

MATANEL FOUNDATION

ACTIVITY REPORT

Program: *Matanel Fellows - Ofakim (horizon) to Israel*
Year: 2024-2025

Please present your activity report according to the following lines. The whole rapport will not exceed 2 or 3 pages (as word document).

Name of the Program: Matanel fellows "Ofakim (Horizons) for Israel"

Year of activity: 2024-2025

Name of the report's writer: Tal Barsheshet

Function of the report's writer: Partnerships Manager & Facilitation Team Member

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Website / Facebook address of the organization: <https://kulna.org.il/>

Facebook page - [LINK](#)

Articles in Kulna's Website: [LINK](#) (*Scroll down to browse the articles*)

Number of active participants in the program: 12

Estimated number of impacted participants: 500 +

Give the actually state of the program (where the program stands at the date of the activity report, no more than ten lines):

The Matanel Fellows Program "*ofakim (Horizons) for Israel*" has successfully completed the programmatic phase and the participants' essays have undergone substantial linguistic and conceptual editing. The online publication process is nearing completion: 8 out of 12 essays have already been published on Kulna's website and social media platforms. The remaining essays are in final stages of preparation and are scheduled for publication in the coming weeks.

The cohort experienced a profound learning journey through peer engagement and encounters with scholars, writers, and public intellectuals. The program's formal components, including a two-day writing seminar in Yeruham, have been completed in full.

We are currently advancing two parallel dissemination tracks to broaden the program's impact.

- **Online Articles:** Over the past two months, we published a new article every Thursday, each written by one of the fellows and posted on our website. Each publication was accompanied by a social media post on Kulna's platforms, featuring a short excerpt and a brief author bio. The writers also shared their articles on their personal pages, generating additional exposure and responses

from thought leaders and cultural figures across social media.

- **Printed Anthology:** We are preparing a celebratory launch event for the printed volume of the essays. Partners from the Jewish and social sectors will be invited, alongside alumni of the program, as part of our efforts to broaden the program's influence.

In addition, the authors are already integrating their ideas into a range of educational frameworks, where their work continues to resonate in live, text-based, *beit midrash*-style discourse.

The main achievements during the last year of activity (main achievements, number of events, number of participants, etc.):

- **Formation of a strong, high-quality writing group** – A meaningful writer's cohort emerged, fostering mutual support and motivation for continued development.
- **High Engagement and Impactful Output** - Participation and completion rates were strong, and the program met its goals in full. The cohort remained highly engaged and delivered meaningful, high-quality writing outcomes.
- **Positive public resonance** – The program generated notable interest among other funders and among participants in other Kulna programs, who expressed appreciation for the originality and depth of the essays produced.

The evaluation (methodology, results, comparisons with the precedent year, conclusions for the future...):

The process this year yielded meaningful and impactful results, marking a significant advancement in the field of contemporary Middle Eastern Jewish thought — particularly valuable in a time of national tension and war.

As expected from a pilot program, the timeline evolved throughout the year, both due to national events and the natural learning curve of a new initiative. We learned that the time originally allocated for writing and for external editing was insufficient. We plan to update the schedule accordingly for the upcoming year.

Additionally, alongside digital and printed distribution, we aim to further expand the program's reach through the development of a podcast platform.

Provisional guide lines for the advancement of the program in the next year:

1. **August–September:** Develop timeline and work plan; recruit participants
2. **October–December:** Five *beit midrash* sessions

3. **January:** Two-day writing seminar
4. **January–March:** Writing process in pairs, with guidance from a program coordinator
5. **March–April:** Language and content editing
6. **May–July:** Digital dissemination of articles
7. **September:** Final printed anthology and closing event

Testimonials:

Ariel Hanoch:

“I had the privilege of visiting the city of Ofakim, as a relative of the late Ofir Libstein z"l. Walking through the streets of the city, meeting its residents — at the Bilia and Edri family homes, and with Yahaloma at the Resilience Center — gave me space to breathe.

