

Ha-Kol

The Newsletter of the Judaic Studies Program
at SUNY-Binghamton

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Spring 1989

No. 2

HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC YEAR DRAWS TO A CLOSE

In this era of glasnost, it might seem that even an official mouthpiece like Ha-Kol ought to abandon the easy road of self-congratulation and report not only the successes but the failures of the Judaic Studies Program at SUNY-Binghamton. After all, if even some Soviet newspapers are becoming freewheeling, muckraking publications, why should Ha-Kol hesitate to tell the whole truth?

Well, we have decided to do just that, to air our dirty laundry in public, to reveal all the details of our failures- just as soon as they occur. Since this year, however, has been in all respects an unmitigatedly successful one, we have no choice but to continue, for the time being, to report recent developments in a manner which, to many of our readers, will probably seem indistinguishable from that of the pre-glasnost Ha-Kol.

Looking back over the past year, we take greatest satisfaction in noting that our program is flourishing. Our broad range of course offerings continues to attract hundreds of students each semester. The number of Judaic Studies majors has reached an all-time high of twenty-six. Also, more and more students are deciding to do a minor in Judaic Studies.

It is not only the quantity but the quality of our students that gives us nachas. We perceive their considerable strengths on a day-to-day basis, when we meet with them in class. But it is especially gratifying to us when we hear them heartily praised by others, as they were most recently by Visiting Professor Ross Brann of Cornell. We cannot repeat the language Professor Brann used to describe his SUNY students- it was too flattering. Some of them read Ha-Kol, and we don't want what he said to go to their heads.

In addition to being a year in which our academic program proceeded smoothly and well, 1988-9 was a year of many special events. There were, of course, the regular meetings of the JUST lunch program (though one was cancelled on account of the measles scare in April). And there were the

visits of guest speakers from Reuben Greenberg, the black Jewish police chief of Charleston, South Carolina, to Professor Herbert Paper of Hebrew Union College, who inaugurated the Rabbi Moses Margolis Memorial Lectureship with a brilliant interpretation of the writings of Sholom Aleichem. One of the highlights of the fall semester was the appearance of the Ethiopian Jewry exhibition; the spring semester was marked by the opening of the exhibition on Binghamton Jewry (see below), and the Holocaust Poetry Conference in May (see below).

As usual, we did our part in sustaining the Binghamton Jewish Community Center's College of Jewish Studies. We ran our internship program, which placed SUNY students in learn-as-you-work situations at the Jewish Community Center, The Reporter, and the Hillel Academy. And we did a million other things. We're not going to include in this issue an edifying account of all the publishing and outside lecturing we all did this year- but be prepared for a barrage of news in our first fall issue.

Our recollection of all of this year's positive achievements is marred, of course, by the memory of the vandalization of the JSU offices in November. In retrospect, however, it is clear that this despicable act was an isolated incident. What stands out in our memories now is not so much the culprits' misdeeds as the solidarity displayed by the university community and the firmness of the university administration in the face of an outbreak of bigotry.

This quick wrap-up of the academic year 1988-9 began with a reference to our acceptance of glasnost; it will close with an update on our ongoing attempt to bring about a measure of perestroika. As reported in our last issue, we have submitted to the university administration a comprehensive proposal for the establishment at SUNY-B of a Department of Judaic Studies. This proposal, we are now happy to inform our readers, has been approved by the Educational Planning and Policies Committee and will be the first item of business this fall on the agenda of the Harpur College Council. Chances for the creation of a Judaic Studies Department look better than ever before.

BEYOND THE CATSKILLS

More than three hundred people, including the President of SUNY-B, Clifford Clark, and representatives of all groups in the local Jewish community, came to the Studio Art Gallery in the Fine Arts Building on the evening of May 17 for the opening of an exhibition on local Jewish history. The exhibition, entitled "Beyond the Catskills: The Jewish Community of Binghamton, New York, 1890-1975," represents the first fruits of the Southern Tier Jewish Historical Project created in 1985 by the Judaic Studies Program.

According to Professor Lance Sussman, the project director, the history of the Jewish community in the Binghamton area is of more than purely local significance. "The most striking thing about Jewish life in the Southern Tier," he says, "is that it is a microcosm of American Jewish life."

This generalization is amply borne out by the exhibition itself, which includes photographs, documents and artifacts reflecting all aspects of the American Jewish experience.

The exhibition was accompanied by a handsome catalog, underwritten with a gift from Ann and Charles Rosenthal, which reproduces many of the photographs and documents displayed in the Studio Art Gallery. Congratulations to Lance Sussman, his assistants Peggy Marcus and Susan Savitch, and many others, on a job well done.

THE POETICS OF WITNESS: HOMAGE TO ABRAHAM SUTZKEVER AT 75

The long-awaited SUNY-B conference on Holocaust poetry was held at the beginning of May, in spite of the difficulties created by the measles epidemic. Our out-of-town guests were allowed to appear and deliver their papers, but the conference was, unfortunately, closed to the general public for reasons of public health. Nevertheless, it was a great success. The speakers reflected on the work of a considerable number of poets, including several who had personally suffered through the years of the Holocaust in Europe. Special attention was paid to the work of Abraham Sutzkever, one of the poets of the Vilna ghetto, who turned seventy-five this year.

From Israel, where he now lives, Sutzkever sent the following telegram to the conference: "A varemen grus tzu ale vos trachten vegn mir, Avram Sutzkever." [Warm greetings to those who keep me in mind] The number of people who will continue to keep him in mind was no doubt increased by the thorough examination of his work which took place at the conference. Professor Michael Taub deserves our congratulations and thanks for the great amount of time and effort he invested in the organization of this outstanding event.

