

# Ha-Kol

The Newsletter of the Judaic Studies Department  
of SUNY Binghamton

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A number of exciting things have happened in the Judaic Studies Department since the last issue of *Ha-Kol*.

## Reception at the President's Home

Pride of place goes to the reception which President Lois DeFleur hosted in her home on Sunday, October 27, in honor of our newly established Department. Over a hundred well-wishers attended. These included many from the community, as well as guests from the university faculty and administration and the Department's Student Committee. Even the weather cooperated, and the rain which had been threatening didn't begin its predicted descent until the last of the guests were on their way out.

Professor Norman Stillman addressed the group, and Yedida Stillman added a few words of greeting as well. President DeFleur expressed her good wishes to the Department. Our old friend and long-time supporter, Professor Philip Piaker, reminisced about the origins of the Judaic Studies Program, and Mr. N. Theodore Sommer, co-chair with Professor Piaker of the Judaic Studies Community Development Board (and Profes-

sor Piaker's former student in the early days of Harpur College) expressed congratulations for our past progress and encouragement for the future. The many who were there enjoyed this landmark affair thoroughly.

## Beni Begin in Binghamton

The Department was particularly privileged to be host to an address by Beni Begin on November 18. Beni is most widely known as the son of former Prime Minister of Israel Menahem Begin. But he has impressive credentials in his own right as an upcoming leader in the political life of Israel, though he has only recently entered the political arena. Beni Begin had lived in Binghamton for a short while in 1973, with the intention of studying geology here for the year, but returned to Israel when the Yom Kippur war broke out. He never made it back, though his wife and family stayed on, expecting his return, until December. Beni was excited about visiting Binghamton again. He agreed to speak here as a fundraiser for the new Judaic Studies Department, and refused to accept any honorarium.

Beni spoke to large crowd at Temple Israel, explaining how Israel was

an asset to the cause of peace in the Middle East. He captivated his audience for over an hour with the charm and humor with which he presented his very serious material. At the reception which followed his remarks, quite a few people got a chance to talk to him personally, both those who remembered him from his stay here and the many who were meeting him for the first time. The Department is proud to have hosted this highly successful event.

We would like to thank those many of you whose extra contribution aided in the financial success of this fundraising event:

Joseph and Marilyn Aigen, Jennie S. Eber, Elinor and Edward Esserman, Samuel Goldin, Dr. Fredrick A. Isaacs, Dr. Silviu and Josephine Landman, Diana and Allan Lyons, Dr. Barret J. Raff, Shirley T. Schwartz, Martha K. Klionsky, Sy and Carol Klionsky, Dr. Leon G. Payes, Abraham and Maida Piaker, Philip and Pauline Piaker, Dr. Jose and Joyce Sambursky, Susan Savitch, Hazel Schwab, Richard Simon, N. Theodore Sommer, Naomi M. Stalman, Temple Israel, Rabbi Ronald Weiss.

### Being a Jew in Romania

In the previous issue of *Ha-Kol*, notice was given of a series of talks which we at Judaic Studies call *Just Lunch*. One of them was by Lidia Vianu, a Romanian Jewish professor who is spending the year here on a Fulbright scholarship. She spoke of her experiences growing up as a Jew in Romania. Lidia has agreed to

summarize her remarks here for the readers of *Ha-Kol*:

### NATIONALITY: \_\_\_\_\_

One of the first things I learned as a Romanian pupil was how to fill in a form for the periodical renewal of my file. We all had one. What are your parents, what were your grandparents' names, do your parents belong to the Party, your nationality.... I was taught early that my nationality was supposed to be Romanian, like everybody else's, and it seemed natural to me. I was born and educated in Romania, I felt I belonged there. But some Romanians did not take me for granted.

My father's name, before he changed it, was Hugo. The first question that frightened me, and made me feel unlike other kids my age (I was no more than seven, a first grader in school), was my best friend's: "What kind of name is that? It's not Romanian!"

