

# BRONFMAN | M 2011

MAGAZINE OF THE BRONFMAN FELLOWSHIPS

ברונפמנים



## Paths of Change

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**Refresh:** Reflections from Bronfmanim on Beginning Again

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**Sound Communication:** A Conversation with BYFI Musicians



**Cover photo credit:** Sam Maron (*Fellow '11*).

The 'Montefiore Windmill,' built in 1857, was the first site the 2011 Fellows visited during their time in Jerusalem.

*Sam Maron (Fellow '11) is a senior in high school at Gann Academy, a pluralistic Jewish day school in the Boston area. An enthusiastic photographer, he hopes to pursue photography more seriously in college while studying neuroscience and philosophy.*

Opinions expressed are those of contributors and do not represent the official positions of The Bronfman Fellowships.

For more information about the Bronfman Fellowships:  
[www.bronfman.org](http://www.bronfman.org)

For more information about the Amitei Bronfman program: [www.amitei-bronfman.org](http://www.amitei-bronfman.org)

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# Behind the Scenes: A Conversation with BYFI's Co-Directors

This has been a big year of transition for BYFI. We asked Elisheva Goldberg (Fellow '05) to interview the new Co-Directors, Becky Voorwinde and Mishael Zion, about their own stories and the direction BYFI will be taking in the year ahead.

by *Elisheva Goldberg (Fellow '05)*

When we, alumni, think of BYFI we think of ... what? We think of the Goldstein Youth Village and Shabbat niggunim. We think of that crazy experience when we were 17, of having discussions with people we never would have met, in places we never would have been, through the lens of texts we never would have seen, had we each stayed in our own bubbles. And we think of those discussions carried on — in various forms — within the alumni community for the last quarter of a century. That's right, folks — BYFI has had 25 summers, and this June it will be turning 26.

This means that Bronfman is having babies, and that when you post on the listserv you are potentially invading the inboxes of 650 very different Jewish Americans. It also means that

BYFI's younger sister, Amitei Bronfman, founded in 1998, had her bat mitzvah last year and is now obligated in all of the mitzvot of any good Bronfman program like alumni gatherings, which seem to be gaining momentum this year through the collaborative efforts of Amitim and Fellows who are spending gap years in Israel. As BYFI alumni, we are provided with an array of opportunities to celebrate our diversity.

These opportunities span geographical regions, age gaps and all mediums of communication. They keep us connected to each other consciously and unconsciously. They build our community. And behind it all, BYFI's staff and our new Co-Directors, Becky Voorwinde and Mishael Zion, are thinking and rethinking, directing and redirecting, organizing and reorganizing the

alumni engagement and education for BYFI. As I walked onto the 17th floor of 375 Park Avenue I was greeted with the polite beige look of a well-dressed office. BYFI's New York City office is in the same space as the Samuel Bronfman Foundation, its funder. It's convenient (no rent), conducive to learning (Mish often joins Edgar's weekly "Talmud Sessions"), and allows for a more seamless and symbiotic relationship (a number of alumni of BYFI work at the Foundation). BYFI has two more offices — one in Albany (hi Ava!) and one — obviously — in Jerusalem (at the PresenTense hub) where Matan, Klil, and the rest of the staff who lead Amitei Bronfman work. I was met jovially, as always, by Mish and escorted into his shared office space with Becky. They agree that one of the greatest benefits of this shared space

is that they get to “check-in” and align their priorities first thing in the morning, before spending the rest of their day following up with alumni, working with members of the Alumni Advisory Board, the Foundation professionals, and consulting with other Jewish organizations who see BYFI as a model program. It is constant work and constant contact. For Becky and Mish, this is not just a “job.”

Becky Voorwinde, 31, grew up in New Haven, CT, and Swampscott, MA, went to Barnard College, and worked at Ernst and Young’s North American head-quarters in the field of corporate social responsibility before beginning her career with BYFI. Becky went on Bronfman in 1997. The child of divorced parents, Becky’s father was Modern Orthodox while her mother affiliated as Conservative, and they chose to send her to Schechter schools. Today, Becky doesn’t define herself in a denominational framework, but certainly works to “build ritual into her life while not abiding by standards.” Becky credits BYFI with providing a powerfully supportive community that did not question her commitment to Jewish life when she married her Australian husband, Mick, who is not Jewish. In discussing her previous position at BYFI as Director of Alumni Engagement, Becky said that she “never met a Bronfman alum that wasn’t interesting” or “who didn’t make her think a little differently.” Becky points out a bookshelf of pieces written by alumni. It seems the bookshelf serves as a reminder of what this program is all about: putting all of those Jewish authors on the same shelf. Since January 2011, Becky’s role as Director of Strategy and Community Engagement means that she’s the one giving BYFI a particular organizational edge, pushing forward the revolutionary ingredients of BYFI — the Alumni Venture Fund, the Alumni Advisory Board, the conference calls...you get the picture. Consequently, she

is also the one who keeps us — the alumni community — talking to each other.

Mishael — or “Mish” as he refers to himself — is a 30-year-old father of two who grew up in Jerusalem not far from the Goldstein Youth Village. Mish’s grandfather was a Conservative rabbi in Minneapolis, a man he likened to “the Forrest Gump of American Jewish history...in all the important moments doing unimportant things.” His father made aliyah (moved to Israel) during the Yom Kippur War and became involved with the Shalom Hartman Institute. Mishael spent three years of his childhood in America, attending public school and later a Jewish school. He studied at Yeshivat Ma’ale Gilboa and spent his service as an IDF liaison with the foreign relations divisions where he spent time in Gaza as well as on the Jordanian border speaking to Egyptians and Jordanians “in English with an Arabic accent” so they would understand him. In his last year of the army he put together a Haggadah with his father called *A Night to Remember: A Haggadah of Contemporary Voices*. Mishael sees his work on the Haggadah as doing what the Rabbis of the Talmud originally wanted: putting texts together to provoke powerful conversation.

After the army Mishael went back to yeshiva, attended Hebrew University, and taught Talmud at the Hartman Institute. Recognizing that he wanted to be more deeply involved in his pupils’ lived experience, Mishael moved to America so he could study and be ordained as a rabbi by Yeshivat Chovevei Torah in Manhattan while his wife Elana took a fellowship at Columbia. Mishael is part Israeli Jew, part American Jew, and navigates the space between those worlds as BYFI’s Director of Education. He sees his job at BYFI as asking the question “how do we go one level deeper?” He wants to know how BYFI “can take an experience and create content, generate good questions, and share tools that will serve a bunch of 17-year-olds and alumni throughout their lives.”

The four pillars of the Fellowship — pluralism, Jewish learning, social responsibility, and engagement with Israel — provide a framework for answering these questions. These pillars remain incredibly strong though I was told they have shifted in focus as Becky and Mish have taken the helm. The discussions have changed with the times

## THE POWER OF A HEVRUTA PARTNERSHIP

Rabbi Hama said:  
Just as in the case of iron,  
when one implement sharpens another,  
so too do two Torah scholars sharpen  
each other when they discuss  
questions of Halakhah *together*.

TALMUD BAVLI TA’ANIT 7A

— the conversation about Israel has broken open and new questions are being asked about the relationship between Israel and American Jewry, about what it means to be “Am Yisrael” (“the Nation of Israel”). Similarly, the conversation about pluralism has taken on more of a post-denominational and diverse character to include Jews with unconventional family structures, Jews of color, and the myriad ways Jews choose to express their Judaism. The AVF has played a role in converting talk of social responsibility into tangible action. These shifts indicate the self-reflective quality of BYFI — the constant reinterpretation that we have come to expect from each other and from our program. Mish told me he believes one of the most beautiful things about Judaism is that it is able to “survive across various interpretations.”

