COMMUNAL LEADERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE

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introduction and questions

ASK MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE JEWS about successful models of structured Jewish self-government, and they will point to the Vaad Arba Aratzos of 16th to 18th century Poland. At its best, the Vaad's operations included many lay people working in concert with the most respected Torah figures of the generation. In some areas, the labor was divided: lay people took more responsibility in some, and rabbonim in others. Decisions were often signed by both. For the most part, the Vaad got things done.

So much has changed since the heyday of the Vaad. No one would argue that the Vaad model is practical for the American Orthodox community today. We do not have anything resembling a unified approach to issues affecting the community as a whole, nor are people of one mind as to whether we would want one, even if it could be constructed. We have important community institutions that were assembled over decades through the mesiras nefesh of many people to whom we are beholden. Each addresses a different slice of the pie of communal issues.

Yet, we are aware that much has changed even since the founding of those institutions. There are new challenges, owing to a much-expanded community, and very new social and economic challenges. How well are we prepared for the future? We asked a group of people with years of experience tending to local and national...
leadership groups to help the rest of us think through the best ways to address the present and plan for the future. We asked them to consider these questions:

1. Which issues should be dealt with by local institutions and which by national ones? How can national institutions achieve the mandate they need to work effectively? How can/should local institutions react when national policies seem at odds with their more localized needs?

2. In the times of the Vaad, each kahal was defined by the existence of a local authority that dealt with issues of halacha, as well as vital community needs such as tzedaka. Very few of those kehilos exist today. What defines a community unit in today's calculus?

3. Are there effective ways for lay people today to interact with rabbinic leadership? What should be the role of lay people?

4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of existing community organizations? Should we strengthen those already in place, or phase in new ones as needed? Are there others that should be phased out, or re-imagined?

5. What advice would you offer the younger generation about how to become effective leaders within the current environment? What are some of the obstacles they can expect to face and how might they overcome them?
THIS ISSUE OF *Klal Perspectives* explores the topic of Community Leadership Infrastructure. In addressing communal leadership, our focus is not on the major principle and policy questions dealt with at the highest levels of national leadership, but on the application of these principles and policies to serving the needs of the community.

In a sense, it would be fair to say that this is the primary topic *Klal Perspectives* was founded to address, as the only effective means of confronting any of the challenges faced by the Orthodox community is through some form of community leadership. In fact, it can be argued that if we had an ideal leadership structure, that system would effectively manage the challenges we face and would even anticipate and control new ones.

Our contributors universally acknowledged that no formal leadership infrastructure exists for any segment of the community. Some suggest possible explanations for why this is while others offer proposals suggesting how we could improve the system we have.

Below is a summary of each article. As always, we would love to hear from you.

**Moishe Bane: Orthodoxy’s Infrastructure: A Product of Selfish Generosity**

The American Orthodox Jewish community exhibits extraordinary generosity, but the generosity is often driven by self-centered, individual initiatives that ignore broader community needs, vision and oversight. This trait has even
infiltrated the overall communal personality. Consequently, the national community, and most local communities, fail to expend effort in surveying and assessing broader communal needs, or to study future communal needs and create a plan to address them. In addition, this communal personality has resulted in a diminishing role for national organizations. Perhaps harnessing the power of this selfish generosity may provide a way forward.

**Rabbi Yehiel Kalish: Defining Organizational Mission**

A primary responsibility of the professional and lay leadership of any Orthodox Jewish organization is to reconsider routinely the reason for the organization’s existence and to ensure that its vision remains fresh and current. The greatest organizational challenge facing American Jewry is allocating and structuring responsibilities amongst institutions in the context of an increasingly diverse Orthodox Jewish environment. It is appropriate to take a step back and explore how the national organizations might better apply themselves in the context of today’s burgeoning Orthodox Jewish community.

**Rabbi Kenneth Auman:**

**The Making of Many Organizations is without Limit…**

With no effective national or local community infrastructure, the Orthodox community is besieged by *mosdot* of all types, with little consideration of the priority of the particular issue being addressed, or the manner by which it is approached. Additionally, there is no realistic likelihood of longer-term strategic planning and there is no one to consider the overall use and appropriation of communal assets. If we wish to bring order to the chaotic world of organizations, it is the top tier of contributors who are needed to make the difference, in consultation with wise rabbinic, lay and professional leadership.

**Aharon Hersh Fried, Ph.D: Where Should We Begin?**

If we were to succeed at organizing our communities into a *Kehilla* structure, its success would depend on developing an
informed framework for problem solving and decision-making – one with a strong foundation of fact-finding and research. If American Orthodoxy has aspirations of tackling its challenges in a responsible manner and in constructing an infrastructure capable of earning respect and deference, the community must first establish and sustain a strong multidisciplinary data-gathering task force that will produce the information and data upon which proper decision-making must be based.

Rabbi Kenneth Brander: The Sacred Synergy Between Local and National Organizations

American Orthodox Jewry would benefit greatly from increased cooperation and coordination between and among local and national organizations. Examples include greater synergism between local and national institutions, regular meetings that include all segments of the larger Jewish community to discuss specific issues affecting the entire community, more focus on whether a national institution can help problem solve than on their relative religious or hashkafic positions, more responsibility on national organizations to keep a pulse on local community needs and increased coordination among national organizations.

Rabbi Gedaliah Weinberger: Musings Regarding The Orthodox Community

There is enormous diversity of opinion regarding the proper definition of “community” in American Orthodox Judaism, with wide-ranging views regarding the appropriate degree of authority and leadership properly wielded by rabbinic and lay leaders. There is a need for increased communication among community factions, but it must be facilitated, or it will never occur. Forums need to be created for the interchange of ideas and frank discussions. Ideally, issues that face every community and upon which there is little disagreement should be addressed by the national organizations on a collective basis.
Rabbi Moshe Hauer: Idealistic Realism in Communal Leadership

Effective leadership is built on a commitment to Shalom that does not preclude disagreement or demand uniformity but that places significant value on communal unity. Leaders are best advised to recognize and appreciate the value of partnership with others and to view change as a gradual process of building communal confidence and influencing attitudes. This posture of humility should be extended to those one is charged to lead, as imposed, authoritarian leadership rarely succeeds in the long term. Rather than breaking down existing structures, change can be brought about by introducing modest but replicable models of change.

Dr. Irving Lebovics: A Realistic, Aspirational Communal Structure

American Orthodoxy thrives in a sociological and political environment dominated by a culture of individual autonomy, liberty and freedom and the likelihood is not high that mandated communal authority will be warmly embraced any time soon. Because of how deeply affected our community is by the unprecedented, autonomous culture in which we live, the predicate of any communal structure must be its appeal to the community, rather than expectation of obedience.

Zev Dunner: Contemporary Challenges in National and Local Orthodox Leadership

The freedom enjoyed by the America Orthodox community breeds the sort of individual self-determination that undermines coordinated leadership, whether locally or nationally. Locally, individual initiatives to meet communal needs can be enhanced by competition, which is the great incentive to provide value. But nationally, there remains an urgent need for a representative national organization to function at the highest level. Ultimately, the community depends on the gedolim, but solutions are needed to relieve them of the impossible burden that currently rests on their shoulders.
David Mandel: The New Equation – Taking Community Service into the Future

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the Orthodox community experienced a rapid expansion of independent non-profit organizations that assumed many of the responsibilities traditionally held within the structure of a local kehillah. Today, the majority of our community’s needs are served through these organizations, which succeed or fail based on factors unique to the modern non-profit sector and that often are not aligned with the interests of the community. The emergence of the independent non-profit organization as perhaps the leading force in serving community needs is a development that must be analyzed.

Rabbi Ron Yitzchak Eisenman: The Shul Rav and the Local Community

In times past, shul rabbis played a prominent if not leading role in all important community decisions. While this model still may be active in some communities, it is no longer present in most cases. Most troubling about this is the trend toward organizations becoming individual monarchies rather than community establishments. Perhaps it is time to include shul rabbis on the boards of directors in community organizations.
ORTHODOXY’S INFRASTRUCTURE: A PRODUCT OF SELFISH GENEROSITY

WHILE STILL IN YESHIVA, one instance when I could not fully understand the views of my rebbe, Rav Yaakov Weinberg, zt”l, concerned the concept of altruism. I had suggested that true altruism is unachievable, since even acts of apparent selflessness reflect the individual’s desires, such as to be the kind of person who acts selflessly. I noted that whether people get their pleasure from primitive sources or from more elevated ones, all are satisfying their own needs or desires. Rav Weinberg vehemently disagreed and advised that I would eventually grow to recognize and appreciate altruism. I speculated that while such lofty accomplishments were not out of my Rebbe’s reach, they would likely forever elude me. Thus far, I have been correct.

I suggested then, and I continue to believe now, that for the individuals who have yet to transcend my very human reality, true altruism is unachievable. If every person is driven by personal drives, and simply undertakes to satisfy their “self”, what distinguishes one person’s actions or accomplishments from another’s? After all, they are simply satisfying their “self.”

I suggested that the distinguishing feature among people is the scope of who is included in their “self.” The most primitive person sees himself as a solitary individual. Most healthy

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people successfully expand their sense of self to include others, such as their spouse and children. When anyone in this expanded ‘self’ is threatened, they are personally threatened, because they identify that person as a part of themselves. The greater the person, the more expansive the ‘self.’ I surmised that a true gadol is one who truly feels that the entirety of Klal Yisrael is his ‘self.’ The gadol feels the pain and joy of every Jew, because every Jew is he.  

Several years ago, one of my sons directed me to Rav Shimon Shkop, zt”l’s introduction to his sefer Sha’arei Yosher in which he suggests this very thesis. I harbor the hope, however, that one day I will gain access to my Rebbe’s lofty world and see that true altruism is indeed achievable.

In this essay, I introduce the concept of selfish generosity, and suggest that many of the deficiencies of the American Orthodox infrastructure result from our self- centered focus. I suggest that our community’s enormous generosity is flawed because it extends only to those with whom we identify and associate. But is that not inevitable if there is no altruism in anyone’s behavior? Is not all generosity of this very nature – satisfying our own personal needs?

My sole suggestion is that, while everyone may be restricted by the need to satisfy self in every act or decision, selfish generosity is harmful to society when it becomes exclusive and divisive, undermining the interests of the community as a whole for the satisfaction of the individual. When people do not even aspire to expand their sense of self beyond its natural affinities (perhaps even celebrating its limited scope), their “generosity” will ultimately obstruct the needs of a healthy, functioning society.

THE EXTENSIVE INFRASTRUCTURE of the American Orthodox community is actually amazingly impressive. While some suggest that the Eastern European “kehilla” structures were more organized and authoritative, in most instances they were

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1 For a similar idea, see Rav E.E. Dessler, Michtav MeEliahu, Vol. 2, Pg 178, and Vol. 1, Pg 37.

2 Klal Perspectives Summer 2013
actually governmentally mandated. Moreover, the Eastern European Jew often felt alienated from general society, and had no social alternative but to associate with others from within.

By contrast, the American Orthodox Jew associates with whomever he wishes, and is certainly not compelled to integrate internally. Nevertheless, the community has constructed an elaborate infrastructure of educational institutions, synagogues, social service providers and special needs programs. By virtue of its deference to rabbis, the community also respects communal authority, and takes pride in the extraordinary percentages of its young people planning community service careers.

Simultaneously, however, the Orthodox community’s infrastructure suffers embarrassing deficiencies. The community’s institutions and resources address not only religious needs, but educational, health, financial and social needs, as well. Since the communal infrastructure plays such a significant role in almost every aspect of life, flaws in the infrastructure cannot be swept aside or ignored. Very often they are.

Among the leading challenges to the community’s infrastructure are (i) the diminishing role, and perceived decline, of national organizations, (ii) the failure of the national community, as well as most local communities, to study and consider anticipated communal needs and create a plan to address them, (iii) the paucity of analysis of community needs on a truly objective basis, and (iv) the absence of community-wide resource allocation studies, on both a national level and within community segments, that would help guide the respective communal priorities.

This essay will review several of the community’s most prominent cultural characteristics, and suggest that much of both the impressive accomplishments and embarrassing deficiencies is an outgrowth of those cultural traits.

The Nexus between Culture and Infrastructure

The infrastructure of a country, business, charity or religious community reveals much about its culture. A community’s
culture and infrastructure are, of course, correlated. The three most dominant influences shaping American Orthodox culture, and thereby the community’s infrastructure, are the Torah tradition, the community’s recognition of being a people in exile (Golus), and the American personality and ethic.

**The Torah Tradition:** Torah tradition is the most prominent influence on American Orthodox culture. Torah values produce profound communal respect for Torah study, Halachic observance, family and charity. The Torah ethos encourages the Jew to sense that he belongs to a special people, and to recognize both spiritual and historical ties with other Jews. Shabbos, Kashrus and minyan, and many other observances, remind the observant Jew that he is “different,” and necessarily lives a life of segregation, to one degree or another.

The centrality of the Oral Torah tradition shapes the rabbinic-reliant nature of the community. The rabbinate plays a pervasive role, educating both children and adults, overseeing religious ritual, and answering Halachic questions. It touches every dimension of daily life, from the kitchen, to the bedroom, to the office. Defference to rabbinic authority and guidance is a keystone of the Orthodox experience.

In multiple ways, Orthodox practices also impose significant economic pressure. Parochial school education alone leaves some otherwise financially comfortable families struggling economically. At the other end of the economic spectrum, the communal need for extraordinary levels of philanthropy transforms the wealthiest from merely being targets of admiration or envy into critical benefactors, on whose largesse others rely. These various influences produce a community that relies on its own rabbis, resources and people.

**A People in Exile:** A Torah Jew behaves and thinks like a person living in golus. We remind ourselves of this golus daily, both in prayers and during Grace after Meals. The typical rabbinic sermon often concludes by hoping for the end of golus, and the joy of a wedding’s climax is seared by a reminder of the historical destruction and the resulting golus. While it may appear that the freedom and indulgences of
American life have blotted away the recognition of being in exile, in many ways the American Jew is relegated to being a Golus Jew.

The exile personality is one of suspicion and wariness. Sometimes, the recognized threats are physical and other times cultural, social or intellectual. The openness and seductiveness of American culture and society is particularly enticing. Increasingly, the intrusion of technology has added a seemingly unstoppable intrusion that poses a devastating threat to Torah observance and to the preservation of the frum community.

One of Orthodoxy’s understandable responses to the golus threat is segregation and isolationism. Though each community segment distinguishes itself by the degree to which it imposes such segregation, this segregation is ubiquitous. Whether by sending children to a Jewish school, maintaining a kosher diet or living within walking distance of a shul, segregation is fundamental to the Orthodox experience. For many, clothing, avoiding non-Orthodox cultural and entertainment experiences, and restricting music and reading choices provide additional barriers.

Though not perfect or without costs, the insularity strategy has succeeded. The American Orthodox population has grown exponentially, not only in numbers but also in the degree and scope of both Mitzvah observance and Torah study. While many lament the flow of those abandoning Orthodoxy, the retention rate of yeshiva high school graduates – particularly in the more insulated communities – appears to be strong, and certainly stronger than one might have feared. Around the Shabbos table, complaints regarding sons foregoing college are more likely due to kollel than to lack of responsibility or drug use. Moreover, the yeshiva graduates in secular academia and the higher professions appear to retain their observance at impressive levels. In fact, it seems as if even yeshiva graduates whose depth of commitment to Orthodox Judaism has waned more than often still send their children to a Jewish day school or yeshiva.

The community’s culture of insulation and segregation, in
whatever degree on the Orthodox spectrum, significantly impacts the community’s infrastructure, translating into an expansive infrastructure premised upon a deep sense of mutual responsibility. There is a sense (or illusion) that every community member is cared for, in one way or another, and every member is a supporter or participant. For example, all children attend a day school and cheder, which in turn claim to uniformly supplement or provide full scholarships to every single student who legitimately cannot pay in full.

Insulation has also resulted in the establishment of numerous internal community social service agencies addressing needs that would typically be met by outside agencies. The frum community has its own job placement services, mental health resources, food banks and even paramedics. Though invaluable to an insular society, these services are costly. Fortunately, G-d’s most generous benevolence has led to many Orthodox families enjoying substantial economic success, and almost every affluent family extends itself to the community.

The barriers against outside forces constructed by Orthodox Judaism are critical to Torah’s flourishing in golus, but there have been unintended consequences. Often isolationism does not end with segregation, but also leads to degradation and derision of those “outside the camp.” By imposing a physical, theological and cultural distance between himself and others, the Orthodox Jew risks creating a personality of alienation. Rather than embrace Torah values, wisdom and culture simply for their truth and grandeur, he may elevate his own approach to Torah by degrading the values, wisdom and culture of others. Rather than viewing being an Orthodox Jew as a privilege and responsibility, he risks turning his religious commitment into a sense of superiority. Tragically, this self-centeredness and hubris leads to selfishness.

How can the Orthodox Jew, whose Torah values only enhance his generous personality, be simultaneously both charitable and selfish? It is possible to express one’s generosity by “going all out” to help others, while selfishly restricting the scope of “others” to those akin to oneself. The Orthodox Jew has created and mastered the art of being selfishly generous.
This trait develops by first establishing a significant divide between Jew and non-Jew. Barriers are then erected between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews. Finally, as could be predicted, the divide extends to factions within the Orthodox community. As such, the very segregation and isolationism that produced the exalted infrastructure leads directly to its least appealing characteristics.

Selfish generosity means giving generously, but only to beneficiaries with whom the benefactor identifies. We build schools for children like ours and extend chessed to those who look like us or share our political or cultural views. Selfish generosity means donating primarily at events honoring a peer, rather than those supporting pressing communal priorities. And it entails investing primarily in causes directly bearing on one’s family – whether devoted to managing a particular disease, the pain of older singles, the suffering of a divorcee without a get, or children at risk. While support of causes that touch oneself and one’s family is both appropriate and healthy, the community’s overall resource allocation scheme cannot afford to be guided by that principle. It often feels as if it is.

There is a well known halachic principle of “aneyai ircha kodmin,” priority goes to one’s neighbors. This directive historically applied to ensuring the well-being of one’s neighbors and family, though there is also a basis to include residents of Eretz Yisroel among one’s neighbors. The principle, however, has been extended beyond geographic proximity and, in practice, guides resource allocation toward those with whom one identifies, regardless of location. This practice also is sensible. The tragedy, however, is that most frum Jews view the spectrum of those “with whom they identify” as so very, very narrow. Rather than consider every Jew in need as their brother, they often view as their brothers only Jews who look like them. Rather than seek to support the religious growth of every observant Jew who is sincere and devoted to Torah and halacha, they view as worthy of assistance only those whose religious style and approach is identical to their own. Would a person’s “self” be expanded, their aneyai ircha parameters would expand, as well. There is
surely a principle that charity begins at home, but it has never been suggested that it should end there, as well.

The experience of isolationism has not only affected the Jew’s social experience, but also his personality and perspective. He has been trained to define “self” as narrowly as possible. He has been acculturated to view an expansive “self” as dangerous, rather than exalted.

Exceptions to this rule include Israel’s vast Orthodox-created chessed institutions that service the broader community, though perhaps Israel is different. American exceptions, such as Satmer Bikur Cholim (which is so often cited as an exception that one may suspect that it was created in order to serve as the token minority), merely highlight the rule. The community watches its own back and trains its youth to do the same.

American Influence: Rarely has a Jewish community, and certainly not a frum community embraced so passionately the culture of its host society. Even the most insular Orthodox Jews have been touched by American values of independence, equality, ambition and creativity. As Americans, the Orthodox community has assumed the American “can do” spirit, and embraces human equality (at least of others within its own community segment).

In light of the central role that rabbinic authority plays in Orthodox doctrine, the American Orthodox Jew struggles with America’s derision of authority, and the influence of a society in which no person or office is so esteemed as to escape mockery. Balancing the American ethos of independent thought and the Torah doctrine of rabbinic authority is a formidable challenge, and this struggle plays significantly in shaping the community’s infrastructure.

While most institutions and dimensions of the infrastructure claim to be guided by rabbinic authority, true deference is often superficial. Even the most respected rabbi may be heard deflecting rabbinic responsibility for curing a community woe by lamenting the limited rabbinic sphere of influence. Calls by community leadership to support a particular cause or behavior carry little weight, and the tradition of lay people allocating
their charitable dollars to the community’s *gabbai tzeddaka* (central collection), or to their local Rav or Rebbe for prioritization and distribution, appears to have substantially disappeared.

Resistance to authority, of course, is not unique to American Jewry. Jewry’s greatest leaders, from the times of Moshe Rabbeinu and onward, confronted this challenge. The difference is that American resistance to authority is not just a deviant tendency but rather a celebrated value.

American Orthodoxy has innovatively resolved its struggle regarding the validity of authority. It pledges allegiance to rabbinic authority, decrying as heretics those who refuse. In practice, however, deference is most often limited to purely halachic decisions, or to rabbinic positions consistent with one’s own. The only types of rabbinic decree attracting consistent loyalty are those that declare that someone else is doing, or thinking, something inappropriate.

The rather ambiguous role of rabbinic leadership may also result from the passive role assumed by most pulpit rabbis and Roshei Yeshiva. Notwithstanding the communal leadership role assigned to the rabbinate, it seems like rabbis rarely engage in studying the communal landscape and its people, and even less often advance a vision for prioritizing and addressing communal needs. For understandable reasons, most leading rabbinic personalities appear to focus almost exclusively on their own students, congregants and institutions – or those who may approach them directly for assistance or guidance.

Rabbinic passivity encourages lesser individuals to fill the leadership void by initiating and building programs and institutions on their own. Guided by selfish generosity, these communal entrepreneurs dismiss any objective exploration of the community’s needs and resources in favor of advancing personal affinities and needs. Requests by this cohort for rabbinic input is superficial, typically limited to soliciting rabbinic letters of support, or carefully avoiding crossing select policy lines that might trigger a rabbinic objection.

Another American character trait is to view every problem as
solvable, every challenge as worthy of attention, and every perceived need as appropriate to be addressed. This culture leads to wonderful benefits for the community’s infrastructure, but it also introduces significant challenges. The expansive view of the potency of the community has led to a plethora of absolutely wonderful programs, incentivized creativity and spurred enormous progress in tackling long-ignored or denied internal challenges and crises. Orthodox Jewry is the richer for it. However, there is a downside. Most significantly, communal resources are typically expended on initiatives not considered in the context of broader communal needs. Absent a rigorous focus on communal planning and triage, attending to every concern inevitably diverts resources away from critical issues that either affect larger numbers or otherwise have greater priority.

In addition, there is a downside to saddling an already overworked and often overwhelmed communal leadership with unrealistic expectations. The inevitably dashed hopes often translate into diminished financial commitment, compromised communal faith and reduced allegiance to communal leadership and its infrastructure.

The Redefining of “Community”

Another profound impact on the infrastructure of Orthodox Jewry has been the redefinition of “community.” Traditionally, a frum community encompassed observant families who live within walking distance of shuls. While members may have deviated slightly in culture or observance, community affiliation meant both practical and psychological identification with neighbors and the local communal infrastructure. Local communities recognized that certain functions were best addressed by national organizations, and so the most highly respected national organizations thrived as they addressed certain collective needs of the various local communities.

