

## HA-KOL

### The Newsletter of the Judaic Studies Department at Binghamton University

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Spring 1993

No. 2

#### GRADUATION APPROACHES

The academic year has almost come to an end. By the time most of our readers receive this newsletter, it probably will be finished. Most of our students and some of our faculty will have scattered. Our not entirely deserted offices will have grown much quieter. And our graduates will be gone forever.

Among those whom we will miss the most are our Judaic Studies majors and minors. We have thirteen majors this year: Janine Bahar, Shira Burstein, Rina Cohen, Marjorie Feld, Amy Firestone, Randi Halperin, Drora Hirsch, Jennifer Hirsch, Avi Liberman, Adena Messinger (who is majoring in Hebrew), Ethan Rivel, Jannifer Sadowsky, and Michelle Turco. Our four minors are Karen Michels, Matthew Symons, Shira Verbit, and Amy Firestone, a major in Judaic Studies who is also minoring in Hebrew.

We had a kind of going away party for them on Sunday, May 2, an astonishingly beautiful day-- for Binghamton. Luckily, we had arranged with the JSU and Hillel to do something better than what we usually do. Instead of a mere brunch in one of the campus lounges we had a picnic at Hillel Director Riva Rittberg's house. We sat around outside and talked and ate prodigious quantities of excellent food. It was a bigger party than any of the end-of-the-semester gatherings of previous years, attended by dozens of non-majors, non-graduates, and even students who were about to graduate yet had never taken a single course in Judaic Studies!

For our graduating majors and minors we had a few tokens of our esteem. We gave them each of those present a book. We did not forget to give one to Riva Rittberg, either, who was such a gracious host that we are already threatening to inflict ourselves upon her again next year.

Before concluding the subject of graduation, we should mention the recipients of various awards given through the Judaic Studies Department. Marjorie Feld will receive the Jacob and Sarah Piaker Memorial Award for Excellence in Judaic Studies.

Amy Firestone will receive the Jewish Federation of Broome County Award for Excellence in Hebrew Studies. Adena Messinger will receive the award for excellence in Hebrew given by the Bnai Zion Foundation Inc. and Brith Abraham. Mazel Tov! Mazel Tov! Mazel Tov!

#### **DOROT SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED**

Two days after the picnic we had an indoor but star-studded luncheon honoring the ten recipients of Dorot Foundation scholarships (of \$1000 each) for study in Israel this summer. The University was represented by President Lois DeFleur and Jim Boyle, Associate Vice-President for Development and Alumni Relations, and by Sharon S. Brehm, Dean of Harpur College. Norman and Yedida Stillman represented our department. But the real stars were the ten winners of the campus-wide competition: Eileen Biondi, Eva Farkash, Lior Greenberg, Rebecca Kaiser, Marina Khvatyuk, Orit Levy, Jamie Luff, David Perel, Tanya Tiamfook and Monica Vaida.

As Norman pointed out at the luncheon, these students constitute a highly diverse group. Some of them are specializing in the sciences, others in the humanities. Some are interested primarily in the arts, and one is from the School of Management. Their plans for the summer likewise cover a broad spectrum. Some will be studying in traditional religious institutions, others will be pursuing Judaic Studies in a more secular environment, and still others be improving their Hebrew skills in a variety of different contexts.

Norman also observed that we are one of the very few universities in the country that have been chosen by the Dorot Foundation to be the beneficiaries of this particular scholarship program. The others include Brown, Cornell, Princeton and other prestigious private universities. For this distinction, we are all deeply grateful.

At the beginning of the luncheon, President DeFleur expressed her pride and pleasure that Binghamton University was chosen to participate in the Dorot scholarship program. She stressed the great value of such a program at a time when international experience is of such vital importance in preparing students for the future, whether they plan to work in business, government, academia, the arts, or in other areas. At the end of the luncheon, Dean Brehm gave voice to her pride in the students and their achievements. She noted that it was particularly gratifying to have the support of the Dorot Foundation at a time when there is so little money available to subsidize our students' study abroad.

This scholarship money comes with a small string attached. After they return, the recipients are obligated to write reports

on their experiences in Israel. Do not be surprised to find excerpts from these reports in our next issue (or, quite possibly, the one after that).

### **CDC MEETS**

Our Community Development Committee had a luncheon meeting on April 28 at a Binghamton restaurant. Members present included Marilyn Aigen, Nancy Blumenthal, Shirley Bronsky, Sam Goldin, Fred Isaacs, Sharon Major, Phil Piaker, Shirley Raff, Gail Schneider, and Ted Sommer. Our Administration was represented by Jim Boyle, Associate Vice-President for Development and Alumni Relations, and our Department by Yedida Stillman, Susan Hubal and three of our students, Marjorie Feld, Gidon Isaacs, and Achikam Yogev. By all accounts, the students stole the show. Just by being themselves they demonstrated what our whole department is about. And they said things about our faculty that we would blush to repeat (Believe it or not, we are not entirely shameless).