It’s exciting to watch BYFI shift its focus and chart a new course focused on life beyond the initial fellowship. Ours is becoming a lifelong fellowship, one in which we connect because we have a shared background, a shared experience, something that binds us even if our opinions, practices, and relationships to religion do not. Mishael quoted Or Mars from the Wexner Foundation when he made reference to the bond that Jews have for each other. He said the bond is natural, “they all had the same Sinai.” For Bronfmanim, Mish added, “it’s called the Goldstein Youth Village.” ■



*Elisheva Goldberg is assistant editor of the forthcoming blog Zion Square and is currently working for the New America Foundation where she works closely with Senior Fellow Peter Beinart. Elisheva is also the Rosh Beit Midrash for Uri L’Tzedek. She holds a*

*B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and speaks Hebrew and Arabic.*

The BYFI community  
congratulates **Becky and  
Michael Voorwinde** on the  
birth of their daughter  
**Miriam Zahavah Voorwinde**  
born 12.16.11

# Paths of Change

*by Heather Sokoloff (Fellow '93)*

“Starting over is common for those attempting to make a difference to society in their professional lives. We learn what works and what does not along the way, tweaking our choices, supplementing our education or choosing an altogether different path.”





Talia Milgrom-Elcott (Fellow '93)

When President Barack Obama pledged to train 100,000 new science and math teachers within a decade during his State of the Union address in January 2011, the announcement was met with a rare chorus of bipartisan applause — and quickly followed by a collective sigh of resignation about the impossibility of the task.

But from her desk in New York City, Talia Milgrom-Elcott (Fellow '93) saw an opportunity. A program officer in urban education at the Carnegie Corporation, a philanthropic foundation, Talia had been funding research to develop strategies to place great principals and teachers into high-need schools; these efforts, she realized, could be expanded and applied to the President's pledge.

Within six months, Talia, who has more than a decade of experience working with system-wide public school reform, helped secure commitments from 80 educational, non-profit, and corporate partners to raise more than \$22 million to support new and existing programs which train science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) teachers, in a joint effort called 100kin10.org.

"This is not putting a school on the moon," says Talia. "This is not beyond our capacity."

Cliches abound when talking about social change; with terms like "levers of change,"

"spheres of influence," and "structural deficiencies," it's hard to tell whether experts are talking about how to influence society or how to build a Rube Goldberg machine. Jargon can obscure the fact that most important questions about the process of making change remain unanswered: Where do societal problems originate and at what point in the chain can we intervene and effectively implement solutions?

For individuals who seek to make a difference in their professional and personal endeavors it can be difficult to determine where best to apply one's talents and how to avoid feeling hopeless when attempting to tackle structural and systemic challenges. To explore different models for approaching this daunting challenge, I talked to several Bronfmanim, each of whom has dedicated his or her professional life to enriching society through a unique synthesis of their resources and talents.

Talia went to law school, with what she describes as a "children of the sixties" idealism that law would be a tool for social change. She eventually found law too blunt an instrument to tackle complex urban issues and wanted to find solutions to problems before they became full-blown and required legal remediation.

"A lot of urban problems like income inequality, health issues, unemployment and underemployment stem from failed public education," says Talia. "Problems like drug addictions and HIV — these are deep and systemic. But there's plenty of evidence to show that investment in public education creates a multiplier effect with many benefits down the road, like reduced violence. And, as a result, reduced prison sentences, a reduced prison population, and a stronger economy."

"Public education is really at the center of all these issues."

She sent a resume to Chancellor Joel Klein after New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg tapped him to head New York City's Department of Education. Mr. Klein took her on as a Special Assistant and she later became Project Director for System Transformation at DOE.

At her current position at the Carnegie Corporation, Talia seeks to remedy shortages in the supply and quality of human capital, primarily teachers and principals.

"Social change can be inspired from above, but it has to emerge more genuinely from the people doing the work. You want to create the platform, the incentive, the opportunity, and the support for people to take action on the things they believe in," says Talia.

"You want to inspire people and provide the tools. But you probably don't want to be doing it all yourself."

While Talia's work focuses on reforming large systems, across the country, Reba Connell (Fellow '87), works on helping individuals as a way to build stronger communities.



Reba Connell (Fellow '87)

Reba is a therapist in Oakland, CA, where she does psychotherapy with couples, individuals, groups, and teens. She uses yoga and meditation with her clients as well as traditional Jewish and Buddhist teaching to explore issues such as generosity, equity, and kindness with her clients. Her practice includes gays, lesbians, and Latinos — groups that have traditionally been underserved or ignored by mental health professionals.

"I see wellness and mental health in the context of our society," says Reba. "Social justice and injustice can impact our overall well-being."

Reba had envisioned a career of direct service to marginalized and needy populations since completing an undergraduate major at Brown in social justice in race and gender. She went to social work school where the dean discouraged graduates from going into private practice, saying it was abandoning the poor.

Her first job was running a teen drop-in clinic in San Francisco's Mission district. In addition to counseling youth, she supervised the clinic's staff and ran programs. Hundreds of teens passed through every year. But Reba became burnt-out and disillusioned. The interactions were too brief and sporadic for her to give the teens the support she felt they required.

"I came to realize I wanted to have relationships with people over time, rather than have them just drop in," says Reba.

In 1999, she quit her job. Broke and unemployed, she took out a book on Buddhism from the public library. Forty dollars in cash had been left in the book which had last been taken out many years prior. She used the money to pay for a class on yoga and started practicing mindfulness meditation to ease her own stress.

She decided to open her therapy practice to use these skills to help people — and finally felt she was working towards the social change she had envisioned. She treats Latino clients in Spanish and, unlike most therapists who do not reveal much about themselves to their clients, Reba is an out lesbian, an identity she believes enables her gay and lesbian clients to feel safe.

"Sometimes I wonder if I should be working in policy or politics dealing with issues like global warming," says Reba.

"But what I seem to be good at, and where my heart seems to be satisfied is sitting with one or two people or a small group. When we are well as individuals, couples, and communities, we can do more to bring about a just world."

Stopping and starting over is common for those attempting to make a difference to society in their professional lives. We learn what works

and what does not along the way, tweaking our choices, supplementing our education or choosing an altogether different path.

Dan Smokler (Fellow '96) has done just this in dedicating his professional life to educating and empowering individuals after a period of direct service in union organizing. Dan gave up a career in the labor movement to become a rabbi. In so doing, he transferred his energies from working towards political and economic empowerment to focusing on cultivating goodness in himself and others.



*Dan Smokler (Fellow '96)*

Dan was always compelled to fight for those without power and became interested in labor issues as an undergraduate at Yale. After graduating he moved to Los Angeles, where he spent four years as a union organizer, working with Latino hotel employees entirely in Spanish. Yet his time in the labor movement felt personally unfulfilling. The big questions of life remained unanswered, such as how to be a good person, raise strong families and build strong communities.

He sought a path to address these questions and found it led him back to studying Torah.

He decided to become a rabbi. Currently, he is both Education Director of Hillel International's Senior Jewish Educator project and Senior Jewish Educator at NYU Hillel, posts that enable him to explore major life questions with students on campus.

