



INSIDE ULPANAT OROT

2026-2027 • 5787



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Ulpanat Orot is to inculcate within our students an appreciation for and a commitment to Torah observance and values. Ulpanat Orot, founded in 1975, was established in Toronto with several specific goals in mind:

- To create an environment where religiously committed Jewish girls will be able to grow intellectually, socially, emotionally, and religiously in a vibrant Jewish setting.
- To offer a dual curriculum of Judaic and General Studies that will arm our students with the methodological tools needed to become self-reliant in classical Jewish texts and give them a broad-based secular grounding in the classical world disciplines.
- To deepen and strengthen the centrality of Eretz Yisrael and Medinat Yisrael as a fundamental element of our Torah beliefs and, to this end, to stress the importance of lashon hakodesh as a manner of achieving these goals.
- To encourage and fervently support the notion of our students continuing their Judaic studies at seminaries in Eretz Yisrael and in other institutions of higher Jewish learning.



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SCHOOL HISTORY

For five decades, Bnei Akiva Schools has been developing outstanding Bnei and Bnot Torah who are immersed in *Ahavat Yisrael*, *Derech Eretz*, and social responsibility towards the Jewish and secular communities in Canada and around the world.

Whether Yeshivat Or Chaim or Ulpanat Orot, the schools are places where boys and girls can grow intellectually, emotionally and religiously in a vibrant Jewish setting. In keeping with the maxim of the worldwide Bnei Akiva organization, *Am Yisrael b'Eretz Yisrael al pi Torat Yisrael* (the Nation of Israel living in the Land of Israel according to the Torah of Israel), Zionism is an integral part of the school's philosophy and is deeply rooted in the curriculum.

Back in the early 1970s, all this was just a dream. At the time, parents in Toronto's Religious Zionist community had just two options for their children entering high school: a co-ed Jewish high school comprised of students from varying backgrounds and levels of religious observance, or a traditional dormitory-style yeshiva for boys with Judaic studies taught in English.

Among those parents were Saul and Mira ז"ל Koschitzky. With Saul's eldest son about to graduate elementary school, he discussed the idea of starting a high school based on Bnei Akiva principles with his neighbour Phil Schwartz, Nachman "Mr. Mizrahi" Sokol ז"ל and Aron Frankel ז"ל.

The old Torah V'Avodah building on Vaughan Road became the first home for the school. The founders hired Rabbi Yehuda Felix as Rosh Yeshiva and Dr. Sol Burack as Principal of General Studies.

"Our goal was not to create rabbis, but *baalei batim* who go to university, who stand on their own feet, and who have responsibility for Klal Yisrael," recalls Saul. "We wanted them to connect to Israel."

The next important step was fundraising. The Orfus family donated \$100,000 in memory of their patriarch Chaim Orfus – hence the name, Or Chaim – and the other founding members jointly matched the donation. Once the school established

itself as a vital institution within the community, important funding came from UJA.

Yeshivat Or Chaim officially opened in September 1973 with 29 students in Grades 10, 11 and 12. Two years later, the boys and their teachers headed north to the school's current location on Almore Avenue. In 1993, the community celebrated the addition of a new Beit Midrash with a Hachnasat Sefer Torah and the building was renamed the Israel and Golda Koschitzky Torah Centre to honour Saul and Henry's parents. Recent additions include a state-of-the-art gym built in 2006 featuring a regulation-sized basketball court, a new multi-purpose room and a remodelled twenty-first century science lab. In 2017, a new Sephardic Beit Midrash was dedicated. A Fitness Centre was added in 2019.

But what about the girls? Shortly after Yeshivat Or Chaim opened its doors, Phil Schwartz began yearning for a similar version to accommodate his eldest daughter, Adrienne. So did Aron Frankel, whose daughter Esty was also about to enter high school.

"I couldn't envision my sons getting a Religious Zionist education while my daughters would have to go to a high school where secular studies were an afterthought," says Phil. "That's why Aron and I began pushing for a girls' school similar to Or Chaim's model."

Ulpanat Orot opened its doors in September 1974 in a house in Thornhill with 23 girls enrolled in grades 10 and 11. The girls – many of them now parents and grandparents – still laugh about davening in the living room and attending classes in the master bedroom with its sunken bathtub. Two years later, the girls moved to the school's current location on Canyon Avenue. In 1980, a new wing was built, featuring additional classrooms and a gym. Recently, the science lab has been remodelled, as has the Beit Midrash.

As word spread of Toronto's new Religious Zionist high school, parents and students from across Canada and the United States started to take notice of the schools' important role beyond

the Toronto community. Bnei Akiva Schools is a private school, inspected by the Ontario Ministry of Education, and affiliated with UJA Federation's Centre for Jewish Education. Combined enrolment currently stands at over 285 students, including children and even grandchildren of alumni.

After graduating Bnei Akiva Schools, our over 2,500 graduates have continued to thrive. Almost all graduates choose to spend a year or more studying in Israel after high school, with most attending yeshiva or seminary to solidify the Jewish education they received in Toronto. Some of these students enlist in the Israel Defense Forces or volunteer for Sherut Leumi where they devote a year or more of service to *Am Yisrael b'Eretz Yisrael*.

All of our graduates apply to university or college and are accepted into one of their top choices. Graduates are successfully employed as rabbis, teachers, accountants, architects, doctors, entrepreneurs, fitness trainers, journalists, lawyers, nurses, paramedics, real estate agents, social workers, and a



host of other professions. One in four graduates – about 600 students – have made aliyah.

