Computer Sciences for the Blind

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מאור עינים

SWISS BANKS HOLOCAUST

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LEGAL SERVICES

December 15, 2003

Hon. Judah Gribitz
Special Master
Holocaust Victim Assets Litigation
PO BOX 8300
San Francisco, CA 94128-8300

Dear Mr. Gribitz,

Attached you will find a proposal requesting funds to provide services to needy Nazi victims.

Your consideration to fund these projects will be greatly appreciated by the Holocaust survivors.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Nochum Lehman
President

NL:sl

Computer Sciences for the Blind

PROPOSAL

to bring new and useful technologies to
Holocaust survivors who are
blind or physically disabled

Submitted by:
Nachum Lehman
December 8, 2003

2132 84ᵗʰ Street, Brooklyn, NY 11214 718-234-6476

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BACKGROUND

For years, the secular world has been pumping millions of dollars into text to speech readers for the visually impaired. IBM started in the 60's with the Kurzweil machine and it has grown exponentially since then. The industry for computer technology for the blind is vast, **but many people and entire communities, _such as the Jewish community_, have been left out simply because no one cared to help them.**

Now, we have the technology available, an organization ready and willing to help, a database worth of thirsty individuals, but we need funding. In every aspect of assistance available to the blind, the Jewish community has been left out. Braille texts are just starting to merge in Hebrew. For a blind or disabled individual, especially an elderly person who was always accustomed to study the weekly portion of the Bible and the commentaries, nothing was available.

CSB is changing all that.

Computer Sciences for the Blind is a national organization, which develops software for blind and physically disabled individuals so they can study Jewish texts and its commentaries, provides technical assistance, information, and training.

Blindness

It turns out that blind adults are 100% adults; blindness is a secondary characteristic. The world exhibits negativity and discourages blind individuals. Often the negativity is cloaked in well meaning smiles, a combination of benevolently low expectations, mixed with the stubborn habit of making blindness the chief defining characteristic of the individual. Never mind that an individual might be bright, articulate, have the ability and desire to study and have a name. Too many people refer to blind individuals as - you know, that blind man.

An elderly Jewish blind or visually impaired individual should have the ability to spend his/her time with meaningful activity and to study subjects that they always studied, and texts that they enjoy and respect. And, they should be able to access and adjust the material independently.

Equality is a major goal. Blind people should be equal to others and be able to participate in the community. For the elderly, this means they can study each week the biblical and other religious texts that they have been accustomed to and to be able to intelligently discuss it with their family and others in the synagogue or at their Sabbath table.

A statement made by Michel Levy, a blind software user and board member of The Jewish Braille Institute, clearly summarizes the accomplishments and future goals of CSB. "A donor

would give almost any amount of money to help a blind person regain his or her vision. The products and services that CSB provide, give blind users the independence and capabilities of a sighted person and are therefore priceless."

Lord Emanuel Jacobowitz was quick to recognize this need and the outstanding results of the CSB technology. While he himself grappled with a visual disorder, he mounted a stark campaign to support this quest for equality. Lord Emanuel Jacobowitz zt"l, Chief Rabbi Emeritus British Empire, personally arranged and attended several meetings with political leaders and philanthropists on behalf of CSB.

Physical Disabilities

Individuals with physical disabilities especially paralysis, are usually totally dependant on others for a variety of personal needs. They spend the day waiting for the next visitor, watching televison or just doing nothing. They can't study because they are not able to get the book that they are looking for, they usually cannot turn the page and often times, their vision is also affected and they cannot see the text properly. As they say in Yiddish "the person is waiting for the angel of death" and the sooner he comes, the better off the person would feel.

How many times have we visited such people and they have expressed themselves in this way? Computer Sciences for the Blind gives these individuals opportunities to study independently through the use of modern day technology through voice recognition and by moving their head, they can control the computer mouse so that the page will move to the next one or to a different chapter. They will be able to command the computer by voice and/or head movements.

B. What is the estimated number of Holocaust survivors living in the community you serve and how many are estimated to require services?

TARGET MARKET - HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS - ELDERLY BLIND AND PHYSICALLY DISABLED INDIVIDUALS

The target market are the elderly blind and physically disabled individuals - especially holocaust survivors.

CSB is a national program and is capable of servicing all Holocaust survivors who need its services who remained in the United States of America and other countries as well.

