

# **First Encounters with Israel: A Picture Coming into Focus**

## **Pre/Post Study of Eighth Grade Trips to Israel**

**Submitted to The Jewish Agency for Israel  
By Rosov Consulting, LLC  
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# I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## A. BACKGROUND

Since November 2012, a team from Rosov Consulting has been working with the AVI CHAI Foundation to study Israel education in North American day schools. At the heart of this study has been a survey of just over 4,000 8th and 12th grade students and their teachers in nearly one hundred schools. The survey has explored how students think about Israel and how their thinking relates to their sense of themselves as Jews and as North Americans.

The Jewish Agency for Israel seized a special opportunity created by the AVI CHAI study. The Jewish Agency leadership recognized that many of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who completed the AVI CHAI survey would shortly be participating in school trips to Israel, before the end of their year in school. The Jewish Agency turned to Rosov Consulting to conduct a companion study: capitalizing on the opportunity to survey eighth grade students both before (pre) and after (post) their school trips to Israel. This study explores a question that until now has not been researched: if and how middle-school students' self-understanding and their connections to Israel are changed by participating in their school's short-term educational trip to Israel.

## B. DATA

In this report, we share the results of what we have learned by comparing student survey-responses from before and after their time in Israel. We present findings based on the pre-trip and post-trip responses of 227 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at 13 Jewish day schools, all of whom participated in a school-organized trip to Israel in the spring of 2013.

The trips in which the students participated ran for between 10 and 23 days. The students were surveyed before their departure as part of the larger study AVI CHAI study. The students from the 13 participating schools were then surveyed again, between two and four weeks after their return to the United States.

## C. FINDINGS

**Image of Israel** – The ways in which students' views of Israel were most changed following the trip reflected their comfort in the country as a young people (thinking of it as a fun vacation destination, a place where teenagers have more freedom, etc.). Other than with regards to the theme of anti-Semitism, there is no obvious connection to Jewish or geopolitical issues among the images of Israel that significantly shifted (for example, thinking of it as the homeland of the Jewish people or as a country facing ingoing threats to existence).

Drawing on the analysis of subpopulations within the larger day school study, we were able to determine the following finding: the students whose image of Israel as a warm and friendly place was most changed were among those who had been less engaged with Israel and Jewish matters before they went on the trip. In general, the images of Israel that were least shifted (Israel as a spiritual center or as the birthplace of the Jewish people) are precisely those that dominate the view of Israel taught in day schools. This suggests a disconnect between the content of what students learn about Israel at school and what they

learn about Israel during their trips. (This disconnect was seen and evidenced in the observations and interviews that the Rosov team conducted in school's as part of the larger AVI CHAI study.)

**Sense of Belonging** - In response to a question that asked students about their degree of association with different groups of Jews, we found that students came home more ready to identify with Jews in general and even more so with supporters of Israel. Notably, after their trip to Israel, greater numbers of students continued to feel more closely connected both to Jews around the world and America than they did to people who say that Israel is important in their life.

While a closer analysis reveals that many students expressed a greater sense of belonging following their time in Israel, there were also students who expressed a weaker sense of belonging. More than 50% of respondents who in the pre-test had located themselves at the margins, expressed a stronger sense of belonging in the post-test. An additional 25% expressed a weaker sense of belonging after the trip. Again, those who previously had been less connected to Israel seem to have been changed most positively by this experience, especially those who before the trip classified themselves as “outsiders”, (see full report for further explanation of this finding).

**Expressions of the Students' Identities** - By soliciting reactions to a series of 34 items concerned with Israel, the Jewish community, the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, and spiritual or existential matters, data revealed that, following time spent in Israel, there is a statistically significant positive shift in expressions concerned with Jewish peoplehood and connection to Israel, and with concerns associated with the relationship between Jews and non-Jews. Spiritual concerns are not significantly changed following a trip to Israel. Moreover, we found that students' tendency to conceive of Israel as intimately related to their conception of the Jewish people is reinforced by their experience, providing further evidence of conceptual crystallization as a result of the trip.

**Confidence in Talking about Various Topics** - A last approach to probing the impact of Israel trips on these young people was to examine changes in the students' expressed confidence in the knowledge they have about various matters. We found that, upon these students' return from Israel, they express significantly greater confidence in talking about all matters, other than those directly connected to spiritual concerns. This may reflect a general boost in self-confidence and belief in their understanding of the world following their time away from home, an experience they evidently appreciate. Again, students' responses to these questions provided evidence of a consolidation and crystallization of their thinking following their experience in Israel.

In analyzing which subpopulation of students was most changed with respect to these conceptual and intellectual matters, we found that in this instance, it was the students who previously were more engaged in Jewish matters that were most changed. It seems that when it comes to cognitive issues, the more engaged students are more receptive to the content of their experience in Israel. When it comes to emotional matters – and especially relationships with Israel and Israelis – it is the less Jewishly-engaged students who are most changed.

## **D. WHAT CAUSES CHANGE?**

There was not enough variation in the sample to explore the extent to which outcomes might be related to the length of time spent in Israel or to different program experiences. However, it was possible to determine that actual changes in students' thoughts and feeling were most often correlated with their sense of having found meaningful the opportunities to reflect on and discuss their experiences during the trip. This is an important finding exposed by the pre/post methodology, since, when students were asked about their own sense of what had been the most meaningful program components for them, they had

regarded those opportunities for reflection and discussion to have been the least meaningful aspect of the trip. It seems that participants may simply not appreciate the time spent in such discussions, especially compared to the programs' more dramatic components. Evidently, these elements are critical to the educational process.

## E. CONCLUSIONS

This first ever study suggests that it is worth taking a closer look at these eighth grade day school trips to Israel and their potential to have an impact upon diverse educational goals.

Taken together, our pre/post research design reveals that short, 10-day to three-week trips to Israel can induce important outcomes: changes in the *structure* of the participants' conceptions; changes in the *intensity* of their conceptions; and changes in the *coherence* of their conceptions. Generally, these trips to Israel crystalize the way in which young people – in the early stages of adolescence - think about Israel and the world. These trips help certain ideas fall in to place.

These trips influence students' affective relationships to Israel especially among those who might not have previously been inclined to identify with Israel. The scale of the shifts observed is moderate, but – we suggest – this shift is surprisingly large given the relatively brief length of time that participants spend in Israel on their trips.

The trips also seem to have a smaller, although occasionally significant, impact on students' understanding of contemporary Israel and the Jewish past. Those elements of students' thinking about Israel that seem most strongly influenced by their time in Israel relate to themes and dimensions concerned with what it is like for people to live in the country. These personal themes are quite different from those, such as Israel's place in Jewish history and religious life, most heavily addressed by day schools during the regular course of the year.

This limited study suggests that not all students respond in the same way to an Israel experience. From data gathered we can conclude that those students who were interested in Jewish matters before the trip are more likely to be engaged by the intellectual and historical ideas they encounter during the trip. Those less connected to Jewish life and Jewish concerns before the trip are more likely to return with a greater sense of Israel as a fun place to spend time and with a greater sense of association with those who live there. Some, however, return to America with a weaker sense of identification with others Jews and with supporters of Israel.

Lastly, it seems that program-time devoted to reflection and discussion is most closely correlated with the changes observed. The participants themselves may not be fully aware of these effects, and they may not appreciate the time spent in such discussions, especially when compared to the programs' more dramatic components. Our pre/post analysis reveals that these elements are critical to the educational process.

## F. FURTHER QUESTIONS

In the best instances, eighth grade school trips provide a different view of Israel from that which is provided inside of school time and curricular structures. We wonder, what happens if students continue on to high school, and the Israel about which they learn is once again an abstract or mythologized one that bears little relation to the one they have experienced and appreciated? Will the impacts of these short programs quickly dissipate without reinforcement, or will students start to feel a dissonance between the contemporary Israel they encountered and the abstract Israel they learn about in school?

We wonder also about the impact of these programs on Israelis. We sense that some of the strongest outcomes observed are a consequence of the time spent in the company of young Israelis; these encounters are a central part of the twinning relationships that schools sustain. We think it is worth exploring what changes for the Israeli participants in these relationships after they have spent time with young people from North America. These outcomes may be an important and untapped outcome of such investments.

Last, we wonder why young people react in such different ways to their time in Israel. Why do some come home feeling more distant from Israel and from Israelis? Is it because of something they experience during their time in the program or is it because of a mismatch between their expectations ahead of the trip and their experiences in the country? We suggest sharpening the resolution of these questions by interviewing those who react to their experiences in this way.

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## II. STUDY BACKGROUND

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Since November 2012, a team from Rosov Consulting has been working with the AVI CHAI Foundation to study Israel education in North American day schools. At the heart of this study has been a survey of just over 4,000 8th and 12th grade students and their teachers in 95 schools. The survey has explored how students think about Israel and how their thinking relates to their sense of themselves as Jews and as North Americans.

The Jewish Agency for Israel seized a special opportunity created by the AVI CHAI study. Jewish Agency leadership recognized that many of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who completed the AVI CHAI survey would shortly be participating in school trips to Israel, before the end of their year in school. The Jewish Agency turned to Rosov Consulting to conduct a follow-up study with a sample of students *after* their return from Israel. This study would make it possible to explore a question that until now has not been researched: if and how middle-school students' self-understanding and their connections to Israel are changed by participating in short-term educational programs in Israel.

