

# THE SAVING REMNANT IS SHINING BRIGHT, ITS FIRE NOW SPREADING RENEWING LIGHT

YEAR SEVEN REPORT ON THE CONCLUDING YEARS  
OF THE AVI CHAI FOUNDATION

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## FOREWORD

This report is based on a thorough review of Board minutes, internal documents, and published reports of The AVI CHAI Foundation, and on interviews with some of the Foundation's senior officers and the Executive Directors for Israel and North America, conducted in the United States and Israel in the summer of 2017. Except where otherwise noted, quotations from AVI CHAI Trustees and staff are drawn from these interviews.

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### BACKGROUND

This is the seventh in a series of reports on how The AVI CHAI Foundation is going about completing its grantmaking by December 31, 2019. The Foundation was established in 1984 by financier Zalman Chaim Bernstein (z"l<sup>1</sup>), with the mission of strengthening Judaism, Jewish literacy, and Jewish tradition; promoting mutual understanding among Jews of differing religious orientations; and sustaining, enlarging, and enriching Jewish commitment to the State of Israel. AVI CHAI makes grants in three regions: North America, Israel, and the former Soviet Union (FSU).

In 2004, following the strongly implied wishes of its donor, who died in 1999, the Foundation's Board of Trustees decided, and then announced in 2005, that it would cease grantmaking operations within a fixed period of time. This series of reports describes the process by which AVI CHAI has planned and carried out its grantmaking so as to

<sup>1</sup> A traditional abbreviation for the Hebrew *zichrono livracha*: "may his memory be a blessing."

achieve significant, lasting objectives in the time remaining and leave its grantees stronger and more fully equipped to carry on the parts of their mission that the Foundation has supported.

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### PART I: OVERVIEW

At the end of 2017, The AVI CHAI Foundation stood exactly two years away from its intended sunset, when its two remaining programs, in North America and in Israel, would make their final grants and disband. (A third program, in the Former Soviet Union, ended in 2015.) But far from an atmosphere of impending doom, the approaching conclusion seemed to be inspiring a heightened sense of urgency and a steadily growing confidence, among both staff and Board, in the prospects of making lasting contributions to the well-being and unity of the Jewish People, the vitality of Judaism, and the centrality of the State of Israel in Jewish life. Many projects and initiatives still await the results of independent evaluations, and some struggle with financial and other challenges as they prepare for the end of

AVI CHAI support. But the feeling that important strides have been made, and some achievements seem likely to endure, has created a sense of buoyancy, even amid the lingering uncertainties.

In **North America**, a clear sign of this confidence surfaced in May 2017 at a program retreat in New York. There, the full Board and staff gathered with a selected group of grantees to review progress, to hear directly from frontline educators and program leaders, and to begin to size up what the program might expect to accomplish by the end of its intended lifespan. The group reviewed what by then had amounted to \$307 million in grants and operating programs in North America since 1985, of which nearly three-quarters (\$222 million) had gone to support Jewish day school education. Another \$28 million had supported the enrichment of Jewish overnight camping, and the remainder was directed toward a variety of other purposes, most of which had been part of the Foundation's early years of exploratory grantmaking in the 1980s and '90s. Beyond grants, the Foundation had made another \$158 million in loans, mainly to support construction or renovation of school and camp facilities whose total value approached \$1 billion.

The extent of AVI CHAI's influence, as reported at the retreat, was impressive: Some 600 day schools enrolling more than 136,000 students a year had benefited from at least one Foundation program. That constitutes more than half the enrollment of all North American day schools combined. Of those 600 schools, 308 were using AVI CHAI support specifically for teaching Hebrew and Israel studies to more than 45,000 students. The schools were using either the Hebrew language and Jewish heritage curriculum TaL AM for grades 1–5 or the Hebrew language program NETA (now called Bishvil Ha-Ivrit) for grades 6–12, or both. These programs had both been created with AVI CHAI backing.

The Foundation's influence on day schools ran broad and deep: More than 1,100 school leaders and administrators and 3,250 teachers had participated

in at least one program supported by AVI CHAI, and roughly 1,500 people at all levels had been mentored by more senior educators and leaders. An AVI CHAI-sponsored training program called Generations, conducted by Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools, had equipped employees at dozens of day schools to carry out fundraising campaigns, collectively adding more than \$100 million to their endowments. An AVI CHAI challenge-grant program known as MATCH had leveraged another \$58 million in first-time large gifts to day schools. Although these initiatives fell far short of satisfying the needs of the chronically undercapitalized day school field, they offered a trove of new resources and methods of operating that is unprecedented in Jewish educational philanthropy. Still, it remains an open question whether other funders will be drawn to a similar or greater level of support for the field (beyond contributing to individual local schools) once AVI CHAI has closed its doors.

More than 100 Jewish summer camps, serving nearly 50,000 campers had taken part in at least one AVI CHAI-funded program—close to two-thirds of all the camps then in operation. Eleven new specialty camps had also been launched with Foundation backing. Twenty-six of the Foundation-supported camps had also received an AVI CHAI building loan. Here, the prospects of lasting success seem more secure, given that the main focus of Foundation support in this field—the infusion of Jewish content into the entire camping experience—is a cause that many camps, camping organizations, and funders have now embraced as their own.

Most of the speakers at the retreat were practitioners working in schools and camps, each with a story of how Foundation support had enriched their professional life, equipped them with new skills or experiences, expanded their material resources for teaching or leadership, strengthened the organizations and fields in which they worked, or some combination of all four. The high spirits sharply contrasted with the mood in the field less

than a decade earlier, at the bottom of the global financial collapse, when personal financial losses were devastating the worlds of fundraising and education, leaving many once-solid organizations facing the prospect of major shrinkage or worse.

Now, with that memory beginning to recede, an AVI CHAI Trustee could reflect, with a combination of relief and hopefulness, that reasons for optimism were plentiful:

What I wasn't prepared for, and was so wonderfully surprised by, was the people in the field—they're okay. They are motivated. They are dedicated. They are optimistic. They are moving forward. Because after [the financial crisis of] 2008–09, certainly in the field of day schools, there was a real fear. There was a real economic panic. It almost was overwhelming. Nobody knew where it was going to go. It's now enough years later, but this is the world we live in. And people from the community are dealing with it, for better or for worse, they're dealing with it. They're positive about it. We helped greatly to arm them, and I don't just mean financially, I mean in terms of expertise, the confidence, building the community. But in the end, it's them, and they're ready, which was the most positive thing that I could have imagined coming out.

For an institution approaching its sunset, with barely a decade left to rebound after the Great Recession, the knowledge that its programs had managed to contribute to a resurgence and fortification of the field—in human and in institutional terms—was heartening. Although many members of the Board continue to reserve judgment about whether AVI CHAI will have fulfilled its mission by the time it closes, one aspect of that mission, in the words of this same Trustee, appeared to be amply realized: the pool of talent populating the schools and camps. “Our legacy is them, and they're not daunted. They're not unaware of the challenges they face. But they're there, and they're ready to grapple with it....And if we spent the last 20 years arming them, then that is a huge, huge accomplishment.”

The program in **Israel** did not host a similar overall review in 2017, but a comprehensive review is planned for June 2019. In the meantime, many people interviewed for this report shared similarly upbeat impressions of the Foundation's achievements there and their likely endurance. Sallai Meridor, a former chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, international chairman of the Jerusalem Foundation, and an astute observer of Israeli life, credits AVI CHAI with helping to create a lasting resurgence of Jewish identity and consciousness. “AVI CHAI has succeeded in awakening, perhaps even in creating, long dormant—but now beginning to be widespread—demand for Jewish culture. The ability of some of the *Batei Midrash*, the founding of which AVI CHAI financed, to succeed in attracting financial support from others without further support from AVI CHAI, suggests that that is so. The sales of a growing number of books of Jewish content whose publication was financed by AVI CHAI also suggests so.”

This is not to say that all of the Foundation's initiatives in Israel will survive forever, or are meant to do so. Unlike the program in North America, which is aimed at strengthening long-lasting institutions in the form of schools and camps, AVI CHAI's Israel program is aimed principally at cultivating Jewish identity writ large, and alleviating divisions among Jewish communities in Israel. That mission probably cannot be accomplished by one set of institutions working in perpetuity. It is more likely to rely on various means of ignition and influence, in which some significant efforts function for a time as inspirers, motivators, and instigators of new activity. By raising public awareness, seeding the environment with new ideas, enriching opportunities for study and cultural engagement, and creating forums for exchange and mutual understanding among different Jewish communities, Foundation-sponsored projects can create movements that carry on in a variety of forms, some enduring and some changing over time.