The big news at this event was Sharon Major's announcement of a donation of \_\_\_\_\_ dollars to our department, in honor of Jim Boyle's father, Joseph Boyle, who recently passed away. In keeping with our unalterable policy, we cannot describe the precise nature of her very generous gift. Suffice it to say that it was a Major donation and will be greatly appreciated.

With regard to Ms. Major's motivation for making her donation we can say a little bit more. She recently returned from her first trip to Israel. Her experiences there, she tells us, inspired her with an ecumenical spirit and heightened her awareness of the interrelationships among all of the religious civilizations that share common biblical roots (She herself is Roman Catholic). She is prepared to support our Judaic Studies Department because its curriculum reflects in so many ways our awareness of this shared heritage, e.g. in its courses on Jews in the Moslem world and Jesus in the Context of First Century Judaism. Judaic Studies, she emphasizes, is not just for Jews.

### **FIRST SEPHARDIC CONFERENCE VOLUME SOON TO HIT THE BOOKSTORES**

The State University of New York Press recently announced the impending publication of New Horizons in Sephardic Studies edited by Yedida K. Stillman and George K. Zucker. This volume grew out of the first Sephardic Conference held here in Binghamton in 1987. It reflects, in the words of Jane Gerber of City University of New York Graduate School, "the breadth, diversity, and interdisciplinary character of Sephardic Studies. New material is presented in an accessible manner, and the

variety of perspectives matches the richness of the subject. The quality of the contributions is uniformly strong."

Those of our readers who attended this conference and remember how exciting it was, and especially those who were there and have by now forgotten what the speakers said, may wish to acquire this volume. The paperback edition costs only \$19.95. The easiest way to obtain it is to contact SUNY Press c/o CUP Services, P.O. Box 6525, Ithaca, New York 14851. You can also order it by telephone (607-277-2211).

#### MAILBAG

In March Yedida Stillman received a letter from **Bob Herrnson**, who has returned from Israel to settle in Brookline, Massachusetts. "I have a nice Jewish-Israeli support group of friends," he wrote. Hebrew newspapers are easy to obtain at local newstands, "and falafel is a two minute walk away (I have yet to find hummus that doesn't taste like wallpaper paste though)." [This does not do justice to the hummus dispensed at Rami's, I am constrained to observe. This Israeli restaurant, directly across the street from the delicatessen where Bob now works, has a hummus which even Yedida Stillman has described as "not bad"- ed.]

"I am currently enrolled at Boston University," Bob continues, "and will finish my EdM in Elementary Education this May... I hope to secure a full time teaching position at an alternative public school or a private Jewish day school for the coming fall... I have, in the meantime, been teaching part time in order to pay my bills. I instruct a fifth grade Hebrew class in history, liturgy, and biblical Hebrew at Temple Israel in Boston... This past year, while sorting out what to do with my life as a recent returnee to the States, I worked as a waiter in a Jewish deli. I had the great fortune of regularly serving a customer who was on sabbatical from Ben Gurion University. Our conversations, though limited to whatever I could get in between lugging plates of hot corned beef and pastrami, were inspirational. I am speaking of the Israeli author Aharon Applefeld.. Our meeting was somehow "**besmert**". Six years prior to my engagement at the Stage Deli, I was introduced to Applefeld's work by a young, soon to be professor by the name of Michael Taub... Hopefully Professor Taub's ankle is healed by now; I remember a distinct lilt in his teaching gait which kept me engaged even though the subject matter was unfamiliar. Incidentally, I only recently read Badenheim 1939. but I wouldn't have recognized Applefeld at all had it not been for Taub..."

**David and Sandra Becker**, more recent graduates, have moved in the other direction, from New York to Israel. They are currently living in a "caravan", i.e. a mobile home, not far from the Dead Sea. Sandra is working as a secretary for a tourist agency in Kfar Adumim. David is working as a fundraiser for the

Melton Center for Jewish Education in the Diaspora. Their two young boys, Yonatan and Amichai, spend much of their time in a day care center. All of the Beckers will be moving soon, to a new home now under construction near the town of Beit Shemesh.

Finally, we received a letter in April from **Deborah Gavin Shemony** ('90) which we would like to reprint almost in full:

"As a former Binghamton student with a minor in Hebrew, I took a number of classes in both Hebrew and Judaic Studies. As I look back with fondness on my college years, I genuinely appreciate the educational opportunities made available to me as a Jewish student on campus. Among them, one that I particularly enjoyed through an independent Judaic Studies project, was going into the local Binghamton community to tutor young children in the Jewish Day School. It was a very special experience for a young Jewish woman who was learning to further appreciate the uniqueness and beauty of her religion and culture.

