

## Torah and Technology

## Generation X,Y, and Z

## Jewish Values in a Secular Society

## New Challenges



# A CONVERSATION ON KIRUV

Rabbi Micah Greenland  
Rabbi Dovid Rosman  
Mrs. Shoshana Schechter  
Rabbi Mark Wildes

We asked four leaders in the field of Jewish outreach to share some of their wisdom and how we can inspire ourselves and inspire others.

### How has Jewish outreach changed over the past 20 years?

**Rabbi Greenland:** At its core, Jewish outreach is remarkably similar — at least as it relates to working with students in their teenage years — as it was 20 years ago. Fundamentally, teens want to feel that they matter and, relatedly, that how they live their lives matters. As a result, our strategy or approach is essentially similar to what it was two decades ago: create inspirational experiences that help awaken a connection to something greater than him or herself, and foster meaningful relationships with role models that the teen can confide in and emulate.

Nonetheless, there are dynamics that make Jewish outreach today even more important, and more challenging, than it was in past years.

First, today's teens — popularly known as Generation Z, encompassing those born between 1995 and 2015 — lack much of the basic Judaic knowledge that organizations like ours could almost take for granted in previous generations. The parents and grandparents of Gen Zers generally attended Hebrew School at least once a week, had at least a passing familiarity with Hebrew prayers, and possessed a basic understanding of the Jewish holidays.

None of that can be taken for granted today. To be sure, teens seem to be just as open to inspiration as their forebears. Moreover, they are generally just as likely — sometimes even more so — to establish vital relationships with advisors and role models. Effectively, the ingredients that animate a desire to grow Jewishly are very much present. However, because of their lack of Jewish literacy, it is definitely harder for motivated teens to progress as quickly as in previous generations. Many American Jewish teens cannot read the aleph beis, have never been to a Pesach seder, and are unaware of basic traditions like fasting on Yom Kippur. Consequently, once a teen is



**Rabbi Micah Greenland ('97YC, '02R)** is the International Director of NCSY, the worldwide youth movement of the Orthodox Union dedicated to connect, inspire and empower Jewish teens and encourage passionate Judaism through Torah and Tradition. Currently, NCSY reaches nearly 28,000 Jewish teens annually in the US, Canada, Israel, South America, and Europe and is the leader in the field of Israel teen travel experiences, bringing nearly 1,500 students to Israel on inspiring summer programs. Rabbi Greenland has served as International Director since 2013, after serving for twelve years as Regional Director of Midwest NCSY. During his tenure as International Director, NCSY has dramatically increased its reach and impact, nearly doubling the numbers of participants in weekly events and summer programs, as well as doubling the organization's fundraising revenue, and he has additional ambitious goals for the organization moving forward. In addition to his professional work in NCSY, Rabbi Greenland serves on the Board of Education of Arie Crown Hebrew Day School in Chicago and is past president of the Chicago Rabbinical Council.



**Rabbi Dovid Rosman ('99YC, '02R)** is the Director of Yeshivat Aish HaTorah in Jerusalem. The yeshiva, consisting of nine steady programs and several more short term programs throughout the school year, caters to close to a thousand men and women ranging from unaffiliated beginners to students studying towards rabbinic ordination. As the Yeshiva Director, Rabbi Rosman has been responsible for building and developing curriculum, innovative programming, and recruitment strategies that have been effective in outreach. He guides the staff of 50+ educators enabling them to be effective and successful teachers and mentors. His teaching responsibilities range from a daily advanced gemara shiur to weekly classes on marriage and self-development. Rabbi Rosman also has also spent thousands of hours counseling individual students and has developed an intimate understanding of the psyche of baalei teshuva and potential baalei teshuva. He is also the author of *Torah Connections* on the parsha (Feldheim), and *Your Wife, Your Self: A Husband's Guide to Shalom Bayis* (Feldheim).



**Mrs. Shoshana Schechter ('91SCW)** is Founder and Director of the Mechina Program and Stern College for Women. The Mechina Program is a beginner's program integrated into the Stern College Judaic Studies program. Students come from all over the country and all over the world. Women participate in inspirational Shabbat celebrations and enjoy hospitality in the homes of mentors, teachers and community leaders. Students also visit sites of Jewish and general interest in New York, one of the world's great centers of Jewish life. After two years in Mechina, students are integrated into the regular Jewish studies courses of Stern College for Women. As director, Mrs. Schechter teaches classes, mentors and inspires women to grow in their Judaism.



**Rabbi Mark Wildes ('89YC, '94R)** is the Founder and Director of Manhattan Jewish Experience. Manhattan Jewish Experience (MJE), a highly successful Jewish outreach and educational program that engages and reconnects unaffiliated Jewish men and women in their 20s & 30s with Judaism and the Jewish community. MJE has successfully reconnected thousands of previously unaffiliated Jewish men and women with Judaism and the Jewish community, hundreds of whom are today living committed Jewish lives and sending their children to Jewish Day Schools. Operating from its three locations in Manhattan, with a talented staff of 15 professionals, MJE's inspirational Shabbat dinners, beginners services, retreats, educational classes, holiday events and trips to Israel have touched the lives of thousands of young Jews and provided a venue through which 322 Jewish couples have married. As its director, Rabbi Wildes mentors the other MJE rabbis and educators, teaches multiple classes each week, delivers Shabbat sermons, blogs, mentors his many students and officiates their weddings, fundraises, leads MJE's Retreats, Shabbatonim and trips to Israel and each Shabbat, with his wife Jill, hosts 20 people at his Shabbat table. He also teaches an outreach training seminar at RIETS, Yeshiva University's rabbinical school, training new leaders for the future and is also the author of the highly acclaimed *Beyond the Instant: Jewish Wisdom for Lasting Happiness in a Fast-Paced Social Media World* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2018).

interested in learning and growing, the time-consuming effort to teach them Hebrew and orient them to the holidays and other traditions means that their growth is slower.

