

## REPORT

### *Knowledge and attitudes of post high school Jewish-American orthodox students in Israel*

**April 2004**

#### Introduction

The post high school “year in Israel” has become a rite of passage for many, if not most, graduates of orthodox Jewish day schools in the United States. These programs typically involve a year or two of intensive religious studies, following which students return to the United States to begin college studies.

In the United States, the issue of activism on behalf of Israel has received considerable attention of late. Several organizations have been involved in bringing speakers to campuses while others have focused on training and education. An umbrella organization, the *Israel Campus Coalition*, was formed in 2002 to foster and promote Israel education and advocacy on campuses throughout country.

The fact that such a large cadre of future college students are present in Israel for an extended period of time presents a unique opportunity to prepare them for the challenge of confronting anti-Israel activity in the United States. It was assumed that these students in particular, given their strong Jewish education and level of religious observance, would have a base of knowledge and motivation to serve as natural leaders on campuses they would attend.

Over the 2003-2004 academic year, and under an initiative of the office of Minister Natan Sharansky, a group of volunteers and volunteer organizations met to discuss the possibilities of working with these students to develop a program that would prepare them to take part in pro-Israel advocacy in the United States. However, absent any empirical data concerning either the basic knowledge level of the students regarding the “hot button” issues of the conflict or their attitudes regarding pro-Israel activism, preparation for such a project would be incomplete.

In order to help develop this program, a survey of basic knowledge and attitudes was conducted among a random sample of the yeshiva/seminary students.

#### The survey

The survey instrument consisted of two parts. The first was a 25-question quiz, in multiple-choice format, with 4 choices per question. The second part was an 8-item attitude screen, using a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from “not at all” to “very much”.

For the “knowledge” part of the survey, questions reviewed areas related to modern Israeli and Zionist history, civil society in Israel, and issues central to the conflict and current political events in the country. The attitude survey attempted to ascertain motivation on the part of the students to participate in pro-Israel advocacy while in Israel and upon their return to the United States.

### The participants

Participants comprised a “convenience sample” of both male and female students studying in Jerusalem area institutions. While this presents a less than ideal sampling, administrative issues impeded collection of data in a more stratified fashion.

All participants were volunteers, and all information was anonymous. While about 100 students completed the survey, many more were approached but declined, citing either lack of desire or a concern (after quickly looking at the survey instrument) that they would not be able to answer questions correctly. Most administrations of the instrument were proctored, and in small groups. In several additional unproctored administrations, a pattern of questionable responses was noted, putting into doubt and subsequently invalidating many other protocols. The data ultimately reported is of the proctored protocols only.

Students appeared to represent a cross-section of those studying in Israel, coming from five separate institutions in the proctored group and many more in the unproctored sample.

Another group of about 50 students completed a modified fill-in version of the instrument. In this administration, answers were left up to the students for many of the questions. Data from this group is also not reported, although a review of the some of the answers will be discussed.

### Control group

A separate administration of the survey took place with a group of American students participating in a special 2-week course in Israel on pro-Israel advocacy. These students were from USA colleges and volunteered for the training in Israel. Questions for the control group were identical for Part A, but two items in Part B (relating to study in Israel and religious attitudes) were not relevant for the group and thus omitted.

### Administration

Administration of the instrument for the control group took place following completion of their course in January 2004. Administration for the yeshiva/seminary students took place over a two-month period from mid-January through mid-March 2004.

## Reasoning behind questions chosen

Appendix A provides results as well as the actual items of the survey instrument.

Questions chosen attempted to tap into knowledge of basic issues related to settlements, the “occupation”, UN resolutions and other arguments presented by pro-Palestinian Arab advocates. Among the four choices for answers, one was clearly correct, while the others were for the most part totally unrelated to the question. For individuals familiar with the issues, the choices should have not posed great difficulty. The survey was designed to take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

While anecdotal reports indicated that the group of students surveyed often have reasons for studying in Israel that are not necessarily related to Zionism or Israel-related activism, it was still thought that knowledge of Israel would be relatively high, as would motivation for learning more. Moreover, these students represent what is probably the “elite” of Jewish education in the United States, attending day schools for most of their life.

## Results and Discussion

The expectation was that students with the educational and religious background of the study’s participants would have a comprehensive knowledge of Israel; no less than their knowledge of other issues related to Judaism. Studying in Israel would ordinarily be thought to strengthen this knowledge, and certainly reflect a desire to learn and be involved more on Israel-related and Zionist inspired activities.

