

MIXED-HERITAGE COUPLES: BECOMING ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN JEWISH LIFE

Embark – 2024 Evaluation

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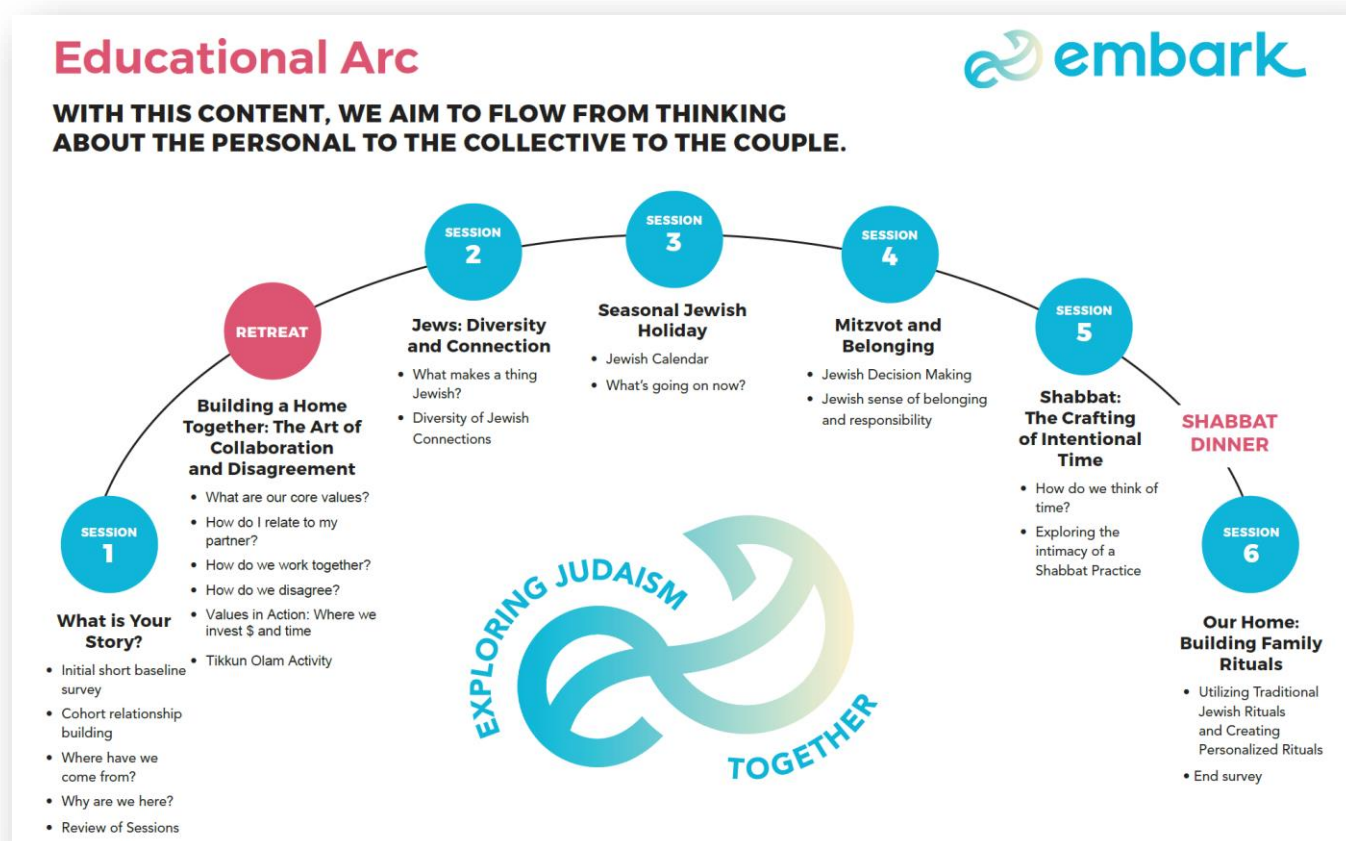
THE CENTER FOR JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD EDUCATION
Building collective Jewish life through education

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INTRODUCTION

Embark is an effort to launch and scale welcoming, high-quality Jewish learning and engagement experiences for young mixed-heritage and interfaith couples, inspired by the success of Central Synagogue’s Center for Exploring Judaism in New York and other existing cohort-based models. The goal is to provide meaningful opportunities for this target population to explore and connect with Judaism, Jewish life, and Jewish community. Emphasis is placed on reaching couples who don’t feel comfortable participating in organized Jewish life and wouldn’t naturally gravitate to synagogues and other Jewish institutions.

Driven by the support of the Laura and Gary Lauder Family Venture Philanthropy Fund, in 2023 a pilot of three groups was run, expanded to an additional four groups who completed their program in the 2024 calendar year.

Embark cohorts have three core pillars: cohorts, rabbis/mentors, and content. A cohort consists of 6–12 couples in their 20s or 30s, who are led by a local rabbi from a local partner organization and follow a nondenominational core curriculum geared toward exploring Jewish life. Participants learn about Judaism and Jewish life while developing a mentoring relationship with the rabbi mentor and formative Jewish social relationships with the other participants.

THE EVALUATION

The goal of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of Embark in empowering mixed-heritage couples to actively participate in Jewish life. Specifically, the evaluation explores the following research questions: (1) How does Embark influence participants’ motivation and ability to shape their Jewish engagement? (2) In what ways does the program strengthen couples’ relationships and their connection to Jewish community? (3) To what extent do participants develop confidence in navigating Jewish spaces, rituals, and communal life?

The evaluation draws:

1. **Start and end program surveys** for participants in four Embark groups that completed their cohort program in 2024.
2. **An alumni survey** that went to all 2023 and 2024 cohorts in December and January 2025. The cohorts include Atlanta (2023), Miami (2023), Philadelphia (2023, 2024), the Bay Area (2024), Denver (2024), and New York City (2024). A total of 100 participants were invited to take part in the survey, with 35 completing it, resulting in an overall response rate of 35%.
3. **Interviews:** In addition to the surveys, the findings were triangulated with interviews with the Rabbi and participants from three of the group. throughout the program and her ongoing contact and conversations with the rabbis who led the three pilot groups.

Start and End of Program Surveys

	Time Period	# Participants
Boston	November-December	12
Denver	January - March	16
Philadelphia	February-April	12
Bay Area	July-August	12
New York	June August	12

- 84% responded to the start survey
- 94% responded to the end survey
- Those answering both start and end are included in tables show start to end change.

Interviews

Denver	Rabbi and 4 couples interviewed
Philadelphia	Rabbi and 3 couples interviewed
New York City	Rabbi and 3 couples interviewed



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pathways into Jewish Life: From Passive to Active Engagement

Embark is an initiative designed to equip mixed-heritage and interfaith couples with the confidence, knowledge, and relationships to engage with Jewish life in ways that feel authentic and meaningful to them. Rather than prescribing a fixed model of Jewish practice, Embark fosters agency, empowering participants to actively shape their Jewish engagement and navigate their evolving Jewish journeys together.

This evaluation builds on insights from Embark's 2023 pilot study, which tested different cohort-based models to understand how to best facilitate Jewish engagement among mixed-heritage couples. The pilot demonstrated that a relationship-driven, experiential educational approach fosters meaningful Jewish engagement and led to the development of a core program model. This model—applied across the 2024 cohorts—ensures a structured yet flexible framework that integrates cohort-based learning, rabbinic mentorship, and accessible Jewish education while remaining adaptable to local contexts.

The 2024 evaluation expands on these learnings, assessing Embark's impact on participants' sense of agency in Jewish life, the strength of their relationships, and their confidence in Jewish communal spaces. The findings highlight how Jewish learning, mentorship, and peer support create pathways for couples to move from passive to active participation, reshaping their relationship with Jewish tradition and community.

Program Model and Approach

Embark is structured around **three core pillars**, which work together to activate participants' **personal agency in Jewish life**:

1. **Cohort Community** – Groups of 6–12 couples create a supportive peer environment where participants learn together, build friendships, and explore Jewish life through shared experiences.
2. **Rabbinic Mentorship** – Each cohort is guided by an approachable rabbi, who serves as a mentor, educator, and facilitator, rather than an authority figure. This personalized mentorship fosters trust and provides participants with ongoing support in navigating Jewish learning and engagement.
3. **Accessible Jewish Learning** – Embark offers practical, discussion-based Jewish education, grounded in real-life applications. The curriculum prioritizes open exploration over rigid doctrine, ensuring that participants—regardless of background—can find their own meaningful entry points into Jewish tradition.

Key Findings and Impact

1. Strengthening Agency in Jewish Engagement

- **Ability** – Participants report that Embark made it easier to integrate Jewish practices and conversations into their daily lives.
- **Ownership** – Couples report feeling more in control of how they engage with Judaism, selecting and adapting traditions in ways that feel authentic to them.
- **Confidence** – Many non-Jewish partners transition from passive observers to active participants in Jewish rituals, community gatherings, and discussions.

2. Building Jewish Community and Belonging

- **Peer Connections** – Participants form meaningful social bonds with other mixed-heritage couples, with a large majority reporting ongoing relationships with their cohort post-program.
- **Overcoming the 'Outsider' Feeling** – Embark reduces barriers to participation, helping couples navigate Jewish spaces with greater confidence. However, some participants, especially the non-Jewish partners, still report a persistent sense of being on the periphery in broader Jewish communal settings.
- **Engagement with Jewish Community** – The alumni report deepening their participation in Jewish communal activities, friendships, and institutions.

3. Expanding Knowledge and Participation in Jewish Life

- **Transformative Learning** – Participants, particularly non-Jewish partners, report significant growth in Jewish knowledge, with many encountering Jewish texts and traditions for the first time.
- **Experiential Learning Through Retreats** – The immersive Shabbat retreat fosters deep connections, strengthens relationships, and provides a structured opportunity to engage with Jewish rituals in a communal setting.
- **Viewing Jewish Practice as Positive and Desirable** – By the end of the program, all participants engage in Jewish practice in some form, though levels of fulfillment vary, particularly among non-Jewish participants.

Challenges and Areas for Growth

1. Facilitating Deeper Integration into Jewish Communal Life

- While Embark strengthens confidence and belonging, some participants—especially non-Jewish partners—continue to feel like outsiders in Jewish communal settings.
- Embark successfully fosters a strong internal community, but many couples struggle with transitioning from Embark into broader Jewish communal life.
- Potential solutions:
 - Strengthening partnerships with local Jewish organizations to create structured post-program engagement opportunities.
 - Expanding mentorship pathways beyond the Embark rabbi to sustain participants' Jewish learning and communal involvement.
 - Focusing on fulfillment in Jewish practice—not just participation—to cultivate deeper, more meaningful connections to Jewish life.

2. Deepening Connection to the Jewish People

Jewish life is fundamentally both a local and global collective experience, rooted in meaningful friendships and community relationships built upon shared memory, knowledge, and a sense of mutual responsibility. As such, an introduction to Jewish life is also an introduction to the collective dimension of Judaism - Peoplehood. For Embark couples, their cohort represents more than just a venue for acquiring knowledge—it serves as a gateway into the rich tapestry of collective Jewish life, encompassing religious, cultural, historical, political, and other dimensions.

Currently, participants report that their cohort discussions focus on their lives as couples within their local communities, with limited engagement in the broader collective aspects of Jewish Peoplehood. This finding highlights a curricular area where Embark can further enhance participants' experience of Jewish belonging. A notable example emerged during the post-October 7th period, which presented an opportunity to explore how Jews both locally and worldwide collectively experience and react to moments of crisis and resilience. As one interviewee noted, the intensity of news coverage around Israel made the war and its impact on American Jewish life a topic of relevance they were eager to discuss.

We recommend incorporating structured discussions on collective Jewish issues that resonate with participants—such as global Jewish responses to current events, or challenges such as antisemitism - to anchor their understanding of Jewish belonging beyond the boundaries of family, religion-focused rituals, and immediate community. This approach would foster a deeper sense of connection to the broader Jewish narrative and inspire deep engagement with the collective Jewish experience.

