

# THE CROWN FAMILY CENTER FOR JEWISH AND ISRAEL STUDIES



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### FROM THE DIRECTOR



## We Want U (University)... and You (Chicago-Area Public)... and #u (Online Public)!

The Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies' mission is an important one: to facilitate the study of Judaism, Jews, and Israel in all of their facets and historical periods with the rigor that only a premier research institution can provide. The mission engages scholars (both our own faculty and students and visitors) to advance what is known in these fields by building on existing work and applying

the most current and sophisticated methods of research to create new knowledge. That knowledge is communicated to the larger public both through academic forums (conferences, publications, and websites) and through public lectures.

The Crown Center strives to build ties with three different communities: the Northwestern campus community (faculty, students, and visiting researchers), the local community that attends our lectures and conferences, and an online community that engages us on our website and via social media.

Our campus community consists of people who are devoted to scholarship about Jewishness, Jews, Judaism, and Israel. The faculty who teach our Jewish studies and Israel studies courses rely on the Crown Center to provide research resources, conference resources, and an intellectual community within which they can test new hypotheses and report scholarly results. The students in our graduate cluster rely on the center to provide a Jewish studies framework that facilitates research in other primary disciplinary fields. Northwestern undergraduates look to us for more than 40 courses a year and the opportunity to major or minor in Jewish studies.

The Chicago-area community enjoys access to our public programming. The Crown Center presents four annual lectures (Crown, Klutznick, Harris, and Vogel) plus additional lectures, panels, and conferences. If you have ideas about speakers we should invite or learning programs we should offer, please share them with us.

Our online endeavors are expanding. Over the past few years we have posted audio and video recordings of public lectures on our website. This coming year we will be making a more deliberate attempt to engage the online public through our website and social media. In spring 2016 we will offer *The Talmud: A Methodological Introduction* as a MOOC (massive open online course). The course is designed for the general public and requires no prior knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic, or the Talmud; it will present the Talmud as it is taught in universities. With more extensive video and audio offerings planned, we hope to make the Crown Center website one of your favorite places for online learning.

Barry Scott Wimpfheimer  
Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Law  
Director, Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies



### “Film and Politics in Israeli History”

Shaul Mitelpunkt, postdoctoral fellow at Northwestern, organized “Film and Politics in Israeli History,” a panel discussion, on October 14, 2014. In addition to Mitelpunkt, speakers included Orit Bashkin (University of Chicago), Rachel Harris (University of Illinois), and Hamid Naficy (Northwestern).

### “Gaza and Beyond”

“Gaza and Beyond: Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab World,” a public program presented on October 23, 2014, addressed the ramifications of the 2014 Gaza war for Israel and the Palestinians, reconciliation efforts between Palestinian political factions, the destabilization of the Arab territorial nation-state, the rise of militant Islam, and the struggle of influential powers in the Middle East. Moderated by Northwestern’s Elie Rekhess, the panel included Shai Feldman (Brandeis University), Khalil Shikaki (Brandeis; Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Ramallah), Abdel Monem Said Aly (Brandeis; Regional Center for Strategic Studies, Cairo; *Al-Masry Al-Youm*), and Nabeel Khoury (Northwestern; Chicago Council on Global Affairs).



Lawrence Baron

### Renée and Lester Crown Speaker Series

Author Gary Shteyngart discussed and read from his best-selling memoir, *Little Failure*, in a program held October 25, 2014, on the Evanston campus. His lecture, “Still Failing: Gary Shteyngart Returns,” was presented as part of the Chicago Humanities Festival.

### Allan and Norma Harris Memorial Lecture in Jewish Studies

Lawrence Baron (San Diego State University) delivered “Hollywood and the Holocaust: From Appeasement to Anti-Nazism, 1933–1945” on November 3, 2014. Baron debunked the myth that Hollywood was late to address Nazi anti-Semitism.

