

IKAR RISING

A STUDY OF THE FIRST YEAR OF A
NEW SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY IN
LOS ANGELES

by
Joshua H. Avedon

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Business Administration in
Nonprofit Management

University of Judaism

©Joshua H. Avedon 2005

Preliminaries

Signatures

Author

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

I authorize the University of Judaism to lend this thesis to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I further authorize the University of Judaism to reproduce this thesis by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Joshua H. Avedon

Thesis Committee

Approved by _____

Nina Lieberman Giladi, Chair of Supervisory Committee

Steven Lowenstein, Primary Reader

Michael Berenbaum, Secondary Reader

Ellen Glettner, Thesis Advisor

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
The Lieber School Of Graduate Studies, University of Judaism

Date _____

Researcher's Perspective

Anyone reading this thesis should know that it was written from the perspective of a “participant-observer” and is not a strictly unbiased examination of IKAR or the IKAR community. Actually, participant-observer is an understatement. Observer makes me sound somewhat unbiased. But I am not unbiased. I am a stakeholder, a partisan, an *IKARite*. As a founder of IKAR, the brother of the board president, a close friend of many other founders, advisors and members of the community, I make no claim to be objective in an examination of how IKAR came to be, or what it has become. Even though I cannot be objective, I can be critical, and sometimes critical in a way that only a stakeholder with a real connection to the institution could be.

My involvement in IKAR has been a gift (and a burden) for over a year. The obligations and rewards of founding a new spiritual community are equally immeasurable. Seeing what we have built in so short a time frequently leaves me with a feeling of awe. Knowing that we have tapped into an existing hunger and are working to provide spiritual, communal and intellectual nourishment leaves me with a feeling of pride. Watching our community grow from infancy to toddlerhood to maturity leaves me with a feeling of hope – hope not just for IKAR, but hope for the re-invention of Jewish community in any context, in any place and with any purpose. IKAR is but one example of how to feed a hunger that exists wherever Jews live, to find a place and a group of people who work together to create community, to find life's answers, to share each other's joys and sorrows, to understand that connectedness is at the root of the human experience. IKAR was born to feed that hunger. I hope that our example will inspire countless others who have been dissatisfied with their experiences with Jewish community to find like-minded individuals and to build their own.

Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the creation and growth of IKAR, a new Jewish spiritual community founded in 2004 in Los Angeles. IKAR is emblematic of a host of new spiritual communities (both Jewish and non-Jewish) that are springing up around the U.S. aimed at creating a new model for a spiritual community. These new organizations seek to address perceived problems with existing religious organizations by focusing on creating compelling prayer experiences, building human relationships and constructing communities that speak to individuals who have been estranged from religious life.

IKAR was founded by a diverse group of lay leaders under the spiritual leadership of Rabbi Sharon Brous. A unique set of circumstances brought Rabbi Brous and the founding families together and they have created a unique institution in response. IKAR has faced a multitude of challenges in its first year, but has built a thriving community that is getting attention across the Jewish world for its innovative nature. At the same time that IKAR is perceived to be on the cutting edge of new Jewish communities, in some aspects, it is also very traditional. IKAR davens a liturgically traditional Conservative service using *Sim Shalom* as the siddur.

This thesis examines how the community's philosophy, governance and participants have come together to allow IKAR to grow from a small start-up to a burgeoning community and congregation. Research for this thesis is based upon literature examining post-modern Jewish identity, personal observation, a focus group, in-depth interviews with participants (including board members) and examination of the organization's public and private documents. The analysis attempts to identify the key characteristics that contributed to IKAR's rapid growth. Conclusions as to how IKAR might be enhanced and further studied follow.

Acknowledgements

My gratitude to my two readers, Steven Lowenstein and Michael Berenbaum. Steven helped to ignite my passion for investigating and investing in synagogue life during my first semester at the University of Judaism and has been a sage and knowledgeable counselor throughout my thesis process. Michael did me the favor and honor of stepping in at the last minute to serve as second reader, and his feedback helped to make this a stronger thesis. I must also thank my good friend and mentor, J. Shawn Landres, for guiding the development of this thesis, helping me frame my research methodology and offering his unique insights into IKAR and the study of emergent spiritual communities. My thanks to the dean of the MBA program, Nina Lieberman Giladi, for her ideas and her advocacy. I would like to thank Ellen Glettner for her enthusiastic support as my thesis advisor. To my teachers at the University of Judaism, thank you for providing me the education I needed to complete this thesis and to become a successful nonprofit manager. To Brent Cohen for his expert advice on understanding and measuring the mindset of target populations, thank you. Thank you to Ron Wolfson for his insight into synagogue life, his support of IKAR and for being a passionate advocate for the renewal of synagogue communities everywhere. I am very grateful to Beryl Geber, whose wisdom, poise and depth of knowledge are what inspired me to enroll in the UJ in the first place. My thanks to Rabbi Mordecai and Rebbetzin Meirav Finley for creating a welcoming spiritual community for my family and for teaching me the value of synagogue membership. As Jewish social entrepreneurs, their creation of Ohr HaTorah inspired me (and I believe many of the leaders of IKAR) to pursue the potentially insane idea of starting a new synagogue. I would like to thank Rabbi Neal Weinberg for providing the basic education necessary for me to become a regular davener and for directing my wife and me to Ohr HaTorah. My thanks to my friend and teacher, Rabbi Scott Meltzer, who has been a terrific

supporter of my studies and has helped me to understand synagogue life from the perspective of a Rabbi as well as get a feel for the differences between the Conservative and Reform movements' approaches to the role of the rabbi. Of course I must thank Rabbi Sharon Brous for her incredible passion and razor-sharp intellect – it is her vision that has breathed life into IKAR and I am honored and grateful to have been able to assist her in executing that vision. My thanks to the staff of Los Angeles Hillel Council for giving me the opportunity to do meaningful work in a nonprofit environment while allowing me the flexibility to pursue my studies. To my fellow travelers, Zuzana Riemer Landres, Leah Buckwold, Jennifer Flam, Jami Trockman, David Weisz, Marc Abrams and Kim Rogoff, thank you for deepening my understanding of the attraction of Jewish life. My thanks also to Abbey Greenberg for her feedback, editing skills, critical thinking and moral support. There are no words to express my gratitude to the IKAR community for making a dream into a reality. I am indebted to IKAR's Board of Directors for their passionate support of our cause, taking the time to help me with this project and for becoming friends through this journey we have taken together. I've always been an admirer of my big sister Melissa Balaban, but the IKAR experience has taken that admiration to a new level for her extraordinary leadership, skillful management and tireless (and probably sleepless) work to make IKAR what it has become. For my mother, Barbara Hammer Avedon (z"l) who was a born builder of community. I must thank my father and step-mother, Mel and Ronnie Avedon, for their love and support for me as a son and as a student. Most of all I am profoundly grateful to my family. My wife, Stephanie, without whom my life would be unlivable, for her patience, support, unconditional love, exceptional parenting skills, incisive editing, constructive feedback and her behind the scenes labor to help stand IKAR on its feet. Lastly to my children, Elias and Navi, the lights of my life, the ikar of my purpose on earth – thank you for the gift of parenthood and for making my life immeasurably richer – I love you more than words can express.

Table of Contents

Preliminaries.....	ii
Signatures.....	ii
Researcher’s Perspective.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Overview.....	1
1.2 New Spiritual Communities.....	2
1.3 Constructed Jewish Identity.....	3
1.4 Sources.....	4
1.5 Structure.....	4
1.6 Methodology.....	5
1.6.1 Overview.....	5
1.6.2 Observations.....	6
1.6.3 Board Dynamics.....	6
1.6.4 Areas of Inquiry.....	7
Chapter 2 Literature Review.....	8
2.1 Types of Literature.....	8
2.2 Themes.....	8
2.2.1 Post Modern Jewish Identity.....	8
2.2.2 Marketing the Message.....	10
2.2.3 Reframing Judaism.....	11
2.2.4 Reinventing Synagogue Life.....	12
2.2.5 Motivations.....	13
2.2.6 Paths of Return.....	14
2.2.7 Community Visions.....	15
2.3 The Tipping Point.....	16
Chapter 3 Theoretical Constructs.....	19
3.1 Overview.....	19
3.2 Jewish Profiling.....	19
3.2.1 The Disconnected.....	20
3.2.2 The Disaffected.....	21
3.2.3 The Discontented.....	21
3.2.4 The Disrespected.....	22
Chapter 4 Descriptive.....	23
4.1 History of IKAR.....	23
4.1.1 Introduction.....	23
4.1.2 Genesis of IKAR.....	23
4.1.3 Chronology.....	26
4.1.4 Strategy.....	37
4.1.5 Tactics.....	40

Chapter 5 Primary Research.....	48
5.1 Overview	48
5.2 Methodology.....	48
5.3 Focus Group.....	48
5.3.1 Methodology	49
5.3.2 Findings.....	50
5.4 In Depth Interviews	64
5.4.1 Ron Wolfson Interview	64
5.4.2 Board Member Interviews.....	67
Chapter 6 Analysis.....	75
6.1 Overview	75
6.2 Philosophy	75
6.3 Underlying Factors for Success.....	76
6.3.1 Community.....	76
6.3.2 Organization.....	81
Chapter 7 Conclusions	88
7.1 Challenges.....	88
7.1.1 Membership.....	89
7.1.2 Role of the Rabbi	90
7.2 Recommendations	92
7.2.1 Governance	92
7.2.2 Community	95
7.2.3 Religious Practice	96
7.3 Questions for Future Study	99
7.3.1 Overview	99
7.3.2 Community.....	99
7.3.3 Governance.....	99
7.4 Final Thoughts.....	100
7.4.1 Answers to Questions from the Introduction	100
Appendices.....	101
Table of Appendices.....	101
Appendix A : Focus Group Release Form	102
Appendix B : Focus Group Pre-Questionnaire.....	103
Appendix C : Focus Group Discussion Guide	104
Appendix D : In Depth Interview Guide.....	106
Glossary.....	108
People and Organizations	113
Biography of Rabbi Sharon Brous	116
Biographies of Board Members.....	117
Bibliography.....	123
Endnotes	126

Note:

Words and phrases from other languages are italicized upon first use and are defined in the glossary.

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Jewish life in America is in flux. The dominant forms of Judaism from the 20th century are being forced to adapt to new sociological realities or risk becoming irrelevant. The shadow of the Holocaust as a major theme in Judaism is dimming as the last of the survivors pass away and a new generation of Jewish leaders arises. This new generation views the Holocaust as a historical phenomenon, the existence of Israel as a given and Jewish identity as a choice. Antisemitism, at least in America, may still exist, but has little impact on an individual Jew's ability to succeed or prosper in our culture. In short, the preeminent themes that shaped Jewish identity in the last century have given way to a new paradigm. This new paradigm is characterized by a shift from external forces shaping identity, to one where personal choices are ascendant.

At the same time, a generation of Jews has grown up dissatisfied with the Jewish institutions that served their parents' generation. Whether religious or secular, affiliated or disconnected, Jews wanting to live in community with other Jews have found a need to re-invent, or at least re-configure, the structures that serve the Jewish community. The 20th century was a time when association and labels played a large role in determining what "type" of Jew one was. Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Zionist, Anti-Zionist, Democrat, Republican, Working-class, Professional, Assimilated, Religious, Secular, Cultural, Inter-married, Self-hating, etc., – all these categories existed to define a Jewish identity that separated some Jews from other Jews who did not share the same self-conception or values. But in an age where Jews

are increasingly eschewing labels and defying institutional structures, it is now possible for a type of cross-pollination of ideas to occur that might have been unthinkable fifty years ago. It is a paradox; as Jewish identity becomes more fractured and individual, it also becomes more possible to envision new communal expressions of Judaism not hindered by the labels and sectarianism of Judaism's past.

1.2 New Spiritual Communities

New forms of spiritual communities are cropping up using new business and marketing models aimed at the disaffiliated and “unchurched.” A spiritual re-awakening is evident across America, both inside and outside of the Jewish world. In the Christian world, spiritual communities such as the Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago (www.willowcreek.org) are at the forefront of this movement. Within the Jewish world, B'nai Jeshurun (BJ) in New York (www.bj.org), Beyt Tikkun (www.beyttikkun.org) in the San Francisco Bay Area and Beth El in Sudbury, Massachusetts (www.bethelsudbury.org) exemplify this revitalization.

What these organizations have in common is a mission to reach out to people who are not usually members of churches or synagogues. These organizations have detailed ideologies and use cutting edge marketing techniques to reach their target populations. Within the religious world, these organizations are the “up and comers;” a new breed of community that is inspiring a quiet revolution within the context of creating new models for houses of worship and spiritual communities.

This quiet revolution is very evident within the Jewish world as new forms of “post-denominational” Judaism become more mainstream. The growth of Reconstructionism, the Renewal movement led by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

and various non-affiliated spiritual communities, are evidence of this trend. The market for these new forms often consists of Jews who have turned their backs on the Judaism of their youth for a multitude of reasons and have only recently discovered a need to reconnect to their “inner Jew.”

1.3 Constructed Jewish Identity

Popular literature also reflects this new area of inquiry with titles such as The Jew Within and Finding a Spiritual Home. Many young Jewish families are trying to make a connection with their heritage, while also hoping to construct a Jewish identity that both supports their values and avoids the negative associations they have with Judaism and organized religion.

A number of motivations underpin this return to Judaism. One is a sense among some Jews that they are missing a spiritual component in their life. Many of them had previously turned to other spiritual paths such as Buddhism or other Eastern religions. The popularization of Kabbalah and the mystical aspects of Judaism has awakened many formerly disaffiliated Jews to the potential within Judaism to meet their spiritual needs. A second, equally important, motivation is a desire for community. While synagogues have always been communities for their congregants, there has also frequently been a sense among the disaffiliated that the primary purpose of a synagogue was for worship or for a place to send children to religious school. The new communities being formed work hard to alter this view by creating environments that are not simply a house of worship and a place of learning but just as importantly, a welcoming community in a world in which community is often hard to find.

1.4 Sources

This thesis is based on three types of primary sources. The first is the private and public documents of IKAR: meeting minutes; internal planning documents including print and website marketing materials, as well as the press coverage that IKAR has received. The second category consists of the literature addressing the revival of interest in Judaism amongst generations X and Y. These books range from sociological explorations of the motivations and psychology of “born again” Jews to popular personal accounts of people’s spiritual journeys. The last source is literature consisting of scholarly work addressing the strategic planning and evaluation of non-profit enterprises, including both secular and specifically Jewish programming.

1.5 Structure

The literature review portion of this thesis consists of an examination of current writing about the return of disaffiliated or disaffected Jews to synagogue life, and contextualization of their behavior in their experiences with Judaism growing up. The purpose is to set the stage for an examination of the specifics of the IKAR case while creating a framework to examine the motivations and desires of the participants in the “IKAR experiment.”

The next section is descriptive, and consists of a narrative of IKAR’s formation and growth, with an eye towards the application of business best practices and organizational models. Within this section the process that brought IKAR about will be examined, from the original conception through the strategies and tactics used in building the community. Of particular interest here is that IKAR was not formed with a well-articulated organizational road map, or even a concretely articulated vision of the end product amongst its founders, yet was still able to create a highly effective

team and synergistic environment for growth.

Next is a more in-depth look at the motivations, attitude and opinions of IKAR community members and board members. This section attempts to reveal a microcosm of the IKAR community via an examination of the viewpoints of some of the individuals involved. While it would be impossible to portray the complete diversity of points of view within IKAR, these perspectives can create a window to understanding the whole more clearly.

1.6 Methodology

1.6.1 Overview

The approach to investigating the IKAR phenomenon includes posing a number of questions at the outset, and then answering them using a variety of methods.

The principle areas of inquiry are:

- a business administration examination into the building of a grassroots community and start-up nonprofit organization - specifically an examination of the board dynamics/mechanics and marketing/public relations efforts;
- a sociological examination of individuals who make up IKAR's core supporters, with an eye toward finding trends and groupings within the community that will both allow a greater understanding of what has brought them to IKAR and to use this understanding to further IKAR's growth in the future.

The first phase of the research involved a careful documentation of the genesis of IKAR, from the background of the founding board members through the envisioning process that led to IKAR's incorporation as a 501(c)3. The materials consist of personal notes of the researcher, and notes taken by other board members, official documents such as the minutes of board of directors' meetings and interviews with key participants to reconstruct the narrative. Since IKAR has only been in existence for a matter of months, this material was readily accessible and easily verifiable.

As a participant in the building of IKAR I have also had numerous informal conversations with community members and board members that have informed my understanding of IKAR and provoked my interest. While these conversations have not been documented, they have created a great deal of context and framed much of my inquiry, and thus must also be considered sources for my research.

Lastly, in-depth information was gathered by conducting personal interviews with IKAR board members, participants and a one time focus group of IKAR participants. The focus groups sought more detailed information about the motivations and attitudes of IKAR community members. The interviews attempted to dig deeper into the attitudes and opinions of the board members in order to better understand their experiences of IKAR and their roles within the community and board.

1.6.2 Observations

Specifically, the following questions were examined:

- Why are people coming to IKAR?
- How are they similar to or different from the people IKAR expected to attract?
- What were the beginning assumptions of those who came to IKAR?
- How did the reality of IKAR differ from those assumptions?
- How has IKAR changed the way they think about Judaism, spiritual community or synagogue membership?

1.6.3 Board Dynamics

One particular area of interest is board dynamics, specifically, how individuals either assume leadership or follower roles when it comes to making critical decisions about the future of an organization. Judging from the outside, IKAR has a highly effective board measured simply by the organizational growth that the enterprise has enjoyed from the moment it was founded. IKAR board members are passionate,

engaged and devoted to the cause of building a community from the ground up. From an insider's perspective the IKAR board has all the dysfunctional elements present in any board, ranging from poor communication, power differentials, contentiousness about vision and execution and even run-of-the-mill personality conflicts. However, although there are disagreements, they are engaged in respectfully and, when issues are put before the full board for consideration, consensus is generally reached on most decisions without any arm-twisting or coercion by the majority or by the chair. What is it that makes the IKAR board unique? Can this kind of momentum be sustained when so much of the work of IKAR is done by the volunteer lay leaders? Is the difference due to the dynamics of the relationships of the members, the cause, the leadership or simply the individuals themselves?

1.6.4 Areas of Inquiry

1. What does it mean to build a spiritual community that is "vision-based" rather than one based on geography, demography or common religious practice?
2. How can a spiritual community be committed to tradition and still be appealing to a audience looking for "something new"?
3. Can Jews committed to ritual observance co-exist in a community with others who are not?
4. Why would a cadre of Jews who were turned off by synagogue life to become actively involved in building a synagogue?
5. Is it possible to make a commitment-phobic group, commit to a single idea or community?
6. How do you build a membership of a group of people who are typically "non-joiners"?
7. How does one build consensus for executing a religious vision among a group with a wide diversity of attitudes, backgrounds, knowledge and level of religiosity?

Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Types of Literature

The published sources for this thesis fall into three basic categories. The first consists of sociological examinations of emergent Jewish identity. This literature addresses the revival of interest in Judaism amongst baby boomers and generations X and Y. These books range from sociological explorations of the motivations and psychology of “born again” Jews to personal accounts of people’s spiritual journeys. This category is typified by Arnold Eisen and Steven Cohen’s The Jew Within, an examination of individuals who have rededicated themselves to living a Jewish life, but who have done so by constructing their own version of what that means. The second category consists of publications examining the changes in synagogue and Jewish communal life in the current era and is typified by Sidney Schwarz’s Finding a Spiritual Home: How a New Generation of Jews Can Transform the American Synagogue. The third category consists of primary source material written by communities embodying the transformation examined herein, such as Congregation Beyt Tikkun’s *Beyt Tikkun: The House of Love and Healing: A Jewish Renewal Synagogue: Founding Perspective* or Congregation B’nai Jeshurun’s *Realizing Our Vision: The BJ Strategic Plan*. Lastly, this thesis (and IKAR’s marketing strategy) were deeply influenced by Malcolm Gladwell’s The Tipping Point, a discussion of which follows the body of the literature review.

2.2 Themes

2.2.1 Post Modern Jewish Identity

The key concept in Eisen and Cohen’s The Jew Within is that the new paradigm

for Jewish identity is dependent upon a “sovereign self.” According to Eisen and Cohen:

The principal authority for contemporary American Jews, in the absence of compelling religious norms and communal loyalties, has become the sovereign self. Each person now performs the labor of fashioning his or her own self, pulling together elements from the various Jewish and non-Jewish repertoires available, rather than stepping into an “inescapable framework” of identity...given at birth. Decisions about ritual observance and involvement in Jewish institutions are made and made again, considered and reconsidered, year by year and even week by week. American Jews speak of their lives, and of their Jewish beliefs and commitments, as a journey of ongoing questioning and development. They avoid language of arrival. There are no final answers, no irrevocable commitments.¹

The authors point out the individualistic and fluid nature of post-modern Judaism. Where once Jewish identity was largely determined by how much one adhered to or broke from traditional modes of Jewish expression, now Jewish identity is increasingly of the “salad bar” variety, where each individual picks and chooses from a variety of ingredients to form their own unique conception of Jewish identity. One of the most significant questions raised by salad-bar Judaism is whether an identity constructed this way is culturally transmissible. In other words, can parents inculcate their children with a Jewish identity when their own recipe for Judaism was made up incrementally and individually? Only a long term study of the offspring of these post-modern Jews will be able to answer this question, but in a world where identity is so easily morphed and augmented, salad-bar Judaism may constitute a whole new type of threat to Jewish continuity. Judaism has always relied upon established institutions and widely practiced normative behavior as the vehicle for handing down traditions to the next generation. Individually-constructed forms of Judaism would need to find other, more personal methods of transmission in order to persist. On the

other hand, many of the Jews who practice this type of identity formation might have otherwise completely abandoned their Judaism, which is an even more obvious threat to continuity. And, on the positive side, Jews who create their own Jewish identity tend to embrace it enthusiastically and willingly, thus increasing the odds they may engender a love of Judaism within their offspring.

2.2.2 Marketing the Message

The Jew Within also highlights the challenge for Jewish institutions, both old and new, in attracting these post-modern Jews. The extreme individualism inherent in the constructed Jewish identities, along with a distrust of traditional structures can make it difficult to attract these “born again” Jews to participate in communal structures. The Judaism embodied by the cases examined in The Jew Within is a personal matter, pursued within the home at an individual or family level. Considering the diversity of practice and ambivalence toward institutional Judaism, how can a community such as IKAR attract these Jews? Moreover, is it possible once they have been attracted, to create programming that appeals to all of them, regardless of their level of ritual observance or personal background?

Jewish institutions face a formidable task in this period of voluntarism and mobility. They must have a range of options available to every individual at every moment, so that when he or she is ready to seize hold of Jewishness or Judaism, the right option is there to be had. Jewish professionals more and more seem like the operators of a transit system. A bus must be ready and waiting at the bus-stop at the exact moment that the prospective Jewish rider appears. The fleet must be sufficiently large to be there whenever wanted, and it must be sufficiently diverse to take account of the diverse tastes and needs of its potential clientele.²

This challenge of finding the right “fit” of synagogue community is the focus of Sydney Schwarz’s Finding a Spiritual Home. Schwarz’s book examines this problem

through personal stories of engagements with four separate congregations from different denominations, and attempts to draw some conclusions about “The Spiritual Possibilities of the American Synagogue”³ and strategies for transforming congregations. Schwarz ably demonstrates that the issues of Jewish community in modern America have no geographic, ideological or denominational boundaries. Jews from across the spectrum seeking spiritual homes have similar needs, and communities from across the spectrum hoping to attract them have similar challenges. As Schwarz puts it:

The contemporary American Jewish community is a strange paradox reflecting both serious danger signs about its future viability and also exciting signs of a Jewish renaissance. This book was born out of a frustration with hundreds of synagogues across America that have yet to understand the needs of today’s Jews. These are Jews who are not so much rejecting Judaism as they are rejecting institutions that have failed to heed their voices. These are the Jewish lost souls of our generation and we suffer from the absence in more ways than we can ever imagine.⁴

Schwarz concludes that there is no secret formula to attracting these Jews; in fact, the relationships between these Jews and the spiritual communities they join are just as personal and individual as their relationship to Judaism itself. They are not so much seeking a certain “type” of synagogue, but rather will simply know it when they find one that suits them.

