Sefaria

Annual Report 2020

We remember two Torah giants and visionaries who each played a foundational role in bringing Sefaria to life.

Photo courtesy of Aleph Society, Steinsaltz.org

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz

A true trailblazer in the work to make Jewish texts accessible to all, Rabbi Steinsaltz was one of the earliest proponents of Sefaria. In the spring of 2013, co-founders Joshua Foer and Brett Lockspeiser shared a buggy prototype with Rabbi Steinsaltz. Not only did he immediately grasp the concept, but as Josh recalls, "at every moment in our conversation, he was three steps ahead of us." This shared passion to revolutionize access to Jewish texts ultimately led to what will arguably remain Sefaria's most historic achievement—liberating Rabbi Steinsaltz's Hebrew and English translations of the Talmud on Sefaria. Read Josh's reflection upon Rabbi Steinsaltz' passing here.

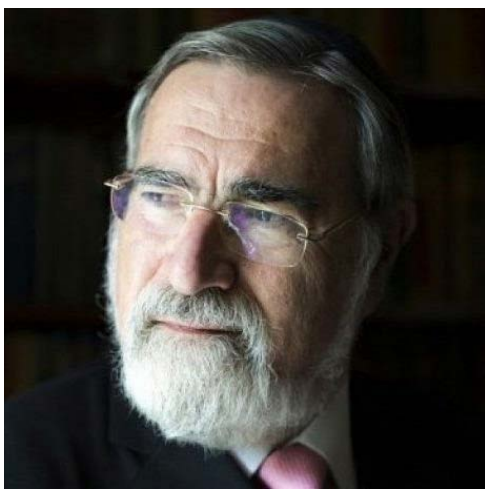


Photo courtesy of RabbiSacks.org

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

A visionary who saw the promise of Sefaria before most others, Rabbi Sacks was an early and avid supporter. In 2013, he wrote:

> *"Throughout the centuries, Jews have always been the people of the book...The Sefaria project has the potential to become the digital home of the book for the people of the book. The digitalisation of our books, manuscripts, and journals is not just creating a vital online resource, but is opening up our ancient heritage to a new generation on a global scale in a digital age."*

In 2017, he called Sefaria "*One of his favorite things happening in the contemporary Jewish world*." He remained a steadfast champion of the project, linking his website to the primary sources in the Sefaria library, and contributing Torah to a growing collection of diverse voices from around the world. You can explore two source sheets Rabbi Sacks contributed to our collection of resources for Shavuot in May 2020 here.

יהי זכרם ברוך

Letter from the CEO

Dear friend,

As many of you would agree, this year was a challenging one. Amidst all of the uncertainty and the unknowns, though, it became increasingly clear that Sefaria is an integral part of Torah's present and future. More than 3.68 million people worldwide turned to Sefaria for Jewish learning, teaching and exploration in 2020. Some even described Sefaria as "a lifeline."

Looking back, the year started off on a high note, as the 14th cycle of Daf Yomi (a program of daily Talmud) launched to unprecedented enthusiasm and participation—thanks, in large part, to the democratization of the Talmud made possible by Sefaria. Our open source data and API played a critical role in powering many of the apps and resources that emerged this past year including the Orthodox Union's *All Daf* and My Jewish Learning's *Daily Dose of Talmud* email newsletter.

Then, COVID-19 brought the world crashing to a halt—and as Jewish education and much of Jewish learning moved online, Sefaria's value to the community became even more evident. Our texts and learning resources helped ease synagogues, schools, and centers of study into the world of virtual learning. Below are just a few highlights from 2020—they were moments of brightness for me and my team in a dark year.

680,000 People Studied Talmud

The number of people using the The William Davidson Talmud—Sefaria's free, digital edition of the Talmud with modern Hebrew and English translations–increased by 48% in 2020. The addition of nikud and punctuation, new commentaries, and rabbinic biographies made Sefaria's Talmud even more accessible to learners.

250 Million Words in the Library

We continued to expand the depth and richness of our free library with several key additions. You can now find new Tanakh commentaries including a complete English translation of Rashi, additional liturgy for Jewish holidays, English translations of the Minor Tractates, works from Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, and more.

3.68 Million Visitors

The average number of monthly visitors increased by 63% between 2019 and 2020. And in the month of December, more than 520,000 people visited Sefaria on the web and through the Sefaria apps. This dramatic growth puts us a full year ahead of a goal we set back in 2018 to reach a half-million people in a month by the end of 2021.

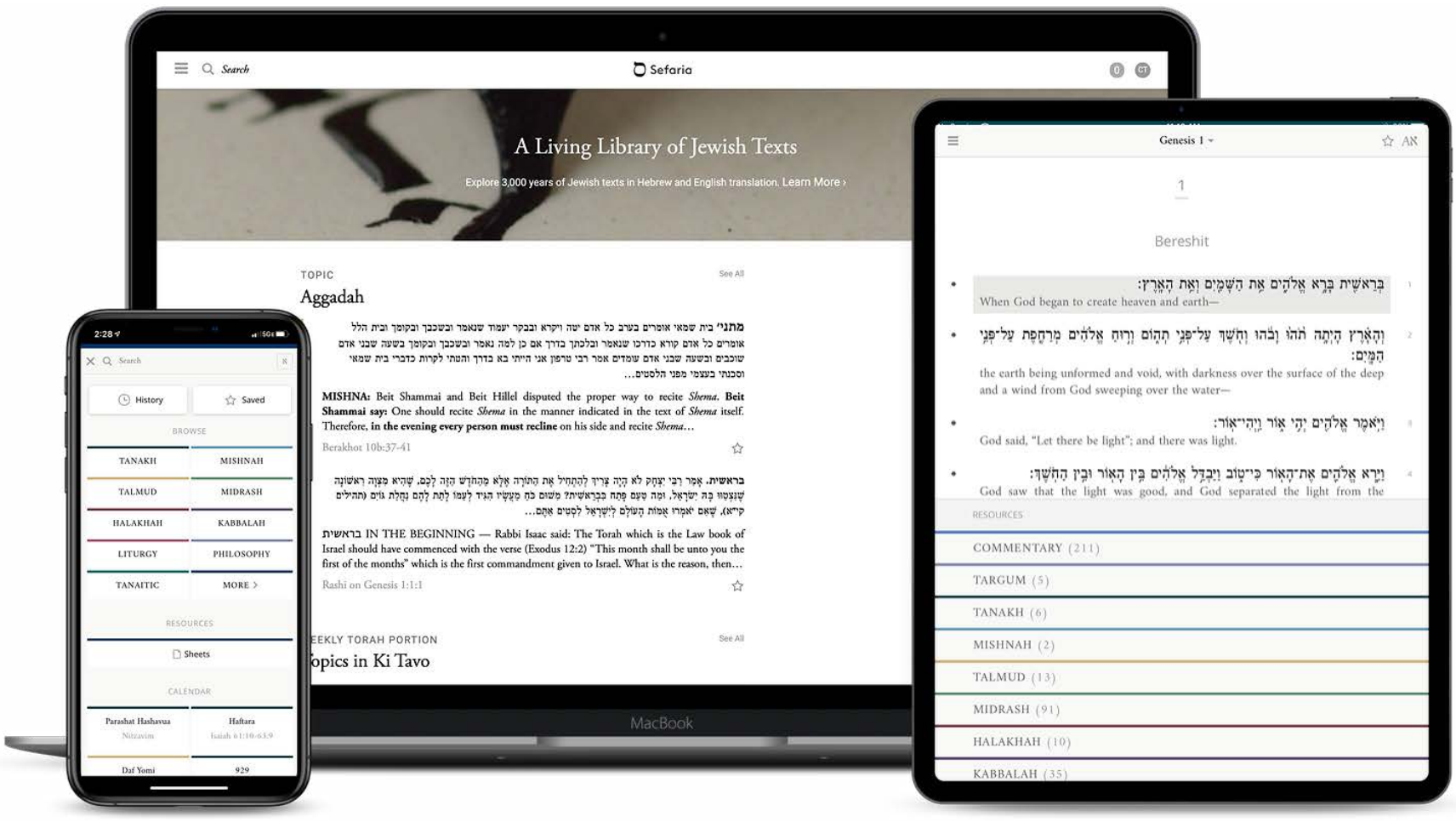
Sefaria supported a world of learning during the pandemic, and is a resource that is now needed more than ever. Despite the hardships 2020 brought, it offered Sefaria the opportunity to make tremendous strides toward our vision of increasing access to the Jewish library for all people.