Over the past decades, the geographically-defined sense of community has waned. While one’s town or neighborhood infrastructure still addresses certain needs and frames one’s identity to a limited degree, Orthodox Jews increasingly
associate and identify with others based on other criteria as well. For example, they often view their community as those with whom they share an approach to Torah values and culture, regardless of where they live. Shared values and culture may derive from a common yeshiva background or a Chasidic rebbe, or by nationality, such as Syrian or Bucharian. For yet others, community may be built upon a common ideological view – such as supporting or opposing Religious Zionism. There is even a geographically dispersed community of families who share a collective focus on kiruv.

This redefining of community results from numerous trends. Families relocate more frequently, and children often marry and move far from home.

The pervasiveness of modern communications, media and the Internet likely has played the greatest role influencing sense of self and identity, in conjunction with the ease, speed and affordability of travel. These technological developments have profoundly altered the human experience, and impacted the frum community and its infrastructure incalculably. For example, proximity and geography are no longer the exclusive keys to relationship building. This shift in the composition of community necessarily affects the way in which American Orthodoxy addresses infrastructure, as well as interactions among community segments.

**Are There Any Truly “National” Organizations? If Not, Who Cares?**

What constitutes a National Organization? An organization may claim to be “national” because it addresses a need that is prevalent throughout the country or attracts members and loyalty from beyond a single region. The agenda of an Orthodox organization that is truly national, however, must be expansive, earning the allegiance of the greater portion of American Orthodox Jews. Aside from perhaps a smattering of single-issue institutions, American Orthodoxy enjoys no truly “national” organizations.

In earlier decades, American Orthodoxy was substantially
dominated by Eastern European immigrants and their progeny. While a few Sephardic Jews resided in certain cities, and distinctions in religious approaches and culture within the community abounded, a degree of communal uniformity prevailed.

Local Orthodox communities benefitted from umbrella organizations that unified them, providing a sense of security in being part of a greater whole. Moreover, local communities were typically ill-equipped to create programs and approaches to religious education and engagement, and lacked the resources or training to represent their own interests and needs in the public marketplace. Thus, the national umbrella institutions assumed these roles. The national organizations were, thereby, respected and appreciated by the broader frum community, and attracted the involvement and support of many of America’s most committed, capable and creative Orthodox Jews.

National Organizations Failed to Change with the Times: As described above, the nature of “community” changed, leaving American Orthodoxy as a patchwork composition of disparate communities of interest. Each of these sub-communities maintains its own halachic standards and specific views regarding the day’s central issues, such as the public and communal role of women and the appropriate degree of integration into American culture and society as well as into the broader, non-Orthodox Jewish community. The most significant distinctions among community segments are the varying degrees (at least in theory) of deference afforded to rabbis, and the extent to which there is a commitment to keeping things “the way they were.” But distinctions between communal segments are not restricted to hashkafic matters. There are also distinctions based on culture, such as whether Chasid or misnaged, or country of origin, such as whether Syrian, Bucharian, Israeli or Russian.

No single organization tries to balance the often-competing needs among these segments, or even to coordinate joint efforts among disparate segments regarding issues that they have in common. Each alleged umbrella organization represents an
increasingly narrow faction of American Orthodoxy, typically a single community segment, and the spectrum of each faction is narrowing further. Occasionally, an organization will pay lip service to representing a broader swath of American Orthodoxy, perhaps even inviting someone from another segment to join a board or speak at an event. However, unless the interests of other segments happen to align with the communal segment dominating the organization, the expansive agenda quickly fades. In sum, the traditional national organizations simply fail to represent today’s more diverse composition of American Orthodoxy. This is no surprise, of course, since American Orthodoxy’s current trend of selfish generosity only sharpens the distinct preferences of individual sub-groups, at the expense of genuine concern about others, even if they are Orthodox, as well.

Is there Really a Need for a National Organization?

The failure of organizations playing important functions is not unprecedented. Interestingly, though such failures are typically followed by a rush to fill the vacuum, no such rush, nor even a slow shuffle, seems to be in evidence. This likely signals either that there is no significant need for a national organization, or that there are other obstacles to developing them.

In fact, there may no longer be a compelling need for a national organization to serve functions initiated thirty or forty years ago. But there are new, vital functions to be addressed on a national level, and the absence of a national organization that can serve these functions encompassing multiple community factions is hurting American Orthodoxy.

Notwithstanding the significant distinctions among communal segments – which are to be celebrated rather than lamented – there are also many common interests. American Orthodoxy’s infrastructure should include a national organization that identifies the common needs shared by all the various factions and that works with the various factions in exploring how to address them. The actual implementation of solutions may differ among factions, in accordance with both the nuanced and the significant differences among them, whether religious or
cultural. But if brought together by a national coordinating body, each faction would certainly learn from the others, creating a far more dynamic and creative process that would benefit everyone.

Several months ago, leading chessed activists from across the country met at an unpublicized meeting to share ideas and concerns. Attendees included individuals from almost all community segments, including Lakewood, Chassidic towns, wealthy and less affluent communities and the Syrian and Modern Orthodox communities. This gathering was organized not by a large and influential organization, but rather by a single, extraordinary community activist. This group of leaders in the area of chessed, and other groups like it, would benefit substantially from a national organization that would be equipped not only to coordinate such large scale efforts on a consistent basis, but also to follow up such meetings to ensure an ongoing sharing of ideas and experiences.

In addition, a national organization is vital in order to undertake those select activities that are best pursued collectively if they are to succeed. For example, if the various factions coordinated on national and local levels in their interactions with the government, the collective agenda would be significantly advanced. The cost of private education, kosher food standards, religious freedom in the workplace and homeland security are but some examples of interests shared by all community segments. The absence of a coordinating body results in communal redundancy and waste, and signals the community’s disorganization and confusion.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, a truly national organization would demonstrate to G-d the collective love that the frum community has for each other, as well as its commitment to the kedusha of Klal Yisroel. It would also confirm that our communal segmentation is solely the result of our varying needs and perspectives, but not, G-d forbid, due to a lack of mutual love and respect. Every parent can attest that one of their greatest pleasures is witnessing love and peace among their children. How can the community deny G-d this nachas from His children?
Is Anyone Prioritizing Community Needs? Or Planning for the Future?

Based upon the absence of published reports or information (and organizations are not shy about publicizing their efforts), one observes that the various needs of the community are rarely reviewed, and their relative import and urgency almost never assessed, on either a national or local level. Facts relating to communal matters are not compiled, and the effectiveness of current initiatives and programs are rarely evaluated. Similarly, there is apparently no one sufficiently assessing the community’s future needs or engaging in long-term planning. In the absence of these critical ingredients, it is impossible to even contemplate proposing communal resource allocation schemes, which should be based on the results of these exercises, in accordance with halacha and Torah values.

These undertakings are not neglected due to any lack of resources or strong leadership, but by a culture severely limited by selfish generosity. A prerequisite to such broad endeavors is a shared commitment to the whole of the community’s needs, with a non-biased view toward individual programs and institutions. The community’s current approach is just the opposite.

Both lay and professional community activists tend to focus on their selected sphere of concern, be it education, social needs, health-related matters, or others. An unbiased survey of community needs can hardly be considered, even if reliable data would be compiled.

New organizations, projects and other undertakings – all valuable additions to the community – are typically initiated by any individual who so chooses, without consideration of broader community needs in the allocation of resources. Success of a project is usually unrelated to community need or program effectiveness, but is rather dependent upon the effectiveness of fundraisers. Often these initiatives are the pet projects of individuals who are motivated by a personal experience or as a career building strategy. Those who will be expected to support the effort are rarely consulted in advance,
nor are rabbis designated by the community to oversee such decisions. Those who decline to financially support a particular project are self-righteously portrayed by the solicitors as miserly and not community-minded. By contrast, many basic and fundamental communal needs are less alluring and exciting and thus enjoy relatively little support. Consequently, innovative and novel projects often attract far more financial support than far more critical basic needs. This system reflects selfish generosity.

Long term planning is simply not on the community’s agenda, whether nationally or locally. For example: who studies what categories and numbers of community professionals will be needed in 20 or 30 years, and whether too much or too little is invested in preparing our youth for these positions? How many classrooms and shul pews will be needed? Should new neighborhoods be established to house the seemingly burgeoning frum population? And, what are the religious and spiritual needs of the unprecedented community of retirement-age Orthodox Jews that is about to flood our community?

Perhaps most significantly, how are local institutions and the national community preparing for the avalanche of retirement and severance funds needed to ensure the basic living needs of community professionals (mechanchim, rabbonim, etc.)? There will be hundreds, nay thousands, reaching retirement over the next 20 or 30 years! American industry has shown that inadequate planning for pension funding can bankrupt an enterprise. Continuing to ignore this impending crisis in the Orthodox community is at the community’s peril. And what about the average baalebatim who will arrive at retirement with no savings to speak of (and perhaps heavy debt) because of the exorbitant costs of tuition, weddings and supporting children in kollel – children who will be in no position to help their parents? Communal planning is not pursued, of course, because it is not in sync with the culture of selfish generosity.

As noted, rabbonim and Roshei Yeshiva focus on their own congregants, students and institutions. While attending

sporadic local and national meetings, few allocate the necessary time to follow up on the issues being addressed. It is surely no fault of the rabbis; they are typically overwhelmed by the numerous demands on their time, while congregants and students pine for more well-deserved attention. Moreover, they often have to raise funds for their own institutions and thus can barely be expected to allocate meaningful time to the broader community picture. Similarly, other types of communal professionals are burdened with work, with little breathing room to focus elsewhere. That leaves these tasks to lay activists.

While lay activists are inadequately equipped to make final triage or planning assessments, they may be most appropriate to initiate the effort. In fact, lay volunteers’ skill set is often suited to addressing these types of exercises. Ultimately, these deliberations require the guidance of great Torah scholarship and the nuanced depth of mesorah. But up to that point, lay activists can play a critical role in carrying the ball.

Equally welcome would be the assumption by philanthropists of the communal responsibility imposed upon them by the wealth they have been granted. Often, philanthropists are uniquely qualified to appreciate the importance of data compilation, need assessments, prioritization and planning, and they ought to play a pivotal role in the development of community infrastructure. Too often the most affluent within the community restrict their contribution to general donations, rather than to the type of input and inquiry they would impose on their business interests. No, philanthropists should not be generating communal agendas. But, they should be urging those in charge of the infrastructure to be diligent in making communal decisions based on adequate information and with due analysis of triage and planning needs.

Proposals: Perhaps Unsatisfying and Perhaps Unrealistic

How can a national Orthodox organization be created to address the new needs of the community, along the lines described above? Similarly, what might induce the community to ensure that analyses are performed that will empower donors
and community builders to identify priorities and make the best choices? And finally, how can the community be induced to study and project future community needs, and to implement the steps that will be necessary to address them properly?

There is always the possibility that one or more Torah personalities may emerge who will capture the hearts and minds of the broadest spectrum of Orthodoxy, and successfully remodel the community’s culture, and thereby its infrastructure. But, then again, Moshiach may tragically be yet further delayed.

A Possible, though Perhaps Unrealistic, Proposal

One approach is to attempt to diffuse the culture of selfish generosity. As noted, this dangerous trait derives not from the community’s insularity, but from the self-centeredness bred by unchecked insularity. Insularity tends to breed yet other unnecessary and destructive tendencies, such as the gratuitous degradation of others, and the “bittul” (negation) of anyone whose views or behavior differs from one’s own. But, we are a wise and creative people. Can we not introduce an approach that will allow us to maintain the necessary insularity without all the harmful side effects?

The first step is to promote a desperately needed culture of respect and admiration for all people – and certainly all Jews – even when their behavior and ideas clash with one’s own. This effort should begin with an increased respect for all frum Jews. As Rav Weinberg taught, one’s Yiddishkeit and yiras shomayim must never be built on the degradation of others’ Yiddishkeit. Role models who promote this view should be selected to lead our shuls and communities, and special attention should be paid to ensuring that children’s role models encourage this attitude, and certainly that they do not advocate against it. Similarly, communities should promote increased study of seforim that encourage ahavas Yisroel and an appreciation for the kedusha of every Jew.

If such a revolution in attitude could be initiated, perhaps community members would begin to become more comfortable with the idea of expanding the scope of their “self” (especially
if it is widely discovered that increased respect for one another does not undermine one’s Orthodoxy or lead to reductions in halachic observance or *yiras shomayim*).

The common concern, of course, is that showing respect for those representing unacceptable views risks encouraging them and strengthening their resolve, perhaps even at the expense of one’s own. Though a legitimate consideration, it is diminished if adequate effort is invested in accompanying the respect with assertive expressions of one’s own positions in a thoughtful and compelling manner. Not only would asserting one’s views illuminate any misimpression by others of one’s own resolve, the need to express those positions will provide a welcome incentive to learn more about them, including the responses to potential challenges one might encounter. When a community adequately educates its members, explaining the deeper justifications for their beliefs and positions and the principles and values upon which their approach is based, the community becomes sufficiently self-assured, and ready to interact with those who differ.

**A Rather Unsatisfying, though Perhaps Viable, Proposal**

Inevitably, some will reject the premise of this essay, and argue that the community behaviors and attitudes lamented here are neither troubling nor problematic, and that they are line with Torah values. Others may agree that the behaviors described as selfish generosity are problematic, but may nevertheless favor retention of the status quo for fear of the unpredictable effects of tinkering with social and philosophical norms. After all, how can one risk compromising *frumkeit*, regardless of the possible upside?

Both of these groups will resist any inclination to change their attitudes regarding the Gentile community, or even the non-observant Jewish community. In fact, they may even fear any blurring of the lines between themselves and other types of frum Jews.

Perhaps, however, the communal infrastructure challenges highlighted above can nevertheless be addressed by *harnessing*...
the power of selfish generosity, rather than by stifling it. This would be accomplished by seeking to align the “selfish” interests of decision-makers and generous donors with the broader interests of the greater community.

The first alternative in capitalizing on the power of selfish generosity is by providing evidence to community leaders and activists as to how various suggested improvements would vastly improve the situation of their own subgroup, and how they, themselves, would be the primary beneficiaries of such improvements. For example, coordinating with others through a national organization should not be presented as a means to assist other groups, but rather to provide them with access to ideas and resources to advance their own interests.

They must be convinced that a broader study of their community’s needs would enhance their ability to succeed in their individual project, even if it requires short-term modifications of their current efforts. They must also be shown that planning for the future can materially benefit their community, and ensure their legacy for many years to come.

If this approach to utilizing selfish generosity to advance community needs fails, perhaps the only alternative is a hardball approach – one that many savvy community leaders have used for generations. Rather than trying to stifle the selfish generosity that has been frustrating the need for broader communal analysis and planning, use selfish generosity to advance the very personal needs of the decision-makers, themselves.

Most individuals involved in community matters are motivated by one or more of three considerations: a sense of accomplishment, kavod, and entertainment. Within these three overarching categories are many sub-categories, such as parnassa advancement, a sense of belonging, opportunities to express one’s talents, and opportunities to grow from association with special people. But it all boils down to accomplishment, kavod and entertainment.

Honor is provided to those involved in communal activities by raising their public profile and facilitating association with
high-end “machers.” Satisfaction is usually the product of producing actual, substantive achievements and convincing oneself that the results are achieved through one’s efforts, whether or not deserving of the credit. Finally, entertainment is attained by meeting interesting people, traveling to interesting places, and being privy to the “inside scoop.”

Perhaps the solution to creating a national coordinating organization, introducing the practice of communal assessment, study and prioritization and developing long term communal strategies is to compile a cadre of the most prestigious community personalities from across all community segments and, with great fanfare, charge the group with the task of implementing these objectives. Participation would be the ultimate kavod, and the access granted to all the inside information about community would be exhilarating. Moreover, members of this august group would necessarily have unfettered access to Torah greats, both in America and Israel, as they review their findings and contemplate triage alternatives.

This caricature of communal leadership is obviously undesirable, as efforts to serve the klal ideally must be motivated by pure intentions. Alas, if introducing a measure of self-interest could lead to a substantially healthier communal infrastructure, perhaps it is the route we ought to pursue.
DEFINING ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION

A PRIMARY FUNCTION OF THE governing board of a nonprofit organization is to define, and periodically reevaluate, its purpose and its goals. Without such continuing supervision, though a board could perhaps promote the organization’s “founding mission” generally, it cannot enunciate and implement that mission in a manner that is responsible and relevant to the community’s current needs.

An Orthodox Jewish mosad (institution) is no different. A primary responsibility of its professional and lay leadership is to routinely reconsider the reason for the organization’s existence and to ensure that its vision remains fresh and current. With its purpose and goals well defined, the organization can be confident in developing criteria for success, strategies for achieving that success, and a protocol for evaluating its achievements.

In past eras, the purpose of each Jewish organization was self-evident. In the 1890’s, in response to the increased persecution of Jews in Poland and Russia, Jewish immigration to the United States began in earnest, launching a new era in Jewish community life. In 1898, Reverend Dr. Henry Pereia Mendes founded the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations – the OU – to address the religious needs of the newly arriving Jews.

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The OU’s mandate was to introduce programs for Jewish education, Shabbos observance, kashrus, divorce, conversion and opposing Christian proselytizing.

By 1915, Jews represented 85 percent of the Free City College student body in New York City, 20 percent of New York University’s student body and 16 percent of those studying at Columbia University. Jewish immigration was so strong that in 1924 the Federal Government enacted the Johnson-Reed Act, specifically designed to slow the pace of Jewish immigration.

As the Jewish population in America increased, Jewish social service organizations were founded to assist in the acculturation and protection of the newly arrived Jewish immigrants. For example, in 1906, the American Jewish Committee was established, with a first agenda item to fight immigration quotas. Today, Orthodox Jewish organizations exist for every facet of religious and non-religious life. A family facing fertility challenges can call A-Time, when there is a need for assistance with the government the Agudah is there, a broken down car and Chaveirim is the way to go and, chalilah, if someone passes away, Misaskim is there to help with shiva.

The Integral Need for Effective National Organizations

The purpose of this discussion is to take a step back and suggest an appropriate role for the larger, national organizations, as well as a challenge or two that they each might overcome. I do not, of course, question the importance or necessity of any of the community’s most significant institutions, but rather hope to explore how the national organizations might better apply themselves in the context of today’s burgeoning American Orthodox Jewish community.

The 2010 Jewish population study estimates that there are 6.2 million Jews in the United States, 15% of whom identify as Orthodox. With a population of almost one million, the Orthodox community can ill afford to neglect its internal communal infrastructure and levels of efficiency. The need for
some basic guidelines should be self evident for the community’s national organizations.

For example, each must have a central national office located in a major Orthodox population center. The central location should likely focus on “big picture” issues, as well as fundraising and goal setting. In addition, the organization cannot afford to be disconnected from the frum communities outside the Eastern United States, and should thus have regional offices or affiliates, charged with implementing the national plan, as well as interfacing with the local community on a daily basis. Lay boards of national organizations must be engaged and committed, and must meet in person at least semi-annually, to ensure that the organization’s mission and activities remain relevant and responsible.

Woodrow Wilson served as President of Princeton University before becoming Governor of New Jersey in 1910 and ascending to the Presidency of the United States in 1912. While at Princeton, Mr. Wilson authored “The Study of Administration,” from which communal leaders can learn an important lesson. In concluding his book, Wilson states, “(the local) duty is to supply the best possible life to a federal organization, to systems within systems; to make town, city, county, state and federal governments live with a like strength and an equally assured healthfulness, keeping each unquestionably its own master and yet making all interdependent with mutual helpfulness.”

Wilson, the organizational expert, lays out for us the theory of a strong national organization and smaller local organizations which are “equally assured” and interdependent with mutual helpfulness.”

### Effective Collectivism through Allocation of Responsibilities

The greatest organizational challenge facing American Jewry is allocating and structuring responsibilities amongst institutions in the context of an increasingly diverse Orthodox Jewish community. In 1851, upon assuming the rabbinical leadership
of Frankfurt, Rav Hirsch served as the catalyst for the founding of the IRG (Israelitische Religions-Gesellschaft), arguably the most effective local communal infrastructure to oversee an Orthodox community during the last two hundred years. Yet perhaps, Rav Hirsch’s success was significantly buttressed by the fact that he was addressing a single, geographically centered community, of like-minded members. The Jews of Rav Hirsch’s community shared a central objective — to strengthen Torah and each member’s individual connection to Torah. By successfully enhancing the Torah life of his congregants and his local community, Rav Hirsch elevated the spiritual level of the entire world.

Contemporary American Orthodoxy is a far cry from the uniformity of vision Rav Hirsch encountered amongst his congregants. American Orthodoxy may share a general goal of Torah observance, but the varying manners in which this goal is pursued, and the varying emphases in education and observance which are adopted in different segments of the community, seems as disparate as ever. For the contemporary American mosad to emulate Rav Hirsch’s success, while also following Wilson’s suggested form of local/national structure, they must acknowledge that today’s frum community is comprised of multiple mini-communities, with a plethora of conflicting sensitivities, approaches and priorities. No doubt the threshold step is a mutually respectful environment in which these disparate approaches and priorities are represented in the process of ongoing organizational development. And the most obvious manner by which to forge cooperation among the differing approaches and opinions is through broad, mandated community involvement and active board member participation.

Steven Covey identifies seven habits that elevate an individual’s effectiveness. His listed habit two is to “begin with the end in mind.” Covey explains that this habit is premised upon the effective use of imagination—the ability to envision in one’s mind what cannot currently be seen with one’s eyes. Just as the successful individual begins an effort with his ultimate goal clearly defined, even the most complex
communal endeavors must strive to do the same. As Covey explains it, all things are created twice – first in one’s mind’s eye, and only thereafter in a physical, actual creation. The tangible creation follows the conceptual creation, just as construction follows a blueprint.

If American Orthodoxy is to forge a collective national effort out of the myriad differing voices within, it is critical that we collectively conceptualize the common characteristics and values that reflect the uniqueness of our kehilla as a whole. We can then define the goals we all hold in common, leaving our differences at the door. This suggestion is not meant to minimize the importance or the implications of the very significant and consequential distinctions that exist within our community in hashkafa and, at times, halacha. In fact, such distinctions should be viewed as “local” considerations in contrast to the broader national community. Such an approach can empower a national agenda that can be more widely supported, while providing a well-defined framework for addressing issues unique to individual communities, whether they are local, per se, or shared by some fraction of the national community.

The Chicago Model

Lest one believe that this distinction between collective and distinct agenda issues cannot be navigated, one need only study the Chicago Orthodox community. That community has very successfully segregated communal concerns that unite the entire community and can be jointly pursued from those that may be viewed and approached differently by different segments of the community.

On matters in which a single approach befits the entire community, clear definitions provide for how leadership will be appointed on behalf the community, with representatives from each constituency sitting together on boards. For example, the local Agudah handles governmental advocacy and the Va’ad HaTzedakos (supervision of charities), the CrC handles kashrus and dayanus (legal proceedings), the Associated Talmud Torahs handles chinuch (education), and so
on. This has been the communal approach since 2004, and it has worked well. Clearly, this success is born of the open and respectful relationship between Rabbi Gedaliah Dov Schwartz of the RCA and the Telzer Rosh HaYeshiva, Rav Avrohom Chaim Levin.

President James Madison advised that clear and strong leadership is especially necessary when so many different opinions will be present; “…a pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure from the mischief of faction… hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention…” Madison concludes that only with a strong executive will such a government succeed. The same is true with our communal organizations. Only with strong executive, or rabbinic leadership, will our communal organizations succeed in bringing together the different factions who need to be at the same table.

