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Australian Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Newsletter

Issue 69 Spring 2019

שנה טובה ומתוקה

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The Hebrew University – a tradition of innovation

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Hebrew U awards more PhDs than any other Israeli university in 2019

By David Israel

As part of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUJI)'s 82nd Board of Governors (BOG) meeting, 335 students were awarded PhD degrees, more than at any other academic institution in Israel.

The majority of new PhDs are in the Natural Sciences (72), Humanities (70) and Social Sciences (46) fields. Fifty-three percent of the recipients are men, and forty-seven percent are women. Last year, the University awarded 311 PhDs, with a peak 366 doctorates in 2012.

The graduates themselves span generations—the oldest is a 75-year-old completing a PhD in History, while the youngest is a 27-year-old completing a doctorate in Medicine.

In addition to the PhD degrees, HUJI awarded honorary degrees and academic prizes to several prominent individuals and researchers. These include an Honorary Doctor of Philosophy for retired Supreme Court Justice Miriam Naor, the Samuel Rothberg Prize for the founder of Efrat and the Ohr Torah Stone educational network Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin. The list also includes honorary degrees for Judea Pearl of the Daniel Pearl Foundation, for Germany's Axel Springer media magnate Friede Springer, for Avichai Foundation Chair Mem Bernstein, and Israeli writer Meir Shalev, among others.

In new vision for Hebrew University, all students will study entrepreneurship

By Shoshanna Solomon, The Times of Israel

Everyone in the workforce today needs to know how to be innovative, says the new managing director of the University's Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre

In Israel, which boasts the greatest number of startups per capita in the world, and sports the nickname Startup Nation, entrepreneurship courses have been sprouting at universities and colleges throughout the country to meet a grassroots demand. These programs aim to arm students with much needed theory along with a toolbox of mentorships, networking and tips on how best to approach investors for funding.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, however, now wants to make entrepreneurship part of the staple diet of all of its students — including historians, engineers and philosophers. "Our vision is that each and every student, from semester one in year one, will learn something about innovation," said Amnon Dekel, the newly appointed managing director of HUstart, the Hebrew University Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre, in an interview with The Times of Israel. "In this century, as you go forward in life, whether you work in tech or in services, you need to be innovative and an entrepreneur."

Appointed to the post in July, Dekel will lead Hebrew University's push to spearhead the development of technology from the huge amount of research within its ivory towers while at the same time helping the university become an integral part of Jerusalem's tech ecosystem.

"The Hebrew University had an image perhaps of an old, not progressive environment," he said. "I have met with our researchers at our labs, and there are seriously innovative world-changing technologies that are being developed. The researchers... were hungry to collaborate, they want to create more startups and take our technologies out into the world."

The university today has a critical mass of research in its pipeline. With the right channelling it can lead to "a huge explosion of things that can happen. The ground is fertile."

Innovation and entrepreneurship, Dekel said, are skills that can be learned, and because they entail being able to identify and solve problems, are needed by everyone in the workforce today.

The university plans to strengthen its curriculum with project-based learning, including courses and entrepreneur workshops. Those students who have developed an idea and want to take it forward, in any field, will be encouraged to join accelerator programs and may also get university funding for their initiatives. The highest level will see the student-entrepreneurs build companies within the university and then take them to the market.

"We are planning to set up a special student fund," Dekel said. "The idea is to encourage students to move from ideas to products."

(Photo: Getty Images)

Amnon Dekel, managing director of the Hebrew University Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre (HUstart)

The university is planning to reach out to philanthropists to finance its plans, he said.

The university's new management is on board with this change, Dekel said. President Asher Cohen took his post in September last year; Yishai Fraenkel, who served as VP of Intel Corp's New Technologies Group, was appointed as director general of the university in October 2017; and Yaron Daniely, who hails from the tech scene, was chosen last year to head Yissum, the technology transfer arm of the university that spearheads the commercialisation of technologies developed in the university.

"Universities have two major reasons to exist," said Dekel. The first aim is to create knowledge through research. The second is to "train people for life, enable graduates to be prepared for their professional lives."

