

Adam S. Ferziger

The Emergence of the Community Kollel:
A New Model for Addressing Assimilation



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The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research
and Strengthening Jewish Vitality
Bar Ilan University – Faculty of Jewish Studies
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A New Model for Addressing Assimilation**

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מחקרים וניירות עמדה

של מרכז רפפורט לחקר ההתבוללות ולחיזוק החינוניות היהודית

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to the author and

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Preface

Assimilation is not an inexorable force of nature, but the result of human choices. For many Jews, maintaining Jewish involvements and affiliations seems less attractive than pursuing the alternatives open to them in the pluralistic societies of contemporary Europe and America. We are convinced that the tendency of many Jews to disassociate from Jewishness reflects real flaws and weaknesses existing in various areas and institutions of Jewish life today. However, such weakness itself is man-made; having understood current dynamics, it is important to move beyond analysis, in the direction of mending and repair. These two aspects are reflected in our name: The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality, founded in Bar Ilan University in the spring of 2001 at the initiative of Ruth and Baruch Rappaport, who identified assimilation as the primary challenge to the future of the Jewish people.

Dr. Adam Ferziger has been associated with the Rappaport Center since its inception; it is therefore fitting that he is also the author of this publication, the Center's 13th ("Bar Mitzva") position paper. His intellectual background makes him unusually well-suited

for his research at the Center. He holds a Ph.D. in Modern Jewish History from Bar Ilan University, where he currently serves as lecturer in the Program in Contemporary Jewry and *Gwendolyn and Joseph Straus Fellow in Jewish Studies*. A resident of Israel, he was born in the United States and holds Orthodox rabbinical ordination (“semicha”) from Yeshiva University. His first book, entitled *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, Nonobservance and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity*, was published by the university of Pennsylvania Press in 2005.

Dr. Ferziger’s first program of research at the Rappaport Center was devoted to an analysis and critique of American Orthodox rabbinical training from a “counter-assimilationist” perspective. Published in 2003 under the title *Training American Orthodox Rabbis to Play a Role in Confronting Assimilation: Programs, Methodologies and Directions*, it has become the classic analysis and critique of that topic.

During his research for that study, Dr. Ferziger became interested in a novel educational framework within Jewish communities in North America: the community kollel. He also noted the actual and potential contributions of this model for the struggle against assimilation and the strengthening of Jewish vitality. With the encouragement of the Rappaport Center, Dr. Ferziger embarked upon a three-part research program devoted to the phenomenon of the community kollel. This paper by Dr. Ferziger is the first fruit of that endeavor. Entitled *The Emergence of the Community Kollel: A New Model for Addressing Assimilation*, the paper presents an historical description and analysis of the kollel phenomenon from its roots in 19th century Eastern Europe, through its various permutations in mid 20th century North America, until the surprisingly flexible developments in that century’s latter

decades. The author integrates his historical narrative with analysis based on the realms of sociology and religious-cultural studies, thus making the reader aware of the various dimensions of the phenomenon and of its implications for Jewish community life and Judaism in the 21st century. Finally, Dr. Ferziger points towards the further stages of his research:

[T]he second section will offer a more detailed description of the contemporary trends in the American community kollel...As a result, a more nuanced typology of the variety of kollelim that are included within the contemporary community kollel movement will emerge. Within this context, discussion will be devoted to the specific pedagogical and social principles that form the foundation for the kollel approach.... With this more comprehensive knowledge in hand, the third and last section of the study will analyze the significance of the community kollel for the understanding of a series of relevant contexts... Why have numerous Jews who have abandoned organized synagogue life found the kollel an attractive alternative? Is the kollel an exclusively Orthodox phenomenon or can the basic principles of the kollel be adopted successfully by other Jewish denominations? Finally, does the kollel model shed light upon other areas of conflict within contemporary Judaism such as gender issues and approaches to dealing with mixed families?

I have no doubt that after reading this “first installment” of Dr. Ferziger’s fascinating findings, its readers will look forward to the coming parts with great anticipation, and rightfully so.

* * *

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Ferziger for his significant contributions to the endeavors of the Rappaport center, and to thank all those whose efforts have enabled the publication of this paper: Ms. Iris Aaron, organizational co-ordinator of the Rappaport center, who was also in charge of proofreading and coordination with the press; Ms. Ruhi Avital (text editor), Ben Gassner studio (cover graphics), and Art Plus press.

Finally, all Jews and all people of good will concerned with the vitality of the Jewish people can take the opportunity presented by the appearance of this publication to adequately recognize and applaud the vision and commitment of Ruth and Baruch Rappaport. May they continue to enjoy together many years of health, happiness, and the deep satisfaction of knowing that through the manifold activities of the Rappaport Center they are making an important contribution to ensuring the future well-being of the Jewish people worldwide.

Zvi Zohar, Director
The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research
and Strengthening Jewish Vitality

Introduction: A New Educational Initiative

Jewish education makes a difference. The National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) of 2000–2001 confirmed that there is a strong correlation between the extent to which an individual is exposed to Jewish learning and the priority that that individual gives to his or her Jewish identity.¹ Another significant finding of the survey is that the number of self-identified American Jews who profess no affiliation with a major Jewish denomination has doubled in the last decade.² When taken together, these two findings pose a challenge for those working to encourage American Jews to strengthen their connection to Jewish life: They must ask themselves what types of educational frameworks will appeal to the increasingly “post-denominational” American Jews of the 21st century?

- 1 *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000–01 Report* (New York: United Jewish Communities, 2004), 14–15.
- 2 Bethamie Horowitz, “Looking for Labels”, *Forward* (February 6, 2004), www.fwd.com/issues/2004/04.02.06/oped1.html.

The following study describes the development of a growing phenomenon in American Jewish education: the community kollel.³ This serves as the historical backdrop for the argument that the kollel framework has great potential for the enrichment of contemporary Jewish life.

Until recently, a kollel (plural – kollelim) was generally understood to be an institution where veteran yeshiva students receive a stipend in order to continue to devote themselves to full-time Talmudic studies after their marriage. While personal study remains a central activity, the new community kollel has been transformed into an informal educational institution geared toward addressing the intellectual and spiritual interests of local Jewish populations throughout the United States and Canada. As will be described below, not all of the new kollelim aim to serve the same constituencies. Some are primarily “inreach” oriented and focus on buttressing the Jewish education of children and adults who are already active members of their communities. Others are “outreach” directed and seek out those who have limited connections to Jewish life, and offer them a variety of Jewish learning experiences with the hope that this will lead them towards greater involvement and commitment.

Indeed, the community kollel is more than a fresh model for popular Jewish textual study. Over the past ten years, it has emerged

3 Community kollels exist in numerous other countries around the world. In fact, the first community kollel was actually established in South Africa. This study, however, focuses on the particular models that have developed in the United States and their interplay with American life. On the first non-American kollel, see N.A., “Kollelim”, *Nitzotzot Min HaNer* 16 (Jan–March, 2004), 3; Moishe Sternbuch, “The Kollel Phenomenon and its Significance”, in *Halakhic Discourses on Masechte Beitzo* (Bnei Brak, 5742), 5–16.

as a unique movement within American Orthodoxy. Today, there are approximately seventy functioning institutions within North America that fit the criteria of a community kollel. This paper aims to describe this framework from both an historical and sociological perspective. It posits that the emergence of the community kollel reflects specific trends within American Orthodoxy. The current discussion also provides the background for a broader study currently in progress. Subsequent examinations will focus upon the relationship between the kollel model and recent trends in both American Jewish life and contemporary American religion in general. These additional analyses, will buttress the suggestion that this model represents a particularly effective tool for engaging early twenty-first century post-denominational American Jews in Jewish learning and experience.

By tracing the historical roots of the community kollel, the present paper provides a context for assessing both the continuity and change that are expressed in its most recent manifestations. Forthcoming sections of a broader study currently in progress will include a series of case studies of specific community kollelim. Each example chosen represents a particular typology that has emerged within the current trend. In addition, this section will move beyond specific locales and models and describe the organizational entities that have emerged as the community kollel idea has become increasingly popular and accepted within the Orthodox world. It will also address various economic aspects of the community kollel and the agencies that deal with this topic, as well as gender issues that are reflected in the role of the kollel wives within the organizational structure. The data presented will then be considered in a third section through a variety of analytical tools and implications that will be drawn regarding the ways in which the

community kollel reflects upon the environment in which it emerged. Finally, suggestions will be offered as to how the existent kollel model can be streamlined to play a more effective role in addressing assimilation and how it can be adopted and adapted by a wider range of groups within American Jewry.