The results of the survey are open to interpretation, but appear to be indicative of major gaps in knowledge among the yeshiva/seminary student population. Motivation for pro-Israel activism also appears to be modicum at best, with attitude responses falling in the middle range of the Likert scale.

Among the control group, results were considerably different, especially in the knowledge component of the survey that tested awareness of and familiarity with facts related to the history of Israel and current issues of concern. These students came from varied backgrounds, but for the most part did not have the formal religious education or background that characterized the yeshiva/seminary group.

The yeshiva/seminary group had few answers where more than 60-70% of the students answered correctly, with only 25-35% (representing levels at or slightly better than chance) answering correctly on many others. Only about 65% were able to correctly define “Zionism”, and less than half had familiarity with basic issues such as refugees, the partition of Palestine, the British mandate, the Oslo

agreements or the Geneva Accords. Only 44% recognized that the Golan Heights is being demanded by Syria or that Yamit was part of territory returned by Israel to Egypt. Over 15% of the students were unable to correctly identify who Adolph Eichmann was while 50% were not able to identify Menachem Begin as being associated with the bombing of the King David Hotel.

On all items in the knowledge survey, the yeshiva/seminary group lagged behind the control group with gaps of from 5-45% per question, differences likely to approach statistical significance,

Attitudes among the yeshiva/seminary group were characterized by moderate responses. The only response that showed “moderately high” ratings was the question on the importance of being involved in pro-Israel advocacy. However, despite this, the motivation or willingness to participate in training was moderate at best. More telling was the fact that the group only attached moderate importance to learning about the Arab-Israel conflict during the year they are spending in Israel.

The control group showed answers that were at least “moderately high” on all items, demonstrating not only a recognition that pro-Israel advocacy is important, but also a willingness and motivation to put this into action by personal example. This is not surprising, since this group was a self-selected sample of activists who volunteered to further their education in this area.

Analysis of protocols of yeshiva/seminary students in the additional sample where fill-in questions were used showed a response pattern that a multiple-choice format (where correct answers were presented) would not reveal. For example, several students identified the “King of Egypt” in response to a question asking them to name an Arab leader that made peace with Israel. Some other answers were as follows: In response to a question asking what the Palestine Mandate referred to, students wrote, “The complete destruction of Israel” and “The Jewish state of Israel”. Many questions were simply not answered, and left blank. A question asking who was responsible for the bombing of the King David Hotel had several students filling in different versions of the phrase “Arab bastards”.

Fill-in protocols were not counted in the data presented.

All students had the option of adding comments to their protocols. Few in either group took advantage of this option, although comments among those that did in the control group were characterized by a desire for more Israel-related courses and appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the training. The yeshiva/seminary comments were generally less flattering in this respect.

Questions may be raised as to why the yeshiva/seminary students showed relatively low levels of both knowledge and motivation. From anecdotal reports, it

appears that many of these students, and the programs they attend, place minimal emphasis on learning or improving Hebrew or having social contact with Israelis or Israeli society. Their movement around Israel is often restricted (either by the schools or by parental mandate) further cutting them off from many of the experiences of mainstream Israel. They appear to have minimal exposure to current events in Israel and often spend extended periods during their year in Israel out of the country, such as during the Passover holiday break, when many students appear to choose being back in the USA over experiencing Passover and Yom HaShoah in Israel. Studies focus mostly on religious subjects, with few schools setting time aside for regular classes on Israel or Zionism

All this raises questions as to the nature of any Zionist identity that these students may have. While one cannot dispute the “love of Israel” that many seem to profess, the centrality of Israel as a major nationalistic (as opposed to religious) motif in their lives appears to be somewhat different from what one would ordinarily expect from students of this type. The fact that many students were reluctant to even participate in the survey for fear of not fairs well is also quite telling.

In terms of pro-Israel activism of USA college students, this population would certainly appear to have the “credentials” to be natural leaders. What appears to be needed, however, is an educational component that would provide these students with the facts of the conflict and the knowledge with which to effectively combat anti-Israel attitudes. If the attitude survey results are accurate, however, many students do not view this as something they would personally involve themselves in, thus placing in question the practical significance of any such training.