A second Gen Z characteristic is the fact that they are digital technology natives. As the first group to have smartphone and social media technology available to them from their earliest years, Gen Z has been exposed to an unprecedented amount of technology throughout their upbringing, and they are incredibly

attached to their mobile devices.

This has multiple ramifications. On the challenging side, it is harder to get and keep their attention. Programming needs to move at a fast pace, with frequent changes of medium and venue necessary for all activity. Additionally, Gen Z is used to virtually everything being customizable, from the exact type of coffee a person orders to exactly the music he or she listens to. As a result, it is challenging to create one-size-fits-all programming. Those of us responsible for innovation in

programming must ensure that we are building in opportunities for each participant to create an individualized experience within a communal context.

At the same time, humans still crave relational connections with other people. The smartphone era makes meaningful, in-person interactions increasingly rare. A significant advantage that outreach programs today offer is the chance for participants to find a respite from the digital world by forming significant relationships that matter. Particularly

when combined with the “disconnect to reconnect” opportunity that we experience each Shabbos and Yom Tov, there is something uniquely valuable that we have to offer teens today that they can appreciate more than in previous generations.

**Rabbi Rosman:** Assimilation is much further along. Many college-aged students have only one Jewish parent (in fact, while interviewing students, we’ve stopped asking if their father is Jewish — we won’t assume that a student with the last name “Cohen” is Jewish, while “McCarthy” probably has a Jewish mother). Therefore, even if any religious practices are observed at home, those practices are not solely Jewish and their basic knowledge of what it means to be Jewish is almost nonexistent. In addition, when the kiruv movement began, most unaffiliated people were raised with a basic Judeo-Christian value system, which was somewhat aligned with the Torah (such as the Ten Commandments). But today, Western society has moved further away from those set of moralities, and the student’s starting point, where they would align with us and find common ground, is drastically different from ours. This makes it more challenging to initially connect with them. The

State of Israel, for example, used to be of common interest and concern, and now may be an obstacle.

Another difference is how busy students are, in general and even when they are on vacation. It used to be that you could walk up to a student at the Kotel, ask him if he had some time to hear an inspirational class on Judaism, and walk him across the street to an Aish Essentials class. Now, almost all Kotel visitors are part of a tour, with a very rigid schedule, and a tour guide telling them that “in 30 minutes we’ll meet to go to the next place on our schedule.” In addition, the backpacker traveling the world searching for truth is almost nonexistent. Over the last decade students have become hyper-focused on getting internships to further their careers. This precludes them from taking time off from school to go to yeshiva and to seriously engage in evaluating and contemplating their belief systems.

A third change is the exposure to technology. Twenty years ago, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube didn’t exist, and Google had just begun. The attention span of the average student was longer than it is today. Students are not necessarily excited to sit through a morning of four back-to-

back, hour-long lectures, no matter how inspiring or entertaining.

But don’t be depressed! We are innovating to address today’s landscape of unaffiliated Jews. Kiruv is booming in ways that no one would ever have dreamed twenty years ago. Success in kiruv comes from Hashem, and since we know that Hashem wants us to bring back His people, we have a guarantee for success. All we must do is put in some effort. And our effort, our engagement, must change with the times. The same content — the Torah’s timeless teachings — taught twenty years ago can be taught today, it just has to be packaged differently. A lower student-teacher ratio creates more natural connections between student and teacher. Experiential, out-of-the-classroom classes and the use of multimedia is becoming more popular. The Aish JInternships program, which gives students exposure to yeshiva while furthering their career, has dropped the barrier that held students back from coming to yeshiva. Being part of a “movement” or something “big” is gaining lots of traction in the world; this phenomenon set the stage for “the Shabbos Project,” where over a million people are sharing the Shabbos experience. Engagement

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through social media and websites can draw students in at unprecedented levels and reach students in areas that *mekarvim* (outreach professionals) never even visited.

We can't forget that every Jew has a *neshama* and is yearning for wisdom on how to be successful, have positive relationships, be an excellent parent, gain self-esteem, and find purpose in life. And we have the goods — the Torah — which gives them that. Once we've engaged them, they are blown away.

**Mrs. Schechter:** Twenty years ago, there were no opportunities for women to have a serious beginner's level college Jewish studies program. Such a program had existed for the men at JSS for many years. Young women who decided to go to Stern College looking for inspiration but didn't have a lot of background were placed in lower level classes, but there was no real framework for them. Their fellow classmates would be active in trying to inspire teens on an NCSY Shabbaton or children from the former Soviet Union, not realizing that someone down the hall was looking for the same inspiration. I founded the Mechina program fifteen years ago to help fill that void. Women can now have an inspirational beginner's experience that is geared specifically for them and is fully integrated with their college experience. Furthermore, over the last twenty years, the landscape has become much broader and our students come from very diverse backgrounds, not just from a few local kiruv organizations.

