

IDF Chief's First Visit Here

He had been invited by the National Security Studies Center and the Chaikin Chair in Geostrategy in mid-January to deliver an address on Israel's security situation to a packed Hecht Auditorium. First, though, Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz wanted his first visit to the University to start with greeting the soldier-students participating in the special degree programs that the University offers in cooperation with the defense establishment. These are the Havatzlot project for select members of the Intelligent Corps, the Naval program, and the Tactical Command College for officers.

The object of these different programs is not just or only to supply factual knowledge. As Prof. Gabriel Ben-Dor, Head of the University's NSSC, put it: "The benefit [of these programs] is the method, and I am happy that the army has understood this." He was referring to the attempt to develop analytical thinking among these particular students.



University Rector Prof. Yossi Ben-Artzi told Halutz, who is the first air force pilot to become IDF chief of staff, that these prestigious programs, in addition to the academic side of the National Security College for higher level officers, were part of the University's social responsibility commitment. "The training of an Israeli leadership in various areas – local authorities, education, and the army – is part of this," he said. "On our campus, the officers also meet a student body that is a reflection of the real diversity of Israeli society."

In his talk, Halutz concentrated on defining "national security." He preferred the term "national strength," which he sees as a triangle of security strength, economic strength, and social strength. He also said that Israel's strategic situation was better than ever, but remained cautious, refusing to predict the future.

One of the most worrisome trends that the IDF Chief of Staff did see for Israeli society was the "poisonous handful" instigating the violent protest against leaving parts of Hebron and other areas of Judea and Samaria that the government wants to evacuate. "We cannot close our eyes to this trend," he warned in his far-reaching talk. "Otherwise it will bring us to where we do not want to be." He was referring to what is being called the battle of Judea and Israel, or settlers actively fighting the IDF.

Dear Friends,

Tu B'Shvat is the festival that most visibly demonstrates the Jewish people's link to Eretz Israel. It is the festival of nature's renewal and rejuvenation, symbolizing the notion of responsibility, to the society, in the tradition of planting trees for the benefit of future generations.

The first edition of our University Newsletter brings together all that Tu B'Shvat stands for. It is a new endeavor that we hope will bring us all together, in shared responsibility, to promote higher education in Israel and to support the rejuvenation and strengthening of Israeli society.

Both President Aaron Ben-Ze'ev and I are looking forward to meeting you once a month via this Newsletter. We will be glad to hear your comments and to learn from your experience.



Prof. Ada Spitzer

Vice President



Iran, he said, represented a threat if it continued its present nuclear policy. Although he said that "we have to take threats (to Israel) with full seriousness so as not to offer a temptation in the future," he also advised that "that the world had to act, not us alone."

He believed the countries of the world now knew that terrorism was a global, not just Palestinian, phenomenon. It was found on every continent, he pointed out, and in Asia in almost every country.

"It is characterized by world Jihad," he commented, "a conglomeration of groups fighting a culture, fighting a pattern of life, that of the West." For that reason, Halutz continued, "There must be international cooperation to fight world terrorism." He was confident that Israel would find many partners against any life-threatening situation.



Prof. Asher Koriat Is 2006 Rothschild Prize Winner

The international and national prizes keep building up for Israel Prize Laureate and University of Haifa Psychology Professor, Asher Koriat.

The most recent is the Rothschild Prize in the area of Social Sciences for 2006.

Koriat, who directs the University's Institute of Information Processing and Decision-Making, as well as its Max Wertheimer Minerva Institute for Cognitive Processing, is one of the world's foremost cognitive researchers. His experimental studies in the field have been in the forefront of scientific research.

University Rector Prof. Yossi Ben-Artzi noted that Koriat's innovative and thorough publications have left deep-seated contributions to the discipline of cognitive psychology.

East Asia Meets Near East

India's Ambassador to Israel Arun Kumar Singh concentrated on commerce. Japan's Ambassador, Jun Yokota, focused on tourism. The Ambassador of the Kazakhstan Republic, Kairat Abdrakhmanov, spotlighted oil. Their visits reflect the increasingly popularity of the University's East Asia Studies Department. University officials expressed interest in research and other academic ties with each of these countries. Each ambassador lectured to the department's students and fielded questions.



In 1992, when India opened its embassy in Israel, trade between the two countries amounted to \$2 million. Today, India's Ambassador Singh said, it stands at \$2.7 billion dollars – a 2,700-fold increase. He cited the opening of the Bank of India in Israel as an example of his country's readiness to invest here.

Japan's Ambassador Yokota (above, 2nd from r.) revealed that only 8,000 Japanese tourists visited Israel last year although this was a 60 percent increase over 2003. The reasons he cited for this lack of tourism: many Japanese consider Israel a dangerous place; tourists who come feel they are harassed at the airport; and a visa for a visiting businessman is a costly, time-consuming matter.

Kazakhstan's Ambassador Abdrakhmanov stated that his country expected to be one of the top ten world oil powers in ten years or even less. He held out the prospect of using Israel's Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline. Most of Israel's trade with his country involved oil, but there was increasing joint activity in other areas, such as space.