While he remains a supporter of causes such as labor rights and environmentalism, Dan is careful to make a distinction between the pursuit of social justice and Jewish observance. "I don't practice Judaism or teach Torah because it's going to build a just society in the short term," says Dan.

"I believe in the long term story of the Jewish people, that the Jewish people are slowly but surely playing a force in the world to move humanity towards greater forms of dignity, and more equality, and recognition of human rights."



*Rachel Bluth (Fellow '91)*

Rachel Bluth (Fellow '91) dedicates countless hours every week to philanthropic work, but she credits her other two careers — an early education in finance and her work as a mother to three young children — with giving her the skills and motivation to become engaged in social change.

After college, Rachel went to business school to ensure she had the skills to be employable and support herself. She had always been interested in public education, and especially in how tax policies financed schools. As a result, real estate got her attention, and she ended up working as a real estate investment banker at Credit Suisse First Boston, focusing on commercial mortgage loan origination and securitization.

"I didn't set out to go into finance," says Rachel. "But I was good at it, and I enjoyed it, and it paid the bills."



Eight years ago, after juggling caring for her one-year-old son and a series of all-nighters at the office, Rachel quit Wall Street to be at home with her family.

Since then, she has launched a second unpaid career as a volunteer involved in social change — but credits her business background with developing her skills relevant to the philanthropic sector.

She started by helping the 14th Street Y, a community center in New York City's East Village, develop a business plan to meet the needs of its current community.

Working with the Y brought Rachel to the Educational Alliance, an organization serving the Lower East Side through publicly-funded preschools, camps, senior centers, arts and culture classes, and social services as well as responsibility for the 14th Street Y.

"Everything you could need for a community is overseen by this organization."

As a trustee on the board of the Educational Alliance, her duties include accounting for the financial responsibility of the organization. The position also enables her to mentor and assist participants at the site's Head Start program and Boys and Girls Clubs. She is also involved with the launch of a program that links some teenage mother participants in Head Start with a program that supports them obtaining their high school diplomas as well as a new college preparation program for the Boys and Girls Club for high school students in the local community.

Rachel says she will likely never return to her Wall Street career. As her three children get older, however, she would like to turn all her philanthropic experience into a paid career. "Something to do with education," she says. ■

*Heather Sokoloff is a freelance writer and mother of two in Montreal, Quebec where she writes about food and other delicious activities. Previously, she covered health, education and politics at the National Post in Toronto.*



*"Social justice is something a lot of people can rally around, but the particulars of justice can create all kinds of different opinions and that's where it gets complicated."*

— NOAM PIANKO

**Noam Pianko (Fellow '90)** is working to change the conversation around service learning and social justice, especially within the context of the Jewish community.

As the chair of Jewish Studies at the University of Washington and leader of a pilot project incorporating volunteering into the curriculum, Noam designed an innovative service learning program with a grant from Repair the World, a non-profit organization that promotes volunteerism among Jewish youth.

Students studying immigration in an American Jewish history course, for example, could teach English to new immigrants at a Seattle community center.

But in discussing service learning, Noam makes a distinction between the concepts of service and justice. He says justice involves making potentially controversial moral claims about how the world should look and working for societal changes, such as focusing on the structural reasons that lead to the existence of poverty in America. Service, on the other hand, means serving and helping the needy — not necessarily with a political focus.

"One thing I am trying to do is push the Jewish community to acknowledge which one they are interested in doing."

"The challenge for the Jewish community is to figure out what we do with this interest in social justice. Some say we should just promote it because Jews should be doing this type of work. Others say, 'Well, this is a way we ensure Jewish continuity, we better make sure we allow Jews to do it together so they will meet other nice Jews and live a Jewish life together, so social justice becomes a vehicle for that sort of thing.'"

"Social justice is something a lot of people can rally around, but the particulars of justice can create all kinds of different opinions and that's where it gets complicated," says Noam.

"The question is, how far are people willing to go in terms of supporting those conversations?" ■

*Noam Pianko (Fellow '90) is associate professor and chair of the Jewish Studies program at the University of Washington. In addition to his research in modern Jewish history, Noam has recently begun an initiative with Repair the World to train Jewish Studies faculty to teach service learning courses. Noam lives in Seattle with his partner, Rachel Nussbaum (Fellow '93) and two daughters, Yona and Mia.*



# Refresh: Reflections from Bronfmanim on Beginning Again

*edited by Rachel Cohen (Fellow '05)*

Living through a moment of crisis or upheaval can leave us feeling broken, cut-off from our familiar reality. Yet the experience of being unsettled can open our eyes to new possibilities and new identities. Four members of the Bronfman community share stories of challenges that altered their paths, bestowing different perspective and illuminating new opportunities.



**Laura Liebman (Fellow '88)**

Admittedly, I have a flair for the dramatic, but little did I expect that the most recent chapter in my life would provide fodder for a Lifetime movie when my marriage of twelve years ended, leaving me with a nearly two year old and a three month old. Add into the mix my father having a heart attack the day my youngest was born, my landing a new job out of financial necessity two weeks after said birth,

and my taking the New York State Bar exam at the same time, as well as a good dose of middle of the night health scares with young children.

Realizing the person to whom I devoted my life no longer wanted to be with me and that the life I imagined living no longer existed was heart-wrenching. It was as if I had slipped through to some parallel universe and could not find the way back. All of the trappings and security of my comfortable, safe existence were stripped away. My friends and family would ask me how I was coping and then ask why I wasn't angrier. Most of them were quite angry on my behalf and there were even some offers, politely declined, along the lines of slashing tires and contacting Mob connections. I admit to moments of pure rage and lamenting my fate, but the truth is I don't have much capacity for holding grudges or harboring animosity.

I made a decision early in the craziness to accept that I could not change certain realities. To preserve my sanity and more importantly, to shield my children, I decided that while I couldn't change much of the situation in which I found myself, I could control the way I chose to react. This acceptance gave me a freedom

to let go of my anger and bitterness to a large extent. It was not forgiveness per se, but rather a growing awareness that each of us is on our own personal journey and the hurt we may cause is largely unintentional. With this constant theme echoing in my head, I was able to maintain a sense of the bigger picture and not descend into my petty inclinations.

It seems amazing, but no one I was close to had ever gotten divorced and I felt completely alone and isolated. My shame and sense of failure were so overwhelming that I lived for months in the shell of my marriage, hiding the truth from everyone close to me (although they would later share that I was not as effective an actress as I believed). As I walked with friends one day, hearing them talk about another couple divorcing, musing that they would never be able to cope with sharing custody, I remained silent and sick to my stomach, paralyzed with the worry that they would find out about my own failing marriage.

As time went on, I learned to share with others and overcome my sense of humiliation. Gradually I began to not only rebuild my life, but redefine myself and my expectations.

Although I was not intent on finding a new partner, I was blessed to meet an incredible man who loves me and my children. I look back on the tumult of the past few years and, at times, am amazed by all that transpired and what I overcame. Still, I am not terribly impressed; I think that most of us have hidden pockets of strength and the ability to cope when tested.

So I slowly rejoined the land of the living, no longer the question mark at social gatherings and safely ensconced in mainstream America once again. I have now joined 50% of the population living with a blended family. It may not be the happily ever after I initially envisioned, but it is an unexpectedly wonderful alternative. After facing my own personal abyss, I have realized that there is a power in loss of innocence both liberating and terrifying. While my fate will not always be one of my making, I can help write the next chapter.

