



# Shomer Collective Community Fellowship



**2023-24 | 5784 Cohort**



**Shomer**  
COLLECTIVE

## About Shomer Collective

Shomer Collective's mission is to improve end-of-life experiences for individuals and their families—inspired by Jewish wisdom, values, and practices—by curating content and resources and building a diverse network of organizational partners.

## About the Community Fellowship

The Fellowship is a 9-month, online, cohort-based learning experience for Jewish educators from a variety of settings and backgrounds. Together, they will explore Jewish wisdom, texts, and traditions about life and death, dying and mourning, guided by experts in the field, and will develop resources to help their communities talk more openly, more frequently, and with less fear about death and dying. The Community Fellowship is made possible thanks to a generous grant from The Covenant Foundation.



The Covenant Foundation

# Meet the



Ash Litschwartz



Betzy Lynch



Heather Erez



Lonnie Kleinman



Melinda Mersack



Noah Strauss

# Fellows



**Shomer Collective**  
**Education Program Manager**  
**Gila Silverman, PhD**

*she/her*



*Shomer Collective*  
*Tucson, Arizona*

## Gila Silverman, PhD

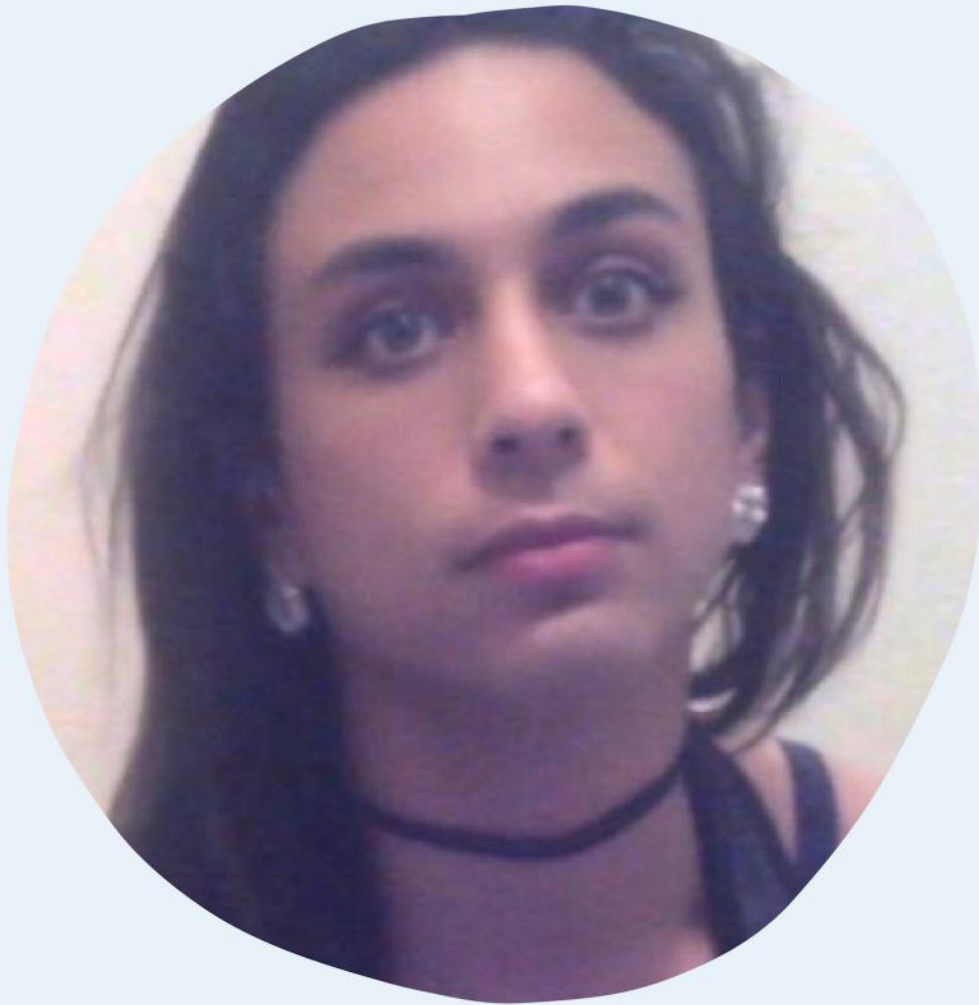
Gila holds a PhD in Sociocultural and Medical Anthropology and a Master's in Public Health, both from the University of Arizona. She also completed a certificate in Congregational Health Ministry at Andover Newton Theological School and was a member of the second cohort of the Jewish Pedagogies Research Fellowship with M<sup>2</sup>: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education. Prior to joining Shomer Collective, Gila served as Director of Jewish Lifelong Learning at Case Western Reserve University's Siegal Lifelong Learning Program. She has also held positions at the New Israel Fund, Shatil, the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, and the Shleimut Institute, an initiative to develop health care programs for synagogues.