Imagine a world in which the OU had Chareidim on the Board of Directors and not just “in the kitchen”? Conceptualize an Agudath Israel Board of Trustees meeting where some participants had a kippah serugah on their head. Is such a world impossible to imagine? These goals are fully achievable and would facilitate an enormous advance in addressing the important collective needs of our growing community. The key is identifying the areas of collective agreement.

The ability to win broad participation by limiting an organizational agenda to widely accepted values is already evidenced in the success of AIPAC in the broader American Jewish community. AIPAC is the premier American institution for advancing the interests of a close Israel/U.S. relationship. Notwithstanding the many, many differing views on political and philosophical spectrum of supporters of Israel, AIPAC’s single, unifying focus results in a clear agenda on the ideas that unite all supporters of Israel. And, likely as a consequence of its very narrow and specific focus, AIPAC hosted 13,000 people at its most recent national conference.
Creating Relationships

Our community is dependent on the emergence of leaders who are capable of making such a dream come true, and winning the support of the community’s rabbis and lay leaders. For this to happen, we must begin to see a desire on the part of the community to move in this direction. The “best minds,” as Wilson puts it, would then be drawn to working for and participating in organizations that represent the collective of American Orthodoxy, on singularly focused, clear agendas.

The composition of the members of the rabbinic and lay boards of directors of the various Orthodox Jewish national organizations should be expanded to include participants from all segments of American Orthodoxy, both hashkafically and geographically. Leave the differences at the door and sit together to develop strategies that will help the entire community, just as Orthodox rabbis and lay leaders sit on the boards of AIPAC to create a stronger US-Israel relationship – a relationship that saves Jewish lives.

The first practical step in pursuing this aspiration is opening discussions and commencing relationships. Rabbis and educators from varying segments of American Jewry must begin to meet regularly. Such interaction will allow all to become familiarized with the agendas and approaches pursued within the various segments of the community. While different approaches will often reflect different hashkafos, other times they will simply reflect the widely disparate types of members within the various segments of the community, such as in their educational background, cultural sensitivities and economic positions. And perhaps it is even possible that the respective groups can actually learn from the approaches of the others.

Every segment of American Orthodox Jewry has rabbinic and lay leaders respected by other segments of the community. As evidenced by Chicago’s success in this regard, this aspiration is achievable – if there is a collective will.
Change is Slow; But Change is in the Air

I do not fancy a shift in communal culture that will suddenly produce the collective will that I describe. I fully recognize that communal cultures and large organizations require a slow, shifting evolution. In fact, the older and better established an organization is, the more challenging it is to facilitate change. With the passing of years upon years of “tradition,” institutions assume the character of a massive aircraft carrier, that requires significant time even to make a slight turn, let alone change course entirely.

Yet, structurally, change is in the air. Larger organizations like Agudath Israel, the Orthodox Union/NCSY and Torah U’Mesorah have started to establish a strong local presence in communities like Cincinnati, Chicago, Miami, Baltimore, Los Angeles and Minneapolis. With this expansion, if performed as described by Wilson’s “systems within systems,” and if board membership becomes inclusive rather than exclusive, the mission and goals of even the largest of institutions will evolve into the most relevant and applicable formulations for the needs of today’s American Orthodoxy.

Change in leadership is already occurring in several major organizations. For the first time, a lay leader from the West Coast recently ascended to the Presidency of the OU, redefining their mission as “Kashrut. Kiruv. Kiddush Hashem.” Similarly, there is a new Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Agudath Israel of America, who has expanded his board to include individuals who reside outside of New York. This expansion will lead to the redefinition of that organization’s holy and timeless mission. When recognized leaders make bold changes, Klal Yisroel can appreciate that these organizations care about the growth of the Orthodox Jewish community.

Cooperation and Coordination among Community Organizations

Even if a global change of communal infrastructure is slow to occur, it is certainly possible, and incredibly important, for local and national rabbinic and lay leadership of these
organizations to meet regularly for one major purpose: to prioritize the use of communal resources. Such coordination is both practical and realistic, and can have a powerful effect on the entire gamut of Jewish organizational life.

In November 1913, Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zt”l, embarked on a very difficult trip. At 65 years old, he was frail and had not been away from home overnight in many years. Yet reports of chillul Shabbos amongst those in the New Yishuv led him to spend months on the road visiting yishuvim in Northern Israel, attempting to teach them to love and embrace the Shabbos. Rav Sonnenfeld was not alone on this trip. In the face of very public criticism, he undertook this trip together with Rav Avrohom Yitzchok Hakohen Kook, zt”l. These Torah giants had many disagreements in hashkafa as well as halacha, including a major public dispute that was then raging about whether supporting the Chief Rabbinate of the secular-dominated World Zionist Organization was an appropriate way to do reach out to the non-Orthodox community, or whether such support would ultimately contribute to the secularization of the Jewish people. Yet their intense disagreement did not detract from their shared love of Hashem and His people. Consequently, when Rav Sonnenfeld embarked on this mission, he did not hesitate to choose Rav Kook as the most effective partner to join him.

Now is the time, during the incredible yet deeply challenging period of growth we are experiencing today, to overcome our differences and to confront together the issues of paramount importance to us all. We must not forget this vital lesson taught to us by the Gedolei HaDor of Eretz Yisroel in our recent history. When we need each other, nothing should stand in our way.
THE MAKING OF MANY ORGANIZATIONS IS WITHOUT LIMIT…

The Luxury of Abundance

While American Jewry is indeed fortunate to live in an age of unprecedented abundance, this blessing is not without its drawbacks. Abundance breeds waste; plenty begets lack of appreciation. One cannot but be struck by the significant change in attitudes toward material possessions over the past few generations. While our grandparents’ generation would avoid waste by routinely peeling unused stamps from unsent letters, our generation discards expensive appliances in need of repair without blinking an eye. The darning needle of yore is the collector’s item of today.

I intend not to wax nostalgic over the “good old days,” or to lament our current wastefulness, but rather to suggest that our casual embrace of personal material bounty has similarly affected our attitude toward abundance in organizational life. If King Solomon could proclaim that “the making of many books is without limit,” we might declare as well that there is no limit to the proliferation of organizations. Indeed, there seems to be no end to books or organizations that currently serve the Jewish people.

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Did we always have so many organizations? Probably not. So why do we have them now? The short answer is that our unparalleled material abundance and financial wealth have afforded us this unprecedented luxury. But there is a more sophisticated reason, as well.

**Current Absence of Communal Infrastructure**

Beginning with the emancipation of European Jewry under Napoleon about two hundred years ago, and accelerated upon the arrival of Jewry to the New World, significant Jewish communal structures or *Kehilla* type arrangements have gradually disappeared. While this trend has particularly affected American Jewry, the balance of Diaspora World Jewry has also not been immune. While it is true that European communities often have official governing bodies, their scope is limited to matters of *kashruth* and personal status, which, while of great importance, do not provide strategic guidance with regard to the myriad other important issues. And the *Rabbanut* in Israel, both nationally and locally (which together with the local *Moatza Datit* might be considered a *Kehilla* structure), has authority that is limited to specific religious functions – e.g. *kashruth*, marriage and divorce, and burial. American Jewry, however, does not even begin to have any such communal structure, whether on a national or local level.

The primary implications of the absence of a community infrastructure lie most consequentially in two spheres: First, its absence eliminates any realistic likelihood of longer-term strategic planning. Second, in the context of current communal concerns, the absence of an overall community infrastructure means there is no one to consider the overall use and appropriation of communal assets.

**Contrast to Past Eras**

Contrast this present reality with the regulation of Jewish communities of years gone by. Often, virtually every aspect of Jewish life was under the iron-fisted control of the *Kehilla* – for better or worse. For example, in 18th century Altona, no less a person than Rav Yaakov Emden was only able to hold a private
minyan in his home because he received special permission from the community! And the saintly Rav Natan Adler in Frankfurt was placed under a cherem (excommunication) for holding his own minyan and deviating from accepted custom.

In the context of these examples of a powerful Kehilla structure, it would have been inconceivable for an individual to initiate an independent organization to address a perceived communal need. Rather, any such perception would have been brought to the attention of the community heads, who would have considered the merits of the issue. If they would conclude that the suggested issue warranted an allocation of communal resources, the Kehilla itself would determine the manner and degree to which the issue would be addressed.

When Kehilla leaders are sincere individuals, and the welfare of the tzibbur (community) is their priority, this type of system functions admirably. If, on the other hand, the leaders are less than exemplary, not only would the true needs of their constituents be compromised, but others who would have the community’s interests in mind would be stymied from addressing critical communal issues. One can only speculate as to the number of instances in which vital issues were ignored or worse.

In contemporary American Orthodoxy, where there is neither a global infrastructure nor any leadership control mechanisms, any individual with the requisite energy and passion for a given cause can attempt to address a particular communal need, either by forming an organization or through some other strategy. Consequently, the community is besieged by mosdot of all types, with little consideration of the priority of the particular issue being addressed, or the manner by which the program is styled or the approach selected. But in light of the downsides of a highly controlled Kehilla noted above, is this surfeit good for the Jews, or the contrary?

Benefits and Burdens of Communal Free Enterprise

There is much that is positive in the current entrepreneurial environment in communal programming, and the resulting
abundance of *mosdot*. The frequent initiation by individuals of programs addressing communal needs not only reflects the profound devotion to *chessed* inherent in our communal culture, but also creates an environment in which creativity is encouraged and ingenuity celebrated and supported. No doubt, the opportunity for personal initiation, without the burden of passing through layers of approval by those representing the “establishment,” has allowed the community to confront challenges that, in the past, were either buried or viewed as irremediable. In the olden days, when people were not free to act in this manner, there were inevitably many individuals who had much to offer, but who were never able to realize their potential, thereby denying the community the benefit of their potentially significant contributions.

Alas, the negative effects of the current system cannot be ignored. The current entrepreneurial communal structure provides no context for the review and evaluation of individual organizations, with no mechanism to address entities that are underperforming or that have outlived their usefulness, yet survive on the common practice of many donors to simply contribute to the same charities each year. This absence of review leads to horrible inefficiency, diverting charitable dollars from the needs that currently deserve attention. Furthermore, the current system lends itself to inevitable duplication of efforts. Not only do individuals often have an incentivize to launch duplicate (though allegedly superior) organizations using judgment inevitably skewed by the needs of their livelihood, even volunteers – with overworking egos, or relatively minor differences of opinion – may compel duplication due to an unwillingness to work collaboratively with existing efforts. And perhaps most importantly, the financial support flowing to any given organization often follows not the importance of the cause or the effectiveness of the institution, but the relative forcefulness or charisma of the leadership involved.

As a hypothetical example, imagine an organization, “*Hachnasat Kallah Deluxe*,” whose mission is to provide very needy *kallot* with the most up-to-date kitchen appliances and
luxurious linens. Also imagine a second program called “Tinokot Shel Bait Rabban,” which subsidizes day school tuition for immigrant children who would otherwise not attend a yeshiva. Hachnasat Kallah Deluxe was founded by a leading, high profile communal philanthropist, who hires a crackerjack executive director successful at raising significant funds. Moreover, the board is filled with friends of the founder – many very well connected individuals who utilize their extensive connections for the benefit of the organization. Tinokot Shel Bait Rabban, by contrast, was founded by a group of extremely idealistic and well-meaning individuals who enjoy few business or social connections among the wealthier segments of the community. They can ill-afford a top-tier fundraiser, and can attract virtually no prominent board members. Though Tinokot Shel Bait Rabban may be the far more “important” cause and should enjoy priority in collecting charitable donations, there is little question that Hachnasat Kallah Deluxe will emerge as the more prominent organization.

On one hand, the success of the American economy can be attributed to its free market culture, and the laissez-faire philosophy of Adam Smith. This same dynamic should operate equally in the charitable sphere. Alas, the American economic free enterprise system works because the consumer can discern the relative value of available consumer products and services. And in instances in which the consumer is either ill-equipped to make the assessment, or can be easily fooled, the government steps in with regulation and oversight. Federal agencies such as the FDA, the FCC, the FAA and the EPA all serve as de facto drags on a true and pure free market system by monitoring the products and production to ensure the reliability of the product and the safety of their production. While the Orthodox community’s current organizational free enterprise system has many advantages, it enjoys no oversight, no regulation and no assurance that the consumer, whether donor or beneficiary of the services offered, understands the true quality and reliability of the product being acquired.

Thus, competition and free market culture, which serve the economy so well, become liabilities rather than assets when
dealing with non profit organizations. Organizations must compete with each other for the limited pool of charitable dollars available and the most worthy institutions do not necessarily come out ahead. In fact, competition often encourages donors to give for the wrong reasons. Name recognition, social giving and honorees at dinners are all examples of how the free market culture negatively affects what ought to be tzdekah giving based solely on the worthiness of the cause.

Equally true, however, is that a well-controlled and narrowly-supervised central authority offers enormous benefits, but faces equally imposing obstacles. The central planning system employed by Soviet Russia, while perhaps eminently rational and compelling, was evidenced to be a colossal failure. Power often corrupts even the saintly, and those not vulnerable to actual corruption are certainly prone to an increasingly narrow perspective on issues of concern, particularly with the passage of years in positions of authority.

**Is a Limited Central Authority Viable?**

Is it at all realistic to aspire to create a single group of distinguished lay leaders and Rabbanim who could both set communal priorities and compel a reliable system by which institutions and individual programs are assessed periodically for relevance and effectiveness? Imagine the avoidance of waste and duplication that could be achieved! The best of both worlds would be preserved. The regulation afforded by the Kehillot of old would be reintroduced, but *sans* the stifling of individual creativity. Individuals would still be able to exercise their initiatives, but priorities could be set and guidelines provided.

Unfortunately, this type of system is not likely attainable in the foreseeable future. The traditional model of the Jewish community that lent itself to control, whether in Ashkenazic or Sephardic locales, was defined by its geographic cohesion. A Kehilla was constituted by a group of Jews in a given geographic area – generally a city, or occasionally a group of towns in close proximity to one another. All Jews, regardless of
their outlooks or their level of religiosity, were included in the community and subject to its authority. Thus, the *Kehilla* was not only a controlling force in the lives of its members, but a unifying factor as well.

In the late 18th century, the geographic nature of the *Kehilla* began to change. The nascent *Hassidic* movement was accused by the *Mitnagdim* of “fragmenting the tzibbur” by creating their own sub-communities within a town. In certain towns, two fully distinct communities actually emerged – a *Hassidic* community and non-*Hassidic* one. In Prague, for example, the great Rav Yechezkel Landau bemoaned the establishment of unauthorized *minyanim* that resulted, challenging the traditional concept of the Jewish community. From that time on, community tended to be conceived as a group of Jews bound together by ideology or sociology, rather than by location, and ceased to serve as a unifying force in Jewish life.

In the mid-nineteenth century, this trend was actually embraced and promoted by a rather unexpected source – Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. Rav Hirsch spearheaded the development of *Austritt*, secession by the Orthodox from the general community in Frankfurt A/M. Rav Hirsch’s example was then followed by Orthodox groups in other German cities, as well. The defining factor of a community thereby increasingly became ideology, rather than proximity.

While this approach to *Kehilla* may have been new on European soil, it was not without its *halachic* precedent. The *Talmud* speaks of “*shnei batei dinim be’ir achat,*” two rabbinic authorities within one city. To the extent that any sort of communal structure exists in the United States, it is generally a function of “*shnei batei dinim*...” in most major Orthodox population centers. American Orthodoxy is hardly a single community, nor is it even a collection of geographically-defined communities. Ours are communities of the like minded, on both the local and national level. On the local level, community synagogues, which are the only vestiges of *Kehilla*, tend to be composed of like-minded families (in the large population centers). Similarly, our national synagogue and rabbinic bodies are also organized along ideological fault lines.
It must be so, for the religious freedom and the personal autonomy that make this country great disallow any type of coercive religious community. Our religious groupings can exist only at the pleasure of their members.

While educational institutions and synagogues are formed along ideological lines, most other types of charitable groups are agenda driven rather than ideologically motivated. They typically seek to address particular communal needs which often transcend hashkafic categories. While the initial organizers of a particular group may well all subscribe to like philosophies, the beneficiaries of the services typically transcend these divisions. Two current, real-life examples, from very different places in the spectrum of Orthodoxy, illustrate this point.

ORA, the Organization for the Resolution of Agunot, is primarily organized by Yeshiva University graduates. ORA, which provides assistance to agunot, is fully utilized by families of all stripes, with little concern for the social and ideological distinctions of ORA staff and supporters. Similarly, Satmar Bikur Cholim, as its name indicates, is founded and serviced by Satmar women, but they eagerly provide services to any and all Jewish patients in hospitals in wide-ranging locations.

ORA will look to Yeshiva University Roshei Yeshiva for guidance. Satmar Bikur Cholim is run under the aegis of the Satmar community. Neither organization would submit to the governance of a different group. While Yeshiva University might be able to exert control upon the organizations within its orbit, and Satmar will effectively govern those in its realm, there is no group able to govern both. Thus, no one will be able to definitively decide priorities for the whole of American Jewry.

Are we therefore doomed to further continue along the path of organizational chaos? Perhaps so. The freedom that democracy affords us and the personal autonomy that our society so cherishes leave great sacrifices in their wakes.
But what is it that could possibly change to remedy the current state of affairs? Though the Kehilla of old is not re-emerging, perhaps control could be introduced from another direction, a direction that is American to its core – economic clout.

Let us analyze and learn from a noble, albeit unsuccessful attempt to change communal norms. A number of years ago, concerned by the high cost of weddings that resulted from pressure to conform and “keep up with the Cohens,” a number of Roshei Yeshiva promulgated a series of takkanot in an attempt to lower the costs connected with weddings. The takkanot limited the number of guests, the menu, and the size of the band, among other items. It drew on the precedent of European Kehillot that had enacted these types of takkanot centuries earlier. However this modern day incarnation failed to achieve the success of its predecessors.

The primary reason for its failure was the lack of any type of enforcement mechanism. Had those who signed on to the takkanot refused to attend weddings that were in violation, the takkanot would have been widely observed by the adherents of the promulgators. However, these Roshei Yeshiva, who are after all responsible for the financial well being of their various yeshivot, felt that they could not afford to offend actual or potential donors by refusing to attend the smachot of their affluent constituents.

But placing the blame at the feet of these Roshei Yeshiva is not fair. They were merely being realists – mindful of the fact that their institutions depend upon the good will of donors to survive. The ultimate responsibility really falls with the wealthy donors themselves who did not feel the need to heed the call of the Roshei Yeshiva. Had they been persuaded to buy in to these ordinances, people of lesser economic means would have gladly followed suit.

If we wish to bring order to the chaotic world of organizations, we can learn from the failure of these takkanot. It is the top tier of contributors who are needed to make the difference. They could set their priorities together. While clearly they would not all be of a single mind, they could create some sort of method...
for ranking various causes and judging the effectiveness of the organizations themselves. This would have to be done in consultation with wise rabbinic, lay and professional leadership.

Motivating this top tier of contributors to take this responsibility would not be a simple task. Contributors have their own personal and communal agendas, some of which have been noted above. To convince them to think as a group rather than as individuals, and to strategize globally with the welfare of the entire community in mind is daunting indeed, but it is not impossible. A team of high caliber rabbinic and lay leadership – people possessed of eloquence, intellectual depth, yirat shamayim, conviction, and dazzling powers of persuasion – working in tandem with the influential contributors of the community might very well be able to effect the kind of change that could lead to organization and efficiency in the Jewish communal world.
WHERE SHOULD WE BEGIN?

A GROUP OF SCIENTISTS IN KENYA, seeking to protect a collection of valuable acacia trees from the harmful grazing of elephants, giraffes and other large mammals, erected a fence around them. Unexpectedly, a number of these “protected” trees declined.

A closer examination of the trees and the animal life they supported revealed that these trees provided shelter and food (in the form of nectars) to three species of ants, while the insects protected the tree against pests, like stem-boring beetles. The scientists found that when elephants, giraffes and other large mammals could no longer graze on the acacias, the trees produced less of the nectar needed to support an aggressively defensive species of ants that was fighting off the beetles. As this ant colony size decreased, and a new and less protective ant species became dominant over the others, the acacias became vulnerable to scale insects and wood-boring beetles.

Overall, the researchers found that the death rate of the
fenced-in trees was double that of unfenced ones, and they grew 65 percent more slowly.¹ Thus, because the intricate interrelationships of the ecological environment had not been adequately taken into account, the scientists’ “protective” measure served instead to bring about substantial harm.

Information & Data as Fundamentals of Leadership

This incident illustrates the complexity and responsibility in decision making that accompanies and defines leadership. Attempting to solve a “problem at hand” cannot be undertaken without first understanding its ecology, i.e. in what environment it resides, what fosters it and what limits it, and what unintended consequences may result from proposed solutions. Perhaps most clearly, this incident underscores the importance of having real information about the “facts on the ground.” It is simply irresponsible to base important decisions on hunches and hypotheses, regardless of how logical and convincing they may seem.

If we were to succeed at organizing our communities into a Kehilla structure that would adhere to the advice and rulings of a central committee akin to the Va’ad Arba Aratzos, it would behoove the members of that Va’ad to have an informed framework for problem solving and decision making – one with a strong foundation of fact-finding and research.

To ensure that the takonos of such a Va’ad be considered a בגないことים, the Va’ad would need to appreciate that any change (read takono) introduced into a community will affect more than its immediately apparent goal, with repercussions to consider. Decision makers will need to acknowledge and understand the complex interconnectedness and interdependence of the many individuals and institutions in each community.² Thus,

² The individuals (men, women, and children), family units (nuclear and extended), schools (elementary, high school, and beyond, girl’s schools, boy’s schools, schools for the learning disabled, for the
individuals belong to families, which they affect and that affect them. Families and institutions (such as schools, shuls, and many more), exist in neighborhoods and communities which they affect and that affect them. Neighborhoods and communities and are located in towns and in cities – each with their own unique culture and social and economic realities – which affect them, and which are also affected by them. And everyone affects and is affected by the larger culture of the country in which they live.

Consequently, a Va’ad would need to appreciate that the same problems presenting in different communities may require very different solutions. Factors to be considered include not only each community’s nuanced colorations of minhag, belief and practice (Ashkenazi, Sefardi, Yeshivish, Chassidic, Modern Orthodox, and more), but also the characteristics and influences of the general non-Jewish population within which the Jewish community is embedded. As the Steipler Gaon advised someone asking about curriculum in an American Yeshiva, “Go ask people who are involved in elementary education. But remember that not all that is good for Bnei Brak is good for Cleveland.” And, of course, the Va’ad will need to identify those principles that are so fundamental and universal that they apply to all alike – at least conceptually, if not always in implementation.

As a “fly on the wall” at the Va’ad’s deliberations, one might witness the frustrations they would confront in trying to address the needs of the klal clearly and objectively. Individuals and delegations from each segment and severely disabled, for the handicapped, as well as for those of our young who are seen as dysfunctional, “off the derech”, or delinquent), shuls, batei dinim, kolelim, hospitals, batei avos, chesed organizations (bikur cholim, tomchei Shabbos, Kimche D’Pischa, Hachnasas Kallah), kiruv organizations, the wedding halls, fund raising institutions, parnassah generating institutions, and umbrella organizations serving as liaisons to government agencies and to the general population are all intertwined and interdependent, often with overlapping directorates, and at times with at least partially or temporarily competing agendas.
The constituency of American Orthodoxy would advocate what they believe to be everyone’s most pressing problems. The Va’ad would need to distinguish between communal and individual problems, set priorities, and identify the issues, decisions and governance that should be addressed locally and which policies should be addressed with a national perspective. And they would need to acquire an understanding both of the factors that contribute to a community’s problems, as well as those that give them strength and protection.