*Laura Liebman (Fellow '88) is the Advancement Officer at Albany Law School. A current resident of Rhinebeck, NY, Laura has also lived and worked across the US and Israel. Outside of work, Laura enjoys spending time with her two sons Yoav and Matan and is an avid runner.*



### Aaron Charlop-Powers (Fellow '02)

With my eyes closed I can see my grandfather sitting on the front porch of his home wearing his iconic Pittsburgh Pirates hat, Hemingway beard, boat shoes with socks, tapered navy sweatpants, a long-sleeve, powder blue polo shirt, and reading glasses. He is smiling. At ninety years old, his blue eyes sparkle with a boyish mischief. He was a man of legendary

wit, renowned for his one-liners and a sense of humor concentrated among Jewish men of his era. Born in 1918 on Fox Street in the south Bronx, his was an epic life. He was prone to repetition but was not redundant; repetition did not dilute his wisdom, it fortified the simple power of his words. Gesturing towards me, then towards himself, he would say: "These are the golden years."

Over the past three years I have had good reason to doubt his words. In March of 2008, my dear friend and former college roommate Eve was abducted and murdered. Last year, while working at the UN, I played a small part of the response effort to the earthquake in Haiti in January of 2010, an effort that, by any indicator from Haiti today, has had little positive impact on the lives of the poor and most affected. On March 17, 2010, my mother was hit and killed by a New York City bus while riding her bicycle to work.

There persists a great sadness in my heart. My grief morphs constantly; sometimes I am overwhelmed by the terribly different reality in which I live, other times it is less intense, but it is always present. I miss my mother more than I can say, I miss Eve every day, and think often of the death, destruction, and heartache of the Haitians who lived before, during, and after the earthquake.

I find myself grieving in two ways: one emotional, visceral, and one impersonal, rational. As I mourn Eve's death, I miss the joy of my friendship with her and feel sickened by the brutality of her last hours. And I am also haunted by the devastation of childhood in many of our inner cities, in which young people are taught to glorify violence, plotting and committing violent acts that value neither their lives nor the lives of others.

The challenge then becomes how to live a meaningful, happy life in this forever altered world. My grandfather knew the answer: No matter your age, it is your duty to live life now — there is no time to waste.

Each day, I try to act in small ways with his words in my heart: hold doors, smile, tell my partner I love her, volunteer, call my father, laugh, find meaning in my work, spend time with friends. I recently decided to embrace my grandfather's words in a bigger way. Six weeks ago I gave notice at my job. I am planning to return to the city I call home and move in with my partner. This may not be the

best professional move, and without a job or an apartment sometimes it feels like I ran off the cliff and then looked down. But, I know this is what is right for me and the time is now. These are the golden years.

*Aaron Charlop-Powers (Fellow '02) is a native of the Bronx, has worked in international development during the four years since graduating college and enjoys building bicycles.*



### Mahlet Abune (Amitah '01)

There is a well-known idiom in Amharic: "an uncomfortable seat reminds you what you are sitting on." I understand this idiom to mean that everything stems from your identity, origin, or citizenship. In my case, that "seat" is the experience of being born in Ethiopia but living in Israel and becoming Israeli.

Have you ever heard of rebirth at the age of twelve? My aliyah to Israel from Ethiopia was a rebirth. I was born in Addis Ababa in 1983. There, I grew up in a traditional and rigid educational system and I had friends who did not know I was Jewish. My new life in Israel is vastly different from my memories of the past; I am still adjusting and rooting myself in this country. Every single day when I wake up in the morning, I make the choice to be Israeli.

It's harder than it might seem. The Ethiopian culture and values with which I was raised are fundamentally different from those of Israeli culture. I was raised to live with difficulties and obstacles, seeing these as things that nurture pride and strength of spirit. In Ethiopia, I looked like everyone else but I was different. In Israel, I look different but I am no longer in exile. Although there is prejudice, I feel a sense of connection here.

*Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.*

— LEONARD COHEN (ANTHEM '92)

My whole journey in Israel has been one of discovering myself anew every day. From learning Hebrew to serving in the army to studying for my degrees, I see every experience as a first step, even if I don't know where it will lead. In the military, I was required to participate in the first circle of the Disengagement from Gaza (direct evacuation of families). During that month and a half, I had to put aside my political views and understand my role as a soldier within political affairs; I had to be a new Mahlet. Then, upon leaving the army, I had to adjust to civilian life and its different rules: another rebirth. As I reflect on the mosaic of my life experiences, I have arrived at a sense that I am reborn, time after time.

My life journey is one of setting down roots, always in new ground. While Ethiopia and Israel remain distant from each other, I find my two identities open more doors than they close. With my two identities, I am empowered to grow and find new life. My motto is "aspire not only to be part of society, but that society will be part of you, too."

*Mahlet Abune (Amitah '01) is currently getting an MA in counseling and organizational development at IDC Herzliya. She also works at the learning center of a Bank Leumi and volunteers once a week as a Hebrew teacher for Ethiopian mothers who are recent immigrants in Lod. In her spare time, she likes to watch movies or play volleyball.*

## **Matan Barak (Director of Amitei Bronfman)**

*What was the beginning of Rabbi Akiva? At age 40 he had not learned anything. One time he was standing at the mouth of a well, and asked "Who hollowed out this rock?" They answered him, "Was it not the water that constantly falls on it?.. Akiva, are you not familiar with the verse "Water wears away stone..." (Job 14:19)?"*

*Rabbi Akiva immediately applied the notion onto himself: "Just as the soft shaped the hard, words of Torah - which are as hard as iron — will, all the more so, shape my heart, which is but flesh and blood."  
Avot De-Rabbi Natan, Chapter 6.*

By the age of 20 I had learned almost nothing. I was a combat soldier in the Israeli army, serving in the then-IDF-controlled security zone in South Lebanon. The last day



of the holiday of Sukkot, a clear winter day, found me on the Beaufort fortress. Minutes before I could catch a ride taking me home, a Hezbollah missile exploded at the post where I stood guard. My injuries were severe - burns, blowback from the blast, shrapnel... I was flown by helicopter to hospital, and remained there for several long and painful months. Rehabilitation was distressing and laborious.

When I finally returned to some sort of normalcy, I began looking at my life, for the first time, as a story in need of interpretation. I was now "embodied," in a very dramatic way (and not by choice!) into a bigger story: the story of my people, of my country, of the Jewish state. My life-story now had deep political and cultural significance; I had become a disabled IDF veteran, a personification of the violence that our region knows so tragically. Having grown up on Kibbutz, with grandparents who survived the Holocaust and grandparents who were classical Zionists, I now felt like a living symbol of Jewish existence in the 20th century. My injury seemed a direct expression of my people's destiny. This was an existential crisis that I felt I could overcome only by finding myself, or creating myself anew, amid the clichés I felt tangled in.

My injury taught me much. More than anything, it taught me of the power of change. Looking back, I see that this understanding allowed me to believe I could defy doctors' diagnoses and overcome the banalities of my story. Regaining agency over my life demanded writing my own story in my own words. Throughout the years since my injury, now more than 14 years ago, I have turned my injury into a narrative of growth and freedom; it has served as a catalyst for reshaping my family's relationship, for my choice of partner, for my more reflective political views.