The Emergence of the Community Kollel: Roots and Forerunners

When tracing the origins of the contemporary community kollel phenomenon, it is notable that the word *kollel* – which stems from the Hebrew root כָּלַל [כלל], meaning a collective – was initially applied to a communal body.⁴ The sixteenth century Jews who settled in Safed divided themselves into congregations (*kehalim*) based on their places of origin. Each *kahal* chose delegates who sat on a communal board that decided issues of common concern and represented the Jews of Safed before the Ottoman authorities as well as Diaspora Jewry. This umbrella group was known as the “kollel”.⁵

Subsequently, the term was applied to the small groups of Jews themselves, who moved together from specific European towns to the Land of Israel. This, once again, conjures up a loose

4 Avraham Ibn-Shoshan, *Milon Ibn-Shoshan* (Israel: Ha-Milon ha-Hadash, 2003), 748.

5 Avraham David, *Aliyah ve-Hityashvut be-Erez Yisrael ba-Meah ha-17* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass, 1993), 129; Ephraim Kupfer, “Kehillat Zefat u-Peulat Rabbi Menahem Azariah mi-Fano le-Ma’an ha-Yishuv be-Erez Yisrael”, *Shalem 2* (1975–76), 361–364.

analogy to the twentieth “community kollelim” in which young families exchange their yeshiva environments for a pioneering experience in an area that had previously not served as a center of Torah study. Not all of the European settlers necessarily spent their days studying the Torah, but their former neighbors considered the spiritual act of living in the Holy Land to be meritorious and worthy of financial support. Funds that arrived were thus divided (*halukah*) according to congregation or kollel.⁶

The principle of lay people financing activities deemed beneficial to Jewish life can be seen, then, as one of the foundations of the kollel from early on in its history. Yet when the first “kollel” specifically geared to supporting young Torah scholars was founded in Lithuania in 1879, it might have appeared that this was merely the application of a new name to a long-held practice among European communities.⁷ The introduction of a new, organized framework, however, seems to have been part of an overall effort

- 6 See: Herbert W. Bomzer, *The Kolel in America* (New York: Sheingold, 1985), 18; *Encyclopaedia Judaica* vol. 10 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), 1161; Louis Ginzerg, *Students, Scholars and Saints* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1928), 161–163; Shaul Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva ha-Litait be-Hithavutah* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1995), 293; A passage from Jacob Emden’s eighteenth century work, *Megillat Sefer* (Warsaw: Schuldberg Bros., 1896), 14–15, may imply that the term did not describe the recipients, but the – corrupt, in his opinion – individuals (“*ha-gabaim ha-kollelim*”) who were responsible for divvying out the money.
- 7 The date is based on Stampfer, 298–299; See Avraham Hanokh Galitzenstein, *Rabbeinu Ha-Zemah Zedek* (Kfar Chabad: Kehot, 1967), 144–146. In describing a network of Chabad-Lubavitch study groups that were established in the 1840s in Russia, the author repeatedly refers to them as “*kollelim*”. He even details the financial arrangements for supporting the students. It would appear, however, that Galitzenstein’s twentieth century perception led him to apply this term to a mid-nineteenth century institution that bore certain similarities to what later became known as a kollel.

to counter the encroachment of modern values and norms on Eastern European society. The specific goal, in light of economic and societal pressures tempting bright young men to abandon the yeshiva, was to give an incentive to gifted individuals to continue to dedicate themselves to Torah studies.⁸ It was also hoped that the kollel would become a breeding ground for the next generation of rabbinic leaders. These aims could only be achieved by founding an institution that drew financial support from a wide geographical area.⁹ It can, therefore, be surmised that it was due to its association with economic assistance that the term *kollel* was applied to the new Lithuanian framework that had been created to enable a select group of married yeshiva graduates to continue their studies.

The fellows of the yeshiva, or *avreikhim*, were accepted after passing an oral exam given by a prominent scholar. Beyond collection of their regular stipend, however, the members of the original group in Kovno (Kaunas), the *Kollel Prushim*, had little to do with each other or with the heads of the institution.¹⁰ They were free to study wherever they chose and no common lectures were offered. Upon completion of the requisite sections of religious code law, a fellow would approach a well-known rabbi, who would

8 Stampfer, 301–303.

9 Mordechai Breuer, *Ohalei Torah: Ha-Yeshiva, Tavnitah ve-Toldotehah* (Jerusalem, Merkaz Shazar, 2004), 28, 149; Stampfer, 293–294; Hayyim Ozer Grodzhinski, *Ahiezer – Kovetz Igrot I* (Bnei Brak: Nezah, 1970), 152–153 [letter 89].

10 The term “*prushim*” means “those who remain separate”. Its introduction into the Kovno title stems from the fact that while the kollel members were all married, they were, at least in the initial period of the kollel’s existence, to live separately from their families and dedicate themselves exclusively to Torah study. Hence, they were “*prushim*”. See Breuer, 405, 437; Stampfer, 301.

then test him, and if he passed, grant him rabbinical ordination. At a point that is still unclear, the kollel concept evolved into a more unified body in which all its members gather daily into one study hall and often learn the same material.¹¹

The goal of rabbinical ordination suggests that the difference between a kollel and a yeshiva was not limited to financial arrangements and the marital status of the students. The subject matter that the kollel members were expected to study, code law, differed from the curriculum of the Lithuanian yeshiva. Following the tradition developed by the followers of Rabbi Elijah of Vilna (known as the *Vilna Gaon* or *GR”A*, 1727–1797), the “new” yeshivas of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries encouraged their students to concentrate on deciphering the more theoretical portions of the Talmud. This was considered a higher level of service of God than simply achieving expertise in the practical law code necessary to function as a communal rabbi.¹² By requiring the kollel members to direct themselves toward achieving rabbinical ordination, the founders were essentially offering fellowships to yeshiva veterans to move them to something closer to a professional training program.¹³

11 Stampfer, 302–304; After World War I, for example, the kollelim that sprang up in the same town as the original *Kollel Prushim*, adopted particularly uniform study practices and standards. See a description of the format of the Slabodka Kollel in Yonason Rosenblum, *Reb Yaakov: The Life and Times of HaGaon Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky* [based on the research of Rabbi Noson Kamenetsky] (Brooklyn: Artscroll, 1993), 89–94.

12 See Emanuel Etkes, “The Relationship Between Talmudic Scholarship and the Institution of the Rabbinate in Nineteenth-Century Lithuanian Jewry”, in Leo Landman (ed.), *Scholars and Scholarship: The Interaction Between Judaism and Other Cultures* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1990), 107–132; idem, *The Gaon: The Man and his Image* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 209–231.

13 Breuer, 149.

While they were eventually expected to gain ordination, it is unclear how different in reality the study programs of the kollel members were from that of the average advanced yeshiva student. Indeed, it took far less time to achieve sufficient mastery of the codes required to receive ordination than the average period that an individual remained in a kollel. Rather than completion of a specific curriculum, it is likely that an invitation to occupy a rabbinical position or other economic factors played a more decisive role in causing a member to depart from a kollel. It is therefore possible that the official emphasis on practical rabbinics was motivated more by the need to publicly combat the demand from the Russian authorities that rabbis receive professional training only in the official government-sponsored rabbinical seminaries. In addition, this official focus may have stemmed from fundraising considerations. By highlighting the professional direction of the institution, any questions by potential benefactors regarding the necessity of creating a facility separate from the ubiquitous yeshiva simply to accommodate married students could be neutralized. This cadre of young scholars, it was claimed, was particularly worthy of support for they were preparing to become the future spiritual leaders of the Jewish people.¹⁴

The tension between dedication to theoretical study and focus on more practical educational endeavors was, as seen above, a core issue for kollel life from its inception. In various permutations, it has remained so until today. Yet the activist posture of the subject

14 Stampfer, 304; According to Rosenblum, 90, the Slabodka Kollel that was established after World War I did have a career orientation. While the members may have continued to dedicate themselves to theoretical Talmudics, they had to make a commitment from the outset that after five years they would gain ordination and fill a rabbinical post.

of this study – the new community kollel in America – represents a particularly stark departure. It differs dramatically from the more academic orientation of the standard model as reflected in its original ancestor in Kovno, and even more so from its mid-twentieth century predecessors in the United States. That said, the spread of the kollel concept was accompanied by an evolution into diverse strains already in Eastern Europe.

Among the different models that emerged, the kollel and yeshiva network organized by the Novaredok yeshiva in interwar Eastern Europe can be viewed as the forerunner or precursor of the contemporary community kollel movement.¹⁵ From its inception in 1896, this yeshiva developed an independent stance and program that diverged both ideologically and in its curriculum from other Lithuanian yeshivas.¹⁶ Its sectarian tendencies and

15 On the debate regarding the concept of “forerunners” or “precursors” in Jewish history, see the original discussions of Jacob Katz, “Nisuim ve-Hayei Ishut be-Motzaei Yemei ha-Beinayim”, *Zion* 10 (1945), 49–52; idem, “The Forerunners of Zionism”, *Jewish Emancipation and Self-Emancipation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986), 104–115. In addition, see: Etkes, *The Gaon*, 51–66 (here the English term used to translate the Hebrew “mevaser”, is “harbinger”); Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 27–32; Adam S. Ferziger, *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, Nonobservance, and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 21–22.

16 On the Novaredok yeshiva and its ideology, see: David E. Fishman, “Mussar and Modernity: The Case of Novaredok”, *Modern Judaism* 8, 1 (February 1988), 41–59; Dov Katz, *Tenuat ha-Mussar* vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1996), 151–290; Yehudah Leib Nekritsh, “Yeshivat Novaredok”, in Samuel K. Mirsky (ed.), *Mosdot Torah be-Eiropah be-Vinyanam u-be-Hurbanam* (New York: Ha-Histadrut ha-Ivrit be-Amerika, 1956), 247–290. For a fictional account based on the author’s own experiences as a Novaredok student, see Chaim Grade, *The Yeshiva* trans. Curt Leviant (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976).

promotion of *mussar*¹⁷ – religious and ethical character development – through an emphasis on the lowliness of man, were deemed highly peculiar, if not dangerous, by most Orthodox Jews. By the end of World War I, however, the founder and ideologue of Novaredok, Rabbi Yosef Yoizl Horowitz (1848–1919), had re-directed the energies of his students toward public activity. Abandoning his reclusive stance, he adopted the concept of *lezakos es ha-rabim*, to turn the many unto righteousness, as went the slogan of his movement.¹⁸ One of his first activities to this end was to establish kollelim throughout Poland.¹⁹ In the context of the current study, it is important to note that these frameworks were generally set up in communities where Torah study centers had previously not existed. At the height of its success, the Novaredok network consisted of 70 branches (kollelim, schools, yeshivas), attended by over 3000 students.²⁰ These various Novaredok institutions were organized into an international network that held biannual conferences with representatives from all the locales.²¹

17 For a description of the Mussar Movement in Lithuania and its various branches and personalities, see Dov Katz, vols. 1–5.

