

Nitzotzot Min HaNer

Kollelim

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Introduction and Overview

*A Jewish man without torah knowledge
Is a man divorced from his glorious past;
A Jewish city without halls of torah study
Is a city estranged from its glorious future.*

Rabbi Zev Epstein¹ on the idea of a kollel

*In every way Kollel rabbis are ambassadors of Torah ...
A Rav without a defined kehilla ...
A bridge so to speak to the Torah world*

Rabbi Zvi Holland, Phoenix Community Kollel

In this edition, Nitzotzot has undertaken a discussion of the central institution in the development of Torah life around the world, the community or outreach kollel. We have presented here something which is comprehensive yet incomplete; we have spoke to many involved in kollelim, though we were not able to reach by our deadline important people in the kollel movement. In keeping with the Nitzotzot approach to discuss real issues with reasonable insight and depth, we have tried to be informative, without being controversial, though even our occasional use of the name, ‘outreach kollel’ to distinguish the these kollelim from other community kollelim is not the preferred name used by these kollelim themselves².

¹ Rabbi Epstein was the Rosh Kollel in Rio de Janeiro

² The kollelim prefer the name ‘community kollel’.

Rabbi Aaron Yehuda Schwab of the Denver Kollel, puts it thus:

We do not like being labeled kiruv kollel, for it conjures up in people’s minds a kollel that doesn’t put an emphasis on strong internal learning.

Rabbi Tzvi Holland of Phoenix has stated:

There is no kollel in the country called an outreach kollel, period. We are community kollelim in that we are committed to a community. Unlike kiruv organizations, when we get involved with people they become part of our community for the long haul not moved on to the frum host community. For a reason, many of us do a lot of outreach, but we do so much more. It has nothing to do with a kiruv stigma at all - we simply do much more than outreach.

However, we believe that, although every outreach kollel is eligible to be called a community kollel, the reverse is not true. The Lakewood Kollel in LA or Melbourne, Australia may do some outreach, but it is certainly not a primary goal. I am not aware of any outreach being done by the Lakewood Kollel in Toronto, for example. Often the kiruv is a function of the personal interests of specific members of the kollel rather than facilitated by the kollel as an institution. (The Ashkenazi Kollel in Mexico City comes to mind.) Community kollelim which are outreach kollelim, may differ from other community kollelim in terms of the cities in which they are located, the nature of many of their activities, the profile and interests of the avreichim they recruit and the sederim they keep. Perhaps, to accommodate the concerns of Rabbi Zvi Holland (see above), it would be appropriate to distinguish such outreach kollelim from other outreach organizations, though outreach organizations themselves differ one from the other on the points of concern. I think, however, that someone who reads this entire



Many issues raised here will be left unresolved, and we believe, require Daas Torah to pasken in each case. Is the kollel just meant to be another institution in town, together with the school, the shul and the chevra kadisha? Or is the kollel supposed to play a larger role? Is there a difference whether the kollel comes into a place where there is no school, or a very weak school, as opposed to a place where there is everything which opens and shuts? Should a kollel set different halachic standards to a kiruv organization?

Other issues we only briefly explored or not at all, such as the outreach contribution the women of these families make and the personal challenges of the families.

We have dated the beginning of the community kollel to the Gateshead Kollel which went out to Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1970. But the idea was not a popular one then. Today, it is remarkable how so many cities and towns have or are clamoring for such an institution. Kollelim differ in size, in the amount of kiruv they do and in the sederim that they keep. Overall, they have been unusually successful as outreach organizations and we have tried to show how that is not just strength in numbers (a kiruv chabura) but is connected to their definition as Torah-learning institutions. As representatives of Torah they are perceived somewhat differently than community rabbis by the baal habatim in the town.

The impact of an outreach on a town has to be measured in another way as well, i.e. as a springboard for broader manpower in the community, as a way of stabilizing the ‘frum-drain’ from the community, and as a way of stimulating broader communal growth and halachic standards.

But not every town is ready for a kollel. We have attempted to answer when a town may be ready for a community kollel, and what are the steps a group of baal habatim should undertake in order to set one up. We felt that it was vital, in this regard, to see why kollelim sometimes fail.

Like many of our editions, we believe this one will be a work in process. Feel free to add to the job we have begun.

Mysterious Appearance of the Community Kollel Idea

In 1970, a group of Gateshead avreichim went out to South Africa to constitute the Kollel Yad Shaul¹. In those days, the concept of a community kollel did not really exist. This group went out strictly to learn². But something mysterious happened and, within a few

Nitzotzot edition will find that most of it is doing just that – showing in which ways these kollelim are unique Torah institutions.

¹ The kollel was led by the late Rabbi Mordechai Shakovitsky, Ztz"l who later made aliyah. It was then taken over by Rabbi Baruch Grosnass who heads it to this day. For most of its history, this was the only kollel in South Africa and was therefore known simply as ‘the Kollel’, as it is still referred to by many to this day.

² The kollel was planned as a community kollel in the sense that it was intended to serve and strengthen a particular local community, the Adas Yeshurun of the Yekkes. Although almost all communities in South Africa were formally Orthodox and communal affiliation was high, there were very few Shomer Shabbos families. Adas Yeshurun was the only community which was an entirely Shomer Shabbos community. They understood that the long term viability of their community, if not of the entire South African Jewry, was at stake. So, although we have described the outreach effects of the kollel as an unexpected outcome of the kollel’s arrival on



months, this group had turned into the major vehicle for kiruv in South Africa. Providence decreed, and the outreach¹ or community kollel was born².

But the idea of the community kollel did not initially spread like wild-fire³. Twenty years later, only a handful of locations had such a kollel, and these were mainly in areas where there was sizable core of frum baal habatim⁴. And then, something happened. Over the decade of the nineties, the outreach kollel idea began to creep into the consciousness of not only bnei Torah, but of people who were barely Orthodox as well⁵. Almost every town began clamoring for its own kollel. Hashgacha arranged for this to happen just at a time when the large force of avreichim were ready to fill this need, a function of the dramatic development of yeshivos and kollelim around Lakewood, in Eretz Yisrael and elsewhere over the previous decades⁶.

The Lakewood kollelim began as an extension of the vision of the Gedolim to create a day school and other communal structures in each town⁷. In those days it took about five years to make a new kollel. Out of town meant Los Angeles, Chicago and Toronto⁸. The families that went out to these places were considered pioneering heroes, and indeed they were. The community kollel idea was important, but it was not the top priority. There was an

the South African scene, the kollel per se, was a planned community kollel. It is for this reason that we give it credit ahead of the Toronto Kollel, which went out in 1972.

¹ Although we have used this term here, it should be pointed out that out of town kollelim do not generally refer to themselves in this way. Generally they use the terms 'out of town' or 'community'. However, we have chosen, for the purposes of this article, to use the term 'outreach' because the other terms are too broad in their usage. 'Out of town' was originally used to refer to Lakewood, Detroit and Toronto; 'community kollel' is used by almost all kollelim where there is any teaching aspect on the part of the avreichim.

² The concept of a kollel per se, is generally attributed to Rav Chaim of Volozhin. The kollel concept was further developed by Rav Yisrael Salanter (Kollel Kovno). One of the most historical kollelim is still thriving, Gateshead Kollel. In the Michtav MeEliyahu, Rav Dessler has several igros defining its objectives. Although there were several initiatives in the 1930's, the first successful kollel on American soil was in 1943, established by Rav Aharon Kotler Ztz"l in White Plains, NY. For a good overview of the history of kollelim in general, as well as the development of the community kollel in the USA see Yaakov Feitman, Jewish Action, Winter, 2002

³ The Toronto Community Kollel, the first of the Lakewood Kollelim in North America was established a two years later, in 1972.

⁴ These Lakewood kollelim attracted frum, but not necessarily learned or Jewishly energized ba'al habatim, into their beis medrash to learn with the avreichim and to inculcate the value of daily learning. We will explore the full impact of this type of kollel later in the article.

⁵ The first such kollel was the Atlanta Scholars Kollel, established in 1987. Dallas was established in 1993. For years after its establishment, Rav Volbe Shlit"a would repeatedly describe the efforts of Rabbi Fried, the Rosh Kollel of Dallas, as words of encouragement to avreichim to go out and do something.

⁶ The overall assessment of the quality and motivation of these avreichim is very high. *The avreichim who join are idealistic and very motivated. They are achievers and almost always strive to "make a difference"*. (Rabbi Moshe Efros, Ner LeElef)

⁷ The person who was the most instrumental in these Lakewood Kollelim was HaRav Nosson Wachtfogel Ztz"l, the Lakewood mashgiach, who worked under the guidance of HaRav Shneur Kotler Ztz"l.

⁸ And indeed they were. In those days, these were places with weak rabbinic presence, inadequate chinuch, weak kashrus, no restaurants and little public learning in their communities just like the smaller towns are now. (Rabbi Zvi Holland) However, they differed with respect to the number of frum baal habatim who existed in those town. In general, there were a large group of frum baal habatim to welcome the kollel to the town.



acute lack of klei kodesh manpower for every area, teachers, rabbeim and roshei yeshiva, even in the greater New York area, and these vital needs had to be taken care of, at least to some degree, before the kollel movement could be stressed as a higher priority¹.

By the 90's, outreach kollelim were being made around the world at a rate of three to five a year, (with a slow-down during the last three, tough economic years). Baal habatim, who a decade ago would have accused such yungerleit of being good-for-nothings and a burden on society, came forward with huge sums of money. Out of town was now Cincinnati, Seattle, St Louis and Dallas. It was soon to become Des Moines, Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro as well.

But it was not only the recipients and supporters of the kollelim whose attitude had changed. So had the attitude of those avreichim who comprised these new kollel chaburahs. The kollel idea proved to be the ideal vehicle through which avreichim could now engage in kiruv rechokim and the idea of kiruv, once assigned to the less successful, became accepted as a worthy undertaking by talmidei chachamim.

Typical of the new approach was the proud statement of Rabbi Aaron Yehudah Schwab, Rosh Kollel of Denver:

I want one of my contributions to this world to be taking top yungerleit (bnei torah and talmidei chachamim looked up to even in the most yeshivish circles) and inspire, train and facilitate them to do kiruv.

I want to break that taboo amongst the greatest resource that Klal Yisroel has - the top level brains who are steeped in Torah and Avodah. I strongly believe that the kiruv scene has a lot to benefit by utilizing the real McCoy.

And so a kollel movement - nay a series of kollel movements - was born. Lakewood² and Kollel International³ have made strings of kollelim and World Mizrachi has come up

¹ Rabbi Zvi Holland, Phoenix Community Kollel.

² Rabbi Yaakov Shulman described the current Beis Midrash Govoha community kollel program as follows:

1. *To help Jewish communities grow by establishing a core of yungerleit who will contribute actively to the community Jewish life, while at the same time establish their families there, send their children to local institutions, etc.. The Kollel is viewed as a resettlement program of a slice of the yeshiva, of the yeshiva ideals and mentality in another community .*

2. *To further spread and disseminate Torah True learning and living. The resulting outlet for the vast talent inherent in and grown in the Beis Midrash Govoha Yeshiva, and contribution to the whole Torah world by utilizing their Kochos in positions of "klei kodesh" that serve these communities reinforces and spreads the Torah way in every place.*

Kollelim, founded by Beth Medrash Govoha are: Los Angeles, Detroit, Toronto, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Deal, Montreal, Boston, Melbourne (Australia), Mexico City, Miami, Philadelphia, Minneapolis and Ottawa.

