



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון  
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן

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# Courageous Leadership

## *The Challenges Facing Jewish Leadership in a Partisan Age*

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*This white paper, identifying a major challenge facing Jewish life in North America and offering a pathway toward potential interventions, has been informed by a series of closed-door convenings organized by the Shalom Hartman Institute in 2018 and 2019, as well as conversations with Jewish leaders on this topic in recent years. The purpose of this paper is to share with others in the Jewish community what the Institute has learned in order to bring focus to this issue, to engage communal attention, and to stimulate constructive responses.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Courageous leadership and open discourse in Jewish institutions are under threat, with ramifications for the immediate health of those institutions and for the future leadership of the Jewish community.

We see this play out when leaders are pushed to take stands on contentious political issues and are punished as their statements emerge into an impossible political and media climate. We see this as marginal activists carry out deliberate campaigns of personal delegitimization. We see this as purity tests become ever more stringent and inimical to effective, inclusive communal leadership.

The range of ideas and ideologies permitted as part of Jewish public discourse is narrowing, and the incentives for the courageous leadership that will generate a creative, diverse Jewish future have been replaced with incentives for risk avoidance.

In American Jewish discourse, the rise of the partisan divide is forcing leaders and institutions into taking political positions beyond the scope of their missions. Jewish institutions are caught in a constant cycle of public response to the news cycle yet are still frequently “called out” for failure to take the “right” stand in a clear and timely way.

The political climate is also forcing Jewish institutions into a constant defensive position, resulting in a huge communal focus on ideological boundary-setting and institutional discomfort as to who speaks on behalf of the organizations.

In general, internal Jewish politics about Israel and Zionism have been divisive for several decades. In the past few years, American partisan rancor is catching up as an equally powerful disorganizing principle in Jewish communal life.

As a result of this climate, some rabbis and other communal leaders are frequently choosing to censor themselves and to speak with less conviction at the cost of collective, thoughtful public leadership on crucial issues. Topics that require moral clarity are muddied by the frequent need to cry wolf, and the result is that the energies needed to build a vibrant, meaningful contemporary Jewish life are dissipated.

There is also growing anecdotal evidence that fewer and fewer qualified and capable leaders are seeking particular leadership roles, in the belief that the work involved in these roles is too political, unrewarding, and dangerous. Until now, the loud consequences to individual leaders

have been significant, but of even greater importance are the silent effects already damaging the entire Jewish community.

Other leaders, in turn, have become political activists in ways that are unsustainable and potentially dangerous — for themselves and their institutions. The “personalization” of institutional Jewish leadership — the identification of organizations with their chief officers — which social media in particular tends to incentivize, exposes leaders to a suite of risks and jeopardizes good governance in institutional leadership.

The gravity of the situation causes us to respond unusually for the Shalom Hartman Institute. Normally we do not offer prescriptions; rather, we educate leaders about ideas and insights, giving the right leaders the right tools to face the right challenges in their fields. In this case, where the scope exceeds any single field and where we have particular expertise, we offer both analysis with perspective and specific ideas for a community-wide response.

This paper outlines the background and method of the Shalom Hartman Institute’s research into this issue, offers an analysis of the structural and contextual forces that are creating this problem, and then provides concrete recommendations for the field to respond.

In summary, we recommend that the Jewish community must invest in training and skill-building for Jewish professionals:

- **in specific areas of content related to Judaism and politics, such that our professionals can emerge as the calmest, sanest people — always capable of being the “bigger person”;**
- **in communications, especially with respect to crisis management;**
- **in network-building so that people under threat can vouch for one another and individuals have communities to turn to for advice and support in moments of crisis.**

And we further believe that, as a community, we must take material responsibility for building a more ethical Jewish public square in which bad behavior is implicitly and explicitly delegitimized and our community lives its professed values.

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## BACKGROUND AND METHOD

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Jewish communal leadership — the individuals who lead the Jewish people, the work of leading, and the ideas and directions to which they lead our community — is of central importance to the Shalom Hartman Institute. We believe that ideas and leaders are the twin engines that power Jewish life, and our principal activity is to optimize those engines.

This means that we develop ideas to help our community stand up to its central adaptive philosophical, political, and spiritual challenges and translate these ideas into cutting-edge educational programs for Jewish professional and lay leaders. We often describe our educational goals as attempting to engender both “confidence” and “competence,” and in our 40 years of work in the North American Jewish leadership landscape, we have demonstrated success

**WE BELIEVE THAT IDEAS AND LEADERS ARE THE TWIN ENGINES THAT POWER JEWISH LIFE.**

developing the kinds of intellectual tools that have altered leadership trajectories for countless individuals — and for the North American Jewish community and its institutions as a result.

In the past few years, in our programs for rabbis, lay leaders, and Jewish professionals on college campuses, we have witnessed an unprecedented level of leadership anxiety. In many cases, Jewish leaders are not only tested — in ways that are to be expected — but they are also publicly and personally vilified, with personal and professional costs. Moreover, we hear more and more that the pace of change and a combination of four major factors is leaving many leaders both confused and vulnerable. Communal leadership is being weakened by:

1. the acceleration of tensions in American partisan politics;
2. shifts in American Jewish opinions and the nature of the discourse about Israel;
3. the demise of the “silent majority” or “center”;
4. the rise of new forms of media, which promote rapid response at the expense of reasoned reaction.

Leaders’ efforts to engage courageously — standing in the breach of these challenges, articulating a coherent position, tackling hard challenges, stirring their communities — often result in setbacks to their personal and professional lives.

These incidents include rabbis subjected to hostile media campaigns from inside and outside their congregations due to actual or perceived relationships with Israeli NGOs viewed as critical of Israel; relentless and personal hostility on social media for failing to adhere to an expected

political position; efforts to get Jewish professionals fired that originate from around the country, usually organized online, in response to a political stance or a misstep; and much more.

This phenomenon concerns us not only because we care about these individuals, but also — and especially — because we care about our community. If, in fact, some of the moral and political challenges that the Jewish people face are intensifying, then a climate that is dismantling leadership becomes especially problematic.

In recent years, and consistent with the growth of the Shalom Hartman Institute and the increasing role we play in convening North American leaders in conversation on urgent issues, we have found and heard from our program participants and partners that many of the challenges they face are far more complicated than can be addressed with content alone. In addition, the skills-based leadership training offered by other organizations working in leadership development in the Jewish community is falling short in equipping our professional and lay leaders with the tools they need to survive and lead effectively in our polarized climate.

In response, Hartman embarked on a project to study this issue, what we call “courageous leadership” — what it takes for a community to create the conditions to support the leaders it actually *needs*, the individuals who will take risks, create change, and move the community forward — and how our community is falling short.

We studied this issue with a method that is uncharacteristic to the usual work of the Shalom Hartman Institute. Ordinarily, our educational deliverables in our programs are the product of years of work on the part of a research team of five to 10 diverse scholars with relevant expertise. For this project, however, we foregrounded the most relevant voices and perspectives from the field of Jewish leadership itself — specifically, lay leaders, funders, clergy, journalists, and professionals. In lieu of convening a research team, we convened the field, with Hartman serving as guide, facilitator, and, ultimately, as interpreter.