*continued on page 4*



Gary Shteyngart



“Gaza and Beyond: Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab World”





Yoram Peri and Elie Rekhess



Danny M. Cohen

continued from page 3

### “2015 Knesset Elections”

On March 5, 2015, Yoram Peri (University of Maryland) and Northwestern’s Elie Rekhess anticipated the Israeli elections in a dialogue titled “2015 Knesset Elections: A Shift in Israeli Politics?” Peri overviewed Israel’s political system and the platforms and issues under consideration in the coming election. Rekhess then discussed the Arab Joint List coalition party and the background of Israel’s Arab voters. In the ensuing conversation Rekhess and Peri queried each other about the relevance of party platforms, the absence of contentious topics such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the potential for a major power shift.

### Train reading and discussion

On Yom Hashoah, April 16, 2015, Danny M. Cohen (Northwestern) read from his newly published novel, *Train*. A work of historical fiction based on hidden Holocaust history, *Train* gives voice to the unheard victims of Nazism—the Roma, the disabled, intermarried Jews, homosexuals, and political enemies of the Nazi regime. The reading was followed by a discussion and author interview facilitated by Northwestern’s Phyllis Lassner.



Lila Corwin Berman

### Manfred H. Vogel Memorial Lecture in Judaic Studies

Lila Corwin Berman (Temple University) presented “Is It Good to Give? The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex” on April 23, 2015. Berman outlined the ways in which communal charity collection and distribution have changed in the past century and how tax laws have caused an increase in “donor-advised funds” and affected Jewish giving.

### “At the Crossroads”

On May 18–19, 2015, Northwestern’s Mira Balberg and Barry Wimpfheimer cochaired the conference “At the Crossroads: New Directions in the Study of Rabbinic Literature.” Held in workshop style, with 12 participants and ample time for discussion and conversation, the conference reflected on the past, present, and future of the academic field of rabbinics.

### Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Lecture in Jewish Civilization

Ruth Langer (Boston College) presented “Dealing with ‘Difficult’ Prayers: Jewish Liturgy in an Age of Jewish-Christian Dialogue” on May 28, 2015, in a program cosponsored with the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago. Langer focused her presentation on *birkat haminin*, an ancient prayer that has been understood as anti-Christian for much of its history. Langer framed this in the context of recent traditionalist attempts to reinstate such prayers in the liturgy despite their polemical meanings in an unprecedented age of religious dialogue.

### Thank you

Thank you to these friends of the Crown Center, who have generously supported our programs this year:

- Heather '92 and Felix Baker
- Nicholas '64 and Eleanor Chabreja
- Diana H. and Steven J. Cobb '65
- Ludmilla Coven
- Crown Family Foundation
- Rochelle and Arthur Elstein
- Shlomo Levine '60

## The Golden Age Shtetl wins Jewish book award

### Other lectures

**November 3, 2014**

Ethan Tucker (Mechon Hadar), "Conversions and Courts: Do You Need Someone Else's Approval to Become a Jew?"

**November 19, 2014**

Marcin Wodzinsky (University of Wroclaw, Poland), "Hasidism: Key Questions"

**December 10, 2014**

Shaul Mitelpunkt (Northwestern), "Gazing at the 'Citizens' Army': The Citizen-Soldier Crisis and American-Israeli Relations, 1967-1973"

**March 10, 2015**

Alyssa Henning (Northwestern), "For the Thing Which I Did Fear Is Come upon Me': Job and Ethical Responses to Research-Related Injuries"

**May 4, 2015**

Race, Religion, and Diaspora Lecture Series: Amelia Glaser (University of California, San Diego), "From Jewish Jesus to Black Christ: Race Violence in Leftist American Yiddish Poetry"

**May 12, 2015**

T. Z. Weiss Holocaust Educational Foundation Lecture: Peter Hayes (Northwestern), "Anti-Semitism and Homophobia in Nazi Germany: Different but Related Hatreds"

**June 2, 2015**

Yael Israel-Cohen (Northwestern), "Between Feminism and Orthodox Judaism in Israel: A Post-Orthodox Discourse"

A book by Northwestern professor Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern that demythologizes the popular image of the shtetl won the Jewish Book Council's 2014 National Jewish Book Award for history.

