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Context matters: forming American rabbinic identity in Israel

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Dissertation

**CONTEXT MATTERS: FORMING AMERICAN RABBINIC IDENTITY IN
ISRAEL**

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated in memory of my late Uncle, Rabbi Peter Light. *Zichrono l'vracha*, may his memory be for a blessing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without support from my family, community, and friends. In particular, thank you to my ever-patient husband Ben and our children Simon, Ella, and Nessa; my parents, Elliot and Diana Light; and, my in-laws, Stuart and Sue Soloway, for all of their on-going support and understanding during this lengthy process. Thank you more than I can express to our stalwart neighborhood day care provider, Mary Jo Clark. Thank you to my dearest friend and constant support, Rebecca Cutler, whose path to a PhD paralleled mine. We shared set-backs and successes, often—coincidentally—at the same time.

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**CONTEXT MATTERS:
FORMING AMERICAN RABBINIC IDENTITY IN ISRAEL
KATHERINE LIGHT SOLOWAY**

Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2018

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ABSTRACT

Context Matters: Forming American Rabbinic Identity in Israel is an ethnographic investigation of thirty-eight American Reform and Conservative rabbinical students as they experience the Israel Year of rabbinic education, a defining feature of their training that distinguishes it from that of American seminarians of other faith traditions. This study analyzes rabbinic identity formation through the students' interactions with six contexts: their own identity journeys, educational institutions, Israel as a place, Jewish time, civil time, and the people they encounter. The students engage with these contexts in the student role and as someone who is both an insider and an outsider. Each context is a plausibility structure for Jewish living, but their influence lies in their convergence. The experiences, interpersonal networks, and relationships with the contexts, become social and religious capital, valued for and by Jewish laypeople, and deemed essential for an American rabbi.

This research calls upon literature from the Sociology of Religion, Sociology of Organizations, Sociology of Education, and various subfields within Jewish Studies. Symbolic Interactionism, narrative constructions of identity, and experiential education provide the theoretical frameworks. Previous research (Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and

Marler 1997) has identified stages in the clergy identity formation process—encounter, evaluation, struggle, and resolution/ internalization. These guide the analysis of how students engage, process their experiences, and consider personal and professional implications. Reflecting the nature of identity formation, the stages are fluid and non-linear. The rabbinical students make sense of their own experiences through constructing identity narratives. They progress toward rabbinic formation as they gain knowledge, skills, habits, and a sense of self as rabbinic -- identity outcomes of clergy education identified by Foster, Dahill, Goleman, and Toletino (2006).

This research expands the conversation on clergy education to include rabbinical students, and it introduces particular Jewish vocabularies for learning to the literature on professional socialization. It also contributes an analysis of Israel-based experiences as they shape those who lead Jewish communities in the U.S. Rabbinic identity is complex; locating the process of formation in Jerusalem for an academic year challenges and enriches the students on their paths to the rabbinate.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CY Conservative Yeshiva
- HUC Hebrew Union College
- JTS Jewish Theological Seminary
- Schechter The Schechter Institute
- Ziegler Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

GLOSSARY OF HEBREW, YIDDISH, AND ARAMAIC TERMS

- alef* the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet
aliyah lit., going up; immigrate to Israel; be called to recite the blessings before and after the Torah is read
aliyah l'regel ascension by foot to Jerusalem
amidah standing prayer
am Yisrael the nation of Israel
amiyut peoplehood
aron kodesh Holy Ark/ Torah cabinet
- ba'al Shacharit* prayer leader for Shacharit [morning] services
bet the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet
beit kneset lit., house of meeting; synagogue
beit midrash house of study or study hall
bimah stage/podium/lectern
birkat hamazon/ bensching blessing after the meal
birkat kohanim/ duchaning recitation of the priestly blessing
b'nai Yisrael lit., the children of Israel, Biblically referring to the descendants of Jacob
bracha, brachot blessing, blessings
- café hafuch* lit., upside-down coffee; cappuccino
chag sameach happy holiday (standard greeting)
challah braided bread
chanukiyah, chanukiyot nine-branched candelabra used on Chanukah; Chanukah menorahs
chevruta study partner
chul shorthand for *chutz l'aretz*, outside the land (of Israel)
- daven, davening* pray, praying in Yiddish-English
derech path, way
dikduk grammar
dvar Torah, divrei Torah words of Torah, short sermon
d'rabbanan from the Rabbis, rabbinic
drash, drashot commentary, commentaries
- edot hamizrach nusach* Jewish-Eastern melodies
Eicha Lamentations
emet truth
etrog citron
- fryer* sucker (coll.)
gabbai prayer service coordinator

gan eden Garden of Eden
gedolei haTorah great Torah scholars
gelilah dressing the Torah
gimmel the third letter of the Hebrew alphabet

hagbah lifting the Torah
hagadah book guiding the Passover *seder* [lit., order] and providing the narrative for the Exodus from Egypt
halakha Jewish law
halakha l'maaseh practical Jewish law
Hallel praise service recited on holidays and rosh chodesh
Har Habayit The Temple Mount
Har Herzl Mount Herzl, the site of Israel's national military cemetery
Har Hazeitim the Mount of Olives
Haredi ultra-Orthodox
Haredim ultra-Orthodox people as a group
havdalah separation ceremony after Shabbat and holidays conclude
hazarah review
Hilkhot Yom Tov . . . the Laws of Holidays
hiloni secular
"Hinei ma tov u'manaim, shevet achim gam yachad" "How good and pleasant it is for brothers to sit together"

"Im tirtzu ein zo agadah: l'hiyot am hofshi b'artzeinu, b'erezt Zion v'Yerushalayim"
. "If you will it, it is no fairy tale: to be a free people in our land, in the land of Zion and Jerusalem"

Kaddish shalem whole kaddish prayer
Kaddish yatom Mourners' kaddish
Kadosh, kedusha holy, holiness
kashrut dietary laws
kavana lit., intention; a short text or thought and reflection
kavod respect
kavod bein adam l'chaveiro respect between a person and his friend/another person
kiddush blessing over wine or grape juice
kippah, kippot skull cap, yarmulke
kiruv religious outreach
kitniyot rice, corn, legumes
kohen descendant of the priestly caste
korban offering, sacrifice
Kotel Western Wall

l'shalem to pay
l'tzalem to photograph
learn lishma learn for the sake of learning/ for its own sake

levi descendant of the service caste in the Temple
leyn read or chant from the Torah
limudei kodesh holy studies
lulav palm, willow, and myrtle branches

ma'afeh shekedim almond croissant
Ma'arat HaMachpelah Tomb of the Patriarchs, Judaism's second most holy site
machloket, machlokot disagreement, conflict
Machloket l'shem shamayim disagreement in the name of heaven; constructive, respectful disagreement
makom kavua permanent place, usually referring to a seat at a table or a desk
mangal, mangalim portable grills
mara d'atra local authority on Jewish law
marit ayin giving a false visual impression
masorti lit., traditional; most closely related to American Conservative Judaism
mehitzah barrier separating men and women in prayer
megillah scroll; most commonly used as shorthand for Megillat Esther, the Scroll of Esther
melakha category of "creative" work forbidden on Shabbat and holidays
menucha rest
Mi shebeyrach the prayer for healing *cholim* [ill people]
"mi she'nikhnas Adar marbim b'simcha" "s/he who welcomes (the month of) Adar increases happiness"
midrash Rabbinic, story-based commentary
mifgash, mifgashim encounter, encounters
minhag custom/tradition
minyan, minyanim prayer quorum/ group
mitzvot commandments, good deeds
moadon student lounge
motzi prayer over bread
musaf amidah the standing prayer during the musaf, extra, service for Shabbat and holidays

niggun wordless melody
nusach Ashkenaz Ashkenazi/German traditional prayer format and tunes

PaRDeS acronym for *peshat* [surface, direct meaning], *remez* [hidden or symbolic meaning], *derash* [sought-after or inquiry-based meaning], and *sod* [secret or esoteric meaning]
pasuk verse
persumei nisa publicizing the miracle
Pesach Passover
posek, poskim Jewish-legal decisors
Psukei D'zimra, a selection of Psalms

Rabbanut . . . the Rabbinat
rav . . . rabbi
Rodef Holomot . . . Pursuer of Dreams
rosh chodesh . . . lit., head of the month
Rosh Hashana . . . head of the year; New Year
ruach . . . spirit
rugelach . . . small spiral, filled pastry

sakit, sakiyot . . . small plastic bags
seder . . . order
sefirat ha'omer, the counting of the omer-measurement of barley used in Temple sacrifices preceding the wheat offered on Shavuot
semikha . . . ordination
Shaarei Sheina . . . Gates of Sleep
Shabbat, Shabbatot . . . Sabbath
Shacharit . . . morning-time prayer service
shana tova . . . (have a) good year
sha'on Shabbat . . . Shabbat clock, electric timer
shiksa, shiksas . . . female non-Jews (derogatory)
shira b'tzibur . . . singing in public
shomer kashrut . . . observant of the kosher laws
shomer mitzvot . . . observant of commandments
shomer Shabbat . . . Sabbath observant
shuckle . . . meditative bowing in prayer or learning
shuk . . . market
shuk arba minim . . . four species market for Sukkot
shul . . . synagogue, temple
shtenders . . . book stands
shtiebl . . . hole-in-the-wall synagogue
sifrei kodesh . . . holy/ religious books
siyyum ha'shavua . . . conclusion of the week
sukkah . . . temporary booth or hut for the holiday of Sukkot

tallit . . . prayer shawl
Talmud Torah . . . learning Jewish texts
Tanakh . . . Hebrew Bible, encompassing Torah, Prophets, and Writings
tefillah . . . prayer
tefillin . . . phylacteries; leather prayer straps
tekes . . . ceremony
tekes ma'avar . . . transfer ceremony
tikkun leil Shavuot . . . Shavuot night study session
Tiveria . . . Tiberius
tiyul . . . outing; hike
trayf . . . non-kosher, most commonly referring to food
tzedakah . . . charity/justice

tzitzit ritual knotted fringes tied the four-corners of a garment worn under a shirt or on the four corners of a prayer shawl

ulpan Hebrew language course

Yam Kinneret . . . Sea of Galilee

yashar koach congratulations

yishuv community settlement

yizkor remembrance prayer and prayer service; “may (God) remember”

Yom HaAtzma'ut Independence Day

Yom HaShoah. . . . Holocaust Remembrance Day

Yom HaZikaron Memorial Day

Yom Ofanaim the Day of Bicycles (alternative name for Yom Kippur)

yom tov/ yontif [holiday with some halakhic restrictions

yotzei in fulfillment of halakhic obligation

zayde . . . grandfather

zemer, zemirot song, songs

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Opening

During the fall semester of 2007, hunkered down in my carrel in the depths of the Brandeis University library, I cracked the spine of a book that would have a profound impact on the way I view identity and American religion. *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools*¹ immediately imprinted itself on my sociological imagination. Whereas most studies I had read focused on identity outcomes, Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Marler focused on process. They addressed the back story, the formation of clergy identity through the students' experiences and the cultural influences on those experiences during the seminary years. Even though the book focused on identity formation of Protestant seminarians in Christian theological schools, it sparked questions for me about generalizability and applicability to rabbinical students and Jewish identity. Casual observations and conversations with friends enrolled in various rabbinical schools at that time revealed the aptness of many concepts and constructions from *Being There*. Gaps in the literatures on Jewish identity and American clergy formation sparked this study; my access to rabbinical schools and rabbinical students enabled the research to take place.²

Application of the core concepts and processes of *Being There* to rabbinic education begs the question, "being where?" Replication of that study would have

¹ Carroll, Jackson W., Barbara G. Wheeler, Daniel O. Aleshire, and Penny Long Marler. 1997. *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools*. New York: Oxford University Press.

² Many thanks to the Wexner Graduate Fellowship, especially Class XIX, for being my first informants and sounding boards and for assisting me in forming the interpersonal connections necessary to pursue my research.

naturally led to a comparative study between cohorts of students at two rabbinical schools, with a focus on campus life and cultural identity inputs. While a study of this kind would have provided much-needed insight into rabbinical schools and rabbinic identity, it would have ignored the most significant structural distinction between Christian and Jewish seminary education: The requirement that relocates rabbinic education half-way around the world, the Israel Year. Judaism is different from Christianity, but the Israel Year makes training for future Reform and Conservative rabbis exceptional in the field of American clergy education.

Rabbinic identity is a combination of knowledge, skills, habits, and a sense of self that reflect the tasks, roles, status, and authority of the individual and the office. Rabbinic identity is an addendum to Jewish identity. Rabbis have duties different from those of laity because of their professional roles, not because they are a different type of Jew with different obligations, religious or otherwise. A rabbi is a specialist in all things Jewish, but rabbinic training and the title of “rabbi” are not prerequisites for acquiring that knowledge or leading rituals or prayer. Rabbinic identity is Jewish identity plus leadership roles, status, and authority.³ This is what sets a rabbi apart from laity, for whom leadership is optional. As with other types of identities, rabbinic identity is not “essentialist” or based on a single dominant category, but formed in a multitude of dimensions through interaction in context.

This study calls on three theoretical frameworks to shed light on the process of rabbinic identity formation, and more specifically the rabbinical students’ experiences of

³ See Weber (1993) for a discussion of the differentiation between clergy and laity.

their own rabbinic identity formation. Narrative approaches to identity construction, socialization, experiential learning, and Symbolic Interactionism are each relevant to different and multiple stages of the identity formation process. Each approach calls on the concepts of context, interaction, and Others to explain how interactions with and within the Israel Year contribute to American rabbinic identity formation.

Being there—in Israel—significantly complexifies research of identity formation in context. Carroll et al. focus on two campuses; in this research, both United States- and Jerusalem-based campuses come into play, but with Israel in general as the larger, shared “campus.” The institutional framework still features but as one of a group of contexts, the others of which are place, time, and interpersonal interactions. The students’ journeys to rabbinical school serve as a foundational context for the formation process. Their journeys re-emerge as relevant as the students reflect on their experiences and construct identity narratives.

The narrative approach to identity formation is gaining contemporary popularity in studies of Jewish identity, but most studies assess identity salience based on affiliation and engagement. Survey-based studies develop typologies of Jewish identity and project the likelihood of in-marriage based on measures of lighting Sabbath candles, attending synagogue services, and hosting holiday meals.⁴ The agenda behind the studies is how to better engage those Jews who are less engaged and reduce intermarriage and apostasy.⁵

These studies generally yield policy recommendations for outreach programs to specific

⁴ National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), conducted every decade, give broad stroke impressions of American Jews and American Jewish communities. The survey reports are all available online through the Berman Jewish Databank at www.jewishdatabank.org.

⁵ How to engage people who are entirely unaffiliated proves difficult because they are not generally respondents in the studies.

subsets of the American Jewish population. As another type of research, studies of Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities do focus on highly engaged, active Jews; however, they often do so in a way that explains behaviors and attitudes as though piety and dedication to ritual exist only within the purview of these groups.

The rabbinical students in this study are highly engaged and strongly connected, but not Orthodox. They affiliate with the Reform and Conservative movements. Some of the students are themselves children of rabbis or communal professionals or come from families with strong integration into Jewish life. Others come from interfaith families, have converted to Judaism, or have more limited histories of engagement. Nevertheless, they all fall within the categories of progressive and connected. As rabbinical students, they are the future American Jewish elite. This study alters the standard focus of identity research from outcome typologies to process and narrative, from laity to leader, from highly engaged Orthodox Jews to highly engaged egalitarian Jews, and from the U.S. to Israel.

This study follows thirty-eight Reform and Conservative rabbinical students—twenty-two from Hebrew Union College (HUC), six from the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), and ten from the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University (Ziegler)—over the course of their Israel Year. Through ethnographic observations and a series of three interviews, I examine how these students experience their own American rabbinic identity as formed through interactions with and within the contexts of the Israel Year. This research is not the rabbinical school version of *Being There*, but core concepts and methods have influenced each aspect of my work, from

initial conceptualization of the project, to the starting format for the formation process, and through thinking about next steps for this research. During every stage in this process and in every context of formation, I ask what it means personally and professionally for the rabbinical students to “be there” and how being in Israel shapes and contributes to American rabbinic identity formation.

Research Questions

Coming into this research, I had many questions about the nature of rabbinic identity formation and how emplacing the process within the context of the Israel Year would impact identity inputs and interactants, specifically the people, places, ideas, objects, and beliefs with which the students interact; processes of formation; and, identity outcomes of knowledge, skills, habits, and a rabbinic sense of self. Through their experiences, who will they become as persons, rabbis, and American Jews? Having previously conducted research on rabbinic identity formation of Modern Orthodox rabbinical students,⁶ I brought an understanding of rabbinic identity to this study. However, that study was limited to the context of the institution and related professional training arenas, such as teaching and pulpit internships.

During and within the Israel Year, what people, places, objects, and situations would the students interpret as formative for themselves? Would formative experiences emerge as different in every context, or are there particularly formative types? Will the students exhibit comparable processes for understanding their experiences, learning from

⁶ Light, Katherine. 2008. *Inside Out, Outside In: YCT Rabbinical School's Open Orthodoxy Transmitted, Absorbed, and Applied*. MA Thesis. Waltham, MA: Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, Brandeis University.

them, and feeling an enhanced sense of selfhood? Will any of the contexts or experiences emerge as *sui generis*? What kinds of identity outcomes would the students gain? Would the identity outcomes be specific to Israeli contexts or transferable to the United States?

I am curious about the personal and professional value of the Israel Year. I am interested in how the students' experiences both challenge and reinforce their personal Judaism; that is, alter and/or enhance the ways that they live Jewishly and identify as Jewish that have been ingrained in them and integrated into their identities since childhood.⁷ I am interested in what and how the rabbinical students contribute to the conversations on what it means to be a Jew, specifically a Reform or Conservative Jew, and live Jewishly in Israel. Additionally, I am interested in their identities as religious professionals and how the Israel Year, as a site for professional education, contributes to the process of rabbinic professionalization. How does the Israel Year impact the relationship between American Jewish identity and Israel? I conceptualized the Israel Year as providing particular types of social and religious capital⁸ based on knowledge of Israel and experiences of living in Israel, capital deemed admirable for lay Jews, yet essential for American rabbis. I discovered that the students did not reflect on the professional utility of their experiences as often as I did and did not use the language or concepts of social capital.

I imagined that the students would experience tension within the Israeli context because the Reform and Conservative movements are relatively small and the rabbis

⁷ Of the 38 students, three were not raised in Jewish homes. Their Jewish socialization took place and they converted to Judaism as adults.

⁸ In the most basic terms, Finke and Dougherty define social capital as "resources secured through social networks" and religious capital as "mastery of and attachment to a specific religious culture" (2002:103).

affiliated with those movements are not recognized as religious leaders by the Israeli Rabbinate [Heb., *Rabbanut*].⁹ I anticipated that the students would harbor a lot of resentment which they would express with frequency. Instead, I discovered that though pockets of tension existed episodically, they did not overwhelm the students' experiences. As Andy,¹⁰ a Ziegler student, explained,

I'm most likely not going to be a rabbi in Israel . . . so the fact that the Jewish authorities in Israel won't recognize me as a rabbi is not really relevant. I'm going to be learning a lot here . . . [but] I'm going to be using it in America and not here. And their opinion doesn't matter. That opinion can't touch me.

Andy expresses feeling impervious to the stringencies of the Rabbinate. Simply put, it is not his community, so the Rabbinate does not have authority; or, rather, their authority is not relevant to Andy. More frequently, the students' negative associations with the religious right came from encounters with security guards or individual Jews, not through direct contact with the institution of the Chief Rabbinate.

Though the Israeli Rabbinate was not of immediate concern to the students, the aspects of the Israel Year with which the students struggled most were related to the implementation and enforcement of policies in strict accordance with ultra-Orthodox interpretations of Jewish law and/or customs. The students might not have expressed immediate concern about the Rabbinate, but whenever they encountered policies that

⁹ For example, they may perform life cycle events, but those events are not accepted as legitimate by the Rabbinate and, thus, the State of Israel.

¹⁰ All names of informants are pseudonyms.

negated their own approaches to Jewish living, the resentment for and antagonism toward the strong arm of the institution emerged in force.

The Israel Year: History and Overview

Israel—as land, state, people, and dream—has always had a place in the hearts, minds, and psyches of the Jewish people. For a significantly shorter period of time, Israel has been a site for American rabbinic education. Spending a year of rabbinical school studying in Israel is a highly valued tradition. HUC, Ziegler, and JTS have all supported Israel Year programs for decades. At the time of this research, HUC students studied at HUC’s Jerusalem campus, JTS students studied at Machon Schechter (Schechter), and Ziegler students studied at the Conservative Yeshiva (CY).¹¹ JTS first began offering a year in Israel as an option for rabbinical students in 1964, but did not have an established Israel Year program, even though they had aspired to one since the founding of the modern State of Israel. JTS had intended to construct an entire campus, but managed only a single dormitory building, the Pnimiya, and an inherited library at Machon Schocken (Lederhendler 1997). HUC’s program, founded in 1970, immediately had a place at HUC’s pre-existing Jerusalem campus, which had previously been a center for archaeological and historical research. From its inception, HUC’s Israel Year became an established part of American Reform rabbinic education. The Ziegler Israel Year program began in 1996 with the establishment of the school as an ordaining institution.

¹¹ At the time of this research, Ziegler’s relationship with the CY was relatively new. Policies and attitudes at Schechter regarding sexual identity and ordination did not reflect those of Ziegler. Additionally, the program was more classroom-based when Ziegler administrators really wanted their students to spend their Israel Year in a beit midrash.

The respective mission statements all highlight Israel's significance historically, culturally, religiously, and for the Jewish people. Originally, HUC's "primary objective was to enable students to acquire proficiency in the Hebrew language and rabbinic texts . . . accompanied by immersion in the life of Israelis and the Jewish people" (Marcus and Peck 1985:196). Currently, HUC's information page is poetic in its presentation of their Israel Year program¹²:

Surrounded by biblical and contemporary Israel, you will begin your academic journey immersed in Hebrew language and text studies, as you get to know the land, culture, and people of Israel. In no other place on earth will you find the rich and complex diversity of Jewish ethnic and religious identities, music, worship, ritual, and spirituality that have evolved across centuries and continents.¹³

Whereas HUC's description focuses on atmosphere and places the Israel Year as integral to an academic journey, JTS frames the importance of the Israel Year in terms of Israel's Jewish demographics: "80% of the world Jewish population lives either in America or Israel . . . As such, it is essential that our school train rabbis who understand Israel—its people, cultures, history, language and politics—and that their rabbinic identity includes deep engagement with the Jewish state."¹⁴ For Ziegler, the Israel Year's significance is tied to the leadership responsibilities and roles of American Conservative rabbis: "To serve as a leader in the Jewish world today requires an intimate familiarity with the State

¹² Officially, HUC's program is called the Year in Israel (YII, for short). For the sake of standardization across all three institutions, all of the programs will be labeled "Israel Year."

¹³ <http://huc.edu/admissions/israel-experience>

¹⁴ <https://jtsisrael.weebly.com/rabbinical-school-program.html>

of Israel, its politics, its people and the challenges it faces.”¹⁵ The three programs, founded in different years for different reasons, have all determined that spending a year studying in Israel is vital for an American rabbi.

The rabbinical students have many roles during the Israel Year. In particular, they exhibit characteristics of a particular type of Israel-based international student and a particular type of homeland tourist. Coates (2004) provides options for how to view an international student and also provides ways to frame how the students engage with their host countries and cultures. The primary difference between Coates’ research subjects and the rabbinical students studying in Israel, is that for Coates’ participants, “homeland” refers to their country of origin (2004:7). For the rabbinical students, Israel, the host country, is the international Jewish homeland. Thus, spending a year studying in Israel is, at its origin, a personal—not just academic—pursuit. Though it may seem foreign, ties through religion, culture, and tradition are undeniable though they may be fraught and contested.

Cohen (2003) and Donitsa-Schmidt and Vadish (2005) specifically address students studying abroad in Israel and how they differ from those in other locales. These authors argue that the students’ “main purpose for spending time in Israel is to strengthen their Jewish identity and become familiar with their own Jewish heritage” (Donitsa-Schmidt and Vadish 2005:33; see also Herman 1970 and Chazan 1992). Jewish young adults who study in Israel are “drawn by an interest in and attachment to Israel and Judaism, which is fostered by their family, social milieu, and previous Jewish education.

¹⁵ <http://ziegler.aju.edu/Default.aspx?id=3862>

Academics play a secondary role to a search for ethnic and religious identity” (Cohen 2003:37). Donitsa-Schmidt and Vadish (2005) and Mittelberg (1999) argue that there is a relationship between identity, Hebrew language proficiency, and disposition toward Israel.¹⁶ An increase in general Jewish socialization emerges as a critical byproduct of the Israel-based study abroad experience (Herman 1970). Study abroad programs and experiences in Israel fit within the standard framework of similar academic programs elsewhere. However, the acknowledgment—and indeed nurturance—of personal, Jewish identity development reflects themes present in pilgrimage or homeland tourism.

Homeland tourism is a subset of general tourism. Kelner (2010) defines tourism more broadly as “a specific genre of travel, in which individuals construct meaning through the consumption of place” (2010:9). Homeland tourism specifically “is not simply a way of coming to know state and society but a way of coming to know the self” (20). The self-focus is the “tourist gaze” focused inward. The consumption habits encouraged through Israel homeland tourism nurture the tourist’s Jewish identity and relationship with Israel. The interactions with Israel, though, are choreographed both in terms of content and hopeful outcomes. For Kelner, perhaps a larger critique of tourism is that “tourists substitute the consumption of symbols in place of an unmediated encounter with reality” (2010:113).

Tourists who wish to have unmediated experiences of place may find them in a borderzone. A touristic borderzone is “a social space that is very much a part of local life and that is structured as a meeting site where visitors and some categories of locals come

¹⁶ The role of Hebrew language and its influence on rabbinic formation will be explored in Chapter Seven as part of a larger conversation on peoplehood.

together to interact” (Bruner 2005:13; Kelner 2010: 88). In the case of study abroad students, though, borderzones are standard places for interaction and the tourist gaze is likely replaced by a longer view of engaging with where they live, albeit temporarily.

The rabbinical students’ gaze, tourist or otherwise, focuses on their own rabbinic identities as they are formed through experiences in and engagement with Israel over the course of the year. The public and private spaces present in both international study and tourism in Israel meld, which increases the complexity of each. The students’ narratives of their experiences in the place and their consumption of the place are guided by personal, professional, and experiential goals for the Israel year.

An Israel experience, in addition to providing first-hand knowledge about international Jewish peoplehood, is intended to promote relationships with the place and also, on a functional level, improve their Hebrew language skills. That the students have a relationship with Israel is not up for debate in any of the seminaries; the nature of the relationship is more open to interpretation. Rabbinical schools recognize that American Jews struggle to reconcile love of the land of Israel and people with “an honest exploration of current problems and challenges” (Teutsch 1997:2). The students, through studying in Israel, experience the tension of the relationship—that it is possible to love the land and state and people of Israel while still feeling frustrated by its problems—in order to model that complexity within their communities.¹⁷ Israel is complex; however, having a close relationship with a complex Israel is still possible. The rabbinical students

¹⁷ Liebman and Cohen (1990) and Dashefsky, Lazerwitz, and Tabory (2003) compare and contrast Judaism in the United States and Israel. They uncover and explore the tensions experienced by Americans trying to reconcile their relationship with Israel in terms of their relationship to Judaism.

achieve this by integrating their struggles with Israel into their relationships with her. They and their relationships with Israel will model this possibility for their future congregations and communities of Reform and Conservative American Jews.

Contexts of Formation

Identity formation is a process that emerges from interactions and takes place with and within contexts. The contexts of the Israel Year include the students' personal and professional identity journeys, institutions, Israel as a place, religious time, civil and civil religious time, and interpersonal interactions. The students experience and engage with each context in slightly different ways based on their roles within and relationships to that context as well as the relationship of that context to other contexts. Each context is a collection of elements that interact with each other to give the context its particular character, culture, and influence on identity. This dissertation addresses each context individually but acknowledges that they do not operate in isolation.

For the rabbinical students, the “power of Israel lies in the fact that it is exactly what the Diaspora is not” (Mittelberg 1999:34); it is a Jewish plausibility structure, a base for the continued existence of a socially-constructed world (Berger 1969:45). A Jewish plausibility structure in the non-Jewish context of the United States is difficult to maintain because it is diluted by competition from other values systems. Jewish plausibility structures are generated and perpetuated in Israel where they are strong but complex because in addition to Judaism being a religious tradition and an ethnicity, it is also a contemporary nationality (Mittelberg 1999). Having a plausibility structure based on a belief system, in this case, is not limited to a religious belief system.

“Israeli society,” Mittelberg argues “provides the ideal community for exposing Diaspora Jews to a wholly Jewish society and culture, hence increasing the salience of Jewish identity” (1999:34). Being in Israel and engaging in and with Jewish plausibility structures—especially where the State has the authority to enforce aspects of Jewish living—as a normal function of daily life strengthens and preserves Jewish identity. Jonathan Woocher, an American Jewish communal visionary believed that the best Jewish education was “enculturating,” not simply instruction-based (Woocher 1994: 25).¹⁸ As an educational experience, the Israel Year wraps the students in Jewish experiences and Jewish contexts.

In addition to being plausibility structures, the spaces of the Israel Year constitute communities of place. Israel, Jerusalem, local neighborhoods, and campuses set the geographical boundaries for the students’ experiences during this one year of their seminary education. The content of the larger area is diverse and encompasses differences in ecology, history, politics, religion, gastronomy, architecture, and so on. While the physical boundaries may be mapped, communities of place are represented by “shared sentiments and goals among members,” because the shared “place and propinquity generate a web of interactions” and networks that are long-term, not based solely on exchange or trade (Barman 2006:5). These interactions may stem from the shared location, as opposed to being the cause of the interaction.

Institutions are also a community of place. Theological seminaries are the institutionalization of religious education and the formal, institutional training space for

¹⁸ Aron (1995) defines “enculturation” as “a loving induction into Jewish culture and the Jewish community.”

religious professionals. As a type of professional school, seminaries are “hybrid institutions,” part intellectual and part practical (Williams 1998). Their goal is to produce highly-knowledgeable master practitioners who embody the identity of their profession (Foster, Dahill, Goleman, and Toletino 2006: 5). This community of place, determined by locale and maintained through the membership, is unique to the year; next June, the students will return to the United States and engage with other communities of place.

The Process of Formation

Formation, a term specifically employed in discussions about clergy identity, is not simply religious socialization; it is training for a professional, public role that has a requirement of a specific pastoral habitus and personally resonant meaning system. Wacquant defines habitus as “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinant ways, which then guide them” (2005:316). Anderson (1994) defines pastoral habitus as “an inner attitude formed from general spirituality shaped by disciplined meditation and study of Christian texts, and informed by the practical knowledge necessary for the work of ministry” (233). The development of a pastoral habitus involves learning theology by heart so that it eventually, organically informs one’s work, as in vocation and behaviors.

Bourdieu defines habitus as “a socialized body. A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world—a field—and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in

that world” (1998:81).¹⁹ In the case of rabbinic education and rabbinic identity, habitus is the unconscious expression and application of knowledge and values that are Jewish and have a professional slant. Habitus, as the integration of who one is with what one does, addresses the rabbi holistically, as a person whose personal Jewish self is interwoven with his or her professional Jewish self. This is the integration of the clergy identity wherein the personal and professional inform and interact with each other to ideally mold a unified disposition and outlook. This integration is reinforced for the rabbinical students by being in the rich context of Jerusalem where their daily lives and studies are structured by the Judaism that surrounds them. The plausibility structure of Israel shapes and reinforces the Jewish habitus. It does the work of formation even without consciousness or intention.

The Jewish habitus of Israel, then, shapes Jewish rabbinical formation. Foster et al. (2006) present elements and goals of formation with an institutionally-controlled process and top-down direction. Focusing on the pedagogical and curricular approaches to formation, Foster et al. use the Catholic definition, which encompasses all aspects of priestly development – academic, pastoral, spiritual, and human (2006:125).²⁰ Carroll et al., utilizing a bottom-up directional and processual approach for understanding formation, focus on the cultures that emerge in the seminaries as the primary force of formation for students (1997:4, 8, 265). Accordingly, we will pay attention to the role institutions and their cultures play, alongside the Israel context itself.

¹⁹ See also Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

²⁰ Non-Catholic seminaries largely focus on spiritual and human formation, though the former is rarely explicitly stated; they treat spiritual formation as a broad concept that may include pastoral formation (Foster et al. 2006:125).

Even though religion and religious identity are shaped through social forces, the processes of acquiring religious identities are experienced on a personal level and are often explicit and conscious. Carroll et al. (1997) approach formation by way of the experiences of students during seminary. In schools with set course schedules and traditional students who take full course loads, Carroll et al. determined that there are three stages of identity formation: assessment, struggle, and reconciliation. The terms were used interchangeably with evaluation, struggle, and resolution. This study utilizes the latter set. At each step, students' relationships to the meaning system and professional aspects of becoming clergy change and evolve. Carroll et al. provide definitions of each stage based on students' experiences in Protestant seminaries and are applicable in this case as well.

Evaluation

Evaluation (also called assessment) and re-evaluation are on-going processes of defining and trying to understand. For Carroll et al.'s Protestant seminarians, the evaluation process began when students first arrived at seminary and realized that the religion and spirituality that led them there in the first place is not the same as what they encounter in school.²¹ The mystique of the spiritual is muted through investigation and the academic setting (Shafer 2010). This aspect of seminary education may destabilize

²¹ For students in Protestant seminaries, this may mean that Christianity prior to seminary had "the flavor of romance; Christian life in the school's dominant view involves a great deal of tedious work" (Carroll et al. 1997:221).

the students, but it is part of the development of a mature, informed faith.²² As this research will illustrate, rabbinical students do not experience a process of unmasking or unsettling in the same way as their colleagues in Christian seminaries. Faith and belief are not generally expressed as prominent themes in Jewish identity, likely because one can be Jewish by birth without any expression of faith and one cannot convert to Judaism through a declaration of belief. A “crisis of faith” is not commonly recognized as a Jewish experience. The closest equivalent is to go “off the *derech* [path],” meaning a disengagement from Jewish practices and communal life. This distinction between Christianity and Judaism may have implications for how the students experience and respond to challenges in their respective seminary experiences.

In the case of the Israel Year experiences of the rabbinical students, the evaluation stage of formation is a basic inquiry, not a challenge to core belief. They ask, simply, “What is going on here, in this situation, scenario, text, or encounter?” Borrowing the language of Biblical exegesis, this is the *peshat* [literal] level of questioning which takes the item to be examined at face value and in its context.²³ The students evaluate and reevaluate what they encounter during the Israel Year, searching out deeper understandings after they uncover the basics.

²² The idea of a challenge to one’s faith is one of the reasons why some Christian denominations do not condone seminary education. They believe that seminaries, by re-evaluating belief and faith, destroy the spiritual connection of one’s calling to the ministry and distance the individual from his or her community and from God. For thoughts on calling and/versus professionalization of clergy, see for example Glasse (1968), Bennett (1973), and Blanchard (1981). Wilson (1958-59) cites Pentecostals as one such group that believes that seminary education harms a person’s organic spiritual call.

²³ The levels of exegesis have the acronym PaRDeS which stands for *peshat* [surface, direct meaning], *remez* [hidden or symbolic meaning], *derash* [sought-after or inquiry-based meaning], and *sod* [secret or esoteric meaning].

Struggle

The struggle stage of formation focuses on meanings. For Carroll et al., this stage was the result of students' initial encounter with the seminary and the conflicts between the perspectives they have brought with them and the schools' messages (Carroll et al. 1997:249). In the case of the Israel Year of rabbinical studies, the struggle phase is characterized by the students' further engagement with the meanings of their encounters and experiences. They struggle because they are challenged—or their worldviews or understandings of Judaism are challenged by situations, people, and places that they encounter and with which they interact. Struggle is important, students realize, because it highlights the students' personal investment and emotional commitment.²⁴

Though difficult, students embrace the struggles as integral to the process of growth. They have a framework for productive, respectful struggle in the Torah study concept of *machloket l'shem shamayim* [conflict in the name of heaven]. Understanding, growth, and expanded knowledge come from conflict with or within a text or with another person or *chevruta* [study partner] about a text. More questions also emerge through this process, signaling an evaluation-struggle cycle.

²⁴ The connection between struggle and intimacy is mirrored in Sasson's (2014) discussion of contemporary relationships with Israel—young people especially are more critical of Israel and they have a closer relationship with her.

Resolution

In the resolution (also called reconciliation) stage of formation, students may reconcile many of the struggles²⁵ as they look towards the conclusion of their training and consider “how to be in the world” (Foster et al. 2006:6). Resolution takes place on a smaller scale as the students process what they experience and learn throughout their seminary educations. They consider how to reframe, reformat, and “take home” their Israel Year experiences for themselves and for their future communities. For themselves, the students consider how their experiences have changed who they are—in this way reflecting Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) Internalization—and how they have inched closer toward their goal of being rabbis. Professionally, the students consider how to adopt, adapt, and apply what they have experienced and learned in class and out of class, formally and informally, into *drashot* [commentaries], *divrei Torah* [words of Torah; sermonettes], and lesson plans. The resolution phase of identity formation reminded the students that the Israel Year is not just for themselves, but for their future congregations and community members. The way they process their experiences has professional relevance and is part of the larger process of rabbinic professionalization.

Identity Outcomes

In each context of the Israel Year, the rabbinical students engaged in interactions that yield information, whether practical or intellectual, reflecting the collaboration between subject, object, and context:

²⁵ Students, by this point, have had “sufficient exposure to the central message and manners” of the school and “seem to be changed by them” (Carroll et al. 1997:242). However, “[v]ery few students adopt the whole dominant message and all associated habits and values. Even fewer reject it entirely” (242).

All social experiences, be they cooperative or competitive, have their own contextual and relational features. All knowledge is generated and shared in relational contexts. Like all personal knowledge, the self is constructed in a relational context. Thus, identity is constructed through a person-in-context (Adams and Marshall 1996: 438).

The students processed their experiences and interactions through the stages of rabbinic formation. The final stage of the formation process is a combination of resolution and integration where the former may focus on application of resultant knowledge and skills to professional contexts and the latter on conceptualization of selfhood. The identity outcomes are broad enough to encompass a range of results and be applicable to the experiences of all of the rabbinical students.

However cyclical and unending the formation process appears, there are indeed outcomes—knowledge, skills, habits, and a sense of self—by which one can measure rabbinic identity formation and the influence of contexts. In fact, Foster et al. posit that “[a] distinguishing feature of professional education is the emphasis on forming in students the dispositions, habits, knowledge, and skills that cohere in professional identity and practice, commitments and integrity” (2006:100).

Knowledge

Knowledge, as an identity outcome, refers to intellectual and practical knowledge as well as the intersection of the two. The rabbinical students were in a position to acquire knowledge formally, informally, and experientially over the course of the Israel

Year in all of the contexts. However, certain types of knowledge featured more prominently in particular contexts, such as intellectual knowledge learned through formal approaches in the institutional context or practical knowledge acquired informally through navigating grocery stores on Friday mornings. In particular, intellectual knowledge is related to Foster et al.'s (2006) pedagogies of interpretation, which has particular resonance for text-based learning.

During the Israel Year, the rabbinical students were exposed to some information that may not be directly related to any of the Israel Year contexts. They could have learned the same information, just as proficiently, at home in the United States. Other types of knowledge, though, were greatly enhanced by being in Israel. Studying the Bible and then visiting the sites where events were reported to have transpired, or where holidays were said to have originated, brought the text to life and could ingrain the information because the learning approach had been multisensory. Interacting with Israelis over Shabbat or in daily life gave the students first-hand cultural and religious knowledge. Practical knowledge and intellectual knowledge had the potential to inform each other through experiences of the Israel Year across all contexts. One drawback may be that the students did not retain certain types of knowledge because, for example, if the institutional goal of the Israel Year is experience, they would not have had to commit facts to memory for exams or draw on their new knowledge to write a paper or prepare a sermon.

Skills

Skills, the application of knowledge in the form of an action, are more directly measurable than knowledge. Like knowledge, though, skills may be learned formally, informally, or experientially; however, all require implementation. Within the context of a seminary, students learn the skills necessary to study and also the skills for sharing that knowledge. Students learn how to perform ritual functions and how to do the tasks required of a rabbi. They practice skills with peers in the safety and comfort of the campus environment.

The Israel Year enabled the students to acquire Jewish skills beyond the walls of their institutions. As a Jewishly educative environment, the rabbinical students learned skills of interaction including language, gestures, and symbols; how to function in daily life activities in a variety of settings from public transportation to shopping; and, how to observe and celebrate Jewish time. The students learned what to do through observing and interacting with Israelis. They developed competence in living in Jerusalem which increased their sense of belonging and of intimacy with the space. Both practical knowledge and skills fall into the category of a cultural tool kit (Swidler 1986). Some elements of the toolkit assisted the students in functioning within the contexts of the Israel Year; the more generalized elements have applicability, particularly in Jewish settings, to strategies of action in Israel and in the United States.

Habits

When routines become rote, they are called habits. Due to its length and as part of the institutional goals for the students' experiences, the Israel Year provided opportunities to develop Jewish and Israel-based habits. Habits may be formed experientially across all contexts of the Israel Year, but are strongly tied to place and time or circumstance. Habits may emerge particularly in repeated scenarios as opposed to experiences of a one-day holiday, for example. Habits develop over time through repetition of actions such as visiting the same place with frequency or performing a particular ritual at a set time. Habits may form intentionally or unintentionally. Religious habits are rituals, though non-religious habits may be ritualized. For the individual, habits contribute to a person's habitus as physical manifestations or expressions of one's socialization, but are not the whole of it.

External factors influence the initial formation and ability to continue a particular habit, however personal. The Israel Year prompted students to develop habits that were specifically Jewish, such as those surrounding Shabbat, and also habits of daily life that emerged from their routines and schedules. Even though habits are an integration of actions into how one goes about life, they may emerge through interactions with one's surroundings and contexts. Without the contexts and conditions, the habit may not be transferable back to the United States. What had been a strong indication of identity formation—acting a certain way consistently over time or having a specific relationship with a place—may prove to be only temporary if it is too tied to locale.

Sense of Self

A rabbinical student's sense of self may be the most abstract aspect of identity formation, but also the most crucial. The development of a rabbinic sense of self means that the individual sees him or herself as a rabbi and, if the individual sees him or herself that way, by deduction from interaction theories, other people—in official capacities or not—must see him or her the same way, or, alternately, in precisely the opposite way. Senses of self emerge from interactions with others and subsequent reflection on the self. It may develop as a result of engaging in behaviors or tasks labeled as “rabbinic,” or may be pre-rabbinic and focused on learning particular information or skills. Regardless, the students' sense of self is subject to change based on specific context and the positions that the students occupy in those contexts.

In each context of the Israel Year, the rabbinical students had roles. Some roles had more prominence in certain contexts. In the institution context, for example, student was the primary role; in the context of interpersonal interactions, being an American rabbinical student may be the prominent role. A person's role informs what a person does in any given context and how he or she fits into that landscape. Exhibiting role competence helps the person achieve a sense of self related to that role. If a rabbinical student speaks Hebrew with accuracy, knows text-based and practical information and how to learn more, can lead prayer services, and can offer an empathetic ear—all things which require interaction with others—he or she may feel “rabbinic” and thus have a rabbinic sense of self.

The Israel Year gave the students the opportunity to focus on their personal Judaism, a necessary component of a professional rabbinic identity. Being a more engaged Jew—specifically one who actively and regularly participated in and led Jewish rituals, held communal and institutional membership and leadership roles, and whose personal lives reflected Jewish norms and lifestyle choices—helped the students feel more Jewish and then more rabbinic as they considered themselves to be role models, exemplars, and leaders.

Assessing Formation

The students' experiences of the Israel Year with and within each context are an example of experiential learning. The rabbinical students learned and developed not just by engaging in tasks and activities, but by being embedded within contexts that were educative. Symbolic Interactionism, explored below, will be the theoretical approach used to explain the nature of the students' engagement with the contexts of rabbinic formation. This approach also reinforces the sociological perspective that identity is formed through interaction. Through a process of narrative construction, the students reflected on and frame their experiences as forming their rabbinic identities. Carroll et al.'s stages of formation have been adapted for this study to include encounter, evaluation, struggle, resolution, and integration. These stages, like identity, are not static. They helped organize the students' experiences of interacting with and within the contexts. Identity outcomes emerged from the students' experiences and interactions and overlapped with the final stages of formation. Students reported acquiring knowledge, gaining skills, developing habits, and experiencing an enhanced sense of rabbinic self.

Experiential Learning: Experiencing the Israel Year

People learn best when they are actively engaged in doing something (Dewey [1938] 1997; Chazan 2003). It does not follow, though, that they automatically have a meaningful experience, but a basic building block is present through active—rather than passive—engagement (Reimer 2003). As the overarching educational philosophy informing the Israel Year, experiential education informed the way in which contexts within the Israel Year were presented to the students and suggested how students should engage with the contexts. Experiential education traditionally refers to the efforts of educators, facilitators, and mediators to provide experiences that aim to teach skills and affect; that is, both practical and existential angles of identity. Experiential education is naturally limited to providing contexts for educative experiences; it is not possible to dictate the experience that an individual will have, only provide the initial materials.

The concept of experiential learning changes the angle of analysis from the educational inputs and conditions to the students' experiences of them. The learning process—that is, the interaction between social knowledge (objective experiences) and personal knowledge (subjective experiences)—engages the individual in different ways as it involves thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving (Kolb 1984:31). Kolb defines four stages of experiential learning: concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (40, 42). These stages fit well with the process of identity formation as it emerged from the rabbinical students' multisensory experiences of the Israel Year within the range of institution-based, place-specific,

interpersonal, temporal, and cultural contexts. Experiential learning, as a concept, sets up a paradigm for and approach to learning the tasks of the occupation by engaging in a fully proprioceptive way, conceptualized as integrated with an individual's professional identity formation.

An experience is a “transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (Dewey [1938] 1997:43). The same things that constitute an experience—interactions with one's surroundings—cumulatively constitute one's identity. Experiences are educative because “[t]he principle that development of experience comes about through interaction means that education is essentially a social process” (58). Participatory experiences are educative experiences.

Chazan (2003) and Reimer (2003) make arguments for the aptness of Dewey's concepts to the field of Jewish education:

[S]o many of the concepts that we wish to teach, such as Shabbat, holidays, and daily blessings, are rooted in actual experiences. The moral system of Judaism—honoring parents, helping the needy, social justice—is rooted in deeds. The cultural life of Judaism—songs, food, and holidays, and others—is rooted in meals, singing, ritual objects and specific celebrations (Chazan 2003: NP).

Jewish experiential education is “[a] philosophy and pedagogy that purposefully engages learners in direct experiences and focused reflection within settings inspired by Jewish values, traditions and texts, in order to create knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop the individuals' capacities to contribute to their communities” (Bryfman 2014:6). Jewish experiential education is both theoretical and practical, incorporates

practice and reflection, takes place in Jewish settings and contexts, and aims to influence Jewish identity formation. These elements and stages echo rabbinic formation. They tell us that, like identity formation during the Israel Year, experiential education is an intentional process that “integrates direct experiences with the learning environment and content” (5). The deeper a person’s immersion in the learning process, the more impact that process will have (Taylor 2014).

In addition to impact, the goals of experiential learning also include a temporal component: “to enable learners to form relationships with their Jewish past, present, and future—and to take ownership of this relationship” (Taylor 2014:43).²⁶ Jewish experiential education is a process of engagement and reflection within contexts with goal outcomes of practical and theoretical knowledge, a Jewish habitus, and relationship with community. An experience, in order to be meaningful, requires interpretation and narration. Interpretation makes an experience part of an individual’s journey, not just an experience that anyone could have; it becomes educative. The way that a particular experience fits into a person’s collection of lifetime experiences illustrates a “continuum of ideas that enables the experience to contribute to ongoing personal growth” (Chazan 2003: NP). The “continuum of ideas” speaks to the identity formation and resulting, on-going narrative of one’s identity journey. Being in Israel enhances Jewish experiential learning because context and content have a symbiotic relationship.

²⁶ This echoes Bellah et al.’s (1985) concept of a “community of memory,” connections with a collective based on shared memories, traditions, and heritage.

Symbolic Interactionism: Experiencing the Israel Year and Forming the Self

Symbolic Interactionism is a framework for explaining and exploring the process of identity formation; that is, how social interactions with and within the contexts of the Israel Year ultimately impact the student's conceptualization of him or herself as a future rabbi. Both religion and religious identity are shaped through social interaction. The students interact with institutions, places, objects, ideas and values, symbols, and people. Contexts are the site of experiences from encounters through engagement, processing meaning, and reflecting on the self. Symbolic Interactionism, employed as a theoretical lens, clarifies that interaction is an on-going process and that meanings are social products "that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact" (Blumer 1969:5).²⁷

Symbolic Interactionism calls on many of the same concepts that Berger and Luckmann (1966) present in their work, *The Social Construction of Reality*. Their framework clarifies the larger context of interactions in the socialization and identity formation process of individuals. According to Berger and Luckmann, the dialectical process of understanding society incorporates the stages of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Internalization is itself the first stage of the social induction process, the process through which an individual becomes a member of society. One's degree of internalization on the path to membership denotes the individual's socialization. Individuals are socialized and inducted into society through the internalization of social norms and mores. Individuals are socialized by significant and generalized others. The

²⁷ See also Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003).

individual is on the receiving end of socialization, but the socialization becomes part of him or her. In other words, objective and subjective realities become symmetrical when the generalized other is “crystallized” in one’s consciousness (Berger and Luckmann 1966:133).

Interaction with an other or others is a central feature of each approach. An individual actor interacts with three different types of objects—physical, social, abstract—and “different objects have different meanings for different individuals” (Ritzer 2000:358). When the rabbinical students interact with others, they are not only engaged with another person, but with that person’s collection of meanings for different kinds of objects. People in communication—through language, gesture, or other symbols—interpret each other’s words and actions on the basis of the meanings that emerge from that interpretation. Interacting with others, whether known intimately or only through a passing exchange, shapes the self. That is, “social interaction is a process that forms human conduct instead of merely a means or a setting for the expression or release of human conduct” (Blumer 1969: 8). Through social interaction, the rabbinical students gain an increased sense of who they are based on how they interpret others as viewing them, their looking glass selves (Cooley [1902] 1964). The self is simultaneously subject and object (Mead 1934; Coser 1977).

The students interact with Israeli others as well as their fellow students, teachers, and friends and family members in Israel and back home, from within their memberships, networks, and affiliations—both formal and informal. The rabbinic self is a social self, born from interaction and constantly engaged in the process of identity formation.

Rabbinic identity formation, though, is measured by contributions to the students' knowledge, skills, habits, and senses of self. While the process of formation can be cerebral, spiritual, emotional, and otherwise personal, the inputs and context of the process are social, and the identity and life of a rabbi are both private and public.

Significant others, introduced as agents of socialization by Berger and Luckmann, are particularly important in Symbolic Interactionism and during the stages of socialization that comprise identity internalization. In the former, significant others interact with an individual in the creation and propagation of meanings that have implications for identity. In the latter, significant others are agents of socialization. Significant others may be of the same or different status in relation to the individual. Regardless of the nature of the relationship, though, these others influence the individual's understanding of reality and meaning systems, clarify his or her role or desired place in a community or society.

The rabbinical students' interactions with Israelis are also experiences of identity with Jewish peoplehood, a social concept with historical roots and seemingly timeless resonance. The concept of Jewish peoplehood dates back thousands of years, to the original Exodus, when *b'nai Yisrael* [lit., the children of Israel, referring to the descendants of Jacob] left Egypt. Over the course of their forty year-long sojourn in the desert and as a result of the shared and formative covenantal experiences, they became *am Yisrael* [the nation of Israel]. The Modern Hebrew word, *amiyut* [peoplehood], carries the weight of the history of the Jewish people from Exodus to the establishment of the

modern State of Israel and beyond.²⁸ The concept of peoplehood is part of the students' identity narratives during the Israel Year because they are Jewish people in the historically Jewish land. By being there, they become part of the larger story of "who we are" in this place.

Narratives: How the Students Shape and Share their Experiences

Identity is embedded in "overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space" (Somers 1994:607). Somers argues that identity is most accurately studied through narrative because "it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities" (1994:606). The students express their identities as journeys through the medium of narrative. The narrative structure reveals explicit and implicit layers of meaning. Students curate their histories of experiences and interactions in order to construct coherent narratives that support their identity choices.

Somers posits that people become who they are by locating themselves within social narratives that they do not create. In contrast, Ammerman (2003) believes that people have input in their contexts. As with religious identity, the students' rabbinic identities are constructed in the intersections between "public narratives" and individual "autobiographies" (Ammerman 2003). The rabbinical students construct their identity journey narratives and make sense of their experiences based on who and what they perceive a rabbi to be and do and the identity goals that they have for themselves. In this

²⁸ There is no such thing as a concise history of the Jewish people outside of the joke about Jewish holidays: "They tried to kill us. We won. Let's eat!"

study, the rabbinical students exhibit this autobiographical narrative approach when they discuss the kind of rabbi they want to be and then exhibit experiential choices that support that vision.

The rabbinical students' narratives begin as personal Jewish journey stories and develop professional "plot lines" (Somers 1994) in different ways: as the students reflect back on their personal experiences and view experiences as having professional applicability, signaling rabbinic aptitude, or foreshadowing a rabbinic career; as the students engaged in activities that produced institutional connections with rabbinical schools, starting even before the application stage; as they reflect on the experiences and interactions of the Israel Year with an eye toward professional applicability as well as personal meaning; and, when they consider their goals, the narratives they have developed inform future decisions as well. Listening to the rabbinical students' narratives and assessing the data in the way the students present it, respects and values the format and content. Both aspects reveal identity formation and influence research method choices.

The narrative self is similar to a symbolic self because it is constructed through interaction. However, it may be constructed through different approaches to interaction. From the narrative construction perspective, the individual has agency in determining his or her identity.²⁹ The individual conceptualizes a narrative or story about who he or she is based on what he or she does, communicates, believes, et cetera. Mead's Symbolic

²⁹According to Horowitz (2001), personal agency is crucial for shaping identity because it signals personal investment in shaping the self through voluntary participation in identity-formative experiences, whether in informal, experiential, or formal educational contexts.

Interactionism does not take agency into account with as much weight as Somers' narrative construction of identity does. However, Mead gives more socializing weight to the people with whom the individual interacts and more weight to the interactions themselves. Identity is formed through the interactions between individuals; identity is the product of the interactions. For Somers, these interactions become part of the individual's story; for Mead, these interactions shape the identities of the individuals and a lifetime of interactions shape both of their identities. Without agency, the individuals in interaction may not be engaged in overt construction. The two approaches to the construction of the self are complementary, but not identical.

The concept of "being there" emerges in Symbolic Interaction, Berger and Luckmann's construction of reality, and narrative construction of identity. That is, interactions and identity are embedded in and cannot be isolated from the contexts in which they occur. Each theoretical approach, however, places different values on and has different uses for contexts at different stages of the larger formation process. In Symbolic Interaction, "being there" refers to being in the interactions which lead to identity formation. Narrative approaches express "being there" by emplotting identity in time, space, and relationships. For Berger and Luckmann, the concept of being there refers to the individual's membership in society following internalization of socialization and induction into society.

Taken together, these approaches suggest that American rabbinical students' identities will be shaped through their experiences and interactions with and within the contexts of the Israel Year, that the students will work toward their own rabbinic

formation via asserting agency, and that they will make sense of their own formation through the creation of identity narratives.

Research Methods

Field research for this study took place during the 2011-2012 academic year. The study assesses the rabbinic formation of students from HUC, JTS, and Ziegler. Though the schools differ from each other in denominational affiliation—HUC is affiliated with the Reform Movement and JTS and Ziegler are Conservative—they share the value of Israel-based Jewish education. The schools were selected because they each require students to spend one year of study at a specifically designated Israeli institution. However, their thinking diverges about the best year to spend in Israel—HUC students are in Israel for their first year, JTS students for their second, and Ziegler students for their third. Since each rabbinical school sends students at a different point in their training, they enter the Israel Year at different points on their rabbinic identity journeys. The students from JTS and Ziegler, arriving for their second and third years, respectively, begin the Israel Year with their rabbinic formation underway and a sense of themselves as American rabbinical students. In contrast, HUC students in Israel for their first year are just starting out. Because the JTS and Ziegler students already have an idea of what it is to be American rabbinical students—that is, experience in the rabbinical student role—they may be better able to consider or have previous experience in assessing the professional relevance and implications of their experiences.

Regardless of the specific timing, the cooperation between the home and host institutions signals shared goals and complementary curricula and pedagogies. Having all

of the students from a given school attend classes together at a Jerusalem-based institution increases the likelihood of internal consistency through comparable academic, religious, and social inputs and also gives the students a shared experience that has the potential to strengthen their bond as a cohort.

Though the interview and observational data were extensive, they were far from complete. In particular, logistical challenges prevented a more comprehensive study of the JTS students at Schechter, though interviews followed the plan. Whereas HUC and the CY are a few blocks from each other near the center of Jerusalem, Schechter is located in Jerusalem's Nayot neighborhood, behind the Israel Museum. The campus is not accessible by public transportation. The most direct path to the Schechter Institute is by walking straight up a hill through a nature reserve. The abnormally small cohort of JTS students (just six students present for the full academic year) combined with their dispersal in general courses offered at Schechter, as opposed to classes specifically geared toward them, made the actual act of observing the students quite complex. Almost all observations took place in the Talmud classes geared specifically for them and taught in a combination of Hebrew and English.

Access, Entrée, and Data Collection

Over email during the summer of 2011, I requested permission to conduct research and was granted access by six administrators and program coordinators at the

U.S.- and Israel-based institutions.³⁰ I utilized Jewish communal networks in order to introduce myself in relation to someone that the administrators knew. Upon arriving in Israel, I met with program coordinators on the respective Jerusalem campuses face-to-face to present my research proposal and answer any questions. Everyone was welcoming and interested in having his or her students take part in the study. Early in the school year at each campus, I emailed the student listservs to introduce myself and the research project. I followed up with a brief in-person presentation at which I recruited informants. I already knew at least one person from each school from a different context in my life. Early in the research process, I utilized those previous contacts to help determine research logistics and coordinate recruitment.

The parameters to be interviewed were as follows: the student must have grown up in the United States, the student must be in Israel for the entirety of the academic year, and the student must be planning to pursue his or her rabbinic career in the United States. These guidelines excluded students who grew up outside of the United States and thus did not experience American Jewish life; students who, for whatever reason, only spent one semester studying in Israel; and, those students who intended to pursue rabbinic careers outside of the United States, generally dictated by career needs of a spouse or the location of extended family. Over the course of the year, students often wondered out loud whether they could see themselves making *aliyah* and living in Israel. This did not disqualify them from being included in the study. They were also not disqualified for having spent time living abroad, specifically post-high school. Students who had grown

³⁰ I required permission from the U.S.-based institutions in order to study the students and permission from the Israel-based institutions to be present there to conduct the research.

up in the United States and converted to Judaism were included because their Jewish frame of reference was American.³¹

Nearly all eligible students volunteered to participate in the study. Most signed up immediately; those who didn't were invited personally to participate. Only one eligible student across the three schools declined to participate and one student did not complete the series of interviews; his responses were not included. Ultimately, thirty-eight rabbinical students volunteered to be interviewed for this study—twenty-two from HUC, ten from Ziegler, and six from JTS.³²

The research plan included ethnographic observations both on- and off-campus and a series of three interviews with students, conducted over the course of the year. The interview protocols are available in Appendices C, D, and E. Informational interviews with select administrators and faculty were conducted, but responses have not been included verbatim. I conducted student interviews during lunchtime and after school. Interviews with HUC students were almost exclusively conducted on-campus in the same classroom. Interviews with Ziegler students and JTS students were conducted on-campus, in their apartments, or in my apartment, depending on schedules and convenience. Interviews with administrators were conducted in their offices. *Entrée* and rapport with students and administrators alike were enhanced through engaging in the timeless classic,

³¹ This particular cohort of rabbinical students did not include any Canadians. However, they would have been included because the United States and Canada share many Jewish institutions and religio-cultural norms. There are no Reform or Conservative rabbinical schools in Canada.

³² Demographic information about the students such as average age, previous Jewish educational experiences, whether the rabbinate is a first or second career, and the number of men versus women from each school is available in Chapter 2 as it relates to identity journeys and, more extensively, in Appendix A.

Jewish Geography.³³ Finding even just one Jew that we both knew in common increased the respondents' comfort and openness and turned willing volunteers into eager participants. In fact, there was not one respondent with whom I did not have a common acquaintance or a shared experience.

Over the course of the year my presence off to the side of a room, pen and note pad in hand, became ubiquitous. I conducted ethnographic observations in nearly every class offered at HUC and the CY and many classes at Schechter. I attended prayer services at each campus whenever I was present on the respective campuses. I attended co-curricular programs on-campus and, when possible, joined off-campus trips as well. With the exception of one personal, reflection-based weekly discussion group at HUC, I had access to all classes, lectures, programs, and prayer services at the three institutions. When space was available on the bus, and at my own expense, I accompanied the students on school-sponsored and inter-seminary trips.

I was around so frequently that at one point when I had missed an event for a family obligation, an HUC administrator told me that I must have been mistaken because she distinctly remembered seeing me there! I received one of the greatest compliments when Evan, an HUC student, told me that I was “one of us, family.” My rapport with the students—initially based on shared interpersonal networks and later cemented in mutual

³³ In essence, Jewish Geography is a network-based method for figuring out who knows whom within the Jewish community. The “game” generally begins with “Where are you from?” and then “Oh, so do you know [X person]?” The more extensive and diverse one’s engagement with Jewish communities and Jewish communal organizations, the larger one’s network, and thus the better one is at playing Jewish Geography. On a personal level, even though I did not have rich Jewish connections growing up, as a result of my heavily Jewish pursuits in college and early adulthood, I consider myself to be connected in the Modern Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform movements and am related to and friends with people who are likewise well-connected. In short, I am good at playing Jewish Geography and it works to my advantage in my research.

respect—increased the quantity and validity of data collected. Students began taking me aside to describe situations they had witnessed and conversations that they had had that I might have missed. Ezra, a Ziegler student with a social science background, often used insider academic language to describe situations to me. The rabbinical students truly lived up to their status as informants.

Kanarek and Lehman (2013) argue that rabbinic formation can only truly be achieved intentionally. That is, students will not reflect on their experiences and grow in their rabbinic identities without facilitation, whether through keeping a journal, attending small group discussions, or completing assignments that prompt integration of curricular information with personal reflections. Based on this framework, and the eagerness with which the students shared their experiences with me, I began to wonder if I were serving as a catalyst for formation. The series of interviews and my presence throughout the year provided the students with a more formalized way to reflect on their experiences. Aiding the rabbinical students' formation was an unintended outcome of the research process. Even if my presence was welcomed and beneficial, it still impacted the students' experience thus reinforcing the nature of research and the researcher as interventions.

In *Tours that Bind, Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism*, Shaul Kelner (2010) described how, even though he was there in the capacity of a researcher, he was also a cultural interpreter. His informants, recognizing that he had a modicum of insider knowledge about Israel—i.e. that he had been there before and they had not—asked him practical questions related to navigating their Israel experiences. I found myself filling a similar role. Having spent a year studying at the Pardes Institute some

years prior, I arrived with a modicum of practical knowledge of living in Jerusalem, experience of studying in a beit midrash, moderate Hebrew language facility, and familiarity with many of the subject areas that the students covered over the course of the year.

Additionally, being married to a British Israeli citizen, my experience of this Israel Year was much more from the perspective of a non-native local. Though I had at times in my life affiliated with the Reform and Conservative movements, I have self-classified for a decade and a half as Modern Orthodox. My religious affiliation was perhaps initially a barrier, but as the students came to know me, they saw me as less exotic and more relatable. I became their token Orthodox Jew and we all tried to understand each other better and with respect.

More important than denominational affiliation or prayer preferences, the students and I shared a classification as highly engaged Jews. We shared a wide range of common Jewish experiences: college Hillel leadership positions, summers at the Brandeis Collegiate Institute (BCI), Birthright Israel trips, time living in Israel, and employment as Hebrew and supplementary school teachers and communal professionals. These shared experiences were not denomination-specific, since the Reform, Conservative, and Modern Orthodox communities overlap in many areas of American Jewish life.

Data Analysis

The interviews and observations yielded copious amounts of data. I transcribed the interviews myself and organized and coded the data by hand³⁴ based on themes within each interview. Prominent phrases and terms were initially identified during transcription; more emerged subsequently. For this research project, I utilized a grounded theory approach which allowed for theory to emerge through the research process (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Charmaz 2006). I started this inductive research process with broad questions about rabbinic formation and themes that I thought might emerge. I entered the first set of interviews with a protocol that reflected identity formation literature and themes related to identity journeys and rabbinical school. Based on early student interview responses, I adjusted the language of the interview protocols to better reflect the students' experiences—as opposed to my expectations and standards expressed in the literature. Student responses and data gleaned through observations then informed the Stage II and Stage III interviews and additional observation sessions. The iterative, almost conversational, nature of grounded theory was well-suited to the non-linear nature of identity formation.

Potential Limitations

While a grounded theory approach was best suited to the content of the research project, it generated an almost overwhelming amount of data across a plethora of themes.

³⁴ Initially, my intention had been to utilize voice recognition software to assist in transcription. This proved more effort than it was worth because the software did not always recognize English accurately, much less Hebrew! I had also intended to use Atlas.ti to organize and code the data, but learning the software ultimately took too much time away from immersing myself in the data. Learning how to effectively and efficiently utilize technology remains a goal for future research endeavors.

This speaks to an error in the scope of the study. A more pointed—or deductive—research approach that perhaps assessed specific angles of identity formation or limited the contexts or target populations of formation would have yielded more manageable quantities of data for a single researcher. The paucity of literature on Israel Year experiences of American rabbinical students compelled me to try to fill all of the gaps in one fell swoop. This study opted for breadth instead of depth, but it nevertheless helps build the social science literature on American rabbinical students.

In terms of the research itself, there was no comparison group of students who did not go to Israel for a year. As a result, it is not possible to assess the relative impact of the Israel Year on American rabbinic formation. This study is not necessarily interested in the students who were not in Israel for the year, but basic information about those students would allow the data from this study to be utilized more widely and in more diverse ways.

Generalizability was not a primary concern for this qualitative study. However, as the year progressed, I did wonder about having limited the sampling pool to HUC, JTS, and Ziegler students. Over the course of the academic year through a variety of extra-curricular programs and extra-institutional organizations, students from the three target institutions interacted with students from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia, Hebrew College in Boston, and even a few from Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) at Yeshiva University in New York.³⁵ The students'

³⁵ Students from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) and Hebrew College (HC) were not included in this research because they were not required to study at a single institution and were either permitted to study in Israel for longer than a year (RRC) or not study in Israel at all (HC). Students from

interactions and relationships with each other prompted ponderings about the creation of a shared culture between American rabbinical students in Jerusalem, regardless of institutional or denominational affiliation.

Locating the Research

This research falls under the broad category of Sociology of Religion, but the nature of studying identity formation in a variety of contexts taps into more subfields and literatures—education, organizations, and identity. The religio-cultural content and the context of Israel carve out space for this research in the field of Jewish studies—specifically Jewish sociology and Jewish education—and straddles American and Israeli subfields. This research has two types of audiences: academic and practitioner. It is for the academic audience because it was conducted within academic frameworks, to academic standards, and data were assessed and presented to standards of the field of Sociology. This study may also prove informative on the practical side of the field of clergy education—for the administrators, educators, and past, present, and future clergy—anyone interested in understanding the formation process and the experiences of the Israel Year.

Forthcoming Chapters

The rabbinical students engage and interact with and within six dominant contexts over the course of the Israel Year: identity journeys, institutions, place, religious time, civil time, and interpersonal interactions. The contexts are interwoven and overlap with

RIETS all studied at the same institution, the Yeshiva University-affiliated Gruss Institute, but were not required to spend a year in Israel, mostly because they already had done so in for a post-high school yeshiva gap year prior to matriculation.

each other, as in the models presented by Cole (1995). Cole defines contexts firstly as “that which surrounds” and, secondly, as “that which weaves together,” meaning that “objects and contexts arise together as part of a single bio-social-cultural process of development” (109). However, they are addressed in discrete chapters not to undermine their complexity but to try to understand each one better, an analytical approach supported by Grotevant (1987). Each context contains plausibility structures and specific characteristics that make it particular to Israel and the Israel Year. The rabbinical students interact with elements of each context from a perspective of embeddedness. Their level of perceived integration into a context varies based on the particularities of the context and the specific experiences and interactions. From an interaction perspective, though, the rabbinical students’ engagement contributes to the shaping of the context just as the context contributes to their identity formation.

The chapter following this introduction presents the students’ first context: their identity journeys. Through narratives of their journeys, the students constructed and shared their personal histories, how their life experiences led them to rabbinical school and the Israel Year, and their identity goals, specifically the image of the rabbi they wish to become. This chapter employs primary and secondary socialization stages as the structural framework. Sub-stages emerged in the build-up to rabbinical school as did patterns of students’ experiences.

Addressing the students’ narratives through this framework highlighted the role of interaction, institutions, family, traditions, Jewish education, Jewish extra-curricular activities, Israel trips, and relationships with additional significant others in the students’

lives. The students who converted to Judaism or for whom the rabbinate was a second career exhibit comparable experiences and relationships that drove them to apply to rabbinical school, but they emerged in a cluster often in emerging adulthood. The students constructed their journey narratives as they interacted with their memories, reading back into their pasts through the lens of their future rabbinic goals. The rabbinical students brought the context of their journey narratives with them to the Israel Year and build on them as their journeys unfold further.

The next chapter, Chapter Three, examines the context of institutions informed especially by Foster et al. (2006), whose research focused primarily on the institutional contexts of clergy formation. Each institution establishes models and patterns that are aimed at forming a professional rabbinical identity. In this case, each group of students has two institutions: one in the U.S. and one in Israel, even though the former is the affiliation and the latter is the literal place of study for this year. The U.S.-based rabbinical schools determined that spending a year in Israel has rabbinic value and also determined which knowledge and skills are important for a rabbi trained at that institution and during the Israel Year. This chapter assesses curricula and pedagogies at HUC, the Conservative Yeshiva, and Schechter based on the home institutions' and the students' own goals for rabbinic formation. Rabbinic formation also occurs within the context of prayer, both in terms of leadership development and the development of personal prayer practice. The students experience formation in institutional context from a position of embeddedness; they have official membership through matriculation, but they are of the institutions because of what they learn and how. The influence of the institutional

contexts extends to all of the other contexts, whether on- or off-campus. The institutions established the Israel Year, but they do not define it entirely nor do they alone determine the students' formative experiences.

Chapter Four addresses the context of Israel as a place. Without place, none of the other contexts would exist. The students' interactions with and embeddedness in the space is proprioceptive. They encounter the place through all of their senses and by feeling themselves physically present where they are. This chapter assesses the influence of place on rabbinic identity formation by examining how students experience Israel in both mediated and unmediated ways. In mediated scenarios, where mediation comes from their institutions, the students have opportunities to engage with the physical space through hiking and outdoor activities; learn first-hand about social, cultural, political, educational, and religious organizations and segments of society; and, interact with Israelis through *mifgashim* [encounters].

In unmediated scenarios, the rabbinical students assert agency to explore Israel, interacting with the place and people through their own efforts. They simultaneously embody the roles of tourist, international student, and temporary resident. Living in Israel for the academic year, they are able to develop daily life habits that integrate them further into the space. By being there, they become part of Israeli society, if only temporarily.

Chapter Five assesses religious time as a context for rabbinic formation. This sets Israel apart from the United States. In Israel, the Jewish calendar is the public calendar; Jewish holidays are public holidays. The students come to the Israel Year with a lifetime of Jewish holiday experiences and many of them have spent some holidays in Israel.

However, this year is an experience in Jewish temporal embeddedness (Lewis and Weigert 1981). They are embedded in the plausibility structure of Jewish time. Having a year's worth of holidays provides a different view. The students experience seasons, not just holidays. They see how Jewish liturgy reflects ecology in Israel and the holidays influence when they have time off from school. What had been their private or congregational schedule is shared on the street.

The students also encounter the strong arm of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate and experience how it influences public policy and public space in regards to compliance with Jewish law for Shabbat and holidays, often in strict and restrictive ways. As Reform and Conservative future rabbis, the students struggle with the stringencies of religious time even as they develop ways to celebrate and observe how they want. The context of religious time is a main feature of the Israel Year because it is Israel-specific. It proves to be highly Jewishly formative, but difficult to conceptualize as transferable because experiences are so Israel-specific.

In Chapter Six, the context of civil time is addressed from two angles: Israeli civil/civil religious holidays and American holidays as celebrated in Israel. These angles raise questions about national identity and Jewish identity—where they intersect, where they diverge, and where the students struggle to experience intersection. The Israeli holidays of Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma'ut bring to light the concept of Jewish peoplehood and the role that it plays in relation to Jewish national identity. The students fall back on peoplehood connections when they feel they cannot connect in typical Israeli ways to the specifically Israeli narrative.

In contrast, the American holidays of the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, which do not carry the same existential heft, present challenges in American identity and outward identification while in Israel. The students' experiences of Israeli state holidays mark them as outsiders within Israel; their celebration of American holidays reinforces outsider status. However, in the context of the American holidays, the students are in positions of authority. Interactions with and within the context of civil time highlights the rabbinical students' negotiations between being outsiders and being insiders in relation to national holidays.

Chapter Seven addresses the context of people and interpersonal interactions. This context is ongoing throughout the Israel Year and present across all contexts. Theories of Symbolic Interactionism feature in analysis within this chapter. This context centers on the students' interactions with Israelis through language and gestures and through items that they wear that have religious symbolism. The rabbinical students also experience an event of national significance together with Israelis, providing a different way of interacting and a different perspective on Israeli society. Some students have more personal experiences through interacting with Israel-based family members. The context provides an opportunity to examine the concept of peoplehood—how it is experienced and how the students reflect on the concept in light of those experiences. In this context, the students' embeddedness is characterized by their relationships to other people in interactions. They are conversation partners, Others, family members, and fellow Jews. The rabbinical students engage in image management, internalize looking glass selves to

varying degrees, and may practice audience segregation in the presentation of selves in different contexts.

Each chapter of this dissertation addresses a context that emerged from the interview data as important to the students and influential for their formation. Each context provides different opportunities for experiences and interactions. The students' rabbinic identities are formed in each context through a different type of embeddedness, all of which enmesh the individual and provide a multisensory experience. The pedagogical approach of experiential education informs how the students relate to and interact with contexts. The process of formation is an analytical tool for assessing how the students experience those events and interactions.