It is clear that the results found cannot be applied to all American yeshiva/seminary students in Israel. Methodological issues related to the survey certainly impact on some of the possible interpretations. The results do, however, match many of the anecdotal and impressionistic reports that Israelis with American day school backgrounds (who have contact with the yeshiva/seminary students through friends and family) have in general of the student population surveyed. A more in-depth and more stringently controlled study would confirm these impressions as well as validate the results found here. Some results point to possible trends that may have implications with regard to where the students received their secondary education or where they choose to attend college. Many students choosing to attend secular colleges appeared to have at least, if not more, knowledge than students choosing to attend Yeshiva or Stern College. Students from high schools that were associated with a more liberal religious philosophy also appeared to fare better. Among the control students, most did not attend Jewish day schools, raising questions as to what factors may account for their higher levels of motivation.

In spite of the results, it is clear that there is a cadre of students among this population that have both the knowledge and the motivation to serve as activists on campus. It is likely that this sub-group would self-select in any program that would be available and continue in their activism after their return to the United States. While most students do not appear to be “activist” types nor possess the desire to be so, this may reflect what is common in the Jewish population in the United States at large. What is of particular note here, however, is that this population is one that has received in-depth Jewish education and religious training, something that sets them apart from the population in general. One would ordinarily expect the numbers from this population who are interested in and knowledgeable about Israel to be at high levels. In practice, however, any efforts at recruiting activists from this population would probably do well to be focused and specific as to whom to select and invest efforts into.

American day schools may want to conduct their own studies of the matter and test the knowledge and attitudes their students have regarding Israel. Even more interesting would be an investigation of the reasons and motivations these students have for spending a year in Israel. Whatever the case, it appears that many of these students return home no more knowledgeable about Israel or the issues related to pro-Israel advocacy than they were prior to their leaving for the year.

These results also have implications for the many initiatives and pro-Israel campus activities that have taken place across campuses in the United States. While some of the programs are well-funded and involve considerable skill on the part of the educators and activists involved, one may ask if there is any solid evidence that there has been any change in the knowledge, behavior or attitudes of students that these efforts are designed to influence. Data on participation in pro-Israel activities is not readily available. Neither is data available that measure attitudes of Jewish students on campus and their knowledge of Israel and issues related to the conflict. Until such data is gathered, the effectiveness of any pro-Israel advocacy training effort remains an open question.

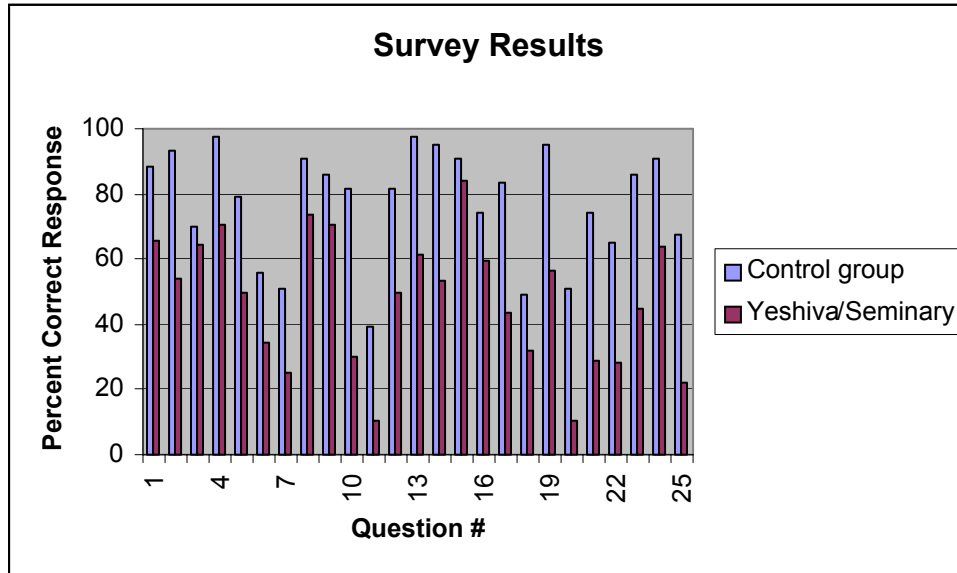
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## Appendix A: RESULTS

Raw results are presented below for both the 43 “Control” group participants (hasbara course students) and the 96 Yeshiva/Seminary students who completed the survey.

Percentages correct for each response are noted in **bold BLUE** for the control group (number on top) and **italicized bold VIOLET** for the Yeshiva/Seminary group (number on bottom). Correct answers are underlined in bold.