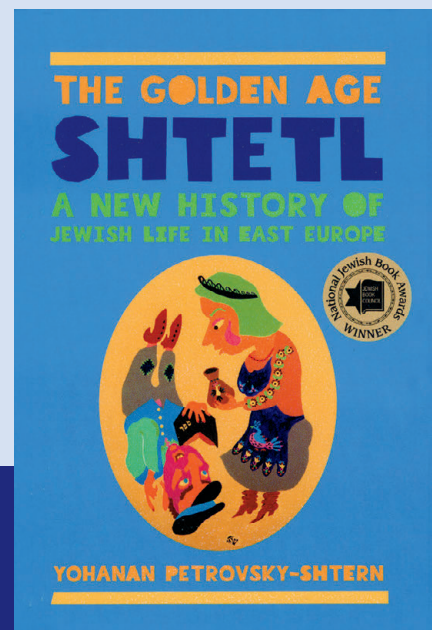
Petrovsky-Shtern's *The Golden Age Shtetl: A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe* (Princeton University Press) replaces the ramshackle image familiar from *Fiddler on the Roof* with a richly detailed depiction of a vibrant community.

The word *shtetl* refers to the small market towns where two-thirds of eastern Europe's Jews lived in the 18th and 19th centuries. Few books have been written on everyday shtetl life in the half-century Petrovsky-Shtern calls "the golden age," between 1790 and 1840; the stereotypes of the broken-down shtetl arose from the period of its later decline. The author's "new history" aims to correct the myths.

A native of Kiev, Petrovsky-Shtern accumulated his evidence from primary sources in Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian archives. He describes previously unknown aspects of how the shtetl worked, looking in turn at trade, the marketplace, the family, housing, taverns, the social role of liquor, smuggling, Jewish-Slavic relations, religious life, and more.

**"The Golden Age Shtetl tells a history that has rarely been transmitted in scholarly books, around the dinner table, or even in Yiddish literature."**

—Jonathan Brent, *Moment*



In choosing *The Golden Age Shtetl* for a 2014 book award, the Jewish Book Council praised the work as "the best written, most comprehensive and engaging book" in the history category. Petrovsky-Shtern received the award in March 2015 at the National Jewish Book Awards ceremony in New York City.

*The Golden Age Shtetl* also received an honorable mention for the 2015 PROSE Award in European and world history from the Association of American Publishers.

# Applying Jewish thought to 21st-century issues

Laurie Zoloth on climate change, Planned Parenthood, and end-of-life decisions

**T**he Jewish concept of *shmita* provided an apt metaphor for Northwestern's Laurie Zoloth in her address as outgoing president of the American Academy of Religion in November 2014, when she called on the organization to do its part for climate change prevention by suspending its annual conference.

*Shmita* is the one year in seven when "all agricultural work stops, the fields are left fallow, and every living creature, animal, and person can eat from the field and the vineyard and the wide open world, when the boundaries of

ownership and possession are broken so that the poor can take what they need, when all debts are released," the professor of religious studies, Jewish studies, and bioethics and medical humanities said in her speech at AAR's annual conference.

Zoloth was proposing not a once-every-seven-years *shmita*, however—but, beginning in 2021, a permanent cancellation of the annual conference for the sake of the planet.

"Every year each participant going to the meeting uses a quantum of carbon that is more than considerable," she said. "Air

travel, staying in hotels, all of this creates a way of living on the earth that is carbon intensive. It could be otherwise."

Zoloth has also proposed that people replace the conference with participation in community service the weekend before Thanksgiving, when the conference is traditionally held.

Throughout her speech as outgoing president, Zoloth brought in references from "my Jewish tradition." In the following interview, she talks about how she finds concepts from Jewish studies such as *shmita* applicable to her work.

**Q: Please describe how, as you were developing your speech, you hit upon the concept of *shmita* to illustrate your point about suspending the AAR conference.**

**A:** Every year the incoming AAR president gets to select the conference theme. I decided as soon as I was elected—three years before the meeting—that since I was trained in ethics, my theme would be about an ethical issue. Climate change is the central moral problem of this time, and time is short to respond and act. I asked every committee chair to focus on this in 2014 so we could spend some thoughtful time [before the meeting] doing our research.

