for nonetheless. They left their role and routine behind and entered into a different dimension of time and space that had a different meaning than any other travel experience. Along the way, many discovered or intensified their sense of connection with Judaism and the Jewish people. And they returned home somehow different. As Larry said, "If I were not to have gone [to Israel] and died, it would have been different in terms of my life story."[6]

The CBJ trip was designed to give rituals and religious expression a prominent place on the itinerary, both in structured and spontaneous ways. The first formal event of the trip was framed as a religious experience through the use of liturgy and the invocation of collective memory. This entailed a tree-planting cer-

emony in a forest on the way up to Jerusalem. Maya, the tour educator, asked the group to form a circle and then dedicate the tree they were about to plant in memory or in honor of someone special in their lives. Each person briefly described their reasons for dedicating their tree to the person they chose. Maya closed by reminding everyone that the circle is wider than the group standing there that day, stating: "We bring others with us on this journey."[7] In her journal, Gloria reflected on her sense of history at the moment of planting.

> Putting those little saplings in the dried out dirt at the edge of a cliff overlooking a valley where in the distance the Maccabees had lived was very emotional. We were remembering those to whom we had dedicated these little trees, remembering thousands of years of Jewish history and looking to the future with hope....The trip was off to a meaningful and spiritual start.[8]

In addition to this ceremony, participants attended a number of formal worship services including two b'nai mitzvah ceremonies. There were a number of more subtle reminders as well. On both Fridays of the trip, the Rabbi encouraged his congregants to "do a little more to observe this Shabbat" to experience the full benefits of a Shabbat in Jerusalem. Most complied. At a visit to a Bedouin tent, the Israeli Jewish interpreter/host asked the group at one point: "Are you religious?" For an instant, no one replied. Then, the Rabbi said "yes," and then the others chimed in. Later, referring back to that incident he said to the group that he wanted them to see themselves as religious people.[9]

Almost every participant in this study had at least one, if not several powerful experiences on the trip that resulted in some degree of internal reflection about self and meaning, which is how religious experience is defined within the context of this study. The range and intensity of that reflection varied, depending on the individual's developmental readiness or openness to change and particular learning style. Those who saw the Israel trip as part of their own process of religious growth wanted to be moved and uplifted. Many of the experiences on the trip, both in the structured setting of the tour and outside of it during unexpected personal moments, served to strengthen and/or accelerate religious growth for those on a self-described path of reflection and change about their religious lives. Certainly their own predisposition had a profound impact on their experience. Larry said it most clearly: "I guess you bring stuff to Israel....your history, your beliefs. Your values. Your expectation. Your hopes.... And reality sort of dances off of it. It heightens it. It changes it."[10]

A MENTOR AS A CATALYST FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION

One aspect of the trip that appeared to have a significant impact on at least some of the participants, was my own unintended role. As a participant observer and researcher, I influenced the process. A number of people agreed to keep journals at my request. Though I did not actively interview anyone while on the trip, when people asked me questions about my research, I would answer. The interviews I conducted with participants after their trips were designed to encourage reflection, and to help the respondent construct knowledge about his or her experiences. I knew full well that the interview would not be a neutral site of reportage. I wanted them to make sense out of how they could integrate their Israel experiences into their life's story.

Some of these participants may not have told their story if I had not been part of their experience. Many in the CBJ group I accompanied, resisted the formal group processing sessions that were part of the organized itinerary. I frequently heard criticisms that these

sessions were juvenile and a waste of time. Yet, these same people were comfortable talking with me about their lives. They shared personal stories of tragedy and triumph, of deaths, divorces, conversions, of their struggles to figure out where they belonged in Judaism and how to make their lives meaningful. This happened serendiptiously while on the trip, on the bus or walking between sites. It happened through the journals they kept and it happened most significantly during the follow-up interviews.

Stories play an essential role in identity formation and the construction, transmission and transformation of culture (Witherell and Noddings, 1991). They provide continuity of personal identity and serve as a means of constructing personal coherence through time (Crites, 1971). When people write or tell their stories they are engaged in both the telling and the interpretation (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). It is an inherently subjective process that embellishes and interprets events in such a way as to make them meaningful to the teller. It is ultimately a process of using the past to construct one's own personal history, defining what matters in a personal way. Under the right conditions, telling one's story can provide and opportunity for critical reflection which leads to transformation. Huberman (1995) describes this as a process of "de-centering" where the possibility is created to reframe one's system of meaning. This disequilibrium can ultimately result in a change in attitudes and behavior.