18 Fishman, “Mussar and Modernity”, 57.

19 Samuel Bialoblocki, *Em la-Masoret* (Tel-Aviv: Bar-Ilan University, 1971), 244; Breuer, 475.

20 Breuer, 334.

21 For an extensive discussion of this period in Novaredok history, see David E. Fishman, “The Musar Movement in Interwar Poland”, in Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelson, Jehuda Reinharz and Chone Shmeruk (eds.), *The Jews in Poland Between Two World Wars* (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 1989), 247–272. The author mentions another Novaredok framework that was developed later and also became known as a kollel. These were periodical one-week retreats held for the heads of elementary-school-age yeshivas, where they would gather spiritual strength before returning to their activities.

The kollelim that were created were far from purely academic in nature. Their aim was to train rabbis and to simultaneously spread Torah to the masses, albeit from a Novaredok perspective.²² Moreover, it was hoped that once the community had grown to appreciate the kollel's contribution, it could serve as the springboard for the establishment of a full-fledged Novaredok yeshiva branch. The following description by a former Lithuanian yeshiva student resonates in particular in light of contemporary developments in the community kollel movement in America, with its emphasis on public service and education:

In order to establish the kollelim, Reb Yoizl traveled to many towns, and wherever he found a few community members that were willing to take upon themselves the responsibility of supporting the *prushim*,²³ he sent ten young men to involve themselves in Torah and mussar. Sustenance of the fellows fell completely upon the shoulders of the local Jews. [...] Ten fellows who have separated themselves from their homes...and spend all their days in the study hall will have a recognizable influence upon a small town. [...] The local rabbi, whether out of choice or due to a feeling of obligation, will join the fellowship...²⁴

Not surprisingly, this departure from the accepted kollel model, even if it reflected an about-face from Novaredok's prior

22 Bialoblocki, 244.

23 Like the original Kovno kollel, the members of the Novaredok kollelim separated from their families in order to focus on their intellectual and spiritual pursuits.

24 Bialoblocki, 244.

unwillingness to cooperate with the rest of Jewish society, was received with antagonism:

Reb Yoizl's kollelim inspired deep opposition on the part of the Torah greats, particularly in Lithuania. Since these fellows were not tested by an authoritative rabbi, they suspected that Reb Yoizl did not demand rigorous standards of Torah study. His approach was, rather, that some may be more conscientious in their studies and some less so, as long as the [Novaredok] *mussar* movement benefits from them.²⁵

Indeed, its practical direction, as well as the less rigorous standards of scholarship, made these kollelim attractive targets for those who opposed the Novaredok approach. Yet others, more sympathetic outsiders, could not but admit that "The Novaredok yeshiva took upon itself a challenge that no other yeshiva was willing to accept: spreading Torah knowledge...and most prominently, establishing yeshivas in places where none had ever existed before".²⁶

The Novaredok kollel was clearly an unconventional model. It is unlikely that any of the key figures in the current community kollel initiatives in North America identify it as an inspiration or precursor of their late twentieth century endeavors. According to Jacob Katz's criteria, however, this should not preclude defining a movement or individual as a forerunner. In his discussion of this concept, he emphasizes that when considering its use, one must be careful to distinguish between a one-time deviant phenomenon that may appear to share similarities with later events or personalities,

25 Ibid.

26 Ya'akov Berman, *Sihot u-Pirkei Zikhronot* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1976), 105; See also Breuer, 334.

but whose context is completely different, and those that can be shown to occupy a place on the historical continuum between one era and another.²⁷ On the other hand, it is unnecessary to show that a certain earlier event or personality directly affected later times or events for it to be declared a forerunner. Rather, what is important is that parallels can be drawn between the circumstances under which the earlier and later phenomena took place.²⁸

Thus, in exploring the development of the community kollel in America, Novaredok deserves forerunner status because it highlights certain potentials and characteristics that are unique to the kollel framework and could be found in it from early on. These traits, which are listed below, offer insight into the nature of the contemporary phenomenon as well:

- Like Novaredok, the contemporary movement focuses on creating kollelim in communities where previously, only limited opportunities for Torah study existed.
- The description of how Rabbi Horowitz established kollelim illustrates the fact that despite a considerable financial commitment, it is much less complicated and less financially demanding to set up a kollel than a school, for example.
- As in the case of Novaredok, in order to establish a kollel, it is not necessary to receive the support of an entire community. A few committed and economically secure individuals or families can at least get the project off the ground.
- Like the Novaredok model, one of the strengths of a kollel lies in its numbers. As opposed to the rabbi or even the

27 Katz, "The Forerunners of Zionism", 108.

28 Katz, "Nisuim ve-Hayei Ishut", 49, n. 175.

Chabad emissary who often feels quite isolated in his religious commitment,²⁹ the kollel arrives as a sub-community of five to ten families.³⁰ Besides easing the settlement process for the fellows and their families, a group of young people learning the Torah in a public study hall creates an atmosphere that a sole practitioner would have difficulty achieving.

- The Novaredok kollelim served as the initial entree for the representatives of the yeshiva into the community. Once this seed existed, it served as the facilitator for the introduction of other institutions, e.g. a yeshiva for children or young adults predicated on the same religious approach. This has often been the case, if not the stated goal from the outset, with contemporary community kollelim.
- Perhaps most significantly, the Novaredok model illustrates the flexible nature that, unlike more rigidly structured institutions such as schools or synagogues, has historically been a characteristic of a kollel. As long as financial backing exists for its activities, be they intellectual development or more direct involvement with the community, the kollel can define for itself how it would like to make use of its human resources.
- Finally, like in Novaredok, attacks have been levied from some circles within America's right-wing yeshiva world

29 Regarding the loneliness of the Chabad emissary, see Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch* (New York: Schocken, 2003), 204–207.

30 Two major networks for establishing community outreach kollelim, Lakewood and Kollel International, try to start all their branches with at least ten families. See *Nitzotzot Min HaNer*, 10.

against the outreach kollelim. Once again, much of the criticism has focused on the shift in time allotment and emphasis from intensive independent Talmudic study to educational activity within the community.

These elements will be elucidated in greater detail through the specific examples of the contemporary community kollel discussed below. At this point, however, it has been established that community kollelim of today have not simply drifted away from the accepted model. Rather, from early on in its history, the financial and human composition of the institution lent itself to flexible definitions of its goals. These ranged, as seen above, from acting as a foundation whose main purpose was to enable young scholars to continue their purely intellectual pursuits; to serving as an Orthodox rabbinical training center; to functioning as an outreach center for one of the more radical ideological movements within early twentieth century Eastern European Orthodoxy.³¹

31 Fishman, “The Mussar Movement”, 265, draws attention to another connection between Novaredok and contemporary Orthodoxy. He sees it, “...as the historical antecedent of contemporary Lubavitch, in that it was the first aggressively expansionist Orthodox movement in modern times”. See below, where parallels are drawn between the Chabad house and the community kollel model.

The American Kollel: From Enclave to Outreach

Stage One: The Kollel as Enclave

The educational approach propounded by the founder of the original American kollel stands in sharp distinction to Novaredok activism. Yet, it too demonstrates the flexible nature of the kollel framework and how this adaptability enables it to serve as a unique educational tool to address new issues that arise within Jewish life.

The Beth Medrash Govoha was established at the height of World War II in 1943, by Lithuanian refugee yeshiva head and renowned scholar, Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1892–1962).³² It was conceived from the outset as a yeshiva in which students would

32 On Kotler and the founding and early history of his yeshiva, see, for example: Bomzer, 26–35; Yoel Finkelman, “Haredi Isolation in Changing Environments: A Case Study in Yeshiva Immigration”, *Modern Judaism* 22:1 (2002), 61–82; idem, “Religion and Public Life in 20th Century American Jewish Thought”, Ph.D. Dissertation, Hebrew University in Jerusalem (2002), 101–115 (see the many additional biographical sources cited in note 2); William B. Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 40–45; Sidney R. Lewittes, *A School for Scholars: The Beth Medrash Govoha, The Rabbi Aharon Kotler Jewish Institute of Higher Learning in*

devote themselves exclusively to Torah study long after marrying. The “Lakewood” yeshiva, as it is popularly known to this day after the New Jersey town where it is located, was set up at a distance of over an hour’s drive from the densely populated Jewish centers of New York City. This separation was a central element in a broad effort to create an enclave in which young scholars could study Torah with only the most minimal contact with the outside world. The physical barriers were reinforced by the ideology that Kotler articulated.³³ Torah study, he proclaimed, was the supreme ideal and should be pursued without concern for future financial or professional security. Expanding upon the outlook that he imbibed as a student in the Lithuanian yeshiva world, he maintained that the young scholar who devoted himself solely to the study of Torah was not only growing intellectually and spiritually, but that this very feat represented a crucial contribution to the welfare of the Jewish people. As such, any activities that distracted him from this pure pursuit were to be discouraged.³⁴

Kotler’s kollel model clearly reflected his negative evaluation of the predominant Jewish culture that had emerged in early twentieth century United States.³⁵ His wrath, however, was not

Lakewood, New Jersey, Ed.D. Dissertation, Rutgers University (1981); Charles S. Liebman, “Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life”, *American Jewish Yearbook* 66 (1965), 67–69; Micha Odenheimer, “Only in America – Lakewood”, *Haaretz* (August 5th, 2005), www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/609176.html.