As for me, I knew that others had written extensively on the texts of the Jewish tradition and ecology. Many turned to Genesis for narratives of stewardship, others to texts that stress the importance of trees. I wanted to offer a concrete activity of reform and repair, not only a critique of the situation. In fact, the concern of much of Hebrew scripture and the rabbinic response literature in regard to agriculture is the relationship between production and distribution and the concerns of justice that emerge there. The idea of *shmita* reminds us that it is our systems of production and consumption that are at the root of the dangerous rise in waste carbon that drives the climate toward ever higher temperatures. Airline traffic uses a disproportionate amount of carbon, as do eating meat and driving. These things are part of academic conferences. We need to start with our own consumptive practices before we profess to others.

**There was a second part to your proposal—not just that people stay home from the conference, but that they use the time to work instead with the poor in their own communities.**

Instead of flying about to cities in which we are tourists and staying in fancy hotels, I thought we should turn to our own cities, learn about our fellow citizens, figure out how to meet the unmet needs in our communities. We could plant orchards, we could teach in high schools, we could learn from the poor in our cities about what our cities need. We will need to work to protect the earth in many pragmatic ways. This would be a beginning.

**You call climate change the moral issue of our time. Besides *shmita*, what concepts from the Jewish tradition could guide us as we tackle the issue of climate change?**

Much of *halacha* [Jewish religious law] stresses the need for limits: on consumption, on acquisition, on ownership, and on how one treats workers. To live in accordance with a revealed positive law is not only a set of behaviors but also an ontology. One is supposed to be in a certain relationship to the earth—that of stewardship and gratitude. The need for adherence to laws of compassion and justice is repeated in a wide variety of places, and the relationship of moral behavior is always linked to the capacity of the earth to be regenerative. The Noah story is one such place, but this is also detailed in daily prayers of the *Shema* and in Hebrew scripture. Of course we understand now how deeply valid is this link between stewardship and the survival of the planet.





**How does Jewish morality differ from generally accepted morality?**

One difference that has emerged historically is the centrality of the Jewish view of time. Core to this are the Sabbath practices, which allow an interruption of the ordinal duties of the marketplace, of technology, and of acquisition. The possibility of interruption in the name of faith—a reordering of priorities towards family, prayer, and study—offers much toward imagining a better world. And the great interruption of the *shmita* year is a larger version of the weekly Sabbath.

**Videos showing Planned Parenthood representatives discussing the use of aborted fetuses for stem cell research recently made news. The videos may have been distorted—a charge which is disputed—but their content was upsetting. How might those who defend a woman's right to choose think about this?**

Classic Jewish texts have understood that abortion, while regrettable, is a tragic necessity under certain conditions. If a woman's life or her mental or physical health is endangered, the pregnancy can be ended; the fetus is seen as a *rodef* [pursuer who threatens to do harm]. The texts also clarify that the moral status of the embryo and fetus is developmental, starting from being “like water” in the first 40 days, to becoming a full human person at birth. Because abortion is a matter of religious law in these texts, never a matter of state authority, outlawing this aspect of Jewish practice would be problematic.

Doctors who provide abortions do so in accord with the law of the land. The videos were released as a political argument against the legality of abortion. Yet what made the images troubling—even for those who are pro-choice—was how tangled up in marketplace exchanges the doctors had become. Even if the videos were edited to mislead, the negotiations about price and tissues as a commodity were real and disturbing. We would want doctors to think only of the health of their patients and not the suitability of tissue.

*Much of halacha stresses the need for limits: on consumption, on acquisition, on ownership, and on how one treats workers. . . . One is supposed to be in a certain relationship to the earth—that of stewardship and gratitude.*

We need to reflect carefully about ways we can support needed research while respecting valid concerns about tissue donation and collection. And we need to understand the deeply held religious beliefs of others on these issues. However, clinics such as Planned Parenthood's need to remain open so that women, especially poor women with no other options for care, can make their decisions in accord with their own moral communities.