AVI CHAI-Israel has tied off its relationship with a number of grantees that used its support to achieve impressive results, with evident

far-reaching consequences, and the majority of those organizations continue to function outside the Foundation's orbit. However, a few that have not survived or remained as strong post-AVI CHAI have nonetheless left behind discrete, long-lasting achievements whose significance is widely recognized.

A similar effect is visible in the **Former Soviet Union** (FSU), where the Foundation concluded its grantmaking in 2015. Since then, many of its former grantees have continued and sometimes even expanded their work with support from other philanthropists. But even those that have not were nevertheless still part of an ignition, a moment of awakening and enrichment of Jewish identity whose ripples carry on in education, in cultural circles, and in individual families.

Trustee George Rohr, who was the Board's leading member and chief advocate for this program, points out that when AVI CHAI began its work in this part of the world, "it was starting with a blank slate and creating, and basically proving, the concept that books, that digital education, a variety of things Jewish, the focus on Jewish things, *worked*. And creating a market for it worked!" AVI CHAI's support for day schools in the FSU, for example, established a quality standard for Jewish education that is now significantly higher than it had been—to the extent that any standards had existed at all. In many cases, parents who have seen the value of this education want to continue it, and they will be the prime source of continued pressure and support for its future.

As the Foundation's last staff member in the FSU, Svetlana Busygina, summed it up, today "some schools feel that they have to provide a certain kind of education and a level of knowledge to their children [and maintain] the level of all programs they provide. So they will keep raising money from parents or from other sponsors." Even assuming that not every school will persevere in this way, a phenomenon has been born and nurtured, and an engine for fortifying Jewish learning and identity has been set in motion.

## The Search for Funding Partners

### Who Will Remain

In its first 20 years, AVI CHAI tended to seek its own philanthropic path, often with little concern about whether other funders would join in supporting its projects. Indeed, in some cases the Foundation deliberately provided 100 percent of a project's budget, aiming to free the grantee from the burdens of fundraising while it navigated the early trials and errors associated with a new venture. On other occasions, AVI CHAI did seek partnerships with other funders, public and private, only to find the resulting relationships fragile or fleeting. In the early years, successful efforts at joint funding were viewed as something akin to exotic birds—welcome and beautiful to behold, but rare.

Once the Board began planning its sunset, however, the question of co-funding became more urgent: How would grantees be able to recruit future donors and allies after AVI CHAI is gone, if they have few such backers now? Beginning in the mid-2000s, and with increasing intensity thereafter, staff and Trustees set out to court fellow funders with whom they could envision a future for the fields they and AVI CHAI support, map out realistic next steps for grantees, and plan an orderly, constructive role for the Foundation as it makes its final grants. In a few cases, particularly in North America, this search has borne real fruit. In most cases, however, it remains a challenge.

In North America, over the course of eight or nine years, the Foundation has been able to join forces with a few other funders whose aggregate contributions have totaled some \$70 million—a small fraction of AVI CHAI's total outlays over this period, but a meaningful amount of money nonetheless. In most cases, these arrangements took the form of "co-creation": AVI CHAI and one or more other donors backing a particular project or organization in which both shared an interest, pursuing goals that the funders defined together. This is not the most hoped-for kind of joint funding (a pure ideal that one person envisioned as, "We



love what you're doing; we'll fund it with you; and we'll keep funding after you're gone.”). It also has tended to work better on new initiatives than on the continuation of efforts already under way. Still, collaboration has the advantage of bringing a variety of perspectives to bear on important lines of work and drawing attention to challenges that are not uniquely “owned” by any one funder.

Co-creation takes time and patience—resources that are, by necessity, growing scarcer as the Foundation approaches its end date. Rare opportunities are still arising as this report is being written—for example, some funders have lately started to inquire about AVI CHAI projects that may be endangered after the Foundation closes—but the time and space for pursuing them are shrinking. In the time remaining, North American staff have begun to test another, complementary approach to attracting funders into the field: Compiling and circulating information on its projects, designed to showcase what has been accomplished, detail what the Foundation has learned along the way, and envision what more can still be done. The staff has retained a consultant to survey some 20 other Jewish funders to determine what they might want to learn and what kinds of information would find the most receptive audience. While this is at least one step removed from actual, hands-on co-funding, it has the advantage of being manageable in the Foundation's remaining years, and it could even have some lingering effect after AVI CHAI is gone.

In Israel, many of the Foundation's initiatives fall squarely within fields of government responsibility (schools and universities, for example, or young people's preparation for military service), so forging funding partnerships with public agencies would seem to be a natural course for those grantees, though not necessarily the only course. In other cases—including the many cultural and informal-study programs associated with Israeli Jewish Renewal—government had not traditionally provided much financial support, though it could surely do more. Private funders, meanwhile, are still discovering the field and only a handful had taken

much of a role as yet. As the search for co-funders was heating up in the Foundation's final decade, AVI CHAI helped found a new advocacy organization in Israel, called Shearim, to build support for its projects among both government and private donors, and, more generally, to raise the public profile of Israeli Jewish Renewal. The Posen Foundation and UJA-Federation of New York were joint sponsors. But the new organization got off to a difficult start, seeking a leadership role in an emerging field that, for all its dynamism, was still inchoate and fractious. Two directors came and went in a short period, and AVI CHAI and its partners eventually decided the time simply wasn't right to keep trying.

Two other efforts, described in more detail later in this report, have met with greater success, though at this point they are still limited in scope. Pseifas, a matching-grant program, has attracted new donors and resources into the field of Israeli Jewish Renewal, but mostly in support of individual organizations and communities, rather than as overall strategic investors in the movement. The Jewish Funders' Network, in which AVI CHAI is an active player, has functioned more as a funders' roundtable than a source of significant new resources for Israeli Jewish Renewal, though that could change. Some new big-vision funders seem to be expressing interest as this is written, but the effort to build bridges and inspire passion for this avenue of philanthropy continues to struggle against strong headwinds.

### **Seeking A Legacy of Stronger Organizations**

As the Foundation prepares to exit the field, it has taken on a parting responsibility for leaving its grantees—or at least many of them—as stronger, better-managed, more stable organizations than when their support from AVI CHAI began. This capacity-building effort has deployed consultants and coaches to work with grantees on such organizational essentials as fundraising, financial management, strategic planning, and board development. Some of these efforts have been more successful than others, but overall they have helped to raise the odds that many grantees will survive the loss of AVI

CHAI funding and will have the requisite skills and leadership to adapt to a more challenging future.

Some grantees have needed a whole array of professional support, from strategic planning to management to governance; others needed only targeted help in a few areas. In two or three cases, the intense self-assessment and problem-solving exercises the consultants have facilitated led organizations to contemplate mergers or consolidations, as a way of blending their strengths and reducing their operating risks after AVI CHAI's departure.

The decision to unite with another organization—and with it, to alter longstanding identities, brands, organizational cultures, and professional relationships—is always fraught, and it typically raises complications and challenges, as well as advantages and opportunities, that are only dimly foreseeable when the decision to consolidate is made. In these instances, AVI CHAI's capacity-building support has been essential at two stages: first, in helping the constituent organizations understand the risks and advantages of any potential merger, and then, once the process is under way, shepherding these complicated arrangements through the natural tensions and obstacles of the first few years.

One area where capacity-building has been disappointing is in fundraising. In Israel, the Foundation attempted not only to advise grantees in this area, but to give them the means of hiring a full-time fundraiser on their staffs. Unlike charitable organizations in the United States, Israel's nonprofits have not been steeped in a culture of fundraising, in which staff, Board, and current financial backers are all continually seeking and cultivating new donors. Tax laws in Israel are not as favorable for the creation of charitable foundations, nor are most Israeli donors as accustomed to aggressive overtures from nonprofits as their American counterparts. So, in an effort to hone its grantees' fundraising capacity and raise donors' awareness of their work, AVI CHAI made grants for organizations to hire a dedicated resource-development professional, someone who

could work with the board and senior managers to build a more sustained, deliberate, and effective quest for supporters. The Foundation started with seven organizations and was prepared to add others, but the effort quickly sputtered. One by one, the newly hired fundraisers left the job, only to be replaced by others who, in many cases, likewise lasted only a short time. Rather than continue to battle against long odds, Trustees pulled the plug. Even in North America, where the art and science of fundraising are more widely practiced, the effort to strengthen this aspect of grantees' management has been the most difficult, with the fewest successes thus far.