Each year, about 100 Jewish day schools run trips to Israel for students during the final months of eighth grade. The great majority of these schools are in the religiously liberal day school sectors, where more than 70% of schools run school Israel trips. Such trips are less common among modern Orthodox day schools, where students are more likely to visit Israel with their families instead. Nevertheless, it is estimated that 30% of modern Orthodox schools lead programs for their students in Israel.<sup>1</sup> Until now there have been no studies exploring the impact of these trips for middle-school students. This is in contrast to the extensive examination of trips to Israel for post high-school participants, most prominently within the framework of Birthright Israel.

## III. DATA FOR THE REPORT

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In this report, we share the results of what we have learned from comparing student survey-responses from before and after their time in Israel. We present findings based on the pre-trip and post-trip responses of 227 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at 13 Jewish day schools all of whom participated in a school-organized trip to Israel in the spring of 2013. The response rate was 86%; this is much higher than is usually the case in such studies because the participants completed the surveys during school time.

Six of the participating schools identify themselves as Community day schools and affiliate with the RAVSAK network of schools. Four schools affiliate with the Conservative, Solomon Schechter Day School network. Three of the schools identify as modern Orthodox day schools. These Orthodox schools draw a population that is more liberal religiously than is usually the case in their sector, and this may account for why they have found it useful to provide a trip to Israel for their students.

The trips in which the students participated ran for a duration between 10 and 23 days. The students were surveyed before their departure as part of the larger study of 95 schools. The students from the 13 participating schools were then surveyed again between two and four weeks after their return to the United States. They were asked many of the same questions to see whether their attitudes and understanding had shifted as a result of their time in Israel. They were also asked some questions that related specifically to their Israel experience. (See Appendix A for a copy of the post-trip survey.)

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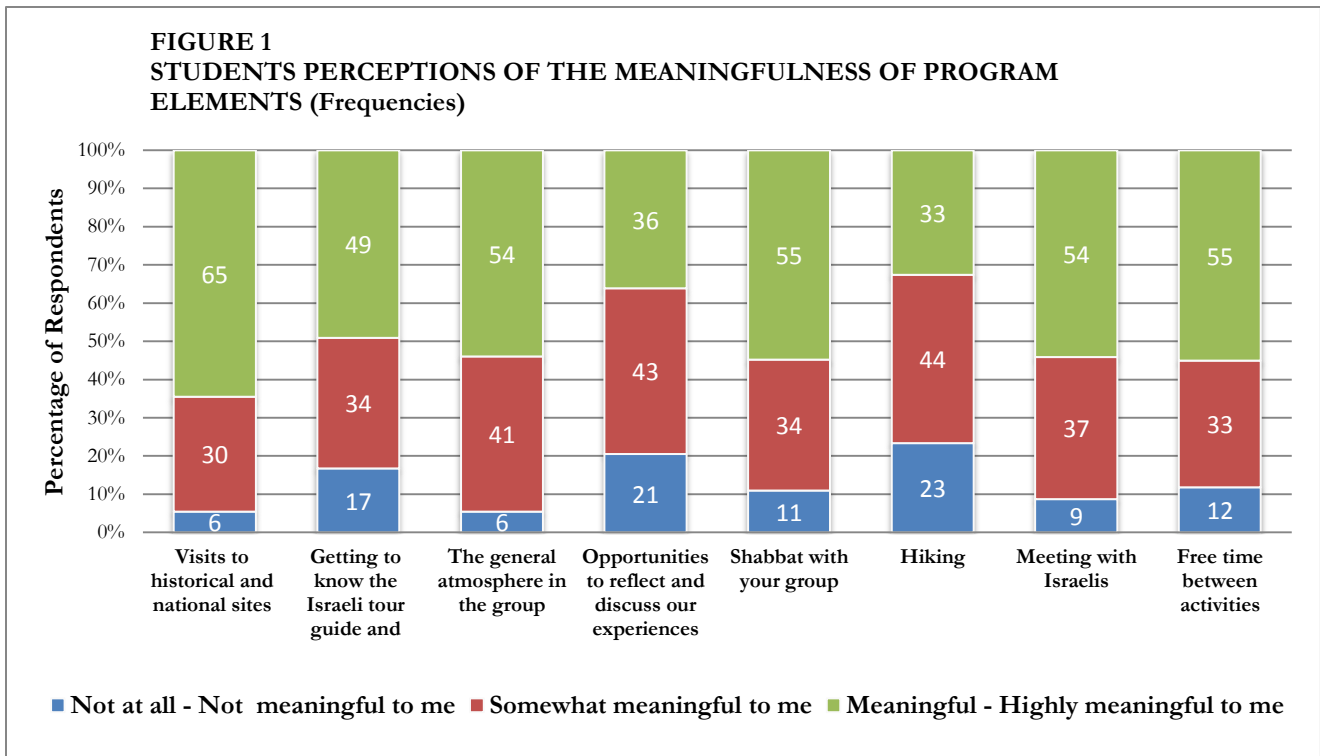
<sup>1</sup> Pomson, A., Deitcher, H. & Muszkat-Barkan, M. (2009). "Israel education in North American day schools: A systems analysis and some strategies for change." Unpublished report submitted to the AVI CHAI Foundation.

## IV. FINDINGS

### A. Student Perceptions of their Trip to Israel

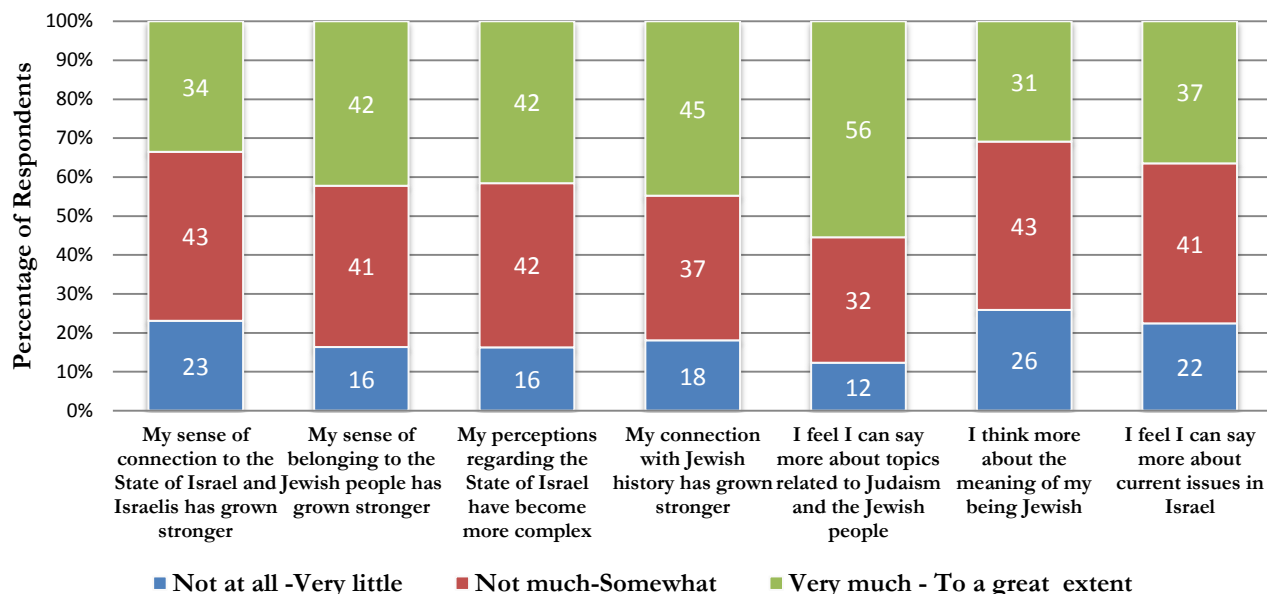
On their return to the United States, students were questioned about their perceptions of their trip. First, they were asked to rate the meaningfulness of different experiences to which they had been exposed during their time in Israel.

As seen in FIGURE 1, students found exposure to sites of historical and national significance to be most meaningful (95% report that this program element was meaningful in some way). Marginally less meaningful in their view was the general atmosphere in the group (94% found it meaningful in some way) and their meetings with Israelis (91% found this meaningful in some way). By contrast, they reported that the least meaningful component of the trip were those opportunities to reflect on and discuss their experiences (something that 79% found meaningful in some way, and that only 36% found more than somewhat meaningful). The relatively low score given to this particular program item is important, since – as will be seen below – how students responded to this particular item may not reflect its actual importance. This item is in fact correlated more highly than any other program item with shifts in participants’ understanding of Israel after the trip.



A second question exploring the students’ perception of their experiences on the trip sought to gauge their own sense of how their thoughts and feelings might have changed as a result of their time in Israel. Their answers to a question, “to what extent was each of the following aspects of the trip meaningful for you?” are seen in FIGURE 2.

**FIGURE 2**  
**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TRIP TO ISRAEL (Frequencies)**



As the students see it, they have become much better informed about a whole range of matters (56% feel that they have much more to say about topics related to Judaism and the Jewish people.) They report that their understanding of Israel has changed (84% report that their perceptions of the State of Israel have in some way become more complex). By contrast, and perhaps surprisingly, just 34% believe that their sense of connection to Israel and Israelis has increased very much, while almost 25% report that this connection has barely if at all increased.