2.2.3 Reframing Judaism

One thread woven throughout Finding a Spiritual Home is the difficulty that the individuals who were examined had in connecting their personal sense of spirituality with a congregation that shared their values. Indeed, a common theme throughout the literature is the perception that religion and spirituality seem at odds with one another in the minds of many of the unchurched, so that while they have no interest in

participating in organized religion, they nonetheless view themselves as spiritual. Many of these same Jews are completely content with their individual and non-institutional spirituality, but still feel they are missing a critical piece that would make them feel whole, namely a sense of community.

2.2.4 Reinventing Synagogue Life

In Schwarz's analysis, the disaffection with the historical synagogue, the rise and decline of the synagogue center, the emergence of counter-culture Judaism (such as the *Havurah* movement) have all paved the way to a new model that synthesizes all three, which he dubs the Synagogue-Community. Unlike the traditional house of worship or a school or a cultural center, the Synagogue-Community is not about a place but about people and relationships. The question at the core of this new model is whether a Synagogue-Community can evolve out of an existing institution, or is something that can only be built from the ground up.

The success of any new venture relies upon two factors: getting people in the door and then keeping them there afterwards. The first is a matter of marketing, the second of programming, but, of course the two are intimately linked. One cannot hope to succeed in the long run unless the marketing is an accurate reflection of the programming and vice versa. Yet for the marketing portion to succeed it requires targeting a message to specific segments, whether demographic or psychographic.⁵ The programming, however, must somehow present a coherent whole. Identifying and appealing to the market segments for the post-modern Jewish institution is one of the great challenges of starting a new enterprise of this type.

Schwarz describes congregants as falling into distinct categories that are based

upon the seminal study by Wade Clark Roof, A Generation of Seekers, which examines the religious behavior of the baby boom generation. Schwarz's categories are: "loyalists, who are members of synagogues and who often participate in the leadership of those institutions; returnees, whose membership in synagogues may be marginal but who are at least reachable for a period of time while the congregation meets their individual or family needs; and dropouts or seekers, who by and large stand outside the orbit of synagogue life."⁶ The challenge is to create a single institution with the power to capture and retain all these constituencies, each of which has very specific needs. The case studies in Schwarz's book detail the outreach methodology of the synagogues he examined, each of which may have lessons for IKAR as it attempts to grow its member base.

2.2.5 Motivations

In Rekindling The Flame Samuel Osherson examines the many reasons why Jews struggle with their Judaism from a psychological perspective. As a self-described "perplexed" Jew married to a non-Jew, Osherson became interested in the forces that motivated Jews to re-connect to their Judaism and the forces that kept them from doing so. He relies upon psychologist Erik Ericson's work on identity and identity formation to find out how we as Jews can move from:

...a passive membership, by birth, following the rules without much personal voice, toward a more active knowing, in which we find a personally meaningful Jewish voice that honors our past and our present. ...understanding the journey from a passive, uncomfortable Jewish identity toward a more active, muscular engagement...⁷

Osherson's book shows how there is a constant tension between seeking out and being driven away - what he describes as an "undertow"⁸ that must be fought for Jews to "rekindle the flame." By understanding this psychological backdrop, those of us

involved in developing Jewish community can learn just what approaches and language are likely to succeed with the swing Jews. Like the other books in this review, after explicating the case studies and drawing some conclusions, Osherson goes on to give some recipes for revitalization. His recommendations are both practical and theoretical, but tend to focus on eliminating the undertow. Like the other authors examining the revitalization of Jewish life and identity, he realizes that getting more Jews to be active participants is as much about healing the past as it is about building the future.

2.2.6 Paths of Return

One important factor for communities hoping to bring Jews back to communal life is understanding how their motivations translate into action. In other words, once someone has been moved to reconnect, where do they turn for guidance on how to do so? Typically the last place they will look is a synagogue, due to the negative associations many swing Jews have with the shuls they grew up in or with organized religion in general. More frequently, popular culture provides the gateway for reconnection. Both the stories in, and the successes of, the books examined in this review are evidence for the hunger for ways to reconnect. The Internet has proved a major source of information for the seekers allowing them to pursue their quest without having to share the details of their backgrounds or having to interact with other Jews.

According to a December 2001 study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project:

- 25% of Internet users have gotten religious or spiritual information online at one point or another. This is an increase from our survey findings in late 2000, which showed that 21% of Internet users – or between 19 million

and 20 million people – had gone online to get religious or spiritual material.

- For comparison's sake, it is interesting to note that more people have gotten religious or spiritual information online than have gambled online, used Web auction sites, traded stocks online, placed phone calls on the Internet, done online banking, or used Internet-based dating services.⁹

And while some find satisfaction in “home schooled” Judaism and look no further, many also realize that their search has hit a wall until they can find like-minded Jews to connect with in a communal atmosphere.

2.2.7 Community Visions

Communities that were founded to reach out to a new generation of Jewish seekers, as well as established synagogues attempting to revitalize by tapping into this market, have adopted a variety of approaches. One commonality that appears is a emphasis on values over a focus on tradition. That is not to say that these communities do not seek to propagate increased religious behavior, but more that they seek to encourage this behavior through an appeal to the intellectual and spiritual needs of their congregants. This approach is a marked departure from synagogue life a generation ago, when religious observance was at the forefront of consciousness, either by the rejection of it (in the Reform movement) or the demand for it (in the Conservative movement). How much ritual one felt comfortable with was a major part of determining which synagogue to join. Now with some Reform Jews embracing *kashrut*, Sabbath observance and other aspects of Jewish law and some Conservative Jews no longer even pretending to adhere to them, the 20th century religious yardstick is becoming obsolete.

This leads to another commonality of the new communities: an embrace of a wide spectrum of religious practice and outspoken tolerance for individuals

determining their own comfort level with Jewish law. This embrace of diversity in practice requires that the new institutions find ways to accommodate the observant without alienating the non-observant. Some communities describe themselves as Halakhic or Halakhically-oriented, meaning that in all communal aspects they follow Jewish law, serving kosher food, prohibiting the use of electronics or money on Shabbat, etc. Some go further and say that an adherence to the law is only a starting point, but that adherence to the values behind the law is even more important. For example, Beyt Tikkun not only mandates that all food at its events must be kosher, but that it must also be vegetarian out of the value of kindness to animals.¹⁰

One of the positive side effects of the creation of the new institutions is that (often for the first time) leaders of communities are forced to articulate their community's values and visions explicitly rather than relying upon a close knit cadre of board members and clergy to make ad hoc decisions behind closed doors. In the competitive marketplace of ideas, having a clearly articulated vision statement is not only an important differentiator in terms of marketing, it creates a guidepost for communal decision-making that is much more egalitarian than the way synagogues were run in decades past.

2.3 The Tipping Point

Malcolm Gladwell's seminal book The Tipping Point has been an important source both for this thesis and for IKAR's marketing strategy. Gladwell's book is an examination of "social epidemics" - how ideas catch fire and spread. The Tipping Point posits a few fundamental rules that explain why certain ideas, trends or products catch fire in the public consciousness. His basic assertion is that "little

things can make a big difference.” His book has become a kind of bible for guerilla marketers and advertising executives alike because it demonstrates the enormous leverage to be gained by understanding tipping point dynamics when trying to promote a new idea.

According to Gladwell there are three rules of social epidemics: **The Law of the Few**, **The Stickiness Factor** and **The Power of Context**.

The Law of the Few states that in any social epidemic, there are three types of people that help create and transmit the “buzz” that allows the phenomenon to take off. They are Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen. Connectors are people who have uncommonly large circles of social and business connections. Mavens are individuals who are regarded as experts in a given area. Salesmen are people who are skilled at persuasion. Oftentimes, a single person can act as all three. For example, imagine you are interested in buying new stereo equipment. You might call your friend who knows everything about electronics (a Maven), he might convince you that a certain brand is perfect for your needs (a Salesman) and then might tell you where to go to get the best deal on it (a Connector). In Gladwell’s paradigm, people who act as Connectors, Mavens or Salesmen have a disproportionate effect on those they come into contact with when it comes to spreading ideas or trends.

The Stickiness Factor refers to the infectiousness of an idea. Stickiness is what makes one idea stand out from the onslaught of ideas that we are exposed on a daily basis. Stickiness is a combination of an idea’s inherent appeal, the readiness for a specific market to “grab on” to that idea and how the idea is communicated. Frequently stickiness has as much to do with how an idea is presented as what the

idea is. As Gladwell says “There is a simple way to package information that, under the right circumstances, can make it irresistible.”¹¹

Lastly, **The Power of Context** is Gladwell’s way of explaining that where and when an idea is transmitted is as important as the idea and who is transmitting it. Gladwell asserts that people are “exquisitely sensitive” to changes in context, and that these changes can determine whether an idea takes off or falls flat. Context can create receptivity to an idea or trend, or assure that it will be rejected. Group dynamics are critical to context. Especially for social phenomenon, a shared group experience of a new idea can make the difference in whether or not it “tips” and becomes contagious. An example of this would be how some people react to hearing new music and their decision to purchase it. Hear a new song on the radio while driving alone in your car and you might think “Thanks a great tune”, but have it played for you by a friend in an enjoyable social gathering and you might rush right out and buy it afterwards. Same song, but the context you experience it in may have a real impact on your reaction to it and your future behavior.

Gladwell’s tipping point thesis is a compelling paradigm for understanding why certain ideas or trends catch on and others do not. But simply knowing the rules does not make it possible to engineer a tipped result or even to predict which ideas will tip and which ones will not. Whether or not a specific idea will tip is the result of a complex interplay between the three rules. What is clear from Gladwell’s analysis, however, is that all three rules are in play in any successfully tipped trend, and that few genuine phenomena succeed without the people, stickiness and context to make them successful.

Chapter 3 THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

3.1 Overview

The biggest challenge that IKAR has faced as an organization and community is finding common ground between all the involved parties. From the outset, the board's mandate was to create an "un-synagogue," a Jewish institution that would provide the services (as in "products and services") that a typical synagogue provides, but to do so in such a way as to appeal to individuals who have been turned off by synagogue life. The basic idea was to create a center for Jewish learning and community that was hip and different and that spoke to a generation of spiritual seekers. The goal was to let that "un-synagogue" concept inform all of the choices made from venue to branding to programming. It was also clear that IKAR was to be a Shabbat-centric community and that creating a compelling Shabbat experience would be the most important first step in defining the new entity.

3.2 Jewish Profiling

For the purposes of this thesis, I have developed four "profiles" or categories of the types of Jews that IKAR is attempting to reach. One should not view these categories as being completely distinct; a single individual may have characteristics from more than one. And quite frequently, families are made up of couples each of whom is from a different category. Yet these definitions may be helpful in understanding what types of market appeals are useful and what types of programming will be successful in attracting and retaining them as supporters.

The first category are the "low-hanging fruit" of the new generation, Roof's loyalists¹² who were never disconnected from Jewish life and usually form the core of

any religious Jewish community. Their biggest concern tends to be assuring that their children grow up with the kind of positive connection to Judaism that they did.

The second category is one that will not be examined in this thesis, the “unreachable”. These are individuals that, for whatever reason, have been so turned off by Jewish involvement and identity that no amount of re-engineering the Jewish enterprise will bring them back into the fold. Even though they are unreachable, a surprising amount of effort is expended hoping to connect them to Jewish communal life. Instead, a more sensible approach might be to concentrate on what Executive Vice President for Strategy E. Kinney Zalesne of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, calls “swing Jews”.

Zalesne points to recent writing by Brandeis [University] professor Jonathan Sarna, who argues that the Jewish leaders of every era have come from the ranks of the young and rebellious — people who understand what it means to reject the establishment.¹³

Zalesne feels that organizations whose mission is to increase the involvement of Jews in Jewish life should be targeting the swing Jews.

The swing Jews, as I have defined them, consist of four groups:

- The Disconnected;
- The Disaffected;
- The Discontented;
- The Disrespected.

3.2.1 The Disconnected

The Disconnected are Jews who grew up with little or no sense of Jewish identity. Their families might be fully assimilated, they may have interfaith parents, or their sense of their Jewishness is so superficial that it effectively has no impact on their identity. The Disconnected frequently have turned to other sources for the

“products and services” that Judaism might provide, that is, they have turned to spiritual paths outside Judaism, found other centers of community, or built a cultural identity from other sources. For this audience, the key is communicating Judaism’s appeal to their needs and making them feel welcome despite their knowledge deficit.

3.2.2 The Disaffected

The Disaffected are those Jews who grew up with a Jewish identity but became alienated or dropped out of Jewish communal life as they grew older. They frequently refer to their experience of Judaism in childhood in negative terms. For them attending Hebrew school was a chore, their Bar/Bat Mitzvah something they did to make their parents happy and their Jewishness something they took for granted (but did not particularly enjoy). Their descriptions of Jewish institutions from their childhood range from cold to materialistic to boring. The key to getting them involved is to convince them that authentic Judaism can be something other than what they have experienced.

3.2.3 The Discontented

The Discontented¹⁴ are Jews who are sharing a pew with the loyalists, paying synagogue dues and going through the motions of being Jewish, but who feel that they are missing something and that the institutions of Judaism they are familiar with just do not “get it.” This audience is ripe for innovative approaches since they share a history and core values with committed members of the Jewish community, but they simply have not found a place that speaks to them personally. The key to getting them involved is listening to and responding to their needs, and creating programming that addresses what they feel is missing from their experiences.

3.2.4 The Disrespected

The Disrespected are typically the so-called double minorities. They are Jews from interfaith families, Jews-by-choice, Gay and Lesbian Jews or any other sub group who might consider themselves Jewish, but who also feel marginalized by the Jewish establishment. In some congregations the Disrespected can include divorced congregants, single parents, over forty singles and even couples without kids. These Jews have been wounded by their interaction with Jewish institutions and made to feel “less than” the mainstream Jews. Creating a welcoming home for these Jews in the world of institutional Judaism requires explicit outreach, creating policies and programs that speak to their individual source of woundedness and making a good faith effort to heal the rift. Many Jewish communities proclaim themselves to be “egalitarian and welcoming of Jews from all backgrounds,” but few will go the extra distance by explicitly saying they welcome Jews of mixed parentage, those with alternative sexual orientations or those who have become Jews by choice. Frequently these individuals can be a source of great vitality and energy for a community but they must be spoken to directly in order for them to get the message.

Chapter 4 DESCRIPTIVE

4.1 History of IKAR

4.1.1 Introduction

Building a successful new synagogue from scratch requires more than leadership and the hard work of volunteers. It also depends upon luck, or in IKAR's case, what could be described as the kind of synchronicity that turns a smoldering ember into a roaring fire – a cascade of tipping point moments. Without any of these elements IKAR could not have caught fire; what brought them together at a certain combustible point in time and is anyone's guess.

For those of us involved in the effort it has seemed nothing short of miraculous. From an outsider's perspective it may be more simply explained. The dry timber of dissatisfied but motivated Jews in Los Angeles, the bright spark of Rabbi Sharon Brous's determination to pursue a vision for a new community, and the high-octane fuel from a board of directors who sacrificed other aspects of their lives in order to feed the fire. When you put it like that, it seems like IKAR was fated to succeed from the outset. For those of us on the inside, every step of IKAR's genesis has been filled with luck, inexplicable coincidences and fortuitous timing. While we may have wondered to ourselves or out loud whether what we were attempting was possible, or even advisable, from the moment we began it also felt that IKAR was *besheret*: destined to be.

4.1.2 Genesis of IKAR

IKAR is a specific incarnation of this new type of Jewish community – a small but growing *kehillah* in Los Angeles founded with the intent of addressing the issues put

forth in the Literature Review portion of this thesis. Formed by a group of families from diverse Jewish backgrounds, IKAR “emerged out of a hunger for a Jewish spiritual community that stimulates the intellect, elevates the spirit, and engages seriously and deeply in the world.”¹⁵ But beyond this ideological impetus (as articulated by Rabbi Sharon Brous), IKAR grew out of a dissatisfaction with the existing Jewish communities in Los Angeles and a resolve on the part of the founding families that they could do better than what was currently available to them.

A distinguishing characteristic of IKAR is the involvement of many individuals who are not dues paying members of the synagogue. The IKAR “community” includes many more people than the membership database. In order to maintain clarity throughout this document the former group are always referred to as “official synagogue members” and the latter as “the IKAR community,” “members of the IKAR community,” or *IKARites*.

IKAR began in Los Angeles in April 2004 by a small group of families under the spiritual leadership of Rabbi Sharon Brous. IKAR’s growth has been nothing short of dynamic, beginning with a few in-home study sessions in the spring, and growing to a community of consisting of hundreds of individuals by the High Holy Days just a few months later, and growing into a healthy congregation with nearly one hundred member units by the end of the first year.

As a study in the formation of a spiritual community and as a non-profit organization, IKAR is unique in several respects. Most new congregations are formed either by groups breaking away from an existing congregation or by a Rabbi who has been seeking a pulpit and has worked to garner the necessary support to strike out on

her/his own. While there is something of both stories in the background of IKAR, Rabbi Brous had no intention of starting her own synagogue in early 2004 when she was initially introduced to the families that became the nucleus of IKAR. And even though some of IKAR's founding families did meet at another congregation where they were members, none of them left thinking that they would be starting their own synagogue. Many start up nonprofits begin life with a benefactor or circle of donors that underwrites the initial stage of incorporation. IKAR had none, but largely "willed" itself into being with the strong leadership of a few individuals determined to make the new venture work.

It would be incorrect to say that IKAR was simply manifested from nothing. Some of the families that went on to found IKAR had until recently been members of another dynamic Los Angeles synagogue, Ohr HaTorah (OHT), led by Rabbi Mordecai Finley and Rebbetzin Meirav Finley. After these several families decided to leave OHT, they determined to remain linked to one another and hoped to find another spiritual community which they could join together. The families had children who had been in religious school together, some of whom were approaching b'nei mitzvah age, so finding a new spiritual home was a pressing matter. While seeking a new synagogue they continued to get together in each others' homes, celebrating holidays and maintaining the micro-community that had been formed after their departure from OHT.

Melissa Balaban, who would later go on to become the President of IKAR's Board, was involved with the Progressive Jewish Alliance (PJA), having previously served on the PJA board. Through Daniel Sokatch, PJA's Executive Director, Rabbi

Sharon Brous (a PJA board member) was introduced to the group of ex-Ohr HaTorah members (or XOs as they came to be called). Rabbi Brous then introduced the XOs to two couples with whom she had been leading an in-home study group and also to her sister-in-law Paulette Light and her family. There was an instant chemistry between them at the first study session held at the Balaban/Wergeles house just before Pesach.

4.1.3 Chronology

4.1.3.1 Passover Study Session

The Passover Study Session held at the Balaban/Wergeles house was somewhat like a blind date. There was palpable excitement between the various groups, but we needed to see if there was a real potential and common ground between the families and Rabbi Brous. Although everyone had been brought to the table by someone else that they trusted, there was still a unfamiliarity that made everyone tread carefully. Passover provided the perfect opportunity for Rabbi Brous to communicate her message of spiritual connectedness leading to social justice. Rabbi Brous engaged the group in a meaningful talk about liberation and redemption. Having recently liberated themselves from a synagogue situation that was not serving their needs, the XOs responded immediately to Rabbi Brous's dvar Torah.

4.1.3.2 Challenges Ahead

The idea to form a new spiritual community under the leadership of Rabbi Brous was discussed. Although the idea appealed to everyone in the group, the practicalities of achieving it seemed nearly insurmountable. As with all new business endeavors, the principle requirements were money, resources and time. The families involved were willing to commit some funds to the new enterprise, but could not muster enough to pay a full-time rabbi and pay ancillary costs. Resources were limited since the

individuals involved had busy lives and no one owned the basic materials necessary to start a synagogue such as siddurim, a torah scroll or a venue. Time, however, became both the principle obstacle and the primary impetus for moving forward. By the time the families were seriously considering embarking on the new venture, Rabbi Brous needed to renew her contract at Milken Community High School where she was the Director of Advanced Jewish Studies. Because the school operates on an academic calendar, she had to give notice if she would not be returning. Also, because the hiring of rabbis typically operates on a similar calendar, if Rabbi Brous chose to leave Milken to join the new venture and it did not work out, it was possible she would be out of work until the next hiring season, which would have been unworkable for her family.

On April 14th, 2004, the nascent board met at the Balaban/Wergeles house to make the final call on how to proceed.¹⁶ Rabbi Brous presented a more fully articulated vision of the values of the community that she hoped to build and that vision strongly resonated with the group.¹⁷ She also presented the looming deadline for her contract renewal and explained its significance. Although there was enthusiasm for the idea of moving forward, the obstacles to success were formidable.

It was clear after that meeting that the will existed to create a new enterprise, but there was no way of knowing whether the enthusiasm would be infectious enough to bring in the number of people necessary to make it succeed. It was decided to hold a Kabbalat Shabbat service as soon as possible to start to gauge the feasibility of the decision. There were constraints as to venue because the service would need to be within walking distance of Rabbi Brous's home to accommodate her observance of Shabbat. A feverish search began, but before the group had even settled on a location,

an email promotion campaign began in earnest.¹⁸ Through Rabbi Brous's connections and each board member's email address book, the word went out to several hundred people about the community's first Kabbalat Shabbat.

4.1.3.3 The First Kabbalat Shabbat

The planners hoped that at least fifty people would show up. Well over a hundred did. The back room at the Aaron Speiser Acting Studio was overflowing with daveners. Rabbi Brous had asked Andy Shugerman, a second year rabbinical student at the University of Judaism, to act as prayer leader. Drummers provided the rhythm. Siddurim were loaned by Shtibl. Gary Wexler helped to put together a brochure featuring a vision statement from Rabbi Brous. A vegetarian dinner was provided by the organizers and the guests were encouraged to bring wine and dessert. By everyone's account it was a unique and wonderful experience of both prayer and community. If IKAR was conceived in the living room of the Balaban/Wergeles home a few weeks prior, then that night on Robertson Boulevard it was born.

Rabbi Brous had written a vision statement for the emergent community:

We are a community of conscience, built on the belief that the Jewish community can and should be vibrant, vital and deeply engaged in the world. We believe that a sense of belonging in a *kehillah* kedoshah, a holy community, can be a powerful antidote to the pain, loneliness and terror of the day, and it can inspire a search for answers to the authentic questions of life, death, love, loss, and longing.

The trend among many religious communities today is insularity and extremism on one hand, and attrition and apathy on the other. We believe in the Prophetic mandate that we search vigorously within our tradition to uncover voices calling for the recognition of human dignity, the loving pursuit of justice, and shalom.

We strive to celebrate the dynamic potential of prayer, through joyful, musical davening. We believe that prayer and learning can be

soulful, inspiring, and profoundly impactful. We believe that matters of the spirit are intimately linked to matters of the world, and that the Jewish community has a distinct responsibility to participate in social justice and tikkun, healing. Spiritual development is ultimately not only for the benefit of the individuals taking the journey, but also for the impact that those individuals will in turn have on our city, our country, and the entire world.

We believe in the transformative power of Shabbat, and its promise of the triumph of love and understanding over hatred and alienation. We believe that serious, passionate, and authentic engagement with Torah is an enduring response to the deepest cry of the human heart. We strive to receive sustenance from the wisdom of our tradition, while simultaneously engaging it in lively debate.

We believe that a community of daveners, learners and activists can make manifest the presence of God both within and beyond the walls of the synagogue.

Our community is both traditional and progressive. It is creative, spiritual, and egalitarian, welcoming people of diverse backgrounds, affiliations and lifestyles. Please join us as we continue to search for increasingly more meaningful ways to serve each other, our community, our world and God.¹⁹

4.1.3.4 Brass Tacks

On May 2nd, 2004, the nascent board met again at the Balaban/Wergeles house to debrief on the Kabbalat Shabbat and decide what to do next. Several approaches were considered on how to proceed.²⁰ The first possibility was termed “the organic growth option.” The idea was to attempt to have one Shabbat service a month while building up support for the new venture and seeking funding. The second possibility was to move forward with a “part-time” approach, which would require hiring Rabbi Brous halftime and having her scale back her commitment to Milken while moving slowly on building infrastructure. The last option, termed “The Miracle” was to build a full fledged shul in the immediate future. Organic growth seemed workable, but did not seem fair to Rabbi Brous, who was already working full time and had a six-month-old

daughter. To ask her to take on this new responsibility without remuneration or any assurances that it would work out seemed unfair. The part-time option was not feasible as Milken needed a full time person in Rabbi Brous's job. And even though most people at the meeting agreed that organic growth might be the "common sense" route, they also agreed that it did not meet their needs. Paramount among these was that their kids have a functioning religious school to attend in the very near term and that the kids who were nearing b'nei mitzvah age stay on track. The biggest obstacle was cash. Rabbi Brous needed to know that her job situation was secure in order to leave her position at Milken. Despite the enthusiasm and good will of the families, only a fraction of the money necessary to pay her had been raised. To move forward required a leap of faith from both parties. At that meeting the group decided to take that leap.

