

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jennifer Rataj

Telephone: (802) 457-4000

Fax: (802) 457-4004

publicity@jewishlights.com

WHY HAVE THOUSANDS OF YOUNG JEWS, OTHERWISE UNENGAGED WITH FORMAL JEWISH LIFE, STARTED MORE THAN SIXTY INNOVATIVE PRAYER COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES?

The rapidly growing independent minyan movement is inventing creative solutions to wide-ranging problems on the Jewish landscape. What can be learned from its innovative approaches to heightened spirituality, serious Jewish learning, gender inclusiveness, technology and flexible leadership models? How can such changes help us build stronger communities with greater connection to religious heritage?

“‘Empowered Judaism’ is a Judaism in which people begin to take responsibility for creating Jewish community, without waiting on the sidelines,” writes Rabbi Elie Kaunfer in the Introduction to **EMPOWERED JUDAISM: What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us about Building Vibrant Jewish Communities** (Jewish Lights / May 2010 / Quality Paperback Original / \$18.99). It is a Judaism that refuses to close itself off to the larger world and knows it has moral responsibility for the major crises of our modern age. It is a Judaism that trusts in the power of communal prayer and refuses to settle for mediocre attempts at connecting to God. It is, in short, a vision for a substantive Judaism of the future: an ‘Empowered Judaism.’”

Kaunfer, one of the leaders of this revolutionary phenomenon, offers refreshingly new analyses of the age-old question of how to build strong Jewish community. He explores the independent minyan movement and the lessons it has to teach about prayer, community organizing and volunteer leadership, and its implications for contemporary struggles in American Judaism. Along with describing the growth of independent minyanim across the country, **EMPOWERED JUDAISM** examines:

- The roles of liturgy, space, music and youth in this new approach to prayer
- Lessons to be learned from the concept of immersive, intensive Jewish learning in an egalitarian context
- Jewish values in which we must invest to achieve a vibrant, robust American Jewish landscape for the twenty-first century

Rabbi Elie Kaunfer, named one of the top fifty Jewish leaders by *The Forward*, and one of *Newsweek's* top fifty rabbis, is co-founder and executive director of Mechon Hadar (www.mechonhadar.org), an institute that empowers Jews to build vibrant Jewish communities. Mechon Hadar has launched the first full-time egalitarian yeshiva program in North America, Yeshivat Hadar (www.yeshivahadar.org), where Rabbi Kaunfer teaches Talmud. A Dorot Fellow and Wexner Graduate Fellow, Rabbi Kaunfer co-founded Kehilat Hadar (www.kehilathadar.org), an independent minyan in Manhattan committed to spirited traditional prayer, study and social action. He was selected as an inaugural Avi Chai Fellow, known as "The Jewish Genius Award."

Prof. Jonathan D. Sarna is the Joseph H. and Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University and director of its Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program. He is author of *American Judaism: A History*, winner of the National Jewish Book Award, among other books.

EMPOWERED JUDAISM

What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us about Building Vibrant Jewish Communities

By Rabbi Elie Kaunfer

Foreword by Prof. Jonathan D. Sarna

Jewish Lights (Woodstock, VT); www.jewishlights.com; 800-962-4544
Quality Paperback Original / \$18.99 / 224 pages / ISBN 978-1-58023-412-2

Praise for
EMPOWERED JUDAISM
**What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us about
Building Vibrant Jewish Communities**

By Rabbi Elie Kaunfer
Foreword by Prof. Jonathan D. Sarna

“Rabbi Elie Kaunfer has emerged as an insistent and compelling voice for enhanced Jewish life in the twenty-first century. The minyanim of which he speaks are symbolic of a deeper vision: an entire community that is empowered, knowledgeable and committed to the richness of the Jewish tradition. Nothing short of a manifesto for the next generation, a challenge to the Jewish community about what we are likely to fall into by default if we do not take Kaunfer’s book seriously.”

—**Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman**, professor of liturgy, worship and ritual, Hebrew Union College; co-founder, Synagogue 3000; author, *Rethinking Synagogues: A New Vocabulary for Congregational Life*

“Taps into the spiritual yearning of a generation that hungers for a Jewish religious practice that is rich, meaningful and unapologetic. Captures the remarkable phenomenon of a newly emergent movement to reclaim vibrancy and vitality in Jewish life. [An] important and valuable contribution to the Jewish future.”

—**Rabbi Sharon Brous**, founder, IKAR (Los Angeles, CA)

“This moving book reveals a critical new development in the lives of younger American Jews. Not often does one have the opportunity to read such an inside story on dramatically positive Jewish history in the making. Elie Kaunfer’s vivid account of participating in the creation of Mechon Hadar, an ‘Independent Congregation’ community that fosters Jewish liturgical and intellectual rigor, egalitarian ethics and group responsibility, and spirituality at the same time is compelling. His analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of conventional American Jewish congregations is spot-on, and will surely provoke lively and important conversations within and outside those congregations. Equally gripping is Kaunfer’s own story of initial resistance to encounters with the Divine, and his eventual immersion into a passionately religious path of Jewishness.”

—**Sylvia Barack Fishman**, chair, Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies and professor of contemporary Jewish life, Brandeis University; author, *The Way Into the Varieties of Jewishness*

“This is no ordinary book. This is a call to revolution ... a passionate and brilliant manifesto [that] sets out a new course for Jewish life in America.... For an American Jewish community despairing of its future, this book is a prophecy of hope and new vision.”

—**Rabbi Edward Feinstein**, editor, *Jews and Judaism in the 21st Century: Human Responsibility, the Presence of God and the Future of the Covenant*

EMPOWERED JUDAISM: What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us about Building Vibrant Jewish Communities (6” x 9”, 224 pp, Quality Paperback Original, ISBN 978-1-58023-412-2, \$18.99) is available from Barnes & Noble, Borders, Books-a-Million, Indigo/Chapters, Waldenbooks, B. Dalton, amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, and many other booksellers, or directly from Jewish Lights Publishing, P.O. Box 237, Woodstock, VT 05091; Tel: (802) 457-4000; Fax: (802) 457-4004; www.jewishlights.com. For credit card orders, call (800) 962-4544. Add \$3.95 shipping and handling for the first book, \$2.50 for each additional book.