In addition, the following kollelim are staffed by Lakewood alumni:

Monsey, St Louis MO, New York, Dallas, Seattle, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Denver, Bensalem (Pennsylvania), Norfolk (Virginia), Onley (MD)

³ *Kollel International brings an added dimension to the community kollel. It offers a "taste" of kollel, what it represents and offers, to cities and communities who either have no idea that such a level of Yiddishkeit can exist, flourish and offer them something, or are aware, but simply not yet on the level of committing to the kollel*



with a variation of the kollel idea, their extensive global network of Torah MiTzion¹. Others such as Minneapolis, Denver and Columbus, were modified clones of the Lakewood idea, drawing mainly or exclusively on Lakewood avreichim². Torah Umesorah, which has had a hand in starting or expanding a whole host of others, announced a special kollel fund at their 2001 convention and have been a quiet but mighty force in the kollel movement ever since. Ner Yisrael³ and Chofetz Chaim⁴ (or their graduates) have been responsible for several kollelim each. Other kollelim were a function of local initiative or of outsiders who stimulated such interest. A new movement of YU kollelim is expected in the immediate future⁵.

America is not the only place where kollel-fever has taken hold. Of the several kollelim made by Ner LeElef graduates, four were founded in other places: South America, South Africa and Russia. England has at least two outreach kollelim, in Whitefield (Manchester) and Ilford (London), and is about to get a third, G-d willing, in Edgware, London after Pesach. Moscow has two kollelim, Budapest one, and Melbourne, Australia has the second largest of any of the Lakewood Kollelim⁶.

Many of the twelve Lakewood Kollelim are in what today would be called Torah cities, and that is in large part due to them. When they went out, LA, Chicago and Toronto were out of town. Not so today⁷. By contrast, the newer kollelim do not have a large core of

financially or idealistically yet. Kollel International would be a kollel to them, to try, with no commitment from their side and no demands. They could observe, “taste” and try it out from the outside. Once they had it, would appreciate it. Until the community was interested and were ready to support the kollel the avreichim would travel in everyday to learn, returning to their families in an established frum community every night, the eventual goal being to move in when the community was ready and could offer support.

The avreichim in this kollel would get people to learn once a week. They would get to know them personally, and slowly they became more involved. Kollel International expected host communities to eventually undertake at least 50% of the cost of the kollel (and families), with Kollel International fundraising covering the rest. (Rabbi Burstyn)

¹ Torah MiTzion, with an annual budget of \$6 million, is represented in 29 communities/campuses worldwide. In the US, there is a Torah MiTzion presence in 14 cities including Detroit, Memphis, Atlanta, and Boca Raton, as well as on campuses such as Yale, Brandeis and UCLA. (Rabbi Yaakov Feitman, Jewish Action, Winter, 2002)

² The Denver Kollel has a serious outreach component. In Minneapolis, both kollelim exist in the broader context of serious kiruv initiatives.

³ E.g. Atlanta and Cincinnati

⁴ E.g. Miami and Huntington

⁵ Some of these are already planned in some schools for the coming year. According to Adam Ferziger, Dr. at Bar Ilan university who is currently doing a major research project on kollelim in his capacity as senior fellow at Bar-Ilan's Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research, Yeshiva University have come to appreciate and value the kollel as a tool for community building. In addition, in recent years, they have been producing many more Bnei Torah who want to stay in learning as well as those who are becoming klei kodesh but are increasingly assertive about the need for a community and framework to service their needs.

⁶ The largest is in Deal, with 90 avreichim.

⁷ Not every city where there is a Lakewood kollel can be considered as well developed, Torah-wise as these. Denver or Minneapolis have a way to go and Ottawa has just begun. But the impact of a Lakewood kollel on any town where it has arrived is unmistakable.



from baal habatim to begin with. They are coming to towns where outreach is the only option for developing any Torah in the city at all.

Not all of the kollelim have the same level of commitment to outreach, but interestingly, the longer a kollel is around, the more outreach it tends to do. The Ashkenazi (Lakewood) Kollel in Mexico recently made a decision to become more outreach orientated, as did the Ohr Somayach Kollel in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Lakewood Kollel in Chicago took a few years to get to the point where it hired two full time people to do outreach, and had one of them move to Northbrook to begin a new Torah-learning center¹. This in part reflects the unfolding, in concentric circles, of the communal needs, working from the core outwards, but it also reflects the growth in sensitivity by the Avreichim to the broader needs of the city. In Manalapan, the Kollel International started as a commuter kollel with one night a week dedicated to outreach, and then moved into the town with a much deeper commitment to outreach. It is rare that a kollel actually drops one of its sedarim to do more outreach, though this has happened as well, in the Valley Kollel in LA and in Des Moines, Iowa.

Along with the developing sensitivity of the avreichim to the needs of the town comes an increasing enthusiasm to fill these needs. And not just the men. I once addressed a group of kollel wives in a particular town, all of whom had made it clear that outreach would play no part in their lives. They were coming strictly as wives and mothers. Yet, I was besieged with questions from each one on how to deal with all the people they had gotten involved with, some of them through shiurim, that they were enthusiastically giving. Our research has found that those wives who were Taharas Hamishpacha teachers, and therefore had a structured outlet to their giving, were considerably more happy than those who were not. And so on.

Another reason for greater kiruv as time goes on is quite practical – baal habatim give more to a kollel which they see as reaching out to the town.

But the most common reason give is that, as the kollel makes a greater impact on the town, the needs of the town, kiruv-wise grow and grow. Not only do more people need to be serviced, but they also begin to reflect a broader range of levels as time goes on.

Kollelim continue to evolve with time. Take Des Moines, Iowa. Des Moines in its first three years was a two seder a day kollel, with 7 ½ hours of learning a day. The outreach responsibilities of the avreichim were for three nights a week, at 1 ½ hours per time. Sundays, the kollel learned both with baal habatim and on its own until 3 pm, after which the kollel was off for the rest of the day. In year four and five, as the outreach needs grew, the kollel dropped to one seder. One avreich began to specialize in college outreach, one in programming, and two in school teaching. Now, the kollel hopes to take on another two avreichim, who will again learn two sedarim.

Although it is too early to calculate all the implications of the community kollel movement, what has clearly emerged is that many of these kollelim have, after a few years, become the hub of communal life in the town. Many of them have taken responsibility for their entire area, and have had the manpower and infrastructure to back this up. The Seattle Kollel's reach has gone as far as Victoria Island, opposite Vancouver, where it has

¹ The Chicago Community Kollel Community Learning Program began by servicing frum baalei batim in West Rogers Park, Peterson Park and Lincolnwood, yet today claims to also attract 1000 unaffiliated Jews to its programming annually.



established a community. Dallas has reached Plano; Houston, Sugarland; Atlanta, Dunwoody; Phoenix, Scottsdale and Tucson; Palo Alto reaches a whole string of cities.

The Roshei Kollel of these places have had a broader vision, beyond their own institutions, towards the development of the town as a whole, or broader. Hand in hand with this has gone a certain lack of institutional egocentricity. They have been unencumbered to invite other organizations to partner them as per the needs of the situation - Discovery, NCSY, Partners in Torah and others are typically welcomed by the local kollel¹.

Models

The Kollel was created by a coalition of organizations and individuals who felt the urgent need to vastly and rapidly expand the scope of outreach in the city, focused around a vibrant beis midrash of Torah study. The Kollel families are comprised of young, energetic men and women who are learned and steeped in Jewish tradition and values and who desire to share this with the broader community.

The Kollel is committed to standards of excellence in everything that it does. This will be reflected both in the establishment and development of a thriving Beit Midrash as well as its interfacing with community by teaching, programming and personal contact. The motto of the Kollel is contained in the clear directive to every Jew: ללמוד וללמד – to study and to teach.

While the above could be the mission statements of any outreach kollel, there is no one mold or model of kollel that can or should be imposed. Even within a particular model there are many variations. There are presently about 12 Beis Midrash Govoha Kollelim and they are as varied as the communities they service. They are not a franchise but rather different expressions which are the cumulative result of the personalities and dedications of the Roshei Kollel the community members etc².

Should a kollel be a service organization, providing manpower to help other organizations, or should it become an independent outreach organization, developing a community around it? If the former, will it be able to define its identity and vision to both itself as well as to its baal habatim? The size of the city is also a factor here. The 'Wolfson' kollel in the 13th District of Paris is involved in activities through many parts of the city and surrounding areas. It is a valuable source of manpower to many organizations. At the same time, the 13th District itself has about 30,000 Jews, and could absorb all the efforts of these avreichim and double again. Should they be focusing on their neighborhood exclusively? There is no obvious answer to this question. Daas Torah will have to be consulted in each case.

¹ Rabbi Nate Segal, Torah Umesorah

² Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, Beis Midrash Govoha's newly appointed Director of Placement



The third model is to be absorbed by or be in association with a larger body, usually a synagogue but occasionally a school¹. It takes a lot of maturity on both sides for this model to work. For a kollel is a whole institution, and essentially this means one institution being under the umbrella of another. In particular, the Rosh Kollel has to understand that the person running the umbrella institution may be less halachically passionate or less learned than he is, and yet he is going to have to communicate respect and responsiveness at all times.

Does this work in the long run? Rabbi Meizlish, who has 100 such kollelim (1,000 avreichim!) around Israel is best positioned to answer this. He places his kollelim in Yeshivot Tichoniyot, and their job is to learn night seder with the students, thereby increasing the number who go to yeshivot when they graduate. His secret, I believe is that he is a 50% partner (Mr. Zev Wolfson funded) in each kollel, that he continues to supervise the avreichim as the outside controlling body, and that the local school never sees themselves as the body actually running the project.

As for kollelim run out of shuls, these are also quite rare. Actually, the fact that most kollelim do not run out of shuls is, according to Adam Ferziger², a key factor in their attractiveness to the baal habatim. They often prefer kollel activities to synagogue based ones, finding them less threatening and more open, and not "mass Judaism" but rather a much more personalized approach. Whereas the Rabbi will get up and give a uniform sermon to the kahal, the avreich will ask him (the balabos) what *he* would like to learn and explore.

Some kollelim, like the Denver kollel, started out as a service organization, but later began to seriously consider the need to develop a community. Sometimes, a kollel is started by a community, as with several of the kollelim in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Depending on how observant the community is, the kollel will then be expected to service the local baal habatim who may even resent the kollel spending too much time on outreach, and do not give credit for the work done out of the shul. In one case, despite the outreach director of the kollel explaining patiently to the synagogue how many new members they would get a year or two down the line, the community was still opposed. The truth is that a kollel which is brought in by the synagogue should understand that to 'outwit' the baal habatim in terms of their stated intentions is not a good idea. Unless kiruv was a central goal of the baal habatim from the outset, the evolution of such a kollel to increased outreach is likely to be sluggish at best.

Kollelim in schools, although a rarity, can be very successful. In Montevideo, an avreich and four bochurim, in what started off as a Torah MiTzion project, has been fabulously successful. Perhaps this is because the school, Yavneh, has established a community around it, and the whole enterprise is considered as one big kiruv project.

Out of town Kollelim also differ in the ratio of learning to kiruv they do. There are full two-seder-a-day kollelim, those with modified two sedarim like Dallas and Palo Alto, and those with only one seder, like Atlanta³. The English speaking Ra'anana Kollel in Israel, learns iyun together in the morning, in the afternoon, the avreichim have to be in seder, but the time is used to prepare shiurim, tutor, or do their own learning.

¹ Most of the Torah MiTzion kollelim have been placed in schools. YU is also likely to place many of its kollelim-to-be in schools.

² Senior fellow at Bar-Ilan's Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research.

³See Appendix B below. Atlanta has an optional night seder as well.