**Rabbi Wildes:** The most dramatic change I have seen is in the very people we are reaching out to and engaging in Jewish life. The level of

Jewish knowledge and connection to religious observance has dramatically decreased in the last two decades. When I started doing outreach work 25 years ago, most of my students had a grandparent who was somewhat learned or at least minimally religious. Today that is a rarity. As a result, there is less familiarity with basic Jewish terms and concepts and more of a gap to bridge in terms of drawing others closer to Yiddishkeit. As my colleagues working in other outreach organizations have concurred, there is simply less of a "Jewish feeling" our participants possess, that we — outreach professionals — can tap into today. Coupled with relative morality being taught religiously on college campuses, it is simply more difficult to *mekarev* a Jew today than it was 20 years ago.

On the other hand, and on a more positive note, millennials, MJE's target population, are "meaning seekers." As a whole, millennials are searching for purpose and meaning in what they do professionally and in the relationships they pursue. They are less motivated by money than their parents' generation and in my experience, more open to ideas and a lifestyle that can be translated into a meaningful and even spiritual way of life. Shabbat is a great example. When Shabbat is presented as a way to disconnect from technology and ordinary life so one can become more connected to loved ones, to community and of course to Hashem, it often becomes the gateway to a life of Torah and mitzvot. This has been one of the main sources of MJE's success: demonstrating the relevance of Torah as a means for living a purposeful and meaningful life.

## **Given that our resources are limited, should our priority be to reach out to larger numbers of unaffiliated Jews with limited engagement or a smaller number of unaffiliated Jews with maximal engagement?**

**Rabbi Rosman:** I don't think it's as simple as one or the other. We need to make sure that our resources are being used to make a meaningful impact and lasting change. We must always ask ourselves, "how can I do that for the greatest amount of people?" The benchmark that will make that difference isn't crystal clear, but that must be the goal. However, I don't think we have limited resources. If everyone with a connection to Torah would commit to reaching out and dedicating themselves to kiruv we would have maximal engagement with a larger number of unaffiliated Jews. At the recent Body and Soul Retreat, a convention run by Project Inspire (a division of Aish HaTorah), 450 observant Jews from mainstream religious communities invited and engaged 450 less-connected Jews in a weekend full of education and a commitment to furthering their Jewish observance. This is a replicable model, primed for widespread success, and will make our resources unlimited.

The biggest problem, however, might not be manpower or money. It's time. With the high percentage of assimilation, if we wait too long, we will lose too many Jews, which makes the effort that much more difficult. Therefore we must impact the masses — at least to the extent that we can ensure that as many Jews as possible maintain a Jewish identity and remain part of the Jewish Nation until we're able to reach them.

**Rabbi Wildes:** I think we need to do some of both because in order to end up with enough unaffiliated Jews to invest in, you need to cast the net widely. Most outreach organizations, including MJE, operate with a funnel model. We offer easy access to larger numbers through more social and content-light programming such as Shabbat Dinners, Happy Hours, Ski Retreats, Holidays parties and the like. From those events, a smaller number of people will be drawn to more content/spiritually oriented events such as Basic Judaism, Hebrew classes, One-on-One Learning, Shabbatonim and Tefilah services. It is that group in which we then invest more seriously, but to tease out that smaller group, I have found larger events are necessary. Once that select group of wisdom and spiritual seekers have been identified, we then focus much of our personnel/

rabbinic resources on them. Hence, MJE's motto: "Resources for all, investment for those who seek." We engage this smaller group of seekers in other high impact programs such as our year-long Fellowship Learning program (named for Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm), Yeshiva/Seminary study in Israel and Shabbat hospitality where participants are sent to observant families for Shabbat meals.

**Mrs. Schechter:** Sustainability is rooted in individual relationships. If we go a mile wide, we might only end up an inch deep. We can try to reach out to a lot of people, but we have to realize that our success will be determined by how many people we can provide with individualized attention. Sometimes it is a rabbi, a teacher a mentor or advisor, and sometimes it can be an otherwise

unrelated community member who develops a friendship with this individual. Going wide is important as long as there a system in place to connect those who are more interested to someone who can develop a lasting relationship.

In Mechina, we have 25 to 30 students a year, which allows for individualized attention. We develop close relationships with our students, which lasts for years. I frequently attend their weddings and other family simchas long after their graduation, which is a testament to these long-lasting relationships.

**Rabbi Greenland:** Since the entire outreach imperative is a Godly mandate, the question of resource allocation is a particularly vexing one. To answer definitively would mean that we know which of those



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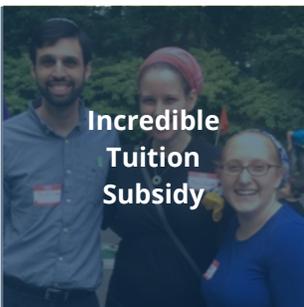
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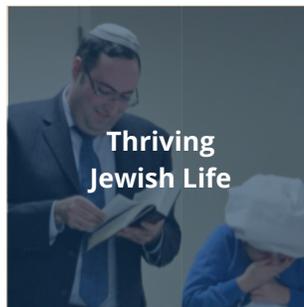
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alternatives is preferable to God, something none of us can claim to truly know.

