

Kehilot Kedoshot – Sacred Communities
Emerging Models on the North American Jewish Landscape

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***Kehilot Kedoshot* – Sacred Communities: Emerging Models on the North American Jewish Landscape**

Caren N. Levine

Executive Summary

This study describes models of sacred Jewish communities and leadership that are emerging on the North American landscape. These communities are focused on connecting individuals with Judaism in personal and communal ways that are consistent with the lives and desires of Jews in the twenty-first century. The paper highlights aspects of these communities' narratives and sheds light on their social and spiritual dynamics. In addition, the study articulates newly emphasized roles and skills for religious lay and professional leadership in sacred communities that are becoming more relationship-based, networked, and connected.

Leaders from thirteen communities were interviewed. These communities include those that focus on prayer; communities that position themselves as cooperatives, spiritual hubs or gateways; communities that “do Jewish” together; and, communities that provide space to “be Jewish” together. In many instances, one community espouses two or more of these frameworks. Some are located in cities and others in the suburbs; occasionally there is cross over. The leaders and innovators represent women and men who are early career through post-retirement. They are highly educated Jews, many of whom themselves felt unsatisfied with the status quo and who hold visions of co-creating alternatives for living vibrant Jewish lives.

Key elements of emergent communities include an emphasis on intentional relationship building, thoughtful community design, distributed leadership opportunities, spiritual leadership and vision, multiple modes of belonging, primal experiences, the use of technology in support of the community, and a culture of networked communities and cross-pollination. In addition, many of these communities maintain mutually beneficial relationships with more traditional Jewish organizations including synagogues, Jewish communal institutions, and foundations. Most of the communities described in this study place a premium on actively listening to and *hearing* their constituents and potential constituents. Several of them were influenced by design thinking, a methodology that focuses on what people want and need in their lives and what does not resonate for them in other models. There is recognition among the leadership that these communities are part of a larger ecosystem of communities to which individuals belong.

Community leaders help bring into focus a Jewish lens on people's lives. They create points of intersection between individual exploration and community. These are similar to more traditionally considered roles and skills of religious leadership, but their emphasis may be different. They prioritize relationship building, collaboration, facilitation, co-learning, community organizing, and adaptive leadership.

In many ways these communities are reclaiming Judaism as the framework for which individuals can live their lives and effect change in the world. Rather than promote a more hierarchical approach of telling people what they need, these communities and their leaders work hard at identifying the needs and aspirations of their members and providing resources and opportunities for them to meet these needs personally and in community.

Kehilot Kedoshot – Sacred Communities: Emerging Models on the North American Jewish Landscape

Caren N. Levine

"To belong to a community is to act as a creator and co-owner of that community... Belonging can also be thought of as a longing to be. Being is our capacity to find our deeper purpose in all that we do. It is the capacity to be present, to discover our authenticity and our whole selves....Community is the container within which our longing to be is fulfilled"

- Peter Block

Introduction

There is a growing interest in emerging models of spiritual communities in Christianity and Judaism. This phenomenon is found across the North American spiritual landscape (Bailey, 2007; Cohen et al, 2007; Kaunfer, 2010; PEW Research Center, 2015; Wuthnow, 1998, 2007). These models tend toward orientations that are more partnership driven rather than hierarchal. In some cases, there is a move to bring conversations about religious life, learning, and practice outside of formal houses of worship and into other spaces where individuals seek community and naturally gather. These venues may include homes, cafes, pubs, restaurants, and public spaces like parks and beaches

The emergence of these communities is a response to people looking for meaning, for cultural relevance, and for spiritual growth. This yearning is not solely an individualistic enterprise; rather, its expression often takes place and is created in community. For many liberal as well as traditional Jews, Judaism is a living relationship and not something that is relegated or "outsourced" to a particular time, place, or establishment. This lived Judaism plays out in the complex ecosystems of people's lives. New models of sacred Jewish community are increasingly designed to facilitate deepening engagement and relationships to Judaism and Jews in ways that acknowledge and even help articulate these complexities.

These communities also reflect changes in the cultural, social, economic, and technological landscapes that promote unprecedented access to resources and expertise that had once been the purview of the religious elite. The influence of the innovation sector, concepts of entrepreneurial leadership, new ways of understanding communities, and the growth of alternative economies (e.g., peer to peer sharing economies such as ride sharing, crowdfunding, etc.) provide frameworks and vocabulary for experimenting with different models of engagement and fulfillment.

The Developing Landscape of North American Jewish Emergent Communities

How are Jewish emergent spiritual communities characterized? Cohen et al (2007) conducted a survey of emergent Jewish communities in the United States from which they identified three modes of emergent Jewish spiritual communities. These include "rabbi-led emergents," "independent minyanim," which are led by a core group of people who are highly Jewishly educated, and "alternative emergent communities" which are spiritual enterprises but not primarily prayer communities (p. 2).

The authors identified the following “family resemblances” that tend to appear in these types of communities:

- Institutionally, there is a shift from location- and function-based institutions toward action- and mission-based institutions. Communally and socially, they are marked by and prize frequent house visits, socializing, celebrations, and comforting in times of stress or sorrow.
- Politically, the communities are experimenting with a wide range of authority and legitimacy. They are reinventing “citizenship” by doing away with conventional forms of congregational membership. Independent minyanim use a variety of decision-making methods to determine questions of halakhah, ritual, and practice. Rabbis leading emergent communities tend to exercise moral authority by modeling it rather than prescribing it, but at the same time they are asserting executive powers usually retained by boards in more conventional synagogues.
- Experientially and spiritually, they seek to create intentional, “authentic” experiences, whether those are defined in terms of greater liturgical virtuosity or in terms of deeper meaningfulness.
- These communities share narratives. Their community stories have common elements around a group of previously disengaged Jews, dissatisfied with existing communal offerings, working together to establish a new platform for Jewish liturgical, educational, and social collective narratives of ethnic self-preservation than with classic Jewish master narratives such as the Exodus liberation and the covenant at Sinai.
- For these communities, the twin pillars of the inherited American Jewish collective identity – the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel – are history, rather than memory. Emergent leaders are far more likely to invoke collective memories of the civil rights movement, the labor movement.
- Ritually, emergent communities evince musical and interpretive innovation, but tend to prefer traditional liturgical forms.
- Materially, these communities place much less stress on capital ownership (few, if any, own their own buildings), and more broadly have developed a culture of paper-free communication via the internet.
- Ethically, emergent communities stress living out Jewish values in the non-Jewish world, and place a strong emphasis on acting Jewishly in support of both Jewish and non-Jewish causes. They tend to be politically progressive.
- Philosophically and theologically, emergent communities tend to evince more God language and they encourage participants not only to bring their faith commitments into the secular world, but also to use “secular” culture and issues as [sic] sources for religious reflections and spiritual growth (Cohen et al, 2007, pp. 3-4).

These communities represent a desire to engage fully and authentically as individuals with Judaism. Kaunfer (2010) describes this as “empowered Judaism:”

...a Judaism in which people begin to take responsibility for creating Jewish community, without waiting on the sidelines. It is a Judaism that recognizes that thousands of Jews – of all ages and backgrounds – are thirsting for a meaningful engagement with critical life questions and want to open up the texts of our past to deepen that engagement. It is a Judaism that has confidence in the wisdom and relevance of our tradition, that doesn’t resort to cheap gimmicks to draw people in. It is a Judaism that includes men and women as equal partners in religion and doesn’t water down the tradition to be inclusive. It is a Judaism that refuses to cede access to knowledge to a vaunted

rabbinical elite but values rabbis as critical teachers who inspire and give people the tools to learn more on their own. It is a Judaism that refuses to close itself off to the larger world and knows it has moral responsibility for the major crises of our modern age. It is a Judaism that trusts in the power of communal prayer and refuses to settle for mediocre attempts at connecting to God (pp. 3-4).

A premium is placed in these communities on cultivating genuine relationships and community building. This movement is seen across the Jewish community:

Specifically in a Jewish communal context, the value of relationships has taken on an elevated role, in work done by Wolfson (2013), UJA-Federation of New York's Connected Congregations (2013-2015), Herring (2012) and the work of emergent Jewish communities like Kavana Cooperative and IKAR (Kaunfer 2010) to build new frames for relationship. Relationships examined here are not between individuals and communal leadership, or between individuals and values or ideas, but between individuals in a non-hierarchical, more lateral sense, for the sake of social connection and the value that is contained within that set of social relationships. (Shapiro Plevan, 2015)

There has been an upsurge in interest in different models of sacred communities. Older, more established Jewish communal institutions, including synagogues and federations are paying attention to these communities to learn from them and adapt promising practices and cultural norms. This includes the work of the UJA-Federation of Greater New York's Synergy program which has sponsored research, convened conversations around their findings, and offered supports to congregations as they experiment with new formats through their Connected Congregations program (<http://www.ujafedny.org/what-we-do/strengthen-organizations/synergy>; <http://www.ujafedny.org/what-we-do/strengthen-organizations/connected-congregations>). Similarly, the Community Foundation for Jewish Education of the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago released a report on independent b'nai mitzvah to better understand the phenomenon and understand why families turn to synagogue alternatives (Pickus, 2015).

Woocher (2011) points out that innovation today in the Jewish community is not "oppositional" as it was in the 1960s and 1970s, protesting against "the establishment." Rather, these innovators are motivated by "what they believe is needed for Jewish life – their Jewish lives – to flourish.... It is about creating opportunities for Jewish living in the 21st century that are more diverse and inclusive; spiritually, intellectually, and aesthetically enriching; and morally compelling." (p. 81). These innovators often have relationships and supports from more established organizations through affiliation, funding, or formal and informal mentoring.

These new organizations take into account older models of sacred communities, respond to them in new ways by refining them, reclaiming what they helped secure in the past, and adapting them or completely reinventing and re-envisioning ways of being in spiritual Jewish community. These relate to larger questions: What does religious leadership look like in an age where information and knowledge are more easily accessible by individuals through technology and social networks and in which community building is highly prized? What are curricular implications for seminaries and other leadership training institutions? How does a more intentionally participatory cultural stance influence the ways in which sacred communities are designed?

These communities tend to be directed toward individuals as themselves – as learners, seekers, active developers of their Jewish experiences, rather than as programming based on demographics. They often express their work as filling perceived gaps in the community and as offering alternatives to the “outsourcing” one’s Judaism. Many of these communities view themselves as part of a constellation of an individual’s communal Jewish opportunities rather than as the sole provider of one’s Jewish experiences. They anticipate that individuals belong to multiple communities, which impacts on how adherents relate to these entities. Individuals may identify as belonging to a community, but they may not be members in the more traditional sense of financial commitment, and so communities are exploring a variety of revenue models that reflect their purpose (Cousens, 2013).

There is evidence that this field is maturing. CLAL sponsors CLI: Clergy Leadership Incubator, a two year fellowship program for early career congregational rabbis to support them in “areas of innovative thinking, change management and institutional transformation” (<http://www.cliforum.org>). JOIN for Justice, the Jewish Organizing Institute and Network runs programs for religious leadership that focus on using “community organizing tools such as relationship building, leadership development, and collective action” (<http://www.joinforjustice.org>).

The Jewish Emergent Network was recently formed by leaders of seven Jewish communities from IKAR (Los Angeles), Kavana (Seattle), The Kitchen (San Francisco), Mishkan (Chicago), Sixth & I (Washington, D.C.), Lab/Shul (New York) and Romemu (New York). They announced the Jewish Emergent Network Rabbinic Fellowship in January 2016 as described below:

The seven communities in the Network do not represent any one denomination or set of religious practices. What they share is a devotion to revitalizing the field of Jewish engagement, a commitment to approaches both traditionally rooted and creative, and a demonstrated success in attracting unaffiliated and disengaged Jews to a rich and meaningful Jewish practice. While each community is different in form and organizational structure, all have taken an entrepreneurial approach to this shared vision, operating outside of conventional institutional models, rethinking basic assumptions about ritual and spiritual practice, membership models, staff structures, the religious/cultural divide and physical space (<http://www.ikar-la.org/jen> downloaded January 8 2016).

The Network inaugurated a two-year National Rabbinic Fellowship beginning in June 2016 to:

immerse talented young clergy in the work of these thriving communities while providing valuable training and mentoring. Fellows will be supported in the development of their rabbinic vision and skills, preparing them to complete the Fellowship as part of a national cohort of creative, vision-driven rabbis eager to invest in the reanimation of North American Jewish life. Upon completion of the program, each Fellow will be poised to educate, engage, and serve an array of underserved populations, including disaffected and unaffiliated Jews, young adults, families with young children, and others. (<http://labshul.org/jewish-emergent-network-announces-new-rabbinic-fellowship/8655>)

Notably, the Network receives support from national philanthropic organizations including Jim Joseph Foundation, Crown Philanthropies, Natan, and the Slingshot Fund.

Cultural, social, and educational trends such as participatory culture, more porous communal boundaries and networks, partnered leadership as differentiated from hierarchal authority, concepts of co-learning, facilitating, greater access to resources previous held by authority figures and elites, understandings of communal social networks, the possibilities of designing for more personalized, customized experiences rather than conforming to institutional offerings are influencing how people of all ages and backgrounds navigate their worlds and are shaping Jewish sacred communities in North America and religious leadership.

About this Study

The purpose of this paper is to describe models of sacred Jewish communities and leadership that are emerging on the North American landscape, to better understand their narratives, and to reflect on developing themes. In addition, the study articulates newly emphasized roles and skills for religious lay and professional leadership in sacred communities that are becoming more relationship-based, networked, and connected.

Several of the communities included in this study were already known to the author through word of mouth or from extensive research. Other communities were identified through requests by the author for nominations for candidates from various social networks. Invitations were extended to leaders of these communities to participate to which thirteen responded. Semi-structured oral interviews were conducted with key informants from these thirteen communities. The focus was on organizers of communities who initiated them or individuals who play key roles in their development. Questions included:

- What did you know / think / envision when you started out? What do you know now? What do you wish you knew? What skills and conditions can you identify for success?
- How do you see your role(s)? How does your (rabbinic) leadership vision juxtapose with the vision of the communities that you are forming/ facilitating/ leading? What are the dynamics?
- How do these entities work?
- What are leadership issues and models?

Respondents were generous with their time and each one graciously shared very personal stories about their own leadership development and of the genesis of their community. These communities represent a variety of models. Most, but not all, are relatively new, less than a decade old, in various stages of formation.

The communities described in this study include those that can be considered rabbi-led communities which are primarily prayer communities, communities which can be considered spiritual hubs that include prayer (some rabbi-led), and alternative spiritual communities that “do Jewish” together such as learning and social action, and / or provide infrastructures to be Jewish together.

The respondents include:

Rabbi Avram Mlotek, co-founder and rabbi of Base: DWTN, New York, New York

Yael Steiner, Beis Community, New York, New York

Rabbi Ronald H. Isaacs, rabbi, and Dr. Leora W. Isaacs, Congregation Beth Judah, Wildwood, New Jersey

Lorraine Litvin Mann, founder, Chavurah of Northern New Jersey
Beth Finger, founder, JWOW: Jewish Without Walls, Suffolk County, New York
Rabbi Sharon Brous, co-founder, IKAR, Los Angeles, California
Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum, co-founder, The Kavana Cooperative, Seattle, Washington
Rabbi Noa Kushner, founder, The Kitchen, San Francisco, California
Nate DeGroot, rabbinic student, founder, Mikdash: Portland's East Side Jewish Cooperative
Rabbi Lizzi Heydemann, founder, Mishkan Chicago, Illinois
Aliza Kline, executive director (Sabbath Queen), OneTable, New York, San Francisco, Chicago
Rabbi Adina Lewittes, founder, Sha'ar Communities, Northern New Jersey
Tamra Dollin, co-founder, Shir Hadash, Denver, Colorado

"Exactly as I show you – the structure of the Mishkan and the structure of its utensils – so you should make it" (Exodus 25:9)

"Moshe Rabbeinu and the Jewish people conceived of the Mishkan and its utensils, with all of its measurements and weights, according to their prophetic ability and by their own light. 'And so you shall make it'- each generation shall endeavor to create the Mishkan through their own prophetic light, by their time and place" (Kedushat Ha-Levi on 25:9)¹

Case Studies

The following case studies are based on interviews with key informants from each community. They are supplemented by additional material, including the organizations' websites. These vignettes represent what the author understood in listening to the interviewees and in reading these resources.

These narratives are snapshots in time, with different communities at different stages of development and formation. The community self-descriptions are taken from community's website. For more additional information about each organization, please see the Appendix which includes descriptive material from each organization's website.

¹ As taken from: <http://etzion.org.il/en/lecture-87-structure-mishkan-reflection-israels-spiritual-situation#ftn1>. With appreciation to Nate DeGroot for sharing this commentary.

Base Hillel

<http://www.basehillel.org>

Interview with Rabbi Avram Mlotek, Base co-founder and rabbi of Base: DWTN

Community Self-Description:

What is Base?

Base is the home of a Rabbinic family which serves as a home-base, a grounding point for young adults. While each Base reflects the personality of the Rabbinic couple and embodies their vision for a vibrant Jewish community, every Base is committed to pluralism and is founded upon three core values: hospitality, learning, and service.

Our Mission

Our mission is to create spaces where Jewish relationships can be fostered that add meaning, purpose, and joy to our lives. By opening our homes on Shabbat and the holidays, by learning Jewish texts, and by conducting acts of service, we aim to create a growing network of people that celebrate, learn, and serve together.

Story: Creating a Home Base

Base sponsors two communities in New York City; one is located in downtown Manhattan and the other is in Brooklyn. Participants include individuals who are seeking community with which to gather for Shabbat meals, Jewish learning, or service projects.

About 70 percent of the people who participate are post-college, in their twenties. The other 30 percent are college students. People bring friends and family members to special events. Base welcomes whomever comes to their home. Their primary target is people who are not going to synagogue. Base draws a variety of people with different religious backgrounds and various cultural backgrounds. The weekly service project attracts a diverse crowd, as does the Torah learning. Participants find them mostly word of mouth and partnerships with other organizations that are reaching out to similar cohorts.

Base sponsors a Jewish Learning Fellowship with National Hillel which is made up of 10 week seminars, 1 ½ over dinner. Students receive a stipend for their participation. It fosters ways for the Jewish community to connect. Base started a conversion class for three students who expressed an interest. Base also partners with Moishe House, Repair the World, and local Hillels.

One of the Base leaders is staffing a Honeymoon Israel trip, a highly subsidized trip to Israel for newlyweds with at least one Jewish partner.

The program is evolving and individualized in terms of what the community wants. The service piece is the actualization of their values. They gather for kavana and put things learned into action. The vision of community is centered around living the Jewish calendar, learning Jewish text, and service. It is a home base for people as they explore their Jewish journeys on their own terms.

Beis Community

<http://beiscommunity.com>

Interview with Yael Steiner

Community Self-Description:

The Beis is an inclusive, intentional Jewish community in Washington Heights that harnesses the creativity of its members to inspire connection.

It started back in 2012 when a bunch of friends met in Le Cheile to talk about the local Jewish community, what it was missing, and how to make it better. After some taco nights, Starbucks meetings, a document (“C is for Community”), and a Facebook group (Open Up Washington Heights), things were up and running. Next came a Shavuot bake-off, and rooftop gatherings, and Pot Luck Learning, and soon we were outgrowing our space. After some retreats and visioning sessions, and a tip from Rabbi Schwartz (Rabbi of Mt. Sinai Jewish Center), we ended up at Congregation Beth Hamedrosh Hagadol of Washington Heights (BHH) in the summer of 2014. And after a year of High Holiday services and meals, monthly Shabbatons, tabling and caroling, and JewsInTheHeights@gmail.com, the Beis Community was officially a thing.