Often, the kollel is servicing both the observant as well as the non-observant community. That is equivalent to running two organizations in one! Kollelim in the larger cities feel this problem more acutely¹. However, the longer a kollel is in a town, the more the demands on them to service those who are observant. Old established kollelim, like Dallas and Atlanta, are beginning to feel this problem acutely. On the one hand, this is no different to any successful kiruv organization which needs to increasingly invest in those who have returned to Torah over the years. However, a kollel, given its definition as a Torah-study institution, is better positioned and therefore under greater pressure to handle second-phase growth.

Kollelim differ in size. Lakewood and Kollel International always strove for 10-men kollelim². Ten families represents a community, and despite the seemingly impossible financial hurdle, these groups managed to pull this off consistently³. Some kollelim, like Cape Town, have started with as few as four avreichim. These are challenging from a learning point of view. If one person is late or absent, things get a bit thin. And the dynamic between the chabura must be much smoother. Four men kollelim have a higher rate of failure than larger kollelim, although this may just reflect the fact that the people who brought in the kollel were not as committed to the kollel idea than those who brought in larger groups⁴. Rabbi Yehoshua Kohl of the Valley Kollel says bluntly, that from a learning point of view, four-men chaburas are a short-term option only.

We almost always think of a kollel as an outside group from the town, but this does not have to be. In Villa Crespo, a neighborhood of Buenos Aires, Argentina, Rabbi Sacca has recruited an afternoon-evening kollel comprised of local avreichim. Of course, a city needs to be a more mature Torah-city to be able to do this. But the idea also worked in Tula, near Russia, where local professionals make up a serious learning kollel (also afternoons and nights). These “avreichim”, who started out barely reading Hebrew, jumped right in, learning mainly gemorrah, with a touch of halacha and Chumash and today learn at a level that would make any city proud.

The Kollel as an Outreach Organization

We believe that a wholistic approach to harbatzas haTorah, teaching Torah to people from all backgrounds and levels, builds a better community for all the people involved.

Rabbi Aaron Yehuda Schwab, Denver Kollel

¹ Rabbi Yehoshua Kohl, Valley Kollel

² Though some kollelim, built on the Lakewood model have always had less than ten avreichim, e.g. Pittsburgh and Denver

³ Rabbi Burstyn

⁴ Several kollelim started out smaller, for financial reasons, but later expanded, or are still in the midst of doing so. Torah Umesorah has been very helpful in helping certain kollelim like Seattle to grow to ten avreichim. Phoenix, also helped by Torah Umesorah, started as a four man kollel with the commitment to expand to 10. After three and a half years they are up to seven.



Combining both a kollel and kiruv in one has many challenges. It means that the demands on the avreich's time are from early in the morning until late at night. In addition many kollelim in bigger centers find that a number of baal habatim have difficulty understanding the idea of a kollel and kiruv combined in one. While they may be sympathetic to both ideas, they see them as separate entities. In a sense it is easier to set up such kollelim in Phoenix and Dallas than in LA or Chicago¹.

Yet, despite the challenges, there is no question that some of the outreach kollelim are amongst the most successful outreach organizations today². More than that, the ripple effect of their activities is felt in the cities they are located. Rick Probst of Discovery for example, has correlated Discovery attendances, in both quantity and quality to cities where kollelim are located³. What is the secret of their success? Is it just a function of numbers – the kollel having a whole team to do kiruv – or is the very nature of a kollel – an institution dedicated to Torah study, the major factor?

For an avreich wishing to make the transition from Jerusalem or Lakewood, an out-of-town kollel seems the ideal, nurturing place. But it is also a rough schedule to do serious learning and serious outreach – two full time jobs if you like – every day. Can you do both properly? The facts speak for themselves. Some of the most successful outreach in the States today is being done by kollelim. On the other hand, there are many kollelim, some with a good number of avreichim, who have been outshone, in purely kiruv terms, by one or two man classical outreach approaches. A quick analysis easily reveals a simple correlation between the level of investment in kiruv and the results⁴.

In this sense, a kollel is no different than a regular kiruv organization. Perhaps it can be called a kiruv organization with a large, high level staff, allowing it to reach into many areas. For example, Atlanta Kollel's 11 rabbis are all geared to different crowds (i.e. young

¹ Rabbi Yehoshua Kohl, Valley Kollel; Rabbi Zev Kahn, Chicago Community Kollel

² Take, for example the kollel in Dallas, which was formed in 1993 as a two seder kollel. Their presence and kiruv so impacted the community it transformed the face of Orthodoxy in Dallas. Dallas' outreach director, Rabbi Benzi Epstein, estimates that the kollel reaches a whopping 7,500 Jews in the town annually (about 15% of the population). They run between 30 – 40 classes per week, reaching about five hundred people. Over 500 baalei-teshuvah have come through their doors.

The kollel transformed the idea of adult education in a dramatic way. When the Kollel arrived, they knew of one adult education class going on in the town. Now every Temple, Synagogue etc. has outreach classes. There have been a few new organizations in town that were started specifically as a response to what the kollel was doing. Rabbi Epstein counts no fewer than 9 new institutions for which the kollel was directly the catalyst and/or actively involved. These include NCSY, a new mikvah, a coed high school, a Bais Yaakov high school and a Chofetz Chaim high school. Recently the kollel opened a new school, hoping for about 70 students. An overwhelming response brought 175 children for the opening semester, with over 200 kids enrolled for the coming semester.

One of their avreichim opened up a new Ashkenazi Shul, which currently has the fastest growing membership in the city. The kollel has initiated an additional two Sephardi communities.

The kollel certainly contributed to the upgrading of standards in the original community. This community hired a new and dynamic Rav for their shul, brought in a good group of serious Yeshiva University avreichim for their own kollel, some of whom teach in the morning in the high school. This pattern is typical of successful kollelim.

³ For example, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, Seattle and Denver

⁴ As we will see below, there are other factors at play.



couples, college, singles, etc.), what Rabbi Daniel Kermeier calls a range of complimentary diversity. This allows them to reach a more diverse range of people in turn.

There are many other kiruv situations where the critical mass of the kollel is a significant advantage. What are examples of kiruv which is best done as a group, i.e. the kollel as a critical number of outreach workers?

Rabbi Kermeier of Palo Alto brings an example of the power of chabura. “Shabbatons and holiday programs require that group presence - we all take on different roles in making it happen and we all work the crowd, etc. We have developed a speaker series that we are marketing to area synagogues and temples which is very exciting to them as it isn't just one speaker but a whole array of speakers on different topics.”

Kollelim have not often enough gotten involved with school-aged children. Here too, the group effect of a chabura can be very helpful. The Palo Alto Kollel runs Beit Midrash programs for some of the area schools (8th -12th grades) - the kids are split into groups led by different rabbis, each learning a piece of Gemara and giving them a taste of what real learning is all about. After this, everyone groups together and discusses some of the issues.

But a kollel is much more than a multi-staffed kiruv organization. Firstly, a kollel has a tremendous advantage when it comes to long term growth. *The kollel provides an element to spiritual growth that can be taken to many levels as the individuals grow. ... A kollel can introduce people to real learning*¹. When someone does come to learn in a kollel, the avreichim provide not just manpower, but the critical mass to give the buzz of a beis hamidrash – to set an atmosphere of learning². *When you walk into the beis medrash, someone from Atlanta stated, it gives the community a sense of warmth and unity. It is an environment in which everyone feels welcome, with a strong sense of community*³.

Finally, and perhaps most important, the kollel represents Torah in ways that other forms of kiruv may not. This in and of itself provides a certain attractive force.

Rav Shmuel Kaminitzky Shlit”a has expressed his opinion that kollelim should be characterized by their learning⁴, (and indeed all the kollelim are proud of this aspect of their daily input). This prompted one rosh kollel of an outreach kollel to say that kollelim therefore have more in common with regular kolellim than with other outreach organizations. However, there is no question that the personality profile of the outreach professional and the avreich in an outreach kollel are very similar, and the very same people often search simultaneously for jobs in both areas. In some cases what distinguishes them is age. DATA in Dallas, the Cincinnati and other kollelim like their avreichim young, while they are still at a serious stage of their Torah learning. Rabbi Fried of Dallas told me that his preferred age for an incoming avreich is 23⁵. By contrast, the preferred age for a full-time outreach position is 28 to 32.

¹ Rabbi Dani Kermeier, Palo Alto Kollel.

² Rabbi Dani Kermeier, Palo Alto Kollel.

³ Of course, the kollel is not a totally self-contained module within the community. It too requires a whole range of communal institutions to back it up – schools, kashrus, mikvah and shuls. What the kollelim have often done is to help build up these institutions and raise their standards, as we discuss elsewhere.

⁴ For example at the (Mid)-West Coast Kollel convention, Tamuz 5762 (July, 2002)

⁵ Generally, the ceiling for an out of town kollel is 30 years of age or three children.



What of the power of learning itself to effect outreach? Did not Rav Yisrael Salanter say that a person who is learning Torah [in Lithuania] will influence someone in Paris to do kiruv? Would this not be a כל שכן if one were learning in the city itself? While this is absolutely true, Rav Aaron Leib Shteinman points out that that very same Rav Yisroel went himself to Paris to do kiruv. Clearly the kiruv-value of direct kiruv, of teaching Torah to someone directly, is far greater than the learning. Two kollelim, following two models, were established in Budapest, Hungary. First a group of avreichim under Rabbi Lajos went out for a year and just sat and learned Torah without any outreach. We are not able to identify the people today who were impacted by that kollel, though we can never know what subtle changes have taken place. A second initiative, under Rabbi Zeev Paskesz, studies and does outreach. Their impact is far easier to discern.

But nor is there any doubt that the learning impacts on the Torah-sensitivity of the city as well, and that usually even institutions that are more on the periphery of Orthodoxy raise their standards as a result of the kollel coming to town¹. These factors must also be counted as part of the kiruv itself. How else to explain the increasing enthusiasm of baal habatim around the world for the idea of Torah learning lishmah², and asking for such a thing in their own city.

But, the enthusiasm for Torah does not stop with the frum baal habatim: Once Torah is being studied in a city, the atmosphere of the community changes. The very atoms, molecules and fabric of the community become rearranged. A thirst for Torah is created. The kollel's success, however, has less to do with kiruv strategies or creative programming and more to do with the inherent power of Torah. An example of this phenomenon is the Chicago Community Kollel, where one man who had never set foot in the kollel started learning with a chavruta in his house. "Everyone in town is learning," he declared to a friend. "Let's do it too."³

Halachic Standards

A kollel is not just like any other outreach organization. A kollel represents Torah standards in that city. Given that most cities do not have a yeshiva, they are the model of how a community of bnei Torah live. In a sense, they are more of an example than the community rabbi, whose example is vital but is also expected as a part of his role. Therefore, people often say, "Well, he's the rabbi. Of course he has to do that. But I am not a rabbi!" Although the avreichim are also "rabbis", they are more of a challenge to people and their life-styles, by the very lives they live. Therefore, they have to set the highest halachic standards in kiruv rechokim as well. If kiruv rechokim is pikuach nefesh, then a kollel like any other

¹ As wherever a community kollel is successful, the other Jewish entities in the community feel pressure to increase and upgrade their own Jewish services, if for no other reason than to compete, and not look ignorant or inept. Interestingly, this applies not only to the Orthodox institutions in the town, but also to the Reform, Conservative and J. C. C. As a result of these community kollelim, Jewish interest in general is raised throughout the community as a whole.

² Without ever abandoning the principle of Lilmod al Menas Lelamed

³ Rabbi Yaakov Feitman, Jewish Action, Winter, 2002, quoting Rabbi Moshe Francis



organization will have its share of sheas hedechaks and kulahs. But at the same time, the avreichim must know that part of their kiruv is the very standards they set, if this is done an inspiring way.

