

## An Op Not to Pass Over



Just in time for Pesach, students-turned-bakers engage in the age-old art of Matzah making and proudly show off their handmade unleavened bread, at a pre-Seder event organized by the Ludwig & Erica Jesselson Institute for Advanced Torah Studies and the Office of the Campus Rabbi, and supervised by Rabbi Shabtai Rappoport, the Jesselson Institute Beit Midrash head.

## A Festive Welcome for a New Torah Scroll

With spirited song and dance, throngs of students, faculty and staff celebrate the debut of a new *Sefer Torah* on campus – the second to be dedicated to the University by Dr. Moshe Peretz, the founder of a leading Israeli building firm, who received both his BA and MA from BIU. Five years after his first gift to the Abisz & Esther Nagel Synagogue in the Jack and Gitta Nagel Family Jewish Heritage Center, the BIU alumnus provides the Schleifer synagogue with its first Sephardic Torah Scroll.



## ISEF-BIU Partnership Provides Life-Transforming Education

Over the past 36 years, ISEF has supported nearly 2,000 promising young scholars at BIU – men and women largely from the periphery and of Sephardic origin, but also Russian and Ethiopian immigrants, Druse and others. Many of the students are the first in their families to go beyond 10th or 12<sup>th</sup> grade. They become an integral part of Israel's economic success story, educating their children in turn, and breaking the vicious cycle of poverty.

ISEF President Nina Weiner – recalling her long connection with BIU and the late Rabbi Emanuel Rackman z"l – notes that a large proportion of ISEF's target population are from religious or traditional backgrounds. "BIU provides both a first-rate academic experience and a 'home,' a campus where they feel their values and traditions are respected and shared by the larger community." Referring to the program's ripple effect, she says "every ISEF scholar is an inspiration, a role model for relatives, friends, and the youngsters they mentor." Combining scholarships with community service and leadership training, this high-impact program empowers young Israelis from underserved and challenged backgrounds to obtain a higher education and, through that, a new life.



Pictured: ISEF recipients Ilana Elbaz Bar, Deputy CEO and Legal Counsel for the Migdal Group, Israel's leading insurance and finance company; Dr. Miriam Bitton, BIU intellectual property law expert and lecturer; and Dr. Refael Minnes, Head of the Microscopy Unit at BIU's Mina & Everard Goodman Faculty of Life Sciences

## 750 Youth Leaders Unite at BIU

Representing 30 countries and 13 Zionist youth movements – ranging from Hashomer Hatzair to Habonim Dror to Bnei Akiva – young Jewish leadership gather on campus for a day of lectures, discussions and fun. Organized by the Jewish Agency for Israel together with BIU and the Student Union, the event is the first in a series aimed at developing innovative ways to enhance Jewish and Zionist informal education



## Research Probes Oxytocin Benefits for Youth with Autism & Premies

Joint BIU-Yale research published in *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* has found that the bonding hormone oxytocin administered as an inhalant generated increased activity in parts of the brain involved in social connection, suggesting that these brain regions are not irrevocably damaged in children with mild autism. BIU psychology senior lecturer Dr. Ilanit Gordan, who is also affiliated with Yale U, is co-author of the novel study which made headlines in the *New York Times*.

Leading media outlets, including *Time* magazine, report on research on baby cuddling, aka "Kangaroo Care (KC)" conducted by Prof. Ruth Feldman, of the Gonda (Goldschmied) Multidisciplinary Brain Research Center. Her study, published in *Biological Psychiatry*, shows that premature infants who get KC (for as little as 14 total hours over 14 days) were less stressed and slept better than their non-cuddled peers, even years later. Feldman, who started her research in 1996, explains that the oxytocin increases in both moms and babes during cuddle sessions.

## High-Powered BIU Expert Wins Again



Prof. Doron Aurbach, of the Department of Chemistry and the Bar-Ilan Institute of Nanotechnology and Advanced Materials (BINA), is the winner of the prestigious 2014 Ernest B. Yeager Award from the International Battery Association (IBA). He is being recognized for his lifelong contributions to the development of alternative power sources (e.g., rechargeable batteries, and the advancement of basic and applied science

facilitating the development of electric vehicles. Aurbach, who has authored more than 450 papers and has been quoted over 16,000 times in scholarly articles, is helping to facilitate a worldwide revolution in electric cars through cooperation with leading companies such as General Motors and the German chemical company BASF.

## MEDICAL BRIEFS

### Making the Grade

BIU's School of Medicine – though only in its third year – placed second out of Israel's five medical faculties in the psychiatry and gynecology exam scores at the national level.

