Harvard Professor Appointed Director of Gonda (Goldschmied) Brain Research Center

Prof. Moshe Bar, a world-leading researcher in Cognitive Neuroscience, is the new Director of Bar-Ilan’s Leslie and Susan Gonda (Goldschmied) Multidisciplinary Brain Research Center. He replaces the Center’s founding head, Prof. Moshe Abeles, who will continue as a researcher at the Center. The returning Israeli scientist from Harvard said he made his final decision to accept the BIU offer after hearing students present their research at a Center conference. “I was impressed with their high level of intelligence and enthusiasm, which is on par with the best students at Harvard,” relates Bar, who intends to place emphasis upon translating basic research into applied research.

Prior to his return after 17 years abroad, he held associate professorships at both Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, and directed the Cognitive Neuroscience Laboratory at the Athinoula A. Martinos Center for Biomedical Imaging. A former member of the Israeli Air Force, Bar received his PhD in Cognitive Neuroscience from the University of Southern California.

Joint BIU-Sheba Ventures

Twelve doctors and senior researchers in the Israeli health system are currently enrolled in a novel one-year diploma program in Biomedical Informatics, jointly offered by BIU’s Mina & Everard Goodman Faculty of Life Sciences and Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer. Launched last year, the program trains participants to keep pace with the medical information revolution and may lead to the discovery of novel treatments.

Another cooperative BIU-Sheba project is the establishment of a special research fund that allocates grants to three joint studies per annum. This year’s recipients: BIU Life Scientists Prof. Ramit Mehr, Dr. Cyril Cohen and Prof. Ron Goldstein, who together with their Sheba partners, received the award for investigations which may have important clinical implications for cancer research.

Teen Math Whiz Makes Grade for BIU Bachelor’s Degree

At the head of the class with a 98% grade point average, 18-year-old Almog Ben David of Ashdod is about to complete his BSc at Bar-Ilan. The teenager, who has made the Dean’s List twice, grew up in a geographic region that statistically would have kept him below the poverty line, but his passion for math has enabled him to excel in the academic world. A graduate of BIU’s Victor Bentata Program for the Advancement of Mathematically Talented Youth, Almog hopes to continue toward his MSc and PhD at the University. “I see myself as a Doctor of Mathematics in five years,” he says.
Creative Developments: Sacred Trash & Beautiful Souls

As part of its prolific agenda, BIU’s Shaindy Rudoff Graduate Program in Creative Writing recently hosted a presentation by acclaimed writer Adina Hoffman and MacArthur-winning poet and translator Peter Cole of their book, Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza (Schocken/Nextbook, 2011). They fascinated the audience with the story of the retrieval from an Egyptian geniza (repository for worn-out texts) of the most vital cache of Jewish manuscripts (e.g., letters, poems, wills, marriage contracts, Bibles) ever discovered and one which provides a panoramic view of 900 years of vibrant Mediterranean Judaism. In January, the Program is holding a memorial graduate reading to honor the legacy of Program benefactor Sheldon Rudoff, z”l.

The Program’s award-winning faculty now includes novelist Evan Fallenberg, who replaces Allen Hoffman as fiction coordinator, and visiting fiction instructor Joan Leegant, whose story, “Beautiful Souls” recently won the 2011 Nelligan Prize for Short Fiction from the Colorado Review and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Kudos also to Linda Zisquit, whose translation of Rivka Miriam’s poetry, These Mountains, is a finalist in the 2011 National Jewish Book Awards.

Interfacing Torah with Science

The Women’s Midrasha in the Ludwig and Erica Jesselson Institute for Advanced Torah Studies has launched an Open Beit Midrash for some 30 BIU students who wish to combine their academic studies with in-depth Torah learning three evenings a week. The female enrollees convene in chevrutot (pairs) to delve into Biblical, Talmudic and other Jewish texts on subjects that they choose, under the direction of the scholarly MA Talmud candidate Sarit Belfer, who is also a Rabbinical Court Advocate. “The Beit Midrash program gives me the freedom to explore subjects that genuinely interest me and opens up a rich world of Jewish learning and knowledge,” enthuses one participant.

