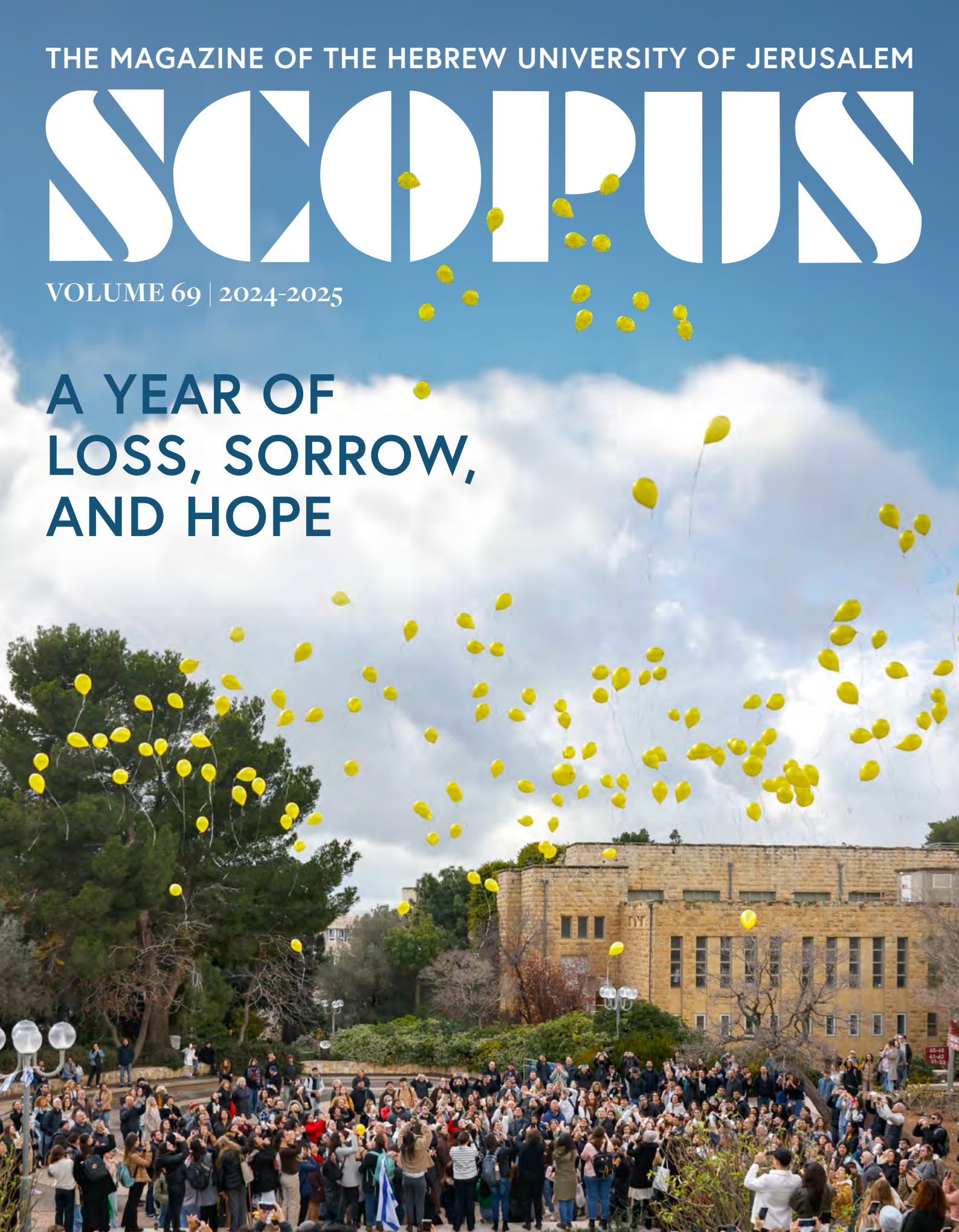


THE MAGAZINE OF THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

# SCOPIUS

VOLUME 69 | 2024-2025

**A YEAR OF  
LOSS, SORROW,  
AND HOPE**



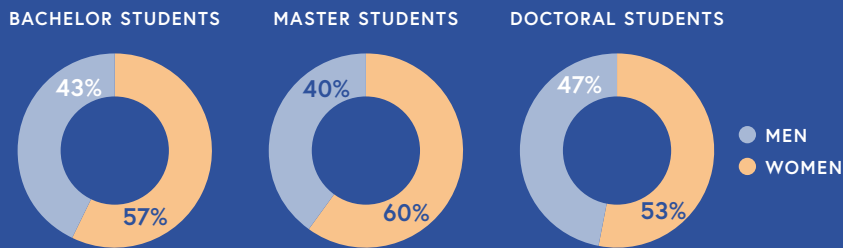
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel's first university, is a multidisciplinary institution of higher learning and research where intellectual pioneering, cutting-edge discovery, and a passion for learning flourish. Ranked among the world's leading universities, the Hebrew University is a center of international repute, with ties extending to the worldwide scientific and academic communities. The Hebrew University is an institution where excellence is emphasized, and where teaching and research drive innovation and provide the broadest of education for its students. At the Hebrew University, success is measured in terms of social impact, ranging from the lives of our students and graduates, to influencing policy on the national level, to advancing the frontiers of science for humankind. At its core, the Hebrew University's mission is to develop cutting-edge research, to educate future leaders, and to nurture generations of outstanding scientists and scholars in all fields of learning.

## 6 campuses

three in Jerusalem (Mount Scopus, Edmond J. Safra, and Ein Kerem) and in Rehovot, Beit Dagan, and Eilat

## 23,778 students

including 13,511 undergraduates, 5,574 master students, 2,302 doctoral students, and 1,874 overseas and pre-academic students, postdoctoral fellows, and others



**20%**  
of students are first-generation in higher education

**4,240 projects**  
in progress across departments and some 100 subject-related and interdisciplinary research centers

**1,350**  
faculty members

**1,900**  
administrative staff

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# Shining Bright in the Darkest of Hours

In ordinary times, *Scopus* magazine is our opportunity to highlight the students, faculty, and alumni that symbolize the high academic standards and social impact that are the core mission of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Yet this is not an ordinary year. The October 7<sup>th</sup> terror attack disrupted every aspect of life in Israel. Hamas violated our border, infiltrated our kibbutzim and towns, and committed unimaginable crimes against innocent civilians, along with the taking of hostages. Two of these hostages are members of our community: occupational therapy graduate student Carmel Gat, who was murdered in captivity and brought to burial in September 2024, and the son of Prof. Jonathan Dekel-Chen, Sagui, who remains in captivity as of this writing. These horrific events, along with the country's largest and longest call-up of reservists, the ongoing war, and the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of Israelis from the north and south, have affected each and every one of us.

Acknowledging and honoring the victims of October 7<sup>th</sup> was a central part of this year's meeting of the Board of Governors, which included a full day in southern Israel, visiting sites that were attacked by Hamas and hearing from survivors.

The uncertainty of this last year presented a number of hurdles specific to the Hebrew University: a delayed opening of the school year, a large number of students on reserve duty, and tensions between different groups on campus. In the pages ahead, you will read how the University's campaign, *We Are One*, succeeded, with the generosity of our dedicated Friends around the world, to help our students stay on track without compromising our academic standards. The campaign also helped ensure that our campuses remain open and inclusive spaces where all are welcome.

Yet the story is much larger, and much more significant, than salvaging the 2023/24 academic year. It is said that in the midst of every crisis lies great opportunity. Indeed, during a year with no shortage of crises, the Hebrew University repeatedly stepped up to contribute to our country and society, relying essentially on our goodwill and knowledge.

This issue of *Scopus* showcases the impact that our students and faculty have had on struggling businesses, how they leveraged the law to advocate for the hostages, provided dental care to the displaced, and led the rehabilitation process for children returning from Hamas captivity. We are immensely proud of every member of our community who readily applied their expertise to problems and challenges on the national scale.

This magazine also includes two highly relevant personal essays. The first is by an alumna who has been building resilience among residents of the western Negev for over two decades, and the second emphasizes the importance of civic education, especially as it relates to the government's attempts at a judicial overhaul and the current war.

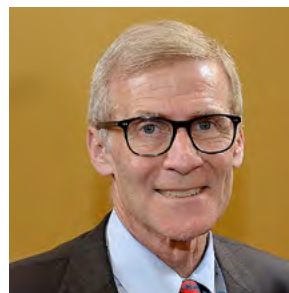
This year, more than ever, *Scopus* stands as a testament to the key role that the Hebrew University plays in Israel and Israeli society, and to the importance of measuring our impact, not only in terms of advancing knowledge, but in our ability to translate that knowledge in meaningful and relevant ways.

Our impact upon Israeli society will be a central theme at next year's Board of Governors, when we celebrate the Hebrew University's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We look forward to welcoming you to Jerusalem in 2025 and wish for more peaceful times ahead.



A. Cohen

Asher Cohen  
President



Dan Schlessinger

Daniel Schlessinger  
Chairman, Board of Governors

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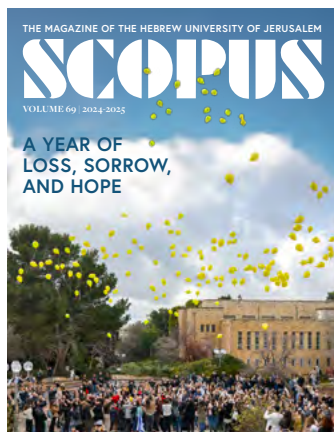
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Cover image: On January 14, 2024, as part of a national 100-minute labor strike to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> day that 136 men, women, and children remained in Hamas captivity, students, staff, and faculty released yellow balloons on the Mount Scopus Campus.

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Hebrew University faculty and students at a pro-democracy protest outside of the Edmond J. Safra Campus at Givat Ram. Their banner reads, No Democracy, No Academia, and they are waving an Israeli flag and a copy of Israel's Declaration of Independence.



WE ARE ONE

# We Are One

BY PROF. GUY HARPAZ



This last year has been nothing short of disastrous. The attack on October 7<sup>th</sup> was a personal tragedy for those directly affected, including hundreds of our students and faculty members, but it was also a national tragedy. Things that had felt stable collapsed overnight. We found ourselves in a never-ending whirlpool of news, emotions, and worries. Our country was at war.

This new reality greatly challenged the Hebrew University and our students in many ways. A large number of students were called up for extended reserve duty, with no end in sight. Over 200 students were displaced from their homes, and the opening of the academic year was delayed by eleven weeks.

The number of affected individuals grows larger when taking into account the partners and family members of those directly affected or serving.

The Hebrew University has been blessed with a strong and dedicated global community of Friends, who immediately reached out to support our efforts to help keep our students on track, regardless of their service or life circumstances, without sacrificing our academic standards.

Thanks to the *We Are One* campaign, the Office of the Dean of Students was able to offer the following to our students:

**1. ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE:** The University provided reservists, their spouses, and evacuees with subscription access to online courses, paired them with tutors, and let them rearrange their course load, postponing certain courses until the following semester or year. Individual academic units organized extra discussion sessions for reservists and the student union organized study marathons before final exams. For struggling students, these were a breath of fresh air.

**2. PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT:** Crucially, the University expanded its psychological services, hiring new therapists and contracting with private ones. Thus, psychological counseling became more available and affordable, just as demand was rising. The Hebrew

University offered student-reservist an initial 30 subsidized sessions, and 10-15 sessions for students whose partners were reservists. Displaced students received similar support.

**3. INCREASING ACCESSIBILITY:** One of the more creative approaches was reaching out to students through the Accessibility Unit to accommodate underlying physical, medical, or emotional conditions that may have been exacerbated by the war. By increasing staffing and hours, the unit worked hard to develop tailor-made solutions to meet each student's individual needs, ranging from tutoring, adapting mandatory attendance requirements, providing alternative exam dates and locations (e.g. quiet rooms), breaks, and more.

**4. FINANCIAL AID:** The University granted a stipend to each reservist, to help cope with extenuating circumstances and unforeseen financial hurdles. Furthermore, financial aid was made available to students studying abroad who wished to return home after October 7<sup>th</sup>.

**5. SUPPORTING THE HOME FRONT:** Many of our students were heavily involved in establishing and running Jerusalem's civic volunteer center, which provided immediate and critical support to reservists' families and newly displaced people in the city. These exceptional students eventually received two academic credits within the framework of our Social Engagement & Community Service program.

I am proud that the Hebrew University was able to quickly identify so many different needs, developing and offering diverse forms of assistance to our students during these terrible times. On the following page you will meet students who, thanks to these interventions, kept their studies on track. It is my hope that each and every affected student has found the help they need to succeed in the 2023/24 academic year, as we continue to do our very best to make sure that no one is left behind.

"I AM PROUD THAT THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY WAS ABLE TO QUICKLY IDENTIFY SO MANY DIFFERENT NEEDS, DEVELOPING AND OFFERING DIVERSE FORMS OF ASSISTANCE TO OUR STUDENTS DURING THESE TERRIBLE TIMES."



Prof. Guy Harpaz is the outgoing Dean of Students at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and holds the Arnold Brecht Chair in European Law.