Conclusion

Embark's 2024 evaluation confirms and expands on the successes identified in the 2023 pilot study, demonstrating that a relationship-driven, experiential Jewish education model can successfully engage mixed-heritage and interfaith couples in Jewish life. The findings highlight how participants—when nurtured through Jewish learning, mentorship, and peer support—take ownership of their Jewish engagement. Participants move beyond seeing Judaism as something external to them and begin actively shaping how they integrate Jewish traditions, values, and community into their own lives. Expanding Embark's post-program engagement, bridging the gap between Embark and broader Jewish communal life, and incorporating discussions of Jewish Peoplehood will further enhance its long-term impact. By refining and expanding these elements, Embark can continue serving as a vital entry point for couples seeking to build their connection to Judaism and Jewish community on their own terms.

Embark 2024 Evaluation: Key Findings

Mixed-Heritage Couples: Becoming Active Participants in Jewish Life

The Three Core Pillars of Embark

Cohort Community

6-12 Couples

Rabbinic Mentorship

Guidance & Support

Accessible Jewish Learning

Enabling Jewish Engagement

Ability

Participants find it easier to integrate Jewish practices into daily life

Ownership

Couples feel more in control of how they engage with Judaism

Confidence

Non-Jewish partners transition from observers to active participants

Building a Jewish Life Together

100%

Embark helps develop a shared Jewish vision

89%

More likely to speak about Jewish life as a couple

76%

Maintain connections with their cohort

Growth in Connection to Jewish Life

Jewish Partners

42% → 80%

Feeling connected "to a great extent" or higher increased from start to end of program

Non-Jewish Partners

36% → 48%

Feeling connected "to a great extent" or higher increased from start to end of program

21% felt no connection at start dropping to 4%

Embark 2024 Evaluation | Mem Global: Jewish community wherever you are

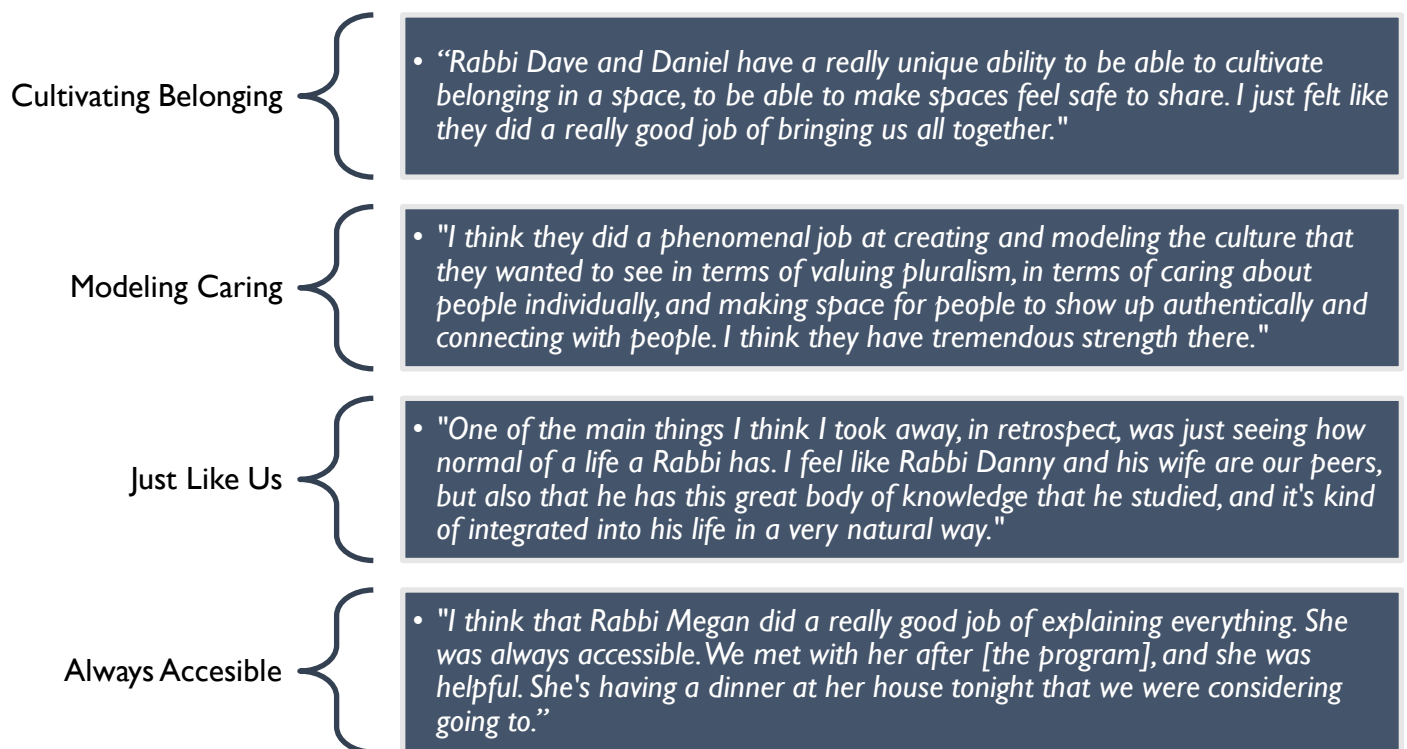
THE EMBARK EXPERIENCE: WHAT MAKES IT WORK?

THE EMBARK RABBI: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, TRUST AND ENGAGEMENT

The Embark Rabbi is central to the Embark experience.

For many Embark is their first significant relationship with a rabbi. The connection to the rabbi defines the program, fostering trust, openness, and deeper engagement with Jewish life. Participants see their rabbi not only as a teacher but as a mentor and guide, creating a welcoming space for exploration. The personal warmth and accessibility of the rabbis stand out as key strengths. Many couples note that the rabbis' model healthy relationships, reinforcing Jewish values in ways that feel practical and relevant.

Almost all outcomes shown in this report statistically correlate with the quality of the relationship a participant reports with their Rabbi. When the relationship with their Rabbi is strong, so the overall results are positive.



At end of their cohort experience the large majority of participants form a strong connection with their Embark Rabbi. Despite differing religious backgrounds, **both Jewish and non-Jewish partners find value in their rabbi's mentorship.**

I connected with a Rabbi	Jewish	Non-Jewish
To a very great extent	55%	35%
To a great extent	36%	41%
An extent	5%	18%
A small extent	5%	6%
Not at all	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%

*End of cohort survey

Sustaining the Connection Post-Embark

The relationship with the Embark Rabbi continues beyond the program. All those who responded to the alumni survey are in touch with their rabbi at least occasionally.

Participants describe different types of relationships with their Embark rabbis, reflecting personal, mentorship-based, and community-oriented connections. Some develop deep personal bonds, turning to their rabbi as a trusted friend and source of support during difficult times. Others view their rabbi primarily as a mentor and spiritual guide, playing a central role in their ongoing Jewish learning and personal growth. For some, the connection extends beyond individual interactions to communal engagement, as they continue attending events hosted by their rabbi and remain connected through shared participation in Jewish life. These varied experiences highlight the multiple ways Embark rabbis foster meaningful and lasting relationships with participants.

Alumni Survey - In a sentence or two, what is the nature of your maintained connection with your Embark Rabbi?

Personal Connection

- "I consider him a friend, and have gone to him for advice in times of grief."

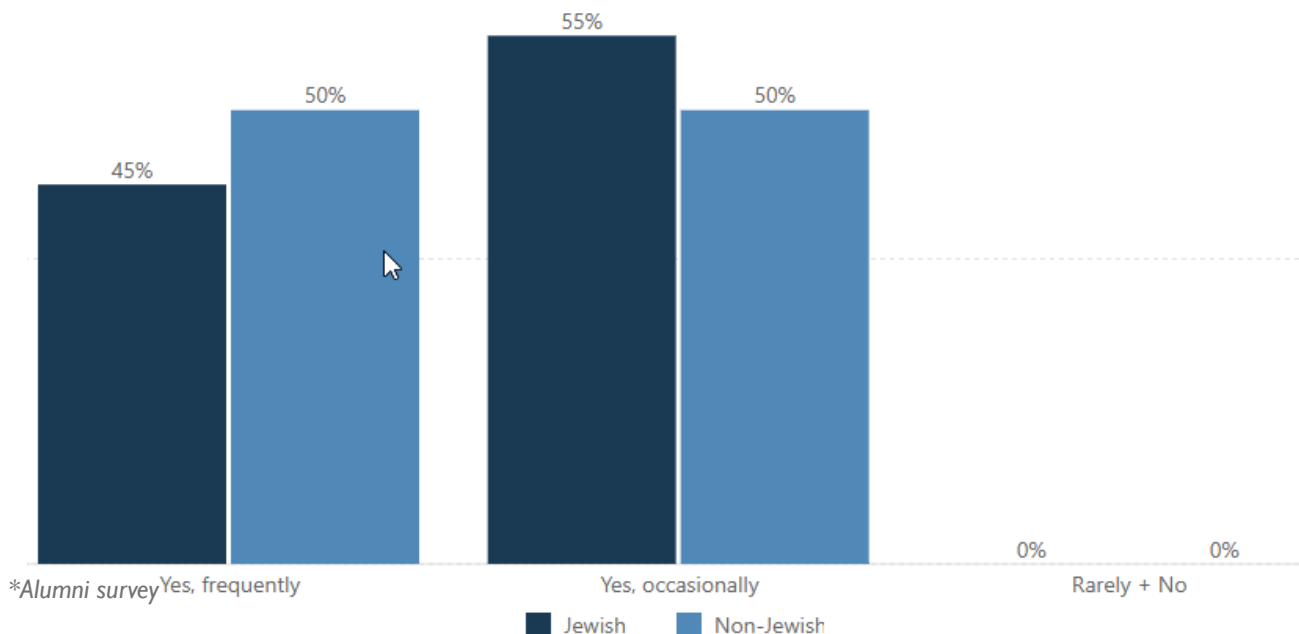
Mentorship-based connection

- "My Rabbi Adam and I maintain a very important relationship and he serves as a mentor and spiritual leader in my life."

Community-based connection

- "We've been invited since to Shabbat dinners and holiday meals, and they curate a crowd, and they're really good at doing that. They've put us in a room with other people who have also been great people to connect with."

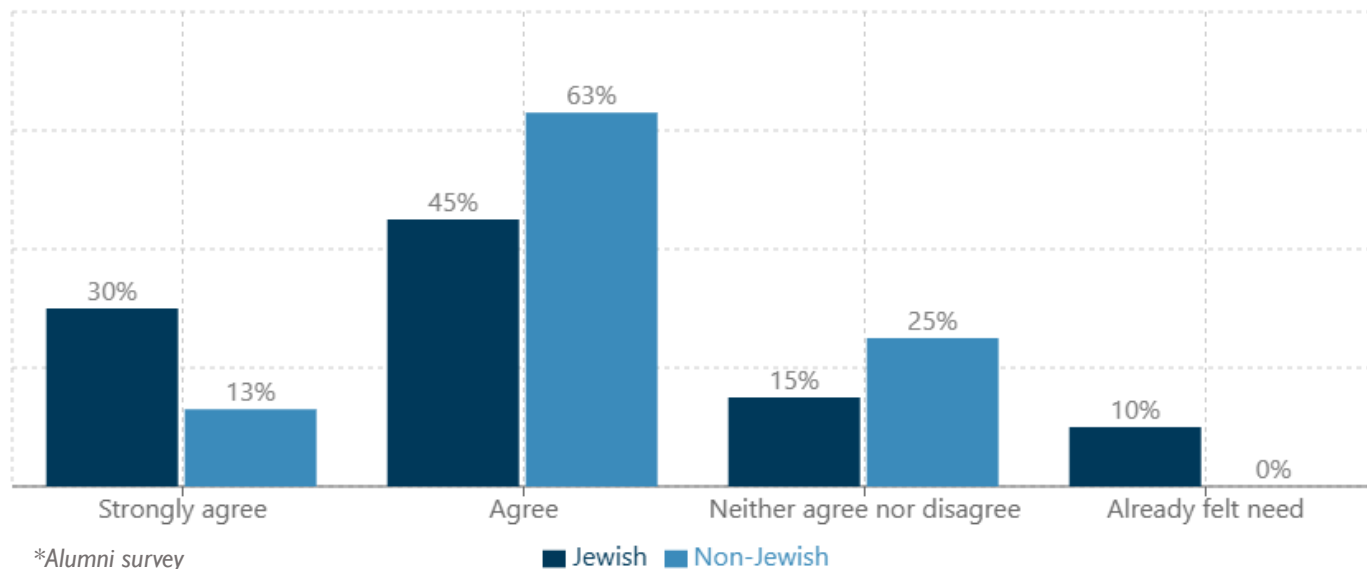
Are you still in touch with your Embark Rabbi?



