

Edge

The cutting

News from
the Machon Gavoah LeTorah
at Bar-Ilan University

Midrash

Rabbi Rappaport, Rosh Beit Midrash

Rabbi Shabtai Rappaport, who has had a long and distinguished career on the Israeli yeshiva scene, has been appointed the new head of the Machon's Beit Midrash. Rabbi Rappaport taught for several years at the Sochochover Yeshiva in Bayit Vegan, for a decade at the Hesder yeshiva Har Etzion, and he was the Rosh Yeshiva of Shvut Yisrael, also a Hesder yeshiva, for 20 years. He was ordained by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and is the trusted editor of Rabbi Feinstein's writings on Gemara and practical halakhah. Rabbi Rappaport has lectured and published widely, and is a noted halakhic expert in the areas of medicine and organ transplants.



Rabbi Shabtai Rappaport

Rabbi Rappaport says of his new position, "I was lucky to come into a beit midrash that was already very well-established. Of course, as the beit midrash continues to grow, new challenges crop up all the time.

"There are **two challenges** in particular that I've taken upon myself to address immediately. The first is the fact that, every year, almost 50% of the students entering the beit midrash program are new, so that if we want to have a cohesive environment, with a sense of continuity and community, we have to find ways to integrate them quickly. The second challenge is the fact that every student comes in with a different academic schedule, meaning that each one has different hours available for Torah

study and at the same time, people's backgrounds are very varied. We're talking about doctoral students with many years of advanced Talmudic background sitting in the same beit midrash with first year university students who are just starting Reshit, exploring their Judaism for the first time.

"What I've done in order to address both these challenges is to create many small study groups, *haburot*, that meet during every hour of the day and on many different levels and topics. We want everyone who comes into the beit midrash to immediately **feel at home and take part in the ongoing dialogue**. We also want every student to be able to tailor a program to his needs and interests. Every beit midrash student is committed to putting in 16 to 22 hours a week, so that's a huge logistical challenge."

Rabbi Rappaport has also created a multi-disciplinary lecture series titled "A Meeting of Worlds", popular evening classes for the general student body, and several distance-learning initiatives. ▶

(“Rosh Beit Midrash” continued from front page)



Rabbi Aharon Katz

The position of Rosh Beit Midrash is a renewable three year term, consonant with chairmanships in the university's other departments. The position was filled for the last two terms by **Rabbi Aharon Katz**, a long-time staff member of the Machon, who graciously agreed to stay on for a seventh year while the Machon searched for an appropriate replacement.

Rabbi Katz has been at the Machon for 35 years, almost since its inception, and he will continue to occupy a senior teaching position at the Machon. “I remember when the beit midrash began, as a small meeting place for several yeshiva graduates pursuing university degrees,” Rabbi Katz reminisced. “And now there are 350 students learning in the beit midrash daily.”

During Rabbi Katz's tenure, many programs were begun that [expanded the scope of the beit midrash](#) and led to tremendous growth, including the Reshit program for students without religious background, the advanced learning program for doctoral students, the popular Friday morning beit midrash which is open to the general public, and various programs in practical rabbinics and halakhic decision-making.

According to **Prof. Daniel Sperber**, President of the Machon, “Because

Rabbi Katz has served as the rabbi of a congregation in Ramat Gan throughout the years in which he taught at Bar-Ilan, he is sensitive to the notion – and made sure his students also appreciated the notion – that halakhic studies are not purely theoretical but also have practical, personal applications.”

Professor Sperber added, “The students have always felt close to Rabbi Katz. He is an extremely open person, both a *talmid hakham* and a *mentsch*.”

Rabbi Shimon Altshul, Director of the Machon, comments, “We are grateful for Rabbi Katz's tremendous contribution and wish Rabbi Rappaport much success in his new position. In just a few short months, he has succeeded in infusing the beit midrash with a sense of [energy, enthusiasm and excitement](#). We all look forward to the continued growth of the beit midrash as the physical and spiritual center of Bar-Ilan University.”