Between the spring of 2018 and the spring of 2019, the Shalom Hartman Institute hosted five half-day convenings devoted to these issues. The 130 participants on the East and West coasts represented different leadership roles, political positions, types of organizations, temperaments, ages, and other expressions of diversity.

Each of the five convenings shared a set of fixed design elements:

- **Curated Attendance:** Each group was carefully constructed with an eye toward diversity of perspective, position within the community, and personal history with the challenges described below. Two of the convenings were for mixed groups of professionals, clergy, lay

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leaders, and funders on the East Coast, one for a parallel group on the West Coast, one for a group of North American rabbis, and one for a group of North American Hillel professionals.

- **Pre-Reading:** Participants were assigned either four or five articles as pre-reading, to ensure that all attendees shared a basic framework and set of concepts (see Appendix I).
- **Chatham House Rule:** Each convening was held under the “Chatham House Rule,” a protocol designed to increase openness of discussion around controversial issues, which states that anyone who comes to the meeting is free to use information from the discussion, but is not allowed to reveal who made any comment or divulge the identity of anyone who attended. The introduction of this rule allowed participants to achieve the level of candor and honesty required for true analysis and reflection.
- **Opening Presentation:** In the first 90 minutes of each convening, Dr. Yehuda Kurtzer shared a basic framework for the questions and working hypotheses of the Courageous Leadership Project, much of which is outlined below in “How We Got Here: A Contextual, Political, and Historical Analysis.” Participants had the opportunity to respond, ask questions, and relate their own experiences to these challenges. These hypotheses were modified and refined between the gatherings on the basis of participant feedback.
- **Working Groups:** Participants were broken up into working groups of six or seven individuals and given a case study (see Appendix II). These case studies, or “Profiles in Leadership,” are based on real events, with key details changed to protect those originally involved and, in some cases, stylized for maximum utility. Each working group was asked to explore the following three questions:
  - **What does the leader in question face — seen and unseen — as the traps, obstacles, and pitfalls in this scenario that would derail his or her leadership?**
  - **What (resources) does the leader in question need in order to weather a crisis and emerge as a leader on the other side of the storm?**
  - **What would “courageous” leadership look like in this situation?**
- **Closing Conversation:** Participants reconvened to share the results of their working groups and relate any final thoughts for the day. Groups offered feedback to each other, often based on personal experience, and made further suggestions of individuals and resources to consult as we continued to research this challenge.

The authors of this document took careful notes at each of the gatherings and, in addition to gathering independent research and following up with several participants, have formulated this paper to share with the field. This paper is informed by learnings and relationships formed in 30-plus years of rabbinic programs with hundreds of alumni and nearly a decade of leadership education programs for Hillel professionals.

## HOW WE GOT HERE: A CONTEXTUAL, POLITICAL, AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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There are several important contexts shaping the challenges facing Jewish leadership in North America.

First, the Jewish community faces a leadership succession challenge, often described as “the pipeline problem.” In recent years, Jewish communal leaders have worried publicly and privately about finding future talented leadership for Jewish institutions (professional and lay). The challenge has been called a “nonprofit leadership development deficit” (SSIR Oct 2015), a “leadership problem” (eJP July 2016), and even a “leadership crisis” (March 2017) as positions go unfilled. This challenge has even resulted in the Jewish community’s creation of an independent entity — Leading Edge — focused entirely on leadership pipeline development.

There may indeed be a leadership crisis of some form if indeed there are not enough people interested in or able to take on the positions of leadership that the community needs. But there may also be a gap between the leadership profile that institutions are looking for and the leaders who are interested in taking up the mantle of leadership.

**DYNAMIC, CHARISMATIC, INDIVIDUAL, LEADERS ARE THOUGHT OF AS SAVIORS FOR STRUGGLING ORGANIZATIONS**

Among our networks of Jewish leaders at the Shalom Hartman Institute, we have noticed a trend toward the cultivation and idealization of dynamic, charismatic, individual leaders who are thought of as saviors for organizations — especially struggling ones — as opposed to thinking about the holistic health of the organizations themselves. This development shapes how we as a Jewish community think of as a good leader.

Taken to an extreme, the question How do we find more talented individuals? can lead to a highly idiosyncratic culture of leadership, one in which a particular leadership style can dominate our communal understanding of effective leadership. Certain organizations that are perceived as the “innovators” in Jewish communal life reward a particular type of leader, but their models of management may carry an outsize influence on other types of organizations looking for new leadership. However, we need to ask, Are these types of attitudes toward Jewish leadership morally desirable? Are they Jewishly grounded? And are they effective?

But the key corollary in the question Who will lead? as it relates to the Jewish community is the question What exactly will they be leading? The Jewish communal landscape has been

undergoing a seismic change, as central umbrella organizations dwindle, individual transactions replace membership, and powerful donors become the major funders — resulting in significant distortions of communal power structures.

It is hard to tell whether the Jewish communal ecosystem is more democratic than it was in the past. On the one hand, the influence of social media alongside a start-up entrepreneurial sector of new Jewish organizations means hierarchies are flatter than ever before, and individuals are no longer bound by local entities. On the other hand, in finance and philanthropy, a smaller number of individuals are shaping the communal agenda as the rise of private and colossal family philanthropies alongside the decline of the federated “community chest” model suggests that power is more highly concentrated than ever before.

These changes put pressure on leaders, who often receive mixed messages about how to respond. Should they strive to be heard above the din of Jewish communal life in order to gain audience, attract funders and recruit talented staff? Should they pursue innovation as an end in itself? How far should they acknowledge the rapid pace of change by following their instincts, in the belief that communal structures cannot keep up?

*All of this anxiety, confusion, and change is deeply destabilizing perceptions of who leaders are meant to be, how they are meant to act, and how the stakeholders in our organizations are supposed to relate to them.*

Second, there is a larger trend in Jewish life in which Jewish politics — especially related to Israel — take up a disproportionate place in Jewish communal life and shape the parameters of attitudes and discourse. The larger intellectual history of this trend should be taken up elsewhere, but we are currently witnessing a kind of singular focus on politics as an organizing principle, and therefore destabilizing element, in Jewish communal life.

Despite the fact that most Jewish institutions are based on ideas and practices that value the spiritual, the religious, and the communal, Israel and its politics is the issue most likely to destabilize a Hillel or a synagogue.

Domestic politics are also an increasingly destabilizing force and, together with Israel, we see American (and global) political polarization as a critical context to understand this leadership climate. In 2014, the Pew Forum released a major study, “[Political Polarization in the American Public](#),” which outlined in detail how much Americans have become politically polarized along partisan lines.

**DOMESTIC POLITICS  
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DESTABILIZING FORCE.**

One aspect of this polarization is partisan antipathy. As the report notes, “the level of antipathy that members of each party feel toward the opposing party has surged over the past two decades. Not only do greater numbers of those in both parties have negative views of the other side, those negative views are increasingly intense. And today, many go so far as to say that the opposing party’s policies threaten the nation’s well-being.” Another aspect of the polarization is ideological consistency: Americans increasingly say that it is important to live in a place where others share their political views, or they report that most of their friends share their political views.

