

Adam S. Ferziger

Centered on Study:

Typologies of the American Community Kolllel



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TYPOLOGIES OF THE AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY KOLLEL



The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research  
and Strengthening Jewish Vitality  
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**Centered on Study:**  
**Typologies of the American Community Kollel**

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## Preface

Dr. Adam Ferziger was born in the United States and holds Orthodox rabbinical ordination (“semicha”) from Yeshiva University. A resident of Israel, he holds a Ph.D. from Bar Ilan University, where he is Associate Director of the Program in Contemporary Jewry. He has been associated with the Rappaport Center since its inception, and his research under the auspices of the center have been instrumental both in increasing recognition of the Center’s contribution to understanding of the Jewish world today – and in recognition of Dr. Ferziger as a leading voice in the study of Jewish life in North America.

Dr. Ferziger’s expertise in the early development of Orthodox responses to non-observant Jews<sup>1</sup> provided him with a solid base to embark upon his first program of research at the Rappaport Center: an analysis and critique of American Orthodox rabbinical training from a “counter-assimilationist” perspective. Published by the Center in 2004, *Training American Orthodox Rabbis to Play a Role in Confronting Assimilation: Programs, Methodologies and Directions* is considered the classic analysis and critique of that topic.

1 Adam Ferziger, *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, non-Observance and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity*, Philadelphia, Penn. U. Press, 2005.

During his research for that study, Dr. Ferziger noted the emergence of the community kollel, an innovative framework sharing a name with the classic kollel but serving a different purpose within Jewish communities in North America. With the support and encouragement of the Rappaport Center, Dr. Ferziger embarked upon a major research program devoted to the phenomenon of the community kollel. The first fruit of that endeavor, *The Emergence of the Community Kollel: A New Model for Addressing Assimilation*, was published by the Center in 2006. Above and beyond making the reader aware of the various dimensions of the phenomenon and of its implications for Jewish community life and Judaism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the study noted the actual and potential contributions of such frameworks to the struggle against assimilation and the strengthening of Jewish vitality.

In the current study, *Centered on Study: Typologies of the American Community Kollel*, Dr. Ferziger brings his research to a deeper and more nuanced level. On the basis of case studies of six different frameworks, each considered to be a community kollel, Ferziger differentiates between the various types of kollels and analyzes the strengths and the problems of each. He then proceeds further, and discusses the matter from two additional perspectives, in chapters titled “Assimilation and the Denominational Divide” and “The Havurah Movement and the Community Kollel”. I am convinced that this cutting-edge study will be hailed by researchers, rabbis, educators and community leaders as an invaluable contribution that not only “photographs” reality but provides insights and analyses that enable both the improvement of current frameworks and the planning for even better community frameworks in the future.

The marriage of research and analysis as a basis for critique and planning is characteristic of the basic orientation of the Rappaport Center at Bar Ilan University. As we understand it, 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, through the manifold activities of the Rappaport Center, have made an important contribution to ensuring the future well-being of the Jewish people worldwide. May G-d grant them and their family much health and well-being.

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 Aharon, organizational co-ordinator of the Rappaport Center, who was also in charge of proofreading and co-ordination with the press; Mr. Yehonatan Chipman (text editor), Ben Gassner studio (cover graphics), and Art Plus press.

Zvi Zohar, Director

The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research  
and Strengthening Jewish Vitality



## Introduction\*

The term "kollel" is commonly applied to a framework in which veteran yeshiva students, generally married ones, receive a living stipend in order to study Talmud and Jewish law on a full-time basis. In a previous work I traced the historical development of a relatively new variation on this institution, the community kollel.<sup>1</sup> Unlike its predecessors, the community kollel is not geared exclusively towards enhancing the scholarship of its core group of fellows. Rather, it is also dedicated to enriching the religious life of other Jews who live in its environs. Indeed, since the late 1980s it has evolved into an effective tool for attracting individuals to increased Jewish learning, traversing boundaries of denomination and affiliation.<sup>2</sup>

\* I would like to thank Dr. Joshua Berman, Mr. Yehonatan Chipman, and Professor Zvi Zohar, for their helpful and insightful comments on earlier drafts of this publication.

1 See Adam S. Ferziger, *The Emergence of the Community Kollel: A New Model for Addressing Assimilation*, Position Paper 13 (Ramat-Gan: Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research – Bar-Ilan University, 2006), 15-32.

2 Until recently, very little attention has been paid within the academic

There are three areas in which the community kollel is distinguished from other banner institutions within Jewish life, illustrating its unique potential for addressing the intellectual and spiritual proclivities of contemporary Jewry. First, as opposed to a formal school or yeshiva that requires extensive infrastructure in order to function, the initial start-up costs and bureaucratic problems entailed in establishing a kollel are relatively low. Second, unlike the synagogue, that is anchored in collective prayer and ritual, community kollels concentrate on study and

world to the community kollel phenomenon. Herbert W. Bomzer, *The Kolel in America* (New York: Sheingold, 1985), 112-115, discusses the Los Angeles Kollel (Kollel Bais Avrohom), which was founded in 1975. William B. Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 258, includes one paragraph on the phenomenon. Both books, however, were published before the major expansion that took place from the late 1980s on. Two partisan studies have been published in the last five years that provide a good deal of primary data and statistics: N.A., "Kollelim", *Nitzotzot Min HaNer* 16 (Jan-March, 2004), available at [www.nerleleef.com/janmar4.pdf](http://www.nerleleef.com/janmar4.pdf); Yaakov Feitman, "It takes a Kollel: The Rise of the Kollel in America", *Jewish Action* 63, 2 (Winter 2002), available at [www.ou.org/publications/ja/5763/5763winter](http://www.ou.org/publications/ja/5763/5763winter). See also Nisson Wolpin, "The Community Kolel: Reaching out with Torah", *The Jewish Observer* (Oct., 1979), 19-26. I have set out to address various aspects of the community kollel in the following articles: Adam S. Ferziger, "From Lubavitch to Lakewood: The Chabadization of American Orthodoxy", in Naftali Loewenthal, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Elliott R. Wolfson (eds.), *Reaching for the Infinite: The Lubavitcher Rebbe – Life, Teachings and Impact* (forthcoming); idem, "Church/Sect Theory and American Orthodoxy Reconsidered", in Stuart Cohen and Bernard Susser (eds.), *An Ambivalent Jew: Charles S. Liebman Memorial Volume* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary Press, 2007), 107-124; idem, "Holy Land in Exile: The *Torah MiTzion* Movement – Toward a New Paradigm for Religious Zionism", in Chaim I. Waxman (ed.), *Religious Zionism: Future Directions* (New York: Yeshiva University Press/Ktav, forthcoming).

development of the individual. Finally, due to its cohesive staff and informal nature, it has the flexibility to adjust quickly to the ever-changing environments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In this study I will expand upon these themes by describing in detail the variations of this model that have emerged in the last twenty years and the ways in which they are responding to the realities of North American Jewish life. The presentation of a wide spectrum of models sheds light on numerous related aspects of American Judaism and Jewish life, including: the rise of assimilation as a central issue of concern for the broader American Jewish community, the connections between Orthodox and nonobservant or non-affiliated Jews in North America, interdenominational relations, the evolution of outreach (*kiruv*) into an Orthodox vocation, the place of the synagogue in Jewish life, conflicts between Modern and Haredi Orthodoxies,<sup>3</sup> the move to the right of Modern Orthodoxy,<sup>4</sup> debates over issues

- 3 On distinctions between "Modern Orthodoxy" and the more traditionalist, Haredi camp within American Orthodoxy, see for example: Ferziger, "Church/Sect Theory and American Orthodoxy Reconsidered"; Samuel Heilman, *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Charles S. Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life", *American Jewish Yearbook* 66 (1965), 48-97; Chaim I. Waxman, "Needed – New Typologies: The Complexity of American Orthodoxy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", *Ambivalent Jew*, 135-156.
- 4 "Modern Orthodox" is capitalized due to its reference to a religious trend which arose in the United States during the mid-twentieth century. In essence, all Jewish Orthodoxies are modern, as they emerged in response to the economic, political, and social changes that had deep influence upon European Jewish society from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Modern Orthodoxy, however, is identified with the brand that celebrated the ability to synthesize allegiance to traditional practices and beliefs with integration into American society and culture. On Jewish Orthodoxy as a modern movement, see for

of gender and feminism, the influence of Chabad<sup>5</sup> Hasidism on American Judaism, the rise of new forms of religious leadership, the economics of communal life, the emergence of new Jewish communities outside traditional centers, and the attitudes of American Jews toward Zionism and settlement in Israel. In the course of the discussion I will also note weaknesses in the community kollel paradigm that need to be considered carefully in order for this model to establish itself as an essential institution within Jewish life.

While historical forerunners of the community kollel may be identified in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Eastern Europe,<sup>6</sup> the form that it has taken today has its roots in the early 1970s. The first kollels in America were founded during the 1940s by immigrants who were products of the Lithuanian yeshivas. They were often secluded physically from the greater Jewish community, and were intended to enable advanced students to

example, Jacob Katz, "Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective", in Peter H. Medding (ed.), *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* II (Bloomington, Minn. 1986), 3-17. During the late 1980s the term "Centrist Orthodoxy" was introduced by those who felt that "Modern Orthodoxy" had come to imply religious laxity. See for example: Norman Lamm, "Centrist Orthodoxy: Judaism and Moderationism, definitions and desideratum", in Jonathan Sacks (ed.), *Orthodoxy Confronts Modernity* (Hoboken and London: Ktav Publishing House, 1991), 48-61; Walter S. Wurtzbarger, "Centrist Orthodoxy: ideology or atmosphere?" in *Rabbinical Council of America – Jubilee Issue* (New York: Rabbinical Council of America, 1985), 67-75.

5 This is the official English spelling that appears in all Chabad literature and websites.

6 On the early history of the kollel, see for example: Bomzer, 17-20; Mordechai Breuer, *Ohalei Torah: Ha-Yeshivah, Tavnitah ve-Toldotehah* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 2004), 28, 149; Shaul Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshivah ha-Litait be-Hithavutah* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 2005), 360-82.

develop their Talmudic acumen without being exposed to the complexities of the world outside the yeshiva enclave. From a socio-ideological perspective, moreover, they served to cultivate a large cadre of individuals who were committed to Torah study and – unlike the "modernists" who dominated American Orthodoxy during the mid-twentieth century – did not idealize integration into the broader culture.<sup>7</sup>

The early 1970s witnessed a new stage in the development of the kollel in America. The concept was expanded to include institutions whose express goal was to interact with the local Jewish surroundings and, consequently, to exert a more direct influence upon them. "Community kollels" were established in neighborhoods with a critical mass of observant Jews and existing Orthodox synagogues, but which lacked a strong presence of learned individuals committed to rigorous halakhic observance. The aim was for a core group of advanced yeshiva students and their families to settle in such locales in order to raise communal interest in Torah study and, over the course of time, to engender a transformation in the nature of local Orthodox Jewish life. Notable examples of such models are the community kollels in Toronto, Chicago and Los Angeles.<sup>8</sup>

7 See: Bomzer, 26-35; Ferziger, "The Emergence of the Community Kollel", 27-32; 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 of Jerusalem (2002), 101-115 (see the many additional biographical sources cited in note 2); Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva*, 40-45; Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life", 67-69.

8 See: Bomzer, 112-115; Ferziger, "The Emergence of the Community Kollel", 32-43; *Nitzotzot Min HaNer*, 6-7; Wolpin, 23-25.

A new era in the development of the American community kollel was inaugurated in the late 1980s, when *kiruv* or "outreach" kollels were founded by graduates of the Lithuanian style yeshivas with the express purpose of addressing nonobservant and unaffiliated North American Jews. Not long after that, in 1994, another community kollel initiative known as *Torah mi-Tzion* (Torah from Zion) was founded by the Modern Orthodox community, in which groups of Israeli yeshiva graduates were brought to American locales for one or two years to buttress the efforts of the local rabbinical and educational staffs.<sup>9</sup>

This third stage is the focus of the current study. It is marked, first, by a proliferation in numbers – there are upwards of thirty Lithuanian-style outreach kollels and twenty-two Torah mi-Tzion centers and affiliated college campus sites throughout North America.<sup>10</sup> Numerous kollels of both types have also been established in Latin America, Europe, South Africa, and Australia.<sup>11</sup> In the course of this expansion, additional subtypes of community kollels have spun-off, integrating aspects of both the *kiruv* kollel and of *Torah mi-Tzion* and responding to some of the deficiencies identified in each. The growth in the number of kollels has also spawned independent organizations and departments within yeshivas, dedicated to recruiting and training potential kollel members, identifying new locations, raising funds, establishing financial infrastructures, producing

9 See Ferziger, "The Emergence of the Community Kollel", 44-56.

10 See *Nitzotzot Min HaNer*, 5. For a list of Torah mi-Tzion chapters, see [www.torahmitzion.org/eng/aboutus/kollels.asp](http://www.torahmitzion.org/eng/aboutus/kollels.asp).

11 On the first non-American community kollel, see *Nitzotzot Min HaNer* 16, 3; Moshe Sternbuch, "The Kollel Phenomenon and its Significance", in *Halakhic Discourses on Masechet Beitza* (B'nai Berak, 5742), 5-16.

educational materials to be utilized by numerous kollels, and cultivating a broader movement by creating national programs in which numerous kollel chapters can participate.<sup>12</sup>

In accounting for the emergence of the new community kollels, attention should be devoted both to the influence of internal developments within American Jewry, as well as to broader themes in American society in general and in American religion in particular. The increase since the 1980s in collective confidence, economic strength and manpower of the Haredi (i.e., non-Hasidic yeshiva world) wing of American Orthodoxy has allowed for a lowering of the defenses that were set up in the mid-twentieth century to neutralize any possible contamination that might arise from intense involvement with nonobservant Jews.<sup>13</sup> Concurrently, heightened concern by almost all Jewish

12 See, e.g., [www.jewishunitylive.com](http://www.jewishunitylive.com).

13 See, e.g.: Adam S. Ferziger, "Between Outreach and Inreach: Redrawing the Lines of the American Orthodox Rabbinate", *Modern Judaism* 25 (2005), 237-263; Heilman, *Sliding to the Right*; Jonathan Sarna, "The Future of American Orthodoxy", *Sh'ma* (Feb. 2001), available at [www.shma.com](http://www.shma.com); Charles Selengut, "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* 376, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (February 15, 1998), available at [http://localhost:4664/cache?event\\_id=153846&schema\\_id=2&q=waxman+haredization&s=sB-b2CDGWKkqHDWHrXNV7Sm1oU](http://localhost:4664/cache?event_id=153846&schema_id=2&q=waxman+haredization&s=sB-b2CDGWKkqHDWHrXNV7Sm1oU); idem, "American Orthodoxy: Confronting Cultural Challenges", *The Edah Journal* 4, 1 (Iyar 5764 [2004]), [www.edah.org](http://www.edah.org); idem, "From Institutional Decay to Primary Day:

parties over the dramatic rise of intermarriage rates among North American Jews has led to greater receptivity to any effort to stem radical assimilation, transcending denominational lines.<sup>14</sup> The new community kollels, emphasizing individual intellectual development and interaction, must also be seen in the context of an American culture that has been described as suffering from the "Bowling Alone" syndrome – i.e., focusing on the self rather than on collective involvement<sup>15</sup> – while simultaneously celebrated as a "generation of seekers" on a continual quest for spiritual meaning.<sup>16</sup> A certain degree of affinity may also be identified between the new community kollels that offer an alternative to

American Orthodox Jewry Since World War II", *American Jewish History* 91 (2003), 405-21.

- 14 See, for example: *National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) 2001*, available at [www.ujc.org/local\\_includes/downloads/temp/njps2000-01\\_revised\\_1.06.04.pdf](http://www.ujc.org/local_includes/downloads/temp/njps2000-01_revised_1.06.04.pdf); Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Intermarriage* (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 2004). On the lowering of denominational tensions, see Jack Wertheimer, *All Quiet on the Denominational Front: Jewish Unity, Denominationalism, and Postdenominationalism in the United States* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2005).
- 15 See Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital", *Journal of Democracy* 6, 1 (1995), 65-78; idem, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1995).
- 16 See, for example: Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen, *The Jew Within* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000); Steven Sharot, "Assimilating, Coalescing and Spiritual-Seeking: Recent Trends among American Jews", *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* XVIII (Jerusalem, 2002), 240-246; Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993); Chaim I. Waxman, *Jewish Baby Boomers: A Communal Perspective* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001); Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 52-84.

the large community synagogue center<sup>17</sup> and the increasing trend toward "small group" worship within American Christianity as an alternative to the mega-church culture of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup>

In the following discussion I will present the history and distinctive characteristics of six North American kollels, each one of which has taken the community kollel concept in a different direction. They are offered here as typological models. In some cases, there are numerous kollel branches throughout the continent predicated on the same approach; from time to time I will refer to these branches and their shared common traits. Other examples are *sui generis*. Nonetheless, these individual cases represent formulations that depart in meaningful ways from the more accepted community kollel models and deserve consideration. Taken together, I believe that the following presentation will offer a view into the distinctive and diverse nature of this new phenomenon within Jewish society and religious culture, as well as providing insight into a myriad of related subjects that are central to contemporary American Jewish life.

It is my hope that this study will enrich both scholars who study contemporary Judaism, as well as creative practitioners

17 On the synagogue center as a unique product of twentieth century American Judaism, see: Debra Dash Moore, "A Synagogue Center Grows in Brooklyn", in Jack Wertheimer (ed.), *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Brandeis/University of New England Press, 1987), 297-326; David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: the Synagogue Center in American Jewish History* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Brandeis/University of New England Press, 1999).

18 See: Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community* (New York: The Free Press, 1994); idem, *"I Come Away Stronger": How Small Groups are Shaping American Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

who are seeking to develop fresh strategies for engaging the broad spectrum of North American Jews with their heritage.

## Typologies of the American Community Kollel

### A. The Classic Model: Kollel Yad Chaim Mordechai - Cedar Green Community Kollel, University Heights and Beachwood (Cleveland), Ohio

Initial impressions can be deceiving: this was my reflection after spending a day observing and interviewing members of the Cedar Green Community Kollel. Before setting out by car, I called Rabbi Yankel Zev ("Velvel") Katz, the founder and *rosh kollel* (kollel head, director), for driving directions. He concluded our brief phone conversation by telling me that across the street from their building was a large Reform temple that allowed the kollel staff to use its parking facility, and suggested that I leave my vehicle there. Upon arrival fifteen minutes later, it occurred to me that such an arrangement might be indicative of the new willingness to maintain relationships with the non-Orthodox that I had begun to identify among some of the community kollels. But as I quickly learned, at least in as far as what is known in Cleveland as the "Katz Kollel", it is unlikely that the neighborly gesture on the part of Temple Emanuel will ever develop into a more substantive relationship.

