

The Newsletter of the Judaic Studies DEPARTMENT!!
at SUNY-Binghamton

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JUST Director

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SPECIAL SELF-CONGRATULATORY ISSUE!

THE SEPHARDIC CONFERENCE WAS
A GREAT SUCCESS!

More or less as we had anticipated, dozens of scholars convened at SUNY-B in April for our long and painstakingly planned Second International, Inter-disciplinary Conference on Sephardic Studies. We could see clearly enough, when they were here, what a good time they were all having and how valuable they found the opportunity provided by the conference for scholarly interchange. They all expressed abundant thanks. Moreover, since their departure, they have been bombarding us with exuberant letters of appreciation. We thought we would quote a few of them and let them blow our horn for us: "What made your conference such a success," writes a scholar from Maryland, was your organizational skills, your warm hospitality, your personal attention to details, and your wonderful gathering of the city's Jewish community to receive us..." From Madrid: "We were very happy to have the opportunity to listen to the

excellent papers, and to be in contact with many significant scholars in the field of Judaic and Sephardic studies. If we add to it your delightful hospitality and the good atmosphere that you have been able to create around the conference, you can be sure that it shall be for us very difficult to forget our stay in Binghamton." We could easily fill the

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FACULTY SENATE VOTES YES!

At the Sephardic Conference itself, President DeFleur congratulated us on what she correctly anticipated to be the imminent success of our long, arduous campaign to transform the Judaic Studies Program into a full-fledged department. A couple of weeks later the Faculty Senate accepted the recommendation of its own Educational Planning and

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CONFERENCE, cont.

rest of this issue with other, similar comments from European, American, South American and Israeli conference participants. Instead of doing so, however, we will quote just one more letter sent not to us directly, but to President DeFleur. Its author, Dr. Albert de Vidas, Vice President of the American Association of Jewish Friends of Turkey, writes that "the Judaic Studies Program, its Director Yedida Stillman and the staff were able to put together an event which has no rival in this field in the United States."

In fact, the conference really did live up to all of our earlier "hype" and we fully deserve all of these wonderful compliments. There were, however, some mishaps and minor lapses. Tudor Parfitt, an English scholar, had his home in London burglarized the day before the conference was to open. This alone would not necessarily have prevented him from coming to Binghamton, had his plane ticket not been among the objects stolen. One of our French guests was able to make it only as far as New York City on his own steam. Desperate to get him here on time, we sent a local driver to the city to fetch him. The driver hit a deer in the Catskills, totally destroying his car (but not hurting himself). Our guest remained stranded in New York.

But if a few things went wrong, almost everything else went right, especially the intellectual side of things. It would be impossible, in this context, to give anything like an adequate review of the contents of the various academic presentations, all of which provided us with a great deal of food for thought. It would be possible, on the other hand, to describe the other kind of food served at the conference- which was terrific. If you weren't there to enjoy the meals, though, it's not likely that you will derive much benefit from a description of all the Sephardic and other delicacies we and our guests devoured. We will therefore refrain from listing them.

We will also refrain from listing the innumerable students, local community members, and members of the university community who volunteered their time and efforts to make this conference a success. It's not that they don't deserve public thanks. Nor have we forgotten them. But there were so many people! And there are so many different lists of volunteers! How can we be sure that we have them all? Isn't it safer, under the circumstances, to thank no one in particular than to risk any accidental omissions? Let us say thanks, therefore, to all those who helped make our conference such a success, either by helping to prepare it or by participating in it. We were happy to be able, with their assistance, to run a conference like this, and we'll do it again.

YES VOTE ON DEPARTMENT, cont.

Policy Committee and, in effect, voted the department into existence. President DeFleur approved the Faculty Senate's decision, as did SUNY-Central in Albany. On June 1, the Department officially came into being.

Our friends, former and current students, and other readers of Ha-kol know all too well what a battle this has been. Now that it is over, however, we can abandon our (only slightly) combative stance, and express our thanks to the people who have stood by our side through thick and thin. Above all, we owe thanks to the numerous students who persisted in demonstrating their ardent support for us by attending countless meetings of the Harpur College Council, the Faculty Senate, and the other deliberative bodies which played a part in the long- but necessary- process of gaining approval for our proposal. We must also thank Sandra Michael and the other authors of the EPPC report to the Faculty Senate. They made a great case for us. Finally, we cannot express our gratitude sufficiently to our friends in the SUNY-B Administration. Throughout the process, they counseled us wisely and- when necessary- calmed us down. Their quiet support, behind the scenes, was indispensable and will not be forgotten.

These words of thanks should not delude our readers into thinking that we have accomplished all our goals and no longer require any additional assistance. On the contrary, we now need you more than ever. Becoming a department will afford us many new opportunities- but only if we are able to raise additional funds. All along we have been assuring people within the university community that departmental status will enhance our image and make it easier for us to acquire outside support. Now it is up to you to prove us right. In other words, send us checks!

GRADUATION 1991

On Sunday, May 12 we had a brunch in honor of our graduating majors, all eleven of them. The food, to be sure, didn't match the conference fare, but it was decent enough. We couldn't afford to give the graduates anything (other than the vast stores of wisdom we have imparted to them over the years), but we did promise them complimentary copies of some of our upcoming books (in the hope and expectation that we will have ampler funds in the future than we have today).

We ought to make special mention of the fact that two of our majors graduated with honors: Nathan Englander and Joel Weiss. Nathan wrote a senior thesis entitled "Trenches." It consists of a collection of three short stories exploring different aspects of Judaism in the 1990s. Joel's thesis was entitled "Dealing

with the Devil: Zionism, Israel, and the German Question." It focuses principally on the 1952 decision of the Israeli Knesset to accept reparations from the Federal Republic of Germany.