AJS REVIEW MOVES TO BINGHAMTON

For a brief period this summer, Binghamton may be the home base of no less than two of this country's leading journals of Judaic studies: Modern Judaism, edited by Profesor Steven Katz of Cornell University (a Binghamton resident) and AJS Review, the principal publication of the thousand-member Association of Jewish Studies. This uprecedented concentration of publishing power in a provincial, upstate town is in the offing since the current editor of AJS Review, Professor Robert Chazan of NYU, is in the midst of turning things over to its next editor, our own Norman Stillman. Such a conjunction of editorships may not take place, however, since Steve Katz is about to depart for a distinguished visitorship at the University of Pennsylvania. In

any event, it now seems extremely unlikely that Ha-Kol will become, for even a brief period, the foremost journal of Jewish studies in Binghamton.

MISCELLANEOUS NEWS AND THANKS

Congratulations to graduating seniors Michael Pitkowsky and Andrew Singer, who shared the Piaker Family Award for outstanding achievement in Judaic Studies. Congratulations to graduating senior Shira L. Newman, winner of the Jewish Federation of Broome County Award for Excellence in Hebrew Studies. And congratulations to graduating seniors Suzannah Berlyne and Rachel Linehardt, who will share the B'nai Zion Foundation Award for Hebrew.

Stephen Kraus (B.A., 1985) writes that he is currently working for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, an important philanthropic agency engaged in work all over the world. "I work in their world headquarters in New York," he writes, "in the computer department where I help enhance the current system. I work closely with the two main refugee transport centers in Vienna and Rome and hope one day to visit these offices." The JDC, he wishes to remind us, "is an excellent source of information for research and maintains a rather extensive library." If anyone wishes to explore the JDC library, they may contact Mr. Kraus at the JDC, 711 Third Avenue, 10th floor, New York, N.Y. 10017 or call (212) 687-6200.

"Beta Israel: A House Divided" will open at the Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum in Philadelphia on May 22, 1989 and will be open to the public until June 25, 1989. The Philadelphia showing is being organized by the American Institute for the Study of Racial and Religious Cooperation. This is the first stop on the exhibition's national tour.

It isn't too soon to note that in the fall we will be welcoming a visiting professor from the University of Haifa, Michael Heltzer. Professor Heltzer is an internationally renowned biblical scholar, with a large list of important publications to his name. Ha-Kol will interview him once he arrives on campus. For now, we are mentioning his impending visit only in order to alert our student readers to the hitherto unannounced availability of an additional course offering during the fall semester: JUST 381B, Jewish People in Biblical Times. The course will be taught by Professor Heltzer, and will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays, at 1:15 to 2:40.

We have begun to receive sets of Die Welt and other German Jewish journals paid for with the matching grant described in our previous issue. Thanks again to Norbert Adler, without whom this would not have been possible.

Thanks to Mr. Martin Taub for taking all the conference speakers and guests out to dinner on May 1, between sessions of the Holocaust Poetry Conference.

Thanks to Mrs. Marilyn Agin, an old friend of JUST, who has generously volunteered many hours of her time to help in the office. Thanks to Carissa and Melanie Baron, two young friends of JUST, who graciously assisted their mother, our secretary Robin Baron, in performing other important office tasks.

LUNCHEON HELD TO HONOR ANN AND CHARLES ROSENTHAL

On Friday May 12 a luncheon was held in the Chenango Room to honor Ann and Charles Rosenthal for their indispensable contributions to the Southern Tier Jewish Historical Project. In addition to the Rosenthals and the Judaic Studies faculty, the luncheon was attended by the President of the University, Clifford Clark, Vice President for Public Service and External Affairs, Susan Payne, and James J. Boyle, Assistant Vice President for Public Service and External Affairs and Director of the University Foundation. The Rosenthals were warmly thanked and presented with a framed publicity poster for the recent exhibition featuring an early twentieth century picture of Charles Rosenthal's grandfather's local business.

LOWE FOUNDATION GRANT RENEWED

Once again we are 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. This is the second year in a row that we have received this grant, and we are extremely grateful to the Lowe Foundation for its vote of confidence in our work.

*****BIG PITCH FOR HELP*****

As you can see, we have a number of generous benefactors ready and willing to help us. But we need more. A lot of the things we do cost money, money we cannot expect to receive, in these difficult days, from the State of New York. Our only recourse is to turn to our friends, and to remind you, gently but urgently, that we do good work. We think we deserve your support. We are asking you to contribute whatever you can to our program.

What will we do with it? Everything costs money. Even Ha-Kol doesn't come free. The labor does, of course, and even the printing costs next to nothing. The same cannot be said, however, for the photoduplication and mailing of hundreds of copies. And Ha-Kol isn't the only thing we have to xerox at our own expense.

If we had more money, we'd have more guest speakers on campus. More than once this year we had the opportunity- but not the funds- to take

advantage of the presence in this area of noted scholars in Judaic Studies. If we had more money, we could fill in some of the gaps in our library's Judaica collection, and keep up more completely with the endless flow of new publications of interest to our faculty and students.

If we had lots more money we could do some really big things. We could fund a permanent graduate assistantship in Judaic studies, and thereby diminish our dependence on other departments for teaching assistants for our various courses. We could endow a permanent visiting position in Land of Israel studies, something for which there is a great demand among the students and for which we feel there is a real need. We could....

Believe us, we could think of good ways to spend whatever donations you send us, small or big. If you have any doubts, experiment! Send us some money and see what we do with it. If you're not happy with the results, you won't get your money back, but you'll at least be immune to any future appeals we might make. But we are confident that we will not disappoint you.

That's it for now. Ha-Kol will not appear again until September. Have a pleasant summer.