My involvement with these trip participants served as such a de-centering agent, causing them to think more deeply about their experiences than they otherwise might have done. Our discourse, based on the interactive effect of my questions and their responses helped develop and shape meaning (Bruner, 1990; Mishler, 1987). As Mishler (1986) writes: "Looking at how interviewees connect their responses into a sustained account, that is, a story, brings out problems and possibilities of interviewing that are not visible when attention is restricted to question-answer exchanges." Thus, the story developed through our collaborative reconstruction of meaning.

There were several instances where this was apparent. A number of people directly stated how valuable they thought our conversations had been in making them think through unresolved issues and clarify unconsidered meanings. Larry said: "It's not usual on a trip to be debriefed and reflect upon it. It brings another dimension....Now that you mention it, I'll think about....Reading about things and reflecting about it does transform it somewhat, at least gives it a different texture."[11] In his comment "Sitting with you is another religious experience,"[11] Charles seemed to be saying that simply having the opportunity to share his thoughts and feelings with a fellow Jew was an important extension of the trip. Joyce said she would not have spoken about a profound religious experience she had at a synagogue on the last Friday night of the trip, "had the opportunity not presented itself."[13] Likewise, Iris told me she would not have talked with anyone at all about her experiences because she didn't think they'd be interested or understand.[14] Lauren expressed similar sentiments. Then she added how she thought every trip should have someone like me to help people process the experience once home. She said:

> I felt the need for some kind of wrapping up. Talking with you affects what's happening to me. It has been really important. If you weren't here, I think the Rabbi would be the logical person to help with the process, though I'm not sure I would have the same conversation with any rabbi, or this rabbi, but I think there should be some person available to fill this role.[15]

The role I played had little to do with the

actual programming of the trip. In fact, I assiduously tried to avoid interfering with the tour guide's or rabbi's narrative accounts or decisions about the itinerary. While my goal as a researcher was to study how mid-life adults reacted to and processed their experiences in Israel, I inadvertently served as a mentor or spiritual guide. The questions I asked helped people elucidate and clarify their experiences. I forced a heightened awareness of the trip as a potential catalyst for change. I afforded people the opportunity to actively reflect on their experiences.

Such a role, if developed, could be a useful addition to any trip, during the journey, but more significantly back at home. No matter how profound, the experiences of an Israel trip are soon overwhelmed by the press of daily life. Participants may tell a few people about some of their experiences, but they soon recognize that few want to hear details of an experience they did not share (Brookfield, 1986). Unless they have an opportunity for actively exploring or expanding ways of understanding what these experiences mean to them in terms of their Jewish beliefs and behaviors, the experiences fade into pleasant memories. Interaction with a mentor or guide would help participants actively reflect on their experiences and shape a narrative from which they could make meaning.

In some cases, the congregational rabbi could fill this role. Other models are possible as well. As Lauren indicated, she did not think she would have been as open with her rabbi as she was with me. Title or position may not be as important in forming this relationship as certain qualities which include an openness to conversation, an ability to foster a climate of non-judgmental collaboration, and a shared condition of uncertainty about the outcome. As Ruffing writes, "what directs the course of the conversation is not one or the other of the participants, but the subject matter of understanding to which the partners are directed in the conversation. Both partners are led by the subject they are pursuing together". (47)

Change is not just a reflective process, but occurs through collaboration and dialogue with others (Friere, 1970; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Belenky, 1986; Brookfield, 1986; Burbules, 1993). Change requires both a social context and the individual will to change. Identity is formed, reshaped, and transformed not in isolation, but in relationship. "Relationality is at the heart of all things," writes Harrison (1985, 15). Conversations wtih a mentor or spiritual guide provide the individual with an opportunity for directed exploration of options that might not be considered for knowing and reknowing the object of study.

While few participants reported actual behavioral changes as a result of their experiences, many did talk about feeling transformed in some way by the trip. At minimum, everyone reported feeling a stronger sense of connection to Israel and to their own sense of Jewish identity. While most did not go home motivated to alter their level of observance, many did find that the trip prompted them to reflect on or question their beliefs and commitments. For example, Charles noted that he did not believe the trip inspired him to increase his observance, but it did make him think more about ritual, "what makes ritual work. What makes... the connections live connections. So I may not do more quantity-wise. I may not even do it more religiously in the traditional definition. But somehow the mind set is more deeply rooted. I guess to me that is what religion means at this point."[16]