Desire for Future Rabbinic Mentorship

Embark's rabbi-led learning model shapes participants' views on Jewish mentorship. When asked whether their experience increases their desire for a connection with a rabbi or Jewish mentor, responses are overwhelmingly positive. A majority of both Jewish (75%) and non-Jewish (76%) participants agree that the experience **"increased my desire for a connection with a Rabbi or Jewish mentor in the future."**

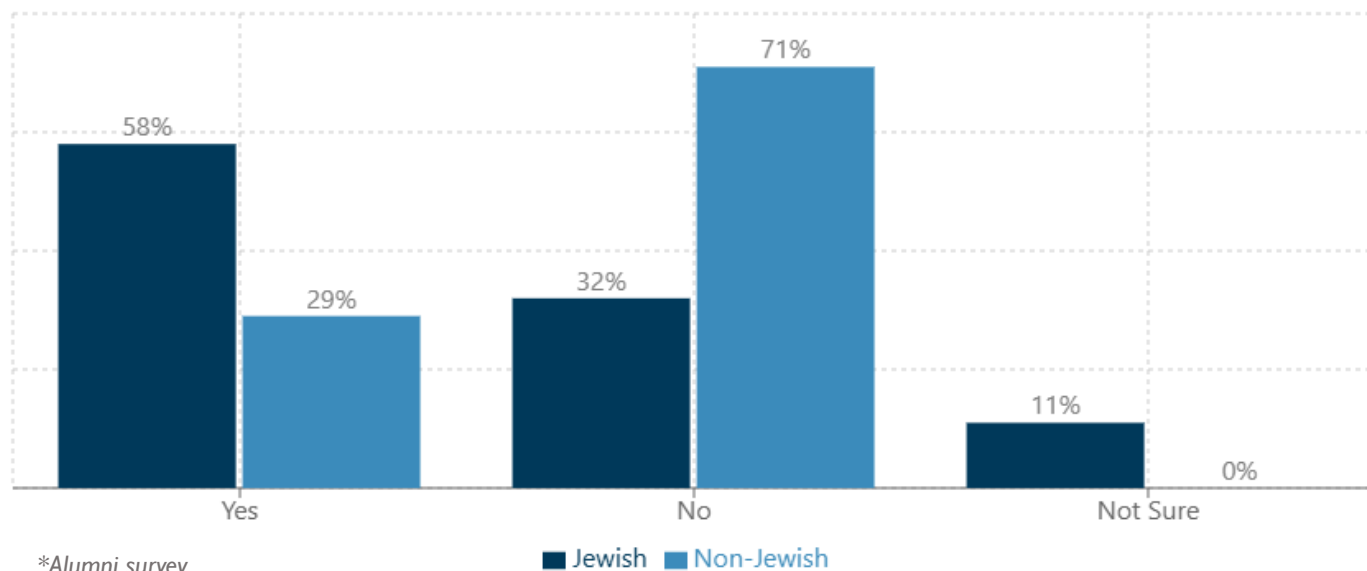
Learning with a Rabbi on Embark increases my desire for a connection with a Rabbi or Jewish mentor in the future



However, when asked, "Besides your connection with the Embark Rabbi, do you have a connection with another person or Rabbi who you think of as a Jewish mentor?", the responses reveal a clear difference between Jewish and non-Jewish participants. While 58% of Jewish participants report having another Jewish mentor, only 29% of non-Jewish participants do. Instead, 71% of non-Jewish participants indicate they do not have such a connection, suggesting that while their desire for rabbinic mentorship may increase, many do not yet have additional Jewish mentorship outside of Embark.

These findings suggest that Embark plays a crucial role in introducing participants—particularly non-Jewish partners—to the concept of rabbinic mentorship, but there remains a gap in translating this interest into additional mentoring relationships beyond the program.

Besides your connection with the Embark Rabbi, do you have a connection with another person or Rabbi who you think of as a Jewish mentor?



ACCESSIBLE KNOWLEDGE FOR JEWISH LIVING

Participants reported that the weekly topics were highly accessible, even for those with little or no background in Jewish learning. Many described their learning as eye-opening, particularly in its exposure to varied Jewish perspectives and practices. For some, this was their first formal encounter with Jewish texts and traditions.

1. **A key element of accessibility is the balance between structured learning and open discussion.** Participants report strengthening their foundation of Jewish knowledge while also engaging in discussions that allowed for personal exploration. Their ability to connect abstract concepts to real-life applications is a crucial factor in making the material relevant.
2. **Participants report an experience of actively articulating Judaism's personal significance in their lives.** Participants engage in structured text study and join dynamic group discussions about holidays and identity formation, forging deeper connections with both Jewish traditions and their fellow couples. They particularly value exploring domestic Jewish practice, envisioning how traditions live within their homes beyond synagogue settings.
3. **Knowledge acquisition drives Jewish relationships.** In discussing what they are learning, couples report communicating with one another about Judaism in their relationship, while also building meaningful community with others navigating similar mixed heritage relationships.

Relevant, Meaningful and
Applicable Discussion

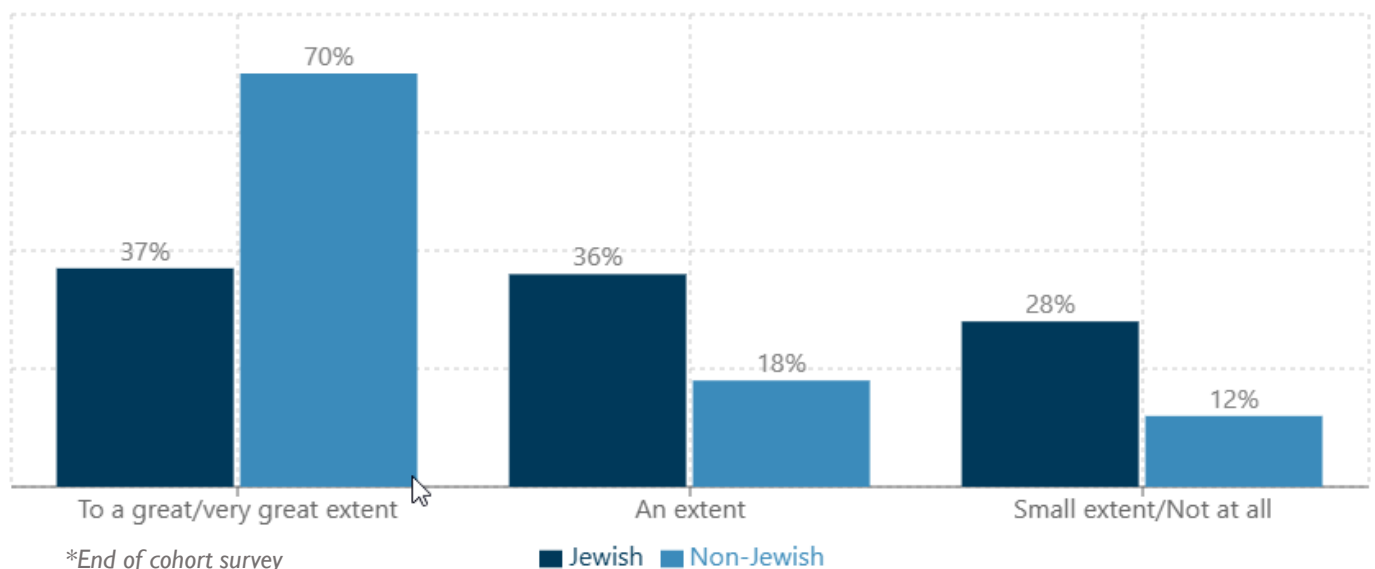
• "We talked about holidays. We talked about conversion versus the concept of 'ger toshav', or the non-Jewish resident in a Jewish community. We talked a lot about identity formation. And one of the really nice things that really got us comfortable with the other couples was doing kinds of pairings, and we would get texts, and then we would kind of all move around. And I feel like that really got me to know the other couples. But also, people look at texts differently and have different concerns about them. They like different things about them. So that was really great for learning and then we would all come together as a big group and talk about them, and that really, really helped to get a deeper understanding of different things."

Judaism in the Home

• "For me, it was honestly about getting a better picture of what Judaism is, and can be, especially within the home, because I feel like we've been to synagogue like twice or so, but I feel like being there doesn't give you a full picture of 'what does that look like in the home?'"

The learning format encouraged participants to not only study Jewish texts but also integrate them into their daily lives. Many couples found discussions particularly useful in helping them navigate Jewish traditions and practices in their shared home life. Again, non-Jewish participants reported higher levels of learning, with 70% stating they gained knowledge 'to a great extent' or higher, compared to 37% of Jewish participants. This suggests that the program was particularly effective in providing accessible entry points for those with less prior exposure to Jewish learning.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement?
'I gained more knowledge about Judaism and Jewish life.'



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Feeling Comfortable and Supported to Learn

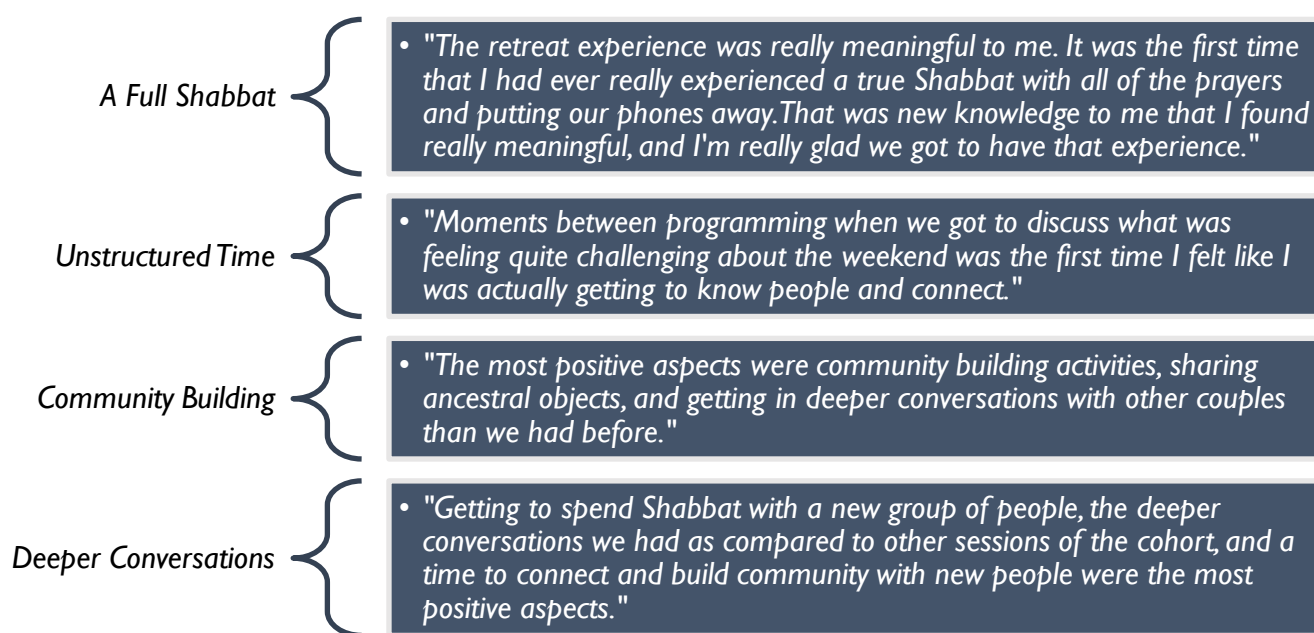
A significant theme across participant feedback is how the connection between them – their peer community - enabled participants to feel more comfortable exploring and integrating Jewish practices. Many found that being in a group of couples with similar backgrounds reduced anxieties about "doing Judaism wrong" and encouraged participation through mutual support and shared learning.