The Whitefield kollel in Manchester came up with an interesting solution to address this issue. It does all of its outreach under the banner of a different organization, the Forum. For different reasons¹, the Phoenix Community Kollel started an Aish HaTorah in their city (staffed by the avreichim) to undertake some of the kiruv challenges in the city. In both cases, the kollel remained closely identified with its sister organization and in neither case was the new framework operated according to any dilution of halachic standards. The same goes for the Chicago Community Kollel, who, when they established a new Torah-learning center in Northbrook, did it under a different name². (The rest of their outreach remains under the Kollel name, however³.) The motivations of each example differs – but the model is the same⁴.

Rabbi Yehoshua Kohl, of the Valley Kollel has pointed to two examples of the higher halachic standards demanded of a kollel. Firstly, Rav Shmuel Kaminetsky Shlitah paskened that they should not use the eiruv, though he made it clear that this was a higher standard and not a reflection of his opinion of the eiruv overall⁵.

On another occasion, he did not allow the kollel to enter the greater LA Synagogue softball competition. The kollel had seen this as a great kiruv opportunity, and HaRav Shmuel Shlit" a had said that the avreichim could play, but they shouldn't field a specific kollel team.

The effect of the kollel setting these higher halachic standards is to improve the standards in the whole town. This is affected in two ways. Firstly, the kollel models a standard which impacts on the frum baal habatim and automatically sets the standard for those whom they mekarev. The presence of the kollel and the children and families offer living examples of Torah life and by way of their participation upgrade the very fabric of the existing Torah institutions⁶.

Secondly, the kollel sometimes pushes for changes in the halachic standards set by the local rabbinate. This is always tricky. The rosh kollel must work with the local Rabbi – in a way that is respectful and careful – to implement change. For example the ideal way to deal with a pasul eruv issue is not by exclaiming that you cannot carry there. In one instance of a

¹ The Phoenix Community Kollel was motivated by the need to provide certain approaches to kiruv for which Aish HaTorah was uniquely suited.

² Since they were establishing a whole new outreach community, and it would be appropriate that this community would have its own standards, HaRav Shmuel Kaminetzky Shlit" a and HaRav Matisyahu Solomon Shlit" a suggested that this community be run as a semi-autonomous entity.

³ Rabbi Yehoshua Karsh and Rabbi Zeev Kahn wear two hats in this respect. They (Rabbi Karsh in particular) continue to develop their learning center in Northbrook within its own framework, as well as doing other kiruv under the kollel name.

⁴ In Mexico City, one of the avreichim of the Ashkenazi Kollel, Rabbi Raziel Pelotovsky has co-opted the two Davidson brothers to make an independent kiruv organization in a different part of town. However, the reasons for this are not relevant to the discussion here.

⁵ HaRav Shmuel Shlit" a allowed the wives to use the eiruv because of the great imposition this would otherwise cause and because failure to do so would significantly impact on their ability to fulfill their mandate.

⁶ Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, Beis Midrash Govoha.



successful resolution of this very issue, the kollel, instead of declaring ‘we won’t carry’, went to the rabbi and offered to make *his* eiruv kosher. They then made sure that it was the rabbi who got the credit for this.¹

The Kollel as a Catalyst for Other Institutions in the City

A good analogy to a community kollel would be an aircraft carrier – the vessel is a microcosm of an army base uprooted and transplanted in another location.

Rabbi Burstyn, Kollel International

Kollelim have been a catalyst for hundreds of new institutions in their towns, schools, yeshivas, kiruv organizations and many others. Sometimes the kollel was directly involved, as in the new communities develop by the Atlanta Kollel or Plano by Dallas, sometimes, this has been in the form of other institutions such as TORCH of Houston which created a night Yeshiva. Sometimes this has been through their alumni and sometimes as an indirect result of the presence of a group of bnei Torah and their need to be serviced. Rabbi Yaakov Feitman² describes the case of the Boston Community Kollel: *Boston is another city which has been transformed since the founding of its kollel 12 years ago. Under the leadership of Rabbi Naftoly Bier, the kollel boasts the participation of over 500 university students annually including many from Harvard and Boston University. The kollel is also responsible for the founding of a Beit Yaakov school for girls, a mesivta high school for boys as well as outreach to the nearby communities of Sharon, Newton and Malden.*

Besides being a catalyst for new institutions, community kollelim have often caused positive change in existing ones. Their kids join local schools and, as a result they ultimately become involved in the community’s chinuch³. Many of their wives (and eventually some of them) take positions in these schools. They influence the kashrus level⁴, and, in general are a much more knowledgeable “consumer” of Yiddishkeit in the community.

A Community Kollel serves to create a new base of quality and authentic Yiddishkeit in the city ... and the city tends to gravitate towards them. (The local Rabbi will automatically think “What are the guys in the kollel going to say about this?” when making

¹ Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, Beis Midrash Govoha

² Jewish Action, Winter, 2002

³ Rabbi Moshe Francis points out that the very presence of such kids from good, Torah families serves to raise the level of the schools.

⁴ Rabbi Moshe Francis gives an example of this in Chicago: When the kollel came to the city the level of kashrus was nowhere at the level that it is today. A store selling meat would sell different levels of meat, all sliced on the same machine. The level of the mashgichim was overall far lower than today. The kollel did not actively campaign to change the level of kashrus, though it avoided buying from certain stores. One proprietor of a take-home-food store said, I want to have a store which the kollel uses as well and decided to change the whole level of the store.



decisions, etc.) and many aspects of the town's functionality is brought up to the kollel's level.

A Community kollel can attract more learned, knowledgeable, from people to the town, – because they now have a base with whom to associate. For example, a rebbe would faster go to a town with a community kollel – he can learn there as well¹.

Rabbi Nate Segal regards this ability to positively impact on other institutions in the city as a possible litmus test for the kollel. *Ultimately the kollel has to change the town. If five years later the day school is still weak but the kollel has a good, learning beis hamidrash and has mekareved many people, is that success or failure?*

The Kollel as a Springboard for New Manpower in the Community

There is another, important role which out of town kollelim play, and that is as a ready supply of manpower for the city. Certain kollelim, like the Atlanta Kollel, are intended for long term stays, but others, like the Cincinnati Kollel, were built on a three year turnover system for the avreichim². But, in the longer term, all the kollelim help seed a community with highly educated religious leaders. Participating communities often hire kollel scholars to serve as their rabbis (Cape Town), teachers (YOLA) and kashrus administrators (Dallas and Chicago). A significant number of kollel fellows settle in the long term in their host communities and come to play important roles in education, spiritual guidance, and moral leadership³. Many avreichim have assumed the responsibility as Rosh Kollel for similar pioneering ventures. Boston Kollel has provided Roshei Kollel for Miami and Denver; Miami for Ottawa and Philadelphia; Chicago for Olney, Maryland⁴. Aside for the fertile training ground these community kollels provide, they allow the avreich time to build up confidence in himself, and a deepened sense of the importance and success of the kollel system.

Although not every avreich has become a leader, the community kollelim have graduated 100's of avreichim to become Klei Kodesh. Consider the Lakewood kollel in LA. Since its inception 36 avreichim have stayed on in LA to become Klei Kodesh. Over the years the entire face of the community changed. Young people came back and married bnei and bnos Torah and built Torah homes near their parents – something that was previously unheard of. The intellectual investment has repaid itself many times over in reversing the

¹ Rabbi Burstyn, Kollel International

² Rabbi Moshe Francis says of the Chicago Community Kollel: The mutual commitment is for 3 years, though it is very rare for anyone to be told to leave, provided that he is learning very well. There have been those who have learned for 12 years, and they have been holding in their learning just as well as when they came in. Most yungerleit realize on their own when they are becoming less productive in their learning. The average stay is 4 – 5 years. Not a high turnover, yet some new blood which energizes the community. Even those who leave, usually stay in the city and usually come to the kollel for at least one seder.

³ Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, Beis Midrash Govoha

⁴ In addition a Chicago alumnus has established a Choshen Mishpat kollel in the community.



from brain drain¹. Of course, whether the graduates stay in the community (as most do), or whether they take up positions in other towns, the net gain for American Jewry is clear².

In its over 23 years of existence, the Chicago Community Kollel has graduated 14 principals and/or *rebbeim* to the Chicago community in teaching or other chinuch positions and six in rabbinical positions. Three are Roshei Yeshiva or Roshei Kollel. A further 8 are in chinuch in other towns, two are in full-time kiruv and one is an editor of the Artscroll Gemorrah³. Many of the wives have also achieved significance, women like Mrs. Pearl Gross, a very highly regarded 8th grade teacher, and Mrs. Miriam Kamenetzky, who plays a significant role in the elementary school.

Sometimes, the kollel graduate lands out quite far from the original city. Rabbi Twersky, graduated from the LA Lakewood Kollel to be a mechanech in Skokie Yeshiva, Chicago. But the idea is the same.

Many avreichim have told me that this was their *kavanah lechatchila*. For them, the outreach kollel is like a half-way house, a transition between their full time learning framework and their going out to becoming klei kodesh.

There have also been numerous cases of avreichim who have gone to a particular town to go straight into Klei Kodesh positions, but restricted their search for such positions to a town which had a kollel. We have yet to see any more than a handful of baal habatim doing the same, though the case of Waterbury seems to have created a new awareness of the possibilities of such a thing happening on a broader scale.

Not every kollel graduate goes out to become involved in klei kodesh. A good number become baal habatim. But this too is a great benefit to the city. The fact that the avreich feels an attachment to the ba'alei batim with whom he has been learning and davening, and to the community, and he goes into a business or profession there, further strengthens that community with the addition of ba'alei batim who are talmidei chachomim. A Ben Torah who is a businessman or professional in one sense makes a profound impression on other laymen in a way that Klei Kodesh do not, since his demeanor and language are not expected in the world of business. Such B'nei Torah can be powerful people in the kiruv process. And the same holds true for the wives of avreichim⁴.

Until recently, the pay scale of kollelim ensured that, as the family grew, the financial pressures would ensure that this transition took place. However, recently, the salaries in outreach kollelim have become competitive with regular Klei Kodesh salaries in those towns. Some like, Rabbi Fasman of the LA Lakewood Kollel, see this as a negative development⁵. Others see it as a positive trend, especially where the kollel is looking to grow up together, to stay as a chaburah for a long time.

¹ Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, Beis Midrash Govoha

² Consider Rabbi Ari Medetsky, who became principle of Ohr Reuven, Monsey, and Rabbi Eli Speiser, who became principal of Yeshiva Elementary School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Both are graduates of the Chicago Community Kollel.

³ See Appendix C for a full listing of the Chicago Community Kollel - List Of Alumni

⁴ Rabbi Moshe Efros, Ner LeElef

⁵ He feels that it will discourage the avreichim from graduating out of the kollel into broader Klei Kodesh positions in the city.



Even where the kollel works on a turnover basis, it is important that the avreichim feel themselves invested in the community on a longer term basis, and that their first attempt will be to stay in the community if possible. The baal habatim will be quite sensitive to this point and it may even compromise their commitment to the kollel if they pick up that the avreichim do not see any future for themselves in the community¹.

The Kiruv Contribution of the Lakewood-Type Community Kollel

We have shown that outreach kollels are winners when it comes to kiruv, but it remains to be evaluated what the kiruv contribution is of those community kollelim that are not encouraging their avreichim to do outreach or are not claiming that kiruv is their primary goal. It is interesting to take a closer look at the Chicago Community Kollel, just because the avreichim are discouraged from initially getting involved with outreach. Rabbi Zucker, the internal Rosh Kollel, feels that kiruv is so enticing, that, if they will do it prematurely, they will get too involved at the expense of the learning².

