

SHAPING THE FUTURE

DESPITE THE WAR



STEP ANNUAL SUMMARY 2025



STEP

Science Training
Encouraging Peace

MISSION

STEP funds the graduate education of pairs of Palestinian and Israeli students (one Israeli, one Palestinian, from the West Bank or Gaza) in health and environmental sciences in Israel. The Fellows work on research projects, side by side, often daily, throughout their graduate degree programs. Together they overcome obstacles, further their careers and create new frontiers in science and medicine while developing deep, enduring personal and professional relationships. STEP Fellows attain leadership positions from which they influence their communities.

New Logo

The war between Israel and Hamas together with events in the West Bank have raised tensions between Israelis and Palestinians to such a fevered pitch



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that our prior logo with the Israeli and Palestinian flags flying under the umbrella of the American flag was considered offensive to some STEP participants from both sides. We changed to a science diplomacy theme symbolized by DNA strands and an olive branch emerging from an open book.

Educating Pairs, Serving Communities, Building Peace

Dear Friends,

STEP continues to thrive thanks to your support and despite the strain the war imposes on both peoples. STEP is currently supporting 20 STEP Fellows (10 pairs), among our biggest cohorts to date. Bound by a quest for scientific discovery and to make the world a better place, these resilient Fellows, together with their mentors are building strong relationships, demonstrating to their labs, universities and communities that working together is not only possible, but also beneficial. On the pages that follow we share some stories of these emerging societal leaders.

Now in our 13th year, there are 30 Ph.D., M.D. and M.S. STEP alumni. Many are now in positions of societal influence. These include professors in Israel and the Palestinian Authority where they promote the STEP ethos with dozens of new students each semester. STEP alumni and Fellows are leaders in industry and also advisers in the Ministries of Agriculture and Health on both sides of the border and can work cross borders.

STEP is also embarking on several new important initiatives:

First: STEP is providing **leadership and mentorship training programs** for our Fellows and alumni. These will hasten their rise to positions in which they can champion the advantages of cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Second: STEP is supporting our **entrepreneurial** and business-oriented alumni and Fellows by partnering with established entrepreneurs who provide guidance for joint ventures with start-up incubator opportunities.

Third: To recruit more Bachelor's level-scientists into graduate education with STEP we **established partnerships** with organizations that share our mission, such as the Arava Institute and Project Rozana.

STEP's impact continues to increase and STEP will be needed in the foreseeable future. As we look toward our future and our goals for growth, we are proud to report that **STEP is receiving more applications from Israelis and Palestinians than ever**. While this is encouraging, it also means that we need increased funding for even more Fellows to benefit from STEP.

You can help STEP grow, evolve and increase its impact through your generous donation.

In gratitude and peace,



Allen Taylor and Kim Kronenberg
STEP Co-Directors

SHAPING THE FUTURE: STEP Students, Faculty and Community

STEP Fellows apply the latest laboratory and computational tools to eradicate disease, purify drinking water, and create sustainable sources of food while building bridges across cultural divides. They publish dozens of scientific articles in high impact journals, speak at international conferences, acknowledging STEP and advocating for peaceful coexistence. An annual community outreach project, required by each pair, shows the value and benefit of joint scientific endeavors to local communities.

STEP's Faculty are critical to STEP's success. Each pair of STEP Fellows is supervised by a dedicated STEP Mentor. STEP Mentors, professors at the hosting universities, serve as scientific leaders and advisers and as ambassadors for the STEP mission. They too have been profoundly impacted by participation in STEP.

STEP is supporting 10 pairs of Fellows this year. In the following pages, we share a few of their stories.



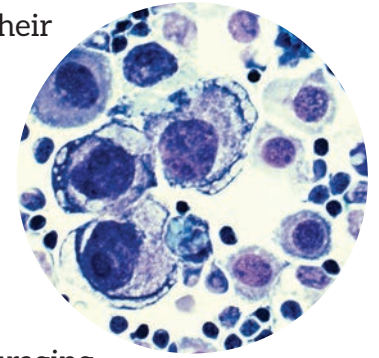
Reem and Omer



Reem is a Ph.D. student and Omer is an M.Sc. student in Professor Batsheva Kerem's lab at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. "I am the first in my family" begins Reem's story, "I want to show that achieving a Ph.D. is possible despite limited opportunities and a difficult reality."