Katz grew up within the Telz Yeshiva community, established in Cleveland by World War II refugees from the renowned Lithuanian institution of that name.<sup>19</sup> His father, Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Katz, was one of its founders and *roshei yeshiva* (yeshiva heads), and his son R. Velvel studied both there and at the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem. He was later employed at Telz as a *mashgiah* (spiritual advisor). His career as a kollel head began modestly in 1984 when, concurrent with teaching in the Telz-sponsored Hebrew Academy of Cleveland boys high school, he set up a *kollel mehankhim* (educator's kollel) in the Cleveland Heights neighborhood. Local Orthodox day school and male high school Jewish studies teachers were invited to study Torah independently for two hours daily in return for a small stipend. When the full-time community kollel was opened in 1995, he chose to move to the boundary between Beachwood and University Heights so as not to compete with the existing Haredi community kollel in Cleveland Heights.<sup>20</sup> Notably, just one year earlier a Religious-Zionist kollel – to be discussed at greater length below – had been established in University Heights – Beachwood. Indeed, both kollels vie for participants and financial support from the same pool of local modern Orthodox Jews. Unlike the Zionist kollel, that encourages community members to identify more strongly

19 On the Telz Yeshiva in Lithuania, see Stampfer, 303-59; on the Telz Yeshiva in Cleveland, see Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva*, 38-40; for an insider's description of both, see Mordechai Gifter, "Yeshivat Telz", in Samuel K. Mirsky (ed.), *Mosdot ha-Torah be-Eiropah be-Vinyanam u-ve-Hurbanam* (New York: Ha-Histadrut ha-Ivrit ba-America, 1956), 169-188.

20 On the Orthodox Jewish community in Beachwood, see Samuel G. Freedman, *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2000), 284-337.

with the State of Israel and to reach a viable synthesis between religious commitment and secular involvements, the focus of the Katz Kollel is exclusively on increased observance and study.<sup>21</sup>

Although established in 1995, the Katz Kollel was designed according to the original "inreach" community kollel model of the 1970s. All of its regular activities take place within the confines of its *beit midrash*<sup>22</sup> (study hall) on the second floor of the small Zikhron Menachem synagogue.<sup>23</sup> In return for a \$22,000 a year fellowship, the twelve *yunger-leit* (fellows) dedicate their morning and afternoon hours to high level Talmudic analysis, while in the evenings they form *hevrutot* (study partnerships) with observant Jews from the area. The aim of the kollel, according to Rabbi Katz, is to "strengthen the core of local Orthodox Jews".<sup>24</sup> Towards this goal, it also sponsors periodic public lectures and Sabbath gatherings for the greater community, held in one of the larger synagogues. On such occasions, separate programming is

- 21 Interview with Rabbi Yankel ("Velvel") Katz, University Heights, Ohio, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003. Tape recordings of the interviews used for this paper are stored at the Bruce and Ruth Rappaport Faculty of Jewish Studies Building, Room 32, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel 52900.
- 22 Haredi Jews would more likely call it a *beis midrash*. In order to maintain consistency I have used the Israeli (Sephardic) pronunciation in all transliterations, unless dealing with names like *Bais Yaakov* that are primarily pronounced according to the Haredi (Ashkenazi) custom.
- 23 Katz actually had plans to move to another location on the border of University Heights and Beachwood, closer to a block on which a number of Orthodox synagogues and schools are located. Thus far, however, the realization of this plan has been thwarted by the University Heights Town Council. See "Minutes of Town Council Meeting – City of University Heights", (January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005), 3-5, available at [www.universityheights.com/pics/councilminutes.cc01042005.pdf](http://www.universityheights.com/pics/councilminutes.cc01042005.pdf).
- 24 Katz Interview.

generally held for men and women. The impact of this institution on Beachwood Jewry, Katz explained, is reflected in a recent influx of young "yeshivish" (i.e., Haredi) people into the neighborhood, a major increase in synagogue attendance, and a greater degree of respect within the Orthodox community toward its rabbis, and towards rabbinical authority in general.<sup>25</sup>

Like many community kollels, there are actually two *roshei kollel* leading the Cedar Green kollel. Katz is essentially the CEO, responsible for fundraising, logistics, community relations, organizational policy, and recruiting members of the local community to attend the kollel. Regarding the latter role, he declares with pride that he regularly calls men from the community at their homes and "nudges" them to come learn.<sup>26</sup> He is also involved in the day-to-day study program of the *yungerleit*, but the primary lecturer – as well as recruiter of the fellows – is the second *rosh kollel*, Rabbi Alexander Charlop. Unlike Katz, Charlop comes from a less uniformly Haredi pedigree. His great-grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Harlap, was a close associate of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), the Religious Zionist thinker and first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Palestine.<sup>27</sup> In fact,

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Rabbi Kook was the most prominent rabbinic authority to support the early twentieth century Zionist settlement movement. Through the efforts of his students, including his son Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook (1891-1982), his writings became the centerpiece for the dominant trend in contemporary Religious Zionism. See, for example: Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism and Religious Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 79-144; Dov Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads: A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 131-230; Chaim I. Waxman, "Messianism, Zionism, and the State of Israel", *Modern Judaism* 7, 2 (1987), 175-192.

both his grandfather, Rabbi Yechiel Michel Charlop (1889-1974), and his father, Rabbi Zevulun Charlop, were outspoken Zionists who served as rabbis of the (Modern Orthodox) Bronx Jewish Center and were closely associated with Yeshiva University (henceforth: YU), the flagship institution for higher learning of American Modern Orthodoxy.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, from 1970 to 2007 his father served as dean of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), the YU rabbinical school, and still holds the title of Special Advisor to the President for Yeshiva Affairs.<sup>29</sup> Alexander Charlop, however, was educated in the leading American and Israeli Haredi yeshivas (Mir, Brisk, Lakewood), and completely identifies with the worldview espoused by these institutions.<sup>30</sup>

Like Katz, Charlop emphasized the importance of increasing the appreciation of Modern Orthodox Jews for Torah study and their respect for the opinions of the *gedolim* (leading rabbinical authorities). In point of fact, he was more explicit in his hope that contact with the kollel would cause them to become "more connected to the *yeshivish* world".<sup>31</sup> Comparing the impact of the 4300-strong yeshiva in Lakewood, New Jersey, the Beth Medrash Govoha, with that of the community kollel, he drew an analogy to the difference between a lighting store that is

28 Moshe Sherman, *Orthodox Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996), 45-46.

29 Zev Elef, "Rabbi Charlop Announces Plans for Vacating RIETS Post", *The Commentator* (May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007), available at <http://media.www.yucommentator.com/media/storage/paper652/news/2007/05/07/News/Rabbi.Charlop.Announces.Plans.For.Vacating.Riets.Post-2894181.shtml>.

30 Interview with Rabbi Alexander Charlop, University Heights, Ohio, Sept. 7, 2003.

31 Ibid.

hidden from view to striking a match in a dark room. That is, the brightest light is not necessarily seen, because it remains far away from most other Jews in Lakewood, while the less intensive lights of the community kollels are more noticeable due to their location within more heterogeneous Jewish locales. The implication was that non-Haredi Orthodox Judaism is comparable to a "dark room" desperately in need of light. One of the kollel fellows, Rabbi Binyamin Levy, expressed these sentiments more concretely. From his perspective, the clearest sign of success was when a local teenage boy chose to leave the community's Modern Orthodox day school to attend a Haredi yeshiva in Milwaukee or in Silver Spring, Maryland.<sup>32</sup>

Despite being rooted in the 1970's model, Rabbi Katz has shown some interest in expanding his activities beyond fully observant Jews. Even here, however, his target population is essentially within the Orthodox orbit – namely, "drop-outs" from Orthodox schools. To this end, he hired a rabbi who is not a regular fellow, whose job is to seek out and attract these teenagers to the kollel. As far as Katz is concerned, while others are doing *kiruv* (outreach), his job is to work with the "core".<sup>33</sup> Charlop, for his part, is well aware that many community kollels have branched out into *kiruv*, but he suspects that such activities ultimately may

32 Interview with Rabbi Binyamin Levy, University Heights, Ohio, Sept. 7, 2003. For a recent discussion in which a Modern Orthodox community activist calls to task another community kollel for putting forth such an approach while claiming otherwise, see David J. Balint, "The Seattle Kollel-Case Study in Unintended Consequences", available at <http://www.jewishideas.org/node/52>.

33 Katz Interview.

have deleterious effects on the *yiras shamayim* (piety; lit. "fear of Heaven") of the *yunger-leit* themselves.<sup>34</sup>

Numerous veteran community kollels, such as those in Los Angeles, Toronto, Chicago and Detroit, have far more developed programming and institutions than the Cedar Green Community Kollel. They offer classes and study opportunities in multiple venues, including regular sessions for women. Some sponsor websites and weekly email newsletters.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, whole communities have emerged around the kollels that have initiated new Haredi-oriented elementary and high schools for boys and girls, and support food establishments that cater to their kashrut (dietary laws) standards.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, the basic orientations of Cedar Green and its larger counterparts are identical. From the perspectives of the *roshei kollel* and the *yunger-leit*, at least, the

34 Charlop Interview. On debates within the Haredi world regarding *kiruv* (outreach) and how much of a priority it should be for the community, see for example: "Symposium on the Priorities for the Years Ahead", *Jewish Observer* (Tammuz-Av, 5757 – Summer, 1997); Marvin Schick, "An Essay on Contemporary Jewish Life", *Tradition* 35:2 (2001), 14-35. See the response to Schick's criticism of the outreach movement by one of the main spokesman of American Haredi Jewry, Nisson Wolpin, "Letter to the Editor", *Tradition* 35:4 (2001), 107: "I find it difficult to believe that someone as knowledgeable as Schick is unfamiliar with the highly effective, uncompromising *kiruv* efforts that grace our landscape, such as Torah Umesorah's decades-old SEED program, which mobilizes kollel couples and mature yeshiva students to teach Torah in grassroots communities across the length and breadth of America ... or the community *kollelim* that light up the entire countryside... all of which are accessible to all – indiscriminately – yet do not waffle in the least in terms of denominational integrity and ideological purity".

35 See, for example, the website of the Chicago kollel, [www.ckkollel.org](http://www.ckkollel.org). In 2007, the kollel celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

36 Regarding Los Angeles, see Bomzer, 112-115.

differences are merely reflective of the stage of development of the particular community and its kollel. As Katz put it, the ongoing endeavor to found kollel sites is part of the larger "step by step" effort of the yeshiva world to transform American Orthodoxy. "Once the main places were covered, they started looking for new frontiers".<sup>37</sup> With the Cedar Green Kollel serving as a point of comparison, I will now explore five other North American community kollels that have, over the last two decades, developed alternatives to what I have termed the "classic" community kollel model.

#### B. From Inreach to Outreach: Kollel Jewish Learning Center – Kollel Beis Yitzchak, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

When, in 1978, Rabbi Shaul Kagan was asked by the Lakewood rosh yeshiva, Rabbi Shneur Kotler, to establish a kollel in Pittsburgh, it is unlikely that either of them imagined that twenty-five years later that same kollel would co-sponsor the gala public screening of a movie entitled "Relentless", nor for that matter inaugurate a "Kollel Golf Classic".<sup>38</sup> Yet under the leadership of Rabbi Aaron Kagan, his now 43-year-old son and fellow Lakewood alumnus, such events have become part and parcel of the kollel repertoire. Indeed, not only was the movie – which dramatizes the moral correctness of Israel's behavior in its conflict with the Palestinians – shown, but the younger Kagan participated afterwards in a panel discussion together with the non-Orthodox heads of the local Federation of Jewish Philanthropies and of the Jewish Community Center (JCC). From his perspective, this was

37 Katz Interview.

38 See [www.kollelpgh.org.golfclassic.html](http://www.kollelpgh.org.golfclassic.html).

a way to gain greater "exposure" for the kollel.<sup>39</sup> These programs are illustrative of the transformation that has occurred since 1998, in which the classic model Beis Yitzchak community kollel has become the Kollel Jewish Learning Center, an institution that caters to both the Orthodox and broader populations of Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill Jewish hub.<sup>40</sup>

The original impetus for starting a community kollel came, as is often the case, from a number of local Orthodox rabbis. While their congregants were for the most part Modern Orthodox, these rabbis held a more Haredi orientation. They hoped that a kollel would "add vitality to the Modern Orthodox community".<sup>41</sup> Thus, they turned to Lakewood, which drafted the elder Kagan, himself a student of the yeshiva's founder Rabbi Aharon Kotler. Following the classic model, a modest building was acquired on a centrally located residential street, where eight to ten *yungerleit* studied Talmud throughout the day. In the evenings, local Orthodox men were invited to learn with the kollel fellows individually or in a more formal lecture framework. A number of these original kollel members settled in the community and

39 Such Haredi sponsored pro-Israel programs also raise questions regarding the nature of the American Haredi world's approach to Zionism and the State of Israel. Should the common held notion that Haredim are anti-Zionists or non-Zionists be taken for granted? Moreover, to what degree has the *kiruv* agenda led to toning down of other ideological principles? For a discussion of the positive approach of contemporary American Haredi Jews toward Israel, that focuses on attachment and involvement with the State, see Chaim I. Waxman, "Israel in Orthodox Identity: The American Experience", in Danny Ben-Moshe and Zohar Segev (eds.), *Israel, the Diaspora, and Jewish Identity* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), 52-66.

40 Interview with R. Aaron Kagan, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Sept. 9, 2003.

41 Ibid.

eventually went on to work in the local Jewish religious and educational institutions.<sup>42</sup>

Yet even during its heyday in the late 1970s and 1980s, the kollel sponsored activities that moved beyond its natural constituency. Some of its public lectures were offered in English and were open to the broader public. Particular efforts were made to expose the Russian immigrants who arrived during that period to Jewish religious culture. The kollel even hired an individual to focus on these initiatives. One result was that Shaul Kagan developed a "network of admirers" and supporters within the non-Orthodox community. That being said, the kollel remained predicated on the classic concept and the vast majority of its endeavors were directed toward the few hundred observant Orthodox families among the 40,000 - 50,000 Jews in Pittsburgh.<sup>43</sup> As one of the veterans of the original kollel expressed it, "at that point the kollel was semi-active in the community".<sup>44</sup>

The elder Kagan's health deteriorated in the early 1990s and with it the financial viability of the kollel. After his death in 1993, the kollel limped along for a few years and was on the verge of closing. Here I would point out that a dynamic of this type, in which one person – often the founder or principal *rosh kollel* – holds the key to economic and organizational stability, is characteristic of many community kollels. Even among the more developed and dynamic kollels, there is usually a single individual who keeps the institution going through his dedication and fundraising skills. Such was the case, as seen above, regarding

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Interview with Rabbi Mordechai Rosenberg, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Sept. 9, 2003.

the Katz kollel in Cleveland; the same scenario will become apparent in the descriptions of Rabbi Menachem Deutsch's role in Atlanta and that of Rabbi Kenneth Brander in Boca Raton. As in a small family business, such a configuration may be the natural result of the entrepreneurial quality of such enterprises and their leaders, but it may also serve as an impediment to the long term potential of such institutions to grow and become established anchors of local Jewish life.

As to Pittsburgh, the kollel eventually survived and even grew due to two main factors: first, some of Shaul Kagan's admirers – both Orthodox and non-Orthodox – organized a board of directors whose goal was to reconstitute it with a clear mission statement and solid financial backing, including covering \$500,000 in accrued debt. Second, in 1998 a new *rosh kollel* – the 32-year-old Aaron Kagan – was hired, who developed the same dedication as his father, while simultaneously reconfiguring the educational and organizational foundation of the institution.<sup>45</sup>

From the outset, Aaron Kagan's vision was to "build a place of both Torah and *kiruv*".<sup>46</sup> Ideologically, he was inspired by such figures such as Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky, a prominent rabbinic figure and head of the Lakewood-offshoot yeshiva in Philadelphia, who supported expansion of Haredi outreach efforts. He was also a graduate of the MAOR program run by Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky of Olney, Maryland, which trains kollel fellows to become outreach rabbis.<sup>47</sup> From Kagan's perspective, Haredi Jews are actually best suited to serve as *kiruv* specialists

45 Interview with Chuck Perlow, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Sept. 9, 2003.

46 Kagan Interview.

47 See Ferziger, "Between Inreach and Outreach", 243-245.

since they can relate and gain acceptance by all Jews, whether nonobservant, Modern Orthodox or themselves Haredi. Simply put, both the Modern Orthodox and Chabad are disparaged by the camp from which he (Kagan) stems, and are therefore limited in their ability to bridge the gaps among all the various Jewish factions.<sup>48</sup>

Kagan admits that he early recognized that, along with the kollel's spiritual and intellectual possibilities, there were compelling practical benefits to introducing what he referred to as "strategic outreach" into the kollel agenda. Addressing the broader Jewish community meant coming into contact with vast, previously untapped financial resources. Once the kollel was perceived as an institution dedicated to offering learning opportunities to all Pittsburgh Jews, regardless of their levels of observance or affiliation, it could garner support from the widest possible constituency.<sup>49</sup>

It would seem that the Kollel Jewish Learning Center is on its way to achieving Kagan's goals. When he arrived there were no full-time fellows, while today there is a second teaching *rosh kollel* who earns \$60,000 per year, as well as five *yunger-leit* who are paid \$28,000 each to study all day and work with the community in the evenings. In addition, three teachers receive a \$12,000 stipend in order to study in the "*kollel mehankhim*" during the afternoons and evenings. Other kollel employees include: an executive director, an outreach director, an office manager, a women's program director, a librarian, a newsletter

48 Ibid.

49 Kagan Interview; Perlow Interview.

editor, and a special events coordinator.<sup>50</sup> In 2003, the kollel's budget reached \$584,000 and a 2.7 million capital campaign was launched to build an expanded facility on the existing lot together with a newly purchased adjoining property.<sup>51</sup> By 2007 the budget reached \$890,000 and the new building was completed and functional.<sup>52</sup> The majority of local participants continued to come from the Orthodox sector – in this category the kollel expanded its offerings by creating a separate program serving female community members – but considerable efforts were made to connect with the broader Jewish population as well.

The kollel co-sponsors one time events that raise public consciousness as well as producing much needed funds. Beyond the "Relentless" screening and panel discussion, there have been annual kollel benefit performances of the Pittsburgh Symphony and the Israel Chamber Orchestra and, on August 20, 2007, the "Kollel Golf Classic" was inaugurated.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, a weekly "lunch-and-learn" class, entitled "Hungry for Torah", is offered in the downtown area, open to men and women, and a class in the Prophets open to male and female graduate students at all levels of Jewish knowledge is given at the Hillel Center of the University of Pittsburgh. The ubiquitous Kabbalah is also part of the Kollel's repertoire, with Rabbi Levi Langer, the second *rosh kollel*, presenting ongoing lecture series with such titles

50 See [www.kollelpgh.org](http://www.kollelpgh.org).

51 Email correspondence from Aaron Kagan, June 25, 2007; Susan Jacobs, "Prep Work Begins on Kollel Addition", *The Jewish Chronicle of Pittsburgh* (April 13, 2005), available at [www.pittchron.com](http://www.pittchron.com).

