

Ask Jethro: Two Chicago Campus Initiatives to Reach and Assess Jewish Emerging Adults

Scott Aaron, Josh Feigelson, and Daniel Libenson

Ever since the 1990 National Jewish Population Study showed a record high percentage of intermarried Jews coupled with a record low percentage of affiliation, serious efforts have been made toward better understanding the sense of Jewish identity and community of the current Jewish young adult generation, often referred to as the Millennials (Cousens, 2007). Research shows that life experiences, rather than institutional engagement, are the portals to reaching the Millennials, who place a greater emphasis on Jewish meaning rather than membership. Three important contemporary fields of study have come to the fore of our understanding why this is the case: Emerging Adulthood, Experiential Education, and Jewish Peoplehood. These fields have changed the way we understand the stage of adult life that encompasses ages 18 to 30, and Jewish organizations have begun to adapt their work with young adults to meet them where they are rather than wait for them to affiliate with the larger community. Knowledge gleaned from these fields has impacted training and programming provided to its affiliate staff by Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, the largest agency to serve Millennials in North America (Zwilling, 2010). This article will focus on two local programs that have been incorporating the lessons learned from these fields to reaching and impacting the Jewish Millennials they serve on their respective campuses. These initiatives, at the Hillels at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University, will be used as a basis from which draw lessons for the field of Jewish education as a whole.

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging Adulthood is a substratum of Developmental Psychology, a field that developed over the course of the 20th century. Along with theories of development that span the life course, such foundational theories as Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development, Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development and Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development, theoreticians have specifically focused on the developmental stage of young adulthood, encompassing roughly the ages of 18-30, include Arthur Chickering and William Perry among others (King, 2009, and Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). In 2000, a refined theory of development for this age group was introduced by Dr. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett of Clark University who coined the term Emerging Adulthood and explained that

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[h]aving left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000, p. 469).

Arnett noticed that in technologically advanced societies such as North America's, increased amounts of education are required to advance in the work force. Hence, adults who once entered the workforce at age 22 with a bachelor's degree now tend to extend their time in school to including master's degrees and even doctorates. They are accordingly delaying traditional life experiences that accompany full adult independence such as marriage, child-bearing, home acquisition, and membership in religious and cultural institutions. They are not embracing commitment in the same way as previous generations and this transience is leading to less of a personal interest in affiliation with mainstream communal institutions such as houses of worship, social/fraternal organizations, and political parties. Emerging Adults are more reflective than previous generations, seeking more personal meaning for their lives, a characteristic exemplified in an increase in social justice activities. They also seek a spiritual understanding of the world but are reticent to be bound by a religious system. Socially they seek intensive, intimate relationships with a diverse range of peoples and are skeptical of broad moral assumptions and large cultural and political institutions. They think in shorter time spans – academic cycles and amount of hours expected of them to achieve a goal – and are unwilling to make long-term commitments beyond the completion of their academic milestones. In short, in contrast with those in this age range in previous generations, the longer path to maturation of today's Emerging Adults is marked by more intensive social and personal experimentation, change and risk than previous generations with an emphasis on short-term impact rather than long-term consequences. It is important to note that there is currently little data published in this area specifically focusing on Jewish Emerging Adults, and what does exist often addresses religious, as opposed to ethnic or cultural, aspects of Jewish identity. Hence the work being done with Jewish Emerging Adults based on developmental theory is designed with extrapolated information rather than a solid amount of tested and specific data.

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Experiential Education

Experiential education has been recognized as an important mechanism for education in general over the last century, but the Jewish community has intentionally embraced it as such in only the last two decades¹. In 1991, Dr. Barry Chazan published an influential article entitled “What is Informal Jewish Education?” in which he demonstrated how informal education is applied in the Jewish community and proposed how it could be improved (Chazan, 1991). His article was published just as the results of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study (Council of Jewish Federations) mentioned earlier were being absorbed by the community. After much soul-searching, the community attributed these facts as resulting from decades of poor supplementary Jewish education and a flurry of resources and effort was put in to alternatives to supplementary education including informal Jewish education experiences that were always known to be impactful but were not necessarily understood as educational, namely camping, youth groups and Israel travel. In 2003, Chazan updated his theory in an on-line article entitled “The Philosophy of Informal Jewish Education.” In this article Chazan laid out eight defining characteristics of successful Informal Jewish education. These include:

1. Person-centered Jewish Education
2. The Centrality of Experience
3. A Curriculum of Jewish Experiences and Values
4. An Interactive Process
5. The Group Experience
6. The Culture of “Jewish” Education
7. Education that Engages
8. Informal Jewish Education’s Holistic Educator

¹ The term Experiential Education is interchangeable with Informal Education. There is ongoing debate in the Jewish education field about whether or not there is a clear distinction between formal and informal education as separate disciplines, but that goes beyond the scope of this article. The authors do subscribe to the separate field theory though and have treated it in this article in that context.

