Year in Review
2020–2021
It was a great honor and deeply humbling to succeed Dean David Berger in July 2020 and take the reins as the Dean of the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies.

When I signed on to do so in late February 2020, I was not expecting to spend much of my first year sat in a home office becoming an amateur epidemiologist. Yet, despite the challenges this presented, thanks to Revel's indefatigable faculty, staff, and students, we continued to progress on all fronts.

Necessity, it is often said, is the mother of invention, and the enforced move to remote platforms that we all experienced this year enabled Revel to engage new audiences both nationally and internationally. This past academic year, our student numbers increased by almost 40%, our internationally renowned faculty continued to produce outstanding scholarship, and we were able to put on events that reached audiences the size of which Revel has never seen before.

This “Year in Review” newsletter highlights some of the best of this past year for you, emphasizing Revel's continued commitment to superior academic achievement and communal engagement.

As we move into the academic year 2021–22, we hope to be able to share more exciting developments with you as Revel continues to build for the future.

With all best wishes,

Daniel Rynhold, PhD
Dean, Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies
It is my pleasure to share some highlights of a very successful academic year at the BRGS PhD program. Despite the hardships that Covid created, our PhD students enjoyed an intellectually stimulating year with significant accomplishments. In the opening event of the fall 2020 semester, advanced PhD students presented summaries of their dissertation research to their peers. Over the course of the academic year, we had a number of Zoom gatherings where PhD students interacted with leading scholars in a range of fields, including Dr. Susan Weissman, Dr. Jordan Finken, Dr. Cedric Cohen Skalli, and Dr. Lawrence Schiffman.

I am honored to recount the accomplishments of our students. Several articles published by our students are listed later in this publication. BRGS is especially proud of our two most recent PhD graduates who both successfully defended their first-rate dissertations. Dr. Asher Oser's dissertation, "When an American Jew Produced: Judah David Eisenstein and the First Hebrew Encyclopedia," tells the story of the publication of the first modern Hebrew encyclopedia, Œzar Yisrael, by Judah David Eisenstein, an amateur scholar and entrepreneurial immigrant to New York City. Dr. Jeong Mun. Heo’s dissertation, “Images of Torah From the Second Temple Period Through the Middle Ages,” tracks the ramifications of the development of conceptions of Torah across a long historical period. We wish Drs. Oser and Heo great success in their future academic endeavors. We are looking forward to building on this year’s successes in the year to come.

Jonathan V. Dauber, PhD
Associate Professor of Jewish Mysticism
Director of the PhD Program
**Events**

**JULY 3, 2020**

*How Will We Remember Covid? A View from the Archives*
Presented by Shulamith Berger and Prof. Steven Fine
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**FEB 10, 2021**

*On the Margins of Medieval Jewish Society in Halakhah and History: the Ger Toshav and the Apostate*
Presented by President Ari Berman and Prof. Ephraim Kanarfogel celebrating the publication of Prof. Kanarfogel’s new book, *Brothers from Afar: Rabbinic Approaches to Apostasy and Reversion in Medieval Europe*
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**FEB 16, 2021**

*Shabbetai Zvi and the Most Successful Messianic Movement in Jewish History after the First Century*
Presented by Prof. David Berger
Sponsored by a Revel supporter and hosted by Young Israel of Great Neck
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**MARCH 17 2021**

*Crisis and Hope: Ambassador Dan Shapiro and Rabbi Yosef Blau in Conversation*
Presented by Prof. Jess Olson
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**APRIL 20 2021**

*Book Launch Contextualizing Jewish Temples*
Presented by Prof. Shalom Holtz in celebration of the publication of his new book, *Contextualizing Jewish Temples*
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READ MORE #2

**APRIL 27, 2021**

*Antisemitism, White Nationalism and Racism in America Today*
Presented by Eric Ward and Prof. Jess Olson
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**MAY 5, 2021**

*Magefah: Pandemics throughout Jewish History*
Presented by Prof Richard Hidary, Prof. Ronnie Perelis, and Prof. Jess Olson
Sponsored by a Revel supporter and hosted by DAT Minyan
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**Chinese-Jewish Conversation**

The Chinese-Jewish Conversation held its last in-person event on March 3, 2020 on Biblical and Chinese Ecological Values. The next day, YU shut down due to Covid. During the academic year 2021/22, the CJC migrated to an online platform, both in English and Chinese. The newly designed CJC website includes a rich video library that presents aspects of the Chinese and Jewish traditions comparatively. The newly created CJC Chinese blog presents essays on Jewish beliefs and customs, festivals, ancient and modern history, and world-famous personalities. Through the CJC WeChat account, the blog is publicized widely on Chinese social media, answering questions that many Chinese people have about Jews, Judaism, and Jewish culture and history.

