

# What is a Communal Hashkafa and Why do we Need It?

## An Identity Guide for Diverse Independent Jewish Communities



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## Introduction

Independent Jewish communities are a growing phenomenon in the Jewish world that is positive and exciting. Just as individual Jews adopt various hashkafot<sup>1</sup> that define many aspects of their lives, it is crucial for diverse independent Jewish communities to develop a communal hashkafa with its associated principles, values, and approaches in order to define their group identity.

What makes this author's model communal hashkafa unique is its use of boundaries to stay within a defined halakhic<sup>2</sup> framework while ensuring flexibility in practical interpretations. It strikes a balance between openness to personal diversity among community members and adherence to religious and halakhic ideals and precepts. It supports a Judaism devoid of denomination and is a model that the author feels will support 21st century Judaism and beyond.

## What Are Independent Communities?

An independent community is not just a synagogue or a minyan<sup>3</sup>, but an organization whose goal is to build a vibrant Jewish community which meets the cultural, religious, and social needs of local Jews. An independent community has the freedom to choose how the organization identifies, determines communal halakha, approaches communal practices, embraces diversity, and affirms the value of every Jew.

## What is a Hashkafa?

Hashkafa (pl Hashkafot) in Hebrew means outlook. The term can be used to mean a personal or group worldview: a paradigm of thought. A Hashkafa is how a person, organization or community views the realm of Torah observance due to their understanding of the overarching principles and spirit of Torah. Hashkafa works in conjunction with halakha as interpretations and applications of halakha differ according to one's hashkafa.

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<sup>1</sup> Hashkafa (pl Hashkafot) Hebrew השקפה 'outlook': Personal or group worldview.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrew הלכתית 'adhering to הַלְכָה halakha', 'Jewish law'; halakha is the way a Jew is directed by Torah to conduct oneself.

<sup>3</sup> Hebrew מנין 'a quorum'(pl minyan): A group of 10 Jewish men over the age of Bar Mitzvah, or 10 Jewish adults over the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah in an egalitarian setting. Also used to mean a prayer group that meets on a regular basis or that follows a specific set of customs or ideals.

## **What is a Communal Hashkafa?**

The term communal hashkafa is used here as a broader “big mind” use of the term hashkafa to denote the general shared values and ideology held within a communal organization and the expression of how an independent community approaches communal practices and embraces diversity. A communal hashkafa defines how the organization views the realm of Torah observance and its inclusion of overarching principles and spirit of Torah. It establishes the general shared ideology held within the organization as well as the reasons behind the ideology. In addition it provides guidelines that reflect the spiritual vision of the community and supports walking a Jewish path together. These guidelines create a container for leadership enabling the answering of communal ritual and spiritual questions, and addressing social and religious realities. A communal hashkafa expresses how the organization identifies Jewishly and chooses to engage in communal observance together; it does not dictate how individuals live their lives Jewishly.

## **Why a Communal Hashkafa?**

The development of a communal hashkafa is a foundational piece for diverse independent communities as it helps define the outlook of the organization and determines institutional values and policies. It also influences programming. When the Torah-rooted values and principles held by the organization are clearly defined and guidelines have been developed, ritual oriented policies and practices are contextualized and the eclectic needs of the community members are met. Adopting a communal hashkafa allows for the expression of inclusive spiritual identity, organizational evolution and the feeding of the souls of Jews communally, no matter what their personal practices. A Jewish community without an established communal hashkafa is like a canoe without a paddle at the mercy of the changing wind and waves. Just as a canoe’s paddle and those who wield it guide its overall efficiency and performance, so a communal hashkafa guides the vision and leadership of the community and impacts the conclusions reached for shared communal observance. Rabbis, lay leaders, board members and staff may come and go, but the community remains. With a communal hashkafa in place, its course is true and sure.

## **Leadership and the Hashkafa**

Personal hashkafot affect the way one thinks about things, and therefore a communal hashkafa necessitates being inclusive of a wide range of personal hashkafot. Embracing intra-Jewish pluralism and walking a halakhic path is not always a simple combination. If pluralism is unconstrained, or too broad a range of difference is incorporated, there is a risk of most or all of the ritual aspects of Judaism being abandoned which leaves the community without any definition of Jewish identity or vessel for Jewish spirituality. If, however, there is too much constraint, the communal identity becomes too restrictive and the organization is no longer inclusive of the wide range of practices within the community.