Dedication Hausner Family Dedication

This past November, the Machon office was surprised by an unexpected phone call: Uri Hausner, David Hausner and Joella Amichai wanted to present the Machon with a donation to honor the memory of their parents, Odette z”l and Avraham Hausner z”l. David Hausner explained, “After his retirement my father spent many happy hours learning in the Beit Midrash, at the Kollel Yom Shishi, and at many of the other classes that are open to the public. It was an important and meaningful part of his life, it enriched the lives of both our parents, and we wanted to show our appreciation to the Machon for that.”

Their donation will support the Reshit program, that gives students without religious background the opportunity to study Jewish sources and explore their Jewish identity in an open, non-coercive program tailored to their needs and interests. To learn more about Reshit, contact Rabbi Shimon Altshul at Shimon.Altshul@mail.biu.ac.il



Odette and Avraham Hausner, of blessed memory

The Machon Gavoah LeTorah thanks all its donors, large and small, who help us provide advanced Jewish education to thousands of students of all ages and levels. We hope you enjoy this update and continue to be an active member of the Machon family.

From Coast to Coast

Coast



Rabbi Shimon Altshul

Rabbi Shimon Altshul, Director of the Jesselson Institute for Advanced Torah Studies made several trips to North America this past year, during which he lectured widely and met with many of the Institute's supporters. Some of the East Coast synagogues visited were **Congregation Ahawas Achim B'nai Jacob and David** in West Orange, NJ, **Young Israel of Scarsdale**, NY and **Congregation Ohab Zedek**, NY where he was Scholar-in-Residence. Rabbi Altshul was warmly received by all the communities he visited and heartened by the interest expressed in supporting the Machon's programs – especially the **doctoral programs** and **Reshit**, an initiative that promotes Jewish learning among non-religious Israelis.

Rabbi Altshul was in Los Angeles twice this year, where he served as a Scholar-in-Residence at **Kehillat Yavneh in Hancock Park**, visited **Bnai David-Judea** Congregation on Pico Boulevard and met with several private supporters. On one trip, he was joined by the Machon's

President, **Professor Daniel Sperber**, who was a weekend Scholar-in-Residence at the **Young Israel of Century City**, spoke at a well-attended reception in the Valley, and presented **Mrs. Blanca Roven Wintner** with his new book.

Rabbi Altshul comments, "I was really delighted to make it to Los Angeles. This represents the renewal of a terrific friendship, and it was wonderful to re-establish our visibility in the community and reconnect with so many of our supporters. My visits abroad impress upon me the importance of telling the Modern Orthodox world about the important work we are doing, preparing a new generation of leadership for Jewish communities in Israel and abroad."

Honoring Blanca

Professor Sperber and Rabbi Altshul visited **Blanca Roven Wintner** and her husband **Ernest Wintner** in their home in **Los Angeles**, where Prof. Sperber personally presented his new book, *The Jewish Life Cycle: Custom, Lore and Iconography*, to **Blanca Roven Wintner**, to whom the book is dedicated. They were joined by her son, Hollywood producer **Charles Roven** and BIU supporter **Liz Steinlauf**. Prof. Sperber explained that he had chosen to dedicate his book to Mrs. Roven Wintner because his ability to publish his work over the past two decades was due primarily to the support provided by his chair, the **Milan Roven Chair in Talmud**, which Blanca dedicated.



left to right: Ron Solomon, Exec. Director, West Coast Friends of BIU, Blanca Roven Wintner, Prof. Daniel Sperber, Charles Roven

Partnering with Columbia University

In June 2009, the Machon will join forces with **Columbia University's Center for Bioethics** to host a conference on **Applying DNA Technology to Halakhah**.

The three-day symposium will bring together medical, religious and academic scholars to discuss complex issues such as genetic testing of embryos, using DNA technology in criminal investigations, confidentiality of genetic information and gene patenting.

Dr. John Loike of Columbia University explains "Our goal is to introduce new biotechnologies to these professionals and provide the

forum for an interactive dialogue that tries to resolve issues raised by these new technologies."

