# Allan Finkelstein

Those who know me are aware that Hayim Herring's basic premise is one that totally supports my belief that our communities need a new way of thinking about how we approach serving Jews. Communities need to know how to work and how to work together. There are two specific areas of interest to me: 1) how we relate to members/participants and 2) how the institutions relate to each other. Here are a few comments about what I think is important in this paper:

I absolutely believe that the time for the "magnet" metaphor is behind us. The core/periphery distinction is far too black and white to accurately reflect the reality of where most American Jews are today. We (Jewish agencies) have, for too long, been thinking in terms of "what I need and what I want."

True, the real "core" active, involved Jews are exactly as Elazar described them. But they are far from being the challenge for us, and far from being the majority. The core model does not work. Jews are affiliated today in different ways at different times in their lives. They do not think institutionally like we might want them to. This is a flaw in how the American Jewish community works. We work against the consumer mentality that is very real. Hayim Herring says, "individual Jews who do not meet the criteria of institutional involvement may actually lead rich Jewish lives." This is important. We have been judging Jews based on affiliation and if they belong to what we think is important. They might have rich Jewish lives that we do not recognize. He quotes Sales and Tobin who say that "affiliation is not tantamount to religiosity." Jews think about meeting their needs in the best, most convenient way that is available at the time that they need it. What they think is convenient at one time may not be how our communities have structured themselves. I agree with Herring that business analogies are valid and real. When dealing with consumers, they are only going to buy a service if it is good. If our services are not of quality, Jews will go elsewhere.

Where we fail as a community is that we still work very much in institutional "silos" and we use language of exclusivity and competition, rather than of collaboration and community. We "talk" community, but we do not act like community. We are constantly using language that

badmouths other institutions. Herring notes that "institutional policies around involvement assume a permanent, stable, physical address" for those who may not be thinking in those terms. We also assume long term affiliation with a given institution. I think a vision of a strong synagogue is still at the core of everything. But a strong synagogue without a strong community around it is weak.

We know, as Hayim Herring points out, that the younger generations are skeptical about allegiance. We know that loyalty to organizations is no longer the norm. The days of joining the JCC, the synagogue, or giving to the federation because that is "just what you do" are not there anymore. We have a real opportunity to build loyalty to community, if only we can get our act together to think about the totality of community as a system that impacts the Jewish journey of the individual.

The network model is an effective way to do this if we realize that people want more than one way to do it. We must think about the totality of the community as a system that impacts the "Jewish journey" of the individual.

While I do not buy the network model totally as it plays out in the paper, I do congratulate Hayim Herring on giving us a real and challenging basis for redesigning how we work. What I believe works for me in his model is the following:

- The interdependence requires that all aspects of community feed "data" or individuals to each other as we understand their needs and see that, perhaps, another institution or experience is more appropriate. We do not do that now. We only worry about serving people when they are in our institution. Wherever the individual enters Jewish life, we have to help them get to the rest of the network. We are bad at that because we do not have the right language or the right attitude.

- The idea that there cannot be a "command control" central to meet the needs of today's Jews. Institutions are critical, indeed I represent one of them, but the ability for each to be entry points to the other is a critical notion. Personalized service and quick response have not been hallmarks of our organizations. Just because we are responsive to somebody's needs and we bring them in an effective way, does not mean that we do not care about

quality. We have to train our staff and lay leaders very different-ly so that when we bring someone in, we bring them into a net-work. I know that some people view this as losing institutional strength and quality of involvement. I believe the opposite, that a quality experience in one institution when combined with a customer-friendly response to the individual, will, in the end build closer ties to whole community if we are all articulating the communal message. That is a big "if." A recent study in Boston showed that on every measure of Jewish identification, those who have multiple affiliations score higher. If you belong to only one institution, your level of Jewish involvement will tend to be lower. Therefore, anyone who says that one specific Jewish organization is the total answer is wrong.

• The characterization of a model that focuses on "planning, organ-izing, leading and coordinating," rather than controlling, cer-tainly would lead to a more meaningful collaborative approach. The control model is just not working; it really turns people off. The question is whether or not we can let go of years of tradition and "built up" ways of working.

I would suggest that, at a minimum, we consider the "network" idea as a new way of thinking together, and planning. If we immediately move to tear apart the details or some of the examples that Hayim Herring pro-vides, we may actually never get to discover the potential of the bigger picture that he is painting. Let us take the following as challenges:

• The idea that the individual "journey" through Jewish life is a valid concept that is worth exploring.

• The idea that not everything must radiate from one "address" or "cen-tral" core.

• That we are richer as a system than as individual institutions.

I would add that a different "language" can be created, one that is sup-portive of other institutions and that assists people in moving more comfort-ably between them. Jews seek multiple communities, not just one, the his-toric community of Eastern Europe. There are many different communities, and they must relate to each other. These ideas could form the basis of a mean-ingful dialogue that would begin to test some of Hayim Herring's ideas.