The pre/post research design employed in this study means that we don't have to take the student responses at face value. By exploring respondents' answers to the same questions asked both before and after the trip, we can examine what in fact did change in students' understandings and attitudes, rather than rely on respondents' retrospective self-report.

As we will see, the students' responses to further questions in the survey indicate that they may have an inaccurate or biased sense of what has happened to them. Contrary to what the students perceive, there is evidence that their relationships with Israel and with its people and their relationships with Jews in general have moderately changed following their trip; further, there has been only a small rather than a major change in their understanding of Israel and its history; and there has been little discernible change in their thinking about broader spiritual or religious matters. Moreover, the aspect of their programs that they least valued, having an opportunity to reflect on and discuss their experiences, may actually have had more impact than they thought.

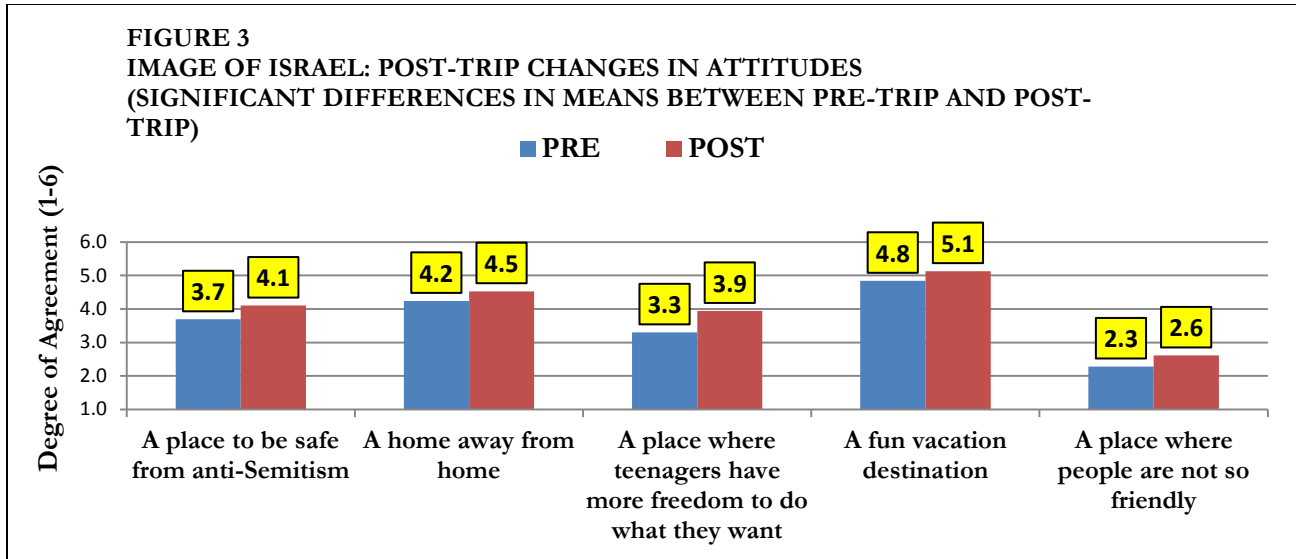
In addition, as we will see, we need to exercise caution about reaching conclusions concerning the aggregate group of students who participated in this study given that, as we will show, a substantial minority seem to have come away from Israel feeling less connected to it than when they arrived.

## B. Image of Israel

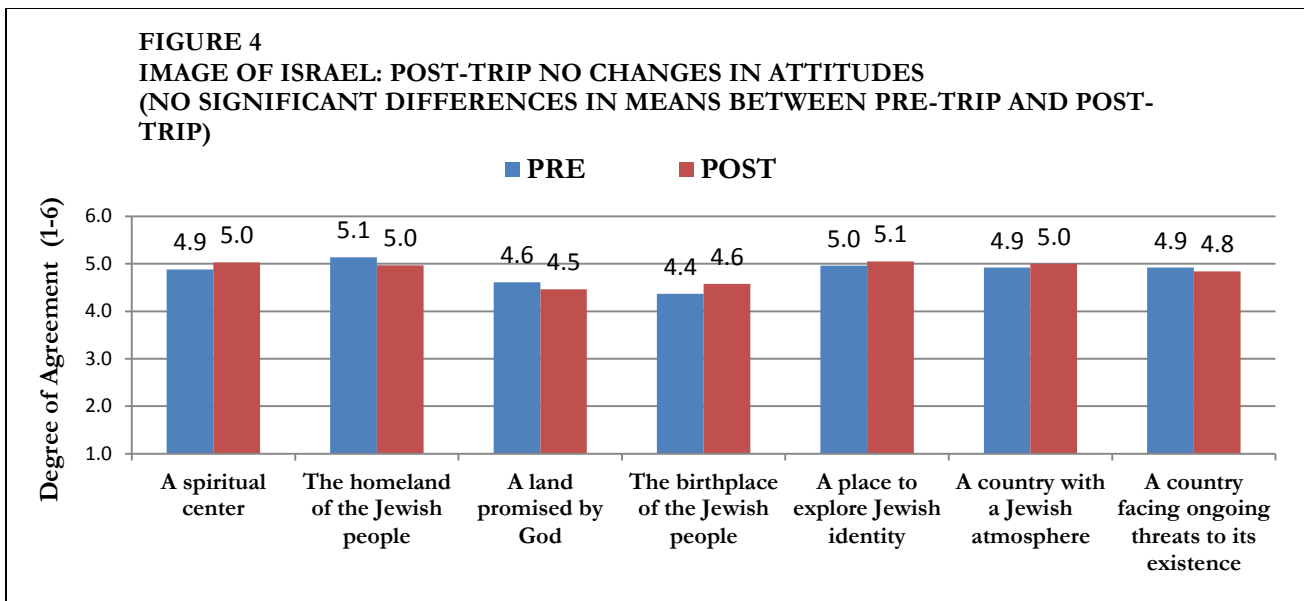
A question about students' image of Israel was included in both the pre- and post-trip surveys. Students were asked, "to what extent do you view Israel as..." for example: "a home away from home," "the homeland of the Jewish people" and "a country with a Jewish atmosphere?"



As seen below, there were some items in this question for which there was a statistically significant change in students' perceived image of Israel (FIGURE 3) Strikingly, most of these items reflect the respondents' greater comfort in the country as young people (a fun vacation destination; a place where teenagers have more freedom, etc.), even while some respondents have evidently experienced disappointing encounters with Israelis. Other than with regards to the theme of anti-Semitism, there is no obvious connection to Jewish or geopolitical issues among the images of Israel that significantly shifted.



Unlike those items in which there was significant change<sup>2</sup>, it is noticeable (as seen in FIGURE 4) that the items where there was no significant change in the perceived image of Israel were all concerned with Israel as a place connected to Jewish matters, whether national or spiritual, for example, a spiritual center; and the homeland of the Jewish people.

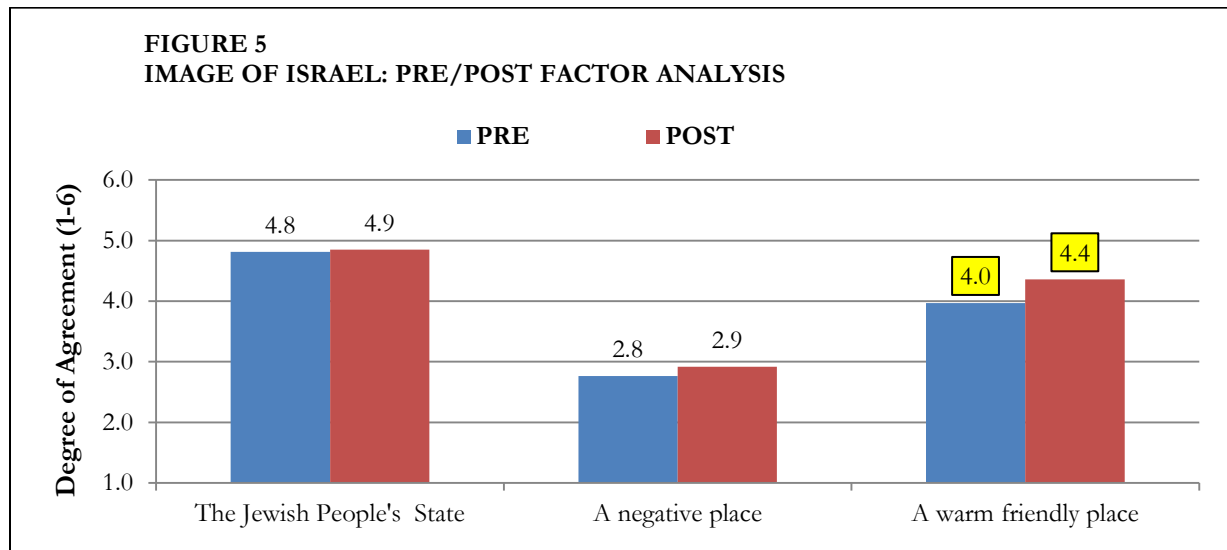


<sup>2</sup> When numbers are highlighted in yellow throughout this report, this denotes a statistically significant change.