Right she was. It was not. But my parents had not told me anything about it, for fear that I might go and talk about it with other children, who, in their turn, would tell their parents. Because this kind of thing — being a Jew — was something everybody knew about you. The children my age knew what I was before I did.

I shall never forget that short moment, and the malicious expression in the eyes of the little girl, my best friend, who asked it. I soon found out myself what it was all about, and I swore to myself never to forget or forgive that look. Never again.

That look followed me all through my life: college, university, profession, friends. I was tense, but not re-

signed. Whenever anything happened to me, good or bad, someone would always say, "Of course, she's a Jew." If I published too much or if I was not promoted, the comment and the reason were the same. I was what I was.

I did not know how bitter I had felt about that until I arrived in America. My first trip when I reached the campus was to the Department of Judaic Studies. I thought vaguely that there must be one, and I asked people around till I found it. Only Robin, the secretary, was there, and I was a bit embarrassed. I left my number. Mike Taub called me that day, and a few days later I met Norman and Yedida Stillman. I realized that it seemed a natural act of courtesy to them that I had looked for the Department. But it meant much more than that to me.

It meant that I could be with people of my own nationality, that I could say freely who and what I was. It would be hard to imagine how much at home and relaxed I felt all at once. I feel as if I had been helped to find my roots. When I go back to Romania, if those Communist forms come up again, now I do have the courage to write: NATIONALITY: Jew.

Lidia Vianu

Dr. Vianu has involved herself in the Department in an even more significant way, and we owe her a special thanks for it. She is teaching a course for us *gratis*, entitled, "The Jewish Assimilation Dilemma." Another speaker at last semester's JuSt Lunch, Dr. Simhoni, a new member of the Philosophy Department, is also offering a course for us (cross-listed

with Philosophy), entitled, "Modern Jewish Philosophy."

The Department tries whenever it can to bring outstanding outside speakers to the campus. This past semester we had the good fortune to listen to Ruth Knafo Setton, of Lafayette College, who read part of a novel she is writing about a girl from a Moroccan Jewish family who grows up in the United States and attempts to find her roots. Professor Setton's reading was fascinating. It opened the eyes of this editor, and I'm sure of many others, to a reality in the Jewish community of which he was not aware, and which has universal appeal.

### Freud's Jewish Heritage

The Department has had the very special privilege of collaborating with the university's Art Museum in the addition of a section called Freud's Jewish Heritage to the highly acclaimed traveling exhibit, *The Freud Antiquities*. Ha-Kol has asked Joyce Sambursky, the Department's Projects Coordinator, to describe it:

A spectacular joint project of eminent importance between the Art Museum and the Judaic Studies Department of SUNY Binghamton culminated with a celebration in honor of Judaic Studies' achieving departmental status. Concluding an extremely successful nationwide tour, the exhibit, *The Freud Antiquities*, a collection of Sigmund Freud's personal art, mounted by Lynn Gamwell, Director of the SUNY Binghamton Art Museum, arrived at the Jewish Museum in New York,

where an additional special section, entitled *Freud's Jewish Heritage*, was added to the exhibit. The *Freud Antiquities* exhibit itself was selected by *Art in America* as one of the twelve most important exhibitions to open in 1989 in any museum in the world.

The first night of Hanukkah was selected to showcase the exhibition in conjunction with this wonderful milestone in university history. A unique series of events for alumni and major donors to Judaic Studies was held on December 1, 1991, at the Jewish Museum. Professors Yedida and Norman Stillman thanked those attending, and Dr. Gamwell led the group on a fascinating personalized tour of the antiquities.

When the remarkable traveling exhibition of Freud's collection was assembled some two years ago, it did not contain a single Jewish object. Through reexamination of a photograph showing many objects in Freud's study, David Becker, then a graduate student in Judaic Studies at SUNY Binghamton, first discovered two kiddush cups. This prompted a renewed search for other materials relating to Freud's Jewish heritage. The Jewish materials now added to the exhibit were only subsequently discovered at the Freud Museum in London.

