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THE AMERICAN ORTHODOX COMMUNITY faces a plethora of challenges, not the least of which is enormous demand on its limited resources. An essential component of the community’s demonstration of its commitment to Torah and *avodas Hashem* is kiruv (outreach), which also serves as an integral expression of the community’s *ahavas Yisrael* – its care for other Jews.

In this issue of Klal Perspectives, contributors have been invited to address the varying approaches to outreach currently being pursued, and the appropriateness of the current allocation of communal resources as among these alternative strategies and focuses.

1. What are the most significant dimensions of current outreach efforts, and how effective are they?

2. In light of the various alternative objectives that may be pursued in conducting outreach, by what criteria is success measured? Are the prevailing measurements of success the appropriate measurements? Can results be reliably calculated? And how is the donor or volunteer able to ascertain which target demographic and which approach to kiruv enjoys the greatest realization and success?

3. Has kiruv in America run its course due to the combination of (a) decades of assimilation that has diminished the number of accessible, non-observant Jews who are halachically Jewish, and (b) the rapidly diminishing sense of Jewish identity among younger, secular Jews? Or, do these factors mitigate in favor a more powerful outreach push, since in a decade or two it may be too late? And finally, what are the new frontiers in outreach that may yet be explored?

**Background**

Outreach to the non-observant has always been a significant component of the American Orthodox experience. In earlier eras, this outreach took the form of basic, synagogue programming and camp experiences, as most Jews who identified as Orthodox were not necessarily observant. For example, after World War Two, the Young Israel movement created the Young Israel Institute, which offered dozens (if not more) of evening courses in basic Judaism to returning veterans with no formal Jewish education who were seeking a more meaningful religious experience.

In essence, almost every Orthodox rabbi in America of the 1950’s and 1960’s was an outreach professional. Similarly, Torah Umesorah spearheaded a national effort to open day schools across North America, also essentially an outreach effort.

About that same time, formal outreach efforts to the non-Orthodox began, as well. Recognizing that a great portion of families attending its shuls were not fully observant, the Orthodox Union created NCSY, introducing increased levels of Torah observance and study to the children of non-observant synagogue members. And, of course, Chabad initiated the most broadly-based outreach efforts, with programs throughout North America (and later the world) targeting both children and adults.

In the mid to late 1960’s, kiruv began to assume even more formalized dimensions. The cultural upheavals among general American youth in the 1960’s, accompanied by the explosion in Jewish pride following the 1967 Six Day War, triggered the initiation of yeshivas for beginners in Israel, the introduction of the “beginner’s minyan” concept in Manhattan’s Lincoln Square Synagogue and elsewhere, and a more aggressive effort by synagogue rabbis around the country to use their pulpits as an avenue to outreach. And these are all mere examples.

Over the more recent decades, outreach has become yet more formalized, more professional and more sophisticated. Certain community kollels include an outreach dimension beyond the Orthodox community. Chabad satellites can be found in large and small communities and on college campuses across the globe. Outreach schools were created to reach Jews from the former Soviet Union. Youth outreach programs extend far beyond the synagogue into public schools throughout North America,
and a new, major push was initiated several years ago by the late Zev Wolfson, a”h, to substantially expand campus outreach.

The Internet, most notably aish.com, has increasingly become a source of Jewish education for the unaffiliated. The introduction of Hebrew charter schools, and attendant after-school religious Talmud Torahs, is another new vista in outreach.

Alas, there appears to be little, if any, coordination among these numerous efforts. While the community is eager to ensure the viability and effectiveness of outreach projects and initiatives, supporters often struggle with evaluating the effectiveness and impact of these efforts. Even the stated goals of many projects are often opaque, and seldom are results published. These absences pose serious risks of redundancy and ineffectiveness, leaving a quagmire for the philanthropist or small donor who would like to allocate a portion of their charity dollar to outreach. And the challenge is equally daunting for the young idealist who would like to dedicate his or her life to outreach – but only if the life commitment and sacrifice is likely to produce serious benefits.

The goal of this Issue of Klal Perspectives is to begin a discussion that may provide communal guidance on these questions.

THE QUESTIONSPOSED to our contributors for the current issue of Klal Perspectives sought to organize and rank kiruv activities within the wide range of communal priorities. By and large, the responses we received did not accept the premise of the questions. With a few exceptions, in place of objective data and analysis of the range of kiruv options, we received presentations passionately advocating specific kiruv programs. While this avoidance of the questions will be frustrating to some, we must also be open to consider it as an affirmation of the strength of passion and spirit in the world of kiruv.

The Rambam in his Sefer HaMitzvos (Aseh 3) includes the mitzvah of kiruv as part of the mitzvah of loving G-d. As he explains, it is the passion one feels for G-d that drives the individual to want to share that passion with anyone he or she can. The presence or absence of this passion is an important marker of the strength of our own commitment to Hashem and His Torah. And while passion does not remove the need for accountability or for thoughtful choices, it may well be that the inherent nature of the kiruv enterprise precludes a “big government” approach of defining communal outreach priorities from the top down.

To make it easier for the reader to jump into an issue with many points of entry, we offer this forward as a road map of the individual articles.

In an impressively comprehensive piece, Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, director of Ner LeElef, builds on his assertion that the global kiruv movement has expanded far more rapidly in the last ten years than it did in the previous thirty. Acknowledging that no one has yet cracked the code of how to measure success, he offers an approach in the areas of campus and community-based kiruv, though concluding with a list of
challenging questions yet to be resolved. He maintains that kiruv has not run its course at all – both based on real data and on guidance from gedolim that we are in the beginning stages of the teshuva prophesied in the Torah. Kiruv can be raised to an entirely new level through pursuing several avenues, such as improving operations of scale, investing in the professional development of mekarvim, developing great leaders – both of kiruv and of mainstream Jewish organizations – and by appealing to refugees from the Conservative movement. He concludes with boundless optimism that we will make the breakthroughs that are necessary to take us to the next level and beyond.

Rabbi Ilan Feldman laments the diminished impact of kiruv from its earlier momentum, notwithstanding increased manpower and resources. He argues that this slide has little to do with the efforts of those in outreach, but rather kiruv can be rejuvenated and be truly effective only if the Orthodox community evolves into a true model of holiness and wholesomeness. Rabbi Feldman identifies the source of the Orthodox community’s failure to play that role in the Orthodox community’s view of itself primarily as an observant community, rather than as a model community. Rabbi Feldman suggests that the American frum community’s exclusive focus on internal needs and observance represents an unjustified deviation from the true and authentic Yiddishkeit exemplified by Avraham Avinu, whose chessed reflected not only a belief in One G-d as the Giver of existence but also an expression of Avraham’s profound faith in human beings as tzelem Elokim – reflections of the Divine. He chastises the Orthodox world for its insularity and parochialism, sharing his fear that we will remain on a path away from the mission of Judaism if we fail to embrace the responsibility to both adhere to halacha and also focus on bringing about kiddush Hashem in the world around us.

Rabbi Dovid Eliezrie chronicles the success of a mushrooming network of Chabad centers. He sees kiruv as unquestionably picking up steam, rather than slowing down. An increasing number of families who are far from observance are nonetheless eager to affiliate with local Chabad establishments because they are greeted non-judgmentally and with genuine ahavas Yisrael. A younger generation of Jews does not bear the burden of the anti-Orthodox prejudices of their elders, and are therefore happy to affiliate with a community shul that offers Jewish authenticity. Success, according to this model, is not determined by speedy transformation to a frum lifestyle (although this remains the ultimate goal), but in any change that positions people or their children closer to it in the long run – or even the performance of a single mitzvah.

Rabbi Bentzi Epstein details the workings of the community outreach kollel, using Dallas as the model. He shows the variety of activities and programs that can be assembled under the rubric of bringing people directly closer to Torah, not to observance. He believes that even with waning interest in Judaism outside of our community, so many people are receptive to the power of pure Torah that what we need the most is more capable and caring young couples, ready to lovingly guide other Jews through the steps of growth and commitment.

Lori Palatnik showcases a new strategy for kiruv that targets Jewish mothers, as people capable of immediately carrying along other families on their journey back to their Jewish roots. The success of her program requires the quick development of kiruv resources in the community beyond those of the kiruv rabbi. She is developing them through a mentoring project with local observant families.

Dr. Marvin Schick argues that the "bloom is long off kiruv," and that there needs to be a change in attitude, as well as strategy. In particular, there needs to be more emphasis on assisting those who are interested - and in not turning them off with negativity and elitism. Seeking to attract those who are not interested has not shown itself to be as effective as many would like to think. His position represents a challenge that must be met by all who have a stake in kiruv. Dr. Schick is one of the most able and respected advocates for Torah education in our community.

He is joined, however, by one of the most creative figures in the world of kiruv, Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, who also questions the effectiveness of some of the kiruv strategies that worked in the past, particularly campus outreach, that he believes are failing today. He opines that the approximately 3500 kiruv professionals are turning out only about 2000 new committed Jews a year, at the cost of about $6000 per success story. He urges a shifting of campus priorities to retention of Modern Orthodox students on campus, and towards social media in general.

Rabbi Raphael Butler adds to the hard questions the editors posed with some pointed questions and analysis of his own. He emerges with a firm resolve to maintain focus on young Jews on campus. He presents multiple reasons why this continues to be the best investment of
resources. He opines that even if costs are high, they should be allocated across the new family members that the new baal teshuva predictably will bring to the community in the space of a short number of years.

Rabbi Steve Burg and Dovid Bashevkin also maintain that kiruv is not an activity so much as an articulation of a Torah community that is sensitive, altruistic, and united. When kiruv is pursued as salesmanship, many of the customers will in time show buyer’s remorse. The best choice in kiruv programming however remains the teenage years, when young Jews have reached an age of responsibility, but are not yet burdened by the accountability they will face just a few years later. At this age, moving positive experiences of authentic Judaism will have the most impact, undisturbed by the skepticism of later years.

Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky aims at upending crisis-driven kiruv, which he sees as flawed on theoretical and practical grounds. Among other things, it produces inordinate and counterproductive focus on numbers, at the expense of quality. Kiruv today ought to aim more at deepening the experience of people interested in Yahadus, rather than broadening the “customer base.” Only Torah study – including months-long stays in yeshivos – can provide Jews with the depth and authenticity they need to live fulfilled, balanced Torah lives.

Rabbi Shraga Simmons weighs in on a variety of innovative projects inspired by the legacy of Rabbi Noach Weinberg z”l that emergency times require emergency measures. Especially important is transforming laypeople into energized and educated mekarvim, and helping them begin community outreach centers. In particular, he showcases the web presence of Aish, which has enormous penetration in far-flung locales and traction with Jews who have near-zero interest in Judaism. Coupled with the wealth of upbeat and relevant Torah material on Aish.com, using videos and other web-based material can lead to meaningful change in a huge number of people. He provides the evidence that casting a wide digital net can lead to serious study and serious change, when coupled with programs like live chat with an Aish rabbi and providing study partners.

Rabbi Benzion Klatzko argues that kiruv should not need justification. It is not an item on a Jewish to-do list, so much as a natural outgrowth of living a proper Torah life. The diminishing returns we witness in outreach today are consequences of the same failings that promote alienation among FFBs. Kiruv, as well as the general state of Torah Judaism – would be in far better shape if we could reemphasize Torah as primarily a relationship with Hashem, and also reaffirm the sense of global mission that is the raison d’être of Klal Yisrael.

Rabbi Yitzchok Feldman takes a dim view of superficial outreach strategies that do not lead to true commitment. Efforts at preventing intermarriage, in particular, are ill-advised. Two Jewish spouses with no commitment to Judaism, even though they have avoided marrying out, are not any more likely to have children who will not marry out. Substantive kiruv must promote emunah in Hashem and his Torah, must allow for individual difference rather than one-size-fits-all presentations, and provide ample opportunity for significant time spent with mentors.

Rabbi Eli Gewirtz offers a mission objective for kiruv organizations: making an appreciable and lasting impact on the greatest number of people. This might mean, in many cases, moving away from casting wider nets for people to come through doors that may prove to be revolving. Appreciable and lasting impact requires a larger commitment to follow-up than most organizations can afford; this should be outsourced to a cadre of volunteers in the community.

TWO MEMBERS OF THE Klal Perspectives Editorial Board offer personal reactions to the issue, and to the state of kiruv. Jonathan Rosenblum speaks glowingly of how the movement enriched his own life, and continues to pump vitality into the communities around the world that he visits. He contrasts the kiruv of old with its present incarnation in terms of the availability of funding, textual resources, and personnel. Should some of the resources of our community be redirected at kiruv kerovim, as a perhaps higher priority? Rabbi Rosenblum argues that the two cannot be separated. A frum community that would turn more insular will have less reason to correct its faults; one less concerned with making itself attractive to outsiders will be less attractive to insiders. Most importantly, it would be a dereliction of duty to the concept of Knesses Yisrael.

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein is less forgiving about the inability of most contributors to provide hard data about their performance. He recounts his malaise after reading some of the pieces, which soon has him pondering the differences between kiruv two decades ago and today. He

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worries about who is doing the outreach, the pool of semi-affiliated Jews that has dried up, and the impact of negative imagery associated with the Orthodox community. What if kiruv professionals really can’t show why their productivity merits greater support than other priorities of the frum world? His equilibrium is restored, however, after reading the contributions of Rabbis Avraham Edelstein and Ilan Feldman, both of whom deliver for him the confidence in the effectiveness of contemporary kiruv, as well as a simple prescription for success.
a rosh yeshiva’s view

AN INTERVIEW WITH
HaRav Sholom Kamenetsky, shlita

Rabbi Sholom Kamenetsky is a Rosh Yeshiva in the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia, and is consulted regularly by many mekarvim and kiruv organizations for guidance in both halacha and hashkafa. He has lectured for years in both Lakewood and Baltimore to avreichim who are preparing for or considering careers in kiruv and/or rabbanus. His presentations and the follow-up question-and-answer sessions at the annual convention of the Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals (AJOP), have generated wide discussion.

Rabbi Kamenetsky generously agreed to speak to Klal Perspectives about the subject of this issue. Because of time limitations, the interview could not be comprehensive in scope and touched only on certain aspects of contemporary kiruv. The editors of Klal Perspectives nevertheless feel that Rabbi Kamenetsky’s insights are an important addition to the current issue.

RABBI KAMENETSKY BEGAN by quoting a general piece of advice from his father, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky, Rosh Yeshiva of the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia, for all those involved in kiruv, whether as funders, kiruv professionals, or interested lay people: “Always remember that you are not HaKadosh Baruch Hu’s apotropis (guardian).” He is responsible for the results, not you, and you have no right to bend Shulchan Aruch in the pursuit of “better results.”

At the same time, Rabbi Kamenetsky emphasized, no one should go into kiruv imagining that he will always be able to preserve “West Point standards” in the field. “We are not talking about doing anything in contravention of Shulchan Aruch,” he stressed, just the fact that any kiruv professional in the field will find himself engaged in many types of activities that he never imagined in himself doing in yeshiva or kollel.

Rabbi Kamenetsky expressed his strong opinion that every kiruv professional in the field, particularly those on isolated university campuses, needs to have a rav with whom he speaks at least once a week (he gives the same advice to Bais Yaakov graduates who take college or graduate school courses where some of the material presents hashkafic difficulties; they must have a rav with whom they can discuss the material, and who can help them navigate their program). Accepting the guidance of a rav is one aspect of what Rabbi Kamenetsky means by not making oneself into Hashem’s apotropis. In addition, the connection with a rav keeps the flame that kiruv workers take into the field connected to the fire of the beis medrash, represented by the rav.

It is quite natural that funders want to know that their tzedakah money is being well spent, and therefore look for concrete ways to measure the success of the programs they are supporting. The effort at quantification, however, can also lead to a numbers-driven approach to kiruv. In that case, much of the kiruv effort is determined by the need to meet the metrics of the donors, rather than by the individual needs of those with whom the kiruv professional is dealing. Anything that causes kiruv professionals to make decisions based on criteria other than the best interests of the Jews they are working with is, in Reb Sholom’s view, pasul.

The first requirement for measuring success is to identify the goal. Rabbi Kamenetsky remains convinced that the most powerful tool in the kiruv arsenal is genuine Torah taught by someone who has spent years immersed in Torah study, and has the communication skills and confidence to teach that Torah to individuals and groups. In addition, the mekarev must be someone who represents what it means to be shaped by the Torah. Rav Sholom mentions that his mother, in her work with college students, often gives them copies of the biography of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky to show them a level of human being with which they have never had any previous contact.
But even if the *mekarev* is a fitting representative of Torah and has much Torah to teach, that still does not guarantee results in any timeframe. The most the *mekarev* can do is to place Torah *al levavecha* (on a Jew’s heart). But whether it is absorbed or the heart hardens is beyond his control.

For Rabbi Kamenetsky, then, the collective kiruv goal is to ensure that as many Jews as possible have access to someone who is genuinely immersed in Torah and capable of conveying it. He illustrates with a moshol. An old galleon was found sunk off the coast of India. At first, plans were made to lift the ship from the ocean bottom, so that archaeologists could examine its contents. But it was determined that the galleon was in no condition to be raised; it would disintegrate in the process. So a decision was made to provide training in archeology to a group of divers, and have them go down to the sea bottom to examine the galleon’s contents. But then someone observed that it made far more sense to take professionally-trained archaeologists and teach them enough diving skills to safely examine the galleon and its contacts.

Similarly, rather than choosing people with ‘people’ skills and trying to teach them enough Torah to be effective, the ideal in kiruv is to provide *avreichim* with the supplementary skills necessary to effectively teach Torah to a kiruv audience.

Rabbi Kamenetsky made two other points with respect to measuring the success of kiruv professionals. The first is that we often see something like the story of the tortoise and the hare in kiruv, and any metric with a short time-span camera will miss that. He pointed to Rabbi Benji Jacoby of Toronto as one of the most successful college *mekarivim*. Rabbi Jacoby works almost exclusively one-to-one and in small classes, and not through large-scale programs. Yet over close to two decades he has produced a large number of serious, well-balanced ba’alei teshuva.

Secondly, a *baal teshuva* passes through a number of stages, from the initial piquing of interest to successful integration in the Torah community, often under the auspices of different institutions and individuals. Thus, it is impossible to attribute any *baal teshuva* to one *mekarev*. As an example, he cited the Chicago Torah Network, run by Rabbi Donnie Deutsch and Rabbi Moshe Katz. Only a part of their efforts are in front-line kiruv, with minimal involvement, for instance, on university campuses. Yet they are crucial to the healthy development of those who have shown that initial interest. Almost every *baal teshuva* in Chicago who successfully integrates into the Chicago community – or another community – passes through the Deutsch Shabbos table, and usually remains closely connected to the family for years. This vital step of helping *ba’alei teshuva* integrate into their new lives in a healthy fashion would seem virtually impossible to measure.
THE GLOBAL TESHUVA MOVEMENT CONTINUES

I. An Overview of the Current State of Outreach

REMARKABLE, YET TRUE: The global kiruv movement expanded far more rapidly in the last ten years than it did in the previous thirty. Thirteen years ago, as the director of Ner LeElef, a training program for outreach professionals, I was skeptical that ten openings in kiruv could be found for our first ten graduates. In fact, most of these graduates went on to create their own institutions. Today, Ner LeElef places at least seventy mekarvim annually, with at least 2,000 positions having been added to the global kiruv world during this period.

The system, of course, is self-perpetuating. Each wave of Ner LeElef placements generated program expansion, accompanied by new salaried positions. The primary challenge to an exponential increase in kiruv has not been a lack of money or ideas, but as Mr. Zev Wolfson always stressed, the challenge is a lack of high quality manpower. True leaders find their own money and meet challenges with their own solutions. In 2004, there were no more than ten non-Chabad mekarvim who defined themselves as full-time campus outreach people. Today, there are over 50 non-Chabad organizations servicing approximately 100 campuses, in addition to the 178 Chabad locations around the world. This campus growth is due primarily to an enormous investment in campus kiruv by three of the most prominent kiruv philanthropists – the Wolfson family, Mr. Elie Horn, of Sao Paulo Brazil and Mr. George Rohr of Manhattan. Applying a corporate approach to kiruv, the Horn-Wolfson partnership "sub-contracted" programming to dozens of organizations, establishing 50 projects on over 100 campuses in North America in a period of just four years.

Recent kiruv expansion, however, transcends the campus. Fully half of the twenty or so Chabad centers in greater Toronto are less than five years old. Atlanta has nine such Chabad centers, most of them new. Cities that were known as “kiruv cities” are now able to attract northeastern frum families in large numbers. About twenty such families joined Beth Jacob in Atlanta in the last year, alone. In Detroit, that number is double. The Young Israel of Houston enjoys a steady trickle of new such members. This trend actually constitutes a venahafoch hu (“flipping the script”), as baalei teshuva are the ones creating the infrastructure that then attract FFBs.

In start-up communities, the biggest hurdle has been establishing Jewish day schools, and particularly high schools. But struggle as they do, schools with authentic Torah-education now exist in Palo Alto, Dallas, Vancouver and most recently in Portland. In fact, Phoenix has added a new day school, a girls’ high school and a boys’ high school all in the last six years, and the Atlanta community offers a full range of Orthodox-school choices, with yet another on the way next year. In a sense, the American baal teshuva movement has triggered a minor reversal in the otherwise global trend of Jewry being increasingly concentrated in major cities. Almost all of British Jewry is concentrated in two cities, with almost 70% in London alone. 25% of all Jews in the former FSU reside in Moscow, and Paris hosts over 50% of French Jewry. America alone is experiencing growth in its smaller cities around the country.

Kiruv in America today spans the entire spectrum of ages with many different models. School-aged children are targeted by NCSY, JET, Oorah, Shalom Torah and other schools, collegiates are addressed by national organizations like Meor and Aish HaTorah, regional efforts like JAM of southern California, and numerous local projects. Young adults are targeted by outreach communities and community kollels. Specialized kiruv organizations have been introduced for Russians, such as RAJE in Brighton Beach and Philadelphia among others, for Bucharim (Emet in Queens), for Persians, for Sephardim and for Israelis. Almost every Chabad Synagogue today is an outreach center. Each

Rabbi Avraham Edelstein is the Director of Ner LeElef.
dimension of the kiruv maze enjoys interlinking components, to one degree or another.

Mekarvim can use prepared class materials, such as the Morasha syllabus online, or they can offer NJOP’s crash course in Hebrew reading. Students can be serviced on campus, sent to retreats like Sinai and Heritage Retreats, go on Morasha Israel trips or Peri or Pathways or J-Internships or Fellowships or JLE; they can take New York metro trips – exploring the city’s cultural AND spiritual offerings through Shor Yoshuv, Ohr Someach Monsey, Gateways or Aish HaTorah. Or, they can take kiruv trips to Poland or Chile or even safaris to South Africa. They can find abundant Torah classes on the web and they can arrange a telephone chavrusa (study partner) through Partners in Torah. They can move on to study in kiruv yeshivos in the United States or Israel. Increasingly, some of these explorations can even be funded by the State of Israel, thanks to the far-reaching innovation of some of our key visionaries.

All of this is input. What about the output? Is all this growth and investment in kiruv efforts producing results? How can measure the success of these efforts, and how do we know they are really effective?

II. How Are Kiruv Efforts Evaluated? Are They Successful?

No one has yet to crack the code of how to measure success. There are certainly numerous alternative approaches to consider, ranging from the “saving one life is enough” approach, to the goal of reducing intermarriage, to counting the number of people who start keeping Shabbos and kashrus, or other milestones of mitzvah observance along the way. Some of the more sophisticated kiruv enterprises employ charts and graphs, and assess the cost-per-student...

Alas, thousands of hours of trying to get a grip on these measurements have left me more confused than ever. Moreover, despite repeated explorations for guidance throughout the years, I have found no consensus among the many significant rabbanim with whom I’ve consulted. Rav Elyashiv, zatzal, was in favor of focusing on drawing greater numbers of those furthest away, while, רבנים שונים, Rav Moshe Shapiro has come out strongly in favor of working with the smaller numbers of nascent baalei teshuva and leading them through greater stages of growth. Rav Yaakov Weinberg, zatzal, told me at one time to focus on one of the influential Ashkenazi elite of Israeli society ahead of 100 individuals, while his brother, Rav Noach, zatzal, focused his efforts on as broad a sweep as possible. Rav Yaakov Rosenberg, zatzal, held strongly that if a subject of outreach efforts didn’t “go all the way,” then the entire kiruv effort was wasted (in his words, "You have accomplished nothing"), while the Roshei Yeshiva of Ohr Someach have clearly employed a more nuanced approach.

Even when specific criteria of success are chosen, results are often simply not trackable. For example, some posit that the success of a campus effort should be measured by the number of students who establish a frum Jewish home or send their children to an Orthodox Jewish day school. In North America, however, the average marriage age is almost 29 for men and almost 27 for women. Typically, their first child will be born 4 years later and will begin school five years after that. It is, therefore, about 17 years after leaving campus that a student’s success can be measured using this criteria – certainly way beyond the practical measuring period!

As an alternative, some advocate that campus kiruv should be measured by students becoming observant. The measurement is applied annually because funding is renewed every year. But a student typically becomes frum over a three to four year period and thus annual calculations significantly distort the results. Moreover, even if these results would be calculated on a three or four year cycle, the results would then be dated and no longer reflective of the productivity of the then-current program and structure (campus programming does not tend to remain static over time). One must, therefore, balance the accuracy of the analysis with its utility.

When focusing on kiruv results, it must be clear that such results may provide little reflection on how a mekarev ought to evaluate himself. There is, after all, an enormous distinction between one assessing one’s own performance in actualizing a project’s strategy and approach and the validity of continuing to pursue such an approach. The focus on results is most valuable for those heading or funding kiruv institutions, since they should use the results as guides for future strategy. By contrast, it is important that the individual engaged in kiruv view his or her efforts purely as a form of avodas Hashem, and, as such, the mekarev’s success must be measured against himself and himself only.
The *mekarev*, of course, must set the highest standards for himself. For inspiration and guidance he should draw on those who have been successful, and try to establish best practices. But a myriad of factors will influence any individual’s success, including local conditions, funding levels and family issues, each of which will inevitably affect both the vision and the results (be they above or below “the market” standard). I note this critical point not to justify low productivity. In fact, I have often encouraged less successful *mekarvim* to move on to an alternative dimension of outreach, and sometimes to get out of kiruv altogether. But I have done so on the basis of individualized advice and not solely based upon some chart or pivot table reflecting results.

Notwithstanding all these obstacles to effectively measuring success in kiruv, like all serious investments, kiruv must be measured based on results. And so, here is my current thinking on the matter, as applied to campus and community-based kiruv, the areas with which I have been most directly involved professionally.

Outreach to small and mid-sized communities typically evolves through various significant stages. Initially, virtually all the community’s needs must be imported, including ideas, money and manpower. As a community advances through the initial stages, it starts to become self-sustaining, generating its own funding and ideas, with community members taking responsibility for identifying and filling communal needs. It begins to insure its own growth, both quantitatively and qualitatively. As religious growth continues, the community begins to approach the threshold of becoming a true Torah community. Examples of cities that have crossed this threshold include Johannesburg, Atlanta, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo and Paris. Cities nearing this threshold include greater Miami, Phoenix and Dallas, and not too far behind are Houston, Detroit and many others (a different dynamic is needed to explain the Torah-emergence of larger cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago and Toronto, as well as the New York dormitory towns).

The evolution of a city into a Torah community may be viewed as a kiruv success but, alas, this process typically does little to alter the massive intermarriage that otherwise continues apace. Viewed in this broader context, the nagging question remains: Can such an effort truly be considered a success?

The key to evaluating the success of kiruv must begin with determining whether halting intermarriage trends is truly kiruv’s objective. There is a strong argument to be made that eliminating community-wide intermarriage is simply not the true objective of kiruv. Kiruv is rather the effort to afford as many Jews as possible a connection to their spiritual and national heritage and the issue is then how to measure and evaluate growth in Torah and mitzvos.

In fact, I have a confession to make. While I know of many programs and organizations that prevent an individual intermarriage here and there – and some that prevent maybe even hundreds – I have never seen a realistic plan that would actually reverse the American intermarriage rate. And since altering the tide of the community’s intermarriage rate is not our ultimate goal, preventing individual intermarriages, without attendant spiritual meaning and growth, seems to be a hollow goal, as well. After all, without altering the overall assimilation trend, convincing a Jew not to intermarry will do little to prevent the intermarriage of the next generation, unless that Jew has also assumed a far more intense relationship to Judaism.

For this reason, much of kiruv, and campus kiruv in particular, is all about the individual student. Since campus kiruv is transient by its very nature, as students come and go, elevating a campus community may be valuable, but it cannot really be a goal. With at most four years to work with any individual student, the campus kiruv worker necessarily assumes a mindset of the quick turnover. In running the Horn-Wolfson funded North American campus projects, Rabbi Menachem Deutsch established the annual goal per *mekarev* of seven new students either becoming frum or attending Yeshiva for six months or longer. While assigning stark numbers to Jewish *neshamas* may be extremely distasteful to many, there is little alternative if the goals are to maximize impact and efficiency.

Notwithstanding these observations regarding community building and campus efforts, numerous other dimensions of kiruv raise yet-unanswered questions regarding measuring success.

For example:

- Should resources be allocated to those demographics more likely to become religious? For example, efforts to be *mekarev* Bucharian Jews have proven more successful than those geared towards...
Russians. Should resources be allocated accordingly, or should the success of each respective effort simply be measured differently?

- Should the goal be mitzvah observance or Jewish literacy? Should our responsibility be to urge observance, or simply to expose Jews to authentic Jewish learning coupled with some Shabbos and Yom Tov experiences, and empower them to make their own decisions? After all, we don't 'mekarev' anyone by our efforts alone. We can merely facilitate.

- In general, should the kiruv net be cast more widely and shallowly, or more narrowly and intensely?

- Should kiruv resources be reserved for those who have not yet become frum, allowing us to stay true to our core mission of engaging others who remain distant, while others step in to service the needs of our baalei teshuva? Or, should the ongoing growth, adjustment and integration of baalei teshuva be considered part and parcel of what kiruv is all about?

- Is the “ripple effect” of students’ future achievements a legitimate criterion in judging success? For example, should the fact that a significant proportion of one program’s graduates reaches leadership positions in the broader society be a factor in evaluating success? We tend to be cavalier in exploring the balancing of quantity (number of people) versus quality (depth of commitment) – are we also prepared to measure quality in terms of personality, wealth, educational level and potential influence on others?

- Within a single spectrum of outreach programming, is it appropriate for each organization to select the criteria by which it chooses to define success?

Solid answers to each of these questions are elusive, as they all tend to require a balance that is delicate and that tends to shift over time. But each is no doubt deserving of further serious attention.

III. Has kiruv in America runs its course due to the combination of (a) decades of assimilation that has diminished the number of accessible, non-observant Jews who are halachically Jewish, and (b) the rapidly diminishing sense of Jewish identity among younger, secular Jews?

There are many pessimists who suggest that the opportunity for American kiruv is rapidly dwindling. They cite decades of American intermarriage and the decreased familiarity of Jews with Torah and Jewish values and tradition (including the decline of Conservative Judaism, discussed below). But, though perhaps it is counter-intuitive, as I evidence elsewhere in this article the numbers of those interested in Judaism have been growing not decreasing. The average community mekarev is showing around three to five baalei teshuva a year, while the average campus rabbi is achieving five to six. And there has been a much larger number coming to learn on a weekly basis and making progress in their mitzvah observance. With the total numbers of mekarvim exponentially greater than it was twenty years ago, the cumulative efforts are highly significant.

Some have observed that English-speaking baal teshuva yeshivas are struggling with enrollment. However, this does not reflect decreased kiruv success – it simply reflects a different model of achieving success. For example, data reveal that 530 previously non-observant students became frum on North American campuses in the 2010-2011 academic year alone, and that figure rose nominally to 552 in 2011-2012. These are significant increases over previous years and previous decades. Moreover, there are entire new communities of baalei teshuva that have only recently mushroomed – in places like Tucson, Arizona and for sub-groups such as Bucharim in Queens, NY. This encouraging trend requires an understanding of the true roots of the Baal Teshuva Movement.

Contrary to the simplistic view of many, the movement was not simply a function of sociological phenomena, such as the shirayim (leftovers) of the Sixties’ generation looking for meaning (America), or the miracles of the Six Day War (Israel), or the arrival of a special kollel (South Africa), etc., etc.

According to Rav Yitzchak Hutner, zatzal (as told to Rav Moshe Shirkin, shlita, who reported this to me) the kiruv movement rather began as part of G-d’s guiding hand in history as we entered a pre-Messianic age. The elaborate teshuva prophesied for the Messianic era was beginning early, the influence flowing “backwards,” as it were, from the powerful inspiration of that anticipated age.

