

# Yeshiva University's Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies



## Dear Friends,

We are honored to present to our community of friends and supporters the inaugural Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies newsletter. With it, we invite you to learn more about the GPATS experience *l'hagdil Torah u'p'hadirah* (to enjoy the splendor of Torah), to further the growth of Torah learning for the women in our community.

Yeshiva University's Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies is a two-year master's program where women study on an advanced level and further their growth in Talmud, Torah knowledge and Halacha. While in the program, women can also attend classes in the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration and the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies to improve their pedagogic skills and knowledge of Bible and Jewish history.

This program creates an elite cadre of female scholars of Talmud and Halacha who study for the sake of growing as Torah observant Jews with strong *ahavat* and *yirat HaShem*. Many go on to serve as formal leaders and role models for the Jewish community. We are so proud of our alumni. More than 100 women have become teachers in many high schools throughout the country, in countless seminaries in Israel, involved in JLIC (Jewish Learning Initiative on College campuses all over the country), NCSY and as *Yoatzot Halacha* in Israel and America. They are literally sharing Torah all over the world.

In this first newsletter, we are pleased to share highlights of our program, students, faculty and alumni. We speak with alumna Tova Warburg-Sinensky, full-time chair of Kohelet Yeshiva High School Talmud Department, about her experiences before, during and after her time in the GPATS program. Additionally, our members of esteemed faculty describe their experiences working with GPATS women and our current students share their goals for their time in the program.

We look forward to your support of this important program and sharing in many future accomplishments. Thank you in advance for your partnership,



**Rabbi Dr.  
Kenneth Brander**  
*Vice President for  
University and  
Community Life,  
Yeshiva University*



**Professor  
Nechama Price**  
*Director of GPATS*





Front row: (l-r) Rachel Shapiro, Eleora Sandman, Chana Shestack, Professor Nechama Price, Zissy Turner, Michal Schechter, Blima Maged. Back row: (l-r) Jennifer Strauss, Victoria Chobot, Makena Owens, Sara Rozner, Rivka Rosenbaum, Chaya Rayman, Talia Molotsky, Sarah Robinson. Not shown: Dr. Julie Joseph

## What Current GPATS Teachers and Students Think

GPATS is a unique program that allows women to grow in their knowledge of Torah and Talmud. The students involved in GPATS tend to be particularly committed to devote their careers to communal service.

Current GPATS student Blima Zelinger comments: “I feel very privileged to be a student at GPATS. Learning full time brings me much joy and *sipuk* [satisfaction/fulfillment]. The rigorous learning and knowledgeable, encouraging *rebbeim* help me advance spiritually and intellectually so that I become a better equipped contributor to the Jewish community.”

Student Sarah Robinson adds: “GPATS is giving me the tools to eventually become a leader in the Jewish community.”

The depth and complexity of learning at GPATS facilitates the fulfillment of an individual aspiration to the comprehensive study of Torah at the highest levels.

“GPATS students are growth-oriented and are deeply invested in their personal, religious and intellectual growth,” said Rabbi David Nachbar, *maggid shiur* to the master’s program in Biblical and Talmudic Interpretation at Stern College for Women. “Their maturity and dedication is a source of strength for me, and it is a privilege to participate in their education. GPATS provides us with an incredible opportunity to explore *Torat HaShem* with uncompromising depth and breadth.”

The program’s alumni are at the forefront of the discussion of female roles in scholarship and leadership—they serve as educators, synagogue scholars or are otherwise active contributors to Jewish communal life. The dialogue around

women’s roles has yielded robust conversations, and GPATS faculty member Rabbi Moshe Kahn states: “The study of Talmud at the highest levels is not an impediment or hindrance to spiritual and religious growth. On the contrary, it is a vehicle through which to achieve it.”

“The GPATS faculty has been phenomenal in treating student’s questions and various approaches to learning with patience, respect, and gentle guidance. I have been challenged to think in new ways and appreciate the value that is placed on chavruta learning and engaging in the text,” Talia Molotsky said. “I recognize and appreciate that this may be a once in a lifetime opportunity to devote myself entirely to learning Torah.”

“Learning in GPATS is a blessing. It feels like Shabbat every day,” said Victoria Shabot.



(l-r) Rabbi Gedalyah Berger, Rabbi Moshe Kahn and Rabbi David Nachbar

## An Interview with Alumna Tova Warburg Sinensky, Chair of Kohelet Yeshiva High School Talmud Department

**Q.** Can you tell us about your pre-college background?

**A.** I’m from Englewood, New Jersey. I attended The Moriah School, The Frisch School and Beit Midrash Migdal Oz before going to Stern and then GPATS.

