



The Hertog Study

CHABAD ON CAMPUS

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Needle Tower, 1968
Smithsonian
Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study, commissioned and funded by the Hertog Foundation, and conducted by a team of academic researchers, was undertaken to learn about Chabad on Campus International, an organization that seeks to enhance Jewish identity and practice among Jewish college students at almost 200 American college campuses. Campus centers are run by Orthodox married couples trained at rabbinical schools and seminaries run by the Chabad-Lubavitch movement.

The study was designed to learn who comes to Chabad at college campuses, how Chabad works with undergraduate students, and what impact Chabad involvement during college has on the post-college lives of young Jewish adults.

This Executive Summary begins with a synopsis of the study's major findings, and then presents a chapter-by-chapter overview of the contents of this report.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- » Chabad on Campus attracts students from a wide range of Jewish backgrounds. Relatively few are Orthodox.
- » Many students are attracted initially by the social scene, food, and family environment at Friday night Shabbat dinners, rather than an interest in Jewish learning or ritual.
- » College alumni who were more frequent participants at Chabad during college had higher scores on post-college measures of Jewish attitudes and behavior than those who were less frequent participants, once other influences on post-college attitudes and behaviors were taken into account.
- » The apparent impact of involvement with Chabad during college is pervasive, affecting a broad range of post-college Jewish attitudes and behaviors. These include religious beliefs and practices, Jewish friendships, Jewish community involvement, Jewish learning, dating and marriage, emotional attachment to Israel, and the importance of being Jewish.

- » The impact appears to be greatest among those who indicated they were raised as Reform and those who were raised with no denominational affiliation. Effects are slightly smaller for those raised as Conservative. Based on the measures used in the study, Chabad participation appears to have little impact on those raised as Orthodox.
- » Relatively few students change their denominational affiliation to Orthodox as a result of their involvement with Chabad on Campus, and virtually none subsequently choose to identify with the Chabad-Lubavitch movement.
- » The data suggest that the majority of those who are frequent participants are affected in ways that bring them closer to the mainstream Jewish community after college.
- » Personal relationships are central to Chabad's work with students. Greater involvement with Chabad and subsequent change in Jewish belief and practice are most likely to occur when a student develops a personal relationship with the Chabad rabbi or the rebbetzin (the rabbi's wife).
- » Gender matters. Men tend to be closer to the rabbi and women tend to be closer to the rebbetzin.
- » Relationships with the rabbi and rebbetzin tend to continue after college, especially among those who were frequent participants at Chabad during college.
- » Of those undergraduate students who participate in Jewish activities on campus, most attend both Chabad and Hillel. There are smaller groups of students who attend one and not the other.
- » In some respects, Chabad and Hillel offer similar engagement opportunities. At the same time, the two present very distinctive differences in style, substance, and programming.

CHAPTER 1: STUDYING CHABAD ON CAMPUS

As of the fall of 2016, Chabad on Campus International, the umbrella organization for campus-based Chabad work, has a presence at 198 American college campuses. Prior to 2000, Chabad operated at less than 30 campuses. Over a relatively short period of time, Chabad has become part of the campus establishment at virtually all American campuses with sizable bodies of Jewish students.

Chabad centers on campus are led by married couples who are graduates of rabbinical schools and seminaries run by the Chabad-Lubavitch movement. Rabbis and their wives (referred to as rebbetzins) adhere to Orthodox Jewish belief and practice. They take their inspiration from the teachings of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, who guided and expanded the movement until his death in 1994.

Chabad centers strive to welcome all Jewish students regardless of their Jewish upbringing or sensibilities. The couples work to create welcoming, attractive, and fun Jewish social environments. In the words of the Chabad on Campus website (www.chabad.edu), they seek to create a “home away from home” and to “ensure that students graduate as stronger and more empowered Jews than when they entered.”