The consequences of this decision were manifold. First Rabbi Brous would need to give notice at Milken. Second, we would need to begin to prepare for a full scale High Holy Day services immediately, without a known venue, support staff or even basic resources such as prayer books. And lastly, the planners would need to work aggressively to fill the coffers with enough money to successfully put together a service. At that meeting future board president Melissa Balaban pronounced herself "cautiously ecstatic"²¹ about the new venture.

4.1.3.5 Discovering the Essence

Monday, May 10th, 2004, at seven in the evening, the group met at the home of Richard and Shari Foos to make a final decision or whether or not to proceed.²² Rabbi Brous had to give notice to Milken. The nascent board had to commit to raising the

funds necessary to pay her salary for a year. The group had to adopt a name and begin work on a strategic plan. It was a watershed moment, but it felt more like an affirmation of something that had already taken on a life of its own. There was comfort that as a team we could pull it off. There had been a successful “proof of concept” event that exceeded expectations. All that remained was to look each other in the eye and agree to work together to make it happen.

Rabbi Brous then revealed the name she was proposing for our new community: IKAR. She explained that *ikar* is Hebrew for “essence” or “core” and that as a community we would be seeking to find that intellectual, spiritual and soulful essence that many of us felt was missing from our lives and from the other shuls we had “shopped for.” The name and the idea behind it had immediate resonance with the group. It was adopted unanimously. Rabbi Brous would give notice at her job the next day and we would immediately begin the process of incorporating as a 501(c)3.

4.1.3.6 Tikkun Leil Shavuot

The first official IKAR event once the community’s name was adopted and the plans for incorporation were formalized was an evening of teaching for Shavuot at the home of board members Paulette Light and Jeff Rake in the Larchmont neighborhood on May 25th, 2004. This event was also an important proof of concept, since it involved an intimate teaching experience with Rabbi Brous that for the first time also included a number of individuals who were one or two degrees away from the core group which was to become IKAR’s founding board of directors. This evening saw the advent of the IKAR House Party formula (see Section 4.1.5 Tactics, for details) , where hosts invited their extended circle of friends, which mixed with members of the

nascent board and newly attracted individuals who had been to the Actor's Studio Shabbat or had heard about that event and the IKAR concept.

4.1.3.7 Live from Roxbury Park

It was clear that for IKAR to succeed it would need to quickly establish a routine, with a viable venue and services offered regularly. We were limited by geography and resources. Because the new board felt that success depended upon attracting young families with children, the venue needed to provide both a suitable space for services and a separate space for children's programming. Also important was that the space make the right statement about what we intended to build, something that was outside the norm for L.A. Jewish communities. Someone suggested renting a church, but by some board members objected to this idea. A furious hunt began for the right locale when the board learned about the Roxbury Park community center in Beverly Hills. It was within walking distance of the rabbi's house. It had a large community room and a smaller classroom. And it was situated in a beautiful park laden with play structures and picnic tables and had plenty of parking. It was ideal.

Nearly two hundred people showed up to the first Roxbury Shabbat on June 11th, 2004 - many came early to join in the community picnic. Better still, many more families with children were present than at the previous Shabbat. The first Roxbury service had somewhat of the feel of a revival meeting. Daveners danced in the aisles and everyone remained after for the dessert *oneg*. It was clear that IKAR had arrived.

4.1.3.8 Summer of 2004

Throughout the summer the momentum continued to build. The board feverishly prepared for a full scale High Holy Days observance which would be held at the

Westside Jewish Community Center (JCC). On August 19th, 2004, *The Jewish Journal* did a story about emerging spiritual communities in Los Angeles featuring IKAR. The article credits IKAR (and the two other communities written about) with addressing a pressing need in Los Angeles: a place for meaningful prayer, combined with fellowship and social action. According to the Journal, the new prayer communities “have evolved from shared and individual dreams and from serendipitous, profound and beshert connections. They are new, egalitarian, independent, warm, collaborative and vibrant.”²³ The piece also points out that the new communities provide a nexus between more traditional, practicing Jews and what Ron Wolfson of the University of Judaism called “spiritual seekers.” The article quotes Rabbi Brous, “We want to do away with what’s orderly, precise and dignified and build a place where people have a spiritual encounter that’s profound and joyous and creative and transformative.”²⁴

4.1.3.9 High Holy Days 5765

Planning for High Holy Days was a logistical challenge, from figuring out how to transform the “industrial basketball court ambiance” of the JCC into holy space, to catering, to promotion and sales of tickets, which were called “IKARds,” in order to seem less commercial. The board actually toyed with the idea of making services completely free, but decided that it would be financially unworkable. IKAR was already beginning to hold Kabbalat Shabbat services at the JCC location, having left Roxbury Park because of costs and the unavailability of the space for Shabbat morning services. Regardless, the board knew that many of the people coming to IKAR services were members of other synagogues and already had tickets to High Holy Days at their home shul. Actual membership in IKAR was still relatively low in comparison to

attendance, only a few dozen individuals and families had joined since the initial membership push. Regardless, the board began planning for services with two hundred plus daveners. Three hundred *machzorim* were purchased and board members had running bets about how many seats would be filled. In order to entice people already holding other High Holy Days tickets and those might not normally attend services, IKAR's High Holy Days IKARds were priced quite affordably compared to other Los Angeles area synagogues' High Holy Days tickets and were offered for sale at the IKAR website. Reservations began pouring in and it quickly became obvious that there would be a full house.

Just a few weeks before Yom Kippur the Jewish Journal printed another article mentioning IKAR, this time focused on "Masters Of Return,"²⁵ people who had changed their lives to become more religiously observant. Rabbi Brous's story was the lead. In her story she told about her path from "cultural Jew" to rabbinic school via a seminar with Aish HaTorah where she had a now well-known and life altering encounter (described here in an article from *The Jewish Week*):

In the middle of a slide show presentation by the Orthodox organization Aish Hatorah, Rabbi Sharon Brous felt the calling. "I said to myself, 'I have to be a rabbi and I have to make it work,'" she recalls. "Then the lights went on and the guy from Aish Hatorah who was courting me to become frum asked me what I thought. I told him I wanted to be a rabbi and he said, 'Why don't you be a *rebbetzin*?' "²⁶

The Jewish Journal article relates Rabbi Brous's shul shopping experience in New York.

She tried and struck out at a string of Manhattan synagogues. Then one Friday night she found herself sitting in the back row of a church where Congregation B'nai Jeshurun was meeting while its building was being renovated.

"It was all in Hebrew, and everyone was singing, and for some reason instead of feeling alienated I felt like I understood every word. I had no idea what was going on, but I did not feel at all lost. I felt I was precisely where I was supposed to be."

What Brous later pinpointed as the "unabashed, unapologetic authenticity of the place" gave her the emotional hook into Jewish life that made her realize there was something deep and real going on, and she wanted to know more about it.

For many IKAR board members and community members, Rabbi Brous's story is familiar and compelling. While there is a good deal of diversity in background among IKARites, one aspect that binds them together is the search for authenticity that Rabbi Brous discovered at B'nai Jeshurun. Her experience as the Marshall Meyer Rabbinic Fellow at B'nai Jeshurun is what laid the groundwork for IKAR. That authenticity is what IKAR strives to capture.

To follow the press coverage in *The Jewish Journal* and raise awareness for IKAR's upcoming High Holy Days (HHD) services, IKAR took out two ads running successive weeks in *The Jewish Journal*. Both ads were conceived in an "anti-marketing" campaign style. Both ads had HHD 5765 and the IKAR website address at the bottom, but did not specifically tout IKAR or High Holy Day services.



IKAR High Holy Day Advertisement 1



IKAR High Holy Day Advertisement 2

Turnout at IKAR's High Holy Days exceeded expectations. Not only did IKAR

sell several hundred individual tickets, but dozens of drop-ins showed up as well. Ultimately, IKAR did over five hundred transactions related to High Holy Days, including entrance and meal IKARds and raised enough money to pay the bills for the next few months.

In an article for *The Providence Phoenix* published on October 1st, 2004, writer Alan Olifson described his IKAR High Holy Days experience this way:

...this Rosh Hashanah I found myself in full Jew garb, sitting on a folding chair in the auditorium of a community center. Four small disco balls left from a previous event — I hope — hung over the congregation. My girlfriend, Jess, and I were looking for a service that — while ostensibly celebrating the beginning of a new year — did not feel like we were getting our molars removed with pliers. And so a friend hipped us to this upstart congregation, which was apparently renting this hall — the home of a recent sock-hop — and we decided to give it a shot.

We were initially excited but, as the day approached, we became increasingly skeptical. Mostly because of the Web site. It started out promising enough, asking, "Not interested in counting pages and watching the clock while sitting through interminable High Holy Day services again this year?" Why, no, no we're not. Please do go on. "We create a participatory, communal worshipping experience. We will pray, dance, study and sing through the liturgy of the High Holy Days," the site continued. Jess and I turned to each other. Um, did it say "dance"?

...near the start of the proceedings, I was sold. In a spirit of celebration so appropriate for New Year's but sadly lacking in the temples of my youth, kids came dancing in from the children's service dressed in makeshift crowns and, inexplicably, trash bags, as we rose and sang songs of jubilation (or, perhaps, songs of absolute subjugation to a spiteful God, I'm not really sure, I do not understand Hebrew. But the tunes were catchy). Though it's only 5765, I'd venture to say we partied like it was 5799.²⁷

4.1.3.10 A Going Concern

If IKAR has had a single Tipping Point, it was High Holy Days 5765. Before High Holy Days IKAR membership was mostly board members and a few other families.

Afterwards, many individuals and families joined in the wake of their High Holy Days experience, making use of IKAR's "apply your IKARds" to membership fees policy. Board members joked that making IKAR seem like an established synagogue for the High Holy Days was only accomplished through the use of smoke and mirrors. Up until High Holy Days IKAR was an alternative upstart. After High Holy Days IKAR was a going concern.

The combined press coverage and community buzz about IKAR helped to solidify the new community's image, which in turn led to more people coming to Shabbat services. IKAR became involved in a number of social justice issues, notably the genocide in Darfur and hunger in Los Angeles. On January 22nd 2005, one of the XO kids was the first to have an IKAR bar mitzvah. IKAR teamed up with Outdoor Jewish Adventures to do monthly nature hikes. A weekly *parashat hashavua* study group was created, led by community members. People continued to join as official synagogue members. More continued to attend events. A generous benefactor allowed IKAR to expand operations and hire another full-time employee. Other supporters stepped forward, one offering a matching grant for any new membership dues. IKAR made it through an entire Jewish year of events, offering a Simchat Torah celebration that brought the house down, a Purim "Justice" carnival with booths that raised money for various social justice causes and a First Year Birthday Bash that cemented IKAR as a unique and wonderful center for Jewish community in Los Angeles.

4.1.4 Strategy

4.1.4.1 The IKAR Brand

Part of IKAR's success is dependent upon a philosophy of putting community first. This may seem like a relatively obvious philosophy for building a new synagogue,

but it is actually not the norm. Ron Wolfson framed it this way: “I think a lot of synagogues never get beyond the practice - to the values, to the meaning, to the core. Most synagogues that start, do not start from that place. They start from ‘Oh, here’s a new Jewish suburb that needs a synagogue.’”

Many start-ups make decisions about products and programming based upon the resources they have available, meaning that fundraising needs to come first. For IKAR to promote the kind of community it sought to create, it was necessary to first build the relationships and not focus on developing resources. In doing so IKAR took a page right out of the Community Church Movement pioneered by Willow Creek Church in Illinois. Willow Creek created its model by going out into neighborhoods and asking people why they did not attend church.

Their survey results boiled down to five factors:

1. Churches are always asking for money (yet nothing perceived as personally significant seemed to be happening with the money).
2. Church services were boring and lifeless.
3. Church services were predictable.
4. Sermons were irrelevant to daily life in the “real world.”
5. The pastor made people feel guilty and ignorant, so they leave church feeling worse than when they entered the doors.²⁸

IKAR never undertook a similar survey, but it is safe to say that these are the exact issues that motivated IKAR’s founders to create a different kind of synagogue.

4.1.4.1.1 Ezra

It was clear from the outset that IKAR would not be able to finance itself through memberships alone. Even in best-case scenarios, synagogue memberships typically only cover about half the operating budget of a fully functioning synagogue. IKAR

hoped to attract a vital, young and dynamic crowd which meant that some would have limited ability to afford full priced memberships. Additionally, it was clear that many of the individuals attending IKAR services already belonged to another synagogue and might not be able to afford a full-priced second membership. At first IKAR considered creating a sliding scale based upon ability to pay to determine membership dues, but ultimately decided on a simpler graduated method with special consideration for students and young people (up to age 29), and anyone with financially challenged circumstances. As part of a policy that no interested person would ever be turned away due to an inability to afford membership at any level, a board member was assigned to work with prospective members to create affordable solutions to membership. “Ezra,” as the anonymous system for subsidized memberships became called, was responsible for making sure no one failed to join IKAR for financial reasons.

4.1.4.2 Connecting Spirituality to Action

From the outset Rabbi Brous’s teachings have sought to emphasize the connection between thought and action in Jewish tradition. In Rabbi Brous’s words:

Our community strives to stand at the intersection of spirituality and social justice, a mandate that is integrated into everything we do. We see a profound connection between Torah, tefillah (prayer), and tikkun (political and social activism), knowing that soulful prayer and serious Jewish learning will inspire our sense of mission and purpose as Jews and as human beings. It is our hope that our tefillah, study, and social justice work will impact the way we live, think and act, and will catalyze real change in the world.²⁹

This message spoke both to the seekers who have been looking for a spiritual home and to those who wanted a community experience that was both thoughtful and impactful on the world.

4.1.5 Tactics

It seems a little odd to describe synagogue programming as “tactics,” but in fact programming is where the mission gets translated into action. IKAR was challenged with creating a community that appealed to a diversity of people living in a diversity of places, with a diversity of needs. Building the necessary relationships would be key to creating momentum and support.

4.1.5.1 House Parties

One of the obvious obstacles to IKAR’s success is the geography of Los Angeles. Most of the board lives on the west side of LA (Santa Monica/Brentwood) while Rabbi Brous lives in the heart of Jewish LA (Pico-Robertson). Other board members lived farther east. As a board we knew that people would be willing to travel for something they could not get locally, but that getting them to come once was critical to getting them hooked. Since there were geographical constraints about where IKAR could hold services, the board opted to do a series of mid-week “House Parties” at various locations throughout the city. These events would include study with Rabbi Brous, a chance to get to know her and hear about the vision of the IKAR community and connect with other individuals involved with IKAR. Although they were initially thought of as a recruitment device, they were, and continue to be, a fundamental part of the IKAR experience. Each house party has a particular theme, which could be teaching about an upcoming holiday, or a particular demographic (e.g. twenty-somethings) or a special guest or existing group of friends. By bringing IKAR to the various neighborhoods around LA, the community has provided an easy “in” for folks who are not initially attracted by the prayer experience, or who do not want to

commute across town on a Friday evening for services.

4.1.5.2 Limudim

Creating a compelling and sustainable religious school was the heart of the motivation for many IKAR board members and their families, some of whom had children nearing b'nei mitzvah age. The board understood that having a real religious school was a requirement to be perceived as a fully functioning synagogue and that having a sound membership base meant attracting families with young children. Moreover, IKAR's mandate to re-invent the synagogue experience would have no meaning without also attempting to re-invent the religious school, the institution responsible for alienating many Jews from participating in organized Judaism. Rabbi Brous worked with IKAR's Rabbinic Intern, HUC Rabbinic student, Deborah Bock (M.J.C.S & M.A.Ed.), board member Paulette Light, the Education Committee, and the IKAR board to create *Limudim* (studies), in October of 2004.

Limudim's mandate is to "shatter the preconception that Hebrew school is boring and irrelevant - our goal is for our children to fall in love with Judaism and find their own voices within the tradition, while exploring innovative new paths to God and Torah."³⁰ Families must be official synagogue members for their children to attend Limudim. In order to deal with the geographic diversity of the community, Limudim classes are held both in east side and west side locations at the homes of board members during the week. The classes come together one Saturday per month for Limudim during Shabbat morning services. In order to serve IKAR's goal of creating a dramatically different learning environment for its school, IKAR's curriculum is eclectic, uses dramatic play and allows kids of different ages to learn

together (and teach each other).

IKAR board member Paulette Light, chair of the Education Committee, wrote this compelling description:

Picture this...

You come in after a long day at school and hear Israeli rock music playing in the background. You ask in Hebrew for a snack and sit and talk with your friends a bit. Suddenly you are transported into another world as Limudim immerses you in Beresheet (Genesis) where you are given a front row seat to experience the stories you may have thought you knew...

Then you have a choice of what to do next! In one particular week you could moderate a debate between Jacob and Esau, be a part of a newscast that is reporting on sibling rivalry between the two, write a poem or song expressing what Rebecca was feeling or cook the soup that Jacob served his father and deliver it to someone in our community who is in need. You will experience art, music and stories that are geared especially to you.

- Before the end of the day your parents are invited to join in as well, to listen to the songs, the broadcast and to learn with you. This is a new kind of religious school!
- Learning centers where children have choices not desks
- Specialists from the community who will lead projects in film making, ecology, animation and more
- Experiential, hands-on, interactive learning
- Creative, experienced teachers who love Judaism
- Designed and implemented by Rabbi Sharon Brous and Rabbinic Intern and Master of Jewish Education Deborah Bock³¹

4.1.5.3 Becoming a Community of Learners

Because IKAR is a community consisting of individuals with diverse Jewish knowledge and backgrounds, it has always been a conducive environment for the creation of learning opportunities aside from those that occur during services. During High Holy Day services, three separate break out sessions were taught by community members between services:

- An hour of Restorative Yoga and breathing, led by Chris Stein, one of LA's finest yoga instructors. Chris will lead us in exercises designed to awaken the spirit and strengthen the body during a fast.
- Engage in a philosophical, psychological, spiritual conversation about the Book of Jonah. Our very own Adam Gilad will be teaching a session called "Eros and the Book of Jonah: Who wants to live?"
- Shawn Landres, a social anthropologist of religion, research fellow at the University of Judaism, and all around great guy will lead a discussion on "What Does it Mean to Choose Judaism in the Contemporary World?". After High Holy Days, where do we go from here? What meaning is there to our identity and practice?³²

This type of community-based learning has become emblematic of IKAR culture. As a community that values both learning and teaching, IKAR has engaged the intellect and skills of both official synagogue members and others to inspire a diversity of learning opportunities.

4.1.5.4 Shabbat b'Yahad

As a critical component of building community IKAR seeks to create social environments with a Jewish context that allow the community to bond to one another and learn together. In some ways Shabbat b'Yahad is the perfect example of this melding of Judaism and community.

On November 12th, 2004, IKAR held its first "Shabbat b'Yahad" (Shabbat Together) at the Westside JCC. Patterned after the hugely successful program at B'nai Jeshurun in New York, Shabbat b'Yahad is a special early Kabbalat Shabbat service followed by (in IKAR's case) a catered Kosher dairy or vegan meal. Over a hundred people stayed for dinner that first night, exceeding reserved seats by twenty or more individuals. Board members ate salad. But it was a memorable evening in many ways. Even though IKAR had been in existence for six months, something about sitting down to a *Shabbes*

dinner with the extended IKAR family solidified the tribal/familial atmosphere the board had been striving to create. The cacophony of ten different tables saying motzi at different times, the shared the experience, and even the ordinariness of the act made it all seem very special. After dinner about half the crowd stayed around for a discussion with Rabbi Brous. It was a quintessential IKAR experience because it combined prayer, community and social justice in an atmosphere of warmth and fellowship.

Since then Shabbat b'Yahad is a regular feature of the IKAR calendar once a month and is an anchor point for the daveners of the IKAR community. In particular, Shabbat b'Yahad attracts a big crowd of people in their twenties and thirties.

4.1.5.5 Internet Communication

IKAR has never used regular mail for marketing purposes. All mass communication with the community has been done online either at the IKAR website (<http://www.ikar-la.org>) or via the IKAR community email list. Focusing on the immediacy of electronic communication, IKAR has saved money and enhanced its ability to organize events and assure attendance even over short timelines. Forty to fifty percent of all Shabbat b'Yahad dinner IKARds are purchased within 24 hours of the event. Guests to IKAR's First Birthday Bash arrived at the door of the event and used two laptop computers hooked into a wireless network to pay their cover charge, buy raffle tickets, send an IKARgram or make a donation. Nearly all transactions between the IKAR office and community members are handled online, either via the IKAR website, or using an Internet-based service to process credit cards.

It was clear from the outset that IKAR was both “sticky” and “contagious” as a

concept. News of it traveled best by word of mouth as assisted by the Internet. One Shabbat b'Yahad a community member (now Board member), Adam Weiss, used Evite (www.evite.com) to invite over one hundred of his friends to join IKAR for dinner. He hosted the thirty plus of them who showed up.

The text of his Evite has become a classic IKAR pitch:

I am not easily impressed. So, when I was invited a couple of weeks ago to attend Friday night services at a "start-up" synagogue on the Westside, I was pretty skeptical. Was this going to be some new-age, trendy, touchy-feely experience (i.e., something up Madonna's ... excuse me, ESTHER's ... alley)? Would I have to stand in a circle, hold hands, and sing kumbaya? Would I be able to sneak out early without being noticed?

A few hours before the service was set to begin, I was even more hesitant to go. I had several projects to finish up at work before I could leave the office, and I was tired from a busy week. Nevertheless, I somehow managed to make my way over to the Westside JCC.

What I saw and heard when I arrived there blew me away. Over 150 people (mostly 20 and 30-somethings and young families) had come together for an egalitarian, traditional, energetic, Friday-night service led by a bright, articulate rabbi not much older than I. The spirit of the congregation and accompanying sound of the percussion were entrancing. The second I entered the room, I forgot all about the office I had just left, and simply smiled.

If you do not belong to a synagogue, or if your parents' synagogue does not cut it, IKAR might just be the place for you. IKAR (meaning root/core/essence) is a brand-new congregation dedicated to building community and tikkun olam. Led by the dynamic Rabbi Sharon Brous, IKAR is about finding our place in the world and fulfilling our obligations to others.

Because IKAR is new and young, you and I have a rare opportunity to help build this community from the ground up. I invite you to join me this Friday night, November 12, at 6:15pm for services and catered dinner with IKAR. **DONOT WORRY ABOUT BEING LATE!** If you cannot stay for dinner, that's fine too. However, I think that dinner will be a highlight of the evening, as we kick back with good food and good company. In your Evite response, please let me know whether you plan to stay for dinner so that I can reserve your

spot (cost is only \$10 + a dessert or bottle of wine to share).

Please feel free to forward this invite to anyone else whom you think might be interested in attending. I look forward to seeing you there!³³

4.1.5.6 Nature Hikes

A critical part of building community means providing opportunities for people to get together outside of large scale events. In February 2005, IKAR partnered with Outdoor Jewish Adventures (www.outdoorjewishadventures.com) to have monthly nature hikes in the Santa Monica mountains. Josh Lake, an accomplished naturalist /educator with a Masters in Jewish Education from Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), leads the hikes. Different hikes target different segments of the community, including young people and families with small children. The hikes attempt to teach about the “wonders of the land and its connection to Judaism.”³⁴

4.1.5.7 Weekly Torah Study

Another critical component of the IKAR formula is the weekly parashat hashavua study group held at a community member’s home every Sunday morning. These study sessions welcome participants with any level of previous Torah learning from absolute beginner to *yeshiva bucher*. Although Rabbi Brous drops by once in a while to listen in, the Torah study group is a lay-lead enterprise, with volunteers taking turns guiding the discussion.

4.1.5.8 Food Donation Program

Each IKAR event has a food collection barrel positioned prominently near the entry. Each person coming to an IKAR event is encouraged to bring one can of food to donate. The idea is to continuously remind ourselves that being involved in Jewish

community means being committed to Tikkun Olam. The collected food is given to SOVA Food Pantry to distribute to the hungry of Los Angeles.