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Synthesizing these characteristics, Chazan refined his definition of Informal Jewish Education:

Informal Jewish education is aimed at the personal growth of Jews of all ages. It happens through the individual's actively experiencing a diversity of Jewish moments and values that are regarded as worthwhile. It works by creating venues, by developing a total educational culture, and by co-opting the social context. It is based on a curriculum of Jewish values and experiences that is presented in a dynamic and flexible manner. As an activity, it does not call for any one venue but may happen in a variety of settings. It evokes pleasurable feelings and memories. It requires Jewishly literate educators with a "teaching" style that is highly interactive and participatory, who are willing to make maximal use of self and personal lifestyle in their educational work. (Chazan, The Philosophy of Informal Jewish Education, 2003, pp. 15-16, italics original)

While Chazan's theoretical construct was initially applied to Jewish educational programming for youth, it was not until 2000 though that a major endeavor was specifically designed around this theory for Emerging Jewish Adults through the implementation of the Birthright Israel program. This effort, with Dr. Chazan as the founding Education Director, sought to connect Jewish Emerging Adults to Israel through a free ten day travel experience to Israel. While the actual long-standing impact of the trip on participant's long-range Jewish and Zionist identity is still being analyzed and debated, it is clear that there is a positive behavioral and attitudinal effect from the trip experience on the participant (Saxe, et al., 2011). Jewish communal agencies that work with large numbers of Jewish Emerging Adults now understand the value of training their staff in informal education theory and techniques and actively craft their programmatic work as informal education experiences.

Jewish Peoplehood

Jewish Peoplehood is also a relatively new sociological prism through which to view today's Jewish community. Drs. Ezra Kopelowitz and Ari Engleberg, leading researchers on Jewish Peoplehood, note:

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The idea of “the Jewish People” is ancient, but the concept of Jewish Peoplehood is new, both to the English and Hebrew languages.... The intensive use by Jewish organizations of the Peoplehood concept and intellectual interest in the topic in almost all cases began no earlier than 2000.... [I]t is enough to note that major organizations such as the United Jewish Communities, the UJA New York Federation, the Jewish Agency for Israel, the Israel Ministry of Education, the Diaspora Museum, the Avi Chai Foundation, the American Jewish Committee and many other smaller organizations are either making the Peoplehood concept into an organizing principle in their organizations or initiating high profile programming with an explicit focus on Jewish Peoplehood – all since 2000 (Kopelowitz & Engelberg, 2007, pp. 3,4).

What exactly Jewish Peoplehood entails is debated among scholars, but Kopelowitz and Engleberg have described three principles that are generally accepted as definitive criteria.

1. **A multi-dimensional experience** – The concept of Jewish Peoplehood assumes an understanding of Jewish belonging that is multidimensional.
2. **Rejection of strong ideology** - Strong ideological frameworks that over emphasize one dimension of the larger Jewish experience are not an acceptable starting point for understanding how individuals connect to the Jewish People.
3. **Connections between Jews, not Jewish identity** - Those concerned with the Jewish Peoplehood concept do not focus on the identity of individuals, but rather on the nature of connections between Jews. The concern is with common elements and frameworks that enable Jews to connect with one another both emotionally and socially (Kopelowitz & Engelberg, 2007, p. 9).

Critics of Jewish Peoplehood often dismiss it as a secular concept that rejects religious identity, but that is inaccurate. Peoplehood expands the concept of the Jewish people to encompass all theologically Jewish identities as well as non-theological, and reorients the Jewish community on a social spectrum rather than a religious hierarchy. It is allowing the community at large to envision itself as holistic and organic rather than dichotomous e.g. observant/non-observant, Israeli/Diaspora, left/right, so that the entirety of the Jewish community is equalized. This prism is allowing the Jewish community to contextualize historic arguments of the last century such as denominationalism, intermarriage, support for Israel and gender roles in to part of a

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larger communal gestalt rather than litmus tests for authentic communal membership. In terms of Jewish Emerging Adults, Jewish Peoplehood has allowed Jewish educational and social institutions to reframe their work with this population so that Jewish observance is not the primary filter for Jewish identity processing and growth.

