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# Web Beth Midrash-2013

**Name of program**

Web Beth Midrash

**Year of activity**

2013

**Name of the report's writer**

Udi Lion

**Function of the report's writer**

Director

**Phones & Emails**

Mail : [udi.lion@keshet-tv.com](mailto:udi.lion@keshet-tv.com)

Phones : +972-50-4507177

**Status of program**

a. The Sugia Platform: We have created an Alpha version of a unique digital platform for online virtual Batei Midrash that foster and facilitate Talmudic-like debate and discussion, utilizing the most modern tools of our times: A Facebook-like, Wikipedia-like application.

b. Virtual Batei Midrash: We have created three virtual pilot forums that engage participants in on-line learning and discussion. These forums are a venue for the creation of a Jewish response to contemporary relevant issues of concern to participants. We are now launching four new Batei Midrash. Ten additional groups are on our waiting list.

c. Diaspora: We have reached agreements with two major Jewish institutions of higher education: Hebrew College of Boston and YCT (Yeshivat Chovevei Torah) in New York to pilot Sugia in North America.

## **Main achievements during the last year of activity**

- a) Launching and upgrading the Sugia digital platform. Following a first run, we have upgraded the Sugia software based on the lessons learned from the pilots.
- b) Launching seven pilot Batei Midrash: Midreshet Ein-Prat; Yeshivat Mahanaim; Metzila ; Ministry of Social Affairs; Amit Educational Network; Alma; Hazon Movement.
- c) Participants: We have reached 94 participants in direct ongoing groups and about 400 in one-time conferences.
- d) Sages – We have recruited more than 120 "sages" (Jewish experts: academics, rabbis, artists, etc.) who have pledged to contribute state-of-the-art resources and their opinions about the different issues.
- e) Sugiot: We have launched discussions on 23 Sugiot.
- f) Diaspora development: We have created an American based Sugia fans who helped us reach detailed agreements to create a three-year pilot program with two major Jewish institutions of higher education : Hebrew College and YCT . We have submitted applications to three different foundations (Covenant, Nathan and Steven Spielberg's Righteous Persons Foundation) for the Sugia North-America project.
- g) Finance: we have reached our financial targets for this year and will finish 2013 with a balanced budget.

For the next year we have already received a commitment from Avi Chai (\$50,000).

Combining this with the Matanel support and the Batei midrash commitments, we have already raised a half of our needed 2014 budget.

The Minister of Education has decided to seek out a way to help the project. From our past experience this might be a long bureaucratic "Via Dolorosa" but it opens up an important venue for the future.

## **Evaluation**

As we are in the first year of the project, it is too early for a quantitative evaluation. But the excited responses we are receiving from various and diverse organizations – in Israel and the Diaspora – are very encouraging. More than 20 organizations have shown interest.

Regretfully, due to our financial limitations, we do not have the ability to work with most of them at the present.

## **Others**

Provisional guidelines for the advancement of the program in the next year:

Our goal for the next year is to develop different models for use on our platform. We also need to develop ways training both staff and users in order to extract the maximum from the application. Another goal is further technological development (we expect that we will need to again upgrade the software this year, based on the learning process that results from all of the above).

We plan to develop 30 full-scale sugiot, reach 14 BMs, approximately 150 additional direct ongoing participants and close to a 1000 participants in one-time conferences.