**New Horizons: Cohort B (5781)**

**Noam Ackerman –** Noam is 25 years old, from Adi in the Jezreel Valley. A graduate of the WIZO Canada School in Nahalal, he completed the pre-military program "Arava," at Moshav Hatzeva, before serving as an officer in the Armored Corps. He sees in-depth study of Jewish sources as an ongoing dialogue between the student and his or her past, as well as an exploration of the dilemmas and questions that arise in relation to our lives in Israel in the year 2020. He will commence his studies with the Ofakim program in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud, and the Department of Jewish History.

**Jodi Weinberg –** Jodi is a psychologist by training, with a B.A. in Psychology and Musicology, and an M.A. in Educational Psychology. She believes that a deep exploration into questions of Jewish identity helps us interpret societal, national and global dynamics that are bound up with Jewish existence in the State of Israel. Similarly, she seeks to acquire valuable psychological tools through studying and confronting questions of identity and belonging. She will commence her studies in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud as a Master's student.

**Eylon Weizmann –** Eylon is 20 years old, from Tel Aviv. He is a graduate of the Thelma Yellin High School of the Arts, where he majored in music and Jewish Thought, and was taught by some of Ofakim’s esteemed graduates, who teach at the school. The IDF awarded Eylon the position of outstanding musician, and he subsequently began to study for his Bachelor's degree in Piano Performance at Tel Aviv University's Buchmann-Mehta School of Music. This year, he decided to switch gears and study Jewish Philosophy. Eylon’s decision stems from his love of knowledge and his admiration for the Ofakim graduates who taught him during high school. He will commence his studies in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud, and the Department of Philosophy.

**Ido Vaknin –** Ido is 28 years old, from Jerusalem, and is a graduate of Jerusalem’s Hartman High School. After graduating the pre-army preparatory program "Ami-Hai" in Carmit, he served as a commander in the Nahal Brigade, and later completed the three-year program at the Nissan Nativ Acting Studio. Ido finds himself in an ongoing conflict centered on questions presented by the Jewish world, and he believes that the best way to bear the burden of this conflict is to share his passion with others. He will commence his studies in the Ofakim program in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and the Department of Literature, with a focus on creative writing.

**Aviad Tortski –** Aged 24, from Jerusalem, Aviad is a graduate of the religious public education system and the pre-army yeshiva at Maaleh Gilboa. He served as a combat soldier in the Nahal Brigade. Aviad approached us after completing one year of study in the Department of Jewish Thought and Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. There he became interested in researching Hasidut, with an emphasis on cognitive internalization as it finds expression in the writings of Professor Ron Margolin (the head of the Ofakim program). He decided to transfer to Tel Aviv University and join the program himself. He will commence his studies in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud and the multidisciplinary humanities program.

**Dana Yitzhak** – Dana is 23 years old, from Tel Aviv, and is a graduate of the Environmental Leadership High School at HaKfar HaYarok, where she focused on cinema and television. She did her army service at Army Radio. She came to the Ofakim program after one semester of study at Tel Aviv University's Department for Cinema and Television. She hopes that the Ofakim program will play a meaningful role in shaping her own Jewish identity, but will also provide her with practical tools to become part of a new generation of educators who are proud to bequeath to their students a vibrant and relevant Jewish culture that is deep and uncompromising. She will commence her studies in the Ofakim program in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud and the Multidisciplinary Program in Humanities.

**Eran Sassa Evron –** Eran is 23 years old, from Jerusalem, and is a graduate of the Alon High School in Ramat HaSharon. He served in the Planning Division of the IDF's External Relations Unit. A graduate of the BINA pre-army program, and a counselor for various programs dealing with Secular Jewish Thought, he is deeply connected to Jewish thought, literature, and the arts. He takes inspiration from the tradition of "And you shall explain to your son" (Exodus 13:8), of passing knowledge from teacher to student, and viewing the teacher as a student himself. He will commence his studies with Ofakim in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud and the Multidisciplinary Program in Humanities.

**Bar Oz –** Bar is 23 years old, from Tel Aviv, and is a graduate of the Manor Kabri School at Kibbutz Kabri. A graduate of the BINA pre-army program, she served in the IDF as a company commander in the Nahal brigade, including time in Beer Sheva and Yad Eliyahu. As the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and a mother who is not halakhically Jewish, Bar is on a journey of self-discovery regarding questions of identity and belonging. Her participation at BINA was the first time she felt that the process she was going through was recognized; this stemmed from in-depth learning and research accompanied by a supportive infrastructure, which gave the students an opportunity to experience a different kind of Judaism, one that allows for sensitivity, searching, asking questions, and raising doubts. She will commence her studies in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud.