Rabbi Dr. Seth Grauer holds the role of Rosh Yeshiva and Head of School. Rabbi Grauer joined our schools after over a decade as a distinguished educator in New York. He previously served as teacher and Rav at Ramaz Upper School, Assistant Principal at Yeshiva University High School for Girls and Associate Rabbi at the prestigious Fifth Avenue Synagogue.

"Bnei Akiva Schools has a rich tradition of Roshei Yeshiva in whose footsteps I now have the honour of following," says Rabbi Grauer. "The buildings are filled with excellent, hard-working educators who use their unique talents and strengths to excite and enrich their students daily. The rabbanim and Judaic Studies faculty strive to find new ways to encourage positive religious growth towards living lives of learning Torah and observance of mitzvot, with a strong emphasis and unwavering commitment to our founding principles of instilling within our students a love for Religious Zionism."

Rabbi Grauer works with his team of administrators and teachers with a keen focus on professionalism, current educational practices and academic excellence, while simultaneously ensuring that Bnei Akiva Schools maintains its warm and welcoming environment.

Though the founders originally thought small, they are extremely proud of how far the school has come and are delighted that the next generation of parents and students are committed to taking Bnei Akiva Schools from strength to strength.

"The school has achieved everything we dreamed about," says Saul. "Our graduates have remained *dati*, excelled at university, succeeded in their professions, and many have made aliyah. Bnei Akiva Schools has strengthened Modern Orthodoxy in Toronto. Though it wasn't easy getting a new school off the ground 50 years ago, one look at our graduates and there is no doubt that we made the right decision. Henry, Phil and I are so very proud of them, and I know that Aron ז"ל and Nachman ז"ל would feel the same."

ADMINISTRATION



RABBI DR. SETH N. GRAUER
Rosh Yeshiva & Head of School

Rabbi Seth Grauer has been the Rosh Yeshiva and Head of School since 2013. Since joining Bnei Akiva Schools, Rabbi Grauer has overseen increased enrollment, significant building improvements, the creation of a mega endowment, and the growth of our educational offerings and religious programming. He also serves as the Honourary President of Mizrahi Canada. Rabbi Grauer previously served as the Assistant Principal at Yeshiva University High School for Girls (“Central”) in New York and was a leading educator for nine years at Ramaz Upper School in Manhattan. Rabbi Grauer worked with teenagers at various summer camps for eight years, and served for five years as the Associate Rabbi at the Fifth Avenue Synagogue in Manhattan. Rabbi Grauer studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion in Israel for two years, served as their Director of Alumni Affairs for nearly five years, is a member of their Board of Directors and is the current Chair of their Rabbinic Committee. He was honoured as their Alumnus of the Year in 2010. Rabbi Grauer received his B.A. in History (honours) from Yeshiva University, his semicha from Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) of Yeshiva University, and his doctorate in Education from the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration at Yeshiva University. He also earned a J.D. from Fordham Law School and served as editor of the Environmental Law Journal. Rabbi Grauer was a Rabbinic Court Intern at the Beth Din of America and a Legal Intern at the New York State Supreme Court and the New York State Office of the Attorney General. He belongs to the inaugural cohort of Sacks Scholars, a premier Jewish educational and leadership initiative utilizing the teachings of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l to address emerging challenges facing the Jewish world and society as a whole. Rabbi Grauer and his wife Leba have four children: Yonina (‘21), Yosef (‘23), Gila (‘25) and JJ (Grade 4 at Netivot).



MR. JONATHAN PARKER
Principal

Mr. Jonathan Parker was born in Buffalo, New York, and has been teaching in Toronto since 2003, when he began at Yeshivat Or Chaim and Ulpanat Orot as an English teacher. After four years of teaching English at Bnei Akiva Schools, Mr. Parker taught Judaic Studies at Associated Hebrew Schools. Following that, he taught Social Sciences at TanenbaumCHAT and was the Dean of Students, in addition to being Advanced Placement Program coordinator. Mr. Parker returned to Bnei Akiva Schools in 2017. As Principal, in addition to his teaching, he oversees compliance with standards set by the Ontario Ministry of Education, implements the school’s educational vision in alignment with our Mission Statement, and coordinates the professional development and oversight of all faculty. He also coaches the Junior Volleyball team and coordinates the Duke of Edinburgh program. He has undergraduate degrees in English and History from S.U.N.Y. Binghamton, a Master’s Degree in Teaching English from Boston University, and is a graduate of the Senior Educators Program at Hebrew University where he wrote his thesis on Tanakh education. Mr. Parker received his Principal’s Qualification from York University. He recently graduated from the Mandel Teacher Education Institute, with a focus on evaluation and professional development practices. Mr. Parker has presented on the exciting innovations at Bnei Akiva Schools both at MTEI and the Network for Research in Jewish Education (NRJE).



MRS. MIRIAM KLEIN
Assistant Principal

Mrs. Miriam Klein holds a degree in Education and Special Education from the University of Toronto, is an active member of the Ontario College of Teachers, and has over 25 years of experience in education and student support. Mrs. Klein brings knowledge and a commitment to student success in every aspect of school life. Before becoming the Assistant Principal of Ulpana, Mrs. Klein served as the Director of Educational Support for Bnei Akiva Schools, where she pioneered the development of two Learning Hubs in both schools, empowering students through personalized support. Her educational philosophy centers on the belief that every student deserves the opportunity to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. A dedicated community leader, Mrs. Klein has served on numerous committees across the Jewish Community of Toronto. In her current role at Ulpana, she works in close partnership with students, parents, and faculty to foster a school environment that is safe, inclusive, and supportive of all learners.