That the baal teshuva movement must be attributed to G-d’s guiding hand alone is evidenced by the fact that it began in multiple countries more or less simultaneously, without any human coordination – with
most initiatives not even knowing of the others’ existence. Just as remarkable, although there were noble efforts at kiruv prior to this time, those early initiatives bore comparatively little fruit (I expect loud protests reminding me of Young Israel, Torah U’Mesorah and maybe even Torah Vodaas). For example, the same Rav Nachman Bulman, zatzal, who had many hundreds of BTs as his students by the time of his death in 2002, hardly made a dent before the time was ripe. In fact, after the advent of the BT movement, even those with relatively mediocre tools were able to realize significant achievements².

There has always been a Torah requirement that we do a national teshuva,³ which is not the same as simply each individual in the nation doing teshuva. National teshuva was destined to be the central phenomenon of the Messianic era - (the People of Israel will be redeemed only through teshuva).⁴ And while the Nesivos Shalom⁵ suggests that the teshuva of our generation draws from the past (specifically, the holiness generated by the experience of the Holocaust), this is no contradiction to the consensus of gedolim that it is a pre-Messianic phenomenon.⁶ In other words, Messianic kedusha (holiness) begins to “peep from the cracks” (Songs of Songs 2:9) – in the generation of Gedaliah, (pre-Messianic era), when a teshuva movement becomes one of the defining phenomena of the age.

In Messianic times, not only do all Jews do teshuva, but we will be led by a descendant of that most illustrious of baalei teshuva, Yehudah. It is so destined, for Mashiach must be a composite of every fragment of kedusha in the world.

Predicting Jewish demographic trends is a risky business at best, especially since it is totally incapable of predicting the future of a meta-historical process like the baal teshuva movement. Social scientists simply lack the tools to anticipate G-d’s Divine plan to envelope history into one grand portrait (revelation of His Oneness). The Baal Teshuva Movement cannot be explained as merely another religious awakening, subject to the ebb and flow of trends and social influences. We will not find ourselves running dry, with the next generation of Jews simply too distant to be brought closer, chas ve’shalom (G-d forbid). On the contrary, kiruv will gather steam right into the Messianic era, when all Jews will do teshuva. We are but seeing individual examples, in whatever numbers, of what will become an across-the-board national phenomenon at a later stage.

² While it is true that there was a general search for spirituality at that time, the dominant trend was away from organized frameworks and rule-orientated religions. American church attendance rose steadily from the Depression until it peaked in 1960 at 69%. By 1970, as the Baal Teshuva Movement was first gaining strength, church attendance had dropped to 63.4% - and it kept dropping (Roy E. Eckhardt, quoted in Paul Johnson, A History of the American People, p. 839). Thus, the Baal Teshuva Movement was operating against the sociological trends, not because of them!

³ See Devarim 30:2 (The Ramban learns that the pasuk tells us that there is mitzvah to do teshuva. Rav Aaron Soleveichik (Rav Aaron Soleveichik (2:9) – in the generation of Gedaliah, (pre-Messianic era), when a teshuva movement becomes one of the defining phenomena of the age.

³ See Devarim 30:2 (The Ramban learns that the pasuk tells us that there is mitzvah to do teshuva. Rav Aaron Soleveichik : ....

⁴ Rambam, Laws of Teshuva 7:5
⁵ See the end of his introduction to Sefer HaMidos.
⁶ As Rav Hutner explained it, it is the overflowing into our generation of the teshuva that we will all do in the Messianic era:

Tanach is replete with examples of the nation as a whole being exhorted to do teshuva. And, of course, all commentators understand that we will all do teshuva in the Messianic era:
IV. What are the New Frontiers in Outreach that May Yet be Explored?

At the outset of this article I described the enormous growth of the kiruv effort, and the many projects and resources now available. But there is yet a vast range of unmet needs that will drive further expansion. We need to tap into the potential of female mekarvim and to capture funding from the growing wealth in the hands of successful women. We are missing out, in the main, on the benefit from the professionalism and insight that can be provided by the many successful Orthodox professionals, including lessons in setting targets, developing business plans and analyzing staff dynamics and productivity. We lack endowments, as we do centralize resources to facilitate greater success in realizing grants from the increased funding available from large private foundations.

We ought to be engaging the kiruv opportunities provided by charter schools. We need to explore more combinations of yeshiva study with degree options. We have to keep exploring that (imaginary?) pot of programmatic gold at the end of the rainbow - the Internet. We have to regroup to learn more interactive styles of teaching, and to understand that the mekarev's blog is not just a weekly essay, but something which weaves in the live interactions and pedagogy of the week.

How far does this go? Do we maintain authenticity when we ask the mekarev to become an interesting personality that students will want to follow on twitter? Can he do all of that while maintaining a real connection to his own ruchnius (spirituality)? Those who teach must also realize their own potential.

Our professional salary scales are designed to choke any growing family into despair and submission. We will have to take the difficult plunge of realigning salaries with current costs of living.

Yet, even if these various needs would be met, they would merely provide incremental improvements to an already successful effort. I would like to suggest several factors that could lead kiruv to an entirely new league:

Operations of Scale: The mindset of the kiruv movement has been incremental and modest. As noted above, no one has ever posited a credible proposal to battle widespread assimilation, and there have been few efforts to realistically introduce kiruv on a massive scale. The budgets of even the largest kiruv organizations are only mid-sized when compared to secular Jewish organizations like the Federations, the JDC, Hadassah Women, Federations of Jewish Philanthropy, AIPAC and the Jewish Agency. And not only is there modesty in size, but also in creativity and innovation. We think of ourselves as cutting edge, but Limud, Moishie Houses and Birthright surely rank as recent initiatives that put us to shame. We have no equivalent of the Jewish Funder's Network, Hadassah Women, AIPAC or Bnei Brith, nor have we broken into the mainstream of the United Synagogues of England or the Consistoire of France. We are dominated by medium-minded parochials, fretting about intermarriage, but failing to mobilize the necessary resources and ingenuity.

The kiruv community has shown signs, however, of contemplating increased scale. When the initial, historic Lakewood kollels were introduced (in Toronto, Los Angeles and Chicago among other cities), the incubation period was five years. That has not changed. But, by comparison to earlier periods, fourteen new outreach kollels were introduced globally in 2004-2005, alone. Last year, the Morasha students and affiliate organizations had 30,000 continuous students in its global network. By contrast, merely ten years ago, I (and likely any serious mekarev) would have declined funding for an effort seeking to identify and activate so many students. We would not have believed ourselves capable of achieving such a goal – and we would have been correct. But G-d is capable of – and apparently willing to do – much more than we expect. Rav Tzadok Hacohen says that the teaching that דמשיחא בעקבתא יסגי חוצפא (in pre-Messianic times, there will be great chutzpah) applies also to דקדושה חוצפא (“holy chutzpah”) as well. We of the kiruv world may be small people, relative to the greats of our generation, but we are given permission to have the chutzpah to do great things.

The grandeur of what kiruv can be is not limited by the absence of resources, but only by the movement’s failure to access the massive resources that already exist in the philanthropic community. Such philanthropists, however, tend to be uninterested in anything less than truly inspiring, global initiatives, and the kiruv world has yet to step up to the plate.
Consider: The first 40 multi-billionaires to sign on to Bill and Melinda Gates' and Warren Buffet's pledge to give at least half of their wealth to charity represented $17 billion in new Jewish money. In the two years since it was launched, the pledge has recruited 92 billionaires including the likes of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Only 2 of the 14 initial donors identifiably Jewish had special Jewish sections of their foundations. Kiruv is not limited by resources, but rather by the absence of a mindset necessary to reach them.

**Great Leaders:** Many of the larger kiruv organizations, led by outstanding and visionary people, find it challenging to locate the right manpower for their senior management positions. They lack organizational depth - sufficient high level middle management, such as the COO types who could blow projects out, taking them national or global to the benefit of all. The economic downturn produced dozens of high level Bnei Torah who found themselves unemployed, sometimes from major corporate positions. Kiruv was not an option for most of them because it did not provide people of this ilk the tools to get started at the high level they were used to from their professional lives.

What we would need for these is: (a) A venture capital fund, (b) Mentoring by leading, experienced mekarvim who will expose them to a graduated measure of opportunities and (c) Fundraising consultants.

Notwithstanding the visionaries who created the primary kiruv organizations and some great Roshei Yeshiva who invested enormously, the kiruv movement lacks visionaries sufficiently inspiring to articulate a vision that will get us to transcend individual institutional considerations. Great leaders make great things happen. While many Roshei Kollel and others have admirably assumed broader responsibility for the Jewish growth of their cities, there is now a need for a national if not an international vision.

**Leadership for Mainstream Organizations:** To date, the kiruv movement has thrived on being external to the broader organized Jewish world. In the main, it has given up on tapping into the significant resources and legitimacy of this (often unsympathetic) world, often leaving kiruv with a stigma of being sectarian and parochial. This approach was fully justified. But the time may have arrived to not only engage this broader community, but to actually serve as its leadership.

Many major American organizations have either a current professional vacuum or have no succession plan. The American Jewish Committee (AJC), the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations (Presidents Conference) are currently headed by talented professionals, all of whom have reached or are approaching retirement. As reflected in the difficulties that confronted International Hillel and United Jewish Communities (national Federation) in finding a leading professional, there is much talk about the shallow pool of candidates for top jobs in Jewish organizations. And while most of these organizations have a sign that says, "Chareidim may not apply," the kiruv movements have produced talented *baalei teshuva* of all stripes, many of whom would be ideal candidates. In particular, these organizations are open, in theory, to the advancement of women, who occupy too few of the top jobs.

The career life span of a campus mekarev is typically 5 to 10 years, and few subsequent kiruv jobs will even match their salary. Perhaps the most qualified members of this cohort would be well positioned to move on to leadership jobs such as these. We ought to be nurturing the leadership that would allow inspired examples of Orthodoxy to begin to take responsibility for the greater Jewish world through these broad-based institutions. This will require some change in our mentality. But it would also lead to a Kiddush HaShem, to exposure by secular Jewish leaders to inspiring examples of Orthodoxy, to access to increased funding, and to a whole new range of opportunities.

**The Conservative Movement:** Strong anecdotal evidence indicates that most *baalei teshuva* grew up within the Conservative Movement. This movement is plunging. It went from 43 percent of affiliated Jewish households in 1990 to 33 percent in 2000. It has gone from 693 congregations in 2001 to 652 in 2010 losing about 15 percent of its members (from 241,300 families to 204,200). In the Northeast, the drop is 30 percent!

Traditionally, Conservative Jews who belong to a congregation were much more highly engaged than those who do not. But that might be changing. As the Conservative movement continues its downward spiral in its race to be ever more accommodating to contemporary trends, there is an increasing number of Jews who leave the movement because of its failure to provide substantive meaning and spiritual fulfillment.
We will have to create new models to attract those disaffected by the Conservative Movement’s failures and to identify the loci of concentrations in which they are residing. The dominant trend is for these Jews to reject any formal framework, and to embrace non-affiliated and self-run groups in their stead. Kiruv must accommodate this need. The open and welcoming attitude of Chabad to all comers makes Chabad a natural refuge for many of these Jews. The balance of the kiruv world also needs an urgent mobilization of resources to address the needs of those from the Conservative movement who continue to have a strong Jewish identity and will not be satisfied with weaker alternatives. If there would be a wave of family-orientated start-up communities that were informal and non-judgmental and that were not part of a formal network, it is possible that we could access a substantial portion of this disaffected population.

**Professional Development:** While we ought to recognize the kiruv movement’s great successes, we also need to focus on closing the gap between performing adequately and living up to a standard of excellence. We respond to the urgency and enormity of our task with dedication and brawn but not always with sophistication, depth and strategic planning. We are constrained by time, professional training resources, and the natural turn-over of staff. Whereas the Westbury Group, for example (a group of philanthropies that give to European Jewry), provides capacity-building specifically for start-up organizations in Europe targeting one region at a time, and the JDC’s LeAtid organization out of France has a dedicated staff of differentiated specialists, the kiruv world is still dominated by amateurs advising amateurs. We have good student training programs, and we have some excellent field people doing house-calls across America. We have ever more polished conferences with a smorgasbord of various pickings, and AJOP (and previously AFIKIM) provides one day training seminars on management, fundraising and other professional needs. However, kiruv has little sustained professional training and mentoring in specialized areas. Should such resources be introduced, professionals would more likely remain energized and engaged, as well be far more prepared to fulfill their missions. We ought to be developing some super-specialists within our own ranks and send them on a circuit to train people on site. We don't just need this help in fundraising, but in how to structure our organizations, how to create the right social environments, how to balance first- with second-phase learning, how to deal with *shalom bayis*, and more.

**V. Do We Lack Coordination?**

The Baal Teshuva Movement has a decent track record of attempted coordination but it is woefully inadequate in certain areas. While technologies such as social networks are being introduced to recruit new students, such technology is not being utilized to effect strong coordination among kiruv efforts. Hence we are weak at handing off our students to other organizations that address differing needs and stages. Shabbat.com further depleted our supply excuses by showing how easily a national data-base and referral site can be set up, especially when the students themselves become motivated to continue their Jewish exploration.

We have mentioned above that we can only access some of the mega-funding with global visions. No one organization is in a position to submit a proposal that is sufficiently comprehensive to inspire these givers. At one stage, the kollels were organizing themselves into a broader umbrella body (just as Rabbi Shlomo Noach Mandel organized schools in the FSU under the rubric of Shema Yisroel), though difficulties arose in sustaining it. Such thinking is good, but it is too tentative and too parochial (e.g., the focus only on kollels) to make the kind of breakthroughs that are required. There is no reason why a group of highly motivated people (*mekarvim*) that number in the several hundreds cannot become a very powerful body with respect not only to funding, but to all kinds of policy issues, as well as acting as instruments of change within the Orthodox community. We have yet to find our voice beyond our own circle.

Lastly, our efforts are not necessarily reflecting today’s Jewish demographic distribution. We are struck by the "exotic factor" of doing one project in each new city, but we lack any sense of proportion of projects per percentage of the Jewish population. We don't yet have a single outreach kollel in Manhattan, yet were we to make a proportionate number of outreach kollels in Manhattan based on the populations where we now have such things, we would need one at least every ten blocks! The San Fernando Valley of LA has about 200,000 Jews, just as San Francisco does. In both, kiruv is far and few between. Southern Florida
has two counties with Jewish populations of 300,000 and one with 200,000, and yet there are only sparse projects throughout these areas. New York has a sixth of the Jewish population but it certainly does not have a sixth of the money going into kiruv.

KIRUV IS THE COMMUNICATION of timeless Torah through contemporary vessels and idioms. As such, the kiruv movement is always in a certain state of transition. We are dealing with a moving target, a rapidly changing generation, and almost daily technological innovations. Woe betides the kiruv organization that thinks that it has found "the formula." Today's successes are tomorrow's failures. Methodologies, goals and targeted age-groups need to be constantly reassessed and often reformulated. The kiruv world by its very nature is engaged in transformation. For us, creative breakthroughs are a part of our basic *avodas Hashem*. Given the enormous implications of this movement in world history, I remain with boundless optimism that we will make the breakthroughs that are necessary to take us to the next level and beyond.

**WHY THE GIANT SLEEPS**

*To Take a Stand* — to express a principle in an uncompromising way; to possess and articulate a vision and a potential that few others see; to be unwavering in commitment to a value.

*To Sell Out* — to abandon a principle or value in favor of prevailing circumstances; to allow immediate conditions to obscure a principled vision; to accommodate a challenge to one's principles in the name of short term convenience.

**WHEN AVRAHAM AVINU TOOK A STAND** for the existence of HKB”H, it was coupled with a profound faith in human beings as reflections of the Divine. Avraham Avinu’s stand was not only for the existence of G-d; it was also an affirmation of humanity’s design and potential to reflect G-d, of its *tzelem Elokim*. He fulfilled his declared mission by developing his potential as a reflection of G-d’s character; his chesed was a manifestation of the human capacity to imitate G-d. His famed *hachnasas orchim* (welcoming of guests), for example, wasn’t a personality trait or a tactic to influence others — it was his affirmation of the greatness of people. He related to wandering idol worshippers as if they were emissaries from G-d because that is what he saw in them. He would not allow their behavior, despite its utter rejection of cardinal truth, to cause him to compromise that stand. It wasn’t blinding love that

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Rabbi Ilan Feldman is the Rabbi of Beth Jacob in Atlanta.
led him to serve guests; it was clarity of vision, which allowed him to see beyond the superficial into their essence. Through his life, an uncompromising affirmation of G-d’s existence, and, thereby, humanity’s greatness, emerges.

Having suffered through 2,000 years of bitter exile, much of our Orthodox community no longer embraces this view of man. We stand for G-d and serve Him dutifully, but we have sold out on the view of man that was the keystone of Avraham Avinu, replacing it with suspicion, cynicism, and judgment (imagine an Orthodox community today begging G-d not to destroy an evil city). This sell out, or abandonment of principle, is at the source of the “sleeping giant” phenomenon, in which our thriving observant communities, larger and more vibrant than ever, are largely ineffective as magnets in our effort to bring the majority of the Jewish family back to observance. And it is the reason we live in dread of losing more of the precious children raised in our own homes. There is hope for us to turn the tide in both these areas, but only if our communities embrace the stand our forefathers took for the Divine nature of man and adopt practices consistent with that view. When we do, our communities will be magnets of spirituality, and outreach will become a natural outgrowth of our way of life.

The State of Outreach Today

I suspect my shul and rabbinate are typical of the state of affairs in outreach to the unaffiliated in 2012. Fifteen years ago a majority of our annual crop of new members came from the ranks of baalei teshuva, many of whose first point of contact was the outreach arm of our community, the Atlanta Scholars Kollel (ASK). Today, our new members are predominantly religious families and young couples, moving to an Orthodox community that is attractive because it offers all the amenities of Orthodox life and a sense of real community, as well as baalei teshuva who made their commitment to be frum in Israel and are now looking for a comfortable and religiously nurturing place to live. Most of the successful outreach activity that continues to occur in our community consists of efforts on the part of hired professionals focused on campus outreach. Our Adult Beginners Service still attracts people, but more and more they are gentiles interested in conversion, and less and less non-observant adults exploring Orthodoxy. As our inner, observant core becomes stronger, larger, and more defined, our synagogue community, whose motto is “The Orthodox Synagogue for All Jews,” has become its own obstacle to outreach, as the recognizable mass of observant Jews that greets a newcomer is daunting. Rarely do I greet a non-observant family exploring our shul, and it has been suggested that our motto has become antiquated. While I do spend time with baalei teshuva dealing with issues typical of that population, a majority of my time is spent presenting classes and forums designed to inform and inspire the already frum, or providing counsel in crises that affect frum families: shalom bayis issues, child raising problems, kids at risk, financial issues, etc.

The heady outreach days of the 1980’s and 1990’s, when it seemed that every outreach organization could point to its own poster children, and when even sophisticated professionals and well-established citizens were becoming Shabbos observant, have faded. With the emergence of the “teens at risk” phenomenon and other challenges to the comfort of a frum lifestyle, the claim we all believed 15 or 20 years ago — that being frum was not only a fulfillment of G-d’s will but would also provide peace, meaning, and safety for one’s family — rings hollow, and is no longer an authentic representation to non-observant people. Moreover, while beginners’ services and Shabbos dinners — relationship building forums — were the tools of outreach back then, tweeting college kids seems to be the active frontier today.

To be sure, the more confident Orthodoxy is the more likely it is going to be interested in sharing with others its values and, indeed, its love of G-d and Torah. Alas, the corollary is also true. When Orthodoxy feels it is fighting for survival, beset by internal social, economic and spiritual problems, it will begin to see the unaffiliated as important but distant cousins who cannot now be invited to the “Shabbos table,” at least not while the parents or the kids, or both, are still working out their own problems. In such a climate, questions about the viability of outreach to the unaffiliated, about efficiency and return on investment of tzedaka dollars are inevitable. And certainly, when the observant and committed community suffers from a plethora of financial and spiritual issues, questions of priority become even more urgent.
A Failed Paradigm

I fear, however, that we are trapped in a paradigm that was doomed from the start, even before more recent, sobering realities set in. The paradigm is the result of a fundamental breakdown in the Orthodox community’s definition of itself as a community. In brief, it is the Orthodox community’s view of itself primarily as an observant community, not as a model community, that explains the synchronicity of two trends: the painfully small number of returnees despite significant efforts, and the phenomenon in which there is no Orthodox household, from Bnai Brak to Lakewood, that does not live in dread of a family member losing his or her commitment to Torah life.

I experienced our lost potential years ago when I joined a Federation/UJA mission to Israel in 1988. In the midst of the “Who Is A Jew” controversy in the late 1980’s, and the deep feelings triggered on both sides of the debate, a strong sense of alienation emerged between Atlanta’s small Orthodox community and the non-Orthodox establishment. It was suggested that it would be worthwhile for me, as the assistant rabbi of Atlanta’s largest Orthodox shul, to participate in the Jewish Federation’s annual mission to Israel. Many members of Federation’s leadership were going to be on the trip, and my goal would be to put a human face on Orthodoxy and reduce tensions between our worlds.

I participated in the Federation trip with a specific strategy. I knew that the trip was planned, and would be executed, without religious sensitivities in mind, and was thus well aware that there would be restaurants in which I could not dine, Shabbos programs that would make me uncomfortable and tour guides whose concept of Jewish history began in 1948. I decided that I would raise no objections, so as not reinforce any negative stereotypes of Orthodox coercion. As a yeshiva graduate who had left kollel only a few years before, restraining from making pronouncements or judgments required significant self control. When shehechiyanu was recited instead of rending garments at the sighting of the Temple Mount, I said nothing. When they offered those who were interested to tour Masada on Shabbos as an alternative to going to shul, I made no comment. When the guide who introduced Mount Carmel dismissed the famous episode of Elijah’s clash with the Baal worshipers as merely a fable I engaged in no debate. Even when a guide described a mikvah as an ancient ritual bath that used to be visited by Biblical Jews thousands of years ago, I waited hours before saying anything. I spent ten days sitting on a bus kibitzing with people who were resentful of Orthodox Jews while my every Orthodox sensibility was powerful, though unintentionally, challenged. I had only one goal – to establish relationships with my tour mates.

By all accounts, I was wildly successful in my mission. By the end of the trip, people were insisting that I address them in group sessions, asking me halachic questions, directing the bus driver to restaurants in which I could eat. To this day, my relationship with many opinion makers in Atlanta remains influenced by that trip, and some have even made major contributions to the growth of Orthodox institutions due to the relationships we forged.

But the one who was most transformed on that trip was me.

What I expected to encounter was a group of 200 Jews devoid of feelings for Israel or religion. What I discovered instead were 200 very religious, spiritual, passionately devoted, proud Jews who knew very little about Torah and who lacked a Jewish vocabulary, but who loved their Jewish brethren in Israel, respected holiness and possessed a passion for Judaism as they knew it that rivaled the passion I had seen in my frum friends. In short, I learned to respect them. And I learned that “secular” Jews are often very religious Jews who do not know ritual, and whose devotion and willingness to sacrifice for the Judaism they do know is inspiring. By the time we parted ways, I actually loved them. Once I made this discovery, I was both surprised and embarrassed that it was new to me.

As is so often the case, a perspective can only be properly re-examined when observed from the outside.

When I joined the Federation trip, I was an Orthodox Jew hoping to survive 10 days in Israel with non-observant Jews, and they were going to survive having me around. At the conclusion of the trip, I was an Orthodox Jew profoundly aware of the souls of my Jewish brothers and sisters, looking beyond their ignorance, appreciating their goodness and sensing their thirst for connection to the Divine. To them, I had become a knowledgeable Jew they wanted to be close to.

What happened on that trip — and many have experienced this — can happen in the millions, but only inside a paradigm that does not prevail today. It is the paradigm of purposeful kiddush Hashem.
Why is Outreach So Difficult?

To illustrate my thesis, allow me this question, and allow me my naiveté: Why is outreach so hard? Why isn’t outreach succeeding wildly in 2012 in comparison to say, twenty-five years ago? There are more Jews observing Torah now, there is more kosher food available now, there are more schools teaching Torah now, there is Artscroll Mishna, Siddur, Chumash, Talmud, “How to Do Everything” now. In fact, there are more Jews on the streets walking home from shul on Shabbos now, more observant professionals — doctors, lawyers, accountants, stockbrokers, businessmen — now, there is an internet filled with Torah discussions and classes and websites now and there are adult education programs everywhere now. Cultural diversity is more accepted now. Indeed, there are more baalei teshuva now – who are each networked to family members who are not frum. Moreover, all this developed while people were critically examining the false gods of materialism and fame, seeking alternative expressions of spirituality. The Torah is truth, its paths are sweet and all its ways are peace. Do people avoid peace, sweetness and truth? Shouldn’t Torah living have sold itself by now? We built it, but they did not come.

A different version of the same question: the greatest outreach opportunity in the history of the Jewish people took place in Eretz Yisrael in the last half of the 20th century. One million passionately Orthodox Jews were enclosed in a territory a bit larger than the State of Delaware with 4 million ignorant Jews – who already knew Hebrew! Imagine the possibilities. Why have the 4 million not been attracted to the 1 million, to put it mildly?

Sadly, there is an open secret known to those who practice outreach: to effectively inspire people to become observant, the effort must be done in isolation from the established Orthodox community. Kiruv needs its own environment, as in retreats or hotel Shabbatons, but don’t bring your recruits into the established Orthodox community. While there are many wonderful and devoted members of the frum community who are quite effective in connecting to possible returnees, frum communities as cultures are simply not conducive to outreach.

The reason for this is not that our communities fail to exemplify devotion and passion, or even inspired living. Our communities, as communities, just don’t exemplify responsibility. They may exemplify commitment, but it stops there.

This is what I mean in distinguishing an observant community from a model community. An observant community is a community concerned primarily with observance. There is a sense of duty to perform an obligation, and to do it properly. Such a community emphasizes halacha, and it emphasizes proper environment. It is determined to survive against a powerful enemy that crouches at the door, and is vigilant in preventing insidious encroachment on its environment. In this mindset, there is greater emphasis placed on the dangerous allure of secularism than on belief in the power of Torah to attract. Its interest in halacha comes, to a degree, at the expense of an interest in people. Strangers are suspect. The wagons are circled. Welcome comes only after a security check, and by then, it doesn’t feel like welcome. The language in these communities is of right and wrong, good and bad, safe and dangerous, judgment and assessment. It is the language of survival.

No one openly acknowledges this strategy or suggests that it is an ideal. But this mode of community reflects the current state of mind of the most visibly observant communities of the Orthodox world, which see themselves as enclaves that scrupulously observe mitzvos in an irredeemable and hostile world.

A Better Model

There is an alternative world view, however, that an Orthodox community can adopt. It is the one introduced by Avraham Avinu, built on faith in G-d – as well as in people and their greatness. This approach sees community as a haven for the shechina (Divine presence). The purpose of community is not self preservation – it is nothing less than kiddush Hashem.

In this view, the passage v’nikdashti besoch bnai yisrael (I, G-d, shall be sanctified among the Children of Israel) is understood to convey a mitzvah specifically incumbent on the community, not merely a requirement of individuals to make personal sacrifices or in ways that bring credit to pious people. Halacha is observed rigorously, and is seen as the means to fulfill the mission to reflect G-d in the world. Communities are models of the human capacity to connect to the Divine; the goal of observance is to give expression to that glorious spiritual
nature of man. Torah is powerful, and secularism and materialism, while capable of attraction and spiritual destruction, are no match for the expressed neshama of man. The vocabulary of such a community is one of connection, of inspiration, of inclusion, of confidence. Its language is that of purpose and mission. There is a sense of custodial responsibility for the Torah, and for other Jews. Non-observant Jews are essentially divine, even if masked by superficial secularism. In looking at other Jews, the goal is not to see how they measure up, but to discover their innate greatness.

Granted, no community exists that exclusively manifests either of these polarities. The extremes described above are merely illustrations, designed to raise questions about basic, and perhaps unexamined, assumptions. Certainly, I do not advocate compromise in adherence to halacha. But when observance is the end all of Jewish life, Judaism becomes obsessive, and almost competitive. By contrast, when life’s purpose is bringing G-d into the world, the focus becomes relationships, connections, and responsibility. The difference in these views in behavior, attitude, and relationship to others is huge.

Aish HaTorah’s agenda in Project Inspire is designed to “Wake the Sleeping Giant” by reminding and training the frum community about their capacity and responsibility to make a difference with our non-religious brethren. However, unless fundamental assumptions of frum living are reexamined and ultimately altered, these valiant efforts are going to be the equivalent of placing icing on a mud pie. If we don’t confront the destructiveness of our cynicism – and our defensive arrogance – about humanity, the giant will return to his slumber as soon as the next inspiring advertisement is over. Those who do enter our communities as a result of outreach efforts will not necessarily discover giants at all. Picture an emotionally and financially secure, successful, well-educated head of household who lives in a world in which wisdom is respected, volunteering over the weekend is considered a wonderful way to spend one’s time, wholesome family activities on Saturday afternoon are seen as a healthy way of building character. Ask him to join a world in which routine Shabbos-table talk argues in favor of Torah by disparaging secular wisdom, in which political candidates are assessed purely on selfish concerns of the religious community, with little concern for their impact on broader society. Not only is this sort of talk distinctly unattractive, it is not the talk of giants; it obscures the sense of responsibility, compassion and awe for G-d’s children that Avraham Avinu left as his legacy to his descendants.

If we are serious about the cause of outreach, the agenda must begin with the transformation of the frum community.

Our Likely Future

Here is what we can look forward to if the prevailing model of community remains dominant. Yeshiva-oriented Orthodoxy will continue to experience the development of huge and dense observant communities. When deciding where to reside, for example, young frum couples will apply religious convenience as their guide since a frum environment and ease of observance are key factors in staying safe. Conditioned to worry about its very survival by the vicissitudes of exile – the haskala, the Holocaust and early American Jewish life – it will celebrate its massive growth as a major victory over the extinction predicted for Torah observance barely fifty years ago. Orthodoxy’s healthy birthrate will mask the tragedies of hundreds, if not thousands, of children from frum homes who opt out, because the language of condemnation and devaluation that permeated their classrooms and Shabbos tables didn’t produce enough fear to keep them in the fold.

The Modern Orthodox community will continue to search desperately for ways to reintroduce religious passion into their communities before it is too late, but they will spurn the effective strategies and valuable ideas of the yeshiva community due to the incessant condemnation and shunning they have suffered at their hands. The Modern Orthodox community’s children, exposed only to the restrictions of observance but not to its opportunities, will choose either to abandon observance in favor of professional success, or “flip out” (i.e., become much more religious), often to their parents’ dismay. The yeshiva-educated community will then continue to point to this trend as evidence in support of its insularity and separatism.

Passionately observant Orthodoxy, no longer “needing” recruits to solidify its standing, will withdraw from an outreach agenda as a result of fiscally “prudent” decisions, only to hasten a process which has religious communities developing as isolated bastions of sameness, united only in the consensus that the sole route to religious survival is by
avoiding interaction, socially and intellectually, with anyone and anything that can be categorized as “other.”

Non-observant Jews will continue their breathless slide into oblivion. The frum community will identify a plethora of villains to blame for the dissipation of non-Orthodox Jewry, but will fail to recognize and accept their own culpability for allowing the non-Orthodox community to remain unhindered, uninspired, and unaffected by the commitment and devotion of Orthodoxy. The frum community will refuse to recognize that non-observant Jews avoided them because they did not care to be around a group who viewed the non-Orthodox as destructive, unwashed masses who are religiously and spiritually obtuse. In fact, as the non-Orthodox community fades before its eyes, Orthodoxy will continue to withhold any indications of respect, interest or love for the rest of the organized Jewish community – all in the name of halachic integrity. Ultimately, in another generation or two, American Jewry will be dominated by the observant, who will view this result as a victory, never considering that its standing alone at the finish line is the result not of its loyalty to Torah, but of its tragic abdication of responsibility to its brothers, and of its failure to live up to its mission to believe in the divine nature of G-d’s children and to be a reliable source of kiddush Hashem.

Even an amateur social scientist can recognize how our bitter exile has conditioned us to forfeit our view of the divine nature of man, and to see survival as the goal of existence. But if the Holocaust and the repeated pogroms and inquisitions did not compel us to abandon Avraham’s stand for G-d, why should they be permitted to cause us to abandon his stand for man? If we sacrificed all “reasonableness” to affirm our patriarch’s teachings regarding humanity the way we sacrificed all “reasonableness” to affirm his faith in Hashem, the result would be nothing short of historical – and perhaps even messianic.

An Alternative Future

Here are the changes in culture that would result from a serious and pervasive implementation of Avraham Avinu’s view of man. Our religious leadership, at all levels, would proactively emphasize – not merely agree – that a key ingredient of avodas Hashem is the development of a profound love, care and sense of responsibility for every Jew, whether or not in one’s comfort zone. Seminaries – even very exclusive ones – would highlight the heroic contributions to Klal Yisrael of those who devote themselves to the study of Torah along with those who are driven by a devotion to outreach and the needs of others. Orthodox Jews would be sufficiently secure with their own Yiddishkeit to invite their neighbors and co-workers to their homes, because the language of fear will have been replaced by a language of connection and confidence. Orthodox Jews would lead lives of idealism that extend beyond their own religious needs, inevitably becoming role models and attractive examples of lifestyle to non-observant Jews. Families will make life decisions informed by the religious needs of Klal Yisrael, not exclusively their own. Young couples will be recognized as an invaluable resource in a battle for the spiritual lives of all Jews, and will be encouraged to choose where to reside based upon where their presence would most greatly enhance Judaism, rather than merely their own religious comforts.