Jews have followed their fellow Americans in this trend toward political polarization. Feelings that someone who holds opposite political views is “a threat to the nation’s well-being” is too often translated in the Jewish community as a feeling that someone who holds opposite views about Israel is “a threat to the Jewish people.” Such strong feelings, borne of political disagreement, are driving, in part, the “take-down” culture that is poisoning the context in which Jewish leaders must lead.

The Pew data also shows how Republicans and Democrats increasingly wish to live in different places: 75% of consistent conservatives prefer to live in areas where houses are larger and farther apart but schools, stores, and restaurants are several miles away, while 77% of consistent liberals prefer to live in areas where the houses are smaller and closer to each other but schools, stores, and restaurants are within walking distance. The American Jewish version of this phenomenon plays out in denominational and institutional affiliation, with Jews increasingly willing to say some version of, “I don’t daven at that shul because it is too politically conservative/liberal” or treating any institution that does not entirely adhere to one’s political instincts as a political opponent.

**MANY GO SO FAR AS TO SAY THAT THE OPPOSING PARTY’S POLICIES THREATEN THE NATION’S WELL-BEING.**

Where once there were clearer lines demarcating the categories of moral, political, and partisan, today these categories are collapsed. This is manifest in larger denominational frameworks, where there are visible political alignments by liberal Jews with the American political left and by Orthodox Jews with the American political right; in an intensified partisan climate, those political choices become damning to a sense of “belonging” to a Jewish collective beyond contingent political needs.

Put differently, if it was once the case that political lines crossed other sociological contexts, making for more political diversity in a variety of religious and geographic contexts, today these lines are blurred. In a Jewish communal ecosystem that is a competitive “buyers’ market”— with

no inherent loyalty — institutions are forced to continually articulate their value proposition to an audience of stakeholders with strong political views, deep antipathy for their political opponents, and pronounced skepticism toward any expressions of centrism, bipartisanship, or neutrality. This climate continually repoliticizes Jewish institutions and forces their leaders into cycles of performance.

A third context is a media culture in which Jewish leaders and institutions are expected to respond to current events in a way that is simultaneously — and impossibly — learned, relevant, thoughtful, and fast. Consider the events of May 2018, which featured violent activity in Gaza and news about the relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. For Jewish leaders, it was difficult to know which of the two stories to pay attention to, which to respond to, and whether or not the leader would be attacked for responding to one and not the other. Dire consequences promised to come from either omission or commission.

Social media by definition entails the curating of an enormous amount of information in real time and becomes an assault on those who try to stay current with the news cycle. To become an active respondent is to jump into an endless and breathless loop and feed a marketplace of Jewish leadership that measures effectiveness in “likes” and “shares,” neither of which is actually a qualitative metric for ethical or learned leadership. And this further assumes that the individual is accountable to a well-intentioned and passionate audience. Social media is famously replete with bullies, bots, and other toxins, and many of these forces can have disrupting influence far beyond their actual power.

**SOCIAL MEDIA IS  
ALSO REplete WITH  
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OTHER TOXINS.**

On top of what seems like an expectation for institutions to respond at lightning-fast speed with a well-thought-out statement lies an increasingly 24/7 culture of social media posting. The digital age has transformed our notion of community from just the real and local to the virtual and national (or even global). Leadership has also evolved, and leaders feel simultaneously beholden to different constituencies.

On social media, words and actions can make targets or champions of leaders. One bon mot word or the organization of a protest can mobilize a media army of support. On the flip side, the anonymous, flat nature of social media makes possible “troll”-like behavior — unsubstantiated or conspiratorial attacks on individuals — that requires enormous time and emotional energy to combat and can never be erased.

Local Jewish leaders often find that they can attract a national following — and either wanted or unwanted scrutiny — through their online personae. Having a leader with thousands of

national friends or enemies can create an untenable accountability structure for institutions that understand, represent, and cater to their core constituencies.

Social media never forgets; the speed of production belies the fact that even a single misbegotten tweet can be captured in a screenshot and live online in perpetuity. One enduring screenshot in a perpetually changing context can easily come back to damage a career long after Twitter battles have been won and lost, long after lines of reference have faded, and long after jokes have been forgotten.

The sum total of these challenges is proving catastrophic to the field. We are watching good professionals suffering under the weight of their obligations and others subjected to attacks that can derail their careers. We are also observing professionals realizing that the best way to survive while leading is to become risk averse to the detriment of institutions and the profession. Early-career professionals are telling us, “I watch the senior rabbi/Hillel director, and their whole job is managing crises. If Jewish leadership is basically managing political issues, I’m out.”

In the field of Jewish journalism, we have heard from our colleagues that, in addition to the incessant hateful antisemitism of trolls, social media culture defines whether a journalist or a publication is “right” or “left,” and once the journalist or publication has taken on that classification, they lose credibility from their political opponents.

Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman compares the hostile treatment of Jewish leaders by those who hire them or those they are meant to serve and lead to an “autoimmune” response. In the Jewish community, it is removing the very Jewish professional leaders vital to survive today’s challenges.

And, if indeed many of our best-intentioned individuals are going to opt out of the system, we face a threefold problem: that our best people cannot or will not be in position to engage the significant moral and political challenges that we face as a people, in Israel and America; that there will be a vacuum in our communal leadership; and that the individuals who want to serve in these roles may be attracted to the political toxicity in ways that could compound the problem.

## THE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES FACING RABBINIC LEADERS

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The challenges described in this white paper affect all Jewish leaders. But one leadership group may be most at risk: our rabbis. Rabbis are under pressure to be “relevant,” but they are often taught skill sets that are the opposite. Philip Graubart eloquently articulated an aspect of the problem, noting that in order to be effective leaders, rabbis in America today have to “understand what centrifuges are, how fast they should spin, how much uranium enrichment matters in making bombs, what sanctions are, how they work, which are effective, which are not.” Needless to say, rabbis learned none of these things in rabbinical school, and it is doubtful that the Jewish community would be better off if they had.

How exactly should a congregational or communal rabbi cultivate deep empathy and a spiritual presence while at the same time respond in real time to political news cycles while avoiding the toxic partisanship of our time? What if the very skills the rabbis do have — pastoral and spiritual — are the precise “antidote” to the political climate, but in our quest to be validated — religiously or politically — we are demanding our religious leaders speak the language of the day?

One problem we face is how to categorize and evaluate rabbis and, accordingly, how they should be trained for today’s challenges. Since the heyday of Rabbis Prinz and Heschel and their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, there has been a trend — especially in liberal Jewish congregations — toward a “prophetic” model of rabbinic leadership, in which successful leadership is defined almost exclusively with reference to protest culture. The biblical prophet is often held up as the vanguard of individual moral courage. But this model — believing that the only way a religious leader can stand in the world is in this particular model of the prophetic tradition — does a major disservice to the actual variety and impacts of effective rabbinic leaders.

Rabbis are also encouraged to be executives and entrepreneurs and are often criticized for failing to stay current. This is one factor behind the growing number of rabbis active on social media and engaged in activism on a national level. As we have seen, however, social media invites challenges and toxicities, and national activism — as a drain of time, distraction of focus, and loss of particularities — can be at odds with the work of local leadership.

