

“The Changing/Changed Jewish Community and Implications for the Jewish Health and Healing Movement”

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I spend much of my time thinking about and observing how the Jewish community organizes and disorganizes itself. Through my own experiences as a Jewish Communal Professional over the past 20 years and the unique access I have to organizational life through the supervision of our graduate internship program and my own consulting, there is much to be passionate about, much to diagnose, and much that can generate frustration and disappointment.

We are in a world of philanthropy that has raised more dollars than any other time in history. Some 212 billion dollars were raised in 2001, and even when adjusted for inflation due to the 9/11 “effect”, this is the second highest level of giving on record. We are in a time where there are more non-profit agencies than any other time in history. We are at an important juncture in the traditional roles of lay leadership, of the power of national agencies, and the role of large, consensus driven organizations. The metaphor that Bill used yesterday of steering a boat in the ocean is an apt one. And that makes it all the more difficult to forecast the functioning of organizational life in the Jewish community, but that shouldn’t stop us from trying!

So, some musings:

- The large consensus-based organizations which still represent the best ideals of the democratic process are not able to maneuver quickly enough to remain entirely relevant.

- As those same organizations become increasingly professionally driven, the traditional underpinnings of lay professional partnership are in question.
- These phenomena and more have proven to be fruitful ground for the development of innovative, leaner organizations whose missions are issue specific, and generally created by a visionary leader or small group of impassioned leaders.
- Family and individual foundations are increasingly directing the communal agenda through their willingness to take on specific issues and act as a funding source with fewer layers of process and overhead. Foundations and Venture philanthropists have been interested and willing to fund the building of infrastructure and social capital in smaller and start-up organizations.
- In a field which was predominately personed by either full time professional staff or, parenthetically, staff who were paid part time but expected to work full time, there is emerging what I have sometimes called “the third sector”—that is to say, contract workers who are tied to a specific project that may also be time limited—and who at any time may have contractual relationships with several organizations at one time.
- We also have a “missing in action” National Jewish Population Study. And from all accounts, the study confirms much of what we know—there are less of us; more of us are aging than any other ethnic group; we are having too few babies too late; and we are not significantly prepared for any of these realities.
- And we know that some of our backbone Jewish agencies are serving less of the Jewish community as we are increasingly seeking services in the private/profit sector.

I know I have thrown out a lot of disparate thoughts, but let me take a shot at putting some of them together.

The way in which the Jewish community has traditionally dealt with challenges, be those of stigma or other communal concerns, was that we created agencies, new departments, planning inquiries, and much consensus building. Organizational missions could be as broad as “Our mission is to serve the Jewish community”. To play in these arenas meant power and resources. We might liken this to a notion in the corporate sector of forming a conglomerate.

A **conglomerate** is anything composed of heterogeneous materials or elements; a corporation consisting of a number of subsidiary companies or divisions; to collect or cluster together.

What I think we are seeing now, is a model of consortium—smaller entrepreneurial organizations and projects forming quickly, working in a project-oriented manner with each other and with already established organizations. **Consortium** is defined as a group of financial institutions or individuals brought together for carrying into effect some financial operations requiring large amounts of capital; any partnership, or union; consent to sound in harmony. **Collaborate** is defined as the act or process of working with one with another to cooperate.

It is interesting to note that several of the large initiatives — Birthright, the STAR program, Jewish Funders Network, etc., are models of this. In organizational management circles, the model of a matrix organization mirrors this—in short, that work teams come together on a project-oriented basis, develop goals and objectives and after having completed their task, move onto different team formations. The advantage is that you can bring the best resources to the goal at hand and achieve greater results.

The rapidly growing health and healing movement is an excellent microcosm, I think, for watching some of these organizational phenomena. It is a movement that has begun to leverage the well-established communal structures and build consortiums that share in social capital resources and infrastructure.

Perhaps I have painted a bleak picture for the national scene. I don't mean to suggest that in 10 years, they will cease to exist, but I will say that to be relevant in the decade to come, they will need to reinvent themselves significantly.

Now that the musings are done, let me suggest some questions:

- How do we hear the loud cry for meaning and connection that is spoken and unspoken?
- Why limit our thinking in terms of possible entry points for healing to buildings, meetings and services?
- How do we create sacred space for personal narratives?
- How do we harness passion, creativity and critical thinking beyond the format of the committee or board meeting?
- How can we sustain consortiums and collaborative efforts without creating duplicative structures or services?
- How can we help to make living a Jewish life an accessible and affordable possibility for Jews in all economic situations?
- How do we use the possibilities of technology to create communities of meaning and intimacy and healing?
- How do we begin to capture a notion of affiliation that goes beyond counting synagogue membership, how many people come to a Pesach seder, or what foods we eat?

- How do we realize the potential of social capital in making organizational and communal change such as the Kalsman Institute seeks to do?
- How can we use the language of healing we have so effectively used with “patients” in our discourse with one another and between organizations?

I want to close sharing an experience I recently had with an alumna of the School of Jewish Communal Service. She was diagnosed at age 34 with an aggressive form of breast cancer—so aggressive that she was not given a lot of hope of survival. She created an e-mail list of 60 some individuals and made us a part of her treatment options, dark moments, absurd moments, profound insights and different types of tattooing available—and of course much more. She created and sustained a community of healing. Many of us didn’t know each other well prior to being part of this online group, but as you can imagine, we developed our own intimate bonds. The good news is this young woman is now a survivor of chemotherapy, radiation, mastectomies and reconstruction—but most importantly, a survivor of breast cancer. I know this is not a unique story, but I share it with you as a story of personal narrative creating community, healing, a profound connection of one human being to another, a collective connection to God, a creation of portable, virtual, sacred space.