Dear friends,

At this time of the year we reflect on the year that was and think about the year to come. Mayanot was very fortunate to have unprecedented success in all areas of our programs over the past 12 months. We brought a record-breaking number of students to Israel, giving them the opportunity to connect to Israel and strengthen their Jewish identities. It is these students who take a leadership position in defending Israel and promoting Jewish life on campus. Our students, thank G-d, are making a difference, and it is only with your partnership that this is possible.

SHANA TOVA

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you and wish you and your family a happy, healthy and sweet year; a year of redemption and a year of peace.

Rabbi Kasriel Shemtov
Executive Director

Rabbi Shlomo Gestetner
Dean
Rohr announces Mayanot airline ticket grant

At the Chabad on Campus conference earlier this year, Mr. George Rohr announced that he would subsidize 100 airline tickets – at an amount of $500 per ticket – for students who study at the Mayanot Institute of Jewish Studies during the upcoming academic year.

Complementing other available subsidies, the grant will cover the costs of return airfare for students enrolled in Mayanot’s semester and year-long programs.

Drawing on the Jewish journey of one individual, Mr. Rohr emphasized the shared influence of the various programs offered by Chabad for young adults, including Chabad on Campus projects, Sinai Scholars, Israel links and the Mayanot Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. “I am proud to be part of all these programs and seeing the impact through the lens of one individual highlights the inter-relationship of these programs and the collective impact of all that we do,” explained Mr. Rohr.

In addition, Mr. Rohr stressed the importance of Yeshiva study for young Jewish adults. “If we are going to ensure that these students build Jewish homes and they themselves will become observant and inspired Jews, learning in a Yeshiva is critical,” he told the crowd. “It is the young students who learn in a Yeshiva who will build Judaism in the future and who will be the next generation of leaders. Mayanot has been successful in educating college students, giving them the tools to learn how to learn and the ‘love for Yiddishkeit’ which is evident when you meet a Mayanot graduate.”
Federman and Schottenstein partner for Mayanot Scholarship Fund

Midwest couples Ben and Rachel Federman and David and Eda Schottenstein are partnering for their second joint philanthropic project, this time launching the Mayanot Institute of Jewish Studies Midwest Scholarship Fund to assist Mayanot students from the Midwest of the United States.

The Fund — established in the memory of Alta Shula Sverdlov o’h, daughter of shlichim Rabbi Yossi and Hindel Sverdlov — will provide promising young adults with the financial means to attend semester and year-long programs at the Mayanot Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem.

Mr. Federman approached Mayanot about starting the project in March of this year, after hearing about the programs from alumni living in the Midwest. “I thought of initiating the Midwest fund because I know individuals that have been to Mayanot and have ended up being active in the Jewish community,” said Federman, CEO and President of 1SaleADay.com. “I was impressed by the alumni I met. They are well-rounded individuals who are committed to spreading the word and to passing on the knowledge they have gained to communities in the Midwest,” he said in an interview.

Mr. Schottenstein, CEO of Astor & Black Custom Clothing, is equally enthusiastic about what the project can do for individuals from the Midwest as well as local Jewish communities. “When people are educated about Judaism and what it is to be a Jew they are more likely to stay connected,” he explains. “Mayanot is at the forefront in that department and in reconnecting youth. Furthermore, when I give to Jewish education I feel like am giving to the Jewish future and helping preserve Jewish identity,” he said.

Over the past thirteen years Mayanot has endeavored not to turn away suitable applicants who are facing financial obstacles. However, given the current financial climate, this policy has become more of a challenge to implement. “We have found that applicants to our programs encounter many challenges when applying to Mayanot. However, it is generally financial pressures that weigh most heavily,” explained Mayanot Executive Director Rabbi Kasriel Shemtov. “We are grateful to Mr. Federman and Mr. Schottenstein for stepping up to the plate and ensuring that no student is turned away. We are certain that recipients of this scholarship will return to their local Jewish communities in the Midwest with the knowledge and enthusiasm they have acquired, and contribute to building and developing vibrant Jewish communities.”

The Schottenstein family supports a number of key projects at Mayanot, including the “Saul’s Scholars” summer program scholarship, dedicated by William and Thomas Schottenstein in the memory of their late uncle, Saul Schottenstein o’h. In 2010, David and Eda Schottenstein contributed to the establishment of Mayanot’s Holtzberg Administration Center, which serves as Mayanot’s administrative and financial offices. “We are truly grateful to Ben Federman, the Schottenstein Family and to all of our supporters,” commented Rabbi Shlomo Gestetner, Dean of Mayanot.
The Summer that Was

Taglit-Birthright Israel: MAYANOT has an outstanding summer, bringing over 1,850 young adults to Israel for life-changing Israel experience. MAYANOT is currently preparing for what looks to be a successful winter.