So the challenge, he said, is to "open up any bottlenecks to enable the creativity that exists in all of our students, faculty and officials."

Success will be measured by the number of startups generated from the university, the success of graduates in their careers, and the level of interest students retain for their university studies.

"Higher education is going through disruption," Dekel said. Costs are too high for many, and online universities and alternative colleges and programming courses are becoming more appealing. "Many feel it is not always necessary to get a professional degree. By doing what we are doing, we create and provide more value for people."

"Universities must stay ahead of the curve," he said. In addition, because the tech industry is changing so fast, there needs to be "cross talk" between professional training and academic studies. "We want everyone on board," and no study area is irrelevant, he said.

In parallel, the university will be reaching out to the growing tech ecosystem in Jerusalem — both the industry and investors — and the public sector to see what pressing problems their researchers and students can address. It will also be reaching out to other schools, like the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, as well as other partners, to collaborate on interdisciplinary projects.

"We want HUJI to strengthen and be strengthened by the Jerusalem tech ecosystem," Dekel said. "We want to take our knowledge and create something greater."

Scientific breakthrough: the mechanism for gamma-ray bursts from space is decoded

The mechanism, published by Prof. Tsvi Piran of the Hebrew University and other researchers, was deciphered following an eruption observed last January, and describes how a stream of particles moving towards us at close to light speed emits the gamma radiation

Gamma-ray bursts, short and intense flushes of energetic radiation coming out from outer space, are the brightest explosions in the universe. As gamma-rays are blocked by the atmosphere the bursts were discovered accidentally in the late sixties by the Vela satellites, defense satellites sent to monitor man-made nuclear explosions in space.

Since their discovery the bursts have been at the focus of attention with several dedicated satellites launched to explore their origin. In the late nineties it was realized that long bursts (lasting more than a few seconds) arise during the death and collapse of massive stars while in the first decade of this century it was found that shorter bursts (lasting less than a few seconds) arise in neutron star mergers. This last realization was confirmed dramatically two years ago with simultaneous observations of gravitational waves by the gravitational wave detectors LIGO and Virgo and a short burst by two satellites, NASA's Fermi and ESA's intergral.

Still many mysteries involving these bursts remained, particularly puzzling was the question how the high energy radiation is produced. Last January a gamma-ray detector on board of NASA's Neil Gehrls Swift satellite detected GRB190114C, a bright burst that took place 4.5 billion years ago in a distant galaxy. Following a trigger from Swift, The MAGIC telescope, a Cherenkov detector at the Roque de los Muchachos observatory in La Palma, Spain slew towards the burst's location and detected extremely high energy photons (at TeV energies) coming from it. The ultra-high energy TeV photons, that were observed about 50 seconds after the prompt emission, in the so called "afterglow" phase, were at least 10 times more energetic than the highest energy photons detected previously from any burst.

By now only preliminary data of the MAGIC observations have been posted. Still, Prof. Evgeny Derishev from the

Gamma-ray bursts. (Photo: CREATIVE COMMONS)

Institute for Applied Physics in Nizhny Novogorod and Prof. Tsvi Piran from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem combined these data with observations of lower energy (X-ray) photons carried out by the Neil Gehrles Swift and have shown that they reveal the details of the emission mechanism. In a paper published in the Astrophysical Journal Letters the authors show that the observed radiation must have originated in a jet moving at 0.9999 of the speed of light towards us. The high energy radiation observed by MAGIC is was emitted by electrons accelerated to TeV energies within the jet. The emission process can also be identified, it is the so called "inverse Compton mechanism" in which ultra-high energy electrons collide with low-energy photons and boosts their energy. Remarkably the same relativistic electrons are also producing the low-energy "seed" photons via synchrotron radiation.

"MAGIC has found the Rosseta stone of gamma-ray bursts" says Prof. Piran. "This unique detection enables us for the first time to discriminate between different emission models and discover what the exact conditions in the explosion are. We can also understand now why such radiation wasn't observed in the past." Future Cherenkov telescopes such as the planned Cherenkov Telescope Array, a multinational project under construction will be much more sensitive than MAGIC. The current detection suggests that many other such events will be detected in the future and will continue to shed light on this cosmic mystery.

