



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

A Left-Hand Squeeze to Enhance Creative Thinking

Want to trigger your imagination? Squeeze a rubber ball with your left hand. That's the finding of a "gripping" BIU brain research study, published in *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* (2010), which shows that left muscle contractions activate the right hemisphere (RH), thereby enhancing creative thinking.

Dr. Abraham Goldstein and students at Bar-Ilan's Leslie and Susan Gonda (Goldschmied) Multidisciplinary Brain Research Center asked 40 participants to squeeze a rubber ball for 4 minutes before engaging in a creative task. Due to mammalian neural cross-wiring, the left-hand is connected to the RH, which has been associated with creative thinking. As predicted, those contracting their left hand scored higher on a creative thinking test than those who used their right hand or refrained altogether from squeezing. This technique, which was also mentioned in the *Wall Street Journal*, offers promise as an effective therapeutic or remedial manipulation and could have wide applications in aiding individuals with language impairments or other disorders believed to be related to hemispheric imbalances.

Applying Math to Assess Voters' Expertise

An interdisciplinary BIU research team has devised an innovative method of optimally weighting voters, even without testing them against questions with known right answers. Profs. Eyal Baharad and Shmuel Nitzan (Economics), Prof. Moshe Koppel (Computer Science) and

Dr. Jacob Goldberger (Engineering) have found that it is possible to gauge voters' relative degrees of expertise by simply comparing their votes on a variety of questions. The study – which appears in the computer science journal, *Autonomous Agents and Multi-Agent Systems* (Jan. 2011), and is also slated for publication in the economics journal, *Theory and Decision* – is likely to have a broad array of applications, such as for businesses eager to best utilize online polling data, and for committees to aggregate expert opinion.

The Faculty of Medicine in the Galilee Shows Vital Signs

Gearing up for its October 2011 launching, BIU's Faculty of Medicine has brought aboard new staff, including its recently appointed Academic Vice Dean, Prof. Jacob Bornstein, Chairman of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Western Galilee Hospital in Nahariya. He chairs several international associations and his department is recognized as one of the most exceptional in women's medicine instruction. The Faculty has thus far contracted ten outstanding experimental researchers in such areas as virology, infectious disease, cancer, neurobiology, bioinformatics and metabolism. Most are Israelis returning from post-doctoral positions at Yale, Harvard, Stanford, and other leading institutions. Additionally, 50 clinical teaching staff members are being recruited from affiliated Galilee hospitals and community clinics.

Of the 130 students enrolled for the coming fall, nearly 60 have completed pre-clinical work at top institutions in Europe (and will graduate as doctors in Spring 2014). The others have BSc degrees in the Life Sciences (and will finish their studies in 2015).

EXPLORING OUR HERITAGE



Ethiopian MA Student Wins Heller Center Research Grant

Wagayie Tavaje, who is writing her Masters thesis on "Violence against Women in the Ethiopian Community in Israel," is the 2011 recipient of the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Student Research Grant. As an immigrant (she was nine and bereft of formal education upon arrival in 1991 as part of "Operation Solomon"), the criminology student has direct access to people and statistics not readily available to outsiders. In light of the study's importance, the Israel Ministry of Welfare and Social Services has expressed interest in her findings, which could have bearing on future policy in addressing this worrisome social challenge.

The Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism marked International Women's Day by announcing its worthy scholarship recipient. Currently celebrating its Bat-Mitzvah year, the Heller Center seeks to advance feminist research on the role of women in Jewish society, religion and culture through its grants, publications, and conventions, including the recent convention on "Fertility, Halacha and Family Health," which it co-sponsored with the Department for Gender Studies and various women's organizations.

Outstanding Kabbalah Researcher is Awarded Prestigious Prize

Prof. Daniel Abrams of the Department of Jewish Philosophy is the 2010 winner of the prestigious Gershom Scholem Prize for outstanding research in Kabbalah. Cited for his "new and creative ways of researching Kabbalistic texts, including gender theories and new methods of interpretation," Abrams is also founder of *Kabbalah*, the leading Kabbalah research journal.

Open Minded Torah Makes its Debut

An internationally renowned authority on Renaissance poetry and philosophy who also publishes widely on Jewish life and learning, BIU Prof. William Kolbrener has authored a new book, *Open Minded Torah: Of Irony, Fundamentalism and Love*, (Continuum, 2011). In essays as likely to turn to baseball, Denzel Washington, and the NASDAQ as to *Macbeth*, quantum physics and psychoanalysis, Kolbrener, who teaches both English Literature and Philosophy at Bar-Ilan, provides powerful –and often surprising – insights into how open-mindedness allows for authentic Jewish commitment in an age otherwise defined by fundamentalism and unbelief. Topics range from parenting a son with Down syndrome to Biblical criticism to Talmudic interpretation of dreams – a perspective on Torah which emphasizes scepticism, creativity and the need to embrace difference. Through a personal synthesis of Western and Jewish learning, popular culture and philosophy, the American-born graduate of Oxford and Columbia offers a compelling new vision where being open minded allows for a non-dogmatic and committed Jewish life.

Probing the Jewish Bioethics of Brain-Stem Death

Case studies in Jewish bioethical decision-making relating to brain death and advanced genetic management sparked lively discussion at a recent *Nitzotzot* conference hosting the eminent Jewish medical ethics expert, Rabbi Dr. Moshe D. Tendler, of Yeshiva University. BIU's flagship Torah and science dialogue monthly series have also focused on Eco-History, featuring Prof. Noah Efron of BIU's Graduate Program in Science, Technology and Society and a member of the Executive Committee of the International Society for Science and Religion; and Brain Research and Halachic Creativity with Prof. Miri Faust of the Department of Psychology and the Gonda Multidisciplinary Brain Research Center.



