

## Point of View no. 85

# The Unparalleled Opportunity to Strengthen Jewish Education and Continuity the Day After Corona

## THE ESSENCE

**This document aims to highlight the unique opportunity created by the challenge of Corona** to both strengthen Jewish continuity worldwide while simultaneously instilling a consciousness of Jewish Peoplehood into Israeli society through formal and informal education.

**Jewish communities are in survival mode right now, and it is clear that the day after Corona will bring new realities.** Over the past two decades, the Jewish world has undergone major changes that have made the challenge of building Jewish identity particularly complex, with Jewish educational frameworks at the center of this struggle.

**The coronavirus is causing significant and traumatic upheaval. At the same time, it also presents an unparalleled opportunity to bring a new vitality and energy into Jewish life worldwide.** By harnessing the momentum of distance learning, it will be possible to significantly lower the cost of Jewish education and make it more attractive as a result of fundamental changes in values, patterns of behavior, or priorities. In short, new models of Jewish education being built during this crisis can generate a critical turning point in building and affirming Jewish continuity.

**Israel can play a role in helping Jewish communities realize this opportunity from its years of experience experimenting with and investing resources into emergency distance learning tools.** Because of the unique context in which the Israeli model was developed, it includes not only online learning, but a supportive social framework that aims enabling a familiar environment that meets the emotional needs of students - an issue very important to Jewish communities. Despite the criticism in Israel on the distance learning during Corona, this makes Israel unique even in comparison to the world's most advanced educational systems.

**Additionally, moving online creates an opportunity for greater joint efforts in peoplehood education between Israelis and world Jewry.** Joint education efforts create common language and a set of tools in which to build Jewish identity and sense of belonging to a larger people.

**Realizing this opportunity requires vision-driven leadership that will be able to exploit the new rules of the game.** The influx of Jewish content online should be organized into a universal and open online database; Home-centered education ought to be championed and nurtured; An approach of 'creative destruction' in education must be embraced; Summer 2020 can be salvaged through joint online informal initiatives. Finally, the use of new technologies may upgrade the possibilities for providing an online formative educational experience in the future.

*This preliminary document will serve as a basis for a collective learning seminar with representatives of educational leadership in Israel and the Jewish world, and will be updated over the next few weeks based on a series of virtual meetings. These activities are a part of the Reut Group's "Seminar 2.0," inspired by the "seminar" led by David Ben-Gurion in 1947 in which he built the framework for Israel's national security concept. Seminar 2.0 aims to encourage the collective learning and adaptation of the State of Israel and the Jewish people in this new era.*

## CORONA'S IMPACT ON JEWISH EDUCATION & CONTINUITY

1. **The immediate challenge:** Corona is heavily impacting Jewish communities around the world, and the crisis has the potential to fundamentally change Jewish communal life as we know it. Jewish communities' available resources will have narrowed and the activities of surviving organizations will be trimmed down, with focus being given to addressing the community's most basic needs.
2. **The Long-Term Challenge: Jewish Continuity** - In the last two decades, Jewish communities around the world have experienced tremendous upheaval. Among other trends, traditional community frameworks have weakened while the power of non-establishment organizations have strengthened, connection towards Israel has become more complex, especially in the United States, Jewish religious streams have morphed and diversified, and Jewish philanthropy has evolved. All of those trends are making the challenge of maintaining Jewish identity and continuity, and Israel engagement more complex
3. **Jewish educational frameworks have become the central vehicle towards building Jewish identity amongst world Jewry. As such, Corona's impact on Jewish education is of central concern regarding Jewish continuity efforts.**