Story: Community Self-Organization

Beis was started by a group of friends who came together to imagine what an intentional community might look like. This group was part of a growing population of highly educated (secularly and Jewishly), young Modern Orthodox individuals who were graduates of Jewish day schools and who were living in Washington Heights. Although there was a large Orthodox synagogue in the area which they frequented, the group was looking for a smaller, more personal environment where they could have opportunities to build other types of relationships and community. Those who attended secular colleges were influenced by their experiences at Hillel, where they enjoyed a high degree of autonomy.

This group of like-minded peers went on Shabbat retreats in the Catskills and ran programs on their own in people’s apartments. They held “Potluck Learning” events in which the host picks a theme or opening text and guests come prepared to share ideas and resources related to the theme including poetry, art, and more traditional texts. They also sponsored Shabbat FrED (Friend) Talks,” based on the model of TED Talks. There were a lot of meals and programs around which the community came together. These types of events capitalized on the wealth of experiences and creativity in the room and helped to foster and strengthen relationships.

Hart Levine was one of the founding members of Beis and became its community organizer. Using skills and experience from his other projects, Hart Levine realized that there was a large number of Jews in Washington Heights who were not affiliated with any synagogue or other Jewish communal institutions.

As the Beis community grew, they experimented with different ideas and programming, while asking themselves what kind of community they wanted to be and how to best achieve this vision. A core group of 8-10 people held a series of visioning sessions. This group included both originators of the community and newer members who were actively involved. It was at this time that Beis became involved in an incubator fellowship for emergent Jewish intentional communities through Hazon, with support from the UJA-Federation of Greater New York. Through this program, they accessed resources and mentorships to help them further develop their vision, mission, and to identify their core values and put them into action.

Through this process, the planning group determined that they would hold services in their own space in order to maintain autonomy over the type of service that they craved rather than at the local synagogue where more traditional structures and hierarchal decision-making were in place. They received funding from the OU who saw Beis as an opportunity to support a new Orthodox community in New York. Many Beis members also maintain membership at the local synagogue and there is a local Partnership Minyan once a month that some attend, so there are many different prayer community options in the area in addition to those offered directly by Beis.

Beis had also developed a series of Shabbatons that attracted large numbers of people from all over New York City. They started to feel a tension between running programs for the larger Jewish community and running events that supported the interests and growth of their own community. The visioning process helped them to better articulate their desire for growing the kind of community they wanted to be a part of and refocus on their original intent of building community locally, in Washington Heights. They are reaching out to the unaffiliated and also to Orthodox Jews who are looking for something different

Creating a welcoming community is a premium value. Friday night services include opportunities for people to introduce themselves to those seated nearby. At communal meals, tables are decorated with homey touches like flowers and other table decorations. Suggested ice breakers are placed at each table. They connect communal meals with homemade food and liturgical events; for example, Beis hosted a musical Hallel that included breakfast. In addition, when people sign up for a Shabbaton, they are asked questions about who they are and their interests. Hart Levine, the community organizer, has follow up conversations with them to get to know them better. Beis also prizes the development of multiple leadership roles that community members can play. People are encouraged to become involved in what they are most interested in, and these roles typically have low barriers for involvement.

Chavurah of Northern New Jersey

Interview with Lorraine Litvin Mann, founder

Story: Connecting Families with Community

Lorraine is a Jewish educator. Her journey began as a member of a reform synagogue where she was also a b'nei mitzvah tutor. Lorraine and her husband had been active in the congregation for many years. At some point, they realized that they were not feeling spiritually fulfilled and that they wanted a different type of communal, spiritual experience. Lorraine and her husband made the difficult decision to leave their synagogue.

Lorraine continued her private tutoring and in the process became more familiar with the families and their needs. She saw in them fellow travelers; people who were also in search of different types of experiences than what they felt the established synagogues in the area could offer. Some were disenfranchised with the synagogue culture and what they perceived as exclusivity, especially around the High Holidays when they were most likely to attend (e.g., preferences in seating for the “big *machers*” who might or might not show up). Some experienced High Holiday synagogue services as “performance” rather than as authentic prayer.

Once these people decided to leave their synagogues, they sought alternative places to go, especially for the High Holidays. One year, in response to her own needs and to theirs, Lorraine ran a Rosh Hashanah service in someone's home for thirty people. Over time, the High Holiday services moved out of homes and into a large backyard, and eventually to larger venues to accommodate the number of worshippers. The group currently rents space at a Women's Club building. The most recent High Holiday service (2015) attracted 375 people.

The services are relatively short. They are kept to about an hour to an hour and a half. Lorraine designs the service to focus on liturgy that she believes will have the greatest impact on the people in attendance. Her goal is to create an experience in which people will be moved to do something every day to make the world a better place. The Rosh Hashanah service is followed by a communal potluck lunch. A minimal fee is charged per family to cover the rental of the space, insurance, parking, and clean up crew.

These services are an extension of the work that Lorraine does with families who engage her to tutor their children for b'nei mitzvah. Her curriculum begins when the students are in fourth grade and includes Hebrew, Torah, life cycle, American Jewish history, and Holocaust study. She encourages parents to sit in on the sessions and study with their children. Often, this leads to the parent's greater participation in services.

Lorraine also officiates at weddings, shivas, and other life cycle events. In addition to High Holiday services, Lorraine used to hold communal seders for her families that grew to include 75-80 people. Eventually, her own family “reclaimed” Lorraine for more intimate family *sederim*. Lorraine does not advertise; rather, people hear about her through word of mouth.

Lorraine encourages people to support their local synagogues. She does not see her position as taking on every role that a synagogue fills. Lorraine would also like to see more independent educators

and service leaders who can offer people alternative routes to being part of Jewish learning and prayer community.

Congregation Beth Judah / Rabbi Ronald H. Isaacs

<http://www.bethjudahtemple.org>

Interviews with Rabbi Ron Isaacs and Leora Isaacs

Community Self-Description:

Beth Judah Temple is the only active synagogue in Cape May County situated at the southernmost tip of New Jersey, jutting between the Delaware Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Located in Wildwood, New Jersey, Beth Judah has been serving the County's Jewish community and its Jewish vacationers for over 100 years.

Whatever your age or stage, we welcome all Jews of all denominations to come, visit, worship, celebrate, share and learn about our beautiful heritage and faith! We offer a warm approach to tradition where everyone counts.

Rabbi Ron Isaacs, a native of Toronto, Canada has recently become the Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Sholom in Bridgewater, New Jersey, where he has served for the past 40 years. Known as the "teaching rabbi", he has used his creative talents in the Temple's Religious School, Hebrew High School and award winning adult education program. Over the years his congregation has earned more than 30 Solomon Schechter awards.

Rabbi Isaacs continues to use his musical talents to perform at J.C.C's, nursing homes, creative healing services, music therapy and worship services. He has written more than 100 books, including his most recent, a childrens' Hanukkah book which will be available for sale in August. He has taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary's Rabbinical School and has served as scholar in residence and lecturer throughout the country.

Last year (and again this year) he will be leading a musical Kabbalat Shabbat service on the beach at the Montreal Inn Beach Resort in Cape May. He is very excited to have the opportunity to lead Temple Beth Judah in worship for the High Holidays as well as lead services twice a month until the end of December.

Story: A Laboratory for Reinvention

This is a case study of a serendipitous coming together of a 100 year old congregation in search of revitalizing itself and a rabbi in search of something new who recently retired from his congregation after 40 years of service.

Congregation Beth Judah is a small synagogue on the New Jersey shore with a 100 year history. It is the only synagogue in Cape May County. The community includes young people, older people, year round residents and seasonal participants who spend summers at the Jersey shore. The congregational community is very attached to the synagogue and the congregation was looking to revitalize itself. Many of them have been members their entire lives. Children who moved away come back for the High Holidays. In the summer, vacationers and seasonal vendors, including Israelis, often drop by.

Rabbi Ron Isaacs, a rabbi, educator, and author, recently retired from leading his congregation in central New Jersey for 40 years. He was ready for new challenges and was looking for venues to experiment with music and prayer, both of which are passions of his. When he was younger, he was part of a Hebrew liturgical rock band. More recently, he took a position as music therapist at a hospice.

Rabbi Isaacs was approached by people at the Wildwood synagogue who knew him from his years of vacationing on the Jersey shore with his family. They asked if he would be willing to lead High Holiday services and perhaps a few additional services in the fall. The congregation's leaders mentioned that they would be open to something different than what had been traditionally done in their synagogue. Ron saw an opportunity to run the kind of service he always dreamed of leading – one that was more participatory and which integrated musical instruments.

Ron and his wife, Leora Isaacs, a Jewish educator, introduced music into the service over the High Holidays. They used drums, tambourines, guitar, and a shofar. The Isaacs shortened the services, which created a more focused and engaged atmosphere. Any fears that the music would be a distraction dissipated. The congregation caught on rather quickly that the music was there to enhance their experience. At the second musical service, Leora brought a duffel bag filled with drums and tambourines and invited people to use them during the service. By Thanksgiving time, the culture change was palpable. More than 40 people attended Friday night services. Upon their arrival, people grabbed instruments and some even brought their own. The service was vibrant with singing and clapping. The following Shabbat morning service included a solid minyan, Torah learning, and additional energetic singing. The services have become an initial launch point for community building. The good vibes of the services provide momentum for the community to move forward with other aspects of their growth, including implementation of a strategic plan.

The rabbi takes advantage of their location by the boardwalk and the ocean. He has conducted Friday night Shabbat services on the beach in the summer, which attracted about 150 people including town officials. Some of the best things that happen are not at the service itself, but afterwards, with the relationships that develop when people hang out together. Ron also spends time developing personal connections with congregants and potential members. Ron is working with congregational leadership to involve them in reaching out to others and creating a thicker network.

Postscript: Recently, the Isaacs were invited to lead a "Ruach Shabbat," a musical Shabbat morning service, at their previous synagogue.

IKAR

<http://www.ikar-la.org>

Interview with Rabbi Sharon Brous

Community Self-Description:

IKAR, an innovative model for Jewish engagement, launched in 2004 in an effort to reclaim the vitality and relevance of Jewish religious practice and reimagine the contours of Jewish community. Recognized nationally for its success in engaging young and disaffected Jews, IKAR is a positive and proactive response to the declining trend in affiliation in the Jewish community. IKAR is dedicated to reanimating Jewish life through imaginative engagement with ritual and spiritual practice and a deep commitment to social justice. Fusing piety and hutzpah, obligation and inspiration, we are harnessing an untapped energy in the Jewish community –attracting and mobilizing Jews who to contribute their vast intellectual and creative resources to address real world concerns effectively and unapologetically.

Story: From Vision to Community

Rabbi Brous was the rabbinic fellow at B'nai Jeshurun (BJ) in New York. She finished rabbinical school and moved to Los Angeles, but she was unable to find a spiritual place where her soul would thrive. She met so many interesting, creative Jewish souls who were not connected to the Jewish community but who were spiritually hungry and intellectually curious. She participated in the first year of Reboot's 35 Under 35 program and again encountered tremendously talented, leading edge Jews in their fields who were marginally from the Jewish community.

What she began hearing is that synagogues were no longer considered sacred places for many of these people. They cited lack of spiritual depth, lack of intellectual honesty, a misalignment with how they navigate their worlds. Rabbi Brous thought about her experiences at BJ. She was inspired to think about what it would be like to have a community where there would be room for everyone and which valued spiritual depth, religious practice, and social action.

IKAR began in Sharon's living room. The initial participants included rabbis and Jewish educators. She wanted to attract those on the margins. She began to tap into people who she knew who were disaffected with the existing organized Jewish community. Her vision was to develop a space where people could have conversations about being Jews in a world on fire. She wrote a vision statement about what she thought possible – she and Melissa Balaban shared it with their friends. Sharon and Melissa invited people to attend a service on a Friday night if the statement resonated. They thought they might have around 10 people. They attracted 150. They did an amazing service together – traditional davening, in Hebrew. People all felt they could somehow own it. Rabbi Brous promised if they could raise a certain amount of money over the weekend, she would quit her job and work on IKAR. Participants called their parents and their grandparents and raised the funding. The purpose of IKAR is to re-animate Jewish life and gain purpose in a troubled world, and give inspiration to the broader Jewish world.

Rabbi Brous took a collaborative approach to community building. In the process, she wrestled with her role. Is she a facilitator? A community leader? She realized that many people do not know what they want Jewishly. She strives to articulate a vision that people can resonate with and then she works with them on

the strategy to achieve this vision. She was interested in religious and spiritual rigor, which was not something with which many people had experience. People also had creative ideas that were in alignment with her vision that she would not have thought of, for example, a rabbinic intern pushed to focus on Jewish cultural aspects. As a result, IKAR ran a successful program on Jews and superheroes that attracted hundreds of people and top talent as panelists.

From its beginning, IKAR was concerned with community. As it grew, there was a fear that it would become more performative than community-based. They started very early in their development to hold house parties. The rabbi wanted to get to know people as individuals and to hear their Jewish story. She asked if people would host house parties of 10-20 people at which to have important conversations. People rose to the occasion. They held house parties every week for five years in various neighborhoods in the Los Angeles area. The rabbi asked the hosts to share what were the most compelling questions that they and their friends were engaged with, and she in turn provided a Jewish framework for these conversations. Through the telling of their Jewish stories and through these conversations, people got to know each other more deeply. Out of these group meetings emerged Minyan Tzedek, an opportunity for social justice learning and social action as a community.

JWOW: Jewish Without Walls

<http://www.jewishwithoutwalls.org>

Interview with Beth Finger, Founder

Community Self-Description:

What is JWOW?

Jewish Without Walls (JWOW) is a grassroots independent initiative to bring Jewish families in Suffolk County together in vibrant Jewish communities. It is a way for parents and children to meet other Jewish families across denominations and affiliations.

What does JWOW do?

JWOW volunteers run events and programs that grow organically from the interests and needs of our community. Our programs are innovative, of the highest quality, and always rooted in friendship.

Welcome to Our Community

Jewish Without Walls invites everyone, regardless of your current level of affiliation to the Jewish community, to get connected. JWOW brings all Jewish people and their families together in a joyful community. We are non-denominational, inclusive and always offer a welcoming environment.

Jewish Without Walls empowers people to build community. We emphasize personal relationships and friendship. We hope that you will attend programs and participate in our online and Facebook conversations. As we depend on volunteers, we hope that, ultimately, you will become an active partner in JWOW. We offer everyone the opportunity to step up to make something great happen, and we support you along the way: JWOW is the engine and our partners are the drivers.

Jewish Without Walls focuses on Jewish culture and tradition. We believe that being part of an intentional Jewish community that celebrates together and learns together will add meaning to your life and enhance your family experience.

Story: An Engine for Relationship Building

JWOW was established four years ago. Beth Finger originally envisioned JWOW as a completely volunteer organization that would provide resources for facilitating the kinds of Jewish communities people wanted for themselves. Beth was influenced by her experiences shaped by Hillel, Wexner Graduate Fellowship, JCCs, and family relationships. Growing up, she was comfortable in all settings and different movements. As an adult, she saw divisions in the Jewish community but didn't understand why.

When she moved to the suburbs and had children, she felt the need to join a synagogue in order to meet other Jewish families. She realized that finding a community of Jewish families might be even harder for working parents. About five years ago, Beth helped organize a Columbus Day event at the UJA Federation, in which she put together a team of people to pack Shabbat food baskets. She noticed how happy the participants were to see each other. They had prior connections and relationships, but not many opportunities to get together to do something as a community. This was a turning point for Beth, who came up with the idea for JWOW. Beth already had a network of people and she had collected their contact

information over the years. Rachel Nussbaum from Kavana (see below) was very helpful to Beth in thinking about community building.

Originally, synagogues were wary of JWOW and its potential impact on their own membership. Now, many rabbis in the area see it as an opportunity and are asking to partner with JWOW. In order to keep the core of JWOW's vision, the organization will partner with synagogues if the event meets in independent public space (that is, not at a synagogue). There also has to be added value from JWOW in order to make it an authentically JWOW program and not just one that taps into the JWOW community.

The idea behind JWOW is to empower Jews to create the community that they want. JWOW is the engine; people are the drivers. The principles are based on community organizing, which includes meeting people, having coffee with them, understanding what makes them tick, and figuring out who the connectors are in various social networks. It is very labor intensive. The job is also about identifying leadership, helping them see how they can do something special for the community and encouraging them to contribute to JWOW's programming. It is not a top-down community. Part of it is finding the right people to run with a program idea. For example, knowing who is interested in cooking or who loves biking and recruiting them to host cooking classes or family biking events. JWOW offers logistical support to make these events happen including finding venues, coordinating dates, sending out information, invitations, and asking people to bring friends, etc. The content is left to those who volunteered their expertise.

JWOW also sponsors a kids co-op. JWOW provides the structure and support for facilitators, including rituals specific to the program such as songs, snacks, and stories from PJ Library. Some facilitators can run with minimal supports, others may need additional assistance.

JWOW draws synagogue members as well as those who are not affiliated with synagogues. They specifically do not hold Shabbat-related programs so that people don't feel they need to choose one over the other. Participants who are synagogue members tend to come for fun. The non-synagogue members tend to come for the community and to celebrate the Jewish holidays.

The big vision is to expand JWOW across the country.

The Kavana Cooperative

<http://kavana.org>

Interview with Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum

Community Self-Description:

Kavana is an independent Jewish community in Seattle. We strive to create a supportive communal environment in which individuals and families can use "kavana" - intention - to create a Jewish life that is spiritually fulfilling, intellectually satisfying, fun, and meaningful.

Kavana has a unique approach to building Jewish community:

- *Cooperative Model - As the first Jewish cooperative of its kind, partners share in the task of creating Jewish life for the group.*
- *Non-Denominational & Pluralistic - Kavana draws participants from highly diverse backgrounds and provides for multiple entry points to Jewish involvement.*
- *"Personalized Judaism in a Community Context" - Kavana acknowledges and embraces the dynamic tension between an individual's interest and needs, versus the desire to create community.*
- *Local - Kavana believes that Jewish communal life will best thrive in settings which are local, organic and intimate.*

Story: The Art of Intentional Community Building

From its inception, Kavana was created as a partnership between the rabbi and a lay partner. They were seeking a Jewish community where their needs and those of their families could be better met. They were influenced by experiences they had in Hillel and in summer camps and wanted to use these as models for infusing Judaism into their everyday lives. Kavana also drew on influences of other organizations and models local to Seattle. For example, they explored preschool co-ops, in which parents volunteer, and Social Venture Partners, which focuses on building relationships that advance shared community goals.

Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum sees her role as both leader and member of the community. It is a very fluid and dynamic relationship. The community is founded on a co-op model, and leadership rests on many shoulders. As a start-up, the board spent much of its initial energy on programmatics, and recruitment. As it transitioned to more operational procedures and staffing, the board moved toward roles of vision and implementation. Rabbi Nussbaum is highly invested in building up the community and creating social glue to grow and cement the community together in various ways. She sees her role as being in a coaching relationship. This intentional community building requires a lot of effort and time.

Rabbi Nussbaum is highly attuned to creating and optimizing opportunities for "social stickiness." She includes in her measures of success how often members socialize outside of the organized Kavana community. Her feeling is that substantive relationships ensure regular contact which affirms a sense of belonging to the community.

Kavana is socially engineered to maximize community contact and relationship building. For example, parents do not wait in their cars to collect their children. Rather, they are required to come into the building and wait for them. Name tags are worn at all events in order to facilitate introductions and conversations. There are many different services happening in the building where people can run into each other. A significant amount of staff time is devoted to facilitating relationships and building sticky relationships. The staff, including the rabbi, spends a great deal of their time listening for trends, themes, and points of connection. They actively engage in network weaving and pouring energy into making social connections. They look at their membership directory with an eye towards creating opportunities for neighborhood stickiness.

In the beginning, they attracted many young couples and families who were the same age as the rabbi and her lay partner. More recently, older people, often transplants who have moved to be closer to their children and grandchildren or other people who have been disconnected from the organized Jewish community have been joining. As a result, Kavana sponsors a monthly get together for this cohort.