Finally, rabbis are especially vulnerable because they tend to serve at the pleasure of their congregations, and because synagogues — as with many physical centers of worship and community — are being squeezed by a wide set of economic and affiliation trends.

## THE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES FACING CAMPUS PROFESSIONALS

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Jewish leaders on college campuses face extreme versions of the challenges described in this paper. College campuses have become indexes of the Jewish collective consciousness, and the controversies that emerge there often function as windows into the most intense version of Jewish political debates. Perhaps this is because the American Jewish community operates with so much anxiety about its demographics and its future, and the college campus concentrates so many young people in one place — and at such a significant inflection point in their emergence to autonomous adulthood. This is evident in the highly militarized language that is commonplace in Israel advocacy on the college campus today. Some students imagine themselves as soldiers on the battlefield for the Jewish people and the State of Israel, while Hillel staff tell us that people view campus workers as being “in the trenches,” “on the front lines,” or “foot soldiers” of the Zionist ideal. When college students are seen as the proxy for the Jewish future, anyone working with Jewish students on campus is subject to enormous scrutiny.

Of course, campuses are, in general, ideological “greenhouses,” places of intensified political debate and culture. Campuses are permanent ecosystems that are often independent from their larger surroundings; students come and go, but faculty members stay. This is the site in which students will try out their identities and the environment in which they often first become politically responsible and accountable.

Given the complexity of maintaining a commitment to pluralism and the validity of diverse views and identities while dealing with students who are testing out the limits of political stances, Hillel professionals often struggle to embody an educational ethos that can stand above the fray on contentious issues related to Israel and domestic politics.

But there are more reasons why those who work as a Jewish professional at a Hillel or a Jewish Student Union are facing untenable pressures. The first is structural: the typical Hillel board. Most Hillels are governed by lay leaders who tend to not live in the community served by the institution. When parents and alumni serve as board members, they may have their own points of access and strong emotional attachments to the university (perhaps predicated on their own experience), but they are not themselves the primary, direct constituents of the Hillel. This structure “squeezes” Hillel professionals between a lay leadership of one generation and location and their primary student audience, which is from a different generation and physical location.

When you add in the influence lay leaders have through making financial gifts, it is easy to see how Hillel professionals are often stuck in a power dynamic that can easily turn nasty, one that can even set the students against the professionals in shaping the ideological agenda of the institution.

Hillels are also unique as essentially the only holistic and intentionally pluralistic full-service Jewish institutions. They are synagogues that serve multiple denominations, they are creators of immersive community across difference, they provide for spiritual, educational, and physical sustenance, and they create a version of Jewish community that is ultimately highly idiosyncratic.

Unfortunately, this commitment to pluralism and intentionally diverse community is becoming a liability. Today's political climate sees pluralism and consensus as evidence of a failed sense of political urgency and prefers ideologically homogenous political groupings. It may be that one reason ideological communities such as Chabad are growing on campus is because they are "unconstrained" by the need to serve a diverse community and preserve a delicate balance among competing ideological, political, communal, and spiritual needs. Hillel professionals are modeling an Olympic balancing act in an environment that is skeptical of the sport that it is watching.

**TODAY'S POLITICAL CLIMATE SEES PLURALISM AND CONSENSUS AS EVIDENCE OF A FAILED SENSE OF POLITICAL URGENCY.**

What makes that balancing act especially difficult is the near-constant pressure to tilt off balance by a wide set of organizations (and sometimes philanthropists) with clear advocacy agendas in one direction or another. When a moment of crisis strikes, Hillel directors are barraged by calls from multiple advocacy groups. Meanwhile, when the campus is calmer, Hillel staff must navigate decisions about funding that is predicated on including or rejecting particular groups. What amounts to an industry of advocacy on campus creates a context that restrains courageous leadership.

All of these challenges would be plenty for any Jewish professional. But Hillel professionals face one more challenge in the realm of Jewish education: choosing between the barely tangible rewards of following the organization's broad mission and the limited but vibrant success of further mobilizing already engaged students.

The primary activity of the campus is educational. The main locus for formal education is the university classroom, but Hillels have a vital formal, informal and experiential educational role. They are also social, behavioral, communal, and religious organizations; and with this complicated identity, the outcomes and content of Jewish education can be widely disparate. In

practice, Hillel professionals often face difficult choices between prioritizing engagement activities that make it more likely they will reach every Jewish student on campus and inspire them to make “an enduring commitment to Jewish life, learning, and Israel” or focusing on narrower educational activities that target a smaller core of engaged students. The question of which Jewish commitments are more or less important comes into play as well, and when various Jewish commitments are also political in nature, educational choices become political choices.

One way to articulate the leadership challenge facing Hillel professionals is to ask: Are Hillels meant to engage in Jewish political battles or are they meant to educate about them? One former Hillel director added up the costs of fighting the boycott movement on campus, including resources and time that could go to other important educational work and ripping apart the very “big tent” pluralistic community that is at the heart of the organization’s explicit mission.

When it comes to Israel, and when it comes to contentious political questions, the larger Jewish community often shifts from an approach that emphasizes “engagement” on an issue to demanding adherence to a concrete position. Nowhere is this more on display than on the college campus, where the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement has achieved its greatest gains in shaping attitudes, and where Jewish campus professionals are put in the awkward position of needing to stake a position that is at once accountable to their identities as educators and conveners of pluralistic community and at the same time accountable to the political positions that are considered normative in the organized Jewish community.

The challenges are indeed enormous. Hillel professionals are pushed by BDS campaigns; by students and activists who demand them to be progressive political leaders; by ideological trends that are incubated first at the university level; by philanthropists who expect them to maintain the party line on Jewish politics; by university peers in interfaith spaces; by advocacy organizations that sometimes work through them and sometimes around them; by actors from other regions and countries or online trolls with no connection to their campus; and by gaps between their students and their boards (and sometimes the students’ parents).

The emerging generation of talent in this system is watching the older generation suffering under the weight of constant political pressures of the executives and expectations of having to stay in line with the proper politics of the Jewish community on Israel and stay conversant with students who do not align with these positions. There is only so much this population can be pushed, unsupported, before the individuals seek more fulfilling opportunities elsewhere. A better way to show how much we care about Jewish life on campus would be to deepen our support for the complex leadership needs of Hillel professionals.

## FROM ANALYSIS TO INTERVENTION

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Due to our long-standing commitment to supporting and strengthening rabbinic and other forms of communal leadership, the Shalom Hartman Institute is concerned about the threat to Jewish leadership. In our years of work, we have seen too many of our friends, partners, and students caught up in these vicissitudes. We are concerned on a personal level for the individuals who suffer unavoidable or unwarranted attacks. But, in a larger sense, we care about thought leadership on the Jewish people's most pressing issues and we believe the current communal climate disincentivizes courageous leadership.

The Jewish people face significant challenges today, but our collective conduct risks turning some of our most remarkable achievements — including the creation of the State of Israel and the unique conditions of American Jewish thriving — into instruments used for the dismantling of our community. The fact that facing these challenges is difficult should not mean that we yield to destabilizing forces nor that we should reward the voices of passionate intensity in our midst merely because they operate most aggressively and with the most certainty.

