

HA-KOL

The Newsletter of the Judaic Studies Program
at SUNY-Binghamton

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ROMANIA, ROMANIA, ROMANIA, ROMAAAAAANIA

So begins one of the most famous of Yiddish show-tunes, a hearty song capable of evoking profound yearnings for the good old days in Romania even among people who can't tell a mamalige from a pastramele. We are using the song's initial words as our opening headline because Romania has been much on our minds lately. Events in that country during the past few months have, of course, attracted a great deal of the world's attention. We in Judaic Studies, however, have been reading about them not only in the newspapers but in our own mail, or, rather, in Michael Taub's mail. Professor Taub, who was born and raised in Romania, received a lengthy letter the other day from a friend in Bucharest named Emil. He shared it with us and we'll share some of it with you.

Emil was present in the Palace Square when Ceausescu delivered his famous last tirade. He was part of the crowd that suddenly started jeering the dictator, forcing him to flee. In his letter he relates that he was among the people fired upon by the infamous Securitate troops. "They shot at us with the semi-automatics at close range (4-5 feet) both from above and below," he writes. "The bullet-proof tanks plowed through the demonstrators. They were simply crushed to death. It was an infernal image. I could not believe it. To shoot into an unarmed multitude of non-violent people..."

"I don't know how long I stayed there or how I got home. I can't remember which way I took. What I had seen made me lose all my senses. I had no idea what world I was in."

Now, under the new provisional regime, Emil is still not quite certain what world he is in. He is still afraid that the people of Romania will not "know what to do with our new found freedom and democracy," but he hopes for the best.

NORMAN MANEA

Our ties with Romania were further strengthened through the visit to our campus on February 21 of the well-known Romanian Jewish writer Norman Manea. Mr. Manea, who is currently teaching

at Bard College under a grant from the Ford Foundation, spoke on the subject of "Romania: The Revolution and the Minorities." His lecture marked the first of a series on Romanian Jewry and its cultural heritage which is being presented by the Judaic Studies Program with the assistance of the newly established Friends and Relatives of Harriet And Louis Silverman Zalman Fund.

Prior to his talk Mr. Manea was the guest of Professor Taub, whose parents, Mr. and Mrs. Leon and Sara Taub, came up from Brooklyn for the occasion, or rather, to help create the occasion. In order to get Mr. Manea into the right mood for his lecture, Mrs. Taub stirred his memories of home with a hefty dose of her famous mamaliege.

Manea's talk dealt mostly with recent developments in Romania. What has happened in his country, Manea explained, is more of a revolt than a revolution. The legacy of decades of totalitarian rule has not been completely overcome. While the country has taken a major step forward, it has yet to develop new, stable social structures.

If sufficient economic progress takes place, Manea believes, it will be possible to hope for a better future in Romania. If not, there is the distinct possibility that the situation will deteriorate dangerously. For the twenty thousand Jews still remaining in the country (out of a pre-war community of 800,000), a worsening of conditions could pose serious problems.

Romania, Manea explained, has a long heritage of xenophobia and antisemitism. Under the Ceausescu regime, this antisemitism found expression chiefly in the deposed dictator's policy of ridding his country of Jews- for a price (that is, thousands of dollars, paid by Israel, for each Jew released). If the Romanian revolt does not mature, in the future, into a successful revolution, the stage might be set for further troubles for the country's Jews and other minorities.

More than a hundred students, faculty and local community members attended Manea's lecture. After the lecture, at a reception in Manea's honor which Howard and Riva Rittberg graciously hosted at their home, many members of the audience had an opportunity to hear Mr. Manea speak further about his own experiences and recent developments in his country. The first event sponsored by the Friends and Relatives of Harriet And Louis Silverman Fund was, in short, a great success. More will soon follow.

PRESIDENTIAL VISIT

We received a visit last month not, as you might expect, from the President of Romania but from the President of SUNY-Binghamton and some of the university's other leading officials. As part of a general effort to familiarize themselves with the current outlooks and operations of all university programs, President Clifford Clark, Vice President for Academic Affairs and

Provost Peter Wagner, Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Research Nathan Dean, and Vice President for Administration Michael Scullard came over to the Fine Arts Building to talk to us.

We had an interesting and very constructive meeting. This official visit provided us with an opportunity to explain our priorities and our problems as well as the chance to see how the administration, from its different vantage point, views our concerns. While no difficulties were resolved on the spot, many were addressed, and we are confident that this well-timed meeting will have positive repercussions.

AND WHAT ABOUT OUR PROPOSAL?