Onward

The goal of the Israel Year is to contribute particular identity inputs—acquired through interactions with and within the contexts of the year—that have personal resonance and professional relevance for future American rabbis. This dissertation, by addressing and assessing each context for formation and the students' experiences of the formation process seeks to explore the nature and particularities of each context based on the ways in which the students interact with and within them and the roles that they have in each; assess students' experiences through the framework of the formation process; and examine knowledge, skills, habits, and senses of self that emerge. This research utilizes experiential education, Symbolic Interactionism, and narrative constructions of identity as theoretical frameworks for analysis. Each context and each student presents a multitude of questions and pathways for assessment. However, the overarching question

across all layers is “Why is being there—in Israel for the Israel Year, at the nexus of all of these contexts—important for American rabbinic formation?” Given that with two Jews come three opinions, there is unlikely to be a monolithic answer. Nevertheless, there is much to explore.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONTEXT OF IDENTITY JOURNEYS AND THEIR NARRATIVES

Introduction and Theoretical Frameworks

The students' identity journeys comprise the first context for rabbinic formation. Coincidentally, the journeys incorporate all of the contexts that emerged as influential for rabbinic identity formation throughout the Israel Year: institutions, Israel, Jewish time, people, and values. Through anecdotes and self-reflexive analysis, the rabbinical students introduced these elements and contexts and showed how they influence their lives. The students developed narratives that highlighted events and experiences that they considered to be relevant for rabbinic work and a rabbinic sense of self. Within a series of three, one- to two-hour long interviews focused on rabbinic identity formation, the students tailored their narratives to most convincingly authenticate their status as rabbinical students. They shared memories that had personal meaning for them and which they believed would most clearly communicate that meaning to other people.

Motivations for entering rabbinical school intersected with identity through "journeys," a term and concept familiar to and already featured in the students' vocabularies. Journeys are "how people's Jewish identities change and develop throughout the life course" (Horowitz 2003:i). The life course is a process, not a collection of discrete episodes and interactions (Dashefsky, Lazerwitz, and Tabory 2003). Horowitz identified five types of journeys, also called "patterns of change" (2003: v). Two of these types, in particular, applied to rabbinical students: "Steady High" and

“Increasing.”³⁶ “Steady High” refers to people who have been “enmeshed in a mutually reinforcing network of Jewish commitment and practice, beginning in their families and continuing in day school and in synagogue life” (iv).³⁷ For those students who had “Steady High” journeys, rabbinical school was a natural step for an already highly-engaged Jew.

“Increasing” journeys involve intensification—as a general trend—of Jewish engagement and involvement³⁸ that led the students to rabbinical school. Within this journey type, experiences, memberships, and relationships in adolescence and early adulthood had substantial influence on one’s Jewish identity. In particular, Horowitz noted of her research subjects, “The most important influences on their identities were later voluntary experiences such as being involved in Jewish youth group, Jewish studies and Hillel-like activities in college or having had a significant positive relationship or experience with regard to one’s Jewishness” (iv).

³⁶ Wuthnow (1998), Dillon and Wink (2003, 2007), Heilman (2006), and others also suggest labels (“dwellers” and “seekers,” “evergreen” and “late bloomer,” “*frum* from birth”/ FFB” and “*ba’al tshuva*”/ BT,” et cetera) for people who have exhibited higher levels of religious engagement and affiliation over time and those whose engagement and affiliation were either late in developing or increased over time. Horowitz’s terms differ because they are two in a collection that provide more specificity about religious journeys. Of the five journeys, two were stable—labeled “Steady Low” and “Steady High”—and three involved movement over an individuals’ life—labeled “Lapsing,” “Increasing,” and “Interior” (Horowitz 2003: v).

³⁷ These early familial, communal, and educational experiences provide initial context, give support for remaining in that—or comparable—contexts, and serve as momentum for sustained engagement. In her research, Horowitz identifies this primarily with Orthodox affiliation, but this pattern is also apparent for some of the Reform and Conservative rabbinical students.

³⁸ In general, the students did not express that their journeys had included any major disruptions or that the pursuit of the rabbinate was a type of “return” to the fold. Though their engagement and participation may have varied, they did not express major shifts in their disengagement or re-engagement with Judaism or Jewish communal organizations.

Narratives Shape and are Shaped by Life Course Experiences

Students shared their journeys through narratives which illustrated that people made choices about how to act depending on both the internal themes of their autobiographies as well as “the situation and cultural plots [they] imagine to be in play” (Ammerman 2003:213). The socially active aspect includes embodied practices, not just stories. McGuire explains that “[l]ived religion is constituted by the practices by which people remember, share, enact, adapt, and create the ‘stories out of which they live.’ And it is constituted through the practices by which people turn these ‘stories’ into everyday action” (McGuire 2007:197). Autobiographical narratives gave voice to and prompt action within the rabbinical students’ Jewish—both personal and professional—journeys. That is, how and why they got to where they are. To paraphrase Ginzberg (1951), one’s choice of an occupation is not simply one decision, but the product of many smaller decisions made over several years. Narratives bring to light the progression of decisions.

The students’ personal narratives reflected themes of collective narratives. Public narratives are “shared accounts of belonging and meaning that are attached to groups, cultures, and institutions in society” (Lövheim 2007: 86). “All of us come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing),” Somers reminds us, “by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making” (1994: 606). Autobiographical narratives, informed by public narratives, shaped the students’ experiences and understanding of their own journeys.

The students’ narratives of their journeys exposed elements of identity development theories, with socialization at the core. Despite its seemingly very personal

nature, one's identity is socially shaped. Socialization, as defined by Berger and Luckmann (1966), incorporates primary and secondary stages. During primary socialization, young children interact with institutions by going where their parents go and belonging and affiliating as part of a family unit. Parents are a child's first and most significant others because they set the child's first plausibility structures within which they can propagate their desired meaning system.

Secondary socialization is characterized by the individual's subsequent encounters and interactions with generalized others and the values and expectations they are perceived to possess (Mead 1934).³⁹ The interactions may reinforce and/or challenge the meaning systems established during primary socialization. Meaning, though personally resonant, is nevertheless a social product. In early secondary socialization, children and adolescents increasingly interact with peers, even though their social circles are influenced by parents. On their own, within the larger groups, they develop friendships and may have role models, such as camp counselors or a childhood rabbi. The individuals engage with Jewish values through experiencing them in formal and informal educational settings. In the secondary socialization of emerging adulthood, individuals assert agency in seeking out meaningful interactions and experiences. Their choices are reinforced by like-minded peers engaged in similar activities. During the pre-professional stage of secondary socialization, the students seek out Jewish activities and experiences

³⁹ The generalized others are a reference group that helps people define themselves through comparison, in particular, the students assess their own religious conduct and beliefs against those of generalized others (Chalfant, Beckley, and Palmer 1994: 55).

that have rabbinic relevance. They have jobs and take on lay leadership roles and learn Jewish skills that have professional relevance.⁴⁰

The ability to construct a narrative begins in childhood. Goffman (1959) notes that the child is a protagonist even before he or she develops language that is adequate to explain something in a narrative structure. During primary socialization, children learn how to make sense of reality. They begin to decode social meanings through reflexive story-telling. Learning what a narrative is and how to construct one develops as children develop language, including both vocabulary and grammar (Bruner 1990: 77). During secondary socialization, children and adults make decisions about who they want to become based on identity goals. They also may seek to construct cohesive narratives in order to exhibit a desired type of self to others. Reflection and retelling are dramatic acts. The individual has a story to tell and endeavors—consciously or not—to create a cohesive narrative arc.

In relating their journeys, students began by describing the forces of primary socialization (Berger and Luckmann 1966), specifically parents and home life growing up. To the extent that it was relevant in individual cases, parents were more likely to introduce the child to God, the vertical significant other (Berger 1969). Chronologically moving through their lives they display sources of secondary socialization—the people, organizations, institutions, and programs that influenced the students' paths (Mead 1934).

⁴⁰ The experiential learning theory of development, drawing on the fields of education, psychology, and neuroscience, echoes themes expressed in the stages of socialization. The stages of growth and development from an experiential learning perspective include acquisition, when the self is undifferentiated and immersed in the world; specialization, when the self is perceived as a form of content and interacts with the world; and, integration, when the self is viewed as a process and transacts with the world (Kolb 1984: 141).

Chalfant, Beckley, and Palmer (1994) break down the components of each phase. They identify the family, institutions, and peer groups as the three general agents of religious socialization that express, transmit, and reinforce religious meaning systems through socialization. The immediate family forms identity in the home, particularly through “formal religious ceremonies involving family life, the practices of parents in the home setting, and, in some cases, special family ceremonies” (Chalfant et al. 1994:66).

Religious institutions are the site of communal rituals such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals, as well as parochial education” (Cornwall 1987).⁴¹ Peer groups and communities including family, neighbors, friends, and affinity groups provide a sense of belonging as well as a plausibility structure that frames a particular meaning system.⁴² Horowitz (2003) identifies three “early exposures” that influence identity for non-Orthodox Jews: “the importance of being Jewish to one’s parents, the development of an ‘Early Jewish Disposition,’ and the early ‘enculturation’ that resulted from steady Shabbat observance and/or involvement in a ‘total Jewish environment’ like a Jewish summer camp” (2003:127) She further explains that strong Jewish identities for this group hinge on “early commitment and ‘imprinting’” followed by “becoming involved in a range of voluntary experiences in adolescence and early adulthood” (ibid.). The tighter the bonds between the individual and the family, institutions, and peers that all share the same meaning system, the stronger the religious meaning system that will be supported.

⁴¹ Religious organizations transmit meaning systems and enforce norms of behavior largely in proportion to the intensity of the individual’s interaction with and integration into the institution.

⁴² According to Hernandez and Dudley (1990), religious commitment is highly correlated with the quality of primary group relationships and the individual’s degree of assimilation with peer culture if, that is, peer culture reflects the primary group.

Individuals construct their selves through reflection and express their identity journeys through narrative. The self is a product and, thus, experiences are both process and inputs. Individuals interact with the contextual elements of their own journeys. As part of the process of reflection and retelling, the rabbinical students encountered and engaged with memories of people, places, times, events, objects, symbols, and values. They selected experiences which they believed contributed to their rabbinic identities and then evaluated them based on their contribution to a rabbinic self, specifically acquisition of knowledge, skills, habits, and/or concept of self. These choices, analyses, and presentation contributed toward what Berger and Luckmann (1966: 68) call a “life plan,” the coordination and meaningful integration of social relationships, careers, and institutions in one’s life (Mittelberg 1999:22).

Personal Journeys, Professional Destinations

The journey to rabbinical school is a combination of two types of journeys: a personal Jewish journey and a pre-professional journey. The students shared the influences of their parents and families, experiences they had as youth whether in Jewish or non-Jewish contexts, and their engagement with Israel. These journeys reflect and foreshadow the complexity of the clergy identity in which the personal and professional intertwine and interact as a matter of course. Through all of the phases of their journeys, students identified what factors had implications for their ultimate decision to pursue the rabbinate. As with identity formation, the forces shaping the students’ decisions to enter rabbinical school emerged as experiences and relationships. Given that this particular

year is spent in Jerusalem, the students' relationships and engagement with Israel are included as well. These evolving relationships with Israel, as reported by the students, featured in both their personal and professional journeys. Additionally, narratives of journeys displayed the ways in which the students' Jewish identities, though they may have been ascribed, were ultimately achieved as the students realized their professional relevance and potential.⁴³

American Reform and Conservative rabbinical students are a subset of American seminarians.⁴⁴ Like their colleagues from other faith traditions, they have interpreted elements of their personal Jewish journeys as having professional relevance. Just as the rabbinic identity is a complex melding of the personal and professional, so too are the students' experiences of their own journeys. The students were diverse in certain aspects of their backgrounds and connections to Judaism, yet their narratives of their journeys to rabbinical school exposed common themes of involvement with Jewish communities, Jewish life, and Jewish organizations, first as participants and then as leaders. This takes Horowitz's (2001, 2003) progression from voluntary to involuntary participation one step further, to a position of leadership of the contexts into which one chose to initially enter

⁴³ Roof (1993) and Wuthnow (1998) argue that the modern religious identity is an achieved religious identity. Religious identities are ultimately "achieved identities" (Hammond 1988, Warner 1993) based on individual choices made in social contexts.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Glenn T. Miller's (1997) chapter, "Just a Little Different: The Jewish Theological Seminary and Other Forms of American Ministerial Preparation," in *Tradition Renewed*. Miller argues that JTS differs from Protestant and Catholic seminaries in the United States in the same way that Judaism differs—that is, the centrality of praxis to Jewish life and leadership. With all of the institutional isomorphism across theological schools, Judaism is culturally separate. Additionally, seemingly tongue-in-cheek, Miller points out that theology is ubiquitous in its paucity across the rabbinical school curriculum.

as a participant. These are people who found meaning and value in Jewish living. Rabbinical school is their shared mode for expressing and further exploring this meaning.

The students' family backgrounds, personal Jewish journeys, and professional journeys not only led them to rabbinical school, but also led them to this year of studies in Israel. This year forced the students to grapple with what Israel means to them personally and professionally, as American Jews and American rabbinical students. The rabbinical students' relationships with Israel appeared at different points in their journey narratives. For some, a relationship with Israel was interwoven into primary socialization in childhood. Israel was simply a fixture in family life. For others, the relationship with Israel was shaped during early secondary socialization, perhaps through attending Jewish youth groups, summer camp, or a high school Israel trip. For many students, though, a relationship with Israel emerged in a more prominent way during college through involvement in Hillel programming, a semester abroad in Israel, or participation in a Birthright Israel trip. For just a few students, this year was their first physical encounter with the land. More significant for this study, however, are what implications the students' relationships with Israel have for their decisions to apply to rabbinical school.

The journey to rabbinical school and the formation of rabbinic identity both followed paths that can be described through narratives as journeys. They are both processes with stages. Formation is a process within the greater identity journey that informs how individuals reflect upon and assert agency in and toward a goal identity. The process of rabbinic formation, to adapt Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Marler's (1997) model, consists of three stages: assessment and re-assessment, struggle, and resolution.

Rabbinical students on their Israel year experienced the phases of this process, but their developing rabbinic identities did not begin at assessment. Through interacting with and analyzing memories, the students shaped rabbinic narratives that stretched back to their childhoods and encompassed the years prior to matriculation. Their memories of experiences and relationships were the building blocks of their rabbinic identities and the context through which they aspired to enter rabbinical school and then pursue the rabbinate as a career.

As the students realized that they wanted to pursue the rabbinate, whether in childhood or as a second career, they developed a portrait of an ideal rabbi—the “good rabbi”—and aspired to that. How the students defined this rabbi colored their analysis of their own suitability for the rabbinate, shaped their future behaviors, and influenced how they viewed their own journeys to rabbinical school. The rabbinic identity is at the intersection of the personal and professional. Max, an HUC student, commented, “I think one of the most difficult things about being a rabbi is you’re expected to both be the leader of people’s Jewish journeys while also a participant in your own Jewish journey.” Beyond this coalescence of being and doing, an ideal rabbi must also possess particular knowledge, skills, and habits and be able to share them in ways befitting both the audience at hand and his or her role as a leader.

This chapter provides the back story, so to speak, of these students’ rabbinic formation; that is, where they come from, how they defined and pursue Jewish meaning, and how they came to choose the rabbinical school path.

Journeys to Rabbinical School

Identity is socially constructed through interactions. Identity journeys begin with an individual's parents. As the person grows up, parental influence is slowly replaced by the influence of other socializing agents such as teachers, peers, and community members. At a certain point, individuals assert their own agency and select or seek out situations and experiences that will shape their identities toward a particular personal and/or professional goal. Lia, an HUC student, shared a narrative of her journey to rabbinical school:

I guess it really all started with my parents. They cultivated an identity within me. It was always very important to them that we were Jewish and went to Hebrew school and cared about being Jewish, which is now kind of weird thinking about it because I'm not sure what their knowledge really is and how much they know about being Jewish and culture and Torah and even Israel. But, we were Jewish. And how to be Jewish? Go to Hebrew school, have Shabbat dinner together, go to services on Saturday. So I guess that's where my interest sort of started. I guess I liked Hebrew school more than the average kid and wanted to be a part of it and stay after and ask the rabbis questions . . . I guess that's where it all started. And, then, through that, I was able to form a really meaningful relationship with my rabbi which is how everything just sort of unfolded. It made me want to go to Israel, take Jewish classes . . . , just, you know, seeing what he did and how he was changing the world, how people looked up to him, and how smart he was and how much he knew. I'm just someone who, I like the people surrounding me to

influence how I act. I'm like pretty easily influenced, so I like to keep positive people in my life and he was just a positive role model.

Lia's journey narrative illustrates who and what asserted socializing influence at which point in Lia's life. The narrative carries the reader from childhood through school and Israel trips, highlighting formative individuals and contexts that Lia interpreted as having shaped her and paved the way to rabbinical school. In the narratives and discussion that follow, the voices of Lia's HUC classmates and her colleagues from JTS and Ziegler will reinforce themes of Lia's journey as they assess from whence they have come and where they would like to go.

Primary Socialization: The Foundation of Family

In most cases, a person's Jewish journey begins in childhood. Of Jews in particular, Waxman posits that "the family has been the most prominent institution involved in ethno-religious identity formation and the transmission of ethno-religious norms and values" (1983: 160). In her study of New York Jews, Horowitz asks, "To what extent, if at all, are people's relationships to being Jewish inscribed during childhood and how malleable are these ties later in life" (2003: i)? The relationships that the students have with their parents are a foundation for identity formation in general and rabbinic identity formation in particular. "Parents," Kosmin asserts, "are the primary agents for transferring cultural and religious elements across generations by transmitting values, norms, and knowledge" (2000: 237).

As the primary agents of socialization in an individual's life, parents both modeled applicable practices, types of relevant relationships, and sometimes gave the students entrée into Jewish organizational life. According to Horowitz, "Early Jewish Training" refers to an individual's exposure to home-based Jewish practices as well as contact with Jewish institutions. These points of contact are an "involuntary experience" because the child is exposed to them by virtue of growing up in the parents' home" (Horowitz 2003: 100).

In addition to primary socialization, the family also provided an initial social position context for the child including "class, status, culture, and geographic area" (Keysar, Kosmin, and Scheckner 2000: 3). They communicated particular values and influence types of interactions that the child would have. These more contextual elements are foundational to socialization though they may not be overt. Parents are successful in the religious socialization of their children when they "take their religion(s) seriously and when the parental approach to religious engagement is affirming" (Bengston 2013: 186).

In family life, many of the students came to understand the centrality of being part of a larger Jewish community. Karen's and Evan's parents, for instance, prioritized Jewish communal engagement. Karen's parents modeled a community-centric Judaism and, as a result of her mother's work in Jewish education, Karen, a Ziegler student, was given her first Jewish job. Her mother's connections gave Karen entrée not just into the Jewish Community Center (JCC) in her college's town, but into Jewish professional life as well.

If there was Jewish stuff then my parents were involved with it; that was just the way it is. Not in any religious way, but in the community-building stuff. So everyone in the community has spent time with my mom like they all know her. So I go off to college ... and I got a job at the JCC ... I called my mom's old director and he was there. "Of course I'll give Ms. Janice's daughter a job in our afterschool program." ... [The JCC] had an afterschool program and I went and I worked with kids.

Unlike Karen's mother who was professionally engaged in Jewish communal life, Evan's parents' communal participation took place primarily in their home. Evan's parents included friends from their synagogue and community in holiday celebrations. Evan, an HUC student, commented, "My parents threw a really big Hanukkah party every year that ... pretty much involved a lot of the community. And we had a close group of friends, maybe seven Jewish family friends whose kids I think of as being like my cousins" Both Karen and Evan expressed that their parents modeled the value of Jewish community participation.

Many students reported having celebrated and observed Shabbat and holidays with their immediate families. Some students' families had particular traditions and rituals. For example, Avi, a JTS student, spoke Hebrew with his parents every Shabbat; Becky, also a JTS student, and her mother stopped at the same bakery every Saturday morning on their way to synagogue. Students' families made *seders* on Passover, erected *sukkahs* [sing., sukkah; temporary booth or hut] on Sukkot, and, like Evan reported above, hosted Chanukah parties. Family and community are the settings in which the

students learn to be Jewish as a first language. Talia, an HUC student, commented that her family's approach to celebrating Shabbat normalized Jewish routines:

[E]ven when I was in high school before I would go to the football games on Friday nights, we would always have Shabbat dinners together like with *challah* [braided bread] and do *kiddush* [blessing over wine or grape juice] and light the candles. It was always at home, everything we did was through a Jewish lens, despite the fact that we don't keep kosher. I really always felt connected to being Jewish and it was always just the thing that we did, it was never that extra thing like "oh it's a special season so we're going to *shul* [synagogue, temple]." It was there, like a part of our normal routine.

Talia's family's Sabbath practice, which she maintains and finds valuable as a rabbinical student, exhibits a habitus⁴⁵ of Jewish living.

Like Talia, Ezra, a Ziegler student, learned Jewish practices from his parents, in particular, by going to synagogue with his mother. Ezra's mother modeled a Judaism that was informed, spiritual, and had deep personal meaning. He reported,

Shul was the place where I got alone time with my mom, the only place I got alone time with my mom which I really valued. ... I sat next to her in shul and her reaction was always to help me understand the words and she would say things like "How do you know the difference between Hebrew and Aramaic?" and looking for the *alef* at the end. ... [S]he would give me this kind of intellectual

⁴⁵ Shafer (2010), in his study of Protestant seminary students, addresses the concept and process of formation of habitus for religious elites—i.e. clergy—in an institutional context.

information which I think was useful in terms of building literacy ... I think the more significant thing maybe, what she [my mother] what she didn't do intentionally, but what I know is that I could watch her pray the *amidah* [standing prayer] in shul and see her cry. And I think that's maybe the most important thing a parent could give to a child in terms of prayer, because I had no idea what was happening but I knew that whatever God she did or didn't believe in, or whatever was or wasn't happening for her in prayer, there was something happening, something big and emotional and important.

Ezra's mother gave him entrée into prayer intellectually, emotionally, and physically.⁴⁶ She helped Ezra form a habitus that included embodied knowledge as expressed through prayer. Having these experiences based in synagogue gave Ezra an institutional connection and context for the knowledge and spiritual connections. Both Talia and Ezra's parents modeled Jewish living, specifically how to be Jewish, not only in terms of being informed, but through feeling the connection deeply.

Max's and Wendy's parents modeled approaches to Jewish life, as well. Max's parents, through example, taught him how to make Jewish decisions. Wendy's parents taught her how to be a meaning-seeker, which she ultimately used to arrive at Judaism. Max explains how his parents modeled decision-making with the end goal of providing Jewish educational contexts for him:

I grew up in ... a Reform synagogue. I also attended a Solomon Schechter Day

⁴⁶ Orsi (2005) comments on the significance of tactile connection in religious experiences and how bodies have a sense of memory. Ezra's prayer experiences and his memories of them were strengthened by being next to his mother.

School . . . which is a Conservative day school. I think both of those were significant in my life, but more significant than either of those places was my parents' attitude towards Judaism and being active in Jewish life. . . . You know, like the fact that they thought it was important enough to send us to Jewish school even though the only Jewish day school available was a Conservative one. It was a conscious choice on their part. . . . I think that was always a huge impact on where I ended up because they're the values and things that were instilled at a very young age. Yeah I learned Hebrew when I was a kid as part of my education, but I don't think, that wasn't what was important. It was the atmosphere . . .

Yes, Max's parents' decision to send him to a Jewish day school provided him with a not insubstantial Jewish education; however, what his parents modeled for him was how to make decisions that resulted in being able to live in a Jewish environment. By sending him to Schechter, Max's parents gave him educational, social, and religious Jewish contexts.

Though not Jewish, Wendy's parents modeled spiritual and religious seeking that shaped Wendy's path to Judaism and then rabbinical school. Wendy stated,

So I'm not Jewish by birth. I was baptized Catholic when I was a baby . . . [but] my dad was married to an evangelical Christian for several years and so I went to a Fundamentalist church. And I think there I really, through that experience I learned two things: one was that I really had a desire to connect spiritually and that I really didn't think that Jesus was the way to do that for me. . . . [A]n ongoing question for me during college was sort of what was my spiritual path

going to be? Now my mother had been, had gone through any number of phases. You know, I think she had gone to a Methodist Church and the Mormon Church and converted to Catholicism when she married my dad and now sort of practices yoga. My stepfather is a Sufi . . . And so there was this sort of world of available stuff . . .

Wendy observed from her parents and step-parents the importance and process of searching for and finding a religious tradition that provides personal meaning and opportunities for connection.⁴⁷ Both Max and Wendy received orientations from their respective parents in terms of priorities that will be relevant as they seek to engage with and establish Jewish contexts for personal meaning for themselves and their future communities.

For some students, their relationships to Israel originated from their families and were integrated into their primary Jewish socialization. Some students' families had strong Zionist roots, others had relatives in Israel, and still others took family vacations to Israel during their childhoods. For example, Andy, a Ziegler student, shared that his grandparents' involvement with Zionist causes modeled a relationship of love for Israel. He explained,

My *zayde* [grandfather], my mother's *zayde*, they're on the very left wing of the spectrum but it is so abundantly clear that they love Israel . . . They've been to

⁴⁷ The modern individual, searching for individualized meaning determined to be missing from his or her ascribed faith, chooses and acts out new religious commitments and identities. According to Berger (1969), choice weakens religious commitment, but "Warner (1993) asserts, it might well strengthen it, since the very act of choosing a religion and its beliefs and practices, when an individual knows there are various competing alternatives, adds agency and meaning to the commitment" (Cadge and Davidman 2003:24).

Israel dozens upon dozens of times. My zayde ... was the former president of Peace Now in America. ... I think they are a great model of what it is to love Israel and at the same time not be afraid of criticizing it. Like a child you know you love them so much and you care about them so much and you know a mother is on her child's case for a reason, that's because she loves him or her.

Whereas Andy's connection to Israel was through a lens of American relations with Israel, Talia, an HUC student, had a connection through Israeli relatives. Talia's father grew up in Israel and they still have extended family living in Israel. Talia spent Shabbatot and holidays with them throughout the year, but reported that it was her Hebrew language skills that benefited the most from the time she spent with her family. Both models of connection were based on family relationships though grounded in different locales and with different foci—one, organizational and political and the other purely relational and familial. These connections with Israel through family may have implications for the person's early relationship with Israel, but may or may not signify whether that relationship influenced the student's decision to apply to rabbinical school.

The students' family backgrounds provided thematically relevant starting points for their rabbinic journeys. The students received exposure to organizational life, spirituality, rituals, Sabbath observance, holiday celebrations, Jewish social contexts, and Israel. By and large, even for those students who experienced lower levels of connection through their families, they still claimed that their rabbinic journeys developed from these early points of connection. Family backgrounds have implications for rabbinic identity formation, though the degree to which they have influence may vary greatly from one

individual to the next. During childhood, parents socialize children to a worldview that includes the religious meaning system to the point that there is “no distinction between socialization into the larger group and religious socialization” (McGuire 1987:48). This of course differs for those who converted to Judaism later in life.

Early Secondary Socialization: Childhood and Adolescence

When children are young, their lives, choices, and identities are mediated by their parents, family members, and primary caregivers. The transition to adolescence is a period during which individuals gradually replace childhood roles and perspectives with more adult versions (Erikson 1977). This shift is aided by the replacement of the initial childhood family unit milieu with broader society (Erikson 1968). As individuals get older, agents of secondary socialization—teachers, peers, community members, and others—have increasing influence.

In childhood and early adolescence, parents assert their socializing authority by selecting agents for and sites of secondary socialization. They may look to the Jewish community to outsource the socialization of their children, relying on institutions like synagogues, summer camps, and religious schools to be their socializing proxies and to teach their children skills and information which they feel are necessary for a Jewish identity (Prell 2000). To adopt the language of Ann Swidler (1986), Jewish parents may not be able to provide their children with the kind of Jewish cultural tool kits (and accompanying strategies of action) that they think their children should have for Jewish

life.⁴⁸ They look to community institutions to fulfill their identity goals for their children and often themselves (Cohen and Kelner 2007; Pomson 2007). Cornwall (1988) labels this roundabout route for social influence “channeling.” Joseph Erickson argues that “parents direct their children to other social influences, and it is these influences which are more salient” (1992:149).

The secondary socialization options that parents choose reflect their own—here, Jewish—orientations. Ozorak (1989) noted that parents’ religious affiliations and the intensity of their commitments are positively correlated with the religious ties of their children. According to Ozorak, parents’ affiliation and faith are “cognitive anchors” for children, signaling a starting point for their own beliefs and affiliation. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) provides equivalent Jewish support for Ozorak’s argument. That is “the more Jewishly traditional the home, the more likely the child will associate with Jewish peers and join Jewish social activities” (Keysar et al. 2000: 45). Regardless of orientation, though, parents begin to relinquish their socializing influence as children age.

In adolescence, the peer group rises to prominence as a socializing agent. Keysar, Kosmin, and Scheckner argue that during adolescence, the peer group “begins to serve as a catalyst for identity development” (2000: 5). Peer group influence exists along a same-dissonant spectrum in relation to parental influence. That is, if one’s peer group reflects one’s family and initial community, there is a greater likelihood that the norms of that

⁴⁸ Skills are one component of Swidler’s cultural tool kit. The other components are habits and styles. She explains, “Culture influences action . . . by shaping a repertoire or ‘tool kit’ of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct ‘strategies of action’” (1986: 273).

group will be reinforced.⁴⁹ Dudley and Dudley (1986) employ the term “social learning theory” to describe intergenerational consistency of values and morals. In contrast, individuation and emancipation theories describe the spaces that adolescents attempt to put between themselves and their parents’ socializing influence. Emancipation theory “explains the generational gap by asserting that adolescents reject their parents’ religious values . . .” (Keysar et al. 2000:6). Jewish children and adolescents engage with peers in two prominent social contexts that their parents have nevertheless selected for them, possibly with their input: Hebrew school and summer camp. These two contexts for secondary socialization, facilitated by parents, employ informal education approaches to reinforce Jewish values and traditions while relying on peer interactions to do so.

In sharing their Jewish journey narratives, the rabbinical students identified the bar/bat mitzvah and Jewish summer camp as the two most formative Jewish experiences of adolescence and the experiences that helped push them along the path toward rabbinical school. Munro presents four ways of understanding bar/bat mitzvah: a natural status change when a Jewish child reaches age 12 (for girls in more traditional Jewish communities) or 13 (for boys and girls in egalitarian communities); formal, public affirmation of one’s Jewish identity; ritual that exhibits mastery of Jewish knowledge, skills, and values; and, an opportunity for communal and familial celebration of the

⁴⁹ Research on Evangelical, Fundamentalist, and other conservative Christians aims to show that the ways that religious values are enacted and the lifestyle choices that are reinforced within hierarchical family structures and communities aim to maintain consistency in religious beliefs and affiliations between generations (Ammerman 1997; Smith and Kim 2003; Smith 2005; Bartkowski 2007). These studies, especially of teenagers, are intended to show the communal orientation of these groups in contrast to contemporary individualism and distancing from communities as described by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1986), Putnam (2000), Cohen and Eisen (2000) and others.

child's accomplishments and status (2016: 60). Attending Jewish summer camp is an immersive, informal educational experience, providing a plausibility structure for Jewish daily life in a peer-centric environment.

The bar and bat mitzvah and summer camp can be explained through various theoretical lenses: as rites of passage, cultural capital, institutionally-tied loci for secondary socialization, and others. They also both illustrate the parents' own Jewish commitment. At a bar or bat mitzvah, the parents' Jewish commitment is on public display. Their child's accomplishment illustrates that Judaism is important for this family and that the parent or parents prioritized this occasion. Additionally, parental or familial support—especially financial support—is crucial for children to attend Jewish summer camp. That the parents sought out a Jewish camp is a statement of values and of desired lifestyle given the Jewish living focus of many sleep away or overnight camps. The bottom line, though, is that they were meaningful experiences—personally and pre-professionally—for these rabbinical students.

For many of the rabbinical students, their formal Jewish educations began in congregation-based Hebrew schools. Considered a chore and a bore by generations of American Jews,⁵⁰ several of the rabbinical students nevertheless cited Hebrew school as an important feature of their Jewish journeys. In general, they were the ones—the select

⁵⁰ In a sermon given at the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' (UAHC; now called the Union for Reform Judaism, URJ) Biennial in Boston in 2001, then-President Rabbi Eric Yoffie referred to supplemental religious schools as the “castor oil of Jewish life, a burden passed from parent to child with the following admonition: ‘I hated it, you’ll hate it, and after your bar mitzvah, you can quit.’”

few—who loved it. For Stephanie, an HUC student, Hebrew school opened up a world of Jewish learning. She explained,

[In Hebrew school], when we started learning I remember learning Hebrew letters and I remember learning the story of Creation and the more I learned the more I wanted to keep learning. I was that nerdy kid in Sunday school who never wanted it to end. . . . I also joined . . . Hebrew high school . . . [which] is Jewish learning for teenagers. And the more I kept learning, the more I kept doing, I knew. I had first thought about becoming a rabbi at age 10 and it was always sort of back in my mind, it never really left.

For Stephanie, Jewish learning had long been prominent on her pathway to the rabbinate. She craved Jewish learning and Hebrew school was a source of fulfillment.

The bar or bat mitzvah is Hebrew school’s capstone event. “When thirteen-year-old bar or bat mitzvah students stand before family, friends, and sometimes community in a public ritual, they exemplify the core values of Judaism, uphold the family honor, and symbolically represent the Jewish future” (Munro 2016: 1; Oppenheimer 2005). It is a moment resplendent with meaning on many familial and temporal levels. For future rabbis, it was also a professional jumping-off point. \

For Talia, an HUC student, and Becky, a JTS student, their respective bat mitzvah experiences gave them a taste of what it was like to function publicly in the role of the rabbi. Talia reported that she loved the process of both preparing for and celebrating her bat mitzvah. It was a turning point for her, not just in terms of skills acquisition, but was

also when she decided that she wanted to pursue the rabbinate as a career. Talia commented,

I loved working with the rabbi. I loved like knowing that I could study anything and still make it a Jewish thing. And I loved standing up in front of the congregation and leading them in prayer and singing from the Torah. I thought it was such a cool experience. And I knew in the preparation that I felt like I really got something out of it beyond like “okay I'm turning 13 I need to read out of the Torah and have a giant party.” For me, I really felt something and I decided that I wanted to be a rabbi when I was 12.

Whereas Talia's preparation for her bat mitzvah had implications for her career choice, for Becky, her bat mitzvah was an entry point into practicing and mastering service-leading, a core skill for rabbis.

So a big part of what influenced me also was the fact that I was part of such a small congregation. From the age of about 10, we didn't have a cantor. There were even a couple years... right after my bat mitzvah when we also did not have a rabbi. ... So for my bat mitzvah, I had learned how to lead services and how to read Torah and ... I was really encouraged to keep leading services, keep reading Torah. And especially because we didn't have a rabbi I kind of felt like if I don't do it, who's going to?

Talia's and Becky's bat mitzvah experiences—contrary to stereotypical teen apathy—were rites of passage that deepened their engagement with Judaism and expanded their

communal participation. They found meaning in the skills and roles that they experienced through the bat mitzvah.

In the American context, “bar mitzvah became the primary means of inculcating Jewish belief and practice, with the hope that the students’ engagement in Judaism would continue beyond the event” (Munro 2016: 4). “The measure of success of a bar/bat mitzvah,” Munro continues, “is actually the continued Jewish identification of the child” (63). The ultimate goal of Hebrew school and bar/bat mitzvah is the production of a Jew. For the rabbinical students, this was true. Attending Hebrew school and the subsequent bar or bat mitzvah incorporated learning, teaching, and leading prayers with a rabbinic role model. Those who eventually became rabbinical students wanted more of this.

The students identified attending Jewish summer camp as the second most significant childhood and adolescent experience related to their decisions to apply to rabbinical school. Camp, aptly described by Natalie, an HUC student, as “a life environment,” provided a context of Jewish time for Jewish living. For four or eight weeks per summer, campers’ Jewish lives are integrated into their daily routines (Sales and Saxe, 2004), as opposed to compartmentalized as in the case of attending Hebrew school or synagogue. For Jen, an HUC student, summer camp was about living Jewishly and interacting with rabbinic role models in a casual, yet supportive, way. The summers that Jen spent at camp, first as a camper and then as a member of staff, modeled what she wanted to have as Jewish and rabbinic lifestyles.

[Reform sleep-away camp] is really where I was able to form my Jewish identity, I think. And as my parents always say, “it was an investment in your education to

send you to camp.” And it's really true. I would say it's the reason that I'm here [in rabbinical school], for the experiences I had where I was really able to live a Jewish life and see what it's like to be Jewish 24/7 and surrounded by Jews and to know that I have a place where I could question my Judaism and question things and I had learned and really, really learn about it. . . . And throughout the time I was in college I also worked at [camp] as a staff member. And there I think probably what really pushed me towards it was also some of the rabbis that I met. And there's probably two in particular that, especially one who just every year really kind of took me under his wing and if I had a question, he would sit me down and we would study Torah together. You know, he would take out the Torah and we would just, in the middle of camp, and I was supposed to be watching kids and making sure they didn't like jump off a bed or something, and instead I'm studying Torah with the rabbi.

Jen's summers at camp provided the experiences and relationships that she identifies as shaping her personal Jewish identity. As a member of camp staff, her Jewish identity took on a leadership aspect which was bolstered by more senior staff members, including rabbis. Camp, for Jen and others, was the context in which rabbinic-relevant formation began and grew.

Summer camp was also a place for developing skills. For Ethan, an HUC student, summer camp was the genesis of his Jewish engagement and a prominent annually-recurring feature of his Jewish journey. He recalled, “I started going to camp in fourth grade and picked up a guitar in seventh grade. I started song-leading at camp, song-

leading services ... I've been doing a lot of that for a long time. I paid my way through college song-leading ...” Learning to play the guitar and capitalizing on this skill in sing-along heavy Reform worship services gave Ethan a taste for congregational leadership as well as increased proficiency in prayer. Song- and prayer-leading are Ethan’s forte; these skills are anchored in his summer camp experiences.

Jen’s and Ethan’s summers at camp, in their minds, paved the way to rabbinical school. Their experiences piqued their interest in Jewish living and they learned skills relevant to communal rabbinic leadership. Summer camps also provided “positive Jewish role models, particularly their counselors. These staff serve as accessible young Jewish models who are relatively close to the teenagers in age and who chose to adopt a positive Jewish identity” (Keysar et al. 2000: 7). In a way, summer camps model for adult communities. In the absence of many adults, teen and young adult counselors and campers take on grownup leadership roles. They learn information and skills that may be consistent with Jewish practice of their home synagogues’ and movement affiliation.⁵¹ Through interacting with each other, campers reinforce their individual Jewish identities⁵² as well as their Jewish social identities.⁵³ Additionally, and significantly, summer camps create positive Jewish experiences. The experiential and informal educational programming of summer camps promotes Jewish friendships and self-identification. Summer camps create positive associations with Judaism for the campers

⁵¹ For the Conservative Movement, refer to Brown (1997) regarding Camp Ramah; for the Reform movement, refer to Lorge and Zola (2006) regarding the Olin-Sang Ruby Union Institute.

⁵² Thoits and Virshup (1997) explore how individuals view themselves in relation to “role partners”

⁵³ For social identity theory, concerned with the definition of “me” in relation to “we,” see for example Hogg (1992).

and this sentiment, more so than knowledge and skill, Heilman (1992) argues, is what makes a strong, dedicated Jew.

Childhood and adolescence mark the transition from exclusively primary socialization to secondary socialization. In this stage, parents may determine their children's social and educational contexts, but their influence is on the wane because they are not immediately present in interactions. When the communal, geographical, and educational contexts reflect the family's religious orientation, they may reinforce primary socialization or even strengthen its force by providing peer role models. On the other hand, if the contexts differ greatly from the orientation of the family, children may appear to rebel by selecting values from their new contexts that are at odds with those of their parents. Regardless of consonance or dissonance with primary socialization, this stage marks the beginning of individuation. Within the narrative arc of Jewish life, as expressed by the research subjects in this study, two features of this life stage dominated: attending Hebrew school and then celebrating a bar or bat mitzvah and attending Jewish summer camp. The rabbinical students pinpointed these as meaningful, formative experiences. They learned information, gained skills, adopted values, engaged in Jewish rituals and daily life, built relationships with peers and role models, and nurtured positive associations with Judaism. So profound were their experiences that some children and adolescents precociously placed rabbinical school as a goal on their Jewish journeys. If, as Erikson argued, "the reliability of young adult commitments largely depends on the outcome of the adolescent struggle for identity" (1997:72), these children-now-rabbinical students were triumphant.

Secondary Socialization: Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is the potentially slow, lengthy stage within secondary socialization that follows adolescence and precedes adult responsibility.⁵⁴ This period is characterized by more pointed identity exploration, self reflection, and a reexamination of personal beliefs separate from those of their parents (Arnett 2000). In general, “exploration of life’s possibilities is greater during these years than it will be at any other period of their life. And the decisions [emerging adults] make during this time will reverberate throughout their adulthood” (Sales and Saxe 2004:16).⁵⁵ Voluntary experiences—that is, experiences entered into by dint of individual agency—during this stage yield a “web of interrelated experiences that mutually reinforce each other (i.e. “the more inputs, the greater the results”). . . . [which] are expected to exert a strong positive influence on subsequent Jewish identity” (Horowitz 2003:106).

During emerging adulthood, experiences that gave the students a taste of being a rabbi were strong motivators along the road to rabbinical school. They challenged the students to begin to conceptualize and integrate their love of Judaism with professional applications. These integrating experiences included playing the role of a rabbi,

⁵⁴ For a comprehensive assessment of the religious lives—beliefs, practices, communal involvement and distancing, life choices, and views on social issues—see Wuthnow (2007), *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*.

⁵⁵ For further elaboration on emerging adulthood and identity, see also Arnett (2000), Arnett, Ramos, and Jensen (2001), and Martin and Smyer (1990).

performing the tasks of a rabbi,⁵⁶ and living what the students classified as a “rabbinic lifestyle.” In particular, three tasks emerged as relevant to a number of students’ decision-making: teaching, learning, and leading prayer. These tasks and events illustrated the ways in which secondary socialization, from peer groups and institutions, among others, impacted the students’ progressions to rabbinical school.

Students expressed that teaching others and studying Jewish texts are acts and experiences that have professional resonance. The ability to perform⁵⁷ these tasks with competence is part of the rabbinic tool kit. The students, by sharing these episodes as part of their narratives, were expressing that they saw themselves as having had professional aptitude or inclination since childhood. These episodes signaled to the students that they are qualified to be in rabbinical school. Dan, an HUC student, found himself explaining Judaism to other Jews in his college dormitory. His recollection of teaching was entwined with his initial realization that he wanted to pursue the rabbinate, as though the act of teaching Judaism hit a chord that resonated with his future. He recalled,

The first time that I really remember thinking maybe I would like to be a rabbi, I remember a day of my freshman year of college, that was a place where I found myself representing Judaism even amongst other Jews who had questions . . . or

⁵⁶ In Basil Herring’s (1991) edited volume, *The Rabbinate as Calling and Vocation*, each chapter is an essay on “The Rabbi As . . .” The twenty-four essays, written by prominent American Orthodox rabbis, address the tasks and roles of a rabbi from wage-earner to spiritual guide.

⁵⁷ Goffman’s (1959) theories of performance and dramaturgy apply to cases of students learning and practicing skills. To use his vocabulary, rabbinical school is largely classifiable as the “back stage” area. Students exhibit their skills in performances of prayer services for themselves, a topic discussed in more detail later in this dissertation.

who came to me with problems of one sort or another. I sort of felt maybe I'm doing the kind of thing that rabbis do . . .

Teaching about Judaism made Dan a representative of Judaism. He became a public figure through sharing Jewish knowledge. In addition to being teachers, the rabbinical students identified that an ideal rabbi is also a student. They recognized that when they engaged and have engaged in teaching and learning, these activities have had professional resonance for them.

Rabbis are also ritual functionaries. As such, in Reform and Conservative congregations, they often lead prayer services. Joel, a Ziegler student, shared his experiences which illustrate not only his early forays into prayer leading but also show the institutional connections that he made in the process. Joel's prayer leading experiences evolved in substance over time. At 16 years old, he began serving as the "page number caller" in his family's synagogue. Subsequently, the rabbi of the congregation left and there was a gap of a few months before his replacement was due to begin. Joel stepped in and stepped up to the task of leading services:

I continued on as the page caller and we would have different congregants come [to lead services]. And after the second week, the congregants did a very upbeat *Kaddish shalem* [whole kaddish] for *Kaddish yatom* [Mourners' kaddish], so I kind of took over at that point and they realized, "Hey, he actually knows what he's doing." So for the rest of the summer I actually led Friday night services.

Joel described this extended leadership experience as "the first thing that really started pushing me on the path" to rabbinical school. Joel's leadership in prayer services

highlights the public and communal aspects of rabbinic leadership. The example of prayer leading shows a clear connection between a particular skill or task and the role of the rabbi. During emerging adulthood, individuals connect experiences to their developing sense of self and assess whether they may lead down a professional path.

Israel Trips are Part of the Journey

Israel trips are an increasingly common feature of American Jewish emerging adulthood (Mittelberg 1999; Saxe and Chazan 2008).⁵⁸ Many students reported formative Israel experiences after high school and/or during college. The programs ranged in duration from a short 10-day trip to one year.⁵⁹ Upwards of twenty rabbinical students in this study reported participating in a semester- or year-long Israel program. Half a dozen students reported longer stays such as participation in different, discrete year-long programs, or in the case of a two students, making *aliyah* [lit., going up; immigrate to Israel] and maintaining Israeli citizenship and residency for a number of years. The length of time that the student spent in Israel may have implications for his or her ease in navigating daily life in Jerusalem. However, as Mittelberg (1999) argues, the length of the trip is not directly related to the individual's attachment to Israel; that is, there is a saturation point, especially for Reform Jews, when they realize the extent of Orthodox

⁵⁸ From their inception by the Jewish Agency in the 1960s, Israel experience trips and programs were considered to have a positive knock-on effect for American Jewish identity. Since the advent of Birthright Israel in 2000, participation has grown so significantly that this specific Israel trip has almost become a rite of passage of emerging American Jewish adulthood (Haldane 2008).

⁵⁹ In order to participate in a Birthright Israel trip, the individual cannot have been to Israel on a group tour before. Some of the rabbinical students only participated in a Birthright-sponsored trip. Some of those who did, though, returned to Israel for a longer program. Few students had a Birthright trip as their only Israel experience.

control and influence. Nevertheless, sentiments of closeness may be either positive or negative and still be close and grounded in love (Sasson 2014). The students' previous Israel experiences and resultant relationships with Israel influenced their decisions to pursue the rabbinate in different ways.

For Hilary, an HUC student, studying and living in Israel was a way to strengthen her own Jewish identity following conversion, meet Jews from around the world, and gain a command of the Hebrew language. After college, Hilary lived, worked, and studied Hebrew on an agricultural kibbutz in the Negev desert. She shared,

[The kibbutz] was just amazing. It reminded me of home. I was totally comfortable there. . . . I saw Jews that were like from South America and Russia and I saw that anyone can be Jewish and there are many different ways being Jewish. And I felt like a connection. These are Jews who live on a farm and they were born here I didn't feel like I was so culturally out like I did before.

Hilary's Israel experience helped her comprehend first-hand the international character of Judaism and Jews, but in an environment—a farm—that reminded her of her Midwestern home. Hilary's experience emboldened her Jewish sense of self. She took that confidence back with her to the United States where she became more active in Jewish education and leadership in her temple. Hilary went to Israel because she had been wrestling with Judaism and trying to find her niche. For her, Israel provided clarity in her Judaism and a way to fit into a Jewish community.

For Becky, a JTS student, Israel prompted wrestling with Judaism and social-religious structures and conventions in Israel. The time-honored tradition of struggling

with Israel, according to the students, helped them clarify their personal relationships with the country and explore ways that they might facilitate others' relationships with Israel. Becky shared a narrative of her previous experience of living in Israel. Her story illustrates a pathway for engagement with Israeli society and culture, the Hebrew language, and Judaism. Becky described ways in which she struggled to find Jewish meaning—and was disappointed when it wasn't forthcoming—in Israel, a place in which she had been told that this was easy and natural to accomplish. She reflected,

I came on Birthright because I'd never been [to Israel before]. I stayed with . . . a family friend and did some touring for a month and then I did kibbutz *ulpan* [Hebrew language program] for five months. . . . I had grown up always being told "Israel is your homeland, Israel is your home, Israel is the home of the Jewish people" and I got here and it wasn't. I wasn't allowed to wear my *tallit* [prayer shawl] at the Kotel. I didn't see—I saw Orthodox and secular, that was it. . . . And it was very difficult and I was even a little angry and I felt like shouting at someone, "Where's my homeland? Because this isn't it." It was hard. . . . But I think it's really important to have the experience of living here so that I can teach people. Because I think another person could've had the experiences that I did and said "I'm done, I'm leaving, this isn't my place, and I'm out." I didn't. I stayed. I was here for a total of seven months between all the different programs and I came back and I wanted to come back.

Each time Becky returned to Israel, she found more small groups and communities of egalitarian Jews with which to connect. Becky recognized that her experiences of

traveling and living in Israel, as well as the existential and religious struggles that she had, are valuable for a future rabbi. For Becky, as well as several other rabbinical students, the fact that being in Israel is a struggle is impetus to engage, not opt out. Israel is an important part of Becky's Jewish journey. Her experiences in Israel helped lead her to rabbinical school and to a point of embracing the Israel Year as integral to her journey to the rabbinate.

Teaching, leading prayer services, and spending time in Israel are experiences relevant to the work and identity of an American rabbi. These types of experiences characterize emerging adulthood, a liminal period of time in the rabbinical students' lives, directly preceding a sharper focus on applying to rabbinical school. Though their parents may continue to assert influence through paying for college, synagogue memberships, Israel trips, and the like, the students are much more actively involved in their own secondary socialization. They began to view experiences as professionally applicable and then sought out additional experiences that reinforced pathways to their goal identity of being a rabbi.

Pursuing Rabbinical School: Mapping a Personally Meaningful Professional Path

The rabbinical students' personal Jewish journeys melded with pre-professional journeys as the students explored and then decided to apply to rabbinical school.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Moving a step further in the process, Becker (1961) comments that admission hopefuls attempt to give the impression of a member of the profession during the interview in order to display natural aptitude for

Regardless of one's Jewish background and parents, the decision to engage with Judaism on a professional level signified a transition in one's Jewish journey. This turning point occurred during secondary socialization. It was an adjustment of approach. That is, the students were no longer merely recipients of rabbinically-relevant input; rather, they exhibited increasing agency in pursuit of experiences that contained rabbinic capital and helped develop a more professional Jewish self. Applying to rabbinical school often indicated what Horowitz (2003) calls an "Increasing" Jewish journey. The students, as part of their Jewish journeys, sought out something "more" and ultimately concluded that rabbinical school could fulfill that desire.⁶¹ Why people pursue rabbinical school is integral to their journeys and narratives. Motivations determined not only a basic desire to pursue the rabbinate but also what kind of rabbi they wish to become.⁶²

the profession; the admissions committee then determines if the candidate actually has the potential to embody the profession.

⁶¹ In her study of Catholic and Jewish teachers, Horowitz (2014: 84) identified three types of beginning teachers: "early deciders," "explorers," and "accidentals." The rabbinical students in this study most closely resemble "early deciders" and "explorers." That is, they used their agency to either directly pursue the rabbinate as a career choice or selected the rabbinate as the most desirable option from an array of other professional options that touched on the work of a rabbi (teacher, social worker, Jewish communal professional, etc.), but without the combination of tasks in one role.

⁶² Two studies of rabbinical schools, though spaced thirty years apart from each other and even further from this study, define motivations that are still applicable. In his 1968 study of Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), JTS, and HUC, Liebman determines that there are two types of motivations for people to pursue the rabbinate: professional/leadership or educational/learning. Liebman defines HUC students as professionally motivated, RIETS students as educationally motivated, and JTS students as a combination of the two (1968:19). These types of motivators seem too simplistic. Nevertheless, the categories of learning and leadership reflect the personal and professional motivations expressed by students in this current study. Some students enter rabbinical school because they want to achieve Jewish literacy in textual knowledge and Jewish practice; others because they want to share Jewish content through leadership roles. In his 1997 study of JTS students, Davidson uncovers four motivational themes for why people enter rabbinical school: a "desire to 'follow in the footsteps' of a family member or role model, find expression for their 'passion for learning,' engage in 'searching,' and 'make a difference'" (1997:451). Davidson notes that the narratives of most respondents may include more than one theme, though, for each person, one dominated.

The decision to apply to rabbinical school originated in either the self or an Other. When it originated with the individual, it often illustrated a rational decision based on an evaluation of one's skill set and professional goals. When the idea to apply to rabbinical school originated external to the self, it may have been with a horizontal other such as a friend, family member, or mentor or with the Vertical Other in the case of a spiritual experience. In all instances, there was the recognition that the rabbinate represented a favorable combination of knowledge, skills, and desired Jewish lifestyle. The difference between internal and external motivation was who connects the dots for the individual—himself/herself or an Other.

The decision to apply to rabbinical school was a milestone on students' Jewish journeys, both personal and professional. The path to rabbinical school began to take shape, formed out of the tasks, roles, and lifestyles that the students desired. Students made the decision to apply to rabbinical school for various reasons, many of which could be classified as seeking, though not in a wholly religious or spiritual sense. Rather, they were systematically looking for a meaningful career that combined their aptitudes and inclinations and supported a Judaism-centric lifestyle. They recognized their interests and skills and saw those reflected in the profile of a rabbi. They also saw the potential to nurture their personal Judaism through a professional role.

Tasks and Roles of Rabbis as Motivators for Pursuing the Rabbinate

The tasks and roles of a rabbi are varied and plentiful. They are a particular combination of knowledge, skill, and affect. Mari and Ilana, students at HUC and JTS

respectively, observed what rabbis do and recognized that those tasks and traits meshed with their own professional goals. They shared their decision-making processes:

Mari: I think eventually I just realized that, that I wanted to do something that combined all of the things I love: teaching, counseling, Judaism, and helping people and social justice and all these things that I was really passionate about and so being a rabbi kind of made sense in a way that the other things I was considering doing didn't so much by themselves.

Ilana: It just kind of all came together and I was like "Wow. I really like teaching, I really like counseling, I really like mentoring, I really like having an active Jewish life, I really like learning, like obviously I should go to rabbinical school." It's the right combination of everything that I wanted to do and if I were to go anywhere, go any other way, I'd have to give up one or more of those things.

The diverse roles and tasks of rabbis provided multiple professional entrance points for the students. People interested in only a couple of the angles could have found themselves drawn to the rabbinate. Or, as in the cases presented above, an individual may have been drawn to several aspects of the profession and lifestyle.

Whereas Mari and Ilana were drawn to the roles and tasks of rabbis, others were drawn to the status of the role. The rabbinate was also the career answer for students who explicitly stated that they admired the leadership positions of rabbis. For Avi, attaining the status of the position was a pathway into the influential conversations that guide the Conservative movement: "[I]f I wanted to be involved in *halakhic* [Jewish-legal] conversations and if I wanted to have a voice in terms of *halakha* [Jewish law], then I had

to be a *mara d'atra* [local authority on Jewish law], I had to be a *rav* [rabbi], I had to be a *posek* [halakhic authority]. So getting *semikha* [ordination] was just going to be essential to whatever I would do.” For Avi, being a rabbi is a professionally necessary stepping stone, a way to access the work he wants to do. For Alyssa, an HUC student, the status of the role fit with her own perception of her potential for achievement. She commented, “I always thought of myself as having a really high professional title, like being a lawyer or getting a PhD or something. So, I guess I’m going to be working in community service for Jewish people, what can I do to be at the top of that?” Her answer: “be a rabbi.” Not only is there status with the role, but as David, an HUC student, pointed out, there is “a certain *kavod* [respect] that exists for a rabbi that doesn’t necessarily exist in other capacities.”

The roles, tasks, and status of rabbis prompted some students’ decisions to apply to rabbinical school. More commonly, though, the decision to apply to rabbinical school was couched in the same terms that influenced identity formation: experiences and relationships. Experiences that integrated the personal and the professional—in a way that echoed or resembled the rabbinic self and role—emerged as powerful motivators. These experiences enabled the students to essentially say “this is what a rabbi does” or “this is like a rabbi’s life,” and then, “I want this” and “this is who I want to be.” Relationships with peers, parents, and clergy also motivated the students to apply to rabbinical school.

A relationship to Judaism was a given for the rabbinical students, but for some it was a strong motivating force for applying to rabbinical school. In the group of people for

whom the relationship with Judaism was a pull factor, there were four people (2 from HUC, 1 from Ziegler, and 1 from JTS) who had been on a path toward an academic degree but chose the rabbinate instead and twelve students (8 from HUC, 3 from Ziegler, and 1 from JTS) for whom the rabbinate was a second career. In addition, eight students (4 from HUC and 4 from Ziegler) switched over from other Jewish communal jobs to rabbinical school.⁶³

In particular, the students whose relationship to Judaism pulled them away from academia were seeking a spiritual angle; that is, academia was not “enough;” academic Jewish studies had the relationship with the Bible, but it did not foster a spiritual component that the students craved. As an example, Alan, a Ziegler student, began a master’s degree in Hebrew Bible before realizing that he craved something more personally meaningful and utilitarian. He explained,

So pretty early on [in the Bible MA program], I kind of decided that I would rather have gone to rabbinical school so that I can work with people. There's actually a lot of beauty in Judaism and love in Judaism and a lot of great things. It's not just “this is what God says” and trying to sit there and tear apart the Bible to figure out how was written, but rather to say look there's great things in the

⁶³ To put the numbers in perspective, of the 38 total research subjects, 22 came from HUC, 10 came from Ziegler, and 6 came from JTS. Still, the HUC students and Ziegler students were more likely than their JTS colleagues to have been on different career paths prior to rabbinical school. In general, this JTS cohort, though small, was nearly uniformly engaged in Jewish home, communal, and institutional life. Three of the six JTS students were the children of JTS-ordained rabbis; two of the HUC students had a parent in the rabbinate; and, one of the Ziegler students had a parent who was a member of clergy though a further three had parents who were Jewish communal professionals.

Bible that you can learn from and that's actually a lot more useful to the general Jewish population than how it was constructed and how it was written.

Alan's relationship with Judaism prompted him to prioritize being a practitioner over an intellectual. He moved away from an academic approach to the Bible and toward the rabbinate, a field in which he felt the Bible was more meaningful, respected, and useful.

The Role of Israel in Deciding to Pursue the Rabbinate

Regardless of the type of trip or length of stay, Israel experiences are relevant to rabbinical school journeys because Israel is relevant to Judaism. For some students, a relationship with Israel was a primary motivator for pursuing a rabbinic career. Israel experiences had professional and religious meaning and, thus, professional and religious implications. Alyssa, an HUC student, and Joe, a JTS student, provided two examples of the types of meaning—professional and religious, respectively—that students gleaned from Israel experiences and how they led to rabbinical school. Spending a year in Israel was Alyssa's impetus for working in a Jewish communal organization. Through her job, she saw that rabbis—to whom she ascribed a high level of status—performed a variety of tasks and have a variety of roles within the Jewish community. She commented,

[A]fter my year in Israel, I loved working in the Jewish community and . . . I was just obsessed with Israel. I wanted to do like Israel advocacy and make Jews come to Israel, so I wanted to work in the Jewish community, maybe on Israel. So, I worked at the UJA-Federation of New York . . . I saw a lot of different things people did in the Jewish community. I saw that rabbis could be educators and

community organization professionals and have all these different roles. So, I kind of applied on a whim because I thought it was really –because I thought if I’m going to be a Jewish professional, I might as well go big or go home.

For Alyssa, her year-long Israel experience was the primary catalyst that started her on the path toward rabbinical school. As a result of a year in Israel, Alyssa sought employment at a major Jewish organization to work on Israel programming where she encountered an array of Jewish professionals, among them rabbis. She perceived rabbis as situated at the top of the Jewish professional hierarchy and decided to channel her energy in that direction.

In contrast to Alyssa’s professional pursuit, Joe’s time in Israel had religious implications which then informed his decision to apply to rabbinical school. Joe, a JTS student, reported,

I decided to go to Israel to learn how to become observant and I lived on a kibbutz for about six months and then I moved to Jerusalem. . . . When I got back to New York . . . I was living on the Upper West Side . . . in a *shomer Shabbat* [Sabbath observant], *shomer kashrut* [observant of the kosher laws] apartment and I lived that way for two and a half years and during that time I lived with Conservative rabbinical students who encouraged me, because I was taking some private Talmud lessons, they said, “You know, you should talk to so-and-so at the Seminary.” And I did and he suggested I take a course in order to see if I was interested in learning there.

After learning about and living an observant Jewish life, when Joe returned to the United States, he sought out the same. Living with JTS students bolstered Joe's religious lifestyle choices. Applying to rabbinical school grew out of his presence in the JTS milieu, the search for an observant community, and a desire for Jewish learning. His roommates, then rabbinical students at JTS, encouraged him to make connections with the institution. Alyssa and Joe are only two cases of many, but their various forms of engagement with Israel led each of them to rabbinical school.

Rabbinical School as the Journey to a Second Career

Approaching the rabbinate as a second career is similar to deciding on rabbinical school as opposed to a purely academic route. In both cases, the individuals desired a meaningful career, a career that valued Judaism from a spiritually fulfilling angle. For Zach, an HUC student, the choice to pursue the rabbinate emerged from his relationship to Jewish aspects of his life; the meaningful times in his life were the particularly "Jewish" times.

I realized that I would come home from work and go "Okay, now what? What's going on with my life? What is this job doing for me?" And I kind of figured that it wasn't doing anything for me on any other level than just making money and it sort of forced me to reflect on my life and my career choice ... I realized that kind of lifestyle wasn't conducive to a life that I wanted ... and like everything that was sort of significant for me and that was important for me came back to a

Jewish moment. . . . [A]ll of the really significant moments of my life were something Jewish.

Zach's job did not provide a lifestyle that he wanted or the meaning that he craved. Like Zach, Dan, also an HUC student, had a successful, non-Jewish career. Dan, who had always been engaged at least on a voluntary basis in Jewish community, worked for awhile in commercial real estate. He explained, "I . . . decided to try something out of the Jewish realm and found during that time that I would rather have always been doing community work, Jewish work, and was doing it in my spare time. And it came to a time to decide what to do, what I had enjoyed for a long time, and I applied [to HUC]." Both Zach's and Dan's relationships to Judaism prompted them to pursue the rabbinate. When the pull toward Jewish work eclipsed the pulls toward their other careers, they knew they had to make the professional switch, to switch lanes and take a new path on their journeys, to expand the metaphor.

Though identity formation is a social process, for most of the rabbinical students, the decision to apply to rabbinical school was a personal one, borne from a moment of reflection on an experience that was either overtly or covertly Jewishly meaningful. Eli, a Ziegler student, shared that his moment had a spiritual context, the context of prayer. Though one could argue that personal prayer is active and integral to the life and work of a rabbi, this part of Eli's narrative is an outlier from those of others because there was no leadership component. He was not engaged with another person or interacting with text or ritual in front of an audience. This was a private moment in a spiritual context, but with no mention of God. Eli shared,

I was sitting [in synagogue on] Yom Kippur 2008, right before the election. At that point, I'd been the de facto director of a political non-profit . . . and I just knew something wasn't right for me. What is it that I want to do? And *musaf amidah* [the standing prayer during the musaf, extra, service for Shabbat and holidays], I broke down. I told myself I've got to stop pushing [rabbinical school] off and I was no longer motivated by the money that I was in my youth. I realized what I was passionate about in my life and I made a decision that what I was pushing off till I was 65 was really relevant now at 28.

For Eli, the rabbinate had been a long-term goal; this particular Yom Kippur, Eli stopped fighting that timeline. He did not use the language of “calling”⁶⁴ or report a Divine voice or presence, but he did express that the decision solidified during a spiritual, prayer-based experience.

Applying to rabbinical school was a decision that some students report reaching on their own, with or without a perceived spiritual intervention. For other students, the decision to pursue the rabbinate came from someone else, a “source of nomination” (Davidson 1997: 451). That is, a friend, parent, or member of the clergy, expressed that

⁶⁴ As Carroll and associates discovered in their study of Christian seminary culture, a moment of spiritual rebirth and renewed relationship with the divine was an important aspect of student identity and student culture (Carroll et al. 1997:218-20). As a counter-point, for the students at a humanistic Midwestern Seminary, “the ministry is neither distinctive nor better than other ‘callings’” (Kleinman 1984:45). Despite the humanistic students’ insistence that everyone is called to ministry, they recognize that having a calling is an “important condition for feeling authentic as an aspiring minister” (43-44). Additionally, a personal calling is all well and good as a starting-point, but it needs to be accepted as legitimate by the ordaining school or denomination (Cetuk 1998). In his study of clergy in The Salvation Army, Grey (2012) argues that using the language of “calling” gets a candidate in the door of a seminary and is a foundation for the individual’s relationship with the organization and the organization’s mission and values (2012). Shafer (2010) found that having had a calling to ministry legitimates the individual’s presence in seminary for him or herself. It becomes an anchor of strength and self-confidence especially when aspects of ministerial education seem arduous.

the person would “make a good rabbi.”⁶⁵ As Isaac, an HUC student, related, a friend of his simply said “You should think about being a rabbi.” So he did. It was a light bulb moment and he acted on it. Both David, an HUC student, and Becky, a JTS student, first considered the rabbinate following comments from members of clergy. Those people saw potential and aptitude in these two students, enough for each to view them as potential future colleagues.

A rabbi suggested to David that he pursue the rabbinate as a way to become more involved in Judaism and Jewish learning. David shared the conversation as he remembered it:

[I]t was only really when I came to my current rabbi ... and said “I’m kind of frustrated” when he said “why?” And I said “because I want to be more involved. ... My thing is that I’m really in love with the Jewish tradition and in love with Jewish teaching and Jewish learning and I feel like I can’t get enough of it.” And he said, “Well you can teach religious school and you can teach adult ed.” And I said “Okay.” So I taught religious school and I taught adult ed., but I said I still need more. And he said “Have you thought about rabbinical school?” and I said “A little bit.” And he said “because I think you’d be good at it.” And I said “Okay.” So I started to look into it a little bit and I really liked the idea and liked what I saw.

⁶⁵ As an aside, students who have a parent who is a rabbi did not report pressure from the parent to pursue the rabbinate; rather, the student viewing the parent as a personal and professional role model was a stronger force.

David's rabbi added fuel to the spark of an idea to pursue the rabbinate. David felt that he had reached a crossroad in his Jewish journey. He wanted to delve deeper into Jewish learning. His rabbi gave him a way forward: rabbinical school.

For Becky, a JTS student, it was a non-Jewish member of clergy who perceived her rabbinical aptitude in sharing words of Torah.

[M]y synagogue hosted Girl Scout Shabbat. . . . And I gave the *dvar* Torah [words of Torah; sermonette] and the *parsha* [Torah portion of the week] was about the *Kohanim's* [Priests'] garments . . . [I]n Girl Scouts . . . uniforms were a big thing, so I gave a *dvar* Torah about how the way we dress changes the way we behave and puts us into certain roles and the Kohanim have their garments and we have our uniforms that make us into Girl Scouts. And a friend of ours, the parent of another Girl Scout . . . who is a Northern Conference Baptist minister told my mom, "[Becky] should be a rabbi." And I was about 14 or 15. He was the first one to suggest that.

By using Torah text to explore contemporary questions and sharing her thoughts in a public setting on Shabbat, Becky demonstrated knowledge and skills relevant to rabbinic work. Becky's *dvar* Torah impressed a minister and, in doing so, he became her nominator to the rabbinic pathway. A rabbi and a minister, respectively, prompted David and Becky to pursue the rabbinate. Each suggestion came as a result of the member of clergy witnessing the student exhibiting what they considered to be the "right kind" of drive or aptitude for the role of a rabbi.

In contrast, Ezra, a Ziegler student, reported that the suggestion to be a rabbi emerged from a conversation that he had with his mother. She pointed out to him that he actually wanted to be a rabbi; she put two and two together for him. Ezra recounted what he told his mom and his subsequent thought process:

“I don’t want to be a rabbi. I want to be a teacher. I kind of want to be a social worker, maybe in somewhat of a Jewish context, like blending teaching and social work and community building, but I don't want to be a rabbi.” [My mom] was like “Actually they have a name for that; it’s called rabbi. That's what you call a person who does all those things in the Jewish community context.” And she knew I had this very personal relationship with God in my spiritual life and that was all developing. I told her she was full of shit. Then, about six months later I kind of had this moment where I was like I just kind of came to realize that I did want to be a rabbi, like that was what I was supposed to do in the world. I felt called to it. I felt like that’s it, that’s the job I want, the work I want. It fits into to both my skill set and my interests and what I feel the work is that I'm supposed to do in the world.

Ezra described that he felt “called”⁶⁶ to the rabbinate and that the idea came via his mother. Ezra’s conversation with his mother displayed the soul-searching and the input of

⁶⁶ Whereas a generally spiritual “calling” may be perceived as essential by and for Christian seminarians to legitimate and authenticate their vocation (Shafer 2010), the same is not true for rabbinical students. The few rabbinical students in this study who used “calling” defined it as a “passion” or a “compulsion.” More commonly, in keeping with the trends explored by Davidson (1997) regarding JTS rabbinical students in historical perspective, rabbinical students based their decision on a self-assessment of their personal and professional interests, aptitude in regards to tasks commonly performed in a rabbinic capacity, love of Judaism, and a desire to both lead and serve the Jewish people. The absence of a spiritual calling similar to

another person that may be characteristic of a calling narrative. Ezra's case illustrated the significance of an interpersonal relationship, a spiritual dimension, and a rational assessment of how the roles and tasks of the rabbi matched with his own skills and interests.

Apply and Apply Again

Rabbinical students share many characteristics, experiences, and interests, but they are not entirely a self-selected group. They must apply and be accepted by a rabbinical school admissions committee. Without that acceptance, the next steps toward becoming a rabbi are not possible unless the individual seeks private tutelage from a rabbi which is not at all common in progressive streams of Judaism. This study did not have a control group of people who were rejected from rabbinical school, but there were a handful who applied once, were given feedback regarding improving their chances for acceptance, and applied again. Their experiences provided a window on the standards expected of a potential rabbinical student and future rabbi. Joel, a Ziegler student, shared his experience:

I started doing weekly study with [my rabbi]. He, the new cantor, and the director of education had a weekly Talmud study that they let me join. You know they got me re-integrated; they started having me give sermons. They were grooming me . . . so I applied to JTS. . . . And JTS said we love your passion, we love your

those of Christian clergy does not signify the lack of a Jewish spiritual dimension in the rabbinate or in the students' drive to be a rabbi, but signals that unlike Christianity, belief does not take center stage in Judaism.

commitment, you just don't have any higher Jewish education. I took one Jewish studies class in college . . . and I went home with my tail between my legs. . . .

Joel then went on to earn a Master's in Jewish Education at JTS and spent summers working at Camp Ramah. He decided to apply again, this time to JTS and Ziegler. Even with desirable credentials—rabbinic references, text, prayer leadership, and Jewish communal experience—admissions committees have the final say on acceptance. Despite feeling kicked in the gut, Joel continued to pursue Jewish professional training. He applied again.

So, JTS said “Thank you, you need more Jewish knowledge you need more Talmud, you need more Hebrew.” Again, [even though] there were people who got in that year who had less Talmud and had less Hebrew than I did. That I think is the stock answer that they give, so whatever. I applied to Ziegler and I did get in.

At the end of the admissions process, Joel was accepted to Ziegler, a school that saw the rabbinic value in his experiences and skill sets.

Other students shared similar patterns of behavior, from rejection and dejection to increased engagement with Jewish learning and communities and then reapplying to rabbinical school. Hilary, an HUC student, summarized this part of her journey: “I just thought that this career was going to link all of the things that I was good at and that I had learned about and that I could really do a good job at different aspects of it. . . . [T]hey turned me down because I really didn't know that much.” Hilary returned to Israel to study, teach, integrate into a Jewish community, and master Hebrew. She reflected, “I'm

really glad they turned me down because I really needed that extra time to really feel confident and learn more.”

Just as students have an image of an ideal rabbi, so do admissions committees. They accept or reject applicants based on their perceived ability to become that rabbi in the future. The students who buy into a shared image of an ideal rabbi and see the institution as integral to their journey toward that goal, work to improve their chances and apply again.

The idea to apply to rabbinical school may originate with the individual self or an Other. The students’ decisions to pursue the rabbinate as a career signified the adoption of a professional perspective in their Jewish lives. The students asserted their agency and made choices that bolstered their résumés and communicated the Jewish experiential capital and knowledge valued by rabbinical schools. The students’ journey narratives began to gel into stories whose logical next way-station was applying to rabbinical school. They self-edited their journey narratives, highlighting those events that showcased their proclivity for Jewish engagement and aptitude for Jewish leadership. The rabbinate is the coalescence of particular knowledge, skills, affect, and lifestyle; recognizing the potential for this coalescence of self in line with who a rabbi is and what a rabbi does signaled the professional route on the students’ Jewish journeys.

Conclusion

Journeys and their narratives are the first, and most personal, context for rabbinic formation. Horowitz argues that “identity is the result of an ongoing process rather than an entity that is fully acquired at a particular point in a person’s lifetime. Thus, a person’s

Jewish identity can be conceptualized as both the cause and consequence of choices made at certain points throughout an individual's lifetime" (2003: xi). From primary socialization through the phases of secondary socialization, the rabbinical students have illustrated how Jewish experiences shaped their personal Jewish identities and led them to reflect on those encounters and experiences with a professional lens. In each stage of formation, the rabbinical students touched on all of the different contexts that ended up emerging during the Israel Year and contributing to rabbinic formation: institutions, Israel, Jewish time, people, and values. The relative consistency between contexts suggests categorical commonalities between identity inputs over the life course. It may also suggest relationships and interactions that are sources of Jewish capital. These contexts and sources of identity inputs and capital are the same whether the individual has had a "Steady High" Jewish journey or an "Increasing" Jewish journey. The only difference is the time frame. That is, a "Steady High" would have experienced particular Jewish contexts and influences beginning in primary socialization whereas an "Increasing" would have experienced these contexts compressed into a shorter span of time, perhaps beginning in emerging adulthood.

Symbolic Interactionism provides a theoretical lens through which to understand how the rabbinical students engaged with their memories, viewed their identity journeys, and shared their narratives. The rabbinical students reflected on experiences and relationships from their past. They interacted with, organized, and attributed meaning to memories in order to develop a coherent, cohesive narrative arc that reinforced their decision to pursue the rabbinate. The students interacted with and within Jewish

institutions, Israel, Jewish time, people, and values through activities, dialogue, symbols, and gestures. They gleaned both personal and professional meaning from these interactions. They developed relationships that gave form and content to their identity journeys which they viewed as legitimizing their pursuit of the rabbinate and influencing rabbinic identity formation.

In primary socialization, interactions and experiences are foundations for the future. If the students had a relationship with Israel during this time, it was a matter of heritage; that is, their parents or grandparents had relationships with Israel and shared that value. As young children, they engaged with Jewish time by celebrating and observing Shabbat and holidays in family contexts either at home or in an institutional context (synagogue or JCC) selected by parents. In primary socialization, children interacted most with parents and immediate family members. Parents were the child's first significant other, agents of socialization, and role models. During this stage, Jewish values—or values relevant to Judaism—were absorbed as they were observed.

