



The AVI CHAI Foundation

AVI CHAI Press Releases

2009 AVI CHAI Fellows Announced

April 2, 2009

2009 AVI CHAI Fellows Announced

Foundation Grants Five Fellowships of \$225K Each Over Three Years

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Deena K. Fuchs

212-396-8850; dfuchs@avichaina.org

New York, NY - April 2, 2009 -- The AVI CHAI Foundation has announced the recipients of the 2009 AVI CHAI Fellowship:

Dr. Erica Brown
David Cygielman
Aliza Kline
Daniel Libenson
Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum

Bios of the fellows are available below.

The recipients of the AVI CHAI Fellowship were selected from an initial pool of more than 43 nominations that were submitted by 18 nominators. The seven members of the selection committee met privately over the course of four months; the nominators and selections committee remain anonymous so that the integrity of the nomination and selection process not be compromised. The first cohort of AVI CHAI Fellows was announced in 2008.

The AVI CHAI Foundation occupies a singular spot in North American Jewish life, defining its goals as fostering high levels of Jewish Literacy; deepening religious purposefulness and promoting Jewish Peoplehood and deeper connections to the State of Israel. Each of the AVI CHAI Fellows has demonstrated a track record of commitment towards these ends and although the award - \$75K per fellow per year - will go towards their proposed activities, the purpose of The AVI CHAI Fellowship is to advance and promote the individual winners as important forces in building a vital American Jewish future built upon these values.

AVI CHAI works toward achieving its goals via (1) supporting programs in the Jewish day school and camping fields, (2) strengthening key institutions in these fields, and (3) engaging partners and successors. "By "engaging partners and successors," explains Yossi Prager, AVI CHAI's Executive Director in North America, "we mean identifying and cultivating philanthropists, thought leaders and practitioners who advance our core goals, within and beyond the fields of our programmatic activities. The AVI CHAI Fellowship is an investment in those people."

For further information, please contact Deena K. Fuchs at 212-396-8850 or by email at dfuchs@avichaina.org.

#

2009 AVI CHAI Fellows - Bios

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. Erica is the author of the book, *Inspired Leadership: A Jewish Perspective*, a National Jewish Book Award finalist and *Jewish Boredom* (forthcoming), and co-author of *The Case for Jewish Peoplehood* (all through Jewish Lights). She has served as 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 and writes a weekly internet essay on topics of Jewish interest. 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.

Contact: ebrown@pjll.org

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.

Contact: david@moishehouse.org

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. Aliza is also working to develop engaging and creative ways to share the Mayyim Hayyim experience with a broad audience of viewers.

Contact: alimak@mayyimhayyim.org

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.

Contact: dlibenson@uchicago.edu

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.

Contact: kavanarabbi@gmail.com

© 2004 AVI CHAI