MRS. HEATHER AARON
Dean

Mrs. Heather Aaron was born in Montreal and moved to Thornhill where she completed her high school education. She went on to study at the University of Toronto, earning a Bachelor of Science in Human Biology with a second major in French Language and Linguistics. Mrs. Aaron later completed a Doctorate of Chiropractic at the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College and practiced for over a decade before transitioning into the field of education. Mrs. Aaron spent ten years teaching with the York Region District School Board, where she held various leadership roles and mentored colleagues. She holds Ontario Principal Qualifications, which she completed through Laurentian University. Mrs. Aaron and her husband, Michael, are proud parents of BAS alumni: Gavriel (‘20), Hannah (‘20), and Sasha (‘23).



RABBI YOSEF KURTZ
Rav Beit Sefer and Director of Israel Guidance

Rabbi Yosef Kurtz is a graduate of Yeshivat Or Chaim and has been teaching at Bnei Akiva Schools since 2015. After graduating from Yeshivat Or Chaim, Rabbi Kurtz studied at Yeshivat Hakotel for two years and completed his degree at York University. While at York, he discovered his passion for Jewish education and began working with NCSY Canada. Previously, Rabbi Kurtz taught Jewish Philosophy, Religious Studies and Jewish Ethics at Torah High. While working for NCSY, he completed an MBA at the Schulich School of Business, specializing in Marketing and Finance. In addition to teaching and managing religious programming, Rabbi Kurtz supervises the school’s JUMP team and oversees Israel Guidance. Rabbi Kurtz lives in Toronto with his wife Stephanie and daughters.

SHLICHIM AND SHLICHOT



MRS. AVIYA EZRA
Judaic Studies

Mrs. Aviya Ezra holds a B.A. in Cognitive Science and Education from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and has completed leadership training at the Straus-Amiel Institute. Mrs. Ezra has led educational programs for diverse audiences and served in national service roles supporting young Jews and the elderly. With experience managing global support teams and nonprofit operations, she combines organizational leadership with a warm, values-driven approach. Mrs. Ezra is passionate about building meaningful connections and inspiring students through curiosity, compassion, and commitment.



RABBI ORI EZRA
Judaic Studies.

Rabbi Ori Ezra holds a BA in Economics and Middle Eastern Studies from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and has completed rabbinic leadership training at the Straus-Amiel Institute. Rabbi Ezra currently works as a Financial Analyst at Amdocs and serves as Youth Manager in Nof Tzion, Jerusalem, where he also leads religious services as a Torah reader and teacher. A strong believer in being active and taking initiative towards strengthening the love of Eretz Yisrael.



MR. SHMAYA HENDEL
Judaic Studies & Technology

Mr. Shmaya Hendel is an experienced educator, engineer, and community leader with a passion for teaching and inspiring others. Holding a B.Sc. in Electrical and Computer Engineering from Ben Gurion University, he has taught STEM subjects in the Israeli Navy and led engineering teams in Israel's top defense industries. Mr. Hendel also brings over 15 years of communal leadership, including youth and adult education, tefillah leadership, and community programming. Fluent in both Hebrew and English, he is known for his end-to-end thinking, interdisciplinary approach, and deep commitment to meaningful Jewish learning and connection.



RABBI ORI IDELS
Judaic Studies, Shaliach

Rabbi Ori Idels, a graduate of the Manhigot Toranit program at Eretz Hemdah, holds Rabbanut Semicha. He has a BEd from Moreshet Ya'akov College, with a focus on teaching Tanach and Toshba. He also holds an MA in Psychology from Bar Ilan University. Rabbi Idels is excited to serve as Rosh Beit Midrash for Mizrahi Canada, in addition to his teaching role at Or Chaim. Rabbi Idels joins us with his wife Talya, and their three children.



MRS. TALIA IDELS
Judaic Studies, Shlichah

Mrs. Talya Idels, a lawyer by training, most recently served as a legal assistant to the Knesset's legal advisor. She joins Mizrahi Canada as Project Manager and is also excited to be teaching at Ulpana. Together with their children—Tzur (7), Naveh (4), and Eden (2), who will all be attending Netivot—the Idels are excited to make Thornhill their home and become part of our warm Toronto community.



RABBI AVIAD PITUCHEY-CHOTAM
Director of Student Activities (YOC)

Rabbi Aviad Pituchey-Chotam is a seasoned Limudei Kodesh educator and experienced Shaliach, currently serving also as Dean of BMZD and returning for his second Shlichut in Toronto. With a strong foundation in Jewish education, Rabbi Pituchey Chotam has held key roles at various institutions including the educational department of Ohr Torah Stone, the Straus-Amiel | Beren Amiel Institute where he trained future Shlichim, and Hebraica Hertzl-Bialik School in Caracas, Venezuela. His expertise in Tanach curriculum development, coupled with a passion for fostering Jewish identity, has been instrumental in his work at Yeshivat Har Etzion and Geshar Educational Center. As a dedicated educator and innovator, Rabbi Pituchey-Chotam has successfully integrated technology and new media into Jewish studies and Ivrit program, and built a strong partnerships with Herzog and Shaanan Colleges to enhance the Young Shlichim program.



MRS. HODAYA PITUCHEY-CHOTAM
Judaic Studies

Mrs. Hodaya Pituchey-Chotam is thrilled to return to Toronto for her second Shlichut at BAS. Combining her passion for education with her talent for interior design and architecture, she brings a unique perspective to the Ulpana. Prior to joining BAS, Mrs. Pituchey Chotam taught Ivrit and Judaic Studies at Hebraica Hertzl-Bialik School in Caracas, Venezuela, and served as a counselor for overseas students at Midreshet Eshel in Jerusalem. She also held a teaching position at Am Yisrael Echad's schools. Her dedication to community service is evident through her Sheirut Leumi at the Halabi Syrian community in New York and her role as Coordinator of the Israeli branch of Bnei Akiva. At BAS, Mrs. Pituchey-Chotam enriches the learning environment through her Ivrit classes and creative hallway displays featuring Torah and current Israeli news.



