



Dear Friends and Colleagues:

In his book *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces that Shape Our Decisions*, the renowned behavioral economist—and trusted advisor to the Foundation—Dan Ariely writes:

So how can we improve the educational system? We should probably first rethink school curricula, and link them in more obvious ways to social goals (elimination of poverty and crime, elevation of human rights, etc.), technological goals (boosting energy conservation, space exploration, nanotechnology, etc.), and medical goals (cures for cancer, diabetes, obesity, etc.) that we care about as a society. This way the students, teachers, and parents might see the larger point in education and become more enthusiastic and motivated about it.

It's a provocative assertion, that we might structure students' educational experiences around the grand challenges that confront us instead of around the tools we hope they'll deploy to solve them. Imagine if the high school experience—instead of being subdivided into the traditional academic disciplines of English, math, science, social studies, and foreign languages—were organized around the questions that young people are asking themselves (whether consciously or not) as they emerge into adulthood and pointed them toward the changes that our complex world demands their participation to effect.

If these were the organizing principles, how might students experience/appreciate education differently? How might they emerge differently

into the world? What passions, creativity, and innovation might we unleash with this approach?

There's a loose analogy here to the celebrated [Reggio Emilia](#) model of early childhood education in which preschool students' encounters with the natural world help to shape the areas of inquiry that their teachers facilitate. For example, a query about how birds fly might lead to a unit of study that encompasses learning about the biodynamics of flight; the convergent evolution that led bats, bees, and birds to develop analogous mechanisms for flight; the history of human-powered flight; etc. I imagine that, in Ariely's formulation, we could build on the Reggio approach in developmentally appropriate ways, deriving the questions through which we organize student learning toward ever-more-complex and -nuanced encounters with the broader world.

This approach mirrors our vision at the Foundation. We're cognizant of the tremendous challenges facing us as Jews, Americans, and citizens of the world, and we believe that Jewish wisdom—along with the wisdom embedded in many other traditions—can help us design solutions. The winners of the inaugural Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom—described in greater detail below—embody this vision in profound and inspiring ways. There are many reasons that these outstanding programs were selected from among the hundreds of worthy applicants for the Prize, but I want to highlight one feature common to both.

[Ask Big Questions Jewish Conversation Guides](#) and [Hadran Alach: Bringing Our Jewish Agricultural Heritage to Life](#) each emerge from a universal challenge, one that all human beings face, and then apply particular Jewish wisdom to address it. At its core, Ask Big Questions represents a response to the fundamental human question, “How ought we to live together with people different from us?” Similarly, Hadran Alach starts from the question, “How ought we to feed ourselves?”

These are universal questions, ones which we all answer—too often implicitly, without reflection—every day through our actions and choices. In response to the first, we might celebrate diversity, seek to understand, try hard to see one another *b'Tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God, seek to persuade, retreat to political echo chambers, self-segregate with like-minded people, link arms, take up arms. In the course of a day, let alone a lifetime, we will likely do many of

these.

And in response to the second, within our communities, we will grow our own food, keep *kosher*, become vegetarian, embrace ethical eating; we might also experience food insecurity, bemoan foodie culture, crave a diet Coke or a Big Mac. As I've learned from the neuroscientist Drew Westen, all of these responses are in us and triggerable, even if latent much of the time.

Both Ask Big Questions and Hadran Alach are united in eschewing pat responses to these primal questions and instead offering serious pathways and tools to support our lifelong struggle to address them. They share a belief that Jewish wisdom can guide us in our ongoing efforts to live better lives for having struggled with questions that matter.

All of us at the Foundation are inspired and humbled by their work, and by the work of all of the applicants to the Prize, and are honored to contribute to their growing impact.

Best,
Aaron



GIVING

Fifty years ago, [Goldie and Jerry Lippman](#) made the decision to start a small foundation to carry out their commitment to and passion for *tzedakah*.

Today, Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah celebrates their legacy and conviction that Jewish wisdom can be a profound source of inspiration and guidance by awarding the inaugural Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom.

By shining a spotlight on the incredible diversity of programs and projects that are

successfully applying Jewish wisdom, the Foundation aims to encourage more organizations in the Jewish community to bring this approach to their work with creativity and intentionality. It is with great pride that we announce the six organizations, selected by [our panel of judges](#) out of a [Semifinalist pool of over 200](#), that will receive cash awards.

The Winner of the Local Category is:

[Hadran Alach: Bringing Our Jewish Agricultural Heritage to Life](#), a program of the **Pearlstone Center in Baltimore, MD.**

Rooted in Torah and embracing all people and all life, Pearlstone inspires over 20,000 individuals of all ages each year by embodying the environmental and agricultural wisdom of our ancient, rich Jewish tradition. Participants harvest according to Torah food justice laws, plant according to laws of forbidden mixtures, and model the Hebrew calendar's sacred sustainable rhythms of rest—Pearlstone brings this Jewish wisdom into participants' lived experiences.

