

ORGANIZATIONAL GLOSSARY & STATISTICS

In 2000, there were 7 independent minyanim; in 2011, 115; they operate in more than 50 cities and 7 countries.

Independent Minyan: A prayer group organized and led by volunteers with no paid clergy & no denomination or movement affiliation

Havurah: A small community in which all members participate in creating authentic and meaningful Jewish experiences

Limmud: An approach to cross-denominational, cross-communal Jewish learning started in the UK in 1980 and now enjoyed by communities throughout the world.

Moishe House: A network of peer-led home-based Jewish communities for Jews in their 20s

Alternative emergent community (sometimes called a parashul): one that self-defines at least in part as a spiritual community but for which gathering for prayer is not the central and defining activity

Synagogue 3000 / Next Dor: A synagogue leadership and research organization focused on next generation engagement

For a bibliography related to the Jewish emergent phenomenon, please see the digital edition at shmadigital.com.

Emergence Unbound

SHAWN LANDRES

💙 ix years ago, I wrote in these pages about a renaissance in Jewish religious life that was happening in new spiritual communities that were unbound by conventional expectations about the roles and parameters of a synagogue. Relationship, not contract or program, was the driving metaphor for many of these communities, whether expressed through hospitality or community organizing.

Given the opportunity to revisit my essay, I turned to a tool not as readily available then as now — Facebook — to crowd-source insights and comments from friends and colleagues who have been pioneers and key observers on the emergent journey: What has or has not changed? Have mainstream synagogues absorbed Jewish emergent lessons? Have Jewish emergent communities become new-model (or not so new-model) synagogues? Over the course of two weeks, August 14-28, 2012, 30 Jews, two Christians, and one Muslim from across the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel, offered more than 80 comments in response to my questions and follow-ups and, more importantly, in response to each other. All of the quotes in this article are taken from that conversation.

The Jewish emergent phenomenon turns out to be neither singular nor unique. Research has confirmed substantial differences among the three broad streams identified in 2006: lay-led independent minyanim, clergy-led congregational startups, and what I termed "parashuls" (analogous to parachurches). And as Ari Y. Kelman reminded me at the time, what was happening in spiritual communities also was — and still is — happening elsewhere in Jewish communal life, in arts and culture, education, social justice, and myriad other spheres. The parallels to the Christian emerging church continue. Ryan Bolger, associate professor of church in contemporary culture at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., observed: "An embodied, rather than just a cognitive faith, has seeped into many parts of the Protestant traditions ... the snapshot in 2012 is a continued move away from enlightenment form of faith toward the postmodern — more arts, more bodies, more (eco)justice, flatter leadership; more community, less 'church.'"

The specific practices of emerging spiritual communities — whether expressed through independent minyanim like Kehilat Hadar and the Mission Minyan; newly formed synagogue alternatives like IKAR, the Kavana Cooperative, and Romemu; or entirely independent initiatives, like the Kavod House (now the Moishe Kavod House Boston) and East Side Jews — are slowly embedding themselves within the congregational establishment. This is visible in three main ways:

- individual experimentation with diverse approaches to spiritual practices, such as yoga, meditation, and bibliodrama (e.g., Storahtelling)
- the establishment of beyond-the-walls initiatives and synagogue satellites, and
- organizational co-sponsorships connecting synagogues and emergent startups.

As the Kitchen's Rabbi Noa Kushner observed, "What was once considered fringe in 2006 is increasingly accepted. Within a year of being in existence, the Kitchen was asked to cosponsor or participate with twelve 'establishment' Jewish organizations. Everyone knows things have already changed. It's only a question of how the new ecosystem will develop." In Los Angeles, an established synagogue (Temple Beth Am), a rabbi-led startup (IKAR), and an independent minyan (Shtibl) co-organize an allnight Shavuot observance every year.

Some of these changes are driven by generational transitions, including the rise of Generation Xers to community leadership and the arrival of highly educated Millennials. Danya Ruttenberg, now Northwestern University Hillel campus rabbi, co-founded the annual Jewcy retreat in 2001; it ran through 2005. Ruttenberg said: "For me (and I think for a lot of the people connected to those first retreats), [Jewcy] was the first time we managed to integrate Judaism and the rest of our lives (activism, alternative culture, non-traditional identities, etc.) in really deep ways. ... '01 was the year the Xers got old enough to create their own Jewish expression." However, it remains to be seen what will become of emerging spiritual communities as their constituencies age out of their 20s and early 30s, according to both Claire Sufrin, visiting professor of modern Jewish thought at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., and Rabbi Aaron Spiegel, former board chair and CEO of Los Angeles- and New York-based Synagogue 3000/Next Dor. Jeremy Burton, a co-founder of New York's Darkhei Noam, an independent minvan, noted that the community had adapted in response to its shifting demographics, adding, for example, both a chevra kadisha and programming for young children.