Because Orthodoxy would authentically and profoundly respect people, Orthodox community leaders would develop a reputation for selfless devotion to the good of the broader community, rather than solely parochial interests. For example, communal leadership will be invested in ensuring strong public schools in their neighborhoods, even though their own constituencies attend only yeshivas.

Though not eliminated, the “at risk” phenomenon would be reduced. Frum schools would rely on inspiration to educate, staffed by even more teachers who believed in their students, who eschewed the language of condemnation, who used personal growth in middos and Torah and mitzvos in their personal lives as the chief tool in forming behavior in their students. Authentic greatness in people will be respected and honored, and not just in frum Jews – in fact, not just in Jews. Communication skills – reading, writing, the ability to articulate ideas in Hebrew, Yiddish, or English, as the case may be – would be seen as indispensable weapons in the arsenal of a typical Orthodox Jew living for kiddush Hashem. The knowledge that students had this ability would create confidence in their capacity to fend for themselves in their encounters with other cultures. They will appreciate that they are trusted to make good decisions, and will not feel oppressive scrutiny of others examining where and when they were compromising on halacha.
Non-observant Jews will be welcomed by their frum neighbors in both large frum communities as well as in evolving frum neighborhoods, and frum Jews will be more than welcome into their neighborhoods by the non-Orthodox, eruv and all, because Orthodox people would be known to be ideal neighbors: friendly, non-judgmental, and interested in the needs of others.

Yes, perhaps what I am describing is messianic. But that should not be a reason to object to, or to marginalize, the picture I draw. On the contrary: the paradigm of survival I decry has, as a key underpinning, the belief that Moshiach is going to do all the work of redemption on our behalf, while we merely await his arrival. In fact, there is currently a dominant presumption that we are expected, indeed doomed, to suffer all the maladies of galus, including the spiritual neuroses acquired in exile, until the very moment of redemption. But is that our true mesorah (tradition)? In reality, Moshiach’s arrival will be hastened by our demonstrating, before his coming, that we are capable of the kinds of revolutionary changes his arrival will demand from all.

What if the requirement to be metzape liyeshua, anticipate the redemption, is a call for us to take advantage of America’s unprecedented conditions of freedom, affluence, and richness in limmud Hatorah, and to behave, as much as possible, as if the Messianic era is at hand? What, really, are we waiting for?

The Unique Model and Success of Chabad

A Few Initial Responses:

1) How effective is kiruv? When a Jew who knows nothing about Judaism attends an enjoyable Torah class, kiruv is effective. In fact, even when a Jew simply tells the rabbi, “You know, you have a point there,” kiruv is effective.

2) How should outreach success be measured? The sole criterion of success in kiruv is growth in Yiddishkeit, just as it is the true criterion of success in all avodas Hashem.

3) Has “kiruv” run its course? The very question is astonishing. To the contrary! Neshamos (souls) are crying out for true Yiddishkeit like never before. There is more success today than ever.

And now the “Pirush Rashi” (explanation):

Chabad of Orange County, CA as a Reflection of the Entire Country

The American outreach movement is just beginning to explode. Through decades of planting the seeds of an intricate and extensive kiruv network at the Rebbe’s direction, Chabad has employed a basic set of principles that serve as the foundation for a successful model of kiruv.

For over a century American Jews have been distancing themselves from traditional Judaism. Now, they are finally moving closer. Reversing the

Rabbi David Eliezrie is a Chabad Shliach in Orange County California, and is the author of an upcoming book on the Jewish Renaissance created by the Rebbe and his Shluchim. He can be reached at rabbi@ocjewish.com.
trend of moving away from Jewish practice and observance, Jewish families are increasingly seeking meaning in Torah and Mitzvos. These new trends reflect a major shift in the attitudes and involvement of Jews in Judaism. Not only are Jews becoming fully observant in larger numbers, but even many who are not yet prepared to be fully *shomer mitzvos* (Mitzvah observant) are increasingly choosing to associate and participate with a community that is based on Torah values. This trend has a positive effect not only on the 25-35% of American Jewry actively engaged in Jewish life, but also for the others who historically have been on the periphery.

My community of Orange County, California is a microcosm of this trend. There are fifteen Chabad Centers in Orange County, ranging in size from storefront operations to community centers in large facilities, offering myriad programs for those of all ages. In addition, Orange County has both a large and a small non-Chabad synagogue, ably serving the community.

During the most recent High Holidays, a full 25% of those in the local Jewish community who attended services chose to participate in services at either one of the Chabad Centers or at one of the Orthodox Shuls. While there are no more than 125 Shabbos observant families in the county, close to 5,000 Jews walked through the doors of a halachic prayer service on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, or both. Many of these Jews had never before attended a halachic service. In fact, some had never attended a prayer service at all!

Community involvement extends way beyond the High Holidays, and increasingly focuses on Torah learning. For example, Chabad’s *Jewish Learning Institute* (JLI), which is the world’s largest network of adult Jewish learning, registered over 17,000 students to take its most recent 6-week course. In Orange County alone, the course was offered in ten locations. Similarly, in Orange County, close to 2,000 children participate in at least some dimension of the Chabad educational network, which includes a day school, two summer camps, three preschools, fifteen Hebrew Schools, six Hebrew Highs, numerous youth clubs in high schools and the Friendship Circle for special needs kids.

Orange County’s ongoing transformation is reflective of a major national trend emanating primarily from Chabad’s efforts. Over just the last eighteen years, the number of Chabad Shluchim (emissaries) families in the United States has quadrupled from 400 to just over 1,600.1 In many communities, Chabad Centers have evolved from storefront operations into true community centers that serve as the mainstream of Jewish life. Participants attending Chabad Centers located outside urban Orthodox cities2 are predominantly not fully *shomer Shabbos*,3 many viewing their connection to these Chabad Centers as their primary Jewish identification.4 Others join only specific programs within a Center.

On campuses throughout North America, tens of thousands of students participate annually in the over 175 full-time Campus Chabad Centers, tens of thousands of younger children attend the over 350 Hebrew Schools5 and Gan Israel summer camps. As this demographic matures, marries and builds their families, we expect that they will tend to affiliate with Chabad and other Orthodox institutions, even though most will not become fully observant. In fact, this anticipated trend has already started. One highly visible and classic example is Congressman and House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, who was involved with Chabad as a college student and today is a member of an Orthodox Shul.

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1 That this growth has occurred after the passing of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson (1902-1992) is a miracle in its own right, deserving of its own article.
2 In fact, many tend to move to larger frum communities as their level of observance increases. As one of the leaders of the RCA told me “you are filling the pews in the OU synagogues.”
3 Some of these individuals take broader leadership roles in the community, creating a trickledown effect on groups like Federation, Israel advocacy organizations and community groups, nudging them closer to an agenda that, at the very least, respects Torah values.
4 This identification creates a unique challenge to demographers seeking accurate data on affiliation trends within the Jewish community. The demographer is simply unable to classify an individual who participates in a Chabad Center, yet doesn’t self-identify as Orthodox. This issue in particular, alongside with the broader nature of hybrid identities, warrants much greater exploration, and may serve as a topic of an article I am contemplating.
Against the backdrop of non-Orthodox Jewry’s struggle with sustaining its community’s affiliation and commitment, this growth is particularly impressive and worthy of study. While the traditional behemoths, such as Federations, JCC’s and the non-Orthodox movements, are suffering significant declines in participation, closer affiliation with Torah and Mitzvos is increasing. Contrary to many naysayers, Chabad’s experience is that younger Jewish Americans are less likely than their elders to bear anxiety, negative perspectives or prejudices towards Orthodoxy, an attitude that served as a major barrier to outreach in previous decades. Though most will likely not become fully observant themselves, their connection to Torah on any level increases the chances that their children will be exposed to educational programs with a Torah perspective, and will thereby be encouraged to increase their observance and move closer to Yiddishkeit. The decrease in the past bitterness of non-Orthodox Jews to Torah and Orthodoxy, though perhaps a reflection of a lesser prior integration into the Jewish community, is also introducing new momentum in the transformation of contemporary Jewish life in the United States.

The Underlying Chabad Principles of Outreach

The success of Chabad’s approach is likely due to Chabad’s unique view of the function of kiruv and their unique approach to practicing it. In fact, Chabad’s approach is quite distinct in certain regards from the outreach approach adopted by other segments of the Orthodox community.

For one, it is an approach based on ahavas Yisroel (the Mitzvah to love one’s fellow Jew) as understood through the lens of Chasidic principles passed down from the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chasidic movement some 300 years ago. As found in the Sefer HaTanya (written by the Alter Rebbe, first of the Chabad Rebbes):

6 The Conservative movement has lost a third of their membership in recent years. While some of those departing have moved towards Reform, significant numbers have affiliated with Chabad. My Chabad Center includes three past presidents of a local conservative congregation that closed. More at http://forward.com/articles/8149/survey-shows-conservative-judaism-s-numbers-drop/

7 Indeed, the millennial generation is ostensibly less religious than their parents are. Nevertheless, we track a deeper openness to tradition among this generation.

… viewing one's physical body with scorn and contempt, and finding joy only in the joy of the soul alone, is a direct and easy way to attain the fulfillment of the commandment "Love your fellow as yourself," [which must be directed] toward every soul of Israel, both great and small. For… the soul and spirit – who can know their greatness and excellence, in [having] their root and source in the living G-d? Being, moreover, all of one kind and all having one Father -- therefore... all Israelis are called ‘real brothers’ by virtue of [the fact that] the source of their souls [is] in the One G-d; only the bodies are separated...

This is what Hillel the Elder meant when he said, in regard to the fulfillment of this commandment, "This [Mitzvah of ahavas Yisroel] is the whole Torah; the rest is but commentary..."

In terms of implementation, this manifests itself in many ways. For example, most outreach efforts tend to encourage the non-observant Jew to adopt an approach to Torah and avodas Hashem (service of G-d) reflective of the mekarev’s (outreach practitioner’s) own community. By contrast, Chabad focuses on the individuality of each person, helping them each on their personal journey towards observance. Not only does this appreciation of the differing inclinations among people offer a much wider breadth of modes of acceptable Torah observance (and thus a greater likelihood that a Jew will find a mode of avodas Hashem with which they are comfortable), but it is also the predicate for Chabad’s commitment to an open and nonjudgmental Jewish environment for those who are not yet willing to make the leap to full shmiras hamitzvos.

On one side are the non-Orthodox segments of Jewry, who have often diluted, ignored or perverted Judaism in their attempt to make Judaism appealing to alienated Jews, and on the other side are other approaches to Orthodoxy, which guard Torah’s purity and authenticity, but in the process often assume a judgmental manner that alienates many Jews who do not live by their standards. Chabad is committed to a third alternative – passionate adherence to halacha and Torah standards, while

8 Tanya, beginning of Chapter 32.

9 If you take a moment to ask almost any baal teshuva, you will almost always discover that, along the away, a Chabad Shliach played a role – and many times a significant one – in the transition from a secular lifestyle to observance.
vehemently ensuring that one’s own commitment to the mesorah (tradition) does not prove to be alienating to non-observant Jews.\(^\text{10}\)

The distinctions among the respective approaches to kiruv may also influence each community’s respective approach to measuring success. While others have measured success in how many people make a major life transition and become fully observant, Chabad has recognized that moving towards tradition is a long process, and that nurturing the process patiently and non-judgmentally is the sole responsible manner of attracting Jews to authentic Judaism. For Chabad, success is not just the person who has become fully shomer Shabbos, but even an increase in the observance of just a single Mitzvah.

At the core of this approach is the view that there are no “rechokim” (“distant” Jews). All Jews share a common spiritual source and destiny and all Jews are connected with a common heritage that reaches back to Sinai. In Chabad’s worldview, no Jew is ever far from Judaism, since every Jew possesses a spiritual core that simply needs to be revealed. The challenge of the mekarev is to find the common connection, light the candle and expose the Jew who has had little background in Yiddishkeit to the depth of Jewish learning and beauty of shmiras hamitzvos.

Former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yisrael M. Lau, related:

> I once mentioned to the Rebbe that I am actively involved in "kiruv rechokim," bringing back lost Jews who have strayed afar. The Rebbe immediately corrected me, "We cannot label anyone as being 'far.' Who are we to determine who is far and who is near? They are all close to G-d!"

Another story:

> One year, shortly after Rosh HaShanah, George Rohr, the prominent New York philanthropist and supporter of Chabad, was understandably proud and excited to tell the Rebbe of the beginner’s service he had conducted at Manhattan’s Kehilath Jeshurun: “Rebbe, you will be pleased to know that we had 180 people for Rosh HaShanah services who came to us with no background.” The Rebbe did not react. Rohr, thinking that the Rebbe had not heard what he had said, repeated his words, this time in a louder voice. “We had 180 people for Rosh HaShanah services who came to us with no background.” The Rebbe rebuked him: “How can you say such a thing? How can you say that they have no background? They have a background. They are the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel and Leah.”

The Rebbe was identifying a mystical reality, while pointing to a flaw in attitude that too often translates into perceptible messages (and often very subtle vibes) of distance that Orthodoxy risks conveying to other Jews.

In addition to Chabad’s distinct attitude, Chabad’s strategic approach is rather unique, as well, and has proven to be extremely successful. Rather than focus on a specific demographic, age group or location, Chabad has deliberately and methodologically established multiple ports of entry for all Jews into Yiddishkeit.

For example, Chabad has been at the forefront of capturing the outreach potential of the Internet. Chabad.org is currently the single largest and most frequently visited Jewish website, internationally. The site offers everything from entry-level articles on Judaism to full-fledged translations of classic Torah texts. The site has created a remarkable interface with over 1,000 affiliate sites (look at www.Jewishafrica.com and my site www.ocjewish.com, and you find they both have the same content yet they are customized for the local community) that coalesces content from all over the globe and gives it a local flavor and yet a national feel.

Similarly, in the area of adult education, Chabad’s Jewish Learning Institute,\(^\text{12}\) discussed above, is the world’s largest network of adult education and has revolutionized Torah learning, with over 350 English

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\(^{10}\) The Rebbe on outreach (with English subtitles), http://www.chabad.org/1339417, and his perspective on giving rebuke to others whose level of observance may need improvement. www.chabad.org/1264759

\(^{11}\) Remarks delivered by Rabbi Lau at the Israeli Knesset. His full remarks can be found at www.chabad.org/395794

\(^{12}\) www.myjli.com. As a teacher of JLI, I can testify how this comprehensive program has changed limmud Hatorah (Torah learning). Most Jews have little experience with classic textual learning. JLI courses have created textbooks in English that allow a student to encounter the great classic texts of Torah with English translations. Classes have Powerpoint presentations as well, to enhance the learning experience. All this opens the door for untold numbers to Torah learning.
speaking locations, and course offerings in Hebrew, Spanish, and Russian. The *Jewish Learning Institute* launches three flagship courses a year, with textbooks, teacher training, PowerPoint presentations, and marketing support. There are women's courses, *parsha* courses and material for Jewish holidays. JLI has created the *National Jewish Retreat* where over one thousand Jews annually spend five days immersed in intensive Jewish learning. Chabad also initiated JNet.org as an alternative Torah learning model.

As mentioned earlier, there are numerous programs addressing young children, in camps and schools, as well as adolescents, in programs such as Cteens.com (Chabad Teen Network). Chabad Campus centers have developed remarkable programs like Sinai Scholars and Israel Links, as well as national and regional Shabbatons. Chabad’s Mayanot Yeshiva in Jerusalem is one of the top two Birthright Israel trip providers, annually bringing thousands of college students to Israel on programs that stress spiritual connection to the Jewish homeland.

Chabad’s experience has evidenced that Kiruv is most effective when the focus is both broad-based and multi-dimensional, premised upon the love and respect of every Jew. These principles dictate that a deliberate, coordinated and multi-dimensional outreach strategy is far preferable to a balkanized approach to Kiruv. Moreover, these experiences dictate that outreach success must be measured over the long-term rather than in annual calculations of new *shomrei Shabbos*. The focus should be on each individual Jew’s personal spiritual needs, and on ensuring an appropriate pace of growth for that individual, without a blanket objective for each person to “become observant.” The focus on evolutionary and individualized spiritual growth is not only more compelling philosophically, it is also more effective. In fact, the success of this model is reflected in the proliferation of those who seek to replicate Chabad’s approach.  

**Conclusion**

How does Chabad define success? Is it the transformation of a Jew from a secular lifestyle to one that is fully observant? Or is it the beginning of a trek from a life orientation devoid of Torah to one that attempts to integrate elements of Yiddishkeit into one’s life? Or is it the performance of one mitzvah on a street-corner in Manhattan? To me, it’s clear that the *ultimate* goal is the former. But it is equally clear to me that success is any of these.

Kiruv in America has not run its course. If anything it is finally getting its groove. Kiruv has moved traditional, authentic Judaism from the periphery of American Jewry to the mainstream of Jewish life. Though perhaps not translated into the masses of Jews becoming observant, increasingly large portions of American Jewry are being comfortable with, and connected to, the basic premises of Torah and mesorah.

Today, the Jewish institution down the block is frequently the local Chabad Center. More and more Jews are becoming regulars at halachically based programs, educating their kids, and slowly being tugged towards greater observance. The development of a national infrastructure that touches every Jewish community in the country, from North Dakota to North Carolina, has set the stage for the next step in the return of more Jews to the observance of their ancestors. It is a growth enterprise, certainly worthy of investment.

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13 [www.jretreat.com](http://www.jretreat.com)
A NEW REALITY:
AN ASSESSMENT OF CONTEMPORARY OUTREACH

WAKE UP AMERICA! The old and familiar “outreach” paradigm of the past half-century no longer exists! New realities must be acknowledged, and the development of new attitudes and new approaches to outreach are necessary. Ignoring these new realities is simply irresponsible.

The Current State of Kiruv

It was long ago predicted that given the increasingly challenging environment in America, the window of opportunity to reach the non-committed Jew would rapidly close. It needs to be acknowledged that the heyday of the baal teshuva movement is probably behind us. Despite the immense resources that have been invested in outreach, current efforts and approaches have not worked effectively. Sadly, American Jewry prayed for a melting pot, but instead we now have a meltdown.

In May 1997, I addressed the Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals (AJOP), speaking at length of the important role played by the non-Orthodox movements in the Teshuva movement. I observed that the vast majority of baalei teshuva grew up with Conservative and Reform backgrounds. I confidently declared that receiving religious training at a Conservative or Reform Temple was an important factor in the lives of the newly-observant young people. I also pointed out that very few baalei teshuva come from backgrounds in which they received no childhood religious training. To my great chagrin, one of the most prominent and highly respected Roshei Yeshiva rose to take strong issue with my assertions, denouncing the Conservative and Reform movements as maysisim umaydeechim and accusing them of misleading Jews from the proper path of Torah and veneration of Heaven. I still recoil when I recall the Rosh Yeshiva’s intense response.

The next morning, the Rosh Yeshiva publicly apologized for his strong remarks, and softened his previous assertions about the Conservative and Reform movements. Frankly, I had been surprised by the Rosh Yeshiva’s initial vehemence since, not long before, on a conference call with several other outreach professionals, the Rosh Yeshiva had stated that, of course, having a Reform or Conservative Hebrew School education was better than receiving no Jewish education at all.

Unfortunately, today’s trends appear to be tragic confirmation of my contention. Contemporaneously with, and clearly related to, the rapid decline of the Conservative movement over the last two decades, it is my view that there has been a precipitous drop in the number of people becoming baalei teshuva in America. This decline is because Jewish youngsters today simply have no real connection to Judaism upon which to build. The vast majority of non-Orthodox Jewish youth now receive no religious education. Many have never been Bar or Bat Mitzvahed, and consequently, have little or no connection with Jewish life. As a result, fewer and fewer young people today respond to conventional outreach efforts. An invitation to a Friday night meal, a Purim party, a Learners Service, etc., is almost hollow and meaningless because virtually nothing Jewish resonates within them.

In one of my early AJOP addresses, I appealed for the greater involvement of the committed community in the kiruv effort, insisting that significant changes to the American Jewish landscape could occur only with the full-hearted participation of the committed community. We have seen some remarkable successes when lay members of local communities are mobilized. Organizations such as the Manhattan Jewish Experience, the Kehilath Jeshurun Outreach Program, the Jewish International Connection of New York (JICNY), Partners in Torah, and

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald is the Director of NJOP (formerly the National Jewish Outreach Program) and rabbi of the Lincoln Square Synagogue Beginners Service. He was the founding President of the Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals.
several community kollels have positively transformed their communities by involving committed local baalebatim. But the lay community still pays only lip service to kiruv, typically taking no active role.

But the failure cannot be attributed solely to the lack of lay involvement. Although the number of outreach professionals and outreach centers has grown rapidly over the last two decades, the pace of Jews becoming baalei teshuva has not grown, and has apparently diminished. In fact, the rate has probably declined by as much as half over the past ten years (an educated, but really speculative, guessmate would be that the annual number of new baalei teshuva today is less than 2,000. The baal teshuva movement probably peaked in the mid 1990s at 3,500 or 4,000 new baalei teshuva a year).

Enrollment in baal teshuva yeshivas for Americans in Israel has declined over the last few years. The few baal teshuva yeshivas in America have relatively few students. The number of baalei teshuva emerging from local outreach kollels, with few exceptions, is minimal, probably not more than one or two per year per kollel member. Several years ago I raised many eyebrows for pointing out the ineffectiveness of contemporary kiruv efforts by noting that approximately 3,500 outreach professionals were “producing” fewer than 2,000 baalei teshuva a year. Had they been refrigerator salesmen they would have been fired fourteen times over! If anything, the trend indicates a worsening success rate.

As part of the new reality, it is necessary to acknowledge that the term “outreach” is outdated, and probably should be retired. In consultation with top marketing experts, I have been persuaded that most young people do not wish to be objects of “outreach.” The entire idea that they are in need of help from others is regarded as rather demeaning. Engaging our Jewish brothers and sisters in positive, joyous Jewish experiences, is a much better way of addressing the issue. As a way of de-emphasizing the notion of “outreach,” the National Jewish Outreach Program has recently been renamed, and will now be known simply by its acronym, “NJOP.”

**New Trends: Birthright & Social Media**

While some of the conventional outreach efforts still attract significant numbers of participants, it is doubtful that these numbers can be sustained for much longer. For example, NJOP still succeeds in attracting large numbers of participants to its conventional programs: Shabbat Across America attracts about 50,000 participants annually, while Read Hebrew America attracts about 10,000 participants annually. But almost all participants are aged 35 and above.

From my perspective, it appears that only two efforts are significantly impacting young people in large numbers: the Birthright Israel program and Social Media. The Birthright Israel program is one of the most successful projects engaging young Jews today. More than 35,000 North American young people participate in the free trip to Israel each year. Surveys conducted of the program provide evidence that most of the Birthright participants are impacted by this singular experience. A small number of participants are even affected deeply and undertake serious lifestyle changes, especially if they are fortunate enough to be part of an Orthodox or a more traditional tour.

Unfortunately, many of the individual Birthright tours have little or no religious content. In the non-religious Birthright trips, participants instead are exposed to the “real” Israel. They spend time on IDF bases, see Tel Aviv “up front and personal,” and rather than experience a real Shabbos, they often spend Saturday in their hotel rooms. In their free time, they frequent Israeli nightclubs, are known to often drink heavily and establish sexual liaisons with fellow participants or Israelis whom they meet on tour. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Birthright participants return to the United States with positive feelings about Israel and increased pride in being Jewish. Some participants eventually make the decision to move to Israel or join the IDF, and some even become religiously observant, all resulting from the initial Birthright experience. The follow-up surveys and studies also indicate that the Birthright experience reduces the likelihood of intermarriage among the participants.

Even more effective are several of the Birthright follow-up programs that offer participants an opportunity to return to Israel, likely because the participants represent a much more select, and highly motivated, cohort. The fact that Birthright is probably the only current Jewish program for which young Jews vie to participate, despite the long waiting lists, underscores its unique success (but then again, why would anyone in his right mind turn down a free trip abroad?).
Social media is increasingly critical to any effort to connect with non-observant young Jews. Most young people, Jews and non-Jews alike, are most responsive to social networking. Most members of Generation Y (older teens, 20s and 30s) no longer speak on phones, or even respond to emails. They text, they tweet, they communicate through Facebook. So-called “Outreach Professionals” who do not engage in these trends should either take a crash course in social networking or start packing their kiruv bags.

Obviously ingenuity and creativity will be critical in introducing social media as an effective tool. But those characteristics have always been the hallmark of effective kiruv, and must continue to be so. In fact, NJOP was one of the earliest outreach programs to recognize the importance of Twitter, establishing “JewishTweets,” which today is one of the largest Jewish Twitter feeds and is rated as the #1 Jewish influencer on Twitter. NJOP also produces the enormously popular Jewish Treats, providing “Juicy Bits of Judaism, Daily.” Between its presence on Twitter and Facebook, NJOP amasses approximately 250,000 impressions a day from its Tweets and email messages.

Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to measure the efficacy of social networking, whether NJOP’s efforts or those of others. From the “old” days, we know that real “engagement” takes place mostly on a one-to-one basis. One of the primary shortcomings of social networking is that “love” and “passion,” two of the most important ingredients in successful engagement, can only be transmitted in a face-to-face encounter. It is nice to be able to learn the Hebrew alphabet online in 22 lessons on “Twebraem School,” but it is not the same as joining a live Hebrew Reading Crash Course, where teachers eagerly follow-up with their students, developing relationships and inviting them to their homes for a Shabbos meal.

Nevertheless, social networking is, indeed, the call of the hour, and the reason should be evident. Those who have had the heartbreaking experience of trying to stop a prospective intermarriage know how critical it is to keep open the lines of communication. In fact, such communication is valuable even after, G-d forbid, intermarriage takes place. Keeping the lines of communication open, with Jews who are not Jewishly connected, is exactly what social networking achieves. The goal, of course, is to trigger the next step, which is transforming the Internet experience into a personal encounter. Alas, this is not easily accomplished. NJOP has had limited success in this area, inviting small groups of networkers together for a Shabbat experience, and organizing meetings at libraries or at singles’ hangouts. In light of the apparent diminution in actual current and anticipated kiruv success, social media, in its unique role, is the avenue that remains open as an important long-term strategy. After all, the most important factor is to keep the channels of communication open always in the hope that there eventually will be a personal encounter, where real change can occur.

**Campus Outreach and Reaching the Already Committed**

Some may wonder why I decline to acknowledge college and campus outreach as successful outreach models. After all, over the past several years there has been a big rush to campus outreach by such programs as Maimonides, Maor, Chabad, Young Israel and OU, each mounting an intensive effort to reach Jewish college students. Although the numbers of Jewish college students being reached are not insignificant, the return on investment is rather small. The costs are often extraordinary, with some of the campus programs costing as much as $6,000 per student participant, about double the cost of Birthright. By stationing college counselors on campus to reach Jewish students, and paying the students stipends to attend a requisite number of classes with Jewish content, organizers hope to make a difference in the students’ Jewish lives.

The anecdotal reports that I hear, however, indicate that the number of participants from non-Orthodox backgrounds who actually become baalei teshuva is limited – probably no more than 200 to 300 annually, if even that many. I do not find these anemic results surprising. I have long believed that G-d and religion do not stand much of a chance of attracting the attention of college students who are faced with a choice of spending a weekend in their dorm rooms with booze and their boyfriends/girlfriends, or attending a Friday night service and Shabbat meal.

In light of the relatively small return on the investment in campus outreach, I wonder why a greater effort is not directed at reaching the not insignificant number of former Yeshiva and Day School graduates who are on campus. In fact, I would argue that it is time to establish more programs on campus (such as OU’s JLIC – Jewish Learning Initiative on
Campus) directed at Modern Orthodox (MO) educated students, who reportedly suffer a very high religious attrition rate during their college years. (One recent study claimed a fallout rate of as many as 50%) Keeping the MO students in the fold is exactly what is needed today. I say this despite my lifelong devotion to reaching out to the non-committed. Clearly, keeping the “committed committed,” should be our top priority.

In addition to the large religious losses of Orthodox-raised students on campus, it is important to revisit the elephant in the room – the fact that significant numbers of frum from birth, Modern Orthodox and even Chareidi-raised young people are falling out. I have long argued that one of the most effective ways of impacting positively on the committed is by inviting non-committed guests for a Shabbos meal. These mutual encounters vastly improve the quality of Shabbos for the committed family, and impact profoundly on the non-observant guests. Given the great losses, we must promote Shabbos hosting more assiduously and effectively. And, as noted, we should be supportive of the college outreach programs that focus on keeping the committed, committed (at least some of them), and help community kollels that are reaching those who were fortunate enough to benefit from intensive Jewish educations, but are declining in their religious commitment, and who would otherwise be lost. Their efforts should be blessed.

Reversing the Downward Trend

So, where does this all lead? Should we all just throw up our hands in despair and close up shop?

No. In fact, if we took note of several critical points, the trend might begin to shift in our favor.

For example, there undoubtedly would be many more baalei teshuva today if the major funders of non-Chabad outreach would be less dogmatic in their “all-or-nothing” outreach demands. Engagement in Judaism is a process. In fact, it is a slow and deliberate process – particularly if those who make religious transformations are to remain moderate and balanced. Those who lack the patience to allow the teshuva process to evolve should visit the thousands of Jews in cults today, and see the results of “love bombing” and brainwashing. That is not what we want - I hope!

I am prepared to compare the empirical results of any kiruv program to the quality and quantity of baalei teshuva who start out slowly with a Hebrew Reading Crash Course or a Shabbat Across America experience. I suggest that the numbers of baalei teshuva who emerge from a well run Learners or Beginners Services is unparalleled.

A Turn to Extremism

Another necessary alteration in the kiruv establishment must be a reversal of the recently growing influence of religiously extreme elements who are subtly radicalizing the kiruv culture. Engaging others in Judaism can only be achieved through tolerance, love and passion. These ingredients must not be forsaken by being replaced with fanaticism. In addition to the unparalleled sweetness of Torah, which sells itself, tolerance, love and passion are the secrets of our success. The current turn to extremism in outreach needs to be stopped, before it is too late.

An example of this dangerous trend is the total elimination of the presence of women from all publicity in the name of “tznius.” Advertisements, fliers and marketing pieces for outreach programs increasingly feature blurred-out faces of little girls, or blank picture frames with the names of the women speakers at the bottom. This type of insulting marketing is currently even being promoted by some of the top names in kiruv. It is not only an embarrassment; it is a huge turnoff to anyone who might consider learning more about their Jewish heritage. This new radicalized direction of kiruv is not only doomed to failure, it also suggests that those who have piously and selflessly devoted their lives to the extraordinary efforts of kiruv either lacked requisite devotion or failed to consult with, and take guidance from, the rabbinic leaders of Jewry. Over 30 years ago, when we discussed with Rav Moshe Feinstein, z”l, and other gedolim the parameters of outreach involving co-ed NCSY and YU outreach seminars, no gadol suggested that women’s faces need, or even should, be blacked out. The parameters were halacha, but the goals demanded moderation with halachic bounds. The advocates who are promoting this radical approach will certainly have to give an account for the many thousands of Jewish souls who are being lost and who will be lost because of the further alienation they are causing.
There is much that remains for us to do. There are plenty of Jews over 35-40 years of age who do respond to conventional kiruv overtures and programs. We need to reach them. By mobilizing the committed, we can significantly increase the numbers reached and, at the same time, strengthen the committed core, keeping them in the fold and enriching their Jewish lives.

Modern technology can be both a curse and a blessing. We need to be alert to the constant flow of new trends in technology and utilize the best of them to advance the cause of Yiddishkeit. We need to get our positive messages out in a big and bold manner.

The Torah (Devarim 30:4) states that our people will be dispersed to the far ends of the Heavens, and from there Hashem will take them and gather them in. There is already evidence of this promise, and its furtherance is our mandate. It can be true today, and it will be true, if we are confident and determined to make it true.

May the Al-mighty bless all the efforts of our hands, in this most vital and sacred work, in which we are engaged.

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There’s a Makom Torah in Dallas

How Community Kollels are Raising Communities

Kiruv initiatives today come in an incredible variety of shapes and sizes, targeting Jews of all backgrounds and ages, in many types of venues and in perhaps hundreds of locations throughout the United States alone. One kiruv model, which makes use of many different types of kiruv initiatives, is the community kollel\(^1\), and it is from that perspective that I will explore the status and viability of American kiruv.