Annual Budget

Executive Director/Coordinator	$75,000
Programmer	$50,000
Recording Personnel	$85,000
Full Time Training Employee	$30,000

Administrative Assistant		$25,000
	Total	**$265,000**
Computer Equipment		$15,000
Rent		$15,000
Office Expenses		$7,500
Traveling Expenses		$10,000
Advertising and Outreach		$5,000
Duplication/Distribution		$25,000
	Total	**$77,500**
		========
	Grand Total	**$342,500**

BACKGROUND

It all started several years ago in a small synagogue. Yitzchok M., was stricken with an incurable eye disease. Day after day, month after month, his eyesight deteriorated. Despite the doctors' best efforts, Yitzchok eventually suffered a complete loss of vision.

Yitzchok asked one of his friends, Nachum Lehman, if he could help him continue to study Jewish texts and thereby have a meaningful life; and help he did. With his knowledge of technology and computer programming, he spent many months researching the technologies available to the blind community but was unable to find a workable solution for Yitzchok. Nachum came to the unavoidable conclusion that custom-made software would be necessary to allow Yitzchok to learn freely and naturally. With the help of two professional programmers and several volunteer readers, Nachum commenced the seemingly insurmountable task of giving those unable to read with their eyes, the ability to read with their ears! Through indexed computer recordings along with custom-made MP3 software, Yitzchok was given the ability to once again learn independently.

Nachum, using the most current MP3 technology, designed a program that would respond to commands on the computer. With the press of a key on the keyboard, Yitzchok could simply access any part of the *text*. He could choose to have it read faster or slower. He could go backwards or forwards, repeat words or press a button for one of the many other commentaries that were recorded for him by his elated peers. Yitzchok was like a fish back in water, as he tackled the *text* with gusto for the first time since he had been struck by blindness.

This small, in-house project embarked on by Nachum and Yitzchok's many friends in his *synagogue* was just the beginning. Word of this new innovation spread quickly and Nachum received several requests to install the system for other visually impaired individuals. At the time, the system was not portable and required hours of work to install on new computer systems. That is when Nachum realized that there was a general need for accessible Jewish

literature, not only for the blind, nor only for scholars like Yitzchok, but also for the many disabled elderly people.

To assess the necessity of the program for the wider public, Nachum ran a small ad in one of the weekly newspapers. From that single ad, he received more than 70 telephone calls! Besides the calls from the blind, there were many calls from other visually impaired and learning-disabled sections of the society. The elderly, whose vision had deteriorated to the extent that book learning was too difficult. There was the call from the octogenarian Holocaust survivor whose greatest pleasure in life was to sit in front of a *Jewish book* learning. This one pleasure that he had after a life full of hardship, was also recently taken from him with his loss of vision.

CSB slowly began to address the learning needs of the visually impaired. Custom recordings were created for many people across the country while new requests continued to pour in. Volunteer readers were established for people who needed large quantities of material. In some areas, entire networks of volunteers were assembled to provide for the recording needs of an individual.

CSB has since completed its first professionally distributed product; the recording of the entire Bible including the Rashi commentary and their linear translations. This project alone involved hundreds of hours of recording, reviewing and editing and took over 4 years to complete. It was sponsored by several generous donors and is distributed free of charge to needy users. It comes as a set of 3 computer CD's which can be used and installed on any standard computer.

Soon after the first version was released, there were several requests from physically disabled elderly users who could not operate a keyboard. That's when CSB integrated an entire voice recognition system so that anyone, no matter the disability, could learn by simply speaking to their computer. It remarkable to witness the system in action.

Another exciting project that is being developed is the *Ethics of our Fathers* with English translation, a full English commentary, and the Hebrew commentaries of the Rav, Rashi, Ramban and Rabbeinu Yona. CSB hopes to begin distributing this great work within the next few months.
Numerous *Talmud,* and *halachic* works are already available through the years of volunteer work done for the project across the country. These texts are available to all users upon request. Currently, the CSB library contains over 40 chapters of Mishne Berura including the Biur Halacha and Shaar Hatzion, a compilation of 250 hours of recording.

CSB is in the process of creating a visual component whereby the words corresponding to the audio recitation, appear on the screen. This will be extremely beneficial to the partially disabled. CSB is also working to expand the library with professional recordings of basic Jewish texts such as *Tehillim, Nach, and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, all with translations and commentaries.

Another important issue being addressed is the issue of pronunciation. The Ashkenazic,

Sephardic and Chassidic communities all pronounce words differently. This is especially relevant when learning with small children who may be confused by the different pronunciations. At this point, most of the material available is in the Ashkenazic pronunciation. Rabbi Raymond Beyda, the popular Sephardic Torah lecturer has enthusiastically agreed to spearhead and actually compose the Sephardic library himself. Material in Chassidic pronunciation is available on a limited basis and will be expanded in the future.

The users of the current programs reside in such diverse places as New York, California, Australia, England, Israel, and everywhere in between. Indeed, Reb Nachum remarks that they have been inundated with so many requests for additional texts and services that it has been almost painful to prioritize the organization's workload to insure that universal need takes precedence over individual requirements.