As a team, we're grateful that we are able to provide so vital a resource—in celebratory times and in crisis.

Thank you for your support.

Daniel Septimus
CEO

About Sefaria



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.

History of Sefaria

2013

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

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.**

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.**

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.

2017

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

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

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.

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.**

2020

Sefaria pivots to **meet the challenges of COVID-19**, offering resources for celebrating holidays at home, tips for distance learning, and video chavruta technology.

Topical search is launched, a major update to the site's architecture and a critical tool for beginners to be able to navigate the library.

Sefaria hits record traffic with **520,000/users in a month**—a full year ahead of our goal.

2020 By the Numbers

LIBRARY

250 million
words

2.59 million
inter-textual links

80
projects powered by Sefaria

TOP 5 TEXTS

- Torah
- Tractate Berakhot
- Tractate Shabbat
- Psalms
- Siddur

USERS

3.68 million
unique users

in **233**
countries & territories

USER-CREATED SHEETS

67,496
(264,729 since 2013)

APP DOWNLOADS

105,235
(303,368 since 2016)

Our Work

LIBRARY

Sefaria's library showcases the remarkable textual tradition of the People of the Book like never before. Sefaria's collection contains nearly 250 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 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. 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, and build our product to be maximally intuitive for people of all backgrounds and digital fluency.

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.

The Sefaria team in action, November 2020

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

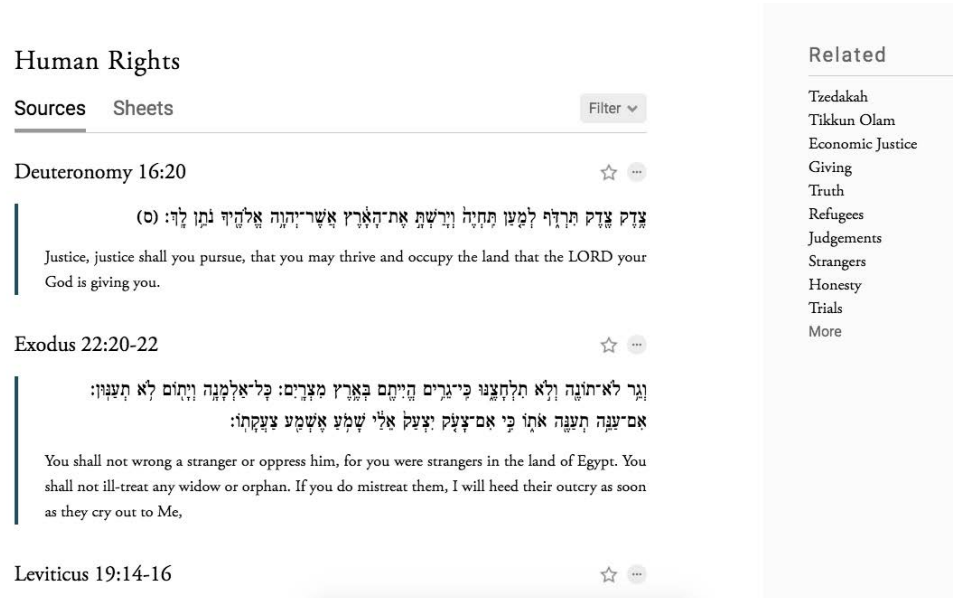
We continued our work to make Sefaria the best-in-class Torah platform for all users–ensuring that texts were not just available to all, but truly accessible to newcomers and the learned alike. Our top priority was a focus on new ways to search and navigate your way through the vast and sometimes overwhelming Jewish canon.

Highlights:

1

Topic Pages

A new way to navigate the Jewish library, Topic pages curate the most significant texts and popular source sheets associated with a given topic, providing learners with an entryway into the library based on what interests them as opposed to book title alone.



2

The Linker

We now have 53 sites currently using the Linker and connecting contemporary content across the web to Sefaria's library of texts, including MyJewishLearning, Aish, JTS, Hebrew College, YU Torah online, and more.

3

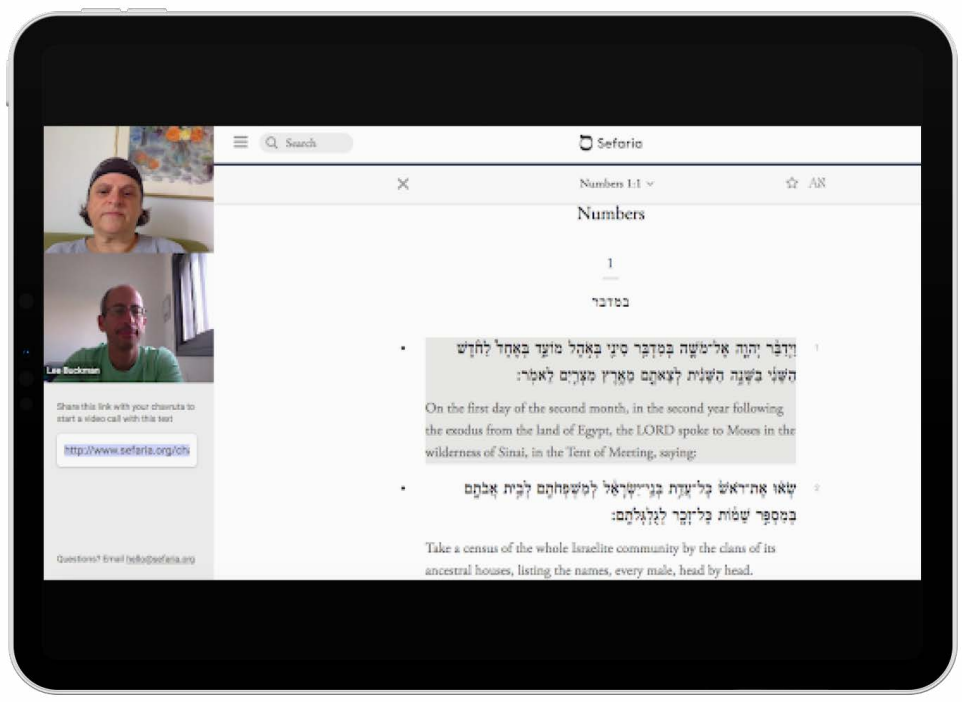
Rabbinic Biographies

This new feature allows users to click on any rabbi's name in the Talmud and find a short biography of who the rabbi was, when he lived, and what his contribution was. Associated Topic pages allow for further exploration, highlighting Talmudic narratives that reference the figure and who his teachers and students were.

