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To whom it may concern:

**Applicant qualifications:**

My academic acquaintance with Lior Zilber spans two years. First, in a seminar on the Early Modern Era which I taught at Tel Aviv University, then as a supervisor for his M.A. thesis, in collaboration with Prof. Moshe Halbertal, and recently as a research fellow in an ISF funded research project, which I direct, on the *pinkasim* of the Jewish community in 18th century Prague. Based on this acquaintance, I wish to consolidate my recommendation regarding Mr. Zilber’s research abilities.

Zilber demonstrates avid scholarly curiosity and excellent analytical skills. His diverse previous backgrounds, both in Jewish studies and as a psychotherapist, as well as his broad general education, are evident in the rich, varied, and sometimes surprising, way in which he engages with the modern history we endeavor to study. Thus, Lior brings to the classroom a variety of excellent personal abilities—sharp thinking, thoroughness, and inspiration matched by a desire to learn, and a remarkable openness and enthusiasm for criticism, inquiry, and improvement.

**The research program:**

The topic of Lior’s M.A. thesis is the metaphysics in Rema’s legal writings. Rema (Rabbi Moses Isserles, d. 1572) is the most important Halakhic adjudicatorofthe Modern Era. His Halakhic writing has maintained its formative value from the 16th century until today. A powerful polemic of infinite dimension supplements every detail of his nomic decisions included in his various legal works (*Darkhei Moshe*, *Commentary on the Shulchan Aruch*, *Torath ha-Chatath*, and *Teshuvot Rema*). But besides the nomic, there is also a prominent philosophical and metaphysical dimension in Rema’s writings. While explicit in one of his works (*Torath ha-Olah*), it appears to be absent in his nomic writing, for which he is usually described in the halakhic discourse as the defender and guardian of Ashkenazi tradition.

Zilber’s work seeks to offer an original examination this thematic junction: to examine the metaphysical aspects in Rema’s seemingly eclectic, traditional Halakhic writing, and attempt to characterize their purpose and meaning. Zilber strives to place this pioneering attempt within its historical context: the study of nature in the Early Modern period, centuries during which there was a shift from post-Renaissance versions of natural philosophy to new, revolutionary propositions included in the “new science” agenda—from Francis Bacon onward—which in time would be referred to as the “scientific revolution.” Rema, Copernicus’s contemporary and compatriot, left behind a collection of fragmented notes and recorded traditions on matters relating to science and history. He is a unique figure—on the one hand, highly influential, on the other, mysterious—through which one may scrutinize the charged intersections between religion and science, law and metaphysics whose interconnectedness constitutes a constant challenge for patterns of existence and thought in Western society in the Modern Era. Zilber’s work thus represents a gateway, not only from *nomos* to metaphysics, but also to the meanings of the metaphysical in Jewish culture, and in this culture’s relationships with the European society surrounding it at a time when both where in the throes of accelerated and significant changes toward modernity.

As a research student, Zilber occupies a key position in the Prague Pinkassim Project which I head. His diligence and rapid, in-depth learning process are outstanding. I therefore warmly recommend Lior for the Summer School Program which will contribute directly to his day-to-day work, as well as to the writing of his thesis, under my supervision, titled: “Kehilat Kodesh Prague: Community and Hevra Kadisha Mechanisms in the *Pinkasim*.”

 Given Zilber’s talents, command of source languages (Hebrew and languages of rabbinical writing) and research languages (English and French), acuity and ingenuity, curiosity and knowledge, I highly recommend him for a travel grant to this program—a program which will contribute to the unprecedented development in such a principle area in Jewish History of the Modern Era whose foundations are still shrouded in fog.

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