**The Tzohar Rabbinic Training Department**

**Background**

**Goals of the Rabbinic Training Department**

Tzohar is the largest rabbinic organization in Israel. Its member rabbis interact with the Israeli public in a variety of different ways. The Rabbinic Training Department was established in an attempt to solidify Tzohar's status as a rabbinic body, and in order to maintain a connection with rabbis in the field. The main focus of this department relates to the work of community rabbis. The complexity of contemporary times requires our rabbis to provide responses to a variety of needs and challenges faced by members of their communities, which makes their work as rabbis a demanding job.

The goals of the program are:

1. **To promote a broad perception of the rabbi's responsibilities.** The traditional approach views the rabbi’s role as limited to the field of Torah teaching, ruling on matters of Jewish law, and concern with synagogue prayer services. Over the years, the role of the community rabbi has expanded and includes elements of welfare, inspiration and public leadership, both within the community and beyond it.

2. **To offer the community rabbi practical tools**. The process leading to rabbinic ordination in Israel relates entirely to the candidate’s knowledge of Jewish law. The skills required of the contemporary rabbi, however, demand much beyond that. Many of these skills can be developed and perfected, enhancing the rabbi's effectiveness and impact.

3. **To offer targeted support to individual rabbis in the unique challenges that they face.** Each community has its own story. The make-up of each community and its unique challenges, together with the personality and skills of the rabbi, require and individual approach.

4. **To respond to the needs of the wife of the community rabbi.** The community rabbinate affects not only the rabbi, but his family, as well. The status of the rabbi's wife and the family’s interactions with the community are part of the rabbi's ongoing personal challenges. Addressing these unique needs helps empower the community rabbi.

**Rabbinic Training Department Activities**

The department operates in four main areas:

**A. The *Ta’atzumot* program**

For a community rabbi to attain rabbinic ordination in the State of Israel, he must pass tests on Jewish law in specific subjects. Serving as a community rabbi, however, requires more complex skills: high interpersonal communication ability, a broad community perspective, personal initiative, general knowledge and knowledge of Jewish law in relevant areas, etc. This requires additional training beyond the standard curriculum.

It is for this reason that the “*Ta’atzumot* program for Continuing Education for Community Rabbis” has been developed. The goal of the program is to help community rabbis develop skills and personal empowerment for optimal work in their communities.

The program is made up of three components:

a. **The acquisition of professional tools** – This includes: interpersonal communication, community building, personal support for members of the community, offer support to families who suffer loss and distress, etc.

b. **Community decision-making** – Participants learn how to deal with the principles of community law, both in specific areas of Jewish law that are particular to the work of the community rabbi, and in matters that require the application of the “spirit of the law.”

c. **Collegial support in facing the challenges of the rabbinate** – Participants are given the opportunity to share and discuss the daily challenges and dilemmas relating to their work as rabbis.

The program is intended for community rabbis who are still in the early years of their rabbinic careers. It consists of guided sessions of about five hours each that take place over the course of two years and is intended for rabbis aged 30-45. In order to enable suitable dynamics, each group is limited to 16 participants.

Program participants receive an annual grant of 10,000 NIS, subject to their full attendance in the entire program.

In the year 5777 (2016-2017), 11 community rabbis from across the country participated in the program.

**B. Individual support program**

As is true in any leadership role, the rabbi of the community is faced with the challenge of loneliness. This loneliness is found in both his professional and his personal/social life. The camaraderie that develops in the *Ta’atzumot* program responds to the personal/social needs of many participants.

Concurrent with this program, Rabbi Tzachi Lehman, a member of the Tzohar Executive Board and Head of the Rabbinic Training Department, holds personal meetings with participants that focus on the professional aspect of the rabbi's work. Discussions at these meeting focus on the specific challenges of each community and each rabbi. These meetings emphasize the importance of moving the community forward according to its character and needs.

This support is given as part of the *Ta’atzumot* program for two years on a regular basis, and continues thereafter, according to the rabbi's needs and expressed desire.