The Project

Software Development

The computer's ability to access specific recordings on command formed the basis of the CSB program. The recordings are divided into 10 to 15 second segments that are internally stamped according to their location in the original text. Commentaries and other reference resources are stamped in a way that corresponds to that of the main text. The software provides an array of features including simple navigation to all sections of the text, searching for text, book marking, and an audio help section. The user may steadily listen to a portion of material and then come upon a passage that needs clarification. He or she would then move to a group of keys that access different references to the difficult subject matter. A new client needs less than an hour of training to be comfortably acquainted with all these features.

Even though the first level of programming has been completed, enhancements and additions are always in progress. Users make suggestions of how the program can be more valuable and the program is amended for subsequent releases.

Future Projects

User requests for audio material have been multiplying daily. The beauty of the way the system works is that once material is inputted it becomes part of the permanent library and can be made available to any user who needs it via CD's, transmission over phone lines or the internet.

With input from current clients, CSB has established a list of projects for the next phase of development. We are constantly inundated with requests for additional texts and services. It has been almost painful to prioritize our work based on universal need taking precedent over

individualized requirements. We have established our focus on the following nine areas in which our efforts will benefit the greatest number of people.

Additional texts

Level I - These works are the most basic and universal components of any Jewish Library. They include Tehillim (Book of Psalms), Pirke Avos (Ethics of our Fathers), Prophets, Kitzer Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Laws), and basic commentaries for these works.

Level II - These works are more lengthy projects and are required for the comprehensive study of Torah. They include the Talmud, additional commentaries on the Bible and other texts.

Visual component

A visual component, where words appear on the screen corresponding to the audio, is both beneficial to the partially sighted and therapeutic for many language, reading, and visual disorders. Several educators have expressed interest in the development of this component for use with their special needs students.

Establishment of volunteer network

Once CSB has completed recording software, efforts will then be focused on the development of a volunteer network. Since the recording software will operate on standard home computer systems, CSB expects to compile a register of hundreds of volunteers ready to read in texts as needed. These volunteer efforts will assist CSB in translating large works into other languages and accommodating other pronunciations.

Internet-based library

A centralized Internet-based library will eliminate the need for software updates and new text distribution for users with Internet access.

Computer distribution

The CSB software has been designed to operate on any computer system. We have therefore been able to accept corporate computer donations of outdated systems and pass these systems on to users who cannot afford to buy one. CSB hopes to significantly expand this service and provide newer systems that can accommodate innovative technologies so necessary for disabled users.

Technical support

CSB recognizes the great need for a technical support division for visually impaired computer users. A typical blind user requires high-end sound devices, text-to-speech software, scanning software, scanned documents reader, and a host of other assistive technology software. Computer manufacturers and software companies are ill equipped to handle the support issues of these users, issues that are frequent and sometimes severe. These users can be immobilized by these issues and are at the mercy of local computer technicians. CSB would like to provide this technical support.

Assistive technologies

CSB has encountered many types of disabilities that may accompany visual impairments. These users can often be assisted through technologies available to the public. CSB must be prepared to investigate, implement, and distribute these technologies to the people who so desperately need it.

Outreach and Distribution

Many of the organizations for the blind and dyslexic have expressed their enthusiasm for promoting this innovative software in their newsletters and on their web sites. Since almost all blind and dyslexic individuals rely on these organizations for assistance, CSB is confident that those in need of its services can be reached. We have begun to develop our own web site that will give us an additional avenue of exposure, as well as provide a forum for the visually impaired to network via audio chat rooms. This is a service not currently available to visually impaired people in our community and for which we have received a multitude of requests.

All products and services of CSB are rendered free of charge to the user. Computer systems are also supplied when available. We are pleased that many individuals and businesses have come forward to donate computers for our clients. In order to make use of the many different types and qualities of systems made available to us, CSB has spared no effort in designing the software to be flexible enough to run on a wide variety of computers.

Need for Funds

At the present time, seventy individuals, mostly elderly are using this system and we have requests from many others. We are unable to service the hundreds of potential users of our current software due to the personnel support required for initial training and future technical assistance. We estimate the potential market nationwide to be over 1,000 individuals. Furthermore, those who are successfully using it are asking for additional texts, and feature enhancements and additions. Additionally, CSB is prepared to commence many of the

prospective projects such as the visual component, and recording program for teachers and parents. Sufficient funds still need to be acquired to move these projects from the drawing board to the 2003 calendar.

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www.usps.com

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Special Master
Holocaust Victim Assets Litigation
PO BOX 8300
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