

Spring 5766/2006

Edge

The cutting News from the Machon Gavoha L'Torah

In God's Image

The Machon Gavoha L'Torah at Bar-Ilan and Columbia University co-sponsored a hugely successful bioethics conference in September called "Creating in God's Image: Ethical Challenges in Stem Cell Research and In Vitro Fertilization". The conference was the first-ever of its kind, bringing together leading academics and halachic experts to find solutions to ethical issues posed by recent developments in stem cell research and assisted reproductive technologies, in the light of Jewish ethics and law. It also brought together a host of prominent Jewish organizations

as sponsors, including the Yavne Founders, Yeshiva University, the Orthodox Union (OU) and the Jewish Press.

At the conference, three hundred scientists, physicians, rabbis, bioethicists, philosophers and students grappled with questions such as: Should women donate their eggs for stem cell research? Can a woman undergoing IVF take hormone injections or harvest her eggs on the Sabbath? Is it ethical to screen



("In God's Image" continued from front page)

embryonic implants for sex selection and not just for genetic diseases like Tay Sachs or cystic fibrosis?

Participants didn't only discuss different aspects of these complex issues, they tried to come up with viable solutions. For example, after discussion, the majority of rabbis present opined that obtaining embryonic stem cells from pre-implanted embryos less than 40 days old does not violate Jewish law, even if the embryo is destroyed afterwards, because the young embryo is not sufficiently developed to be recognized as human in Jewish law. Thus, it would be acceptable for women to donate their oocytes for stem cell research.

Nadav Kidron, Director General of the Institute of Advanced Torah Studies, says, "The conference was an international meeting of minds, of the kind that will hopefully become a model for analyzing all kinds of scientific-ethical dilemmas in the 21st century. It opened up a lot of avenues for further exploration, and I sincerely hope this will become a regular event, because in this way we can resolve so many major issues."

Economics & Jewish Law

The Machon continues to spearhead exploration of the interface between modern life and Jewish law.

In January, the Machon held a conference, co-sponsored by BIU's Business School and the Yavne Founders, on modern banking practices and halachah.

In his introductory words, Prof. Daniel Sperber, President of the Machon, spoke of the complexities of SRI, Socially Responsible Investment, in modern financial markets. The opening lecture was given by General (ret.) Uzi Dayan, former head of the National Security Council. He discussed the need to radically rethink the nation's economic priorities. Dayan Avraham Sherman, of the Supreme Rabbinic Court of Israel, analyzed the halachic complexities involved when Israeli public institutions make use of *heter iska*, the legal mechanism which enables Jews to earn interest.

Rabbi Dr. Asher Meir, research director of the Business Ethics Center of Jerusalem, spoke about the need to reform bankruptcy laws in Israel. "Unlike many comparably advanced countries, in Israel it's almost impossible to declare personal bankruptcy – which is ironic, since the whole idea of giving people

a chance to wipe out their debts and start again comes from the Torah, from the biblical laws of the sabbatical and jubilee years." Rabbi Dr. Meir showed how Jewishly-inspired legislation could allow debtors to recover without harming the economy.

Experts further analyzed topics such as Israel's current fiscal policies in



From left to right: Prof. Ben-Zion Zilberfarb, Director of The Aharon Meir Banking Center, Rabbi Shlomo Shefer, Campus Rabbi of BIU, Prof. Yoel Guttman, BIU Economics Dept., Dayan Avraham Sherman of the Supreme Rabbinic Court of Israel

light of Talmudic attitudes to socio-economic planning, the approach of Islamic courts in Europe to interest-taking and mortgages, and the halachic repercussions of automated banking systems.

New

A New Look for the Midrasha

In the past fifteen years, enrollment at the Midrasha for Women has gone up by 50%, from 600 to 900. As a result, the Machon has been striving to improve the facilities of the Midrasha to accommodate the large numbers of students who pass through every year. This year, in addition to dedicating the beautiful new Zambrowsky Board Room and Library, the Midrasha built an airy student lounge that includes a private corner for nursing mothers.



Rabbi Dr. Yitzchak Kraus, Dean of the Midrasha, explains, "At the Midrasha, we don't see motherhood and Torah learning as mutually exclusive, as an either-or proposition. Our goal is to help young women combine their roles as mothers and students with ease."

Couples Counseling

"We had no idea how great the demand was until now," says Rebbetzin Batsheva Roth. Roth, who coordinates the Midrasha's program to train bridal counselors, recently organized two series of lectures on intimacy and sexual functioning from the Jewish perspective. The lectures were co-sponsored by the Bar-Ilan School of Social Work. Bridal counselors from across the country were invited, as well as rabbis, social workers and others who regularly counsel religious couples.

The purpose: to acquaint participants with new therapies and techniques of which they might not have been aware.

"We did this to raise the consciousness of the counselors, but it also raised our awareness of the needs out there," says Rebbetzin Roth. "Based on people's responses, we're now planning more such events, as well as looking for ways to improve education in family issues for young men and grooms."

Student Profile: Amir Mashiach

At the age of 36, Amir Mashiach has accomplished more than many people do in a lifetime – and he's not done yet. Amir, who began his life in the development town of Afula, followed his religious high school and outstanding army combat career with several years of work in Israel's General Security Services (the Shabak, as it's known in Israel). While serving in the GSS, Amir simultaneously pursued a law degree at Bar-Ilan University.

Then Amir made a career change: "I realized that my Judaism and the Jewish community were so important to me that I wanted to work in something that would give expression to that in my day-to-day life."



