

THE
AVI CHAI
FELLOWSHIP

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AVI CHAI's mission and The AVI CHAI Fellowship: The AVI CHAI Fellowship aims to identify and support outstanding individuals who are engaged in activities that promote the Foundation's goals in North America and who will be identified as creative partners in its work.

AVI CHAI's mission is:

- To encourage those of the Jewish faith towards greater commitment to Jewish observance and lifestyle by increasing their understanding, appreciation and practice of Jewish traditions, customs and laws; and
- To encourage mutual understanding and sensitivity among Jews of different religious backgrounds and commitments to observance.

We promote this mission in North America through what we have termed **LRP**:

1. Fostering high levels of Jewish **L**iteracy
2. Deepening **R**eligious Purposefulness¹
3. Promoting Jewish **P**eoplehood and deeper connections with Israel

We believe Jewish commitment—our key mission in North America—depends on these elements, because Judaism derives from a core set of texts and lives in ongoing dialogue with those texts (literacy); because Judaism is lived and experienced in daily practice and interactions guided by those texts (religious purposefulness); and because in the 21st century Jews throughout the world should feel connected as one people with responsibility for one another and for the national homeland in the modern State of Israel.

The AVI CHAI Fellowship—an Investment in Individuals: AVI CHAI works toward **LRP** via (1) programs in the day school and camping fields, (2) strengthening key institutions in these fields, and (3) engaging partners and successors. By “engaging partners and successors,” we mean identifying and cultivating philanthropists, thought leaders and practitioners who advance our core goals, within and beyond the fields of our programmatic activities. Among these are people already engaged in supporting and promoting ideas and institutions. But there are also people who are concerned about AVI CHAI's goals and who imagine their contributions in ways not yet considered by existing institutions. These are people with vision, creativity, courage, savvy and stamina to try new things, to think outside the conventional boxes or inside them in new ways, and to see opportunities where others see obstacles. The AVI CHAI Fellowship is intended to be a vehicle for investing in these people and the ideas they seek to launch or expand.

¹ Religious Purposefulness is a term coined by Marvin Schick in his book-length manuscript, *Outreach and Jewish Education*: “[Schools] must be determined to contribute to Jewish continuity by promoting a distinctive Jewish message that aims to bring about some religious transformation.”

The AVI CHAI Foundation, endowed by Zalman C. Bernstein, z”l, is a private foundation operating in Israel, North America and the former Soviet Union that is committed to the perpetuation of the Jewish people, Judaism and the centrality of the State of Israel to the Jewish people.

In North America, AVI CHAI seeks to achieve its mission by fostering high levels of Jewish literacy, deepening religious purposefulness, and promoting Jewish peoplehood and deeper connections to the State of Israel.

We believe that Jewish commitment depends on these elements, because Judaism derives from a core set of texts and lives in ongoing dialogue with those texts (literacy); because Judaism is lived and experienced in daily practice and interactions with family, neighbors and strangers guided by those texts (religious purposefulness); and because in the 21st century, Jews throughout the world should feel connected to other Jews and to the modern State of Israel.

As a “value investor,” AVI CHAI has decided to work with day schools and summer camps—to contribute to the content of their Jewish learning, the nature of their Jewish experiences, and the competence, character and outlook of the Jewish adults who guide the Jewish journeys.

We also recognize that our success requires that key institutions in our fields be viable and sustainable, and we are working to develop new ways to ensure their strength. And, we appreciate that the long-term impact of our work depends on our persuading Jewish educators, thought leaders and philanthropists to collaborate with us along the way and to champion our mission after AVI CHAI winds down in 2020.

* * *

AVI CHAI means “My father lives.” That is what we want for our children—to know that our culture, our values and the richness of our traditions will live on in our children and in their future generations, just as the profound meaning and inspiration of our forbearers’ lives continue to live on through us today.



Dr. Erica Brown

Director for Adult Education

The Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning

Dr. Erica Brown is the Director for Adult Education at The Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning and the Scholar-in-Residence for The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. She is also an adjunct professor at American University and George Washington University, was a Jerusalem Fellow and is a faculty member of the Wexner Foundation. She lectures widely on subjects of Jewish interest and leadership, in addition to extensive writing in journals of education and Jewish studies. She has chapters in *Jewish Legal Writings by Women*, *Torah of the Mothers*, and *Wisdom from All of My Teachers* and writes a weekly internet essay on topics of Jewish interest. Erica is the author of the book, *Inspired Leadership: A Jewish Perspective* and *Jewish Boredom* (forthcoming), a National Jewish Book Award finalist and co-author of *The Case for Jewish Peoplehood*. She resides with her husband and four children in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Erica plans to use her Fellowship in part for her own professional development and towards her plans to develop a Jewish values curriculum for journalists and media opinion shapers.