In early secondary socialization, interactions and experiences for the students were mediated by parental input, but children and adolescents asserted agency within those curated contexts. The individuals began to see value and meaning in Jewish experiences. A few of them decided that they wanted to be rabbis when they grew up. In this stage, as children and adolescents, the students interacted with institutions because their attendance and membership were via parental initiative. They may have developed cursory relationships with Israel through exposure in Hebrew school curricula or in synagogue. The individuals engaged with Jewish time by marking their own bar or bat

mitzvahs or celebrating Shabbat at camp. They were still involved in family celebrations, but Jewish time may have begun to have personal relevance and meaning. During this stage, the students' journey narratives began to develop trajectory, though not necessarily direction.

During secondary socialization as emerging adults, while their peers may have moved away from Jewish institutions these current rabbinical students generally asserted agency in seeking out relationships with institutions such as a college Hillel or synagogue where they could teach Hebrew school. Their relationships with Israel took on a personal angle as many visited Israel on a birthright Israel trip or spent a summer, semester, or year studying either at an Israeli university or on a year-long program such as Otzma. A few students made aliyah, illustrating a more intimate relationship with Israel. These emerging adults sought out Shabbat meals and holiday services offered through communal institutions and/or they celebrated Jewish holidays and Shabbat in peer groups. As they exercised agency in seeking out these experiences, they were also looking to reinforce practices and integrate, or maintain closeness with, Jewish time in their lives. They interacted with Jewish values by seeking out experiences that they found to be meaningful.

In the pre-professional stage of secondary socialization, individuals sought out interactions and experiences that were oriented toward the goal of attending rabbinical school or acquiring skills or knowledge that were relevant to serving as a rabbi. They began to see themselves in a rabbinic role. In this stage, the individuals developed institutional attachments through membership and/or employment. They sought

opportunities to connect professionally with Israel or to otherwise further a relationship that had been created earlier. In their relationships with Jewish time, the individuals began to take on leadership roles in rituals and celebrations. They worked to develop skills that they deemed important to rabbinic function. Their relationships with other people revealed that they aspired to be like other rabbis and do what they do. They began to see themselves reflected in current rabbinical students. In the context of values, the individuals sought professionally relevant, enriching experiences to build their professional portfolios and resumes while continuing to search for personally meaningful and fulfilling Jewish experiences.

Now, as accepted rabbinical students, they are in Israel, a context their schools have deemed to be professionally necessary to their training. The students now foresee themselves making their personal relationships with Israel professionally relevant. The students see the role of the rabbi vis-à-vis Israel as a facilitator. That is, someone who facilitates understanding of Israel, facilitates conversations about Israel, facilitates relationships with Israel, and facilitates experiences in Israel. In order to facilitate Israel for American Jews, the rabbi must have knowledge about Israel as well as a personal connection. Ilana explained that, “as a Jewish community leader, we have to be willing to not only know enough of the facts to be able to share knowledge of country, but be able to share why we as individuals feel connected to Israel as a country.” For David, that connection to Israel needs to be complex. He explained, “[i]t doesn't mean that he or she has to love Israel unequivocally or even be hypercritical of Israel. I just think there needs to be a complex and nuanced relationship that takes into account a lot of factors ...” The

relationships that American Jews have with Israel are broad and varied; a rabbi must recognize that diversity and be able to facilitate relationships with Israel with sensitivity, integrating the factual with the emotional.

The journeys of the Reform and Conservative rabbinical students are both personal and professional. As the students reflected on their paths to rabbinical school, they illustrated elements of and forces for identity formation. They told of the foundations from their families; summers spent at Jewish camp; opportunities to teach, learn, and lead prayer services; relationships that promoted the pursuit of the rabbinate; and experiences deemed both personally and professionally meaningful. The students arrived with various pre-existing relationships with Israel. The students' journeys are but one context for rabbinic formation during the Israel Year, the overarching context for this phase in the students' rabbinic identity formation. The students' journeys may be similar to each other in terms of experiences and interpretations of meaning, but they are fundamentally subjective and personal. Beginning with the next chapter, The Institutional Context, the contexts will be shared. Shared experiences in common contexts are central to the standardization necessary for professional training and rabbinic formation. The students' identity narratives—their Jewish journeys—explain how they arrived at the Israel year; now they will explore what it means to be in the Israel Year as it unfolds.

CHAPTER THREE
INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS OF THE ISRAEL YEAR AND THEIR
INFLUENCE ON RABBINIC FORMATION

Introduction

Rabbinic education, as a type of professional education, is rooted in the institutions of rabbinical schools, seminaries, and yeshivot. Seminaries represent the formal training stage for religious professionals, situated between selection and career development (Beckford and Demerath 2007). The institutions and the faculty therein are tasked with transmitting theoretical, practical, and normative knowledge and the particular skills that are required for one to function first as a student and then to perform the tasks and take on the role of a member of clergy (Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Marler 1997). The institutions also provide their students with social and religious capital valued by and necessary for American seminarians and clergy alike (Finke and Dougherty 2002). Though the practical aspects of training may take place external to the institution, the experiences still fall within the purview of the institutions. The institutions confer ordination [Heb., *semikha*]—that is, grant professional legitimacy (Weber 1993)—to those students who meet objective criteria of mastery (Nesbitt 2007). The institutions are the structures that were created for the professionalization of the role (here, of a rabbi) and the maintenance of the profession across time and space (Gamoran, Secada, and Marrett 2007).

Maintaining the profession,⁶⁷ Abbott argues, means defining a set of occupational tasks and the work needed for the role. Abbott's approach addresses boundaries between professions—each profession's jurisdiction—in particular where a profession's tasks border on, could be taken over by, or may be outsourced to other professionals. Abbott's focus on the distinctive tasks of the occupation fits well with an inspection of rabbinic education during the Israel Year. Specifically, Abbott's perspective prompts questions about what the rabbinical students are learning that sets rabbinic education apart from Jewish education and how rabbinic education sets the students apart from Jewish laity.

Becker's (1961) "situational learning" and Miller's (1970) concept of "learning the ropes" both address the practical aspects of professional training. The goal is not so much the students' socialization as engagement in the activity of the professions. The focus is on doing the work and being shaped into the desired professional as a result. In terms of the Israel Year, when work experience outside of the institutions is absent, engagement with and learning the practice of the profession is less direct, focused more on skills and knowledge and less on application in a public space. Bernstein (1971) employs the terms "collection" and "integration" to describe the course work and internship stages of professional education, respectively. This perspective, focusing on acquiring and employing information, carves out a place for experiential education and experiential learning in professional education. When the skills and knowledge are

⁶⁷ The terms "profession," "professionalization," and "professionalism" address status, occupation, training, and behavior. They are interrelated and complementary, though not identical and not used precisely in the same way. Clergy are a "status profession" (Elliott 1972), sharing the classification with doctors and lawyers. This category separates clergy from occupations that have been professionalized through specific, higher-level training. Professionalism is the institutionalization of expertise in people (Abbott 1988:323).

integrated into the individual's own self concept and guide his or her behavior, this indicates the achievement of a professional habitus.

The end-goal of rabbinic education, as a process of professionalizing Jewish practice and leadership, is the formation of a particular type of professional who has displayed mastery of expert knowledge and relevant skills. Ordination confers status and authority. In particular, modern clergy exhibit rational-legal authority⁶⁸ which addresses the professional training and bureaucratic tasks of clergy. A member of the clergy has the authority to exercise leadership because “she or he is believed to protect, interpret, and represent the group's core values and beliefs and contribute to their realization” (Carroll 1991:43). The roles of the rabbi and the contexts within which he or she exercises authority define the parameters of rabbinic leadership and the place and value of the profession in society. The production of more rabbis in rabbinical schools maintains the presence and legitimacy of the profession and professionals, even though the ways in which people may regard or interact with them shifts over time.

This chapter examines the institutional contexts for rabbinic formation during the Israel Year: Hebrew Union College's (HUC) Jerusalem campus, the Conservative Yeshiva (CY), and the Schechter Institute (Schechter). The formal institutional contexts are grounded in and guided by goals for rabbinic education. Carroll (1971) defines the

⁶⁸ Traditional definitions of authority begin with Weber who divides authority into three ideal types: traditional authority, charismatic authority, and rational-legal authority. Traditional authority rests on “an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them” (Weber 1968:215). Charismatic authority is based on “the devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative pattern or order revealed or ordained by him” (215). Lastly, rational-legal authority rests on “a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority to issue commands” (215). In reality, the authority types exist in combination with each other.

goals of theological education, which can be applied to rabbinic education, as 1) mastery of the intellectual equipment necessary for the ministry; 2) development of practical skill competence, including the theories and norms that inform those skills; 3) spiritual formation, the development and deepening of spiritual life; and, 4) secular awareness about the place of religion and religious organizations in the world (1971:64).

These goals of religious knowledge, practical skills, spiritual formation, and secular awareness were expressed and balanced by each school in the context of its physical space, daily and weekly schedules, curricula, and pedagogies. Indeed, the educational methods used by the schools – their pedagogies – reflected these goals. Theological schools use pedagogies of interpretation to increase knowledge, pedagogies of practice to teach skills, pedagogies of contextualization to engender secular awareness, and pedagogies of formation to address the fundamental spiritual being of their participants (Foster, Dahill, Goleman, and Toletino 2006).

Analyses of schools as institutions, and of education more generally, often employ a top-down approach; that is, assessments of curricula and pedagogies are from the perspective of the teacher. This study, however, in focusing on students' experiences, utilizes a bottom-up approach. While this study presents ethnographic observations to set the scene, the stages of rabbinic formation emerged from students' comments and the narratives of their experiences. Likewise, the goals of theological education (Carroll 1971) and pedagogies of theological education (Foster et al. 2006) were approached from the student perspective. Thus, this angle treated both formal and informal educational

scenarios as experiential learning. What the students learned, how they learned, and where they learned influenced their rabbinic formation.

From a Symbolic Interactionism perspective, the rabbinical students interacted with the institutional contexts from their position in the student role, embedded within the fabric of the institutions. The students consumed the information and skills that were taught within the institutions. They interacted with all aspects of the institutions—structure, content, and abstract elements—and, by doing so, contributed to the meaning and culture of the space and their own identity formation. The students interacted with each other as co-travelers on a shared journey, looking to one another for assistance with classwork, homework, and to navigate the culture of the institution and life off-campus. The student role rooted the students in the institutional contexts, their affiliations signaled membership in the space and the larger context of professionalized rabbinic education. By experiencing the Israel Year together, the students created social capital—“connections among individuals” (Putnam 2001:19)—through reciprocity within their interpersonal networks and communities on each campus and across seminary affiliations.

From the students’ point of view, the process of becoming a rabbi – and the place of this Israel Year in that process – is more evolutionary than a matter of achieving discrete curricular goals. The stages of their formation, which have been adapted from Carroll et al. (1997) generally included encounter, evaluation, struggle, and resolution/integration. HUC, Schechter, and the CY, as institutions, provided both context and content for stages of formation. Within the spaces of the schools, students

encountered curricula and pedagogies. The students struggled with these elements, searching for meaning while acquiring knowledge and skills deemed necessary by their schools for a future rabbi. On occasion, students expressed intentions to integrate an element of learning from the classroom, *beit midrash* [house of study or study hall], or prayer service into their personal Jewish practice and how they viewed themselves as becoming rabbis. Through their experiences with and within institutional contexts, the rabbinical students acquired knowledge, gained skills, developed habits, and formed a sense of self that revealed institutional goals and the implementation of particular pedagogies and curricula. The students were not just socialized to a particular “student role” (Gracey 1975), but took a longer view toward application in their rabbinic careers.

This chapter opens with profiles of each school which describe the physical spaces and provide a general overview of what takes place in those spaces—specifically, descriptions of the rhythms of daily and weekly schedules on-campus. The two subsequent sections explore the content of the students’ educational experiences—first on-campus, in classes and through prayer services—and then off-campus through (albeit limited) student pulpit experiences. These experiences are assessed through the frameworks of the goals and pedagogies of theological education, respectively, with a focus on the process of rabbinic formation.

Institutional Profiles

In the world of organizations, form and function interact with goals and purpose to shape institutions. Seminaries differ from other types of institutions, and even other types of schools, because their structure and function are grounded in the values of a

religious tradition and religious community. However, they are still in the business of producing a particular type of person and professional—in this case, a rabbi. The production is formalized and streamlined through the physical campus, the hierarchical administrative structure, curricula, and pedagogies.

The shared goals of rabbinic education provide somewhat standardized inputs for the students at each institution and are intended to reinforce the goals and priorities set for the students by their home seminaries in the United States. Students from HUC in the U.S. studied at HUC's Jerusalem campus, students from the Ziegler School studied at the Conservative Yeshiva (CY), and students from the Jewish Theological Seminary studied at the Schechter Institute (Schechter). The parity—aspirational or achieved—between these Israeli and U.S.-based institutions signaled an organizational partnership in the task of forming future rabbis in this one year away from the home campus. This section examines HUC, the CY, and Schechter in terms of their physical spaces and daily and weekly schedules. These are the basic institutional contexts for rabbinic formation during the Israel Year.

Hebrew Union College – Jerusalem campus

Hebrew Union College's Jerusalem campus is located on King David Street between the illustrious King David and David Citadel hotels and just a short walk from the walls of the Old City. The location was intentional and symbolic, placing Reform Judaism just beyond the walls of traditional Judaism at the borderline between the ancient and modern cities of Jerusalem. The campus itself is a maze of limestone buildings and

manicured open spaces: an organizational wing which includes a sanctuary for prayer services, library, museum, classrooms, an auditorium, nursery school, and a *moadon* [student lounge]. The campus connects to Beit Shmuel, a dormitory/hotel/events center run by the World Union for Progressive Judaism. On sunny days, the campus literally radiated warmth from the ground up; on rainy days—of which there were many during this particular school year—the stone facades were gray with damp and cold to the touch.

Inside, the furniture and interior design were reminiscent of a time (the 1970s or 1980s, perhaps) when the campus was full and buzzing with activity. Today, except for one classroom that had a SmartBoard, the spaces seemed old and tired. Several seats in the auditorium were missing backs, desks, or both. The general state of the interiors was not so much indicative of neglect as it is of competing budget priorities. Indisputably, providing employment to a few more people was more important than buying new chairs and tables.

As with the workweek in Israel, the academic week at HUC began on Sunday morning. The daily schedule was unrelenting. The short breaks between classes left little time for students to run to their lockers in the *moadon* and use the restroom. The entire student body was largely on campus during the same hours and on the same days, reminiscent of high school. A standard day ran from 8:30am until mid- to late-afternoon except for Thursday when end-time was approximately 1:00pm. HUC students' schedules were based on their Hebrew fluency level. The Hebrew level (*alef*, *bet*, and *gimmel*—the first three letters of the Hebrew alphabet; *alef* is the lowest level) determined most of the classes that students took, with the exception of electives taught

in English. Required courses included Biblical Hebrew Grammar, Bible, Modern Hebrew, Liturgy, Second Temple History (Fall semester), and *Chazal* (Sages, taught in the Spring semester). In addition, a rabbinical student seminar was held on Sunday afternoons and History of Zionism (Fall semester) or electives (Spring semester) were held on Tuesday afternoons. During the fall semester, the students gathered for a short pre-Shabbat program, called *siyyum ha'shavua* [conclusion of the week] featuring a *dvar Torah* [short sermon] and pastries.

On Sunday afternoons and Thursday mornings, students gathered for peer-led prayer services in Murstein, the campus chapel. On Tuesday mornings, students were expected to attend—but did not consistently do so—prayer services run by the Israeli rabbinical students also held in Murstein. On Sundays and Tuesdays, the students convened for program-wide lectures in history and liturgy, respectively. Following the lectures, students attended discussion sections (seminar-style classes for clarifying and delving further into the material with a faculty member) based on their Hebrew level. On Wednesdays, the entire student body participated in HUC's Israel Seminar. These programs either took place on campus, with outside lecturers coming in, or the students went off-campus, either locally or farther afield.

Based on the number of in-class hours from the course schedule, learning Hebrew was clearly the focus of the Israel year. The placement of Hebrew classes daily during the morning sessions reinforced their significance. According to Max, a student, delving into the original Hebrew texts reflected that value of the institution: "I think they're making a point about the importance of Hebrew." At HUC, learning Hebrew was not only a stated

objective of the Israel year, but something the students expected. According to HUC recruitment materials, “By the end of year one [of HUC rabbinical school] . . . [y]ou’ll know Hebrew.” Though students reported varying levels of success, they agreed that it was valued by the institutions and in Judaism in general. Knowledge of Modern Hebrew is a form of social capital; knowledge of biblical Hebrew is a form of religious capital.

Lunchtime was scheduled down-time. The hour and twenty-minute-long lunch break meant that students often did homework, met to plan prayer services, or went on short excursions in small groups. HUC was a full-service campus, but was also just a 10-minute walk from the center of town. Many students purchased lunch at the sandwich shop in Beit Shmuel or at the lunch counter in the moadon. When the weather was pleasant, students ate outdoors, sitting on any of the many steps and ledges around campus. Frequently, the school hosted optional lunch-and-learns for the students. Regardless of programming, several faculty members regularly ate lunch with the students, intentionally attempting to get to know the students better and have a presence outside of the classroom.

Student interaction did not end at the conclusion of the school day, whether it was to study in the library on-campus or go to the town of Mevasseret Zion to volunteer with kids in an Absorption Center. Approximately half of the HUC students volunteered weekly with the Mevasseret community. It was a way for them to leave the HUC campus and participate in Israeli life, but still maintain a modicum of comfort, because they went as a group. More so than the Conservative Yeshiva or Schechter, HUC’s insularity—based on the intensity of the on-campus schedule which had implications for how and

with whom students spent their time during the week and on weekends—was often referred to as a “bubble.” The space, schedule, and general flow of campus and classroom-based life made it an apt description.

The HUC campus was the primary context for students’ formal academic experiences of the Israel Year. The maze-like layout of the buildings, the outdated design and condition of the interiors, the academic-heavy course content and frontal/lecture-based pedagogies employed, and the daily and weekly schedule, all taken together created the environment. HUC’s institutional structure communicated a sense of immersion in learning from course materials, faculty, and community.

Conservative Yeshiva

The Conservative Yeshiva was a 10-minute walk across the street, around the corner, and up the hill from HUC. The CY was almost hidden next to Moreshet Yisrael synagogue and the Fuchsberg Center which took up the entire northeastern corner of Agron Street, just down the hill from the Prime Minister’s residence. Though there was a larger campus, the focal point of the Conservative Yeshiva was the beit midrash, accessible through a small garden or internally in the building at the base of a staircase. Both columns and arches, covered in Jerusalem stone-colored and fuzzy, noise-reducing, synthetic material made the room feel warm and welcoming. Bookcases lined the walls with a break at the front of the room for the *aron kodesh* [Holy Ark/ Torah cabinet]. Tables of various lengths and chairs filled the center of the room. Some spots at the tables were claimed by students as a personal *makom kavua* [permanent place].

The beit midrash was used for everything—study, prayer, lectures, programs, and eating. It was a compact space, but unless every seat at every table was occupied, it did not feel crowded. An office for the head of the yeshiva was in one corner at the back of the room; a classroom was in the other. Between the two were more bookcases, tables, chairs, and a hallway with the coat hooks and restrooms. A small kitchenette was off to the side of the classroom. There were student lockers near the doorway to the stairs leading up to the entry floor of the entire building. Some classes were held in an adjacent building owned by the CY, the original building of the yeshiva; administrative offices were adjacent to that, down a garden path. When the weather was sunny, students would lie out on the benches of the Fuchsberg Center’s small amphitheater.

The school week at the Conservative Yeshiva ran from Sunday through Thursday. Prayer services punctuated the rhythm of the school day. Each day began with Shacharit at 8:00am. After Shacharit, many students made breakfast for themselves in the small kitchenette, taking their bowls of cold cereal, oatmeal, or yogurt with them to class or into the beit midrash to learn with a *chevruta* [study partner for dyad learning].

The CY curriculum was Talmud-heavy, as expected for a yeshiva. Four mornings a week, students learned Talmud from 9:05am until 12:30pm. One morning per week, students studied *Tanakh* [Hebrew Bible, encompassing Torah, Prophets, and Writings]. The original texts were always studied together with commentaries. In general, following in the traditional yeshiva model, each class included a shiur in a classroom and chevruta learning—called *seder* [order]—in the beit midrash. With the exception of Hebrew language, all classes flowed in the same way. As with HUC, Ziegler students at the CY

were tracked based on Hebrew ability; however, the relative paucity of both classes and students meant that most students were together in the same classes most of the time.

Lunchtime was a welcome and necessary break in the day for the Ziegler students. The students had routines and often ate in small groups, whether in the yeshiva or at any number of restaurants in the center of Jerusalem. Jake explained the standard approach to lunchtime: “We have a group that likes going out for meals ranging from falafel, some days we’re ambitious and go to an all-you-can-eat grill bar . . . Somedays we’ll go to SuperSol and pool our money and buy rolls and deli meats and have a communal lunch.”

Hebrew *ulpan* [language course] met from 1:45pm until 3pm. By mid-year, many students had no qualms about missing the occasional ulpan class. An hour and fifteen minutes a couple times per week did not promote substantive Hebrew language learning and with no courses taught exclusively in Hebrew, the students felt like attending the class was just not worth their time.

Mincha prayer services at 3pm marked the start of the afternoon session, running from 3:20pm to 6:15pm. Afternoon course offerings were more varied than the mornings. A standard student schedule included Tanakh on Sundays, *Midrash* [Rabbinic, story-based commentary] on Mondays, *Halakha L’Maaseh* [Practical Jewish Law] on Tuesdays, and *Poskim* [legal decisors] and the Development of Halakha on Wednesdays. As per Ziegler’s requirements, the rabbinical students only needed one semester each of Midrash and Poskim. The CY offered the class both Fall and Spring; the students decided individually which semester they wanted to take which class. Just as with the Talmud

classes in the morning, the afternoon courses also included chevruta/seder and shiur, reinforcing the classification and identity of the institution as a yeshiva.

At the end of the day, students participated in a variety of off-campus extra-curricular programs such as facilitating a beit midrash program for American study abroad students at Hebrew University or a rabbinical student group at the Hartman Institute. However, students largely agreed that the long CY days did not leave much time to experience Israel. The class hours, physical space, the rhythm of learning based on moving between classroom and chevruta study, and the presence and nature of faculty interactions reinforced that being at the CY was an immersive yeshiva experience.

Schechter Institute

The Schechter Institute, removed from the center of town, was located in the part of Jerusalem dedicated to the modern state. The larger area was home to the Knesset, Supreme Court, Israel Museum, and Givat Ram campus of the Hebrew University. Schechter, through physical position, gained—or hopes to gain—symbolic proximity for itself as an institution on par with a university, and for *Masorti* [lit., traditional; most closely related to American Conservative Judaism] Judaism in the Israeli landscape. The Schechter campus was notoriously difficult to reach. Schechter was located through a nature preserve and up the side of a hill in a residential neighborhood. The campus felt remote and removed from the bustling Jerusalem neighborhoods where the students resided.

During this research project, the Schechter campus was in transition. At the start of the academic year, everything was centered in the old three-story building, a long, rectangular structure with a single hallway running the length of each floor. Classrooms and offices, uniform in shape and size were on both sides. Midway through the year, the new building opened, adjacent to the old. It was a spacious, airy, light-filled, multi-storey structure, pink and tan in color from the Jerusalem stone. The new building was rounded in places and a plethora of windows let in ample sunlight. A tiered garden with the seven Biblical species⁶⁹ sat just outside the floor-to-ceiling windows of the beit midrash. The new building was an inviting, attractive place, but with faculty offices, student lockers, and the small café still in the old building, the students still spent much time walking between the two.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Schechter Institute was the student body. The JTS students, a small group this year by any measure, studied with a handful of Israeli rabbinical students and a group of students from the Seminario Rabinico Latinoamericano in Argentina. The vast majority of Schechter students were studying for Masters' degrees in Jewish education. They may have had no connection to the Masorti movement and, as the JTS students reported, may not have even been aware that they are studying at a Masorti institution. Unlike at HUC and the Conservative Yeshiva, the American rabbinical students did not drive campus life. They took classes with other students and participated in programming of their own in the shared space, but aside from

⁶⁹ The seven Biblical species include wheat, barley, grapes, olives, dates, pomegranates, and figs. They are native to the land of Israel and are mentioned specifically in Deuteronomy 8:8.

organizing (or trying to organize) Shacharit and Mincha *minyanim* [prayer services with a quorum of ten], they did not have a forceful presence.

Language was perhaps the most visible element that set Schechter apart from both HUC and the Conservative Yeshiva. Hebrew was the common spoken language on campus. JTS students attended classes entirely in Hebrew and spoke Hebrew not necessarily with each other, but with other Schechter students, faculty, and administrators. As an aside, students noted that their Hebrew improved when they were in classes without other JTS students; English could not be a crutch, which it often was when JTS students took classes together or learned together in chevruta. Hebrew was the shared language of the place, defining the Schechter Institute as a decidedly Israeli institution.

The Schechter schedule for the JTS students differed significantly from the HUC and CY schedules. The students had many class options because they took electives with Israeli Master's in Education students and the classes met less frequently, often only once per week. JTS students may have had classes only three days per week, depending on which courses they chose to take. The variation of schedules between students meant that some of the students rarely saw each other.

Like the Conservative Yeshiva, days at Schechter began with minyan, or at least an attempt to form a minyan. Because of the demographics of the Schechter Institute this particular year—specifically because of the small number of JTS students—minyanim did not always take place. In the mornings, the JTS students at Schechter took three core courses: Talmud, Halakha, and Hebrew. By second semester, a few of the students no

longer took Hebrew, having achieved sufficient fluency. Talmud met twice a week; Halakha once. Mincha minyan took place—when they had enough people—before lunchtime. The lunch break lasted an hour, but waiting and Mincha could cut the time more than in half. Regardless, afternoon classes began at 1:00pm.

During the first semester, several students took electives in the afternoons; in the spring they took them in the mornings. Students chose from whichever electives they liked: Midrash, History, or Bible, for example, which could be based on straight text or focus on a theme such as gender or interfaith relations. A few of the electives, such as Israeli history, were taught in English. For some students, electives were an opportunity to delve into pet topics while in Israel. For example, in the United States Becky was very involved with interfaith groups. At Schechter, she took a class entitled “Miracles in the Literature of Chazal in the New Testament and Tanakh.”

The flow of the week at Schechter was based on the individual student’s schedule. All of the JTS students took a couple of classes together during the week, but their individualized schedules did not necessarily provide a cohort-wide rhythm. Co-curricular programming was noticeably absent for the JTS students at Schechter. Though there were campus-wide programs, the JTS students had no obligation to attend them. In previous years, when the number of JTS students at Schechter was higher, they had more of a presence on campus and may have influenced the institution more. This year, however, the students’ on-campus experiences were limited to the classroom and beit midrash. JTS students, though they may have had enriching experiences at Schechter, also had the time and space—as well as the language skills—to explore Israel on their own and with each

other. Studying at Schechter was an Israeli experience with the benefits and challenges of Hebrew immersion in coursework with Israeli classmates. The language and cultural environments on-campus and the openness of the schedule enabled the JTS students to put their language skills to practical use.

HUC, the CY, and Schechter were the three main institutional contexts of the Israel Year. Each was different in terms of specifics, but they all shared features that made them recognizable as specifically Jewish educational institutions. The three schools, as physical spaces with particular internal structures and schedules that communicated educational and identity values and priorities in-line with those of the U.S.-based schools, were the institutional place of encounter. The curricula of HUC, the CY, and Schechter, as transmitted through pedagogies, were starting points for the rabbinical students' institution-based experiences of the Israel year and rabbinic formation. The formation process took place through what and how the students encountered material, both formally and informally, and how they defined, struggled to find meaning in, and applied what they learned to their lives.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Whereas physical spaces and schedules provided the structure for rabbinic education during the Israel Year, curriculum and pedagogy were, respectively, the content and mode of transmittal. In broad terms, educating clergy involves the teaching of knowledge, skills, and a “normative perspective” (Carroll et al. 1997). The normative perspective, an orientation or stance toward the world, serves as a shared rationale for a given subject or practice. It may begin as a subject for learning and debate, but must

become part of the rabbinical habitus, the professional's ingrained dispositions, capacities, and behaviors (Wacquant 2005).

As mentioned in the discussion of the schools' schedules, the formal curricula across institutions were similar, reflecting general agreement about what one must study—Bible, Jewish Law, Liturgy, History, Midrash, and others—in order to achieve the desired standard of Jewish literacy to be considered an “expert.”⁷⁰ Students also needed resource knowledge to know where to look for particular types of information and how to use myriad dictionaries and reference materials to access more texts. The act of learning is also a skill that requires practice.

Rabbinic education differs from standard Jewish education because one's training is guided by the public functions, standards for, and status of the rabbinic role. The students must prove mastery of that particular knowledge in order to be ordained. Rabbinic education differs from Christian seminarian education because there is no history of tension regarding professionalization. *Semikha* [rabbinic ordination] has not always required attending rabbinical school,⁷¹ but has always required high-level learning and extensive knowledge (Telushkin 1991). The Jewish tradition is literature rich—even

⁷⁰ Courses that speak to rabbinic practice such as Pastoral Counseling are part of the state-side curricula. To put rabbinic education in context, the standard Christian seminary curricular program, in addressing the intellectual standards of faith traditions and theological education, typically includes “study of the Scriptures, (often in the original languages of Hebrew and Greek), church history, theology, ethics, and various courses in the ministerial arts – for example, preaching, worship leadership, and pastoral care and counseling” (Carroll 1971:10).

⁷¹ Learning privately with a rabbi is also an accepted though less common model, particularly in the United States and even more particularly for Reform and Conservative Jews. In Israel, men who pass upwards of a dozen exams on Jewish law are granted *semikha* by the Chief Rabbinate.

the more mystical strains of Judaism are text-centric—and being learned has always been valued, yet required for rabbis.

As a complement, implicit curriculum refers to the teaching and learning processes for the formative values, assumptions, patterns of interactions, and relationships present in seminary culture. In addition, the null curricula are those things not taught and not offered to students (Eisner 1985:54). The implicit curricula are qualities of self that have rabbinic resonance that the students pick up in classes and through the normal course of interactions, either in backstage scenarios (Goffman 1959)⁷² or not.

Faculty members play significant roles in the transmission of both explicit/formal and implicit/informal curricula. The rabbinical students viewed the educators, from the start, as not only people who needed to teach them information, but as people with the potential—possibly the obligation—to be rabbinic role models even if they are not rabbis. Pedagogy is the conduit for cultural and identity transmission employed by seminary administrators and faculty, the primary agents of formation, even if they are unable to clearly articulate a definition of formation (Rosov 2001). According to Foster et al. (2006), seminary educators are tasked with instructing their students in the

. . . disciplined analysis of sacred texts; in the formation of their pastoral

identities, dispositions and values; in the understanding of the complex social,

⁷² Goffman (1959) explores the concept of stages—here, the interest is in the backstage area—in his dramaturgical theory of identity and the presentation of the self. The backstage area is removed from audiences and private. This is the space, supposedly, where one need not wear a costume, play a particular role, or be selective in behaviors because of a type of audience.

political, and congregational conditions that surround them; and in the skills of preacher, counselor, liturgist, and leader through which they exercise their pastoral, priestly, and rabbinical responsibilities (2006:xi-xii).

These align with four pedagogies of theological education: interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance. Educators employ these pedagogies to teach different aspects of the clergy role.⁷³ The varied pedagogies and tasks required for complete clergy education span the formal and informal, and explicit and implicit aspects of theological education and pastoral formation.

Rabbinic education exists along the university-yeshiva spectrum. The university model used at HUC is characterized by lecture-based classes with direct questions asked of the students and translation go-arounds (i.e. a student reads one or two lines and translates them into either English or Modern Hebrew and the next person does the same and so on). In contrast, with the yeshiva model, present at the CY and Schechter, each lesson includes a shiur either following or preceding seder/chevruta learning in the beit midrash. The shiur-seder model is “Jewish” in the traditional sense of Jewish text teaching and learning. This format is used in yeshivot the world over. The university model, most consistently utilized by HUC, is not traditionally Jewish, but it is consistent with Reform Judaism’s history of modernizing Jewish textual learning by placing it in the academy (Liebman 1968). The CY and Schechter used a more university-like model for

⁷³ The knowledge, tasks, and roles of the rabbi are differentiated in rabbinic education coursework to support the students’ mastery of the subjects. They may have integrating projects (such as writing short sermons) or practice integrating knowledge within the context of an internship or teaching Hebrew school. Because the subjects are differentiated for classes, the fact that instructors are not rabbis, but rather scholars or practitioners, gives students direct access to the information and gives them the opportunity to practice using a pastoral imagination (Dykstra 2001) to integrate knowledge into rabbinic roles.

courses such as history or philosophy that were not classified as *limudei kodesh* [holy studies]; the university model was employed at HUC for all subject matter, including *limudei kodesh*. In short, the pedagogies employed for rabbinic training are enabled by the faculty through the curricula and are grounded in the educational model of each school.

Two case studies are presented below, one example of the university model from HUC and one example of the yeshiva model from Schechter. Ethnographic observations of the classes and chevruta learning session illustrate what the students were taught, how the information was presented, how the students interacted with the material and their classmates, and how they processed the information as future American rabbis.

Learning Liturgy at HUC

Every week, the HUC students attended a weekly Liturgy lecture and seminar, the latter based on Hebrew level. Liturgy has value as a subject because of its direct applicability to the tasks of a rabbi – both the knowledge and the skills gained are clearly relevant. Engaging the students in discussions about liturgy helped them more fully apply their Hebrew knowledge and translation skills while identifying the rabbi's roles and responsibilities for leading prayer services and interpreting liturgy, as the following example illustrates.

The topic this day's Liturgy lecture and seminar was Tachanun, the set of repentance prayers said after the silent repetition of the Amidah prayer. Tachanun prayers are not included in the newest edition of the Reform prayer book, *Mishkan Tefillah*, and

the weekday services are not a common practice for Reform Jews; thus, familiarity with these prayers in Reform circles is limited. The students' engagement with the material is broad, though they translate segments of the text line-by-line.

Five minutes past noon. Students in kitah bet casually file into Room 106. The square room is on the small side, relative to other classrooms. A SmartBoard, the only one in any room on the HUC campus, dominates the eastern wall of the room. A standard white board covers much of the northern-facing wall. There are exposed blocks of yellow insulation material on the walls. The few windows facing south and north are narrow and have single-paned glass. The room is a comfortable temperature today, a Tuesday in mid-April. Tables are pushed together to form a U that opens toward the SmartBoard.

The students chat casually as they sit down and organize their things, taking laptops and spiral notebooks out of their backpacks and putting Nalgens, disposable coffee cups, and bottles of Diet Coke on the tables. The teacher, a rabbi and member of the administration, goes to the classroom door to call in Lee who has been playing Frisbee in the courtyard. The class has twelve students, including two from the cantorial program and one from the Jewish education program. The seminar begins with a kavana [lit., intention; a short text or thought and reflection] shared by Mari. She has brought two Yehuda Amichai poems about prayer and God.

The class moves on from poetry to discuss the Liturgy lecture. The conversation begins with questions about choreography in the Amidah [standing prayer]. Gabe, the education student, asks about taking steps backward and forward at the beginning and end of the Amidah. The teacher replies, "We want you to know what is normative, but

feel free to depart from it, . . . but only if the other way is meaningful, like if it's family minhag [custom/tradition] . . . if you're going to depart from tradition . . . have some reason for doing so." The teacher adds that prayer choreography is "so problematic for us as Reform Jews . . . physicality is largely abandoned."

The class continues with a closer look at the text of Tachanun. The teacher has the text visible on the SmartBoard, but students also refer to their own prayer books and hand-outs. The text comes from the Rinat Yisrael siddur (an Israeli Orthodox prayer book entirely in Hebrew). The students take turns reading and translating a couple lines from Hebrew to English. On occasion, they pause to discuss grammar and vocabulary. By this point in the year, the students are reading Hebrew with fluidity and fluency, even if they are not fully able to translate the words. The last part of the class is a discussion of what should be done, if anything, about Tachanun in Reform liturgy. Mari thinks that Tachanun should be included so that people can engage with it in some way. Max doesn't see the point in having it available because the average Reform Jew only prays on Shabbat and Tachanun is not part of Shabbat liturgy. For Wendy, having a daily Tachanun detracts from the power of Yom Kippur. The teacher ends the discussion by commenting that "removing something from prayer books means people won't even know that it exists." He adds about Tachanun themes in particular, "I want prayer to lift me up. Tachanun helps to lower us a bit; you think you're way up there, but you're not . . . as great as you think you are." With that, class concludes.

At HUC, where learning is based on a university model, the physical context for learning was clearly a classroom. The teacher's position in front was clear and reinforced

the university feel. The students seemed comfortable in and accustomed to the space and how it was used. The atmosphere was casual and friendly. In each class, the format was the same, regardless of the subject, and for an outside observer, it was often tedious. Max explained: “You know, we take a lot of our classes—while they’re different classes, they’re very, very similar. . . . Bible and the Liturgy shiur and the Chazal shiur are all very similar: Let’s look at something in Hebrew, let’s translate it, and let’s talk about it briefly.” The instructor would lecture for a while and then the students opened the appropriate photocopied course packet and took turns reading in the original Hebrew and translating one or two sentences at a time into either English or Modern Hebrew, depending on the class level. Occasionally, the instructor stopped to elaborate on a particular point or provide an insight. The teachers posed questions to the students, the students answered; the students asked questions of the teachers, the teachers answered.

On the day presented above, the students began their inquiry by contextualizing Tachanun as a prayer that traditionally follows the Amidah in the siddur, but not *Mishkan Tefillah*, the American Reform Movement’s new siddur. The specific subject matter turned what would have been a typical class translation and discussion exercise into discussion of Reform Judaism’s views on liturgy, prayer, and prayer choreography. Tachanun was an esoteric topic that required the students to refer to an Orthodox siddur in order to understand its meaning but then return to the values of Reform Judaism to understand its meaning and potential implications for their own perspectives on prayer. In particular, Alyssa valued the Liturgy seminar intellectually, as an intersection of material

from many different classes, and as an opportunity to envision rabbinic practice. She explained,

I'm really interested in liturgy and . . . I like doing translations and that's where kind of all the different Hebrew things I'm learning seem to come together, like in the liturgy, in a way they don't necessarily in *Dikduk* [grammar] or even in Bible class . . . [Liturgy seminar] kind of gives me a chance to like look ahead and conceptualize what that looks like in the world in a real suburban congregation.

For Alyssa, even though the topic might have been obscure, studying liturgy made the subject matter more immediately relevant to her future rabbinate.

This description of one class session of *kitah bet's* Liturgy seminar illustrated the flow of the class, the teacher's approach to the class and material, how students engaged with the day's lesson, and the perspective of Reform Judaism. To varying degrees, the seminar addressed the full range of pedagogies of clergy education: interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance. To begin, the students had the opportunity to practice a rabbinical task through giving a *kavana*. Today, that task fell to Mari. She chose a text (the Yehuda Amichai poems) that related to the subject matter of the course, resonated or reflected on Judaism and society, and held personal meaning for her – work that required both interpretation and contextualization. Then, Mari interpreted the poem and shared it with the class, adding an element of performance.

The class continued with a combination of translations of the text in the *siddur* and a discussion of how to engage with prayer through a Reform lens. Reform Judaism is based on the reworking—literally, reforming—of traditional, halakhic Judaism. These

future rabbis were tasked with engaging in that same process. Thus, the students have exposure to a greater breadth of liturgy. Not only does this have practical benefit—when they are in different contexts and encounter non-Reform liturgy, it will not be entirely foreign to them—but comparison is a powerful interpretative pedagogy.

Accessing *Rinat Yisrael* and other sources and siddurim within the context of HUC classes allowed the students to familiarize themselves with the books and their content from within a more supportive and supported place. They explored the texts together, as opposed to being in an Orthodox prayer context and being caught off-guard by a siddur solely in Hebrew that was unfamiliar to them. The students learned information that was transferable from the Orthodox siddur back to Reform Judaism and, for some students, gave them pause about the editorial choices that were made regarding Mishkan Tefillah.

Through this class, the students gained knowledge when they learned about Tachanun. They contextualized the prayer and its meanings within the siddur, translated the words, and increased their familiarity with *Rinat Yisrael*. In terms of skills, the students learned the choreography of saying Tachanun and enhanced their aptitude for reading and translating Hebrew. The students enhanced their Normative Perspective by exploring the reasons for saying or not saying Tachanun and why it does not appear in Mishkan Tefillah, though maybe it should. The students increased their social capital by learning with classmates who had become friends. The class dynamic was strong and collegial. The students acquired abstract religious capital because they learned about the Tachanun prayer as a concept, not in order to practically integrate it into their personal or

professional prayer practice. They treated and related to Tachanun as they would any other text.

Educational goals included creating greater general Jewish literacy and ensuring that Reform choices were informed choices, an approach that is replicable in all areas of Jewish life. Through class discussion, the students also worked through how to make the liturgy their own. This process, as with formation more generally, left a lot of options for personal choice and interpersonal variation in prayer open. The Liturgy seminar did not focus on just one pedagogy or goal, but covered all four holistically, in particular through the students' expressing their developing views on practicing and leading prayer and their visions for their future rabbinate.

Learning Shabbat Practice at Schechter

At Schechter, JTS students attend a two-part halakha class that includes chevruta study then shiur. The sessions complement each other, reinforcing the course material for the students through providing different ways of engaging with the text and each other. The goals and pedagogies of theological education and the stages of rabbinic formation are evident in both seder and shiur, taken separately and together.

The early February weather is dreary and damp. The chill from outside permeates the building, despite the heat being on. Gray light comes through the narrow windows on the southern side of the room. The students sit in pairs, one person across from another, in the Schechter beit midrash. Square and rectangular tables hug the walls, blocking access to the books on the bookcases that line the perimeter of the room. A

person seeking out a particular tome must disrupt the chevruta to retrieve it. Metal chair legs scratch on the stone floor. This is the last halakha class of the first semester. The topic is Hilkhoh Yom Tov, the Laws of Holidays. Evie and Ilana have finished learning the text in the Mishna Brura. They briefly do hazarah [review], going back through the main points of each section.

Their learning continues with an article in their course packet entitled “The Use of Electricity on Shabbat and Yom Tov” by (Orthodox) Rabbis Broyde and Jachter. Before they begin to read, Evie comments, “I’m going to feel really bad about all the electricity I use on Shabbat.” Even though it’s in English, Ilana and Evie read a couple sentences at a time and then restate them in simpler language. This is the same process they use when they study texts in Hebrew and Aramaic and translate them into either English or Modern Hebrew. The article addresses incandescent and then fluorescent lights, the latter of which are not prohibited on Shabbat because there is no filament. Conversation moves from the text to their personal practices. Ilana comments that she turns lights off, but not on; her roommate does both. Evie says that she does not turn lights on or off on Shabbat but will not prevent family members from doing so.

The text broadens to address electrical appliances. Ilana interjects the well-known adage, “when there’s a rabbinic will, there’s a halakhic way.” They conclude from the text that modern cooking appliances are prohibited because they did not exist when the laws were being debated and created. Ilana expresses that she understands the logic but does not think it is halakhic. Evie offers a blanket statement: “I don’t love halakhic reasoning. It doesn’t speak to me.” They veer off on a tangent about personal

and familial Shabbat observance and then return to discussing appliances, this time about turning them on and off and whether sparks are created. Ilana mentions that her parents turn lights on and off on yom tov [holiday with some halakhic restrictions], but not Shabbat. Now, she has learned that this is the d'rabbanan [rabbinic] position and not just a unique custom of her family. The text covers stoves with and without pilot lights, refrigerators, and telephones.

The students conclude that it is perhaps best to use electric timers, set before holidays and Shabbat, in order to utilize appliances that would otherwise be halakhically out-of-bounds. Evie says, "I think I'm going to use my timers this Shabbat. This is really inspiring me . . ." Ilana adds, "I want to put my space heater on a timer."

The students move into the adjacent classroom for the shiur segment of the class. Tables in two columns, a handful of rows on each side, face the board on the eastern wall of the room. White plastic chairs are stacked in the back of the room. A member of the building maintenance staff is cleaning the floor outside the classroom. The rag on the stick smacks the floor. Inside the room, students move chairs around to face the front. This is a small class of a dozen students, most of whom are from JTS, though there are a couple Israelis as well. The teacher, Professor F., who is fluent in both English and Hebrew, announces that he will be lecturing mainly in English "because we have a lot to get through."

Professor F. begins by asking if the students themselves use electricity on Shabbat and holidays. Their responses vary. The teacher comments that, "[i]n instinctively, in Orthodoxy, they do not use electricity because it resembles melakha [category of

“creative” work forbidden on Shabbat and holidays]. By the time poskim addressed it, they found out it was very complicated . . . [and] often concluded that it wasn’t keeping with the spirit of Shabbat.”

Professor F. writes lists of terms in Hebrew and English on the board. He sketches pictures of circuitry in houses. He lectures, referring to the terms and diagrams. His notes are based on the Haredi posek Rabbi Auerbach. He brings in the Ravad and Rambam and a contemporary posek who is also a physicist, Ze’ev Lev. In speaking, he switches effortlessly between Hebrew, English, and Aramaic. The students, knowledgeable and comfortable with the back-and-forth, don’t seem confused in the least. The students take notes on laptops and in their course books about who holds what view on electricity use. Professor F. says, “I don’t want to evaluate these views, I just want to make you aware. . . . It’s important not to judge people who do things different than you—that’s my main thing.” Evie’s question, “So . . . what should [you/we/I] do?” falls on deaf ears. The lesson concludes at noon, the aromas of soup wafting down the hallway from the small cafeteria. It is time for Mincha.

Learning a text with a chevruata means that the students try to understand the text on its own terms and then connect with it through examples from their own lives (Holzer and Kent 2014). Engagement on this level reinforces the material, but can also lead to students re-examining their own practices. In the case of Ilana and Evie, examination of the text on electricity leads them to express their intentions to be more halakhically stringent in their personal practices. Dyad learning, in addition to prompting decisions,

also leads to tangents, but that is a cornerstone of Jewish legal tradition. Significant Jewish texts—such as the Talmud—are themselves known for tangents.

The example of this shiur illustrates how information is transmitted in this context, with this subject matter, and by this particular teacher. Professor F. used a pedagogical approach that engaged the students aurally through reading aloud—with facility in Hebrew, Aramaic, and English⁷⁴—having them do so as well, and asking questions; visually, through diagrams and illustrations on the board; and, emotionally by giving them the space and encouragement to reflect on their own practices and Judaism. Professor F.'s non-judgmental perspective exhibited in his pedagogy is a model of the inherently Conservative approach to halakhic leadership: there are majority and minority opinions based on in-depth interpretations of the text and both are acceptable.

Without a direct answer and without himself being ordained as a rabbi, Professor F. modeled desirable interpersonal, professional, and ritual behavior for a Conservative rabbi. Professor F. ignored Evie's question because he has a religious and intellectual personal policy of not telling the students what to do. If he had shared his position and practice, students might mimic him without engaging in their own examination of the text and reflection on personal practices. As he mentioned previously, "It's important not to judge people who do things different than you . . ." Not sharing his own practices reinforces this policy of openness that can be applied at the communal level and encourages learning in order to formulate one's practice. Professor F. presented

⁷⁴ For an examination of how Jewish languages transmit information as well as identity, see Benor (2012).

viewpoints in the text and created an environment for exploration and examination of one's own practices and beliefs without dictating what should and should not be done.

Taken as a unit, the chevruta and shiur sections of this halakha class strongly exhibited three pedagogies and goals of clergy education: interpretation, contextualization, and formation. The interpretation came from learning and grappling with the texts, whether in Hebrew or articles in English. The process of interpretation required translation not just to Modern Hebrew and English, but to the contemporary context, hence the pedagogy of contextualization. Formation came into play as the students assessed their own practices and beliefs and sought to grow in their personal Judaism and with an eye toward professional persona and role. Particularly in chevruta, Evie and Ilana encountered concepts, defined and then struggled with them in the texts and also through sharing personal experiences, and then concluded that perhaps they should adjust their practices to better align with the halakha.

The class set up the possibility for performance as well in that learning armed the students with information to use in the field as rabbis. Learning in chevruta provided an individual "in" to the material; Professor F.'s teaching and guidance reinforced the students' relationships with the text by providing more information, further interpretation, and a personal example. In terms of the overarching goals of theological education (Carroll 1971), the above example illustrates the intellectual, text-centric aspect of clergy training and secular awareness of how religion fits into the modern world.

The students' engaged with Professor F. about the ideas in the text, instead of just translating the content, which displayed achievement in the skill of Jewish learning. The

students deepened their imagination of their future rabbinical careers as they encountered the texts and practices together. Though they may not necessarily be learning from pulpit rabbis, or former congregational leaders, the traditions they explored allowed them to make their own connections to the tasks and roles of a consciously ritually observant Jew and rabbi that lie ahead. The beit midrash is its own pedagogical contribution to rabbinical formation.

Engagement, Interpretation, and Steps toward Formation

The university model example from HUC and the yeshiva model example from Schechter illustrate what the students learned, how they learned, and how these processes reinforced formation processes and the respective schools' knowledge and learning goals for their students during the Israel Year. In each of the cases, students engaged to varying degrees with the goals of interpretation and contextualization. They did so with an eye toward performance, specifically considering how to lead prayer and serve as role models for informed, considered Shabbat observance. The ways in which the students engaged with the given texts and with the instructors reflect the approach to how texts are learned: encountering the texts themselves, seeking the larger concepts they teach, and struggling with contemporary contexts; that is, interpretation.

Jewish life and traditional standards inform rabbinical school curricula. The students covered standard topics such as liturgy and Shabbat, but in rabbinical school, they go a step further. It is almost as if rabbinical school is the honors class—they cover the basics and then move on to esoteric sub-topics. In terms of what was presented above,

Tachanun has basically been erased from Reform prayer and electricity on Shabbat and Yom Tov is not a prominent issue within the Conservative movement. The curricula speak to the formation of the rabbinical students' Normative Perspectives that explain the information in more depth and with more background context than would be needed by laity. Topics such as these gave the students more practice learning. There are few topics with binary answers; the exploration of various opinions and perspectives is at the root of Jewish learning. Learning is both a skill, a habit, and a norm. The habitus of a rabbi is one with learning at its core.

The university model pedagogical approach presents Jewish, rabbinically-relevant material in a format that the students recognize from their college years. They are able to focus on the course content because they are already competent in the mode of its delivery. The university model is not entirely frontal lectures, but the unit of engagement with the information is the class, not the dyad, as in the case of the chevruta model. The HUC students encountered Tachanun as a class, defined the text of the prayer as a class, struggled to understand the meanings of the prayer as a class, and considered implications and applications in their future rabbinate as a class. With Tachanun as the subject matter, the students traveled through the formation process as a group. They shared the experience with each other, thus building pre-professional social capital and strengthening their capacity to learn with each other in this context. The students learned together and built relationships grounded in the mutual pursuit of knowledge and perfection of relevant skills. The number of people in collaboration with the text and concepts at any given time does not mean that an individual loses the opportunity to

engage intimately with the material, though closeness of encounter with texts is a hallmark of chevruta learning.

The chevruta relationship builds social and religious capital, that is, both the relationships and the religious skills they will need. It does so while reinforcing the Jewish values of *Talmud Torah* [learning Jewish texts], *machloket*⁷⁵ *l'shem shamayim* [disagreement in the name of heaven/respectful dissent], and *kavod bein adam l'chaveiro* [respect between a person and his friend/another person]. The text anchored the students' learning and conversations. They interacted with each other and the text. They needed basic linguistic and topical knowledge to access the materials and then enhanced their knowledge through learning. The act of learning is a skill that Ilana and Evie practiced. Learning is part of a Jewish habitus, a disposition toward engagement with text and integration of the practice of learning into the normal course of one's life. The chevruta relationship enhances religious capital because the content has value as knowledge and the act of learning in chevruta has value as a Jewish skill. Being able to learn in chevruta is a central skill for Jews and an important aspect of the student role as people engaged in learning.

In chevruta, Ilana and Evie engaged with the text, developed attitudes toward the text that shifted as they defined the concepts and arguments, and took the information a step further by considering ways to integrate the information into their lives. Initially, Ilana and Evie's stance toward the text was to personally discount it and not have it

⁷⁵ Machloket is the reason there is something to discuss and learn. The concept is foundational for rabbinic education. To say that there are differing opinions prompts an exploration of different perspectives and their meanings.

influence their own practice. Ilana learned from the text that her family's practice was actually rooted in an interpretation of the text. The students then considered adjusting their own Shabbat practices to more halakhically observe Shabbat, but that would require that use of a modern invention: the electric timer, known in Israel as a *sha'on Shabbat* [Shabbat clock]. This brief chevruta experience carried Ilana and Evie through a formation experience, from encountering the text to a resolution to adjust personal practice based on the information in the text and the chevruta-based conversation.

In classes, students encountered texts, concepts, and thoughts and experiences shared by classmates and faculty, with an eye toward developing as a future rabbi. Regardless of the home- or Israel-based institution, the goals of learning are knowing and doing; knowledge informs practice; the combination, achieved, is formation. The ways in which the students learned—and what they gleaned from not only what the instructors taught but how they approached the material—gave them a framework for assessing their own practices, developing a more informed practice, and possibly altering their practices as a result of the knowledge. The learning process and informed engagement exhibiting knowledge, skills and habits—are part of developing a rabbinic sense of self.

Campus-Based Organized Prayer

The presence of prayer in weekly and daily schedules, the presence of prayer spaces on campuses, the presentation of praying and prayer leadership within the curriculum as a skill to be mastered and a practice to adopt into one's life and even embody, set clergy education apart from other types of professional education. Prayer [*davening* in Yiddish-English and *tefillah* in Hebrew; all three terms will be used

interchangeably] is a cornerstone of Jewish life, especially for rabbis who are expected to be able to lead services with fluency and comfort. The place of prayer in rabbinic education, though, depends on the institutional structure and particular Jewish movement. Each seminary's curricular goals and its prayer service participation policy reflect these differences. The nature of prayer and organized prayer services provide many points for comparison between the rabbinical programs and Jerusalem-based institutions.

The rabbinical schools and Jerusalem-based institutions each had their own expectations for students' participation in, attendance at, and displays of proficiency in prayer services on-campus. As evident from the schools' schedules, prayer services were held at the CY three times every day for Shacharit, Mincha, and Ma'ariv. In contrast, prayer services were held just a few times per week at HUC with Mincha and Ma'ariv each assigned a semester so that students could become more familiar with the particular service. There was little regard for matching the service to its halakhically assigned, appropriate time of day. The HUC students understood the reasoning for the school's scheduling decision, even if some of them found it bizarre.

Over the course of the year, the HUC students were required to lead services twice, read from the Torah once, and deliver one dvar Torah over the course of the year. Ziegler students were expected to have competencies—specifically to be able to lead services and *leyn* [read or chant from the Torah], but did not have explicit requirements to lead during their year at the Conservative Yeshiva. At the CY, the prayer community included a diverse group of students (not just those from Ziegler), faculty, and administrators. At HUC, a larger institution, the prayer community was specific to the

rabbinical, cantorial, education, and communal service students from the United States. Faculty and administrators from that particular program attended prayer services, but services were not institution-wide.

Neither Ziegler/CY nor HUC had specific prayer service attendance requirements for its students. However, the place of services between—as opposed to before or after—class periods at HUC increased attendance. The belief was that the commandedness of prayer ought to be a sufficient motivator to get Ziegler students to Shacharit in the morning. For some students it was, but not for others. For Greg, being a Shacharit “regular” at both Ziegler and then CY shaped his belief that regular attendance is necessary to develop the davening skills and attendance habits expected of rabbis. For Greg, attending and participating in morning minyan was a crucial aspect of rabbinic practice. That is, routine is necessary for competence in praying and leading prayer. He elaborated, “I think there are people who are going to come out of school and not really be competent at leading Shacharit and I would hate to think what happens when you show up at a shul that you’re running and you can’t lead Shacharit well.” Greg tied minyan attendance with necessary leadership skills. Greg believed Shacharit attendance was central to being a rabbi and, as such, should be mandatory and enforced through an attendance policy, given that people did not attend voluntarily.

At HUC, this link was clearer: the students were required to practice leading prayer services. In Reform Judaism, there is no ascription to prayer commandedness; the

explicit motivator for the students' attendance was a school requirement.⁷⁶ Implicitly, the students also felt compelled to support each other. They appreciated when their classmates were present when they led services and wanted to return the favor. In both school contexts—Ziegler and HUC—there was an acknowledgment that this was what a rabbi was supposed to do: pray and lead others in prayer. Attending and participating was viewed not just as practical professional development, but development of the habit of prayer. As Greg clearly stated, “[a] rabbi should go to minyan, so it’s good to get in the habit of it now.”

Prayer is a practice, a habit and part of a habitus, an obligation whether based on Jewish law or school attendance policy, a toolkit, an opportunity to wear or try on ritual objects, a form of religious capital, an inroad to social capital (when one davens with a minyan), an interaction with other people and God through the text of a siddur, a songful experience, a silent experience, an embodied experience, and ultimately a defining feature of clergy education. How the students led and participated in group prayer was a matter of both skill development and personal formation.

A comparison of Shacharit services at the Conservative Yeshiva and HUC illustrates the myriad aspects of prayer as a complex, multisensory activity that has both personal and professional value and in which the students engage as both congregants/participants and leaders. Services at the two schools shared goals of formation yet differed on several measures that distinguish between the Reform and

⁷⁶ The attendance requirement does not negate the fact that some students may attend because they find the services to be spiritually meaningful. However, none of the students actually mentioned “meaning” as a primary motivation.

Conservative traditions as well as how each school approaches teaching prayer and prayer leadership. The observations were conducted on the same day, two hours apart.

Shacharit at the Conservative Yeshiva

8:00 am. The beit midrash at the Conservative Yeshiva is sparsely populated, a rare sight given the number of students who usually pack the space. There are maybe 13 or 14 people (approximately one-third female), a mix of students, not all of whom are from Ziegler, and faculty. People are scattered around the room, seated at and standing next to the tables. Both men and women have wrapped or are in the process of wrapping tefillin. All but one person, a woman, is wearing a tallit. A student from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia who is studying at the Conservative Yeshiva leads Psukei D'zimra, a selection of Psalms. She stands at the podium in the front of the room, by the door to the patio, facing the Torah ark with her back to the assembled group. The gabbai [prayer service coordinator] wanders the room offering laminated note cards with honors written on them. With the exception of the student leader saying the first and last line of each prayer and the group singing Psalm 150, Psukei D'zimra is done in a mumble.

The gabbai asks for a volunteer to lead Shacharit. A man on the opposite side of the room stands up, moves to the front of the room, and begins. The group responds when a response is required; the parts designated as needing to be said in unison with the entire congregation are largely said in unison. Still, late-comers catch up with the prayers that they missed, even if not audibly. The paucity of people and the presence of

late-comers give the visual impression of anomic prayer. People use different prayer books, including Rinat Yisrael, Koren, Art Scroll, and Sim Shalom. One woman, a teacher, does not use a prayer book, but it is clear from her physical movements and her lips that she has memorized the prayer service. Her actions indicate a habitus of prayer—she embodies the words and act of praying.

The ba'al Shacharit [prayer leader for Shacharit] looks around after the Shema to see if people are largely finished. He pauses for a minute, waiting. Then, he says “emet” [truth; as written in the text] and continues. The Amidah is next. People shuckle [meditative bowing] and sway in place, engaging their bodies in prayer albeit in a controlled manner in which their feet do not move. A female student arrives at 8:20. She waits at the side of the room for the teacher to finish praying before she approaches her preferred seat in the beit midrash and extracts her tefillin [phylacteries; leather prayer straps] from a shelf under her desk. At the end of the prayer, two people remain standing, waiting until others have finished, before moving on to the repetition of the Amidah. They sit following the Kedusha prayer. A couple of people speak softly and the sound of water running comes from the kitchenette. A levi [descendant of the service caste in the Temple] is washing the hands of the lone kohen [descendant of the priestly caste]. The kohen makes his way to the front for duchaning [recitation of the priestly blessing].

For Tachanun, everyone sits, backs bent, with head resting in the crook of his or her arm. People rise slowly, following the choreography of the prayer sequence, until they are back to standing. The Torah service begins. The walk around the room with the scroll gives everyone a chance to kiss it with a tap from a tallit [prayer shawl] or siddur.

Alan serves as the gabbai at the front; another Ziegler student leyns. The reading is fluid and fluent. Greg has the third aliyah [lit., “going up”; act of being called to the Torah; requires recitation of a prayer before and after the reading of the Torah]. Alan leads the Mishebeyrach prayer, the prayer for healing. When Alan’s eyes meet theirs, people say the Hebrew or names of ill friends, family, and acquaintances to be included in the communal prayer for healing. Hagbah [lifting the Torah], gelilah [dressing the Torah], a final procession of the Torah around the room, and placing the Torah back into the ark end this part of the service. In the meantime, one more student has arrived. She is visibly saying her Amidah. Kaddish, Aleinu, the Mourner’s Kaddish, and the psalm for the day round out davening.

Students and faculty un-wrap tefillin and fold tallitot. They return siddurim to their backpacks or to the designated shelf on a bookcase in the rear of the beit midrash. One teacher gives a short dvar Torah; another makes announcements for the day: there will be a guest speaker in the afternoon, end-of-term evaluations are due, thank you to all who participated in the service, and lastly please help yourself to the breakfast cereal in the kitchenette.

Shacharit at HUC

10:00am. The first period of morning classes has just finished. The last few HUC students enter the Murstein synagogue just inside the main door to the administration wing at HUC. Cinderblock walls are painted white. Narrow windows on each side of the large room let in insufficient light and warmth. The chairs, facing eastward toward the

aron kodesh, bimah [stage/podium/lectern], and door of the room, are arranged in an angular semi-circle. There are two aisles and many more rows of chairs than necessary. A camera, on video function, sits on a tripod off to the side of the aisle closest to the door. The chairs are wooden with green fabric. In typical sanctuary style, the rear of each chair has built-in storage for prayer books and Bibles. All sounds, from chairs scraping to backpacks unzipping to pages turning, are amplified by the stone floor.

One male rabbinical student and one female cantorial student stand at the front of the room. The in-house accompanist sits at the piano on the left-hand side of the room at the front. They are the designated service leaders for today. The rabbinical student, Ethan, is wearing a guitar. Students, several of whom are wearing tallitot (though many have borrowed the official HUC school tallitot), sit with prayer books in their laps. One student is sitting down and attempting to wrap tefillin.

The leaders begin with a niggun[wordless melody], relaxing the atmosphere of the room. Ethan quotes from Psalm 71 and then adds, “As we approach finals, we need to take the time to breathe, meditate . . . take a moment to find a kavana that works for us . . . The siddur gives us the order and together we take the time for Shacharit.” In unison, the assembled congregation of students, faculty, and staff sing “Modeh Ani” then “Ma Tov” in a round, and “Elohai Neshama” with the Debbie Friedman melody. The prayer leaders take turns to each read a poem in English from the prayer book, Mishkan Tefillah, which everyone is using. As a group, everyone reads the blessing for learning Torah in unison followed by “Elu Dvarim.” They read “Baruch She’amar” responsively in Hebrew. People appear to be lost for “Mizmor l’Todah”; the prayer leaders have

forgotten to announce the page number. Before Shacharit begins, the leaders have replaced the half Kaddish with a song entitled "Beyond," the lyrics and music for which are on a handout. The Shema prayer includes a piano accompaniment with singing. The vast majority of people in the room have covered their eyes; a few stare straight ahead.

The Amidah. The rabbinical student and cantorial student at the front lead through the end of Kedusha. Some students sway and shuckle as they pray; one student does the traditional three steps forward, three steps back choreography; a couple of students sit with their eyes closed. When they finish, or when they sense that most people have sat down already, the remaining students sit down quickly as though they are dominoes.

They stand up again for the opening of the ark at the beginning of the Torah service. The leaders slide the curtain and open the wooden doors of the ark together. The rabbinical student hands the Torah scroll to the cantorial student who approaches the reading table where a cantorial teacher waits to assist. Three students read from the Torah, one for each aliyah. Each leyns a few lines in trope and provides an English translation. Upon finishing, the congregation shouts "yashar koach" [congratulations] for a job well done. Before the third student leyns, they say the Mishebeyrach for cholim [ill people], using the Debbie Friedman tune. People share names in Hebrew and English of those in need of healing.

After hagbah and gelilah, but before returning the Torah to the ark, Evan shares a dvar Torah on parshat Toldot, the Torah portion of the week. He links the importance of relationships, love, leadership, and humility to the dreams and character flaws and

ultimate positive leadership of Joseph. Following a chorus of “yasher koach” for Evan, the prayer leaders return the Torah to the ark. “Aleinu” is sung with the doors of the ark open. All but two students remain standing for the Mourners’ Kaddish. The service ends with an up-beat “Oseh Shalom,” complete with enthusiastic singing and clapping. After brief announcements and a plea to drop a few coins into the tzedakah [charity/justice] box on the way out, students head to class.

Function of and Formation from Prayer Services

Shacharit at the CY and HUC illustrate the place of prayer in the curricula and views on practicing prayer as didactic. The services also highlight the differences future rabbis will encounter in these movements. While both services followed the basic flow of the siddur according to *nusach Ashkenaz* [Ashkenazi/German traditional prayer format and tunes]; HUC approached prayer services with much more formality than the CY. At the CY, students chose from any number of siddurim; at HUC, even though they referred to different siddurim in Liturgy class, in services they all used *Mishkan Tefillah*.

Everyone began together and went through the siddur at nearly the same pace. Page numbers were usually announced to guide participants through the service. The group experience was mediated by the structure of the book.

The Reform and Conservative movements have different stances on personal obligation in prayer and norms for services in affiliated congregations. In Reform Judaism, the goal is for participation in communal prayer; in Conservative Judaism, the goal is for the individual to fulfill his or her personal, halakhic obligation to pray and,

preferably, to pray with others in a minyan so that all prayers can be recited. At the CY, those who arrived late mostly began where they needed to in order to have an halakhically complete davening. They did not jump in to the same place in the service as the leader. The expectations of the movements and schools differed, which had implications for the knowledge, skills, and habits of prayer that the respective groups of students were able to develop.

Language, in addition to location in the siddur, is a core element of prayer, both literally and symbolically. At the CY, davening was almost entirely in Hebrew, with the exception of Aramaic for selected prayers such as Kaddish. At HUC, students incorporated English readings—whether direct translations of prayers or separate poems, some of which appeared in the siddur. The prayers in their original languages promote connections to traditional Judaism, Israel, and international Jewish peoplehood, which are highlighted by being in an Israeli context where Hebrew is very much alive. There was a disconnect here because the Reform rabbinical students prayed more in Hebrew in Israel where this was normative, but they used *Mishkan Tefillah*, an American prayer book to remind them where they were from and where they were going. Using *Mishkan Tefillah* was also didactic and geared toward leadership—they took every opportunity to familiarize themselves with the siddur that they will be using in their rabbinate. The siddur did not necessarily meet the goal of helping the students develop personal practice; it spoke to professional roles and expectations.

The ways prayers are vocalized also amplifies the language. At HUC, Shacharit sounded like a sing-along or concert. Much of the service was sung in either English or

Hebrew and at all but one service of any kind during the year, there was musical accompaniment of some sort, most often guitar, if not also piano. In contrast, at the CY, there may have been a niggun or short tune and the occasional presence of a bongo drum, but the mumbles of prayer were far from a sing-along. Nevertheless, a couple of the students and faculty members tried to push for more music. Eli shared his thoughts: “It’s pretty uninspiring, davening here . . . [One of our teachers] is really passionate about singing before Mincha and so we’ve been really good about doing that lately. That really helps enter into the proper mindset to maybe make it a little more meaningful . . .” For Eli, music was a doorway to more meaningful prayer and a more meaningful prayer experience. It was not the culture of the institution to have a lot of song integrated into prayer and it was not the personal practice of many of the students who led services to include singing, but for Eli and a handful of others, it was personally important and diversified their prayer experiences and those of others in a meaningful way.

Prayer is a physical act that incorporates physical accoutrements. It is through these objects that the performance aspect of prayer is most prominent. For prayer at the CY, everyone wore tefillin and most people also wore a tallit. These items belonged to the individuals; some were used more frequently than others. At HUC, it emerged over time that, in the main, students wore a tallit for prayer 1) when they were taking part or had a role in the service and/or 2) when they had just purchased a new tallit for themselves. Tallitot with the HUC logo were always available for those who had forgotten their personal tallit or wanted to experiment with wearing one. Only two students and one faculty member consistently wrapped tefillin. At HUC, wearing a

kippah during prayer was more common than wearing one in all contexts, but not everyone wore one and no expectation was ever expressed that they should. The consistent incorporation of personal prayer garments was another way that Conservative practice was distinctive. The way that the students used the items shows an element of religious capital and that they have already developed habits of use.

Movement, as in bodily participation in prayer, is differently present in the two prayer contexts. Traditionally, certain prayers have associated choreography. Lifting oneself up on one's toes for "*kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*" [holy, holy, holy] in the Kedusha is meant to bring one closer to angels. The choreography may or may not reflect the theological or spiritual motivation of the individual, but it does signal membership in a community of practice. At CY, the Ziegler students knew what to do and they did it. At HUC, a small handful of students took steps forward and back and bowed at traditionally designated places. The number of people trying a particular practice increased significantly after a Liturgy lecture wherein the choreography was introduced and explained to them, an example of teaching and learning the particular normative perspective. At the time of this observation of Shacharit, the students had not yet learned about prayer choreography.

At HUC, students prayed in order to learn how to pray, to lead prayer, and to support their classmates who led. The institutional goal for rabbinic training at HUC was for students to develop proficiency in leading services, leyning, and giving divrei Torah. Students met with an advisor to discuss how they would lead their services, how to leyn and translate their part of the Torah reading, and what to say in their dvar Torah. This

professional training was the most skills-focused aspect of practical rabbinics that the students had during their first year. Along with other aspects of the HUC Year in Israel curriculum, leading prayer was viewed as foundational. However, having a new leader bringing his or her personal touch each time posed challenges for the student-congregants seeking to become more familiar with services. As Keith, an HUC student, reflected, “. . . every service that you go to is different. And to me, I think that makes it very difficult to practice how to pray.”

In contrast to the decorum of HUC, the approach at the Conservative Yeshiva for the Ziegler students was more casual and less structured; leading tefillah was entirely voluntary. As with other aspects of the CY, self-motivation was expected; there were no compulsory requirements. The people who showed up with frequency were often the people who ended up leading simply because they were already in the room. That is not to say that Ziegler did not have learning goals for its students, but they need not be fulfilled during the Israel Year.⁷⁷ Those who served as gabbai or regularly participated in leading services expressed that their classmates were missing out on important opportunities to practice davening skills. Those who did not attend, or attended infrequently, reported that they were competent in leading services and leyning and could easily do so, but do not seek out opportunities to practice.

In addition to learning how to pray, attending services develops the habit of prayer. The commandment to pray can be fulfilled on one's own, but the likelihood of

⁷⁷ By the conclusion of their fourth year at Ziegler, according to Ezra, students must pass a set of tefillah requirements exhibiting proficiency in leading daily, Shabbat, and holiday services and leyning Torah, Haftarah, and Megillot [Scrolls, in particular, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, etc.].

actually doing it may be increased if one attends services—and if one has been formed into the habit of praying. Jake, a Ziegler student who openly admitted to struggling with prayer as a practice, signed up to participate in aspects of the Shacharit service in order to ensure that he attended and maintained skills. He commented, “I volunteer to read Torah every now and again as just a way to say ‘alright, Thursday mornings I have to be there.’” Attending services reinforced necessary rabbinic habits. Wendy, an HUC student, credited the twice-weekly prayer services at HUC with helping her appreciate and enjoy a more regular prayer practice: “I really have loved the regularity of tefillah during the week. I really look forward to tefillah on Sundays and Thursdays . . .”

Elements of the students’ rabbinic identities were formed through attending and leading prayer services. They gained familiarity and comfort with the act of praying on a personal level and with exhibiting prayer-relevant skills and facilitating the prayer experiences of others on a professional level. Attending, participating in, and leading prayer services were not necessarily easily achieved for the students, nor were the prayer experiences always positive. This was partly the nature of group prayer: with different leaders, leadership styles, and approaches to liturgy (music is just one example) came diversity, and someone is bound to feel unfulfilled. Campus-based prayer was a social experience that could be deeply personal as well. It was also a practical experience that could have significant impact on an individual’s development of a rabbinic habitus and religious capital that incorporates tefillah in the way and to the degree prescribed by the particular movement.

Prayer experiences, skills, and habits are elements of social and religious capital. They are personally and professionally relevant resources. Habitus describes the students' "orientation toward using these resources to implement the model of practice" (Dumais 2002:45) of an American Reform or Conservative rabbi. Attending minyan whether as a leader or congregant strengthens the students' social networks while the regularity of engaging in prayer reinforces an embodied practice. Habitus is the result of socialization (Bourdieu 2002); some students aspired to achieve a habitus of prayer through regularly engaging in it .

Student Pulpits

In the United States, student pulpits and rabbinic internships are core elements of seminary curriculum; during the Israel year, they are far less common. The internship is a key component of professional education because students have a forum for practicing skills and applying knowledge in a situation that has varying degrees of supervision. Even as students interact with professionals and the profession and change and are changed by them, internships contribute to the maintenance of the profession through socialization of the student to the tasks, roles, and status of the profession (Atkinson 2014).

In theory, the Conservative rabbinical students spending the year at either Schechter or the Conservative Yeshiva were matched with Masorti congregations in Israel. Only a handful of the students meet with success in visiting the congregations for Shabbat or a holiday once or twice, much less going on a regular basis. Two students, Becky from JTS and Jill from Ziegler, actually developed a schedule for spending one

Shabbat per month with their assigned communities. Through mentorship and participation in congregational life, the students had opportunities to practice the functions of a rabbi, try on a rabbinic role and identity, and build relationships with a community. That these internships take place in Israel in Hebrew language-dominant scenarios adds layers of social, cultural, and religious complexity to the experiences.

One Shabbat per month, Becky volunteered at a small, lay-led Masorti congregation in Maale Adumim, just outside Jerusalem. She helped lead services and gave *divrei Torah* in Hebrew (“memorable because it was terrifying!”). Her work there was complicated by the gendered nature of the community, and their rather tenuous relationship to Masorti Judaism, as compared to communities in Jerusalem that were more consciously Masorti:

This community really is—first of all, it’s almost all women . . . there are two men that come and they’re both husbands of women who are there, and about half of [the women] grew up secular and wanted some religion without coercion and the other half grew up Orthodox and were like “I don’t know what Masorti is, but I don’t want to be behind a *mechitzah* [barrier separating men and women in prayer spaces].”