Rabbis and rebbetzins hope that through the caring they show and the lifestyle they model, students will be drawn to explore and embrace Jewish practices and teachings. In addition, rabbis and rebbetzins hope that the feeling of Jewish community they create on campus prepares students to participate in a local Jewish community post-college wherever they may end up living.

Despite the seeming disparity between the Orthodox orientation of Chabad and the more liberal social and religious values of many Millennial Jews, Chabad attracts sizable numbers of Jewish students from non-religious backgrounds. While there have been numerous studies of Jewish college students, no

systematic research prior to this study has specifically focused on how Chabad affects the Jewish students who participate.

This study seeks to explore three core questions:

- » *Who comes to Chabad on college campuses?*
- » *What is the nature of Chabad's work with students on campus?*
- » *What is the post-college impact of Chabad on Campus?*

To address these questions, the authors conducted both qualitative and quantitative research at 22 Chabad campus centers across the United States with the cooperation of Chabad on Campus International. Qualitative data included interviews and/or focus groups with rabbis and rebbetzins, current students, alumni, parents, faculty, university officials, and Hillel leaders at a sample of the campuses. Quantitative data was obtained by surveying alumni. Using email lists acquired from all 22 of the centers, an online questionnaire asked alumni about:

- » Jewish upbringing prior to college
- » Involvement with Chabad, Hillel, and other Jewish organizations as an undergraduate
- » Current Jewish involvement and beliefs
- » Post-college involvement with Chabad

The analysis utilized more than 2,400 responses from alumni ages 21 to 29 who graduated in 2007 or later.

CHAPTER 2: WHO COMES TO CHABAD ON CAMPUS?

The work of Chabad varies in accordance with the Jewish backgrounds of the students who come to Chabad. Students' Jewish upbringing, in conjunction with the overall character of Jewish life at a particular campus, interact to affect who comes to Chabad, why they come, how often they come, and the impact Chabad exerts on their Jewish lives.

Survey respondents were raised in the following Jewish denominations: Orthodox (11%), Conservative (39%), Reform (32%), with no denominational affiliation (10%), other (8%). These varied across schools — different schools had different mixes of student backgrounds.

In contrast with the broader Jewish young adult population in the United States, Chabad draws a larger percentage with Conservative denominational backgrounds and a smaller number raised with no denominational affiliation.

About three-quarters of respondents (76%) attended both Chabad and Hillel at some point during their undergraduate years. About one in six respondents (16%) never attended Chabad as an undergraduate but nonetheless appeared on a list provided by a Chabad center. Among respondents who attended Chabad at least once, 88 percent were not Orthodox.

Respondents were divided into three categories of participation at Chabad: none/low (53%), moderate (25%), and high (22%).

Respondents were more likely to participate if they were raised Orthodox, Conservative, or with no denominational affiliation, had attended day school, had two Jewish parents, had some Chabad involvement prior to college, or had a conservative political orientation. Respondents were less likely to participate if they were raised Reform or had a liberal political orientation.

Survey data indicated that most respondents felt welcome at Chabad. In response to the statement: *Chabad was a welcoming space for Jews from all backgrounds*, those raised Orthodox were most likely to choose “to a great extent” (75%). Those raised Reform were least likely, with about half (52%) choosing “to a great extent.”

Those who did not attend Chabad either lacked interest in any Jewish offerings on campus, preferred Hillel, or held liberal social or Jewish values that in their mind ran contrary to Chabad’s values and practices.

Interviews and focus groups indicated that the social scene, food, and the warm family environment, especially on Friday nights, were the main draws to Chabad initially for many students, rather than an interest in Jewish learning or ritual.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS THE NATURE OF CHABAD’S WORK WITH STUDENTS ON CAMPUS?

Interviews suggest that seven core operating principles underlie Chabad’s work with college students on campus.

Love Every Jew

Chabad theology maintains that the Jewish people are as a single soul. The concept of *ahavas Yisrael* — loving every Jew — is at the heart of every interaction with students.