**Shai Amir** – Aged 28 from Tel Aviv, Shai is a graduate of the Kiryat Hinuch Shachar Ma'ayan High School at Kibbutz Ein HaHoresh. She completed her national service as an assistant for children with special needs. She has a Bachelor's degree from the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud and the Department of Philosophy at Tel Aviv University.Shai believes that studying Jewish sources and Jewish thought is an anchor in her life and provides her with tools for creating a feeling of security and belonging. Because of this, she wants to continue her studies and pass on her knowledge to others, through teaching in both formal and informal settings. Due to concerns about studying over Zoom, Shai will begin her studies with Ofakim in the second semester of 5781, in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud's Master's program.

**New Horizons Cohort A (5781)**

**Itamar Ohana-Lev –** Aged 24, from Givatayim, Itamar is married to Shoval. He is a permanent officer in the Intelligence Corps. Raised in Ramat Gan, he is a graduate of Bar Ilan University's Art & Science Yeshiva High School (part of the state-religious education system); the Bnei Akiva youth movement; and the Hesder yeshiva Machanaim in Gush Etzion. He served in the IDF as a producer, editor and presenter for Army Radio (he also graduated its journalism course). During his army service he produced and edited a special prizewinning series dealing with the history of the Jewish people and Israeli culture.

He began his studies this year in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and the Department of Jewish History. He sees the connection between these two areas and the importance of studying both the ideas and the context in which they were formulated. He believes that the cultural richness of the Jewish people is a torch illuminating the way forward, and that it is important to mark it as the most meaningful tool in shaping the Jewish and Israeli identity of the students.

**Tamara Bell** – Tamara is 31 and lives in Tel Aviv. She grew up in Tzfat, where she graduated from the Makif High School. She completed her army service as a human resources coordinator for the Israeli Air Force. She has a Bachelor's degree in East Asian Studies and Multidisciplinary Studies from Tel Hai College. Tamara was a counselor and informal educator with a variety of civil society projects. She is currently contemplating Judaism as a concept, a communal framework, and a religion. She seeks to deepen her study in an academic environment, and feels a sense of mission to teach. She spent a year in China studying Chinese, and also speaks Hebrew, English, Spanish and French. This year she began studying for a Master's in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud.

**Ayelet Ben Shitrit –** Ayelet is 26 years old and currently lives in Tel Aviv. She grew up in Jerusalem in a “masorti” (“traditional”) Mizrahi family. She studied at the Keshet High School for religious and secular students. She is a graduate of the Noam youth movement (affiliated with the Conservative movement), which led her to Women of the Wall and a year of service with the Jewish Agency in Chicago, where she was an emissary in the Conservative community, a Jewish day school and summer camp. She then worked at the Ramah summer camp in Wisconsin for two subsequent years. She served in the army at a center for the blind and hard of hearing, and was a counselor in schools and centers for Jewish and Arab children with hearing difficulties. Following her army service, Ayelet spent a year as a counselor at the Hanaton pre-army program in the Lower Galilee. Last year, she worked at the Conservative movement's Knesset Guard organization, which monitors developments related to religion and state in the Knesset, and also helps train activists. This year she commenced her studies in the Departments of Jewish Philosophy and Literature.

**David Ben Shimul –** David is 30 years old, from Carmiel, and is married with two children. He has a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from UNINTER in the Brazilian city of Curtiba. He hopes the Ofakim program will provide him with the knowledge and tools to be able to deliver content laden with values, identity and belonging to students in the public education system – to be part of an education system different than the one he grew up in, to understand it and to have influence within it. He is studying for a Master's in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud.

**Aviya Gur –** Aviya is 26 years old, from Givat Ada. She is a musician, writer, and singer. A graduate of the Aloni Yitzhak Youth Village, she served in the Israeli Navy. This year she began studying at Tel Aviv University's Department of Linguistics. She also engaged in Jewish studies at the Itim Beit Midrash. She believes in our ability as human beings to demonstrate creativity, craftsmanship and empathy, and hopes to keep this faith and pass it on to her friends and students, while encouraging critical thinking, the ability to raise doubts, and developing independent thought and freedom of internal discourse. She commenced her studies this year in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and the Department of Biblical Studies.