To the extent I am comfortable taking a position, my answer is informed by the Gemara in *Brakhos* 27b, and 28a, which reports the following episode: When Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya replaced Rabban Gamliel as the Nasi, he immediately instituted a change in the beis medrash. Previously, in Rabban Gamliel's tenure, entry to the beis medrash was limited to those students whose actions reflected their inner values; this significantly limited the number of students who came to study. Under Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, the guard who had previously screened students for worthiness was removed, and everyone was invited to enter the beis medrash. As people poured in, hundreds of new benches were quickly added to accommodate the new students, with the Gemara recording a disagreement as to whether it was 400 or 700 new benches that were necessary. The *Ksav Sofer* offers a resolution to the dispute by suggesting that 400 benches may have been added, but 700 benches, encompassing even the students who had been present previously under Rabban Gamliel, were filled with students all experiencing a resurgence in their Torah study. According to this view, even the learning of those students who were permitted to enter under the previous administration was significantly enhanced by the many new students studying Torah in the same beis medrash. In fact, the Gemara reports that many questions that had previously been unanswered were resolved on that momentous day, likely because it was not only the quantity of people studying that increased, but the quality of their learning was itself perfected.

I believe this Gemara informs our dilemma about resource allocation for outreach. It would be easy to understand the choice as binary: between reaching a larger number of individuals with a seemingly "lower quality" interaction and focusing on a more select group of people with a more intensive, higher quality engagement. However, as the Gemara indicates, often the quality of the experience is itself impacted by the quantity of those participating. Moreover, it is often impossible to identify who has the potential to progress further in his or her journey of growth in Torah and mitzvos without first engaging with a larger group.

Finally, there is one other instructive element of the Gemara I would like to call attention to. Notably, the Gemara focuses not on the number of **people** who were added to the beis medrash, but rather the number of **benches**. Seemingly, merely demonstrating that everyone has a place — to sit, to study, to grow — is itself of tremendous value. Not only did Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya invite people to enter, he also made them feel welcome by offering each of them a place. By bringing in new benches, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya was saying: "You are all wanted here. We can learn together and grow from one another." That message had an impact on two groups of people: both those who were already inside the beis medrash and also those who had just joined when the climate of exclusivity departed.

What kind of community do we want to be and what kind of message do we want to send to the rest of Klal Yisrael? I would suggest that there is tremendous value to all of us, both those who already feel connected to

Torah and mitzvos and those who do not, to live with the value that each individual matters and that no one can be left behind. As such, I believe our mandate is to do our utmost to reach every Jew — with as high quality an experience as we can.

### **What do you believe is the single greatest barrier to nurturing Jewish identity in the 21st century?**

**Mrs. Schechter:** Ironically, technology is our greatest barrier but it is also our greatest gateway. People have a steady diet of entertainment and they tend to stay home rather than look for ways to become engaged. Why go out when you can have your social interactions online? People are not as social in today's times. Running programs is more challenging. At the same time, because of technology, there is a lot more apathy, and the level of connection between people is not as deep, so there is a lot of opportunity to reach out to people looking to develop deep and meaningful relationships. In a world where people cannot find meaning, we have the opportunity to provide them with meaning.

**Rabbi Rosman:** In today's culture, it's unpopular to be identified with religion (even outside of Judaism). The media causes people to feel embarrassed to be connected with Israel, and to be proud of certain values they believe in. With social media, a person's personal life is much more public. Everyone knows what you're doing. Therefore, a person can no longer simply identify with religion or visit Israel. In order to take such a stance, he or she will have to be very strong and justify his or her views and travels and defend them against

antagonists. Few people are able to go that far against the tide.

### **Should outreach be left to “professionals,” or is it something that the general Jewish population should do, and if so, how?**

**Rabbi Rosman:** Kiruv is an obligation of every single Jew. The mitzvos of “*Lo sa’amod al dam rei’echa* — **Do not stand by idly on the blood of your neighbor**” (Shelah, *parshas Kedoshim* 60, *Taz*, Orach Chaim, 306:5, *Minchas Chinuch* 239:4), “*Hashev teshiveim* — **return a lost object**” (Shelah, *Torah Shebiksav*, *Parshas Ki Sisa*, *Or HaChaim Hakadosh*, *Devarim*, 22:1, Chofetz Chaim, *Chomos Ha’Das*, *Ma’amarei chizuk hadas* #3), “*Hochei’ach Tochi’ach* — **constructive criticism**” (Rambam, *Sefer HaMitzvos*, *aseh* #205), and *Ahavas Hashem* — **Love Hashem** (Rambam, *Sefer HaMitzvos*, *aseh* #3), are just a few of the many mitzvos requiring us to engage in kiruv.

In addition, the Yerushalmi (Sotah 7:4, quoted by the Ramban, *Devarim* 27:26) tells the story of King Yoshiyahu, who grew up in a house that actively worked to rid the Torah from Klal Yisrael. Because he grew up in such an environment, he hadn’t seen a sefer Torah for the first 18 years of his reign. While making repairs in the Beis Hamikdash, Chilkiyau (father of Yirmiyahu) found a sefer Torah and opened it to the pasuk “*arur asher lo yakim as divrei haTorah hazos* — Cursed be he who does not uphold all the words of the Torah.” When Yoshiyahu heard this, he ripped his clothes in anguish over all the years he had neglected the Torah out of sheer ignorance. Then he cried out “*alai lehakim* — it is on me to uphold the

Torah,” it is my responsibility to fix this, and he single handedly sparked a massive nationwide wave of *teshuvah*. The Chofetz Chaim (*Chomas Hadas*, *Ma’amarei chizuk hadas* #4) writes that this obligation doesn’t fall solely on the leaders of the community, but on every person who can strengthen religion within others.

