Spending Down in the 21st Century

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In North America, AVI CHAI's planned spend-down has prompted a shift in our thinking. We have moved from an *abundance mindset*—operating with abundant financial resources and abundant time—to a *scarcity mindset*—trying to make a difference with scarce financial resources and scarce time. Our abundance mindset enabled us to choose to do many good things without choosing among the competing good things. Our abundance mindset did not require us to think about partners and successors—we had the money, time and human resources to do it ourselves and do it well. By contrast, a scarcity mindset requires that we choose among competing goods. It also makes us think about sustaining the goods we choose, since we will not be around to enable them to continue. Scarcity at AVI CHAI makes us shift the onus of propulsion from us to our key partners—other philanthropists, key institutions advancing Jewish Literacy (L), Religious Purposefulness (R) or, or Jewish Peoplehood (P), or communities. And scarcity shifts our attention from pushing products to strengthening markets—of consumers and producers.

Specifically and practically, this new scarcity mindset is leading us away from exclusively planting trees and toward fertilizing soil—away from providing LRP programs to day schools and camps and their personnel, and toward attending to the conditions and contexts that will enable those settings and people to thrive. Whereas we once focused exclusively and successfully on curricula, personnel enrichment programs, and other LRP enhancements for camps and schools, we now also consider how to ensure that day schools are affordable for the foreseeable future (strengthening the viability of the day school market for its consumers), and that core institutions that serve day schools are strong (strengthening the viability of the day school market for its producers). This has been the impetus for the efforts of our "workgroups" and our strengthening institutions activity.

Meanwhile, as has been reported previously, the North American staff and the executive committee of the board have spend much of this past year engaged in an intensive education about the workings of this new 21st Century. As we have read, talked, and beheld the technological wonders of the world around us, we see that just as AVI CHAI's spend-down offers a new mindset, these remarkable (and perhaps revolutionary) times offer AVI CHAI a new toolkit. And perhaps ironically, whereas the spend-down induced mindset is a scarcity mindset, the new toolkit proffered by this digital age is one that invites a mentality of abundance.

Let us take a moment to peer into the realities of this new world. Once upon a time, in the middle of the 1400s, a man named Gutenberg revolutionized the world by inventing the printing press. The printing press enabled mass literacy, and mass literacy empowered previously ignorant masses of people, and the rest, as they say, is history. Down came the power of kings

¹ This report was originally submitted as a Memo to the Trustees of AVI CHAI, in May, 2010. It is informed by a year's worth of learning undertaken at AVI CHAI North America.

² AVI CHAI refers to its core focus on Jewish Literacy, Religious Purposefulness and Jewish Peoplehood as LRP.

Think about what has happened to journalism, retail, entertainment, and countless other sectors. Once there were THE New York Times and THE Wall Street Journal, now there are the so-called pajama media, which can be anybody and everybody who cares to write something and press send. When the pajama media are in countries such as Iran where the professional media have limited access, the pajama media become our best (and sometimes only) source of information. What was once scarce has become abundant.

Once there were retail stores where physical space and local preferences defined what was for sale. Now there are online stores with infinite shelf space serving a global marketplace. What was once defined by scarcity is now unabashedly abundant. Once there was Blockbuster; now there is Netflix. Once there was Tower Records offering 50,000 tracks during store hours; now there is iTunes, with upwards of 25 million tracks available on demand. Once there was network television; now there is YouTube, which offers at one time more content than the entire movie and television industries have produced throughout time. What was once scarcity has become abundance.

Once there were photographers, today there is Flikr. Once there were weekend garage sales, today there is eBay, where one person's hand-me-down is another person's treasure, and where every day millions of people (including the disabled and the home-bound) make their livings. What was once scarcity has become abundance. When in the third quarter of 2008 the stock market tanked and "no one had any money," a candidate running for President of the United States raised \$175 million in small donations, the largest amount ever raised in any political campaign in a single quarter.