### JEWISH EDUCATION: EFFECTIVE BUT NOT INCLUSIVE

4. In general, **Jewish educational frameworks are effective in building a Jewish identity amongst its recipients.** Beginning in the 1950s, American Jewish institutions became the central forum for building and preserving Jewish identity. Through day schools, Hebrew schools, youth movements, summer camps, delegations to Israel and educational programming for adults and families, Jewish communities are able to give their members a formative personal educational experience.
5. **However, the reality is that many young Jews do not receive Jewish education based on lack of affordability or attractiveness.**
  - ❖ **The major flaw of Jewish education is its high cost** - Jewish education has become too much of a financial burden for many families, particularly in the US.
  - ❖ **There is no standardization within Jewish education** - Quality of education varies between communities. As such, "Jewish education" refers to a collection of different approaches with a range of effectiveness and results.
  - ❖ **The weakening of the community framework and the sense of collective affiliation** - the younger Jewish generation has become more indifferent to its Jewish identity and traditional communal frameworks. This is partly based on the championing of universal norms and individualistic views at the expense of traditional community values.

### PEOPLEHOOD EDUCATION IN ISRAEL: A MAJOR CHANGE

6. **Classical Zionism negated the concept of diaspora. Since Israel's establishment, education in Israel did not include a Jewish World curriculum post-Holocaust.** Thus, the Israeli education system has left Israeli society largely ignorant towards the contemporary Jewish world. This has contributed to the erosion of consciousness and belonging of Israelis to the Jewish collective.
7. **Two years ago, a "revolution" started within Israel's educational system around this issue, as "Jewish peoplehood" education began expanding both in formal and informal settings.** Despite the many challenges of these educational units the momentum led by the Ministry of Education, the Jewish Agency, the Youth Movement Council, the Joint Council of Mechinot (Pre-Military Leadership Academies) and others, constitutes a significant improvement in instilling a level of "Jewish peoplehood consciousness" within Israeli society.

### CORONA'S IMMEDIATE CHALLENGE TO JEWISH EDUCATION

8. **The ongoing crisis has put a halt to all traditional education programs, bringing about dismissal of vital staff and threatening to shut down all planned activities this summer,** as camps and expeditions to Israel are expected to be canceled. As such, in a post-corona reality, the recovery of Jewish education will start at a low point.

9. **Expected depletion of resources** - The crisis is hitting the household economy and Jewish philanthropy. As a result, the Jewish world's shrinking available resources is hurting Jewish education's budget.

## **AN UNPARALLELED OPPORTUNITY**

10. **In the post-Corona world, the most fundamental working assumptions of Jewish communal life worldwide are set to change. It may be that an environment to generate the evolution and dissemination of a more inclusive Jewish education amongst new audiences, will be created.**

### **CHANGING RULES OF THE GAME**

11. **The economic recession will require a change in Jewish education's financial model as Jewish families struggle to recover during and after this crisis.** Many households cannot afford the cost of Jewish education. Certainly after the crisis, Jewish communities will need an alternative or complementary educational model to compensate for the changed financial reality.
12. **Comeback of the community over the individual** - During the crisis the value of Jewish communal frameworks has been exemplified in the form of services and assistance. During the long recovery period expected after the crisis, the value of the community as a socio-economic safety net is likely to be more appreciated by young people and the unaffiliated.
13. **Solidarity and a stronger Israel engagement** - History shows that pandemics generate greater sense of social solidarity, and it may be in the aftermath of Corona, the Jewish community will be able to deal with sensitive issues in a greater civil discourse. In recent years, high polarization has politicized learning and discussion around Israel within certain Jewish educational frameworks, and some organizations decided to disengage from this issue as a result.
14. **Lifelong learning: Corona has initiated a global leap of technological literacy**, particularly amongst the older population who are adapting to remote communication technologies. This can be utilized to create informal online educational frameworks as part of Jewish lifelong learning initiatives.