The needs and interests of the community bubble up organically. Kavana provides a space for deepening relationships and adding Jewish context to these needs and interests. It creates a platform for community to happen.

The Kitchen

<http://www.thekitchensf.org>

Interview with Rabbi Noa Kushner

Community Self-Description:

Mission

Judaism is about provoking awe and purpose. That's what we're here for.

We believe that Jewish religious practice can transform: It can change lives, make meaning, and invest people in the world. This transformation requires a flexible, living ecosystem of Jewish experiences. That's what we're building.

The Kitchen is a religious community, deeply grounded in serious exploration of Jewish tradition, text, and ritual. We are creating a spiritually engaging community of seekers at all levels of Jewish knowledge and experience.

The Kitchen does not welcome people only because we aspire to be tolerant, accessible, or inclusive. We welcome people because we ARE those people. There are no insiders or outsiders, there are no others here. We are all others and we all members of modern families. We begin from a place of yes: Every question and request is met with a sense of possibility, optimism and embrace.

At The Kitchen we combine elements of the unexpected, secular, and beautiful in the exploration of Jewish life. We insist that Jewish practice be relevant, a tool for greater investment in the world. At the same time, we practice irreverent reverence—looking for the places where the every-day draws attention to the divine, and the mundane emphasizes what's holy.

We believe in pursuing justice in our lives and our communities. The Kitchen is committed to working toward the prevention of hunger, violence, homelessness, disease, ignorance, abuse, and oppression among all people.

We know the challenges are great. But the prize is even greater: A transformative religious community with room for many expressions of serious Jewish living and a collective power to do good.

Here, we aspire to do nothing more than other generations have done before us: harness the power of Jewish life in our time.

Story: Creating Transformative Community

Rabbi Noa Kushner was interested in creating a high quality Shabbat experience. She started The Kitchen with other people. The Kitchen is not based in a building; rather, it treats all of San Francisco as its campus.

The Kitchen provides a means for people to have a significant way of doing Jewish in their lives. Community opportunities are built into programming. For example, after communal meals, people clean up and do the dishes together and hang out. There are spiritual fitness classes. The Kitchen is organizing a group of newlyweds to participate in Honeymoon Israel. Affinity groups are emerging, for example, poets and artists, who are gathering around interests and integrating Jewish content into their work.

The rabbi's vision about community is that she wants people to do Jewish in meaningful ways. In order to do that, they need other people. Community is therefore a by-product of their Jewish engagement. She is interested in people's investment of themselves – sometimes this is expressed in monetary ways, and sometimes it is not, and both are honored.

The Kitchen was heavily influenced by design thinking, an innovative human-centered design process for problem solving. This process has gained traction in the start up culture that is prevalent in the San Francisco area and is also used in educational and other creative settings.

They learn a lot from the technology community in San Francisco. The tech community pioneered methods for start ups and innovative design constructs, such as sketching out ideas, trying them out, and re-releasing them in an iterative process. Many people in the community are used to this type of prototyping and design and are therefore receptive to experimentation at The Kitchen. They are there because they want to see it work – there is a lot of good will and trust and they develop. Many of their community members are young and may not have been to synagogue at all if not on a regular basis. The Kitchen does not advertise. They gained momentum in the beginning through word of mouth.

Rabbi Kushner's role as founding rabbi is becoming more complex as additional staff joins the team. It is not a lay-lead culture. It is a rabbinic-driven culture, in partnership with staff and volunteers. A number of seminaries have expressed interest in their sharing their work with rabbinical students.

The Kitchen has a davening team that focuses on the quality of the music during services. The davening teams are based on the IKAR model, and they are influenced by the heart-felt participatory davening experienced at Camp Ramah. For The Kitchen, music was an untapped vein. The rabbi hired people to create musically complex services and they engaged musicians from the community. They used vocalists, instruments, harmonies. The davening team sits at a table in the middle of the community rather than up front. Everyone on the team is praying, not performing. The result is transformational; prayer should feel transformational. It takes a lot of work to make something look effortless.

As the Kitchen expands, they will serve a broader population. As a result, the community will develop multiple channels through which to engage and it will look less like a synagogue community. Ideally, there will be multiple rabbis working around the city.

Mikdash: Portland's East Side Jewish Cooperative

<http://www.mikdashportland.org>

Interview with Nate DeGroot, Rabbinic Student

Community Self-Description:

Mission

Mikdash is a cooperative Jewish community and grassroots incubator for creativity, spirituality, and celebration, based in Portland, OR. Mikdash supports and empowers folks to generously share their gifts - their skills, passions, talents, and interests - with one another, to help facilitate sacred experience and the growth of meaningful community.

Rabbinical student, loosely connected community, etc.
space

Story: Tapping into Cultural Zeitgeist: Sharing Economy, Gift Economy, Emergent Communities.

Nate DeGroot spent time his first summer in Portland meeting with people over coffee, often 3-5 meetings a day. He listened to their stories, discovered who they are, heard their relationships to Judaism, and shared his emerging vision of Mikdash. The design of Mikdash was modeled on idea that the Israelites were instructed to build the biblical *mishkan* and offer the gifts of their heart. The principle of a gift economy assumes that everyone has many gifts to give, and passions what they want to share with others. Others, in turn, have gifts to share that make us more whole and fills in gaps; abundance yields abundance. Mikdash also capitalized on Portland's progressive cultural norms, which included an orientation toward sharing economies and community cooperatives.

Mikdash was developed as a grassroots incubator to help people share their gifts with those who want to receive them, in the spirit of sacredness and in the framework of community. Nate's role was to tap community members to share their gifts. In a gift economy, lots of different types of currencies are valued, for example, performing administrative tasks, cleaning up after events, etc.). People donated their time and resources, such as yoga mats for Havdalah yoga events. They rented a house for the summer to provide a space for the community to create itself. They referred to the house as a "communal hub for Jewish life and experience...Equipped with a backyard and garden, an open kitchen and plenty of common space, this is our container. How we fill it is up to us."

Nate noted that people move to Portland for many reasons. They don't necessarily come to Portland specifically for Jewish community, but that doesn't mean that they don't want a Jewish community. There is great power in connecting people to each other and to have a central organizing body to help people makes these connections. Mikdash focused on six core paths, with the idea that there are many paths to experience the sacred. For Mikdash, these included: health and wellness; arts, social justice; nature; Jewish learning; and Jewish sacred times and rituals.

From an entrepreneurial perspective, it was very exciting to be able to put a vision into practice. It was great to hear people respond positively and to have those moments of pride and excitement when this work

came to fruition. The down side was that there was not a lot of time to revel in accomplishments. Another issue was time to develop leadership. Nate spent the last three weeks of his time there focusing less on programmatic and more on relationship building. His goal was to further develop an environment in which people would step up their engagement in the community and commit to assuming responsibilities as part of the organizational team so that the community would not be as dependent on one specific person for their organizational and leadership needs.

Postscript: Nate DeGroot left Portland to take a position as rabbinic intern at IKAR in Los Angeles with Rabbi Sharon Brous. Mikdash members are working to continue building their community.

Mishkan Chicago

<http://www.mishkanchicago.org>

Interview with Rabbi Lizzi Heydemann

Community Self-Description:

Who We Are

Mishkan is a burgeoning spiritual community in Chicago reclaiming Judaism's inspiration and transformative essence. Not bound by a particular location, we meet for soulful musical prayer and learning, at homes and spaces all around the city, from synagogues to yoga studios.

Our Mission

Our mission is to engage, educate, empower, connect and inspire people through dynamic experiences of Jewish prayer, learning, social activism and community building. Whether in person or online, through music or Talmud or powerful conversations, whether in services or social events, Mishkan is reimagining and reinvigorating the next generation of Judaism in Chicago and beyond.

Story: In Search of Authenticity

Mishkan emerged from ideas that Rabbi Lizzi Heydemann was thinking about before she moved back to Chicago. The rabbi was seeking authenticity and the kind of spiritual experience that would excite her. She was planning on returning to Chicago and knew that there was a thirst for a different type of spiritual type of prayer experience but she was not sure what it was. The rabbi has worked at IKAR and was familiar with Romemu. She knew from these experiences that community could be catalyzed through prayer.

Rabbi Heydemann began writing about her ideas. While still in Los Angeles, she spoke with people who could be hosting this burgeoning community, and with philanthropists who might be interested in supporting it. When she moved back to Chicago, she was able to hit the ground running and started talking with people. She went to events that attracted young adults in order to gain more information about what attracted them. She actively engaged with participants at these events, walking around, talking with them, collecting email addresses.

The first Mishkan service was held in a participant/s living room. Sixty-five people came for the service and dinner. Half the people who came were either people who knew the rabbi from a position she held in the suburbs and were curious; and people who were connected to other synagogues in the community; the other half were young people whom she had met at those events. There was a snowball effect.

The people who come to services now include people who are connected to other synagogues in Chicago, people who are curious about the service and who know her from her work in the suburbs. Mishkan is reaching people who are not already synagogue members. Most of these people do not realize what Judaism has to offer them. Much of their community is made up of spiritual seekers in their mid-thirties. They come because they love the prayer service.

What draws people to Mishkan? People enjoy the music and the spirit of the services. Mishkan feels like serious Judaism. Most of the services are in Hebrew. They are designed so that experienced daveners (pray-ers) and novices alike will find meaning.

Early on, the rabbi welcomed people before services began, by asking their names, who they are, and connecting them to others. During the service itself, she would take a moment to invite people to greet each other. After a while, she created the “love team” – emissaries of love who welcome people, help them find seats, introduce them to others, and serve as the glue that holds the community together.

The hub around which the community turns are services. Services are like a pilgrimage event, where every body shows up. Other portals for Mishkan include activities in different parts of the city where Judaism does not yet have an institutional footprint. Mishkan is excellent at programs for adult spiritual seekers and are getting ready to launch a school for children

Mishkan was able to achieve its five year plan in three years and it is becoming more stable and less of a start up. They are experimenting with new ideas and programs. The rabbi is working with her staff to continue building great programs without her needing to be at the center, which changes some of the dynamics. The rabbi defined her leadership role as Chief Spiritual Visionary and protector of the vision for the community. The rabbi’s role is now shifting toward re-calibrating the original vision as it changes. The vision is evolving beyond her because of where people in the community, board, funders would like to see Mishkan grow.

OneTable

<http://onetable.org>

Interview with Aliza Kilne, executive director (Sabbath Queen)

Community Self-Description:

As an online and in-person hub, we help people in their 20s and 30s find, enjoy and share Shabbat dinners to make the most of their Friday night and enjoy the best of life together. We make it easy for hosts to welcome people to a Shabbat dinner at home, for guests to savor a Friday meal and for all to experience unique events for Shabbat dinner out. There's nothing better than a great dinner with people you love. Join us for slowing down, joining together, and sharing stories. Join us for new connections and moments of meaning.

Our approach is simple: Seek, Savor, Share

Story: A Hub for Distributed Leadership.

Michael Steinhardt, a philanthropist, was inspired by his own experiences of Shabbat dinners to develop OneTable. Aliza Kline was charged with developing a program that is based on making Shabbat a habit for a specific cohort of young Jews. OneTable integrated a process of design thinking to begin mapping out what matters to this target population and how they could meet those needs. They approached this work with a lot of curiosity.

OneTable is not an emerging community in and of itself. Its primary role is to plant seeds for communities to emerge out of a shared experience. Each person is empowered to “do Shabbat.” They are encouraged to bring friends, friends of friends, and to reach out to others in their social networks. OneTable is also developing a “tribe” among hosts.

Their goal is to create more distributed leadership. Aliza’s role as leader is focused on empowerment. She meets with people for coffee and she trains other coaches to take on this role. She targets people who have memories of Shabbat and who don’t realize that they themselves can “do” Shabbat.

Each host creates their home profile which includes menu and what to anticipate regarding Shabbat observance. The dinners are non-judgmental. Everyone can determine the kavana of their Shabbat.

A high percentage of hosts were originally guests who were inspired by their experience to take on a hosting role. As OneTable has been experimenting with recruiting hosts, they are looking at ways to lowering barriers for participation. For example, how many guests can people typically host in New York apartments? People are often exhausted at the end of the week from working late hours; how can OneTable make it easier on them to host?

OneTable uses multiple strategies to reach participants. They take advantage of partnerships with organizations that serve young adults but which do not sponsor Shabbat dinners, which serves as a great compliment. They are also partnering with Honeymoon Israel (<http://www.honeymoonisrael.org>), highly subsidized, 9-day trips to Israel for groups of couples from the same city, including interfaith couples. They also work with Chabad.

OneTable uses technology to go from online to face to face (“URL to get IRL” – ‘in real life’). They are currently using a social dining platform called Feastly (<https://eatfeastly.com>), a third party resource that connects chefs with diners for more personalized experiences, for example, dinner parties with friends at a chef’s home. OneTable is growing nationally and will be set up in communities across the United States.

Sha'ar Communities

<http://shaarcommunities.org>

Interview with Rabbi Adina Lewittes

Community Self-Description:

About Sha'ar

SHA'AR COMMUNITIES is a groundbreaking suburban network of small, inclusive and accessible Jewish communities connected by a broad vision of Jewish renaissance. Each revolving around a different modality of Jewish engagement, be it prayer, study, travel or social action, our communities together offer an innovative, affordable and pluralistic model of Jewish identity-building and affiliation. Sha'ar Communities welcomes the changes and challenges in Jewish life today, and in response has initiated the next paradigm of Jewish life for the 21st century.

Sha'ar Communities creates multiple gates ("Sha'ar" = gate) through which people can enter Jewish life and establish Jewish connections. Its name recalls the eight gates leading into the Old City of Jerusalem and suggests the figurative gates we might pass through while on our spiritual journey. People experience Jewish life from a variety of perspectives. Sha'ar looks to offer multiple gateways through which seekers can pass to create connections to Judaism and to community. Our name, Sha'ar, is formed in the singular to convey the sacredness of each of the gates through which we travel.

Story: Opening the Gates: Networked Communities.

The concept of Sha'ar emerged when Rabbi Lewittes became more cognizant of numbers of people who were not connected to the main gateways of Jewish life. Sha'ar was developed as a response to community who stood on the margins of the Jewish community for far too long. Synagogues, which historically have served as these gateways, were not meeting the needs of these people for various reasons. There were people who were not coming to synagogues who had diverse spiritual and communal needs and there were people who were in synagogues but did not feel connected.

For some, there were issues of finances that played a prohibitive role in joining a Jewish communal center. Typically, these financial issues were not relegated to Jewish aspects of their lives, but rather, were a part of how they managed financial decisions in their lives in general.

Taking these into account, Sha'ar was created as a network of seven communities which were eventually focused on the following six gates:

Gate of Prayer (Tefillah)

Gate of Study (Limud)

Gate of Repair (Tikkun Olam)

Gate of Tomorrow – creative programming for children

Gate of Discovery (Nesiyot)

Gate of Wholeness & Healing

The name “Sha’ar” (Gate) expresses the intent behind the community. Although there are multiple gates in this networked community, they do not call themselves “Sha’arim” (Gates). One gate is authentic enough.

Each gate allowed for affordability by being based on a “pay for service” model. The concept of gates facilitates the creation of fellowship by fostering relationships and creating responsibility to others. A premise of Sha’ar is that inner Jewish values and inspiration need to be taken seriously. This sense of responsibility and accountability for one’s self and one’s community are fundamental values for Sha’ar. Participants are invited to share what matters to them Jewishly, and the rabbi will create something with and for them, but there is an expectation of commitment to it. The “tell me what matters to you” component is part of inviting people to a different level of responsibility. Rabbi Lewittes wants to work with people to find ways into Jewish life that lead to deeper responsibility and which, in turn, feeds their souls.

People who come to Sha’ar come from different walks of life. There are people who have a history with institutional Judaism as well as those who have been on the margins, or people who have not been nourished by more traditional Jewish offerings. At Sha’ar, inter-married Jews and Jews who have different types of commitments to Judaism have a place to nurture those identities.

An advantage of being a small, grass-roots organization is an openness to taking risks and experimenting. It involves creative teamwork. One of their goals is to model how to live Judaism as a framework for life, whatever one is doing. For example, teens interact with leaders in commerce and industry and learn how Jewish values shape how they engage in business and navigate the world. They met with a well-known musician who grew up in the Jewish community and who shared what it means to use your voice to bring strength to people who are without power.

Music plays a large role in the Sha’ar community. Music is essential and is a key to the rabbi’s theology of prayer. Rabbi Lewittes views the creation of music as the language of prayer and introspection, rather than as an aesthetic devise. She reminds people that “hitpallel” – the verb for praying – is reflexive. It is a time to focus on the business of reflecting on who you are in your life, with yourself. Music allows those engaged in praying to build relationships to text and liturgy. Rabbi Lewittes points out that people often feel that praying in Hebrew is challenging. She cites a teaching by the Rebbe that prayer through *nigunim* (melodies) is harder precisely because of the absence of words. A *nigun* can open one up to deeper places emotionally and spiritually. The one who is praying cannot hide behind the words.

Sha’ar is an internally networked organization through its multiple gates. It is also a networked organization with other institutions. For example, it is in partnership with the local Federation to work with members of the LGBT community.

Shir Hadash, Denver, CO

<http://headenver.org/index.php/2014-09-03-20-54-29/shabbat/shir-hadash>

Interview with Tamra Dollin, spiritual leader, and supplemented by additional articles by Rabbi Bruce Dollin

Community Self-Description:

Shir Hadash - A Musical Shabbat Experience at HEA at 9:45 am at the Goldberger Youth Center (across the street from the main HEA building)

Shir Hadash is a musical service where participants are encouraged to unite their voices in soulful melodies gathered from Jewish communities around the world. This two-hour service features the essential elements of traditional liturgy, with explanations from the Rabbis to help worshipers better understand our prayers and the weekly Torah portion.

Story: Community Ownership.

Shir Hadash, established in 2012, is a parallel weekly Shabbat morning service that was created by the Hebrew Educational Alliance, a synagogue that has been in existence for over 85 years, first as an Orthodox congregation, then as a traditional, egalitarian Conservative one.

Rabbi Bruce Dollin is the rabbi of Hebrew Educational Alliance. Tammy Dollin is a Jewish professional and alumna of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship. The couple spent time during the rabbi's four month sabbatical exploring different innovative communities in the Jewish and Christian worlds. Upon their return, they gathered together lay leaders who had participated in the Wexner Heritage Program and who had been exposed to different styles of davening. They grappled with the question, "What kind of service do you want to go to?" Through this process, as informed by their experiences and learnings from other communities, they created Shir Hadash, a weekly Shabbat morning service and monthly Friday night service that runs concurrent with the main service.

The Dollins officially kicked off Shir Hadash just after the High Holidays in 2012 and have been meeting weekly every Shabbat since then. The following year they rented space at a nearby church for High Holiday services. Eight hundred people turned up on Yom Kippur. There was a small effect on the traditional sanctuary service, but overall they had a net gain of 300-400 people between the two services.

The formative leadership of Shir Hadash was highly invested in community members owning their prayer experience and their community. As part of their planning, they made decisions about the service itself and logistics, with an eye toward providing space for participants to feel more engaged. The two hour prayer service would include some traditional elements in the liturgical order from *Barchu* through a full *Amidah*, with a focus on specific words and melodies for some of the liturgy rather than the complete prayer. There was also a focus on melodies that are easy for people to sing or to "la la la", an abbreviated Torah reading, an interactive *d'var torah*, and no haftarah or musaf. The founding group of leaders who loved to *daven* and sing practiced new songs and melodies in the Dollin's living room.

