



Dear Friends,

For the past 25 years, AVI CHAI has been funding programs to help you advance the Jewish day school field. All of our work has been in partnership with you – day school principals, educators and volunteers – for the benefit of children who become part of the unbroken chain of Jews studying Torah and contributing to the community. It has always been our profound privilege to support your commitment to Jewish education.

AVI CHAI began as a creation of Zalman C. Bernstein z”l, whose generosity and passion drew an unusual group of Trustees and staff who have continued his work 20 years after his passing.

By the early 1980s, Sanford C. Bernstein (as Zalman was known then) had built and grown a thriving investment company. By 1984, Zalman launched The AVI CHAI Foundation, as part of his personal Jewish journey, which began after the death of his father and ultimately included an embrace of traditional observance and Aliyah. AVI CHAI means “my father lives,” and the name can be understood to refer to Zalman’s father, our Father in heaven and all the parents who educate the next generation of our great People.

Initially, the Foundation focused on outreach to adults – the path Zalman took to his own Jewish lifestyle and commitments. However, at the end of eight years, based on research and evaluation that was Zalman’s hallmark in business and philanthropy, Zalman and his trustees decided to shift the focus in North America to Jewish education of children. The thinking was that Jewishly literate children, purposeful in their religious life and committed to the State of Israel, would serve as the energizing nucleus of the next generation of Jews.

Our focus would be not only what made a school great – strong leadership, well-trained teachers, quality curriculum – but also on the Jewish content and character of Jewish day schools in North America.

Over time, the board and staff grew, and so did AVI CHAI’s portfolio of Jewish day school (and summer camp) related grants. To ensure that his vision would remain the guiding force, Zalman wanted AVI CHAI to spend down its grantmaking assets in the lifetime of the Trustees he selected and knew. Zalman passed away in early 1999, and by the end of this year—nine months from now—AVI CHAI will cease its grantmaking, leaving behind funding only for Beit AVI CHAI, an operating Jewish Israeli cultural center in Jerusalem. By the end, AVI CHAI will have invested \$1.2 billion globally, nearly \$480 million in North America.

In our early years in the day school world, we helped to develop curricula for Hebrew language and Jewish studies; we supported programs that trained professional leaders and educators for schools; and we expanded a program originally created by another foundation to provide interest-free loans for construction and renovation at schools. While the loan program ended as our spend-down approached, most of the other programs continue to thrive today.

In our last decade, we began to invest in the sustainability of our funded programs and a few new areas in the day school field: financial vitality (fundraising, endowments, government funding), personalized and blended learning, and lay leadership training. We tried many things, succeeding in some and failing in others. We are fortunate to partner with other funders who share similar goals.

One very exciting yet complicated and difficult initiative in the final years was the merging of five day school organizations into one – Prizmah. Still in its early years, Prizmah has expanded the work of PaRDeS, PEJE, RAVSAK, the Schechter Network and the YU School Partnership, and it has released a new strategic plan that will guide new and more ambitious efforts. We are delighted to have been among Prizmah’s founders and thrilled to join you at this conference, celebrating, learning and sharing together.

We are proud of the many AVI CHAI projects and initiatives that will continue, the 175 schools and camps that were enhanced and expanded with AVI CHAI interest-free loans, the thousands of educators and leaders who improved their craft through our programs, the hundreds of thousands of students who have used curricula we funded, and the 45 research reports that have helped us better understand this enterprise. We are prouder, still, of you. Your expertise, experience, dedication and imagination breathed life and love into our best ideas and efforts. We learned from you everyday. We are still learning.

When we think about AVI CHAI’s “legacy,” we think first about you. We know you will continue the sacred work long after AVI CHAI’s sunset. We humbly thank you for guiding us and inspiring us. For you have taught us how to instill the values of literacy, religious purpose and a commitment to the Jewish people and the State of Israel into today’s Jewish students. You are Zalman’s legacy, and because of you the Jewish future of North American day school graduates will be glorious.

With love,

Rachel Mohl Abrahams  
Deborah Fishman  
Nechama Leibowitz  
Marlene Wasserman

Galli Aizenman  
Deena K. Fuchs  
Leah Nadich Meir

Michael Berger  
Eli Kannai  
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