Pictured in photo on right: Individuals from our special needs trips, a tailor-made Taglit-Birthright Israel program organized by the Friendship Circle and Mayanot.
Croatian Professor Studies at Mayanot

If you were to meet him today, you would hardly believe that Mayanot student Benny (Vukan) Marinković did not discover that he was Jewish until age 7.

As a teacher of Jewish Thought at the University of Zagreb in Croatia, and co-founder of Rimon, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the improvement of Jewish life, one would think that Marinković grew up in an environment infused with Jewish culture and religious practice. The 31-year-old, however, was born and raised in Zagreb, a city in Croatia consisting of 2,000 Jews, 90 percent of whom, he claims, are completely disconnected from the Jewish community which was almost entirely destroyed during the Holocaust. “The Jewish community of Zagreb has faced Nazism, communism, war and the Yugoslav secession,” explains Marinković. “After the Croatian War of Independence, however, things started to improve for the community. In 1996, the community received its first community Rabbi since the Holocaust. Traditional Jewish life was for the first time reintroduced,” he says.

Although he had been attending community camps since a young age, it wasn’t until age 17 or 18 - a year of two after Croatia’s independence - that Marinković became interested in strengthening his Jewish identity. It was through his studies of philosophy and comparative religion at a Jesuit college in Zagreb, the only place in Croatia where religious studies were available, that Marinković began to delve into the texts of Judaism and examine his Judaism. “As my knowledge developed about other religions,” he explains, “I became aware of my very superficial knowledge of Judaism and I felt a need to learn more.” Marinković began to examine Jewish texts, eventually writing a thesis on the first five principles of Rambam and earning and M.A. in Philosophy and Religious Studies.

In 2008, after spending the year learning Jewish philosophy at Paideia - The European Institute for Jewish Studies, Marinković became increasingly involved in creating educational and cultural programs for the Zagreb Jewish community. He began lecturing in Jewish philosophy at the University of Zagreb, co-founded the Rimon Center and also started working with the local Chabad, together with local shlichim Rabbi Pinchas and Mrs. Raizel Zaklas, where he would organize community projects. Remarkably, many of the courses he organized for Rimon were tailored to non-Jewish residents of Zagreb, and none of the students in his philosophy course had Jewish ancestry that he knows of. “There is a huge interest by non-Jews in Jewish culture, mysticism and politics,” explains Marinković. “There is a lot of ignorance about Judaism in the non-Jewish world, especially in Croatia, and a lot of confusion and misunderstanding stems from it. That is why we decided that giving tailored courses could help bridge the gap between these two populations.”

Marinković claims that despite the ignorance amongst the general population about Judaism, anti-Semitism in Croatia is minimal. “There are groups of individuals who discuss Judaism using anti-Zionist language. However, that is not unique to Croatia. It is just a sign that we are part of the European milieu.” Marinković explains that one can easily wear a kippa on the streets of Zagreb and that although you may be recognized as a Jew, a reaction is unlikely.

At Mayanot for the year, Marinković has put on hold all previous obligations in order to focus on learning. “Through the course of my academic studies, the need to integrate spiritual, religious, emotional and cultural life became more apparent, he explains. And that’s how I got more interested in Chassidut as a means to bridge these fragmented expressions of Judaism that I encountered and appropriated through study and life. I came to Mayanot to try and unify the various parts of Judaism and to learn how Chassidut perceives unity between Halacha, philosophy and psychology.”

Marinković is currently working on a book about the development of Jewish thought, from antiquity to the renaissance period.

As for the future? Marinković is interested in completing a PhD in medieval Jewish philosophy either in Israel or the States. Asked whether he will be returning to Croatia in the near future, Marinković explains that he is not yet ready to return. “In order to be of better service to the Jewish people, I need to gain more knowledge and need to integrate Judaism into various aspects of my life,” he says.
Four years ago, Jacob Huberman and Elena Younessi were participants on a Mayanot Birthright trip.