A community kollel is typically comprised of between 4 and 10 highly motivated and religiously educated families who settle in a Jewish community in order to help develop it into a thriving “makom Torah” that attracts and serves Jews of all backgrounds. A makom Torah is an environment that reflects the Torah’s ideal vision for society, characterized by embrace of authentic Torah study as a guide to life, centrality of service of G-d – especially in personal growth and prayer (avoda) – and a joy in giving to others in every way (gemilus chasadim). This is a far broader commitment than simply to study Torah during the day and engage in outreach and give classes at nights and on weekends.

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Rabbi Bentzi Epstein is the Director of DATA, the Dallas Area Torah Association. This article was prepared for publication by Rabbi Dovid Goldman, Managing Editor of Klal Perspectives.

\(^1\) Not all community kolles have an emphasis on outreach; some exist primarily to serve a frum community, though perhaps engaging in some outreach as well (some examples are mentioned below). The model I describe considers outreach among its primary objectives.
In Dallas, the community kollel model has proven to be enormously effective in drawing Jews of all backgrounds to a life of Torah. What are its elements, can the model be replicated, and does it remain an attractive strategy?

Dallas Area Torah Association

When the Dallas Area Torah Association (DATA) first opened its doors in 1992, there were only a handful of community kollelim in existence, and all but one were established primarily to serve Orthodox communities (e.g., Los Angeles, Chicago, Toronto, Detroit). The one exception was Atlanta, whose Atlanta Scholars Kollel (ASK) had been founded in 1987 to further enhance Atlanta’s growing “kiruv” community. Since that time, many outreach kollels have been launched throughout the country, and much has been learned about how this model works.

When DATA’s first four families arrived in Dallas, there were three Orthodox-led shuls but only about fifteen fully Shabbos-observant families. There was a single mikvah visited by twenty-some women per month, and a single Orthodox community day school hosting 350 children – almost none of whom went on to Orthodox high schools. Dallas did enjoy, however, a reliable kashrus organization, as well as an eruv. There was also the presence of Chabad.

Today, Dallas has eleven Orthodox shuls, comprised of about 375 fully Shabbos-observant families, and four mikvahs visited by 300 women per month. There are now two Orthodox day schools with over 700 students – almost all of whom go on to Orthodox high schools – including the three Dallas high schools (a Bais Yaakov, a Yeshiva and a Modern Orthodox co-ed school). There are seven kosher restaurants, three communities with or about to have their own eruv, and several kiruv organizations. Just as importantly, DATA teaches over 1,000 students each week – the bulk of whom are not fully Shabbos-observant – in more than 50 weekly classes, and touches approximately 15-20% of the 60,000 Jews in Dallas each year. There are now close to fifty klei kodesh (rabbis, Torah educators, etc.) in town serving the broader Dallas community.

DATA also has: a Sunday school for those families not ready to send their children to a day school, a summer camp program staffed by 40-50 counselors from Torah Umesorah’s SEED program serving hundreds of children in multiple locations (with five or six follow-up events throughout the year for which some counselors return), an active NCSY, a campus program reaching 300-400 students a year on several campuses throughout the Dallas area (about 10% of whom join an Israel trip, and 15-20 of whom will pursue full-time learning), and a recently launched young Jewish professionals program (YJP) with over 400 people involved, and over 100 people attending its last event.

While DATA’s successes reflect the higher end of the community kollel success rates, many kollels around the country are following a similar trajectory. Before analyzing the strategy and its implementation, we must first and foremost acknowledge the three primary reasons for DATA’s success: siyata d’shmaya, siyata d’shmaya and siyata d’shmaya (support from Heaven). With that in mind, there is little doubt that this growth came about almost entirely through the presence of DATA, and the same can be said for many other community kollels. I will address some of the specifics about our approach and our programs, but first, a word about our philosophy, which is also reflected by other similar kollels.

Why a Kollel?

Rabbi Zev Epstein (no relation), Rosh Kollel in Rio de Janeiro, remarked: “A Jewish man without Torah knowledge is a man divorced from his glorious past; A Jewish city without halls of Torah study is a city estranged from its glorious future.” The philosophy of a community kollel is simple: Talmud mavia lidei maaseh (Torah study leads to action). The kollel message is super-focused: Torah, in its fullest definition, is a treasure that must be made accessible to every Jew.

The kollel members, our community’s most beloved and treasured resource, are accomplished Torah scholars and, along with their highly educated and passionate families, love, learn, live and teach Torah. But

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2 Outreach community kollels have been opened in such cities as Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Denver, Houston, Kansas City, Las Vegas, Milwaukee, Miami, Minneapolis, Palo Alto, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Portland, Providence, Seattle, St. Louis and many more.

for us, “Torah” is not merely something declared from the pulpit or studied in school. It is not simply concerned with what to do and what not to do. It does not mean keeping Shabbos or davening (praying) or being honest or raising children or leading a community.

In a community kollel, connecting to Torah means gaining first-hand knowledge and understanding of the Jewish People’s covenant and relationship with G-d, which one can only achieve by directly engaging and grappling with the Torah’s original sources. Proverbs teaches that Torah is light (10:23), and that is exactly what we seek to offer – the vision G-d shared with us in giving us His Torah. Kollel rabbis bring an understanding of Torah that speaks to everything that matters in life, empowering every Jew to appreciate how much Torah can mean to them, as well as to their families and the community. It is a palpable goodness they can taste that consistently opens new avenues for thought and opportunities for understanding, action and growth. In a community kollel, kiruv is not simply about bringing people close to observance, but rather it is about bringing them closer to the Torah itself.

This necessarily includes such ideals as ahavas Hashem (love of G-d) and yiras Hashem (awe of G-d), as well as the joy of personal growth through learning, through yamim tovim, and through making a difference. For individuals and families who are building their Jewish identities almost from the ground up, these are not elusive ideas to work on during mussar seder, they are transformational ideals that define their Jewish identities. Spiritual growth and connection to G-d and learning about His will become the very entry points to a renewed dedication to Jewish life. In time, they discover for themselves how these principles lead to halacha, and how halacha reflects G-d’s will in daily life. Observances follow for each person in their own time, as they come to appreciate how it fits into an inspired life of meaning, direction and community.

One bein hazmanim (intercession), a woman in the community was at our Shabbos table, as was a young man who was grew up in an Orthodox home and was studying in yeshiva full time. In the course of conversation, the woman asked the yeshiva student, “Would you do anything you knew you would not be proud of?” The yeshiva boy thought about it and then answered, “Not if it would affect anyone else.” Reacting with disbelief, the woman exclaimed: “You mean you would hurt your own neshama, just for some fleeting pleasure???” For someone who had come to Torah through the kollel, Torah was not simply a rule book of do’s and don’t’s – it was the reality of her neshama.

Programming

Building upon this “philosophy of kiruv,” the successful kollel offers a wide array of programming to all facets of the greater Jewish community. As noted, programs are designed to achieve a single purpose – to bring Jews closer to Torah. The challenge, of course, is designing programs that reach people and that capture their interest, keeping an eye out to ensure our timeless content is presented in a “package” with maximum contemporary appeal. In developing our programs, we make sure each one has three vital elements that we believe are the most significant and effective dimensions of our outreach programs – excitement, an interpersonal dimension and wisdom.

❖ Excitement

Every DATA program is designed to be exciting. Why? Because learning Torah is exciting. What can be more exciting than the opportunity to know G-d and to be known by Him – and then to make Him proud of you? It is the ultimate vitality: ein chaim ela Torah – there is no life other than Torah. If you do not find it hopelessly exciting, you’ve made a wrong turn somewhere. Even if you grew up with Torah and have “gotten used to it,” imagine how exciting it would be if you could actually encounter it for the first time?

A program is exciting when it elicits the feeling that something especially good is opening itself up to you – something that “gets you going” and that you are eager to pursue further. A program that is merely
“inspiring,” a word more often associated with kiruv, is not the same. Though inspiration and excitement often go together, inspiration by itself tends to fade, and is thus not as valuable to the student. This subtle distinction highlights just how important it is to us to focus on our student’s best interests, rather than on simply winning them over. We are excited about Torah because we know how infinitely good it is, and we just can’t help wanting to share it.

I find it truly astounding, in fact, how many community kollels independently arrived at this same secret of success: loving and caring for the people of their communities. These kollels are blessed with individuals who learned in yeshiva the meaning of the phrase in Mishlei (Proverbs 31:26) “Toras chessed.” In analyzing this phrase, the Talmud asks, “Is there such a thing as Torah that is not of chessed?” (Sukkah 49b) In fact, they are inseparable. This phrase reminds us that it is meaningless to reach out with Torah and not also with chessed.

Those who reach out this way reflect the approach of our forefather Avraham, who also sought to teach the way of G-d: welcome guests, give to them, tend to their needs, care for them, pray for them and honor them – and naturally share with them priceless knowledge about their Creator. This sense of a priceless opportunity is what we strive to communicate in every program we offer to our truly beloved community.

❖ A Social Dimension

Torah was given to the Jewish people as a community, and not just to a collection of individuals. As a result, it can be lived only within the context of a social environment (anyone who has been to yeshiva knows how important this dimension is). Every DATA program is therefore designed to include a sense of community, of connecting to others as part of the learning experience.

One-on-one kiruv can be effective and meaningful, but there is no avoiding the need to eventually become part of a community. We are social beings who can only thrive within the framework of a social group, and so offering Torah in a vacuum is not a long-term solution. Too often, baalei teshuva move on from their initial source of religious growth and eventually begin to feel they have run aground. Every vision of kiruv must have an “endgame” in mind with the opportunity for baalei teshuva to eventually “live happily ever after.” Sending them off to “follow the yellow brick road” and expecting caring, wise and courageous people to jump out of the scenery to help them through the inevitable challenges is not fair.

Perhaps the most unique dimension of the community kollel, and the source of its particular effectiveness, is its mission “to develop a community into a thriving makom Torah that attracts Jews of all backgrounds.” This approach provides the “whole package,” from the initial introduction to Torah and beginner’s programs to community integration for the long term. It is designed to start with the “Once upon a time” and to be there every step of the way until including “happily ever after.” Together, the Torah we teach and the social environment we cultivate are designed to foster a sense of connection and belonging, of being an active and cherished part of G-d’s people.

Perhaps most essential to this connection is the relationship that students form with one or more of the kollel rabbis and their families. For many, many Jews, the traditional model of “rabbi/congregant” does not provide them with a spiritually fulfilling connection to Judaism. The kollel rabbi offers a whole new model. He is no figurehead representing a community – instead, he can be described as a best friend who has absorbed priceless wisdom about G-d’s world and who is excited about sharing it. There is no congregational baggage or specific affiliation, no commitments or annual dues and no focus on synagogue services. Simply put, he represents the vision in DATA’s tag line: “Know more. Live Better.” And his family is a blast. Together, they are the social connection that makes all the difference.

❖ Wisdom

As vital as excitement and community are to a life of Torah, the Torah itself is, of course, ultimately about knowledge. When standing before an audience of Jews who are not committed to Torah, there is inevitably some hesitation about the veracity of your message, as well as about its relevance. To win their confidence, it is not enough to present ideas that are interesting. The class must be at the very least fascinating and preferably mind-blowing.

In the words of King David, Torah knowledge is “more precious than gold, even much of the finest gold, sweeter than honey and drippings of the combs” (Psalms 19:11). We strive to offer at least some content in
each class that meets that description for each student – something that is so compelling that they cannot fail to be impressed.

Finding such ideas is easy – the Torah is overflowing with them. The challenge is choosing and presenting ideas in a manner that will speak to those we seek to reach. This begins with understanding our students as well as we can so we can make every effort to bring out wisdom they will find uniquely valuable. We understand that nothing less than the kavod haTorah⁶ is on the line, and that Jewish lives depend on us to convey it to them.

In fact, this reflects our definition of kiruv – bridging the tragic gap that separates Jew from Torah, bringing each closer to the other. In providing Torah content that jumps off the page, we seek to make Torah not only accessible but irresistible.

Tracking Progress and Success

One of kiruv’s greatest challenges is how to track progress and success. On one level, there is something not quite right about reducing the spiritual and personal growth of so many people you care deeply about to quantifiable, measurable statistics for an annual report. But this same deep caring for so many Jews, and the enormity of the work to be done, compels us to ensure that we are being most effective with our own time and with our available resources. And that means reviewing our accomplishments, learning from our experiences, as well as from the experiences of others, and using this analysis to make smart decisions regarding how to proceed.

DATA has applied three measurements – all of which, it should be stressed, are uniquely relevant in the context of community outreach.

❖ Number of People Learning

Talmud mavia lidei maaseh (Torah study leads to action), quoted earlier, is not merely a Talmudic dictum, but also an observable reality. Consequently, DATA’s most important measurement is how many people in our community are learning Torah on a regular basis.

Our ultimate goal is daily Torah study but we never push anyone. In fact, we believe that “caring” must come before “knowing”; inasmuch as students develop and deepen their appreciation for what Torah is, they will choose to learn more often and more deeply. But our primary message is to encourage everyone to embrace Torah study as a vital element of their lives on a regular basis. If these numbers are strong and growing – from new people learning to increased learning of regulars – we have been doing the most important part of our job.

❖ Growth in Mitzvah Observance

Though Torah study in and of itself leads to action, everyone also needs guidance and encouragement as they explore increasing their shmiras hamitzvos (observance of mitzvos). I must emphasize that the kollel is committed first and foremost to embracing everyone in the community, with no expectations. If anyone has any interest in Torah, we are ready to welcome them with open arms. Our love and respect for every Jew, regardless of what their level of observance may be, must leave no room for doubt.

At the same time, we believe that every year offers all of us – whatever our level of observance – new opportunities to “upgrade” our Judaism. A student who has appreciated and grown from their Torah study last year ought to explore additional avenues for growth this year. To that end, we focus our encouragement about mitzvah observance around the Jewish holidays, teaching that each holiday offers unique opportunities for growth. For example, Chanukah teaches about rededication to our priorities, as we remember how dedicated the Maccabees were to living according to their principles, even when mitzvah observance was outlawed. It is thus a propitious time to dedicate ourselves to a specific mitzvah, and we encourage our students to choose one to focus on. Each of the other holidays also has its own message of growth in mitzvah and we utilize these messages to focus on taking steps forward in mitzvah observance.

We dedicate time to reviewing our students and discussing how we can help them make the best decisions for their personal and spiritual growth. Each student will have at least one kollel rabbi or rebbetzin who is responsible to guide them on their journey, and who will always be paying attention to how they are growing, what they might need and

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⁶ Kavod HaTorah translates as the honor, or glory, of the Torah, which represents our connection to the infinite goodness of G-d Himself, so to speak.
whether they are ready for new commitments. We look out for specific milestones, such as taking on observance of Shabbos, kashrus and mikvah, as well as enrolling children in day school. Sometimes our students depend on our reaching out to them with encouragement and support when the time to consider these big decisions arrives.

Donations

Though religion is too closely intertwined with dollars for my taste, among the many mitzvos we have to teach is how to give tzedaka. A Torah life includes financial support of the community, and that means learning about how to allocate one’s tzedaka dollars. If students are absorbing our messages about how valuable Torah education and observance is to our community, they will begin to support Torah institutions and causes. Since building our community is so central to our mission, one of the most important measures of our success is the growth of the community’s infrastructure.

As described above, the handful of institutions that existed when DATA arrived have blossomed manifold. When we arrived in Dallas, the overall annual budget for the Orthodox community – covering all its essential institutions – was approximately $5 million. Today, it is $18 million. These numbers say a lot about whether we are doing our job.

When the numbers are going up, it says our student are committing not only to a vision of Torah but to a vision of community. Without this growing support, our vision for a growing community will not be realistic. With it, we can be confident that our dreams for Dallas to become a “thriving makom Torah” are more than just dreams. And there is still so much room for growth.

Like Dallas, community kollels across America see their fundraising as part of the process of building community. As a result, virtually all their ongoing fundraising efforts are local. In Dallas, close to 95% of our budget is raised locally, and others have similar numbers. With more outside funding, there is far more that could be accomplished.

The Future of Kiruv

I view the American kiruv effort as being at the early stages of its development, not its sunset. It may be true that Jewish identity among the non-observant community is declining and that the window of opportunity to reach out is at risk of closing. Moreover, it is harder to reach certain segments of the community and some of the statistics are alarming. In many cases, however, these observations simply require adjusting the kiruv effort to these new realities. Our world is changing by the minute and we cannot allow ourselves to fall behind.

While I have focused on Dallas, the community kollel movement has succeeded in developing a sustainable model of transforming communities in dozens of cities across the country into thriving centers of Torah that attract Jews of all backgrounds to a Torah way of life. The pure message that high-quality Torah study is available for every Jew, and that Torah can lead to all good things within a community, is the ideal message with which to reach out in developing a Jewish future for local individuals and families.

This is a crucial era – perhaps a turning point in the future of outreach. The opportunity exists to reach more people than we have before, but the window is closing as Jewish identity dissolves into something much more distant from Torah than it ever was. It is especially vital that available resources be invested wisely in models that have proven success and a trajectory of growth. I believe the community kollel is one of those models.
**KIRUV: IF WE DO NOT CHANGE, WE WILL LOSE**

I LIVE IN THE WASHINGTON D.C. AREA, but on a recent trip to Israel, I was speaking to the young smicha (rabbinical program) wives at Aish HaTorah in Jerusalem, as I try to do almost every year. I told them that I was going to tell them something very different this year. In past years, I would usually say something like, “Go out there, be supportive of what your husband is doing, host some guests for shabbos, start tutoring one-on-one, build up slowly and begin teaching classes…rah, rah, rah.”

But instead, this year I told them, “I am not going to tell you to do those things any more, because ‘slowly’ is no longer an option, for we are quickly running out of time.”

My husband and I have been working in active community-based kiruv for the past 25 years. Before that he was on staff at Aish HaTorah in Jerusalem, teaching the beginner’s Gemara (Talmud) shiur as well as Rambam (Maimonides). After moving to Toronto, we became the founding rabbi and rebbetzin of The Village Shul, initiating one of the most vibrant outreach communities in North America. We then helped shape an exciting direction for Aish Denver and subsequently moved to the Washington D.C. area to help transition Aish there from an educational center to an outreach community.

Building another outreach community in the D.C. area was the safe thing to do. We had done it in the past and there was definitely a need. But since we began our kiruv efforts 25 years ago, we have watched an increasingly steep decline in society’s values dramatically alter the landscape of non-Orthodox society, undermining the entire model of how kiruv is supposed to work. Doing the safe or easy thing no longer seems like a viable choice.

Until not so long ago, there was a stable “middle class” of Judaism, with traditional family values and a strong sense of Jewish identity. Kiruv efforts consisted of appealing to these values and building on them – guiding individuals and families further along a path whose beginnings they recognized. The heritage we sought to share with them had a familiar ring in their ears and our job was to encourage them to take a “next step” in their Judaism.

This Jew is rapidly disappearing, replaced by a generation with values and morals entirely incompatible with those of the Torah. What often turned on the parents now turns off the children.

Years ago, there was a famous comedian whose highly irreverent routine included “The Seven Words You Can’t Say on Television.” Today, you can say all of those words on television, and more. Years ago, Lucy and Ricky slept in separate beds. Today, Ricky sleeps with Fred in a popular and accepted mainstream comedy.

The internet has opened up a whole new world of access to wisdom and education, but in one “click,” the sickest and most depraved content is also there for the taking. Children have become so highly sexualized that they have literally lost their childhood. Stories of what happens in the bathrooms at Bar and Bat Mitzvah parties, or in homes at middle-school basement parties, would shock you. Trying to reach these young people with the Torah’s lofty and inspired principles is a gargantuan task, as their Jewish souls are buried deep beneath the surface.

The “middle class” of Judaism is rapidly disappearing. Gone is the generation in which Jews generally married Jews (and if they didn’t, it was still shocking). The distinction between Jew and non-Jew is hardly acknowledged at all.

Today, in some cities (think Seattle, San Francisco, etc…), it is unusual to meet a couple who are not intermarried. My non-observant but proudly Jewish mother-in-law in Chicago tells me, “My friends and I no longer struggle with 'should we go to the intermarriage of our children?'”
Everyone goes. We do not want to lose our kids. Today we struggle with, “do we go the christening of our grandchildren?”

Increasingly we see, either you are “in” – an educated committed Jew – or you are “out,” ignorant, gone from the Jewish ranks, intermarried, assimilated, apathetic. In my family, though raised as secular Jews, three out of four of us became observant. The fourth one got married in a church on Shabbos and is raising his kids as Christians.

Welcome to the new Jewish “normal.” We cannot afford to use the same kiruv model that has been tried in the past, because we are now facing the “last stand.” It is do or die, but “die” is not an option when it comes to Klal Yisroel (The Jewish People).

So what do we do? Consider the following two-step plan of action:

I. Shift the Target Market

I have spoken on many major American college campuses and I am familiar with the wonderful college kiruv work being performed. These initiatives are actively engaging Jewish students, sending them to Israel, and supporting their journeys before they make that critical decision of whom to marry.

But, while I support and believe in these programs, if we are nearing the end of an intense spiritual war, it may be a mistake to make these students our primary target. After all, if you connect a 20 year old young man to his Judaism, and he becomes a committed Jew, you have now impacted a 20 year old. But what about his 17 year old sister, his 15 year old brother and his mother and father? Yes, perhaps if he stays on track and matures in his Judaism he will be a positive example to his family and some may follow suit, but we have seen that it is “hit and miss” and a long term project.

When a High School kid gets involved with NCSY or a college kid goes on one of the many outreach programs in Israel and comes back home excited about their Judaism, if the parents are not on board, this kid is swimming against the tide. Some will make it, and some will not.

Last year, about 2/3 of the way through a trip, one of the women came up to me and began to cry. I took her aside and asked what was wrong. She composed herself, took a breath, and confessed: “I came on the trip because it was a free way to get to Israel and to get my son out of Ohr Samayach. But, Lori, I was wrong. I want him to stay.”

“What should I tell him?” she asked, now crying in my arms.

I hugged her tight and whispered in her ear, “Tell him you were wrong.”

What could be an effective alternative? My answer is to target mothers, the one person in the family whose Jewish reawakening will have the greatest impact on the entire family.

Throughout our kiruv careers it became crystal clear that the key to impacting a family is through the Jewish woman; the wife, the mother. The woman of the home, in general, is the one who is the main decider of some of the most important choices a family will make: where to live, what schools children will attend, who they will socialize with, and the list goes on and on. The impact of these choices is literally the difference between one lifestyle and another. Spiritually, some of these choices can be the difference between life and death. I always tell women, “The choice of where you send your kids to school will not result in who your kids will be, it is who your grandchildren will be.”

Inspiring a woman is inspiring the family. And if you inspire enough families, you inspire a community. Inspire enough communities; you can change the world.

Four years ago, eight women founded The Jewish Women’s Renaissance Project (“JWRP”) in order to empower women with Torah values in the quickest and most efficient way. Their flagship project is their nine-day “Birthright” for Mothers TAG Trips to Israel. TAG stands for “Transform and Grow,” and that is exactly what happens.

The trip is free for the women, not including airfare. The local organizations contribute just $250-300 per woman; JWRP raises the rest.

By the end of 2012, in just four short years, the JWRP will have brought close to 3,000 women to Israel, in partnership with fifty outreach organizations from nine different countries. An exciting new trend is that...
local Jewish Federations are coming on board, which is giving kiruv organizations a new mainstream partner, some for the very first time. The results are over-the-top. And most importantly, the women are pushing their husbands and children out the door to learn Torah.

**Results**

The women are surveyed at the conclusion of each trip, and though the results are overwhelmingly positive, they do not impress me. *Of course,* everyone is excited on the last day of a high impact, nine day trip packed with inspiration and emotion. But the real question is how long the impact lasts.

So we track the women closely after the trip, offering support and follow-up through our many partner organizations throughout the country. These local partners, such as Aish branches, community kollels, shuls and kiruv organization, are an essential part of our vision, both because they help recruit women to join TAG trips and because their time in Israel is only the beginning of a long journey; it is what happens once they return home that really counts.

City leaders from among our partners participate in monthly conference calls to share best practices and explore each other’s challenges. Speakers are sent to the various cities but there are also live, interactive video events that allow women from all over the world to hear their favorite speakers, reminisce and chat with one another. Each organization submits quarterly reports on the events they have with their women, attendance, and other important information regarding the women’s progress in their post-trip learning and growth.

During the trips, we strongly emphasize that the women must take this inspiration home and assume spiritual responsibility for their families, communities and even for the Jewish people. For example, many of the women have initiated fundraising projects in support of the many chesed organizations we introduce to them. They bring their friends to classes and begin to invite them for Shabbat experiences. And they are the most effective recruiters for subsequent trips. I recently spoke at a recruiting event in Los Angeles, which was attended by 200 women – all of whom were recruited by the 45 Los Angeles women who had come on the previous trip.

We sold out our 1,200 spots for 2013 in 10 days. Would we like to bring more? Yes. Is there a demand? Yes, again. But our rapid growth has required us to build an infrastructure to support it, so we are monitoring the increases in numbers as we build the proper team. Our ultimate goal is to bring 10,000 women per year. We strongly feel that two to three years with those numbers would shift Klal Yisroel (The Jewish People) in the right direction.

Here is some of our data from one full year that illustrates how we have hit a mark:

- 86% say being Jewish is more important to me.
- 42% have placed their kids into Jewish youth groups.
- 23% of those with school aged children switched them from a public or non-Jewish private school to a Jewish Day School.
- 68% of their husbands have increased their Jewish involvement.
- 92% increased their financial support of their local Jewish community.
- 97% encouraged their family and friends to go to Israel.
- 33% are considering moving to Israel.
- 76% increase their attendance at Jewish services.
- 95% increased their observance of mitzvot.
- 75% increased their observance of Shabbat.
- 90% increased their Jewish study.
- 33% now observe the laws of mikvah.

You can see all of the data online at [www.jwrp.org/annualreport_2011NF.pdf](http://www.jwrp.org/annualreport_2011NF.pdf)

Story after story convinces me that we are on to something very big. Torah is the greatest product in the world; you just have to present it in a way that it can be heard, in the right environment and at the right stage of life. These are mature women (average age is 40) who are struggling to make sense of their lives and are ready to learn how G-d put us into this world and gave us an instruction manual. One woman wrote to tell me: “We called off the divorce.”

At the end of the trip I tell them that we just gave them the tip of the iceberg. There is so much more.
The success of the JWRP has highlighted a problem in conventional kiruv that was always there, but which has been inadequately addressed: The numbers do not add up. There are simply not enough of us to reach as many people as we must.

The primary goal of any outreach organization is to meet and engage Jews who are far away from their heritage. The “Free Trip to Israel” has helped, as it attracts women and their families to local organizations that otherwise would not have reached them. And we help establish close relationships by having local representatives – typically, the rebbetzins – come along to Israel to help lead outings. Engaging them post-trip is thus relatively easy. As Rebbetzin Lauren Shaps from JET in Ottawa recently remarked, “They can’t get enough of us.”

The bumpy road towards Jewish knowledge and commitment depends not only on learning but on connection and relationship. Ask almost any baal teshuva, and they will tell you of the special people who helped, guided, and supported them along the way. More than teachers, these people serve as a “living Torah,” an example of what it means to live Torah values as a family and as part of a like-minded community. They do this by opening their homes every Shabbat, inviting novices to family simchas, including them on chol hamoed (intermediate days between Jewish holidays) outings, calling to share their excitement when a great speaker comes to town and volunteering to drive so all could attend together. They are the mentor family that adopts the novice, loving them like their own, and taking responsibility to help them every step of the way, from making sure they get on the right trip to Israel, to, in the right time, finding them their soul mate.

The local outreach organizations are now being flooded with women who are on fire, seeking to learn and grow, and they want to bring their families with them. But how many families can one kiruv professional possibly engage on this ongoing, committed level? My observation has been that perhaps three to four families per year, at most.

So what is the reaction of the organizations to a sudden influx of families needing guidance and nurturing? Either they desperately try to raise the additional funds needed to hire more staff, or they simply scale back their outreach efforts. For those involved in our TAG trips, “scaling back” means reducing the number of women they undertake to send on the TAG Trip the following year. Alas, both these approaches are mistakes.

We have finally found a program that brings in new families and jumps starts their interest in Torah within just nine days; this is not a time to cut back. It is a time to expand.

But even if more money could be raised, despite the tight economy, and even if new, talented staff could be found (also not easy), it will not solve this “good” problem of having to service all of these new “customers.” There are simply not enough of us to go around.

As such, the solution is to leverage the influence of kiruv professionals to engage the broader community in the effort. Kiruv professionals must stop trying to be salesmen and instead become shadchanim (matchmakers) and resource people.

My husband always says, “The job of kiruv is too great to leave to the rabbis.”

Over the next year, the JWRP will be test marketing a new follow-up program called “Family to Family.” This program will match observant lay-families in the community with JWRP families to mentor them on their challenging journey towards Jewish knowledge and commitment. On the professional side, it will be a team effort between Project Inspire (who will help give the lay-families basic kiruv training), Partners in Torah (who will make sure that all JWRP family members are learning, either in person or on the phone) and the local outreach organization (which will be an ongoing resource to the lay-family, and will continue to provide programming and resources to the families from JWRP).

All Boats Rise

The benefit of engaging all observant Jews in outreach is not only an increase in kiruv capacity, but also an intense inspiration for the already observant participants. After the first trips in the summer of 2009, a rabbi from Dallas called me up and asked, “What did you do to my wife?”

“She came back after leading the group from Dallas and told me that she wants to start teaching — though she never taught before — and says
that since we need a mikvah, she wants to begin raising the money to make it happen. What did you do?”

As my friend, who is the CEO of the Dallas Federation, says, “All boats rise.” When you lift one group, it lifts us all.

We have all seen the declining inspiration within the observant community. As one gadol b’Torah (Torah Giant) told me, “Today, the Orthodox families are so weak.”

There are programs and initiatives beginning to address this, but Rabbi Noah Weinberg, zt”l, argued that the best way to inspire an observant family is to get them to reach out to their fellow Jew who is far away from knowledge and commitment.

There are no easy, quick fix answers, and there are more issues than solutions. But if we begin to shift the primary target market to mothers, and seriously engage the lay-community in order to change the culture and methodology of kiruv, perhaps we will have a real chance to truly bringing Hashem’s children home.

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**Who Are We Reaching Out To?**

**When I was honored** at the Torah U'Mesora dinner twenty-five years ago, I compared the understandable emphasis that our community was placing on kiruv with our neglect of the challenges arising from the abandonment of religious life by many, mostly younger persons, who—though raised observant—no longer considered themselves Orthodox. “We speak of kiruv rechokim,” I said, “but we pay no heed to the problem of richuk kerovim.”

At the time, kiruv activity was in its heyday, enveloped in a great deal of hype and expectation. There were good reasons for this. Both nationally and locally, there were committed and energetic persons who were devoted to kiruv and who apparently were producing impressive results. However, even then there seemed to be an excessive emphasis on public relations, that could be justified as necessary not only for fundraising, without which kiruv activity could not proceed, but also as an instrumentality of kiruv itself. Publicity resulted in persons outside of our religious life knowing more about the glories of our tradition.

Whatever the justification, it would have been helpful had the proclamations of triumph been accompanied by a healthy dose of introspection. The point would not have been to question whether kiruv was necessary and beneficial, but whether there were other ways to reach out, and whether the strategies that were being employed were as effective as some claimed them to be.

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**Dr. Marvin Schick** is President of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School and a senior advisor to the Avi Chai Foundation.
A generation has passed. Let’s face it, the bloom is long off kiruv. Many of those who labor in this vineyard strike me as tired, doing by rote what they have done for many years, as if they are in some kind of box that they cannot escape from. The rhetoric is toned down, perhaps because people aren’t paying attention. Of course, there is the annual gathering of the Association of Jewish Outreach Programs, an organization whose mission seems to be to demonstrate that although, like so many other Jewish organizations, it is no longer alive, it can have an annual convention nonetheless.

If we look at day school enrollment, a field that I monitor on an ongoing basis, the number of students in outreach and immigrant schools has plummeted over the last decade by more than fifty percent – significantly because the Russian immigration occurred a generation and more ago and because the Bukharian community has either drifted away or been more fully incorporated into Orthodox life. Even so, some schools that once catered to what can be called kiruv families have closed and others are barely hanging in there. Equally telling is the situation at what may be termed ordinary day schools and yeshivas. The former are largely closed to kiruv families because of very high and ever-increasing tuition and scant scholarship assistance, while the latter are far more restrictive in their admission policy than they used to be, fearing that if they accept students from homes that do not live up to the religious standard the schools promote, there is a heightened danger that mainline Orthodox children will be influenced in the wrong direction.

For all of the harsh reality that may induce a negative view of kiruv, there is much that the movement can be proud of. Outreach in America takes place in a world engulfed in modernism and secularism and is akin to swimming against the tide. Every successful outreach story is a validation of the great principle of kiruv proclaimed in the famous Mishna in Sanhedrin that teaches us that saving a single life is like saving the entire world. Surely, this applies to spiritual salvation.

Thus, in his farewell address as president of AJOP in what seems to be an eon ago, Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald – the most eminent of all outreach workers – declared that statistics show that on the average, each outreach worker produces one-half a person of outreach success each year. He was declaring victory and not defeat, even as he was cautioning all of us about how Sisyphean the challenge is.

