

*The Newsletter of the  
Judaic Studies Department*

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Chair and Editor*

**BINGHAMTON  
UNIVERSITY**

# Ha-Kol

## הקול

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Number 1

### Upcoming Events

It looks as if this semester the focus of our JUST LUNCH series will be on the nineteenth century. We have tentative commitments from a number of faculty members in other departments to give talks on such subjects as Karl Marx and the Jews and George Eliot's philosemitic novel *Daniel Deronda*. It's a little too early, however, to divulge the details concerning names, time and place, so we'll have to resort to other means of publicizing these events. In the meantime, however, we can announce the time and date of another lecture. At noon on Friday, November 3, the Judaic Studies Department will be co-sponsoring a public lecture by the renowned David Biale, formerly of this university and currently teaching at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Prof. Biale's subject will be "Blood and Belief: The Function of a symbol in Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Middle Ages." This lecture will be held in LN 1120, otherwise known as the Medieval Commons, which is located in the Library Tower, not far from the main elevator.

**The Judaic Studies  
Department mourns  
the passing of  
Mrs. Audrey Morell,  
wife of Professor  
Samuel Morell.**

### Where's the Newsletter?

Surprisingly few people posed this question in the course of the past year, during which *Ha-Kol* did not make a single appearance. The question we have been asked much more frequently is a more fundamental one: What's going to happen to your department? It is, we have to say, largely because it has been so difficult to respond to the latter question that we have been so reluctant to put together a newsletter. Until recently, it has been just too hard for us to summon the will and the energy to be the optimistic voice of the Judaic Studies Department. But now that all the shoes have fallen and we can see that we are, after all, still here, and still carrying on, it finally seems as if we can resume publication.

What has happened, as most of our readers probably know, is that our department has been greatly reduced in strength. Of our original five full-time faculty members only two remain in Binghamton. Norman and Yedida Stillman have gone to the University of Oklahoma, Michael Taub is now teaching at Vassar, and only Samuel Morell and Allan Arkush are left on board. And thanks to the recent university budget cutbacks, it seems that it will be extremely difficult to replace our losses with new tenure-track appointments. For the foreseeable future we are likely to remain a two-man department, struggling to maintain, with very limited human resources, the framework within which a full-fledged program in Judaic Studies can be offered.

If it were indeed only the two of us, our task would already be unmanageable. Fortunately, however, we have plenty of support from other quarters within the university. Professor Leon Goldstein of the Philosophy Department, Deborah Hertz and Lance Sussman of the History Department, as well as other faculty members berthed in other departments, will be continuing to offer courses cross-listed with Judaic Studies. In addition, there are many people in the local community who will be teaching for us. This fall Dr. Carl Roemer, our veteran adjunct, will be teaching Judaic Studies 242 (The Second Temple Period). Jack Weinstein, a native speaker of Yiddish with a lifetime of experience in teaching both Hebrew and Yiddish, will be teaching Yiddish 101. Dror Abend will once again be teaching a mini-course on Israeli poetry. Two other courses will be squeezed into our curriculum during the first half of the month of November. The unusual details concerning these courses, which will be of great interest to our students, will be presented elsewhere in this newsletter.

Thanks to the generosity of so many of our friends and supporters, we have been able to hire a new Hebrew instructor. Mr. Shmuel Shepkaru, a native of Israel who is completing a Ph.D. in medieval Jewish history at New York University, will be teaching all of our introductory Hebrew courses this fall, and will also be teaching medieval Jewish history for us in the spring. We also have other people lined up to teach for us in the spring semester, too, but it is still a little too early to mention their names.

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## A Stillman Returns

Careful readers of the list of Fall Courses we have posted all over campus will note the unexpected presence of a Stillman. This is not Yedida, who is, alas, gone for good. This is hard to believe, I know, since her voice is still reverberating in our classrooms, her name is mentioned in our offices virtually every day, and the beneficial effects of her years of endeavor will continue for a long time to shape the environment in which we carry on our work. No, it is not Yedida but Norman who will be returning — for a little while. Thanks to Dean Brehm's resourcefulness and thanks to Norman's freedom from teaching responsibilities in Oklahoma this fall, we will be able to have our soon-to-be former colleague teach two courses for us during the first half of November. We almost said two mini-courses, but that would not be entirely accurate. One of the courses he is teaching, the one on Middle Eastern Jewry in modern times, will indeed be a pure mini-course (a two-credit course). The other, the course on Jewish travelers, will be a little more complicated. Students will be able to take it as a mini-course or as a regular four credit course, depending on whether they attend only the pre-prandial session or both the pre- and post-prandial classes. The earlier session will consist of lectures in English; the latter will take a closer look at the travel narratives in the original Hebrew.