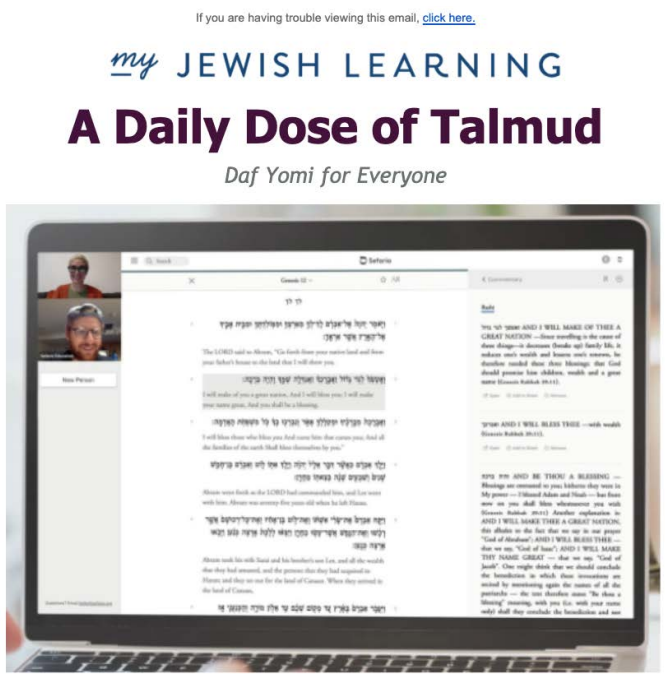
PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Chavruta Video Technology

Back in March, in an effort to adapt to the new digital needs of the Covid-19 reality, Sefaria's engineering team began exploring the possibility of adding a video aspect to the Sefaria learning experience. This past summer, we created a prototype of a feature called Daf Roulette, a tool that matches individual learners randomly with an online chavruta over video, followed by "Chavruta on Sefaria," which allows users to grab a unique URL to send to their chavruta of choice, allowing them to meet face-to-face over a shared page of text. Bringing the human component so essential to the Beit Midrash experience to Sefaria has the potential to transform the site and the experience of text study for all people.



A screenshot of Sefaria's Chavruta feature.



A snapshot from MyJewishLearning's Daily Dose of Talmud community using Chavruta on Sefaria.

> *As a kollel avreich, it was nice to learn with somebody completely outside the spectrum of who normally comes through the door. I learned with a very nice 80 year old lady who had never learned Bavli before, so that was a bit of a surprise... It was an excellent moment for teaching, extending the reach of Torah, and making a Kiddush HaShem. Isn't that what Sefaria is all about?"*

> *"I was paired with a non-Jewish episcopal woman from Maine who learns Daf Yomi. As an observant Jew from Baltimore we were the furthest thing from a traditional pair. Yet, our learning was rich and meaningful. Kol HaKavod."*

> *Just having an opportunity to discuss text with someone was great. [My Chavruta] was more knowledgeable than I, but he was a good sport about it. I read the English and he read the Hebrew. He was a good model for me to listen to as I develop my Hebrew skills."*

CONTENT ACQUISITION

Our library grew from 209 million words to 250 million words this year. We placed special emphasis on rounding out our core collection with the acquisition of translations, increasing the diversity of our collection through the inclusion of more female and Sephardic voices, and exploring foreign language acquisitions.

Highlights:

1

Liturgy Improvements

In preparation for a High Holiday season that largely excluded synagogues and physical prayer books, we made a concerted effort to update our liturgical offerings so users could have access to these texts wherever they found themselves.

2

Notable Releases

We released a complete English version of Rashi on Tanakh; *Peninei Halakha*, Rabbi Eliezer Melamed's widely requested halakhic text; Responsa from former Sephardic Chief Rabbis of Israel.

3

Building Out Our Talmud Library

The William Davidson Talmud is even more accessible with the addition of nikud and punctuation and the release of several key Talmudic commentaries, including the Meiri and Chiddushei Rabbi Akiva Eiger. This work continues to pay off: more than 680,000 people studied the Talmud this year on Sefaria.

4

Foreign Language Acquisitions

To make Sefaria a truly global resource, we made major progress towards developing a multilingual site with translations in multiple languages.

CONTENT SPOTLIGHT

A Focus on Women's Voices

In an effort to expand the diversity of voices in our library, we worked hard this year to include more women's voices there. We finalized two deals to add modern classics to our site—Dr. Judith Hauptman's *Rereading the Rabbis* and Dr. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg's *Moses: A Human Life*—and are in conversation with publishers about additional opportunities. In addition to pursuing works published in the last 50 years, we are in active conversations with top female scholars and organizations that support them to help bring more Torah scholarship by women into the world. As one piece of that work, we are hosting The Jewish Women Scholars' Writing Fellowship, a new initiative presented in partnership with Maharat aimed to elevate Jewish women's scholarship with workshops, support, and resources to develop and publish new content.

OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

We made significant leaps to grow Sefaria's audience with particular emphasis on reaching those newer to Jewish text study. We also leaned heavily into a "Powered by Sefaria" model of partnership this past year, focusing on Sefaria's enormous potential to not only serve as an invaluable resource in its own right, but to power the Jewish learning facilitated by other organizations.

Highlights:

1

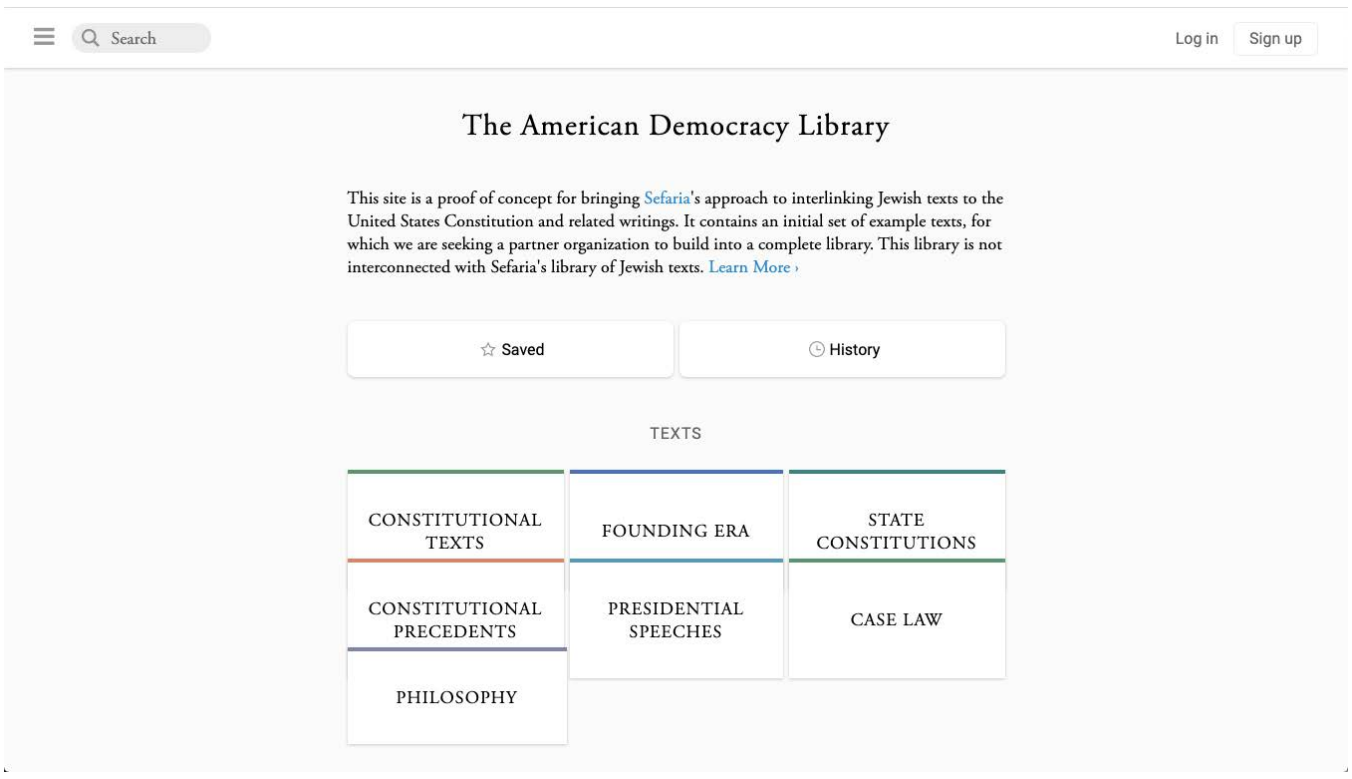
Social Media Growth

We doubled our engagement across social media platforms in 2020 and just hit 10,000 followers on Instagram! This work is in line with our effort to expand to new audiences, specifically beginners and youth.

2

Sefaria for Democracy

A proof of concept, Sefaria for Democracy was our first attempt at generalizing Sefaria's digital infrastructure for other bodies of knowledge. This has the potential to serve as an important revenue stream for Sefaria in the future, while also highlighting the power of Sefaria's infrastructure for other traditions and canons.



3

Exciting Partnerships

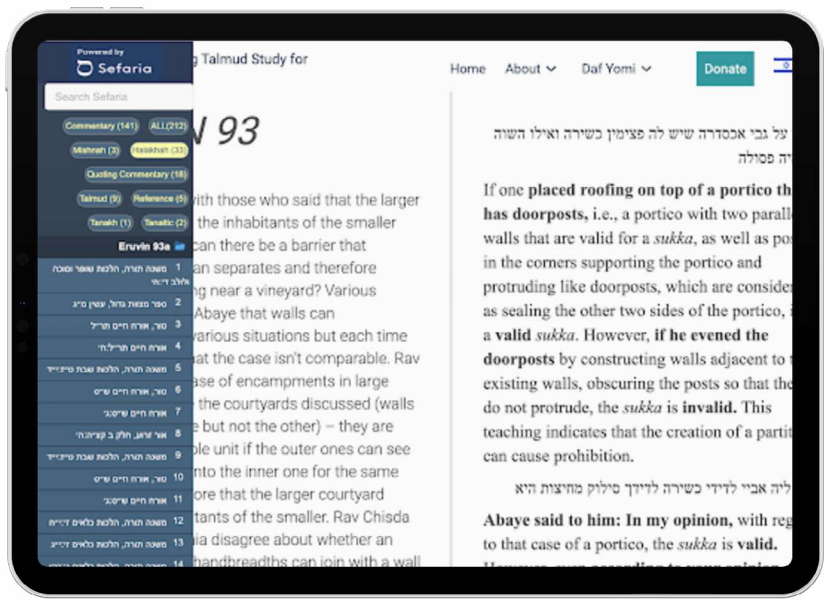
We partnered with many exciting organizations this past year in an effort to power their own Jewish learning. Highlights included work with Moishe House this past Purim to get Sefaria's edition of Megillat Esther into the hands of their constituents, and Sefaria's contribution to OneTable's "Here For" project over the High Holidays.

MARKETING AND ENGAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT

Powered by Sefaria Contest

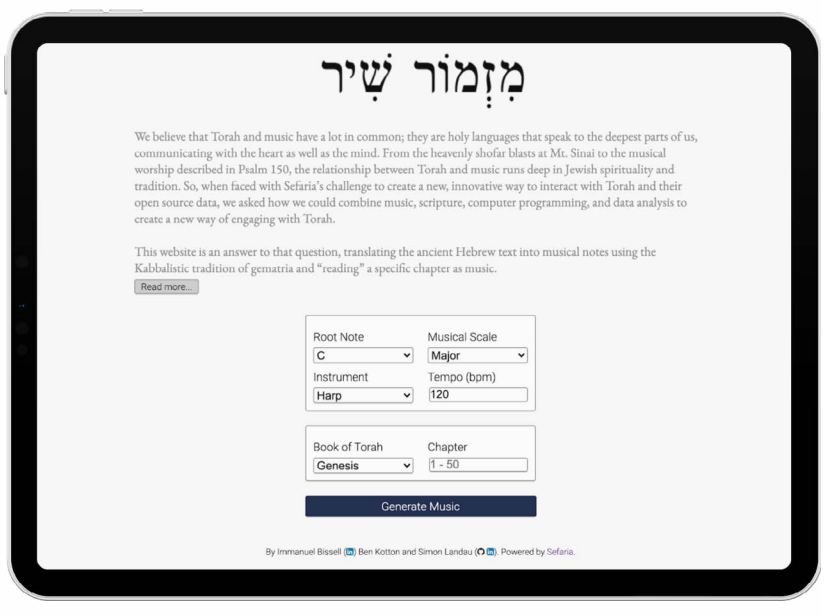
In an effort to seed the digital future of Jewish texts and in response to some extra free time people might have found themselves with this summer due to Covid-19, we launched the Powered by Sefaria Contest in July—inviting the global Sefaria community to make use of our free and open digital dataset of Jewish texts, translations, and interconnections. We saw tremendous enthusiasm, welcoming over 200 sign-ups and 50 high-quality submissions from Sefaria users around the world. We are proud to be able to offer the building blocks of digital Torah for all to build off of to continue to create the future of tech and Torah.

Check out a few of the winners and honorable mentions below, and explore the rest here.



Grand Prize Winner:

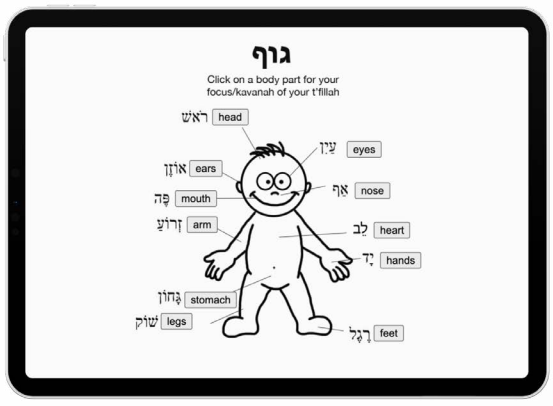
The **Talmud Sidebar Extension** brings Sefaria's learning resources to Daf Yomi sites across the web. Created in response to the move to Zoom for Daf Yomi classes the world over in the wake of Covid-19, the extension recognizes what daf you're learning or listening to on nearly a dozen Daf Yomi sites. It then enables a sidebar to see connections from Sefaria's library or link straight back to Sefaria.



