



הסוכנות היהודית לארץ ישראל

The Jewish Agency for Israel

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Building Future Jewish Leadership: A Panel Discussion

The Challenge

One of the central goals of educational and communal activity among young adults is the cultivation of future leadership for Jewish projects, institutions and communities. Intuitively, it is widely believed that the successful engagement of the best and brightest of today's young people will significantly improve the quality and vitality of Jewish life in the future. The priorities, passions and commitments of these future leaders, a product of their personal biographies and conscious educational intervention, will shape and inform the future agenda of the Jewish world. Their attitudes and emotions regarding religion and tradition, the State of Israel, Jewish Peoplehood and the pressing challenges of Jewish life will carry great weight in determining the composition of the Jewish world of tomorrow.

On the Campus

Tomorrow's Jewish leaders are today's Jewish University students. Such students are at a crossroads in their intellectual and personal development. They are at a period crucial to the formation of their individual and social identities --a period in which they are exposed to different intellectual challenges, come into contact with different social milieux and pressures; a period during which ideas and conceptions assumed to be self-evident will be challenged. For the vast majority, the college campus and community, both within the classroom and without, pose profound challenges, and offer intriguing possibilities. Enhancing the extent and quality of educational and communal intervention in helping University students meet those challenges and grow into those possibilities is therefore a critical common agenda across the spectrum of the global Jewish community. This intervention should focus both on the campus as an arena where Jewishness and Israel are often challenged and attacked, and on the

lecture hall and classroom, where disconcerting messages about Israel are often presented in the guise of academic objectivity and authority. In fact, such intervention must start even earlier, including preparation for the campus as part of ongoing work with youth and the importance of pre-campus long-term programs in Israel, with specific leadership cultivation components.

Relevancy

The blatant expressions of anti-Israel hostility and tension which have rocked certain University campuses throughout the world, linked in many cases to the resurfacing of latent anti-Semitism as well as new and dangerous forms, have highlighted for many the need to equip students with the ability to respond to their critics and reassert their own beliefs and commitments about their Jewish identity and their identification with Israel. One of the main tasks for leadership development on campus today is in the field of Israel Advocacy. Beyond this, leadership training must also equip campus activists with tools and approaches to widen the circles of Jewish involvement on campus. Campus leadership involves making Jewish life relevant and compelling to today's University aged student, including adopting new language and conceptual frameworks appropriate for the contemporary Jewish world. A global approach to developing Jewish student leadership must also take into account the considerable geographical diversity of the Jewish world. The importance of developing student leadership within Israel imbued with Jewish Zionist commitment should not be overlooked.

Cultivating Future Communal Leadership

The cultivation of Jewish student leadership has a profound impact on the future of Jewish leadership and thus on the essence of Jewish life. The transition from the campus to the community and community leadership is an especially critical juncture. It is essential that we inspire the best and the brightest of our students to commit themselves to lay and professional Jewish community service and, where possible, assume leadership roles in NGOs and politics. This is not an automatic transition. We must deal with issues of attrition, of prioritization, of leadership approaches, and we need to more carefully consider the Jewish aspects of leadership within overall leadership orientation. Can we distinguish between Jewish leadership and leaders who as Jews have an impact on the larger society?

For this reason, the situation of Jewish students and Jewish student leadership is a collective concern that requires the best of our thinking and the collective

commitment of time, energy and resources.

This context sets the stage for deliberation on three sets of central questions:

- a) **What are the prime challenges facing Jewish University students around the world? What is the role of leadership in meeting these challenges? How can campus leadership be cultivated through intervention before young people begin University study? What role can Israel play in such intervention? What factors stemming from cultural diversity should be taken into account? Are the breeding grounds for young leadership in Israel different than in the Diaspora? How can partnerships between Diaspora and Israeli communities be used to further development of leadership cadres? What is the value of an Israel experience in the formation of Jewish leadership and in the development of Jewish identity? In the cultivation of future Jewish leaders, which tasks may be best undertaken by local Jewish communities and which by outside sources (e.g. the Government of Israel, the Jewish Agency, international Jewish organizations, etc.)?**
- b) **What is the nature of Jewish leadership in the University setting? What are the prime issues on the agenda of Jewish student leaders? How can Jewish student leadership successfully meet the challenge of widening and deepening Jewish commitment among students and of strengthening the engagement of University age students with Israel? Do we need Jewish leadership on the campus or do we need Jews to be leaders on the campus? What role can Jewish on-campus societies and student unions**
- c) **play in helping to cultivate leadership and to maintain Jewish identity and Israel awareness among students?**
- d) **What is the relationship between Jewish student leadership and future leadership for Jewish communities and the Jewish People? What is the impact of today's campus challenges on the cultivation of future leadership? What are the types of Jewish capital—literary, social, experiential and psychic---which can be developed among students to grow effective future Jewish leadership firmly committed to and engaged with Israel?**