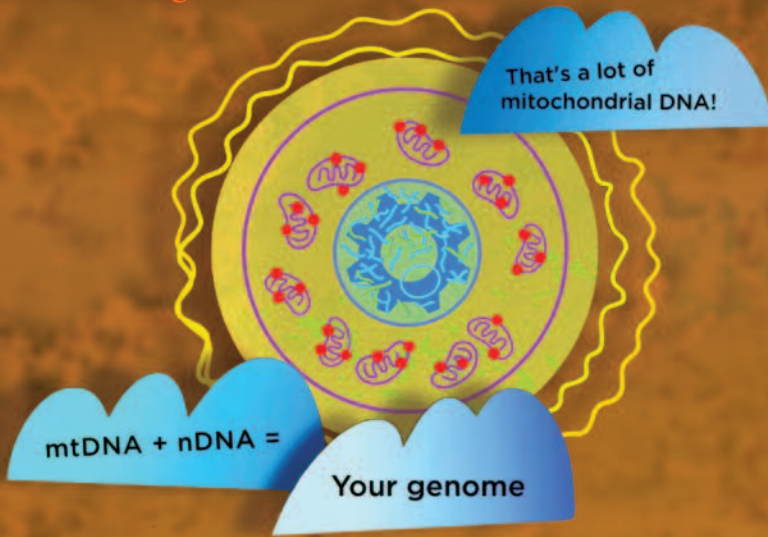


IMPACT

SUMMER 2017



AMERICAN ASSOCIATES
Ben-Gurion University
of the Negev



GENOMICS: MAPPING THE WAY TO PERSONALIZED MEDICINE

ISRAEL AND THE HOLOCAUST

DO JOURNALISTS KNOW WHAT
THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT?

BUILDING COMMUNITY WITH
OPEN APARTMENTS



VISION
IMAGINE. INVENT. INSPIRE.

Celebrating BGU's 50th Anniversary

MERGING PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

BY TONI YOUNG AABGU PRESIDENT



I believe this issue of *Impact* clearly shows how uniquely the past, present and future meet in the State of Israel.

The nation is so new, and its development so unusual, that its history fascinates the world. Students from everywhere come to Ben-Gurion University to explore the phenomenon that is Israel and research how the nation was shaped. You may be surprised, as I am, to learn about some of the ways that thousands of Holocaust survivors helped build a nation just as they rebuilt their own lives, with unquenchable energy in the face of unthinkable loss.

A highly topical challenge is the status of today’s news media. The practice of journalism is at issue across the globe and the questions are tough: What role can professionals play given the “democratization” of news and the consequences to publishers? How can journalists re-establish lost credibility? You’ll appreciate the firsthand insights of a leading journalist turned academic.

And then there’s the future. That’s where genomic research comes in. Learn about the tantalizing goals to live longer, healthier lives and the idea of personalized medicine that matches medical treatment to your individual genetic blueprint. You won’t want to miss this special in-depth report on four scientists who are breaking new ground.

And finally, what is more meaningful to the future than young people? Read about what community-minded BGU students are accomplishing through the Lillian and Larry Goodman Open Apartments Program. Discover how they help to transform the communities they live in—as well as the people they encounter—and what they learn in the process.

I know you’ll feel good about a future that is in the hands of students and faculty like these.

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ON THE COVER: Collage illustration created from “Gene Cross Talk,” an animated video designed and produced by Lynn Fellman to explain the significance of Prof. Dan Mishmar’s work on evolutionary genomics. Story starts on page 12. Watch the video at www.aabgu.org/gene-cross-talk

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2020 VISION CAMPAIGN REACHES HALFWAY MARK



A rendering of the first part of the North Campus, now under development



As BGU looks forward to turning 50 in 2020, we *imagine* a future where BGU *invents* and *inspires* a new world. Watch this video of the visionary future in the year 2045: www.aabgu.org/future

SINCE BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY publicly launched its worldwide \$500 million 2020 Vision Campaign almost one year ago, \$250 million has been donated or pledged.

“It is extremely rewarding to have already reached the halfway mark with still four more years to go to the end of the campaign,” says Prof. Rivka Carmi, BGU president. “The spirit and generosity of our supporters never ceases to amaze and inspire me.”

The impetus for the campaign is BGU’s 50th anniversary—which will be celebrated in the spring of 2020—and the need for funds to expand the University, building the North Campus that will double BGU’s footprint in Beer-Sheva.

AABGU is leading the major fundraising initiative, with a goal of raising 80 percent of the total, or \$400 million. All donations contributed through September 30, 2021 will be counted as a 2020 campaign gift.

Toni Young, AABGU president, says, “Of the \$250 million dollars **\$500M** accounted for, AABGU donors contributed \$200 million. So AABGU is also already halfway to our goal. I want to thank all our generous donors who have made this possible and those who are still thinking about their gifts.”

The half-billion-dollar campaign will allow for the unprecedented growth in students expected over the next 10 years as Beer-Sheva becomes a thriving metropolis of talent and **\$250M** technology, with BGU at the epicenter of this transformation. ■

Whether you support scholarships, research, capital projects, or other special programs, together we are forging a new pioneering era for BGU and Israel. To learn more visit <http://vision.aabgu.org>



ושנתם לבניך

TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN

BY DORON KRAKOW

Doron Krakow recently stepped down as executive vice president after nearly 10 years of outstanding service. The board and staff of AABGU thank Doron for his committed and passionate leadership. In his final column for *Impact*, he shares a poignant message about the importance of Holocaust education.

AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER, the enormous shadow cast by the Shoah has served as an ever-present reminder of the precariousness of Jewish life in the Diaspora, and of the crucial need for a strong and independent State of Israel, the fulfillment of the Zionist dream. From the time I was old enough, it was books that infused my mind with insight and my soul with heartbreak.

The Diary of Anne Frank, *Night*, the poems of Hanna Senesh, and later memoirs like those of Primo Levi. The miniseries, “Holocaust,” and major motion pictures like “The Odessa File,” “Sophie’s Choice” and “Schindler’s List” put faces on the victims and gave them voices. The butchers, too. Hate. Fear. Panic. Heroism. Sacrifice. They were all right in front of us.

But through it all, it was the eyewitnesses who were nearby. Survivors. The firsthand accounts of what they had seen and what they experienced were more than stories. They made it real. They saw what they saw. They lost everything: parents, children, loved ones, homes, whole towns. Everything they owned. Everything they treasured. Everything they knew. They had been through the gates of hell and their survival ensured that we would have the chance to learn about it—firsthand.

When I first read *Night* I remember thinking that Elie Wiesel’s survival had been a miracle. I stopped counting how many twists of fate had been necessary for him to somehow make it through the war. And there were others. Other memoirs, articles, interviews, and eyewitness accounts. Each time the same reaction: “Her survival was a miracle.” “His story defies the imagination.” Eventually I came to realize that a miracle, or “the hand of fate,” was the only way that someone survived.

History is a funny thing. There are things that happened “a long time ago.” Stories and legends—like those from the Bible, the Roman Empire, the explorers who discovered the world. Others are more recent, like the American Revolution, the Gettysburg Address, the invention of the telephone and the lightbulb. While they have bearing on the lives we live

today, we know them only through books and what we learned in school. And often we know only the headlines.

It’s different when someone you know tells you about history as they saw it—as they experienced it. New York City before cars. A home town when it was mostly farms. Storming the beaches at Anzio. The day Kennedy was assassinated. With the help of those who were there, you can almost see it with your own eyes. And when you make a simplistic assumption about some aspect of what you think you understand, someone who was there can fill in the blanks and make sure that you’re clear, particularly when it was something much more difficult with which to come to terms.

Elie Wiesel once said that he came to realize that the reason he survived was so that he could give voice to those who didn’t. He never fancied himself a writer of special talent. He was just one among the millions—one who happened to live. And thanks to him, and to so many others, it remains more than mere history for us. It is real; it is near at hand; it is just beyond our grasp.

As the years pass, there are fewer and fewer eyewitnesses left. Fewer and fewer whose personal accounts make it real. Fewer and fewer to stand up and ensure that we don’t allow Holocaust rhetoric to be misused by those seeking to promote agendas that bear no relation to our people’s unique calamity.

Nazis were not “authority figures with delusions of grandeur.” They weren’t political leaders with tendencies toward demagoguery. Their attempted genocide perpetrated against the Jews is not the same thing as the oppression of a minority, the displacement of refugees or the slaughter of innocents in wartime.

The survivors among us have always been there to make sure that we are clear about the distinctions, and that we and our children understand the contrast between a defenseless Jew and one empowered through the fulfillment of the Zionist dream. But, their voices are fading. One by one, we’re losing them. Elie Wiesel ז”ל. Lolita Goldstein ז”ל. Lottie Marcus ז”ל. And too many others. With each loss, our responsibility grows.

In the *Sh'ma* we are tasked with a responsibility: *v'shinantam levanecha*—and you shall teach them [the *mitzvot*] diligently to your children. We are no less responsible when it comes to the story of the Shoah.

Ben-Gurion University is a shining example of the achievements possible in a sovereign Jewish State. Together with its peer institutions, it bears direct responsibility for shepherding our past and unlocking the potential of our future. Home to the largest number of Holocaust survivors in the world, Israel and its universities bear a special responsibility when it comes to educating the next generation about the Shoah.

Our commitment to enabling great scholars and thinkers like BGU's Hannah Yablonka, Aharon Appelfeld, Tuvia Friling,

and many others to deepen and enhance the breadth and quality of research and teaching in this critical field helps assure that Ben-Gurion University will do its part to shepherd our generation and those that follow, and enable them to rise to the occasion and meet this crucial responsibility head on.

My teacher, Mel Reisfield, often ended his lectures by reminding his *chanichim* (those who learned from him) that “we Jews are endowed with a sense of history.” Indeed we are. At a time when the days in which we can turn to the eyewitnesses of the Holocaust are fading fast, may we rise to the occasion once more. *Am Yisrael chai* עם ישראל חי ■

INCOME WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST

With fixed income returns at historic lows and with individuals reluctant to take financial risks, an AABGU Charitable Gift Annuity (CGA) may provide considerable economic benefits. In particular, retired individuals who depend on interest and dividends to defray a portion of their living expenses may find that a CGA will enable them to obtain high, lifetime fixed-rate annuity amounts at low tax costs.

An AABGU gift annuity offers among the highest rates of return in the country and is one of the safest ways to receive high fixed-income for life. New York State law requires that we have a fully funded reserve account to protect annuitants.

Individuals 65 years old or older can receive rates between six and 11.3 percent. For example, a single individual, age 78, will get a 7.6 percent annuity rate. A \$20,000 annuity will provide \$1,520 per year. The tax-free portion for the first 10.5 years is 76.3 percent or \$1,159.76. The charitable deduction is \$7,828 and \$1,957 is saved in income taxes. The tax savings reduces the cost of the CGA from \$20,000 to \$18,043.*

Those under 65 years of age can establish a deferred annuity now and get amazing rates later. For instance, at age 60, if the first payment is deferred until age 70, the fixed lifetime rate would be 11.2 percent.

And, not only might your annuity income be mostly tax-free, you are also creating a legacy by ensuring future revenue to Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Your name will be added to the Living Legacy Garden on the Marcus Family Campus in Beer-Sheva.

We encourage you to consult with your attorney, accountant or financial planner, or speak to AABGU's renowned philanthropic advisor, Neal Myerberg, Esq., about this and other AABGU planned giving options.

*Assumes use of itemized deductions and 25 percent combined marginal rate

AABGU Charitable Gift Annuity

Among the Highest Rates in the Country

Sample Annuity Rates

Age	Rate	Tax Free*
65	6%	69.6%
70	6.5%	72.8%
75	7.1%	75.4%
80	8%	77.9%
85	9.5%	81.8%
90	11.3%	84%

*In the month you use cash to establish a gift annuity, a final calculation is made determining the portion that will be paid to you tax-free.

To request a non-binding rate illustration, go to

www.aabgu.org/cga-request

e-mail plannedgiving@aabgu.org

or call 800-962-2248 ext. 1400

Remember AABGU in your will.

MICHELE LEVIN is a strategist by nature and training. After a successful career as a clothing buyer, she retired to raise her three children and discovered the satisfaction of volunteer work, involving herself in her synagogue, her children's Jewish day school and other Jewish organizations.

"I realized that volunteering had become my new profession," she says. "So I thought about where to invest my time strategically. My passion was Jewish education and Israel. Therefore, I started focusing my energies and accepting only positions that relate to these areas."

Her volunteer experience gave her insight into her strategic abilities, leading her to return to school for a master's degree in organization development and leadership.

By 2012, she was already so heavily engaged that when she was nominated for AABGU's newly created Zin Fellows Leadership Program, she resisted. "I'd done a ton of leadership programs and while they were always productive, I felt I didn't need one more." But in the end, the unique program and people involved convinced her.

"It was an incredible experience," she says. "I met wonderful people, learned so much about Israel, and I fell in love with the Negev and the idea of BGU as a cornerstone in its development.

"It was such a gift, to learn from accomplished professors. When you're given a gift, you give back."

Michele and her husband, Robert, who runs a family real estate management firm, live in a suburb of Philadelphia and are active in AABGU's Mid-Atlantic Region. Michele is also involved with the Negev Funding Coalition (NFC), a consortium of Jewish federations committed to supporting the development of the Negev. The NFC views BGU as a key partner in accomplishing its work.

"We see the necessity and beauty of how the Negev can be developed in ways that draw people there," she says. "We want to affect change in the poorer communities to make people more resilient, and build cities people want to live in."

In this spirit, Michele is also the vice chair of The Jewish Federations of North America's (JFNA) Negev Now initiative. This is a three-year initiative to improve the quality of life for residents of the Negev and attract more Israelis to the region. Negev Now underwrites BGU courses in placemaking, which is a planning approach that capitalizes on a commu-



MICHELE LEVIN
BALA CYNWYD, PENNSYLVANIA

STRATEGIZING THE NEGEV'S FUTURE

nity's assets to inspire healthy and happy public spaces, as well as other projects in the region.

