

## Research Team Bios

**Ari Y. Kelman** is the inaugural Jim Joseph Professor in Education and Jewish Studies in the Stanford Graduate School of Education, where he also directs the Concentration in Education and Jewish Studies. He is currently serving as the Interim Director of the Taube Center for Jewish Studies. He holds a courtesy appointment in Religious Studies and is a faculty affiliate of the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, the American Studies Program, and the Taube Center for Jewish Studies. His research revolves around the ongoing exploration of how people learn to develop religious sensibilities, and it has taken him to church, to Krakow, Poland, to many many b'nai mitzvah and deep into the archives of religious music of the early 1970s.

**Antero Garcia** is an Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University. Prior to completing his Ph.D., Antero was an English teacher at a public high school in South Central Los Angeles. Through work focused on increasing equitable teaching and learning opportunities for urban youth through the use of participatory media and gameplay, Antero co-designed the Critical Design and Gaming School—a public high school currently open in South Central Los Angeles. In 2008 Antero co-developed the Black Cloud Game. A Digital Media and Learning Competition award recipient, the Black Cloud provoked students to take real time assessment of air quality in their community. Antero is currently exploring the learning and civic practices of tabletop gaming communities that play games like Dungeons & Dragons. Antero received his Ph.D. in the Urban Schooling division of the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

**Molly B. Zieleszinski** has spent more than a decade teaching and researching technology and learning in K-12. She has a Ph.D. from Stanford University in Learning Sciences & Technology Design where her research focused on understanding how technology is used to support learning in K-12 classrooms. In her time at Stanford, she developed expertise in technology design, design thinking, curriculum development, and teacher education. Today, as Founder and CEO of MBZ Labs, she works in partnership with educational technology companies, research and education organizations to develop and implement strategic initiatives bridging technology, research and practice. Learn more about Molly's work by visiting MBZLabs.com.

**Mia Sara Bruch** is a research and strategy consultant who has worked with such clients as IDEO, the Aspen Institute, and top research universities. She received her Ph.D. in history from Stanford University.

## Dear Colleague

Our understanding of the nature of Jewish learning is evolving, just as Jewish learning itself is. Learning opportunities that were seemingly confined to classrooms a generation ago are now readily accepted by many as occurring in a range of settings and experiences—camps, campuses, retreat centers, service and travel programs, public spaces...the list goes on. This exciting expansion stretches our understanding of where, when, and how learning can happen.

The current phase of this evolution, underway for at least a decade, is into the limitless world of online learning. Most of us are only just beginning to understand and appreciate how this form of learning integrates into our lives.

A few years ago, the Jim Joseph Foundation began to experiment with funding educational technology and digital engagement as a path to Jewish learning. Our hypothesis was that deep engagement with the interactive content on Jewish learning-focused websites, online communities, apps, podcasts, and video series could lead to meaningful Jewish learning outcomes and a greater sense of connection, meaning, and purpose.

***The Future of Jewish Learning Is Here: How Digital Media Are Reshaping Jewish Education* provides a first-ever exploration of this hypothesis. The findings that emerge from 24 in-depth interviews conducted by Ari Y. Kelman, Ph.D., and the research team offer compelling evidence that serious Jewish learning indeed happens online. The research also shows ways in which online learning is distinct from offline learning and ways in which these two domains are complementary and linked.**

Most importantly, this report opens new questions about the future of Jewish learning. For this reason, rather than providing a set of recommendations, each section includes key questions to consider. Whether you are a funder, an organizational leader, a student, or an educator, we hope these questions will inspire new thinking and experimentation in your work. We invite you to join us in bringing the questions in this report, other questions they inspire, and your proposed answers into your favorite forums (online or offline) for discussing the future of Jewish learning.

Thank you for taking the time to review this report and to learn with us about this crucial, timely, and evolving space.



## Executive Summary

Among the many ways in which the internet has irreversibly changed our lives is how it has enabled access to information with unprecedented speed and ease. By changing how we engage with information, it has also changed how people relate to information and how they negotiate its various meanings. Social media have accelerated this process by creating new ways to connect people through sharing information. These changes have influenced our communities, our politics, our consumption patterns, how we spend our leisure time, and even our definitions of “friend” and “like.”

These changes have also transformed our definition of learning, expanding it beyond the school day, beyond expertise and beyond books, newspapers, and encyclopedias. Over the past few years, amateur astronomers have discovered new stars, scientists have crowdsourced solutions to age-old problems in protein folding, and online communities of critics have opened up new ways of understanding old texts. The internet has also expanded the depth and range of learning communities, as social media have made it possible for the formation of affinity groups around hobbies or interests no matter how esoteric, while YouTube has become the first stop for instructional videos of all kinds. Advances in digital media have made it possible to learn more things in more new ways than anyone could have imagined possible, even 25 years ago.