4.1.5.9 Tikkun: Take Action

IKAR is also committed to taking action for social justice both locally and globally. Locally, IKAR has teamed with P.A.T.H. (People Assisting the Homeless – www.ePATH.org) to allow IKAR community members to bring or serve food to the homeless of Los Angeles. Globally, IKAR has been vocal about the genocide in Sudan, child soldiers in Sri Lanka and Tsunami relief efforts. The b'nei mitzvah class of Limudim has recently begun the IKAR water project, working with Ethos to sell bottled water and raise money to bring drinkable water to villages in the developing world. The idea of this project is to move beyond the typical b'nei mitzvah project, and really use it as a teaching device for the connection between tikkun and Torah. The ultimate goal is to build a well in a community that the Limudim students will connect to through correspondence and other means. In other words, the project does more than just send money to make things better — it also fosters an intimate understanding of the issues on a personal level. Limudim students will have the opportunity to see how their work has made an impact and get to know the people whose lives it has affected.

Chapter 5 PRIMARY RESEARCH

5.1 Overview

There are many roads to IKAR. The founders of IKAR each have their own individual Jewish journey that brought them to their involvement with IKAR. For the community, IKAR has become a part of their Jewish journey. While the specifics of each story differ, there is a common thread of people seeking something that seemed elusive until IKAR was built and was able to address that need.

5.2 Methodology

Because the stories are so individual and personal, the best way to examine IKAR participation, whether at the board or community level, was to hear those stories. Even though these stories are only a few of all the stories within IKAR, they have something to tell us about the various motivations and attitudes evidenced within the diverse IKAR community. One thing in common with all the individuals who participated in the research for this thesis is that they felt compelled to talk about IKAR and their IKAR experiences (bad and good). This kind of passion is emblematic of IKAR participants and is, perhaps, a reflection of the passionate nature of the IKAR concept.

5.3 Focus Group

In order to get a deeper understanding of the backgrounds and motivations of some IKAR participants, a focus group was conducted on Sunday March 26th, 2005, at the Westside JCC. An email invitation was sent to forty plus individuals who had been attending IKAR events. The individuals were selected for their level of interest and ability to articulate their positions. Participants included both official synagogue

members of IKAR as well as members of the larger IKAR community. Some attempt was made to include a cross-section of the IKAR community in terms of demographics and Jewish background, however, the final fifteen participants were “self-selected” from the larger list. While the group cannot be said to be a scientific sample of IKAR community, they did evidence a diversity of opinions and were able to provide insight about individual motivations which can be loosely applied to the larger community.

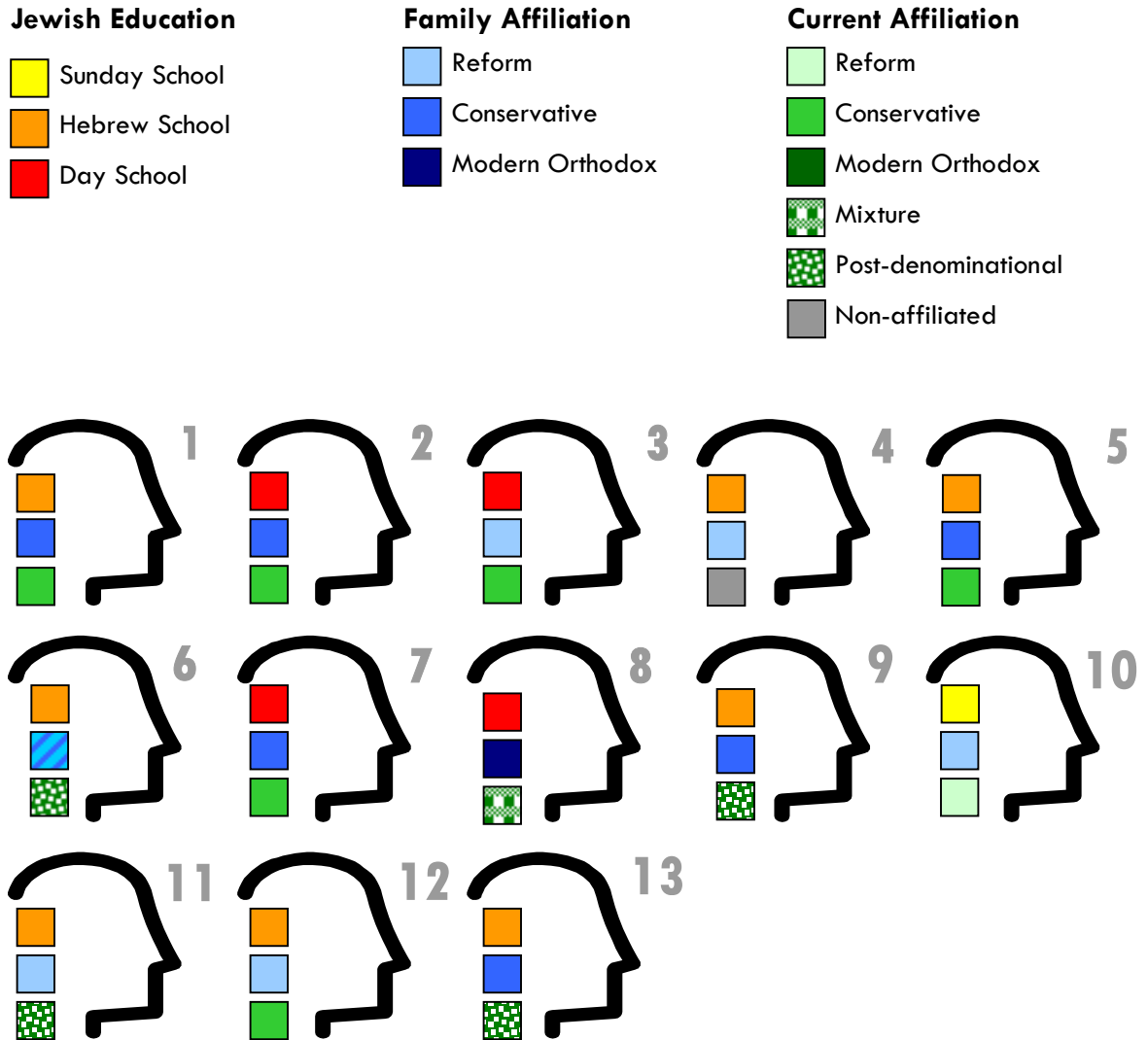
5.3.1 Methodology

The focus group was held in a meeting room on the main floor of the Westside JCC, in the same building where IKAR holds services. Kosher refreshments, including coffee, were provided. Participants filled out a one page questionnaire before the outset (see Appendix B). The purpose was to assist in understanding the background of each participant in respect to how it might inform his/her opinions expressed within the proceedings. Questions covered demography and Jewish identity. Each participant was provided with a pen and pad of paper to take notes during the proceedings. Participants were also encouraged to follow up the focus group by emailing any other feedback they had, in case something had occurred to them upon later reflection or if they simply had not had time to articulate a specific point. None of the participants availed themselves of this invitation. The focus group was videotaped with a single digital video recorder equipped with a shotgun microphone. Each participant was assured of personal anonymity, including that the video would be viewed by no one but the researcher, but that their words (without attribution) would be quoted. Each of them signed a release form which permitted the use of their words for the purpose of this thesis.³⁵

5.3.2 Findings

5.3.2.1 Pre-Focus Group Questionnaire Data

The Questionnaire (Appendix C) asked four demographic questions, five Jewish identity questions and three IKAR questions. Here are the Jewish identity profiles of the 13 participants:



5.3.2.2 Members and Non-members

As the chart below shows, focus group participants were equally divided among members and non-members. There were also roughly equal proportions for the

number of IKAR events attended, with an obvious correlation between number of events attended and official synagogue membership.

IKAR Events Attended	Non-members	Members
1-5	3	
6-10	3	
11-15	1	2
16+		4

5.3.2.3 Participant Background

Although every attempt was made to include a diversity of perspectives and backgrounds in the group, one uniform element is that all participants had a favorable impression of IKAR. Levels of involvement differed, from members, to prospective members, to “shul shoppers,” but none came to the group with an ax to grind or for the purpose of slamming IKAR. In fact this generally positive attitude about IKAR made it somewhat difficult to elicit comments that were critical of IKAR. However, this is not really problematic from an investigative standpoint, since the goal was to examine the attitudes of people who are supporters of IKAR, and was intended to gather observations about anyone who has ever had an IKAR experience. It would be interesting (but difficult) to do an investigation of individuals who came to IKAR once and decided not to come back in order to find out what turned them off. The focus here was to find out what turned the participants on, so their boosterism was to be expected.

5.3.2.4 Jewish Identity

The first portion of the focus group was dedicated to introducing the participants to one another. Each got to share their names, occupations and a little about their Jewish background. Following that brief exchange, the discussion turned

to involvement with, and feelings toward, Judaism and Jewish life and Jewish community in Los Angeles. Some participants were long time Angelenos and other fairly recent arrivals, but most agreed that finding the right Jewish experience in LA has been a challenge for them. One participant laid out the options this way:

“If you’re into the Carlbachy, alternative davening experiences then you go to the Happy Minyan, but if you do not want to be in the orthodox scene, then you’re sort of confined to Neshama minyan and the Shtibl minyan.... after years of trying a lot of different things and for me it was sort of like there was Neshama on Friday night and Shtibl on Saturday morning maybe a little Library Minyan here and there but that’s a little traditional. But there were not a lot of options until IKAR came along.”

Most participants agreed that they were searching for something that spoke to them personally. As one participant put it, “For me the spiritual part of the experience supersedes the religious part in a way - that’s the way in for me, that’s what is important to me to have an authentic experience.” Another offered: “I felt like Goldilocks, this one is too much this, this one not enough that, never quite right.”

There was near unanimity for what they like about Jewish life and what they want out of it – in a word: Community.

Q: What do you like about Jewish life?

- “Community connectedness and just a support network also”
- “There’s something cyclical about Jewish life and you cannot have that without community.”
- “Big picture, in terms of getting out of the micro and into the macro”
- “Community friendships and definitely the cyclical nature of the year”
- “Identity, being able to have it as the root that goes in to all aspects of life”
- “Shared experiences with me and my friends”
- “Being a part of a bigger picture”
- “Ritual, celebration, family”
- “Comfort, comfort from the traditions that you grew up with”

- “Communal experience, the importance of social justice”

Interestingly, when asked what they thought was missing from Jewish life, the answer was also nearly unanimous and also the same: Community.

Probing a bit deeper, participants voiced frustration not just with finding the right community, but also with how to get involved.

Q: What is the biggest obstacle to getting involved?

- “Inclusiveness.”
- “Accessibility. I think that there are a lot of barriers to participation, whether those barriers are real or perceived, the perceived ones are real for the people who experience them”
- “Lack of understanding.”
- “A way to get around the politics, too much politics.”
- “A lack of mutual acceptance between different areas/denominations of Judaism or at the very least a common thread.”
- “The sense that Judaism is fun. It is about community and commandment and obligation and all these other heavy, heavy things, but it’s also fun and joyful. If we, as a people, put that out more, we’d probably do a better job of keeping people in and connected.”

5.3.2.5 IKAR Involvement

The next section of the discussion covered IKAR Involvement. Every participant in the group had found out about IKAR from at least one trusted personal connection, as opposed to mass media or general “buzz.” This phenomenon is indicative of Tipping Point dynamics. When questioned more it turned out that every person at the focus group had been brought to IKAR by a connector. In IKAR’s case connectors are as likely to be groups of people as they are individuals.

The connectors who were responsible for bringing focus group participants to IKAR were:

- Andy Shugerman
- Hebrew Union College Students
- Joshua Avedon
- Rabbi Sharon Brous
- Shtibl Minyan
- University of Judaism Students

What is most striking about this perhaps is that many of the people coming to IKAR are already in community with one another in some other context (or even multiple contexts), whether it is through prayer experiences, school or work. This may also help to explain why many people who come to IKAR feel instantly connected – they arrive feeling like they already know a bunch of people in the room. They tend to express this as IKAR being welcoming (which it certainly strives to be), but it might be more easily explained by the fact that they are being welcomed by people that they already know.

Several focus group participants remarked on the number of IKAR community members who were employed as Jewish communal workers. One director of a local Jewish organization said, “I’m amazed by the number of Jewish professionals that come here regularly.” The participants felt that this is unusual, in that providers of Jewish community tend to shy away from pursuing Jewish communal activities in their off hours. IKAR actually seems to be a haven for Jewish sector professionals. As one participant put it, “I come to IKAR to escape the burden of being a Jewish community provider, so that I can be a consumer.”

Frequently at IKAR, a community member may be connector, maven and salesman all rolled into one. The IKAR community is the product of a relatively small set of these individuals who are plugged into Jewish life in Los Angeles and who are

seen as Jewish resources by their friends. One reason that IKAR has never had to do any real marketing for events or membership is because members of the community are continually acting as conduits for new recruits.

Many participants in the focus group had a hard time describing just what IKAR is, despite the fact that many of them claimed to have been asked this question numerous times. This indescribability is actually a selling point for many people who are looking for something out of the ordinary. They trust the person who is recommending IKAR, even though their description of it is rather non-specific, which leads to intrigue and wanting to find out for oneself. As one participant put it: “At first I heard about it and I was kind of like, uh I do not know, but then there was this buzz, then it was like, okay I gotta go, everyone is talking about it. They said this was the best thing that ever came out of the LA Jewish community, you cannot describe it you just have to come.”

Q: What is IKAR?

- “A new, innovative Jewish community”
- “A new, spiritual, non-synagogue sort of synagogue”
- “A non traditional, traditional synagogue”
- “Lively, spiritual”
- “Progressive thinking”
- “It’s my synagogue. Can you believe I joined a synagogue?”
- “I would say it’s our synagogue. I actually do not feel like it’s non shul shul. I feel like it’s a shul.”

The sense of intrigue and ambiguity also helped to keep people from creating a preconceived notion about what going to IKAR would be like. When asked “How was IKAR like or unlike your expectations?” participants responded:

- “I did not know there were going to be drums.”
- “It was very familiar and comfortable. In all the buzz no one ever uses the word Conservative big C, but it’s a total straight Conservative service. It felt like camp, it felt like shul, it felt like lots of things I’d done before. But it was different from other shuls in that there was a wide demographic...and people were so nice and it was totally unexpected.”
- “I thought there were people coming out the woodwork. Just when you think that you know everybody in the LA Jewish community, it’s like all these new people, this whole new group. That was nice.”
- “I was blown away by how many people that I knew that I did not know were in LA.
- “I did not know there was going to be bongo drums and I loved it. It was like camp feeling all over again that I had when I was a kid.”
- “I was amazed at how big the congregation was.”

Q: What made you decide to come back?

- “Drums”
- “Singing”
- “It felt right to me.”
- “You just leave with that feeling of yes! This is how you’re supposed feel after services, not disappointment about what it was or what it should have been.”

Some participants stated that not having services every Friday and Saturday would be a factor in people not becoming members or at least committed IKARites. For other participants who felt like IKAR was important to them, there was a willingness to plan their schedule around IKAR events. In fact, for some participants the lack of a consistent schedule worked to IKAR’s advantage. According to them, IKAR’s somewhat erratic schedule actually forced them to pay more attention to the emails, check the website more regularly and plan their davening experiences in advance. Two main reasons for this were expressed: the first is that without penciling IKAR in, you’ll miss it and the second was that IKAR felt like a special treat since you just could not have it whenever you wanted it.

Q: How does IKAR fit into your life?

- “I actually think that this is a place that we feel comfortable going to shul. It’s worth getting up instead of sitting reading the paper. It’s a place that we feel comfortable not just davening but seeing friends and just being part of the community.”
- “I feel guilty not going. I feel an active sense of loss having missed something.”
- “I found a synagogue that’s a refuge for me. I want to be here. I need to be here. It’s almost like an appointment, I schedule everything around it.”

The board of IKAR has been very conscious from the outset that we need to present a differentiated offering in order to attract new people. There are many choices for being involved in Jewish life in LA and one thing many participants said they wanted was “something different.” Many of the choices that IKAR made in order to define our brand were targeted at this sentiment.

One aspect of IKAR stood out for the participants who were regular daveners at other minyanim, the fact that IKAR is building a full-fledged synagogue, not just another minyan. The fact that IKAR is more than just a place to celebrate Shabbat was a major attraction of IKAR to some participants.

“One of the things that I first realized when I came here that was different from Shtibl or Neshama was that it (IKAR) was people who really wanted to have a congregation rather than people who wanted to pray together on Saturday morning or Friday night. There’s a commitment to paying dues and hiring staff and thinking thoughtfully about the development of a community. And that I think is particularly Jewish...I think this is different and that is valuable to me.”

A sense of pride in being a stakeholder was evident in the comments made by nearly all the focus group participants. Clearly part of the attractiveness of IKAR was that they were being asked to commit and to do something that none of their other prayer groups had asked of them: to build a functioning full-fledged synagogue. “We are

growing as this community and these kids are going to grow up with this IKAR Judaism and it's really meaningful. I mean, my bat mitzvah was about presents."

The fact that so much of what attracted these same people to IKAR was that it was a -start up and not an established synagogue also had a downside. There was some concern about what might happen to IKAR "when it grows up."

- "I think that part of the appeal is that it's new, it's innovative, it's homegrown, and has a holistic approach. But when it becomes institutionalized and steady then it loses its innovative touch and people feel either overburden or obligated or if I join this community I'll be asked to do 5000 things... It's awesome that it's grassroots. That's the inspirational part of the community."
- "In many ways it's defined by what it's not. Once you start defining something by measurable, tangible ways, it becomes more almost exclusive. To me I think 'building', and I think I'm not comfortable walking in there. I do not care if I'm a member or not. I think that you put up walls, you push people out. I love coming here. I think that it's awesome that we're praying on a basketball court. I think that is cool. It shows that it does not matter where you are and that you do not need a lot to get a bunch of people in a room and have a really great experience. While I think that growth is inevitable and necessary to continue to attract and sustain a community, it would be wise to be cautious about the upward growth in becoming defined by a movement, a building, strict membership."

Despite these concerns, for some focus group participants, IKAR needed to become more "institutionalized" to serve their needs better, particularly if they needed a place that conducted services every Friday night and Saturday morning.

"It's like a love affair versus a marriage in a way. It just gets fatiguing after a while not to have that infrastructure. I think that it's inevitable as part of the process, maybe a building is a huge step, but still just things that define it in some way... otherwise I do not think it will be able to sustain itself."

The key for most participants was that IKAR needed to evolve and grow, but that it also needed to retain what was attractive about it in the first place.

“I think that this is a huge part of the challenge that synagogues all over the country are facing right now with the generation gap and the accessibility question for me is really key.”

When asked to describe an IKAR experience that made them want to be involved with the IKAR community, participants talked about both religious experiences and personal ones. There was a story about one participant whose mother came to services and was visibly moved, one story about how the community celebrated Andy Shugerman’s birthday, and one about having a shout out for a simcha in the Shabbat bulletin. In other words, it was generally a combination of the community experience and prayer experience that bonded participants to IKAR. One group member recounted a particular Kabbalat Shabbat:

“Something about that night, there was this energy in the air. The davening was so good. Then Rabbi Brous’s sermon was so good. It almost left everyone speechless and like breathless a little bit. And then we went right into a niggun and I felt like I was in *Tzfat* or something. The spiritual level in the room was just so high.”

Another participant spoke about how it felt to get the “inside jokes” in the Purim spiel, “It really felt nice to be included in sort of that unspoken recognition of something that was happening that only if you knew this group you would get that joke.”

Because IKAR attracts many younger Jews, being part of the IKAR community, or being members of IKAR is the first time that they have made such a choice for themselves, separate from the shul they grew up in. Many participants remarked about how empowered they felt by finding something that fit their needs and being able to make the choice to get involved.

Q: What do you get from being involved with IKAR?

- “For us as couple it’s the first shul that we’ve been really happy and excited about together.”
- “It’s growing up kind of. You know your parents always told you there were Shabbat services and you’d go with your parents. And now it’s like I’m going because I want to go and it’s the first time that that’s happened.”

As part of this investigation it was important to find out in what ways IKAR was not addressing the needs of the community. It was difficult to get participants to engage in being critical of IKAR, especially after having heard so many positive comments. Eventually a topic arose that seems to strike a real response: the nature of the services. For the first time in the focus group the divisions between the big “C” Conservative Jews and the others was completely apparent. Anyone who grew up with a Conservative background felt completely comfortable davening at IKAR and the ones that did not, were not as comfortable. There was a good deal of disagreement about how to address this problem, but one thing was clear from the perspective of the invested Conservatives: they were also conservative with a little “c”, their attitude was that changing anything to make the service contain more of a learner’s component was not a good idea.

Some participants who are not expert daveners (even those that grew up Conservative) reported that while they enjoy coming to IKAR, IKAR’s services are problematic for them. As one participant who grew up Conservative and reads Hebrew said, “I do not feel like there’s enough guidance in the service. I sometimes get lost and so if people know less than me, I do not think it’s inviting for people who do not know what they are doing.” Another participant who only learned traditional davening in the past few years commented, “I do feel comfortable in services, but I

also understand why people would not. I've only been doing this big Shabbat thing for 6 years. I've come to learn so much. I can imagine if this was year one for me, I'd be like 'thanks, but I do not really know what's going on.'"

Some participants felt that the fact that the service was so familiar to some daveners and so unfamiliar to others was unfair:

"It's not that I have not tried it or that I'm not open minded to it, but I do not read Hebrew. I do not know the flow of the service even after having gone a few times and feeling more familiar in a big-picture sense. But not enough to actually connect with the material and connect with the praying. It's more of the cloudier spiritual aspect that keeps me there, but the praying, not so much..."

Q: What would fix that?

"I think something less defined by a movement, either a prayerbook or a collection of various different sources that are used on regular basis that would sort of become IKAR's own. And not something that for some people is exactly how they grew up and very, very familiar. Whereas if it's not your background, it's almost like there's too much catching up to do. I'll never catch up. So something that was maybe new to everybody."

But the reactions of those who were comfortable with the service as it is were equally strong:

"I think it's reasonable to say that there should be a little bit more direction, but I actually think that if there were significantly more English in the service or significantly more learning aspect, that I would be less likely to come. I think it's dangerous to make everything a learner's area."

This comment was particularly worth noting because up until this point, no one had mentioned injecting more English into the service. It was as if the very recommendation that the services be made more accessible to the inexperienced necessitated more English, and this was clearly unacceptable. However it was not only the experienced daveners who were opposed to including more training aspects

in the service.

“I very much am on my training wheels. But part of the reason that I come to IKAR is that I do not want any of that when I pray. I would love to have some sort of regular learning situation and I would love to learn how to pray better, but Kabbalat Shabbat especially, I do not want any of that other stuff. The sermon is plenty. I want to just do it (the davening).”

Some participants tried to come up with solutions for the people who were struggling such as: “I think for me it feels very different in terms of IKAR’s idea of a service to have more English or a learning component as part of the service. A learning component as part of Shabbat might be useful.”

Suggestions included having a separate learners minyan, a class on a weeknight, or every few months doing one Shabbat billed as a learner’s Shabbat. Although the intent of the people suggesting solutions was to help the strugglers get the education they needed to not feel put off by IKAR’s services, this provoked a defensive reaction in more than one participant.

“It’s all sounding from the way we’ve been talking about it, that there’s one way to do it. That there’s this one document and there’s “the way” you know, learning to do it “this way.” Some people are extremely comfortable and like it and would not have it any other way ... and that’s the one aspect that I do not like. Is that something that I can tolerate or just accept as part of the experience because there are so many other things that I like or am I going to let that be a huge struggle? It feels funny to be hearing that there is a sense that there is a way to do it, because that’s not the way I think about IKAR - more that IKAR is what everybody brings to it. But if you are not really making room for all those ways for people to interpret and be a part of it, then you cannot say that you are.”

Once the group had engaged in the conflict about the accessibility of services and what to do about it, they all became more comfortable expressing criticisms from the conceptual to the practical (e.g. “We need more real social justice action” and “I do not like the vegan food at Shabbat b’Yahad”). But no topic seemed to strike a chord

with the focus group as much as the discussion of the prayer experience and their frustration with other synagogue's prayer experiences.

Interestingly the one place that there was common ground regardless of background is in disappointment with the synagogue(s) where they grew up. The big "C" Conservative Jews had strong positive associations with Judaism because of their families, youth groups or camps, not because of their synagogue experience. The one thing that all the participants could agree upon is that they were dissatisfied with their synagogue experiences in the past.

5.4 In Depth Interviews

5.4.1 Ron Wolfson Interview

Ron Wolfson is the founding Director of the Whizin Center for the Jewish Future and the Vice President and Dean of the Fingerhut School at the University of Judaism. As a founder of Synagogue 2000, Dr. Wolfson is an expert in rejuvenating synagogue life and creating spiritual community. As a trusted advisor to Rabbi Brous, Dr. Wolfson has acted as one of IKAR's key mavens, connectors and salesmen all rolled into one. Dr. Wolfson is not a member of IKAR, but has been instrumental in IKAR's development due to his consultative relationship with Rabbi Brous, his expertise on synagogue life and his support for the venture.