Michele has noticed significant change in the Negev since her Zin experience in 2013. "I see people who are proud of where they live and want to make it better. I'm inspired by the changes I see and BGU's role. It makes it easy to talk about the University and share with people the technology, water conservation research and so many other exciting areas."

Michele found the Zin program so effective in introducing her to BGU and the Negev that after graduating she nominated another fellow from her Philadelphia area. Together they later recruited three more. "I'm a firm believer that a strong Israel makes a strong Diaspora. We need each other to be strong."

Michele is now a member of AABGU's national board. In September, she and Robert will assume leadership of the Philadelphia chapter. Their

main goal is to put young leadership programs in place and engage people in the 35+ age range. Michele is strategizing.

"I see BGU professors as a primary resource. The people I know love to learn, and the opportunity to involve them by inviting them to a lecture and getting them together is incredible.

"I think people understand the need to give back, however they need to be educated on how meaningful their efforts will be. My experience has shown me that you always get back more than you give."

Michele credits her parents for teaching her not only to give, but to do it with passion. She hopes she has demonstrated and passed down that ethic to her children. "As a family, we always looked for opportunities to give back—cleaning up the park or playground, projects in the community. It's a Jewish value, and one of the most basic."

With her youngest child now in college, Michele has joined the consulting firm *gestaltworks, llc*, which specializes in management consulting, organization development, strategic planning, leadership development, teaming, coaching, and training. Michele's area of expertise is nonprofit and faith-based organizations.

Balancing this with all her work for Jewish education and other causes is easy, she says, because "I'm so lucky to do what I love." ■

CAROL AND HARRY SAAL lived in Israel for three years in the mid 1970s, but Beer-Sheva—and BGU—were “not much on our radar at the time,” Harry says. BGU was founded in 1969, so there wasn’t much to see.

“But several years later, we heard glowing things about the University from our Silicon Valley friends, especially its focus on technology and its real commitment to community service.”

The high-tech orientation appealed to Harry, a computer networking pioneer and entrepreneur, and Carol, who helped launch his two companies and worked in the business for many years. Both were also sympathetic to its community service mission. “I believe deeply in building community,” Carol says. “It’s my way of expressing my Judaism.”

The Saals were well known supporters of local Jewish causes in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Israel, so it was not surprising when AABGU’s Northwest regional office asked them to host an event in their home. What did surprise the Saals was the number of people who turned out.

“We had done events before for universities, but never had so many people come,” Carol says. “So that got our attention, too. We tried to figure out what we were missing that everyone else seemed to get.”

The BGU president at the time, Prof. Avishay Braverman, soon invited Carol to lunch and filled her in. “And so we started getting seriously involved.”

The rest is mutually rewarding history. “Both of us became very committed to BGU’s mission—to bring education and jobs to the Negev and develop it as a place where people want to live,” Carol explains. In addition to being generous University benefactors, the Saals have been AABGU leaders for more than two decades.

Carol served as AABGU’s 13th board president from 2005 to 2009 and is currently a vice chair on BGU’s board of governors. Harry is also a member of the board of governors, and both are members of the University’s prestigious Ben-Gurion Society.

The Saals believe in actively engaging with the enterprises they support. Harry, a physics Ph.D. whose successful start-ups focused on aspects of personal computer networking, became closely involved with the construction of BGU’s Alon Building for High-Technology, whose auditorium is



CAROL AND HARRY SAAL
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTED TO SILICON WADI

named for the Saals.

“I helped create a vision for the Alon building that included critical incubator space, so that the University would relate closely to the surrounding community and support startups,” Harry says.

“My model was Stanford, which seeded the creation of Silicon Valley. Today it’s very much like I imagined it and beyond. The Advanced Technologies Park, a short walk from campus, is filled with a diverse mix of startups and established technology businesses.”

Harry also advises BGU on its growing cyber security specialization, a critical area in which he has gained expertise. The Saals support student scholarships as well, and most recently the building of the American Associates Village at Sede Boqer. Carol notes that involvement with AABGU is rewarding in its own right. “The regular events where brilliant researchers and faculty members talk

about their latest work, the cultural events—it’s an incredibly rich experience. We meet other committed donors and get to know them around the U.S. We’ve made friends; we go on AABGU-led trips.” Harry agrees: “It’s become a pretty important part of our lives.”

The Saals have taken care to instill the philanthropic commitment in their children. “When the company went public we immediately set up a philanthropic fund and included our children on the board,” Carol says. “They sat in and learned the process of stewardship and decision making. This is very important—you learn philanthropy from role models, and the best role models can be your own parents.”

Harry has retired “several times” and now heads a pharmaceutical company that has progressed to the human clinical trial stage after 10 years of pre-clinical research. Carol continues to serve and raise funds for a host of charitable causes in medicine, education and Jewish organizations in the Bay Area and Israel. Surprised by the absence of a Jewish community center in Silicon Valley, she spearheaded a campaign to raise money to build the thriving Oshman Family JCC.

What do the Saals do in their free time? Do they have any? “We make it!” Carol says. “We relax at our vacation home in the wine country. And we have time for our grandchildren. Definitely.” ■

ISRAEL AND THE HOLOCAUST

WHEN PROF. HANNA YABLONKA was looking for a dissertation subject, she asked her father about it over the coffee they shared every Wednesday.

“I think you should write the story of the Holocaust survivors in Israel,” Gabriel Torok said. He was a survivor of forced labor himself. Yablonka brought the idea to her supervising professor, the well-known Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer. “I asked him, are there about 100 dissertations already? He said ‘No! I prayed to God that someone would take this subject!’”

That was in 1984. Prof. Yablonka wrote her Ph.D. thesis and thus embarked on a pioneer career, researching and teaching a subject that “gives us a very good key to understanding the Israeli psyche,” she says.

“In the beginning, the national identity was based mostly on the miracle of having a sovereign state. But in the 1960s, the Holocaust became the center of the Israeli experience. It changed how Israelis explain the narrative of Israel’s existence and how national decisions are made about core challenges.”

Prof. Yablonka joined BGU’s

Department of History in 1990. Nine years later she suggested that a new discipline be created: Israel studies. Here, too, she was a pioneer. Together with Prof. Tuvia Friling, then head of the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, she developed the first-ever academic

“The stories of a half-million survivors who came to Israel is such a breathtaking story of human courage and strength.”

— PROF. HANNA YABLONKA

program dealing with the State of Israel from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Fourteen hand-picked Ph.D. and five M.A. students are currently engaged in researching the Holocaust and its aftermath under Yablonka’s supervision. She brings to these students her own sense of the Holocaust as an empower-

ing subject. Both her parents were survivors, and like many who came to Israel after the war, chose to dedicate themselves to building new lives and a new nation. Re-building rather than loss and victimization was the focus of Israeli society. “But, it was also a very open issue in our house,” Yablonka says, “inherent in the family biography and of everyday life, including jokes.”

Her interest in Israel’s history and its impact on the national psyche took shape in her books, including *Survivors of the Holocaust: Israel After the War*. This explores the social integration of the post-WWII immigrants with the Israeli population and their contribution to the State’s growth.

In another project, she focused on the specific event she considers to be a pivotal point for Israel’s war survivors and the collective experience: the 1962 Adolf Eichmann trial. The result is her comprehensive book, *The Eichmann Affair—Its Origins, Impact and Significance, 1960-1967*.

Prof. Yablonka was the first to gain access to the trial archives after the material was available. The opportunity

to look behind the scenes led her to intriguing, far less familiar historical territory. In the 1950s, the Knesset passed the Nazi and Nazi Accomplices Act directed at both Nazis and Jews who had held roles in the Jewish *Judenrat* and militia in the ghettos, and as capos in the concentration camps.

Learning that the Israeli police maintained the archive, Yablonka pressed for the information, and after nine months gained access. The journal article she wrote about the trials was reported in a leading newspaper. “It led to a huge discourse in Israel, unfolding a story swept under the rug for many years,” she says.

Prof. Yablonka found that 50 trials were held and most of the people were convicted. Her article exposed how survivors were put on trial for the roles they may or may not have played in the camps and ghettos. Soon after the article

appeared, the police closed the archive from view.

“The trials were a huge tragedy,” she says. Unlike every other Israeli law, this one allowed a crime to be proven on hearsay. “Basically, the only proof they had were witnesses who came and told what they remembered, and always other

witnesses who spoke in favor of the accused. The judge had to decide who to believe.

“Only after the Eichmann trial did people become gradually aware that Jews under the Shoah couldn’t be judged according to regular circumstances of life. It took time to understand this.”

In the article’s wake, the children of four affected families came to see Yablonka, with pictures of their parents and stories about their difficult lives. “I was doing historical research and it was the first time I saw faces. It was

“Do we deserve to be the children of those who perished? I ask that of my students all the time. I owe it to myself as a teacher and the daughter of my survivor parents and granddaughter of all those who perished.”

— PROF. HANNA YABLONKA

shocking to hear—people came to Israel to open a new page and found themselves in a new tragedy, a new struggle, many with babies born as part of the big hope.”

More heartening is the message she finds in the Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum, where she serves as historian. “This is a tool to see the Shoah as an empowering experience rather than a weakening one through the stories of the survivors and the choices they made. Taking such a disaster and translating it into a positive energy—people choosing life over despair, to build up with their own hands—no human lesson is bigger than this great message that says after all, ‘yes we can.’

“The stories of a half-million survivors who came to Israel is such a breathtaking story of human courage and strength,” Yablonka says. “It allows us to tell the children at the museum, this is what the Shoah obliges us to ask every morning when we wake and every night we go to bed: Did I do good? What did I do today to justify that I am an offspring of survivors? For Jews it’s an ongoing search. Do we deserve to be the children of those who perished?”

“I ask that of my students all the time. I owe it to myself as a teacher and the daughter of my survivor parents and granddaughter of all those who perished. Israel faces many moral issues and questions, and this is the one major criterion that should be used.”

Her own family’s example continues to inspire her. After leaving the camps, where she lost her first husband, her mother, Dr. Ibi Klein Torok, went back to the University of Bratislava to finish her medical studies. Her father, Prof. Gabriel Torok, also completed his medical studies at Charles University in Prague. They met in 1948 and immigrated to Israel in 1949.

After the Soroka Medical Center was established, the family moved to Beer-Sheva, where her father was the pioneer orthopedist



Ibi Klein Torok, M.D., Holocaust survivor and Prof. Yablonka's mother, at her recent 100th birthday



Prof. Hanna Yablonka in Krakow, Poland

and her mother became the district public health doctor. In this role she helped to develop medical services for the Negev Bedouins.

“My mother was asked on TV, ‘How can you, as a survivor, do that?’” Yablonka recalls. “She said ‘It isn’t in spite of the Shoah; it’s because of the Shoah.’ That’s the model I take with me.”

TELLING THE DOCTORS’ STORY

Seven years ago, Rachel Herzog—at age 60—decided it was time to do something she’d planned for a long time: earn a Ph.D. “The subject I was most interested in was the Holocaust.”



Dr. Rachel Herzog

She and her husband are both children of survivors. “But it was not talked about in our homes,” she says.

“So I decided to focus my research on the encounter between Holocaust survivors and Israeli society. I’d worked for doctors for nearly 20 years, and decided to

focus on survivor doctors because this group had not been studied. I found Hanna Yablonka to supervise me.”

Herzog spent four years on the research, searching out all the physicians who came to Israel between 1945 and 1957. “I looked at their personal history and their careers; I learned about the health of the society at the time, which was awful—a very high mortality rate. Only 15 of the doctors were still alive, so I talked to friends and families. They gave me letters, photos, diaries, and shared memories. It was very interesting and very exciting. Sometimes I cried.”

Herzog found another untold story. Like all Holocaust survivors in Israel, the doctors faced difficult times.

Employers in the health system—arguing that these doctors hadn’t practiced for 10 years and that they didn’t speak Hebrew—were skeptical of their skills. Hard work, low salaries and bad accommodations confronted them. Israeli society was not prepared to accept them nor did it understand them.

Yet, these physicians were badly needed. Many new immigrants suffered from chronic diseases, or were sick and disabled, requiring hospitalization and care. Israel’s uneven development had created a concentration of doctors with established practices in a few areas, and huge areas were left virtually unserved.

“Their contribution was enormous,” Herzog says. “They were the first to be sent to the villages and frontier settlements where the established doctors wouldn’t go. They were absorbed by the health care system and contributed a lot to its development.”

The numbers surprised her. “There were more than a thousand of these immigrant doctors. In 1952, they represented a third of all Israeli doctors, and by then many had already reached management level.” Beyond their major role in building the healthcare system, this group became a model

for the absorption of other immigrants.

“It was an amazing story,” Herzog says, “a story of strength and human victory that should be better known.”

Dr. Rachel Herzog is currently a historian and independent researcher. She works as a labor relationship counselor for the physician members of the Organization of Clalit Health Services, Israel’s chief medical provider.

UNDERSTANDING BEGIN’S IDEOLOGY

“I’ve always been fascinated with the connection between politics in Israel and the memory of the Holocaust—how it affected decision-making,” says Dr. Amir Peleg. So when he needed topics for his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees, both at BGU, he identified Menachem Begin as an ideal subject.

Begin was the only Israeli prime minister to consider himself a survivor, although of the Russian gulag rather than the Nazi camps. “I found that he learned several ideological lessons,” Peleg says. “The idea of Jewish honor—that the Jews must never let themselves be humiliated again because when you’re



In Memory of the Death March from Dachau, sculpture by Hubertus von Pilgrim, at Yad Vashem—The World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem

not treated as a human being, they can kill you. Second, that the Jews must have a state of their own or the Holocaust would happen again.”

To find out whether Begin’s preoccupation with the Holocaust was for rhetorical purposes or true belief that influenced his leadership, Peleg exhaustively reviewed his writings, newspaper coverage, Knesset records, and more. “I found that the beliefs were part of his ideology before the Holocaust happened—his first memories were of escaping his Polish village, a world not safe. What happened in World War II strengthened this ideology.”

When Begin became prime minister in 1977, he recast Israel’s assumptions about war. The ruling premise was that the Jewish State would



Dr. Amir Peleg

fight back only if attacked. “He believed that if the enemy is getting stronger and threatening to annihilate us, then we have a moral right to start a war. This to him was a lesson of the Holocaust.”