Much of Gila's academic and communal work has focused on the intersections of religion, spirituality, health and healing, exploring the diverse ways that we find meaning and relevance in Jewish tradition and ritual, particularly at times of illness and loss. Her most recent writings have focused on kaddish and Jewish mourning, both from ethnographic and personal perspectives. She also co-edited a special issue on Anthropology and Grief, in the journal *Death Studies*.



# Ash Litschwartz

*she / they*



*Berkeley-Oakland Midrash, Eastbay JCC  
Richmond, California*

Ash Litschwartz is a dedicated Jewish educator with over a decade of experience who brings her passion and expertise to both formal and informal educational environments. With a particular dedication to addressing the unique challenges of supplementary education for Jewish youth and teenagers, Ash has established a strong presence in the Bay Area Conservative, Reform, and Independent Jewish communities.

Currently, Ash is the lead educator at Edah/Midrasha, which works with Jewish teens and youth across the greater Eastbay area to create participant centered learning spaces. She has worked extensively in teaching gender inclusion across various organizations at both local and national levels.

Drawn from the wisdom of our Sages, "It is not up to you to complete the task, but neither are you free to refrain from doing your part," serves as her guiding philosophy. It is through this lens that Ash views her responsibility as a Jewish educator - to equip the next generation with the tools and traditions necessary to shape a vibrant Jewish future.



# Betzy Lynch

*she / her*



*Lawrence Family JCC  
La Jolla, California*

# Betzy Lynch

Betzy works as the CEO of the Lawrence Family JCC, JACOBS FAMILY CAMPUS. From 2013 through August, 2017 she served as the Executive Director of the Levite JCC in Birmingham, Alabama. Prior to that, she was Assistant Executive Director of the JCC in Memphis, Tennessee. She has had multiple leadership experiences with the JCC Maccabi Games including Games Director in 2012 and in 2017, was Games host. Betzy also serves on the continental Board of Directors of JCCs of North America.

Betzy attended Goucher College, where she played tennis and basketball and earned a BA in Business Management and Communications. Next, she attended Indiana State University to earn her MA in Physical Education, Coaching and Exercise Science. She has also earned a certificate in Jewish Experiential Education from the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Recently, Betzy was awarded San Diego Business Journal Business (SDBJ) Woman of the Year (nonprofit division). Additionally, Betzy has been named one of 500 Most Influential People in San Diego and was a finalist for CEO of the Year. Betzy was also honored by being a San Diego Magazine Woman of the Year Finalist and SDBJ Nonprofit Executive of the Year Finalist.

Betzy and her husband, Spencer and their two children, Renie and Cooper live in Carmel Valley.



# Chava Vidal

*she / her*



*Congregation Etz Chaim,  
Hospice of Cincinnati Inpatient Unit  
Cincinnati, Ohio*

Chava Vidal is a Jewish American, Chilean descendant, Synagogue Employee, and Hospice Nurse. She has been fortunate enough to work across the three major branches of Judaism in a variety of capacities including but not limited to: Hebrew School teacher, B'nai Mitzvah Tutor, Youth Director for USY and NFTY, and Israel Madricha. Chava now works with all generations in all aspects of Synagogue life as the Youth and Family Program Director for Congregation Etz Chaim, a Conservative Synagogue in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Chava's work focuses on making ritual, routine, and tradition meaningful for all ages and stages. As an adult, she went back to school and pursued a second life calling as a nurse. During her second week of nursing school, Chava realized she was meant to be a hospice nurse - and has been able to work in that holy field since 2020. As a hospice nurse, Chava has the honor of holding the hands of dying patients and comforting and supporting their family members. Helping people pass with support, comfort and dignity has filled her with a new sense of purpose, writing that, "While I cannot change the trajectory for my patients and families, I can reduce their fear, and provide education as a source of power helping them prepare for what comes next."