RABBI AMI YUNGER
Judaic Studies

Rabbi Ami Yunger was born in Montreal and made aliyah after high school. He has a degree in Business and Economics from Bar Ilan University. Rabbi Yunger completed Mizrahi's Shalhevet Shlichut training program, has worked at Moshava Ennismore in recent summers, and has experience in delivering shiurim/informal education for Mizrahi and many other organizations in Israel and Canada. Ami is the COO of Mizrahi Canada, and is happy to be teaching at BAS alongside his role in Mizrahi.



MRS. SAMARA YUNGER
Student Activities Coordinator (UO)

Prior to making aliyah, Mrs. Samara Yunger attended Ulpanat Orot. She studied Special Education and Art at Bar Ilan University. Mrs. Yunger was the Director of Moshava Bair in Toronto, and is entering her fourth year as Assistant Director at Camp Moshava Ennismore. Mrs. Yunger brings her experience in program planning and managing teams to her role at Ulpana.

FACILITIES STAFF



RABBI ARI SITNIK
Information Technology Manager



MR. STEVE HYTEK
Building Maintenance



MS. LOSANA NICKA
Custodian



During my four years at Ulpana I've been privileged to learn from the school's incredible staff. I've forged such amazing relationships inside and outside of the classroom. Each of the staff members exemplifies such empathy, kindness and genuine care for every student.

CHAVI ZIELENIEC ('22)

BUSINESS AND EDUCATIONAL OFFICES



MRS. ESTHER MENDLOWITZ
Manager, Business Administration

Mrs. Esther Mendlowitz has a Bachelor of Science and a Master's of Business Administration. Her previous work experience was in the financial industry in insurance and financial management. Since June 2013, Esther has served as the Manager of Business Administration at Bnei Akiva Schools. In that capacity, she manages the operations of the school, overseeing the business office, general operations, tuition and subsidy matters.



MRS. GEOULA OSIPOV
Controller

Mrs. Geoula Osipov graduated with honours from business schools both in Israel and in Canada. Bringing over twenty years of experience in the accounting field, she joined Bnei Akiva Schools' business office as controller in the spring of 2011. Mrs. Osipov lives in Thornhill with her husband, is the mother of two adult children, and is a proud grandmother of four!



MRS. DIKLA WEITZNER
Director of Admissions

Dikla Weitzner brings extensive experience in informal education, camp leadership, community programming, and event planning, with a strong passion for creating meaningful experiences and building lasting relationships. A proud alumna of Bnei Akiva Schools, Dikla has a deep and personal connection to the Bnei Akiva community; her husband is also an alumnus, and all four of her children have attended Bnei Akiva Schools. Throughout her career, Dikla has loved working with people, supporting families, and creating welcoming environments where individuals feel connected and valued. As Director of Admissions, she is excited to bring her experience and personal connection to the community to help families discover all that Bnei Akiva Schools has to offer.



LUCIANO MALEWICZ
Operations Manager

Luciano Malewicz is the Operations Manager at Bnei Akiva Schools of Toronto, where he coordinates facilities, contractors, and projects to support the school's daily operations. His background includes finance, business management, and information technology, along with practical experience in technical repairs and training in emergency medical services. He enjoys bringing these different skills together to solve problems, manage resources, and support a safe and welcoming school environment. His involvement in Jewish community life includes community security and volunteer service, reflecting his commitment to the safety and well-being of others. Originally from Argentina, Luciano and his family moved to Toronto after seven years in Winnipeg, and he is happy to be part of Bnei Akiva Schools as both a staff member and a parent.



**MRS. SHOSHANA
GOTTFRIED**

Administrative Coordinator



MS. NOMI BARANCIK

Administrative Assistant



MS. JULIE HO

Bookkeeper



MS. MARNI COHEN

*Business Office
Administrator*

DEVELOPMENT OFFICE



RABBI GAVRY MANDEL

Managing Director and Judaic Studies

Rabbi Gavry Mandel studied at Aish HaTorah College of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem for five years. While there, he developed a very close relationship with its founder, Rabbi Noah Weinberg, of blessed memory. Rabbi Mandel has been involved in Jewish education for over ten years, working with a number of organizations. For three years, he served as a campus rabbi for the students of the University of Western Ontario, in London, Ontario. Rabbi Mandel was the Associate Director of NCSY Canada for five years. In that position, he managed a staff of 40, running programs across Canada which reached over 3,000 teens annually. Rabbi Mandel is also the author of the acclaimed *Judaism Unravelled*, published by Feldheim Publishers in 2016. Rabbi Mandel and his wife, Deena (Herman '08), have three children, Yissy, Nava and David.



MS. TAMARA COLODNY

Development Coordinator

Ms. Tamara Colodny Velichover joined the Development Office in 2016. With a keen attention to detail and a passion for coordinating special events, Tamara is excited to support the generous donors of Bnei Akiva Schools. Her role includes managing fundraising events such as the IKO Charity Golf Tournament, as well as processing donations and pledges. Prior to joining Bnei Akiva Schools, Tamara worked in marketing and public relations roles for 13 years. Tamara and her husband, Lior, live in Thornhill and have two children.



MRS. AUBREY FREEDMAN

Director of Special Projects

Mrs. Aubrey Freedman, originally from New Jersey, has built a robust career in marketing and events over the past 15 years. With a background in Fashion Marketing, her professional journey took a meaningful turn toward education and community development after she started her family. Now residing in Toronto with her husband and their four boys, Aubrey is deeply passionate about community work and is dedicated to strengthening the Toronto Jewish community.