Becky discovered that even though the congregation officially affiliated as Masorti, members did not understand that she herself was Conservative. The congregants thought that she was training to be a Reform rabbi. In addition, the congregation had little in the way of structure or support: “They are completely volunteer-led. They get help from the central Masorti office, but not even a part-time administrator. They don’t have their own

building; they meet in a community center. They do have their own Torah scroll, but that only happened in December.” In short, Becky notes that the congregation is “a lot of people trying to find where they fit in Judaism.”

Becky’s internship was informal, much like the congregation itself. Her role was fluid and she did not have a mentor or supervisor. She was definitely learning by doing. From Becky’s description, the congregation also sounded as though it was accidentally Masorti. A lack of understanding about the Masorti movement is not uncommon in Israel. Other Conservative rabbinical students reported defining and explaining Masorti/Conservative Judaism to Israelis and navigating being a female rabbinical student in a context where female rabbis are rare and, if they exist, are Reform.

By contrast, the congregation where Jill interned has a strong affiliation with and knowledge of the Masorti movement in Israel. The synagogue was in the French Hill neighborhood in Jerusalem, down the street from Hebrew University’s Mt. Scopus campus. Jill observed that there were a lot of Anglo expats and American Conservative rabbis in the community, making it feel all the more welcoming to her. In particular, Jill felt supported when she gave divrei Torah on Friday nights:

Instead of knocking me down about the pronunciation of my Hebrew or having an American accent, they keep telling the rabbi that it’s so amazing that I’m doing this. . . . I just started learning Hebrew a few years ago and now I’m standing in front of a very learned, very powerful community and delivering my personal thoughts on the parsha in Hebrew. It’s amazing.

For Jill, the ability to give a dvar Torah brings to life Ziegler's goals for its rabbinical students and the value of learning:

[It is] the manifestation of what we do [at Ziegler]. . . [I]t's so special to be able to read the text in Hebrew and now understand it in Hebrew and then be able to build notions off of grammatical fluctuations that you know, you can write something topical and it can translate both ways.

Through an internship, Jill practiced the role and tasks of a rabbi with the added challenge of Hebrew.

Jill's internship was structured. She had a specific role, tasks to perform, and the community's rabbi was her assigned mentor. This internship enlarged her sense of identity by connecting with an Israeli Masorti community; but more than anything, it allowed her to practice becoming a part of Hebrew-speaking community. Preparing and delivering a dvar Torah for adults and leading the children's service in Hebrew meant linking language skill with religious knowledge and performance.

Student pulpit internships are a clear example of pedagogies of performance. However, not everyone had the same opportunities. For those who were offered the opportunity at all, the internships were optional and not all students were interested in or able to spend one Shabbat per month or less with an Israeli congregation. Jill admitted that if she had been assigned to a congregation in Be'er Sheva, for example, the distance and travel time would have meant that she simply would not have been able to go. The students who did have internships lead prayers, delivered sermons or divrei Torah, and taught shiurim. These three rabbinic duties, generally integral to rabbinic education on-

and off-campus, were outsourced during the Israel year. There was no classroom component. A mentor, who transmitted information formally and through role modeling, was key to teaching what rabbis do in congregational settings and how rabbis comport themselves.

Being in Israel dictated the context of the internship. Logistics dictated that students were only rarely embedded in Israeli communities, even just one Shabbat or holiday at a time. When they are, their leadership was shaped by the cultural, linguistic, and religious realities of the Israeli congregational and communal contexts. The students were challenged to master the language and to understand the religious and cultural differences they encountered. By staying with and interacting with families in the communities and engaging with the congregations, rabbis, and community members, they built relationships and professional networks. The experiences that the students had through their internships and the ways in which they interacted with Israeli Masorti congregations contributed to their rabbinic formation by giving them opportunities to explore rabbinic tasks and roles and put knowledge to use in leadership contexts. As they practiced rabbinic skills, performing them in front of an audience of congregants and a rabbinic mentor, they began to internalize the rabbinic role and it became more real for them.

The Process of Formation in Institutional Contexts

Coursework, internships, and campus-based prayer services are standard aspects of formal clergy education. The specific knowledge, skills, contextualization, and formation are always shaped by the particular religious tradition for which the

prospective clergy person is being trained. What the students learn (knowledge and skills), how they learn, and in what contexts their learning takes place all shape the future rabbis. In this case, they learn to contextualize their knowledge both to bodies of secular knowledge and personal experience, but also to the place where they are learning.

How, then, is rabbinic formation affected by the institutional structures and practices that are in place in this Israel year? What do the students encounter? How do they define what they encounter (evaluation, re-evaluation)? What meanings do they derive (struggle)? How do they adopt, adapt, and then possibly integrate the ideas, knowledge, and skills from the institutional contexts into their developing rabbinic selves?

In classrooms and the beit midrash, students engaged with information and grappled with what it meant in and of itself and what it meant for them as future rabbis. Students speculated about how they would apply new knowledge to their lives. Ilana and Evie, for example, stated an intention to use more electric timers on Shabbat and holidays to avoid directly turning switches on and off.

In on-campus prayer services and in surrounding debates, students had opportunities to learn and practice prayer and prayer-leading skills. Additionally, they struggled with their own participation in group prayer. The structured HUC experience with prayer-leading requirements and scheduling, as though Shacharit was a class to attend, placed it within a formal educational framework. Shacharit at HUC was treated as a type of knowledge to be acquired, a skill to practice, and a habit to develop. Formation was not a primary goal. Students could measure for themselves how they had grown in

prayer-leading, comfort level with services, and the habit of prayer. For Ziegler students at the CY, the formation process was not as structured and thus not as clear. Students may have encountered and evaluated services and then opted out instead of engaging in the struggle. Or, they may have opted out after the struggle. Regular attendance and leadership were more likely to lead to the development of prayer habits and deeper spiritual formation. They may have sought change, as described by Greg, by working within the system, or by Eli, who added niggunim to Mincha services.

Student pulpits provided additional formation inputs for the handful of students who had them. Students encountered, defined, and engaged with communities toward the end result of professional development which included networking and relationship-building, as well as skills (especially language) development. Their experiences added a practical angle to information and skills learned in classes. For Jill, preparing and delivering a dvar Torah was one such integrating experience.

The institutional contexts of the Israel Year contributed to rabbinical identity formation through knowledge, skills, habits, and the development of a sense of self. What the students learned was based on curricula deemed necessary by the institutions. As students, they first learned that there is much more to learn. Some of it seemed esoteric and unnecessary, but they were learning how to learn. The HUC students learned through lectures and round robin translation from Hebrew. The year was a practice in text translation. The Ziegler students learned how to learn *lishma*, for the sake of learning, in a *beit midrash*. The JTS students learned how to learn almost entirely in Hebrew in classes with Israelis. They all acquired knowledge and practice language skills.

The students also learned in order to put information from the texts into practice in personal and professional capacities. When Evie and Ilana studied about electricity on Shabbat and Yom Tov, they developed a relationship with the material by assessing personal practices within the framework presented in the literature. However, the topic was chosen not for reasons of personal edification, but because electricity is a key topic within Shabbat observance for Conservative Jews. What the students learn may have implications for personal practice, but as a common topic, they are likely to need to exhibit knowledge in professional contexts as well.

Others of the skills were practical and tactile. How to wrap tefillin, blessings over different foods, choreography in prayer, how to leyn Torah and haftorah, and Hebrew language can all be taught and learned. Skills and knowledge overlap, but skills are visible when people engage their bodies in their performance. The performance communicates a type of identity and means that this is someone who can and does do this thing; this is a person who practices his or her religion outwardly, who displays this habitus. An individual expresses habitus—that is, embodied socialization—through “standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking” (Bourdieu 1990:70). These physical expressions and others put one’s identity on public display.

Rabbis are expected to be able to perform various functions within the multitude of rabbinic roles; this is why Ziegler has a checklist for skills competence that the students must complete. Whereas a layperson serving as gabbai may be an admired skill, it is a requirement of a rabbi not to perform that role necessarily, but to be able to—with ease, no less—when needed. Rabbinical schools ensure that the students have skills

deemed necessary for public rabbinic function. The skills also have ramifications for personal practice as well, but those physical expressions may only be visible in backstage areas.

Within institutional contexts, the rabbinical students developed habits of studenthood—going to classes, the daily schedule on campus, eating lunch with friends, studying, and attempting to squeeze in time for life and experiencing Israel in the evenings and on weekends. They developed habits particular to being students in Israel—operating within the flow of the Israeli week, where the school/work week is Sunday through Thursday and the weekends are Friday and Shabbat.

They also developed a particular sense of studenthood, or socialization to a particular student role, informed by their home institutions. For the Ziegler and JTS students, this was a type of “year off,” a year to learn *lishma* [for the sake of learning; for its own sake] without professional obligations. This differed from the HUC year, which was the first year of the students’ rabbinical student educations. It had to be foundational. Students were meant to devote themselves to learning foundational knowledge, Hebrew language, and leadership skills. Still, the students across the institutions also shared common selfhood traits. They were all American rabbinical students in Israel for the year. Though they may have spent hours each day immersed in Hebrew and Aramaic texts, they still talked amongst themselves in English. There were other identity anchors, as well, that were reinforced through interactions with classmates, faculty, and administrators in the institutional settings. The identity and roles of a student were reinforced, but the students were also being groomed for leadership.

The institutional contexts of the Israel Year contributed schedule and structure, academic content, social contacts, and a sense of professional purpose to the rabbinical students' narratives and journeys. In this phase, they were students engaged in professional training on the path toward the rabbinate. The institutional contexts supplied them with the content for their identities as Jewish professionals and the reified pathways for achieving the identity goals of the rabbinic profession. The Israel Year is an important stage in the students' journeys because the institutions will also be the ordaining and degree-granting entities that validate the students' desire to be rabbis. For example, the students' mastery of course content has direct implications for their ability to pass necessary exams.

Hebrew Union College, the Conservative Yeshiva, and the Schechter Institute provided the institutional contexts for rabbinic formation during the Israel year. The physical spaces and daily and weekly schedules, the curricula and pedagogies, on-campus prayer services, and pulpit internships were the content of students' school-based experiences. Many of the students' academic experiences on-campus in Israel could largely be replicated in the United States, but the Israeli context was never far from the content and process of learning. Certain courses within a school's broader curricula were tied specifically to Israel, although most classes could be taught on the home campuses with the same goals for professional knowledge and skills. The context of Israel most directly shaped the student experience when they were engaged in pulpit internships. There they had to use their Hebrew and directly interact with Israeli Masorti communities, gaining first-hand experience about how congregations in Israel operated.

Conclusion

The institutional contexts of the Israel Year provided an institutional anchor for the students' experiences. Though they were spending the year in Israel, they were doing so as rabbinical students, as established through their enrollment in rabbinical school. The institutional schedules determined how the students spent their time. The school year calendars were hybrids of the Israeli and American academic calendars, with HUC most closely reflecting an American schedule and Schechter being entirely Israeli because that is the primary population it serves. The institutional schedules also determined when students were in class or even on-campus and how much they took home with them to continue studying at the end of the day and on the weekends.

The nature of the schools as religious institutions also impacted how the students spent their Jewish non-school time, whether meeting up with classmates to attend Shabbat services or participating in campus-based holiday services.⁷⁸ The curricula and pedagogies of each institution established a structure for what and how the students learned in each school. These in turn reinforced the significance of the material to an American rabbi of the particular denomination. The institutional contexts contextualized the students' Israel Year experiences in the larger processes of rabbinic education and rabbinic formation.

Rabbinic education is just one type of professional education with many variables and variations. The Israel Year challenges common conceptions of American clergy professional training by relocating it outside of the United States for a year. What, how,

⁷⁸ The concept of Jewish time is explored in Chapter 5.

where, and with whom the students learned added complexity to the standard process of American clergy professionalization. The students gained knowledge and skills and developed habits that were particular to the profession they were entering, but also specific to the Israeli context and hybrid American-/Anglo-Israeli character of the institutions. They gained Israel-specific forms of and pathways to social capital, something many consider to be prerequisites in the American rabbinate and for American Jewish communities. The educational approaches of these institutions also deployed experience-based learning. Even though few students had internships (the typical experience-based seminary learning), both the curriculum and the place surrounded students with experiences through which they were being shaped by a rabbinical habitus. Adding Israel to the equation of American rabbinic education expands the scope of American clergy professional education and the standards for professional achievement.

CHAPTER FOUR
MEDIATED AND UNMEDIATED EXPERIENCES OF ISRAEL,
THE PLACE

Introduction

The Israel Year shapes students into rabbis by through the experience of living in this very particular place. Whereas institutional contexts operate primarily through formal (overt and implicit) educational goals, Israel itself forms the larger arena in which learning and formation occur. As Dewey ([1938] 1997) and Chazan (2003) argue, people learn best when they are engaged in a multisensory way. There is no assured causality between this kind of involvement and having a meaningful experience—defined subjectively by each student him or herself—but a basic building block is present through active, rather than passive, engagement (Reimer 2003). The rabbinical students engaged with and encountered Israel through two main pathways: mediated experiences and unmediated exploration. The former were structured through Hebrew Union College's weekly Israel Seminar and the inter-seminary Israel Experience Program (IEP). Unmediated experiences of Israel encompassed students' own wanderings around Jerusalem and self-guided excursions to other parts of the country, either alone or in small groups.

Regardless of whether the students were, in a given moment, part of a group excursion or exploring Israel alone, their personal emplacement colored their experiences. The rabbinical students occupied and negotiated a space in-between. They

were neither Israeli citizens⁷⁹ nor tourists or even homeland tourists, but temporary residents. They exhibited characteristics of study abroad students, but theirs was an experience that integrated professional training and religious life and identity. They were full-time students enrolled in Jerusalem-based institutions, but they were there as future American rabbis. The students were alternately on and off the bus, to apply a tourism metaphor that highlights the insularity of tour groups. Both mediated and unmediated experiences of Israel exposed the students' liminality in, and impacted how they interacted with, the Israeli context.

Hebrew Union College's weekly Israel Seminar and the inter-seminary Israel Experience Program (IEP) provided mediated experiences of Israel that echoed themes from the tradition of a youth group *tiyul* [outing; hike], but with academic overtones, institutional ties, and professional training goals. From an institutional perspective, the programs were guided by the goals of theological education and the respective rabbinical schools' desired outcomes for their students' Israel Year experiences. These programs gave students opportunities to engage with Israel from the traditional tripartite angles of land, state, and people. Having relationships with Israel on these levels is important social capital for an American rabbi and, thus, integral to their professional formation. Together, the students traveled within and outside of Jerusalem; met with Israelis engaged in community work; and, discussed concepts and ideas central to Israeli society, politics, identity, and their own relationships with the place. *Mifgashim* [encounters; sing.,

⁷⁹ A handful of the students do have Israeli citizenship, but as they are enrolled in American programs, it often presents as of secondary or waning importance to their self-identification.

mifgash] with Israelis were a common curricular component of tourism programs such as Birthright Israel. The concept was utilized in HUC's Israel Seminar and the IEP as well. Mifgashim are increasingly promoted by financial donors and Israel educators alike because they are believed to "promote emotional attachment, transcend political differences, and stabilize the contentious politics of Israel in the American Jewish community" (Sasson 2014:156). Back in the United States, the students will undoubtedly have to engage with others about Israel on a political level, from inside and outside the Jewish community. Living in Israel and participating in mifgashim took politics away from the spotlight and allowed the students to interact with Israel on numerous levels, building a more rounded relationship. However, as a result, the students may have been underprepared for the political content in the United States that dominates the discourse on Israel.

Whereas co-curricular experiences were guided by the goals of theological education, the students' extra-institutional experiences were guided by the students' own goals for their Israel year. Based on a grounded assessment of the interview data gathered for this project, students' goals for the year mirrored the goals of their institutions: to experience Israel and build or strengthen a relationship with Israel, where "relationship" was defined broadly and no specific type of relationship was specified, though it was implied to be left of center. The students also recognized the professional applicability—the take-home value—of their experiences. The rabbinical students' goals shaped how they wanted to spend their time and what types of experiences they sought to have outside of institutional contexts. Exploring Israel on their own or with classmates, the

rabbinical students married the cultural knowledge and skills they developed as temporary residents with the curiosity of tourists.

The context of Israel—how it was utilized and experienced whether formally or informally and the relationships people felt that they had with Israel as a place, gave purpose and content to the Israel year of rabbinic studies. The rabbinical students interacted with Israel as places, institutions, people, time, and a combination of values, meanings, and ideas. Rabbinic formation emerged from the experiences of the year in the place. These interaction-based experiences and this process of searching for understanding, meaning, and applicability yielded knowledge, skills, habits, and a sense of self as rabbinic.

Institution-Mediated Israel Experiences

Hebrew Union College's Israel Seminar and the inter-seminary Israel Experience Program provided mediated co-curricular Israel experiences for the rabbinical students. In its entirety, the year of rabbinical studies in Israel may be classified as an "Israel experience," in the tradition of youth and young adult Israel experience programs (Chazan 2003).⁸⁰ As with other aspects of the Israel year curriculum at each school, however, these programs aimed to foster knowledge, habits, and skills to will equip these students for their future work as rabbis. The knowledge, in this case, was based in both factual and practical experience with Israel.

⁸⁰ The Israel Year diverges from the traditional model of Israel experience trips and programs through its rabbinic education components and focus on taking the Israel experience "home" to the United States as opposed to staying "home" in Israel, the historic Jewish homeland.

The Israel Seminar was essentially a class that took up the entirety of every Wednesday during the HUC academic year. The Israel Experience Program met less frequently, approximately once every month or two, and took students away from their regular classes. The HUC students participated in both the Israel Seminar and IEP; Schechter and the Conservative Yeshiva did not provide a comparably intensive and consistent Israel education component in their curricula, though Schechter had a class that included trips within Jerusalem during the fall semester, and both schools did have occasional guided outings.

All HUC Year in Israel students (rabbinic, cantorial, education, communal service) participated in the weekly Israel Seminar which was coordinated and facilitated by Steve and Jamie,⁸¹ scholar tour guides with long tenures on HUC's faculty. The Israel Seminar is a cornerstone of the curriculum for the Year in Israel, the one element that cannot be replicated in the United States. The goal of the Israel Seminar was to expose HUC students to Israeli society (religious, cultural, political, military, social services, and other angles and sectors) through either bringing guest speakers to campus or going off-campus to engage with Israelis and institutions. Topics ran the gamut of the diversity of Israeli society but were limited by access. Some groups—specifically those on the religious and political right that did not see engagement as potential outreach or public relations for their group—were not interested in meeting with Reform rabbinical students, Americans, or Jews. This prevented the students from encountering the full range of Israel's diversity. They missed people and aspects of society that could further deepen

⁸¹ Pseudonyms are used for faculty, staff, and administrators, just as they are for students.

and complexify their personal and professional relationships with Israel. Encountering these limitations, however, was also a valuable lesson in boundaries and provided a looking-glass view of where American rabbinical students fit into Israeli society.

The inter-seminary Israel Experience Program (IEP) was a joint program between HUC, JTS, and Ziegler sponsored by the United Jewish Appeal (UJA)-Federation of New York. The program was created in response to fears expressed in an article by Rabbi Daniel Gordis (2011) that American rabbinical students were becoming increasingly if not anti-Israel then at least apathetic toward Israel.⁸² Aaron, a JTS-trained rabbi working on behalf of the Conservative rabbinical students, coordinated the IEP in close contact with HUC administrators. The founding intention of the IEP was to facilitate the rabbinical students' positive relationships with Israel. In practice, the purpose of the IEP was to teach the context of Israel and deepen students' relationships with Israel through travel and seminars together as future rabbinic colleagues. The IEP pedagogy of contextualization incorporated visiting organizations, schools, and community centers; listening to lectures, panel discussions, and presentations; and, speaking with Israelis from multiple religious and ethnic groups. Through shared experiences and more socially-oriented activities such as hikes, the students from the different schools got to know each other, setting foundations for friendship and professional networks.

HUC's Israel Seminar and the IEP provided in-roads to Israel for the students and framed experiences in Israel as relevant for American rabbinic identity. This work

⁸² This perspective was quickly disproved by Cohen (2011) with additional support from Sasson (2014). A more thorough discussion appears in the Introduction to this dissertation.

required pedagogies that take account of political contention. The students' relationships with Israel—and how that complex affinity influenced the formation of their rabbinic identities—were directly addressed through the pedagogical approach of “mature love” and the concept of “complicating Israel.” Educators and students alike were challenged and encouraged to “grapple with difficult issues, appreciate diversity and complexity of different points of view, and reflect critically on what [Israel] means to them in their own lives” (Grant and Kopelowitz 2012:23). As a paradigm for critique, educator Robbie Gringras (2004) promotes simultaneously “hugging and wrestling” with Israel.⁸³

The Israel Seminar and IEP facilitated and mediated students' program-based encounters with Israel. The home- and Israel-based institutions sought to produce rabbinical students who had informed and committed relationships with Israel. These relationships, like all of the formation process, required evaluation and struggle. Critiques, for some students, signaled a lack of love and appreciation for Israel; for other students, critiques were the only pathway through which they know how to develop what they viewed as an honest relationship with Israel.⁸⁴ The Israel Seminar's “*Haredim* [ultra-Orthodox] in Israel” session and the IEP's North Tiyul provide a window on how that process evolved for these students.

⁸³ Gringras explains that hugging and wrestling both come from a place of caring. He writes, “If I don't care about a community, I will never get angry about the way it operates. Anger, grappling, wrestling, only emerges from commitment. Commitment is not only defined by what we agree on, it is also defined by what we argue about” (2004).

⁸⁴ Not surprisingly, the mediation of engagement with Israel comes with biases. Those biases are generally politically left-leaning, in line with the liberal, left-leaning religious orientation of the schools. The two orientations at once are not a given (Cohen 2011), a noted point of controversy and debate among students between students and program coordinators throughout the year.

HUC Israel Seminar: “The Haredim in Israel”

Today is “Haredi Day” at HUC. The students are dressed conservatively—seeing the men in long pants and long-sleeved shirts in December is not uncommon, but the often jeans-clad women all wear skirts at least down to their knees if not longer, and shirts with sleeves that go past the elbows. The smatterings of bright colors, the low necklines, and their body language give them away as having dressed up for the day. Before their field trip to Meah Shearim, Jerusalem’s preeminent ultra-Orthodox neighborhood, the students split into two groups to discuss the previous week’s topics of Modern Orthodoxy and the National Religious movement in Israel.⁸⁵ For his group of eighteen students, Jamie’s goal is to make sure that before they enter the community, they understand the basic tenets of Orthodox Judaism in Israel. Jamie presents a basic history of the Haredi movement and then takes questions. He closes out the session by specifying the deep trauma that the Haredi community still feels from having been nearly eradicated in the Holocaust. “Haredi Jews in Israel are just now beginning to look beyond that,” he states.

At 11:00am, the students depart HUC. Half of the students visit Kemach,⁸⁶ an organization that helps Haredi men enter professional training programs and universities in order to get jobs to support their families. The other half of the group takes a walking

⁸⁵ Where possible, the Israel Seminar organizers try to have topics that build on one another. For example, in mid-December, over the course of two Wednesdays, the HUC students learn about Orthodox Judaism. The topic of the first week was Modern Orthodoxy in Israel; the topic of the second week was ultra-Orthodoxy in Israel.

⁸⁶ The organization’s name, Kemach, refers to the saying “*ein kemach, ein Torah*,” “without flour (meaning bread or money), there is no Torah.” The organization’s mission is to help Haredi Jews achieve the training and employment that they need in order to earn money to support their families and their religious lifestyles.

tour of Meah Shearim. The intention of the walking tour is to utilize the context of Jerusalem to teach the HUC students about Haredi Judaism. They are able to encounter Haredi Jews and Judaism by being in that iconic neighborhood, a space teeming with life that seems so anachronistic, especially given its proximity to the bustling, modern center of town.

The context of a group walking tour marks the students as Other in that space.

Mari recounted her experience.

[W]e were walking as a big group with men and women together. So this man came out of his house and started yelling at our guide: “You know, you can’t walk here and men and women can’t walk together.” And the guide was just like “We’re not doing anything wrong” and just tried to get away and keep walking. But then the man got really angry and started yelling at us and calling us shikshas [female non-Jews, derogatory] really loudly and screaming. I realized at that moment that I have always considered Haredim to be legitimate Jews, but the fact that they don’t necessarily consider me to be a legitimate Jew is really hard. And where do I draw the line between my tolerance and my willingness to accept them and recognition that they don’t accept me?

Mari’s experience on the walking tour was an encounter with a neighborhood and a person who considered her to be not just an outsider to that community, but not a Jew at all. The walking tour was meant to be a cultural history lesson, which it was, just not in the way it had been intended—that is, without direct confrontation. The aim was for the students to interact with the space, but with its people only in the abstract. This direct

confrontation personalized the encounter and removes the veil of politeness and hospitality. If this one unfiltered interaction was all that the students had to go by, they may have thought that all Haredi Jews believed that they are not Jewish, a point touched on in the afternoon program.

After lunch, all of the students convene on the ground floor of a girls' school in Meah Shearim for a presentation by the American-born director of the Torah Institute of Contemporary Issues. The organization is a public policy think tank for issues impacting Haredi communities in Israel, but it accepts rulings from gedolei haTorah [great Torah scholars] without question. The fact that the director is addressing a group of Reform rabbinical students is not lost—he validates this controversial decision by openly framing his talk about Haredi Judaism as kiruv [religious outreach]. The HUC students are here because this man—under the guise of outreach—was willing to speak to them.

David shared his reflections on the afternoon lecture and compared it to the morning session at Kemach:

I heard the rabbi [the Director of the Torah Institute of Contemporary Issues] . . . say, he was talking about liberal Jews and Westernized Jews and how—he didn't have to say it but he said it, in a way: "Well we're keeping our own distance from you. We welcome you and we understand that you're going to see the light some day and you're going to turn things around and you're going to understand that you need to be like us." . . . And then he said the big clincher which was, "It's easy for a lot of Jews to walk around in the modern world and feel like democracy and tolerance are Jewish values, but you know, they're not." And I was just like—

it just really opened my eyes because, like, I knew there was nothing inherently like this in Torah, but I so see them as things that are derived from Torah and derived from rabbinical exegesis and . . . he doesn't see it that way at all. Wow. I'm like, how do we talk to these people? I don't even know. Because when I was at Kemach, I was like yeah, they're the same but different, and then I go to this school and it's like it's different, but different. I wrestle with it back and forth. It's hard. It's really hard.

David was stunned. He did not know anymore how to interact with Haredi Jews because the foundation that he had thought they shared no longer had legs. For David, the divisions between his conceptions of Judaism and of this rabbi—this emissary of Haredi Judaism—were clarified through direct contact.

As evident from David's and Mari's narratives of their experiences, the day's programs were informative, but they also struck highly emotional chords. David's and Mari's reflections on the day revealed how direct contact with Haredi Jews actually erected barriers to connecting with Haredi Judaism. The meanings that emerged from these interactions shook them. When they realized that they were not viewed or accepted as legitimate Jews, regardless of their lineage, they began to question even the most basic concept of Jewish unity. Before this direct experience, they had an idea of what David described as "same, but different." Not anymore. "I just felt kind of discouraged that there is such a divide," commented Mari, "because I've always kind of been of this belief that we're too few in this world to be so divided." Determining who is Other is integral to defining the boundaries of the Haredi community. Encountering this, the HUC students

responded in-kind, through Othering. Through this program, the HUC students learned about Haredi Judaism, and it has saddened them and shaken their concept of Jewish peoplehood. However, though painful, it strengthened their group identity, similar to the dynamic of increased solidarity upon encountering deviant others (Durkheim 1982), a goal of the Israel Seminar.

Whereas David and Mari expressed their hurt and frustration, many of the HUC students disengaged. The students heard the Director of the Torah Institute state that the most basic tenets of Haredi Judaism delegitimize Reform ideology. The students fundamentally disagreed; for them, liberal Judaism is legitimate Judaism. However, they responded by staring into the distance, rolling their eyes, and several students even nodded off. Only once they boarded the bus back to campus, the students vocalized their frustration, disagreement, and even disgust with having heard Reform Judaism marginalized and delegitimized. In a secure space, surrounded by peers who reinforced their collective identity and shared worldview, the students were able to open up. The encounters at Kemach, on the Meah Shearim walking tour, and from the Torah Institute lecture rattled them in the moment and stuck with them in the long-term, influencing their attitudes toward Haredi Jews and Haredi Judaism throughout the remainder of the school year.

The Israel Seminar provided mediated access, structured opportunities for interaction, and time for reflection for comprehending the context of a diverse Israel. Steve and Jamie, in planning the programs, did not shy away from complex situations or difficult conversations. They framed the students' experiences and struggles as necessary

for understanding a complex Israel and developing future rabbis that are Israel-literate and able to comprehend some of the nuance of the place. The elements of the formation process reinforced the relevance of informal and experience-based learning. That is, students should learn the most through direct experiences and engagement with where they are and the people who live and work there, something that is possible, in this case, only because HUC arranged the encounters.

Inter-Seminary Israel Experience Program: North Tiyul

Early one weekday morning in the middle of March, HUC, JTS, and Ziegler students gathered on the steps outside HUC to board buses for the two-day North Tiyul. The goal of the tiyul was for students to engage with the concepts of diversity, democracy, and citizenship. They were meant to accomplish this through conversations about and encounters with communities that the students wouldn't otherwise be able to access. The first stop was a library in the integrated Jewish, Muslim, and Christian town of Ramle where the students engaged in guided discussions about citizenship and identity. After lunch, the students boarded the bus and continued northward to Shorashim, a *yishuv* [community settlement], the site of their first mifgash.

In a community room at the yishuv, the students met and interacted with representatives from four different local Jewish communities. The communities differed from each other religiously (Conservative, Reform, secular), economically, and politically. Sitting in small groups, the community representatives from Shorashim, Yishuv Eschar, Kibbutz Pelech, and Har Halutz rotated through, answering the students'

questions about membership, governance structures, ideologies, and identity. Each community was designed to attract member-residents with particular identities and ideologies. The community councils were legally permitted to accept applications from only the type of potential neighbors they wanted, a practice that the students struggled to comprehend. Overt, codified communal exclusionary practices for housing purposes and neighborhood membership—especially since they are normative—left many of the students feeling deeply uncomfortable.

The north of Israel is home to Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Druze. However, by being in the area, the students saw that neighborhoods and towns were not just separate but split even further based on a variety of standards and parameters set by the community groups. “I’d never really realized,” commented Wendy, an HUC student, “that even in areas where it is so mixed, how not mixed it is and how people really have zero contact with people who live the town over.” Wendy clarified why she felt so troubled by the situation:

I got really discouraged because I really felt like, you know, if there’s any way that [democracy in Israel] is going to work, it has to be because people feel like joint citizens of a country and that is so not where people are. People are living in a Jewish town or an Arab town. . . . it’s just depressing to me that there’s a separate—even among the very enlightened folk, there’s a separate but equal or separate but slightly less equal mentality here that is foreign to me and very hard.

Wendy viewed the discrete communities from the angle of democracy and citizenship that had been introduced that morning as the analytical framework for the tiyul. The

distance she observed between neighbors was incongruous to her; it seemed so outdated and so antithetical to democratic values. Wendy had thought of Israel as valuing diversity, but she did not see that in practice, even on this small scale. It was not just that diversity was not present, but she had encountered a framework that, by its explicit criteria, legitimized and perpetuated discrimination. The implementation of policies of preference put her Jewish values and thus Judaism in opposition to the values of the communities. Encountering injustice unsettled her and negatively impacted her relationship with Israel. Her image of Israel was not what she had thought, and she felt destabilized.

The second day of the tiyul focused on encounters with Arab communities in the North. The day began with Shacharit prayer services (separate Reform and Conservative services although students may attend either or none), breakfast, and a brief history lesson on Arab-Jewish relations. The students then departed for the Arab Israeli town of Deir al-Assad. For an hour, the rabbinical students had a mifgash, in a mix of Hebrew and English, with students at the local high school.⁸⁷ The goal was for the rabbinical students to meet face-to-face with Israeli Arabs and for the high school students to practice speaking English.

The two groups of students sit in concentric circles in the center of a large, light, open room. Towers of plastic chairs and a collection of portable white boards seem to huddle in the corner. Every once in awhile, the students are given conversation starters:

⁸⁷ In previous years, other groups of Americans had met with Arab-Israeli university students. However, the convenient access to, scheduling reliability of a high school group, and increased willingness of younger students to chat more, outweighed the age proximity of an older group.

“Teach the Americans to count to ten in Arabic”; “Everyone share what they like and dislike about where they live”; “Do you ever fight with your parents? If so, about what?”

The room hums with multi-lingual conversation. Every ten or so minutes, the rabbinical students stand up and shift five seats to the right so they can chat with more high school students in this unique twist on speed-dating. Conversations continue until a group of students leaves to take a math test.

For Alyssa, encountering and engaging with students at Deir al-Assad High School is poignant because it was a direct interaction, not a filtered news report. For Alyssa, having a few conversations with teenagers over an hour or so gave her a generally positive outlook on intergroup relations and humanity in general. She explained,

I really liked talking to the kids at the Arab school in the village. You hear so much rhetoric and you don't really know what it's like on the ground. And I'm constantly reading the news and like I read one news source that says like “there's no peace to be had. Every Arab Israeli and every Palestinian in every territory hates Israel and wants to throw them into the sea.” And then you read another thing and it's the opposite. So . . . it was a good reminder to not be quick to judge and to like put the idea of people first. . . . I feel obligated towards those children.

Alyssa had not previously expressed negative views about Israeli Arabs or Palestinians, but she still came away from the experience feeling more open and more accepting. Meeting people, instead of reading the news, adds nuance and gives a face to her relationship with Israel.

At noon, the rabbinical students file out of the high school and walk down the hill to the Deir al-Assad community center. Here, they meet a local councilor who is an anomaly amongst Arab Israelis because he taps into Israeli governmental resources⁸⁸ to fund local programs and service learning projects for youth. The rabbinical students' attention wanes as stomachs rumble. It is lunchtime, after all. A few students doze off in their seats and several others leave to use the restroom down the hall. However, many still manage to engage with the speaker on topics of personal identity, local economics, and the place of Arabs in Israeli democracy. Like the other events of the day, interactions are structured, with opportunities for direct conversation. The students do not discuss hot-button topics; rather, they focus on themes of common humanity. The visit to Deir al-Assad ends with a trek back up the hill to the bus parked outside the high school.

The lunchtime session in a multi-purpose room at Shorashim was an opportunity for the students to process what they had encountered on this tiyul and think through how it impacts their views on and relationships with Israel. Given their collective size, the students divided into two HUC groups and one combined JTS and Ziegler group. The question guiding the session: “Is Israel a Jewish state, a state for Jews, or a state for all of its citizens?” The students were tasked with creating a symbolic representation of their aspirational State of Israel using different shapes of paper. Each shape had different size options—the larger size denoted more significance.

⁸⁸ Though Arab Israeli towns are eligible for Israeli government entitlement funding, most communities do not apply to receive the funds, preferring to maintain autonomy. Their motivations are not uniform, though some view accepting funds as complicity with Israeli government policies perceived as discriminatory against their communities.

The students' paper shapes revealed deep struggles with Orthodox control of the Jewish public sphere and a lack of equity for citizens, both Jewish and not. Becky, a JTS student, spoke to the religious angle; Andy, a Ziegler student, focused on the political. Becky appreciated that Israel is a Jewish state and has a Jewish character but was troubled by the role of the government and chief rabbinate in dictating public Judaism. She commented, "So I think that a state for the Jews would have the—in my ideal world—would have the obligation to make sure that everyone has the ability to express their Judaism as they want. So, that right is still there, but it's not a centralized, enforced thing." For Becky, equality in a state for Jewish people was about the right to practice Judaism—for her, Conservative Judaism—and be supported in those practices by the state.

Andy vocalized concern about preference given to Jews over other groups and, by extension, his own privilege. He stated, "I like that Israel is a state for Jewish people that people can be Jews and feel comfortable here but when that infringes on other's rights—when we have the Right of Return⁸⁹ but other people don't, that becomes an issue and I still have that need for fairness for all citizens." Becky and Andy both believed that Israel should be a state for Jewish people, but that this should not in any way diminish the rights or privileges of other people, specifically the non-Orthodox and non-Jews. Andy and Becky's views of how Israel ought to be—welcoming to all Jews and fair to all citizens—

⁸⁹ The Right of Return, developed in response to World War II, states that anyone who is him or herself Jewish or has at least one Jewish grandparent is eligible to immigrate to Israel. The reason for the Right of Return was to reinforce Israel's own identity as a safe haven for Jews experiencing anti-Semitism. For more, see Sacher (2006), *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*.

reflected the injustice and inequality that they saw in the religious and political spheres in contemporary Israel, injustice and inequality their off-campus experiences had made vividly real.

Regardless of the multitude of paper iterations, many of the students came to the same conclusions. Firstly, they wanted Israel to have a national Jewish character, but not state-controlled religion. They expressed that they appreciated that Judaism is the religion of the public sphere, but they resented the control held by the Orthodox Rabbinate. Secondly, many students believed that because of Jewish values of equality and justice, Israel has the ability to be a state for all of its citizens. Even though the overt goal of the exercise was for students to define an aspirational, abstract Israel, the endeavor was also intensely personal, prompting the students to reflect on sometimes long-standing relationships with Israel and to vocalize many of their personal struggles.

Following the intense, introspective exercise, the rabbinical students visited a mosque in the town of Sakhnin. Leaving their shoes at the entrance, the students enter the large, open, ornate, carpeted space. A local imam welcomes the students and gives them an overview of the mosque and Islam in the area. The rabbinical students are invited to ask questions, which some do:

“How long do you have to train to become an imam?”

“I am still learning.”

“Can a woman be an imam?”

“Not officially, but we have women in this mosque who lead prayers for other women.”

“How do people decide which mosque to attend?”

“People go to the mosque closest to their home.”

While the imam talks with some students, others quietly wander around the space admiring the painted ceiling, large chandelier, Qurans balanced on the floor-level book stands. “Floor shtenders [book stands], cushions, and rugs could transform the CY,” Jake comments quietly, clearly envious of the comfort he perceives. After a short while, the students head back to the entrance, put on their shoes, and help themselves to the rugelach—a pastry that may have cultural significance or merely be ubiquitous and easily available—set out by the mosque as a treat for them. The students then board the buses and head back on the long drive to Jerusalem.

The HUC Israel Seminar and the inter-seminary Israel Experience Program gave the rabbinical students opportunities to engage with their context of Israel in a mediated, group-based way. Their resulting interactions influenced how Israel will become part of their rabbinic identity. They developed skills in dialoguing and observation, shaped habits of direct—yet mediated—engagement with Israeli institutions and people, and developed a sense of self that included a relationship with Israel, an important type of social capital for a future American rabbi. Through the students’ interactions with the diversity of Others that inhabit this place, they may also gain clarity about who they are in relation to those others and in the eyes of those others—for better or worse. The students struggled with their interactions, but they did so from a place of safety in numbers. Being with classmates and colleagues provided a supportive group context for processing their experiences and developing a sense of social selfhood.

Structured Liminality and Struggle

Encountering and engaging with Israel transformed the students' knowledge of the place with depth and complexity. As Jake, a Ziegler student, commented, "It's nice to show us these things and let us kind of reflect on the Israel we think we know but we don't, but we kind of did know, but we didn't." The students may have known about Haredi Judaism but may never have interacted with community institutions or Haredi Jews. They could have known how the inside of a mosque looks and even have visited one before but being able to openly ask questions of an imam made a personal—and interreligious collegial—connection. Direct encounters bridged the gap between abstract and grounded knowledge, but each encounter happened in structured, liminal spaces.

The Israel Seminar and IEP gave the students access to parts of Israel, institutions, and people that they might not have otherwise been able to meet, but there were limits to what can be structured. While the programs enabled access, they may have also hindered it. As mentioned previously, some organizations and people did not want to meet with progressive American Jews. Or, in the case of the Torah Institute, the encounter was rationalized as religious outreach. Group size was also an issue. A single HUC student dressed conservatively may have been able to walk through Meah Shearim with little notice, but a co-ed group with a tour guide was a conspicuous target for animosity. For the IEP, group size meant traveling on two buses and reducing opportunities for one-on-

one interactions, both between students from different schools and with Israelis. Group characteristics impacted the ability to engage and the structure of the encounters.

The encounters occupied spaces in-between, neither the boundaried institutions of everyday student life nor the unmediated surrounding culture. Whether in Meah Shearim or various communities in the North—the Israel Seminar and IEP reflected the student-tourists’ own liminality. They left campus and traveled to places of liminality—Kemach was a space between, assisting Haredi Jews in accessing education and jobs in predominantly secular schools and businesses; the high school class in Deir al-Assad was a liminal space that spanned cultures through language despite its location. The students embodied their own border-crossing on HUC’s walking tour of Meah Shearim and literally consumed cultural intersections by eating rugelach in the foyer of the Sakhnin mosque.

Steve, Jamie, and Aaron guided the students’ evaluations of their Israel Seminar and IEP encounters with Israel. The program coordinators framed the encounters by providing history, background information, and context. They provided guiding questions and encouraged students to pay attention to specific aspects of encounters. Before the HUC students embarked on their visits to Kemach and Meah Shearim, Steve and Jamie presented necessary information to help the students understand what they would be encountering and how it fit into the tapestry of Israeli Orthodox Judaism. On the North Tiyul, the stop in Ramle was an opportunity for the students to engage with ideas and concepts of democracy, access, and citizenship prior to engaging with Israelis directly. During the lunchtime session at Shorashim, Aaron helped the students evaluate the

experience by encouraging them to tear, fold, and manipulate the pieces of paper if the flat shapes did not speak to them. These teacher-guides provided interpretive schemes and tactics to help the students understand their encounters with Israel, often encouraging struggle.

Both the Israel Seminar and IEP promoted struggle as a necessary step toward developing a deeper relationship with Israel. In keeping with the pedagogical approach of complexifying Israel, program coordinators purposely arranged scenarios that challenged the students. In both the Israel Seminar and IEP, differences were highlighted when sameness was assumed, and similarities were highlighted when difference was assumed. Struggle was about squaring assumptions with the realities encountered on the ground, but it was also about learning how to hold the tension and live with unresolved conflict. The students struggled with the dissonance, expressing themselves through language that denoted frustration, sadness, disappointment, and even anger. Face-to-face encounters complexified the students' evaluations of Israel by making them personal, which ultimately deepened their relationship with Israel.

The end-goal for both Israel experience programs, and one of the goals for the Israel Year in general, was for the students to develop more informed, deeper relationships with Israel. These programs provided structured liminal points of engagement in which pedagogies of mature love were modeled, moments that embraced the struggle as both characteristic of a complex society and opportunities for growth. The students wanted to achieve resolution, but a relationship with Israel involves an

emotional connection that fluctuates in an on-going process of examination and meaning-making.

During the paper shapes activity on the North Tiyul, Jake and Greg shared their long view of relationships with Israel. Both Ziegler students reflected on how their experiences of Judaism in Israel had had an impact on their ability to see themselves potentially living there. Jake, whose relationship with Israel was inculcated early in life, expressed that his relationship with Israel has taken a hit this year as he has encountered tension, antagonism, and conflict between different Jewish factions and between Jews and others within Israel.

So I used to want to make aliyah. Long before I had any desire to be a professional, rabbinic Jew, I wanted to live here and contribute to making this place better. And unfortunately, this year has completely taken away any desire for me to ever want to live here and that's a very painful reality for me to deal with.

Jake's sadness about the current state of his relationship with Israel was tied to the fact that he cannot fathom his ideal Israel; the reality on the ground was too different and too much of an obstacle. What he encountered not just on the North Tiyul but throughout the year was the source of struggle that was painful enough to change a previously positive life-long relationship with Israel.

Despite the negativity that rose to the surface as the students struggled with what they wanted Israel to be and the realities they encountered, some students managed a

more hopeful spin and a less despairing resolution. Greg, also a Ziegler student, said that he could see himself making a life in Israel:

I came here not wanting to make aliyah, but I could . . . When I walk down the street, even when I see the pushing and Haredim treating people like dirt and Arabs being treated like dirt, I still see the *chag sameach* [happy holiday]. I walk down the street and turn the corner and see the Old City of Jerusalem and wow, this is a pretty special place in spite of all these things. . . . Maybe we just need to say “yes, there are problems, but there are going to be problems. Let’s work on those problems.”

Whereas Jake felt worn down by the issues, Greg expressed a motivation to work for change. Greg characterized the Old City and Jerusalem as “a pretty special place in spite of all these things,” which motivated him to address the challenges and imagine living in Israel in order to do so.

The Israel Seminar and IEP, as informal and experiential educational components of formal rabbinic education, promoted personal and professional connections with the students’ current context of Israel. The IEP and Israel Seminar gave the students opportunities to encounter Israel in a way that was guided by the educational principle of “mature love” and mediated but not scripted. The guided angle also enabled the students to more readily process their experiences as part of their rabbinic journeys and adopt, adapt, and integrate their experiences into their formation narratives. Their relationships with Israel are ever-evolving, as are their rabbinic identities. The Israel Seminar and IEP may prove to be poignant parts of these intertwined journeys, opportunities to experience

Israel in the company of fellow rabbinical students tying their professional networks to the experience of this “very special place.”

Unmediated Extra-Institutional Israel Experiences

The students were in Israel because their schools required it of them; however, their engagement with Israel as a place was not limited to institutional contexts and mediated experiences. Outside of school, the students encountered and engaged with Israel on their own terms. The students explored Jerusalem where they lived and also ventured further afield to other cities and areas of the country. They both developed local routines that made them feel at-home and took trips that were more tourist-like in nature. What the students did, where they went, and how they spent their time marked them as temporary residents. More generally, they also fit into the categories of study abroad students (Cohen 2003) and meaning-seekers, a classification often reserved for homeland tourists or pilgrims (Kelner 2010).

Though the rabbinical students may have exhibited characteristics of homeland tourists, they crossed the boundary between resident and tourist again and again as they sought out Jewishly meaningful personal experiences and deeper, more direct relationships with Israel. Talia, an HUC student, commented that she had been to Israel previously as a tourist. As a temporary resident, though, she viewed her surroundings a bit differently: “For me what’s been so cool about this year, even the traveling around Jerusalem and seeing things, is that you don’t see them as a tourist but you see them as someone living here. You can look past the tourist things.” Living in Jerusalem gave Talia the opportunity to see things up-close. “Off the bus,” the students were able to have

unmediated, self-guided interactions with spaces and people. When the students encountered and engaged with Israel on their own or in small groups, they used their privilege as American Jewish temporary residents to their benefit.

As a result of being in Jerusalem, the details of daily life were place-specific. Anyone can buy groceries in a supermarket, but you have to be in Jerusalem to buy them at the Mahane Yehuda *shuk* [market]. Anyone can pray, but you have to be in Jerusalem to pray at the *Kotel* [Western Wall] in the Old City. Thus, the specific place-related rabbinic capital encompassed the mystique of Jerusalem. The history and religious significance of Jerusalem made daily living all the more alluring when it happened in a place that is so valued the world over.

The Israel Year in general and unmediated encounters with Israel in particular was an experience of space. As Kelner defined it, tourism is an “embodied engagement with place” (2010:133). If tourism is “an experience of self-in-place” (199), then residence for a year would be all the more so. This embeddedness, explained by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as “one’s physical presence in a location and experiences that are above all sensory and proprioceptive, or having to do with the body’s orientation in space” (2002:312), rang particularly true for the rabbinical students as temporary residents. The students’ multisensory engagement in the rituals of daily life—what they saw, touched, tasted, smelled, and heard as they went about their days—shaped their relationships with the place and contributed to the meaning that Jerusalem and Israel have for them as Jews and future rabbis. The access that they had as Jewish Americans enabled their experiences. When they were unable to gain entrance because they were Jewish,

they did because they were American. Tourists, whether Jewish or not, can go places, such as Bethlehem, that Israeli citizens cannot.

As the students explored Jerusalem and other cities in Israel, they wove the place into their emerging sense of themselves as rabbis. Their goals for their unmediated experiences of Israel mirrored those set by their institutions. That is, the students themselves desired diverse experiences that deepened their relationships with Israel. In search of authenticity and a more real Israel, they wanted more direct interactions with the place, even if it was religiously or culturally challenging for them as American Reform and Conservative Jews. In unmediated scenarios, the students experienced the place not as an object, but through themselves, as “knowledge of an emplaced self” (Kelner 2010:133).

The Old City of Jerusalem

Jerusalem’s Old City and especially the Western Wall are destinations for pilgrims and locals alike. The Kotel holds an irreplaceable spot in the hearts of the Jewish people. In prayer, Jews the world over physically orient themselves toward the Western Wall. As tourists, the students were consumers of the sights, sounds, and cultures throughout Jerusalem’s spaces, fully engaging their senses as described by Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (2002). As locals, however, they had the option and opportunity to visit with a degree of frequency and develop deeper relationships with the space if they choose. The proximity of Hebrew Union College and the Conservative Yeshiva to the Old City made the space relatively easy to access. The Old City is a complex, emotional, evocative

places (Carroll 2011). Mari, an HUC student, described the wonder and awe that she still experiences when she visits the Old City:

I think the Old City is just such an unbelievable microcosm of world religions and there's this one corner where you can see the entrance to the Jewish Quarter and one of the Arab bazaars and one of the streets of the Christian Quarter. And you're just standing at this cross-section of like cultural everything. It's just unbelievable. And the people-watching is also phenomenal because you're trying to guess their religion. It's very cool. I think it's one of the most unique places on earth and I love it there.

The Old City is a densely multi-cultural and religiously diverse space. For Mari and her classmates, the diversity reminded them that Jerusalem is not just a Jewish place. As they sought to meet their goals of developing more personal relationships with Israel, the rabbinical students embraced complexity. Even in unmediated interactions with Israel, the students internalized the tenets of Grant and Kopelowitz's "mature love": they recognized and respected struggle as a pathway to a deeper, more informed relationship.

Dave, an HUC student, took full advantage of his campus' proximity to the Old City. Venturing into the Old City approximately once a week, Dave was a Kotel "regular" because, as he stated, "I want that to be the thing that I remember when I leave. . . . Having a relationship with the Kotel makes it so much more than a wall, much more than even a connection to the Temple and tradition . . ." Dave chose to encounter the Kotel with frequency and cemented the place and his relationship with it in his memory. He interpreted the space as meaningful, as a way to connect with Jewish tradition and

enhance his “relationship with God.” The Western Wall was both a powerful religious symbol of international significance and a public space that Dave intentionally made personal.

Whereas Dave interpreted his encounters with the Kotel as positive and spiritually nurturing, Evan, another HUC student experienced this symbolic space as a site of conflict. He and his girlfriend visited the Western Wall on the 9th of Av [Tisha B’Av], the Hebrew date on which the destruction of the First and Second Temples is commemorated. On that mid-summer evening, following the HUC-sponsored program, as Evan told the story,

We were sitting on the ground in the Kotel plaza behind the barrier . . . in the area where we were sitting, there were like men and women sitting on the ground together. We were just kind of in-between them and we were talking about Tisha B’Av and having a really interesting conversation about it, like different ways to think about it, like it’s a time to remember our historical scars and our personal scars and talking about the Third Temple, and thank God we have Israel now, so what’s Tisha B’Av all about? . . . it was kind of emotional. We were talking about things in our lives that had been really hard for us . . . so she put her head on my shoulder and I put my arm around her in order to comfort her. And this man comes up to us and says “you can’t do that here.” He said it to us in Hebrew. We were like “we’re comforting each other, this isn’t a symbol of affection . . . This is mourning, this isn’t loving.” He kind of started shouting at us and I had a really

negative reaction to this person and we got up and stormed out of the Kotel plaza and it was a really intense experience.

Evan discovered that they were not free to define the space as they chose. Rather, the reality of ultra-Orthodox authority imposed itself, in the form of an unwelcome encounter. No amount of explanation could create a space for their non-Orthodox interpretation of acceptable behavior in this place. If the couple had been part of a group program or otherwise mediated experience on that same evening in that same space, they might have been shielded from a negative interaction with the security guard. This conflict of meanings and interpretations of appropriate ways to observe a holiday and behave in public drove a wedge between Evan and the Kotel.

Non-Jewish sites in the Old City also intrigued the rabbinical students. Their privilege as Americans, despite being Jewish, gave them easier access to Muslim and Christian spaces. Jill, a Ziegler student, recalled a visit to the Muslim-controlled Temple Mount [called *Har HaBayit*] with classmates. Jill described her experience and its meaning to her as follows:

[T]hree of us went to Har Habayit. . . . And as we were walking into the entrance, I got warned not to stir up any trouble, but we went up there and it was amazing. . . . Would I go to all those places if the Temple was standing? No, but the Temple's not standing right now and there's a mosque there. Anyone's allowed to be up there and so you can go all the way to the far side which is overlooking *Har Hazeitim* [the Mount of Olives]. So we climbed up on the walls and . . . we walked back and forth the whole length of the wall . . . [W]e actually sang

niggunim; you're not supposed to pray up there. . . . There used to be a guard for every Jewish group that would go up there and they policed them. But we were able to roam; we were able to take pictures.

Jill's narrative of her experience illustrated how she and her classmates were taking advantage of their access, proximity, and privilege to more fully explore Jerusalem and the Old City and also be closer to this holy site. From the initial warning about going to the site to the guidelines for behavior, and the previous policy of being accompanied by a guard, Har Habayit had been slated as a place to avoid. Nevertheless, Jill and her classmates went, even singing and climbing up the walls. The way that they engaged with the site mimicked the practices of other tourists, but their behavior reflected a willingness to strategize about how far to push the stated parameters for behavior—singing niggunim, but not praying. Their privilege as American Jews gave them access to a holy Muslim site in a way that was not reciprocated by policies for Muslims in Jewish-controlled spaces. Jill did not mention larger struggles such as these, only the hypothetical that she would not have access if the Temple were standing.

Jill and her classmates experienced the Temple Mount by being there, walking the walls, singing, taking pictures, and admiring the view. Visiting the Temple Mount may be considered part of her larger goal to experience as much of Israel as she is able to access. Colloquially, visiting the Temple Mount was on Jill's "bucket list." Jill noted that it may appear incongruous to visit a non-Jewish site, but this was universally on everyone's list of Jerusalem tourism experiences, and rabbinic students need not limit themselves.

The rabbinical students also visited Christian parts of the Old City. Talia, an HUC student, visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher with family in town from the United States. She was struck by the ritual actions she observed.

I walked into the Church and I was watching people put their holy water in water bottles and their new crucifixes and their cell phones on the Stone of the Unction—which I then had to look up what the Stone of the Unction was. It was where Jesus' body was anointed before it was buried. And they touched their things to it and I was so struck that it looked exactly like what we do at the Kotel where we stand and we elbow our way in for a little crack to put our little note in. And it was the same behavior. It's a different way of being active and passive and a different way of trying to transfer holiness through osmosis or trying to just draw out as much holiness from something that you can. I was just really struck by seeing that and it was such a thing that could have happened anywhere, but because it was Jerusalem, you could just feel like . . . Whether they believe in what they're seeing in the mosaics on the wall or they believe the words that they're hearing being chanted from a room that they don't see, something is there and it's connecting them . . .

Talia characterized her experience as “a huge Israel multi-cultural moment.” She recognized the similarity between Jewish and Christian relationships to the holy sites in this city; and that engagement – being there – has given her a sensory memory. By viewing rituals in the Church, Talia saw Jewish behaviors at the Kotel as comparable, to understand more about how people interpreted holiness, how they engaged with things

that they believe contained and can transmit holiness, and how they sought to imbue elements from their lives with holiness. Talia's visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher had interfaith resonance. Being there gave her a holistic sense of the Old City and how, regardless of the Quarter, people proprioceptively engaged with the holiness that they perceived to be present.

The rabbinical students reported varying frequencies with which they visited the Old City as well as a variety of types of relationships with the place. Common to all, though, was an acknowledgment of its significance—both Jewishly and in the scheme of world cultures and religions—and that it is widely regarded as meaningful (Carroll 2011). The students visited Jewish, Muslim, and Christian sites in the Old City, sometimes as tourists and often as temporary residents. They defined and understood their experiences and interactions—both positive and negative—with an eye toward their rabbinic identities. For Dave, this took the form of building a spiritual connection with the Kotel; for Evan, this took the form of redefining and disengaging from that same space. For Jill and Talia, experiences in the Old City were about utilizing access to learn and explore non-Jewish sites. Their observations and interactions challenged them to make meaning from the ways people of different faiths experienced holiness in the Old City.

The Shuk

The Machane Yehuda market is another iconic space in Jerusalem frequented by the rabbinical students. The shuk is located on Jaffa Street, directly west of the Old City and past the modern center of town. Whereas the students' relationships with the Old

City were largely based on episodic encounters, their relationships with the shuk evolved over time as they transitioned from being tourists in search of a local cultural experience to temporary residents shopping for groceries. The shuk was a site for encountering Israel on cultural, consumer, and inter-personal levels. The students' goals and expectations changed along with the meanings they attached to their experiences. Their struggles were with the place, the people in the place, or with themselves as they learned to navigate the space and vendors with a level of comfort and familiarity. As a result, shopping in or visiting the shuk became an established part of their weekly routine, a habit.

In her narrative of her relationship with the shuk, Jen, an HUC student, described the transition from tourist to temporary resident. Her social contexts for shopping, which evolved over time, influenced her shopping experiences and her relationship with the shuk.

At the beginning of the year we did go [to the shuk] in a big group and then the problem would be either you would feel the like social norms of needing to wait for everybody when they're at every specific stall and it took like 5 hours . . . Or, you would end up splitting off and you would go home and be on your own anyway. So it was kind of like in these smaller groups it made more sense. . . . We run into a lot of people. It's unusual if I don't see at least 2 or 3 classmates while I'm there.

Jen's narrative shows the social dynamic of shopping with classmates which, at the shuk, had implications for one's identity. Being with a large group in the shuk was a surefire way to be conspicuous and to be labeled a "tourist" by vendors. The adaptation of

shopping alone or in a small group helped to avoid this situation. The students practiced their Hebrew, navigated tight spaces, and shopped around more. Jen and her classmates struggled to fit in while shopping in the shuk, ultimately realizing that in smaller groups or alone, they were able to blend in better to daily life in Jerusalem, even though they spent their days in distinctly American social and academic contexts.

The wonder and excitement of visiting the shuk in their early days living in Jerusalem gave way to strategic approaches to shopping. The students calculated the optimal day of the week and time of day to do their shopping. Marcie, an HUC student, reflected, “[s]ometimes it’s fun to go on a Friday morning, but only if you go early and only if you have a lot of energy. And, you know, after awhile it gets to a point of like OK, I’m going to do everything I can to not have to go to the shuk on Friday morning.” Fridays before Shabbat, were without a doubt the busiest time of week at the shuk. The bustling crowds and stalls packed tightly next to each other, perhaps novel at first, became overwhelming. While many students indicated that shopping at the shuk was part of their weekly routine, a few emphatically noted their preference for shopping on Thursdays. They adopted the shuk as a regular shopping destination, adapted their shopping schedule to coincide with fewer crowds, and integrated the shuk trip into their weekly schedules. Developing routines, in particular rhythms of consumption, was a symptom of living in a place.

Many students noted that a trip to the shuk was part of their weekly routine, but for some it was more than just a utilitarian necessity. Ilana, a JTS student, talked about why this place was important to her:

So always part of the routine is to have a trip to the shuk at least once to get what we need for the week. I love it there; it makes me happy. . . . I feel more connected to where my food comes from which is a big thing for me. . . . I think there's something about being there that I just know I can't get at home. And I'm eating a lot more produce because of it. There's just always stuff to see and taste.

The shuk was not only an integrated part of Ilana's life in Jerusalem, but a unique-to-Israel experience, thus increasing its value and increasing her commitment to having it as part of her week. Ilana's habit of shopping at the shuk every week reinforced her tangible connection to Jerusalem as a place in addition to connecting her to her food.

The students' encounters with and relationships to the shuk varied based on their reasons for going. Are they there to explore, to eat, to attend a nighttime outdoor dance party, or are they buying food for the week or for Shabbat? Relationships with the shuk also emerged as interpersonal connections. Seeing the same people, interacting with the same people, developing a relationship over time with the same people, took the relationship with the place one step further into a relationship with specific people. The people who sold produce became his "guys," as Ethan explained:

I love when I go [to the shuk] with friends, I have "guys." Like oh you need bread? Let's go to my bread guy. You need vegetables? What kind? Oh you need tomatoes? Let's go to my tomato guy. Like I've got guys. That's awesome. I mean, the fact that I've gone there enough that whatever someone needs for basics, I can tell them the best place to get it. That's really cool.

Relationships with people—whether genuinely reciprocated or not—added depth to the students' experiences and gave faces to the students' shuk routines. To be recognized validated one's longer-term presence in a place.

The rabbinical students engaged with the shuk as consumers of both goods and experiences. Emotions toward the shuk varied wildly depending on the individual, the time of week, and the time of day. Nevertheless, it was widely regarded as one of the place-specific aspects of Jerusalem that the rabbinical students most valued and reported that they anticipated missing the most once they returned to the United States. Becky, a JTS student, summed up her relationship to the shuk:

I love Machane Yehuda, the shuk. It's dirty and it's noisy and it's crowded, and for some sick and twisted reason, I love that. I have to be in the right mood; if I'm exhausted and like mildly headache-y, that is not the time to go. But I really enjoy the shuk. I really love buying fruits and vegetables because they're in-season and not because they've been in some freezer case for months.

The shuk is an irreplaceable aspect of Jerusalem and the Israel year of rabbinical school. Whether students encountered and interacted with the shuk as tourists or as locals, they were always consumers of multisensory experiences that they label as distinctly Israeli.

The students' relationships with the shuk mirrored the formation process, but how did this experience translate to a rabbinic identity? Their relationships evolved over the course of the year as their familiarity increases. They evaluated and reevaluated the shuk in terms of its place and utility in their lives. They also evaluated the shuk based on why they went: Could they accomplish their shopping goals at the shuk? Could they have the

kind of relationships with the place and vendors that they want? The students struggled to fit the shuk into their schedules, and struggled literally to find their way around the different stalls, understand quickly-spoken Hebrew in a loud environment, and wade through the masses of humanity as they attempted to shop. Their goal during the Israel Year was to attain the type of relationship that they wanted with the shuk and that, if it was their intention, integrate trips to the shuk into their weekly schedules.

Along the way, they learned practical skills for living in Jerusalem. They gained knowledge of the space—where different vendors were located, how to grab the hanging plastic *sakiyot* [small bags; sing., *sakit*] to fill with produce, weight conversions into kilograms, and how to understand numbers yelled in rapid-fire Hebrew over the din. The students developed the requisite skills to effectively shop at the shuk, purchasing a granny cart if necessary, and figuring out when they wanted to be there. They developed habits within their shopping—including not only preferences for particular produce, spices, cheese, home goods, pita, meat, and pickle and olive vendors, but also routes to take to visit them all. All of these elements combined gave the students a sense of self that included this very particular space. These practical and sensory habits of life in Israel will go home with them.

Beyond Jerusalem

In addition to getting to know Jerusalem, the rabbinical students also traveled around Israel, to the extent that their schedules allowed. Many students reported the occasional trip to Tel Aviv, whether to go to the Nachalat Binyamin artists' market, the

beach, or the old town in Jaffa. Over longer breaks, such as the weeks of Sukkot, Chanukah, or *Pesach* [Passover], they traveled in small groups north to the Galilee or south to Eilat. A few students admitted to skipping classes for a personal mental health day. Wherever they went, the students had expectations for their experiences but also opened themselves up to struggles. Some students approached their travels with conceptualizations of what they wanted to take away from the experience and how they wanted it to influence how they behave and viewed themselves as future rabbis; others are open to whatever experience presented itself.

When they set out on their own, the rabbinical students traveled to less-accessible destinations, or places that their institutions would not, for security reasons, take a group. For example, Alyssa, an HUC student, joined tour groups to visit Hebron, a highly-disputed town over the 1967 Green Line. Her intention was to encounter and be challenged by a difficult place and situation. Though several students from all three rabbinical schools reported taking various trips to Hebron, Alyssa articulated many shared themes in her narrative:

[O]ne of my goals this year was to go to Hebron because there aren't many places in Israel that I haven't been and that was one. That was important to see and I hadn't been. And so first I went with all Orthodox community-type people and then I went again with Rabbis for Human Rights . . . I had really very little prior knowledge of the place and had two drastically different experiences there. And like I'm still trying to decide what that means to me. In my mind, it seems like a place that is really an anomaly as far as Israel goes and receives a lot of attention

and I mean there are a lot of problems there and I feel very critical of what's going on there in the way I don't a lot of the time about Israel.

Alyssa wanted to learn about the place first-hand and challenge herself. As with stories recounted by other students, Alyssa's account focused on the harsh divisions between Jews and Muslims, Orthodox control of Jewish holy sites, a pervasive military presence, and severe economic disparities.

Alyssa knew enough about the challenges Hebron represents to take two trips, each time with a different group. The trips with the Orthodox group and the more liberal Rabbis for Human Rights did not provide clarity about the situation, but the different perspectives provided options for evaluating the truths on the ground. The Orthodox group's aim is for participants to have a religious experience at *Ma'arat HaMachpelah* [Tomb of the Patriarchs, Judaism's second most holy site] aided by the military presence and Orthodox control of the area and despite the political tension in the area. The Rabbis for Human Rights tour's aim was for participants to witness injustice, understand the struggles between the Jewish and Muslim factions in the space, and advocate for justice in theory if not in practice. Together they added layers to the religious and political complexities of the place. Alyssa continued to struggle; she had not fully processed her experiences, but she had deepened and complicated her relationship with Israel, challenging her own love of Israel by putting herself in these situations.

Whereas Hebron is a site for encountering Muslim and Jewish communities outside of Jerusalem, Bethlehem is the quintessential Christian destination. Travelling with a few classmates, Liz, an HUC student, went to Bethlehem on Christmas day. She

actively took advantage of the geographical proximity and her American privilege of access since Israeli Jews are prohibited from visiting Bethlehem. Liz described her trip:

[On] Christmas I went to Bethlehem. . . . And like we didn't realize that you need to get tickets to go into the church, the big church there, beforehand, so we didn't have tickets. The Palestinian president was there. We were like waiting out in the rain for like an hour . . . But we still went to the different concerts and they had a Christmas Tree Shoppe-like place and like it was just interesting to see . . .

For Liz and her friends and classmates, visiting Bethlehem on Christmas was a tourist activity even though for some Christians it may be a pilgrimage. Nevertheless, it was a unique, place-specific experience that had cultural and religious significance—social and religious capital that may be redeemable in future interfaith settings.

The rabbinical students also traveled to take a break from the cultural, religious, and academic tension that they felt in Jerusalem. The tradition of the Israeli tiyul involves being outside and connecting with the land. When they had time—or when they actively made time—the students took themselves on tiyulim. In fact, Ilana and Daniela, JTS students, had “Tiyul Tuesday” every week since they did not have classes at Schechter that day. Other students tried to get out on Fridays when none of the schools were in session. For example, Max reported that he and some of his HUC classmates spent a Friday hiking and spelunking outside Beit Guvrin near Beit Shemesh. Talia, also an HUC student, counteracted the stress of school by taking a mental health day at the Dead Sea. She commented,

I felt so guilty the entire day because I missed a whole day of school and I was like making myself sick. But finally I was floating in the Dead Sea and thinking “I’m not going to be a worse rabbi because I skipped school one day to go to the Dead Sea. It might make me cooler.”

Talia’s day off was a way for her to counteract impending burnout. Her justification, though, reinforced her developing rabbinic identity: she might be a “cooler” rabbi as a result. She was being a bit of a rebel in skipping rabbinical school classes for a day, but having an Israel experience that connected her to the place and ultimately helped her focus in class were indeed relevant to rabbinic education and identity formation. Ilana, Daniela, Max, and Talia encountered and engaged with Israel in physical, tactile ways that helped them develop a closer relationship with the place. This, after all, was one of the goals of a *tiyul*: to get to know the land of Israel more intimately (Kelner 2010).

School vacations during Sukkot, Chanukah, and Passover were additional opportunities for the students to explore Israel outside of Jerusalem. Self-guided groups of HUC and JTS students visited the Galilee during Sukkot and Pesach vacations, respectively. Ilana described her experience: “[We] went up to *Tiveria* [Tiberius] and rode bikes around the *Kinneret* [Sea of Galilee] for a day. . . . it was so cool to see when we were biking how high the water level was. Incredible. And so green.” The students reported awe when they connected with the land of Israel and rejuvenation when they spent time in nature. Time out to relax had positive implications for their relationships with Israel and their classmates as well as their enjoyment of the year. These encounters

and experiences with Israel were already proving to have been integrated into the students' developing rabbinic identities as “great memories” that tied them to the land.

To the extent that their schedules allowed and to the extent that they were self-motivated, the rabbinical students explored Israel outside of Jerusalem. They were curious about Jewish and non-Jewish places and traditions and, as Americans, these were accessible to them. Those students who ventured past the boundaries of their geographical, cultural, and religious groups reported feeling enriched. The struggles to define and find meaning in an experience led to broader understanding and relationship with Israel as a whole country, not just Jewish Jerusalem. What the students ultimately adopted, adapted, and integrated into their developing rabbinic selves was not immediately apparent. Their encounters with places, situations, and people outside of Jerusalem, though, contributed to their collection of experiences in Israel and deepened—and complexified—their relationship with the land, the people, and the politics. Diverse, multi-sensory encounters were part of their formation.

Experiences of Place in the Formation of Rabbis

The students' own goals for the year were to experience Israel as much as possible and to build and/or deepen a relationship with the place. These goals guided how they spent their time outside of class and how they processed what they did. For some students, this meant pursuing a relationship with the Old City or the shuk, essentially integrating these iconic destinations into their lives. Through their experiences, students engaged in the process of a rabbinic formation that included a complicated relationship

with this place. Engaging in daily life in Israel and traveling outside of Jerusalem, the students encountered Israel without mediation. These interactions with places were not facilitated by a gatekeeper. Going to Bethlehem, Liz and her classmates were literally left out in the rain because they did not know that they needed tickets to enter the church on Christmas. The students' encounters with Israelis were also not buffered by a teacher or mediator. They had direct interpersonal interactions with Israelis. This openness sometimes led to unpleasant interactions, such as Evan's encounter with the Kotel plaza security guard. In contrast, though, it enabled Ethan to develop a cadre of "guys" whose stalls he frequented at the shuk.

In unmediated encounters with Israel, the students evaluated the situations themselves and determined what was going on in a given place at a given moment. Talia's evaluation and analysis of what she encountered at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher illustrated this. She observed people sprinkling holy water on their belongings, drew a comparison to Jewish practices of sticking notes into cracks in the Western Wall, and found poignancy that the setting promoted holiness. Talia said, "[I]t was such a thing that could have happened anywhere, but because it was Jerusalem, you could just feel like . . . something is there and it's connecting them and I just felt like that was a huge Israel multi-cultural moment for me."

All of the rabbinical students struggled with the encounters that they had and how those encounters influenced their relationship with Israel, both in terms of personal meaning and professional utility. Unmediated situations prompted seen and unforeseen struggles. Alyssa, who claimed to maintain unwavering support for Israel, nevertheless

intentionally struggled with the discrimination and inequality she saw in Hebron. She felt critical of Israel, an attitude new to her. She struggled not only with how to be critical, but also with what the harsh realities in Hebron mean for her larger, positive relationship with Israel. Alyssa wanted struggle, though, and she was open to the challenge because she believed that the end result would enhance her relationship with Israel and her rabbinic identity. In contrast, Evan did not foresee struggle as part of his experience sitting on the Kotel Plaza on Tisha B'Av. That struggle with the security guard was unanticipated, unwelcome, and not part of a larger personal mission to feel uncomfortable in order to have a closer relationship with Israel.

The process of adopting, adapting, and integrating place-specific experiences into their developing rabbinic identities continued throughout the year. Developing weekly routines led to a sense of Jerusalem as their own. For Dave, this meant going to the Kotel weekly and purposefully developing a relationship with the Old City. Ilana went to the shuk every week to buy produce that connected her to the land as well as to Jerusalem. Other students broadened their relationships with Israel by taking advantage of the proximity of world-renowned sites. A single visit to a place like the Temple Mount had a significant impact. Months after the experience, Jill still recalled details of her excursion and how she found meaning through simultaneously being closer to the ancient Jewish Temple and also visiting a Muslim holy site. Even an ordinary tiyul allowed Max and his classmates to integrate the sights, sounds, and textures of Israel into their lives. Dave, Ilana, Jill, and Max integrated this place into their lives differently, but all had

proprioceptive, multisensory experiences that fostered closeness in their relationships with Israel.

The onus was on the rabbinical students themselves to have unmediated experiences of Israel. The students desired diverse experiences and sought out encounters with places that helped them meet their goals, even though they could not foresee what their relationships with Israel would finally become. Regardless of the destination, the students' encounters were multidimensional, personally and politically complex. As they evaluated their experiences and struggled with what they meant, the students also negotiated their own place in Israel, forming one vital part of their identities as American rabbis.

Whether they developed routines that integrated destinations and habits into their daily lives or acted more as tourists visiting sites or going on hikes, the students processed their experiences as American rabbinical students who were currently living in Israel. They sought to be residents of Jerusalem through doing things that set them apart from tourists—they shopped at the shuk alone or in small groups or at off-times during the week; they visited the Kotel as a habit; they escaped for a day to the Dead Sea. They wanted personal connections; that is, to feel at home in the traditional, ancient Jewish homeland. They also wanted to take their experiences home with them to the United States, in essence to package up their experiences in a way that can be utilized in their future professional roles. Unmediated encounters with Israel gave the rabbinical students a modicum of control over the inputs into their relationships with Israel and rabbinic formation.

Conclusion

The context of Israel, specifically addressed as the place, and its influence on rabbinic formation were explored above through both mediated and unmediated experiences. Israel, with all its complications, is an ever-present, multisensory educational experience. Rabbinic formation involves the entire person, including his or her place in Israel. These rabbinical students, living and studying for a year in this place, encountered and interacted with places and locations, time, people, and values, meanings, and ideas. In the mediated scenarios explored above, the rabbinical students interacted with places that expanded their experience of both Jewish and non-Jewish life in Israel, exposing the diversity and offering frames and modes of interpretation. In situations not mediated by their schools, the rabbinical students found their own places of connection, as well as challenge. The students also interacted with Israeli time, the rhythms of holidays and of the week, shaping how the students interacted with the spaces.

The students also encountered people in these places. In mediated situations, the people they met were often hand-picked or vetted, though the experience of the man in Meah Shearim yelling “shiksa” was entirely unplanned, even if not entirely unexpected. In unmediated situations, the students did not have as much control over the people with whom they interacted, though place and timing did have influence. Without the aid of a facilitator, the students communicated and interacted on their own, which was sometimes be fraught and uncomfortable. However, they were also free to develop relationships with people they saw frequently as they revisited a particular space.