### Annual Translational Research Conference

Some 120 Israeli medical researchers from the School of Medicine and BIU-associated hospitals in the north convened at the School's annual translational research conference. Organized by three prominent faculty researchers, Prof. Batia Kristal, Dr. Itay Onn and Dr. Meital Gal-Tanamy, the event featured a keynote address on RNA epigenetics by Prof. Gidon Rechavi, head of the Sheba Cancer Center. Prizes were also awarded to four talented grad students in the School's medical sciences track. Guided by a translational research approach, the School focuses on investigation which is oriented towards clinical, diagnostic and treatment implementations.

### New Arrivals

This year the School welcomes into its faculty ranks microbiologist Omry Koren (PhD: Tel Aviv U; postdoc: Cornell), who examines the role of bacteria found in the digestive system of healthy and diseased individuals; Meir Shamay (PhD: Weizmann Institute; postdoc: Johns Hopkins), head of the School's Viral Oncology Lab; and Moshe Dessau (PhD: Tel Aviv U; postdoc: Yale), who focuses on the structural biology of infectious agents.

## Community Outreach

As part of an initiative to afford youth in the north with hands-on lab experience, faculty members supervise high school juniors conducting a scientific project in lieu of the matriculation exam. Dr. Itay Onn's student, a local kibbutznik, is exploring the role of the protein complex "cohesin" in maintaining chromosome stability and forestalling developmental disorders and cancer. Dr. Meir Shamay's student from neighboring Rosh Pina is developing a novel screen to identify interactions that may promote cancer development by the Kaposi's sarcoma-associated herpesvirus. "The idea is to get these students into a research environment and inspire them to pursue a career in science," says Shamay.



Setting the stage for cultural enrichment in the north, the School's recent concert series meshed classical and contemporary with ethnic culture, drawing crowds to hear prominent musicians and young talent from the Galilee perform

Donning work garb and gloves, School faculty members volunteer at a Samed club for the elderly, whitewashing, painting, gardening – in short, giving the place a fresh look for Pesach

## Law Faculty Hosts 2<sup>nd</sup> Agunah Summit

The BIU Faculty of Law was a lead partner in organizing the Second Agunah Summit which addressed the institutional aspect of "chained" women and particularly the state's responsibility toward wives who cannot obtain a Jewish bill of divorce from their husbands. Co-organized by the Israel Democracy Institute, the Tikvah Center for Law & Jewish Civilization and the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, the Summit focused on the current Israeli reality, where only religious marriage and divorce are officially recognized by law. Similarly attention was devoted to the situation in the Diaspora. Speakers voiced support for prenups, legislation to annul marriage under certain circumstances, and appointing progressive-minded members to the panel that selects rabbinical judges. BIU Law Dean Prof. Shahar Lifshitz raised intriguing solutions based on previous Halakhic approaches largely ignored in recent centuries, such as empowering rabbinic courts to enforce divorce after a separation period, or enabling a woman to obtain a divorce solely at her initiative.

## BIU's Award-Winning Law Faculty

In tribute to its noted activities in promoting human rights, the Ruth and Emanuel Rackman Center for the Advancement of the Status of Women was granted the Gorni Prize from the Israeli Association of Public Law.

Honors and recognition were also recently accorded to several faculty members, including Dr. Hadar Dancig-Rosenberg, who won the Cheshin Law Prize for Academic Excellence in Law; Prof. Gideon Parchomovsky, recipient of the Zeltner Prize awarded to senior researchers; and Prof. Yair Lorberbaum and Prof. Amichai Radzyner, who will be Harry Starr Fellows in Judaica at Harvard next year.

The Israel Council for Higher Education reported that BIU has the most widely published law faculty in Israel while another study found that three BIU law faculty members figure among the six young researchers who have published in the most prestigious publications worldwide.

## Cyber Bullying Forum on Campus

In our increasingly digital world, parents worry about the dangers lurking on line, in particular, their children's exposure to cyber bullying. This challenge was highlighted at BIU's 2014 Mordechai Bar-Lev Forum on Research of Informal Education. Prof. Zehavit Gross, who heads both the Burg Chair and the UNESCO Chair on Human Rights, Democracy, Peace and Tolerance, spoke of the need to bring together senior academicians, field workers, and teenagers in finding workable solutions. Educating toward safe web navigation and building trust between children and their parents and teachers is a key factor in their development into stable youth, said Gross, who calls for informal ed initiatives such as enlisting the student council in combatting cyber aggressiveness which can totally undermine the victim's self-image.

## BIU Jewish Historian Lectures and Consults in E. Europe

A sought-after lecturer in Eastern Europe, Prof. Moshe Rosman of the Israel and Golda Koschitzky Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry, delivered the keynote address in Moscow at the 21<sup>st</sup> annual conference of the Russian Association for Jewish Studies. The first session marked the launching of the Russian translation of his award-winning book, *How Jewish is Jewish History*.

Rosman also made consultation visits to Moscow's Museum of the Jews in Russia and the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center, and was a guest of Vilnius University in Lithuania, where he conducted research, lectured and gave doctoral seminars.