Don't conclude from the presence of this question on page 3 that our proposal to make Judaic Studies a department has been placed on anyone's back burner. Things are moving- but they are moving, as do most things at most universities, rather slowly. The proposal is currently before the Educational Planning and Policies Committee of the Faculty Senate. This committee has called in a number of our faculty members and others for hearings. From the EEPC the proposal will go to the Faculty Senate. We hope to see the matter resolved before the end of the current academic year.

SHALOM SHOER RESIGNS

This is old news already, but we didn't want to be the only journal in the area that failed to take note of this epoch-making development. As readers of The Reporter, Pipe Dream, and many others are already well aware, Shalom Shoer has stepped down from his position as JSU coordinator.

During his three years of service Shalom had lots of fun and a lot of exciting experiences. What he will be remembered for, however, is what he gave- of his time, of his energy, of himself. What Shalom himself will remember, he tells us, is above all the satisfaction he received from witnessing students who had been utterly detached from Jewish life acquire an interest in their heritage and become active in Jewish life.

It is difficult for us to lament Shalom's departure from his JSU position, since he is not really going away. He will simply be wearing one less hat. A graduate student at SUNY in comparative literature, Shalom is also one of our veteran Hebrew instructors. And, we might add, the proud father of newborn Tal (a boy).

Shalom's successor as JSU coordinator will be Riva Rittberg, who is currently undergoing her baptism of fire. We'll be interviewing her soon, if she survives.

NEW JUDAIC STUDIES COMMITTEE FORMED

In order to strengthen our ties with the Broome County Jewish Community we have revived a long-dormant institution: the Judaic Studies Committee. Present at the first meeting of this committee on February 14 were Marilyn Aigen, Jennie Eber, Sam Goldin, Dr. Silviu Landman, Judy Pletter, Riva Rittberg, Brian Savitch, Barbara Ullman, and, of course, the Judaic Studies faculty. Several other members of the local community who have expressed a desire to serve on the committee (Peggy Marcus, Naomi Feld, Janet Levine, Lillian Sommer, Ken Harf and Rachel Esserman) were unable to attend.

The first meeting went well. Over lunch in the Chenango Room we had a lengthy and fruitful discussion of the ways in which the committee could 1) promote a better understanding within the local community of the activities of the Judaic Studies Program and 2) facilitate community participation in those activities. Some of the participants offered constructive criticism, explaining that we need to make greater efforts to familiarize the local community with our endeavors. Others gave us helpful pointers. We were told, for instance, that a lot of people simply do not know their way around the SUNY campus. When we invite them to a public lecture, we should supply a map pointing the way to the appropriate building. Several participants also suggested ways in which we could, at no great expense, improve the appearance (but not, of course, the content) of our newsletter. In addition to making practical suggestions, many of the new committee members volunteered to undertake particular responsibilities, such as hosting some of our out-of-town lecturers.

The Judaic Studies Committee, we feel, is off to a good start. It is very gratifying to us to see how quickly and readily a sizeable group of active and committed community members has rallied to our side. We are deeply grateful to the members of this group both for what they have already done and for what they have promised to do in the future.

ALUMNI AND OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

Contributions to Judaic Studies continue to arrive. For their generous donations to our program, we extend our thanks to Elihu Iarasch, Elinor Josephson, Harold N. and Libby Krohnengold, Professor Saul Levin, Michael Parks, Harold Steinbach, and Marvin and Celia Wiseman (who sent their contribution in honor of the fortieth birthday of their son, JUST Professor and Ha-kol editor Allan Arkush).

We are, needless to say, overjoyed to receive any contributions. The ones that give us the greatest pleasure, however, are those that come from our alumni. We recently heard

from Millicent D. Davis, a 1979 SUNY-B graduate. "I always enjoy reading the newsletter and hearing what's happening on campus as it relates to the Judaic Studies Program," she told us, in a letter accompanying her check. "As an alumna from 1979, my happier moments at SUNY-B were those involving the Judaic Studies Program."

We also heard from David and Sandra Becker, alumni of much more recent vintage who are now settled in New York City. David is currently serving as Co-ordinator of Special Projects and Assistant to the Executive Director of the North American Conference On Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ). "Work is very hectic," David writes, "as is life in New York in general. We do miss Binghamton but I am gaining wonderful experience and I do feel as though I'm making a significant contribution to the cause... Sandra is doing well and feeling fine. She is completing her master's degree and doing some free lance translation and Hebrew calligraphy."

Taking up a suggestion at the end of David's letter, we will remind you that contributions can be sent to the Judaic Studies Program, Fine Arts 349, SUNY-Binghamton, Binghamton, New York 13901.

