To the Jewish Studies Program, Central European University,

I wish to warmly recommend Mr. Lior Zilber for the Summer School in the Study of Ashkenazic Pinkassim and for a study grant in the framework of the Pinkassim Project. Lior is a student with a “winning” combination of scope, depth, and motivation. Lior was a student in my course “Hasidic Thought in the 20th Century,” and stood out for his broad, multi-faceted knowledge, astute, deep comprehension, and scholarly acumen, which were often concealed behind his modest and reserved countenance. He demonstrated an engrained understanding and knowledge of all phases and movements in Jewish Thought. Lior is a gifted individual with a critical sensibility and profound perception of remarkable aspects of both source texts and research literature. The paper he submitted for this course was excellent and contributed to his final course grade of 94.

Lior has travelled a long and unusual path: he started out in the world of yeshivas, studied at Mercaz Harav Yeshiva, was the head of a Kollel Halakha, and was involved in educational activities abroad. At the same time, he married and raised eight children. Today, Lior works as a couples’ therapist. At a relatively late age, Lior “discovered” academic research. He enrolled in a comprehensive study program at the Open University, and later joined our department. Lior is currently a student in our M.A. program and is writing his thesis under the supervision of Prof. Moshe Halbertal and Dr. Maoz Kahana. Undoubtedly, such a bold undertaking can be executed only by someone like Lior, who is genuinely enthusiastic about research.

The topic Lior has chosen for his thesis is of utmost importance for scholarship: he strives to analyze the thought of Rabbi Moses Isserles, the Rema (1530-1572), one of the most influential halakhic scholars of all time, whose works—part of which have been preserved in their original handwritten form—have received limited scholarly attention to date. Lior’s choice of topic is thus excellent, but at the same time, highly demanding: it requires in-depth knowledge of Halakha (given that Rema was, first and foremost, an adjudicator), Kabbalah, philosophy, and 16th century Polish history. In my opinion, Lior is well equipped with extensive knowledge—the fertile outcome of his Yeshiva background and academic education—and therefore, is one of few capable of carrying the burden of such a “weighty” endeavor. Indeed, this topic far exceeds the scope of an M.A. thesis; still, as I have come to understand from conversations with Lior, he intends to develop his current work into a doctoral dissertation.

As you are aware, Lior is studying the Prague Pinkassim under the supervision of Dr. Maoz Kahana in the framework of the Pinkassim Project. Lior’s knowledge in Torah studies and history, unique talents, and academic proficiencies contribute to the thorough approach this project requires.

I recommend Lior very highly for this study program and grant. I am certain that will both benefit from and contribute to this important project.

Prof. Benjamin Brown

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