Norman, as you can see, will be quite busy, teaching six hours a day, every day, for two weeks. He is doing this, we hasten to observe, not to demonstrate to Governor Pataki how much additional work can be squeezed out of an individual faculty member, but only in order to facilitate his presence here without detriment to his new responsibilities in Oklahoma. Six hours a day is of course a lot of time to spend teaching, but no one familiar with our impending visitor's irrepressible enthusiasm and inexhaustible energy can have any doubts whatsoever about his ability to do so on a sustained basis. We look forward to having him back — for however brief a period.

## More Highlights from Last Year

Our Hebrew language program had a particularly good year, thanks to the efforts of such instructors as Yaara Aspir and Moshe Shmaryahu (who have since left the area), Jack Weinstein (who has switched to teaching Yiddish), Shalom Shoer (who is still at Cornell and quite likely to resurface on our campus in the near future), and Marc Fogel (who has returned from a semester in Israel with not only a half-year's academic credits but a wife as well!). Our short-lived Arabic in Hebrew program has dissolved, with the departure of Josef Meri, our Palestinian Arabic instructor, for graduate studies in England. And Prof. Angel Saenz-Badillos has returned to Spain, after teaching a highly successful mini-course on the history of the Hebrew language during the spring semester.

Thanks to the generosity of the Jewish Chattaqua Society, we were able to sponsor a course on Jewish theology taught by Rabbi Elihu Schagrin, rabbi emeritus of Temple Concord in Binghamton. With more than thirty students enrolled, this course was a notable success. Not only were the students highly pleased to have an opportunity to take a course of this kind, but Rabbi Schagrin too voiced his thorough satisfaction with the experience of teaching a group of highly motivated young people.

One Sunday in April, thanks to the generous support of Mr. Herbert R. Levine, the Judaic Studies Department was able to co-sponsor (together with Chabad) a student bus trip to the Holocaust Museum in Washington. More than a hundred students participated in this excursion. For all of them it was a moving and memorable experience, one which they will remember for a long time to come.

The spring semester concluded with our biannual Rabbi Moses Margolis Memorial Lecture. The fourth lecture in this series was delivered by Professor Jeremy Rabkin of the Cornell University Government Department, who spoke on "The Curious Case of Kiryas Joel." One measure of the success of the lecture was the lively discussion of relations between church and state that followed Professor Rabkin's scintillating presentation. Another is the fact that he has already been invited back to Binghamton by the Jewish Community Center's College of Jewish Studies to speak in October in the context of their series on the Christian right and the Jews.

At a party for our graduating majors and minors back in the spring of 1991, we gave all of the departing students symbolic awards: gift certificates enabling them to obtain from us, eventually, a free copy of one of three as yet unpublished books that members of our faculty were then preparing for publication. Finally, the last of these three books has appeared in print. If any member of the small but select group of the class of '91 still has in his or her possession an unused certificate, he or she can now mail it to our offices in exchange for a copy of Allan Arkush's Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment. Those of our readers who do not have certificates but have lately been experiencing sleep difficulties may wish to obtain this highly useful volume by ordering it directly from SUNY Press.

## Melamed Comes and Goes

We had a faculty guest during the academic year 1994-95, Professor Avraham Melamed of the Department of Jewish History at the University of Haifa. Professor Melamed taught four courses for us in medieval Jewish history and philosophy, all of which were very well received by our students and a particularly large contingent of auditors from the local community. He also spoke on numerous occasions under the auspices of local Jewish organizations. In January, Susan Master, our student intern, interviewed Professor Melamed for Ha-Kol. Comparing the Judaic Studies curriculum with that of his own university, he noted that in Haifa "There are at least four to five departments which deal with all Judaic studies. Just as Binghamton has separate departments for American History and English Literature, Haifa University has departments for Jewish language, Bible, Talmud and literature." Israeli students, Professor Melamed added, "can major or minor in a Judaic Studies department or any other department and take individual Judaic studies courses on their own volition."

Professor Melamed observed that some Binghamton students have a problem with Hebrew, but he added, with a chuckle, that Israeli students have their share of problems reading an English biography. An outstanding difference between the students of the two countries is their classroom behavior. "Binghamton students are much less involved and more passive in the classroom. However, they are more respectful of their professors," said Melamed. "Here, I have to pressure them to talk in class. This seems to be the experience of other professors as well. In Haifa, I have to shut up the students."

Reflecting on his time here, Professor Melamed believes that he is accomplishing all that he set out to do. He enjoys being in a different community, observing the way in which it deals with its problems and concerns.