Not just images: Hebrew University's new MRI technique can "see" molecular changes in the brain

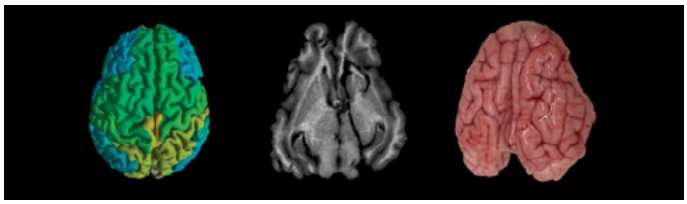
By David Israel

MRI's give us a picture of our body's insides—organs, bones, nerves and soft tissue. But what if MRI's could show us the molecular makeup of our body parts, and help doctors more quickly determine the onset of disease and begin treatment?

Study author—Hebrew University's Dr. Aviv Mezer. (Photo: Aviv Mezer)

In a paper published in Nature Communications, Professor Aviv Mezer and his team at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUJI)'s Edmond and Lily Safra Centre for Brain Sciences successfully transformed an MRI from a diagnostic camera that takes into a device that can record changes in the biological makeup of brain tissue. This is especially important for doctors looking to understand whether a patient is merely getting older or developing a neurodegenerative disease, such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's.

"Instead of images, our quantitative MRI model provides molecular information about the brain tissue we're studying. This could allow doctors to compare brain scans taken over time from the same patient, and to differentiate between healthy and diseased brain tissue, without resorting to invasive or dangerous procedures, such as brain tissue biopsies," explained Mezer.



From right to left: Pig's brain; standard MRI brain scan; new MRI scan showing differences in molecular makeup in different parts of the brain. (Photo: Shir Filo/Hebrew University)

The new MRI Technique provides users with a molecular map of different areas in the brain. (Photo: Shir Filo/Hebrew University)

External signs of aging are familiar to us: grey hair, a stooped spine, occasional memory loss. However, how do we know if a patient's brain is aging normally or developing a disease? The answer is found on the biological level. Both normal aging and neurodegenerative diseases create biological "footprints" in the brain, changing the lipid and protein content of brain tissue.

Whereas current MRI scans provide only pictures of the human brain, this new technique provides biological readouts of brain tissue—the ability to see what's going on, on a molecular level, and to direct a course of treatment accordingly. "When we take a blood test, it shows us the exact number of white blood cells in our body and whether that number is higher than normal due to illness. MRI scans provide images of the brain but don't show changes in the composition of the human brain, changes that could potentially differentiate normal aging from the beginnings of Alzheimer's or Parkinson's," shared PhD student Shir Filo who worked on the study.

Looking ahead, Mezer believes that the new MRI technique will also provide a crucial understanding into how our brains age, "when we scanned young and old patients' brains, we saw that different brain areas ages differently. For example, in some white-matter areas, there is a decrease in brain tissue volume, whereas in the grey-matter, tissue volume remains constant. However, we saw major changes in the molecular makeup of the grey matter in younger versus older subjects".

All this bodes well for patients. Not only will MRI's be able to distinguish molecular signs of normal aging from the early signs of disease. Patients will more likely receive correct diagnoses earlier, speeding up when they begin treatment and maintaining an improved quality of life longer, all via a non-invasive technique.

Staircase of ancient Canaanite palace discovered in northern Israel

By Judy Siegel-Itzkovich, Breaking Israel News Israel 365

"However, all those towns that are still standing on their mounds were not burned down by Yisrael; it was Hazor alone that Yehoshua burned down." Joshua 11:13 (The Israel Bible™)

A magnificent, well-preserved staircase built in a Canaanite palace about 3,500 years ago has been discovered by Hebrew University of Jerusalem archeologists in the 30th season of their excavations at Tel Hatzor National Park – a UNESCO World Heritage Site located east of the Rosh Pina Road near Kibbutz Ayelet Hashahar in northern Israel.

The biblical Hazor was perhaps the greatest of the cities of the Land of Israel in the Late Canaanite period.