33 Novaredok’s activist dimension aside, Finkelman, *Religion and Public Life*, 147–148, suggests that certain aspects of Kotler’s isolationism may have been influenced by Rabbi Yosef Yoizl Horowitz’s concept of *bitahon*, trust in God.

34 *Ibid.*, 118–120, 142–147; Helmreich, 43–44, 284.

35 There were additional factors that drove him towards this goal, notably his desire to “re-create” on American soil the Lithuanian Torah academies that had been destroyed during the Holocaust.

limited to the thriving Reform and Conservative movements. Rather, he considered American Modern Orthodoxy, with its relaxed approach to observance and its integration of religious commitment with general culture and professional life, to be a dangerous misrepresentation of true Jewish values.³⁶ He was convinced that in order for what he considered authentic Judaism to survive, it was imperative to project a clear alternative to the synthetic version that had become so prevalent. The key to achieving this goal was to nurture a generation of American Jews willing to sacrifice material and social status, as well as professional and cultural advancement, for the sake of Torah study.³⁷

Kotler's concept was not only new to American Jewry, it ran counter to the work ethic that was part of the national ethos – one that immigrant Jews had adopted with a passion.³⁸ The disparity between his own educational vision and the prevailing approach is exemplified by the more direct curricular aims of his institution. Lakewood's goal was not to function as a rabbinical seminary intent upon moving its graduates into pulpit and educational positions according to a uniform formula. Rather, students were encouraged to continue to devote themselves to theoretical study for as long as possible. Unlike the *Kollel Prushim* in Kovno, which was created to enable the most outstanding pupils to develop their minds, receipt of a kollel stipend in Lakewood was purely a reflection of an individual's willingness and basic ability to continue to study

36 See, for example, Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Twentieth Century American Orthodoxy's Era of Non-Observance (1900–1960)", *Torah Umadda Journal* 9 (2000), 87–107; Liebman, 31, 67–68.

37 Finkelman, *Religion and Public Life*, 111–114, 137–140.

38 See, for example, Barry R. Chiswick, "The Postwar Economy of American Jews", *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 8 (1992), 85–101.

Talmud on a full-time basis. Thus, the average Lakewood kollel member sits within its study halls for seven years after marriage, and study periods of even ten years and more are not uncommon.³⁹ Once they have decided to leave the kollel, those deemed suitable are certainly encouraged to serve the Jewish community.⁴⁰

The first American kollel served almost from the outset as a model or at least a catalyst for the establishment of similar frameworks.⁴¹ Numerous kollelim were established in America from the mid-twentieth century on,⁴² each with its own particular emphasis. Some concentrated their curricula on a specific aspect of Talmudic law, while others were more directly oriented toward training their fellows for future careers in the rabbinate and Jewish education. Some even allowed their students to simultaneously study for an academic degree.⁴³ Fundamentally, however, these institutions were designed along the same lines as Lakewood: They were to be enclaves in which young married men were offered a stipend in order to devote themselves exclusively to enriching their own knowledge of the Torah. During their tenure in the kollel, they were generally not expected and often discouraged from involvement in the surrounding Jewish community. As opposed to the subsequent community kollel model, many of the original kollel study halls were not established in the vicinity of high-density

39 Interview, Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, Director of Lakewood Community Kollel program, Lakewood, New Jersey, Sept. 13, 2003.

40 Since the early 1950s, students leaving Lakewood to pursue careers as rabbis or Jewish educators have been provided with some training prior to their departure. See Bomzer, 32–33.

41 Bomzer, 19; Liebman, 69.

42 According to Bomzer, 9, in 1981 there were over sixty kollelim in America.

43 See Bomzer for a detailed description of the major kollelim up to 1986.

Jewish population centers in order to influence other Jews. Location was almost exclusively a function of logistic and fiscal considerations. The vast majority were situated within areas that were already home to a high percentage of Orthodox Jews and in which advanced Talmudic study was already taking place. More often than not, a kollel would be set up in the vicinity of an existing yeshiva that served as the mother or sponsor institution and as a principal source of future fellows.⁴⁴

Like the classic Kovno model that emerged from the context of late nineteenth-century Lithuania, the kollel framework was deemed by some to be a useful tool in influencing the religious atmosphere among mid-twentieth century American Jewry. In Rabbi Aharon Kotler's estimation, what was needed most in post-World War II Jewish America was a group of Jews that repudiated the idealized vision of integration of Judaism and American culture. "Authentic" Judaism could develop in America only if a core population isolated itself physically and concentrated exclusively on enriching its own Jewish knowledge and commitment. The key to achieving this goal, in his opinion, was to establish a structure on American soil that would enable young men to dedicate themselves to their Torah studies for a considerable number of years after they had married and begun a family.⁴⁵ Measured in pure numbers, the success of Rabbi Kotler's model is unquestionable. From a fledging institution that started out with twelve students in 1943, by the early 1980s, Lakewood had grown

44 Helmreich, 257–258.

45 See Yaakov Yosef Reinman, "Remembering Reb Shneur Kotler", in Nisson Wolpin (ed.), *The Torah Profile* (Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1988), 236.

to close to 500.⁴⁶ Indeed, the years since then have seen a veritable population explosion, **with the current Lakewood student body numbering about 4300, 85% of whom are married.**⁴⁷ While Lakewood is by far the largest, the kollelim connected with other major yeshivas have also experienced significant growth.⁴⁸ Moreover, after leaving the study halls, hundreds of kollel alumni have gone on to serve as rabbis and religious educators and found their own educational institutions.

Stage Two: The Early Community Kollelim and the Power of Proximity

The emergence of the first community kollelim further testifies to the successful integration of the kollel into American Jewish life and the general flexibility of this framework. By the early 1970s the leaders of the yeshiva community felt confident enough in the long-term stability of this institution to begin supporting a new model as well. Instead of attaching “post-graduate” kollelim to prominent yeshivas, independent bodies were established in locales with active Orthodox congregations where advanced Torah study had previously been the precinct of only a small minority. Often they were preceded by short-term study seminars, such as the Torah Umesorah sponsored SEED program, in which yeshiva students would spend a few weeks during the summer studying in a

46 Bomzer, 26.

47 See: <http://nces.ed.gov/globallocator/index.asp?search=1&start=NJ&city=Lakewood&zipcode=&miles=&itemname=beth+medrash+govoha&sortby=name&college=1&status=search+finished&records=45&CS=DCGC 197B; odenheimer>

48 See Bomzer.

community.⁴⁹ These initiatives stepped up local interest in a more permanent structure. After fundraising efforts had created a viable financial base, groups of about ten veteran fellows and *roshei kollel* (kollel leaders or instructors) and their families were recruited from among existing institutions. They were then transplanted as a collective to highly populated Jewish communities outside the New York area, such as Toronto (1970),⁵⁰ Los Angeles (1975),⁵¹ Pittsburgh (1978) and Chicago (1981), where they set up a *bais medrash* (study hall) as the home for their activities.

The daytime schedule of the community kollel members was much the same as that which they had followed at their previous locations. On average, the hours of 8:30 A.M. to 6:30 P.M. were occupied with independent Talmudic study and advanced lectures.⁵² Their evening activities, however, differed dramatically. At night, the exclusive study hall became an “open” *bais medrash*, where the community was invited to come and learn. The fellows were expected to occupy themselves during these hours with one-on-one textual partnerships (*hevrusas*) with lay people or with more formal frontal-type teaching.

Like their post-World War II predecessors, each community kollel developed its own unique character and chose a different

49 Bomzer, 33–34; Wolpin, 20. SEED was founded in 1974 by Rabbi Avi Shulman. His son, Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, is now the director of Lakewood’s community kollel program.

50 According to *Nitzotzot Min HaNer*, 3, the Toronto Community Kollel was founded in 1972. The original community kollel was actually begun in Johannesburg, South Africa by alumni of the Gateshead yeshiva in England. On this kollel, see Sternbuch.

51 See a more expansive description of this kollel in Bomzer, 112–115.

52 Nisson Wolpin, “The Community Koleh: Reaching out with Torah”, *The Jewish Observer* (Oct. 1979), 23.

emphasis. Some demanded daily involvement with the community, while others made sure that certain days were devoted purely to individual study; some sponsored prayer services in their study halls both during the week and on the Sabbath and holidays, while others made it a principle to pray with the rest of the community in one of the local synagogues. Their common qualities, however, offer further insight into the nature of the kollel in particular and developments within 1970s American Orthodoxy in general.