In today's world, everyone and anyone can be a journalist, a movie producer, a retailer. Each and every one of us can do this from anywhere at any time. And there is no telling whether the most influential ones are the "professionals" or the "amateurs."

The age of abundance means community and collaboration do not require institutions (constrained by time, space, and money). Collaboration requires no travel, no wait time, and no common location.

The age of abundance means we can all be producers (of goods, content, meaning, ideas, and effort) even as we are all consumers (of the same). What we produce can be infinitely customized, personalized and adapted. And likewise each of us can be an infinitely discriminating consumer—of news, products and services, ideas and entertainment, with the power of the most powerful available to each of us in the form of our hand-held mobile phones. The age of abundance means there are infinite messages, and anybody and everybody can be a messenger.

The age of abundance means small is the new big—the entire "long tail" of the less "mainstream" can make themselves heard, yes for worse, and yes, for better.

Most of us feel at sea in this world of abundance. (After all, the post-Gutenberg world took a good 200 years to sort through the ramifications of that first information revolution.) And many of us may not like it. We may prefer the local cinema to Netflix. We may pine for the simple days of ABC, NBC and CBS in this age of YouTube. We may wish our children could get lost in the library stacks instead of in Google. We may like the Wall Street Journal more than the Huffington Post, Bloomingdales more than eBay, leather-bound Britannicas more than Wikipedia, yearbooks more than Facebook. But like it or not, here we are. And more to the point, ready or not, here they come. The power (for good or not-so-good) of many has been unleashed and it is not going away.

And so, the question for AVI CHAI (or for any other institution, whether for-profit, not-for-profit, local, national or global) is not "what do we think of our age?" Rather, AVI CHAI (and other institutions) must ask "what does it take to get things done nowadays?"

Once upon a time powerful institutions could command people's attention. But in this world, when ordinary people can get in the proverbial door without turning its knob or even setting eyes on it, the key is *earning* people's attention. Earning people's attention can no longer be done by using traditional marketing and advertising. Pushing ideas, even good ones, even pushing them hard, is not sufficient in today's world. Why? Because when every person with a mobile phone (all 5 billion of us) can push ideas, even well-financed pushes get lost in the global competition for people's attention. These times of abundance demand new strategies for being heard and for making a difference.

While the curse of these times might be the overload of information, the blessing is the ease of connection to those who are like-minded. On the one hand the world has Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) arising from the constant oversupply of information. On the other hand, every institution, every cause, every person can build, find and sustain niche networks. If you have a hobby, no matter how arcane, it is easy to find fellow-travelers no matter how far away they may reside. If you collect things, no matter how obscure, it is easy to locate rare additions to your collection that may be in someone's basement thousands of miles away. If you have a question, big or small, it is easy to ask 700 friends at once. If you care about a candidate, an issue, an idea, a law, an event, a person, it is easy to scour the planet for all those who concur. Rather than bringing a few select people to address a problem, the age of abundance invites each of us to bring our problem to our people.

What we have learned is that the key to breaking through the cacophony of this age of global ADD is building strong and engaged networks of like-minded people. If we see something in the world worth changing, we must find those people who are already inclined in the same direction and inspire them to assemble those they know who are inclined in the same direction who will inspire those they know to do the same. That is to say leadership must be tribal (bringing together like-minds) and it must enlist membership in something. This holds true if we are selling Pepsi Cola (witness their new campaigns to co-market with users' causes, placing the latter on their cans), helping Haiti, running as a Republican in Massachusetts, launching electric cars or student villages in Israel, seeking public financing for day schools, or trying to increase

Jewish summer camp enrollment. The aim is to replace the push of the institution with the drive of a movement—not a mass movement, but a Tribe, a movement of the true believers.