As difficult as outreach has been, it becomes more difficult with each passing day, the inevitable consequence of advanced assimilation and intermarriage. In pure arithmetic terms, there are fewer Jews to reach out to each day, in part because intermarriage creates largely insurmountable halachic issues and, at least as important, there are fewer people listening to our messages. I imagine that just about every contributor to this symposium is making the same point.

I also imagine that in too many places, kiruv professionals are going about their work as if the world in the second decade of this no longer new century is not much changed from the world of the 1970s and 1980s.

None of this means that the kiruv enterprise should be shut down. What it does mean is that there needs to be a change in attitude and strategy, beginning with the recognition that, at least in its first stage, the return to Judaism is in many instances serendipitous. People are drawn to Judaism not because an organization or activity has beaten the drums or done anything in Billy Graham style but because individuals sense that they want to be drawn to the spiritual and to the great heritage of our people.

This serendipitous, initial embrace of a return to Judaism is enhanced or, in turn, deterred by what can be referred to as the climate of opinion. If returning to religion seems to be the thing to do, more people will return. If it seems out of style, or something that just about no one is doing, the prospect for return is clearly diminished. I do not know how one can create a climate of opinion. What can be suggested is that when we as a religious community act in a noble fashion, demonstrating our concern for others, being less judgmental and being more open to embracing people who do not – at least as yet – share our vision, the likelihood that distant Jews, especially younger ones, will want to learn more about Judaism is greatly increased.

On the other hand, when we act and speak in ways that turn off outsiders, we can be assured that outsiders will not turn to us. As one telling example from recent days, there is the racism and other forms of nastiness expressed by too many Orthodox Jews regarding the man who was just re-elected as president of the United States. Whatever we may think about President Obama’s policies or ideology, he is the president of a country that has been kind to our people, a country predicated on the idea of tolerance. If we are intolerant, as too many of us are, the
reciprocal will be that we will be rejected. To borrow from a very old maxim that has applicability every single day, we need to do unto others as we want others to do unto us.

Although the point is obvious, it needs to be stressed that our gratuitous negativism toward non-Jews generally and, at times, toward other ethnic groups is a powerful factor in the rejection of Orthodoxy by too many of our young. Instead of drawing people closer, we are alienating them.

After the initial decision has been made by an individual or family to draw closer to our religion and community, organized outreach activity is vital. This, too, is an obvious point and it constitutes much of what the outreach world is currently engaged in. Shabbos activities, study groups, one on-one learning and many other stratagems are necessary and useful, as individuals continue on the road toward greater religiosity and commitment. There is an abundance of attractive programs and, certainly, ArtScroll has been a big help.

Yet, because so much of what we do as a religious people is in Hebrew, and we have an abundance of rules and requirements, those who are learning about Judaism may encounter roadblocks along the way. I have often sat in shul as the davening has proceeded at a super-rapid pace and wondered how I would feel if my Hebrew was limited and/or I was not familiar with the liturgy. I might stay the course; I might also abandon the process of return. Very few synagogues have beginners' services. We have to make our religion more user-friendly, not by watering down religious requirements but by making what is required more accessible.

There is a second aspect to this point. The reliance on regular classes with texts is understandable because text-based material is central to our religious life. But I have also been in Gemara classes where men who are in the process of returning to Judaism simply gave up because they could not adequately follow what was happening.

Chabad recognizes this and its reaching out is, at times, as user-friendly as can be. This is important because Chabad in the aggregate dwarfs by a considerable margin all else that might be labeled as kiruv. The interesting thing about this is that when most people write about kiruv, Chabad is often missing from the scene, as if it’s in a different world or dimension. This is telling - and not only because there is a paucity of cooperative interactions between Chabad and the rest of what might be referred to as outreach. Each side seems not to sufficiently recognize the other.

Although I admire Chabad’s creativity, as for example in its use of the Internet, its idea of user-friendliness seems to be stretched to the point where Judaic outcomes are considered far less important than how an individual reacts at a particular point in time. Outreach, as we know, is designed to be transformative. Chabad aims much lower and while this means that it hits the target more often, it also means that at the end of the day, the people who come into its ambit are very little changed in behavior or attitude.

I recognize that many in Chabad will reject this. When I have written in this vein, I have been sharply taken to task. I stick to my guns, even as I recognize the dedication and sacrifice of a great many of Chabad’s emissaries. If the movement was remotely as transformative as some of its votaries claim it to be, day school enrollment statistics would be different, as would many of the other demographic indices of Jewish religious life.

In sum, what is needed both from the nominal outreach world and the Chabad world is greater introspection, a greater willingness to ask questions about what is being done and whether the outcomes are as glorious as some like to claim them to be. None of this diminishes the critical teaching of the value of saving a single life. But let us also keep in mind that after that single life has been saved, there are many other lives to be reached out to.
THEOLOGICAL TRIAGE: WHEN THE IMMEASURABLE NEEDS TO BE MEASURED

AT TIMES, KIRUV HAS FLOURISHED with minimal expenditure or strain on communal resources by maximizing the value of an engaged Orthodox community. But this approach has its limits. It requires an army of committed community members to maintain long-term relationships, shepherding the searching Jew through the process of return. It requires know-how as well as openness on the part of the community to engage a world beyond their personal comfort zone. There can be perhaps hundreds of families that will undertake such an effort, resulting in hundreds of new baalei teshuva – but over the slow-paced course of many years. From motivational pastoral rabbis and rebbetzins to welcoming neighbors and understanding day schools, our communities can and should be an inviting environment for hundreds of searching couples in the years ahead.

But as we revel in many meaningful moments of success, the reality is that we are rapidly losing Jews to assimilation and intermarriage at a rate that demands a far greater response. While the problems are not new, a renewed effort has unfolded in recent years to reinvigorate campus and young professional outreach and create new beachheads of opportunity to engage the searching Jew. Instead of following conventional and rather slow-paced communal engagement, these efforts implement far more intensive, experiential modalities with the potential to play a significant role in reshaping Jewish life.

One thing is certain: whether the focus is on college students and young professionals or on other segments of the community, the allocation of communal resources requires responsible strategies and thoughtful cost/benefit analysis. At the historic Siyum HaShas celebration at MetLife Stadium last August, there were 2,000 non-observant, college-aged students and young professionals attending, who merited a special welcome, heralded as the "Not Yet Ba'alei Teshuva." Likely lost on most in the crowd, however, were the elaborate efforts and the substantial resources that were invested in bringing these "Not Yet Ba'alei Teshuva" to such an event.

First, it required a coordinated effort by numerous kiruv organizations around the globe. Second, apart from the cost of attendance and transportation, a pre-siyum event for these young people was hosted at a nearby hotel. The participants enjoyed a light meal while listening to inspiring speakers, and then broke into groups for a learning session before being bused over to the stadium.

The effort was actually a reflection of years of relationship building, hundreds of hours of work on this project, inspired marketing and a budget of over $30,000. While many of the participants thoroughly enjoyed the event, the question begs to be asked: Was this effort a sound use of tzedakah funds and communal resources?

No doubt, a significant minority of the attendees will ultimately become shomrei Torah umitzvos. Yet, these same funds and hours of communal work could have been directed to feeding needy families, helping marry off orphans, contributing to the salaries of unpaid Jewish educators, or adding an after-school program in an enriched yeshiva environment. I call this dilemma theological triage. Where should the community be directing its tzedakah dollars?

THE FUNDING PRIORITY DILEMMA

Perhaps the first question in analyzing the cost effectiveness of kiruv is defining its goals. Should kiruv success be measured by how many intermarriages are prevented, or by the number of Torah supporters recruited? Should the number of not yet observant children enrolled in day school be the yardstick, or perhaps the degree to which a Jew assumes communal responsibility?

Furthermore, the scope of the analysis must be made clear. It is generally
understood that kiruv happens in two stages: reaching out to larger numbers first, and then following up with those individuals who are interested in further engagement. Should we allocate a certain amount of overhead to the initial stage and then separately measure how cost-effective follow-up efforts are? Or do we expect individual successes to justify the entire investment? And how much Jewish commitment qualifies as a success? Do those who fall short of that goal merit inclusion in the cost analysis? For example, if “success” is defined as becoming an observant Jew, what of the attendees and participants who become more Jewishly engaged, and perhaps avoid intermarriage, but eschew observance? Is this a partial success that justifies expenses and if so, how is it measured? Should the cost of the Siyum Hashas event be allocated among all 2,000 participants, or only the projected 400 who are likely to become observant?

A further challenge to the kiruv community is how to decide the optimal target age and demographic, and to assess the degree to which one strategy or approach should be preferred. There are, after all, many portals of engagement available within a potential Ba’al Tshuva’s life cycle – high school, college age, newly married, young families, retired, etc. At which stage is outreach likely to prove most effective?

The defining challenge is to fashion an approach that enables the kiruv community to focus primarily on the area likely to have an impact on the greatest number, while preserving the benefits of success that accrue from targeting other life stages, as well.

While there have been studies underscoring the challenges of engaging the non-affiliated, there is tragically little data or analysis that allows for a comparative evaluations of the effectiveness of alternative programs or strategies. Ideally, such analysis is needed to justify the myriad decisions being made in allocating kiruv resources. Without reliable data, priorities and strategies are decided upon based on the observations and experience of experts, and on the minimal data that is available.

Based upon these limited factors, a strong view has emerged that the most effective use of resources is to target college age students and young professionals and, in fact, a significant paradigm shift has occurred in this direction. Aided by a new infusion of resources, manpower and mindset, the focus of kiruv efforts has begun to switch from community-based efforts to the campus and young professional communities.

This shift was based on the following arguments in favor of this focus:

1. **Ideal Age.** This population is old enough to explore and evaluate ideas and values, yet still young and flexible enough to change direction. Moreover, they are at a stage in maturity and development that allows for the independence to chart one’s own destiny.

2. **One is Sometimes Better than Two.** Working with married couples poses difficult challenges, as husband and wife often explore a Torah way of life in different ways and at varying speeds. This can potentially lead to friction in their relationship, which is certainly something to be avoided.

3. **Easily Accessible.** There are approximately one million Jewish students on campuses throughout the world. Most are still readily identifiable and many have already enjoyed some initial Jewish engagement. In particular, Birthright has provided a significant initial spark which, if properly ignited, can trigger a far more engaged Jewish student population. For example, at least 40% of those involved in ongoing Torah study programs on campus today have participated in a Birthright program. It would be irresponsible for the kiruv effort to neglect the opportunity to build upon Birthright’s incredible impact.

4. **Social Forces.** There is a strong desire within the student and young professional community to connect with peers. As these populations are already seeking such connections, outreach efforts that include attractive social environments have a greater likelihood of drawing interest.

5. **Time.** For a young single, time is on their side. A college student or young professional is well suited to consider an intensive Torah study program in one of the many Torah institutions around the world. A three-month, six-month or one year study experience can lead to far-reaching life changes. Such commitments are far more difficult to make for those who are married or already settled.

Therefore, I would posit that the potential measure of kiruv success can reach 20 times greater in a campus and young community environment than it can in the context of community outreach. While this sounds like hyperbole, initial data has indicated that over 600 students and young
professionals have become Shabbos observant over the past academic year, alone. Initial projections for this year are even greater, and we assume that as measurement matrices and best practices testing continue to improve we can expect this number to increase dramatically.

Nevertheless, the campus path to Sinai is not without serious challenges:

1. **Staff Costs.** Community, synagogue-based outreach often requires only negligible incremental costs. The Rabbi is already in place, as is the community infrastructure to embrace the *ba’al teshuva*. While adding funds to a community outreach initiative certainly facilitates a more robust outreach program, such costs pale in comparison to the campus-young professional model. Moreover, a campus community must be built and rebuilt almost every year. Not only is this effort daunting, but it is further challenged by the inability to develop a local support system to help fund the program.

2. **Event Costs.** The campus and young professional model relies upon costly programming. Trips, seminars, fellowships, and other initiatives are expensive, yet are critical to sustaining an effective and successful program.

3. **Pressure for Results.** The pressure felt by those in the field to produce results risks compromising the idealism and spiritual focus and love that is integral to effective kiruv. We must marvel at the devotion of the families who dedicate their lives to the service of our unlettered brethren. However, we must maintain laser-like focus in evaluating tangible achievement over time. Especially considering the short window of opportunity before students inevitably move on, this results-based model can potentially ask too much of those in the field.

**Adopting a Long-Term Vision**

While both communal and campus kiruv are important, both approaches are expensive and demand a serious allocation of limited communal resources. In justifying the communal expenditure, the cost should be assessed as one would an initial investment in a start-up venture. After all, the returns on these investments will manifest in multiple manners, and in a leveraged growth for so many dimensions of an expanded and increasingly motivated Klal Yisrael.

For example, were it to cost $20,000 in communal funds\(^1\) for the staffing and funding that leads to each *ba’al teshuva* who joins the Torah community, it would be an investment well spent. Even in the early stages of development, it is not unreasonable to project successful ventures that will allow for a significant infusion of *baalei teshuva* at the suggested cost.

Play it out one generation. In a mere twenty years, the individual is now married with a family, and is no longer one observant, committed Jew, but rather three or five, or more. With no need for a further infusion of kiruv funds, the next generation is now exponentially greater. Our initial kiruv investment has now been pared down to but a few dollars per affected Jew, and in return, the community enjoys *askonim* (activists), *talmidei chachomim* (Torah scholars), leaders in *chessed* (charitable work) and inspiration and families who have successfully integrated into the fabric of the Torah community\(^2\).

And that takes us back to the Met Life Stadium.

While support for our Torah institutions and schools must obviously be maintained, we must also include those "Not Yet *Ba’alei Teshuva*" among our priorities. With effective follow up, trends indicate that 400 of those 2,000 students and young professionals at the Siyum HaShas will go on to make major strides in *limud hatorah* (Torah study) and *shmiras hamitzvos* (mitzvah observance). In some of the more successful campus kiruv models, 25% of those who have effective follow up activities following initial meaningful Torah experiences such as Israel trips become Torah observant. The overwhelming majority of the 2,000 in attendance that night were participants on such a track.

As Chazal (our sages) have indicated, "elef nichnasu" – of every 1,000 students that enter the Beis HaMedrash (study hall), only a minority excels – but all of them grow from the experience.

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\(^1\) Evaluating costs per student is always difficult. Were to develop a similar evaluation for the cost per 12 years of day school, mesivtos, kolelim, etc. we would immediately appreciate that priorities cannot be developed solely based on cost.

\(^2\) Though, in many instances, the integration process is far from smooth in the first generation, a review of the challenges and possible solutions is beyond the scope of this article.
Consequently, while it certainly makes sense to reach thousands in an attempt to prevent intermarriage, the proscribed portal of engagement must always include opportunity for a meaningful percentage to pursue far greater growth and **limud haTorah**.

The overwhelming majority may never achieve the goal of active Torah living but a natural by-product of effective informal Torah education is a dramatic decrease in intermarriage Among the over 40,000 non-observant students and young professionals involved in ongoing Torah study and other kiruv activities who have married, the intermarriage rate is under 2%.

One last thought. These reflections have focused on the kiruv efforts and investments likely to produce the greatest potential for long-term success, loosely defined as sustaining a Torah-true lifestyle. However, this cold and calculated assessment should not ignore or undermine the numerous mitzvos fulfilled in every kiruv encounter, regardless of ultimate results.

The inestimable value and merit of such efforts will certainly secure a special place in eternity for those toiling for Klal Yisroel, faithfully following the trail blazed by Avraham Avinu himself.

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**STUFF PEOPLE SAY ABOUT JEWISH OUTREACH TOWARD AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTEMPORARY OUTREACH MOVEMENT**

In April 2012, a Jewish outreach organization posted a humorous video on YouTube portraying, quite cleverly, the reservations many Orthodox Jews harbor about the outreach movement. Comical satires of individuals within the yeshiva community pose questions, laden with yeshivish jargon, about the merits of Jewish outreach. One character wonders, “You think you’re so shtark (religiously resolute) that you’re ready to work on others?” Another character, a convincing Jewish woman were it not for the beard, insists that the Jewish outreach organization, “should be paying my kids tuition before they are paying those kids.” The video has been viewed nearly forty thousand times, not an insignificant number for a viral video in the Orthodox Jewish community.

While clearly intended for entertainment and marketing purposes, the video reflects innate, yet typically unspoken frustrations felt by many observant Jews. The video’s amusing questions raise some very real and very serious questions about the focus, methodology, and future of Jewish outreach – issues in desperate need of careful analysis.

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**Rabbi Steve Burg** has worked as a kiruv professional for NCSY for 22 years, serving as the International Director of NCSY for the last seven. Rabbi Burg will be leaving NCSY on January 1 to join the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

**Dovid Bashevkin** is Associate Director of Education for National NCSY.

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“You think by being mekarev people, that you’re “tooin uf” (accomplishing)?!! You’re going to get them to become yeshivalite (yeshiva students)?! You’re going to get them to learn in kollel?!”

- Kiruv satire video

Measuring Success in Jewish Outreach

Return on Investment (ROI), cost-benefit analysis (CBA), and many other terms normally reserved for financial analysis of for-profit institutions have begun to creep into the lexicon of the more sophisticated and advanced not-for-profit institutions. As not-for-profit professionals are increasingly graduates of advanced education programs in sophisticated schools, and as philanthropists increasingly seek returns on their charitable investments beyond a warm feeling or being honored at a dinner, charitable institutions increasingly conduct careful analysis of their efforts and strategy. Recently, compelled by the leadership of a few justifiably demanding mega-funders of outreach, coupled with the recent economic downturn, the scope and focus of the outreach movement has begun to be put under more scrutiny.

Investment analysis as it relates to Jewish outreach is uniquely ambiguous since, in contrast to most other non-profits, such as a soup-kitchen or a scholarship fund, its target outcome is markedly non-monetary, namely religious growth. A soup kitchen has a clear, quantifiable goal – feeding the needy. A scholarship fund measures its success primarily by the academic achievements of the students it supports. What then is the measure of success in the world of outreach? Alas, outreach suffers from certain evaluation handicaps that do not apply to many other charitable ventures. While social service agencies and academic institutions can employ objective and measurable criteria to gauge effectiveness (at least to some degree), outreach works in the elusive and esoteric realm of souls – and how can the holiness of a soul be measured?

Some argue that the prime objective of outreach should be preventing intermarriage, without an attendant commitment by the individual to Torah observance, merely delays the inevitable intermarriage to the next generation, hardly justifying the communal investment. Others suggest that the sole legitimate objective of outreach is creating fully observant Jews, even if there are numerous intermediate steps in the process. Many find middle ground, suggesting that an increase in Jewish commitment is a major and significant accomplishment for the Jewish people, from both a spiritual and a sociological perspective.

Setting aside which criteria of success one chooses to apply, it has become increasingly recognized that choosing some criteria, with identifiable objectives, enhances productivity and effectiveness. Whichever criteria one chooses, it is critical that outreach supporters and participants be acculturated to immediately identifying the goals of each initiative and being fully committed to review and assessment of achievement and failure.

NCSY has recognized the importance of self-evaluation and data-based assessment. Over the past several years, NCSY has introduced a database for use across the country, giving its leaders the opportunity to analyze data patterns from many locations, and to weigh the relative merits and challenges of its many programs and initiatives.

In August of 2012, Dan Hazony, the Director of Information Systems for NCSY, published an honest appraisal of NCSY’s efforts at data collection to measure and improve its outreach efforts in an article entitled, “Using Quantitative Data to Lead Qualitative Conversations.” Mr. Hazony, who has overseen our database since it began monitoring Shabbaton attendance and as it expanded afterwards to monitor all walk-ins, admits that maintaining such a database can be a “confusing and daunting task.” Specifically, even after overcoming the difficulties of setting up a basic infrastructure, our system still struggles with widespread acceptance and compliance by our staff. Overall, as Mr. Hazony mentions, even considering its flaws, the database has been a tremendous help for our organizational growth.

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1 All references are to the above-mentioned video
The primary advantage of data collection is that it helps distinguish realism from delusion within the outreach movement. In both for-profit and non-profit industries, there is a propensity to overstate numbers, a malady that certainly has not escaped the outreach movement. Most likely a product of the tension between objectivity and the need to raise money, many outreach professionals provide numbers that tend to be exaggerated. Data collection, aside from allowing clear presentation of actual quantitative measures, such as program attendance, helps prevent the incentive for external exaggeration from becoming internal delusion. Even when outreach professionals may “round up” when describing their attendance numbers to donors, having the actual numbers helps keep internal discussions regarding programmatic successes honest and accurate. More honest internal discussions can and should lead to more accurate and honest discussions in the marketing and philanthropic sphere, as well.

The primary disadvantage, however, relates to the shift in focus that is often caused by a data-driven outreach movement. As mentioned earlier, the readily quantifiable aspects of outreach, such as attendance, are not the essence of what outreach purports to accomplish. While some organizations use modified language such as “Jewish identity” and “engagement” to more accurately align with quantitative outreach measures, there is no true quantitative measure that can reflect qualitative religious growth. Programmatic attendance, with all of its advantages, is also a dangerous proxy for monitoring religious development. Outreach professionals, in fear of the financial repercussions that may result from an unsatisfactory answer to the all-too-ubiquitous donor question, “how many people came?,” can dangerously skew their outreach efforts to focus on quantity at the expense of quality. We may never be able to accurately quantify religious growth, but we need to be extremely cautious when using surrogate measures, lest outreach becomes more about event planning than religious education.

“How much money do you need to make a baal teshuva?”
- Kiruv video

Choosing the Optimum Outreach Constituency

Once criteria of success are selected, another decision that an outreach initiative must consider is what age group and what demographic is most appropriate to focus upon. Should outreach focus on teenagers? College students? Young couples? Should American children and families be the focus, or perhaps Israelis, Russians or Bucharians living in our locale? Each potential market should ideally be the subject of a thorough CBA calculating which demographic yields the most successful outreach “return.”

The sole focus of NCSY outreach is teenagers. Without a rigorous CBA evaluating each potential demographic, we could not honestly present conclusive evidence that these are the most beneficial years for outreach efforts. We can, however, present our reasoning for why NCSY has chosen, for over half a century, to focus its outreach efforts exclusively on teenagers.

Erik Erikson (1902-1994), the famed German psychologist, proposed nine stages in psychological development. He singled out adolescence as years characterized by the over-arching question of self-definition and exploration. The volatility and uncertainty surrounding this stage of development have not been lost on psychologists. Dr. James Marcia, a student of Erikson’s, once remarked that “studying identity in adolescents is not a task for the methodologically hypersensitive.” Nevertheless, echoing much of the consensus of the psychological community, Dr. Marcia concluded that proper resolution of the issues raised during this stage of development is crucial for long-term emotional stability. Commenting on the importance of identity formation during adolescence, Dr. Marcia wrote, “…it is an educationally and clinically useful concept. Individuals do better and feel better about themselves and others when they "have" it (i.e., a well formed identity).”

The centrality of identity formation during adolescence is not underestimated by the psychological community and it certainly should not be ignored by outreach professionals. Outreach is an exercise in the

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6 Ibid.
presentation of religious principles and ideas, and the introduction of a lifestyle and of life values that will likely form the basis of a student’s broader identity. A married couple may have the independence to make long-term decisions, and college students often exhibit enormous intellectual curiosity. But during no period in human development is identity formation as much in play as it is during adolescence.

Identity formation during adolescence also plays a central role in Jewish thought and practice. The Jewish teenage years are bookended, by the Bar or Bat Mitzvah on one side, when a child accepts responsibility to participate in normative Jewish practice, and by one’s twentieth birthday on the other side, when one becomes halakhically accountable for one’s actions – what is called עונשין בר. ב.” 7 In Jewish law, the teenage years bridge responsibility and accountability. Adolescence is the period during which the Torah expects people to consider their values and ideals and take responsibility for their decisions. Only at the age of twenty, when the formation of one’s identity is complete, is one ready to become accountable for those commitments and responsibilities.

“You think of yourself so shtark (strong) that you’re ready to work on others??” – Kiruv video

The Positive Externalities of Jewish Outreach

Debates may rage regarding the effectiveness and productivity of the outreach movement, but we must recognize that outreach is integral not just to the Orthodox community but to Orthodox identity. A suffering outreach movement cuts deeply into the very fabric of Orthodox identity and the quality of the Orthodox personality. The community’s character is compromised, and its integral values of sensitivity, altruism, and unity are undermined.

For a moment, imagine Orthodoxy without a strong outreach movement. In such a world, in a community with no welcome center, how would the Orthodox community genuinely reflect a true concern for the well-being of every Jew? An Orthodox community without outreach is like a hotel without a front desk. While certain guests may be fortunate to have rooms, the unavailability of new check-ins will eventually result in those inside shunning and ignoring their brethren without decent lodging.

Robert Wilson, one of the pioneers of nuclear physics, was once summoned to testify before a Congressional committee to defend a recent multi-million dollar expenditure his lab had made for physics research. When pressed by congress to explain what his work had to do with national security, he famously responded, “It has nothing to do directly with defending our country except to make it worth defending.”

Jewish outreach, while certainly contributing to the utilitarian “defense” of Jewry, makes our community worth defending. Outreach underscores the values and character that must be endemic to a truly religious society and it embodies the sensitivity and vision of a unified Jewish community – a vitally important expression of who we are that is sadly overlooked in discussions regarding the merits of outreach in the Jewish community.

The current strength of the Orthodox community, while remarkable, can easily obscure how important it is for our community to have open doors. Many members of the community feel confident and comfortable with the size and scope of our community. But for those who doubt the actual practical advantage of a Jewish outreach movement, they must understand that a Jewish community that does not reach out to the broader Jewish world may not be worth defending.

“Here you have an organization that is going to be m’kavrev rechokim (bring close those who are far) and m’rachek krovim (make distant those who are close).” – Kiruv video

Organizational Challenges and Future Possibilities for Outreach Organizations

Most professionals will acknowledge that much of their expertise is accumulated on the job, as well as from continuing education once they have a more direct and sophisticated appreciation for their profession and

7 See Talmud Shabbos 89b. A broader discussion of this halakhic principle is outside of the scope of our discussion, but is discussed by many Talmudic commentaries and Responsa. In particular, see Responsa Chacham Tzvi #49, Responsa of the Noda Beyehuda Basra YD #164, Responsa of Chasam Sofer YD #155, and Responsa of Tzitz Eliezer YD #20, who all limit the actual halakhic applicability of this principle.

its challenges. Schooling is vital, but continuing training is equally important. A doctor spends years as a resident and fellow learning how to diagnose. A lawyer is hardly ready to stand before court after passing the bar exam. Their primary professional development comes as a result of their professional experiences and opportunities. What, then, are the professional skills and areas of expertise that are being strategically developed among outreach professional after they are fully engaged in their profession? Sadly, the answer is not enough. This is a symptom of perhaps the greatest challenge to the continued success and effectiveness of outreach – a crisis of quality in the field’s human capital.

Like other ambitious enterprises, NCSY finds it increasingly difficult to attract high quality candidates into its professional ranks. While it may initially be assumed that the absence of high quality candidates is due to the lack of interest in outreach by more sophisticated and learned candidates, in fact, that is not the case. To be sure, NCSY and most outreach professionals exhibit a great deal of passion and dedication, but as a community, we have failed at providing them the skills to develop long-term careers in outreach or in other areas of Jewish communal work.

While programs such as Ner L’Elef, Ohr Lagolah and others have made enormous strides in preparing young people for a career in outreach, once the career begins, the opportunities for further training and career development suddenly vanishes. Few organizations, if any, provide training programs and even fewer help finance higher education to advance the outreach professional’s skill set and long-term career options.

After a few years of outreach work, what new skills have the outreach professionals learned? At NCSY, the most capable develop valuable fundraising skills, some learn marketing techniques, and others grow in Torah scholarship, but too many remain exactly at the same point professionally as they were when they started. A career in outreach should be attractive to the most creative, passionate and innovative of our community’s young people – and it can be. But the kiruv community must affirmatively and deliberately introduce a career path that deems the option to be attractive and inviting.

Many outreach jobs, and particularly those dealing with high school students and collegiates, are appropriate to someone in their twenties, thirties and sometimes forties. But rare is the sixty-five year old who can gracefully dance on a table at a shabbaton, or engage a smoke-filled frat group on a Saturday night. In order to attract those who could be superstars at earlier career stages, they must be convinced that their initial job description will be followed by opportunities in other roles when they are ready to move on. Invariably, this will require investing in continuing education programs.

If we hope to create substantive baalei teshuva, we first need to commit ourselves to more substantive outreach professionals. A broad effort to service those in the field of outreach could potential result in a new generation of educators, fundraisers, and marketing gurus who would be able to present the relevancy of Torah, not only to those unaffiliated, but within our community as well.

Instead, too often, outreach professionals are cast aside once they are perceived as “too old” to relate to the overwhelmingly youthful constituents within outreach movements. Aside from breeding a regrettable amount of ill-will among outreach professionals, the movement is ignoring what could potentially be a fantastic long term investment for the Jewish community. A career in outreach is not for everybody, but we need to provide more development opportunities so it can transform the people it attracts into “somebody’s.”

“Where are all of the baalei teshuva? Have you ever saw one?”

– Kiruv video

Concluding Thoughts on the Present and Future of Jewish Outreach

Despite the difficulties and limitations that force our community to make difficult decisions about educational focus and financial allocations, ultimately, within the greater scope of Jewish history, these are decisions that are positive reflections of the relative wealth, independence, and prominence of the contemporary American Jewish community. Though the spiritual stakes are very real, we owe a sincere debt of gratitude that our physical existence is no longer as precarious as it is in many other venues and as it was in previous generations. Although this physical comfort may have contributed to the spiritual difficulties that confront our community, it should also facilitate the consideration of communal
problems with greater clarity and focus. The matter is quite urgent, but our conclusions must be carefully considered and deliberate.

In an ideal world, we would have a community that can focus on the entire gamut of demographics in their outreach efforts. Sadly, our world is not ideal. But a non-ideal world does not mean that we should compromise on our most essential ideals as a religious community. Regardless of our financial state or political situation, outreach must remain a part of our communal agenda in the final analysis simply because it is a part of our historical tradition. Echoing Robert Wilson’s aforementioned testimony, outreach must continue if we are to remain a broad and sensitive religious community that is worth defending.

GETTING BACK TO BASICS

IN ADDRESSING THE QUESTIONS posed in this issue, I will begin by identifying my basic assumptions about what outreach is intended to accomplish. On that basis, we can then assess whether interim targets and programs are aligned with the desired long-term goals. To paraphrase Stephen Covey: We must ensure that our systems are aligned with our values, and remember that we can’t talk ourselves out of problems that we are behaving ourselves into.

The Goal of Kiruv

A significant portion of the Jewish people has little if any Torah knowledge and even less connection to halachic observance, the two foundations of authentic Jewish life. The result is Jewish ignorance and Jewish apathy. This is the problem which kiruv seeks to solve. As such, the solution must necessarily be built on reintroducing Torah study and observance in a manner that is engaging, meaningful, inspiring – and authentic.

Not all outreach professionals and supporters, however, share this understanding of kiruv’s goal. Often, when funds are solicited for outreach, or people are recruited to engage in kiruv, the pitch is predicated on crisis. “Assimilation has taken (killed?) more Jews than...
Hitler.” “If Nazis were shooting Jews in the street, wouldn’t you drop everything to save them?” “In a decade or two it may be too late.” While one can view these declarations as mere hyperbole, they are often taken very seriously, and this attitude has informed many decisions in selecting among alternate kiruv strategies.

For those approaching outreach as a crisis-management response, the goal of kiruv is nothing less than ensuring the survival of the Jewish people. Every generation – and perhaps every day – that passes without reversing (or at least slowing) assimilation is one step closer to the disappearance of Jewry. In this view, kiruv must aim to address masses of Jews. The depth, and even the full authenticity, of the Judaism being proffered is far less significant than the number of people reached. I believe this view is seriously flawed.

Assimilation is wildly different than Jews being subject to death camps and pogroms. Jews shot in the street are lost forever. In such situations, we would certainly be required to do anything necessary, as quickly as possible to save the maximum number of helpless victims. By contrast, ignorant Jews are neither dead nor helpless, and even their assimilation is not irreversible. Witness the number of formerly intermarried couples who are today full ba’alei teshuva. Witness the even larger number of children of intermarried couples who are in ba’al teshuva Yeshivas today.1 Non-observant Jews are very much alive, and always candidates for a return to authentic Judaism. If they are not interested, they have made a choice. We might wish they were better informed before making that choice. And if possible, we should find opportunities to make them better informed. But a refusal to become informed is also a choice. No one is shooting them in the streets.2

There is also a serious ideological flaw in this crisis mentality. It ignores the uniqueness of Klal Yisrael and the eternal covenant between the Almighty and our forefathers regarding the survival of the Jewish people.

Three thousand years of Jewish history demonstrate the immutability of that covenant. We aren’t going to disappear, chas v’shalom.3 A couple of simple examples from the past forty years can illustrate that the covenant is as valid as ever.