52 Kagan Email Correspondence.

53 See [www.kollelpgh.org](http://www.kollelpgh.org).

as "The Mystic's Guide to the Bible"<sup>54</sup> and "The Mystic's Guide to the Galaxy".<sup>55</sup> In addition to the lectures and learning partnerships with the kollel staff available to all area Jews – Kagan, for example, studies regularly with a Conservative and a Reform rabbi from the neighborhood – the kollel sponsors both the "Discovery" program in conjunction with the Aish Hatorah outreach organization and a "Crash Course in Jewish History" together with the local JCC.<sup>56</sup>

All these activities, as well as links to numerous Jewish resources, are listed on the Kollel's website. An email newsletter, including a schedule of events, Torah teachings and a message board, is sent out weekly to over 700 people.<sup>57</sup> The following announcement appears regularly in the newsletter: "Create-A-Class: want to learn something you don't see on our schedule? Can't make it to the Kollel but can gather a few friends in your home or office? Let us know! We will bring the Kollel to you".<sup>58</sup> From May 2005, the schedule of classes was listed as well on Pittsburgh's Jewish Community Calendar website.<sup>59</sup> Every year the kollel also holds free beginner's services during the high holidays. Rabbi Yale Butler, an Orthodox Pittsburgh resident and media publisher who led the event in 2002, explained his motivations as follows: "I'm doing a beginner's service because

54 See Kollel Jewish Learning Center, E-NEWS for *Parshas Ki Sisa – Shabbos Parah*, March 18, 2006 – 18 Adar 5766.

55 Kollel Jewish Learning Center, E-NEWS for *Parshas Vayakhel*, March 5, 2005 – 24 Adar I 5765.

56 Kagan Interview.

57 See [www.kollelpgh.org](http://www.kollelpgh.org).

58 See Kollel Jewish Learning Center, E-NEWS, March 18, 2006.

59 See <http://pittsburgh.planitjewish.com>.

so many Jews are seeking, but don't know where to turn".<sup>60</sup>

In the course of creating an address for Pittsburgh's Jewish seekers – there are approximately 20,000 unaffiliated local Jews<sup>61</sup> – Kagan has cultivated a group of well-established nonobservant individuals who have become regular participants in the kollel's activities, as well as advisors regarding kollel development and policy. One such is Barton "Bob" Schechter, a self-proclaimed non-observant but active Conservative Jew, whose rich career in Jewish communal service included sixteen years as director of the Pittsburgh JCC and prior stints in Columbus, Denver, and Atlanta, and today a private organizational consultant. Schechter was impressed with Kagan's ability to educate diverse constituencies while simultaneously neither "compromising his own [Haredi] identity" nor appearing "coercive, evangelical or offensive".<sup>62</sup> From his perspective, congregations, regardless of their denomination, are very "possessive" of their rabbis: "They can't do what the kollel can do, they have to cultivate allegiance to the congregation. Communal work cannot conflict with synagogue work".<sup>63</sup> The kollel, by contrast, is run by observant Jews but remains officially unaffiliated with any of the denominations. Thus, by focusing on study rather than ritual, "it is the best placed agency within the community" to "bridge the gaps".<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Schechter believes that the community kollel

60 Steve Levin, "Synagogues Try New Approaches to attract Jews to Holiday Services", *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Sept. 18<sup>th</sup>, 2002), available at [www.post-gazette.com/04259/379416.stm](http://www.post-gazette.com/04259/379416.stm).

61 Ibid.

62 Interview with Barton "Bob" Schechter, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Sept. 9, 2003.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

concept need not remain an exclusively Orthodox endeavor. If the Reform Hebrew Union College or the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary were to nurture graduates with similar levels of commitment, he sees no reason why they couldn't be successful. Chuck Perlow, who attends an Orthodox synagogue but says he is not Orthodox, agrees: "People aren't finding spirituality in synagogues. Community kollels can pick up where the Havurah movement left off".<sup>65</sup>

Perlow, a past president and major benefactor of the kollel, also stressed the non-denominational nature of the kollel. "Most non-affiliated Jews are afraid to go to an Orthodox synagogue but they will go to the kollel...The kollel is viewed first as an educational institution, as less scary".<sup>66</sup> He also drew an interesting parallel between the kollel and the movement that has championed outreach work throughout the world. "It is not viewed as a denominationally-oriented organization, it is viewed more like Chabad".<sup>67</sup> In another study, I have expanded upon the many parallels between the Chabad house and the community *kiruv* kollel.<sup>68</sup> Here I would add that, along with the kollel, Pittsburgh is also home to a Chabad community that numbers over a hundred families and runs its own school. While there are no cooperative activities between the Hasidic and Mitnaggedic (i.e., Lithuanian, non- or anti-Hasidic) centers, it is notable that

65 Interview with Chuck Perlow, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Sept. 9, 2003. On the Havurah movement, see Riv-Ellen Prell, *Prayer and Community: The Havurah in American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

66 Perlow Interview.

67 Ibid.

68 See Ferziger, "From Lubavitch to Lakewood".

they have both been able to create frameworks for interfacing with the nonobservant population within the same venue. Similarly, in Atlanta, the pioneer community *kiruv* kollel to be discussed in the next chapter, has thrived in an area in which Chabad has also made significant inroads. Boca Raton, Florida is yet another example in which both the community kollel, albeit a more Modern Orthodox-oriented one, and Chabad, have had strong presences. To be sure, there are many *kiruv* kollels that have established themselves in locations with only minimal Chabad presence. Yet the fact that numerous venues with parallel successes exist suggests that, while the Chabad Hasidim and the Haredim possess different Orthodox worldviews, they have both tapped in to the individualistic, quest-oriented, and post-denominational trends within American Judaism. Nonetheless, the kollel may actually offer a type of communal framework that some find lacking within Chabad. Unlike the Chabad house that centers on the *shlichah* (emissary) couple, the kollel's considerably larger staff automatically creates a sense of the collective. This feeling of community, which remains founded upon voluntary, non-allegiance-focused affiliation, may be particularly attractive to contemporary Jews who are looking for a sense of Jewish togetherness, but prefer one predicated on what Robert Wuthnow has termed "loose connections".<sup>69</sup>

Not all of the veteran kollel fellows are thrilled with the methods adopted by Kagan to reach out beyond the kollel study hall. Rabbi Mordechai Rosenberg was brought to the

69 See Robert Wuthnow, *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America's Fragmented Communities* (Cambridge and Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998), 9-57.

Pittsburgh kollel by Kagan's father in 1988. Today he teaches in the local day school, is one of the community's two *mohalim* (ritual circumcisers), and learns in the *kollel mehankhim* every afternoon and evening. He is not against opening the doors of the kollel study house to all Jews, but he feels that many of the new activities that take place outside the building represent a digression from Torah study, which is the basis of the institution. Movie screenings, crash courses and the like are, he suggests, best left to outreach professionals like Aish Hatorah and Ohr Someah.<sup>70</sup>

Such sentiments are the natural product of an institution that represents a transitional type whose roots are in the classic community kollel model of the 1970s, but whose direction is increasingly toward outreach within the broader Jewish population. By contrast, the Atlanta Scholars Kollel was founded from the outset as a *kiruv* kollel and has developed this concept into a sophisticated, multifaceted outreach organization. Somewhat ironically, over time it has also had to introduce more elements of the classic community *kollel* model in order to satisfy the religious thirst of its growing newly-religious constituency.

### C. Pioneering Outreach and Activism: ASK – Atlanta Scholars Kollel, Toco Hills and Dunwoody (Atlanta), Georgia

Like the Pittsburgh kollel, inaugurated in 1985, when Rabbi Ilan Feldman wanted to establish a community kollel, he turned to a yeshiva and requested that it send a group of *yunger-leit* to Atlanta. Three main factors, however, have distinguished the

70 Rosenberg Interview.

development of ASK from its Pittsburgh counterpart since its inception in 1987. First, as an alumnus of the Ner Israel yeshiva in Baltimore and a son-in-law of its rosh yeshiva, Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, Feldman, who was at time the assistant rabbi of Atlanta's (Orthodox) Beth Jacob synagogue and is today the senior rabbi, approached Ner Israel rather than Lakewood. Unlike Lakewood, which had traditionally emphasized the removal of its students from communal activism and forbade them from studying in a university, Ner Israel had another approach. While it rejected the ideology of positive synthesis between religious commitment and American culture championed by YU,<sup>71</sup> it recognized the practical advantages of producing graduates who were university trained and had experience in educational work beyond the four walls of the yeshiva. In point of fact, under the leadership of Weinberg, the yeshiva community became involved in outreach with the nonobservant Jewish population.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the world view upon which the original core of ASK fellows was nurtured saw *kiruv* as a natural ideal. The second factor was the Atlanta Jewish community. Although larger in total numbers than Pittsburgh – in 1996 there were approximately 77,000 Jews and in the subsequent decade the Atlanta Jewish population expanded to 120,000 (30% affiliation rate and 50% intermarriage

71 On Yeshiva University, see for example: Victor B. Geller, *Orthodoxy Awakens: The Belkin Era at Yeshiva University* (Jerusalem: Urim, 2003); Jeffrey S. Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Gilbert Klapperman, *The Story of Yeshiva University* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1969).

72 On Ner Israel, see Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva*, 32-33, 48, 59, 79, 242.

rate)<sup>73</sup> – the Orthodox sector was smaller and less established than in Pittsburgh. In fact, most observant Jews in Atlanta were themselves newly religious. It was therefore unlikely that enough activity and funding could be generated from within the Orthodox segment to sustain a community kollel. The final factor was Rabbi Menachem Deutsch, the founding dean handpicked by Weinberg and still the driving force and architect of ASK.<sup>74</sup>

Regarding the development of community kollels in America since the 1980s, Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, director of Lakewood Yeshiva's kollel initiatives, stated unequivocally that "Rabbi Menachem Deutsch defined the movement".<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Rabbi Nate Segal, the head of the community development department at Torah Umesorah – the American Haredi oriented educational umbrella organization that provides start up funds to many kollels – suggested that, in order for new ones to flourish, "We need twenty grade 'A' superstars like Rabbi Menachem Deutsch".<sup>76</sup> What has enabled Deutsch and his kollel to achieve such celebrity status within the American yeshiva world?

Aware as he was of the nature of the Atlanta Jewish community, this Ner Israel graduate and son of a Dallas Jewish day school principal, who had also spent a short stint studying at YU, reconceived the community kollel as a vehicle for outreach. This did not necessarily negate its ability to strengthen the commitment

73 See N.A., *Jewish Community Centennial Study 2006*, available at [www.shalomatlanta.org/page.html?ArticleID=121291](http://www.shalomatlanta.org/page.html?ArticleID=121291).

74 Interview with Rabbi Menachem Deutsch, Toco Hills, Atlanta, Georgia, Sept. 18, 2003.

75 Interview with Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, Lakewood, New Jersey, Sept. 13, 2003.

76 Interview with Rabbi Nate Segal, Staten Island, New York, Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

of the Orthodox, but it did require a fundamental revamping of the kollel educational approach and structure. In order to address unaffiliated Jews, reasoned Deutsch, the kollel could no longer function as a relatively passive framework in which only those who entered its environment would be serviced. Instead, it had to adopt an "activist" stance, which implied seeking out local Jews and providing them with multiple modalities for Jewish learning both within the kollel *beit midrash* and in other venues as well.<sup>77</sup> To accomplish this goal, Deutsch felt it impossible to adopt the classic kollel standard in which the *yunger-leit* were expected to dedicate eight to ten hours a day to personal study. This aspect of the kollel was limited instead to three to four daily hours, while the rest of the fellows' time was to be spent performing various formal and informal educational tasks.

Recall that the prevailing concept of a kollel, stemming back to the late nineteenth century, was that of an institution providing married yeshiva students with a living stipend in order to continue study on a full-time basis. Even if the original community kollels from the 1970s added a service element to the schedule, Talmud study remained the core occupation of the *yunger-leit*. Study is still a requirement of the ASK fellows, but it has been relegated to about a third of their daily schedule. The term 'kollel' as such has taken on new meaning; The re-constituted ASK model is that of a multifaceted educational organization, in which a small portion of the staff member's work day is devoted to personal intellectual and religious development.

77 The distinction between activist and passivist kollels was first suggested to me in an interview with Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky, Jerusalem, Israel, August 24, 2003.

Critics argue that such a framework no longer justifies being termed a kollel. Deutsch's retort is that what distinguishes ASK from the outreach approach of other non-kollel frameworks, is that all of its efforts, beginning with the personal study of the fellows, are grounded in Jewish learning.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, such criticism may have played a role in the decision in 2006 to bring in a *rosh kollel*, Rabbi Doniel Pransky, whose main role is to guide the intellectual development of the *yunger-leit* themselves.<sup>79</sup> One testament to the stature of both Pransky and ASK within the American Haredi world is the fact that Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky, the prominent head of the Philadelphia yeshiva, flew to Atlanta in order to participate in the installation ceremony of the new *rosh kollel*.<sup>80</sup>

ASK's activist outreach approach, along with its emphasis on study of Torah as something that should be available to all Jews, are reflected in its official mission statement:

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...By uniting fellow Jews through shared joy in religious education and Judaic tradition, and by extending a friendly, upbeat, non-judgmental invitation to all Jews, ASK is building bridges in our community.<sup>81</sup>

78 Deutsch Interview.

79 Tovah Fruchtmann, "New Rabbi to Help Guide Scholarship", *Atlanta Jewish Times* (March 3, 2006), available at <http://jtonline.us/main.asp?Search=1&ArticleID=1549&SectionID=23&SubSectionID=58&S=1>.

80 N.A., "A Night for Adult Education", *Atlanta Jewish Times* (September 12, 2006), available at <http://jtonline.us/main.asp?Search=1&ArticleID=1473&SectionID=45&SubSectionID=104&S=1>.

81 See <http://www.atlantakollel.org/about.htm>. For a relatively balanced

Following this mission and the activist model developed in order to achieve it, over the last two decades ASK has become both a major vehicle for Jewish outreach throughout greater Atlanta and on college campuses in other parts of Georgia, as well as a central purveyor of religious services for the local Orthodox community, centered in the Toco Hills area. ASK's current activities include: a daily open *beit midrash* with independent study partnerships for Jews possessing all degrees of knowledge, as well as a full schedule of classes on multiple levels; "The Kollel Institute", also known as "ASK U", in which male and female adults with minimal Jewish knowledge enroll in a text based program consisting of four courses: Jewish history, Jewish living, Jewish Thought, the Book (Bible); free Hebrew crash reading courses; four different adult beginner's prayer services (two on Sabbath and two on weekdays) – one of which takes place in the Reform Temple Sinai of Sandy Springs; weekly singles events and young couples activities throughout the year; thirteen lunch-and-learn classes in corporations, law offices, hospitals, Jewish Community Centers, schools, and homes; women's study groups; "Torah for Teens"; home study meetings and Jewish club sessions in three of Atlanta's exclusive private schools (Pace Academy, Paideia School, and Woodward Academy); a tape library; and campus outreach at four different universities.<sup>82</sup>

Congregation Ariel, a synagogue that due to its distinctive new edifice is known more popularly as the "Kollel Dome", is

journalistic view of ASK's activities, see Melanie A. Lasoff, "Men in Black: How the Atlanta Scholars Kollel turns people on to our 3,000-year-old tradition", *Atlanta Jewish Times* (April 13, 2001), available at <http://atlanta.jewish.com/archives/2001/041301cs.htm>.

82 See [www.atlantakollel.org](http://www.atlantakollel.org).

located in the tony Atlanta suburb of Dunwoody and is led by one of the original ASK members, Rabbi Binyamin Friedman. Unlike most Orthodox synagogues whose rabbis are Ner Israel graduates, care was taken to ensure that an adjacent parking lot would be available on the Sabbath for the cars of the worshippers.<sup>83</sup> The Kollel Dome sponsors an array of activities geared to the predominantly nonobservant Jewish population of the neighborhood.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to Deutsch, who directs the entire \$1.3 million operation<sup>85</sup> and devotes a considerable amount of time to fundraising, and the newly appointed Pransky, there are today ten male staff members earning at least \$45,000 per year.<sup>86</sup> While they may all be called upon to participate in a variety of programs, each one has his own regular, defined responsibilities. Two focus on study and lecture programs in the main *beit midrash* in Toco Hills, three work on college campus activities, two on the activities at the Kollel Dome Dunwoody center, and three teach numerous "lunch-and-learn" and adult education classes open to the broader Jewish public, coordinate the singles and young adults programs, and run the beginner's prayer services. There

83 Interview with Rabbi Binyamin Friedman, Toco Hills, Atlanta, Georgia, Sept. 18, 2003. Friedman asserted that the decision to provide a parking facility was done with the full support of Weinberg, the Ner Israel rosh yeshiva. He also emphasized that he makes clear to his congregants that it is highly preferable not to drive to synagogue.

84 See [www.ask.org/classes.htm](http://www.ask.org/classes.htm). According to Friedman, 20 to 30 of the synagogue's 100 member families are Sabbath observant.

85 Email correspondence from Marcia Sternberg, ASK Secretary, June 26, 2007.

86 Deutsch Interview. This was the figure that was given in 2003, the updated 2007 salaries were not disclosed.

are also two women on the educational staff who co-direct the "Bina" program for women. Other local rabbis and educators teach individual classes under the kollel's auspices.<sup>87</sup>

Parallel with its expansive outreach program, ASK has from the beginning devoted considerable efforts toward the Orthodox community. Over time, the kollel has become a central address providing numerous religious services that in many venues would be the responsibility of the local congregational rabbis, and for sponsoring educational initiatives that conform to Haredi standards. Such services and involvements include: supervision of the *eruv* (the physical boundary that, under the halakhah, allows for carrying objects in public on the Sabbath), running the *Va'ad ha-Kashrut* that oversees compliance with dietary laws in local food establishments, sitting on the board of the Jewish day school, and serving as the driving force for the creation of non-coed Jewish schools for boys and girls.<sup>88</sup> In these capacities, ASK functions more like the classic community kollels that began in the 1970s and transformed environments that were populated by Modern Orthodox Jews into bastions of American Haredism. Yet, within the overall scheme of ASK's activist model, these efforts have a threefold purpose. They certainly seek to attract local Orthodox Jews and particularly their children closer to a Haredi lifestyle; They provide a framework for Jewish living that enables the ASK staff itself to bring up their own families according to their preferred standards; Of equal significance, however, they engender a Jewish environment that, in the eyes of the ASK members, will be most nurturing and beneficial to

87 See [www.atlantakollel.org/staff.htm](http://www.atlantakollel.org/staff.htm).

88 Deutsch Interview.

those of their outreach products who eventually choose to adopt a fully observant lifestyle. Indeed, insofar as Deutsch is intent on providing opportunities for Jewish learning to all Jews as well as expanding the donor base of the kollel, he is unequivocal in his conviction that the newly religious products of ASK programming are the clearest indication of the kollel's accomplishments and lasting influence on Atlanta Jewry.<sup>89</sup>

The concrete goal of encouraging increasingly greater commitment to study and observance is reflected in the "business model" instituted by Deutsch in 1997. Rather than measuring success purely on the basis of numbers of participants in ASK programs, a "tracking" system was set into place whereby the staff members follow the "progress" of those with whom they come into contact. Charts are prepared that list the names of individuals as well as personal "benchmarks". These range from the first level, which is "getting in the door" – meaning those who show up for one-time events open to the public – to participation in regular social meetings, attending a monthly lunch-and-learn, signing up for a weekly class, studying individually with a kollel partner, joining one of the beginner's services, becoming a synagogue member, making one's home kitchen kosher and, finally, accepting full observance of Sabbath and dietary laws.<sup>90</sup> Deutsch meets each kollel member on a quarterly basis, at which time they review the list of participants in the activities that they

89 Ibid.

90 Some outreach activists refer to this step as "making it to the endzone". For a description of how the system works in practice, see Joni Pelt, "Orthodox Conversion Hits Close to Home", *Atlanta Jewish Times* (January 1, 2007), available at <http://jtonline.us/main.asp?Search=1&ArticleID=2086&SectionID=35&SubSectionID=85&S=1>.

supervise, consult on particular cases, and strategize regarding how to increase productivity. Deutsch is adamant in stating that he recognizes the value of every effort made by a Jew to connect to Jewish learning and tradition, regardless of whether or not it leads to adoption of an observant lifestyle. That being said, he is unswerving in his belief that each additional newly religious Jew is more significant in the fight for Jewish survival in the face of rampant assimilation than preventing ten couples from intermarrying. "It is an issue of triage. You need to spend time with those who will go the distance".<sup>91</sup> Thus, when decisions must be made as to how to best utilize the kollel's human, intellectual and financial resources, identifying those with the greatest long term potential for religious involvement constitutes a central consideration.<sup>92</sup>

ASK is not the only *kiruv* kollel that has had a transformative influence on local Jewish life. DATA (Dallas Area Torah Association) founded in 1992,<sup>93</sup> Houston's TORCH (Torah Outreach Resource Center of Houston) founded in 1998,<sup>94</sup> the Phoenix Community Kollel founded in 2000,<sup>95</sup> and Palo Alto's JSN (Jewish Study Network) founded in 2001,<sup>96</sup> are other prominent examples of outreach oriented kollels that have taken on central roles in their spheres. Each has adjusted the outreach model to their particular religious orientations and local circumstances. To offer one example, DATA has a kollel member

91 Deutsch Interview.

92 Ibid.

93 See [www.datanet.org/AboutDATA/Aboutdata.html](http://www.datanet.org/AboutDATA/Aboutdata.html).

94 See [www.torchweb.com/index.php](http://www.torchweb.com/index.php).

95 See [www.aztorah.com](http://www.aztorah.com).

96 See [www.jsn.info/inthenews.html](http://www.jsn.info/inthenews.html).

whose title is "Director of DATA's Israeli Branch". His job is to interface with the large numbers of expatriate Israelis who live in the Dallas area.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, as the community *kiruv* kollel model has spread, efforts have begun to formally constitute a movement by creating an organization that distributes educational materials for use by all chapters, and staging one-time events simultaneously in each of the cities that focus on the same theme.