The issue is not the fabulous contribution that this kollel (and others like it in LA, Toronto and elsewhere) has made to its communities. We know now, 23 years later, that the effect of this model of kollel has been very dramatic. People who have left the city to come back after a few years describe how it is a totally different community most obvious in terms of the numbers of baal habatim learning every night, and the chashivus given to such learning³. Most avreichim have stayed, because the town was large enough to accommodate them and their chinuch needs, and some of them started other kollelim⁴ and institutions in turn or became heads of existing institutions.

As we remarked above, all community kollelim have provided extensive manpower to the community, and have been a catalyst for the upgrading of existing schools and other communal structures in the community. Many kollelim have started new institutions

¹ Rabbi Yehoshua Kohl, Valley Kollel

² However, Rabbi Moshe Francis reports there are always one or two yungerleit who gravitate to kiruv, who have an affinity for it and who like doing it. They will go to an outreach center, and do it. They will be allowed to go out to the community at night and over the weekend. The avreichim are broad minded and are machshiv it – just not at this stage of their lives.

³ When the kollel came to the city, there was not much learning happening in the city - almost all the shuls were closed at night. Because of the influence of the kollel, both directly and indirectly, almost every shul today runs nightly learning programs. 23 years ago, Rabbi Francis began to give the 3rd Daf Yomi shiur in the city. Today, there are 25 or more such shiurim. 23 years ago, an askan who did no learning was highly respected on the basis of his communal work alone. Today, a modicum of learning is considered an essential ingredient to the askan's package. (Rabbi Moshe Francis)

An example of the direct contribution of the kollel to this is its optional (for the avreichim) kollel 'boker' program in two different locations, at Peterson Park and the kollel itself. These are from 6:00-7:00AM. They are there to give the baal habatim an opportunity to learn beiyun bechaburah, in a Yeshiva type learning setting.

⁴ For example, Rabbi Zev Cohen, today a posek, has started his own Choshen Mishpat kollel.



themselves. A significant number have started new communities and quite a few have taken a broader responsibility for not only their own cities, but for the entire surrounding areas.

But what of its contribution to kiruv rechokim? It is interesting that, the Chicago Kollel was no exception in following the general broader vision of kollellim, like others, i.e. that their mission is to serve the whole Chicago community. In the word of Rabbi Moshe Francis, *We want to do outreach and we want to do it on an ambitious scale but it is primarily the domain of our outreach division as opposed to the yungerleit.*

From the outset, the kollel hired a full-time outreach person, Rabbi Chaim Gross; today the kollel has a full-time outreach staff of 3¹. Through these efforts, this kollel ranks amongst those others who have started a new Torah-learning center (in Northbrook). Two of its alumni² started a new kiruv organization in the town, the Chicago Torah Network.

Now let us look at an even more difficult example, kiruv wise, the Toronto Community Kollel³. The achievements of this kollel are impressive. *The Toronto kollel, under the leadership of Rabbi Shlomo Miller, has influenced thousands of lives in its 34 years of operation. It has been instrumental in the opening of five yeshivot, five mesivtot and even spawned another kollel last year. The rosh kollel himself, by virtue of his vast scholarship and endearing personality, has made the kollel the central address for all communal questions⁴.*

Yet, unlike the Chicago kollel, this kollel has no outreach division whatsoever⁵. Unlike the LA Kollel, there is Rabbi Baruch Graden and his extensive outreach to Israelis in the city. Yet, one of the leading kiruv people in the city, Rabbi Shlomo Noach Mandel, is of the belief that the kollel provided the communal infrastructure, Torah standards and overall Torah context in which the kiruv in the town was later able to take place. We will never be able to draw a straight line between Aish HaTorah, Toronto, or the Bayit Shul or the efforts of Rabbi Ezriel Sitzer in Richmond Hill and the kollel. But to the Rabbi Mandels of this world, it is clear as a bell that the latter could not have taken place without the former.

Could these kollelim have done more kiruv? The answer will always be yes. But this misses the point. The question has to be: “From a kiruv perspective, is the model of these kollelim to come into a fairly large frum area and, by transforming that frum area into a makom Torah, to create a strong ripple effect in concentric circles outwards to the non-observant as well – is that a successful model?” The answer, to this in my opinion, is a resounding yes.

¹ Rabbi Chaim Gross was succeeded by Rabbi Shmuel Kurtz. Rabbi Yehoshua Karsh eventually took over that position and was later joined by Rabbi Zev Kahn and later an administrative assistant.

² Rabbis Doni Deutsch and Moshe Katz

³ The kollel has certainly been quite central in transforming the city into a major Torah center.

⁴ Rabbi Yaakov Feitman, Jewish Action, Winter, 2002

⁵ This is not to say that, over the years, the avreichim, or members of the hanhala of their own accord, have not engaged in outreach. Rabbi Moshe Rivlin z”l, former executive director of the Kollel used to organize a class given on Sunday morning by the other Rosh Kollel, Rabbi Hirshman, for non-frum people. Rabbi Rivlin himself used to give classes for non-frum people and the Toronto kollel does send a representative each year to the AJOP convention, another sign of some interest in outreach.



The Perception of Kollel Families by the Community

Besides taking an active interest and involvement in the personal lives of the community¹, Kollelim have needed to take an active interest in what is happening in their towns, and it is not always easy to maintain a position of neutrality. In addition, most kollelim are engaged in active fundraising in their town. There will always be those who are bothered by the price tag the kollel comes with, and others who have yet to appreciate the value of the learning the avreichim do for themselves. One baal habayis who had learned in good yeshivos told me: “Of course I want the avreichim to learn. But they have to learn *beshaa shelo yom velo layla*. When do you think I get my learning in?”

Interestingly, where the ‘Kollel rabbi’ is in his early to mid-twenties, he is respected in a different way than the community rabbi. He is more of a rabbi-buddy, often referred to by his first name. In this respect, he lacks the kind of formal ‘rabbinic respect’ of the community rabbi. (A community rabbi is never referred to by his first name.) His relationship with the community involves a certain casualness and familiarity². However, in kollelim where the average age is higher, like Atlanta, this distinction does not appear to exist.

Yet, this does not mean that the avreich is not respected. The source of this respect is the recognition of a superior level of scholarship and the authenticity of Torah which he represents and the modeling of Torah which he provides. And this recognition often cuts across a diverse range of Jews in the city, be they unaffiliated, Reform, Conservative or Orthodox³.

This modeling for the community extends to the wives of the avreichim as well. They too are being viewed as representing not just the kollel, but Orthodoxy in general, be it while they are shopping or walking with their children in the street.

It is also much more possible for ‘kollel rabbis’ [than community rabbis] to stay out of politics and the type of decisions which prove to be divisive. [To some degree,] community rabbis are involved in so many other facets of community life and many of those decisions end up rubbing some people the wrong way therefore they are subject to the scrutiny of the community more than kollel rabbis. The kollel is singularly focused on Torah and spreading it; everyone knows that and that is what they appreciate⁴.

It is often the peripherally Orthodox rather than the non-observant, who are the most threatened by a kollel's presence, either because they perceive the avreichim as being too religious and extreme for them, or because the whole idea of kollel goes against their hashkafah. But kollelim have faced, and risen to such challenges. Where enough effort was

¹ Avreichim usually get involved in the social needs of the community, Bikur Cholim, Kiruv, Eiruv, Kosher products, whatever that particular town needs. In addition the wives of the kollel fellows meet with and interact with even the most secular people in the community, in the schools, at their jobs, in the grocery and make a point of building relationships – something the women are better positioned for – as they are usually viewed as less confrontational and less threatening. (Rabbi Yaakov Shulman)

² Rabbi Yehoshua Kohl, Valley Kollel. The kollelim themselves often project a certain image of their avreichim. For example, Denver has business cards for each avreich calling them a Kollel fellow.

³ Rabbi Dani Kermeier, Palo Alto Kollel

⁴ Rabbi Dani Kermeier, Palo Alto Kollel



made to communicate their Ahavas Yisroel, to promote good relations with the other institutions in town and to show that they are accepting of everyone, opposition has usually, though not always been overcome.

Overall, the ties the kollel avreichim create with the community usually run very personal and deep. When avreichim are ready to leave kollel for whatever personal reason, the baal habatim usually seek to find them jobs as klei kodesh in the community or even local business (if that is what they want to do) rather than have them leave the community and seek work elsewhere. In these capacities they continue to influence and build the community by their presence and that of their children¹.

Why Kollels Failed?

The stakes of a failed kollel are high. Reb Elya Svei is of the opinion that it is never worth opening any Torah institution which will later have to be closed, because of the chillul Hash-m involved. It is sobering to witness the extensive run-up development (prior to the kollel going out) by the likes of a Rabbi Nate Segal or Lakewood.

In fact, it is common to underestimate the complexity of making a kollel. It is sobering to witness the number of failed kollelim, in Montreal, Miami, Memphis, Edmington, Rio, San Antonio, Budapest and elsewhere. There were many other initiatives where enormous energies were put into a stillborn effort. The idea that all you need is money in hand to go out, recruit a rosh kollel and four to ten families and you have your instant kollel is both naïve and dangerous.

Some of the kollelim seemed to have failed in part or in whole because of money², but this is not the most common reason for failure. Where there has been a dynamic rosh kollel at the helm, the finances have usually been found³. Politics or interpersonal tensions, sometimes between members of the chabura and sometimes between the chabura and outside force have also taken their toll. Where there have been two roshei kollel, sometimes they did not compliment each other, and sometimes they have come to the town with differing concepts of what their respective roles should be⁴.

Sometimes conflicts have arisen when the expectations of the local baal habatim were not met. Sometimes these expectations were unrealistic to begin with. Sometimes it was not clear what the relation between the baal habatim and the rosh kollel ought to have been –

¹ Rabbi Moshe Efros, Ner LeElef

² Rabbi Zvi Holland reminded us of the mesorah that no Torah mosad ever closed because of money. The real reason, even where there are financial problems, lies elsewhere, in machlokes, impropriety or other. The financial difficulties are just a reflection of this. However, there is no question that many roshei kollel have found the ongoing financial burden tiresome to the point where they have questioned whether this is what they want to be doing with their lives.

³ Dr. Adam Ferziger, senior fellow at Bar-Ilan's Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research.

⁴ Rabbi Moshe Francis. He further stated that the respective roles of the roshei kollel must be put in writing.



it was not clear who should be making the decisions. Sometimes a power struggle developed and sometimes one or more community rabbis felt threatened by the arrival of the kollel¹.

Many of these problems could be mitigated if the roshei kollel had the right skills and if they were adequately counseled beforehand². Many roshei kollel go into their new situation with little or no counseling, feeling that they had the right instincts to get it right. Often they fail to correctly read the sensitivities and needs of the local community. Lack of consultation with people experienced in community affairs is based on a dangerous oversimplification of the problems involved³.

One of the most frequent reasons for failure has been the unmet expectations of the baal habatim. A kollel costs a lot of money. Baal habatim feel that, if they are pouring in these huge sums, they want to see results, and fast. They may tolerate or even understand the learning, but this is not the main thing for them. What they mean by results is outreach, and that is something which takes time. (Ironically, some kollelim that were brought in by frum baal habatim had just the opposite problem. The baal habatim resented the kollel doing outreach instead of servicing them.)