### **BOOSTING REMOTE EDUCATION**

15. **The 'cloud' has become saturated with Jewish content as distance learning becomes the norm.** The disabling of traditional educational frameworks has led to the ongoing creation of significant amounts of educational material online in a variety of subjects, levels and languages. Greater integration of distance learning and online resources has the potential to dramatically reduce the costs of Jewish education.
16. **Israel has the potential to significantly contribute to distance learning based on years of emergency preparedness.** The security challenges facing Israel led the Ministry of Education to prepare an emergency education system years ago:
  - ❖ **The Israeli model not only includes distance learning as a substitute for classroom learning, but also a supportive social-educational framework** that provides students with an emotional response. This makes Israel unique even in comparison to the world's most advanced educational systems ( See [Eli Hurwitz](#) in Hebrew).
  - ❖ Despite criticism within Israel regarding remote learning during Corona, it is conjectured that **the years of planning, the annual drills and the technological tools now being used could be an asset** to Jewish communities who will want to expand the scope of remote schooling in their educational systems.
17. **Collective Learning Opportunity: The potential for modeling and adapting effective programs** - A more meaningful integration of distance learning within Jewish education will facilitate the transfer of knowledge and educational content between communities.
18. **Potential for a joint Israel - World-Jewry Peoplehood narrative and programming** –
  - ❖ The existence of different frameworks in creating and building Jewish identity has contributed to the 'consciousness gap' between Israel and world Jewry. As such, creating shared content

units that are integrated in distance learning within formal education can strengthen shared Jewish concepts and feelings of connection throughout the Jewish world.

- ❖ Post-Corona, there will be a window of opportunity to evaluate and update current norms and programs of formal education frameworks in Israel and the Jewish world. This will also present a moment of flexibility that can bring about greater collaboration.

19. **Distance learning will democratize content and provide an opportunity to evaluate and update curriculum based on how content is used, implemented and promoted.**

## THE TASK AHEAD

20. **Seizing this opportunity requires courageous and visionary leadership.** As Jewish communities will tend to focus on domestic affairs and rehabilitation efforts, the limited resources that are available must be channeled to promote inclusive and affordable education. Here are some points to consider in this regard:
21. **World Jewry's Online Classroom: Creating a "universal adaptor" for educational content -** There's an opportunity to organize Jewish online content into an integrated platform or several of them, that could serve Jewish educators and communities worldwide. With such a platform, an alternative, effective, inclusive and affordable educational framework will be created. An online Jewish content database will also help to standardize Jewish education. Additionally, the more educational institutions in Israel that are able to connect with and enrich such an online space, the more empowered Israeli society will be to feel a sense of connection and solidarity with world Jewry.
22. **Save the 'Lost Summer' through a joint online creation -** the bulk of informal Jewish educational activity takes place during the summer and is based on meetings (such as summer camps) and expeditions (experience programs for Israel). Presumably, most organizations that run these programs are currently trying to find an alternative online, which makes the differentiation and uniqueness of each program less valuable. This creates an opening for collaboration and pooling of resources to generate programming that will serve more than one organization.
23. **Significant learning requires more integration of parents and family.** The increased involvement of parents in their children's educational lives during home isolation should be encouraged and enhanced by Jewish educators and nonprofits. A new educational approach should incorporate and enhance the family framework in shaping Jewish identity.
24. **Bringing an approach of 'creative destruction' to education that encourages innovation -** Corona's impact on Jewish education is inevitable. Jewish leadership should promote the approach of 'creative destruction' through shaking off old patterns and adopting new ones which will move the system forward. This will require determining who and what are both real assets and burdens. It is also an opportunity to use data to measure the effectiveness of educational initiatives.
25. **New technologies which development likely to get boosted after Corona may upgrade possibilities to create formative personal educational experiences in distance learning.** Experts estimate that this period of time will lead to the blossoming of certain technologies. such as virtual conferences, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and self-manufacturing based on 3D printing. Using these technologies through a combination of gaming-based education, collaborative creation, virtual communities and tours, and collaborative volunteering projects can provide a meaningful educational experience.
26. **Israel's support in remote education initiatives.** The knowledge gained in Israel regarding distance learning in preparation of emergencies could be very valuable in the required reformation of the Jewish education. Already during this crisis, an emergency headquarters was established by the Ministry of Diaspora (through Mosaic United) and the Center of Educational Technology (CET) that helps teachers of formal Jewish education in European communities move to online learning. **This document calls to expand this mandate and support the effort of Jewish communities in building an alternative or supplementary communal distance learning platform.**

**End.**