

June 2021

Bay Area and Polish Jewish Communities Partner on Educational Programs

Minyan Makers, led by the Northern California Board of Rabbis and the Taube Center for Jewish Life & Learning, in Warsaw, celebrates closing program June 22; Succeeded by new program Doresh, with Swig and Libitzky support

SAN FRANCISCO / WARSAW, POLAND. JUNE 10, 2021 – In early 2020, pre-COVID, the Northern California Board of Rabbis (NCBOR), based in San Francisco, and the Taube Center for Jewish Life & Learning, based in Warsaw, Poland, co-created **Minyan Makers**, a Jewish text-based learning initiative. Over the course of a year, rabbis from the Bay Area, Modesto, Santa Cruz, and Humboldt County led online workshops for Jewish cultural and educational professionals across Poland that explored the contemporary relevance of Jewish religious texts.

Minyan Makers brought together 13 NCBOR rabbis and 44 professionals from 21 Polish Jewish institutions. Divided into four *minyanim*, groups of at least ten participants, they studied selected texts from the Torah, *siddur* (Jewish prayer book), Talmud, and Kabbalah. Funded by a grant from Taube Philanthropies, the Taube Center’s Libitzky Family Foundation rabbinic intern, Gabe Miner, facilitated the cohorts and the NCBOR coordinated the rabbis, who donated their time.

The concept was inspired by a 2015 Taube Center Jewish heritage study tour of Poland for NCBOR rabbis, led by Rabbis Marvin Goodman and Allen Bennett. Upon their return to the Bay Area, participants committed to strengthening Jewish life in Poland. The following year, Rabbi Bennett and Rabbi George Schlesinger each spent a month in Poland volunteer-working with the Warsaw and Krakow Jewish communities, respectively. Further discussions explored options for actively engaging the Bay Area and Polish Jewish communities.

“The challenge was how to best leverage the commitment and knowledge of NCBOR’s rabbis and have an impact on as many people in Poland as possible,” said Helise Lieberman, Director of

the Taube Center in Warsaw. The solution, Minyan Makers, came about during a conversation with NCBOR's Rabbi Pam Frydman and Shana Penn, Taube Philanthropies' Executive Director.

"For me, this is personal," said Rabbi Pam Frydman. "We lost over 100 members of our family in Poland alone during the Holocaust. Facilitating Minyan Makers for Jewish professionals in Poland was an unspeakable privilege. My colleagues and I are ever grateful to Taube Philanthropies in the Bay Area and to Helise Lieberman and the Taube Center in Warsaw for making it possible."

Rabbi Frydman, who had traveled to Poland in 2015, worked hand-in-hand with the Taube Center to develop the sessions' themes and arranged for the sessions to be taught by Rabbis Peretz Wolf-Prusan, Danny Gottlieb, Serena Eisenberg, Shalom Bochner, Rabbi Lori Klein, Margaret Holub, Chaya Gusfield, Meredith Cahn, Dorothy Richman, Eli Cohen, Naomi Steinberg, David Cooper, and Jaymee Alpert. Session themes included how Jewish sources address the Jewish responsibility to visit the sick, managing and overcoming crisis, and communal advocacy.

"I chose the opening teachings from Pirke Avot (Sayings of our Ancestors)," said Rabbi Peretz Wolf-Prusan who led the first session. "This simple and elegant dialogue between teachers and students, composed after the destruction of Judean autonomy in the second century, reveals the central mission of the Mishna itself — the reconstruction and revitalization of Jewish life. It was relevant then and is relevant now, in post-Holocaust Poland, where we have found a common place to reimagine Jewish life reborn."

"I feel privileged to teach and to learn from Minyan Makers," said Rabbi Alpert who is leading the last session, "and I am grateful to everyone who has made this program possible. In the concluding session, we will explore the connection between endings and beginnings, and I hope that the Jewish texts we discuss will guide the effort forward."

The program's fourth and final cycle is now coming to a close. The participants in Poland

represented an array of Polish Jewish cultural institutions including the American Jewish Committee, the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute, the Auschwitz Jewish Center, the Galicia Jewish Museum, Hillels and JCCs in Krakow and Warsaw, the Krakow Jewish Culture Festival, and the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

“Minyan Makers showed me how to work with various religious texts and relate them to current events and to our everyday lives,” says Anna Wencel, who heads the education program at the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow.

The success of the program encouraged Miner, who is currently continuing his rabbinic studies at HUC-JIR’s New York campus, to create a successor program, **Doresh**. In rabbinic texts the word *doresh* means *to interpret* or *teach*, from the root meaning *to seek*, as in “to seek answers or understanding.”

“An important element of this new iteration will be the inclusion of Polish Jewish sources,” explains Miner. “We felt it was important to give participants an opportunity to connect with their own history through the teachings of Rabbi Moses Isserles, the renowned 16th-century Polish halachic scholar, and Lublin-based Rabbi Meir Shapiro, promoter of *daf yomi*, the daily study of Talmud.”

Doresh, based on the successful model of Minyan Makers, is supported by Bay Area community leaders Roselyne Swig and the Libitzky Family Foundation, and will reach out to former Minyan Makers participants in Poland as well as to newcomers.

Minyan Makers focused on outreach, providing an introduction to Jewish text-based learning. Doresh allows for more depth with a cycle of five learning sessions per cohort instead of the initial three. This format, which will be available to two cohorts of ten, will further enhance community-building and professional networking.

“Jewish educators and funders around the globe have learned that it is possible to facilitate engaging online learning experiences that inspire a sense of communal connection. Doresh will

create a virtual *beit midrash*, a house of study, building on this connection as it fosters a sense of peoplehood,” explained Lieberman.

ABOUT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BOARD OF RABBIS

The Northern California Board of Rabbis serves the needs of colleagues, acts as a religious resource in communal and individual affairs, and builds connections and commitment to the Jewish community.

ABOUT TAUBE CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE & LEARNING

The Taube Center for Jewish Life & Learning Foundation is dedicated to enriching Jewish life in Poland and to connecting Jews from around the globe with their Eastern European heritage. The Taube Center produces an array of educational programs and resources, including custom-designed Jewish heritage tours; TJHTalks, a monthly webinar series on Poland’s Jewish past and present; Yerusha, a professional development program; and Mi Dor Le Dor Europe, a pan-European Jewish heritage educational initiative.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS:

Association of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw)

American Jewish Committee (Warsaw)

Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation (Oswiecim)

Brama Grodzka-Teatr NN (Lublin)

Committee for the Jewish Heritage Protection (Tarnów)

Cukerman's Gate Foundation (Bedzin)

Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (Warsaw)

Galicia Jewish Museum (Krakow)

Hillel Warsaw

Hillel Krakow

JCC Krakow

JCC Warsaw

Jewish Culture Festival (Krakow)

Lauder-Morasha Jewish Day School (Warsaw)

Lodz Jewish Cemetery (Lodz)

Mifgash Foundation (Warsaw)

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Warsaw)

Zuzanna Ginczanka High School (Warsaw)