In both mediated and unmediated situations, the rabbinical students encountered values, meanings, and ideas. For the North Tiyul, the curricular intention was to explore the concepts of diversity, democracy, and citizenship in Israel. Those values had a whole host of meanings and could be seen through many perspectives in the Israeli context. In mediated contexts, the values may have been stated explicitly, and exploration of their meanings may have been facilitated. In unmediated contexts, the students encountered ideas that were then interpreted through their own perspectives, but informed by their mediated experiences in Israel. In the Old City and Bethlehem, the rabbinical students who visited non-Jewish sites encountered ideas and values from Christianity and Islam, and they sometimes noticed parallel values in Judaism, as Talia did. They also added layers of personal and professional meaning when they intentionally and routinely made a holy site part of life, as Dave did with the Kotel. The places themselves had meaning, the elements of the places had meaning, and the ways in which the students encountered, sought to understand, struggled with, and allowed those places to influence them had meaning for their rabbinic identities.

In mediated experiences of the Israel Seminar and inter-seminary Israel Experience Program, students engaged with a complex Israel. HUC students encountered and struggled directly with ultra-Orthodoxy and struggled to find meaning in an experience where Reform Judaism was delegitimized. On the IEP North Tiyul, the rabbinical students struggled individually and collectively with concepts of ethnic and religious diversity in Israel. By attempting to define an ideal Israel using paper shapes, students engaged with concepts related to their own lived experiences and experimented

with putting those ideas into words. Some resolved that they could live in Israel; others concluded that Israel could not be integrated into their lives in that way. In this case of experiential education, the process of formation led to socially informed personal decisions. The students processed their experiences through both personal and professional lenses.

In their unmediated engagement with Israel, the students wanted to experience Israel in a way that was both personally meaningful and professionally utilitarian. They expressed a desire to “make the most of” the Israel year by experiencing those aspects of Israeli daily life, Judaism, and culture that were particular to the place. Their experiences made possible new relationships with Israel as they grappled with what this place meant to them as Jews and future American Reform and Conservative rabbis. Whether in developing the daily habits of a temporary resident or in wanderings that resemble those of a homeland tourist, they engaged with places, evaluated what they meant on the surface and then struggled with how to incorporate each place into their own sense of rabbinical self. In Israel, the students adapted, adopted, and integrated destinations into their daily lives. No matter how these routines and encounters eventually influence the students’ longer-term relationships with Israel and rabbinic identities, the experiences contributed to deepening and complicating the relationships with Israel that they will take into their future roles. Living in Israel gave the students particular social capital necessary for their professional qualifications. Max, an HUC student, noted that “You can read as many articles [about Israel] as you want and watch news reports and whatever, but

actually being here is a very different experience and it lends legitimacy to who you are, to your opinions, . . . and to your actions.”

An informed relationship with Israel based on a breadth of experiences and the depth of knowledge that comes from being in and interacting with one’s surroundings is a professional necessity for an American rabbi. Both mediated and unmediated experiences of Israel influence rabbinic formation. Mediated experiences, in particular the Israel Seminar and Israel Experience Program, provided structured inputs for rabbinic identities. Unmediated experiences, in contrast, made for a more organic formation process. Living in, encountering, and experiencing a diverse Israel shaped the narratives of rabbinic identity formation these students told about their Israel year.

Formation is measured by knowledge, skills, habits, and a sense of self. In mediated situations, faculty and administrators vetted and framed what was taught. That knowledge was then available as students encounter unmediated situations, and new knowledge emerged from those unmediated experiences. Knowledge and skills often blended together in experience-based settings. The goal of the Israel year was to develop a simultaneously more nuanced and more broadly overarching picture of Israeli society, and that happened in mediated content, practical skills, and experiences of encounter and struggle. Students were exposed to information about diversity in Israel, but also experienced how society is organized to maintain boundaries between neighbors. Their learning was first-hand and experiential as they built up a body of place-specific knowledge.

The rabbinical students, by trial and error and asking directions, also learned how to explore, that is, how to engage in experiential learning. Through practice, they developed the skills of participation instead of leadership, skills of listening and questioning, skills of reflection and processing, and skills of interpretation and contextualization. The students also practiced the skills of multisensory learning—as opposed to learning from texts or even formulated prayer—through sight, smell, touch, and sense of self in space. They developed daily life skills for getting around Israel—mastering important phrases in Hebrew, negotiating public transportation when necessary, and sometimes adapting to norms and mores of different communities. The students acquired information as knowledge, but how to function in those spaces required skill. Indirectly, they learned that practical experience is a source of knowledge.

Their sense of self emerged from place-based interactions with others and the social roles those interactions entailed. They were tourists and students and temporary residents, among many other things. As residents of Jerusalem, if only for a year, the rabbinical students were able to develop habits of daily life that may go home with them in different ways. Their interaction with mediating institutions not only facilitated their own experience, but provided valuable future connections. They may have a deepened spiritual sense of connection to Judaism, as well as broader interfaith knowledge. They will surely take with them their continuing struggle with the complexity of the society in which they have lived. Whatever memories they take home will be associated with the space as well as with the experiences that created those memories in the first place.

The rabbinical students' senses of self emerged from interactions with Israel as a place. Their status and role as American rabbinical students shaped the experiences they had and how they built a relationship with Israel. They now have membership in the community of people who have lived in Jerusalem for a year. This membership strengthens their personal sense of self as well as the selfhood that is projected to others. The resultant knowledge, skills, and habits reflect those interactions and place the students in a category with other rabbinical students and Americans who have done the same.

CHAPTER FIVE

LIVING IN JEWISH TIME AS A CONTEXT FOR RABBINIC FORMATION

Introduction

According to Durkheim, religious life emerges from the rhythm of social life, and social life is structured by and provides the structure for time ([1912] 1995: 442). During the Israel Year, the rabbinical students were ensconced in the context of Jewish time. The underlying social and temporal contexts were Jewish. The Jewish social context reinforced itself through Jewish holidays because, as Durkheim argued, “rites are means by which the social group reaffirms itself periodically” (390). It should follow, then, that since “human feelings intensify when they are collectively affirmed” (403) and holidays serve the purpose of reaffirming the group, the rabbinical students’ ties to the group will intensify as they celebrate a cycle of rites. Celebrating the Jewish year in Jerusalem reinforced a sense of membership in the Jewish community and faith tradition.

The place and the people heightened the significance of Jewish holy days, both the weekly Sabbath [Hebrew, *Shabbat*; plural, *Shabbatot*] and religious holidays. The institutional contexts attempted to tailor the students’ observances to the needs of a future rabbi; the peer contexts gave the students community and provided inroads to personal meaning. Especially during the Israel Year, the rabbinical students actively engaged in strengthening their ties to Judaism and Jewish tradition. They were not merely seeking membership within a group of co-religionists, they were seeking leadership. The formation of their rabbinic identities requires strong ties with the Jewish calendar year.

The Israel Year provided a highly concentrated Jewish year experience as the rabbinical students celebrated and observe holidays together within the larger contexts of a Jewish society and a Jewish state.

Celebrations of Jewish holidays are most publicly visible in high-density Jewish areas, and Jerusalem is both high-density and the international apex of observant Jewry. According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics' 2009-2011 Social Survey, 30% of Jerusalem's Jewish population over 20 years old identifies as ultra-Orthodox and a further 50% self-identify as "observant" or "traditional." In Jerusalem, only 20% self-identify as "non-religious/secular." In all other areas of Israel combined, 9% of Jews self-identify as "ultra-Orthodox" and 48% identify as "observant" or "traditional." The same catchment area includes 43% who identify as "non-religious/secular."⁹⁰

In addition to the relatively high percentage of ultra-Orthodox and observant Jews in Jerusalem, the Israeli rabbinate is under Orthodox control, enforcing the Jewish character of the state and the observance of Jewish law in public and specifically religious spaces. The demographic reality of Jewish Jerusalem places observance of the Jewish calendar year prominently in the public sphere. Sharot (2007) uses the term "orthoprax" to define the normative Jewish observance in the public sphere. Engaging in Jewish customs and rituals is, for many Israelis, according to Sharot, an expression of cultural heritage and Jewish identity, but not Jewish-religious identity. He writes,

⁹⁰ Choshen, Maya, Michal Korach, Inbal Doron, Yael Israeli and Yair Assaf-Shapira. 2013. *Jerusalem: Facts and Trends*. Publication Number 427. The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies: Jerusalem, p. 27.

Quite a number of Israelis carry out a number of practices, not because of a belief in their divine origins or as a religious obligation, but because they are conforming to common practices that express a Jewish-Israeli national identity. However, the way that secular Jews carry out the practices often differs substantially [from that of their observant co-religionists]" (Sharot 2007: 678).

Jewish practice may be an expression of religiosity, but Sharot argues that it is also an expression of heritage. The variety of practices illustrates diversity in lived Judaism that is religion-adjacent—in particular the Jewish customs of secular Jews—and can be valuable for Reform and Conservative rabbinical students as they determined which practices they would like to adopt and take home.

As with anywhere else in the world, cultural artifacts and symbols in the public sphere publicize the holidays and seasons. Here, though, they were intensely Jewish. Jewish time is public time—the holidays that the students had celebrated only at summer camp, temple, synagogue, or home are proudly in the streets. Greetings of *chag sameach* [happy holiday] and *shana tova* [good year] were not only spoken between friends but appeared on the fronts of buses and on banners hung above roads. The visibility of holiday symbols remained novel for the students throughout the year, even as they grew to expect them. Jewish time and Jewish people reinforce the Jewish character of the space. Borrowing language from Berger (1967), we may say that Jerusalem is the ultimate Jewish plausibility structure (Mittelberg 1999), a context that supports and reinforces Jewish values and lifestyles. For Mari, an HUC student, being in Israel altered her experience of time:

I think I have a heightened awareness of [Jewish holidays] and I also realize how little awareness I have when I'm not in Israel. . . . Here, life is defined by the holidays. . . . It's not spring break, it's Pesach, and it's not winter break, it's Chanukah. It's just amazing to me. . . . [M]y sense of time is now, this year at least, very much correlated to the holidays. And I never have experienced that before . . .

As a result of being in Israel, Mari experienced the year through Jewish time markers.

Jewish time has deep historical roots in Israel. This place, or general geographical area, is where the holidays originated and where they make sense. The seasons align with and reinforce the rituals and meanings of the holidays. Becky, a JTS student, recalled being outside in the middle of the night in the early summer and encountering dew:

I'm half asleep and I see this thick, thick, thick coating of dew everywhere. And I had never seen dew like that in my whole life. "Oh my God! This is why we pray for *tal* [dew]." It actually makes a difference here; this much moisture is actually going to do something here. I'd never seen dew like that and that was like a huge, huge revelation for me.

Becky's encounter with dew closed the gap between the Jewish year, natural year, and prayer. Liturgy made more sense because she witnessed how it reflected the natural world.

In addition to natural ecology, the physical built space also embodies the history of holidays. The historical Temple, the only remnant of which is the Western Wall, is the central focus for the three weeks (including the nine days) that are the crescendo to the 9th

of Av, the Hebrew date commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples. The *Kotel* [Western Wall] was easy to access and was walking distance from where the students lived and studied. Holiday time-in-place was immediately present and tangible.

Over the course of the Israel Year, within the spatial, institutional, and inter-personal contexts that reinforced the flow and content of Jewish time, the rabbinical students reported that their relationships with the Jewish calendar deepened. The students encountered, evaluated, struggled with, and sought to adopt, adapt, and integrate their experiences of living the Jewish calendar year into what they did and their evolving conceptions of self. The rabbinical students could not avoid encountering Jewish holidays because of their prominence in the public sphere. However, they often had to make personal decisions about how to observe and celebrate. The wealth of options for off-campus prayer services, for example, was overwhelming. The geographic and social contexts provided different models for observance and celebration than the students encountered in the United States. The students struggled with the meaning of each holiday and decision about how they wanted to celebrate. As they learned about and evaluated holiday traditions, they compared and contrasted their experiences with previous holiday experiences in Israel and in the United States.

In the end, the students turned their attention inward and focused on how they wanted to personalize their experiences and apply them to home and professional contexts. The pervasive symbols and cultural artifacts made celebrating the Jewish year in Jerusalem a highly concentrated, intense Jewish experience with the potential to significantly influence American rabbinic formation. Knowledge gained, skills acquired,

habits developed, and the shaping of a sense of self all came to include a new sense of the calendar.

Shabbat: Centrally Important Time Apart

Shabbat, the Sabbath, is the most frequently-occurring Jewish holy day. The weekly calendar is centered on Shabbat—how many days since, how many days until. The days are named in Hebrew beginning with the first day [*Yom Rishon*], Sunday, and ending with Shabbat, never called “the seventh day.” From Thursday evening through Friday afternoon, Jewish Jerusalem seems to be engaged in collective temporal panic (Lyman and Scott 1970; Lewis and Weigert 1981) preparing for Shabbat: finish shopping, finish cooking, finish washing; everyone seems to be out and about. In Jerusalem, a siren sounds across the city on Fridays before sundown to mark the beginning of Shabbat. Quiet descends, the silence of a Shabbat shalom, a descriptor of and hope for peace and peacefulness and the traditional greeting for the Sabbath. Abraham Joshua Heschel describes Shabbat as a “palace in time” ([1951] 2005). It is a time apart, the time that God rested after creating the world.

Even as it is a time apart, it is not abstract; following God’s example and “resting” is an active process of engagement in particular prayers, rituals, and customs and active abstention from thirty-six categories of creative work. As Durkheim ([1912]1995) theorized, “work is the preeminent form of profane activity. . . . Man cannot approach his god intimately while still bearing the marks of his profane life . . .” (311-312). Ahad Ha’Am, the noted cultural Zionist, famously wrote, “More than the Jewish people have

kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jewish people.”⁹¹ Ahad Ha’ Am’s words ring true in this Jewish social context. Even as people are divided by how they celebrate Shabbat and their attitudes toward public restrictions imposed by the Orthodox establishment, Shabbat is a unifying weekly event in Jewish life.

The rabbinical students entered the year knowing full well that Shabbat would be an integral part of life in Israel and they had expectations for their own Shabbat experiences. The frequency of Shabbat gave the students more opportunities to explore different ways of observing and celebrating than any other Jewish holy day. They had time to try out prayer services with different congregations, invite different classmates over for meals, and figure out how to use the time to recharge for the week ahead. Through the narratives of their Israel year, students expressed eagerness and enthusiasm to try out the myriad Shabbat options that Jerusalem offered.

Though the students largely attended services and pursued experiences that they found personally fulfilling, they also reflected on the professional applicability of their choices and experiences. Meanwhile, elements of the milieu and culture of Shabbat in Jerusalem challenged the students religiously, socially, and culturally. Above all, though, Shabbatot were largely their own. Unlike any other time, for this one year, they did not have responsibilities for leading a congregation. With occasional exceptions—some of the JTS and Ziegler students had monthly pulpit internships—the time was their own; it was their opportunity to build a personal relationship with Shabbat.

⁹¹ Ginsberg, Asher. 2011 (1912). *Ahad Ha-Am: Selected Essays*. Leon Simon, trans. Series: Classics in Judaica. Academic Studies Press: Boston.

The students' social and personal Shabbat experiences influenced their rabbinic formation processes. The students encountered and struggled to find meaning within the elements and varied traditions of Jerusalem- and Israel-based Shabbatot. They then took aspects of what they had seen and might have adopted, adapted, and sought to integrate them into their own lives. Over the course of the year, many of the students developed Shabbat-related preferences, habits, and routines. Some students had Shabbat preparation routines that involved shopping in the shuk and purchasing challah from a specific bakery. Other students had particular congregations that they frequented for Kabbalat Shabbat services. Smaller groups of students rotated amongst themselves who would host Shabbat dinner each week. Though these habits may have been specific to Jerusalem as a place and the current social situation—in particular living in close proximity to so many classmates and far from family and friends who are not rabbinical students—the students' narratives nevertheless reflected the role of new habits in their identity formation. What they would ultimately take back with them to the United States was an open question, the stuff of much speculation among the students. As they told the stories of their Shabbatot in Jerusalem, three themes emerged: where they chose to pray and why, with whom they shared Shabbat meals, and how they carved out time to relax. Taken together, these elements painted a picture of how the students negotiated, interacted with, and struggled to find and make meaning of Shabbat in Jerusalem.

Searching for a Spiritual Home, Prayer Community, and Uplifting Song

Shabbat begins at sundown on Fridays. For the students, Friday evenings were characterized by attending synagogue or a *minyan* [prayer group] for Kabbalat Shabbat, the service that welcomes the Sabbath. This is the most up-beat service of the week and is largely sung. For many of the students, attending Kabbalat Shabbat was integral to their routine. Max, an HUC student, explained,

[T]he biggest thing, the most important part of my Shabbat, if I do nothing else, is going to services, going to Kabbalat Shabbat. That's like the thing, the moment in the week that I look forward to more than anything else. Like sitting in *shul* [synagogue] and when they start singing 'Yedid Nefesh,' it's a very emotional experience for me.

Attending alone or with friends, having this prayer experience outside of school was a cornerstone of Max's week.

Max often found himself at Shira Hadasha, an egalitarian yet Modern Orthodox congregation near where he lived. Communal prayer options abound in Jerusalem, but most of the students gravitated toward a handful of Anglo minyanim⁹² located in the Katamon, Baka, and German Colony neighborhoods. Shira Hadasha and Yakar were two favorites despite their orientation as Modern Orthodox and the presence of a *mechitzah* [barrier separating men and women] in the prayer space. Prayer and prayer communities in English-speaking Jerusalem are most commonly Orthodox. The fact that this group of

⁹² An "Anglo minyan" refers to a prayer group populated largely by native English speakers, those who are in Israel temporarily and those who have emigrated to Israel.

Reform and Conservative—that is, egalitarian—rabbinical students regularly attended largely non-egalitarian prayer services highlights the push of the religious environment of Jerusalem and the pull of the particular prayer communities and experiences. Keith, an HUC student, shared why he loved Friday evenings at Yakar:

Yakar is so packed. There's a couple of chairs. And I'm not a person who likes a mechitzah. In fact, I really detest it. And on the men's side, you've got all these men standing in this room literally packed in there like sardines. . . . And we do Kabbalat Shabbat and it's singing from beginning to end. And to me it is just so moving. . . . That is the most wonderful beginning to Shabbat for me. . . . [T]he way I've always felt my spiritual connection is through singing and so that gets me the closest to where I want to be.

Keith returned to Yakar over and over again, since the service allowed him to connect with Shabbat in his favorite way—through singing, especially with a packed crowd—even though he hated the separation of men and women during prayer and did not affiliate as Orthodox.

In a city rich with congregations and synagogues of varying sizes, egalitarian options are less common and with a couple of exceptions, do not meet weekly.⁹³ The students identified five egalitarian minyanim that they attended: Kol Haneshama, Sod Siach, Nava Tehillah, Kedem, and Moreshet Yisrael. Some students and their partners or

⁹³ This stands in stark contrast to the American norm wherein Reform and Conservative congregations far out-number Orthodox synagogues, with the exception of enclave communities. See, for example, Sheskin, Ira M. and Arnold Dashefsky. 2015. "Jewish Population in the United States, 2015" in *American Jewish Year Book*. Springer: New York.

spouses made a point of either exclusively or predominantly attending egalitarian prayer services; others sought out both. Ezra, a Ziegler student, and his family tried to balance their experiences by attending at least one egalitarian prayer service each Shabbat. He explained,

I'd say typically we go to two different places—one on Friday night, one on Saturday morning—where we're exploring something new and different that we're interested in, like the little Moroccan *shtiebl* [hole-in-the-wall synagogue] in Nachlaot that we can wander into or the Italian synagogue . . . or the Great Synagogue . . . I try to make sure I go to one egalitarian place if I'm going to a non-egalitarian place another time, which is something I kind of go back and forth about because, to be quite honest, the interesting places to explore ethnically and musically and liturgically, are not egalitarian here. And the places that are egalitarian tend to be very American and not actually producing anything that feels new or Israeli or exciting, but I strongly prefer egalitarian *davening* [prayer, praying]. So we kind of balance that.

Ezra recognized that he was able to encounter a greater cross section of Israeli religious life if he attended Orthodox minyanim. His family's decision illustrates a willingness to remove themselves from their egalitarian comfort zone in order to have more diverse prayer experiences. Ezra balanced this by attending egalitarian prayer services as well, though he was not fully satisfied with either. Familiar with varieties and styles of egalitarian prayer in the United States, Ezra encountered very little in Jerusalem. For the students who attended non-egalitarian, Orthodox services, prayer options were vast even

though the students gravitated toward the Anglo options. Refusing to budge on egalitarianism limited students' exposure to the diversity of Jewish practice and people in Jerusalem.

*Kiddush, Motzi, and Menucha*⁹⁴

Gathering for Shabbat meals was another cornerstone of the Israel Year Shabbat experience. Students met up either at or after attending Kabbalat Shabbat services. The location of their dinner plans generally dictated where they would attend services since the imposed norm (buses aren't running, taxis are scarce) was to walk on Shabbat. Students gathered in each other's apartments, often for potlucks. Hosting and attending Shabbat dinner was part of the rhythm of the weeks and the year. Wendy, an HUC student, explained the environment that supported her own family's participation in this aspect of Shabbat culture:

I feel like because Jerusalem shuts down on Fridays and Saturdays [i.e. restaurants are closed] and because I'm in a community of people who from the get-go were having Shabbat dinners and it's sort of expected that that's one of the things that happens, we've gotten in this lovely routine of pretty much every Shabbat having a group of people either at our house or [going] somewhere else. My kids love it; they really look forward to it.

Whether they had families of their own or not, rabbinical students created family-like environments on Shabbat evenings by having group dinners in their homes. For some

⁹⁴ Literally, the blessing over wine, the blessing over bread, and rest.

students, Shabbat dinners were a new element of their week; for others, in particular Ziegler and JTS students who were further along in their rabbinical school careers, Shabbat meals with classmates and friends were likely already an established part of their weekly routines.

While communal meals were common, it was not the only Shabbat narrative. At its most basic, Shabbat is a time to rest. While Shabbat may be a social time, it is also one of the few times the students could be alone during the week. The quietest time of the week in Jerusalem is Saturday morning. Sleeping rabbinical students actively contributed to this aspect of the atmosphere. Jake, a Ziegler student, commented, “I haven’t actually been to *shul* [synagogue, temple] in awhile honestly on a Shabbat morning. It’s the one morning I actually have to sleep in and I’m taking Shabbat *menucha* [rest] very literally these days.” Stephanie, an HUC student, joked that she attends one of two “congregations” on Shabbat morning: “I go to *Shaarei Sheina* [Gates of Sleep] or *Rodef Holomot* [Pursuer of Dreams].”

Dan, an HUC student, however, made it a priority to attend genuine services on Shabbat morning nearly every week:

Saturday morning . . . I don’t think I’ve ever missed a service [at HUC] here because I’m often leading . . . Generally I like it and I feel like I should, aside from liking it and it being the proper way to observe Shabbat, it’s also if I’m here and training to be a rabbi, that’s part of it. That’s how my Saturday mornings will be.

Dan felt obligated to attend services even if he was not leading; being there had professional resonance for him.

Shabbat lunch was generally a laid-back affair. Students did their own thing, sometimes eating together or sharing a picnic in a local park. The afternoons were for relaxing. Eli, a Ziegler student, explained that, for him, “Shabbat is a day to really be lazy. And it’s funny because like it’s a day you should be learning and reading Torah, but that’s what I do all week. My work is learning, so it’s actually important to me to have a day that I just really relax and do nothing mindful.” Once Eli is working as a rabbi, with the varied tasks and roles of the office, learning will not play as prominent of a role in his life. However, during this year, spending most waking hours of most days in the CY beit midrash, learning was his job, so on Shabbat he rested from that type of work. Regardless of where they were in the mornings, most students “observed” the tradition of the Shabbat afternoon nap, sometimes overlapping with the end of Shabbat. The *havdalah* [separation] ceremony on Saturday night marks the conclusion of the week’s Shabbat, and then the new week begins. Jerusalem begins throbbing again, restaurants open, and buses and taxis start running.

Seek and You May Encounter

Many students reported craving a routine: friends to share meals with and meaningful prayer experiences at a “home” congregation. Their motivations to seek out these things influenced what they encountered, both what they sought out intentionally and what they opened themselves up to encounter. This was particularly visible in the

case of prayer services. Every week, Isaac, an HUC student, intended to have a “meaningful Shabbat experience,” but his strategies were somewhat open-ended. A fairly random experience one Friday evening stuck out as particularly meaningful to him:

Two Fridays ago when it was pouring rain and nasty, I went to this one shul a few streets down . . . I had no plans before dinner, so I went over there. And it was really cool just to be in some random shul. I didn’t know anybody. I didn’t go with friends. I didn’t plan it. I just went there and it was like 60 other Jews and I was anonymous and praying and there’s a lot of *ruach* [spirit] and *kavana* [intention] . . . it was exactly the kind of prayer experience that I like. I liked the fact that I was kind of sitting there as like a part of the community, but not. It was so cool just to do that and the rain kind of added another element to it which was really cool.

Isaac’s spontaneity opened him up to a new communal prayer experience. This was precisely the type of experience he was hoping to find. The preponderance of Jewish communities and synagogues within a short distance of his apartment made the encounter possible; Isaac’s own curiosity and motivation made it happen. Isaac was present and participating in the minyan, yet unknown to the men praying around him.

Figuring Out Shabbat in Israel

As they sought out Shabbat experiences, the students also encountered boundaries of Shabbat in Jerusalem, in particular, boundaries in the Orthodox-controlled public sphere. The rabbinical students evaluated and sometimes struggled with the Shabbat

situations that they encountered. Their point of reference was often their experiences in the United States. Jen, an HUC student, noted that in Israel you do not go to Shabbat, Shabbat comes to you.

In Israel, because Shabbat is knocking on your front door, so it's there and you don't have to go to synagogue. For a lot of people in the States, the way that they celebrate Shabbat is to go to their synagogues on Friday nights. Like that's their marker of Shabbat. And here, you don't necessarily need to do that because . . . [y]ou have it in the culture . . .⁹⁵

Shabbat is in the air in Israel. Greetings for a Shabbat shalom appear on television and radio stations and appear in the form of flowers sold at busy intersections and fresh loaves of challah given a prominent place in bakeries. The aspects of Shabbat that American Jews connect with in synagogues and in the privacy of their homes are on the street in Israel. This is what the students encountered and how they understood it: Shabbat had a palpable presence in society.

Because of where they were, Shabbat required additional actions and responsibilities. Though separate for its holiness, Shabbat was also felt during the rest of the week. Talia, an HUC student, talked about the preparations that began before Shabbat.

⁹⁵ Jen located Shabbat in Israel in “the culture.” In Israel, Shabbat greets people at their doorsteps whereas in the U.S., Shabbat is a destination. This distinction echoes Troeltsch’s (1977) characterizations of sect versus church, where a sect—and membership in the sect—is intentional and communal and a church is of the culture. Troeltsch originally used the model of the Catholic Church, but the terms resonate for culturally-pervasive Judaism in Israel versus a minority, denominationally-based system in the United States.

[I]f I'm hosting Shabbat, [Thursday] is the day that I need to try to get everything I need and sometimes I'll start cooking stuff on Thursday night so I can make sure that I have time to go to services on Friday. It basically means that I'm already prepping for Shabbat on Thursday afternoons which is insane. I can't believe how much of the week is actually dedicated to Shabbat. It's very cool to experience it here because I've never had that before.

Talia's evaluation points to this as a new experience for her. The reality of the time-in-place, of Shabbat in a Jerusalem that "shuts down," and the social situation of being with a community of similarly practicing classmates, defined Shabbat as a time for being together. The rabbinical students evaluated Shabbat as a time apart from the mundane rest of the week, but also as a time that has an expansive presence in the six other days.

Wrestling with Shabbat: Meaning, Observance, and Community

The students evaluated Shabbat in order to define what it was given where they were. They then struggled with how to spend the time to meet their own goals. They struggled with both personal and social aspects of Shabbat—where to daven, with whom to eat meals, and what to do alone. As Jill, a Ziegler student, commented, "On some levels, Shabbos is a profound connection with other people, but I think on the other levels . . . it is a profound time to be with yourself." The students struggled to balance these two ways to spend their time.

Students looking for an egalitarian prayer community were especially likely to struggle with Shabbat. Daniela, a JTS student, reported:

I have not found a shul that I like being at here and that's really hard for me because in New York I have my shuls that I love. And so there's like a minyan that meets twice a month on Friday nights and once a month on Shabbos morning, but . . . it's not a home So that's been really frustrating.

Several students echoed Daniela's sentiments in describing their struggles with Shabbat davening experiences. For those students who sought egalitarian prayer experiences, Jerusalem was a difficult place to find a community. Even congregations that claimed to be egalitarian may not have provided fully equal—according to American Jewish standards of practice—experiences for men and women. Within their struggles, the students described making compromises. Becky, a JTS student, commented, “I always have to balance my interest in seeing the way other communities work with my own personal Shabbos needs. And I don't always have the opportunity to daven the way that I would like to.”

The rabbinical students also reported struggling with Shabbat meals. Josh and Keith—both HUC students—expressed dissatisfaction and hurt from the “dinner scene” and hosting. Josh's struggles stemmed from having a different approach to Shabbat observance than his classmates.

[I]n hosting Shabbat, [my wife] and I couldn't care less what we do; like we'll do the blessing over the wine, the blessing over the bread. We don't even do that if we can get away with it. I mean, like, we just don't care. So we're super-nervous because last time we hosted, we didn't have the salt out, we didn't have the bread covered, and people were kind of like insulted. I was like “Wait, wait, wait, this is

Reform; we're supposed to be OK with each other's practices." And so that kind of gave us pause about hosting things until we really get an idea of who is how far along in terms of their own practices for Shabbat.

Josh struggled not with his family's practices in isolation, but with the judgment that he felt from his classmates as a result of their standards of practice.

Keith likewise felt marginalized from the expected, normative communal meal experience because he had spent many meals alone. He heard from others: "'Oh you'll never have a Shabbat when you're not invited somewhere.' It's a myth. There have been plenty of Shabbats where I've been invited nowhere. . . . I actually spent the time alone, and . . . it was honestly, it was heartbreaking. It really was." Eating alone left Keith not just struggling with loneliness but also with the meaning of Shabbat. Keith had expected that the social context of rabbinical school would mirror home and family life. For different reasons, Josh and Keith found that Shabbat in Israel did not measure up to their ideals and expectations.

Students also reported struggling with a lack of down-time. During the week, they expressed frustration about not being able to experience and see more of Israel because of the class schedule and homework. On the weekends, they expressed frustration about having to choose between halakhic rest and physical rest. That is, if they prioritized sleeping and spending time alone to re-charge, they missed out on communal Shabbat prayer and meal experiences. However, if they filled their Shabbatot with social time, they often found that they had no alone or down-time during the entire week. The students also reported not being able to relax or use their time as they wished because of

state regulation of Shabbat observance, specifically mandated cessation of commerce by kosher restaurants, public transportation, and attractions.

In addition to negotiating differences in observance at a societal level, students also struggled to accommodate and relate to observance differences with their classmates. For HUC, scheduling a group havdalah ceremony was one such instance of struggle.

Natalie reported,

Doing havdalah used to be kind of a class thing and we would all plan when and where we were meeting. And people would post on the Facebook wall on Friday or Saturday when havdalah was going to happen. And then some people were like “I don’t check my phone and I don’t get on Facebook or I don’t get on the computer at all on Shabbos, so there’s no way for me to know and I feel left out.”

And I think that’s something that people didn’t take into account.

The planning process itself was an exercise in learning about the diversity of Shabbat observance within the HUC community.

Shabbat in Jerusalem was both an opportunity to explore new meanings and practices and an occasion for struggle. The students were seekers and consumers of the experiences that various Jerusalem-based prayer communities had to offer and shapers of their own habits for how to spend their day off. They struggled to craft meaningful Shabbat experiences in a context that they knew was temporary, recognizing that it was one of their last opportunities to focus on personal Jewish edification as opposed to communal leadership.

Integrating (into) Shabbat

Over the course of the year, as students addressed their struggles with Shabbat observance in Jerusalem, they also began to establish routines and find meaning. As a weekly occurrence, students had many opportunities to experiment with what to do on Shabbat. Their routines reflected the social-religious structures of Jerusalem and the social circles in which they spent time. After several Shabbatot in a row in Jerusalem, Ilana, a JTS student, found a routine. She explained,

[My roommate] and I host a lot of meals because we have a large space and both of us really love hosting. . . . So it's been really nice. People know we're a place they can come to. . . . [S]o usually depending on the weather, I'll go to shul on Friday night. . . . I'm not just going to go to standard, Orthodox davening because I could just daven at home, but there are a couple of minyanim, like Sod Siach, that I really enjoy. Sometimes I go to Kedem. I'd like to try to go to Navah Tehillah a little more often . . . or Shira Hadasha once in awhile. So I guess typically Friday is dinner in my apartment. People hang out for awhile. Shabbat morning I usually go to shul, again to the same places, depending on who's meeting and then often just kind of a laid-back lunch. Lately, because the weather's been nice, I'll walk around in the park which we live right by or Emek Hamatzevah. I've been there a couple of times. Or if I'm at somebody else's place, we'll hang out or take a walk. I usually fall asleep the last couple hours of Shabbat, which is a problem because I can't sleep Saturday night and then wake up really tired for school the next day. But it's just a very relaxed—I think I'm in

a place where I feel like I don't need to do crazy things on Shabbat to have my fill of experiences here.

Ilana took advantage of what Jerusalem had to offer on Shabbat and what being part of the community of American rabbinical students provided in terms of a social outlet. Ilana was an active participant in all aspects of Shabbat. She integrated her context as a rabbinical student in Jerusalem into how and with whom she spent Shabbat. She had a personal practice and adapted it to the Israel Year.

In addition to developing Shabbat routines during this one year, some students considered how they may adopt, adapt, and integrate elements of their Jerusalem Shabbat routines into their future rabbinic careers. Not only did they become increasingly comfortable over the course of the year, but they also integrated their own practices and preferences into the available options and, as the year continued, began to explore how they might take their routines home with them. Evan, an HUC student, shared his favorite Shabbat routine: "I really enjoy the Friday night prayer experience and then going to dinner at people's houses. It's just really become a fun part of our life here that I hope we can continue back in the States."

In addition to personal Shabbat routines, the students also expressed a desire to apply certain practices to professional life. Jake, a Ziegler student, shared his Shabbat morning experience: "I like Yakar's structure. I like that after *shacharit* [morning-time prayer service] they do learning either in Hebrew or English. I think it's a beautiful thing and I've always felt like 'How do I incorporate that into American Jewish life?' I don't know if that's doable yet, but I'm dwelling on that one."

Shabbat is the focus of the weekly cycle. It has prominence in Israel and, as such, if it was not already a focal point in the students' week, it became so. The students integrated Shabbat into what they did. They attempted to integrate practices in prayer, social norms that promote communal Shabbat meals (and create discomfort for those who feel marginalized in this practice), and personal needs and opportunities for down-time. The things that became habitual were shaped by the particular temporal rhythm of Jerusalem. Their Shabbat preparation routines must fit within the framework of the state-imposed religious law disallowing public commerce on the Jewish Sabbath. Shabbat in Jerusalem also meant an abundance of communal prayer opportunities; a broader culture of sharing Shabbat meals with friends, family, and guests; and, a quietude that pervades the space. The rabbinical students became accustomed to the norms and atmosphere of Shabbat in general, and Shabbat in Jerusalem, in particular.

Celebrating Jewish Holidays: New Experiences and Established Traditions

The rabbinical students entered the Israel year familiar with celebrating Jewish holidays. They had celebrated years' worth of holidays before, whether in Israel or not—and thus had some idea of, and expectations for, how to celebrate or observe. The students' narratives of their holiday experiences illustrated the process of rabbinic formation as both personal and professional journeys. Additionally, unlike other years when they had or will have student pulpits and internships, during the Israel Year the students had the freedom to have their own holiday experiences without direct professional pressures or responsibilities.

This year, the students' holiday experiences were embedded within the context of Israel and Jerusalem more specifically. In Israel, Jewish holidays are national holidays. They are prominent in the public sphere through symbols, decorations, electronic signs on the fronts of buses that proclaim "chag sameach," traditional holiday products and foods, and, of course, religious restrictions. The geographic location as the source of the Jewish religion means that this is where the holidays originated and where the holidays align appropriately with the seasons, which is particularly significant for agricultural holidays. The Jewish social context of Israel means that holidays are widely celebrated and observed. All of these factors, including the interpersonal and institutional contexts of the rabbinical student, enrich the Jewish meaning of celebrating holidays.

**Narrating Experiences of the Jewish Year: Everything That Should Be
Familiar Feels a Bit Foreign**

The 9th of Av: Trying out Mourning

In early August, the rabbinical students experienced their first Jewish holiday in Israel: Tisha B'Av, the Ninth of the Hebrew month of Av, a fast day commemorating the destructions of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. Only the HUC students were in-country at that point. Tisha B'Av is not a commonly recognized or observed holiday in Reform Judaism, so for many students—with the exception of those who had exposure at summer camp—this was their first encounter. In addition to the limited school-sponsored programs, the HUC students observed Tisha B'Av in their own way. Many students

eventually made their way to the Old City and many also sought out lectures on themes of the day at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies.

For Keith, who had never paid attention to Tisha B'Av before the Israel Year, simply being in Jerusalem and witnessing other people observing the holiday had profound personal resonance.

Just the idea of seeing what people do for Tisha B'Av and what significance they give to it and I suppose being here, in Jerusalem, the place of the destruction [of the Temple] twice on Tisha B'Av gave it that significance. I don't think I could have gotten the significance out of Tisha B'Av without being here. . . . I'm a very visual thinker, so to be able to picture in my mind the walls of the Old City and then be able to think about what historically happened on Tisha B'Av, it's going to mean something to me moving forward.

Having observed Tisha B'Av up-close, Keith had visual images to take home. Not only had he been in the historic space, but he had observed how other people mark Tisha B'Av in that space. He was not specific about the impact this would have on his own observance, but he acknowledged the memories and heightened meaning.⁹⁶ Even though

⁹⁶ Keith's desire for connection reflects Durkheim's claim that one makes himself sad on the 9th of Av in order to reaffirm his own faith and thus place in the group:

For his part, when the individual feels firmly attached to the society to which he belongs, he feels morally bound to share in its grief and its joy. To abandon it would be to break the ties that bind him to the collectivity, to give up wanting collectivity, and to contradict himself. If the [Jew] fasts and mortifies himself . . . on the anniversary of Jerusalem's fall, it is not to give way to sadness spontaneously felt. . . . the believer's inward state is in disproportion to the harsh abstinences to which he submits. If he is sad, it is first and foremost because he forces himself to be and disciplines himself to be; and he disciplines himself to be in order to affirm his faith ([1912] 1995: 403).

Keith does not force himself to be sad in order to connect with the Jewish people and reinforce his personal faith on Tisha B'Av. Rather, he is curious about how other people are sad. He feels that perhaps the people

the HUC program that evening largely ignored the intersection and significance of time-in-place, Keith managed to make a meaningful link nonetheless.

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in Jerusalem: Tradition in Conflict with Novelty

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the High Holidays, are the most important days of the Jewish year. The rabbinical students all entered the Israel year with preexisting relationships with and many experiences of these two holidays. Some of them had celebrated and observed the holidays in Israel, Jerusalem even, but for many this year was their first experience in the space. In addition, it stood out for some as the first time they were not with family for the holidays and/or the first time they were not working in a synagogue.⁹⁷

HUC required students to attend on-campus prayer services for both holidays. For Lee, this provided a sense of comfort and belonging. He commented, “I really enjoyed Yom Kippur because I felt like I had a place to go. I was really happy to come to HUC. It was like my place. I knew the people who were leading the services. My friends were in it. I felt connected to it.” In contrast, Max reported feeling cheated out of having a local experience:

[O]ne of the things I found very frustrating about the chagim is that we’re here in Jerusalem and instead of being able to go to services . . . wherever we wanted, . . .

who are visibly expressing grief for the loss of the Temple are the most integrated into the Jewish community. Though he does not personally feel grief in the moment, Keith sees a connection between sadness and community, recognizing that as the goal, integrating emotion for the day in this place.

⁹⁷ This is true of the HUC and Ziegler students—they did not have pulpit or congregational internships. However, the JTS students did not arrive in Israel until Sukkot as a result of their High Holiday pulpit internship obligations.

erev Rosh Hashana we had to be here [at HUC] and all of Yom Kippur we had to be here. And I found that incredibly limiting because, one, I didn't like the services but I also like you're in Israel, you can go to any services you want to and you're going to go to English-language, American service, the same service we've been going to our entire lives and are probably going to lead for the rest of our lives. And this is an opportunity for us to do all different sorts of things.

Being required to attend English-language, American Reform services at HUC signaled a missed opportunity for Max—perhaps his only opportunity—to take advantage of the context of Israel. Lee, on the other hand, welcomed the services at HUC as an opportunity to connect with classmates in a religiously and ritually meaningful way.

The high holidays are public holidays, partially explaining why Max felt it was so important to be away from campus. Perhaps the most striking aspect of Yom Kippur in Israel was not that it has a public presence, however, but that popular observance of the holiday was so different from any observance in the United States. Regardless of location, Yom Kippur is referred to as *Shabbat Shabbaton*, the ultimate Sabbath. The streets are quiet, almost entirely devoid of cars. This emptiness sets the stage for Israel's unique observance of Yom Kippur as *Yom Ofanaim*, the Day of Bicycles. Keith's narrative of the holiday noted these distinctions.

Yom Kippur here is exceptional . . . everything really does stop. The traffic lights aren't on. Except for emergency vehicles, there are no cars or trucks on the roads. And I didn't really get it leading up to Yom Kippur, but somebody said "kids are tuning up their bicycles for Yom Kippur." . . . I will never in my life forget this

image of walking back from the Old City erev Yom Kippur . . . we're down at the bottom of the hill [King David Street] and this kid pedals his bike up the hill as far as we can see, he turns around, and he starts coming down the hill and he proceeds to stand up on the seat of his bicycle with his arms out, stretched out, and he is standing on his bicycle and he rides his bicycle this way all the way down to the bottom of the hill and manages to—not only does he manage to stand up, but he also manages to sit down at the bottom of the hill. . . . I could not help but applaud and give him a hoorah. I'll never forget that. There's no religious significance to that, but hey, in this wacky way this is the kid's observance of Yom Kippur.

With empty streets, Yom Kippur enables Yom Ofanaim. This is how this time is labeled in Jerusalem and how Israelis engage with the holiday. Keith's narrative tells us not so much how he observed the holiday, but what he observed on the holiday, a marking of time that became part of his learning.

Sukkot: Much Ado about Foliage and Temporary Structures

Before Sukkot, the autumn harvest festival which takes place a week after Yom Kippur, many people (individuals and family units) purchase the symbols for the holiday, the *lulav* [palm, willow, and myrtle branches] and *etrog* [citron]. These items are sold in pop-up stores and market stalls, known colloquially as a *shuk arba minim* [four species

market].⁹⁸ Independent of each other, students from both HUC and Ziegler had opportunities to go on guided tours of a shuk arba minim. Talia's and Will's experiences illustrate two different evaluations from the visit. What fascinated Talia, an HUC student, disgusted Will, a Ziegler student:

Talia: I went to that thing in Machane Yehuda where they have all of the lulavim. That was so amazing to see everyone. I have this picture of this guy with a ruler and he's literally measuring the leaves, individual leaves. I could not believe it; it was so amazing. . . . And for me, you know, you go to synagogue and they have a lulav and etrog and you say the *brachot* [blessings] and . . . it's a totally different thing. And seeing this and knowing what they were thinking of—your lulav has to be a certain way and this is how it was for the Temple. Super, super cool.

Will: I remember going to the shuk with . . . one of the rabbis here. And I remember not giving a shit about the precise qualities of the lulav that they were making such a big deal about. And I just remember feeling so far from home because everyone in this little tent was Haredi and smelly and arguing about prices and I just didn't want to be there. It was just like a set of priorities like so retrograde and yeah, it just didn't feel very much in the spirit of anything holy.

It is the same place, but Talia's and Will's evaluations were very different. Talia saw men engaged in a holy pursuit. These people were putting significant effort into choosing ritual objects in order to emulate rituals from the historic Temple. She was fascinated and

⁹⁸ A shuk arba minim is analogous to pumpkin patches and Halloween costume shops in the United States. They are seasonal, temporary, and sell ritual items specific to the holiday.

impressed; it was “Super, super cool.” Will saw the men’s attention to detail as counter to his concept of holiness by being focused on measurements and arguing about prices.

The rabbinical students consistently commented on the public nature of Jewish holidays in Israel. Sukkot is one of the most visible, since Jews eat and may even sleep in temporary huts called *sukkot* [sing., *sukkah*]. The week-long festival announces itself through the presence of *sukkot* on apartment balconies, in private yards, and on the pavement adjacent to restaurants. Ezra, a Ziegler student, reported an “only in Israel” experience—his apartment building had a roof-top *sukkah* available for use by its residents. He commented,

I’ve lived in very Jewish neighborhoods before for a long time, both on the Upper West Side and Pico Robertson where there actually are *sukkot* throughout the streets, so seeing that kind of thing is not so different here . . . , but to actually have my building have decided to have its own *sukkah* on the roof was a trip and especially to get out of that *sukkah* and stand on that roof and be looking at a whole view of Jerusalem . . . that was fun, but it was bizarre not having . . . my [own] *sukkah*.

At home, Ezra and his family build their own *sukkah* annually. The experience of having neighbors with *sukkot* was also not new. Having a critical mass of families to support a *sukkah* in an apartment building was novel. Plus, the view could not have been more spectacular.

Ilana, a JTS student, also noted the sense of community during Sukkot. As a JTS student, she arrived in Israel during the intermediary days of Sukkot; however, she had

previously spent the full holiday in Israel. She commented, “I always love . . . going to restaurants and eating in their sukkot, so I did that a couple of times . . . everyone’s out there. I think there’s a nice communal feeling that you don’t get when people aren’t sharing the same holiday. So that was really nice.” Eating in a sukkah evoked, for Ilana, a sense of communal cohesion from a shared experience at a shared time. Sukkot is both communal and very public. Apartment buildings and Jerusalem restaurants provide sukkahs, the infrastructure for halakhic observance of the festival.

Chanukah: The Festival of Lights in Glass Boxes on Doorsteps

Similar to Sukkot, Chanukah has a highly visible, though smaller-scale public presence. Its public presence is religiously mandated, though variously interpreted. The main point of Chanukah observance is *perumei nisa*, publicizing the miracle of the Maccabee’s defeat of the Greeks and the burning of the small jug of oil in the Temple for 8 days. People place *chanukiyot* [nine-branched candelabras; Chanukah menorahs] in windows facing the street or even in glass boxes⁹⁹ on their front steps to more fully publicize the miracle.¹⁰⁰

Public Chanukah candle-lighting is a hallmark of the holiday and in-line with the mandate of *perumei nisa*. This ritual performed in the public sphere can even be

⁹⁹ In English-speaking circles, these glass boxes are colloquially called “chanuquariums,” a combination of chanukiyah and aquarium.

¹⁰⁰ In addition, the tradition is to eat fried foods, the favorite being *sufganiyot* [jam-filled donuts]. Bakeries try to out-do each other, advertizing their pictures of their most decadent sufganiyot on billboards and placards across the city. Several of the rabbinical students conduct self-guided sufganiyot taste tests over the course of the holiday.

accessed by passers-by. Lee, an HUC student, saw a Chanukah menorah-lighting while at the gym:

I remember it was the first night of Chanukah and I was actually really angry because I didn't really know anyone who was doing candle-lighting and we weren't doing it at my house . . . I was working out and I was taking a drink of water and . . . I look out the window and here's like . . . Rabbi So and So and this big whole thing and this big candle lighting and everyone's doing this thing and I'm kind of looking at it from the window and I remember just being really happy that I was at the gym and I got to see the candle lighting . . .

In this instance, Lee was a consumer of Chanukah, not a participant. For him, the serendipitous public candle-lighting was meaningful because he did not have his own despite wanting it. Chanukah came to him, even in an incongruous place, highlighting how Judaism in the Israeli context pervades the culture, much as did the medieval Catholic Church in Europe (see Troeltsch 1977). Rituals performed in public can serve as a point of entrée for people who want that observance but do not have the means or inclination to pursue it alone. Publicly-performed rituals may also be an affront to secular sensibilities, but that was not Lee's perspective or experience.

Purim: The Whole Megillah in Public

Purim, the next holiday of note on the Jewish calendar, takes place on the 15th of Adar in Jerusalem, but the 14th of Adar elsewhere. People begin their celebrations on *Rosh Chodesh* Adar, the start of the new month. As the song goes, *mi she'nikhnas Adar*

marbim b'simcha [s/he who welcomes (the month of) Adar increases happiness]. Purim is a classic example of a “tension management holiday” (Etzioni 2004). During a tension management holiday, “mores that are upheld during the rest of the year are suspended to allow for indulgence, and some forms of behavior usually considered asocial, and hence disintegrative, are temporarily accepted” (12).¹⁰¹

Purim is visible in different ways in the public sphere: people of all ages wear costumes starting even from the beginning of the month of Adar, people walk and drive around delivering gift baskets, individuals and organizations host parties in public and private spaces, and people chant megillah all over. Karen, a Ziegler student, has heard Megillat Esther many times in her life, but this reading in a Jerusalem restaurant stood out:

These two men walk in and they're talking to the owners and all of a sudden they start handing out books and explaining to us in Hebrew that they're going to read megillah for us. We're like literally on our last bites. We're trying to rush because we want to get back and change and go to the party on the complete other side of town . . . They now block the doors . . . and they start reading megillah. And the only people in the restaurant are the owner, like a waiter or two, a cook, this

¹⁰¹ Etzioni elaborates, “Purim . . . is a quintessential tension management holiday. The holiday begins with a reading of the Megillah, a scroll containing the Book of Esther. However, the reading of the Megillah is no solemn affair. Children and adults may come in costume, and whenever the name of the villain of the story is read aloud, the congregation hisses, stomps their feet, or shakes noisemakers. Once the reading of the Megillah concludes, celebrants are expected to consume alcoholic drinks—according to tradition, one is supposed to become so intoxicated that he cannot distinguish between Haman, the villain, and Mordecai, the heroic cousin of Esther” (14). Tension management holidays nonetheless strengthen a person’s bond with the group, like a recommitment holiday presented in regard to Passover, but through a pathway of time-constrained deviance.

American family who like clearly have no clue what's going on, and me and [my best friend]. And these two guys just whip out the megillah and read the whole thing in like 10 minutes. And the only time they would ever stop for Haman is if we caught it just as he got there and we were able to boo at the exact moment, otherwise he just kept going. It was amazing. So we were *yotzei* [fulfilled halakhic obligation]. We were stuck in this restaurant. It was so funny.

Karen was not given the choice to participate or not, but she was grateful for the opportunity to fulfill her religious obligation to hear megillah. She viewed the experience as humorous and something that could only happen in Israel. The men—Jewish outreach workers motivated by having as many Jews as possible fulfill the mitzvah to hear megillah—assumed that the restaurant patrons were Jewish and in need of hearing megillah. That the exit was blocked speaks to the coercion of the situation; that the whole megillah was read in just ten minutes speaks to a desire to not inconvenience people any longer than necessary and likely be able to hurry to the next restaurant to read megillah for those diners.

Passover: How Is This Year Different from All Other Years?

Without a doubt, *Pesach* [Passover] is a highlight of the Jewish year and the Year in Israel. According to Etzioni (2004), Passover is a “recommitment holiday,” a holiday that invokes a shared history, includes rituals that remind the individual of his or her connection to the group and to its narrative, and strengthens the individual’s affinity for

the group. In these ways, Passover supports Durkheim's integration thesis that shared holidays strengthen group attachment. Ezra, a Ziegler student, reflected,

[F]or me, there was definitely something inherently amazing about being in Israel on Pesach. I grew up in a secular, Zionist family more or less, so the background of what you talk about on Pesach is about the liberation of the Jewish people coming to the land of Israel . . . And, here we are. So that was a trip for me, to actually be manifesting that "next year in Jerusalem" and here I actually am. It was very powerful to be here.

Passover in Israel reinforced the students' commitments to Jewish time, Jewish ritual, and Jewish life, but not without struggle.

The imposition of halakhic observance in public spaces such as supermarkets illustrates the degree to which the forces that promote group cohesion can also be coercive. As a result of the halakhic prohibitions against eating leavened foods, supermarkets are required by the state to refrain from selling such products and are legally culpable if they transgress. Entire aisles are shrouded in dark plastic to cover disallowed items and cash registers are programmed to avoid sales of leavened foods starting before the holiday begins. For Wendy, an HUC student, the negation of personal choice was a burden. She commented, "[I]t felt very oppressive for me. You know, a week and a half before Pesach it was already hard to buy certain things . . ." In contrast, Karen, a Ziegler student, appreciated the freedom of not having to check whether an item was kosher for Pesach because all of them were: "I just went to the Supersol and I just

bought food and I didn't need to think about it.” The context of Israel imposes consumption-based observance of Passover according to Jewish law.

In the spirit of the *hagadah* [book guiding the *seder* [lit., order] and providing the narrative for the Exodus from Egypt], the students constantly asked themselves, “How is this [experience] different from all other [experiences]?” Whether the holiday had deep meaning or they had a relaxing vacation planned—the students viewed Pesach as a special time and even more so because they were in Israel. Passover experiences were not limited to the night of the seder.¹⁰² Preparation for Passover is a vivid example of time-in-place, specifically of the intersection of Jewish time, Jewish place, and Jewish law.

The rabbinical students all had time off from school during the Passover festival. Many of them stay in Israel, but there were a variety of other options. Several went to Europe to visit friends or family, and a contingent of HUC students traveled to the Former Soviet Union (FSU) as part of an organized program. The students who remained in Israel, with a few exceptions, stayed in Jerusalem. Some students were invited to seder at the home of a mentor or faculty member; other students joined Israel-based family members or collaborate with each other to create a seder.

The students who hosted seder reported conscious efforts to meld their favorite parts of sedarim from home with things that they had learned during the Israel Year thus far. Even as they expressed sadness about not being with family, relished the opportunity

¹⁰² One of the most prominent differences is the absence in Israel of a second day of *yom tov* [lit., good day, i.e. holiday-day with halakhic obligations and restrictions; *yontif* in Yiddish] for holidays. The students noticed this in particular on Passover because there was only one night of seder. Most of the rabbinical students were accustomed to attending and/or hosting two sedarim and some express missing the opportunity to do it over again.

to create a “by us, for us” seder. Ilana, a JTS student, co-hosted seder with classmates and colleagues from different rabbinical schools:

Some friends and I decided this is like maybe our only chance to do a nice deep, high-level seder because we weren't with families [and] the only kids that were among our group . . . were too little for us to need to tell the seder to anyway. It was just a bunch of really creative, awesome rabbinical students. . . . We split up the different parts and everyone signed up for things they wanted to do and brought in creative things. . . . We just sat—nobody had a table big enough, so we sat on cushions on the floor around somebody's living room. It was just really laid-back yet everyone brought such amazing [insights and texts].

Ilana's narrative illustrated the social, religious, and intellectual contexts of the Israel year of rabbinical school. Having a group of people together who were eager to delve into the deeper meanings and themes of the hagadah, without family or professional obligations, made the seder possible; motivated students made it happen. Taking full advantage of the social context of the Israel Year, Ilana actively created a memory for herself and her classmates.

Many of the students who did not go abroad took advantage of the intermediary days [*chol ha'moed*] to travel and play tourist in Israel. Josh, an HUC student, and his wife conducted their own self-guided grand tour of Jerusalem museums; a group of JTS students bicycled around the Kinneret [Sea of Galilee]; and students from all three schools went to the beach in Tel Aviv. Students particularly enjoyed eating in restaurants. Joel, a Ziegler student, compared his U.S. and Israel experiences: “In the States, Passover

is a week of eating matzah that you bring from home, but here you can actually go out. The best chicken fried rice¹⁰³ I ever ate was at Sushi Rehaviva during Passover.”

All holidays are time apart, holy time as compared to secular or profane time. Pesach, with its preparatory cleaning to remove leaven, the climax of the seder night, and a week of dietary restrictions, has a distinct and intense presence in time, made all the more acute in this place.

Shavuot: Receiving Torah in Jerusalem

Shavuot, the holiday commemorating the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, rounds out the Jewish religious year. This year, the holiday fell at the end of May. Since their classes and exams ended more than a week earlier, nearly all the HUC students had departed the country by this time. Ziegler students at the Conservative Yeshiva were just wrapping up their year of study. The JTS students at Schechter, which operates on an Israeli academic schedule, were still present. Standard Shavuot observance entails staying awake all night learning—that is, receiving—Torah. Minyanim, yeshivot, schools, and private citizens alike host lectures and facilitate chevruta learning. Ziegler and JTS students reported learning at several places around Jerusalem. Ezra and his family “popped around the city” to hear lectures at HUC, Jerusalem’s Great Synagogue, and the Hartman Institute; a handful of students reported going to the Fuchsberg Center and the Pardes Institute to learn; and, in a more private approach, Becky and Avi, both JTS

¹⁰³ Many of Ashkenazi origin report regularly eating *kitniyot* [rice, corn, legumes], a Sephardi tradition and the custom in Israel that has been mainstreamed by the Conservative Movement’s Rabbinic Assembly since this research was conducted.

students, co-hosted a *tikkun leil Shavuot* [Shavuot night study session; tikkun for short] at Avi's apartment.

After staying up, people traditionally attend a special holiday shacharit service at sunrise. Throngs of people walk to the Kotel, reminiscent of the historical, traditional *aliyah l'regel* [ascension by foot] to the Temple for holy days. Groups of varying sizes hold services at the Kotel. Those wishing to participate in an egalitarian service are marginalized; they must walk around the corner to Robinson's Arch. Though she is bothered that more women were not involved, Evie, a JTS student, described the city-wide egalitarian service and the reading of Megillat Ruth [the Book/ Scroll of Ruth] as "really beautiful." Ilana added,

I went to Robinson's Arch for Masorti davening [and] gave myself a nice private, quiet moment at the Kotel with my tallit there . . . There was nobody around me. I mean, I don't think I give so much *kedusha* [holiness] to the Kotel as a physical space, but I just like the fact of being able to do that there . . . that it was allowed there was really empowering and really nice.

After the service, students returned home and "passed out," to quote Eli, or ate. Before sleeping away the remainder of the holiday, Ilana and her roommate, also a rabbinical student, hosted breakfast for their friends. The Jewish year in Jerusalem—from Tisha B'Av through Shavuot—was been both familiar and foreign. Both specific holidays and the flow of time in Israel influenced the students' rabbinic identity formation.

A Jewish Year in the Formation of American Rabbis

These rabbinical students wanted to encounter and experience Jewish time in ways that were both meaningful to them and authentic to the place. They took advantage of the time and place to explore widely. Those students who had already spent any given holiday in Israel were less compelled by a search for what they considered to be Israeli authenticity. Ilana, a JTS student, summed it up: “I’ve done the chagim here before, so I didn’t feel like I needed to find the typical, most authentic Israeli experience.” For them, the balance swung more towards a familiar type of observance from home or at least a more selective integration with Israeli custom.

The students negotiated between having experiences for themselves and having experiences with an eye toward professional application and getting the most out of the Israel Year. Both types of experiences impacted rabbinic formation, but the latter was more intentional in soaking up Israeli influence. In the absence of school-sponsored programs, students pursued their own holiday encounters and experiences, within the limits of space and access. Being in a place where Jewish holidays are prominent in the public sphere normalized both the holiday and observance of it and, as part of that, provided easy access to holiday or ritual items and prayer services.

The students’ ability to encounter Jewish time was facilitated not just by what they were doing during the Israel Year, but by what they were not doing. For many of the students, holidays had been a time for working, generally in a student pulpit or internship capacity. In Israel, unless they participated in a school-sponsored program or prayer

service, they did not have professional responsibilities. Jake, a Ziegler student, reflected on having the year “off”:

I haven't had chagim—Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur specifically—when I'm not working except for this year and the last time I was in Israel. So when I was youth director, I was running teen programming for those days. Usually . . . the only time I got to daven was Kol Nidre except one year I ran a family service for Kol Nidre. . . . So, the high holidays are work to me. In some ways, I've always considered myself almost a mercenary. . . . I never have the days to myself. So, it's like being here—this year being here I don't have to worry about jobs or money or internships. In theory I'm here for Talmud Torah and the experience of just enjoying the holidays. And one variable could be that this is the last time I get to do that as well.

Not only did Jake and his classmates and colleagues not have professional responsibilities, the requirement was for them to have enjoyable, personal experiences of holidays. To use halakhic language, there were both positive and negative commandments at play for the students to experience Jewish time and encounter holidays.

Trying to Understand Israeli Holidays through Comparisons with American Jewish Traditions

Exploring holiday celebrations also challenged the students to make sense of what they encountered. They sought to understand holidays, observances and celebrations, and

the general atmosphere at holiday times all within the context of Israel and the Israel Year. They constructed meanings based on expectations and anecdotes from others; their own prior experiences in Israel during holiday times, if they have any; and, significantly, their own holiday traditions and customs from home and their families. The students largely defined their encounters through analogies and comparisons with what they knew from the U.S. or what they perceived about Israel.

Ilana, a JTS student, compared Purim in Israel with U.S. holidays: “[Purim is] a combination of like the happiness and sweetness and friendliness that one has in the States during the regular holiday season, like December, plus like the craziness that happens over Halloween.” Whereas Ilana’s definition relied on what was familiar, Talia, an HUC student, defined a Sukkot *shuk arba minim* [four species market] as uniquely Israeli. She commented, “[I]t felt like a real Israeli experience because it’s something I’d never see in the States. I felt very much like I was here.” Authenticity came from difference. This Israeli experience did not challenge her own customs or detract from her perception of how the holiday should be. It was just different. Equally different was the publicly-shared ritual calendar. A person could view Chanukah candle-lighting from the gym or hear Megillat Esther read at a restaurant on Purim. As Joe, a JTS student, summed up Israelis’ relationship to the Jewish calendar, Jewish holidays were “obviously very different from the States because of the public nature . . . everyone knows about [any given holiday], and it doesn’t translate that everyone does it, but it has significance at some level for everyone.”

When Israeli holiday traditions challenged the students' conceptualization of acceptable holiday observance or impeded personal observance, evaluations turned negative. The Israeli Yom Kippur tradition of streets closing to most traffic and kids riding bicycles was frequently mentioned as unique to the place. For Mari, it was a fantastic sight to behold. "It was unbelievable. There were people sitting in the middle of the street and I'd never seen anything like that before. . . . it's just so unique and really kind of beautiful." Wendy, on the other hand, said, "Do I really think that having the honoring of the day [should] in part be like 'ooh, look, kids, the day of bicycles, you can go bicycle in the street'? That's not Yom Kippur to me." Wendy did not view bicycling as an appropriate way to observe Yom Kippur, but she was also troubled that the closed roads prevented her family from driving to and from services at HUC.

Experiencing differences and making comparisons was often the vehicle for expanded understanding. Alyssa and some of her HUC classmates had the opportunity to observe and help lead a children's Purim program and carnival outside Jerusalem. She reflected,

I went to a thing in Modi'in and it was really cool just to see how much the kids enjoyed it. So I think that was a good way to learn a little bit about Israeli society. I'd never seen the way children celebrate Purim here. And their Purim carnival is kind of like the one at home. That was surprising. There were no goldfish. Is that like a thing everywhere in America, the goldfish? I used to bring home like five goldfish every year. But here they had a Purim carnival and the kids were all

dressed up, a megillah reading, a little skit, the rabbis were being silly. So that was something that was really similar and I thought that it was cool to see. The familiarity and similarities—even minus the goldfish—helped Alyssa see a more international Judaism and how rabbis participated in creating that experience for the children.

Struggling with Holidays: Disappointment and Missed Opportunities

The students often struggled with what they found when they evaluated their holiday experiences. In particular, the rabbinical students struggled with dissonance between expectations for holidays and the reality of their experiences; missed opportunities and/or disappointing experiences; and, boundaries or perceived limitations that prevented them from celebrating in a way that they desired. Even though the students accepted that struggle was integral to identity formation, they felt a certain sting around holidays because they had so many of their own customs and preferences, many of which may have been family traditions.

The aggravation about missed opportunities and disappointing experiences was especially acute because for most holidays, they only had one shot to “get it right.” When the dimensions of location and time were decoupled, students sensed a missed opportunity. HUC’s Tisha B’Av program was a missed opportunity on an institutional scale. According to student reactions, the school’s program blatantly ignored the significance of place in commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. Jen’s account captured the frustration:

[HUC] took us out of Jerusalem on Tisha B'Av which I think is incredibly strange. They took us to [the Emaus convent] . . . where there was an interfaith kind of ceremony, they chanted a little bit of *Eicha* [*Lamentations*]—not so much—and they had some interpretive readings and musical interludes . . . It was HUC and people from . . . a couple other synagogues around there . . . [a]nd then also a few of the nuns from the convent came. So it was really interesting and I think any other day of the week it would have been a very appropriate program; on Tisha B'Av, I don't think it was appropriate for them not to educate us and for them to take us out of Jerusalem and not even give people the opportunity to go to the Kotel. Whether you feel a connection to it or not. . . . this is where the Temple was!

Removing the HUC students from Jerusalem disconnected them from the historical place and thus the premise of the holiday. It was a significant missed opportunity to link holiday and place.

For many other holidays, students directly compared celebrations in Israel to what they knew from home. Sometimes Israel did not measure up. Daniela, a JTS student, failed in her search for a Simchat Torah holiday experience comparable to what she knew from New York:

Simchat Torah felt really lame . . . I daven at an Orthodox shul in New York, but it would never be a question of if women are allowed to dance with the sefer Torah . . . and here it was like “Gasp! Yakar let a woman hold a sefer Torah.” I just wanted to roll my eyes . . . there was a room packed with 200 women and

about 10 of them danced and sang. . . . [Then] I went to an American minyan and I felt like I either need to leave and go somewhere else or I'm going to hijack this round of *hakafot* [circuits of dancing with the Torah around the room after a verse is read] so it can be what I want it to be. And I tried to hijack and it was fine, but I was the only person really into it, so I left. I went to an Israeli minyan in the morning, Mayanot, which is a Conservative shul in East Talpiot and it's very Israeli which I love. . . . It felt like a family congregation that wasn't my own but that was welcoming.

Daniela struggled with the dissonance between her American congregation's general enthusiasm for women's participation and what she experienced that day. The Israeli Masorti congregation was not her first choice, but she recognized it as a familiar type of place that welcomed her. Daniela's experience was just one example of a student searching for a holiday experience that was comparable to what he or she knew, loved, and missed from home. Daniela's experiences of Orthodox Judaism had always had an egalitarian tilt whereby women and men were separate, but that separation did not hinder women's engagement and enthusiasm for celebration with each other. That is, the Orthodox policies did not dampen the women's practices. In Jerusalem, she encountered non-egalitarian policies and practices and congregational attitudes toward engagement that reflected those policies. By being in Jerusalem, Daniela may have realized the uniqueness of her Orthodox congregational experience in New York.

Just as the religious establishment shaped the davening experience of women, the legal religious establishment shaped what was and was not possible for everyone. The

students often struggled with how Jewish holidays were presented and had a presence in the public sphere. Demographically and legally, being in the majority meant that the publically-celebrated, widely observed holidays are Jewish holidays, and how they are observed is regulated by law. Both the state mandated, public sphere observance and the normative observance that comes from Jewish population density created an atmosphere that some students found stifling. Wendy, an HUC student, boiled the issue down to choice or rather the absence of choice:

I was sort of chafing against what I felt was kind of an arrogant idea of “oh well here in this country we all celebrate it.” But I think what I started to realize was that for me, part of the work of really doing those holidays . . . is making the effort and defining myself against the mainstream. Like to me, it’s meaningful if it’s a random Tuesday for everyone else and because I’m Jewish, for me, I’m going to services. If all the streets are closed and everyone’s doing it, it’s harder for me to make that a meaningful choice of mine and that’s important to me, personally. I know a lot of people feel like “oh getting to do the holidays in Jerusalem.” And I just didn’t feel it. Maybe I want to feel it too much.

During the Israel Year, Wendy struggled with finding meaning in holiday encounters and experiences when personal choice was absent.

Both Troeltsch (1977) and Niebuhr (1951) claim that voluntary choice strengthens one’s religious commitment, especially when people are in a diverse setting. Munro (2016) found this to be true in her research of the American bar and bat mitzvah. Not only did the young teens feel that their choice to celebrate their bar or bat mitzvah

through ritual in a synagogue setting bolstered and personalized their Jewish identities, but their parents also expressed the importance of their children expressing this choice as a measure of seriousness and commitment to Judaism and the bar/bat mitzvah itself. In addition, Wendy's struggles echoed Davidman's argument about unsynagoged Jews: "Rather than gaining a Jewish identity by socializing with other Jews . . . unsynagoged Jews gained their sense of Jewishness precisely in their connections with non-Jews. Being different highlighted the importance of their Jewish identity" (2007: 63). Thus, Wendy's emphasis on choice was not only characteristic of the contrast between sect/minority and church/majority religion, it was also very American—not Israeli.

Celebrating with an Eye toward Professional Application

While Shabbat provided ample avenues for integrating new practices into personal and professional development, holidays presented more of a challenge. Nevertheless, celebrating the Jewish year in Jerusalem provided the students with a wealth of transferrable experiences and exposed them to various traditions. They engaged in experimentation with practices that were new to them; had experiences that they wanted to adapt to professional contexts; acquired customs and items that they could take home; and they developed evolving relationships with the Jewish calendar.

As they sought to broaden their repertoire of customs for personal edification and professional development, the rabbinical students tried out traditions and practices that were new to them. These practices may have been specific to the Israeli context or not,

but they were part of the students' Israel Year experiences and thus associated with this place. Stephanie, an HUC student, tried her hand at a Rosh Hashana seder:

I hosted dinner and we had learned about the Rosh Hashana seder that is done, so we took that and we tried to make food using some of those [symbols] and that was pretty entertaining. Instead of having an animal head [*rosh*] on the table, we created one out of fruit. So we had a cantaloupe and with toothpicks we stuck in a date for a nose, two tomatoes for eyes, and ginger for horns.

Stephanie and her classmates took what they learned in class, adapted and integrated it into their Rosh Hashana celebration. She may not continue the tradition the following year, but she still had the fruit head in her freezer several months after the holiday.

Over the course of the Jewish holiday year, students encountered traditions and practices that they expressed wanting to bring home and use in their own professional settings. Ezra, a Zeigler student, recalled a Simchat Torah program at Navah Tehillah, a Renewal minyan:

[T]hey did this one really sweet thing that was actually moving where not only did they unwrap the Torah, which I have seen before, but you would stand behind the scroll itself and somebody came to you and you would sort of tell them where to stop with their *tallis* [prayer shawl] at a *pasuk* [verse] and then they would read the *pasuk* to you, translate it if you needed that, and . . . [t]hey would like turn that *pasuk* into a *bracha* [blessing]. I thought that was just gorgeous, like you kind of have your *pasuk* that's going to bless you for the year . . . even ones that you think "how the hell is that going to be a *bracha*?"

Ezra added, “I felt like I had lesson plans for like the next five years for Simchat Torah.” Not only did he find beauty in the activity, he envisioned himself recreating this aspect of the program in a rabbinic capacity. Ezra, tuned into the professional applicability of his holiday experiences, expressed an intention to integrate his encounter into his collection of Jewish holiday educational activities.

In addition to having new experiences, some students also reported purchasing ritual items that facilitated a new or different observance. They bought things commonly used in Jerusalem—but not necessarily commonplace in the U.S.—that they tried out in Israel and could integrate into their regular practices at home. Several students reported purchasing an oil Chanukah menorah. Zach, an HUC student, had never lit an oil chanukiyah before the Israel Year, but purchased this typical Israeli item that he can integrate into his family’s annual celebration in the United States. Zach also acquired a symbol: the oil chanukiyah carries within it and advertises the religious meanings of the holiday as well as the fact that the owner of the item had spent Chanukah in Israel.

Perhaps the strongest marker of the role of holidays in rabbinic identity formation was an evolution of the students’ own relationships with the Jewish calendar as Jewish time existed all around them. By living the Jewish year in Jerusalem, the students had front-row seats to the Jewish holiday calendar and how people live it, holiday to holiday and season to season. The Israel Year enabled the rabbinical students to encounter the Jewish calendar year in the place where the holidays largely originated and are widely celebrated. The milieu supports celebration and observance, but the students were still tasked with defining if and how the holidays are meaningful on personal and professional

levels. Some students struggled more than others, especially if they could not celebrate in a way that they cared deeply about, or if their preconceived idea of a holiday celebration turned out to be more of a missed opportunity. While the students were in Israel, they necessarily adopted the holiday celebration options that were available, adapted them and themselves and integrated them in order to create the experience they wanted to have.

Conclusion: Rabbinic Formation through Living the Jewish Year in Israel

Durkheim's explanation of secular versus religious life aptly describes the context of the Jewish year in Jerusalem: "[Man] cannot live a religious life of any intensity unless he first withdraws more or less completely from secular life" ([1912] 1995: 313).

Providing a highly concentrated Jewish experience embedded within a time/space operating on a sacralized calendar is a premise of the Israel Year. Being in Jerusalem does not separate a person from secular life, but as a Jewishly intense space, that which is secular is less present—and given less space—in the public sphere.

The intersection—or not—of the academic and religious calendars had implications for the students' observance. When a holiday fell within the academic calendar, students expected to have access to increased information about the holiday as well as an infrastructure for observance supported by faculty and reinforced in the peer group. For students who were accustomed to celebrating all of the holidays of the Jewish year, institutional and peer support may not have been essential to their observance, though it may still have proven educational and enriching.

Rabbinical school provides guidance and information about what the students should do during Jewish holidays; rabbinical school in Jerusalem placed the students

within a context where the vast majority of people were doing those things, albeit in differing ways.¹⁰⁴ While communal celebrations reinforce group ties, the rabbinical students grappled with how Jewish observance was presented and enforced in the public sphere. They raised concerns about ultra-Orthodox hegemony and the marginalization of egalitarian practice. They sought egalitarian minyanim, but did not find them to be stable spiritual homes because of the infrequency with which they met. They participated in *aliyah l'regel* [ascent—as in pilgrimage—by foot] up to the Old City on Shavuot, but did not have a space at the Kotel and had to make their way around the corner to Robinson's Arch.

At the same time, though, they appreciated, patronized, and participated in those aspects of public Judaism that did not challenge their sensibilities. They ate in the sukkot erected adjacent to restaurants and felt a sense of communal warmth, as Ilana explained. They sang their hearts out at Kabbalat Shabbat services in spite of the mechitzah separating men and women. The shared experiences, songs, and prayers connected them.

The rhythm of Jewish time within this high-density Jewish setting located in a place with Biblical history wrapped the students in the elements of identity formation. The students took advantage of these opportunities to encounter, evaluate, struggle with, and internalize ways to live Jewish holy time. Living the Jewish calendar year in a Jewish context both enhanced and complexified Jewish identity. This is all the more so the case

¹⁰⁴ Each campus did something for every holiday, but there was significant variation in intensity of content and attendance policies between campuses and also between holidays on the same campus. In general, the HUC approach was for students to learn about holidays through experiencing them. The approach at the CY was much more formal, with a lecture on the halakhic highlights delivered before each holiday. At Schechter, information was less formally presented, but when done, it was halakhic in nature.

for rabbinical students who had an eye toward the application of their personal experiences to future public, professional contexts.