"Being with other mixed heritage couples, learning from them, asking questions, realizing that there are more couples that are of mixed heritage than you realize, and having that connection, it felt good. It felt good to be doing it together with a bunch of other people, with a bunch of other couples."

"I think that we would feel more comfortable if someone were to invite us [to a Shabbat meal]. We would feel comfortable hosting a Shabbat dinner more now probably than before. We would feel more comfortable that we would be able to make connections."

Enhancing Jewish Learning and Community Through Immersive Retreats

The Embark retreats are a vital contribution to the relationship building process. The retreats take place over a Shabbat weekend, providing an immersive experience that blends structured learning, community-building, and informal peer engagement. Participants share meals, engage in discussions led by their cohort rabbi, and take part in Jewish rituals, including Shabbat services and a Havdalah ceremony. The schedule balances facilitated sessions on Jewish life and belonging with unstructured time for socializing and reflection.



By blending study, discussion, and shared experiences, the retreat creates a dynamic and impactful environment that fosters meaningful connections and Jewish engagement. The immersive experience strengthens relationships and sets a positive tone for the remainder of the cohort journey, making it an essential component of the Embark program.

Purpose and Timing

- **Intimacy and Trust:** The retreat is intentionally scheduled early in the program to foster intimacy and trust, creating a foundation for deeper engagement.
- **Connections:** Participants frequently report that it enhances their comfort and strengthens connections within the cohort. Those unable to attend often express regret, recognizing the retreat's role in deepening relationships.
- **Timing:** In one cohort where the retreat occurred later, participants noted that an earlier placement would have been preferable.

Retreat Activities

- **Structured Engagement:** Facilitated discussions encourage participants to reflect on Jewish life and belonging.
- **Unstructured Social Time:** Free time allows for organic relationship-building and informal peer interactions.
- **Personal Sharing:** Participants move from light conversation to deeper discussions, fostering openness and vulnerability.
- **Jewish Rituals:** Shared Shabbat experiences create a meaningful engagement with Jewish tradition.

Impact on Participants

- **Strengthening Relationships:** The retreat builds familiarity and a sense of belonging, making it easier for participants to engage in meaningful discussions.
- **Deep and Personal Conversations:** Participants value the retreat's ability to create an environment of trust where open discussions flourish.
- **Jewish Practice and Connection:** The immersive setting enhances engagement with Jewish rituals in a way that weekly sessions cannot fully replicate.
- **Havdalah as a Highlight:** Participants consistently describe the Havdalah ritual as a spiritual and meaningful conclusion to the retreat.

Tribe 12

MOISHE HOUSE

Embark Philly Couples Cohort: The Home We Build Together

**Starts January 10th @ 6:30 PM**

**The Weitzman**



OUTCOMES: PARTICIPATION IN JEWISH LIFE AND COMMUNITY

OVERCOMING THE FEELING OF BEING AN OUTSIDER IN JEWISH SPACES

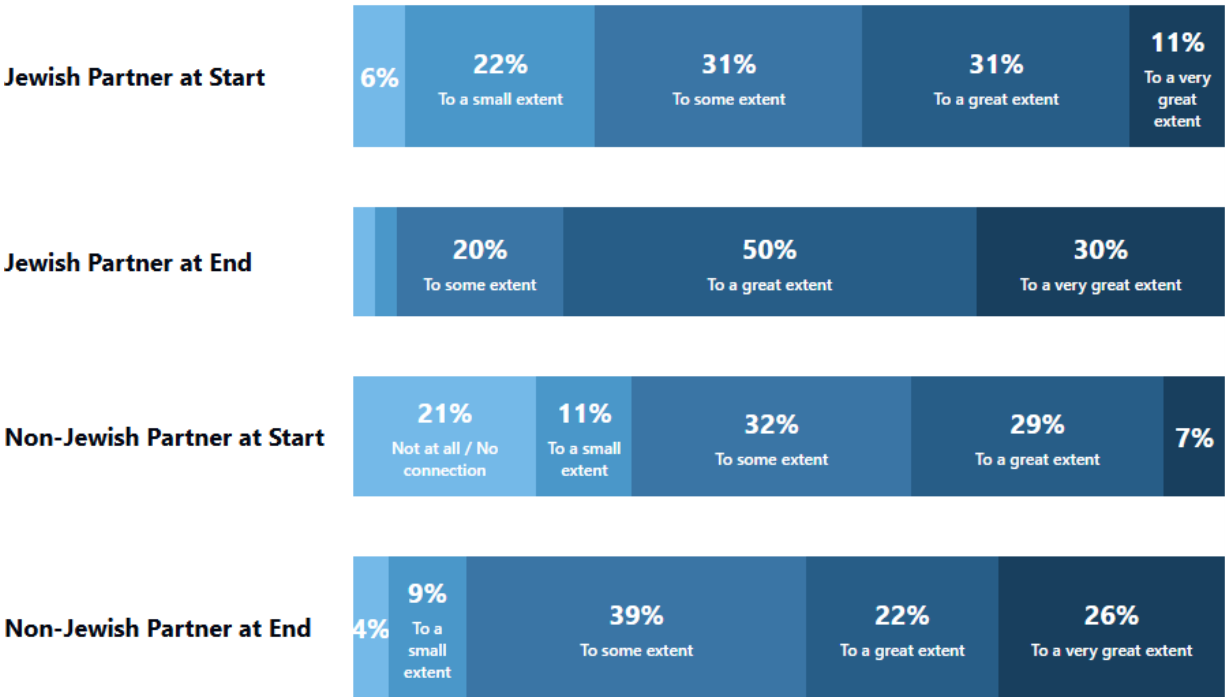
A central factor in understanding Embark’s impact is the sense of belonging—feeling authentically part of Jewish life and community. While Embark fosters greater comfort in Jewish spaces, particularly for Jewish partners, non-Jewish partners often continue to experience a sense of being an outsider.

The start-to-end comparison of responses to the question “To what extent do you feel good about your connection to Jewish life?” reveals significant positive shifts for both Jewish and non-Jewish partners:

- For Jewish partners, the increase is dramatic, those feeling connected "to a great extent" or higher rise from 42% to 80%. At program’s end, no Jewish participants reported feeling only “a small” or “no connection.”
- For non-Jewish partners, the proportion of those feeling connected "to a great extent" or higher grew from 36% to 48%, while those reporting "no connection" or just "to a small extent" dropped from 32% to 13%.

Despite these gains, 52% of non-Jewish partners still reported a connection of less than "to a great extent." This lingering gap is rooted in a persistent sense of being an outsider in Jewish communal spaces. Interviews revealed that while non-Jewish participants generally feel welcomed, they often remain on the periphery, grappling with questions of authenticity and comfort in Jewish environments. Notably, being part of a mixed-heritage cohort within Embark helps mitigate these feelings. Within the Embark group, participants develop a sense of belonging, yet the feeling of being "other" often re-emerges in broader Jewish community settings.

To what extent do you feel good about your connection to Jewish life?



Feels Welcome But Different

• “To some extent, no matter how inviting the Jewish community might be, or however hard I try to educate my partner on certain things, or bring him into certain spaces, he might feel welcomed, but he'll always feel like a bit of an outsider, and that's something that I heard from a lot of the non-Jewish partners in our group. And so it just made me more aware, and perhaps more empathetic to that.”

Authenticity

• "I have like an authenticity complex where I grew up my whole life being told I was Jewish by my Black mother because she was like, 'your dad is Jewish.' So like my whole life I was told that I was Jewish but did not grow up in a Jewish community. So I think it's been a lifelong question for me about my Jewishness or Jewish peoplehood"

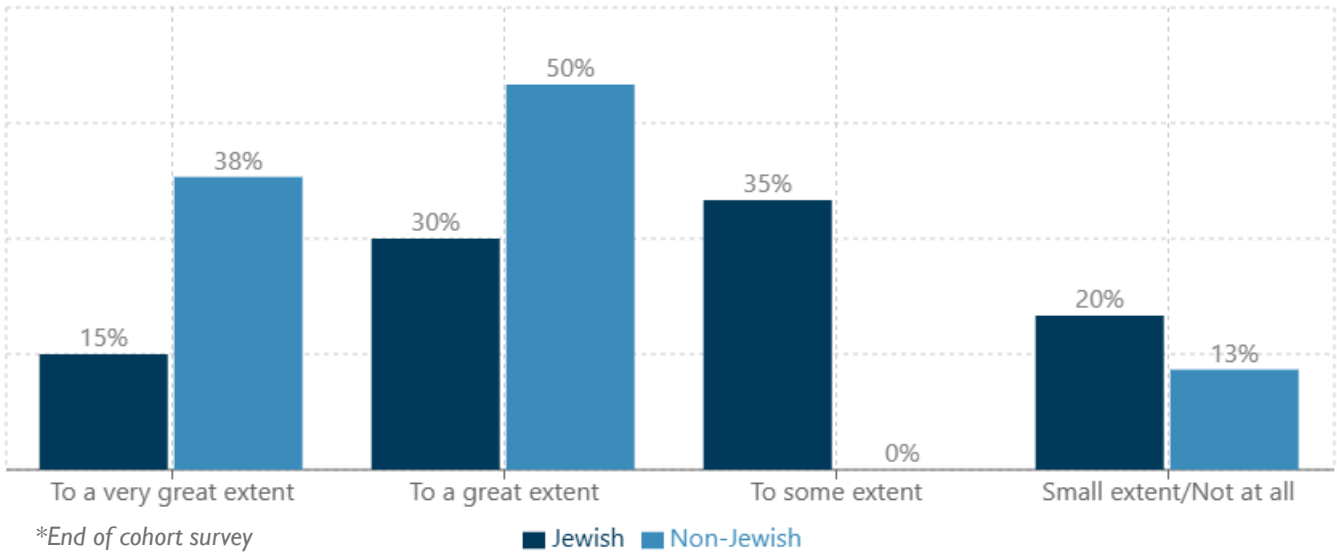
Jewish confidence emerges from two intertwined aspects of the Embark experience: Jewish knowledge acquisition and the supportive group environment that normalizes engagement in Jewish life. These elements reinforce each other, allowing participants to gain the skills, language, and relationships necessary to integrate Judaism into their lives. The survey data and direct quotes from participants illustrate how these components contribute to a growing sense of confidence in Jewish spaces.

Jewish Knowledge as a Foundation for Confidence

Participants report that learning about Jewish traditions and concepts helped them feel more equipped to participate in Jewish life. The structured nature of the classes provided a safe and supportive environment for asking questions and deepening their understanding of words and concepts that Jews use to communicate with one another, as well as an understanding of Jewish practices. For many, this learning translated into greater confidence in participating in Jewish life.