Although new to Binghamton, Professor Melamed is no stranger to New York. His wife and children are U.S. citizens. He received his M.A. from Columbia University. His plans for the immediate future include a cross-country tour with his family in the summer. "Basically, I'm glad I came to the States. Teaching in an American university has indeed been a positive learning experience for me."

Postscript: The Melameds took their scheduled trip across the United States. Ha-Kol editor Allan Arkush visited them in late August in their last American resting place, the home of Mrs. Melamed's mother in Portland, Maine. They had had a good time seeing the sites, but they were eager to return home to Israel.

## Dorot Scholarships

Once again our department will be serving as the intermediary between the Dorot Foundation and ten worthy students who wish to study in Israel this summer. There are ten scholarships of \$1000 each. Any Binghamton undergraduate interested in pursuing any kind of academic program in Israel this summer (archaeological dig, yeshivah study, university study, Hebrew language study) is eligible to apply.

Application forms are available in the Judaic Studies office, and should be turned in to us by February 1, 1996.



## Temple Beth El Lecture Scheduled

Thanks to the generosity during the past year of the people listed at the end of this newsletter and thanks to many others who have donated money to us in recent years, we have at long last been able to hire Mr. Shmuel Shepkaru to be our new Hebrew instructor.

The occupant of our community-funded position, Mr. Shmuel Shepkaru, has been busy since the beginning of September teaching our three introductory Hebrew classes (each containing thirty students). While we have no wish to distract him from his new and very demanding instructional responsibilities, we would very much like to take a little time to introduce him to the people who have made possible his presence in Binghamton.

The perfect occasion for doing so, we feel, would be at our second annual Temple Beth El of Endicott Lecture. We have scheduled this lecture for 7:30 p.m. on the evening of Monday, October 23, in the restored chapel of Temple Beth El (resituated on the lower floor of Temple Israel in Vestal). The lecturer will be none other than Mr. Shepkaru himself. For in addition to being an experienced Hebrew teacher, he is completing a Ph.D. in medieval Jewish history at New York University. His topic will be one with which he deals rather extensively in his nearly finished dissertation: "The First Crusade and the Jews". A reception will follow the lecture.

At the same time that we welcome Mr. Shepkaru we will also have the pleasure of accepting the portrait of Elie Wiesel by the Binghamton artist Mr. Cecil Poppolo. After it is placed on display at an as yet undetermined location on campus, this portrait, will be permanently situated in the Judaic Studies Department offices.

## Thank You

Our Department's weakest point remains its disorganized thank-you policy, which is entirely traceable to its chairman's bad upbringing. We are plagued by the suspicion that we have neglected to thank some of our benefactors directly for either their contributions to our regular funds or to the special Hebrew instructorship campaign. We certainly hope that we are not omitting any names at all from the following lists of people who have donated funds to us in the past year:

For donations to our general funds we wish to express our thanks to Anita Aboulafia, Mr. & Mrs. Stanley D. Aronowitz, Serge and Shelley (Reich) Ben Nathan, Marc and Elaine Coel, Gary Donner, Mr. Adam Edwards, Jeffrey Eisenberg, Amy Feld, Shari Fisch, Mr. & Mrs. Eliot Friedman, Mr. & Mrs. Marc Goldberg, Dr. Jeffrey Gorelick, Eliot Hoff, Dr. Stuart Kahn, Paula Kramer, Natalie Jacoby and Richard Stern, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Krohnengold, Dr. and Mrs. Silviu Landman, Barbara Lefsky, Mark Lefkowitz, Sharon and Ted Major, Lisa Mendelsohn, Andrew Mestel, Lisa Mendelsohn, John Nissenbaum, Mark Reisman, Dr. and Mrs. Irwin Rosenberg, Cathy Satz, Wendy Sabinsky, Mr. & Mrs. Mark Salsberg, Rabbi Elihu Schagrin, Prof. and Mrs. Melvyn Shefftz, Paul and Ellen (Kachalsky) Silberman Mr. & Mrs. Howard Schilit, Eric Steckler, Sheila Steinbach, Drs. David & Jill Thierman, Ben Weitsman and sons, and Michael Wyler.

