



בית הרצל
מדרש הרצל
BEIT MIDRASH HAR'EL
ע"ש בלדה קאופמן לינדנבאום
IN MEMORY OF BELDA KAUFMAN LINDENBAUM

Beit Midrash Har'el Overview 5785

WWW.HAR-EL.ORG



The Dalai Lama wrote in his autobiography that the traditional education which he received as a child in the monasteries of Tibet left him singularly unprepared to lead his people in the 20th Century.
We ensure that the same will not be said of rabbinic training today.



Photos by: Larry Brandt, Meir Jermolowicz, Nadav Schwartz, Muki Schwartz

Overview

At Beit Midrash Har'el, men and women who are dedicated to Halakha, study Torah together as equals and enjoy equally the stature that Torah learning bestows within the community.

Our Smikha track is a three-year program for men and women, seasoned pedagogues as well as promising educators and leaders, engaged in rabbinic studies in an open and supportive learning environment. The program requires 3 full days plus one evening of study each week.

Fellows are accepted to the program based on a set of criteria including academic achievements, Jewish textual proficiency, exemplary character and leadership potential. The curriculum is designed to provide the requisite knowledge and tools to engage in communal leadership and education. Our fellows come to us with advanced Torah knowledge and a nuanced grasp of the world. The course of studies emphasizes an attitude of intellectual honesty and openness to the world as much as the content of the subject matter itself.

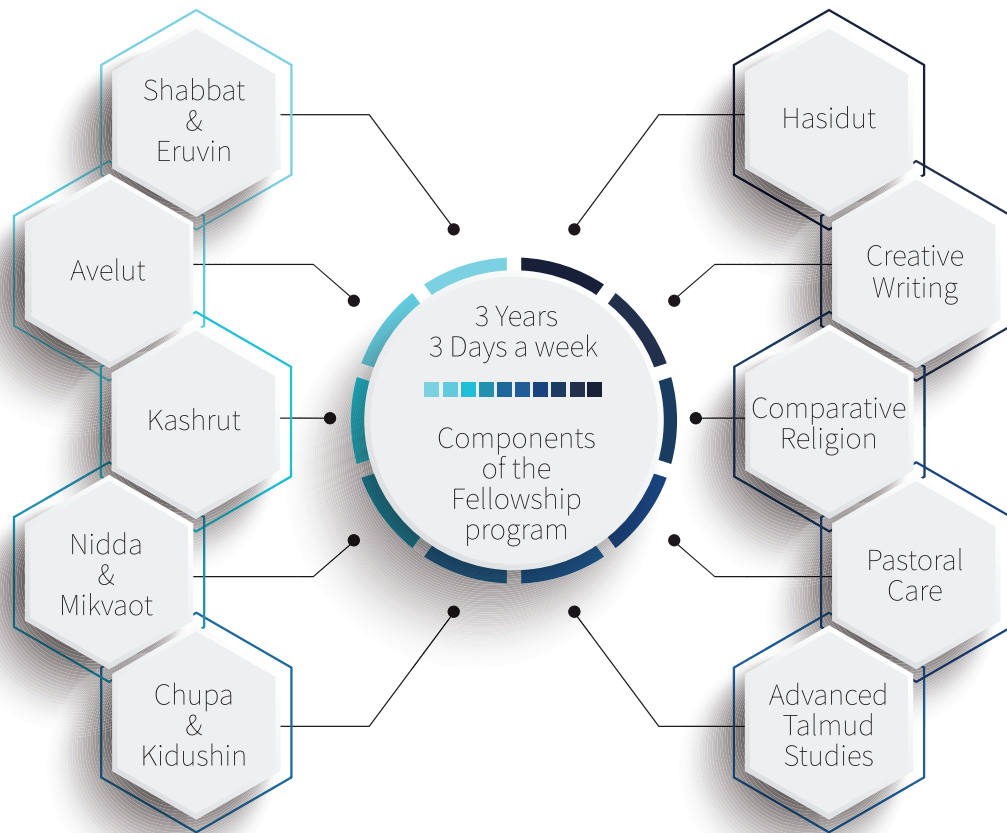
What makes us unique is that we do not shy away from the thorny issues emerging from contemporary sensibilities of fairness and equality that challenge orthodoxy today. Our encounter with modernity is in a God-conscious, compassionate, inclusive, and halachically faithful way.