Upon arrival in a town, the headspace of the avreichim is often to settle in, start learning and then begin the outreach. It takes time to get your kids into school, rent an apartment and find out how to get to the local grocery store. Two monthly pay-checks later, the baal habatim are furious. Add to that the fact that many avreichim arrive in a city a little raw in some of their professional skills and interpersonal niceties, and that they sometimes are the source of significant culture shock to the city and it is not difficult to see how some baal habatim quickly demonize the avreichim. A downward spiral can so easily set in.

We have found that many problems are avoided when a clear time-table is explicitly spelled out in advance.

Is a Kollel Always Good for a Town?

There is a mistaken idea that every town is always ready, any time, to absorb an outreach kollel. Many people are too ready to regard the kollel as a catch-all solution for all their problems⁴. The stated purpose of the kollel may be varied: to strengthen the day school, to bring in new blood into the town and its institutions, to have the wives of the avreichim as teachers, to have a center of learning, to do outreach, to prevent the ‘frum-drain’ etc. These motivations have to be looked at closely to assess their match, as the challenge, with the kollel, as the solution⁵.

¹ Rabbi Moshe Francis, Chicago Community Kollel

² The list of those individuals and organizations who have been involved with such preparation is too long to place here, but they are reflected in many of the names whose opinions we have quoted throughout this piece. In addition, Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky’s Maor program has also invested much time in preparing Roshei Kollelim.

³ Rabbi Moshe Francis, Chicago Community Kollel

⁴ Rabbi Nate Segal, Torah Umesorah

⁵ *ibid*



While theoretically every town could always benefit from a group of avreichim who are sitting and learning Torah, things have not always been so easy. But an outreach kollel involves other elements as well. A kollel provides an intensive concentration of high quality manpower, impacting on a town. It is a significant institution from the very outset. The expectations are high, the financial requirements are high, and many factors have to be in place before a kollel can enter the town.

Rabbi Nate Segal¹, a veteran of establishing kollelim, says that it is hard to come up with a general set of rules to say which town is ripe for what and when. Because of the cost of maintaining a kollel, it sometimes can drain the finances away from other institutions in the city, causing not only competition for limited financial resources, but sometimes a net loss to the city. Sometimes it would have been better for a town to have taken just one or two avreichim instead of a whole kollel, at least until a much later stage in the development of that town.

On the other hand, there are certain towns where the failure to start a kollel will mean that, in Torah terms, there will simply not be a town ten years down the line. In such cases, the extra financial strain on other institutions would be worth it².

In the end, each town is different, and it really does require a thorough outside expert assessment in consultation with Daas Torah, to come up with the right formula. The baal habatim or local rabbi must be open to a reassessment of their initial views, the enthusiasm for which is sometimes blinding³.

The traditional Lakewood Kollel has done best where there was a fairly large observant community to begin with. Even if the kollel plans on doing substantive outreach, the readiness factor of the town would be assessed by the potential impact on the observant community, rather than the broader community.

It is far more difficult to assess the readiness factor when it comes to outreach oriented community kollelim. A real study of the unaffiliated population in question must be conducted, and meetings held with the community leaders (Conservative, Reform, Federation, Hillel, etc.) to really gain an appreciation of what the challenges may be⁴. It is often impossible to achieve across the board consensus within this broader community. At the same time there must be a good core of local interest from within the community. This issue recently came to light when strong consideration was given to establishing a kollel in San Francisco. Although there were interested individuals, there would have been no community to receive this kollel and the hope was that some sort of community could be built completely from scratch.

Against this core of support, potential opposition needs to be measured. Sadly, the strongest opposition to a new kollel often comes from within our own Orthodox ranks. This includes other organizations that often suddenly remember that they had had this idea first, and want to keep the territory clean of other kollel initiatives so that they can make theirs at some stage in the future. Experience has shown that they rarely do. Other organizations fear the sapping of their financial reserves, or are simply worried about being outshone.

¹ Head of Torah Umesorah's Community Development Division.

² Rabbi Nate Segal, Torah Umesorah

³ Rabbi Nate Segal

⁴ Rabbi Daniel Kermeier of the Palo Alto Kollel



Sometimes the opposition is ideological – baal habatim in the town wanted a different hashkafa-orientation coming in or have stereotypical, negative images of who these avreichim are.

Conspiracy theories in the town may abound, especially if the kollel is associated with a broader umbrella. It is always far better to stress that this is a local initiative, here to service the community. Rabbi Joey Felsen of Palo Alto reports how a local reporter wrote up a sympathetic article about their kollel. But the reporter found the kollel listed under AJOP and reported that this was part of a broader initiative. Some of the value of the article was certainly undermined by the reporting of this information¹.

It is hard to give a precise description of the minimum infrastructure which needs to be in place – mikveh, eiruv, what kind of chinuch, etc. before a kollel can come to a town. Rabbi Holland (Phoenix) is of the opinion that while the town does not need all of this as a part of the welcoming mat, they do need to be at the point where they are ready for the building of this infrastructure triggered by the arrival of the kollel. The avreichim are going to push for such things, but they will need the broader support and participation of the community to make it happen.

Clearly, a kollel cannot be the first institution in town. I have never known a kollel to go into a town where there was not first at least shul and a mikveh. Usually, the shul had been around for a long time, and almost always the rabbi of the shul was enthusiastic to help. There is definitely a higher incidence of failure in kollelim that were brought in too early by an outreach-community rabbi, i.e. in the first few years of his position.

There is no one check list that one can tick off to determine the overall readiness factor of any town for a kollel. However, please see note² below for an excellent overview by Rabbi Yaakov Shulman of four basic categories of towns in this regard.

¹ Rabbi Zvi Holland of the Phoenix Community Kollel reported a similar incident.

² Towns and cities can be graded on their level of Jewish affiliation/observance and vitality according to the following categories.

A: A community with a vital Jewish communal life, can support and has the full spectrum of stable and thriving Jewish institutions. This type of community would be the SOURCE for avreichim who will join community kollelim. (It would generally have multiple educational systems [choices] boys and girls HS etc.) A Kollel there would be an added Community resource generally further strengthening the frum community and creating waves and ripples in the surrounding communities

B: A town with some Jewish communal life, some Jewish institutions, but not the full gamut of communal institutions (E.g. one elementary school system, a boys or girls HS but not both etc.), enough to support a complete, thriving and growing community. This type of community is a good location for a community kollel, which will stabilize the existing community and stop the brain-drain, attracting young families to settle there. They will often welcome and support the Kollel. The Kollel can contribute significantly to the community's growth and attraction to other young Jewish couples/families but the community is not very needy and may "outgrow" the kollel quickly.

C: A community with very basic Jewish communal life, may need development work to enable a Kollel to thrive and is essentially lacking the infrastructure to attract and make young families comfortable – or even to appreciate the value it brings. However the potential for the kollel's contribution is vast, hopefully lasting and will upgrade every aspect of the community's Jewish functionality and attraction for other Jews.

D: A community with nearly no Jewish community life. It may be a wonderful opportunity and the ultimate challenge for the kollel, but is generally not yet ready for or capable of supporting the Kollel. It will require work on the part of the existing Kiruv personnel to make the community ready for the Kollel. The ability of the



How to Start a New Kollel

We are not attempting a how-to manual here, and at best we can give a few pointers in the paragraphs below. Making a kollel is a tricky business and it is best to solicit the help of one of the experienced ‘kollel-makers’. HaRav Shmuel Kamenetzky Shlit”a is the Daas Torah for tens of kollelim of all shapes and sizes, though all of the recognized Roshei Yeshiva have experience in this area. Rabbi Nate Segal of Torah Umesorah is a giant figure in this area. Rabbi Moshe Francis also has vast experience for the Lakewood type model as does Rabbi Fruchthandler, Rabbi Fasman and others¹. Rabbi Segal cautions that the local variables of each city is so significant that it may be misleading to set out any rules of thumb.

It's often critical for the Rav of the town to drive the establishment of a community kollel, and in the smaller Jewish communities, he often best understands what the community needs, how the kollel should be structured and what type of avreichim will be most likely to succeed in his community².

Finances

It takes at two to five years from the idea stage before a kollel is actually developed in a new location. False expectations of a ‘quick-fix’ often lead to impatience on the part of the baal habatim which could have been avoided had a realistic time-table been laid out to begin with. On the other hand, some of those very same baal habatim, faced with the looming realities of the finances, sometimes slow things down towards the end, sometimes for years at a time³.

The community’s readiness to accept and to finance the kollel has to be assessed not only for the initial period of time, but for the period after the seed funding runs out. Some seed funding often comes from the outside and this money can be very seductive. But outside financing is usually only short-term. Many kollelim hit their financial crisis in the third and fourth year when their budgets (now without the seed money) double overnight⁴.

Long-term sustainability can only come from within the community. One has to project that, at the end of the seed funding period, there will be enough interest generated within the community to continue the financing from within. Of course, the community has to have the means for this at the outset⁵. Some kollelim are financed by one large donor. This too is dangerous, and requires careful consideration at the outset⁶. Big donors, who often are

Kollel to succeed depends on many factors, especially in this environment, such as the interest of the community in supporting the Kollel, the proximity to and attractiveness for other Jewish couples/families.

¹ Rabbis Yaakov Shulman, Dovid Refson, Moshe Efros, Shi Milikowsky, Dovid Merkin, and Raphael Butler all have had significant exposure to kollelim and their issues.

² Rabbi Moshe Efros, Ner LeElef

³ Rabbi Nate Segal, Torah Umesorah

⁴ Rabbi Nate Segal, Torah Umesorah

⁵ Rabbi Moshe Francis, Chicago Community Kollel

⁶ Rabbi Moshe Francis, Chicago Community Kollel



quite sincere about their initial commitment, do not always have the money come delivery time¹.

Size

This relates to a second issue, the size of the kollel. The size of the kollel has to be related to the financial resources of that community. A smaller community cannot consider a large 10 man kollel². Given the need for a longer term view of the finances, Rabbi Nate Segal suggests that many towns start off their kollel too big. There is no reason why a kollel cannot start off with four avreichim, and add two avreichim every year or every second year until they reach the right size³. There is no point starting off too big and then having to downsize or collapse altogether.

Kollel Salaries

Other kollelim have come up with a different solution to the finances – pay the avreichim less than they need. This is as disingenuous as it is cruel. Wives of avreichim who cannot afford their basic necessities, couples who can never afford to invite guests, tension in the home because of the financial stress are all consequences of baal habatim living comfortably and saying blithely that the avreichim should dedicate themselves to the Jewish nation without bread on the table. In these cases, it is usually the wife who suffers most. It is her basic needs that go unmet in an environment that is lonely and without the normal support structure. It is she who is deprived of doing any kiruv by not being able to afford guests. Often this means feelings of isolation, hopelessness and envy at her husband who is able to toddle off to do his kiruv under the budget of the official kollel activities⁴.

Local Interest and Support

Besides the finances, personal relationships with the key players need to be developed. Everything from housing to potential jobs for the kollel wives needs to be researched⁵.

Sometimes, especially where the kollel is being initiated by a local rabbi and not the baal habatim, further interest needs to be generated first. An excellent way of doing this is through Torah Umesorah's SEED. SEED of Torah Umesorah has often been the 'seeding' for a future kollel. Mr. Avi Shulman was the first to see how the interest in Torah learning generated by a summer program could develop into a request for a kollel. Begun in 1974,

¹ Rabbi Nate Segal, Torah Umesorah

² Rabbi Moshe Francis, Chicago Community Kollel

³ This will also help to maintain an adequate replenishment rate. Otherwise, the kollel can find themselves with almost a complete turnover at a certain point in time. (Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, Beis Midrash Govoha)

⁴ Rabbi Nate Segal, Torah Umesorah

⁵ Rabi Yaakov Shulman, Beis Midrash Govoha. The wives of the avreichim will often teach in the schools, but may also take other jobs or open businesses. The initial research has to be reviewed for compatibility with the actual chabura after they are chosen.