Every *Mitzvah* Matters

Chabad theology views the performance of any Torah-based *mitzvah* as fulfilling a commandment that brings the individual performing the *mitzvah* closer to God. Thus, any *mitzvah* a student does, even if only performed once, is considered a spiritual achievement.

Being a Chabad Rabbi and Rebbetzin is Not a Job, It is a Mission

For Chabad rabbis and rebbetzins, working with students is not a job with a set number of hours per week for which they receive a salary. Their mission involves a long-term commitment to be the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s “emissaries” at a particular campus.

Personal Relationships are Central

Rabbis and rebbetzins strive to build personal relationships with students.

Chabad Centers are a Family Endeavor

One of the primary ways that Chabad creates a warm social environment is by modeling traditional Jewish family life.

Chabad Strictly Adheres to Jewish Law

Chabad rabbis and rebbetzins are strictly guided by Orthodox *halacha*, Jewish law. Despite their scrupulous personal observance, emissaries do not consider students who do not follow these practices to be any less Jewish, and they do not impose these practices upon them.

Chabad is Inclusive, but Not Pluralist

All Jewish students, regardless of background and upbringing, attend the same events, and all are welcomed regardless of their beliefs or practices. Chabad does not see it as their purpose to teach students about differences among the various streams of Judaism.

Rabbis and rebbetzins bring about change in Jewish identity and practice among students by expressing interest, warmth and caring. Relationships with rabbis and rebbetzins evolve as students grow closer to them. Students, in the context of this burgeoning personal relationship, gradually become more receptive to encouragement regarding Jewish practice. Male students developed closer personal relationships with rabbis, and female students with rebbetzins.

Friday night dinners with a lively, warm social atmosphere and free home-cooked meals, sometimes attended by more than 100 students, are the primary gateway to greater Chabad involvement. Since it is difficult to develop personal relationships with individual students during these large events, rabbis and rebbetzins also hold more intimate Shabbat gatherings.

Other approaches used by Chabad to deepen personal relationships and foster change include encouraging students to volunteer, having one-on-one meetings to discuss personal issues or Judaism, holding group classes on Jewish topics, and encouraging participation in Birthright Israel.

Relationships with rabbis and rebbetzins often continue after graduation. Years after graduation, three out of five (60%) survey respondents who had participated frequently during college had been in touch with their campus rabbi or rebbetzin within the past year.

Chabad's approach to change is incremental. Full Orthodox observance might be hoped for but is not expected. Each individual *mitzvah* is considered a spiritual achievement. Rabbis and rebbetzins are realistic about how much change is possible. Accordingly, survey respondents reported relatively little pressure from rabbis and rebbetzins to become more religiously observant. Relatively few students change their denominational affiliation to Orthodox as a result of their involvement with Chabad on Campus and virtually none subsequently choose to identify with the Chabad-Lubavitch movement.

Rebbetzins play an important role, sometimes teaching the same classes that the rabbi teaches. They also teach classes for women only, covering topics such as love, relationships, and marriage. The presence and availability of the rebbetzin is especially important for female students.

Both the rabbi and the rebbetzin see one of their most important roles as opening up their homes and families to Jewish students and modeling observant Jewish family life for them. Young children of the rabbi and rebbetzin are often present at Chabad events.

Promoting in-marriage is a universally held Chabad value. Rabbis and rebbetzins discourage those with whom they have developed a personal relationship from dating someone who is not Jewish, and are disappointed if a student with whom they had become close marries someone who is not Jewish. Rabbis regularly conduct weddings of alumni, traveling across the country or even overseas, but will only marry couples if the husband and wife are both Jewish according to Orthodox Jewish law.

The Chabad-Lubavitch movement is strongly pro-Israel and right-leaning on the spectrum of viewpoints toward Israel. On campuses where anti-Israel sentiments are visible and vocal, pro-Israel students view Chabad as a safe haven, knowing that they will find support and understanding from the campus rabbi and rebbetzin.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT IS THE POST-COLLEGE IMPACT OF CHABAD ON CAMPUS?