Joey Weisenberg's CD's came out and were a huge influence. The Dollins invited people into their living room who loved to daven and some of whom were singers. The first song they sang was in English. They played guitar and drums to see what it would sound like. People were really committed to the process. Early on, they decided not to use guitar in the prayer service. They felt that it made people passive and

filled space that would otherwise be filled with voices. Drums were integrated into the service – they provide some rhythm and provide an element of fun and additional means for participating. Indeed, they felt strongly that voices are where the power is – people bringing their voices from their gut. They realized that they liked singing together. The rabbi spoke about the prayers and they would try out new melodies.

In the weeks before the first Shir Hadash service, Rabbi Dollin taught songs and melodies to a “musaf class,” creating a core group of about twenty people who could facilitate and model the singing. And then they decided “let’s do this” and set a date to launch. From the outset, they felt that Shir Hadash should be its own community, and the expectation was that people could benefit from attending regular weekly services at Shir Hadash without feeling that they were rotating week to week with HEA (although people are free to do so).

As influenced by IKAR, they have a davening team of singers and drummers whose members range from 8 years old to 72. Typically, 8-12 team members lead various parts over the course of the service.

The leadership was committed to bringing people together for a shared experience that was warm, welcoming, and didn’t leave people feeling lost; Hebrew components are sufficiently explanatory. It was understood that the leaders were not performing the service for the congregants; rather, everyone makes the service together. In the beginning, it was the leadership who made the service happen. It is no longer that way. They taught the community the melodies and the flow of the service.

The leadership also recognized that people may have different needs at any given time during the service. Some might be happy to be sitting in community with people whom they feel cares about them. Others might be moved to stand up and sing. Each week is different depending on the energy in the room. Tammy Dollin leads the community every week. The rabbi and the music directors of the original synagogue each rotate in once a month to Shir Hadash.

Where once the cantor might have read Torah, there is a cadre of 8-10 regular volunteers who read 3-5 lines of the parashah. When they come up, each reader introduces him/herself and is invited to mention anything special that they are marking this week; for example, the first time an Israeli girl had an aliyah. The leadership makes sure to notice and name community moments such as inviting a member who is observing a yahrtzeit to say a few words about their loved one. An increasingly diverse population has been attending services and feel they have a place to be in community with others and to share their personal experiences.

Community members care for one another. After a member of the community passed away, thirty people volunteered to act as *shomrim* to stay with the body before burial. The community is also becoming a training ground for young people who are interested in music and want to try out leadership roles. People are asking members who are not rabbis to officiate at ritual / life cycle events. Tammy Dollin has become a spiritual leader of the community. She tries to convey through her presence and through the use of her singing voice, which gains power through the liturgy, the feeling that “I care about you. I am connected to God and to our community. I can be there with you. Are you ready to stand in the space you are taking and be fully present in the moment?” People want authenticity, to feel important, alive, connected. They want to have someone they love and with whom they have a connection with who can touch them and make a difference.

***"The Universe is made of stories, not of atoms."
- Muriel Rukeyser***

Emerging Themes in the Narratives of Sacred Communities

The communities explored in this paper represent just a few of the different models of emergent sacred communities that are appearing on the North American landscape. The stories told are only a small representation of what these communities are and how they are affecting individuals and resonating in the larger Jewish community.

It is clear that meaningful, authentic sacred experiences are desired and cherished by individuals of all ages and backgrounds and not relegated to specific demographics or religious communities. Rather, this desire is rooted deep in human experience, in the human narrative.

The communities that are described in this paper were created by people who themselves are looking for deeper connections and sacred meaning in their lives. They had a hunch that if they had these needs, so did others – and even so, they were often overwhelmed by the reception they received when putting these ideas and actions out into the world. These are individuals who are committed to sharing with others ways in which to experience Judaism as a serious, meaningful experience in their lives. In some cases, they were responding to gaps that they saw in the extent Jewish communal offerings that they believed they could fill. In any case, they make clear that their work is not to create “Judaism lite” but rather, making deep, authentic, Jewish experiences more accessible to more people.

These leaders have specific visions of what the “platforms” or spaces could look like that would facilitate these experiences which they revisited and refined over time. They have the courage and drive, curiosity and enthusiasm to put themselves out there, often in partnership with other like-minded individuals, to experiment and play and listen and reflect back and revise. They take advantage of resources available to them – people, cultural attitudes and assets, and emergent trends in education, innovation, entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship, to revitalize and renew traditional modes of Jewish being in the world.

In their work, these individuals and organizations are creating new narratives in the North American experience of sacred communities. In many ways, they are participating in a “call and response” conversation with the more established North American Jewish community. They riff off of frameworks that already exist, such as more typical membership models that were themselves developed over time under influences of other forms of membership organizations. They have more flexibilities with which to play because of their newness. In turn, more traditional sacred communities and their supporters are looking toward these new entities to learn from their experiences. Boundaries are becoming more porous – and they are taking advantage of those liminal spaces to capitalize on facilitating multiple pathways to a larger vision of engaging and equipping individuals to live Jewish lives. These opportunities for learning from each other also help make the invisible more visible and provide language for better articulating and understanding how to frame diverse narratives.

In listening to the stories of these individuals and communities, several themes emerged that contribute to their successes and furthering their visions. These include an emphasis on intentional relationship building, thoughtful community design, distributed leadership opportunities, spiritual leadership and vision, multiple modes of belonging, primal experiences, the use of technology in support of the community, and a culture of networked communities and cross-pollination.

It is noteworthy that so many of these communities are open to spiritual seekers of all backgrounds, Jewish and otherwise. There is a recognition and confidence that Judaism has an abundance to offer the world. In this way, they are claiming a renewed relationship with the role of Judaism in the world at large.

Relationship Building

Cultivating and developing connections and relationships are key to the ways in which many of these communities function and are at the core of their community ideals. Relationships are a life force behind the creation of these sacred communities. Leadership spends a significant amount of their time listening to people's Jewish stories, even before individuals walk through their doors, even before the doors are created. Sometimes the primary relationship builder is the community's spiritual leader. Often the work of relationship building is shared among community members.

Personal contact with members and potential members of communities is a regular practice that is a key component of their work. Rabbi Ron Isaacs sets time aside each week to make check in calls to congregants, potential congregants, and lapsed congregants. Rabbi Isaacs' goal is to connect with each family personally at least once during the year. He spends additional time with those who need it, and he prioritizes the order of his list according to what is going on in a person's life, for example, if they are experiencing a particular difficulty or are anticipating a *simcha*. When he finishes his list, he starts again. Rabbi Isaacs keeps a spreadsheet for personal use to keep track of the calls and to record notes regarding any follow up that might be needed including interventions or networking. He encourages his top lay leadership to consider implementing this practice as well. Rabbi Sharon Brous, Nate DeGroot, Beth Finger, Avram Mlotek and others reported on the many hours they spend over coffee with individuals or in small group settings listening to their Jewish stories, getting to know who they are, and understanding how to connect them with others.

In addition to actively listening and learning about people's Jewish lives, these organizations provide opportunities for people to socialize with each other. Some of these opportunities might be "informal" through doing activities together, such as setting up a room, washing dishes together, hanging out after services, or gathering together at a playground. Others are more structured opportunities to "do Jewish" together. The emphasis on relationships and community building can be seen in the staff titles: Community Organizer, Community Mobilizer, and, Director of Community.

Relationships also extend to those that are built with other organizations like Hillel, Moishe House, Honeymoon Israel, local synagogues, and secular structures that members inhabit, such as the Sundae Cycles pop up holiday dessert events sponsored by Morgan St. Theater Ice Cream and Mikdash in Portland.

Design for Community

Intentional Community / Designing for Stickiness

Many, but not all of the communities studied were primarily interested in reaching underserved, disaffected Jews. It appears that the primary motivation for the formation of these communities was typically a desire on the part of the founder or co-founders to have a community that filled their own personal needs, which often corresponded to perceived gaps in existing opportunities.

These communities tend to put individuals and community in the foreground of their mission and vision. For example, Base calls for creation of spaces “where Jewish relationships can be fostered that add meaning, purpose, and joy to our lives.... [W]e aim to create a growing network of people that celebrate, learn, and serve together.” (Base website). Beis describes itself as “an inclusive, intentional Jewish community in Washington Heights that harnesses the creativity of its members to inspire connection.” (Beis website). Lorraine Mann provides infrastructures for community to develop around the families with whom she works individually. Congregation Beth Judah and Rabbi Ron Isaacs are working to revitalize an existing synagogue congregation by creating new venues for connection and community weaving. JWOW is a means for bringing “Jewish families in Suffolk County together in vibrant Jewish communities....across denominations and affiliations” (JWOW website) and to empower Jews to create the community they want.

IKAR expresses itself as “an innovative model for Jewish engagement...in an effort to reclaim the vitality and relevance of Jewish religious practice and reimagine the contours of the Jewish community” (IKAR website). Kavana strives “to create a supportive communal environment in which individuals and families can use ‘kavana’ – intention – to create a Jewish life that is spiritually fulfilling, intellectually satisfying, fun, and meaningful.” Further, its approach includes “‘Personalized Judaism in a Community Context’ – Kavana acknowledges and embraces the dynamic tension between an individual’s interest and needs, versus the desire to create community” (Kavana website).

The Kitchen “is a religious community, deeply grounded in serious exploration of Jewish tradition, text, and ritual. We are creating a spiritually engaging community of seekers at all levels of Jewish knowledge and experience” (The Kitchen website). Mikdash viewed itself as an incubator to support and empower “folks to generously share their gifts – their skills, passions, talents, and interests – with one another, to help facilitate sacred experience and the growth of meaningful community” (Mikdash website). Mishkan posits the following about community:

When we think about Jewish community our minds usually zero in on a location where community meets- a synagogue, a JCC. But what if community were defined by common values instead- by the relentless pursuit of the holy and the just, and that in gathering around that pursuit anywhere at all, we establish a sacred community? This description gets at the heart of Mishkan (Mishkan website).

OneTable facilitates the fostering of community over Shabbat meals: “Join us for slowing down, joining together, and sharing stories. Join us for new connections and moments of meaning” (OneTable website). Sha’ar Communities is a “suburban network of small, inclusive and accessible Jewish communities connected by a broad vision of Jewish renaissance.... Sha’ar looks to offer multiple gateways through which seekers can pass to create connections to Judaism and to community” (Sha’ar Communities

website). Shir Hadash emphasizes the power of music: “Shir Hadash is a musical service where participants are encouraged to unite their voices in soulful melodies gathered from Jewish communities around the world” (Shir Hadash website).

Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum of Kavana devotes a large amount of her time to creating and optimizing opportunities for “social stickiness” to maximize community contact and relationship building. She wrote about her strategies in her article, “Building Jewish Community with Intentionality: The Cooperative Model” (2011). The larger Kavana community rarely convenes together; rather, there are regular weekly events that are targeted toward smaller groups of people which amount to serving hundreds of individuals in a typical week. Their most successful new members are those who are already connected through friends and acquaintances who refer them to Kavana. The community takes advantage of local, neighborhood based programming that meets in living rooms and in public spaces. Kavana leadership spends considerable time matching hosts and guests for Shabbat home hospitality programs and fostering environments for informal networking. They are keenly aware of the power of tapping into existing social networks to broaden and deepen engagement. They have worked hard to create “a low bar to entry and a high bar of expectations.” The expectations work both ways – they expect members to participate, volunteer, and otherwise support the community, and the community will continue to “provide high-level Jewish content” (p. 107).

Rabbi Sharon Brous at IKAR attended house parties every week for five years throughout Los Angeles. The house parties were an opportunity for small groups to convene for conversations and to tell their stories. The rabbi provided Jewish frameworks for these stories and these conversations connected these individuals more deeply.

Beth Finger of JWOW tapped into social network theory. She identified “connectors” with social capital who could reach out to friends and acquaintances to further build up various communities. Beth listened carefully to configure who is interested in what in order to match up individuals with common interests. She also identified who might be willing to take leadership roles.

Each of these communities are interested in individuals “doing Jewish” in community. They value serious Jewish engagement by individuals in community and value the relationships between individuals and community. It is interesting to note perceived nuances in approaches to this relationship. For Rabbi Noa Kushner of the Kitchen, community is the by-product of meaningful Jewish engagement. For others, like, Beth Finger of JWOW and for OneTable, community building is entwined with Jewish engagement.

Design of Prayer Services

The prayer communities are intent on offering serious, meaningful, engaging services. They often choose to abbreviate the liturgy, introduce creative elements, and focus on ways to better engage all participants, often through music. Shir Hadash in Denver, for example, caps the length of their prayer service to two hours. In designing the service, they determined criteria for what they would consider minimal standards for a *halakhic* service and they built the flow of the service around that. They also taught community leadership how to run the service. Eventually leading services shifted from the Dollins to the community. In addition, the d’var torah is designed to be interactive; for example, the congregation might break into

hevruta (small study groups) to engage more closely with a text. The community feels strongly that this experience should be about individual's learning and not about the religious leadership talking.

The Isaacs removed the *musaf* section from Shabbat morning services. They found that by abbreviating services, participants remained rooted to their seats, except when they were moved to dance or play on instruments. There were no distractions and therefore no "shushing" of people. Participants were actively engaged and doing what they needed to have a prayerful experience.

Lorraine Mann focused Rosh Hashanah services on an hour and a half of intensive spiritual work the goal of which was to move individuals to make a difference in the world every day.

Prayer communities were intentional in their creation of serious prayer environments. For example, at Mishkan, most of the service is in Hebrew but there are efforts to make the experience meaningful to novices as well as those more familiar with the liturgy. There is a recognition and intention that the flow of Friday night services provides a transit from the regular week into sacred time and space.

Location, Location, Location

Some organizations were focused on local community building – that is, developing community within a particular neighborhood. Others saw themselves as part of a larger ecosystem in which to tap. Still others were focused on providing platforms for community to convene. Many of these communities were not attached to specific buildings or locations.

At one point, Beis pulled back on programmatic events that attracted people from outer boroughs because they wanted to focus on their original vision of intentionally building a local community. This included setting up tables in the neighborhood to recruit individuals to join them for High Holiday services. On the other hand, some communities' strategy is to deliberately extend their boundaries, like Mishkan Chicago, Kavana in Seattle, and The Kitchen in San Francisco. They regularly hold events in diverse neighborhoods and treat their geographic regions as extended campuses.

JWOW specifically sponsors events that bring people together in public spaces like parks. In addition to renting a house to use as communal space, Mikdash: Portland takes advantage of portability and creates a presence where people were already gathered, to sponsor pop-up events. Base takes advantage of the home as center for communal gathering, hospitality and learning. They also sponsor events at other neighborhood sites including social service projects. At present, there are two Base Hillel locations, one in downtown Manhattan and the other in Brooklyn, both hubs of young Jewish life. Each location is run by married couples with support from educational and administrative staffing.

There is also a desire to take advantage of the geographic environment and local ethos. For example, Congregation Beth Judah in Wildwood, NJ is situated near the Atlantic Ocean and the rabbi's house is a block from the boardwalk. The summer population increases with tourists and the attendant seasonal commerce (many of the merchants are Israeli). Rabbi Isaacs held a Shabbat service on the beach one Friday night and attracted about 150 people, not all of whom were Jewish.

Never underestimate the importance of a living room. A number of interviewees mentioned how these start ups emerged from ideas hatched in their living rooms. Often living rooms became venues for convening people to plan, experiment, and actualize those ideas. It might not be accidental that living rooms provide space to dream up communities and to host them. Yes, it is helpful to have easily accessible, convenient spaces in which to gather friends. But more than that, living rooms are the public heart in the intimate space of homes. Homes are sacred space; indeed, one's home is one's temple, a *mikdash me'at*, small sanctuary:

In her book about Algerian Jewish traditions, *Le Culte de la Table Dressee: Rites et Traditions de la Table Juive Algerienne (The Cult of the Set Table: Rites and Traditions of the Algerian Jewish Table)*, social anthropologist Joelle Bahloul describes the festive table as a place of the cult, and the unfolding of the meal as a liturgical re-enactment of what goes on in the temple. She explains that the ritualization of gastronomic acts transforms the kitchen into a sanctuary; the dining room into a miniature temple; the table into an altar; the convivial gatherings into a commune of the faithful; and the wife-cook into a high priestess. The lighting of candles by the women of the house; the ritual washing of the hands; the reciting of Kiddush (the prayer of sanctification of the day) over wine by the head of the family; the breaking of bread and passing around of pieces with a sprinkling of salt - all these action, accompanied by blessings, hymns, and special prayers, contribute to giving the meal a sacred character. (Roden, 1996)

Home plays out in different ways as well. Base: Hillel offers just that – a home base for individuals as they explore their Jewish journeys on their own terms. The leaderships offers home hospitality, a place to gather to learn, to engage in service projects, to share Shabbat and holiday meals, and to have access to mentors and fellow travelers. OneTable encourages people to convene Shabbat meals together in their homes. IKAR members host house parties and many prayer communities, like Sha'ar, hold services in homes.

Cafes play an important role as gathering places. Many leaders spend part of their professional time meeting with individuals in coffee houses to hear each other's stories and get to know each other better. Whether intentional or not, having Jewish conversations outside of an office or communal building is a means of actively signaling that the sacred can be experienced everywhere and not in just one designated location.

The Influence of Local Culture

Local culture is a big influence on these communities. In Portland, Mikdash was designed to capitalize on the local ethos of the sharing and gift economy. This was born out in its membership models and in events like the pop up Sundae Cycle holiday ice cream meet ups as described below:

The gift of ice cream. The gift of Shabbat.

A totally free, family-friendly afternoon of Shabbos fun and ice cream decadence, the cost of admission simply your best gift.

Join us for this FREE kickoff event for Sundae Cycles 5776, a year's worth of Jewish holiday themed ice cream sundae social dessert gatherings! This Saturday features a full-on three-course shabbat-themed tasting menu with Jewish content provided by Mikdash founder Nate DeGroot and

ice cream sundaes and game-show themed entertainment courtesy of Jared Goodman and his inimitable dessert pop-up, Morgan St. Theater. This is a can't miss!

Like the gift that is Shabbat, this performance is being gifted to Mikdash by Jared and MST. And since Mikdash is a community founded on the principles of gift economy, your ticket to this event is simply your greatest gift. Make a real commitment to sharing your gift (skill, passion, talent, time, money) with Mikdash sometime during the upcoming year, and enjoy this performance for free. Not sure what to give, Nate will be more than happy to brainstorm with you!

<http://www.mikdashportland.org/events/2015/8/15/morgan-st-theatre-mikdash-portland-present-sundae-cycles-year-2-kickoff-performance-shabbat>

Similarly, The Kitchen was influenced by the culture of technology start ups prevalent in San Francisco, both in terms of its own design process of trying out ideas, tweaking them, and re-releasing them in an iterative process, as well as in attracting members of the thriving tech community who are used to a culture of experimentation and discovery. IKAR in LA has been able to tap into creative individuals who are drawn to the Hollywood area.

Distributed Leadership

Rather than define leadership either as a position of authority in a social structure or as a personal set of characteristics, we may find it a great deal more useful to define leadership as an *activity*. This allows for leadership from multiple positions in a social structure....It also allows for the use of a variety of abilities depending on the demands of the culture and situation. *Sacred Strategies* (p. 227) (quoting Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*)

Prayer Leadership

It takes knowledge, skill, energy, and kavanah (intent) to lead prayer services. A number of prayer communities, including IKAR, Kavana, and Mishkan created davening teams which help to facilitate communal prayer experiences. At Shir Hadash, the davening team learns different parts of the service in order to better lead the community. There is no one prayer leader (*shaliach tzibbur*) during the service; rather, there could be 8-12 people on any given Shabbat who take a part in leading the congregation in prayer.

Many of these prayer communities provide members with CDs or access to online playlists with which they are able to become more familiar with the liturgy and music.

Providing Structures/ Platforms to Facilitate Self-Organizing

Several of these communities viewed themselves as platforms for allowing individuals to self-organize into community. JWOW provides resources for people to create the types of Jewish community they want for themselves based on principles of community organizing. Kavana sees itself as providing a space for deepening relationships, adding Jewish context, and creating a platform for community to happen.