No one could have imagined that the Russian Jewry of the 1970’s could ever produce the numbers who, in the subsequent decades, would reclaim their Jewish identity and, in many cases, their observance. It was simply miraculous. Similarly, no one who grew up in the Orthodox community of Los Angeles in the 1960’s (as I did) would ever have dreamed about the number of daily minyanim, daf yomi classes, and kosher restaurants with which Los Angeles is today blessed.

The pintele yid, the eternal spark that resides in every Jew, and the eternal survival of the Jewish nation should give us the confidence to calm down, assume a long-term perspective, and select realistic and meaningful goals.

The primary goal of Orthodox outreach should be to enable individual Jews who did not grow up with Torah knowledge and observance to live an authentic, well balanced life of Torah and Mitzvos. Certainly, less lofty goals – preventing intermarriage, promoting pride in Judaism, and increasing support for Israel – are also important. But many Jewish groups are already focused on these goals. Our aim should be to fulfill our obligation to teach Torah to every Jew. This is a lofty goal, but it is also an authentic, Jewish goal. Teaching authentic Torah to individuals over an extended period of time has proven the most effective way to enable a Jew to grow into a balanced, confident observant Jew.4

Is the Opportunity for Effective Kiruv Dwindling?

It is commonly suggested that kiruv was easier twenty years ago. The conventional thesis to support this suggestion is that twenty years ago a significant number of Jewish college students and young professionals typically had at least a reform or conservative Jewish education, as well

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1 Currently, less than 70% of the students enrolled in our Yeshiva and seminary (Shapell’s/Darche Noam and Midreshet Rachel v’Chaya) have two Jewish parents. This number has been steadily dropping over the past few years.

2 If you want a sharper illustration of my point, ask yourself the following question: Who is the victim you are trying to save from “death” (i.e. assimilation or intermarriage), and who is the perpetrator of this “murder” from whom you are trying to save him?

3 See Sanhedrin 97b about how G-d ensures that Moshiach will come even if we don’t do the requisite teshuva. And many commentaries on the two tochachas (rebukes), Devarim Ch. 28 and Vayikra Ch. 26 about the role of tragedies and exile to ensure that the Jewish people never stray from Torah completely.

4 And it also has been shown to prevent intermarriage, promote pride in Judaism, and increase support for Israel!
as a strong attachment to the State of Israel. They were already “in the
game,” and the role of kiruv was to introduce them to increased levels of
Jewish identity and observance. Today, there is less interest in Israel and
things Jewish, particularly among Jewish collegiates, which makes kiruv
more difficult and less effective.

This thesis may be true. But if it is, rather than justifying diminished
results, it demands that we employ appropriate kiruv strategies.

First and foremost, resources should be focused on those students who
grew up with a connection to Judaism of any sort, and who maintain an
interest in furthering that connection. This includes both the apparently
shrinking pool of those educated in Conservative and Reform day
schools, along with the growing pool of the non- or partially-observant
who attended Orthodox day schools and high schools.

When we look beyond this population to target students who grew up
lacking any attachment to things Jewish, we should recognize the
potential created by Birthright Israel, as have many kiruv programs and
funders. Conceived and financed largely by secular Jews to enhance
Jewish engagement and identity, Birthright has created a pool of tens of
thousands of young Jews who return from their free trip to Israel excited
about Israel and aware of their Jewish identity. The Birthright Israel
experience doesn’t necessarily provide a connection to the religious
dimension of that identity. But the great potential for igniting the missing
religious dimension has been recognized by kiruv rabbis and funders,
who have developed Birthright follow-up programs to tap into this
enthusiasm.

Unfortunately, in the spirit of the crisis mentality discussed above, the
kiruv follow up is constituted primarily of programs that pay students
money to attend classes on Jewish leadership, Israel advocacy and
“relationships,” rather than authentic Torah learning. The students are
then provided with yet further free trips to Israel (and, amazingly, on
occasion trips to South Africa, South America, or other exotic
locations).\(^5\) The goal of all these initiatives, of course, is for these
students to be “influenced” to become observant. Moreover, to attract the
largest numbers of students, these programs too often include Torah
content that is watered down, if not eliminated entirely. Though they
successfully avoid “scaring off” participants, they fail to provide
sufficient resources for those students actually interested in religious
growth, while having very little impact on the participants who don’t
have that interest to begin with. Consultants call this “lose-lose.”

The ineffectiveness of this approach has been exacerbated by the
decision to measure programmatic success by the number of new
participants a campus or community rabbi recruits each semester. This
criterion of success has created a serious catch-22 for anyone hoping to
enhance the long-term religious growth of each participant. The rabbi
who successfully attracts numerous participants, and in awakening some
interest in religious growth, does not have the time he needs to continue
working with them, since he needs to focus on recruiting even more new
students. And insufficient recruiting of new participants can translate into
diminished funding.

This frustration is expressed by countless people in the field. Too often,
rabbis have been unable to build individual relationships and encourage
long-term religious growth because of pressure to bring in new people.
These frustrations reflect a system that rewards quantity rather than
quality.

What is less well known are the complaints voiced by some program
participants, themselves. Many young Jews whose interest in Judaism
was enhanced by the “initial” programs complain that as they became
increasingly observant, the rabbi/rebbetzin was less responsive, and less
likely to return their calls or have enough time for them.

Donors to kiruv, and particularly those making significant financial
investments, are eager to realize measurable results. But time has passed
and the results of current strategies have begun to be evidenced; this
methodology has simply failed to produce the expected results. It is now

\(^5\) The problematic nature of these “Learn and earn” type programs, paying
people to do something that should be done for its own sake, has been shown in
many studies to lead to diminished participation and motivation. See the books
*The Gift Relationship* by Richard Titmuss, *The Hidden Cost of Reward* by Mark
Lepper and David Greene, and the 2008 article “Crowding Out in Blood
Donation,” by Melstrom and Johansson. Paying someone to do something
creates the perception that there must be a cost associated with doing it. While
some justify it by comparing these programs to the providing of stipends for
Kollel studies, this comparison is flawed on many levels, but is beyond the
scope of what can be discussed here.
time to change course. Kiruv can surely recapture its effectiveness and produce much better results if the focus is reverted to the individual student, and appropriate Torah study becomes a major component of the programs. We will probably never achieve the massive numbers sought in the strategy encouraged by a “crisis” mentality. But, at least we are likely to realize significant numbers of young Jews assuming a sincere and substantive commitment to growth in Judaism.

Learning From the Business World
A common refrain among philanthropists is that charities, including kiruv organizations, should learn from the business world to identify goals and measure success. They draw on business practices and experience as a source of direction. I would like to do the same.

In 2005, Sprint and Nextel merged. Prior to the merger, Nextel had the industry’s highest customer retention rate, popularly attributed to excellent customer service. Sprint, by contrast, focused on attracting new customers (and sometimes even surreptitiously extending contracts of existing customers). Servicing existing customers and solving their problems just wasn’t among Sprint’s priorities.

Within three years of their merger, Sprint-Nextel almost went bankrupt. A 2008 Businessweek\(^6\) article analyzed this deterioration. Quotes from disgruntled employees identified the reason for high customer attrition, “The 38-year-old who worked in a call center…says the numbers-driven management approach implemented after the combination led to poor morale and deteriorating customer service. Even bathroom trips were monitored. ‘They would micromanage us like children’… In the pre-merger Nextel, she had been judged based solely on the number of customer problems she solved, regardless of the time they consumed. In fact, she would occasionally spend up to 30 minutes resolving a particularly thorny issue. After the merger, by contrast, speed was the priority. ‘They would say, 'your calls need to be shortened.'”

The evolution at American Express was quite different. Upon becoming Amex’s Executive Vice President of World Service in 2005, Jim Bush began a program to empower call center employees to “solve the problem, as long as it takes.” “Deepen customer relationships rather than make customers’ phone calls go faster.”\(^7\) As he hoped, this program led to increased customer satisfaction, and long term customer retention. As opposed to Sprint employees, who were judged by how many calls they were able to handle per hour, how fast they could advance to the next customer, and whether they got customers to purchase new products, Amex focused on quality and developing customer relationships. The results are in: Amex surged and Sprint almost went bankrupt.

Currently, too much of outreach is dominated by strategies designed to rapidly bring in many new “customers”, while providing little of the long-term “customer service” that would nurture a valuable customer base, albeit more slowly.

Would it not be both welcome and compelling for a kiruv funder to ask, “How will the two hundred Jews you expect to attract be serviced if you spark their interest?” rather than the more typical “How can you expand your target to touching two thousand Jews instead of only two hundred?”

If it is true that the number of non-Orthodox Jews interested in Judaism is dropping, perhaps this demand would rebound if outreach programs provided more and better “customer service” to those eagerly seeking this service, rather than pursuing Jews who are just not that interested.

The Yeshiva Model
What does proper “customer service” in kiruv look like?

A \textit{ba’al teshuvah} entering the Orthodox world undergoes significant attitudinal and behavioral changes, which are accompanied by emotional, psychological and behavioral challenges. Healthy adjustment requires time, and it also requires support. Kiruv strategies and tactics must allow the developing \textit{ba’al teshuvah} the time to grow at a responsible pace, ensuring that each step he takes is stable and that he is equipped to deal with the challenges of family, friends and his own upbringing. Outreach workers must be well trained, and afforded the time to provide that support.

Without additional cost, kiruv resources should be reallocated, with less spent on the front-line programs to “bring people in” and more invested on follow-up – learning with, and nurturing the long-term growth of, those who are interested. Proper follow-up requires well-trained kiruv resources.

\(^{6}\) Sprint’s Wake Up Call, Spencer E. Ante, Businessweek Feb. 20, 2008

\(^{7}\) “Can I Help You?”, Fortune Magazine, April 30, 2012
professionals who will take a long-term perspective, relating to each
person as an individual, working closely with them through each stage of
their spiritual growth.

Too often, I hear from communal rabbis about the difficulties faced by
*ba'alei teshuvah* who have joined their communities with only a rushed
or incomplete kiruv process. If the primary goal of Orthodox outreach is
to enable an authentic, well-balanced life of Torah and Mitzvos, then the
Jew with little Torah background must be provided with the foundations
necessary to live that life.

Having been involved for over 35 years in Yeshivas and seminars for
*ba'alei teshuvah*, and having educated and followed the progress of
thousands of our students, I am perhaps biased in my belief that the
requisite foundations for a full Torah life are best acquired by spending a
significant period of time in an appropriate Yeshiva or seminary. But
even for those who don’t have that opportunity, avenues must be
introduced to provide these foundations. Otherwise, the kiruv effort
cannot ensure the long-term success of its “front-line” efforts.

These foundations include:

- **The Ability to Learn Torah**: This is essential for the *ba’al teshuvah*’s own growth, as well as to enable him or her to raise
  children who are motivated to take Torah study seriously. A *ba’al teshuvah* who lacks basic Torah-study skills is unlikely to devote
  meaningful time to learning, or spend time learning with his or her
  children. This would be tragic, since engaging in Torah study is
  essential – in maintaining one’s own connection with the Almighty,
  for continued mitzvah observance, and as a core element of
  transmitting Torah to one’s children. Especially in this area, “talking
  the talk without walking the walk” is a prescription for raising
  rebellious teenagers.

- **Observing Role Models for Jewish Marriage and Parenting**: The
  Torah’s vision for family life is absolutely vital for every family, but
  it can only be learned from role models. And since a high percentage
  of *ba’alei teshuvah* grow up in single parent homes, they often lack
  role models even for the basics of marriage and parenting. Moreover,
  their expectations of marriage and family life are significantly
  influenced by secular media, by family turmoil, or simply by a vivid
  imagination.

  Interacting with real-life couples in real-life situations provides a
  basis from which to learn a Torah approach to family life. While in
  Yeshiva or seminary, students observe ongoing family interactions of
  their rabbeim and community families, seeing how typical observant
  Jewish families function and respond to ordinary family challenges.
  They receive guidance on how to raise FFB children, since a *ba’al teshuvah*’s own experiences do not include appropriate parental
  reactions to a child missing *minyan*, for example, or not wanting to
  stay at the Shabbos table. Feedback from our alumni over 35 years has highlighted these experiences as playing a critical role in their
  own very successful marriages and families. In addition, of course,
  *ba’al teshuvah* yeshivas and seminaries must have classes devoted to
  marriage issues that are particularly relevant to their students.

- **The Ability to Grow Slowly… step by step, in an environment that
  is focused on long-term growth – without any distractions, but
  without undue pressure (not all yeshivas follow this model, but it is a proven secret of success for the long-term growth of the students.)

- **The Yeshiva Experience of Building a Community** and Growing
  with Others over a Significant Period of Time: Our alumni report
  that the friendships forged during the year or two spent in the
  yeshiva or seminary were critical to their growth, and also served as
  a long-lasting network of support. The relationships one builds with
  others experiencing a similar process of growth are priceless, and are
  invariably treasured years and decades later.

  For newly married couples, however, spending six to twelve months
  studying simultaneously in a Yeshiva and seminary is especially
  important. The impact on a marriage of this joint experience is
  inestimable. Beyond all the reasons mentioned above, this experience
  establishes the foundations of their lives in an environment of Torah

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8 Even well-prepared *baalei teshuva* will need ongoing guidance once they join
a new Orthodox community. I therefore believe the outreach community should
focus their attention on placing qualified people in every Orthodox community,
with the mandate to spend time learning with and nurturing the growth of
*ba’alei teshuva*. Community kollelim satisfy this need in certain towns, but there
are not enough of them. This needs to become a top priority in our new focus on
“customer service.”
study, enabling them to grow together, and make joint commitments to Jewish growth. In the American yeshiva community, the culture of spending the first year or two of marriage in kollel has become normative, even for those who will go on to school or professions. This practice reflects the recognition that commencing marriage on a foundation of Torah learning provides a long-term religious influence on the marriage and family. This opportunity is even more imperative for baalei teshuvah, as it enables them to create a Torah foundation for their marriage.

For many people, spending time in Yeshiva or seminary poses a great challenge, especially for those in the midst of their careers, and even more so if they are already married. But it should be made a priority whenever possible, and funders should recognize the critical importance of this experience to the long-term success of kiruv.

A Final Suggestion for Campuses

One final suggestion for campus life is to foster greater interaction on campus between the Orthodox students and their rabbis on the one hand, and the outreach rabbis and their students on the other hand. On some campuses, there is currently a tension between JLIC rabbis, who service the Orthodox students, and the outreach rabbis who are focused on servicing students who grew up with no commitment to mitzvah observance. Sometimes, outreach rabbis view the Modern Orthodox students on secular campuses as either not that inspired, not that observant or simply poor role models for their presently non-observant students and emerging ba’alei teshuva. Unfortunately, there are Orthodox students who fit that mold. But in the larger scheme of things, I see the Orthodox student body as a hidden resource that can enhance the long-term effectiveness of campus kiruv.

Moreover, the religious commitment of the Orthodox students can actually be enhanced through interaction with the community of those who are interested, though not observant. I base this on my experiences of the past thirty-five years, and that of our students who became ba’alei teshuvah well before there were official kiruv rabbis on campus. At that time, the Orthodox students were a natural address for non-observant Jews looking for more authenticity in their Judaism. This led to a wonderful synergy of growth. The Orthodox students became role models for the emerging ba’alei teshuva, who could see through their peers that mitzvah observance was relevant and meaningful, and who could experience through them the value of community in Orthodox life. It also allowed for the preferred process of slow, organic growth.

Today, there are some kiruv rabbis whose presentation of “authentic Orthodoxy” is naturally limited to their own personal style, one that may not be realistic or appropriate for many developing ba’alei teshuva. Facilitating interaction with a broad range of FFB’s would show a breadth of Torah Judaism, and illustrate to the potential ba’al teshuvah that the significant life changes he is considering are actually quite doable. Meanwhile, the enthusiasm and the need for increased Torah learning on the part of the ba’alei teshuvah can serve to inspire and motivate many of the Orthodox students to be more serious in their Torah observance, and to take responsibility to help fellow Jews in their Torah growth.

While much has changed on campus, I still believe that increased cooperation between these two communities would serve the interests of both groups, resulting in many more well balanced and committed Torah observant Jews.

Isn’t that the ultimate goal of kiruv?

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9 A program of the OU to place rabbinic couples on campuses with significant Orthodox enrollment to support these students over their four-year stay in a secular university environment. This developed in response to the significant number of students who had been through twelve years of Orthodox Day School, a year or two in Yeshiva in Israel, and were leaving university non-observant.
OUTREACH & INREACH: CASTING A WORLD WIDE NET

THERE IS A BASIC FLAW in the question, “Should preferential resources be allocated to inreach or to outreach?” This implies contradictory solutions – that somehow, frum and non-frum Jews operate in separate universes.

Rav Noach Weinberg, zt”l, founder of Aish HaTorah, had a plan for the Jewish people that was all-inclusive and holistic: Draft the frum world into doing kiruv and accomplish both goals simultaneously.

First, for the frum community, kiruv provides a front-row view of secular Jews being drawn to Yiddishkeit. Beyond the dose of inspiration, the imperative to reach out persuades a frum person to examine his own relationship with Torah and mitzvos – adding vitality, energy and enthusiasm to his household and community.

Second, the more kiruv that’s being done, the more baalei teshuva (BTs) join the frum community. BTs bring “added value” by financially supporting schools, shuls and chessed organizations, while infusing the frum world with fresh ideas and vitality. All this continues to play a major role in the renaissance of Torah Judaism in America today.

Which makes this a win-win holistic cycle that is in many ways self-sustaining and perpetuating.

Rabbi Shraga Simmons, originally from Buffalo, New York, is a journalist, educator and filmmaker. For the past 15 years he has served as Senior Editor of Aish.com.

Back in the 1970s, Rav Noach developed a strategy that he called "Awaken the Sleeping Giant" – to mobilize the frum community to reach out to the masses of unaffiliated American Jews. Rav Noach knew that if left to "kiruv professionals," the funding needed to hire the necessary army of rabbis was completely unrealistic – aside from the challenge of even finding that many rabbis. The only practical way to reach masses of secular Jews, he concluded, is to build a grassroots movement of frum Jews pre-primed with the knowledge and commitment to Yiddishkeit.

As such, Aish HaTorah’s goal was never to be an organization of kiruv professionals, but rather a consortium of “partners” – laypeople, donors, shul rabbis – empowered to take responsibility for helping to accomplish the greater mission.

Initially, the frum world was less than receptive; they simply didn’t believe that kiruv could succeed. So Rav Noach implemented Plan B: being mekarev secular Jews who – knowing the feasibility – naturally would become kiruv leaders.

After 40 years of kiruv success, the message finally sank in for the frum community. At last, in 2007, Aish launched Project Inspire with Rav Noach’s original goal of training frum Jews to reach out – i.e., to be mekarev frum mekarvim.

The plan appears to be working. Project Inspire weekend conventions have energized thousands of frum people, giving them a boost to transmit enthusiasm to their families and others. Over 7,000 people have attended a Project Inspire Kiruv Training Seminar, learning how to answer common kiruv questions and how to avoid kiruv blunders. Based on this training, many hundreds have signed up to learn one-on-one with a non-frum partner.

This has spawned tens of thousands of meaningful interactions with non-frum neighbors, friends and co-workers. One chassidishe woman has inspired a dozen people to accept Shabbos observance, while another has brought more than 100 women to learn in Israel. After attending a Project Inspire event several years ago, the "Traveling Chassidim" now visit communities across North America, sharing the beauty of Shabbos with Jews of all backgrounds.

Highly respected rabbis in America have concluded that the most effective way to do “community inreach” – i.e. to keep the frum
Community inspired – is to get them involved in outreach. By seeing the incredible affect that one Shabbos dinner has on a non-frum Jew, children and adults alike gain greater appreciation for their own Yiddishkeit.

Herein lies the key, self-generating mechanism: Kiruv success depends on the mekarev himself appreciating the power of Torah.

Furthermore, with laypeople volunteering the work, the entire enterprise is highly cost-effective. Today, lay-driven outreach communities in Brooklyn, Queens, the Five Towns, Monsey, Teaneck and Toronto exist with virtually no overhead. The primary “cost” is to provide these people with user-friendly tools such as “Easy Outreach Packages” that combine an inspirational message with Rosh Hashanah honey, Chanukah candles or mishloach manos. Significantly, the per-unit cost of producing such items decreases as more people get involved.

Casting the Net

When it comes to reaching secular Jews, the most potent method is to find them where they are: online.

With their higher-than-average education and income, Jews are more highly connected to the Internet than the general population. In Israel, for example, 77% of Jews have Internet access and over 50% use Facebook (internetworldstats.com). With today’s ubiquitous mobile devices, secular people are connected 24/7 – checking news, engaging in work activities, shopping and communicating with friends.

Online kiruv, however, requires a different strategy than traditional kiruv. First of all, there’s no cholent to help warm things up ☺. But the real challenge is that in casting a wide net, there’s no way to know precisely who’s picking up the message. Families? Young professionals? College kids? Seniors? Men or women? Is the person affiliated-but-not-frum? Unaffiliated, yet with a proud Jewish identity? Perhaps apathetic, barely maintaining a blip of Jewish identification? Or worse, negative about their Judaism?

In my 15 years at Aish.com, I’ve had the unique opportunity of reaching out to all these groups simultaneously. We use a mixture of articles and videos (20,000 of them!) on spirituality, current events, dating advice, parenting advice, teen advice, recipes, Jewish holidays, Holocaust studies, Israel updates and even Jewish humor. We cast a global “internet” – offering something for everyone.

The net is cast widest for young, disengaged Jews with near-zero interest in Judaism. It’s a big challenge to step out of our mindset and figure out precisely “where they’re at.” In today’s media-saturated world, it’s an even bigger challenge to create a product that attracts their attention.

It is said that “the medium is the message,” and young people today rely increasingly on videos for their information and inspiration. So in addition to written content, Aish.com produces short online films – creative, unique clips that are cool and entertaining. And we aim for viral power – the “wow” that motivates viewers to forward it on to their friends. Of course, all this is done with the guidance of the Rosh Yeshiva of Aish HaTorah and other poskim, with whom we frequently consult.

The Almighty has blessed us, and in one year, we produced three consecutive multi-million-view films. It began with “Google Exodus,” which told the Passover story as if Moses and Pharaoh had the use of modern Internet tools. The film was a smashing success, viewed online over 2 million times. Beyond this, it was exposed to millions of viewers via the mainstream media – on NBC’s Today Show and later at a number of Jewish film festivals. The Hebrew version placed second on Israel’s list of top Internet videos of the year.

We followed up with “Rosh Hashanah Rock Anthem,” which showed professional dancers (dressed as yeshiva students) break-dancing around the Jewish Quarter. This certified hit (over 2 million views) was featured in the Washington Post, Chicago Tribune and on popular television dance shows, where one secular (and apparently Jewish) host declared: “A yarmulke never looked so good!” Aish.com’s next music video, for Chanukah, also registered over 2 million views.

Once we achieve this point of contact, the next step is to provide a segue to an ongoing relationship in the form of email subscriptions. Currently over 400,000 people receive Aish.com emails at least twice a week – plugging into meaningful Jewish content in four languages (English, Hebrew, Spanish, and French).

Although a frum person might find some of these films vapid or meaningless, they are truly inspiring for the not-yet-frum Jew. As evidenced by the thousands of comments, these films break down the
misconception that Judaism is all about restriction and misery. When unaffiliated Jews see frum Jews who are upbeat and celebrating life, it is a paradigm shift – a complete revamping of their prior perception of Torah Judaism as “antiquated and irrational.”

Beyond this, we strive to inject the videos with a meaningful message. The Rosh Hashanah dance film, for example, touts the importance of cheshbon hanefesh (soul searching) and teshuva: “Taking stock is what we do tonight... Let's all get written in the Book of Life.” Some viewers, like one fellow in Philadelphia, showed up at Aish’s High Holiday services solely on the basis of having seen the Rosh Hashanah film.

Another positive outcome: By appealing to all strata of Jews, these films help build a critically important bridge between the secular and religious. The mainstream press in Israel – traditionally quite anti-religious – loves the uplifting messages and the fact that a yeshiva cares to reach out and inspire the public. Ynet, the number one source for Israeli news, featured our Rosh Hashanah film on their home page, hailing it as "Judaism that speaks to everyone."

**Entry Point**

Of the million-plus monthly visits to Aish.com, we regard each one as a kiruv success. We learn this from the epiphany of Rebbe Akiva at the rock: Though it seemed that each drop of water was having no impact, in reality, over time those drops completely transformed the rock. Similarly with Torah, Rebbe Akiva concluded that every drop is significant, though the transformation takes time to manifest. Every bit we do to “move the needle” – in the direction of Jewish pride, Jewish knowledge, Jewish consciousness – is a success. As marketing guru Seth Godin says: The goal isn't always to close the sale, any more than the goal of a first date is to get married. Rather, the goal is to move forward, to earn trust and curiosity and conversation.

The overarching goal of our website is to provide an entry point for deeper engagement. Once we get people's attention, it's just a click away to the treasure trove of Torah-based content, such as our introductory-level “Toras Chaim,” which consists of hot current topics with a “Jewish spin.” For example, when polarization characterized the 2012 U.S. presidential election, we offered Jewish lessons for unity and understanding. And when General David Petraeus admitted to infidelity, we used that as a launching pad to discuss the Torah concept of yichud (i.e., prescriptions about men and women being along together). The thousands who read these and other articles come away with the sense that Torah is insightful, practical, rational, relevant and compelling – providing real solutions for modern-world problems.

One of our recent innovations is online chat – what I call the “virtual shoulder tap.” A box pops up on the user’s screen, and an Aish rabbi is there to engage in one-on-one dialogue. As a testament to the power of frontline Internet kiruv, we successfully encouraged a spiritually growing Jew in Georgia to join a frum community, and persuaded a man in southern Europe to go study in yeshiva.

The kiruv jackpot is shmiras hamitzvos, and as a stepping-stone we developed the JewishPathways.com advanced learning site, offering self-paced multi-media courses on Hilchos Shabbos, Hilchos Brachos, Jewish History, Derech Hashem, mussar and more.

Of course, nothing can ever substitute for personal contact. That is why we constantly try to connect people with phone chavrusas (study partners) and Shabbos placements. We’ve benefited from the presence of Aish branches and kiruv kollels in so many cities worldwide – facilitating our ability to elevate people beyond the online experience into a personal relationship with a rabbi or rebbetzin who can follow up carefully and guide their Jewish growth.

Aish.com also benefits from the appreciation – shared by secular Jews – that Jerusalem is the center of the Jewish world. It is no coincidence that the baal teshuva movement – its great yeshivas and most rabbinical training – has historically been centered in Jerusalem. In that way, Aish.com is uniquely positioned, with our offices located directly opposite the Western Wall and a 24-hour "Wall-cam" that has registered 33 million visitors. Nothing quite matches the impact of learning Torah at the center of Jewish destiny, and the spectacular new Aish building allows us to extend invitations to come learn overlooking the Kotel – a place that touches every pintele Yid (i.e., the spark in every Jewish soul).

**Winning the War**

Since we rarely meet face-to-face with our readers, it can be challenging to get a sense of the impact we’re having. I recently ran into a friend in Jerusalem who introduced me to the woman he was with. She surprised
me by saying: “I have to thank you. I was living in Iowa, far from any Jewish community. I started visiting Aish.com and got more interested in Judaism. I began keeping kosher and Shabbat, and now I’ve moved to Israel to pursue my studies full-time.”

Thank G-d, our efforts appear to be paying off. In a reader survey, 86% said that Aish.com has inspired them to more Torah learning, and 75% said that Aish.com has led them to increased synagogue attendance and/or Jewish affiliation.

One of the most exciting aspects of our work is reaching Jews in far-flung places. One reader visited a synagogue in Mumbai, India for Shabbat services, and found Aish.com parsha sheets being distributed and used as the basis for group discussion. We receive frequent emails from teachers (both Jew and Gentile) who use our Holocaust section as their high school curriculum. And I can’t even count the number of times someone has told me that their Reform or Conservative rabbi quoted Aish.com in a sermon.

Still, there is so much more we can do. For example, “TED” is a hugely popular online series of riveting 10-minute talks, proving that Internet users are willing to invest real time to watch something of quality and substance. Yet where is the Torah version? We already have an array of truly unforgettable speakers who are able to masterfully articulate Torah content. Bringing them together in a top-tier Jewish version of TED could be a real breakthrough in our efforts to reach intelligent, discriminating Jews.

Other untapped markets are waiting to be filled such as a comprehensive women’s site and a 20-something site driven by mobile-friendly video content.

Implementing these projects requires money, manpower and thinking out of the box. Rav Noach always said: If we’re serious about winning this war, we need to come up with a $20 million game plan and a dozen home-run ideas. He compared our challenge to someone whose child, G-d forbid, is terminally ill. Since the parent loves that child so much and is desperate to save him, highly experimental avenues will be explored. The parent stays up day and night, pursuing every possible avenue, stopping at nothing. Rav Noach said: “Even if people call you crazy, it’s crazier to just stand by.”

People are drowning spiritually right before our eyes, and even those of us involved in full-time kiruv have a tendency to get “comfortable.” Rav Noach would pound his fist and say: “If we’re concerned with the Almighty’s honor, we must care for his children. There’s a holocaust going on!”

It’s not so easy to live with that as a constant reality. So in 2006, Rav Noach took a group of sixty Aish rabbis to Poland, to confront the physical Holocaust of the last generation in order to become more real with the spiritual holocaust of the current generation. Rav Noach implored us – and wrote in his tzava’a (ethical will) – to sit on the floor for 10 minutes each day and ponder what else we can do to protect kavod Shamayim (the honor of Heaven).

**Kiruv Army**

The sad reality is that kiruv is operating in a vanishing market. Sixty-nine percent of children in intermarried families are being raised as non-Jews (Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011), and only 15% of children of intermarried couples marry Jews (1990 and 2000 National Jewish Population Studies).

Are we doing enough to counteract this crisis? There are approximately 1,500 kiruv professionals in North America ("The Need for Community-wide Outreach," Binah magazine, 2008). Assuming that each of them touches 100 people in a significant way, reaching 150,000 Jews, there would still be over 4 million unaffiliated Jews in North America not being reached. Even with some 30,000 frum people actively involved with Project Inspire, the output is still far short of what’s needed.

I once asked Rav Noach: “How do we keep on fighting if we’re losing the war?” He responded: “What is lost is lost. We need to learn from that, keep looking forward, and focus on those we can still save.”

In the face of the Jewish genocide during World War II, it took years of pressure to arouse the American government out of its complacency. Yet nobody thought to suggest, “Let’s give up because Polish Jewry has already been murdered.” No! In the final year, the War Refugee Board was created and a few hundred thousand Hungarian Jews were saved.

Today, assimilation and intermarriage cause tens of thousands of Jews to be lost to Klal Yisrael each year. Yet these tragic losses do not exempt us
from the responsibility to do whatever we can to reach those Jews who remain. The Jewish people are one and we don’t give up on anyone.

Which brings us back to the frum community, who recognize the magnitude of the chillul Hashem (desecration of G-d’s name) of 90% of the Almighty’s children who are “off the derech.” Of the many available tools for reaching out, Aish.com is perhaps the simplest and most effective. Every click in the right direction creates a synergy whereby frum people turn on others and as a consequence themselves.

All Jews are Hashem’s precious children, and every drop in the effort to save even a single Jew is a success.

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**UNIFIED THEORY OF KIRUV**

**KIRUV. THE WORD CONJURES UP** images of the scraggily, long haired backpacker who, after traversing the globe in search of spiritual truths, finds his life changed by a tap on the shoulder at the Western Wall. While this scenario has certainly played out countless times, it hardly reflect the scope and breadth of the outreach movement.

Outreach has gone through significant changes in recent years. While religious defection from Judaism has occurred throughout history, its pace has accelerated substantially over the past two hundred years. Much of this was due to the Haskala (enlightenment) movement, which gave birth to alien forms of Judaism, as well as the emancipation of Europe, which helped point the way to the exit.

It was not until the 1960’s, especially in the aftermath of the Six Day War, that we as a people were emboldened to start reaching out to our wayward brethren. In the mere forty-five years since, we had evolved from a people struggling to survive, to one dynamically growing in confidence and numbers. That certainly was a good time to reach out!

What started as a fringe movement that was relegated to legendary personalities and idealistic individuals had, in a mere forty years, become a national cause, as well as a legitimate career choice. The heroes are many and the players are organized and professional. Chabad, Aish,

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**Rabbi Benzion Klatzko**, a musmach of Mir Yeshiva, is a leading figure in campus outreach, a renowned speaker, and founder of the world’s largest Jewish social network, Shabbat.com.
Neve, Ohr Somayach, NCSY, Project Inspire, Community Kollelim, Arachim, and many more, have all contributed admirably to the worldwide outreach movement. This has resulted in every demographic and age bracket being touched and effected. It is safe to say, that outside of large and established Jewish cities such as New York and Lakewood, kehilos (communities) throughout North America are significantly represented by active returnees. The movement has breathed life into communities near and far and infused skilled and talented professionals into our ranks.