In most areas, however, the capacity-building initiative has proven to be worth the effort. In Israel, an assessment after several years, incorporating the judgments of both AVI CHAI staff and the grantees themselves, found widespread, tangible improvements in nearly all the areas the consultants tackled (the main exception being fundraising). And the benefits were internal as well as external: The AVI CHAI staff itself developed a greater sophistication in organizational development as employees worked alongside consultants and grantees to diagnose and overcome problems. One Israel staff member earned an advanced degree in the subject while this initiative was under way.

### **A Note on New Initiatives and Staff Morale in the Final Years**

Two years from the end of their tenure at AVI CHAI, staff members uniformly report a level of commitment to and enthusiasm about their work that seems undiminished from past years. Indeed, in some ways the approaching sunset has led to an even greater sense of urgency and intensity of effort, as the time for fortifying outstanding grantees and solidifying accomplishments in the field draws short. Interview after interview revealed a level of dedication to the mission and personal investment in its success that would be nearly impossible to overstate. And outside observers—particularly among collaborating funders—offer little but praise and appreciation



for the quality of AVI CHAI's personnel. In one respect, however, the brevity of the Foundation's remaining life has led to some frustration among staff members, or at least ambivalence, about the quality of work life in the final years.

Although AVI CHAI has prided itself on maintaining a disciplined focus on a narrowly defined set of objectives, it has also, like most foundations, devoted some of its resources to exploring and testing new opportunities in the fields where it works. It has generally done so by pairing an initial, exploratory grant with a concurrent evaluation, which helps the Board determine how fruitful a new area of activity might be. Any decision about major or expanded commitments to the new work have generally awaited the results of these evaluations.

With so little time left for this piloting-evaluation-expansion process, some Board members have become increasingly cautious about taking on new initiatives. They reason that the Board would enjoy only a brief window to gather data and form conclusive judgments about a project's potential—both its likely impact and its prospects for long-term survival—before AVI CHAI would have to make its final grant and depart. This wariness is not absolute, and not all Trustees share it. A few new initiatives have been approved, as will be described later in this report, by using a rigorous fast-track approach to evaluation and startup funding, which seems to be working. But the Board's receptivity to new projects is clearly tightening, and the time remaining is becoming too short for even a moderately risky new venture to organize, launch, and ramp up.

Yet formulating and refining new ideas is, in most foundations, the most invigorating and technically challenging part of the program staff's responsibilities. Take away the opportunity to probe new territory, and some of the spark of Foundation work inevitably dims.

This situation was, of course, predictable. It is a common phenomenon among time-limited foundations that are close to their end dates, many

of which deliberately downsize their staffs well before their doors close, foreseeing a shrinking programmatic workload and diminishing staff energy in the final phase. At AVI CHAI, however, no major downsizing is planned, and a considerable body of important, challenging work remains to be done: capacity-building, evaluations still in progress, other funders pondering what role they might play in fields where the disappearance of AVI CHAI will leave a gap, and any number of unfinished projects still laboring to wrap up on time. With so much work still to be done, no staff member has reason to feel unneeded. The only thing missing from their work lives, in many cases, is the opportunity to explore something new.

Rightly or not, a few employees have interpreted the Board's increasing resistance to new projects as a sign that Trustees are indifferent to employees' level of enthusiasm and commitment. Program staff compensation has long been structured to create a strong incentive for virtually every staff member to continue serving to the very end. Still, some staffers wonder, as one put it, whether the Board is truly committed to keeping employees engaged and fulfilled all the way to the end, or whether "it's just, if you want to stay, you can stay."

This may be a natural side-effect of bringing a complex program to an end and living through the inevitable denouement of wrapping up and closing down. The effect may be stronger, and the emotions more raw, in institutions like AVI CHAI, whose employees are as personally immersed in the mission as they are professionally. It should be noted that the same employee who felt as if the Board may be growing indifferent to staff morale also pointed out that "there is much still to do with what we have on our respective plates. Each of the program officers is looking at his or her plate, at the amount of work on it, and how interesting it is for each of us. That is the major factor in our decision to want to stay. It is *interesting* work! That is why we want to feel genuinely needed by the AVI CHAI Trustees—to help fulfill AVI CHAI's mission through our work."

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## PART II: UPDATE ON NORTH AMERICA

The largest and oldest of AVI CHAI's undertakings in North America has been the enrichment and strengthening of Jewish day schools, with particular focus on Jewish studies, Israel education, and Hebrew language instruction. Foundation projects have focused on curriculum development, the training of principals and other school leaders, mentoring and training new teachers, and, more recently, blended and online learning. Rather than viewing these as discrete initiatives, AVI CHAI has pursued them as integrated parts of an overall effort to build the field of day school education, with elevated standards, an expanded pool of talented personnel, and better tools and techniques for teaching and leadership.

As the end of these efforts approaches, Trustees have been buoyant about the results, although questions remain about the long-term durability of AVI CHAI's achievements. But even without final answers to those questions, one Trustee summed up the case for a positive outlook in these terms:

AVI CHAI deserves credit for having set the philanthropic agenda, because no one has brought more daylight to shine upon the day school area and its various needs, as well as the potential solution to some of those needs, than AVI CHAI has—by being out in the field, by convening conferences, by pulling people together, by creating a field. They pulled teachers together through the various training and mentoring programs and kept them in touch. They have used technology to keep those learning and professional communities together beyond the particular programs in which they were initially engaged.... Technologically, we've explored distance learning, blended learning, the greater or lesser degree to which technological developments can be used so as to provide resources on a more cost-effective basis.

In the field of **curriculum development**, AVI CHAI provided the principal financing to launch

two organizations, TaL AM and NETA, which have developed state-of-the-art primary and secondary school curricula in Jewish studies and Hebrew. In 2015, the TaL AM print curriculum was adapted into a digital, interactive blended-learning program called iTaLAM, which is now used for teaching some 30,000 day school students around the world.

When planning for the Foundation's spend-down began in 2008, AVI CHAI's attention began to focus on how best to transition the governance and financing of NETA and TaL AM to external partners, with AVI CHAI itself continuing to finance the transition for a limited period of time. The search for a partner to assume responsibility for TaL AM focused on identifying a for-profit firm with significant experience in developing and marketing computer-based educational and training programs, as well as games for young children. After interviewing several entities, AVI CHAI and TaL AM selected Compedia, a successful Israeli firm organized and run by highly talented young computer engineers.

A critical early challenge in the creation of iTaLAM was establishing a new nonprofit organization with its own CEO, staff, and board of directors to operate the digital venture. The new board includes the Compedia officers, the TaL AM founders Tova and Shlomo Shimon, AVI CHAI officers, and representatives of the Gruss Foundation, one of the project's new donors. It has thus become a new entity—a joint venture among the original TaL AM, the funders, and Compedia, in which the founders of the original enterprise continue to have active input into the new entity's evolution. Perhaps because of that opportunity for input, the founders and managers of TaL AM have worked cooperatively with the Compedia executives and their teams in the transition, despite the customary bumps in the road typical of most mergers. However, the terms governing the merger require the new venture to raise significant financial support for iTaLAM, to phase in as AVI CHAI funding gradually phases out. That requirement is proving, as it usually does, to be a greater challenge than the parties anticipated.

Still, the iTaLAM leadership, Compedia, and AVI CHAI are energetically engaged in fundraising for iTaLAM, and they consistently express optimism and report having amicable relationships.

NETA's transition from AVI CHAI was different from TaL AM's in several ways, some of which may have contributed to the difficulties NETA has encountered during its transition. Instead of creating a separate organization to run NETA, AVI CHAI negotiated an arrangement whereby control of NETA was shifted to Israel's Center for Educational Technology (CET), a long-existing nonprofit whose primary focus has been on developing technological innovations primarily for education in Israel.

Compared with TaL AM, NETA was more of an old-technology enterprise. It developed printed books, which day school teachers and students used, and it relied primarily on in-person workshops to train teachers in the use of those materials. NETA employees devoted significant time and resources to visiting the schools where their teaching materials were used. AVI CHAI, however, was convinced that a critical component of any next step for NETA had to involve the use of digital or blended learning, as well as Internet-delivered training for NETA teachers.

The Foundation's choice of Israel's CET as the partner for NETA seemed logically persuasive. However, in practice it has proved more turbulent than the creation of iTaLAM. Among other things, the new arrangement essentially establishes NETA as a program of CET, not an independent nonprofit, like iTaLAM, in which the partners share governance responsibilities. Even before the changeover formally began, differences surfaced between the founders of NETA and AVI CHAI officials about the program's future, and further differences of vision have continued to arise in the new relationship with CET. The structure of that relationship may have made it somewhat harder for the two teams to reach a common vision. In any event, NETA's primary founder, Hila Kobliner, eventually left the partnership.