After the conference a professional task force will synthesize the material presented and compose a set of guidelines for rabbinical leaders in Israel and the United States. These guidelines will be available online and the results ►

of the symposium will also be published in a special edition of the *Columbia University Journal of Bioethics*.

Rabbi Shimon Altshul, Director of the Machon, comments, "Our goal is not just to discuss bioethical issues in a theoretical way, but to seek active solutions that mesh with halakhah and our ethical traditions. As

a top-tier beit midrash integrated within a first-rate university, that's something we are uniquely qualified to do."

Rabbi Emanuel Rackman ז"ל, 1910-2008

The Machon mourns the loss of Rabbi Emanuel Rackman who died this past December at the age of 98, following a distinguished 70-year-long career in the rabbinate.



Rabbi Rackman, described by the New York Times as "an outspoken advocate of a more inclusive, intellectually open Orthodox Judaism" served as the President of Bar-Ilan University from 1977 to 1985 and as its Chancellor from 1986 to 1999, when he was appointed Chancellor Emeritus. Under his leadership, the University tripled the size of its student body and grew in stature as a prominent international Jewish academic institution.

Rabbi Rackman was a leader of Modern Orthodoxy in America and Israel, who served for decades as both a congregational rabbi and a professor of law. He was President of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), the New York Board of Rabbis, and Vice-President of the Religious Zionists of America (RZA) and authored many articles and books that expressed his forward-thinking approach, including *Israel's Emerging Constitution*, *One Man's Judaism*, and *Jewish Values for Modern Man*.

Rabbi Rackman advocated tirelessly for women's rights and social justice, and was especially concerned with the plight of *agunot* denied

halakhic divorces by their husbands. At the Machon, Rabbi Rackman was instrumental in establishing the **Graduate Program for Women in Law and Halakhah**, which trains female lawyers to work in family law in Israel's civil and religious courts and ensure the rights of Jewish women.

Prof. Daniel Sperber, President of the Machon, reminisced, "For Rabbi Rackman it was vital that halakhah reflect the basic ethical values of Judaism...He was adamantly opposed to unwarranted stringency in halakhic decision-making.

"This is a great loss to us all, and especially for the Machon, to whom he was such a good friend, staunch supporter and dedicated member of our Board of Governors, for he brought brightness to all who encircled him and to every framework in which he functioned."

Recent Publications

Ishah, Havah, Adam (Woman, Eve, Adam) edited by Aviva Sharbat is a collection of scholarly articles that examines Jewish views of woman's roles and rights in a contemporary context. Academic and rabbinic writers provide perspectives on public roles for women in Jewish communal life, Torah learning for women, changes to traditional family structures and more. Recommended for scholars and laymen alike. (Rubin Mass Publishers Ltd., Israel)

Tikshoret veYahadut (Communications and Judaism) edited by Dr. Tsurriel Rashi and Moti Zaft is a review of



the halakhic, sociological and theological issues raised by the interface between Judaism and the world of mass media – journalism, filmmaking, internet and the like. The book includes articles on topics such as media ethics and Jewish law, the relationship between Israel's ultra-Orthodox community and the mass media, and the role of the rabbi in the internet age. (Keter Zahav Publishing, Israel)

Helping Others Grieve

In November, Jerome and Sylvia Goldberg of Chicago dedicated a classroom in memory of their daughter, Myra Goldberg Hier. Myra died at age 43, leaving behind her parents, two sisters, a husband and two children, Benjamin Phillip and David Samuel Hier. The classroom will be used for education in Bereavement Counseling, which is taught as part of the Machon's Rakowitz Program for Communal Rabbis in Israel.

Sandra Goldberg Sirkin and her husband Jeffrey Sirkin flew to Israel in order to attend the dedication and Sandra explained the significance it had for her family: "Myra was a learning disability educator. Education, particularly Jewish education, was very important to her. My parents witnessed the distress that Myra's sons experienced during her illness and subsequent death. They decided that because there are so many children in Israel who experience distress from the loss of a parent or significant other, this would be the ideal place to establish a program to teach rabbis how to provide counseling for the grieving."