MRS. JAIME REICH COHN

Director of Communications

Mrs. Jaime Reich Cohn is a Toronto native with a diverse professional background in the Jewish community, including experience in campus engagement, advocacy, governance, fundraising, event planning, outreach, and community engagement. As Director of Communications, Jaime is excited to help Bnei Akiva Schools of Toronto communicate its mission and impact effectively, strengthen its public profile, and build greater awareness of the exceptional opportunities it provides to students and families.



MS. DALYA ROTHMAN

Executive Assistant to Head of School

Mrs. Dalya Rothman serves as the Executive Assistant to Head of School at Bnei Akiva Schools, bringing a profound dedication and an extensive professional background to the administrative leadership team. As an alumna and a parent of Bnei Akiva Schools graduates, Dalya possesses a comprehensive understanding of the institution's values and a deep personal connection to its communal mission. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in English and has distinguished herself over a twenty-year career in the field of education. Her vast experience and multifaceted perspective ensure the highest level of professional support for the school's operations, fostering a seamless environment for students, faculty, and families alike.



MRS. SOHEILA SABETI

Development Associate

Mrs. Soheila Sabeti is an educational administrator with 25 years of experience in the Jewish Day School system in Toronto. Mrs. Sabeti has held senior positions in Admissions, Marketing, Operations and Educational Management and worked in both Elementary and High School levels. She joined Bnei Akiva Schools as a Development Associate in 2018, working on community outreach projects and publications. Mrs. Sabeti holds a B.Sc. and an M.D. in Family Medicine. She is married with three adult children and two grandchildren.



MRS. ANDREA EDELMAN KAY

Graphic Designer

Mrs. Andrea Edelman Kay grew up in New York City and studied photography at New York University. She went on to work as a photo editor at *Vogue* and *Condé Nast Traveler*, where she developed her eye for visual storytelling and design. She now lives in Toronto with her husband, Dr. Jeffery Kay ('11), and their two children, Julian and Hallie.

JUDAIC STUDIES FACULTY



MS. MIRIAM BESSIN
Judaic Studies, Director of Alumni Affairs

Ms. Miriam Bessin was born and raised in Toronto. After graduating from Ulpana, Miriam spent a year pursuing Judaic Studies in Midreshet HaRova in Jerusalem. She returned to Toronto where she completed her B.A. (Honours) in Religious Studies as well as a B.Ed. in Education at York University. Most recently, she obtained her certificate in Experiential Jewish Education from Yeshiva University. Lovingly referred to as “Prof” by her students, she has been teaching Tanach and Physical Education at Bnei Akiva Schools since 2009.



RABBI AKIVA DANZINGER
Ivrit and Director of Educational Development

Rabbi Akiva Danzinger was raised in both Israel and Toronto. He attended yeshivot in France, Israel, and the United States. He received his rabbinical ordination in Venice, Italy. Rabbi Danzinger has a Masters of Education from Brandeis University and is a Legacy Heritage Teacher Leader Fellow. He has taught a range of Judaic subjects in a number of Toronto Jewish day schools, including The Toronto Heschel School, Associated Hebrew Schools and TanenbaumCHAT. Rabbi Danzinger promotes the advantages of a chevruta-style of learning and is passionate about fostering his students’ higher-order and critical thinking. When not analyzing arcane Jewish legal responsa of contemporary rabbinic sages, Rabbi Danzinger enjoys camping, scuba-diving and horseback riding. He lives in Toronto with his wife and their three children.



MRS. SARA ERLICH
Ivrit

Mrs. Sara Erlich graduated from Telma Yelin School with a degree in Musical Studies, and obtained her bachelor’s degree in Hebrew Literature and Philosophy from Tel Aviv University after completing her military service. Prior to working at Bnei Akiva Schools, Mrs. Erlich taught literature and language to Grades 7–10 in Israel. Mrs. Erlich has been teaching Ivrit at Bnei Akiva Schools since 2006. Over the past few years, Mrs. Erlich has further developed the Ivrit curriculum. Mrs. Erlich has a great passion and devotion for the Hebrew language which she enjoys passing on to her pupils, emphasizing the language to be a fundamental requirement at Bnei Akiva Schools. She has had many students contact her from Israel thanking her for the level of Hebrew mastery that she has been able to instill.



MRS. FAIGY GRUNFELD
Jewish History and Navi

As a high school history teacher and an adult lecturer in Jewish history, Mrs. Faigy Grunfeld has always been intrigued by the narrative of humanity in general and of the Jewish people in particular. With a strong emphasis on primary source material ranging from rabbinic responsa to personal letters and journals to legal documents, she has designed curricula which explore the social history of Ashkenazic Jewry and lectured on the topic for Partners in Torah Detroit. She holds a BA in History from LCW (Manhattan) and is a feature writer for Hamodia, as well as a freelance writer for Jewish Action and The Jewish Press. One of her greatest passions is awakening in her students a curiosity and enthusiasm for the gravity-defying story of Jewish survival through its astonishing, millennia-long saga.



MRS. SHYNDEE KESTENBAUM
Judaic Studies, Arts and Technology

Mrs. Shyndee Kestenbaum has been working in the field of formal and informal Jewish education for the last 15 years. She worked at NCSY and Torah High, as a city director for Toronto NCSY and teacher of Jewish Philosophy, Jewish Ethics, Religious Studies and Israel Advocacy. She also spent many summers as an assistant director of Camp Etz Chaim in Moscow, Russia as well as Director of Jewish Programming in Camp Northland Bnai Brith. Mrs. Kestenbaum manages a graphic and media company and is in middle of completing her MBA in marketing. She lives in Toronto with her five sons.