But really, even without a list of commandments, anyone who has a deep care for people and understands that a connection with Hashem is the best thing for them, both in this world (giving a life full of meaning and satisfaction) and the next, should *naturally* want to share the beauty and depth of Judaism with the less affiliated.

And on a practical level, in order for kiruv to be successful, it is impossible for only specific individuals to do it. This is for two reasons: The first is that due to the number of Jews who need to be reached, it’s an unfeasible model to rely solely on professionals. The Chofetz Chaim (Introduction to *Ma’amarei chizuk hadas*) compares this to the firemen of his day. At an earlier time, there were so few fires that it was enough for a single group designated by the government to extinguish any fire that would come up. But as fires became more rampant, it became crucial that people all over would be ready to put out the fires in any place and at any time. So too with the fires of the *yetzer hara*. It was enough to have people like the Alshich or the Dubna Maggid who traveled around inspiring people. But now, when the fires of the *yetzer hara* have intensified and become more widespread, everyone needs to be on the team to help out. The second reason is that lay people are embedded with unaffiliated Jews

at work or other venues. They can connect in ways that *mekarvim* and rabbis cannot. The unaffiliated Jew never thinks of himself as becoming a rabbi, and therefore the lay person has a serious advantage in establishing a relationship with him.

There are also selfish reasons why an observant Jew should engage in kiruv. The *Chovos Halevavos* (*Sha’ar Habitachon*, ch. 4 and *Sha’ar Ahavas Hashem*, ch. 6) writes that someone who brings another closer to Hashem gets reward for all the other person’s and his decedents’ mitzvos. What an incredible return on investment! Even more important, however, is that articulating what Judaism is to someone else can help you understand what Judaism means to you and will strengthen your own *avodas Hashem*. Crystalizing the answers for tough issues in Judaism helps you build your own *emunah*. Talking about the beauty of the Torah and a Torah lifestyle allows you to appreciate what we have even more. As an ambassador of Hashem and the Torah, we rise to heights that we didn’t realize we were capable of.

How to do it is very easy. To start, share a simple Torah idea, like “did you know that the Torah speaks about happiness or how to be rich?” Simply



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inviting someone over for Shabbos can have a great impact. Don't be scared that they'll ask you something you don't know. And if you don't know the answer, just say "that's a great question! I would like to think about it and get back to you." Then go ask someone who answers these questions often. We would have no problem doing that when someone would ask us a halachic question, so why should it be different with hashkafic questions? If you want some basic training, Project Inspire offers short seminars where you can learn how to engage in kiruv, and there's a lot of information on their website and on Aish.com's. Project Inspire even has a series of comedy films that depict observant people in real-life scenarios with non-observant people. Aish.com has a live chat, where you can ask a rabbi any question and get an answer immediately. Project Inspire can set you up with someone for you to learn with over the phone (and will guide you as to what to learn). Bottom line, there are no excuses!

**Mrs. Schechter:** As I mentioned earlier, one of the most important components of kiruv is developing sincere relationships and in a certain sense, a non-kiruv professional might be better suited to develop a relationship than a professional. A beginner may be more guarded when interacting with a kiruv professional because he or she might view himself or herself as the kiruv professional's "project." Anyone can make such a great impact and all that is required is to be friendly and warm.

There are many opportunities to meet people who are interested in growing in their Judaism. Local rabbis and kiruv professionals are always looking for people who can host for Shabbos

and develop relationships with people who are growing in their Judaism.

At the same time, when developing relationships, issues do arise that require advice from a professional. It is important that a kiruv professional is involved who is attuned to the many sensitivities of family dynamics and other mental health issues, and who will seek guidance from a posek and mental health professional when necessary.

**There are simply too few outreach professionals to engage the large number of unaffiliated or less affiliated Jews. We need more soldiers in this battle and so everyone counts.**

**Rabbi Wildes:** Outreach should *not* be left to professionals for two reasons, one practical and one theological. First, there are simply too few outreach professionals to engage the large number of unaffiliated or less affiliated Jews. We need more soldiers in this battle and so everyone counts. It is also the friend, neighbor or colleague at work, by virtue of their more informal relationship, that can often have a greater impact than the rabbi or professional outreach worker.

Second, the Torah's charge of *hocheach tocheach* (Vayikra 19:17)—to correct or help improve a fellow Jew's relationship with Torah, is not limited to outreach professionals. This is a Biblical imperative that applies to each and every Jew. Rav Chaim of Volozhin wrote that the highest act

of *v'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocho*, love thy neighbor — something all Jews are also obligated in — is to give another Jew Torah. *Kol yisrael areivim ze bazeh* — "all Jews are responsible for one another" is not just a nice homiletical statement by our Sages, but an important halachic principle and the reason we repeat *brachot* for a fellow Jew if they are unable to recite it themselves. On Shabbat for example, even if one has already made their own Kiddush, one may recite the blessing again (with Hashem's name) on behalf of someone else. Rabbeinu Nissim, *Rosh Hashana* 8a, explains that this is because of *Kol yisrael areivim ze bazeh*. Even though we may have already made the blessing for ourselves, the concept of *areivus* teaches us that as long as a fellow Jew has not recited their own blessing, *our* mitzvah is incomplete. If we haven't helped others in their relationship with God, we have not fulfilled our own.