The fact that non-Orthodox Israeli Jews engage in Jewish rites and rituals provides a model for the rabbinical students' own observance choices while in Israel. Examples of how secular Jews engage with Jewish time provide alternatives to Orthodoxy and the orthopraxis (Sharot 2007). The pervasiveness of the celebrations in the culture means that there is a wide range of variation in the ways rituals are enacted. Lighting Chanukah candles in a bar or disco is an authentic expression of Judaism in Israel, as is lighting Chanukah candles in the window of a yeshiva in the Old City. For some of the rabbinical students, what may have seemed dissonant was actually liberating: They did not feel constrained by the entire package of observant life but, as they did in the U.S., could pick and choose which aspects of Jewish practice and tradition were meaningful to them. Their ability to choose will be challenged as they take on the role of a rabbi, but during the Israel Year, when their time was more their own, their choices were less scrutinized and could be purely for personal fulfillment.

The information and skills the students learned, habits they acquired, and the senses of self that they developed as they celebrated revealed the progress that the students had made on their rabbinic journeys. Spending a year living according to the Jewish calendar in a Jewish plausibility structure reinforced the students' own religious practices.

Acquiring Knowledge of Sacred Time

The rabbinical students acquired knowledge through experiencing Jewish time in a Jewish-majority context. They learned by observing others and trying out practices for themselves. As they evaluated what they saw, the students compared experiences in Israel with those that they knew from home, gaining clarity about traditions in both contexts.

In the Israeli context, the students learned that Jewish practice can be an expression of Jewish culture and heritage, not just religion (Sharot 2007). This was an important insight for Reform and Conservative rabbinical students who wanted to avoid strict Orthodox practices while expanding their options for Jewish customs and observance. In Israel, the students encountered examples of Jewish expression from across the religious, cultural, and ethnic spectra.

The students also learned as they experienced the Jewish liturgical year in Israel's climate and seasons. The students witnessed first-hand how holidays are tied to the land. Becky, a JTS student, noted that her walk to and from Schechter through Emek HaMatzevah allowed her to see wheat growing in the time between Pesach and Shavuot,¹⁰⁵ as though the land of Israel was preparing to provide the first offering of wheat at the Temple.

One of the best experiences for me this year . . . is that on the walk up to Schechter, . . . there's all this wild wheat growing and it's been really amazing to be counting the omer and watching the wheat get taller and then get ripier and now

¹⁰⁵ During the 49 intermediary days between Pesach and Shavuot, traditional Jews participate in *sefirat ha'omer*, the counting of the omer-measurement of barley used in Temple sacrifices preceding the wheat offered on Shavuot.

actually it's almost all past-ripe, which is kind of funny because it's been that way for a week and we're not at Shavuot yet. That's been really amazing to see—wow, counting the omer isn't just something theoretical; it actually is very practical here, at least in theory if you're working in agriculture.

By encountering nature up-close several times a week, Becky felt the connection between prayer and the land: “I definitely think that one of the most important things about spending an entire year here is really feeling the rhythm of the year.” To pray the Jewish year and celebrate the Jewish year in Israel gave meaning to both and reinforced the special relationship between time and place. Liturgical knowledge emerged through experiences of time-in-place.

The students learned about each other's practices and worked to adapt and accommodate each other's needs. This process of negotiation gave the students a starting point from which to build a body of both experienced and observed knowledge. Awareness and comprehension of the differences also enabled the students to better process their experiences with an eye toward professional applicability.

Honing Skills Relevant to Sacred Time

Through experiencing Shabbat and holidays during the Israel Year, the rabbinical students learned skills associated with different types of rituals and observances. They learned by emulating the actions of others. Coming to rabbinical school and the Israel Year with a lifetime of experiences already, the rabbinical students did not work on skills from zero, but rather learned how to adapt to an Israeli context. Jake, a *kohen* [descendent

of Temple Priests; *kohanim*, pl.], was not a stranger to *birkat kohanim*, the priestly blessing recited during prayer services. However, being in Jerusalem meant that he recited this blessing and performed the rituals at every communal prayer opportunity. Over Sukkot and Pesach, Jake was also able to participate in the massive public *birkat kohanim* at the Kotel. The context of the Israel Year reinforced Jake's skills, prompted him to learn more about *birkat kohanim*, and gave him a venue to recite the blessing in the most public of spaces.

Skills did not emerge as readily or clearly from experiences as they did from formal instruction. However, the HUC students had the unique opportunity during the Israel Year to learn how to lead a Passover seder and then to do so in the Former Soviet Union. Under the aegis of the FSU Pesach Project, approximately a dozen rabbinical and cantorial students traveled in groups of two, three, or four to different cities in Russia, Belarus, and the Ukraine to help local communities celebrate Passover. The experiences gave the students a broader view of international Jewry and Jewish organizations. The trip was also an opportunity to practice leading rituals in public and be seen—and begin to see themselves—in a rabbinic light. Natalie and Ben, a cantorial student, led a seder in the town of Minsk, in Belarus. She remembered,

There were like 50 people . . . we provided the hagadot, we provided the matzah, we were absolutely sure that without us and without the FSU Pesach Project, there wouldn't have been a seder. . . . I'd never led a seder before. It was always my dad's thing. . . . It was really inspiring; it was really incredible to be there and to

be a leader and to experience Eastern European Jewry for the first time and to make those connections.

For Natalie, the Pesach Project was a Jewish leadership experience with deep emotional resonance. She described the experience as “absolutely phenomenal” both for what she could accomplish in serving Jewish communities and that she was able to do so in Belarus, her family’s country of origin. Through instruction and emulation, students learned the necessary skills for personal participation in and leadership of rituals and celebrations.

Developing Habits for and of Sacred Time

As an outcome of experiencing Jewish time in Jerusalem during the Israel Year, students developed habits of observance as well as exploration of observance options, especially for Shabbat. Spending a year’s worth of Shabbatot in Israel gave the students opportunities to not only integrate Shabbat into their weekly schedules but also to explore and develop habits related to their own Shabbat preparation and celebration. In Jerusalem, Shabbat determines the rhythm of the week. The students necessarily adjusted their own schedules to accommodate the public schedule. They adjusted to the public strictures, explored the options, and established routines that may shape their future professional lives.

The students’ own social context prompted consideration for how communities shaped observance. The students negotiated between developing habits that fulfill personal desires for prayer versus going somewhere close to the apartment of the person

hosting Shabbat dinner. The students developed a consciousness for different observance levels that informed practices. As the students spent more time together, they learned about each other's preferences and integrated or accommodated those in their own habits. The students created group norms, just as the communities the students will soon lead.

The Israel Year challenged individual habits that students already had by placing them in institutional and public contexts. At an institutional level, attendance policies for on-campus programming prevented the students from exploring local prayer options. The Orthodox hegemony and norm of orthopraxis in the public sphere impacted students' experiences of Shabbat and holidays. The students' favorite traditions, shaped throughout a lifetime of celebrating with family and friends in the United States, sometimes went unfulfilled or were challenged in the Israeli context. Daniela's desire to dance with the Torah on Simchat Torah was something that she expected to be able to do within a community of like-minded women who were supported in their actions by the synagogue community. Daniela went to three minyanim before finding a practice and community that reflected her desired expression of observance, her Simchat Torah custom.

Selfhood Shaped through Experiencing Sacred Time

Living the Jewish liturgical year reinforced the students' senses of self by way of their roles as Jews and as members of the Jewish religion. Being in rabbinical school reinforced the student role. As rabbinical students, they were tasked with observing and celebrating holidays in ways that were personally meaningful but with an eye toward leadership. The context of Israel reinforced holiday observances and celebrations because

holiday-related objects could be obtained easily, Jewish rituals were performed in the public sphere, and the calendar ran on Jewish time. These elements facilitated personal and communal Jewish holiday observance.

The Israel Year did not reinforce the rabbinical students' direct leadership roles vis-à-vis Shabbatot and holidays, with the exception of the very few JTS and Ziegler students who had internships. However, having the ability to experience Jewish time more fully, without professional responsibilities or constraints, fed the students' need for meaningful personal experiences, a form of both social and religious capital. He or she will not be able to facilitate meaningful Shabbat and holiday experiences without first having had his or her own. In seeking out and exploring prayer services and rituals that may have meaning for them, the students' observances and celebrations of Shabbatot and holidays belonged to them, perhaps for the final time in many years.

CHAPTER SIX
CIVIL AND CIVIL RELIGIOUS TIME: RABBINIC FORMATION IN THE
STATE OF ISRAEL

Introduction

During the Israel Year, the rabbinical students engaged with multiple calendars. They operated on academic and institutional schedules, lived the rhythm of Shabbat-centric weeks and Jewish holiday cycles, and experienced the ins and outs of Israeli and American civil time, especially as marked by holidays. All the ways they encountered time in this particular place shaped their rabbinic identity as they connected with where they were and searched for who they were and who they want to become. The relationship between their American identities and their experiences of Israel as a nation and core location for Jewish peoplehood is integral to who they will become as rabbis.

Israel's public calendar is not solely religious, just as Judaism is not just a religion; it is also a political entity that—as the only Jewish nation-state in the world—engages with Judaism in a unique way. Civil religion is the religious dimension of a society (Bellah 1967) and civil holidays provide some of the most public displays of civil religion. “Civil religion,” as Wuthnow (1994) describes, “embodies a nation's sense of sacred time, giving it an understanding of its origins, the significant events in its past, and the direction of its movement through history” (131). The concept of civil religion is perhaps more complex in Israel, a country founded on a religious identity, even though the meanings and expressions of that identity have long been contested.

During the Israel Year, the rabbinical students engaged with civil religion holidays from two countries: Israel and the United States. They encountered the former as temporary residents in Israel and the latter as expatriates. The students approached both with a desire to connect—to Israeli history, culture, and society, and with their peers and colleagues—through the shared memories and bonds of American traditions in isolation from an American place. The holidays served different, yet complementary, purposes for rabbinical students seeking to make sense of their surroundings without losing an American sense of self. Both sets of holidays influenced the students' rabbinic identity formation by providing experiences that were personally and professionally meaningful.

Israel's civil religion is unquestionably Jewish and unapologetically Orthodox. This does not mesh with Israeli religious diversity, even within Judaism—never mind Muslim and Christian communities. Aronoff argues that even without consensus of religion and/or ideology, “the symbolic framework of the Israeli civil religion in its various forms and incarnations provides a common frame of reference and unity for Israelis with various and varying religious and ideological persuasions” (1981:2). The underlying, common belief of Israeli civil religion is “the historic, religious, and/or moral right of the Jewish people to a national identity and independent state in its ancient homeland” (5). Even as many reject this, it is a broad enough belief that, demographically, majority Jewish support is sufficient for propagation. It is also broad enough for the rabbinical students to find a place to fit, at least politically.

Civil religion, though it shapes and is shaped by a society as a whole, also has implications for identity at the level of the individual. In their research on Israeli civil

religion, Liebman and Don-Yehiya ([1979] 1983) argue that in Israel, the individual's Jewish identity and Israeli civic identity have a symbiotic relationship. As civil religion acquires more religious symbols—or as religious symbols are increasingly ascribed to civic holidays—people from both ends of the Jewish religious spectrum are drawn in: symbols unite those who relate because it is “more Jewish” and those whose civil religion becomes a means of religious expression (Aronoff 1981:4). Individual and communal identity strengthen each other within civil religious frameworks. The rabbinical students were embedded in this context and struggled to comprehend and connect with it during the Israel Year.

During the Israel Year, the rabbinical students also joined together to celebrate American national holidays. In the summer, shortly after HUC students arrived in-country, the College sponsored a Fourth of July barbeque in the park. Thanksgiving dinner was a highlight of the inter-seminary Israel Experience Program's (IEP) South tiyul. On their own or in small groups, during winter break, some rabbinical students attended a Christmas program in the area.¹⁰⁶ The progression of these American civil holidays did not tell a single narrative, and the holidays were not known to elicit intense emotional responses. Nevertheless, the American holidays did something that the Israeli holidays could not: they evoked homesickness and personal nostalgia. The rabbinical

¹⁰⁶ Based on interview data, the rabbinical students' attendance at Christmas services and programs was not because of apostasy. Rather, it came from a place of curiosity and ease of access. The students reported never having attended a midnight Christmas service in the United States, but they did in Jerusalem because there was one in English in their neighborhood.

students encountered American holidays in Israel with the (often poignant) expectation that this year would be different.

During the Israel Year, Israeli national holidays were significant opportunities for experiential learning about the ties that bind Israelis together and how American Jews were or were not able to fully participate with empathy. American national holidays celebrated in Israel stood out as occasions for the rabbinical students to be bound together by their home-national identity. Israeli and American civil religion holidays provided temporal, location-based, and social contexts for American rabbinic formation. Taken together, they became formative of who they wanted to become as future American rabbis.

Israeli Civil Religion

The core holidays of Israeli civil religion sacralize the narrative of statehood and the on-going efforts of national survival. *Yom HaShoah* [Holocaust Remembrance Day], *Yom HaZikaron* [Memorial Day], and *Yom HaAtzma'ut* [Independence Day] are products of the twentieth century, but the narrative on which they are based is thousands of years old.¹⁰⁷ Aronoff explains,

The central myth of Exile and Redemption derives from Jewish religious tradition. Zionist civil religion interprets the messianic vision of Zion in terms of

¹⁰⁷ Sachar (2006) provides a painstakingly thorough examination of the history of the modern State of Israel. Sachar's focus is not on the larger Jewish narrative, dating back to the Bible, yet that history and the connections to the land echo throughout the documents and events leading to the founding of the State. As Sharot points out, "The sacralization of the land by secular Zionism was difficult, if not impossible, to dissociate from its sacred status within traditional religion" (2007: 674). Judaism is fundamental to the State, thus making it unsurprising that civil religion holidays, symbols, and commemorations are unapologetically Jewish.

contemporary nationalism. As it became elaborated it provided the motivation and the legitimization for the return of the Jews to their historic homeland and the creation of the modern state of Israel (1981:3).

Thus, these holidays propagate narratives—some would say myths—of both rebirth and continuity of the Jewish people in their historical homeland. Passover precedes the holidays, serving as a religious anchor, and the holidays themselves take place during the forty days of the Omer leading up to Shavuot, which commemorates the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.

The Israeli high holidays of Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma'ut fall during the springtime, but it is the founding myth that determined the timing. The civil holidays were developed and scheduled at that specific time to connect the narrative of the birth of the modern State of Israel to the Jewish people's original exodus from Egypt. They publicly reinforce the values of freedom, strength, heroism, and self-determination. The flow of the commemorative days, beginning with Yom HaShoah, is meant to show that the State of Israel and the Jewish people emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust and were, as a phoenix, born again. The rebirth of a nation continues to be difficult, however, and there are many wars and battles on the road to actualization. Yom HaZikaron honors those who gave their lives so that Israel may continue to exist. Yom HaAtzma'ut not only marks the historical creation of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948 (the fifth of the Hebrew month of Iyyar, the official date of celebration each year), but as part of the progression of holidays, it signifies the annual renewal of the State.

Each of the “*yoms*” [days] as they are known to American Jews, includes an evening commemorative *tekes* [ceremony] and a daytime commemoration or event. The series of commemorative days begins on the evening of the 27th of the Hebrew month of Nisan with Yom HaShoah, first established as a commemorative day in Israel in 1951 on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The national Yom HaShoah tekes is held at Yad VaShem, Israel’s Holocaust memorial museum in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁸

Yom HaZikaron is a week later. It begins on the evening of the fourth day of the Hebrew month of Iyyar at 8pm with a commemorative one minute-long siren and the lowering of flags to half-staff. The national ceremony for Yom HaZikaron is held at the Western Wall. Each year, just this once, the Kotel is devoid of people engaged in religious prayers. Instead, it is the stage for Israeli civil religion. On the day itself, traditions include attending tekesim at high schools and military cemeteries. A commemorative two minute-long siren sounds across Israel at 11am when memorial prayers are read.

That evening, as the sun is setting, the nation transitions to Yom HaAtzma’ut. The official *tekes ma’avar* [transfer ceremony] takes place at *Har* [Mount] Herzl in Jerusalem, the national military cemetery. It is a grandiose affair that combines speeches, music, dance, military formations, and historical narratives. Throughout the night, people participate in Israeli folk dancing at Kikar Safra, Jerusalem’s municipal area. Music, dancing in all forms, and silly string consume the center of town. Yom HaAtzma’ut is a

¹⁰⁸ Yom HaShoah is different from the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, established by the United Nations, which takes place outside of Israel on January 27th, the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

public holiday. During the day, families and friends gather in parks to have barbeques and watch air shows.

Though some of the themes expressed are universal, as a result of the narrative arc and commemorative traditions, the yoms are uniquely Israeli. This made the rabbinical students feel like outsiders as they scrambled to both comprehend and commemorate. The rabbinical students' narratives of their Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma'ut experiences revealed how they observed the holidays and highlight what they found to be personally and professionally important. The students encountered Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma'ut in Israel struggled through the days and eventually integrated them into their evolving senses of a rabbinic self.

Encountering and Engaging with the Yoms

Being in Israel is crucial for the observance of Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma'ut. Many students had not encountered the holidays in the United States, or were exposed to the holidays in ways that could not capture the deep social resonance that they have in Israel. Even students who had previously experienced the holidays in Israel found that the information and framing provided by their institutions helped them better understand the holidays. For example, Ilana, a JTS student, came to understand the basic narrative:

I actually really enjoyed the sequence of the days and I felt like I finally “got” them and experienced them in the way they were intended to be experienced . . . I

was very tuned in to the flow of the calendar this year and like also as part of our preparation, we talked a lot about what the messages are that they're trying to convey: freedom from slavery, then followed by more destruction, then followed by independence. This is all part of one narrative . . .

Being in school in Israel gave Ilana the opportunity to observe the holidays as the narratives of their creation intended – not as isolated days, but as a whole. Experiencing the holidays has greater impact when there is an intentional narrative that gives them meaning individually, as a thematic group, and as a group in comparison to religious holidays.

In addition to providing knowledge about the holidays, the schools also gave their students access. Hebrew Union College provided a limited number of tickets to the national Yom HaShoah tekes at Yad VaShem, an event Josh took advantage of. He shared,

The gates open between 5 and 6pm . . . The [tekes] doesn't start til 8, so you have to wait two hours before it starts. . . . And you can't just walk right into Yad VaShem. You need to take a bus. And then there's four security checkpoints to go through. It's ridiculous. . . . [I]t was so cold. They gave us blankets it was so cold. I liked how that there was no delay; as soon as it started, it started. They had the corporal, the guy who had the voice of an opera singer. Ridiculous. His voice was so powerful and he was so small. And I was really impressed how they did it. I

wasn't really impressed with Bibi's¹⁰⁹ speech. I can understand the tension with Iran. I didn't feel like it was appropriate . . . I felt like he was using really strong rhetoric on a day that was inappropriate for that kind of rhetoric. But I liked everyone else's speech and I had the simultaneous broadcast. So they had six Holocaust survivors there and in quick detail told their stories and that was really intense. . . . I got a little teary-eyed after hearing what they had to say. . . . But it was really powerful to hear their version of what happened. Some of those were the most poignant, meaningful moments. It felt like a service.

Josh encountered Israel's national Yom HaShoah ceremony in-person as a multisensory experience. With the aid of the English simulcast piped into earbuds, he was able to understand what was being said by the dignitaries, national leaders, and survivors. His emotional response to the tekes revealed the nature of civil religion: the tekes was like a religious service.

The symbols and gestures of the tekes draw on common religious elements: six people (each one representing a million Jews killed in the Shoah) lighting candles at nighttime to symbolize illuminating the darkness; recitation of liturgy; the deeply evocative voice of the vocal soloist; and even a sermon that some members of the audience dislike. There is a prescribed formula for the ceremony with particular songs, prayers, speeches, and even candles being lit. The tekes was designed to evoke emotions, first of sorrow and then of hope. It is also a Jewish national memorial service. In a Jewish

¹⁰⁹ Prime Minister Benjamin ("Bibi") Netanyahu.

space with Jewish history driving the purpose and content of Holocaust Memorial Day, the symbolism is unabashedly Jewish.

In addition to attending ceremonies, the students also seized opportunities to encounter less formal holiday commemorations. Eli, a Ziegler student, attended Yom HaZikaron programs—the first, official, state ceremony, at the Kotel and then the large communal gathering in the center of town. The two programs were nearby in terms of location, but truly distant from each other in terms of the emotions they evoked for Eli.

I went with Greg and Jake and we went to the Kotel and we saw Shimon Peres speak. So we went to the official tekes which just felt so full of pomp and circumstance and like posturing. And then we were maybe there for 15 minutes. There was a crazy crowd so we couldn't really enjoy it. So we snuck back out and we over to Kikar Safra where there was the *shira b'tzibur* [singing in public]. There were all people around our age and a little bit younger than me, not much older than me, and they're all just singing these beautiful songs and it was a completely different experience. It was like singing with people, and feeling like how real the loss of life is, especially comparing it to the vibe I was getting from Yom HaShoah. Like this, people really were into because it affects them daily. Their friends are dying and they served with people and they saw people die during [military] service. . . . So that was really moving for me; I really loved it.

While the government-sponsored Yom HaZikaron tekes did not connect emotionally for Eli and his friends, shared music—the Israeli tradition of *shira b'tzibur*—evoked the

emotional connection that he was seeking. Through singing together, he experienced the shared emotion and loss that Yom HaZikaron represents.

As the rabbinical students moved through the progression of Israeli national holidays, they took note of the ethos of the public sphere as they tried to make sense of and define the holidays and their experiences of them. Even the radio and television stations had commemorative programming. Joel, a Ziegler student, recounted waiting for the national Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'Atzmaut tekes ma'avar to air:

I happened to turn on the television to get ready for the program and the channel was still on either Hop or Nick, Jr., one of the kids' channels. And I remember seeing a candle. The screen just had one graphic and it said *yizkor* [may (God) remember] and it had a candle. And I was like “wow, even the kids' stations here observe!” It's profound! It's really—not even engrained—but it's part of the fabric of society, from MTV to the kids' channel, the music was different, MTV was doing play lists of soldiers who had died the previous year. The family told them their favorite 3 or 4 songs. They were playing that music. It was intense.

As Joel noted, the holidays pervade Israeli culture and change the tone and content of mass media. The television stations adapt their programming, reinforcing the commemorative social atmosphere and tone of the day. The messages of the holidays seep into Israeli society so much more so than any American holiday. The students were stunned by the cultural difference despite expecting it. Their reactions were often emotional, adding depth and a sense of intimacy to their experiences.

Yom HaZikaron carries a weight in society unlike any other because the lists of those who have died in military service or at the hands of terrorists continuously grow. The HUC students had the opportunity to view this continuity in-person when they attended a tekes at a local high school. Dan, an HUC student, commented on what he observed at Gymnasia Rehavia.¹¹⁰

Yom HaZikaron was very fascinating to see the way that Memorial Day is engrained in every level of society. We went to a commemoration at a school here and all the kids singing, reading names of people from the school who've fallen over the years, the soldiers who've graduated from the schools visiting, parents there. And it's something that everyone knows and is trained to do. And that is very different than home.

On Yom HaZikaron, Israelis return to their high schools for commemorative ceremonies to honor their fallen classmates; parents and grandparents of fallen soldiers return to their children's schools to honor them. This tekes, and those like it, involve generations of Israelis. Greg, a Ziegler student, compared the Israeli reality to what he knew from the U.S. He noted that "people here, mainly young-ish people, really take [Yom HaZikaron] seriously, so much more so than Memorial Day or Veterans' Day or anything that we have back home." As the students witnessed, Yom HaZikaron binds Israelis across generations.

¹¹⁰ Gymnasia Rehavia was founded nearly 40 years prior to the State of Israel and, as such, the names of fallen soldiers present are a retrospective on the State and the battles that have touched her, from local skirmishes and ambushes to full-blown wars.

The students encountered the holidays on spiritual and explicitly religious levels as well. The days' narrative centers on the history of the State of Israel, but it is within the larger narrative of the Jewish people who have returned to the Promised Land after a long, long exile. This is not just the realization of Theodore Herzl's dream, but of the thousands year dream of the Jewish people to be a free people in their historic homeland.¹¹¹ The students attended *tekesei ma'avar* with local congregations to mark the end of Yom HaZikaron and the beginning of Yom HaAtzma'ut.¹¹² Greg, a Ziegler student, attended a *tekes ma'avar* where they sang the *Hallel* [lit., praise] service and Psalms 113 through 118:

They did a kind of transferring ceremony . . . We davened and sang and did Hallel, which I thought was great. . . . it felt really appropriate. And like we're saying the *Al Hanisim* [lit., about the miracles] paragraph for Yom HaAtzma'ut. There are some people who say it, but leave off the *bracha* [blessing]. I think absolutely we should be saying this. How is Yom HaAtzma'ut different from Chanukah or Purim? You know what the difference is? I'm certain this happened. The other two, I'm not so certain they happened. It says in *Al Hanisim*, "*b'yamim hahem b'zman hazeh*" ["in these days, at this time"]. Like that's pretty blatant. Absolutely we should say it.

¹¹¹ As the 1976 Debbie Friedman song based on Theodor Herzl's famous phrase goes, *Im tirtzu ein zo agadah: l'hiyot am hofshi b'artzeinu, b'eretZ Tzion v'Yerushalayim* [If you will it, it is no fairy tale: to be a free people in our land, in the land of Zion and Jerusalem].

¹¹² The national *tekes ma'avar* is held at Mount Herzl, the national military cemetery in Jerusalem, and focuses primarily on the civil narrative.

Greg recognized the poignancy of framing Yom HaAtzma'ut in religious terms. It is a narrative that made sense to him, that he recognized as worthy of liturgical acknowledgment as a miracle. Through the *tekes ma'avar*, Greg encountered the holiday as an event with spiritual-historical relevance.

Karen, a Ziegler student, encountered Yom HaAtzma'ut as a festive holiday in a public park with her family and classmates. For logistical and child safety reasons, some classmates wanted to have a barbeque at home and then go to a park. In the end, she said, "Everyone else was like 'no, we want the real cultural experience that we're here for.'" Karen and her classmates found their "real cultural experience" at Gan Sacher:

We got there and got a great spot. We set up a whole bunch of blankets and had tons of food and a little barbeque . . . We sat next to this huge family . . . and they all sang Israeli folk songs while we were there. And it was such the stereotypical experience that I expected to have. I was pretty sure that as soon as this happened, I'd be like "yeah . . . this is kitschy and I don't know why I made such a big deal."

And it was all those things and it was so much fun!

Once Karen and her classmates got over their caution and went to Gan Sacher, they had a "wonderful time." They encountered Yom HaAtzma'ut as they wanted to; that is, as they believed it should be encountered authentically: grilling in a park adjacent to Israelis singing folk songs. Karen recognized this as a stereotypical image of a Yom HaAtzma'ut celebration, and she loved it nonetheless.

These holidays fall almost at the end of the Israel Year, serving to highlight the Israeli aspect of the Israel Year. The rabbinical students reported seeking interactions

with Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma'ut from social, historical, spiritual, and cultural angles. They wanted to encounter Israel, but they also wanted to encounter themselves and uncover their own personal connections with the Israeli narrative. They reported “witnessing” the Yom HaShoah tekes and the grief of Israelis on Yom HaZikaron. “Witnessing” suggests a reverence for the encounter, but also suggests distance. Regardless of the mindset that the students brought to the encounter, they had to make sense of what they saw and experienced.

Evaluation: Everything Has More Intensity in Israel

The rabbinical students tried to make sense of their experiences through their American-tinted glasses. Having grown up valuing a separation between church and state, the ways in which religion and state interact in Israel caught them off-guard, even though they knew to expect it. The commemorative holidays were not by any means their first encounter with state-sponsored Judaism, but they provided some of the most explicit and public displays. After months of nearly commerce- and public transportation-free Shabbatot and holidays, the rabbinical students expected state involvement in Judaism. However, they expressed surprise at encountering Judaism woven into national commemorations. Instead of a separation between religion and state, the students encountered measured appropriations of Jewish music, symbols, and liturgy in civil ceremonies. In Israel, civil religion is unapologetically civil Judaism.

In order to better evaluate what they will encounter, the rabbinical students learned in advance about the structure of the national Yom HaShoah ceremony. They

watched a recording of a previous ceremony, and Steve, the instructor, pressed pause frequently to point out intentionally placed visual, auditory, and religious symbols. The students learned about the standard elements of the ceremonies—which prayers are offered, which songs sung, where speakers with personal anecdotes fit in, highly evocative points that may draw tears—and how the ceremonies are constructed to flow. In this way, they were given tools for evaluating and interpreting what they would encounter.

As an IEP exercise, the students formed small groups and designed mock Yom HaShoah programs for American congregations, a skill their schools evidently hoped they would take home with them. By learning the back-story and creating something of their own, the students were better able to understand what they would be viewing in the national Yom HaShoah tekes, either in-person or live on television. In this way, the rabbinical students entered the civil-religious holiday season prepared for what they will encounter and with a modicum of understanding about not just the history of the holidays and content of the ceremonies, but the implicit messages and symbols as well. Both the knowledge and the experience formed the connections to Israel they will take home with them.

The rabbinical students attempted to define what they encountered through comparisons with American ceremonies and holidays, but nothing was on par with Israel's nationwide commemorative sirens. On Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron, one- and two-minute commemorative sirens sound out across Israel. As Dan, an HUC student stated, the siren "is kind of an appropriate kind of sound as a symbol for what we were

remembering.” For Israelis, the sirens cue a national ritual (Ephratt 2015). For the rabbinical students who had not previously experienced the sirens, the scene was striking. People stop walking, cars stop and drivers get out, bicyclists dismount, and everyone stands still in honor of those who have died. Zach, an HUC student, observed that “everyone stops in the street . . . and gets out of the car and puts their head down. These are probably a bunch of secular Israeli people . . . and they look like they’re praying. It’s amazing. That’s something that would only happen here.” Zach witnessed the “religion” aspect of Israeli civil religion and expressed feeling “privileged” to have been able to experience what he defines as a uniquely Israeli moment.

Yom HaAtzma’ut presents as similar to Independence Day in other countries, but the students noticed aspects of the day and how people celebrated that reminded them of the uniqueness of Israel. Dave, an HUC student, spoke of a powerful experience of place and peoplehood on the eve of Yom HaAtzma’ut as he was walking through the center of town:

I just saw a moment that made July Fourth feel like a joke. The sense of national unity and identity and passion for homeland could only exist here. We were walking down Hillel at 1 or 2 in the morning and there was a DJ playing on this three story tower and there had to be 6-7,000 kids, like with their shirts off sitting on their friends’ shoulders, spinning their shirts above their heads, not just dancing but massive energy explosions of movement—it was beyond dancing . . . to this DJ who was playing a pretty terrible techno version of *HaTikvah* [“The Hope,” Israel’s national anthem]. But the energy from the crowd was beyond

anything I'd ever experienced in the US. It was national identity . . . these kids are probably a year or two away from the army, just losing it and having a blast and there was just so much intensity in the party. . . . I don't ever feel that in the US . . . It was powerful.

Witnessing teenagers rocking out to the Israeli national anthem produced in Dave a heightened “consciousness of where I was.” By contrast to the United States, there is a higher level of passionate energy—which he labels as patriotism and peoplehood and Joel, a Ziegler student, calls a “nationalistic orgy.” Dave noted that they were on the verge of entering the army so their intense partying may either be a “last hurrah” or a denial of the serious life stage just around the corner. Regardless, Dave’s experience could be seen as a moment of Durkheimian collective effervescence, with a particular Israeli flavor.

Whereas Dave evaluated Yom HaAtzma’ut through the pulsing, patriotic energy of a party, Eli, a Ziegler student, defined the uniqueness of Yom HaAtzma’ut through civil religion. For Eli, Yom HaAtzma’ut festivities were similar to the Fourth of July in terms of the barbeque in the park, but they were distinctly Israeli and distinctly Jewish. He described his experience at Gan Sacher:

There was a group next to us that was singing a whole bunch of traditional Jewish songs and someone was playing clarinet and they had a drum and it was really beautiful. Some old man was trying to get a minyan together for mincha. That was probably the most real experience for me. . . . I wasn't wearing my sandals. A few people weren't wearing shoes. We were just standing there in the grass. It was

edot hamizrach nusach [Jewish-Eastern melodies]. There were some Israeli soldiers kicking a soccer ball around, some young Israeli girls just wearing short-shorts and bikini tops. The smell of all the *mangalim* [portable grills] was just burning all the different food. And then, all of a sudden, overhead, was an air show. These airplanes kept flying overhead while we're davening. It was just so "only in Israel." It had this really festive feel to it, but it was also very Jewish . . .

Eli painted a picture of the secular and religious intermingling in the celebration. It is a complex—yet seemingly effortless—melange of the different aspects of Israel: music, nature, prayer, sunshine, sport, barbeques, and the military.

When American Jewish communities observe Israeli holidays, the celebrations are not the same. Dan, an HUC student, made the comparison: "Yom HaShoah has always been recognized where I'm from and commemorated, but not as a national event as far as the whole country doing it, and not as a national event either in terms of the need for and promise of a nation. So it's a very different kind of thing." In Israel, Yom HaShoah is a crucial part of the national narrative; the formation of the modern State of Israel is a tangible, positive, national outcome that Jill, a Ziegler student, found important.

In America, Yom Hashoah is Debbie Downer Day 110%, but here it's Yom HaShoah *v'HaGevurah* [and the Heroes] . . . because Israel is here. And I'm not saying that Israel happened because of the Holocaust, but that mindset that you turn everything into an active response, a positive, active response of self-defense and self-actualization, that's what's moving.

The way that Yom HaShoah is commemorated in Israel is uplifting and empowering; in addition to honoring the dead, it celebrates human and national life.

The political valence of Yom HaAtzma'ut in Israel is different from the tone in the United States. In Israel, though there are protests and calls for recognition of the harm done to Palestinians in pursuit of Israeli independence, Yom HaAtzma'ut,¹¹³ for Jews, is a largely unifying holiday. In the United States, however, Yom HaAtzma'ut may be perceived as dividing the Jewish community along conservative and liberal religious and political lines. Ezra, a Ziegler student, reported feeling more free in Israel to join in Yom HaAtzma'ut festivities; back home, he felt socially, politically, and religiously inhibited.

[B]eing here [for Yom HaAtzma'ut] meant more opportunities to actually participate in a way that is very, very hard at home . . . Like any kind of an Israel Day thing in any city, I feel like it's AIPAC¹¹⁴ plus the rabid right-wing Orthodox and it's very hard to have a space to celebrate Israel in *chul* [shorthand for *chutz l'aretz*, outside the land (of Israel)] without that being completely hawkish. That felt more possible here. We're having a barbeque and we're walking on the land and we're being a family . . . saying "Isn't it amazing to have a country?" . . . And it's not to say it's apolitical, but it didn't feel very laden. . . . It was nice just to have a day to feel patriotic a little bit.

Yom HaAtzma'ut in Israel was liberating for Ezra. He was able to be pro-Israel and celebrate Israel in a way that honored the Land, State, and her history without being

¹¹³ The *Naqba* [Catastrophe], in Arabic.

¹¹⁴ AIPAC is the acronym for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

labelled right-wing. In the U.S., Ezra struggled to find an identity that includes celebrating Israel's nationhood. In celebrating Yom HaAtzma'ut in Israel, Ezra recognized his own independence.

The rabbinical students evaluated their encounters based on what they knew from American experiences and what they came to expect based on their own experiences in Israel. The students brought with them Christian-hued American commemorative holiday celebrations that purport to keep church and state separate. In Israel, Jewish religious and national history are inextricable. As the students experienced and evaluated the Israeli yoms, they were able to better conceptualize the breadth and depth of Israeli history and society as they experience the ties of on-going shared loss and rebirth that bind Jewish Israelis together.

Struggling to Connect Emotionally

The rabbinical students reported struggling with the Israeli national holidays in two ways: What they wanted to experience versus what they actually experienced, and whether they felt that they fit in—or not—in Israel. In part, the students defined what they wanted to experience as an emotional state. Evan, an HUC student who attended the Yom HaShoah tekes at Yad VaShem, reflected, “Oh my God. It was so intense. It was really intense. . . . I was incredibly moved by it.” The emotional force of the experience was significant. Evan wanted to be moved. On Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron, the rabbinical students wanted to cry because tears signal a genuine connection with Israel and the Israeli people. This was not a spurious goal; as Jews and future communal

leaders, they have a legitimate stake in the history, present, and future of Israel. Yet, they are still outsiders because these are national holidays—though observed through civil Judaism—and Israel is not their state. This tension stretches throughout the holidays as students negotiated how to commemorate and what and how to feel.

For the rabbinical students, the commemorative sirens on Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron were moments of potential connection. The rabbinical students reported a variety of reactions to experiencing the sirens. Most of them desperately wanted to feel the intensity of the moment and a sense of national unity. Before the sirens sounded, they struggled to be in the right place at the right time in order to observe the moments of silence. As the sirens sounded, they struggled to be present and open to the emotions they hoped would be evoked. They also struggled with what was taking place around them—whether others were observing in still silence or not. After the sirens finished, students struggled to overcome their resulting emotions—whether sadness, poignancy, or disappointment.

Their emotional response was not always predictable. After decades of reading Holocaust literature and viewing pictures and movies, Jen said that she felt “very desensitized.” She added, “I feel sadness, but I don’t feel overt emotion.” However, the noise of the siren, in contrast to the quiet of the streets, struck a visceral chord. Jen explained, “I think being here is very different . . . when the siren goes off seeing that the whole country really stops for two minutes or a minute, to remember. . . . that really gets me.” The siren added dimensions of sound and community and, by doing so, tapped an

emotional depth. The siren reignited the sadness that Jen knew she had the capacity to feel.

In contrast, Dave felt “disappointed” because the siren did not meet his emotion-driven expectations. Despite desperately wanting to do so, Dave struggled to connect with Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron through the sirens. He explained,

I had an expectation of what the siren would feel like, which at that particular time it wasn't that meaningful for me. The one in the morning, I don't know, it was very—we were here at school and a couple cars drove by. Some people didn't get out of their cars. It was more questioning what they were doing or not doing or their level of awareness or if they were making a statement . . . It was very sort of “this is not what this is supposed to be.” And I had no sense of presence for that moment and it was very disappointing for me. And I was happy to participate, but I felt like an on-looker, not a participant . . .

The siren, on its own, was not evocative for him because the response of other people was different from what he expected, but on Yom HaZikaron his experience was different:

Yom Hazikaron was very powerful. I had a very interesting experience. . . . The night of, I was on Agrippas when the siren went off which is absolutely the opposite of what I experienced on Yom Hashoah. A couple of police officers were out of their car standing there. I saw two buses where everyone in the buses was standing. The streets were silent. It was very meaningful and I felt—at first I was compelled to look around and then I was compelled to look up and just reflect on

what was going on around me. It actually felt very freeing and very much a sense of being a part of the experience and the memory and the remembrance and memorial.

When everyone was observing in the prescribed manner, Dave felt the intensity of the shared experience. It was personally meaningful because it was collectively observed. He had been waiting for that collective effervescence to spur his personal experience.

The students also struggled with the transition between holidays, in particular Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzma'ut. While tekesei ma'avar help ease the transition from mourning to celebration, it may still be very difficult, especially for someone who had just located an emotional connection to collective remembrance. Talia explained,

I don't know how Israelis can just shut it off . . . I was so sad on Yom HaZikaron and then it's like "OK, Independence Day. We're psyched!" . . . It was hard for me, but [Israelis] really get into it and the day of, we woke up and claimed a nice spot at Gan HaPa'amon and . . . had a huge grill that day.

As with other holidays, what is happening in the public square—how other people act, appear to feel, and behave—gave the students role models for their own behaviors and emotional states. So, when everyone seemed to have recovered from the heavy sadness of the previous day and was at the park having a barbeque, the students went to the park and had a barbeque, too. As Durkheim would suggest, in the midst of an intense ritual event, participants looked to others for not only how to behave, but also for how to feel.

Because their schools did not provide any particular orientation to the holidays, the students struggled to understand the scope and practice of the holidays in Israeli

society. A few of the students learned the norms of observance when they went out to eat and could not find an open restaurant. Lia, an HUC student, recounted,

I tried to go out to eat, but I realized most places were closed because it was Yom HaShoah, which is actually pretty interesting. I went to Restobar which is where I always go—open on Shabbat, not kosher—and like for that to be closed on Yom HaShoah when it's usually open when everything else is closed, like really shows the importance of the *chag* [religious holiday] to the culture of Israel, which is an interesting realization. It shows how deeply it's embedded in secular Israeli culture.

This was an “ah-ha” moment for Lia: Yom HaShoah is so significant that it is treated with even stricter observance than a religious holiday.

Whereas many of the students struggled to find a connection with the Israeli holidays, others attempted to differentiate themselves because they felt burnt out near the end of the year, disconnected from Israeli people or Jewish peoplehood, and/or eager to return to the U.S. Hilary, an HUC student who had lived in Israel for a few years, felt herself moving away from the holidays and holiday observances as she anticipated returning to the United States. “[L]ately I’ve been finding it hard to connect to Israeli holidays because I am really of a mindset that I am becoming an American again and I’m going home. . . . I think it’s on purpose, I think its emotional distancing.” For Will, a Ziegler student, the distance was there from the beginning. As he said, “these are not my holidays; they belong to Israelis.” He elaborated on why he did not buy into the whole Israeli package.

[E]ven Yom HaShoah is very Israeli and it doesn't do it for me in terms of the narrative, in terms of the—how do I want to describe this?—there's a certain element of the calendar that's manipulative about having Yom HaShoah and then Yom HaZikaron and then Yom HaAtzma'ut. It grabs the Holocaust and says “this belongs to us, the Israelis. This is our pre-history. This is the tragedy which leads to the phoenix being born again,” which is fine if you're Israeli. I'm not, I don't intend to be. Most of the people who died in the Shoah were not Zionists and I don't think their deaths make them into some sort of *korban* [offering, sacrifice] which is necessary for the creation of a state. I think that's a horrible thought.

Will did not buy into what he interpreted to be the standard Israeli narrative of the holidays. Instead of connecting with the holidays from a different angle, he simply felt repelled.

The rabbinical students' struggles with Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma'ut revealed the emotional complexity of Israel's civil religion. Those who desired a connection wanted to have visceral reactions to the memorial ceremonies and sirens. Those who did not want to connect struggled to distance themselves from public displays that were not in line with what they wanted to feel. The students struggled with proximity. When they wanted to be close and feel close, what if they were not and did not? When they wanted to be far and feel distant, what if they could not? Then, what if they finally achieved that closeness and emotional buy-in only to discover that the goalposts had moved and it is now a different holiday with associated emotions that were

180 degrees different? The rabbinical students' experiences of Israel's national holidays were complex and had personal reverberations, to say the least.

Taking Stock of Personal Experiences and Considering Communal Applications

How the rabbinical students personally connected—or not—with Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma'ut will ultimately affect how they intend to translate their experiences to professional settings. The inter-seminary Israel Experience Program gave the students background information about Yom HaShoah and tasked them with developing a mock-up of a U.S. congregation-based commemoration ceremony. Other than that single experience, however, the students determined for themselves if and how they intended to adopt, adapt, and integrate their experiences into what they did as rabbis and their emerging sense of self.

Before they could think about an American audience, however, they had to determine how the stories of these holidays made sense alongside their own stories. These are Israeli holidays that tell the Israeli narrative and engage Israeli society in a way that places almost all of the rabbinical students on the outside. Whereas the rabbinical students may have been able to find a connection on Yom HaShoah if their family's histories were impacted by the Holocaust, they may not have connected with Yom HaZikaron because they had no direct ties to Israel's military. Jen, an HUC student who has family in Israel, explained,

I don't have a family member who was killed here. I don't have a friend who was killed here, but I have family and friends who fight for this country and who serve

in the army and who live here on a daily basis and who are threatened by violence on a daily basis. And so I think in a way, I connect through my family who's here and I connect through the people I know and my friends who have fought, who fought in the Second Lebanon War or who were in Jerusalem during the Second Intifada. You know, so I think I connect through them. . . . I connect through other people's stories.

Jen encountered the holidays through the stories and experiences of Israelis. In so doing, she constructed a civil religious *dvar Torah*—gathering the data and literature and experiences that she needed to construct a personally meaningful narrative to share with others.

For some students, the story of connection was not so much with the Israeli state as with Jewish peoplehood. Lia, an HUC student, encountered the holidays with her American classmates, and commented, “being outside with the siren with all my classmates and getting to share that moment together is pretty much something I’ll never forget for the rest of my life. It really makes you feel like you’re part of something larger, like you’re really part of the peoplehood.” It was a type of Jewish synecdoche—a Jewish national connection. The collective action created a sense of greater unity.

Collective experience, accompanied by deep emotion, constituted the kind of holiday experience the rabbinical students saw as sources of authentic solidarity with Israelis. That connection paid American dividends by creating “Jewish capital.” Achieving emotional solidarity with Israeli Jews allows a rabbi to claim a global Jewish connection. The most authentic moments – the ones that give the students a sense of

having emotionally, spiritually, and physically arrived – are when the emotion sneaks up on a person. Talia, an HUC student, described her experience on Yom HaShoah:

Everyone says “oh yeah, the siren on Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron. It’s so powerful.” Do people really stop? I don’t really buy it that people stop their cars. And I realized we walked outside and it was very quiet. There were very few cars. And then the siren happened and people got out of their cars and stood. Like I lost it instantly. And people that had been walking down the hill just stopped right where they were and I could not believe it. It was so powerful. It just resonated with me and it was exactly what everyone said it would be and I just didn’t believe it.

“Losing it” was a positive experience because it denoted an intense, personally resonant moment.

Dave, another HUC student, was also caught off-guard. He experienced a powerful connection when he and his classmates attended the Yom HaZikaron tekes at the high school in Rehavia. Dave had no expectations that this would happen.

It was very powerful and I wasn’t really expecting to get anything out of it except maybe to see the experience of the ceremony, but it ended up being that Israeli moment that I wanted to have. . . . I was sitting with [an HUC staff member] and . . . they told a story between reading all the names and that story was about someone her son had gone to high school with. That was really intense and close to home, to be with her and watch her have emotions and me feel sad and try to find the space to hold all the names that just kept going.

Dave's "Israeli moment" was mediated by someone whose personal connection provided him with a vicarious personal connection.

Joel, a Ziegler student, had his "Israeli moment" during Yom HaAtzma'ut. The pieces fell into place, allowing him to connect his experiences in Israel with what he had learned and taught in the United States:

Yom HaAtzma'ut was like one of those altering moments. It was just like "OK, now I get it." It's one thing to hear about as a kid in religious school—even being a teacher in religious school, discussing it with your students: Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaShoah, the country comes to a stop. It's one thing to talk about; it's another thing to experience. And when someone says "Yom HaAtzma'ut is frivolity and it's fun and there's shaving cream and kids running around and everyone's barbequeing," it's one thing to talk about it and to hear about it and it's another thing to experience it. I'm glad I had the opportunity to experience it.

The Israel holidays were no longer someone else's story. When Joel returns to the US and teaches about the holidays, he will be able to do so from a place of personal knowledge.

In addition to personal edification, the rabbinical students considered how they wanted to take the holidays into their rabbinical practice. What they have learned by being there and their shared experiences will contribute to and shape communal dialogue about Israel and inform their Israel programming. The rabbinical students, from positions of authority and by way of their own experiences, will help form their communities' relationships with Israel. The power to mold communal attitudes and connections gave the students an imperative to make the most of their experiences and to strive for the

types of experiences and connections with holidays that they deem to be the most important, significant, and authentic. The students' experiences were not just for themselves.

Not everything will translate, of course. Stephanie, an HUC student, considered how to adapt the tekes ma'avar from Yom HaZikaron to Yom HaAtzma'ut to her student pulpit in the coming year in a congregation that includes Marines. "How can I bring some of this back either for Yom Hazikaron which is Israeli or for Memorial Day which is American?" Students expressed doubts about translating the meaning of Yom HaZikaron to American congregants who had not experienced compulsory military or national service as is the case in Israel. For Stephanie, though, a community of Marines may be the right audience.

Many of the students were so wrapped up in the experiences of the moment that they were not necessarily thinking about future applications. However, Ethan, an HUC student who had been in Israel for the holidays before, purposefully took time to consider professional applicability. Just before Yom HaShoah, in fact, Ethan learned that one of the Shabbatot when he will be in his student pulpit the following year will fall between Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron. Ethan considered how to use the siren to teach.

One of the things I'd been thinking of doing is at the Friday night service of that weekend when we do the Israeli stuff is to do a siren for Yom HaShoah and on the Saturday morning service doing a siren for Yom HaZikaron, like so they get the feeling that in the middle of everything you just stop what you're doing. You can't—even watching a video, it doesn't give the same effect as actually doing it.

And clearly these experiences can't be replicated, but you can get something close to it.

While the Israeli holidays cannot be directly translated to an American Jewish context, Ethan hoped to teach from experience and share some of the symbols of the days through an experiential multisensory approach that may trigger emotional responses, the very reactions that the students had been so eager to achieve.

The rabbinical students experienced Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma'ut primarily for themselves, but given the opportunity, considered how they might translate their experiences back to the United States. Their connections with the Israeli holiday narrative emerged not from isolated encounters, but from symbols experienced in social, cultural, and historical contexts. Although the translation will not be easy, they feel the urgency of experiencing these holidays not just for themselves but for their future communities, classrooms, and congregations.

Israeli Civil Religion and Two Sides of the Same Identity Coin

In Israel, according to Liebman and Don-Yehiya, "civil religion provides meaning and expression to one's Jewish identity just as one's Jewish identity provides meaning and expression to one's Israeli identity" (1983[1979]:17). Thus, the two identities are mutually reinforcing and formative. Though the students are not Israeli, they experienced this mutual reinforcement. Josh and his classmates noted that the national Yom HaShoah tekes was like a religious service; as Zach stood for a commemorative siren, he saw Israelis with heads bowed as if in prayer; Greg said Hallel at a synagogue's tekes

ma'avar, reflecting on the miracle of existence of the State of Israel; and, Dave noted the Jewish-national euphoria of Israeli teenagers on Yom HaAtzma'ut. Through their encounters, the rabbinical students were able to glean a deeper understanding of the narrative thread of the holidays and how commemorative ceremonies, religious symbols, and artifacts are structured and used (some may say co-opted) to transmit particular meanings that support the official narrative.

The students wrestled with all of these aspects of the holidays as they sorted through facts and history in the abstract and pursued what they see as an ideal, authentic emotional state: a pang of loss, preferably accompanied by teary eyes, followed by elation at the existence of the State. Through the process of observing the days, the students reflected on how they are able to achieve the connection that they wanted through stories, friends of friends, and the visceral sound of the siren. Though many students focused on their own experiences, professional adaptations and applications were also in view. From experience to application, though, the rabbinical students found ways that their Judaism enabled them to connect with Israel's civil religion and the Israeli experience.

Celebrating American Holidays in Israel

The rabbinical students' experiences of Israeli civil holidays brought to light the struggle to feel like an Israeli insider despite having the status of a foreigner, albeit one that can readily relate to the religious aspects of civil religion. Over the course of the Israel Year, the rabbinical students also experienced American holidays and a different kind of foreignness. Just after arriving in-country, HUC hosted a Fourth of July barbeque

for this new cohort. While on tiyul with the inter-seminary Israel Experience Program in the South of Israel, the rabbinical students were treated to a Thanksgiving feast on a kibbutz. On their own, students sought out Christmas celebrations in Jerusalem, primarily motivated by novelty and ease of access. These three holidays emerged from interview data as the most salient American holidays during the year.¹¹⁵ The Fourth of July and Thanksgiving, as civic holidays, connected the rabbinical students to their own sense of Americanness, if not patriotism. Christmas, often viewed as a cultural holiday with religious origins, was taken by the rabbinical students as American, not Christian, because it reminded them of home—mass culture and shopping malls, more so than family.

The rabbinical students' experiences of American holidays during the Israel Year reflect the tension they felt from being away from home, regardless of how comfortable they were in Israel. In particular, the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas highlight how the students negotiated their identities as Americans and American Jews in the Israeli context. Unlike Jewish-religious or Israeli holidays, which have high visibility in the public square, American holidays required the rabbinical students to carve out their own spaces for celebration. Just as the students found novelty in the social pervasiveness of Jewish holidays, they also found novelty in taking charge of their American holiday celebrations. Each experience challenged and redefined the meaning of community and home.

¹¹⁵ The Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas are not representative of America's purest civil religion, but, it may be argued, have greater importance for the students than Presidents' Day, Memorial Day, and Veterans' Day, for example.

The oddity of celebrating American holidays in Israel during this year stood in contrast to memories of consistent and largely uniform traditions from home. A new place and a different community mean a necessary reconstruction of the socially integrating power of collective rituals. Etzioni wrote,

Given that holidays tend to rely on the legitimization of tradition and on affective attachment founded on shared memories and histories, a question arises . . . Do holidays lose some or all of their power to reinforce commitments to values if they are extensively edited, let alone vastly reengineered? (Etzioni 2004:31)

On the contrary, editing and reengineering for a new place seemed to strengthen the students' sense of connection and commitment. They brought their traditions and memories to their current celebrations.¹¹⁶ Editing the locale by celebrating American holidays in Israel, intentionally connected them to American traditions and underlying values.

Celebrating American holidays in Israel was an exercise in negotiation of culture, contexts, and content, not unlike negotiating the complex identities of future American rabbis studying in Israel. In a way, American holidays in Israel are similar to American Jews in Israel: they have both more similarities and more differences than what appears on the surface.

¹¹⁶ Historically in the United States, according to Muir (2004), the Thanksgiving holiday was spread nationwide by nostalgic New Englanders who had moved away, generally in professional capacities, to seek their fortunes. So lovely were their memories of the bountiful Thanksgiving feasts, warm family and communal atmospheres, and joyous church services that they pressured local officials to proclaim a Thanksgiving holiday wherever they lived. Thus, the tradition of taking Thanksgiving with oneself to a new locale has deep historical roots. The rabbinical students, most likely unknowingly, represent a continuation of this tradition in an international and Jewish iteration.

Fourth of July

As part of their Year in Israel orientation, HUC orientation staff planned a Fourth of July barbeque for the newly arrived rabbinical students. It was an opportunity for the students to meet each other in a casual setting and to spend time in a Jerusalem public space. With the exception of those who arrived early to take an additional Hebrew language class, the HUC students were just landing on or around the day itself. Many of those who attended the event recalled feeling somewhat jetlagged and dazed by their new surroundings and social context.

The picnic took place at the aptly named Gan HaPa'amon, Liberty Bell Park, just a short walk up the hill from the HUC campus. Gan HaPa'amon attracts a diverse cross section of Jerusalem's population, from religiously observant to secular Jews and Muslims, to international tourists and English-speaking young adults spending the year studying in Jerusalem. Proximity to campus aside, the demographic openness of Gan HaPa'amon reflects American values of diversity, an interpretation that did not go unnoticed by the rabbinical students and has particular poignancy on the Fourth of July. Nevertheless, the physical layout of the park with a couple of open spaces and a playground, is particularly suited for private gatherings—numerous alcoves with stone benches line the long, shaded walkway that stretches from one end the park to the other. The ways in which the rabbinical students encountered the event and the space, interpreted and evaluated what they encountered, struggled with their experiences, and

incorporated what they learned both challenged and reinforced the norms inherent in the space and the values represented by the holiday.

The rabbinical students encountered the Fourth of July barbeque with varying levels of trepidation. As with any school meet-and-greet event, they understood that they were meeting their future friends and colleagues, but they did not know each other yet. They were starting out together, all somewhat anxious about the path ahead. The picnic was a purposeful hybrid experience; that is, a taste of what it will be like to be an American living in Israel. Their celebration was generic enough to make the actual holiday irrelevant. Nothing was specifically American—there were no apple pies or fireworks—yet it was timed so that the themes remained salient. As the students encountered the holiday, they also encountered and recognized their own liminality; that is, how they straddled group affiliations and boundaries. The multiple layers of encounter foreshadowed the cultural complexity of the year.

The food and activities reflected the hybridity of celebrating this American holiday in Israel. According to Jen, the students were asked to contribute “chips, pita, [and] *salatim* [lit., salads, but refers to “spreads” such as hummus, babaganoush, tehina, etc.]” The students played Frisbee with each other, but more significantly, what they remembered months after the fact was that a handful of their classmates spontaneously played American football and soccer with a group of Arab kids. To many of the HUC students, this illustrated how American sports facilitated positive cross-cultural interactions. Keith explained how this one experience spoke directly to his values, especially as a newcomer to Israel on the Fourth of July:

I had just got here, never been to Israel before, and you have this idea in your mind of this conflict between Arabs and Jews, Palestinians and Jews, and here one of my first experiences is that we as rabbinical students . . . are having this picnic and we're having a great time playing with Arab children. . . . [P]art of the great thing about the United States is how much diversity there is between cultures and how much people interact with one another. To me, it was kind of a perfect picture. You know, perfect expression of Fourth of July in Israel was this interaction between Jewish people and Arab people without any pretenses.

Keith's rose-tinted evaluation of the isolated pick-up games demonstrated that diversity and coexistence are possible in Israel, at least between Americans and Israeli Arabs. The rabbinical students evaluated what they encountered on the Fourth of July in terms of their American values of diversity.

The biggest struggle the rabbinical students reported was their jetlag and general confusion about being in a new place. Wendy and her family had just arrived in Israel the previous day. "We were just so completely disoriented at this point. The idea that I was supposed to bring something to the barbeque seemed so daunting because the idea of navigating an Israeli grocery store to pick up some chips, I just didn't know how I was going to do it." The struggle was not the Fourth of July, but shopping in Israel for the first time.¹¹⁷ In the middle of their acclimation, they did not report wistfulness about missing

¹¹⁷ If the Israel Year were in fact an entire year, it would be interesting to compare Fourth of July celebrations as the first event of the year and as the final event of the year. The students would have obviously known each other and have bonded as a community, but how would their having been in Israel changed their approach to celebrating this American holiday? Would they be in a process of distancing themselves from each other and Israel as they prepare to leave the country? Would the same symbols—the

celebrations at home with family. They did, however, express varying levels of discomfort and awkwardness about meeting their new classmates. As Mari commented, “I was excited and happy to meet everybody, but it was very overwhelming.” Buying chips and meeting new people, both while jetlagged, were emblematic of the students’ struggles on this holiday.

Memories of the students’ Fourth of July experiences were not explicitly tied to the holiday itself. Its place in the story of their Israel Year was as a beginning. Awkward initial conversations and the new social scene dissolved rather quickly into a collective sense of looking forward to the journey ahead. As Dan said, “it’s kind of the feeling that we were all on an island together. You know, whether it was finding our way home from the park, from the barbeque, or where you can buy a towel, or whatever it was . . .” Dan recognized that he and his classmates all shared a connection through their uncertainty about where they were. The students bonded quickly out of necessity. They discovered that they needed to rely on each other in order to make sense of the place and how to function within it. Despite anxiety and culture shock, Wendy admitted “this is all very alien, but it might be ok.” Something new had begun.

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving in Israel is a known entity in places with a lot of immigrants and American ex-pats. Since the Israeli calendar does not accommodate the holiday,

array of salatim and the American football—be taken as integrations that would condition the students to return to the U.S.?

American families in Israel may have a Thanksgiving-style meal for Shabbat dinner. The rabbinical students' Thanksgiving celebration, however, took place on the day itself and was an elaborate, organized affair. Thanksgiving dinner was the centerpiece of the interseminary Israel Experience Program (IEP) South Tiyul in the Negev. The tiyul was meant to give the students an opportunity to unwind and be in nature. This was also the first time that they were all together for a lengthy bus ride and an overnight trip. They spent the day hiking Mount Shlomo in Eilat, Israel's southern-most city, and then had a Thanksgiving program and feast in the dining room at Kibbutz Keturah. The students participated in both as a large group, getting to know each other better and creating shared memories of the day.

Thanksgiving is a holiday laden with meaning and memories. Not surprisingly, the students cared deeply about what they did, what they ate, and what traditions they shared with their families. Only a couple of the students, clearly outliers, expressed indifference about Thanksgiving. The rabbinical students encountered Thanksgiving through the lenses of their own memories and evaluated their holiday experiences on the IEP tiyul with a critical eye, comparing and contrasting them with what they knew and missed from home. They struggled with homesickness, never more acute or widespread as on Thanksgiving Day. Eventually they were able to reflect on the meaning and value of celebrating Thanksgiving in Israel as Americans and Jews.

The students encountered Thanksgiving with nostalgia for holidays past, gratitude for the efforts made to create a celebration for them in Israel, chagrin at the hybrid nature of holiday celebrations, and sadness for what they were missing at home. Jill, a Ziegler

student, described the meal: “[T]he staff and the members of the kibbutz prepared a full Thanksgiving meal for us: turkey, gravy, stuffing, down to pecan pie and pumpkin pie. Someone told them ‘this is what’s on a table in America’ and they got everything, down to the corny turkey decorations.” The students’ stories reflected their strong relationships with Thanksgiving foods. There was something about Thanksgiving food that seemed absolutely necessary and unable to be compromised.¹¹⁸ They expressed dismay, for example, at the presence of raisins in the apple pies, even as they expressed gratitude to the kibbutz kitchen staff for recreating their gastronomical memories.

Still, Thanksgiving is also strongly linked to family and family traditions. Zach, an HUC student, appreciated the meal, but missed family and watching football:

That was a lot of fun and we had really good food and it was everything Thanksgiving should be, aside from being with my family. If I wasn’t with my family, this was a close second. Unfortunately we couldn’t watch any football games, so maybe it wasn’t exactly an almost close second. That was a really good night and homey.

A quality Thanksgiving experience is “homey,” a quality that many other students either did not experience or struggled to locate in that evening.

The rabbinical students expressed struggling a lot with Thanksgiving-related homesickness. They described missing family gatherings, traditions, food, and football. Natalie, an HUC student, did not realize how much she valued Thanksgiving until this

¹¹⁸ As part of a larger conversation about food and meaning for Mormon missionaries, Rudy (2003) explores the significance of familiar Thanksgiving foods as an anchor to home and positive reinforcement of Americanness. She also notes the great lengths people go to in order to recreate particular dishes.

tiyul. “I didn’t expect to feel so homesick because it’s not my favorite holiday. I guess you don’t realize what you miss until you don’t have it anymore.” Talia, also an HUC student, expressed an appreciation for the technical accuracy of the Thanksgiving meal, but described Thanksgiving as “the peak of my homesickness.” She elaborated,

I remember calling my parents like during the dinner to say “hi” and “happy Thanksgiving” and I like totally lost it on the phone. I was outside. There were also other people outside on their phones crying. It was like a very tough time of year, I think, and Thanksgiving this year, it was the first time I haven’t been home for it.

Talia and her colleagues felt the separation from family intensely on Thanksgiving. There was nowhere else to look for a more “authentic” experience than home, and they could not be there. With Jewish holidays, being in Israel was a bonus. Thanksgiving, however, could never be value-added in Israel because the physical and social contexts had no special meaning for this holiday.

On Thanksgiving, these rabbinical students simply claimed their Americanness, negotiating new and adapted American identities in this non-American context—Thanksgiving dinner on the kibbutz. As Andy, a Ziegler student reflected, “it was OK to be American in that space.” The students were able to tap into that aspect of their identities on Thanksgiving and celebrate it, as opposed to simply using it as a filter for their Israel experiences. It was an opportunity for American exceptionalism, but also a point of cultural intersection. Following the meal, the students said the traditional Jewish *birkat hamazon* [blessing after the meal]. Afterward, in what Jill called “one of the stand-

out moments of the year,” the students broke into a spontaneous Americana sing-along.

Jill explained,

[A]t the end of the evening . . . we *bensched* [Yiddish, recited birkat hamazon] and then we went into *zemirot* [songs], except the *zemirot* because it wasn't Shabbos, we sang like 'God Bless America,' we sang the national anthem. We sang country songs, we sang like American classic rock songs. It was like American *zemiros* [*zemirot*]. . . So that was hysterical.

Thanksgiving became an outlet for the rabbinical students' expressions of both their American and Jewish American selves through sharing food and song.

Israel was the context, but this one evening was an American oasis. Andy added that one of his colleagues “stood up and started singing HaTikvah and . . . we stopped it because . . . that just wasn't OK in that space.” The students had cordoned off the area as a safe space to be American and to be American Jews. For this evening, they had isolated themselves from the context of Israel. The students adapted and Americanized the Jewish practice of singing after a festive meal to Thanksgiving and create a Jewish American hybrid within the Israeli context. As Andy commented, the singalong prompted him to ask, “What does it mean to be an American in Israel and like when should you be trying to blend in and when should you be trying to assert your Americanness?”

Christmas

Christmas celebrations were not a core—or even peripheral—part of the Israel Year experience. However, several rabbinical students took note of the holiday, mostly

by way of its absence from the public sphere. They saw small, sparkling lights on trees throughout Jerusalem and realized that they were for Chanukah and wintertime, not for Christmas. They noticed that they did not encounter Santa Claus in the mall or anywhere really, outside of the Christian and Armenian parts of the Old City. Christmas, for the rabbinical students, was not a Christian-religious holiday; but like Thanksgiving, it represented America. The students felt nostalgic for Christmas songs that played in public spaces at home and for the traditions that they shared with their families on that day when almost everything was closed.

Only those students who took initiative encountered Christmas in Israel. For others, it passed with little or no notice. Those who ventured out to local celebrations had assumptions and knowledge from home against which to evaluate their experiences. They were open-minded, but recognizing themselves as outsiders, they were not always sure how to engage. They were curious about customs, but did not want to let their curiosity lead to inadvertent Christian practices or statements of faith. They recognized that their proximity provided an opportunity to explore a different faith tradition. What they internalized in the end was an appreciation of how Christmas is observed in Israel, interfaith knowledge that may be useful in future years. Jen, an HUC student, shared a narrative of her Christmas experience:

Christmas Eve, we did half Jewish traditions and half not. So we . . . had Chinese food and then we went to the Scottish Church for midnight mass [sic] because we had never been. Of course there's a church on every single block where I live, but why would I go there when I could go in Jerusalem? . . . Also, it was an English

service which was really nice. And it was really intriguing for the most part really because of how many of the songs I knew . . . They sang “Silent Night” . . . and “Oh Little Town of Bethlehem” and a couple of other songs . . . These are songs that at home we sing because we hear them on the radio or in the mall . . .

Jen and her classmates encountered Christmas because they wanted to. They purposefully ordered Chinese food and decided to go to a late night carols service at the Scottish Church. Jen had never been to a church before, yet some of the songs were familiar from popular culture. She did not express struggle, but she did voice her attempt to balance participation and distance, saying, “when you sing it it’s not like you’re saying a prayer.” For Jen and others, observing Christmas in these ways was a unique utilization of the Israel Year to broaden interfaith horizons while feeding nostalgia for an American holiday.

The rabbinical students encountered Christmas with curiosity. They were aware of the irony and the potential dissonance of their choice, but they also recognized an opportunity. This year, they could be curious without push-back from congregants or a board of directors and without requiring the caveat of an official interfaith program. The Scottish Church was accessible to them in terms of location, a service conducted in English, and a policy of welcoming whomever wanted to enter. They could go in as Americans and not purposefully advertise their Judaism. The students encountered Christmas as semi-knowledgeable outsiders. The holiday was not as foreign as it could have been, but it was also not their own and not the source of a specifically religious experience.

Their evaluation of their Christmas experiences began with its lack of visibility in Jewish Jerusalem. Zach, an HUC student, commented that “Christmas came and passed and you wouldn’t have blinked an eye and wouldn’t even have known it.” The students who ventured out to a Christmas service evaluated the content mostly against whatever songs they knew from American culture. Mari, however, actually knew all of the words because, as she shared, “All of my friends in high school had been evangelical Christians who taught me all of these songs.” Knowing all of the lyrics allowed Mari to integrate her experience more closely with the larger congregation.

Full integration into the experience was not, however, what this encounter was about. The students struggled, as Jews, with a liturgy that expressed beliefs that were not theirs and a choreography of ritual that was unknown to them. Jen expressed the boundaries she drew for herself within the songs:

Where do you draw the line between singing just for singing and singing as a prayer and do you participate in a service like that? Do you not? I kind of draw the line where if there’s a specific reference to Jesus in the song, I won’t sing it.

But if it’s a general God reference and if it’s not specific about the birth of Christ, I would sing it.

In order to remain consistent with her Judaism yet accommodate the Church setting which she had voluntarily entered, Jen engaged in the ages-old Jewish tradition of editing out “Jesus” from the lyrics.

It was harder to manage their physical presence. The ten HUC students that attended the midnight service comprised approximately a quarter of the entire assembled congregation. Mari described the scene:

[I]t was a small room to begin with, like a small chapel, but I mean yeah there were probably like 40 people total, if that, and we were a good chunk. I mean, and we sat in the back and stood out like sore thumbs because we were all whispering “What’s going on?” We didn’t know what to do. We all stood up a second too late and sat down a second too early . . .

The students were aware of their own status as awkward interlopers. The fact that they were “fish out of water” was a prominent part of the students’ struggle with the context and content of the church service.

This experience became a part of their rabbinical formation as they affirmed their own curiosity about this holiday and devised a way to explore. Experiencing a major American (Christian) holiday outside its American context required adaptation and spurred reflection. They approached Christmas as an American holiday with American and Jewish American traditions. It was not a holiday that the vast majority of students celebrated, yet they expressed personal and cultural nostalgia. Even as some of the HUC students strategically engaged, they also understood where to draw a Jewish line in the lyrics.

Attending the church service gave the rabbinical students a multicultural, interfaith experience that was be difficult to come by in Jewish Jerusalem and even more difficult for an ordained rabbi to come by in the United States. It might have been

possible for the students to attend a comparable service in the United States, but there was a certain dissonance that they relished about having the experience in Jerusalem. They also realized that experiencing Christianity up-close was otherwise largely absent from the Israel Year.

American Holidays in Jerusalem: Remembering Where You Came From and That You are Going Back

Celebrating American holidays in Israel gave the rabbinical students opportunities to temporarily reclaim or revisit their Americanness through symbols and rituals and to connect with each other as fellow ex-pats instead of just classmates. In short, it was not about the holidays; the holidays were the pretense for getting together and sharing an American experience in a distant, non-American context. Those experiences were seeds of specifically American rabbinic formation. On the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, the rabbinical students encountered each other specifically as Americans who will ultimately serve in an American context.

The Fourth of July barbeque, Thanksgiving dinner, and Christmas church service were bonding opportunities for the students as they defined their group identity as American Jews in Israel. On the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving, being together mitigated the students' otherness as Americans in Israel. On Christmas, being together gave the students a support system as they ventured into an unknown space, simultaneously in search of novelty and familiarity.

The rabbinical students evaluated what—and whom—they encountered through comparisons with memories from home and expectations for how the holidays should be adapted to an Israeli context. The pies at Thanksgiving, while delicious, did not need to have raisins, for example. The students struggled with their experiences of homesickness and with how to negotiate “HaTikvah” or the lyrics of Christmas carols. In both cases, the songs and how students responded to them were statements about which aspects of their identities the students saw as most prominent in each time and place.

The rabbinical students also processed the value that the experiences have for them as future American rabbis, integrating these celebrations into the story of the Israel Year. Through meeting each other at the Fourth of July barbeque, the HUC students began to see that they were going to be alright, that they would have friends, and that they would help each other figure out life in Jerusalem. The Thanksgiving feast gave them a forum to celebrate a much-loved American holiday despite being in Israel. Although many report missing family and traditions from home, their Americana song session revealed the strength of their group cohesion and their proud attachment to the American story. With help from the inter-seminary Israel Experience Program coordinator and kibbutz kitchen staff, the students were able to create a protected space to celebrate Americanness in Israel. The Christmas service at the Scottish Church, on the other hand, prompted the group of HUC students to define boundaries between their Jewish identities and Christianity and between Jewish American and Christian traditions. Celebrating the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas during the Israel Year gave

the students a way to examine how the Israeli context might influence their American and Jewish American identities.

The rabbinical students adopted, adapted, and integrated their American holiday experiences into the array of Israel Year experiences. These holidays in and of themselves may not have had direct relevance for rabbinic identity. They were not value-added holiday experiences, because the messages and symbols of the holidays were not being reinforced by the Israeli context. If anything, the holidays and celebrations were pared down so that only the critical—or easiest to come by—elements were present. Celebrating American holidays in Israel gave the rabbinical students the opportunity to learn about being the outsider trying to find avenues of affinity.

The rabbinical students engaged in hybridizing their American-Jewishness directly when it came to holidays. They confronted the hyphen head-on. They expressed pride about their Americanness and a self-assuredness that they did not always feel in celebrating Jewish holidays in Israel. The students were experts by way of lifetimes of personal experience and a lack of opposition from others, and they felt empowered by these things. The Israel Year, however, challenged them to adapt to their surroundings. They crafted celebrations out of memories and symbols from home, the cultural ingredients of the context, and the community in which they were embedded as students, something which will be explored further in the coming chapter.

Conclusion: Forming Religious, National, and National-Religious Identities

Civil religion sacralizes the state by elevating the historical narrative to a spiritual level. Civil religion is observed and celebrated through public rituals and holidays.

During the Israel Year, the rabbinical students engaged with civil time through holidays. As with religious holidays, participating in civil and civil-religious holidays and ritual occasions defined morality, reaffirmed group solidarity, and strengthened shared identity (De Coulanges [1864] 1956; Durkheim [1912] 1995; Cristi and Dawson 2007). The rabbinical students' encounters with Israeli and American holidays (and the accompanying sacralization) became part of their rabbinic formation by complexifying their relationships with the holidays, through first-hand experience in the case of Israeli holidays and ex-pat experiences in the case of American holidays.

Intellectual and Experiential Knowledge of National Time

Even when the students had previously experienced the Israeli yoms, they may not have been informed about them. During this year, their institutions and the IEP provided background information about the holidays and explained the narrative arc that connects them. Faculty also dissected the formula for commemorative ceremonies and in doing so, called attention to symbolic details and how the tekesim are choreographed to evoke maximum emotion. This cerebral knowledge armed the students with the ability to analyze the ceremonies and the tools to measure their responses against the emotional expectations of an authentic experience. This could also lead them to feel inadequate if their own feelings did not attain the goal state.

By handing out tickets and arranging for students to hear speakers, HUC, the CY, and Schechter gave the students access to ceremonies and thus more intimate knowledge of the experience. They were able to witness the impact of these days at a communal

level and evoke a sense of peoplehood even when they had no immediate ties to the people actually participating in a given tek. The schools helped the students achieve the role of participant-observer, a deeper experience than merely participating or observing by dint of being in Israel at the correct time of year. When the students headed out on their own to attend programs at Kikar Safra or picnics in Gan Sacher, their participation is assisted by where they were. Jerusalem is at the geographical heart of national celebrations, and by the late spring the students had established familiarity with the city that not only facilitated their participation but gave them a sense of belonging. These important events took place in their neighborhoods, on their streets, and in their parks. The students' physical proximity enabled their emotional proximity.