*Names in Hebrew and Chinese from a Kaifeng Jewish prayer book. Courtesy of the Klau Library in Cincinnati.*
Publications

DAVID BERGER

MORDECHAI Z. COHEN

STEVEN FINE

NAOMI GRUNHAUS

JEFFREY S. GUROCK
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RICHARD HIDARY
READ MORE
**SHALOM HOLTZ**


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**AARON KOLLER**


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**ARI MERMELESTEIN**

**BOOK** Power and Emotion in Ancient Judaism: Community and Identity in Formation, Cambridge University Press.

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**DANIEL RYNIHOLD**


**Of Note**

Prof. Joshua Karlip was awarded a generous book grant from SEFER, an institute of Jewish history in Moscow, for research on his book project, Rabbis in the Land of Atheism: The Struggle to Save Judaism in the Soviet Union.

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Prof. Ronnie Perelis hosted a conference, Translating Americas, sponsored by the American Academy for Jewish Research.

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Rabbi Tzvi Sinensky, a PhD student, wrote an article in the forthcoming edition of Tradition.

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Rabbi Yaakov Taubes, a PhD student, published an article, “A Fresh Approach to Nahmanides and Aggadah at Barcelona” In: Jewish Quarterly Review 110 (2010), 769-701.

Binyamin Goldstein, a PhD student, published an article, “Encountering the Grotesque.” In: (Anna Krauß, Jonas Leipziger and Friederike Schücking-Jungblut, eds.) Material Aspects of Reading in Ancient and Medieval Cultures (pp 233-250). De Gruyter.

Miriam Zami, a PhD student published an article, “Yefet, Shem, and the New Dead Sea Scrolls” in the Tradition journal.

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Of Note

Dean Prof. Daniel Rynhold participated in this podcast: The Philosophical Legacy of Jonathan Sacks and a panel discussion with the London School of Jewish Studies on The Life Changing Ideas of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Z”l.

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READ MORE #2

Recent Revel PhD graduate, Rabbi Dr. Yosie Levine, wrote this important article about Covid vaccines.

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**RECENT GRADUATES**

Jeong Mun Heo recently completed his PhD. His dissertation is titled, “Images of Torah from the Second Temple Period Through the Middle Ages”. He also holds a B.c in Mathematics and Computer Sciences from Kosin University and a MDiv from Korea Theological Seminary in his native South Korea, and a MA in Jewish Education from the Hebrew University Jerusalem, as well as a ThM in Biblical Studies from Boston College. He hopes to continue research in the area of phenomenology of religion, and the philosophical and theological discourse between Judaism and Christianity. He would like to establish an academic center for Jewish Studies and Jewish-Christian Dialogue in South Korea, which would contribute to not only promoting a mutual and positive understanding of their ancient roots that preserve academic, religious, and cultural Jewish-Christian heritages but also broadening the understanding of the interreligious dialogues between Jewish-Christian faiths, as well as other religious faiths.

“Looking back at great memories of my time at YU, I can say that it was the most fortunate, blessed, and rewarding experience in my academic life.”

“I was particularly privileged to have had the opportunity to meet and learn from Revel’s faculty. I enjoyed the classes which were taught by the excellent professors who have contributed to my experience and intellectual development—enriching and empowering my knowledge and understanding of a broad range of academic areas...[O]ne of the major highlights of my experience during the first year at YU—how, in an individual tutorial with my supervisor, Dr. Jonathan V. Dauber, I enjoyed reading the Hebrew original texts of the Nefesh HaChaim, written by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, who discusses the idea of Torah lishmah, Torah for Torah’s Sake.”