Our vision is to develop, with our students, an authentic vision of Torah life and thought which will be compelling for Orthodox Jews and others beyond denominational boundaries today.

Our Rabbinic Fellowship

Beit Midrash Har'el is the only co-ed rabbinic program committed to Orthodoxy and halacha as well as gender equality in learning, teaching, and recognition.

Our students will be the leaders of the future and are poised to impact communities both in Israel as well as the diaspora.



New Beit Midrash Initiative

Collaborative Seminar for the Study of the Jewish Interpretive Tradition.

Jewish tradition is characterized by continual interpretation and reinterpretation of sacred texts. Although much time and effort is spent interpreting texts, insufficient thought has been given to a number of critical questions:

How do our religious stories emerge and are transmitted? What are the underlying historical and psychological influences which create the context of the interpretation that is going on? What are our core values? Values such as democracy, fairness, justice, duty, loyalty, self-sacrifice, family, Zionism, and continuity from where are they derived? What is the relationship between our stories and our rituals? Should we look at and be critical of our values? How do values influence the understanding of narratives and Halacha? Are there limits to Halachic interpretation? What might they look like? Is the relationship between



Halacha and God's will, or different versions of *Torah min Hashamayim*, relevant in determining Halacha?

These questions are vital when we seek to address, in a fundamental way, contemporary challenges facing traditional Jews.



Most Orthodox Jews attribute literal truth to the narratives of the Torah as well as to Halachic categories and structures. For example, the distinctions that the Halacha makes between men and women or between gentiles and Jews are somehow believed to be embedded in objective reality.



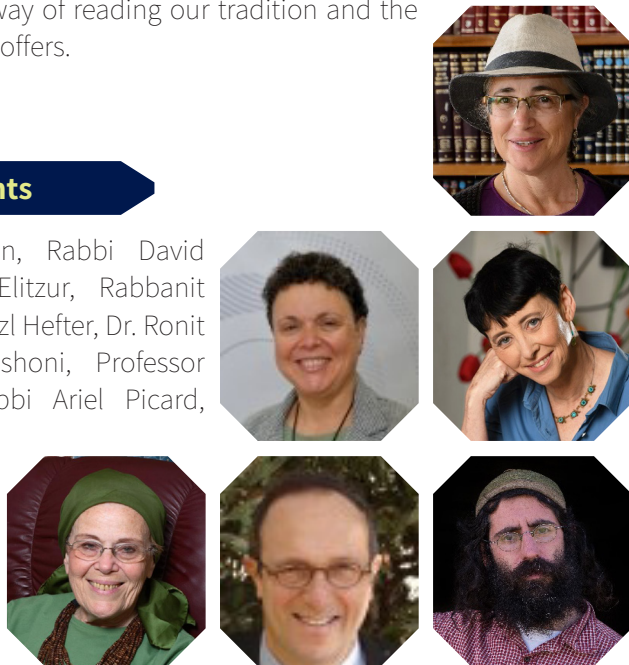
This, often unstated, assumption lies at the core of how modern Orthodoxy responds to - or fails to respond to - the pressing issues of the day. We explore the validity of this assumption and possible alternatives.

A select group of Jewish Scholars and educators has been exploring the hermeneutics of the interpretive tradition. The objective is to think through these historical, psychological, and anthropological issues, especially as they influence the genesis of our Torah narratives, Halacha, and the mystical and Hasidic sources and how we understand them.