Wolfson believes that IKAR is an example of a growing number of communities that reflect "a trend in America religious life, this era of spirituality, this deep need that people seem to be expressing for a place that helps them answer life's basic questions." His basic premise is that many synagogues do not understand the business they are in or try to address the real questions being asked by today's Jews, namely: "Is this a place I can go and find a community that gives me connection, that gives me a sense of purpose, that helps me figure out the meaning of my life, that helps me encounter God?"

According to Wolfson, most synagogues were not even asking those questions a decade ago because they were more concerned with how to recruit new members and how to keep them coming back. He says that the answer was usually programs. "Our [Synagogue 2000's] theory is that synagogues are not about programs, they are about relationships."

Wolfson contends that the reason why most synagogues have been so slow to catch on to the trends in American spiritual life is because they are happy with their current model. “They have a lot of business. But it’s a revolving door business.” That business is about providing a religious school for parents to send their kids to in order to have a bar or bat mitzvah, and it assumes that families will join when their oldest child is ready to begin b’nei mitzvah training that that they will leave when their youngest completes it. Wolfson says that this because synagogues are organized around schools or around families not “around these spiritual needs and wants and desires.”

Given the challenges facing existing congregations in terms of their ability to change their business model, Wolfson says that IKAR may have an advantage in starting from scratch. “But one of the challenges that IKAR faces, as any start-up does... it’s not ‘how do we get new members’ or ‘what do we do about creating a culture’, that’s pretty easy. What’s difficult is keeping the creativity and the vision and the energy of start-up as it begins to mature.”

And how does IKAR match up to the new paradigm that he and Synagogue 2000 are trying to promote? “I think it matches up beautifully. My experience of IKAR in the services I’ve been to... magnificent, uplifting. Just today I met with one of my graduate students here at the University of Judaism who said to me ‘I was spiritually lost in Los Angeles, I came here six months ago, I’ve been to every minyan in town and when I discovered IKAR I found my spiritual home’.” For Wolfson, any synagogue that focuses on providing a spiritual home for its congregants is more likely to build community than one focused on a school or on individual programs.

Wolfson thinks that other communities have something to learn from IKAR. For him, the most important elements are human experiences, being greeted at the door, being recognized when you come back, connecting with other people. He tells this story about his experience at an IKAR Shabbat morning service:

“I was honored with an *aliyah*. The card that I was given to explain the process of taking an *aliyah* to the torah was the best I’ve ever seen. It not only gave me the directions of what to do and the text of what I was supposed to do, but it was done in such a charming and off-handed way that it immediately put a smile my face. It said something like ‘I’ll bet you’re worrying about this now that we’ve given you this honor – thanks a lot! We don’t want you to feel like an idiot when you get up there, so here’s what you need to do...’ I’ve never seen that before in a synagogue... It’s more than stylistic, it’s a reflection of the value that the community places on making people feel at home.”

From Wolfson’s perspective it is not enough that IKAR is being innovative in the way it draws people in, he says that it is also critical to continually evaluate those choices. “Because what happens in start ups often is you experiment... and if it works you just want to keep doing it without reflecting: what are the principles that make it work? And then let’s make sure that we are paying attention to our principles, one of which is “let’s keep experimenting.”

“The opportunity in Los Angeles is that this town is filled with a lot of shul shoppers and shul hoppers. Less than 18% of the community belongs to a synagogue, so there is plenty of opportunity to reach the unchurched, the unsynagogued. People seek out a spiritual community and they’re willing to travel if they find one that fits them. This is also a challenge because the loyalty of some of these people is thin and they’re fickle. It does not take much for someone to get upset with their congregation.”

According to Wolfson, “Synagogues that send the message that we really want to be a resource center for your Jewish journey and that we accept you wherever you are and that our job is to encourage you to take that next step...” are the ones that succeed.

5.4.2 Board Member Interviews

5.4.2.1 Methodology

Board member interviews were conducted over a four week period at their homes. In cases where both spouses were on the board, the interview was conducted together if possible. Participants were assured of anonymity and encouraged to be open and critical of IKAR and their experience as board members. While not every single board member was interviewed, every attempt was made to include a representative sample from the core constituencies that made up the initial IKAR board. Only members of the original IKAR board were interviewed, because the newer members were not privy to the formative conversations about the organization and could not effectively respond to questions about expectations and realities and the development over time of the organization. The interview questions were timed to last forty-five minutes, with an additional fifteen minutes allotted for follow up discussion if desired (see Appendix E, In Depth Interview Guide). The interviews consisted of two main parts. The first section is a discussion of background and Jewish identity of the participants, in order to contextualize them within the categories of “Jewish Profiles” described in the Theoretical Constructs portion of this thesis. The second section was on their experience in building IKAR and as IKAR board members and community members. The primary goal of the interviews was to understand what led the board members to become involved in IKAR, what their

experience has been, and how that experience measured up to their individual expectations and needs.

5.4.2.2 Findings

5.4.2.2.1 Board Member Backgrounds

Members of the IKAR board come from a wide variety of Jewish backgrounds and experiences. But regardless of the denomination they grew up in, they had difficulty finding a synagogue in Los Angeles in which they felt comfortable. All of them were motivated to find a spiritual home, but it was a struggle. The motivations to find a place also were varied.

- “I think I was looking for a community. And I was looking for the type of community I grew up in, which was, the synagogue was the center of my parent’s social world... That’s where their friends were. You sat with them and prayed with them but there was also the social aspect.”
- “It became important for me to find a congregation. Life felt too scary. I felt like we were hanging out there alone in the world.”
- “I was not only looking for a service I could sit through and would not be incredibly boring, that it could be intellectual, that it could be joyous and exciting, but also that I could have people who seemed to be at the same stage of life with and be friends with.”

Another characteristic many IKAR board members share is that they did not like Hebrew School and have had problems with “institutional Judaism.”

- “My relationship with it is one of struggle. I also had the dreadful classic Hebrew school experience. Learn it but do not ever talk about it or know what it means.”
- “I was on my way to being bat mitzvahed and when I was twelve I dropped out. I did not tell my parents, I just stopped going, unbeknownst to them. I would ride my bicycle around the neighborhood. And finally the synagogue called and was like “where’s your daughter?” and they said “What do you mean? She’s with you.” So they sat me down and asked me why I was not going – do not you want to get bat mitzvahed?” I did not. I did not know why I was going, I did not know why I was doing it. Nothing spoke to me in any way. I would ask a question and the rabbi could not answer it... I just felt very disenfranchised from the whole process.”

The IKAR board has many married couples on it. One thing that is striking is how much of the community-finding process is a dynamic between the differing needs of each spouse. One seeks tradition, while the other seeks innovation. One is focused on spiritual growth, the other on finding community. Many board members described the shul shopping process as a challenge to find something that fit both of them (and would work for their kids). For these couples, the opportunity to participate in building a shul that would suit both their needs was very attractive.

“We were the wandering Jews. We went around town trying different synagogues. There would be one that I would like but [my spouse] would not, or [my spouse] would really like and I did not.”

Q: What is IKAR?

- “It’s a process that’s becoming.”
- “It’s something that seems pretty hip. It has a nice vibe and they’re playing drums and the rabbi is young and smart and egalitarian.”
- “I do not know what IKAR is yet, but I like that. It’s evolving. It’s sort of mish-mosh. It’s an ultra-conservative Rabbi who is drawn to people who are not. It’s an interesting dilemma.”
- “I guess it’s a community in development. There are the daveners, who I think it’s really geared towards. There are people like me who have very different approaches or needs from Judaism and I would imagine that not all the groups who are coming will remain there.”
- “I say, it’s really like a Conservative temple, but it’s like a lot better. I think of it as Conservative because of the davening, because of the services.”
- “I think it’s a work in progress. It’s open to input from a lot of different sources and it has the potential to grow into something really interesting if we’re not too dogmatic from the top down.”
- “I think that it’s a worthwhile endeavor. I do not know what its going to become, but I’d like to have some say in what it becomes.”
- “It’s much more a part of my life than I ever thought something Jewish would be.”

Q: What makes you want to come to IKAR events?

- “I know that there will be friendliness and warmth, there’s nothing that feels threatening about it.”
- “You know what I love more about this place more than any other place that I’ve been? It’s okay to stand up, it’s okay to move more, it’s okay to clap, you get to circle around or dance a little bit. And that is really great for me. I love that.”
- “A sense of community. Some sense of obligation too.”
- “I think there’s a warm, very real unpretentious vibe that appeals to me.”
- “I feel drawn to more traditional service. I do not take it literally, I do not need to feel like everything I’m saying is true. I like the melodies, it’s just a place for me to connect and meditate.”

Q: What does community mean to you?

- “Individual unity of mind: that we’re there for a singular purpose but that we can all express our own ideas.”
- “Community? As a congregant it means comfort. As a board member community is beginning to feel a little bit more like compromise.”
- “I’m looking for people in relatively close proximity who share values, my sensibility, and together might want to do some things.”
- “I think community needs to be able to reflect and incorporate the needs of a diverse group.”

Q: What is the most important thing about IKAR?

- “A sense of kindness.”
- “Just the fact that it’s there presenting something else than the norm.”
- “The most important thing is my kids having a spark that they have never had before.”
- “Prior to IKAR I was like an attendee.”
- “Being able to create the place we were envisioning.”

Q: Describe an IKAR experience that touched you.

- “Standing by the door watching us run out of books, and watching the little kids sitting on their parent’s laps, and people getting up to let people with kids sit down, and people talking to each other, and then *l’cha dodi* being explained and all of us at once turning and taking a deep breath. It was incredible, it was such a moment that everyone allowed themselves to be vulnerable. It was as if all these different people just were transformed.”

- “Suddenly I feel lifted, I feel different than my norm, I’m no longer in my day-to-day. It’s like wow, great, this is what I came here for, something else.”
- “When we all bowed down for *Aleinu* on Yom Kippur – for me it was the perfect IKAR moment in a couple ways. First of all it was totally explained so anyone who was just off the street would understand why people were bowing down and Rabbi Brous gave a couple different explanations and encouraged people to push beyond what they were comfortable doing. And so every person in that room, for one second were equals and understood and then could make their own choice - not from a position of awkwardness or learnedness or anything. There was no judgment at all. And you could make your own choice and most people ended up doing it. It brought people to a place that they’d never been, that I’ve never been, at any kind of synagogue experience, nor could I even imagine myself getting there.”

Q: How does IKAR fit into your life?

- “To me its really been a thread that’s brought us back to Judaism that we did not find with any other synagogue.”
- “It’s hard to fit IKAR into my life. It’s hard to go and to go alone. Once I get there, once I battle the traffic, it feels really great.”

When asked about IKAR’s mission, board members that were interviewed tended to view it through their own prism. In other words, what they hoped to find in IKAR is how they described what IKAR does.

Q: What is IKAR’s mission?

- “IKAR wants to be a vital Jewish community on a spiritual level on a local and global impactful, level. I think IKAR, Rabbi Brous’s presence, the mission that’s coming through her is to affect change like a ripple out locally, nationally, globally.”
- “To provide an alternative home for the disenfranchised Jew. This represents an alternative. Here we are, we’re a caring community, not only for each other, but we’re going to reach out into the world and affect change.”
- “To form a stable, self-perpetuating Jewish community that merges the most profound accessible attributes of Judaism to pull in people like me, who are out.”
- “To bring the BJ model, somewhat modern but born-again Judaism to LA.”

Q: How effective is the IKAR board?

- “I’m not sure that the board is functioning as well as it could. I do not even know what all the committees are and what they’re doing. Sometimes I find out about things and I’m like ‘wow, who knew?’ and I’m sure other people are that way about what I’m doing.”
- “I miss having a sense of what the whole feels like.”
- “I think the organization is extraordinarily effective. I think that the board is ineffective.”
- “I feel like we agree to disagree.”
- “I have no idea how effective the IKAR board is.”
- “I think there is a core of people who are very committed and get things done.
- “There’s a camaraderie, roll up your sleeves and just do it, sacrifice. Hard work.”
- “I think the IKAR board is full of wizards. I’m just absolutely stunned and amazed at what has happened and how quickly things have happened and the phenomenal array of talent.”

Q: Why is the IKAR board effective?

- “Maybe because of the diversity. Maybe because of the fact that there are so many interesting facets and people and we’re all bringing something and experiencing something and trying to form something, we’re not quite sure what it is, but there’s like ‘let’s do it’ and there’s an energy.”
- “I think it’s a very varied group of people with very different skill sets that have come together for a single purpose that a lot of that single purpose they agree on. There are different things that will need to be fine tuned, and disagreements between people and between the Rabbi and stuff like that. But I think its an unusual situation that a group of people could come together and with amazing rapidity got on it’s feet a functioning spiritual community that keeps growing. It’s been one of the most amazing experiences of my life.”
- The board is the reason why IKAR got up and running so incredibly fast. People brought totally different skills sets to it and we found in like two meetings we had everything we needed to get going.”

Frustration with the board process is not only about the top-down organization or differences about religious practice. Some board members were genuinely frustrated with what the board is doing.

“I do not think we’re really doing anything. I do not think we’ve taken votes. I do not think we are making policy. I do not think there have been any controversial issues that have been decided or debated. It’s a very ‘report-out’ organization. Under that rubric it’s not effective.”

Some board members also felt that the board was not as effective as it might be because of the way it was formed, without a statement of requirements or predetermined criteria.

“What has happened is that we brought everyone on the board as sort of a thank you, a statement of leadership rather than a thought out process.”

Q: What is the role of the committees?

- “They are supposed to facilitate their namesake whatever they are. If it’s the education committee we figure out what the needs are and make it happen in a branded way, in a way that says “IKAR”.
- “Committee members tend to think that the committees they are on work well. But no one knows about the other committees.”
- “There is a sense that many areas are not being tended –current members, social justice, the unaffiliated...”
- “I think that people feel more ownership when they’re involved. I do not think they want committee meetings, but they want important roles.”

Q: Who should IKAR board members represent?

- “I’m not sure if there should be people representing constituencies, like a young married, an unaffiliated, etc. I feel like there are representations of a constituent and not being yourself. I do want people from different areas of life. Its more about skill sets.”
- “The people who write the checks. Those are the people who keep it going.”
- “I think you want them to get a certain thing done, but in a way that is taking into account and keeping in touch with the needs of the members. If they’re going to be acting on their behalf they need to be accountable.”

There is a desire on the part of many board members to move beyond the day-to-day management of IKAR and think more broadly about the vision and IKAR’s future.

- “I think what we need to do is get to place where we are all talking about the vision and dreaming about what IKAR could be instead of arguing about the price of water or the size of the pension.”
- “We’re moving so fast in terms of getting stuff done and the same people have been doing everything from the beginning. So its so hard to move us from a scurrying place where we are all hands in volunteers to a vision-place that I think we need to be.”
- “I wish there was more time to grapple with things. I wish we could just really have time to explore and to answer and to figure out. It just feels like we are just rush rush rush.”
- “I really feel like we need to be making strategic policy, which is challenging because there is not a big infrastructure. If we were more mindful and planful than this would either get done or we would realize that we do not have enough people and that we are not executing the appropriate vision.”

One characteristic of all the IKAR board members that were interviewed was a sense of pride in ownership. They felt as if building IKAR was an accomplishment worth celebrating, and that their contributions to IKAR’s success gave them a sense of satisfaction.

- “I feel very much like my Jewish community has expanded greatly. I feel oddly connected to the congregations that my friends go to. Because I started a temple I feel so much more supportive of other temples. I always make sure that I give money when I’m places because I realize how much work and time and money and effort. I’m so much more sensitized to what other people are doing and what it takes.”
- “Because I’m a founding board member, I feel an incredible sense of ownership. So when I’m there I feel so comfortable, that I feel so involved, and that I feel so okay about it.”
- “I am so proud to be a founder of this and so proud to be on the board. I love it. I rarely miss a meeting. I love having given birth to this.”

Chapter 6 ANALYSIS

6.1 Overview

One of the most important things to realize about IKAR is that it is at once three things: a synagogue, a community and a philosophy. The synagogue is a California nonprofit corporation with over one hundred member units, a full time staff of two and several additional part-time employees. The IKAR community consists of a much wider circle and includes hundreds more individuals. IKAR has a high proportion of event attendees, and even regular Shabbes daveners who are not official synagogue members. The “extended” IKAR community consists of families and individuals who either belong to another shul, or belong to no shul. Conversely, there are dues-paying members who are not regular daveners. The IKAR email distribution list has nearly 1000 addresses, only approximately 15% of which are official synagogue members.

6.2 Philosophy

IKAR was founded with a vision statement, but never specifically spelled out its game plan or described the “rules of the road.” Not surprisingly, had we chosen to do so, they might look quite similar to Willow Creek’s statement of purpose:

Exaltation: Willow Creek Community Church exists to provide believers with the opportunity to worship and glorify God together.

Edification: Willow Creek Community Church exists to help believers build a foundation of Biblical understanding, establish a devotional life, discover their spiritual gifts, and encourage believers to become participating members in the church.

Evangelism: Willow Creek Community Church exists to reach out to people who are facing an eternity separated from God. Believers are encouraged to seek out the unchurched and look for opportunities to share God’s love with them.

Social Action: Willow Creek Community Church exists to act as a conscience to the world by demonstrating the love and righteousness in both word and deed.³⁶

Reformulated for IKAR, this might read like:

Tefillah: IKAR exists to provide Jews with the opportunity to engage in meaningful communal prayer experiences that comfort, inspire and uplift the soul.

Spirituality and Education: IKAR exists to help Jews build a foundation of Torah understanding, further their Jewish education, establish a devotional life and discover their spiritual gifts.

Community: IKAR exists to reach out to people who have been disconnected from or discontented with synagogue life and encourage them to participate in building the IKAR community.

Social Action: IKAR exists to act as a conscience to the world by embodying the commandment of Tikkun Olam in both word and deed.

6.3 Underlying Factors for Success

Any study of a successful start-up basically comes down to one question: What factor or combination of factors allowed the IKAR phenomenon to occur? Any successful venture relied upon committed and talented people to get off the ground, but what is unique about IKAR that can help to explain its particular success?

The answer is a combination of factors about the community and its founders. These factors form an ideological framework upon which the substance of IKAR was built. They are:

- | COMMUNITY | ORGANIZATION |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compelling Worship Experiences • Highest Common Denominator Judaism • Community First Philosophy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preformed Teams • Creative Ambiguity • Entrepreneurial Governance |

6.3.1 Community

6.3.1.1 Compelling Worship Experiences

At the heart of IKAR's success is the IKAR Kabbalat Shabbat experience. It was clear from the first Shabbat at the Speiser studio that there was something about the

combination of Rabbi Brous's presence and teaching, Andy Shugerman's prayer leading and the use of drumming that was a winning combination. Kabbalat Shabbat services remain central to IKAR's "brand" and community.

6.3.1.1.1 Rabbi Sharon Brous

From the outset Rabbi Brous's teaching, passion and personal warmth have had a palpable effect on individuals who came to IKAR services. Rabbi Brous challenged the community to have a prayer experience that is joyous, profound and inspirational. The first service that she put together with Andy Shugerman and the ad hoc drum choir was exactly that. The combination of traditional worship and a progressive attitude created a special environment that clearly resonates with those who attend IKAR services.

6.3.1.1.2 Andy Shugerman

Andy Shugerman's davening and prayer-leading has been a central aspect of the IKAR formula. From the first Shabbat (where the crowd was boosted by people who were connected to Andy through the University of Judaism), Andy's prayer leading has set the tone for enthusiastic and jubilant worship that has become a hallmark of IKAR services. As one focus group participant said about Andy:

"He's so soulful. He really helps me go into the spiritual place. It's his essence. I do not think it's something you could bottle. His soulfulness is so transparent to me. And he just helps takes me there, seems like it's an easier fit for him. I'm just way more cerebral and he's a good fit for me."³⁷

6.3.1.1.3 The Drums

It is also clear that the drums are a critical part of what makes the IKAR prayer experience so compelling. The drumming reinforces the tribal feel of IKAR's services. It epitomizes IKAR's dedication to melding tradition with innovation. While no other

musical instruments are used during Shabbat services, IKAR has embraced the chance to bring rhythm to the forefront of the davening experience. Several focus group participants pointed out how surprised and enchanted they were by the drumming at IKAR's services.

Drum leader and IKAR Board member Ross Levinson explained his thinking about it this way in an email to the IKAR "drum choir":

Subject: Drumming with Heart

In my opinion, the key to the experience being fulfilling to all of us (the drum choir as well as the congregation) is to be open and aware of our "heart" at all times. I mean both your own individual heart as well as the congregations "heart." The heart beat that we reflect in our drumming is the key. We all need to be aware of it and listen closely to it. The sound and the vibration of your body and your soul should feel part of the bigger picture. This moment, these moments are not about us. They are about all of "us": the congregation, the air, the muses, the spirits,...G-d. What ever way you think and connect with the divine. This is primary. All else needs to disappear. The space is key. Leave room for something else to enter. Leave room for the spiritual breath to fill you and then follow where it leads.

...Music is not the note played on the piano or the hit on the drum head, it is the time before and after that note. It is in the space that separates sound from sound, noise from noise where the divine resides.³⁸

6.3.1.2 Highest Common Denominator Judaism

Creating a common ground for Jews of diverse backgrounds and levels of observance is a challenge. It is now clear that at first many board members did not understand Rabbi Brous's commitment to Halakhah or how that would impact the nature of IKAR. The XO's came from a synagogue where observance of Halakhah was never a core issue. For example, at OHT, communal events are kosher-style (meaning there is no mixing of meat and milk, but food is not necessarily prepared under kosher conditions or with kosher meat), congregants are permitted to write in order to take

notes during services on Shabbat, and tickets to lunch are sold out of a cash box following services. Individuals who are religiously observant can follow their own practice, but those who do not feel bound by Halakhah have any and all options open to them in terms of how they personally will behave. In a way, this is a typically “liberal” attitude in that it provides the maximum freedom for individuals to choose for themselves. However the downside of this freedom is that anyone who is truly uncomfortable seeing others write in services, or use money on Shabbat, is likely to feel uncomfortable in that environment.

IKAR strives to do the opposite by creating what could be termed **Highest Common Denominator Judaism**, flowing from a recognition that if one wants to build a community that is welcoming both to religiously observant Jews and Jews who are less observant, one needs to cater to the needs of the more strictly observant. Having a Halakhically-committed Rabbi makes this a necessity, but moreover, creating an environment that both values tradition and the support of traditional Jews demands it.

This philosophy can seem counter intuitive to individuals whose definition of inclusiveness is tolerance. For western liberal tradition, tolerance and pluralism go hand in hand. But to create a truly pluralistic Jewish community, tolerance is not an effective strategy. For Jews of all stripes to feel comfortable in community with one another requires buying into the concept that Halakhic norms are a requirement for community-sponsored activities. What individuals do outside of the community experience, is, of course, entirely up to them. Indeed, when it comes to the behaviors of IKAR community members, there is quite a diversity of practice from strictly

kosher to not at all. But for all official IKAR events, even those that take place at people's homes, such as house parties, or Limudim, IKAR requires that all food served be either kosher or vegetarian/dairy.

Regardless of the attempt to create a highest common denominator experience for community activities, there is absolutely nothing coercive about IKAR's culture when it comes to personal observance. Most board members are not Halakhically observant Jews. The acceptance of a variety of lifestyles flows directly from Rabbi Brous who is personally observant, but who obviously also feels both comfortable and desirous of being in community with other Jews who are not. Although she leads by example, there has never been any sense that she or the board expects or requires any particular level of observance of Jewish law from community members. This is a unique feature of IKAR: that it strives to create a deeply Jewish environment, yet welcomes anyone, wherever they are in terms of their personal beliefs or practices.

6.3.1.3 Community-First Philosophy

What does it mean to have a **Community-First Philosophy**? To begin with it means all decisions about programs and communication must be made with intent of building relationships, not doing business. Doing business is getting people to fill out forms and send in checks. Building relationships means creating a social context where people are welcomed, included and enriched. IKAR's de-emphasis on official synagogue membership flowed from this philosophy. The goal was to get people involved in IKAR by meeting their needs, trusting that as IKAR grew, the community would help to meet the organization's needs. It meant affordable dues for anyone who wished to become an official member, and many opportunities to participate without

having done so. Willow Creek's strategy asserts that "bringing the unchurched into the church could only happen when believers built a *relationship of integrity* with them."³⁹ This relationship of integrity requires that there be no ulterior motive for reaching out to new people beyond hoping to involve them in the community.