Skills as Applied Knowledge of Holiday Observance

Knowledge intersected with skill as the students developed a critical eye for evaluating the ways that the holidays were observed in public spaces. The students learned how to observe ceremonies and how to observe the holidays. They also learned how to evaluate and interpret the holidays with an eye toward the American Jewish community; that is, a skill of adaptation. These are professional skills. The rabbinical students gained skills in negotiating the options for observance and celebration. The Ziegler students' Yom HaAtzma'ut barbeque was a testament to their ability, developed over the course of the year, to be successful in daily life in Israel. Their presence and activities at Gan Sacher were a display of achievement in their own socialization. They were appropriately participating in Israeli culture and the life of the nation, not just

Jewish peoplehood with the incidental addition of Israel. Blending in and exhibiting competence in living in Israel was an important aspect of rabbinic formation during the Israel Year because it showed the students' relationship with the place, time, and people.

During the Israel Year, the rabbinical students also developed skills in adapting American holiday celebrations to the Israeli milieu. They approached Thanksgiving, ironically for some, with almost halakhic attention to detail. They address every aspect of the Thanksgiving meal and even though preparations were largely outsourced to the kibbutz kitchen, the students had significant input. They marveled at the cranberry sauce, and would have been devastated if it had been missing. For the Fourth of July and Christmas, the rabbinical students exhibited skills of coalescence. They embraced the Israeli context and made it work for their holiday celebrations. The HUC barbeque was not particularly American or Israeli, reflecting the newly-arrived students' state of befuddlement. For Christmas, Chinese food provided continuity with the American Jewish experience, but the students enjoyed the novelty of creating their own ways to celebrate, even if they had never done anything for the holiday before.

Holiday Habits

Since each holiday appeared only once, the rabbinical students did not have the opportunity to develop habits. However, elements of the Israel Year may well go home with them. Once they understand the basic structure of tekesim for the yoms, they may develop a new habit of commemoration. In Israel, the habits of commemoration are national rituals. The sirens that ring out on Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron call the

nation to mourn through a single, sustained tone. The lack of verbal content puts the onus—and freedom—to find personal meaning on the individual. It is a private moment, shared with everyone else and, as such, engineered to be all the more powerful. The rabbinical students recognized that they were participating in rituals and that those rituals were intended to evoke particular emotions.

The Israel Year marked a deviation in habits for American holiday celebrations. Despite their best efforts, they were unable to maintain habits from home. However, being away from family and friends, they did learn to exercise their own agency as they created celebrations for themselves, perhaps for the first time. They selected their favorite parts of the holidays and adapted them to the Israeli setting. The more they engaged in this cross-cultural give-and-take, the more habitual and natural it became. That habit of cultural exchange and adaptation was a critical aspect of their rabbinical formation.

Hybrid Sense of Self

In terms of both Israeli and American national holidays, the formation process contributed to the rabbinical students' senses of self on communal and individual levels. Liebman and Don-Yehiya write that, “. . . civil religion can order the environment and shape the experiences only of those whose personal identity is merged to their communal identity” (1979: 6). For many of the students celebrating civil religious holidays reinforced a communal identity linked to Israel, a place in the larger Jewish peoplehood. During the Israel Year, the students' ties to their classmates also tightened as they observed the Israeli holidays together as a group of non-Israelis and celebrated American

holidays together as a group of temporary ex-pats. They found their place as Americans in Israel through hybridizing celebrations. In Israel, they became exemplars of American holiday celebrants, even though in the U.S. they may not have been. The students expressed hybrid identities and did so in a group which reinforced them.

The rabbinical students, as temporary residents, had a sense of self that could be defined as liminal, bilingual, and a hybrid. They straddled different groups and frames of reference, but they had legitimacy in doing so because they were students. Their inquisitiveness and newness to the process of observing the Israeli yoms was perfectly acceptable because of their learner status. As Americans, they were not expected to understand the holidays and customs, even on an intellectual level, much less emotional level. However, they were expected to learn because they have a Jewish professional mandate to be knowledgeable, to have experiences of the holidays, and to have an idea of how to translate experiences and meanings for American Jewish audiences.

The rabbinical students witnessed how Israelis observe Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron and found their own emotional points of connection to the narrative of the State of Israel. American holidays, observed in another country, also evoked new forms of connection. Observing civil religious holidays in Israel reaffirmed group solidarity between the students and Israelis and the students and each other. Most importantly, the students came to feel more at one with Israelis and the Israeli narrative. To stand on the street when the commemoration siren sounded was a ritual experience shared with Israelis. For some, this led to an increased sense of connection, even if they had not personally lost relatives or close friends in Israel's numerous wars. Although they might

have shed a tear or two on Yom HaZikaron, their grief was collective, not personal. They were part of the Jewish peoplehood that is bereaved.

Shared experience of the holidays also reinforced the bonds between the American rabbinical students. They arrived with stories from other Americans and rabbinical students who had spent a year living in Israel, and they created their own shared experiences. This narrative chain links the identity goals of this cohort with the professional cohorts they will join.

By celebrating American holidays in Israel, the rabbinical students achieved a sense of group solidarity and common American (-Jewish) identity. This most clearly took place at Thanksgiving, as they participated in the central ritual (the feast) together. They literally consumed the experience that was created for them, and then expressed their Americanness and American Jewishness with their “American zemiros.” The students were together in their loneliness, but also in their reinforcement of American and American Jewish identities. The rabbinical students’ experiences of the Fourth of July and Christmas were not as clear-cut in their influences on identity. Each provided moments of solidarity and opportunities to explore and expand meanings, but no new shared rabbinical identity was being experienced.

Experiencing Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma’ut and the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas in Israel contributed to American rabbinic formation by challenging the students to understand social-historical narratives, establish where they fit into them, and connect in ways that were personally and professionally meaningful. Straddling the line between outsider and insider, the students encountered

Israeli civil religious time and holidays. They encountered the American holidays as insiders in a place where the holidays were foreign. The students struggled to find meaning and relevance in the wide array of holiday encounters they experienced. Above all, they were searching for connections. Experiencing the Israeli yoms did not make the students Israeli, but it met a professional—and often personal—need for connection with the Israeli State and Israeli narrative. Celebrating American holidays with classmates in Israel met students' personal needs to reconnect with home.

Their own nostalgia reminded the students that the Israel Year is temporary. Throughout the year, they were reminded of their relationships to Jewish peoplehood and of the significance of interpersonal relationships with their compatriots and with the people they were meeting in Israel. The contexts of people, relationships, and interpersonal interactions will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ISRAELI PEOPLE AND JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD: FORMING THE RABBINIC SELF THROUGH INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS

Introduction

Over the course of the Israel Year, the rabbinical students fleshed out their roles as students within their respective institutions, delved into all-encompassing and multi-sensory proprioceptive experiences of living in the space that is Israel, and experimented with traditions from a position of temporal embeddedness within Jewish and Israeli civil calendars. Through these forms of being enmeshed, the rabbinical students encountered and interacted with Others. Their interactions contributed to their entitativity, their sense of belonging, and their measure of emplacement. In some cases, the students interpreted a face-to-face exchange, whether verbal or visual, with an Israeli taxi driver or shop keeper as characteristic of Israelis in general. Sometimes, the interaction was genuinely with Israeli society writ large, as in the case of groundbreaking current events. At other points, such as when the rabbinical students engaged with Israeli members of their own extended families, the Other was more personal.

Society is the product of interpersonal interactions (Mead 1934; Park 1952; Goffman 1959; Blumer 1969). In the case presented here, the rabbinical students' interactions yielded a sense of Jewish peoplehood and a sense of developing rabbinic selfhood. Exchanges had the effect of making the given rabbinical student feel closer to

or more distant from the Jewish ethno-religious collective. The rabbinical students' interactions were reflected back to them and informed the process of rabbinic formation.

The rabbinical students interacted with Israeli Others through language, gestures, clothing and accessories; and they engaged in informational, monetary, and service transactions. Symbolic Interactionism, employed as a theoretical lens, clarifies that interaction is an on-going process and that meanings are social products “that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact” (Blumer 1969:5).¹¹⁹ An individual actor interacts with three different types of objects—physical, social, abstract—and “different objects have different meanings for different individuals” (Ritzer 2000:358). When the rabbinical students interacted with Israelis, they were not only engaged with another person, but with that person's collection of meanings for different kinds of objects. People in communication—through language, gesture, or other symbols—interpret each other's words and actions on the basis of the meanings that emerge from that interpretation.

Interacting with Others, whether known intimately or only through a passing exchange, shapes the self. That is, “social interaction is a process that forms human conduct instead of being merely a means or a setting for the expression or release of human conduct” (Blumer 1969: 8). As the rabbinical students interacted with Israeli Others, they gained an increased sense of self based on how they interpret Israelis as viewing them, their looking-glass selves (Cooley [1902] 1964). “The essence of the self,” according to Mead, “is its reflexivity. . . . Through the individual's ability to take in his

¹¹⁹ See also Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003).

imagination the attitudes of others, his self becomes an object of his own reflection. The self as both subject and object is the essence of being social” (quoted in Coser 1977: 337-338).

The students interacted with Israeli Others from within their memberships, networks, and affiliations—both formal and informal. The rabbinic self is a social self, born from interaction and constantly engaged in the process of identity formation: encounter, evaluation, struggle, and resolution (Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Marler 1997). Identity formation is measured by contributions to the students’ knowledge, skills, and habits. While the process of formation can be cerebral, spiritual, emotional, and otherwise personal, the inputs and context of the process are social, and the identity and life of a rabbi are both private and public.

The rabbinical students’ interactions with Israelis were experiences of Jewish peoplehood, a social concept with historical roots and seemingly timeless resonance. The concept of Jewish peoplehood dates back thousands of years, to the original Exodus, when *bnai Yisrael* [lit., the children of Israel, referring to the descendants of Jacob] left Egypt. Over the course of their forty year-long sojourn in the desert, and as a result of the shared and formative covenantal experiences, they became *am Yisrael* [the nation of Israel]. The Modern Hebrew word, *amiyut* [peoplehood], carries the weight of the history of the Jewish people from Exodus to the establishment of the modern State of Israel and beyond.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ There is no such thing as a concise history of the Jewish people outside of the joke about Jewish holidays: “They tried to kill us. We won. Let’s eat!”

The students, especially HUC students who attended the on-campus week-long Colloquium on Jewish Peoplehood, devoted significant time attempting to understand what peoplehood means, struggled to find a definition that would reinforce what and how they personally connect with other Jews. A few students related to Judaism primarily as a religion instead of as a culture or ethnicity. For them, peoplehood was a more complex (but not impossible) circle to square. The students who understood Judaism as a combination of religion, culture, and ethnicity drew on multiple vocabularies, historical frameworks, and identity categories to define peoplehood. Although they considered these ideas and theories to be enriching, the students recognized that, ultimately, peoplehood could only be understood experientially,¹²¹ especially since it was commonly defined as a “sense” or “feeling” of unity or connection between Jews.¹²² The connection is communal and may be based on religious practice, culture, and/or ethnicity. Wolf (2000) labels this community-bound emotion “transcendent belonging.” Identification with the Jewish collective, then, is best strengthened by connecting Jews with each other (Kopelowitz 2003).

A cornerstone of peoplehood discussions is setting the boundaries for who is a Jew. Subjectively, this plays out as defining one’s own Jewish identity and defining one’s

¹²¹ This is yet another example of the value added education of encounter and experience championed by Dewey ([1938] 1997) and applied to Jewish contexts by Chazan (1994, 2003), Reimer (2003), and Bryfman (2014).

¹²² Liebman and Cohen 1990; Ezrachi and Sutnick 1997; Levy, Levinson, and Katz 1997; Goldberg 2002; Saxe et al. 2002; Dashefsky, Lazerwitz, and Tabor 2003; Cohen and Wertheimer 2006; Grant and Marmur 2006; Wolf 2007; and Pianko 2013 all comment on this topic. Some of them focus on how Jewish peoplehood is used to explain American relationships with Israel and Israeli Jews; others address peoplehood as a goal sense of solidarity that signals a strong, resilient Jewish identity. Though the list seems extensive, this is just a sampling of the more recent authors who discuss Jewish peoplehood.

self as Jewish to others. Defining Jewish peoplehood and engaging with the diversity of the Jewish people prompted—even forced—the rabbinical students to define themselves and their Judaism to themselves and others. They engaged in conversations about their identities and their types of Judaism with taxi drivers, servers in restaurants, and family members in Israel. They were negotiating their place in the Jewish peoplehood tent while also defining the borders. Peoplehood—what Somers (1994) would call a “public narrative”—makes Jewish identity a social entity and the formation of that identity, a social venture.

Jewish peoplehood is, of course, international, and it is no surprise that Jews in different places may relate to Jewish peoplehood in different ways. For example, Liebman and Cohen (1990) uncovered distinct differences between American and Israeli Jews. For Americans, the most salient aspect of peoplehood is the tie to “an international Jewish people”; for Israelis, it is the concept of familism (Liebman and Cohen 1990: 29). The definitions and experiences of Jewish peoplehood emerge in every interaction with another Jew. As the American rabbinical students engaged with Israelis on a personal level, they observed differences in attitude toward peoplehood which were largely consistent with Liebman and Cohen’s model. Their encounters and interactions with a diversity of Jews in Israel deepened their understanding of the international character of Jewish peoplehood.

The community of rabbinical students in Jerusalem for the year was the students’ primary reference group, a framework for American rabbinic socialization, and a filter through which students interpreted their experiences of the year and adapted them to their

budding rabbinical selves. Their own community of progressive American Jews, in Israel for the year, informed the students' looking-glass selves and their conceptualizations of a generalized other. Their own sense of identity emerged through interaction with and reinforcement from their own community, but as the students interacted with Israelis on interpersonal, familial, and national levels, they were also defining who they were not. Put simply, identity includes taking differences and othering them to create boundaries (Kaufman 1998:50). Membership in the Jewish peoplehood is both ascribed by ancestry and may also be achieved through religious conversion.¹²³

Membership and boundaries were part of what these students were encountering in Israel. A sense of Jewish identity is intricately and intimately tied with one's belonging to, or feeling marginalized from, other Jews, Jewish community, and Jewish peoplehood.¹²⁴ Being in rabbinical school buttresses one's place in the Jewish community, but it depends on which community. When the students encountered a diversity of Jews and communities, their sense of belonging within the Jewish peoplehood—based on their own communal affiliations—could be challenged. Without a sense of peoplehood, Grant and Marmor (2006) argue, one's Jewish identity will be “thin” and hard to sustain.

¹²³ Coleman and Hoffer's (1987) terms “value community” and “functional community” speak to the aspects of Jewish community that bind Jews across generations. Jewish communities are “value communities in that individuals share value consistency even if they are not brought together by the structures of the community; and they are functional communities in that the close-knit relationship among community members reaches across generations to create, reinforce, and perpetuate social norms and sanctions within the community” (Hammerman 2017: 4-5). On a smaller scale, rabbinical students represent and participate in both value and functional communities, with and without their institutions.

¹²⁴ Their primary frame of reference is Jewish. They're not in Israel for an inter-religious experience; they're there for a Jewish experience that may have interfaith experiences as a bonus (yes, bonus, not detraction).

According to student narratives as shared in interviews, three types of encounters evoked feelings of Jewish unity. The rabbinical students experienced peoplehood in transactions with Israelis in everyday life, in conversations with Israel-based members of their extended families, and in shared experiences of watershed current events. Each of these types of encounter was multi-layered, encompassing emotional, material, and discursive cues that prompted students to reflect on who they are as Americans and Jews and how they are a part of Jewish peoplehood.

Everyday Interactions with Israelis

The rabbinical students encountered and interacted with Israelis in coffee shops and grocery stores, in homes and community centers, in taxi cabs, and at the bank. These encounters and interactions were structured by social conventions and norms and especially by the language in which they took place. Hebrew was both an inroad and a barrier to encounter and understanding. When needed and when they were able, students used Hebrew. Hebrew competency—not necessarily fluency—was a goal for most students, a key to greater ease in living in Israel and something that went hand-in-hand with cultural competency. Keith, an HUC student, recalled a major everyday-life achievement.

The accomplishment I am most proud of is that . . . when I try to order a *café hafuch* [cappuccino] and a *ma'afeh shekedim* [almond croissant] . . . I can do that completely in Hebrew and well enough that they'll respond to me in Hebrew. . . . And I get what I order!

This success—not only getting what he ordered but having the other person reply to him in Hebrew helped Keith feel more competent in daily living, but also that he belonged.

If speaking Hebrew provides access then, as Becky, a JTS student, experienced, speaking both Hebrew and English opened up other possibilities. She described exchanges at her local supermarket:

I guess I look American enough, but also I know what I'm doing enough that multiple times when I've gone and there's been some American tourist who doesn't speak any Hebrew and of course none of the employees speak any English and they're like trying to talk to each other, I've gotten . . . in the middle of these absurd arguments. It's actually great because that's how you learn about a culture, right? . . . [By] getting stuck in the middle of an argument between an Israeli sales clerk and someone who doesn't speak Hebrew.

As a result of being functionally bilingual, Becky could act as a translator of language and culture, a role that utilized her knowledge and skills and also highlighted the in-betweenness of her emerging identity. Israeli supermarkets challenge American norms of shopping culture—in particular, the practice of putting one's cart in line as a space-saver prior to actually finishing one's shopping. However, Becky's encounter was a more literal exercise in translation.

Hebrew is also a way to connect with a diverse Israeli and global Judaism. Every week, a group of HUC students volunteered in an Absorption Center that primarily served the Ethiopian community. The students played with the children and helped them with homework. The students reported increased comfort and confidence in speaking

Hebrew as they interacted with children and other second-language learners. However, their interactions had farther-reaching implications, as Alyssa shared:

I'm building relationships with them and actually making a difference. And they really look forward to us coming every week and it's really rewarding. Sometimes we have real conversations when I can communicate with them in Hebrew and like hear about their just like little things in passing and things they're curious about in my life. We're kind of giving them this education about what people outside their community are like and also it's like a sense of Jewish peoplehood like we can't really communicate that well, but we'll be singing seasonal songs while we're playing and I'll be like "I know that!" so we'll sing a song together.

For Alyssa, cultural exchange with the Ethiopian children was a two-way experience, each learning about the other and broadening their understanding of Jewish peoplehood. The students engaged with the children and their families as American rabbinical students, but neither of those identities were especially salient. Although the experience had the potential to deepen a rabbinical identity, they did not serve in a rabbinic capacity or present a rabbinic persona.

Alyssa's encounter and interaction with Ethiopian children in the Absorption Center was structured by the school's weekly schedule, but the actual engagement with the children meandered through any number of games, activities, homework assignments, and songs. Unlike more casual interactions, Alyssa and her classmates had the opportunity to develop relationships with the children and their families over the course

of the school year. The cumulative time that they spent together was actually quite lengthy, and their familiarity with each other increased over the year.

Ordering pastries, navigating a supermarket, and singing holiday songs with children were types of interactions that the rabbinical students had with Israelis that marked their increasing belonging in the culture and were forms of social capital, but not substantive exchanges with existential implications. Interestingly, some of the more memorable or poignant conversations with Israelis, were interactions with taxi drivers. These journeys presented opportunities for sustained conversations in a way that short, perfunctory interactions with a barista, for example, would not. Avi, a JTS student, stated “I find the cab conversations I have to be some of the most important conversations I’ve had. I feel like I’m meeting the *amcha* [nation; people].” The taxi conversations that have stuck with the students, the ones that they recounted as memorable, bolstered their identities as rabbinical students. Many of the students assumed that they would not be accepted by ordinary Israelis as legitimate future rabbis. They expected Israelis to have a binary view of religious and secular Judaism that did not accommodate progressive streams of Judaism, much less their leadership. Thus, any interaction that suggested otherwise was interpreted as surprising and positive.

Taxi cabs were a classic site for American-Israeli encounter. They provided a finite timeframe and confined space for an interaction. Everyone, rabbinical student or not, had the same context when riding in a taxi, but the content of the interaction could vary widely. Often the conversation began with what they were doing in Israel, which could easily lead to identity-defining exchanges. Some students chose to divulge their

status as Reform or Conservative rabbinical students, but they often feared that this was a risky move. However, they viewed these types of interactions as teaching moments. The rabbinical student became the informant about American Judaism and the existence of a non-Orthodox rabbinate. Ethan recalled a meaningful taxi ride shared with an HUC classmate:

[C]learly the driver knows we're not from here and he's like "What are you doing?"

"Oh we're studying here for the year."

"Oh, what are you studying?"

"Rabbanut."

He says "Oh! Reformim!"

"That was wonderful. He totally loved it. That was a great cab ride moment."

Ethan's reaction revealed common assumptions held by the rabbinical students: 1) that the students represented the only point of contact that the taxi drivers had with progressive Jews, 2) that progressive Judaism was somehow taboo and unacceptable, and 3) that people studying to be progressive rabbis were pariahs. How the students approached their interactions with taxi drivers, specifically when the conversation turned to what they were doing in Israel, revealed looking-glass assumptions, to adapt Cooley's term. The rabbinical students expected disdain, but were often surprised to encounter acceptance and appreciation. As Jen, an HUC student, commented about a taxi driver with whom she chatted, "I guess there's more to secular people than I thought." The cultural interactions went both ways: the students did not always realize that they were

also beneficiaries of a cross-cultural exchange that broadened their picture of secular Israelis.

The rabbinical students encountered and engaged with people in transactions and interactions. They learned about themselves and about Israel and Israelis through these exchanges. The students also encountered objects that had to be interpreted and incorporated into their picture of Israel. According to Mead, as related by Blumer, the meaning of objects is “dependent on the orientation and action of people toward them” (1969:68). Meanings vary based on context. An encounter with an object in the context of Israeli culture and society may illustrate the dramatic effect of context and interpreter on meaning. Mari, an HUC student, shared her experience at a bank:

There was one time I was at the bank waiting to pay a bill and this guy walks in with a gun on his pants and I was like “Oh my God! What is going on?” And Jen was like “Well, they can do that here.” And I was just like “What?! Why do you need a gun in a bank unless you’re going to hold it up and kill people?” It was so bizarre. . . . It was just like a Tuesday and he decided to bring his gun to the bank. It was really weird.

In her mind, there was only one meaning for a gun in a bank. However, Jen, who had accompanied her that day, reinterpreted the situation as normal for Israel. Not only did Jen’s reinterpretation alert Mari to a different meaning based on the context of the object, it also categorized the entire situation as an “only in Israel” experience. The “only in Israel” category pushed Mari to expand her interpretation of the object by acknowledging the relevance of its context. As Mari and her classmates got to know Israel more

intimately over the course of the year, the meanings that they attributed to objects broadened or were compartmentalized, and viewed as having different meanings based on cultural context.

Trying to Make Sense of Interactions with Israelis

Struggling to understand the explicit meanings of the people and situations they encountered meant that the rabbinical students were experiencing Israeli society with increased ease and comfort over time, specifically as their conversational Hebrew improved. Hebrew language was not just a mode of communication but a pathway to more opportunities for interaction with a broader cross-section of Israeli society. Though not required in Jerusalem's Anglo bubble, mastery of basic conversational Hebrew made the students feel more competent and confident in routine daily living. It also opened opportunities for more meaningful interactions. A ride in a taxi could be more than a way to get from point A to point B; it could be an unexpected affirmation of one's rabbinic path and one's legitimacy as a progressive Jew. A trip to the supermarket could turn into an opportunity to facilitate cross-cultural exchange. A visit to the bank could be a lesson in how definitions of common objects could change based on setting. Even a simple transaction had the possibility of being a significant interaction as the rabbinical students learned more about Israel and Israelis and allowed what they learned to shape what they did.

Throughout their year, the rabbinical students found themselves in situations where they had to explain what they were doing in Israel. They described how they

evaluated when and under what circumstances they would reveal their rabbinical student status because, as they had heard from others and may know from personal experience, reactions were rarely neutral. The students, especially the women, challenged the accepted stereotype of an observant (generally Orthodox) male rabbinical student. Natalie, an HUC student, described her personal experience at the airport as an example of this common dilemma:

The security person for El Al, I decided to tell her that I'm here to become a rabbi and she's like "What? What does that mean? I've never heard that before! What are you talking about?" . . . She was literally shocked; she did not know what to do with me. In the end, she let me through. . . . And it's interesting. I know that some people in our class don't say that. They say that they're "doing Jewish studies" and some people say "Yeah I want to tell them; I want to see what their reaction is." And I think for me sometimes it depends on the situation. Do I really want to have that conversation? Do I get the feeling that they're going to be receptive or not receptive? But then again I do the same thing in America because when you tell people you're going to become a rabbi, usually the way they act toward you is different.

As Natalie said, some of her classmates were more forthcoming than others about their status as rabbinical students. However, their willingness to go out on a limb to share that they were rabbinical students may have led to even more questions. These mutual reality-defining situations were part of the learning that took place in Israeli interactions.

Struggling to Understand and Transmit Meanings through Interactions

Seeking out and navigating everyday interactions with Israelis was difficult, and the students were not always convinced that it was worth it. Their bubble was comfortable and provided most of what they required during the Israel Year. Greg, a Ziegler student, put it this way:

I think I haven't done such a great job of getting outside the bubble which is partially my own fault and partially just the nature of being here as an American studying at the Conservative Yeshiva. I think some people go out of their way . . . but I also don't get it. Like why is that important? I think that, I mean I'm going to be working in an Anglo community wherever that is, whether it's in America or not in America and I'm going to be predominantly working with Anglos, so I'm not quite sure why it is so so important to have to find ways to really meet Israelis from all over the place. I think it's interesting, I think there's a lot we can learn from it, but I don't know if that's necessarily a priority.

Greg's comments question the professional applicability and necessity of interacting with local residents. From an Israel education perspective, developing relationships with Israelis is an inroad to a more meaningful relationship with Israel, but remaining entirely within one's religio-social circle does not even allow for the possibility. Greg's comments speak to the role of personal agency in encounters and interactions that can influence identity (Burke and Reitzes 1991).

Cross-cultural interactions with Israelis inevitably evoke differences in the meanings attributed to gestures and symbols. Some misunderstandings were caused by

linguistic or cultural gaps that, on reflection, were humorous. For example, one time in a café, David, an HUC student, asked to photograph [*l'tzalem*] his server instead of asking to pay [*l'shalem*] her. Struggling to communicate in Hebrew, despite successes, was an ongoing stressor throughout the year. The JTS students attended classes exclusively in Hebrew and naturally developed greater facility, but all the other students were able to function without issue in English. Even students that were nearly fluent in Hebrew reported muddling through awkward language-based interactions with Israelis, including the student who was teased by an Israeli child for pronouncing her own name—a common Israeli name—with an American accent.

In addition to language, the rabbinical students also struggled to understand the Israeli meanings of gestures, mannerisms, and modes of interaction. Mari and Jen's visit to the bank was a prime example of how one's own cultural background and prior understanding of symbols informs expectations and interpretations. Students often reported struggling with casual exchanges while shopping or on public transportation. They struggled with both intense rudeness and intense hospitality. For example, a few HUC students witnessed a bus lightly hit a pedestrian. They expected other people to express concern for the person's well-being. Instead, passengers yelled at the person for getting in the way of their bus. A couple of JTS students went into a jewelry store in the Old City that had been recommended to them by a colleague from a different rabbinical school. Unexpectedly, they were invited to join the family for tea. The rabbinical students struggled to understand these norms of their social context. Only when they no longer noticed things as out of the ordinary did these new meanings become internalized.

Memorable conversations with taxi cab drivers often gave the students pause long after the trips had taken place, especially as they reflected on the secular-religious divide in Israel. Ethan, an HUC student, remembered another exchange with a taxi driver.

Neither person was observing Shabbat, but each had his way of celebrating it.

When I was doing a service for a Birthright trip, I took a cab . . . and he's like "Oh, when do you want me to pick you up?" And I said "At this time." And he's like "But you're leading services, right?" And I'm like "Yeah." "So . . . they can't start until this time because that's the time that Shabbat actually enters and then you're going to have dinner and then you're going to schmooze for a little bit and then I'll pick you up at this time." And I was like "No, no, no. I need you to pick me up at this time . . . because we're having people over." . . . And he just was like "No. What are you talking about? Of course you're not going to start the service at 5."

Ethan's identity as a Reform rabbinical student meant that he had plans to lead Shabbat services on Friday in the late afternoon and then plans for Shabbat dinner with family and friends. Shabbat was important to Ethan, professionally and personally, but he was not concerned about halakhic observance of Shabbat. That juxtaposition confused the taxi driver. Unfamiliar with customs of Reform Judaism, though not ritually observant himself, the taxi driver simply could not fathom that Shabbat services would begin before the halakhic start of Shabbat. Ethan's mode of practice challenged the driver's categories and, in turn, provided a moment of self-reflection for Ethan.

Interactions as Rabbinic Identity Building Blocks

The rabbinical students processed their experiences interacting with Israelis in light of who they wanted to become as rabbis. They wanted to learn from their encounters and be shaped by their experiences, what Berger and Luckmann refer to as “integration” (1966:68). Their Hebrew language successes were not just victories in communication, but a way of proving mastery of a skill deemed important—though not necessarily essential—for an American rabbi. The conversations that they had with taxi drivers and their only-in-Israel daily life experiences contributed to their arsenal of sermon fodder, but the meanings were deeper.

The content of the encounters increased their Israeli cultural knowledge and understanding—another important aspect of being an American rabbi—but also exhibited how they fit into Israeli society and Jewish peoplehood. They revealed who they were to taxi drivers and the taxi drivers’ responses revealed to the students what it might take to belong. The students’ interactions with Israelis gave them a sense of the diversity of Jewish peoplehood as viewed from their vantage point as progressive American Jewish temporary residents of Jerusalem. Their own memberships and identities expanded as a result of greater cultural learning.

Encountering and Interacting with Israelis through Symbolic Clothing and Accessories

In addition to verbal exchanges, the rabbinical students also interacted with Israelis through wearable symbols, some of which were explicitly religious but all of which communicated religious meaning. In Jerusalem in particular, the rabbinical

students encountered widespread use of religious clothing and accessories in daily life — specifically *kippot* [sing., *kippah*, skull cap], *tzitzit* [ritual knotted fringes on a four-cornered garment worn under a shirt], and women’s headscarves and skirts. Many factors, religious and social, contributed to the students’ consideration about and decisions to adopt an item for personal use. Sometimes, the students’ reasons were religious and reflected an intention to heighten their personal observance or spiritual connection. At other times, the decision signaled an attempt to “pass.” The students knew that they were treated differently when they wore a head covering or a skirt. Utilizing the symbols did not make the students more or less Jewish, but it did transmit an identity of increased religiosity that could increase their acceptance by people on the conservative part of the religiosity spectrum.

Adopting symbolic clothing and accessories for everyday use had social ramifications. Many of the students internalized common, shared meanings and reported heightened awareness that these symbols gave them access, status, and responsibility. Dave, an HUC student, said that he wore *tzitzit* because “it feels authentic to me.” However, he recognized that his “year here has been filled with privilege and access and opportunity. Like, my *tzitzit* have given me a lot of invitations [to meals and to join minyanim for prayer].” Access and privilege were directly related to the fact that Dave wore *tzitzit*, a visible sign of assumed observance.

Privilege came with responsibility, as many students agreed. David, also an HUC student, described how wearing a *kippah* influenced how he behaved. He felt both social

and Jewish responsibility as someone who wore a kippah. It even affected his restaurant choices.

[W]earing a kippah, I know that people are looking at me . . . I feel like whatever I do is under the microscope. If I decided to go crazy one day and . . . like whatever, get non-kosher food. There's a Korean restaurant just right on the corner that has shrimp. Like, if I'm wearing a kippah, I know people are looking at me so that's not going to happen. . . . There's just a sense in which I've been aware that I am a representative in some way of Jewish values . . .

David knew what religious meaning his kippah transmitted and felt obligated to check his behavior accordingly. He knew that if people saw someone with a kippah eating in a non-kosher restaurant that they might then think it was kosher.¹²⁵ It is a significant responsibility which David did not take on lightly. Clothing can have commonly agreed-upon meanings that constrain behavior and act back on the wearer.

When men wore a kippah or tzitzit, their religious access increased and their status as rabbinical students was accepted without question. For women, wearing long skirts provided more religious acceptance and access, but none of the female students reported a significant wardrobe shift over the course of the Israel Year. Several did note an increased self-consciousness about attire. Wearing a long skirt in particular areas and contexts would not necessarily grant them acceptance, but at least it made them feel less out-of-place. Ilana, a JTS student, talked about going into ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods.

¹²⁵ There is a very long tradition of this debate, encompassed in the Hebrew term *marit ayin* which basically means giving a false visual impression, specifically a false impression as to the halakhic suitability of something.

I have always tried to be respectful when I know I'm going to Meah Shearim I will dress in a certain way and wear a long skirt. But I've been more aware of it in terms of worry—like am I dressing in a way that's not only respectful but won't get me harassed or won't get people angry? Like, is this shirt too bright? Is it enough that it covers me or does it also have to be a dull color? That kind of thing.

During the Israel Year, unrest and anti-religious protests increased in frequency. From women being harassed for refusing to sit at the rear of buses to school girls being spat on for wearing “immodest” clothing, religious social conventions appeared to radicalize rightward in the public eye. As a result, Ilana paid closer attention not just to the length of her skirts, but also to colors. For her own sense of security, she tried to be unnoticed.¹²⁶ Based on news reports, Ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods could be unfriendly places for people who did not look like they fit in. Sadly, they are also where many bookstores specializing in religious texts were located.

The students viewed the social convention as a dress code to follow. Those students whose wardrobe naturally trended toward the conservative took issue with skirt-

¹²⁶ Over the course of the Israel Year, the rabbinical students identified various times when they tried to blend in with native Israelis. As explored in Chapter 3, the rabbinical students tried to blend in when shopping at the shuk. They felt legitimacy in being there. In the case of dressing a certain way to enter a religious neighborhood, the aim was also to blend in, but to do so for the sake of anonymity and to avoid negative reactions. If the students did not blend in while shopping at the shuk, they may have been targeted as tourists and be taken for a *fryer* [sucker] when vendors try to get them to purchase things. If the students stuck out in a religious neighborhood, they felt afraid. People from within those communities who did not conform—such as women who did not sit at the rear of the bus—were ostracized. The students were interlopers even though they may only have been there to buy books (viewed as somewhat subversive for the book seller, actually, to be selling *sifrei kodesh* [religious books] to women). The rabbinical students may have been called names, spat on, or have pebbles thrown at them. This did not happen, but hearsay was a strong motivator.

wearing, but also found it easier to adjust, as Jill, a Ziegler student, put it, “I certainly have to play by the rules . . . I wear skirts . . . but I dress like that regularly and it’s not that I’m doing something for someone else. I just see that as part of the protocol, part of what to do.” Jill viewed herself as somewhat of a natural chameleon, able to blend in without going to extra effort, unlike some of her classmates or colleagues from other schools.

Wearing the socially “correct” article of clothing in the socially “correct” way reinforces commonly held definitions and may give the wearer access to certain places or groups. However, when a certain accessory or article of clothing is used “incorrectly,” specifically when it is employed by the “wrong” type of person, there are social implications for the individual that ripple through the context. Female Reform and Conservative rabbinical students wear *tallitot* [sing., *tallit*, prayer shawl] and kippot without question in the United States. Within progressive American Judaism, their use of these items is in no way subversive and in no way considered to be unacceptable appropriation. Jerusalem is different.

The rabbinical students tried items on, which, of course, was also an act of trying on social responses. For men, wearing a kippah or tzitzit in Jerusalem was ubiquitous. The students themselves made assumptions about others based on the meanings of these items. Male rabbinical students “passed” for more observant without question or discussion. In this context, though, when female rabbinical students adopted the same accessories, they may have had to defend—sometimes publicly—their choice to and their

right to wear them. According to more traditional interpretations, the women's action was a breach of meaning and of socio-religious custom.

Wearing religious items in Israel meant that both men and women experienced variations in belonging within Jewish peoplehood. If their attire was consistent with accepted meanings and customs, it signaled their membership, but if perceived as inconsistent with Israeli (read: Orthodox) norms, it marked them as outsiders. The students knew the standard meanings of these symbols, but, in keeping with their egalitarian Judaism, their practice did not place gendered parameters on who could wear them.

Determining, Transmitting, and Challenging the Meanings of Symbolic Garments and Accessories

In Jerusalem, with its high concentration of ritually-observant Jews, symbolic accessories and articles of clothing that have religious functions and meanings are commonplace in the public sphere. The students themselves tried on the clothing and explored the meanings. They knew the ritual purpose of a given item and how that item was employed in ways that fulfilled the particular ritual or commandment. They also learned to interpret what that says about the overall Jewish identity of a person for whom engaging in a particular ritual is a seamless part of his or her life. When a symbolic item is worn in an identifiably commonplace manner, especially if it looks well-used or well-loved, the onlooker may assume consistency between common meaning of the item and

identity. Even the rabbinical students who had more experimental or fluid relationships with wearables assumed identity consistency for Israelis.

A double standard of sorts emerged: when the rabbinical students tried on a kippah, for example, they were just trying it on; when they saw someone they did not know wearing a kippah, they assumed a whole host of things about the other person's ritual observance, denominational affiliation, and prayer community preference. When the students acknowledged this discrepancy between how they viewed their own choices and how they viewed the choices of others, a more perceptive and reflective self emerged. They cycled through considering how others might view them which, in turn, fed into the choices they made about adopting particular symbolic garments. It was an on-going process.

As symbols, the meaning of these religious items was never simply overt. In fact, when explained in skeletal terms, the items were simply head coverings or shawls. However, the students inevitably extrapolated implicit meanings. They interpreted wearable religious items in the same way that many others would—as synecdoche or a single sign designating generalizable religiosity in one's life. Jake, a Ziegler student, described his fellow patrons at a bar in downtown Jerusalem with whom he had struck up a friendship: “These were kippah-wearing Jews and tzitzit-wearing Jews and, you know, they probably know more Gemara than me.” Jake assumed knowledge of religious texts based on the men's wearable accessories.

The same layers of meaning presented a challenge for the rabbinical students themselves. What meaning would the symbols have for them? They evaluated the

meanings that the symbols had for others and learned to interpret according to social context, but part of the process of integrating the symbols into one's life—or not—was exploring their personal resonance. The rabbinical students, as students, experimented with wearable symbols as part of their processes of developing personally meaningful religious practices and exhibiting a visible Jewish identity. Some students covered their heads because of social pressures; others did it because it had personal meaning. The male JTS and Ziegler students were already accustomed to wearing a kippah or hat at all times. Eli, a Ziegler student, said that wearing a kippah all the time was presented to him as a requirement when he began his rabbinical studies. Greg, also a Ziegler student, commented that in Israel, unlike in the United States, “I can go anywhere and leave my kippah on.” In Israel he felt like part of the “in-crowd.”

The topic of head covering was less straightforward for HUC students, but some chose to experiment with wearing a kippah. The comfort that Greg felt translated to social pressure for Keith. He explained, “I wear a kippah if I'm in an atmosphere where I might offend somebody if I don't wear one. I rarely wear a tallit. . . . I'm a spiritual person, not a religious one. And here I feel like all the inputs have said ‘Be a religious Jew.’” The prevalence of markers of observance put pressure on him to change not just what he did but the kind of Jew that he was. He noted that “I did try, but it just wasn't me. I don't have a connection with those things.” All of the students were aware that wearing a kippah had social implications that in turn reflected on their own identity.

Struggling with Wearable Symbols, Their Meanings, and What Other People May

Think

The rabbinical students struggled with the meanings that symbolic items had in the abstract and when they were worn. They felt the weight of the meaning in addition to the fabric on their bodies. With frequent wear or use, sometimes that weight went away. Sometimes, the students wanted to maintain a sense of awareness and set their own parameters for use—to keep it “special.”¹²⁷ They struggled with how others viewed them when they wore something “religious”—and how others would view them if they did not. They struggled with the differences in practice and interpretation between Israel and the United States.

The students, in particular women, struggled with being socially denied access to religious garb and being denied the access granted to men when they wore those same items. How and where they wore religious items was a frequent site of struggle. At a Women of the Wall *rosh chodesh* [lit., head of the month] service, Daniela, a JTS student, was wearing her tallit to pray, as she did on a daily basis. A female and male security guard instructed her to wear it in a different way and then adjusted it on her body while she was still wearing it. The Orthodox establishment’s approach to women wearing tallitot—interpreted as a garment solely for men—was that they should wear them in

¹²⁷ At HUC, the students wore tallitot at particular times that at first appeared inconsistent. Upon lengthier observation, though, patterns emerged. Some students wore a tallit at every prayer opportunity while other wore a tallit consistently just for Shacharit services. Other students wore a tallit only when leading services or when they were given a participatory role (“an honor”) in the service. Instead of donning the tallit just to perform a particular ritual function, the person would often wear the tallit for the entire service. This meant that, discounting the regular tallit-wearers, an observer could determine which students would be participating in a given service just by looking around the room and noting who was wearing a tallit. What had seemed like inconsistent adoption of ritual garb was actually a pattern of use.

different ways, to resemble a scarf instead of a prayer shawl. The establishment physically imposed its practice and its meaning on Daniela, but adjusting the tallit only changed its appearance, not Daniela's use of it. Her protestations of "I'm trying to *daven* [pray] right now. Please leave me alone" fell on deaf ears. Ultimately, Daniela and a few of her classmates were arrested for disturbing the peace. Protestations from their institutions facilitated a speedy release. Daniela's tallit gained a new meaning after her arrest, a symbol of spiritual and social protest.

The students also struggled with differences in expectations for laity and clergy in terms of wearing particular ritual garments. These discrepancies stemmed in part from the fact that professionals have audiences, boards, and constituents that may inform and determine what one wears and when. Laity in progressive Judaism, on the other hand, are welcome to choose which wearable symbols to employ based on personal resonance, an approach that butts heads with expectations or seminary policies regarding using these items. Male Conservative rabbinical students are required to wear a kippah and many felt comfortable doing so, especially in a context where it is a normative practice. Their practice is reinforced by the community of rabbinical students and Conservative rabbis and is accepted—though not commonplace—for Conservative laity. For those who do not fit into this box, the Israeli context can stifle their self-expression.

Being in an observance-dense space raised questions for the students about the meanings that the symbols had for them and whether frequent use could alter those meanings. Some students already had a personal practice and thought that an increase in frequency or consistency might decrease personal meaning; others thought an increase in

practice would increase personal meaning. For some, employing a wearable symbol was not a daily practice, but something that they don on special occasions. Zach, an HUC student, shared his trepidation about developing a kippah-wearing habit:

I put on a kippah when I feel like I want that extra sense or feeling to make it extra-special . . . I still struggle with the idea of doing things all the time because if you do them all the time, they're more ingrained and become more a part of you . . . if I do it every once in awhile, then it continues to have meaning. Whereas when you do it all the time, it loses that sort of specialness. If I wear a kippah all the time, it doesn't become special when I put one on.

For Zach, wearing a kippah spurs a feeling or a sense of specialness. He was concerned that if it became rote, the specialness would diminish. Since, for him, its meaning was linked to the emotional experience of Revelation or the high that one might feel in a spiritual moment of connection, he did not want to settle for “less.”

Personal Practices and Professional Imperatives

How the rabbinical students will integrate these clothing practices into their emerging rabbinic self is somewhat open-ended. The experiences of the Israel year provided a deeper sense of what the symbols can mean and how others interpreted them. At its root, the decision to don a symbolic garment or not, or whether to wear it with consistency or not, was affected by this range of meanings and interpretations. Adopting a symbol and wearing it in the same way as others identifies the person with a certain segment of the Jewish peoplehood, according to onlookers. The challenge for the

students—while still in Israel—was to consider which symbols to adopt and how and when to wear them and, in turn, how they will present themselves in an American context. The students' frames of reference had two sources: the U.S. and Israel. The U.S. is an audience with a different range of knowledge and assumptions about what these symbols mean. The more rigid parameters in Israel will not apply in the U.S. Habits developed in Israel might have to be adapted when they returned home.

Plans for the future were shaped at the intersection of social pressure and personal choice. The students considered whether other people expected them to wear kippot and tallitot personally or professionally, as an identifier of personal faith, or both. Dan, an HUC student, reflected on this challenge thinking forward to a bar mitzvah in the United States:

I have found myself putting on a kippah on Shabbat . . . That's not something I did at home and . . . if I'm without it I don't feel naked or not holy. But I realized that I'm going to be back home soon and I just RSVPed "yes" to a bar mitzvah. Will I put one on then because that's what I do now? And what is that message for myself or other people? . . . I think it's more outside of me—if I'm wearing it for myself it's fine either way.

Dan was developing his own kippah-wearing practice, but wondered if other people's expectations of him would have changed now that he is a rabbinical student. It is as though his head is now public domain and his head covering is a communal concern. However, he and his classmates expressed a determination to keep the symbols

personally meaningful, even if they must follow expectations and protocols for wearing them.

As a sign of their own openness to experimenting and their valuing of these objects, many of the rabbinical students purchased wearable Judaica both to put on immediately and to take home. Over the course of the year, an increasing number of HUC students experimented with wearing kippot and tallitot during prayer services, beyond just the times when they were leading. Though many brought similar items from home, they nevertheless purchased more in Jerusalem where they were readily available.¹²⁸ This broadened range of objects and meanings became part of the way they expressed their rabbinical identities.¹²⁹

Encountering and Interacting with Israelis in a National Moment

The rabbinical students primarily encountered and interacted with Israelis—and by extension, Israeli society and culture, on an individual level. They learned about and felt impacted by Israel through one-on-one exchanges. However, during the Israel Year, the rabbinical students also witnessed a major national moment: the release of Gilad Shalit, the Israeli soldier held in captivity by Hamas in Gaza for five years. Gilad Shalit was released in October during the intermediary days of Sukkot. Because the academic year schedule was based on the Jewish calendar, the rabbinical students, like average Israelis, had school vacation at that time. The time away from school enabled them to

¹²⁸ People purchase objects that are available. Colleen McDannell (1995) explores patterns of consumption of religious objects, clothing, and artifacts in *Material Christianity*. Jerusalem is a hub for Judaica which informs what the students purchase and the meanings that they ascribe to their purchases and how that reflects on who they aspire to be as Jews.

¹²⁹ For American Jewish approaches to material culture and consumption in historical perspective, see *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950* by Jenna Weissman Joselit.

experience the news without direct filtering from their institutions or faculty members. Some students viewed this happenstance of scheduling as providing them with a more authentically Israeli experience because they were with Israelis in public spaces.

Gilad's release was the "Where were you when . . .?" moment of the Israel Year. The students reported remembering where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news of Gilad's release and then when he actually was released. "I have a very distinctive memory," commented Stephanie, an HUC student, "of trying to work on my Second Temple History midterm at the same time I was refreshing every five minutes on JPost¹³⁰ to see what was going on." The news consumed the country and many of the rabbinical students were eager to be consumed by it. Whether they agreed with the prisoner swap or not, they felt part of and witness to something bigger than themselves, something important for Israel and the Jewish people.

The HUC and Ziegler students had already been in Israel for awhile when Gilad was released, but the JTS students were only just arriving. Ilana's narrative of her arrival in Israel and immediate experience of this news event illustrates her transition to Israel as a country, as the setting where Jewish peoplehood seems alive, and as a point of comparison between news coverage in the United States and Israel.

I got here the day that Gilad Shalit was released and the prisoner swap happened. And I spent all of my first night jet-lagged, watching videos of the busloads of prisoners being brought back and then I spent the next day walking past the Gilad Shalit tent where people were celebrating. For me, that was very exciting. . . . I

¹³⁰ JPost is the shorthand name for the Jerusalem Post, accessed here via its website.

was worried about what it would look like: how people would react, because I knew that people were very divided on whether or not they supported the deal and I myself wasn't 100% sure how I felt about it, but then everyone was so happy when they were able to see pictures and videos of him reuniting with his family . . . I felt very connected to everyone in that moment which was an amazing thing . . . people were dancing in the streets and greeting each other and smiling and being so happy. And it became clear to me how different it was experiencing that in Israel versus just watching the news at home. And yeah that was very special for me.

Before getting to Israel, Ilana had been concerned about how people would respond to Gilad Shalit's release. In Israel, though, she experienced an emotional connection with Israelis as everyone seemed to be celebrating together. The holiday of Sukkot was both a backdrop and reinforcement of the communal sentimentality. Ilana's reflections revealed how being in Israel gave her a personal connection to the event and also reinforced her sense of connectedness with Israelis.

The rabbinical students' encounters were two-fold: they encountered the event and they encountered Israelis living through and experiencing the event. Unlike other encounters, the rabbinical students were participants. They received the news in the same way and at the same time as Israelis. When the news broke that Gilad Shalit would be released, many students reported going to the protest tent outside of the Prime Minister's residence almost immediately. Because it was Sukkot, however, some students were farther away from Jerusalem. Jill, a Ziegler student, encountered the event up-close

because she lived in an apartment near the Prime Minister's residence and had volunteered in the protest tent.

Before school started, I spent whole days [at the Gilad Shalit tent] volunteering and helping out. . . . It was a really nice little community. And so when we heard the news [of Gilad's release] . . . we went over there and there wasn't a huge crowd yet and so I was standing amongst the international press pool and I got this amazing spot where I was right outside the tent and I could see in and . . . some press guy came and elbowed me and said "You're not standing here." I said "No. I sat in the tent with those people. Where were you when they were sitting in the tent?" Like, don't push me out of the way now. Not that I'm greater than any other, but the press showed up when he was freed. The press wasn't there on a daily basis after the first month, you know.

Jill's relationship with the Gilad Shalit tent made her feel all the more connected when he was released. She was not just an emotional by-stander, but someone who had a history and relationships with the people and cause.

Isaac, an HUC student, also had a front-row seat. He explained, "I live right next to the tent, like two buildings over from that, so every day I would walk by and see Noam or Aviva there, so it was very much a big part for months and then all of a sudden, that happened. So that was huge." For Isaac, proximity to the tent meant that he often saw Gilad's parents. Isaac's proximity did not necessarily mean that his emotional experience was any more or less intense than those of his classmates, but his familiarity with the key players could lead to increased personal investment in the events.

Physical and emotional proximity make encounters possible and can prompt emotional investment. However, the news of Gilad Shalit's release was not limited to the small area outside the Prime Minister's residence in Jerusalem and not limited to a single day. Greg, a Ziegler student, described the news as a thematic feature of his Sukkot break:

The day before erev Sukkot we had off from school . . . so we went to the Temple Mount . . . It was later that day that the news came out that Gilad Shalit was being released, so then we wound up outside Bibi's house for the celebration there, which was a very cool experience. . . . And then the day he was being released was also during Sukkot and it was while we were down in Eilat. So we were watching some of that in a beach-side bar, just watching Bibi speak and watching things happening. And of course on the way back we had to stop at Yotvata. And while we were there, there was even more news of him getting back home.

News of Gilad's return home traveled with Greg from Eilat back northward to Jerusalem, with a stop for ice cream on the way. The rabbinical students encountered news of Gilad's release at the protest tent in Jerusalem and throughout Israel, via media outlets, and in Israeli spaces.

The timeline of Gilad's release—from the news of his impending release to the day he arrived home—seemed surreal. Jill imagined that the atmosphere outside the tent by the Prime Minister's residence in Jerusalem was similar to when the State of Israel was declared. She described “children and adults of all kinds dancing in the street and singing and just rejoicing for the state of a nationalistic Israeli cause.” It was a shared

experience, almost spiritual in nature, another moment in Israeli civil religion. For those who connected, it could be considered an almost Durkheimian episode of collective effervescence. Ethan, an HUC student, described the “impromptu celebration” at the tent as “electric” and “insane.” For other students, it was an important event that evoked feelings of Jewish peoplehood and Israeli nationhood.

Meaning is a social product and, as such, the meaning of Gilad Shalit’s release emerged through the ways people took in and responded to the news. The students attributed several meanings to the event and to their experiences of it, all of which reflected its emotional and social angles. When they were unsure what they thought or how they felt, they looked at others around them and asked if their own innate response was similar. In the end, their experience of direct participation in a civil religion ritual clearly changed them.

What am I witnessing? What am I a part of?

The rabbinical students evaluated the explicit meaning of these events through comparing news reports. They looked to Israelis and to American Jews in the United States for comparison points, as well. Over Sukkot vacation, Jake and a few Ziegler classmates were in Eilat. Due to an injury, instead of going hiking, Jake spent the day watching television in a bar at the beach: “Gilad Shalit in Egyptian hands, a still shot of Gilad Shalit being handed over finally to the Israeli military just constantly on a loop.” Jake witnessed the unfolding of events on television and by watching the reactions of the

Israelis around him. The most meaningful part of his day was when Binyamin Netanyahu gave a press conference. He remembered,

I looked around and [the bar] was packed with Israelis—all generations, crying. And it was at that moment that I kind of had this revelation of “this is everyone’s story here.” And that was kind of like the pop Israeli sentiment that Gilad is everyone’s son and yet that is the moment it really hit home for me that he was in some way connecting everyone, whether you thought he should be returned or not.

The experience of being with Israelis, watching the release unfold, and hearing the Prime Minister speak on television¹³¹ Jake witnessed Israelis’ reactions to this event. Jake felt invested and connected. He felt a part of the Israeli family of which Gilad was a collective son. Being with Israelis helped Jake understand the emotional impact of Gilad’s release.

Students also observed American Jewish perspectives. Alan, a Ziegler student, observed contrasting responses from Americans and Israelis on Facebook.

The Gilad Shalit thing was interesting to watch. I think it was interesting in part because you got—like between our friends in America and from watching it here, you have two very different perspectives which was on one hand, we had friends

¹³¹ Tenenboim-Weissblatt (2013) explores the concepts of retrospective and prospective memory and how both are purposefully shaped by the media. Her research focuses on cases of kidnapping and how collective prospective memory—that is, what people anticipate will occur—is informed by what has happened in the past in other cases. The concepts and case studies both resonate with the case of Gilad Shalit, the role of the media in presenting that news, and collective responses to the situation and news together. Shalit was still being held in captivity during the research phase, so his release and the surrounding media narrative were not included in the research.

post things on Facebook in America like there's one kid is he really worth giving back all these terrorists for? And then the Israelis were like "we got back this one kid. I don't care what we had to give up, we got back this one kid." And so it was really like, you could really see the difference in perspectives between our American friends and Israelis.

Alan observed that Americans were more likely to question the terms of Gilad's release, whereas Israelis focused primarily on the fact that he was being released. In Israel, where military or national service are nearly compulsory, the government's and military's promise to bring home all soldiers dead or alive and at whatever cost is an important feature of their social contract. Americans may not share or understand that perspective.

The students evaluated Gilad's release and the news of Gilad's release as Americans living in Israel. They wanted to understand the logistics—and sometimes questioned them like their American counterparts—but they also wanted to feel the emotions they saw expressed around them. In addition to the pragmatic, transactional meanings observed by friends and family outside of Israel, the students' proximity to Israelis experiencing the event gave them access to emotional and symbolic meanings, as well.

More so than anything else that the students encountered, Gilad's release brought forth a sense of Israeli nationhood and Jewish peoplehood. The students witnessed this moment and felt the sentiment in the public sphere, yet many of them struggled. They struggled with their own take on the news, especially if they were not fully convinced that the prisoner swap was a prudent move; they struggled with the waves of Israeli-

national and Jewish-national sentiment, especially if they felt they did not fit in but wanted to. People like Jill and Isaac, whose proximity to the tent and familiarity with the cause, had a feeling of a legitimately achieved emotional connection, but most of the students struggled with their own raw, emotional reactions, what Mordechai Kaplan would surely point to as a sense of peoplehood.

Gilad's release prompted a wave of national and peoplehood sentiment: Ethan, Jill, Ilana, and others witnessed this outside the Prime Minister's residence, Jake in the bar in Eilat, Greg at Yotvata, and Alan on social media. They all saw how one person's release from captivity stirred a sense of Jewish peoplehood, exhibited through singing and dancing in the streets, crying, hugging, and general camaraderie. Though the students saw this, not all of them were able to move from observer to participant. Mari, an HUC student, recalled her experience of Gilad Shalit's release from that more distant perspective.

The Gilad Shalit situation was fascinating to me because I'd never experienced a country that's usually so divided come together in such a profound way. . . . And even though it was controversial and even though there were a lot of problems, there was this general sentiment that it was a sigh of relief almost. OK. He's home. He's alive. He's fine. I thought that was pretty cool that the whole country came together. He was like their son. And that was obviously part of the campaign that his parents worked really hard to create, but more power to them: it worked. . . . It was pretty amazing.

For Mari, the poignant part of the Gilad Shalit release was the way in which it galvanized a usually fractious people. Gilad as “their son” was a powerfully unifying concept, she observed, but she did not use pronouns that suggest that she was part of that whole. Gilad Shalit’s return evoked a good deal of positive sentiment and pride that a nation takes care of her children.

Struggling to Connect, Resisting Connections

A handful of the rabbinical students were parents, and some of them experienced the event through that lens. Karen reported feeling emotional for what all the mothers—Gilad’s mother and the mothers of the released Palestinian prisoners alike—were feeling.

When [Gilad] came home, I was mesmerized by the television. I couldn’t stop watching everything that was happening. When they made the announcement, everyone was in the streets. I wanted to go out there; I didn’t for some reason, but I could hear people screaming from the streets. That was really emotional for me. . . . And then they took down the tent and I bawled every single day for like a week and half because I knew that his mother had him home. Even right now I am tearing up . . . I think about the mothers.

Karen empathized with the mothers’ experiences—the pain of separation and the joy of reuniting with one’s child.

The question labeled by many as “unstated,” though it was in fact not far from the surface was “Is it worth it?” Is the return of one Jew worth the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners? Wendy raised this question and provided her own take on the

release day. She commented that the day itself was “a really weird day for me because I felt like everyone was celebrating and it was supposed to be this amazing, happy occasion and yet I feel like philosophically I wasn’t necessarily in favor of the exchange. Not that I’m not happy that he’s with his family . . .” She added, “There was sort of social pressure to be out in the streets celebrating . . .” Not all students felt a closeness to the event. They did not ignore Gilad’s release, but they were not as invested in it as some of their classmates. Josh, an HUC student, commented, “I’m less fascinated with Gilad Shalit. I’m not sure why. That didn’t really affect me the way it affected other people. I’m more fascinated with Israel’s economic position right now.” He knew that the social pressure to celebrate and be invested in Gilad’s release existed, but he did not personally feel that pressure.

Membership in the In-Crowd because They Were There

Oftentimes, the rabbinical students felt that their struggles were part of the process of integrating experiences into their identities. The students saw the rabbinic resale value. They wanted to retain the emotional side of the experience for themselves as well as preserve lessons of Jewish unity. Their experiences of the moment had cache and were a valuable commodity, but they were complicated. You had to be there. How could they translate this experience? How could they not just take it home, but share it in a way that could be meaningful to others and has educational or spiritual value? This is the challenge of the rabbinate: taking a personally meaningful experience and adapting it so that others can use it as a point of connection as well. The students integrated these

experiences into their journey narratives as a way to bottle or package them to share with others.

Joel's effort to capture the moment began as the event was still unfolding. He wrote a sermon for his former youth group.

Gilad Shalit was momentous. I remember when they took down the tent. I also remember the whole e-Jewish world: Facebook, Twitter, all that stuff was like "How is this going to change everything?" I wrote some sermons, sermonettes, to a youth group I was a part of and my youth travel group—we have an alumni page.

Joel's response was framed by his professional identity. David, an HUC student, evaluated Gilad's ordeal through the lens of his own relationship with Israel. Without ever having been to Israel prior to this year, David began following Israeli news just before Gilad was taken into captivity in June 2006. Being in Israel for his release was very poignant for David because his own relationship with Israel was intertwined with the story.¹³²

Gilad's release was the central, most newsworthy public event of the Israel Year. Several of the students mentioned that they had already followed Israeli current events, but they noted the difference in media coverage between American and Israeli outlets. Mari, an HUC student, articulated how she experienced the difference.

¹³² Gilad Shalit was also a theme in my relationship with Israel. He was captured during my first one-year stint living in Israel and released five years later during my second. After a series of military skirmishes near the border with Lebanon and the border with Gaza, including one in which the cousin of an Israeli friend of mine was killed, it was amazing to witness something so positive. Gilad Shalit's release was a significant part of my year; however, I am not exaggerating when I claim that it was also significant for the rabbinical students.

[E]very time something happened, I always kind of braced myself for the worst and assumed [Israel] was going to implode or something and nothing ever happened. And so now I kind of realize that my views on this country are so different when I'm in America. . . . My parents watching CNN or whatever news station and seeing the protests in Gaza and Ramallah and the violence and everything and if that's their picture, I don't see that. That's not even in my mind. So I think things are a lot calmer than they look here . . .

Mari learned that hearing about and watching Israeli news stories unfold while abroad gave a certain fatalistic slant to the events. However, her lived experience in Israel did not reflect the existential crisis storyline. Recognizing that and having the lived experience provided Mari with important perspective on how the views of her future communities and congregations in the United States are shaped. Mari and her classmates may be able to provide counter-narratives.

If the Israel Year is about creating a relationship with Israel, newsworthy events can serve as powerful points of connection to place and people. Evan, an HUC student, commented, "I feel really deeply with Israel, like what happens to Israel happens to the whole Jewish people and just like being here makes it so much more present."

Experiencing these events with others may also be poignant moments in interpersonal relationships, moments that are grounded in the particular place where the event took place. However, the rabbinical students had varying relationships with Israel going into the year and those relationships developed differently throughout the year; thus, the students' interpretations of events, including this one, may differ widely.

Still, the students recognized the importance of following Israeli news. They had a personal investment while they were residents, but felt that they would have a professional obligation when they returned home. Becky, a JTS student, said, “I’m not the best at keeping up with the news which is, again, something I’m not so happy about and that I’d change. I also feel like I need to change because I feel like it’s kind of a rabbi’s job to know about these things.” Keeping up with Israeli news is part of the task of a rabbi and an extension of one’s relationship with contemporary Israel. American rabbis are expected to have a relationship with Israel that extends to following significant current events. As leaders, they will also be interpreters of news from Israel and shapers of others’ relationships with Israel.

Interactions with Israeli Family Members

Whereas Gilad Shalit’s release, specifically when framed as the return of a son of Israel, gave the rabbinical students a taste of Israeli peoplehood, some of the students experienced peoplehood through interactions with biological family. A handful of rabbinical students had family members in Israel with whom they spent the occasional weekend or holiday. For some of the students, this was the first time they had met these members of their extended families. They were not necessarily close by blood, but in Israel, almost any family is close family. Having family members that invited the students into their homes gave the students a way to escape their academic, social, and religious bubbles and entrée into an Israeli home and Israeli family life. Their experiences and relationships were not the same as those of Israelis with one another, but the students’ interactions with their family members provided an “in” to Israeli society and

religion. They were also opportunities to teach about and model American Reform and Conservative Judaism. In other words, there was a mutual negotiation of identity.

Being in Israel brings families together. Something happens—something has always happened—when even distant family members connect in Israel. The rabbinical students most often encountered their family members, and their family members' Jewish practice, in their homes. This gave them an opportunity to experience home life in Israel and, depending on where they lived, the students had opportunities to travel outside of Jerusalem and encounter less English language-dominant areas of the country. The rabbinical students encountered Israeli family members during time off from school—specifically on Shabbatot and holidays. In this way, the students encountered how Israelis celebrated and observed Jewish time and rituals.

The rabbinical students encountered Israeli family members as themselves, as progressive American Jews on the path to the rabbinate. Those identities, however, raised questions about Reform and Conservative Judaism, variations in practice, comparisons with lived and official state-sponsored Judaism in Israel, and differences between American and Israeli definitions of and expectations for rabbis. Encounters with Israeli family members personalized Israelis, provided opportunities for extended interaction, were a window into Israeli society and Judaism in Israel. Most importantly, they represented the possibility for a relationship with a person or people that could help anchor the rabbinical students' relationships with Israel.

The rabbinical students interacted with their family members through sharing daily living and, on holidays, through shared rituals. Sharing holidays and rituals

facilitated communication, as a social ritual would (Goffman 1982), and reinforced Jewish peoplehood by building bonds between those present in the room and those beyond who have engaged or will engage in the same rituals (Kopelowitz 2008). Spending time with relatives reinforced the relationships that the students had with these family members, gave the students insights into Israeli culture, and exposed them to Jewish diversity in Israel.

Talia, an HUC student, spent Shabbat with cousins, and her experience encapsulated several themes expressed by the other students with Israel-based family members: the integration of Jewish ritual into seemingly secular life, knowledge of traditional customs despite non-observance, and a lack of knowledge about progressive Jewish approaches to observance.

I think the first time I went up to visit my family and I had just met them and they're . . . about as secular as you get . . . I was there for a weekend and they wanted to know what to do for Shabbat because here they have this American young lady who has come into their lives and is apparently going to be a rabbi so of course she wants to go to *beit kneset* [synagogue] and of course she wants to say Kiddush at dinner and have challah and there needs to be two challahs. And they're like kind of frantically trying to put things together and I'm like "Oh, we don't need to do that." I had to explain to them that I'm more than happy to do things the way that they normally do things. And they have Shabbat dinner together every week and the mom always lights candles . . . For me, explaining there are different ways that practice is legitimate and doing what works for you

on a Friday night is a totally legitimate celebration of Shabbat whether or not they're intending it to be. And I said "just spending time with the family, that's what I need to do." . . . So I think I was their first exposure to an American Reform kind of human and having to explain it really made me realize what it is that I'm doing and how I'm connecting to things.

Talia's weekend with her cousins, who celebrated Shabbat through lighting Shabbat candles and having dinner together, introduced her to the ways in which secular Judaism in Israel still encompasses traditional Jewish rituals. Though Talia modeled her own version of American Reform Judaism, her interaction with her cousins was an example of cultural exchange. Through the natural course of Shabbat, both Talia and her cousins shared their own observances. Neither side made demands on the other. In the language of Symbolic Interactionism, the two parties shared a common meaning for Shabbat; however, they did not realize that until the tension-filled moment showed itself to be benign.

Talia's visit also included a meaning-filled gesture that communicated Reform Judaism to her cousins.

When it's Saturday morning and I come down in my yoga pants and they're like "You don't want to go to synagogue?" And I'm like "Not really. Is that ok?" And they're like "Yeah, that's perfect. Do you want breakfast?" That I think was kind of surprising for them that I think they really liked it. I liked it.

In Mead's words, symbolic interaction is a "presentation of gestures and a response to the meaning of those gestures. . . . Thus, the gesture has meaning for both the person who

makes it and for the person to whom it is directed. When the gesture has the same meaning for both, the two parties understand each other” (Blumer 1969: 9). Wearing yoga pants on Shabbat morning was Talia’s gesture. She communicated a relaxed, non-synagogue and non-observance focus for Shabbat morning. As her cousins responded, the yoga pants became the “perfect” gesture for their secular lifestyle. Talia’s weekend with her cousins was an exercise in Jewish peoplehood—an interaction between secular and non-secular Jews over Shabbat that involved co-participation in rituals and sharing customs in a low-pressure, positive way.

Jen, also an HUC student, spent one evening of Chanukah with members of her extended family. A tension-filled experience, Jen found herself at odds with her cousins who were more politically and religiously conservative than she.

I went over there for Chanukah. . . . And it’s very interesting. They’re very open and they know exactly what I’m doing here and their children and grandchildren are religious Zionists and they lived in Gush Katif and now they don’t live in Gush Katif,¹³³ as I try to stay non-political about that. But you know, they had one daughter who like talked to me a little bit, but then their son who didn’t talk to me at all. It’s just like a very jarring experience that I’m related to him. I understand that he doesn’t know me at all, but he’s in the army, he’s working in Gaza. He believes they should still be living in Gaza. He’s Orthodox and I’m here sitting in jeans wanting to be a Reform rabbi. That goes against everything that he’s been

¹³³ Gush Katif was a Jewish settlement bloc in the southern Gaza Strip that was evacuated in 2005 when the Israeli army pulled out of Gaza.

taught. And so it's just like I would talk to him and he'd kind of give me one-word answers. They're not Haredi, but I didn't shake his hand. But it's just like those interesting encounters that you have with people, whether they're related to you or not, just the stigma that because I'm Reform, or in the eyes of Israel, because I'm *hiloni* [secular], that there's something that we can't connect or people are unwilling to even try to connect.

Jen related her stilted conversations with her cousins as typical of interactions with more observant Israelis. Not all of Jen's cousins engaged with her; their non-interaction, though, still transmitted a message. Jen's cousins did not directly confront her about Reform Judaism, but she interpreted their reactions to and interactions with her as indicative of their disapproval.

Talia's and Jen's experiences with their family members centered on sharing Jewish ritual occasions—Shabbat for Talia and Chanukah for Jen. Ezra and Alan, both Ziegler students, had conversation-based interactions with cousins. They discussed Conservative Judaism's approaches to observing *kashrut* [dietary laws] and *mitzvot* [commandments], respectively. Spending time with his extended family in Israel and discussing where to eat prompted Ezra to have a conversation with his cousin about kosher food.

“This place really, it's not kosher.” And I said to him “Right, what that means is that it doesn't have a rabbi who supervises it, but kashrut is actually about the food that you consume and not about the person who's watching it. And it's very important to me that I don't eat *trayf* [non-kosher food]. What I eat is kosher, I

just happen to define that not in terms of the person who is watching it.” Then I explained to him, “I am going to order a salad and have a beer and it’s really kosher.” And his mind was like blowing up, like he couldn’t figure out how it could be—and it was exciting to him actually because I’m living a life that he could imagine, much more religious per se and ritually observant than his life, but it’s a life that’s not detached from the society in which you live.

Through explaining how and why he agreed to go to a non-kosher restaurant, Ezra modeled for his cousin how to negotiate Jewish observance in secular society and where he defined the boundaries between acceptable/kosher and unacceptable/non-kosher foods. Though the topic of conversation was dinner, the larger subject was Jewish life. Ezra and his cousin, through their conversation, came to a better understanding about how each one defined kashrut and how to live Jewishly in a largely secular society.

Alan’s conversation with his relative also reflected questions of Jewish observance in the modern world.

[I] spent about half the drive from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem trying to explain to him the difference between Conservative/Masorti and Reform because [Israelis] don’t really have that frame of reference here. They don’t really get it . . . If you are not Haredi but you are still religious, you’re Reform. They don’t quite get that there’s something in-between, which is actually really interesting because they get Reform . . . and so like I said, “We’re still observant of halakha, we’re still *shomer mitzvot* [guardian or observant of commandments], but we’re more liberal in how we interpret that.”

Alan's conversation ran the gamut of Jewish observance, from tzitzit to Shabbat to egalitarianism and women's ritual obligations. Through this extended conversation in a car, Alan taught his brother-in-law about Conservative Judaism, a mainstay of American Judaism that lacks a real presence on the Israeli religiosity spectrum. Through this conversation, Alan better defined his own Jewish identity and his place on the religious spectrum in Israel.

For those rabbinical students with family in Israel, the familism aspect of peoplehood was literal. By interacting with family members, the rabbinical students gained access to a more intimate side of Israeli life. For Talia, Jen, Ezra, and Alan, Reform or Conservative Judaism guides how they live Jewishly. Through their interactions with Israeli family members, the students modeled how they lived; they were informal ambassadors for their movements, bringing Jewish diversity with them to family time. When there was tension, it was an example of tensions among Jews. Families are complicated, so is familism.

Evaluating Interactions with Family Members

On the surface, the rabbinical students evaluated their interactions with family members just as they would for encounters with other Israelis. The students type-cast and pigeonholed these people in order to create rudimentary identity profiles and establish some of their own parameters for engagement. Talia saw her relatives as secular Jews, Jen saw her relatives as right-wing religious Zionists, Ezra saw his relative as someone who had the potential to be more observant, and Alan saw his relatives as generally

confused about the grayer areas of Jewish observance. These initial assessments guided how they engaged. They also tried to assess what their relatives might think of them. These expectations then filtered the reactions and responses they encountered.

When they encountered their family members and were able to engage—that is, to dig deeper and have a substantive conversation—all parties were able to learn from each other. For example, Talia felt that the time she spent with her relatives was educative for everyone; they learned about her and about how she lives out her Reform Judaism and she learned about how secular Israelis live out their Judaism. They found that they had common goals and even complementary ways of celebrating Shabbat. In contrast, Jen experienced little mutual understanding, as her cousins barely looked at her, much less engaged in conversation. She was left to make assumptions about her cousins and their apparent disregard for her and her Judaism.

Encounters and interactions with family members were never without struggle, whether across national, cultural, and religious lines, or not. As American rabbinical students in Israel, however, there was an acute tension between the presumed ties of family and the rifts based on family members' perceptions of the legitimacy of who they were, their professional paths, and their Judaism. Jen experienced tension that she associates with the “stigma” of Reform Judaism. Her very legitimacy as a Jew was questioned because she is Reform. Realizing that her cousin's children would not accept her as a Reform rabbinical student, she focused on her own indisputable Jewish lineage to stake her place in Judaism. She explains, “I'm halakhically Jewish and I know that, but

because of the way that I was raised, people don't consider it to be legitimate. It's hard. It's much more evident here than it is in the States.”

The cultural and observance spectrum in American Judaism overlap—but imperfectly—with the spectrum found in Israel. For Jen, the abstract struggle between the religious right and religious left became personal. On the flip side, Talia down-played the religious aspect of who she sought to become and focused on the family-oriented parts of Shabbat. Both Jen and Talia struggled to provide definitions of themselves that were familiar and relatable to their cousins' views of who is Jewish, but also who is in the family.

With fewer and less intense ramifications for one's legitimacy as a Jew, students also struggled to explain the middle parts of the observance spectrum. Ezra's conversation used the case of kosher certification versus kosher food as a way to explain this middle ground. Alan's discussion about the finer points of Conservative observance was a more direct hashing-out. Struggling to define American types of Judaism highlights religio-cultural divides and commonly held assumptions about Jewish practice in both spheres. In the Israeli context, the Conservative rabbinical students learned to be spokespeople for their movement.

Interactions with Family Members Shape Rabbinic Formation

Encounters and engagement with Israeli family members have implications for the rabbinical students' relationships with their families, while providing exposure to a greater cross-section of Judaism and first-hand experiences of Jewish peoplehood.

Whereas an Orthodox or secular person may not give a Reform or Conservative American Jew a second glance, when the person is family, he or she may be more invested in trying to understand the Israeli Other. As a result of time with family, the rabbinical students developed a more nuanced sense of how Israelis in general viewed them and viewed their Judaism. This helped the students find clarity about their place in Israeli society even as it led to struggle.

Though the students may not have known their Israel-based family members prior to this year, relationships can be taken home. Literature on *mifgashim* and Israeli experiential education points to the effectiveness of interpersonal connections for developing emotional connections to Israel. Sparking and continuing a relationship with one's family members has the potential to enhance one's relationship with Israel as well as one's relationship with one's own family. Whereas students and tourists may lose touch with "their Israelis" from a *mifgash*, familial bonds last even if contact goes on hiatus. Through family, the students will always have ties to Israel.