Who are AVI CHAI's "many" or AVI CHAI's "multiple manies" and how will we identify them, unite them and unleash their power? Up until now, AVI CHAI has relied on its financial resources as its primary lever. AVI CHAI has used money to put programs where we wanted them. AVI CHAI has used money to make institutions and individuals do things we thought they should do. How might human resources become our primary lever? How might AVI CHAI find them, connect them, and empower them to propel the financing of day schools, the strengthening of institutions, and sharing of the core ideas we and they care about, to build the Jewish future we and they are waiting for?

In an abundance economy, a thousand \$100 donors are more powerful than one single \$100,000 donor, precisely because 1000 is more than 1. In an abundance economy, where bulk mail has been replaced by Facebook and Twitter, 1000 people can instantly reach 100,000 people, and 100,000 people can quickly connect to 10,000,000. In an abundance economy, an idea goes much farther if it is propelled friend to friend to friend to friend--with each friend using the language she knows will engage her friends, who then use the language each of them knows will engage his and her friends--than if it is centrally packaged and pushed. Or as one person put it, it's about links not hits.

AVI CHAI North America often speaks about how we push against the grain. AVI CHAI imagines itself holding the torch of Jewish-heavy amid the darkness of Jewish-lite. When most 21st century Jews think assimilation is a triumph—after all, the universities and hospitals and law firms that were once closed to Jews are now run by them—AVI CHAI pushes for Jewish particularism. And more than that. When most Jews are content with a Jewish particularism of bagels, grandma's chicken soup, Yom Kippur and tikkun olam, AVI CHAI seeks to promote the particularism of Jewish literacy, religious purposefulness, and a connection to the Jewish people with Israel at the center. AVI CHAI dreads the tidal wave it sees rushing over its efforts and threatening to drown everything it cares about in a sea of intermarriage, indifference, and all that is possible in America.

Long before there was Obama2008, there was The Heritage Foundation, a great fount of the conservative movement that has long been supported primarily by thousands of individual donors. And as they explain it, the secret is linking all of the overlapping circles. Person One cares about X, Y, and Q. Person Two cares about X, B and C. And Person Three is passionate about X, K, and J. Person One describes X one way. Person Two practices X another way. Person Three does some X, but only at certain times of year and when certain people are present. Heritage has learned how to bring Person One, Person Two, and Person Three (and Persons Four, Five, Six. . .) around a common commitment to X, even though none have Y, Q, B, C, or K and J in common, and none articulate X quite the way Heritage does. Likewise, if we listen closely, no doubt there are multiple ways to express or enact a commitment to L, or to R or to be P. The more closely we listen, the larger may be our LRP tribe.

As AVI CHAI chooses among the goods to accomplish over its remaining decade—lobbying for public funds for day schools, building an endowment for day schools, building strong LRP

institutions, perhaps making the case for Jewish education—it will be important to do this work with the toolkit of abundance. Bringing these tools to our work will require resources, perhaps as much as 10-15% of the funds we have left to spend. But our learning makes us confident that we cannot afford to work otherwise.

Here is another way to think about what all of this means. Think of AVI CHAI's offices in North America. Right now they are composed of many, many bricks. Together these bricks make up the beautiful edifice standing tall on the corner of Park Avenue and East 85th Street that houses AVI CHAI's soon-to-be waning power. Now imagine putting each one of those bricks into the hands of a different LRP champion—be it an institution in New York or San Francisco or Jerusalem, a passionate day school parent in Louisville, an inspiring congregational rabbi in Las Vegas, a sixth grade technology wizard in Phoenix, a twenty-six year old Bible Rapper in Atlanta, an inspired DeLeT teacher, a Cornerstone Fellow, a Pardes educator, or an AVI CHAI Fellow in Boston or Philadelphia. And imagine that each brick, each in someone else's hands, becomes the cornerstone of a new commitment to some piece of the work. Together all of those brick-holders would be AVI CHAI's successors. But rather than an AVI CHAI whose resources are scarce, this new network would be an abundant and renewable platform of LRP possibility that a single stand-alone institution could never achieve, even one that chose to remain open for yet another century.

The future is bright if AVI CHAI assembles and empowers those who will make it so.