The established hashkafa also affects what kind of staff the community searches for and hires. Ideally a communal hashkafa should be in place before searching for a rabbi or other religious leadership. If the community already has a rabbi or other religious leadership before a communal hashkafa is in place it is important that the hashkafa is developed in such a way that the religious leadership is comfortable working within the hashkafa to be established. In addition the rabbi and other religious leadership must be supportive of the halakhic methodology that will be used to determine the range of communal observance practices that fall within the boundaries of the hashkafa.

## **Steps for Developing a Hashkafa**

The steps below are meant to guide independent community leaders in establishing an appropriate communal hashkafa for their communities.

### Step 1

- a) Determine the committee responsible for the creation and development of a communal hashkafa.
- b) Determine the committee responsible for the creation, development and review of ritual/religious oriented policies and protocols.

### Step 2

Adopt foundational Torah values to serve as the anchor for the communal hashkafa.

### Step 3

Adopt approaches and principles for the foundation of the communal hashkafa.

### Step 4

Adopt a halakhic methodology for determining boundaries and/or stances on a range of communal observance that falls within the boundaries of the hashkafa.

### Step 5

Using the adopted halakhic methodology, formulate general ritual oriented policies and Minhag Hamakom, ‘the custom of the place’, that work within the boundaries of the hashkafa for a range of communal observance.

## Foundational Torah Values

A communal hashkafa, with its embedded halakhic system, sets guidelines and boundaries for how people relate to Torah values together as a community. The Torah values adopted by the organization serve as the anchor for the hashkafa. Values that concern human relations and draw Jews to the world of Torah are foundational and imperative for a stable community.

## Examples

### Ahava<sup>4</sup> אֶהְבֶּה **Love and care for others...**

Ahava is paramount and a foundation of the Torah. The Torah instructs to "love your neighbor as yourself"<sup>5</sup> and to "love the stranger as yourself"<sup>6</sup>. It also instructs to “love Hashem with all our heart, soul and strength”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> love

<sup>5</sup> Vayikra 19:18

<sup>6</sup> Vayikra 19:34

<sup>7</sup> Devarim 6:5

### **Chesed<sup>8</sup> חֶסֶד & Tzedek<sup>9</sup> צְדָקָה Engage in social justice...**

Chesed is a cornerstone of Torah values and an expression of ahava. The concept of chesed appears in the Torah more than 190 times. It refers to Hashem's kindness and love toward humanity as well as humanity's kindness and love for each other. Tzedek means 'justice, fairness, straightness, honesty, equity, the path of truth' and the concept of tzedek expresses the idea of aspiring to act justly, with righteousness and with equity. The famous line צְדָקָה צְדָקָה, תִּרְדֹּף is translated by Everett Fox as 'Equity, equity you are to pursue'<sup>10</sup>. Having chesed and tzedek as foundational values allows the organization to provide for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the community in an unbiased way.

### **Shalom<sup>11</sup> שְׁלוֹמִים & Achdut<sup>12</sup> אַחְדוּת Pursue peace and unity...**

Shalom and achdut are interconnected<sup>13</sup> and come on the heels of ahava and chesed. With shalom and achdut held as organizational values, relationships take precedence and unity and respect amongst community members takes on the essence of a brit/covenant. The Hebrew word brit means 'something that binds, a contract, a pact that bridges two parts together'. This reminds us to care for others<sup>14</sup> and to remember standing together at Mount Sinai<sup>15</sup>. The values of shalom and achdut are vital to the success of the organization. The first verse of the Shma<sup>16</sup> proclaims the unity of Hashem<sup>17</sup> which is then followed by the words "and you shall love...".

### **Kevod Habriyot<sup>18</sup> כְּבוֹד הַבְּרִיּוֹת Act like we are created in the divine image...**

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<sup>8</sup> lovingkindness

<sup>9</sup> righteousness

<sup>10</sup> Devarim 16:20 תִּרְדֹּף--לִמְעַן תִּחְיֶה Equity, equity you are to pursue, In order that you may live And possess the land that YHWH your God is giving you!

<sup>11</sup> completeness or wholeness; peace

<sup>12</sup> unity; oneness

<sup>13</sup> This is hinted at since the gematria of the letters of both ahava and echad is 13.