Of special importance regarding the Jewish materials found in Sigmund Freud's study was the discovery of a rare medieval Hanukkah lamp. The lamp, dating from the thirteenth century, is an important find for the study of Judaica. "Although long visible among Freud's antiquities, this lamp did not come to the attention of scholars of

Jewish ceremonial art until now, and has not previously been published. There are probably only three other known lamps in the world which can be dated to the thirteenth century or earlier and which can be definitely identified as Hanukkah lamps," stated Dr. Gamwell.

Joyce Sambursky

Some of our alumni who were present at the event had the following to say:

\*A wonderful exhibit! Couldn't think of a better way to celebrate the first night of Hanukkah and the creation of the Judaic Studies department.

Paula Kramer, '79

\*I think everyone who came found the exhibit extremely interesting. The personal tour really made the exhibit! I can't imagine staring at so many faces of statues while I'm trying to work.

Laura Sokol, '89

\*What a great idea, to pair the Freud exhibit with the creation of the Judaic Studies Department! Two exciting events to be celebrated in conjunction with the holiday of Hanukkah!

Lynn Gamwell's tour through Freud's personal museum was not only informative but enjoyable as well. I highly recommend the exhibit to all.

Stacey Agin, '89

## Judaic Studies News from the Library

Giti Comninos is the Judaic Studies Bibliographer at the Bartle Library. *Ha-Kol* asked her to let us know what's going on in this very important area:

We are in the process of preparing a reference guide for Judaic Studies, which will be available at the Bartle Library Reference desk by February. It is designed to help students search for, and find, reference works, periodicals, and books of Judaic significance and interest in both the Hebrew and Yiddish collection (on the 3rd floor of the Bartle Library, beyond the "Z" section), and in the general library collection.

If any further assistance or information is needed, please feel free to contact me at Extension 2861.

Our Judaic Studies collection is diverse and growing. The following few selections are examples of the publications recently added to our collection:

*\*From the Ends of the Earth: Judaic Treasures of the Library of Congress.*

This is a handsome, lavishly illustrated publication which presents wide-ranging elements from one of the world's greatest collections of Judaica and Hebraica. Scholarly and informative commentary on the history of the Jewish experience, originally prepared to accompany a traveling exhibition, is provided for this book by Prof. Abraham Karp.

The Hebraic section of the Library of Congress, which got its start in 1912, represents thousands of years of

the historical, intellectual and spiritual endeavors of the Jewish people.

*\*Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions: Corpus and Concordance*, by G. I. Davies.

"The inscriptions dealt with in this book come from the Old Testament period (c. 1000B.C. to c. 200B.C.) and constitute an important additional source for our knowledge of the Hebrew language and the religion, history and customs of ancient Israel."

*\*Abraham's Children: Israel's Young Generation*, by Peter Sichrovsky.

"Twenty-six young Israeli men and women, reflecting the astonishing diversity of cultures, traditions, and backgrounds that make up their young homeland, join here to create a unique and poignant self-portrait of their country caught in the crush of history at a moment of crisis."

*\*Studies in Hebrew and Aramaic Syntax*, edited by K. Jongeling, H. L. Murre-van den Berg and L. van Rompay.

This volume contains sixteen essays on syntactical questions in the field of Hebrew and Aramaic. "Whereas Biblical Hebrew is discussed in most of the essays, other language forms are represented as well, Imperial Aramaic, Middle Aramaic, and Classical Syriac."

This is but a bare sampling of our many new acquisitions.

Giti Comninos  
Judaic Studies Bibliographer

## 500 Years from the Spanish Expulsion

1992 is a very significant year on the Jewish calendar, for it marks the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Consequently, a great deal of academic activity is being dedicated this year to the study of Sephardic Jewry. Professor Norman Stillman, who has published extensively on that subject, has been especially busy with speaking engagements and academic conferences. Recently he attended an international convention on Sephardic studies in Toledo, and *Ha-Kol* has asked him to summarize his experience for us.