The contrast between the students' responses to the different items in this question is further reinforced by employing the analytical methodology of factor analysis.<sup>3</sup> This analysis reveals that three basic images of Israel underlie the students' responses to the question's 19 items:

- **Israel as the Jewish People's State** (including items such as “a spiritual center,” “a place to explore Jewish identity” and “the birthplace of the Jewish people”).
- **Israel as a Negative Place** (including items such as “a dangerous place,” “a poor country” and “a place where people are not friendly”).
- **Israel as a Warm and Friendly Place** (including items such as “a place with close friends and/or family,” “a place where teenagers have more freedom to do what they want” and “a fun vacation destination”).

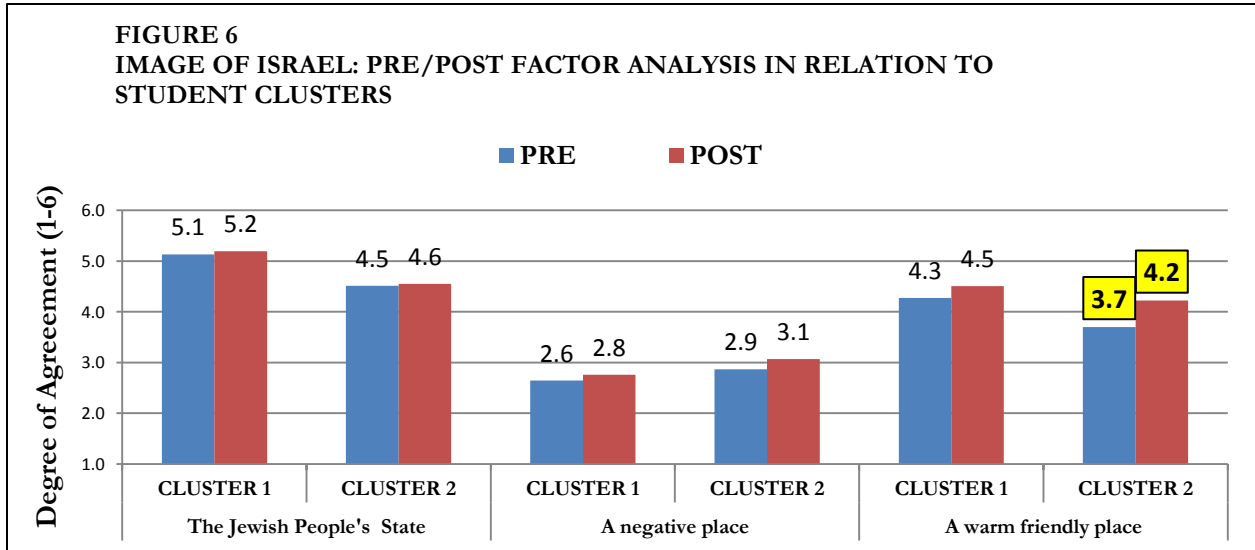
As seen in FIGURE 5, only the last factor – Israel as a warm and friendly place - was changed in a significant fashion following time in Israel.



<sup>3</sup> Factor Analysis is a statistical technique that can uncover the underlying perceptions of the respondents, related to the issues they are questioned about. This is done by examining the relationship patterns underlying interacting attitudes. Factor analysis is used to analyze large numbers of *dependent* variables, such as attitudes towards Israel or perceptions of the Jewish people.

Probing yet further, we can explore for which students this image of Israel has most shifted. In our larger study of Israel education in day schools, using the technique of cluster analysis we identified two clearly distinct student populations in the eighth grade of day school. One group (Cluster 1) was much more engaged with Israel and Jewish matters; the other group (Cluster 2) was much less engaged or positive about these things. (See appendix B for a summary of the differences between these two groups.)

For the one factor where there has been a significant change in students' image of Israel following their trip – the image of Israel as a warm and friendly place - we find that that it was *only* among the less engaged students from Cluster 2 that a change of significance has occurred (see FIGURE 6).



Of course, the students in Cluster 2 came to Israel less inclined to think of it in positive terms than did other students. But importantly, this group is most impacted by time in the country, in terms of relating to it as a place where one can feel comfortable. (We will see below that in other respects this group changed less than others following their trip.)

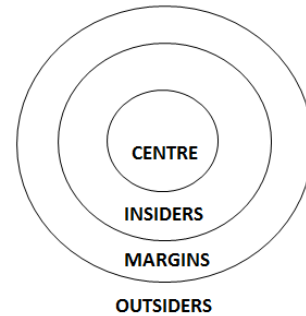
In general – whether for Cluster 1 or Cluster 2 students - it is especially noticeable that the factors that have not shifted in significant ways (and related individual items, such as Israel as a spiritual center or as the birthplace of the Jewish people) are those that – as revealed in the larger study - dominate the view of Israel taught in day schools. This points to an important conclusion: there seems to be a disconnect between the content of what students learn about Israel at school and what they learn about Israel on their trips. This disconnect is further evidenced by the observations and interviews we conducted in schools where we found very little interaction between the educators teaching about Israel in schools and the providers designing programs in Israel.

As we discuss below, this disconnect might be viewed as a healthy phenomenon in providing an opportunity to rebalance the messages that students receive in their schools. Alternatively, it might constitute a missed opportunity reflecting an inconsistent and incoherent approach to Israel education that ultimately will only confuse day school students.

### C. Sense of Belonging/Self-Categorization

The first and most basic element recognized as the heart of collective identity is self-categorization: identifying oneself as a member of, or categorizing oneself in terms of, a particular social grouping.

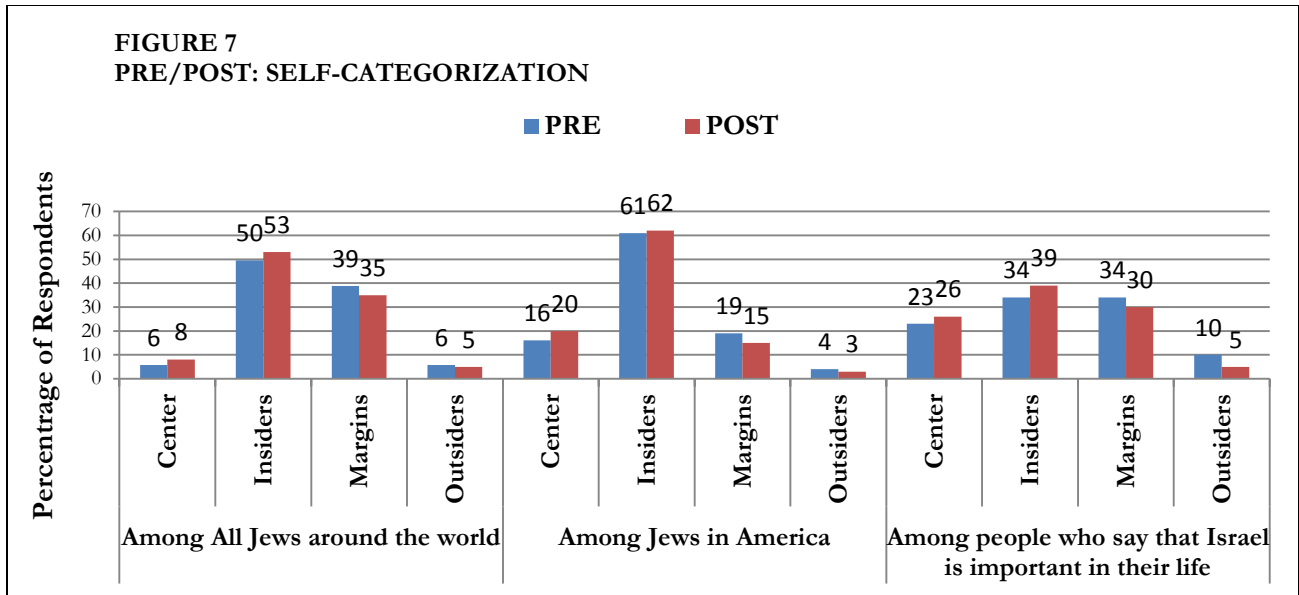
The students were asked to place themselves in one of the circles (center, insiders, margins, and outsiders) in relation to each of three categories: all Jews around the world; Jews in America; and people who say that Israel is important in their life. These questions were intended to probe the students' sense of belonging to these groups and their perceived centrality to them. The question was phrased as follows:



Each group has a center, insiders, margins and outsiders. For example in the category of sports:

- **The Centre group** – are the dedicated fans that never miss a game, fill their homes with the team's collectibles, t-shirts, etc.
- **The Insider group**– are fans of the team who keep up to date with how their team is doing, they go occasionally to games, and are happy when their team wins and sad when they lose.
- **The Marginal group** – are those fans who like one team more than all the others, show some interest in it, but hardly ever watch games
- **The Outsider group** - are those people who are not interested in sports and don't follow how any teams are doing.

The students' responses (in FIGURE 7) differ quite sharply from their own self-assessment. As we previously saw, reporting on their own sense of what had changed, only a third felt a much greater sense of connection to Israelis, the State of Israel and to the Jewish people in general (FIGURE 2). Employing the pre/post analysis, there is evidence that, in general, students in fact came home more ready to identify with Jews in general and even more so with supporters of Israel, although after their trip to Israel, greater numbers of students continued to feel more closely connected both to Jews around the world and in America than they did to people who say that Israel is important in their life.