The very act of leaving the enclave and settling in an existing Orthodox community represents the major digression of the community kollel from the accepted model. Financial considerations certainly played a role in this development. With the continual growth in the 1960s and 1970s of the numbers of young men who desired to study in a kollel, it was necessary to expand the resources for supporting these individuals. Bringing the kollel to the community gave incentive to local philanthropists who were looking for more pragmatic benefits for their immediate surroundings. Simultaneously, the community kollelim offered larger stipends to their fellows than those available in most of the established institutions. Thus, there were also rewards that could entice veteran kollel students to uproot their families and leave the cozy yeshiva environment. In addition, a few years of residence in a kollel often served as an entry ticket to permanent employment in one of the local synagogues or day schools.⁵³ That said, the move of the kollel into the heart of Jewish collective life was not

53 According to *Nitzotzot Min HaNer*, 17, 35–36, since its inception, 36 members of the Los Angeles Kollel have remained there and been integrated into the rabbinate and Orthodox school system. In Chicago, the number has reached 29.

purely the result of socio-economic considerations. It was, rather, part of a major educational policy shift. This is evinced most clearly by the support of none other than Rabbi Shneur Kotler (1918–1982), who, upon the death of his father in 1962, succeeded him as leader of the Lakewood yeshiva and its followers.⁵⁴ His advocacy, along with that of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky,⁵⁵ himself a product of the Kovno/Slabodka kollel and retired leader of Brooklyn’s *Torah Vodaath* yeshiva, gave license to a number of communal activists to develop these new institutions.⁵⁶

By the 1970s, the heirs to the legacy of Rabbi Aharon Kotler believed that his mission had succeeded. An American yeshiva world espousing an ideologically right-wing Orthodoxy that rejected popular culture was a reality. No longer preoccupied with mere survival, it was ready to move towards expansion. The separation of select kollel fellows from the yeshiva womb reflects an increased level of self-confidence on the part of this segment of American Jewry. Not only was their brand of Judaism sustainable in incubatory form, but it could also grow under more diverse societal conditions. Already in 1965, Charles Liebman defined the most recent products of the yeshiva world as imbued with a new sense of self:

⁵⁴ *Nitzotzot Min HaNer*, 4.

⁵⁵ See Rosenblum, *Reb Yaakov*, 226. He refers to Kamenetsky as the “Father of the Community Kollel”, particularly due to his intense personal involvement with the establishment of the Toronto, Los Angeles and Chicago kollelim. See his picture on p. 226 with the founders of the Chicago community kollelim.

⁵⁶ Interview with Rabbi Yankel Velvel Katz, Rosh Kollel, Cedar-Green Community Kollel, Beachwood, Ohio, Sept. 9, 2003; Most often mentioned are Rabbi Dov Lesser of the Torah Umesorah educational network and Rabbi Nossan Wachtfogel.

...the basic sources for their new-found strength are...the young yeshiva graduates now at home in at least the *superficial* aspects of American culture and committed to tradition and the *rashei yeshivot* (yeshiva deans). They need not adjust completely to America because they are sufficiently well acquainted with it to be able to reject many of its manifestations.⁵⁷

The main targets of the spread of the yeshiva world beyond its strongholds in the American northeast, were the Orthodox congregants who had primarily been served until then by the more ideologically modern Yeshiva University graduates.⁵⁸ By establishing a base for itself within communities that previously had not been populated by Jews who followed its brand of Orthodoxy, right-wing Orthodoxy hoped to move their world closer to that of their new neighbors. As one of the current leaders of the community-kollel movement put it, Rabbi Shneur Kotler “...wanted to change the committed Jews into *Torah Jews*”.⁵⁹

The development of the community kollel to some degree parallels the *ba'al teshuvah* (returnee or newly observant) movement that had begun to make inroads within American Judaism during the late sixties and early seventies.⁶⁰ Both indicate a transition within Orthodoxy from a more defensive posture to one of expansion. At the time, however, sustained “outreach”

57 Liebman, 90.

58 *Nitzotzot Min HaNer*, 6–7.

59 Interview with Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky, Jerusalem, August 2, 2003. Rabbi Milikowsky is the founder of the Rabbi Samuel and Zehava Friedman Kollel in Olney, Maryland and Director of the MAOR rabbinical training program.

60 See M. Herbert Danzger, *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism* (New Haven: Yale, 1989), 71–95.

education within the United States was primarily the domain of the Hassidic Chabad movement and Modern Orthodoxy.⁶¹ Indeed, both these factions had long been directing their rabbinical products toward addressing the religious needs of greater American Jewry.⁶² By contrast, the influence of the yeshiva world on the American returnee phenomenon was felt more indirectly at this juncture. Specifically, a number of its graduates had immigrated to Israel and were founding independent institutions geared toward college students and young adults visiting Jerusalem.⁶³

When viewed in comparison to the nascent *ba'al teshuvah* movement, then, the early community kollelim testify to a move of the yeshiva world away from its previous self-imposed solitude. Their direction, however, can best be described as “inreach”. These yeshiva world institutions sought to increase the commitment of Jews affiliated with Orthodoxy to Torah learning and strict halakhic practice. As such, the inreach-oriented community kollel of the 1970s was a reflection of a fresh, but limited willingness of the American yeshiva world at that time to confront outside culture. By making its way into broader Jewish society via a critical mass of ten kollel families, it was not completely abandoning the enclave concept, but rather creating a mini-enclave within the community. The isolation of Lakewood was certainly no longer the exclusive

61 Ibid., 36–43, 58–66; Liebman, 65, 79–82, 91.

62 See Jeffrey S. Gurock, “Resisters and Accomodators: Varieties of Orthodox Rabbis in America, 1886–1983”, *American Jewish Archives* (November 1983), 139–141; idem, “The Orthodox Synagogue”, in Jack Wertheimer (ed.), *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 61–64.

63 Danzger, 65–70, 115–116, 340. Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld’s Yeshiva Sh’or Yashuv in Far Rockaway, founded in 1967 as an extension of the Chaim Berlin Yeshiva, was an early exception. See 65–66 and 115.

goal, although efforts were being made to preserve aspects of its sectarian atmosphere. In the words of Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, the current director of the Lakewood community kollel program, “The Kollel is viewed as a resettlement program of a slice of the yeshiva, of the yeshiva ideals and mentality in another community”.⁶⁴ This ability to create an environment that was not foreign to the fellows was one of the keys to the success of the new kollelim in attracting members.

For one, many of the 1960s graduates of the Right Wing yeshivas were reluctant to enter the pulpit rabbinate. They were apprehensive that they would lose their spiritual and personal independence as employees and central figures within a congregation; that between the demands of the community and the social needs of their own families, they would be forced to compromise on their religious values.⁶⁵ Other fellows from the larger yeshivas and kollelim were attracted by the financial incentives of an “out-of-town” kollel, but feared that leaving the classic enclave would mean the end to their growth in Talmudic scholarship. As an independently funded homogeneous collective, the mini-enclave kollel alleviated much of these concerns. The primary occupation of the fellows remained personal, religious and cerebral development rather than interaction with congregants. In order to hedge against the potential for slacking off in intellectual and spiritual development, a more rigid system for checking individual progress was often instituted. From a social perspective, the majority of time was spent with the same peer group as before, both lending a sense of continuity and serving as constant

⁶⁴ *Nitzotzot Min HaNer*, 5 [note 2].

⁶⁵ Helmreich, 243–245, 280–281; Liebman, 70.

reinforcement of the values internalized in the yeshiva. The kollel wives and children also had an automatic social circle that ideally protected them from loneliness. Otherwise, intensive social involvement with the community would have been an immediate requirement rather than a choice.⁶⁶

The mode through which the kollelim sought to influence Jewish life further expressed their function as an extension of the enclave. The kollel study hall was designated as the primary, and often exclusive, venue for direct educational contacts between the fellows and the community. While sometimes being established in a room allocated by the local synagogue, the preferable option was to rent or acquire a separate edifice located a short distance from the main congregation(s). By doing so, a unique “Temple” of Torah was created that would serve as a visual symbol. Moreover, the message being expressed was literal inreach: “Come to us, here you will experience a dynamic, authentic Judaism that is more pristine and pure than the stale, compromised version available in your local Orthodox congregation”. Limiting activities to the kollel *bais medrash* also guaranteed that the main clientele of the kollel would be Jews affiliated with Orthodoxy who were most likely to hear about the kollel and would feel most comfortable entering its sanctuary.

Over time, the various original community kollelim have diversified and some have become less rigid in their guidelines regarding the location of their activities, the types of programs that they sponsor and the religious background of the Jews that they seek to inspire. Some kollelim, for example, have hired

66 Compare to the comments of a yeshiva graduate who went out on his own to a small town, cited in Helmreich, 287.

“outreach coordinators” to address the broader Jewish population without directly changing the mandate of the core institution.⁶⁷ As such, the main pursuits of these kollelim have remained quite consistent. “The primary purpose of the community kollel”, declared one of the leaders of the right-wing Orthodox Agudath Israel National Organization, “is the same as any kollel’s – the growth of its members in their studies...but its location and schedule are different – designed for optimum interaction with community members”.⁶⁸ At their base, these kollelim are meant to be mini-enclaves where young married men are expected to continue to focus on Torah study. The activities that they sponsor are intended to augment, but by no means supersede, the main source of their influence on the community – the maintenance of a mini-enclave of full-time advanced Talmudic learning within the locale.

This perspective was elaborated upon by Rabbi Moishe Sternbuch, a leading Torah scholar in the Israeli yeshiva world, during a lecture series in 1980 at the Johannesburg community kollel:

...in most [community] Kollelim, the members of the Kollel actively participate in the educational needs of the community. This is done in off-hours, by donating time for classes for adult education. The effect this has on the community is immeasurable.

However, more effective is the indirect ripple effect which the Kollelim have had on the community. The young men

⁶⁷ *Nitzotzot Min HaNer*, 2 [note 2].

⁶⁸ Wolpin, 21; See a classic description of this type of kollel at the Chicago Community Kollel website, www.cckollel.org/about-fs.html.

who study in the kollelim become models for the rest of the community for what Torah culture is all about. The presence of the idealism of a group of young men who give up money and prestige for the pursuit of Jewish knowledge is the most powerful statement of what Jewish values are. In the face of such models, people are forced to reexamine their own scale of values in a Jewish light. At the least, they are compelled to find some time during the day when they can devote themselves to Torah wisdom. And once these people begin studying Torah, they themselves become more and more committed to Jewish practices.⁶⁹

Sternbuch also pointed to another aspect of this “indirect ripple effect” that highlights the “inreach” goals of the early community kollelim:

Wherever a Kollel exists, the area becomes a more desirable place to live for someone who wants a true Jewish Torah environment. The community begins to attract more and more of these committed families. The educational facilities are upgraded to meet their requirements. It becomes easier to attract better teachers to the city; besides, the wives of the Kollel members are in themselves an excellent pool of teachers. Synagogues are slowly transformed...