Bringing together leading scientists, eminent Jewish scholars and outstanding PhD students, Bar-Ilan’s Fall 2011 Nitzotzot forums examined topics in Cognitive Science (creativity and insanity in science, Halakha and Jewish thought), Psychology (responsibility for action in mental illness), Logic (viewing the logic of Halakha in light of Gödel’s incompleteness theorem), and Particle Physics (Physical Reality in Halakha and Modern Science). The January 2012 session of BIU’s flagship Torah and Science Dialogue series focused on Author Identification in Computer Science, Philosophy and Halakha, and featured a talk by Israel Belfer, a PhD candidate in the Science, Technology and Society Program.
Law with an Asian Twist

Twenty second-year Law undergrads are gaining proficiency in Chinese and Japanese (next year, Korean, too), along with a working knowledge of Asian legal systems. Enrolled in a novel BIU initiative that enables them to couple their LLB with a second BA in Asian Studies (in the Faculty of Humanities), they are being trained for future careers that will interface with the booming Far East industry, commerce and business world. The curriculum also offers an extensive introduction to the culture, politics and economics of China, India, Japan and other East and Southeast Asian countries.

Championing Women’s Legal Rights

Working tirelessly to end discrimination and improve women’s rights, the Ruth and Emanuel Rackman Center for the Advancement of Women’s Status, in the BIU Faculty of Law, has recently scored victories:

- Challenging retroactive Get cancellation at the High Rabbinical Court, the Center secured a new Bill of Divorce and damage payments for a woman whose original Get was cancelled two years after granted (and she was left an Aguna for five years);
- The Center initiated a bill to the Knesset focused on alleviating hardship of wives of recalcitrant husbands who refuse to grant them a Get. The Rabbinic Courts will be obligated to hold a meeting 45 days after the divorce order in order to decide on the possibility of new sanctions on the husband;
- Interceding on behalf of an Ethiopian woman, the Center has taken steps to ensure that documents needed to file restraining orders in courts and police stations be available in Amharic, Arabic and Russian, as well as Hebrew.

BIU Programs Taught Entirely in English Draw Students from Abroad

BIU’s new English-language BA program in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, initiated by the Dean of Students Office, is off to a good start, with 32 enthusiastic freshmen from the US, Canada, England, Italy, Switzerland and Belarus studying Economics, Political Studies and Sociology with leading experts. The Program also offers enriching Jewish heritage courses, an Ulpan to boost Hebrew-language skills, trips to key Israeli sites and Shabbat retreats. Meanwhile, in the School of Education, 18 students from North America are pursuing an MA in Curriculum Studies with a specialization in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (in cooperation with the English Department). The first dozen grads of BIU’s two-year Teach and Study Program (TASP) are already working in schools in Israel and abroad.

In August 2012, BIU plans to launch Israel’s first postbac premed program in English for American BA grads. A joint venture of the Mina & Everard Goodman Faculty of Life Sciences and the Dean of Students Office, the one-year program – directed by Dr. Don Katcoff of the Faculty – will include Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Calculus and Statistics, as well as the Stanley Kaplan MCAT preparatory course. Students will also be offered Jewish enrichment, a Hebrew-language Ulpan, and a course in Emergency Medicine.

In Fall 2012, BIU’s School of Communication will offer a new BA in Communication in English for overseas students.

Experts Evaluate Iranian Threat and Arab Spring at BESA Forum

“As steep as the price for hitting Iran may be, it will be less painful than the cost of living with an Iranian nuclear weapons threat,” argued former Mossad chief Maj. Gen. (res.) Danny Yatom at the conference, “Israeli Security in a New Regional Environment,” sponsored by BIU’s Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies. Maj. Gen. (res.) Uzi Dayan, former head of IDF military intelligence and national security advisor, stated that the upheavals in the Arab world “prove once again that the Arab-Israeli conflict is not the central problem in this region.” As to the Arab Spring, the experts concurred that it is not going to result in democracy, and may make things even worse for Israel.