## NATASHA KING

2<sup>nd</sup> year, Plant Sciences and Genetics in Agriculture  
Reservist on her kibbutz, Kibbutz Be'eri

*“I coordinated daily operations with the military in and around Be’eri, including agriculture, the removal of debris and undetonated ammunition, and even retrieved items from abandoned homes. When the semester began, my classmates were curious, but I wasn’t ready to talk. Photos of missing kibbutz members, who are like my extended family, were everywhere. I just couldn’t be in class. The University understood my hardships, waived mandatory attendance, provided me with a tutor, and gave me extra time for exams. I had volunteered to help and was being helped in return!”*

## MAY GOREN

2<sup>nd</sup> year, Dental Medicine  
Reservist, General Staff Reconnaissance Unit

*“I volunteered for the reserves and underwent expedited training to work with bereaved families: the funeral, shiva (mourning), bureaucracy, and, primarily, emotional support. When the semester began, I transferred behind the scenes, where I did four 12-hour shifts a week, taking breaks only for exams. A year later, I continue to serve. The University’s help was tremendous; I was assigned a tutor who accommodated my schedule and was given the option of attending additional lab sessions. I am thankful that the Hebrew University recognized my service and was willing to help me succeed.”*



We Are  
One



## S.H.

2<sup>nd</sup> year, Biochemistry, Food Science and Nutrition  
Reservist

*“Although I was discharged before the semester began, I continued volunteering in the reserves 1-2 days a week. It was challenging balancing my studies and maintaining focus. The exceptional support from the Accessibility Unit proved invaluable. They worked closely with me to adjust my course load and requirements and ensure my academic success. Talking to friends at other universities, the Hebrew University truly stands out in its commitment to the well-being of its student-reservists.”*



## A.L.

2<sup>nd</sup> year, Environmental Sciences & Geoinformatics  
Reservist, General Staff Reconnaissance Unit

*“Returning to campus after months of battle, I found it challenging to bridge my own state of mind and reality on campus. Thankfully, I received 20 tutoring sessions for one of my courses. Sitting with my tutor on a weekly basis, and studying for the exam, made all the difference!”*

## OHAD BAHALUL

1<sup>st</sup> year, Plant Sciences and Genetics in Agriculture  
Reservist, Carmeli Infantry Brigade

*“During the first semester, I could only manage a few classes. After returning to campus, I was offered the option of a “shadow semester,” which enabled me to complete first-semester classes during the second semester, either in person or via recordings. My professors taught entire courses to a small group of reservists, to keep us on track. I feel privileged to receive this help and am thankful that the University values my success—in the reserves and in the classroom.”*



# The Right People in the Worst of Times

*Hebrew University Experts Post-October 7<sup>th</sup>*



Social work and psychology are living, breathing disciplines. Thus, it is fitting that Hebrew University faculty members regularly work closely with public and civil organizations and contribute their expertise and knowledge to the community. Other faculty members are active on the level of policy, publishing position papers and weighing in on regulatory processes and legislation.

It was therefore natural that, following October 7<sup>th</sup>, these dedicated practitioners and researchers of the human psyche and soul would be the first to spring into action. While many in Israel and around the world were shocked, emotionally overwhelmed, or mentally paralyzed, Hebrew University faculty were already hard at work.

“The Hamas attack was something different altogether,” says Prof. Asher Ben-Arieh, the dean of the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare. “We are seeing entirely new kinds of trauma. This isn’t just more of the same, or ‘ordinary’ trauma that has been amplified. Hebrew University faculty members were the first to recognize the need to study, understand, and develop responses to this new reality.”



*“Israel is experiencing months of ongoing, acute trauma. It is an open wound in the collective psyche.”*

**PROF. CARMIT KATZ**

## Developing a Plan

One such researcher is Prof. Carmit Katz from the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare. She also serves as deputy CEO and research director of the Hebrew University-affiliated Haruv Institute, Israel’s leading training organization for helping children suffering from abuse and neglect. An expert in child maltreatment, Prof. Katz remembers thinking there was only one possible scenario: the kidnapped children must return home. “I couldn’t even conceive of the alternative,” she recalls.

Prof. Katz started collaborating with the Israeli Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs. “I began by surveying the literature, but that didn’t get me very far,” she says. “Next, I looked at modern-day examples: the Boko Haram kidnappings, for instance. But there is very little empirical knowledge from those cases.” She then began visiting Israelis who had been held hostage in the past and found their experiences and insights highly informative.

In late October, Prof. Katz and the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs held a 48-hour marathon, emerging with a protocol for receiving Israeli children from Hamas captivity. “We didn’t even know that a deal was being negotiated,” she says. “We just knew we should be ready.”

Around the same time, Dr. Fortunato (“Fortu”) Benarroch, a senior lecturer of psychiatry at the Hebrew University’s Faculty of Medicine and an expert in childhood trauma, was also thinking of ways to help.

“Too many Israeli children have experienced trauma and post-trauma, starting in the early aughts with the second *intifada*,” says Dr. Benarroch. In response to this growing need, the Hadassah

Medical Center established its Center for Pediatric Traumatic Stress, which Dr. Benarroch now directs. Next came the Second Lebanon War in 2006, with Hezbollah firing missiles into northern Israel, and increasing numbers of rockets being fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel, affecting the south for nearly two decades.

“The sad truth is that we have become experts in pediatric trauma-focused therapy,” laments Dr. Benarroch. “On October 7<sup>th</sup>, we were ready to go.”

## Rehabilitating Child Hostages

In mid-November, it became clear that a hostage deal was in the pipeline and that children would be among the first to be released. Prof. Katz began putting her plan into action, training every single person who would be interacting with the returned children.

Israeli soldiers at the Egyptian border were instructed to introduce themselves and tell the children only that they were bringing them somewhere safe. Sunglasses and hats were provided, in case the kids were acclimated to being underground. Families were given carefully crafted sentences for specific situations, such as delivering news about the death of a parent or loved one, asking the children about their experiences in captivity, and responses to anticipated post-traumatic behavior.

The Haruv Institute invited Dr. Benarroch to contribute his expertise by supporting the therapists working with the returned children. “Each child is unique,” says Dr. Benarroch, “and there are so many factors that will affect their rehabilitation: Were they abducted with a parent or siblings? Are they returning to a functioning family? Are they returning home, or is their family still displaced?”

Prof. Katz adds, “We are finding that these children’s trauma most closely resembles the trauma of neglect or betrayal. Pre-October 7<sup>th</sup>, these children believed they were safe: in their safe rooms, with the IDF along the border, and that their parents would always protect them. Then the worst happened. The terrorists crossed the border and infiltrated their safe rooms, the army sometimes never arrived, and many young children saw their parents doing anything they could to protect them, but eventually being injured or killed, before being abducted to Gaza.”

According to Prof. Katz, this basic narrative holds true for all Israelis—to varying degrees. “The country is experiencing months of ongoing, acute trauma,” she says. “It is just a question of scale.” According to her, Israel won’t be able to start rebuilding trust until every single hostage has returned home. “It is an open wound in the collective psyche,” she says, “and it cannot heal as long as hostages remain in Gaza.”

*“The sad truth is that we have become experts in pediatric trauma-focused therapy. On October 7<sup>th</sup>, we were ready to go.”*

**DR. FORTUNATO BENARROCH**



## Building Exponential Resilience

Hebrew University faculty are also having a meaningful impact on Israeli society by building resilience. They are sharing their knowledge and skills with large groups of therapists and social workers, empowering them to make a difference in individual people's lives.

*“I recognized an opportunity: working with post-traumatic individuals with the goal of preventing domestic violence.”*

DR. OHAD GILBAR



Under Dr. Benarroch's leadership, the Center for Pediatric Traumatic Stress joined forces with the Israel Trauma Coalition. They offered a training program for therapists working with affected populations, primarily those displaced from their homes in the north or south and living in hotels.

In addition, Dr. Benarroch developed shorter trainings for teachers, social workers, school counselors, and other professionals. He equipped them to help children and parents work through myriad stress factors, including their experiences on October 7<sup>th</sup>, worries about a partner or parent on reserve duty, mothers who were suddenly single-parenting, displacement and temporary living, uncertainty in general, and dealing with traumatic grief. By helping therapists address a litany of issues, Dr. Benarroch has indirectly helped multitudes of children and families nationwide.

Another Hebrew University researcher working on a larger scale is Dr. Ohad Gilbar. A senior lecturer at the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, Dr. Gilbar's research focuses on the intersection between trauma and domestic violence. “The connection has been well-documented,” he explains. “Abusive partners often suffer from post-traumatic stress.”

With the opening of the school year delayed, the School of Social Work decided to offer hands-on courses for graduate students. Dr. Gilbar recognized an opportunity: a chance to work with post-traumatic individuals with the goal of preventing domestic violence in the first place.

He contacted his postdoctoral mentor, Dr. Casey Taft at the Boston University School of Medicine, who had developed *Strength at Home*, an intervention aimed at preventing trauma-based intimate partner violence. Together they developed a course: *Managing Intimate Relationships in Times of Emergency*.

Dr. Gilbar and Dr. Taft trained Hebrew University graduate students to work with displaced people living in hotels and provide skills for coping with stress, anger, conflict, and improving communication. For Dr. Gilbar, running an intervention with people without a record of violent

behavior was a unique opportunity. “My hope is that by providing skills for working through trauma, coping with stress stemming from displacement, uncertainty, and life in cramped quarters,” he says, “couples can emerge stronger.”

The intervention, which lasted eight sessions, was run at a number of hotels. Students met the groups in designated spaces. By marketing it as a ‘workshop,’ people were more willing to attend and participate. “It wasn't therapy,” says Dr. Gilbar. “Participants weren't required to speak up or share; it was really up to them.”

Students participated in weekly guidance sessions with Dr. Gilbar and Dr. Taft, who joined over Zoom. They shared, reflected, and learned from their experiences. “It was very rewarding to see the students using the tool we developed, as they empowered couples to work through their difficulties at such a terrible time,” says Dr. Taft.

“It is hard to even describe the chaos of the hotels,” says social work graduate student Ayelet Tapiero. “Displaced people coping with trauma, young children without school, and zero privacy.

“The couples who signed up were fully dedicated to the process. Week after week, they came to work on their relationship,” she explains. “They grew as individuals, as couples, and even as a group.”

## Touching People's Lives

“These interventions work,” confirms Dr. Benarroch. He remembers one particular displaced family living in a hotel room. Everyone was dealing with post-trauma and, without school, the kids were restless. “It took two or three sessions,” he recalls, “for the family to reach a point where they were able to talk about their experiences, share, and validate their feelings. They could work through their anger and fears. Suddenly the parents and children were able to speak openly.”

In his view, this is precisely the role of the Hebrew University. “As a public institution, we must balance research, teaching, and public service. Developing evidence-based interventions that can help people, right here and right now, is part of our core mission,” he says proudly.

“War is horrible,” says Prof. Asher Ben-Arieh. “But in such grave circumstances, the Hebrew University is equipped and obliged to step up and serve the community. In our case, this means leading the effort to serve and treat children and their families.”

*“War is horrible. But the Hebrew University is equipped and obliged to step up and serve the community.”*

PROF. ASHER BEN-ARIEH





"There was only one possible scenario: the kidnapped children must return home." Prof. Carmit Katz



# Growing Dates, Growing Hope

Two date farmers, three Hebrew University MBA students, and one Teva Pharmaceutical executive walk into a Tel Aviv conference room. This might sound like the beginning of a joke, but it's actually the beginning of a Hebrew University wartime project aimed at helping small businesses: HUBS-Aid.

When the war broke out, Prof. Renana Peres of the Hebrew University Business School (HUBS), identified an opportunity: connect MBA students with struggling small businesses nationwide. The semester hadn't started, so students could gain hands-on experience while helping business owners survive the wartime slump.

Prof. Peres recruited top business executives to serve as mentors and issued a call for student participation.

One student who answered the call was Dan Corb, who is in the LLB-MBA honors track. He was exempt from reserve duty and remembers feeling useless. "My friends were all serving, endangering their lives to protect me. When I saw the HUBS-Aid project, I knew I had to sign up."

Another student was Ori Bracha. With a BA in geography and international relations from the Hebrew University, he was earning an MBA with hopes of starting an environmental tech company. The war had put his plans for finding a job on hold. He too was exempt from the reserves and wanted to do something meaningful while waiting for the semester to start.

Their mentor was Sharon Sheep, head of Teva Pharmaceutical's

Global Operations Financial Planning & Analysis. Like many Israelis, she had been awash with anxiety the first weeks of the war. When she was asked to volunteer with HUBS-Aid, she realized it would be a blessed way to feel useful.

The team was assigned to Tamar Hasson, a family business that produces premium dates in Menahemia, a small village located in the northern Jordan Valley, 5.2 km (3.2 miles) south of the Kinneret. The company is run by Ido Hasson, a third-generation date farmer, who five years ago took over the business with his wife, Liron.

"Our region produces the best dates in Israel, thanks to the mineral-rich soil," Ido explains. "And our brand, Tamar Hasson, produces the best dates in the region." Ordinarily, 70 percent of their yield is sold through airport duty-free shops or purchased by high-end hotels and restaurants. On October 7<sup>th</sup>, those revenue streams instantly shut down.

With the harvest only a month behind them, they had an entire year's crop ready to go—with no outlet. "We have storage facilities," says Liron, "but we also have a reputation. We won't sell old dates." They turned to the internet, where they discovered HUBS-Aid.