The development of the two program models described here has been influenced by lessons learned from these three fields of study. As the reader will see, both programs have incorporated the developmental reality of Emerging Adulthood, the creativity of Experiential Education and the permission of Jewish Peoplehood to craft unique and successful mechanisms to meet and support Jewish Emerging Adults on their respective campuses where they are in their life course. While neither program is a universal solution for every Jewish Emerging Adult's needs, they both offer pertinent entryways for Jewish Emerging Adults undergoing their own personal definition process.

The Ask Big Questions Initiative at Northwestern University

One of the leading thinkers in moral development for Emerging Adults, Sharon Daloz Parks has persuasively written that the years of emerging adulthood are marked by an exploration of some of life's biggest questions: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going? Who will be my partners? Who what will be my legacy?

Typically, in the years from seventeen to thirty a distinctive mode of meaning-making can emerge, one that has certain adult characteristics but understandably lacks others. This mode of meaning-making includes (1) becoming critically aware of one's own composing of reality, (2) self-consciously participating in an ongoing dialogue toward truth, and (3) cultivating a capacity to respond—to act—in ways that are satisfying and just. (Daloz Parks, 2000, p. 6)

Ask Big Questions was developed with the vision that Hillel could contribute to a campus culture in which these questions animated campus life. If the university were a place where *all* students were asking these questions, then Jewish students would be more likely to

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engage with Jewish tradition—either through their own initiative or through active engagement strategies implemented by Hillel professionals. As students unpacked the big questions of their lives, they would look for sources of meaning to help them, and Hillel would be the place for them to find guidance and partnership. In this sense the inspiration for the initiative was none other than Moses, who had the presence of mind to look at the burning bush and ask a question about it. The initial aim of Ask Big Questions was to simply help students to ask the questions that Jewish tradition is ready and able to help them explore.

The story of Ask Big Questions begins in 2005, when Fiedler Hillel at Northwestern University began a new method of public engagement with the university and the Jewish community. Hillel staff started hanging banners on its building and on campus. The banners literally asked big questions, and were usually timed to be meaningful within the context of the Jewish, secular, or university calendar. For instance, at Rosh Hashanah (which was also fell near the beginning of the academic term) a banner asked, “What will you do better this year?” At Thanksgiving a banner read, “What are you thankful for?” And during fraternity and sorority recruitment a banner inquired, “Who do you belong to?”

The purpose of the banners was to position Hillel as an asker of meaningful questions. Hillel’s web address was printed on them, but there was no specific follow-up to the banners on the website or through programming. As time went on, the banners gained notice and attention on campus and began to provoke conversation. In 2007, Hillel International partnered with the Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI) to promote “public space Judaism” projects and offered grants to individual campuses for initiatives along these lines. Under the guidelines of the grant program, initiatives needed to create opportunities for Jewish engagement in public spaces on campus—quads, coffee shops, student centers, etc. The banner campaign seemed like a natural fit, and JOI awarded Northwestern University Hillel a grant to develop the banner campaign into a larger initiative, Ask Big Questions (ABQ), complete with print media, a website, and live events.

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The grant proposal was submitted in May, and awarded in July, after students had already left campus. The website and the whole initiative were scheduled to launch in the fall when students returned. Thus the initiative was developed over the summer, largely independently by the campus rabbi. In October the rabbi engaged a number of students to create a student leadership team. These students were drawn from both traditional populations and from among the newly-created Campus Entrepreneurs Initiative (CEI), which was composed of Jewish students who had previously been uninvolved in institutional Jewish life on campus. CEI was aimed at developing participating students as Jewish social entrepreneurs and engaging their uninvolved friends in Jewish life. CEI is described below in greater detail in the section discussing programming at the University of Chicago Hillel.

The grant and the process that led to it shaped ABQ in three significant ways. First, the grant enabled the design and creation of a website that would develop the questions asked on the banners. Instead of pointing students to www.nuhillel.org, which at that point featured no content to follow up on the questions, students would be directed to www.askbigquestions.com, which would feature short video interviews in which students provided answers to these questions, a short blog post contextualizing the question in Jewish terms, and links to Jewish explorations of the questions.

Second, the banners were integrated with the website and other print materials, including post-it notes and posters, to create a unified print culture that sparked interest and established a brand identity for the initiative as both meaningful and fun—and public. Third, and perhaps most significantly, events were held in the student center Starbucks, and featured the campus rabbi interviewing popular professors of whom many, but not all, were Jewish. The inclusion of professors in the initiative was critical to student participation, as their presence was intended to communicate to students that these conversations were “safe spaces,” i.e. spaces in which they would not be proselytized and which would adhere to campus norms of intellectual honesty. At the same time, the events created alternative spaces for students and professors to interact outside the classroom and for professors to speak beyond their academic discipline.