BIU Workshop on Japanese Calligraphy Carving on Wood (Kokuji)

Master Tousen Usuda (front row, center), Kokuji instructors and participants display their art at the workshop, hosted by BIU’s South and Southeast Asia Program.
BIU NEWSBYTES

All you need to know in a glance

Winter 2011/2012

BIU OUTREACH

A Taste of Shabbat on Thursday

It’s Thursday and the cholent is already being served as traditional Shabbat melodies fill the air on BIU’s North Campus. Some 50 students from both religious and secular backgrounds congregate on mats near the two strumming guitarists and scores of others saunter around as they imbibe the Sabbath flavor during their afternoon break. Michael, an MA Law candidate, reflects on the weekly Torah portion and its message: “Our strength is in our unity – we must bridge our gaps.” The weekly event, held under the auspices of Campus Rabbi Shlomo Shefer together with the BIU Student Union, draws favorable reviews. “The cholent is delicious”, says a student named Tom. Concurring, Michal, a Psychology major, adds that the pre-Shabbat gathering “is a great tradition.”

Kabbalah Goes Public

Hidden from the public eye for generations, esoteric Jewish wisdom is being studied by dozens of men and women from all walks of life at BIU’s Shlomo Moussiaeff Center for Research in Kabbalah. During the Fall Semester, 100 people attended courses on: “Maimonides in the Hidden Depths” (analyzing hidden elements of his philosophy and addressing such questions as: Who is the perfect man, and what is the relationship between miracles and the Redemption?), “Mysticism Here and Now” (focusing on the great 20th century mystical thinkers Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook and Rabbi Yehuda Leib Ashlag, as well as on the writings of Martin Buber, Uri Zvi Greenberg, Ahad Ha’am and Bialik), “The Secrets of the Godly-Human Journey in Kabbalah Teachings” (clarifying the cornerstones of Kabbalistic thought, especially man’s spiritual character through study of the Zohar, Lurianic Kabbalah, and Rabbi Ashlag’s teachings). Some 300 students are expected to attend five additional Kabbalah courses during the Spring Semester. To date, more than 5,000 men and women have participated in Center courses.

Empowering Israeli Security Forces with a Bar-Ilan BA

BIU recently awarded BA diplomas to 149 members of Israel’s Security Forces, who have completed special Social Science programs offered by Bar-Ilan’s Regional Colleges. Participants earned degrees in either Political Studies or Criminology, while gaining an introduction to the Jewish “bookshelf” through enriching Jewish heritage courses. “Today you are becoming ambassadors of Bar-Ilan,” BIU Rector Prof. Haim Taitelbaum told the graduates, who join the ranks of more than 2,000 other alumni of BIU’s academic programs for the defense establishment, which were launched 17 years ago.

2011/2012 Concert Season Commences on Right Note

This year’s concert season, launched by the Department of Music, offers two series: The Contemporary Quartet, comprising four String Quartet performances (Schubert’s Death and the Maiden, Beethoven’s Op. 132 as well as Contemporary and Israeli works); and the World-Embracing Jewish Music series, which presents three evenings of Jewish Music spanning Renaissance and Klezmer. Dedicated to the memory of Ben Meiselman, and thanks to the Phyllis Dubrofsky Foundation, the BIU music series are held on Tuesday evenings in the Margot Rosenberg-Pulitzer Auditorium in the Marcus and Ann Rosenberg Music Building.

BIU Students Bring Hanukkah Light and Cheer to Patients

Bar-Ilan students light the Menorah, sing traditional melodies and distribute donuts to patients at Ra’anana’s Beit Levinstein Rehabilitation Hospital, during the annual Hanukkah visit organized by the BIU Student Union.

Photo credits: Adi Shitrit

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