

**REPORT OF THE FACILITATORS  
OF THE MIZRACHI FORUMS HELD IN MARCH 2021**

**09 April 2021**

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Andrew Strum QC, Ora-Tali Korbl and Dan Goodhardt were appointed by the Mizrahi Executive to facilitate a series of forums held in March 2021 regarding:
- governance and transparency;
  - rabbinic leadership: future planning, opportunities and challenges;
  - female participation, representation and engagement; and
  - youth and young adult participation –
- within the Mizrahi Organisation. Andrew Strum QC facilitated the first and second forums; Ora-Tali Korbl facilitated the third; and Dan Goodhardt facilitated the fourth. Our report as to the matters discussed at those forums and, where appropriate, our recommendations in relation thereto, follows. We have each drafted the parts of this report referable to the forums conducted by us, which accounts for the somewhat differing writing styles below. However, we have read and concur with the parts of the report authored by each other.
- 1.2 At the outset, it should be noted that, of all those in our community who were eligible to attend, under 100 people in total attended the forums, with a substantial overlap of attendees. We do not know why such a relatively small number of people attended. Anecdotally, it has been reported to us (and it may be the fact) that this may be attributable, at one end of the spectrum, to satisfaction with the state of affairs and a lack of desire for change at Mizrahi; and, at the other end of the spectrum, to a lack of trust in the forum process and the prospect for substantive change; with a third possibility, namely, apathy, towards the middle of the spectrum. Accordingly, it is not possible for us or readers of this report to determine the extent to which the matters discussed herein are representative of the views of the broader Mizrahi community who did not attend.
- 1.3 What was clear from the forums, however, is that of the participants, a substantial number of women and youth / young adults, as well as members generally, expressed a sense of disenfranchisement from the Organisation. This was particularly so in relation to involvement of women and youth in:
- the leadership of the organisation;
  - the religious life of the community.

Only a minority of the participants expressed satisfaction with the current state of affairs in the community.

- 1.4 We also note that, although there were several forums dedicated to each of the four areas specified above, there was a substantial overlap in the matters discussed. For example, at the governance and transparency forums, matters were raised which also touched upon the areas of rabbinic leadership, female participation and youth / young adult participation. The same observation may be made in respect of each of the three other areas covered by the forums.
- 1.5 Many of the matters raised at each of the forums were similar in nature, albeit possibly with slightly nuanced variations thereon. We have endeavoured to address such matters generally in this report. However, it is not and cannot reasonably be an inventory of each and every matter raised. Where we have not reported specifically on some matters, that is because they were similar in substance to other matters raised; we have, nevertheless, taken them into account in a general sense. Some issues were raised or sought to be raised which were not, on any view, within the scope of our remit and, hence, are not necessarily addressed in this report.
- 1.6 It was not within the scope of our remit to engage in a fact-finding exercise and we have not made findings of fact. We report and comment upon matters raised and discussed but we cannot make any findings as to the accuracy or truthfulness of such matters.
- 1.7 It was made clear at each forum that we wished the participants' focus to be forward-looking and solution focussed, rather than retrospective and complaining in nature, albeit that we acknowledged it is unrealistic to look forward in a vacuum, without reference to the past. It was also made clear that we wished participants to identify and discuss issues, rather than individuals, and that, if there were issues involving individuals, they were likely referable to systemic problems within the Mizrachi Organisation and its structure. On the whole, albeit with a few exceptions, our guidelines were respected by the participants.

## **2. GOVERNANCE AND TRANSPARENCY**

2.1 As was advised at the commencement of each of the two governance and transparency forums, it was not proposed to take a narrow, picky view to the term “governance” but, rather, to allow broad discussion of matters and concerns relating to the conduct of the organisation. Many of those issues were of a structural and / or cultural nature (in the latter case, in the sense of the culture of the conduct of the Organisation).

### **Structural Issues**

2.2 Despite our inquiries, we were unable to ascertain, with any degree of certainty, when the current Mizrahi Constitution, in its original form, was first adopted. However, it was suggested that it may date back as far as the 1950s or 1960s, albeit that it has been amended on a number of occasions over the ensuing decades.

2.3 By way of background, the Mizrahi Constitution provides that:

- the Executive shall consist of the President, the Vice-President, the Treasurer and the Secretary of Mizrahi; the Chairperson, Deputy-Chairperson and Treasurer of Leibler Yavneh College; the other Officers and Chairs of Committees who have been appointed to the Executive from time to time; and the Immediate Past President of Mizrahi;
- the Committee shall consist of the Executive Officers and twelve (non-Executive) members of the Committee.

2.4 Views were expressed that the Mizrahi Constitution and the governance structure for which it provides, with the passage of time, is no longer fit for purpose. In particular:

- Whilst the Constitution provides for a Committee (including Executive members) of no less than 20 people (which, it was suggested, would in itself be unwieldy), the membership of the current Committee exceeds 30 people, and was suggested to be unworkable.
- Uncertainty was expressed as to what the Committee is intended to do under the Constitution and whether it actually fulfils that role, as opposed to being a mere “rubber-stamp” for the Executive. The role of the Committee under the Constitution is general and vague, namely:
  - to govern the Organisation, together with the Executive;
  - to meet once in every calendar month where possible and, in any event, not than eight times per annum;

- to deal with matters not provided for in the constitution which come within the scope of Mizrahi's activities;
  - to engage personnel, incur expenses or take any other legal action required to conduct the affairs of the Organisation; and
  - in its discretion, from time to time, to direct the Trustees of Mizrahi (currently Mizrahi Nominees Pty Ltd) to take whatever action the Committee deems necessary to carry out the objectives of the Organisation.
- The role of the Executive is even more undefined. Indeed, the only obligations imposed by the Constitution upon it are to govern the Organisation, together with the Committee; for its officers to be members of the Committee; and to ensure that proper financial records are kept of the income and expenditure and of the assets and liabilities relating to all aspects of the Organisation's activities. There is no reference to or requirement for the Executive to undertake, for example, long-term planning or an over-arching supervisory role, such as a Board might do.
  - Of the two biggest components comprising the Organisation, aside from the Beit Yehuda synagogue and the various minyanim, there are only four generalised references to Leibler Yavneh College and no references to Kosher Australia in the Constitution. Similarly, there is only one generalised reference to Bnei Akiva and no reference to the Beit Midrash.

#### 2.5 Various suggestions were mooted, ranging:

- from a minimalist approach of reducing the Executive and, more importantly, the Committee, to (or close to) the numbers envisaged by the Constitution;
- to a maximalist approach which would involve the abolition of the Committee (similar to the abolition of the Leibler-Yavneh School Council) and a consequential restructure of the Executive.