OneTable provides a format for young adults to convene and share Shabbat meals together. The Kitchen fosters affinity groups that emerge from their community; these might include poets, artists, or mourners who have connected through other Kavana activities. Beis Community sponsors events like the Shabbat FrED (Friend) Talks and Potluck Learning events which provides formats for community to learn more about each other.

Religious Leadership

Community leaders play various roles in their communities. The way that they prioritize these roles depends on the community, the leader's vision, and the leader's own individual strengths and preferences. Sometimes the roles depend on the developmental stage of the community. These roles can be roles that religious leadership traditionally brings to the forefront, such as leading prayer, serving as pastor, and teaching. But typically in these communities, religious leadership assumes large responsibilities for community organizing, relationship building, and entrepreneurial pursuits. In some communities, there is strong collaboration with lay leadership in designing and maintaining the community. In some cases, lay leaders take over responsibilities traditionally relegated to professionals.

Spiritual Leadership

Congregation Beth Judah in Wildwood, NJ, IKAR in Los Angeles, Kavana in Seattle, The Kitchen in San Francisco, Mishkan in Chicago, and Sha'ar Communities in Bergen County, NJ are primarily rabbinic-driven prayer communities.

Shir Hadash in Denver has professional religious leadership that take turns rotating into the community every week, but they also have a consistent religious leader in Tammy Dollin who is there every week. Tammy is one of the congregation's co-founders and is a professional Jewish educator who has assumed the role of religious leader, spiritual guide, and pastoral caregiver for her community. This has been a profound identity shift for Tammy. In addition, because of the expectation that a mix of professionals and lay leadership take on communal responsibilities as noted above, members of the community have begun to rely on friends or family members to officiate rituals that had previously only been performed by rabbis.

Working in these communities and engaging in a deep level with individuals can transform how one thinks about their leadership roles. Communities which are designed to attract those who are not affiliated with more established Jewish communal organizations often bring with them the opportunity for leaders to re-assess their own assumptions about members' and potential members' needs and identities.

Rabbi Adina Lewittes, for example, is noticing more that people who are not Jewish are coming to communities like Sha'ar and Romemu. Some of them may be fellow travelers – those who have family members who are Jewish or who are considering becoming Jewish. But just as there are Jews who embrace living in a diverse, fluid world and tap into its riches to deepen their spiritual and communal identities, so too do those from other cultural or religious backgrounds who are eager to tap aspects of Judaism that have something to offer them. This puts a modern framework on an ancient belief that Judaism is a gift to the entire world.

Rabbi Lewittes' own leadership has evolved and grown throughout her experiences with Sha'ar and working with people with diverse needs and interests and stories. She has become more attuned to the relationship between what individuals need for authenticity and her role as religious leader. Sometimes she can offer them what they need as an officiant; sometimes as someone sitting beside them in the pew as their rabbi but not as officiant. The complexities of people's individual lives and relationships to their Jewish identities have shaped her evolving personal sense of leadership and what it means to be part of the Jewish community as much as it is shaping the lives of those individuals.

Community Leader / Community Organizer

Rabbi Avram Mlotek of Base: Hillel notes that his roles vary. The people who come to Base are mostly people in their twenties and represent a variety of different religious backgrounds and cultures. The weekly service projects attract a diverse crowd. In addition to coordinating service projects and Torah learning, the rabbi started a conversion class for a few students. He also partners with other Jewish organizations that have similar goals like Moishe House and Repair the World. In addition, the rabbi is staffing a trip to Israel for newlyweds with Honeymoon Israel (www.honeymoonisrael.org) which offers subsidized trips to groups of couples from the same city.

In at least one case, a founder had previous training in community organization. Hart Levine used his background in community organizing to work with his partners in creating and developing Beis.

Founders and leaders of many of these communities notice shifts as their organizations move from start up phase to more stability. Their roles as visionary and organizer may change subtly or more overtly as communities grow and add staff and additional infrastructures. Some of them wonder if the communities will be able to continue without them in the future and try to ensure the communities' viability beyond the founding leadership.

Modes of Belonging

In her book, *Matterness*, Allison Fine discusses the need for strengthening and reclaiming civic power and engagement in concert with developing and supporting organizations that are effective at providing resources, networking, products, and services. She defines "matterness" as:

the shared space between people and organizations where each is heard, their unique needs are met, and a greater whole is formed. Matterness is:

- The willingness and ability of individuals to speak and be heard;
- The willingness of organizations to listen and work *with* – not *at* – people, and to engage people on the inside and outside as creative problem solvers and ambassadors;
- The smart use of social media to connect people online and on land in huge ecosystems of people and organizations that are filled with generosity and capital. (pp. 3-4)

Many of the communities described in this study place a premium on actively listening to and *hearing* their constituents and potential constituents. Individuals matter to the organization, and the organization matters to the individuals. What's more, there are often a multiplicity of articulated ways that individuals can

express their connections and engagement with the community. In some cases it may be financial commitment. In others, it may be fulfilled in leadership roles, or clearing dishes, or adding their voice to the communal singing, or just showing up.

Aron et al highlight the relational duality of what they refer to as “mattering” in synagogue contexts:

What [great synagogues] offer is not just more programming but also an opportunity to matter.

Mattering has two sides. *Internally*, it denotes a personal sense of wholeness, satisfaction that all's right in the world. One can label that feeling spiritual, a word that comes up with some frequency in the testimonials of people we met. It was also couched in terms of *community*, a word with almost mystical overtones for those we interviewed, indicating that they had found a place to belong. *Externally*, people sense that they matter to others – they make a difference to the synagogue community and to the larger world beyond it... *Mattering internally* is associated with learning that runs deep, and the consequent conviction that one is connected to tradition, to a past, and even to something that might be called transcendent. *Mattering externally* derives from being part of a healing community and a force for social justice. Regular Shabbat services take on an additional dimension of reflecting and celebrating how people matter in both ways.” - *Sacred Strategies* (p. 153)

The act of individuals being in sacred community and engaged in sacred service can foster a powerful nexus of internal and external mattering.

Membership Structures

Membership in any community is in many ways an act of imagination. Individuals may feel connected to and affiliated with communities that don't actually view these same individuals as members because they appear to be on the periphery or have not given the organization any type of pledge of affiliation. Similarly, organizations may claim individuals as members even though some of those individuals may not feel especially involved with or attached to them. Many people today are part of multiple communities but they do not express their connection to them through traditional membership models, such as dues.

Membership in the communities studied tend to emphasize a sense of mutual commitment between the individual and the community, which is in keeping with the strongly felt acknowledgment that many of these communities articulate – that they are made up of individuals with individual needs and desires. As a result, descriptions of their membership structures affirm multiple paths and diverse ways of expressing membership. It is worth noting that in their public wording of membership is often contextualized in terms of individual growth, communal responsibility, Jewish values, and then financial commitment.

IKAR's website:

IKAR's unique spirit depends on the love, talent, and involvement of each of our members. When you join, you sign our membership brit. This brit is an expression of your core commitments and a way to expand your own Jewish horizons through learning and spiritual growth.

Specifically, we ask that you (1) engage in Jewish learning to stretch your heart and mind, (2) dedicate time and creative energy to the community's growth, (3) work toward the tikkun – repair – of our city, our country, Israel and the world through participation in Minyan Tzedek, our social justice work, and, (4) help us build and sustain IKAR with a financial contribution. Please take a moment to consider your commitments and contributions in each of these four areas.

Kavana's website:

Do I have to be a partner to participate in Kavana?

No. One of Kavana's core values is to welcome everybody, and you are invited to participate and to explore the community. That being said, to be part of a community, a person needs to consistently participate and provide material support. Our expectation is that regular participants will choose to become partners, better supporting themselves and the community in the process.

Do partners get any special benefits that non-partners don't get?

Yes. Partners gain access to our rabbi, staff, and like-minded partners to create and realize their own vision of Judaism – whether it involves prayer, adult or family learning, home observance, community involvement, a book group, Jewish cooking, or something else. We call this “personalized Judaism in a community context.” Partners also typically get a discount on event fees, and the opportunity to participate in governance and help set the direction of the community. From a legal perspective, partners have official voting rights and access to certain organizational information that is typically held private (such as financial information).

How does someone become a partner?

First, by participating in the Kavana community and deciding that it could play an important role in your life. Second, by scheduling a meeting with the rabbi to explore and define what partnership might look like for you. And, third, by participating regularly and supporting Kavana through the contribution of time and money.

How much do partners typically contribute to Kavana?

Each person's relationship with the community is different. For many partners, Kavana is their only Jewish community, and as a result of that deep relationship and commitment, all of the time and money they contribute goes toward Kavana. Other partners are involved in many communities, and spread their contributions proportionally across them.

Is there a minimum amount of money that a partner is required to contribute to Kavana?

No. Again, this varies from person to person based on their relationship with the community. Here are a few things partners should keep in mind when making financial contributions:

- In FY2011, program fees covered 33% of the cost of Kavana's total operations. After accounting for these fees, the average cost per partner household to operate Kavana was

about \$3,500, and the average partner household contribution was \$787. Obviously, there's a big gap there, and we're hoping to bring those two numbers into closer alignment as we move forward.

- The Torah talks about tithing, or giving 10% of one's income to support the community. While that may sound out of reach to many of us, a typical expectation for Jewish families in America is that they will contribute 1 to 2% of their pre-tax income to supporting their Jewish community. (You do the math -- \$50,000 household income would correspond to an annual partner contribution of between \$500 and \$1000; \$150,000 household income would correspond to between \$1500 and \$3000; etc.)
- As mentioned previously, the amount of time and money a partner contributes varies proportionally to the depth and duration of their involvement in the community. Ultimately it's up to every partner to determine his or her own level of giving.

Is there a minimum amount of time that a partner is required to contribute to Kavana?

No. This varies from person to person based on their relationship with the community. That being said, there are some things partners keep in mind when considering volunteer time:

- Kavana is a cooperative, and to work it presumes a meaningful volunteer commitment from all partner households.
- Kavana is most vibrant when partners are contributing their time toward producing programming and services that they personally value.

Should I become a partner?

That is a decision unique to each individual or family. However, our tradition speaks to this subject: the Talmud teaches that the longer someone has been part of a community, the greater responsibility they should take for maintaining it. (For example, after you had lived in a city for a month you were expected to contribute to a fund for the poor, and after you had lived there for a year, you were also expected to contribute to the fund that maintained the walls of the city.) While Kavana's timeline is not set out as strictly, we like the principle.

The Kitchen's website:

What do you get when you subscribe to The Kitchen?

Yes, you get unlimited access to our now infamous shabbats, first pick at those over-the-top feasts and holidays you've heard about and a meaningfully modern approach to lifecycle events from the cradle on up. Sure you get all that, but really, subscribing The Kitchen means stepping it up and connecting with a community of folks like you. We want people who can see where we're going and want to help us get there. If you're ready to be counted in and counted on, this is for you.

What do you get when you subscribe to The Kitchen? You get to build something that matters. Get started by picking the subscription that's right for you. Each subscription includes

Getting Hitched
And Baby Makes 3
The Big One Three
Making It Official
The Rabbi Is In
Spiritual Fitness
High(er) Holidays
All the shabbatot and holidays you can handle

*Freedom School must be added a la carte.

Mikdash's website:

Mikdash knows that, just like us, gifts can come in all shapes and sizes and believes that, for our community to sustain itself, we must value the unique contributions of our members. That is why we've made it easy for you to offer whatever it is you have to give. Whether that's volunteering to teach an art therapy class or donating pillows to the meditation room, cooking a communal meal or cleaning up afterwards, helping to make cross-community connections, handling the organization's legal paperwork, or perhaps donating a large industrial space on Portland's inner east side, we view each of these as inherently valuable currencies and are grateful for whatever it is you have to give. Please check out our Gift Registry (below) to see some gifts Mikdash is currently looking for and let us know ways you'd like to contribute by filling out the adjacent Give a Gift form. Oh, and then there's also money, that other pesky currency we always seem to need to have. As always, if you are able, please... Give Money! Give Something Other than Money! (Gift Registry)

In some communities, there are invitations to take part in activities or assume hosting or leadership responsibilities. People who participated as guests at OneTable events, for example, are encouraged to host their own Shabbat dinner with support from the organization. JWOW assumes everyone is a member, and there is no fee involved.

Primal Experiences

Music, food, and storytelling are all ancient, human, primal experiences. Meditation, movement and dance provide other deep, sensual, primal communal experiences. Leaders were often intentional and experimental in aligning these experiences with their vision of community.

Music

Music in many of these communities is part of the communal aesthetic, a vehicle for experiential participation, or a theology; in some cases it may be perceived as any combination of these values.

The melding of voices can be a powerful and moving experience. Not only is it beautiful to hear, but it is the enactment of being a part of something bigger than one's self, in community.

Rabbi Bruce Dollin of Shir Hadash wrote:

“Hearing each other sing! In each congregation I visited, I was able to hear the voices of the people next to me, in front of me and all around me, sing. This, I think, is where one experiences the magic of prayers.” – Rabbi Bruce Dollin, *Report on My Sabbatical (Dec 18, 2011 to April 15, 2012)*

“We needed to hear each other sing; we needed to become a community with one voice, to leave aside consciousness of self and merge with the music, each other and God.” – Rabbi Bruce Dollin, “Shir Hadash: A New Saturday Morning Service at Hebrew Educational Alliance, Denver” <http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/shir-hadash-a-new-saturday-morning-service-at-hebrew-educational-alliance-denver>

Tammy Dollin, also of Shir Hadash, explained how music and songs were selected to promote maximal participation. Most of the singing is in Hebrew. The community recorded a CD to assist people in learning the songs and prayers. . In addition, versions of the prayers and song that are used often lend themselves to people’s participation by singing “la la las” if they were unable to incorporate the words. Shir Hadash also integrates a few verses or entire songs in English.

Rabbi Noa Kushner, of The Kitchen in San Francisco, highlights the transformational power of music and prayer. Originally, the davening was participatory based on the Camp Ramah style. It was “heartfelt and amazing” but Rabbi Kushner felt that music remained an untapped vein. She wanted to make the music more complex while retaining its participatory nature. Influenced by the IKAR model, The Kitchen developed a davening team. They brought in IKAR’s music director and gabbai to work with them and gathered together musicians from the community. The davening team worked on arrangements and harmonies. The team facilitated davening from a table in the middle of the room, not the front. The effect was transformational. A key to the success of the davening team is that everyone on the team is praying, not performing.

Many of the prayer communities have created their own CDs or playlists, which are generally made accessible online through their websites. These resources are often inspired by other similar communities. They tend to make good use of SoundCloud or other audio sharing platforms to upload audio files, sample each other’s works, and create playlists using each other’s material.

Music is not just for praying. Mishkan Chicago invites people to experience their music not only at their prayer services but beyond:

Prayer is song, and song can be prayer. “The only language that seems to be compatible with the wonder and mystery of being is the language of music.” Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

But let’s be honest: you don’t need some fancy rabbi to tell you that music matters when we show up for prayer. You know it when you feel it, when you feel that unmistakable sense of being lifted and propelled higher on the wings of a soaring niggun– words, voices and harmonies blending together to create a moment that has no other word to describe it other than magical. Spiritual. Holy. A moment that transcends our differing beliefs and questions, and simply asserts the presence of beauty and connection.

We invite you experience inspired, down-to-earth Judaism, wherever you are in the world, and wherever you are on your journey. <http://www.mishkanchicago.org/our-music> (retrieved December 20, 2015)

Leora Isaacs reflected on the introduction of a music-focused service at Congregation Beth Judah. She believes that music creates connections – with the liturgy, with the community, with ourselves, with the Divine. The community-ness of music provides participants with visceral connections. Music can move people beyond the cognitive meaning of the prayers.

Instruments also play a role. As related above, the Isaacs bring a duffle bag of drums and tambourines to services at Congregation Beth Judah. It did not take long for people to become used to them, to grab a tambourine or drum – or bring their own instruments – and to use them during the service on their own initiative. This lent a highly participatory, even visceral element to the community-ness of the prayer experience. In some communities there are “davening teams” that provide musical leadership and accompaniment through instruments as well as voice. Instruments might include percussion such as drums and tambourines, and/ or strings such as guitars and fiddles. In at least one community, there was a decision to not include strings since their physical structure seemed like a barrier between the one playing and the rest of the community.

For some, music is an articulated, integral part of a theology of prayer. As described above, Rabbi Adina Lewittes of Sha’ar Communities views the creation of music as the language of prayer and introspection, rather than as an aesthetic devise. She uses nigunim, wordless melodies, to provide a gateway into one’s deeper emotional and spiritual recesses.

Food / Shabbat

Food is nurturing. If one is physically satisfied and cared for, it can open one to other experiences spiritually. Food facilitates the having of communal experiences; most people know how to “do food.” As Jenkins (2011) noted food can play a role in orienting people to new experiences and to participation.

Even though it does not specifically cite food, the name, The Kitchen, evokes a place of nurture and gathering. The name is explained on the website:

Why call it The Kitchen?

We want people to get that we are informal, accessible, and about getting work done. You do work in a kitchen and then often take what you’ve done to other places. Then you come back to do more. It’s also the place everyone wants to be when there’s a party.

<http://www.thekitchensf.org/faq>

People gather together and eat communal meals after services at The Kitchen and in other communities. Beis sponsors Potluck Learning: Collaborative Soul Food events, as well as Shavuot bake-offs, Shabbat “FrED (Friend) Talks” in conjunction with communal *seudah shlishit* meals. Food and beverage also played a prominent role in their establishment, planning their community at a local bar, Starbucks, other local gathering places. Many of the service projects sponsored by Base: Hillel involve feeding the homeless or providing food packages for those who are home-bound. In some prayer communities, light refreshments

are available during services. People are welcome to congregate around the table to socialize in the hallways and to bring food and beverages into the prayer service as a cultural norm.

OneTable is specifically designed around the idea of a communal Shabbat dinner. It is all about food and community and providing low barrier access to a Jewish experience. It capitalizes on the values that the Shabbat meal represents – a time to be in community with others and to slow down and recharge as the week winds down.

Storytelling

Storytelling is an ancient mode of human expression. There is something primal still about sitting around the campfire together and listening to stories. There are multiple ways in which participants engage with narratives in these communities. These may include the narratives of song, of Torah, of learning, of community, of the people themselves. Some of these narratives may weave around them like invisible threads, for example, liturgical sequences that express motifs and concepts. Some may be more visible to the initiated, like Beis's Potluck Learning where people literally bring narratives in the form of texts or objects to share in discussion with the community.

Technology

Technology plays multiple roles in building and supporting communities, including communications through e-blasts and e-newsletters that promote upcoming events, and postings on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Technology also serves administrative roles by providing ways to register for events, collect data. In many ways, technology helps to provide digital glue to bring the community together and also to extend its potential reach through participants' social networks and to those who follow these organizations online but may not yet be visible to the community at large.

Communities also use technology to help individuals self-organize. OneTable, for example, uses software by Feastly to help coordinate Shabbat meals – as Aliza Kline likes to say, they are using the URL online to get to the IRL (“in real life”), the face to face. New platforms are emerging like <http://gathering.co> which can facilitate the creation of affinity groups, in this case, book clubs.

Technology also allows for easier sampling and accessing of music and livestreaming services, in which people can participate from anywhere and which also provides windows into different types of experiences.

One of the most game-changing aspects of technology is the ability that anyone with an Internet connection can find resources and information on their own, much of which had been previously provided by authoritative individuals such as rabbis, cantors and Jewish educators. Technology provides platforms for people to equip themselves to participate (e.g., learn the music, prayers, get to know aspects of a community via the website, manage expectations and anxiety, locate their own narratives in a community's, and to access additional resources for information and ideas for enacting rituals (e.g., Kveller, MyJewishLearning, Ritualwell, Wikipedia).