Begin followed through on this belief. One result was the bombing of an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981. “His press secretary wanted to keep the Israeli role quiet,” Peleg says. “But

Begin said no, announce it: ‘I want all the nations of the world to know that if someone tries to build a nuclear reactor, Israel will bomb it again.’”

Begin was also a strong advocate for Israeli control of the West Bank. He is credited with directing Israel toward becoming a Jewish rather than secular state, and opening the gates to Orthodox influence. In line with his ideology, he sought to focus Jewish minds everywhere, as well as in Israel, on the Holocaust. “The most important thing he did as prime minister,” Peleg says, “was adding a paragraph to the Israel education law saying that every student in every school must learn about the Holocaust so it will stay in the collective memory.”

Dr. Amir Peleg is well aware that today Begin’s impact has become more controversial than ever. “Not everybody is happy about it. But as a historian I’m not a judge—I just show and explain.”

Awarded his Ph.D. in 2015, Peleg is a writer for The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which represents the world’s Jews in negotiating for compensation and restitution for victims of Nazi persecution and their heirs.

DISCOVERING THE MISSING PERSONS CHALLENGE

As Prof. Yablonka’s student since her undergraduate years, Tehila Darmon Malka was drawn to the phenomenon of post-Holocaust missing persons in Israel. “It’s a family story on both sides,” she says. “Connecting my

personal background with history is interesting. It’s a story of rebuilding; so in that way it’s optimistic.”

Malka first investigated how many Jewish people could be defined as missing persons after World War II. She discovered that it was a huge phenomenon: hundreds of thousands disappeared, creating a myriad of problems for surviving families.

“In Jewish law, women who lose their husbands and don’t know where they are can’t remarry, so they can’t go on and rebuild their lives.

There are questions of remembrance. If a loved one died we can memorialize them at Yad Vashem [the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem]. But if we don’t know whether they died, where can we create memorials for them?



Tehila Darmon Malka

“And the situations stay with people forever. The idea that the Germans were very well organized and listed everyone is a myth. They didn’t. We can’t look at their records and know who is alive or dead. There were some stories with happy endings; after the war many people found each other. But today it’s very rare. The fog still exists, so the Holocaust isn’t finished in a way.”

Most of the searchers are a generation away from the Holocaust experience—the children of those who originally looked for relatives. Malka spoke with more than 20 of them. “They feel they are continuing their parents’ legacy. Some quit their jobs to do it. There is a very strong need to know.”

Today, searching for records is much easier with new technology and accessible archives, but paradoxically, the idea that the mystery can be solved keeps the shadow alive. People feel compelled to keep trying.

Malka came to realize that the missing persons problem is not

Continued on page 35



GENOMICS MAPPING THE WAY TO PERSONALIZED MEDICINE

IN THE EVERYDAY course of life, we take our physical selves for granted—our stable temperature, ability to move, sense, react, and all the rest. But scientists who research life on the molecular level have quite another picture: 30 trillion cells each governed by 20,000 genes in a constant state of flux, renewal, repair, or death, enacted by millions of unfelt biochemical miracles every millisecond.

We shouldn't be surprised that the miracles are sometimes imperfect, or become so. A pathway is lost; a gene is triggered or silenced; a cell is damaged beyond repair. We may inherit a mutation that makes us vulnerable to our environment or experience, develop cancer, or suffer from neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. And, of course, we grow old.

It all happens on the molecular level. Accordingly, the most shining prospects for treating, curing or preventing what goes wrong with our bodies and brains reside with research into genetic blueprints. This is the basis of "personalized medicine" that promises to give each individual precisely the right treatment for whatever ailments one might have. It also feeds our vision of a healthier and perhaps longer lifespan.

BGU scientists are making break-

through discoveries in this arena as members of the Center for Evolutionary Genomics and Medicine (EGM). It began three years ago with a corridor conversation between Prof. Daniel Mishmar and Dr. Ramon Birnbaum, both from the Department of Life Sciences. "We were talking about our mutual interest in genomics," Mishmar

"...the most shining prospects for treating, curing or preventing what goes wrong with our bodies and brains reside with research into genetic blueprints."

— PROF. DANIEL MISHMAR

says. "The discussion grew longer and longer, and we realized that interest in this growing field is deeper than a conversation between the two of us."

Enthusiasm for forming a group spread quickly among BGU scientists in various disciplines: plant experts, ecologists, evolution researchers, those interested in the molecular basis of

disease, and many more. They all have in common the use of tools and concepts to study the genome—the complete set of genetic instructions inherited by every organism—and a strong belief that this emerging field spells "future."

The pioneering work is sparked by successive breakthroughs in charting the human genome and technology for analyzing big data. These factors have torn down the walls between specializations and empowered individual labs to accomplish important, even groundbreaking, work.

"Unfortunately, scientists from different fields don't ordinarily talk," Mishmar says. "We realized a center would provide the missing platform for interaction and spur the conversation." So the two researchers set out to develop an umbrella that would give many different scientists the infrastructure to meet, share data, hear critiques and insights from each other, and catch up on rapidly developing concepts and technologies.

Prof. Mishmar and Dr. Birnbaum envisioned that such a meeting ground would foster collaboration, but more than they expected materialized. Twenty-four BGU groups are already engaged in genomic research projects.

The EGM Center is not a dedicated building, but is a resource of skills, knowledge and equipment to support BGU's genomics researchers and nourish their success. This effort is a unique one. Most genomics centers throughout Israel, and even worldwide, are mainly technical centers focused on the generation of genome-level sequences. Unlike EGM, their focus is always limited to diseases, and they rarely dive into the conceptual depths of evolution, ecology or other fields of biology.

To support this important interdisciplinary direction, the University is recruiting young faculty whose skills combine with BGU's experienced scientific leaders for ideal collaborations.

While these pages cannot do justice to EGM's 24 research groups, here are a few samples of the work underway and the people doing it.

REPAIRING DNA DAMAGE

Dr. Debbie Toiber likes questions. One of her most pressing emerged when she became interested in the mechanics of how DNA functions. If all cells share the same genetic code, how do they differentiate?

"If DNA is the script," she explains, "everybody in the theater gets the same script, but each player reads a different part. Genetic markers tell each organ what part to read to determine the cell type. But some genes are more flexible and can be affected by your lifestyle."

At 19, Toiber left Mexico to make *aliyah* to Israel on her own and earned degrees in molecular biology and brain-related diseases. After postdoctoral work on DNA repair mechanisms at Harvard, she joined BGU's Department of Life Sciences in 2014. Her lab reflects her focus.

"DNA damage is one of the major causes of aging and age-related disease,"

"Can we delay aging? It's possible. Health spans can be improved; we don't know about lifespan."

— DR. DEBBIE TOIBER

she says. "What happens is that every day we get a little bit of damage just by living.

"Most of the damage is repaired, but not everything. So as we age the DNA damage accumulates. You start to get sick more because the cells cannot repair all of the damage. They may be signaled that it's too dangerous to keep living and may commit suicide. So cells and neurons die. Organs become debilitated, leading to aging disorders. Or the cells may keep dividing anyway. Then you get cancer."

There is tangible evidence of this. Tissues from older people show more

cell damage and the effects of neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's. Dr. Toiber investigates why DNA repair becomes less functional as we age, and how specific enzymes might be used to repair cells, particularly to counter neurodegenerative diseases. "We lose many things as we age," she explains, "but DNA is the most important because losing some of that is like losing our archive.

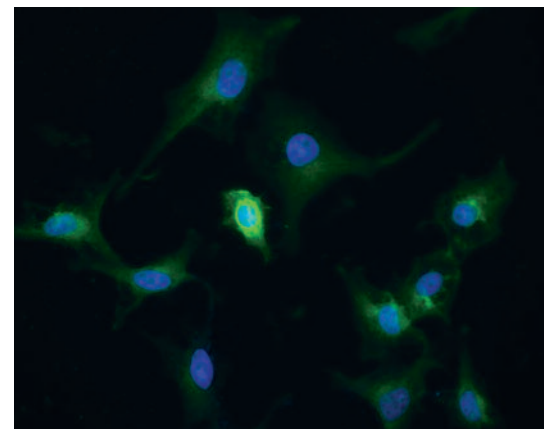
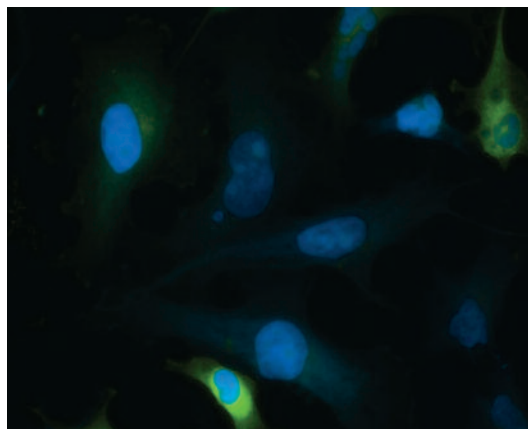
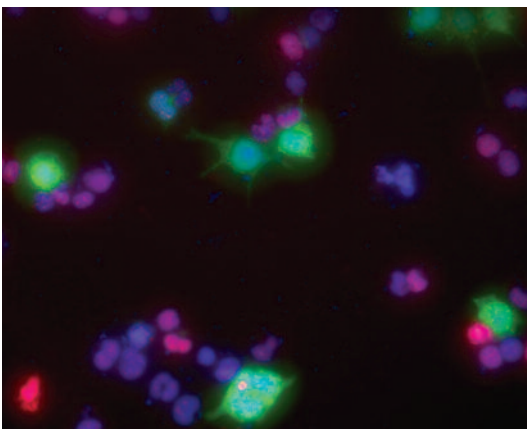
"We start with gene expression. What's going on when you're missing repair enzymes?" In one project, mice are engineered to lack a key repair enzyme. Behavior tests are carried out to identify impairments in learning and memory. The stressed cells are signaled to die, but they can be rescued by re-introducing this key enzyme.

Other projects analyze how changes in the script messaging occur in the wake of damage. "The code is flexible, and some repairing can be improved if we can regulate the part of the code where the signals come from." This is relevant to cancer and the aging process.

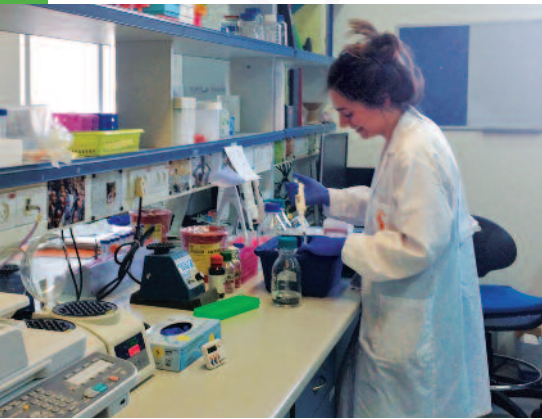
Inherited mutations in genes that limit their ability to repair DNA damage teach us that the repair process is critical



Dr. Debbie Toiber



Fluorescent microscope images taken in Dr. Toiber's lab to investigate molecular processes: The cell nuclei containing genetic information in the form of DNA are marked in blue. Green indicates the localization of a protein involved in DNA repair, and red indicates a specific epigenetic modification.



A student in Dr. Toiber's lab

to immune system diseases, cancer prevention, neurodegeneration, and premature aging. “Someone born with such a mutation has less capacity to deal with damage and is more prone, for example, to get BRCA1 breast cancer.” If cells can be prevented from dividing when damaged, treatments for some cancers could be developed. Another project addresses this possibility.

“Our main goal is to improve health by reducing stress acting on the cells from unrepaired DNA. We focus on the brain—my expertise—to develop a general theory about DNA damage and repair. Can we delay aging? It’s possible. Health spans can be improved; we don’t know about lifespan.”

Some of the drugs Toiber’s lab is screening are already FDA approved. “If they haven’t been used for neurodegeneration but work for it, the process will be much faster.” This is a significant hope with many of the experiments underway in genome research.

LOOKING FOR THE CODE TO STOP CANCER

Dr. Barak Rotblat came to research cancer on the genomic level after studying plant science and then pathology, earning a Ph.D. in biophysics. “In working on Huntington’s, a neurodegenerative disease, it turned out that the genome was important. I liked the connection to clinical relevance.”

He found that a new field was emerging: the study of long noncoding RNA (abbreviated as lncRNA). RNA is a substance in all living cells that carries

the genetic instruction from DNA. It was long thought that DNA produces RNA, which in turn makes protein, Rotblat says. But lncRNA, originally labeled as “junk,” has begun to emerge as essential to coding and regulating genes.

When the human genome was fully sequenced, nearly 20,000 genes that code for proteins—the large molecules upon which all life is built—were identified. With deeper research it was discovered that each cell contains about 80,000 additional genes that do not code, called RNAs. “No one knew what these long noncoding RNAs do,” Rotblat says. “I wanted to find out.” This interest propelled Rotblat’s research when he joined BGU and established his lab in 2013.

He grows cell cultures on plastic dishes and manipulates lncRNA genes of his choice by injecting a virus. Depending on the experiment, he activates or represses the gene he’s investigating. “Then I measure how fast the cells proliferate by counting them under the microscope every day.

“We’re looking for new genes that are important in cancer biology,” he says. His lab backs up the experiments with cell cultures from animal studies in collaboration with Dr. Moshe Elkabets, another EGM Center member (see page 17). In one set of recent experiments, he wanted to find out if a particular gene affects the growth of a kind of cancer. A lncRNA gene was injected into

a mouse’s brain to see what effect it would have on the tumor.

The result was an eye-opener. “We were working on a gene thought to be a tumor suppressor—one that would block its growth. But we found the opposite. We injected human brain cells into mice and silenced the gene we were studying. After eight weeks we looked at the tumors and took pictures. They showed that without the gene the tumor didn’t grow at all. So the gene is a driver. If you turn the gene off, the cancer doesn’t grow.”

Dr. Rotblat then reviewed a large volume of patient data and found that his conclusion corresponds with evidence in child cancer patients. Those with a high expression of the gene he is studying had shorter survival rates.