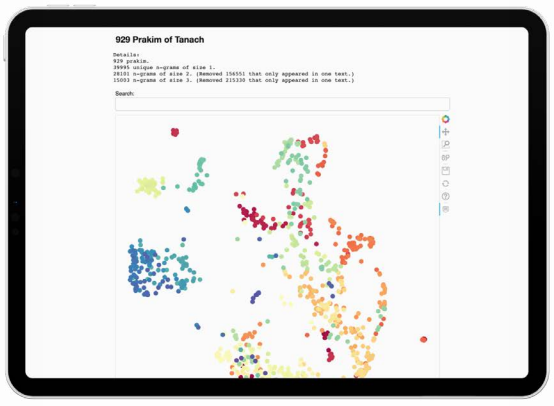
Youth Prize Winner:

Mizmor Shir explores the intersections of Torah and music as two forms of holy language. Using the Kabbalistic tradition of gematria, Mizmor Shir transforms the text of the Torah into music, in keys and scales that you choose, to reveal unseen (and unheard) patterns within it.

Honorable Mentions:



Goof has the honor of being the project submitted to contest by the youngest entrant at 11 years old. lets you explore texts of Tefillah through the lens of the body. Pick a body part and see texts that relate to it.



Sefer Similarity Map visualizes relationships among Jewish texts by analyzing their usage of words or phrases to show which texts and sections have the most in common.

CiteMakor is a Twitter bot which accepts requests for citations and responds by tweeting back one or more images that include the cited text.

EDUCATION

Sefaria's education efforts changed abruptly with the pandemic, moving from a focus on in-person initiatives like the Regional Intensive in Baltimore to a digital-first focus. Our team was there for educators, students, and learners of all ages with webinars, office hours, and a steady stream of resources to support remote learning.

Highlights include:

1

New Resources to Simplify the Sefaria Experience

We released a new Sefaria user manual, meant to provide easily accessible answers for questions big and small. We also began hosting a range of introductory webinars on topics ranging from Sefaria 101 to Sefaria Stacks (a guided tour of the Jewish canon and content in Sefaria's library). We were thrilled to see incredible interest—the very first one had over 1,900 sign-ups!

2

Holidays at Home

We developed special holiday learning resources suited for celebrating Passover, Shavuot, and the High Holidays at home, for an unusual year without access to synagogues and communal resources.

3

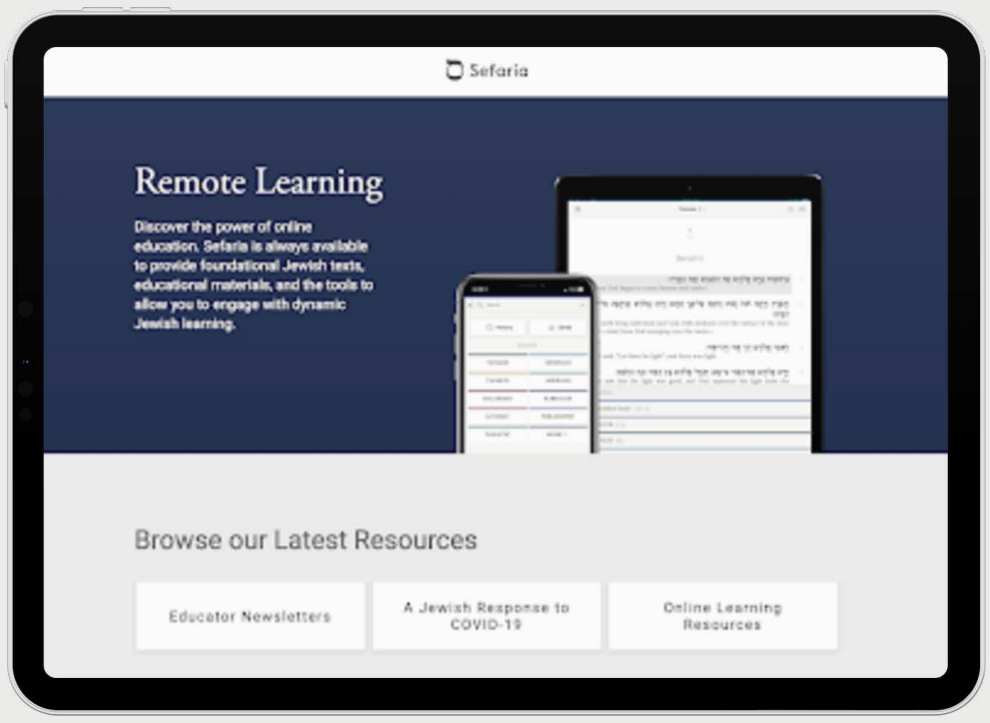
The Sefaria Classroom

We launched a new Facebook group to serve as a meeting place for Jewish educators to connect, share lesson plans, and explore novel ways Sefaria can impact the way they teach.

EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT

Sefaria Resources for Covid-19

Sefaria's education team spent the bulk of 2020 responding to the unique challenges that Jewish educators and professionals are facing in the Covid-19 pandemic. In response to mass closures, Sefaria's education team mobilized quickly to offer assistance to all of the educators, students, rabbis, and learners who found themselves with new distance learning needs. We launched a remote learning landing page that aggregates resources for educators and everyday learners; unveiled a new menu of workshops to equip diverse groups to leverage Sefaria's digital technology to navigate the challenges brought on by remote learnin; and offered 1:1 office hours for educators to discuss the unique needs of their schools or communities. This Forward article describes the importance of both Sefaria and this work in this moment.



Sefaria has become a lifeline and digital bridge that I and my community share as we explore our love and searching of Torah. To say that Sefaria has impacted our digital learning and teaching during COVID-19 would perhaps be one of the greatest understatements any of us could make. With Sefaria we have all increased our abilities to share, grow, and treasure this gift, thanks to your diligence, excellence, and expertise. Thank you!"

Arin Hilton

I'm greatly appreciative for Sefaria in this time of distress, as it is allowing me access to many sefarim I would not have otherwise. Thank you all so much!"

Sixth Grader, RYNJ

Thank you, Sefaria! You've opened up new sources for my weekly shiur for several years, and now you are sustaining my congregation during the pandemic.
We so appreciate all your recent features too!
Rabbi Gilah Langner

I have been able to continue learning Torah online with my chevrutot/classmates even without being in a Beit Midrash that has a concordance, BDB, dictionary, etc. It's been really amazing to be able to feel like my learning is still at a similar level as before even though it has moved online."

Elyssa Hurwitz

Sefaria has changed how I study even before Covid-19. I was intrigued by the thought of studying Daf Yomi, but don't have the funds to purchase a set of the Talmud. Additionally, I wasn't sure if I was willing to commit to buying a set of Talmud. Here it is, June, I've studied the Daf daily and am only able to do so thanks to Sefaria!!"