We should also mention the recipients of various awards. Natalie Jacoby was the winner of the Jewish Federation of Broome County's Award for Excellence in Hebrew Studies. Joel Weiss received the Jacob and Sara Piaker Memorial Award for Excellence in Judaic Studies. Paula Safier and Rebecca Weissman received awards for excellence in Hebrew given by the Bnai Zion Foundation Inc. and Brith Abraham.

We'll miss all of our majors and minors, as well as the far more numerous group of seniors who took one or more courses with us during their years on campus. We are consoled by the thought that others will come to replace even the most irreplaceable of them.

SAFRA VESAYFA

This issue of Ha-kol really should include an extensive faculty update detailing the experiences and accomplishments of our Judaic Studies faculty. In preparing Ha-kol for publication, however, nothing is more difficult than compiling one of these updates. Most appearances to the contrary, our faculty members are a modest bunch. It's hard to get them to vaunt themselves. And, at this time of year, it's hard to do anything hard. So instead of pleading with each and every one of them to turn in a description of their latest doings, we're going to postpone our next update until the fall.

What can't wait until the fall, however, is the story that goes with our exotic-sounding headline. At a gathering this April, Professor Michael Taub very appropriately incorporated this ancient locution into a toast in honor of Norman Stillman. Safra vesayfa is Aramaic for "author and swordsman." And that, amazingly enough, is what Norman has proved himself to be this spring. On the one hand, we could say, he published his massive tome The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times. This book, a sequel to his earlier volume on the Jews of Arab lands, includes a one hundred and eighty page survey of the recent history of the Jews from Morocco to Iraq as well as four hundred pages of translated and edited primary sources. With the other hand, he successfully wielded an actual saber against most of his foes. To quote the Pipe Dream (March 26, 1991): "The Binghamton fencing club made fools of the competition Sunday at the West Gym in a long awaited match that finally got off the ground... The Saber event was an extremely close event as the round robin format left the event in a four-way tie for first. By the slimmest margin Joe Amodemo was awarded second place and faculty advisor Norman Stillman took third...." Third (by a slim margin) is not bad at all, we think, when you're more than twice the age of the competition.

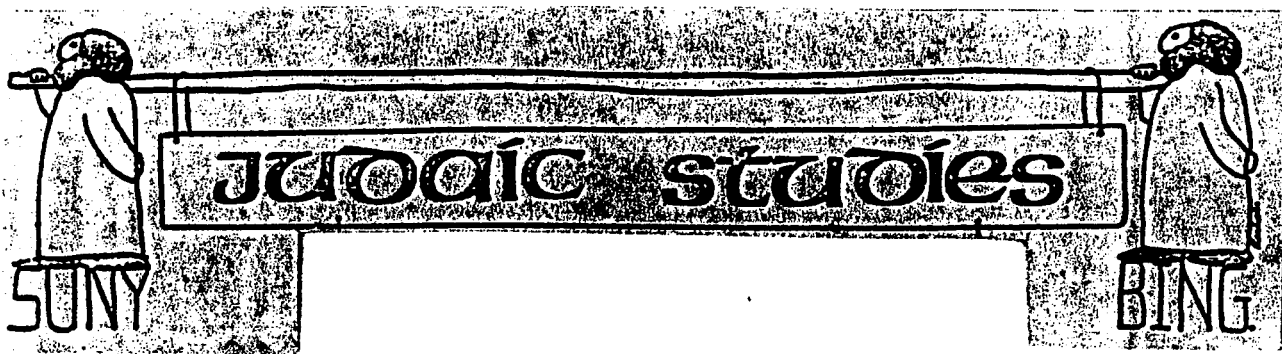
EDITOR TAKES LEAVE

If the truth be told, one of the reasons I postponed the faculty update to our next issue is so I won't have to do it. I'm going away for the year. In fact, I'm already gone. I'm putting this issue together in Boston, where I will spend the summer, the upcoming academic year, and the following summer, thanks to a grant from the Harry & Lynde Bradley Foundation. Now that this issue is practically finished, I hope to devote most of my time to completing my book on Moses Mendelssohn. During my spare time I will not be taking fencing lessons.

As of next fall, our newsletter will be edited by Professor Sam Morell. You'll be hearing from him in October. Before signing off, I have to do one more thing: I must thank our donors. So,

thanks to the American Sephardi Foundation for their second big donation (\$5000) in support of the Sephardic Conference. Thanks to Dr. Silviu Landman of Vestal. Together with his contribution, he sent a note praising the Sephardic Conference and hoping that our "program, soon-to-be department, will be able to bring much more of interest to the local Jewish community." Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Otto Furth and to Joyce A. Stillman for their contributions in support of the Sephardic Conference. Thanks to Deborah Gellen (alumna), who sent her donation in memory of Professor Isidore Friedland who taught Yiddish for Judaic Studies for many years. Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Aigen, Mr. Martin Bender, and Mr. and Mrs. David Schlam and Lance and Liz Sussman. Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Carl Kaiserman, parents of one of our current majors, Mark Kaiserman. Thanks to Hazel G. Schwab and Alain Fetaya (a recent alumnus, who attended the Sephardic Conference). Thanks to Merle N. Englander (whose donation is in honor of Nathan's graduation).

And, finally, thanks to all of you for being my appreciative readers over the past three years. It's been fun. Have a good summer, and a good year!



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