The first major effort in this direction took place in March 2005, when the completion of the seven year *Daf Yomi* Talmud study cycle was turned into a "celebration of Jewish unity". As part of their "unity" activities, the Phoenix Community Kollel developed a curriculum on different expressions of peace in the Talmud. Workshops were held utilizing this program with children from local Orthodox and non-Orthodox schools as well as the Hillel houses of Arizona State University and the University of Arizona. At the central public event, the kollel hosted Hadassah Lieberman, wife of the former Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee. Unity awards were also given by the kollel to the leaders of the local Federation, Jewish Community Center, United Jewish Committee and the Jewish National Fund. The regional director of the Anti-Defamation League chaired the evening, that was "designed to bring Jews of all backgrounds together in celebration of that which truly unites us – our Torah".<sup>98</sup> ASK, which was one of the initiators of the Jewish Unity program, held a gala dinner at which the famed author and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel was the guest of honor. Since 2005,

97 See [www.datanet.org/AboutDATA/Meetrabbis.html](http://www.datanet.org/AboutDATA/Meetrabbis.html).

98 Leisah Mann, "Jewish Unity 2005 Makes World Debut", *Jewish News of Greater Phoenix* (February 18, 2005), available at [www.jewishaz.com/jewishnews/050218/unity.shtml](http://www.jewishaz.com/jewishnews/050218/unity.shtml).

the Jewish unity gathering has become a regular feature on the calendars of ASK and eleven other community kollels.<sup>99</sup> Beyond testifying to efforts at developing a more clearly defined kollel movement, it is an example of the activist orientation that both expands the kollel's financial base and accomplishes the first stage of bringing people "in the door". After the 2007 dinner at which an "Outreach Torah" was dedicated and Stan Kasten, an Atlanta native who is a major figure in professional sports, was honored, Deutsch acknowledged that "The Jewish Unity Live event provides a majority of the operating budget for the year".<sup>100</sup>

That "ASK had done an incredible job", is acknowledged wholeheartedly by Rabbi Michael Broyde of the Young Israel of Toco Hills (Modern Orthodox). Its success, he believes, is due to the core pluralistic approach it takes to Jewish learning.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, he is highly skeptical about viewing the numbers of participants who adopt an observant lifestyle as the ultimate barometer of success. Broyde asks, "Does Rabbi Deutsch keep statistics of how many Orthodox students have been turned off by the oversimplified version of religion that they have been offered?".<sup>102</sup> Many of the most successful *kiruv* kollels, he claims, have also driven away the Modern Orthodox Jews who once were the core of local Orthodox life. Consistent with this

99 See [www.jewishunitylive.com](http://www.jewishunitylive.com).

100 Fran Memberg, "Kollel Hits an Outreach Home Run", *Atlanta Jewish Times* (March 30, 2007), available at <http://jtonline.us/main.asp?Search=1&ArticleID=2663&SectionID=23&SubSectionID=&S=1>.

101 See, for example, N.A., "News: Maimonides Heirs", *Atlanta Jewish Times* (January 1, 2007), available at <http://jtonline.us/main.asp?Search=1&ArticleID=2072&SectionID=23&SubSectionID=58&S=1>.

102 Interview with Rabbi Michael Broyde, Toco Hills, Atlanta, Georgia, Sept. 18, 2003.

perspective, Broyde set out in 1998 together with Rabbi Michael Berger, a fellow Emory University professor, to establish a sophisticated, explicitly Modern Orthodox alternative to the ASK model within the Toco Hills area. As part of this effort, their synagogue sponsors ATM, the Atlanta Torah mi-Tzion Kollel.<sup>103</sup> ATM is an affiliate of the Torah mi-Tzion movement, the cooperative Israeli-American community kollel model.<sup>104</sup>

#### D. A Zionist Kollel in America: Torat Tzion Kollel, Beachwood and University Heights (Cleveland), Ohio

The familiar sights and sounds of the *beit midrash* drew me in. Young men wearing knitted skullcaps and sandals, some of them bearded, were sitting in twosomes and debating the intricacies of ancient Talmudic texts. The large study hall was lined with books and panels made of Jerusalem stone engraved with citations from the works of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. Huge volumes rested upon the tables between the pairs, most of them in their twenties. As I watched these students engaged in intellectual duel, *tzitzit* fringes spilling out of their untucked shirts, their excited Hebrew discussions reminded me of the many study halls I had visited in Israel where young *hesdernikim* dedicate five years of their lives to a program mixing intensive Jewish study with service in the Israel Defense Forces.<sup>105</sup> But I wasn't in the hills of Jerusalem, I was in Cleveland.<sup>106</sup>

103 See [www.torahmitzion.org/atlanta/section.asp](http://www.torahmitzion.org/atlanta/section.asp).

104 Broyde Interview.

105 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.

106 See the picture at [www.torahmitzion.org/cleveland/section.asp](http://www.torahmitzion.org/cleveland/section.asp).

That day in September 2003 was my first encounter with the *beit midrash* of the Cleveland Torat Tzion Kollel (henceforth CTTK). This institution was created in 1994 through a collaborative effort between Bob Stark, philanthropist and Orthodox activist, and the leaders of Yeshivat Har Etzion, one of the oldest and best-known Israeli *hesder* yeshivas.<sup>107</sup> Har Etzion committed to sending senior rabbis to Cleveland for two-year stints, along with a group of post-Army married and single students.<sup>108</sup> There they established a study hall in the Fuchs Mizrachi School (University Heights, henceforth FMS), that served as a base both for advancing their own Talmudic erudition and for a wide variety of formal and informal educational activities with the student body. In addition, they created an open *beit midrash* in Beachwood's Young Israel of Greater Cleveland synagogue, in order to offer opportunities for Torah learning to the surrounding Orthodox community in the evenings and on weekends.<sup>109</sup> Stark provided the initial annual budget of \$250,000 for the first few years.<sup>110</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the *Torah mi-Tzion* organization was

107 See: Conversation with Robert L. Stark, Beachwood, Ohio, September 6, 2003; [www.torahmitzion.org/cleveland/section.asp](http://www.torahmitzion.org/cleveland/section.asp). On Stark, see Samuel Freedman, *Jew vs. Jew*, 284-287. On Yeshivat Har Etzion, see David Morrison, *The Gush: Center of Modern Religious Zionism* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2003).

108 From 1997, single students were also integrated. See: "Site Visit by David Roth and Ze'ev Schwartz to Cleveland, November 2001", *Torah mi-Tzion* (henceforth TMZ in the notes) Cleveland File, TMZ Jerusalem Office, 54 King George St., Jerusalem 91710, entrance floor; Interview with Rabbi Binyamin Blau, former *rosh kollel* of CTTK and principal of Fuchs Mizrachi High School, University Heights, Ohio, Sept. 8, 2003.

109 Blau Interview; Interview with Vicky Epstein Frolich, CTTK Administrator, University Heights, Ohio, Sept. 8, 2003.

110 Blau Interview; Frolich Interview.

founded in Jerusalem. Under the guidance of founding executive director Ze'ev Schwartz, also a former Har Etzion student,<sup>111</sup> it became a worldwide movement that today encompasses twenty-two Religious Zionist *kollels*, from Melbourne<sup>112</sup> to Montevideo<sup>113</sup> and from Capetown<sup>114</sup> to Memphis, Tennessee.<sup>115</sup> Fourteen of them are located in North America, in addition to ten affiliated Jewish Learning Initiative (JLI) programs on major university campuses.<sup>116</sup>

In Cleveland, under the leadership of a number of talented and charismatic American born scholars who had been living in Israel and were sent there as "emissaries", CTTK quickly attained a central role in the religious life of the Modern Orthodox community. Through its school base, most of the community's children gained exposure to Israeli-style Torah study and their extra-curricular programs and celebrations were bestowed with an "Israeli" ambience. Through open *beit midrash* evenings, ongoing lectures – including a highly popular study program

111 Moshe Green, an American philanthropist who was active in Religious Zionist circles, gave the initial support for TMZ and served as chairman until his death in 1999. One testimony to the prominence of the movement within the Religious Zionist camp was the recent appointment of Schwartz as general secretary of World Bnei Akiva, the main Religious Zionist youth movement. Rabbi Boaz Genut, who returned to Israel in the Summer of 2006 after three years as head of the TMZ kollel in St. Louis, was appointed the new executive director. Schwartz remains formally involved through the position of chairman of TMZ. See the letter from Larry Roth, president of TMZ, announcing the change, [www.torahmitzion.org/eng/news/view.asp?id=290](http://www.torahmitzion.org/eng/news/view.asp?id=290).

112 See [www.torahmitzion.org/melbourne/section.asp](http://www.torahmitzion.org/melbourne/section.asp).

113 See [www.torahmitzion.org/montevideo/section.asp](http://www.torahmitzion.org/montevideo/section.asp).

114 See [www.torahmitzion.org/capeTown/section.asp](http://www.torahmitzion.org/capeTown/section.asp).

115 See [www.torahmitzion.org/memphis/section.asp](http://www.torahmitzion.org/memphis/section.asp).

116 For a full list see [www.torahmitzion.org/eng/aboutus/kollels.asp](http://www.torahmitzion.org/eng/aboutus/kollels.asp). On JLI, see <http://jli.co.il/>.

for women orchestrated by the kollel wives – and a rich array of special events, the parents also had the opportunity to gain inspiration from the Israeli Religious-Zionist spirit.

In terms of its main constituency, CTTK is reminiscent of the classic community kollels that emerged in the late 1970s. Both concentrate on inreach, working to strengthen the observance and ideological commitments of Orthodox Jews by offering enhanced Torah study and experiential opportunities. Again, parallel to the efforts of Cleveland's Katz kollel *yunger-leit* to convince modern Orthodox parents to send their children to more yeshivish schools, its CTTK neighbors present study in an Israeli yeshiva and settlement in Israel as ideal pursuits. But there is an important distinction to be made between the nature of Torah mi-Tzion and that of the Haredi community kollels, that relates to internal developments within American Orthodoxy. While the Haredi world's activities emanate from increased strength and self-confidence, the development of the Israeli kollels is part of Modern Orthodoxy's response to a "crisis" that it has experienced since the 1980s. Many products of Modern Orthodox homes and schools have found the Haredi approach far more attractive and fulfilling than their parent's version. Conversely, others have responded to their uninspiring upbringings by abandoning religious observance altogether. The Israeli Religious-Zionist community as such – with its "battle-hardened" Sabra Torah students – has been drafted as one possible cure to the ideological malaise and lack of passionate role models that has become endemic to this sector of American Orthodoxy.<sup>117</sup>

117 On the crisis within American Modern Orthodoxy, see for example: Jonathan Sacks, "Modern Orthodoxy In Crisis", *Le'ela* 2:17 (1984), 20-25; William

Indeed, when Bob Stark was asked to describe the idea at the basis of creating CTTK, his response was consistent with these goals: "I wanted to bring to Cleveland Israeli scholars, who are living Torah in a different way than those of us in Exile [...] Their's is the Torah of redemption, and as such has a different flavor".<sup>118</sup> According to former CTTK *rosh kollel* Rabbi Binny Blau, the current principal of FMS high school, Stark's aim was to create a "total Zionist experience". This, Blau claimed, was expressed in the hope that by the time an FMS student graduated, he/she would "no longer feel comfortable living in the Diaspora".<sup>119</sup> To date, Torah mi-Tzion kollels have been successful at introducing a Religious Zionist spirit into numerous communities. Since CTTK was established, for example, there has been a marked increase in *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) among modern Orthodox Jews in Cleveland.<sup>120</sup> Yet the dependence of Modern Orthodox communities on Israeli yeshiva graduates as key figures in the renaissance of their religious environments has also been fraught with difficulties. For one, CTTK's successes

Helmreich and Reuel Shinnar, "Modern Orthodoxy in America: Possibilities for a Movement Under Siege", *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints* 383, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (June 1, 1998), available at [http://localhost:4664/cache?event\\_id=153867&schema\\_id=2&q=shinnar&s=VdOg1F7h3NoU1t4F9F224bVP1kI](http://localhost:4664/cache?event_id=153867&schema_id=2&q=shinnar&s=VdOg1F7h3NoU1t4F9F224bVP1kI); Edward S. Shapiro, "Modern Orthodoxy in Crisis: A Test Case", *Judaism* 51:3 (Summer 2002), 347-361.

118 See "Cleveland is Springboard for *Kollel* Movement", *Cleveland Jewish News* (Dec. 1, 2005), available at <http://torahmitzion.org/eng/news/view.asp?id=237>.

119 Blau Interview; See also his essay on TMZ, published on the Lookjed educational website as "Creative Solutions to Current Educational Challenges: The Torah MiTzion *Kollels*", [www.lookstein.org/lookjed/read.php?f=1&i=13437&t=13437](http://www.lookstein.org/lookjed/read.php?f=1&i=13437&t=13437).

120 Blau Interview.

notwithstanding, most Modern Orthodox Jews in America do not see immigration to Israel as a realistic goal for themselves nor for their children. In the words of Broyde, Atlanta's ATM Zionst kollel head, "Religious Zionism cannot be the center of Modern Orthodoxy".<sup>121</sup>

As Chaim Waxman has demonstrated, Orthodox Jews show a stronger attachment to Israel than do any other Jewish denomination. They visit more often, send their children regularly to study for extended periods, and thousands have made Israel their permanent home.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, they account for a good deal of the increase in North American *aliyah*, from 1400 persons in the year 2000 to 3201 in 2006.<sup>123</sup> Yet since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, only some 120,000 North American Jews have made it their permanent home. By contrast, the American Jewish population is estimated to be between five and six million.<sup>124</sup> Thus, while there is an increased interest in *aliyah*, and Orthodox Jewry may be leading the way, most of the Orthodox, like their fellow American Jews, are not motivated to uproot themselves.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, the approach of Modern Orthodoxy to

121 Broyde Interview.

122 See Waxman, "Israel in American Orthodox Identity".

123 See [www.Jewishagency.org/jewishagency/English/press+room/aliyah](http://www.Jewishagency.org/jewishagency/English/press+room/aliyah); [www.wzo.org.il/en/resources/view.asp?id=1508/aliyah+statistics](http://www.wzo.org.il/en/resources/view.asp?id=1508/aliyah+statistics).

124 The *National Jewish Population Survey*, Year 2000, stated the figure as 5.2 million. See [www.ujc.org/content\\_display.html?ArticleID=83784](http://www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=83784); According to a study by Brandeis University published in 2007, the figure is closer to 6 million. See Shmuel Rosner, "Brandeis Finds One Million More Jews than Thought", *Haaretz* (February 9, 2007), available at [www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/823218.html](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/823218.html).

125 See: Yoseph Salmon, "The Mizrachi Movement in America: A Belated but Sturdy Offshoot", *American Jewish Archives* 48 (1996): 161-175; Chaim

the role of Israel resembles the Americanized version of spiritual Zionism articulated by Israel Friedlander in the early twentieth century and adopted by the Conservative movement. "The vision that now evolved", in the words of Evyatar Friesel, "was that of an American Judaism made richer by the Zionist influence".<sup>126</sup> Similarly, the aim of the Modern Orthodox is for Zionism and the existence of the State of Israel to inform their Judaism and inspire all aspects of their spiritual lives.<sup>127</sup> This theme was echoed by Rabbi Leonard Matanky, Dean of Chicago's Ida Crown Jewish Academy, rabbi of the Orthodox Congregation K.I.N.S. of West Rogers Park,<sup>128</sup> and a driving force in Chicago's Torah mi-Tzion kollel since its inception, who acknowledged that: "*aliyah* isn't mentioned too often, so as not to disturb the sense of equilibrium of living in the Diaspora".<sup>129</sup>

Thus, notwithstanding that Torah mi-Tzion's emissaries – and even some of its sponsors like CTTK's Bob Stark – would

I. Waxman, "Preface", in Chaim I. Waxman (ed.), *Israel as a Religious Reality* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1994), xiii-xviii.

126 Evyatar Friesel, "The Meaning of Zionism and Its Influence among the American Jewish Religious Movements", in Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira (eds.), *Religion and Zionism* (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 177-179.

127 To my understanding, Rabbi Shalom Carmy's essay on Religious Zionist existence in the *galut* offers a philosophically-oriented articulation that is quite similar to the approach described here. See Shalom Carmy, "A View from the Fleshpots: Exploratory Remarks on Gilded *Galut* Existence", in Waxman, *Israel as a Religious Reality*, 34.

128 On Matanky, see [www.rabbis.org/news/article.cfm?-10071](http://www.rabbis.org/news/article.cfm?-10071); [www.congkins.org/index.asp?id=59](http://www.congkins.org/index.asp?id=59).

129 Leonard A. Matanky, "Israel's Impact on American Orthodoxy: A Response", Presentation, Conference on "Religious Zionism: New Directions", New York, March 19, 2007.

like to encourage Modern Orthodox Jews to move to Israel, they have had to create a more nuanced educational message, one that posits identification with the State of Israel together with increased Jewish study and religious passion as the key to Jewish survival. To a certain degree, such an ideological compromise may be compared to the changes that have taken place in Haredi outreach; Where once the focus was almost exclusively on creating newly observant Jews, today there is a growing recognition of the value of broadening the exposure of all Jews to Torah study, even if it is unlikely that there will be a dramatic change in their religious lifestyles.

Torah mi-Tzion's de-emphasis of settlement in Israel as a central educational message is reflected, for one, in its official publications and websites. Focus is consistently placed on expanding and upgrading the opportunities and level of Torah study taking place in local communities, strengthening Jewish identity and Israel-Diaspora relations, and promoting what is referred to as the "values of Religious Zionism" – the most prominent of them being an undefined, almost mystical idea called "*Torat Eretz Yisrael*" (the Torah of the Land of Israel).<sup>130</sup> Rarely in any of the publications does direct promotion of the idea of *aliyah* appear – and when it does, it is low on the scale of priorities, almost hidden.

To offer a few representative examples: On the inside cover of the folder given both to communities considering opening up a Torah mi-Tzion *kollel*, as well as to yeshiva students recruited for *shelihut* (serving as an emissary), the following aims are listed:

130 The term appears in the writings of Abraham Isaac Kook. See, for example, *Orot ha-Kodesh* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1985), 13.