<sup>14</sup> See B'reishit 18:17-19 where Avraham bargains with Hashem to save the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

<sup>15</sup> Devarim 29:9-14

<sup>16</sup> Devarim 6:4 which promotes the belief in God's unity

<sup>17</sup> שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

<sup>18</sup> respect for others and the preservation of human dignity; lit honor of created beings

Kevod Habriyot is one of the most fundamental assumptions of Jewish ethics<sup>19</sup> and Halakha<sup>20</sup>. It connects with the idea of being created B'tselem Elohim<sup>21</sup>. When discussing this concept, the Talmud Bavli<sup>22</sup> allows for flexibility to waive rabbinic mitzvot, monetary mitzvot and passive non-observance of positive Torah mitzvot in order to preserve human dignity<sup>23</sup>. The Talmud Yerushalmi<sup>24</sup> takes this one step further stating that Kevod Habriyot overrides even an active breach of a Torah mitzvah<sup>25</sup>, although they qualify that this is only on a temporary basis<sup>26</sup>. The concept of kevod habriyot has hashkafic importance, especially in an egalitarian community,<sup>27</sup> along with the concept of Lo L'vayeish.<sup>28</sup>

### **Avodat Hashem<sup>29</sup> עֲבוֹדַת הַשֵּׁם Apply Torah values in the service of Hashem...**

There is a beautiful aggadic passage in the Talmud Bavli<sup>30</sup> where the sages debate what they consider the greatest principle of the Torah<sup>31</sup>. In another similar dispute<sup>32</sup> the conclusion emphasizes the values of B'tselem Elohim and Kevod Habriyot mentioned above, as foundational guides for interpersonal ethics. The conclusions in these two disputes teach us that

<sup>19</sup> see BT Brachot 19b; Megilla 3b; Shabbat 81ab and 94b; Eruvin 41b; Bava Kama 79b; Menachot 37b and 38a

<sup>20</sup> Jewish Law

<sup>21</sup> the human person as God's image; Since humans are created B'Tselem Elohim human souls strive for unity and oneness.

<sup>22</sup> the Babylonian Talmud

<sup>23</sup> BT Brachot 19

<sup>24</sup> The Jerusalem Talmud; The Talmud Yerushalmi was codified about a hundred or two hundred years before the Bavli

<sup>25</sup> from the Hebrew root 'to connect'

<sup>26</sup> JT Nazir 7: 56

<sup>27</sup> see R Eliezer Waldenberg on hearing aids; R Mendel Shapira and R Daniel Sperber on the baraita in BT Megillah 23a

<sup>28</sup> not to embarrass or shame someone "To humiliate a person is tantamount to shedding blood" BT Bava Metzia 58b-59a

<sup>29</sup> divine service

<sup>30</sup> see introduction to the commentary HaKotev to Ein Yaakov: the collected aggadic passages of the Talmud; also see Netivot Olam, Ahavat Re'a by the Maharal

<sup>31</sup> R Ben Azzai says it is that we are created B'tselem Elohim; R Ben Zoma says it is the principle of the Shema; R Ben Nannas says it is love your neighbor as yourself; and R Ben Pazzi brings a verse from Shemot (29:39) that refers to the order that the sacrifices were brought (from shemot 29:39) - which was adopted as halakha.

<sup>32</sup> between R. Akiba and R Ben Azzaia about which is a greater rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself" or "This is the book of the descendants of Adam"; see Bereshit Rabbah (בראשית רבה פרשה כד ד"ה ז ר' תנחומא); see also Sifra: Midrash Halakha on Vayikra, which presents the same dispute, but the sages names are reversed. See also JT Nedarim 9:4; Rabad on Bereshit Rabbah

it is the application of all the great Torah values and high ideals in the world that together, in action, form the basis for avodat hashem<sup>33</sup>.

### **Ohev Et HaB'riyot<sup>34</sup> אוהב את הבריות Love all humanity and draw them close to the Torah...**

It would be remiss to discuss the above values without acknowledging that these concepts pertain to all humanity<sup>35</sup>. The precept to "love your neighbor as yourself"<sup>36</sup> is best understood to include all humanity otherwise the word used would not be 'neighbor' but 'brother' or 'your people'<sup>37</sup>.