In early December, the entire team assembled in Tel Aviv for their first meeting. "We mostly listened to Ido and Liron's needs, dreams, and challenges for their business to grow," Sharon recalls. The team instantly clicked. Within a few hours they were hard at work researching ideas and following leads.

**"OUR STUDENTS AND  
MENTORS DEVELOPED  
TAILOR-MADE STRATEGIES  
FOR EACH BUSINESS."**

**— Prof. Renana Peres**

With Tu B'Shvat (Jewish Arbor Day) right around the corner, a central tenet of their business plan was to market gift packages, which Israeli workplaces often distribute around the holiday. But Ido and Liron wanted something bigger. They reached out to other small businesses affected by the situation and put together a gift basket that included their dates, honey produced near the Gaza border, and confiture and olive oil from the Golan Heights. They began marketing their baskets to large employers and were thrilled when the first order rolled in: 1,500 baskets from the Bank of Israel. Additional orders came from Keter Plastics and Bank Mizrahi-Tefahot.

Liron reflects, "Working with the team was great. We put our minds together and utilized our connections and networks. Sharon and the students were the wind beneath our wings."

In all, HUBS-Aid brought together 120 students, 40 mentors, and 80 small businesses in a variety of fields. Prof. Peres herself can hardly believe the project's impact. "Our students and mentors developed tailor-made strategies for each business," she says proudly. The project received national recognition when Prof. Peres was selected for the prestigious Landau-Mifal HaPais Prize for Arts and Sciences, noting her contribution to helping the community overcome wartime trauma.

For Liron and Ido, HUBS-Aid arrived in the nick of time. "We are thinking not only about making it through the war," Ido says, "but how to keep growing as a business."

Sharon, Dan, and Ori are equally pleased with the outcome—but not surprised. This sort of mutual aid is what Israelis expect from each other in times of emergency. Ori sums it up, "Everyone we consulted with, including top executives, was extremely generous with their time and advice. Being on the receiving end of so much goodwill, makes me want to pay it forward!"

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**"WORKING WITH THE TEAM  
WAS GREAT. SHARON AND THE  
STUDENTS WERE THE WIND  
BENEATH OUR WINGS."**

**– Liron Hasson**

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*A gift basket marketed by Tamar Hasson, featuring honey, walnuts, and confiture along with their premium dates.*



מטוה המשיפחות להחזרת החטופים והנעדרים

# No Rock Left Unturned:

## *Leveraging International Law for the Hostages*

A central aspect of this war has been the hostages held in Gaza. As the nation aims to heal, the fate of these missing men, women, and children is central to rebuilding social trust and cohesion.

Yet for the Clinical Legal Education Center (CLEC) at the Hebrew University's Faculty of Law, the question of hostages is not new. The International Human Rights Clinic has been involved in the cases of four Israelis who have been held in Gaza for years, enabling the Clinic to take immediate action after October 7<sup>th</sup>.

Since 2018, the International Human Rights Clinic has been representing four Israeli families whose loved ones are being held by Hamas in Gaza: Oron Shaul, Hadar Goldin, Avera Mengistu, and Hisham al-Sayed. Over the years, the Clinic has appealed to several different United Nations bodies, such as the Committee on

the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on behalf of Avera Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed. These UN working groups operate on a strictly humanitarian basis, without political or criminal repercussions.

Thanks to the Clinic's work, in 2019 the CRPD determined that although the men were being held by Hamas, the Palestinian Authority was responsible for gathering and providing information on their whereabouts and ensuring their well-being.

"We relied on these previous activities for the appeals we filed in the fall of 2023," explains Prof. Yaël Ronen, the academic director of the International Human Rights Clinic.

Given the delayed opening of the 2023/24 school year, and with many law students serving in the reserves, CLEC put out a call for students who wanted to gain hands-on experience in international human rights and humanitarian law. "There was a lot of interest," recalls Adv. Michal Goren, who is the clinical director of the International Human Rights Clinic. "We received responses from former students, students studying abroad, and even students who hadn't even formally begun the clinical program."

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, Alon Teshuva, a third-year law student, was studying abroad at the Center for Transnational Legal Studies (CTLS) at King's College London. In the days that followed, he and the other Hebrew University students tracked the news and hung posters of the kidnapped, but that felt insignificant. He was approached by Hebrew University Prof. Yuval Shany, who serves as the academic co-director of CTLS, asking if he wanted to volunteer with the Clinics. Alon immediately agreed.

Another student eager to help was Keren Goldsmith, who was in her final year of the joint law-Middle Eastern studies program.





For both Alon and Keren, their experience volunteering with CLEC was transformative. “Law is the basis for how we live together, and it can be a tool for positive change,” Keren says. “Working on these appeals, I better understood why we need the United Nations and its very specific working groups.”

Alon recalls conversations he had in London with classmates who asked about the attack, Israel, and the Israeli-Arab conflict. “As students of transnational law, they were receptive to legal explanations about the Balfour Declaration and the 1947 UN partition plan, which form the basis for the existence of the State of Israel. This is Zionism—the belief in our right to live peacefully in this land.”

Dr. Shiran Reichenberg, the executive director of the Clinical Legal Education Center, says, “The hostages have been held in Gaza for nearly a year. The International Human Rights Clinic demonstrates the importance of a clinical legal education. Our students learn from combining hands-on experience with academic knowledge, and they go on to benefit individuals and society—just as Keren and Alon helped the hostages’ families.”

Keren was signed up for the International Human Rights Clinic, but the semester hadn’t started yet. When the call went out, she was ready and willing.

On October 14<sup>th</sup>, a mere week after the attack, and with the exact number of hostages still shifting, CLEC began filing appeals on behalf of the Hostages and Missing Families Forum to various UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs, urging them to “issue an urgent appeal for Hamas to reveal and clarify the fate and whereabouts of every person taken by it or held by it.”

Subsequent appeals to United Nations bodies and the International Committee of the Red Cross focused on hostages with disabilities, severe allergies, and other medical conditions. Some of these appeals were collaborations with Israeli disability advocacy groups such as Bizchut. “We explored every option,” says Prof. Ronen. “No rock was left unturned. We needed to be thorough and systematic, to do everything possible to bring these people home.”

The Clinic also filed communications before the United Nations on behalf of 13 individual hostages’ families who requested CLEC’s assistance. Throughout October and November, Alon and Keren prepared these communications, an endeavor which was surprisingly bureaucratic.

They filled out forms for each hostage, indicating their name, place of residence, date last seen, and details about the abduction itself. They had to establish the legal basis for filing the communication, which included general information about the attack and conditions of captivity, as they became known. Next, the students set about gathering additional information, such as footage or eyewitness testimonies—anything that could strengthen the factual basis for each individual communication.

Beyond these efforts vis-à-vis international bodies, the Clinic provided another invaluable legal service to the Hostages and Missing Families Forum: developing and writing a Q&A on the legal status of the hostages, international laws of armed conflict, and treatment of specific groups such as the elderly, sick, and women and children. Keren and Alon worked with other student volunteers to develop the Q&A, which can be found at <https://Stories.BringThemHomeNow.net/q-a>.

Alon remembers watching the hostage deal on television in late November 2023. “Suddenly I saw one of the children whose name I had written in a communication form. He was back! I watched him run into his father’s arms!” Tears welled up in Alon’s eyes.

***“On TV, I saw one of the children whose name I had written in a communication form. He was back! I watched him run into his father’s arms!”***

**ALON TESHUVA**



***“Working on these appeals, I better understood why we need the United Nations and its very specific working groups.”***

**KEREN GOLDSMITH**





# Dental Care for the Displaced

*By the Numbers*

From left: Ilan Cohen (6<sup>th</sup> year student) and Prof. Alon Livni, who supervised and guided the volunteer students, treating displaced people in the U Coral Beach Club Hotel in Eilat.

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11<sup>th</sup>

of October, Dr. Rinat Tzach and Shirya Teitelbaum first treated displaced people in a hotel

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31

fifth- and sixth-year students volunteered to provide dental care in hotels

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23

hotels visited, including 2 trips to Eilat

---

5-85

age range of patients

---

438

patients treated nationwide

---

13

workshops on dental hygiene for displaced children

---

2

mobile clinics purchased thanks to donations

“



## DR. SHIRYA TEITELBAUM

Alumna, class of 2024

*“An elderly man came in for something minor and stayed to talk to us. He was thankful that we had come, not for the dental care per se, but for providing emotional support. He had been displaced from his kibbutz, and just wanted to be seen.”*

“



## DR. RINAT TZACH

Faculty member

*“I felt empowered to apply my professional skills to helping people. Whether it was eliminating pain, listening, or just giving someone a new toothbrush, volunteering in the hotels was unlike any other experience I’ve had.”*

“



## LIOR HOIKHMAN

Sixth-year dental medicine student

*“A woman came in for an extraction and began to cry. I apologized for the pain. She replied, ‘my tooth has been aching since October 7<sup>th</sup>, and I’m feeling overwhelmed.’ She was just glad to get it out. We were helping people on the smallest level—a single tooth—but it meant the world to them.”*

# From the Hebrew University to the Western Negev

## *My Story of Resilience*

In 1989, at age 25, I graduated with a BSW in social and community work from the Hebrew University's Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare. I clearly remember specific lectures and teachers that opened my eyes to the various options for assisting others, for becoming actively involved in Israeli society, and for impacting lives. I was a relatively new immigrant from London, so it was a shock when, shortly after completing my studies, I received my call-up notice from the Israel Defense Forces. I could have received an exemption but decided to serve. That decision, and my

subsequent two and a half years as a mental health officer, turned out to further my career as a social worker well-integrated into Israeli society, and later as a trauma therapist.

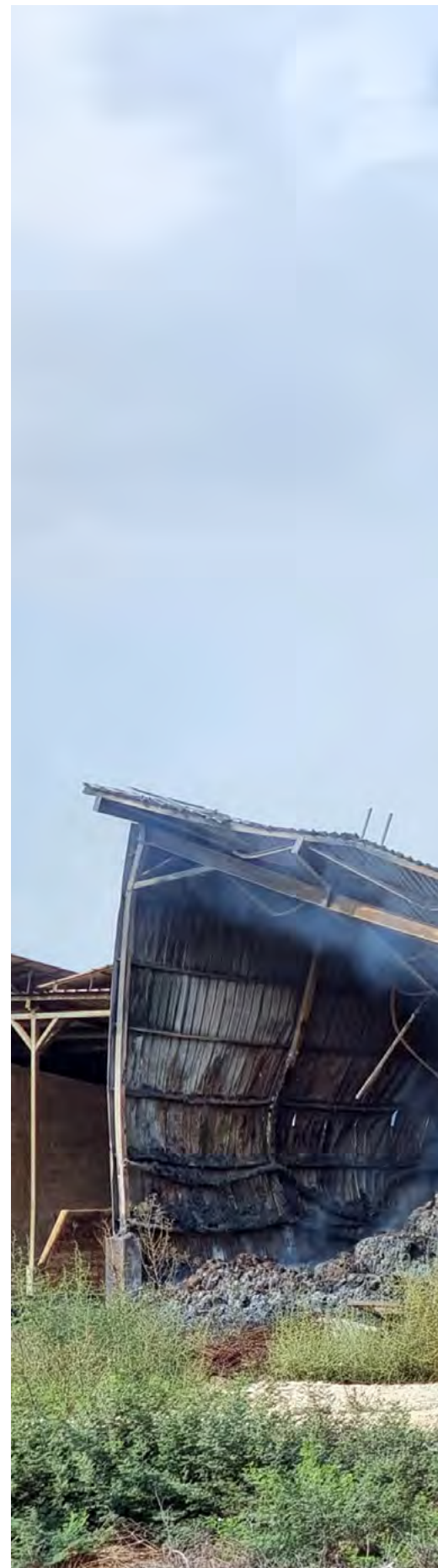
During my military service I met my husband, Stevie. We married, and I moved to his home on Kibbutz Alumim, 3.5 kilometers (2.1 miles) west of the Gaza Strip, neighbor to the today-famous kibbutzim Be'eri, Nahal Oz, and Kfar Aza.

Upon my release from the army, I worked as a social worker and specialized as a child and family court welfare officer for the Gaza-adjacent Sha'ar HaNegev Regional Council. The area included Nahal Oz and other nearby kibbutzim. It was the early 2000s, and rocket attacks, tunnel threats, and balloon- and kite-bombs were becoming part of life in southern Israel.

**"ALONG WITH THERAPISTS NATIONWIDE, I AM WORKING TO HELP AFFECTED PEOPLE REGAIN THEIR BALANCE, TO REALIGN THEIR BELIEF SYSTEM, AND TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES."**



Esther Marcus is a Hebrew University alumna who has been living and working as a social worker and therapist in the western and central Negev for over two decades. She holds a BSW from the Hebrew University, an MSW from Ben-Gurion University, and a certificate in video therapy from Ma'aleh.