“My experiences and studies at YU provided me with immense joy of learning. I was empowered by the spirit of integrating faith and scholarship...”
**Asher Oser** recently completed his PhD. His dissertation is titled “When an American Jew Produced: Judah David Eisenstein and the First Hebrew Encyclopedia,” and tells the story of the publication of first modern Hebrew encyclopedia, *Ozar Yisrael*, by Judah David Eisenstein, an amateur scholar and entrepreneurial immigrant to New York City.

**Aron White** is originally from the UK, and has a BSc in Politics and International Relations from the University of London. After studying at Yeshivat Hakotel, he began his Semikha studies at RIETS Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, which he completed in 2020. During his Semikha studies, he also earned a certificate in Mental Health Counselling through the RIETS/Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology, as well as an MA in Jewish History through the Bernard Revel Graduate School. Aron made Aliya with his family in October 2020, and now works as the Torah Projects Coordinator for Mizrachi USA/RZA.

“I feel that my time in Revel has made me a better Jew, and enabled me to be a better Rabbi and teacher. Through the range of courses I was enabled to study, all taught by genuinely world leading professors, I felt I both deepened and broadened my understanding of Jewish history, heritage and learning. By combining the best of academic scholarship with an institution that celebrates a commitment to Jewish life, Revel has given me something invaluable that I will take with me for the rest of my life.”

**Denise Zami** currently teaches Tanakh to 9th and 11th grades at SAR High School in Riverdale. She just completed her MA in Bible Studies at Revel. Denise also received her BA in Jewish Education from Stern College for Women Yeshiva University, where she was a Legacy Heritage Scholar. Denise previously taught Jewish Studies at Gann Academy, an innovative pluralistic high school in the Boston area. Denise lives in Manhattan with her husband Jason and new baby girl, Regina.

**Rebecca Zami** completed her MA in Ancient Jewish History. Currently, Rebecca is the Leon Charney Research Associate at the YU Center for Israel Studies working on the upcoming exhibit, Samaritans: A Biblical People. Rebecca has a particular interest in Biblical archaeology and has participated in archaeological excavations in Israel and hopes to pursue a degree in archaeology following her graduation from Revel.

**Mendel Breitstein** holds a BA in English literature from the University of Maryland and an MA in Medieval Jewish history from BRGS. He is a teacher at Yeshivat Bne Akiva Netivot Haim in Pisgat Zeval and also teaches in Israeli colleges. He is pursuing a doctorate in Jewish philosophy.

**Avishag Damari** has a joint BEd in Judaic Studies and Educational technology from Michlala Jerusalem College, and an MA in Leadership and Educational System Management from Bar-Ilan University. After teaching Middle School Judaic Studies and Media Communications for several years in Israel, Avishag came to New York as a Shlicha for the World Zionist Organization whereby she taught Hebrew Language, Israeli Culture, and Zionism, at both Barkai Yeshiva in Brooklyn, and SAR Academy in Riverdale. Avishag received an MA in Jewish philosophy at the Bernard Revel Graduate School, where she is now engaged in PhD studies in the same discipline.

**Roy Feldman** holds a BA in History and Linguistics from Columbia University, an MA in Jewish History from BRGS, and Rabbinic Ordination from RIETS. He is currently Associate Rabbi at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun. Roy is pursuing a doctorate in Jewish History and has a particular interest in American Jewish History.
Elisha Fine is a doctoral student in Jewish History of the modern period at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies of Yeshiva University. Having recently completed his MSW at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, his work focuses on the cultural history of death and dying.

Noam Kornsgold holds a BA in History from Columbia University and a BA in Talmud and Rabbinics from JTS. He also earned a MA in Talmud and Rabbinic and rabbinic ordination from JTS. Noam currently serves as the Director of Education and Programming at Camp Ramah in the Berkshires. He is pursuing a doctorate in medieval Jewish history with a particular interest in the development of halakhah in medieval Ashkenaz.

Annie Nagel holds a BA in Biology from Stern College and a JD from UCLA School of Law. Annie practiced law in Los Angeles for several years and currently teaches Tanach at YULA Girls High School. She is pursuing a doctorate in Bible and has a particular interest in the biblical commentaries of Ramban.

David Selis is the Leon Charney Doctoral Fellow at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies of Yeshiva University, and a research fellow of the YU Center for Israel Studies. His particular interests are the history of the Hebrew book and Modern Jewish cultural history.