



Annual Report 2019



## We are the People of the Book.

For thousands of years, Jewish culture, traditions, and values have been shaped by an ongoing conversation with our texts and with one another. Sefaria is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating the future of Torah in an open and participatory way.

Historically, developments in information technology have expanded access to Torah. From an oral tradition to handwritten scrolls to a vast corpus of printed books, each new medium democratized knowledge and brought more people into the great Jewish conversation. We are the generation charged with shepherding Torah from print to digital in a way that can expand its reach and impact in new and unprecedented ways.

## 2013

Co-founders Joshua Foer and Brett Lockspeiser **launch Sefaria**.

## 2015

Sefaria makes its **first deal with a major Jewish publisher** (Urim) to digitize and release translations into the public domain.

The Sefaria library grows to include **50 million words**.

## 2017

Sefaria makes history by releasing **The William Davidson Talmud**.

Sefaria launches **sefaria.org.il**, a website for Israelis and native Hebrew speakers.

## 2019

Sefaria celebrates the release of **Nechama Leibowitz's** sourcesheet collection, marking the first female commentator in the core Sefaria library.

Users continue creating source sheets and the database hits **200,000!**

Sefaria's library hits **209 million words**.

## 2014

Sefaria's engineers stretch the limits of what digital Torah can do by pioneering the **first data visualization tool** showcasing connections between Tanakh and Talmud.

Users create **6,000 source sheets** using Sefaria's Source Sheet Builder.

Sefaria launches its Day School Partnership Initiative with a **cohort of four schools**.

## 2016

Sefaria releases a complete, bilingual version of **Rashi's Torah commentary**.

Sefaria puts the Torah in users' pockets with its first **mobile apps** for Android and iOS.

## 2018

More than **1 million users** from almost every country in the world visit Sefaria's library in a single year.

**Sefaria releases two digital dictionaries:** the Jastrow Talmudic dictionary and the Klein etymological dictionary of Hebrew.

LIBRARY



209,500,918  
words



2,683,380  
inter-textual links



30  
third-party apps  
powered by Sefaria

TOP 5 TEXTS

Torah



Siddur



Psalms



Tractate  
Berakhot



Pirkei  
Avot

USERS

2,010,587  
unique visitors

in 233  
countries &  
territories

used Sefaria for



1,224,404  
hours



52,016  
days



140  
years

USER-CREATED SHEETS



57,690  
(201,597 since 2013)

APP DOWNLOADS



83,405  
(198,133 since 2016)

## LIBRARY

Sefaria's library showcases the remarkable textual tradition of the People of the Book like never before. Sefaria's collection contains nearly 210 million words in Hebrew and English translation, spanning Tanakh, Midrash, Mishnah, Talmud, Halakhah, Responsa, Kabbalah, Chasidut, Philosophy, Musar, Liturgy, and commentaries.

## PRODUCT

Sefaria's library is designed for a seamless, beautiful, and intuitive learning experience. Our engineers work to develop explanatory tools and innovative resources that encourage exploration and allow users of all backgrounds to engage with the Torah in new and unprecedented ways, unique to the digital era.

## EDUCATION

Sefaria is not merely an archive for preserving Jewish texts; it is a platform meant to give these texts new life. Sefaria partners with Jewish schools, organizations, and thought leaders to develop innovative lesson plans, support educators and students, and explore the possibilities that emerge at the intersection of Tech and Torah.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

For the Jewish people, our texts are our collective inheritance. They belong to everyone and we want them to be available to everyone. As such, all of our code is released in the public domain or with free public licenses, ensuring that texts in the library are free to use and reuse, forever. Sefaria's easily exportable data powers Jewish learning across the web as we invite everyone – including third-party developers, researchers, and other digital publishers – to reuse our code and data to build apps, conduct research, make visualizations, and more.

## ACCESS

Access is at the core of everything we do at Sefaria. We believe that the People of the Book should enjoy unfettered access to their eponymous texts. It's what leads us to make the site free, release all texts with open licenses, build our product to be maximally intuitive for people of all ages and digital fluency, and offer visual aids and learning tools along the way.

## CONVERSATION

Judaism's core texts grew out of millennia-long conversations and arguments across generations. More than a collection of books on a shelf, the Jewish canon is a giant corpus of interconnected texts that speak to each other. Sefaria is making it easier than ever to explore the conversations of the past, while also creating a space for ancient conversations to continue in new ways, with new participants, new questions, and new layers of dialogue.



## PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Our engineering and design efforts this year were geared towards maximizing the accessibility of Sefaria’s library by making text navigation easier and empowering users to discover, learn and create Torah.

