

HA-KOL

The Newsletter of the Judaic Studies Program
at SUNY-Binghamton

Norman Stillman,
JUST Interim Director

Allan Arkush
Ha-Kol Editor

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No. 1

COMPLIMENTS!

We thought we'd share with you some of the expressions of appreciation we've heard over the summer from alumni, parents and friends.

Dear Yedida,

...Enclosed is a donation for the Judaic Studies Program. You have done a superb job and we in the community should be much more supportive....

With love,
Sarah Koffman

Dear Professors Stillman and Taub,

We take pleasure in being able to send you a contribution in order to preserve the Yiddish language. We were delighted that our son Russell chose to enrich his own cultural heritage with your classes, and hope that others will have the opportunity to do the same.

Sincerely,
Susan and Ted Wenacur

Dear Professor Stillman,

...Keep up the good work with the Yiddish program....

Sincerely,
Mitchell Zucker

OUR THANKS

Thanks for the kind words, and thanks for the support. We are deeply grateful to many members of the local community, SUNY alumni, and other friends for the encouragement they have offered us and for their generous response to our recent appeal for funds.

Thanks to our Friends Mr. and Mrs. Harold Abramowitz, Dr. Donald A. Bronsky, Mr. and Mrs. Max S. Budd, Suzanne Buschman, Mr. and Mrs. Ira A. Cohen, Mr. and Mrs. David Elias, James B. Gitlitz, Esq., Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Goldin, Martha K. Klionsky, Mitch Lombard, Michael Marks, Murray Rappaport, Dr. and Mrs. Gary Rendsburg, Flora Rosefsky, Mr. and Mrs. Louis H. Rosenberg, Mr. and Mrs. David Roth, Rabbi and Mrs. Elihu Schagrin, Raymond Senzer, Dr. and Mrs. Richard Shore, Sheila B. Steinbach, Pearl D. Sterling, Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Wenacur, and Mitchell Zucker.

Thanks to our Associates Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Aigen, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Arnold, Rosalie W. Becker, Mr. and Mrs. Israel Gottesman, Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Groman, Sarah Koffman, Isabelle S. Levene, Dr. and Mrs. Jack Levene, Joseph Neuwirth, Dr. and Mrs. Raphael Paisner, Mrs. Joyce A. Stillman, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Sugin, Dr. and Mrs. David Thierman, Dr. and Mrs. Mark Walker, Jill L. Wolk, Dana R. Zwillinger.

Special thanks to Rabbis Ronald Weiss and Marc Raphael of Binghamton Congregations Beth David and Temple Israel for their support.

BLINKEN FOUNDATION GRANT

We are happy to announce that the Blinken Foundation of New York City has made a gift of \$850 to the Judaic Studies Program Account in the University Library. This gift was a response to a challenge grant offered by Mr. Norbert Adler of Binghamton. The funds will be used for the acquisition of the microfiche volumes of Die Welt, the official organ of the World Zionist Organization, founded and edited in 1897 by Theodore Herzl. With this acquisition the resources of our library in the area of Zionist history will be significantly enhanced.

LOWE FOUNDATION GRANT

We are likewise happy to announce that the Joe and Emily Lowe Foundation of Palm Beach, Florida has awarded a \$3500 grant to the Judaic Studies Program to support our Hebrew language classes. The grant will enable us to hire two experienced Israeli assistants to conduct some of the elementary sections. We are grateful to the Lowe Foundation for its assistance, which will make it possible for us to offer Hebrew classes this year to all students interested in taking them.

A LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

My name is Yelena Luckert. My father Yakov Rabinovich was a long-term "refusenik" in Leningrad. He was an activist in the movement, the last member of my immediate family remaining in the Soviet Union. This year my father was finally permitted to emigrate from the USSR. I had not seen him for eight years. He entered the USA on July 28, 1988.

Many US politicians, organizations and ordinary people helped my family in our struggle to reunite with my father. Among them were students and faculty of SUNY-Binghamton and leaders of the local Jewish community. In the spring of 1988, as our last resort, we collected numerous signatures on a petition in behalf of my father addressed to Michael Gorbachev. More than five hundred signatures were from SUNY-Binghamton.

On behalf of my family, I would like to use this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to those who stood by us during that time, giving us absolutely vital moral support, advice and in some cases, their influence to pressure the Soviet officials. Our special thanks are to those who were able to go the Soviet Union during those years and who brought back to us regards from my father.

Thank you all very much.