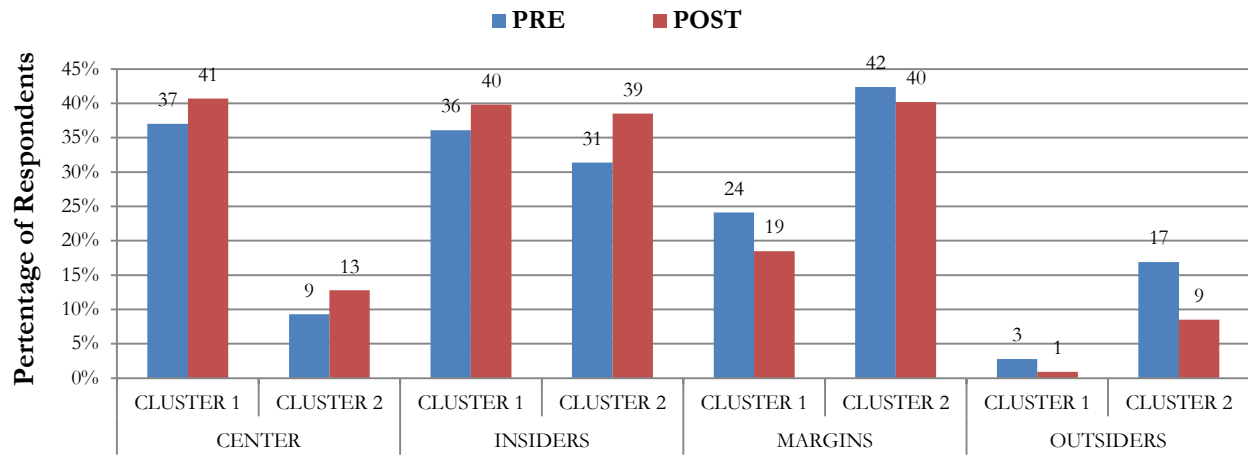


Closer analysis reveals that greater aggregate changes in students’ self-categorization were limited by the fact that not all changes in this respect were in a consistently positive direction. To put it differently, although following their time in Israel many students expressed a greater sense of belonging, there were also students who expressed a weaker sense of belonging. Indeed, the fact that a sub-population of students identified themselves *less* closely with these categories after their time in Israel raises important questions about what produced such outcomes.

This phenomenon is well illustrated with regards to the category of people who say that Israel is important in their life. It is striking that more than 25% of those who before the trip identified themselves as either at the “center” or as “insiders,” *after* the trip expressed a weaker sense of belonging to these groups (in the margins or as outsiders). This pattern is overshadowed in the aggregate totals by the more than 50% of respondents who in the pre-test had located themselves at the margins, and then in the post-test expressed a stronger sense of belonging. The fact that, after an Israel trip, so many students expressed lower levels of identification with those for whom Israel is a part of their life calls for further examination. We wonder whether the decline in identification reflects a greater sense of the difference between one’s own life and the lives of Israelis following time spent in the country.

Again, drawing on the cluster analysis of the larger population sample that participated in the AVI CHAI day school study, we can pinpoint which were the students who, following their trip, expressed a greater or lesser sense of identification with those for whom Israel is an important part of their life. Again, as seen in FIGURE 8, it seems that it was the Cluster 2 students, those who previously had been less connected to Israel, who seem to have been changed most positively by this experience, especially those who before the trip classified themselves as “outsiders.”

**FIGURE 8  
PRE/POST: AMONG PEOPLE WHO SAY THAT ISRAEL IS IMPORTANT IN  
THEIR LIFE...(IN RELATION TO STUDENT CLUSTERS)**



#### D. Aspects of Students' Identities

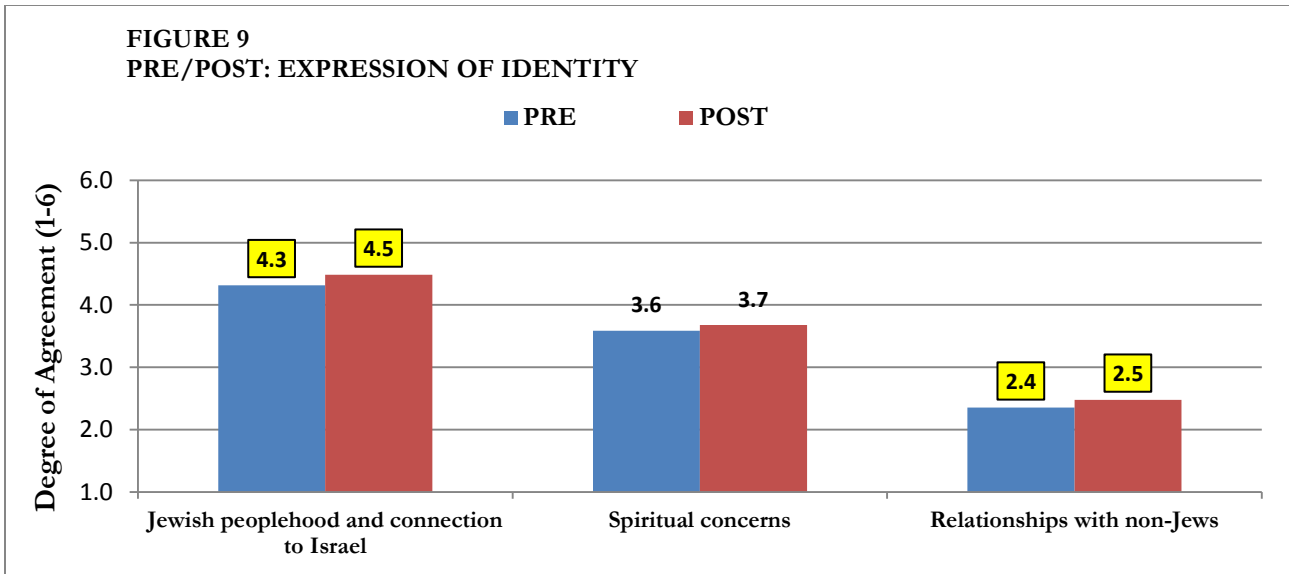
A similarly nuanced sense of what is changed following time spent on a school program in Israel is provided by the students' responses to two further sets of questions.

First, affective and cognitive expressions of the students' identities were examined by soliciting reactions to a series of 34 statement items concerned with: Israel (for example, "I'm happy when I hear that somebody famous is Israeli"); the Jewish community (for example, "I feel proud that people know that I'm Jewish"), the relationship between Jews and non-Jews (for example, "It's important that Jews only date other Jews"), and spiritual or existential matters (for example, "I believe in life after death").

Factor analysis of the students' responses revealed three foci of expression:

- **Jewish Peoplehood and Connection to Israel** (including items such as "I feel a part of my local Jewish community," "I feel I have a strong connection to Jews wherever they are" and "Israel is the homeland of all Jews").
- **Spiritual Concerns** (including items such as "I believe that God listens to my prayers," "Observing mitzvot is a way to connect to God" and "I believe in life after death").
- **Relationships with non-Jews** (including, "It's important that my best friends are Jewish," "It's important that Jews only date other Jews" and "I care equally about the suffering of Jews and non-Jews").

As seen in FIGURE 9, following time in Israel there is a statistically significant shift in those factors concerned with Jewish peoplehood and connection to Israel, and with concerns associated with the relationship between Jews and non-Jews. Spiritual concerns are not significantly changed following a trip to Israel.



Two further phenomena are worth highlighting. First, it seems that even before students go to Israel, concepts concerned with Israel such as “If Israel were destroyed my life would be different” sit easily together within the same conceptual category (as expressed by the factor analysis) as concepts concerned with dimensions of Jewish peoplehood such as “I feel I have a strong connection to Jews wherever they are.” Students evidently conceive of Israel as intimately related to their conception of the Jewish people. This, we found, remains consistent and is even strengthened after the trip.

A second phenomenon revealed by the reliability test<sup>4</sup> of the factors identified in the factor analysis is the very high rate of coherence among the concepts included in each of these three factors: for Jewish peoplehood and connection to Israel, there was a measure of 0.929 out of 1.0 before the trip; and of 0.936 after the trip. Similar patterns were observed for the other factors. Taken together these changes indicate a process of conceptual crystallization related to time spent in Israel.