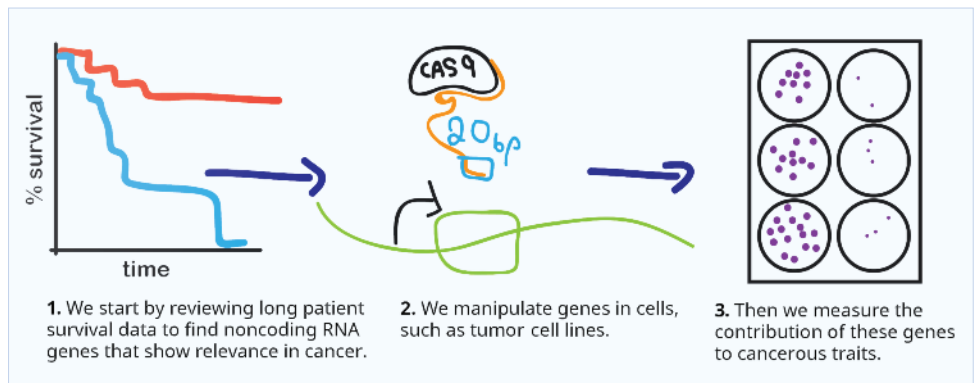
“Now we’re looking for a molecule that inhibits the activity of this gene—and would be a potential therapy for this cancer.”



Dr. Barak Rotblat

The creative part of the research, Rotblat says, is picking which genes to work on. Each can absorb many months. “It’s hard to investigate 100,000 genes in your lifetime! I use my research, computational tools, talk to colleagues, then sit with

the data and make an educated guess. Then I test a few possibilities. If I’m lucky, one turns out to be true. But often it’s not true. Even negative data is useful. If what we’re looking at isn’t doing what we thought, is that a clue



The investigation process in Dr. Rotblat's lab

to what it does? The work is never completely wasted.

“Sometimes I go back to the drawing board and read the literature. I may find an unrelated article that indicates what’s going on with our system. And I brainstorm with students, colleagues, friends—that’s an important way to figure out what’s happening, and why the EGM Center helps so much.”

His vision is “ultimately, to have a menu of genes that help cancer cells survive under stress and find molecules to target those genes. We want to understand how they function, and also, how normal cells survive under stress.”

This is the path to personalized medicine. “You can take a biopsy, see the specific tumor, know which genes are highly expressed and which promote the cancer’s growth. Then you create a cocktail to hit the tumor cells of the individual patient.”

MAPPING “JUNK DNA” AND EPILEPSY

Dr. Ramon Birnbaum began his studies as an economist, but a course on genetics got his attention. Although he worked with plants during his second degree, “my real passion was to do human genetics,” he says. He chose BGU for his Ph.D. studies and after postdoctoral work, joined the Department of Life Sciences in 2013.

Along the way he discovered the fascination of noncoding DNA. This is a component of an organism’s DNA which does *not* code for genes, but rather, *regulates* their function. At first, DNA identified as “noncoding” was assumed to play no role in the complex process of creating new molecules, which is carried out in every cell. It was dismissed as “junk DNA.” This view has changed dramatically as genomics research kicked in.

“I thought this field would give me a lot of space to study and work,” Birnbaum says. “On the other hand, there were no models to



Dr. Ramon Birnbaum

follow so it was like being a pioneer and having to invent new methods.”

Dr. Birnbaum finds that noncoding DNA in fact plays an essential, though not yet understood, role in gene regulation: determining which of the tens of thousands of genes in a genome are “expressed”—meaning, turned on or off. The process cannot be fully explained by looking at how the coding DNA alone functions.

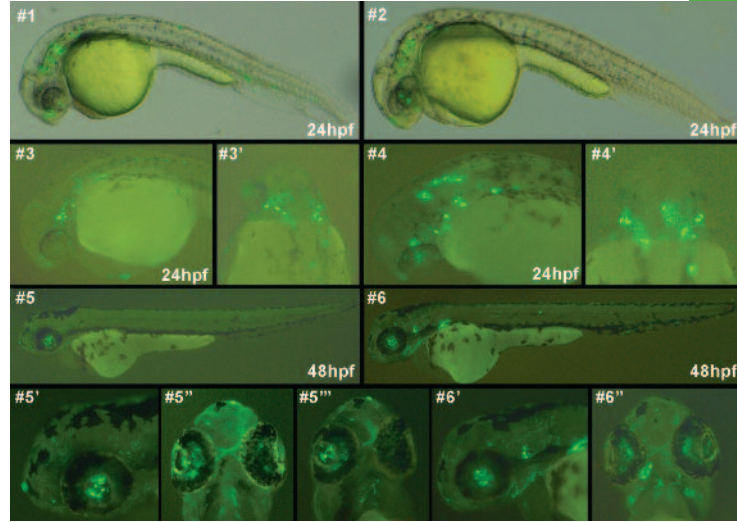
“We understand how gene regulation works

“It will soon be common to look at your genetic profile to diagnose disease, certain behaviors, which food to eat. It’s the integration of genetics and lifestyle.”

— DR. RAMON BIRNBAUM

better now, but we don’t understand the mechanism,” Birnbaum says. “If we have a mutation in DNA that changes the protein sequence, we can understand how it could lead to a disorder. But to understand the outcomes of mutations in noncoding DNA is a whole different game. There, we do not understand the words, grammar and syntax.”

Noncoding DNA can harbor regulatory elements that enhance or promote the activity of specific genes, and also large genomic regions. Dr. Birnbaum is specifically interested in gene regulation during



From Dr. Birnbaum’s lab: Images of an enhancer that turns on the expression of a gene in the brain, STXPB1, which is essential to neuronal function. When mutated it can cause severe early onset epilepsy.

the brain’s development. A main research focus is early onset epilepsy.

Diagnosis of infants is notably difficult. “The symptoms can look the same, but the causes can be very different. Diving into the mechanisms will lead to more accurate diagnosis and avoid inefficient or even damaging medication.”

Many candidate genes have been identified for early onset epilepsy, Birnbaum says. “We need to screen them to identify possible disease-causing mutations, but need to consider the regulatory elements, which can produce the same effect. This is very basic science. We’re tracking the mechanism of regulation, and eventually it applies to building better diagnostics.”

The team tests ideas and data using zebra fish, which make good models because of their similar genomic content to humans, their accelerated lifecycle and transparency. To find out how different regions in the genome function as enhancers of epilepsy-associated genes, the researchers inject a piece of DNA into the fish to see how the enhancer functions in the brain. Does it switch a gene on and cause an epilepsy-type condition? “Ultimately, we’ll have a map of enhancers and the target genes they regulate,” Birnbaum says.

And eventually, diagnosticians will have a full genetic map so they can identify the exact cause of a baby's epilepsy and treat it with the best medication, which probably already exists.

The future is already happening, Birnbaum observes. "It will soon be common to look at your genetic profile to diagnose disease, certain behaviors, which food to eat. It's the integration of genetics and lifestyle. And part of it is understanding the entire genome—not just the coding part, but the 99 percent that is noncoding."

UNDERSTANDING MITOCHONDRIA AND HUMAN EVOLUTION

Genomics Center co-founder Prof. Daniel Mishmar's own research lab focuses on the genetic system of mitochondria. These tiny, bacteria-like structures inhabit all cells but live outside the nucleus, which houses the blueprinting genes that direct the creation of new molecules.

Around 2 billion years ago, Mishmar explains, mitochondria were independent living bacteria. They are believed to have formed a symbiotic relationship with one-celled organisms, and inside their host's cells, gradually lost many of their genes to the cell nucleus.

The mitochondria are the only cellular organelles in animals that have their own genomes. Unlike in the human cell nucleus, which harbors thousands of genes, the mitochondrial genome harbors only 37 genes. But despite their relatively small number, these genes are essential to life.

"The mitochondria are the power plant for all tissues, especially our main energy consumer—the brain," Mishmar says. "The genes within the mitochondria code for proteins that physically interact with proteins from the nucleus to form the machine that generates energy."



Prof. Daniel Mishmar

The mitochondria are also responsible for the cell death process, play a major role in creating nucleotides—the building blocks of the DNA—and are hubs for many other cellular activities.

"Our curiosity focuses on the interaction between the nucleus and the mitochondria through direct protein or regulatory mechanisms—the proteins that bind RNA and DNA when new molecules are created."

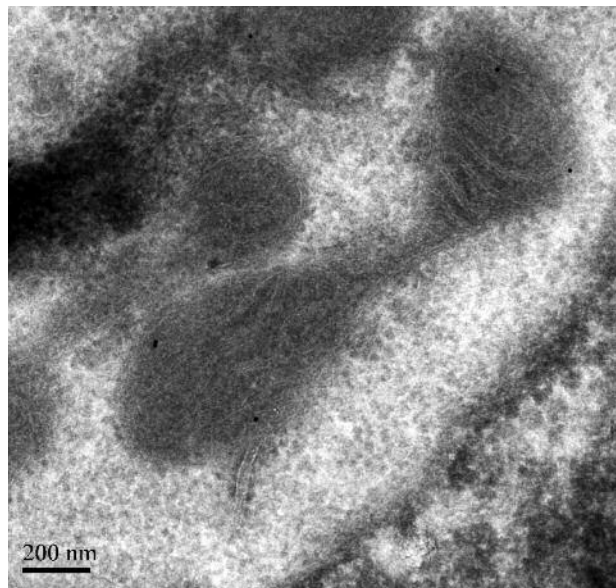
Prof. Mishmar initially studied archeology and was especially drawn to human evolution. He switched to biology, but retained his interest in the genetic perspective of evolution. "I don't ask physical anthropology questions any more, but the way I look at evolution is not the usual way of genetics. I'm still interested in the whole organism and cultural things." He has been a faculty member at BGU since 2004.

Mitochondria-based dysfunction can lead to neurodegenerative diseases in the heart, muscle, liver, and other tissue. One recent project in Mishmar's lab compared blood cells in black Africans and white non-Africans.

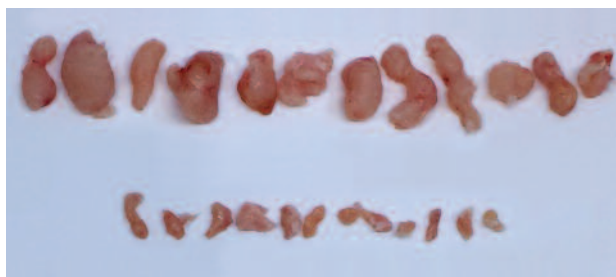
The team found a surprising variation. The regulation of mitochondrial genes is different in the two groups. It was previously assumed that genetic variation in the mitochondrial genome had no impact. Prof. Mishmar's study suggests they have a function that may have been critical to survival as humans left Africa to populate the rest of the world.

All non-African populations are believed to have migrated from Africa 60,000 years ago. Only those who could contend with the colder climates were able to survive, and the change in mitochondria—the cell's power plant—was central to this adaptation, Mishmar believes. He suspects that change in the body's energy metabolism is involved. "This is the first research that brings this idea to reality and shows how a mutation happens."

Prof. Mishmar is also excited about research into the basic mechanics of mitochondria and DNA transcription (the first step in the process of copying DNA into RNA to create a new molecule). "We used novel next-generation



Prof. Dan Mishmar's electron microscopy image of connected mitochondria that look like tilted figure eights



Dr. Barak Rotblat's surprising discovery: The top row shows tumors grown from human cancer cells injected into mice, where they grew. The tumors in the bottom row are from the same cells, but they were genetically manipulated to silence a specific gene thought to inhibit cancer growth. Surprisingly, these are much smaller, demonstrating that the identified gene is actually critical to promoting tumor growth, rather than suppressing it.

sequencing techniques to see how mitochondria are involved in the emergence of new species. We're the first to show this!"

He is accustomed to producing results that run counter to accepted dogma. One discovery, published last year, was a protein that regulates the mitochondrial transcription process. This protein was previously believed to be present only in the nucleus. Though proven by the data, the concept continues to meet resistance.

“The mitochondria are the power plant for all tissues, especially our main energy consumer—the brain.”

— PROF. DANIEL MISHMAR

“When you try to break a wall, it's hard work. I'm a scientist. When I see data we pursue it. Okay, these proteins are in the mitochondria—what do they do? This is a work in progress; I think we may have another surprising result.”

And when it comes to their research, Prof. Mishmar and his EGM Center colleagues believe surprise is always the best result. ■

BGU's Center for Evolutionary Genomics and Medicine (EGM) provides fellowships to the best of the brightest in the field and provides them with well-equipped labs. To learn about funding opportunities that make this possible, contact the regional director in your area or call **800-962-2248 ext. 1400.**

UNDERSTANDING GENOMICS TO DEFEAT CANCER



DR. MOSHE ELKABETS wants to feel that the work he does is important for the world. When he started studying at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, he didn't yet know what that would be. “The vision came when I started doing research and was exposed to different fields,” he says. “I found I wanted to do cancer research, and more practically to focus on cancer therapy. That's what I trained for and that's what I am doing.”

The training encompassed three degrees from BGU culminating in a Ph.D., three years of postdoctoral work in Boston at Brigham and Women's Hospital-Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, and two and a half more years of research at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York.

By the time he completed this education, Dr. Elkabets had published research results in leading cancer journals and attracted international interest. He chose BGU among many offers and joined the Shraga Segal Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Genetics in the Faculty of Health Sciences in 2015.

He is a member of BGU's Center for Evolutionary Genomics and Medicine. The lab he set up investigates head, neck and gynecological cancers, which can be similar in causes and therapies. His focus: precision medicine driven by genomics. “We try to understand the correlation between the cancer's mutation profile and specific therapies to improve treatment.”

Moshe Elkabets's long path to his chosen work was supported by ISEF, a foundation based in New York that provides scholarships to Sephardic students in Israel's universities. He had grown up in Ofakim, a development town in southern Israel and historically an immigrant community. His father came from Morocco at age 11, and his mother's family was from Egypt.

“We worked hard, always,” he says of his parents and four siblings. “But making ends meet was difficult.” Furthermore, the town's absence of cultural opportunities limited his early education. He spent three years in an army engineering unit and then worked to save for university. In 2005, looking toward a Ph.D., he was awarded an ISEF scholarship.