In this vein, other commentators have drawn particular attention to the introduction of stricter standards of halakhic observance in areas such as *kashrut* (dietary laws) and Jewish family purity as an outgrowth of a community kollel. Initially, it is the kollel families who create a market for products that bear the supervisory seal of

69 Sternbuch, 15.

authorities accepted within right-wing Orthodoxy. Eventually, more and more community members begin to demand the same merchandise.⁷⁰

Not all of the kollelim actually succeeded in turning their environs into new centers of the expanding American yeshiva world. Once seed money had run out, some failed to garner sufficient communal financial support to continue to function.⁷¹ Others settled for becoming “right-wing” fixtures within a Modern Orthodox community, without germinating the critical mass of locals interested in moving closer to their lifestyle. In such cases, the kollelim often achieved the more limited goals of creating a place of Torah learning for those who desired it and providing a consistent supply of teachers for the local day school.⁷² There are, however, prominent examples of neighborhoods in which the presence of the kollel was a central factor in their transformation into bastions of American right-wing Orthodoxy. A brief visit to the former center of Los Angeles Modern Orthodoxy, Beverly Boulevard off La Brea, will attest to this phenomenon. A similar experience can be found in the West Rodgers Park area of Chicago and the Thornhill section of Toronto’s Bathurst corridor.⁷³ In all

70 Wolpin, 25.

71 Examples of cities with community kollelim that failed include Montreal, Miami, Memphis, Edmonton, San Antonio. See *Nitzozot Min HaNer*, 21.

72 Indeed, Samuel Heilman has argued that one of the key factors in the move to the right of children who grew up in Modern Orthodox homes is the influence of the many day-school teachers who promote their own right-wing approach. See Samuel C. Heilman, *Sliding to the right: The Contest for the Future of American Orthodoxy* (Los Angeles and Berkeley University of California Press, 2006).

73 See Etan Diamond, *And I Will Dwell in their Midst: Orthodox Jews in Suburbia* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 26–54, 82–86.

these areas, schools, synagogues, ritual baths, and commercial enterprises sprang up in the last few decades of the twentieth century around a kollel community. In the process, they became attractive alternatives for graduates of the yeshiva world who did not want to settle in New York or in Israel.

Following the principle propounded in the mid-twentieth century by Rabbi Aharon Kotler, 1970s right-wing Orthodoxy continued to maintain that the very existence in a given area of a collective dedicated to advanced Torah study would have a profound influence upon its surroundings. Kotler sought to create an alternative to common notions of American Judaism by introducing the kollel enclave into its national landscape. His heirs were confident that their brand of Judaism would survive. Indeed, they believed that its power could be expanded by placing mini-enclaves in closer proximity to a natural constituency – Jews who already identified with Orthodoxy. In the process, the flexible nature of the kollel structure and its adaptation to the educational goals of its sponsors and initiators had been reinforced. By becoming part of the local Jewish environment, the community kollelim widened the gap between the American model and the framework first developed in Kovno. Simultaneously the status of the Novaredok activist kollel approach as a forerunner or precursor becomes more relevant. The pendulum had swung from elitist scholarship to a hybrid that grew out of the tension between advanced study and popular education.⁷⁴ Due to its inreach tendency, which focused on exposing others to the kollel learning environment, the emphasis on the intellectual and spiritual pursuits of the fellows was

74 Bomzer, 135.

maintained. The warm study hall still placed a figurative barrier between itself and outside culture.

The next stage in the emergence of the community kollel saw a more dramatic move away from the classical kollel models. This was consistent with a further empowerment and leap in the self-esteem of the American yeshiva world, along with the introduction and rapid spread of a framework that stemmed from a unique cooperative effort between American Modern Orthodoxy and Israeli Religious Zionism.

Stage Three: Outreach and Zionism

In the years 1987 and 1993, two new kollelim were established – in Atlanta, Georgia and Beachwood (Cleveland), Ohio, respectively. The former was sponsored by graduates of the yeshiva world, while the latter represented the initial entrance of Modern Orthodoxy into the community kollel scene. Taken together, the creation of these two institutions can be seen as watershed events. They symbolize the beginning of the latest and arguably the most intriguing phase in the history of the kollel in America. Indeed, based on the many branches that have subsequently sprung up using either the Atlanta Scholars Kollel (henceforth referred to by its official acronym ASK) or the Cleveland Torat Tzion Kollel as a model, it is reasonable to refer to the contemporary phenomenon as a “movement”.

As the main focus of the current study, this most recent stage offers ever more original and extensive illustrations of how the kollel has been drafted and transformed in order to confront the evolving realities of American Jewish life. In so doing, analysis of the kollel framework continues to function as a vehicle for gaining broader insight into the ongoing development of Orthodoxy in America.

Like a number of the early community kollelim, ASK was preceded from 1983 to 1986 by a series of summer SEED programs. One of the main figures in what became known as the Atlanta Summer Kollel was Ilan Feldman, a student at the time at Baltimore's Ner Israel Yeshiva and the son of the rabbi of Atlanta's largest Orthodox synagogue.⁷⁵ By 1987, Feldman was ready to move back to Atlanta and prepare to join his father at the pulpit of Congregation Beth Jacob in Toco Hills. After securing initial funding via the Torah Umesorah organization, he appealed to Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, the *Rosh Yeshiva* (Dean) of Ner Israel, to send a group of fellows to Atlanta in order to establish a permanent community kollel.⁷⁶ The young man chosen to lead this group was Rabbi Menachem Deutsch, then twenty-eight years old.

Rather than follow the community kollel model that already existed, Deutsch developed a new concept. The idea was to move from the "indirect ripple effect" described above which posited that the very existence of a Torah center in the community would eventually lead to change, to the exertion of direct influence upon local religious life. In addition, his evaluation of Atlanta's Jewish population led him to the conclusion that there were too few observant Jews to focus purely on this sector. After some initial hesitation, with Rabbi Weinberg's encouragement, Deutsch moved to create a kollel that would be more proactive than its predecessors and would involve its fellows intensively in both "inreach" and "outreach".⁷⁷

75 On Ner Israel, see Helmreich, 32–33, 48, 59, 79, 242.

76 Interview with Rabbi Binyamin Friedman, Rabbi of Congregation Ariel and an original ASK fellow, Atlanta, Georgia, Sept. 18, 2003.

77 Interview with Rabbi Menachem Deutsch, Founder and Rosh Kollel of ASK, Atlanta, Ga., Sept. 18, 2003.

The first concrete indication of a change in emphasis in Atlanta was the decision to require the fellows to devote only three to four hours of their day to personal Talmud study. During the rest of the time, they were expected to be involved in a broad range of formal and informal educational activities. Over time, a multifaceted outreach program was developed that included a daily open *bais medrash* (study hall) with independent study partnerships for Jews possessing all levels of knowledge; Hebrew crash reading courses; adult beginners services – including one in a Reform Temple; singles events; lunch and learn classes in corporations, hospitals and schools; women’s study groups, “Torah for Teens”, home study meetings; a tape library; young couples activities; and campus outreach in four different universities. Congregation Ariel, a new synagogue that due to its distinct edifice is known more popularly as the “Kollel Dome”, was established in the tony Atlanta suburb of Dunwoody. Unlike most Orthodox synagogues led by Ner Israel graduates, an adjacent parking lot was available on the Sabbath for the cars of the worshippers. The current ASK staff consists of eight full-time kollel members, each responsible for a different aspect of the program. Additional instructors as well as an administrative staff of five are also supported by the yearly budget that has risen from \$180,000, at the end of the first year, to the over \$850,000. Its glossy promotional literature declares unabashedly, “Whether you’re Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, unaffiliated or somewhere in between, the Atlanta Scholars Kollel (ASK) is your most vibrant source for Jewish learning in Atlanta...”.⁷⁸ Its officially stated goal is “...to heighten Jewish

78 “Come Learn With Us” Brochure, Atlanta Scholars Kollel, no date printed.

identity through hands-on educational experiences that respect all Jews”.⁷⁹

Today there are close to thirty outreach kollelim throughout North America, with an average of three to four new ones established each year.⁸⁰ Some of them are modeled directly after Atlanta, while others have developed alternative styles and schedules. Moreover, institutions such as Lakewood have created an internal infrastructure that is responsible for selecting the future kollel members, offering them advanced training and hunting out new venues. In addition, they help raise the local funds to support these endeavors, and troubleshoot for the first few years. *Torah Umesorah* has also established a multi-million dollar seed-money fund. Shulman of Lakewood states categorically that through his activities in Atlanta, “Rabbi Menachem Deutsch defined the movement”.⁸¹

Like ASK, the Cleveland Torat Tzion Kollel (Torah of Zion, henceforth CTTK) also began through a partnership between a native son and a prominent yeshiva.⁸² Bob Stark was not a rabbi, but a builder, who in his professional life constructed high-end shopping malls. In his philanthropic efforts, he was one of the most vocal and central activists in developing Cleveland’s Orthodox educational and religious institutions.⁸³ A newly observant Jew in

79 Ibid; Deutsch Interview; See the ASK website for a mission statement and a detailed description of its activities, www.atlantakollel.org.

80 *Nitzotzot Min HaNer*, 5; See a list that includes both traditional community and outreach kollelim at www.ajocom/ajop/kolleldoc.cfm.