...to transmit the values of Religious Zionism by promoting the lofty ideal of Torat Yisrael, Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael... [Torah mi-Tzion] stresses the importance of building ties among all Jews and undertakes to strengthen Jewish identity and unity. ... [Torah mi-Tzion] aims to bridge the gap between Israel and Diaspora communities, emphasizing the centrality of Israel, as it is written: "from Zion the Torah will come forth"...

It is notable that the end of the first paragraph is an inverted allusion to the slogan of Mizrachi (the Religious Zionist movement) attributed to Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan: "*Am Yisrael, be-Eretz Yisrael, al pi Torat Yisrael*" ("the nation of Israel, in the Land of Israel, according to the Torah of Israel"). Whereas in the original statement the Torah is intended to define the nature of life in the Land, here it is the "Torah of the Land" that is being carried by the emissaries to the nation in the Diaspora. In addition, as opposed to the original attempt at combining the three components into one cohesive whole, here each value can stand independently. Consistent with this tone, the self-description of Torah mi-Tzion on its official website states: "The aim of the program is to assist the local leadership to strengthen Judaism in their communities through the creation of a unique Torah atmosphere which includes Judaism and Zionism".<sup>131</sup>

This de-emphasis on emigration and settlement in Israel is reflected within Torah mi-Tzion's pioneering chapter. It will be recalled that CTTK's founder, Bob Stark, hoped that the graduates of FMS would "no longer feel comfortable living in

131 See [www.torahmitzion.org/eng/aboutus/default.asp](http://www.torahmitzion.org/eng/aboutus/default.asp).

the Diaspora".<sup>132</sup> But even in this original Zionist kollel the pendulum has turned away from *aliyah* and towards the religious development of local Modern Orthodoxy. As FMS principal Blau acknowledged, when tension arises between strengthening connections to Torah and those to Zionism, Torah is clearly the priority.<sup>133</sup> Rabbi Michael Unterberg, another veteran FMS teacher who has maintained his affiliation with CTTK since its establishment, is emphatic in supporting this approach. Like other Judaic studies instructors in the school, in the afternoons he studies in CTTK's *Kollel Mehankhim*. The main motivation for the founding of CTTK, in his view, was actually defensive. As a community under the strong influence of the Haredi Telz Yeshiva, Modern Orthodoxy in Cleveland had "a bad self-image". "Zionist-Orthodox" role models served as testimony to the existence of an authentic non-Haredi brand of Judaism that was not simply a product of compromise. In his opinion, the type of "Israel-centric extremism" that Stark had sometimes promoted, was detrimental to CTTK's main goal of generating heightened excitement regarding Torah study.<sup>134</sup> Consistent with this critique, the current CTTK mission statement seems closer to the view of Zionism as an integral part of Modern Orthodox identity, rather than as a practical directive:

This "Torat Tzion" inspires those of us in *Galut* (Diaspora) to develop a profound commitment to Torah and to cultivate a real relationship with Israel. Through this process we are

132 Blau Interview; Blau Essay.

133 Blau Interview.

134 Interview with Rabbi Michael Unterberg, University Heights, Ohio, Sept. 8, 2003.

invigorated and motivated to assume the responsibilities of a people who have been returned to our land...<sup>135</sup>

The recognition that concentration on fortifying local Modern Orthodox Jewish life rather than *aliyah* ought to be at the center of Torah mi-Tzion's mission, has placed the spotlight on other drawbacks to its model that may have been initially overlooked. One issue is the lack of permanence; Unlike the Haredi kollel heads, who move to their locales with the intention of settling, or even the *yunger-leit* who make open-ended commitments of three to five years and are sometimes hopeful that they will be able to integrate into the community, Torah mi-Tzion staff members stay for one to two years. Of course, they are replaced by another *rosh kollel* and a new group of hesder graduates, but each delegation goes through an extended period of acclimation and adjustment to what is for them a new and foreign environment. Indeed, even if *aliyah* were not the main message, it would be somewhat paradoxical to apply the term "Zionist kollel" to a framework that does not require that its Israeli representatives return home after a clearly delimited period. That being said, the lack of permanence is compounded by the relatively limited English language skills of many kollel heads and their students. Even if they arrive able to converse in English relatively fluently, they are often hard-put to deliver a public lecture in English or to offer the Sabbath morning sermon in a large synagogue. Again, the comparison with the Haredi community kollel *yunger-leit* is instructive; While their black hats and jackets may distinguish their dress from the more diversified style of most local Jews, their native

135 See [www.fuchsmizrachi.org/kollel.htm](http://www.fuchsmizrachi.org/kollel.htm).

English as well as their familiarity with American culture enables them to traverse other divides relatively smoothly. By contrast, the Israeli *hesdernikim* may look more like the community members, and their Israeli army veteran aura can generate a certain excitement, but their inability to integrate easily into the American cultural discourse remains a significant disability. In an evaluation of Torah mi-Tzion written by Chicago's Matanky together with one of its former kollel heads, Rabbi Yehuda Sussman, they conceded, "Kollel Torah Mitzion can never be a truly 'American' Community *Kollel*. The ramifications (be they positive or negative) should not be underestimated".<sup>136</sup>

The increased sensitivity to the cultural and language gap and the way it negatively influences efforts to rejuvenate Modern Orthodoxy, coupled with various local factors, have led to reevaluations of the Torah mi-Tzion model in some of its strongest chapters. In Chicago this frustration has led to experimentation with other formats, such as integrating American yeshiva graduates and working more directly with YU. Even in Cleveland's pioneering CTTK, according to Blau, there has been a certain withdrawal from the original model. Due to economic difficulties that developed since Stark cut his yearly funding to \$50,000, as well as dissatisfaction with the caliber and language skills of the kollel heads and emissaries being sent by Torah mi-Tzion, "for the moment we have taken a step back from the Israeli model".<sup>137</sup> Much as the Israeli component was cherished by the community, if the emissaries were ineffective Torah disseminators, it was preferable and more financially viable to

136 Matanky and Sussman, "Creative Solutions II".

137 Email communication from Rabbi Binyamin Blau, February 7, 2007.

bring in native English speakers, albeit ones who identify with Religious Zionism.<sup>138</sup>

This retreat from the Israeli model by two of the pioneering kollel outposts clearly calls for Torah mi-Tzion to critically review and possibly revamp its offerings. It highlights the difficulties in sustaining a kollel that has no permanent staff and whose emissaries may be equipped with the amorphous *Torat Eretz Yisrael*, but not necessarily functional English.

Indeed, when Rabbi Kenneth (Kenny) Brander of the (Modern Orthodox) Boca Raton Synagogue (henceforth BRS) decided to open a community kollel in 1997, he was intent on creating a non-Haredi model but wary of it becoming a chapter of Torah mi-Tzion. Appreciative as he was of the importance of introducing a Religious Zionist motif, he worried – echoing the conclusions reached in Cleveland and Chicago ten years later – that it would "take too much time for the Israelis to figure it out".<sup>139</sup> He chose, instead, to create a framework that was a Modern Orthodox variation on the community *kiruv* kollel.

### E. Modern Orthodoxy and Outreach: Boca Raton Community Kollel, Boca Raton, Florida

Brander, who received both his bachelor's degree and his rabbinic ordination from YU, arrived in Boca Raton in 1991 at age 29, after serving previously as assistant rabbi of Manhattan's

138 Telephone Interview with Rabbi Binyamin Blau, February 7, 2007.

139 Interview with Rabbi Kenneth Brander, Jerusalem, August 24, 2003. In order to supplement the Zionist education of his community, he made an arrangement in which each year four Israeli Religious Zionist women perform their Israeli national service in Boca Raton.

prominent Lincoln Square Synagogue.<sup>140</sup> At the time, BRS was a struggling young congregation of sixty families trying to establish an Orthodox presence in an area that had once been completely off limits to Jews, and whose relatively recent Jewish influx was decidedly sympathetic towards liberal denominations.<sup>141</sup> During his fourteen year tenure, the synagogue was transformed into a vibrant community of nearly 600 families, with a new building encompassing a *mikvah* (ritual bath), numerous prayer, study and social venues, as well as a separate sanctuary for Sephardic services.<sup>142</sup> As the leader of local Orthodox Jewry, Brander was also instrumental in founding the Weinbaum Yeshiva High School, where he served as dean,<sup>143</sup> and creating the Orthodox Rabbinical Board (ORB) – a kosher food supervisory framework whose authority is recognized even by Miami's Haredi contingent. In 2003, an offshoot known as BRS West was also founded to

140 On the Lincoln Square Synagogue and its role in the development of Orthodox outreach under the leadership of Rabbi Steven (Shlomo) Riskin and Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, see M. Herbert Danzger, *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 36-43.

141 In 1970 there were 1000 Jewish persons living in all of South Palm Beach County, while by 1980 there were 37,000. Between 1990 and 2005, the Jewish population jumped from 92,000 to 136,000, with the Boca Raton Jewish community rising from 59,800 to 76,800. See Ira M. Sheskin, *The 2005 South Palm Beach County Jewish Community Study: Summary Report* (South Palm Beach: Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County, 2006), available at [www.jewishboca.org/clientuploads/Demographic\\_Study/003\\_Key\\_Findings\\_Boca\\_Raton.pdf](http://www.jewishboca.org/clientuploads/Demographic_Study/003_Key_Findings_Boca_Raton.pdf).

142 See Jane Musgrave, "Boca Raton's Orthodox Revolution", *Boca Magazine* (July 1, 2001), available at [www.bocamag.com/index.php?src=news&prid=8&category=articles](http://www.bocamag.com/index.php?src=news&prid=8&category=articles).

143 See [www.wyhs.net/History.htm](http://www.wyhs.net/History.htm).

serve another part of Boca Raton's sprawling conglomeration of condominium villages and gated communities.<sup>144</sup>

These accomplishments certainly testify to Brander's exceptional leadership skills and personal tenacity. The picture they paint is of a young rabbi who was unusually successful in fulfilling the goal for which he was hired: building a dynamic Orthodox community. Notwithstanding, much of the expansion of the Boca Raton Orthodox community during the 1990s and early 2000s can undoubtedly be attributed to the significant growth of the Jewish population in Boca Raton and throughout the South Palm Beach County region. Particularly since 1995, the settlement trend has moved away from part-time "snowbird" retired couples and towards year-round young families.<sup>145</sup> One can gain deeper insight into the unique model that Brander sought to develop, however, by exploring his efforts with regard to the Boca Raton Community Kollel (henceforth BRCK).

According to Brander, when he arrived at BRS over half the synagogue membership consisted of Jews who did not observe the Sabbath laws. From the outset, then, the synagogue oriented itself toward diversity, and engaged in both inreach to Orthodox affiliated Jews and in outreach to those not connected to the community. Over the course of time, many members became

144 See [www.brswest.org](http://www.brswest.org).

145 See [www.jewishboca.org/clientuploads/Demographic\\_Study/006\\_Major\\_Changes\\_1995-2005.pdf](http://www.jewishboca.org/clientuploads/Demographic_Study/006_Major_Changes_1995-2005.pdf). While the overall percentage of Orthodox Jews in South Palm Beach County is a relatively low 4% in relation to the national average of 8%, in the age group of 50 and below the figure is closer to 7%. Thus, in the demographic category that has generated new synagogue membership and populated the schools, the Orthodox growth is particularly significant. See Sheskin, available at [www.jewishboca.org/clientuploads/Demographic\\_Study/010\\_Religious\\_Profile.pdf](http://www.jewishboca.org/clientuploads/Demographic_Study/010_Religious_Profile.pdf).

more religiously observant, but BRS continued to attract local nonobservant Jews. Indeed, while the BRS private parking lot was officially closed on the Sabbath, convenient parking was made available in an adjacent area.<sup>146</sup>

By 1996 the synagogue was flourishing, and Brander felt that he needed additional manpower in order to achieve three goals. First, after observing many other American Orthodox communities marked by a high percentage of newly-observant members, he noted that they eventually tended to veer towards a Haredi orientation.<sup>147</sup> He was therefore eager to solidify the

146 Brander Interview.

147 Dallas is a prime example of this phenomenon. The DATA (Dallas Area Torah Association) kollel was established in 1992, and was led from the outset by graduates of Haredi yeshivas. Initially, it was supported by a wide coalition that included prominent figures within the predominantly Modern Orthodox observant community. The kollel leadership and fellows attended the local Modern Orthodox synagogue and were involved in the coed day school and high school. As the kollel grew in influence, it attracted a considerable number of newly observant Jews who supported the Haredi outlook of its leaders. Eventually, the Orthodox community split. Those associated with the DATA kollel established their own synagogue with a former DATA fellow as rabbi. A nine million dollar multipurpose synagogue-center edifice was completed in late 2007. Separate gender elementary and high schools were opened as well. Although they do feel threatened, unlike the scenario feared by Brander, the Modern Orthodox sector has succeeded in maintaining its own vibrant communal ambience. After the division, a dynamic young Yeshiva University graduate was hired as rabbi of the Modern Orthodox synagogue and succeeded in introducing new energies to the community. Among others, a second community kollel was created whose fellows were integrated into the faculties of the Modern Orthodox schools. Interview with Rabbi Benzi Epstein, Executive Director – DATA Kollel, Dallas, Texas, Feb. 8, 2008; Discussion with Steven Rosenberg, Dallas, Texas, Feb. 9, 2008; Discussion with Rabbi Ari Perl, Rabbi – Sha'arei Tefillah Synagogue, Dallas, Texas, Feb. 11, 2008.

Modern Orthodox foundation of his community. Second, as a rabbi serving a large observant constituency, he concluded that the only way to reach out to the Jewish population beyond those who sought the community's services, was to create a separate entity that would be manned by individuals not directly employed by the synagogue. Finally, he felt that Modern Orthodox rabbis were not being trained to engage both the Orthodox and non-Orthodox population. He hoped that, by offering an environment in which such individuals could gain experience and guidance, they would be better equipped to serve as rabbis in similarly heterogeneous environments throughout North America.<sup>148</sup>

In order for these aims to be reached, BRCK was established in the *beit midrash* of BRS and strict criteria were set down for the fellows to be selected.<sup>149</sup> Kollel members would be recently-ordained Orthodox rabbis who were committed to continued personal growth in Talmudic study. Simultaneously, they were to be open to exposure to non-Orthodox Jewish society and to studying Torah with a wide range of Jews without necessarily intending to convince them to become fully observant. The fellows also had to be willing to teach Talmud and all other religious subjects to women. A minimum two-year commitment was demanded, although simultaneously it was made clear that serving in the kollel was not meant to be a long-term career. YU provided a natural source of candidates, and the vast majority of the fellows since the kollel's inception were graduates of its RIETS ordination program.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, BRCK was until recently

148 Brander Interview.

149 Originally it was called the Boca Raton Judaic Fellows Program.

150 Ibid.

officially connected to YU, and received a considerable portion of its funding from the latter's Center for the Jewish Future (henceforth CJF), which is today led by Brander himself.<sup>151</sup>

In his capacity as dean of the kollel, Brander recruited and interviewed prospective fellows and their wives, orchestrated personal study and communal learning programs, and raised the funds to cover BRCK's yearly budget, which in 2003 was \$400,000 and by 2006 had reached \$750,000.<sup>152</sup> During Brander's tenure, the fellows received a financial package that included a \$23,000 annual salary, free apartment, full health insurance, and a 50% reduction in school tuition for their children.<sup>153</sup> Until 2007 the BRCK staff also included Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovici – who served as *rosh kollel* but lived in New York and flew to Boca Raton every two weeks in order to present high level Talmudic discourses to the fellows – an executive director, and secretarial staff. Subsequent to Brander's departure in 2005, a permanent *rosh kollel* was hired.<sup>154</sup>

Although all kollel members needed to fulfill certain basic requirements in order to be accepted, some of the recruits were more naturally oriented toward working with a diverse Jewish population, while others tended toward a religious outlook that was more suited to an Orthodox observant constituency. As in ASK of Atlanta, Brander divided the fellows, and directed some

151 Telephone Interview with Rabbi Yehoshua Looks, Executive Director of BRCK, July 22, 2007.

152 Brander Interview; Email Correspondence from Rabbi Yehoshua Looks, August 26, 2007.

153 Since Brander left Boca Raton in 2005, the tuition reduction has not been guaranteed.

154 Looks Interview, August 22, 2007. The most recent *rosh kollel* was Rabbi Joshua Flug, a YU graduate and former fellow.

toward classes, hevrutas, lunch-and-learns, and explanatory services for broader Boca Raton Jewry, while others focused on offering increased Torah learning opportunities for the Orthodox core of BRS. That being said, BRCK's official mission statement focused on the role that was intended for it to play for all of Boca Raton Jewry:

Our goal is to educate, not indoctrinate. This vision empowers Jewish people from all walks of life to join together and learn more about their Jewish heritage in an open environment. The kollel is a center with a portal of entry for anyone seeking spiritual growth. Our experience has shown that, when people have a deeper understanding of their Jewish heritage, they develop a closer connection to the Jewish people and a greater love for the State of Israel.<sup>155</sup>

During Brander's stay in Boca Raton, BRCK's communal outreach programming grew to include: over a dozen weekly lunch-and-learn study sessions (the groups included parents from the Federation sponsored Donna Klein Jewish Academy, the staffs of the Solomon Schechter School and the Jewish Family Services, various private medical, legal and business offices, and the executive boards of both a local Conservative synagogue and the South Palm Beach County Federation of Jewish Philanthropies); the Shul by the Grove ("...at the doorstep of Boca Grove, a premier country club community in the heart of Boca Raton...Everyone is welcome regardless of his or her Jewish affiliation");<sup>156</sup> Boca Tov Café and Spirit, situated in a local strip mall, which "offers

155 See [www.kollel.org/about.php](http://www.kollel.org/about.php).

156 See [www.bocatov.org/shul.html](http://www.bocatov.org/shul.html).

classes and delicious coffee, light breakfast, a weekly schedule of inspiring programs and interactions...Jewish meditation and motivational seminars...social gathering(s) to hear the sounds of soft guitar and bongos playing hip Middle Eastern tunes";<sup>157</sup> and an explanatory prayer service in the library of BRS with 60 regular Sabbath attendees and 200 in the tent built for the high holidays. Brander pointed out that at the end of holiday services a list was handed out with contact information for all of the local synagogues, including Conservative and Reform ones. The message was that, in the effort to combat assimilation, any increase in Jewish religious involvement was to be encouraged. This approach paid off when, for example, the kollel was invited to run Torah study sessions on the Shavuot holiday for one of the large Reform temples.<sup>158</sup>

This open orientation was evidenced as well in the composition of the BRCK board of directors, which included both Orthodox and non-observant members. As in the case of Pittsburgh's Kollel Jewish Learning Center, such representation was clearly useful for expanding BRCK's fundraising resources, but the fact that some of Boca Raton's most powerful philanthropists chose to associate with an ostensibly Orthodox organization attested as well to the positive reputation both of the kollel and of its founder.