As online media have changed the ways that we think about learning in general, they also are changing how we think about Jewish learning. Jewish learning now happens everywhere learning happens online. It happens on Wikipedia and Google, through Facebook and YouTube, through podcasts and Skype, as well on more targeted Jewish content providers like BimBam, Sefaria, and Kveller. All of these platforms facilitate engagements with information, and, as such, they all foster emergent forms of learning.

Learning online does not look exactly like learning in classrooms or schools, summer camps or seminaries. Nor should we expect it to. And yet, people are learning online, and this report makes the case for understanding online engagements as educational. The question it answers is, “How are people learning online?”

Combining leading research about secular online learning and new data about Jewish online learning, *The Future of Jewish Learning Is Here* offers a substantive, richly illustrative, and intimately informed account of Jewish learning online. It accounts for when, where, and how it happens, what people are learning, and how they are engaging with information alone and in relation with others.

## Jewish educational online media enable learners to:

### 1 Connect with others around Jewish learning

Learners use the social dimensions of online media to reinforce their connections with others, both real and imagined, around engagement with Jewish content. Sometimes, this takes the form of sharing podcasts, videos, or texts. Sometimes this sensibility is more diffuse, as people imagine others who might be having a similar experience elsewhere, in relationship to this same media.

### 2 Access Jewish knowledge beyond Jewish institutions

Learners value access to Jewish knowledge that circulates and articulates perspectives that are not channeled through institutions of Jewish life (synagogues, community centers, etc.). The accessibility of online information lowers barriers to entry for learners seeking answers to questions, and learners report feeling validated and empowered to ask questions they might not pose otherwise.

### 3 Learn in sync with the rhythms of the Jewish calendar

Whether driven by the platforms themselves or by the interests of learners, the publishing patterns of Jewish media online mean that annual holidays and weekly Sabbath observance take on additional influence. They shape the timing and content of much Jewish online media. Learners, as a result, engage with online media in patterns that follow the rhythms of Jewish life as they time their learning to newly available material.

### 4 Utilize different platforms for different ends

The specifically Jewish expertise of certain platforms enhances elements of the online learning experience. People develop connections to certain platforms and value the expertise those platforms offer them. Wikipedia, in all likelihood, has more information than My Jewish Learning, but the Jewish imprimatur of the latter invests the content with additional meaning for learners.

### 5 Integrate online learning and offline practice

Online learning is fundamentally connected to offline experiences and vice versa. Learners are brought to online media because of needs or questions that they cannot answer or adequately address without it. Similarly, the experiences of learning online find their way into offline conversations with family and friends and enable new formations and formulations of Jewish life as it is lived, both online and off.

Together, these key findings represent a portrait of Jewish learning online, with the understanding that learning online is more diffuse, less coordinated, more generally self-directed than learning in schools and other formal settings. *The Future of Jewish Learning Is Here: How Digital Media Are Reshaping Jewish Education* offers insights into how and what people learn online, as part of a larger conversation about what Jewish education looks like in the 21st century.

This report is a sequel to *Smart Money: Recommendations for an Educational Technology and Digital Engagement Investment Strategy*, commissioned by the Jim Joseph Foundation and William Davidson Foundation and released in March 2017. Where *Smart Money* explored how one might approach investing in technology and digital engagement resources, this report focuses on how people engage with Jewish online media for learning. By understanding how people learn, those interested in designing or investing in Jewish learning experiences of all kinds can make better informed and more targeted interventions to better address learners' needs.



From Udacity and YouTube to podcasts and apps, opportunities for learning online have grown dramatically over the past decade. These innovations enable greater access to a greater range of information and, in the process, they have changed our understanding of where and how learning might happen. Put slightly differently, online learning has changed what is possible to learn and how people learn, as well. Learning, in a sense, is embedded in online interactions of all kinds, from soliciting feedback from a community of other writers on a fan-fiction hub like Wattpad to posting and informally debating a partisan news topic in a social network like Facebook, to listening to a TED talk. Learning principles undergird wide swaths of our online interactions.

These can all be understood as examples of “connected learning.” Formally described in 2013 by Mizuko Ito and others, connected learning describes social practices that are “socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented toward educational, economic, or political opportunity.” Initially developed to describe forms of engagement among youth, Ito’s framework illuminated the possibilities that emerge when a young person “pursues a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults, and is in turn able to link this learning and interest to academic achievement, career possibilities, or civic engagement.” This broad description of connected learning frames several ways online learning practices are understood today.

**Learning on and across platforms that specialize in Jewish content generally resembles Ito’s conception of “connected learning.” We identified five characteristics shared by both:**

- 1 Learning is social
- 2 Knowledge, expertise, and power are distributed
- 3 Learning is both synchronous and asynchronous
- 4 Platforms shape the learning experience
- 5 Online learning is IRL (In Real Life), too



However, these general characteristics of online learning do not fully account for the specific dynamics of Jewish learning online. Taking each characteristic in turn, we can identify both broad trends and specific examples to draw a more detailed portrait of online learning across platforms that specialize in Jewish content.