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Between October and December 2007, six questions were asked on campus, online, and in “fireside chats” with professors. These questions were,

- “Where do you feel at home?”
- “Would you die for a cause?”
- “What are you thankful for?”
- “What do you say no to?”
- “What is the best advice you’ve ever received?”
- “What day in your life would you live over?”

In keeping with JOI’s emphasis on Jewish engagement through public space projects—with the goal of further Jewish engagement in more identifiably Jewish space—students at each event were asked to fill out a small information card indicating their interest in different types of programming. These cards were to be used in following up with participants, either by Hillel professionals or student groups.

Northwestern Hillel funded the initiative independently once the grant funding expired in December 2007. In February of 2008, the student leadership team and the Campus Rabbi informally evaluated the effectiveness of the initiative. Among the successes of the initiative were the website, which, though not as robust as desired, was still remarkable in integrating video, writing, and comments. The print materials were viewed as successful in creating a playful yet serious feeling.

But the evaluation also revealed a point of significant tension around both the events and the website. According to anecdotal feedback, in many students’ minds it was not clear what ABQ was trying to be: was it aiming to be a Jewish initiative open to the general public? Or was it a secular initiative (as indicated by the presence of the professors in the events), with a Jewish twist? In either of the cases, the Jewish students organizing the initiative felt discomfort and tension: either ABQ should be more unabashedly Jewish, with discussions taking place in Hillel and the Jewishness prominently featured as part of the advertising for the events, or it

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should become fully open to all points of view, not just Jewish ones. This tension was expressed by both the students from more institutionally-affiliated backgrounds and those in CEI.

An example helps to illustrate the case. In January 2008, the rabbi and the student leaders decided to develop a new print product, a booklet of ten cards, each of which would feature a big question on the front and follow up questions on the back. The cards could be used by individuals or groups to create their own ABQ conversations. In keeping with the Jewish engagement aims of the original grant, the rabbi included quotes from Jewish sources along with the follow-up questions on the back of the cards. When one of the student leaders saw the draft, she commented that it didn't make sense to her: either the cards should feature quotes from a number of different spiritual and religious traditions, or they shouldn't feature Jewish quotes. In her mind, ABQ needed to be either no-faith or multi-faith, but it could not be only Jewish, at least not if it aimed to have a public profile. (While the student leaders ultimately liked the idea of including quotes from multiple traditions, time constraints forced them to proceed with postcards without the quotes altogether.) In addition, though the rabbi's facilitation and reflections were valuable, the centrality of the rabbi to the conversations and the writing of the blog posts on the website generated suspicion among the students as to whether there was an ulterior religious motive to the overall program.

In light of this, the student leadership team opted for a change: ABQ would become independent of Hillel, and would instead aim to engage the entire breadth of the university community. With help from the rabbi, the group secured funding from the university provost and the department of philosophy, which enabled the student leaders to redesign the website and build an infrastructure for growth. The rabbi became an informal advisor, the chair of the philosophy department was engaged as an additional advisor, and the initiative continues to be run by a student board (still disproportionately Jewish, but including a more diverse representation of the student body than when the initiative was part of Hillel). Additionally, while ABQ continues to sponsor public events with professors, students on the board now also organize "wine and cheese" events in student living rooms for students to talk to other students.

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Lessons Learned From ABQ

Ultimately Hillel, other religious institutions, cultural organizations, and even academic units such as the philosophy department, benefit from a campus culture that promotes students' exploration of big questions. A rising tide lifts all boats. ABQ has more credibility as a university entity—with Hillel as a key partner—than as one solely sponsored by Hillel. And while the public events of ABQ may no longer feature Jewish conversation as readily as they did in the initiative's early days, the methodology and philosophy of big questions is one that has come to strongly influence Jewish conversation within Hillel. These points are discussed below.

