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"The Making of a Mensch" to Premiere on Character Day 2015

New Tiffany Shlain film addresses big issues from an engaging Jewish perspective; coincides with High Holidays

SAN FRANCISCO, CA -- A new film and discussion package in development, *The Making of a Mensch*, will premiere this fall on Character Day 2015 (September 18), a global day to engage Jewish and secular communities around the world in different perspectives and teachings around character development. The film, directed by acclaimed Emmy-nominated filmmaker Tiffany Shlain (creator of Sundance hit film *The Tribe* and founder of The Webby Awards), explores character development through the ancient Jewish wisdom of Mussar, updating these teachings through her trademark accessible, provocative, engaging, and entertaining 21st century lens. The September 18, 2015 release date intentionally falls during the Jewish High Holidays, a period of reflection and self-examination on one's character.

"Premiering *The Making of a Mensch* as part of Character Day, and during the High Holidays, will create a very powerful experience that we hope will spark new conversation and thinking about how to live fulfilling and purposeful lives in today's 24/7 world," says Director Tiffany Shlain, named by *Newsweek* as one of the 'Women Shaping the 21st Century.' "People are hungry for deep and meaningful engagement around big topics like character and giving back in fulfilling ways. And after last year's Character Day, Jewish educators and rabbis introduced me to the teachings of Mussar and it became very clear we had to make this film and resources about character through the lens of these great ancient Jewish teachings. We want to deliver an experience through the film and conversation cards and materials that gets Jews of all ages excited to dive in and learn more."

The inaugural Character Day 2014 was a wide success with 1,500 schools and nonprofits around the world screening Shlain's film, *The Science of Character*, which launched the event, and utilizing resources to hold discussions with their communities. The U.S. State Department screened the film in Washington, DC and at embassies around the world. In total, people tapped in from over 120 countries and 3000 cities, and the film was translated into 14 different languages.

With *The Making of a Mensch*, Shlain's film making studio Let it Ripple hopes to engage more than 3,000 schools, synagogues, JCCs, nonprofits, Jewish camps, and other community organizations globally in film screenings and other activities on Character Day 2015. Partners already include the U.S. State Department, Foundation for Jewish Camp, The Covenant Foundation, National Association of Independent Schools, the San Francisco Unified School District, the Center on Media and Child Health, and many more. Locally in San Francisco, the film will have a live premiere at the prestigious JCCSF Arts & Ideas series with Tiffany in conversation on stage about *The Making of a Mensch* (tickets go on sale June 29, 2015). And, as with last year's film, Let it Ripple will utilize "Cloud Filmmaking" over the next few months to seek input, via video, from people all over the world on the issues the film will address. Shlain and her team will then select some of the submissions to include in the final film.

"With all the technology and creative tools available today it's fantastic to be able to collaborate with people around the world on these films. This summer we will be asking people to send in videos answering, 'what's your definition of a mensch?" adds Shlain. "Character Day also harnesses all of that technology to bring people together on a global Google Hangout to discuss and wrestle with these bigger questions of about how to become exemplary humans...mensches in today's world."

Rabbi Avi Orlow, Director of Jewish Education at Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC), viewed *The Science of Character* last year and was especially intrigued by a poster the film team created for all screenings called "The Periodic Table of Character Strengths," detailing character strengths based on the social science work by Dr. Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson. He recognized the potential to adapt it to spur learning for a Jewish audience based on the ethical teachings of the Mussar movement. Orlow says that FJC's camps participating in Cloud Filmmaking this summer will engage campers and staff in Character Day outside of camp.

"From the film to the resources to the immersive learning environment of camp, this is an opportunity to engage youth in a whole learning experience," adds Orlow. "We absolutely deal with questions about morals and positive character, and we need to create an active learning environment around these topics. A revival of the Mussar movement in the context of modern psychology offers us unique insights about morality and our humanity that are strikingly relevant in today's modern world."

Adds Harlene Appelman, Executive Director of the Covenant Foundation, one of the funders behind the project: "The conversation around Mussar and character are so ripe right now, while we simultaneously need new ways of reviving these Jewish teachings. This is what Tiffany Shlain does best: take important and complicated subjects, and present them in ways that excite people of all ages. It's the perfect message at the perfect time, with the right messenger. The visual medium; the supplemental learning materials; the way it all comes together on one big day—it's all very forward thinking for the world of Jewish education. We're excited that Let it Ripple's creative spirit is the driving force behind this, building towards Character Day 2015."

Let it Ripple already has reached out to rabbis and educators who are incorporating the film and materials—all free—into their High Holiday conversations or early school year curriculum. Online materials will include discussion questions for different age ranges (elementary school, middle school, high school, college/university/adult), and a robust site that offers a deeper dive into resources for each of the character strengths identified in the updated Mussar version of the original character strengths poster. The physical package of discussion materials will include a discussion book and pack of conversation cards. Similar to the cards included with *The Tribe* package (Shlain's film from 2006, still used by thousands of Jewish educators around the world), these cards will have engaging graphics, questions, thought experiments, activities to develop these strengths, and suggested practices to incorporate on a long term basis.

The *Making of a Mensch* is Shlains first explicitly Jewish-themed film since *The Tribe* in 2006, which explored American Jewish identity through the history of the Barbie doll. Shlain's original online series, the Emmy-nominated *The Future Starts Here*, has over 40 million views and in its first episode, "Technology Shabbats," explored Shlain's family's weekly ritual of turning off all screens one day each week, an updated interpretation of the very old tradition of Shabbat.

"I think people are ready for this deep conversation, and it's this great opportunity to show how these ancient Jewish ideas are in fact very relevant and can be a guide to leading a meaningful and purposeful life in today's world," adds Shlain. "*The Making of a Mensch* and Character Day 2015 will ignite this dialogue. The short film is the appetizer and the discussion everyone has afterwards delving deeper into materials is the main course."

View a promo for Character Day 2015 here. Sign up to be part of the global film premiere of The Making of a Mensch here.

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Let It Ripple's mission is to use film, technology, discussion materials, and live and virtual events to engage people in conversation and action around complicated subjects that are shaping our lives, and updating these topics through an engaging, accessible, 21st century lens. Over the past ten years, the team has created and distributed 28 films, engaged over 50 Million people in dialogue, and created a new way of making films called "Cloud Filmmaking," where they make films collaboratively with people all over the world and offer free customized versions of the films to thousands of schools and nonprofits to help further their reach.
www.letitripple.org

Led by Tiffany Shlain, Emmy-nominated filmmaker and founder of The Webby Awards the SF based The Moxie Institute Film Studio + Lab has had four films premiere at Sundance, won over 70 awards, and has been singled out by the New York Times as "Examining everything from the big bang to Twitter." Three of their films have been selected by The U.S. State Department to screen at embassies around the world as part of the American Film Showcase. Their AOL Original hit series, The Future Starts Here, was nominated for an Emmy Award in the category New Approaches: Arts, Lifestyle & Culture, and has over 40 million views. One of the most viewed episodes in the show is called "Technology Shabbats" where she shares her ritual with her family of unplugging from all screens for one day a week for the past 5 years. www.tiffanyshlain.com twitter @tiffanyshlain