**Q.** Why did you choose the GPATS program? Was it always a goal of yours to apply?

**A.** Since high school I was in love with gemara learning. GPATS just seemed like a natural next step for me.

**Q.** What was your favorite part of the GPATS program?

**A.** I loved the conceptual, yet textually-grounded approach of Rabbi Mayer; and the clarity of Rabbi Berger’s presentation, as well as his expertise in halacha. This was and continues to be so valuable to me.

**Q.** What opportunities came from being in the GPATS?

**A.** On Fridays during my second year at GPATS, I helped out in Rivka Kahan’s gemara class. At that point she was in an administrative role and that was also a great entry point for me into Ma’ayanot. From this, I was able to present a model lesson at Ma’ayanot which led to a job.

**Q.** What do you consider to be the highlights of GPATS program for you?

**A.** I solidified my methodology of learning gemara. I also formed a relationship with Rabbi Berger and have been privileged to benefit from his halachic, pastoral and communal leadership expertise for the past 12 years.



**Q.** Since you graduated from the GPATS program, what have you been up to?

**A.** I taught gemara, halacha and Jewish philosophy at Ma’ayanot for seven years, as well as serving as the chair of the gemara department and co-director of professional development. During that time I discovered that I was not only in love with gemara, but with the pedagogy involved in teaching gemara. I also trained with the Jewish New Teacher Project to become a mentor and I mentored for a few years at Ma’ayanot. Midway through my time at Ma’ayanot, we moved to Einstein, where my husband served as the rabbi. I taught a lot of kallah during that time. Then we moved to Pennsylvania where I continued teaching gemara, serving as the chair of the gemara department and mentoring at Kohelet Yeshiva High School. This is my third year serving as the Yoetzet Halacha for the Greater Philadelphia area, and I truly love the work. I chose to switch gears this year and accepted a position with the New Teacher Center to serve as the Jewish New Teacher Project’s Greater Philadelphia Community mentor. I mentor nine teachers in three different schools. Many of the interpersonal skills that are utilized in mentoring are the same as those utilized in answer she’elot as a Yoetzet Halacha, which is an added bonus.

### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PAST YEAR

- Community Yom Iyun in Teaneck, New Jersey
- June Zman at Stern College—a month of intensive Talmud Study for Women in various universities
- Articles in Yeshiva University’s Torah-to-Go
- Scholar-in-Residence Shabbat in Jamaica Estates, NY
- Scholar-in-Residence for Shavout in Columbus, Ohio
- Shiur presentations at Grand Getaways Pesach 2016 at the Waldorf Astoria, Orlando



## As Hospital Chaplains, GPATS Students Provide Spiritual Comfort to Patients and Families



In a patient room at Mount Sinai Medical Center, a man sits by the bedside of his dying wife during her last moments. He is soon joined by Michal Schechter, an aspiring doctor. But the purpose of Schechter's visit is not to address a physical hurt. Instead, as a Jewish chaplain at Mount Sinai, the 23-year-old seeks to provide relief, comfort and closure for the emotional and spiritual suffering of patients and their families.

"As a chaplain in a hospital setting, my primary responsibility is to support and see the hospital experience from the non-medical provider side—namely, the patient's point of view," said Schechter, a recent graduate of Stern College for Women's pre-med program and current student in its Graduate Program for Advanced Talmudic Study (GPATS). "I feel that my chaplaincy work will make me a more caring and empathetic physician to my future patients. The close involvement with patients, as well as their families and friends, has helped me develop a better understanding of the mental and emotional challenges people face in a hospital setting."

The idea to become a hospital chaplain grew from Schechter's desire to marry her passion for medicine with the love of Judaism that led her to enroll in GPATS. The program is designed to provide women with an opportunity to further develop high-level Talmudic skills, but it also urges students to share their knowledge more broadly.

"All GPATS students share a love and passion for learning and spreading Torah, some as professional educators and others by using their Torah knowledge to enhance the world around them in different venues," said Nechama Price, director of GPATS. "I am fortunate to facilitate internships between each of the talented women and many incredible

organizations. These opportunities allow the women to gain additional experience and exposure to areas of Jewish life which fit their professional goals."

"Through GPATS, I connected with Rabbi Daniel Coleman, the Jewish chaplain at North Shore University Hospital and was privileged to participate in a Clinical Pastoral Education course there this past summer," said Schechter.