This experience inspired a simple belief in the possibility of shaping my world and led me to the only world which constantly struggles with that challenge — the world of education. As a teacher and Director of Amitei Bronfman, I am constantly confronted by questions of transformation — of individuals and their environment, and of the courage and faith needed for this process. The educational process allows me to experience, enrich, and support this growth.

Rabbi Akiva, above, asks himself, simply — can't I change? The question echoes through all of human experience. Rabbi Akiva knows that hard work is necessary, but if change can transpire in the natural world, then it is possible within him as well. Rabbi Akiva's reach for a better self serves as an inspiration to observe, to reflect, and to create a different reality for myself and others. ■

*Matan Barak (Director of Amitei Bronfman) lives in Tel Aviv and has a BA and MA from Hebrew University in Jewish Thought and Jewish Studies. Matan has been working in formal and informal education settings for 12 years and is an alumnus of the Revivim Program for enhancing Jewish studies in secular schools in Israel. Matan develops the educational vision and curriculum for the Amitei Bronfman Fellowship and manages the program. In addition, he works to build and strengthen the alumni community. When not working for Amitei Bronfman, Matan creates high school level curriculum.*



Sound  
Communication:  
A Conversation with  
BYFI Musicians

**AVLANA EISENBERG** (*Fellow '93*)  
and **DAN EDINBERG** (*Fellow '97*)

**A**vlana Eisenberg (Fellow '93) and Dan Edinberg (Fellow '97) are professional musicians. Avlana's musical path started at home in her family of professional and amateur musicians. She was given a violin at age 4 and grew up playing holiday medleys at family gatherings; while in college, she explored conducting and founded and directed a chamber orchestra. Since college, Avlana has balanced her law degree and career with studying and performing all over the world as an orchestral conductor. This summer she recorded her first CD, with her mother, a professional violinist. Dan also was immersed in music from day one and he began playing violin and piano at a young age. He heard the bass calling

which he used to show the psychology behind a jazz quartet communicating and how you can apply that to non-musical situations. He would bring together musicians and have them play and then discuss what they're doing. And I guess that's what drew me to jazz music: it's a very social music. Everybody has their own space to say what they want and that communication is making art with a group of people. But that dynamic can be played out anywhere.

**AVLANA:** I completely agree. I would say I've learned more about communication, leadership, psychology, and diplomacy from my experiences conducting than anything else. Conductors are giving TED talks about leadership and even coming into business

**DAN:** Trust and non-verbal communication are really what it comes down to.

**BYFI:** How much of your identity as a musician is centered around the experience of performance?

**DAN:** I went into recorded music because I was pretty sick of performing every night. I didn't like being the center of attention and I wanted to focus on the music, not on looking a certain way. But after I spent a few years in the



*Dan Edinberg (left), Avlana Eisenberg (right).*

his name in high school and started playing jazz trios with his father and brother; later, he discovered composition and harmony, eventually spending several years with the band ZOX. He now writes for and performs with his band, The Stepkids, currently on international tour. We asked the two of them to reflect together on a life in music and their different directions and listened in on the conversation.

**BYFI:** Does your professional experience translate outside the musical world?

**DAN:** My dad actually had a whole presentation, called "Groovin High,"

schools and talking to MBA classes. Yes, as the conductor, you're standing in front and telling the orchestra when to start and stop and so forth, but ultimately it's all about empowerment. For instance, one of the main roles of the conductor is to synthesize all the different instrumentalists' approaches into one cohesive interpretation. So I have to gauge when to make clear decisions and when to rely on the instrumentalists to use their musical intuition, which might be incredibly strong and wise and well-informed. That give and take is the greatest challenge, but when it's working, it enhances the music immeasurably.

recording studio, the urge to perform came solely out of love for the music that I was doing.

So, it's complicated. I feel like I've regenerated myself as a performer and now I'm very comfortable in both of those worlds. The studio and the stage can really complement each other; they compete with each other in a good way and recording something great should make it play better live. But I do feel that it's important not to overload on either one of them.

**AVLANA:** It's the live performance that I love. The energy of live performance is something that I thrive on and it can't be simulated.

*Music is made by sifting the good from the bad. The musician has to find the "good spirit" and reject the bad. After all, a musical instrument is basically a vessel containing air. The musician produces the sounds by causing the air to vibrate. His task is to move his hands on the instrument in such a way as to produce good spirit, harmony, while avoiding the disharmony - the dissonant winds of gloom and depression. So a person must play their own self by seeking the good points in themselves. When a person refuses to allow himself to fall into despair but instead gives himself new life by finding and gathering his positive points, this makes melodies.*

REB NACHMAN OF BRESLOV,  
LIKUTEI MOHARAN  
VOL. I TORAH #282

Everyone in the room knows it's for real; the audience desperately wants to be transported and the ensemble wants to be elevated and take their music to another level — it's very, very different. I find that I crave it and one of the challenges for me, this summer, was to try to create that even in a recording situation.

**DAN:** It's true. I mean, the immediate connection of a live show is, in the end, live. That's always going to be there and it's what makes me identify as a musician. It's an incredible moment of connection.

**BYFI:** Has your Jewish identity intersected with your identity as a musician?

**AVLANA:** Judaism and music are the two parts of my life that are inextricably connected to my family. Growing up, almost every week my mother would chant the Haftarah and she would palpably transport the congregation and that showed me music's capacity to engage people spiritually. I have done work

as a cantorial soloist and my goal always is to empower the congregation and use music to move people between emotional planes.

**DAN:** I definitely relate to that. In fact, you just brought me back to a moment on our Bronfman summer: all of us in a synagogue with the room of people singing—the spiritual impact was huge.

**AVLANA:** I even remember, on our Bronfman trip, that the very first moment I felt like we were becoming a community was when we were taught a niggun at the 92nd Street Y. Had it been a Hebrew song, some people might have been familiar with it or comfortable with it, some might not have, but this was just a melody and it brought us together. Having experienced this phenomenon both within a religious context and a musical performative one, I truly believe in the capacity of music to transport and unite.

#### DANIEL EDINBERG

*Daniel Edinberg '97 has been pursuing music his whole life. A new project he co-founded, The Stepkids, just signed to Stones Throw Records and is now in the middle of a world tour all over North America, Europe, Japan, and Australia. In his spare time he*

*scores movies and TV commercials, teaches music, and cooks empanadas with Empanadas jdpm!, a company he co-founded with his girlfriend Clara. He lives in Brooklyn, NY.*

#### AVLANA EISENBERG

*A Fulbright Fellow and winner of Glamour Magazine's Top Ten College Women, Avlana Eisenberg began conducting while an undergraduate at Yale University, where she founded and directed the Silliman Symphony, a 60-member chamber orchestra, and was awarded Yale's V. Browne Irish Award for Excellence in the Performing Arts. Avlana holds a Master's Degree in Orchestral Conducting from the University of Michigan, a Graduate Performance Diploma from the Peabody Institute, and a J.D. from Stanford Law School. She currently serves on the teaching faculty of Harvard Law School as a Climenko Fellow and Lecturer on Law. Avlana is also active as a guest conductor, most recently performing with the Lancaster Festival Orchestra and recording a debut CD with the Budapest Symphony Orchestra. ■*



*The Stepkids*



## SARAH MARCUS, poetry

### When you can no longer dwell in the solitude of your heart.

The lake, white and milky in the afternoon sun, the other side deceptively close, he thinks he remembers that tree from before.