#### 2.6 An intermediate position was also discussed which, in our opinion, also has merit and which the current or future Executive and Committee should consider, namely:

- the abolition of the Committee;
- the retention and possible expansion of fixed sub-committees, to be renamed committees, and to be specifically provided for by the Constitution; and
- the chairpersons of each of these committees to be members of the Executive.

- 2.7 The Constitution presently provides that, in addition to the Executive and the Committee, “committees and sub-committees may be appointed by the Mizrahi Committee as are necessary to co-ordinate the various activities of the Organisation” but that “these appointments must be reaffirmed annually by the Committee”. The Constitution already provides that the Executive shall consist of “other Officers and Chairmen [sic] of Committees who have been appointed to the Executive from time to time” and that such “Executive positions so created will then be open to election at subsequent Annual General Meeting”; however, “these positions may be terminated by the Committee or by a majority resolution at the Annual General Meeting”. Consideration should be given to a less ad hoc process, which presently enables sub-committees, other than the Synagogue Sub-Committee (which is constitutionally enshrined), to be created and disbanded at will by the Committee.
- 2.8 To be clear, what is recommended for consideration, in the first instance, by the current and / or future Executive and Committee and, ultimately, by the membership of Mizrahi, is a governance structure which would constitutionally enshrine a number of committees (presently termed “sub-committees”), with the chairs thereof constitutionally to be members of the Executive, removing the existing discretion of the Executive in this regard. This could, in our opinion, lead to a more efficient and streamlined governance of the Organisation. However, we are of the opinion that this should not be considered in a piecemeal fashion, independently of consideration of an overarching review and redrafting of the Constitution.
- 2.9 Concern was expressed regarding the co-option of members of the Committee to the Executive and the possible ramifications thereof, including the possibility of a change in the balance of power on the elected Executive. Whilst the Mizrahi Constitution provides that the Committee may co-opt additional members from time to time, there is no equivalent provision in respect of the Executive. At most, the Constitution provides that the Executive shall consist of “other Officers and Chairmen of Committee who have been appointed to the Executive from time to time”, in which case “executive positions so created will then be open to election at subsequent Annual General Meeting”. Not only was it suggested that co-option to the Executive should cease but it would appear that it is, in fact, not constitutional. In all the circumstances, taking into account the views expressed and the provisions of the Constitution, we are of the opinion that the practice of co-option, at least to the Executive, should cease.

2.10 In respect of the present position on the Executive of Immediate Past President, there were, again, several possibilities mooted, from no change to the position, to the abolition of the position altogether. Concern was expressed that, were an incumbent president defeated in an election, thereby constitutionally assuming the position of Immediate Past President, there may be an unhealthy tension between him (or her) and the incoming President and / or Executive generally (and / or a possible undermining of them by him / her). On the other hand, views were expressed that there is merit in an element of continuity from one Executive to another brought about by the office of Immediate Past President. Compromise proposals, which we commend for consideration, included:

- limiting the tenure of the Immediate Past President to one term after they leave office; and
- two (rather than one) year terms, with annual half elections, whereby only one half of the positions on the Executive would be open for election in each year, such that every year the Executive would be comprised of (at least) half of the previous year's Executive members, thereby ensuring a degree of continuity.

2.11 Another structural issue raised, but one which also overlaps with the cultural aspect of governance, as well as with the issues of female and youth / young adult representation, is that of the presently unlimited ability under the Constitution for Executive and Committee members to remain in those governance positions and, indeed, to hold the same governance positions, for many years, until they eventually elect to retire or are voted out of office. The dilemma is a circular one; on the one hand, it was suggested that some people long remain in office because no-one else is prepared to assume those positions of leadership; on the other hand, it was also suggested that some people are reluctant to seek leadership positions because of (at least) a perception that there is no vacancy or desire for them, as well as reported instances of people being actively discouraged from running for such positions. It was suggested that this difficulty could be remedied by:

- limited terms on the Executive (and the Committee, if it continue to exist) of, say, four to six years (especially if two-year terms are adopted), after which a member must step down and be ineligible for re-election for, say, two years; and
- limited terms in office of, say, two to four years (i.e. one to two two-year terms), such that, if limited terms of four to six years were adopted, a particular office could not be held for more than, say two to four years.



We commend such an amendment to the governance structure of Mizrachi for consideration by the Executive and the Committee.

- 2.12 In relation to female and youth / young adult representation on the Mizrachi Executive, there was broad support for and little, if any, opposition to the desirability of the concept. Rather, discussion centred on how this might best be achieved. In terms of youth / young adult representation, points raised and canvassed included:
- in the case of Bnei Akiva - the Merakez being a specified member of the Executive. This could be seen to be consistent with one of the Objects of the Mizrachi Organisation specified in its current Constitution, namely, “*to encourage, support and guide the development of Mizrachi youth groups, in particular Bnei Akiva, and their related activities*”;
  - in the case of Ohr David – the chairperson of that minyan being a specified member of the Executive;
  - in both cases – a review of eligibility for membership. The current Constitution relevantly provides that “*Jewish persons of 18 years of age and above ... shall be eligible for membership* ” and that membership fees will be “*determined by the committee from time to time*”. Whilst membership fees (as opposed to seat fees) are, on one view, relatively modest at Mizrachi (namely, \$330 per annum), the Committee should consider the affordability of even such an amount for, say, full time university students under a certain age (possibly 25 years) and consider a reduced fee, without any derogation from full voting rights.
- 2.13 The issue of how best to achieve female representation on the Mizrachi Executive is, at least, in part, a cultural one, namely *genuine* encouragement of women to stand for election, without any explicit or implicit discouragement. In circumstances where, as reported above, a substantial number of women and youth / young adults expressed a sense of disenfranchisement from the Organisation, it was suggested that the Objects of the Mizrachi Organisation specified in its current (or any new) Constitution might be amended in terms drawn specifically to encourage or, as best practicable, require participation in the governance of the Organisation by men, women and youth / young adults who are members thereof. Against this, it was rightly said that such moves, certainly in isolation, might be seen to be (and might be) tokenistic, rather than substantive.
- 2.14 There was discussion regarding whether a minimum number (or even one half) of Executive positions should be earmarked for women. Views differed broadly in this

regard. There were those who argued that only such a step would ensure female involvement. There were also those who argued that such a step would merely be tokenistic, in that it might achieve the desired “quantity” of women in the governance of the Organisation, but not necessarily the desired “quality” of Executive members. It is trite to observe that, ideally, the most suitable people should lead or be sought to lead the Organisation, irrespective of gender or, indeed, age. On the other hand, however, it may be that some moderately drastic measures are, at least initially, required to “jump start” female involvement in the Executive governance of Mizrachi. Ultimately, it is not beyond contemplation that both desirable ends can be achieved, namely quantity and quality. Our community, by its nature, is blessed with many women who are religiously and secularly educated and / or who are professionals or businesswomen or who otherwise possess qualities that would make them an asset to the Executive, as well as to the Mizrachi Organisation and community generally.