IMPROVING SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Justice Ministry Taps BIU Legal Expert to Write Israel's Insolvency Law

Dr. David Hahn of the Faculty of Law has been chosen by the Ministry of Justice to assist in drafting Israel's new Insolvency Law. Reputed as Israel's foremost expert in this field, Hahn has also won a generous research grant from the Israel Science Foundation to enable him to conclude a thorough research on the optimal insolvency law for Israel. Dr. Hahn's new book on this very subject was published last year, and it is expected that some of the ideas developed therein will serve as the basis for the new law.

Two BIU Women Professors Win Top Israeli Honors

Prof. Pnina Klein, Head of BIU's Baker Center for Research and Treatment of Children with Special Needs, is this year's winner of the prestigious Israel Prize in Education. One of the world's foremost researchers in early childhood education, Klein has developed the MISC (More Intelligent and Sensitive Child) Program which has been adopted by the National Institutes of Health as the tool for early intervention, in combination with medical treatment, for AIDS-infected children in Africa.

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari, Director of BIU's Rackman Center for the Advancement of the Status of Women, has been named 2010 Woman of the Year in Law by the prestigious monthly magazine *Praklitim*, published by the Israel Bar Association. One of the country's leading experts, activists and lobbyists for improving gender equality, Halperin-Kaddari is a member and former vice president of the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Examining the Rehabilitation of Israel's Brain-Injured

The long-term rehabilitation of head-injured patients was the vital focus of a conference held at Jaffa's Rehabilitation Center for Veterans After Traumatic Brain-Injury, which is associated with both Bar-Ilan and the Israel Ministry of Defense. The Center staff gave workshops on their novel approach to rehabilitating patients and the Director, Prof. Eli Vakil, addressed the professional gathering on the longstanding consequences of traumatic brain injury. Vakil heads the Jacob Ballas Memory and Amnesia Laboratory at BIU's Gonda (Goldschmied) Multidisciplinary Brain Research Center.

Established in 1973, the Rehabilitation Center uniquely provides disabled Israeli combat veterans with treatment, employment and enrichment in a dynamic and stimulating environment. A model institution both in Israel and abroad, the Center aims, wherever possible, to re-integrate the head-injured into society.

Jerusalem Winter Writing Seminar with Author Robert Cohen

Against the backdrop of the picturesque Old City walls, prize-winning American novelist, Robert Cohen, eloquently led a three-day Creative Writing Seminar on "Initiations: Beauty, Sadness and Mystery" at the Stern House in Yemin Moshe. The BIU writer-in-residence, who teaches literature and creative writing at Middlebury College in Vermont, was brought to Israel by the Shaindy Rudoff Graduate Program in Creative Writing. The seminar afforded participants with the rare opportunity to study great authors and improve writing skills under the guidance of a master.

BIU POLITICAL COMMENTATORS IMPACT WORLDWIDE

World Media Quotes BIU Political Pundits on Mideast Upheaval

Bar-Ilan political analysts are being increasingly called upon by the international media to share their insights into the current Middle East uprisings. To name just a few: Political Studies Prof. Yehudit Ronen, an expert on Libya, has been quoted by several media outlets, among them Germany's *Der Spiegel* and Frankfurter *Allgemeine Zeitung*, and the Chinese news agency *Xinhua*. The *New York Times* cited BESA Director Prof. Efraim Inbar in an article on the Hezbollahization of Lebanon. In covering the Egyptian unrest and its ramifications for Israel, *Newsweek* included the observations of Prof. Hillel Frisch of the BESA Center. And let us not forget veteran analyst, Prof. Gerald Steinberg of the Department of Political Studies, who commented in the *Christian Science Monitor* about Israel's concern that an Islamic-based government in Egypt would allow much more freedom of movement and terrorists across the border.

BIU Islamic Expert Gives Capitol Hill Briefing

A foremost authority in Arab and Middle East Studies and a former IDF Military Intelligence Lt. Colonel, Dr. Mordechai Kedar addressed US congressional members, staffers and community members on "Why is the Middle East such a Difficult Area for Americans and Westerners to Understand." A lecturer in BIU's Department of Arabic and a BESA research fellow, Kedar has authored numerous publications on the Islamic world and the clash of values between Islam, Middle Eastern Societies and the West. Sponsored by EMET (Endowment for Middle East Truth), the Capitol Hill briefing was part of the Dr. Miriam and Sheldon G. Adelson Policy Seminar Series.



BIU Conferences Survey the Latest Mid-East Turmoil

In the wake of the dynamic turn of events in the Middle East, Bar-Ilan University has hosted a number of conferences, including: "Upheaval in the Arab World," sponsored by the Department of Middle East Studies, which convened BIU experts who addressed the vacuum created in the Arab countries and the global danger in the absence of proper leadership; the use of social networks, such as *Facebook*, as a protest tool; and the impact of the turmoil on the Palestinians, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and the world oil market.

"Israel in a Turbulent Middle East," sponsored by the Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies, examined the current state of affairs in the Arab world, the American approach, the impact of regional developments upon the peace process, and Israel's predicament and policy options, with the participation of MK Avi Dichter, former Minister of Public Security; and Deputy Foreign Minister and MK Danny Ayalon, the former Israeli Ambassador to the United States.