Hands down, the best way for *anyone* to engage someone less affiliated is by inviting them to your home for a Shabbat meal. Nothing is as powerful as seeing a family enjoying each other's conversation and not on their phones! Add some words of Torah and *z'mirot* to the mix and you're good to go. As one of my teachers, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin once said: "for the price of a chicken you can save a Jew". Alternatively, bringing someone to an interesting class or outreach event can be helpful as some are intimidated to come on their own.

**Are there methods that have been developed in the world of outreach that can be applied in engaging the apathy we often encounter within the FFB (Frum from birth) community?**

**Mrs. Schechter:** Our methodology is about finding a meaningful relationship with the Torah. We are in kiruv because we have a great product to sell and those who have grown up with Torah their whole lives have a great product to consume. They just have to realize how applicable it is to their lives.

In Devarim (10:12), Moshe Rabbeinu tells the Jewish people:

וַעֲתָהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שְׂאֵל מֵעַמּוֹךְ כִּי  
אִם לִירְאָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלַכֵּת בְּכָל דְרָכָיו  
וּלְאַהֲבָה אֹתוֹ וְלַעֲבֹד אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ  
וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ.

*And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the Lord your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and soul.*

The Gemara, *Megillah* 25a, asks: is *yirah*, reverence of Hashem, such an easy thing that Moshe Rabbeinu can tell us that all we need to do is revere Hashem? Rav Yosef Albo, *Sefer Ha'ikarim* 3:31, explains that the mitzvos are a formula for a meaningful life. Moshe Rabbeinu wasn't asking people for the "simple" task of revering Hashem. He was asking them to observe mitzvos for the purpose of living a meaningful life and the reverence would come as a result. If we could perhaps compare it to someone who goes to the doctor with a serious heart condition and the doctor says, "all you need to do is lose thirty pounds, just cut out unhealthy foods, fats and sugars and that will really improve your condition." The patient might say "What do you mean, 'Just?' It's not so easy to make those changes." But when he considers the fact that it can change his or her life, it may seem like a relatively easy change. If we can convey to those who suffer

from apathy that when we attend a class or when we daven, it's a way to connect to Hashem. It's not just another class that we need to attend or something we need to cross off of a checklist. It's a way to live a meaningful life.

**Rabbi Wildes:** There are a number of approaches we routinely use in outreach that I strongly believe should be used in confronting the apathy we find in the FFB world. I'd like to be specific, focusing on tefilah (prayer) and Torah study.

## A kiruv organization would never allow for a boring tefilah experience, nor should our own synagogues.

**Tefilah:** Davening in our shuls needs to be more inspiring. A kiruv organization would never allow for a boring tefilah experience, nor should our own synagogues. Shuls need to choose *ba'alei tefilah* who not only have pleasant voices, but who are also adept at getting others to sing. Prayer is not a spectator sport and we need to do better in engaging people in tefilah. Strategically placing a few *ba'alei ruach* around the bimah to sing along with the chazan can often encourage others to join. Also, offering brief explanations of the tefilot, particularly between aliyot during krias Hatorah, helps keep the people "in the game" and allows the congregation to understand at least the basics of tefilah. We make the assumption that people who have been davening their whole lives understand what

they say and only the beginners need explanations. We know this is not true and so brief tefilah insights during davening, or a tefilah class during the week, can really help. Finally, for those who would otherwise tune out during krias Hatorah, we offer a parsha class/discussion, which may also work in some communities.

**Torah Study:** What often inspires beginners to Judaism to become more committed is getting answers to their questions regarding Creation, God, Revelation and other basic Jewish concepts. Many are also interested in the more "spiritual," kabbalistic aspects of Judaism and that too is something every kiruv organization must teach if they wish to draw their students closer to God. These basic topics, as well as the more "spiritual" aspects of Torah, are either completely absent or too superficially covered in our yeshivot and day schools. Jewish day school students, particularly in high school, have legitimate questions and I believe would be drawn closer to Yiddishkeit if these areas were taught in a real way. The curriculum in most day schools, which focuses primarily on Talmud, Hebrew and Chumash works for a certain percentage of the student body. Many are uninspired for a host of reasons, but chief among them is that they are not learning the areas of Torah that interest them and they are not getting their questions answered. We are also not speaking enough to our children about God and spirituality. This is also why after twelve years of day school, there are yeshiva graduates who can easily read a pasuk in Chumash or a line in the Gemara but cannot tell you why we believe in God or why it is important to be religious. This would never work for a beginner to Judaism and it is not working for many of our own children.

The day school curriculum would greatly benefit from including more *hashkafa* and spirituality.

**Rabbi Greenland:** There are many, but I will limit my response to the one overarching approach that I believe is the most important.

The single most significant approach from the world of outreach that must be incorporated within the FFB community can be summarized simply as “warmth without judgment.” In the world of outreach, we accept everyone as they are, recognizing that everyone is on his or her individual journey. We don’t judge anyone by their appearance, by their family background, or by their attitudes or behaviors.

Sadly, our FFB community is filled with judgment. Despite Chazal being incredibly clear about the dangers of judging others, we routinely fall short in this area, and as a result we sometimes inflict irreparable harm on young people or adults within our Orthodox community. If only we could collectively resolve to import the warmth and lack of judgment from the outreach world into our FFB world, our community would instantly be a more growth-oriented and inspiring one.