**THE FACT THAT FACING THESE CHALLENGES IS DIFFICULT SHOULD NOT MEAN THAT WE YIELD TO DESTABILIZING FORCES.**

We, in particular, care because we recognize that given the constriction of Jewish discourse, we must actively advocate for the ideals we are committed to sustaining, ideas such as “peoplehood” and “pluralism.”

We believe that commitment to these ideals does not betray a misbegotten “centrism” or other forms of banality in the face of today's moral urgencies; it reflects a commitment to a set of transcendent Jewish ideals that need to be sustained as independent moral concerns and that may strengthen the capacity of Jewish leaders to face those precise moral challenges.

We have identified four types of intervention; each category includes a set of programmatic activities for the Jewish community to consider for prioritization and investment:

### 1. CONTENT

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Ideas matter, and the single most significant variable in the capacity of leaders to hold splintering communities together, or to withstand attacks on their legitimacy, or lead the communities to take a strong and courageous stand that may be unpopular lies in their sophisticated knowledge of the issues themselves. In our programs, we often describe this as trying to be “the biggest person in the room” – to close off the criticism

and distrust that often undermines leaders when, in addition to dealing with external critics and attackers, leaders have to struggle with their own crisis of confidence in being able to formulate learned positions on the issues (or know where to look).

This does not require, as discussed above, the acquisition of a knowledge base that is outside the competency of the field (for example, rabbis should not have to know about centrifuges). Instead, we want to argue for a stronger “Torah of politics,” conceptual framework for thinking about the most challenging issues of our time that help to shape the thinking of leadership both prior to and during a crisis, as well as with space and time to learn about the issues and engage them substantively. This means closing the gap between what we describe as “Judaism” — texts, ideas, ideals — and what we imagine as “politics” — the major issues and concerns of the day.

Today’s critical questions include the ability to articulate clearly what we mean when we talk about a “Jewish and democratic state,” even before we debate the issues of Israel and Palestine; to be able to interrogate the differences, and sometimes the convergences, between antisemitism and anti-Zionism; or to engage in learned ways about the dynamics of pluralism, boundaries, and coalitions. On all these issues, there is real “Torah,” and there is learnable

expertise for Jewish leaders to become conversant about ideas. In addition to being conversant about the ideas, they should be educators and visionaries— they should lead rather than react.

This work requires creating more contexts for leaders to engage in this kind of study, with stronger constructive content for Jewish leaders on the major issues facing Jewish life so that they can be more substantive, informed, and sophisticated leaders with the confidence and the competence to choose their battles,

as opposed to simply having to keep pace with a fast-moving political culture. It also requires us to introduce changes in the public discourse, as will be mapped out below, such that this kind of knowledge is properly valorized in the Jewish community as the stuff of quality leadership instead of the current use of speed, hostility, and popularity as entertainment-based indexes for the public discourse.

Some interventions in this arena could include:

- a. EXPANDING EXISTING PLATFORMS FOR EXECUTIVE/RABBINIC LEARNING:** The Shalom Hartman Institute is one of multiple institutions in the field that provides opportunities for rabbis, Hillel professionals, and other Jewish leaders to study Jewish ideas with a focus on contemporary issues and application. Our work is unique in the field of “Jewish leadership education” with its focus on Jewish ideas rather than the mechanics of leadership education, but we are not alone. The field remains relatively

**ON ALL THESE ISSUES, THERE IS REAL “TORAH,” AND THERE IS LEARNABLE EXPERTISE FOR JEWISH LEADERS TO BECOME CONVERSANT ABOUT IDEAS.**

underdeveloped, especially for Jewish professionals in both legacy and start-up organizations. This is in part because professional development remains underfunded across the board, and organizations tend to value skill-based learning opportunities more than the Jewish content-based experiences that can make for a distinctive and deeper set of communal systems. Our organization is eager to grow our platforms for Jewish communal leaders, and we know of other worthy organizations with similar programs. However, the field of Jewish philanthropy has to normalize this kind of training and make it far more accessible.

- b. BUILDING A JEWISH TAXONOMY OF DISSENT:** Jewish communities need a taxonomy of dissent that allows us to have shared language and criteria to understand the difference between principled disagreement (e.g., mahloket l'shem shamayim) and take-down culture (heresy, herem). Can we construct a Jewish model for dissent and disagreement that allows it to be constructive? Such a taxonomy could push back against the rhetorics of absolutism or delegitimization facing Jewish leaders. One practical idea, beyond the education needed to foster this culture, is that institutions model a respect for dissenting views by publishing them at moments of decision-making and creating transparency about the decision-making process and the variables that informed it.
- c. MODELING SUBSTANTIVE CONFLICT:** Debates on Israel and Jewish politics are often characterized as the worst internecine Jewish conflict ever experienced. Such exceptionalism does not help the cause of combating it! Jews have been in divisive conflict before and have signally survived. Public education on previous cases of divisive conflict, on inflection points in Jewish history, and on how the individuals involved overcame or avoided the splits might help reduce the sense of contemporary uniqueness and offer us perspectives and solutions that could be useful in our institutional and public discourse.

## 2. TRAINING AND COACHING

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In addition to investing in ideas as a critical foundational element of good leadership, quality leaders also need training on specific skills for this present moment. The Jewish community should be developing a “playbook” for institutional crisis management and investing in training and skills for Jewish leaders to understand the dynamics and vicissitudes of contemporary communications. These activities can include:

- a. CRISIS MEDIA TRAINING:** Few Jewish professionals receive initial or ongoing media training designed to shape strategic responses in the first few hours and days of a media cycle. Minor missteps can become full-grown crises without quick, decisive, and skilled

interventions. The Jewish community should provide crisis media training. Board members of Jewish institutions may also need a version of this training, which they can use both in handling their own responsibilities and in supporting professionals. Leaders need opportunities to learn and then practice the skills, and the institutions they lead need the time and resources to develop best practices.

- b. CRISIS COACHING TEAMS:** Few leaders have boards that are able to support them effectively in any given particular crisis. The Jewish community should organize a cohort of senior mentors who will make themselves available in real-time to leaders caught in the eye of a storm. These supportive figures can in turn support each other — sharing what they learn along the way — and inform the training experience that is offered to leaders.
- c. INSTITUTIONAL CONSULTING:** Healthy leaders and systems support institutions in fostering board and organizational cultures that can constructively prevent, address, and survive crises. The community should proactively provide systems and maintenance support to encourage healthy organizations and prevent crises.

### 3. NETWORKS, ALLIES, AND RELATIONAL SUPPORT

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Leaders are lonely and feel vulnerable, and they need character witnesses and communal voices to reward their courage. The single most important variable that leaders credit for their survival after being attacked for some transgression, lapse in judgement, or perception of ill-feeling is whether colleagues use their social capital to stand up and vouch for them.

It is critical that we establish and strengthen networks of leaders who can turn to one another during times of crisis to workshop their responses and serve as character witnesses for one another. We need to strengthen Jewish professional networks **across political and ideological difference** in order to ensure that partisan take-down culture is effectively replaced by constructive alternatives and principled disagreement.

