

# At The Center Bamerkaz

Spring 2015

The Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies  
at the Graduate Theological Union

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## Welcome to the Center!

The Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies (CJS) offers courses in Jewish Studies for students at the CJS and throughout the GTU, the University of California, Berkeley, and the wider community. The CJS faculty is committed to combining rigorous text-study of primary sources with sophisticated interdisciplinary approaches -- all within an inclusive learning environment. Among our areas of focus are the study of Jewish-Christian and Jewish-Islamic relations from late antiquity to modernity, the classical Jewish library, Jewish secular culture, and Jewish literary studies. The Center also hosts conferences and lectures, celebrations of Jewish holidays, and other programs that are open to the public. CJS offers an M.A. degree, a Ph.D, and a Certificate. Courses are open to community auditors with permission of the faculty. For more information, visit our website at [www.gtu.edu/CJS](http://www.gtu.edu/CJS).

### At The Center | Bamerkaz | Spring 2015

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Deena Aranoff

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## Letter From The Director

Among the things I regularly learn from my colleague Deena Aranoff is the idea that even the most esoteric aspects of what we teach have relevance and applications to our lives. One example is the lessons Deena draws from the mystical ideas of creation in Lurianic Kabbalah. Rather than the notion of Creation as divine overflow that characterizes the Zohar, Isaac Luria taught that Creation could also be conceptualized as contraction (tzimtzum), as holding back in order to allow something new to arise. The creative value of holding back, as teachers and parents, is something we have also discussed—though Deena is far better at it than I am.

At the Center for Jewish Studies, the most wonderful moments for me are those that we didn't necessarily plan, that arise as if organically from the community around us rather than being sketched out at faculty and staff meetings. To name just a few: At the lunch we host at the beginning of every semester, M.A. student Carrie Sealine showed us a slide show, complete with a musical soundtrack, of the political graffiti she saw this very difficult summer in Jerusalem, as a Pardes Summer Language Fellow. The slide show spoke in ways that political discussion often doesn't manage, giving us a sense of the physical environment Carrie was embedded in and making concrete (literally!) the GTU motto of "where religion meets the world." Another example was the talk doctoral student Susan Aguilar gave on Jewish religious processions in Medieval Aragon, in a student-run series of academic works-in-progress.

But even events we plan can surprise me: We kicked off the school year (and Jewish year!) with a talk by the Israeli environmental activist Julian Sinclair on the Shmitta, the "sabbatical" year in which the land is supposed to lie fallow. I was fascinated to hear that this year, for the first time in perhaps two millennia, there have been many attempts to embrace the strictures of Shmitta for their environmental and psychological wisdom, rather than finding "work-arounds," as was so commonly done on previous occasions. The Jewish world is changing in significant ways that encourage both new thinking and historical-textual grounding, and it made me proud that we at CJS are part of these changes. This year, we have also instituted a theme that we will plan numerous events around, the environmental challenges to the planet and the contribution of religious thought to planetary healing. The title of our February 8th Tauber Day of Learning was "*Earthlings: Religion in an Age of Climate Change*" and it included speakers from the Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and (for the first time) Hindu traditions. Along with this important topic, we also held our annual Taube conference on Eastern European Jewish Culture this fall, on Hasidism, featuring Marcin Wodzinski on the question of women and Hasidism, and discussing the upcoming history of Hasidism edited by David Biale, long-time CJS director and present colleague at UC Davis.

CJS is going through a particularly strong phase right now, with new grants from the Koret, Taube, Tauber, and Hellman Foundations that allow us to focus our energies on academics and programming for the next few years. We hope you take advantage of the rich roster of programs at the CJS, within the classroom and beyond. And enjoy the newsletter!

Best wishes,  
Naomi Seidman  
Director, Richard S. Dinner for Jewish Studies  
at the Graduate Theological Union

## Jews: Ancient, Medieval and Modern

Master's students at the Center for Jewish Studies are required to take two seminars: Ancient and Medieval Jewish Civilization and Themes in Modern Jewish History and Thought. These seminars provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the significant literary and historical developments in Judaism. It also allows them to locate their particular research topics within the long durée of Jewish history. This effort to provide a comprehensive grasp of Jewish civilization is reflected on the doctoral level as well. Doctoral students have a distribution requirement that covers most periods of Jewish history and their comprehensive exams require that they demonstrate facility within the broader trends of the Jewish past.