This does not mean that the work of religious leadership has been supplanted; rather, roles are shifting. If anything, these leadership roles are becoming increasingly important in helping people better interpret and more deeply engage with content. Tammy Dollin of Shir Hadash in Denver noted:

What I'm realizing is that there are some hard skills needed to lead our communities spiritually, like liturgical knowledge, understanding of Hebrew, torah/haftorah reading, musical ability, knowledge of the Jewish calendar and lifecycle rituals. People are getting lots of info from the internet; they still need someone to make it come alive and feel authentic and grounded. And to see the engagement and joy that follow is magical.

Several of these communities employed design thinking, a methodology to help them better articulate their vision and mission and to help them develop a means for conceptualizing, prototyping, testing, and revising community design. It is a collaborative methodology that values creativity and team work in design and is popular among innovative start ups in San Francisco. Design thinking is defined as:

a methodology that imbues the full spectrum of innovation activities with a human-centered design ethos...[!]innovation is powered by a thorough understanding, through direct observation, of what people want and need in their lives and what they like or dislike about the way particular products are made, packaged, marketed, sold, and supported. (Brown, 2008)

The Kitchen worked with consultants who had expertise in design thinking. Their experiences with design thinking inspired other communities to engage in the process for their own work.

Networked Communities / Cross Pollination

In interviewing leaders of these communities, it was notable how many of them tapped into each other for ideas, resources, and professional and emotional support. It is not surprising that the leaders of seven emergent sacred communities formed a community of practice over the past two years to nurture each other and to grow the field. They were partially funded by the Slingshot Fund, the Natan Fund, and the Leichtag Foundation. A formal network of these seven communities was announced in early 2016: the Jewish Emergent Network (<http://jewishemergentnetwork.strikingly.com>):

The Jewish Emergent Network is comprised of the leaders of seven path-breaking Jewish communities from across the United States that have come together in the spirit of collaboration. These include: IKAR in Los Angeles, Kavana in Seattle, The Kitchen in San Francisco, Mishkan in Chicago, Sixth & I in Washington, D.C., and Lab/Shul and Romemu in New York. <http://www.ikar-la.org/jen> (downloaded January 8 2016)

Seed funding for this Network was provided by the Jim Joseph Foundation and the Crown Family, organizations that are known for fostering innovation in the Jewish world. Moreover, the Network recently announced a two-year rabbinic fellowship for early career rabbis to gain experience and mentoring under their auspices to further develop their vision for working with under-served populations.

Many of the connections that these leaders formed stemmed from previous encounters with each other in the Jewish world. Congregation B'nai Jeshurun (BJ), a synagogue in New York was also an influence

among many of the prayer communities, directly (via rabbinic fellowships or previous membership) or indirectly (e.g., through music that has permeated the Jewish world). IKAR and Romemu were also credited with influencing ideas around prayer community. A few prayer leaders like Bruce and Tammy Dollin and Ron and Leora Isaacs created opportunities to visit other prayer communities in order to learn from them and experience new models of prayer and community.

Several founders of these communities credited their experiences at Camp Ramah, Hillel, or in leadership programs such as the Wexner Graduate Fellowship as inspiration for developing communities where participants have a fair amount of autonomy and partnership in creating serious, meaningful Jewish experiences. Wexner and other community organizing programs provided them with frameworks for leadership and skill sets for organizational work; at least three community leaders were Wexner Graduate Fellows or Alumni. Other organizations played roles in incubating ideas, leadership development, and financial support including Crown Philanthropies, Hazon, Jim Joseph Foundation, JOIN for Justice, the Leichtag Foundation, Natan, Reboot, Slingshot Fund, the Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life, UJA-Federation of Greater New York, the Wexner Foundation, and OU.

As previously mentioned, design thinking played a significant role in the development of organizations like The Kitchen and OneTable, and has become a popular tool in the Jewish community to support the rapid design of creative, collaborative innovation.

Music is a strong example of the permeability and generosity that can be found in the ethos of many of these communities. Several communities adapted the idea of davening teams from IKAR. Prayer communities often curated online soundtracks from other communities in order to develop their own playlists without having to re-invent wheels or spend duplicative time recording and uploading or cutting CDs. Communities that did produce CDs made them available to wider audiences through these same technological resources.

As noted above, a number of communities actively connect with other organizations like Hillel, Moishe House, Honeymoon Israel, local synagogues, and secular venues. Some communities, such as JWOW, Sha'ar, Shir Hadash, and OneTable position themselves as containers for internally networked communities – some more formally linked than others.

Professional Learning and Skills

The roles that the founders and leaders of these communities play can be complex. Some in prayer communities clearly identify as the rabbi of a rabbi-driven community. Other rabbis see their roles as more fluid – they are the spiritual leader and they are also a member of the community. As community leaders, many are trying to cultivate lay leadership to partner with them in more proactive ways. As founders, many of the leaders wonder how to prepare their communities for the next generation of leadership. Can their community continue without them and if so, what needs to be in place to make this transition as smooth as possible? In general, these leaders regularly reflect on what their communities need from them and how they can respond.

As the communities mature, the original leaderships' roles may shift. For example, Rabbi Lizzie Heydemann's role is evolving as Mishkan transitions from start up to a more stable organization with staff

and board infrastructures. Her role as original visionary is adapting to the ways in which Mishkan is developing on its own momentum.

Barack Fishman, et al (2011) noted that in their conversations with many entrepreneurial leaders, “creating change requires having an insider’s knowledge but an outsider’s willingness to think independently and take risks” (p. 182). In general, these leaders drive the communal vision and work hard, in partnership with other key community members, to create the community they themselves want to participate in. They are often the person who holds it all together. They may view themselves as co-creator, member of the community, educator, concierge, connector, resource, a fellow traveler, mentor, coach, guide, advocate, program planner, listener, witness. They help bring into focus a Jewish lens on people’s lives. They help create points of intersection between individual exploration and community.

These roles emphasize skills in relationship building, facilitation, co-learning, community organizing, and adaptive leadership. In this way, leadership benefits from skills more typically associated with entrepreneurship and innovation.

Literature is emerging on the professional preparation for religious leadership in seminaries and subsequent ongoing professional learning to ensure a vibrant North American Jewish community into the future, whether synagogue-based or not (Foster et al, 2006; Herring and Roscher, 2014; Tauber, 2015). Foster et al observe how Jewish and Christian seminaries train leaders to cultivate practical theology, professional identities, and skills for leadership and teaching. They highlight views of learning that is internalized and, citing the work of Lave and Wenger regarding apprenticeship and communities of practice, a sense of “learning as increasing participation in communities of practice...” (p. 350). In many ways, this is not only a role for religious leadership themselves but also an aspiration for their work with their community.

The essays in Herring and Roscher describe challenges of today’s rabbinate and suggest integrating new skills and looking at other rapidly changing professional fields for models of training. For example, Richman and Libenson recommend, given the democratization of access to knowledge, a greater emphasis on religious leadership on learning how to think, continued learning, and adapting to new circumstances and ideas (p. 40). Tauber describes models of rabbinic leadership in the context of educators as facilitators, co-learners, and community builders.

These issues are not limited to Jewish life, but are of interest and of keen relevance to the larger spiritual landscape in which contemporary Jewish life resides.

**“Extended, the lines of relationships intersect in the eternal Thou.”
- Martin Buber, *I and Thou***

Conclusion

Judaism has a long, varied, and rich history of meaning making by individuals and their communities. The thirteen communities studied for this paper include communities that focus on prayer, communities that position themselves as cooperatives, spiritual hubs or gateways, communities that “do Jewish” together, and communities that provide space to “be Jewish” together. In many instances, one community espouses two or more of these frameworks. Some are located in cities and others in the suburbs; sometimes these boundaries become porous and there is cross over. The leaders and innovators represent women and men who are early career through post-retirement. They are highly educated Jews, many of whom themselves felt unsatisfied with the status quo and who hold visions of co-creating alternatives for living vibrant Jewish lives.

These entities tend to employ a stance of “radical community” in which each person matters as an individual and as someone who has gifts to bring to the *kehila* and that the power of the *kehila* benefits each individual in return. This is enacted through the power of connection. The more that people can connect with themselves and with each other, the more they build this muscle of connection, the more primed they may become to connect with God. The more they practice the art of connection with God, the more they may feel connected to themselves and to each other. There is a desire to connect individuals to Judaism and to Jewish community, and to make the world a better place for it.

These communities tend to hold the belief that Jews and Judaism have important roles in the world and that many individuals do not feel fully equipped to exercise this birthright. To paraphrase a comment made by Rabbi Adina Lewittes regarding Sha’ar, these communities invite individuals to connect with their Jewish heritage and to actively participant in the Jewish destiny.

Key elements of emergent communities include an emphasis on intentional relationship building, thoughtful community design, distributed leadership opportunities, spiritual leadership and vision, multiple modes of belonging, primal experiences, the use of technology in support of the community, and a culture of networked communities and cross-pollination. In addition, many of these communities maintain mutually beneficial relationships with more traditional Jewish organizations including synagogues, Jewish communal institutions, and foundations.

Most of the communities described in this study place a premium on actively listening to, *hearing*, and responding to the needs of their constituents and potential constituents. Several of them were influenced by design thinking, a methodology that focuses on what people want and need in their lives and what does not resonate for them in other models. They tend to be transdenominational, and even those that are affiliated with a particular movement welcome Jews of diverse backgrounds. There is recognition among the leadership that these communities are part of a larger ecosystem of communities to which individuals belong. Therefore, they often offer individuals options for expressing their connections and engagement with the community.

Community leaders help bring into focus a Jewish lens on people's lives. They facilitate creating points of intersection between individual exploration and community. The roles that these leaders undertake and the skills that they employ exercise include those that are found among more traditional religious leadership. However, these new leaders tend to prioritize relationship building, collaboration, facilitation, co-learning, community organizing, and adaptive leadership over more hierarchical models.

These leaders appreciate that people experience their lives in multiplicities. People like to have choices, and there are more choices available so that they do not feel the need to conform to models that might not work for them. Many of these communities attract previously unengaged individuals. Many also attract people who do not separate out their Jewish identity by a specific time and place and who are yearning to better integrate their Jewish selves into their daily lives in multiple ways, and to making the world a better place. These communities provide individuals with skills, resources, experiences, learning, and spiritual development to become better equipped to navigate their lives as Jews.

In many ways these communities are reclaiming Judaism as the framework for which individuals can live their lives and effect change in the world. Rather than promote a more top-down approach of telling people what they need, these communities and their leaders work hard at identifying the needs and aspirations of their members and providing resources and opportunities for them to meet these needs personally and as individuals engaged in *kehilot kedoshot*, sacred communities.

Addendum: Descriptions of Each Community from Their Websites

Base Hillel

<http://www.basehillel.org>

downloaded October 25, 2015

What is Base?

Base is the home of a Rabbinic family which serves as a home-base, a grounding point for young adults. While each Base reflects the personality of the Rabbinic couple and embodies their vision for a vibrant Jewish community, every Base is committed to pluralism and is founded upon three core values: hospitality, learning, and service.

So, what can I expect if I join the Base community?

- Experience the Jewish calendar
- Learn from Jewish texts and tradition
- Develop a Jewish social network
- Build a relationship with a Jewish mentor
- Engage in the Jewish value of service
- Encounter Jewish diversity

What do you mean by hospitality, learning, and service?

Hospitality means we open our homes for Shabbat and holiday meals, as well as learning and discussion groups. Learning is a broad term for the study of Jewish ideas and texts, both ancient and contemporary. Unless specified for a particular study group, no previous background is needed. Service means understanding what needs exist in our neighborhoods and getting up to help. Service is the actualization of our values.

What's the big picture?

We're building...

A generation of young adults that see themselves as a part of the Jewish family.

A generation of young adults living lives of meaning, purpose, and joy.

A generation of young rabbinic couples acting as pluralistic communal organizers and spiritual leaders.

Strong networks of young adults that celebrate, learn, and serve together.

Areas where young Jews live serving as central hubs of Jewish life.

Stronger local communities.

Our Mission

Our mission is to create spaces where Jewish relationships can be fostered that add meaning, purpose, and joy to our lives. By opening our homes on Shabbat and the holidays, by learning Jewish texts, and by conducting acts of service, we aim to create a growing network of people that celebrate, learn, and serve together.

Our Vision

We envision a world in which...

Jews of all backgrounds and affiliations can proudly answer the question, "Why be Jewish?"

Jews feel regenerated by Judaism's opportunities for supportive community, deep inquiry, and social action.

Jews are connected to and inspired by their diverse extended family, the Jewish people.

Why Rabbis?

We believe that Rabbis are meant to serve the Jewish people 'where they are.' As mentors, guides, and community organizers, we're taking our pulpit into the heart of where life happens: our neighborhoods and our homes.

Why Hospitality, Learning, and Service?

We believe that a Jewish home is founded upon three things: hospitality, learning, and service.

Hospitality—We are committed to the revolution of kindness Abraham and Sarah started thousands of years ago by opening their home to strangers and welcoming them as friends. Hospitality is a posture of receiving others with compassion and offering what you are able.

Learning—Knowledge is power. Learning empowers us to make informed decisions about our beliefs and behavior. Discussing relevant and diverse Jewish ideas allows us to connect with the shared history and tradition Jews have been debating for thousands of years. Jewish texts act as a springboard for deep questioning and exploration on all elements of the human experience.

Acts of Service—Judaism at its core is about helping create a more just world. While learning is important and helps shape our values, action is the opportunity to actualize our values and to make a positive impact in our communities.

Why Base?

The home has always been the epicenter of Jewish life. Home is the place where we are most ourselves, the place in which we are free to dream, to question, and to explore. A home is safe, warm, and stable. At the Base, we bring together a family as diverse as they come- the Jewish people! Like all families the dynamic is simultaneously complicated, messy, profound, conflictual, and integral.

Generous Support has come from the following:

UJA Federation of New York

Hillel International

Beis Community

<http://beiscommunity.com>

downloaded October 25, 2015

The Beis is an inclusive, intentional Jewish community in Washington Heights that harnesses the creativity of its members to inspire connection.

The Beis is a community of Jews in Washington Heights.

It started back in 2012 when a bunch of friends met in Le Cheile to talk about the local Jewish community, what it was missing, and how to make it better. After some taco nights, Starbucks meetings, a document (“C is for Community”), and a Facebook group (Open Up Washington Heights), things were up and running. Next came a Shavuot bake-off, and rooftop gatherings, and Pot Luck Learning, and soon we were outgrowing our space. After some retreats and visioning sessions, and a tip from Rabbi Schwartz (Rabbi of Mt. Sinai Jewish Center), we ended up at Congregation Beth Hamedrosh Hagadol of Washington Heights (BHH) in the summer of 2014. And after a year of High Holiday services and meals, monthly Shabbatons, tabling and caroling, and JewsInTheHeights@gmail.com, the Beis Community was officially a thing.

Hart and Yael Levine and Lily Lozovsky have been helping make it happen, so get in touch with them if you have any pressing questions or ideas for the next best thing to hit the Heights. But we’re a grassroots community – not a rabbinic couple running a program, nor an organization or a shul – so there are plenty of other wonderful people running things and taking charge. It makes us harder to define and definitely very unique, but it’s very much at the core of what we are.

We’ve gotten support from UJA (through their Hakhel Fellowship for Intentional Jewish Communities), OneTable (back when it was called Start Up Shabbat), and most significantly, the OU – who’s invested in this project as a manifestation of their investment in post-college young Jews, Orthodox and not. And of course, we’d love your support as well!

Congregation Beth Judah

<http://www.bethjudahtemple.org>

downloaded October 25, 2015 and November 29, 2015

Beth Judah Temple is the only active synagogue in Cape May County situated at the southernmost tip of New Jersey, jutting between the Delaware Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Located in Wildwood, New Jersey, Beth Judah has been serving the County's Jewish community and its Jewish vacationers for over 100 years.

Whatever your age or stage, we welcome all Jews of all denominations to come, visit, worship, celebrate, share and learn about our beautiful heritage and faith! We offer a warm approach to tradition where everyone counts.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE...from the Strategic Plan [excerpt]

The purpose of this strategic plan is to guide the decision making of the board and staff as they develop and manage the policies, programs, services, and infrastructure of the synagogue. This plan will help determine how to best serve our congregation and our community while remaining consistent with our new mission, vision and value statements. This plan was developed with the recognition that if it is to be successfully implemented, it will require the continuing development and engagement of board leadership, increased involvement and visibility in the Beth Judah community, and the acquisition of new resources that provide a diversified and sufficient funding base and program infrastructure.

For the most part, detailed implementation planning has been left for the next stage of the process. According to the plan, Beth Judah must restructure itself to work toward five main goals. It must focus on its core functions; build new models of membership, participation, spirituality, leadership, and governance; create an effective regional presence, and expand its financial base and use the funds it earns or raises in different ways than it does now. This plan will only be a document without active leadership from the Board. It cannot succeed without equally active support and engagement of members, lay people, and staff.

Rabbi Ronald Isaacs

Rabbi Ron Isaacs, a native of Toronto, Canada has recently become the Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Sholom in Bridgewater, New Jersey, where he has served for the past 40 years. Known as the "teaching rabbi", he has used his creative talents in the Temple's Religious School, Hebrew High School and award winning adult education program. Over the years his congregation has earned more than 30 Solomon Schechter awards.

Rabbi Isaacs continues to use his musical talents to perform at J.C.C's, nursing homes, creative healing services, music therapy and worship services. He has written more than 100 books, including his most recent, a childrens' Hanukkah book which will be available for sale in August. He has taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary's Rabbinical School and has served as scholar in residence and lecturer throughout the country.

Last year (and again this year) he will be leading a musical Kabbalat Shabbat service on the beach at the Montreal Inn Beach Resort in Cape May. He is very excited to have the opportunity to lead Temple Beth Judah in worship for the High Holidays as well as lead services twice a month until the end of December.

WELCOME TO RABBIRON.COM is your place to connect with and learn from Rabbi Ron. Do you have questions about Judaism? From the most mundane to the highly-complex, Rabbi Ron is here to field your questions. Just email your question to asktherabbi@rabbiron.com. You can receive a personal answer and your question may be posted on the site, as well.

IKAR

<http://www.ikar-la.org>

downloaded October 25, 2015

About

To be Jewish today is to be animated by both gratitude and unrest, by humility and audacity. It is to recognize the utter magnificence of the world, the miracle of human life and human connection, the possibility of love and the abundance of life's blessings. And it is, at the same time, to feel the exodus from Egypt – the journey from slavery to freedom, from degradation to dignity – in our guts. It is to refuse to accept a world saturated with injustice, oppression and human suffering, and to become agents of social change whose fiercest weapons are love, faith and holy hutzpah. -Rabbi Sharon Brous

IKAR is a leading edge Jewish community in Los Angeles that seeks to inspire people across the religious spectrum and is reverberating across the country. Fusing piety and hutzpah, tradition and imagination, activism and spiritual practice, IKAR seeks to reclaim the essence (the ikar) of Judaism and to help redefine what it means to be Jewish today.

IKAR, an innovative model for Jewish engagement, launched in 2004 in an effort to reclaim the vitality and relevance of Jewish religious practice and reimagine the contours of Jewish community. Recognized nationally for its success in engaging young and disaffected Jews, IKAR is a positive and proactive response to the declining trend in affiliation in the Jewish community. IKAR is dedicated to reanimating Jewish life through imaginative engagement with ritual and spiritual practice and a deep commitment to social justice. Fusing piety and hutzpah, obligation and inspiration, we are harnessing an untapped energy in the Jewish community –attracting and mobilizing Jews who to contribute their vast intellectual and creative resources to address real world concerns effectively and unapologetically.

Since its founding, we have witnessed exponential growth from a handful of people to a community of 570+ member households – making it one of the fastest growing Jewish communities in the country. Hundreds of others – both in Los Angeles and nationally – participate in a wide diversity of IKAR programs and services. In addition to establishing a vital presence in Los Angeles, we have also become a leading model of engaging, authentic, resonant Jewish life that is inspiring change in synagogues and communities around the country.

