

# A UNIVERSITY LIKE NO OTHER



## **Dr. Daniel Barkan** **From NYC to the Galilee**

For someone accustomed to working amidst the urban bustle of New York City, the transition to the pastoral hills of northern Israel – where Bar-Ilan University's new Medical School is located – might seem like entering another world. But moving between worlds is a natural for Dr. Daniel Barkan, a Jerusalem-trained physician who is leaving New York's Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center to become a member not only of the first incoming cycle of new faculty, but also the Medical School's first expert in clinical microbiology.

Equally comfortable in the laboratory and in the hospital ward, Dr. Barkan – who was born in the Former Soviet Union and lived in Tel Aviv since childhood – takes an integrated approach to his new job. "Many medical school researchers hold doctorates but have never treated patients, while others – who are licensed physicians – chose lab research over medicine," he says, adding that he himself spent years as a physician before he began concentrating on basic science. "Because my training encompasses both points of view – the lab and the clinic – I believe I can help students understand the practical microbiology they'll need to become excellent physicians, while exposing them to the laboratory skills that can lead to medically-significant discoveries. All this will ultimately lead to new approaches, as well as better patient care."

After completing his medical degree and a Masters in parasitology – as well as an Internal Medicine residency – Dr. Barkan was awarded a fellowship at Memorial Sloan-Kettering in 2005. His research at Sloan-Kettering, which focused on the bacterium that causes tuberculosis, demonstrated how a particular family of enzymes can modulate the body's immune response.

"We showed how tuberculosis bacteria that carry a mutated form of certain enzymes trigger a stronger counter-attack by cells of the immune system," he says. "This indicates that it may eventually be possible to use genetically-altered enzymes as part of an anti-tuberculosis vaccine." Dr. Barkan adds that this is significant because tuberculosis – on the rise in Israel due to increased immigration from countries where TB has not been brought under control – is increasingly resistant to antibiotic medications.

Dr. Barkan looks forward continuing his research, and to the challenge of helping to build a new scholarly community in the Galilee. "Recruiting excellent graduate students requires wooing candidates away from the more established and centrally-located medical schools," he says. "A student who wants to do a PhD will be looking for good mentors, good facilities, and good scholarships. That's why – especially in its first few years of existence – the School is investing heavily, to make sure that what we offer our students is second to none."

According to Dr. Barkan, the opening of the Medical School will also contribute to an "upgrade" of Safed's local medical infrastructure. "Every great medical school is associated with a great teaching hospital," he says. "As the Medical School becomes more established, it will continue to attract top physicians and scientists to the North. This will raise health care standards – in the Galilee and throughout the country."



Ultimately, however, Dr. Barkan's decision to come home to Israel was personal. "As a secular Zionist, I identify with the mission of building up Israel's economy and Jewish population, from the north to the south," he says. "But after six years in New York, my decision was also about family – especially because my wife and I recently became first-time parents of twins. Of course, being close to the grandparents will be a tremendous help!"

"To tell you the truth," says Dr. Barkan. "Joining a new school is something like becoming a father: there's a lot of excitement, along with a strong motivation to give your all, in order to make this new enterprise the best it can possibly be."



*Bar-Ilan University is a world-class university which provides a sterling academic experience for its 1,500 faculty and 33,000 students. Our mission, however, goes beyond the role of a typical research institution. At Bar-Ilan, we are guided by the wisdom of our forefathers, drawing from and inspired by the Jewish sources, with a goal of building character and leadership for Israel and the Jewish nation. The new School of Medicine being opened by Bar-Ilan in October 2011 provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate the BIU creed in action.*



**Bar-Ilan University**