These requirements reflect a tendency in Jewish studies to investigate Jewish phenomena within the broad sweep of the Jewish

past, a tendency that is at odds with an equally compelling trend, namely, the emphasis upon the local, contextual nature of Jewish life. The latter approach insists that historical realities are best understood as a function of their immediate context. As the old adage goes, "People are more like their contemporaries than they are to their own ancestors."

Jewish studies, therefore, operates within two competing paradigms: the study of Jewish phenomena as they relate to their immediate economic conditions, vernacular literatures and local forms and the relationship they bear to the nearly three millennia of Jewish literary and religious creativity. The Jewish past can be told as a story of rupture or continuity, depending on one's perspective. We hope to prepare scholars who can tell both sides of the story.



**By:  
Deena  
Aranoff**

## Community Members:

The Center for Jewish Studies welcomes auditors from our community to attend our classes and participate in discussions. This opportunity is ideal for those who are interested in Jewish studies but are not currently pursuing degrees.

CJS also offers a Certificate in Jewish Studies. The Certificate allows students to register for graduate level coursework and to receive a transcript and documentation of graduate work in Jewish studies.

Any Questions? Feel free to contact us:  
Email: [cjs@gtu.edu](mailto:cjs@gtu.edu)  
Phone: 510-649-2482.



**By:  
Staci  
Akselrod**

## New Experiences

It's 5:15pm and I'm riding my bike down Milvia, about to cross Dwight. I coast to a stop at the sign, my eyes carefully attuned to the '74 forest green Volvo station wagon waiting. As I inch forward, the car's driver looks at me, blinking me through.

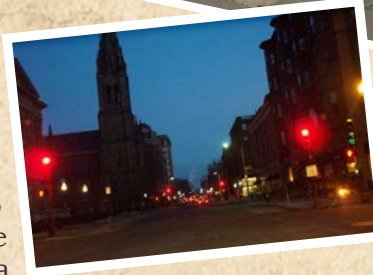
Just a month or two back, this reaction might have terrified me. As a recent transplant from Chicago, my norm was harrowing half-mile rides down Montrose Ave, racing busses for position down the narrow lane between the parked cars and vehicles.

I had known that I would want to further my Jewish Studies education since finishing my BA, but after moving to Chicago I also fell into deeper love with learning as a Jewish communal experience. It was there that I discovered that Jewish community could come through activism, potlucks, and study, without the formal structure of a school or job. Moving here has been a practice in learning how to adapt to the subtle differences between communities, and

in learning to forge my own space. My studies focus on questions surrounding how Jewish sexual and gender identities are represented in Yiddish theatre and literature. The richness of the Yiddish canon fascinates me, and the more I read about receptions of Yiddish performances, the more I want to continue my studies.

I'm excited to be here, and to explore the richness that Berkeley and the GTU have to offer. I've already fallen back into exploring library stacks with glee, thumbing through pages of books, and drinking coffee past my bedtime. I'm glad to be back to working with Yiddish, setting goals, and meeting new people. I get to continue to ask questions about Jewish theatre and about perceptions of gender, and I'm loving every minute so far.

So I cross over Blake and continue down the quieter, slightly rockier portion of Milvia. I let myself coast down the road, taking in the surrounding buildings and the quiet calm. The exploration of a new environment is made easier by the rhythm of continued study and the excitement of new opportunities, and I look forward to deepening my knowledge and welcoming new experiences.



## Snapshots From.... Advisory Committee Meeting



## Snapshots From....Sukkot



## Judaism and the Way of Tea

An opportunity to study traditional Chinese tea with a local master wooed me to the Bay Area. I began studying with Winnie, a local tea master, and working at her teashop about a year and a half ago. Tea is a rich tradition from which I have learned tremendously, and even after studying and practicing intensively for an extended time, I can only claim a beginning level of understanding.

While my familiarity with tea grew, each time I steeped the tea was much like the first. Winnie emphasized a “beginner’s mind” mentality in her approach to tea. She taught me a method of tea service called “gungfu style”. Basically it entails using a large amount of leaf in a small vessel and steeping the tea very quickly, many times in one sitting. However, gungfu translates as “great skill”, “great patience”, “mastery”, and “great practice”. My training with Winnie was as focused on my mind as it was on the tea.