Vision

IKAR is an idea. A way in. A community. A catalyst. A challenge. A vibe.

IKAR is a big idea: That Jewish life can be dynamic, compelling, creative and challenging. That the way we pray ought to have an impact the way we live. That each generation of Jews needs to find an authentic way to express itself, rooted in the past but dreaming of the future.

IKAR is a way in: No judgment. Really. Newbies and ringers, seekers and cynics, activists and ambivalents; the dynamism of our community is based on its diversity. Our work is to ignite sparks and create points of access to an invigorating and purposeful Jewish life.

IKAR is a holy community: A kehillah kedoshah – a sacred collection of people working to awaken the spirit and transform the world. We are looking to bring meaning and purpose into our lives through serious and authentic engagement with Judaism. And we believe in the ability of a passionate, dedicated group of people to change the world.

IKAR is a catalyst: Reanimating Jewish life and redefining what is possible in the 21st century. We are dedicated to reclaiming spiritual and religious practice in a way that is accessible, challenging, and transformative.

IKAR is a challenge: Spiritual practice ought to challenge us to live beyond our comfort zone. The IKAR challenge is to be simultaneously wholehearted and broken-hearted—to engage deeply in the world as it is, but to always believe that things can be better. And to know that religious commitments must manifest themselves in a deep dedication to bringing healing, justice, dignity and peace to our world.

F.A.Q.

Learning the ropes

Are you a synagogue or what?

Yes and no and kinda. Words like “synagogue” can feel constraining, and we want to think expansively about what Jewish life can be – so we think of ourselves as a spiritual community and let the experience define itself. Check out this video we made for our Purim shpiel a few years ago. It kind of says it all.

What movement are you affiliated with?

IKAR is post-denominational and not affiliated with any movement. We hope all Jews feel comfortable at IKAR — Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, unaffiliated, Frum, faithful, disconnected and skeptical.

Do I have to be a member to come to IKAR?

Not at all. Our doors are open to anyone to come and join us for services. If you're coming for the first time, be sure to introduce yourself so we can welcome you and shower with love and maybe even rope you in to help pour scotch.

Are you open to interfaith families?

Absolutely. IKAR families come in all imaginable configurations. Really—we challenge you to imagine one we don't have.

What if I don't know Hebrew?

No Hebrew, no problem. Many of us neither read nor speak it. There's a lot of Hebrew in the service — but also a lot of music and spirit, and Hebrew is not a prerequisite for getting swept up in both. Humming and random lalalas are highly encouraged.

Do you keep kosher?

Yes. All meals served at IKAR are vegetarian and are brought in from either hekshered (kosher certified) or vegan establishments.

What do I wear to IKAR?

Jeans, or Prada. Or something in between. Our services are not about your clothes, they're about your spirit. That said, you shouldn't feel awkward in a suit if that's how you roll.

Does your clergy perform same-sex weddings?

Yes.

What, exactly, is Minyan Tzedek and why are you always talking about it?

We believe that the active pursuit of justice is a core expression of our Jewish spiritual and religious selves, so social justice and pursuing dignity for all people is integrated into everything we do at IKAR. Minyan Tzedek is our social justice work, mobilizing the organizing power of our entire community to bring about more equality in our world. We've created four minyanim (or "paths"): Feeding Our Neighbors, Green Action, Organizing and Global Partnership and you can read about them here. Our goal is to engage every member of the IKAR community.

When will IKAR have its own building?

Currently IKAR rents space from the Westside JCC. Our Early Childhood Center is run off-site nearby. We're hard at work identifying potential properties and conducting real estate and architectural studies as we strive to find our own location that best fits our needs. We've been searching for a site within our current geographic area and are looking for a property that has room for an inspiring, sacred space for davening, lectures, screenings and learning, a center for exploration in Jewish art, music and culture, a coffee shop, and a space that will house Limudim and our Early Childhood Center. It took Moses 40 years to find his way to the Promised Land – we're hoping to wrap this search up in a fraction of that time.

Making it Official

Why do you have three types of membership?

Membership contributions only cover a tiny portion (approximately 20%) of IKAR's total budget. So we've been exploring ways to increase these contributions to cover a greater percentage of our annual operating expense.

Last year we piloted our Sustainability Model to help us strengthen the financial health of our community in the long term while remaining consistent with IKAR's dynamic and inclusive approach. We're continuing to explore this model, and now offer three membership contribution levels so that each individual or family can do what fits best. Read more about it here.

Can we get a discount on membership if we belong to another shul?

An associate membership is available for people who already belong to another synagogue, or those who don't live in the area but want to support our work. Associate memberships have all the privileges of a full membership, except IKARds (tickets) for the High Holy Days.

You require a “spiritual commitment” from members — What does that entail?

When you join IKAR, you sign our membership brit. This brit is an expression of your core commitments and a way to expand your own Jewish horizons through learning and spiritual growth.

Does IKAR offer financial aid?

We have a few different membership models to fit different needs. That said, we don't turn anyone away for financial reasons. If our membership contribution rates feel out of your reach, you can email ezra@ikar-la.org link and we'll have a confidential conversation and let us know what level of contribution is you think is a doable and meaningful for you. Alternatively you can just fill out the “Ezra” portion you'll find as you make your way through the membership form.

Diving In

Do you have adult education?

Why yes. We consider ourselves a community of learners and we offer a variety of programs that let us explore the most soul-stirring questions through the lens of Jewish texts and traditions. We often study in people's homes so folks can engage in provocative learning and text study in an informal environment with a glass of wine and some chocolate. We cap registration at the number of people who can fit comfortably in the hosts' living room, and we choose discussion topics based on what is most interesting or compelling to members of the community at that time.

How am I supposed to meet people?

This community is crawling with good folks – moldy oldies and newbies alike – and there are so many ways to connect. One way to meet people is to just start showing up at services (and be sure to come say hi to one of the rabbis or staff if you're new – if we haven't approached you first — and we'll help introduce you around). Come to house parties for some small-group learning over wine. Volunteer with hesed or in our office or as a Shabbat Schmoozer or in preparation for a big event or holiday. Hop into an activity with TRIBE (20s/30s), Alta Rockers, or with a group of fellow parents. Come to our Shabbaton. There are a lot of doorways in. Get on our Weekly Email list, check out our Facebook page and website to learn more and stay in the loop.

Are there ways to get involved with Jewish rituals at IKAR (e.g., read Torah)?

Yes, please. If you have skills, we want them. Please let us know what you can do and we will put you to work.

Membership

IKAR's unique spirit depends on the love, talent, and involvement of each of our members. When you join, you sign our membership brit. This brit is an expression of your core commitments and a way to expand your own Jewish horizons through learning and spiritual growth.

Specifically, we ask that you (1) engage in Jewish learning to stretch your heart and mind, (2) dedicate time and creative energy to the community's growth, (3) work toward the tikkun – repair – of our city, our country, Israel and the world through participation in Minyan Tzedek, our social justice work, and, (4) help us build and sustain IKAR with a financial contribution. Please take a moment to consider your commitments and contributions in each of these four areas.

Members are involved in celebration and recognition of life cycle events. Via our Rabbis and our Hesed network, we provide local care, food, and kindness for those with newborn babies, illnesses, or recent losses. Members are invited to celebrate births, b'nei mitzvot, weddings, and other major events with the blessing of our clergy and in participation with the community.

Over the past 10 years our community has been blessed with exponential growth both in membership and in impact... and our budget and expenses have, of course, grown as well. Spearheaded by our Board of Directors, we have done a great deal of research to find a membership model that fits our core values as well as our growing financial need.

Currently, membership contributions only cover approximately 20% of IKAR's budget. (Learn more about IKAR's annual operating budget.) We've been exploring ways to increase these contributions to cover a greater percentage of our annual operating expense – which will in turn minimize the need for multiple appeals to our community throughout the year, and help us plan better at the start of each fiscal year.

Last year we piloted our Sustainability Model to help us strengthen the financial health of our community in the long term while remaining consistent with IKAR's dynamic and inclusive approach. We're continuing to explore this model but with a few enhancements.

JWOW: Jewish Without Walls

<http://www.jewishwithoutwalls.org>

downloaded October 25, 2015

What is JWOW?

Jewish Without Walls (JWOW) is a grassroots independent initiative to bring Jewish families in Suffolk County together in vibrant Jewish communities. It is a way for parents and children to meet other Jewish families across denominations and affiliations.

What does JWOW do?

JWOW volunteers run events and programs that grow organically from the interests and needs of our community. Our programs are innovative, of the highest quality, and always rooted in friendship.

This sounds great. How can I get involved?

There are a number of ways to join the JWOW community:

- + Attend our awesome events. Find out what's coming up here.
- + "Like" our page on Facebook. This link will take you right there! [FB Link](#)
- + Join our Facebook group and join our online conversations. [Group Link](#)
- + Volunteer to help with a program or come up with your own idea for a JWOW event.
[Click here to volunteer.](#)
- + Join our listserv so that you get information about our upcoming events.

Welcome to Our Community

Jewish Without Walls invites everyone, regardless of your current level of affiliation to the Jewish community, to get connected. JWOW brings all Jewish people and their families together in a joyful community. We are non-denominational, inclusive and always offer a welcoming environment.

Jewish Without Walls empowers people to build community. We emphasize personal relationships and friendship. We hope that you will attend programs and participate in our online and Facebook conversations. As we depend on volunteers, we hope that, ultimately, you will become an active partner in JWOW. We offer everyone the opportunity to step up to make something great happen, and we support you along the way: JWOW is the engine and our partners are the drivers.

Jewish Without Walls focuses on Jewish culture and tradition. We believe that being part of an intentional Jewish community that celebrates together and learns together will add meaning to your life and enhance your family experience.

Mission

To create meaningful and joyful opportunities for families to connect with one another across denominations and affiliations; to feel part of a vibrant, warm and caring community, to enrich Jewish identity, and to inspire leadership and engagement in the Jewish community.

Goals

1. Bring Jewish families together, across denominations and regardless of affiliation, in vibrant Jewish communities.
2. Offer opportunities for adults and children to find enhanced relevance and value in their identity through Jewish tradition, culture and community.
3. Motivate and empower people to create the Jewish community they want and need.
4. Support a more dynamic Jewish life locally and beyond.

Join Us!

Everyone is a Member of JWOW and it's Free!

Please complete the form below to be added to our email list.
This way you will be up to date on all that is happening!

The Kavana Cooperative

<http://kavana.org>

downloaded October 25, 2015

Kavana is an independent Jewish community in Seattle. We strive to create a supportive communal environment in which individuals and families can use "kavana" - intention - to create a Jewish life that is spiritually fulfilling, intellectually satisfying, fun, and meaningful.

Kavana has a unique approach to building Jewish community:

- Cooperative Model - As the first Jewish cooperative of its kind, partners share in the task of creating Jewish life for the group.
- Non-Denominational & Pluralistic - Kavana draws participants from highly diverse backgrounds and provides for multiple entry points to Jewish involvement.
- "Personalized Judaism in a Community Context" - Kavana acknowledges and embraces the dynamic tension between an individual's interest and needs, versus the desire to create community.
- Local - Kavana believes that Jewish communal life will best thrive in settings which are local, organic and intimate.

Vision

Kavana is a cooperative that empowers participants to create a meaningful Jewish life and a positive Jewish identity.

Mission

Kavana welcomes individuals and families with many approaches to Judaism, offers a variety of ways to engage in Jewish life, and demands participation in our community.

Values

Cooperative
Connected
Innovative
Inspiring
Fun
Welcoming
Local
Thought-Provoking
Experiential

Note: Our Vision, Mission & Values were articulated in the spring of 2010 by a hard-working group of Kavana partners and community-members, and we'd like to thank them for their time and enthusiasm. (Thanks!)

About the Kavana Cooperative

Kavana aims to build a supportive, warm, and open-minded community in Seattle in which individuals from a wide array of backgrounds can use “kavana” – intention – to create a personally meaningful Jewish life.

Our cooperative model helps achieve this vision. Each partner commits to taking an active role, to being a "producer," rather than just a "consumer," of Jewish life.

Kavana’s innovative, high-quality programs center around Shabbat and holidays, learning, community (social events and social activism), and family. These events take place around Queen Anne and surrounding Seattle neighborhoods – at community centers, coffee shops, parks and homes.

From Kavana’s inception, we have been “thinking big” about how Jewish life in America should be organized, and how communities can maximize their impact on the lives of their members. Kavana has received national recognition – from foundations and granting organizations, from Slingshot, and from Newsweek – for our creative approach to Jewish community building.

Interested to see what all the buzz is about? Drop us a line, and we’d be happy to answer questions or welcome you at an upcoming event.

Kavana Partnership Explained

Do I have to be a partner to participate in Kavana?

No. One of Kavana’s core values is to welcome everybody, and you are invited to participate and to explore the community. That being said, to be part of a community, a person needs to consistently participate and provide material support. Our expectation is that regular participants will choose to become partners, better supporting themselves and the community in the process.

Do partners get any special benefits that non-partners don’t get?

Yes. Partners gain access to our rabbi, staff, and like-minded partners to create and realize their own vision of Judaism – whether it involves prayer, adult or family learning, home observance, community involvement, a book group, Jewish cooking, or something else. We call this “personalized Judaism in a community context.” Partners also typically get a discount on event fees, and the opportunity to participate in governance and help set the direction of the community. From a legal perspective, partners have official voting rights and access to certain organizational information that is typically held private (such as financial information).

How does someone become a partner?

First, by participating in the Kavana community and deciding that it could play an important role in your life. Second, by scheduling a meeting with the rabbi to explore and define what partnership might look like for you. And, third, by participating regularly and supporting Kavana through the contribution of time and money.

How much do partners typically contribute to Kavana?

Each person's relationship with the community is different. For many partners, Kavana is their only Jewish community, and as a result of that deep relationship and commitment, all of the time and money they contribute goes toward Kavana. Other partners are involved in many communities, and spread their contributions proportionally across them.

Is there a minimum amount of money that a partner is required to contribute to Kavana?

No. Again, this varies from person to person based on their relationship with the community. Here are a few things partners should keep in mind when making financial contributions:

- In FY2011, program fees covered 33% of the cost of Kavana's total operations. After accounting for these fees, the average cost per partner household to operate Kavana was about \$3,500, and the average partner household contribution was \$787. Obviously, there's a big gap there, and we're hoping to bring those two numbers into closer alignment as we move forward.
- The Torah talks about tithing, or giving 10% of one's income to support the community. While that may sound out of reach to many of us, a typical expectation for Jewish families in America is that they will contribute 1 to 2% of their pre-tax income to supporting their Jewish community. (You do the math -- \$50,000 household income would correspond to an annual partner contribution of between \$500 and \$1000; \$150,000 household income would correspond to between \$1500 and \$3000; etc.)
- As mentioned previously, the amount of time and money a partner contributes varies proportionally to the depth and duration of their involvement in the community. Ultimately it's up to every partner to determine his or her own level of giving.

Is there a minimum amount of time that a partner is required to contribute to Kavana?

No. This varies from person to person based on their relationship with the community. That being said, there are some things partners keep in mind when considering volunteer time:

- Kavana is a cooperative, and to work it presumes a meaningful volunteer commitment from all partner households.
- Kavana is most vibrant when partners are contributing their time toward producing programming and services that they personally value.

Should I become a partner?

That is a decision unique to each individual or family. However, our tradition speaks to this subject: the Talmud teaches that the longer someone has been part of a community, the greater responsibility they should take for maintaining it. (For example, after you had lived in a city for a month you were expected to contribute to a fund for the poor, and after you had lived there for a year, you were also expected to contribute to the fund that maintained the walls of the city.) While Kavana's timeline is not set out as strictly, we like the principle.

What is a Kavana partner?

A Kavana partner is an individual or family who has chosen to join the Kavana community through an annual contribution of time and money.

What is the benefit of becoming a partner?

Kavana is a community whose core value is to empower its partners to be producers of their own Jewish lives. As a result, the key benefit of becoming a Kavana partner is the satisfaction that comes from taking responsibility for creating and supporting your own personal and communal Jewish life. (Really... it feels great!) In addition, you'll receive the support of a dynamic and innovative rabbi, a committed staff, and a vibrant community in realizing your vision of Judaism, whatever it may be.

The Kitchen

<http://www.thekitchensf.org>

downloaded October 25, 2015

Looking to do Jewish? Us, too.

Mission

Judaism is about provoking awe and purpose. That's what we're here for.

We believe that Jewish religious practice can transform: It can change lives, make meaning, and invest people in the world. This transformation requires a flexible, living ecosystem of Jewish experiences. That's what we're building.

The Kitchen is a religious community, deeply grounded in serious exploration of Jewish tradition, text, and ritual. We are creating a spiritually engaging community of seekers at all levels of Jewish knowledge and experience.

The Kitchen does not welcome people only because we aspire to be tolerant, accessible, or inclusive. We welcome people because we ARE those people. There are no insiders or outsiders, there are no others here. We are all others and we all members of modern families. We begin from a place of yes: Every question and request is met with a sense of possibility, optimism and embrace.

At The Kitchen we combine elements of the unexpected, secular, and beautiful in the exploration of Jewish life. We insist that Jewish practice be relevant, a tool for greater investment in the world. At the same time, we practice irreverent reverence—looking for the places where the every-day draws attention to the divine, and the mundane emphasizes what's holy.

We believe in pursuing justice in our lives and our communities. The Kitchen is committed to working toward the prevention of hunger, violence, homelessness, disease, ignorance, abuse, and oppression among all people.

We know the challenges are great. But the prize is even greater: A transformative religious community with room for many expressions of serious Jewish living and a collective power to do good.

Here, we aspire to do nothing more than other generations have done before us: harness the power of Jewish life in our time.

What We're Trying

TOOL KITS

Because your desk drawer isn't necessarily full of ritual objects and instruction books. But ours is.

THE JEW TRUCK

What if there were a Jew Truck you'd find at the Farmer's Market or Ferry Building? With a "Rabbi Is In" couch in the back? You into it?

HILL ASSIST

If you need help with cooking a chicken or experiencing a life crisis, we think you should be able to call the God Squad for an in-home visit.

THE PAUSE APP

Take a moment for awe or gratitude. Stop the madness. Create a moment in space and time for...well...a pause.

VENDING MACHINE

We were thinking: What if you could just get your "I need a mezuzah or shabbos candles" jones satisfied, 24/7?

FAQs

Why call it The Kitchen?

We want people to get that we are informal, accessible, and about getting work done. You do work in a kitchen and then often take what you've done to other places. Then you come back to do more. It's also the place everyone wants to be when there's a party.

Is this a synagogue?

Not exactly, but it is probably closer to a synagogue than anything else so if it makes you feel better you can call it that.

Is this a restaurant / catering company?

Nope.

What if I don't believe in God?

Let's not start with whether you believe in God or not. Let's start with whether or not you want to do Jewish and be connected to a bunch of other people who are trying to do the same thing. We can get to the God thing later or never. The place to start should probably just be: "Do I want to do Jewish stuff?"

What if I / or my girlfriend / boyfriend / Aunt Sally is not Jewish?

We don't get hung up on who is 'technically' Jewish or not. All that really matters is who wants to do Jewish or not. Let's put it this way, you could be a direct descendant of Moses, but if you aren't interested in trying anything Jewish, the ride is pretty much over. By the same token, you can be Santa Claus himself, and if you decide to jump on the Jewish train, and are open to seeing where it takes you, then the ride has just begun.

What if I have no idea about how to pray?

If you are new to praying, or can't read hebrew, or don't even know the difference between shabbat and shalom, just give it time. It is normal for it to be difficult in the beginning, like a yoga class would be if you had never taken yoga. If you just keep showing up and trying, you will begin to get it. We promise.