### Judaic Studies in Spain 500 Years after the Expulsion

During finals week of last semester, I attended a conference in Toledo, Spain, entitled, "En Torno a Sefarad." The gathering, sponsored by the Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia, and by the Fundación Amigos de Sefarad, brought together more than 100 scholars from all over the world, who gave papers on Sephardic history, linguistics and literature, archeology and art history.

I could not help but think during the conference about the ghosts of the past that seemed to be everywhere in this ancient city perched on a steep hill overlooking the Tagus River, so well known to everyone from El Greco's painting. (El Greco's home, by the way, was originally that of Samuel Abulafia, treasurer and advisor to Pedro the Cruel of Castile.) During the Middle Ages, both under

Muslim and Christian rule, Toledo had a large, flourishing Jewish community numbering in the thousands. It was home to poets, philosophers and rabbinical scholars. It had numerous synagogues, some very sumptuous, two of which have survived intact, the mosque-like synagogue of Joseph Ibn Shoshan, built in 1204, later converted into a church and now called Santa Maria la Blanca, and the ornate Transito Synagogue, built by Samuel Abulafia around 1357, which is now the Museo Sefardi. A magnificent exhibition of manuscripts was on display in the Museum in honor of the occasion.

But what impressed me most was not the town (I had been there before), nor was it the scholarly papers (I have heard so many after all). What impressed me most was the great interest Judaic Studies have in Spain. All of the country's major newspapers gave the conference extensive coverage. The majority of the scholars giving papers, and of course almost all of the audience except for the foreign guests, were Spaniards. Sephardic Jewish history is considered an important component of Spanish history. Judaic Studies in the form of Hebrew language and literature, Aramaic, and Sephardic history and culture are taught in most Spanish universities. There is probably nowhere outside of Israel, the United States and France, where there are more people involved in Judaic research and teaching, or for that matter more students of Judaic Studies. But what makes Spain so different from the other three centers is that in Spain 99% (probably 99.9%) of those

involved in Judaic Studies — both students and teachers — are themselves non-Jews. In Israel the figure is the reverse. In the United States and France the majority of those who teach Judaic Studies are Jews, as are many of the students, but by no means are the proportions so lopsided as they are in Spain in the reverse direction. At Madrid's venerable Universidad Complutense, there are more than forty majors working on degrees in Hebrew language and literature under Professor Angel Sáenz-Badillos and his colleague-wife Professor Judit Targarona Borrás, both of whom attended our Second International Conference of Sephardic Studies here in Binghamton last year, and both of whom speak excellent Hebrew. In addition to the Hebraists and historians, many of whom I had met previously at the conferences in Spain, Israel and elsewhere, I had the pleasure of meeting Judeo-Arabists, like Dr. Monserrat Abumalhan, the Sáenz-Badillo's colleague at the Complutense, who recently published an edition and translation of Moses Ibn Ezra's treatise on the art of Hebrew poetry and rhetoric. I also had a chance to see at a special display the enormous Spanish output of books, both academic and popular, on Jewish topics.

I could not help but think of the historical irony that 601 years after the first wave of pogroms that first undermined Iberian Jewry, and 500 years after the Edict of Expulsion, that Judaic Studies was once again flourishing in Spain. Ferdinand, Isabella and Torquemada would indeed have been surprised.

Norman Stillman

## The Judaic Studies Department Endowment Fund

A number of local supporters of the Judaic Studies Department have organized to help it financially in these difficult times. *Ha-Kol* has asked Gail Schneider, who is active in this group, to describe its work and its goals:

The Judaic Studies Community Development Board, a group of concerned community leaders, supports an Endowment Fund to enhance the fledgling Judaic Studies Department at SUNY Binghamton. The Judaic Studies Department is undergoing a period of growth, internal accomplishment and both national and international recognition, but due to the New York State fiscal crisis, it is also being smothered at the bottom of the budget pile.

By supporting the Endowment Fund, the local community will most certainly gain from the educational enrichment provided by both resident and visiting academicians. The availability of course material and other educational opportunities at the University Center, the Jewish Community Center and other local agencies will most certainly provide a basis to many individuals for further study and intellectual enrichment.

