

What we're doing: instigated questions and provoked answers.

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A newsletter.



## Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The Nobel laureate in physics [Isidor Rabi](#) was once asked, "Why did you become a scientist, rather than a doctor or lawyer or businessman, like the other immigrant kids in your neighborhood?" He responded: "My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: 'So? Did you learn anything today?' But not my mother. She always asked me a different question. 'Izzy,' she would say, 'did you ask a good question today?' That difference—asking good questions—made me become a scientist."

I was reminded of this story a few weeks ago while spending a couple of days with the design team of [HaKaveret](#), a project of the Jewish Education Innovation Challenge that Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah is honored to support, along with [Mayberg Foundation](#) and Arnee and Walter Winshall. Through HaKaveret, 10 Jewish educators have come together to be trained in design thinking and to co-create a series of new approaches to Judaic studies for Jewish day schools.

To create something new while remaining responsive to a community's real needs is to get away from pat answers and deep into the questions behind them. Claudia Rankine, in her genre-bending book of poetry and essays, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, cites both James Baldwin and Dostoyevsky on questioning:

*"The purpose of art," James Baldwin wrote, "is to lay bare the questions hidden*

*by the answers.” He might have been channeling Dostoyevsky’s statement that “we have all the answers. It is the questions we do not know.”*

Underlying these diverse perspectives on questions is a shared humility and curiosity that animate the work of innovation. Humility on the one hand, because we’re acknowledging that we don’t have all the answers, and curiosity, because we’re committed to exploring and experimenting even in the face of that uncertainty.

At Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, we’re motivated by the idea that Jewish wisdom helps people live better lives and shape a better world, that there's an interdependent relationship between the Jewish people and our wisdom tradition. That wisdom tradition offers guidance and inspiration for us, and we, in turn, cultivate and adapt it to remain relevant and meaningful in the face of relentless change.

The work of the HaKaveret designers sits squarely in that sweet spot—seeking to strengthen the relationship between our people and our tradition in a way that ensures Judaism’s enduring value for the world and for future generations. And these innovative educators are bringing to bear the best of humility and curiosity in their work. Isidor Rabi’s mother would be proud.

I want to focus for another moment on that theme of humility, which I think is often underplayed in the “innovation sector,” where projecting (sometimes false) confidence and (occasionally pretending to know the) answers, in the face of real questions seems too often to be rewarded. Embracing innovation can be an opportunity to acknowledge our own fallibility, that we don't have it all figured out, and that we have important questions still to reckon with, learning and insight still to be revealed. As funders, we need to see a commitment to questions, and not a false pretense to all the answers, as a source of strength, not weakness. Every innovation is eventually overtaken by the next—just ask Sperry Univac, IBM, and Microsoft (Apple, Facebook, Google, and Amazon will have their moments as well). Any innovator worth her salt recognizes—and is humbled by—that reality.

When I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, we had a lesson on whales. My teacher, Mrs. Caine, explained that whales were mammals, not fish; that they had hair and gave birth to live young; and that they had this incredible baleen to filter plankton out

of the water. I raised my hand and said, “But Mrs. Caine, some whales have teeth.” She corrected me—baleen was one of the things that made whales whales, she reiterated—and we moved on.

It turned out I was right, but that wasn’t the point. What happened next was. The following day, Mrs. Caine came to class and publicly apologized for having corrected me. She’d been intrigued by my observation, had checked her facts, and had learned that, in fact, some whales do have teeth. In showing that even teachers could make mistakes and learn from them, that curiosity and ongoing learning are the key, not answers, she modeled for us the value of asking questions, challenging authority, learning, acknowledging mistakes, and trying always to get better.

I can't overstate the importance of that kind of modeling—for students, teachers, families, institutions, and the entire Jewish community—something HaKaveret embodies in powerful ways. As another Nobel Laureate, Albert Einstein, said, “We can't solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” There’s no dearth of new thinking in the realm of Jewish education, and no lack of great question asking, and I'm excited to see where it takes us.