MRS. SHIRA LIPNER
Judaic Studies

Mrs. Shira Lipner has been involved in Jewish education for the past 20 years. She has taught almost every Limudei Kodesh subject and has created curricula for several courses that are currently being taught in both institutions, as well as coordinating the Yimei Iyun for Tiferes. After graduating from Ulpana, Mrs. Lipner attended Michlelet Orot, and then obtained her BA (Hon.) in Psychology from York University and her MA in Child Study and Education from OISE/UT. She currently serves as the Rebbetzin of Shaarei Tefillah Congregation, where she coordinates and runs the Bat Mitzvah Program, as well as gives guidance and shiurim to women and is a kallah teacher. Notwithstanding her professional experience, her greatest educational challenge continues to take place in her home with her husband and eight beautiful children.



RABBI SHLOMO MANDEL
Judaic Studies

Rabbi Shlomo Mandel joined the Judaic Studies faculty in 2021. In addition to his teaching duties, Rabbi Mandel is Director of NCSY Canada’s Jewish Student Union, overseeing the organization’s public-school programming, having previously served as City Director for NCSY Toronto. Rabbi Mandel also teaches classes for NCSY’s Torah High program and is Rabbi of 147 Elder Street, a local Jewish senior care residence. He completed his undergraduate degree in 2016, graduating summa cum laude from Touro University. Rabbi Mandel received his rabbinic ordination from the Orthodox Union in 2019 and most recently, in March 2021, received his MBA from the Quantic School of Business & Technology.



MRS. SHAYNA SAFRAN (PASKOWITZ)

Judaics

Mrs. Shayna Safran (Paskowitz), originally from Toronto, holds a degree in Jewish Studies from Touro University. Most recently, she worked as an Executive Assistant at The Sephardic Academy of Manhattan. Shayna spent her gap year in Israel at Midreshet Harova and has worked and volunteered with a number of organizations, including NCSY, Mizrahi, and BAS. She is very excited to be working at Ulpana as a proud alum!



I chose to go to Ulpana because of its warm atmosphere. It's a place where the teachers care about you, and it is truly a place where everybody knows your name.

TEMIMA TOVA GERSTL ('18)



GENERAL STUDIES FACULTY



MRS. RACHEL BELZBERG

Mathematics

Mrs. Rachel Belzberg has been teaching Science and Math at Bnei Akiva Schools since 2011. After earning an Honours Bachelors of Science from York University, she went on to complete a Masters of Science in Education. Outside of the classroom, Mrs. Belzberg enjoys cooking and various outdoor activities. Mrs. Belzberg's calm and caring nature combine with her high expectations to help students achieve success in the classroom and after high school.



MS. ALLISON BEULA

Dance and Drama

Ms. Allison Beula holds an Honours B.A.A. in film and is a recipient of the "Norman Jewison Filmmaker" Award. She furthered her training at The Randolph College For The Performing Arts, for whom she currently Directs, Choreographs, and Instructs. She is also on faculty for The Avenue Road Arts School and VIBE Arts. She has lead workshops and classes for dozens of institutions including: Mirvish (Lion King), The Toronto and Catholic School Board, OISE, and The Ontario School of Ballet, to name a few. She trained with Upright Citizens Brigade and Dance Manhattan (NYC), and is a graduate of the Second City Conservatory Program. Ms. Beula is a two-time recipient of an Ontario Arts Council grant for "Artists in Education". Her choreography can be seen in the video "Hypnotized" (Jeffery Straker) which hit the "MMM" Top 10. She also choreographed for "CBC-CBC Days Live" and she continues to direct and choreograph multiple productions across the city every year. She recently made her television series debut as a principal lead, performing "DURP-E" the loveable robot, in Season One of "Oh Yuck!" which debuted this past year in Australia and will be airing in North America imminently.



MRS. MONICA CHOCRON

Science

Mrs. Monica Chocron earned a summa cum laude Licentiate of Education degree from the University Andres Bello (Caracas, Venezuela) with a specialization in Physics and Mathematics. For the first 14 years of her teaching career, Mrs. Chocron taught at the Colegio Moral y Luces Herzl-Bialik in Caracas (where she studied) teaching in the classroom and working as the Physics Department Chair. She received a special recognition for uninterrupted service and a prize for excellent teacher's performance given by Keren Chinuch Caracas. In 2002, she and her family moved to Canada, and she worked for seven years at Associated Hebrew Schools. Since 2009, Mrs. Chocron has been teaching Science, Physics, and Mathematics at both Yeshivat Or Chaim and Ulpamat Orot. Mrs. Chocron oversees the school's participation in the Weizmann Safe Competition, where she has overseen multiple winning teams in the National competition, who have advanced to the International competition in Israel.

**RABBI EZER DIENA***Gemara Department Head and Science Department Head*

A local Torontonian, Rabbi Ezer Diena attended Ner Yisrael Yeshiva for high school, and studied in Israel for two years at Yeshivas Toras Moshe under Rabbi Michel Shurkin, a premier student of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik. Mr. Diena returned to Toronto to study at York University, where he received his B.Sc. (Honours Chemistry) and B.Ed., and obtained OCT certification to teach Math and Science at the high school level. Upon graduation, while teaching part-time at Yeshivat Or Chaim, Mr. Diena joined Beit Midrash Zichron Dov, where he served as an avreich, as well as BAYT, where he served as Rabbinic Assistant. He is married to Thornhill native Chaya (Benmergui), and they have a three children.