### PART A



- 1 “Zionism” is a concept that is best defined as:
- Membership in pro-Israel organizations
  - The national liberation movement of the Jewish people**
  - A movement that fights anti-Semitism
  - The rights of Israel to the West Bank and Gaza

**88.37**

**65.6**

- 2 Arabs in Israel:
- Cannot become full citizens
  - Are encouraged to emigrate
  - Are all Moslems
  - Have full rights as any other Israeli**

**93.02**

**54.1**

- 3 Israeli law is based on:
- The Talmud and Jewish sources
  - The US constitution
  - Laws promulgated by the Knesset**
  - The Israeli constitution

**69.7**

**64.5**

- 4 The right of Jews to a homeland was affirmed by:
- The Balfour Declaration in 1917**
  - The European Community in 1948
  - The Versailles Conference in 1919
  - The Yalta Conference in 1945
- 97.6  
70.8
- 5 Which one of the following fought for Israel in 1948?
- Yitzchak Rabin**
  - Bibi Netanyahu
  - Natan Sharansky
  - Ehud Barak
79.  
50
- 6 UN resolution 194 speaks about the following:
- The need for Israel to withdraw from Lebanon
  - The issues concerning refugees**
  - Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai
  - Conditions for peace with Jordan
- 55.81  
34.3
- 7 When Israel was created by the UN, which of the following was also created?
- The Arab league
  - The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)
  - An Arab state in Palestine**
  - Jewish settlements in Hebron
- 51.16  
25
- 8 Which of the following is the most important issue for the Arabs?
- The absence of civil marriage in Israel
  - Lack of funding for mosques in Israel
  - The occupation**
  - Lack of democracy in Israel
- 90.6  
73.9
- 9 Israel first began settling the West Bank and Gaza:
- Right before implementation of the Oslo Accords
  - After the Six-day war**
  - After the Yom Kippur war
  - After the Sinai campaign
- 86.04  
70.8
- 10 The "Palestine Mandate" refers to:
- The Turkish rule in the area
  - The Arab desire for a state
  - The British rule in the area**
  - The United Nations partition resolution
- 81.39  
30.2



- 11 Which of the following places in Israel is significantly Arab?  
 a. Beersheba  
 b. **Haifa**  
 c. Hanita  
 d. Degania  
 39.53  
 10.4
- 12 Who was responsible for the bombing of the King David Hotel?  
 a. Yasser Arafat  
 b. **Menachem Begin**  
 c. Osama Bin Laden  
 d. Gamel Abdul Nassar  
 81.39  
 50
- 13 Which one of the following Arab leaders made peace with Israel?  
 a. **Anwar Sadat**  
 b. Hosni Mubarak  
 c. Abu Mazen  
 d. Saeb Erekat  
 97.6  
 61.4
- 14 The charter of the PLO calls for:  
 a. Peaceful co-existence with Israel  
 b. Israel to honor UN resolutions  
 c. **Armed struggle to liberate the land**  
 d. Cooperation with Hamas by the Arabs  
 95.34  
 53.1
- 15 Which of the following is true of Adolph Eichmann?  
 a. Was first German Prime Minister to recognize Israel  
 b. **Was tried and executed by Israel in 1962 for Nazi crimes**  
 c. Was a German who helped Israel find Nazi war criminals  
 d. Recognized by Yad Vashem as "Tzadik U'mot Ha'Olam"  
 90.6  
 84.3
- 16 The "Law of Return" refers to:  
 a. Persecuted Jews obtaining Israeli citizenship while abroad  
 b. The Arab demand for refugees to return to Israel  
 c. **Any Jew's right to obtain Israeli citizenship**  
 d. Arab laws demanding that Israel return land to the Palestinians  
 74.41  
 59.3
- 17 Which of the following areas were returned by Israel to Egypt?  
 a. Alexandria  
 b. Ramallah  
 c. Gaza  
 d. **Yamit**  
 83.72  
 43.7