2019 highlights include:

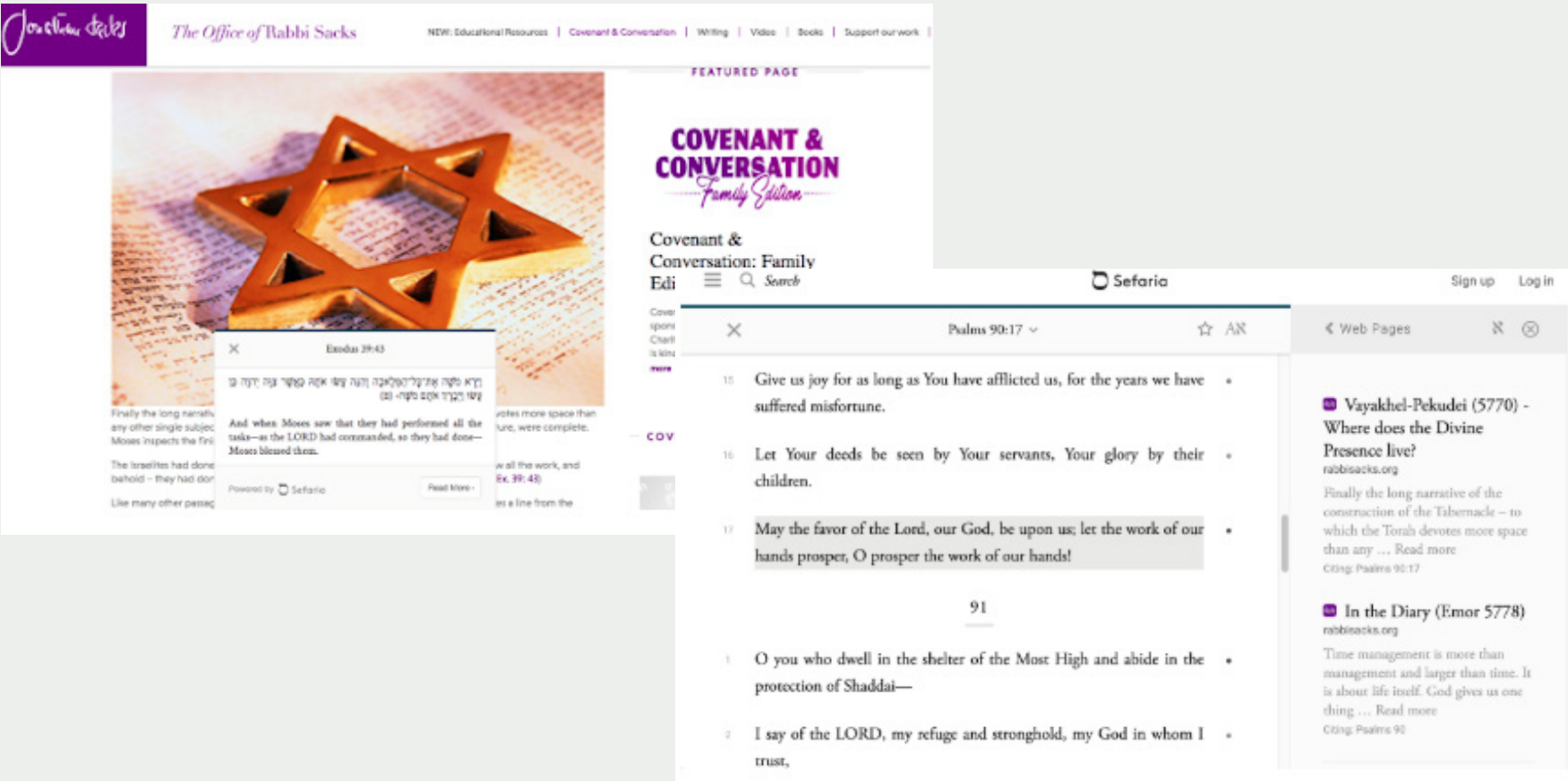
- 1 Topical navigation of Sheets
- 2 Mobile log-in
- 3 New discovery-driven homepage

## PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

### The Two-Way Linker

A couple of years ago, we released a free JavaScript plugin that automatically connects Torah content across the internet to primary sources in our library. Websites that use this Sefaria Linker give their users direct access on their site to any primary sources they cite, allowing curious learners to go deeper in their study. This winter, we released a Two-Way Linker that now enables the reverse: citations on external websites that have embedded our linker will now appear in the Sefaria sidebar as a new resource to explore while learning. This small bit of code has disproportionate potential for Sefaria. It allows us to offer relevant contemporary Jewish content to our users without having to negotiate licenses and raise concomitant funds. More exciting yet, if successful, the Two-Way Linker has the potential to position Sefaria as the central node in the Torah internet. We’re still in the early stages of connecting with outside sites but one day, we hope you’ll be able to find all of your favorite Torah on Sefaria.

The Sefaria Linker in action on Rabbi Sacks's website:



The Two-Way Linker in action on the Sefaria website:

## CONTENT ACQUISITION

Our library grew from 184 million words to 209 million words this year, with special emphasis placed on rounding out our core collection and the acquisition of texts in translations.