JUST NEWS

FALL 1988 COURSE OFFERINGS:

JUST 232	Introduction to Religious Studies I	N. Stillman
JUST 242	Jewish History: Ezra to Islam	A. Arkush
JUST 244	Modern Jewish History	A. Arkush
JUST 261	American Jewish History	L. Sussman
JUST 265	Politics of Israel	D. Peretz
JUST 280	Religion in America	L. Sussman
Hebrew 101	Beginning Hebrew	S. Morell, S. Shoer, M. Taub
Hebrew 203	Intermediate Hebrew	S. Morell
Hebrew 281	Modern Israeli Fiction	M. Taub
Hebrew 380	Advanced Readings in Hebrew	S. Morell

FACULTY AND STUDENT UPDATE:

Allan Arkush reports a nearly detectable improvement in his tennis game. His review of David Biale's Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History appeared in the most recent issue of Modern Judaism. . . Deborah Hertz has returned to Binghamton after an

exhilarating year in Jerusalem (see interview below). Her Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin was published in May by Yale University Press... Shmuel Morell attended this summer's conference of the Institute of Jewish Law at Boston University. He was prevented from attending the CAJE Conference in Milwaukee by a terrible case of poison sumac... Lance Sussman served as Staff Rabbi at a UAHC camp in the Poconos. He completed an article on reform Judaism's position on church-state issues, which will appear in a forthcoming volume on American Jews and Constitution... Michael Taub has completed the preparation of an annotated anthology of translations of contemporary Israeli plays. His next project will be a study of the Yiddish theatre in Romania... Norman and Yedida Stillman could congratulate themselves for having had the foresight to air-condition their house- last year. Yedida left the house to participate in the Third International Congress for the Study of Sephardi and Oriental Jewry at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where she delivered a paper on "The Jewish Courtier Class in Late Eighteenth Century Morocco as seen through the Eyes of Samuel Romanelli." Norman's book The Language and Culture of the Jews of Sefrou, Morocco: an Ethnolinguistic Study was published this summer (University of Manchester). Yedida will be on sabbatical this year (and commuting to the University of Haifa). Norman will serve for the year as JUST interim director.

Irit Erez and Diane Spitz-Raphael have joined us this year as graduate students in Jewish history... David Becker spent part of the summer in Ethiopia (see interview below)... Sandra Sketchley spent most of the summer in Binghamton doing research... Motti Zaken is still suffering from the effects of a traffic accident in Israel. We wish him a refuah shelema and a nesiah tovah.

INTERVIEWS

Two members of the JUST community who recently returned from overseas agreed to share some of their experiences with us, Professor Deborah Hertz (History), just back from a year in Israel, and David Becker (grad, History), who spent the summer in Ethiopia. Here are some excerpts from our interviews with both of them.

Deborah Hertz

Ha-kol: What kind of research were you doing in Israel?

Hertz: I was doing a very small amount of primary research at the Central Archives of the Jewish People on the Givat Ram campus of the Hebrew University. It involved Austritt records, records of German Jews who had left Judaism beginning in 1873 but had not necessarily (although possibly) converted to Christianity. This

is a parallel source to the main source for my book, which is conversion cards. An East German scholar has recently published a book based on similar records from Berlin. But he either did not care or did not know that the same kind of records existed for eight other German cities, sometimes in absolutely gorgeous detail...

Most of what I was doing, though, was secondary source research, in German, for two different chapters on my book on conversion from Judaism- and working on my Hebrew.

Ha-kol: You went to Israel on a research Fulbright, but you ended up teaching at the Hebrew University too. How did that happen?

Hertz: Well, I received a letter from the chair of the Department of Jewish History, Michael Graetz, saying that they had organized a seminar- because I was coming. I agreed to do it, not realizing at the time that teaching is a very important way to get to know one's colleagues. It so happened that this seminar was co-taught by no less than six faculty members: Steven Ascheim, Robert Wistrich, Gaby Motzkin, Dov Kulka, Michael Graetz and myself. It was attended by all of about fifteen students, though sometimes the audience grew rather large, to maybe twenty-five or thirty people. I gave four lectures in the seminar, three on the research methodology of my work to date and one on the prospectus for my new book.

Ha-kol: What did you think of the Israeli students?

Hertz: The students were not all Israelis. Several of the graduate students working in the Jewish History department are American, German or French. That made things very exciting, since they had a variety of trainings and were in possession of a good number of languages and were extremely well-informed individuals. I would say that the level of graduate study there is very high. Some of the graduate students were older, which is wonderful. They had a lot of life-experience, a lot of intellectual experience. Some auditors in the seminar had a tremendously rich intellectual background. In fact, I would have to say that the two hours a week I spent in that seminar were the greatest intellectual high that I've had in a very long time. At times I was flabbergasted by people's range of knowledge.