He is concerned about the way she looks at him or doesn't look at him. The way she's grown quiet when making love—always out riding

horses and never at home. She wonders why they've hiked all these miles to have the same conversation that they've had at their kitchen

table hundreds of times before. He attempts to have a different conversation, only he uses the same words. She wishes he would leave—

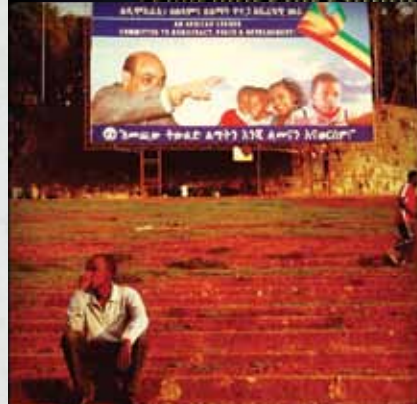
wishes she could give these last few years back to him. Instead, they make love because this is how he convinces himself she still

loves him. This is how they become whole again. He resents her motionlessness as the sun sets beneath the tree line.

She follows him to these places because she owes him this much, because this is the closest to forgiveness that they get. ■



*Sarah Marcus (Fellow '02) is currently pursuing her MFA in poetry at George Mason University, where she is also an English faculty member, a staff blogger and reader for So to Speak: a feminist journal of language & art, and a staff member and reviewer for Phoebe: A Journal of Literature & Art. She was named a finalist for the Iron Horse Literary Review 2011 Single-Author Competition in Poetry, and a top 25 finalist in Glimmer Train's November 2010 Short Story Award for New Writers competition. Originally from Cleveland, OH, she most recently resides and writes in Fairfax, VA.*



"This photo was taken in Ethiopia, in the Debra Lybons monastery, about two hours drive from Addis Ababa. In this photo are a mother and her son photographed under the photo of the monastery founder, Takhela Haimanothe, who was a very important figure in the ancient and unique Christianity of Ethiopia. An amazing connection exists between Judaism and Christianity in Ethiopia; several Christian customs are evidence of that link: circumcision, refraining from eating pork, and keeping Shabbat."



## ROE HASSON, photography



*Roe Hasson (Amit '00) lives in Jerusalem, where he is studying Anthropology and African Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He currently works in the Israeli Foreign Ministry.*

*"In the context of my work, I have had the chance to travel to many African countries. I fell in love with this continent and its people, which has led to my current intellectual interest and studies."*



# Amplifying Impact

## The BYFI Alumni Venture Fund

*Profiles by Rachel Cohen (Fellow '05)*

The BYFI Alumni Venture Fund enables alumni of the Bronfman Youth Fellowships to support their peers' cutting-edge initiatives with funding and technical assistance. Since launching our fundraising campaign in 2005, donations from alumni and their families have enabled us to award **\$152,815** in grants to **96** innovative alumni-led projects that are helping to shape the Jewish community and the wider world.

Alumni Venture Fund highlights from 2011:

- We were recognized for the second year in a row by Slingshot, A Resource Guide to Jewish Innovation, as one of the 50 most innovative programs in the North American Jewish community today.
- BYFI community voted to give the first ever Alumni Choice Award to Keshet: Mobilizing Youth for Equality (Idit Klein, Fellow '89) for best reflecting the mission of BYFI.
- We had 24 applications for grants this year, 7 of which came from Amitim.

All members of the BYFI community are eligible to apply. Grants support projects that seek to promote BYFI's core values of Jewish learning, pluralism, engagement with Israel, social responsibility or a combination of the above.



*Limor Alon (Amitah '04)*

### Adva

Limor Alon (Amitah '04) found herself needing a creative and social outlet in her first year studying cognitive sciences at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheva. After talking with Matan Barak, Director of Amitei Bronfman, she decided to create a mini-Bronfman program for teens in Beersheva who do not have access to youth movements or leadership training. The reality of certain neighborhoods immediately surrounding the university is disheartening; Shikun Dalet teems with prostitutes and drugs, giving it a reputation as the worst neighborhood in all of Israel. Limor says it was very clear what she wanted to do: "take a model we love — Bronfman — and replicate it locally." The initial goals were two-fold: to provide a platform for underprivileged teens to learn and build relationships as well as to recruit Amitim alumni to serve as mentors and keep them connected to the Bronfman community. Since then, this ambitious initiative has already started to live up to its name, Adva (ripple), by empowering youth from the first year to "pay it forward" and create programming of their own.

BYFI and the AVF pledged support from the beginning and Limor says, "the grant was

amazing and allowed me to dream big. This program belongs completely to Bronfman—it's the result of BYFI's investment in me." But finding the right partners in Beersheva was incredibly challenging and Limor recalls knocking on dozens of doors, literally and figuratively, and being rejected time and again. "At the very beginning of the program," Limor remembers, "there were times when I was close to shutting it down...getting the university to cooperate was difficult and making compromises was hard." Yet individuals were consistently helpful and generous with their time and resources and then the municipality of Beersheva joined the team. Now, Adva has gained a reputation for itself: "the mayor is asking about the project and the deputy mayor has met with participants." At this point, Limor is focusing her energy on making Adva sustainable, with deep roots and intimate collaborations in the local community, so that it will continue to flourish when she leaves. Whatever comes next, the lessons of this process will stick with Limor: "You don't have to be a professional educator to change people's lives through education."

*Limor Alon (Amitah '04) is originally from Jerusalem. She participated in the Garin Amit and served in Sayeret Matkal in the IDF. She studies cognitive sciences at Ben Gurion University in Beersheva and is aspiring towards a second degree in psychology.*

### Fourth Wall Arts Salon

In late summer 2009, Elijah Dornstreich (Fellow '92) found himself in between opportunities and decided to get away for a bit to contemplate his next move. Upon returning to Philadelphia, he approached a friend who is a muralist with the world-renowned City of Philadelphia



Elijah Dornstreich (Fellow '92)

Mural Arts Program about the idea of doing a monthly Arts Salon at his home. There was a gap, Elijah describes: "People just like us - young, educated, aesthetically-attuned city dwellers - were seeking something more in their city's cultural menu and their own social calendar. Something as affordable as a bar but much more engaging." And Fourth Wall Arts Salon was born as an attempt to address the need for both entertainment and community.

Initially, Elijah recalls, they were picturing a great community-building concept for a wide circle of friends and colleagues — but not a full-fledged organization. "But as we incubated

the concept - placing the best underground artists across all genres into the highest level ivory tower institutions in our region - the positive feedback and our own dreams got the better of us. The

founding members began to see the scope of the project's possibilities widen. The monthly Salons became the backbone of an organization which could do social good in more areas, including education. With the help of the AVF, Fourth Wall held a weeklong Creative Writing and Theater summer camp at the Asian Arts Initiative in Philadelphia, and a fall after-school program featuring creative writing and magic at Girard College High School, a school in North Philadelphia for students who come from single-parent households.

Elijah notes, "We couldn't have anticipated that our vision would appeal to so many, but it's a testament to the innovation represented in our model, and the energy we brought to our partnerships and marketing. Those elements are key." And for anyone who wants to know more, Elijah says, "I'm always available to talk to anyone in the community about my experience — or anything else!"