If it is to be responsible and effective, all of the Va’ad’s functions would require proper research. Otherwise, it is likely to do nothing more than function reactively to impulse diagnosis and the crisis-de-jour. If created today, the Va’ad’s greatest frustration would likely be the dearth of available information necessary for such communal decision making.

In reality, of course, adequate and objective information, and the actual research to support communal decisions, are necessary to any form of communal leadership. The astounding paucity of communal data and information may be the very reason that the creation of a Va’ad, or any form of a global infrastructure for American Orthodoxy, seems simply unimaginable and not even worthy of investment or exploration. In fact, it may also be the cause of the currently diminished role and respect for any form of communal leadership and infrastructure. If American Orthodoxy has aspirations of tackling its challenges in a responsible manner and in constructing an infrastructure deserving of respect and deference, the community must first establish and sustain a strong multidisciplinary data-gathering task force that will produce the information and data necessary to proper decision-making.

The Product of Research

Some may be wondering whether such research is really necessary. Can’t anybody with half a brain simply look around our communities and see what causes what, and what needs to be fixed? In fact, of course, this view – widespread and self-evident as it may seem – is fundamentally erroneous.
For years, our community’s approach to identifying and addressing problems has followed a recognizable and predictable pattern. A good, well-intentioned person or group notices a problem in their community. Studying the problem within the confines of their communities, and based on their personal experiences, they reach a conclusion about the culprit or cause of the problem. The purported cause will then be publicized and decried, sometimes accompanied by a call for an all-out effort to eliminate the alleged cause and thereby eradicate the problem. Everyone then gets busy eradicating the purported cause, but not attending to the problem itself. Unfortunately, this approach has rarely worked.

An example of this approach has been the community’s approach to “children at risk.” Depending on what is in vogue, and on the background and interests of those decrying the problem, this phenomenon has been blamed on any one of a series of causes, including kriah (Hebrew reading) problems, poor teaching of Gemoro, a curriculum which is impossible for some children to keep up with, poor self-esteem, broken homes, Jewish schools rejecting children, faulty parenting, incompetent rabbeyim or teachers, and communities being insufficiently accepting of children who “march to the beat of a different drummer.” Additional culprits have been the lack of discipline in homes and schools, physical or sexual abuse of children, schools failing to teach enough hashkafa, parents and teachers unwilling or unable to answer children’s questions about Jewish belief and practice, the media, and of course, the Internet.

At different times, each of the above has been cited as the major cause of the problem, supported by allegedly authoritative “statistics,” which themselves are most often incomplete or totally fictitious, and almost always unaccompanied by a citation or any reference to their source.\(^3\)

\(^3\) There is a very telling video on YouTube of a “mover” in Eretz Yisroel trying to convince Reb Aharon Leib Steinman Shlita to place a ban on the modern Jewish singers and musicians. At one point he exclaims, “Most of those who leave the Torah way of life (Poshrim)
In response to each alleged cause being promoted, those who are the alleged perpetrators of the cause, as well as those who should have prevented the cause, immediately point to examples of children at risk who were not impacted by the purported cause as well as children who had been subject to the purported cause but were “unaffected.” After an initial ballyhoo with much finger pointing, the various claims and counterclaims usually cancel each other out and the alleged cause fades from the radar screen. The challenge of “children at risk” thus remains and may actually be growing. But as a communal agenda, the concern has receded in favor of other “problems of the hour,” without ever having been properly or thoroughly addressed.

Aside from the flawed methodology of assigning a causative role to any single factor, the identification of a single primary cause harmfully deflects responsibility from all the other possible contributing causes. For example, if the established premise is that the sexual abuse of children and the Internet create all the children at risk, scant attention will be paid to *kriah* problems, to our failure to answer children’s questions, to physical and mental abuse in dysfunctional homes and schools or to any of the other important issues mentioned above. The “causes” of children at risk, of course, may very well be, “all of the above,” albeit at different times for different children. The truth is that all these factors need to be addressed.

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leave as a result of their listening to these singers!” Reb Aryeh Leib asks him, “But I was told that the *Poshrim* are caused by the Internet?” at which point the “mover” backtracks and says, “Yes, but it’s via the Internet that they get the discs of these singers.”

I well remember, when in the early days of the “children at risk” brouhaha; when the Jewish Observer published not one, but two special editions on the topic (November 1999 and March 2000), a *mechanech*, whom I highly respect, telling me that all the children at risk he has seen, even those who were unsuccessful in their learning, came from problematic families. It was not the Yeshivos who were at fault, and there was little or nothing they could do about it.
Key Dimensions of the Research Process

Absent proper research, the community is unable to construct a methodically sound and consistent approach to addressing any of its challenges. In order to demonstrate the value, and in fact the necessity, of quality research in addressing community challenges, I offer here an in-depth, research-based analysis of the “children at risk” phenomenon. This discussion is intended to serve as an example of how a given challenge can be explored in a manner that leads to meaningful opportunities for legitimate solutions. I trust the reader will find this a valuable exercise.

Step I - Ascertaining the “What” of our problems

A prerequisite to addressing problems is identifying their nature and prevalence. Are they rampant or localized? For example, unsubstantiated numbers abound regarding the number of children who are either “off the derech,” or who are only “walking the walk, and talking the talk.” Articles decry the massive numbers of teens keeping a “half-Shabbos,” i.e. texting on Shabbos. But how real are these numbers? Even if a small survey has actually been conducted in some circumscribed community, are the numbers produced true for all communities? Some argue that details do not matter because “even one is too much!” Certainly every Jew is precious, but the first step in remedying a problem is identifying its scope, delineating its parameters, and, by so doing, possibly finding clues that highlight its causes.

This is the model used in medicine. Before medical researchers can speak of the etiology of an illness, they perform an epidemiological study. Identifying the exact populations or locations in which an illness occurs frequently provides clues about what may be contributing to the cause of that illness.\(^5\)

\(^5\) To cite one example from medical research: In a paper published in 1989 [Olshan, Andrew F., Baird, Patricia A. Teschketa, Kay Paternal Occupational Exposures and the Risk of Down Syndromes, Am. J. Hum. Genet. 44:646-651, 1989) a study is described wherein 1,008 cases of live-born Down’s syndrome in British Columbia, Canada, were identified for the period 1952-73. An analysis of the occupations
Step II – Identifying Contributing Causes

It is important to avoid thinking in terms of “what causes the illness,” but rather in terms of “what contributes to the cause of the illness.” The distinction is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, years of experience have taught researchers that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain definitive causes, especially in the social sciences. Thus, most assertions of “cause and effect” are based on observations of the confluence of two events. For example, one may point out that “most boys who are off the derech have been beaten by punitive parents.” In actuality, finding that two factors tend to occur together merely indicates that they are co-related. It says little or nothing about cause and effect. After all, has it been established which is the cause and which is the effect?

For example, the finding that a very high percentage of juvenile delinquents have been beaten by their fathers does not necessarily mean that “children who are beaten become juvenile delinquents.” It is equally plausible that “children with difficult natures and anti-social personalities tend to bring out the worst in their parents and, as a result, get beaten.” It may also be true that the two factors – fathers beating children and children becoming Juvenile Delinquents – are not at all causally linked, but are rather both a result of a third factor, such as poverty. Perhaps fathers failing to make a living are tense, on edge, and angry, and thus prone to beating their children. And it may also be true that children raised in poverty, pining for luxuries enjoyed by others and seeing no obvious way to achieve success themselves, are more prone to delinquency to earn a quick buck. Thus, the presence of two factors, abusive fathers and juvenile delinquents, are not necessarily cause and effect. The basic rule in research is “correlation is not causation.”

Another, and perhaps even more pertinent, reason for shying away from the term “cause” is that research in the social of the fathers of these children showed that they were likely to be working in occupations which exposed them to solvents. Thus the study of prevalence led to discovery of a probable cause.
sciences and in education has revealed that a single factor is rarely the cause of any problem. To quote one prominent researcher in the area of juvenile delinquency (Jessor 1993\(^6\)), “Research has shown us that no single variable (such as self-esteem), no single setting (such as the inner city), no single explanatory concept (e.g. genetics, personality, environment), can handle the data. Instead, we have a web-of-causation, i.e. many factors that directly or indirectly have an impact on a person’s development.”

Not only do most problems have multiple causes, but almost every “cause” that puts an individual at risk for developing a specific problem may be offset by some other factor that tends to protect from and to prevent the development of that same problem. For example, a boy growing up in a strife-filled home, who is rejected by his school due to persistent failing, may nevertheless grow up healthy if there is a family member, an older friend, a religious leader, or simply an interested adult who takes him under his wing, inviting him to his home where he may experience some normalcy. Perhaps this caring adult will teach the child a skill or a trade that helps him feel successful in some way. Research must thus look not only at what causes “at risk” behavior, but also at what prevents such behavior from developing despite the presence of risk factors.

In light of the above, instead of seeking and speaking of a problem’s causes and culprits, it is more productive to speak of “risk factors” and “protective factors.” Factors that put a person at risk of developing a given problem should be identified, as should factors that protect against the debilitating effects of the risk factors.

It must also be understood that explanatory domains for behavior are bidirectional and reciprocal, i.e., they affect each other and are reactive to each other. For example, a child who is doing poorly in school may, as a result, also receive negative

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\(^6\) Jessor, Richard, Successful Adolescent Development Among Youth in High Risk Settings, American Psychologist, 117-126, February 1993
messages at home, and thus perform even more poorly in school. The entire “web of causation” must be studied – both how events and factors directly and indirectly affect children, and how children are affected by them, both positively and negatively.

Perhaps this concept can be clarified with an example from research on the problem of juvenile delinquency. The table below is taken from Jesser’s paper on the study of juvenile delinquency, cited above.

The table presents the various levels and domains of causation for juvenile delinquency. It is organized into three levels, as follows:

1. The various **risk and protective factors** that may contribute, positively or negatively, to the development of risk behavior amongst adolescents [top row of the chart]. This includes factors in various life domains, including: biological predispositions, a child’s actual social environment, the child’s perceived environment, the child’s personality and his actual current repertoire of behaviors. Each of these domains contains some factors which may
increase the probability of a child’s engaging in risky behavior (i.e. risk factors), and also some factors that may decrease the probability of a child’s engaging in risky behavior (i.e. protective factors).

2. The various **risky behaviors** in which adolescents engage (e.g. truancy, drug use, drunk driving, etc.).

3. The **outcomes** of risky behaviors (e.g. poor health, school failure, compromised job prospects, low self-esteem, poverty).

Note that in the first row there are bi-directional, horizontal arrows pointing from one domain to another. The message is that factors in one domain may influence factors in another, and also be influenced by them. For example, a child with a difficult temperament will tend to see life more negatively and will also react to negative events in his social life.

There are also bi-directional, vertical arrows pointing in both directions. These convey that life is dynamic, and that once a child has engaged in a particular behavior, such behavior is likely to affect other factors in the child’s life. For example, a child who completes his school-work and realizes some success will also be changing his perceived environment, and perhaps even his friends. By driving drunk, a child negatively affects his own self-image and his perceived chances in life. While this process is certainly complex, it is also encouraging since it provides many avenues for improving lives in our communities.

**Step III – Planning and Attempting Solutions**

The fruits of research not only illustrate the web of a problem’s causation, but also the web of factors that operate to protect against that same problem. Research not only points to multifaceted, comprehensive solutions, it highlights which dimensions of communal life warrant improvement and the likely results we can hope to see from possible changes. Research can also demonstrate how a few minor changes can have a large effect, even when the underlying problems cannot be solved.
Furthermore, even once solutions are being implemented, continued research makes it possible to measure progress realistically and it can alert to any need for fine-tuning or for large-scale changes.

**The Scope of Necessary Research, and How to Proceed**

The first dimension of a research plan for community analysis is to ascertain the breadth and depth of the community’s problems in the sphere of concern. Using *chinuch* as an example, below is a prototypical approach, equally applicable to other spheres:

Step I: List the various problem areas in *chinuch*, including those that result *in* problems, those that result *from* problems, and those that do both.

Applying this methodology to the painful area of “children at risk,” (as in “off the derech”), the first step – as in any research project – is to conduct a review of all relevant literature. What research has been conducted regarding juvenile delinquency in the general population, and what are their findings? Though “off the derech” is not necessarily the same as “juvenile delinquency,” and the Orthodox community is culturally distinct, there remain enough parallels to deem the study of existing research on juvenile delinquency a worthy starting point.

In the general literature, as in the Orthodox community, various causes and culprits have been identified, which can be divided as follows:

- **Problems residing in children** (i.e. Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder, emotional or personality disorders, the hubris of adolescence, and the like).
- **Problems residing in the schools**: Poor teaching, curricula appropriate only for the elite (whether by dint of level of difficulty or content), elitism, rejection of children on academic, intellectual, religious, or social grounds (they are not from the “right” families).
- **Problems in the home**: Strife, disorganization, poverty, lack of communication, abuse and/or neglect.
- **Problems in the community**: Lack of communal organization, an exclusive social hierarchy, including in who is respected and honored, who is granted recognition and privilege and who gets **shidduchim**.

- **Problems in the larger culture**: Its insidious intrusion and influence, the low and base moral and ethical level of popular entertainment, the dangers of social media and the Internet, the easy availability and access to smut. Some suggest that the influence of **the scientific attitude** and the general **culture of rationalism** and free-thinking negatively influence our children.

No doubt, each of these factors plays some role, whether contributing to a problem, being fed by and in turn worsening a problem or serving as risk factors (or to some children, even protective factors).

This comprehensive approach will not lead to solving, or even substantially affecting, all of these problems. And there is no guarantee that the research literature will be full of great insights and ideas ready to be implemented. Much can be learned, however, from reviewing the literature and seeing how the progressive accumulation of information about problems has informed solutions in many communities, and in many cases very effectively. We do not always have to start from scratch and “reinvent the wheel.”

**Step II: Conduct actual research within the Orthodox community**, with the initial goal of identifying and quantifying the extent of the problems—for example, what percentage of Orthodox children actually go “off the derech.”

One approach to such a study might be to randomly select twenty elementary schools that are representative and inclusive of some of American Orthodoxy’s key demographics (i.e., “in-town,” “out-of-town,” Chassidic, Yeshivish, Modern-Orthodox). The graduating (8th grade) class of the year 2000 would be reviewed, student by student, determining the current status of each student. At the simplest level, this review would provide an introductory estimate of the percentage of children who go off the derech. It would identify any significant
differences between the varying categories of schools and communities. For purposes of comparison, it would also be important to record the percentage of children entering each school’s preschool that are from observant homes, and what percentage of an elementary school’s population continues to a Jewish high school.

The questions would then be further refined to gain further knowledge. School records would reveal how well each child was progressing, and whether anything stood out, such as struggling with *kriah*, or in other parts of the curriculum, or sudden changes in grades. Teacher’s comments could also provide insight into the emotional and behavioral state of each child, as well as their social situation.

The findings regarding the impact of school and community categories would be instructive to both parents and educators. Without identifying the individual schools, we may be able to point to higher percentages of children at risk in one population than in another, or we might find the same, but with different profiles pointing to different risk factors in each population. We may find that children with learning problems were at greater risk, or we may not. We may discover what protective factors helped some children grow in a healthy manner, where others did not. Research may thereby instruct the community as to which dimensions of our schools require strengthening and which need to be modified, what programs need to be added, and which of our programs may be harmful and should be discontinued.

**Research Programs in other Areas**

Research of this type can be conducted in many areas, such as the problems of divorce and the increase in broken

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7 This would of course be a somewhat weak study, being that much of the data would be retrospective in nature, i.e. looking back and gathering data from the past. Future studies could follow children prospectively from childhood to adulthood. Rich data and information has been gathered in this way in other communities. We need to begin somewhere.

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engagements. Many “causes” have been suggested for these problems: the lack of *midos*, immaturity, the lack of education and preparation for marriage, the Internet, the lack of *parnassah* (livelihood), and plain and simple lust. To pick one area of interest, many have suggested that at a fundamental level, an insufficient emphasis on *midos* is at fault, and that we have raised a generation of people who feel entitled to get their way – how they want it, and when they want it – and that they are not willing or ready to work on a relationship. Is this so? There is some very interesting research and some interesting research tools that have been developed for the study of values and the extent to which people hold them and guide their behavior by them. If we do find that our young people lack values or *midos*, it would then behoove us to ask what protective factors exist in the many marriages that do remain intact. Again, this would be a complex set of activities, but it would lead to possible fruitful knowledge and change.

A proper think tank, peopled by a multidisciplinary team of researchers as well as by businessmen, *talmidei chachomim*, and serious *baalei batim*, could, over time, with the guidance of professionals learn to ask the right research questions, formulate ways to answer them, and come up with practical advice and suggestions for change and improvement in our communities. This will provide a Va’ad of rabbinic leaders with the information that is so crucial for responsible decision making.
THE SACRED SYNERGY BETWEEN LOCAL AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Impact of the Culture of Individuality

Within the American community, there has always been a struggle between personal autonomy, the autonomy of the local synagogue or shtiebel and the dynamics of the national Jewish community. Perhaps inspired by the Vaad Arba Arazot (mid-16th century - 1764), the efforts in the early 1900’s in New York to create a kehilah movement¹, and the establishment of the Young Israel Movement² and the

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The author wishes to thank Mr. Anosh Zaghi, a Yeshiva University Presidential Fellow for his help with this article.


Orthodox Union\textsuperscript{3}, are just a few examples of the Jewish community’s desire to establish national Jewish organizations. National organizations often represent local communities to external groups, such as Congress or the White House, and can play an invaluable role, such as assisting in the navigation and leveraging of vast resources to address the community’s greater challenges and opportunities. In addition, national organizations can introduce and encourage uniform standards, thereby empowering local communities in their efforts to address various religious and social issues. The local community, however, is uniquely capable of providing a personal touch when dealing with its constituents’ needs. While the resources of a particular community may be limited, only the local community can truly understand its members’ particular spiritual, fiscal, and social challenges, which may differ significantly from those of other communities.

In the era of Post-Modernism, the meta-narratives of community have been deconstructed. The contemporary social-philosophical trend is focused on the ideal that every individual has a right to celebrate personal narratives defined by his or her cultural norms. This emphasis on the individual over the community poses challenges for both local and national organizations. An example of a challenge that this trend poses for national organizations involves the establishment of various boutique foundations. Over the past 25 years, new funding and programming organizations have emerged, each focusing on its narrow, albeit important, agenda. A generation ago, many of these foundations functioned under a large national communal tent. This new phenomenon may have created greater success in addressing particular needs, but in the process, many national organizations have become poorer, both in fiscal resources and in wisdom.

\textsuperscript{3} For further elaboration see Markovitz, E. (1965). Henry Pereira Mendes: Architect of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations. American Jewish Historical Quarterly, 55, 364.
These boutique organizations also affect local organizations as they serve the community in ways the synagogue used to, such as setting up shiva homes, providing food for the local poor and establishing youth centers or loan funds for the indigent. Though they surely provide invaluable services, by privatizing responsibilities traditionally entrusted by the community to local synagogues, they inhibit the perpetuation of a central address of chesed in the local Orthodox community. The causes for these changes are beyond the scope of this article. Clearly, the alienation from local and national communal structures, as well as the veneration of the individual and the need for him/her to create a unique mark on society, has helped to foster the creation of these boutique institutions.

**The Respective Roles of National and Local Organizations**

Should the conduit of communal service be through national or local organizations? I believe that the American Jewish community at large, and the Orthodox community in particular, cannot be serviced through a single paradigm. Our success is predicated on the hard work of local community institutions, synagogues, communal professionals and lay leaders. Collectively, they work to create a haven and heaven for local constituents. However, the effectiveness and impact of local leadership and local institutions are significantly enhanced when they receive and accept guidance and support from national organizations.

Without the assistance provided by national organizations, our local communities would be much weaker. Local community professionals and lay leaders often lack the financial and organizational muscle to institute the social and spiritual changes necessary to empower their communities. Yet, while national organizations can provide such muscle, they must not act as power brokers who demand that all initiatives or local advancements be approved or developed through them. Such demands mute the creativity and energy of the local community. It is the local knowledge of the community and its constituents that enables the coordination of effective and
fiscally responsible initiatives that empower and inspire the local population. National organizations must welcome local communities’ insight in their design and development of national initiatives. A cacophony of dissonant voices weakens us; a symphony between national organizations, local community and creative individuals is the surest way to serve the Jewish community.

To illustrate the value of integrating the national and the local, consider the distinction between the role of the rabbinate in Israel and that of the rabbinate in North America. In America, the local rabbi seeks to personalize every life cycle experience. Upon having children, couples typically interact personally with their rabbis, who know them and guide them in celebrating this milestone. A rabbi who is asked to be a mesadar kidushin (officiate at a wedding) typically knows the bride or the groom if not both, and is aware of any familial challenges they might be experiencing. He is able to perform the wedding ceremony with appropriate sensitivity. When the community loses one of its members, the rabbi conducting the funeral usually knows the deceased and often even the extended family. He can speak about the deceased with real knowledge and deal with the family’s needs in a manner that shows proper kavod hamet (honor to the deceased).

Yet, as a collective body, the American Orthodox rabbinate lacks national structure in many regards, resulting in a variety of challenges, particularly in the arena of national standards. For example, American Orthodox Jewry lacks standards that ensure proper funeral practice, and proper national standards are equally lacking for conversion and marriage. This lack of national standards creates a chasm in our community structure. If proper marriage and divorce protocols are inconsistent, issues of personal status and eligibility to marry within certain communities may, God forbid, be called into question.

By contrast, the Israeli national rabbinate enjoys great influence in ensuring proper national standards for conversion and wedding ceremonies, and in maintaining consistency in the laws addressing the preparation of the deceased and burial.
practices. However, the rabbinate’s interaction with its constituents is frequently very impersonal. Often, the mesader kiddushin only recognizes the bride because of the dress she is wearing and finds out information about the chatan only moments before the chupah. The potential for conducting a personal ceremony is minimal.

Going to the mikvah for the first time can be a transformative experience that enables reflection about the role of spirituality in relationships. When this experience becomes part of a bureaucracy, it seems to lose its spirituality and can become a turnoff. What is gained in the institution of national standards is lost in lack of personalization. When treated with personal dignity and respect, life cycle events can be transformational and can empower participants to become engaged members of the Jewish community. Often, a national rabbinical structure will remain detached from the community, especially when the rabbi responsible for community standards lives elsewhere.