For donations to our Hebrew instructorship fund we wish to express our thanks to Joe and Marilyn Aigen, Bruce Becker, Shelly Reich Ben Nathan, Dr. Jeffrey Berger, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Berman, Esther Bernstein, Dr. and Mrs. Jerome Blumenthal, Max and Beatrice Budd, Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence Cadkin, Ira Cohen, Marcia Craner, Jack Docster, Jennie Eber, Merle Englander, Martha Ezor, Susan and Andrew Friedman, Deborah Gellen, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Goldin, Amy Griggs, Sharon Gross, Kenneth Harf, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Hecht, Mr. Leonard Hershman, Dr. and Mrs. Gerald Hubal, Helen Isaacson, Natalie Jacoby, Jane Joseph, Mitchell Karlick, Sharon and Ted Major, Dr. and Mrs. Stephen Major, Seth and Dina Marlowe, Linda Neuwirth, George and Pamela Peters, Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Piaker, Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Piaker, Bessie Pierson, Rabbi Mark Raphael, Rabbi Paul Resnick, Rev. and Mrs. Carl Roemer, Dr. Israel J. Rosefsky, Dr. and Mrs. Irwin Rosenberg, Dr. and Mrs. Jose Sambursky, Dr. Janet Schmuckler, Hazel Schwab, Dr. and Mrs. Barry Shaw, Dr. and Mrs. Harold Shulman, N. Theodor Sommer, Bess Strum, Sheryl Teitel Winkler, Dina Suzanne Towbin, Susan Werner, and Ian Winkler.

To this latter list of donors we must add also the Endicott Jewish Community Center (Temple Beth El), the Joe and Emily Lowe Foundation, and the Jacob and Rose Olum Foundation, all of which have made vital contributions to our instructorship fund.

If only our list of faculty members was even one eighth as long as our (perhaps not entirely complete) list of donors! Fortunately, however, the lists of students enrolled in our courses each semester is far longer than both the lists printed above. And this, after all, is why it is worth your while to make donations to us. The ultimate beneficiaries of your generosity, who are generally unaware of the fact that their program is being supported by people other than their parents, are truly deserving of your assistance. We're not going to make another appeal to you, this time at least, but we will not be disappointed if you continue to keep us in mind.

## Class of '95

One of our most recent graduates, we are proud to report, was the commencement speaker at last year's graduation. After a long and arduous selection process (consisting of a lengthy application, a review of one's academic record, faculty interviews, peer review, etc.), Diana Epel was selected to address the huge crowd of graduates, family members, faculty and other guests attending the main commencement ceremony. None of our faculty members could attend graduation, but Diana was gracious enough to leave us a copy of her address, which was reportedly very well received. We will quote from it only the section that deals directly with us: "We're truly grateful to the faculty and administration who taught us and supported us. I know this is true for my Department of Judaic Studies, which always stood firmly behind me in all of my endeavors."

We have gratefully quoted this paragraph even though it departs slightly from the truth. Almost from the day of her arrival at Binghamton Diana endeavored to prepare herself to be nothing other than a professor of Judaic Studies. While we were more than happy to teach her everything we could, we frequently stood in her way, reminding her of the difficulties she was likely to face in what we anticipate will be a shrinking job market. She listened to us but, in obedience to an irresistible inner drive, disregarded our warnings. This fall, we are nevertheless happy to say, she will be an entering graduate student in New York University's celebrated Department of Judaic Studies, where she plans to focus on medieval Jewish history. Needless to say, we wish her the best of luck.

Diana Epel was also the recipient of the Jacob and Sara Piaker Memorial Award for Excellence in Judaic Studies. The Jewish Federation of Broome County Award for Excellence in Hebrew Studies and the Bnai Zion/Berith Abraham Awards were granted to Leora Berkowitz.

Our other graduating majors and minors have varying plans for the future. Some of them are as yet a little uncertain where they are heading; others, including those listed below, know exactly what they are going to be doing in the immediate future. **Marc Brown** is staying put in Binghamton for at least a little while, until he finishes his MBA. **Julia Reytblat** is going to attend Yeshiva University's Cardozo School of Law. **Allison Halpern** will be studying Jewish communal service at Brandeis University's Hornstein School (where, we learn from a card she sent us only last month, she is already very excited about the fieldwork she will be doing with a Jewish family educator at the Newton Jewish Community Center). **Elizabeth Stevens** will be studying at the Jewish Theological Seminary's Cantor's Institute. **Lisa Wolk** will be studying for an M.A. in social work at the University of Pennsylvania and a certificate in Jewish communal service at either Gratz College or the Wurzwiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University. **Andrew Zucker** plans to spend a year in Israel at Midreshet Lindenbaum. And the rest, we hope, will keep us posted. We wish them all the best.

## Newsletter

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So, we have bad news... and good news. The bad news is that our department seems to have dwindled to a skeletal crew. The good news is that we still have access to the human resources necessary to flesh out this skeleton with a substantial academic program. Bearing this in mind, we have stopped moping. We cannot pretend to be altogether happy about the current situation, but we are grateful for what we still have and ready to carry on with our work.