The principles of tea and gungfu have come alive for me in an entirely different way since starting my studies here at the GTU. With an academic

background in Eastern religions, my Jewish roots and Reform upbringing have been the extent of my Jewish education. Although I am fascinated by what I have been learning and impressed by the GTU community, the difficulty in transitioning has been an internal one.

Revered or not, being a novice is not so easy. I find myself wanting to know everything, immediately! And wishing to prove, mainly to myself, that I know it all. Being ok with the fact that I do not know has been a practice of “great patience.” In Jewish studies, I’ve found gungfu. Who would’ve thought?

Overall, I am delighted with all that I am discovering at GTU. The gungfu mindset has inspired my transition, and tea has literally been fueling my studies. These days, I mostly drink tea nontraditionally, sipping from a thermos between pages of reading. However, I welcome any chance to serve tea the gungfu way, especially to this community. It seems to me that Jewish Studies will be a lifetime of “great practice.” I am honored to begin.



By:  
**Genevieve  
Greinetz**



**By:  
Joey  
Glick**

## An Inter-Religious Atlas for a Jewish Journey

For my 23rd birthday, my girlfriend gave me a priceless gift: *The New Historical Atlas of Religion in America*. The atlas is filled with hundreds of maps, tracking the geography of congregational density, religious migration, and countless other stories over the course of American history. Over the past several years, I've worked as an interfaith organizer in communities across the country. In the course of these jobs, I have asked mentors and friends to sign my atlas on a map and geographical point to which they feel most connected. I've watched a teacher that I know as a Coloradan-Jew sign as Pennsylvania-Quaker. I've seen a friend identify as a Kansas City-Evangelical one year, only to re-sign as a Berkeley-Buddhist the next. I love the smudge marks, surprises, and handwritten annotations that have come to define this messy text.

When my luggage arrived in Berkeley, I found some of the pages of my Hebrew Bible unbound and inserted into my atlas of American religion. I cannot think of a better metaphor for the sort of learning that has brought me to the Center for Jewish Studies. I come to Berkeley

with the hope of pursuing text study that engages with the complicated questions raised by American religious pluralism. Specifically, I am excited about studying biblical and rabbinic literature that challenges interfaith audiences. I hope to create readings of these texts that can provide interfaith groups with tools to discuss difficult topics, including inter-religious difference and conflict.

I cannot imagine a better place than the CJS and GTU to take on this research. I feel blessed to have access to mentors who can give me the skills and guidance to read difficult biblical and rabbinic literature. At the GTU, I have found an interfaith community of peers, willing and able to challenge my readings of these texts.

As a Berkeley-Jerusalem Fellow, I will have the chance to carry this textual engagement into a term at Pardes in Jerusalem. Between teachers and classmates, Jerusalem and Berkeley, and religious atlases and ancient Jewish texts, I am confident that I will find my place on the map of inter-religious America. I look forward to departing from this point to a career as a leader and servant within interfaith communities.

## Snapshots From...Earthlings Conference



Individuals from all different areas of GTU came together on February 8th of this year to discuss what does it mean to be a religious person in an age of climate change. With the generous sponsorship from the Tauber Foundation, this conference explored different faith traditions and what each offered in regards to enviromental obligation. It was an insightful conference that hopefully is only the beginning of real change.



## Snapshots From....Hasidism Conference



## Queering The Davennen' Leadership Training

The soft rhythm of Hebrew fills the air, with a woman at the head of the synagogue chanting the Ma'ariv prayer. The prayer is slowly transformed into a spoken word delight for the senses. I remember looking around the room and taking in the eclectic group of Jews that made up The Davennen' Leadership Training Institute (DLTI), a beautifully organized, retreat based prayer-leading institute, in its eighth two-year cycle at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center, in Falls Village, CT. In this place of prayer were soldiers, mystics, hippies, rabbis, cantors, students thereof, and everything in between.

We all came from varying levels of practice, and from movements across the Jewish world. The woman who turned the Ma'ariv into a rhythmic spoken word piece was raised Orthodox and is a musician from Berlin, by way of Hungary, another is a Reform rabbi from a congregation in Arizona, and another is from Berkeley, an interim Renewal spiritual leader at a local synagogue. What we all have in common is fervor for prayer, and a desire to lead our communities into a new world of tefillah, to connect with the Divine in new and fantastic ways. During the weeklong adult summer camp, we deeply experienced each other's quirks, snoring habits, and became a chevre, a supportive network of friends.