Jewish Emerging Adulthood: Jewish students are no different from their peers in being interested in the big questions of emerging adulthood. These questions matter to them, and when they have safe spaces in which to discuss them, they respond. But as evidenced by ABQ's ultimate move away from Hillel, many of them can be quite sensitive to where and how they integrate Jewish tradition into their exploration. The students who pushed for a clearer identity for ABQ—either fully Jewish or fully non-sectarian—felt literally out of place discussing Jewish values in a public setting. In their minds, that kind of discussion was more appropriate for a more clearly Jewish setting, such as the Hillel building or a Hillel-sponsored event that was clearly Jewish in its advertising and public image. ABQ did not mention anything about Jewish explorations in its advertising, and thus the Jewish students felt that when other students showed up to an ABQ event and found the rabbi emceeding, they would feel surprised. Whether non-Jewish students actually felt this way is less important than the perception among the Jewish student organizers that they would: it reflected their own notions about where Jewish life was appropriate and where it was not, specifically that Jewish life needs to be conducted in Jewish space, or, if conducted in public space, needs to be clearly and unabashedly Jewish. These tensions are emblematic of the struggle in Emerging Adults to find personal guidance and meaning from social structures such as religion while still being mistrustful of them as limiting or exclusive of others.

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Experiential Education: Northwestern Hillel's educational philosophy has become rooted in big questions. Northwestern Hillel staff have become accustomed to engaging students in such questions, and students themselves have become increasingly comfortable using big questions (e.g. "What's the best advice you've ever received?") in place of small questions (e.g. "What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?") to introduce a group to one another. This is in keeping with person-centered practice as identified by Chazan. Asking big questions like this as part of the communal culture has stimulated a broader student interest in studying traditional Jewish texts as sources of life lessons. Text study now regularly begins with a personal question and then moves to a big question, which frames the study of text. Text study at first blush is assumed to be a formal educational tool, but it fits quite well in to Experiential Education in the right context. Text is rarely if ever presented as a stand-alone entity, but is instead framed by personal and collective exploration of big questions. Thus, for example, a text study on the creation narrative of Genesis 1-2 would be framed by an exploration of a big question: "Where do you feel at home", or "What is our purpose in the world?" This would be preceded by an immediate, personal question that engages this student in his/her own experience, for example: "Think of the place you feel most at home. Jot down a few words that describe it, or draw a picture of it," followed by communal sharing of responses. This preparatory work situates Jewish text learning within the personal narrative of the student, and creates a level playing field for all participants when studying the text. With more traditional students, it also helps them to understand the text within a larger context of human life. Text thus becomes an interlocutor in the student's personal narrative, which furthers an educational vision in which every student is writing the story of his/her life in dialogue with the enduring story of the Jewish people.

Jewish Peoplehood: Central to both the discussion approach and the larger conceptual framework of ABQ is a replacement of dogma or Truth (with a capital T) at the center of the conversation with truths espoused by the individual participants and articulated in a context of community. ABQ changes the paradigm of dialogue from one in which there is only one truth to a pluralistic acknowledgement of multiple truth claims. A discussion in which participants

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answer the question, “Where do you feel at home?” and such follow-up questions as, “What defines home?” and “Can we have homes together?” is very different from a discussion on the question, “Do Jews have an historical claim to the land of Israel?” While the latter is the kind of question we have tended to focus on—not only with regard to Israel, but with our religious lives in general (think: “Intermarriage—right or wrong?” or “Who is a Jew?”)—educators working with emerging adults have long known that such either/or discussions are frequently non-starters at best, and damaging at worst. An ABQ approach thus takes an entirely different tack, aiming for rich conversation that is at once anchored in personal narrative and a larger sense of peoplehood. ABQ’s approach exemplifies the connective nature of Jewish community rather than an ideological one, and it allows student participants to express a multiplicity of truths that could all be understood as Jewish. ABQ provides emotional and social connectivity while also understanding the holistic nature of Jewish identity and community.

The Jethro Initiative at the University of Chicago

Newberger Hillel at the University of Chicago began to design a new approach to Hillel work in 2006 based on the understanding of emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental and educational phase of life. Reasoning that a new developmental phase called for a new institutional structure, The Jethro Initiative was launched. The Initiative was so-named because it drew inspiration from the story in chapter 18 of the book of Exodus describing the visit to the Israelite camp of Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro the Priest of Midian.

Traditionally, Hillel’s work had been accomplished largely through a “club model”—Hillel functioning as the “Jewish club” on campus—and through “programming.” The generally-implicit theory standing behind Hillel’s work was that students came to college with relatively well-formed Jewish identities that could be sustained through college if Hillel provided regular Jewish events and a physical space in which Jewish activity was comfortable and encouraged. As more and more Jews arrived at college without well-formed Jewish identities in the 1990s, various experiments were tried to “engage” these students in Jewish activities, but the underlying model was not changed very much. Hillel still tried to attract students to a central

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Jewish location by putting on and marketing a variety of events and by focusing on Shabbat and holiday services and meals in the central location.