The connection to the here and now is deeply felt in *"Matanel fellows - ofakim"*. The frequent gatherings were more relevant than ever. The engagement with current events was not merely about “what’s new,” but rather about refining historical consciousness — holding both “small time” and “great time” in tandem. This process was essential and found concrete expression in the group’s discussions and in the personal worlds that each participant brought into the shared space.

The group itself — along with the valuable in-person meetings (in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Ofakim, Yeruham, and more), the conversations in various discussion forums, the ongoing writing process, the revisions and editing stages, and the midterm writing assignments — all of these came together and culminated in a powerful experience. I can wholeheartedly say that I received a great deal from the process, and I feel that I also gave something back.

The dedicated team at Kulna Yeruham — especially Matan’el Bouzaglo — did an outstanding job. My fellow participants were instrumental in fostering mutual inspiration and in echoing the ripples of the essays we produced. This has been a transformative journey, and I would be delighted to continue participating in future cohorts, alongside new participants and through additional platforms for traditional writing to be seen and heard.”

Gabrielle Rigler

“Hi,

First of all, thank you for the platform and for the opportunity to write and connect with such a unique group. The very existence of a traditional group whose members have experienced similar feelings of “otherness” within secular or religious society is comforting and uplifting in and of itself.

The group's engagement with political and social issues added a significant dimension — something I personally felt was missing in other programs. For me, the deeper discovery of *Masortiyut* (traditionalism) lies in its ability to create a simple Jewish space for living within the tensions that define Israeli identity.

Secondly, in terms of the writing experience — thank you so much for the editorial guidance, encouragement, and support for the texts. I felt a great deal of freedom to write what I truly wanted to express, which was very fulfilling.

I sincerely hope that if future groups of this kind are formed — I'll be able to make time, between work and family, to take part again. The exploration of traditional identity is deeply important to me, and I would love to bring it further into the system I work within."

Uriel Shechter

Participating in the "*Matanel fellows - ofakim*" program was a wonderful experience — both personally and intellectually.

It was a real pleasure to be part of a thoughtful, diverse, and intellectually engaged group that sought to reflect together on the challenges facing Israeli society.

The program struck a strong balance between professionalism and clear goals on the one hand, and a welcoming, open-minded atmosphere on the other.

I am grateful to the program team for the invitation and the opportunity.

Natali Dahari Ben-Nemer

"I was truly grateful for the opportunity to participate in the program led by *Kulna*, the "*Matanel fellows*", focused on political writing in a traditional context.

As a traditional woman, I feel that I carry a unique lens — one that has yet to be fully articulated as a coherent worldview. Through the learning and writing process in the program, I now feel more able to express this perspective and to give voice to the distinctive way in which the traditional community engages with public and political issues on the national agenda.

This process was made possible thanks to the professional and personal guidance of Matan'el Bouzaglo, as well as the peer learning that continued throughout the program.

This social and professional circle provided the sense of safety I needed — and without it, I'm not sure I would have felt confident enough to write with honesty and clarity from a traditional perspective.

I would be very happy to continue this journey and to grow as a writer who is committed to the traditional narrative and to the traditional community in Israel.

Thank you so much for this opportunity and for the deep and meaningful learning experience."

Eliran Ohayon:

"*Matanel fellows - Ofakim*" allowed me to feel at home — and when you're at home, you can bring forth the most authentic voice within you.

That, to me, is the greatest gift: the partners along the way, the mutual inspiration, and the ability to show up as we are — giving honest expression to where we come from, within spaces of thought and reflection.

Thankfully, the program's leadership gave us the freedom to dream and to dare: to write about what isn't always part of the consensus, to touch on pain points and open wounds.

What I take with me most from this experience is hope — the people of Israel are in need of ideas, and throughout this journey I heard more than a few that could serve as the foundation for a renewed vision and a new path forward.”

Please join the Evaluation Report, the Financial Report and the list of the participants to the program (**as PDF documents**)

Please join photos – as **JPG files** – and any link or any other document connected to the program which will seem to you relevant – as **PDF document**.

Please join a 5 minutes movie which presents your institution and the particular project supported by the Matanel Foundation. The movie should be accessible to the philanthropic world and to other potential donors.