



Matanel Fellows: "Vision and Utopias" Beit Midrash at Alma

Thanks to the generous support of the **Matanel Foundation**, in 2026 we were able to run a unique Beit Midrash program combining textual study with writing on the theme of **"Vision and Utopias."**

The program was launched on **April 12, 2026**, following a competitive application process that attracted dozens of young Israeli adults with a passion for learning and writing. Alma's academic committee designed a tailored curriculum, bringing together **29 Matanel Fellows** for a shared journey of study.

We held ten weekly learning sessions; each divided into two parts:

1. **Beit Midrash Study (2 hours):** Including *havrutot* (paired study) sessions that took participants on a historical-literary journey through the treasures of Hebrew culture, tracing foundational concepts such as the Messiah, redemption, vision, and utopia (see detailed schedule below). The sessions were led by Alma faculty members in rotation; each brought to the sessions relevant texts from their field of expertise.
2. **Writing and Processing Workshop:** Following the textual study, the group engaged in processing the material through writing exercises tailored to each session, facilitated by **Yuval Friedman** (screenwriter, *The Jews Are Coming*) and **Eyal Twito** (Mandel School for Educational Leadership).

Following the ten weeks of study, the group gathered for **three intensive writing days** led by author and essayist **Orna Kazin**, who guided the participants in the art of essay writing. Participants wrote personal essays (up to 2,000 words) describing a line of thought or an internal, self-reflective dialogue on various subjects of personal engagement, through which they chose to gaze into Israel's imagined future 25 years from now.

Two weeks later, the fellows submitted their draft essays to copy editor **Nimrod Berko**. The finalized collection of essays is scheduled to be published digitally on the **"E-vrit"** website and app, as well as printed and sold at Alma.

Study Session Schedule (April 12, 2026 – June 14, 2026)

- **April 12:** Opening session with **Dr. Ruth Calderon**, President of Alma: *"To Meet Etymological Terror? Thoughts on the Messiah and Redemption in Hebrew Culture"*

אלמא, בית לתרבות עברית | Alma, Home for Hebrew Culture

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- **April 19:** Prophetic Visions in the Bible with **Gera Tuvia** (Isaiah 11), Alma faculty
- **April 26:** Fantasy in the Mishnah with **Dr. Yael Fisch**, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- **May 3:** Eschatological Vision and Messianism in Maimonides with **Eyal Twito**, Mandel Institute for Educational Leadership
- **May 10:** Reading *The Book of Visions* by Rabbi Chaim Vital with **Dr. Assaf Tamari**, Alma and Shalem College faculty
- **May 17:** Redemption in Kabbalah with **Dr. Neta Sobol**, Alma faculty
- **May 24:** Hermann Cohen's Human Redemption with **Dr. Jeremy Fogel**, Alma faculty, Tel Aviv University
- **May 31:** Zionism, Utopia, Theater: Herzl's *Altneuland* and Boris Schatz's *The Rebuilt Jerusalem* with **Prof. Yair Lipschitz**, Tel Aviv University, Alma faculty
- **June 7:** Utopias in Literature with **Noa Manheim**, editor, translator, and host of *The Grimm Sisters* podcast
- **June 14:** On Sabbateanism following *Nehemiah*, with **Yaacov Z. Meir**, Alma faculty, author, and lecturer at the University of Haifa

Intensive Writing Days (June 21–23, 2026): Facilitated by **Orna Kazin**, author and essayist.

Photos from the Study Sessions:







Participant Feedback:

- “I fully immersed myself in the experience of learning about personal essay writing. I especially enjoyed hearing from my classmates, learning about their personal perspectives and unique writing voices, and engaging in our enriching discussions. It was fascinating, and I think we could have done even more of it.” Einat Weinbaum
- “I feel like I've learned so much and experimented with a completely new writing style. She manages to both build confidence and, at the same time, challenge and push us.” Nathaly Varshevsky
- ““The guidance was excellent. There isn't a framework/outline yet, but there will be, and there's a clear direction. Above all, a different atmosphere was created in the group. Suddenly, we got to know the participants in a different way—what occupies them, what interests them—and to be exposed to everyone's brilliant ideas. It seems that Arna's guidance took everyone's work to the next level.” Tamar Yarom
- “I am Shahaf from Amitei Matanel. This was my first introduction to Alma, after already hearing about your curriculum from several satisfied alumni. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to participate in the workshop. The variety of lecturers, the content, and all the thought and organization behind the scenes were very meaningful



and enriching for me. Lots of thoughts before and after every session. It's been an absolute pleasure that leaves me wanting more learning like this. Thank you so much, truly an interesting and exceptional experience, both intellectually and emotionally.”
Shahaf

- “The havrutot (study pairs/groups) that we had at the beginning were really interesting, and I would have been happy to have more of them, and in general, more shared spaces with the group itself, because a writing group is an intimate place, and the more we get to know each other and reveal ourselves, the more it allows for the openness and vulnerability that benefits both the writing and the experience.

I am truly grateful for this experience; I felt I was in very good company, and I took something away from every teacher who taught us. It was stunning, challenging, and empowering. I am happy to get to know Alma and be a part of it!” Adi Zaks

Request for Continued Support for Similar Activities Next Year:

"Thank you very much for the trust you have placed in us by supporting the Matanel Fellows Beit Midrash program at Alma this year. We would be delighted to join forces again in the coming year and would like to request that you consider renewing your support, so that we may continue this important and collaborative work."