We believe that this project will impact how we interpret our stories and our Halacha in a way that allows for greater responsiveness and compassion. Our goal is to address hard questions and our responses to them in order to engage the greatest number of thoughtful modern Orthodox Jews, those who live within the world of Halacha, to a new, more self-aware way of reading our tradition and the possibilities which that offers.

Initiative Participants

Dr. Batsheva Bertman, Rabbi David Bigman, Dr. Tehila Elitzur, Rabbanit Batya Hefter, Rabbi Herzl Hefter, Dr. Ronit Irshaj, Yonatan Nachshoni, Professor Vered Noam, Dr. Rabbi Ariel Picard, Professor Tamar Ross, Dr. Shmuel Wygoda, Rabbi Shaul Yudelman



Our plans for the future

Beit Midrash Har'el is committed to a vision of Israel where religious leaders and values play a central role inspiring broader Israeli society - and beyond to the global Jewish people and elsewhere around the world.

We are not a political institution. Yet, the approach we embody provides an important alternative vision of Jewish religious thought and leadership - especially at a time when more and more individuals are distanced from religious life and community and fractures in Israeli society are in need of healing.

Our immediate focus is on expanding Beit Midrash Har'el's two core programs:

Beit Midrash Har'el's Rabbinic Fellowship:

We are now on track to continue significant growth in the Beit Midrash program. We are planning to recruit and accept another cohort of Fellows for the next academic year and need to expand our capacity in terms of faculty and classroom resources.

Collaborative Seminar for the Study of the Jewish Interpretive Tradition:

Our Collaborative Seminar is a new, vital program where we are convening an impressive group of religious thinkers to address key issues affecting the halachic community as we confront modernity. The product of this "think tank" will include a groundbreaking book/journal, designed to look squarely at what goes into the interpretive process in which traditional Judaism has been engaged for millennia. This will then serve as a strategic platform to be leveraged to engage rabbis, educators, and the broader community in this thinking and conversation.

We welcome partners, collaborators, and investors in these endeavors.

**Thank you,
Rabbi Herzl Hefter**

Our Staff



Rabbi Herzl Hefter - Founder and Rosh Beit Midrash Har'el

Graduate of Yeshiva University, where he studied under the tutelage of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik ז"ל. He received his semikha from Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein ז"ל at Yeshivat Har Etzion. Rabbi Hefter has taught Yoreh De'ah at the Gruss Kollel of Yeshiva University and served as head of the Bruria Scholars Program at Midreshet Lindenbaum. Additionally, he taught at Yeshivat Mevor Chaim in Moscow and was the Rosh Kollel of the first Torah MiTzion Kollel in Cleveland, Ohio.



Dr. Tehila Elitzur - Responsa Literature

Holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in Talmud and Jewish thought from the Hebrew University. Her doctorate, earned at Ben-Gurion University, focuses on halakhic and responsa literature.



Rav Nadav Berger - Talmud

Received his semikha from Beit Midrash Har'el. He currently teaches Talmud and Halakha at the Beit Midrash and serves as the Rosh Beit Midrash (Dean) of the Hadar Institute of Israel. He holds an M.A. in Talmud and Halakha from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



Dr. Yakov Azriel - Creative Writing Workshop

Holds a B.A. in English Literature from Brooklyn College and an M.A. and doctorate focused on the symbolism in the stories of Rabbi Nachman of Braslav. He is currently a lecturer at Herzog College and has taught at Bar-Ilan University, the Hebrew University, and various yeshivah-high schools. His poetry has earned him twenty-one awards in international poetry competitions, and he has twice been awarded fellowships from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.



Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler - Halacha Le'Ma'ashe

Is a former student of, and special assistant to, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, zt"l. In addition to being a graduate of Yeshiva University in New York (B.A./M.A), with rabbinic ordination from Y.U.'s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (R.I.E.T.S.), Rabbi Adler holds a Ph.D in Talmud from Bar Ilan University. During the past 38 years Rabbi Adler has served as a community pulpit Rabbi most recently at the Ohel Nechama community Synagogue in Jerusalem.