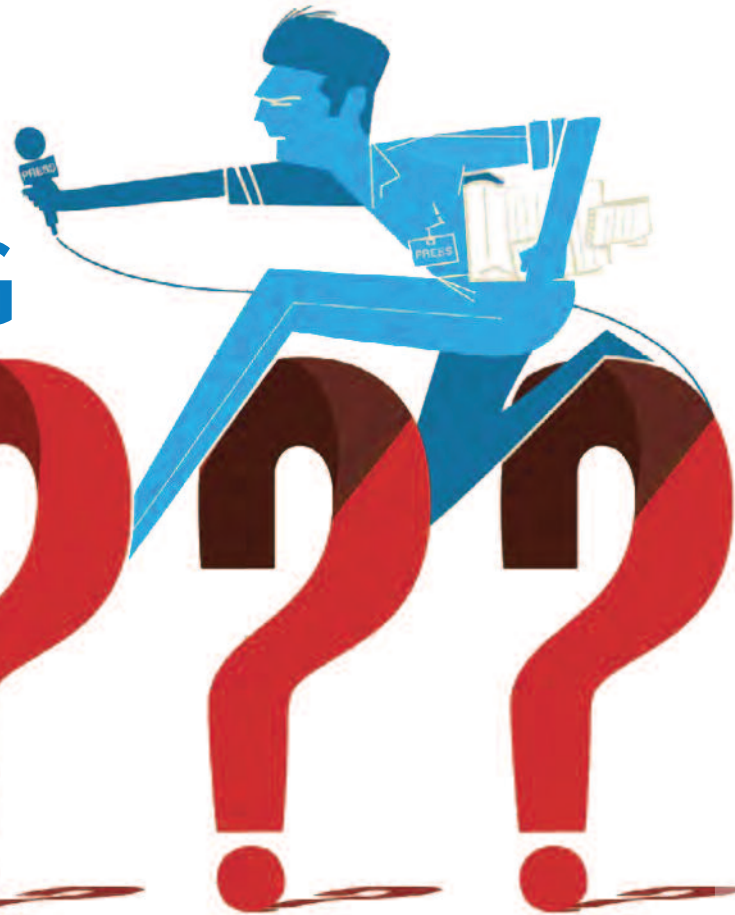
“ISEF gave me not just financial support all the way through my postdoc, but inspiration. They believed in me—that I can do well.” This month, ISEF is celebrating its 40th anniversary.

Today, Dr. Elkabets, his wife, Keren, and three children live on a Negev kibbutz. Pursuing his research in the south where members of his family also still live has special meaning for him. “There are more than a half-million people here but there's a lack of research and I think that negatively affects their treatment as patients. We have different populations and some types of cancer are unique to the region but haven't been investigated.”

Two current projects particularly excite him. One investigates ovarian cancer for which no current treatment exists.

Continued on page 35

DO JOURNALISTS KNOW WHAT THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT?



WHEN ZVI REICH was a 14-year-old Yeshiva student, a rabbi told a well-known story. “Why do we eat pomegranates on Rosh Hashanah? Because each one contains 613 seeds—the same number as the Torah’s 613 commandments.”

“I said to myself, no way, that can’t be true,” recalls Reich, now an associate professor in BGU’s Department of Communication Studies. “So I took a knife, opened up a pomegranate, and invited some Yeshiva friends to count with me. Guess what? There were more than 800 seeds! So one pomegranate was enough to refute the legend.” He later confirmed this finding with botanical experts, who told him it was impossible for a pomegranate to have a fixed number of seeds.

To Reich the story represents not only a native skepticism, but also his personal transitions between worlds: from Yeshiva to involvement in the larger secular world, and later, from a successful career as a newspaper journalist and editor to the academic world. In bridging between the two career paths, the skepticism has come front and center, with echoes of the favorite Talmudic study method: posing questions.

“How do journalists know what they’re talking about?” he asks. “And how much can we trust their accounts?

How can we contribute to helping them do better?” These questions guide his research and the team of Ph.D. students he directs. He wants the

“The flow of quality information and the effort to tell the truth is the lifeblood of democracy.”

— PROF. ZVI REICH

communications department to make an impact by clarifying the challenges journalism confronts in Western democracies, especially the United

States, and supplying realistic ways to reinvigorate the field.

His approach couldn’t be timelier. It is widely recognized that the news industry is in trouble. Today, more people learn about the world through unfiltered online sources; the newspaper industry and news cycle continue to shrink, and more reporters find themselves overburdened and under-equipped.

“The crisis in journalism is huge,” Prof. Reich agrees. “At the same time, as individuals, we were never so desperate for reliable, high-quality information in every part of our lives. The flow of quality information and the effort to tell the truth is the lifeblood of democracy. What we’re doing in the department is part of a broader effort

All illustrations by Leo Atelman from [The Skeptic in the Newsroom: Tools for Coping With a Deceptive World](#) by Prof. Zvi Reich and Yigal Godler

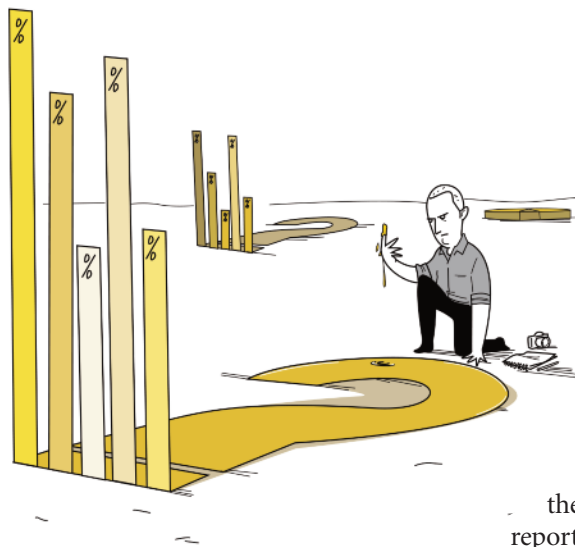
to reinvent journalism. People who live in both the practical and academic world, like me, have a special duty to contribute to this.”

A DECADE IN THE FIELD

In the mid 1990s, Reich at 35 was a senior editor of *Yedioth Ahronoth*, a major daily Israeli newspaper. He had served as the magazine, news, business, and city editor. One day, the human resource manager observed that in 10 years Reich had not yet taken a vacation. He made an offer that was hard to refuse: a year off with full pay. “Wow! That was generous and I felt I had to do something substantial with this year,” Reich says. “I decided to finish my B.A., which I hadn’t had time for.”

At The Hebrew University he discovered how interested he was in learning. “I couldn’t stop! Two years later I decided to quit my job. I ended up working on my Ph.D.”

While his thesis was still under review, BGU invited Reich to join its new Department of Communication Studies. He immediately said yes, and



Skepticism about statistics and studies

then was off for a year of postdoctoral work at the Columbia University School of Journalism.

Now teaching undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students, he finds Ben-Gurion University’s “involvement in industry, in practical life and in the community” a natural fit with his own thinking. “It’s BGU’s strategy to be relevant and make a difference.”

MEDIA MEETS DEMOCRATIZATION

The full picture of journalism is complicated, Prof. Reich says. The United States workforce has been cut in half over the past 10 years and the trend continues.

Journalists are not only asked to do more with less, but to cover more subjects without specialized knowledge.

“The industry today is bleeding expertise,” Reich says. “We need more specialization than ever, but specialized reporting is the most expensive part of journalism. We’re losing the most experienced and specialized reporters.” Many news organizations no longer have a single science reporter or political reporter, for example.

At the same time, the number of people employed by the information industry, especially marketing and public relations, keeps growing. “So the number of truth-finder positions shrinks and more and more people earn their living by withholding information or spinning the truth. We should be worried by this ratio.”

Nevertheless, Prof. Reich believes that current pessimism about journalism’s future is not justified. The “democratization” of news through online technology, which enables anyone to disseminate information, has a positive side, he says. “No one can

The Skeptic in the Newsroom authors
Ph.D. student Yigal Godler (left) and Prof. Zvi Reich

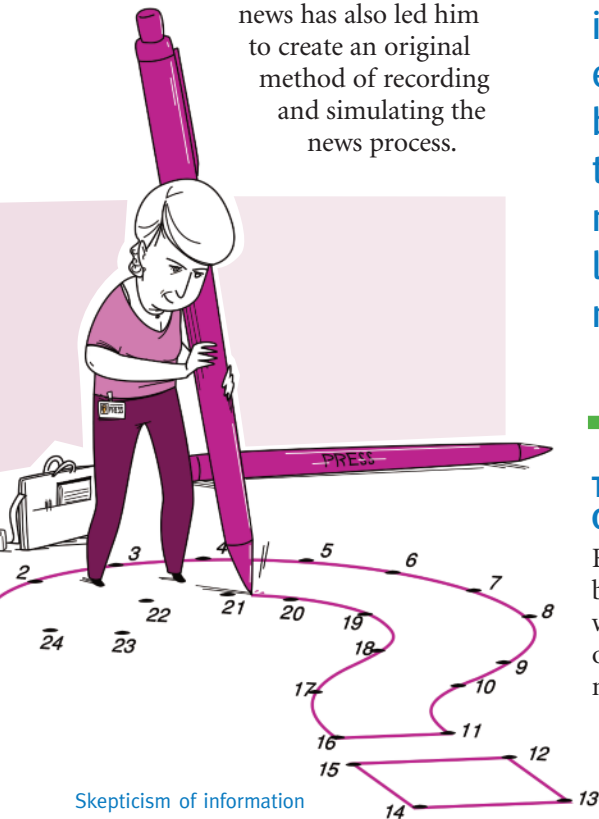


suppress information any more, not even a dictator. But this bears considerable danger to democracy because misleading people with lies and fake news was never easier. People's predispositions make them easy victims to rumors and lies."

Technology may fragment audiences, but it also gives professionals sophisticated new tools to work with. "In the middle of a crisis this richness finds us. Is journalism dying? No. The crisis is a source of energy, a driving force toward experimentation and innovation. It may be worse before it's better, but people should realize that the media is trying to reinvent itself. What the economic model will look like, we don't yet know. Journalism has never been so rich with technologies, platforms, genres, and forms of employment and participation."

Prof. Reich's work includes a prize-winning booklet on crisis communications for public organizations, and a book called *Sourcing the News: Key Issues in Journalism*. His interest

in how news becomes news has also led him to create an original method of recording and simulating the news process.



His statistical model encompasses elements like the frequency with which journalists observe events firsthand, their information cross-checking habits, the impact of time pressure, and the value of stories consumed over TV compared to print, radio and online. He has been invited to introduce this approach in Belgium, Holland and Sweden, among other countries, and this year is a visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication.



Skepticism about sources

“No one can suppress information any more, not even a dictator. But this bears considerable danger to democracy because misleading people with lies and fake news was never easier.”

— PROF. ZVI REICH

TEACHING THE ART OF SKEPTICISM

Five years ago, Prof. Reich was asked by the Israel Democracy Institute to write a book for practicing journalists on using skepticism to improve news coverage.

“We knew it was a huge project; where to start?” he asks. “We’d need to bring it down to earth and

make it conversational, but at the same time contain deep abstract truth. What is truth? What is fact? How do we translate that into practice so journalists could touch, understand and apply it? How do we speak to people who have little time in an engaging and practical way?”

Working with his Ph.D. student, Yigal Godler, Reich spent four years developing *The Skeptic in the Newsroom: Tools for Coping With a Deceptive World*. In fewer than 100 pages the book poses rhetorical questions to help journalists guide themselves to better evaluate what they know and whether their knowledge is robust enough. (See sidebar.)

The questions are arranged around four focal points that invite journalistic skepticism: information; news sources; methods used by sources such as scientists and pollsters to gather data and carry out studies; and the methods used by journalists themselves.

The book is illustrated with cartoons that reflect Reich’s metaphor for the reporting process: connecting the dots.

“There are many ways to connect dots. We need to think, what are the dots, and the lines—how should we treat them? Can another picture be drawn with the same dots? Do we have all the dots? Never. Your sources supply you with some dots, but in a way that draws a picture favorable to them.”

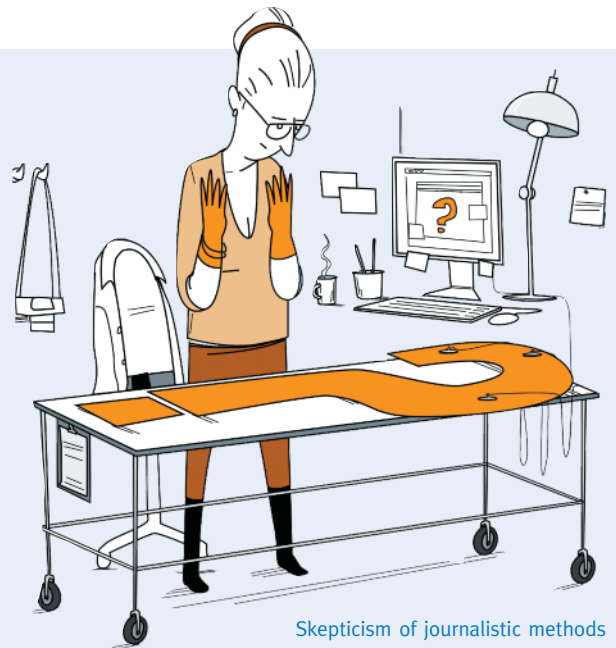
Prof. Reich’s ambition is to help time-pressed journalists, constantly challenged to understand new fields of knowledge, connect the dots better. And, he believes, a reinvented media can renew public trust and appreciation of its value.

“The deterioration of trust in all public institutions is a big problem for

Western democracy. In addition to figuring out how to improve journalism, we have to convince people not to believe efforts to denounce it so easily. Many journalists wake up in the morning to give an honest service and tell the truth. They deserve more trust than we now give them.” ■

EXCERPT FROM *The Skeptic in the Newsroom*

Why skepticism? Why now? Journalism is undergoing a crisis. Fewer (and increasingly overworked) journalists are acquiring less in-depth familiarity with their fields of coverage and the journalistic immune system is becoming less capable of withstanding the forces of spin and deception. This makes skepticism now, more than ever, essential for high-quality journalistic work...Skepticism also increases a journalist’s self-awareness, illuminating certain facets of the profession that are often gray and ambiguous.