Through movement, song, dance, and even a Queer and Quaker inspired Shabbat Mincha service, we engaged the

Divine in ways that moved everyone. The Shabbat Mincha was actually the one that I put together with my co-leader Jonathan Zasloff, a Professor at UCLA School of Law, and ALEPH Rabbinic Student. It was the first time either of us had led a Shabbat Mincha, or the Torah Service embedded in the hour long time for prayer. With only a few days of work, we put together a mashup that allowed our backgrounds to shine, and that we were very proud to lead.

During the Mincha I shared a prayer from my Siddur Sha'ar Zahav, "A Queer Amidah", which was written by Andrew Ramer. The Amidah is the central standing prayer which is read audibly, yet quietly to oneself, which I of course read aloud, and substituted for the more traditional Amidah during the service. Afterward I was approached by many from my chevre, and faculty, who all wanted copies of "A Queer Amidah". For me this was a

validation of all the bridgework that my congregation, Sha'ar Zahav, and other LGBTIQQA synagogues have done to make it perfectly acceptable for me to be Jewish, Bisexual, and Trans in the very intersectional way that I am.

Of all the summer happenings that I experienced, from the intensive language course, to the eight-week Jewish educator intensive, the part that has forever changed my life is the last thing I experienced before returning to the GTU - the DLTI. While I still have three more weeks to this two-year program, I look forward to every moment with my chevre.



By:  
**Martin  
Rawlings-Fein**

# My 2014 Israel Trip



By:  
**Carrie  
Sealine**

I spent this summer in Jerusalem at the Pardes Institute which was made possible by the generosity of the Berkeley-Pardes Fellowship. I attended the two morning classes in Talmud at Pardes and spent the afternoons on research for my thesis. As an alternative cultural immersion, I read several Israeli novels in English translation and documented the graffiti in Nachla'ot, the neighborhood in which I stayed. I feel especially grateful for the opportunity this grant gave me to reconnect with family and friends

I hadn't seen in the decades since they made aliyah, several since the 1970s. These personal connections brought me into the houses and families of people of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and degrees and styles of Israeli Judaism. I met the spouses and children of childhood friends and two of my cousin's four sons for the first time. In this way, I had the privilege of attending a shiur by Rabbi Benjamin Lau on the Shabbat of the air raid at Kehillat Ramban and the release party for Istiftach, the band Na'am Ensemble's new CD at the Yellow Submarine studio.

Both of the classes I took at Pardes were taught by Leah Rosenthal. Intermediate/Advanced Talmud focused on readings from chapter 8 of Baba Kama, *hahovel*, the one who damages his neighbor, and the appropriate understanding and application of the Biblical injunction to take an eye for an eye, and so on. My chevruta partners included a GTU graduate and a Parisian attorney considering a change of venue. The Bavli and Torah sources were supplemented with commentary by scholars ranging from R. Yosef Karo and Rashi, to Maimonides, and Philo. The Biblical material was presented in the context of the Ancient Near Eastern Laws

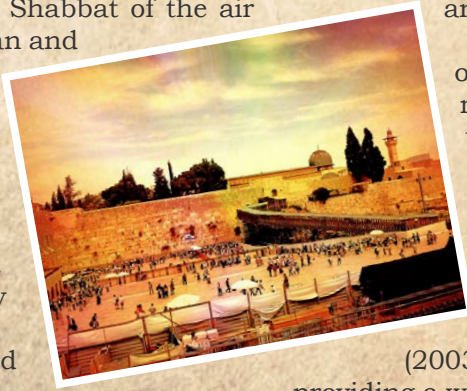
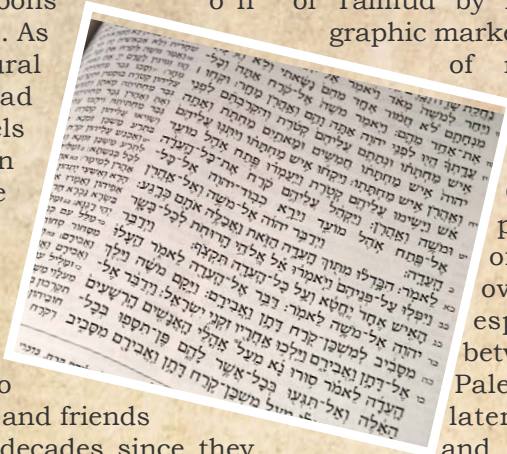
of Eshnuna and Code of Hammurabi. The course was designed to strengthen textual skills such as identifying the structure and analysis of forms of rabbinic argument and hermeneutic strategies, navigation of Talmud by linguistic and visual or graphic markers, as well as recognition of rabbinic cultural and religious concerns, tensions, anxieties, and organization. Close attention was paid to the layering of rabbinic discourse over time and place, especially distinguishing between earlier Tannaitic/Palestinian material and later Amoraic/Palestinian and Babylonian discussions.