In 2019 we added:

- 1 The final three tractates of the William Davidson Talmud
- 2 New translations: Avot d’Rabi Natan and the Mishnah
- 3 New learning tools, including vowelization and punctuation for Talmud

## CONTENT SPOTLIGHT

### Nechama Leibowitz Collection

In May, we celebrated the historic release of 1,500 of famed scholar Nechama Leibowitz’s source sheets. Nechama Leibowitz, z”l, was one of the towering figures of Torah scholarship in the 20th century and the founder of the modern source sheet. Her students were so eager to study with her that they often asked for homework, and these assignments developed into her legendary gilyonot or source sheets. These gilyonot are studied for their incisive questions and thought-provoking approach, and we are thrilled to offer them on Sefaria. In addition to this being the first time this collection of work was made available to the public, this was also the first time Sefaria featured a woman in our list of core text commentators.

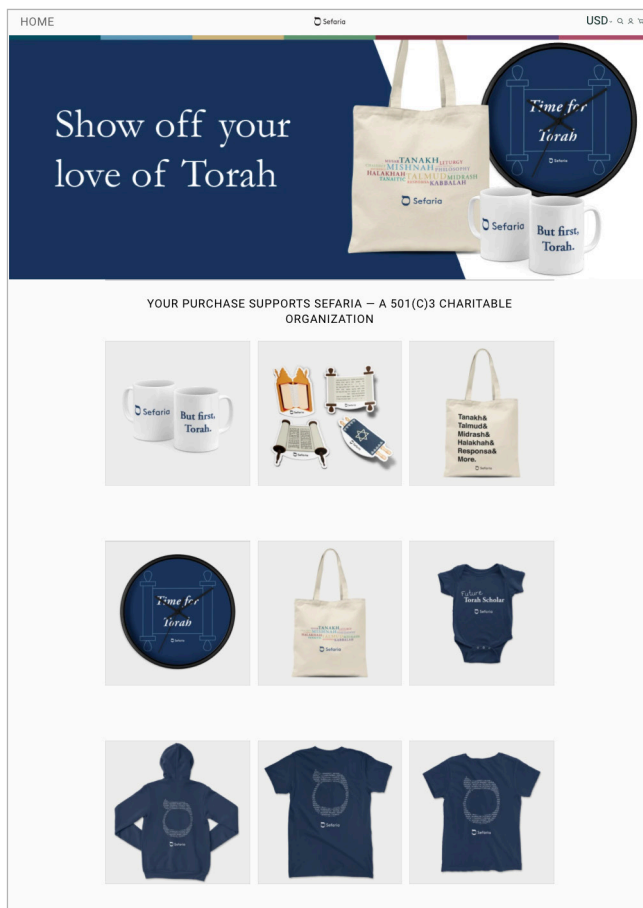


Photos courtesy of MyJewishLearning.com

## MARKETING

For the first time in 2019, we invested in marketing Sefaria (instead of relying on organic growth alone) in an effort to grow the audience for Torah.

In 2019 we:



The Sefaria Store

1

Released a grogger feature on the app for Purim

2

Launched a Torah emoji campaign that went viral

3

Received a Google grant and began Search Engine Marketing

4

Opened the Sefaria Store for business

## MARKETING SPOTLIGHT

### Press

Sefaria was in the news in 2019! We received more press this year than ever before. Highlights included a story titled "Sefaria Turns a Female Page" in The Jerusalem Post celebrating the Nechama Leibowitz launch, and mentions in several interesting thought pieces (on topics like the consequences of a digital Torah on Jewish memory; Torah and Braille; and a piece on Torah and global Jewry titled: "How do you say Sefaria in French, German or Italian?"). Most exciting yet, Sefaria closed out the year – and the decade – with some pretty remarkable coverage. The Forward selected Brett, our co-founder and CTO, as one of their 50 most influential American Jews. The Jewish Week included Sefaria in their roundup of major Jewish stories of the past decade, and the JTA led with Sefaria in a list of the 10 ways American Jewish life changed in the 2010s.





## EDUCATION

In 2019, our team traveled near and far to explore what a digital library of Torah texts could offer to students, teachers, and curious learners around the globe.