Parenthetically, national rabbinic organizations in North America recognize these shortcomings and are trying to close the gap between the Israeli and American rabbinates’ approaches. The Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) and the Beth Din of America (BDA) have introduced standards for conversion and have created a national network of conversion courts. They are working to assure a consistency throughout North America and ensure that conversions in North America will be recognized by the Rabbinate in Israel and by courts across the Jewish world. Similarly, Israeli organizations like Tzohar are trying to close this gap by establishing a community-based rabbinate that performs marriages at no cost and whose rabbis meet with the engaged couple prior to their wedding. I believe that the RCA and the BDA are successfully swinging the pendulum in North America from a totally community based rabbinate to one that has national standards, and that Tzohar, under the leadership of Rav Stav,

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4 See http://www.judaismconversion.org
5 See http://www.tzohar.org.il
is creating a spiritual energy in Israel that has triggered conversations about moving the Israeli rabbinate away from a purely national and hierarchal paradigm toward one that is community-based as well.

Suggested Synergies Among Local and National Efforts

Allow me to share some brief ideas that speak to the need for a sacred synergy between national organizations and local institutions. I have cited familiar examples relating to the need for interaction between local Orthodox communities and national Orthodox institutions. Of course, there is also a need for synergy between all national Jewish organizations, such as AIPAC, JFNA, AJC, ADL, and local Jewish communities. Halakha demands that the Orthodox community recognize the need to engage with the larger Jewish community and to realize that we are citizens of a larger society required to work for the betterment of its social fabric.⁶

Many of the areas in which local and national Orthodox institutions can synergistically interact include the following:

Kashrut: Upon arriving in Boca Raton in 1991 to serve as the community rabbi, I found no reliable kosher establishments at all. Even the local supermarket carried few kosher products. When the now very successful Kashrut organization was launched, we relied on the guidance of national kashrut organizations—particularly the Orthodox Union. The OU assisted with determining kashrut standards, as well as in

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hiring and training the proper mashgichim (supervisors), thereby ensuring the highest kashrut standards. Kashrut would never have come to Boca, however, had the operations been delegated to a national organization. Not only was their fee structure prohibitive, their rules and guidelines were inflexible – appropriate for national companies but too challenging for the various local establishments that were being encouraged to become kosher.

Moreover, the initiative’s success was facilitated by the South Palm Beach Federation, at the time a 28-acre campus that later grew to 100 acres. For political and policy reasons, the South Palm Beach Federation would never have agreed to supervision by a national Orthodox organization. The Federation legitimately felt that turning to a national agency would be insensitive to local rabbinic leadership. Yet, despite the need to create a local kashrut agency, the guidance received from the OU in determining kashrut standards, as well as in hiring and training the proper mashgichim, ensured the highest kashrut standards. It was a true partnership between local and national communal resources and resulted in enormous benefits to the community.

**Shidduchim & Relationship Building:** In my view, the commonly referenced “shidduch crisis” has less to do with people getting married and much more to do with how young people date and pursue relationships. Factors behind the so called “shidduch crisis” include: the lack of available venues for singles to meet, the odyssey years (or emerging adulthood), the plethora of educational and professional endeavors singles feel they should pursue before getting married, the forensic research conducted and trivial details considered before an initial date, lack of understanding as to the meaning of commitment and the emphasis on factors unrelated to a healthy marriage. The complexity of the interplay between some of these challenges cannot be managed by either local communities or national organizations alone.

Four years ago, Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future initiated “YU Connects” to enhance this necessary
The interplay between national initiatives and local communities. The methods employed by YU Connects include: convening the resources of both YU’s University and Yeshiva to conduct academic research and prepare educational materials that focus on relationships, conducting exciting social events for singles, working with trained volunteer connectors, which at the present number more than ninety dedicated men and women, and helping create matches through a state-of-the-art online matchmaking site powered by Saw You At Sinai.7

Though YU Connects successfully interacts with students on the YU campus and others in the Tri-state area, the enterprise’s success rests largely upon the hard work and talents of local shadchanim (called “connectors”) and concerned local Rabbanim. Local educators and rabbis are beginning to discuss relationships in their classrooms and in their Shabbat sermons. Concerned local congregants have become trained YU Connectors, participating as part of a national consortium, but primarily focused on the needs of their respective communities.

YU Connects has also produced research-based educational material as a resource for local efforts. This year alone, two pamphlets were compiled with important research in the area of relationships, together with articles by Roshei Yeshiva and experts in the field of relationships. At the request of local communities, over 40,000 copies of each volume were printed. However, this material is effectively made accessible only through the efforts of local rabbonim, who ensure that the materials are promulgated in their communities. YU Connects is another example of the necessary interplay between the resources that only a national institution can realistically create, but only local leadership can disseminate and make valuable.

Yet there is so much more to do. YU Connects has not been successful in achieving one of its goals: ensuring that issues concerning dating and relationships are discussed in every Yeshiva and seminary in Israel and that a curriculum is

7 See yu.edu/cjf/yuconnects/
developed and used by both Charedi and more modern Orthodox Yeshivot, Bais Yaakovs and day schools. Time will tell if YU Connects will fully succeed in effectively partnering with local communities to achieve this important goal.

Youth: National organizations such as OU/NCSY, Bnei Akiva and Pirchei/Bnos have developed wonderful structures for youth programming, especially for junior high school and high school students. Even in the FFB (“frum from birth”) world, summer camps, both for-profit and non-profit, have become important outlets for Jewish continuity. They all greatly benefit our community. The latitude and longitude of their programming are simply amazing. Yet there is still work to be done in coordinating our national and local efforts. While so much is being done on the national level that clearly benefits our local communities, we must ask ourselves: Are we engaging synergistically? What are we doing to train our local youth directors and give guidance to our local youth committees? Have we brought together community rabbis to train them in how to use informal education methodologies in their engagement with youth and adults?

Though many young adults attend creative and effective summer camps and youth programming such as NCSY, Bnei Akiva and Pirchei/Bnos, it is critically important that local institutions, such as youth departments, day schools and yeshivot, be given the opportunity to professionalize their experiential and informal education skills. Without empowering the local community and asking for their guidance in the structures we create nationally, we risk missing opportunities to effectively deal with all youth - those enthusiastically engaged and those not yet engaged. If we are to effectively empower and motivate the next generation, we must do it through collaboration. This is the most effective way to guarantee the immortality of our people.

Collaboration of Lay Leaders: Every community has its own distinct opportunities and challenges. Lay leaders, those sitting on the Executive Boards and Boards of local shuls, schools, federations, should create, whether formally or
informally, a SWOT analysis of their community’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Even large communities would benefit from a collaborative discussion among representatives of the various community boards and their senior professionals to chart out communal priorities. Such collaboration could enhance communal focus, reduce redundancy and facilitate greater efficiency.

Some local communities have, in fact, begun to create SWOT analyses on at least certain aspects of their community’s needs, and national guidance has played an important role. Under the leadership of philanthropist David Magerman, founder of the Kohelet foundation, and their director Holly Cohen, schools and yeshivot of all denominations in the Greater Philadelphia area jointly created a Jewish Day School Collaborative. These schools include: Abrams Hebrew Academy, Kohelet Yeshiva High School, Politz Cherry Hill, Politz Hebrew Academy, Jack Barrack Hebrew Academy, Torah Academy, Kosloff Torah Academy, Perelman Jewish day School and Kellman-Brown Academy. The Jewish schools in Greater Philadelphia are, thereby, working collectively to maximize the impact of both current and future resources. The coalition currently focuses on four primary areas: educational programming, financial efficiency, professional development and specialist services.8 9

Another example is the Northern New Jersey Jewish Education for Generations (JEFG), which was established in 2009 in Northern New Jersey, under the leadership of Sam Moed.9 Recognizing the Jewish identity challenges in their region imposed by day school tuition, JEFG operates as a local day school network, working in tandem with local

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8 For further elaboration on Kohelet’s pioneering work in this area see [http://www.koheletfoundation.org/programs.html#jdsc](http://www.koheletfoundation.org/programs.html#jdsc)
9 Mr. Moed’s vision was well articulated in a speech he delivered on “Day School Sustainability: A Potential Blueprint” at Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future Championsgate Leadership Conference. His comments can be found: [http://www.ou.org/tuition/resources/day_school_sustainability_a_potential_blueprint/#.UZ7WGUCcrU](http://www.ou.org/tuition/resources/day_school_sustainability_a_potential_blueprint/#.UZ7WGUCcrU).
rabbinic leadership and federations. The initiative has already created some transformational change in the area of day school tuition costs. JEFG acknowledges that its success is predicated, in part, on the expertise provided by national organizations. As reported by JEFG, Yeshiva University’s Institute for University-School Partnership has been involved in benchmarking efforts to help each school identify cost savings and enhance their individual development efforts, with the goal of reducing tuition. Similarly, JEFG has been working closely with the OU to gain access to untapped government funding. Furthermore, many of JEFG’s initiatives have been supported by the Avi Chai Foundation.

These are wonderful examples of partnership that can be created when the expertise and financial support of national organizations is combined with the drive and energy of concerned community residents.

Rabbinic Education and Leadership: Today’s pulpit rabbis are called upon to address extremely complex questions, and deal with family and social issues that have never before plagued our community. Simultaneously, rabbis are expected to serve as both spiritual guides and CEO’s of their synagogues. Continuing rabbinic education is essential for rabbis, as well as for rebbitzens, whose role is often critical. As part of Yeshiva University’s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) that has trained hundreds of pulpit rabbis, Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future has established a robust continuing education program for practicing rabbis. The program focuses on Torah study, as well as on the continued development of pastoral and administrative skills. Programs are offered through multiple forums. These include mentor opportunities for rabbis and rebbeetzins in need of help with specific community challenges, three annual spiritual retreats for different groups of 30 to 50 rabbis each, an annual conference for 100 rebbeetzins, online courses in areas of halakha, pastoral counseling and administrative skills. Additionally, a

10 See http://www.nnjkids.org/
password-protected website, rabbanan.org has been created. This is an online resource available exclusively to rabbis, providing specially prepared teaching guides, shared sermon starters, “drasha nuggets,” and insights and references on contemporary issues. Over one thousand community rabbis across North America and throughout the world have mobile access to the ever-growing trove of materials and to the staff and resources of Yeshiva University, who are committed to their growth and success. This professional and spiritual development, coordinated by a national institution, empowers rabbis, and consequently strengthens the communities they serve. Moreover, the rabbinic feedback culled at these programs allows RIETS to reorient its rabbinical student professional training program, thereby ensuring that the preparation of future generations of rabbis is in sync with the Jewish community’s evolving challenges.

Local rabbinic efforts are similarly advanced by other national initiatives. For example, the work of Rabbi Mordechai Willig with the Beth Din of America and with ORA in creating, developing and promoting a standard prenuptial agreement has made it much easier for rabbis to require every engaged couple to sign one. As the now-popular ORA adage goes: “Friends don’t let friends get married without a halakhic prenup.” By introducing this practice as a national standard, rabbis can simply explain that this is a national requirement articulated in protocols established by the RCA and supported by Gedolei Yisroel, including a letter signed by some of the Roshei Yeshiva of RIETS.11 Perhaps through further healthy engagement between national organizations and the local rabbinate, the challenges of agunah, a spiritual blight on our community’s tapestry, can ultimately be obviated.

These few examples highlight the need for partnership between our creative leaders in local communities and those guiding our national organizations.

Key Lessons Learned

- American Orthodox Jewry would benefit greatly from increased cooperation and coordination. The community would be greatly enhanced if all segments, whether Chasidish, right wing, Modern Orthodox or part of the larger Jewish community, would meet to discuss specific issues affecting the entire community. Remedies to important challenges would enjoy a greater likelihood of being identified if project teams would be created comprised of the best people of each segment of the community. Furthermore, such collaboration would create a mindset that would affect so many other aspects of the community agenda.

- Imagine if we were willing to reach out to national institutions solely based on their capacity to help problem solve and not based on religious or hashkafic lines. Not only would this be a broadening experience for our local community’s hearts and minds, it would also facilitate effective change more readily.

- National organizations must be encouraged to keep a pulse on local community needs. Frequently, goals of national organizations are established without strategic planning that includes input from local communities.

- Coordination among national organizations is critical. Collectively, these organizations must agree upon which organizations are best positioned to tackle specific community issues. Duplication of services would be reduced and our limited community funds would be leveraged for the greater good.

By identifying our respective roles and our unique abilities and talents and by recognizing that we don’t need to do it all alone, national and local leadership can become more effective in guaranteeing the immortality of our people and the eternality of our Torah way of life.

One Final Observation

The pressures of supporting an Orthodox lifestyle, and the fact that most families require income from both spouses, compels contemporary lay leaders to engage in a juggling act between
professional, familial and communal responsibilities. This challenging routine limits the pool of talented people capable or willing to become part of the leadership cadre of our community. Due to this and other factors, the role that a lay leader expects to play, whether on a local or national level, is different than it was a generation ago. In the past, the community’s professional leaders were more or less trusted by lay leaders and philanthropists to shape the visions of the organizations they believed in. Lay leaders were “consumers” who believed in, and were attracted to, an organization’s vision and were therefore willing to provide time and financial support.

Today’s generation of lay leaders and philanthropists seek to help shape the vision and be active stakeholders in the process. They don’t want to sit through board meetings where the leaders’ rhetoric is simply regurgitated. Rather, they expect board meetings to serve as incubators for dialogue and visioning. These new cohorts of leaders wish to participate as producers and help actively shape organizations’ mandates. Yet, they are still consumers in that they seek to benefit from the energy and spiritual product that our organizations’ visions and activities create. They want to be prosumers, stakeholders in our community enterprises that are producers and consumers simultaneously. Let’s take an honest, hard look at our boards. Aren’t they getting greyer? On both a national and local level, organizations that have the courage and the conviction to be guided by this new leadership paradigm are likely to be the ones that succeed in establishing creative environments for Jewish Life. The key to success in the Jewish community is no longer about a charismatic blinding personality, but rather about inspiring others to lead, based upon a spirit of collaboration.

For further elaboration on this idea watch a 12 minute talk I gave on this topic: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-R70GeullA
Musings Regarding the Orthodox Community

There is enormous diversity of opinion regarding the proper definition of “community” in American Orthodox Judaism. Similarly, there are numerous views regarding the appropriate degree of authority and leadership properly wielded by the rabbinic and lay heads of the community. These divergent views are not simply narrow areas of disagreement, but are rather connected to a broader scope of differences expressed in varying approaches and attitudes to Torah and halacha, the role of Rabbonim and gedolim, attitudes toward Eretz Yisroel, and lifestyle issues such as mode of dress, culture and language, and the overall relationship to modern secular culture.

A Survey of the Components of American Orthodoxy

Perhaps most similar to the communities of the Vaad Arba Arotzos or the Jewish shtetl of old is a contemporary American Chassidic enclave. In Skver, Monsey Vizhnitz, and generally in Kiryas Yoel, the Rebbe is the recognized supreme leader and all community members are expected to obey and mirror the official position promulgated by him. Outside influence and

Rabbi Gedaliah Weinberger, Chairman of the Board Emeritus of Agudath Israel of America, is a prominent lay leader in numerous national Orthodox organizations and educational institutions, including Torah Umesorah, Bais Medrash Govoha and Torah Vodaas.
products are simply not tolerated, just like “shechutai chutz”\textsuperscript{1} was not permissible in shtetlach of old.

This model, however, is not restricted to insular towns. Strong Chassidic groupings that are spread out among several large cities, and even transnationally, such as Ger, Belz, Vizhnitz and Bobov, also recognize the Rebbe as the very real authority and ultimate arbiter of disagreements. Since these groups do not enjoy the seclusion afforded by avoiding metropolises, there is a lesser shield against outside influences.

There is also a Chassidic concept of a “heimisher yid.” This is someone who is a nominal follower of a Rebbe, perhaps due to familial background, who dresses in a nominative Chassidic mode, but will conduct life quite independent from the guidelines and dictates of the Rebbe. Yet, to a certain degree, he is guided by “consensus Chassidus.” In certain regards, the Heimisher yid is more akin to being a member of the yeshiva world than a rebbe-dominated Chassidus.

Chabad is sui generis, due to several factors, perhaps most particularly the absence of a living Rebbe. Nevertheless, they express strong adherence to their leaders’ perpetuation of the Rebbe’s will and world-outlook. Chabad has many characteristics of both the insular and the non-insular Chassidic groupings, although their primary characteristic is fierce independence.

The “yeshivishe world” also has numerous sub-groupings. Many community members develop an allegiance to their Rosh Yeshiva, typically the head of the post-high-school yeshiva attended by the individual before studying in Eretz Yisroel or in Lakewood’s Beth Medrosh Gevoha. The Rosh Yeshiva serves not only as an educator but as a life mentor, typically serving as a continuing source of authority for years after the student has left the yeshiva. Some of these Roshei Yeshiva

\textsuperscript{1} Literally, “outside slaughtering” referring to animals sanctified as Temple offerings that are slaughtered outside the Temple courtyard, which are disqualified and forbidden. It is a term applied to disqualify unwanted imports from outside the confines of an insular Jewish community.
turn to the Agudah’s Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah as their guide, while others follow the “Brisker derech,” which assumes a far more definite world-outlook but also encourages greater independence from higher authority figures.

There are many who do not fully identify with the classical Chassidic and yeshivish communities, though regard themselves as staunch members of the Orthodox community. This distancing often has more to do with their view of community leadership than its hashkafa. Often, they will turn to the shul Rav as their authority.

Communities far from the Tri-State area are often referred to as out-of-town communities, and they vary significantly in size and diversity. The Rav of smaller towns in particular is frequently the key authority, guiding his flock in accordance with his own allegiances and views. Some of these smaller communities are the final vestiges of true kehillas. Once an out-of-town community develops beyond a certain point, it tends to assume some of the diverse features of large cities, and risks losing its kehilla flavor.

Lakewood is a phenomenon to itself. While almost all community members adhere to a certain halachic framework, for many, their earlier relationship with a Rosh Yeshiva or Rebbe remains important. Some select the Roshei Yeshiva of Bais Medrash Govoha or one of the town’s official poskim as their authority. The ultimate authority, however, is often the gedolei Eretz Yisroel, as it is for many of the Roshei Yeshiva nationwide.

The Modern Orthodox community prefers to foster more “independent thinkers.” There is a wide range of adherence to rabbonim in matters of halacha and world outlook, though rabbonim eschew the concept of “daas Torah” (reverence for pronouncements of Torah leaders) so cherished in the yeshiva world. As a result, it is more difficult to formulate uniform policy and action within this broad group. On the other hand, much as the groups mentioned above, Modern Orthodoxy is split into subgroups with variations in practice and beliefs.
An Overview of the Yeshiva Community

A very partial list of Orthodox communal organizations within the yeshiva community (outside of the many organizations that operate primarily for the welfare of the community in Eretz Yisroel) and their categories are:

1. **Health organizations**: Hatzalah, Misaskim, Chesed shel Emes, the many Bikur Cholim organizations, Bonei Olam, A-Time, Relief, Echo, RCCS, Chai Lifeline, Chaim Aruchim, MRI, Dor Yeshorim, Chevra Kadisha.

2. **Poverty**: Keren Aniyim, Tomchei Shabbos, Masbia, Free Loan Funds (Gmachim)

3. **Education, Training and Jobs**: Chedarim, Bais Yaakovs and Yeshivos, Torah Umesorah, Reshet Shiurai Torah, the Daf Yomi movement, PCS, COPE, EPI, Learn and Network.

4. **Umbrella Organizations**: Shuls and Kehillos, Agudah

5. **Assistance**: Shomrim, Chaveirim. Jewish Neighborhood Community Organizations.

6. **Kashrus organizations**: Too numerous to mention. These often are run on a business model, rather than on a communal model.

7. **Kiruv**: Chabad, Oorah, Aish Hatorah, Ohr Sameach, NCSY, Gateways, Partners in Torah, Community Kollels.

8. **Dropout prevention**: Project Intercept, Project YES, Our Place, Rachel’s House, remedial schools.

When a new communal need is identified, a new organization is formed or an existing umbrella organization establishes a new division (such as Torah Umesorah’s creation of Partners in Torah). Each organization in a particular field gravitates to what it does best. However, too often ego and perception of unfilled needs often result in turf wars.

Generally, these organizations do a good job, but they are often run as personal fiefdoms and, unfortunately, there are sometimes turf wars among these organizations. Many organizations begin sub-branches for distinct functions, and
these targeted programs occasionally are spun off into separate or quasi-separate organizations. Within the broader Orthodox community, examples include NCSY from the OU, Shuvu or Project Yes from Agudath Israel, and the Bikur Cholim of Satmar.

**Competing Agendas Within American Orthodoxy**

As noted above, different communities within American Orthodoxy have distinct agendas and perspectives. Not only does this translate into varying types of programs and styles, but occasionally into conflicting or inconsistent Orthodox messages to governmental offices. Government officials often justifiably complain that they are unable to determine the Orthodox community’s actual priorities, or the community’s ultimate position on key issues.

The solution is increased communication among community factions. Groups must learn to understand each other’s viewpoints and to cooperate in instances of agreement. The need for such communication and mutual respect, however, is certainly not limited to governmental matters. Can it possibly be in the community’s interests for there to be conflict between the Hatzalah organizations in different neighborhoods, or between fertility assistance groups, or among bikur cholim organizations? Does it really matter whether the kosher hospitality room in a given hospital is run by the wide-brims or the tall-crowns?

This communication needs to be facilitated, or it will never occur. Forums need to be created for the interchange of ideas and frank discussions of issues. Ideally, the organizers should come from the organizations themselves, but perhaps it has to be done by Rabbonim or national organizations. Let the groups learn about each other and develop camaraderie and confidence in each other.

Issues that face every community and upon which there is little disagreement should be addressed by the national organizations on a collective basis. Examples include funding for Yeshivos, immigration and health issues, and morality concerns.
National organizations should recognize their constituencies and respect their differences with other Orthodox constituencies. Within limits, the leaders need to stand above the fray and let disagreeing communities state their positions frankly while respecting the equally frank attitudes of other communities.

The Dynamic Between Lay Leaders and Rabbinic Authorities in the Yeshiva Community

In the chassidic and yeshiva communities, lay leaders are expected to adhere closely to rabbinic leadership and thereby serve as the executive arm of the community. Rabbinic leadership, by contrast, serves as the legislature, judiciary and ultimate head of the executive arm, as well. Under the guidance of Rabbonim, lay leaders develop or perpetuate communal organizations and serve as the implementation arm of such organizations.

The role of intelligent, caring lay leadership (askonim) is to bring issues to the fore, to solicit experts in the areas of concern, to outline the nature and effects of individual issues, to debate the issues and to develop clear pro-and-con positions. Their obligation is then to bring their distilled knowledge and individual recommendations to Rabbonim for halachic review, for Torah-oriented views of the issues, and for advice and re-examination. Rabbinical leadership should be actively used to resolve issues within a community and between communities.

Much of what lay communal leaders address involves a close connection to halacha and minhag Yisroel (Torah tradition). Lay people must necessarily retain close relationships with rabbonim, and function harmoniously with them. Yet, despite the clearly subordinate role of the lay community, lay leaders must be recognized and appreciated since they organize and run the dozens of communal organizations without which Orthodoxy would be much the poorer.

The Rabbonim selected to work with the lay leadership must be the best minds and of outstanding character. They should have significant levels of experience and insight and should be
“mesunim b’din,” careful in analysis and slow to judge. They must be individuals whose advice is valued by the intelligent, committed members of the community.