The same word עֵל used for neighbor in the verse in Vayikra<sup>38</sup> is also used in the Nach<sup>39</sup> to describe David's friend Hushai the Archite who was a non-Jew<sup>40</sup>. Most diverse independent communities include people who are not halakhically Jewish<sup>41</sup> and they must be viewed as and made to feel as full members of the Kehilla<sup>42</sup>. The author likes the term K'rovei Israel<sup>43</sup> and has defined it for her community's purposes as:

- A non-Jew who is an active member of our community or whose spouse or loved one is an active member of our community.
- A non-Jew who lives a Jewish lifestyle or is in the process of learning how to live a Jewish lifestyle but who has not (yet) converted.

<sup>33</sup> service to hashem; see Shemot 10:26, 23:25; Devarim 10:12-16, 10:20, 11:13, 13:5, 28:47; I Shmuel 12:20-22; Taanit 2a:11; Avot 1:2-3; Sotah 31a:8; Arakhin 11a:11; Mishneh Torah, Prayer and the Priestly Blessing 1:1, Repentance 10; Duties of the Heart, Third Treatise on Service of God 1:1-4, Eighth Treatise on Examining the Soul 3:164-166; Sefer Kuzari 5:25

<sup>34</sup> loving humankind

<sup>35</sup> R Pinchas Eliahu of Vilna, sefer hubris, section 2 discourse 13

<sup>36</sup> Vayikra 19:18 וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹתָּךְ see also commentary of Rabbi Raphael Samson Hirsch

<sup>37</sup> see also R Pinchas Eliahu of Vilna, sefer habrit 2:13

<sup>38</sup> Vayikra 19:18 וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹתָּךְ

<sup>39</sup> Prophets and Writings

<sup>40</sup> 2 Samuel 16:16 חוּשַׁי הָאֲרָכִי רֵעֵהוּ הַגִּי

<sup>41</sup> spouses, children, relatives, people studying for conversion and other active community members

<sup>42</sup> This is pertinent in organization membership discussions. The place for discussions of who is a Jew might concern board and leadership positions as well as, of course, aliyot to the Torah etc. but the author feels that membership in the organization should not be exclusionary.

<sup>43</sup> Literally "those who are close to [the people of] Israel". The author was not successful in determining who coined the term K'rov Yisrael for this purpose.



### **Kehillah<sup>44</sup> קהילה Value community...**

Kehilla is the result of all of the above. When we value each member of the community as an individual as well as a part of the whole, and we project lovingkindness, unity, and respect we are inclusive. Inclusion values diversity, fosters respectful discourse and allows for meaningful relationships between community members. True community offers friendship, compassion and acceptance to every individual while viewing the collective as an integral part of the Jewish experience. As mentioned above, a communal hashkafa defines how the organization chooses to engage in communal observance together, it does not dictate how individuals live their lives Jewishly.

### **Torah תורה Live Torah...**

Torah is the foundation for all of the above and the basis for Hashkafa.

### **Ometz Ruach<sup>45</sup> אומץ רוח Stand True with Strength of Spirit**

#### **Foundational Approaches and Principles**

An inclusive halakha-based communal hashkafa approaches commitment towards the sanctity and relevance of the written and oral Torahs, as well as the decrees and laws instituted by the Rabbis, and any subsequent fulfillment of mitzvot from an open halakhic mindset. Judaism is not a set of beliefs, it is a way of walking through life using the Torah as guidance and a blueprint for proper living. The root of the word halakha means to walk or go; halakha is the way a Jew is directed by Torah to conduct oneself<sup>46</sup>.

The approaches and principles adopted by the organization serve as the foundation for the hashkafa. The approaches and principles are then used to establish the boundaries that the hashkafa and its related halakha encompass, which affects how the organization holds halakhically and practically. The model principles exemplified below attempt to set up a system

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<sup>44</sup> community

<sup>45</sup> courage

<sup>46</sup> Many also consider the goal of halakha as connecting to Hashem through the mitzvot and aiding in tikkun olam.

that honors and respects the traditional concept of halakha including the principle that halakhah must be in accord with “the ways of pleasantness”<sup>47</sup>.