**Talia Greenfield –** Talia is 23 years old, from Ra'anana. She is a graduate of the Tzvia Ulpana in Herziliya (part of the religious public-school system), of Bnei Akiva, and Midreshet Ein HaNatziv. She believes that Judaism should be taught in way that feels alive and relevant for Israel’s diverse society, both religious and secular, and she is interested in exploring this further in the Ofakim program. She commenced her studies this year in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and the Department of Biblical Studies.

**Libby Levin –** Libby is 26 years old, from Tel Aviv, and grew up in Kibbutz Ma'ayan Baruch in the Upper Galilee. She is a graduate of the Emek HaHula High Shool in Kibbutz Kfar Blum, and is a graduate of Kav HaZinuk's program for advancing young leadership in Israel’s periphery. This NGO identifies, trains and supports future social leadership that is value-based, diverse and groundbreaking. Libby completed a year of pre-army service at the Neve Hadar Dormitory in Havatzelet HaSharon, a therapeutic and post-hospitalization dorm for at-risk children and youth.

Libby completed her army service in the Education Corps, as an NCO in the Center for the Advancement of Special Populations, where she supported soldiers who were having difficulties in acclimation, finances and education. She has also been a guide/counselor with the Masa Israeli program. Having engaged in social projects for most of her life, Libby has been looking for a way into the world of education. She is excited to study in this program and to grow in the educational arena. She commenced her studies this year in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and the Department of General History.

**Meital Hillel** – Meital is 22 years old, from Moshav Bnei Dror in the Sharon. She is a graduate of the 'Dror' Kiryat Hinuch High School in the Sharon, where she focused on Land of Israel studies and Archaeology, while also studying general history at the Open University. Prior to her army service, Meital completed a year of service with “BaKehila – Leading Social Change.” In that setting, she taught young women at-risk who were going to study at the Evelina Tehila High School. During her army service, Meital taught Hebrew at an Ulpan in the Masorti High School, supporting homeless youth (through the Etnachta program). Afterwards, she was a commander in the education unit in the South and a commander for training commanders.

As the daughter of a mother who made Aliyah from Ethiopia and as someone who has worked with at-risk girls, Meital sees great value in Jewish identity and is glad to be able to help shape this in young people, as a source of inspiration and strength. She commenced her studies this year in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and the Department of Jewish History.

**Shiran Katz –** Aged 24, from Tel Aviv, Shiran is a graduate of the Thelma Yellin High School of the Arts in Givatayim, where she focused on Jewish Thought and Dance. At the end of her studies, she won a prize for excellence in the fields of learning, art, society, and humanities. She completed a year of pre-army service at “Zemer” in Migdal HaEmek, where she worked in education and empowerment of teens in Israel’s periphery. In the army, she was a commander on the border with Egypt, and on Israel’s Independence Day, was recognized by army leaders as an outstanding officer.

She started studying at Tel Aviv University's Philosophy, Economics and Political Science program in 5779, having been inspired by her Jewish Philosophy studies in high school. She has a mission to educate and inspire the future generation, and for this reason, joined the Ofakim program, which combines education with a teaching qualification. Her dream is to open a school for the arts in Israel’s periphery, to allow as many people as possible to have the exceptional experience that she had in high school, a period which shaped her values. The steps she is currently taking towards that goal include her university studies, private tutoring for children (one-on-one and groups), coaching for children and youth, and the creation of a free private-tutoring project via social media. She commenced her studies this year in the Department of Jewish Philosophy and the Multidisciplinary Program in Humanities.

**Yoni Sharon –** Yoni is 34 years old, from Tel Aviv. He is a musician and guitar teacher. A graduate of the Hadassim High School, with a major in theater, he then graduated from the Rimon Music School, where he majored in performance. He was also certified as a sound engineer and technician. In the army, Yoni served in the Classified Intelligence Corps in a role that supported combat units. In the last few years, he has worked as an independent musician, playing in bands, teaching guitar, producing, and recording. Through his work as a guitar teacher, he came to understood that, alongside his love and passion for music, he also had a deep desire to teach. As a result, he decided to improve his professional and pedagogical abilities and to teach formally. And, as someone from an extremely secular background, he wanted to broaden his knowledge of Jewish culture, its development and sources – this is how he found the Ofakim program. He also wants to broaden his knowledge of general philosophy and religious studies. He commenced his studies this year in the Department of Philosophy and the Department of Jewish Philosophy.