Willow Creek also focuses on something that IKAR has worked hard at: creating a good first impression. Knowing that people are seeking authenticity means making sure that their first experience reinforces that they have found it. For Willow Creek that meant asking the seekers not to participate in the offering when the plate was passed for donations at services. "This was designed to put the seekers at ease and to reinforce the fact that they were welcome at Willow Creek for themselves and not for their financial contributions."⁴⁰ For IKAR, this means a very low-key approach to fundraising within the community. This was evidenced at the 5765 High Holy Day services, when rather than the typical "appeal" from the *bima* for donations, IKAR board members "testified" about their IKAR experiences and invited the daveners to join the community. Even some children of board members got up and spoke about why IKAR was a special community. This approach was specifically designed to contrast with the typical High Holy Days appeal aimed getting donations from the "three-times-a-year" Jews. Instead, what was presented were personal accounts meant to dramatize the value of belonging to the IKAR community, not the value of just contributing money.

6.3.2 Organization

6.3.2.1 Preformed Teams

The fact that there were "preformed" teams making up the IKAR board really allowed the organization to hit the ground running. Team experiences with Ohr

HaTorah, Progressive Jewish Alliance, or with Rabbi Brous made the new board instantly coalesce. Existing trust, work and volunteer relationships between certain board members allowed the other board members to feel secure. When it came time to pull together and attack the logistical issues facing IKAR there were preformed teams, and ultimately one team, in place.

In particular, the XOs had already worked together effectively as members of a synagogue community. As parents of children at the Ohr HaTorah religious school they had worked on projects together before and were good friends. The people connected through the Progressive Jewish Alliance had a similar existing, successful and friendly working relationship. Rabbi Brous was connected to and had worked with numerous groups and people both from the L.A. Jewish community and beyond.

While the previous connectedness of some IKAR members was clearly advantageous in creating an effective team, it also sometimes exacerbated the differences between the various groups. Even though effective relationships have been formed across the pre-IKAR constituencies, there are still differences between the groups. These differences seem to be more a result of respectful disagreements than of any personal issues. In fact the board has done a remarkable job of building individual relationships with one another. The differences, whether geographical, religious or ideological still play a part in board politics. However, despite the inevitable conflicts between board members, there has never been a major disagreement about matters of substance to the future of the community and all the original board members but two are still involved with IKAR.

6.3.2.2 Creative Ambiguity

Sometimes clarity can be an impediment. Conventional wisdom about nonprofits needing to achieve unanimity about their mission, vision and execution strategy in order to succeed does not apply to IKAR. In fact, had the founders of IKAR pressed harder to nail down these details there is a chance IKAR never would have come together. That is because there was not (and still is not) any unanimity about what IKAR is. Most of the terms used to envision IKAR at the outset defined it in negative terms: “un-synagogue,” “nacho mama’s synagogue,” “a synagogue for people who do not usually belong to synagogues,” etc. As one board member said about getting clarity prior to starting out: “Maybe it was just not as important as to just get the thing off the ground. You do not lay out an exact road map.” Most board members who were interviewed agreed that not everyone was on the same page when IKAR started. As one put it “We very much wanted to form a synagogue in our own image. And so did Rabbi Brous, but one thing that we did not realize is that maybe our images were different.”

In other words, by not fully articulating the details of what IKAR was to become, board members could work together, all the while preserving their individual vision of what they wanted IKAR to be. Whether due to a subconscious choice or because the individuals involved knew that there was a wide diversity of (potentially conflicting) visions, *Creative Ambiguity* was instrumental in getting everyone involved to forge a common cause.

The one aspect that was absolutely clear to everyone was that IKAR was striving to build a community, not an institution. This community would need to value

individuals, create warmth and fellowship and be welcoming to anyone who wanted to participate. The group also absolutely bought into Rabbi Brous's central point that personal spiritual growth and pursuing social justice in the greater world were intimately linked. But in those early conversations, certain topics were conspicuously unresolved. For example, it was obvious from the outset that there was a geographical problem with most of the board living on the west side of Los Angeles (Santa Monica, Pacific Palisades, Brentwood, etc.), but Rabbi Brous and a few others living much farther east. It was clear that both groups preferred to have IKAR located close to their homes, but it was decided that until a permanent location could be found, IKAR would work with what was possible, as constrained by practicalities such as what was available, or Rabbi Brous's need to be able to walk to and from services. Another area of ambiguity relates to the "religious conception" of the new entity. The board accepted that IKAR would likely have to affiliate with the Conservative movement in order to protect Rabbi Brous's future employment opportunities, but few board members considered themselves Conservative Jews or were anxious to affiliate with any movement. The Conservative movement allows Rabbis to determine practice in their own synagogues, but there are several areas that have hard fast rules, such as those regarding intermarriage, who is a Jew, gay marriage, etc. There was little discussion of how IKAR would approach these topics despite the fact that the families that founded IKAR included Jews by choice and an intermarried couple.

Creative Ambiguity has both been a boon to IKAR and a bane to some board members. In retrospect, some board members have expressed that they wish that more time had been spent creating a shared vision of what IKAR was to become before having committed themselves. As one board member put it: "I wish we had

really sat down and said ‘this is what we mean by the un-synagogue’ I wish someone had explained it so I knew what it would be like.”

Even the board members who have expressed frustration with the reality not matching their expectations have felt a real sense of pride at what has been accomplished. The frustration is more about the process not being as inclusive or democratic as it might have been. And while it is clear that some perspectives have been more served than others in the execution of IKAR, it is also clear that if more time was spent debating the nature of IKAR there would have been less time spent on building the actuality of it.

In an entrepreneurial for-profit environment no one would bother to debate the fairness of the executive team’s leadership or bemoan the lack of democracy in decision-making. But nonprofit normative behavior encourages individuals to believe that good governance is either democratic or consensus-based. In an entrepreneurial environment, spending time talking when you could be executing is irresponsible. But because IKAR is a Jewish, community-based, progressive-minded not-for-profit enterprise some board members clearly feel that there is something incongruous about not having everyone’s opinion count equally.

6.3.2.3 Entrepreneurial Governance

One reason that the constituencies have been able to work together is because of the Executive Committee, which includes individuals who represent the differing perspectives of the founders. One point worth noting is that while numerically, XOs still make up the plurality of the board, they are the minority on the Executive Committee. The founding board had eighteen members (plus Rabbi Brous, ex officio)

with the Executive Committee of five (including Rabbi Brous). Both the board and the Executive Committee has grown since IKAR's founding, and two board members have stepped down from the board.

IKAR is run by **Entrepreneurial Governance**; a method that includes strong leadership, centralized decision-making and an execution-focused strategy. The Executive Committee serves as the governing body for IKAR. Although input comes from each board member, practical decision-making flows from the Executive Committee (with the leadership of Rabbi Brous) to the board for final sanction. One board member described the full IKAR board as being "a very report-out organization." Meetings of the full board, which take place roughly once a month, are used mostly to inform board members of decisions that the Executive Committee has made, to have those decisions affirmed and to discuss strategy or talk about long-term goals. Few motions are made, few votes are taken and most are unanimous.

Most literature on effective board recruitment focuses on ethical stewardship, acquiring specific skill sets, cultivating effective fundraisers and mandating certain levels of participation. The initial IKAR board was not built; it grew organically out of the families who came together to found IKAR. As time has gone by the board has expanded more strategically, looking to bring in certain skills, resources and constituencies, but the original board was born de facto of the group sitting around the table at the Balaban/Wergeles house. That group included a number of married couples, which is unusual and could be considered problematic in terms of the fairness of voting and the possibility for conflicting loyalties. Many board members had little or no nonprofit experience either from the professional or lay leader side.

However the Executive Committee members all have board experience from either the lay or professional side (or both).

What many of the other board members did have in common is an entrepreneurial background. Over half the original IKAR board has experience working entrepreneurially, whether in the technology industry, producing film and television or owning their own businesses. Their background as people “who make things happen” was a critical component of IKAR’s organizational success. As one board member remarked about the individuals on IKAR’s board: “Each one had brought a wealth of knowledge from other experiences – seeing what they liked and did not like about other places and none of the other places were quite right. People have come into this bringing the good things from all their other experiences. So people were primed for something like this.”

Chapter 7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Challenges

Much of this thesis has detailed IKAR's process of building a community and organization in a very short time and with very few resources. I have postulated some reasons for IKAR's rapid growth ranging from the market need, to Rabbi Brous's extraordinary vision, to the characteristics of the board. It is enough to state that IKAR is a success beyond the expectations of its founders. But IKAR still has a great deal to accomplish to fulfill the dreams of its founders, which, naturally, greatly exceeded their expectations. Some of these future accomplishments will simply take more time and resources to come to fruition. Other dreams may need to be re-adjusted to meet the realities that IKAR is now facing.

Even though IKAR began with a mandate to reach out to unaffiliated Jews, accomplishing this outreach is challenging. If one is committed to creating a Halakhic environment and using traditional liturgy, how exactly does one make the less observant and less Jewishly educated Jews feel like they can participate? Despite the intentions of the board from day one, IKAR has always been a more accessible community (at least in terms of ritual) for those who know how to daven, who already see the value in synagogue life and who are committed to being involved in it. In the terminology of this thesis, many IKAR board members originally hoped that the unaffiliated Jews would be IKAR's primary market, but have discovered that IKAR is more likely to attract Loyalists, the Discontented and some Disaffected but has had only limited success in reaching the Disconnected.

Although IKAR may not have turned out the way many board members originally

conceived of it, the founders of IKAR should realize that they have succeeded in their basic mandate to create an “un-synagogue”. Many of them may differ on what the “un” is exactly, but it is clear to all of them that there is something about IKAR that sets it apart from other synagogues they have known. The “un” is not in the form of the service, but in the feel. The “un” is not about IKAR’s purpose, but about its nature. As one focus group participant said:

“One of the things I always say to people was that it started this summer in the park. And that for a lot of people, you think of park and you do not think of walls, you do not think of fences, you do not think of barriers to access. Community for IKAR is very much an idea and not a place.”

7.1.1 Membership

One troubling fact from the perspective of long-term solvency is that IKAR has far more supporters than official synagogue members. There may be a number of explanations for this. Certainly one is that there has been a purposeful focus on building the community rather than simply racking up memberships. In order to cater to the generational resistance to joining evidenced by many of the younger community members (as expressed during the focus group), IKAR has used a soft-sell approach to member recruitment. While this has undoubtedly limited the number of dues paying members of IKAR, it has served the overall philosophy of the organization of putting community and relationships ahead of synagogue standard operating procedure.

As IKAR grows and budgetary requirements expand, a greater focus on having community members become official synagogue members will most likely be required. This process will need to be approached delicately to assure that the underlying communitarian philosophy is not undermined by the process.

IKAR has established itself as both a community and as an attractive “product” in the Jewish communal marketplace. Having created that product and demonstrated its appeal, it is now time to grow its market-share. IKAR has a competitive product. But for IKAR to keep providing that product means that it must be supported by its consumers. Not only is this a financial necessity, but it is clear that stakeholdership is an important value for many IKARites. Turning the community members into “owners” is an important next step in IKAR’s evolution.

7.1.2 Role of the Rabbi

By far the biggest difference between the expectations of some of the board members and Rabbi Brous was on the role of the Rabbi in determining policy, and most especially religious practices, for the community. Some board members seem to have started out with the sense that everything about IKAR was to be determined through a collaborative effort. Some had the expectation that in creating an “un-synagogue” all options were on the table for discussion. But as soon as IKAR had held its first Shabbat and began the process of formalization, many board members realized this was not the case. Several board members reported that they cried at that first service, but for different reasons. One said “I had a wonderful experience. I was moved, I cried. It felt comforting, familiar, like I really wanted to get to know more of the people there.” Another board member said: “I cried because I was like, I cannot believe this is what I’ve been putting my energy into.”

Three factors contributed to this disconnect in perceptions. The first is that some of the XOs, having just left a synagogue community that was entirely clergy led, say that they had been looking for an experience that was more reflective of who they

were and one that was more responsive to their input. By getting in on the ground floor they believed that they would be able to influence all aspects of the new community's development, from governance, to spiritual practices to policy. Secondly, none of the XOs was deeply invested in the Conservative movement's philosophy or ideas about the role of the rabbi. Conservative rabbis are expected to toe the movement's line when it comes to the major debates of the day, but they have both latitude and discretion in determining how their shuls are run. The XOs never bought into that model, either of movement philosophy (which it is fair to say many of them believed was hidebound, intolerant of diversity and inhospitable to alternative religious practices) or to the personal power of the senior rabbi. Lastly, some board members apparently did not understand the implications of Rabbi Brous's dedication to Halakhah and to traditional prayer. Moreover, they did not realize what a profound impact that dedication would have on the nature of the institution they were attempting to create. Most ascribed to a typically liberal philosophy of tolerance. They were prepared to tolerate having a rabbi who was more deeply observant than themselves, but they did not realize that the community they were building could not tolerate a non-Halakhic environment, at least when it came to community-sponsored events.

This disconnect continues to confound the IKAR leadership. Some of the board members interviewed expressed frustration that there was not more flexibility about the nature of IKAR services, the liturgy, or the religious practices of the community. Some also said they wished that there were a religious practice committee. Many spoke about finding alternatives to the traditional service.

“I would like to find a way to daven, to pray, to open up the envelope little more. It’s very strict in a certain sense. I enjoyed when Amichai came.⁴¹ And I would like to have more of the opportunities for that type of experience, so I do not have to go to it through the siddur – maybe there’s some other way to collectively pray and to experience Judaism and religion and community. Just try something else.”

Others felt that determining how services are run is the job of the rabbi alone.

They say that opening up that process for discussion would have a negative impact on the result.

“If we start to take a poll of what services should be, it would be the lowest common denominator of what people want. And you would end up with Shabbat on Wednesday because it’s more convenient for people.”

Some describe their attempts to push IKAR services to evolve and become more accessible to them as struggle. As one board member said: “I think it has been a wrangle between different forces, but a good one, a healthy one.” Another offered, “It’s a path that people are pretty far apart still, between the founders, most of them, and the Rabbi and they are trying to forge a path to each other. I think there is lot of trust and a lot of good will, but I think there is a lot of interest in forging that path.” In a way, this wrangle between tradition and modernity embodies the challenge facing IKAR, which is to make traditional Judaism both attractive and relevant to a new audience.

7.2 Recommendations

7.2.1 Governance

7.2.1.1 Adopting a “Foundational Document”

The Creative Ambiguity that allowed IKAR to come about may no longer be an asset, and may actually be a hindrance to further development of the community and the board. At one year of age, IKAR now has the stability and momentum to think

more clearly about the values and assumptions that should frame decision-making for the future. Those values and assumptions should be committed to writing – not because IKAR requires a constitution, or should become married to one way of thinking about things, but because the process of creating such a document would be a healthy and useful one. Every organization changes and evolves in unexpected ways. IKAR as a community and as an organization needs to find the courage to take the next step of formalization which would require creating some kind of manifesto, such as Beyt Tikkun's *Beyt Tikkun: The House of Love and Healing: A Jewish Renewal Synagogue: Founding Perspective*. The results of this process may cause some individuals pull away from IKAR, but it will also draw others near. For the startup board to become a true instrument of governance in the long term, there will need to be turnover and new blood. Part of what will determine who should be on the future board of IKAR is finding a more clearly defined vision and articulating it in writing.

7.2.1.2 Strategic Planning Process

Engaging in a strategic planning process would be the follow up to creating the document proposed above. If the Foundational Document articulates the vision and the values, the strategic planning process would lay out a road map for how to put them into practice one, five, ten years hence. IKAR's founders have never been afraid to dream big. A strategic planning process would give them the opportunity to dream long term, and to discover where the journey they began together a year ago is likely to take them.

7.2.1.3 Board Development

The nature of IKAR's board is one of the most important factors for how the

community and organization will evolve as it moves from start-up to established synagogue. Will IKAR continue with Entrepreneurial Governance, or will being a more mature organization lead to a different form (perhaps a more egalitarian form) of decision-making? As the requirements for board membership become more defined and rigorous, will board members also demand more input into governance? What should those requirements be? Must board membership require substantive monetary support, or will sweat equity be recognized as an equally important contribution to IKAR's future? Up until now, there has been little focus on, or requirement for, board members to be actively involved in fundraising activities. Does this need to change, or is there the possibility for different board members to contribute to IKAR's success in different ways, yet still all feel as if their contributions are equally valued? Is there an effective way to address the diversity of opinions and concerns (specifically about religious practice) evidenced by the current board, or should the board seek to make conformity to a specific ideology a requirement for membership?

Most importantly, what should be the nature of the IKAR board? Should it aspire to enact the kinds of governance recommended by established synagogues and nonprofit experts? If IKAR is really an unsynagogue, should it not also question the basic assumptions about what makes up an effective and desirable board? Nothing about IKAR's founding or growth followed an established blueprint or "industry standard," yet IKAR has thrived. Should IKAR continue with a maverick style of governance, or seek to become more conventional? How would having a more conventional governance structure affect the nature of the community, or the desirability of being on the board? Many board members helped to found IKAR in order to build something that was unlike the synagogues they knew before – will

making IKAR more “institutional” turn them off to participation? What should be the role of the founders, either as board members or as former board members, when IKAR evolves to the next stage of life? Who should get to chart the course for this evolution and what are the values and goals that should guide them?

7.2.2 Community

7.2.2.1 Feedback Mechanisms

The IKAR focus group was not only an effective milieu to explore the different perspectives in the IKAR community, it also turned out to be therapeutic to the participants. Many of the focus group participants were vocal in their appreciation for being included in the group and felt like they had been given a wonderful opportunity to both express themselves and to learn more about their fellow IKARites. IKAR has no formal mechanism for soliciting feedback from the community, and conducting more focus groups would be an efficacious way both to learn more about how community members feel and to help them understand each other. Other possibilities are a survey, an online feedback mechanism and a town-hall style meeting of official synagogue members.

7.2.2.2 Developing New Community Leaders

IKAR needs to do a much better job of cultivating the motivated and talented members of the community to become more deeply involved. As one board member put it: “I think it would be better if there was more participation from the membership. I think people outside of the board see that things are functioning in a moderately functional way and so they let other people do the work. I think if it could be expanded so that there was more community participation that probably would not be a bad idea.” Members of the IKAR community are ready to step forward to take

leadership roles and register their viewpoints about IKAR. There is a clear attraction for some IKARites that they are in at the beginning of something, and have a chance to help influence and build it.

As one board member said:

“I think there should be a process by which you are involved in IKAR, there should be people who identify potential board members and a grooming process where they are asked to be on different committees, do different fundraising activities, trying to see where they fit the best. They’re almost like in this wading pool and when we see that a skill set is either leaving the board or we need an infusion in some way then people who have proven themselves in different places get on the board.”

7.2.3 Religious Practice

7.2.3.1 Creating a Seeker’s Service

One of Willow Creek’s most important insights and guiding principles is that “The needs of the seeker differ from those of the believer”⁴² and that creating a single service that met the needs of both groups is impossible. The Willow Creek approach to seekers is a seven step strategy with both market-focused and community-focused elements. Step 3 is providing a special service for seekers built on six principles:

1. All people (not just believers) matter to God: therefore they matter to us.
2. Nonbelieving unchurched people need to be reached.
3. Meeting the needs of believers and seekers cannot be done in the same service since the needs of the believer and the needs of the seeker differ greatly.
4. Respect for the spiritual journey of the seeker must be communicated, allowed for, and legitimized.
5. Seekers do not want to be embarrassed, singled out, pressured or identified.
6. Excellence reflects the glory of God and has a positive effect on people.⁴³

The goal of any Seeker’s Service must be to meet the seekers where they are, but to

illuminate a path that allows them to grow into believers. In IKAR's case, a Seeker's Service should not be an alternative to the main prayer experience, but a bridge to it.

An IKAR Seeker Service would still need to retain the elements that make all IKAR services compelling: intensity, joyful worship, intellectual engagement, and community. The key to such a service is that it must be accessible to anyone regardless of their level of Jewish education, understanding of Hebrew or previous synagogue experience. Such a service would need more explanations of the liturgy, more guidance for the prayers, and most likely more discussion or readings in English. Most importantly, in order to make the service accessible to individuals who are unfamiliar with the liturgy or do not read Hebrew, the Seeker's Service needs to have an IKAR Siddur.

7.2.3.2 An IKAR Siddur

One of the documents that has helped to define what IKAR represents is the beautiful *mahzor* that Rabbi Brous created for High Holy Days 5765. This book is a compelling combination of traditional liturgy, incisive commentary, helpful guidance and engaging narrative. It strives to make the High Holy Day liturgy and service comprehensible, while contextualizing it in a progressive (often humorous) tone. That combination of being true to tradition, while making liturgy seem compelling and relevant is exactly what the IKAR Siddur must accomplish.

On a practical level, the IKAR Siddur needs to combine traditional liturgy with authentic yet approachable translation and useful transliteration of the prayers. One of the most frustrating aspects of traditional prayer for the focus group members who did not grow up in a Conservative shul is being able to at once: a) know the music, b)

follow the flow of the service, b) understand the liturgy, c) chant the Hebrew and d) attain a mental state conducive to worship during the service. An IKAR Siddur should be designed to address these problems and would provide a unique gateway to the IKAR davening experience for those without the Jewish background to jump right in.

Moreover, creating the IKAR Siddur would create a collaborative process between Rabbi Brous and the board members who are frustrated by traditional liturgy. It would create a team-based atmosphere where Rabbi Brous could present her thinking on why traditional liturgy is important and relevant, and allow the interested board members to learn about the service from the inside out. There is no doubt that Rabbi Brous must drive this process and that it must support her vision of what an IKAR service and prayer book ought to be. But creating it with input from the board members who are struggling would invest them in the process and create real buy-in for why IKAR needs to have a traditional service.

Most importantly, creating an IKAR Siddur would be send a hugely meaningful signal about IKAR's desire to reach out to the Disaffected, the Discontented, the Disconnected, and the Disrespected to help them find a way into prayer and synagogue life. As Ron Wolfson put it: "You may want to create your own prayerbook, that's essentially Sim Shalom or some version of it but that has within it other things. To create your own siddur would be in and of itself an important statement. Because it's yours. It's not the Conservative movement's, it's not this rabbi's or another's. It's IKAR's prayer book."

7.3 Questions for Future Study

7.3.1 Overview

This thesis has barely scratched the surface in terms of understanding the IKAR community. The diversity of Jewish journeys within the IKAR community makes fertile ground for further inquiry. Indeed, IKAR has been the subject of several formal studies as well as informal ones. The insight to be gleaned from learning more about the IKAR community could be used both to benefit IKAR and to help other emergent spiritual communities to understand the needs of their consumers.

7.3.2 Community

It would be useful to know more accurately who is coming to IKAR and what they are expecting from it. This type of community data could easily be acquired by a survey, even one conducted online. It would be especially useful to compare official synagogue members in comparison to community members. The goal would be to get a better understanding of what motivates individuals to go beyond getting involved and commit themselves to membership.

7.3.3 Governance

One thing that start-ups of any sort find out is that the founding board is not necessarily the right board for the next phase in the enterprise's growth. Founder's syndrome, burnout and incompatible visions are just a few of the reasons why founding board members sometimes need to step back so that the organization they helped to create can grow up. Watching how the IKAR board evolves to face the next phase in the organization's growth would make an interesting study.

7.4 Final Thoughts

7.4.1 Answers to Questions from the Introduction

Question 1 What does it mean to build a spiritual community that is “vision-based” rather than one based on geography, demography or common religious practice?

Answer 1 If you’re after authenticity, it has to be vision-based. People want to be in community with people with whom they share tastes and values – not people with whom they are thrown together by accident.

Question 2 How can a spiritual community be committed to tradition and still be appealing to a audience looking for “something new”?

Answer 2 It’s a challenge. Part of it involves making tradition feel new and marketing it in a new way.

Question 3 Can Jews committed to ritual observance co-exist in a community with others who are not?

Answer 3 Absolutely. But it requires that the traditional Jews are committed to being in community with Jews who are not as observant, and it requires that liberal non-observant Jews recognize that tolerance for the observant means catering to the highest Halakhic standard, not the lowest.

Question 4 Why would a cadre of Jews who were turned off by synagogue life to become actively involved in building a synagogue?

Answer 4 Because nothing that already existed spoke to them. They realized that if they wanted the kind of community they were seeking, they would have to build it. And they like the idea of building something.