## Examples

### Boundaries for halakhic communal observance & minhag hamakom

An ideal communal hashkafa for a diverse independent community includes the ability to set a range for communal practices - all of which are defined as halakhic but which may encompass a substantial range in interpretation, stringency or tradition. A open minded halakha-based hashkafa is concerned with assuring that communal values, approaches and observance are based on the foundations of the Torah. This author’s model is unique in its use of boundaries to stay within a defined halakhic framework while ensuring flexibility in practical interpretations. Halakhic Judaism works under the operative assumption that, immanently, the message and text of Torah is open to diverse interpretations. Therefore authorities and communities may arrive at different conclusions concerning the application of halakha and copious Jewish literature includes a wonderful range of options that adhere to Torah principles, ethics and values. Within halakhic Judaism there are distinctions between halakha which comes directly from the Torah and halakha that was set by the rabbinical sages, with varying opinions on which mitzvot and interpretations fall into which category. Mitzvot that come directly from the Torah<sup>48</sup> carry superior authority to rabbinic ones<sup>49</sup>.

When setting the boundaries for communal observance, the author has chosen halakha d'oraita<sup>50</sup> as one boundary. The boundary on the other side is determined by the organizational identity. Anything that falls outside either of these boundaries is considered not within the communal hashkafa and therefore non-halakhic for the purpose of communal observance, even if

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<sup>47</sup> Mishlei 3:17 "דְּרָכֶיהָ דִּרְכֵי נֹעַם וְכָל נְתִיבֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם"; This principle is exemplified in many instances throughout the Talmud. See R Eliezer Berkovits, HaHalakha, Koha V'Tafkida (1981) [Hebrew] – expanded version of Not in Heaven.

<sup>48</sup> referred to as de'oraita

<sup>49</sup> referred to as de'rabbanan

<sup>50</sup> Aramaic אִתְּתָא 'of instruction': used to mean a halakha originating from the Torah (versus rabbinical halakhot/laws).

considered halakhically permissible by others. For instance, if an organization has an egalitarian identity any practices that exclude women are outside the boundaries of the hashkafa and therefore are considered not within the halakha as defined by Minhag Hamakom and not included in regular programming. We will see below however, that the example hashkafa does not exclude all activities that are not within the communal hashkafa but rather they can be included via an approval process (to be determined by the organization) with clear advertising. When deciding on the halakhic and hashkafic boundaries for communal practices, many different interpretations and approaches should be considered as well as how any subsequent adopted stances will affect all aspects of the community.

### **Midrash<sup>51</sup> Torah**

Interpreting Torah in a way that has relevance for contemporary life can be challenging as evidenced by the prolific and varied interpretations by sages and scholars over the ages. Many pieces of Torah, upon simple reading, seem to be obscure, ambiguous, incomprehensible and sometimes even unethical or farcical. Tools of Midrash Halakha<sup>52</sup> which apply methods of interpretation to the text have therefore been used since before mishnaic times to shed light on certain less clear parts. The key when exploring how best to interpret for the practical communal observance of mitzvot is to first trace the source of the halachic issue in the Tanach, looking at all the instances of a specific topic, then look for its source in Midrash Halakha and see where it is first mentioned in those texts. One can then move on to other texts, in order of antiquity, using clues such as key words in Mishnaic language and asking questions such as, is this the only way that this text can be understood? When drawing from talmudic sources it is important to analyze the text, comparing variants in both talmuds and related sugiyot. Teshuvot<sup>53</sup> and commentaries can then be used to see how various rabbinic sources throughout the ages understood and applied interpretation for their communities.

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<sup>51</sup> The Hebrew root שׂרַח means to seek out, to analyze, to investigate, to look for

<sup>52</sup> methods of investigating meaning of text

<sup>53</sup> rabbinic responses to a question posed about halakhic practice; also referred to as responsa

### **Koah d'heteira adif<sup>54</sup>**

An independent community has the unique opportunity to create its own Minhag ‘custom’ to observe together within the halakhic framework described by the determined Hashkafa. Since the time of the tanna'im<sup>55</sup>, our great sages and rabbis have searched for solutions with which to confront new issues. They combed through ancient sources to find solutions that people could live with and that supported their interpretations of Torah based on what they saw as best for their communities in their time, place and situation. This is exemplified in the proliferation of different laws, rules, and practices throughout our history and in different segments of Judaism today. Due to the diverse makeup of many independent communities, the need for unity, and 21st century realities the author recommends adopting a general methodology of koach d'heteira adif when determining what falls within the boundaries of a communal hashkafa. It is important here to reiterate that a communal hashkafa does not dictate or even recommend how individuals live their lives Jewishly but is simply a vessel to hold the community together within a halakhic framework in the best way for the community.