Sharon Laufer - Administrative Director

Is a well-seasoned Jewish communal professional with a long, successful administrative career both here in Israel, and in the North American Jewish community. In 2004 she was appointed as Director of Administration for North American Programs at the Shalom Hartman Institute, a position she held for twelve years before coming to the Beit Midrash.

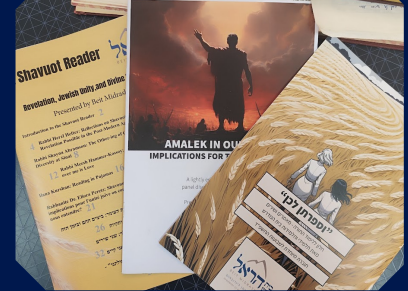


Nadav Schwartz - Community Manager

Holds a B.Ed. from Lifshitz College and was awarded the Minister for Social Equality Award in 2022. Develops innovative study units, facilitates group workshops, and leads initiatives aimed at bridging differences.

Life in the Beit Midrash

- Publications Featuring Students and Alumni
- Guest Speakers
- Informal Activities and Education
- Havruta - Peer to Peer Learning
- Lev HaSugia - Peer to Peer Teaching
- Practical Sessions on Psak and Pastoral Care
- Teaching in the Community
- Educational Trips
- Halakha Le'Maaseh - Matzah Baking
- Divrei Torah and Ochel Nefesh
- Deep Discussions - Lishmah
- Public Panels and Presentations
- Rigorous Halakhic Classes and Curriculum
- Alumni Networking
- Building Community Within and Beyond the Beit Midrash



Our Students



Aderet Weinberger

Aderet, a clinical social worker, holds an M.A. in Social Work from Hebrew University and a B.A. in Integrated Psycho-Criminology from Bar-Ilan University. She works at Returno, a drug rehabilitation center, and aspires to create a learning center for women from challenging socio-economic backgrounds.



Aryeh Landsberg

Aryeh is a Talmudic scholar with over a decade in Yeshivat Mir's higher learning track. He is currently completing a law degree, clerking for a Rabbinic Advocate, and working as a liaison between government agencies and the public. Aryeh joins Har'el to expand his Torah knowledge and explore its applications in modern contexts.



Atarah Ross Gale

Atarah holds a B.Ed. from Michlalah, Jerusalem College for Women, and completed coursework toward a Ph.D. in Bible at the Bernard Revel Graduate School. She has served on the faculty of the Drisha Institute in NY, as an adjunct professor at Stern College for Women, and as a lecturer at Boston Hebrew College. Her semikha will allow her to leverage her extensive experience to work more effectively with converts, elder communities, and adult education initiatives.



Avigail Harel

Avigail has studied Talmud at Hebrew University, Yeshivat Hadar and Migdal Oz's advanced Talmud and Halakha program. She holds a master's degree in Jewish Thought from Ben-Gurion University. Avigail has taught Bible and Jewish Philosophy at Pelech Jerusalem and the Heschel School in NY.



Benjamin Minich

Benjamin, a doctoral student in Jewish Thought at Bar-Ilan University, is fluent in Hebrew, English, Ukrainian, and Russian. An ordained Reform rabbi, he leads the Kehilat Daniel in Jaffa and works at the Daniel Center for Progressive Judaism. Benjamin is a member of Maram and CCAR and serves on the committee for the Limmud FSU Israel.



Galia Diller Zaks

Galia holds a 3rd degree in clinical psychology and a B.A. in Law. Her Ph.D. in Psychology focuses on Spiritual Quest Theory of Attachment and Belief in God. Galia integrates Jewish law with psychological research, aiming to advance the dialogue between Halakhah and psychotherapy. Galia is married to Shay & a mother of five.