BTW, if it's too much to sing the words, just sing the melody to yourself. Or, rather than conquering the whole service, start by praying one prayer with intention or even a single word.

Are you LGBT friendly?

Of course.

I want to know the tunes. How can I learn the music?

Click here for all our shabbat music on SoundCloud. (For fastest learning, we recommend you play it in the car. Not sure why, it just works.)

How do I find out more?

Click for links to our Facebook, Twitter, and e-mail lists. Best thing to do, though, is just show up.

What if I'm not ready to join? Can I still come to shabbat?

Of course. We'd love to have you. Services are always free and open to all, dinner requires a ticket.

What if I am ready to join?

Click here for information.

Join

What do you get when you subscribe to The Kitchen?

Yes, you get unlimited access to our now infamous shabbats, first pick at those over-the-top feasts and holidays you've heard about and a meaningfully modern approach to lifecycle events from the cradle on up. Sure you get all that, but really, subscribing The Kitchen means stepping it up and connecting with a community of folks like you. We want people who can see where we're going and want to help us get there. If you're ready to be counted in and counted on, this is for you.

What do you get when you subscribe to The Kitchen? You get to build something that matters.

Get started by picking the subscription that's right for you.

Each subscription includes

Getting Hitched

And Baby Makes 3

The Big One Three

Making It Official

The Rabbi Is In

Spiritual Fitness

High(er) Holidays

All the shabbatot and holidays you can handle

*Freedom School must be added a la carte.

Mikdash: Portland's East Side Jewish Cooperative

<http://www.mikdashportland.org>

downloaded October 25, 2015

Mission

Mikdash is a cooperative Jewish community and grassroots incubator for creativity, spirituality, and celebration, based in Portland, OR. Mikdash supports and empowers folks to generously share their gifts - their skills, passions, talents, and interests - with one another, to help facilitate sacred experience and the growth of meaningful community.

Method

To build this unique sacred space, Mikdash derives its organizing principle from the first instruction given to Moses, explaining how the Israelites are to build their very first Mikdash (Exodus 25:1).

"Make for me a Mikdash", God says, "by offering the gifts of your heart. In so doing, you will receive My gifts." This recognition of the synchronicity and symbiosis of gift giving, that the more generously and honestly we give of ourselves, the more the universe gives back, guides our model.

Mikdash proposes that all of us - individuals and organizations alike - have gifts to give. We all have things we do well, things we love doing, skills, passions, and unique curiosities that we have and get to share with each other. Mikdash believes the quality of these gifts and the goodwill generated by offering them is a sacred thing. Mikdash also presumes that each of us has lacks and needs, that there are gifts that each one of us could use some more of, that there are always ways that each of us could feel more whole.

As a communal organization, Mikdash sees it as its task to help empower, support, organize, and facilitate the dynamic sharing of these gifts between both individuals and institutions, pairing willing gift-givers with wanting gift-receivers to maximize the healing impact of the gifts we have to give, to create the greatest opportunity for collaborative synergy, spiritual cohesion, and communal abundance.

Values

As a Jewish organization, it seems worthwhile to try and articulate some of the key Jewish values that inform Mikdash's approach to Jewish communal life. What follows is a preliminary attempt to do that:

Inclusivity - Mikdash is committed to being a proactively welcoming and inclusive Jewish space that values and honors all people as they are. Mikdash believes that we are each infinitely unique, that we each get to define our own identities, and that we each deserve respect as our fullest selves. Jews of all ages, genders, identities, orientations, colors, family structures, ancestry, and abilities have a home at Mikdash.

Egalitarianism - Mikdash is committed to the equal access of all to Jewish prayer, practice, learning and ritual. One of the things this means is that all prayer at Mikdash will be mechitzah-free, with open and mixed seating.

Pluralism - Mikdash is committed to respectful engagement with a diverse range of prayer styles, practices, rituals, and beliefs, in the context of its other values and for the purpose of personal growth and deeper understanding.

Trans-denominationalism - Mikdash sees itself as living in a trans-denominational world. A patchwork of Jewish identities, traditions, and movements, Mikdash welcomes people from all denominations and none at all, and as a community, affiliates simply as Jewish.

Cyclical - Mikdash operates on Jewish time and grounds its communal life and practice in these ancient rhythms. Mikdash believes greatly in the spiritual and communal power of living in relationship with, ritualizing, and celebrating our movement through the day, week, month, and year cycles, the holiday cycles, the Torah cycles, and the life cycles of our members.

Halachah/Jewish Law - Mikdash understands itself to be actively engaged in and accountable to the Jewish halachic project. In ongoing relationship with life's biggest questions, we feel a sense of moral obligation and opportunity to align our daily actions with our deepest values, and draw our inspiration on how best to do this from a variety of diverse sources.

Evolving Jewish Identity - Mikdash embraces an ever-evolving definition of Jewish identity and Jewish community. Mikdash understands and honors that being Jewish is neither a simple nor an exclusive identity for us today and that "Jewish community" no longer means a community of only Jews, but rather a diverse mix of people with varied Jewish identities and relationships to Judaism and Jews.

Healing/Tikun Olam - Mikdash knows the world, in the some ways, to be existentially broken and in need of some TLC. Mikdash also believes that we as individuals and communities have the power to help mend the broken vessels that exist through our daily interactions and the way we live our lives. All that Mikdash does is in service of wholeness and healing for ourselves, the world, and the Divine.

Vision

A converted industrial space on the inner east side and not too far from Burnside, the long-term vision for Mikdash is a gritty and grassroots spiritual home for Jewish life and community in Portland, Oregon. A unique model designed specifically for this community, specifically for now, Mikdash breaks free from past conceptions of sacred space and welcomes in a new paradigm of cooperation and abundance, deep relevance and interconnectedness, honesty, humility, and possibility. Mikdash believes that religion matters, but it also believes most of us have just barely scratched the surface of what it can look like, what it can feel like. More than a synagogue, and not quite a JCC, Mikdash is a Jewish communal spiritual hub that helps us connect to that which matters most through that which we care most about.

Get Involved

Here are some of the easiest ways to get involved with Mikdash...

[Get the Newsletter](#)

[Find Us on Social Media](#)

[Visit the House](#)

[Give a Gift](#)

[View the Calendar](#)
[Contact Us](#)

Giving

Mikdash knows that, just like us, gifts can come in all shapes and sizes and believes that, for our community to sustain itself, we must value the unique contributions of our members. That is why we've made it easy for you to offer whatever it is you have to give. Whether that's volunteering to teach an art therapy class or donating pillows to the meditation room, cooking a communal meal or cleaning up afterwards, helping to make cross-community connections, handling the organization's legal paperwork, or perhaps donating a large industrial space on Portland's inner east side, we view each of these as inherently valuable currencies and are grateful for whatever it is you have to give. Please check out our Gift Registry (below) to see some gifts Mikdash is currently looking for and let us know ways you'd like to contribute by filling out the adjacent Give a Gift form. Oh, and then there's also money, that other pesky currency we always seem to need to have. As always, if you are able, please... Give Money! Give Something Other than Money! (Gift Registry)

Mishkan Chicago

<http://www.mishkanchicago.org>

downloaded November 8, 2015

Who We Are

Mishkan is a burgeoning spiritual community in Chicago reclaiming Judaism's inspiration and transformative essence. Not bound by a particular location, we meet for soulful musical prayer and learning, at homes and spaces all around the city, from synagogues to yoga studios.

The Torah describes the Mishkan as a tent that the ancient Israelites carried with them through the desert, creating holy space whenever and where ever they stopped to gather around and in it. Where ever we are on our journeys as Jews and as citizens of the world, we create meaningful connections- with ourselves, with others, with Jewish wisdom and with God- when we gather together in prayer, song, learning, and tikkun (repairing the world). That's what Mishkan is all about.

Our Mission

Our mission is to engage, educate, empower, connect and inspire people through dynamic experiences of Jewish prayer, learning, social activism and community building. Whether in person or online, through music or Talmud or powerful conversations, whether in services or social events, Mishkan is reimagining and reinventing the next generation of Judaism in Chicago and beyond.

Our History

We've been around since our first service in a Lincoln Park living room in September of 2011. Since then our staff has grown from one volunteer rabbi/founder to a growing staff of five, including our amazing Managing Director Rachel Cort, our Community Mobilizer, Ellie Spitz, and our newest hires, our intrepid Education Director Ilana Gleicher-Bloom, and our more-competant-than-G!d Office Manager Rachel Gray Alexander. We have 8 board members – all regulars at our events and people who care deeply about the present and future sustainability of our community. We have about 150 Builders and see a crowd of over 2,000 people at High Holidays and at events throughout the year. We're constantly striving to maintain the energy of our fast growing community alongside the intimacy and familiarity of the Mishkan you know and love.

Our Vision

We envision a Chicago and American Jewish landscape in which Torah [Jewish wisdom, text, practice, culture], Avodah [being of sacred service in community] and Gemilut Hassadim [being of service to other creatures, people and the planet] guides and inspires our lives, and we as Jews participate in bringing about a world which all people feel safe and supported to manifest their fullest selves.

So join the rabbi for coffee, show up at a house party in your neighborhood, get inspired at a Friday night service, get involved in tikkun (repairing the world) work. Meet other folks in Chicago who are hungry for deeper Jewish experiences that get us higher, push us farther, and get us more and more connected.

Just get in touch already, would you?

The Concept + Core Values

When we think about Jewish community our minds usually zero in on a location where community meets- a synagogue, a JCC. But what if community were defined by common values instead- by the relentless pursuit of the holy and the just, and that in gathering around that pursuit anywhere at all, we establish a sacred community? This description gets at the heart of Mishkan.

The ancient Mishkan traveled with the Israelites through the desert and brought God's presence into its midst whenever and wherever the people would set it up and bring the best of themselves- their hearts, their talents and treasures- to the project. Likewise, brought together by our belief that through music, prayer, study and tikkun (repair) we transform ourselves and the world, Mishkan began convening in unconventional spaces- yoga and art studios, living rooms, spiritual centers, backyards, and yes, synagogues, too- wherever people were gathered in holy intention. Even as we've settled into two consistent spaces (at the Bodhi Spiritual Center and Anshe Emet Synagogue, as well as our new space on Ravenswood), we continue to meet for classes and personal meetings in locations across the city. We partner with other community groups to further the holy work of spreading inspiration and love.

We'll admit it: the Mishkan an unconventional kind of community, a cross-community community, designed to enhance the Jewish landscape in Chicago and create a new way in. We hope you find what you're looking for.

Our Core Values:

These values lie at the center of our work and animate everything we do.

Inspiration. "*Yehi Or*- Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). The first and most important purpose of our existence on earth, the Torah describes, is to create light. Mishkan strives to create an environment where each person can be moved, inspired, learn something, be challenged, taken on a journey, and brought to a higher emotional, spiritual, intellectual and moral place. Every event includes elements of Torah study, music and meaningful social encounter that build a greater sense of enlightenment, broadly construed, and every Shabbat and holiday event has something that participants can take home for further study. We aim to generate, stoke and spread light.

Self-expression. "*Ahalelah Yah b'hayai*- I will praise The Source with my life" (Psalm 146). Practicing a living spiritual tradition means animating the words, forms and rituals created by our ancestors with each person's own life experiences, passions, talents, loves. Too many religious experiences feel like we leave our real selves at the door when we walk in. At Mishkan we create containers for real self-expression through music, text, meditation, breath, and through creating a space that is comfortable enough for us to laugh, cry, dance, sing out, be silent, pray... whatever is real for each person. This is a safe space to be one's self.

Radical Accessibility. *“Karov Yah l’kol korav– God is close to anyone to calls out”* (Psalm 145). Any person regardless of background is welcome and invited to find meaning, inspiration and community at Mishkan. The ancient Mishkan in the desert brought together the Israelites from across the spectrum of the community, and so do we: young, young-at-heart, total novices alongside people with different skills and abilities, LGBTQ Jews, people in interfaith relationships, Jews-by-Choice, from all denominational backgrounds, people who aren’t Jewish. We believe everyone’s birthright is to connect in this way. We facilitate deep connection with Torah and Jewish prayer by providing transliteration guides, by explaining rituals and translating Hebrew, even having community members sign at times when there’s a non-hearing person in the room. We will always do our best to accommodate unique needs, whether for disability access, allergies, or other individual circumstances, to make participation at Mishkan more accessible for all.

Healing/Tikkun. *“L’taken Olam b’malkhut Shaddai– To repair the world according to God’s vision”* (Siddur). We believe that to make religion matter, we must take the energy and inspiration we derive from our spiritual practice out to a world that desperately needs more light, more justice, more goodness, and more peace. Working with local community organizing groups, service agencies, and taking inspiration from the many people in our community involved in the work of social change, Mishkan is constantly working toward greater social justice, locally, nationally and globally.

Yisrael/Israel *“Ki m’tzion tetze Torah/Because wisdom emanates from Zion”* (Michah 4:2). The love and longing for the land of Israel has been a central spiritual value for Jews since the first call to Abraham. Mishkan recognizes our unique role as a Jewish spiritual community in the diaspora to create an environment where everyone can explore their own authentic, informed, and personal relationship with Israel– the historic land, the Biblical ideal, the diverse global people, and the modern State that brings all these complex dimensions into a vital contemporary reality. We approach the State of Israel with love and amazement at its extraordinary achievements and a desire to work toward fulfillment of its founding ideals.

Mishkan is a space where people from a wide spectrum of views on Israel are active, vocal members of the community. We believe that a diverse tapestry of opinions strengthens the fabric of our community and are committed to genuinely engaging with views that may diverge from our own, and navigating all our conversations with grace and respect.

OneTable

<http://onetable.org>

downloaded October 25, 2015

As an online and in-person hub, we help people in their 20s and 30s find, enjoy and share Shabbat dinners to make the most of their Friday night and enjoy the best of life together. We make it easy for hosts to welcome people to a Shabbat dinner at home, for guests to savor a Friday meal and for all to experience unique events for Shabbat dinner out. There's nothing better than a great dinner with people you love. Join us for slowing down, joining together, and sharing stories. Join us for new connections and moments of meaning.

Our approach is simple: Seek, Savor, Share

Seek discover new people, places and traditions.

- Anybody can be a guest or a host. This is an invitation to explore new ways to create Jewish space in your life in a way that's authentic to you.
- Whether you grew up making Shabbat dinner or this is something new, you have the opportunity to open your table, deepen old friendships and make new connections.

Savor moments and experiences to enjoy a feast for the mind and the senses.

- Shabbat dinner holds flavors of our family traditions and new rituals.
- Unplug from the chaos of the week and take the much-needed time to be present.
- Start up your weekend by slowing down to savor the moments that matter.

Share what you love with people you love, and belong to something bigger.

- When you join around the table, you sit side-by-side, as equals, as friends, new and old.
- At Shabbat dinner, you share a connection with the people in the room, in the broader community and around the world.
- Shabbat dinner creates the space to share the Jewish experience and belong to something bigger.

The success of OneTable dinners depends on skilled hosts who create elevated experiences for guests. We provide practical and personalized support so they can feel comfortable and have fun hosting friends in their home.

Host a Dinner

We provide practical and personalized support so you can feel comfortable and have fun hosting friends. Apply to host.

Attend a Dinner

Enjoy delicious flavors, authentic conversation and new experiences. View a range of dinners hosted by OneTable Hosts on Feastly, our social dining platform.

Host an Event

We are now accepting applications for hosting Shabbat dinner events (25-60 people) in 2015. Submit your proposal.

OneTable Dinner Offerings

Intimate Dinners at Home – OneTable offers support for hosts through “Nourishment Credit” which can be applied to resources to make hosting easier, like on-demand grocery or prepared food delivery. One on one “Shabbat Coaching,” where each host can explore the questions or challenges he or she faces when hosting a Jewish ritual. And, “Nosh:pitality” gatherings to learn cooking, challah baking, cocktail making, and ritual facilitation. Hosts create online profiles and dinner events on a private Shabbat dinner page of Feastly, a social dining platform: eatfeastly.com/onetable.

Shabbat Dinner Event Partnerships – OneTable provides financial support for entrepreneurial hosts to create their own Shabbat dinner events, often held in restaurants or other private dining venues, for 25-60 people with ticket prices ranging from \$10-\$100. For example, Liz Alpern and Jeffrey Yoskowitz, founders of the Jewish foodie business, The Gefilteria, created a farm-to-table Shabbat dinner for 50 people in Brooklyn.

Welcoming Spaces – for multiple, individually hosted dinners taking place at the same time: for instance, the rooftop of the JCC in Manhattan where 15 hosts can reserve a table, invite friends, and be provided with wine, challah and dessert, plus live music and the opportunity to meet more than 100 other hosts and guests.

OneTable Supporters

With thanks to OneTable operating partners and visionary funders, The Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life and The Paul E. Singer Foundation, we successfully launched in New York in 2014. In 2015 we expanded to Chicago and welcomed local support from an anonymous funder. Additional support to help OneTable grow comes from the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation.

Help us scale the experience so more people can Shabbat together by supporting OneTable in your local community.

Sha'ar Communities

<http://shaarcommunities.org>

downloaded October 25, 2015

About Sha'ar

SHA'AR COMMUNITIES is a groundbreaking suburban network of small, inclusive and accessible Jewish communities connected by a broad vision of Jewish renaissance. Each revolving around a different modality of Jewish engagement, be it prayer, study, travel or social action, our communities together offer an innovative, affordable and pluralistic model of Jewish identity-building and affiliation. Sha'ar Communities welcomes the changes and challenges in Jewish life today, and in response has initiated the next paradigm of Jewish life for the 21st century.

Sha'ar Communities creates multiple gates ("Sha'ar" = gate) through which people can enter Jewish life and establish Jewish connections. Its name recalls the eight gates leading into the Old City of Jerusalem and suggests the figurative gates we might pass through while on our spiritual journey. People experience Jewish life from a variety of perspectives. Sha'ar looks to offer multiple gateways through which seekers can pass to create connections to Judaism and to community. Our name, Sha'ar, is formed in the singular to convey the sacredness of each of the gates through which we travel.

For some one gate will suffice. For others, several might beckon. For some Sha'ar Communities will be their primary Jewish home. For others, it will provide a secondary community. Each gate provides its own community, with its own membership or fee-for-service payment structure.

We welcome people of all Jewish backgrounds to our warm, participatory and inclusive communities.

Gates

The Gate is Open . . .

In forming our community, we dreamed of offering diverse and compelling opportunities for people to connect to Judaism and Jewish life. Our name, Sha'ar (gate), conveys both our mission and our belief that Jewish life is a continual journey through gates of spiritual growth and discovery. Should you have any questions, please contact us at 201-213-9569, or send an email to andy@shaarcommunities.org

We hope that you will see yourself in our vision and join Sha'ar in our journeys. For some one gate will suffice. For others, several might beckon.

Gate of Prayer (Tefillah)

Gate of Study (Limud)

Gate of Repair (Tikkun Olam)

Gate of Tomorrow

Gate of Discovery (Nesiyot)

Gate of Wholeness & Healing

Music

Sha'ar's uniqueness is that we recognize that people journey towards Judaism and spirituality differently. This is why we offer multiple gateways for people to pass through on their journey, and why we are very excited to introduce Sha'ar Shirah ("Gate of Song")!

Shir Hadash

<https://headenver.org/index.php/2015-10-07-13-55-43/shabbat/shir-hadash>

downloaded October 25, 2015

Shir Hadash - A Musical Shabbat Experience at HEA at 9:45 am at the Goldberger Youth Center (across the street from the main HEA building)

Shir Hadash is a musical service where participants are encouraged to unite their voices in soulful melodies gathered from Jewish communities around the world. This two-hour service features the essential elements of traditional liturgy, with explanations from the Rabbis to help worshipers better understand our prayers and the weekly Torah portion.

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Additional resources related to the topic of this paper are bookmarked here:

<https://delicious.com/jlearn2.0/ajrthesis>