81 Shulman Interview.

82 See www.fuchsmizrachi.org/kollel.htm.

83 See Samuel G. Freedman, *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2000), 284–287.

his own right, he was taken by the religious passion that emanated from the right-wing yeshivas and kollelim of Cleveland. An ardent Religious-Zionist, however, he felt that strengthening the connection between the local Orthodox community – particularly the children – and Israeli-based Torah-study-oriented Religious Zionism was the key to fostering a healthy and sustainable Modern Orthodox life.⁸⁴

To this end, Stark approached Yeshivat Har Etzion, one of the oldest and best known Israeli *hesder* institutions, where students participate in a five-year program that combines traditional yeshiva study with army service.⁸⁵ Together, they produced a plan in which Har-Etzion would send a senior teacher who had grown up in the United States, along with a group of post-Army students, to Cleveland. There they would establish a *beit medrash* in the Fuchs-Mizrachi Day School that would serve as a base both for their own advanced Talmud study and for educational activities with the student body. In addition, they would create an open *beit medrash* and provide study opportunities in the evenings and on weekends for the local Orthodox community. Stark provided the annual budget of \$250,000 for the first few years.⁸⁶

84 Conversation with Robert L. Stark, Beachwood, Ohio, September 6, 2003.

85 On Yeshivat Har Etzion, see David Morrison, *The Gush: Center of Modern Religious Zionism* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2003); www.haretzion.org. On the hesder program and concept, see: Stuart A. Cohen, “The Hesder Yeshivot in Israel: A Church-State Arrangement”, *Journal of Church and State* 35 (1993), 113–130; Aharon Lichtenstein, “The Ideology of Hesder”, *Tradition* 19, 3 (1981), 199–217.

86 Interview with Rabbi Binyamin Blau, former Rosh Kollel of CTTK and Principal of Fuchs-Mizrachi High School, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, Sept. 8, 2003; interview with Vicky Epstein Frolich, CTTK Administrator, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, Sept. 8, 2003.

At about the same time, a similar type of framework was launched in Cape Town, South Africa by native son and Yeshivat Har Etzion graduate, Rabbi Jonathan Glass. These efforts caught the attention of both the American Modern Orthodox world and the *hesder* yeshiva system in Israel. A Jerusalem-based umbrella organization was created through the efforts of American-Israeli philanthropist Morris (Moshe) Green and Zev Schwartz, another expatriate South African and Yeshivat Har Etzion graduate. As of fall 2005, the Schwartz-directed *Torah MitZion* (Torah from Zion, henceforth TMZ) network, involved 20 affiliate community kollelim – 14 of which were North American based – as well as the Jewish Learning Initiative, which sponsored emissary couples in ten different major universities.⁸⁷

Like the right-wing community kollelim, each TMZ branch has developed a different emphasis that reflects the nature and financial realities of the host community, as well as the tendencies of the specific rosh kollel (kollel dean) and fellows. Some TMZ kollelim are made up of a married rosh kollel and single fellows, others consist only of married couples, while yet others are a mix. Another type of synthesis is that of the kollelim that supplement the Israeli fellows with American graduates of Yeshiva University. In some, the mandate is to maintain a presence of full-time learners in the school, while in others, the fellows are expected to buttress the permanent staff by serving as actual formal Judaic studies instructors. Finally, while none of them precludes outreach activities, only a small minority dedicate considerable efforts to working with weakly affiliated Jews. Certainly in North America,

87 www.torahmitzion.org.

the basic framework initially propagated in Cleveland has become the standard format, that is, the kollelim are manned by Israeli Religious-Zionist rabbis and fellows who stay for one to two years. They are primarily based in Modern Orthodox day schools. Their presence is a means by which the schools can offer inspiring role models for the predominantly observant student body. They also act as both formal and informal educators. Similarly, their communal functions – be they lectures and study sessions or Israel Independence Day celebrations – are generally run in conjunction with the local Orthodox synagogue(s). As such, the TMZ kollelim can be defined as predominantly “inreach” oriented. “The aim of the program”, as the TMZ official website proclaims, “is to assist the local leadership to strengthen Judaism in their communities through a unique Torah atmosphere which includes Judaism and Zionism”.⁸⁸

The latest phase in the history of the kollel in America, then, has produced at least two new applications for the kollel framework. The Right Wing Orthodox outreach models have transformed the kollel into an organization dedicated to addressing assimilation and indifference to Jewish identity among the broad spectrum of the American Jewish collective. The TMZ initiatives, in contrast, have molded a kollel that is geared toward creating multiple opportunities for direct dissemination of a specific ideology among a defined sector of the Jewish population. The aim is to solidify – if not salvage – the dual commitment of Modern Orthodox Jews to Torah observance and the centrality of the State of Israel. However, the lines between outreach and inreach orientations should not be

88 Ibid; Interview with Zev Schwartz, Executive Director, Torah MiTzion Kollelim, Jerusalem (May 22, 2003).

drawn too sharply. As already pointed out, the yeshiva world continues to sponsor many inreach-oriented community kollelim, and like Atlanta, just about all of the “cutting edge” outreach kollelim serve the Orthodox community too. Similarly, the TMZ kollelim do not consider outreach beyond their mandate, and a few of them have made significant efforts in this direction.⁸⁹ That said, the direction of the yeshiva world is clearly toward increased outreach, while the TMZ model is focused upon strengthening commitment within the Modern Orthodox community.

One way of interpreting the TMZ focus is to view it as an effort to stem the tide away from the move to the right among the Modern Orthodox.⁹⁰ That is, the American Modern Orthodox

89 The Syracuse branch is notable in this regard, see www.torahmitzion.org/syracuse/section.asp.

90 Charles Liebman already documented this burgeoning trend in his “Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life”, 89–92; idem, “Left and Right in American Orthodoxy”, *Judaism* 15:1 (Winter, 1966), 102–107; For an early manifestation of opposition to the growing move to the right, see the 1968 comments of the leading modern Orthodox rabbi, Joseph H. Lookstein, cited in Adam S. Ferziger, “The Lookstein Legacy: An American Orthodox Rabbinical Dynasty”, *Jewish History* 13, 1 (Spring 1999), 130–131; In addition, see, for example: Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva*, 233–234; idem and Reuel Shinnar, “Modern Orthodoxy in America: Possibilities for a Movement Under Siege”, *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (June 1, 1998); Jonathan Sacks, “Modern Orthodoxy In Crisis”, *Le’ela* 2:17 (1984), 20–25; Jonathan Sarna, “The Future of American Orthodoxy”, *Shma.Com* (Feb. 2001), www.shma.com; Charles Selegut, “By Torah Alone: Yeshiva Fundamentalism in Jewish Life”, in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Accounting for Fundamentalisms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 236–263; Haym Soloveitchik, “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy”, *Tradition* 28, 4 (Summer 1994), 64–130, reprinted in Roberta Rosenberg and Chaim I. Waxman (eds.), *Jews in America: A Contemporary Reader* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 320–276; Chaim I. Waxman, “The Haredization of American Orthodox Jewry”, *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints*,

community feels that its own institutions have not produced a critical mass of young people who embrace a combination of Torah, modern culture and Zionism. Rather, the majority of young American Orthodox educators are closer to the outlook of the yeshiva world, be they former students of Lakewood and Ner Israel or graduates of Modern Orthodoxy's banner institution, Yeshiva University. These individuals are key players in advancing a less positive attitude on the part of the younger generation of the Modern Orthodox toward secular culture, as well as encouraging an idealization of strict halakhic interpretation in a broad range of issues.⁹¹ The only resource left, it can be claimed, for finding a wellspring of inspiring individuals who are truly committed to Religious Zionism is Israel. As such, the former *hesder* soldiers have been recruited from the outside to help restake a claim for the primacy of the principles of Modern Orthodoxy within American Jewish life. A report from the Baltimore contingent published in the TMZ newsletter, *Kol Hakollelim*, supports this perception:

Baltimore is home to some 100,000 Jews, of whom 20,000 are Orthodox – mostly 'haredi' (right wing), since Baltimore boasts the famous "Ner Israel" yeshiva, whose influence is felt throughout the city's Orthodox community...in light of these facts, the focus of the kollel's work lies more in the "Zionist" area than in the "Religious" one. The outreach in which the Kollel engages is mostly towards *Torat Eretz Yisrael*

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (February 15, 1998); idem, "American Orthodoxy: Confronting Cultural Challenges", *The Edah Journal* 4, 1 (Iyar 5764 [2004]), www.edah.org.

91 See Heilman, *Sliding to the Right*.

– teaching about the uniqueness of the land and the special mitzvah (commandment) of living in it.⁹²

It should be mentioned that while they share many common values, Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism are by no means one and the same. Indeed, in issues not related to the theological meaning of the State, quite a few of the *hesder* yeshivas that form the reservoir for TMZ fellows likely share much more in common with American right-wing Orthodoxy than with the ideologically Modern Orthodox sector. Assuming that reinforcing its camp is one of its goals, one may question whether the outlook of many TMZ fellows is truly consistent with that of its hosts. It might even be argued that the presence of TMZ could buttress the move to the right on the part of certain American communities.⁹³

It is this disparity between the Israeli mindset and American Modern Orthodoxy that forms part of the backdrop for two kollels that do not fit neatly into either the right wing outreach model or the TMZ. In 1996, Rabbi Kenneth Brander of the Boca Raton Synagogue in

92 Yossi Orenstein, “Kollel Torah MiTzion – Baltimore”, *Kol Hakollelim* 9 (Sivan, 5763 – May/June 2003), www.torahmitzion.org. See the article Shmulik Eldar, “Kollel Torah MiTzion – Cape Town”, on the same page in which the TMZ kollel member speaks of the “somewhat competitive situation” brought about by the recent arrival of an *Ohr Someach* (Right Wing Orthodox) kollel. As a result, “we have learned to read the map” and “resolved to emphasize our Zionist aspect very strongly...This is expressed...in an attempt to include a Zionist aspect in every *devar Torah* (brief Torah homily), every shiur (Torah class) and – of course – in our *hevrutah* (partnership) study”.