**Rabbi Rosman:** Teaching Torah to an unaffiliated Jew requires two things: First, make no assumption that the student knows anything or believes in anything — not in Hashem or in the Torah. The education starts from ground up and must be given over in a non-judgmental way. Second, the teaching must show how our beliefs are valid and how the Torah is relevant and valuable to us. A life filled with Hashem is the most incredible thing you can ever have; better than all the other “opportunities” that the world

deems “exciting.” Some members of the FFB community aren’t mature enough at the age when they learned the basics. As they grow older, their education tends to focus on the what’s and how’s of Judaism, and little, if at all, on the why’s. Many young adults and adults in the FFB community are starving for this education, as we’ve seen in programs like Aish’s Geshet post high school program for young men from day school backgrounds, and from the fact that Aish’s Essentials program is packed with young men from the most esteemed yeshivot in Eretz Yisrael (both litvish and chasidish) and young women from all types of seminaries. A program called Amatz brought 50 women principals from the most yeshivish and chasidish girl schools to Eretz Yisrael to learn how to teach the fundamentals of Judaism, so they can bring it back to teach in their schools. If we can incorporate these fundamentals into advanced education in our yeshivas, it could make a big impact.

Another technique to consider. When an unaffiliated Jew falls in love with the Torah, he often wants to teach it to everyone. This has actually proven to be an excellent tool in strengthening and deepening their love for Torah and their *emunah*. If the FFB community could empower their students to teach Torah, even to one another, they will see drastic changes in the level of commitment and enthusiasm for Torah.

### **What was your most inspirational outreach experience?**

**Rabbi Wildes:** Approximately 10 years ago, a young man, an MJE participant by the name of Mark Arkovitz, approached me at the end

of the MJE Shabbat Beginners Service and asked: “Why does the Cantor each week carry the Torah from the Ark and leave the room with it? Where is he going with the Torah?” I answered, that since MJE does not have its own Torah and we borrow one from The Jewish Center (the synagogue downstairs), our Chazzan needs to return it each week to their Ark. Mark then asked why MJE does not have its own Torah. “Doesn’t it say somewhere that you’re supposed to write your own Torah?” he asked. “Yes” I acknowledged, “but a Torah can be very expensive, The Jewish Center has many and they are kind enough to lend us one of theirs.” “Well how much is a Torah?” asked Mark. I answered it could be like \$20,000, maybe even \$30,000 and then Mark asked: “Do you have to be a holy person to donate one?” I saw where the conversation was going and so I responded: “Mark, you’re a holy person.” And then this guy who I barely knew, who had been coming to MJE for just a few months, blurted out: “I’ll do it! I’d donate a Torah to MJE.”

Fast forward one year later. A Torah had been written and we planned a special *Hachnasat Sefer Torah*, an event to welcome our new Torah. I asked Mark if he wanted to speak at the celebration and he declined, saying he was “just a doctor, not a public speaker.” However, right before my beloved mentor Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter, whom I had asked to be our guest speaker, rose to address the large audience, Mark asked if he could share a few words. “Of course,” I told him, “this is your day.”

Mark got up and before a packed room, shared the following: “Thank you all for coming here today. Before

the big rabbi speaks, I wanted to tell you why I decided to become Shabbat observant. Growing up, I really only attended synagogue on the High Holidays, and a friend dragged me to MJE's Yom Kippur services. I liked the service and the crowd and so I started taking some classes and coming on Shabbat. I attended MJE's Shabbat services for like six months, but I really wasn't sure if I could ever become Shabbos observant. It's one thing to come to services, to the kiddush... but to start actually observing Shabbat — that's a big deal. But then I had this one patient." At the time, Mark was a pediatric surgeon at Columbia Presbyterian, and he went on to describe one of his patients, a five-year-old girl who unfortunately had a very poor prognosis. "I was assigned to her with a team of specialists but there was very little

we could do. Every night I'd walk by her room to look in on her. It was so sad. She was such a sweet little girl. I started to develop a relationship with the parents who were Chasidic. I had

**"God, you know there's nothing we can do to save this little girl's life, but if You save her life, I'll start keeping Shabbos."**

never known a Chasidic Jew before, and I felt so bad for them. One night, as I was finishing up my rounds, I passed by the little girl's room and walked in to check on her. She was sleeping peacefully. I sat at the edge of her bed and I had my first real talk with God. I looked up at the ceiling

and I said: "God, you know there's nothing we can do to save this little girl's life, but if You save her life, I'll start keeping Shabbos."

"Fast forward," Mark continued, "she survived and now I'm Shomer Shabbos." Thank you all for coming to celebrate MJE's new Torah.

I'll never forget that moment. Mark made aliyah, became a pediatric surgeon at Jerusalem's Shaarei Tzedek Hospital, got married and now has four children who all attend Yeshiva. Before Mark's friend dragged him to MJE on that fateful Yom Kippur day, Dr. Mark Arcovitz was unknown to the Jewish community. Today he is a learned, observant Jew raising his children in the ways of Torah and mitzvot. This is the opportunity we have and which we must take seriously — to inspire our Jewish brothers and

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**Rabbi Rosman:** There are so many! Meeting genuine, growth-oriented students who are on fire about Hashem and Torah inspires me every day. But here's just one example.