David Cygielman
Founder and Executive Director
Moishe House

David Cygielman is the founder and executive director of Moishe House, which, now with 25 houses in nine countries, serves as hubs for the young adult Jewish community with an emphasis on ages 21-30. Moishe House provides a rent subsidy and a program budget for a handful of young and innovative Jews to live in and create their vision of an ideal Jewish communal space through programs that they initiate and implement. Since creating Moishe House in 2006, David has pioneered the growth from one Moishe House to more than 25 Moishe Houses in nine countries, serving more than 3,000 young adults each month. David has more than ten years of experience in non-profit management, beginning in high school by creating Feed the Need, a community-based homeless feeding organization, for which his efforts were widely recognized. While in college, David served as the president of Hillel and member of Alpha Epsilon Fraternity. Following his graduation in 2003 from the University of California at Santa Barbara, where he graduated with honors in Business/Economics, David continued his community involvement by sitting on the Board of Directors for the Santa Barbara Nonprofit Support Center, Santa Barbara Hillel, Jewish Film World, Congregation Bnai Brith, the Jewish Federation of Greater Santa Barbara and the Professional Leaders Project.

David plans to use the Fellowship to enhance the existing Moishe Houses and ultimately double their number. He intends to visit every Moishe House, build relationships with the residents and their communities, and provide tailored training and support. David also intends to enroll in several Jewish learning programs to deepen his own Judaic knowledge.



Aliza Kline

Founding Executive Director

Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh
Paula Brody & Family Education Center

Aliza Kline is the founding executive director of Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh and the Paula Brody & Family Education Center in Newton, Massachusetts. Mayyim Hayyim, which reclaims and reimagines mikveh for the 21st century, was founded in 2001; it opened and began serving the Jewish community of Greater Boston in May 2004. Since then, Mayyim Hayyim has provided more than 5,700 immersions to women, men and children and education programs and art exhibits to 10,000 visitors from all over the world. Her past work experience includes UJA-Federation of New York, Jerusalem Open House – Community Center of LGBTQ Israelis, Arava Institute for Environmental Studies – Regional Academic Program for Middle Eastern and North American Students, JNF On Campus and Hillel. Aliza holds a Masters in Public Administration degree from New York University with a Bachelor degree in History and Psychology from Washington University in St. Louis. Aliza is married to Rabbi Bradley Solmsen who is the director of Genesis and BIMA at Brandeis University and Associate Director of the Institute for Informal Jewish Education. Aliza and Bradley are the very proud parents of daughters, Ela and Gila, and God-willing one more at the end of March!

Aliza plans to use her Fellowship to strengthen the organizational capacity of Mayyim Hayyim thereby enabling her to devote greater resources to reaching out to communities across North America interested in this unique approach to ritual immersion and education. The proceeds may also be directed towards the development of engaging and creative ways to share the Mayyim Hayyim experience with a broad audience.



Daniel Libenson

Executive Director

Newberger Hillel Center at the University of Chicago

Daniel Libenson has been executive director of the Newberger Hillel Center at the University of Chicago since 2006. At Chicago, he has created the "Jethro Initiative," an effort to reimagine and redesign Hillel as an institution capable of delivering on its vision of "inspiring every Jewish student to make an enduring commitment to Jewish life." The Jethro Initiative has attracted national attention and funding, including a prestigious Covenant Foundation Signature Grant. Libenson graduated *cum laude* from Harvard College and *magna cum laude* from Harvard Law School. He was an editor of the *Harvard Law Review* and clerked for Judge Michael Boudin on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit. Immediately prior to coming to Chicago, Libenson taught law at the University of St. Thomas School of Law in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In college, Libenson served as president of Harvard Hillel. After graduation, he served as a member of its Board of Directors and strategic planning committee and spent three years on the professional staff as Director of New Initiatives. Libenson resides in Chicago with his wife, Beth Niestat, whom he met while they both served on the staff of Harvard Hillel, and with their two children, Sam and Miriam.