Skepticism of journalistic methods

SOME QUESTIONS JOURNALISTS SHOULD ASK THEMSELVES

Skepticism of Information:

- Why am I receiving this information? Who else knows about it?
- Which missing pieces of information are needed to get a complete picture of the story? What can be concluded from the fact that some information was excluded?
- Is there any solid evidence that can confirm or refute this information? If so, what should that information look like? Where can such evidence be obtained?
- Did I provide satisfactory answers to the questions that the information brings up?

News Sources:

- How do the source’s interests reflect upon the information and the way in which it should be handled?
- What is the relationship between the information that the source reveals and that which he/she is trying to obscure?
- Am I able to distinguish between real experts and pseudo-experts whose public acclaim surpasses their actual expertise?

Skepticism About Statistics and Studies:

- Do the data really support the conclusions that the researchers present? Is the fact that researchers emphasize certain findings at the expense of others justified?
- What alternative conclusions do the data make possible?
- In a medical study, is sufficient attention paid to the risks of a new medical treatment or only its advantages?
- Are the findings surprising? Reasonable? Do they match the findings of previous studies? If not, is there a convincing reason for that?

Skepticism of Journalistic Methods:

- Whenever something looks obvious to me, do I stop and ask myself, “Why is this so?”
- Have I gathered enough information to know what I am talking about?
- Do I really know how to listen without putting words into the mouths of interview subjects?
- Could this coin have more than two sides, which would justify bringing in more than two opinions?

COMMUNITY COMMITMENT IN ACTION



FOR 39 YEARS the Lillian and Larry Goodman Open Apartments Program has acted as a living demonstration of BGU's unique commitment to the Beer-Sheva community.

Run by BGU's Department of Community Action, the program provides more than 100 students each year with rent-free apartments in the city's least affluent neighborhoods. In return, the Goodman Fellows give eight or more hours every week to the communities they live in.

They run more than 90 classes for people of all ages, help children with homework, manage dozens of recreational clubs, and organize theater, art, dance, and sports programs. They work with residents to nurture community gardens and create holiday celebrations. They run summer camps for children and take them on field trips. They hold street makeovers and paint apartments. They adopt families—and find themselves adopted in return.

And, they develop a new perspective on people whose life experience is sometimes very different from their own.

PART OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

"We are going inside their homes, their lives, and at first we're shocked," says Michael Cherniak, an industrial engi-

neering student who graduates next year. He has been a Goodman Fellow for three years and coordinates activities in the Rotenberg neighborhood.

"They have a hard life and are trying their best to survive and do the best for their children. After a while we become not so judgmental and then

"What makes our street special is the sense of community, the warmth. We're just like one big family with all that it entails."

— MICHAEL CHERNIAK

we're their ambassadors, translating what we see—very neglected houses with flat screen TVs, for example. We explain how they can invest money in different ways. They aren't able to save money for a rainy day, but they don't want to feel poor."

His street is home to people of all different religions and all types of

families, "virtually every type of person in the world," Michael says. "What makes our street special is the sense of community, the warmth. We're just like one big family with all that it entails." Women power the neighborhood; many of the men have left or are in jail and the women support their families with low-level, insecure work like housekeeping.

Michael reports that a few days earlier, he was sitting outside with his dog at 11:00 p.m. and a 17-year old he'd known for a few years joined him. Michael knew the teenager had been kicked out of several schools and earned a police record for stealing.

"We talked about everything—me, him, whatever seemed interesting—and I asked him if there was anything he wanted to do. He told me 'I know you, and I trust you, and can tell you that I need to learn to read.' He was ashamed, and didn't want to come to classes with other kids. So now one of us helps him privately several times per week."

At the same time, Goodman Fellows benefit from the close community. Recently Michael was home sick for a week, and after a few days a neighbor called to ask what had happened to him.

Top: Sprucing up a local youth social club

“I saw her every day but hadn’t spoken more than a hello or a few sentences to her, but she noticed I was missing. A few hours later she knocked on my door with hot vegetable soup she made for me. It touched me a lot.

“They know us by name, what we’re studying, what we’re doing, trust us very much. They know where we live—and when I leave the next student will live in my apartment and they’ll know where he or she is. Together we’re 39 years in the neighborhood and we’re part of it.”

Activities in each of the six neighborhoods Goodman Fellows live in are planned with the residents during the first month of every year. “We ask them what they need,” Michael says, “so we know what they want and what’s



Michael Cherniak (right)

important to them.” One recent result was the creation of a men’s walking group. “Most of the time they’d sit home watching TV after a long day of work, so they’re happy to get out of the house to talk, to laugh.”

Meet three more Goodman Fellows who share their stories in their own words.

ORI MITTELFUNCT:
HELPING TEENS FIND THEIR VOICE
Studying social work

I lead a theater club for teens in the Gimmel neighborhood. My work is to recruit teens to take part, lead the club and write a play to reflect their lives. Our challenge to put on a play all by ourselves was a complex and empowering experience. The teens came up with a lot of ideas and chose how cellphones

replace human relationships after one girl did ‘the zombie walk’ to show how someone walks when they’re on a cellphone.

The play was a very exciting experience for us, and a big success. I feel the theater process is a great way to get kids to know each other. It teaches them to persevere and feel proud of themselves.

I was especially moved by Maram, an Arab girl who came to the club because I asked her to. She was very introverted and shy and reluctant to participate in our drama exercises.

But as the year went on she became more confident; her posture improved; she willingly took part in rehearsals and showed a lot of motivation. She gradually stopped being afraid to speak, and



Ori Mittelfunct (2nd from left)

started sharing her opinions, acting and even putting more effort into her physical appearance.

I witnessed especially a change in the way she learned to speak out and stand up for herself. I admit that even when she was out of line, I couldn’t be mad at her—I was just so thrilled to see how far she’d come.

ELAD EDRI:
FOSTERING CO-EXISTENCE
Studying economics and accounting

Two years ago, I led a neighborhood soccer club that met twice a week. The first few times we met, the kids automatically separated into two groups: Jews and Arabs. They played together but didn’t communicate with each other. During the first month, my goal was to bring the kids closer together.



Elad Edri

I divided them into mixed groups.

Gradually, they developed strong social ties and it was exciting to see them cooperating. They started communicating better during games, and slowly transitioned to communicating perfectly. The kids created bonds off the field as well, and arranged soccer games on their own. The sense of alienation was slowly replaced by a sense of solidarity and friendship.

This has been the most satisfying social action experience for me as a student. It was great to be able to bring people together from different ethnic groups and break down stereotypes through sports, and help them form lasting friendships.

LINOR ZINER RAVOVSKY:
EMPOWERING IDENTITY AND COOPERATION
Studying for teacher certification

I chose to study at BGU because I knew it is a social university situated near challenged neighborhoods. As someone who grew up in a challenged neighborhood myself, where people were very



Linor Ziner Ravovsky (left)

HELPING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

poor, I really wanted to give back. When I heard about Open Apartments, I fell in love with the vision, the concept and the way the program works.

I just love working with youth and acting, so I led a community theater group for girls from seventh to tenth grade. The girls in the club pitched ideas for a play based on their daily lives. We selected a story, created the play and performed it at the end of the year.

Working on the play wasn't always easy. Sometimes the girls felt despairing and some wanted to leave. They didn't always agree with each other's ideas and there was a lot of pressure to be ready on time. But we finally succeeded in putting on a spicy play that received national coverage. The girls were even interviewed on TV!

The play itself focused on people who are unconventional. The girls included Jews from Dimona, Russian

immigrants, Jehovah's Witnesses, girls of Moroccan descent, and two Arab girls who traveled in from Hebron. The amazing part was that they didn't even realize these differences among themselves until they started working on the play. They were so proud of themselves, so excited to appear on stage with material they wrote themselves, and slowly realized that they are each different, unique and very special. ■

LILLIAN AND LARRY GOODMAN OPEN APARTMENTS PROGRAM

- 100 Goodman Fellows contributing 8+ hours weekly
- 73 apartments in 6 neighborhoods
- 92 clubs and classes for residents of all ages
- 90 "adopted families"
- Holiday community events
- Book and clothing fairs, cultural field trips, neighborhood beautification days
- Summer camp for 130 children 6 to 13 years old
- 2,000 participating residents annually

Donations to the Open Apartments will be matched by the Goodman Supporting Foundations.

www.aabgu.org/donate-apartments



1. Students clean up and paint the public spaces of a neighborhood. 2. Summer camp
3. After-school soccer club



BERY SHVARTS

NURSING PEOPLE BACK TO HEALTH

FOR 25-YEAR-OLD Bery Shvarts, becoming a nurse was a natural path. Both grandmothers had been nurses, one in Ukraine and the other in Russia, and his mother is a practical nurse employed in a Haifa hospital.

“There was the tradition, and I saw what kind of work my mother does. And then I was a medic in the army and found I enjoyed helping people.”

So after three years of service, which included 12 weeks of medic training, Bery took his college entrance exams, did well, and considered his options. “My home is in Haifa and I wanted to live somewhere outside, so I searched locations. I decided on BGU because the nursing department is so good, plus I had served in the south and knew it. Also living expenses are not as high as other places.”

Perhaps most important: “I didn’t want to be just a student. I wanted also to give to the community. Here there are a lot of programs for that. It’s not just a regular education—it’s serving the community, and that’s what makes it one of the best places.”

Now finishing his third year of the four-year program, Bery feels that the University has more than lived up to what he anticipated. “The high level of teaching is incredible. It’s very intensive, the first two years especially. They want you to have time in the field.”

He also likes seeing how Beer-Sheva and the University are both blossoming. “It’s great to be a student here. There’s a big social life and it’s a very close-knit community. BGU is a new university and growing; every year you see a few more buildings. And when you graduate you have the tools to find a good job and earn a living.”

Bery participates in the Ted Arison Family Foundation scholarship program to help develop new Israeli leaders and promote social activism. A small number of students in need of financial assistance are selected each year. All participate in some form of community service four to six hours per week.

“We give time, but it’s not just about that,” Bery says. “We have lectures by all kinds of different people to give us more insight into living in Israel and all the different groups here. We become better people.”

During his first year, Bery volunteered for a foundation that helps mentally impaired people—“I liked that a lot”—and last year moved to a women’s shelter. “I help children with their homework, play soccer with them, whatever they need. You see immigrants, Arabs, Bedouins, religious people all living together like a small community, accepting each other and the volunteers. The experience was really fun and meaningful for me.”

He knows there is a huge need for male nurses. “So getting a job won’t be hard. But at BGU they teach you a lot more than you need. You get more experience and medical knowledge to practice and help patients.” He hopes to continue further studies at BGU but is open to a number of possibilities. “The nursing world is wide!”

The bachelor’s program has already introduced Bery to several medical specializations and he will experience more in the next year. So far, he found one favorite that surprised him. “I had a week in geriatrics and didn’t expect to like it. So I was amazed at how interesting it was to me. I wish I’d had more time there and want to continue with it in the future.”

One particular experience led him to envision his future. “I treated a patient who was a veteran and fought in the 1948 and 1956 wars. Now he’s a completely different man; he has dementia and can’t remember his wife or anything else. It was such a change from when he was a young decorated soldier. I helped him for a few days and I wanted to get him off his chair and do some sport activity. And I did! The nurses watched and were shocked.

“It’s been very satisfying to make a difference.” ■

GREAT LAKES

Larry Goodman, *Honorary Chair*
 Robyn L. Schneider, *Director*
 (847) 983-3630
 greatlakes@aabgu.org

SHARING WATER RESOURCE EXPERTISE

AABGU's Great Lakes Region hosted Prof. Noam Weisbrod, director of BGU's Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research, in Milwaukee and Chicago.

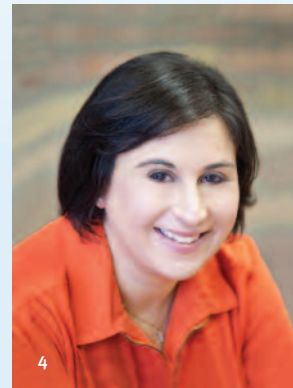
His visit to Milwaukee included a talk co-sponsored by the Jewish Community Relations Council and Israel Center of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation. He also participated in meetings at the Global Water Center, Marquette University and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Freshwater Sciences.

In Chicago, Prof. Weisbrod represented the Zuckerberg Institute at the University of Chicago (UC) "Water for the World: A Crown Family Celebration." It included a panel discussion featuring fellow Zuckerberg researcher Prof. Eilon Adar; James L. Skinner, the new Crown family professor and director of the Water Research Initiative in UC's Institute for Molecular Engineering; and other experts.

The event, hosted by UC President Robert J. Zimmer, also celebrated the collaboration between the Institute for Molecular Engineering and Ben-Gurion University. BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi was in attendance to underscore the University's commitment to this important water research partnership.

BGU'S CONNECTION WITH MICHIGAN

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder and his team recently visited BGU's Marcus Family Campus in Beer-Sheva, telling BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi he hopes to continue forging a



1. Prof. Noam Weisbrod speaking in Milwaukee
2. Michigan Governor Rick Snyder with BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi at BGU with the Advanced Technologies Park behind them
3. Julia Gauchman speaking at the award ceremony for the Hillel Gauchman Prize for Excellence in Mathematics Exploration
4. Robyn L. Schneider

connection between Israel and the state of Michigan.

Governor Snyder was updated on BGU's activities in the field of high-tech, with an emphasis on cyber and information security. His visit followed the culmination of a three-year partnership on renewable energy between the University of Michigan and BGU that ended last year.

INAUGURAL RECIPIENT OF MATHEMATICS PRIZE

Ph.D. student Nadav Meir was selected as the first recipient of the Hillel Gauchman Prize for Excellence in Mathematics Exploration.

During the award ceremony at BGU, Julia Gauchman, who commissioned the prize in her husband's memory, was joined by her children and grandchildren. It was a "bittersweet moment," as Julia put it, but she was overjoyed to be able to honor her husband's memory in such a profound way in a place so dear to their family.