Question 5 Is it possible to make a commitment-phobic group, commit to a single idea or community?

Answer 5 Yes and no. You can get a commitment-phobic group hooked on an idea and a community. Turning that into a sustainable business model is another question.

Question 6 How do you build a membership of a group of people who are typically “non-joiners”?

Answer 6 By speaking their language. It requires creating compelling experiences and communicating a vision that inspires them.

Question 7 How does one build consensus for executing a religious vision among a group with a wide diversity of attitudes, backgrounds, knowledge and level of religiosity?

Answer 7 Consensus is over-rated. Leadership is more important. It is the very nature of religious practice that it does not compromise or come about by a democratic process. Building tolerance, understanding and respect is more important than having consensus.

APPENDICES

Table of Appendices

Appendix A: Focus Group Release Form	102
Appendix B: Focus Group Pre-Questionnaire	103
Appendix C: Focus Group Discussion Guide	104
Appendix D: In Depth Interview Guide	106

Appendix A: Focus Group Release Form

THESIS RESEARCH PROJECT

General Release

I grant the University of Judaism, Joshua Avedon and its designees permission to use my image and/or utterances arising out of the

IKAR PARTICIPATION FOCUS GROUP

My words may only be used without identifying me by name. No other restrictions as to usage shall apply. Video and audio tape are to used for the purpose of review by the researcher only.

Name of Subject

Address

City

State

Zip

Subject's Signature

Date

Appendix B: Focus Group Pre-Questionnaire

MASTERS THESIS RESEARCH

IKAR Focus Group Pre-Focus Group Questionnaire

1. What is your Name?					
2. What is your Gender? <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> M					
3. What is your Date of Birth?		<input type="text"/> Month	<input type="text"/> Day	<input type="text"/> Year	
4. What is your Marital Status? <input type="checkbox"/> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed					
5. If you have children, what are their ages?			<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> No children
6. What is the main type of Jewish education you received as a child? <small>Select one only</small>					
		<input type="checkbox"/> None		<input type="checkbox"/> Yeshiva or Day School	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday School		<input type="checkbox"/> Private tutoring	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Hebrew School or other part-time Jewish school		<input type="checkbox"/> Any other type	
7. What was your family's affiliation growing up?					
		<input type="checkbox"/> Reform		<input type="checkbox"/> Post-denominational	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Conservative		<input type="checkbox"/> Secular Jewish	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Reconstructionist		<input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Jewish	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Modern Orthodox		<input type="checkbox"/> Non-affiliated	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Orthodox		<input type="checkbox"/> Not Jewish	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal		<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
8. What is your current affiliation?					
		<input type="checkbox"/> Reform		<input type="checkbox"/> Post-denominational	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Conservative		<input type="checkbox"/> Secular Jewish	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Reconstructionist		<input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Jewish	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Modern Orthodox		<input type="checkbox"/> Non-affiliated	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Orthodox		<input type="checkbox"/> Not Jewish	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal		<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
9. How many times have you been to Israel?					
		Never	Once	Twice	Three +
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. About how many IKAR events have you attended?					
		None	1-5	6-10	11-15
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Are you a member of IKAR?					
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		<input type="checkbox"/> No	
12. If so, when did you join? <small>(approx.)</small>					

Appendix C: Focus Group Discussion Guide

MASTERS THESIS RESEARCH

IKAR Participation Focus Group Discussion Guide

I. INTRO, EXPLANATION OF GROUP PROCESS, WARM UP (5 MINUTES)

Introduction of moderator and subject of (e.g., your participation in, perception of and connection to IKAR).

Explanation of audio and videotaping, assurance of confidentiality, importance of candid and honest answers, respectful disagreement encouraged.

We have a lot to cover today, so at times it may seem I'm moving very quickly.

Introductions: name, household/family, occupation, Jewish background

II. JUDAISM ATTITUDES/INVOLVEMENT (15 MINUTES)

I'd like to start with a discussion of your involvement with, and feelings toward, Judaism and Jewish life and Jewish community in Los Angeles.

A. How would you characterize your current involvement with Judaism and Jewish life?

B. Has your involvement always been at this level, or has it changed over your lifetime?

- How has it changed?

- Why has it changed?

What has your experience been with Jewish community in Los Angeles? If you are new to L.A. what has your experience been over the past few years?

What do you like about being involved in Jewish life?

What do you feel is missing?

III. IKAR INVOLVEMENT (15 MINUTES)

A. How did you find out about IKAR?

B. If you heard about IKAR from friends, what did they say?

C. What made you come to IKAR for the first time?

D. What was the first IKAR event you attended?

E. How was IKAR like or unlike your expectations?

F. What made you decide to come back?

IV. IKAR DESCRIPTION (25 MINUTES)

- A. What is IKAR?
- B. How does IKAR fit into your life?
- C. What makes you want to come to IKAR events?
- D. Do you feel that you are part of the IKAR community? Why or why not?
- E. What does community mean to you?
- F. What is IKAR to you?

V. IKAR NEEDS AND DESIRES (25 MINUTES)

- A. Describe an IKAR experience that made you want to be involved with the IKAR community.
- B. What do you get from being involved with IKAR?
- C. What are you not getting that you wish you would?
- D. If you moved to another city, what would you miss most about IKAR?
- E. If you could change one thing about IKAR, what would it be?
- F. If that one thing were changed, what would you change next?
- G. What is unique about IKAR?

VI. IKAR MEMBERSHIP (20 MINUTES)

Let's talk about membership. This is not a pitch, we're just hoping to find out how involvement with IKAR translates into a commitment to IKAR.

- A. Who here is a member?
- B. Who here has paid fees and filled out an application to become a member?
- C. What do you do that makes you feel invested in IKAR?
- D. What does IKAR do that makes you feel invested in IKAR?
- E. For those who are not official members, how do you describe your relationship to IKAR?
- F. What could IKAR do or change that would make you want to join? Or do you just not like the idea of "joining" in general?
- G. Are any of you members of other synagogues?
- H. Can you be a member of more than one community?

VII. WRAP UP

- A. Is there anything else you would like to add?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Appendix D: In Depth Interview Guide

MASTERS THESIS RESEARCH IKAR In Depth Interview Guide

I. INTRO, EXPLANATION OF PROCESS (5 MINUTES)

Introduction of interviewer and subjects (e.g., your participation in, perception of and connection to IKAR).

Explanation of audio taping, assurance of confidentiality, importance of candid and honest answers. Check back for attributable quote usage.

We have a lot to cover today, so at times it may seem I'm moving very quickly.

Introductions: name, household/family, occupation, Jewish background

II. JUDAISM ATTITUDES/INVOLVEMENT (10 MINUTES)

I'd like to start with a discussion of your involvement with, and feelings toward, Judaism and Jewish life and Jewish community in Los Angeles.

A. How would you characterize your current involvement with Judaism and Jewish life?

B. Has your involvement always been at this level, or has it changed over your lifetime?

- How has it changed?

- Why has it changed?

What has your experience been with Jewish community in Los Angeles? If you are new to L.A. what has your experience been over the past few years?

What do you like about being involved in Jewish life?

What do you feel is missing?

III. IKAR DESCRIPTION (10 MINUTES)

A. What is IKAR?

B. How does IKAR fit into your life?

C. What makes you want to come to IKAR events?

D. What is IKAR to you?

E. What is IKAR's mission?

F. What is the most important thing about IKAR?

G. What is unique about IKAR?

H. How has IKAR changed in the year since it began?

I. What does community mean to you?

J. Are you members of other synagogues?

K. Can you be a member of more than one community?

IV. IKAR INVOLVEMENT (15 MINUTES)

A. How did you meet Rabbi Brous?

B. Why did you get involved in IKAR?

C. What did you hope to get out of your involvement with IKAR?

- D. What do you get out of your involvement with IKAR?
- E. What are you not getting that you wish you would?
- F. How does IKAR fit into your schedule?
- G. Describe an IKAR experience that touched you.
- H. If you could change one thing about IKAR, what would it be?
- I. If that one thing were changed, what would you change next?

V. IKAR BOARD PARTICIPATION**(15 MINUTES)**

- A. What skills do you bring to being an IKAR board member?
- B. What is your role on the board?
- C. What is your favorite part of being on the IKAR board?
- D. What is your least favorite part of being on the IKAR board?
- E. How do you contribute to the organizing of IKAR?
- F. How do you contribute to fundraising for IKAR?
- G. Rate your board meeting attendance – poor good excellent
- H. Do you have any previous board experience? Describe.

VI. IKAR BOARD EFFECTIVENESS**(10 MINUTES)**

- A. How effective is the IKAR board? Why?
- B. How would the effectiveness change if the board were bigger/smaller? Why?
- C. What committees are you on?
- D. What is the role of the committees?
- E. Should there be more committees? Which would you create? What would their function be?
- F. What is the role of the executive committee?
- G. How should IKAR select new board members?

VII. WRAP UP

Is there anything else you would like to add?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

GLOSSARY

Aleinu *ah-lay-NOO* (Hebrew)

Aleinu is a Jewish prayer found in the siddur, the classical Jewish prayerbook. Traditional Jews recite it at the end of each of the three daily Jewish prayers sessions.

Aliyah *ah-lee-AH* (Hebrew)

Literally: going up. To go up to the read from or bless the Torah. The term is also used to describe immigration to Israel.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah pl. B'nai Mitzvah *BAHR/BAHT mitz-VAH buh-NAY mitz-VAH* (Hebrew)

Literally: son/daughter of commandment. Ceremony marking a Jew's becoming an adult member of the community.

Beresheet *buh-ray-SHEET* (Hebrew)

Genesis. The first chapter of the Hebrew bible.

Beshert *buh-SHAIRT* (Yiddish)

Destined, predestined, fated, meant to be.

Bima *BEE-mah* (Hebrew)

Ritual center stage in a sanctuary; a raised platform from which Jewish worship is lead.

Creative Ambiguity

Phrase coined by the author to describe the state of avoiding the over specification of details in order to galvanize widespread support from a group with differing perceptions of a goal.

Daven *DAH-ven* (Yiddish)

To pray (in an intense, soulful manner).

Davener *DAH-ven-er* (Yiddish)

One who davens.

Dvar Torah *duh-VAHR TOW-rah* (Hebrew)

Literally: a word of Torah. A short teaching from Jewish tradition.

Entrepreneurial Governance

Phrase created by the author describing a nonprofit organization that is run as if it were a for-profit start up.

Frum *FROOM* (Yiddish)

Pious, devout, religious, observant.

Halakhah *khah-lah-KHAH* (Hebrew)

Jewish law.

Halakhic

In accordance with Jewish law.

Hannukah *KHAH-noo-kah* (Hebrew)

Hanukkah is a winter eight-day holiday that commemorates the rededication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem after the Jews' 165 B.C.E. victory over the Hellenist Syrians.

Havurah pl. *havurot khah-voo-RAH khah-voo-ROAT* (Hebrew)

Started by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan (the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism), the idea of a havurah is to encourage experimentation and a greater sense of community within a smaller group, as opposed to a synagogue.

Hassidic *khah-SID-ik*

A sect of orthodox Judaism known for their joyous worship style.

High Holy Days

The High Holy Days, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (and the intervening “Days of Awe” are the most important of the yearly Jewish Holidays and the only holidays that are purely religious, as they are not related to any historical or natural event. They are the holidays for which even typically non-observant Jews will go to synagogue.

Highest Common Denominator Judaism

Author’s term for catering to the strictest adherence to Jewish law within any given group of individuals.

Ikar *ee-KAR* (Hebrew)

Essence, core, marrow, gist, pith, quintessence, substance, nub, principle, point.

IKARd

A ticket to an IKAR event.

IKARite

Any member of the IKAR extended community (not necessarily dues paying members).

Kabbalah *kah-bah-LAH* (Hebrew)

The school of Jewish mysticism founded in the middle ages, currently undergoing a significant revival both within and outside of the Jewish world.

Kabbalat Shabbat *kah-bah-LAHT sha-BAHT* (Hebrew)

Friday night Shabbat services.

Kashrut *kash-ROOT* (Hebrew)

Jewish dietary law.

Kavannah *kah-vah-NAH* (Hebrew)

Literally: attunement; heartfelt mental and spiritual concentration

Kehillah *keh-hee-LAH* (Hebrew)

A spiritual community.

L’cha dodi *leh-KHA doh-DEE* (Hebrew)

The traditional Friday night prayer welcoming the Sabbath Bride.

Mahzor *makh-ZOAR* pl. machzorim (Hebrew)

The special siddur, or prayerbook used for Festival prayer services.

Minyan pl. **minyanim** *min-YAHN min-yahn-EEM* (Hebrew)

The quorum of ten Jews required for many Jewish prayers. Orthodox Jews require all ten be men, other forms of Judaism permit women to be counted in a minyan.

Motzi *MOH-Tzee* (Hebrew)

The prayer over the bread.

Niggun *nih-GOON* (Yiddish)

A Hassidic wordless melody sung during prayer.

Oneg *OH-neg* (Hebrew)

Literally: pleasure. Customarily a snack, dessert or meal following Shabbat services.

Parashat hashavua *par-ah-SHAT ha-sha-VOO-ah* (Hebrew)

The weekly Torah portion.

Postdenominational

Description preferred by Jews who do not subscribe to a specific denominational definition or orientation of Judaism (also sometimes Transdenominational or Nondenominational).

Psychographic

In sociological examinations, psychographic is the psychological counterpart to demographics. While demographics are quantitative measurements of data such as age, education level and marital status, psychographics are measurements of tastes, values and interests.

Purim

Feast of Lots, or feast of Esther, taking place on the 14th day of Adar.

Rebbetzin *reh-BET-zin* (Yiddish)

The wife of a Rabbi.

Renewal

Specifically, the school of thought within Judaism founded by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. Renewal Judaism attempts to connect a Hassidic approach to spirituality to a progressive and cross cultural approach to Jewish practice. Renewal is not yet a “movement” in the sense that Orthodoxy, Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionism are, but it does have elements of that type of infrastructure, including affiliated synagogues and havurot.

More generally, the aspect of many Jewish communities who embrace the idea that Judaism is undergoing a renaissance period driven by new spiritual communities that defy traditional structures.

Rosh Hashanah *ROSH ha-sha-NAH* (Hebrew)

Literally: the head of the year. The Jewish New Year celebration.

Salad Bar Judaism

Term coined by the author of this thesis to describe eclectic Jewish practice of many Jews from generations X and Y. Salad bar Judaism is characterized by picking and choosing which elements of religious practice or behaviors to engage in without regard to the traditional categories of observant, secular or a specific denominational orientation.

Shabbat *sha-BAHT* (Hebrew)

The seventh day of creation, upon which God rested from his labors. Celebrated weekly by Jews in home and at synagogue as a day of rest and rejuvenation.

Shabbat b'Yahad *sha-BAHT beh-yah-KHAD*(Hebrew)

Literally: Shabbat together. An early Shabbat service at IKAR followed by a catered dinner and discussion. Based upon a similar program from B'nai Jeshurun.

Shabbes *SHA-bis* (Yiddish)

Shabbat.

shaliah tzibbur (the “shatz”) *sha-LEE-akh TZI-boor* (Hebrew)

A representative of the community who leads the community in prayer, and, at times, recites prayers on their behalf.

Shomer Shabbat *sho-MAIR sha-BAHT* (Hebrew)

Literally: guardian of Shabbat. One who keeps the Jewish laws governing the Sabbath.

Shul *shool* (Yiddish)

A synagogue, or Jewish school.

Shul shoppers

Descriptive term for people who spend time at a variety of synagogues in order to find one that fits their needs.

Sim Shalom *SIM sha-LOAM* (Hebrew)

The Conservative Movement's daily prayerbook.

Simcha *SIM-khah* (Hebrew)

Literally: a happiness. Hebrew for a life celebration such as a wedding, bris or bar mitzvah.

Simchat Torah *SIM-khaht toe-RAH* (Hebrew)

Jewish holiday whose name means “rejoicing of Torah” and celebrates the completion of the yearly cycle of Torah readings.

Sovereign Self

Eisen and Cohen's term from *The Jew Within* describing Post Modern Jewish identity as a matter of personal choice and interpretation.

Synagogue

Building for Jewish public prayer, study and assembly.

Tefillah *tuh-FEE-lah* (Hebrew)
Prayer.

Teshuvah *tuh-SHOO-vah* (Hebrew)
Often translated as “repentance,” teshuvah literally means “turn” or “return.” Teshuvah encompasses the two requisites of repentance and reconciliation: a turn from what is wrong and a turn toward what is right.

Tikkun *tee-KOON* (Hebrew)
Literally: repair. The mandate that Jews must work to heal the world.

Tikkun Leil Shavuot *tee-KOON layl sha-VOO-oat* (Hebrew)
Tikkun Leil Shavuot is the custom of staying up the entire night (leil) of Shavuot studying with the community in order to reexperience standing at Sinai.

Torah *TWO-rah* (Hebrew)
Written law, the five books of Moses. The first section of the Hebrew bible which is read from during Shabbat morning services.

Tzfat *TZFAHT* (Hebrew)
The hilltop city in Israel that is the ancient home of Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah).

Unchurched
Individuals who do not belong to a church. More loosely, individuals of any faith who are not affiliated with organized religion.

Unsynagogued
See unchurched.

XOs
Former Ohr Hatorah members.

Yeshiva *yuh-SHEE-vah* (Hebrew)
A rabbinical college.

Yeshiva bucher *yeh-SHEE-vuh BUKH-er* (Yiddish)
A yeshiva student.

Yom Kippur *YOM kee-POOR* (Hebrew)
Day of Atonement; annual occasion of Jewish confession and repentance.

ז”ל (zichrono levrochah) (Hebrew)
May he be remembered for good. Signifies that a person is deceased.

Definitions have been compiled and combined from a variety of sources including: <http://www.yiddishdictionaryonline.com>, <http://bethor.org/education/dictionary.html>, <http://en.wikipedia.org>, <http://www.aleinu.org>, <http://www.joyofjewish.com>, <http://re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk/gcsere/glossaries/judglos.html>, <http://urj.org>, Rabbi Sharon Brous, and the author.

PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS

Aish HaTorah

International Jewish organization dedicated to helping Jews reconnect to traditional Judaism.

Avedon, Joshua

The author of this thesis and founding member of IKAR's board of directors.

Balaban, Melissa

Assistant Dean at the USC School of Law and president of IKAR's founding board of directors.

B'nai Jeshurun (BJ)

Synagogue in New York where Rabbi Brous did a rabbinic fellowship prior to moving to Los Angeles. BJ is known for its tremendous vitality and is the model for what IKAR hopes to accomplish on the West coast.

Beth Am

A large Conservative synagogue in Los Angeles.

Beth El

A progressive synagogue in Sudbury, Massachusetts affiliated with the Reform Movement.

Beyt Tikkun

Rabbi Michael Lerner's (of Tikkun Magazine) synagogue in the Bay Area. Affiliated with the Renewal movement.

Bock, Deborah

Master of Jewish Education, Jewish Communal Service, rabbinic student at Hebrew Union College and director of IKAR's religious school, Limudim.

Brous, Rabbi Sharon

Rabbi Sharon Brous is the founding rabbi of the IKAR community. Ordained at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Rabbi Sharon Brous received a Master's Degree in Religion and Human Rights from Columbia University, where she also received her Bachelor's Degree in History in 1995. After ordination, she served as Rabbinic Fellow at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York City.

Gilad, Adam

Adam Gilad is a screenwriter and a founding member of IKAR's board of directors.

Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life

Hillel is an international organization that builds Jewish communities on college campuses. Hillel provides opportunities for Jewish students to explore and celebrate their Jewish identity through its global network of over 500 regional centers, campus Foundations and Hillel student organizations.

Hebrew Union College (HUC)

The Reform Movement Seminary and institute of higher learning, with campuses in Cincinnati, New York, Los Angeles, and Jerusalem.

IKAR

A dynamic new Jewish spiritual community in Los Angeles.

Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS)

One of the Conservative Movement's Seminaries, located in New York.

Landres, Shawn

Shawn Landres is a writer and teacher on religious studies, an advisor to IKAR and the researcher behind the Los Angeles Religious Identity and Practice Survey, a study of dynamic religious communities (including IKAR) in Los Angeles.

Library Minyan

Temple Beth Am's Library Minyan is a participatory, lay-led, davening and learning community that blends traditional observance with a fully modern and egalitarian approach to Jewish living.

Light, Paulette

Paulette Light is an entrepreneur, Rabbi Sharon Brous's sister-in-law and a founding member of IKAR's board of directors.

Milken Community High School

A transdenominational Jewish day school in Los Angeles where Rabbi Brous worked prior to founding IKAR.

Neshama Minyan

Temple Beth Am's Neshama Minyan meets every Friday evening for a lively Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat/Ma'ariv service using the melodies of the late Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach.

Ohr HaTorah (OHT)

Synagogue founded by Rabbi Mordecai Finley and Rebbetzin Meirav Finley in west Los Angeles. The shul that many IKAR board members belonged to prior to founding IKAR.

PATH (People Assisting The Homeless)

PATH is a non-profit community agency that seeks to empower homeless people with the tools for self-sufficiency and serves 17,000 people annually in Southern California.

Progressive Jewish Alliance (PJA)

The Progressive Jewish Alliance is a young, non-profit, non-denominational, inter-generational membership organization for those who are committed to social change. PJA's purpose is to be the progressive voice in the Jewish community and the Jewish voice in the progressive community.

Rake, Jeff

Jeff Rake is a screenwriter and a founding member of IKAR's board of directors.

Schachter-Shalomi, Rabbi Zalman

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi is a former Hassidic rabbi who left Orthodoxy and is the founder of the Renewal movement, known for his blending of Eastern philosophy and mystical Judaism.

Shugerman, Andy

Andy Shugerman is a student at the University of Judaism's Zeigler School of Rabbinic Studies and the shaliah tzibbur (prayer leader) for IKAR.

Sokatch, Daniel

Daniel Sokatch is the Executive Director of the Progressive Jewish Alliance and a founding member of the IKAR board of directors.

Shtibl Minyan

The Shtibl Minyan is an egalitarian orthodox spiritual group that considers social and economic justice as much a part of their religious tradition as prayer and ritual. "Shtibl" refers to the small prayer rooms that were once a fixture of Jewish Eastern Europe, and which operated more like community centers than temples.

Synagogue 2000

Synagogue 2000 (S2K) is a national, not-for-profit institute dedicated to revitalizing and re-energizing synagogue life in North America.

Weiss, Adam

Adam Weiss is a Los Angeles attorney and member of IKAR's board of directors.

University of Judaism (UJ)

A Jewish university and graduate school as well as the home to the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies (one of the Conservative Movement's Seminaries), and Synagogue 2000. Located in Los Angeles.

Westside Jewish Community Center (JCC)

Fifty year-old center for Jewish life in Los Angeles. Current home of the IKAR offices and where IKAR services are held.

Wexler, Gary

Gary Wexler is the founder of Passion Marketing for Issues and Causes, a noted expert on the marketing of nonprofits and an advisor to IKAR.

Willow Creek Community Church

Willow Creek is an interdenominational church in Illinois that is known for its dynamic success at building community and reaching out to the "un-churched."

Wolfson, Ron

Ron Wolfson is the founding Director of the Whizin Center for the Jewish Future, the Vice President and Dean of the Fingerhut School at the University of Judaism, a founder of Synagogue 2000 and an advisor to IKAR.

BIOGRAPHY OF RABBI SHARON BROUS

Rabbi Sharon Brous

Rabbi Sharon Brous is the founding rabbi of the IKAR community.

While in rabbinical school at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Rabbi Sharon Brous received a Master's Degree in Religion and Human Rights from Columbia University, where she also received her Bachelor's Degree in History in 1995. At Columbia, Rabbi Brous organized and participated in annual international conferences on Religion and Human Rights in Bellagio, Italy, in which Jewish, Christian and Muslim clergy and activists gathered to engage issues of poverty, AIDS, peace, and religious tolerance.

After ordination, she served as Rabbinic Fellow at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York City (BJ), a socially conscious synagogue known for its spiritual depth and vitality. At BJ, Rabbi Brous worked and studied with Rabbis Roly Matalon and Marcelo Bronstein.

In Los Angeles, Rabbi Brous served as Director of Advanced Jewish Studies at Milken Community High School, where she challenged students to translate Jewish ideas about justice and human dignity into action. In 2002, for example, she directed a pioneer high school delegation to participate in a human rights mission to El Salvador with the American Jewish World Service. Rabbi Brous also created an innovative Parent Education program, designing grade-level parallel curricula for parents interested in wrestling with the same texts that their children encountered in school.