- 2.15 One merit of a more streamlined governance structure, involving the abolition of the Committee and stronger committees (presently termed sub-committees), with the chairpersons thereof being members of the Executive, may be that it will provide a fertile breeding ground for people, including women and youth / young adults, to rise organically through these governance levels of the organisation. It may also remedy another concern that was broadly voiced, namely, lack of succession planning. A concern was raised that, unlike the President, who has a Vice-President, should any of the other key executive members become unable to fulfil or unwilling to continue in their roles, there is presently no succession planning to ensure a smooth (or, indeed, any) transition. Specific examples given and concerns expressed were particularly in relation the specialised roles of Treasurer and Chairperson of Kosher Australia and the body of knowledge reposed in the holders of each of those offices.
- 2.16 Concern was also expressed that major transactions are able to be undertaken by the Executive and the Committee without reference to the membership. Examples were given of the recent acquisition of land adjacent to Mizrachi and the appointment of the next Rosh Kollel. As noted above, the Constitution, as presently drafted, authorises the Committee, for example, to:
- engage personnel, incur expenses or taken any other legal action required to conduct the affairs of the Organisation; and
  - in its discretion, from time to time, to direct the Trustees of Mizrachi (i.e. Mizrachi Nominees Pty Ltd) to take whatever action the Committee deems necessary to carry out the objectives of the Organisation.

- 2.17 Further, whilst in recent years, it has been the practice of the Executive and the Committee to put the employment / further employment of the Rabbi of Mizrahi to a communal vote, there is no constitutional requirement that it do so.
- 2.18 The countervailing argument raised is that, like governments, the Executive and the Committee are also elected to govern; in the same way that governments generally do not put specific actions or transactions to the electorate but are judged upon them at subsequent elections, so too should the Executive and the Committee be free to govern. An intermediate position that was canvassed, and which we commend for consideration, is that certain “extraordinary” transactions, such as the examples given (namely, the acquisition of real estate, the appointment of a Rabbi and the appointment of a Rosh Kollel), involving substantial financial or communal ramifications, be required to be put a communal discussion and vote.
- 2.19 As noted above, of the two biggest components comprising the Organisation (in addition to the Beit Yehuda synagogue and the various minyanim), there are only four generalised references to Leibler Yavneh College and no references to Kosher Australia in the Constitution. In respect of Leibler Yavneh College, it was speculated that this may, at least in part, be because, when the Constitution apparently was first adopted, the College was in its infancy. In respect of Kosher Australia, its predecessor(s) may not even have existed then. Whilst the Constitution has been amended on a number of occasions over the years, it does not appear that the relationship – and inter-relationship - between the Organisation and each of Leibler Yavneh College and Kosher Australia has been reconsidered in any substantive fashion. It was suggested that, of the three stakeholders identified above, both the College and Kosher Australia may have outgrown not only Bet Yehuda and the other minyanim but, indeed, the Organisation itself. Further, a number of participants suggested that the interrelationship (including the financial relationship) between the Mizrahi Organisation and, in particular, the College is unclear and indiscernible. Another matter raised was a possible restructuring of the Organisation to comprise three constitutionally recognised arms of Mizrahi, namely, the College, Kosher Australia and the synagogue / minyanim. Whilst there was general discussion of these issues, there were no concrete suggestions mooted, probably because, simply put, it is too complex an issue to be solved (or even attempted to be solved) in public forums. One suggestion – very much a minority view – was that consideration should be given to a severance of the relationship between the Organisation on the one hand and the College and / or Kosher Australia on the other. Another suggestion

was that a comprehensive, professional strategic review of the entire Organisation and its constituent parts should be undertaken by, say, a management consultant. Whilst a sensible and possibly overdue suggestion, the likely substantial cost involved in such an exercise was recognised. Nevertheless, we are of the opinion that the issue merits consideration by the Executive and the Committee as part of an overarching review.

- 2.20 Widespread support was voiced, with little to no opposition, for the need to appoint a CEO for the Organisation as soon as possible, as well as the employment of more office staff. It was observed that few, if any, businesses with assets and income comparable to those of Mizrachi would not have a CEO. It was suggested that one reason why people may be reluctant to become involved in the governance of the Organisation is that, in particular, Executive members, including the President, were said to be regularly required to undertake office or administrative tasks that, simply put, should not be required of them and for which they (and aspiring future Executive members) do not have, and should not need to make, the time.
- 2.21 Like many communal organisations, it is not uncommon for members to have grievances or complaints against another member or members arising from or related to their membership of or participation in the Organisation, or against a member or members of the Executive or the Committee or even, indeed, against an employee or official of the Organisation. We were informed at the forums that, historically, there was an informal, ad hoc, grievance or complaints panel comprised of three respected community elders, two of whom are now deceased and one of whom has made Aliyah. As things presently stand, there is no vehicle by which to resolve or even endeavour to resolve such issues. A need for such a panel was expressed. This is a matter to which the Executive and the Committee should give consideration. It was suggested, with merit, that such a panel should be entirely independent of the governance structure of the organisation and comprised of people recognised for their integrity and discretion, at least some of whom should have appropriate mediation skills. Whilst it was suggested that one of the rabbis in the employ of the Organisation from time to time should be a member of the panel, it was recognised that this would likely be untenable where the grievance is against a member (or members) of the Executive or the Committee who are, effectively, the employers of that rabbi. However, a panel somewhat broader than three members, as was historically the case, would permit the members of the panel most appropriate to the resolution of the particular grievance to be assigned to it and, where appropriate, that might include a rabbinic member. It was

not contemplated that the panel would have any disciplinary powers, such as powers of expulsion or suspension of membership or like measures.

2.22 Lastly, under this rubric, the issue of appropriate policies to deal with, for example, discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying and child protection was raised. It was ascertained that, since March 2019, Mizrahi has had in place a Child Safety Policy and a Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect Policy, as well as a policy for conducting internal investigations into allegations of adult abuse or misconduct toward children, all of which are available on the Mizrahi website. However, whilst we were provided with:

- a Conflict of Interest Policy;
- a Code of Professional Conduct; and
- a Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Policy –

as at 2008, it was unclear whether those documents were ever adopted by the Organisation and / or presently are (or ever were) operative. This should be clarified and, if not operative, should be promptly remedied.