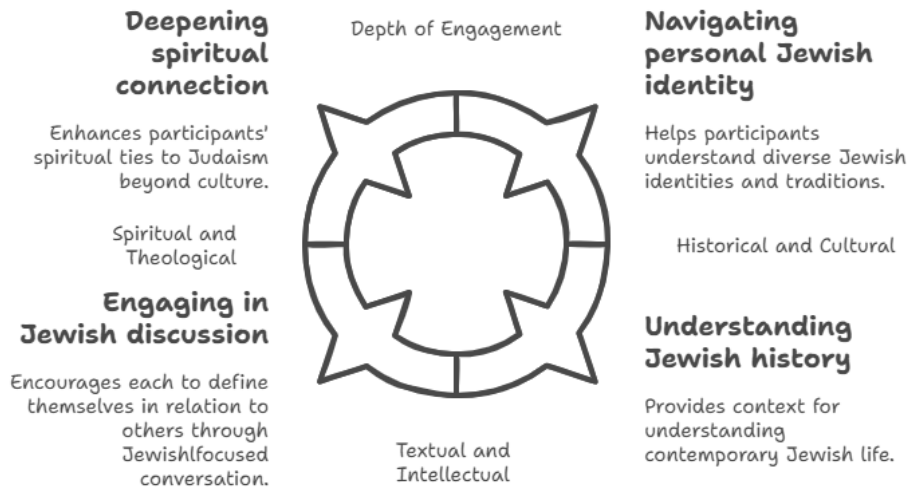
Jewish participants deepened their understanding of Judaism, often personalizing their engagement. Many non-Jewish participants experienced transformative impact, gaining significant Jewish knowledge for the first time. Data shows non-Jewish participants reported higher increases in knowledge, highlighting Embark's effectiveness in foundational education. The program plays a crucial role for non-Jewish partners by enabling them to actively engage in Jewish spaces, while Jewish participants built upon existing knowledge.

To what extent do the following statements describe the contribution of Embark for you?
Embark made a positive contribution to your Jewish knowledge



Jewish Partner
"Embark gave me a language or vocabulary around how to describe the parts of Judaism that are important to me. Before Embark, I would say that Judaism is important. My partner would ask me why it's important and I would say that I don't know - it just is. I didn't have a good way to talk about it. And so I feel like I've gained a vocabulary to be able to identify those important pieces."

Mapping Jewish Knowledge and Contributions in Embark



TYPES OF JEWISH KNOWLEDGE GAINED IN EMBARK

1. Spiritual and Theological Knowledge

Participants highlighted an increased understanding of Jewish spirituality, theology, and concepts related to God.

- “The spiritual ideas about our relationship with God.”
- “Jewish views on things like charity and belief in God.”

Contribution to Participants:

- Deepened their sense of connection to Judaism as a spiritual tradition, rather than only a cultural or historical identity.
- Helped them integrate Jewish ethics and values into their daily lives, particularly in decision-making and relationships.
- Encouraged curiosity and continued engagement with Jewish learning (e.g., joining a Torah study group post-Embark).

2. Textual and Intellectual Knowledge

Participants gained knowledge of Jewish texts, debates, and traditions, as well as exposure to different Jewish perspectives.

- “The discussion about debate and argument... that it’s about understanding both sides and picking one.”
- “Have a place to discuss Jewish text as a community was fulfilling.”
- “Ways to study Jewish culture and texts with my non-Jewish partner.”

Contribution to Participants:

- Built confidence in engaging with Jewish texts, allowing them to participate in study groups or conversations about Jewish learning.
- Fostered critical thinking by exposing participants to Jewish traditions of debate and pluralism in interpretation.
- Created opportunities for couples (including interfaith couples) to study Jewish texts together, deepening their shared engagement.

3. Historical and Cultural Knowledge

Some participants found value in learning about the diversity of Jewish life, movements, and historical context.

- “Understanding how different people/movements define Judaism.”
- “Learning about the great diversity in ways to engage with Judaism, from liberal to conservative.”
- “Rabbi Megan provided a thorough outline of how Judaism is a religion, ethnicity, and culture, and how there are many different forms of Judaism and ways to observe the holidays.”

Contribution to Participants:

- Helped participants navigate their own place within Jewish tradition, particularly those from mixed-heritage or interfaith backgrounds.
- Reduced anxiety and feelings of exclusion, as participants realized there is no single “correct” way to be Jewish.
- Strengthened personal agency, giving participants the tools to craft a Jewish life that aligns with their

Increased Confidence – Perspective, Comfort and the Ability to Engage

Participants report the Jewish learning gives them the tools to more confidently navigate Jewish life and rituals. Whether it was understanding holiday traditions, learning to lead a Shabbat meal, or engaging with Jewish texts for the first time, participants found that structured exposure to Jewish knowledge helped them feel more prepared and competent in Jewish settings.

"I loved the Jewish learning and being able to do that in a way that was accessible for my partner. That none of it to me felt like we weren't doing anything that I thought, Oh, I've done this before'. It all felt very new and fresh even with all of my experience in Jewish education, and then being able to do that and have her come in."

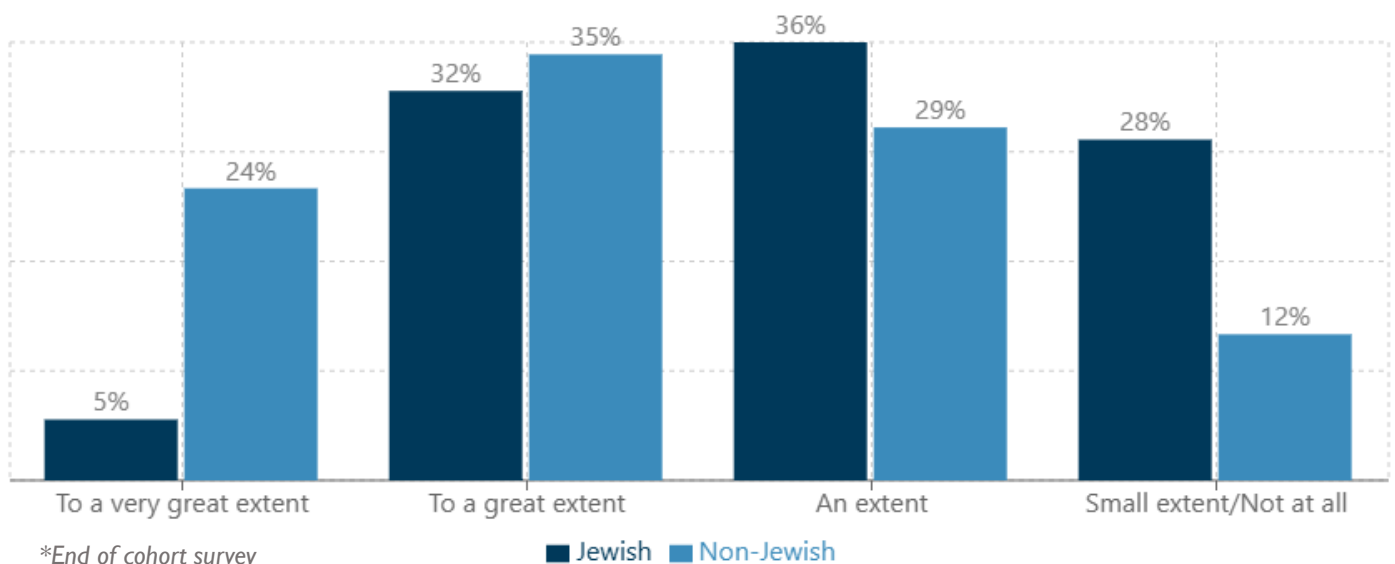
"I think the Jewish wisdom here is taking the time to pause and do something with intention, and not just because it's what you always do. I think the idea of pausing and taking stock of something or thinking of the intention of why you're doing something, is really valuable. Whether it's Shabbat, or meals, or other practices, there's something meaningful about doing it with purpose."

This learning was particularly meaningful for non-Jewish partners, who described how Jewish learning allowed them to move from passive observation to active engagement:

"We also went to a service as part of the program. We went to a Friday evening service in Midtown... It was a really different congregation. I think we went to an LGBTQ-friendly synagogue. It was interesting to attend a service where we didn't know anyone there, and it was helpful to see another version of it without my partner's family."

"I would participate in Shabbat sometimes at my partner's parents' house, but they're the leaders of their household. So I'm feeling like a guest and doing what they ask and being polite. But if we're doing it I'm relying on my partner, too. I don't know those prayers. But I felt like having us try it ourselves made me more comfortable."

I increased my sense of confidence participating in Jewish activities



These findings suggest that while Jewish participants deepened their existing knowledge and increased confidence to participate in Jewish life, a majority of the non-Jewish participants experienced an even greater transformation, with structured learning providing them with a framework for feeling more confident to participate that many did not previously have.

Social Confidence to Enter Jewish Spaces

Participants describe the peer-relationships within the cohort giving them confidence to enter Jewish spaces that previously felt unfamiliar or intimidating. Some describe overcoming feelings of being an imposter, namely that they are outsiders who don't belong.

"Having a kind of support group to talk about those feelings was honestly one of the biggest things for me, and I thought I was the only person that was struggling with that. And then it came up from everybody that it's really hard when you love somebody, but you also know that there are people out there that think that it's bad that you're with them. It was really nice to have support from other people, and to also see how rich their Jewish lives were, and to realize like this does not compromise them and it's not going to compromise me."

"After Embark ended, we did a Shabbat dinner with couples that were able to make it. We still see a few of them at shul sometimes, which is really nice. And at a few events. And one of the really nice things is that we see both the Jewish partner and the non-Jewish partner around at these events as well. So we often will sit together or ask who's going. So it is really nice. Everyone's kind of scattered from all around Denver. Some people are further away, and that affects who goes to what. But we're definitely still in touch with people."

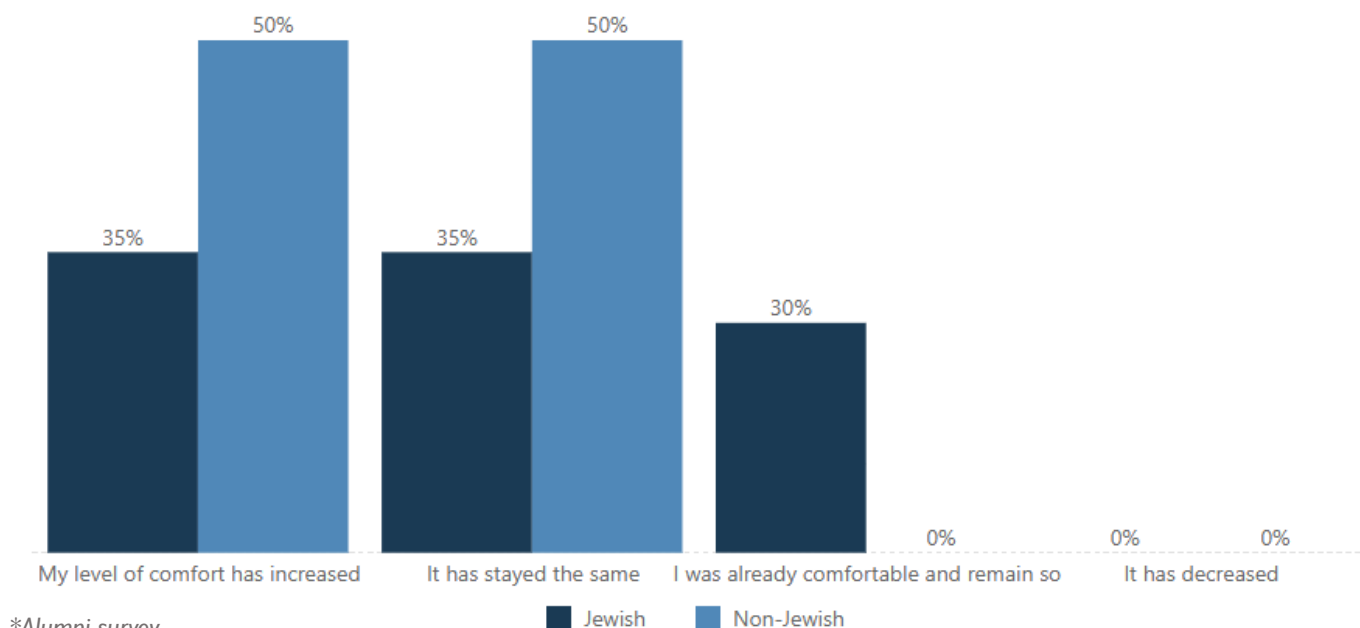
For some, the experience directly led to increased participation in Jewish life beyond Embark:

"Since then we've been invited to several different people's Shabbat dinners. We attended a Bar Mitzvah in New Jersey. Since then [the end of Embark], I have been invited and welcomed and going to many more Jewish events of a wide variety, which has been really nice."