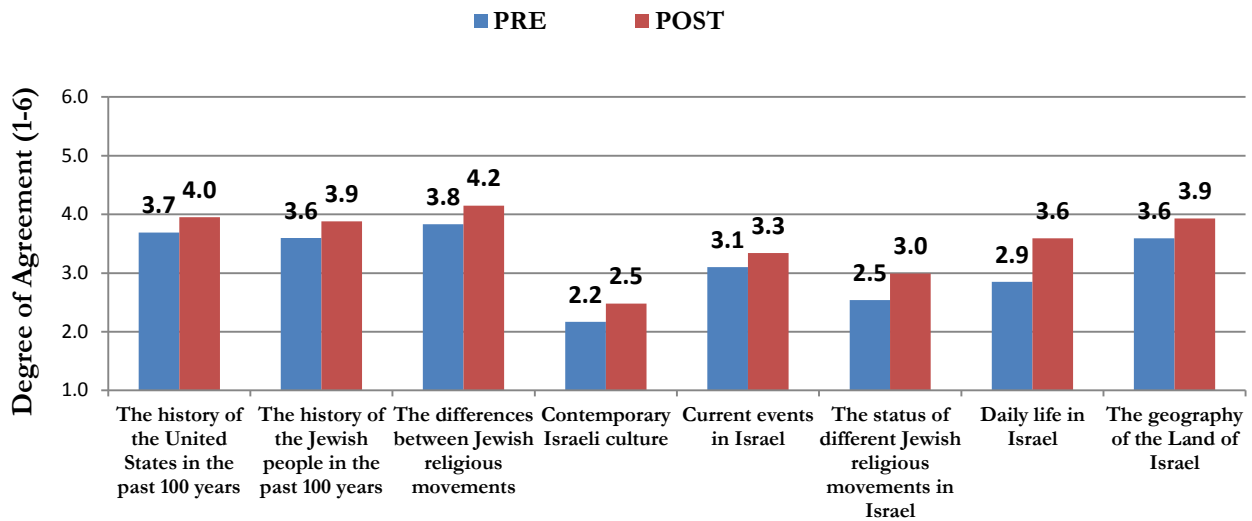
### E. Confidence Talking About Various Topics

A last approach to probing the impact of Israel trips on these young people was to examine changes in the students' expressed confidence in the knowledge they have about various matters. In this instance, students were presented with 24 topic items. These included topics such as “The importance of Israel in the Tanakh,” “Current events in Israel,” “The equality of women in society” and “Why some people suffer and others don't.” The students were asked: “Imagine you're with a group of friends, how confident are you to talk about the following topics?”

There were significant increases in students' expressed confidence in talking about 8 of these topics (FIGURE 10). These eight items convey a strong flavor of such trips with their strong focus on exposing students to daily life in Israel in personal and cultural terms, accompanied by a smattering of historical issues, but hardly any reference to geo-political complexities.

<sup>4</sup> In the psychometrics, reliability is used to describe the overall consistency of a measure. In this section we relate to the concept of "internal consistency" which assesses the consistency of results across items within a factor. The most common internal consistency measure is Cronbach's alpha (the reliability coefficient).

**FIGURE 10**  
**SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN STUDENTS' CONFIDENCE TALKING ABOUT**  
**VARIOUS TOPICS**

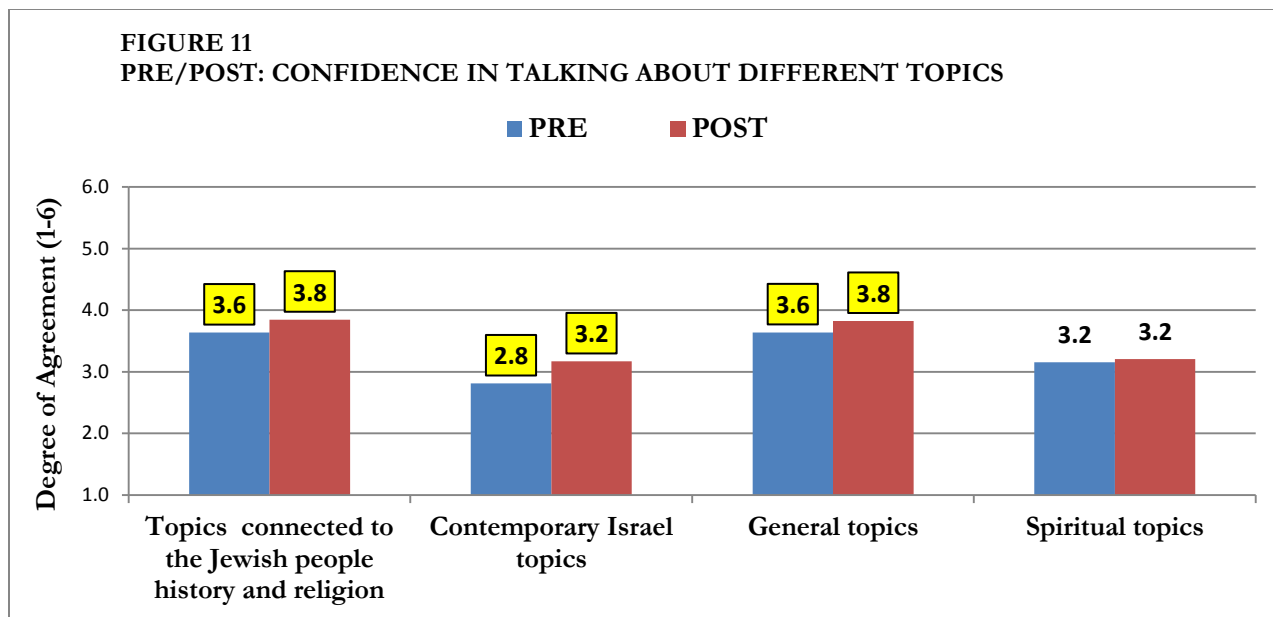


Factor analysis revealed that the participants conceived of four types of knowledge:

- **Topics Connected to the Jewish People History and Religion** (including items such as “The differences between Jewish religious movements,” “Reasons for the emergence of Zionism” and “The geography of the Land of Israel”)
- **Contemporary Israel** (including items such as “Contemporary Israeli culture (such as films, music and books),” “Current events in Israel” and “Daily life in Israel”)
- **General topics** (including items such as “Current events in the United States,” “The equality of women in society” and “Global climate change”)
- **Spiritual Topics** (including items such as “The meaning of life” and “Why some people suffer and others don't.”)

As seen in FIGURE 11, when students return from Israel, they express significantly greater confidence in talking about *most* matters, other than those directly connected to spiritual matters. While it might be surprising that their confidence in talking about general topics is also significantly higher following their trip, we suspect that this simply reflects a general boost in self-confidence and belief in their understanding of the world following their time away from home, an experience they evidently appreciate, as indicated by their response to other questions.





As with the previously discussed question, the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha), of these factors also reveals a consistent increase among all four factors towards greater internal coherence. Again, this reflects a consolidation and crystallization of student thinking following their experience in Israel. Change in this respect is not just an increase in the intensity with which ideas are held, it is also a process of greater clarification.

As with previous questions, we can probe which students were most changed following their trip, both in their attitudes to a range of Jewish issues (the changes displayed in FIGURE 10) and in their confidence to talk about different matters (the changes displayed in FIGURE 11). On these matters, we found that there was again a significant difference between Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 students. This time, however, it was the Cluster 1 students – those previously more engaged in Jewish matters – who were most changed following the trip (other than with respect to confidence to talking about general topics where there was no difference between the Clusters). It seems that when it comes to conceptual and intellectual matters the Cluster 1 students are more receptive to the content of their experience in Israel. When it comes to emotional matters – and especially relationships with Israel and Israelis – it is the Cluster 2 students who are most changed.

## F. Searching for Causes

In trying to uncover what it was about the students' time in Israel that accounted for the changes we observed, our challenge is that the programs we studied were quite similar to one another; there were few if any large variables available for comparison. Although there was some variation in the length of the trips, ranging from 10 days to three weeks, both longer and shorter programs included essentially the same kinds of components: a mix of visits to religious and historical sites such as the Kotel and Masada, and to sites of national significance such as Yad Vashem and Independence Hall. Almost all included encounters (*mifgahsim*) with Israeli peers. Some trips devoted more time to peer encounters than did others, and some trips explored less conventional sites; for example one tour visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher as well as the Dome of the Rock, and another visited The Cave of Machpelah in Hebron. Because only small numbers of those involved in the study participated in these program-variations, we have not been able to tease apart which of these experiences are most likely correlated with particular

outcomes. Likewise, without a larger and more varied sample of programs, we have not been able to determine whether length of time in Israel might be linked to different outcomes.

Given these constraints, to test whether changes in students' attitudes and ideas are related in some way to different aspects of what they experienced, we must rely on correlating students' responses to the question we asked about what they themselves perceived to have been the most meaningful aspects of the program (the findings for which are summarized in FIGURE 1) with their answers to other questions. While such correlations tended to be quite weak, probably because – as we saw above - the students do not have the most accurate sense of what most changed for them, some interesting patterns do emerge from this comparison.

The trip component that was most often correlated with actual changes in the students' thoughts and feelings was students' sense of having found meaningful the opportunities to reflect on and discuss their experiences during the trip. Perceiving these opportunities to have been meaningful was correlated with:

- Actual changes in the feelings of Jewish peoplehood and connection to Israel (corr .204)
- Actual changes in spiritual concerns (corr .211)
- Actual changes in the confidence to talk about topics connected to the Jewish people, history and religion (.283)
- Actual changes in the confidence to talk about Contemporary Israel topics (.310)

Also related, if more narrowly, to actual changes in attitudes, was the students' sense that meeting with Israelis during the trip was meaningful. Encouragingly, this was specifically correlated with a real change in perceiving Israel as a warm and friendly place (corr .245).