The structure of the relationships is not the only source of tension in this case. The differences between NETA and CET are more fundamental, and thus less tractable, than any that have arisen between TaL Am and Compedia. As one participant in the negotiations put it, the challenge of this transition seems to be "typical of moving from a first founder generation—with a passionate, charismatic founder who's very committed to a specific way of doing things—into a second generation" that is more focused on growth and adaptation.

**In strengthening day schools through a national support and networking organization,** AVI CHAI has pursued a third merger, even more complex than the two involving curriculum development. The result is a new organization, launched in 2016, called Prizmah, the Hebrew word for prism. It comprises five organizations, four of which AVI CHAI has supported for roughly a decade. Together, they form a comprehensive network, training provider, advocacy group, and general service organization for North American day schools. The constituent organizations are:

- PEJE—the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, which offered programs and support related to the finance and non-educational operations of schools;
- RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network, which worked with cross-denominational community day schools to strengthen their life, leadership, and learning;
- The Schechter Day School Network, an association of schools affiliated with Conservative Judaism;
- Yeshiva University School Partnership, an advisory and training program for leaders of modern and centrist Orthodox day schools; and
- PARDeS, a network of 13 Reform Jewish day schools.

As the Foundation began to focus on the implications of its rapidly approaching end of grantmaking, it systematically began to consider

what to do to prepare the first four of these organizations—all longstanding grantees—for life after AVI CHAI. From conversations with other funders who had also supported one or more of these organizations, it became clear that that a single, combined program of comprehensive support for day schools would offer the best means of meeting the diverse needs of a wide variety of Jewish day schools. Just as important, it would have the only real chance of attracting support from multiple sources over the long term. Difficult as such a merger would be, it would be better than watching the individual organizations struggle on their own after their final grants from AVI CHAI and, very likely, eventually disappear. Best of all, if successful, the merged organization could weave together the differing strengths and forms of expertise that had made each of its constituent organizations stand out.

Yossi Prager, the Foundation's executive director for North America, notes that "it has been exceedingly difficult to attract support for national efforts to finance infrastructure programs to train or retrain Jewish day school teachers and administrators, mentor teachers, develop school curriculum and the like, even from wealthy donors who have been steadily generous to their local day schools. So if the thinking about sustainability is critical, Prizmah is sort of the best hope. There's still a question whether people are going to fund nationally, but at least there's a vehicle now where there wasn't any vehicle before. As a statement to the field, and as a vehicle of integrity, I strongly believe that Prizmah is a great achievement."

There remains considerable concern, however, about whether the "runway" between now and the time when AVI CHAI's window for grantmaking closes is long enough for the merged venture to succeed. Will three or four years be long enough to persuade other funders to ante up the funds necessary to get Prizmah off to the successful launch the idea deserves? Obviously, the jury is still out on that question. Some of the organizers clearly wish that the lead time had been longer—say, five or six years.

But the idea will now have to prove itself, for better or worse, by the end of 2019 or soon thereafter.

As part of its emphasis on **training for day school leaders and teachers**, AVI CHAI has been a prime funder of the Jewish New Teacher Project, which provides mentors for educators as they start their careers. It began as a result of a conversation between Yossi Prager and Ellen Moir, who was then the CEO of the New Teacher Project (now officially known as TNTTP), an organization that helps school systems improve educational quality. Mr. Prager asked whether TNTTP would consider creating a distinct project for Jewish day school teachers, if AVI CHAI provided the initial funding. TNTTP agreed, and the project launched in 2003. The Jim Joseph Foundation, the Nash Foundation, and the UJA-Federation of New York were early co-funders.

Now in its 14th year, JNTP is working with 55 Jewish day schools nationwide, with 128 specially trained mentors supporting 162 teachers as of mid-2017. The program has trained more than 1,000 educators thus far, including the mentors and the teachers they support. Mr. Prager describes the rate at which the mentored teachers remain in day school careers as "astronomical." Nina Bruder, the project's director, reports strong and steady growth from year to year in the number of mentors, teachers, and participating schools. Admittedly, mentoring is not a low-cost approach to teacher development. Not only does it cost money to train and deploy mentors, but the arrangement entails removing a more senior educator from the classroom for a time, while the mentoring is under way. Nonetheless, the model appears to produce more skilled teachers who become long-term assets and potential leaders in the field.

JNTP has now managed to raise more from other funders than it has received from the AVI CHAI and Jim Joseph Foundations combined. Nonetheless, that additional money is largely for expansion into new localities, whereas the AVI CHAI and Jim Joseph grants have underwritten the core operating expenses

that are indispensable for running a complex and expanding national program. The search for additional core support of that kind is now a top priority for the project, particularly in preparation for AVI CHAI's departure in 2019. JNTP is meeting with growing success in that search, and has recently become one of 15 organizations selected for Project Accelerate, which provides growth capital and support for organizational infrastructure at successful and expanding Jewish nonprofits.

AVI CHAI's investment in JNTP not only helped launch an innovative approach to the professional formation of day school teachers, it has helped to draw the attention of other Jewish funders to this work. Ms. Bruder reports that many of her successful appeals to new donors have been the result of the credibility the project derives from having the AVI CHAI and Jim Joseph Foundations as backers.

Another AVI CHAI-supported program for day school teachers is the Center for Jewish Educators at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem (not related to the PARDeS network that is now part of Prizmah). The Foundation provides scholarships for participants in the Pardes Educators Program, a two-year course of professional training and academic study for day school teachers. Although the program is not large in number—152 teachers had graduated as of the end of 2017—its graduates help define a standard of excellence in teaching Jewish Studies. Some 80 percent of graduates have remained in the field of Jewish education, and several have moved into positions of school leadership where they now guide and influence other teachers.

As AVI CHAI approaches its end date, it can classify the Pardes Educators Program among its successes, almost regardless of the program's longevity beyond its last Foundation grant. The lives the program has affected, the careers it has launched, and the quality of the professionals it has helped to draw to and retain in Jewish education all stand as valuable contributions to the field whose significance will continue to ripple outward. But the cost per student has been high, and the number

of people enrolling in each cohort has declined somewhat. In exchange for their scholarships, participants must commit to two years of study, plus three additional years of teaching in a Jewish day school afterward. That five-year commitment likely limits the potential reach of the program. For AVI CHAI, support for the Pardes Educators Program has effectively been a bet on quality over quantity.

**In online and blended learning,** AVI CHAI has been a pioneer and champion for a field that shows considerable promise but is still gaining a foothold in the day school world. Senior Program Officer Rachel Mohl Abrahams acknowledges that “we are still very much at the center of that work, both from an operational perspective and from a funding perspective”—a source of concern for an institution with only two years left in its lifespan. Although other funders have joined AVI CHAI in this field—for example, the Kohelet Foundation has joined in supporting the Lookstein Virtual Jewish Academy, an accredited online school for Jewish studies—several partners have taken a more cautious approach, and are not currently funding the effort to advance blended learning projects.

So far, the one multi-party partnership to promote blended learning is J-Blend, developed and supported jointly by AVI CHAI and the Miami Jewish Federation. “It's both an operational partnership and a funding partnership,” Ms. Abrahams says, “a model that we are trying to promote.” It's also a partnership operationally with Digital Jewish Learning Network, a national operator of blended-learning initiatives that is also an AVI CHAI grantee.

The Foundation's latest effort to widen acceptance of blended learning has been to train and coach teachers directly in using the technology. AVI CHAI has formed a partnership with Better Lesson, a for-profit company that specializes in coaching teachers in how to use blended learning. In this arrangement, the Foundation pays the full cost of the first year of coaching and thereafter shares the cost with the school where the teacher works. The Foundation



is also encouraging schools that use iTaLAM and NETA to send teachers to Better Lesson.

Among its other projects in this area, AVI CHAI has supported the development of Internet-based online Jewish studies courses for high schools. The Lookstein Academy, based at Bar-Ilan University in Jerusalem, is one of these, as is the Online Judaic Studies Consortium, affiliated with The Virtual High School, headquartered in Maryland. The Foundation was instrumental in launching both ventures. In addition to these online Jewish studies developers, AVI CHAI is continuing to support Yeshiva University's online Jewish studies course, called CollegeNOW, in which students take university-level courses and earn college credit.