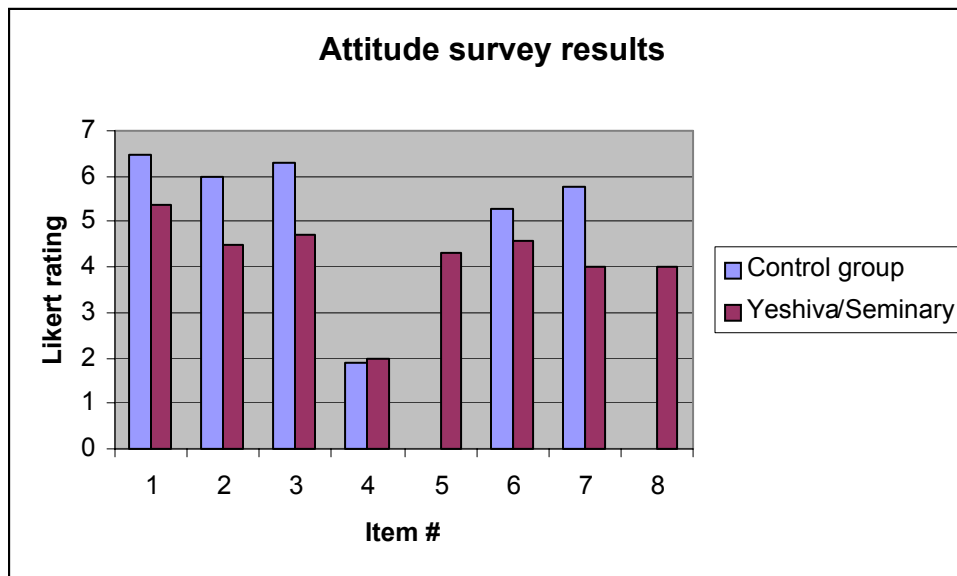
- 18 The security fence being built by Israel:
- Is mostly a high solid wall
  - Is being planned to stretch from Haifa to the Dead Sea
  - Consists mostly of trenches and electronic devices**
  - Will not include Jerusalem
- 48.83  
32.2
- 19 Which of the following countries do not have diplomatic relations with Israel?
- Turkey
  - Egypt
  - Jordan
  - Lebanon**
- 95.34  
56.2
- 20 The Oslo Accord did not call for:
- Limiting the size of the Palestinian police force
  - Democratic elections for the Palestinians
  - Limiting Israeli settlement activity**
  - Limiting Palestinian diplomatic activity abroad
- 51.16  
10.4
- 21 Palestinians claim international law is against Israeli settlements because of:
- The 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention**
  - The Red Sea Summit agreement
  - The UN commission on human rights
  - The Hague international court
- 74.41  
29.1
- 22 The head of which country recently made anti-Israel, anti-Semitic remarks?
- Turkey
  - Oman
  - Indonesia
  - Malaysia**
- 65.11  
28.1
- 23 The Golan Heights:
- Is being demanded by the Palestinians as part of their homeland
  - Was always Israeli territory
  - Is being demanded by Syria**
  - Was captured from Lebanon
- 86.04  
44.7
- 24 The "Road Map" refers to:
- A peace plan proposed by Arik Sharon
  - A proposal promoted by the United States**
  - A plan to combat anti-Semitism
  - An Arab plan for resolving the conflict
- 90.69  
63.5

25 Which Israeli figure was behind the Geneva Accords?

- a. Yossi Sarid
- b. Tommy Lapid
- c. Shimon Peres
- d. **Yossi Beilin**

67.44

21.8



### PART B

***How important is it for you to personally become active in pro-Israel advocacy on your college campus on your return to the USA?***

1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
Not at all Very Much

6.45

5.36

***How likely are you to take a leadership role in pro-Israel advocacy on your campus?***

1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
Not at all Very Much

6

4.48

***How likely are you, on your own, to research topics related to pro-Israel advocacy?***

1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
Not at all Very Much

6.3

4.7

**Do you agree with the attitude that students going to Jewish schools do not have to be as knowledgeable about pro-Israel advocacy as much as students on other campuses?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
 Not at all Very Much

**1.9**  
**2.**

**How important is it for you to have as the major goal of your year in Israel to return with a comprehensive knowledge of the Arab-Israeli conflict?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
 Not at all Very Much

**N/A**  
**4.3**

**How important is for you to attend a course this year that would teach pro-Israel advocacy skills on campus?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
 Not at all Very Much

**5.27**  
**4.6**

**Would you volunteer your free time to attend such a course?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
 Not at all Very Much

**5.76**  
**4.**

**Do you agree that having a deep knowledge of Torah and Halacha is the best tool for being pro-Israel on the college campus?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
 Not at all Very Much

**N/A**  
**4.**