### **Cultural Issues**

2.23 Many of the cultural issues identified at the forums have already been referred to and / or addressed under the rubric of structural issues, above, and need not be repeated in detail, save to note, in summary:

- a substantial number of women and youth / young adults, as well as members generally, who attended the forums expressed a sense of disenfranchisement from the Organisation and an endemic lack of trust in its leadership;
- the perceived and / or actual tendency of some members of the Committee and Executive to remain thereon generally, or in particular offices, for lengthy periods of time, without enabling or encouraging new blood to take over;
- the perceived and / or actual lack of *genuine* encouragement of women to stand for election for governance positions, without any explicit or implicit discouragement;
- the lack of succession planning and progression through the ranks of governance of the Organisation.

2.24 Other issues raised included the following.

- The Constitution provides, amongst other things, that “*only current financial members may accept any office or vote at meeting*”. Not only does the Constitution

enshrine the principle of “one member, one vote” but, equally importantly, it defines eligibility to stand for office. Provided that one meets the stipulated criteria, he /she is able to stand for office. There is no place for reported instances (if they occur) of people being asked, told or pressured not to do so. Purported reasons such as not embarrassing an incumbent Executive member by challenging him / her have no place in the democratic structure created by the Constitution. Insofar as such instances may have occurred in the past, we are of the opinion that they should not occur in the future.

- A number of participants at the forums expressed frustration at the ad hoc manner in which decisions of the Executive are announced to the membership of the Organisation. For example, it was reported that, on some occasions, such decisions have been announced at Seuda Shlishit. It was suggested, with apparent merit, that Seuda Shlishit and like events are not appropriate forums for such announcements to members. Neither a majority of the community generally, nor many women or youth / young adults, in particular, are in attendance. Parenthetically, we note it was reported that poor female attendance at Seuda Shlishit is attributable, at least in part, to the maintenance of separate seating which flies in the face of the ethos of the Organisation and the Mizrahi community generally. Such a piecemeal approach towards important communal announcements, leaving word to filter through the membership, is not conducive to a perception of or actual transparency or to a sense of inclusiveness of the various elements of the community. One solution proposed was for regular (such as monthly or quarterly) written reports by the Executive to the membership of the Organisation.
- It was reported that, in some instances, Executive decisions are made outside of meetings, by selected members of the Executive being approached until a majority is reached, with the remaining members thereafter being presented with a fait accompli. If accurate, this again is not conducive of transparency or a perception thereof or, indeed, due process. Decisions of the Executive should be made with the opportunity for all members thereof to be heard and considered on issues.
- Concern was expressed in relation to how the criteria for the advertisement for the next rabbi were identified or devised, and by whom; how and by whom the membership of the Rabbinic Selection Committee was selected; whether the Rabbinic Selection Committee is representative of the various stakeholders in the Organisation; and the process by which any formal applications or informal expressions of interest, addressed to the President, are guaranteed to be conveyed to the Committee. The very fact that these matters have not been

explained to the membership at large might be said to be symptomatic of a lack of transparency in the governance of the Organisation.

- It was reported that Executive meetings are, on occasions (or more frequently) called without sufficient notice and / or without the provision of agendas and, where relevant, background information, to all members thereof. We note, however, that the Constitution requires that notices convening any meeting to be issued not less than seven days prior to the date thereof. It would appear this may, on occasions, be observed in the breach. Solutions proposed in this regard were that, save for extenuating circumstances when a meeting may need to be called at shorter notice (albeit not less than the minimum seven day period prescribed by the Constitution):
  - at the beginning of each year, a calendar listing Committee and Executive meetings for the year be distributed to the members thereof and to the membership generally; or
  - for example, Executive meetings generally be held on the first Tuesday night of each month and Committee meetings generally be held on the third Tuesday night of each month (or some similar schedule), with certain exceptions, such as the month of Tishrei.

### **3. RABBINIC LEADERSHIP: FUTURE PLANNING, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

- 3.1 At the outset, we wish to note the overwhelmingly positive views expressed at these forums of Rabbi Mirvis' term as Senior Rabbi of the Mizrachi Organisation and the regret that the Rabbanit and he and their children will be leaving us shortly, albeit to return to Israel which is, after all, a fundamental element of the ethos of the Organisation.
- 3.2 It was recognised that it has historically been a difficult and lengthy process for the Organisation to replace its Senior Rabbis. However, in part, due to the tyranny of distance, it will likely be all the more so on this occasion, in the era and eventual aftermath of COVID-19. This is so due to at least two factors:
- In the past, overseas candidates have been brought to Melbourne for a two week trial period. It would appear that, for the foreseeable future, such candidates will need to absent themselves from their families and their existing communities for a period for four to six weeks, to allow for a fortnight's quarantine in Australia and, possibly, another period of quarantine upon their return to their home countries. They may not be willing or able to undertake such a lengthy period of absence.
  - COVID-19 has made us realise that the world is no longer as small as it once seemed. Whereas, until 18 months ago or so, Israel, England, the USA, Canada and South Africa (from where we are likely to source a rabbi) were no more than 24 to 48 hours away, our ability and, more importantly for present purposes, the ability of any rabbi from overseas to visit family there, especially in case of urgent need, is restricted and uncertain. This may well be a deterrent to rabbis who might otherwise have been interested in applying for or accepting the position.
- 3.3 One solution suggested for this dilemma may be to look more locally, within Australia and New Zealand. However, unless the Mizrachi were prepared to contemplate the appointment of a Senior Rabbi from within the Lubavitch or Kollel world, which proposition did not enjoy any substantial support, the prospects of a local candidate were said to be limited in the extreme.
- 3.4 A recurring theme at the forums was the desire not only for rabbinic leadership generally, but also female religious leadership, as well as rabbinic leadership primarily dedicated to the youth and young adults, including for outreach work.