The excavations are being conducted by leading researchers from the university's archeology institute, Israel Prize laureate Prof. Amnon Ben-Tor and Dr. Shlomit Bechar, his excavations partner in recent years. The palace that was uncovered in the digs is thought to have been destroyed in the fire that nearly obliterated Hatzor, whose destruction is mentioned in the Bible (the Book of Joshua 11:10-13) as part of the conquest of the land.

The staircase, on the northern slopes of the upper city and opposite the lower city "is unique and impressive and hints at the splendour that is expected to be exposed," the archeologists said. Parts of the palace have been exposed in previous seasons, while the staircase has not yet been completely revealed.

This year the work of exposing a magnificent staircase that led from the spacious paved courtyard to the inside of the palace was completed. This is an unprecedented staircase in the ancient Near East. So far, seven steps about 4.5 meters wide and consisting of basalt slabs specially meant for the building of stairs have been exposed. This staircase probably led to the main entrance to the palace itself. The walls of the palace that remained were more than two meters in height, with the rest destroyed in the great fire.

Ben-Tor and Bechar were joined by dozens of students and volunteers, including students from the Archeology Institute, a group of students from France and volunteers from England, Germany, Spain, the US, Canada, Finland, Australia, and China. Most of the volunteers have worked there in the past and returned for another round of excavations.

The digs are part of the Salz Foundation excavations at Hatzor in memory of the late archeologist Prof. Yigael Yadin, who led the first delegation to the site in 1955.

The first Tel Hazor excavations continued until 1958, then again between 1968 and 1970 and finally continued from 1990 under the supervision of Ben-Tor. Hatzor is considered the largest and most important of the archeological sites in Israel, and thus was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site, of which there are nine in this country.

Excavations at Tel Hatzor (Photo: John Rinks)

World Heritage Sites are cultural and/or natural sites considered to be of "Outstanding Universal Value," having special importance for everyone.

The most important artifacts found in the palace include Egyptian scarabs, some 40 huge storage vessels indicating large-scale storage capacity, many basalt vessels, raw materials related to the palace workshops and four royal inscriptions (three inscriptions in Egyptian hieroglyphs and one in Akkadian).

Among these inscriptions were two Egyptian statues discovered in recent years – a sphinx fragment of the Egyptian King Mykerinos (or Menkaure, who ruled Egypt around 2,500 BCE), which was the largest Egyptian royal statue ever discovered in the Levant. The second is a fragment of a statue of an Egyptian official named Nab-Po who existed in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom during the 18th and 19th centuries BCE, a period in which Hazor did not yet exist. This is the largest private Egyptian sculpture discovered in the Levant from the second millennium BCE.

In an additional part of the dig exposed this season were found the remains of the last Jewish city that was destroyed during by Tiglath-Pileser, King of Assyria (mentioned in the book of 2 Kings 15: 29-30). A considerable quantity of shattered pottery vessels provides archeological evidence of this destruction. In future digs, the team of archeologists is expected to reveal additional parts of the city's administrative palace.

Tel Hatzor can rightly be considered the "flagship" of the Hebrew University's excavations and of Israeli archeological digs in general.

The importance of the site is clear due to its conquest by the tribes of Israel (the battle between the cities of the north of the country under the leadership of Yavin king of Hatzor and the tribes of Israel under the leadership of Joshua). This led to the settlement of the tribes of Israel "in this land (Joshua 11:17).

Hatzor is a key site for examining the reliability of Biblical historiography. Written documentation and various artifacts attest to the fact that the city maintained cultural and commercial ties with both Egypt and Babylon. In addition, various artistic findings brought to Hatzor from near and far are evidence of this.

(Photo: Shutterstock.com)

This tech helps self-driving cars see well in all weather

By Brian Blum, Israel 21C

Israeli start up makes shortwave infrared cameras affordable for the autonomous vehicle market, potentially boosting road safety significantly.

When a self-driving Uber struck and killed a pedestrian in Tempe, Arizona in 2018, it marked the first time autonomous vehicle technology was involved in a fatality and set off warning bells across the nascent industry.

Industry insiders and concerned legislators asked: Are self-driving cars ready to be tested on real streets? How can the technology be improved to avoid devastating collisions?