Talmudic Personalities presented a portrait "gallery" of key figures as glimpsed through their frequently enigmatic, nuanced, complex and shifting stories in the Bavli, the Yerushalmi and later midrash collections. To accommodate a broader range of learners, texts in this class were read in English, with the original sources provided and referenced as necessary.

Although not on the official program of study, I read, as mentioned above, three Israeli novels, including S.Y. Agnon, *In the Heart of the Seas* (1948), Aharon Megged, *The Living on the Dead* (1965), and A.B. Yehoshua, *The Liberated Bride* (2003), which were helpful in

providing a wealth of cultural information and detail in a relatively short time. I researched and read over 20 book chapters and journal articles pertaining to my thesis and took advantage of the library at Hebrew University for materials.

My time in Jerusalem has had a powerful impact on my ability to read and use Rabbinic materials in the development of my thesis objective to uncover the story of the Hasmonean dynasty and "history" in the Rabbinic literature. I am grateful to the Berkeley-Pardes Fellowship for their support of my studies.





## Getting Medieval in 2014

This past year has been very full, busy and rewarding for me. At the end of 2013, I passed my comprehensive exams for my PhD and this year has included conferences at which I presented papers and a wonderful research trip to Spain in preparation for proposing my dissertation in November. My doctoral work focuses on Jewish life in the Crown of Aragon (in present-day northern Spain) during the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries. I am particularly interested in the construction and expression of Jewish identity by Jews. I study Jewish participation in urban processions as a way of discerning how these public proclamations of Christian political and religious sovereignty reveal important details of how Jews asserted their identity and place in urban societies.

In April, I presented a paper at the annual Medieval Academy of America meeting, held at UCLA, titled “Negotiating Identity: Jews in Christian Processions in Late Medieval Aragon.” In

late June, thanks to a grant from the Taube Foundation, I travelled to Spain to present another paper and to conduct preliminary research in archives for my dissertation. On my first night in Spain, I walked through the Barri Gòtic (the old quarter) in Barcelona and, in an amazing stroke of luck, saw a traditional Corpus Christi procession! The procession was virtually identical to the processions of six hundred years ago, complete with “gigantes” (enormous puppet models) of historical figures and symbolic beasts, like the “drac” (dragon).

Next, I travelled to Lleida for the International Medieval Meeting, where I presented my paper, “Jewish Funerals for Christian Kings: Enacting Identity through Memorial Rituals in Medieval Aragon-Catalonia.” The official languages of the conference were Catalan, Spanish and English and my paper was one of only three during the entire conference presented in English. My language skills got a real work out! From Lleida, I travelled to Zaragoza, Cervera and Tarragona for

research. Each of these towns have important historical archives and I knew they were centers of medieval Jewish life. I had some preliminary citations of documents I wanted to see and I wanted to be able to look for more. In each place I visited, the local archivists were amazingly helpful and gracious. Although most of the archivists seemed slightly mystified as to why I study Jewish history, they were very happy to have someone express an interest in their archives. I eventually was able to locate over two dozen documents that I will use in my dissertation. They range from descriptions of payments to a Jewish tailor for making the mourning clothing for thirty six Christian municipal authorities in



Tarragona for the funeral of King Pedro IV in 1387 to descriptions of a separate Jewish funeral held for King Alfonso in Cervera. Locating and reading the documents is an adventure in itself: some are digitized and easily accessible, some are referenced in compilations of documents and some are literally stored in stacks of parchment documents tied together! Before I even left for Spain, I had to study paleography to learn how to read and interpret medieval styles of script. Finally, the documents themselves may be written in Latin, Catalan or Spanish, or a combination of any or all of these languages. Notwithstanding the challenges, I found that having direct access to these historical records was invaluable not only for uncovering important details but also for gaining an understanding of what the medieval scribes and record-keepers found significant.