### 2019 highlights include:

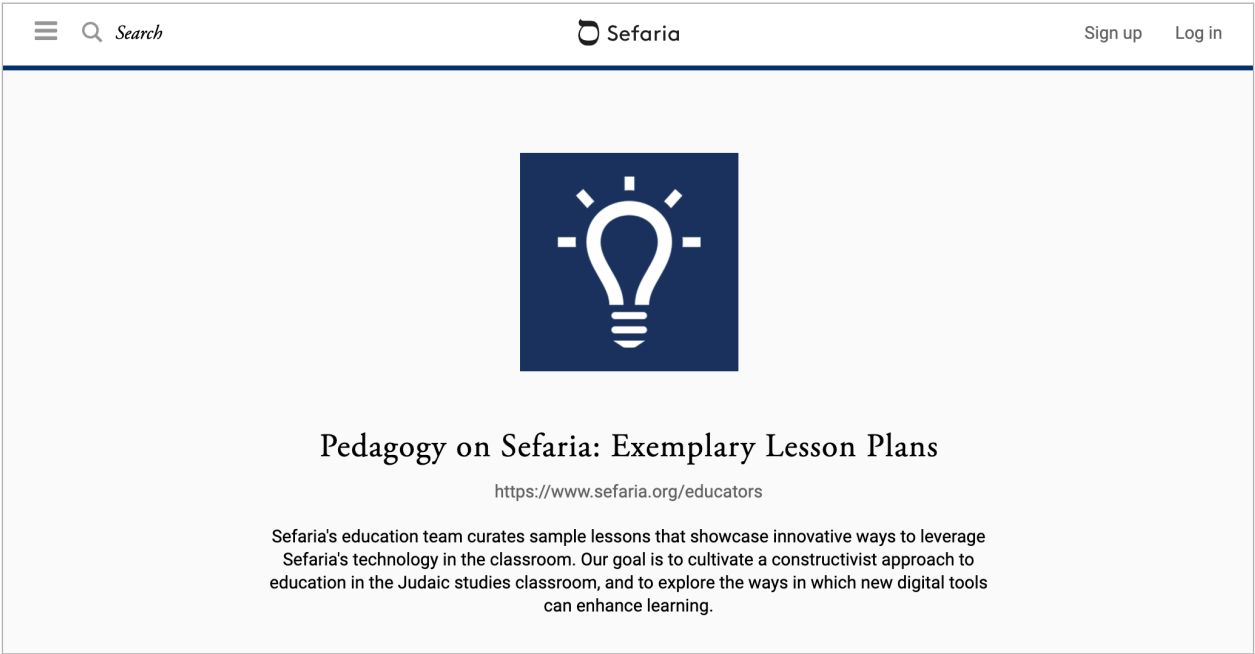
- 1

Trainings in Uruguay, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Paris in partnership with Israel's Ministry of Diaspora
- 2

The launch of Pedagogy on Sefaria, a new group for model lesson plans using Sefaria
- 3

Our new training courses for educators and students
- 4

Partnering with the Be’eri Initiative for Pluralistic Jewish Education in Israel to empower Jewish educators in secular schools



## EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT

### Baltimore Regional Intensive

Our team piloted a new educational intensive in Baltimore. Generously funded by the Meyerhoff Foundation, our Director of Education Sara Wolkenfeld made the first of three visits to Baltimore in November to work with the entire community to explore how Sefaria might superpower Jewish learning at every level. The first visit was wonderful, the highlight being Sara’s presentation – titled Torah Learning in a Digital Age – at the CJE’s Festival of Jewish Literature, in which every participant worked with a group of their peers to create their own sheet on Sefaria. You can view the entire [group of sheets on Sefaria](#). We look forward to continuing this work over the next two visits.



## FUNDRAISING

Continuing to strengthen our community fundraising efforts was of chief importance to us in 2019. We sought to build a more sustainable model by encouraging our users to give through a variety of different channels.

The results were remarkable and we:

- 1 Increased our overall donor base by 40% from 2018 to 2019
- 2 Increased the total amount raised under or equal to \$1,000 by 67%
- 3 Reached 230 participants to join *Sefaria Sustainers*, Sefaria’s monthly giving program
- 4 Had 56 people sponsor a day of learning on our site
- 5 Secured \$136,000 towards new text sponsorships from eight individuals and foundations

## FUNDRAISING SPOTLIGHT

### Foundation Support

Foundation support remains vital as we continue to build out these more sustainable fundraising channels, and we continued to experience the generosity and loyalty of our most trusted partners this year. At the end of 2018 and beginning of 2019, Sefaria secured major renewal gifts from the Maimonides Fund, Jim Joseph Foundation, and William Davidson Foundation. More than material support, this vote of confidence from Sefaria’s three major supporters laid the groundwork for much of the critical work described above as well as strengthened our appeals to new foundations whose support we sought this year. We secured new gifts this year from The Russell Berrie Foundation, The David Berg Foundation, Joseph & Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Funds, Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, and Leading Edge.



I am an old-school, low tech, "aol" rabbi, who is more apt to go for the book than the computer. For years, I have watched my younger colleagues use the disks to generate material for classes or sermons. For me, cut and paste meant scissors and tape. Sefaria has encouraged and allowed me to step into the new world of research and creation of materials.

- *Rabbi Steven Lindemann*

Sefaria literally has changed my life - no exaggeration. I am not a trained educator, just a mom of four who enjoys learning through whatever means I can, as well as teaching when given the opportunities... Sefaria makes me feel like I am part of a community of learners, and when I am inspired by the source sheets of others I feel like I am connecting to like minded souls. Without Sefaria, I would feel lost. Taking on teaching projects would feel too daunting. Sefaria was the transformation that I didn't even know I needed until I suddenly cannot live without it.

- *Daniella Druck*

I am a middle school Tanach teacher and every year Sefaria is an invaluable tool for me inside and outside of the classroom. This year however, I decided it was just as important that my students learn how to use Sefaria and access it's texts and commentaries. It's been amazing! They're able to work so much more independently, looking for commentators, tracking down a more obscure source, etc. It's become such an important tool in my curriculum! Thanks Sefaria!