Perhaps most importantly, a feeling of freshness and vitality has descended upon the faithful, affirming that one who lives a Torah lifestyle can stand proudly and confidently, regardless of which way the ideological winds blow.

Given kiruv’s success and impact, it may be surprising that some question its ongoing value. However, the Jewish community’s growth and expansion has introduced new challenges and exacerbated others. Marital harmony, kids at risk, job stability and the cost of raising and maintaining an Orthodox home are all serious challenges facing Orthodox Jewry.

So the question is, simply put, has the time come to put kiruv on the back burner and focus on other issues?

I recently presented this question on my weekly radio show (Hidabroot 97.5FM) to the listening audience, expecting to hear a firm if disappointed “Yes, it’s time to work on the more immediate issues that afflict our community.” After all, my audience is largely comprised of frum listeners who are painfully aware of the many communal concerns we have mentioned. In fact, we often use one or more of these issues as the show’s weekly talking point, with call-ins and text messages passionately debating their solutions.

To my surprise, the response was quite to the contrary. Our listeners felt strongly that there is no justification to abandon kiruv. The drive to reach out should be a natural expression of living a good, solid Torah life and our community must remain committed to it. Many listeners themselves felt that, with minimal effort (a Shabbos invite here, a friendly hello there), even they could help reverse the tide of assimilation, and they were fully supportive of intensive efforts to accomplish much more.

The response to that show taught me three things:

- As a nation, we still believe in the validity of Kiruv.
- We believe that everyone can be involved in reaching out on some level.
- Outreach need not be left to professionals working outside the framework of the community. Rather, our community is beginning to view it as an organic expression of its values, and of its dedication to Judaism done correctly.

This was all fascinating to me, given the fact that I am a mekarev by profession!

But, if kiruv (the unaffiliated returning) is a natural response to their exposure to a Torah lifestyle, why isn’t outreach much more effective than it has been? Are outreach professionals failing to bring people in, or is something lacking in our Torah lifestyle that is repelling people instead of attracting them?

I believe that we intuitively know the answer to this question. Non-observant Jews are generally unimpressed by our lifestyle, and many are turned off by it. This is not because of outreach efforts – it is because of us.

This suggestion is a scary indictment of Orthodox Jewry. Perhaps it is too harsh. But the question remains -What is missing? Why, do we not enjoy the respect and admiration of the non-observant community?

Perhaps we should start off by exploring how it is that Torah is supposed to be naturally attractive and compelling. Perhaps most of all, it is a function of how well a Torah community reflects the true definition of what Judaism is and how well it carries out its core mission.

Historically, Judaism too often has been defined incorrectly, and the damage has been immeasurable. Although Judaism is often listed amongst the great “religions” of the world, the Torah categorically avoids the designation – and even the word – “religion.” In its place, the Torah always insists on using a completely different construct: a metaphor for relationship.
Judaism is a Relationship

Relationship is not religion. They are not the same and they are not alike. When Hashem asked the Jewish people if they want to accept the Torah, they answered “Naaseh v’nishma,” we will do and we will listen. Hashem then rhetorically asked “Who revealed to My children this secret used by the heavenly angels?”

What is this great secret? The fact that they reversed the order and didn’t respond, “Nishma v’naaseh” – we will listen and then we will do? Is the order of their response the great secret? In reality, the order of their reply is quite noteworthy. In considering a religion, one first listens, hears, judges and then commits to act. We weigh the proofs, survey the evidence, and if all checks out, we commit.

A pledge of to “do” first before listening is something else entirely. When a loved one asks for a favor, the typical response is “Sure! What would you like me to do?” This reflection of trust and eagerness to please is the very hallmark of a loving relationship. And this was the “secret” known by the angels. Hashem wants relationship with us!

In the Temple’s Kodesh Hakadashim (Holy of Holies), perched atop the Aron Kodesh (Ark of the Covenant) stood the keruvim, one with the face of a boy and the other with the face of a girl, lovingly gazing into each other’s eyes. Metaphorically, one represented Hashem and the other the Jewish people. In fact, when Hashem was upset or disappointed with the Jewish people, the keruvim would turn their backs to each other like a quarreling couple who have ceased communicating.

The analogy couldn’t be clearer! The Torah presents Judaism as a relationship hundreds and hundreds of times. Shir Hashirim (Song of Songs), the quintessential love song, is described by Rabbi Akiva as “kodesh kadashim” the holiest of holies!

The ramifications are tremendous. Each mitzvah, as well as its meaning, morphs when seen through the eyes of relationship. Shabbos is no longer a ritualistic day off. Rather, it is romantic special time with the One we love, complete with flowers, a bottle of wine, and a candlelit dinner. We call out “Boi kallah, boi kallah” imploring our beloved bride to come and join us.

Even the Challah has romantic overtures, reminding us that Hashem braided Eve’s hair so she should be attractive to Adam. B’samim (spices) during havdalah remind us of the scent of our loved one, in the same way a lover dabs her perfume on a letter she is sending to her soldier on the front lines. She, like Hashem, is imploring him to remember her and return home soon. So we say, “hayom yom rishon l’Shabbos” today is one day towards my special time with my beloved.

Shmini Atzeres becomes a moving farewell to a loved one, when we echo Hashem’s words to us – “koshe alay praidaschem” (it is difficult for Me to part from you). Tefillin turn into a love locket where we engrave our allegiance to Hashem Echod (one G-d) and He, wearing his celestial tefillin pledges back to us, “Umi k’amcha Yisroel goy echad ba’aretz”, there is no one like you Klal Yisroel!

When one is in a meaningful relationship, it becomes a deeply personal, moving experience. Happiness and a sense of bliss descend upon us and all is right with the world. The definition of Judaism as relationship and not as a religion makes all the difference in the world.

Unfortunately, many of the contemporary issues that plague our communities result from the steady numbing of the disconnected soul. The happiness in our relationship, which is supposed to be a catalyst to shmiras hamitzvos (mitzvah observance), has seen its passion dulled. Perhaps this is due to the burden of exile, or perhaps due to its creature comforts. But for many, Torah, while meticulously observed, no longer sets their souls on fire. Our children see this, and they go elsewhere to find joy. Our spouses see this and they lose respect and appreciation for us. It is no wonder that a depressive monotony can set in. Worse, what should be a source of inspiration becomes a burden we must bear. Like soldiers, we religiously follow our marching orders, extracting pleasure from Judaism’s trappings (a nice bowl of chulent followed by a Shabbos nap), rather than its substance as an eternal relationship with the Divine.

My family is involved in outreach, and we are frequently joined on kiruv Shabbatons by FFBs (“frum from birth”), who are invariably thrilled by the joy they experience. I have often heard the refrain, "the religious need this as well." The truth is that we all need it. Happiness is the lynchpin of Judaism – the key to success in our relationship with Hashem. Already
we were warned in the Torah about “not serving Hashem with joy and goodness of heart” (Devarim 28:47).

Is it any surprise that Carlebach minyanim are proliferating? Is it really a mystery why 50,000 people a year head to Uman for Rosh Hashana? The Jewish people are begging to rediscover the simcha (joy) in Yiddishkiet. Our children, our homes and kehilos are striving to recapture the essence of a loving and vibrant relationship with our Heavenly Father. When a non-observant person witnesses the true happiness of Judaism manifested in the Jewish home, this becomes the greatest reason to give it serious consideration. No kiruv expertise required!

But when the joy of a relationship is absent, no intellectual argument or outreach seminar will be convincing or compelling. A loveless relationship is simply hollow and burdensome.

**The “Great Mission”**

Aside from the need for a Torah community to reflect the true definition of what Judaism is, it must be focused on its core mission.

The Almighty has a vision for all of mankind and has chosen the Jewish people as His faithful ambassadors to carry it out. While the world was steeped in immorality and corruption, our forefathers were building a people whose destiny was to be the "Light unto the nations." Our enslavement in Egypt prepared us to deliver the message, that there is a better way to treat people and that we are all created in His image. We learned empathy by experiencing abuse, and we reinforce this lesson yearly by eating the "bread of affliction."

Empathy is the great tool that the Almighty uses to teach us how to advocate for a better world. V’ohavtoh l’reacho kamocha (love your fellow as yourself) works because I love myself. This is the reason that immediately after we left Egypt and received the Ten Commandments the Torah launches into the laws of how to treat a slave (see the beginning of Parshas Mishpatim): because we have been there and we have done that. Says the Almighty, “It wasn’t pleasant, was it? It was difficult and degrading, correct? Now go forth and teach the world by example that there is a better way!” Thus, morals and values that many assume were always universally accepted norms actually originate in the Torah.

We have a great mission, and the world depends on Jews to complete it. Everything we do or say reflects this mission and its fidelity. When we fall short, we reflect poorly on the Creator, because we represent Him on Earth. We are the teachers of morality and the world is our students.

Absent this understanding, Judaism devolves into slices of ritual and custom that, while obligatory and significant, bypass the overarching motive behind the Jewish people's raison d'être. This is why the Rambam states that chillal Hashem (misrepresenting G-d and his vision of goodness) is the greatest of avairos, atoned for only by death.

This thesis is no new age Judaism. L'saken olam b'malchus Sha-dai (to fix up the world under the Almighty’s kingship) has been a constant yearning, fervent prayer and our ultimate goal since the beginning. It is the normative understanding of Judaism dating back to its founder, Avraham Avinu (our forefather Abraham), whose life’s mission was to teach the world about Hashem through acts of lovingkindness.

Over time, our focus on this assignment has faded. Not only is the concept of ohr lagoyim – a light unto the nations – rarely mentioned in our schools and homes, we have come to see the nations of the world as a threat to be avoided, lest we learn from their ways. We isolate ourselves, living comfortably in our own insular bubble, blocking out the problems and difficulties that face the world. Hardly the makings of a healthy teacher/student relationship!

Of course, Judaism does not advocate proselytizing to gentiles. It is through our kiyum hamitzvos (mitzvah observance) that the world is meant to see and learn. When we embrace our mission, it injects meaning into our otherwise mystifying rituals and observances. In the right context, everything begins to make sense. At the same time, our way of life becomes far more accessible and compelling to our non-observant brethren, who will naturally respect how sensitive we are and how much we care.

Certainly, there is a balance that must be found between our role to be an influence and our vulnerability to being influenced, and each community must struggle to find its path. Even so, the mandate remains and it must animate our actions as well as our interactions with the nations of the world. When we lose this focus, we live smaller lives, with less meaning and significance to the world and history. It is not compelling to join (or
rejoin) a nation that looks down on the rest of mankind. But when we heed its call, the nobility and actions of the Jewish people lights a path for the world to ultimately recognize the rulership of Hashem over the universe.

Am I advocating doing away with kiruv? While perhaps one day I will happily be looking for other employment, we are not there yet. We have some work to do as a nation before the product is so desirable that it attracts the unaffiliated all on its own. Meanwhile, organized kiruv is vital to help us get to where we need to go. It is especially through kiruv today that we have the opportunity to discover our divine relationship through fresh and excited eyes. With its infusion of energetic and motivated neophytes, kiruv offers the best hope for us to become reacquainted with the Judaism of old.

When we ultimately right our ship and infuse happiness and responsibility into our Judaism, the world will quickly take note. Positivity is contagious, and can be shared across the globe in seconds. Our actions will reflect a nation with a divine mandate, who are joyfully changing the world for the better.

Definition and mission. Its why people will choose the Chosen People.

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Kiruv versus Outreach
Making a Lasting Impact

If the period immediately following the Six-Day war was a boom time for Jewish identity and affiliation, the current period is something of a recession. But just as economic fluctuations do not eliminate certain constant axioms, efforts to increase Jewish affiliation and commitment must recognize certain constant principles. I fear, however, that efforts in America to reach the unaffiliated have strayed from certain fundamental ideals, and this change has deeply affected the effort and its results.

My concerns center on the distinction between activities that I will distinguish as kiruv on the one hand and outreach on the other. I use the term “kiruv” to reference efforts designed to facilitate a Jew’s sea-change commitment to Torah and yiras shomayim (fear of Heaven). By “outreach”, on the other hand, I refer to general efforts to provide non-observant Jews with positive experiences of traditional Judaism. The two approaches work best in coordination, with initial exposure coming through outreach, and kiruv efforts guiding those who are interested in taking the next step. Currently, however, these two objectives are often muddled, leading to obfuscated goals, an inability to measure success, and – often – ill-prepared Jews entering the observant community.

Rabbi Yitzchok Feldman is the rabbi of Congregation Emek Beracha in Palo Alto, CA.
The confusion is made more acute when one gives “outreach” the prestige of “kiruv.” The effects of outreach by itself are fleeting. They might raise the standing of traditional Jews or Judaism; or they might lessen their “strangeness,” thereby making them more accessible. But they rarely result in a sustainable uptick in spiritual growth, i.e. in choices that will bring people substantially closer to an observant life. Given the assimilation pressures buffeting a contemporary Jew, we cannot afford to be satisfied with such evanescent gains.

With far fewer resources and far less personnel than they have today, yeshivas in Israel and America were opened in the 1960’s and 1970’s that aspired to teach authentic Judaism to a small but highly motivated subset of young Jews. Aided by a conducive environment, including the enthusiasm generated by Israel’s emergence as a modern dynamo, an eager cohort with raw but powerful Jewish instincts were drawn to these yeshivas and were mentored by a small cadre of gifted and deeply motivated kiruv pioneers. The focus of such institutions was to help the student evolve into a Ben or Bas Torah (i.e., live a Torah-oriented life), despite beginning the journey with little more than an inchoate sense of Jewishness and Jewish literacy that often ended with the Aleph-Beis. The goal was wildly ambitious and, the herculean efforts were wildly successful. In an era in which the radical was not rare, such changes were both fathomable and often achievable.

Alas, society’s current cultural environment is far more pragmatic, less idealistic and certainly less radical. The Jewish youth of today is not only less prone to idealism and inspiration, but also has drifted further from Jewish roots and Jewish identity. The reaction of the Jewish outreach professional to these trends, and to the more pragmatic environment, is to assume a strategy that is far less ambitious and imaginative in aspiration, with goals too often limited to corralling young Jews into doing almost anything Jewish at almost any level (i.e., outreach). While these activities would be valuable if pursued in conjunction with follow-up efforts designed to guide the Jew towards a commitment to Yiddishkeit, this happens much less frequently than it should. Most striking, however, is the blind support of many philanthropists, despite the ineffectiveness of their investment. One would have hoped that the very pragmatism that dulls radical aspiration would, at least, mandate a more focused strategy and an emphasis on more measurable results.

Contemporary Jewish Youth

Young Jews today possess a far more tenuous relationship to their Jewish identity. Their parents’ relationship to Judaism is often weaker than the generation before, and connections to more traditional grandparents or great-grandparents can be very distant. Moreover, the likelihood that Jewish inspiration will be drawn from a connection to Israel is no longer axiomatic. Tragically, for many youth, Israel is actually a toxic topic. And perhaps most significantly, contemporary Jewish youth, like its non-Jewish peers, is less moved by idealism or inspiration than the parents’ generation.

Perhaps influenced by the perilous economic times, though the trend was evident even beforehand, the searching Jewish neshama (soul) prepared to take a few years away from the rat race to explore spirituality is almost an endangered species. Getting sixty uninterrupted minutes of religious focus in a deeply wired world is tough; six uninterrupted months seems like a pipedream. An additional factor that must be addressed in any exploration of the viability of ongoing kiruv is the fact that a large segment of the “Jewish” population is simply not halachically Jewish, a trend that is inevitably expanding and that is making outreach something of a minefield.

Not only is the nature of the Jew changing, but the manner by which relationships are formed and sustained has changed. Young people live in a world of weak associations. Social media have created a massive array of facile ways to conceive pathetically weak ties. These trends affect marriage dynamics, family relationships and communal structures. Social ties born of electronic connections have only a passing resemblance to true relationships, and they are hardly the strong bond that offers the hope of sustainability. Making introductions has become almost comically easy but that’s where such ties typically end. Connecting the Jew to his Torah heritage, however, requires deep and authentic relationships – whether across the teaching podium or across the dining room table. The ability of the non-observant Jew to engage in these types of relationships, however, is at risk.

Though the situation does not augur well for reaching out to teens and twenty-somethings, they certainly cannot be abandoned. As hard as it is to reach young Jews, they are just beginning to think about the world in
independent and meaningful ways, and it is our obligation to ensure that Judaism is part of their nascent, and fresh, framing of the world.

The Outreach Response

In reaction to these trends, enormous resources are being poured into reaching the dwindling numbers of non-observant yet accessible Jews. Using the terms I identified above, these efforts are often called kiruv, but in actuality they are usually merely outreach.

The wide world of outreach is much bigger, much more diverse, and more vibrant than when I walked into Yeshiva for the first time in 1982. This army of professionals is doing undeniably valuable work. They are representing the Torah world in all kinds of tricky situations, and on the whole they do so admirably, performing a kiddush Hashem in a world that desperately needs it. They sometimes recruit young Jews to join a pivotal trip to Israel that could challenge and even inspire them. Or they simply reach Jews who would otherwise never have a chance to encounter an authentic traditional text, or a traditional Jewish meal, or even a traditional Jew.

But very few of those mining the fields of outreach are charged with the task of bringing people to true commitment to Torah and Mitzvos. And though perhaps this “Judaism lite” approach is necessary as a first step in the kiruv process, there is typically no “next step” in place to build upon the momentary inspiration that may be triggered by the initial inspiration during a beautiful trip to Israel, in a meaningful class, or at an exciting event.

Introductory-level outreach efforts directed toward young and unattached Jews are shallow in their aspirations and fleeting in their effects without coordinated follow-up. By their very nature they are incapable of transforming someone into a committed Jew. Spiritual growth for baalei teshuva is no different in certain regards than the religious growth of an observant Jew. The frum parent and the classical yeshiva rebbe both know that the child of an observant home becomes integrated into the religious community through a deep bond with Yiddishkeit that involves deep social relationships, deep educational involvement and deep cultural bonds. Many of the earlier generation of Kiruv pioneers understood that kiruv is no different. Encouraging a Jew to perform a Mitzvah here or to adopt a custom there is simply insufficient. It is all about bringing people to a way of life devoted to Torah and to Mesora, a life that will transmit to their progeny a fighting chance to live a fully-observant, fully-actualized Jewish life. If kiruv has done its job, the children of baalei teshuva will be able to pursue such a life because of their parents’ choices, while most contemporary Jews would be willing to embrace such a life only despite their parents’ choices.

A clarification: Although much of what I am saying holds true in analyzing any outreach endeavor, my emphasis is on efforts aimed at younger Jewish singles. Couples and families, who are often unable to make radical changes in their lives for other pragmatic reasons, have always been a large segment of the Baal Teshuva population. They present, however, a different dynamic. Their progress is often made in fits and starts, and is not easily measured. Such populations make up the challenge faced by kiruv-oriented shuls and, if a city is blessed to have one, a community kollel. Together, they are best positioned to support and guide these families.

Battling Intermarriage is Simply Ineffective

An oft-repeated justification for broad-based though shallow outreach is that the effort stymies intermarriage. Tragically, however, simply preventing intermarriage is an almost meaningless and typically short-lived victory, which I do not believe justifies the allocation of precious communal resources.

Without a deeper commitment to Jewish custom and theology, many Jewish marriages can be called Jewish in sociological terms, only. When the Jewish basis of their union is simply the circumstances of their partner’s birth, there is no evidence that they will be any more motivated to pursue Jewish spiritual growth. Absent a decision to pursue a strong Jewish education for their children, the next generation will be no closer to Judaism than their parents were, usually calling for a repeat struggle to avoid intermarriage.

The sole argument in favor of battling intermarriage without deeper Jewish meaning is that such efforts will, at least, retain the possibility that the next generation will become more Jewishly involved. But this is the same hope one would have if a Jewish woman married a Gentile – namely, at least there is a possibility the Jewish child could become more attached to Jewish tradition. There was a time when delaying the hope
for another generation seemed harmless. But the forces of assimilation are overwhelming now, and we do not have another generation to wait. Basic logic dictates, therefore, that this goal justifies an allocation of resources only if it comes at no cost to true kiruv, which is providing non-observant Jews with access to the meaning and understanding of authentic Judaism.

The Preferred Approach

The proper allocation of communal resources – both financial and human – needs to be an initial allocation to broad-based outreach, but only to the extent that such outreach is directly intertwined with true kiruv follow up.

What are the components of this true kiruv?

- **Emuna**: Integral to any true kiruv effort is the communication of emuna (religious faith) to the non-observant Jew. Jews are a creative and immensely talented people, and there is much pride in belonging to such a tribe. In addition, Judaism is built upon an intellectually rigorous oral tradition that continues to beguile and enchant even the most sophisticated newcomers. But in addition to peoplehood and letters, Judaism must also be understood as a religion. That means kiruv must be upfront about G-d, Torah and Mitzvos, and the centrality of belief in Hashem and in the mesorah (the chain of tradition). Contemporary outreach tends to sidestep this basic point. The very mention of G-d is often avoided, and Jewish identity and pride are often pursued in place of spirituality. In the context of true kiruv, this serves no one well.

Kiruv must provide intense one-on-one attention, addressing a person’s questions but also his or her situation. Some people need significant assistance before deciding to become observant. Certain Jews are troubled by academic challenges to authentic Judaism, with searching questions about Biblical Criticism or other conundrums posed by the university study of Judaism. Others only need to learn the fundamentals of spirituality and the principles of Torah thought. But avoiding the core vitality of our religion is not only dishonest, but also ineffective as a kiruv approach.

- **Individuality**: Each Jew’s journey is different, and his/her needs are unique. Some will discover the elegance of learning while others the tranquility of Shabbat. Some will find the holiness of Judaism in action, and others in self-improvement. People’s familial and social backgrounds will also significantly influence their proper integration into Judaism. Some will bear the burden of intermarried parents or non-Jewish fathers. Others may face difficult career transitions when readying themselves for marriage or the creation of a Jewish family. True and effective kiruv requires an intensive approach that demands a lot more attention, a lot more teaching, and a lot more individual face-time. A long period in Yeshiva, which remains an elite experience, is not an absolute requirement, but it remains imperative that those who seek to join the Orthodox community are provided ample opportunities to attend high-level teaching and that they have access to constant doses of guidance.

After all, the Jew needs to feel the empowering sense of connection to Hashem and to know that the transformation from a secular lifestyle to one of Torah and Mitzvos is doable, and that it fits them. They need to be sure that they will land softly, that their life’s dreams and aspirations won’t be stifled, and that their actualization as people will be enhanced, and not retarded.

- **Mentors**: Authentic kiruv requires many mentors. A single source of guidance and influence is both ineffective and dangerous. Consequently, a city with a kiruv-minded community kollel is so much more effective than a community with merely a solo, kiruv-oriented community rabbi. These multiple mentors must function as more than mere cheerleaders. The Pirkei D’Rebbe Eliezer begins with a tearful Eliezer ben Horkenas pining to learn Torah. The episode ends with him paired up to learn birkas hamazon (Grace after Meals) with no less than the leader of the Jewish people, Raban Yochanan ben Zachai in Yerushalayim. Could there have been a more inspiring learning experience? For bentsching! Training for outreach professionals does not always emphasize the need for an encounter with this kind of teacher. And great talmidei chachamim (Torah scholars) must not feel that working with baalei teshuva is beneath them.

And how many teachers are really needed? A visitor to a successful kiruv retreat once remarked to the head of the program, “There’s a lot of staff here,” to which the program head responded, “Ever been to an operating
room? Two doctors, three nurses, and an anesthesiologist – all for one patient. Sounds like a lot of staff.”

The Role of the Philanthropist

The emphasis on quantifying the numbers of baalei teshuva resulting from kiruv endeavors undermines all of this. Demanding high volume is no more productive than employing an assembly line to create great art. A neshama is Hashem’s handiwork and it must be connected to its roots with individual loving care. Most baalei teshuva have career paths and life experiences which require specialized guidance. There is no room for cookie-cutter approaches or speedy pit stops. Too often the emphasis on numbers seems to assume that this work can be done like an oil change. Outreach may be measured in numbers but kiruv cannot. In Jewish communal life, a partnership must be forged between the communal professional and the funder. While communal professionals are relied upon to make proposals regarding communal initiatives and to lead in their implementation, the donor is tasked with not only providing the financial support but also serving as a check on the efforts of communal professionals. This is intended to ensure that resources are employed thoughtfully and responsibly, and that efforts do not merely reflect the visions and inclinations of the visionary communal activist but are also effective and necessary.

In the kiruv world, as in other areas of Jewry, donors are most generous with their funding, but many are too deferential and inattentive. For example, few supporters focus on the need to balance outreach with kiruv, or the simple ineffectiveness of seeking to avoid intermarriage when not followed up with adequate kiruv efforts.

According to Thomas Tierney and Joel Fleischman in their book Give Smart, philanthropy should proceed through three essential steps – get personal, get clear, and then get real. A funder must begin by identifying where his or her personal passion lies. The next step, getting clear, is about settling on clear goals. Funders must decide: Is the goal outreach or kiruv? Lastly, getting real means being realistic about how to successfully implement one’s vision.

The greatest struggle seems to be to “get clear,” as fuzzy-headedness about goals is pervasive. Also challenging is to “get real.” For example, we must be realistic about the fact that kiruv programs are expensive. All labor intensive endeavors are expensive, and this one requires a lot of person-to-person interaction. Starving such programs of money is not clear-headed thinking, and neither is imposing number quotas on them. In the end, sustainable human choices are involved, and no formula or approach can guarantee what anyone will choose.

Measuring success needs to be focused on making sure outreach efforts effectively coordinate with kiruv programs. Then at least they will be held to account for giving young Jews the chance to choose.

1 Tierney, Thomas and Fleischman, Joel, Give Smart: Philanthropy that Gets Results. Published by PublicAffairs (2011). Professor Fleischman’s name will be familiar to many readers because of its appearance in the first few pages of every Mesorah Publication from the Artscroll Siddur to the Schottenstein Shas. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Mesorah Heritage Foundation, chaired by R’ Dovid Feinstein, Shlit’a.
rabbī eli gewirtz

OUTREACH IS IN

OUTREACH TO UNAFFILIATED and marginally-affiliated Jews, while by no means a new phenomenon, has taken on a higher profile in recent years. Professionally-staffed organizations offer a wide range of programs, from free trips to Israel and “crash courses” on everything Jewish, to volunteer-driven chavrusa programs and assorted other projects that aim to share the beauty of Judaism with fellow Jews. Outreach is clearly on the community agenda – as is fundraising to support these efforts.

With tzedakah dollars in short supply, however, there are those who question whether the community can afford to allocate funds to outreach when there are so many other pressing communal needs. Even without the proactive efforts of the various outreach projects, there exists a palpable thirst for Jewish knowledge among Jews of all ages, affiliations and levels of observance. Whose obligation is it to quench the thirst for Jewish knowledge and increased Jewish involvement sparked by Birthright, for example? Should it be left to the Federations? What about the thousands of Jews who search the Internet each and every day seeking opportunities to connect with their heritage? Who will be there for them if not us?

Still, questions about outreach remain, even for the outreach enthusiast. Here are a few:

Consider for a moment what constitutes success in outreach. Is it a feeling of Jewish pride? When someone decides to become fully mitzvah-observant? When parents enroll their children in a Jewish day school? When someone decides to date only Jews?

Suppose someone previously impacted by an organization’s efforts becomes committed to Judaism only after being involved over a span of years with a variety of rabbis and organizations. Can it perhaps be argued that some of the organizations along the chain were superfluous or redundant?

Finally, consider the following typical scenario: An organization with a staff of ten professionals successfully attracts hundreds of people each year to its events, but develops a strong bond with only a small number of these participants. The cost of running these events is considerable and in some cases prohibitive, but they do reach large numbers of people. Should they perhaps consider running fewer events aimed at complete beginners, and focus their primary efforts on individuals who have demonstrated a sincere interest in Judaism? This approach would minimize the number of people exposed to Judaism, but offer the regulars a greater degree of attention, likely improving the program’s long-term impact. Or does the positive exposure afforded to the larger numbers provide sufficient justification for its larger scale scope and budget?

What follows is a personal perspective expressed with the goal of generating discussion. The reader is invited to disagree, and I assume that many will. Here are my thoughts:

Stating the seemingly obvious, organizations dedicated to outreach should be focused on making an appreciable and lasting impact on the majority of their participants. As acknowledged, there may be no novelty in this idea but, at the risk of stating the obvious twice, the reader is asked to note three of the words used: appreciable, lasting and majority.

What follows is a personal perspective expressed with the goal of generating discussion. The reader is invited to disagree, and I assume that many will. Here are my thoughts:

Stating the seemingly obvious, organizations dedicated to outreach should be focused on making an appreciable and lasting impact on the majority of their participants. As acknowledged, there may be no novelty in this idea but, at the risk of stating the obvious twice, the reader is asked to note three of the words used: appreciable, lasting and majority.

Rabbi Eli Gewirtz is the National Director of Partners in Torah.

15 The term “impact” is intentionally vague as organizations have different ways of defining the outcomes they hope to achieve. Whatever the definition, it should measurable and at the end of the day, appreciable. It should be noted as well that this article focuses on organizations. Individuals who choose to share the beauty of Judaism with fellow Jews should not be focused on making a measurable impact. For reasons too numerous to spell out here, such a focus is almost always counter-productive.
Making an appreciable and lasting impact is an objective – not a guaranteed outcome. It is dependent on each and every participant’s individual choice and personal circumstances. That said, certain factors seem to be universal among those who’ve chosen to become more Jewishly committed: a) Commitment evolves over a period of time, usually a considerable period of time. b) Commitment occurs after having had numerous positive Jewish experiences and almost always as a result of being involved with a variety of mentors, programs and organizations. c) Commitment almost always involves a substantive, ongoing, personal relationship with at least one Jewish role model over a one-to-two-year period. This role model is in addition to the organization’s staff who, while stellar role models themselves, simply do not have the time to offer the time-consuming, weekly attention, that each person requires.

The necessity for a long-term relationship with a role model cannot be overstated. In addition to serving as mentors for students as they navigate through their initial questions and struggles, this role model is often the primary, and sometimes the only, source of support for students, long after they graduate from the status of ‘student’. This is especially true for baalei teshuva, who in many cases make significant changes in their lifestyle only to discover that the teachers who always seemed to be readily accessible are no longer nearly as available. In contrast to long-time Jewish community members who enjoy extensive support from family and friends, these brave men and women suddenly find themselves without families to go to for yomim tovim and without a network of support – just when they need it most. One can only imagine the pain experienced by someone who effectively turned their life upside down to become more observant only to sever their religious ties in frustration after feeling unsupported in their everyday life. This phenomenon is unfortunately not uncommon.

Having established that making an appreciable and lasting impact ought to be the organization’s driving objective, organizations would do well to a) clearly define their objectives and hoped-for outcomes, and b) have a system in place for evaluating whether they are achieving their objectives. Without a clearly articulated goal, it is impossible to accurately gauge their success. Without an objective system for self-evaluation, they can’t possibly know what they’re doing right, and what needs to be tweaked, fixed, or completely revised. A survey of all participants conducted by an independent entity is an excellent way for organizations to accomplish this goal. It’s also a good way to demonstrate the organization’s effectiveness to donors and potential donors. Anecdotal “evidence” will only go so far.

Funders of outreach projects need to be careful not to confuse ‘numbers’ with ‘impact.’ On the surface, an organization that can attract many hundreds of people to its events can appear to be more successful than those that reach fewer people. Such thinking however, can place an unhealthy emphasis on reaching ever greater numbers of people, effectively ensuring that even fewer numbers of the participants receive the individualized attention so critical to their growth.

Finally, while many, if not most, organizations make an appreciable and lasting impact on many of their participants, few are equipped to make an appreciable and lasting impact on the majority of their participants. Nor should they be expected to. Why not? A medical analogy may be useful here. An expectant woman with a heart condition must be seen by her cardiologist throughout her pregnancy, but it would be foolhardy for her to expect the cardiologist to deliver the baby. It would be equally foolhardy for her to expect her cardiologist or obstetrician to personally provide the tender, ongoing homecare she’ll require once her child is delivered.

By their nature, outreach organizations have a limited number of professionals. To be sure, their staff is likely more versatile than most medical specialists and can simultaneously wear many hats. Yet, with only seven days in a week to work their magic, they simply can’t offer a full range of services for every one of the multitude of people who come through their doors each year. Unsurprisingly, the one service which tends to suffer the most is the matching of each student with a role model that can potentially develop into a long-term personal relationship. Even when offered, not every student will take advantage of such an opportunity. However, failing to offer such a provision practically guarantees that the majority of their participants will eventually drop off the map.

A number of organizations do have one or two staff members whose responsibilities include “follow-up.” This generally means that someone will reach out and “stay in touch” with the program’s alumni, and, where appropriate, inform them of events or programs in their area. Well-
meaning as such efforts may be, they invariably fail to have any staying power. In some of the better-case scenarios, the follow-up person may arrange for participants to be matched with a family that will hopefully adopt the student and cultivate the necessary long-term relationship. Though certainly beneficial, such endeavors often fall short of meeting their objectives. Unmonitored as they are, these families may or may not follow through, the student may or may not ‘click’ with the family, and the relationship may or may not continue with any regularity over an extended period of time.