Reem and Omer study mechanisms of genetic instability at the early stages of cancer development from different angles. Working side by side at the bench and continuing their

discussions outside the lab, they felt that joining STEP was right for them. STEP's support enables them to build their scientific careers and to share their expertise with local researchers in Israel and the West Bank. Reem offers scientific advice to the Palestinian Ministry of Health. Through their community outreach project for STEP they take pride in teaching



and encouraging younger scientists..

Reem: "We spoke about the current political situation and the war. We shared how each of us was experiencing it differently, as a Palestinian and as an Israeli. We also expressed our frustration with our decision makers and politicians. These conversations weren't easy, but they were respectful and honest. They helped us better understand each other's reality and made our partnership feel more human and meaningful."

Omer: "One of the things I value most about my relationship with Reem is how open we are with each other – including on political topics. We share our perspectives with honesty, curiosity and respect. We also have small day-to-day gestures that make the partnership special, like bringing each other chocolate or a croissant."

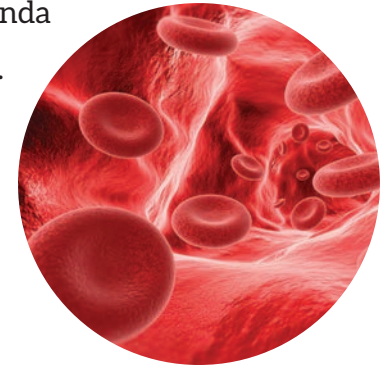


Amanda and Randa

As STEP Fellows in different laboratories at Hebrew University, twin sisters Amanda and Randa, are enthusiastic about science and about making a societal difference.

Amanda and her STEP partner, Shirly, are graduate students in the laboratory of Professor Anat Florentin. They are exploring an ancient cell structure in the parasites that cause diseases such as malaria. Their goal is to use this information to design new classes of antimicrobials.

Randa and her STEP partner, Adi, are graduate students in the laboratories of Professors Yiska Weisblum and Maayan Salton. They are researching how infections spread in the human body



and hope to devise new antiviral and therapeutic agents.

Amanda and Randa: "We grew up in the Old City of Jerusalem, in a community where very few people, including our parents, had higher education or worked in science.

STEP opened doors, offered a supportive community, and strengthened our belief that science could truly be our path. The journey was not always easy, but it shaped who we are today. Now, as researchers, we share not only a passion for discovery but also a mission to inspire others, especially young Palestinian women, to see that they too have a place in science."



Amanda (R) with
STEP partner, Shirly



Randa (L) and STEP partner, Adi

Nina and Manar

Manar and Nina did not start as instant colleagues or best friends. In fact, Manar was initially hesitant to join STEP, concerned she would be ‘normalizing’ the behavior of the Israeli government. Now, in their fourth year of a STEP Fellowship in the laboratory of Professor Dror Sharon at Hebrew University, Manar and Nina are advancing the development of new tools to correct the DNA that causes blinding diseases. They have honed their science together, and with the same devotion, they have forged the deepest of friendships. When Nina gave birth to her son, the only person she invited into the hospital room other than her family, was Manar.