Examination of the correlations between the students' responses revealed only one other significant relationship. Here, actual changes in the confidence to talk about Contemporary Israel topics were found to be correlated with:

- Perceiving the visits to historical and national sites during the trip as meaningful (.249)
- Perceiving getting to know the Israeli tour guide and speaking informally with him/her during the trip as meaningful (.233)
- Perceiving the general atmosphere in the group during the trip as meaningful (.201)
- Perceiving Shabbat with your group during the trip as meaningful (.225)

We take this last finding to underline how the overall experience of the trip, involving tours to resonant historical sites and participating in intense physical activity in the company of peers rather than with family, leaves many participants feeling much more confident in themselves and in their understanding of their world. It is certainly notable that it is students' sense of self confidence that is more closely related to what they found most meaningful about the trip than are actual changes in their attitudes or understanding of substantive matters.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

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A great deal of cynicism and skepticism surrounds eighth grade trips to Israel; cynicism in the sense that educators often see these programs as little more than vehicles for enticing students to remain enrolled in school until the end of the middle-school grades. Because these trips invariably occur during the last few

weeks of school, they are frequently dismissed as some kind of graduation ritual, equivalent to an elaborate prom. Also, because the participants are relatively young, there is often skepticism about the kind of impact these programs have, certainly by comparison to much longer trips or to experiences that serve older populations such as Birthright or MASA.

This limited study suggests that it is worth taking a closer look at these eighth grade programs and their potential.

Taken together, our findings suggest that short 10-day to three-week trips to Israel can induce important outcomes: changes in the *structure* of the participants' conceptions (their ideas about Israel become clearer following these trips), changes in the *intensity* of their conceptions (they come to identify more strongly with ideas or attitudes they previously held or that they had not previously considered), and changes in the *coherence* of their conceptions (there are clearer and more consistent connections between their ideas about certain important matters). Generally, these short trips to Israel crystalize how young people – in the early stages of adolescence - think about Israel and the world. The trips, it seems, help certain ideas fall in to place. Most strikingly, these trips seem to influence students' affective relationships to Israel especially among those who might not have previously been inclined to identify with Israel. The scale of the shifts observed is only moderate, but – we suggest – this shift is surprisingly large given the relatively brief length of time that participants are in Israel. These outcomes express students' connection to Israel and to other Jews, among whom Israelis loom large. Generally, students' connection to Israel both before and after their trips is strongly anchored in a broader and stronger sense of belonging to Jews in America and around the world.

These trips to Israel seem also to have a smaller, although occasionally significant, impact on students' understanding of contemporary Israel and the Jewish past. Those elements of students' thinking about and image of Israel that seem most strongly influenced by their time in the country relate to themes and dimensions concerned with what it is like for people to live in the country. These personal themes are quite different from those, such as Israel's place in Jewish history and religious life, most heavily addressed by day schools during the regular course of the year. On the one hand, this is a cause for concern, reflecting a disconnect between the content of trips and the educational programming that proceeds them over the course of many years. On the other hand, this might reflect an important complementary role played by trips in compensating for what is generally absent from regular programming in schools.

This limited study reveals that not all students respond in the same way to an Israel experience. Those who before the trip were interested in Jewish matters are more likely to be engaged by the intellectual and historical ideas they encounter. Those less connected to Jewish life and Jewish concerns are more likely to return with a greater sense of Israel as a fun place to spend time and with a greater sense of association with those who live there. As we have noted on a few occasions, some, however, return to America with a weaker sense of identification with others Jews and with supporters of Israel. We suggest that it is important to learn more about who these students are, and what might account for their responses.

Lastly, in determining what features of students' time in Israel account for the changes observed, we highlight how it is program-time devoted to reflection and discussion that seem to be most closely linked with such changes. The participants themselves may not be fully aware of these effects, and they may not appreciate the time spent in such discussions, especially compared to the programs' more dramatic components, but these elements are evidently critical to the educational process. Our sample size did not, however, allow us to determine whether length of the trip to Israel is related to with particular effects.

## VI. FURTHER QUESTIONS

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In the best instances, these experiences provide a different view of Israel from that provided in school. But, we wonder, what happens if students continue on to high school, and the Israel about which they learn is once again an abstract or mythologized one that bears little relation to the one they have experienced and appreciated? Will the impacts of these short programs quickly dissipate without reinforcement, or will students start to feel a dissonance between the contemporary Israel they encountered and the abstract Israel they learn about in school?

We suggest that it will be crucial to narrow the gaps between these experiences and what takes place in school, both before and after the programs. Of course, that begs the question about how such gaps can be narrowed and who might lead this work.

We wonder also about the impact of these programs on Israelis. We sense that some of the strongest outcomes observed are a consequence of the time spent in the company of young Israelis; these encounters are a central part of the twinning relationships that schools sustain. We think it is worth exploring what changes, for the Israeli participants in these relationships, after they have spent time with young people from North America. These outcomes may be an important and untapped outcome of such investments.

Lastly, we wonder why young people react in such different ways to their time in Israel. Why do some come home feeling more distant from Israel and from Israelis? Is it because of something they experience during their time in the program or is it because of a mismatch between their expectations ahead of the trip and their experiences in the country? We suggest sharpening the resolution of these questions by interviewing those who react to their experiences in this way.

## APPENDIX A

### Post-program Survey Fielded to Participating Students

Dear Student,

We would like your feedback about different aspects of your school's trip to Israel. In addition, we would like to learn about your family and your Jewish life.

Many of these questions were in the survey you completed before your trip to Israel.

To remind you: there are no right or wrong answers . We would appreciate your full and honest responses to each and every question. Please answer each one without skipping over any of them. There is no need to include your name. Nothing that you write will be shared with anyone. Your answers will be completely anonymous.

Thank you for your cooperation

#### A. To what extent was each of the following aspects of the trip meaningful for you?

		Not at all meaning -ful to me					Highly meaning -ful to me
1.	Visits to historical and national sites (eg. Massada, Mt. Herzl, Yad Vashem, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.	Getting to know the Israeli tour guide and speaking informally with him/her	1	2	3	4	5	6
3.	The general atmosphere in the group	1	2	3	4	5	6
4.	Opportunities to reflect and discuss our experiences	1	2	3	4	5	6
5.	Shabbat with your group	1	2	3	4	5	6
6.	Hiking	1	2	3	4	5	6
7.	Meeting with Israelis	1	2	3	4	5	6
8.	Free time between activities	1	2	3	4	5	6

**B. Which parts of your Israel trip would you recommend including on future trips? (If you didn't visit the site, please mark '0' with an X)**

		Not at all recommend ed	Not recommen ed	Recommen ded	Highly recommen ed		Did not visit/I don't know what that is
1.	Jerusalem – the Western Wall ("HaKotel")	1	2	3	4		0
2.	Jerusalem – the Jewish Quarter	1	2	3	4		0
3.	Jerusalem – Yad Vashem	1	2	3	4		0
4.	Jerusalem – Mount Herzl	1	2	3	4		0
5.	The Desert – Massada	1	2	3	4		0
6.	The Dead sea	1	2	3	4		0
7.	The Desert – Bedouin tent (Kfar Hanokdim/Chan HaShayarot)	1	2	3	4		0
8.	Tel Aviv – Independence Hall	1	2	3	4		0
9.	Tel Aviv – Rabin Square	1	2	3	4		0
10.	The Golan Heights	1	2	3	4		0

**C. As a result of my school's Israel trip –**

		Not at all					To a great extent
1.	I think more about the meaning of my being Jewish	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.	My connection with Jewish history has grown stronger	1	2	3	4	5	6
3.	My sense of belonging to the Jewish people has grown stronger	1	2	3	4	5	6
4.	My perceptions regarding the State of Israel have become more complex	1	2	3	4	5	6
5.	My sense of connection to the State of Israel and Israelis has grown stronger	1	2	3	4	5	6
6.	I feel I can say more about current issues in Israel	1	2	3	4	5	6
7.	I feel I can say more about topics related to Judaism and the Jewish people	1	2	3	4	5	6

**E. Please read each statement and mark your position relating to the statement by circling one number on the scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).**

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
BC1	I feel that the United States is my home	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC2	I would like to know more about Jews in other countries	1	2	3	4	5	6
BS1	I believe that God listens to prayer	1	2	3	4	5	6
BI1	I have a strong connection to people in Israel	1	2	3	4	5	6
BE1	I feel a responsibility towards Jews in need	1	2	3	4	5	6
BI2	Israel is the homeland of all Jews	1	23	3	4	5	6
BC3	I feel a part of my local Jewish community	1	2	3	4	5	6
BI3	When I think about Israel I feel pride	1	2	3	4	5	6
BS2	I respect people who observe Jewish law (Halacha)	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC4	When I think about the Jewish People I feel pride	1	2	3	4	5	6
BI4	I'm happy when I hear that somebody famous is Israeli	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC5	I have a strong connection to other Jews wherever they are.	1	2	3	4	5	6
BI5	If Israel were destroyed my life would be different	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC6	It's important that my best friends are Jewish	1	2	3	4	5	6
BI6	I don't really understand what is going on in Israel	1	2	3	4	5	6
BE3	I would like to know more about Jewish views on environmentalism	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC7	There are strong similarities between Jews in different places	1	2	3	4	5	6
BI7	I need to learn more in order to understand what is going on in Israel	1	2	3	4	5	6
BS3	Observing mitzvot is a way to connect to God	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC8	I feel close to other Jews in America	1	2	3	4	5	6
BI8	I feel that Israel is my homeland	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC9	I feel proud that people know that I'm Jewish	1	2	3	4	5	6
BE2	When I see someone insulting others on Facebook, I feel like I should	1	2	3	4	5	6

	intervene						
BS4	I feel that I am protected from above	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC10	Jews, wherever they are, share a common destiny	1	2	3	4	5	6
BI9	I would like to get to know more Israelis	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC11	It's important for me to have non-Jewish friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
BS5	I believe in life after death	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC12	It's important that Jews only date other Jews	1	2	3	4	5	6
B20	When there is a crisis or war in Israel, I pay special attention	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC13	I care equally about the suffering of Jews and non-Jews	1	2	3	4	5	6
BE4	When I think about making a difference in the world, I think first about helping Jews.	1	2	3	4	5	6
BS6	There have been moments in my life when I have felt God's presence	1	2	3	4	5	6
BC14	If people love each other, religion should not make a difference when they marry	1	2	3	4	5	6