"Stella and Josh organized an event where we all went to the Botanical Garden together. And we got to see some of the couples there that we really liked, and some of them are gonna go to our drawing event, too."

The combination of accessible Jewish knowledge and a supportive group dynamic helped participants not only gain confidence in Jewish spaces but also develop lasting relationships that sustained their Jewish engagement beyond the program. Additional data from the alumni survey further highlights how Jewish knowledge and comfort in Jewish spaces evolved post-program:

How would you describe the level of comfort that you have experienced in Jewish spaces since completing Embark?



"My level of comfort has increased because I now feel I belong in Jewish spaces in a way I didn't before."

VIEWING JEWISH PRACTICE AS POSITIVE AND DESIRABLE

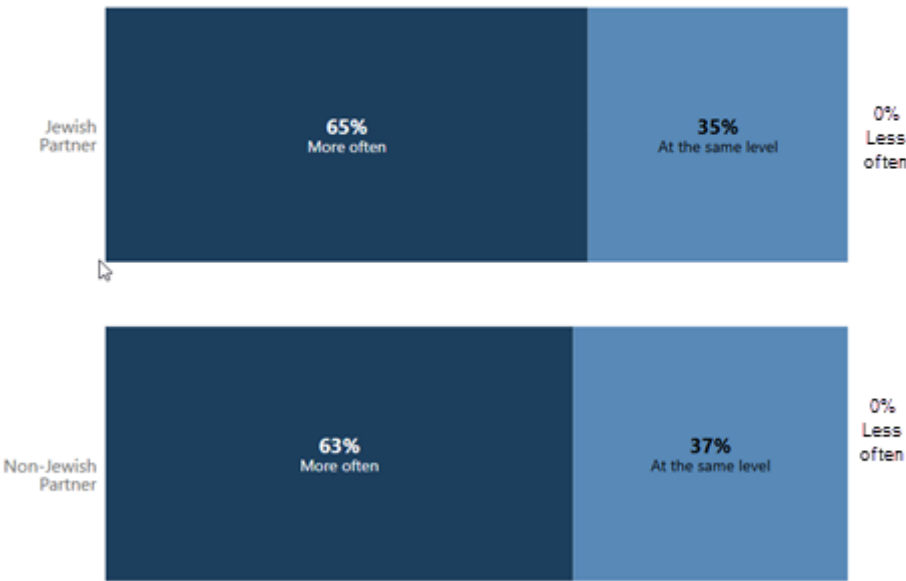
At the end of the program a majority of participants report incorporating more Jewish practices into their lives as a couple (chart top-right).

From start to the end of the program there is a positive movement for participants relationship to Jewish practice (chart page-bottom).

- Among the Jewish partners, the biggest shift was the jump in those finding Jewish practice "very fulfilling," rising from 18% to 32%. By program's end everyone became engaged, as the number of people who "did not currently participate" dropped to zero.
- For the non-Jewish partners, the biggest change was a complete shift into Jewish engagement—the 32% who weren't participating at all dropped to zero.

For all just a minority find Jewish practice "very fulfilling" indicating that for the large majority Embark serves as a pathway to stimulating openness to Jewish practice as positive and desirable. All in some way got involved in Jewish life—especially those who started with no participation—but fulfillment didn't always follow, especially for the non-Jewish partners.

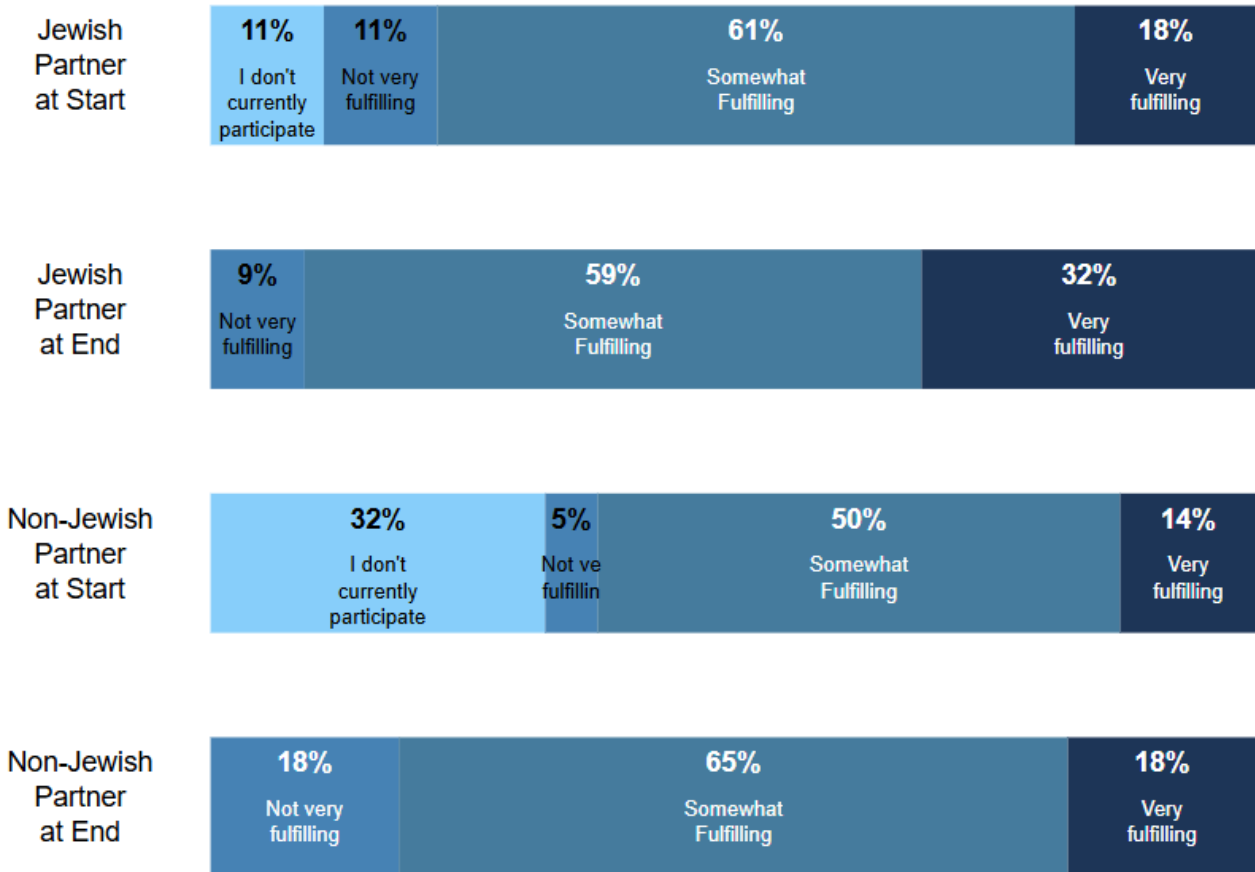
As a result of participating in Embark, are you currently incorporating Jewish traditions, culture, and/or rituals into your life as a couple more often, at a similar level, or less often?



*End of cohort survey

"I think Embark has sort of reframed the way that I think about things. Made me a little bit more open to the idea of actively participating in the Jewish community from the perspective of hosting Shabbat or something."

How Fulfilling is Your Current Jewish Practice?



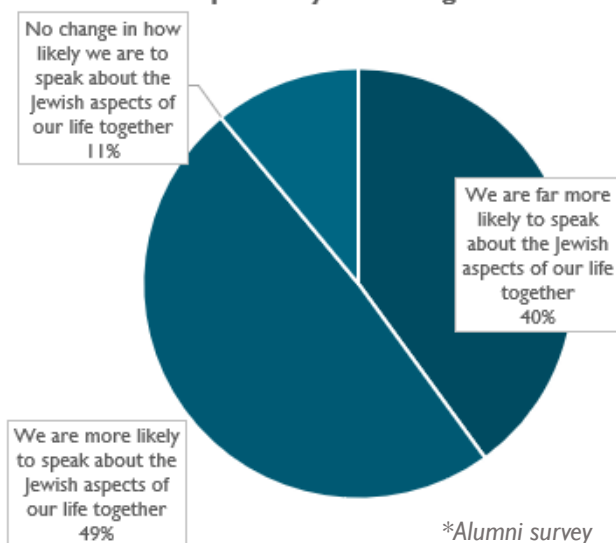
*Alumni survey

COUPLE FOCUSED OUTCOMES

Jewish Conversations that Strengthen Couples Relationships

89% of the alumni survey respondents report being more likely to speak about the Jewish aspects of their life together. Couples report discussing a range of topics, including their communication style about Jewish life as a couple, holiday traditions, family, and integration into the Jewish community. Through these Embark enabled conversations, they identify what truly matters to them, their values and preferences, and in the process strengthen their personal connection to one another. While topics like *brit milah* for future children or balancing Chanukah and Christmas are sometimes uncomfortable and charged, these discussions ultimately foster greater understanding and openness in their relationships.

As a result of participating in Embark, to what extent are you and your partner more likely to speak about the Jewish aspects of your life together?



Couples Bond Strengthened

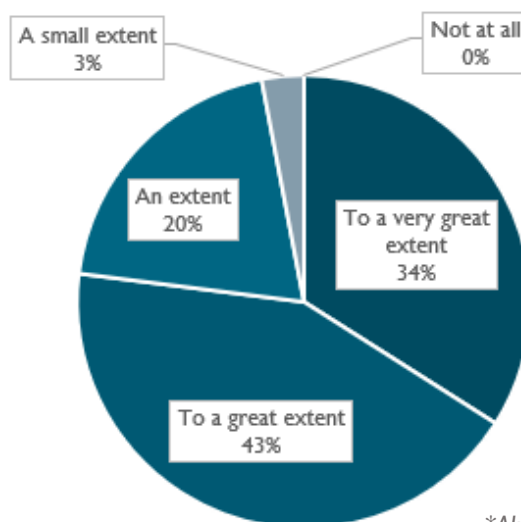
- "I feel that for me husband and me, our bond has only strengthened. There is a feeling of trust knowing, okay, we've had some of these conversations now, and we know the intentions and the morals behind each other's thoughts. So, going forward, I have a lot of confidence that we can talk, negotiate, and try to come up with our own traditions and form our own household traditions."

Almost all (97%) report Embark making it easier to speak with their partner about the Jewish dimensions of their life together. Many couples report gaining confidence in their ability to negotiate and compromise, allowing them to create their own household traditions. Class discussions bring up topics that might have been discussed in the past as a couple but are revisited with greater understanding.

To what extent did participating in Embark make it easier to speak with your partner about the Jewish dimension of your life together?

Open Communication

- "Embark made us talk about certain things that maybe we wouldn't have. She [Rabbi Megan] made us face some uncomfortable questions. It's good in that sense. There was one session about holiday traditions. Her family does different things from my family, because her family is not Jewish and how we split all that up. That was a big conversation, although that's something that we now have figured out."