The Foundation's work in **overnight camping** has attracted broad support from other funders and thus is likely to be among its more durable achievements. Much of that work was inspired and guided by a 2002 research report, called *Limud by the Lake*, by Brandeis social psychologist Amy Sales and colleagues. The report established a principle that has undergirded most of AVI CHAI's work in overnight camping: that Jewish learning at camp can have a lifelong effect on participants' Jewish affiliation, but not if it is simply a discrete program offered for part of a day or week, no matter how well conceived and executed. To make a lasting difference in young Jewish lives, the Jewish content needs to infuse camp life overall, from arrival to departure. That conclusion, Mr. Prager says, "influenced how we did our philanthropy." It has evidently appealed to other funders as well, and has helped to set in motion a substantial cultural change in the way summer camps instill Jewish identity in their programs and among their staff and campers.

The effectiveness of AVI CHAI's investment in overnight camping is the result not only of its own strategic efforts, sustained for close to 15 years, but also of the outstanding performance of one of its key partners in the field, the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC). Funders such as the Marcus Foundation, the Crown Family Philanthropies,

and the Morningstar Foundation have stepped in to support FJC activities that were either begun or substantially expanded with AVI CHAI backing. Alongside its support for FJC, the Foundation has invested in a broad mix of national umbrella organizations that support Jewish camping, including Ramah, Union for Reform Judaism, Young Judaea, and the Jewish Community Center Association, all of which also work closely with FJC. As a result of this increasingly strong network of sponsors and supporters, the Foundation's approaching sunset, while still a financial blow to the field, poses little or no threat to the momentum that has built up over the past decade or more.

Alongside the deepening of Jewish content in summer camps has come a dramatic expansion of the camping field. The number of overnight campers in nonprofit Jewish camps increased by 22 percent between 2007 and 2016, and the rate of growth has been stronger than average since 2015. In 2016 alone, 81,000 young people were campers in these establishments and another 11,000 served as college-age counselors. The latter group has been shown to benefit from the enriched Jewish programming at least as much as, and perhaps more than, the younger campers. Over the decade from 2007 to 2016, 285,000 unique individuals have participated in nonprofit Jewish overnight camps.

Before AVI CHAI became active in camping, no foundations of any size focused on instilling Jewish content in camps that identified as Jewish. The camps were left on their own to create their Jewish identity. It is therefore no exaggeration to describe AVI CHAI as having been responsible for developing and instilling systematic Jewish content programming in the American overnight camping world. Moreover, as the Foundation prepares to end its grantmaking role, the many partners who have co-funded programs that it initiated are now in the process of replacing AVI CHAI support with their own support.

In addition to the larger number of other funders for whom overnight Jewish camping is now a



program priority, the existence of the Foundation for Jewish Camp as AVI CHAI's primary operational and substantive partner has by itself enhanced the impact of its philanthropic dollars immensely. For example, the ability to maintain two full-time Jewish educators on the FJC staff has significantly raised the quality of AVI CHAI's substantive Jewish content training programs for the campers, the counselors and the assistant directors and the camp directors. The continued strength of FJC is among the principle reasons AVI CHAI can be confident of a lasting and far-reaching impact in this field.

Although AVI CHAI's roster of promising projects in North America is long, some **discontinued projects** fall into the category of worthwhile experiments that ultimately did not meet AVI CHAI's expectations. These include J-Skyway, a teacher training program; the Jewish Teacher Corps, a teacher-recruitment program modeled on Teach for America; Bunk Connect, which helped families afford the cost of summer camping; and Nadiv, in which full-time experiential educators serve jointly at summer camps and day schools. The largest initiative of this kind was the classroom magazine *Babaganewz*, which presented current events, information about Israel, and background on Jewish holidays traditions, with a focus each month on a particular Jewish value. Accompanied by teacher guides and a website, *Babaganewz* was aimed at students in the 4th through 7th grades. It was published from 2001 through 2008, but it was never able to demonstrate a deep or lasting impression on readers, despite a high cost.

“In the end,” Mr. Prager reflects, “we couldn't justify continuing it. It was one of those things where the input is both beautiful and rich, more Jewishly rich, but we couldn't justify continuity. “

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### PART III: UPDATE ON ISRAEL

In Israel, AVI CHAI has become closely identified with the blossoming field often referred to as “Israeli Jewish Renewal” or “Israeli Judaism,” which encourages study, cultural expression, and community activity aimed at intensifying Jewish-

Israeli-Zionist identity and cohesion. In one way or another, all the Foundation's philanthropic initiatives in Israel aim at advancing this movement and solidifying the key elements—learning, leadership, cultural awareness, philanthropy, outreach—that can help it succeed.

To that end, programs in Israel cluster under seven broad headings: (1) creating and disseminating Jewish culture, (2) encouraging mutual understanding and responsibility, (3) fostering Jewish communities, (4) promoting Jewish literacy and values in state schools, (5) fostering *batei midrash* and learning communities, (6) inspiring young leaders, and (7) strengthening the field—that is, the organizational underpinnings—of Jewish Renewal.

Among its contributions to **Jewish culture**, AVI CHAI's most tangible initiative is its signature cultural center in Jerusalem, Beit AVI CHAI, for which the Foundation has reserved an endowment that will endure after its grantmaking ceases. Opened in 2007, the institution is by now a well-established presence in the Israeli-Jewish cultural world. But even beyond the array of concerts, plays, study sessions, special events, lectures, and workshops offered at Beit AVI CHAI, the Foundation supports a roster of educational and cultural web sites, films, television series, and book publications.

Of the many websites it has supported over the years, the most widely used is [929.org.il](http://929.org.il), named for the number of chapters in the Hebrew bible. Administered by the Center for Educational Technology, the site offers opportunities for scriptural study, including a designated Biblical chapter each day. CET also hosts several other AVI CHAI-sponsored sites, including Tarbut Israel, a website aimed at teachers of Jewish Culture in the state school system, as well as the general public, encompassing Jewish culture, tradition, philosophy, and the oral Torah (Mishna and Talmud). It was initiated by the Posen Foundation and joined by AVI CHAI, the Hartman Institute, and CET. [Mikranet.org.il](http://Mikranet.org.il), operated in partnership with the Israel Ministry of Education and developed

in partnership with CET and Gesher, offers classical commentaries and online texts from the Bible, Mishna, Talmud, and Midrash. A new site, [Zusha.org.il](http://Zusha.org.il), hosts an anthology of Chassidic stories.

The list of Foundation-supported websites includes several others as well; it is impressively long and rich in diverse content. However, staff at AVI CHAI remain concerned that these websites are reaching too few users to make a critical difference, and that they are not yet being promoted effectively. Plans are under way, however, to explore marketing strategies that could significantly increase the traffic on these sites, which in mid-2017 was estimated at about 500,000 visits per month in aggregate.

One website in particular, [piyut.org.il](http://piyut.org.il), is a direct outgrowth of a 15-year-long AVI CHAI initiative to promote one particular form of Jewish traditional cultural expression: the singing or chanting of Jewish liturgical poetry, or *piyyut*—hymns to the glory of God and many aspects of His creation. The effort began in 2001 with a program to encourage the study and singing of *piyyutim* on college campuses. This was broadened the following year to support Singing Communities across Israel, which continue to the present and are thriving. Next came the website, which launched in 2005. It contains background on the art form, including hundreds of *piyyutim* and thousands of recordings chanted according to the traditions of Jewish communities from around the world. The site also hosts an active community called ‘*Piyyut* sharing,’ which enables surfers to share texts, renderings, and resources from their traditions. AVI CHAI later funded a *beit midrash* program of Jewish study for popular and *piyyut* singers. According to Trustee Arthur Fried, the Foundation’s sustained support of *piyyut* has “spawned conferences and festivals attracting thousands of people...and has now become a part of mainline Israeli culture.”

The Israel Film and Television Program, now almost 20 years old, has by now reached a far larger audience. It has a convincing record of financing critically praised films and television programs that have attracted a significant public following. With

an eye toward the program’s future sustainability, in 2013 AVI CHAI Israel negotiated a partnership with the Gesher Multicultural Film Fund, a public foundation supported in large part by the Israeli government, to create “The Film and Media Collaborative.” This formal partnership in the field of Jewish Israeli film television and media pools resources to pursue common goals of using motion pictures, television, and new media to generate among Israeli society a greater openness and engagement with their Jewish cultural roots.

For the program’s long-term continuity beyond the end of AVI CHAI’s grantmaking, the staff believes that another strategic partner, in addition to Gesher, would be desirable. Explorations are under way. But even if the effort does not continue in its current form, the Foundation is confident that it has already made an enduring mark in the film and TV industry. “One of the most heartwarming accomplishments,” the AVI CHAI website states, “is the inspiration of industry veterans and young Israeli filmmakers to become more involved with what has now become legitimate content for film and television: the Jewish-Israeli story.”