The discerning reader may detect a personal bias— that organizations work strategically and cooperatively with others, such as Partners in Torah, that have the ability to simultaneously offer ongoing, personalized attention to thousands of people.

With budgets nearing, or in excess of, a million dollars for the typical organization, it seems only logical for each organization to do what it does best – offer a meaningful Jewish experience to as many men and women as possible, effectively demonstrate the beauty and vibrancy of Jewish life, and engage participants in learning and other Jewish activities. The time-consuming and long-term relationship building, on the other hand, should be left to dedicated volunteers that are professionally coordinated and monitored on an ongoing basis. Consider the efficiency of this model: one paid coordinator can effectively manage 250 volunteers! In simple dollars-and-cents terms, that’s an additional 250 devoted staff members for the price of one. Seems like a pretty good deal.

To be sure, not every outreach student will be attracted to the idea of studying. While a surprisingly large number of people will opt for this when it is diligently promoted (and only if it is diligently promoted), some will require a different type of ongoing personal relationship which organizations such as Partners in Torah cannot provide. Nonetheless, the burden on the organization can be drastically reduced if they outsourced at least those who would benefit from this very personal and effective weekly studying experience.

Several organizations agree. After experimenting with a number of other models for follow-up, two national organizations and a handful of smaller organizations have partnered on some level with Partners in Torah to ensure that their follow-up will be properly managed and monitored. Some have created their own Partners in Torah face-to-face program to service as many people locally as possible, and refer the rest to Partners in Torah’s national office to be matched with an over-the-phone study partner. Both groups, those who are serviced locally and those who study over the phone, are entered into a database to which the individual organizations have full access, allowing anyone whose “partnership” dissolves to be quickly matched with a new mentor.

Another invariable benefit of being part of a larger database is that the organization can then learn about Partners in Torah’s former and current participants in its area, giving the organization access to numerous, and in many cases hundreds of, ‘warm’ leads.

If such a solution exists, one wonders why others have not yet jumped at the opportunity.

One explanation might be the fear of another organization encroaching on their potential fundraising prospects. Petty as this may sound, in the real world, organizations struggle mightily to meet their budgets, and such thinking can enter the equation. The following anecdote illustrates just how this may play out in real life:

Some time ago, I made a fundraising call to someone who had been learning with Partners in Torah for over 10 years. After I introduced myself to him, the gentleman spent several minutes extolling the virtues of Partners in Torah and how he considers it one of the most valuable services offered by the Jewish community. He continued to describe how his family’s life had been forever changed by Partners in Torah and how proud he was that both his children were now attending a Jewish day school. I then asked him to consider making a donation of $1,800. Without hesitating, he responded that although he loves the organization, he could not make a contribution at this time. He explained that he and his wife had donated a building to the local day school and a Sefer Torah to their shul that very year, and they could not afford to make an additional charitable contribution. I thanked him for what he had done for his community and... whether we had somehow failed by not doing a better job of holding onto him so that we too could benefit from his largesse. How is it, I wondered, that the day school and shul benefitted so greatly from our efforts while we wouldn't even receive a relatively minor contribution? I then realized (okay, maybe not right away) that
while we may never enjoy his financial backing, this was a major success story.

As this story demonstrates, success can be determined by the net gain to the Jewish community. If so, then maybe, just maybe, outreach organizations (dare I say, all Jewish organizations?) would do well to start thinking about how we can all work towards the common goal of making an **appreciable and lasting impact** on the Jewish community. Furthermore, as noted earlier, increased commitment to Judaism generally happens only after having been involved with a variety of mentors, programs and organizations. As such, for an organization to accomplish its goals, it needs its students to connect with other Jewish organizations. Taking this a step further, any barometer of an organization’s success should include an assessment of the existence and the quality of its involvement with other organizations.

Overly idealistic though it may sound, the question of how organizations can at least begin to work together should be on the agenda of every outreach organization. While the idea may never be realized in its fullest sense – and will likely encounter some resistance – funders of the various outreach initiatives have an opportunity to nudge this process along by making it clear to outreach professionals that they consider the creation of inter-organizational partnerships an indication of the organization’s strength, rather than a sign of weakness. This small step could go a long way in addressing some of the questions raised earlier and in ensuring that we collectively make an **appreciable and lasting impact** on the Jewish community at large.

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**IT’S NOT YOUR MOTHER’S KIRUV**

**THIS IS THE STORY OF** how I, as one of the editors of *Klal Perspectives*, lost my place in kiruv Paradise, and how I found my way back again.

As I dove into the submissions we received for this issue, little did I realize that I would find it similar to beholding what used to be an angelic child who has turned into a teenager. The experience can age a person beyond his years. I found myself traveling back to memories of another time in kiruv, and comparing the outreach initiatives of previous years with descriptions of the current version. Soon I was longing for an era that seemed to have passed without our realizing that it had slipped by. How had things become so….different? I began to fret. Could this work? What would the future bring?

As an editor of *Klal Perspectives*, I had hoped that this issue would offer a change of pace after the ponderous topics of previous issues. Here was a topic, I thought, that would elicit a plethora of completely upbeat responses. Every article, I expected, would bring a smile to readers’ lips.

Many readers will react that way, and I am happy for them. We did, after all, gratefully receive a good number of thoughtful responses from highly competent practitioners of kiruv.

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**Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein** is the director of Interfaith Affairs for the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a professor of Jewish Law and Ethics at Loyola Law School and the Founding Editor of Cross-Currents.com.
I, however, could not manage a broad, cheek-to-cheek grin. I found myself discomfited by some unanswered questions and challenges. We had posed some very specific questions to our potential contributors. Some were particularly difficult. I am an enthusiastic kiruv booster, but I am painfully aware of the new-fangled skepticism about kiruv, and I wanted the authors to convince us that the outreach enterprise remains one of the crown jewels of contemporary Torah living. I was hoping that the authors would make an effective case that kiruv should occupy a position of prominence on the hierarchy of community priorities. I wanted to feel good, but did not want to receive self-congratulatory testimonials.

We had issued a challenge to our writers: show us that kiruv pays off. Justify the expense in time, talent and money. Show us that kiruv has not stalled out. Demonstrate how it is cost effective. Hit us with cold facts and figures – the case you would make to reassure an efficiency-oriented donor. As I started reading the contributions, I grew concerned. I was learning a good deal about some genuinely exciting new strategies and programs, but I was not getting the reassurances that I was looking for. Almost unanimously, contributors simply avoided answering the questions, or explained why they could not provide the requested facts and arguments. Some explained why it is difficult to provide a metric for kiruv success. Nonetheless, they confidently insisted that kiruv was a worthwhile endeavor. (I was already convinced of that.) Most of the other articles seemed to say, “You asked us to hit one out of the park. We are not sure we can do that in regard to numbers and cost-efficiencies. But we can nail a line drive just over the head of the shortstop – at least our particular organization can – and that will get a player to first base.” My hope – shared by some of my colleagues – is that the contributors, after reading the other pieces in this issue and hearing some of the critique by their fellow kiruv professionals, will respond with follow-up articles or letters, which we will be happy to publish.

This, however, was not altogether reassuring. In first reading the submissions, I found myself looking at something very different from what I had committed myself to some decades ago. I was used to passion and exuberance on the part of kiruv professionals – dreamy visions of an idyllic future, couched in superlatives. In the kiruv I knew and championed, it was taken for granted that vigorous outreach would both change the face of the frum community, and lead the rest of Jewry back to observance. All Jews back then were divided into three categories: FFB’s, BT’s, and NYBT’s, the last acronym indicating Not Yet Baalei Teshuva. The new realities that now stood before my eyes weighed heavily upon my mood. So much had changed from the kiruv of yesteryear!

What changed? Here is a quick inventory of the differences.

- **Who is doing it.** Kiruv had come of age since the time that our impressions of it were created. It had once been the peg upon which a small number of souls on fire hung their visionary hats. Once a small number of impassioned souls heeded a call to rescue their brothers and sisters from impending doom. They were an expeditionary force sent into a war zone, trudging through the mire of cynicism and rejection, and carrying huge burdens of fundraising in their backpacks. Today, kiruv is a job description. For a **yungerman** on the cusp of leaving kollel to earn a living, and without any specific career training, one of the options for consideration is kiruv. (This does not imply that such people will not do a good job. Clearly, many rise to the occasion once they learn the ropes. They deserve credit and appreciation for locating themselves in communities that some of their peers will not consider. Nonetheless, what used to be an expeditionary force has become a regular army.)

  In earlier times, **mekarvim** boldly proclaimed that they could turn around a generation. Those they would inspire would in turn inspire their families and friends, and an entire people could be turned around. It didn’t quite happen. To be sure, across North America, **baalei teshuvah** have increased the numbers of **mispallelim** in shuls and children in the classroom. They have introduced new skills and a renewed enthusiasm to Orthodoxy Judaism. Like most revolutions, however, by the second generation they had become establishment. Today, kiruv is similar to a rescue effort after an earthquake. You tend to the victims you think you can still save, aware that most will remain buried under the rubble.

- **Who is open to it.** Kiruv used to be looking to a different audience. The spiritual seekers of the Sixties and Seventies – the low-hanging fruit at the Kotel on the way back from Tibet, waiting to be plucked by R. Meir Schuster (may HKBH send him a **refuah bekarov**) and ably directed to a Shabbos meal or a yeshivah – are nowhere to be...
found. The number of mekarvim has dramatically grown, but enrollment in kiruv yeshivos has shrunk. Young people are no longer eager to put their life plans on hold for a few years while they explore their heritage or find themselves; the career marketplace has turned much more competitive, cruel and demanding. Hence, the debate about focus. Should it be college students? Couples starting families? Back then, the issue was triage. With so many to help, whom do we help first? Today some of us are questioning whether a much larger number are beyond help, at least bederech hateva (absent a miracle).

- **The sources from which it draws.** Rabbi Buchwald charges in his contribution that kiruv never really “made” baalei teshuvah. For the most part, the numbers came not from the spiritually unwashed, but from people with some religious background, primarily through the Conservative movement. That movement, however, is now in its death throes, closing its schools and temples and moving towards a merger with Reform. It failed miserably in its long-term goal of conserving halachic practice for future generations. Those future generations they were anticipating are the young people of today who are marrying out without flinching, or who have dropped out of Jewish affiliation altogether. The inexorable slide of the Conservative movement into spiritual oblivion will mean even fewer kiruv candidates from their ranks in the future.

- **How Orthodoxy’s coming of age drives down the numbers.** Orthodoxy itself has changed. It once had a certain mystique of being sort of other-worldly, a counterculture of cholent rather than weed. It was relatively unknown to the outsider, except for its reputation –known only from a distance – for authenticity. Its faults were hidden from public view. Being Orthodox was presumed to demand sacrifice and discipline in the pursuit of spiritual rewards. Today, we are in the public spotlight often, but not to receive adulation and admiration. We cannot even count the number of front-page scandals that have marred the image of the Torah Jew. We are viewed, on the one hand, as harboring abusers, banning books and women’s faces, as intellectually rejectionist and primitive, judgmental and xenophobic, and perpetuating the cycle of dependency that Senator Moynihan observed in other communities. On the other hand, we are depicted as materialistic and self-indulgent, spending far in excess of what we earn. The outsider looking in (and the media help him do it with the click of a mouse) sees greater variety in eateries, wine labels, designer sheitels and Pesach orgies of consumption than in ways of connecting with Divinity. In a word, as we have exploded in size, we have become a less inviting community to join.

Rabbi Avrohom Edelstein’s piece set me on the road to recovery. He answered each of our questions with facts and figures. Where he had none, he evidenced that the inability to respond was due to the inherent ambiguity of the question, not for lack of trying. As the head of Ner L’Elef, he has placed hundreds of mekarvim in all sorts of positions and places. Many of our other contributors are good examples of the Rambam’s ba’al melachah achar: they are expert and passionate about their own bailiwick. Rabbi Edelstein, however, observes the entire landscape – the successes and the failures, the traditional and the novel. He is convinced that the number of people interested in Judaism is growing rather than shrinking. His treatment of the topic was nothing less than magisterial.

Rabbi Ilan Feldman was also magisterial, but in the realm of hashkafa (perspective). He speaks to our hearts and minds, reminiscent of the idealism some of us heard in a different generation. Perhaps that is because he is part of that generation that heard the exhortations of Rav Nachman Bulman, zt”l, and watched the unflagging energy Rav Yaakov Weinberg zt”l personally brought to the avodah of kiruv. By taking us back to an earlier time, he gives us the clearest mandate for the future.

Rabbi Feldman’s thesis is powerful. The greatest asset we possess is the presentation of a Torah-based community that is so attractive as to be irresistible. Kiruv has slowed because we no longer are that community. We may be an observant community, but we are no longer a model community. “Fifteen or twenty years ago we were pretty confident in asserting that being frum was not only a fulfillment of G-d’s will, but that Orthodoxy represented a lifestyle that would provide a family with tranquility, healthy relationships, proper values and meaningful spirituality. Over the last two decades, however, there has been an undeniable recognition that a morass of social, familial and religious challenges have crept into our families… The mindset of an ‘Observant...
Community’ is fearful focus on the threat of secularism and its enticing allure, with little attention allocated to the power and grandeur of Torah. Strangers are suspect. The wagons must be circled… The first step in the outreach’s agenda must be the transformation of the frum community. We must recognize that many non-observant families are led by emotionally and financially secure and successful educated parents who respect wisdom, consider weekend volunteerism to be an exalted way of spending one’s free time, and view wholesome family activities on Saturday afternoon as a healthy way of building character. We cannot possibly expect such parents to join a society in which routine Shabbos table talk favors disparaging secular wisdom rather than exploring subtleties and ethical messages in Torah.”

Rabbi Feldman’s prescription gives me hope because it ties the future of kiruv to the very future of the Torah community. With HKBH Himself guaranteeing the latter, the former will surely follow as well. Count me as a returnee to kiruv Paradise.

The Paradise that I returned to, however, is still not the unspoiled place it was before Man left his imprint. My enthusiasm for the kiruv enterprise may have been reignited, but uneasiness with some of the contributions continues. I remain convinced that our asking direct, pointed questions of the contributors was the right way to go. It is disappointing that many contributors did not care or were unable to respond with even the most basic data. While several of the articles make a good case for the difficulty in defining success in kiruv, surely any organization needs to operate with some sort of operational definition of a mission accomplished, and ought to be compiling data on their performance. Surely every kiruv effort can set goals and expectations, and measure how well they are being achieved – and even compute the costs.

In so many areas of Jewish communal life, we cannot make informed decisions without real data and real analysis. As difficult as it may be, all institutions in Jewish life need to become more transparent and more accountable. If, for example, two tzedakah solicitations for fairly comparable causes confront me on my desk, and there is money left for only one, I would like to know which one delivers more with less overhead. With finite resources available, it is simply not good enough to tell me that each one of them performs a wonderful and vital task. Similarly, without gainsaying the value of many forms of kiruv, I would like to know which ones deliver more – and why. I can learn from and appreciate many of the thoughtful arguments offered in these pages, but if a particular variety of kiruv “costs” X number of thousands of dollars, we need to know that and factor it in to our communal thinking, particularly when we are facing in parts of the country a meltdown of our day school chinuch system.

It will also make a better community. We are far too forgiving when we give people a pass simply because they are involved in something positive or holy. Too many things can be allowed when we argue that X is doing a fine thing, so leave him alone. Since the Editorial Board began mulling over the issues and challenges that we face as a community, we have spent many hours looking for patterns and themes. Speaking only for myself, one conclusion that can be drawn is that much that ails our community boils down to not setting up expectations, and not demanding accountability. This applies not only to individual kiruv organizations, but to other parts of the communal cholent. Schools don’t show where their monies are going, or justify the level of expenditures relative to others. Tzedakos may be doing a good job, but some spend an inordinate percentage on overhead, PR, salaries (for relatives), etc. Individuals learn for years in yeshivos and kollelim without any monitoring of progress, retention, or accomplishment. (One colleague argued for compassion. It is not the fault of the kiruv organizations, he said. The years of learning that nurtured them also knew no measurement or assessment. Kiruv workers were simply performing according to the same rules that governed their years in yeshiva! Indeed this might be true. But all the more reason why “laissez-faire” should not be the words describing our expectations from our professionals, and why the questions we posed seemed like a good place to start asking for more).

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Keeping perspective is crucial. My hesitations about some of the articles amount to nothing more than a mum oveir – a temporary, passing blemish on a body of kiruv that is healthy and vital.

Chazal tell us that Herod’s beis hamikdosh (Temple) displayed uncommon beauty. Its stones were staggered, creating the visual impression of undulating waves.
Why waves? Rav Hutner, zt”l, explained beautifully, according to a report that I received orally. Each wave, heading towards the shoreline, evidences strength and power. At its closest approach, the wave crests to its fullest height and fury. A few seconds later, all that remains is water meekly trickling towards the toes of the observer standing a short distance away.

The beis hamikdosh would not last very long after Herod’s renovations. It was destined to become a pile of smoldering rubble. Was it worthwhile investing in a dying enterprise? Chazal tell us that the last decades of a beis hamikdosh had to resemble the might and majesty of towering waves, even if they would all come crashing down a short while later, and become a memory. Until the very end, Klal Yisrael had to put all their strength and passion into the avodah of the mikdosh, regardless of what the future was going to bring.

In fact, those last decades produced a transformation in the way Torah was learned and propagated. The products of that revolution sustained and continue to sustain the Jewish People through two millennia of galus.

We do not know whether kiruv is slowing down, as many contributors conceded, or speeding up, as Rabbi Edelstein and Rabbi Eliezrie maintain. By assembling this issue, it has become clearer in my mind that we must rouse ourselves from our lethargy and recommit ourselves to kiruv with zeal and enthusiasm. We must reconnect to the mission HKBH entrusted to us – bringing Eloku (G-dliness) to the world. In so doing, we will not be saving souls as much as saving ourselves.

epilogue, jonathan rosenblum

I WRITE FROM A DIFFERENT perspective than most of the contributors to this symposium – not from the point of view of the kiruv professional, but as a beneficiary of the kiruv movement that first began to flourish in the early ‘70s. My wife and I came to Israel in 1979 on our honeymoon and found our way to Ohr Somayach, where I learned for over two years, which were followed by nearly a decade of full-time kollel learning. I am also currently at work on a biography of Rabbi Noach Weinberg, the great visionary of the early ba’al teshuva movement.

Apart from a lack of Yiddish – which in America can give one away as a ba’alei teshuva – my wife and I would appear to be well-integrated into mainstream Torah society: We have both held public positions, our children’s shidduchim do not seem to have been adversely affected by any stigma attaching to being ba’alei teshuva and we function comfortably within Israeli chareidi society (or at least our particular subgroup of that society).

Yet it would not be fully accurate to say that we have ceased to be ba’alei teshuva. Many of our closest friends are those with whom we have shared the journey, including, in my case, three siblings. And we continue to interact on a regular basis with a variety of ba’al teshuva institutions. I am a frequent visitor to both Ohr Somayach and Aish HaTorah, and a few years back had a morning chavrusah in Darchei.

Jonathan Rosenblum is a columnist, author, biographer and lecturer.
Noam, another ba’al teshuva yeshiva, whose rosh yeshiva is my next door neighbor.

We regularly host guests from the two ba’al teshuva yeshivos in our Har Nof neighborhood – Machon Shlomo and Machon Yaakov, where my youngest brother teaches – and from Neve Yerushalayim, the ba’al teshuva seminary in Har Nof. In addition, I’m often struck by how many of the mainstream yeshiva and seminary students who join us for Shabbos are themselves the children of ba’alei teshuva.

On my travels, too – at least those outside the New York metropolitan area – I’m acutely aware of the large number of ba’alei teshuva whom I meet. Nearly a quarter of the Johannesburg community today is shomer Shabbos, the highest percentage of any Jewish community in the world, outside Israel. Yet until the early 1970s, there was scarcely a shomer Shabbos community at all in South Africa, apart from a small German-Jewish kehillah. Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein is himself a product of the wave of teshuva that swept South Africa from that time, and despite his relative youth, is fast emerging as one of the most dynamic and articulate spokesmen for Orthodox Judaism in the world.

I spent a Shabbos a few years back in the Atlanta suburb of Dunwoody, in a congregation led by Rabbi Binyamin Friedman. Fifteen years ago, there was not a shomer Shabbos Jew in Dunwoody. Today there is a vibrant Orthodox shul, which began as an outgrowth of an adult education series under the auspices of the Atlanta Scholars Kollel (ASK). On a recent visit to Cincinnati, I heard about a suburban Conservative synagogue that was taken over by a dynamic young Orthodox rav, who started with an Orthodox minyan in the basement. Rabbi Yaakov Meyer in Denver has created a thriving shul in a neighborhood that was previously without any shomer Shabbos families. And for good measure, I can easily rattle off another dozen shuls in which I have spent Shabbos in which the majority – usually a large majority – of the mispallelim did not grow up in shomer Shabbos homes or are geirim.

The four founders of the Dallas Kollel (DATA), all of whom learned in kollel under Rav Tzvi Kushlevsky while I was there, literally transformed the Dallas Jewish community, as detailed by Rabbi Benzi Epstein elsewhere in this issue.

Last winter, I spent a week speaking for Aish HaTorah – U.K. I was astounded by the dedication of the team of rabbis to changing the face of Anglo Jewry. On a Friday afternoon less than two hours before Shabbos, there were still ten people working in the London headquarters. Over a week in England, I managed only a partial glimpse of the organization’s overall approach, which included a distinct action plan targeting every demographic of Anglo Jewry – from high-flying yuppies and Oxbridge students to the rundown neighborhoods in which most London Jews once lived. Over the last decade, Aish – U.K.’s manifold activities have resulted in a statistically demonstrable decline in the British intermarriage rate.

WHAT IS MY INTENT with this pointillist presentation? It is simply to point out how much kiruv is going on today and how much energy and creativity many mekarvavim devote to the task. To one for whom ba’alei teshuva are real life individuals, and not just statistics – admittedly a small percentage of all American Jewry – the question of whether too much time and money was devoted to introducing them to Torah takes on an entirely different perspective.

Kiruv is not just something that happened in the halcyon days of the ‘70s among back-packing hippies picked up by Rabbi Meir Schuster at the Kotel. It is happening today as well, even if those coming to ba’alei teshuva yeshivos are more likely to be Wharton grads than spiritual seekers fresh from the Himalayas.

Kiruv was always a frustrating enterprise, and it always will be. Every ba’al teshuva is at some level a miracle. The odds are always against someone thoroughly reexamining the default assumptions with which he or she was raised. Ba’alei teshuva cannot be “made” (as in the ugly phrase “I made so-and-so frum”) or mass produced. Even in the imaginary golden age of kiruv, not more than one out of ten who entered the doors of Aish HaTorah or Ohr Somayach stayed for any period of time.

About thirty years ago, a close friend of mine from Ohr Somayach who was then a congregational rabbi in the South, remarked at an AJOP convention, “It’s so hard to influence someone to become a ba’al teshuva.” Bracha Zaret, who founded JAM (Jewish Awareness Movement) on the UCLA campus together with her husband Rabbi Moshe Dovid Zaret, responded, “It’s not so hard. You just have to care enough.” (Anyone who doubts the impact of present day kiruv should
Rebbetzin Zaret’s insight remains true today. And that is what I was attempting to demonstrate above. Those who come to the task with passion, the ability to show genuine concern for their fellow Jews, and a solid base in Torah learning will have a positive impact on Jewish lives. Some will be more productive and some less, but over time they will all witness “miracles” they can point to with pride.

Sometimes the seeds they plant will only take root years later and may be watered by others in the interim. And sometimes their impact will only be charted by a Divine calculus, as even those Jews who appear to find their way to Torah through pure serendipity may well be the Divinely ordained beneficiary of the efforts of some determined, selfless kiruv worker half way around the globe.

The nature of kiruv does not remain static. The field is not the same as it was forty years ago. The rapid decline of the Conservative Movement, in particular, and of Jewish identity among the young, in general, are real challenges. So is the uncertain economic future facing many college graduates, which makes them less willing to take off a year or more for full-time study in Israel.

But contrary to what we may think, the environment for kiruv has improved in many respects. The resources available for kiruv – both human and financial – dwarf what was available then. In the early days of the modern kiruv revolution, virtually the only ones available to go out into the field were themselves ba’alei teshuva, often relatively freshly minted. Today, the field is as likely to attract those who have spent their entire lives in mainstream yeshivos. In the London branch of Aish HaTorah, for instance, all but one of the ten senior staff members are the product of a mainstream yeshiva.

In the early ‘70s, there were almost no English-language works available for a Jew whose curiosity about Torah was piqued at any level. Today, top quality translations of Gemara and Chumash (with Rashi and Ramban) exist, and much of the classic Torah literature has been translated as well. The number of English-language works available – both inspirational and explanatory – many of them produced by ba’alei teshuva - has increased exponentially. The Internet has made it possible for a Jew in the most isolated outpost to access an almost endless supply of shiurim on any topic he chooses, as well as a dozen Ask-the-Rabbi sites.

And perhaps most importantly, the recognition is growing in the Orthodox community, through organizations such as Partners in Torah and Project Inspire, that kiruv is too important to leave to the professionals. It is an obligation incumbent on the entire community. That recognition greatly multiplies the available manpower, and makes possible much more of the crucial informal kiruv done at the Shabbos table.

I DO NOT MEAN TO ARGUE that everything is so hunky-dory in kiruv that we need not bother measuring the success of various kiruv efforts. I do believe, however, that a great deal of energy is currently wasted massaging numbers to satisfy donors, and that many workers in the field ignore their own best instincts in favor of programs that generate “measurable outcomes”.

There is virtually no area in which the Torah world would not benefit from a great deal more hard data, and kiruv is no exception. It is not a static field. The opening of the gates of the FSU in the early ‘90s, for instance, brought into play an entirely new demographic and mandated a reallocation of communal resources. It did not take a weatherman then to know which way the wind was blowing. But there are more subtle shifts in the responses of different population groups to kiruv efforts that require more sophisticated statistical analysis. (I, for one, am convinced that kiruv efforts in Israel offer greater potential return on the kiruv dollar.)

There are also more talented and less talented kiruv professionals. Though the difference may not be easily discerned in one year or two, over time it likely will be. Identifying those who possess the requisite chemistry is clearly a desideratum, and it makes sense to direct greater resources in their direction. (It is possible, however, that someone who was only minimally successful in one institutional structure will be much more successful in a structure more suited to his particular talents.)

My guess is that those who receive little positive reinforcement from the targets of their efforts will leave the field of their own accord, simply for the lack of satisfaction. (Unfortunately, even some who do have that
positive feedback may leave the field for other reasons, such as the lack of suitable schooling for their children near their university campus.)

THE QUESTIONS POSED by the editors of Klal Perspectives implicitly ask whether the results from current kiruv efforts justify the amounts currently being expended, and whether money now spent on kiruv would be better directed to other communal needs – the most often mentioned of which is kiruv k’rovim.

With respect to the comparison between kiruv k’rovim versus kiruv rechokim, I would argue that the two go hand-in-hand. A community that does not hold its own young will of necessity be less attractive to outsiders. (That contradiction makes frequently heard calls for a major proselytizing effort among gentiles by rabbis in the hemorrhaging Conservative movement so pathetic.) For instance, college students from non-Orthodox homes are unlikely to be positively influenced by their Shabbos observant friends’ rapid flight from Torah observance as soon as they arrive at college.

Conversely, an Orthodox community whose members give more thought to why they feel fortunate to have been born into a Torah observant family and how to convey those feelings to those not so privileged would be better equipped to hold its young. Young people who toss off observance at the first opportunity – not because of any familial or personal dysfunction, but because they have never found mitzvah observance to be anything other than a set of unwanted restrictions – have likely never heard their parents express much excitement about being an Orthodox Jew or demonstrate that excitement in their behavior.

I DO NOT BELIEVE that the claim of kiruv rechokim to communal support can be evaluated by any specific metric – e.g., how much was spent last year per college student who went to study in yeshiva or a seminary in Israel – without adding a lot of other factors to the equation, many of them difficult or impossible to measure.

Among those factors is what the ba’alei teshuva bring to the Torah community. Here I write as a ba’al teshuva partisan who is convinced that the contribution of ba’alei teshuva has been considerable. Even if the numbers entering were merely equal to those leaving the Torah community, I would argue there has been a net gain in quality. Let me just mention a few of those contributions.

Just as Orthodox-educated university students in full flight from observance send a negative message to other Jewish students, so too do those becoming powerfully attracted to a Torah life send a positive message to Orthodox students. On a personal level, I remember the decision of a brilliant college friend to undergo a halachic conversion, after much learning, as a powerful impetus to look more deeply into my own Judaism.

Ba’alei teshuva have brought energy and enthusiasm, as well as many skills in short supply, to the Torah community. Those coming from sophisticated secular backgrounds helped create an audience for some of the deepest Torah thinkers of our time, such as Rav Moshe Shapiro. And they have also used to their command of contemporary intellectual idiom – Rabbis Akiva Tatz and Jeremy Kagan come immediately to mind – to make the Torah of those thinkers available to a broad audience, including those without an extensive Torah background.

The ba’al teshuva movement has pushed the Torah community to live up to its own highest ideals. Because ba’alei teshuva were often attracted to Torah observance through contact with some of the most exemplary figures within the Torah world – my own list would start with Rabbi Aharon Feldman and libadel bein chaim l’chaim, Rabbi Nachman Bulman – they demand that the Torah world live up to its own highest ideals, and are less willing to accept certain failings as “normal.”

Members of the Torah community involved in kiruv are acutely aware that their actions can have a powerful impact for good or bad on the perception of Torah life of not-yet-religious Jews. The greater the communal involvement in kiruv – which is by definition outward-looking – the greater the incentive to behave better. (As a general rule, the more isolated and self-enclosed a Torah community is the worse will the behavior of its members be, particularly with respect to mitzvos bein adam l’chaveiro.)

Finally, ba’alei teshuva, who have personally experienced the difference between a life of Torah and mitzvos and one without, still tend to bring the greatest passion to kiruv work and constitute a disproportionate percentage of those active in the field.
NO LESS IMPORTANT than what the ba’alei teshuva bring is what the Torah community would lose by making a strategic decision to retreat from kiruv. That retreat would constitute a betrayal of some of the most fundamental Torah values. At present, the Torah community is the last bastion of Klal Yisrael consciousness. Only those who believe in a Divine mission given to the Jewish People at Sinai can offer a coherent account of what binds Jews together. Knesses Yisrael is the corporate identity of the Jewish People, of which each individual Jew is a part. Halachically, that concept is expressed as areivus – e.g., no Jew has fully discharged his halachic obligations, such as Kiddush, until each Jew has done so.

To turn our back on kiruv would constitute denial of Klal Yisrael – of the shared destiny of the Jewish people and the mutual concern incumbent on each of us. As a sometime apologist for the Torah community, I’m frequently asked whether Torah Jews care about anyone besides their own community. I always point to the tens of millions of dollars raised each year in the Torah community to support kiruv work – e.g., the entire SHUVU school system, which boasts superior secular studies and an enriched Jewish education, supported to the tune of over ten million dollars a year by American baalebatim. Shuvu was founded at the request of the late Rabbi Avrohom Pam, to serve children from Russian-speaking families in Israel. (Yes, I do understand that non-religious Jews might not consider that form of concern benevolent.)

In a pamphlet written in 1905 called Chizuk HaDat, the Chofetz Chaim quotes the Sifri on the verse, “And you shall love the L-rd, your G-d,” which refers to Avraham Avinu as “the one who loves Me.” From here, the Chofetz Chaim derives that the essence of the Love of G-d is to “call others to Him.” And similarly, when one does not devote himself to combating the disgrace to Hashem that results from widespread alienation from His commandments, one demonstrates his indifference to Hashem’s honor.

The Chovos Halevovos writes that even one who has perfected his soul to the level of perfection of the prophets does not enjoy the reward of “one who shows others the proper path and turns the wicked around to the service of Hashem” (Sha’ar Avodas HaElokim 5:6). And in Sha’ar HaBitachon, Chapter 4, he goes even further and writes that even one’s good deeds do not entitle him to reward in the World to Come unless he also teaches “others about the service of G-d and guides them in doing good.”

In the above-mentioned pamphlet, the Chofetz Chaim describes the failure to act to rescue one’s fellow Jew from ignorance of Torah as transgression in bein adam l’chaveiro – a form of “don’t stand idly by on your brother’s blood.” Therefore, he writes, if one cannot save one’s fellow Jew himself, he is required to hire others to do so.

Just as lack of effort to bring Jews closer to Hashem reflects a lack of ahavas Hashem (love of G-d), so too does it reflect a lack of ahavas Yisrael (love of one’s fellow Jew) and of belief in the “genetic” connection of every Jew to a life of Torah and mitzvos.