- *Devorah Hornstein*

I am a working class Jew and a Hebrew teacher. I can't afford a big library, but I need access to our texts. I use Sefaria all the time to study, debate, and create lesson plans. Thank you!

- *Marc T.*

I live in Denver, CO and three times each week, I use Sefaria to study with my grandchildren. On Sunday, I study the Mussar text Orchot Tzaddikim with a grandson in England. On Thursday morning, I study Pirke Avot with a grandson in Israel. On Thursday afternoon, I study Masechet Magillah with another grandson in Israel. Whatsapp and Sefaria are as essential tools to promoting Torah learning as Xerox was 50 years ago.

- *Sefaria User*

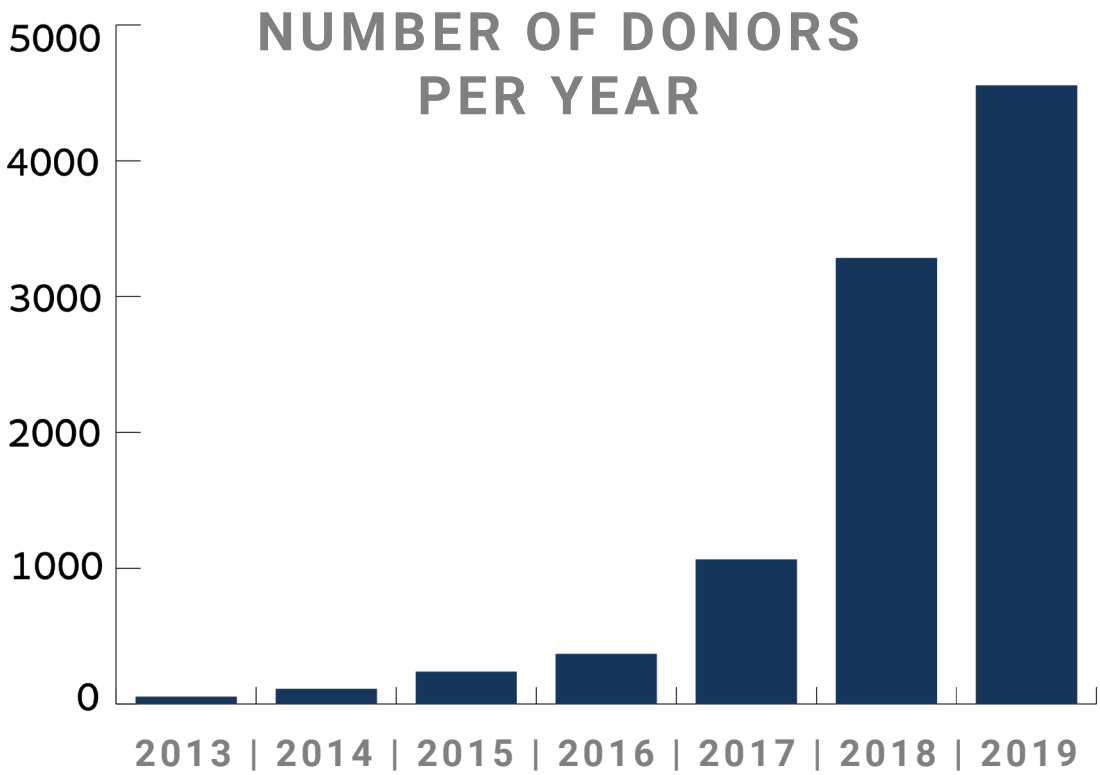
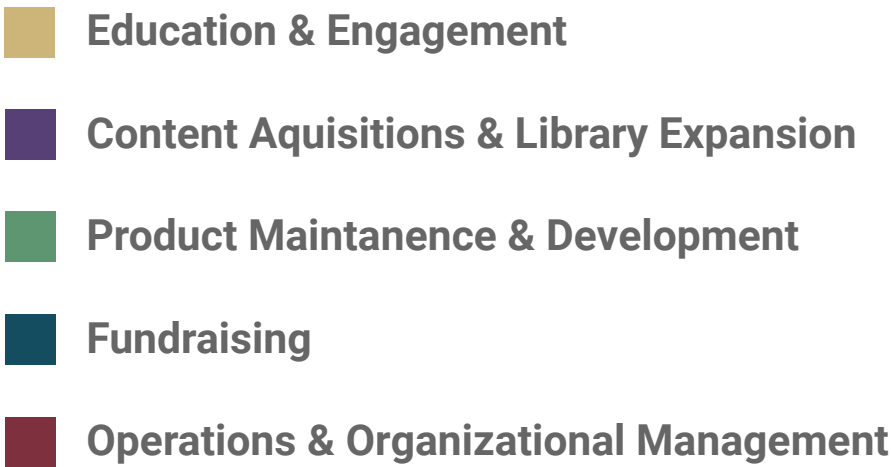
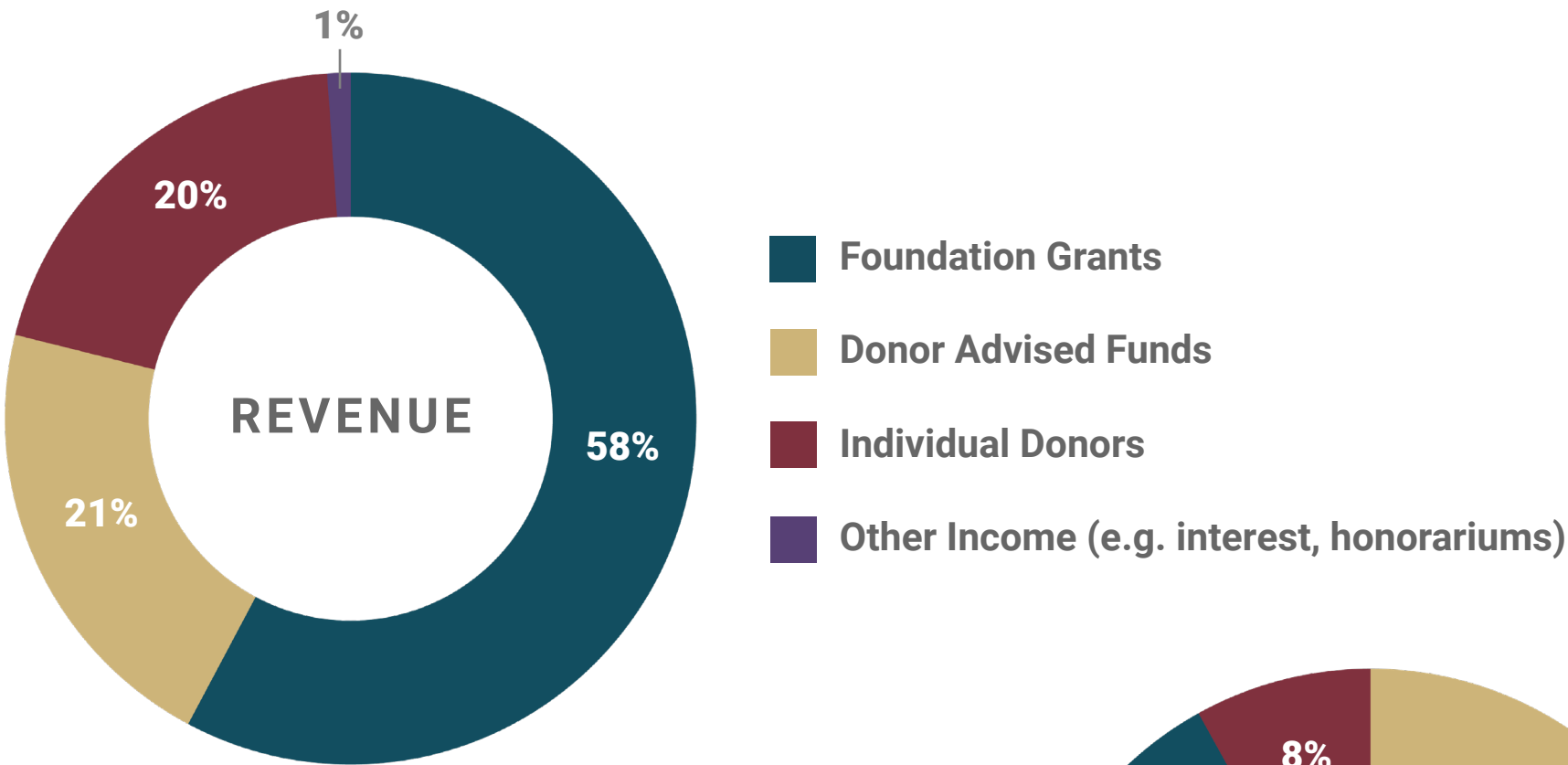
Sefaria's commitment to digital text access for all who seek to take hold of Torah played a pivotal and unparalleled role in my rabbinical school journey. As the first blind woman in the world to become a rabbi, Sefaria's digital library enabled me to access rabbinic texts with ease for both educational as well as Torah lishma purposes. With much hakarat hatov do I thank Sefaria for the incredible and holy work you are doing.