The orientation toward intellectual conflict is very different from what American academics are used to. It was assumed that there would always be a good fight and that it would be tremendously enjoyable. When there was nothing to fight about, people found things to fight about. So that was like the rest of Israel, prickly but great....

Ha-kol: Did you meet any SUNY graduates over there?

Hertz: Yes, yes! I had two experiences I'll never forget, wonderful experiences. One was at a large political event. Someone called out my name, it was very exciting, she had taken a course with me on the Holocaust a couple of years ago. Then one

day I was waiting for the bus around the corner from my house and a familiar face turned up. And indeed it was a Judaic Studies major who is now in a one-year program in Israel...

David Becker

Ha-kol: When you were in Ethiopia, did you meet with the relatives of people who have already made it to Israel?

Becker: Yes, we did.

Ha-kol: Can they correspond freely with their relatives?

Becker: It's really hard to say. There is correspondence between Israel and Ethiopia, even a considerable amount of telephoning. For more than a year, for instance, the Israeli Ministry of Education, in conjunction with the Jewish Agency, has been arranging for Ethiopian school children who have come to Israel without their parents to call home once a month at government expense.

Ha-kol: And what kinds of things are the people in Ethiopia hearing about Israel?

Becker: Hard to say. The impression I get is that they don't spend much time talking politics on the phone... We're fairly sure that those phone conversations are tapped. In fact, we saw the bugging devices in one of the hotel rooms used for this purpose...

Ha-kol: What was your biggest surprise in Ethiopia?

Becker: I was surprised by the number of Marrano-types in Ethiopia, Ethiopian Jews living as Christians.

Ha-kol: What do you think will happen to those people?

Becker: The ones that we have records on- those cases are being worked on. There's a whole other group, recently discovered, called the Maryam Wodet, which translates roughly as the lovers of Mary. It stems from the turn of the century when the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews was in Ethiopia. The Society referred to the Jews there as "Haters of Mary." To counterbalance that, there was this group, composed of converted Jews, who wished to prove to the Christians that they were now "lovers of Mary." And that's a fairly large group. The figures range now from anywhere from thirty thousand to fifty thousand. This is a group whose members will only marry amongst themselves. Jews won't marry them and Christians won't marry them, neither group really recognizes them. I'm quite curious about what will ultimately happen to them.

Ha-kol: Are they perhaps secretive when dealing with people like you? Do they practice Judaism covertly?

Becker: I didn't actually meet too many of them. I met people who pointed some of them out to me, but you couldn't really approach them and ask "Are you really a secret Jew?" From what I've read and heard and seen, they do keep the sabbath and some form of kashrut. They seem to know where they come from. How strictly they keep these things I don't know, but they do keep some semblance of them.

Ha-kol: Have any of these people found their way to Israel?

Becker: I'm sure some of them have arrived. It's highly likely, statistically speaking. Potentially, it poses a real problem, as anyone who has followed the history of Ethiopian Jews in Israel can well imagine.....

UPCOMING EVENTS

The Rev. Moses Margolis Memorial Lecture, originally planned for October 16, has been postponed on account of the illness of Professor David Daube, our scheduled speaker. Professor Paul Finkelman will soon have news about the rescheduling of the lecture....Two of our people will be giving lectures during Parents' Weekend (October 8-9). Professor Michael Taub will be speaking on the contemporary significance of the Yiddish language ("Farvus Yiddish?") David Becker will be speaking on "Ethiopian Jewry: The Unsolved Problem."... Professor Harris Lenowitz of the University of Utah will be here to lecture during the second week of October (exact date and time to be announced soon) on the Frankists, one of the strangest groups ever to emerge out of Judaism...Binghamton's College of Jewish Studies will begin its fall program next month. The program will consist of six lectures on "The Middle East in Turmoil." Three of the lectures will be delivered by SUNY-B professors Don Peretz and Norman Stillman, the others by visitors from Cornell, Tel Aviv and Harvard. Reuben Greenberg, the police chief of Charleston, South Carolina, will speak on campus on October 25. He will discuss police work, racism and antisemitism.

Michael Taub is continuing to make preparations for a national conference on campus in April devoted to a consideration of Yiddish Holocaust poetry. We're still short of funds for this conference (to the tune of about \$2500), and we'd appreciate any help we can get.

That's not all, folks, but the rest of our news can wait for the next edition of Ha-kol. And we do need the last few lines of this page to wish you all a

SHANAH TOVAH