Most who noted feeling changed by their experiences or encounters were already engaged in a process of redefining their relationship to Jewish life and practice. In a few instances, something unexpected or disorienting occurred on the trip, that prompted serious critical reflection. Lauren, for example, bought herself a *tallit*, after she had resolved

that this was not going to be a part of her evolving practice.[17] At our follow-up interview six months after her trip, she noted how she is reminded of her experiences every time she wraps herself in it. In another case, Daniel, who was on the August trip, described having an epiphany at services on his first Shabbat in Jerusalem. The Torah portion that morning included a section reiterating the laws of *kashrut*. He felt like he was getting a message that had to be heeded:

> The first Shabbat we attended services at an Italian synagogue, which is a replica of synagogue from Italy from hundreds of years ago....It was *very* unusual and interesting....And I just felt sitting there then that morning, and hearing about the laws of *kashrut*, that someone was telling me that that was what I should be doing. And since that time, I've kept kosher. That was a very moving *religious* experience.[18]

Most cases of change, however, were far less dramatic than these. Instead, they were part of a larger, more gradual and ongoing process. This was largely influenced by age and stage of the life cycle. Younger participants and those who were still raising children appeared far more likely to be actively engaged in questioning their relationship and level of involvement with Judaism and Jewish life. They were the ones who were more active in their congregations and more likely to say they were transformed by their experiences and encounters. Joyce who had two daughters still at home, said: "[Israel] was part of my journey, and I'm on a journey. And this [trip] was an important step in my evolving in trying to become the best person I can be, which is clichéd but what I feel. And Judaism is a big part of that."[19]

In contrast, older participants generally described their level of involvement in Jewish life and practice as fairly stable. Many of them had experiences which they described as extremely moving or even religious, yet they were less likely to critically reflect on any questions these experiences might raise in terms of their existing perceptions and understandings. For instance, Robert who was in his mid-fifties said: "No. I am what I was before I went there. I came away with a lot of images I didn't have before but I don't think it changed my commitment to Judaism at all."[20]

Lasting transformation requires reframing what Berger and Luckmann call one's plausibility structure, the social base in which one functions. This automatically occurs while on the journey. However, one is not transformed by this temporary departure from one's social base unless one's subjective reality is changed. Knowledge is local, Geertz says, meaning we shape our world view based on our experience and perspective which is shaped by our social and epistemological structure. We can define experience broadly to include both encounters with texts and sites and interpersonal relationships, but it is still circumscribed. We can only know to the limits of our range of vision (Gadamer). Change occurs when we expand the range by breaking from everyday experience and opening ourselves up to other possibilities, other world views (Buchmann and Floden). This often requires dissonance and provocation to prompt reflection on past systems of meaning. The break must be sustained as well. It is not just a matter of acquiring new knowledge, or perceiving something differently, but of absorbing that knowledge or perception into one's being.

Spiritual direction can assist greatly in this process of reframing meaning. Like the tour guide, a mentor mediates the experience. The majority of the guides I observed principally were interested in providing their own interpretations of the multitude of sites, scenes and stories present in an Israel trip. They shared a doctrinaire and frontal approach to imparting information which emphasized product over process and elevated them to master of the

learning environment. Erik Cohen's (1985) study of Israeli tour guides confirms this as the normative approach. This resulted in a tightly scripted program that limited chance encounters and unexpected twists and turns that might have prompted new insights and new ways of knowing and understanding. In contrast, my more limited role enabled a different kind of learning. It focused more on facilitating the construction of participants' own interpretations through a process of interactive questioning (Sternberg).

Travel provides a natural laboratory for expanding one's range of vision and altering one's subjective reality. In travel, people have the opportunity to see themselves in a different light than they do at home, thus enhancing the potential for change. Travel, in general, and religious experience, in particular, can create disequilibrium and the irritant of uncertainty which are necessary to recast and reframe meaning. Travelers 'try on' different personae when they are away from their ordinary existence. Such dissimulation may range from an innocent attempt to fit in with the native culture through dress, language or eating habits, to more equivocal behaviors such as exaggerating or lying about one's family or social status, or occupation. These behaviors remain a relatively harmless travel game if the individual returns to his former self when he goes home. Hoever, if the traveler internalizes the change, it becomes part of him no matter where he may be (Leed). In such situations, the individual's subjective reality has been altered through the experiences of the journey. For it to be sustained upon returning home, it needs to be preserved through one's culture and relationships. For example, it is far easier for a person who wishes to become more observant, to connect more closely with an observant community. It is the group experience that sustains the commitment by reinforcing the subjective reality of the individual's system of meaning. Here too, a mentor can help people clarify their goals and then work with them to develop a plan of action to attain them.