Particularly striking was the statement of Larry Altshul, then President of the South Palm Beach Federation. A Cleveland native and lifelong Reform Temple member, he compared Brander to "Abba Hillel Silver, in his day the most respected spokesman in

157 See [www.bocatov.org/index.html](http://www.bocatov.org/index.html).

158 Brander Interview.

the Rabbinate".<sup>159</sup> Such an accolade for an Orthodox rabbi did not come easily to Altshul, who before moving to Boca Raton had lived in Beachwood Ohio, whose deep-seated Orthodox-Reform tensions were documented by Samuel G. Freedman in his book *Jew vs. Jew*.<sup>160</sup> Altshul came to know Brander through the latter's membership on the Federation's board of directors, and he often asked for the rabbi's assistance in various projects and made use of his "good judgment".<sup>161</sup> Altshul was also a regular participant in the lunch-and-learn that Brander taught personally to fifteen select individuals from around the community, held on a rotating basis in the board rooms of the members. On the Purim holiday, Brander invited the entire group to his home to join in the festive *seudah*. As to the kollel, in Altshul's estimation, "The Kollel equals Brander...It is not out to proselytize, nor intent on trying to sway people's thinking...It is driven by his power, influence and charisma".<sup>162</sup>

Such qualities found an eager audience in Boca Raton, a migrant community only 1% of whose members were born there.<sup>163</sup> As newcomers, many of whom had detached themselves from their roots in more established Jewish strongholds in the Northeast and Midwest, quite a few of those active in the kollel

159 Interview with Larry Altshul, Boca Raton, Florida, Sept. 19, 2003. On Abba Hillel Silver, the long serving rabbi of Cleveland's Reform Temple, *The Temple*, and leading spokesman for American Jewry and Zionism, see: Marc Lee Raphael, *Abba Hillel Silver: A Profile in American Judaism* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1989).

160 Freedman, *Jew vs. Jew*, 284-337.

161 Altshul Interview.

162 Ibid.

163 See [www.jewishboca.org/clientuploads/Demographic\\_Study/003\\_Key\\_Findings\\_Boca\\_Raton.pdf](http://www.jewishboca.org/clientuploads/Demographic_Study/003_Key_Findings_Boca_Raton.pdf).

shared the sentiments of Penny Perlman, the former President of BRCK who had been affiliated since childhood with the Conservative movement, "I have been searching...throughout my life". Yet BRCK was by no means the only option available in the area. There are three Conservative synagogues in the town, four Reform or Reconstructionist ones,<sup>164</sup> a Kabbalah Centre,<sup>165</sup> and three Chabad houses.<sup>166</sup> Brander, who prided himself on the positive relationship he maintained with both the non-Orthodox and with Chabad, was nonetheless adamantly opposed to the suggestion that the kollel is essentially a Modern Orthodox effort to duplicate Chabad's successful outreach approach. In his opinion, Chabad was outstanding at initially attracting unaffiliated Jews and even bringing them toward observance, but at a certain point people desire the more normative community environment offered by BRS, and the more sophisticated Jewish learning available through BRCK.<sup>167</sup>

A similar distinction was iterated by Suzy Garfinkel Chevalier, who acknowledged that, in general, "Boca Raton is spiritually thirsty", and suggested that "BRS is a vital *community* that does outreach, while Chabad is an *outreach group*".<sup>168</sup> Garfinkel Chevalier is a kollel board member who was raised Reform and previously married to a non-Jew. She originally

164 See [www.kosherdelight.com/FloridaBocaRatonSynagogues.htm](http://www.kosherdelight.com/FloridaBocaRatonSynagogues.htm).

165 [www.kabbalah.com/k/index.php/p=locations/a/18&mode=courses](http://www.kabbalah.com/k/index.php/p=locations/a/18&mode=courses).

166 See [www.Chabadofbocaraton.com](http://www.Chabadofbocaraton.com). For an extensive discussion of Chabad in Boca Raton, including its relationship with Brander, see Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch* (New York: Schocken, 2003), 33-39.

167 See Fishkoff, 37-38.

168 Interview with Suzy Garfinkel Chevalier, Boca Raton, Florida, September 19, 2003 (my emphasis).

came to BRS because of the "Tot Shabbat" program for her preschoolers, and drives to BRS on Saturdays in order to attend the kollel's explanatory service. "Prior to meeting Rabbi Brander I heard stories of Orthodox Jews stoning those who drove on Shabbat. Rabbi Brander has shown me outreach, openness, and tolerance".<sup>169</sup> To her mind, the kollel's most significant role was to enable Brander to address an additional Jewish constituency with minimal compromise to his position as spiritual leader of an active Orthodox congregation, "In the absence of the ability to clone himself, he set up a kollel".<sup>170</sup>

It would appear that at least some of the fellows succeeded in adopting the attitudes and cultivating the skills necessary for the kollel to pursue this goal. Such was my sense after witnessing Rabbi Avi Heller present a class on the *shofar* (ram's horn) to twenty parents at the Donna Klein Jewish Academy and subsequently conduct the explanatory service on the Sabbath. My meeting with Ira Holz led me to a similar conclusion. Holz, who grew up in a non-observant Brooklyn family, attended Orthodox schools and camps through the twelfth grade. In Boca Raton he was an active member at the (Conservative) Bnai Torah Congregation. As he put it, in New York you "don't really need a synagogue to feel Jewish", but "in Boca, you have to seek out Judaism".<sup>171</sup> This is essentially what he did in 1998 when he organized a weekly Torah class in the board room of his investment banking firm for ten friends, all members of the same Conservative synagogue. For the first three years a rabbi from the

169 Ibid.

170 Ibid.

171 Interview with Ira Holz, Boca Raton, Florida, September 19, 2003.

(Conservative) Jewish Theological Seminary (henceforth JTS) flew down from New York two to three times a month to present the class. When he was no longer able to do so, Holz seized the opportunity to "look for a higher level" of discourse and turned to Brander, whom he knew from the Federation board. For the next few years Heller taught the class, which Holz called "the highlight of the week".<sup>172</sup> Beyond his youthful dynamism and knowledge, what struck Holz in particular was that while "he never tells you what to do", Heller offered positive encouragement to people to get more involved and raise their level of observance. This was far more attractive than "Conservative Judaism, that doesn't seem to stand for anything".<sup>173</sup>

When I re-contacted Holz in June 2007, I learned from him that the meetings no longer existed, "it got to the point where most of our schedules were too busy to accommodate a weekly class".<sup>174</sup> Concurrently, due to an unfortunate scandal involving the previous executive director of the kollel,<sup>175</sup> Heller was asked to take on the job of executive director himself. After a brief stint in this position, he left Boca Raton for his current position as Jewish Education Director at Boston University's Hillel House.<sup>176</sup> Meanwhile, Holz has continued his learning independently with

172 Ibid.

173 Ibid.

174 Email Correspondence from Ira Holtz, June 15, 2007.

175 Stephanie Slater, "Rabbi's Lawyer Denies Woman's Harassment Charge", *Palm Beach Post* (July 20, 2005), [www.palmbeachpost.com/localnews/content/local\\_news/epaper/2005/07/20/m4b\\_brRabbi\\_0720.html](http://www.palmbeachpost.com/localnews/content/local_news/epaper/2005/07/20/m4b_brRabbi_0720.html).

176 See Stephanie Crumley, "Rabbi Talks Religion on the Run", *The Daily Free Press* (Sept. 20, 2006), available at [www.dailyfreepress.com/media/storage/paper87/news/2006/09/20/News/Rabbi.Talks.Religion.On.Short.Run-2287046.shtml](http://www.dailyfreepress.com/media/storage/paper87/news/2006/09/20/News/Rabbi.Talks.Religion.On.Short.Run-2287046.shtml).

a JTS rabbi, but no longer has any contact with BRCK.<sup>177</sup> This circumstance highlights a theme that has come across throughout this study: the overwhelmingly important role that charismatic personalities play in the success of the community kollels. Clearly, there were technical factors that led to the demise of Holz's group, but Heller's absence was certainly a significant issue. That being said, his departure was a relatively minor event in comparison to that of Brander.

Over the course of his tenure, Brander's reputation as a community builder and a spokesman for Orthodoxy within the broader Jewish community became well known. So much so, that soon after being appointed as President of YU, Richard Joel asked him to move to the New York region in order to lead the institution's most ambitious new project, the Center for the Jewish Future (CJF).<sup>178</sup> For nearly two decades YU had directed most of its resources toward establishing its reputation as both a first-rate secular university and a yeshiva whose students and faculty could compete with the best of the Haredi yeshiva world. Under Joel, the former president of the non-sectarian Bnai Brith Hillel national campus organization, YU set out to reengage the broader Jewish community. In his capacity as dean of CJF, Brander was to spearhead all of YU's outreach efforts to Jewish communities in North America and throughout the world, and to cultivate a new generation of rabbis and community activists

<sup>177</sup> Holz Email Correspondence.

<sup>178</sup> Ari Fridman, "Rabbi Kenny Brander to Join Yeshiva Leadership: Administration Announces Center for the Jewish Future", *The Commentator* (March 29, 2005), available at [www.yucommentator.com/media/paper652/news/2004/10/26/News/Rabbi.Kenny.Brande.To.Join.Yeshiva.Leadership-772211.shtml](http://www.yucommentator.com/media/paper652/news/2004/10/26/News/Rabbi.Kenny.Brande.To.Join.Yeshiva.Leadership-772211.shtml).

who would be equipped to interface with the widest spectrum of Jews.<sup>179</sup> Among his priorities was the establishment of a YU sponsored network of Modern Orthodox community kollels.

In realizing his vision for Boca Raton through the establishment of a kollel, Brander experienced a great deal of success, yet his current goals, which include multiplying this model and for that matter adjusting it to the needs of a wide range of individual communities, represent a difficult challenge. This is particularly so since, rather than serving as both rabbi and CEO, as he essentially did at BRS,<sup>180</sup> he must now work within a large bureaucracy and under the watchful eyes of his superiors and their board of directors. This entails the acquisition of additional skill sets to those which enabled him to flourish in the rabbinate. Meanwhile, it is as yet unclear what aspects of his legacy will remain permanent fixtures within his former community.

Institutions such as BRS, the Weinbaum Yeshiva High School, and the ORB kosher food board have continued to service the constantly expanding Boca Raton Orthodox community. Yet since Brander's departure, the kollel struggled to maintain itself both financially and programmatically. Based on objective credentials, Brander's successor Rabbi Efram Goldberg seemed perfectly suited to build upon the path set by his predecessor, and indeed this would appear to have been the case within his role as BRS rabbi. Goldberg is a YU graduate who came to Boca Raton

179 As of the writing of this study, Brander had completed two and one half years in his new position. To view some of the CJF's current programming, see [www.yu.edu/cjf/](http://www.yu.edu/cjf/).

180 On rabbi/CEO as a modern rabbinical model, see Adam S. Ferziger, "The Lookstein Legacy: An American Orthodox Rabbinical Dynasty", *Jewish History* 13, 1 (Spring 1999), 127-149.

as a BRCK fellow, served as the original leader of the explanatory service, and subsequently held the position of assistant rabbi of BRS under Brander.<sup>181</sup> Nonetheless, as a young rabbi who must address the needs of a highly demanding core Orthodox population, striking a reasonable balance between seemingly competing constituencies poses difficulties. It is also conceivable that Goldberg, as might be expected from one stepping into such large shoes, would like to make his personal mark by adjusting the direction of the community in a variety of ways.

From the fall of 2006, BRCK began a process of reorganization and re-conceptualization. A new board replaced the original one and hired Rabbi Yehoshua Looks as executive director. Goldberg occupied the position of co-chair, but Looks – who was previously both a business executive and an educational administrator and most recently lived in Jerusalem – was tapped to set the fiscal and educational direction of the institution.<sup>182</sup> Looks' vision differed from that of Brander; Rather than aiming to both shore up Modern Orthodox religious life and address the broader Jewish population, he wanted BRCK to refocus purely toward outreach. The impetus for this decision was, to a great extent, financial. As long as BRCK was the main supplier of high level adult education for the Orthodox, it was perceived as a division of BRS. Apparently, this suited Brander who saw all the elements of his rabbinate as interrelated. Looks and his

181 See [www.brsweb.org/RabbiGoldberg.php](http://www.brsweb.org/RabbiGoldberg.php).

182 There were six executive board members; Four, including Goldberg, were observant members of BRS. One was a member of a Reform Temple, and the other of a Conservative Synagogue. The latter is Eric Altshul, the son of Larry Altshul mentioned above, who was the president of the local Federation and a participant in Brander's lunch-and-learn class.

board, however, hoped that potential donors, who felt in the past that as long as they were supporting BRS they did not need to allocate separate funds for the kollel, would change their views. Moreover, by detaching from the synagogue, the kollel fellows would be able, in his opinion, to direct their energies exclusively toward expanding the kollel's exposure among the non-observant majority of the area's Jews.<sup>183</sup>

One of the sectors that Looks hoped to target was university students. Until fall 2007, BRCK's vehicle for addressing collegiates and post-graduates was the Boca Tov Café. The new board decided to close its doors, citing results that did not justify the heavy financial outlays made in the endeavor. Some of the funds that became available were to be channeled to support the activities of a new kollel fellow who would devote himself exclusively to campus outreach. Interestingly, the person recruited to fill this position was not a YU graduate, but rather an English-speaking product of the Bat Ayin yeshiva in Israel's Judean Hills. This yeshiva is known for its combination of neo-Hasidism and intellectual openness,<sup>184</sup> and it was felt that this orientation would be ideally suited for contemporary Jewish young adults. In general, Looks wanted to diversify the makeup of the kollel fellows by recruiting from a wider range of institutions of higher Jewish learning, each with its own unique character. This, he felt, would enhance BRCK's ability to speak to multiple sub-groups among the Jews of the region.<sup>185</sup>

183 Looks Interview, July 22, 2007.

184 See [www.batayin.org/about](http://www.batayin.org/about).

185 Looks Interview, July 22, 2007.

On the basis of the above discussion of other community outreach kollels, the decision to disassociate from BRS would appear to have been a wise one; The model developed by Brander was predicated to a great degree on what Max Weber referred to as "charismatic leadership", which built on the rabbi's ability to interweave a variety of constituencies into a multifaceted rabbinate. The new approach entailed a transition to something closer to "rational-legal authority" in Weberian terms, and theoretically would pave the way for tapping fresh financial resources.<sup>186</sup> In addition, it avoided the problems of competing constituencies that, as noted earlier, are endemic to communities in which the rabbi, but not necessarily the congregation, desires to expand his efforts beyond the immediate synagogue membership. The reformulated BRCK was also intended to facilitate the cultivation of a framework that was more stable and less dependent in the long term on the unique talents of an individual leader. That being said, other than Chabad houses and Aish Hatorah and Ohr Somayach centers, there are few American Orthodox communal institutions that sustain their existence purely on outreach. Particularly in the case of the community kollel, servicing observant Jews who have made Talmud study part of their regimen had guaranteed that there will be regular attendance at the kollel *beit midrash*.<sup>187</sup> Moreover, it is worthwhile

186 See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, A.H. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (eds.), (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1947), 358-373; W. Richard Scott, *Organizations: Rational, Natural and Open Systems* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 32-34.

187 For a description and sociological analysis of the role that regular Talmud study can play for Modern Orthodox Jews, see Samuel C. Heilman, *The People of the Book: Drama, Fellowship, and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

to reiterate the distinction made by Suzy Garfinkel Chevalier and highlighted above, "BRS is a vital community that does outreach, while Chabad is an outreach group".<sup>188</sup> That is, one of the strengths of Brander's model of coordinated inreach and outreach arms was that it created a natural connection between the less affiliated and a bona fide community. For those who desired to strengthen their levels of observance, there was a smooth segue into a functioning congregation. Yet the many Jews like Garfinkel Chevalier, who enjoyed the intellectual and spiritual inspiration of the kollel but were not motivated to change their lifestyle, could also appreciate the collective warmth of a welcoming and somewhat heterogeneous congregation. Simultaneously, through its explanatory service and the introduction of a diverse group of Jews into the BRS complex, the kollel served as a hedge against the synagogue being swept away by the insularity that characterizes many Modern Orthodox synagogues; Recall that one of Brander's motivations in 1996 for establishing a kollel was to avoid the "haredization" that he saw enveloping numerous communities. Under the new arrangement, preventing such a trend would have become far more difficult. Nevertheless, with the large influx of young Orthodox families into Boca Raton, such a reality may be ultimately inevitable.

Beyond the practical exigencies that engendered the plan to detach BRCK from BRS, I suggest that the underlying sentiment that emerged from the new board's decision was that a Modern Orthodox community that integrates observant and nonobservant Jews is in the long run untenable. While this is consistent with

188 Garfinkel-Chevalier Interview.

the dominant trend within American Modern Orthodoxy,<sup>189</sup> it is a sharp departure from the structure that Brander sought to nurture during his fourteen year tenure.

Despite their efforts to re-conceptualize BRCK, Looks and his board were apparently unable to actualize the kollel model that they had envisioned. Among others, YU's CJF embarked on plans for a new regional initiative that precluded it from continuing to subsidize the BRCK program. As such, a decision was taken in the spring of 2008 to close BRCK.

There are, however, BRCK alumni who have subsequently moved on, but continue to champion the cause of an American Orthodoxy that can sustain diversity. A prominent example is Rabbi Dov Linzer. This YU graduate (ordained by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate), who served as a senior fellow in Boca Raton during the first two and half years of the kollel's existence, is currently the rosh ha-yeshiva and head of academics at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (henceforth YCT).<sup>190</sup> Founded by the well-known Modern Orthodox activist Rabbi Avi Weiss, it is a liberal Orthodox response to the cultural insularity and the move to the right that its leaders believe has characterized American Modern Orthodoxy in the last decades. Specifically, it reflects a sense among Rabbi Weiss and like-minded Orthodox Jews that YU-RIETS has succumbed to these forces and no longer represents a forthright philosophy of Modern Orthodoxy. YCT's outlook is expressed in its official mission statement, which includes, among other points, "encouraging intellectual openness, questioning,

189 See, for example, Ferziger, "Between Inreach and Outreach", 249-253; Heilman, *Sliding to the Right*, 47-61.

190 On Linzer, see [www.yctorah.org/content/view/23/49](http://www.yctorah.org/content/view/23/49).

and critical thinking as essential components of one's full service to God...affirming the shared covenantal bond between all Jews ...actively pursuing the positive and respectful interaction of all Jewish movements....and recognizing the need to enhance and expand the role of women".<sup>191</sup>

Although all of YCT's tenets reflect central topics of debate within contemporary Orthodoxy, gender-related issues have arguably become among the most tendentious areas of conflict.<sup>192</sup> In the last two decades, Orthodox women have emerged as institute heads for women's seminaries that focus on Talmud study,<sup>193</sup> halakhic advisors in matters of family purity,<sup>194</sup> spiritual leaders for Orthodox synagogues,<sup>195</sup> and *toanot rabbaniyot* (advocates)

191 See [www.yctorah.org/content/view/1/49](http://www.yctorah.org/content/view/1/49).

192 There is an extensive bibliography on the topic, some of which has been collected at the website of the main advocacy group in America, JOFA – Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, [www.jofa.org](http://www.jofa.org). See also the materials collected at [www.edah.org](http://www.edah.org). Since its publication, much debate has surrounded Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Brandeis/University Press of New England, 2004). See the bibliography, with a rich collection of English and Hebrew sources on women and Orthodox Judaism, in the Hebrew version of Ross's work, *Armon ha-Torah mi-Ma'al La: al Orthodoxiyah ve-Feminism* (Tel Aviv: Alma College and Am Oved, 2007), 420-457. In Israel, many Orthodox feminists have joined together in the *Kolekh* ("your voice") organization. See [www.kolech.org](http://www.kolech.org). A subsequent publication that also raised discussion and controversy is Daniel Sperber, *Darkah shel Halakhah: Keriyat Nashim la-Torah – Perakim be-Mediniyut Pesikah* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 2007), which argues for the halakhic legitimacy of women being called up to recite the blessings on the Torah during a public prayer service.