*The terrorists shot cows, destroyed the electricity in the dairy farm, and set fire to the cows' food. The fire blazed for a week. The terrorists wanted to ensure that we would not be a land flowing with milk and honey.*

---

"I AM A MOTHER,  
A GRANDMOTHER, A WIDOW,  
AN AUTHOR, A FRIEND, A  
ZIONIST, A PROUD SOCIAL  
WORKER AND THERAPIST, A  
SURVIVOR,  
AND A MANAGER OF A  
RESILIENCE CENTER CLINIC IN  
THE WESTERN NEGEV."

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Much of my work involved helping residents adjust to these threats, build their resilience, and be proactive in protecting themselves and their communities.

I went on to earn an MSW with a specialization in art therapy from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and moved on to a new job as a therapist with the Maslan Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Support Center in Be'er Sheva. It was there that I met my personal heroes, the survivors of sexual assault who entrusted me to be part of their journey to recovery.

The security situation in the south continued to decline. When the youngest of my four children, then aged 8, asked me how he could protect his friend when the sirens sounded, alerting of a rocket attack, I decided to write a therapeutic book for young children. *Color Red (Tseva Adom, in Hebrew)* is named after the rocket alarm system. The book tells our story through the eyes of the now-friendly alarm who becomes empowered as he recognizes that he has a job to do and is privileged to do so. The book enables children to recognize their fears, to identify their own strengths and resources, and shows them that they have ways to protect themselves.

Next, I trained as a video therapist, learning to employ cinematographic tools in therapy, and was appointed manager of the resilience center in the S'dot Negev Regional Council, just south of Sha'ar HaNegev. This is where I have worked for the past seven years. Our therapy is solution-focused, and our therapists are specially trained to answer our hotline, carry out emergency interventions following rocket attacks, and help all residents cope with threats while developing resilience.

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, Kibbutz Alumim was infiltrated by terrorists who massacred 22 of our foreign workers from Thailand and Nepal and kidnapped two of them; injured three members of our first-response team and an older member of the kibbutz; and killed many soldiers who were defending our community. Two soldiers raised on the kibbutz were killed in action that day, a third a few weeks later in Gaza.



Thankfully, my family survived the attack. But while hiding in our safe room, I answered numerous calls from residents suffering anxiety attacks, as well as from families throughout the country who were searching for loved ones who had attended the nearby Nova music festival.

On October 8<sup>th</sup>, half of the approximately 3,000 residents in our regional council were evacuated to hotels nationwide. Practically overnight, we set up 11 resilience centers from Eilat in the south to Migdal in the north. We grew our team from 17 to 190 therapists who provided individual, family, and group therapy throughout the country.

For residents, adjusting to life in a hotel while also coping with the trauma of October 7<sup>th</sup> presented numerous challenges. Families lost their privacy and their ability to make decisions for themselves. At the time of writing, ten months after the attack, many Alumim families remain split, with fathers, husbands, and sons still on reserve duty, while the women and children continue to live in hotels in Netanya. Despair is a familiar emotion: people trying to cope with the aftermath of that terrible day, hostages who remain in captivity, and a war that continues to rage. Talk of rehabilitation and the future brings even more challenges as residents must decide whether to return home and are asking themselves if they can rebuild trust in the armed forces and the government.

This war has brought me unimaginable loss in my professional and personal life. Mira Stahl, a member of my original therapy team at the S'dot Negev resilience center, was murdered in her home on



*The living quarters of Kibbutz Alumim's foreign workers after the October 7<sup>th</sup> attack. The terrorists slaughtered 22 Nepalese and Thai workers and kidnapped two. One was released and the other, Bipin Joshi, remains captive in Gaza.*

Kibbutz Kfar Aza. My good friend and fellow therapist Lilach Kipnis was murdered in her home on Kibbutz Be'eri. By far the biggest blow was losing my husband, Stevie. After being evacuated, he immediately returned to Alumim to rebuild his beloved dairy farm which had been destroyed by the terrorists. In December, he suffered a cardiac arrest and died.

Along with therapists nationwide, I am working to help affected people regain their balance, to realign their belief system, and to make decisions for themselves and their families. We try to meet their needs while also proactively establishing robust support systems. Today we have a resilience therapy room at every school in the S'dot Negev Regional Council and we are setting up resilience rooms on every kibbutz and moshav.

These resilience centers are supported by the National Insurance Institute (*Bituach Leumi*) and by the Israel Trauma Coalition, with the latter providing courses and general management support. As residents have begun to return home, they are helped by a team of 50 therapists based at the local clinic, who are helping them process all they have been through. Another 70 therapists are working with residents who have yet to return or are undecided. In Netanya alone, a team of 30 therapists is assisting members of Alumim, many still undecided about when, or whether, to move home.

I look back to the days I walked the corridors of the Mount Scopus Campus, stood in line to take out books from the social work library,

discovered the world of Free Loan Associations (*gemachim*) with Prof. Eliezer Yaffe, learnt about the infrastructure of the Ministry of Welfare from Prof. Abraham Doron, and gained insights on the nature of community work from Prof. Gail Auslander. Never could I have imagined that my professional life would have taken me to where I am today.

I believe that resilience is an integral part of the Jewish and Israeli DNA. Victimhood may be seen to dominate our history and reality, but we have choices: how we cope, how we present ourselves, and how we own and tell our story. These choices are our survival.

Telling and listening to our stories is of the utmost importance.

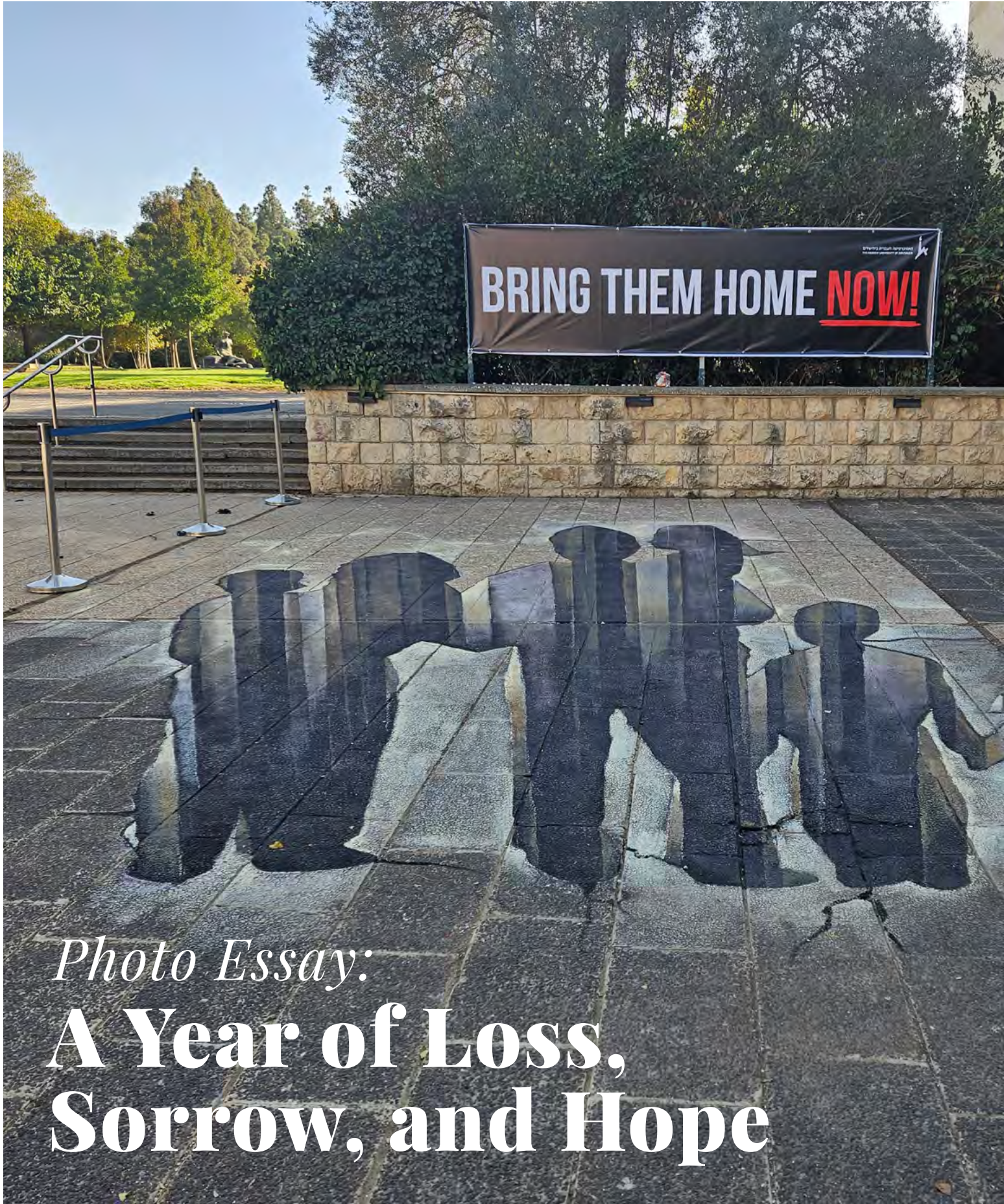
My story is one of many woven into a national story.

My story as a social worker began at the Hebrew University.

My life at the Hebrew University also provided me with lifelong friends.

I am forever grateful for those first years of my life in Israel, years which shaped me and set me on the path to who and where I am today.

Today I am a mother, a grandmother, a widow, an author, a friend, a Zionist, a proud social worker and therapist, a survivor, and a manager of a resilience center in the western Negev.



*Photo Essay:*  
**A Year of Loss,  
Sorrow, and Hope**





1

Since October 7th, Israel has been awash with visual reminders of the immense physical loss and emotional pain stemming from the Hamas attack and the subsequent prolonged war. Israel's landscape has been marked by memorials for lost friends and family, efforts to keep the hostages in the public eye, and acts of solidarity and hope.

In the following pages you will see many examples of these from our campuses, a reminder that times are tough, we are in it together, and this too shall pass.



2

1 | Chalk art created on the Edmond J. Safra Campus as part of a nation-wide civic day of mourning. On November 10, 2023, the Hebrew University community gathered to remember those who lost their lives on October 7<sup>th</sup> and call for the release of the hostages. This striking chalk art was created by artist Ana Kogan.

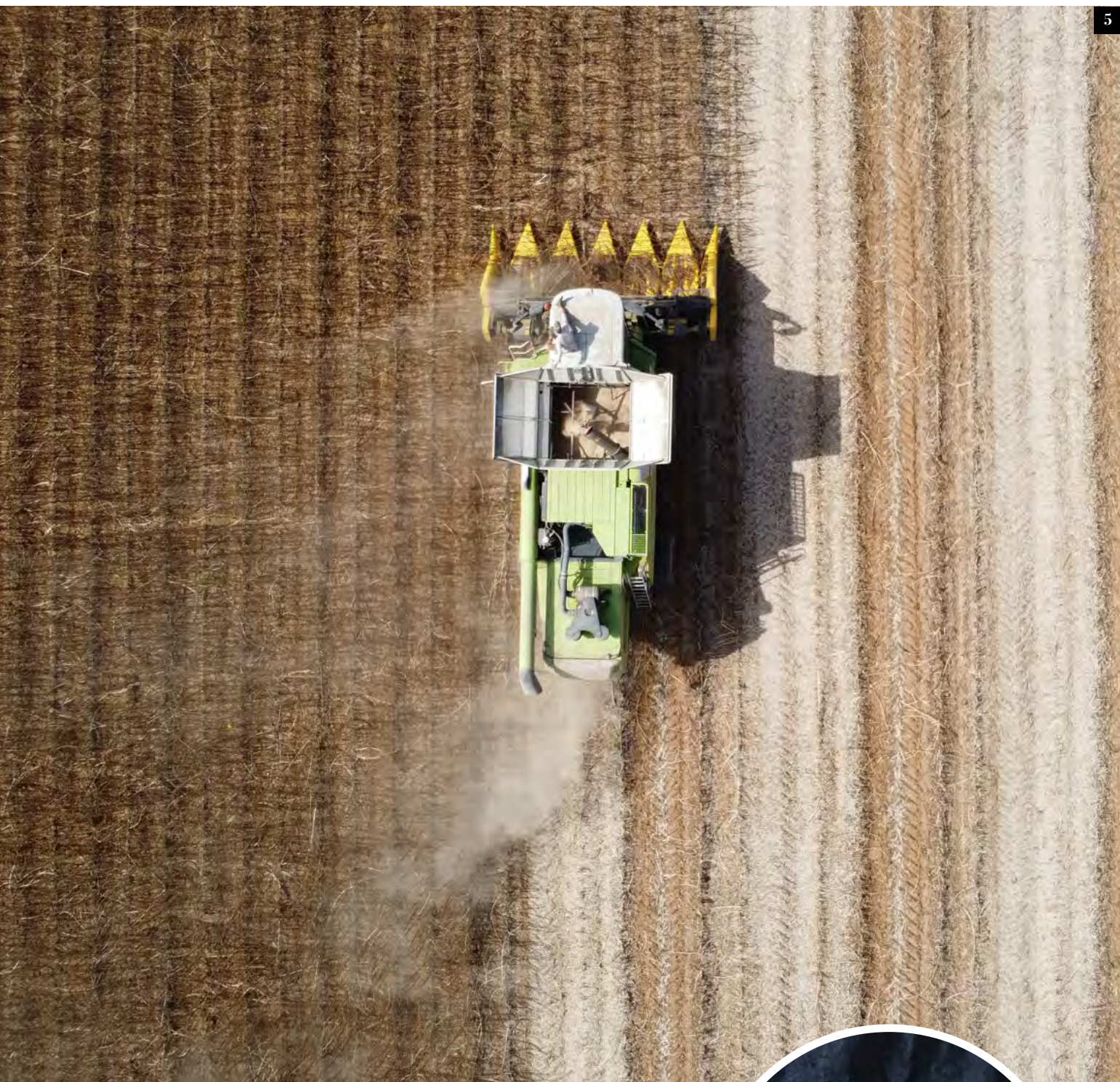
2 | Students planting a *Garden of Hope* in memory of those murdered by Hamas on October 7<sup>th</sup> and those killed in the war. The Hebrew University marked Tu B'Shvat (Jewish Arbor Day) by planting two gardens, one at the Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment, and the other on the Edmond J. Safra Campus. The event was created in collaboration with the Hebrew University's Center for Sustainability.



