

# The Graduate School

## Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies



### Numbers 2008-09

- 553 students
- 71 faculty members
- 14 interdisciplinary M.A. tracks in Jewish Studies
- 74 graduates in 2008 for a total of 914 graduates since 1988
- 15 books published by Schechter or Schechter faculty
- 12 academic conferences sponsored or co-sponsored

### Academic News

**FOCUS ON: Accreditation**  
Schechter received final recognition as an Israeli academic institution from the Council for Higher Education in Israel. This recognition facilitates the further growth of our Institution.

**Growth:** Schechter runs the largest M.A. program in Jewish Studies in Israel with 553 students, coming from over 150 cities and towns throughout Israel

**Growth:** Number of students registered for 2009-10 academic year is 25% higher than the figure recorded at the same time last year

**New Track:** Hebrew and Jewish Literature, the 15<sup>th</sup> M.A. track at Schechter, will be offered to students in 2009-10

**Library Acquisitions:** The Aryeh Gini Collection of Books on Jerusalem and the Land of Israel ■ The Library of Rabbi Buddy Sachs z"l totalling 8,000 volumes

**Alumni:** Alumni newsletter published twice a year; 1<sup>st</sup> Alumni Conference held at Schechter in December 2008 with lectures on Tu B'shvat and ecology, 60 graduates in attendance; alumni instrumental in establishing Legacy Learning Communities (see profiles p.9 and p.23)

**Strategic Partnerships:** Schechter is pursuing ties with Yaakov Herzog Center, Ministry of Tourism Tour Guide Department and other government offices for student recruitment

**FOCUS ON: Handmade Midrash in the Artist's Home** staged an impressive art exhibit at Schechter in January 2009. Twelve students, together with their mentor and teacher, **Dr. Jo Milgrom**, created works that visually depicted their personal dialogue with Biblical sources.

### Faculty News

#### ■ Kekst Faculty Fellowship

**Dr. Shula Laderman** concluded her two-year tenure as Kekst Fellow, which allowed her to prepare *God's Blueprint of Creation* for publication with E.J. Brill, Leiden. The new Kekst Fellow for 2009-11 will be **Prof. Guy Miron**, Associate Prof. of Modern Jewish History at Schechter.

■ **Batsheva Margalit-Stern**, Senior Lecturer in Land of Israel Studies and Women's Studies, won Haifa University's highly coveted Hecht Prize in 2009 for her book *Redemption in Bondage: The Women Workers' Movement in Eretz Israel, 1920-1939*, co-published by the Schechter Institute and Yad Ben Tzvi.

■ **Prof. David Golinkin** was asked to serve on the Academic Council of the World Union of Jewish Studies.

■ **Prof. Renée Levine Melamed** was appointed Dean of the Graduate School.

■ **Prof. Alice Shalvi** received an Honorary Fellowship from the Open University.

■ **Dr. Pinchas Mandel** and **Dr. Tamar Kadari**, both lecturers in Midrash at Schechter, received prestigious Israel Science Foundation (four-year) grants for their research on *Eichah Rabbah* and *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*, which will be published by Schechter's Midrash Project.

■ **Dr. Brenda Bacon** and **Dr. Ari Ackerman** were elected members of the executive committee of the Israeli Association for Research in Jewish Education.

■ **Prof. Yossi Turner** was promoted from Senior Lecturer to Associate Professor.

■ **Dr. Yair Paz** was promoted from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer in Land of Israel Studies.

■ **Dr. Doron Bar** was appointed Advisor to the Land of Israel Studies Track.

■ **Dr. Paul Shrell Fox** was appointed Advisor to the Jewish Women's Studies Track.

Chair of the Board **Robert S. Rifkind** | President **Prof. David Golinkin**  
 Chair of the Executive Committee **Ya'akov Tsur** | Dean **Prof. Renée Levine Melammed**  
 Vice President for Finance and Administration **Liat Citron**  
 Vice President for Development **Eitan Cooper**



**FOCUS ON: The Marc and Henia Liebhaber Prize for Religious Tolerance in Israel** was awarded to veteran Jewish educator, **Muki Tsur**, at a ceremony held in Jerusalem on December 4, 2008. Muki Tsur is an educator, writer and historian whose work has been directed at bridging the fault-lines of religious polarization threatening Israeli society. The next prize in 2009 will be shared by singer **Shlomo Gronich** and radio personality **Jackie Levy** who bring Israelis together through song and comedy.