# Dave Siegel

*he / him*



*Hofstra Hillel  
Hempstead, New York*

Growing up on Long Island, Rabbi Dave Siegel was an active member and officer of METNY United Synagogue Youth (USY). He received his BA in Politics, Philosophy, and Law/History from Binghamton University and has received masters degrees from both New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and the Jewish Theological Seminary's William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education.

Before attending JTS, Dave worked as the Director of Special Projects at the 92nd Street Y. During his time in Rabbinical School, Dave focused on leadership and professional development in the Jewish community. He has also served in leadership positions at Camp Ramah in the Berkshires, the Foundation for Jewish Camp, and United Synagogue Youth. Dave is currently the Executive Director of Hofstra University Hillel and serves as a university chaplain.



# Heather Erez

*she / her*



*Temple Beth El of Boca Raton  
Boca Raton, Florida*

Heather Erez, RJE (Reform Jewish Educator) is the Director of Youth and Family Education and Engagement at Temple Beth El of Boca Raton. After living and teaching in Kibbutz Tzora in Israel she worked at San Francisco Hillel for 9 years before following her passion for Jewish education and earning a Masters in Religious Education at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion and starting her career in supplemental Jewish education at Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco.

Heather has served as a board member for the Association of Reform Jewish Educators and continues to further her professional development as part of the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute's cohort focusing on enhancing teacher education in the field.

In her spare time, Heather serves on the Spanish River Community High School PTSA executive board and volunteers as a Guardian ad Litem for Palm Beach County. Heather, and her husband, Shachar, are the proud parents of now high schoolers, Noam and Eden.



# Lonnie Kleinman

*she / her*



*Keshet  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

## Lonnie Kleinman

Rabbi Lonnie Kleinman is Keshet's Associate Director of Education and Training. Lonnie previously served as a chaplain resident at the Hospital at the University of Pennsylvania, where she met and journeyed alongside patients and families. She was also the fellowship coordinator at Tribe12, where she brought a queer lens to programming. Lonnie holds a BA in Religious Studies and Art History from Lewis and Clark College and a MA in Hebrew Letters and Ordination from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. She is passionate about relational organizing and pastoral care in dreaming of a future in which all people are seen and affirmed, and liberation exists for us all. She loves gathering inspiration for dreaming and living out this world through Talmud study, especially as exemplified in the holy connections of hevruta study. Lonnie is a trained spiritual director, ritualist, and death educator.

Originally from Tucson, AZ, on Tohono O'odham land, Lonnie is a queer, fat femme. She currently lives in Philadelphia, on Lenape land. In her free time, she tends to her garden and house plants and hikes in the woods with her pup.



# Mara Bragg

*she / her*



*Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan  
New York, New York*

Mara Bragg is an early childhood educator in New York City who has held many roles in the Jewish community.

From teacher to parent support group leader to event programmer, she enjoys building relationships with families through the joys and challenges of life, including holding space for difficult conversations. Mara has navigated end-of-life matters as a speaker about organ donation and a volunteer for LiveOnNY.

She is currently a pre-nursery teacher at the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan.



# Matthew Nover

*he / him*



*Beth El Synagogue  
East Windsor, New Jersey*

A graduate of the Rabbinical School at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, where he studied Hebrew Bible, Jewish Education, and more, Rabbi Matt Nover joined Beth El Synagogue in East Windsor, NJ in July 2019 as the Assistant Rabbi and Education Director. He is the former Chair of the Principal's Council of Princeton-Mercer-Bucks, the coordinator for the Introduction to Judaism Class for Princeton-Mercer-Bucks Board of Rabbis, and a past President of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Jewish Educators' Assembly.

