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Remembering the past to ensure the future for the Jewish people, Israel and all humankind.

Long Term Impact of the March of the Living on Participants

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In 2015, a study was conducted to determine the long-term impact of the March of the Living program on its Jewish participants. A total of 250 past participants were selected at random and interviewed at length. They included those who had gone very recently, in the Spring of 2015; those who had taken the trip five years ago, in 2010, and those who went a decade ago, in 2005. The questions covered a broad range of issues related to attitudes and behaviors about Jewish identity, views about Israel and the Holocaust, ritual observance, charitable giving, and lifestyle questions, as well as career choices.

Respondents included both observant and non-observant Jewish males and females and came from all over the United States and Canada. About two-thirds had completed a Jewish day or community school. 38% were affiliated with the Orthodox community, 39% with the Conservative movement, 18% identified as Reform, and 4% were unaffiliated. The refusal rate was under 1%. The researcher is not connected with the March in any way. Indeed, March leaders agreed in advance to allow the results to be made public regardless of the outcome—positive or negative.

Here are the results of the study 

Most participants went on the March of the Living because it was a chance to better understand their own Jewish culture. Friends and parents also played a role in the decision to go. The majority did not belong to any Jewish organizations before they went. About 20% became more active in their synagogues following the March, with 76%, giving credit to the March for the increase. Thirty eight percent joined Jewish organizations after the March and 28% gave credit to the March for that decision.

Two of the most remarkable findings of this study are that, first, close to half of those responding have visited Israel again since going on the March. This is a very high rate when you consider that this figure includes the 80% who either just went on the March this year or five years ago. Second, **an astonishing 94% of those who had gone in 2005 have visited Israel since then.**

Jews who go on the March are almost four times as likely to visit Israel as Jews in general. Close to half have visited Israel three or more times. Most significantly, about two-thirds assert that their decision to travel to Israel again was influenced by the March experience. Thus we see that going on the March has a huge impact on one's future involvement with the state of Israel.



More than two-thirds of those traveling to Israel did so as tourists. About 40% also studied in Israel while there and 7% volunteered on a kibbutz, in the army, or an organization. Almost half would consider moving to Israel and half said the March influenced their views on this matter.



The overwhelming majority of unmarried March participants, 86%, assert that it's very important that their spouse be Jewish. And if the person they fell in love with happened to not be Jewish, then 65% would insist that they convert. As respondents get older higher numbers feel that way. Of those who went in 2005, ten years ago, 87% would insist on conversion.

With respect to education, 91% intend to give their children a Jewish education. And just under half were directly influenced by the March in their thinking. By a 65% to 35% margin, respondents also feel that it's important to live in a Jewish neighborhood.

One of the most important findings for the Jewish community was support for Jewish causes. **Almost 90% of respondents said that the March had made it more likely that they would financially support Jewish causes.** Action speaks louder than words, of course and here the news is also encouraging. Despite their youthfulness, over 60% have given in the past to Jewish causes.

Of those interviewed, 54% said that the March had made them more tolerant towards other groups as well. But an even higher proportion of those who went on the March ten years ago, 66%, reported that the March had made them more tolerant. Twenty two percent stated that they were involved in social causes such as helping the homeless, the poor, minorities, women's rights etc. And 37% claimed to have been influenced to do so by the March.

A full 90% felt that the March had made them more aware of the need to become involved when confronted with anti-Semitism. This was true over the long run as well. About 94% of those who went ten years ago continued to feel that the March had deeply influenced their attitudes about anti-Semitism. Those currently studying at universities were evenly split on whether anti-Semitism is a problem on campus,. Even so, 50% is a high number and the issue needs to be fully addressed.

About 95% of those who went on the March say it has strengthened their Jewish identity. About 20% say their level of observance has increased

Approximately 15% state that the March has had, or is having an impact on their career choice. This is a high number since 80% of our respondents are still in college or graduate school.

Overall, two thirds of those who went said the March had a significant impact on their thinking as a Jew and only 2% felt that it had no impact. But surprisingly, a higher proportion of those who went ten years ago felt it had a major influence on their thinking as Jews than did those who went more recently. The margin was 46% for the older cohort and 35% for the younger group. What this means is that when



the dust settles, so to speak, those who went a long time ago, nevertheless, realize the March's long term impact on their lives.

When asked what aspect of the trip affected them most, 90% said it was the trips to the camps. A somewhat lower but still high percentage, around 63%, gave high rankings to both the March and the Israeli segment of the journey. The tours were considered of less interest with only 36% citing them as very important.

Given the overwhelmingly positive results, it's fair to say that the March has been and continues to be an enormously successful program in terms of ensuring and enhancing Jewish identity and in making people realize how important it is to be an engaged Jew who cares about his or her community and about human beings in general. And in more than a few cases the March has changed the lives of its participants. And that is no small feat.