The Foundation’s attempt to encourage **mutual understanding and responsibility** is also aimed at broad-based cultural influence, and its centerpiece is the 21-year-old initiative Tzav Pius. With both formal and informal education programs, in and out of school, Tzav Pius promotes “a cohesive Israeli society with national resilience, founded on the values of social solidarity and a commitment to civil involvement in the community and in the field of education.” In 2013, Tzav Pius was spun off as an independent organization, in the hope of ensuring its continuing efforts for mutual understanding and responsibility beyond 2019.

Like the film and TV program, Tzav Pius has made a cultural mark that is likely to endure. As AVI CHAI’s executive director for Israel, Eli Silver, puts it, the “whole notion of *pius*, of dialogue, in the way that each member of Israeli society has something to say,” has found a place in the national self-image.

It is, he continues, “an essential part of what the Jewish state should be all about it...and promoting that in schools and testing it in summer camp, those are important contributions.” Even if the effect of the program has not been “revolutionary,” in the sense of upending broad-based societal patterns and behaviors, “it has created those islands of sanity in Israel in which people want to hear one another and understand and learn from one another.” Among other signs of spreading cultural influence, the program’s support for mixed religious-secular schools appears to be catching on—“a trend that’s growing slowly, but growing.” The Tzav Pius summer camp, which also combines religious and secular youth, has been successful enough to give hope that it will continue beyond the end of AVI CHAI funding.

At a more local level, a goal of fostering **Israeli Jewish communities** has led to the formation of a national nonprofit called Nitzanim, which “seeks to foster, reinforce, and enrich the Jewish-Israeli experience” in a variety of municipalities around the country. AVI CHAI launched Nitzanim more than a decade ago with grants to a handful of local authorities to see what kinds of programs would emerge, and then established the independent coordinating organization to continue working with local sites and helping them by training organizers and leaders and supporting events and activities that enrich the local Jewish cultural environment. There are now nine communities that are members of Nitzanim, and five more at some point in the process of entering membership.

Other Foundation initiatives likewise support local efforts to fortify Jewish cultural identity and involvement. These include a project commenced in 2015 to encourage more Jewish learning and identity among Israel’s more than 270 kibbutzim—cooperative communities comprising some 170,000 members. Though they have been a distinctive facet of Israeli Jewish society since the early 20th century, most kibbutzim are secular and have a tenuous connection to Jewish culture and tradition. Among national leaders of the kibbutz

movement, including educational coordinators from individual kibbutzim, AVI CHAI has created training programs on how to bring together kibbutz members of varying backgrounds, and with varying levels of Jewish awareness, around basic activities associated with the Jewish calendar and life cycle that integrate Jewish and Israeli identity. In a smaller group—originally ten in 2016, then growing to 22 a year later—the program has worked more intensively to design and launch educational and cultural activities community by community.

One factor behind the creation of this initiative has been the growing attractiveness of kibbutz life to the younger generation of Israeli men and women. This has led to an influx of new residents coming to live in kibbutzim with varying degrees of Jewish backgrounds and little experience with kibbutz life. The diversity of this new population has created a need for some form of communal life that makes room for Jewish practices and secular expressions of Jewish culture that unite the community and ease cultural and religious tensions.

In an interview in 2017, a leader in the kibbutz movement expressed enthusiasm about the initiative’s growth and potential: “We had a big conference that takes place every five years, where the kibbutz movement decides what our goals for the next five years will be. And this is now one of them. Six goals were chosen, and one of them is putting cultural Judaism on every table, in every kibbutz. And this is huge! It wouldn’t have happened except for AVI CHAI.”

Parallel to the initiative with the Kibbutz Movement, the Foundation also launched an effort in 2015 to promote Jewish culture and study within the Moshav Movement, comprising more than 250 cooperative agricultural settlements around the country with 180,000 residents. Similar to the kibbutz initiative, the project with the Moshav Movement seeks to enhance each moshav community’s connection to Jewish culture, via the education and training of its national leadership and key change agents, along with intensive work with individual moshavim.

A separate area of Foundation work promotes Jewish literacy and values in **State schools**, with the goal of reinforcing students' Jewish and Zionist identity and their connection to Jewish tradition. A signature AVI CHAI initiative in this category is a program at Hebrew University called Revivim, which trains teachers of Jewish Studies. It was created with Foundation support and sustained for more than a decade, but it is now continuing to operate beyond its final AVI CHAI grant.

A much more recent initiative has been the Tel Aviv Regional School District program called Otzarot, which developed similarly to the Kibbutz and Moshav movement initiatives described earlier. It started with a pilot year in 2016, followed by a three-year grant from 2017 through 2019, with each annual installment conditioned on a positive evaluation. The goal of this effort is to encourage schools to develop innovative projects related to Israeli Jewish culture over a two-year period, with the hope that afterward the mature projects will continue on as school traditions. The program began with a call for proposals among the 400 district schools. A first cohort of 27 schools was approved, followed by a second of 21, and the district is now in the middle of reviewing applications for a third cohort. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has embraced the Otzarot model and is rolling it out in all seven school districts in the country during 2018.

Like the Kibbutz and Moshav initiatives, this project demonstrates how AVI CHAI has approached new opportunities close to the end of its lifespan: by setting in motion an ambitious pilot-and-ramp-up process, accompanied by simultaneous evaluations each year, beginning with the pilot year and continuing for three years after that, until the Foundation's sunset. In each case, the project includes a plan for the new initiative to be adopted by well-established institutions that can carry on when the Foundation is gone.

Another relatively new initiative, though one based on years of earlier effort, is the result of a

partnership between AVI CHAI and the national educational nonprofit KIAH (Kol Yisrael Chaverim). Operating in both the national and national-religious school systems, this program promotes education that "emphasizes the relationship between personal identity, social responsibility, and social awareness." It was formed by a marriage of two earlier AVI CHAI grantees, Morasha and Ma'arag, that represented distinct but complementary approaches to this educational goal.

AVI CHAI's partnership with KIAH traces its origins to a Foundation grant 18 years ago to help create MiMizrach Shemesh, a *beit midrash* that encourages young people, social leaders, and activists to engage in social activity inspired by Mizrahi Jewish heritage. The program's founder, Yehuda Maimaran, then went on to establish Morasha, aimed at embedding a more formal kind of Jewish social education in the Israeli school system, likewise drawing from the Mizrahi heritage. To ensure the survival and sound management of these programs, Maimaran arranged to house them in KIAH, part of the 150-year-old Alliance Israelite Universelle.

Separately, AVI CHAI had funded the creation of another school-based program, Ma'arag, which promotes excellence in Jewish, Zionist, and civic education in the state schools. The Foundation helped this new organization arrange ongoing funding from the Israeli Ministry of Education. Then, in 2013, looking ahead to AVI CHAI's closure, the Foundation initiated a strategic planning process with Ma'arag's leaders, who, in the end, chose to merge their organization into KIAH.

All these steps have produced a cluster of educational enrichment efforts under the umbrella of a strong organization with a national reputation and influential backers, known for its dedication to Israel's least advantaged communities. This substantially improves the odds that these educational initiatives will endure beyond AVI CHAI's sunset. To boost those odds still further, as it winds down its financial support of KIAH,

the Foundation has made a challenge grant of 3 million Shekels—one million Shekels a year for three years—to secure a future for Morasha and Ma’arag, with the requirement that KIAH match this grant 2-to-1 from other sources.

To enrich informal Jewish education, AVI CHAI has supported an array of *batei midrash and learning communities*, including MiMizrach Shemesh and several others. Among the earliest of these was Elul, which the Foundation helped to create with an initial grant in 1992 and has supported ever since. Its wide reach across Israel and the diversity of its programming remain highly regarded, but it must now prepare for a future without AVI CHAI funding. Elul recently pursued a merger with another organization in the same field but was unable to reach a mutually agreeable arrangement. Currently, Elul’s leadership has focused and made great strides on strengthening its financial viability as an independent nonprofit.

The co-founder of Elul, Mordechai Bar-Or, went on to found another *beit midrash*, Kolot, in 1997, once again with seminal AVI CHAI support. Designed with a particular appeal to secular young professionals from many different fields, Kolot has proved to be a powerful magnet for those wishing to study the relevance of Jewish texts to the critical problems facing Israel and Jews today, and since the end of AVI CHAI’s support in 2016, it has carried on independently.