Spain was a wonderful experience, from delicious tapas to beautiful mosaics on public buildings to the natural beauty of the land. Its long and contested history is evident in its Roman ruins and Muslim art alongside magnificent fortified castles. I can't wait to return in 2015 for more research—and definitely more tapas!



**By:  
Susan L.  
Aguilar**

## Continuing M.A. Students:

**Miriam Attia**, Berkeley-Jerusalem Fellow, attended the Drisha Institute in New York this fall. She is working on Jewish theological approaches to suffering. Miriam won second prize in the Friedman-Lowenthal Essay contest.

**Zelig Golden**, founder of Wilderness Torah, Wexner Fellow, and CJS Berkeley-Jerusalem Fellow, attended the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in the fall semester, working on textual approaches to earth-based Judaism.

**Glennis Lamm** spent the summer in Israel, dividing her time between the Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies and an archaeological dig near the Sea of Galilee. She is completing a thesis on synagogue development in first-century Galilee.

**Cara Levin** teaches in the San Leandro School District and is researching Jews and tattoos.

**Martin Rawlings-Fein** is currently working as the 4th/5th grade Kehilla teacher at Congregation Sha'ar Zahav's Religious School, Beit Sefer Phyllis Mintzer and completing a thesis on King David as a bisexual character. Martin attended the University of San Francisco Ulpan this past summer.

**Rachel Rosenberg** is a Jewish hospice chaplain at Mission Hospice and Home care in San Mateo, and is working on a Masters in Jewish Studies in order to deepen her knowledge of Judaism in an interfaith context. She won first prize in the Friedman-Lowenthal Essay Prize this past May.

**Carrie Sealine** works as a Hebrew school teacher at Temple Isaiah, and is completing a thesis on alternative views of the Maccabees in antiquity and contemporary Judaism. She spent last summer at the Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies.

## New M.A. Students

**Staci Akselrod**, a recent graduate of Hampshire College, is studying the interaction between Queer Theory and Jewish Studies and is interested in conceptions of gender and sexuality in Jewish literature.

**Joseph Glick**, a social activist, is exploring liminality and social change with an emphasis on the tension between conversion and conversation in interfaith dialogue.

**Genevieve Greinetz** has a particular interest in Jewish Mysticism and interfaith dialogue between Judaism and Asian religions.

## Continuing Ph.D. Students:

**Susan Aguilar**, in the Jewish History and Culture Area, is working on a dissertation on the participation of Spanish Jews in medieval public processions and celebrations. Susan traveled to Spain this summer on a Taube Summer Research Grant to do archival research regarding medieval Jews in the town of Cervera.

**Ashley Bacchi**, a Jewish History and Culture student, is completing a dissertation on the Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism in the Hellenistic period, with a particular attention to the Sybilline oracles. Ashley attended the European Association for Jewish Studies congress in Paris this summer with the support of a Taube Summer research grant, presenting a paper on "Jewish Appropriation of Pagan Authority: The Case of the Sibylline Oracles."

**Robert Galoob**, a student in the Jewish History and Culture Area, continues to work on his dissertation on radical martyrology during the First Crusade, focusing on the influence of *Sefer Hasidim*.

**Eleanor Shapiro**, director of the Jewish Music Festival and student in the Interdisciplinary Studies area at the GTU, spent the last year as a Fulbright Scholar researching Jewish cultural festivals, memory, and music in contemporary Poland.

**Alan Shore** continues to work on his dissertation on Jewish-Christian relations in the United States during and immediately following the Holocaust. He attended the Centre for Yiddish Culture International Summer Seminar in Yiddish Language and Culture in Warsaw last summer with the support of a Taube Summer Language Grant.

**Jay Siskin**, a student in the Jewish History and Culture Area, is working on a dissertation on the shared Jewish and Christian uses of vernacular French in the Middle Ages. Jay traveled to France with the support of a Taube Summer research grant to research two unpublished Old French versions of a thirteenth century Jewish-Christian debate.

**Todd Whelan**, a student in the Jewish History and Culture Area, is working on rethinking Jewish emancipation through the frame of "The Jewish Atlantic."