## Scholarship News

**The Judge Simon Rifkind and Harry Meresman Scholarships for Academic Excellence** were awarded to ten deserving graduates at the Schechter Commencement Exercises in December 2008.

**Prof. Alice Shalvi Scholarships for Outstanding Students in Gender Studies and Judaism and the Arts** were awarded to three top students in the field, also at the graduation ceremony.

**The Sidney Frank Foundation Scholarships in Women's and Gender Studies** were awarded to two exceptional students in the field.

**The Grinspoon Scholarships for M.A. Students in the TALI Leadership Program** were conferred on 10 TALI teachers and principals of outstanding merit.

**Scholarships for Students from Development Towns and Underprivileged Neighborhoods** allowed 56 students to study at Schechter in 2008-09. Among these students are six from the Ethiopian community and two first-year Russian-speaking students who joined the M.A. program through Midreshet Yerushalayim.

### We Remember

**William (Bill) Davidson z"l (1922-2009)**, a passionate believer in Jewish Education in Israel and the Diaspora, who created a scholarship fund for first-year graduate students in 2002 which enabled close to 1000 Davidson Scholarship recipients to earn degrees in Jewish studies at the Schechter Institute. He will be sorely missed by the entire Schechter community.

## Research Institutes

**The Institute of Applied Halakhah** continues to publish a library of Halakhic literature in Hebrew, English, and Russian for Jews throughout the world. It has published 24 volumes of scholarly research.

1. Robert Rifkind congratulates Neta Goldman on receiving a Rifkind-Meresman Scholarship  
 2. Schechter Library  
 3. Artwork by M.A. student Roni Gur from Handmade Midrash Exhibit  
 4. Dr. Shula Laderman and Prof. Shmuel Glick  
 5. Graduates of Interdisciplinary Jewish Studies M.A. track with advisor Dr. George Savran (left)  
 6. Prof. David Golinkin (left) and Ya'akov Tsur present Muki Tsur (center) with Liebhaber Prize  
 7. Newly elected Dean, Prof. Renée Levine Melammed  
 8. M.A. student in Family and Community Studies track with advisor Dr. Paul Shrell-Fox (left).

**The Center for Judaism and the Arts** was established in 2001 for the enrichment of educational and cultural life in Israel and includes the M.A. track in Judaism and the Arts and TALI's *Visual Midrash Electronic Archive* which will go online in September 2009.

**The Center for Women in Jewish Law** was established in 1999 in order to enable women rabbis to research, publish and educate the public on the rights of women from the perspective of Jewish Law. Its publications include *Jewish Law Watch*; *Za'akat Dalot (The Cry of the Wretched): Halakhic Solutions for the Agunot of our Time*; *To Learn and To Teach*; and *Ask the Rabbi*, a collection of responsa culled from the *Ask the Rabbi* website.

# Graduate School Bridge-Builders



## The Builder

Aharale Rotstein, 59, Principal, Shaar HaNegev High School, adjoins the town of Sderot, in Israel's western Negev; grew up in Tel Aviv, but settled on Kibbutz Mefalsim, where he lives today; Class of '94 – Schechter Institute's first graduating class.

## The Blueprint

**"Israel's major crisis is not between the political 'left' and 'right,' but rather of identity. We can no longer afford to cop out - using Orthodoxy as our proxy. Every year, I see myself turning more and more to my Jewish roots for answers. This philosophy guides the spirit of my school as well."**

## The Bridge

Aharale joined the Schechter M.A. program at its inception in 1990. Together with four other students, all of them teachers, they learned at Schechter. He studied one day a week in Jerusalem and the rest of the week worked in the kibbutz dairy barn. "Once I got to Schechter, I knew that I wanted a life in education," remembers Aharale. The same year that he received his M.A. he became principal of the Shaar HaNegev secular public high school.

Fifteen years later, Aharale is in full command at the school which today serves more than 1000 students. "I have succeeded in my role as educator if by the end of their high school studies, my students have learned to ask themselves 'who am I?' and 'why am I here?'" His educational approach was always firmly grounded in the values of Zionism and universalism, but with the passing of time, Aharale feels ever more strongly about the role Judaism must play in his students' lives.