### **Embody Torat Chayim and positive meaningful observance**

The book of Mishlei<sup>56</sup> refers to the Torah as “a tree of life to those who grasp her”<sup>57</sup> It is a Torat Chayim<sup>58</sup>, a dynamic process that requires ongoing chiddush<sup>59</sup> in order to remain relevant. The sages of the mishnah and talmud interpreted the Torah as they deemed fit given the changed circumstances after the cataclysmic destruction of the temple. Today the Jewish world is also in crisis. Large segments of Jews feel the lack of meaningful uplifting Jewish observance, as well as the sting of exclusion, and often seek other options, either in a non-halakhic framework or outside Jewish tradition. Independent communities are well poised to be inclusive and to offer a variety of positive meaningful ways to express Jewish communal life. The Torah does not

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<sup>54</sup> ‘the force of permissive ruling is paramount’; Favoring the position of leniency. See BT, Beitza 2b; BT, Berachot 60a; also R. Menahem ha-Me'iri on Hulin 49b

<sup>55</sup> Rabbinic sages whose views are recorded in the Mishnah or lived in mishnaic times

<sup>56</sup> Proverbs

<sup>57</sup> Mishlei 3:18; עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמְחַיִּים קָה

<sup>58</sup> Living Torah

<sup>59</sup> innovative interpretation; see the writings of the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, R. Chaim David Halevi Z'l among others

require or desire strife and anguish in its application but rather that we serve Hashem with simcha<sup>60</sup> imbuing our observance of mitzvot with kindness, enthusiasm and positive intent. Community building is often the most important challenge for diverse independent communities. With compassionate and empathetic planning, services classes and holiday events can be developed that are enjoyable, educational, inspiring and meaningful. However, it is important to note that what may be meaningful to one person may not be to another. One way to approach meeting the various ritual needs and desires of the community is to offer multiple programming “streams” all of which fall within the determined boundaries of the hashkafa, but which support many different expressions of Jewish life. Any “streams” defined should be looked at as a general guide for programming and advertising purposes.

### **Halakhic Methodology**

Before determining the range of communal observance that falls within the boundaries of the hashkafa there needs to be a set methodology by which options are assessed. When determining general ritual oriented policies and specific communal practices for an independent community, a broad range of perspectives need to be considered, and sources should be researched and weighed in light of the specific time, place and circumstances. It is important that any adopted stances will create comfort and ease, a sense of belonging, and of being seen and heard.

The methodology below is suggested by the author for use by the Hashkafa Committee in conjunction with the Rabbi/Lay Leaders to ensure consistency and a healthy balance of power.

### **Example methodology**

The following methodology is gleaned from the halakhic methodology the author learned in semikha studies with Rabbi Haim Ovadia.

1. Establish through research the origin of the law or practice under debate.

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<sup>60</sup> see Devarim 28:47; Ramchal, Messilat Yesarim, Chapter 18

- a) Determine whether the practice is based on (in descending order of importance) the halakhic parts of the Torah, the non-halakhic Torah narratives, the Nach (Prophets and Writings), the Mishnah, the Talmud, the Geonic period, the Early or late Medieval period, the Post Renaissance period, or more modern times.
  - b) Determine where and when the particular law or custom originated. (i.e. amongst Lithuanian mitnagdim of the 19th century; amongst the Persian Jews in the 6th century; amongst the Jews of Israel in the 2nd century etc.)
2. When looking at sources, include minority opinions and determine the context in which a text was written along with its function and purpose/inferred intent by the author in line with the understanding and mindset of the day. Have there been modern developments that perhaps caused unforeseen undesirable ramifications of the various rulings that were established concerning the law or practice under debate?
  3. Enquire into whether the practice was a reaction to circumstances in a certain time or place and if so determine whether the practice still holds relevance for the community as 21st century Jews.
  4. Discuss the current implications for the community if the practice is adopted by the organization.
  5. Discuss whether adopting this practice will have future ramifications for the organization.
  6. Discuss whether all participants agree that this is the best outcome for the diverse community and if possible come to a unanimous decision.
  7. Written recommendations, including halakhic support as needed, are submitted to the other committee members by the proposing member(s)<sup>61</sup> for their final review and input.