Daniel intends to use the AVI CHAI Fellowship to launch the creation of a center for Jewish ideas and innovation, which would leverage the power of the university for the benefit of the Jewish people. With a "faculty" of practitioner-scholars spending half their time on research, design, assessment, and dissemination and half their time implementing and experimenting on the ground, the center marries an academic think tank to a living laboratory, creating a rapid innovation cycle. The center, which will also seek to partner with and create non-student Jewish laboratory communities, will become an ideas engine for the Jewish people, playing the role in Jewish society that the university plays in general society.



Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum

Founder and Executive Director

Kavana Cooperative

Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum is the founder and Executive Director of the Kavana Cooperative (www.kavana.org), a unique religious community in Seattle which has gained national attention for its innovative approach to Jewish engagement. Kavana is a pluralistic Jewish community built on a cooperative model, in which all partners are expected to take an active role in shaping the community. Since 2006, Kavana has attracted a diverse cross-section of young adults and families from the Seattle Jewish community, including many who were previously unaffiliated. In 2008, Rachel was named on *Newsweek* Magazine's list of the "Top 25 Pulpit Rabbis in America." A recipient of the Bronfman Youth Fellowship and the Wexner Graduate Fellowship, Rachel was ordained by and received a Masters in Midrash from the Jewish Theological Seminary in 2004. Rachel is a native of Charleston, South Carolina, and a graduate of Duke University where she received the Benjamin N. Duke Leadership Award. Before founding Kavana, Rachel served in a variety of rabbinic capacities, including at Harvard Hillel, Beth-El in Durham, North Carolina and Herzl-Ner Tamid Conservative Congregation in Mercer Island, Washington, where she served as Assistant Rabbi for two years. Rachel lives in Seattle with her husband Noam Pianko and their daughter Yona.

Rachel's project will help Kavana grow its Hebrew immersion program, which aims to teach Hebrew virtually from birth and ultimately to create a community which can engage meaningfully with Jewish texts and other Jewish communities around the world. Additionally, Kavana plans to expand its successful cooperative model, and will explore replicating its model of neighborhood "pods" in Seattle and other communities across North America.



Ariel Beery
Co-Founder & Director
Presentense Institute

Ariel Beery is the co-founder and director of the Presentense Group, as well as editor and publisher of *Presentense Magazine* and co-founder of the Presentense Institute for socially-minded entrepreneurs. A widely-published columnist in over a dozen papers around the world including the *Forward*, the *London Jewish Chronicle*, the *Jerusalem Post* and *Haaretz*, Ariel teaches and lectures at conferences worldwide, focusing on issues pertaining to the Jewish People, Zionism and the impact of the Information Age on human communities.

A *summa cum laude* graduate of Columbia University and a graduate student at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Jewish Philosophy, receiving a Masters in Public Administration from New York University in Nonprofit Management and a Masters in Judaic Studies, Ariel was named one of the **10 Jews to Watch** by the *World Jewish Digest*, along with Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and was a finalist in the Brandeis University search for a Visiting Professor for Jewish Communal Innovation.

Ariel's grant proposal, with Aharon Horwitz, was to expand *Presentense Magazine* and the Presentense Institute for Creative Zionism to form a corps of forward-thinking social and communal pioneers, specially trained for the Information Age.

2009 Update

Ariel Beery & Aharon Horwitz report that Presentense has grown significantly since they received the Fellowship. They have launched 27 Presentense projects and have expanded from two to six cities, reaching thousands of people as they build the infrastructure of a strong and connected Jewish People.



Aharon Horwitz
Co-Founder & Director
PresenTense Group

Aharon Horwitz is the co-founder and director of the the PresenTense Group and the co-founder of the PresenTense Institute for socially minded entrepreneurs. He has founded and directed initiatives in technology and community such as *MavenHaven.com* as well as in the area of student programming, such as the *Azure Student Journals Project*. Aharon speaks regularly within the Jewish Community and consults on student programming, strategic planning and innovative marketing.

A 2004 graduate of Columbia University, he studied Political Science and Arabic and has published and been cited on the subject of suicide terrorism. He volunteers for the Jerusalem based social justice organizations *B'Maaglei Tzedek* and *Atzum's Task Force on Human Trafficking* and is a recipient of the World Zionist Organization's *Herzl Prize*.