SEED programs were the harbinger for tens of community kollelim. The Minneapolis Kollel out of Rabbi Moshe Tuvia Lief's community is such an example, after SEED was there three summers in a row¹.

Community or Outreach Model

The type of kollel has to be a good fit for that type of community – is it going to be more learning oriented or outreach oriented. A mismatch will create considerable tension². We have addressed this elsewhere.

Selection of the Rosh Chabura

The recruitment stage then begins. Novice kollel-builders often make the mistake of going out and finding whoever they can – avreichim and rosh kollel – in no particular order. Experience has shown a high degree of incompatibility between the avreichim amongst themselves, often under a Rosh Chabura who is not delighted with his pre-packaged group. Therefore, this approach is a mistake. It is rare that you, as the local rabbi or group of baal habatim, have the time to do it right, and even if you did, this is not the way to go about things.

One should always first find the Rosh Chabura. He (not you) should find the avreichim to be approved by you³. By Rosh Chabura we do not necessarily mean the Rosh Kollel; rather the Rosh Chabura is the person taking responsibility for the kollel – what the Lakewood kollelim call the external Rosh Kollel⁴. In bigger cities, the Rosh Kollel need not even be a full time member of the kollel. His job is to be a talmid chacham, to give shiurim and set the learning – although be careful to take someone who is very pro-kiruv, as he will exert considerable influence over the avreichim.

¹ Rabbi Yaakov Feitman, Jewish Action, Winter, 2002. Rabbi Feitman continues: *Mr. Shulman uses a parable to explain the SEED program's success in spawning kollelim. An entrepreneur decides to manufacture shirts in a Third World country where he can employ cheap labor. While he pays the laborers minimum wages, they are content since they can purchase things they never had before. However, once they purchase all that there is to buy in the village, they quit. The frantic manufacturer airlifts in 100 copies of the Montgomery-Ward catalogue and drops one in front of every hut. The workers return. Similarly, Mr. Shulman observes, in many cities, SEED programs provide a taste of authentic Jewish learning to individuals who have never experienced it before. Ta'amu ureu ki tov, Taste it [Torah] and see that it is good. Once they sample Torah, they are hooked. Thus, in Columbus, Ohio, after a summer of SEED, a community member mused, "We never knew how good it could be."* Two years later, a kollel was born in America's heartland.

² Rabbi Moshe Francis, Chicago Community Kollel

³ Generally as a package deal since each avreich is contingent on another.

⁴ The Lakewood model is to have two mature roshei kollel who ideally themselves have experienced an out of town situation;

a. An inside man who runs the beis medrash, generally has, or develops with time, psak stature and is the address for all questions and issues

b. An outside man community rosh kollel who is to harness the kollel's ability to relate to the community. He is generally responsible for fundraising and logistical questions that may arise. (Rabbi Yaakov Shulman)



It is the Rosh Chabura that will determine things like how much kiruv the kollel does. The Ashkenazi Kollel in Mexico City has had very talented and kiruv minded avreichim from its outset. But its kiruv results were minimal because the Rosh Kollel was not so minded. (This is not a criticism as much as it reflects a certain prioritization. He felt that the mandate of the kollel was to service the frum baal habatim, the very people who had brought out the kollel to begin with.) Even an ambiguous attitude, like the earlier era of the Melbourne Kollel, led to frustrated attempts by individual avreichim to do serious kiruv¹. On the other hand, a kiruv minded rosh kollel has led many a non-kiruv orientated chabura at the outset into high kiruv gear.

The Rosh Chabura must have many other talents, and we are not going to mention them all here. But it is particularly worth mentioning that he and his wife have to be able to look after the avreichim and their families. If they are older, they have to be like substitute parents in a sense to the young couples. They will set the tone for the whole chabura.

However, the Lakewood model is to have two ‘partners’ – roshei kollel - at the outset. The determinant of this is partially a function of size – two roshei kollel would only be relevant in a kollel of ten or more avreichim². And size is often a function, in turn of finances. But it is also a function of the goals and vision of the kollel. If the kollel is going to be very community oriented, and the avreichim are of a very high level of learning and require a high level rosh kollel, it is unrealistic to expect one person to be able to be holding in the learning and to actively engage the community³. Sometimes this is resolved by having a director of programming as in the case of the Dallas kollel.

In Chicago, for example, Rabbi Zucker is in the beis hamidrash all the time. He is vital to the learning atmosphere of the kollel, which is at a high level. Rabbi Moshe Francis, the second rosh kollel, is dedicated exclusively to harbatzas hatorah in the community. Of course, two roshei kollel means that they have to be able to work together. And this has not always happened.

Selection of the Avreichim

The actual selection of avreichim is a tricky thing. This is especially so because the Rosh Chabura is probably doing this for the first time. He is probably under considerable time pressure. He may not find more than a certain number of avreichim interested in the kollel to begin with. He may feel that the whole chabura is going to dissipate if he doesn't let in the last applicants, though he suspects that they are not the right people.

Here too, there is a significant difference between those who are going out to a traditional Lakewood kollel and those who are going out to a more outreach oriented model. In both cases, most kollelim choose avreichim in the 23 – 26 years old range, people who have learned for a few years in kollel⁴, are still motivated in their learning, but are happy to

¹ We are great admirers of this magnificent kollel, and the kollel has, for many years now, had an outreach component. We are simply stating that the Roshei Chaburah rather than the avreichim, will determine how much or how little kiruv gets done.

² The Palo Alto Kollel is an exception to this.

³ Rabbi Moshe Francis, Chicago Community Kollel

⁴ This gives them both a certain level of maturity and a certain level of learning. (Rabbi Moshe Francis)



learn either non-yeshivish mesechtas and/or to learn meshechtas aliba dehilchasa¹. In either case, avreichim are expected to give a two to three year commitment to learning (a rosh kollel will be expected to give a longer commitment).

The chosen avreichim must be dedicated and talented learners, with a pleasant personality and interest in others, and with an eye to community building. They must be team players (*for machlokes will not help a community*), very knowledgeable and most of all “mentchen”².

Ideally, the Rosh Chabura should be choosing people who are self starters, and who can interface with community. If the avreichim are not independent builders, then it is vital that there be someone, other than the Rosh Chabura, whose sole task is programming³. Can one take a risk on an avreich who sees the kollel as a half-way house, a spring-board to going into Klei Kodesh? Opinions differ. One Rosh Chabura has this to say: “I would not hire such a guy...Although we learn two sederim...We are ALSO full time outreach...Unless your are FULL TIME PASSIONATE about KIRUV...By definition you WILL fail...The job requires 120% !!!”

But it is just on this point that community kollelim differ significantly. In the case of the Chicago kollel, a potential avreich who would state as his primary motivation for wanting to join the kollel as a desire to get involved with the community would be viewed unfavorably⁴.

Besides all of their individual talents, the avreichim have to be able to be friends with each other – they have to gel as a group. And so do their wives. In a non-religious area, the ungerleit and wives don't have a choice whom to be friends with. The chabura will be their friends and if they don't particularly like an individual, they may feel miserable and lonely. This is especially true of the wives. Kollel families face challenges in raising their children in a Torah-true way. Kollel people have the opportunity to bond with each other and create their own little frum haven. The kollel children have the other kollel children as friends. But for all this to happen smoothly, it is vital that *it be known in advance* that the kollel wives will be friends with each other⁵. (A kollel needs to have particular sensitivity when a new family joining the kollel and everyone else has been there for a while and is already friends with each other⁶.)

The avreichim also all have to be comfortable with the Daas Torah of the Kollel, which may mean accepting someone who was not until now the person they referred to.

¹ Newly weds usually wants to continue to learn the yeshivish mesechtas and in the traditional way. (Rabbi Moshe Francis). Rabbi Moshe Francis stated that this profile was on the advice of Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky Ztz"l. He would compare this to kollelim attached to a yeshiva. The latter are bochurim with taleisim. A community kollel should have a degree of sophistication above that. The avreich should be settled in his marriage. But the should not be too old, someone whose learning is beginning to taper off. Generally, the ceiling in such kollelim is 30 years of age or a family with three children.

² Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, Beis Midrash Govoha

³ Rabbi Yehoshua Kohl, Valley Kollel

⁴ *We look for ungerleit who are on a very high level of learning. Look for a very high caliber of person who is interested in his own learning. If he says that he wants to come to get involved in the community as his sole motivation, that is seen as a negative.* (Rabbi Moshe Francis)

⁵ Mrs. Aviva Korngold

⁶ Mrs. Aviva Korngold



Where Chaburahs are drawn from the same Yeshiva (e.g. Atlanta which initially drew only from Ner Yisrael), this problem does not arise.

Therefore, before the kollel goes out, they need to meet together on many occasions – to talk and plan and bond. And so do their wives.

And talking of wives: The selection must be as couples – never only interview the avreich. When asked what would be the most important advice for a new Kollel wife, Mrs. Chaya Glazer of the Atlanta Scholars Kollel said the following: *You have to be strong and independent. You have to realize that you are in this as a team. Most of the time your husband will be out working and even when he is home he will be working. It is a 24 hour job; there are no breaks or vacations. Yet, on the other hand, there is no job in the world that is more rewarding and fulfilling. You will make friends with the other Kollel wives and become a family that you know you can count on*¹.

Beyond bonding, the avreichim need preparation and lots of it. Ner LeElef and programs like it offer as much as two years (part-time) preparation, and they recognize that this is not enough (but as much as is feasible). Avreichim also need to understand that, just when they are going into an intense professional situation (learning and inreach/outreach), their family needs are going to increase as well². There are dozens of issues to be addressed – do you eat in other people's homes or not, do you accept the local rabbi as a posek, what are the first activities the kollel should do, etc. etc.

Finally, a decision needs to be made whether a special director of outreach will be appointed³.

Advance Guard and Welcoming Committee

In an ideal situation the Rosh Kollel should move out to the location several months before the Kollel fellows join. (In the Boston Kollel Rabbi Bier moved there a year earlier). This way he has the time to sort out local “politics” and head off any foreseeable problems⁴.

¹ On raising a family in such an environment, Mrs. Glazer further stated: You have to be very strong in your ways and not let the outside world get to you. You have to be able to explain to your children what you are doing and why you are doing it so that they don't say things or do things that you would not normally accept.

² Rabbi Moshe Efros, Ner LeElef: *An avreich needs to acknowledge that his wife is often very lonely and his children have neither sufficient peers (on their level) and are exposed to influences they normally would not encounter. The avreich needs to invest time, love, care and effort into building his relationship with his kids, ensuring that he is aware of their progress and challenges so that they can be met effectively and in time. An avreich should be spending time helping his children (and wife) sort out the problems they encounter in this new environment and how to properly handle potential problems (kashrus issues at friends homes and schools, TV, etc.).*

³ Rabbi Moshe Efros, Ner LeElef: *In some cases the Rosh Kollel will initiate or direct the outreach activities, but more often than not, he will appoint one of the avreichim with a special talent or interest in kiruv, to assume those responsibilities. Some kollelim (often as a kollel grows) hire an outreach director who is charged with designing and implementing a plan for each avreich's outreach work. In this case usually the outreach director will learn a couple of hours each day in the kollel and then focus on the kollel's kiruv activities (even as the rest of the kollel continues on to learn second seder.)*

⁴ Rabbi Yaakov Shulman



When the Ohr Somayach kollel arrived in Johannesburg, each new kollel family was twinned with a local family. The local family showed them how to shop, helped them find a doctor, told them about hechsherim and made sure that they knew how to get back home. Each family arrived with a fridge full of food. Now that's hachnasas orchim!