93 See, for example, Eliezer Don-Yehiya, “Does Place Make a Difference? Jewish Orthodoxy in Israel and in the Diaspora”, in Chaim I. Waxman (ed.), *Israel as a Religious Reality* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1994), 43–74; idem, “The Book and the Sword: The Nationalist Yeshivot and Political Radicalism in Israel”, in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Accounting for Fundamentalisms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 264–302.

South Florida founded a kollel that is manned primarily by YU rabbinical graduates. The range of activities that it offers parallels those of the right wing outreach kollels far more than the predominant TMZ model.⁹⁴ By choosing YU graduates, however, Brander hoped to at once buttress the modern Orthodox character of his fast growing community, while simultaneously presenting fellows who could operate more smoothly within the broader American Jewish cultural milieu.⁹⁵ Indeed, upon moving to New York in 2005 to serve as the founding dean of YU's new Center for the Jewish Future, one of Brander's first initiatives was to create a framework for establishing community kollels under YU's auspices. Interestingly, however, to date the first and only YU community kollel is situated in the Hebrew Academy of Five Towns and Rockaway (HAFTAR), an institution that caters almost exclusively to highly affiliated Modern Orthodox schoolchildren and their families. Thus, it would seem that this first YU model can be described as an inreach kollel, an "Americanized" TMZ so to speak, that aims primarily to inject energy into a Modern Orthodox camp that is still on the defensive.⁹⁶

To reiterate, the rise of TMZ (and for that matter, the YU community kollels as well) reflects, among other things, the insecurity of American Modern Orthodoxy that has resulted from the move to the right within its camp. The current outreach trend, by contrast, seems to imply opposite trends within the Right Wing

94 See the Boca Raton Kollel website: <http://kollel.org>.

95 Interview with Rabbi Kenneth Brander, Jerusalem, August 24th, 2003.

96 The launching of a second YN community kollel is planned for September 2006. As it will be situated in the Modern Orthodox David Renov Stahler (DRS) Yeshiva High School for Boys (HALB) of Woodmere, New York, the above analysis would appear to apply to this new kollel as well. On DRS, see <http://www.halb.org/home>.

community kollel movement. Rather than shelter themselves and the Torah itself in a self imposed enclave, the heirs of Rabbi Aharon Kotler's sectarian approach are constantly exploring new ways to interact with Jews of every denomination and lifestyle. Certainly the kollel framework offers safeguards and checks that are meant to counterbalance any negative influence of society on the fellows and their families. Central to the new direction, however, is a sense of triumphalism on the part of the yeshiva world.⁹⁷ If just a half a century ago it feared for its survival, today it observes that it is Modern Orthodoxy that is in decline and the non-Orthodox who risk extinction. Meanwhile, its own communities and institutions have continued to expand both numerically and geographically. This sense of self has led to a reconsideration of the role of the yeshiva world within the broader framework of American Orthodoxy. Today it feels so confident in its own survival that it can and should be a central player in strengthening the Jewish identity of others. The popularity of the community outreach kollel is one of the main manifestations of this transition. Indeed, part of the outreach effort is intended to garner new recruits for the yeshiva world itself. Be that the case, it will be argued further on that this

97 There is a vast corpus of writing published in the Orthodox press over the last twenty years that can be characterized as "triumphalist" literature. Such articles are sprinkled among most issues of the *Jewish Observer*, which is sponsored by the right-wing Orthodox *Agudath Israel of America*. This theme of triumphalism is also highlighted in many of the entries in a symposium on the future of American Orthodoxy published in *Tradition* 32, 4 (Summer 1998). For less partisan evaluations of Orthodox success, see for example: Bernard Susser and Charles S. Liebman, *Choosing Survival* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 139–146; Jack Wertheimer, "Recent Trends in American Judaism", *American Jewish Year Book* 1989 (New York: American Jewish committee, 1989), 107–124; Sarna, "The Future of American Orthodoxy".

argument does not account for the entire phenomenon. What does seem to have transpired, however, is that in its efforts to address the weakly affiliated, the right-wing Orthodox themselves have internalized cultural norms that they previously viewed pejoratively as reflections of the compromising ways of the Modern Orthodoxy. Thus, if the inreach direction of TMZ exemplifies an effort to resuscitate Modern Orthodoxy, the right-wing outreach kollel indicates a dilution of some of the active antipathy of this camp toward integration with other Jews and the cultural norms that they represent.

Parallel to highlighting two of the seemingly polar directions that are manifested in the contemporary community kollel movement, it is equally important to emphasize the common thread that unites both of the major kollel frameworks that have emerged since the late eighties. Simply put, their shared activist orientation represents a revolution in the nature of the American kollel. While they continue to anchor their programs in the personal commitment of the fellows to advanced Talmudic studies, they dedicate the bulk of their time and efforts to directly influencing local Jewish life. This is an absolute departure from the enclavist orientation promulgated by Rabbi Aharon Kotler in the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, when viewed chronologically, one can see how these models evolved from the second stage “intermediary” community kollelim that highlighted the “indirect ripple effect”. Yet the most recent developments reflect a completely new role for the kollel in America that is more reminiscent of the unique Novaredok model described above. These institutions bear little in common with the elitist sanctuaries that enabled married yeshiva students to continue their advanced studies – regardless of whether or not they invited others to briefly experience this atmosphere as well.

Summary

This study began with the following question: what types of educational frameworks can appeal to the increasingly “post-denominational” American Jews of the 21st century? Through its original approach, the new community kollel offers a novel environment for exposure to Jewish knowledge in a non-coercive setting. Based on the data discussed above, it is fast becoming a major service institution within American Jewish communal life that stands alongside – or sometimes as a replacement for – the day school or Hebrew school and synagogue. Its mandate can be summarized as offering experiences and knowledge to the turn-of-the-twenty-first-century Jew that the more veteran settings do not provide.

The next stages in this study, which are currently in progress, will build upon many of the themes and understandings that have been introduced in this historical presentation. In order to do so, the second section will offer a more detailed description of the contemporary trends in the American community kollel. Through a series of case studies, the two major categories discussed above – community outreach and TMZ – will be further analyzed. As a

result, a more nuanced typology of the variety of kollelim that are included within the contemporary community kollel movement will emerge. Within this context, discussion will be devoted to the specific pedagogical and social principles that form the foundation for the kollel approach. Additional significant information will be attained through a depiction of the workings of the overarching organizational structures that have been created, as well as the mechanisms for funding these ambitious projects.

With this more comprehensive knowledge in hand, the third and last section of the study will analyze the significance of the community kollel for the understanding of a series of relevant contexts. What insight does the emergence and apparent success of the community kollel offer regarding the intellectual and spiritual proclivities of contemporary Americans and American Jews in particular? Did similar frameworks (other than kollelim) exist previously in America that could have served as a prototype or at least precipitate thinking that ultimately led to the creation of the new kollel models? Why have numerous Jews who have abandoned organized synagogue life found the kollel an attractive alternative? Is the kollel an exclusively Orthodox phenomenon or can the basic principles of the kollel be adopted successfully by other Jewish denominations? Finally, does the kollel model shed light upon other areas of conflict within contemporary Judaism such as gender issues and approaches to dealing with mixed families?

List of Publications

The Rappaport Center publishes Research and Position Papers, authored by outstanding scholars and experts. These papers present original and interesting findings concerning issues pertaining to assimilation and Jewish identity. Written at a high level of cultural and conceptual analysis, they are nevertheless not ‘ivory tower’ research; they bear operational implications for ameliorating and improving real-life situations. The Research and Position Papers of the Rappaport Center are an invaluable and original series, constituting a significant addition to the collection of any public and research library and to the bookshelves of individuals interested in, or concerned with, the future of the Jewish people. To date, the following publications have appeared in this series:

- **Israeli Assimilation: The Absorption of Non-Jews into Israeli Society and its Influence on the Collective Identity**, by Asher Cohen (Hebrew)
- **A Critique of Jewish Identity Discourse**, by Avi Sagi (Hebrew)
- **Halakhic Responses to Assimilation**, by Ariel Picard (Hebrew)

- **Training American Orthodox Rabbis to Play a Role in Confronting Assimilation: Programs, Methodologies and Directions**, by Adam S. Ferziger (English)
- **Making the Jewish Canon Accessible to Our Generation**, by Yedidia Z. Stern (Hebrew/English)
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- **“The Jewish Story”: The Meaning of Jewish Identity and the Factors Shaping it Among Jewish Youth in Mexico City and Tashkent**, by Dana Pereg, Mario Mikulincer and Maya Aksakalov (Hebrew)
- **The Quintessential Dilemma: American Jewish Responses to Inter-marriage**, by Gerald Cromer (Hebrew/English)
- **“Jewishness” in Postmodernity: The Case of Sweden**, by Lars Dencik (Hebrew/English)
- **Assimilation in Italy and the Methods of Confronting it**, by Yaakov Andrea Lattes (Hebrew/Italian)
- **The Rosenzweig Lehrhaus: Proposal for a Jewish House of Study in Kassel Inspired by Franz Rosenzweig’s *Frankfurt Lehrhaus***, by Ephraim Meir (English).
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