Aharon's grant project proposal, with Ariel Beery, was to expand *PresenTense Magazine* and the PresenTense Institute for Creative Zionism to form a corps of forward-thinking social and communal pioneers, specially trained for the Information Age.

2009 Update

Ariel Beery & Aharon Horwitz report that PresenTense has grown significantly since they received the Fellowship. They have launched 27 PresentTense projects and have expanded from two to six cities, reaching thousands of people as they build the infrastructure of a strong and connected Jewish People.



Dr. Betsy Dolgin Katz

Founding North American Director

Florence Melton Adult Mini-School

Dr. Betsy Dolgin Katz is a teacher of adults in a variety of venues and a consultant and mentor to those specializing in adult education. Until August 2008 she served as the founding North American Director of the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School. Formerly the Director of the Departments of Adult and Family Learning and Synagogue Education for the Community Foundation for Jewish Education and the Board of Jewish Education, Betsy was also a founder and Educational Director of the Dolores Kohl Jewish Teacher Center.

Betsy is a member of the Board of Directors of the Covenant Foundation and past chairperson of the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE) and the Alliance for Adult Jewish Learning (AAJL). She serves on the Education Committee and the Curriculum Task Force of Chicagoland Jewish High School. She is a mentor for Masters Students at Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies and a consultant to the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative (JECEI).

In 2002, Betsy was named by the *Forward* as one of the fifty most influential Jewish leaders in North America. She has written on adult Jewish learning and taught extensively in North America and Israel. She attended the University of Michigan and Ohio State University and earned her Doctorate in Education at the University of Cincinnati. Her writing includes *Let a New Light Shine*, a book on teaching Jerusalem. A contributor to various publications, her latest book, *The Adult Jewish Education Handbook: Planning, Practice, and Theory*, written with Roberta Lewis Goodman was published in 2004.

Betsy's grant proposal, drawing on the philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig as well as her long and distinguished career in the field, was to write a book about the development of adult Jewish learning against the backdrop of contemporary American society.

2009 Update

Betsy Dolgin Katz is researching and writing the initial three chapters of her book, which is also part of a formal proposal to be submitted to potential publishers. She plans to present her work at an upcoming conference of The Network for Research in Jewish Education, at which she will invite responses to the book's purpose, format, and outline.



Rabbi Elie Kaunfer
Co-Founder & Executive Director
Mechon Hadar

Rabbi Elie Kaunfer is co-founder and executive director of Mechon Hadar: An Institute for Prayer, Personal Growth and Jewish Study (www.mechonhadar.org). Mechon Hadar has created a network of dozens of grassroots religious communities — or independent *minyanim* — across the country. He co-authored the first demographic study of these minyanim, which was cited in the *New York Times*.

In 2001, Elie co-founded Kehilat Hadar (www.kehilathadar.org), an egalitarian community in Manhattan committed to spirited traditional prayer, study and social action. Over the past seven years, Hadar has attracted over 2,500 people to its Shabbat and holiday services, weekly Beit Midrash and social action programming.

In 2007, Mechon Hadar launched Yeshivat Hadar — a full-time, independent egalitarian yeshiva. Within two years, Yeshivat Hadar has received 115 applications from 20 states and five countries and doubled its student body in 2008 from 18 to 36 students.

A Wexner Graduate Fellow, Elie completed ordination and an Masters in liturgy at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he is continuing work on a doctorate in liturgy. Elie is a co-founder of Limmud NY and is a member of the Jewish Emergent Group of Synagogue 3000. He has taught for Drisha, CAJE, AJWS, Avodah, the Covenant Foundation, the Wexner Foundation, the Dorot Foundation and the Samuel Bronfman Foundation. A graduate of Harvard, he served as president of Harvard Hillel and was awarded a Dorot Fellowship upon graduation. Elie is a former corporate fraud investigator and analyst at Morgan Stanley. *The Forward* has named him one of 50 Top Jewish Leaders and the Jewish Week named him one of 36 Under 36 in 2008.

Rabbi Kaunfer's grant proposal was to expand Yeshivat Hadar to a full-year program, aimed to begin in Fall 2009. This would represent the first egalitarian yeshiva in the United States.