### 4. PUBLIC SQUARE

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The Jewish community must strengthen its civil communal space by developing a communal discourse that supports, respects, and rewards thoughtful and ethical leadership and grapples with the challenges facing Jewish life today and the nuances of leading in this environment. The Jewish community today acts as though it is a

passive witness to the public square as opposed to taking responsibility for it. A few possible interventions can include:

- a. **RESPECT REFEREES:** Given the lack of will by Facebook or Twitter to police their platforms, can the Jewish community as a whole implement a “trust” or “disregard” standard? Is there need for a group of people or institutions to serve as communal referees? We know of three leaders in different states who were attacked by the same attacker. Should there be a group that can call out those who egregiously and repeatedly use shaming techniques against leaders? Can we educate audiences to disregard shaming and bullying tactics?
- b. **PUBLIC CONDUCT COMMITMENTS:** The Jewish community could solicit pledges by funders and Jewish professionals about moral conduct toward one another as it relates to political opinions and political accountability. The field today lacks trust as professionals often feel implicitly “policed” without clear covenants about expectations or political alignments.
- c. **POSITIVE MEDIA:** The Jewish community should consider campaigns or other forms of advertising to articulate the values of pluralism, principled dissent, and healthy disagreement in the Jewish public square. What kind of language, ideas, or narratives can model healthy alternatives to our current culture?
- d. **CONTINUED PUBLIC REFLECTION ON JEWISH LEADERSHIP:** We suggest further spaces, open and closed, to consider the extent and the manner to which we want our Jewish leaders to engage in political issues and the State of Israel. The current challenges are exacerbated by having little coherence, much less shared understanding, of how this is all supposed to work and few neutral spaces in which this discussion can take place. We propose further forums and platforms for deliberations on this issue. Open deliberations, such as the suggestion about publishing dissents, offer a means for the Jewish community to model a culture of principled disagreement. This could mean more “town meetings” for legacy organizations to share why they take certain positions and to mitigate against the “call out” culture that often implicitly responds to the lack of a venue within which to air grievances or be heard. Closed gatherings help build trust among leaders, even across political difference, when they can build shared empathy and understanding about environmental challenges that quality leaders face, regardless of the positions they are taking.

**CAN WE EDUCATE AUDIENCES TO DISREGARD SHAMING AND BULLYING TACTICS?**

## SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

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The key findings of this process have been the articulation of a problem that is felt in widespread ways across the Jewish communal ecosystem, the beginning of a cross-platform collaboration to understand the causes and build a network to respond, and the foregoing recommendations — at various degrees of specificity — for Jewish philanthropy and Jewish education to take ownership of various interventions. We share this list of potential interventions in the spirit of encouraging and inviting a larger dialogue about addressing the issue and by doing so, to promote a larger communal commitment to derech erez that can transcend the toxic and competitive culture of ideas we now have.

The problems we have observed and the challenges we face in the Jewish community are ours specifically, but they're not ours alone. The broader North American community faces similar problems, and we hope that the particularity of our situation will not stand in the way of us learning from others and others learning from us how to harness pluralism, democracy, and the power of technology to forge forward into a vibrant human future.

The Shalom Hartman Institute is prepared to continue to play a central and galvanizing role in this work, but the scope of our responsibility remains to be determined. We hope that Jewish philanthropy in particular will support the infrastructure necessary to approach the problem of courageous leadership as holistically as possible, whether working with our institution, with a network of institutions, or with a new/autonomous intervention. In any case, it is critical that the issues raised in this paper remain at the forefront wherever discussions of the Jewish community and its future take place.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The gatherings under the auspices of the Courageous Leadership Project and this paper were all initially made possible by the visionary support — and wise counsel — of Marcia Riklis. The project was expanded to the West Coast through the designated support and with the partnership of the Lisa and Douglas Goldman Fund. We are also especially grateful to Dr. Debbie Findling for her ongoing guidance. The support of UJA-Federation in New York and the Koret Foundation in San Francisco have been critical to the founding and ongoing presence of the Shalom Hartman Institute in these cities and those organizations continue to make the nimbleness that allowed us to pivot into this urgent work possible.

The board of directors of the Shalom Hartman Institute continues to provide a foundation of trust and support that allows the Institute and its scholars to operate with ideological and institutional independence, which is especially critical for a project with these sensitivities. The Institute's iEngage Project, under the leadership of the Institute's president, Rabbi Donniel Hartman, contributed enormously to creating the culture and credibility on issues of Jewish politics that underlie this paper.

The 130 professionals and lay leaders who attended these gatherings offered boundless wisdom in our sessions, and many of the insights in this document are a result of these collaborative conversations. We also benefited separately and specifically from the insights of Andres Spokoyny of the Jewish Funders Network and Daniel Lubetzky and Michael Johnston of the Lubetzky Family Foundation.

The programmatic activity of the project was led by Naomi Adland with support from Michael Grumer, Dalit Horn, Rob France, and Lauren Berkun for the East Coast gatherings and from Josh Ladon and Rachel Allen on the West Coast. Dan Friedman played an instrumental role in the editing and publication of this paper.

## APPENDIX I: BACKGROUND READINGS AND NEWS COVERAGE OF THE GATHERINGS

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The following readings were assigned to participants prior to the gatherings:

- [“Anatomy of a Takedown”](#) – Gary Rosenblatt, *The Jewish Week*
- [“Why the witch hunts?”](#) – Yehuda Kurtzer, *The Times of Israel*
- [“Confessions of a Digital Nazi Hunter”](#) – Yair Rosenberg, *The New York Times*
- [“Mob Rule”](#) – Rachel Lithgow, *Tablet*
- [“The Excommunicator’s Song”](#) – Alana Newhouse, *Tablet*

One of the gatherings resulted in the following news and opinion piece:

- [“Standing Up to Communal Bullies”](#) – Gary Rosenblatt, *The Jewish Week*

## APPENDIX II: SAMPLE CASE STUDIES USED AT THE GATHERINGS

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*The following five examples are anonymized versions of real cases. In the Shalom Hartman Institute gatherings, these were modified slightly in ways that made them more useful for specific target audiences (e.g., rabbis, Hillel professionals, or for use in specific regions).*

Please consider the scenario below. First, flesh out this character: what else do we know about them? Expand the story to better understand this person and the context of their leadership, their background, and their challenges. Then, please address the following questions:

1. What does the leader in question face – seen and unseen – as the traps, obstacles, and pitfalls in this scenario that would derail their leadership?
2. What (resources) does the leader in question need in order to weather the storm and emerge as a leader on the other side?
3. What would “courageous” leadership look like in this situation?

**GROUP 1:** Rabbi A has been hired as the solo rabbi at a Conservative congregation with a small minority of vocal conservatives. She replaces a long-serving, complicated but respected — and retiring — male colleague. Her predecessor was renowned for his hawkish, extremely detailed and policy-oriented sermons on Israel; it has been indicated to her that the congregation expects her to make Israel a central feature of her pulpit. Her own politics are less hawkish than her

predecessor's and her training and background make her far less equipped or inclined to deliver regular sermons on Israeli political issues. During her first year, a war breaks out in Gaza.