**The Need for Expert Advice and Empirical Data**

In addition to serving as the arbiters of communal decisions, rabbonim should also be catalysts in bringing experts together for analysis and to serve as think tanks for solutions or workarounds. One example was the rabbonim’s approach to exploring appropriate communal safeguards against the scourge of the Internet. Some communities flatly banned its use, others put in safeguards to ensure it only be used for business purposes, others disabled or censored access to specific immorality but left the Internet usable as a general tool and still others believed that moral suasion was the only solution that could be permanent. Yet, notwithstanding the disparate responses, the examination of the dangers and the technical knowledge and skills to deal with the situation produced the basic premises upon which the various communities reached their respective policy positions.

Another example of rabbinic utilization of outside guidance arose in exploring solutions to the problem of older unmarried girls in the yeshiva community. A mathematical analysis and empirical studies pinpointed the age gap between marriageable boys and girls as a major contributing factor.

There is a need for scientific and sociological empirics, together with the primary source of traditional Torah teachings (indeed, Torah teachings often provide the clearest empirics), in order to focus accurately on problems affecting the Torah community. Examples of the success of these methods over the span of Jewish history include Jewish public education (Rav Yehoshua ben Gamla), the institution of yeshivos (Rav Chaim Volozhiner), education for girls (Sarah Schenirer) and Daf Yomi (Rav Meir Shapiro and the Imrei Emes). I would venture to put Chassidus (the Baal Shem Tov and Rav Dov Ber of Mezeritch), Mussar (Rav Yisroel Salanter) and the Shulchan Aruch (Rav Yosef Karo and the Ramo) in the same category.
In many ways we live in the ‘best of times and the worst of times.’ We have been afforded unparalleled freedom to observe all the tenets of Yiddishkeit, to live as we choose and devote ourselves to our faith, our families and our community. Yet, we face the ever-increasing specter of attacks from within and without, attacks that sometimes question our fundamental attitudes and practices. Each of the diverse subgroups cannot meet these challenges alone. Working together when appropriate can yield results of immense proportions.

It is up to us to work hard to make it happen. B’siyata d’shemaya, our kehillos will continue to grow and flourish.
IDEALISTIC REALISM IN COMMUNAL LEADERSHIP

I HAVE BEEN BLESSED WITH the opportunity to serve as a Rav in Baltimore, Maryland, and to be involved both in developing our own shul community and with a range of broader communal issues and institutions. Baltimore is a unique community in several ways, but perhaps most significantly in its relative success at maintaining a sense of peaceful cooperation both within the Orthodox community, as well as between the Orthodox and the broader Jewish community. The following are a few reflections on effective leadership that I have learned and gleaned from our community’s senior leaders, particularly as they have contributed to its unique strength.

1. Create a Culture of Shalom.

“And I will grant peace”: You might say [upon receiving bounty], “Here is food, and here is drink. But if there is no peace, there is nothing!” Scripture, therefore, states, after all this blessing, “I will grant peace in the Land.” From here we learn that peace is equal to everything else. Similarly, it says [in our morning prayers], “Blessed are You, O Lord... Who... makes peace and creates everything.”

Rashi to Vayikra 26:6

Rabbi Moshe Hauer is the rabbi of Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion in Baltimore, Maryland and is a member of the Editorial Board of Klal Perspectives.
It would be impossible to overstate the value of Shalom in personal and communal life. The sentiment that “if there is no peace, there is nothing” has been echoed by countless families ensconced in luxurious mansions but beset by domestic strife. And it is a feeling repeatedly expressed by communal leaders and members working hard to accomplish things in their communities but finding that in-fighting and lack of communal cooperation limits their capacity and distracts them from the real work at hand. As the Rambam advised his son:

Do not sully yourself with machlokes (strife) that destroys the body, the soul and property, leaving nothing. I have seen the bright blackened, leaders diminished, families broken, princes demoted from their positions, large cities weakened, groups disbanded, pious people lost, the trustworthy erased [and] honored people shamed and disgraced – all as a result of strife. Prophets prophesized, wise men shared their wisdom and philosophers explored and elaborated on the evils of strife, and they all could not truly capture the extent of it. Thus, I urge you to despise it and distance yourself from it and from all those who consider themselves its friends and supporters.

Kisvei HaRambam, Mussar l’bno Rav Avraham

A community can and must work to create a culture of Shalom. Though tensions and rivalries will certainly exist between communal organizations and between groups on different points of the spectrum of Jewish religious life, these tensions need not be allowed to explode. Instead, the organizations and the community should adopt a posture that ranges from working together cooperatively to “live-and-let-live”. The most basic foundation of this culture of Shalom is the very practical realization that each of us does better when we are not distracted by fighting and when we are able to help each other.

The culture of Shalom does not require the abandonment of ambition or of principle, nor does it call for slavish adherence to the status quo. It can encourage the generation of new initiatives and organizations, and live the dictum of our Sages that competition amongst scholars increases wisdom (Bava
Basra 21a). It should not constrain vigorous debates and arguments about matters of fundamental principle. But it must do all these in a communal culture where the leadership has a tangible commitment to manage the inevitable conflicts with sensitivity and maturity. They can accomplish this by avoiding where at all possible attacking or alienating others, limiting the disputes to principle and preventing them from devolving into personal and insurmountable rifts.¹

Thus, for example, it is well established that principle limits Orthodox participation with other streams in religious matters, including joint membership on communal Boards of Rabbis. This is a necessary division given the absolute and significant differences over fundamentals of the Jewish faith, such as belief in the divine, eternal and binding nature of Torah. It nevertheless remains possible and appropriate for leaders and members of these various streams to build and maintain friendships and working relationships that build understanding, retain a sense of community between Jews of all streams and facilitate working together on issues of common concern.

There may be situations where a movement is actually beyond the pale (Jews for J, for example), and should not be included in the community at all. Even less dramatic deviations may be seen as actively undermining the strength or fundamental direction of the community and could call for a more dramatic and stark response. In this regard an important distinction is to be made, as explained by the Rambam in Hilchos Mamrim (3:1-3), between developing and established movements. One may wish to oppose and stand firm against the development of a movement that is diverting people away from the path of Torah, while being more helpful to an existing constituency that is already established on a different path. For example, including the founders of a new “partnership minyan” is not in

¹ There are those who would say that peaceful Baltimore nevertheless does suffer from a dearth of personal ambition and represents a less intense – and hence more compromised – brand of Orthodoxy. I understand that this may be the case, and in the view of some may not be worth the price. My mentors did not share that view.
the same category as working with the leadership of an existing, non-Orthodox community school. Drawing these precise lines requires great wisdom and nuance and is beyond the scope of what can be presented here.

To summarize: to create a culture of Shalom, we must think carefully before defining another group as ”outside” the community. Where possible and appropriate (as discussed above), we must reach across the aisle to members of the other group and to work together on issues of common concern. We must teach members of our communities – by how we speak about others and interact with them – how important it is that we not isolate our communities from the rest of Klal Yisrael. And we must not speak of the “other” as a threat, or strategize about how to work against or around them.

2. **Genuinely recognize the contributions of others to the general good.**

*People mistakenly believe that peace in the world means that everyone will share common viewpoints and think the same way. Thus, when they see scholars disagreeing about an issue, it appears to be the exact opposite of peace. True peace, however, comes precisely through the proliferation of divergent views. When all of the various angles and sides of an issue are exposed, and we are able to clarify how each one has its place, that is true peace. The Hebrew word 'Shalom' means both 'peace' and 'completeness.' We will only attain complete knowledge when we are able to accommodate all views – even those that appear contradictory – as partial perceptions of the whole truth. Like an interlocking puzzle, together, they present a complete picture.*

Rav AY Kook, Olas R’Iyah

Beyond a simple commitment to avoid the damage caused by in-fighting, we must construct a positive vision of communal peace that recognizes both that one size does not fit all, and that no single segment of the community can address all of the
community’s varied needs. As a practical example, an Orthodox community preoccupied with building institutions of religious life and education such as schools and shuls may welcome the commitment of a local Federation to build agencies to provide much-needed social services. A school that wishes to provide a more intensive educational or religious environment that tends to be exclusive may recognize the need to be supportive of others interested in providing an acceptable though less demanding alternative to the broader population. This feeling should be expressed by leadership finding ways to show interest in, and be involved and supportive of, the complementary venture.²

Of course, this posture requires a sense of confidence and security, to the point that one is not fearful that any assistance to, or recognition of, the other would confuse or dilute one’s

² Two illustrations come to mind of how this principle looked in real life. When I was installed as rabbi of our shul, my Rebbe, HaRav Yaakov Weinberg, zt”l, came to the celebratory banquet. As was the custom, the banquet began with the American and Israeli national anthems. Rav Weinberg was a profound lover of Eretz Yisrael but he was not a Zionist, and would not of his own accord sing the secular anthem of Medinat Yisrael. Nevertheless, he stood next to me and sang along in full voice, recognizing that, for many in the assembled group, Medinat Yisrael was a focal point of Jewish identity and activity and that it was appropriate for him to recognize and uphold this value for their sake. He was confident that his students would not misunderstand his singing of Hatikvah as a philosophical shift, but would see it instead as an expression of his respect for Klal Yisrael.

Likewise, when a day school opened in Baltimore to the left of the existing mainstream yeshivos, Rabbi Naftali Neuberger, zt”l, worked to help the institution in various ways. I remember sitting with him at the dedication of the school’s new campus, as he remarked how important it was that we were in attendance. He, too, was not concerned that his assistance and presence would confuse his constituency or materially weaken the institutions he had invested great effort to build. Instead, he felt it more critical that this developing institution feel a measure of connection to and respect from his community.
own message. This is eminently possible, as a strong and consistent internal message is not likely to be forgotten or confused by the extension of a hand to another. Often, in fact, the opposite is the case. When we reject others entirely without regard for their positive contributions, it confuses our constituents greatly. This idea was expressed most clearly by the late Telzer Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Eliyahu Meir Bloch:

   In general, I already expressed my view that we lost a great deal by refraining from recognizing correct issues just because the irreligious and their supporters in the Mizrachi agreed to them... In my opinion, the reason our views do not resonate in the hearts of the broader community is not our firm stance against their incorrect views; rather it is because of our negative position regarding their correct views, such as learning Tanach, speaking Hebrew and Eretz Yisrael. The community cannot understand our concerns. Indeed, they will understand us when we emphasize our positive attitude towards the true elements of their positions and reject only that which is false.

   I must say that this attitude of ours is not a new product of our life in America. We acted this way in Lithuania, as well, despite the fact that then, as now, we were totally zealous concerning anything that, God forbid, is not in accordance with the spirit of Torah, and never retreated because of persecution, denouncement and sometimes even suffering, sorrow and much damage to our holy Yeshiva.

   Letter of Rav E.M. Bloch, Sefer Mitzvas HaShalom, 1st Ed., p. 607

3. **Lead with humility; be humble and open about your challenges, both communally and individually.**

   When King Shaul failed to properly prosecute the war against Amalek, he lost the kingdom. King David, on the other hand, did not lose his kingdom over the sin of Batsheva. This is because Shaul first denied he had sinned, then when forced to acknowledge it he shifted blame to the people, and finally, when that excuse failed, he asked
Shmuel to nevertheless continue to publicly accord him the honor he had previously enjoyed. David, on the other hand, accepted responsibility for his actions immediately and unconditionally. Thus, David’s humility, candor and accountability for his failings was what qualified him for leadership of the people.

Based on Sefer Halkkarim, 4:26

‘Leadership’ is not the best term to use in the context of community; a far better term is ‘communal service.’ In the words of Rabban Gamliel, “Do you think I am giving you power? I am giving you servitude” (Horiyos 10a). This is not just an exercise in good character; it is also the fundamental strategy of effective leadership. The path of wisdom recognizes that humbly serving and responding to the people builds strength far more than it conveys weakness.

Specifically, it is very difficult to trust someone who is not honest and open about their challenges. The people are smart, and they know that all is not perfect. They usually look to leadership not to maintain the status quo but to help the community address its challenges. Leadership builds trust by acknowledging, for example, the parent’s concern for their child’s safety or for how he will support his family – not by dismissing such concerns. One who is not willing to acknowledge challenges or past mistakes, and seems more focused on presenting the most perfect public face, will not be the most trusted leader.

4. Force rarely works.

And it came to pass, when Yeravam the son of Nevat and all the congregation of Israel came, and spoke unto Rechavam, saying: 'Thy father made our yoke grievous; now therefore make lighter the grievous service of your father and ease the heavy yoke which he put upon us, and we will serve you.' ... And King Rechavam took counsel with the older men that had stood before Shlomo his father while he yet lived... And they spoke to him, saying: 'If you will be a servant unto this people this day, and will serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them,
then they will be your servants forever.’ But he forsook the counsel of the older men and took counsel with the young men that had grown up with him.... And they spoke to him, saying: ‘Tell them: ... Whereas my father did burden you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke....’ So Yeravam and all the people came to Rechavam ... and the King answered the people roughly, and forsook the counsel of the older men that they had given him, and spoke to them following the counsel of the young men.... Thus, Israel rebelled against the house of David, unto this day.

Melachim I, Chapter 12

It has been proven time and again that decrees handed down from communal leadership – rabbinic or lay – are ineffective, even in communities that appear most subservient to rabbinic authority. Leadership that has previously built trust can inspire, assist and guide the community, and can participate in creating the vehicles and structures for change. It is rare, however, that fundamental change can be legislated. As seen from the tragic story of Rechavam, even those who are in a position to impose change would be advised to use that power carefully, lest they forfeit the kingdom by a show of excessive force.

Those who wish to help guide the community to a better place must dedicate themselves first and foremost to working as communal servants, being there to provide for both individual and communal needs. Over time, this builds ‘leadership capital’ that will foster greater influence. While it goes without saying that those who have not built such trust will be unable to impose change, it must be noted that even known, loved and trusted figures can quickly squander their leadership capital when they try to force a specific agenda on a disinterested community. And it is most unwise to attempt to force change on another group from the outside; we can rather work with them to see how we can help them encourage what they can see themselves as necessary change. Carrots are more effective than sticks.

Of course, in many situations, leadership must hold their ground, and not lead by referendum. They must recognize
nevertheless that any show of force comes with a price and that, for the long-term health of the community, it is incumbent upon them to address the resentment that is likely to result.

Thus, effective leaders are keenly and humbly aware of their limitations. Instead of seeing themselves as rulers who tell the community exactly how high to jump, they function as guides to help the community make the right choices. In that framework, they are keenly aware of their limitations, of the community’s interests and inclinations and of the level of trust they have gained within the community. And within these parameters they carefully help the community move itself forward.

5. Change is a gradual process and is not initiated by broad consensus; Build initiatives rather than demolish what exists.

Patience is critical in accomplishing lasting change. Given the difficulty and inadvisability of legislating change, we must work instead to change attitudes. Especially in large communities, this is not an instantaneous event, but a very gradual process. As dire as a situation may appear, we must resist the urge to fix it immediately. In promoting change, the more time allowed for the process to unfold gradually, the better the ultimate result.

Similarly, change is usually not accomplished by consensus. Many important ideas die on “Haskama Row,” waiting for a local Vaad or for a national Moetzes to line up behind them. Indeed, precisely because of the broad constituency represented by a Vaad or even by a single gadol, such bodies or individuals are necessarily conservative, restrained from spearheading efforts at sweeping change that part of their broad constituency may be unprepared to embrace. If, on the other hand, a responsible individual initiates a modest project after confirming with others greater than he that his plan is will not be destructive, his small success can ultimately generate wider interest and duplication. If the model is worthy, “build it and they will come.”
An excellent example of such an approach is the plethora of projects and organizations developed in Israel over the past decade to assist Charedim wishing to enter the workforce. Due to the nature of the community, and the strongly held opinions on various sides, the recognized gedolim felt they could not openly and actively endorse such a model of change, as too many of their constituents were not ready to embrace it. So instead of proposing sweeping change, they not only allowed but in many cases encouraged capable individuals to create programs that would be there to address the needs of those who sought them. They knew that as the programs began to succeed in helping those who had completed their productive years in the Bais HaMedrash transition to successful careers, these successes would breed more success and slowly – perhaps painfully slowly – the community would embrace the necessary changes.

Interestingly, this is a classic example of what some would consider a failure of leadership. After all, the issue of Charedi poverty is large and urgent, and – in the view of some - true leaders would confront the situation more immediately, openly and directly. On the other hand, it may be the case instead that true leaders understand their limitations and know that an attempt at sweeping and quick change would result in upheaval and opposition that could threaten the entire effort. Thus, they choose to encourage more gradual and organic change – a model that requires infinitely more patience but one that is more likely to produce effective results.

This model of change does not use a sledgehammer; it uses quiet and determined creativity. If I may again quote Harav Kook in a letter he wrote to a rabbinic colleague in the leadership of Mizrachi:

*It has come to my attention that in a speech you gave ... you spoke very negatively about the holy institution Shaarei Torah and you disparaged its Torah scholars and its students. I literally trembled when I heard this, and if not for the fact that I heard it from someone who is completely trustworthy, I would never have believed such a thing about someone as great as yourself.*

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My friend, this is not the way – to tear down with your hands our holy institutions, our treasure houses of life. It is possible [as you have suggested] that our times require us to create schools that teach secular subjects, so that our generation will be drawn to attend them, provided of course that they are imbued with the spirit of the Torah. However, how terrible it would be if because of this we would attack our existing institutions – our living and enduring holy treasure houses. I, myself, have on more than one occasion assessed the students of Shaarei Torah and I will testify that [it will help us] establish a generation of G-d fearing Torah scholars, filled with a love of Torah and fear of Heaven.... And this is specifically because this holy institution has followed the paths laid by the Torah giants of previous generations. ... Only through the ancient Beit HaMedrash and those who study there can Torah and light come to Bnei Yisrael. ...

Please strengthen yourself in the following idea – that we must only build up and never tear down, to add and never to take away. (Letters, #570)

To summarize: Effective leadership is built on a commitment to Shalom that does not preclude disagreement or demand uniformity, but that places significant value on communal unity. Beyond the avoidance of outright hostility, leaders are best advised to recognize and appreciate the partnership and roles of others in the bigger picture. This posture of humility should be extended not only to other branches of the community, but also to those one is charged to lead, as imposed, authoritarian leadership rarely succeeds in the long term. In this framework, change is undertaken as a process rather than as an event, as a result of gradually building communal confidence and influencing attitudes. Rather than breaking down existing structures, we can bring about change by introducing modest but replicable models of change.

The results of this approach are not exciting. But they are consistent and healthy, and can be accomplished with a pervasive spirit of Shalom. And while the notions expressed
may appear naively idealistic given the unfortunate fractious nature in our communities, in another sense, they present the most realistic path for leadership to accomplish real change.

Afterword: Dreaming of Shalom Ba’Aretz

At this time, all of us who share a concern for the Jewish future are focused on the incredibly intense tensions that have developed in Israel, both within the Orthodox community as well as between the Orthodox and the broader community, creating a state of divisiveness unprecedented in recent memory. While this journal as a rule deals with issues on the American scene, it is hard to refrain from adding a few final thoughts, considering how the approaches described above could impact those tensions. So with appropriate apologies for daring to wade into the challenges of the Israeli community, here are a few naïve observations and suggestions:

- Imagine Charedim, instead of complaining about the cuts in government funding, taking time to recognize the incredible amount of funding they have received, and expressing appreciation internally and externally for the opportunities provided for them by the secular state.
- Imagine Charedim taking a trip to a military cemetery to pray at the graves of those who fell in battle to protect them.3

3 In 1948, Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, Rav of Yerushalayim, wrote a letter to the Chiefs of Staff of the Army requesting an exemption for Yeshiva students from Army service. The letter consists essentially of two main paragraphs. The first paragraph writes admiringly and appreciatively of the selfless dedication of those who have volunteered to serve the nascent state, fighting with zealousness and bravery for the survival of the Jewish people against its sworn enemies. It goes on to lament the tragic losses of many of these brave souls in the bloody battles for independence. The second paragraph makes the familiar argument that the yeshiva students should be allowed and encouraged to continue their holy work, as they play a critical role in the defense of the country, with their spiritual efforts supporting and upholding the battlefield heroics.
Imagine secular Israelis expressing appreciation internally and externally for the contributions of the religious community to the character of Israeli life by virtue of their volunteerism, their spirit of idealism and their commitment to the history and destiny of our people.

Imagine secular Israelis helping others recognize that whatever government subsidies Charedim have received pale in comparison to their own investment and self-sacrifice in raising their large families as an expression of their profound commitment to the future of the Jewish People.

Imagine personalities within the Charedi leadership openly acknowledging some of the social and economic challenges currently facing their community, and working to bridge the understandable divide with a secular society that cannot readily appreciate how their Torah study constitutes “sharing the burden.”

Imagine non-Charedi leaders who feel empowered by their electoral success to impose change or burdens on others choosing instead to put aside that power to impose and to instead explore what they can do to help others foster change.

It would seem clear that steps like these would build harmony and understanding within our People, while strengthening the leadership on all sides.

Imagine….
A REALISTIC, ASPIRATIONAL COMMUNAL STRUCTURE

RABBONIM AND COMMUNITY ASKONIM have always pined for structured Jewish self-government. In my early days of communal involvement, I would often ponder different models in my mind – an American Chief Rabbi with local rabbinic offices in each major city, perhaps a national system of Batei Din, and maybe an elected communal lay board. I even entertained the idea of an American “Raish Galusa” (Exilarch).

Perhaps these fantasies derived from my observations of the Federation structure and its apparent advantages. Or, maybe I was influenced by a nostalgic reference to the Vaad Arba Aratzos, which operated in Poland during the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries. I imagined that a communal structure, in whatever form, could advance efforts to address communal concerns and challenges. Once adopted, a communal structure could facilitate the introduction of meaningful national standards for American Orthodoxy, thereby uniting us all, and eliminating the needless and often destructive “denominational bickering” within the Orthodox community.

Futility of Aspiring for a Broad Communal Infrastructure

After years of activism within the Orthodox community, it now appears to me that increased communal structure within the
American Orthodox community may be totally unrealistic, and any effort to introduce the idea may be counter-productive. In past eras, the infrastructures imposed upon, and accepted by, the Jewish community was consistent with the broader culture and political environment in which the community lived. Authoritarian regimes were the prevalent governmental structures, and rigid and disciplined authority was part of the fabric of society. In such environments, the Jewish community’s acceptance of internal authority and communal infrastructure was consistent with other dimensions of the community’s cultural and sociological experience. The embrace of such authority was likely reflective of the ancient propensity to “asima alai melech kchol hagoyim asher sevivosai” (Let me appoint a king upon myself as in all the surrounding nations – Devarim 17-14).

By contrast, American Orthodoxy thrives in a sociological and political environment dominated by a culture of Individual autonomy, liberty and freedom. The questioning and challenging of authority is fundamental to the American experience, reflected in the constant demeaning of authoritative figures and institutions by the media and in popular culture. Moreover, the ubiquitous cycle of political campaigning creates an environment of transient power and authority.

In this environment, the concept of mandated communal authority is not likely to be warmly embraced by the frum community. Even within Orthodox communities that profess deep commitment to daas Torah, actual deference to Torah leadership is often wanting, and there is little communal appetite to cede authority to others, whether to make important communal decisions, enact rabbinic takonos or enforce judgments issued by Batai Din.

This challenge even creeps into our ability to truly appreciate our intended relationship with HKB”H. Mired by these contemporary influences, what does the American Jew envision when encountering the model of Hashem as King, or of our being slaves to a Master? Can the attribute of Hashem as “King” possibly evoke within us the awe and fear of such Kingship experienced by those well-familiar with the power of
authority while living under the dominion of the Russian Tsar? How does one relate to being a servant to Hashem when one’s sole connection to the concept of servitude is through history books or portrayals in popular culture?