Meir Ezri, Israel's 1st Ambassador to Iran, Funds New Gulf Center

The height of the crisis over Iran's nuclear capability finds the University naming its newest research facility the Meir and Miriam Ezri Center for Iran and Gulf Studies. Ezri was Israel's first ambassador to Iran and a dominant figure in creating the special relationship between Israel and Iran during the reign of the Shah in the 1960s and 1970s.

Ezri's generous donation to the Center, headed by the world-renowned scholar Prof. Amatzia Baram, will foster research of Iranian-Israeli relations from the establishment of the State to the Islamic revolution in 1979. The Center will also investigate Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf emirates.

Center researchers are hopeful that the many documents to be collected in this area from all relevant archives around the world, especially those in Iran, will shed new light on key issues on the relations of the two states in the current period.

Acting director of the Ezri Center while Baram is on sabbatical in Washington and Australia is the University's former Rector and a noted Middle East historian, Prof. Gad Gilbar.

New Friends Board in Canada

The Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Friends of the University held in mid-January re-elected Bob Amsterdam, a Toronto lawyer, as President. Michael Davis of Toronto was named Chairman. Guy Bérard, Oliver Bush, Avraham Elarar, Juan Gutierrez, His Excellency Carlos Miranda of the Embassy of the Republic of Costa Rica, and Dory Tuvim were elected Directors.

University President Prof. Aaron Ben-Ze'ev and Vice-President Prof. Ada Spitzer attended the meeting, which also saw the establishment of a Young Leadership Division. The new young leadership body is organizing a contingent of young professionals for a Mission to the University. In addition, a gala dinner is being planned for next November. Ready to help with the Association's resurgence into the Canadian community are Hetty Shapiro, appointed National Executive Director and based in Toronto, and well-known author and journalist, Joe King, who continues as Executive Director of the Montréal office.



Canadian Friends' President Bob Amsterdam (l.) with University President Prof. Aaron Ben-Ze'ev



University Is Represented – In Iraq

Nearly 20 years ago, Robert Gersh and Susan Horowitz met and fell in love while at the University's Overseas Students Program. Now his wife, Susan wanted to surprise Robert for his birthday, which he would be celebrating this year in Iraq as a Contracting Officer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. What better surprise than a University of Haifa T-shirt to remind him of their fond memories on Mt. Carmel. Robert is also a Jewish Lay Leader for Camp Fallujah, where he works. Will the T-shirt he is showing off begin a new fashion trend in a very unlikely location?

University of Haifa Produces 'The World's Best Speaker'

A University of Haifa philosophy student, Anat Gelber, has earned the crown of the "world's best speaker"—in her case, in English as a Second Language (ESL). She gained the title at the world rhetorical championships held in Dublin in January.

Gelber, 25, had previously twice gained the designation of "best ESL speaker in Europe," in 2003 and 2005. A graduate student, she had honed her oratorical skills as a member of the University's Rhetorical Society for the past five years. This debating club, set up only eight years ago, is considered one of the most successful in Israel.

The "Demosthenes of Israel" admits she suffered from audience fear and couldn't talk for more than 20 seconds when she first started public speaking. "The training and the tough work in the framework of the club are what turned me into a champion," she remarked.

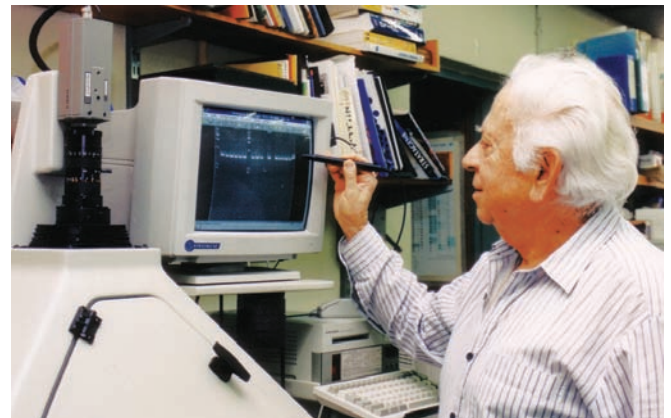


The debating club also gives rhetorical lessons to Haifa high schools and workshops to various groups. "We see debating as a prime educational tool in a country in which violence has become the central culture of discussion," Gelber said. "It is a tool that develops critical and analytical thinking, which are necessary skills for every high school pupil and every [college] student."

Researchers Identify Gene That Will Revolutionize Agriculture

Researchers from the Institute of Evolution, headed by Prof. Eviatar Nevo, have succeeded in isolating a gene that withstands salinity. This important discovery will make it possible to grow plants, including crops, in saline earth, a development that will contribute in the future to a true revolution in saline agriculture throughout the world.

"The research will contribute to a significant increase in the amount of arable land available for agriculture," said Nevo, who initiated and spearheaded this pioneering research. The highly significant discovery of international importance was published in mid-December 2005 in the prestigious Proceedings of the U. S. National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).