SPRING 1990 CURRICULUM

CORE COURSES

JUST/ HIST 241	Biblical History	Sussman
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TOPICS COURSES

JUST/ HIST 246	Modern Antisemitism	Arkush
JUST/ HIST 247	Rebirth of Israel	Arkush
JUST 262H/ COMP LIT 331 A	The Holocaust in Literature: Wiesel, Appelfeld, Lustig, Levi	Taub
JUST 262P/ PHIL 111	Philosophy of Religion	Goldstein
JUST 381H/ HEBR 331H	Biblical Hebrew Texts: The Book of Esther, Ezra & Nehemiah (in Hebrew)	Heltzer
JUST 382M/ HIST 380P	Messianism	Arkush
JUST 395	Internship	Staff
JUST 397	Independent Study	Staff
JUST 491	Practicum in College Teaching	Staff
JUST 499	Senior Thesis	Staff

LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE COURSES

YIDDISH 102	Elementary Yiddish II	Taub
YIDDISH 204	Intermediate Yiddish II	Taub
YIDDISH 391	Practicum in College Teaching	Taub
YIDDISH 397	Independent Study	Taub
HEBREW 102	Elementary Hebrew II (01)	Merhavy
HEBREW 204	Introduction to Modern Hebrew Literature	Stillman, Y.
HEBREW 331H	Biblical Hebrew Texts	Heltzer
HEBREW 331J	Journalistic Hebrew	Stillman, Y.
HEBREW 391	Practicum in College Teaching	Staff
HEBREW 397	Independent Study	Staff

SOMEWHERE IN THE NEGEV

Most of our students head for home during the winter break; only a few come back at the end of January with sun tans. Paula Safier spent most of her "vacation" neither at home nor basking in the sun. She did spend a large part of it lying on her back--not in the sand but under jeeps and other vehicles which she was helping to repair at an Israeli army base in the Negev.

Paula, who had never visited Israel before, went there this winter with a program called Volunteers for Israel. After a very quick tour of Jerusalem and the northern part of the country she and her group of eight other Americans headed south, to a base not far from the Gaza Strip. This was her home for the next couple of weeks.

At first she worked in the kitchen. But that lasted only a day. "I didn't want to see how they prepared our food," she explains. "I didn't want to see the cook dropping his cigarette ashes into the schnitzel. I just didn't want to see it happen." But she also wanted to do something more "productive." So she switched to the base's garage.

In the garage she was one of two women working with about thirty men. The men didn't seem too happy about their being there. Shortly after arriving she overheard a couple of her male co-workers complaining that women didn't belong in the garage, but in the warehouse, doing inventory, or something like that. Fed up with their sexism, Paula unexpectedly broke into their conversation with the announcement that "ani mevinah ivrit" [I understand Hebrew].

The offending soldier was quick to reply. "Mah at rotzah, prass?" [What do you want, a prize?]

"No," Paula responded, "I just want you to stop talking that way about us." And they did.

In general, Paula was thrilled by what she saw in Israel. She was, however, surprised and disappointed to see that women in the Israeli Army for the most part played only subordinate roles and were rarely found anywhere near combat units. While this dismayed her, she has no immediate- or long-term- plans to help change the situation. Her next trip to Israel, she tells us, will be as a civilian. Her purpose will be to study, not to work. Still, she is happy to have had the experience of serving as a volunteer on an Israeli Army base and proud to have made a contribution to Israel's well-being.

AN IMPORTANT BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Jeanne Eichelberger, our faithful friend at Bartle Library, one of the unsung heroes of the Judaic Studies Program, informs us that the library will be purchasing microfiche copies of volumes 1-77 (1880-1923) of Révue des études juives (REJ). Published in France, the REJ is the most venerable of existing journals of Judaic Studies. With the acquisition of this microfiche set our collection is nearly complete. We lack only the issues published between 1924 and 1959, the year Bartle Library began subscribing to the REJ. We hope to be able to remedy this deficiency in the near future.

UPCOMING EVENTS

There's not much space left for announcements. We will mention the two impending JUST Lunches dealing with the Book of Esther, one to be led by Professor Michael Heltzer, the other to be led by Professor Gary Rendsburg of Cornell, but by the time Ha-kol reaches our readers these events will already have taken place. In the less immediate future we are expecting two guests especially worthy of note. Arnost Lustig, the well-known Czech-Jewish author, will be coming to campus to speak on Yom Ha-Shoah (time and place of his talk unknown, at this moment, to the editor of Ha-kol, who is hurrying to get this issue to press). On Sunday, May 6 we will have the second lecture in the Bernard Lasky Judaic Studies Lecture Series Endowment. Our speaker will be Dr. Nikos Stavroulakis, the director and founder of the Jewish Museum of Greece in Athens, Greece. His lecture will concentrate on contemporary synagogues in Greece but will include a general overview of ancient Greek synagogues as well. Both of these events will be covered in our next issue.

H A P P Y P A S S O V E R