Alma, another of the original *batei midrash* established with support from AVI CHAI, was founded at about the same time as Kolot, but with a more formal program (it had originally hoped to become a degree-granting institution). In December 2015, Alma became a subsidiary of the Shalom Hartman Institute of Jerusalem and is continuing to offer its courses of study from its center in Tel Aviv, the Alma Home for Hebrew Culture. Because of the financial and managerial strength of the Hartman Institute, Alma’s future beyond AVI CHAI seems assured.

In other attempts to cultivate and inspire **young leaders**, the Foundation has supported programs that, in the words of its website, help young people develop “a keen sense of social responsibility and... acquire a Jewish language that informs and guides their lives and affects their circles of influence.” Among the most influential of these has been the creation of many pluralistic *mechinot*—residential programs of study, reflection, and service in the year before young people begin their service in the Israel Defense Forces. These programs gather participants of many perspectives from across the religious-secular spectrum, inspiring a commitment to Judaism and Jewish renewal, Zionism, democracy, tolerance, responsibility to society, and active service to the community. In 2014, there were 24 such programs serving 1,500 young people. AVI CHAI funded the first *mechinot* specifically designed to combine students of different religious and secular backgrounds and to infuse these programs with Jewish content. Among the Foundation’s goals in underwriting these pluralistic *mechinot*, according to Mr. Silver, was a determination “to build into the DNA in this emerging field what were essential components to the curriculum,” including eight weekly hours of Jewish studies.

To help consolidate the considerable advancement of this field over roughly 20 years of AVI CHAI support, the Foundation has also supported the Joint Council of Pre-Military Academies, informally known as the Mechinot Council, an umbrella organization established in 2009. As its funding for individual *mechinot* has wound down, AVI CHAI has increasingly focused its attention on fortifying the Council, supporting its fundraising, planning, and management, and generally ensuring the future of a signature Foundation achievement.

On a related track, AVI CHAI’s Shnat Sherut project comprises three program tracks for adding Jewish content to the pre-military year during which some young Israelis volunteer to assist in addressing social and economic problems affecting less-well-off Israeli communities. The three tracks—with the Kibbutz



Movement, the Jewish Agency, and the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement—are making progress in instilling Jewish study as an integral component of year-long volunteer service for over 1,000 youth.

Favorable experience with the Mechinot Council has led AVI CHAI to attempt something similar with the four-decade-old Council of Youth Movements in Israel, helping the council to develop a program for its members dealing specifically with Jewish-Israeli identity. Given the council's relatively long history and broad-based membership—which encompasses the entire political, religious, and social spectrum—the Foundation considers this a strong platform on which to build additional pillars of the Israeli Jewish Renewal movement. However, with relatively little time remaining in its grantmaking life, AVI CHAI has sought from the outset to focus a substantial part of its efforts on attracting additional funders for any new program.

Casting its strategic focus more broadly, AVI CHAI has sought in its final years to buttress the whole **field of Israeli Jewish Renewal**, by (in the words of its website) “nurturing government and philanthropic support and increasing the organizational capacity of key institutions focusing on Jewish Renewal.” This encompasses a search for additional, ongoing funding for the field and an attempt to build networks and forums for organizations and funders that will ensure its continual growth.

In the pursuit of greater and more stable philanthropic support, AVI CHAI has run into several roadblocks, though the effort continues. The essential problem is that Israeli Jewish Renewal programs and organizations have attracted only marginal support from government agencies thus far and have not yet enjoyed much media attention or otherwise benefited from wide public exposure. This has made it difficult to inspire much momentum among private donors. For Mr. Silver, this has been particularly frustrating, because he believes “there’s plenty of wealth here,” and there remain some methods of appealing to possible contributors that have not yet been vigorously pursued.

Among its many efforts to build the organizational strength and durability of its Israel grantees—most of which have been well-received and are showing credible signs of success—one disappointment has been the attempt to help those grantees hire financial resource developers on their staffs. The Foundation paid for seven organizations to hire in-house fundraisers, but, in Mr. Silver's judgment, “uniformly it failed.” In most cases, the new employees were unable to raise even enough new money to cover their own salaries. When organizations tried replacing their original fundraisers with new ones, the results were largely unchanged. The disappointment has led many at AVI CHAI to doubt that this approach has much potential, so it has been largely abandoned.

For the past few years, AVI CHAI's primary vehicle for attracting donations to Israeli Jewish Renewal programs has been the Pseifas (“Mosaic”) matching grant program, a joint initiative with the New York Federation and the Jewish Funders Network Israel. In this partnership, AVI CHAI and the Federation each matched new donor gifts to Israeli Jewish Renewal organizations up to a specified amount. Two rounds of Pseifas drew a better-than-expected response, but showed little sign of galvanizing a movement of donors in the direction of sustained giving for the field of Israeli Jewish Renewal. A new attempt, dubbed Pseifas 3.0, is encouraging current AVI CHAI grantees to recruit new donors, or increase the commitment of current donors, by offering to match any new contribution between NIS 40,000 and 180,000 per donor per year—on condition that the donor commits to an equal or greater contribution for a second year. Applications for Pseifas 3.0 are due in early 2018, with announcements of approved matching grants in April.

Beyond matching grants, AVI CHAI has also helped to convene a Forum of Foundations and Federations Engaged in Jewish Identity and Education, which meets annually, and sometimes several times a year. At a minimum, the forum is intended to encourage discussion among funders about the



needs of the field and their interests in supporting it, and it may also provide a launching pad for coalitions to support some common programs.

Organizations at the front lines of Israeli Jewish Renewal have likewise coalesced, with AVI CHAI support, under an umbrella organization called Panim. It brings together some 60 *batei midrash* and other nonprofit organizations that are dedicated to fostering Judaism in Israel. In 2017, 28 percent of Panim's annual budget came from the AVI CHAI Foundation, a share that will decline each year. In addition, it receives about 10 percent of its revenues in the form of membership dues paid by the member organizations, as well as admissions fees for attending conferences and seminars organized by Panim. It has also succeeded in attracting contributions from U.S. Jewish federations, including the Philadelphia and Metro West federations. Panim has sought to promote the field via a range of initiatives, such as annual conferences, roundtable discussions on best practices, and various PR efforts.

In the hope of attracting more support from government, among other sources, AVI CHAI joined the Posen Foundation and the UJA Federation of New York in establishing an advocacy organization called Shearim – Fulfilling Israeli Judaism. Its purpose was to raise the field's media profile, build public awareness, and persuade government and private funders to dedicate resources to its ongoing support. However, during its brief two years of operation, Shearim suffered from leadership turnover and generally found no champions willing to join in a more aggressive push for government support.

The organization has recently been reconstituted, with a new assignment that may fuel its mission of raising public awareness about Israeli Jewish Renewal. The new initiative, called **Shabbat Unplugged**, is designed to draw Israelis together around a common understanding and observance of Shabbat that is unifying rather than entangled with controversies over religion, tradition, and secular life.

The great Zionist thinker Ahad Ha'am famously observed that "more than the Jews have kept the

Shabbat, the Shabbat has kept the Jews." Yet, in Israel, perhaps no religious issue elicits more controversy than the extent to which the Jewish state and its citizens should be required—or persuaded—to observe, or even to recognize, Shabbat. Ruth Kabbesa-Abramzon, the Director of Shabbat Unplugged, hit the nail on the head when she observed that the initiative's goal is to make Shabbat an opportunity rather than a problem or a hindrance.

Her research on what Israelis most want from Shabbat is to be able to spend more quality time with their family and friends—which requires, among other things, freeing them from addiction to the screens of smartphones, computers, and television monitors. Accordingly, the initiative has three components: (1) a public-relations campaign to promote unplugging from screens and connecting to family, friends, and community on Shabbat; (2) promotion of a diverse and robust menu of Shabbat activities; and (3) development of a new language for talking about Shabbat, which unites key sectors of Israeli society, and is not divisive or limited to religious categories.

If it succeeds, it is possible that Shabbat Unplugged will prove to be so attractive to the public that it could end up satisfying some of the original ambitions for Shearim, including training a public spotlight on the broader Israeli Jewish Renewal movement and perhaps attracting governmental support.

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#### PART IV: UPDATE ON THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

AVI CHAI's activities in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) were the first to conclude and made up the smallest of the Foundation's three geographical programs. But they have left an important mark in Jewish content in a part of the world where little or none existed before. Despite the fact that the Foundation is no longer making grants in Russia, some of the most important initiatives launched by AVI CHAI during its grantmaking years there continue to function

by means of support from other philanthropists, foundations, and the government of Russia.