The classes in bereavement counseling are run as a workshop for couples — rabbis and wives preparing for communal roles. They meet with psychologists and rabbis who share their own professional experiences and discuss strategies for helping grieving individuals, both



Rabbi Shimon Altshul and Sandra Goldberg Sirkin uncover the plaque on the newly dedicated classroom

spiritually and physically. Rabbi Yehuda Altshuler, Director of the Rakowitz Program comments, "When there's a death in the family, often rabbis are the first ones on the scene. They need to be spiritual advisers, psychologists and social workers all rolled into one, but up until now Israeli rabbis have not been trained to fulfill all these roles. The workshops taking place in this classroom will change that. We are honored that the Goldberg family has chosen Bar-Ilan as the vehicle to memorialize their precious daughter, and hope that the classes given here will help many other grieving families come to terms with their losses."

Reaching Out to Others

"One of the most important things we teach at the Machon is that Jewish learning does not take place in a vacuum. It must always be accompanied by engagement with others, and especially those in need." To this end, Kobi Pitusi, Machon Administrator, organizes many volunteering initiatives that Machon students participate in over the course of the year. A sampling of this past year's activities:

- Machon students visit hospitalized young children during holidays and cheer them with songs and games.
- During Operation Cast Lead, Machon students and staff collected toys and treats for children living under the constant threat of shelling on Israel's southern borders. They visited community centers and shelters in Ofakim and Netivot, providing fun activities and games wherever they went.
- Students of the Machon run programs in the university for children from disadvantaged homes and academically weak schools. The fun, educational activities teach kids Jewish concepts, but their main purpose is to introduce the children to the university and encourage them to consider higher education and personal advancement as a real possibility for themselves.



The oncology ward at Schneider Children's Hospital



In a bomb shelter in the Negev

Scholars

Outstanding Scholars

The Machon's new post-doctoral program enables a select group of truly outstanding scholars to further develop their leadership skills and publish in their fields. Post-docs are also required to spend time teaching at the Machon. Below, a rundown of this year's exceptional post-docs:



Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Glicksberg has an M.A. in Jewish History, a Ph.D. in Jewish Law and is the Rabbi of Nitzanim Synagogue in Baka, Jerusalem. He teaches Jewish history in several institutions of higher learning, and Jewish studies in Bar-Ilan. Last year, he published a book in conjunction with fellow post-doc Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Kasirer on rabbinic law, the source of its authority and its limitations, and the two are currently at work on another book.



Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Kasirer has a B.A. in education, an M.A. in Jewish history and a Ph.D. in Jewish Philosophy, as well as rabbinic ordination. Last year, he published a book in conjunction with fellow post-doc Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Glicksberg and the two are now collaborating on a second book that examines various approaches to halakhic decision-making.



Rabbi Dr. Amir Mashiach is a former member of Israel's General Security Services (the "Shabak") who has acquired degrees in law, education and Jewish philosophy, as well as rabbinical ordination. He is currently teaching Jewish philosophy and thought in several institutions of higher learning, serving as a communal rabbi in Petah Tikva and researching philosophies of halakhah in the modern era.



Rabbi Dr. Daniel Nikritin has rabbinical ordination and degrees in psychology and couples therapy. He also holds a doctorate in literature, on the art of Talmudic storytelling, and teaches in a high school program for exceptional students. He is currently investigating the importance of emotional and psychological states in the determination of halakhah.



Dr. Ahron Orenstein holds three degrees in law and jurisprudence from Bar-Ilan University and has worked as a lawyer for several years. He is currently researching and writing on torts in Jewish law.



Dr. Tsurriel Rashi is the Head of the Department of Mass Communications at Lifshitz College of Education in Jerusalem and a lecturer in the Department of Political Studies at Bar-Ilan University (Communications Program). He was recently appointed by Israel's Ministry of Education to develop curricula in communication studies for all Israeli high schools. He edited a book on Judaism and communications and is currently researching the expression of ethical concepts in Jewish sources.

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