- 3.5 After discussion, it was generally accepted that, in a modern Orthodox community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the traditional model of a rabbi and rabbanit couple may well be a thing of the past, especially if we wish again to employ a young rabbi, regarding which there seemed to be consensus. A young rabbi will (in all likelihood) be married to a young wife, possibly with her own career entirely unrelated to the rabbinate and with young children. Indeed, a view was expressed that, by that fact alone, such a rabbanit is and will be a role model to the girls and young women of the Mizrachi community, combining תורה עם דרך ארץ. Even if a rabbanit were not a career-woman or had older children, it was largely acknowledged that long gone are the days when a synagogue can hope to have “two for the price of one” and she would likely need to be employed to undertake the duties previously performed by rabbis’ wives gratis, merely by reason of being married to the rabbi of the community.
- 3.6 There was a broad consensus that it will be necessary to sever the communal roles previously under by senior rabbis and their wives and that, in any event, there may be merit in doing so. It is unlikely that, in a rabbi / rabbanit couple, they will meet all or even most of the criteria sought of each of them. We might well be faced with a situation where either the rabbi or the rabbanit, but not both of them, have the desired qualities. Further, in circumstances where יועצות הלכה have become increasingly common in the world of Religious Zionist Judaism, to which the Mizrachi Organisation constitutionally subscribes, there was acceptance that women in the community may feel more comfortable posing שאלות to them, rather than to a rabbi. It was suggested that such a female religious leadership role might be undertaken in the future by, and combined with the role of, the ראש מדרשה at Mizrachi. It was also agreed that, given the politically-charged nature of various labels denoting female religious leadership in the Orthodox world, we should use neutral titles such as those suggested above, namely, a יועצת הלכה or the ראש מדרשה.
- 3.7 Concern was expressed across the generations at the lack of rabbinic leadership solely or primarily dedicated to the youth and young adults, including for outreach work. This was especially so in circumstances where other shules have rabbis dedicated to this age-group and other communal organisations are engaging in outreach work, resulting in a loss of youth and young adults from our community to them. The age-group envisaged was from those in their early 20s to late 30s.
- 3.8 In the result, what was ultimately broadly agreed was that there should ideally be a religious leadership team comprised of:

- a Senior Rabbi, albeit not necessarily senior in years and even preferably not so;
  - a female in a religious leadership role;
  - an Assistant Rabbi whose responsibilities would primarily be towards the youth and young adults and who would engage in outreach work with them. Ideally, that rabbi could be a candidate for the position of Senior Rabbi in the fullness of time, thereby providing a degree of continuity in rabbinic leadership of the Organisation.
- Additional members of the religious leadership time might also include the Rosh Kollel and the Bnei Akiva shaliach / shlichah.

- 3.9 Whilst it was envisaged that all members of the core team would be employed on a full-time basis by the Mizrachi Organisation, that could and should include some responsibilities in the areas of formal and informal Jewish education at Leibler Yavneh College, thereby integrating the religious leadership of Mizrachi with the College. Whilst such a full-time team might be an expensive undertaking, it was considered to be a priority for the Organisation and the cost thereof might be defrayed, albeit probably only to a modest degree, by rationalisation of other rabbinic employees employed by Mizrachi.
- 3.10 As discussed above, under the rubric of governance and transparency, concern was voiced in relation to how the criteria for the advertisement for the next rabbi were identified or devised, and by whom; how and by whom the membership of the Rabbinic Selection Committee was selected; whether the Rabbinic Selection Committee is representative of the various stakeholders in the Organisation; and the process by which any formal applications or informal expressions of interest, addressed to the President, are guaranteed to be conveyed to the Committee.
- 3.11 Amongst the additional criteria identified for the next Senior Rabbi were, in no particular order of importance:
- formal counselling / conflict resolution skills, in an era in which family breakdown is becoming increasingly common;
  - tertiary qualifications, in addition to impeccable rabbinic qualifications;
  - excellent oral and written communication skills in English;
  - pastoral skills;
  - an inspirational personality;
  - an ability to undertake kiruv work;
  - the delivery of shiurim to the membership of the Organisation, male and female, young and old, across the board, both during the days and in the evenings;

- a team-player; and
- a requirement that the rabbi's children attend Leibler-Yavneh College, which has not always been the case in the past.

3.12 Clearly, no individual candidate will meet all or even most of these criteria and it may be appropriate to apportion them amongst the members of a rabbinic team.

3.13 One matter which, unsurprisingly, was the subject of considerable discussion at each of these forums was the extent to which a willingness to allow increased women's involvement in religious life upon the Balaclava Road campus, within recognised halakhic boundaries, should be an employment criterion for the next Senior Rabbi. As noted above, a substantial number of women, including amongst the youth and young adults, expressed a sense of disenfranchisement from the Organisation for the very reason that, to date, there has been little such involvement permitted. That gave rise to discussion of what Mizrachi is and what we want it to be. Unlike other synagogues in Melbourne, with the possible exception of Adass Israel and Yeshiva, we are more than just a synagogue or even a group of minyanim, differentiated primarily only by age. We are a community, with our own school, Beit Midrash and Midrasha and kashrut authority, as well as the main synagogue and various minyanim. Should our members be required to tow one proverbial line or do we wish to enable as much diversity as we *reasonably* can, within recognised halakhic boundaries? On one view, there is much to commend a "live and let live" approach, provided it is within those boundaries. If, to take a less controversial example, a group of women wishes to participate in a megillah reading by women for women upon the Balaclava Road campus, one may question what is the harm for the male members of Mizrachi, who will not be able to attend, or for the other women, who do not wish to attend and who will continue to be able to attend traditional megillah readings in the Beit Yehuda synagogue or one of the various other minyanim upon the premises? A view, with merit in our opinion, was expressed that in circumstances where women's megillah readings are permitted upon the Elsternwick campus, there can be no reason not to allow at least such readings upon the Balaclava Road campus.

3.14 The main areas of women's religious participation raised at the forums were:

- women's megillah readings;
- women's hakafot at Simchat Torah;
- women's Kriat HaTorah at Simchat Torah; and

- women's Shabbat Mevarchim tefillah groups.
- 3.15 Unsurprisingly, there was no consensus regarding what happens in the Religious Zionist, modern Orthodox world, especially in Israel. Some participants stated that they had never come across such practices in like communities in Israel or elsewhere. Other participants gave accounts of diametrically opposed experiences. We surmise that is because it is a lineal or not a binary issue within the Religious Zionist, modern Orthodox world.
- 3.16 We are of the opinion that, within a communal setting such as ours, the focus should be on compromise, rather than capitulation, and evolution, rather than revolution. Whilst some members might support all of these forms of participation, others (including some women) may be opposed to all of them. The view was expressed that women's megillah readings at Purim and hakafot at Simchat Torah were the least contentious of the issues identified above.
- 3.17 In the result, we are of the opinion that a selection criterion should also be a willingness to allow increased women's involvement in religious life upon the Balaclava Road campus, within recognised halakhic boundaries, at least to the minimum extent of women's megillah readings at Purim and hakafot at Simchat Torah.