Elijah Dornstreich (Fellow '92) is a business entrepreneur living in Philadelphia. He is the co-founder of Fourth Wall Arts, a non-profit entertainment company, and he is a member of BYFI's Alumni Advisory Board. Elijah is recently engaged, and he and his fiancée Gennifer welcome all Bronfmanim to get in touch if they pass through Philly and would like to be introduced to a cultural experience, city park, or watering hole...or if they need a place to crash. [elijah@dornstreich.com](mailto:elijah@dornstreich.com)

## Jewish Enrichment Center

There's a new face of Jewish education in Chicago: the Jewish Enrichment Center, founded and directed by Rabbi Rebecca Milder (Fellow '91). About two years ago, Rabbi Milder tackled a daunting challenge for Jewish educators nationwide: to provide high quality Jewish after school care with an educational approach that includes children from many different Jewish backgrounds—congregational members, unaffiliated students, and day school students. Since then, community collaboration and financial support as well as a grant from the AVF have turned parking lot conversations into a full-fledged educational institution.

The educational model is hands-on and engages children with an evolving Judaism. "Children explore Jewish values, culture,



Rabbi Rebecca Milder (Fellow '91)

and history through art, construction, drama, baking, science, and more, while playing with friends and hearing Hebrew as a living language," explains Rabbi Milder. So what does a typical day look like? "On one day during the theme of Sukkot, K — 1st graders were drawn to pictures of themselves in action from the previous week, when they had "wandered" bamidbar (in the desert/wilderness). The children told stories about their experience bamidbar, consolidating their understanding of Leviticus 23:42, 43."

Rabbi Milder developed a curriculum that focuses on four Jewish themes per year, examined through five lenses: biblical, rabbinic, historical, cultural, and personal. Staff learning is a vital part of the educational model: "Each day at the Enrichment Center includes paid professional development and collaboration time for the staff. The team studies biblical and rabbinic texts and works together to translate core ideas into language and experiences that could serve as the foundation for children's exploration."

One of the most rewarding elements of the project has involved bringing the local Jewish community together in support of a common goal. People have donated time and skills including painting walls, reading legal documents, offering educational insight, building a website, recruiting families, and more. A local synagogue generously donates space. "I've stayed focused on the idea that we are building a place of Jewish enrichment: that the Jewish Enrichment Center is one piece of families' Jewish lives, and only by institutions working together can we provide children with the knowledge and experiences necessary for lifelong Jewish engagement."



Rabbi Rebecca Milder (Fellow '91) is a Jewish educator whose work has included rebuilding synagogue schools, creating and leading family education initiatives, and running around the woods with kids as a Jewish environmental and experiential educator. Rebecca's most recent work was at the Community Foundation for Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago, fostering collaboration among Jewish day schools, and of course, the Jewish Enrichment Center.

## Keshet: Mobilizing Youth for Equality

In 2001, Idit Klein (Fellow '89) founded Keshet, an organization to advocate for the full inclusion of LGBT individuals in Jewish life and communities. Since then, Keshet has turned into a nationally-recognized powerhouse for its organizing efforts and vast network of resources and activities. Most recently, Keshet collaborated with BBYO to create a national campaign against homophobic



bullying in Jewish youth groups, Mobilizing Jewish Youth for Equality. As Joanna Ware, the lead organizer, notes, "For many teens, their involvement in a youth movement is a fundamental piece of the formation of their Jewish identity and connection to Jewish community, and often forms the base for a lifelong engagement in Jewish life. But for many LGBT teens, these communities that offer challenging, enriching, meaningful, celebratory Jewish experiences to their straight



Idit Klein (Fellow '89)

peers can be incredibly isolating and lonely." Moreover, when LGBT teens first find support and inclusion within their Jewish community, it sends an incredibly powerful message.

The biggest challenge, according to Joanna, is convincing community members that LGBT inclusion is still an issue within liberal Judaism. While the institutions of liberal Judaism have passed several laudable resolutions, "inclusion work must also translate to community cultural norms and behaviors in order for spaces to feel safe for LGBT teens. A region that passes a resolution in support of gay marriage but does not respond to homophobic bullying when and where it occurs remains unsafe for LGBT teens."



Keshet approached the challenge of changing cultural norms and behaviors in

these youth movements by primarily working with the staff. Impacting the lives of LGBT youth is the top priority of the campaign, but the model is one of empowerment and building communities which can sustain the transformative efforts. For instance, as Joanna explains, "Working with youth professionals and educators has a far wider reach than if we were to sit down with 45 teens for an hour and a half. The youth professionals who support, mentor, guide, and work with teen leaders have an incredibly capacity to impact the lives

of those teens, and so our goal is to equip them with the skills, tools, and knowledge to work in collaboration with their teens."

Happily, the response so far has been overwhelmingly positive. NFTY professionals who participated in a training for the Mid-Atlantic Region said it was necessary, valuable, and welcome. Keshet has found that Jewish communal professionals with whom they work want to support the teens in their lives; they simply need the resources — exactly the niche Keshet fills with this campaign.

*Idit Klein (Fellow '89) is the Executive Director of Keshet, an organization that works to ensure that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Jews are included in all parts of the Jewish community. Since 2001, she has built Keshet into a nine person, over \$850k organization with national reach. Prior to Keshet, Idit was an activist in the queer women's community in Israel and played a role in early organizing around the creation of the Jerusalem Open House. Idit was among eight recipients of the 2003-2005 Joshua Venture Fellowship for young Jewish social entrepreneurs. She is a past fellow and current board member of the Jewish Organizing Initiative and was honored by the Jewish Women's Archive with a Women Who Dared award.*

## Hot Summer for Ethiopian New Immigrant Children

Eitan Siani (Amit '09) spent three years of high school volunteering in an absorption center that has year-round programming to help Ethiopian youth and their communities to adjust to their new lives in Israel. Eitan helped with weekly programs and also spent every other Shabbat in the absorption center, giving him the opportunity to become close with the community and gain insight into the unique challenges of Ethiopian immigration. Over the course of those years, Eitan identified two key issues that prevent new Ethiopian immigrants who make aliyah from smoothly integrating into Israeli society: first, the tremendous pressure to adjust to Israeli society and resultant family tension, and second, the difficulties that young Ethiopians face in negotiating their two identities. Last year, he took on the responsibility of directing the two-week summer camp, A Hot Summer for Ethiopian New Immigrant Children, the culmination of the yearly activities for 250 youth. In addition to providing structured, educational supervision, Eitan reports, "We try to deal with both



Eitan Siani (Amit '09)

the family difficulties and the identity issues through home visits, programing about the importance of family, respect, and mutual understanding, and activities and discussions which address the issue of having an Ethiopian and Israeli identity."

As director of the camp, however, Eitan was concerned with the building of relationships and community among staff as well as campers. For him, "the biggest challenge was to foster meaningful bonds between the counselors (some were new and some had done it before) and the campers." Preparation for the summer included madrichim (counselor) training sessions and visits to the center as well as developing curriculum. With a range of programming that included fun outdoor activities, study sessions, personal conversations with campers, and community building sessions, one of Eitan's goals was to strike a healthy balance for the campers. Coming out of the summer, Eitan feels that the primary lesson for him was the challenge and importance of cooperating and collaborating with others: "People have needs, thoughts and feelings and you have to learn to adapt in order to make their experience fun and worthwhile... I learned most that working with people is the most humbling and meaningful experience."