"The program provided supervised pastoral training to participants who included theological graduate students and ordained clergy from different religions and backgrounds. I was excited when Rabbi Coleman offered me the chance to continue chaplaincy work with him this year at Mount Sinai."

As a chaplain, Schechter consults with patients of all faiths, as well as those who specifically request to meet with a Jewish chaplain. That might seem like a heavy

undertaking for a graduate student—but for Schechter, it has taught her an important and increasingly rare skill: the art of listening.

"I believe that the training I received and the daily interactions with patients, many of whom were critically or even terminally ill, help me develop a greater sensitivity and a deeper sense of empathy with others' travails," said Schechter. "While I helped the patients, I am also changed for the better. Taking an active interest in other people's well-being and hearing what they are feeling in their hearts is one of the greatest and most powerful gifts that we can provide, not only to the people around us, but also to ourselves."

As she begins her second year in the chaplaincy, Schechter has been joined by fellow GPATS student Sara Rozner, who hopes to pursue a doctorate in clinical psychology. Like Schechter, Rozner was introduced to the opportunity through



(l-r) Michal Schechter and Sara Rozner

GPATS. "As a volunteer chaplain at Mount Sinai, I visit with patients and their families and support them with their spiritual and emotional needs," said Rozner. "Contending with illness and hospitalization can be very stressful, upsetting, and spiritually challenging. It can help to have someone to talk to."

Rozner is also hoping the experience will illuminate her chosen career path. "The kind of emotional skills needed for chaplaincy are very similar to the skills needed for psychology—empathy, listening skills, acceptance, emotional and mental presence."

She added, "I feel privileged to be able to engage with people on this deep level, and I hope that through this experience I will be able to strengthen my emotional skills and one day become a better therapist than I might have been without it."

For both Rozner and Schechter, GPATS has played a crucial role in their development as future clinicians, in addition to Torah scholars.

"I believe that GPATS provides me with an in-depth knowledge and understanding of Judaism which contributes to the religious aspect of my chaplaincy work, and the program's support of my work has been instrumental in the success of my hospital internship," said Schechter. "It is a testament to GPATS that their students are offered placement at world-class facilities and are given the opportunity to explore careers at the intersection of science and spirituality."

"We are so proud of Michal and Sara for the critical contribution to the lives of their patients in their chaplaincy internships," said Price.



## GPATS Provides Summer Talmud Learning at Stern

A five-week Talmud program called "June Zman" was held at Stern College for Women under the auspices of Yeshiva University's Graduate Program in Advanced Talmud Study (GPATS) this year. June Zman, which ran from May 31 through June 30, was open to all college-age and post college-age women and was free for Stern College students, also offering the possibility to dorm. Classes met Monday through Thursday, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., with each day divided between chavruta (paired) learning and shiur (lecture). Over thirty students—including Stern College students and alumni, non-YU students, and post-high school students who will attend Stern following seminary—registered.

This marks the first time the Israel Henry Beren Campus has hosted a summer learning program for women. Program overseer Nechama Price, director of GPATS, explained that June Zman served many students who were not able to incorporate Talmud courses into their timetables during the academic year. "We thought it would be a beautiful idea to have someone who teaches at GPATS give Stern College a month of learning, either for college credit or lishma [for its own sake]," said Price, adding that a broader goal of GPATS is to reach out to the greater YU and general community.

"The fact that women at Stern College requested an extra month of Talmud learning, simply for the sake of Torah study, is a celebration of what makes YU unique," said Rabbi Kenneth Brander, YU vice president for university and community life. "We encouraged their wish and created a June Zman, similar to what the men have on our uptown campus, and are very proud of the women who have decided

### INTERNSHIPS

- Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel Congregation, Chicago, IL
- Congregation Beth Shalom, Lawrence, NY
- Congregation Shaarei Tefillah, Newton, MA
- Keshet Israel, Washington, DC
- Lincoln Square Synagogue, New York, NY
- Princeton University, Princeton, NJ
- The Ramaz School Friday Kollel, New York, NY
- Young Israel of West Hartford, CT
- Chaplaincy in Mount Sinai Hospital, New York, NY
- Chaplaincy in North Shore Hospital, Manhasset, NY



to immerse themselves in study for an additional five weeks.”

GPATS Instructor Rabbi David Nachbar served as June Zman’s instructor, teaching Tractate Berachot. Rabbi Nachbar noted that the text of Berachot, which explores discussion on topics such as biblical and rabbinic prayer structures, standardized and circumstantial prayers, as well as weekday and special occasion prayers, “offers students the opportunity to deepen their understanding and appreciation of one of our primary modes of serving God in its various forms.” He observed that having a relatively large summer cohort “creates a collective learning environment that is infused with great energy and dynamism.”