## **4. FEMALE PARTICIPATION, REPRESENTATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

### **Overarching comments**

- 4.1 There was a general sense of scepticism amongst many of participants as to the motivations for running this forum and a concern that, regardless of the forums, the status quo would remain.
- 4.2 It was identified that this 'issue' appears to be specific to Beit Yehuda (as a 'micro-community' of different ages, so the matters discussed here would extend to, say, b'not mitzvah etc) – it is less of an issue in Beit Haroeh and Kehillat Ohr David and a non-issue in Bnei Akiva (it was specifically noted that Bnei Akiva has had 3 consecutive years of female leadership).
- 4.3 There was consensus that there is an inextricable link between female participation, representation and engagement, and rabbinic leadership and governance.
- 4.4 It was agreed that not all women in Mizrahi want the same type/level of participation and engagement but that there needed to be more options so that women had the choice. We note that when it came to female representation (on the committee/executive), it was unanimous that, to date, women have not been adequately represented.
- 4.5 The salient point raised at these forums was that there needs to be a cultural shift in the attitudes and behaviours of the men in Mizrahi (at all levels) to:
- a) generally be less exclusive, and proactively more inclusive;
  - b) appreciate that whilst there may not be any express constitutional barriers, there are political and cultural barriers to participation, representation and engagement, and all the more so for the women in the community; and
  - c) be guided by the NCJWA Vic Gender Equality Pledge (to which Mizrahi has apparently been a signatory for some time) (**Pledge**) and actively encourage female participation, representation and engagement in Mizrahi.

### **'Jump-off' points**

- 4.6 It was noted by one of the participants of the forum that whilst the Pledge was (apparently) unanimously signed by the Mizrahi Executive, the lack of action and accountability since becoming a signatory gives the impression that it has not been

taken seriously by the current leadership. Notably, at the time of writing this report, the organisation was unable to even provide its signed copy of the Pledge. Whilst it was acknowledged that the Pledge is not ‘the be all and end all’, there was general agreement that it was a useful ‘yardstick’ to track Mizrachi’s progress vis-à-vis female participation, representation and engagement.

- 4.7 A number of participants raised the issue of ‘loss’ - i.e. the cost to Mizrachi if the status quo is maintained. This was discussed generally (‘losing’ men and women to ‘Blake Street’ and ‘Ohrsome’) but also specifically (fewer and fewer women and girls coming to Shule and/or otherwise being involved). These losses have cultural, reputational and financial impacts on the organisation.
- 4.8 The key to successful, productive organisational change is the way it is managed. Seeking and sharing feedback regularly as change is implemented and then adjusting the change management plan will help the change makers maintain morale and facilitate the change from each of their ends.

#### *Opportunities*

- *For the Mizrachi Executive to revisit the Pledge, build policies around the Pledge’s objectives and then periodically measure its progress against those objectives.*
- *For Mizrachi to capitalise on retention/growth opportunities by appealing to and engaging with a group that should be 50% of its membership base.*

#### **Cultural change**

- 4.9 Many participants at the forums, both male and female, expressed concerns that there was a ‘boys-club’ culture at Mizrachi that was intimidating. Some participants described it as a ‘lack of empathy’ and others went as far as to call it a culture of ‘bullying’.
- 4.10 It was noted that formal changes to leadership structures and/or religious participation would be undermined if they were not accompanied by genuine changes to this culture.
- 4.11 From the discussions, it became apparent that this is a significant barrier (if not, the *most* significant barrier) to women (and girls) wanting to be involved in Mizrachi - both at a lay and governance level.
- 4.12 The participants were encouraged to brainstorm ways in which this culture could be changed and many suggested that the Pledge be used as the organisation’s point of

reference. There were a number of participants who felt that it was the responsibility of the Executive to champion cultural change 'from the top down'.

- 4.13 There appeared to be consensus that if the culture changed and women were 'viewed as equals' and 'made to feel more welcome', their participation and engagement would organically follow.

#### *Opportunities*

- *For the Mizrahi Executive to honestly appraise its current culture, revisit the Pledge and promote a culture that is consistent with the Pledge.*

#### **Leadership**

- 4.14 There was considerable overlap in some of the issues raised at these forums and the forums on governance. As these general points have been discussed elsewhere in this report, they have not been repeated in this section. There are, however, governance issues which participants felt disproportionately impacted women and these are discussed here.
- 4.15 The lack of women on the Beit Yehuda 'Shule Subcommittee' was discussed as a specific example and participants also queried whether any women had been consulted regarding the renovation plans - there appears to be a widespread assumption (correctly or otherwise) that they have not. As a side note, the issue of there still not being any lift to the first floor was raised in the context of it being a barrier for older/less abled women to participate in shul and at kiddusim, seudah shlishit etc.
- 4.16 A number of female participants at the forum expressed a reluctance / lack of confidence to independently run for leadership positions based on the reported experiences of other women in the community who have previously run and the perceived 'tap-on-shoulder' culture (rather than, say, one of freely contested elections) that currently exists.
- 4.17 This, in turn, led to a discussion of having a 'quota' or 'allocated seats' system so that women in leadership positions could feel or be supported by other women - a 'power in numbers' approach. One participant felt very strongly about not using the word 'quota' lest it carry with it a stigma.
- 4.18 There was also a suggestion of having co-Presidents (one male, one female) with each representing everyone.

- 4.19 The discussion then moved from the quantity of representation to the quality of it. Some female participants who have held committee positions in the past reported that they did not have (or feel they had) an authoritative voice or adequate opportunities to contribute, despite having all the relevant skills and motivations. It was agreed that this was directly linked to the current culture (discussed above) which needed to change in order to realise the full potential of equal representation in leadership.
- 4.20 It was also noted that women would organically be encouraged to participate after seeing other women have positive leadership experiences within the organisation and that there could and should be an opportunity for those thinking of getting involved to shadow current leaders (both male and female) to gain experience and confidence in different roles.

#### *Opportunities*

- *For Mizrachi to consider implementing a 'quota' / 'allocated seats' system so as to immediately encourage equal representation and participation at all levels of leadership.*
- *For Mizrachi to consider creating a portfolio on the Executive (and then a sub-committee) specifically focused on female participation, representation and engagement.*

#### **Religious participation and engagement**

- 4.21 As mentioned above, the matters concerning Rabbinic leadership at Mizrachi which are discussed elsewhere in this report, inevitably impact female religious participation and engagement (or the lack thereof). Without repeating such matter here, notable issues raised at the women's forums were:
- a) a 'political' influence (whether perceived or otherwise) when it came to Halachic decision-making which was inhibiting wider involvement. At both forums, participants queried why women's megillah reading on Purim was allowed at the Leibler Yavneh College Elsternwick campus but not at Mizrachi Balaclava Road campus itself;
  - b) appointment of a female religious leader who was either married to the appointed Rabbi or a separate appointment altogether, is as important a consideration as the appointment of a Senior Rabbi;
  - c) following on from the point above, any appointed Rabbi should encourage female religious participation as much as possible within recognised halachic boundaries, and be more engaging with women in the community.