- *Rabbi Lauren Tuchman*

Sefaria did not only expand my knowledge and passion for Torah, but also gave me the confidence to prepare and teach Torah to others.

- *Shoshana Lehman, student*

Sefaria secured nearly \$3M for operating expenses and special projects in 2019. Expenses totaled \$2.9M. Below is a breakdown of Sefaria's 2019 financials.



*To learn more about Sefaria's financials, you can look at the latest 990 at [sefaria.org/donate](https://sefaria.org/donate) or you can explore [Guidestar.org](https://www.guidestar.org).*



The digital nature of the work enables our team to work remotely, attracting the best talent from around the globe for this project. The Sefaria team works from New York, the Bay Area, Chicago, St. Louis, Boston, Denver, Berlin, and across Israel.



**Daniel Septimus**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Brett Lockspeiser**  
Co-Founder & CTO



**Annie Lumerman**  
Chief Operating Officer



**Lev Israel**  
Chief Data Officer



**Sara Wolkenfeld**  
Chief Learning Officer



**Lizi Martin**  
Israel Director



**Gabriel Weiner**  
Director of Product



**Emmanuel Bloch**  
France Director



**Rachel Buckman**  
Education Associate



**Ephraim Damboritz**  
Sr. Managing Engineer



**Lorenzo Fernando Davis**  
Sr. Infrastructure and  
Backend Engineer



**Hannah Goldberger**  
Sr. Development  
Associate



**Tali Herenstein**  
Chief of Staff



**Steve Kaplan**  
Content Engineer



**Jonathan Mosenkin**  
Sr. Content Engineer



**Russel Neiss**  
Sr. Product Engineer



**Shanee Rosen**  
Content Engineer



**Noah Santacruz**  
Sr. Research Engineer



**Chava Tzemach**  
Communications &  
Marketing Manager



**Shmuel Weissman**  
Manager of Text Acquisition  
& Text Quality



**Hedva Yechieli**  
Israel Education Coordinator

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We have assembled a board of directors that brings considerable expertise in non-profit management, finance, strategy, and Jewish learning and leadership. We were excited to welcome a new member this year, Michael Englander. In addition to being a long-time friend of Sefaria, Michael is a super user with a particular interest in Kabbalistic and Chasidic texts, and we’re excited to lean on him for his varied expertise.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Joshua Foer, Co-founder and Chairman, Atlas Obscura | Elana Stein Hain, Shalom Hartman Institute             |
| Brett Lockspeiser, Co-founder and CTO, Sefaria      | Raanan Agus, Goldman Sachs                             |
| Mo Koyfman, Treasurer, Shine Capital                | Rona Sheramy, Jewish Foundation for Education of Women |
| Felicia Herman, Natan Fund                          | Michael Englander, Millennium Partners                 |
| Joshua Kushner, Thrive Capital                      |  |
| Jonathan Koschitzky, IKO Industries                 |  |

## ADVISORY COUNCIL

We are proud to have a diverse set of experts and industry leaders who share our passion for Jewish texts, access, and the future of Jewish learning and share their time to help us strategize and act. Some engage on specific problems, others at a more general level, but all have provided invaluable insight as sounding boards and thought-partners as we pursue this work.

- |                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| Jacob Kupietzky      | Libby Novack    |
| Virginia Bayer       | Sam Moed        |
| Mamie Kanfer Stewart | Michael Bloch   |
| James Rothschild     | Ilan Rubinstein |
| Joseph Meyer         | Akiva Katz      |



**Sefaria co-founders Joshua Foer and Brett Lockspeiser accepting the Dr. Benjamin J. Shevach Award for achievement in the field of Jewish education at the 2019 Hebrew College graduation ceremony.**

*Photo courtesy of Hebrew College, Photographer Zachary Sherman*

**To our major FY19 supporters:**

**FOUNDER’S CIRCLE**

Jim Joseph Foundation  
William Davidson Foundation

**PARTNERS**

Koschitzky Family  
Maimonides Fund

**INNOVATORS**

Raanan and Nicole Agus	Hilary and Mo Koyfman
AVI CHAI Foundation	Joshua Kushner
Aryeh B. and Elana Bourkoff	The Lucius N. Littauer Foundation
The Covenant Foundation	Rubinstein, Koschitzky, and Pertman families
The Crown Family	The Russell Berrie Foundation
David and Tracey Frankel	