Ilana Kurshan

Ilana Kurshan is the author of *"If All the Seas Were Ink"*, a memoir of Talmud study. She has worked in literary publishing both in New York and Jerusalem, as a translator and foreign rights agent and as the Books Editor of Lilit Magazine. Kurshan graduated summa cum laude in History of Science from Harvard University and earned an M.Phil. in English Literature from Cambridge University. Her new memoir, *Children of the Book*, is forthcoming from St. Martin's Press this summer.



Ilene Strauss

Ilene holds a B.A. in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies from Brandeis University and M.A.'s in Talmud (JTS) and Special Education (University of Michigan). After 48 years as an educator of Limudai Kodesh she says learning at Beit Midrash Harel has been a pure pleasure, as Ilene has waited a long time to be able to send herself to Kollel.



Na'ama Shalem

Na'ama is completing her studies in Tel Aviv University's interdisciplinary program in Bible, Archaeology, Talmud, and Literature. A graduate of Pelech and Migdal Oz, she served in the Air Force's Intelligence Unit as a translator and completed National Service at the Society for the Protection of Nature. Na'ama has also studied at Drisha, Hadar, and the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance.



Natan Maze

Natan is an educator and social entrepreneur, involved in an initiative to make Israeli society more environmentally sustainable. Natan studied Judaism and Philosophy at the Natur Midrasha and founded Bar-Kayma, an NGO connecting Judaism and environmental sustainability. With semikha, Natan plans to promote the halakhic aspects of sustainability.



Oria Feuerstein

Oria is currently pursuing a master's degree in Jewish Thought. She is a graduate of Ein Hanatziv, Chevruta, and Nishamat. Oria is deeply committed to the belief that Torah learning plays a central role in both personal and societal development. As a teacher, she sees herself as a "human bridge" — helping individuals from secular backgrounds connect with the central ideas of Torah and Halakha.



Rivital Singer

Rivital, a graduate of Midreshet Lindenbaum, is a high school teacher. Currently completing a masters degree in education management, she aspires to lead as a high school principal, bridging the worlds of the beit midrash and broader society.



Sara Levy Stevenson

Sara, a registered nurse, holds a B.A. in Nursing from Ben-Gurion University. She studied Torah at Midreshet Lindenbaum and Pardes, where she engaged with the intersection of halakha, health, and patient care. She aims to lead in integrating halakha into healthcare practices.



Sara Laya Heller

Sara holds a bachelor's degree in Education and Art Studies and studied Torah at the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem, including its Advanced Educators Program. At Har'el, she seeks to merge Torah and art, inspiring students to encounter art within the beit midrash. She also aspires to use her semikha to support her social activism, especially for agunot.



Sasya Shmuelov

Sasya immigrated to Israel from Russia in 2022. She holds a bachelor's degree in Judaic Studies and is completing a master's in Educational Counseling and a second bachelor's in English teaching. Fluent in Hebrew, Russian, English, and French, Sasya has significant experience teaching Gemara and Tanach, including work with Chabad in Russia.



Tzipi Sandler

Tzipi studied Talmud at Pardes and taught at the Hartman Girls' High School. She studied for four years at the Herzog College's women's beit midrash and aspires to broaden her impact in Jewish education.



Meir Jermolowicz

Meir, born in the Ukraine, holds master’s degrees in IT Management and Religious Dialogue. Living in Poland for the past 25 years, he came to Yiddishkeit later in life. Since then, he has significantly contributed to Jewish adult education through the ‘Chavura’ project and translated Rabbi David Brofsky’s halachic works, ‘Hilchot Mo’adim’ and ‘Hilchot Avelut,’ into Polish. An active speaker at Jewish-Christian dialogue events, Meir plans to use his semikha to further promote interfaith understanding and combat antisemitism through dialogue and education.



Yehonatan Nachshoni

Yonatan is a doctoral student in Kabbalah at Ben-Gurion University, focusing on the concept of the Self. He studied at Yeshivat Beit El and Otniel and holds a bachelor’s degree in Jewish Philosophy from Tel Aviv University, with a focus on Indian and Sanskrit studies. Yonatan is also a talented musician and poet.