A Mayanot Journey to the Chuppah

Standing only meters apart on a visit to the kever of Yonatan Ben Uziel next to Amuka in Tsfat, a mystical site renowned for helping people find their zivug (spouse), the two Birthright participants could not have imagined that their future life partner was standing right beside them. Jacob, a graduate of the Mayanot Men’s Program, and Elena married earlier this year, returning recently to Israel as a married couple to lead a Mayanot Birthright trip. In a recent interview, they described the story behind their meeting as well as expressing their gratitude to Mayanot. “Mayanot brought us together,” they explained.

While Jacob and Elena were on the same ten-day program, it was not until returning to the States that the two got to know one another. Elena was literally the ‘girl next door,’ when Jacob moved to Los Angeles after returning from Israel where he participated in the Mayanot Birthright program as well as Mayanot Men’s Program. “Elena lived three houses down from me. I didn’t discover that until we started speaking on facebook and she discovered that I had moved to Los Angeles. We came outside into the street and started chatting. I invited myself to her house for Shabbat dinner and the rest was history,” says Jacob.

Jacob, a professor of Film at the University of La Verne, explains that the knowledge that he gained from his experience at the Mayanot Yeshiva was instrumental in his leadership skills during the recent Birthright trip. “Leading on the trip gave me the opportunity to give a life-changing experience to someone else,” explained Jacob.
Visiting Surgeon

Dr. Dennis Maiman, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Neurological Surgery at the Medical College of Wisconsin, together with his wife Dina, visited Mayanot recently. After touring the Mayanot Women’s Program together with Rabbis Meir Levinger and Shlomie Gestetner, Dr. and Mrs. Maiman expressed their appreciation for the institution. As longtime supporters of Mayanot, the Maimans were particularly impressed by the high level of academic excellence, the sophisticated curriculum and the positive energy they witnessed while on their tour of the facilities.

In Memory – Mrs. Myra Kraft OBM

Mayanot was deeply saddened by the passing of Mrs. Myra Kraft, a longtime supporter and friend of Mayanot.
Students at the Mayanot Women’s Program were fortunate to have the opportunity to meet Mrs. Kraft OBM when she visited the program in October last year.

Mrs. Kraft was a source of inspiration to students, speaking about her lifelong involvement in philanthropic organizations including the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the New England Patriots Charitable Foundation and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston, of which she was the first woman and Jew to be elected chairman. She encouraged the students of Mayanot to be active in causes, both within the Jewish and wider communities. “To actually go out and do the work is really important. If you believe in something then you need to convince people and talk to your friends and try and get them interested.”

Mayanot extends its condolences and sympathy to Mr. Robert Kraft and to their four sons, Jonathan, Daniel, Joshua and David. We wish the entire Kraft family much comfort.
MAZAL TOVS

Engagements and Weddings

Naomi Fauman and Tuvyah Schleifer
Aaron Leaf and Dvorah Leah Brami
Yitzchok Nussbaum and Devorah Leah Steinfeld
Yehudis Diskin and Avram Levitan
Leah Dreskin and Betzalel Daniel Mellinger
Daria Auerbach and Nechemia Barkai
Jennifer Amy Hankin and Jarrod Anthony Freedman
Chana Miriam Lester and Alon Chanoch Golub
Pascale Gozlan and Tomer Chazan
Chava Zviklin and Michael Shapiro
David Spencer and Ilana Rauch
Ilana Hecht and Eliaou Azulai
Gani Domber and Aaron Lazer Goodman
Maria Shteyman and Ilia Brusin
Sara Becker and Benaya Plotkin
Rachel Pollack and Daniel Eliezer Weissman
Mushka Dubasava and Michael Dashevsky
Chaya Goodman and Yosef Kurtz
Joelle Cohn and Mordechai Wilshinsky
Justine Brozin and Antony Seeff
Tania Abaad and Binyomin Yehuda Preminger
Jacob Huberman and Elena Younessi
Ronny Shnapp and Mel Drinkwater
Chanie Wolosow and Naftoli Minkowitz
Naomi Touger and Levi Grossbaum
Jamie Goodwin and Ben Schwed
Shifka Seigel and Abie Shammah
Baruch Arky and Zehava Shahed Akinadé
Pacey Lipkind and Rivkah Shirah Francis
Jesse Kaufman and Rivkah Winderman

Births

Eli and Leah Levin, boy
Tal and Talia Chaya Bloom, boy
Elad and Marcy Nehorai, girl
David and Miriam Malca, girl
Adam and Tzivi Szental, boy.
(Mazal tov the grandparents: Richard & Rebecca Szental, Chaim & Chayi Glick)
Baruch Akiva and Rochel Hayman, boy
Mazal tov to the grandparents: Avraham and Devora Hayman
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