**GROUP 2:** In the midst of a controversial political moment related to the Trump administration, a Jewish communal executive retweeted — from her private account — a series of memes without paying attention to their having originated from Tamika Mallory (one of the co-presidents of the 2019 Women's March), then went to bed. By morning, she had become a meme herself — as evidenced by screenshots of her tweets, countless retweets, and an op-ed in the *Forward*. Her attempts to backpedal — to delete the offending tweets and try to clarify her intentions — were met with growing calls for her resignation. In addition, a new set of hostile responses came from constituents who *supported* the original message and now resented her attempts to rescind her early tweets.

**GROUP 3:** Rabbi L is planning a trip to Israel. He has built what he thinks is a balanced trip, but an early draft of the itinerary accidentally gets appended on an email from the rabbi to a congregant (who is considering going on the trip), including suggestions for meetings with a wide array of controversial left-wing organizations. The itinerary is posted online and promoted, along with a number of inaccurate aspersions, causing the rabbi to be deluged with hate mail from around the country, online protests, and a hostile op-ed questioning his legitimacy that is published in *The Algemeiner*. The congregation likes the rabbi, but his contract is up in a year or so, and no one likes the attention.

**GROUP 4:** R is the beloved associate director at a Hillel at a major coastal university with a sizable Jewish population and a politically progressive student body. She watches as her supervisor is squeezed out of the role of director, caught between a politically conservative board of directors, a progressive student population, and a constellation of events that land at the same time: the university's board of trustees' contentious nomination of a prominent political conservative, a proposed visit to the campus by Breaking the Silence, and the director's inability to maintain consensus or civility. R is approached to apply for the job of director.

**GROUP 5:** B is an executive at a mid-level Federation and a member at the local Reform synagogue. The J Street U chapter at the nearby campus runs an audit of the Federation giving in Israel and discovers that in spite of the Federation policy not to allocate funds across the Green Line, a \$30,000 grant made its way to Ariel. The J Street U student president — whose mother is the rabbi of the synagogue — reaches out to B to meet, and right before, she elatedly posts about the meeting on social media. Two board members and major donors call B: if he meets in any official way with the J Street students, they will end their pledges to the Federation.

## APPENDIX III: RABBINIC CHALLENGES

The following three examples are anonymized versions of real cases collected and curated by Rabbi Gordon Tucker. They illustrate how a rabbi acting in good faith, with a commitment to pluralism, Jewish peoplehood, and humanitarian principles can be the target of destabilizing personal, professional, and institutional attacks to the clear detriment of the community. These are the types of scenarios that a healthy congregation should be able to move past with grace.

Consider the scenarios below and address the following six questions:

1. How can we empower every synagogue leader to be as supportive as the lay leaders in these situations?
2. How can we best mitigate the costs to the organization, the rabbi, and the lay leaders of fighting for pluralism, Jewish peoplehood, and humanitarian principles?
3. What characteristics should communities look for in future rabbis?
4. What aspects of future rabbinic engagement agreements can best codify the commitment of congregations to a constructive, pluralistic future?
5. How can we empower less-senior rabbis and less firmly established communities to stand their ground as successfully as these rabbis?
6. How can we inspire young, talented members of the community to become rabbis?

### CASE I: Mainstream Israelis Run Afoul of American Purity Tests

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A former IDF Chief of Staff was brought to the U.S. by J Street. Although he was speaking entirely for himself and not promoting J Street or its positions, this mainstream Israeli with deep military experience was a valuable voice for the organization to bring to North America. Whatever he chose to say, J Street felt his opinions on issues concerning Israel's security — and especially about Iran's nuclear program — were worth hearing.

But when the rabbi of a large congregation in the New York area booked this former “Ramatkal” to speak during the week preceding the Days of Awe, the rumor mill sprang into action. Receptive members of the community were told, doubly inaccurately, that the synagogue was sponsoring a “J Street Event” on “Erev Rosh Hashanah.” Many congregants weighed in. One reaction, shared by many others, went as follows [bold added]:

*“I hear your take on allowing almost all views to be expressed at the synagogue, and accept that this is your prerogative as the rabbi. However, I’m not happy about the*

*shul engaging in any activities that might either give the mistaken impression that you endorse J Street, or even expose members to this organization.”*

Another congregant strongly suggested to the rabbi that decisions about bringing outside speakers to the congregation should henceforth be subject to review by a committee of the synagogue’s board of trustees. The rabbi had enough seniority to point out that the rabbinic engagement agreement guaranteed complete discretion about such invitations.

One long-time member and generous financial supporter of the shul told the synagogue president that he considered the Ramatkal’s appearance to be an attack on everything he had tried to do for years in support of Israel. He asked that the annual Kol Nidre Appeal check he had just sent in be returned to him while he rethought his long-standing relationship with the synagogue.

That extreme reaction was eventually calmed down by the lay leadership. Though burdened with this and other reactions, they brought the episode to a close and were forceful in upholding both the rabbi’s authority and, more broadly, the principle of open discourse, which is typified by this statement of the shul president to a passionate objector:

*“This synagogue has an admirable record of hosting speakers about Judaism and Israel from a wide variety of viewpoints. I know that these appearances do not constitute an endorsement of the organization bringing the speaker, but rather an acknowledgment that they represent a not insignificant point of view in the Jewish and Israeli community....”*

## **CASE II: Humanitarian Aid Leads to the Public Shaming of a Rabbi**

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In response to a request for assistance from a Likud member of Knesset, a rabbi wrote a discretionary fund check to the New Israel Fund as a pass-through channel for funds going to support the Ethiopian Jews still in Gondar and Addis Ababa. Every penny of that contribution passed through to help save Ethiopian Jews and further their eventual aliyah. It seemed a Jewish and Zionist act: to provide support for Jews in a precarious and dangerous Diaspora helping them to immigrate to Israel and become citizens.

A congregant, apparently working with activists who had already publicly vilified people in the Jewish community for supporting organizations like the NIF, saw the contribution noted in the NIF Annual Report. They launched a smear campaign against the rabbi in various Jewish right-wing outlets. The campaign included a demand that the rabbi be dismissed by the synagogue’s

board of trustees on the grounds that the rabbi was giving aid and comfort to terrorists out to destroy Israel. Statements by Israeli politicians on the right — including Naftali Bennett — were offered as proof of NIF’s Israel “hatred.”

The provocateurs started to pressure the officers of the rabbi’s congregation, in some cases telling their law partners that they were aiding and abetting, through their synagogue, the eventual demise of the Jewish state. Partners of some of those synagogue officers, who knew none of the context, then expressed concern about losing clients to possible publicity of this nature about their firms. This, in turn, put pressure on those officers.

Since the congregation was already involved, the rabbi was forced to address the issue with the community. Among other things, the rabbi made this statement to the synagogue membership:

*“The claim to be loving Israel is not a universal solvent that dissolves all crimes of slander and reckless disregard of the truth. It is, in reality, a profound disrespect of Israel to use it in that way. We have just marked 20 years since rabble-rousing language and irresponsible accusations actually led to a national catastrophe and continuing trauma in Israel. And today, with the greater reach of the Internet and the availability of social media, the possibilities for mischief and for permanent damage to reputations and to human relations are vastly increased. We have to stop blurring the vital distinction between ‘I think you are wrong’ and ‘I think you are despicable.’ Civilization, and our survival as a morally healthy and functioning Jewish community, depends urgently on that distinction. The only good that can come from the ugliness of recent weeks is if it finally drives home that point to all of us.”*

And in a sermon from the congregation’s bimah, the rabbi also gave this warning:

*“This is about intimidation, which sets out to demonize every other vision, calling each one of them anti-Zionist, anti-Israel, in league with Israel’s enemies, and leaving a detritus of sullied names and reputations in its wake. It aims to intimidate my younger rabbinic colleagues, and congregations everywhere. Beware, it tells them: if you dare to articulate another way of loving Israel, you will be dragged through the same mud that other rabbis and congregations have been dragged through.”*

The congregation stood firm, but the vilification lives forever on the Internet.