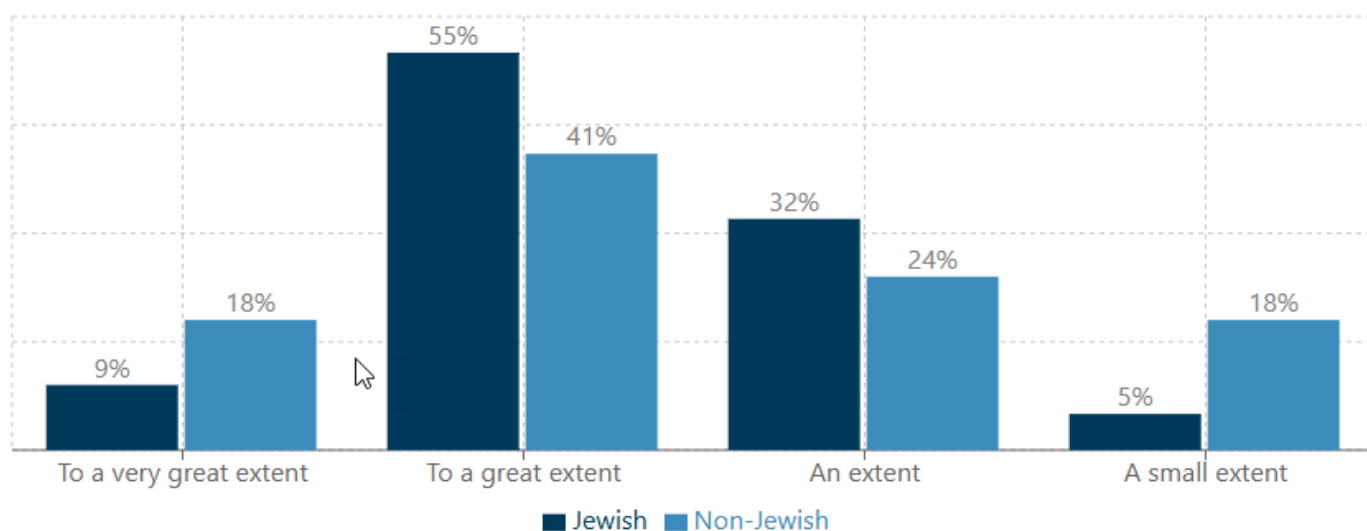
Deepened Couple Focused Knowledge and Understanding

Participants describe how Embark deepened their understanding of Jewish values they share, strengthened their relationships in the process. For both the Jewish and non-Jewish partner the program creates opportunities for reflection, encouraging couples to consider the Jewish traditions they wish to embrace and how to integrate them into their lives. Embark enables these couples to engage with Jewish life in ways that feel authentic and personal, while also strengthening their ties to a broader Jewish community.

"Embark has deepened our understanding of each other's spiritual needs and helped us explore our shared Jewish values on a deeper level, strengthening our connection."

"It created a space for us to reflect upon the traditions we want to practice as a family and tangible ways we are going to implement them."

I gained a better understanding of how Judaism integrates into our life as a couple



*End of cohort survey



"I think what we also appreciated was that it was put on by a couple. It was nice, seeing their relationship as well. They have a beautiful marriage and just almost using them as an example, and their relationship also as a model."

Envisioning Shared Household Practice

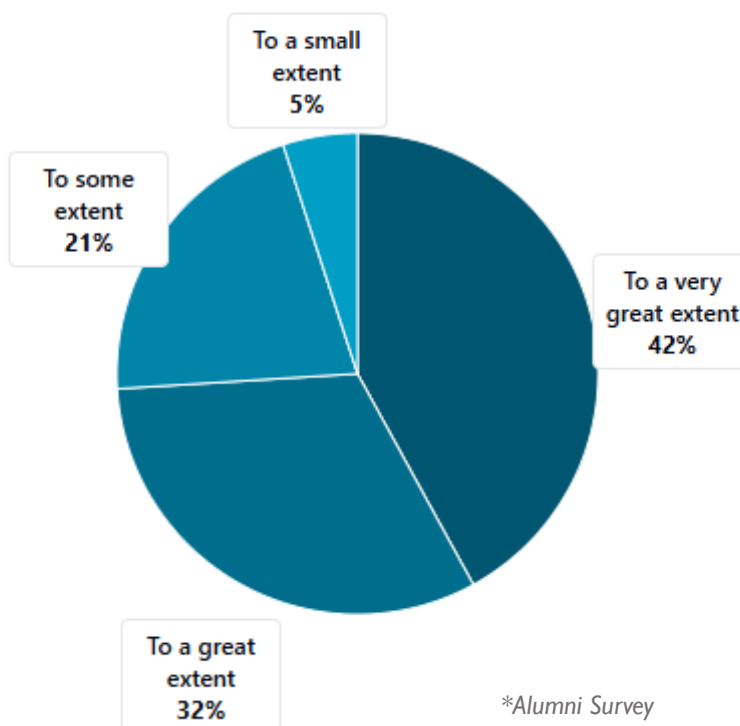
All report Embark helping them and their partner to form a shared vision of how they want to integrate Jewish living into their lives, with 76% attributing the contribution “to a great extent or higher.” Couples describe Embark enabling them to develop a discussion about their shared household practices and long-term vision for their Jewish life. They engage in discussions both in class and at home. At home, they explore how to shape their own practices, which is a direct result of the learning and discussions in the program. This process also encourages them to think more intentionally about how they want to practice and observe Jewish traditions in a way that feels authentic to them. Shabbat meals are the most practiced tradition. Many of the participants report greater motivation to host their own Shabbat meals for the first time and incorporate more religious elements into them.

"I am on a Jewish journey. We can establish ourselves as a Jewish couple and have traditions that we do and connect to Judaism together in a way that's not immediately related to how you can still be living a Jewish life before being a Jewish person."

"I think the program helped us think about what it means to build a home together. It wasn't just about rituals, but about the values and practical steps we want to take as a couple moving forward."

"We saw the magic of observing Shabbat, starting it off in community together on a Friday night at a service, and then also not having technology all day and spending time with people just talking and being in community on a Saturday. It felt like a really special time that we wanted to continue."

To what extent do you feel that Embark helped you and your partner form a shared vision of how you want to integrate Jewish living into your life together?



*Alumni Survey

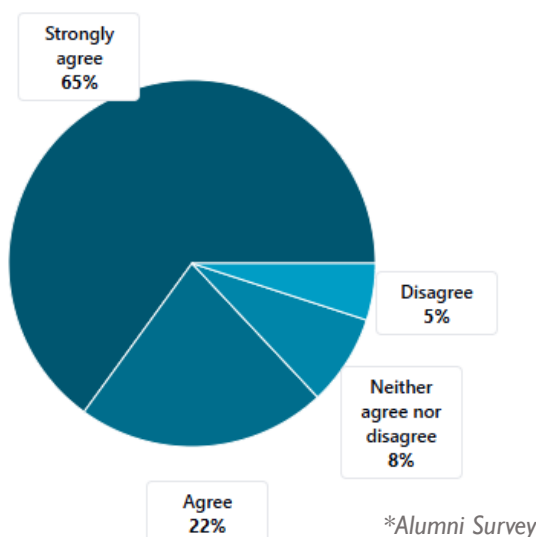
COMMUNITY FOCUSED OUTCOMES

Finding a Community of Peers

Participation for many has a profound impact on their sense of peer-community. Many stated that they had not previously had access to such a supportive Jewish network, and the program provided new opportunities to maintain and deepen relationships. The Embark experience facilitated both meaningful social connections and engagement in Jewish communal life—not just through holiday gatherings but also in casual, everyday interactions. For some participants, this was their first real connection to a Jewish network, offering both social and practical support. The peer community helps participants stay informed about events, feel welcomed in Jewish spaces, and have a support system that extends beyond the program, reinforcing their connection to Jewish life.

Notably, in the alumni survey 87% agree that connecting with a peer group of other mixed-heritage couples is an important aspect of Embark, and 76% report maintaining connections with their cohort, showing the lasting impact of these relationships.

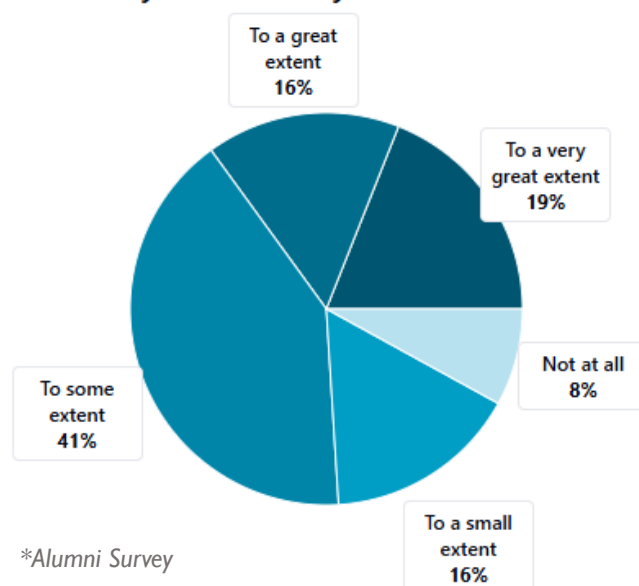
Connecting with a peer-group of mixed heritage couples is an important contribution of Embark for me



"I never had access to a community like that before. And that is really the highlight of why I really liked it because I have a chance now to go to events when I'm able to, whereas I didn't have that before. I'm sure that I'm going to be getting more messages about upcoming events. It's not just for Shabbat, but they [the Rabbi] even wanted to just get together to go out somewhere and do mini golf, just to hang out and stay connected. So they are working to not just bring us together for holiday events, but to also have us hang out in social settings, and just to continue the relationships."

"We have people in the [Embark] community who we want to keep relationships with that we want to continue to foster in the long run. And then maybe some people who we wouldn't want to get together outside of this group with, but they might be knowledgeable on something that we could reach out to them about in the style of networking."

To what extent have you maintained connections with any members of your Embark cohort?



Increased Participation in Jewish Community

Embark fosters deeper engagement in Jewish communal life. In the alumni survey, both Jewish and non-Jewish participants report increasing their involvement in local Jewish organizations, Jewish friendships, and Jewish activities hosted by others, with many also considering further participation.

- **Jewish Friendships:** A majority (60%-75%) strengthen their Jewish friendships through Embark. The program creates a supportive environment for forming and deepening relationships, building a stronger sense of connection within Jewish communal spaces. A smaller group (13%-20%) choose not to expand their Jewish social circles beyond Embark, indicating that while the program successfully fosters connections, some participants prefer to maintain their existing networks.
- **Jewish Activities Hosted by Others:** Around 60%-63% participate more frequently in Jewish activities within their communities, and another 25%-30% consider doing so. Embark introduces participants to new opportunities and encourages ongoing communal involvement.
- **Local Jewish Organizations:** Over half (50%-63%) increase their participation in local Jewish organizations, while 25%-45% express interest in doing so. A small number (5%-13%) do not pursue further engagement. Many participants take steps toward greater institutional involvement, while others explore different ways to connect with Jewish communal life.