3 | Empty chairs at the Board of Governors closing event for the two members of the Hebrew University community who were taken hostage by Hamas on October 7<sup>th</sup>. Carmel Gat, a graduate student in occupational therapy, was kidnapped from her parents' home on Kibbutz Be'eri and Sagui Dekel-Chen, son of Prof. Jonathan Dekel-Chen, was kidnapped from his home on Kibbutz Nir Oz.



4 | An interpretive dance performed at the tribute to recipients of Honorary Doctorates during the 2024 Board of Governors. The dancers performed against a backdrop of images of the hostages, to the song *Bring Them Home: A Broadway Prayer*, which was recorded by members of the Broadway community to raise awareness of the hostages' plight.



5 | Aerial photo of the sesame harvest near the Gaza border, along with a bottle of sesame oil dedicated to the memory of Yacoby Inon ז"ל, who graduated from the Faculty of Agriculture in 1979. Yacoby worked as a field crops agronomist and in recent years supported Prof. Zvi Peleg's breeding program to develop a high-yield and high-quality sesame variety adapted for the Israeli climate. The harvest of this variety took place on October 12<sup>th</sup>, just days after Hamas terrorists murdered Yacoby and his wife, Bilha, in their home on Netiv HaAsara. This sesame variety has been named in his memory.







6 | A large banner calling for the immediate release of the hostages, hanging from an outward-facing building of the James J. Shasha Complex for Psychological Sciences on the Mount Scopus Campus. Similar banners were hung on all of the Hebrew University's campuses.

7 | An exhibition of illustrations of hostages by artist Ze'ev "Shoshke" Engelmayer, which opened at the Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Brain Sciences in August 2024. Following October 7<sup>th</sup>, the artist began publishing colorful and happy images that re-imagined scenes from that horrific day. He began drawing "daily postcards" of hostages per requests of hostages' families and friends. These iconic images have been gifted to dignitaries and displayed in museums worldwide, and adorn streets and bus stops across Israel.

# Hope

## *Q&A with Dr. Oded Adomi Leshem*

### **Q: How did you become interested in studying hope?**

**A:** I have long volunteered driving sick Palestinian kids from the West Bank and Gaza to Israeli hospitals. In 2010, I took Mohammad, a boy from Gaza, and his aunt, Ibtisam, back and forth as Mohammad underwent a bone marrow transplant at the Sheba Medical Center. I was always amazed by Ibtisam's relentless hope for peace because at the same time, people in Gaza were living in a very harsh reality. This spurred my curiosity about hope and its relationship with reality.

### **Q: How do you study hope from an academic perspective?**

**A:** The word "hope" is used so broadly that it can, in fact, be hard to pinpoint its meaning. To say, "I hope for peace" (I wish for peace), is quite different from saying, "I have hope that there will be peace" (I expect peace to come about). To solve this, I developed a bi-dimensional model for understanding hope.

The first dimension is the WISH dimension, which is driven by our wishes and desires for something. The second dimension is EXPECTATION, which is driven by our assessment of the likelihood that our wishes will materialize. Neither dimension is sufficient on its own, but, taken together, they enable us to understand and even quantify hope.

### **Q: Why are you specifically interested in studying hope in conflict zones?**

**A:** As a father of three, I am deeply concerned by conflicts and the price children are paying, and will pay, for their continuation. I have devoted much of my adult life to understanding conflicts and possible ways to transform them. We know that conflicts are not inevitable; to end bloodshed we must also address their underlying psychological roots, which include understanding hope and its absence.

### **Q: Hope becomes an indicator, a way to forge a path toward resolution.**

**A:** Right. Let's take the local conflict as an example. Although hoping for peace was a core value throughout Israel's history, we see a slump over the last two decades in both dimensions of hope. Data show that not only have Jewish Israelis decreased their expectations that peace will come about, but they also report wishing for peace less.

### **Q: What role do leaders play? Can they affect people's hope?**

**A:** Leaders have a choice: politics of hope or politics of skepticism. Leaders who choose hope offer a clear vision of the future. They will inspire people to imagine that better things are possible.

Politics of skepticism focus on the here-and-now. Leaders who choose skepticism do not provide a clear vision and therefore discourage political imagination. As time passes, people are trained to be content and obedient.

### **Q: The last year and a half have not been easy in Israel, and hope feels hard to come by. In January 2023, the government announced it would overhaul the judicial system. How do you interpret the large widespread protests that lasted nearly a year?**

**A:** Like many other young countries, core issues were not addressed at Israel's founding. The government's announcement of its intent to overhaul the judicial system and subsequent legislation brought those unresolved issues to the fore. What is Israel about? What are its core values? Society is at a crossroads and needs to decide: A liberal democracy? A theocracy?

The large pro-democracy protests indeed garnered attention worldwide. But in my opinion, hope was not salient enough in their message. It is tempting to focus on the wrongdoings of your political rival, but often it comes at the expense of an alternative vision of what a democratic and tolerant future looks

like. This vision should be simple, tangible, and concrete—inspiring people to stand up and fight *for* something.

### **Q: More recently, Israel is coping with the horrific attack of October 7<sup>th</sup>, the hostages in Gaza, and the prolonged war. Among all the fear, anger, and sorrow, is there any room for hope?**

**A:** Even under the most dire circumstances, there is room for hope. Not a naïve hope, but a very grounded type of hope. First, ensure that your WISH remains intact, even when your EXPECTATIONS are challenged. The clearer and stronger your aspirations and long-term goals are, the easier this will be.

**"LEADERS WHO CHOOSE  
HOPE OFFER A CLEAR VISION  
OF THE FUTURE. THEY WILL  
INSPIRE PEOPLE TO IMAGINE  
THAT BETTER THINGS ARE  
POSSIBLE."**

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"ONE AREA WHERE I FIND  
HOPE FOR ISRAEL'S RECOVERY  
AND REJUVENATION IS ITS  
UNIVERSITIES."

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Avoid getting bogged down in the here-and-now. Second, find inward coping strategies that build resilience, but ensure self-care does not distract you from your social responsibilities.

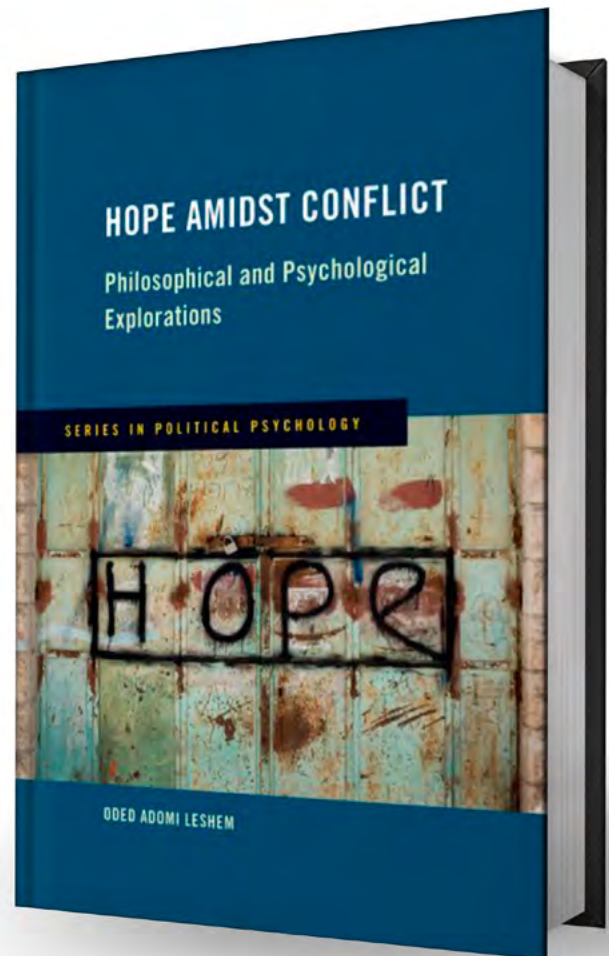
Third, stay active and participate in collective action. In fact, taking action infuses others with hope. Attending a rally calling for the release of hostages or helping a displaced family do their laundry—these small acts of solidarity go a long way toward the perseverance of people whose lives were upended on October 7<sup>th</sup> and will also keep your own hope alive.

**Q:** *Where do you find hope these days?*

**A:** One area where I find hope for Israel's recovery and rejuvenation is its universities. Why? First, because universities serve people, not governments. Israel's universities stood in support of democracy, aligning themselves with the citizens, the majority of which believe democracy is vital to Israel. Second, universities are future-oriented institutions. They offer the younger generation a way to invest in their future.

Closer to home, at the Hebrew University, I am in the process of establishing the interdisciplinary International Hub for Hope Research, which will be based at the Psychology of Intergroup Conflict and Reconciliation Lab. The hub will bring together junior and senior researchers interested in hope and its role as a catalyst for social change. We will conduct cutting-edge basic and applied research and disseminate our insights on ways that hope can strengthen democracy, equality, and peace.

I hope the research hub will contribute to science and to people worldwide who, like all of us, could use a little hope.



Dr. Oded Adomi Leshem is a political psychologist who has been exploring the concept of hope for over a decade. Based at Prof. Eran Halperin's Psychology of Intergroup Conflict and Reconciliation Lab in the Psychology Department, he is particularly interested in hope as a social and political phenomenon. His recent book, *Hope Amidst Conflict* (Oxford University Press), investigates hope in the seemingly hopeless realities of intractable conflicts. Dr. Leshem is the founder and future director of the newly established International Hub for Hope Research at the Hebrew University.

# What Gives You Hope?

*Hebrew University faculty, staff, and students share what has given them hope over the last year.*

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*“I find hope in the farmers. So many people in the region lost someone on October 7<sup>th</sup>. But when I see members of my own kibbutz, dedicated farmers, returning to the fields every morning, with a smile on their face, I am filled with hope.”*

**NATASHA KING**

p. 8



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*“We find hope in our faith. We believe and know that Israel is our home, and the country and nation are destined to flourish.”*

**IDO AND LIRON HASSON**

p. 14-15



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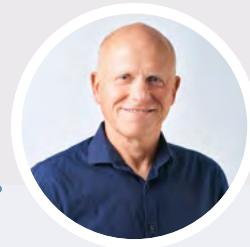
*“I find hope knowing that humankind goes through ups and downs, but eventually reaches equilibrium. I believe in the Israeli people and know, deep down, that society will choose democracy.”*

**KEREN GOLDSMITH**

p. 16-17



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*“I find hope in our faculty and students’ wonderful contributions to the State of Israel this last year. Seeing our students succeed, despite lengthy reserve duty, thanks to assistance they have received from their peers and from the University, fills me with hope.”*

**PROF. TAMIR SHEAFER**

Rector, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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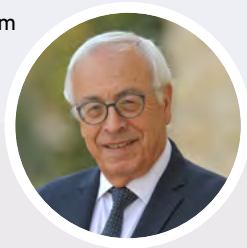


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*“I find hope in the younger generation of our nation, as I see them continue to excel despite the difficulties. I find hope in the commitment, despite the difficulties, to our basic values. I find hope in the massive wave of voluntarism among our students and faculty alike. I find hope in the spirit of the Israeli people.”*

**AMB. YOSSI GAL**

Vice President for Advancement and External Relations,  
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



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*“My Christian faith has deepened. Trauma, like a relentless sculptor, has carved away the distractions, revealing the bedrock of my core values. I’ve found strength in my belief in good, in God, and in the enduring light of hope.”*

**DR. NDE FON NJWENG**

p. 40



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*I find hope in our nation’s ability to cope with pain and sorrow, and still look ahead. To live, because there isn’t an alternative. I am inspired by previous generations who experienced unimaginable horrors and got back up on their feet.*

**DR. RINAT TZACH**

p. 18-19

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*“I find hope in people. Although people are behind the horrific events that are affecting our lives, I want to believe that most humans strive for good and want to change our reality for the best. We cannot give up the belief that we have the power to make a difference for the best and must remain determined to make it happen.”*

**PROF. MONA KHOURY**

Vice President for Strategy & Diversity,  
The Hebrew of University of Jerusalem

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# The Elephant on the Roof

## *Creating an Inclusive Space on Campus*

The spark happened during a Zoom meeting. It was mid-October, and two Hebrew University faculty members, Dr. Noga Keidar (sociology) and Dr. Diego Rotman (theater studies), were describing life against the backdrop of war to their colleagues at the University of Toronto. It was a routine meeting of a joint HU-UT research group that studies the social aspects of space, and the idea emerged to create an inclusive space on Hebrew University's campus, inspired by the group's research. They reached out to Dr. Michal Braier (geography) who Dr. Keidar knew from the University's Urban Clinic.