- 4.22 No participant expressed a desire to cross beyond the boundaries of modern Orthodox halakhic practice. Instead, there was a general sentiment that Mizrahi needs to proactively find more ways, within halakhic boundaries (as determined by the senior rabbi and not the Executive or Committee, whether implicitly or explicitly) to include women in religious activities instead of citing reasons (perceived to be 'excuses') to exclude them and to celebrate their inclusion.
- 4.23 Participants proposed many 'solutions' to get women immediately more involved. These are outlined here as they were raised - the authors have not made enquiries into or judgements about their suitability:
- a) mixed seating at Kiddushim and Seudah Shlishit (regardless of whether, as was reported, '*certain men are [apparently] used to their seats*'). It is important to note that this was unanimously agreed by all participants at both forums;
  - b) provided it were halakhically acceptable, mixed seating at Shiurim given in Shul. Alternatively, having women sit on 'one side of the table and men on the other' (but at the same table) at these Shiurim;
  - c) more group singing in Shule services so women could sing along without concerns of Kol Isha. A few participants noted that this apparently happens well in Beit Haroeh but not in Beit Yehuda;
  - d) honouring relevant women in the community on Simchat Torah together with the Chatan Torah and Chatan Bereshit, rather than having a separate function at a different time of the year. A participant suggested that this would enable single women (including those divorced or widowed), who never have the shared enjoyment of a husband's honour at Simchat Torah, to have an opportunity to have this honour themselves;
  - e) adopting Chief Rabbi Mirvis' 'bracha for women at Simchat Torah'. The participant was unable to provide a copy of the actual bracha but provided this link as a source - <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/chief-rabbi-issues-new-prayer-to-honour-women-ahead-of-simchat-torah/> ;
  - f) a women-only minyan with a Chazanit for Rosh Chodesh;
  - g) women being 'allowed' to make Kiddush at women-only Kiddushim; and
  - h) involving women in the decision-making when it comes to appointing Chazanim for Yamim Noraim.
- 4.24 A participant raised the issue of the Megillat Ruth reading which apparently took place at an inconvenient time, not leaving women enough time to get back into Shul and which was also 'interrupted' by a men's shiur.

4.25 At both forums, the discussion extended to the disproportionate under-involvement of Bnot Mitzvot compared to Bnei Mitzvot. Many participants wanted girls to be actively encouraged to have their simcha *in* Shule like (but, of course, also differently to) boys.

*Opportunities*

- *For Mizrahi to consider the list of proposed 'solutions' to increase female involvement and implement those it deems appropriate.*
- *For Mizrahi to refer to the above suggestions for Halachic determination and then implement them if appropriate.*

## **5. YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT PARTICIPATION**

### **Overarching comments**

- 5.1 Mizrachi is at its strongest when all of its members and member organisations feel welcomed and included. There was a view shared by many younger people at the forums that, at times, they feel excluded from Mizrachi and their ideas are ignored. Whether this is perception or reality is less important; if today's youth is to be the future of the Organisation they must feel included, empowered and accepted as soon as possible.
- 5.2 There was a clear sense that the vast majority of participants at the Youth and Young Adult Participation forums wanted Mizrachi to be successful and to find a greater role for youth in leadership roles across the organisation. In this sense, younger members of the community want to be active in their membership, and will only be lost to the organisation if decision-makers do not listen to what they are saying.

### **'Jump-off' points**

- 5.3 Mizrachi's full suite of youth organisations and programs are often thought of as a natural pathway from child into adulthood. From student at Leibler Yavneh College and chanich at Bnei Akiva to Shnatie, to madrich, to Kehilat Ohr David (KOD) member with the Beit Midrash playing a parallel role, there is a natural pathway. However, throughout the discussion, there were several anecdotes pointing to issues in each of these transitions. If widespread, these suggestions challenge the assumption that there will be a steady flow of young members into Mizrachi in the future.
- 5.4 Bnei Akiva chanichim are diverse and are not predominantly from Yavneh as they once were. This offers both an opportunity to reach more people, but also a risk that those involved in Bnei Akiva do not necessarily see themselves as belonging to Mizrachi.
- 5.5 Similarly, the number of Bnei Akiva "shnaties" (post-school students who attend a gap year on a Bnei Akiva Israel program) has reportedly decreased significantly, irrespective of COVID-19. The programs in Israel have traditionally energised members and kept them involved in Bnei Akiva and Mizrachi for longer. Lower numbers participating in Shnat means lower numbers of madrichim and lower numbers remaining involved in Mizrachi. Anecdotally, those who do not attend Shnat are less likely to become involved in Bnei or attend Mizrachi at all.

- 5.6 Post-Bnei, many ex-madrachim do not view KOD as a natural progression for a range of reasons. Chiefly among these is the perception that KOD's average age is too high and some reportedly feel uncomfortable leaving the Bnei Akiva minyan to join another minyan which has a large number of young children (whose parents are KOD members). This can lead to some former madrichim no longer attending shule services.
- 5.7 At each transition point, if a member leaves it is unlikely that they will return. Therefore, each of these transition points is a risk for the organisation. It is only really once people want to bring their young children to shule that there is a chance they may return.

#### *Opportunities*

- *For Mizrachi to study the numbers from the past 5-10 years (or longer) to understand trends and whether there are emerging problems with some of the transition points.*
- *For Mizrachi to create an overarching strategy for maintaining members from high school into KOD, involving each of the stakeholders (Leibler Yavneh College, Bnei Akiva, Beit Midrash, KOD) in the strategy.*
- *For Mizrachi to consider the effectiveness of Shnat recruitment and the attractiveness of the program and to investigate current barriers to entry with a view to increasing the number of attendees. Shnat is viewed as being a key aspect of the transition process.*
- *(See points below regarding youth leadership and focus of KOD)*

#### **Youth culture**

- 5.8 Loyalty to an organisation or minyan should not be taken for granted. It must be earned and can easily be lost. When members or attendees of Bnei Akiva or KOD choose to attend events or services run by other community organisations, this is not a sign of disloyalty. Even the most committed Mizrachi members should be expected to choose events and minyan based on their interests and friendship circles.
- 5.9 However, this presents a challenge, as well as an opportunity to Mizrachi. On one hand, it means that Mizrachi cannot be guaranteed strong attendance or support by its members if its programming does not appeal to its membership. There is the potential to spend money on events which are not well supported. On the other hand, if events and services have broad appeal, Mizrachi can attract not only members but non-members from a range of organisations.

