JTS The Jewish Theological Seminary

November 25, 2013
22 *Kislev* 5774

Mr. Mandell L. Berman
30542 Hickory Lane
Franklin, MI 48025

Dear Bill,

It was an honor -- and a real pleasure! - to see you twice this month, especially to have had you visit us at JTS, have lunch in my office, and talk about the work of The Davidson School and its importance for the future of Jewish education. Thank you for the two checks of $500,000 and $320,000. We are delighted to allocate these toward endowment as a way to continue the legacy of your annual support for JTS and the Davidson Scholarship program in perpetuity.

As promised, I want to follow up on your invitation to reiterate our desire to see the creation of the **Berman Fund for Research and Evaluation** at the Davidson School. Here is my proposal:

When we last met, I especially enjoyed your enthusiastic assent to my statement that there is no end of new ideas for reforming and improving Jewish education across the Jewish world, but too many of them end up going nowhere – or, worse, of wasting money better spent elsewhere – because they lack assessment and evaluation. Without measures of long term effectiveness and best practice and grounding in evaluation and research, we cannot learn what ideas are worth continuing and replicating. You have long been committed to this effort. It's one of the things that always led me to regard you as a kindred spirit. You appreciate new ideas – but you insist they be tested. I agree whole-heartedly.

At JTS, as you know, we have established an excellent array of programs serving Jewish education, some that have been shaped and refined over many years of experience. Bill Davidson *z"l* said to Barry and me one day that he did not want an ivory tower. He wanted impact. We have tried to make that happen again and again. The scope of what we have going by way of projects is unparalleled: DSLTI (Day School Leadership Training Institute), Prozdor High School, the Standards and Benchmarks program for teaching *Tanach*, Ivriyon (Hebrew immersion for day school teachers) , among others. Add to that the programs that we have begun to pilot only recently: Israel education, Jewish Experiential Leadership Institute for staff of JCCs, and Jewish Early Childhood Education Leadership Institute (jointly with HUC and Bank Street). Some of these programs have already benefited immensely from outside evaluation.

Others will be assessed in coming months. The newest initiative, the one closest to my heart, is Reframe: bringing methods of Camp Ramah into a pilot set of congregational schools. We are making each Reframe congregation a site of "action research" so that the experiment can be studied and assessed in "real time," as it occurs. This is absolutely essential to the project's success.

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And that is true of virtually every element of every program and initiative Davidson undertakes: such as assessing program impact on the ground, measuring the skills and success of particular mentors, or market testing of fees and new models of program delivery like effective use of online learning.

That explains why I was overjoyed at the interest you expressed in making it possible for us to support research and evaluation of our Jewish education programs – including aspects of them that take place at The Davidson School itself - for many years to come. On the basis of that conversation, I am pleased to propose establishment of **The Berman Fund for Education Action-Research and Evaluation**.

A $1 million endowment would yield the sum of $50,000 annually for research and evaluation. You are being, and have been, most generous to us. We would understand if you would like the $320,000 you handed me be the first payment toward this $1 million fund instead of continuing the scholarship. In addition, the $500,000 check will also be endowment, providing a legacy of $25,000 to continue a portion of your support for the JTS Annual Fund.

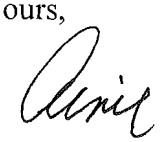
What is more, the establishment of the Berman Fund could not come at a more opportune time. The Davidson School completed a comprehensive strategic planning process last year, and one of the leading outcomes was a call to make an ever-stronger mark in Jewish educational research and thought leadership. We have re-organized our efforts to that end, linking academic programs to professional development projects in the field and making those projects more responsive to changing needs of communities through impact evaluation.

There is yet another factor important to the timing of this gift: JTS has just received a major challenge grant of $2.6 million from the AVI CHAI Foundation, and your gift would help us meet that challenge in addition to so many others.

Bill, I cannot tell you how excited I am to contemplate this possibility and to discuss it further with you. It is always good to see you and have the benefit of your thinking.

Thanks for all you do.

Yours,



Arnold Eisen

AME/mlg

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