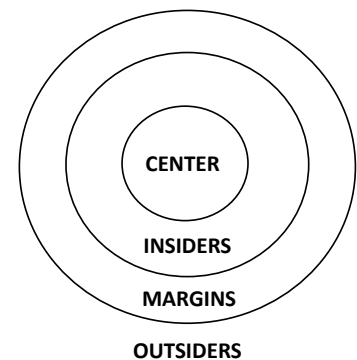
**F. Each group has a center, insiders, margins and outsiders. For example, in the category of sports:**

The Center group – are the dedicated fans that go to most games, fill their homes with the team's collectibles, jerseys of t-shirts, etc.

The Insider group– are fans of the team who keep up to date with how their team is doing, they go occasionally to games, and are happy when their team wins and sad when they lose.

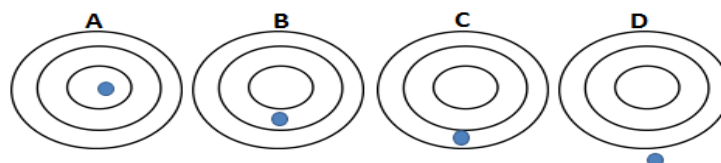
The Marginal group – are those fans who like one team more than all the others, show some interest in it, but hardly ever watch games

The Outsider group - are those people who are not interested in sports and don't follow how any teams are doing.



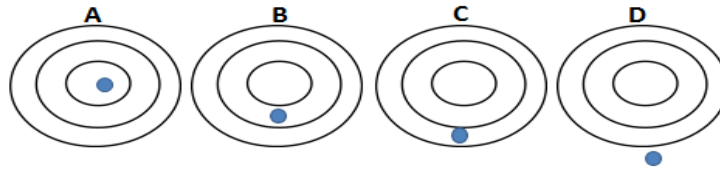
Please select which of the following categories is most appropriate for you:

**F1. Among All Jews around the world, where do you place yourself?**

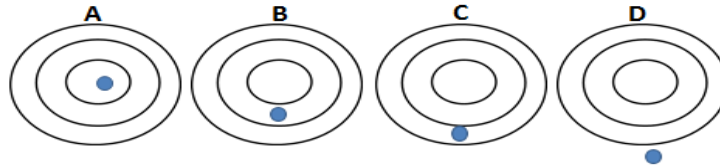




**F2. Among Jews in America, where do you place yourself?**



**F3. Among people who say that Israel is important in their life, where do you place yourself?**



**G. Imagine you're with a group of friends who are having a conversation about the topics below. How confident are you in your knowledge to talk about these things?**

		Not at all confident	Only a little	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very confident	Completely confident
EC1	The history of the United States in the past 100 years	1	2	3	4	5	6
EE1	The equality of women in society	1	2	3	4	5	6
EI1	Reasons for the emergence of Zionism	1	2	3	4	5	6
EC2	Current events in the United States	1	2	3	4	5	6
ES1	God	1	2	3	4	5	6
EI2	Contemporary Israeli culture (such as films, music and books)	1	2	3	4	5	6
EC3	The Holocaust	1	2	3	4	5	6
EE2	Jewish attitudes towards homosexuality	1	2	3	4	5	6
EI3	Current events in Israel	1	2	3	4	5	6
EC4	American culture (such as films, music and books)	1	2	3	4	5	6
ES2	The meaning of life	1	2	3	4	5	6
EI4	The Arab/Israeli conflict	1	2	3	4	5	6
EC5	Jewish religious customs	1	2	3	4	5	6
EE3	Global climate change	1	2	3	4	5	6
EI5	The status of different Jewish religious movements in Israel	1	2	3	4	5	6
EC6	The history of the Jewish people in the past 100 years	1	2	3	4	5	6
ES3	Why some people suffer and others don't	1	2	3	4	5	6
EI6	Daily life in Israel	1	2	3	4	5	6
EC7	Jewish culture (such as food, films, music, books, poetry)	1	2	3	4	5	6
EE4	Cyber-bullying	1	2	3	4	5	6

EI7	The importance of Israel in the Tenakh	1	2	3	4	5	6
EC8	The differences between Jewish religious movements (e.g. Conservative, Reform, Orthodox, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	6
ES4	Jewish law (Halacha)	1	2	3	4	5	6
EI8	The geography of the Land of Israel	1	2	3	4	5	6

**H. To what extent would you describe Israel as?**

		Not at all	Very little	Not much	Somewhat	A lot	Very much
GP11	A country with a Jewish atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5	6
GP1	A spiritual center	1	2	3	4	5	6
GN1	A dangerous place	1	2	3	4	5	6
GP2	The homeland of the Jewish people	1	2	3	4	5	6
GN3	A poor country	1	2	3	4	5	6
GP3	A place to be safe from anti-Semitism	1	2	3	4	5	6
GN8	A country facing ongoing threats to its existence	1	2	3	4	5	6
GP10	A place to explore Jewish identity	1	2	3	4	5	6
GP4	A home away from home	1	2	3	4	5	6
GN5	A place where all Jews are not treated equally	1	2	3	4	5	6
GP5	A place with close friends and/or family	1	2	3	4	5	6
GN2	A place full of ultra-orthodox Jews	1	2	3	4	5	6
GP6	A place where teenagers have more freedom to do what they want	1	2	3	4	5	6
GP9	The birthplace of the Jewish people	1	2	3	4	5	6
GN6	A place where Arabs are treated unfairly	1	2	3	4	5	6
GP7	A land promised by God	1	2	3	4	5	6
GN7	A state governed by Jewish law (Halacha)	1	2	3	4	5	6
GP8	A fun vacation destination	1	2	3	4	5	6
GN4	A place where people are not so friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6

**I. When considering all that you know about Israel (history, current events, etc.), how much have you learned from each of the following?**

	Not applicable	Nothing	Very little	Not much	Somewhat	A lot	Very much
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Family							
The media (such as television, Facebook, newspapers, etc)							
General experiences in school							
Classes about Israel in school							
My school Israel trip							
Synagogue							
Other Jewish organizations such as camp, youth groups, etc.							

**J. When considering your personal feelings towards Israel, how influenced are you by each of the following?**

	Not applicable	Nothing	Very little	Not much	Somewhat	A lot	Very much
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Family							
The media (such as television, Facebook, newspapers, etc)							
General experiences in school							
Classes about Israel in school							
My school Israel trip							
Synagogue							
Other Jewish organizations such as camp, youth groups, etc.							

**J. How do you imagine your life over the next 10 years?**

**What is the probability that you will be doing or will have done the following?**

		Very low probability	Low probability	Low-medium probability	Medium-high probability	High probability	Very High probability
J1	Going to a Jewish high school						
J2	Studying in university						
J3	Living in the United States						
J4	Participating in events that are related to the State of Israel						
J5	Volunteering actively within the Jewish community						
J6	Visiting Israel						
J7	Starting a professional career						
J8	Travelling around the world						
J9	Living in Israel						
J10	Having a good, well-paying job						
J11	Taking part in activities and/or ceremonies at synagogue						
J12	Serving in the Israeli army						
J13	Involvement in a Jewish youth group (such as Habonim, USY, BBYO)						

J1 4	Donating (time or money) to an Israel organization						
J1 5	Other: _____ _____						

**K29. Personal Anonymous Code**

Please enter the initials of your first name and family name, and four digits of your birthday. (For example, if your name is David Rubin, and your birthday is at 7 June, the code will be – DR0706.)

## APPENDIX B

### Significant Differences Between 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Clusters

	Cluster 1 (61% of sample)	Cluster 2 (39% of sample)
Female	54%	45%
Youth group members	38%	27%
Attended a Jewish summer camp	87%	69%
A non-Jewish parent	3%	15%
Denomination	Orthodox 55% Conservative 26% Reform/Just Jewish 17%	Orthodox 14% Conservative 32% Reform/Just Jewish 44%
Two or more visits to Israel	43%	23%
Relatives in Israel	78%	60%
Either parent plays a leadership role in the community	45%	36%
Parents participate in community events	86%	63%
Attend synagogue at least once a week	58%	20%