*Eitan Siani (Amit '09) is in his second year at Yeshivat Yerucham. He is enlisting in the army in August and is from Efrat.*

*Rachel Cohen (Fellow '05) started working with BYFI as madricha during the 2009 and 2010 summers and recently joined the New York City team after graduating from Penn in May 2011. In addition to working with BYFI, she is currently completing pre-med coursework at City College of New York and volunteering at St. Luke's Hospital and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. ■*

RACHEL GLAZER, poetry

**Brightness and Contrast**

September 18, 2011

I cheat memory of its artistic freedom,  
sucking the milliseconds onto a compact flash card,  
compacting a smile flashed under the flint-and-  
steel strike of a laugh into 10 grams of plastic and  
metal and assigning that smile a number, to be my  
prisoner until the nostalgia sets in or I choose to  
exploit that moment of elation as art.

The summer robbed me of my life of crime;  
no shutter speed could keep time with the lavender  
garden sky breathing over Jerusalem's stone or the  
horns of an ibex racing Ayelet up the canyon-side or  
the calm, fierce ideas laid in the grass for the  
ants to explore.

The box around my neck was too timid to close  
in on the boxes you thought outside of.  
My eyes were too seeing to look, and my pen  
soon ran out of ink as the last of it faded into  
the back of my hand.

And now even the words fail me.  
And I only hope my atrophied memory,  
so long dependent on pixels and pens,  
can burn the images into my grey matter.

Nothing's black and white anymore. ■



Rachel Glazer (Fellow '11)  
is a high school senior from  
Northeast Georgia who  
writes pictures and takes  
poems in the Meantime.



# Bringing Bronfman Home

# Ma'aseh Action Projects

by Rachel Cohen (Fellow '05)



Hannah Acheson-Field (Fellow '10)

"Over the summer," Hannah explains, "I thought a great deal about the Arab/Israeli conflict, thought about what peace would look like, and how it could be achieved. Personal narratives feel so far from politics, and I wanted to expose American children to the reality of the Middle East through teaching about children in these places." For her project, she presented at local Connecticut middle schools, using a curriculum she developed featuring clips from the documentary *Promises* followed by a discussion of her experiences living in the Middle East.

## Teaching the Middle East

After spending the fall semester of junior year in Jordan and the summer before senior year in Israel with BYFI, Hannah Acheson-Field (Fellow '10) realized that she wanted to synthesize those experiences for her Ma'aseh project. The simultaneous distance and proximity of the two cultures and experiences was remarkable; while driving near Jericho over the summer, she remembers realizing that her Jordanian host family's vacation home was not more than a couple of miles away.

There were hard choices to make; it was difficult to pick what felt most important. "I quickly learned that I could not say everything," she recalls, "and I have tremendous respect for my teachers who consistently create lessons which are so clear and coherent. One of the hardest things for me was balancing information and relating my personal experience and activities. I tried to have a few specific goals that I would meet in my presentation but it was often hard to feel like I expressed myself as well as I wanted to." Ultimately, however, the positive reactions from local students were more than

enough to count the project as a success: "My favorite part was having students thank me after my presentations and tell me how much they enjoyed them." By sharing the stories of students in the Middle East and her own experiences, Hannah brought new perspectives to students thousands of miles away.

*Hannah Acheson-Field (Fellow '10) is a freshman at Brown University originally from Maine. She is considering studying Chemical Engineering or Computer Science and is a member of Engineers without Borders and a refugee tutoring program.*



*Rafi Bildner (Fellow '10)*

## "Building Community Sustainably"

At the end of his BYFI summer, Rafi Bildner (Fellow '10) knew how he was going to translate the core values of BYFI to his home community: by starting a food sustainability initiative. Having spent part of his junior year at the Mountain School in Vermont, Rafi was already excited about implementing a sustainability project at his school. So when he learned about the Ma'aseh project, he felt it would be the perfect way to frame this idea; after all, as he says, "On Bronfman, I realized the true power of a vibrant, strong, diverse, and engaged community—and that is what food systems should be about. The local food movement is about using food systems and local communities to strengthen each other."

Rafi's project centered on his school's newly renovated greenhouse, which he wanted to use for small scale food production, but more importantly, as an instructive model of sustainability. Along with a group of other students committed to transforming the greenhouse into an educational space, Rafi spent most of the spring planting vegetables and herbs and giving presentations. The group put together a report for the school

administration detailing how the greenhouse should continue to be used in the future. The group hopes that the school will "make a commitment to food sustainability and its environmental footprint."

*Rafi Bildner (Fellow '10) is currently studying French cuisine and pastry at Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Arts Institute in Ottawa, Canada. After culinary school, he will be working full-time for the Barack Obama 2012 presidential campaign, before entering Yale University in the fall of 2012.*



*Sara Jacobs (Fellow '10)*

## "Cross-Country Chevruta"

Sara Jacobs (Fellow '10), from Newton, MA, decided her Ma'aseh initiative would aim "to create the experience of pluralistic dialogue on an individual basis for the participants." Across the country, in Berkeley, CA, Marnina Wirtschafter (Fellow '10) was inspired by Sara's idea and they decided to collaborate. Sara comes from a traditionally observant family and attended a Modern Orthodox high school, while Marnina is active in her Renewal synagogue and Reconstructionist chavurah and attended public high school. Their collaboration positioned the project to bring together a diverse group of individuals for conversation, and "Bite-Sized Torah" was born: a series of weekly parsha discussions via phone and Skype.

Initially, Sara and Marnina set up several chevruta learning pairs and gave them some starting questions for discussion. Soon, they evolved the project to have maximum impact. They realized that facilitated conference calls would give the participants a more concrete basis for conversation. The topics they covered included a discussion of Shabbat, Shmita, and Yovel in relation to the idea and meaning of

completion, the role of punishment in the learning process, and the final call focused on the meaning of identity and smaller communities within larger societies in the context of the census. Although the unfamiliar format of the conference call, participants' busy schedules, and the time difference introduced some challenges, the discussions that came out of the three phone calls reaffirmed the importance of engaging disparate communities and individuals in Jewish dialogue for both Marnina and Sara. As one participant



*Marnina Wirtschafter (Fellow '10)*

reflected, "our parsha sessions are reassuring for me as a student about to head out into a college with barely any Jewish community. I know now that I will be able to find Jewish learning no matter where I go or who I'm with."

*Sara Jacobs (Fellow '10) is from Newton, MA, and attended Maimonides High School. She is currently spending a gap year in Jerusalem, volunteering and studying at Nishmat. Next year she will be a freshman at Princeton University.*

*Marnina Wirtschafter (Fellow '10) is in her first year at UCLA, pursuing a Theater Minor and considering Sociology and Women's Studies Majors. She grew up in Berkeley, CA, where she attended a non-denominational Jewish Day School and later participated in the pluralistic Midrasha program to maintain her connection to the Jewish community while at a public high school. Marnina has performed with an all-female cappella group and in a production of Spring Awakening on UCLA's campus, and looks forward to becoming more involved in the Hillel and social activism scenes. ■*

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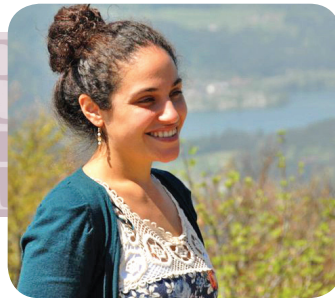
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**See you there!**  
**October 20-21, 2012, NYC**

Please contact Naamah Paley ([naamah@byfi.org](mailto:naamah@byfi.org)) if you want to help us create a memorable weekend experience. You do not need to be based in New York to contribute your talents and energy!

**25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Weekend**