Svetlana Busygina, director of the program, concludes that a remnant of what AVI CHAI has accomplished in the FSU will survive, and in some cases even thrive, even if not at the same level as before. “You may publish 100 books a year, or you may publish 15 books a year,” she says. But even a reduced number of books is an asset for the Jewish community that had not existed before. Furthermore, she adds, “Jewish books were published before, but they were not as popular. They were not provided in regular book stores. It was difficult to find them. The quality of the publication was very poor.” Now, however, the standard of quality is much higher and demand has risen as a result. Consumer expectations are elevated, so it would be difficult, if not impossible, for publishers to revert to the older, lower standards. Now that many publications are available as audio books, consumer demand for them has risen, and publishers will continue to serve the market. She notes that, before AVI CHAI, past editions of Jewish books were often censored, whereas now full, accurate texts are available, and readers expect nothing less.

Although no other funders have yet taken on the challenge of Jewish content-production as expansively as AVI CHAI did, the Foundation plainly set an example of what is possible, and others have begun to follow this lead. Further, because AVI CHAI worked with established book publishers in creating its book series—publishers “who have worked in the Jewish community for many years” and are respected by Jewish readers—the capacity to continue publishing these titles will survive the Foundation’s departure. The panel that selected books to be published is also continuing its work, Ms. Busygina reports, even without AVI CHAI’s financial support.

Websites pose a more difficult problem. For example, [Booknik.ru](http://Booknik.ru) (a Russian-language portal focusing on Jewish literature and culture) was costly

to operate but widely respected for the quality of its content and its neutrality and balance in matters of politics, religion, and ideology. It was, in Ms. Busygina’s words, “comprehensive, authoritative, and objective.” Unfortunately, those who now might consider adopting the site and paying the cost of maintaining it are less apt to take such a neutral tone. Possible supporters have been clear that any site under their sponsorship would have to toe the funder’s political or philosophical line. That, she fears, “would make this website less interesting to the public.” As a result, she notes, Booknik is currently “frozen”—still online, with a reservoir of material and occasional updates, but no staff to keep it lively and no ad revenue to support it. Given the high quality and rising popularity of the site, seeing it all but stagnate has been, in Ms. Busygina’s words, “a most painful thing.”

A happier story involves Eshkolot, a series of text-based Jewish study programs for Moscow’s young professionals and university students. This Ms. Busygina describes as “the happiest child of the AVI CHAI family” in the FSU. The Genesis Philanthropy Group, a foundation dedicated to promoting Jewish identity for Russian-speaking Jews worldwide, has adopted Eshkolot and is considering expanding the program well beyond Moscow. For now, in the first year of Genesis support, the project has continued as before. And an online academy has been added, so that people can view past programs and stream current ones, even if they are far from Moscow.

Another bright spot in AVI CHAI’s Russia legacy, Ms. Busygina reports, is the Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Moscow and a corresponding department at St. Petersburg State University, both of which AVI CHAI helped found and for which it has provided scholarships. “These departments are part of the most popular universities in Russia,” Ms. Busygina notes, “so there will always be competition among students who want to apply.” Here, too, the Genesis Foundation has been willing to provide continuing support and has added some

enhancements to the program. The fact that these departments have always had support from other funders besides AVI CHAI—including Genesis, the JDC, and the Rothschild Foundation—has helped them carry on well beyond AVI CHAI’s departure.

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**CONCLUSION:  
REFLECTIONS ON THOUGHT LEADERSHIP**

As AVI CHAI draws closer to its sunset, the time is approaching for an assessment of the effect the Foundation has had on the field of Jewish philanthropy—beyond its support for any given grantee or its cooperation with various funding partners. What influence, if any, has the Foundation exerted on the fields to which it has committed its resources, and on the donors and foundations upon which those fields will depend once AVI CHAI is no more? Interviews conducted for this report suggest that the Foundation’s intellectual and moral leadership will continue to resonate in at least two aspects of its philanthropy, and several observers saw opportunities for ongoing influence in a third area as well.

**1. Capacity-Building for Grantee Organizations.**

In Israel and North America, AVI CHAI has been a leader among Jewish foundations in providing capacity-building resources and consulting advice for its grantees, enabling its recipients to achieve greater impact than would have been possible in the absence of that support. Recently, the Foundation has begun to employ a different form of capacity-building: lending AVI CHAI staff to grantees for a period of time, usually in the early weeks of a new grantee’s existence. The idea could be expanded, if AVI CHAI were to consider lending some of its staff time to new, unstaffed Jewish foundations, to help them achieve a better-informed standard for professional operation.

Karen Weiss, a staff member of AVI CHAI Israel, believes that the Foundation’s practice of dedicating full-time program staff to grantee capacity-building, and providing “continuing guidance before, during, and after grantmaking” has set a standard

for philanthropy. The Foundation’s dedication to capacity-building, she says, focuses on “the resilience of organizations” and includes such basic organizational essentials as “strategy, vision, mission, work plan, budgets, and infrastructure,” along with a more precise concentration on specific needs and gaps, such as fundraising.

**2. Modeling the Use of Research and Evaluation.**

One of the primary reasons AVI CHAI has been able to make such progress in developing the field of Jewish content across many kinds of institutions and initiatives is its reliance on developing meticulous research and then being relentlessly guided by those research findings. Examples are Marvin Schick’s pioneering study of Jewish day schools, Amy Sales’s “Limud by the Lake” on Jewish camping, and the series of continuing reports on the census of Jewish day schools every five years.

AVI CHAI’s use of research in strategic and tactical decision-making has also set a model for the field. “Being a research-driven foundation is one of the central hallmarks of AVI CHAI and its practice,” Trustee Lief Rosenblatt told me. “There is almost nothing that AVI CHAI does where it doesn’t self-evaluate, self-critique, try to gather in data...whether the data are metrics or mathematical data or sometimes if they are just an accumulation of serious qualitative data.... That’s the whole [Zalman] Bernstein [z”l] approach to investing money, and investing in companies: to have an extensively research-driven program for figuring out how to invest money. And this has carried over into philanthropy.”

A closely-related point, he continued, is that a respect for research entails a willingness to question one’s own suppositions and assumptions and, once a path has been chosen, setting measurable expectations. This means “measuring successes and not being pulled just by your heartstrings.... Do some research to test your hypothesis. And then, when you have a program, hold people accountable in advance to certain standards and certain levels of evaluation that are going to proceed, so that

you can tweak your programs as you go along to be improving them constantly. Or cutting bait!”

Liora Pascal, director of evaluation at AVI CHAI Israel, believes that AVI CHAI’s approach to evaluative research has been especially groundbreaking in Israel. “Systematic evaluation of grants and grantees is rare to the point of non-existence in Israeli foundations,” she says.

“In AVI CHAI, we are not doing just evaluation. Our evaluation involves implementation of the work, to be a learning organization, to discover how to do things better.”

**3. Convening the Field.** During the course of my 40-plus interviews for this report, I always asked what the interviewees think AVI CHAI should do to foster greater understanding of and commitment to the Jewish program goals on which it has focused during its grantmaking life. One prominent idea emerged, with several possible variations.

To set the scene, one commentator bemoaned the lack of “high-quality, deliberative convening” among grantmakers in Jewish philanthropy. AVI CHAI, this person suggested, should join with like-minded institutions to gather small groups of funders for “really substantive discussions on policy implications for where we should be putting our finite energy and dollars.” These should be “not just meetings, but proper convenings, where people are doing

papers in advance.” These should include smaller, newer, or more thinly staffed foundations that are less well networked and may be less aware of what is happening in the field. With two years of such gatherings, it might be possible to gain clarity on some long-term questions, such as, “What’s the curriculum that the Jewish community ought to engage with, and how do we do that? Who has to be around? What do we want the Jewish community in America to look like 15 years from now?”

An AVI CHAI staff member from North America added that “the best thought leadership we can do is to give people opportunities to learn, and to think together with us.” The Foundation could contribute writing and research to such an effort, but should also seek out contributions to “days of learning” from other funders and scholars.

Mr. Prager considers the opportunity for these kinds of convening and information-sharing to be part of the Foundation’s departing responsibility to the field. “Whether or not we’re doing new programs in the years between now and sundown,” he says, “we have developed a wealth of knowledge and experience about Jewish grantmaking. New foundations are coming on board, and existing foundations are continuing to make grants. I think we should devote ourselves, over our coming 2½ years, to trying to be helpful to them.... We are feeling both an opportunity and sense of responsibility to help make other people’s work better with our experience.”