Tevet 5778, January 2018

To whom it may concern:

**Qualifications of the Candidate**

I have maintained an academic acquaintance with Lior Silber for the past four years. It began when I taught a seminar at Tel Aviv University on the topic of the Early Modern Era, continued when I advised him in writing his master’s thesis—in conjunction with Professor Moshe Halbertal—and continues to this day in his capacity as a researcher in a research project that I have been conducting, with Israel Science Foundation funding, on the world of the records (*pinkasim*) of the eighteenth-century Prague Jewish community. It is on this basis that I present my recommendations in regard to Mr. Silber’s research capabilities.

Silber is gifted with keen curiosity as a researcher and outstanding analytic skills. His diverse background includes Jewish studies and psychotherapy, coupled with broad general erudition. These make themselves evident in the rich, multi-tiered, and sometimes surprising way in which he examines the object of our inquiry, modern history. In these respects, Lior brings to class a brace of outstanding personal capabilities—well-honed thinking, thoroughness, inspiration, an ardent wish to learn, and abundant and eager willingness to accept criticism, learn, and improve.

**Research program**

The topic of Silber’s master’s thesis is metaphysics in the legal writings of Rema (Rabbi Moses Isserles, d. 1572), the most important halakhic authority in the modern era. Rema’s halakhic writing has been of formative importance since the sixteenth century: towering discussion, infinite in its dimensions, that accompanies every detail in the nomian rulings that he included in his various legal works (*Darkhe Moshe,* glosses on *Shulhan ‘Arukh, Torat Hattat,* and *Responsa of Rema*). Alongside the nomian aspect of Rema’s oeuvre, however, one encounters a salient philosophical and metaphysical dimension. This aspect is explicitly evident in one of Rema’s works (*Torat ha’Ola*) but seems to be absent in his nomian writing, in which the halakhic discourse usually portrays him as a defender and preserver of Ashkenazi custom.

In his work, Silber wishes to give this topical intersection its initial scholarly treatment by examining the metaphysical aspects of Rema’s seemingly eclectic and traditional halakhic writings and to try to characterize their intentions and meaning. It is Silber’s aim to set this pioneering attempt in the direct historical context in which it was produced: study of the nature of the Early Modern Era, which in these centuries progressed from post-Renaissance versions of “natural philosophy” to new revolutionary proposals that were incorporated into the agenda of “new science”—from Francis Bacon onward, the doings of which eventually would be called the “scientific revolution.” Rema, a contemporary and fellow townsman of Copernicus, left behind a wealth of fragmentary notes and traditions on matters of science and history. Antipodal to his unparalleled centrality and influence, his attitude toward nature and metaphysics is shrouded in mist. Through it, however, one may explore the so-freighted intersections of relations between religion and science and between law and metaphysics, the interweaving of which continues to challenge the existential and intellectual patterns of modern Western society. In this respect, Silber’s work opens a gate from the nomian not only to the metaphysical but also to the meanings of the metaphysical in Jewish culture and its relations with its surrounding European society as both underwent rapid modern processes of change that were meaningful in multiple ways.

This work breaks new ground both in terms of its object—Rema, whose nomian writing has hardly been researched—and in terms of the substance of its contents, which deal with the integration of metaphysical nature and nomian writing in the Early Modern Era in a Jewish environment, a corpus that exerted critical canonic influence on halakhic writing in the years following Rema’s generation.

Thus Silber’s work, soon to be submitted, accepts a challenge that is complex but highly promising in terms of its contentual and methodic horizons. Due to his obvious capabilities, his command of the relevant languages (the source languages: Hebrew and the argots of rabbinical writing, and those of research: English and French), his acuity and propensity to innovation, his curiosity, and his erudition, I warmly recommend that he be awarded the stipend, which may contribute to what verges on the first-ever development of a field of knowledge so central in Jewish modernity and so little researched.

Sincerely,

Maoz Kahane  
Senior Lecturer  
Department of Jewish History  
Tel Aviv University