To ascertain the ways in which involvement with Chabad during college influences young adults, the study assessed Chabad's impact on 18 different measures of post-college Jewish engagement. The measures that were selected are indicators of a Jewishly engaged life, applicable to people across the Jewish denominational spectrum, and not at all exclusive to Orthodox Judaism.

Religious Belief, Practice, and Affiliation:

- » Belief in God
- » Frequency of lighting Shabbat candles
- » Attending Shabbat meals
- » Hosting Shabbat meals
- » Frequency of attending religious services
- » Synagogue membership and dues

Friendships, Community Involvement, and Learning:

- » Extent of Jewish friendships
- » Feeling part of a local Jewish community
- » Volunteering for a Jewish organization
- » Assuming a leadership role in a Jewish organization
- » Donating to Jewish organizations
- » Participation in a Jewish class or learning group

Dating and Marriage:

- » Importance of dating Jews
- » Proportion of dates that were with Jews
- » Importance of marrying a Jew
- » Choosing a Jewish spouse (among those who are married)

Israel:

- » Emotional attachment to Israel

Being Jewish:

- » Importance of being Jewish

The study employed a “dosage” model to assess impact. If Chabad does have an impact post-college, then alumni with higher levels of participation at Chabad during college should exhibit higher levels of post-college engagement. The greater the Chabad dosage during college, the greater should be the Jewish engagement after college.

The study employed a statistical technique called logistic regression. This approach enables one to see whether Chabad participation influences each of the 18 measures of Jewish engagement while statistically “removing” other influences on post-college Jewish engagement such as Jewish

upbringing, pre-college Jewish education and experiences, other Jewish experiences during college (such as Hillel participation), and the overall level of Jewish life at the college attended. The analyses looked separately at those raised Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and with no denominational affiliation.

Overall, across the 18 measures of Jewish engagement, those who were raised Orthodox had higher levels of current Jewish engagement in general, but were less likely to be measurably influenced by Chabad, as only small differences separated infrequent from frequent participants.

Those raised Conservative, Reform or with no denominational affiliation had lower overall levels of current Jewish engagement relative to those raised Orthodox. However, they appeared to be more influenced by Chabad participation, as large differences separated infrequent from frequent participants.

Differences between infrequent and frequent participation at Chabad during college were statistically significant across all 18 of the measures of post-college Jewish engagement among those raised Reform and Conservative, and 16 of 18 for those raised with no denominational affiliation. Among those raised Orthodox, only three of the measures showed statistically significant differences.

On some measures of Jewish engagement and for some denominational groups, moderate participation is sufficient to show impact. Other measures appear to require a higher dosage of Chabad.

The impact of Chabad is largest among those raised Reform and with no denominational affiliation. Effect sizes are slightly smaller for those raised Conservative. Chabad participation appears to have little or no impact on those raised Orthodox using these measures.

Two-thirds (67%) of alumni who had participated frequently during college sought out Chabad when traveling after college. There is not a strong inclination to affiliate with local Chabad centers after college.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The likely impact of involvement with Chabad during college is pervasive, affecting a broad range of Jewish attitudes and behaviors. These include religious beliefs and practices, Jewish friendships, Jewish community involvement, Jewish learning, dating and marriage, emotional attachment to Israel, and the importance of being Jewish. The data suggest that frequent participants are affected in ways that bring them closer to the mainstream Jewish community after college.

In some respects, Hillel and Chabad offer similar engagement opportunities. At the same time, the two present very distinctive differences in style, substance, and programming. Chabad's approach appears to be effective in reaching students despite its unorthodox approach and Orthodox foundations.

Of the 198 campuses where Chabad has a presence, the vast majority are not schools that draw high school graduates with strong Jewish identities looking for a campus that has an active Jewish life. Jewish students at these schools are more likely to have been raised Reform or with no denominational affiliation. Overall, most of the work of campus emissaries is with these types of students, where the data suggest the potential for change is greatest.