At the same time that University of Chicago Hillel began to rethink its model, Hillel's Schusterman International Center (SIC), based in Washington, DC and the main support institution for campus Hillels, had recently adopted a strategic plan that grew out of a national survey of Jewish students that highlighted just how different Jewish students were in 2006 compared to the 1960s and 1970s, or even the 1980s and 1990s. Working in parallel, the SIC and University of Chicago Hillel converged on the idea that relationships, rather than programs, were the key to the Jewish engagement of these students.

To paraphrase Tolstoy, committed Jews are all alike, but every disengaged Jewish student needs to be engaged differently. Of course, committed Jews are not really all alike, but their commitment often means that their needs can be met within the existing structures, which is not true for disengaged students. As many Jewish organizations have discovered especially through efforts working with emerging adults, mass marketing and mass programming are not effective with a population of individuals used to servicing their particular niche interests through the internet. That emerging adults are particularly self-focused only exacerbates the issue: emerging adults take it as a point of pride that they would not stoop to participating in an experience that was not specifically designed for people just like them. It quickly became apparent that a strategy built around a central location that was trying to broadcast from the core to the periphery was not going to be successful.

As the staff of the University of Chicago Hillel came to understand emerging adulthood as an extended transition from childhood to adulthood—as Arnett (2000, p. 473) puts it, “the period of life that offers the most opportunities for identity exploration in the areas of love, work and worldviews”—its leadership drew inspiration from another time of exploration, namely the Israelites' sojourn in the wilderness as they transitioned from being slaves in Egypt to being free people in Canaan. At the beginning of this journey, Moses' father-in-law Jethro, the Priest of Midian, arrives at the Israelite camp and sees that Moses has put into place an

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ineffective organizational structure. Moses' centralized approach has made the people utterly dependent upon him; worse, the inefficient system exhausts both Moses and the people (who are forced to wait on line all day to talk to him) and is not effective at reaching most of the people most of the time. Jethro advises Moses to set up a broad-based leadership structure, with leaders of groups as small as ten people. Moses is to select capable leaders and train them, and these leaders will do the day-to-day work, leaving Moses to deal with only the most difficult issues.

When this story is applied to Hillel's challenges with emerging adults, two fundamental insights in Jethro's advice are apparent. First, young people need to feel individually known and cared for in order to feel part of something; and second, the organization's central leaders and structures cannot give every individual that feeling, and certainly not while also planning and implementing the institution's broader programming.

The first step, then, was to question how to give every Jewish student on campus the feeling that he or she is personally known and cared for by someone in the Jewish community. From the Jethro story and from experience, it was clear that Hillel's full-time staff—even if it grew substantially—would never be able to accomplish this gargantuan task. Jethro's advice to Moses was to appoint non-professional leaders of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands, and this advice might be practical for a campus community as well. With a grant from the Covenant Foundation, University of Chicago Hillel invented an approach of its own, and also built on the SIC's Campus Entrepreneurs Initiative.

The SIC launched the Campus Entrepreneurs Initiative (CEI) in 2006. The idea of this project is to hire a number of student interns (usually between eight and twelve per campus, which is more a factor of limited funding than any kind of magic number) and to train each student to be a kind of Jewish community organizer. Each intern is then responsible for establishing and maintaining 60 relationships with uninvolved Jewish students in their campus community. The interns themselves are generally students who have not previously been involved in Jewish life on campus but are attracted to the internship opportunity, so

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theoretically these students better understand their uninvolved peers and are likely to be able to relate to them. CEI interns also typically design programmatic initiatives for their peers and also recruit their contacts for Birthright Israel trips and other intensive Jewish experiences.

At the University of Chicago, the CEI model was adapted and modified in a few key ways so that the interns could essentially function as Jethro's "leaders of tens"—that is, the level of leadership closest to the people.. A training curriculum was built around Jewish texts so that the interns would start to see the relevance of Jewish ideas to their own lives—they are participating in a leadership education program in order to become effective community organizers, and they discover that these texts are capable of teaching leadership and community organizing—and would become increasingly able to talk to their friends about why Jewish "stuff" was actually interesting and compelling. A set of on-campus experiences were also designed, such as a monthly "Mega-Shabbat" Friday night dinner that took place outside the Hillel building (and thus felt less like an activity of the central Hillel institution), to which interns could invite their peers so that they could have a rhythm of positive Jewish experiences that might start to become a habit. Like Jethro's leaders of tens, CEI interns' job was getting to know "tens" — that is, each individual student — and making them *feel* known and cared about, and then linking these friends and contacts into a web of Jewish activity and establishing relationships between them and the next group of leaders.