For the past three years, Rabbi Brous has been a rabbi with REBOOT, a network of Jewish trend-setters, thinkers and activists, grappling with Jewish values and identity, and the Jewish future. She is involved in several justice-oriented initiatives with Progressive Jewish Alliance, such as a groundbreaking restorative justice project, in which she trains mediators to work with non-violent adolescent offenders in the city of Los Angeles. She co-teaches a course on Social Justice and Spiritual Activism for Hebrew Union College and University of Judaism rabbinical students.

This past spring, Rabbi Brous began working with IKAR founders to envision and build a soulful, authentic, passionate, intellectually challenging and socially active Jewish Spiritual Center in LA. IKAR was created to offer a compelling, progressive Jewish response to the pain, suffering, loneliness and violence that characterize our world. Rabbi Brous's dream has been to build a holy community of people who pray together, hold one another in their suffering, dance at one another's simchas, and dream together about and make manifest the kind of world they want to live in.⁴⁴

BIOGRAPHIES OF BOARD MEMBERS

Melissa Balaban, President

My husband, Adam Wergeles and I, have been searching for a Jewish community that will engage, inspire, challenge and enrich the lives of our entire family, and one that uses the richness of our beautiful tradition to engage the world in a meaningful way. When we could not find an existing community that meets all of these needs, we joined with an immensely talented and inspiring group of people, lead by Rabbi Sharon Brous, to create something beautiful. It has been a thrill and privilege to work with such a remarkable group of people to make IKAR come to life. When not helping to plan and implement the growth of this beautiful community, I am a wife, a mother to Maya and Emma, a daughter, a daughter-in-law, a sister, an aunt and an Assistant Dean at USC Law School.

Joshua Avedon

I come from a distinguished line of atheists, socialists and even some anarchists. Some might say that helping to found a synagogue is a betrayal of everything they taught me not to believe in. But they also taught me the value of building community, that each of us has a responsibility to create a more just world and that education is the key to liberation. I was compelled to be a part of IKAR because I believe in the continuous reinvention of Judaism for each generation and that reverence for the past can only be made meaningful by creating a plan for the future. When not being an enthusiastic IKARite, I am husband of a wonderful woman, Stephanie, father of two remarkable children, Elias and Navi, a Jewish communal service worker at Los Angeles Hillel Council and a candidate for an MBA in non-profit management at the University of Judaism. I feel truly blessed to be a part of this unique enterprise.

Andrea Blaugrund

Since attending Brandeis-Bardin Institute 20 years ago in Simi Valley, far from her native New York, Andrea Blaugrund Nevins has been searching for a synagogue that could combine the remarkable spiritual lessons she began to learn there with practical action in the world. After many conversations with her dear friend and neighbor, Paulette Light, a few small study sessions with Sharon Brous, and a serendipitous introduction to Daniel Sokatch at a wedding in Cambridge, Massachusetts, she committed herself to helping create IKAR in any way she could. She is an Academy Award-nominated documentary filmmaker, and feels extraordinarily blessed to be the wife of David Nevins and mother of Clara and Charlie.

Celia Bernstein

I have been seeking a spiritual community that engages my mind, my spirit and my passion for social action. I have been seeking a rabbi who can be my guide into a Judaism that both renews the soul and spirit and invigorates social activism. I have been seeking a place where my husband Brad and my 9 yr. old daughter Lena can find compelling portals into Judaism. I have been

seeking a community that truly shares my values. For me, IKAR is the place I have been seeking. During the weekdays, I am the West Coast Director of The Shefa Fund, a national Jewish public foundation that engages in low-income community investing, socially responsible grantmaking, and funder education.

Richard Foos

I always wanted to be a social worker and although I loved my entrepreneurship, I still longed for impactful ways to do community service. Eventually, I interwove these dreams, working with non-profit organizations, progressive businesses, and community members to develop more democratic ways to view the roles of the employer, the employee and the community. I come to Ikar with relief and excitement after a life-long search for a meaningful way to practice Judaism.

Shari Foos

After decades of writing, performing and waiting for Godot, I miraculously became a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and founded The BRIDGE Program, a free college level course in the humanities. The internal growth from these dual focuses has brought me to my core, my essence, my Ikar. I hope to continue my life as a human being, a wife and mother, a daughter, a friend and a citizen of the planet, informed by the beauty of Judaism.

Nan Friedman

Through a desire for my family to be part of a vibrant, joyous and meaningful Jewish community, I have found my way to Rabbi Brous, my fellow board members and the growing IKAR community. I am thrilled to be on this journey with all of you in creating IKAR. Other creative work includes writing for kids tv and being a partner in talking dog events, a special events management company. At the heart of it all is my husband Ross Levinson, a composer, and our 12 year old son Jamie, a kid.

Adam Gilad

I hid in the bathroom during Hebrew School. I joined USY for the girls. One day, pushing my bicycle in the Cambridge, England rain, I felt a profound emptiness and sense of lack despite/because of my Philosophy studies there. So I went to Israel for the sunshine. I got pulled off the Western Wall into a Yeshiva and was astonished at the depth of learning, spiritual focus, integrated lifestyle and sense of purpose among the observant community. Two years later, I ran, astonished by the parochialism, racism, closed-mindedness and limited imaginations of the observant community. After a period of grief, I discovered a passionate progressive, serious community here in LA. Inspired, I began to meld two of my passions, writing and Jewish thought/ spiritual studies into a series of creative workshops which has almost made up for the aridity and organizational stupidity of the entertainment industry, where I have been a writer and producer for 11 years. I have two sons who could make up for any bother, obstacle, frustration or disappointment this world might offer. But that still doesn't mean I will buy them a mini-bike.

Yazmin Ibarlucea-Peebles*

I discovered Judaism 15 years ago through the University of Judaism and since then I have been in search of a spiritual community that reflects the morals, ethics, values and traditions that drew me to Judaism in the first place. During this spiritual quest I met my husband Mac, who, to my great delight, had been searching for the same thing for several years. We joined our spirits and continued the search together with my children, Nathan and Adam. Early this year we decided to follow the leadership of a few amazing families who, like us, were also searching for the Essence of Judaism. Our search ended when we decided to join them in founding IKAR. I most enjoy spending time with my husband and kids. My favorite day of the week is Shabbat as it allows me to spend uninterrupted time with them. When I'm not driving my kids to school, music or gymnastics lessons, or leading a group of scouts to serve our community, our environment, their family and their own personal growth, I work. I am currently the Corporate Controller of an Italian machine tool company. My current project involves a maquila plant in Mexico. I recently went back to school to pursue an art degree.

Brad Kesden

I am the executive director of ROCK THE CLASSROOM, a nonprofit that brings professional musicians into public schools to teach a music/literacy program. I got involved with IKAR because of the amazing teachings of Sharon Brous, my desire to once and for all make a connection to "the Judaism thing" and to create a positive Jewish experience for my daughter, as an alternative to the same old tortuous, ossified fire and brimstone crap that got shoved down my throat as a kid.

Lynn Kilroy

I feel blessed to be one amongst this vibrant group of individuals who have founded IKAR. I stepped into this process because I am committed to being a part of a community that is spiritual at its core and in its actions... where adults and children can grow, feel safe, and feel excited to be learning and praying together. I bring to IKAR my curiosity as a psychologist to look for ways that Torah lends insight to living as a conscious being. As a mother and an advocate for children with special needs, I also bring a passion for developing an educational program that is rich, meaningful, and accessible. I am very excited to be on this road and extend a hand to all who wish to be a part of this journey.

Ross Levinson

Who knew? I would never in my wildest dreams have planned to be part of the creation of a new temple and a Jewish community, and yet here I am. And much to my surprise and delight: loving it! This progressive community full of warmth and spirit is home to so many strange and wonderful human beings, drawn together to find deeper and truer meaning in their lives. Growing up in Brooklyn, NY in an orthodox temple, I never quite fit in completely. There was always something missing, some part of the story that I was not privy to. The strict adherence to what I perceived to be such an outdated set of mores and beliefs. The role of women, the intolerance for

anything different. And yet there were some truly magical moments in that temple. The kavannah and the soulful singing during services could reach spectacular highs. At those moments, the synagogue would actually seem to become a window into the divine. I had since attended services many times in my adult life, always disappointed by the lack of that true "feeling." I have finally come home, to a congregation that not only stimulates me intellectually but fills my soul with life and energy. Rabbi Brous is a deeply committed and passionate teacher with a clear vision and a prevailing sense of truth and justice. She encourages all she meets to not only talk the talk but walk the walk. I am a composer and an actor for film and television. I am married to Nan Friedman. We are parents to Jamie and have a lovely dog Lewis, aka Prince Shmooley.

Paulette Light

I am originally from Philadelphia and I have been married for almost thirteen years and have three children, Talia, Evan and Joey. I joined IKAR because I am anxious to give my children Jewish meaning and community in their lives, and could use a dose of spirituality myself. I am especially excited to be working on Limudim, helping to develop interactive, engaging studies for our children and also participating in the pre-k gimilut chasadim project in which we connect our children to their community even before they go to school. I can, by the way, name all the U.S. presidents in chronological order.

Rachel Light

I'm the youngest of four, raised by a family that prioritized Judaism above everything else and nurtured in an environment in which I was able to grow as an individual while always being proud of my Jewish Identity. Now, living 3000 miles from home in a town where time seems suspended by sunshine and life is on hold (well sort of) while I work long tv production hours, I'm trying to discover what's important to me and how I want to structure my world. From my first experience at IKAR I knew it needed to be a staple in my life. At IKAR I can sing loudly, study with insightful individuals, dance to a drummer's beat, spend time with my family and learn about myself in the process.

Mac Peebles*

My wife, Yazmin, and I are members of and helped found Ikar because we want to be part of a Jewish moral and spiritual community in which we and our children can grow. During and after college, I discovered and grew to love Judaism and then started attending a synagogue. At that synagogue, I discovered Yazmin and grew to love her and her sons Nathan and Adam! When I am not setting up chairs at Ikar or thinking about the next chair layout, I enjoy hanging out with Yazmin, Nathan and Adam. At work, I help engineer systems that help our soldiers be safer and more effective in their missions to protect us.

Paula Mazur

If one could dream up a Jewish spiritual community, what would it look like? Here's my laundry list: it would be morally intact, it would honor authenticity, creativity, inclusiveness, and social responsibility, it would be relevant and make our kids feel cool to be Jewish, it would speak to our deepest spiritual yearnings, it would have a rabbi who walked the talk and led with grace, and it would be filled with people we really liked hanging out with. Lucky for us, many other Angelinos seem to be looking for the same thing. Beyond luck and into the zone of beshert, the extraordinary Rabbi Sharon Brous was looking for us as we were looking for her. Thus was IKAR born. I produce and write for film and television. I am married to Robert Mickelson. We have two children, Lulu (12) and Julian (9), and three cats.

Robert Mickelson

From a backyard meeting just a few months ago, we had a sense that other like minded families were looking for a Jewish community that could challenge us spiritually as well as morally and be a fun, stimulating environment to make Jewish learning and life exciting for our children. In a short time IKAR has blossomed into that community - our "Field of Dreams." I work as a producer and director in film and television. I am blessed with a wonderful family, my wife Paula Mazur, my daughter Lulu, and son Julian.

David N. Myers

I came to IKAR, first, because I love the people involved and, second, because I felt like I needed more energy and kavannah in davening. Happily, I've found both. When I'm not davening, I teach Jewish history at UCLA, where I also direct the Center for Jewish Studies.

Amy Povich

I am thrilled to be part of the dynamic and passionate emerging community of IKAR. Already, the work and spirit of IKAR has been tremendous and has become for me an inspiring and welcoming place to rediscover my relationship to Judaism, learn, and celebrate the joining of our families. I am an actress, originally from most cities east, married to David Agus and Mom to Sydney and Miles.

Jeff Rake

Growing up a fairweather Conservative Jew in the San Fernando Valley, my religious identity centered around hebrew school, holidays, and summer camp. But my connection to Judaism, while always present, has never moved beyond cultural. As a husband and father of three, I am eager for my family to grow spiritually as part of the IKAR community. When not furthering my Jewish identity, I can be found writing, playing in the backyard, or sleeping - not necessarily in that order. I also like peppermint ice cream.

Daniel Sokatch

For me, serving on the Board of IKAR means helping to build the shul I wish I'd grown up in. In my day job I have the privilege of directing the Progressive Jewish Alliance, an organization dedicated to serving as a vehicle enabling Jews to work for social justice in the greater Los Angeles community. In IKAR I have found a community of people dedicated to building a vehicle for Jewish spiritual activism and joyful celebration. Also, my two year and four month old daughter Noa thinks IKAR's Kabbalat Shabbat is the greatest thing she's ever experienced and that Rabbi Brous is a rock star.

Adam Wergeles

Over the past few years, I have learned, much to my surprise, that there was more to Judaism than the drudgery of the Judaism of my youth. I have seen glimpses of the beauty and spirituality that can come with a more fully realized Jewish life. Never in a million years, did I ever contemplate that I would work with a bunch of dedicated people to form a spiritual community. However, working with Rabbi Brous and the other board members to help bring to fruition the splendid vision of IKAR has become both extraordinarily exciting and fulfilling. I am the father of two spectacular daughters, Maya and Emma, and the husband of our esteemed president, Melissa Balaban. By day, I am a lawyer.

Adam Miller

No biography on file.

Gregg Podell

No biography on file.

Adam Weiss

No biography on file.

*Former board member

All board member biographies are self-written.⁴⁵

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Aron, Isa. *Becoming a Congregation of Learners: Learning as a Key to Revitalizing Congregational Life*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing 2000.
- Aron, Isa. *The Self-Renewing Congregation: Organizational Strategies for Revitalizing Congregational Life*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing 2002.
- Carver, John. *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations*. 2nd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1997.
- Cohen, Steven M., and Arnold M. Eisen. *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2000.
- Drucker, Peter F. *Managing the Non-Profit Organization: Principles and Practices*. New York: HarperBusiness 1992.
- Elazar, Daniel J. *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society 1976.
- Fried, Stephen. *The New Rabbi: A Congregation Searches for Its Leader*. New York: Bantam Books 2002.
- Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point. How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. New York: Bay Back Books 2000.
- Herman, Robert D. and Associates. *The Jossey-Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1994.
- Lerner, Michael. *Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons 1994.
- Osherson, Samuel. *Rekindling the Flame: How Jews Are Coming Back To Their Faith*. New York: Harcourt, Inc. 2001.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. *Utilization-Focused Evaluation: The New Century Text*. 3rd Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications 1997.
- Roof, Wade Clark. *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*. San Francisco: HarperCollins 1993.
- Schwarz, Sidney. *Finding a Spiritual Home: How a New Generation of Jews Can Transform the American Synagogue*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 2000.
- Waskow, Arthur. *Godwrestling Round 2: Ancient Wisdom, Future Paths*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing 1996.

Pamphlets/Internal Documents

Beyt Tikkun: The House of Love and Healing: A Jewish Renewal Synagogue: Founding Perspective.
np: Beyt Tikkun.

Realizing Our Vision: The BJ Strategic Plan. np: Congregation B'nai Jeshurun 1999.

Articles

Aron, Isa. "The Self Renewing Organization: How Ideas From The Field Of Organizational Development Can Revitalize Jewish Institutions." Research Paper: The Jewish Agency for Israel October 2002. <
<http://www.jafi.org.il/education/moriya/Reports.html>>.

Cousens, Beth. "Concentric Circles of Self and Community: The Journey of a Young Family through Judaism." *Beth Cousens* 2004.

"CyberFaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online" from Pew Internet & American Life Project, 23 December 2001,
<http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_CyberFaith_Report.pdf> 11 March 2005.

Fax, Julie Gruenbaum. "Masters of Return: Becoming Religious Changes People's Lives — for Better and for Worse." *The Jewish Journal* 9 Sept 2004.

Josephs, Susan. "Justice, Thou Shalt Pursue." *The Jewish Week* 20 December 2001.
<<http://www.thejewishweek.com/bottom/specialcontent.php3?artid=253>>.

Kelner, Shaul. "A Charismatic Community: Congregation B'nai Jeshurun." *Jewish Leadership Case Series* No 1 January 1999: 1-16. Wexner Heritage Foundation.
<<http://www.wexnerheritage.org/asp/articles.asp?x=b>>.

Kopelowitz, Dr. Ezra. "What is "Jewishness," How is it Transmitted? A Look at the Nature of a Centrist Jewish Organization." Presented to Research Seminar on "Education and Belonging? The Experience of Israeli and Diaspora Jews." Department of Jewish Zionist Education, The Jewish Agency. 14 October 2001.

Lipstadt, Dr. Deborah. "Building Jewish Community in an Age of Diminishing Consensus." *The Wexner Heritage Foundation Leadership Library* August 1999: 1-19.

Mayer, Egon, Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar. "American Jewish Identity Survey 2001." *The Graduate Center of the City University of New York* 2001: 1-55. *The Center for Cultural Judaism* 2003. 14 January 2005. <<http://www.culturaljudaism.org>> .

Mellado, James. "Willow Creek Community Church (A)." *Harvard Business School* 1991: 1-22. *Harvard Business School Online*. Harvard Business School Publishing. 2 February 2005 <<http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu>>.

Olifson, Alan. "Awe, shucks: Stepping out of the trappings of Stealth Jew and into a yarmulke for a few days." *The Providence Phoenix* October 1-7, 2004.
<http://www.providencephoenix.com/features/out_there/documents/04164672.asp>, 25 October 2004.

"Panim el Panim: Face to Face - A Guide for Congregational Conversations about Worship." *Union for Reform Judaism*. <
<http://urj.org/worship/getstarted/getting%20started%20-%20a%20fanciful%20tale/>>.

- Popper, Nathaniel. "Faces Forward Joining the Battle To Capture the Hearts of Young Jews." *Forward* 9 July 2004.
 <<http://www.forward.com/main/article.php?ref=popper200407071125>>.
- "Synagogue Renewal." *The Leader* 2.2 (1999): 1+.
- Ulman, Jane. "New Prayer Communities Seek Spiritual High." *The Jewish Journal* 20 August 2004.
- Woocher, Jonathan. "If You Build It, Will The Come? Accessibility, Affordability and Participating in Jewish Communal Life." *The Center for Policy Options University of Judaism Policy Papers Series* April 2001: 1-28.

Internet Sources

- Alliance for Jewish Renewal*. Aleph. 25 October 2004. <<http://aleph.org/>>.
- B'nai Or Boston*. B'nai Or. 30 October 2004. <<http://www.bnaior.org/>>.
- Bayit Chadash*. Bayit Chadash. 9 November 2004. <<http://www.bayitchadash.org/>>.
- Beth El in Sudbury, MA*. April 2005. Beth El. 1 December 2004.
 <<http://www.bethelsudbury.org/>>.
- Beyt Tikkun*. Beyt Tikkun. 11 November 2004. <<http://www.beyttikkun.org/>>.
- IKAR*. IKAR. 1 January, 2005. <<http://www.ikar-la.org/>>
- Congregation B'nai Jeshurun*. B'nai Jeshurun. 3 November 2004. <<http://www.bj.org/>>.
- The Shalom Center*. The Shalom Center. 15 November 2004.
 <<http://www.shalomctr.org/>>.
- Wexner Foundation*. Wexner Foundation. 9 November 2004.
 <<http://www.wexnerfoundation.org/>>.
- Willow Creek Community Church*. Willow Creek. 22 November 2004.
 <<http://www.willowcreek.org/>>.
- Zeek: A Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture*. April 2005. Zeek. 20 November 2004.
 <<http://www.zeek.net/>>.

Congregations/Communities/Groups

- B'nai Jeshurun in New York, NY
- B'nai Or in Boston, Massachusetts
- Beth El in Sudbury, Massachusetts
- Beyt Chadash in Jaffa, Israel
- Beyt Tikkun in the San Francisco Bay Area, California
- Ohr HaTorah in Los Angeles, California
- P'nai Or in Princeton, New Jersey
- Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, Illinois

ENDNOTES

-
- ¹ Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family and Community in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 2.
- ² *Ibid* p.205
- ³ Sydney Schwarz, *Finding a Spiritual Home* (Jossey-Bass New York, NY, 2000), 219.
- ⁴ *Ibid*, xxiv.
- ⁵ See glossary for definition
- ⁶ Sydney Schwarz, *Finding a Spiritual Home* (Jossey-Bass New York, NY, 2000), 263.
- ⁷ Samuel Osherson, *Rekindling the Flame: The Many Paths to a Vibrant Judaism*, (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 17.
- ⁸ *Ibid*, 7
- ⁹ “CyberFaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online” from Pew Internet & American Life Project, 23 December 2001, <http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_CyberFaith_Report.pdf> 11 March 2005
- ¹⁰ *Beit Tikkun: The House of Love and Healing: A Jewish Renewal Synagogue: Founding Perspective*, 13.
- ¹¹ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, (New York: Bay Back Books, 2000), 132.
- ¹² Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Harpercollins; 1st ed edition 1993)
- ¹³ Nathaniel Popper, “Joining the Battle To Capture the Hearts of Young Jews,” in *Forward*, 9 July 2004, <<http://www.forward.com/main/article.php?ref=popper200407071125>>, (11 November 2004).
- ¹⁴ Samuel Osherson, *Rekindling the Flame: The Many Paths to a Vibrant Judaism*, (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 2.
- ¹⁵ IKAR Web site home page. 29 January 2005, Author Rabbi Sharon Brous, <<http://www.ikar-la.org/index.html>>, 29 January 2005.
- ¹⁶ Planning Meeting Agenda, 14 April 2004.
- ¹⁷ Joshua Avedon, New Shul Meeting Notes, 14 April, 2004.
- ¹⁸ Shabbat Invitation Email, 23 April 2004.
- ¹⁹ See Initial Vision Statement, 19 April 2004.
- ²⁰ Planning Meeting Agenda, 2 May, 2004.
- ²¹ Joshua Avedon, Personal notes, 2 May 2004.
- ²² Planning Meeting Agenda, 10 May 2004.
- ²³ Jane Ulman, “New Prayer Communities Seek Spiritual High,” in *The Jewish Journal*, 20 August 2004.
- ²⁴ *Ibid*
- ²⁵ Julie Gruenbaum Fax, “Masters of Return: Becoming Religious Changes People’s Lives — for Better and for Worse.” in *The Jewish Journal*, 9 Sept 2004.
- ²⁶ Susan Josephs, “Justice, Thou Shalt Pursue,” in *The Jewish Week*, 20 December 2001. <<http://www.thejewishweek.com/bottom/specialcontent.php3?artid=253>>, 10 November 2004.
- ²⁷ Alan Olifson, “Awe, shucks: Stepping out of the trappings of Stealth Jew and into a yarmulke for a few days,” in *The Providence Phoenix*, October 1-7, 2004. <http://www.providencephoenix.com/features/out_there/documents/04164672.asp>, 25 October 2004.
- ²⁸ James Mellado, “Willow Creek Community Church (A),” Harvard Business School 1991: 1-22. Harvard Business School Online. (Harvard Business School Publishing, 1991), <<http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu>>, 2 February 2005, 1.
- ²⁹ IKAR website, <www.ikar-la.org/index.html>, 25 May 2004.
- ³⁰ IKAR brochure, 13 September 2004.
- ³¹ IKAR website, <www.ikar-la.org/school.html>, 15 September 2004.
- ³² Email to the IKAR community about High Holy Days 5765 10 September 2004
- ³³ Adam Weiss Evite, 12 November 2004.
- ³⁴ IKAR website, <www.ikar-la.org/dayhikes.html>, 24 January 2005.
- ³⁵ See Appendix A Focus Group Release Form.

³⁶ Mellado, "Willow Creek Community Church," 1.

³⁷ IKAR focus group participant, 26 March 2004.

³⁸ Email from Ross Levinson to drum choir, 20 January 2005.

³⁹ Mellado, "Willow Creek Community Church," 8.

⁴⁰ Mellado, "Willow Creek Community Church," 10.

⁴¹ Amichai Lau Lavie is an Israeli-born mythologist, storyteller and teacher of Judaic Literature. Storahelling is a radical fusion of storytelling, Torah, traditional ritual theater and contemporary performance art.

⁴² Mellado, "Willow Creek Community Church," 6.

⁴³ Ibid 8.

⁴⁴ IKAR Web site rabbi page. 1 May 2005, Author Rabbi Sharon Brous, <<http://www.ikar-la.org/rabbi.html>>, 1 January 2005.

⁴⁵ IKAR Web site board page. 1 January 2005, Authors various, <<http://www.ikar-la.org/board.html>>, 1 January 2005.