193 See, for example, [www.skamigdalo.org/staff.htm#admin](http://www.skamigdalo.org/staff.htm#admin).

194 See, for example, [www.yoatzot.org/about.php](http://www.yoatzot.org/about.php).

195 See, for example, [www.hir.org/madricha\\_ruchanit.html](http://www.hir.org/madricha_ruchanit.html); Shmuel Rosner, "Mazav ha-Judaism: mah bein rav le-ven morah ruhanit", *Ha'aretz* (Feb.

in Israeli religious courts.<sup>196</sup> One apparently uncontroversial expression of the increased prominence of women leaders that has reached into the community kollel phenomenon – even as seen above among Haredi oriented frameworks – is the initiation of all-women learning programs, that are also led and taught by highly knowledgeable Orthodox women.<sup>197</sup> A more radical example of the increased role of women in kollels, however, is the SAR High School *beit midrash*, where women study side by side with men in their capacities as Torah fellows.

#### F. Modern Orthodoxy and Mixed Gender: SAR Academy High School Beit Midrash, Riverdale, New York

Imagine the interior of a high school building designed like a small indoor mall, with many of the glass-walled classrooms facing out to an atrium centered around an active *beit midrash*. As students move from class to class they observe and hear the sounds of young men and women, some just a few years older than them, absorbed in Torah learning. The pupils themselves also have the opportunity to join in this intellectual-spiritual experience, either as part of the small groups that are assigned to study with one

2, 2008), available at <http://cafe.themarker.com/view.php?t=332968>; Joel Wolowelsky, "Rabbis, Rebbetzins and Halakhic Advisors", *Tradition* 36:4 (2002), 54-63.

196 See, for example, [www.lind.org.il/advocates.htm](http://www.lind.org.il/advocates.htm). For a broad discussion of women's leadership in Israeli Orthodoxy, see Tova Cohen, "'And All the Women Followed Her...' – On Women's Religious Leadership in Israeli Modern Orthodoxy", in Jack Wertheimer (ed.), *Jewish Religious Leadership – Image and Reality II* (New York: JTS, 2004), 715-756.

197 On the phenomenon of popular oriented all-women lectures within contemporary Israeli Haredi society, see Kimmy Caplan, *Be-Sod ha-Siah ha-Haredi* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 2007), 198, 208-210.

of the fellows on a regular basis or, if they so desire, through a one-on-one *hevruta*. Such was the vision conceived by Rabbi Tully Hartzstark for the new coeducational Modern Orthodox high school that he would serve as founding principal.<sup>198</sup>

The elementary school division of the SAR Academy was established in 1969 through the merger of three Bronx Jewish day schools (Salanter, Akiba, Riverdale). Particularly since the inauguration of its award winning building in 1974, which features an open classroom setting with no internal walls, it gained a reputation as a dynamic institution whose approach to both secular and religious studies focused on individual development and experiential learning. Today it serves a population of 800 students who come from its Riverdale, New York locale as well as from throughout the greater metropolitan New York area.<sup>199</sup> When a combination of ideological, geographic, and economic factors led the board of directors to embark on a high school, they chose Hartzstark as the person best suited to bring the plan to fruition. A YU graduate and former high school teacher who was then serving as vice principal for Judaic studies in the elementary school, he was relieved of all other responsibilities and given over a year in which to formulate a fresh educational concept, develop a curriculum, and recruit the appropriate staff. The school began operating in 2003, and by 2007 its student body had reached 300.<sup>200</sup>

198 Interview with Rabbi Tully Hartzstark, Riverdale, New York, Sept. 17, 2003.

199 In the interest of full disclosure, I am a member of the SAR Academy's graduating class of 1978.

200 On the high school, see for example, Rivka Bukowski, "A Vision Realized: SAR High School Celebrates its First Graduating Class", *Westchester*

From the moment it opened its doors, the SAR High School's *beit midrash* fellows program was designed to be an integral component of its educational culture. With the entrance of the students to a new building designed in consultation with Harcztark in 2004, his vision of a school physically centered around an active Torah study hall was realized. He hoped that by focusing on individuals and smaller groups, the fellows would provide support to the Judaic studies teaching staff. Moreover, by seeing and interacting on a regular basis with young people who were dedicated to Torah study, his students would have approachable role models to emulate. From his perspective, for a school that bucked the dominant trend by maintaining that coeducation was suited to Orthodox norms and encouraging its female students to strive for the highest levels of Jewish scholarship,<sup>201</sup> it was imperative that such a *beit midrash* be populated by both men and women.<sup>202</sup>

In 2003, there were 10 fellows, four full-time men, plus two additional men and four women who participated on a part-time basis. The initial budget was \$40,000. By 2007-08 the \$250,000 budget sustained eleven full-time members and three part-timers, as well as a full-time *rosh kollel*. Half of the fourteen fellows were women. In addition to their own individual study programs, each kollel member was assigned three classes and he/she was

*Jewish Chronicle* (June 2007), available at [www.wjchronicle.com/PAGES/june\\_story002.html](http://www.wjchronicle.com/PAGES/june_story002.html). On the Riverdale Jewish community, see for example, Hilary Larson, "Flourishing in the Bronx", *The Jewish Week* (August 1, 2003), available at [www.thejewishweek.com/news/newscontent.php3?artid=+8274&print=yes](http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/newscontent.php3?artid=+8274&print=yes).

201 See Heilman, *Sliding to the Right*, 89-90, 100-101.

202 Harcztark Interview.

expected to meet with small groups of pupils from each of these classes at least twice a week.<sup>203</sup>

Harczstark was eager to create a study hall that would reflect the core values of his school and its aspirations for its students. Along with the centrality of lifelong Torah learning for men and women, these included intellectual openness and the vital meaning of the State of Israel for contemporary Jews. To this end, he joined forces with the Torah mi-Tzion movement, and simultaneously appealed to graduates of various American and Israeli centers for higher Torah learning. A Torah mi-Tzion branch had been active at the Lincoln Square Synagogue since 1998-99.<sup>204</sup> By 2003, its Manhattan sponsors were eager to expand the daytime activities of its Israeli fellows as well as to receive funding that would help defray the costs of sustaining their kollel. By associating with SAR, however, Torah mi-Tzion in effect committed its Israeli recruits to joining a coed *beit midrash*. That being said, the Torah mi-Tzion fellows emphasized that, while they studied in the same hall, they did not have one-on-one study partnerships with women.<sup>205</sup>

Through 2007, the Torah mi-Tzion group remained the main source for the male fellows. In addition to their Zionist spirit, Harczstark added that having native Israelis working with the students had contributed significantly to their Hebrew language skills.<sup>206</sup> Other male members have come from among YU rabbinical students who received permission to study at SAR

203 Email correspondence from Rabbi Tully Harczstark, July 23, 2007.

204 See [www.torahmitzion.org/newyork/section.asp?id=341](http://www.torahmitzion.org/newyork/section.asp?id=341).

205 Interview with TMZ SAR fellows: Nati Bar-Dor, Rafi Cohen, Eitan Weissberg, Riverdale, New York, Sept. 17, 2003.

206 Harczstark Interview.

during their final year in the program, and additional local post-college age men who were eager to devote time to intensive study as well as gain experience as educators. The annual stipends, which by 2007-08 reached \$17,000 for fulltime fellows (9AM to 3:30PM) and \$10,000 for part-timers (9-1:30),<sup>207</sup> made this an attractive option for graduate students or active educators in the area who could adjust their schedules appropriately.<sup>208</sup> In light of the above discussion regarding the instability and lack of English skills that characterize many of the Torah mi-Tzion kollels, it is notable that SAR has been successful in creating an integrated model of Israelis with local Americans.

Insofar as recruiting female *beit midrash* members was concerned, SAR's ability to find appropriate candidates was a direct result of the major expansion since the 1990s in high level Torah study, with Talmud a major component, among Orthodox women. Some of the central agents of this revolution include: the Drisha Institute on Manhattan's Upper West Side,<sup>209</sup> YU's Graduate Program for Women in Advanced Talmudic Studies (GPATS),<sup>210</sup> Midreshet Lindenbaum,<sup>211</sup> Matan,<sup>212</sup> Nishmat,<sup>213</sup> and the Stella K. Abraham Beit Midrash for Women of Yeshivat Har Etzion (Migdal Oz) in Israel.<sup>214</sup> These institutions have

207 Harczstark Email, July 23, 2007.

208 Interview with SAR Beit Midrash Fellows: Avery Joel, Rena Landman, Bathsheva Maslow, Jonathan Maslow, Deena Najman, and Sara Susswein Tessler, Riverdale, New York, Sept. 17, 2003.

209 See [www.drisha.org/about.html](http://www.drisha.org/about.html).

210 See [www.yu.edu/gpats/pageC.aspx?id=5642](http://www.yu.edu/gpats/pageC.aspx?id=5642).

211 See [www.midreshet-lindenbaum.org.il](http://www.midreshet-lindenbaum.org.il).

212 See [www.matan.org.il/english/content.asp?id=42](http://www.matan.org.il/english/content.asp?id=42).

213 See [www.nishmat.net/about.php](http://www.nishmat.net/about.php).

214 See [www.skamigdalo.org/staff.htm](http://www.skamigdalo.org/staff.htm).

produced a new cadre of Orthodox women who are both deeply committed to religious observance as well as having Talmud skills that far exceed the norm even among Modern Orthodox males from previous generations.<sup>215</sup> Initially, all of the SAR female fellows were Americans. Subsequently, a relationship was developed with the Israel-based Bnei Akiva world movement in which single women were sent as emissaries to join the SAR *beit midrash*. Essentially, these fellows are female parallels to the Torah mi-Tzion hesder graduates and reflect Harczstark's appreciation for the energy brought to the school by the Israeli contingents.<sup>216</sup> The fact that young Israeli women are motivated to assume such roles illustrates the parallel trends toward increased higher level Torah study among both Modern Orthodox American women and female products of Israeli Religious Zionism.<sup>217</sup>

Advanced Talmud study for Modern Orthodox men has no doubt also increased significantly during the same period, but the transformation in the role of women has had a particularly dramatic influence on the overall atmosphere of Modern Orthodox communal life. It is reasonable to assume that, in the long term,

215 SAR Beit Midrash Fellows Interview.

216 Harczstark Email Correspondence, July 23, 2007.

217 On advance in higher Torah learning among Modern Orthodox and Israeli Religious Zionist women, see, for example: Tova Cohen, "And all the women followed her"; Tamar El-Or, *Next Year I Will Know More: Literacy and Identity Among Young Orthodox Women in Israel* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002); Rochelle Furstenberg, "The Flourishing of Higher Jewish Learning for Women", *Jerusalem Letter* 429 (May 2000), 1-11; Naomi Graetz, "Women and Religion in Israel", in Kalpana Misra and Melanie S. Rich (eds.), *Jewish Feminism in Israel* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England/Brandeis University Press, 2003), 35-39; Joel Wolowelsky, *Women, Jewish Law and Modernity: New Opportunities in a Post-Feminist Age* (Jersey City, NJ, 2003), 111-122.

the introduction of female fellows into high school settings will play a seminal role in raising the level of women Torah scholars even beyond its current state. Surely there are other high schools besides SAR in which numerous female Torah scholars teach, but regular exposure to a *beit midrash* in which both women and men debate the meaning of Talmudic passages offers a unique picture for female adolescents to explore and possibly emulate.

To date, according to Harcsztark, there have been no negative comments from the SAR parent body regarding the coed nature of the *beit midrash*. Surely such attacks could be deemed hypocritical when coming from people who chose to send their children to a high school where all academic subjects in both general and Judaic studies are taught in mixed gender settings. On the other hand, he did receive some negative feedback when a woman was hired as one of the main Talmud instructors.<sup>218</sup> This suggests that, even among the more liberal elements of Modern Orthodoxy, identification of certain roles with males is still deeply embedded in the collective conscience. To a certain degree, then, there is a peculiarly subversive potential to the mixed gender kollel or *beit midrash* that differs from that stemming from the female Talmud instructor. In a manner less demonstrative than that of a charismatic and possibly intimidating teacher, the daily activities of the female fellows offer an image of normative Modern Orthodox young women who are close in age to the students. They are not necessarily high powered individualists who may seem too prominent to serve as useful role models for many pupils and too revolutionary for some of their parents,

218 Harcsztark Email Correspondence, July 23, 2007.

but they have nonetheless moved far beyond the traditional boundaries of gender roles within Orthodox Judaism.

It is notable that the forthright approach of SAR toward coeducational study has raised some questions among the student themselves. In March 2007, the school dedicated a Shabbaton (Sabbath weekend) of the entire student body to the theme of "the coed world". In a letter sent to parents that Friday, Harcsztark explained that they would be "exploring pros, cons, and issues that arise when boys and girls are in school together. We believe that it is very important for us to discuss these issues as a school".<sup>219</sup> The focus of the weekend was on the numerous social questions and tensions that arise in educational settings in which male and female teenagers are constantly together. That being said, it is not unlikely that at least some of the SAR students are perplexed by the ever-expanding gap between their school's outlook and the prevailing trend toward greater separation of the sexes and adoption of Haredi norms within the wider American Orthodox landscape.<sup>220</sup>

219 See *Koleinu – SAR High School News* (March 16, 2007), available at [www.sarhighschool.org/files/ Koleinu%202007%20March%2016.htm](http://www.sarhighschool.org/files/Koleinu%202007%20March%2016.htm).

220 For a recent discussion of the implications of mixed and separate gender educational settings, see Elizabeth Weil, "Teaching Boys and Girls Separately", *New York Times* (March 2, 2008), available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/02/magazine/02sex3t.html?scp=1&sq=separate+gender+education&st=nyt>.

## Centered on Study

The SAR High School Beit Midrash is at once a less innovative framework and a far more revolutionary one than some of the outreach-oriented community kollels described above. On one level, it fits neatly into the category of school-based inreach. The constituency that it targets is 97% observant.<sup>221</sup> Although the Torah mi-Tzion fellows also work with adults through their affiliation with the Lincoln Square Synagogue, the SAR component focuses on Orthodox high school students, and to a very limited degree on their families. From this perspective, it resembles the model of the classic community kollels first founded in the 1970s – as illustrated above in the description of the Cedar Green Community Kollel – that aimed to strengthen the commitment to Torah study and religious observance of a predominantly Orthodox constituency, as well as the Torah mi-Tzion school-based models such as the Cleveland Torat Tzion Kollel (CTTK). At the same time, its mixed gender character clearly sets it apart from all the other Orthodox-affiliated

221 Hartzstark Interview.

community kollels discussed above. As I have already observed, the relationship between this model and the larger phenomenon of advanced Torah learning among Orthodox women is noteworthy unto itself. Yet SAR's *Beit Midrash* also vividly highlights a more general characteristic of community kollels distinguishing them from other more established communal institutions.

Unlike synagogues that are anchored by collective ritual, the core activity that marks community kollels is the study of Jewish texts and the acquisition of knowledge thereof. This focus on study rather than ritual is a key factor in the ability of this institution to address a broad spectrum of contemporary Jews. By engaging people primarily through the intellect, the *beit midrash* encourages greater individual expression than does the standardized prayer of the synagogue. This aspect of the community kollels accounts in part for its attraction to the many American Jews who may be classified as members of a "generation of seekers", who perceive religion more as a personal quest for meaning than as an expression of identity with a collective body.<sup>222</sup> No less dramatically, kinds of dynamics and interactions that might have been ruled beyond the boundary within the ritual arena are more acceptable when placed under the rubric of Torah study.

To begin with the SAR example: it is located within the context of a Modern Orthodox institution that follows strictly the halakhic traditions mandating separation of the sexes during prayer. Notwithstanding, by utilizing the less normatively proscribed atmosphere of the *beit midrash*, it has succeeded in expanding women's roles within religious life in a significant way.

222 See Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*.

There are certainly sectors within Orthodoxy that would demand applying the same separations found in the synagogue to Torah learning as well.<sup>223</sup> Nevertheless, for the most part women's Torah learning and coeducation in general – if not necessarily encouraged<sup>224</sup> – never attained the same interdenominational boundary maintenance stature as did mixed prayer.<sup>225</sup> Indeed, the contemporary revolution in women's Torah study has its historical roots in the halakhic opinions of highly respected authorities of the early and mid-twentieth century.<sup>226</sup> Thus, the less directly

- 223 For examples of far more radical efforts to prevent interaction between the sexes, see Samuel C. Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodox Jewry* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 307-312.
- 224 On coeducation and American Modern Orthodoxy, see the analysis of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's approach in Seth Farber, *An American Orthodox Dreamer: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Boston's Maimonides School* (Hanover and London: Brandeis/New England University Press, 2004), 74-87.
- 225 On mixed seating in the synagogue as a denominational boundary within American Jewry, see Jonathan Sarna, "The Debate over Mixed Seating in the American Synagogue", in Wertheimer, *The American Synagogue*, 363-394. Also see Baruch Litvin (ed.), *The Sanctity of the Synagogue* (New York: Spero Foundation, 1959).
- 226 See Shoshana Pantel Zolty, *And All Your Children Shall be Learned: Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1997), 55-95. See also, for example: Naomi G. Cohen, "Women and the Study of Talmud", *Tradition* 24:1 (Fall 1988), 28-37, reprinted in Joel Wolowelsky (ed.), *Women and the Study of Torah: Essays from the Pages of Tradition* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav, 2001), 6-12; David H. Ellenson and Elissa ben Naim, "Women and the Study of Torah: a Responsum by Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin of Jerusalem", *Nashim* 4 (2000), 119-139, reprinted in David H. Ellenson, *After Emancipation: Jewish Religious Responses to Modernity* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 2004), 323-345; Joel Wolowelsky, "Modern Orthodoxy and Women's Changing Self-Perception", *Tradition* 22:1 (Spring 1986), 65-81.

confrontational nature of the *beit midrash* has allowed for the introduction of a mixed gender dynamic that was heretofore unheard of within the framework of advanced Orthodox Torah study.<sup>227</sup> Of course, the fact that an activity does not blatantly undermine widely accepted norms is by no means proof that it is ultimately less subversive.<sup>228</sup> To cite a related example, the connection between the founding of the seemingly conservative Beis Yaakov schools for women in Poland and the subsequent emergence of Orthodox feminism suggests that less directly confrontational educational adjustments can lead to changes in Jewish life that are at least as pervasive as outright attempts at ritual reform.<sup>229</sup>

227 The Pardes Institute in Jerusalem is a coeducational yeshiva run for the most part by Orthodox Jews. That being said, it is officially an unaffiliated institution. See [www.pardes.org.il](http://www.pardes.org.il).

228 For a discussion by an Israeli Religious Zionist figure who is not considered to be militantly anti-feminist regarding the subversive potentials of women's higher Torah learning, see Yuval Cherlow, "Talmud Torah shel nashim – sikuyim ve-sikunim", in Margalit Shilo (ed.), *Li-Hiyot Ishah Yehudiyah* (Jerusalem: Kolech and Urim, 2001), 67-72.

229 On the founding of Bais Yaakov and its significance for the development of Orthodox Feminism, see: Deborah Weissman, "Bais Yaakov: A Historical Model for Jewish Feminists", in Elizabeth Koltun (ed.), *The Jewish Women: New Perspectives* (New York: 1976), 139-148; idem, "Bais Ya'akov as an Innovation in Jewish Women's Education: A Contribution to the Study of Education and Social Change", *Studies in Jewish Education* 7 (1995), 278-300; Zolty, 263-300. For a Haredi perspective, see Perl Benisch, *Carry Me in Your Heart: The Life and Legacy of Sarah Schenirer – Founder and Visionary of the Bais Yaakov Movement* (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2003). On the transformation of the Bais Yaakov framework from an agent for synthesizing modern culture to one that combats it, see Tamar El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant: Ultraorthodox Jewish Women and their World*, trans. Haim Watzman (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 65-87.