In May, he will be keynote speaker at the Polish Constitution Day celebrations, where he will lecture in Polish. Invited by the nation's Constitutional Tribunal, Rosman has been accorded a special courtesy: the annual May 3 festivities (which fall on Saturday this year) have been pushed up to Thursday to accommodate the Sabbath-observant BIU professor.

## BIU Academic Delegation Tours Turkey



Touring Turkey and hearing firsthand about the country's politics and relations with Israel, a BIU academic delegation visit Istanbul's oldest synagogue "Ahrida" in the old Jewish Quarter. The trip was organized by BESA researcher and Middle East scholar, Dr. Efrat Aviv, and Dr. Ronen Yitzhak of the Western Galilee College, which is under BIU's academic auspices

## Mainstreaming Students with ID

Five participants in BIU's groundbreaking *Otzmot* (Empowerment) program for students with intellectual disabilities have been mainstreamed in regular university classes and will be taking exams, working to amass course credits and earn their undergrad degree.

## Israel Prize Laureates

Congrats to Prof. Shamma Friedman of the Naftal-Yaffe Department of Talmud who is to receive this year's Israel Prize for Research in Talmud for his "enormous and varied study of Talmudic literature which has earned him an international reputation as a leading speaker on the study of the *Mishna* and *Tosefta* (supplement to the *Mishna*) and questions of literary structure and formation of the Talmud text."

Israel's highest accolade is also being awarded to Rabbi Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein, member of BIU's Board of Trustees and Council of Founders, who serves as dean of the Har Etzion Yeshiva and is widely regarded as a leader of Modern Orthodoxy. He is being lauded for his contribution to "Jewish Religious Literature."

## US Embassy Presents American Classics to BIU Library System



Hilary Olsin-Windecker, Counselor for Press and Cultural Affairs at the US Embassy in Israel, reviews the collection of more than 100 American classics which the Embassy presented to the BIU Library System. The Wurzweiler Central Library has also recently displayed a photo exhibit on the Samaritans and illustrations from Solomon's *Song of Songs*

## New "Open Bible" Lectures Draw Hundreds

Reaching out to the community at large, BIU's Bible lecture series enables participants to explore key Biblical figures and messages together with top scholars from the Zalman Shamir Department of Bible. A dozen intriguing sessions on the *Book of Judges* –this year's focus – examine such topics as leadership in crisis, women heroines, Jephthah's daughter: a family tragedy, and Samson's riddles. In a relaxed atmosphere, over coffee and cake, close to 300 people from diverse backgrounds study the Book of Books. The initiative of Jewish Studies Faculty Dean Prof. Elie Assis, Assis recalls the first lecture: "We planned for a group of 30 but ten times that many showed up!" This has reaffirmed BIU's important role in opening up the world of the Bible to a truly knowledge-seeking public wishing to strengthen their Jewish learning.

## Torah & Science Forum Expands Northward

Five years after its launching by the Jesselson Institute, BIU's intellectual platform *Nitzotzot* is expanding to the periphery, bringing lectures which explore the interface of science and Torah to its new branch in Kfar Tavor, in the Lower Galilee. Gifted doctoral candidates, scientists and Jewish scholars address diverse hot-button research topics (e.g. saving lives and determining the moment of death, brain research and its significance vis-à-vis creativity in *Halakha*) at the meetings, which are open to the general public. The Galilee initiative is spearheaded by BIU geography Prof. Yossi Katz. Plans are now in the offing to establish additional *Nitzotzot* branches in the Upper Galilee and in the south.

## Jesselson Institute Head Addresses Int'l Interfaith Conference in London

As Israeli Chief Rabbinate rep, Rabbi Prof. Daniel Sperber, President of BIU's Jesselson Institute for Advanced Torah Studies, addressed the international Conference of World Religions held in London. "Judaism is the progenitor of the monotheistic, the so-called Abrahamic religions," he said, noting that "humankind was placed in the world not as masters, but as custodians, to preserve it for further generations. Hence, the involvement in conservation and ecology is not merely a matter of global interest, but also a divine directive." He also spoke of social-interpersonal laws (e.g. charity) that appear in the Bible, which "constitute a blueprint for the morality and ethical behavior of all humankind." The event was attended by renowned leaders, including the head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and the Archbishop of the UK Catholic Church. BIU has cultivated ongoing interdenominational ties, as seen in the October visit of the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal André-Armand Vingt-Trois.

## BIU Physicist's Books Presented to Pontiff



Spanish-language editions of two books (*Fossils and Faith: Understanding Torah and Science* and *In the Beginning: Biblical Creation and Science*) authored by BIU physicist Prof. Nathan Aviezer were presented by Argentinean Sephardic Chief Rabbi Isaac Sacca to Pope Francis at a recent meeting at the Vatican