## The Builder

Benjamin Cohen, 44, Director, Sderot Cinematheque, Schechter Class of '08. The Cohen's first sabra, Benny comes from a family of nine siblings that immigrated from Morocco in 1962. His three children were all born in Sderot, making them the third generation of Cohens to live in Sderot.

## The Blueprint

**"Schechter showed me the 'aesthetic' in Judaism. Our sages depicted both an inner and outer splendor in mankind. Exposing this beauty guides me in all programming that emanates from the Cinematheque."**

## The Bridge

At the helm of the Sderot Cinematheque since 2005, Benny Cohen sees his job as a mission, especially in a place like Sderot, a development town in Israel's western Negev that has been the target of missile fire from Gaza for the past eight years. "Throughout this entire war of attrition, we never once closed our doors. One of our two movie halls serves also as a bomb shelter. We screened movies from morning 'til night, providing 'shelter' both literally and figuratively for the residents of Sderot."

Graduating from Schechter in 2008 with a specialization in Judaism and the Arts, Cohen has taken the power of the cinema and transformed it into a tool for community education and social action. "We are a bridge for the diverse populations of Sderot and the outlying areas: religious, secular, city folk, kibbutznik and moshavnik, the economically weak and strong." Cohen, who grew up in a religious home, is intrigued with the notion of Jewish culture and its place in Israeli society. He has built a number of innovative programs that mesh the study of Jewish texts with film. "The 'silver screen' is the great equalizer, allowing us to break down stereotypes and create avenues of dialogue."





### The Builder

**Roni Gur**, 32, teacher of art and dance; writer of a children's column on the Arts for Israeli daily *Makor Rishon*; grew up in a religious Zionist home in Haifa; splits her time between Haifa where she teaches and Jerusalem where she studies at Schechter.

### The Blueprint

**"I teach art in the morning, dance in the afternoon and write at night. As a religious woman drawn to the arts, all my life I have heard that I will have to make compromises. At Schechter, I learned that Judaism also speaks in the 'voice of the woman', and this dialogue allows for self-expression within the bounds of Jewish law."**

### The Bridge

Roni teaches young women subjects that are not the standard fare for a religious girls' high school. The issues of "modesty" and "graven images" resonate with age-old taboos within her community. But her studies at Schechter have empowered her both professionally and personally. "I'm not only a teacher, but I am a religious woman who serves as an example to my students. Together, through art, we deal with extremely sensitive issues that touch upon social norms, sexuality, family relations and more."

Roni is majoring in Jewish Women's Studies. "Up until now, I was not accustomed to having teachers ask me what I think. At Schechter, we grapple with real issues that strike at the essence of who we are. I take this same courage and openness back to my students, showing them that it is not only permissible to think and to question, but it is mandatory if we want to contribute to our society as women and as artists."

### The Builder

**Dr. Mirik Gerzi**, 61, teacher of Judaism, Oholo College, near the Sea of Galilee; has lived her whole life in the Jezreel Valley's Kibbutz Bet Hashita where her parents were founding members. She graduated with the first Schechter M.A. class in 1994 and returned to Schechter between 1996 and 2003 to complete a DHL on "Human Beauty in Rabbinic Literature."

### The Blueprint

**"The sacred books are an essential part of Jewish culture and my roots. But I believe that the Torah was written by Man, not God. I think it is important for a Jew to be familiar with his literary and cultural heritage in the same way that an Englishman connects to Shakespeare."**

### The Bridge

Mirik Gerzi has been involved in Jewish education for over twenty years, first as a Jewish studies teacher in the kibbutz high school and most recently as a college lecturer. She notes a change in the attitude of young Israelis toward Judaism. "Young people today are more open and eager to learn about the Jewish sources and heritage. Their parents and especially their grandparents were more concerned with building the 'new Jew' which rejected traditional Jewish life.

Mirik has established a Bet Midrash learning community on kibbutz. "The kibbutz move toward privatization powered a new need to search for Jewish roots. The collective dining hall gave way to the intimacy of the home and a return to the family as the basic social unit. Within this atmosphere, Shabbat, the Pesach Seder and Chanukah candle-lighting take on new meaning for the individual."

"I enjoyed Schechter because it brought an approach to religion that accepted rationality, modernity and aspired to gender equality."