**MR. RICH DLIN***Mathematics and Business*

Mr. Rich Dlin is a veteran education who believes that guiding young people along their path is one of the highest honours and greatest responsibilities. This is why he is drawn to education and why he has been so focused on improving the student experience. Mr. Dlin's journey as an educator includes university lecturer, international lecturer, high school teacher and math department head. He has undergraduate and graduate degrees in mathematics from the University of Waterloo and a degree in education from the University of Western Ontario. Mr. Dlin is passionate about the joy of learning and has found that the study of mathematics is a perfect path to discovering that joy.

**MS. ATARA ENGLISH***Social Worker*

Ms. Atara English is an Ulpanat Orot alumna and holds an MSW degree from Wurzweiler School of Social Work. After graduating Ulpana she completed her year in Israel and then attended York University where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities. She has experience working with children and youth in schools and community agencies throughout Toronto. She builds on students' strengths and believes in empowering them to reach their full potential. Atara enjoys meeting with students, creating therapeutic relationships and promoting mental wellness within the school culture!

**MR. NATHAN FOX***Humanities*

Mr. Nathan Fox is a dedicated Business and Social Science educator with extensive instructional experience across Canada, China, and Israel, alongside international community development work in Costa Rica. Holding a Bachelor of Education from Western University and a Bachelor of Environmental Studies from the University of Waterloo, Mr. Fox brings a diverse, cross-cultural perspective to curriculum development and student engagement. Beyond the classroom, Mr. Fox is the founder and host of The Fox Den, an educational podcast exploring business strategy, leadership, and career growth. Passionate about empowering the next generation of learners, he actively integrates real-world business insights, digital media strategy, and collaborative learning into his educational practice.

**MRS. ILANA HEYMANN***Science and Physical Education*

Mrs. Ilana Heymann joined BAS in September, 2020. A graduate of the Concurrent Education program at York University, Ilana holds a B.A. in Sociology and a B.Ed in Intermediate/Senior Education. She has qualifications in French, Social Sciences, Special Education and Junior Education and is an active member of Ontario College of Teachers. Mrs. Heymann is very excited to bring her energy and experiences to the Bnei Akiva Schools family.

**MS. SIMONE LABI***Science*

Ms. Simone Labi-Han (Ms. Labi) has taught in the Toronto District School Board for over 30 years. Most of her years were spent at Newtonbrook S.S. as a curriculum leader in the science department, and she also taught mathematics full-time at Marc Garneau C.I. for 13 years. She has worked at the Ministry of Education in the area of assessment and evaluation, and worked at the board level, writing assessment policy. Ms. Labi was also a digital lead learner for the board, teaching the features of programs and apps. She loves mentoring students, especially in science contests and environmental issues and has run the eco-club and science club for many, many years. Ms. Labi has a degree in Biology and Psychology from York University, as well as her Bachelor's Degree in Education. Her Master's degree in Science curriculum development was from the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Ms. Labi has vast experience teaching all grades at all levels and is thrilled to be teaching at Bnei Akiva Schools.

**DR. SHLOMIT LEVY***Science*

Dr. Shlomit Levy has taught Science at BAS since 2008 and has passionately engaged in science education for the last twenty years. Prior to her move to Toronto, she taught Pathology and Anatomy in the New York/ American Program at the Sackler Faculty of Medicine in Tel Aviv University. Dr. Levy received her B.Sc. with honours from Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Honours M.Sc. and Ph.D. in Anatomy and Pathology from Tel Aviv University, M.B.A. with distinction from Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh, and authored articles in peer reviewed journals. During her postdoctoral studies at Toronto's Mount Sinai Hospital, she was the recipient of the Samuel Lunenfeld Award and The Kidney Foundation Award. Dr. Levy aims to inspire the next generation of scientists by making science exciting, relevant and fun.

**MRS. NAOMI LIDSKY***English and Learning Strategies*

Born and raised in Toronto, Mrs. Naomi Lidsky is an alumna of Ulpana, and studied at York University before earning her Masters of Teaching from OISE at the University of Toronto. For 13 years prior to joining Bnei Akiva Schools, Naomi worked as a special education teacher, as well as a learning support coordinator and advisor. When she is not teaching, she is busy taking care of her amazing and energetic children, and volunteering in the community.

**RABBI LESLIE LIPSON***History*

Rabbi Leslie P. Lipson brings 27 years of formal and informal educational experience to Bnei Akiva Schools. A former Wall Street Foreign Exchange Currency Trader, Rabbi Lipson holds a BA in History from Haverford College, where he also played Division III basketball. He earned an MBA from York University and Masters in Education and Rabbinic Ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. His wife, Adina, is also an educator and has been teaching for 27 years. They are blessed with four grown children, three of whom attended BAS schools. Rabbi Lipson is a student of History and enjoys reading histories and biographies. He is also an avid baseball fan, and appreciates listening to classic Jazz, R&B, Bob Dylan, and Jerry Garcia.

**MRS. ROCHELLE LIPSON***Arts*

Mrs. Rochelle Lipson has been teaching Visual Arts at Bnei Akiva Schools since 2007. She received her Specialized Honours Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from York University. Mrs. Lipson has also taught various courses at Eitz Chaim Schools. She initiated and has continued to organize the BAS Celebration of the Arts since 2009. Mrs. Lipson has also overseen joint creative projects with other schools. She continues to educate herself and works with various art media in order to grow artistically and pass that knowledge and creativity on to her students.