### **CASE III: Doing a Mitzvah for Refugees Collides with Partisan Politics**

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In 2017, four Jewish and Christian houses of worship partnered with HIAS to sponsor the resettlement of a refugee family from the Middle East. They were restricted to helping holders

of Special Immigrant Visas when refugees from Muslim countries were blocked by the Trump administration.

One family qualified because the father had worked with the American government in Afghanistan and was, as a consequence of that work, a potential target of violence by the Taliban. The coalition managed to bring the family to their community, settle them in an apartment, help the father find employment, and enroll their four-year-old son in the nursery school of one of the synagogues involved.

Just after the congregation was informed of the refugee family's arrival and the success of this "mitzvah project," a synagogue member connected to Republican politics and the Israeli governing coalition wrote to the congregation's rabbi. The member objected to the shul's involvement with HIAS, saying that it was:

*"unsettling that the shul continues to support an organization that sues our newly and democratically elected government for implementing a new refugee policy that was abused and out of control under the Obama administration and that has the sole purpose of protecting America from terrorism and becoming like Europe. While the story of this particular family is heart warming, as the father worked as a contractor for the U.S., an organization that has no access to classified information nor understands the true threats that the U.S. faces every day, has no business suing the government. Let the government do its job, and they should simply do theirs in taking care of refugees from wherever and however many the Federal Government properly screens and allows into the U.S. to keep us safe. Who elected this NGO to set foreign policy for the U.S. and why should we support them? What credentials do they have to speak for U.S. national security policy, border control and the American people? Just my opinion of course..."*

The rabbi responded in a full way, and no further communication was received, except for the member's resignation, which followed in short order.

This case illustrates how rabbis spend an exhausting amount of time responding to angry congregants individually. It shows how rabbis are subject to intimidation by those who insist that their lack of access to information or expertise in certain technical matters renders them unqualified to make moral judgments for their communities.

Due to their interaction with a wide variety of groups that do good in a number of ways, rabbis are particularly susceptible to guilt by association. If a faction perceives a partisan disagreement against one group, through smears and insistence, the faction can make the rabbi seem unfit.

## APPENDIX IV: PARTICIPANTS IN THE GATHERINGS

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The 130 participants in the various gatherings were asked after the fact whether they would consent to having their names listed in this document. The following have agreed. Inclusion in this list does not imply or constitute endorsement of any or all of this document, its hypotheses, or recommendations.

<i>Jamie Allen Black</i>	<i>Debbie Findling</i>	<i>David-Seth Kirshner</i>	<i>Elana Rodan Schuldt</i>
<i>Lisa Armony</i>	<i>Barry Finestone</i>	<i>Dara Klarfeld</i>	<i>Yair Rosenberg</i>
<i>Jason Benkendorf</i>	<i>Sue Fishkoff</i>	<i>Darren Kleinberg</i>	<i>Gary Rosenblatt</i>
<i>Ollie Benn</i>	<i>Danielle Foreman</i>	<i>Jeff Kobrin</i>	<i>Jennie Rosenn</i>
<i>Jonathan Berkun</i>	<i>Rob France</i>	<i>Shira Koch Epstein</i>	<i>Dan Rubin</i>
<i>Lauren Berkun</i>	<i>Erica Frankel</i>	<i>Manes Kogan</i>	<i>Joanna Samuels</i>
<i>Matt Berler</i>	<i>Maital Friedman</i>	<i>Michael Koplou</i>	<i>Yossi Sapirman</i>
<i>Maya Bernstein</i>	<i>Adina Frydman</i>	<i>Doron Krakow</i>	<i>Bob Scherr</i>
<i>Barbara Birch</i>	<i>Andy Gitelson</i>	<i>Sam Lauter</i>	<i>Itzik Schiffer</i>
<i>Jacob Blumenthal</i>	<i>Arnold Gluck</i>	<i>Jonah Layman</i>	<i>Tilly Shames</i>
<i>Neil Blumofe</i>	<i>Idana Goldberg</i>	<i>Sarah Lefton</i>	<i>Jim Shapiro</i>
<i>Zack Bodner</i>	<i>Juli Goodman</i>	<i>Danny Lehmann</i>	<i>Amee Sherer</i>
<i>Analia Bortz</i>	<i>Melanie Gorelick</i>	<i>Erin Leib Smokler</i>	<i>Andy Silow-Carroll</i>
<i>Angela Buchdahl</i>	<i>Sally Gottesman</i>	<i>Joy Levitt</i>	<i>Clara Silver</i>
<i>Jennifer Chestnut</i>	<i>Danny Grossman</i>	<i>Dahlia Lithwick</i>	<i>Joy Sisisky</i>
<i>Ayelet Cohen</i>	<i>Hana Gruenberg</i>	<i>Asher Lopatin</i>	<i>Tara Slone Goldstein</i>
<i>Uri Cohen</i>	<i>Tully Harcsztarck</i>	<i>Gabe Most</i>	<i>David Steinhardt</i>
<i>Yonatan Cohen</i>	<i>Jay Herman</i>	<i>David Myers</i>	<i>Lisa Tabak</i>
<i>Gali Cooks</i>	<i>Andrea Hoffman</i>	<i>Adam Naftalin-</i>	<i>Gordon Tucker</i>
<i>Alan Divack</i>	<i>Stephanie Ives</i>	<i>Kelman</i>	<i>Becky Voorwinde</i>
<i>Jane Eisner</i>	<i>Kenneth Jacobson</i>	<i>Alana Newhouse</i>	<i>Missy Walny</i>
<i>Ed Elkin</i>	<i>Rachel Jacoby</i>	<i>Dawne Bear Novicoff</i>	<i>Dov Waxman</i>
<i>Shifra Elman</i>	<i>Rosenfield</i>	<i>Amy Olson</i>	<i>Ariel Weiner</i>
<i>Steven Exler</i>	<i>Jonathan Jaffe</i>	<i>Nitzan Pelman</i>	<i>David Weis</i>
<i>Nat Ezray</i>	<i>Peter Joseph</i>	<i>Abby Pogrebin</i>	<i>Adam Weisberg</i>
<i>Barbara Farber</i>	<i>Aaron Katler</i>	<i>Amy Rabbino</i>	<i>Sharon Weiss-</i>
<i>Michael Feshbach</i>	<i>Vlad Khaykin</i>	<i>Tamara Rebick</i>	<i>Greenberg</i>
<i>Daniella Fields</i>	<i>Avi Killip</i>	<i>Marcia Riklis</i>	<i>Neil Zuckerman</i>
<i>Elmaliach</i>	<i>Dennis Kirschbaum</i>	<i>Orli Rinat</i>	



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