"Now that I've become overly maudlin about my college years... let me briefly explain the reason for my letter. I recently received your request for alumni assistance in helping to bring Israeli scholars to Binghamton, and I just wanted to express my support for your efforts. Your attempts to bring these scholars to campus are absolutely wonderful, and I'm sure they will have an enlightening effect upon all students who choose to take advantage of their knowledge and experiences.

"In short, although I was only able to make a small contribution to the fund at this time, I'd like to extend an offer of assistance-- in any way needed-- to help make your efforts a success. Although I no longer live in New York State (I moved to Maryland and now work for Israel Military Industries), anytime you need an alumni to help you out down here, please feel free to call on me. Best of luck to you and shalom!"

Our initial reaction to this very gratifying letter was to consider whether we could possibly ask Deborah to arrange a discount for us on some of the lighter weaponry her firm produces. We do not really need it to sustain discipline in our classrooms, but it seemed to us-- for a moment-- that a small arsenal of our own might supply us with a useful bargaining chip in our future negotiations with the university administration. Upon reflection, however, we realized that this might set a dangerous precedent for other departments. In all seriousness, though, we were very much heartened by Deborah's offer and are giving genuine thought to ways in which we might take her up on it. Maybe there are some other alumni out there who have some ideas?

#### **FINAL THANKS OF THE YEAR**

Careful readers may have noted that in our article on the CDC meeting we did not thank Sharon Major for her donation. We

do so here, in the right place. And we likewise thank all of our other recent donors for their contributions. We thank, above all, the Lowe Foundation, for coming through for us once again with the \$3600 grant we need to keep our Hebrew program going. And we thank, for their generosity, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Abramowitz, Marilyn and Joseph Aigen, Pearl Barron, Ira Cohen, Merle Englander, Lori Kaplan Felice, Dr. and Mrs. Michael Fidler, Lisa and Otto Furth, Mr. and Mrs. Victor Gorodischer, Diane and Harold Herz, Jane Tamar Joseph, Lisa Koenigsberg, William Kohane, Lillian and Mark Levy, Marianne and Richard Matties, Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Mestel, Linda Neuwirth, Miriam Payes (whose donation was in memory of her late husband, Leon), Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Person, Pamela and George Peters, Dana and Michael Petrover, Martha and Paul Resnick, Bruce Ruderman, Kenneth Sass, Naomi and Richard Shore, Barbara and Richard Simon, Stephen Slavin, Eve Snitiker, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Strum, Barbara and Leonard Sugin, Donald Sukloff, Miriam Tellerman, Shirley and William Walter, and Louise Zuckerman.

Lastly, we would like to give special thanks to Dr. Eric Steckler for his donation. Dr. Steckler, a Florida gastroenterologist, is a veteran of the Judaic Studies Program. He studied Hebrew with Shmuel Morell back in the early '70s and was, as well, one of Norman Stillman's first students in Binghamton. He graduated in 1974 and has only recently reestablished contact with us, to our delight.

#### FINAL PLUG OF THE YEAR

Not for money-- this time. But you know what we could really use? Another printer. We have a laser printer now, located in Robin Barron's office. But there are many times when the competition for it is intense. If anybody out there has a printer they don't use anymore, we would sure appreciate it if you would donate it to us. It doesn't have to be a laser printer. A good dot matrix printer would suit many of our purposes well enough. We got a typewriter this way once; maybe we'll get lucky again.

#### FAREWELL TO THE SEROUSSIS

We cannot conclude this issue without saying thanks once again to Edwin and Yaara Seroussi, whose contribution to our department this year has been enormous. This is well known, we think, to all readers of Ha-Kol, but especially to those who constitute part of our campus community. The Seroussis are returning to their home in Israel (Well, not exactly. They just sold their house in Bet Shemesh-- not to the Beckers-- and are moving to Jerusalem... but even in a gossip newsletter like

ours, there is no reason to go into the details of this matter). We'll miss them a lot. We hope to have them back some day.

#### **MARGOLIS LECTURE**

This edition of Ha-Kol is being published too late for us to provide any advance publicity for this year's Rabbi Moses Margolis Lecturer, Professor Lynn Davidman of Brown University. If all goes according to schedule, she will have spoken on May 9 on the subject of her award-winning book, Tradition in a Rootless World. We hope everything went well and that we saw you all there.

And we wish you farewell for the summer, which for us, as you know, begins in May. We'll be back in the fall, which for us, as you know, begins in August.

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