The Covenant Foundation grant allowed University of Chicago Hillel to experiment with that next level of leadership, analogous to Jethro's "leaders of fifties"— more removed from the people's day-to-day experience, but also more able to connect students with substantive and meaningful Jewish content and experiences. Keeping in mind the need for individual attention, the resistance to mass marketing and mass experiences of emerging adults in the internet age, and their expectation of connecting to others through niche interests, University of Chicago Hillel hired what it called "adjunct educators" to work with small groups of students, assembled around shared interests. These adjunct educators were post-college adults who were hired to work for ten to fifteen hours per week to connect with twenty or thirty students in the context of small group activities and one-on-one interactions. Where the CEI interns

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were previously uninvolved in Jewish life, the adjunct educators were people living adult lives in which being Jewish was well integrated into their other interests. As such, they could serve as role models for students, establishing plausibility structures for the students to imagine their own Jewish adult lives.

As the CEI program and the adjunct educator program have co-evolved, University of Chicago Hillel has found that the winning strategy is to connect one or two CEI interns with an adjunct educator who shares an interest with them. Based on this shared interest, interns are able to connect their friends with the same interests to the adjunct educator, who is able to offer a deeper and more substantive Jewish experience than the intern can. One illustrative example involves an adjunct educator who is both an experienced informal Jewish educator, stemming from long experience in the Jewish camping world, and a certified Yoga instructor. The adjunct educator connected with a CEI intern who had a passion for Yoga, and together they quickly built a Jewish Yoga community of about twenty students that meets weekly. Students who come to Yoga every week—many of whom started off as the intern’s friends or part of their target engagement group—grew close with the adjunct educator and had frequent coffee dates and conversations about their lives and concerns. These conversations allowed the adjunct educator to raise Jewish questions and to discuss Jewish issues. Over time, many of these previously uninvolved students applied for Birthright trips and other high-impact experiences, attended Mega-Shabbat and other regularly occurring activities, and even applied to become CEI interns.

During the execution of and experimentation with these projects, University of Chicago Hillel also began to develop a model of Jewish emerging adult development that was based on a traditional Jewish text. It became apparent in the course of these projects that students move through three phases of Jewish engagement. In the first stage, students who begin with little to no interest in Jewish matters can be connected through CEI interns and initial positive experiences and, after regular participation in low-intensity experiences like Mega-Shabbat or intern-created initiatives, can become more open to more content-rich experiences, such as a Birthright trip or an adjunct educator’s small groups. After these experiences, students enter

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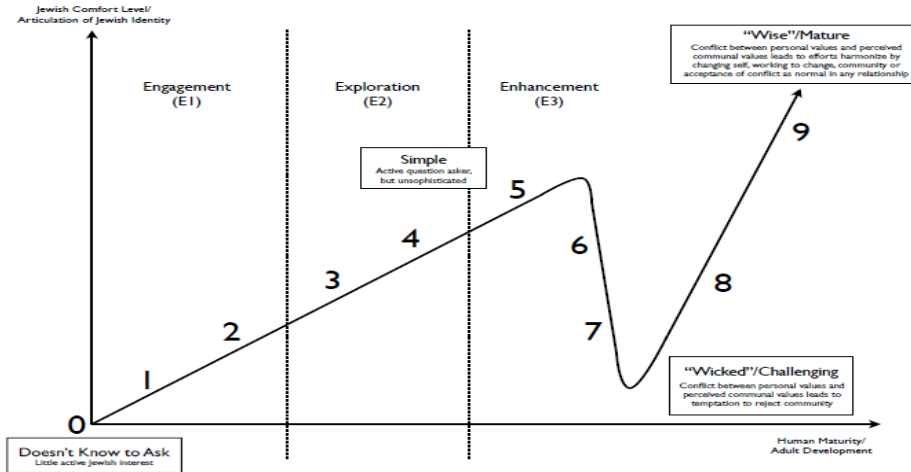
the second stage, becoming more active seekers of Jewish experiences—engaging in what looks like a kind of “dating”—until they develop a sense of themselves as Jewishly committed. In the third stage, this internal sense of commitment must be nurtured and maintained, as even committed students are still emerging adults—a developmental stage in which non-commitment is the norm—and backsliding or outright rebellion and abandonment of prior commitments are not unusual.