Manar: *“I think that we grew together both intellectually and emotionally during this nonending war ! We learned to love and respect each other and feel for each other. The umbrella that has been given to us by STEP is our comfort zone, and I appreciate how we both grew together holding each other’s hand under this umbrella.”*

Nina: *“I believe I have the capacity to embody values of tolerance and coexistence within the scientific world and be an example to other Israeli researchers as well as foreign colleagues.”*

SHAPING THE FUTURE: STEP Fellows, Alumni and Faculty: a Network of Changemakers

Change doesn't happen by individuals in isolation. STEP is building a community of scientists who are also ambassadors for peaceful coexistence. An Annual Convocation, brings Fellows, Alumni and Faculty together for a day of science, food and entertainment. STEP also hosts social gatherings and online Zoom meetings that enable our scientists to network, friendships to flourish, and members of the community to feel there is a safe place for difficult conversations. Fellows, faculty, university departments, families and communities are inspired and influenced by involvement with the people and activities sponsored by STEP. STEP's Alumni are leaders in academia, industry, and in government ministries, spreading and modeling the ethos of STEP.

Professor Sahar Melamed of Hebrew University echoes the voices of many STEP Faculty:

"[STEP Fellows'] participation in STEP has shown how academic collaboration can overcome boundaries and build bridges even in times of conflict and has drawn a lot of admiration from other professors and students in the department."



Professors and Students socialized together during the 2025 STEP Convocation, Jerusalem

Raghad and Hila

Hila and Raghad are Fellows in Professor Melamed's lab. They are uncovering new insights into the pathogenicity of infectious bacteria by investigating regulation of genes and analyzing them with 'big data' computational tools. Their findings will provide new diagnostics and therapies for these infections.

Professor Melamed: *"Having one Israeli and one Palestinian student in my lab participate in STEP this year has been a deeply meaningful experience for me. Watching them work together, sharing ideas, supporting each other, and finding common purpose, has shown what genuine collaboration can look like. It has felt like a ray of light amid the tense atmosphere that has affected both Israeli and Palestinian communities in recent years."*



Raghad and Hila

Shadi and Adar

In Professor Sharon Schlesinger's lab, at the Faculty of Agriculture at Hebrew University, Adar and Shadi are designing new sources of protein that can be used in lieu of meat, seeking a future where food sources are sustainable and have less negative impact on the environment. As champions for the STEP mission, they host high school students in their lab, fulfilling a STEP requirement for community service. In addition, Shadi, as Diversity Ambassador for Hebrew University, speaks to groups of university students and invited guests about his life experience.



Shadi: "Sharing my story through programs and outreach, I aim to empower other young Arabs to believe they belong in high-level scientific environments."



Adar: "[Working with younger students] showed how shared scientific work can be a model for cooperation and mutual respect. It strengthened our own partnership and inspired others."



Adar and Shadi presented their research at the Annual STEP Convocation 2025

"The sense of friendship and collaboration among lab members has proven stronger than the tension of the conflict. This is due in large part to the open communication we maintain in the lab and the genuine friendship between Adar and Shadi, which sets a wonderful example for the entire team."

Professor Sharon Schlesinger
Hebrew University



Ahmad, STEP Alumnus, and Acting Director of Health Services at IsraAID, discusses creating leadership opportunities for STEP Alumni with STEP Faculty, Professors Gabriel Nussbaum and Doron Steinberg.

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YOUR DONATIONS AT WORK

Thank you for your invaluable support in advancing science, enhancing lives and building the fabric for peace in the Israel-Palestine area.

	SCHOLARSHIPS
\$12,500	Supports a STEP pair for a year. For this amount you can name a pair.
\$125,000	Supports 10 pairs in 2026. (STEP leverages its funds with dollar-for-dollar match by participating universities.)
\$50,000	Supports a pair for the full length of their M.D./Ph.D.
	OPERATIONS
\$85,000	Pays the salaries for STEP's part-time Regional Representative, Outreach Coordinator, part-time Assistant, as well as expenses for the Annual Convocation and other administrative costs.
\$70,000	Currently, STEP Board and Steering Committee members work without pay. Our Goal is for a part-time, paid Director-Successor.

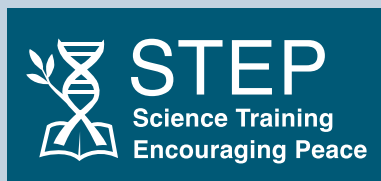
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Or

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Educating Pairs,
Serving Communities,
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