CONCLUSION

This research explored how adults with a wide range of motivations, expectations and learning styles were influenced by their experiences of Israel on a congregational trip. To varying degrees, their trips reinforced and strengthened commitments to their synagogue community and their own sense of Judaism. For some, it went beyond the identity reinforcement that many trips achieve in that it also restored or intensified a sense of timeless symbolic connection with the land and people of Israel. For a few, it actually prompted critical reflection on life choices and beliefs and sparked concrete behavioral change.

Everyone who participated in this study had a tremendously positive experience that they valued in a way different from other any other type of vacation. They felt enriched and fulfilled by their experiences. For those who were already engaged in reflecting about their religious lives, their experiences in Israel influenced this ongoing process of change. My role as a mentor who asked questions and encouraged people to make meaning out of their answers appeared to have influenced the degree of critical reflection in a number of cases.

Adult education builds from where learners begin, in terms of their background and experience, and their readiness to learn and test prior assumptions and premises that shaped pre-existing world views and systems of meaning. It is largely focused on empowerment, autonomy and self-direction. Israel trips focus on creating connections, instilling a sense of rootedness, feeling part of the dream. At first glance, it may appear that these goals are at cross-purposes with one another. Yet they hold the potential for a profound commonal-

ity, the making of personal meaning. This meaning-making can best occur when trip planners and educators honor the multiple learning styles and motivations of participants. They must build from the background, goals, expectations, and assumptions learners bring with them on the trip by gently challenging them to rethink, clarify and expand those sources of knowledge and beliefs. They must mix answers with questions, attend to group process and continuously encourage participants to question what the experiences, sites, and encounters on the trip mean to them as American Jews.

Creating opportunities for critical reflection is certainly an important component of a trip interested in facilitating the potential for change. Such opportunities need to pervade all elements of the curriculum. No single form or vehicle for reflection will work for every participant. Journals are a powerful tool for reflecting on past and present experience. Yet, not everyone is willing to invest the time and effort required to maintain a journal. The same is true for other kinds of reflective exercises. Some people enjoy group processing sessions; others don't. Some actively engage in dialogue; others are more reticent to share ideas, opinions and feelings in a large gorup setting. The key for trip planners and facilitators is to ensure that a broad mix of options for reflective practice are available to participants, both through the narrative structure and as a complement to it. Creating a role of mentor on the trip and back in the home community seems to be one approach that would encourage ongoing reflection and dialogue about experiences of the trip and how they relate to participants' Jewish beliefs, commitments and practice.

Certainly, a mentor alone cannot produce transformation. Also important are the trip itinerary and the way in which the guide mediates what participants see, learn, do, and experience on their trip. A guide who can skillfully balance questions and multiple perspectives with a compelling narrative encourages the learner to find his or her own meaning in the story.

A program that creates opportunity for dialogue and dissonance whether through a mentor, the guide or some combination cultivates a creative tension where the opportunities for transformation lie. Such a program should help ground its participants both in master stories and modern sensibilities. It allows for both critical thinking and shared community. It should help participants recognize their inherent biases and allow them to see another point of view, without losing and hopefully even enriching their personal sense of meaning. Perhaps most significantly, it keeps Israel a dynamic force in their lives, no matter how distant the separation in time and space. And, if these dynamic dimensions of Israel can be integrated into what it means to be Jewish, then Israel can retain a place in American Jewish life.

ENDNOTES

[1]The works of Erikson, Knowles, Mezirow, Bruenr, Havighurst, and Berger and Luckmann among others, all contribute to this distillation. See also Stephen Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986), M. F. Belenky, B. M. Clinchy, N. R. Goldberger, & J. M. Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), Cyril Houle, *Patterns of Leaning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

[2]Interview with Lauren, 8/26/98.

[3]Interview with Joyce, 2/10/99.

[4]Interview with Carol, 9/3/98.

[5]Interview with Gloria, 3/8/99.

[6]Interview with Larry, 7/7/99.

[7]LG journal entry, 1/24/98.

[8]Gloria journal entry, 12/24/98.

[9]LG journal entry, 1/1/99 and interview with CBJ rabbi, 1/27/99.

[10]Interview with Larry, 2/11/99.

[11]Interview with Larry, 7/7/99.
[12]Interview with Charles, 2/21/99.
[13]Interview with Joyce, 2/11/99.
[14]Interview with Iris, 2/11/99.
[15]Interview with Lauren, 1/21/99.
[16]Interview with Charles, 2/21/99.
[17]Lauren journal entry, 7/13/98.
[18]Interview with Daniel, 3/2/99.
[19]Interview with Joyce, 2/11/99.
[20]Interview with Robert, 2/28/99.

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