



## **Hannaton Mechina Graduates**

**2019**

### **Introduction: Goals of the survey and what we examined**

The purpose of the survey was to examine, through graduates of the Hannaton Mechina, the effectiveness of the Mechina educational program in specific areas and the impact on the graduates of the Mechina. Specifically, we tried to examine whether the graduates were affected by what they had learned and experienced in the Mechina.

The opening question in the survey related to the influence of the Mechina on graduates in several areas: Israeli and Jewish identity, leadership, decisions related to army service, politics, community and social involvement. Those who responded that the program did affect them on one of the subjects, received further questions on the subject and were asked to elaborate more accurately on the impact of the mechina in this area. In addition, graduates were asked to give personal examples and to tell in their own words how the Mechina influenced them in this field.

Specifically, we considered the issue of pluralism and its application in many different areas. When we refer to pluralism, we refer to the definition as we understand the concept and as explained in the booklet here.

### **Where is pluralism expressed among graduates of the Mechina?**

On almost every subject in the questionnaire, graduates of the Mechina mentioned components that were related to the values of pluralism - openness, acceptance of the other, listening, inclusion.

When we asked graduates what three values they had taken from the Mechina which were still important or significant in their lives today, answers such as pluralism, inclusion, tolerance, acceptance of the other, listening and sharing were among the repeated values.

Similarly, in areas such as politics and the army, there is also a tendency among Hannaton graduates to emphasize the openness and acceptance of the other within these areas.

For example, when asked about politics, only half of the respondents answered that they wanted to be involved in Israeli politics, but the vast majority said that following their year at the Hannaton Mechina, they were more open to opinions that differed from their own than they were before attending the Mechina.

- 100% said they understand that different views can be obtained from both left and right
- 97% said they are more open to hearing different political opinions
- 92% said it was important for them to hear different political opinions.

## **Jewish Identity**

There is a strong emphasis on Judaism, Jewish identity and Israeli identity in the Hanaton Mechina. At the same time, staff, educators and the management of the Mechina do not believe there is only one right way to live a Jewish life. This value of diversity within Judaism was passed on to the Mechina graduates as seen in the answers they gave and the different ways in which they connected to Judaism.

- Many graduates (45%) said because of their experiences in the Mechina, they very much connect to rituals and ceremony (Kiddush, havdala, candle lighting) and/or Shabbat and holidays.
- Graduates emphasized the cultural and ceremonial elements of Judaism, that is, Judaism as a culture and less as a religion with rules and laws.
- About 24% of the respondents - both those who define themselves as religious and those who define themselves as secular - said that the program helped them find their place in Judaism.
- According to some graduates, the Mechina helped them see that Judaism can be more complex than black and white, religious and secular, and that there are many more possibilities both in terms of the law itself and actual practice.
- Graduates also felt that they had received knowledge that would enable them to understand and communicate more easily with other Jews.

### **In the words of the graduates:**

*The very fact that I am a Jew and have a broad understanding of Judaism, strongly influences my worldview, including my ability to communicate with different people in Israel and throughout the world, within that Jewish prism. In my decision-making, too, I feel influenced by "Jewish" values. On a more practical level, I now work at the NOAM youth movement, because I understand that Judaism in Israel should be open and accepting.*

*I am no longer alienated from the Jewish world and do not see it solely in the possession of the Chief Rabbinate. Rather, I feel responsible for the Jewish world and for its character in my daily life. I also connect to the prayer services at Hannaton. I love learning about this world to understand more about the complex reality of our people and our history. This doesn't mean that I do it a lot, but there is no doubt that the program opened a window to this crazy world".*

*I feel that Judaism influences my life in everything, that I want to celebrate the holidays and feel the atmosphere of Shabbat even though I do not believe in God or in the commandments. My Jewish identity strengthens my love for Israel and my sense of belonging.*

*I feel that Judaism is part of my identity more in a cultural and traditional sense than in terms of practice. I'd like to have a chuppah for my wedding, but I would probably prefer to read a text from Agnon instead of having a rabbi.*

*It's important for me that my children do not suddenly discover Jewish culture at the age of 19. They don't have to act on it, and as far as I'm concerned they can even completely ignore it (although I think it would be a pity), but a person has to know where he came from and what group he belongs to before he looks away.*

## **Leadership**

According to the dictionary, leadership is " the position or function of a leader, a person who guides or directs a group." In the Hanaton Mechina, the word leadership is rarely used. Nevertheless, graduates repeatedly referred to the qualities of leadership and leaders not only in the specific question on leadership but also on questions related to politics, volunteerism and community.

The vast majority said that from the Mechina they acquired the tools, the desire, and the ability to lead and even try to influence others and be a model for others. This statistic is not surprising given the type of leadership that the Mechina strives to pass on to students in the program. But it was interesting to understand how "leadership" is expressed amongst the graduates, and how they view leadership.

Although some spoke about their personal decision to become commanders or officers, others spoke of "quiet" leadership, as expressed daily through conversations, behavior, and personal example.