Self-driving cars "see" through a variety of high-tech cameras and sensors attached to the vehicle. But even the best cameras can get tripped up in dark or inclement conditions.

Israeli startup TriEye is bringing to the consumer car market a dashboard-mounted SWIR (shortwave infrared) camera that can successfully navigate through snow, fog, dust and rain.

SWIR cameras have been around for several decades, deployed primarily in the military. "But they were too expensive to be used in mass-market applications," Ziv Livne, TriEye's VP of product and business development, tells ISRAEL21c.

TriEye's technology is based on 10 years of research conducted by Prof. Uriel Levy, head of the nano-photonic lab in the department of applied physics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Levy had been looking for ways to bring the price of SWIR cameras down by getting them to work using CMOS semiconductors. Those are the kinds of silicon chips used by most digital cameras today, rather than the much more expensive semiconductor technology – it's called InGaAs – powering most SWIR cameras.

What makes TriEye better than the competition? "We don't like to say we're better than this one or that one. All the sensors are important," Livne replies.

However, he continued, "For the problem we're solving – the low-visibility challenge – the sensors we have today don't get enough resolution and contrast and understanding of the scene to make reliable driving decisions."

That wasn't the problem in Tempe when that self-driving Uber killed Elaine Herzberg as she was pushing a bicycle across a four-lane highway. The weather was clear and visibility was fine.

Uber had deactivated the car's emergency braking system to make for a smoother ride, and the car's software – which noticed Herzberg a full six seconds before impact – malfunctioned and read her shape as benign. Even worse, the human "backup" driver was not watching the road.

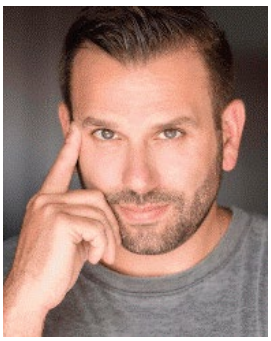
But it is true that low visibility and bad weather account for 21 percent of vehicle crashes in the US – a total of 1.2 million collisions per year. If TriEye can play a small part in bringing that number down, Livne will be satisfied.

"We like to wake up in the morning and feel like we're actually saving lives," he says. The company aims to release its product to the market by 2020.

Entrepreneur Ori Allon donates 1.2 million (NIS) to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for scholarships in computer science

By Tali Aronsky

The Hebrew University is expected to grant generous scholarships over the next two years to computer science students thanks to the contribution of entrepreneur Dr. Ori Allon



Ori Allon

A condition of the donation is that such scholarships will be distributed equally to female and male students (subject to the actual application numbers), in order to promote gender equality in the high-tech sector.

For the purpose of awarding scholarships, Allon is donating some 1.2 million NIS to the Hebrew University in the first stage, and intends to donate 600,000 shekels annually thereafter for the same purpose.

The top student scholarship recipient will be offered a summer internship at the Compass offices which was founded by Allon together with his business partner, Robert Reffkin, a former White House advisor and Chief of Staff to the COO and president of Goldman Sachs. Compass, which operates a technology platform in the field of real estate, has reached a $4.4 billion valuation last September and listed $45.5 billion in sales in 2018.

Prof. Asher Cohen, President of the Hebrew University, stated that "we are happy and excited about this initial collaboration with Dr. Ori Allon and we are grateful for

this donation for scholarships designated for female and male students. The field of Computer Science has traditionally been characterized as one with a relative minority of women and we are partners in Dr. Allon's efforts to encourage and support female students who are studying for advanced degrees in Computer Science".

Allon made two successful exits when he sold two companies which he founded to Google and to Twitter. The first was when he sold the search engine Orion, developed in the framework of his doctorate, which was bought in 2006 by Google. After the sale, Allon joined Google's management team, and the search engine he had developed was the basis of Google's ability to offer its users related searches.

Four years later, he founded the start-up company Julpan, which developed a search engine for social networks, and was acquired in 2011 by Twitter. Following this sale, Allon joined Twitter as the Director of Engineering of its New York office, a role in which he worked for a year, until he left to establish Compass.

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