**DR. JANNA NADLER***English*

Dr. Janna Nadler teaches English at Bnei Akiva Schools and is also the Staff Yearbook Advisor. She has a Ph.D. in English from McMaster University and a B.Ed., Honours B.A., and M.A. from York University; all degrees were supported by merit-based scholarships. Before teaching at Bnei Akiva Schools, Dr. Nadler taught Canadian Literature and Children's Literature at McMaster University and the University of Toronto. Dr. Nadler is also a well-known speaker and book reviewer for book club groups throughout the GTA. She is the creator/director of Book Clubs by Janna (www.bookclubsbyjanna.com). Dr. Nadler has three children, Maya, Jordan and Aliza.

**MR. HILLEL RAPP***Humanities*

Mr. Hillel Rapp is a teacher and writer with a background in both education and finance. He teaches a variety of subjects and uses his teaching practice to develop students' self-awareness as learners through a process of mindful learning to mastery. Previously, Mr. Rapp has served in numerous roles as an educational administrator, most recently as Principal of Bnei Akiva Schools from 2016–2025. He writes frequently on Jewish education at JED Notebook, which can be found at hillelrapp.substack.com. In finance, Mr. Rapp managed business development and investor relations, specializing in hedge fund and private equity investments. Mr. Rapp and his wife, Racheli Meister ('01), have three children, Jack, Keira and Aiden.

**MRS. ARLENE RIPSMAN***Mathematics and Coding*

Since 2007 Mrs. Arlene Ripsman has been a member of the faculty at Ulpana and Or Chaim, where she teaches Mathematics and Computer Science. Mrs. Ripsman earned her Honours B.Sc. in Mathematics and Statistics from the University of Toronto. Prior to joining Bnei Akiva Schools, she worked for an actuarial consulting firm for seven years before returning to university to study Computer Science. Mrs. Ripsman received her Honours B.Sc. and M.Sc. in Computer Science from York University. Over the course of her academic career, Mrs. Ripsman had an opportunity to teach at both the University of Toronto and York University. It was through these activities that Mrs. Ripsman discovered her passion for teaching. She brings this passion for teaching to her day-to-day responsibilities at Bnei Akiva Schools.

**MR. AMITAI ROSEN***Learning Strategist*

Mr. Amitai Rosen has been teaching since 2017. He grew up in Philadelphia and graduated from Kohelet Yeshiva High School. Mr. Rosen graduated from Yeshiva University with a B.A. in English, and then completed a Master of Science in Teaching at Fordham University. He has taught a variety of courses including English, History, and Music in the Jewish Day School system. Mr. Rosen and his wife Michali got married in 2024.

**DR. ZAHAVA ROSENBERG-YUNGER***Student Support and Judaics*

Dr. Zahava Rosenberg-Yunger is a seasoned educator and health services researcher with nearly 20 years of experience in both high school and post-secondary education. Currently serving as an Adjunct Professor at Toronto Metropolitan University, Dr. Rosenberg-Yunger has held roles in a variety of sectors, including not-for-profit organizations, industry, and academia. She holds a PhD in Health Policy from the University of Toronto, an MA in Interdisciplinary Studies from York University, and a BSc (Honours) from the University of Toronto. In her teaching practice, Dr. Rosenberg-Yunger is a dedicated learning facilitator who implements diverse strategies to support students in their educational growth and success.

**MS. ESTHER RUTLEDGE***Mathematics*

Ms. Esther Rutledge has been working in the field of formal and informal education for the last 18 years. She taught in various private high schools and in administrative roles with NCSY and Torah High. She has a B.Ed and Masters in Education and has decided to return to the classroom to bring the joy of learning math to students. In her spare time she enjoys spending time with family, reading and going on vacations. She is a mother of four children, three boys and a girl.

**DR. ERIC SALTSMAN***English Department Head and Director of Educational Advancement*

Dr. Eric Saltsman has an Honours Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Studies and Classics from Dalhousie University and a Master of Teaching degree from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at U of T. Mr. Saltsman's approach to education is centred around demonstrating how subject matter can be used in real-world application and he constantly finds ways to appeal to the interests of his students. He believes that the age-old adage, "you learn something new every day" is a remarkable understatement. Since joining in 2016, Dr. Saltsman has enjoyed exploring the nuances of the English language with the bright young minds at Bnei Akiva Schools.

**MS. SARENA SILVER***Mathematics*

Ms. Sarena Silver has been working in education since 2005. She was raised in Ottawa, and before moving to Toronto in 2007, she lived in Montreal and Vancouver, where she received her BSc from McGill University and her BEd from the University of British Columbia. Ms. Silver has been teaching Math and French throughout her teaching career in Vancouver and Toronto. When not at work, she likes spending time with her puppy and enjoying the outdoors.

**MS. LEORA STERLIN***Humanities*

Ms. Leora Sterlin is a trained lawyer who received her law degree from the University of Western Ontario, and her Masters of Law from the London School of Economics. In 2002 she switched careers and went to York University to complete a Bachelors of Education. She taught at Bialik Hebrew Day School for many years, and then in 2012 combined her passion for law and for teaching, and moved to teach Law at TanenbaumCHAT. Ms. Sterlin has been teaching at Bnei Akiva Schools since 2016.

**MS. SARAH ZAHAVI***Art & Technology Department Head*

An Ulpana graduate, Ms. Sarah Zahavi returned to Bnei Akiva Schools in 2022 as a faculty member and now teaches Media Arts, Communication Technology, and English. She also acts as department head of the Art and Technology Department. Ms. Zahavi has a Bachelor of Technology from Toronto Metropolitan University with a concentration in Publishing and a minor in Communication Design. She is currently completing a Professional Master of Education at Queen's University. When not at school, Ms. Zahavi enjoys experimenting with new recipes and exploring hiking trails across the GTA.



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