Yohanan David Zinn

Yohanan, Studied at the Natur Beit Midrash and in ‘Yeshivat Otniel’, works as an individual and couple therapist, leads workshops for developing emotional independence, and has been involved in leading study and prayer programs for alumni of the Natur Integration Midrasha and the “Va’ani Tefillah” community. Yohanan came to the beit midrash to gain profound foundations in halachic decision-making to play a meaningful role in addressing the questions, challenges, and changes of our generation, approaching them from a perspective that examines the relationships between spiritual, emotional, and halachic understandings.

Our Alumni Impact

Beit Midrash Har’el alumni are visible, innovative religious leaders who are active in education, community building, social change organizations, and academic research and scholarship. Their work in education, promoting shared society, instilling Jewish identity, and encouraging inclusive approaches within a variety of religious communities as well as secular contexts sends an important message that deep commitment to our tradition can actually go hand in hand with promoting a more inclusive Jewish community and a more compassionate society in general. Part of the impact of the Beit Midrash is reflected in the impact our alumni are having. What follows are selected highlights:

Teaching/Education

Rabbi Gidon Admanit: Teaches classes in Talmud and Parshat HaShavua for the elderly.

Rabbi Ellyse Borghi: Teaches at Beit Midrash Oz and provides pastoral care to the Shira Hadasha community in Melbourne, Australia.

Rabbi Rahel Berkovits: Senior faculty member at the Pardes Institute, lectures widely on women, Jewish law, and sexual ethics.

Rabbi Nadav Berger: Rosh Beit Midrash of Hadar in Israel; teaches Talmud and Halakhah.

Rabbi Batya Jacobs: Teaches at Yerushalayim Torah Academy High School and develops educational curricula.

Rabbi Tzvika (Tzvi) Graetz: Congregational Rabbi in Los Angeles, CA.

Rabbi Dr. Mira Neshama Niculescu Weil: Teaches Jewish mindfulness, meditation, and yoga while maintaining traditional observance.

Rabbi Dr. Olla Solomyak: Teaches philosophy at Shalem College, focusing on metaphysics and Hasidic thought.

Rabbi Lisa Klug: Teaches Jewish mindfulness, self-compassion, and meditative writing.

Rabbi Leah Shakdiel: Teaches Democratic Judaism in Israeli pre-military academies.

Rabbi Aryeh Ronay: Teaches English at the Hartman High School.

Leadership/Rabbinic Roles

Rabbi Tzvika (Tzvi) Graetz: Congregational Rabbi in Los Angeles, CA.

Rabbi David Goodman: Rabbi of Congregation Moreshet Avraham in Jerusalem and editor of PodDrash podcast.

Rabbi Eliana Kinderlehrer: Facilitates groups for new couples, offering halakhic insights, and officiates at weddings.

Rabbi Elhanan Miller: Founder of People of the Book, promoting interfaith dialogue.

Rabbi Rachel (Bluth) Rosenbluth: Chief Creative Officer at Living Jewishly.

Rabbi Hanan Leberman: Founder of a halakhically committed community bridging religious and secular Israelis.

Rabbi Lara Haft Yom-Tov: Congregational Rabbi at New North London Synagogue, UK.

Social Activism

Rabbi Gidon Admanit: Public activist promoting democracy and Palestinian rights in Israel.

Rabbi Leah Shakdiel: Active in

Rabbis for Human Rights, LGBTQ inclusion, and removing the mamzer stigma.

Rabbi Lisa Klug: Active in campaigns against antisemitism (#EndJewHatred)

Innovative Initiatives

Rabbi Shayna Abramson Kovler: Founder of International Women's Talmud Day, fostering empathetic religious spaces.

Rabbi Noam Prutzer: Founder of "Get Out Jerusalem"

Rabbi Dr. Alexandra (Eliora) Peretz: Founder of Beit Midrash Shefa and the Ruth & Akiva program, offering halakhic guidance.