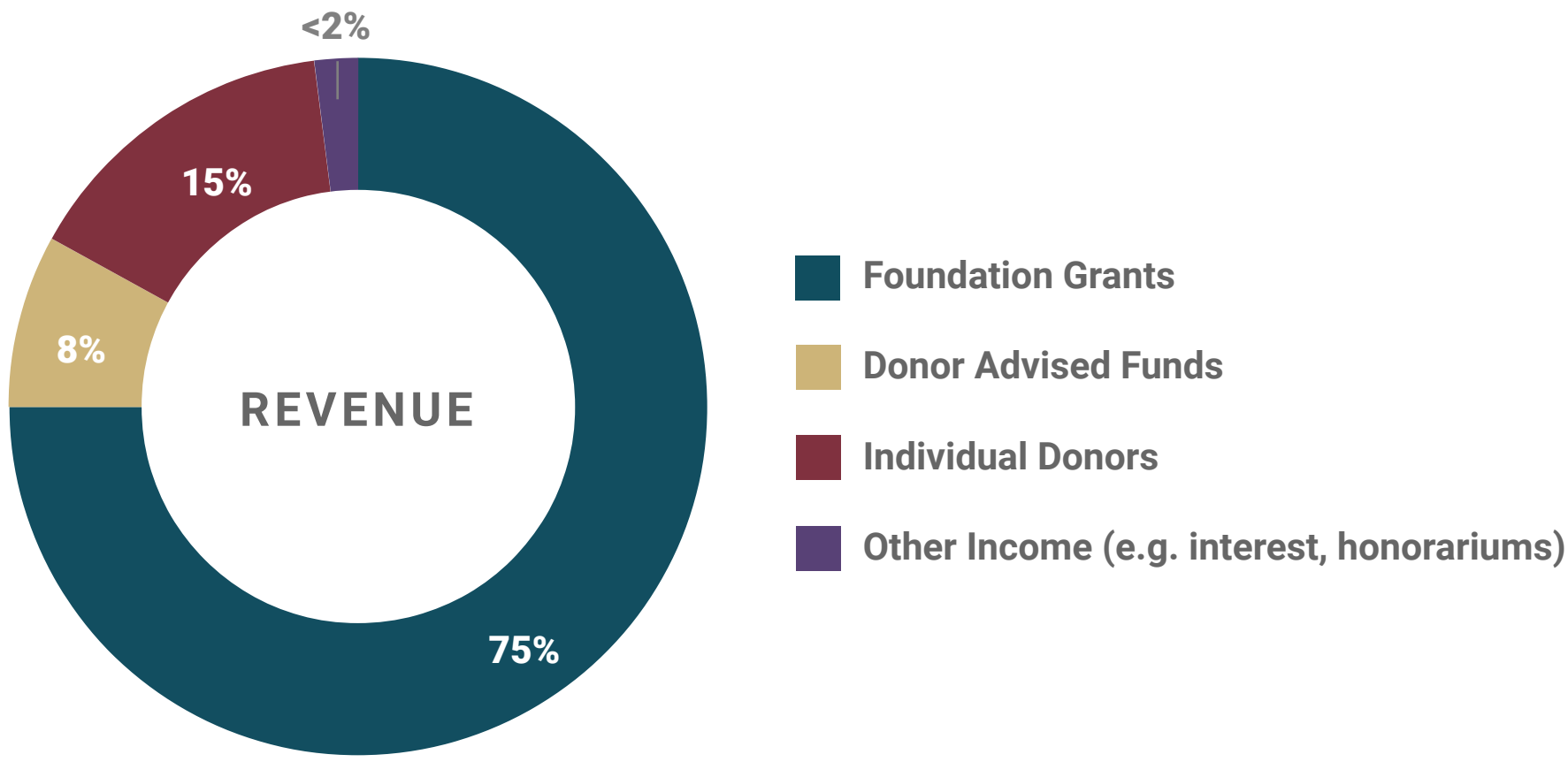
Anne Hope

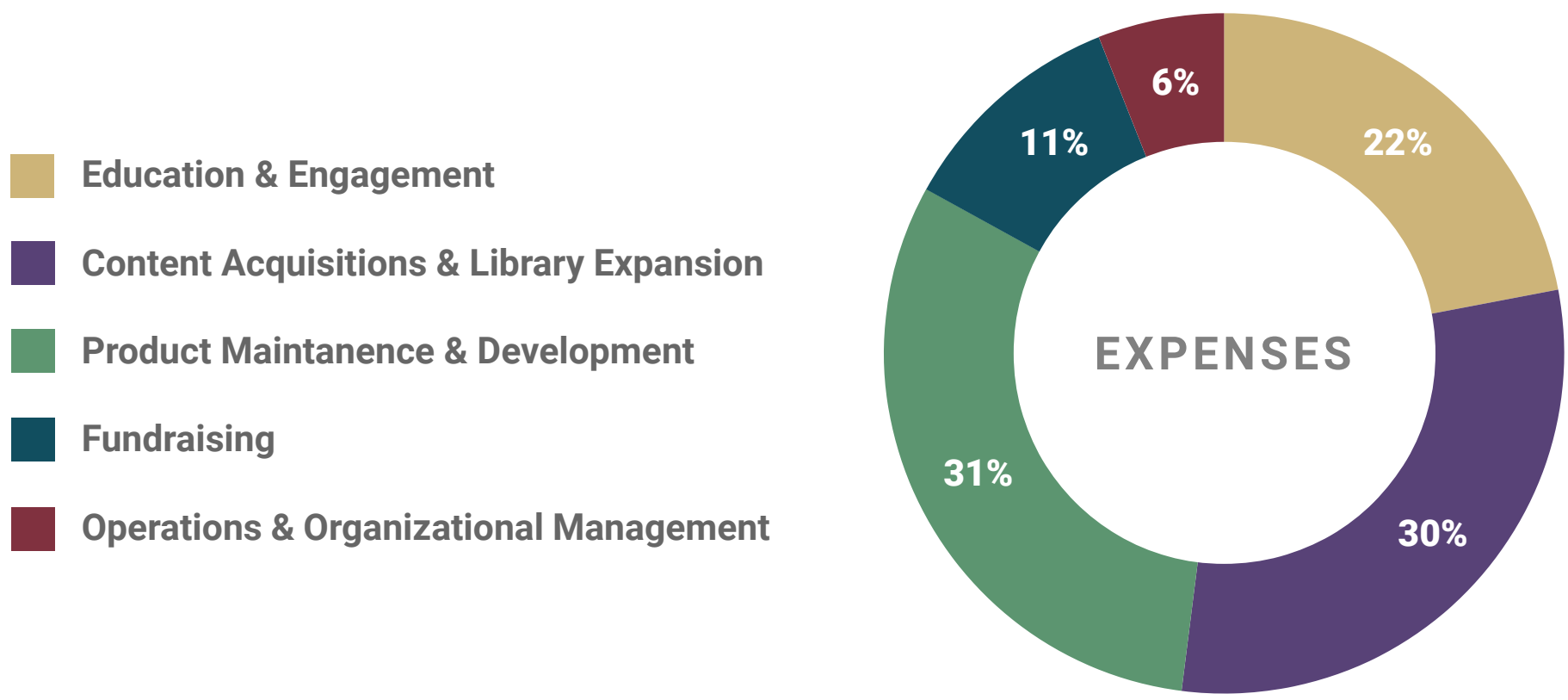
Since I no longer have my 4th grade students in a classroom with a tanach, every assignment I give in Chumash, Navi, and Ketuvim, is accompanied by a sefaria link. It is so user friendly, which is what my students need, especially at a time when literally everything must be digitalized and sorted through at home. The sefaria link is a key tool in navigation and translation skills in this digital learning climate."