Since starting Embark, you increased your participation in any of the following forms of Jewish activity? Alumni Survey Jewish Participants

	I have increased my participation	I am considering increasing my participation	I do not intend to increase my participation	I have decreased my participation	Total
Local Jewish organizations	50%	45%	5%	0%	100%
Jewish friendships	60%	20%	20%	0%	100%
Jewish activities hosted by others in my community	60%	30%	10%	0%	100%

Non-Jewish Participants

	I have increased my participation	I am considering increasing my participation	I do not intend to increase my participation	I have decreased my participation	Total
Local Jewish organizations	63%	25%	13%	6%	100%
Jewish friendships	75%	13%	13%	0%	100%
Jewish activities hosted by others in my community	63%	25%	13%	0%	100%



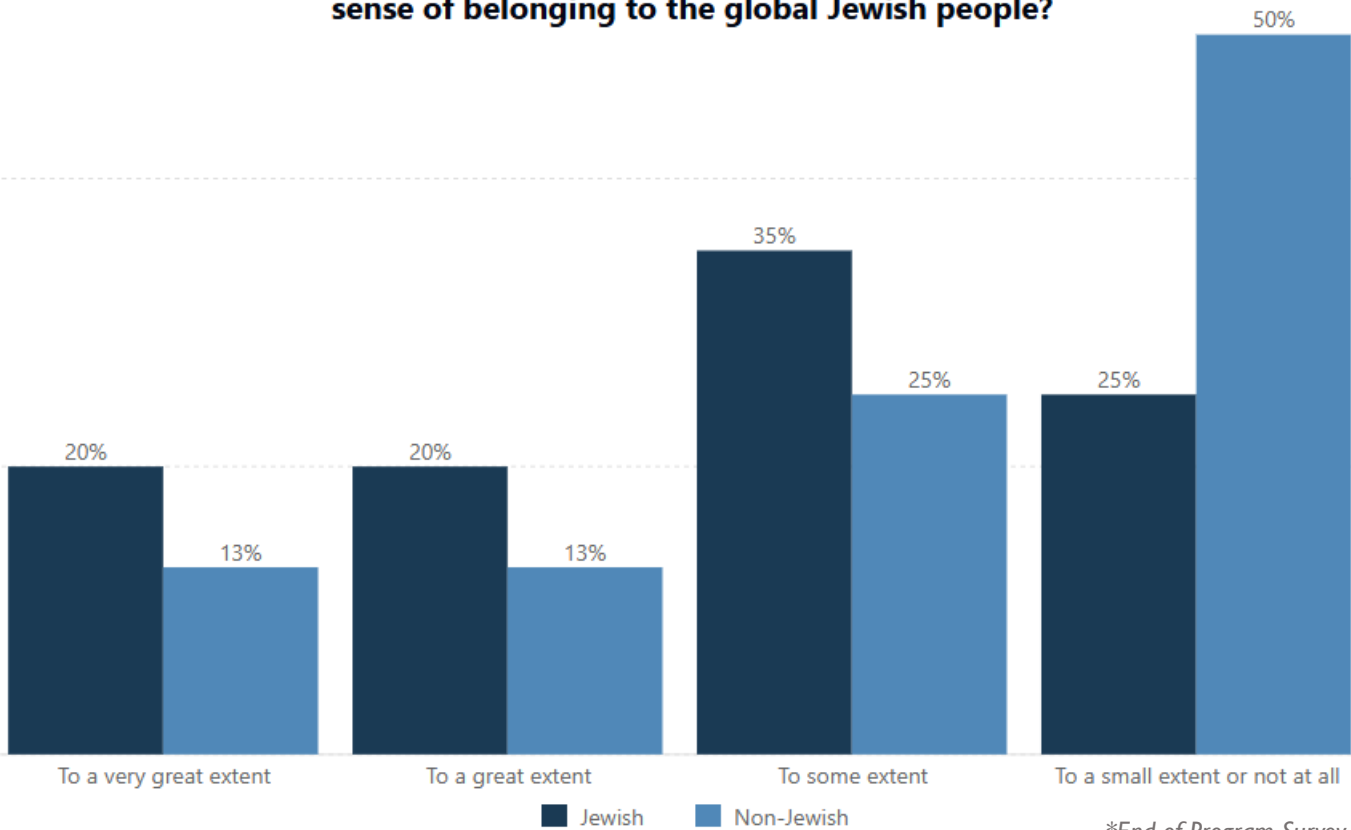
BELONGING TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE

In comparison to the other outcome measures a focus on connection to the global Jewish People shows mixed results. A minority of participants report a contribution to “a very great,” or “great extent.”

- 40% of Jewish respondents stated that Embark contributed to their sense of belonging to a "great extent" or "very great extent," compared to 26% of non-Jewish respondents.
- 50% of non-Jewish participants reported that Embark contributed "to a small extent," compared to 20% of Jewish participants.

These findings suggest that while Embark effectively fosters engagement with Jewish life, there are likely opportunities to enhance its impact on non-Jewish participants' sense of global Jewish belonging.

To what extent did Embark contribute to your personal sense of belonging to the global Jewish people?



A Primary Local Focus

Jewish life is fundamentally both a local and global collective experience, rooted in meaningful friendships and community relationships built upon shared memory, knowledge, and a sense of mutual responsibility. As such, an introduction to Jewish life is also an introduction to the collective dimension of Judaism - Peoplehood. For Embark couples, their cohort represents more than just a venue for acquiring knowledge—it serves as a gateway into the rich tapestry of collective Jewish life, encompassing religious, cultural, historical, political, and other dimensions.

Noticeably missing from the written survey responses and interviews is reference by the participants to outcomes associated with broader collective aspects of Jewish Peoplehood. The participants’ focus is primarily local. In the interviews the couples focus in on their personal lives in relationship to the Embark group and the Jewish community including: More knowledge of Judaism and engagement with Jewish texts, connecting with other Jewish participants, building a relationship with a Rabbi, and attending more Jewish events in the community.

This outcome is consistent with the Embark Educational Arc (see graphic on table of contents page), where the global/historical collective dimension is not explicated. As we show in the case study below, greater intentionality by Embark and the Rabbi’s to addressing the global Jewish dimension will very likely have significant positive impact. There is likely interest and desire among the participants to engage with pressing issues facing Jews worldwide today that are also relevant to their lives.

A Case Study – Discussing the Fallout from October 7th

In the interviews just one participant referenced an example of an Embark discussion with global Jewish significance. The example given below is of a discussion having to do with Israel in the context of the fallout from October 7th. The example is important as it shows how a global event of intense significance to Jews and about which participants are curious, can contribute to the Embark process of engaging with Jewish life.

The following quote highlights how *Embark* fosters an environment where participants can navigate challenging discussions—especially around Israel post-October 7th—while maintaining trust, mutual respect, and a commitment to learning from one another. It illustrates how Embark prepares individuals to engage with diverse perspectives, even on polarizing issues. The speaker describes an initial apprehension about how differing levels of connection to Israel might impact the conversation, yet the group's ability to listen, reflect, and navigate the discussion with care demonstrates the strength of the *Embark* framework. The fact that this conversation became a "final test" of trust and constructive dialogue speaks to the program's effectiveness in helping participants develop the confidence and skills to engage in difficult yet essential discussions.

"The discussion on Israel post-October 7th was requested because many people were deeply confused and uncertain about what kind of support they needed. We covered the current conflict in Israel as well as some historical context to provide a broader understanding.

Going into the conversation, we were quite apprehensive. We had one student who was Israeli, while one or two others were less connected to Israel and did not feel a strong personal affiliation. Despite our initial concerns, the discussion went remarkably well. It remained cordial, though at times it felt like participants were being overly cautious, avoiding conflict to the point that the conversation didn't push into deeper engagement.

That said, everyone had the opportunity to share their perspectives, and there was a genuine effort to listen and engage with different viewpoints. It was meaningful to hear diverse voices and to frame individual perspectives within the broader emotional and communal context of the topic. Ultimately, there was a shared trust that everyone in the room cared about the people involved on all sides, and no one walked away feeling disrespected.

I was truly impressed—it felt like a testament to how the course was structured. In many ways, it was like a final test: 'Can we actually navigate a conversation like this? Do we trust each other enough?' It was the ultimate trust exercise—an opportunity to speak honestly while still maintaining a sense of comfort and mutual respect. Of all our discussions, this one had the greatest potential for tension, yet it also demonstrated how far we had come as a group."



DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Successfully Creating Meaningful Pathways into Jewish Life

The Embark 2024 Evaluation confirms that the program successfully creates meaningful pathways into Jewish life for mixed-heritage and interfaith couples by fostering learning, relationship-building, and Jewish engagement. The findings demonstrate that Embark's three core pillars—cohorts, rabbis/mentors, and content—work together to shape participants' experiences and outcomes.

- **Cohorts provide a peer community**, offering couples **a safe and supportive space where** they can explore Jewish life without fear of judgment. The shared experience reduces isolation, strengthens confidence, and fosters enduring relationships with other couples.
- **Rabbis serve as both teachers and mentors**, playing a critical role in participants' engagement with Jewish learning and practice. The trust built with Embark rabbis directly correlates with participants' increased confidence in Jewish spaces and their likelihood of maintaining Jewish engagement post-program.
- **Content is accessible and directly applicable to daily life**, ensuring that even those with minimal prior Jewish knowledge find the learning meaningful. The retreat experience, in particular, deepens personal connections to Jewish ritual and community, setting the stage for continued participation.

Embark leads to measurable growth in both couple-focused and community-focused engagement.

Couples report stronger communication about Jewish life, greater clarity in shaping their household practices, and increased confidence in Jewish spaces. At the community level, many participants deepen their Jewish friendships and increase participation in Jewish communal activities.

From Passive to Active Engagement with Jewish Life

Embark offers couples an opportunity to explore Judaism as an active and personal journey rather than a set of inherited traditions or expectations from one's family or others. A central theme emerging this evaluation is the development of “agency.”¹ Jewish education at its most effective does not merely transmit knowledge; it equips learners with the ability and confidence to actively shape their engagement with Jewish community and the Jewish People. For mixed-heritage and interfaith couples, agency means moving beyond observing Jewish life from outside, to developing personal, intentional, and shared Jewish engagement.

- **From Passive to Active:** Many Jewish participants reported a transformation in how they relate to their Jewish heritage. They moved from relying on familial traditions to actively deciding what aspects of Judaism to embrace in their own home. The process of learning with their partner provided an opportunity for reflection and intention-setting.
- **From Guest to Participant:** Non-Jewish participants gained the confidence to engage with Jewish life as active participants rather than guests, with many reporting that Embark helped them navigate Jewish spaces with greater comfort.

These shifts reflect how learning and supportive peer environments activate individuals by cultivating Jewish agency.

Nurturing Agency on Embark

Agency does not develop automatically—it must be intentionally nurtured. Embark's model avoids a one-size-fits-all approach and instead provides couples with the space to explore how Judaism integrates into their shared lives. Through rabbinic mentorship, structured discussions, and experiential learning (such as observing Shabbat and holiday rituals together), participants develop their own frameworks for Jewish engagement. By the end of the program, all participants engaged report engaging in some form of Jewish practice, but the level of fulfillment of that practice varied, highlighting the importance of continued opportunities for Jewish growth beyond Embark.

¹ Woocher, Jonathan. 2012. "Reinventing Jewish Education for the 21st Century." *Journal of Jewish Education* 78(3):182-226.

Challenges and Areas for Growth

Two key areas emerge as priorities for strengthening Embark's impact:

1. **Facilitating Deeper Integration into Jewish Communal Life**

While Embark reduces barriers to Jewish participation, some participants—particularly non-Jewish partners—continue to feel like outsiders in Jewish communal spaces. Embark fosters a strong internal sense of belonging within its cohorts but bridging the transition from Embark to broader Jewish communal life remains a challenge for many.

- Strengthening partnerships with local Jewish organizations can create structured post-program engagement opportunities.
- Providing mentorship pathways beyond the Embark rabbi can help sustain participants' Jewish learning and exploration.
- A focus on fulfillment in Jewish practice—not just participation—can help couples cultivate deeper, personally meaningful connections to Jewish life.

2. **Deepening Connection to the Global Jewish People**

The evaluation indicates that participants primarily focus on their personal and local Jewish experience, with limited engagement in the broader global dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood. Fostering both local and global Jewish consciousness enhances Jewish motivation, confidence and long-term engagement.

- Incorporating discussions on global Jewish issues, such as contemporary challenges facing world Jewry, can help expand participants' sense of Jewish belonging beyond their immediate community.
- Structured conversations on Jewish Peoplehood, Israel, and Jewish historical narratives may create stronger connections between participants' personal Jewish journeys and the collective Jewish experience.
- The post-October 7th period offers a unique moment for mixed-heritage couples to explore how Jews worldwide experience moments of crisis and resilience together.

Final Thoughts

Embark has proven to be a transformative experience for mixed-heritage and interfaith couples, providing them with the relationships, skills, and confidence to integrate Judaism into their lives in meaningful ways. The program's success demonstrates that agency in Jewish education emerges when individuals feel ownership over their Jewish journey—when Jewish learning is accessible, personally relevant, and deeply connected to broader life questions.

Strengthening post-program engagement, bridging the gap between Embark and broader Jewish communal life, and expanding discussions of Jewish Peoplehood will further enhance the program's long-term impact. By refining and expanding these elements, Embark can continue to serve as a vital entry point for couples seeking to build their connection to Judaism and Jewish community.