Amir joined the Torah MiTzion Kollel in Chicago, and spent two years teaching Torah in the community and obtaining a teaching degree. He then returned to Israel to begin a Master's degree in Jewish philosophy and study for rabbinical ordination (*semicha*) at the Machon in Bar-Ilan. Today, Amir is working on his PhD in Jewish philosophy. He recently passed his tests for ordination and is completing his coursework at the Rakowitz Center for the Community Rabbinate

in Israel, a program that develops practical rabbinic skills. This month, he assumes the position of communal rabbi at the Young Israel of Ramot, Jerusalem. Not surprisingly, Amir is a recipient of the Bar-Ilan Presidential Scholarship of Excellence, sponsored by Dan and Ilana Benson.

"I chose the Machon because it had something that I couldn't find anywhere else – incredibly knowledgeable rabbis in a *beit midrash* that is both geographically and intellectually

close to the world of academia. It's a winning combination – rabbis who are open to difficult questions and to modern research, just across the street from the philosophy classroom. In addition, the Rakowitz Center has prepared me for practical rabbinics in multiple ways. I've learned from psychologists how to more effectively deal with troubled youth, from experts in public speaking how to give speeches that are interesting and organized, and from mediation experts how I can help married couples. I've also learned from more experienced rabbis

how to deal with business conflicts between congregants and how to deal with difficult halachic problems in a 'client-friendly' fashion. I don't think I could have gotten all this anywhere else in the world."

Dedicated Roven Library Dedicated

Blanca Roven Wintner, honorary President of the West Coast Friends of Bar-Ilan University, recently dedicated, together with her son Charles, the beautifully remodeled Milan and Blanca Roven Library. The library is in everlasting tribute to Blanca's late husband Milan Roven, z"l, and Blanca's dear son, Fred, z"l, who passed away tragically some years ago. The project was based on the personal recommendation of Bar-Ilan's esteemed Chancellor, Rabbi Emanuel Rackman.



Chancellor Rabbi Emanuel Rackman and Mrs. Blanca Roven Wintner

Mrs. Roven Wintner has endowed the Milan Roven Chair in Talmud as a memorial to Milan, z"l, who was a scholar and Zionist leader. The incumbent of the Roven Chair is Prof. Daniel Sperber, current President of the Machon Gavoha L'Torah.

Hachnasat Sefer Torah



On September 28, 2005, Meir and Aviva Blum of Tel Aviv donated a **Sefer Torah** to the Machon in memory of their parents who perished in the Holocaust. Rav Yisrael Meir Lau, Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv and former Chief Rabbi of Israel, and Rav Yaakov Ariel, Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan, both spoke at the event, as did Rav Aharon Katz, Head of the Beit

Midrash. After the final letters of the Sefer Torah were written, the new scroll was accompanied to the *beit midrash* with much singing and dancing, and a festive banquet completed the celebrations.

Thanks

Special Thanks to...

Mr. & Mrs. Norman Sternthal • For their continuing support

Blanca Roven Wintner & Charles Roven • Refurbishing and upgrading of the Milan and Blanca Roven Midrasha Library and its courtyard

Bonami Foundation • Scholarship endowment in memory of David Bonami z"l

Jesselson Family • Scholarships for the Metivta Program at the Midrasha

Rabbi & Mrs. Karpol Bender • Dedication of the Board Room and Library, in memory of Rabbi and Mrs. Zemach Zambrowsky zt"l, in the Midrasha

Rabbi & Mrs. Jacob Friedman • Rosh HaYeshivah Classroom at the Beit Midrash, in memory of their family who perished during the Holocaust

Eli & Greta Hirmes • Major classroom at the Midrasha, in memory of Bessie & William H. Cohen z"l

Strauss Foundation, through its Chairman, Mr. Pinchas Spielman • Scholarships

Anonymous • Support for 8 Doctoral students

Dr. & Mrs. Irving Moskowitz • Support for 8 Doctoral students

Blum Family • A Sefer Torah in memory of parents perished in the Holocaust

Anonymous • Dedication of a Torah publication

J. Samuel Harwit & Manya H. Aviv, z"l, Charitable Trust • Support for two Doctoral students

Dan & Ilana Benson • Support for a Doctoral student

Dr. & Mrs. Ron Nagel and Mr. & Mrs. David Nagel • Support for a Doctoral student

Mr. & Mrs. David Friedman / Mark Friedman / Naomi Wolens • Support for a Doctoral student

Mr. & Mrs. Alain Cytron • Support for a Doctoral student

Shlomo & Sheila Melkman • Support for a Doctoral student

The Robert Sillins Family Foundation • Support for a Doctoral student

Jack & Dr. Gitty Bendheim • Support for a Doctoral student

Mr. & Mrs. Steve Gelles and Friends from Westchester, NY • Support for a Doctoral student

Sutton Family • Support for the Machon

Wagner Family • Endowment of a computer in the Midrasha Library, in memory of Mr. & Mrs. Julius Bienefeld z"l and Mr. & Mrs. Efraim Wagner z"l

Mr. & Mrs. Eduard Cohen • Scholarship

Stephen & Judith Margulies • Beit Midrash table in honor of their son Ezra's bar mitzvah



About the Machon

The Machon

Gavoha L'Torah, known as The Ludwig and Erica Jesselson Institute for Advanced Torah Studies, was founded in 1972 and is the spiritual and physical center of Bar-Ilan University.

The Machon consists of two parts, the Beit Midrash (*kollel*) for men and the Midrasha for Women.

Every week at the Machon, over 1200 Beit Midrash and Midrasha students devote between 10-25 hours to *Torah lishmah*, Torah study for its own sake, in addition to their full academic course load.

In the 34 years since it began, the Machon has produced thousands of graduates who combine top-notch academic degrees with the highest levels of Torah learning. **Machon alumni impact every day on Jewish life in Israel and the Diaspora.**

המכון הגבוה לתורה ע"ש לודביג ד"ר ואריקה יסלון (ע"ר)

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