Among the things graduates learned at the Mechina which helped them lead both in the army and in civilian life:

- To be a personal example and role model and to recognize how our behavior affects others
- Lead others on issues that are important to you
- It is not the job or the role but how you take on that role or job
- To take responsibility
- Do not ignore injustice

What the graduates noted that they gained from or acquired at the Mechina:

- The Mechina offered a safe space that allowed people to experiment and grow
- Opportunities to motivate and lead
- Opportunities in which they could develop leadership qualities
- An understanding that they can influence others by what they say or do
- A deeper understanding of the importance of leadership
- The values they noted that were received or drawn from the program guided them when they were introduced

In the words of the graduates:

*I try to make a positive impact on those around me. I discovered that this leadership actually came through in silence, with emotion, in the small, one-on-one conversations, through individual support and sensitivity to those around me, and with a great deal of work on my part to serve as an example to other, quietly, with the hope that I am somehow affecting others. I am beginning to see the positive influence. This is the kind of leadership that I find myself in at this moment in time, and I think that the refinements or clarifications I've made are because of the Mechina and the experience of living as part of a group.*

*I understood that leadership is daily life, to live according to and to be attentive to the values that lead you, and in turn, to impact on one's environment.*

*The mechina woke me from my apathy. It forced me to look around and encouraged me to want to do better and believe that I could. It pushed me to choose not to sit idly by and wait for something to change and improve on its own, but to be someone who will make that change and improve what every I am able to do.*

*In the army, I worked in a training position and eventually served as a commander. I felt that without the mechina I would not have been able to reach these positions, because in the mechina I discovered qualities of leadership in myself and developed them. I feel that it is important to be a model of inspiration and leadership when necessary. This also gives others the belief that they can do the same.*

## **Army**

The Hannaton Mechina does not promote any specific job or place in the IDF, in contrast to other mechina programs which frequently encourage their graduates to become officers, pilots, and reconnaissance soldiers. Hannaton prefers that every graduate makes an impact in the army - and everywhere else - in her or his own way.

Thus, 16.5% of the graduates said that the Mechina helped them understand that they did not want to become commanders or officers, and 50% said that the program helped them understand that they did want these jobs.

Graduates noted that the Mechina's influence was on their behavior, their conversations, and their relationships with other people.

- 90% of the Mechina graduates said that the program helped them with various decisions they had to make during their military service.
- 98% said that the program affected their conversations with other soldiers and with civilians during their service.
- 96% said that the program affected their behavior in the army.

Among the things that graduates said they took with them to the army or initiated in the army following their experiences in the Mechina:

- Acceptance of the other and an openness to different opinions
- The ability to deal with challenges or obstacles
- The desire to raise issues related to pluralistic Judaism.

In the words of the graduates:

*I can say wholeheartedly that had it not been for the Mechina, not only would I not have completed a combat course, I certainly would not have followed gone on to become a commander.*

*One graduate told of her work at “Nativ”, a unit in which there are soldiers who are converting to Judaism. The soldiers teaching in the program come from both religious and secular backgrounds. It was important for her to talk about alternative types of conversion and the problems with the Chief Rabbinate.*

*In the army, I gave my team lessons like we had in the Mechina. I wanted them to relate to the past, so that they would be more than just physically fit and professional combat soldiers. I taught them a bit of midrash and some Frankel, a bit of Gordon and a bit of Trumpeldor. It turns out that they really enjoyed this. Once, on their own initiative, they asked me to give them a lesson one Shabbat afternoon, at the expense of their free time.*

*I was a commander in the Education Corps and the Mechina had a big impact on the way I chose to lead my subordinates. It also helped me get to know myself and understand that I did not want to become an officer and that this was not the right path for me.*

## **Community**

The place of pluralism, Judaism and Jewish identity also arose in the question of community. One can see the significance of the Hannaton community when examining data regarding its impact on the graduates:

- More than 85% of the graduates said that it was important for them to be part of a community, and that the Mechina and the Hannaton community helped them reach this understanding.
- 70% want to live in a Jewish community.
- 78% said it was important for them to be in a diverse Jewish community.
- 51% said it was important for them to be in a diverse community and not only with Jews.

In the words of the graduates:

*I'm part of the IGY (The Organization for Gay Youth) community. There are Arabs and Jews, Muslims and Christians. I challenge Rivlin's speech about tribes. I feel much more connected to a gay Arab than to a straight Jew. Or to my Arab female friend who is a feminist and believes in*

*pluralism. I see the community as part of my life, a place for fulfillment, a safe space and a place where I can be with others who will be my partners in the same vision.*

*I grew up in a traditional kibbutz. I always knew what a community was. But the community in Hannaton taught me what a diverse, special, loving, inclusive and supportive community is.*

*I think life in the place I grew up in has very much tied me to the community I live in today. What the program did was help me understand how to be part of a community. It's not enough to be a passive participant; sometimes it requires sacrifice.*

## **General data**

- The online survey was sent to all graduates four times between February and May 2019. This includes approximately 200 men and women, 95 of whom answered the questionnaire.
- Of the respondents, 49% are men, and 51% are women.
- Over 53% of respondents define themselves as secular.
- Respondents were in very diverse positions in the army (Table 2).

## **Conclusions**

Pluralism, in the sense of openness to different opinions and acceptance of the other, is a central value in the Hannaton Mechina, and one of the values that graduates internalize and take with them both to the army and to their civilian lives. The graduates wrote repeatedly about their ability to listen to other opinions and to accept people who are different from them.

Graduates of the Mechina grew closer to Judaism during their year at Hannaton, and some continue to feel close to Judaism, through ritual, holidays and study.

Mechina graduates feel that Judaism can be varied; there is no one way, or right way, to be a Jew. This allows many graduates to be more open to Judaism in general, and to other Jews in particular.

Hannaton Mechina graduates do not become leaders over the ten months in the program but they undergo a process that allows them to acquire leadership tools in a safe place and to take what they have learned to the army, the home, work and studies.

Many graduates also reported on using one or more "leadership" component to improve a situation or help others.