### **Role Models**

- 5.10 There was broad support for Mizrahi to create one or more paid, full-time role(s) as youth leader. Some participants felt it was most suitable for the primary role to be a rabbi, others felt this was less important. Many participants stressed that it would be ideal to have male and female youth leaders. Most participants felt it did not matter whether this was a couple or two separate dedicated roles, but argued that each youth leader needs to be suited to the role in their own right.
- 5.11 Those who preferred a rabbi in the role spoke about the close relationship that they had developed with their rabbi at yeshivah or midrasha in Israel, and wanted to replicate that relationship. Advocates for this model argued that this person needs to be warm, approachable, energetic, persistent and open-minded. Some members were seeking 'pastoral care'. An example was given that a rabbi or female religious leader should have time to call individual community members and invite them to learn one-on-one during the afternoon between university classes. This would also ensure a Religious Zionist presence on university campuses.
- 5.12 Those who argued that it is not critical that the leader be a rabbi or female religious leader, emphasised personality traits as being more important than religious leadership. They argued that the most important thing is that the person have individual relationships with youth members and be warm and approachable. The term 'connectedness' came up on several occasions. Youth members want to feel connected and drawn in to the community through a personal relationship. Many young people want to be contacted directly by the youth leader on a regular basis.
- 5.13 It was suggested that the youth leader(s) could have a transitional role, creating relationships with Bnei Akiva madrichim which extend into KOD. The role(s) would act as a bridge between Bnei Akiva and KOD ,making the transition more natural and comfortable. It was widely agreed that this role could be key to keeping ex-madrichim involved with the organisation.
- 5.14 One of the points raised, when comparing Mizrahi to other successful youth programs, is that there needs to be greater longevity within the leadership. To be effective in forming relationships with madrichim which extend well into a person's time in KOD requires long appointments of 5-10 years. This is in contrast to most shlichim and Rashei Beit Midrash, who tend to stay in the role for 2-3 years.

- 5.15 There needs to be greater coordination between rabbinical leaders. There were suggestions for a youth rabbi and rabbanit or female religious leader to work in conjunction together with the Rosh Kollel and Rosh Midrasha, in addition to the Senior Rabbi. These leaders need to have a collaborative approach and ensure that members are not being missed if they slip between Mizrachi age or lifecycle categories.
- 5.16 There was debate within one of the forums as to whether the investment in Hesder Bachurim is justified or whether there should be greater financial investment in local youth leaders. Several youth expressed a wish to be employed in formal and informal roles at Leibler Yavneh College and/or the Beit Midrash upon completing year 12 or returning from Shnat. Some participants felt that such opportunities were limited by the Hesder Bachurim (both in terms of funding and programming opportunities). There was another view that Hesder Bachurim provide a unique connection to Israel which cannot be easily replaced. Whether or not employing local leaders is connected to the employment of Hesder Bachurim needs to be determined. However, employing local leaders as role-models to younger Mizrachi members (or children of members) appears to be a mutually beneficial idea as it keeps the leaders and younger members connected.

#### *Opportunities*

- *Consideration should be given to employing one or more youth leaders. Consideration needs to be given to the best model, including desired personality attributes, length of appointment, male/female roles, rabbinical leadership or not, role description, etc. Further consultation with a broader range of young adults may be required. (Note - it should not be assumed that one person can be Rosh Kollel, rabbi of KOD and perform a role for Bnei. There may be multiple leaders required.)*
- *For Mizrachi / Leibler Yavneh College to consider a program to employ young adult members at the College and in the Beit Midrash.*

#### **Bnei/Mizrachi Relationship**

- 5.17 Bnei Akiva leadership expressed the view that there could be a role for a board of advisors or a "parents and friends" group. Whilst there was no consensus regarding exactly what the model should be, the broad purpose would be to provide advice on governance issues (such as insurance, tax, finance etc) and act as a conduit to the Mizrachi Executive. It was noted, however, that there is a risk in creating such a body because it is important that Bnei Akiva madrichim maintain their independence in day-to-day decision making.

- 5.18 A member of the Bnei Akiva leadership expressed that, although they recently wanted help, they did not know whom to approach at Mizrachi or how to make the approach. Others said that they felt Mizrachi's leaders were very busy and did not have time for them. In thinking about the role of a Bnei Akiva board or the like, the view was expressed that board members should not be involved in other Mizrachi committees, and should make Bnei Akiva their primary focus within the Organisation.
- 5.19 One of the issues raised at the forum was that, initially, Bnei Akiva madrichim were not invited to the forums, as they are currently not Mizrachi members. The question was raised as to whether this could be changed, whereby those who purchase a seat in the Bnei Akiva minyan (possibly over the age of 18, if required) become members of Mizrachi. This would provide Mizrachi's youth a greater voice, opportunities for greater involvement in the organisation and more of a sense of inclusion.

#### *Opportunities*

- *For Mizrachi leadership to provide assistance to Bnei Akiva in progressing considerations regarding a governance body.*
- *For Bnei Akiva leadership to consider the merits of a governance body. The final decision as to whether a body should be created should rest with the movement, but Mizrachi has a role to play in workshopping options.*
- *For the Mizrachi Committee / Executive to consider including members of the Bnei Akiva minyan as Mizrachi members.*

#### **Kehillat Ohr David**

- 5.20 Several participants stressed that there should be a seamless transition from the Bnei Akiva shule to KOD, in order to avoid losing future members. Some participants in this age group argued that they are currently hesitant to join KOD because of the average age of the minyan. Similarly, there were a number of points raised about KOD not being able to cater for all of its members, particularly with events, as the members have a diverse range of needs. There was broad agreement that Mizrachi needs to have a clear idea of the purpose of KOD and who it caters for.
- 5.21 At the same time, there was concern that if older members of the minyan are encouraged to leave, they may go to other minyanim outside Mizrachi. Whilst it is unlikely that all members in a particular age group (or life-stage) will agree upon what the most appropriate change is, if any, there needs to be consultation and a group approach taken.

- 5.22 Bnei Akiva leadership saw opportunities for greater interaction between KOD and the movement. This could include joining services and events which can make the transition for those progressing from Bnei Akiva easier.
- 5.23 A youth rabbi and rabbanit or female religious leader could have a substantial impact in helping to make the connection between Bnei Akiva and KOD stronger. Potentially, they could be responsible for both, thereby already creating a connection with madrichim, which would make them feel welcome as they moved into KOD.

#### *Opportunities*

- *For older members of KOD to discuss options with Mizrahi leadership to devise a means of transition to another Mizrahi minyan.*
- *For Bnei Akiva and KOD leadership to discuss collaboration opportunities.*



## **6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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