

Jewish Teenagers Slip

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS — While young people today often accuse adults of preaching what they don't practice, many Jewish teen-agers apparently practice what they don't necessarily believe.

That, at least, seems implied in a preliminary report on the most ambitious survey ever undertaken on the changing attitudes of North American Jewish youth. A developmental study of successive generations of leaders of B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, it will, when completed, cover a period of 25 years.

The project was designed by Dr. Fred Masserik, Los Angeles, director of the Behavioral Research Associates and technical chairman of the National Jewish Population Study, in cooperation with Dr. Max F. Baer, national director of the B'BYO.

The survey's initial report presented by Dr. Baer at the annual meeting of the B'nai B'rith Youth Commission here reveals a surprising number of Jewish customs that many teen-agers observe without any sense of inner commitment. They often indicated a higher degree of "practice" than of "belief" with regard to specific Jewish customs.

Bucking the trend, were a few Jewish customs on which teen-age "belief" and "practice" appear to coincide. One of these, ironically, is the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, which has come under sharp criticism of many adults, who re-

gard its modern form as too elaborate. Seventy percent of the 91 young respondents said they "believe" in the ceremony, and on almost equal number said they had participated in its Practice."

There was also a "belief-practice" correspondence in synagogue attendance, although the total percentages of those who responded affirmatively were only 42 and 43 percent, respectively.

Items for which the degree of "Belief" prevailed over "Practice" included: the need to combat anti-Semitism, to work for the survival of Israel, and observation of the Sabbath and the celebration of Purim. In these areas, evidently "practice" has not yet caught up with "belief".

But in 20 other aspects of Jewish experience — including fasting on Yom Kippur, lighting candles on Chanukah, belonging to a Jewish Center, volunteering for Jewish fundraising, enjoying Jewish music, literature and art and "knowing some Hebrew" — the "practice" percentages outweighed the degree of "belief" by an average 20 to 30 percentage points.

Subjects of the initial phase of the study are B'BYO's current regional and council presidents throughout the United States and Canada. The participants, almost equally divided between boys and girls, are members of the Aleph Zadick Aleph boys, and the B'nai B'rith Girls, the teen-age components of the 50,000-member B'nai B'rith Youth Organization. Most are 17-year-olds, about a fourth are 18, and a fifth are 16 or younger.

Asked to describe their homes in terms of "commitment to Jewishness", more than 60 percent indicated "above average", including 5.4 percent characterized as "exceptionally intense Jewish commitment."

Commenting on the report, Dr. Baer noted that those Jewish practices in which respondents professed not to "believe" were probably rooted in family custom, personal habits or community expectations, rather than in genuine religious feelings.

"This", observed the B'BYO director, "need not be an adverse finding. If there is at least some carry-over of family practice by the younger generation — or if it practices Jewish customs for other reasons, there is always a possibility that genuine belief will blossom forth later on. After all, psychologists maintain that practice can produce belief, just as readily as belief can produce practice. At least, there is something to build on — provided the Jewish community responds to the changing intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of youth."

Jack J. Spitzer, Riverside, California, national chairman of the B'nai B'rith Youth Commission, presided at the three-day gathering at the Palmer House. Participating in a discussion of youth-adult relations were the three youth presidents of B'BYO: Jack Mintz, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, head of Aleph Zadik Aleph, Amy Horowitz, Silver Spring, Maryland, president of B'nai B'rith Girls and Pam Gerwitz, Los Angeles, California, president of the B'nai Brith Young Adults.

NEW YORK: -- A one-semester, fifteen-credit study program for American students at the Tel Aviv University will commence January 27, 1970 under the sponsorship of the University of Maryland, Tel Aviv University, and the American Zionist Youth Foundation. Requests for further information should be addressed to the University of Maryland Semester in Israel at Tel Aviv University, 515 Pak Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10022.

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