Broadly understood — within and beyond the synagogue context — the Jewish emergent phenomenon reflects three large-scale transformations of identity and collectivity in 21st-century Jewish life. The first is the unbundling and relocation of activities previously "packaged" in a given institution, such as the synagogue. Much of the creativity — and the discomfort — associated with this shift is that it represents the end of mass loyalty to an imagined communal center. Jewish emergent practice is taking place elsewhere, and not just on a one-time basis. Rabbi Menachem Cohen, founder of the Mitziut Jewish Community in Chicago, commented, "We have choices. We talk now of integrating our Jewish values into social and environmental justice. We find God while harvesting organic potatoes and celebrate Shabbos at Occupy Chicago."

The second transformation, related to the first, is that the organizing principle for collective action is now the interpersonal, relational dynamic rather than the institutional framework. In the emergent context, the guarantor of an organization's long-term impact is neither real estate nor an endowment, but rather network resilience. Nowhere is this more true than in the context of lay-led independent minyanim, which tend to be all-volunteer groups that use borrowed or rented space for Shabbat and holiday services. Relationship capital, rather than economic capital, sustains independent minyanim. To that end, their success is not tied to organizational longevity, but rather the strength of social bonds connecting their stakeholders. As Rabbi Elie Kaunfer, cofounder of Kehilat Hadar and Mechon Hadar in New York, argued, "If a minyan provides intensive, real connection and [a] davening community, but then fades, isn't that itself a success, perhaps more so than a sustainable but mediocre alternative?"

The third transformation is the bundling (and rebundling) of activities and practices into new institutions that reflect contemporary realities and meet the needs of the individuals they engage and serve. "Integrating Judaism and the rest of our lives (both in language and as a goal) is more normative now," observed Kavana's Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum. "...The whole field has absolutely shifted over the past decade. I'm seeing the work of the emergent groups not only building strong local Jewish communities in particular cities, but also trickling into the way that mainstream Jewish institutions are thinking, speaking, programming, and acting." Rabbi Yechiel Hoffman, executive director of LimmudLA, noted the influence of emergent organizations on the development of "newer community-driven organizations and networks that are not necessarily driven by religious ideology or needs," but warned that despite their momentum, they remain financially insecure.

Some startups appear to be the result of current philanthropic attention to the newly identified life stage called "emerging adulthood" (officially 18-26, but more broadly the so-called continued on next page



Voices from a Facebook Conversation



"Congregations are the most stable nonprofit institutions in America; [they] have been for 150 years. While synagogues have taken a hit recently, they're still counted in that stability. I'm not advocating the status quo; synagogues have to change. But creating new models isn't enough until and unless they become part of communal practice."

> - Rabbi Aaron Spiegel of Indianapolis, former board chair and CEO of Synagogue 3000/Next Dor.

"Most people who participated in our Occupy Judaism services weren't members of synagogues, though many who helped lead are members of an indie *minyan*. I think most weren't daveners generally, because they were driven away from their shuls due to the cost, the interpersonal politics, and their politics on Israel. They came to us because it was free; it was an act of rebellion against the establishment from which they were alienated; they could bring their non-Jewish partners and kids; and they could fully be themselves, whether prog-[progressive], post-, anti-, or non-Zionist, and still be welcome into a community. It was the antithesis of everything synagogue-like they had experienced."

- Daniel Sieradski, Founder of New York-based Occupy Judaism

"One of my arguments with Elie Kaunfer ...was whether the more important shared principles were ideological or structural. I lobbied for the first, but the independent minyan conferences were really about the second. This meant a wide degree of ideological pluralism with a focus on shared structural elements. I'm still not sure that was the right choice." - Yehuda Kurtzer, co-founder of the Washington Square Minyan in Brookline, Mass.