Hadran Alach brings to life an aspect of Jewish wisdom nearly lost in our contemporary highly urbanized society: Jewish agricultural laws and practices. By operating a farm that observes Biblically mandated practices such as tithing, leaving the corners of the field unharvested, leaving gleanings for the poor to gather, and shmita – a sabbatical year where the fields are left fallow – and inviting thousands to share in the experience of producing food in a way that advances the values of justice with a spirit of joy and respect for the rhythms of nature, Hadran Alach demonstrates that even ancient wisdom can be transformative today.

The winner of the National/International Category is:

[Ask Big Questions Jewish Conversation Guides](#), a program of **Ask Big Questions, established by Hillel International.**

Since 2011, Ask Big Questions has created over 30 conversation guides that use Jewish wisdom to help participants wrestle with some of our biggest human questions about social justice, diversity and inclusion, forgiveness, and other topics. These conversation guides have been downloaded by over 40,000 users in a wide array of settings. They have provided a powerful and scalable approach for both professional educators and laypeople to engage themselves and each other, and apply Jewish wisdom directly to people's biggest questions.

Ancient and contemporary wisdom are both brought to bear on the Big Question and into dialogue with the participants. The outcome is that participants leave thinking about the behaviors they wish to undertake as a result of the conversation they've had and the wisdom with which they've engaged.

Each of our top prize winners will receive \$18,000. Our runners-up, who will receive awards of \$6,000 each are:

- [B'naiture Pre-teen Rite of Passage and Mentorship](#), a program of Wilderness Torah in Berkeley, CA (local) - a ground-breaking two-year rite of passage journey for pre-teens that integrates Jewish wisdom, nature connection, and mentorship.
- [Milwaukee Jewish Artists' Laboratory](#), a program of the Harry and Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center in Milwaukee, WI (local) - a community of professional Jewish artists that meet to study texts together, exploring their meanings and relevance to their personal and professional lives.
- [Encounter](#), based in New York and Israel (national) - is a non-partisan educational organization that seeks to galvanize constructive Jewish leadership on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through experiential programs.
- [The Urban Adamah Fellowship](#), a program of Urban Adamah, based in Berkeley, CA (national) - a residential immersive ecospiritual-Jewish-social justice bootcamp for young Jews that integrates applied Jewish wisdom with sustainable agriculture and social justice training.

Taken together these six programs provide a glimpse of a new Jewish reality that is emerging today: a renewed endeavor to use Jewish teachings and practices to have profound, even transformative, impact on the lives of Jews (and in some cases others as well), by bringing them to bear, openly and creatively, on the real issues and aspirations that animate us. Each of the six winning programs, and many more among the entrants, treats Jewish tradition with deep respect, but also with a willingness to reshape it, to delve into it from multiple perspectives, even to mix it with wisdom from other traditions so that it can be applied with a sense of personal ownership and authenticity by their participants.



How can Jewish wisdom help guide you in today's America? Watch the video above for a short list of wisdom we've turned to following the election - and share with those still searching for inspiration!



The video above recommends further examination of [Tochecha](#), the Jewish wisdom around Rebuke, and the multiple perspectives offered in this month's [Sh'ma Now!](#)

LEARNING

Of the many frameworks used to apply Jewish wisdom, we have found personal and institutional power in Jewish Sensibilities, the terminology introduced by Vanessa

Ochs to describe the ideas, values, emotions and behaviors shaped from and by Jewish history, stories and sources that provide inspiration and guidance to help us respond creatively and thoughtfully to life's challenges and opportunities.

We have been working - and learning - with several organizations to adapt Jewish Sensibilities for use in a variety of settings, and we are delighted to be able to present a first iteration of that work for public use. A variety of new and curated content, ready for practical use by educators and other Jewish professionals, is now available at www.JewishSensibilities.org

Please check it out!



We've moved offices!

Please change our physical mailing address in your files:

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SHARING

The merger of UpStart, Bikkurim and Joshua Venture Group was an incredible example of three organizations coming to the table to partner in an open and creative way - we're in awe of their willingness to innovate internally, in the best interest of the sector!

[This report in eJewishPhilanthropy](#), discussing the increasing clout of megadonors in philanthropy, gave us a lot to think about.

We're always impressed and inspired by the [Pomegranate Prize recipients](#), awarded by the Covenant Foundation this past month to emerging Jewish educators.

ICYMI: catch our Senior Fellow, Jon Woocher and Director of Jewish and Organizational Learning, Rabbi Lee Moore on [Episode 37 of Judaism Unbound](#) - stream online or subscribe to the podcast via [iTunes!!!](#)

The [Bronfman Youth Fellowships](#) applications need to be in by January 4th - now's the time to make sure the high school juniors you know are working on their submissions. <http://bronfman.org/become>

What else should we be sharing?

[Click here to send us your recommendations!](#)



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