They organized a brainstorming session, and ten students showed up. The first discussion led to a second one. Dr. Keidar recalls how the prevalent mood was for Palestinians and Israelis to avoid contact. "But campus is precisely the place for such encounters," she says, smiling. "Still, meeting on a deserted campus felt strange and sad."

The three faculty members decided to further explore these ideas by developing an academic course, which they titled: *Creating Inclusive Spaces during Wartime: Building a Green Roof at Mt. Scopus*. The course was listed under theater studies but was open to students across disciplines. It was the only course that opened in the fall, prior to the official opening of the academic year.

Ester Kremer is a former teacher who is now studying social work. When she saw the course advertised, she knew she had to join. "I seek out diversity," she says. "I want to know and engage with different kinds of people."

At the first session she was glad to see Malak Abu Nijmeh. "I met Ester through social work," Malak says. "We've studied together and are both in the student union." While their political views often clash, Malak reports, "we have a lot of respect for one another."

Forty-four students enrolled in the course, which began on November

30<sup>th</sup>. Half were Jewish Israelis, and half were Palestinian Israelis and Palestinians from East Jerusalem. That morning, they woke to news of a terror attack in Jerusalem. "We worried students would choose to stay away," recalls Dr. Rotman, "but eventually, nearly everyone made it. Those who couldn't, joined via Zoom."

After the first lecture, the students went location hunting on the deserted campus. It was a sunny day. Afterward, one student reflected, "I had hoped the semester would be entirely online, to avoid tension. But now that we are here, I want to return to in-person learning, because campus is the perfect meeting place."

They picked the roof atop the Yitzhak Rabin Building with a sweeping eastward view. Each session began with a theoretical lecture: sustainability, placemaking, performance studies, urban activism, and more.

The second half of each class was hands-on. Students began planning, planting, designing, and decorating the space. From week to week, the project grew. The Mount Scopus National Botanical Garden provided plants and guidance. The

students visited green roofs created by Muslala, a West Jerusalem organization that operates in the intersection of art-community-activism, and Sinsila, a similar organization in East Jerusalem. Eight students were inspired to further study green roofs through Muslala's designated course. The HU-UT research group donated funds, and Dr. Rotman's organization, Mamuta, and the Faculty of Humanities also contributed significantly.

The faculty were pleased to see the students working together, side-by-side. But for the students, there was an elephant in the room. Or rather, an elephant on the roof: the war. The Jewish Israeli students, in particular, felt that an inclusive space should also welcome opinions and emotions.

The faculty agreed and began facilitating discussions. Jewish

**"THE COURSE EMPOWERED  
ME TO MAKE JERUSALEM  
A BETTER CITY FOR ALL—  
IN TIMES OF WAR AND  
PEACE."**

**— Malak Abu Nijmeh**

students shared their pain over the events of October 7<sup>th</sup> and the war. Palestinian students reported the fear they felt sharing their political opinions or grief over the war in Gaza. Jewish students talked about the burden of military service, while their Palestinian peers shared how they and their families experience the Israeli army. Palestinian students were finally able to share their experience of being a minority on campus, even dropping

courses if they were the only Arab student enrolled. These discussions evoked complex feelings, pain, and conflict.

After five intensive weeks of hard work, *HaGag/Satekh*, as the students dubbed the roof, was taking shape. During the sixth and final session, the space was buzzing with activity: discussion groups, yoga, making mobiles, and knitting on the rails. “It made for a very festive opening,” reflects Dr. Keidar.



*Ester Kremer (R) and Malak Abu Nijmeh (L) on the green roof.*

The same week, the campus opened its doors for the new school year. “It felt like our bubble had burst,” reflected one student. Suddenly the campus was flooded with students—some in uniform, some dividing their time between the reserves and school, and others just apprehensive of returning to school. The war had become more palpable on campus.

Malak was grateful for being part of the green roof, especially after the school year began. “Hearing the experiences and opinions of my Jewish

peers,” she says, “prepared me for the rest of my time at Hebrew University. The course empowered me to make Jerusalem a better city for all—in times of war and peace.”

Ester and Malak continue to be involved in developing the roof.

Ester is collaborating with the Van Leer Institute’s *Masa’ot Da’at* leadership program to develop a platform for showcasing the complex history of the roof’s expansive vista, which includes Jewish neighborhoods, Palestinian neighborhoods, and even Jordan. “I want to expose visitors to the multiple, overlapping narratives,” she says.

Malak continues to develop the physical space of the roof, and helped organize a conference titled *Space, Not Swords*, which brought together environmental groups to discuss the creation of green and inclusive spaces during war.

Dr. Rotman, Dr. Keidar, and Dr. Braier are generally pleased with the process and the outcome of the course. “Yet at the same time,” reflects Dr. Braier, “*HaGag/Satekh* feels almost insignificant in comparison to the harshness of reality.”

They find solace in the words of Prof. Dror Burstein (literature, law): “A garden is the best a person can do in the world, meaning in both space and time. Therefore, a garden is diametrically opposed to violence. It is a space for growth, tenderness, and meaning. In other words, the garden’s relationship to daily life is like that of poetry to everyday language.”



The logo of *HaGag/Satekh*, combining Hebrew and Arabic writing



From left: Dr. Michal Braier (Minerva Center, Urban Clinic), Dr. Noga Keidar (sociology, Urban Clinic), and Dr. Diego Rotman (theater studies)

**YAIR KOCHAV**

Musical Director

*A decade ago, I founded Tahrir, a nomadic cultural institution and stage that brings together people through art and culture, stemming from the belief that our culture is our liberty. Most recently, Tahrir has found a home at the Hebrew University, where I direct an intercultural musical ensemble under the aegis of the Unit for Social Involvement. I am immensely proud of the student musicians, whose voices and backgrounds blend together. Through the universal language of music, the Hebrew University ensemble is realizing the social and musical vision of Tahrir.*

# Harmony on

**REFAEL MOR**

Piano

*With the war in the backdrop, and despite our personal differences, playing music together keeps me optimistic.*

**ALON SHOVAL**

Electric Guitar

*The ensemble's musicians contribute the songs and arrange the music in our repertoire. Through improvised solo pieces, each musician can fully express themselves through music.*



**URI TZEMACH**

Bass Guitar

*The ensemble exposed me to non-Western instruments and music. I have come to realize the similarities between Western and Eastern music are greater than the differences.*

**AMR ABU SHARKEIA**

Oud

*I taught myself to play the oud. The ensemble motivated me to learn more and improve, and my peers were a great source of help and inspiration.*

# Campus *The Hebrew University Ensemble*

## NOA PELED

Vocalist

*My Classical background trained me to sing in Romance languages. The ensemble was my first opportunity to sing in Arabic. I love how music brings people together.*

## MATAN KOHEN

Kanun

*The kanun's scale is Western, but it looks distinctly Eastern. I began my musical journey as a chazan in my Turkish synagogue and went on to study Turkish classical (Ottoman) music.*

## NACHMAN ABERGEL

Kamancheh

*I began playing music at age 15, to fulfill a deep spiritual need. I fell in love with the kamancheh through my own ethnic roots—Persian music filled my childhood home.*



## SAMAR QASASFEH

Vocalist

*I started singing at age ten, in my church. Music is art, and it doesn't belong to any one person or group. The ensemble creates and connects around music, not politics.*

## SAGIT ZILBERMAN

Soprano Saxophone

*Music is the purest form of conversation, and it gives me immense satisfaction and meaning. Playing music brings people together, benefiting audiences and musicians alike.*

## DAVID ZVI KADISH

Trombone

*I have played the trombone professionally since age 11. I first encountered the oud, kamancheh, and kanun through the ensemble, and I look forward to deepening my understanding of Eastern music in years to come.*

# The Onward March of Public Health

Every year, the International Master of Public Health (IMPH) program welcomes 22-25 students from around the globe, who travel to Jerusalem to gain critical skills for advancing public health in their home countries. And this year was no exception.

The first student to arrive was Israel Samuelsen from Myanmar. He arrived in September, hoping to sightsee before classes began.

“With the first siren on October 7<sup>th</sup>, I ran into the stairwell. People were annoyed. By the second siren, the mood had visibly changed. People were worried.” He had lived through years of civil war in Myanmar, but that didn’t make this experience any easier.

The second student to arrive was Dr. Nde Fon Njweng. She departed her native Cameroon, a country experiencing civil war since 2016 (the Anglophone crisis), on the morning of October 7<sup>th</sup>.

“I realized something was amiss during my connection in Addis Ababa,” Nde Fon recalls. “IMPH director Prof. Hagit Hochner called and advised me to return immediately to Cameroon. Due to the complexity of turning around mid-flight, we decided I would continue to Israel, rest, and board the earliest possible flight back. But that wasn’t so easy. A few days later, I experienced three sirens and was guided through it all. Jerusalem was relatively safe and the IMPH staff was highly supportive and welcoming. It felt like home,” she says.

Israel and Nde Fon eventually ended up in the Hebrew University dorms, finding comfort in each other’s company and in their faith. Ten days later, Nde Fon returned to Cameroon until the semester could begin.

“While the rest of the University postponed the opening of the school year, the IMPH program didn’t have that option,” says Dr. Maureen Malowany, the program’s alumni academic coordinator.

“Our students arrange their schedules, often months in advance, to participate in this intensive 12-month program.”

Ultimately, classes began over Zoom the week of October 23<sup>rd</sup>. A month later, the students flew to Israel. Many flights were still cancelled, so the African students were rerouted through Johannesburg, while everyone from the east flew through Dubai.

On campus, the students settled into the reality of war, safe rooms, and sirens. The IMPH staff conducted frequent mental health check-ins.

For Israel Samuelsen, the sense of grief was palpable. “Pictures of the hostages were everywhere, and our professors were constantly going to funerals. We visited the Soroka Medical Center in Be’er Sheva, hearing firsthand what their emergency room looked like on October 7<sup>th</sup>.”

For Nde Fon, another memorable moment was a seminar by Prof. Hagai Levine, who defined epidemiology as a tool for “helping people in trouble, wherever they may be.” In his talk, he focused on the hostages and their health

status. They also heard from a nurse whose sister was being held captive by Hamas. “It was so emotional; people were brought to tears,” she recalls.

These are not easy days in Israel, but Nde Fon is trying to see the cup half full. She has seen war before, working in a conflict zone in Cameroon. “Studying during a war is challenging, but with resilience we can succeed,” she says optimistically. “As public health professionals, we need to know what public health looks like in times of war. It is unfortunate, but it is also an opportunity.”

“This is the power of the IMPH community,” Dr. Malowany says with pride. “Our students and alumni are committed to public health, and nothing can stop them!”

**MY CAMEROONIAN MENTORS  
ENTHUSIASTICALLY PUSHED  
ME TO APPLY FOR THE HEBREW  
UNIVERSITY'S IMPH PROGRAM.  
THEY WERE RIGHT!"**

**– Dr. Nde Fon Njweng**



Dr. Nde Fon Njweng (IMPH 2024) is the daughter of an MD in public health and hospital administrator.



Israel Samuelsen (IMPH 2024) is the son of Danish and English humanitarian workers. He grew up in Nepal, China, and Myanmar.



# A STEP in the Right Direction

Under ordinary circumstances, Hosniyah “Hoson” El and Noa Hourvitz might never have met. Hoson was born in Hebron and moved with her family to East Jerusalem as a child. Noa grew up in central Israel.

What brought these two remarkable women together is the Hebrew University.

Hoson attended Arabic-speaking high school and graduated with high enough marks to study medicine abroad. Instead, she enrolled in the Hebrew University’s preparatory program for East Jerusalem students, learned Hebrew, and began studying biology. She completed her BSc and then began an MSc in genetics under the supervision of Prof. Yehuda Tzfati, who encouraged her to continue to a doctorate. “I hesitated,” she recalls, “but then my experiments started returning data—and I was hooked.”

Noa is a Jewish Israeli; she moved to Jerusalem to study biology. She joined Prof. Tzfati’s lab as an undergraduate student and fell in love with research. But she also wanted to have a more immediate impact on people’s lives, so she completed a master’s degree in genetic counseling concurrent to her work in the lab. “I really enjoy both fields,” she says. “I started my internship in genetic counseling at the same time I began working on my doctorate.”

Noa and Hoson immediately clicked. As their friendship grew and their research progressed, they joined the Science Training Encouraging Peace (STEP) program, which supports pairs of Israeli and Palestinian graduate students working together in the sciences.

The events of October 7<sup>th</sup> severely challenged many people’s perceptions and beliefs, and Noa and Hoson were no exception. But they had a unique anchor—each other.

As the extent of the horrific attack became clear, Hoson felt comfortable enough in their friendship to reach out to Noa and ask how she was doing. And as the war unfolded, Hoson could talk with Noa about the pain of seeing the destruction in Gaza and share the experience of war from the Palestinian perspective.