University of Chicago Hillel developed a conceptual model that maps these phases onto the four children described in the Passover Seder—the child who does not ask questions, the simple child, the rebellious child, and the wise child (see illustration below). While no two students go on precisely the same path, this conceptual model is broadly applicable and helpful in describing where a student currently is and what sorts of experiences might help her move toward increasing interest in or commitment to Jewish life. The conceptual model is used to train new staff and to design specific educational experiences targeted at helping students move from one stage to the next, as opposed to simply creating “positive Jewish experiences” aimed at an undifferentiated mass audience.

For example, the recognition that a period of alienation (the rebellious child) is normal and common led to an evaluation of what sorts of experiences could be made available to students when they are feeling alienated. University of Chicago Hillel staff realized that, because alienated students would by definition be uninterested in attending programs, the only tool available would be relationships with other people. At that point, Chicago Hillel began to design a mentoring program that would try to establish mentoring relationships between trained volunteers—Jewish adults from the community—and students before the students entered the “rebellious” phase so that when students became alienated, they would still be in close contact with someone who could help them reconnect when the time was right.

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For funding reasons and demographic reasons, Chicago Hillel’s focus to date has been the engagement of uninvolved students and those at the earlier stages of Jewish exploration. As it has succeeded in engaging more and more of these students, it has recently begun to focus more on building more content-rich experiences that help students engage more deeply and begin to build mature adult identities as committed Jews, understanding that this commitment will manifest itself very differently for different students. While students who develop a strong interest in exploring Jewish life are more open to programs aimed at an undifferentiated large audience, an individualized approach—or at least a small-group interest-based approach—is still far more effective. A key challenge is to design approaches that can provide this individualization in a cost-effective and affordable way. Recently, for example, University of Chicago Hillel has begun to experiment with a new internship in which it will train more engaged and knowledgeable students to design substantive and innovative Jewish experiences for their peers. This project balances the affordability of interns with the greater depth needed to satisfy and maintain the interest of students who have entered the second stage—the simple child—described above.

As the Jethro Initiative continues to develop, University of Chicago Hillel is moving rapidly toward accomplishing its goal of inspiring and empowering every Jewish student at the University of Chicago to make an enduring commitment to Jewish life.

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Lessons Learned From the Jethro Initiative

Jewish Emerging Adulthood – The Jethro Initiative used the knowledge that Emerging Adults exhibit two seemingly disparate behavioral trends, namely that they are narrowly focused on their own experience while not secure enough in themselves as they transition from childhood adolescence? to feel completely independent in their self-identity. By creating a programmatic process that allowed for exposure to secure Jewish adults who are experts in specific areas that individual students find of personal value, Jethro could work with the developmental conditions of the students to provide role models and mentors for the students' own developmental journey. Chicago Hillel was also able to place its observations about Jewish student development in a specifically Jewish context using the parable of the four children from the Passover Seder.

Jewish Experiential Education – The Jethro program recognized a fundamental point of reaching students at a developmental level was to lead with experience in order to create conditions of acceptance for identity development stimulus. Whether the experiential medium was music, yoga, cooking or others, all of them provided a common experience for the participants with the potential Jewish role model who both empowered the student to master a personally valuable skill set and created a trusting relationship to explore a common Jewish identity through the prism of the shared medium. The experience itself was truly a self-learning one through the hands of a skilled teacher and role model.

Jewish Peoplehood – By intentionally not prioritizing or focusing on religious or theological rubrics of Jewish identity and instead placing the priority on common interests among Jews rather than Judaism as the common interest, Jethro implemented an intentional peoplehood approach to Jewish identity. Theology and practice was never addressed unless the student raised it and there was no expectation that it would ever come up otherwise. Of course, as expected, students did raise it with the adjunct educators who were trained to allow the student to lead the conversation and not respond with any answer that was not authentic to the educator's own identity. Judaism became part of the discussion, not its focus, and students

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could come to whatever point they were ready for with it on their terms and at their own pace. In other words, they came to it when it suited their developmental interest and process.

Conclusion

The common lessons of both Chicago Hillel programs is that a theory-based approach and an understanding of a specific population and its dynamics can be valuable tools in designing and implementing impactful educational programs that succeed in reaching them in depth. Both programs were designed for the individual to find their own meaning within them, to access them at their own pace, and to see them as a resource in their own Jewish growth in whatever way the individual was ready to develop their personal Jewish adult identity. This approach can be modeled not just on campuses like those in Chicago, but on campuses around the Jewish world.

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