Originally from Texas, he came to New Jersey for his undergraduate studies at Rutgers University, where he majored in Physics and Jewish Studies. He has been involved with supplementary schools as a student, a teacher, and an administrator for most of his life, and cares deeply about making them succeed.

Rabbi Nover is passionate about Jewish Education, and focuses on making Judaism relevant to his students. He lives by the saying "there are seventy interpretations to every verse in the Torah," and loves to bring unconventional ideas to the discussion. Whether that's looking at the physics of David's sling, or looking at Zombies and Judaism, Rabbi Nover tries to find a way to make Judaism matter to his students.



# Melinda Mersack

*she / her*



*jHUB*  
*Cleveland, Ohio*

Rabbi Melinda Mersack is the Director of jHUB which provides new ways for interfaith couples and families to comfortably explore Jewish culture and values in the modern world, a program of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland and the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland and an 18Doors affiliate. Rabbi Melinda is a graduate of M<sup>2</sup>: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education Senior Educators and Relational Learning cohorts, and is a Rabbis Without Borders Fellow of CLAL and was a Brickner Fellow of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Rabbi Melinda earned a B.A. from Washington University in St. Louis, and a Master of Hebrew Letters and ordination from the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion. Each year, she attends summer camp as visiting faculty and is an advocate for inter-religious dialogue and social justice.



# Noah Strauss

*they / them*



*Jewish Children's Folkshul  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

Noah Strauss is an organizer, educator, and writer, and a graduate student in Judaism and Human Rights at Gratz College. Their interests include pursuing a rabbinate focused on chronic illness, Deafness, and disability.

Noah developed and implemented an ASL curriculum at Jewish Children's Folkshul where they've taught 4th and 5th grade for six years. They also teach in the early childhood program at Germantown Jewish Centre, and facilitate a multi faith community in ASL using a viral disability justice centered TikTok account with their partner. Noah is a former Ma'avir Fellow with the National Havurah Committee and an alum of Bend the Arc's Jeremiah community organizing fellowship, Repair the World's Service Corps, and Mayyim Hayyim's Rising Tide mikveh guide training.

Noah's writing is featured in Jewish Currents, New Voices, Lilith Magazine, The Forward, Jewschool, and Disability Visibility.

In 2019, their best friend, the Rabbi Emet Tauber passed away from complications of Ehlers Danlos Syndrome (EDS). Over the last year, Noah was a fellow in the faith inclusion and belonging department at Respectability, where they designed and conducted an oral history project about the mutual aid network that formed around Emet, made up predominantly of queer & trans disabled Jewish people.



# Shira Becher

*she / her*



*Hannah Senesh Community Day School  
Brooklyn, New York*

Shira Becher is a Judaics Studies teacher at the Hannah Senesh Community Day School in Brooklyn, New York. She also directed and helped to launch Senesh's inaugural Hebrew Immersion Day Camp and is one of the founding members of Senesh's LGBTQ+ staff affinity group.

Shira studied at NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized study, where she concentrated on the intersection of religious and national identities in education. She completed studies in Israel at the Hebrew University and Tel Hai University. She holds a masters degree in Jewish education from the Jewish Theological Seminary. Shira earned a certification in Yoga training for educators and sees social emotional wellness as the foundation for a thriving classroom community.

In her personal time, Shira enjoys playing softball and spending time in Prospect Park. She served on the executive board of the Prospect Park Women's Softball League and utilizes this experience to connect with students over sports and lessons in teamwork.



# Wilhelmina Gottschalk

*she / her*



*Ohr Kodesh Congregation  
Chevy Chase, MD*

# Wilhelmina Gottschalk

Wilhelmina Gottschalk looks forward to learning and being challenged through participation in the Shomer Collective Fellowship. She directs the religious school at Ohr Kodesh Congregation in Chevy Chase, MD, and lives in Washington DC with her husband and two children.

Wilhelmina believes that Jewish end-of-life considerations should and must be accessible and meaningful across the Jewish identity spectrum, and that in our most vulnerable times it is vital that our communities show up for us.