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<sup>61</sup> or the secretary of the committee

## **General Ritual Oriented Policies**

Without a clear understanding of the boundaries of the communal hashkafa there can be no real shared communal identity or social adhesion. When there is debate concerning what is beyond the boundaries of the communal hashkafa the result is communal conflict and sectarianism. The building of a viable healthy Jewish community necessitates clarity on the range of shared communal observance practices and the extent that differences are accommodated within the boundaries of the hashkafa.

In order to establish communal clarity and integrity concerning the acceptable range of communal observance practices there is a need for ritual oriented policy. These policies must be consistent with the hashkafa as represented in identity and mission statements. It is important to note that just as the community rabbi of independent communities partners with the executive director and the president in the community building and programming aspects of the organization it is important that the community rabbi partner with the Hashkafa Committee concerning important ritual/religious oriented decision making that affects the community. When proposing new ritual oriented policy or reviewing current ritual oriented policy the Hashkafa Committee works in conjunction with the Community Rabbi, who is an ex-officio member of the committee and given the due respect of their professional status, in order to best meet the specific needs of the congregation or changes in circumstances at any given time.

### **General policy examples**

1. The organization self-identifies as an independent egalitarian pluralistic community for Jewish life.
2. The term independent reflects that the organization is not affiliated with any particular denomination.
3. The term egalitarian reflects the inclusion of all gender identities within the communal hashkafa and Minhag Hamakom as well as the ideal of shared authority and mutuality within the organization.

4. The organization's chosen model is Jewish cultural pluralism which allows for a myriad of Jewish identities and hashkafot as well as halakhic boundaries consisting of defined values and communal practices.
5. The organization is halakha-based and therefore the rabbi/lay leadership is halakhic by some definition and is comfortable working within the adopted hashkafa as well as with the myriad of Jewish identities and hashkafot represented in the greater community.
6. The organization's programming is halakha-based and this necessitates an extremely broad open-minded interpretation of halakha that can accommodate, as much as possible, freedom of expression for the different streams of programming within the hashkafa.
7. Practice, within the chosen range of halakhic interpretation, can differ between and within the different programming streams.
8. Proposed programming, services or events that fall outside the organization's halakha-based identity and communal hashkafa<sup>62</sup> can be included on a case by case basis via an approval process (to be determined) with clear advertising.
9. Advertising includes all pertinent information so people know what to expect.

### **Minhag Hamakom**

In addition to the need for ritual oriented policy there is also a need for established halakhic boundaries and/or stances on a range of communal observance practices to ensure communal coherence and transparency. These stances also must be consistent with the hashkafa as represented in identity and mission statements.

The wording of the recommended stances should utilize languaging such as "allowed within the organizational halakhic stance" to reflect the fact that it is not proscriptive for all programming but allowable within the boundaries of the determined hashkafa and its related halakha. As questions arise they should be addressed by the Hashkafa Committee in conjunction with the Rabbi/Lay Leaders as described in the example methodology above.

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<sup>62</sup> for example non-egalitarian minyans or non-halakhic observance practices



## Minhag Hamakom Example

- **Does the organization allow or require the use of a mechitza during prayer services in the regular programming?**

**Situation:** Some members of independent communities are uncomfortable praying in a mixed seating atmosphere while others find the use of a mechitza disagreeable.

**Recommended Stance:** Though use of a mechitza falls outside the halakha-based identity and communal hashkafa for an organization that self-identifies as an independent egalitarian pluralistic community, the communal hashkafa includes a tri-chitza which is available in all regular service programming.

### In Conclusion

A communal hashkafa guides the vision and leadership of the community as well as providing a shared identity for its members. Adopting a communal hashkafa that describes and supports the spiritual religious identity of the organization as stated in its identity and mission statement is critical for a diverse independent community to thrive in the 21st century. Establishing a communal hashkafa that includes Torah-rooted values, approaches, principles as well as boundaries for halakhic communal ritual and spiritual observance practices, enables independent communities to embrace intra-Jewish pluralism, preserve the halakhic nature of the organization, ensure social adhesion and build a viable healthy community.

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