APPENDICES

Appendix A: What Should be Called a Kollel?

The issue of definition was academic until recently when some of the kollelim began to organize themselves as a group, and to explore whether there were standards to which the kollelim should adhere.

Definitions are always difficult and setting of standards tricky. Should one take into account the local climate and should standards be the same in all part of the world? Is this one of those issues which is best left unresolved? Would setting a minimum standard encourage some to go for only the minimum?

It is difficult to justify one man shows as kollelim, or even an avreich with a group of bochurim (e.g. Torah MiTzion). This is not to denigrate the wonderful work which such groups do¹. But it is clearly an abuse of the word kollel. I was fascinated to learn that Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem was called Ohr Somayach Institutions, and not Ohr Somayach Yeshiva. I was told that this is because Rav Shach, Ztz"l, with whom Ohr Somayach had consulted, had a very clear idea of what a yeshiva does and is. Anything, beyond that, even with a full time buzzing beis midrash as Ohr Somayach has always had *letiferes*, must go under another name. The same can be said about kollelim. In Russia and sometimes South America, regular night time learning by baal habatim is often called a kollel, and in Vancouver, a group of community rabbis got together for a period and gave themselves the same name.

The consensus of Roshei Yeshiva appears to be that a Community Kollel is an institution where at least four avreichim learn at least one full seder², with a commitment to teaching Torah to the community the rest of time (as opposed to being mechanchim mashgichim etc.)³. But the word kollel is much broader than ‘community kollel’. Take the ‘Kollel Mechanchim’ in Los Angeles, or the “Kollel LeRabanim” in Marseilles for example. These, one seder a day institutions, are certainly worthy of the name kollel.

It should also be pointed out that vibrant kollelim have had vibrant batei midrash. The avreichim have often been joined in their learning sedarim by local rabanim, teachers, etc. in the town. The kollel in Jardim de America, Sao Paulo, Brazil, had 15 baal habatim learning morning seder together with the avreichim within six months of arriving.

¹ I personally have witnessed some of the successes of these initiatives.

² Preferably morning seder

³ However, the broader usage of kollel, as opposed to community kollel, has other applications as well. For example, Rabbi Reuven Ohana, Chief Rabbi of Marseilles, France, recently made an afternoon kollel for the community rabbis in Marseilles. Perhaps it should be called Beis Midrash, not kollel, though even in Yerushalayim, a one seder a day format, with nothing around it, is called a kollel. What the Roshei Yeshiva are referring to, however, is a whole institution, in all its parameters. When can a group of bnei Torah put all that they do, both their learning and communal work, under the banner ‘community kollel’?



Appendix B: The Torah Study of the Avreichim

Lakewood style community kollelim such as Chicago often differ from those which are more outreach orientated in the age of the avreichim, the times of the sederim, and in other significant respects.

The Chicago Kollel has two full sederim reflecting ‘normal’ kollel hours, 9:00 AM – 1:05 PM and 3:00 PM - 6.15 PM. During these sederim the avreichim learn amongst themselves – they are not allowed to prepare and certainly not to give a shiur. Even Sunday morning, which is a popular time with baal habatim, is off limits for shiurim by the avreichim. The kollel handles these shiurim through their roshei kollel and outreach staff. Night seder, which is from 7:45-9:45 PM is for the community, but still based essentially in the beis hamidrash¹.

Outreach kollelim, by contrast, reflect a reasonable range of learning options to accommodate their increased outreach privileges. Atlanta has one, fairly short seder in the morning with an optional seder at night for those not teaching, while the Valley Kollel and Des Moines have only the morning seder. The Ra’anana kollel has one formal seder in the morning, but the avreichim are expected to be in the Beis Midrash in the afternoon, preparing their own shiurim. learning bechavrusa, or even learning with baal habatim. Phoenix, Dallas and Palo Alto have two modified sederim. Palo Alto, for example, learns first seder from 9:15 AM - 12:45 PM. Dallas starts and ends even earlier (8.30-12.30). Both use lunch time for business-men’s shiurim, chavrusas with Baal Habatim and college students. Second seder in Palo Alto is from 2:15-5:30 PM. Houston is similar². Phoenix learns 9 AM -5 PM with only a small lunch break.

Kollelim that have kept to a traditional two seder a day learning schedule, have felt acute conflict with any attempts to do serious kiruv. Such an example can be found in Creteilles, just outside of Paris. With a long lunch break, second seder finishes at seven. This has led to a situation where the avreichim increasingly cut into seder time to give their shiurim. Many of the avreichim don’t get home until late, missing out on family time. As they develop their outreach more, they are under constant pressure (as are all kollelim) to dedicate more time, rather than less, to kiruv as time goes on. Fortunately, they are whole heartedly into the learning and have managed to maintain a serious level thus far.

Experience has shown that whereas a kollel of young avreichim with a reasonably high turnover are led by the atmosphere of a few masmidim, a more mature chaburah requires greater discipline and possibly better learners³.

Some community kollelim give themselves chizuk by having shiurim and vaadim from visiting Talmidei Chachamim. Rabbi Reuven Leuchter gives several vaadim from Israel over the phone (to the Phoenix, Cincinnati and other kollelim). Dallas and some others have testing.

¹ The avreichim run many things outside its Beis Midrash. Three of them teach halacha in Hanna Sacks. Some of them are involved with the kollel’s ‘boker’ programs. And some are involved with outreach.

² 1st Seder – 9-12, Flex Time – 12-1PM, 2nd Seder – 2:30 – 5:45 PM, Fri. 9:00 –12:00 noon, Sun. - 9 – 1 (Unless at a class)

³ Rabbi Zvi Holland, Phoenix



There is no one thing that kollelim learn. Palo Alto has learned Yeshivish and non-Yeshivish mesechtas¹. Phoenix learn whole mesechtos with halacha lemaaseh². TORCH of Houston learns one Seder of regular yeshivish mesechtas and one seder Gemorrah and Halachah L'maaseh. They just competed Hilchos Gittin with hands on Shimush from R' Nota Greenblatt in siddur Gittin. The Kollel now has a Beis Din that they are mesader if there needs to be a shaliach, etc. R' Nota walks them through the shailos, shimush in names, etc.

They have now gone onto learning Nidda, with shimush from R' Shmuel Fuerst. He will come to Houston from time to time to go over mar'os with the avreichim. The kollel gets packages of them sent in from "out of town" to Houston to review.

¹ The have learned Rosh Hashanah, Sanhedrin, Bava Kama, Bechoros and Avodah Zara

² So far they have learned Shabbos and Chulin with plans to learn Gittin , Nidah and Eiruvim



Appendix C: The Chicago Community Kollel - List Of Alumni

Alumni Serving as Congregational Rabbis

Rabbi Zev Cohen	<i>Congregation Adas Yeshurun</i>
Rabbi Ephraim Friedman	<i>Morah Ho'Raah, Bais Medrash Mekor Chaim</i>
Rabbi Reuven Gross	<i>Congregation Shaarei Tzedek</i>
Rabbi Yaakov Lipsky	<i>Formerly of Congregation Beth Itzchok</i>
Rabbi Henoah Plotnik	<i>Congregation Bais Tefillah</i>
Rabbi Mordechai Raizman	<i>Bais Medrash Mekor Chaim</i>

Alumni in Education

In Chicago

Rabbi Aharon Cohen	<i>Rebbe, Arie Crown Hebrew Day School</i>
Rabbi Zev Cohen	<i>Rosh Kollel, Choshen Mishpat Kollel</i>
Rabbi Ephraim Friedman (current member)	<i>HalachaTeacher, Hannah Sacks</i>
Rabbi Eliezer Gifter	<i>Rebbe, Yeshiva Shearis Yisroel/Veitzener Cheder</i>
Rabbi Reuven Gross	<i>Rebbe, Ida Crown Jewish Academy</i>
Rabbi Zvi Kamenetzky	<i>Mashgiach Ruchni of the High School and Rebbe, Bet Midrash L'Torah (Hebrew Theological College)</i>
Rabbi Pinchos Krystal	<i>Rebbe, Yeshiva Shearis Yisroel/Veitzener Cheder</i>
Rabbi Shmuel Kurtz	<i>Rebbe, Ida Crown Jewish Academy</i>
Rabbi Yaakov Lipsky	<i>Rosh Kollel, Rabbi Samuel & Zahava Friedman Community Kollel, Olney, Maryland</i>
Rabbi Yehuda Nadoff	<i>Rebbe, Arie Crown Hebrew Day School</i>
Rabbi Henoah Plotnik	<i>Rebbe, Yeshiva Tiferes Tzvi</i>
Rabbi Ephraim Polatsek	<i>Rosh Chabura, Kollel Boker Program</i>
Rabbi Shlomo Pomerantz	<i>Rebbe, Arie Crown Hebrew Day School</i>
Rabbi Dovid Rifkind	<i>Rebbe, Arie Crown Hebrew Day School: Rosh Chabura, Kollel Boker Program</i>
Rabbi Moshe Rosenstein (current member)	<i>Halacha teacher, Hannah Sacks</i>
Rabbi Eli Samber	<i>Rebbe, Arie Crown Hebrew Day School</i>
Rabbi Moshe Sterman	<i>Director of Community Education, Chicago Community Kollel</i>
Rabbi Yaakov Sussman	<i>Rosh Yeshiva, Bet Midrash L'Torah (Hebrew Theological College)</i>
Rabbi Boruch Weinberg	<i>Rebbe, Bet Midrash L'Torah (Hebrew Theological College): Rosh Chabura, Kollel Boker Program</i>
Rabbi Zucker	



(current member)

Halacha Teacher, Hannah Sacks

Other Locations

Rabbi Yaakov Biron

Rebbe, Yeshiva Toras Emes, Los Angeles

Rabbi Dovid Gibber

Rebbe, Mesivta Chasan Sofer, Brooklyn

Rabbi Dovid Margulies

Rebbe, Rabbi Naftali Riff Yeshiva, South Bend, Indiana

Rabbi Ari Medetsky

Principal, Ohr Reuven, Monsey, New York

Rabbi Kaddish Rubinfeld

Mashgiach & Maggid Shiur, Yeshiva Gedolah, Southfield, Michigan

Rabbi Leib Schulman

Rebbe, Torah Academy of Greater Philadelphia

Rabbi Eli Speiser

Principal, Yeshiva Elementary School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Rabbi Dovid Wolpin

Rebbe, Yeshiva Katana, Lakewood, New Jersey

Alumni in Outreach

Rabbi Doni Deutsch

Director, Chicago Torah Network

Rabbi Moshe Katz

Director, Chicago Torah Network

Alumni in Jewish publications

Rabbi Feivel Wahl

Editor, Schottenstein edition of the Artscroll Talmud

Alumni in Business and Professional Life

Rabbi Eliezer Appleton

Computer software developer/consultant

Rabbi Avi Banker

President, Special Assets, Inc., Board member of various community organizations

Rabbi Zvi Feiner

Director of Finance, Orchard Court Partnership Healthcare, Daf Yomi Maggid Shiur

Rabbi Yehuda Krohn

Clinical Psychologist

Rabbi Raphael Lieberman

Vice President, Gericare Inc., Daf Yomi Maggid Shiur

Rabbi Moshe Menachem Liberman

Candidate for Juris Doctor

Rabbi Dr. Jerry Lob

Clinical Psychologist

Rabbi Dovid Oppenheimer

Rabbinical Coordinator, Chicago Rabbinical Council

Rabbi Ephraim Polatsek

President, Home Time Construction