**C. The *Pirchei Rabbanim* program**

Many yeshivot and kollelim offer programs that prepare students for the tests for ordination, at the end of which the student receives rabbinic ordination. In practice, only a few of the ordained rabbis choose to become community rabbis. Some turn to the field of education, while others choose another profession. Only a small minority seek a community in which to serve.

There are several reasons why so few choose to serve in communities. One reason is the limited acquaintance that many have with the world of the rabbinate. Sometimes a person is familiar with a certain style of rabbinic leadership that he does not find suitable for himself, which discourages him from pursuing a community rabbi position. Our goal is to expose rabbis to different models of community and rabbinic leadership in the hope that they will find suitable models that will be perceived as appropriate challenges for them.

This is where the *Pirchei Rabbanim* program comes into play. The purpose of the program is to offer in-depth understanding of various possibilities available in the community rabbinate.

In the course of the program, participants meet with a wide range of community rabbis who work in different communities and in a variety of roles. Each meeting has a visiting rabbi who comes and shares his personal experiences, offering a unique perspective on a specific component of the possibilities in the rabbinic world.

Among the topics discussed are: Why be a community rabbi? What must one do to prepare himself to be a successful rabbi? How does the rabbi perceive of himself? Are community members clients, employers or partners? What are the boundaries of rabbinic work? What are the characteristics of rabbinic work in various communities? A combination rabbinic career – integrating a rabbinic position with another profession. The role of the rabbi's family.

The program is made up of ten three-hour sessions. The program is designed for yeshiva students towards the end of their rabbinic ordination studies or immediately thereafter. The age range is 25-32. In order to enable suitable dynamics, each group is limited to 16 participants.

Program participants receive a one-time grant of NIS 3,000, subject to their full attendance in the entire program.

In the course of the year 5777 (2016-2017), two groups of the *Pirchei Rabbanim* program took place:

1. The Ra’anana group included 12 participants who came from Yeshivat Karnei Shomron, the community kollel in Shoham and the community kollel in Ra’anana.

2. The Jerusalem group included 13 participants from Yeshivat Bet El and Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav.

**D. The *Ta’atzumot* women’s program**

The community rabbi does not serve the community as an individual, inasmuch as his wife and family are partners in his mission. In many communities, the rabbi's wife plays a role in the community. Even those wives of rabbis who do not see themselves as playing a rabbinic role in the community, are nevertheless affected in their personal, marital and family lives.

Oftentimes the rabbi shares his challenges with his wife, and the eyes of the community are directed to the rabbi, his wife and family. It is not uncommon for women of the community to turn to the rabbi's wife in their time of need, etc.

The *Ta’atzumot* women’s program serves to respond to these issues. The program aims to empower the rabbi's wife and create a sense of camaraderie among peers.

Among the subjects discussed are: How to talk to adolescents about their sexuality, their challenges, and especially about themselves; confidences and discoveries in their rabbinic work; talking with and about mental illness, issues when facing terminal illness or chronic disease; how professional lives impact on personal lives; domestic violence.

In the course of the year 5777 (2016-2017), 25 wives of rabbis participated in two series of meetings: five meetings in the winter and three in the summer.

**The *Ta’atzumot* Rabbinic Training program - 5778**

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| Name | Location | Year |
| Hanan Shukrun | Jerusalem | 2 |
| Ovadia Simani | Neve Michael | 2 |
| Aviram Hariv | Pedu’el | 2 |
| Ron Alon | Shoham | 1 |
| Avi Shayish | Rehovot | 1 |
| Yair Beinstock | Efrat | 1 |
| Yehonatan Amrani | Holon | 1 |
| Ariel Ziskind | Gonenim, Jerusalem | 1 |
| Amichai Shukrun | Ramat Gan | 1 |
| Refael Delouya | Har Bracha | 1 |
| Dovi Stern | Mitzpe Ilan | 1 |
| Zev Rosenfeld | Talmon | 2 |
| Sharon Simchi | Holon | 1 |
| Haggai Stamler | Jerusalem | 1 |
| Sarel Weinberger | Binyamina | 2 |

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| Tali Bar-Lev | Coordinator |
| Boaz Ganot | Director of the Rabbinic Training Department |
| Rabbi Tzachi Lehman | Program Head |