**Current Communal Structure**

The current American Klal structure is dominated by mini-Kehillas, each with little authority beyond that which is generated through peer pressure. Those communities that have been relatively successful in insulating themselves from the prevalent culture of autonomy and independence in American society (such as certain of the larger Chasidic groups) occasionally suffer from a tendency to disrespect the rules and regulations of that society, sometimes resulting in friction with the American legal system.

This absence of communal authority, however, does not translate into an absence of services and institutions addressing communal needs. These needs are being addressed primarily by wholly independent (and often single-issue) social and religious service groups that are beholden either to no one, or perhaps nominally to chosen rabbinic figures. The same is true for almost all yeshivas and seminaries, and in most large Jewish communities, even chadarim and day schools.

Functions that were traditionally part of the communal structure now often operate as private businesses (e.g., kashrus, Bais Din, chevra kadisha, etc.). Not only are such mosdos no longer under the control of the community, many are not under rabbinic control either, as shuls and schools increasingly operate under the auspices and control of a single lay individual (baal habayis).

The trend towards institutional control by self-appointed lay individuals has even infiltrated the spectrum of the community’s few national organizations, which are increasingly controlled by wealthy lay people with no communal mandate, and, at times, little historical or “religious” expertise. In these national organizations, rabbinic leadership and accountability are often unclear and inconsistent, and in
other cases merely nominal. Rather than reflecting unique missions designated by the community, distinctions between institutions often become blurred, resulting in duplication of efforts and unnecessary denominational (as well as general) competition.

The absence of community-based efforts extends beyond organizational governance to fund sourcing, as well. With few exceptions, traditional Kehilla funding models simply do not exist. Consequently, most communal projects and institutions are substantially dependent on wealthy donors, who thereby acquire undue influence and often come to dictate the communal agenda.

In summary, today’s American Orthodox community operates through a loose patchwork of autonomous groups and individuals, often altruistic but sometimes self-serving. In any event, communal institutions, whether in the fields of social services, economic assistance, education or halachic observance, are subject to little or no oversight, and often little professional or religious guidance. It is a time of

There is no king in Israel, אָרוֹן כְּלָוָה כְּיָשָׂרַאֵל
each does what is right in his אַשְׁר הָיָשָׂר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה
own eyes (see Shoftim 17:6, 21:25).

A Realistic, Aspirational Communal Structure

So how should our Kehilla look? Do the influences that preclude the re-introduction of a tightly controlled communal structure dictate that no structural enhancements should be attempted, at all? I suggest that there are substantive and significant improvements that ought to be introduced, which may potentially become accepted. The caveat to any such efforts, however, is to recognize that because our community is deeply affected by the unprecedented, autonomous culture in which we live, the predicate of any communal structure must be its appeal to the community, rather than its expectation of obedience.
We must create a situation in which people will voluntarily choose to belong, finding the community structure compelling and worthy of their allegiance. It is vital that leadership come across as welcoming and inclusive rather than demanding and exclusive. The approach of simply announcing edicts and takonos from above is not only unenforceable (and widely ignored), it severely compromises the respect and deference to leadership that could otherwise be generated. Imposing leadership will not work today. The trick will be to get everyone to want to join rather than to have to.

None of this precludes the study of and adherence to “mussar,” nor does it imply that there should be no admonition to correct the wrong. It does not negate such laudatory efforts as seeking to curb wedding expenses or to monitor internet use. We simply require a form of mussar that can speak to our generation in a language that we understand.

It is also important to note that a koach harabbonim and a koach hatzibur still do exist, even in our autonomous world. Leaders can have influence and the tzibur can and does change; therefore, we should feel obligated to determine how to make those positive changes happen even in our unique times. Each Rav, each organization and each individual should feel a sense of achrayus (responsibility) for Klal Yisroel, each playing their unique role in this process.

**Practical Suggestions**

So let’s get specific. The suggestions below are by no means comprehensive, but are intended to represent a first step in the right direction.

- Professionalize Our Mosdos: The current unstructured networks of both local and national communal organizations are here to stay, but their current lack of accountability can surely be changed. The koach harabbonim and the koach hatzibur are currently under-utilized as obvious vehicles for accountability and efficiency. For example, an entity that has inadequate rabbinic involvement and oversight should not enjoy the support and association of rabbonim.
The lay community also carries enough influence to improve accountability of communal institutions – but once again, collective efforts and intent is required. For example, philanthropists and communal supporters should refrain from supporting and associating with entities that fail to operate transparently and in full compliance with applicable laws. In fact, an effort in this regard is already in place. A new initiative supported by many gedolai Torah and askonim is underway called “Vehiyisem Nekiyim,” which intends to formalize appropriate operational guidelines for our communal organizations. Vehiyisem Nekiyim will seek voluntary compliance with a Code of internal controls for shuls, yeshivos, and other community organizations. The goal, of course, is to introduce a set of organizational standards for fiscal responsibility, and transparent governance. The Code includes many “best management practices,” such as maintaining proper books and records, operating under the guidance of an active finance committee, double signing of checks, not remitting payment of expenditures with cash, adhering to proper payroll procedures and having a semi-annual review of all finances conducted by an outside accountant. This initiative will provide the community with an opportunity to influence the manner by which communal mosdos operate, but it will only be effective to the extent that they are willing to expect compliance.

- Eliminate Unnecessary Duplication: In the 1980’s the Jewish community was involved in addressing the needs of a large number of Iranian Jews trying to escape a new, fundamentalist Islamic regime. After a meeting at the State Department on this issue, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, z”l, of Agudas Yisroel, observed that the meeting was attended by fifteen representatives – one each from Catholic, Protestant and Lutheran organizations – and twelve representatives from twelve independent Jewish organizations. The community simply cannot afford this type of unnecessary duplication of communal resources.

Organizational efficiency also mandates appreciating when and when not to become independently involved in a given issue. For example, there are no ideological differences within
Orthodox Jewry on the issue of School Choice so there should be no need for every Orthodox organization, Chasidus and ethnic group to have their own competing School Choice initiatives.. On the other hand, the lead organization, whose mission it may be to deal with government, should certainly involve all other interested Orthodox Jewish constituencies in their deliberations and public activities. Again, the koach harabbonim and koach hatzibur can help in this area.

- Include Lay Contributors of Time and Expertise in Communal Decisions: In Fiddler on the Roof, Tevye famously opined; “If I were a rich man…They would ask me to advise them… and it won’t make one bit of difference if I answer right or wrong. When you are rich they think you really know.” Unfortunately for Reb Tevye, it does make a difference. Wealthy people deserve a place of honor and their views should be solicited. After all, their tremendous chesed underwrites a good deal of our Jewish life. However, philanthropists are not the only ones who should hold positions of lay influence. Many people commit great amounts of time and expertise on behalf of the tzibur, and these contributions must be recognized as also being vital. The involvement of these community members in making decisions is not only appropriate, it is also the wiser approach to elevating the effectiveness of our mosdos. Our community enjoys members with a vast array of skill sets and knowledge bases. It would be foolish and wasteful to preclude the utilization of these potential contributions simply because they do not belong to those who have deep pockets. Their voices are simply critical if we “want to get it right.” For example, membership on a Yeshiva Board might be reserved for large contributors to the Yeshiva. When a financial problem hits, such a Board might decide to raise tuition without considering sufficiently how this will affect the majority of the parents. A more inclusive Board might be more sensitive to the impact of a tuition raise on the average parent, and may look for better solutions to the problem, such as revamping the institutional organization, restructuring some of the finances to save money, or encourage parental involvement.
• Be Cognizant of Your Role. As mentioned above, a significant obstacle to an effective communal infrastructure is the recent trend of individuals to over-step the bounds of their appropriate roles, such as when baalai batim assume the function of rabbonim, or rabbonim play the role of a knowledgeable businessman. Too often, those in power assume that their leadership role implies that they are appropriate to every function. Too often, individuals claim expertise in areas in which they have limited background or training.

As a dentist, I am often asked halachic questions relating to the treatment that I am rendering. Despite having learned the relevant halachos in great detail, my standard response is, “I have an arrangement with the Rabbonim. They don’t write prescriptions and I don’t pasken shailos.” Similarly, communal board members should not dictate chinuch issues in a yeshiva; indeed, there is something amiss when a shul is referred to as Mr. So and So’s shul instead of Rabbi So and So’s Shul. An organization’s lay board members and its professional staff have distinct roles. The Board has to step back and allow the staff to do its work and the staff has to accept the oversight of the Board.

Here is another example: The Rabbinic Council of California (RCC) is a rabbinic organization that provides kashrus certification, Bais Din services for monetary disputes, geirus, eruv certification and various programs for the local rabbonim. The RCC also has a lay board, which is responsible for assuring the financial viability of the organization and advising the rabbonim on secular legal issues that apply to their work, among other activities. While the lay board may assist in drafting the standard arbitration agreement for the Bais Din, it would clearly be inappropriate for any board member to be involved with the Dayanim on a specific Din Torah. Again, the only way to achieve this will be when the Rabbonim and the tzibur demand it.

• Recognize that there are No More Secrets. Every day, there is a news story about some well-known or iconic individual who was found to have committed some indiscretion that has come to light through a revealed e-mail or other document
made public, destroying their reputation and career. In the last number of months, a revered football coach and a Catholic Cardinal have seen their lives ruined by such disclosures. A prominent Rosh Yeshiva once asked me to speak to an Orthodox film producer about a documentary he had made. The film had excerpts from a drasha given by a well-known Rav that the Rosh Yeshiva felt were used out of context. The Rav, who had given that drasha to a women’s group in Brooklyn on Tisha B’av, never dreamed that his words would be part of a TV documentary in a way that he would have never intended. The saying,” the walls have ears” has never been truer.

Another Rosh Yeshiva told me of a question he had been asked about a hashkofo issue as he was leaving the Bais Medrash, and that by the time he reached the door, hundreds of people had, electronically, gotten word of his answer! Rabbonim and askonim must be aware that anything they say, do, or write, whether public or private, is exposed, often in a short period of time. As Chazal have taught us, “motsa sefasecha tishmor” means “guard what passes your lips” as well as “fulfill what passes your lips” (i.e., commitments).

One final point: Our Rabbonim and askonim should hold themselves to the highest possible standard of behavior. It would be valuable to reread some Torah sources that relate to leadership in the Jewish community. The Raisher Rav, in his sefer, Hadrash Veha’iyun, discusses the characteristics of a “Nasi.” Commenting on the posuk in Parshas Shlach with the words, “kol nasi bahem,” Rav Levin, z’t’l, posits that a leader in Klal Yisroel must be “kol nasi,” a “whole leader” – not a partial one. He must be a leader from head to toe, constantly dedicated to his service. His actions must be impeccable, both in public and in private, as even private indiscretion will affect his outlook on his responsibility. The Alter MiNavardok wrote a chapter in his sefer, Madraigas Ha’adam called Mezakeh Harabbim, which should be required reading for every askan. In it, Rav Horowitz, z’t”l, lays out the prerequisite character traits of one who does Klal work. He, too, emphasizes the need for dedication to the task, adding that one must be pure in his
avodas hatzibur l’sham Shomayim, without an eye for personal gain or aggrandizement.

I add these words of our Gedolai Torah because they serve as a yardstick for those who seek positions of leadership in our Kehillos, and more importantly, so that the rest of us will know how to determine whom to follow.
CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN NATIONAL AND LOCAL ORTHODOX LEADERSHIP

THE VAAD ARBA AROTZOS, which was introduced in the 16th Century and remained active for approximately 200 years, is often proffered as the archetypal communal structure of recent history and looked to for guidance. During its tenure, the Vaad Arba Arotzos acted as the central authority over Jewish residents of Greater Poland, which then also encompassed sections of Russia and Lithuania. It was authorized to act as final arbiter of internal matters of Halacha, and determined the manner by which the Jewish community interacted with the government and with the gentile population. It defined jurisdiction for each city’s sphere of influence and served as the final arbiter of differences that arose among batei din of different cities.

Unfortunately, apart from marveling at its longevity and influence, there is little to be learned from the Vaad Arba Arotzos, since it was premised upon a reality that simply cannot be replicated today – an enforceable monopoly of power. The Vaad Arba Arotzos could enforce its mandate through the imposition of fines, excommunications and the mandate accorded to it by the State. It was primarily through its State-granted power, however, that it enjoyed the hegemony

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necessary to create and maintain discipline and order in the *kehillos* within its defined borders.

**The Unique Nature of American Orthodoxy**

In stark contrast, not only does American Orthodoxy lack national leadership with any power to dictate positions to local communities and their respective rabbinic bodies, the leadership of local communities themselves enjoys minimal enforceable powers over their members. In the “Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave,” rabbinic and communal leadership operates within a framework that can only be described as anarchy.

For example, a litigant who is dissatisfied with a Bais Din can simply march off to look for another, and if that fails, he can simply create a Bais Din of his own. Even within a single neighborhood, different community segments may consult different authorities. In light of the wide range of *kehillos* – Litvish, *baalebatish*, Edot Hamizrach, Modern-Orthodox, Chassidish and others – many of which have multiple internal strands as well, a *psak* to suit one’s needs is a phone call away. One is left with astounding oddities on even the most fundamental halachic issues, such as the difficulty in ascertaining a standard spelling in *Loshon Kodesh* for the word “Lakewood,” thereby raising serious difficulties in the sphere of *gittin*.

While a select few communities, such as Baltimore and Washington Heights, have achieved relatively greater cohesion, it is primarily a reflection of these communities’ relatively homogenous populations, and the absence of any significant and distinct sub-group with critical mass. It is more than likely that this unity would be compromised in a flash should a new, sufficiently large group of Orthodox Jews with a truly distinct orientation emerge in their midst.

In addition to the effects of disparate sub-groups within a single town, community infrastructure in America is compromised by the community’s tolerance of self-selected individuals or small groups simply deciding to hang out their
shingles and assume leadership responsibility in critical areas of communal function, such as kashrus, education, chessed shel emes (caring for the body of a deceased) and general chessed services. It is only in the event of serious infractions that such individuals are held accountable, and even then, the only recourse is for community members to abandon that individual’s enterprise in favor of another individual’s competing mosad (institution).

This practice has led to a profusion of hashgochos (kashrus certifications), chessed organizations and yeshivos in every established Jewish population center, with little attention paid to collective efficiency. Moreover, the ubiquitous lack of transparency typically makes it impossible for the average member of the community to perceive the significant variations in the quality and reliability of the various alternatives.

In light of the absence of a true communal mandate and any semblance of enforcement power, what role, if any, is there for national organizations and what can they possibly hope to achieve?

One obstacle to overcome is that significant investment in national enterprises is inhibited by the risk that one or more competing organizations will enter the scene with similar goals and mission statements, but with some competitive advantage. Perhaps they will have greater vision, excitement or creativity, or they will be closer in touch with new trends and needs within the community. In fact, this cycle has occurred repeatedly. For example, the initially exclusive role of the OU was intruded upon by the National Council of Young Israel, which in turn lost ground to the Charedi shuls and shteiblach in the years following the Second World War. Even in their heydays, neither the OU nor National Council of Young Israel truly represented more than a fraction of American Orthodox Jewry, and neither had the ability to enforce their positions and policies on individual communities, other than by revoking the membership of a shul, which was not much of a threat.

In fact, when the yeshiva world first emerged as a fledgling force in the forties, a conscious decision was made to shift the
center of the community from the synagogue to the yeshiva, shifting influence from local rabbis to a group of leading Roshei Yeshiva, in the form of Agudath Israel’s Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah. Even this leadership forum, however, never gained meaningful traction outside the yeshiva world, or even within the Chassidic world, which in turn never had a central, over-arching, authority beyond each respective Chassidic court.

No doubt, there have been many individual instances of cooperation across organizational entities. For example, when the possibility arose that the New York Federation would provide funding for Orthodox schools, a letter was signed by the majority of Litvishe Roshei Yeshiva, as well as many prominent Chassidishe Rebbes, collectively requesting that Torah Umesorah act as a clearing house for potential funding. Practically, this request reflected their hope of insulating the individual organizations from any restrictive conditions the Federation might seek to impose. Not only was such cooperation rare, but even in this instance there were many notable absences in the ranks of signatories.

The Need for National Communal Representation

It might be suggested that multiple national organizations instead of just one has the effect of increasing communal influence, which tends to be enhanced by numbers. In reality, however, bulk is even more powerful than numbers if expressed in a unified, rather than fragmented, approach. The recent challenge to metzitza bepeh (MbP in journalistic parlance) is such an example. In addition to the specific concern of relevance to all Charedim, there is a fairly broad consensus throughout Orthodoxy that such government intrusion into halachic standards is problematic. While poskim differ on whether MbP is halachically mandated, all segments agree that it is unacceptable to have Orthodox religious practices dictated by local, state or national government, particularly when these bodies are lobbied and influenced by those who do not hold dear our interests and values.

An effective response to such challenges requires a complex and sophisticated strategy that cannot possibly be implemented
through individual *shtieblach*, shuls, *batei din*, kashrus organizations or educational institutions. In such instances, our community requires organizations with depth of sophistication and experience that are fully qualified to represent the best interests of the entire community, whether on a regional or national level. Not only does such collective representation generate greater deference on the part of the government or other outside entity, but when an institution is charged with playing such a role, it will be more empowered to develop the degree of sophistication, knowledge and connections necessary to fulfill its mission.

We cannot necessarily anticipate the challenges of this sort that may confront the frum community in the years and decades ahead. But neither can we take for granted our current freedoms regarding *shechita*, *shmiras* (observance of) Shabbos and education of our children, or the wide host of entitlements to which we have become accustomed in the United States. Representative bodies must be maintained to advocate for our communal needs and interests, and must be well staffed and prepared for any possible eventualities that we can merely hope and pray will never arrive.

**Local Needs Should be Addressed Differently than National Concerns**

The litany of obstacles to the establishment of a serious and controlled communal structure might sound like a jeremiad, encouraging the conclusion that the community is doomed and will forever be mired in ineffectiveness. In fact, however, there is a fundamental distinction between the community’s national and local needs for collectivism and uniformity.

As a confirmed Thatcherite, I believe that a little bit of anarchy at a local level is not all bad, and that competition born in the absence of structure can motivate the creation of a better mousetrap. For example, in the sphere of *dinei* Torah, competing *batei din* and multiple *pesakim* (rulings) may cause confusion and inconsistency, but a Bais Din with a monopoly is an alternative that carries its own risks. Examples are vulnerability to ossification resulting in indifferent and
inconsistent service (as found in many of the municipal *batei din* in Eretz Yisroel) or a profound abuse of power (as witnessed in a scandal currently rocking a major European *kehilla*).

Similarly, the service provided in other communal functions is often enhanced when there is more than a single provider. Competition compels increased dedication to quality and attentiveness. Frequently, there are complaints of communal inefficiency resulting from institutional redundancy. In fact, the pressure of competition may actually trigger *increased* efficiency, as well as heightened quality, even when considering the expenses of both organizations. In most communal instances, two is better than one, and frequently three is even better than two, though cooperation in areas of mutual interest may occasionally be beneficial.

It generally takes a leap of faith for a community to open a second school or shul. In most instances, however, communal resources prove to be available, and the economics are actually not a zero-sum game. The history of American communities evidences that multiple institutions tend to survive and thrive, so long as they are both well run, and have clear goals and mission statements.

There are many examples of a second day school opening a decade or two after the founding of the first, usually in response to new communal needs and characteristics. Inevitably the new enterprise is met with much moaning, wailing, gnashing of teeth and, more prosaically, with claims that the new institution will force the demise of the original. A five year review, however, evidences that most often, after an initial slump, the original school returns to its historical enrollment and the new school houses a student body more than sufficient to justify its existence. Rather than the new institution causing a communal strain, it most often expands the student base and broadens the community, in general. The town thus becomes more attractive due to its more varied infrastructure, attracting new families and general community growth. If communal members are mature and responsible, the passage of time will result in the burying of the initial hatchets.
and the pursuit of the many common agendas that they most certainly share.

**The Distinction of National Needs**

While this view may be compelling for individual cities and communities, is it equally applicable to national organizations? National organizations are vital to serve the representative functions discussed above, but they also should be responsible for assessing the state of the national Orthodox community as a whole. Such national institutions are expected to maintain a bird’s eye view and to utilize experience gleaned in one sphere to improve another.

The structure of each national organization also needs clear definition. Should it serve in a consulting capacity or as an umbrella organization? Should it have offices in a single, central location, or also open branch offices, whether for fundraising or programmatic purposes? Can a national entity be effective with a hybrid local/national outlook?

There is also a reverse question: How can local communities monitor whether a national organization begins to stagnate? In fact, how does an organization monitor itself in this regard? National institutions take much longer to fade and die. Moreover, their very size imposes greater barriers to entry by possible competitors, making it more challenging for younger, nimbler competitors to set up shop when the old guard is simply not “getting it done.” How can the community avoid the burden of large national organizations staggering on for decades past their “sell-by” dates, smothering local talent and using much of the oxygen that could be best utilized starting new initiatives? Moreover, how can the community prevent large organizations from snuffing out start-ups that would be more effective at addressing core issues?

It is critical that the community demand that any communal institution evidence a periodic assessment of its goals, and of its strategy and effectiveness in meeting those goals. And as important as periodic review is for local entities, all the more so is such discipline critical for larger, national entities, which
not only assume greater responsibility and draw enormous communal resources, they also are more likely to preclude others from assuming their roles, even when an alternative body would be more efficient and effective.

For example, the Orthodox Union was intended to be a national umbrella of Orthodox synagogues, which was particularly important in an era when the Orthodox synagogue was struggling for identity and legitimacy. Moreover, the OU was intended to play the leading role in ensuring that American Jewry had access to basic halachic functions, such as kashrus. Finally, the OU assumed the mantle of representing American Orthodoxy, particularly for those communal members who identified as religious Zionists and as Centrist (and one time called Modern) Orthodox. Aside from the widely respected, and cash generating, kashrus division, how well is the OU doing in fulfilling its mission? If the OU quietly went out of business, would it need to be replaced? Must NCSY be seen as natural appendage of a national enterprise, or would it be equally if not more effective and efficient as a separate entity? How much of the OU’s current functions include servicing the Orthodox synagogue, and is such a function even necessary any longer?

Another example: Torah Umesorah was conceived to help found an Orthodox day school in every American city with more than 5,000 Jews, and to assist local communities with staffing and maintaining their schools. Astoundingly, this goal was achieved by 1970. Did that mean that Torah Umesorah should have then been terminated, or was there still work to be done in maintenance, training, staffing and curriculum development (all of which were part of the original mission statement) as well as creating schools in new, emerging communities? Did the newer communities in America of Russian, Israeli and Bucharian Jews enjoy Torah Umesorah’s same enthusiastic zeal and commitment for the creation of day schools, as was enjoyed by the non-observant communities in the 1950’s and 1960’s? And have the emergence of organizations addressing Jewish education needs for the broader community more in tune with their weltanschauung,
such as RAVSAK and PEJE, eliminated or at least curtailed the broader communal scope of Torah Umesorah? Should Torah Umesorah now focus exclusively on single gender schools, thereby ceding its role as a true national enterprise? Where do Torah Umesorah divisions such as SEED, Hemshech and Counterforce fit into Torah Umesorah’s mandate and goals, and are they really natural stable-mates with, for example, the School-Visitation or Publications departments?