GENEROSITY THAT CHANGES LIVES

The David and Inez Myers Foundation of Cleveland pledged an additional million dollar donation to support their already generous commitment to the recruitment and support of young faculty in the life sciences.

"It is gratifying to have a capacity to make a difference in institutions and, more importantly, in people's lives," says Foundation President Lee Kohrman.

NEW REGIONAL DIRECTOR

AABGU is excited to welcome Robyn L. Schneider as the new director of the Great Lakes Region. With her vast experience in fundraising, strong ties in the area, M.B.A., and M.A. in Jewish communal service, she is sure to have a significant impact on the region's growth and success. "I look forward to playing a part in fulfilling David Ben-Gurion's dream of making the desert bloom," says Schneider.

GREATER FLORIDA

GREATER FLORIDA

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Robert Colton, Billy Joel, Edward Kaplan, Jan Liff, Alan Newman, Joel Reinstein, Martin Weinberg

Reva Feldman, *Director*
(561) 705-0117
florida@aabgu.org

BGU FACULTY IN SOUTH FLORIDA

Prof. Noam Weisbrod, director of BGU's Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research, recently visited the AABGU Greater Florida Region. National Board Members Rob Colton and Joel Reinstein co-sponsored a private reception, featuring a lively discussion with long-time donors on the latest water research being conducted at the Zuckerberg Institute.

Prof. Weisbrod also spoke at Temple Beth Am in Jupiter and Temple Emanu-El Palm Beach on the topic, "Does the Earth Breathe? Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Global Warming and the Water Cycle."

South Florida hosted Prof. Emeritus Ilan Troen to engage the community in discussions on exposing the arguments for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Two events, co-sponsored by the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County and the Lorraine and Jack N. Friedman Commission for Jewish Education of the Palm Beaches, were held at Temple Beth Torah in Wellington and Temple Beth El in West Palm Beach. AABGU Founder Dorothy Polayes also hosted a parlor meeting in her home.

The region hosted Dr. Leslie Lobel, of BGU's Shraga Segal Department of Microbiology, Immunology and

Genetics, who shared his latest research on the Zika virus and other emerging viral diseases. Dr. Lobel spoke at the Miami Beach JCC and at Temple Sinai in North Miami Beach. He also met with Dr. Michael Farzan, co-chair of the Department of Immunology and Microbiology at Scripps Research Institute in Jupiter.

The 18th Annual Snowbird Reception was held at Bocaire Country Club in Boca Raton, co-sponsored with AABGU's Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia Chapter. The guest speaker, Dr. Yiftach Gepner, recently received his Ph.D. from BGU's Department of Public Health under the mentorship of world-renowned nutritionist Prof. Iris Shai. He spoke about "The Impact of Lifestyle on Your Health."

Greater Florida Region donors Sylvia and Stanley Graber were recognized for becoming founders. Members of the Living Legacy Society and the Asarot Society were also honored at the event.

VISITING BGU

Helene and David Weingarten made a special visit to Ben-Gurion University to visit their son, Adam, who is completing a postdoc with Prof. Ira Weinstock of the Department of Chemistry.



1. Rabbi Leonid Feldman, Temple Beth El; Prof. Emeritus Ilan Troen; Dr. Penny Beers, executive director of the Lorraine and Jack N. Friedman Commission for Jewish Education of the Palm Beaches; Alan Newman, AABGU national board member; Adam Kramarow of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County 2. Sharon Shine; Benjamin Golub; Prof. Noam Weisbrod; Marilyn and Edward Kaplan 3. Sylvia and Stanley Graber, of Delray Beach, are new founders and members of AABGU's Asarot Society. 4. Israel's first academic research nanosatellite, BGUSAT, was recently launched into orbit thanks to generous seed funding provided by Rachel and Max Javit of Boca Raton.

GREATER NEW YORK

Lite Sabin, *Chair*
 Kevin M. Leopold
Executive Director—Northeast
 Diane Romirowsky
Associate Director
 Ilana Lewin, *Assistant Director*
 Chani Pearlstein, *Program Manager*
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EDY'S HOUSE SUPPORTING CANCER PATIENTS IN BEER-SHEVA

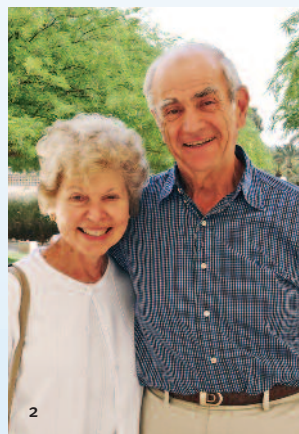
AABGU's Greater New York Region has been privileged to develop a deep friendship and partnership with Sol Freedman, one of the region's most loyal supporters. Sol has been a member of the AABGU and BGU family for many years. He and his late wife, Edy Freedman z"l, have generously supported a variety of important programs at BGU that would not have been possible without their dedication and involvement.

Sol has always had a great appreciation for language and culture. In particular, his love of Yiddish, specifically proverbs, helped lead him to provide seed funding to grow the University's Yiddish language program. Thankfully, Sol did not stop there. He continued his support of foreign languages by sponsoring Chinese classes at BGU.

Following the second intifada in the early 2000s, Israel's hotel and tourism industry suffered greatly. As a result, student internships for BGU's hotel and management program were eliminated.

Once Sol learned of the situation, he immediately devised a creative solution and established a summer hotel internship program in New York City. His leadership and commitment to the students helped overcome numerous obstacles, including visa and student housing issues.

Along with the help of Jessica Sillins,



1. Aviva Segev, Sol Freedman, Pesach Shvartzman, and BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi at the naming of Edy's House in 2011 2. Edy z"l and Sol Freedman at BGU in 2003 3. Standing: BGU students in the Hotel Internship Program. Sitting: Jessica Sillins, Sol Freedman and Faculty Advisor Judith Keren-Klot

a vice president of AABGU's national board, the hotel internship program has been incredibly successful, and recently celebrated its 14th year. A dozen or more students gain experience each year in various major New York City hotels, as well as hotels in New Jersey and North Carolina.

Perhaps closest to Sol's heart is the Ma'agan Community Support Center for Cancer Patients and Their Families in Beer-Sheva, which he established with Edy in 2000. The Center was renamed *Beit Edy* (Edy's House) in 2011 in her loving memory.

As Edy once described the Center's purpose, "If you meet inside a hospital, you're sick. If you meet in the community, you're learning to live with an illness."

Established to provide social and emotional support to people with cancer and their families and friends, and as a supplement to conventional health care, Edy's House offers emotional support and networking groups, lectures, workshops, and social events in a warm, home-like setting.

All of its programs and services are available free of charge. No such program previously existed in Israel, where the growing incidence of cancer, especially among young people and new immigrants, has generated an urgent need for auxiliary care.

AABGU and BGU sincerely thank Sol and the Freedman family for their continued friendship, support and inspiration.

For the second consecutive year, all donations to Edy's House made by December 31, 2017 will be matched dollar-for-dollar up to \$50,000 by Sol Freedman and family.

To make your matched donation, call 646-452-3703 or send a check made out to AABGU to:
AABGU Greater New York Region
Attn: Edy's House
1001 Avenue of the Americas, 19th Floor
New York, NY 10018

GREATER TEXAS

Elizabeth Grzebinski
Regional/Houston Chair
 Ellen Marcus, *Austin Chair*
 Dr. Michael Ozer
San Antonio Chair
 Deborah Bergeron
Regional Director
 (713) 522-8284
 texas@aabgu.org

ADDING TEXAS HOSPITALITY TO AABGU'S MID-WINTER MEETING

The Greater Texas Region hosted AABGU's "Blooming With Innovation" Mid-Winter Meeting in February, welcoming national board members and friends from across the country to Houston.

The events kicked off with a Taste of Texas dinner at Genesis Steakhouse, hosted by the regional board. Guests were dressed "cowboy style" while they enjoyed kosher barbeque and frozen margaritas, and connected with old and new friends.

KOSHER EXTRAVAGANZA BENEFITS CYBER SECURITY

The 16th Gourmet Kosher Extravaganza, chaired by Dr. Riva Collins and Shira Yoshor, was held the following evening.

Extravaganza attendees enjoyed a five course kosher meal prepared by a team of seven of Houston's finest chefs: Carmelo Mauro of Carmelo's; Luigi Shimata of Arcodoro; Mark Cox of Mark's Culinary Consulting; Steve Caruana of the Westin Galleria; Jason Goldstein of Genesis Steakhouse; Mark Holley of Holley's Seafood; and Luis Roger of BCN Taste and Tradition.

All funds raised at the dinner will support cyber security research at BGU. Guest speaker BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi highlighted the central role the University is playing in this growing field.

The evening's master of ceremonies, Stephen Breslauer, a vice chair on BGU's board of governors, shared that the Israeli government is matching dollar-for-dollar all money raised for the University's Cyber Security Research Initiative. Then he announced a special additional match – Chef Carmelo Mauro and his wife, Hilary, would match every dollar raised that evening. "This means that each dollar from

you and Carmelo will be matched by the Israeli government, making your donation of \$1,000 a \$4,000 investment for BGU," said Breslauer to a standing ovation.

The evening concluded with a poignant presentation to Nurit Feige, wife of Dr. Michael Feige ז"ל who was killed in a terrorist attack on Sarona Market in Tel Aviv last May.

Dr. Feige was head of the undergraduate Israel studies program and a member of the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism. In his memory, AABGU raised the funds to establish the Michael Feige Chair in Israeli Society to be occupied by a rising star at the Institute.



1. Stephen Breslauer with the Extravaganza's team of chefs: Luis Roger, Mark Cox, Mark Holley, Steve Caruana, Carmelo Mauro, Luigi Shimata, and Jason Goldstein
2. An AABGU/BGU round-up at the Taste of Texas welcome dinner. Front row: Sarah Allen, Carol Saal, Ellen Marcus, Toni Young, Nurit Feige Back row: Neal Myerberg, Julia Nelson, Mark Mendelson, Lloyd Goldman, and Dr. Hila Riemer
3. Stephen Breslauer thanks Carmelo Mauro for his generous match that will greatly benefit BGU cyber security research.
4. Fred Levine; BGU President Prof. Rivka Carmi; Velve Levine



MID-ATLANTIC

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THE NEGEV FORUM EXPLORES ISRAELI EDUCATION

Members of the Mid-Atlantic Region’s Negev Forum gathered in the home of Philadelphia Chapter Associate Chairs Holly and Norm Nelson for a reception and presentation by BGU’s Dr. Adam Lefstein, “Better Than Best Practice: Capitalizing on Challenges in Israeli Education.”

The Negev Forum, which engages a new generation of AABGU friends, is co-chaired by Jodi and Sam Greenblatt, Maribeth and Steve Lerner, and Holly and Norm Nelson. Holly, a member of AABGU’s national board and a graduate of the Zin Fellows Leadership Program, took particular pleasure in introducing Dr. Lefstein, who is also her cousin.

TRIBUTE BRUNCH SUCCESS

The annual Tribute Brunch, held this time in the magnificent Philadelphia Horticulture Center in Fairmount Park in November, was a memorable occasion. Jack R Bershad, Esq., was recognized for his 15 years of leadership as the region’s chair, and Connie and Sam Katz were installed as regional chairs by Toni Young, president of AABGU’s national board.

Lelaine and Stuart Nemer of the Delaware chapter, and Marla and Rob Zipkin, Philadelphia chapter

chairs, were honored for leaving their “Footsteps in the Negev” through their service to BGU.

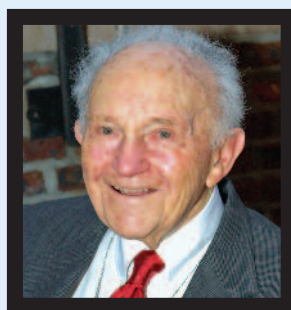
CELEBRATING DAVID BEN-GURION

In March, the region co-sponsored a screening of “Ben-Gurion, Epilogue” in partnership with the Israeli Film Festival of Philadelphia.

A Founders and Friends Reception with special guest Alon Ben-Gurion, David Ben-Gurion’s grandson, was held in May in Philadelphia. This was followed by a program, co-hosted by the National Museum of American Jewish History, where Alon presented “Memories of My Grandfather” to local AABGU supporters and guests.



1. Bottom row: Marla Zipkin, Philadelphia chapter co-chair; Norm Nelson; Connie Katz, Mid-Atlantic regional co-chair; Holly Nelson. Top row: Rob Zipkin, Philadelphia chapter co-chair; Dr. Adam Lefstein; Steve Lerner; Maribeth Lerner; Sam Katz, Mid-Atlantic regional co-chair 2. Sam Katz, Connie Katz and Jack R Bershad at the 2016 Tribute Brunch 3. Celebrating the *chai* anniversary of the Annual Snowbird Reception, the Mid-Atlantic Region partnered with the Greater Florida Region for a luncheon attended by 85 guests at the Bocaire Country Club in Boca Raton. Pictured are guest speaker Dr. Yiftach Gepner with event co-chairs Ann Waldman and Dorothy Wasserman, and Marilyn and Edward Kaplan. 4. Alon Ben-Gurion



Just a few days after the region’s Tribute Brunch, attended, as usual, by Murray H. Shusterman, he passed away peacefully at home at the age of 104. Beloved friend, leader and devoted philanthropist, his legacy lives on at the University through his many significant gifts, including the Murray H. Shusterman Gate of Knowledge, currently under construction. He will be sorely missed.

NEW ENGLAND

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THE IMPACT OF NEW ENGLAND VISIONARIES ON THE NEGEV

When you think about Beer-Sheva and the Negev, what comes to mind? Perhaps images of camels, tents and sand, or adjectives like dry, arid and bare?

Beer-Sheva is no longer a desolate pit stop on the road to Eilat. It is a bustling metropolis filled with a young, vibrant community of students and faculty eager to be the next generation of pioneers fulfilling David Ben-Gurion’s vision for Israel’s Negev desert.

A handful of special individuals and families from AABGU’s New England Region who got involved with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in the early 1970s and 1980s deserve a great deal of credit for having the vision of what a new university in the Negev could be.