The researchers isolated the gene in a fungus that lives in the Dead Sea. "It helps [the fungus] defend itself against salinity," Nevo said, adding that this research and its future applications will help solve the problem of a scarcity of arable agricultural land. It will enable the development of agriculture in the Negev, in the area around the Dead Sea, and in other saline areas throughout the world. The Carmel-Haifa University Economic Corp. has filed for a patent on EhHog in the names of the researchers.

Thousands Flock to the Virtual Open House

More than 9,000 visited the University on its second virtual open house, which went on line in mid-January. Adopting the slogan "Take a trip to the University without leaving your armchair," the open house made the campus fully available to Internet surfers from 4 – 9 p.m. All by accessing the site <http://www.openday.haifa.ac.il>, and surfing to whatever interested the user. Prospective students were able to register. Staff answered questions online about courses, admission requirements, programs, activities, and the location of the nearest tennis court. The largest number of inquiries, 4,164, had to do with B.A. studies. University officials were surprised that 45% of all hits came from the Greater Tel Aviv area; 5% were from Jerusalem. Nor was the virtual visit limited to Israel; there were hits from the United States, Colombia in Central America, and even from China. As University President Aaron Ben-Ze'ev remarked about this open house, it enabled students to see how academic excellence and innovation go hand-in-hand with a personal approach at the University of Haifa.

Animating Two Birds with One Stone: The Open Apartments Project

Economically hard-pressed students need money for tuition and rent. Distressed neighborhoods need energetic and sympathetic assistance. The University's commitment to social responsibility has matched the two needs in an innovative program it calls "Open Apartments."

In return for 12 hours of working with residents of a particular neighborhood – whether as tutors for children, organizing activity circles for adults, setting a youth club, providing a shoulder to cry on – students receive a stipend, a rent-free apartment in the neighborhood, and living expenses.

The Open Apartments project, which is run out of the Dean of Students Office, is an unmediated channel of communication that the University has established with different communities. It began as a joint venture with the Haifa-Boston Partnership and a community center in one of Haifa's distressed neighborhoods. A measure of its success is reflected in the waiting list of neighborhoods and towns in the Haifa suburbs and even beyond that are eager to set up an Open Apartment.

Full of challenges

Alex Altshuler, a graduate student in the School of Social Work, defines the community where his Open Apartment is located as "full of challenges." No longer classified as a new immigrant from Russia, Alex looks upon the situation like this: "Just as there are a lot of socioeconomic problems in this neighborhood, so it also has a lot of forces. We have here a huge opportunity for making changes." He likes to tell how he and a fellow Open Apartment student came across a gang of youngsters, whom he persuaded to follow him to the structure that was meant to be a youth club. Two months after that accidental meeting, the clubhouse has an operating group theater, most of whose members were part of that original gang.

Kobi Filo, of Eilat, who studied Communication Disorders, put his finger on the project's effectiveness: "The fact that we live in the neighborhood is its strongest effect. You feel you are one of them a little more. Inside, you understand things that you can't understand from the outside."

His experience in working in the community led him to observe



that "they [the youngsters] see the University as a place that offers them a way out of the circle they are in. We symbolize a chance for them." He hinted at the time actually spent in community service when he said, "Living in the place leads to a high level of involvement in the life of the residents."

Rawan Bisharat, from the Arab town



of Yafia, recounts that she has spent 30 hours and more a week dealing with the private and community life of the people. Rawan, who studies Education and Sociology, said she has always wanted to work with children and youth. The project gives her an optimal combination of studies, aiding a community that interests her – a mixed Jewish-Arab neighborhood – and a needed stipend.

The dilemmas she encounters remind her at times of what troubled her when she was a young teenager. In light of the experience, she declares, "I have found my goal in life." Among the activities she initiated is a dual language community newspaper. She has taken her young charges to visit the University. Because of her, a group of Arab-speaking youngsters visit hospital patients from the Arab community and act as interlocutors for those who don't know Hebrew, in addition to bringing a little joy into their hospital stay.

Eran Bercovitz, a Psychology student, was the first Sabra, or native Israeli, to work with Russian immigrants in the Open Apartment framework. He had a chance to apply his study major when he succeeded in weaning a young teenager from an addiction to the Internet and sending him to an AA-like program to break computer dependence. The relationship he formed with the youth also helped in improving the boy's life.

Societal outlook

Perhaps it is natural that most student participants come from academic fields with a social or therapeutic bent. But not all of them, by any means. Lilach Bareket, a coordinator in the Dean of Students Office's Student Advancement Section, states that the main emphasis on finding Open Apartment candidates is on those who have a societal outlook, without stereotypes or prejudices, as well as a readiness to live in the neighborhoods in which they are to work.

Initially, she explained, it was thought that the students who lived in a particular neighborhood had to come from the ethnic group most represented there in order to provide a role model. This idea ran into problems almost from the start, in part because the participating students were at times themselves grappling with their traditions.

The students in the project represent all sectors of the University's pluralistic student body. They are active in various educational and welfare programs. They evince initiative. Indeed it is up to them to initiate and supply a range of activities that will respond to the needs that they identify.