## New Ph.D. Students

**Leigh Ann Hildebrand**, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, is focusing on the historical interplay between Judaism and Goddess Worship, in antiquity and contemporary Jewish American culture.

## May 2014 Graduates:

**Shmaryahu Brownstein** completed a thesis on "From Want to Wealth: Continuity, Contiguity, and Innovation in Habad Hasidism." He is currently a doctoral student in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at U.C. Berkeley.

**Patricia Gibbs Hellman** completed a thesis on "God's Indwelling as Radiant Intellect: An Intertextual Reading of Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed."

**Christopher Ramsey** completed a thesis on "Winston Churchill: A Founder of the Jewish State?" arguing that Churchill should be considered a founder of the state of Israel.

**Todd Whelan** completed a thesis on "Jewish Cowboys and the Myth of the Frontier: Scripting Jewishness in American Mass Culture" as his thesis. He is currently a doctoral student in the Interdisciplinary Area of the GTU.

**Randi Wren** completed a thesis on "Forming American: In the Name of God, the Hebrew Bible, and Liberty." She is currently a first-year rabbinical student at the Academy of Jewish Religion in Los Angeles.

# Finding the Place I Belong

It was the well-worn chair, the overgrown courtyard, the musty bookstore, the sunny patch of reddish earth, and the outlook of that historic wall....

I think there is a tacit heartbeat in people that desires to know where they belong. Some even spend a lifetime trying to find that one place where they feel at home. And it would be ridiculous for me to say I have not been on a similar journey. Even at a place as diverse as GTU, finding my place has been a little difficult. But as I think back to this last summer, my heart aches as snapshots of my time in Israel flood into my memory. This was not my first time to Israel. It has always been a place that I loved, and could envision myself spending a great deal of time one day. But this trip was different. It was the first trip where I was primarily by myself, and it was the first trip where I found my place.

See, it was that well-worn chair in Pardes' Beit Midrash where I found out, to my surprise, that I knew more Hebrew than I thought I did. It was there that I carved out a lasting friendship with my Havruta, and learned more about Judaism from her than I ever could in any class. For the first time, a world of Talmud was opened up before me, and I was given the tools I needed to continue to improve my studies.

It was that musty bookstore in a small side alley in Jerusalem. Here I sat for hours with piles of used archaeology books all around me, and where my new friend gave me an impromptu crash course on archaeology. Her eyes lighting up as she handed me book after book ushering me further into a world I loved.

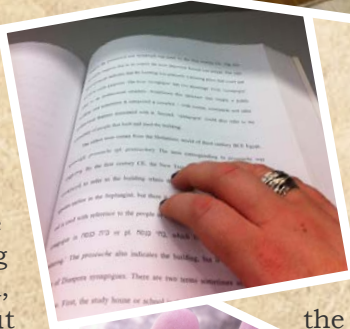
It was that overgrown courtyard in the middle of Jerusalem where the hustle of the day could be heard drawing to a close. Here I sat with a warm cup of tea around

a makeshift table swapping stories, and building new friendships with a group of archaeology students. They had all just finished their respective digs and were sharing the discoveries their site had to offer. Here I remember exclaiming, "No one back home understands why I get so excited talking about all of this, its nice to finally be around people that do."

It was that sunny patch of reddish earth. My legs dangling over the edge of my square, and in my hands was the tattered notebook that contains all my sketches of Israel. I thumbed through trying to find the next blank page. My gaze surveying the last two weeks of work that my friends and I had accomplished with little more than small hand tools. I began to etch the current status of my square, and I couldn't help as a smile spread across my face.

It was the outlook of that historic wall that surrounds the Old City of Jerusalem. Some of my friends had never been to Israel before and wanted to see the city. They asked me to go along to answer any archaeology or history questions. And I remember standing at one of those lookouts. I could see the city that I loved spread out before me, and here I thought back over a summer that was so full that I didn't think such a trip was possible. I thought about the turmoil I had both witnessed and been subject to, and I couldn't help but whisper a prayer under my breath. In that moment, a prayer

of thanksgiving and intercession rose from my lips as streams of tears washed down my face. I have spent a lot of my life trying to find out where I belong, only to discover them in the snapshots of an incredible summer. A summer filled with learning and wonder. A summer that was only made possible by CJS's donors and partners, and for that—Thank you.



**By:  
Glennis  
Lamm**



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