Katherine Simon

FINANCIALS

Sefaria secured $4M in revenue in 2020. Expenses for general operations and special projects totaled $3.6M. Below is a breakdown of Sefaria's 2020 financials.





To learn more about Sefaria's financials, you can view the latest tax forms at sefaria.org/donate or you can explore Guidestar.org.

FUNDRAISING

Continuing to strengthen our community fundraising efforts was of chief importance to us in 2020. We sought to build a more sustainable model by encouraging our users to give through a variety of different channels.

7,094
total donors in 2020

4,936
first-time donors

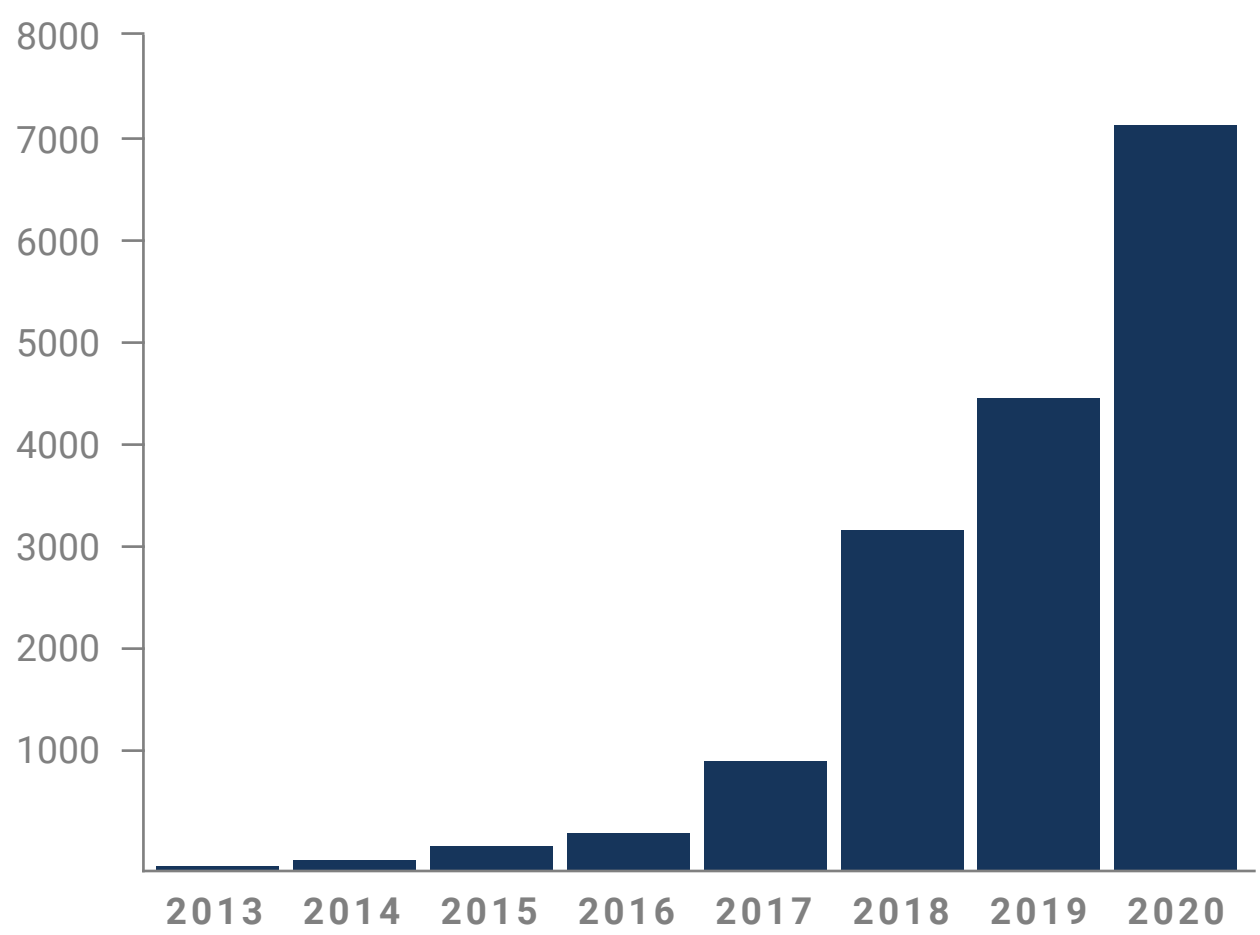
57%
increase in the size of our donor base

77%
increase in small dollar donations ($1,000 or less), raising more than $500,000!

882
Sustainers, Sefaria's monthly donor program, increased from 265 to 882 members. This program is now slated to raise more than $165,000 annually.

100
days of learning are sponsored, bringing in more than $30,000 for the year.

NUMBER OF DONORS PER YEAR



Team

The digital nature of the work enables our team to work remotely, attracting the best talent from around the globe. 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

Loren Berman
Outreach & Engagement Associate

Rachel Buckman
Sr. Education Associate

Ephraim Damboritz
Sr. Managing Engineer

Lorenzo Fernando Davis
Sr. Infrastructure and Backend Engineer

Lizzie Frankel
Communications & Marketing Associate

Yishai Glasner
Jr. Content Engineer

Hannah Goldberger
Development Manager

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
Sr. 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 nonprofit management, finance, strategy, and Jewish learning and leadership. In 2020, we were thrilled to welcome Ruth Calderon to the Board. A former Member of Knesset from the Yesh Atid party and Deputy Speaker of the Knesset (2013–2015), Ruth is an educator and Talmud scholar. She established the first Israeli secular, pluralistic, and egalitarian Beth Midrash, Elul, and founded Alma, the Home for Hebrew Culture in Tel Aviv. Ruth brings passion, varied expertise, and an extensive knowledge of the Torah landscape in Israel that we are confident will be a tremendous asset in our strategic objective to make Torah truly accessible to Jews of all backgrounds, all over the world.

Joshua Foer	Elana Stein Hain
Brett Lockspeiser	Raanan Agus
Mo Koyfman	Rona Sheramy
Felicia Herman	Michael Englander
Joshua Kushner	Ruth Calderon
Jonathan Koschitzky	

the algemeiner JEWISH 100

The Top 100 People Positively Influencing Jewish Life, 2020

Brett Lockspeiser

Computer programmer

Tech pioneer Brett Lockspeiser is the creator of the "Sefaria" app, a free digital library of Jewish texts in English and Hebrew. A secular Jew with no formal Jewish education, Lockspeiser, 37, was the project's chief engineer. Lockspeiser began his career in technology as a Product Manager at Google where he led the team that created the Google News Archives. After leaving Google, he worked with a number of startups and non-profits in the Bay Area. Lockspeiser has said that he founded Sefaria with partner Joshua Foer after realizing "how few of the basic possibilities for Torah and technology had yet been realized." (Photo: Contemporary Jewish Museum / Screenshot)

INNOVATION

Sefaria co-founder and Chief Technology Officer Brett Lockspeiser on *The Algemeiner*'s Top 100 People Positively Influencing Jewish Life, 2020 list.