“In some other labs, the events of October 7<sup>th</sup> tore friendships apart,” Noa laments. “But things were different in our lab.” Hoson agrees: “My own family doesn’t understand how I can have an Israeli friend. I know that if I hadn’t met Noa or Prof. Tzfati, I wouldn’t understand either.”

Both women agree—the basis for change is in education. And at the Hebrew University, they are taking a STEP in the right direction.



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**"MY OWN FAMILY DOESN'T UNDERSTAND HOW I CAN HAVE AN ISRAELI FRIEND. I KNOW THAT IF I HADN'T MET NOA OR PROF. TZFATI, I WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND EITHER."**

**– Hosniyah "Hoson" El**

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# Democratic Citizenship in Times of Crisis

BY DR. ADAR COHEN



February 2023. A large pro-democracy protest circling the Knesset, in response to the government's intent to begin a judicial overhaul.

In my line of work, we like to say, “Being a citizen is easy, but becoming a democratic citizen is hard.” But that’s an over-simplification. Being a democratic citizen in Israel, especially during the last two years—is truly hard. And being a teacher during this time has been outright challenging.

I began my academic journey studying law, then earned a master’s degree in political science. When I decided to become a teacher, civic studies was the natural choice. After spending six years in the classroom, I began working for the Ministry of Education and was eventually appointed the National Inspector of Civic Education. Today I head the Department of Teacher Education at The Seymour Fox School of Education at the Hebrew University, where my approach to teacher training is rooted in my deep belief in civic education and is applicable to every single discipline.

Civic education takes a four-fold approach: 1. political literacy (knowledge of the political structure and processes); 2. civic patriotism (the meaning of belonging to society); 3. political education (critical thinking, openness to multiple perspectives); 4. political activism (civic or political engagement).

My research is driven by the question: what should civic education look like in Israel as a Jewish democracy and a multicultural society experiencing internal and external conflicts?

The last two years have made this question more relevant than ever, as the country has grappled with attempted changes to the judicial system, followed by a long, drawn-out war.

## 2023: Overhaul or Reform?

In January 2023 the government announced that it would begin making changes to Israel's judicial system. The response was quick: large-scale ongoing protests in support of Israel as a liberal democracy. As an educator, the dilemma was whether all opinions should enjoy equal representation when discussing controversial political issues, especially given the polarization of Israeli society.



The nature of Israeli democracy is not exactly typical debate club material. It is not an abstract topic that can be argued for or against as a thought exercise. It is the rock of our existence.

The approach I took for training teachers was rooted in my observation that supporters of the government favored a “judicial reform,” while opponents of the government opposed a “regime overhaul.” The sides were using different terms because they saw reality differently. Despite my personal unequivocal objection to the government’s approach, I strongly believe that different viewpoints should be welcome in the classroom. I trained teachers to be fair and inclusive, without necessarily being neutral or objective.

Ultimately, the large-scale, ongoing, and non-violent protests are proof of our democracy’s strength. We should be proud of the commitment that so many people feel toward their country and their critical approach to the government and its policies.

## 2023/24: Wartime Civic Education

Along with research and teaching, The Seymour Fox School of Education is highly committed to working in, and with, the community. This became especially pertinent after the war broke out, and educators and schools found themselves in uncharted territory.

On top of the trauma, war, and massive call-up of reserves, makeshift schools quickly emerged to serve the displaced children.

Along with other faculty members, I organized a series of virtual teacher trainings. The first, which was held on October 13<sup>th</sup>, prepared teachers to cope with trauma and build resilience among their students. Two subsequent sessions focused on the role of schools during times of emergency: addressing students’ emotional needs, maintaining a routine, and how to talk about the war with students.

In May 2024, I helped organize the annual Education Conference, a joint venture

between the Hebrew University, Leyada high school, and the Jerusalem municipality. Teachers gathered to hear lectures and participate in workshops on how to teach the conflict and other educational dilemmas that arose during the war.

An additional conference, this one academic in nature, was organized by The Seymour Fox School of Education’s Research Center for Teacher Learning and Training in June 2024. It brought together Israeli experts who had conducted research in Israeli schools post-October 7<sup>th</sup>. Along with two colleagues, I presented research on how the current war has influenced the pedagogy of teachers who ordinarily bring activism and politics into their classes.

## Making Education Relevant

On a personal level, in December 2023, I began volunteering as a civic studies teacher for a group of high school students displaced from Netiv HaAsara. It was refreshing to return to the classroom, and I greatly enjoyed my time with them. They were learning civics for its own sake; there was no matriculation exam at the end of the year. I was free to follow their questions or address topics relevant to their lives.

One day we played an online trivia game and another day we talked Diaspora-Israel relations. The didn’t feel they were learning—but they actually learned more than I ever imagined possible, precisely because the material was relevant to their lives. They could immerse themselves without worrying about passing the final exam.

I gradually realized the discrepancy between what we wanted to talk about and explore, and what would have been required to succeed on the official exam. There will be a lot to rebuild after the war, and I hope that we can rethink the basic structure of high school and its curriculum, to make it more relevant to the students’ lives.

After all, this is the immense promise of education. To develop future citizens, leaders, and thinkers. In times of war, as in times of peace, Israel needs the best people at its helm.



Dr. Adar Cohen holds an LLB, an MA in political science, and a PhD in education, all from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is a former high school civic studies teacher and served as the National Inspector of Civic Education between 2008-2012. Today he heads the Department of Teacher Education at The Seymour Fox School of Education at the Hebrew University.

# The Smallest Level, The Greatest Applications

In the very beginning, there was chirality. Molecules that were chemically identical could develop as either “right-handed” or “left-handed” (mirror images of each other). Then biology stepped in, and life forms began favoring one version over another. The result: every biological material has the same specific chiral direction. Change the direction, and everything changes. An infamous example is the drug thalidomide, which was marketed as a mixture of its two chiralities; one had the desired therapeutic effect while the other caused severe birth defects.

Prof. Yossi Paltiel (applied physics) and his collaborators, began asking a very basic question: Why does biology prefer one form of chirality? Why is nature so particular at the quantum level, that the “direction” of the molecule matters so much?

His research found that chirality affects an even smaller process: electron and nuclear spins, akin to a tiny rotating magnet inside each chiral molecule within each cell.

“You can imagine the spin like an American football,” says Prof. Paltiel. “A good throw spins through the air, reaching the target. The spin stabilizes the ball. In biology we want the same effect. The current passing through our cells and bodies must arrive at the right target at the right time, without scattering in the process.”

In the lab, Prof. Paltiel manipulates the electron spin, utilizing chiral molecules. These synthetic molecules can generate a very small magnet that can be harnessed for a variety of purposes.



Prof. Yossi Paltiel is the chair of the Institute for Applied Physics, the incoming dean of the Faculty of Sciences, and the director of the Brojde Center for Innovative Engineering at the Center for Nano Science and Nano Technology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

“The ability to control the spin at the tiniest level will positively impact a number of fields,” says Prof. Paltiel. The potential is immense: from the development of more effective drugs and healthier foods, to harnessing the spin for creating faster and more effective memory storage devices, such as hard drives. Another application would reduce the cost of electrolysis (separating the hydrogen from water, for energy) by half.

“This research is interesting because it starts with a very basic question, but has immediate and impactful applications,” says Prof. Paltiel.



# A Great Balancing Act

## *The Human Endocannabinoid System*

It is not news that an unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyle result in metabolic disease. What is news is that Prof. Yossi Tam (pharmacology) is doing something about it—through his cannabinoid research.

“Our body naturally produces cannabinoids that activate our endocannabinoid system,” he explains. “This system closely regulates the processing of fats, sugars, and proteins.”

Yet an unhealthy lifestyle causes our body to produce too many cannabinoids. The system gets over-activated and cannot properly function. This results in metabolic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, inflammation, fatty liver disease, and high blood pressure.

Prof. Yossi Tam has developed new cannabinoid molecules capable of blocking the endocannabinoid system’s receptors and preventing its over-activation. These molecules are the key component of a new drug that will soon undergo phase I clinical trials. So far, the results seem promising, with lower sugar levels, weight loss of up to 25 percent, and better liver fat.

“We know that obesity and diabetes are also linked to osteoporosis, and 12 percent of the world suffers from chronic kidney disease,” says Prof. Tam. “This cannabinoid-based drug has the potential to cure many ailments that all stem from one place—the endocannabinoid system.”



Prof. Yossi Tam is a professor of pharmacology and director of the Hebrew University's Multidisciplinary Center for Cannabinoid Research. He heads the Obesity and Metabolism Laboratory and serves as the vice dean for research at the Faculty of Medicine.

# Fighting Bacteria— With Viruses

Prof. Ronen Hazan is worried about one specific threat to human health: the rise of resistance to antibiotic drugs. He is not alone; the World Health Organization and the United Nations have also sounded the alarm on the fact that resistant bacteria are now the second leading cause of death worldwide.

In addition to resistance, biofilms also pose a threat. These are structures formed by bacteria that are impervious to antibiotics, meaning the structure is stronger than the individual bacteria within it. (Examples include dental plaque and the slime inside a garden hose.)

Lastly, antibiotics is a mass killer: it wipes out the bacteria making you sick along with the good flora in your gut.

“Antibiotics are wonderful, and they work,” says Prof. Hazan, “but they have their shortcomings. My research into bacteriophages offers an effective and safe solution, which can be administered alongside antibiotic treatment.”

Bacteriophages (from the Greek, to devour bacteria) are actually viruses that target bacteria with a high degree of specificity. “Viruses need to invade other cells to survive,” explains Prof. Hazan, “So it’s essentially a matching game.”

His Phage Therapy Lab can identify, select, and even genetically engineer phages that target specific bacteria, easily circumventing

antibiotic resistance. Prof. Hazan has also used phages to break down biofilms inside catheter tubes, which can be a dangerous source of infection.

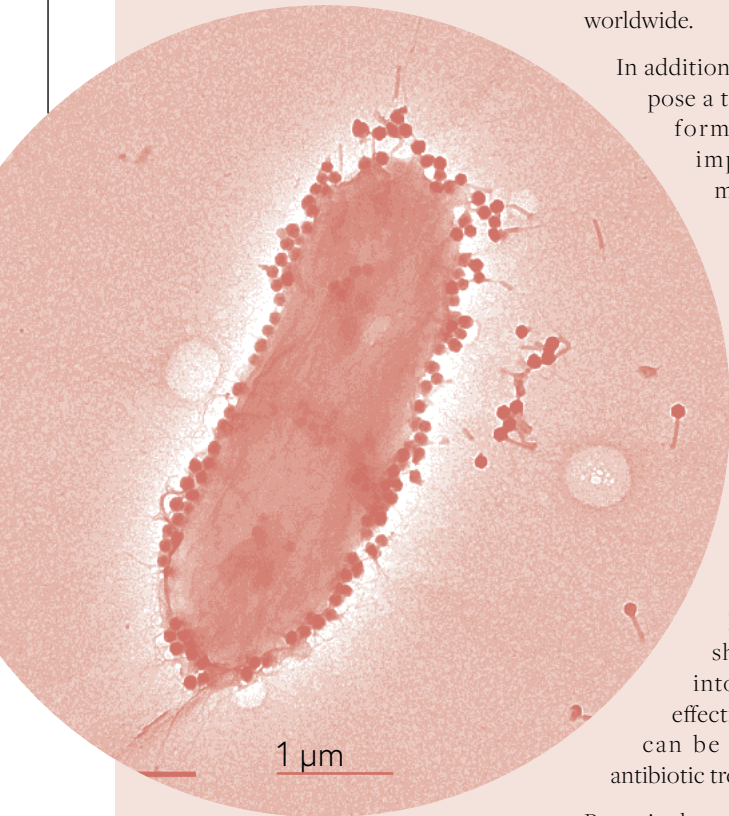
Lastly, phages enter the body, devour only their target bacteria, and then die. “Phages and bacteria are in a kind of tug-of-war,” explains Prof. Hazan. “Phages have survived for millions of years because of bacteria. As bacteria evolve, so do the phages.”

Yet drug companies don’t like to invest in drugs like phages, which are not one-size-fits-all. And the FDA is wary of approving them, because phages are constantly adapting to their target bacteria.

Yet since 2018, Prof. Hazan, in collaboration with Prof. Ran Nir-Paz from the Department of Infectious Diseases at the Hadassah Medical Center, has used phages to treat over 30 patients who had run out of options. “These were mostly compassionate care cases,” he says. “Remarkably, most of them made a full recovery.” He has also treated pets at Vet Holim, a veterinary hospital in the Jerusalem hills.

“The barrier we currently face is logistical, not scientific,” explains Prof. Hazan. “To treat humans safely, the phage must be isolated from leftover bacterial matter in accordance with the highest standards.” Currently, this means shipping his phage to laboratories abroad and paying for the process.

Prof. Hazan’s dream is to expand the Phage Therapy Lab to a full-service provider, which can identify, sequence, process, clean, and administer phages—entirely on-site. “We have the know-how,” he says, “and my lab is one of the leaders in phage research. The next stage is building our own facility at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.”



*A phage (PASA16) attacks Pseudomonas aeruginosa bacteria, as seen through transmission electron microscopy. PASA16 has been used to treat 16 patients, with a 86% success rate. (Color has been added for illustrative purposes.)*



Prof. Ronen Hazan is an associate professor at the Faculty of Dental Medicine of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He holds a BSc in biology and an MSc and PhD in microbiology, all from the Hebrew University. He conducted postdoctoral research at Harvard Medical School and Mass General Hospital in Boston, MA.