2009 Update

Rabbi Elie Kaunfer reports that Mechon Hadar organized the National Independent Minyan Conference this past November, attracting 180 people from 32 minyanim and major Jewish institutions, representing close to 14,000 minyan constituents. In September 2009, Mechon Hadar will launch the first year-round full-time egalitarian yeshiva in North America; they received 114 applications from 47 cities and six countries for their summer and year-round programs.



Rabbi Dov Linzer

Rosh HaYeshiva & Dean

Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School

Rabbi Dov Linzer is the Rosh HaYeshiva and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School. Rabbi Linzer studied for many years at Yeshivat Har Etzion, was a member of Yeshiva University's Gruss Kollel Elyon, and received his ordination from the Israeli Rabbinate. He is a recipient of the Javits Graduate fellowship, and a doctoral candidate in Religion at Columbia University.

Rabbi Linzer headed the Boca Raton Kollel for the first two-and-a-half years of its existence, giving classes to the rabbis of the Kollel, and lecturing throughout the South Florida communities. He has published *halakha* and philosophical articles in Torah journals and lectures widely at synagogues and conferences on topics relating to *halakha*, Orthodoxy, and modernity.

Rabbi Linzer spearheaded the development of the YCT Rabbinical School curriculum into an innovative four year ordination program which provides its students with rigorous *halakbic* study and sophisticated professional training in the context of a religious atmosphere which cultivates openness and inclusiveness. In addition to overseeing the Yeshiva's Torah curriculum, R. Linzer teaches advanced *halakha* in a broad range of areas across all four sections of the Shulchan Aruch, the Jewish code of laws. Rabbi Linzer teaches advanced classes in Talmud and a year-long class in Contemporary Challenges of Modern Orthodoxy.

Rabbi Linzer's grant proposal was to create a rabbinical school curriculum for educators, allowing the Orthodox rabbinate to gain enhanced pedagogical training, so that they are better trained to be Day School educators.

2009 Update

Rabbi Dov Linzer has been visiting and researching existing Jewish educator-training programs in Israel and the United States, as well as visiting Jewish high schools known for their innovative teaching or culture. He has also been engaged in ongoing consultations with experts in the field of pedagogy and professional training. He is now assessing the feasibility of implementing a first-phase of this program at YCT for September 2009.



Rabbi Menachem Schmidt

Executive Director

Lubavitch House

Menachem Schmidt graduated from The Peddie School in 1972, the Newhouse School of Communications at Syracuse University in 1976, and received rabbinic ordination in 1980 from Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch in Montreal. He was appointed by Rabbi Abraham Shemtov to work in Philadelphia as an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe at the University of Pennsylvania. That year, he and his wife Chava founded Lubavitch House at the university, where he is still a hands-on executive director.

Rabbi Schmidt aided in founding many of the Chabad Lubavitch centers in the Delaware Valley and other institutions in the Philadelphia area including co-founding the Jewish Relief Agency and The Steinhardt Neubauer Jewish Heritage Programs (JHP), a project of the Cayne Heritage Foundation. JHP was a pioneer in peer to peer campus outreach and mentoring of college students by community professionals. That program has now expanded to ten campuses. He has been instrumental in creating the national network of Chabad Houses on campus. This eventually became the Chabad on Campus International Foundation, which has been in the forefront of building over 100 Chabad Houses on campuses nationally and more internationally. Rabbi Schmidt presently serves as its president.

Rabbi Schmidt is also a musician and he plays lead guitar in the Baal Shem Tov chasidic rock band. Most recently he was the impetus behind creating The Old City Jewish Art Center in Philadelphia, which he also directs. The Old City Jewish Art Center hosts the “First Friday Shabbos” events, which have become a local legend, drawing crowds every month.

Rabbi Schmidt’s grant proposal was to expand innovative Jewish programming in the Philadelphia area.

2009 Update

Rabbi Menachem Schmidt’s Jewish Heritage Programs (JHP) have brought a vibrant and innovative new addition to the arts in Philadelphia with the creation of the Old City Jewish Art Center (OCJAC). It offers a unique environment in which artists and art lovers of all backgrounds can come together to enjoy and expand Judaism’s contributions to the arts. More than 1,000 visitors attend OCJAC’s First Friday Shabbos Celebration each month. The OCJAC has partnered with Birthright NEXT in Philadelphia for many of its programs, especially those related to art, and it has just inaugurated an “artist in residence” program. All of these efforts enable Rabbi Schmidt to promote other Jewish programming as well.



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