Best,  
Aaron

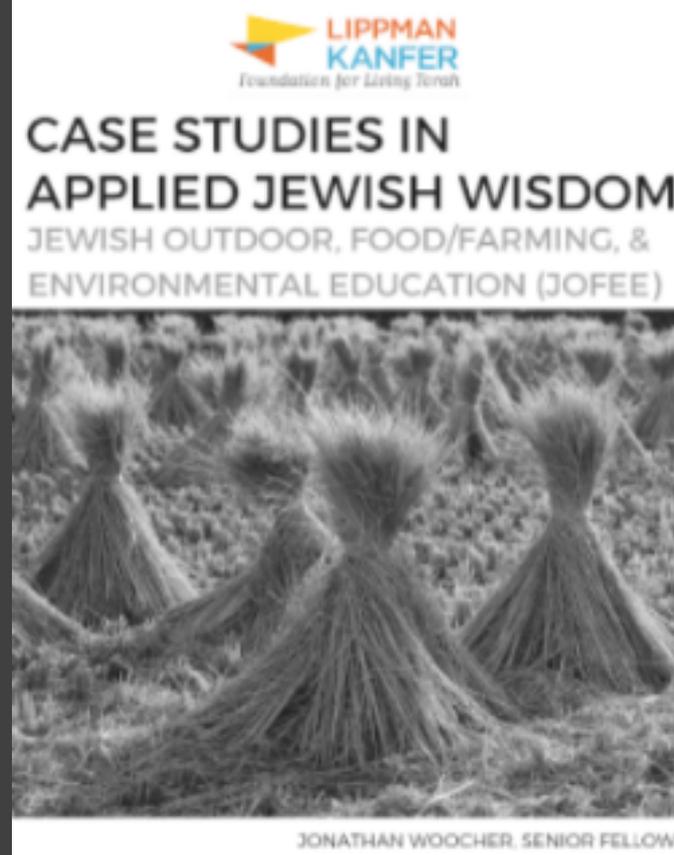
## GIVING

[JOFEE – Jewish Outdoor Food, Farming & Environmental Education](#) – is a growing sector within the Jewish community achieving exciting levels of success and impact. We are inspired by the JOFEE sectors innovative use of applied Jewish wisdom, [a subject our Senior Fellow Jon Woocher investigated](#) by examining the diversity of JOFEE approaches and projects represented among the semifinalists of the 2016 Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom.

The JOFEE field is also trying to utilize best practices of innovation and organizational development to support its growth – a way of working that we are proud to back not only because of the impact these strategies have on the JOFEE field, but because of the learning opportunities they yield for the Jewish community at large.

In 2016, we supported the J4 – [Hazon](#), [Wilderness Torah](#), [Pearlstone Center](#), and [Urban Adamah](#), the four field leaders in both size and entrepreneurship – with a grant to plan a leadership development program. The collaborative effort was not without challenges, but constructive conflict led to a robust plan with high buy-in from all participants. During the planning process, the J4 learned about the field’s long-term needs and their distinctive, individual hopes for growth as part of a larger movement. All are better positioned to define their roles in the field independently and collaboratively. We learned, in our role as funder and thought partner, the importance of investing in a planning process that facilitates frank conversation and testing of ideas before rushing to execution phases, and encouraging everyone to be willing to walk away from an idea that does not pan out, regardless of previous investments.

That said, the idea has come together into a well designed project, with great promise for “harvest” at the end of the growing season! We are pleased to announce a two year grant to implement this Leadership Development Program designed by the J4, and look forward to additional learnings as the project moves forward.



[Learn more](#) about Applied Jewish Wisdom and the JOFEE Sector.

[Volume One of our Case Studies series](#) is authored by Senior Fellow Jon Woocher and focuses on the 20 JOFEE programs recognized as Semifinalists in the 2016 Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom.

## Please register now

for the second session of our webinar series, offering a chance to learn with winners of the 2016 Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom



### Rabba Melanie Landau of Encounter Retrieving the Hidden Gifts of Conflict

When we avoid conflict we also lose the opportunity for authentic connection. Learn tools of “conflict transformation” to explore and relate to in new ways all those with whom you are in conflict. This webinar will offer theoretical understanding of the cycle of drama as well as practical tools, rooted in Jewish wisdom, for transforming conflict at both personal and professional levels

**Register now**  
June 20, 1 - 2:30 pm EDT

**LIPPMAN  
KANFER PRIZE**  
for Applied Jewish Wisdom

[Click here](#) to stream or download a recording of Zelig Golden's session, [Cultural Mentoring: The Hebrew Calendar as Judaism's Natural Operating System](#).

THIS MONTH'S CONVERSATION:

Havdil | הַבְּדִיל

Distinctions

Jews and Distinctiveness

[Sh'ma Now](#), on [The Forward](#) website, looks at HAVDIL, Distinctions - how and why we draw them, why we're drawn *to* them, what impact they have on us.

## SHARING

If you enjoyed our webinar with Zelig Golden on the practical and profound uses of the Jewish calendar in pedagogy and organizational development, [sign up for the Wilderness Torah Training Institute](#).

[Congratulations to the 2017 Covenant Foundation recipients](#), all leaders in applied Jewish wisdom.

[Can history serve as the keystone of being Jewish?](#) A question worth exploring - we see history as a critical fount of Jewish wisdom.

We love [these case studies](#), compiled by [Jeducation World](#), on part-time Jewish education that is working. We love to learn from and build on success!

We use Sefaria, we support Sefaria - and we are still fascinated and inspired by [the story of Sefaria](#). Worth 6 minutes of your time.

[Insightful interview](#) with OneTable Executive Director and Schusterman Fellow Aliza Kline - a great explanation of the power ritual as applied Jewish wisdom...PLUS a great challah recipe.

*What else should we be sharing?*

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



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