As these local resources become more utilized, other nationally recognized scholars will also become available to enhance our programs throughout the community.

Having a internationally recognized nucleus of academic excellence, but not having funds to support it, is a most frustrating state of affairs for all of us interested in the Jewish in-



tellectual climate in our area. Accordingly, the Judaic Studies Community Development Board seeks a remedy for this situation through its Endowment Fund. All sources, both in and out of the community, are encouraged to contribute in this way to the Department. Your support of the Judaic Studies Department is vital at this juncture, and your participation in our work may well be crucial to our success. We encourage all our alumni and well-wishers throughout the state and the nation to actively support the Endowment Fund. With your help we look forward to the future.

Gail Schneider

The response to the Fund has already been quite gratifying. Following is a list of our donors, quite few of whom are Judaic Studies alumni:

Allan Arkush and Bonnie Edwards, Pearl F. Barron, David and Sandra Becker, Dr. and Mrs. Donald Bronsky, Meryl Brown, Charles Cohen, Rabbi Herman Cohen, Millicent D. Davis, Jennie Eber, Merle N. Englander, Lisa Fendrick, Dr. and Mrs. Michael Fidler, Ronald Fried, Mindy Kramsky and Eliot Friedman, Abby Fruchter, Michael Getman, Carl and Suzanne Gitlitz, Sheldon Goldfarb, Mr. and Mrs. Victor Gorodischer, Philip D. Gottlieb, Sharon Gross-Hershman, Claire Jacobs, Isabel S. Levene, Dinah Marlow, Andrew Mestel, David Parmet, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Person, George Peters, Pamela Peters, Dana Petrover, Philip M. Piaker, M. Bessie Pierson, Michael Pitkowsky, Dr. and Mrs. Irwin Rosenberg, Howard Schilit, Pearl Sterling, Temple Israel, Harry Tilevitz,

Shari Yagoda-Haber, Barbara Zable, Jack Zable, Andrew and Rachelle Zalman-Miller.

Our thanks extends to many other donors as well who have come to our attention too late to be included here. They will be listed in the next newsletter.

### Thanks for a Practical Gift!

A special thanks to Mr. Jack Decster, who donated a FAX machine to the Department office, which he delivered personally. It as been put to immediate use, and has made a big difference in the smooth functioning of the office.

### Upcoming Events

Several events of interest are planned for the coming months.

\*Professor Steven T. Katz, of Cornell University's Near Eastern Studies Department, will speak on the topic, "Rescuers: Those Who Saved Jewish Lives during the Holocaust." Professor Katz, who has written and lectured widely on many aspects of Jewish history and thought, has been studying the Holocaust for many years, and a major work of his on the subject is about to be published. His talk will be given on Thursday, February 13, at 7:30 P.M., in the University Union, Room 133. This lecture is being sponsored by JSU/Hillel.

\*Professor Elie Podeh, of Tel Aviv University, an expert on the contemporary Middle East, will speak on the



topic, "From Kuwait to Washington (via Madrid): the Middle East between War and Peace." Dr. Podeh has been an advisor on the Arab Middle East to a committee of the Knesset, and has been one of two advisors responsible for the production of a weekly educational program on Israeli TV dealing with Middle Eastern history. He is currently a Visiting Professor at Cornell University, and is teaching a course for our Department this semester on the Politics of Israel and the Middle East. He will be speaking on Wednesday, February 19, at 4:30 P.M., in LH 9.

\*A striking photographic exhibit on biblical archeology, entitled, *Israel: Archeology from the Air*, will open on Sunday, March 22 at the SUNY Art Museum, and a special formal opening will be held on that day for Friends of Judaic Studies. The exhibit will be open to the general public from March 23 to April 5. Please watch for further details regarding the opening.

### **Sincere Apologies Department**

We try, but sometimes we don't get it right. The editor of *Ha-Kol* apologizes to Deborah Blumenthal, who wrote so movingly of her experiences as a *Sherut La'am* volunteer in Israel last year, for inadvertently conferring on her a new name. We're glad to have the opportunity of giving her old one back to her.