Individuals such as George Shrut; brothers Frederick and Philip Krupp; Jerry Sundell; Michael Cyker; Monte Goldman; Lou Spero; Joseph Linsey; and Ralph Kaplan, all of blessed memory, and many others, including Irwin Chafez, Ted Cutler and Jim Stavis, understood the importance of establishing the University as a vehicle for the economic and social development of the region.

Their legacy is greater than the sum of their countless scholarships and dedications of labs, buildings and gardens on campus. The accomplishments of BGU today are built upon



their vision for a future that has arrived.

AABGU and BGU are forever grateful to these committed leaders of the community, as well as some of their children who have continued their family’s remarkable legacies, including Marjorie and Max Schechner; Howard Shrut and Hannah Banks; and Douglas and Judi Krupp.

BGU has established itself as a major player in research areas such as alternative energy, cyber and homeland security, desert and water research, Israel studies, medical research, biotechnology, nanotechnology, neuroscience, robotics, and other important disciplines.

Some 20,000 students are studying at the University’s beautiful campuses in Beer-Sheva, Sede Boqer and Eilat. Thirty-one percent of the student body is pursuing advanced degrees, and more than 40 percent of undergraduates volunteer in the community.

Beer-Sheva is also home to the Advanced Technologies Park adjacent

1. George Shrut (center) received an honorary doctoral degree from BGU in 1987 in the company of his daughter, Marjorie Schechner; Milada Ayrton; grandchildren Jonathan and Ranen Schechner; son-in-law Max Schechner; and son Howard Shrut 2. Jerry and Faye Sundell 3. Douglas Krupp and Bernice Krupp (far right) with students Danielle Keidar and Noa Keren-Khadmy, recipients of the Philip Krupp Scholarship Endowment Fund

to BGU’s Marcus Family Campus, which has become the center of Israel’s cyber security operations, and the future home of the IDF technology intelligence units.

The city’s growth is unparalleled. Today’s Beer-Sheva is filled with eco-friendly developments, museums, outdoor markets, an amphitheater, soccer stadium, and more.

On your next trip to Israel, plan to experience the “new” Negev for yourself and come visit BGU’s high-tech ecosystem blooming in the desert.

AABGU will facilitate a personalized tour of campus based on your specific interests. You will be amazed and inspired by how far the University has come thanks to the support of visionary individuals who invested in David Ben-Gurion’s dream. Contact Kevin Leopold at kleopold@aabgu.org or 646-452-3686 for more information.

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IS YOUR REFRIGERATOR SPYING ON YOU?

Prof. Yuval Elovici, director of BGU's Cyber Security Research Center and Deutsche Telekom Innovations Labs@BGU, recently spoke in Palo Alto on the topic, "Cyber Threats to Infrastructure, Democracy and the Internet of Things: How Israel Is One Step Ahead."

Prof. Elovici engaged a group of Silicon Valley high-tech professionals and community members, together with business leader Eric Benhamou, in an eye-opening discussion moderated by computer networking entrepreneur Dr. Harry Saal.

As mobile devices and the "internet of things" have become ubiquitous, new cyber security technologies are critical for defending personal privacy and institutional infrastructure. Even the most seemingly benign objects, from home appliances to headphones, can be infiltrated by hackers intent on stealing information. On a larger scale, networks for banking, public and private transportation, medical data, and the 911 system are not immune to potentially crippling threats.

BGU has been at the forefront of cyber security research and development for more than a decade. A team of experts, led by Prof. Elovici, has become internationally known for their skill in exposing vulnerabilities before they can be discovered by hackers.

"Many other universities are doing more theoretical research, which is very important," Prof. Elovici says. "But BGU's applied cyber security research can be transferred much faster to the market."

BGU AUTISM RESEARCHERS SHARE THEIR EXPERTISE

Three of BGU's top autism specialists recently spoke about their cutting-edge research at the Oshman Family JCC in Palo Alto and at Congregation

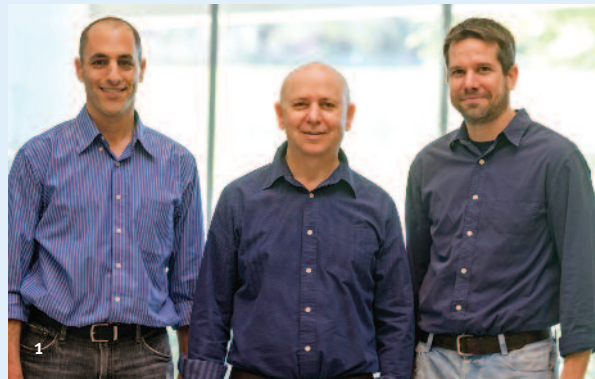
Emanu-El in San Francisco.

Dr. Ilan Dinstein shared how his neurophysiological autism lab at BGU is the only one of its kind in Israel to use neuroimaging techniques—such as MRI and EEG—to study brain structure and function in children with autism. His goal is to identify objective biological markers for diagnosis in children as young as one year old.

He also discussed the benefits of the regional autism database, one of the world's most comprehensive, developed in partnership with Soroka University Medical Center. The database is used to collect behavioral, metabolic, clinical, neuroimaging, and genetic data from Negev children with autism, as well as from their parents and siblings.

Dr. Idan Menashe, a senior lecturer in BGU's Department of Public Health, spoke about the genetics of autism, with a focus on recent discoveries in the genetics of autistic savants.

Dr. Gal Meiri, M.D., head of the Preschool Psychiatric Unit at Soroka and a lecturer at BGU, highlighted his work in the Negev's Bedouin community, where autism went largely undiagnosed until about 10 years ago. He also shared early findings in clinical trials that offer hope for treatment in the future.



1. Dr. Idan Menashe; Gal Meiri, M.D.; Dr. Ilan Dinstein
2. Dan Feldman with cyber security event moderator Dr. Harry Saal, a member of BGU's board of governors
3. Stanford University Prof. Jeff Ullman with cyber security panelist Eric Benhamou, a member of BGU's board of governors
4. Peter Wexler; Carol Saal, a vice chair on BGU's board of governors; Prof. Yuval Elovici

SOUTHWEST

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RESEARCH “POWER COUPLE”

AABGU’s Southwest Region recently welcomed BGU researchers Drs. Hila and Raziel Riemer to speak at a dessert reception at the Intercontinental Hotel in Los Angeles.

Dr. Hila Riemer, associate professor in BGU’s Guilford Glazer Faculty of Business and Management, specializes in researching consumer psychology. She gave a presentation about “The Effects of Emotions on People’s Judgments and Behavior: A Cross-Cultural Perspective.”

Dr. Raziel Riemer, associate professor in BGU’s Department of Industrial Engineering and Management, highlighted his robotics research that focuses on “How Understanding Human Motion Can Improve People’s Lives.”

Hila and Raziel also shared their joint research, “The Effect of People’s Emotions on the Motion of Their Bodies.” They are currently on sabbatical in the Bay Area. Hila is a visiting scholar at Stanford University’s Department of Psychology. Raziel is a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley.

SHARING THE SECRETS OF NEUROLOGICAL DISORDERS

Jim and Helen Zukin hosted an exclusive reception at The Peninsula Beverly Hills, featuring guest speaker Prof. Alon Monsonogo of BGU’s Faculty of Health Sciences.

Prof. Monsonogo presented “Unlocking the Secrets of Neurological Disorders.” The attendees enjoyed an



1. AABGU supporters Lisa Field and Larry Field 2. Standing: Ben Marandy; Dr. Hila Riemer. Seated: Ruth Flinkman-Marandy 3. Dr. Hila Riemer, Rhoda (Ricky) Levine and Dr. Raziel Riemer 4. Geoff Gold; Southwest Regional Director Philip Gomperts; Helen Zukin; Stephanie Gold

enlightening program that covered various brain health concerns, including Alzheimer’s disease.

Prof. Monsonogo also went to Phoenix, Arizona to speak at an event hosted by Herb and Laura Roskind and co-sponsored by the Arizona State University (ASU) Foundation. Laura Roskind is co-chair of the trustees of ASU. The program was designed to highlight the many collaborations between BGU and ASU.

SUMMIT ON WATER IN LAS VEGAS

BGU was the leading academic sponsor and partner of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s first joint Israel/U.S. water conference. The BusinessH2O Summit

was held at the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas on December 12, 2016.

Featured speakers from BGU included Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research Director Prof. Noam Weisbrod, and Zuckerberg researchers Profs. Amit Gross and Jack Gilron. They shared Israel’s technological know-how and BGU’s expertise on water resource management. Zuckerberg Institute benefactor and BGU board chairman emeritus, Roy Zuckerberg, also presented a keynote address on “Investing in Water Research.” Special guests of AABGU included Robert (Bobby) Feldman and Brenda and Russell Frank.

WASHINGTON/ BALTIMORE

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WELCOME NEW REGIONAL CHAIR IRA WAGNER

The Washington/Baltimore Region is pleased to announce its new regional chair, Ira Wagner. Ira and his wife, Marcia, have become increasingly involved with AABGU over the last eight years. A member of AABGU's national board and investment committee, Ira is a former president of European Capital Financial Services, a subsidiary of American Capital, Ltd.

Originally from Baltimore and now residing in Bethesda, Maryland, Ira is uniquely connected to both communities and looks forward to increasing local interest in and support for BGU.

The region is grateful to Art and Edie Hessel for their significant and passionate commitment to AABGU as outgoing co-chairs of the D.C. chapter. They led the effort to hire the region's professional staff and, in so doing, helped revitalize local events and engagement in support of BGU for the past 10 years.

Speaking, hosting and recruiting for numerous events over the years, Art and Edie will continue to share their enthusiasm for BGU in the Washington community and beyond through Art's continuing role as a member of the national board and audit committee.

COUNTERING THE ANTI-ISRAEL BOYCOTT

AABGU recently partnered with three local organizations for events with Prof. Ilan Troen, a former director of BGU's Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the



1. Thanking Edie and Art Hessel, outgoing D.C. chapter chairs 2. New Washington/Baltimore Regional Chair Ira Wagner 3. Prof. Yuval Elovici lectures on the security challenges of the "Internet of things." Watch the video at www.aabgu.org/IOT

Study of Israel and Zionism and the Ben-Gurion Archives, and a former dean of BGU's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Hosted by Beth Tfiloh Congregation, AABGU partnered with the Baltimore Jewish Council and the Baltimore Israel Coalition for a discussion: "Campus Chaos: The BDS Battle."

Prof. Troen addressed a Washington, D.C. gathering at "Understanding BDS: The View From Israel and the American Campus," a joint AABGU-AJC Washington event. Both talks attracted large groups and elicited an important discussion about what the Jewish community can do to educate younger generations to help counter misinformation about Israel on college campuses today.

CYBER SECURITY IN AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY

The Washington/Baltimore Region partnered with American University's

Center for Israel Studies for the third time to host a two-day conference in March exploring critical areas of cyber security.

Prof. Yuval Elovici of BGU's Department of Information Systems Engineering and director of the Deutsche Telekom Innovations Labs@BGU opened the conference with a keynote address, "The Internet of Things: The New Frontier of Cyber Conflict." Watch the informative and interesting lecture at www.aabgu.org/IOT.

The following day's conference featured four expert panels, exploring the latest U.S.-Israeli cyber policy issues involving national security, crime, human rights, and the digital economy. Each panel explored the responsibilities of various governmental agencies, as well as the roles of the private and public sectors in both the United States and Israel.

ISRAEL AND THE HOLOCAUST

Continued from page 11

just a Holocaust dilemma, but an all-too-common one in today's world. "In every society with a trauma story, the missing person problem is part of it. With a large trauma like genocide, the focus is on the survivors or the dead—but no attention is given to the ones in the middle, the missing. I see this as a gray area that needs more understanding—how society deals with the problems, the questions."

Tehila Darmon Malka will complete her Ph.D. this year and take some time to decide on her next step. While she feels this research has brought her a lot of sadness, it has expanded her understanding.

"As a Jew, an Israeli, I think about it. In the last few months I was part of an Israeli group that decided we cannot be silent about what is happening in Syria, despite the politics. So we asked people to donate money so we can buy baby food, blankets and clothing. And it's amazing! We collected 1.3 million shekels [more than \$350,000]. Many told us, 'I give because I remember what happened to my grandfather, and how the world was silent.'" ■

ALUMNUS PROFILE

UNDERSTANDING GENOMICS TO DEFEAT CANCER

Continued from page 17

"We're able to describe the pathway activated for patients with a specific mutation, which is present in about 20 percent of cases. We believe there is a chance to use a very potent drug combination for patients with that mutation." While a cure is not on the horizon, he hopes the treatment will induce a stable or chronic disease situation rather than a lethal one. A global pharmaceutical company is working with the lab.

The second project relates to head and neck cancer. His team is studying a biomarker (a cancer indicator) that predicts how a patient will respond to an approved, widely used medication. After working with a patient who showed a strong resistance to it, the team is investigating whether the discovery proves out with a larger group.

"When we understand the molecular mechanisms that distinguish patients who respond and don't respond to a treatment, we can tailor it better, and hopefully propose a better one."

Although happy to be making progress, Dr. Elkabets feels "it's never fast enough. We need to find new therapies and treatments for these cancers. In the long run, we'll look for new treatments that combine targeted and immune therapies."

Considering Elkabets's passion, intelligence and drive, we can all look forward to his success. ■

CORRECTION

In the last issue of *Impact* that acknowledged our most recent philanthropic partners, members of BGU's prestigious Ben-Gurion Society were inadvertently left out. We apologize for this unfortunate error and salute these magnanimous supporters.

BEN-GURION SOCIETY (\$1 MILLION+)

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Eris and Lawrence Field Family Foundation, Beverly Hills, CA

Dr. Philip and Sima Needleman, St. Louis, MO

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Plant an Olive Tree *to Seed Desert Research*

Plant an olive tree in *Wadi Mashash*, the experimental farm of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, and support invaluable agricultural research that could mean the difference between starvation and sustenance for men, women and children who live in drylands and deserts.

Planting a tree for research in honor or in memory of a loved one, or to commemorate a milestone occasion, is a great way to show you care, while also helping to make the Negev desert bloom.

To make your 100 percent tax-deductible contribution,
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