Agudath Israel was born in Poland a century ago to represent the interests of Orthodoxy to the government in a united fashion. In order to retain influence regardless of who was in power at the time, Agudath Israel needed to be perceived as apolitical regarding any government policy not directly affecting specifically Jewish issues. It galvanized sufficient support to hold seats in the Senate and Sejm and had the backing of much of the Chassidic and Misnagdic segments of the Orthodox world. Its American incarnation was launched in the 1930’s by Rabbi Eliezer Silver, and enjoyed its real expansion after the war. Over the years, Agudath Israel of America has increasingly involved itself in areas of programming, including camps, shuls, Daf Yomi, siyum mishnayos, archives, a publication, and a choir. Nevertheless, the primary goal has been to represent “Chareidi” Orthodoxy to the rest of the Jewish, and non-Jewish, American community. This role includes lobbying legislators and filing legal briefs throughout the United States, as well as seeking the procurement and provision of social services to various sectors of the community, such as job training and placement, school bussing and housing for seniors. Agudath Israel also maintains field offices in many of the non-New York centers of Chareidi activity. This magnificent sprawl of departments and activities operates under the direction of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah, which meets several times a year to focus on the issues of the day.

Is Agudath Israel of America still fulfilling its initial mission? What is its current mandate and how well is it performing? Who is studying these questions? Is its leadership structure designed to serve the full range of its natural constituents, and
to meet the community-wide needs that are most urgent? Is the role and composition of the Moetzes well-suited to Agudah’s current organizational structure to promote effective processes in meeting today's complex and rapidly-evolving challenges? Is there a conflict between the Agudah’s role as a public “defender of the faith,” giving voice to Torah values however unpopular, and their role of maintaining agreeable relationships with government officials, especially when it involves ensuring state or city funding for the many social programs listed above?

To summarize, if all three of these organizations were to declare “mission accomplished” and close, how quickly would they be replaced and what would the replacements look like?

The Critical, yet Challenging, Role of the Gedolim

Ultimately, the gedolim to whom each institution turns is responsible for assessing the organization’s priorities and to wind down those organization that have overstayed their usefulness and to refocus those that have strayed from their missions. Unfortunately, it is difficult for the gedolim to disentangle themselves from the deep, often decades-long personal relationships they have formed with the personnel and lay leadership of these organizations. In essence, involvement of gedolim in the continual operations of an institution can create a negiš (attachment), possibly requiring other gedolim to play the role of periodic evaluator.

Moreover, with the growth in the size and needs of the Orthodox Community, it is simply no longer humanly possible for the gedolim to expend the time necessary to address the broad scope of community needs, and certainly not to study the details of all the issues at hand. Additionally, gedolim often have no choice but to rely on second- and even third-hand reports, which are all subject to the inevitably biased filtering of the intermediaries. Questions presented to gedolim by those within an organization do not always reflect the best and broadest view of the reality and the best interests of the greater community.
In the past, the gedolim have deliberately addressed these concerns by introducing sub-bodies of younger Roshei Yeshiva to examine the battlefield and report back to them for consultation. For example, in the mid 1970’s, the Rabbinical Advisory Board of Torah Umesorah comprised such giants as Rav Moishe Feinstein, Rav Yakov Kamenetzky, Rav Yitzchok Ruderman, Rav Yitzchok Hutner, Rav Shneur Kotler, Rav Boruch Sorotzkin, and Rav Mordechai Gifter, zichronam livracha. Nevertheless, this esteemed group of senior gedolim invited the then-much-younger Rav Elya Svei and Rav Yaakov Weinberg, z”l, to conduct monthly meetings with the staff of TU to hear directly about the challenges they faced and to actively focus them on the priorities designated by the Rabbinical Advisory Board. This arrangement provided a more pro-active role for the gedolim in directing the affairs of Torah Umesorah, instead of responding to those issues brought before them. It also allowed the gedolim greater access to the workings of the organization, both nationally and locally, and provided those in the trenches unmediated access to the daas Torah they sought.

The reintroduction of a comparable arrangement, in which a broader constituency of rabbinic leaders is designated by the gedolim to play a similar role, is likely to occur only upon the urging of the broader community. It behooves both lay and professional activists within the frum community to make such requests of the gedolim, presenting the case that such expanded designations will enhance, rather than stymie, the effectiveness of, and appreciation for, their Torah guidance.

Summary

In summary, there is a subtle balance in play between an overarching, singular presence and numerous smaller entities – the precise interplay being dictated by the realities of the day. So long as it is relatively fluid and provides room for change, a perhaps uneasy yet necessary balance will be found that will naturally adjust with changes in circumstances.

The pivotal role of the gedolim cannot be overstated, but at the same time, one must be aware of the impossible demands on
their time and the immeasurable responsibilities they are asked to bear.

Most importantly, there is always room for activists with talent, enterprise and the willingness to take achrayus (responsibility) and accept nesiurus ol (the burdens of others). All of those involved in serving the community must ask how recently we have done a full cheshbon hanefesh (self evaluation) and where we find ourselves relative to our original ideals. Are we still as energized and idealistic as we were five/ten/twenty years ago?

Those who are not actively involved with the klal should be looking at themselves in the mirror and asking why it is that they get to take without giving back. The opportunities are huge and, if one is prepared to sleep a little less, one can do a lot more. With a little bit of mazel, anyone can become a partner to greatness; with real dedication, though, one can join the pantheon of all-time heroes.
THE NEW EQUATION: TAKING COMMUNITY SERVICE INTO THE FUTURE

THE AMERICAN ORTHODOX JEWISH community has been blessed with dramatic population growth over the last two to three decades. Unfortunately, as the general community has become increasingly aware, social and economic problems have been developing exponentially, as well. As recently as ten years ago, a prominent Orthodox Jewish activist accused OHEL of greatly exaggerating the prevalence of child abuse in the community in order to qualify for government funding. If only that cynical remark were true! We now know all too well that the rising incidence of a host of societal ills, including sexual abuse of children, addiction, highly contentious divorces (especially among young couples with children), developmental and psychiatric disabilities and poverty among the elderly require an ever-expanding social service safety net.

This is not to say that our community was totally unprepared to address these needs. In the two decades following President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society legislation in the mid-1960s, there was a notable increase in Jewish community-based non-profit organizations founded to serve the social and economic needs of the community. A great expansion then took place in the New York metropolitan area in the mid-1980s when New York Governor Mario Cuomo's liberal funding of social

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services added impetus to the development of professional organizations dedicated to helping members of our community struggling with the full range of human ills and needs. Over the past thirty years, the number of Jewish organizations attempting to address these problems has expanded from a handful to hundreds. Glimpse a Jewish newspaper’s mental health supplement or service directory and each will list scores of organizations providing a broad range of community mental health services.¹

This expansion, however, represented a rapid departure from the traditional delivery of social services within the Orthodox community. Driven opportunistically by substantial government support, these organizations generally adopted the organizational framework of the modern not-for-profit entity, with its own leadership structure. Today, the majority of our community’s needs are served through these independently run non-profits outside of any traditional community framework. This entire system for delivery of social services, though it now plays a vital and central role in community life, has taken on a life of its own.

We are left with a sense that many needs are being met effectively by honorable people but without any overall leadership and coordination. Do we really need all of these many organizations that are now vying for limited private, as well as government, resources? Does the current mix of organizations, with the varied funding they receive, reflect the

¹ There has also been a recent jump in publishing books addressing needs that had previously been off-limits. Some of those are: The Shame Borne in Silence, Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., Mirkov Publications, 1996; Off the Derech, Why Observant Jews Leave Judaism, Faranak Margolese, Devora Publishing, 2005; Breaking the Silence: Sexual Abuse in the Jewish Community, David Mandel and David Pelcovitz, Ph.D, Ktav Publishing, 2011; Project Safe Camp, Debbie Fox, LCSW; The Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Program (SAVI), Mount Sinai Hospital; Let’s Stay Safe! Bracha Goetz, David Pelcovits, Ph.D and Benzion Twerski, Ph.D, ArtScroll Mesorah Publications, 2011; Special Report on Jewish Poverty, UJA Federation of New York, 2013.
values of a responsible Torah community? Where is there overlap and where are there gaps and unmet needs? The uncertainty about this system is due to many factors, but the emergence of the independent non-profit organization as perhaps THE leading force in community affairs is a development that must be analyzed.

In this essay, I propose to review the consequences of this development, to explore how economic forces operate within the non-profit sector and how this impacts our community, and to suggest how embracing the “chochma” (wisdom) within the contemporary non-profit model can empower our communities, nationally as well as locally, to identify and meet their needs effectively and efficiently.

**For-Profits vs. Non-Profits**

Two-hundred and forty years ago, economist Adam Smith posited that the commercial marketplace is regulated by an "Invisible Hand" of self-interest and competition: providers of goods and services have an incentive to best meet the needs of the marketplace, as consumers will reward providers that best meet their needs by purchasing their goods and services. Thus, a company offering an inferior or outdated product will discover objectively that its performance does not justify the ongoing investment and will either improve the product or withdraw from the market.

Smith's writings have served as the foundation for capitalism and democracy ever since but, unfortunately, his Invisible Hand left the third pillar of society – the non-profit sector – largely untouched. Since the support of non-profit organizations is not based on direct self-interest and does not operate in a traditional “marketplace,” this sector does not enjoy the economic forces that reward value and deter waste; instead, it is driven by the ability of individual organizations to reach and persuade potential donors of the subjective value of their work. Without a true “marketplace,” there is little means for donors to compare providers or causes, and so donors tend to make their decisions based on what seems right at the time considering the information they have available.
To illustrate, the principal measure of publicly held companies is return on shareholder investments. If the company stock rises, shareholders tend to be satisfied, the stock value remains strong and the company can thrive. In the not-for-profit sector, however, there is no such measure of achievement. Success must often be measured in vague theorems that are difficult to quantify, such as customer (client) satisfaction, anecdotal information, emotional appeal and personal experiences. Even when organizations have clearly-defined goals and objectives, the worthiness of the goals themselves is hardly measurable. And to complicate matters, what was worthy a decade ago may present very differently today, even though what changed and how it changed may remain unclear.

As a result, while a business that is in the red will eventually exhaust its credit lines, be unable to pay its bills and ultimately fail in the marketplace, a not-for-profit that is not pulling its weight will often continue as usual as long as it still has a good name and can prevail upon its donors to support it. Only under great duress will it shutter its doors, or perhaps merge with a like-minded agency. This tenacity is especially pronounced where Founders Syndrome exists: the agency head who is the original founder is unwilling to change direction or cede oversight or authority to others more capable of fresh strategic thinking.

Theoretically, donors should seek the same accountability from the organizations they support that stockholders expect from the company’s directors. And in fact, professional non-profits take accountability very seriously, publishing annual reports that demonstrate how contributions are managed and how well the organization is succeeding at its mission. The fact that the “business” of a particular agency is responding to one of the emotionally charged communal needs, such as mental illness, poverty, addictions, child abuse, or homelessness, does not negate the need for a professional approach to management, operations, accountability and efficiency.

In fact, in the absence of market pressures compelling the non-profit to maximize its quality and efficiency, even greater skill
and professionalism is needed from its Board and management to ensure that it does not stray from its mission or its standards.

There is another important distinction between for-profit and non-profit companies. While multiple retail stores, for example, result in competition and variety to the advantage of consumers, the reverse tends to be true in the not-for-profit world. Too many agencies competing for limited dollars from government, foundations, and individual donors often leads to a lower quality of service. In many cases, one regional agency consolidating skills and funds would be far more effective than several local agencies with insufficient resources.

Unfortunately, desperate parents seeking services for their addicted children, for their chronically depressed adult daughter or for their destitute neighbor will accept any help offered, even when the organization and its employees are of marginal reliability. They are being shortchanged, often without their knowledge, for many people have no reliable way to gauge the quality of these services. The simple fact is that complex social problems require competent professional assessment and treatment. It is no place for bargain-basement operation.

What Can Be Done?

Boards of Directors have a responsibility to inspire new young leaders and to prepare them to assume the mantle of leadership. At the same time, young board members must appreciate the learning opportunity and the wisdom of their more experienced colleagues.

Rating systems for not-for-profits should be introduced such as those that exist in the private sector – for example, Moody’s rating of financial health, and New York City’s newly enacted restaurant rating system.

Not-for-profits operate with various levels of transparency. Though Sarbanes-Oxley legislation was not directed to the not-for-profit community, there are many organizations that voluntarily adhere to such principles – but not enough.
It is the responsibility of each agency’s Board of Directors to ensure that their mission, strategic plan, and client services are aligned and that their performance is meeting appropriate standards. Surprisingly, this is not always so. Organizations sometimes stray from their original purposes, losing focus, falling behind the times or taking on extra responsibilities that strain their effectiveness and financial stability. The fiduciary responsibility of the Board compels it to make difficult choices; it must act when fiscal prudence must outweigh righteous zealou sness, or when accomplished staff members are not meeting current expectations.

Responsibility, however, also rests within the community. There is an urgent need to change the climate of public attitude toward non-profit service organizations, educating the community about the vital role they currently play – and potentially can play – in providing for the community’s urgent needs and solving its pressing problems.

Especially, our community must give greater weight and respect to the not-for-profit professions. This isn't just charity work. It requires well-trained professionals who understand how to define – and periodically redefine – an organization’s mission and to maximize its effectiveness and efficiency in serving that mission. There is a wealth of wisdom in the non-profit world about how to succeed within the framework of the contemporary non-profit organization, but far too few members of our community look to this wisdom as a key to achieving our communities’ goals.

There is a need for an educational initiative to raise awareness in our community about the professional path to confronting and meeting the challenges we face as a community. Ultimately, this will include developing a well-compensated career ladder worthy of attracting the kind of people capable of making the greatest difference.

This initiative is critical for two reasons:

1) It will enable those already involved on a professional level to feel that their work is valued, a significant factor when dealing with the day to day frustrations in this difficult field.
2) It will provide a sufficient pool of highly skilled talent to continue this klal work. How many Jewish mothers raise their children to enter the not-for-profit world? How many high school seniors dream of becoming the Albert Einstein of social services?

The fact is that providing these essential services – as an administrator, nurse, social worker, psychologist or any other mental health professional – is as fulfilling as it is painstaking. There is enormous satisfaction in helping people in a meaningful way – often making all the difference in dire life situations. It is hands-on work, and many young people would roll up their sleeves and pitch in if these fields were more accessible and attractive to them.

Numerous possibilities exist to pursue such an initiative:

Schools should look seriously at how they teach certain values, and how those teachings could be implemented on a practical level. It’s true that we begin teaching even the youngest children about tzedakah with classroom pushkas, Tehillim-a-thons, Bowl-a-thons and many other incentives (until they are old enough to participate in Purim collections). But if mechanchim want their students to develop a true, deep understanding of tzedakah, if they want them to feel its genuine value, they should make it a point to acquaint them with the many tzedakah organizations and what they do. Take some time (for example, every Rosh Chodesh) to show the children where the money they raise goes and how it makes a difference in people’s lives. Invite speakers from these organizations on a regular basis to make this topic come alive. Take them on field trips to places where people are helped (such as Tomche Shabbos, Bikur Cholim). Let them experience where their tzedakah dollar goes. Let them see it, touch it, feel it and when they are grown they will give their maaser money with love and sensitivity. Perhaps they will even be motivated to take on a greater role in the chessed these organizations do.

I am troubled by a great disparity in some communities between girls’ experience of gemilas chassadim and that of boys. Girls are required to participate in chessed activities,
while boys are often let off the hook. In many of our yeshivos, *gemilas chassadim* is taught as a concept, but not lived by the *bochurim*. They have little or no opportunity to put it in practice, and this is a lamentable situation. Certainly, the study of Torah is a priority, but is it truly complete if they are not encouraged to take responsibility for the welfare of others? This value must be developed all through their lives, not simply thrust upon them once they are *baalei batim* with sufficient incomes to be the targets of fundraisers.

And finally, high schools should invest more in leadership training, including formal mentoring programs. If a student has been taught to properly value *tedakah* and *gemilas chassadim*, if he has developed a strong sense that he is needed by the klal and should do his utmost to serve others, he will be willing to consider making that his life’s work. If our high schools afford their students the opportunity to develop the needed skills and encourage participation in social service, we will develop an even greater caring, competent community, ready to take on our communal challenges.

Whether or not they enter the field as professionals, our youth will be the lay leaders, the market makers in the not-for-profit sector. Young dynamic leaders must be taught that serving on a community-based organization’s Board of Directors is much more than a status symbol. By necessity we operate in a more difficult social, financial and regulatory environment, and they must be prepared to shoulder that responsibility.

Our community has built an extraordinary system of support for the physical, emotional and mental health of the many in need. Lay leaders and donors have devoted time, energy, passion and enormous financial support. Tomorrow’s leaders and funders have unprecedented opportunities to cooperate in the making of a better world. Progress can be achieved by the commitment of our best and brightest to careful realistic planning, not accepting marginal self-preservation or patchwork solutions. The needs are great, and we must encourage those with talent, compassion, and a true sense of *klal* to participate in this growing endeavor.
THE SHUL RAV AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

IN MANY ERAS, AND IN MANY LOCATIONS, the shul Rav played a prominent, if not the lead role in addressing community-wide issues. It is worthy to reassess whether the contemporary shul Rav should be expected to play that role. Since my experience with nation-wide issues and national organizations has been limited, I limit my observations to the role of the shul rabbi within the local community.

Comments such as these, of course, are based upon my experiences, which are necessarily limited in scope. I imagine that many rabbis and communities experience very different concerns.

The Reduced Role of the Local Rav in Communal Organizations

Growing up, I envisioned the local Rav as being totally immersed in every aspect of the community. In addition to wearing the varied hats that come with being a shul Rav, he also wore the principal’s hat, the hat of kashrus administrator, and the hat of leader of the local chessed organization.

While there may be certain communities where these multiple roles are still played by a single individual, it is certainly not the case in most communities.

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We live in the age of specialization. Even in fields like law and medicine, we turn to specialists to address our needs. For example, we no longer turn to merely a single internist and surgeon, but rather seek out doctors with narrow specialties - one who treats only liver problems and another the pancreas. This trend toward specificity and specialization has spread to the Jewish community, as well. The local school principal is typically an expert in the field of Jewish education, while other community professionals are trained specifically in fund raising, social services or job placement. Consequently, the local rabbi often plays at best a secondary role in setting policies for the local educational and chessed institutions.

In addition to the advent of specialization within local community leadership, another factor that limits the role of the rabbi is his increasingly consuming responsibility to care for his congregants. Though the rabbinate has always been a demanding job, in my experience, it has become more intense over the last decade. Today, rabbis are more likely to be inundated with his congregants’ deep and agonizing personal issues, precluding him from being as actively involved in the activities of local organizations. Perhaps this is due to the complexity of contemporary life, perhaps because formerly not-discussed issues are no longer taboo. Perhaps part of this demand relates to the increase of recent-returnees to Orthodoxy. In any event, the rabbi often simply does not have the luxury of devoting as much time as he would wish to the affairs of communal organizations.

Alas, there is a third reason for the rabbi’s reduced role in communal institutions; that is, some local institutions do not perceive themselves as being communal institutions. Often, an organization (most typically an educational organization), is opened by former Yeshiva graduates at their own initiative and without prior broad-based community discussion. These founders often view their personal Rosh Yeshiva as their spiritual mentor and advisor, and thus see little reason to seek the input of the local rabbi. Indeed, the increased influence played by Roshei Yeshiva has often severely reduced (and
occasionally eliminated) the need for the local rabbis’ involvement in communal affairs.

Finally, the former era of rabbinic organizations that included non-Orthodox rabbis may have created a culture of rabbinic distrust for broad-based communal efforts and coalitions.

**Consequences of the Rav’s Reduced Role**

The reduced role of the shul Rav in local organizations is not necessarily a negative development. Indeed, in some ways the independence may benefit both sides, since it allows each party to express views freely, and criticize the other in (hopefully) positive ways. On the other hand, this diminishment of local rabbinic influence is sadly symptomatic of the further breakdown of the old-fashioned *kehilla*.

It is not the reduction of local rabbinic influence that is most troubling, but the trend toward organizations becoming individual monarchies rather than community establishments. Increasingly, a school or *chessed* organization will “belong” to a particular professional or *askan*. Dynasties are created, and a sense of proprietorship evolves.

But, this too is not all negative. I recall when a neighbor of mine decided to transfer his son from the local day school to the local *cheider* type school. He related that one of the day school’s lay board members criticized his decision by declaring, “Now that you are sending your son to Rabbi Ploni’s yeshiva, you will never again have any input in your son’s *chinuch*.” The fellow responded on the spot, “That may be true. However, now at least you won’t have any more say in my son’s *chinuch*.” Indeed, the involvement of unqualified lay leaders, whose sole credentials for involvement in Torah and *chessed* is their philanthropy, has caused a knee jerk reaction to reject ‘non- *daas Torah*’ input in decisions of certain organizations.

Since the rabbi is not the Rosh Yeshiva or ‘gadol’ of the institutional proprietor, he is often more closely associated with the lay leadership, or seen as an independent rather than a “*daas Torah*”, and is often excluded, as well.
Ultimately, I am not convinced that the reduction of the shul Rav’s influence is actually detrimental to the Jewish community. For the most part, those involved in Torah and chessed have rabbinic mentorship as their personal Torah guides. Moreover, Roshei Yeshiva are themselves increasingly better equipped to assess issues of this nature since they themselves, are not only talmedei chachomim, but frequently askanim, as well.

The greatest consequence of the reduction in demands on the local Rav is not a deprivation from the Rav’s perspective (who is typically overwhelmed with congregational issues and is more than happy to be relieved of communal responsibilities) but rather the loss of multiple perspectives that exist when an institution is a true, communal institution. When every yeshiva, organization and institution is a private fiefdom, there is little room for constructive criticism or creative contributions. The shul rabbi, by virtue of his being a non-aligned individual, could serve as a sounding board for new ideas and a critic of the insular and sometimes clannish oligarchic leadership of the independent organization. The reintroduction of this role, however, would require a minor (though likely resisted) change to organizational structures.

A Proposal

Although perhaps sounding somewhat regressive, true progress would be achieved through the re-introduction of boards of directors in community organizations that include both the leadership of the particular organization and local shul rabbis. By including such rabbinic representation in the governing body of the school and/or chessed organization, each organization would enjoy the benefit of a more unified and broadly respected community organization, as well as an ally and often invaluable assistant in the important and constant battle of fund-raising. The demand for the rabbi to play this role should not come from the rabbi, but rather from the organization. Rabbis, of course, will need to learn to use this newfound role judiciously, since it will inevitably be
withdrawn if he uses his pulpit as a bully pulpit, rather than for fundraising appeals.

It is the rabbi’s duty to avoid being viewed as seeking to wrest control or authority over the existing communal organization; however, by establishing a more inclusive board or moetzes of community leaders, whose task will be to discuss and ultimately decide on the mission as well as the best path to fulfill that mission, we can help create a more unified and effective Jewish community.

And on the more esoteric level, inclusion of the shul rabbi in local organizational boards will advance that elusive, but much desired, feeling of achdus to which we all subscribe.