# Doing Good—For Others



Dr. Michal Almog-Bar is an associate professor at the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare. Her research focuses on civil society and social policy. She heads the interdisciplinary Institute for the Study of Civil Society and Philanthropy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

What motivates someone to wake up in the morning and go do something for someone else? This question has always been on the mind of Dr. Michal Almog-Bar, whose research aims to better understand how civil society works toward and creates social change.

“Civil activities such as volunteering and protesting seem intuitive,” she explains. “But my research has shown that the state and its governing bodies play a role in how and whether people choose to participate in civil society. It’s not as straightforward as it seems.”

For the past decade, Dr. Almog-Bar has headed the Hebrew University’s Institute for the Study of Civil Society and Philanthropy (ISCSP), which studies nonprofit organizations, philanthropy, social entrepreneurship, volunteering, and civic engagement within Israel, and toward Israel, primarily by Jewish communities around the world.

“ISCSP aims to understand how civic engagement in its different forms can be translated into social impact,” Dr. Almog-Bar says. “This often means identifying and developing ways for civil society, government, businesses, and communities to work together.”

The research conducted under the auspices of ISCSP is broad. Examples include different forms of philanthropy in Israel; intergenerational transmission of philanthropic values; civic initiatives in times of crises; cross-sector partnerships between nonprofits, philanthropy, government, and businesses; different forms of volunteering such as digital volunteering; and giving and volunteering in Israeli Arab communities, with the goal of helping local governments foster a culture of volunteerism and support local NGOs.

## Having a Direct Impact

One way that ISCSP is already having a direct impact is through its reports. The *Israeli Giving Yearbook* amalgamates research and data on volunteering, corporate giving, giving within different sectors, and much more. Published annually since 2022, the report is presented to the President of the State of Israel on International Volunteer Day.

Another significant issue studied by ISCSP is gender in relation to philanthropy and civic engagement. In one study, the researchers mapped out the sources of funding of 197 nonprofit associations that work specifically with, or for, women and girls in Israel. They found that less than 1 percent of philanthropic donations (domestically and from abroad) are earmarked for woman and girls in Israel.

## Civil Society in Israel

Dr. Almog-Bar’s own research has shown how Israelis, driven by a strong sense of social responsibility and high degree of solidarity, as well as anger and disappointment, are quick to mobilize in times of crisis, such as the pandemic, judicial overhaul, and war. In addition, Israel has

20,000+ registered nonprofit organizations, which is comparatively high. “But that’s not the complete picture,” she says. “Many of the nonprofits are small, and many work with the government or provide outsourced governmental services. Between crises, Israeli civil society is relatively weak and there is still much to develop and strengthen within the nonprofit sector.”

Yet in times of crisis, there is no doubt that civil society rises to the hour. During the first few weeks of the war, a ISCSP study found that half the citizens volunteered in some capacity (this number excludes reservists). This is precisely where Dr. Almog-Bar finds hope. “I strongly believe in the power of civil society to strengthen society and democracy in Israel!” she says proudly.



# World of Friends



The Hebrew University's supporters and Friends Associations are integral partners in the development and advancement of the University. In the pages ahead you will meet some of the individuals who actively support the University and its mission across the globe.

## American Friends of the Hebrew University

### 1 | 54<sup>th</sup> Annual George A. Katz Torch of Learning Award

The American Friends of the Hebrew University's George A. Katz Torch of Learning Award proudly honored two distinguished leaders in its legal community. Generous donors help the University's Faculty of Law to educate future leaders, provide pro bono legal services to underserved populations in Israel, and contribute to the legal community, both locally and globally.

From left: *Scott A. Edelman, honoree; Pamela N. Emmerich, AFHU President; Ann M. Kappler, honoree*

### 2 | 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Bel Air Affaire

The 14th Annual Bel Air Affaire, co-chaired by Joyce Brandman, Renae Jacobs-Anson and Dr. David Anson, and Helen Jacobs-

Lepor and Dr. Norman Lepor, and hosted at the iconic Papillon Estate in Beverly Hills, honored Roberta and Stanley Bogen with the Humanitarian Torch of Learning Award. Proceeds from the evening benefitted student scholarships at the University.

From left: *Prof. Asher Cohen, HU President; Roberta Bogen, honoree; Stanley Bogen, honoree*

### 3 | 2024 Palm Beach Scopus Gala

The American Friends of the Hebrew University presented the 2024 Southeast Region Scopus Award to philanthropists Lisa and Michael Rome at the Four Seasons, Palm Beach. The gala raised funds for the University's *We Are One* campaign, including psychological counseling, tutoring, scholarships, and acute financial relief for students and faculty impacted by the war. The event also provided funding for the University's Center for Computational Medicine.





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From left: *Michael Rome, honoree; Lisa Rome, honoree; Prof. Asher Cohen, HU President; Josh Rednik, AFHU CEO*

**4 | LEAD Cohort II Graduation**

The American Friends of the Hebrew University's Leadership Empowerment and Development (LEAD) Cohort II graduated from the 18-month leadership program in Austin, Texas, and have joined the ranks of the AFHU Board of Regents. Mazal tov!

From left: *Michael and Yael Kotick; Sammi Edelson; Marissa Lepor; Ariel Anson; Julia Cherlow; Gali Grant; Jesse Levin Jillian Frieder; Michelle Bernstein; Jesse Phillips; Jeremy Schreier; Laura Abrams, AFHU; Josh Rednik, AFHU CEO; David Wulkan*

**5 | Las Vegas Scopus Award**

The American Friends of the Hebrew University presented the Las Vegas Scopus Award to attorney and philanthropist David Z. Chesnoff at the Encore at Wynn Hotel in Las Vegas. The event raised funds to support

student scholarships and the University's Clinical Legal Education Center.

From left: *Alex Yemnidjian; Prof. Asher Cohen, HU President; David Z. Chesnoff, honoree*

**Israel Friends of the Hebrew University**

**6 | Boutique Event at the Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment**

Israeli members of the Board of Governors, Leading Alumni, and Friends of the University visited labs and heard about the cutting-edge agricultural research being done on bees, plants, fish evolution, and biodiversity.

From left: *Tova Sagol; Sami Sagol, HU Honorary Doctor; Dr. Efrat Maroz-Fine*

**7 | International Women's Day Panel**

The second part of the boutique event was an opportunity to showcase the University's support of Israel and Israeli society during the war, and featured a panel titled *Female Leadership at the Forefront of Wartime Medicine: Stories from the Front*.

From left: *Shona Goldwirth, medical student; Dr. Osnat Levtzion-Korach; Prof. Dina Ben Yehuda; Prof. Dalit Sela-Donenfeld*

**8 | 40-Under-40**

The Hebrew University was proud to introduce its inaugural 40-Under-40 list, featuring alumni who are leaders in their fields and are shaping Israeli society today and in the future. The event was a joint endeavor between the Alumni Association and the University's Marketing Division.



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## Canadian Friends of the Hebrew University

### 9 | CFHU's Inaugural Einstein Business Forum

From left: Steven Mintz, Harley Mintz, Greg Bailey, Michael Kraft, Rami Kleinmann

### 10 | Canadian Friends Dinner at the BOG

From left: Prof. Orly Sade, Prof. Asher Ben-Arieh, Gail Asper, Amnon Dekel, Shiri Liberman

## Australian Friends of the Hebrew University

### 11 | Australian Friends Gathering and Lecture

From left: Rob Schneider, Australian Friends CEO; Rabbi Dr. Orna Triguboff; Michael Dunkel, Australian Friends President

## British Friends of the Hebrew University

### 12 | European, British, and Latin American Friends Annual Cocktail Dinner

During the 2024 Board of Governors, 75 guests gathered at the beautiful Mandel School for Advanced Studies in the Humanities on the Mount Scopus Campus. The event was held jointly with Friends from Europe, Latin America, South America, and a few from Australia and South Africa. Attendees included British Council and British Embassy representatives, International Public Health students, alumni, and HU scholars.

*Pictured: Part of the 22-person BFHU delegation*

### 13 | Celebrating Einstein's 145<sup>th</sup> Birthday

Renowned architect Daniel Libeskind and HU Prof. Hanoch Gutfreund addressed a packed audience at JW3 in London during an evening devoted to the Einstein House project at the Hebrew University, followed by a celebratory lunch hosted by the British Friends of the Hebrew University.

*From left: Daniel Libeskind; Alan Jacobs, BFHU Chair; Prof. Hanoch Gutfreund*

### 14 | HU Alumni Association in the United Kingdom

UK-based Israeli HU alumni gathered at the Center for Transnational Legal Studies to hear Prof. Asher Cohen speak on the University's challenges during the war, followed by a conversation between HU Vice President for Strategy & Diversity, Prof. Mona Khoury, and alumna Iris Margulis, the EU Quality Director at Amazon, on workplace diversity and how academia is preparing graduates for the modern workforce.



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## Latin American Friends of the Hebrew University

### 15 | 34<sup>th</sup> Shasha Summer Symposium

The event, which was hosted by the Argentinian and Uruguayan Friends of the Hebrew University, took place in Punta del Este, Uruguay.

From left: Edu Pollak; Marcos Israel; Prof. Arie Kacowicz; Gabriel Goldman; Amb. Michal Hershkovitz; Hector Sussman

## European Friends of the Hebrew University

### 16 | French Friends of the Hebrew University

The French Friends gathered in Paris to hear a lecture from HU Prof. Barak Medina titled *The Judicial Reform and Israeli Democracy*.

### 17 | French-Speaking Swiss Friends of the Hebrew University

The French-speaking Swiss Friends of the Hebrew University hosted HU Vice President for Strategy & Diversity, Prof. Mona Khoury, for a talk titled *Rebuilding Trust in a Shared Society: Jews and Arabs in Israeli Universities*.

## 18 | German-Speaking Swiss Friends of the Hebrew University

The German-speaking Swiss Friends of the Hebrew University hosted a panel titled *The Rule of Law in Times of Deep Crisis*. The panel featured HU Prof. Yuval Shany and was moderated by Dr. Vera Rottenberg Liatowitsch, a former Swiss federal judge.

From left: Nadia Guth Biasini; Prof. Yuval Shani; Prof. Dr. Matthias Mahlmann; Justice Dr. Vera Rottenberg Liatowitsch

ASK THE EXPERT

ASK THE EXPERT

# Artificial Intelligence



## What is artificial intelligence?

Artificial intelligence (AI) was born out of the combination of computer coding, statistics, and big data.

The first stage was *machine learning*, which combined computer coding and statistics to predict outcomes. This is what enables your word processor to make suggestions as you type. The second stage was *deep learning*, which used neural networks that resemble our brain. This made possible the identification of structures within data. This leap was based on larger datasets, which in turn required more powerful computers.

The third stage of AI came in 2020, with another leap in algorithms, networks, and data, which now comprised millions of billions of datapoints. The current stage is *foundation models*, which can generate entirely new information based on existing data. Scientists “train” these models by masking (hiding) part of the dataset, and then seeing whether the model can generate the missing data.

## What are some of the benefits of AI, and how might it affect our readers’ lives?

First, AI improves access to textual sources, including, for example, ancient texts. Second, it can summarize large amounts of information for an easier read.

The third application is medicine. In recent years, science has reached a greater understanding of our immune system. With AI tools you can endlessly model amino acids, thus speeding up the process of identifying disease factors or even developing tailor-made biological drugs.

Lastly, climate science is benefitting from AI. Recently IBM and NASA developed a joint weather and climate model, which can predict both how particular weather events will impact people on the ground and long-term patterns of the global climate.

## This all sounds very promising. Are there any pitfalls or shortcomings?

The biggest danger posed by AI is its ability to create highly realistic yet fabricated content that can influence people’s perceptions and emotions. To combat this, industry leaders and academic organizations, such as the Hebrew University, formed the AI Alliance, which aims at fostering an open community and enabling developers and researchers to accelerate responsible innovation in AI while ensuring scientific rigor alongside trust, safety, and security.

Other uses of AI are not necessarily malicious but are more like malpractice. For example, AI can help students with wording and grammar, but it cannot replace learning, creativity, or original ideas. Students and their academic advisors need to be better trained to know how, when, and where to apply the tools of AI.

Of course, AI also has a democratizing effect. Whether helping less privileged people express themselves fluently or eliminating the need for on-site medical experts, plenty of people are already benefitting from AI in a multitude of ways.

## How does AI serve your research and work?

Together with my team and collaborators at IBM Research, I develop biomedical foundation models to study the interaction of the human body with a variety of materials. I utilize these models to analyze differences between the cells of healthy and sick people, which can single out proteins that may increase susceptibility to disease. Similar models are also used to design new drugs that target those proteins.

This is the future of medicine: to better understand disease and develop cures that are both effective and without side effects. I am fortunate to be advancing medicine, science, and AI at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

## Thank you, this has been very informative.



Prof. Michal Rosen-Zvi is the Director for Accelerated Discovery with AI at IBM and an adjunct professor of computational medicine at the Hebrew University’s Faculty of Medicine. She holds a BSc, MSc, and PhD in physics and computational physics.

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