Conclusion: Forming Rabbinic Identity through Interpersonal Interaction

The human interactions of the Jerusalem year influenced rabbinic identity formation and the students' sense of Jewish peoplehood. Throughout the Israel Year, the rabbinical students interacted with Israelis through language, visual symbols, gestures, and shared events, rituals, and activities. Sometimes, they knew the person with whom they were interacting; sometimes, a stranger remained a stranger. The students' interactions—whether alone or in a class or peer group—revealed the expansiveness of Jewish peoplehood. Interactions sometimes blurred differences and strengthened bonds

between Jews (Rosenak 2008). The students encountered cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity that complexified their understandings of Jewish peoplehood and challenged their own sense of identity.

The students' interactions—that is, their experiences of peoplehood—had implications for their rabbinic identity formation. The people, things, and meanings they encountered are materials and tools for what they will do and who they want to be. The students struggled to understand the interactions and their meanings and carve out a place within Jewish peoplehood. They also worked to figure out how their experiences would impact their conceptions of self and alter what they do as Jews and as rabbis.

Interactions with Israelis influenced the rabbinical students' identities by exposing them to a more diverse cross-section of Jews, a wider range of language, meaning, and gestures. The Israel Year was an exercise in decoding Israeli society. The rabbinical students encountered, evaluated, and struggled with the contexts and content of their interactions. They then adopted, adapted, and integrated those interactions into their actions and identities. They gained an increasing ease of interaction with Israelis in common settings and improved facility with daily-use Hebrew. The students were able to successfully go to the post office, bank, or supermarket and could order food off of a menu printed in Hebrew. They were functionally culturally competent.

Identity Outcomes from the Context of Interactions with Israelis

Interactions with Israelis constituted a context of rabbinic formation during the Israel Year. The process of formation yielded knowledge, skills, habits, and senses of

self. Through interactions with Israelis, the rabbinical students acquired information that had relevance for their personal and professional identities. The context of Israel presented Hebrew language as a foundational area of knowledge, but the interactions and struggles of the formation process determined the students' relationship to the language. Students learned Hebrew as subject matter in institutional contexts, but their knowledge was either reinforced or deemed unnecessary on the street. Knowledge—or lack thereof—of Hebrew shaped the students' interactions.

Through interactions with Israelis, the rabbinical students learned first-hand about diversity in Israel. Through school-sponsored programs or out on their own, the students interacted with Israelis from different religious, ethnic, and cultural walks of life. These interactions also taught the students how to interpret the objects and actions of the people around them and how to use those cultural objects strategically. Female students came to see long skirts not just as articles of clothing, but as a tool for accessing Haredi neighborhoods with a modicum of anonymity. All the rabbinical students learned about—and struggled with—the different meanings of overtly religious clothing and accessories, especially Israel's Orthodox hegemony that strictly guarded gender boundaries. Experiencing the ramifications of clashes around meanings and appropriation of objects and symbols deepened the students' knowledge of them.

The students also learned about Israeli diversity through interacting with family members. Through both conversations and gestures, they learned and taught about varieties of Judaism, especially variations within progressive Judaism. When they were

with Israeli family members, they were engaged in cultural exchanges that highlighted their own place in a diverse Jewish peoplehood.

The students also practiced skills in less intimate interpersonal interaction. Through short, casual conversations with taxi drivers, the rabbinical students were able to develop and hone narratives about what they were doing in Israel. Students practiced these same conversational and information-sharing skills when they explained themselves and their practices to Israeli family members. Over the course of the Israel Year, the rabbinical students developed skills in discerning different ways to interact with different people, what to tell whom, and under what circumstances. Though they knew how to engage in code-switching at home, the students had to develop the skill in Israel, especially when speaking in Hebrew. When her cousins seemed to reject her very Jewishness, Jen switched to setting her Jewish status in the context of matrilineal descent, a framework that her ritually observant cousins understood and accepted.

Habits are skills, informed by knowledge, and employed with frequency to the point that they become rote or second-nature. Interaction and daily life skills turned into habits as the Israel Year continued. The rabbinical students also exercised agency to intentionally develop habits. Many students reported developing habits of news consumption, especially as a result of experiencing the release of Gilad Shalit. Gilad's return was the personal hook that engaged the students in following current events, a habit that could be continued, with some alterations, from outside of Israel as well.

Students also sometimes resisted developing habits. Zach, an HUC student, provided the clearest example when he argued against wearing a kippah in order to keep

it “special” and preserve its meaning. He observed the positive impact that this choice has for his classmates who visibly fit in and were able to access religious contexts without trouble, but Zach resisted.

Identity is socially-created. Thus, an expanded sense of self was a main product of the students’ interactions with Israelis. They began as Jews who are American Reform or Conservative rabbinical students and year-long residents of Jerusalem. Family roles emerged as salient at various points, but were altered in their interactions with Israeli cousins and expanded in their identification with parents as they witnessed the release of Gilad Shalit. They gained a more expansive sense of membership in the greater Jewish peoplehood, a concept of community which knows no limit in time or geographical boundary.

The rabbinical students’ reflexive views of themselves expanded through daily interactions to become temporary residents, not tourists. American students in Jerusalem-based institutions that cater to Americans, are a known demographic; and year in and year out, rabbinical students are part of that. The students had their place as residents, but in Jerusalem, progressive Judaism is not normative. The perceived Israeli secular-Orthodox binary appeared to leave them out. They could avoid the identity dissonance by avoiding disclosure of their Jewish orientation, but such avoidance is difficult.

As a result, students developed strategies for how to present themselves to the Israeli Other. In so doing, they are also engaged in anticipating that Other’s own orientation and guessing how the interaction would proceed. Sometimes initial misperceptions could be renegotiated, but other times the distance remained. The students

sought ways to define themselves that navigated the distance between who they are as progressive American rabbinical students and who Israeli Others perceive or wish them to be. They adapt their explanations of self to a vocabulary and set of parameters to which Israeli Others could relate.

The students' interactions with Israelis complexified their Jewish looking-glass selves and their perception of Jewish peoplehood. Burke and Reitzes (1991) use a simile to describe how individuals respond to input about their identities: "Individuals use their identities as thermostats to assess the identity implications of interactions and to initiate behaviors that maintain or restore congruency between the identity and the reflected appraisals" (242). The authors assume identity consistency as a goal. In that sense, feedback helps the individual assess the fit between identity and context.

The view of others is relevant to an individual's Jewish identity. One can claim membership in the Jewish peoplehood, but one's membership must necessarily be confirmed by the group. Students struggled with peoplehood—if the Other does not accept me, why should I accept him or her? However they chose to approach the subject, in the abstract or in concrete interactions, the rabbinical students are part of the international Jewish peoplehood. They begin interactions with Israelis as part of the peoplehood and end interactions as part of the Jewish peoplehood. Their place, however, was not static nor always simple to define. They never questioned whether they belonged, but they did not always feel comfortable or confident asserting their place.

The rabbinical students searched for a place within Jewish peoplehood, and in doing so, searched for themselves. As rabbis, they are not just members of the Jewish

people, they are leaders, elites. The rabbi is an authority figure and a person who has power. This is all the more difficult to conceptualize in the Israeli context. In the context of Orthodox-controlled Israel, these rabbinical students cannot achieve official, State-sponsored authority. In general, though, they perceived Israelis to be generally antagonistic toward progressive Judaism because that is the stance of the Chief Rabbinate. When they got positive responses to their identities as Reform or Conservative rabbinical students, they were surprised.

The status and position of a Reform or Conservative rabbi in the Israeli, Orthodox establishment-controlled context is somewhat of a paradox. The title “rabbi” evokes reverence and respect. As Hervieu-Leger (2000) argues, the “priest” is a guard and producer of collective memory and his or her power comes from that. She writes, “[i]n all instances it is the recognized ability to expound the true memory of the group that constitutes the core of religious power” (126). “Rabbis” have religious power, but in Israel, the labels “Reform” and “Conservative” call that power into question. The adjective disempowers the noun.

Still, these rabbinical students were engaged in connecting people to the group’s memory. Dan, an HUC student, talked about Jewish peoplehood as a topic to be taught, and himself as someone who will teach. He explained,

The idea of peoplehood, I think it seems like a reflex to me. It’s funny to think of it as a thing that needs to be addressed or taught as a value, but it does, clearly. Everyone who’s Jewish doesn’t just naturally consider what their connection is to the Jewish people . . . It’s very interesting to be aware of and try to think how to

try to tap into people's capacities for feeling like there's something that's bigger than themselves and to help people feel that that's important . . .

As Jewish communal professionals, the students will need to have a concept of Jewish peoplehood that then guides how they lead Jews. Jewish peoplehood after all, is about Jewish people, and as rabbis, the students will—in a variety of capacities—be leaders of Jews.

As future rabbis, being in Israel and encountering and engaging with Israelis, experiencing newsworthy events, and spending time with family members provides rabbinic capital. However, it is what they do with that capital—how they frame it as rabbinically relevant and how they act on it—that is important for rabbinic formation. To be formative and transformative, the students' encounters must influence their developing perceptions of rabbinic selfhood, and, importantly here, their personal and communal sense of belonging to a greater Jewish community. The students' sense of peoplehood ends where it begins: with their own membership in Jewish community.

The rabbinical students encountered and interacted with people from a place of membership within their own communities, including their student community. They helped each other evaluate and decode interactions with Israelis and with Israel itself. They struggled together, supporting each other as they figured out how to process encounters, events, and experiences. They even occasionally collaborated to develop ways in which to apply their experiences to what they seek to do in rabbinic capacities. Even if their resolutions were solitary, the students were still being formed within the context of their own communities, something we will explore further in the final chapter.

The rabbinical students came to conceptualize Jewish peoplehood as what Jews have in common with each other. Those commonalities bind Jews to each other across time and space. The students conceived of themselves individually as part of the Jewish peoplehood and, with a pre-professional lens, as future leaders of collectivities of Jewish people. Both of these perspectives informed how they understood their engagement with Israelis. They also understood themselves to be members in a variety of communities that became part of the diversity of Israel and of Jewish peoplehood. Their presence and engagement with Israeli culture increased the visibility of the American, English-speaking, egalitarian segment of international Jewish peoplehood. Through interactions with Israelis, the rabbinical students explored the depth and personal resonance of Jewish peoplehood, strengthened their own primary rabbinic reference group (their community of classmates), and engaged in the formation of their rabbinic selves.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Opening

A pleasant mix of afternoon sun and shade, a gentle breeze. It is early May. HUC, Ziegler, and JTS students have gathered on the lawn at HUC for the final event of the interseminary Israel Experience Program. This is an opportunity for the group to sing a little, learn a little, eat a little, and reflect a little on their shared Israel Year. Students schmooze, waiting for everyone to arrive. Both the walls of the Old City and the profile of the David Citadel Hotel are clearly visible from this spot, with HUC—and all that it represents—adjacent to both. An HUC cantorial student and a Ziegler rabbinical student take out guitars and start singing a niggun.

Aaron, the program coordinator, welcomes everyone to “this bit of gan eden [Garden of Eden]” and delivers a short dvar Torah about tonight being Lag B’Omer, the home stretch to standing at Sinai and receiving the Ten Commandments on Shavuot. Many students focus their eyes toward the horizon or the grass, passively paying attention. Israel is a place and the IEP has been a program for receiving Torah and experiencing Israel together. “Israel is truly a personal responsibility,” Aaron says. It is at the “core of who we are as rabbis, cantors, educators, lay people . . . [the] core of our identities.”

Introduction

The Israel Year is a reified part of American rabbinic education. The rabbinical schools established the year in Israel as part of their curricula; it is “emplotted”

(Emirbayer and Mische 1998) within the story of becoming an American rabbi. This decision reflected the value of this place and experiences therein to Jews, both laity and leadership. The actual integration of Israel experiences into rabbinic education has been formalized to embody the particular type of Israel experience the schools hope the students will have, but the Israel Year still has deep personal resonance.

Israel is not just the location for this year of rabbinic education, it is at the center of rabbinic identity; there is parity between external context and internal content. The internalization of the context can only take place by engaging from a position of embeddedness. In this way, contexts are the foundation of identity formation, the structures internalized as habitus. Contexts supply the people, places, concepts, and symbols with which people interact and through which they create meaning and form ways of being. The Israel Year provided crucial contexts for rabbinic identity formation, but the power of the Israel Year lay in the intersection of and interactions between the contexts. The rabbinical students engaged with multiple contexts at the same time, even though one may have come to the fore in a given scenario. Given the multifaceted nature of Judaism as religion, culture, and nation, and the complexity of rabbinic identity as professional and personal, it stood to reason that the contexts, processes, and outcomes of formation would be multi-layered.

This research addressed rabbinic identity formation in six contexts of the Israel Year: identity journeys, institutions, place, religious time, civil time, and interpersonal interactions. Student experiences with and within each context were analyzed utilizing identity formation as a framework. Whereas the contexts provided raw materials for

experiences, the formation framework broke down the process into stages: encounter, evaluation, struggle, and resolution.

Within these stages, experiential learning and Symbolic Interactionism served as lenses through which to observe how the rabbinical students engaged with what they encountered, defined situations, and grappled with the meanings and implications of their rabbinic identities. The stages of formation were fluid, overlapped with each other, and often repeated themselves.¹³⁴ The final stage, Resolution, denoted an intention to apply one's experiences to professional settings.¹³⁵ As a complement, Internalization suggested an integration of one's experiences into one's complex, evolving rabbinic identity. Identity outcomes emerged across four dimensions: knowledge, skills, habits, and sense of self.¹³⁶ As with contexts and the formation process, the identity outcomes were complex and changeable.

Becoming a Rabbi in the Contexts of the Israel Year

Looking back at each of the six contexts of the Israel Year, we can summarize the ways in which the students engaged with those contexts, and the outcomes of those interactions.

¹³⁴ It is worth noting that none of the rabbinical students' experiences upended or challenged the general formation process initially presented by Carroll et al. (1997) and adjusted to better suit this study. The stages and their fluidity accommodated variation within the model. Data did not vary to an extent significant enough to alter the model.

¹³⁵ Students were not asked to discuss their visions and goals for their rabbinates, but rather to focus on application of knowledge and skills in professional contexts without regard to the larger picture. This was an unfortunate oversight on the part of the researcher.

¹³⁶ Foster et al. (2006) identified these identity outcomes in their study of clergy education. They emerged on their own from this research data, a convenient coincidence!

Journeys: Foundations of Rabbinic Formation

The students' journeys to rabbinical school were contexts for formation. Throughout the primary and secondary socialization stages, their pre-professional Jewish identities were shaped and influenced through interactions with parents and other family members, Hebrew school teachers, rabbinic role models, camp counselors, and peers in both formal and informal educational settings, at home, on Israel trips, and in workplaces. The rabbinical students engaged with these people, these settings, and the meanings that they perceived to be at play, first involuntarily and then voluntarily, exercising their agency in pursuit of a desired Jewish identity (Horowitz 2001). The rabbinical students made sense of their experiences through developing journey narratives.

The students embarked on the journey toward a rabbinic sense of self when they began to have the rabbinate as a career goal and read relevance for the tasks and persona of a rabbi back into their narratives of personal experiences. When they decided to pursue the rabbinate—whether accepted to rabbinical school yet or not—the students began to view themselves as people who had Jewish leadership potential. This sense of self was initially confirmed upon being accepted to rabbinical school and then evolved as the students matriculated and began their studies.

The students' journeys to rabbinical school were the foundation for their experiences of the Israel Year. Their previous experiences celebrating holidays, learning Jewish texts, developing ritual and prayer practices, and exercising Jewish leadership were starting points for their experiences of the Israel Year. The students' rabbinic identities had been primed for formation by the contexts that emerged as significant in

their journey narratives, the same types of contexts which emerged as formative during the Israel Year: institutions, place, religious and civil time, and interpersonal interactions.

Institutions: Structures for Rabbinic Formation

Within the institutions of the Israel Year—HUC’s Jerusalem campus, the Conservative Yeshiva, and the Schechter Institute—the rabbinical students interacted with the formal and informal curricula, pedagogies, and physical spaces of each school. The explicit curricula transmitted information deemed valuable and necessary for rabbinic functionality within the Reform and Conservative movements. The implicit curricula communicated values, thus providing reasons why the explicit curricula were important. The physical spaces communicated intended function of the spaces, set the tone and provided materials and support for the types of learning that should have been taking place, and revealed the values and priorities of the institutions. Being on the different campuses influenced how the students engaged with and felt about their educational and prayer experiences in those spaces. The spaces communicated different goals for and values of rabbinic training, but those differences were largely consistent with their institutional and Jewish approaches to curriculum, pedagogy, learning, rabbinic education, and the type of rabbi the institutions hoped to produce.

The rabbinical students learned information and skills and developed routines and habits of daily life centered on school curricula, schedules, and structures. The U.S.- and Israel-based institutions worked together to help the students meet each institutions’ learning and experiential goals during the year. Their school routines revealed the social

inputs and aspects of hidden curriculum. When the students needed to be on campus, what class or prayer service to attend at what appointed time, whom to eat lunch with and where, when and where to study, and how to spend free time all shaped them as students enrolled in a particular institution in the process of training to be a particular type of rabbi.

Place: Locus for Rabbinic Formation

Israel, the place, is a vast context for rabbinic formation. The rabbinical students interacted with Israel through mediated and unmediated experiences. Within HUC's Israel Seminar and the inter-seminary Israel Experience Program, the schools provided structured opportunities for the rabbinical students to travel, meet with Israelis in different parts of the country, listen to presentations, engage in discussions, and then process their experiences in group contexts.

The students' own travels in Israel over the course of the year provided an unmediated pathway to a relationship with Israel. They were learning about Israel and developing a relationship with her through experiential learning and frameworks of experiential education. Their knowledge of how to engage with those spaces, the integration of those spaces and interactions into their daily life routines in Israel, and their competence in doing so impacted the students' sense of belonging. The rabbinical students developed habits through unmediated interactions with elements of different contexts within Israel. They exercised agency in forming a relationship with places by visiting them on a regular basis, an activity that signified that they were residents and not

visitors. Habits emerged from where they went, with whom they interacted, and what they sought to accomplish.

In mediated scenarios, the rabbinical students' primary role was that of a tourist. They were not traditional homeland tourists, but their historic and spiritual connection as Jews to Israel was at the core of all institution-mediated encounters. The rabbinical students' role, in terms of content and motivation to connect with the environment, lay at the intersection of homeland tourism and study abroad students. In their role as temporary residents, the rabbinical students deepened their connections with Israel through developing place-specific routines and habits, engaging in daily life in the public sphere, and traveling around Israel in order to achieve extra-institutional goals for personal edification. They were neither tourist nor resident, but their experiences and routines introduced them to the spectrum of Jewish peoplehood. Their own Jewish identity was shaped by learning about Israeli society and then struggling with where they fit into its complexity. The students especially struggled with being the Other when they had thought that the gaps between progressive and more right-wing Judaism were reconciled or at least respected.

Jewish Time: Holidays, Cycles, and Seasons for Formation

In Israel, the public sphere operates on a Jewish calendar. Shabbat and holidays are tangible in Jerusalem, from the sounding of the public siren that signals candle-lighting times to holiday greetings on buses and the stillness of the streets on Shabbat and holiday afternoons. The flow of the weeks is centered on Shabbat; the rhythm of the

seasons is punctuated by holidays that are familiar but ways of celebrating that may be novel. A year of Shabbat-centric weeks fed Shabbat routines, habits, and rituals that shaped a habitus. The students tried out different prayer groups, shared meals or despaired at being alone, and relished the quiet even as they felt frustration about the lack of public transportation or open cafés. The multi-sensory context, repeated weekly, reinforced opportunities to not just experience Shabbat but to develop customs and proprioceptive habits of engaging with prayer communities, peers, and traditions. The students developed personal practices and internalized a sense of and expectations for the rhythms of Jewish time and the calendar, which may be transferable to the United States.

Jewish holidays in Israel presented alternative ways to observe and celebrate. With only one shot at each holiday, the students took different approaches along the familiar-novel continuum. They sought out what they believed to be authentic Israeli experiences yet felt almost bereft without their favorite traditions from home. The public calendar reinforced Judaism and Jewish practice, but did so through policies that curtailed or eliminated personal choices to observe.

The overarching context of the Israel Year meant that the students were primarily interacting with Jewish time as laity and not in leadership capacities. The context of religious time and the Jewish calendar reinforced the students' sense of self as Jews. However, as Reform and Conservative Jews, their egalitarianism ran counter to the policies and practices of the Israeli religious milieu. The students compromised and negotiated within the context to practice in their preferred ways. The public sphere only genuinely supports halakhically observant Judaism. The presence of one overarching

version of Judaism that is prominent in the public sphere signals that there are likely other versions of Judaism that are not visible.

Egalitarian Judaism had very limited public exposure, and even less of a communal presence. The rabbinical students encountered fewer congregations and communities outside of their schools that prayed the way they did and practiced Judaism the way they did. As they sought out prayer communities outside of school and developed Shabbat routines, habits, and rituals, the students defined themselves by what they were not doing and where they were not going as well as by the positive choices that they made. Religiously speaking, the students' senses of self were both settled because they were part of the Jewish majority, but unsettled because within that, they were in denominational minorities.

Civil Time: National Formation

The students interacted with the context of civil and civil-religious time through their experiences of Israeli state holidays and the celebration of American holidays in Israel. For some of the students, the Israel Year was their first opportunity to experience Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma'ut—the Israeli High Holidays—in their country of origin. Even if the students had attended commemorations or celebrations stateside, nothing compared to being in a place in which the majority of people were observing together. The commemoration of these holidays is a specific intersection of people, place, and time that cannot be replicated elsewhere. Overwhelmingly, the rabbinical students' goal was to observe and celebrate in the same way as Israelis which

included connecting on an emotional level as well. The students were outsiders by nationality, but insiders based on Jewish peoplehood.

For American holidays that occurred during the Israel Year, the students were insiders to the holidays, but celebrating them put them in an outsider position in the context of Israel. The students found their own ways to celebrate the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. They approached holiday planning with attention to authentic, American detail but acceptance that this year was different. The students had authority in these holiday celebrations that gave them a sense of ownership and a connection with home.

The rabbinical students' experiences of civil time highlighted their roles vis-à-vis citizenship. In Israel, for American holidays, they were American ex-pats; for Israeli holidays, they focused on their sense of self that connected them to the greater Jewish peoplehood. For Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzma'ut, the rabbinical students presented as outsiders desperate to connect with the commemorations on intellectual, experiential, and emotional levels. Knowledge of the narrative arc of the holidays and how Israelis observed them shifted to a skills set when the students engaged on a practical level. The students expressed a desire to know the holidays on emotional, intellectual, and experiential levels and tried to mimic Israelis in order to gain appropriate commemoration skills that they could take back home.

Interpersonal Interactions: Formation through Connections and Relationships

Through the context of interpersonal interactions, the rabbinical students encountered Israelis through language, symbols, objects, gestures, and a shared national moment. The rabbinical students engaged with Israelis in a variety of situations: casual interactions in the course of daily life, visual interactions through wearing garments and/or accessories that had religious significance, and interactions with family members. More dramatically, they engaged with the nation and Jewish peoplehood when Gilad Shalit was released from captivity. Every interaction and every actor had layers of meanings that the rabbinical students attempted to decipher, aided or hindered at times by their knowledge of Hebrew and understanding of Israeli cultural, social, and religious landscapes.

Just as they learned about Israel through their interactions, the people with whom they interacted learn about progressive American Judaism. The rabbinical students were part of the tapestry of Jewish peoplehood and, as year-long residents of Jerusalem, at least temporarily part of the social fabric of Israel as well. Meanings emerged from their interactions, meanings that had resonance for their conceptualizations of where they were and who they were trying to become. Through their interactions, they impacted the context and the people with whom they interacted. The students themselves developed habits of interaction—that is, they absorbed the norms of engagement in different spaces, with different people, at different times.

A Nexus of Socialization Forces

The Israel Year, as a collection of contexts, was a nexus of socialization forces. Through participating in the Israel Year and interacting with and within the contexts, the rabbinical students were exposed to plausibility structures for Jewish living that reinforced each other. In Jewish identity literature, scholars make the case that a child who attends a Jewish day school, has an engaged Jewish home life, and participates in a synagogue or other community organization has the strongest likelihood of robust Jewish identity outcomes (Sales and Saxe 2004). This scenario parallels the Israel Year in that every sphere of the students' lives in this year constituted a Jewish plausibility structure. Not all contexts reflected the most desirable or relevant aspects of Judaism, but the overarching messages and lifestyles were largely consistent.

Living in Israel provided a Jewish plausibility structure; the institutional framework of the Israel Year made that structure rabbinic. The Israel Year was contextualized as professionally important and set within their official professional training. On their journeys to rabbinical school, most of the rabbinical students had prior Israel experiences ranging from vacations to visits with Israeli family members to youth group or ten-day trips during college. At either end of the bell curve were a couple of people who had never been to Israel before or who had made aliyah.¹³⁷ The Israel Year was different. The students themselves framed their Israel experiences as important on a personal level for them as Jews—possibly in keeping with a model of ancient Jewish

¹³⁷ See Appendix A.

pilgrimage to the Holy Land or connections with Zionist causes. This Year, however, was relevant to pursuing a rabbinic career.

From an institutional perspective, the knowledge, skills and habits that the students acquired and the experiences that they had were part of the larger curricular framework. These students, according to their home and Israel-based institutions, will most benefit in their rabbinic training by being in Israel and learning these particular things at this particular point on their rabbinic journeys. The institutions valued all of the contexts of the Israel Year; the collection of contexts made the year unable to be reproduced in the United States. Even if the schools' goals for their students during this year were not explicitly related to religious or religio-cultural leadership, they were still relevant to the formation of a rabbi as a complete person.

The Israel Year was shared within a community of people who built and found membership in a "community of place" (Barman 2006), establishing relationships with people with whom they shared a grounded and tangible local experience. And, with their rabbinical colleagues-in-training they also established a professional "community of purpose" (Lamont 1992; Barman 2006). Both reinforced their membership in Judaism's "community of memory" (Bellah et al. 1986, Prell 2000), Jewish peoplehood.¹³⁸ Being together in a foreign country away from family and friends increased the bonds between the students. What may have originated from a place of mutual dependence became a community of mutual formation.

¹³⁸ For a thorough discussion of and comparisons between definitions of community and their relevance to identity, including Tonnies' (1957) *gemeinschaft* versus *gesellschaft*, see Kong and Yeoh (1995).

*Inputs and Outputs: Rabbinic Capital, Rabbinic Tool Kits, Rabbinic
Imaginations, and Rabbinic Habitus*

The Israel Year provided both social and religious capital that had personal and professional relevance. In terms of social capital, the Israel Year had Jewish value. People who have spent time in Israel have measurably stronger Jewish identities (Mittelberg 1999). There is correlation between spending time in Israel and Jewish identity even if there is not causality. American Jews who have spent time in and have a relationship with Israel are more engaged in Jewish rituals in their home and personal lives and have stronger ties with Jewish communal organizations than their non-Israel-visiting peers (Saxe and Chazan 2008). Like other Jews, but more so, rabbis are expected to possess religious capital—the rich, personal relationships with Jewish tradition and Jewish practice that time in Israel can foster. Israel is not just a place, but a thing of religious value. In this way, they were not just in Israel for themselves; they have stakeholders and potential audiences even if those have not been established yet.

In addition to rabbinically-relevant Jewish capital, the Israel Year also supplied a professionally useful “cultural tool kit” (Swidler 1986). The practical knowledge, skills, and habits that the students acquired and developed comprised their Israel Year tool kits. Mastery of the tools in the cultural tool kit, employed through strategies of action, led to competence in daily living and academic arenas. The students were able to engage accurately through a range of established Jewish “group styles” (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). Their displays of competence impacted the students’ sense of self. The

students could justify their membership, deepening a sense of belonging. Being a person who possesses particular information and skill sets or someone who has specific routines in his or her life establishes the credibility of their claim to inhabiting a role. Practicing those skills and routines also becomes personally meaningful when the individual feels that he or she embodies the role and belongs.

Over the course of the Israel Year, the rabbinical students viewed the knowledge, skills, and habits that they acquired through a lens of professional application. To varying degrees, the students exercised, employed, and applied a rabbinical or “pastoral imagination” (Dykstra 2001). That is, through a synthesis of experience, knowledge, and action, the students developed rabbinic “perception, understanding, and action” (Goleman 2017:652). The students trained their rabbinic eye to view the world in a particular way, specifically to consider professional applications of information and skills they had personally experienced in Israel. Through developing a rabbinic imagination, the students learned to hold the personal and professional aspects of Judaism in one thought.

That is, the experiences of the Israel Year contributed to the formation of a rabbinic habitus, an intuitive knowledge of tradition and way of acting accordingly. Through their experiences, the students developed an inner compass for functioning in the different contexts of the Israel Year. The overall influence on how they lived and how they reflected on themselves revealed the ways in which they felt integrated into the deep structure of the context. Habitus, the disposition of a soul, is the goal of theological education: personal and pastoral formation (Farley 1983). Habitus integrates cognitive,

affective, and behavioral components of ministry. An embodied habitus can be employed without thought as praxis or strategies of action (Foster et al. 2006; Dykstra 2001).

Rabbinic habitus shapes a rabbinic imagination, the integration of the knowledge, skills, and perspective on reality that are gained through rabbinic training into daily work and life (Dykstra 2001). The rabbinic or pastoral imagination assists the students in integrating the spiritual and the mundane (Shulman 2006), or, perhaps more aptly in this case, the somewhat abstract tradition rooted in texts and rituals and the reality of contemporary Jewish life. The habitus they developed during the plausibility structures of the Israel Year may be particular to that time and space and thus not permanent, but having inhabited that particular habitus will influence what develops in the future.

From Outsider to Insider, Individual to Community Member

The overarching contexts of the Israel Year echoed the formative contexts that emerged from the students' Jewish journey narratives. More than the contexts, what emerged from the students' narratives was a progression of development toward the rabbinate—from periphery to core, from lay to elite. The rabbinical students exhibited comparable progressions over the course of the Israel Year. Through their interactions with and within the contexts of the Israel Year, the rabbinical students moved from outsider to insider. As the year progressed, they become increasingly familiar with the contexts and all that they had to offer. They spent the year living and studying in Jerusalem, embedded in all of these contexts, yet only recognized their own integration late in the year.

The progression from outsider to insider was also subjective. The process of formation is, in itself, a path toward integration and internalization. The rabbinical students began by encountering situations, people, places, and objects that were external to themselves. Through experiences and engagement, they sought to understand those things and grapple with their meaning and personal and professional relevance. The rabbinical students internalized those implications and meanings, folding them into their identities. The process of formation is not wholly linear, nor is it experienced as such. A student may engage in evaluation and struggle simultaneously or in a loop before moving on to resolution or internalization, which itself may be temporary. The interactions between the stages of formation and the interactions of the individual with the process of formation highlight the fluidity of identity but also display the individual's increasing embeddedness within the process.

Identity outcomes—knowledge, skills, habits, and a sense of self as rabbinic—emerged from the students' journey narratives and continued to serve as markers of achievement. They were also a progression from external to internal—from knowledge that was abstract or cerebral, gained by learning from materials and experiences external to the self; to skills one performed and with which one consciously engaged the body; to habits that, once developed, were second-nature or automatic and no longer required thought; to an internalized self-concept of who one is—a progression of role but also of being. These were not just different identity outcomes, but different aspects of the journey to the rabbinate. The students viewed the knowledge and skills they gained and habits they developed as integral to the roles and tasks of a rabbi. Their sense of self as

rabbinic emerged through self-reflection, attention to audiences, and the adoption of a rabbinic looking-glass self. The rabbinical students acquired knowledge, gained skills, developed habits, and constructed and felt a sense of self that reflected the unique elements of the Israel Year. As they progress beyond the Israel Year through the remainder of rabbinical school and into their careers, they will also acclimate to their now-nascent rabbinic identities.

Though experienced in different ways and with different degrees of intensity and integration, the student community was a mainstay of the Israel Year. Within the context of community, the students will preserve their memories of experiences and relationships with different aspects of the Israel Year. Over time, the student community will evolve into a professional network. Their interactions will evolve with their changing roles. They are each other's fellow travelers on the rabbinic journey.

The Israel Year as a Beit Midrash

In studying and discussing Israel experience programs, scholars of Jewish and Israel education and practitioners in the field frame Israel as a classroom. The concept of "classroom," though, speaks to a more *wissenschaftlich* [scientific] perspective associated with the Berlin model as opposed to the Athens model of *paideia* [cultural and, here, spiritual education] (Kelsey 1993). These two concepts have a complicated relationship within the context of seminary education and clergy formation. Traditionally, seminaries try to address the tension and strike a balance between Athens/*paideia* and Berlin/*wissenschaft* through curricular and pedagogical choices that reflect the intellectual, practical, spiritual, and secular contextual goals of theological education

(Carroll 1971). While Christian seminaries employ numerous approaches to balancing and negotiating between Athens and Berlin,¹³⁹ Jewish education provides an historic yet timeless model: the beit midrash.¹⁴⁰ During the Israel Year, the rabbinical students encountered and wrestled with both *paideia* and *wissenschaft* through processes of engagement that mirrored the ways that people study in a beit midrash.

The Israel Year—all of the contexts of that place in that time—is analogous to a beit midrash. A beit midrash is a Jewish space with Jewish content. It is loud and busy, filled with people in interaction with each other and with texts. In the case of the Israel Year, the students' experiences were the texts. They dialogued with classmates, colleagues, and Israeli Others as a type of real-time, lived *chevruta* study. Holzer and Kent described the ideal engaged learning scenario:

In *havruta* [their spelling] text study, we aim to cultivate learners of texts who are not removed spectators but rather engaged participants in dialogue with the text and with their *havruta* partner, who genuinely desire to hear what texts and co-conversants have to say to them and articulate what they have to say to the text and to their partner (2014:168).

¹³⁹ See, for example, Kleinman (1984), Chalfant et al. (1994), Foster et al. (2006), and Shafer (2010) for different curricular and pedagogical approaches to negotiating between Athens and Berlin in various seminary contexts.

¹⁴⁰ The poetic approach would be to add in Jerusalem to the Athens-Berlin binary. Leo Strauss (see Janssens 2008) presents the binary of Athens and Jerusalem, wherein the former represents philosophy and reason and the latter represents revelation. In addition to Strauss' prior appropriation of Jerusalem and the fact that, historically, the world's greatest batei midrash were not in Jerusalem. Due to the destruction of the First and Second Temples in 587 BCE and 70 CE, respectively, batei midrash were scattered across the world in places such as Yavneh, Pumbedita, Lublin, Vilna, and countless others. In the absence of a Temple, Judaism's focus shifted from sacrifices to prayer and study.

Learning the text—or trying to understand an experience—exhibited a process similar to the stages of identity formation. PaRDeS is the Hebrew acronym that describes the process of learning a text and encountering the layers of textual exegesis. PaRDeS stands for *peshat* [surface, direct meaning], *remez* [hidden or symbolic meaning], *derash* [sought-after or inquiry-based meaning], and *sod* [secret or esoteric meaning].¹⁴¹ In a *beit midrash*, *chevruta* pairs encounter the text, explore meanings at each level, dig for and grapple with those meanings, and then reflect on any implications for their own lives and practices. The process of learning text in a *beit midrash* bears a striking resemblance to the process of clergy formation, and even more so because of the interpersonal interaction within the *chevruta* framework.

The goal of *chevruta* text study “is to lead each learner toward a more reflective and critical viewpoint and a deeper self-consciousness” (Holzer and Kent 2014:169). Struggle is integral to the process of learning in a *beit midrash*. A disagreement in the text and difference in opinion in understanding the text are known as a *machloket* [disagreement, conflict; pl., *machlokot*]. *Machloket l’shem shamayim* [disagreement in the name of heaven; constructive, respectful conflict]¹⁴² reinforces the necessity of grappling and disagreeing with text and between individuals for the process of learning. The ability to listen closely and maintain respect for the other person despite disagreement strengthens the *chevruta* relationship and reinforces the social nature of learning and, by extension, identity formation.

¹⁴¹ For a comprehensive explanation of stages of exegesis, see *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis* by David Weiss Halivni.

¹⁴² <https://elmad.pardes.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Machloket-lshem-shamayim-for-Lesson-Plan.pdf>

Text study with a partner, like interactions in general, impacts an individual's identity. For Ricoeur, text study “culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself” (1981:158-59). Holzer and Kent “identify self-understanding as a dialogical and intrapersonal goal . . .” (2014:169). Identity emerges from interaction with Others in and with the contexts of the Israel Year. The Israel Year as a *beit midrash* is a setting within which information is learned, skills are developed, and senses of self emerge through interaction with the physical and written Other.

Through experiencing the Israel Year together, the rabbinical students learned about each other and developed interpersonal skills and a sense of group cohesion. The students interacted with each other across contexts and in different ways. They were each other's classmates, roommates, seatmates on buses, minyan co-members, and friends. In institutional contexts, especially in *chevruta* pairs, students read, translated, and deciphered the meanings of texts. They discussed the text, their views on the text, and relatable experiences that they had. In addition, they also shared small talk about sports, love, hobbies, and daily living. Tangents were commonplace. They may have detracted momentarily—or longer—from studying the text, but they performed the valuable function of deepening the students' relationships with each other within a Jewish learning-focused environment. The students' relationships with each other occasionally led to marriage, often led to lifelong friendships, and always shaped a professional network.

Contributions

This research has relevance for both academics and practitioners—for those who study American religion and American clergy, for those who teach American seminarians and are charged with the task of their formation, and for seminarians and clergy themselves. It contributes Jewish specificity to the study of American religion and American clergy and brings knowledge about Jewish theological education beyond its often limited circulation. Rabbinical schools—especially HUC and JTS—often conduct internal evaluations and may produce histories that rely heavily on sociological data, both quantitative and qualitative. Though the research methods may solidly reflect the standards of academia, the audience is often limited to the institution and those affiliated with it. Foster et al.'s *Educating Clergy*, by including research on JTS, was an exception to this trend because not only did the authors include research on the school and its pedagogies, the school was given equal weight in a comparative study. Given that the American Jewish population is so small in comparison to other American religions and relatively clustered in major metropolitan areas, the quantity of studies of Christian seminaries and clergy is entirely justified. This research contributes a Jewish perspective to the body of research on American clergy formation.

Previous studies of clergy formation focused on identity work within the context of a seminary, both on-campus and off-campus in internship or student pulpit scenarios. This study complexified the process of clergy identity formation by locating it in multiple contexts. This study placed all of the contexts of the Israel Year in a web of formational influence. Each context of the Israel Year provided people, places, objects, ideas, and

structures with which the rabbinical students interacted and through which their identities were influenced. Every interaction in every context had the potential to be formative. This integrated view reflects the educational and formative potential of the Israel Year as a whole. Though the students spent time on their respective campuses, Israel was the larger campus for the year. Rabbinic formation took place in all contexts within the Israel Year; this study gives them their due.

In addition to providing a Jewish application for the formation process, this research also revealed a complexity to how the process unfolded for the students. Those who study identity, socialization, and formation know that the process of developing an identity is not uniform and not linear. The ways that these rabbinical students reported experiencing identity formation showed when and how the formation process tended to incorporate both repetition and cyclical periods. In terms of repetition, the rabbinical students' narratives revealed that they may have encountered similar scenarios, but in different ways based on whether the encounter was mediated or unmediated, whether English or Hebrew was the dominant language, and whom they were with. The evaluation and struggle stages tended to present as a progressing cycle of trying to figure out what something meant both practically and theoretically and then what that meant and how that felt for the individual. The two stages existed in conversation with each other and both were accepted by the students as necessary for rabbinic growth.

This research applied Symbolic Interactionism to the study of religious identity. In doing so, it interacted with the framework—as the framework itself set up similar scenarios. The case of American rabbinic identity formation was another way in which

Symbolic Interactionism helped decipher people's encounters and the process and outcomes of engagement. The concept of Significant Others defined the rabbinical students' interactants and, in doing so, revealed a hole: Where was God in the Israel Year? Did God play a role in the students' experiences over the course of the Israel Year? Surely God, this vertical significant Other (Berger 1969), would have featured in a year spent studying to become a rabbi in the spiritual capital of the Jewish world. With the exception of some optional discussions on mysticism at the Conservative Yeshiva, God was not a curricular topic. For people who spent so much time engaged in praying, studying how to pray, practicing prayer, and leading prayer, God was surprisingly absent as a topic of discussion, as opposed to a conversation partner. God and theology in general were left to the rabbinical students to explore, which a few of them did privately on their own time. The rabbinical students, a group of people who were very comfortable speaking extensively, rarely mentioned God in their interviews. This was perhaps one of the most noticeable differences when compared to studies of Christian seminaries and clergy.¹⁴³

This research used the format of narrative to explore the formation of rabbinic identity. The case of rabbinic identity—specifically the combination of the personal and the professional—displayed the suitability of the approach. Narratives captured processes and thus captured identity formation. The students' narratives allowed for their own voices to come through naturally as they worked through their experiences and what

¹⁴³ “Where is God in rabbinical school?” is another topic for another study, the results of which will be able to add the spiritual dimension to the discussion of rabbinic formation. After all, the traditional meaning of formation focuses on spirituality, specifically the shaping of a spiritual habitus.

those experiences meant for them on their journeys. The act of shaping a narrative revealed how the students experienced the different facets of the Israel Year, learned from those experiences, and they framed their experiences as relevant to their budding rabbinic identities. The narrative format was how the students made sense of their lives and shared their journeys. Giving their narratives methodological weight respected the students' voices, perspectives, and their identity processes. The narrative approach allowed for presentation of data in a way that fit not only the subject matter but how the research subjects related to their own experiences.

Within the Jewish and academic realms, this research expanded the conversation of Israel-based experiential education to professional training. With the exception of Judah M. Cohen's (2009) study of HUC cantorial students on their Israel Year, most Israel experience research focuses on Israel trips. Israel trip research is now overwhelmingly either directly about or presents a comparison with Birthright Israel tours and tour participants. Other studies exist, but the sea change that the program caused in the American Jewish community rightly deserves significant attention from those engaged in researching the American Jewish community. This research was different. Though it had some of the basic foundations regarding the link between spending time in Israel and enhancement of one's American Jewish identity, there were key differences. The program lasted longer, incorporated professional training, and required a starting point of a preexisting strong Jewish identity. The transformations that happened were both different and deeper.

Complications

The Israel Year presented both an immense opportunity and an immense challenge for American rabbinic formation. In Israel, the students had access to experiences and contexts that had no American equivalent, but every interaction and experience had strong American influences. Students did not experience Israel in a truly Israeli way, especially at first. Experiences initially reflected a coalescence or cultural bricolage that facilitated a subsequent transference of experiences back home. To that end, the students engaged in a particular type of cultural immersion that was Israeli but with a strong American orientation. Their institutions facilitated this. The models in play were functional models for intersectional immersion. Living off-campus encouraged the development of competence in independent living—it was an adult model, not an adolescent dormitory-based model. Each school had a different way of operationalizing its desired level of immersion; students were encouraged to exercise agency in seeking out more engagement with Israelis. The intersectionality of experiences worked with the goal of American rabbinic formation that values a relationship with Israel and can take that value back home to their congregations.

The Israel Year experiences themselves presented challenges in light of formation. Habits are the strongest marker of identity because they are second-nature and multisensory. However, habits are also context-specific, or supported by contexts to the extent that they may be difficult to replicate outside those structures. That is to say, if a student's strongest connection with the Israel Year was through his or her Shabbat routine which incorporates shopping at the shuk, praying at a specific minyan for

Kabbalat Shabbat, and taking a walk through his or her neighborhood to listen to people singing at home after Shabbat dinner, how can they take this home? If habits and routines are the strongest markers of identity, but the strongest markers of identity are not transferrable, is it adequate to have had a habit at a certain point, even if it's not maintained? In the case of the Israel Year, a habit reflected a moment or period of time in a person's relationship with a context. The impact may not be measurable. Rabbinic formation with and within the contexts of the Israel Year was a challenge in terms of maintenance, but it was not unique to these students in this year. Follow-up research should explore how habits and routines in one formative place influence subsequent identity and practice.

Limitations

This research has several limitations. The research focused on breadth at the expense of depth, attempting to cover the whole of this year-long experience. While this is not unheard of for grounded theory approaches, the absence of a more limited focus posed analytical challenges. Likewise, if theoretical frameworks had been defined during the planning stage—as opposed to the writing stage—the data might have been easier to code and analyze.

In terms of the research itself, there was no control group of students who were not present for the Israel Year. With a U.S.-based control group, the researcher would have been able to better highlight the impact of the contexts of the Israel Year on rabbinic formation. A control group would not have been possible for the HUC students because spending the first year in Israel is an established mandatory program requirement.

However, a handful of students each from JTS and Ziegler either received a pass (most commonly for family reasons) or were in Israel for only half of the year. None of them were interviewed. The groups of students that were present were not compared against each other at a cohort level. Though students from different schools arrived at different points in their rabbinic journeys, had different institutional affiliations which dictated some different experiences, they were mostly addressed together as progressive American rabbinical students. The differences between student cohorts could have been explored more in-depth and would doubtless have yielded telling results about nuance in Israel Year experiences. However, these types of comparisons were not part of the original research plan and major differences did not independently emerge with force.

Since so much data had already been collected, no follow-up interviews were conducted with the rabbinical students upon their return to the U.S. This complicates data retrospectively because there was no verification as to whether the students followed through with their plans for integrating or maintaining knowledge, skills, and habits they developed over the course of the year. There is also no data about how returning to the U.S. impacted their sense of self. In Israel, they negotiated between an American Jewish identity and the influence of the contexts of the Israel Year. How, though, did they renegotiate with their home context subsequent to their experiences of the Israel Year? This snapshot of one year, though lacking in some areas, did provide in-depth information about what experiences and interactions influenced the rabbinical students' self-perceptions of American rabbinic identity formation over the year.

Recommendations

Since this research speaks to people engaged in the education of rabbinical students and to the students themselves, the researcher feels obligated to offer a few policy recommendations. Identity formation takes place through interactions. The students interact with and within the contexts of the Israel Year with the end result of contributing to their rabbinic identities.

Filling in Gaps in the Formation Opportunities at the Intersection of Israel Year Contexts

The Israel Year was an intentional, organized collection of experiences for American rabbinical students. Interactions with the content of the various contexts of the Israel Year provided rabbinic identity input for the students. In some cases, the experiences and impact may have been unique to Israel; in other cases, the added value is limited. As stated previously, however, the formative power of the Israel Year lies in the nexus of these contexts—the institutions, place, time, and people—all experienced by the students within the context of their own identity journeys and shared through their narratives. The institutions' programs shaped the students into rabbis that have particular types of knowledge and skills, largely in line with the professional standards and communal needs of American Judaism. In order for Hebrew Union College, the Ziegler School, and the Jewish Theological Seminary to more fully capitalize on the Israel Year, I offer the following suggestions for adjusting and expanding programs.

The HUC Israel Year program is intended to form rabbis whose relationship with Israel is foundational to their rabbinic identities. The academic program was rich with

course offerings in Hebrew language and grammar, Bible, liturgy, history, and some Talmud and Mishnah. The Israel Seminar introduced them to Israeli society and communal institutions. The HUC Israel Year was a highly mediated experience—not only did the institution want a relationship with Israel to be foundational, it appeared that they had a particular type of broad, cross-sectional relationship in mind. Diversity of experience took precedent over reinforcement of existing traditions; the students' experiences were varied and broad, but not necessarily deep. HUC formed rabbinical students who had a “big tent” relationship with Israel, but not necessarily with Judaism. The gap in their connections with more traditional Judaism—not adoption of traditional Judaism, but exposure and an introduction to practices—hindered their ability to fully capitalize on interaction opportunities with a broader range of Israelis and Jews in Israel, including other rabbinical students.

Over the course of the year, the HUC students spent a lot of time learning Jewish content (knowledge), but they did not learn in a Jewish way (skills). In order to better reinforce the interaction-based learning and identity formation of the Israel Year, HUC should consider implementing a *beit midrash* pedagogical model. The interaction at the heart of this model provides a Jewish framework for engaging with classmates and information, regardless of the nature of that information. Though the curriculum at HUC incorporates a lot of Jewish text, the current pedagogy¹⁴⁴ does not maximize inter-student

¹⁴⁴ The pedagogical approaches employed in most HUC classrooms reflect a university lecture—or Berlin--model, wholly appropriate in regards to the Reform Movement's German origins, but possibly not as formation-oriented as a *beit midrash*. In the HUC library one afternoon, I happened across a row of bookcases labeled “Beit Midrash.” It also did not promote interaction or formation on its own though the books on the shelves were volumes of the Babylonian Talmud.

interaction. The students miss opportunities to have a direct relationship with the text and to build closer bonds with each other.

The Ziegler Israel Year program, by placing its students at the Conservative Yeshiva prioritized learning in a traditional Jewish way. The program shaped rabbinical students in the traditional mold of learned people who are comfortable learning in chevruta in a beit midrash and competent in engaging with texts as well as supporting resources including the Concordance and several types of dictionaries. The students developed relationships with the texts, with each other grounded in the process of learning, and with the CY. However, the lengthy yeshiva days did not leave much time to explore Israel. Some of the students—in particular Andy, Jill, and Eli—made a point of becoming involved in programs outside of the CY, whether social, cultural, or religious. On the whole, though, the program did not provide many opportunities to explore Israel in mediated or unmediated ways on a regular basis outside of school vacations and the interseminary Israel Experience Program. By learning text in a predominantly English language environment, the students also may not have had the linguistic skills to fully engage with Israel and Israelis when they did have time.

In order to better capitalize on the Israeli context, Ziegler and the CY may want to consider increasing Israel-specific programming and increasing the students' ability and aptitude to interact with the various Israeli contexts. These programs do not need to detract from learning text; in fact, many places of biblical and contemporary significance were within walking distance of the yeshiva and could enhance the students'

comprehension of the materials and deepen rabbinic formation by providing a more multisensory approach, one that capitalizes on the students' embeddedness in Israel.

At Schechter, JTS students spent their time learning and interacting in Hebrew, with each other, Israeli classmates, and faculty. JTS prioritized the Hebrew immersive experience, an experience that would have been difficult, if not impossible, to replicate outside of Israel. The students' more open course schedules gave them opportunities to use their Hebrew skills outside of the institution in self-guided travels within Jerusalem and in the rest of Israel. The students' language skills were reinforced and their cultural knowledge could be increased through their own initiative. The centrality of Modern Hebrew may not be entirely relevant to the daily work of an American rabbi, which is likely to more frequently engage with biblical or liturgical Hebrew, but it was nevertheless admirable.

The dearth of Israeli rabbinical students enrolled at Schechter (during that particular year) and the paucity of off-campus mediated Israel experiences meant that the JTS students missed out on professional networking opportunities. The Schechter students, most of whom were not Masorti, were primarily in classes with Israelis enrolled in Schechter's Masters' in Jewish Education program. Interacting with future Israeli rabbis would have increased the JTS students' social capital and professional networks. They had the skills to interact with leaders and rabbis—elites who will be their future, Israel-based colleagues—but the absence of mediated programs meant that they did not have ready access. Their travels and conversations with Israelis enhanced their language

skills, but the institutions missed an opportunity to assist the students in fully capitalizing on the Israeli context at a professional level.

In order for the Israel Year to have maximal impact on rabbinic formation, the rabbinical schools and the rabbinical students should capitalize on the proprioceptive, multisensory opportunities that the various contexts present. Engaged experience-based learning has the potential to shape rabbis deeply, even impacting their rabbinic habitus. This engagement may alter the rabbis that the institutions produce and influence the movements.

The HUC students' more direct interaction with text and each other in a chevruta context and exposure to traditions and traditional Judaism could deepen the future rabbi's knowledge, skills, and networks. Learning in an environment that supports direct engagement shapes the practice for direct engagement with Judaism and Jewish tradition. The rabbis may feel empowered, more knowledgeable, and less inhibited around more traditional Jews. Likewise, if people teach the way they were taught, changing from a frontal pedagogy to a shiur-seder pedagogy may ultimately impact Reform laity by increasing their direct and active engagement with Judaism, writ large. The engagement model does not seek to challenge the ideologies at the core of Reform Judaism, merely challenge the current approach.

Increasing the Ziegler students' engagement with Israel outside the walls of the CY could deepen their relationships with Israel and increase the relevance of studying in Jerusalem. Ziegler and the CY, by capitalizing on the embeddedness of text and Jewish history in that space could help the students achieve a more lasting level of learning by

adding a multisensory element. Integrating an immersive text learning experience with the location in which learning takes place may provide a more well-rounded educational experience. This models integration of text and context for the rabbis which they can then model for their congregations and communities.

A more engaged Israel Year experience for JTS students capitalizes on their language abilities by increasing their interpersonal interactions with Israelis as pre-professionals. Enhancing the JTS students' opportunities to interact and network with Jewish leaders, organizations, and the Masorti movement in Israel could increase their social capital in Israel and also increase the visibility of Conservative Judaism in Israel. A more visible Conservative Judaism may be educative for Israelis who have never encountered or heard of Masorti Judaism and may ultimately increase the number of Israeli rabbinical students enrolled at Schechter who would then enhance the American students' networks with future Israeli colleagues. This creates a more visible Conservative Judaism within the contexts of the Israel Year.

Interactions and embedded experiences shape identities. Adjusting how the rabbinical students interact with what, where, and with whom they are learning may increase the formation potential of the Israel Year and later influence the types of rabbis produced and possibly aspects of the Reform and Conservative movements.

Formation Requires Intention

Rabbinic identity formation was not addressed outright during the Israel Year. Kanarek and Lehman make a strong case that assignments and structures that promote

and require reflection are necessary for seminary students to achieve integration of “cognitive, personal, and professional identities” (2013:18). With the exception of HUC’s weekly evening discussion section facilitated by local rabbis—which elicited lukewarm responses from students—formation was not an explicit topic. During particular sessions and exercises within the interseminary Israel Experience Program, the students were prompted to reflect on their own identity development. However, these exercises were infrequent and disjointed. Students’ interactions with each other in chevruta were the primary space for identity work. Additionally, the interviews conducted for this research also provided space for reflection at three times throughout the year. However, serving as a catalyst for formation was a byproduct, not a goal, of the research. Within the context of learning, prompted by the texts, they reflected on their own practices and considered new approaches to living Judaism. However, absent any assignments, the students did not have a way to track their own development.

Each rabbinical program should develop an approach to formation in order to more fully capitalize on and have the students retain the sense of self they develop during the Israel Year. Something as simple as a formalized, reflective journal-writing assignment, for example, could have enhanced the students’ experiences of the Israel Year through more actively integrating their experiences into their identity narratives. Sharing their experiences with each other perhaps in chevruta may reinforce both individual identities and group membership and cohesion.

Looking Ahead

The data collected through this research allow for many more directions of analysis. Without conducting further research, one could pursue several avenues of inquiry into the Israel Year experiences of American rabbinical students by delving further into students' experiences in any of the contexts. In particular, gender deserves a closer look as a factor that shaped the students' experiences. This research also sets the foundation for a longitudinal study of rabbinic identity formation, perhaps with a comparative angle between the movements. Following this cohort of rabbinical students could lead to a "Seven Up" style project whereby a cross-section of students are revisited in order to assess what they have been doing in their careers and lives, with an eye toward the progression of rabbinic identity and the continued impact of Israel Year on rabbinic knowledge, skills, habits, and sense of self.

As another approach, focusing on the relationship with Israel and applying typologies developed by other scholars may provide a more organized insight into rabbinic identity formation. In their study of ten HUC students during and following their Israel Year, Muszkat-Barkan and Grant (2015), for example, developed a continuum of bi-cultural negotiation strategies (Bridging, Struggling, and Visiting) to explain the students' relationships with Israel, Israelis, and Jewish peoplehood.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Students classified as Bridging were "striving to create a strong connection between their American and Jewish collective identities. . . . [and] motivated to create alignment between their American-Reform Jewish identity and their sense of Jewish collective belonging" (Muszkat-Barkan and Grant 2015: 42). Students who were Struggling "often found their emotions at odds with their intellectual understandings of Israel and Jewish Peoplehood and its alignment with their Jewish American identity" (ibid.). They wanted to belong, but, among other things, they did not have the facility with Hebrew. Visiting students had strong

Even though this current study did not employ Muszkat-Barkan and Grant's continuum to explain rabbinical students' relationships with the Israeli context, the types nevertheless make sense with the vast majority of the rabbinical students across all schools falling in between the Bridging and Struggling categories (very few would definitively be in one or the other) with just a few in the Visiting category. A more in-depth analysis based on the continuum but using the students from this current study could contribute nuance to the model and provide a different analytical angle—one that includes Conservative rabbinical students—for the current data.¹⁴⁶ The data collected for this study would lack that element. Research on rabbinical students is scarce; using models collaboratively may both clarify and deepen the field of study.

Closing

On the HUC lawn for the IEP closing program, the HUC Israel Year director speaks: "Most of us sitting here today are about to leave this place," he says. We have had "precious moments together. We're moving on, but part of us remains here in the hearts of colleagues and places we've left our mark. We take with us memories and people in our hearts." Following an evaluation and light dinner, the program closes. The assembled group sings a few songs including "Hinei ma tov u'manaim, shevet achim

American identities, viewed Judaism as a religion instead of a civilization, and related to Israel intellectually but did not feel a strong emotional connection.

¹⁴⁶ Of note, Muszkat-Barkan and Grant conducted follow-up interviews during the rabbinical students' third or fourth years of rabbinical school. They were looking for salience of Israel relationships and bicultural negotiation following the return from Israel. In general, the longer the time spent away from Israel, the less the students had to negotiate relationships and thus the weaker the relationships became.

gam yachad” [*“how good and pleasant it is for brothers to sit together”*] and there is a request to stay and make a minyan so that someone is able to say the Mourner’s Kaddish.

American rabbinic identity formation is a complex process, rooted in contexts, experiences, and interactions. In the overarching context of the Israel Year, American rabbinical students experienced Israel with an eye toward both the personal and professional aspects of rabbinic identity. The students made sense of and shared their formative experiences and relationships through identity narratives. The Israel Year challenged the rabbinical students as it enriched who they are and aim to be. Being there—being in Israel for that year with their future colleagues—was important for the rabbis they will become.

APPENDIX A

Student Demographic Summary Statistics

This study includes 38 students studying full-time for the entire year who grew up in the United States and intend to be rabbis in the United States, including 21 men and 17 women ranging in age from 22 to 42 years old, with most clustered in their late 20s. To note, during the Israel Year, HUC students are in their first year, JTS students are in their second year, and Ziegler students are in their third year of rabbinical school. By the time the HUC students reach their third year, their average age will be higher than the average for Ziegler at this point.

	Number of Respondents	Men	Women	Average Age (Mean)
HUC	22	11	11	28.4 years
Ziegler	6	2	4	26.8 years
JTS	10	8	2	29 years

Table 1. Basic Statistics

The following charts provide a basic overview of the rabbinical students' participation in Jewish contexts and programs from childhood through just prior to rabbinical school matriculation. Taken together, the data reveal engaged people who grew up in mostly engaged Jewish households. As children, the now-rabbinical students had exposure to Jewish life in their homes and through Jewish community organizations and networks. When they began to assert their own agency in Jewish decision-making, they pursued Jewish programs, whether or not they were also engaged in non-Jewish or secular groups and institutions. Though the numbers of students vary between schools, the JTS students present as the most uniformly Jewishly engaged over the amount of the

life course covered thus far. The HUC students, though, display consistency within their cohort, which provides an overview portrait of the kinds of Jews that may end up being Reform rabbinical students.

The following tables provide just an overview of these students' experiences and may be the corollary to a future quantitative study. Any one of the following categories could be expanded upon and assessed more closely, though a comparison group of students with comparable engagement levels who chose other career paths would help provide insight on rabbinic identity trajectories. Looking at trends of experiences and engagement, it is little wonder that the rabbinical students, in reflecting on their lives, saw rabbinical school as a logical next step in their lives and as a professionalization of their Jewish identities.

	None	Minimal	Moderate	Active
HUC	3	2	4	13
Ziegler	1	-	2	7
JTS	-	2	2	4

Table 2. Level of Jewish Engagement in the Home

	None	Minimal	Moderate	Active-Lay	Active-Community Professional	Active-Clergy
HUC	3	3	2	10	1	3
Ziegler	1	-	3	3	2	1
JTS	-	1	1	1	-	3

Table 3. Family Engagement with Jewish Community (Institutions and/or Networks)

	Yes	No	Unspecified
HUC	1	21	-
Ziegler	1	7	2
JTS	3	3	-

Table 4. Jewish Day School Attendance

	Yes	No
HUC	19	3
Ziegler	9	1
JTS	6	-

Table 5. Hebrew School Attendance

	Yes – child	Yes – adult	No
HUC	19	3	-
Ziegler	9	1	-
JTS	6	-	-

Table 6. Had a Bar or Bat Mitzvah

	Yes – high school	Yes – adult	No	Unspecified
HUC	6	3	11	2
Ziegler	4	-	4	2
JTS	4	-	2	-

Table 7. Participation in Continuing Jewish Education

	Yes	No	Unspecified
HUC	6	13	3
Ziegler	2	6	2
JTS	3	3	-

Table 8. Jewish Summer Camp Attendance

	Yes	No	Unspecified
HUC	5	11	6
Ziegler	5	4	1
JTS	4	2	-

Table 9. Youth Group Participation

	Yes	No	Unspecified
HUC	14	6	2
Ziegler	9	1	-
JTS	4	-	2

Table 10. Jewish Engagement in College

	Yes – short-term	Yes – medium-term	Yes – long-term	No
HUC	11	3	5	3

Ziegler	4	3	2	1
JTS	-	2	4	-

Table 11. Israel Trip/ Program Participation

	Yes – teaching	Yes – congregation	Yes – organization	Yes – unspecified	None
HUC	9	2	7	4	-
Ziegler	3	1	5	1	-
JTS	5	-	-	1	-

Table 12. Jewish Professional Experience (NB: professional experience is required for admission)

APPENDIX B**Demographic Intake Survey for Students**

Name:

Rabbinical School and Year:

Age:

Marital Status:

Do you have children? If yes, how many?:

Hometown:

Most Recent Place of Residence:

College/University Attended:

Graduation Year:

Degree(s) Received:

(If Applicable) Graduate School Attended:

Graduation Year:

Degree(s) Received:

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol for Students, Stage 1 Autumn 2011

The goal of this interview is to learn about your journey to rabbinical school and your early impressions and experiences of being in Israel. I will also be asking you to reflect a bit on some of the larger questions about the place of Israel in the training of future North American rabbis. This is your space to share. I have an idea of the kinds of things that I'd like to hear from you and I'm interested in anecdotes and stories more than lists. I'll be guiding you through the interview, but I also want this to be what you need in terms of an opportunity to reflect on your year.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If there are questions you are uncomfortable answering, we can skip them. If at any point, you would like to pause or terminate the interview, please just let me know. You're welcome to leave at any point. You're invited to share as much or as little as you are comfortable doing. Everything is valuable and appreciated.

I. Basics

- a. Where are you enrolled here in Israel?
- b. Where are you enrolled in rabbinical school when you're in the U.S.?
- c. How long have you been in Israel? Have you lived here previously? If so, under what circumstances?

II. Background: Your Journey Thus Far

- a. Please tell me a little bit about yourself; that is, your Jewish journey growing up.
 - i. Where did you grow up?
 - ii. What kind of school did you go to?
 - iii. What sort of Jewish experiences (school, camp, synagogue, holidays, etc.) did you have and at what frequency?
 - iv. What were some events in your earlier life which you perceive to have been significant in your earlier development?
 - v. Which people (and their relationships to you) do you perceive to have been significant in your earlier development?
 - vi. Anything else?
- b. Moving forward in your journey, please tell me about your path to rabbinical school.
 - i. Why do you want to be a rabbi?
 - ii. Why did you want to go to rabbinical school?
 - iii. Was there a particular person or event that made rabbinical school a compelling option? Would you please tell me about the person and his or her relationship to you?

- iv. Did you consider training/have you trained for any other careers? If so, please explain.
 - v. If the rabbinate will be a second career for you, were there things that compelled you to switch?
 - c. Please reflect for me about the year so far.
 - i. What was your first week in Israel like? What did you do? Whom did you meet? Where did you go? What experiences stick out most in your mind?
 - ii. Please share some memories from orientation.
 - iii. What were some of your experiences early in the year, i.e. classes, Shabbatonim, tiyulim, etc.?
- III. The Profession of the Rabbi: An Idealized Portrait**
 - a. How do you define the tasks of a rabbi?
 - b. How do you define the ideal personal characteristics/personality/affect of a rabbi?
 - c. How do you define the goals (personal, professional, and/or communal) of a rabbi?
 - d. How do you think Israel fits into this picture?
- IV. Your Vision and Goals**
 - a. What are your goals for this year, both practical (i.e. improve Hebrew skills, etc.) and ideological?
 - b. What are your goals for your rabbinical school experience?
 - c. How do you see this year in Israel as enhancing and/or detracting from your training as an American rabbi?
 - i. What are you most looking forward to this year?
 - ii. What are you dreading?
- V. Meta Reflections and Expectations**
 - a. What has surprised you about Israel and/or challenges ideas that you had about Israel?
 - b. What expectations, if any, did you have about coming to live in Israel for a year?
 - c. Why do or don't you think that spending a year in Israel is important for being a Jew? For being an (American) rabbi?
- VI. Additional Bit**
 - a. Is there anything that you'd like to add or feel that I should have asked but didn't?

Request for Next Time

Please bring photos of different places you have seen/experienced/visited/lived in this year. There are no guidelines for what type of place, but you should be prepared to share a little bit about your relationship to each space and/or experiences that you've had in those spaces.

Thank you!!

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol for Students, Stage 2 February/March 2012

The goal of this interview is to learn about students' Israel year from their own perspectives. Which experiences, encounters, and interactions do they think are/were significant and/or meaningful, both personally and professionally? Students are encouraged to share anecdotes and stories, as opposed to providing play-by-play accounts.

The interview has three main sections: the calendar, school, and being in Israel. The first section gives the students the opportunity to walk me through a standard week, share both typical and exceptional Shabbat experiences, and describe particular memories from holiday observances/celebrations. The second section provides opportunities for students to explain experiences specifically related to school: classes, prayer services on-campus, co-curricular and extra-curricular programs both on and off campus, and how what they have learned impacts their lives. The final section addresses students' experiences of being in and interactions with Israel. This section includes school trips, traveling alone or with friends, reactions to current events, and memorable conversations the students have had with Israelis, specifically conversations wherein they explain what and where they are studying. I also ask the students to reflect on occasions during the year when they may have felt "rabbinic." The final question—presented again, in the same wording as from the first interview—asks students to assess whether they think the Israel year is enhances or detracts from their education as American rabbinical students.

- I. How have you been since we last met?**
 - a. Have there been any significant changes in your life since we last spoke? (e.g. change in relationship status, moved to a new apartment, passed a significant exam, made a new decision regarding the coming year?)
- II. The Calendar**
 - a. Walk me through a standard week in your life this year.
 - i. What kinds of routines do you have, if any?
 - b. Shabbat
 - i. Please describe your typical Shabbat this year. What kinds of things do you do? With whom? Where, if anywhere, do you usually go for services? Do you attend or host Shabbat meals?
 - ii. Please describe a particularly memorable Shabbat or Shabbat component, whether positive or negative. What made this experience memorable/special?
 - c. Holidays, both Jewish and American – Please share with me your memories, positive or negative, from the holidays that you've celebrated/observed during your time here. What did you do? Where did

you go? With whom? What did you find nurturing and/or frustrating about your experiences? Did you have any conversations or interactions that have stuck with you? How were the experiences different from and/or similar to your previous holiday experiences? Please describe any leadership roles that you had over the holidays.

- i. Summer: Shavuot, 4th of July, Tisha B' Av, Tu B' Av
- ii. Fall: Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shmini Atzeret, Simchat Torah, Halloween, Thanksgiving
- iii. Winter: Chanukah, Christmas, New Years, Tu B'Shvat, Valentine's Day

III. School

- a. Classes – Instead of giving me a run-down of your course schedule, I'm interested in knowing about the classes that you find either meaningful or not meaningful to you in your rabbinic education. Please share specific anecdotes of experiences, texts you've learned, or conversations that you've had in class.
- b. Prayer/Tfilah – Please describe the nature of your involvement with campus-based prayer services. Do you attend? Have/do you lead services, give sermons, or read Torah?
- c. Extra-/Co-Curricular Programs – Please describe whether or not you participate in any of the following programs, the nature of your involvement, and any stand-out memories that you have related to the programs.
 - i. Campus-based programs such as lunch-and-learns, workshops, the HUC colloquium on peoplehood, etc.
 - ii. Inter-seminary Israel Experience Program
 - iii. Hartman Rabbinical Students group
 - iv. Rav Siach
 - v. Encounter
 - vi. Parallel Lives
 - vii. Rabbis for Human Rights
 - viii. Etc.?
- d. In terms of what you have learned, is there anything in particular that you now incorporate into your life philosophy, personal rituals, beliefs, and/or theology? Please explain.
- e. Have you done any teaching this year? Please explain.

IV. Being in Israel

- a. School trips – Please explain any stand-out memories that you have from school-run trips or excursions. Where did you go? When? What made the trip memorable for you, whether for positive or negative reasons? What did you find meaningful or important? Did you learn anything in particular on the trip?

- b. Traveling/ going places on your own or with friends – Please describe any traveling that you have done outside of an organized school context, whether nationally or locally. What occasions prompt your travels? (Local excursions to the shuk and participating in the monthly pub quiz at HaGov count.)
- c. Current events – What political or social events stick out in your mind as being particularly momentous? For example, do you have any particular memories of the social justice “tent protests” or the release of Gilad Shalit?
- d. “Only in Israel” experiences – Please share any “only in Israel” experiences that you’ve had. For example, has a woman on a bus ever handed you her baby while she went to the front to pay the fare?
- e. Pivotal conversations, including conversations about being a rabbinical student – Please describe any conversations that you’ve had with Israelis that stick out in your mind, particularly conversations about being a liberal, American rabbinical student.
- f. Interactions with Israeli diversity – Please describe any experiences that you’ve had interacting with diversity in Israel, i.e. communities different from the Anglo, Ashkenazi, liberal community.
- g. Hebrew – Have you had any noteworthy experiences or a Hebrew language faux pas? Please describe.

V. Growing

- a. Has there been a time this year when you’ve felt “rabbinic” or like a rabbi? Please explain.

VI. The Israel Year

- a. Last time we spoke, I asked you if you felt that the Israel year enhanced or detracted from your training/education as a North American rabbi. How do you feel now, more than half-way through your year?

Thank you so much! I’m looking forward to catching up with you again towards the end of the school year!

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol for Students, Stage 3 April/May 2012

The goal of this interview is to learn about how you perceive your own growth over the course of the year and what you plan on taking back with you to the U.S. This is an opportunity for you to share with me your processes—where did you start the year and where have you ended? What was the Israel year experience like for you, both personally and professionally? What did you find to be nurturing and what did you find to be frustrating? I will also be asking you to reflect a bit on some of the larger questions that we've explored over the course of the year that have to do with the place of Israel in the training of future North American rabbis. This is your space to share. I have an idea of the kinds of things that I'd like to hear from you and, like last time, I'm interested in anecdotes and stories more than lists. I'll be guiding you through the interview, but I also want this to be what you need in terms of an opportunity to reflect on your year.

As always, your participation is entirely voluntary. If there are questions you are uncomfortable answering, we can skip them. If at any point, you would like to pause or terminate the interview, please just let me know. You're welcome to leave at any point. You're invited to share as much or as little as you are comfortable doing. Everything is valuable and appreciated.

- I.** How have you been since we last met?
 - a.** Have there been any significant changes in your life since we last spoke (e.g. change in relationship status, moved to a new apartment, passed a significant exam, made a new decision regarding the coming summer or year)?
- II.** Recent Holidays
 - a.** How did you spend the following holidays? Where were you? What did you do? Whom were you with? How were your experiences similar to or different from previous experiences?
 - i.** Pesach
 - ii.** Yom HaShoah
 - iii.** Yom HaZikaron
 - iv.** Yom HaAtzma'ut
- III.** Narratives of Growth. I'm interested in knowing how you perceive your growth over the course of the year in a few categories. I'm interested in things that you feel have been meaningful, valuable, and even frustrating for you as you continue to develop as a future American rabbi. Think of the year as a whole, from when you arrived until now.
 - a.** Knowledge of/ relationship to Jewish texts and subjects

- i. Where did you start, what were some pivotal or meaningful points along the way, and where are you now?
 - ii. What are you taking home/ next steps?
 - b. Development of “Rabbinic” skills (possibly leadership in some way or prayer, divrei Torah, etc.; also, text/learning skills)
 - i. Where did you start, what were some pivotal or meaningful points along the way, and where are you now?
 - ii. What are you taking home/ next steps?
 - c. Relationship to the Jewish calendar (particularly things like Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, fast days, and holidays)
 - i. Where did you start, what were some pivotal or meaningful points along the way, and where are you now?
 - ii. What are you taking home/ next steps?
 - d. Relationship to Israel (including interactions with Israel and Israelis, as well as relationship to Hebrew)
 - i. Where did you start, what were some pivotal or meaningful points along the way, and where are you now?
 - ii. What are you taking home/ next steps?
 - e. Relationship with other rabbinical students (friendship or pre-professional networks), whether from your school or not
 - i. Where did you start, what were some pivotal or meaningful points along the way, and where are you now?
 - ii. What are you taking home/ next steps?
 - f. Have you had any relationships of note in either a mentor or mentee capacity?
 - i. Where did you start, what were some pivotal or meaningful points along the way, and where are you now?
 - ii. What are you taking home/ next steps?
- IV. Identity – The rabbinic identity is a combination of a personal Jewish identity and a professional identity. Those two aspects become increasingly intertwined over the course of your education and career. I want to address each separately here, though. If and when they overlap, that’s fine.
 - a. Understanding of yourself/growth of your personal Jewish identity (i.e. things like confidence in expression of symbols, taking on rituals, language choice, practices that have meaning, awareness of X, theology, etc. etc.)
 - i. Where did you start, what were some pivotal or meaningful points along the way, and where are you now?
 - ii. What are you taking home/ next steps?
 - b. Understanding of yourself/ growth of your pre-professional identity
 - i. Where did you start, what were some pivotal or meaningful points along the way, and where are you now?
 - ii. What are you taking home/ next steps?

- V. What has been your biggest frustration this year (e.g.: maybe a goal that you didn't meet or a missed opportunity)?
- VI. What has been your biggest success this year?
- VII. What have you loved this year?
- VIII. Perceptions of Rabbis
 - a. Given your experiences during this year, how has your perception and definition of who a rabbi is or what a rabbi does changed, if at all?
 - b. Where does Israel fit into this picture?
 - c. Why do you want to be a rabbi? How has this changed over the course of the year?
 - d. Have you felt "rabbinic" since we last spoke?
- IX. Each time we speak, I ask you whether you feel that the Israel year enhances or detracts from your training specifically as a North American rabbi. How do you feel now, at the conclusion of your year?
- X. Is there anything else you would like to add or think that I should have asked, but didn't?

Thank you so much!! It has been an absolute pleasure learning from you this year. Please keep in touch. Really. I mean it.

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CURRICULUM VITAE