Eric Coopersmith was 19 years old, volunteering at Kibbutz Shaar Ha'amakim in Israel. During a visit to Jerusalem he stumbled across Aish HaTorah, where he met Ephraim Shore, a fellow Canadian who had been learning in the yeshiva for several months. Eric enjoyed his conversation with Ephraim and began to think that perhaps there is more to Judaism than what he was exposed to in Hebrew school. He told Ephraim that he would come back to visit in a month or so, but right now he had to complete his stint as a volunteer at the kibbutz.

Back at the kibbutz, Eric shared his impressions of Aish with his non-Jewish roommate. This roommate was a turned-off Roman Catholic, and he convinced Eric that the rabbis were snake-oil salesmen and that religion was empty. Eric subsequently decided to forget about spending any time at Aish and go directly back to Europe after he finished at the kibbutz.

Several weeks later, Ephraim was on a bus heading north. Looking out the window, he suddenly saw a sign for Kibbutz Shaar Ha'amakim. "Hey, isn't that the kibbutz where that guy Eric is?" Ephraim said to himself.

He quickly pressed the stop button and got off the bus. He tracked Eric down at the kibbutz and re-convinced him that it would be worthwhile to come back to Aish HaTorah to check out the wisdom of Judaism before continuing his year of travel in Europe.

To make a long story short, a few weeks later Eric returned to Aish HaTorah, where he eventually became a rabbi and one of the rosh yeshiva's closest confidants, responsible for developing many of Aish HaTorah's most successful and influential programs worldwide.

Ephraim could easily have stayed on the bus, which is what most of us probably would have done. After all, he had only met Eric once, for a few hours. But instead he seized the opportunity to reach out, not

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knowing the impact his actions would eventually have on the Jewish people.

**Rabbi Greenland:** There are lots of “wow” stories, but to me, the real inspiration comes from seeing genuine results. Being part of an organization like NCSY, I am inspired by the many Torah giants whose involvement in our programs began during their high school years and who now lead Jewish communities of their own. Roshei Yeshiva and Roshei Kollel like Harav Zev Leff, Rabbi Yehuda Cheplowitz, and Rabbi Yerachmiel Fried are living examples of the power of connecting with someone in a meaningful way during his or her high school years.

One story that is a bit closer to home, i.e. that took place during my own years as a staff member, involves a public-school student named Jennifer (not her real name) from Skokie, Illinois who graduated high school around ten years ago. Jennifer got involved in our programs during her sophomore year, slowly but surely deepening her involvement through Shabbatonim and weekly after school activities. Following Jennifer’s 11th grade year, she went on a summer Israel trip with NCSY, where she connected with a number of advisors who soon became important role models. As a result of those relationships, Jennifer made the landmark decision to attend seminary in Israel following high school.

Thus far, there is nothing particularly remarkable about Jennifer’s story. There are thousands who have followed a similar path. But what stands out about Jennifer was her determination that she would attend the same seminary — Michlala — that some of her advisors had attended. For a student from public school, it seemed like an impossible

goal. Nonetheless, we managed to arrange a meeting with a Michlala senior educator, and in November of her senior year she had an interview. While Jennifer made a strong impression through her remarkable resolve, she lacked the skills and background necessary to be admitted. Despite that limitation, the educator offered Jennifer a challenge. He handed her a list of sefarim that he wanted her to learn. If Jennifer would set up chavrusas in order to study 12 hours weekly — three hours each school day, Monday through Thursday, between November and March — he would reevaluate her for admission in March.

Jennifer rose to the challenge. She set up multiple chavrusas every day of the week and plugged away for four-and-a-half months. When the educator returned to Chicago before Pesach and tested Jennifer, he was undoubtedly impressed by the knowledge and skills she had gained during that time period. But even more, he was persuaded that the same determination that had brought her this far would ensure that she could be successful in Michlala as well. He accepted her on the spot.

Jennifer was indeed successful at Michlala and emerged from the experience a committed, inspired and knowledgeable young woman. Several years later, Jennifer married a young man from a different Midwestern city, himself an NCSY alumnus, with whom she is now raising a growing family as *shomrei Torah u’mitzvos*.

**Mrs. Schechter:** It is important to note that as much as we think that we inspire them, they also provide us with inspiration. I will share one particular story of a student of mine who grew up Catholic and was always

told that she has to love God. She was a very spiritual person but nothing really resonated. When she was 15 years old, she Googled “how to love God” and came across a shiur on yutorah.org. She listened to the shiur and was mesmerized. She then started listening to other shiurim on yutorah.org and was totally drawn to Judaism and ended up converting to Judaism.

There is a rabbinic expression, “*devarim hayotzim min halev nichnasim lalev*” — matters that leave the heart, enter the heart. If something is said sincerely and with feeling, it will be received with enthusiasm. This student was looking for something authentic and she found it because they were conveying a message that was authentic and doing so in an authentic way.

The Rambam, *Sefer Hamitzot, Aseh* no. 3, writes that when you admire someone, you tell everyone you know how great this person is and you try to get others to admire this person as much as you do. The Rambam says that this is a *mashal* (parable) for the mitzvah of loving Hashem. If we love Hashem and His Torah, we should be trying to convince everyone we know how great He is and how much they would benefit from having a relationship with Him. This, the Rambam says, is why Avraham Avinu made it his life mission to spread the word of God and bring people closer to Hashem. It was this type of approach that my student was able to pick up on yutorah.org. There was no hidden agenda. No tricks. Just someone trying to share a connection to Hashem with others. This is a simple but effective model for kiruv.