The same focus on study that facilitated the revolutionary mixed gender SAR Beit Midrash is also central to the transformation of the community kollel from an exclusively Orthodox institution into an effective outreach vehicle. From the perspective of its Orthodox sponsors, it allows for a far more lenient admission policy than would be demanded in a prayer situation. While questions of halakhic Jewishness are likely to eventually come up, they do not have the same decisive effect in a study situation as in a synagogue.<sup>230</sup> When approaching a person to join a class, it is sufficient for the invitee himself (or herself) to attest to his/her Jewish identity. In a synagogue, by contrast, as soon as an halakhic issue arises, such as being counted for a quorum or being called to the Torah, concrete proofs will be demanded from the individual to determine whether he/she qualifies to be a full-fledged participant in ceremonial activity.<sup>231</sup> Recall the comment

230 For an illustration of the boundary maintenance constraints of the synagogue, see Blu and Irving Greeberg, "Bintel Brief: Yitz and Blu Greenberg Peer Across the Denominational Divide", *The Forward* (Nov. 27, 2007), available at [www.forward.com/blogs/bintel-blog/12103](http://www.forward.com/blogs/bintel-blog/12103).

231 On individual Jewish identity and Orthodox public prayer honors, see for example: Adam S. Ferziger, *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, Nonobservance, and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 28-34, 43, 126-127, 143-144, 159, 160-162, 167-169, 173-180, 243 n. 40, 250 n. 37; idem, "Between "Ashkenazi" and Sepharad: An Early Modern German Rabbinic Response to Religious Pluralism in the Spanish-Portuguese Community", *Studia Rosenthaliana* 35:1 (Spring 2001), 7-22; Ariel Picard, *Ha-Pesikah ha-Hilkhatit bat Yameinu ve-Hitmodedutah im Ba'ayot shel Hitbolelut* – Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research – Position Paper 3 (Ramat-Gan: Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research – Bar-Ilan University, 2003). On the general role of synagogue honors (*kibbudim*) as vehicles for group coalescence, see Samuel C. Heilman, *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1973), 76-77.

of Chuck Perlow, a nonobservant supporter of Pittsburgh's Kollel Jewish Learning Center, "Most non-affiliated Jews are afraid to go to an Orthodox synagogue but they will go to the kollel...The kollel is viewed first as an educational institution, less scary".<sup>232</sup> For that matter, the Orthodox synagogue with its strictly separate seating creates acute barriers for nonobservant women – most of whom would initially find the Orthodox approach foreign if not offensive – that do not automatically arise in a study environment. Even when kollels do address non-Orthodox Jews through ritual vehicles – ASK's beginner's group at Temple Sinai or the instructional prayer service in Boca Raton for example – their identification as teaching and learning institutions rather than as ritual performance ones may allow for less rigid enforcement of standards than would a formal synagogue environment.<sup>233</sup>

The study character of the community kollels also enables them to function more easily as portals of access to religious life for the large number of contemporary American Jews who are married to non-Jews. Orthodox halakhah not only prevents non-Jews from participating in numerous public rituals, it also entails sanctions forbidding their Jewish spouses themselves from receiving certain religious honors.<sup>234</sup> Surely social outcasting can be introduced to non-ceremonial settings as well, but there is no official mandate that demands doing so. Even among those

232 Perlow Interview.

233 The DATA kollel in Dallas is led by Haredi oriented figures. Nonetheless, the Learner's Service that is conducted by Rabbi Benzi Epstein of DATA at the Ohr HaTorah synagogue makes use of a relatively liberal partition between men and women. Moreover, whenever actual prayer is not taking place the partition is removed. See Epstein Interview. On the Learner's Service, see <http://www.ohratorahdallas.org/ShabbosInShul.html>.

234 See: Ferziger, *Exclusion and Hierarchy*, 199-200; Picard, 22-29.

Haredi circles that are active in outreach, there is a growing recognition that, under current social realities, promoting their initiatives exclusively for in-married Jews and their offspring would severely limit their potential audiences (and fundraising resources). As such, those involved in Orthodox outreach struggle to find ways to service intermarried families without trampling on broadly accepted halakhic principles. Once again, the study-centered *beit midrash* provides a framework for intensive Jewish involvement for intermarried Jews and their families that is devoid of the normative minefields that occupy the synagogue sanctum.<sup>235</sup>

The comparison between synagogues and community kollels not only explains the utility of the latter institution in contemporary Jewish life, but is likewise instructive in considering the long term pitfalls that may await this framework. For all the drawbacks of the synagogue in the eyes of contemporary Jews, it is much easier for a community to justify and sustain its existence than even the most dynamic kollel. A synagogue provides what many still consider to be essential religious services for the local Jewish population, and not merely for those who attend on a fairly regular basis. It is a place to go on the high holidays, to celebrate a bar or bat-mitzvah, to seek a rabbi who can perform a wedding or a *mohel* (ritual circumciser), to recite the *kaddish* (mourner's declaration), or even to secure a burial plot in a Jewish cemetery. There is no question that, for growing numbers of unaffiliated American Jews, even these basic symbols of religious connection have lost much of their

235 Interview with David Luderman, Participant – DATA Kollel, Dallas, Texas, Feb. 10, 2008.

value. Yet there still remain significant numbers of Jews who consider it important that such institutions exist within their local environs.<sup>236</sup> For many of these individuals, the ambience and offerings of an outreach kollel may be more inviting or inspiring. Nonetheless, the kollel is still to a large extent a luxury item. American Jews, like many of their Christian neighbors, have an ingrained tradition of supporting a local house of prayer.<sup>237</sup> Stimulating a similar sense of communal responsibility towards a kollel is a difficult challenge. Much as community kollels may be appreciated, the way is still long towards their being considered essential Jewish communal institutions. In addition, while study may be attractive and empowering, for many contemporary Jews the main attraction of religion is its spiritual element. For such individuals, independent synagogues or lay-led prayer meeting frameworks may be a more natural alternative to the establishment congregations than the community kollel.<sup>238</sup>

BRCK in Boca Raton serves as an initial example for this understanding. The assumption of its new board was that as long as the kollel remained affiliated with the Boca Raton Synagogue, it was difficult to convince people – even many of those who utilized the kollel's services on a regular basis – that, in addition to their synagogue dues and contributions, they should allot

236 See Cohen and Eisen, *The Jew Within*, 170.

237 On the civil religion of American Jews, see for example: Jonathan Steven Woosner, *Civil Judaism in the United States* (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Community Studies, 1978).

238 See, for example, Neela Banerjee, "Challenging Tradition, Young Jews Worship on Their Terms", *The New York Times* (Nov. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007), available at [www.nytimes.com/2007/11/28/us/28minyan.html?ei=5087&em=&en=4d239e472d05d25e&ex=1196485200&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1196323866-ja4k1/IIHnz7jUau7fX51Q](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/28/us/28minyan.html?ei=5087&em=&en=4d239e472d05d25e&ex=1196485200&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1196323866-ja4k1/IIHnz7jUau7fX51Q).

separate funds to the operation of the kollel. They saw the kollel as an extension of the main institution, the synagogue. By detaching the kollel from the synagogue and refocusing its activities exclusively on outreach, its new board took a gamble. It hoped to cultivate a constituency that did not have allegiances to other local religious frameworks, and could be brought to appreciate the central – not auxiliary – role that a kollel can play in local Jewish life. In view of the decision to close BRCK, at least in this case it would appear that rather than increasing support, independence caused instability.

The SAR *Beit Midrash*, as a purely school sponsored framework, differs from all the other models discussed above in that it does not function as an independent unit. Indeed, affiliation with a school – with its regular tuition income – offers the promise of greater stability, but also emphasizes the luxury quality of the kollel model. For even as its principal has literally made the *Beit Midrash* a central feature of its educational program, were the school to experience financial duress, it seems likely that the kollel would be forfeited prior to making cuts in staff or other essential educational services.

There are at least five community kollels that have succeeded in becoming essential components of local Jewish life. These are the classic kollels established in the 1970s in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Toronto, and ASK in Atlanta and DATA in Dallas. In the cases of Los Angeles, Chicago, and Toronto, these are predominantly inreach oriented kollels that have created full-fledged Haredi communities around themselves, and provide a range of services to their observant constituencies more comparable to a multi-faceted synagogue framework than to that of a limited community kollel. The ASK and DATA kollels

are more outreach oriented frameworks that have also achieved degrees of stability beyond that found in most community kollels. In both cases, this is partially thanks to their involvements in providing such essential services as supervision of kosher food and *eruv* for the observant community. That being said, their total dependence on fundraising rather than other forms of income like membership or tuition, present an ongoing difficulty.<sup>239</sup>

239 The problem of maintaining the financial stability of a kollel has long dogged its leaders. Rabbi Jacob Ruderman, the late head of the Ner Israel yeshiva in Baltimore, commented in 1982 that "...it is very difficult to raise funds for a *kolel*. The *ba'alei battim* [laymen] have not yet accepted the *kolel* as an absolute necessity for the future growth of Torah". The citation may be found in Bomzer, 25. Ruderman was referring to a traditional kollel in which the fellows are full-time students. Theoretically, raising funds for a community kollel that directly services local constituents should be easier, but it still demands far more explanation than a school or synagogue.

## Assimilation and the Denominational Divide

The main task confronting the architects of the various community kollels is to create formulas to ensure long-term institutional and financial stability. This is a formidable challenge, as the very success of the kollel model is tied to the flexible nature that allows it to regularly reinvent itself in light of changing circumstances and cultural moods. This quality presents a difficulty when seeking to cultivate the stability that will compel local Jews to recognize the necessity of the institution. Another aspect of the kollels that has been noted throughout this study is the role of charismatic leadership in enabling a kollel to get off the ground and create a niche for itself within a community. Clearly such figures add a great deal of appeal, but they also make their institutions overly dependent for ongoing survival on their unique skills. Returning to the comparison to synagogues, such institutions thrive as well when guided by inspirational rabbinical leaders. Yet this is not an absolute condition for their survival. If community kollels are to establish themselves as essential institutions, they too must produce alternatives to their dependence on unusually talented

individual leaders. One partial solution is for the leadership to develop a strong board of lay supporters who will take it upon themselves to assure both the financial viability and organizational continuity that can withstand major personnel changes. Among others, this body could focus on creating kollel endowments that would provide for long term income that would alleviate some of the ongoing financial obstacles.

Regarding the role of the community kollels in addressing issues of assimilation and alienation from Jewish life, I suggest that avoiding forthright denominational and congregational affiliation is well-advised. Informal relations with Orthodox synagogues are valuable in that they allow for a smooth transition to active Orthodox life for those kollel participants who are attracted to this religious approach. Yet this path is unlikely to appeal to most American Jews. Moreover, no matter how inviting and non-coercive the *beit midrash* environment may be, direct affiliation with the Orthodox establishment automatically distances many Jews from the entire enterprise. By remaining officially neutral and concentrating on creating a warm study environment and stimulating programs that appeal to current intellectual and spiritual proclivities, the community kollels stand the best chance of relating to the broadest range of contemporary Jews. For the Orthodox, this may mean losing out on some participants who might be convinced by more clear-cut encouragement to join their ranks. Nevertheless, such a denominationally neutral platform offers greater potential for contributing to the large-scale exposure of American Jewry to Jewish knowledge.

Denominational neutrality is also relevant to the aforementioned Achilles heel of creating a solid financial basis for the kollel within local Jewish community life. Although there

are numerous prominent Orthodox Jewish philanthropists, they remain a relatively limited number that must support a large number of Orthodox-sponsored religious, educational and social institutions and movements. Far greater funding resources can be tapped within the non-Orthodox majority. Some non-Orthodox philanthropists may support Orthodox efforts due to personal nostalgia or out of a sense that the traditionalists remain the bearers of Jewish authenticity. Many others, however, have no such inclinations but are deeply committed to Jewish learning and strengthening Jewish identification. The more the community kollel demonstrates its value as a neutral environment for Jewish expression and as a nonbiased portal toward increased engagement, the greater the appeal of this institution to the non-Orthodox philanthropic community.<sup>240</sup>

The relative level of connection between the community kollel and Orthodoxy leads to another question: can this framework be adopted effectively by non-Orthodox groups? On the one hand, there is absolutely no reason why it should not. Orthodoxy by no means possesses a monopoly on advanced Jewish knowledge and sophisticated pedagogy. Indeed, as demonstrated by Boston's Meah program,<sup>241</sup> the Melton mini-schools throughout North

240 On trends in American Jewish philanthropy, see, e.g.: Barry A. Kosmin and Paul Ritterband (eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Philanthropy in America* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991); Marc Lee Raphael, *Understanding Jewish Philanthropy* (New York: Ktav, 1979); Gary A. Tobin, *The Transition of Communal Values and Behavior in Jewish Philanthropy* (San Francisco: Institute for Jewish & Community Research, 2001); Jack Wertheimer, "Current Trends in American Jewish Philanthropy", in David Singer and Ruth R. Seldin, eds., *American Jewish Year Book*, 97 (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1997), 3-92.

241 See, for example, Sylvia Barack Fishman, "Education is Destiny",

America,<sup>242</sup> and "Kolel: The Adult Center for Liberal Jewish Learning", a pluralistic JCC-based program in Toronto,<sup>243</sup> neutral or non-Orthodox affiliated Jewish bodies have been highly successful since the 1990s in creating new opportunities for mass exposure to Jewish learning. Nevertheless, the specific structure of the community kollel and the lifestyle orientation of its staff are predicated upon Orthodox social and educational norms that move beyond issues of theology and halakhic observance. For one, despite the differences between the community kollel and its post-World War II precursor, the newer model remains rooted in the Haredi Orthodox notion that young Jewish men should dedicate the initial years of their married lives to study-oriented Jewish pursuits. This worldview encourages its adherents to make personal sacrifices – lack of financial security, delay of long term career goals, willingness to live in places devoid of supportive religious infrastructure – in order to achieve ideological aims and sustain personal spiritual growth. While such ideals are cherished by numerous individuals outside the Orthodox milieu, they are not central to the educational message put forward by non-Orthodox Jewish education and family life.<sup>244</sup> Here the comments of Richard Joel, at the time the president and international director of Bnai Brith/Hillel and currently the president of Yeshiva University, in which he contrasts Chabad

*Jerusalem Post* (Dec. 5, 2006), available at [www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1164881826474&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull](http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1164881826474&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull)

242 See, for example, Moira Schneider, "Founder of Melton Mini-Schools Dies", *Chicago Jewish News* (Feb. 23, 2007), available at [www.chicagojewishnews.com/forums/showthread.php?t=110](http://www.chicagojewishnews.com/forums/showthread.php?t=110).

243 See [www.kolel.org/pages/about\\_us.html](http://www.kolel.org/pages/about_us.html).

244 See Bomzer, 23-24.

campus emissaries and his own dedicated staff members, would seem to apply equally to comparisons with the non-Hasidic kollel fellows as well: "They [Chabad] are all mission driven and prepared to devote their lives to it. [My people] want to go home at the end of a day. It's a different cultural *gestalt*".<sup>245</sup>

Moving beyond distinctive social and religious outlooks, there are also practical factors which make the community kollel a more natural fit for the Orthodox, particularly its Haredi representatives, than other Jewish groups. Most non-Haredi American Jews are college-educated and have been encouraged from childhood on to pursue a profession within the secular world. Indeed, those who end up devoting themselves to Jewish education and the rabbinate generally do so as a conscious career choice. This does not mean that they are lacking in idealism, but that they came to this professional path after trying out or at least having other options available to them. In the case of Haredi educators – including community kollel members – the scenario is different. Quite a few yeshiva students eventually acquire university or vocational training in such fields as computers and accountancy, and a very small minority go on to advanced training in such fields as law and health-related professions.<sup>246</sup> Others join family businesses or gravitate toward independent entrepreneurship. Those areas which are most suited both to their educational backgrounds and their religious life-styles, however,

245 Cited in Fishkoff, 100.

246 For changes in approaches to professional education within American Haredi society see: Amiram Gonen, *From Yeshiva to Work: The American Experience and Lessons for Israel* (Jerusalem: Floersheimer Inst. for Policy Studies, 2000); Heilman, *Sliding to the Right*, 140-179.

are careers as Jewish educators and communal functionaries.<sup>247</sup> Thus, the community kollel offers the veteran yeshiva student and his wife an opportunity to take a first step out of the yeshiva and into the world of religious education and leadership. For some, it may serve as a transitional stage in which they can continue high level study on a part-time basis while gaining invaluable hands-on experience. For others it may turn out to be a long term career path. What is significant for the current discussion is that it flows naturally from their educational experiences and ideational orientations. For the non-Orthodox world – and to a large extent also for the Modern Orthodox world centered around Yeshiva University – it would be insufficient to create its own community kollel movement, with new organizational infrastructures, solid funding, and creative programming. Rather, a more fundamental reconsideration of the nature of its approaches to career development and personal ambition would be required.

247 Bomzer, 24.

## Conclusion: The Community Kollel and the Havurah Movement

Since the late 1980s, Orthodox sponsored community kollels have been transformed from predominantly inwardly-oriented enclaves to dynamic, multi-dimensional educational frameworks. They remain rooted in Jewish learning as their core activity, but they do so in a manner designed to appeal to a wide range of American Jews. This new Jewish institutional model emerged, as discussed above, in response to changes that took place within American Orthodoxy, in the broader Jewish community, as well as in American religious culture in general. Recall, however, the insightful comparison made by Chuck Perlow of Pittsburgh, "Community kollels can pick up where the Havurah movement left off".<sup>248</sup>

The Havurah movement that began in the late 1960s as a counter-culture inspired effort at "Jewish renewal" also produced a dynamic religious framework that responded to a variety of internal Jewish as well as external currents. The goal of its founders was to "redeem the current bleakness of American

<sup>248</sup> Perlow Interview.

Jewish religious life".<sup>249</sup> But after an initial period of excitement and growth, it eventually died down as an independent American Jewish movement. Indeed, many elements of Havurah style worship and activity had long lasting influence on American Judaism and synagogue life – in fact a connection can be drawn between its emphasis on collective study and the community kollels,<sup>250</sup> and some Havurah-style worship communities continue to flourish, but the model itself was never successfully transformed from a creative and inspiring initiative into an essential component of Jewish life.<sup>251</sup> Will the community kollels follow a similar pattern to the Havurah movement or will they succeed in integrating themselves into the basic fabric of Jewish communal life? After a period of substantial growth since the late 1990s, the leaders of the kollel movement must focus more of their creative energies on addressing this existential issue.

249 Meredith L. Woocher, "Radical Tradition: The Ideological Underpinnings of the Early Havurah Movement" (Seminar Paper, Brandeis University, 1997), cited in Sarna, *American Judaism*, 320.

250 Among his many innovations, Mordecai Kaplan was one of the first American Jewish religious figures to advance informal text study as a central activity of community life. This, among others, was one of the ways in which Kaplan laid the groundwork for the subsequent emergence of the Havurah movement. In this light, the community kollel can also be seen as a framework in which the ideas of this original thinker eventually came to fruition – this notwithstanding the clear distinctions between Kaplan's theological and ideological vision and those of the Orthodox kollel activists. For a nuanced discussion of Kaplan's influence on the Havurah movement, see Riv-Ellen Prell, "America, Mordecai Kaplan, and the Postwar Jewish Youth Revolt", *Jewish Social Studies* 12, 2 (2006), 164-169.

251 Sarna, *American Judaism*, 321-322.



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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:

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