"Unlike Yehuda, I do think the structural principles of independent minyanim are important; on the other hand, I never thought independent minyanim and "rabbi-led emergent" communities had all that much in common, other than when they started and what they're not: not affiliated with denominations, not housed in their own buildings, and that's not even true for all of them anyway." - Ben Dreyfus, co-founder of Kol Zimrah in New York and an organizer of Minyan Segulah in Silver Spring, Md.

Join this conversation on https://www.facebook.com/JewishEmergent.



Shawn Landres, a Sh'ma Advisory Board member, is co-founder and CEO of Jumpstart, where he helps visionary philanthropic and nonprofit leaders of Jewish and interreligious causes find the perspective and connections they need to achieve impact, build stronger communities, and transform the world. This past summer, Landres' work was recognized by the White House, which featured him as a "spotlight innovator" and speaker at its forum for faith-based social innovators in July. Landres has also received recognition from the World Council for Jewish Communal Service and from the JCSA: Jewish Communal Service and JCSA: Jewish Communal Service Association of North America. which honored him with a 2012 Ted Comet Exemplar Award.

More Voices

"Jewish Renewal itself is having this exact conversation, essentially wondering if it will die when the original leadership does. Some argue that we MUST be sustainable and some argue that the movement has done what it needed to do." - Rabbi David Ingber, founder and spiritual director of Romemu in N.Y.

"The synagogue will have to demonstrate its ability to organize and meet the real spiritual and physical needs of a new generation that is practicing resilience and not just craving authenticity and meaning." - Rabbi Shoshana Leis, co-rabbi of Congregation Har Shalom in Fort Collins, Colo.

"20s and 30s"), and through national initiatives (Moishe House and Synagogue 3000's Next Dor) and local ones (Sixth & I Historic Synagogue in Washington D.C.). Other self-organized and grassroots-funded efforts represent new crossgenerational bundles of activities, especially those focused on the environment or food, such as Jewish urban farms and eco- and ethical kashrut. "For many of us who did not grow up in the 'establishment,' at Jewish summer camp, or Hillel," wrote Tel Aviv-based nonprofit strategist Marni Mandell, "our participation in these indie minyanim gave us the ability to go and establish communities of our own. Many have asked whether we are looking for funding and how we will ensure sustainability, and our response is that as long as we are relevant, we don't worry about either one."

"I'm not really interested in whether we

are a synagogue or not," declared the Kitchen's Kushner. "I like some synagogues plenty. What does interest me is trying to figure out what to call this new idea, so we can succinctly get across what is continuous with synagogues and where we overlap with independent minyanim, havurot, etc. We need a new term; we (many of us) have the ideas already."

Indeed, as my Facebook conversation confirmed, this most recent period of Jewish emergence generally has been less about the "what" — the articulation of substantive new ideologies — and more about the "how": the evolution of new organizing principles for spiritual communities and the integration of religious values and spiritual practices into individual lives. The emerging organizational models of 21st-century Jewish life continue to iterate and expand, drawing on one another's lessons of struggle and success.

Sh'ma on Kindle

Find us at: kindle.amazon.com

The free Kindle application lets you read Kindle books on your iPad, iPhone or iPod touch-no Kindle required.

Sh'ma also on:





Envisioned Communities: A 'Sh'ma' Roundtable

We asked several rabbis, representing the spectrum of religious belief and practice, who have founded successful spiritual communities — most of which do not consider themselves "synagogues" — to talk about what distinguishes these groups. We wondered if indie minyanim and communities are having an impact on the expectations of what a more mainstream synagogue is supposed to be and do. And we wondered whether the impact goes both ways: Are these communities becoming part of the synagogue scene without the name?

Sharon Brous: Each of us is working to build meaningful Jewish community, being very thoughtful and creative about Jewish education, and bringing people together in purposeful ways. But this is precisely what many of our colleagues in more conventional institutions are also striving to do. Is there a significant difference between what's happening inside the institutional world and our efforts on the outside? Is there a difference in substance, in form, or in both?

Lizzi Heydemann: I would call Mishkan a spiritual community rather than a synagogue.

We don't offer the breadth of programs that typical synagogues offer, and we don't serve that population either. Our Friday night services are followed by dinner, where people stay late into the evening. We're suited to serve young adults, people without children; we start and end late. This is a population that feels alienated by synagogues that now focus primarily on families. Our community might look different in five years when our singles get married, have children, and ask for alternatives.

Zushe Greenberg: What is changing in the U.S. and around the world is that traditional