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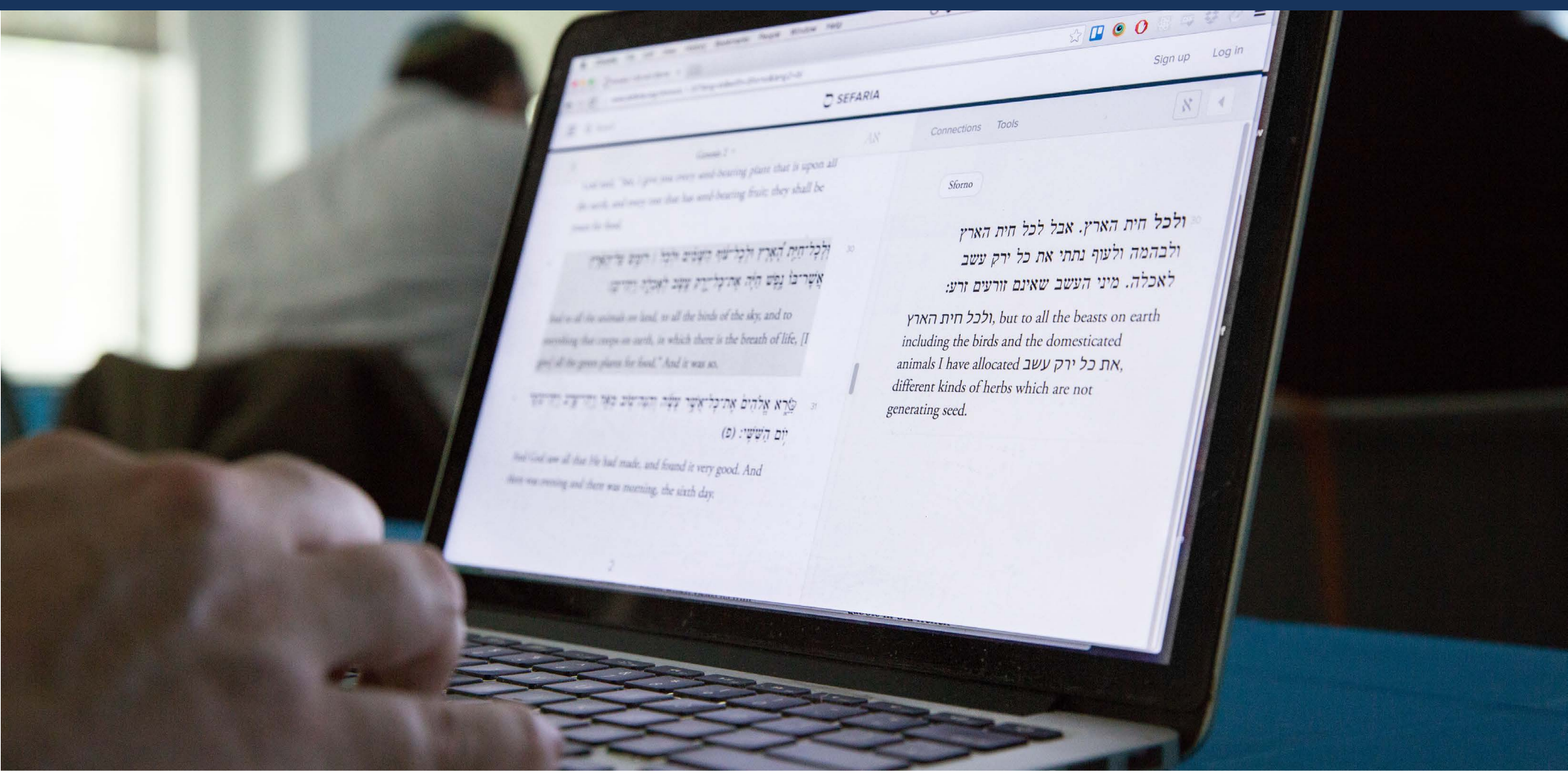

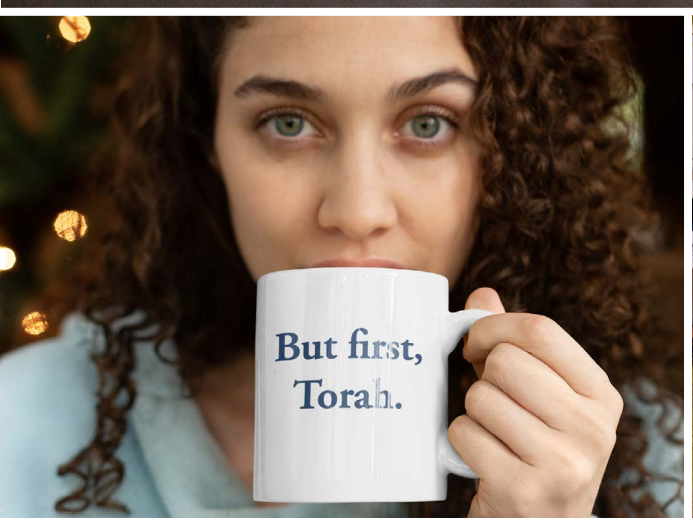

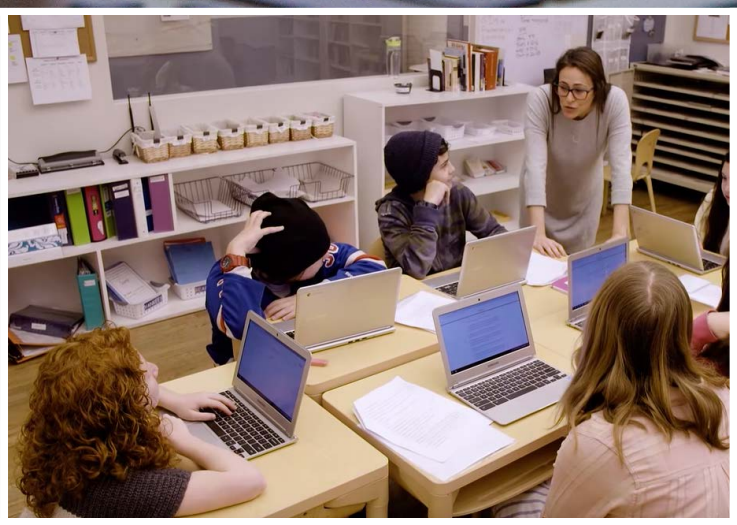

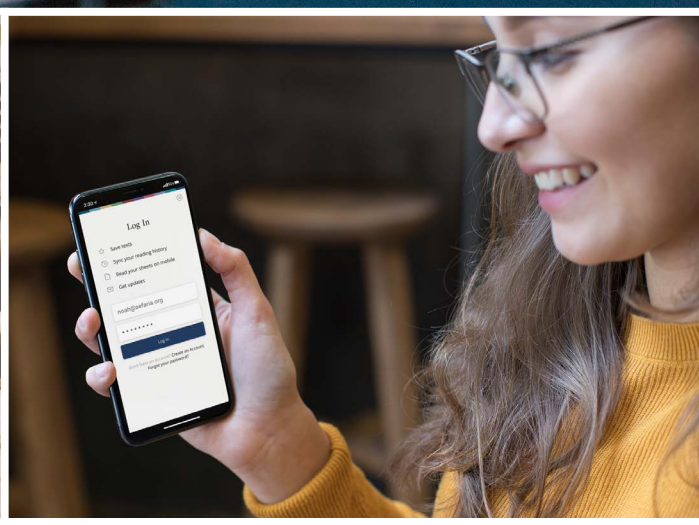

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