Rabbi Elhanan Miller: Created People of the Book, an online interfaith dialogue project.

Rabbi Shmuel Ben David: Partner in "Lechatchila," a home for Israeli Torah.

Academic Roles/Research

Rabbi Dr. Mira Neshama Niculescu Weil: Researcher at Hebrew University, expert on Jewish Buddhists and mindfulness.

Rabbi Dr. Olla Solomyak: Researches metaphysics, Hasidic thought, and philosophy.

Rabbi Dr. Alexandra (Eliora) Peretz: Researcher in transitional justice and halakhic guidance.

Therapy/Counseling

Rabbi Eliana Kinderlehrer: Facilitates therapy groups for new couples.

Rabbi Aryeh Ronay: Spiritual counselor using IFS and meditation for personal growth.

Interfaith/Inclusivity

Rabbi Elhanan Miller: Promotes interfaith dialogue

through online videos for Arab audiences.

Rabbi Aryeh Ronay: Runs Creation Care, an interfaith ecology discussion group.

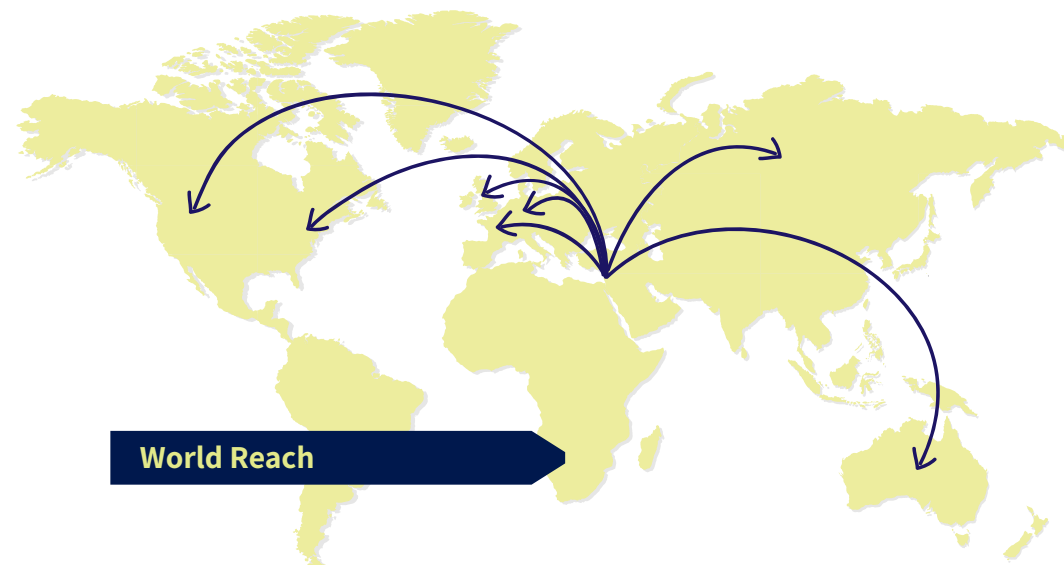
Rabbi Leah Shakdiel: Advocates for LGBTQ inclusion and halakhic equality.

Media/Content Creation

Rabbi David Goodman: Founder and editor of Well of Faith digital journal and PodDrash podcast.

Rabbi Elhanan Miller: Founder of People of the Book, promoting interfaith dialogue.

Rabbi Lisa Klug: Writes about Jewish topics for leading media outlets.



World Reach

אמר רבי אלעזר אמר רבי חנינא תלמידיו
חכמים ערבים שלום בעולם שנאמר (ישעיהו
נד, יג) וכל בנוך לעודי ה' ורב שלום בנוך אל
תקרי בנוך אלא בוניך (ברכות סד א)

Rabbi Elazar said Rabbi Ḥanina said: Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as it is said: “And all your children [banayikh] shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children” (Isaiah 54:13). Do not read your sons [banayikh], but your builders [bonayikh]. (Berachot 64A)



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