The program’s learning was designed to take place at an intermediate level, though Nachbar noted that, like most shiurim, the program contained students with a range of skillsets. Price said that the program aimed to engage all learners, whether they were beginners developing new skills, or advanced students who hadn’t had the opportunity to utilize them for a while.

**“Yeshiva University, through Stern College and its Graduate Program in Advanced Talmud Studies for women, is the largest institution in the Jewish world teaching Torah and Talmud to women.”**

—RABBI KENNETH BRANDER

Program participant Chani Grossman ’18S said that this was her first experience learning Talmud. “I wanted to try it out in a non-pressured environment,” said Grossman, who studies biology and Jewish history. “So far, it’s really good, and I’m learning a lot.”

Biology major Avital Habshush ’17S noted the challenge of devoting serious lengths of time to religious learning during the academic year. “I decided to enroll in this program to keep learning the Torah that I love and keep growing,” Habshush said. “I think it’s wonderful how the university is giving us this opportunity.”

Sharona Kern of Barnard College said she appreciated the chance to experience some of the best that Stern College has to offer. “There is a lack of opportunities for post-college learning when you don’t want to commit to a full year or two, so I was really excited to participate in this program,” she said. “Everyone’s taking the program very seriously, and I don’t take it for granted.”

Rabbi Brander noted that in 1977 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik gave “one of the most important Talmud lectures of the 20th Century, the first formal lecture on Talmud to women” at Stern College, with the intention that the Talmud would become part of the heritage known as Torat Imecha (the Torah from your mothers). “Yeshiva University, through Stern College and its Graduate Program in Advanced Talmud Studies for women (GPATS), is the largest institution in the Jewish world teaching Torah and Talmud to women,” said Rabbi Brander. “We encourage women to encounter and intellectually engage with the rabbis of the Talmud and the subsequent commentaries.”



## New Partnership Between Yeshiva University’s Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies and Local High Schools Creates High-Level Learning Opportunities for Students

A new partnership between Yeshiva University’s Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies (GPATS) and several local high schools will provide new opportunities for girls to engage in high-level Judaic studies with the support and mentorship of GPATS students and faculty.

Called Sunday Night Learning: Empowered by GPATS (SNL), featuring a series of events for young women in Jewish high schools in the vicinity of Teaneck, New Jersey. Each event will begin with a dinner and *chavruta* [partnered] learning with current students in GPATS, a program designed to provide young women with opportunities to immerse themselves in post-graduate study of Judaic topics. The learning will be followed by advanced *shiurim* [lectures] from GPATS and YU faculty on topics that will range from Tanach to gemara and Jewish philosophy.

“The goal is to feature an array of topics and styles to show students the vastness of Torah,” said Nechama

Price, director of GPATS. “We hope that this will provide inspiration for participants and spread our passion for Torah study.”

The idea for the program actually originated with Dr. Jessica Kornwasser, a mother who was intrigued by Price’s discussion of GPATS and women’s learning at YU’s annual ChampionsGate Leadership Conference. “After hearing Nechama Price and several other Stern College Judaic Studies professors speak at Championsgate, I found myself wishing that my daughter, a sophomore in high school, could get a glimpse of the Torah learning that awaits her in college,” said Kornwasser. “The idea was met with enthusiasm by Nechama and several other mothers of high school girls, and Sunday Night Learning (SNL) began to take shape.”

“I was really excited by the idea of spreading the message of women’s learning to a younger generation,” added Price.

The first event of the series will take place from 7 to 9 p.m. on Sunday, December 18 at the Bais Medrash of Bergenfield, 371 South Prospect Avenue, Bergenfield, New Jersey, 07621. Price will deliver a shiur titled, “These Are A Few of Their Favorite Things’: Favoritism in Tanach.” “I feel privileged to be able to run such an incredible program and to facilitate learning between post-college and high school students,” she said.



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- \$10,000 support the Beit Midrash learning for a month
- \$5,000 support a GPATS shiur for a week
- \$2,500 support the learning in the Beit Midrash for a week
- \$1,800 support a GPATS fellow for a week
- \$360 sponsor a day of learning in the GPATS Beit Midrash
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*Stay tuned for our next GPATS Yom Iyun in Teaneck, New Jersey,  
featuring GPATS faculty and alumni.*