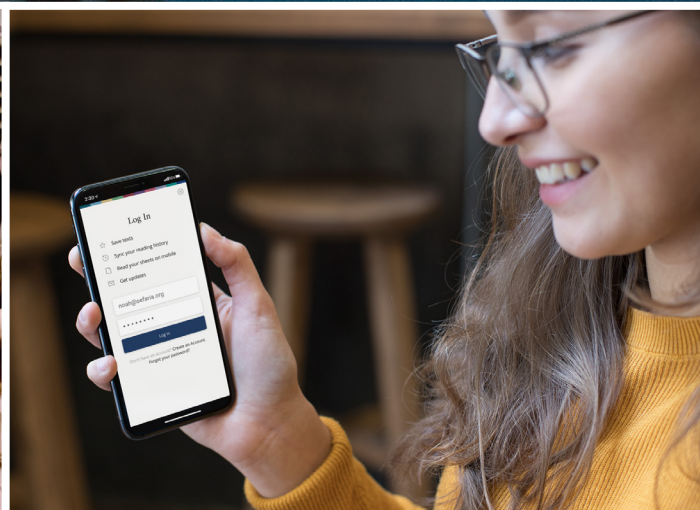
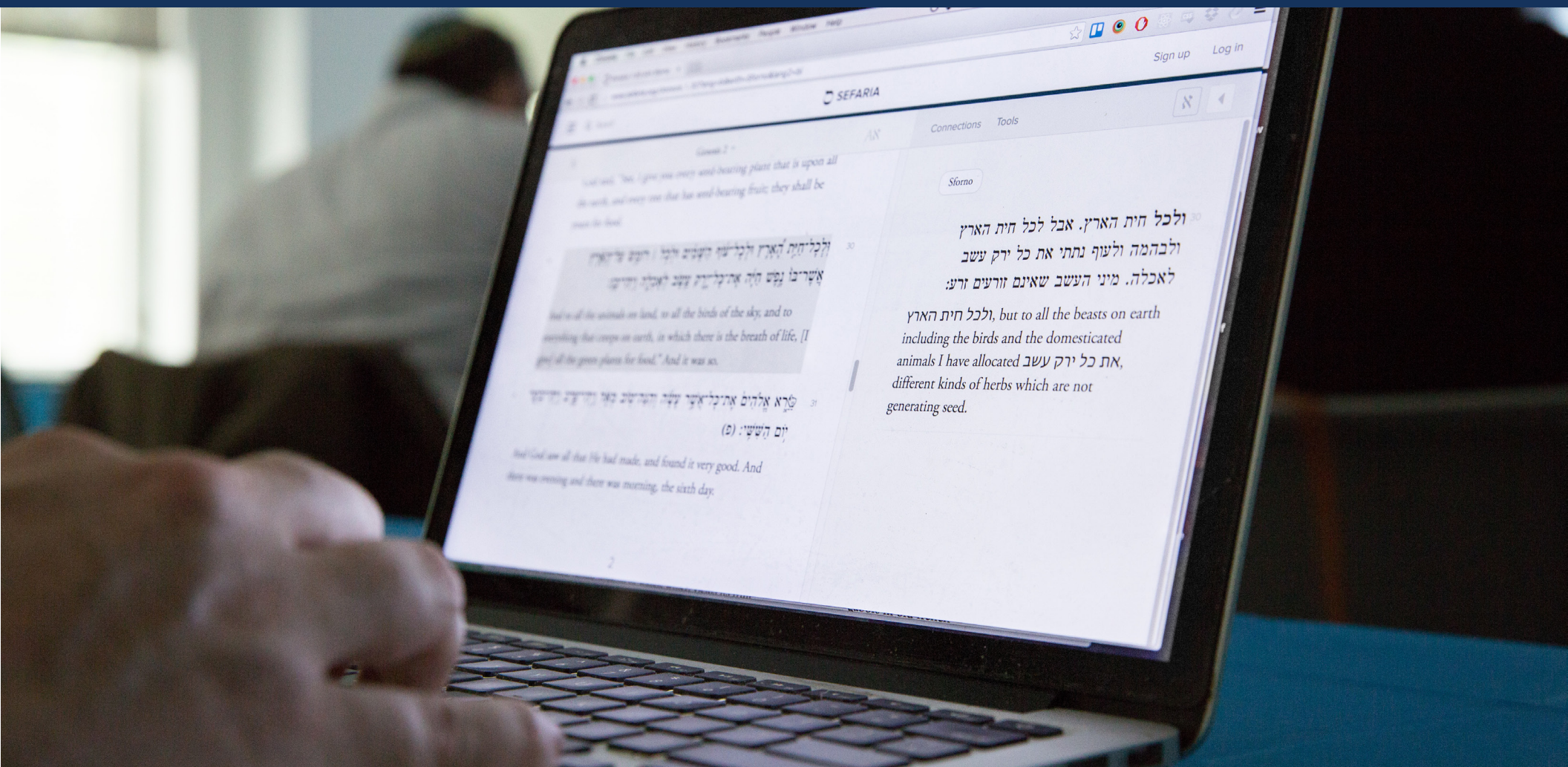
**BUILDERS**

David Berg Foundation  
Virginia Bayer and Rabbi Robert Hirt  
Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Funds  
The Joyce and Irving Goldman Family Foundation  
Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah  
Targum Shlishi and Raquel and Aryeh Rubin

**We are also thankful to the following individuals and organizations for their generosity:**

The Academy of the Hebrew Language  
The National Library of Israel  
Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP  
Mark Cohen, Pearl Cohen





## LEARN

[Learn](#) with Sefaria. Join the 300,000 people visiting Sefaria every month to learn Torah, build source sheets, and keep the great, millenia-old Jewish conversation going.

## SHARE

Have you translated a text? [Reach out](#) to our content team to see if we can make use of this translation to open up the Jewish canon to non Hebrew-language native speakers.

## DONATE

Your support keeps our library open and free for all, forever. [Join](#) the thousands of people who contribute what they can to keep Sefaria going.

## SPONSOR

You can now make a more permanent mark by [sponsoring a day of learning](#) or a text in honor or memory of a loved one.

## STAY CONNECTED

Like us on Facebook, follow us on Instagram and Twitter. [Sign up](#) for our newsletter to keep abreast of our latest text releases, features, and updates.

**To get involved, email [tali@sefaria.org](mailto:tali@sefaria.org).**





[www.sefaria.org](http://www.sefaria.org)

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