The videos pose a complex challenge, and not just to the *halacha* that permits abortion. The issues of justice for the poor, journalistic integrity, the

ethical stance of physicians, the marketplace and its limits, and the polarization of our deliberative democracy are all at stake.

**In biomedical ethics, one controversial issue is whether to use medical interventions to sustain life, to withdraw interventions and let nature take its course, or even to allow terminally ill patients to end their own lives. Does Jewish tradition have anything to say about this?**

Yes, it has much to say. One important difference between normative American bioethics and Jewish bioethics is that American bioethics has personal autonomy as a central moral appeal. In Jewish bioethics, personal autonomy has a very weak appeal. A second important difference is in the idea of a personal, literal heaven, an idea that drives many of these choices, particularly for Christians. Jewish tradition has an idea of collective redemption, of messianic hope, instead. And finally, the idea of “nature” is different in Jewish thought. The actions of healing and cultivation are both seen as part of a proper response to illness. Nature is not inherently good or wise; the world is unfinished, in need of human action. All of these concepts in Jewish ethics make the decision to withdraw care more complex.

**Is there anything you would like to add in closing?**

Jewish ethics is heir to a tradition of rabbinic thought. In that tradition, the problems of the marketplace, of families, and of neighbors were brought into the house of study for reflection, analysis, and finally—sometimes—pragmatic solutions. The intricate arguments belong in the world—so it is right that scholars of ethics now take these arguments to the site of current ethical dilemmas: Can we allow humans to colonize space? Can we alter DNA to eliminate disease? Under what circumstances might war be just? It is the task of Jewish scholars to bring these ideas to the public square and to the public debates about our future.

**Mira Balberg**, assistant professor of religious studies, specializes in ancient Judaism, with a focus on rabbinic literature. She is the author of *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature* (University of California Press, 2014) and *Gateway to Rabbinic Literature* (Open University of Israel Press, 2013). She is working on a book exploring the transformations of sacrifice in early rabbinic literature. During 2014–15 she was a fellow at the Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan.

**Efrat Bloom**, visiting assistant professor, recently published “Fiction’s Paradigmatic Alterity: José Saramago on the Ethics of the Literary” in the volume *Ethics and Poetics: Ethical Recognitions and Social Reconfigurations in Modern Narratives* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014). As a research fellow at the Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan during the 2015–16 academic year, she will be studying Walter Benjamin’s work on translation.

**Danny M. Cohen**, assistant professor of instruction in the School of Education and Social Policy, is a learning scientist with a specialization in Holocaust memory and the design of Holocaust education. An appointed member of the Illinois Holocaust and Genocide Commission, he is the author of *Train* (2015), a novel inspired by hidden Holocaust histories. Other 2014–15 publications include “Behind ‘The 19th Window’” and “The 19th Window” in *The Holocaust in History and Memory 7* and “Magical Transports and Transformations: The Lessons of Children’s Holocaust Fiction” (with Phyllis Lassner) in *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 33 (2).

**Peter Fenves**, Joan and Sarepta Harrison Professor of Literature, specializes in German-Jewish thought and literature from the late 18th to the early 20th century. His emphasis is on aspects of the *Haskalah* [Jewish Enlightenment], especially Moses Mendelssohn’s late writings, and a certain messianic train in early-20th-century thought, especially the work of Franz Kafka and Walter Benjamin. His 2015 publications include “Entanglement—Of Benjamin with Heidegger” in *Sparks Will Fly: Benjamin and Heidegger* (SUNY Press) and “Kant in Benjamins *Wahlverwandtschaften*-Essay” in *Benjamins Wahlverwandtschaften: Zur Kritik einer programmatischen Interpretation* (Suhrkamp).

**Marcia Gealy**, associate professor of instruction in the Writing Program, Jewish studies, and comparative literature, teaches the courses Modern Jewish Literature and Storytelling in American Jewish Literature. She has been recognized as a Charles Deering McCormick Distinguished Senior Lecturer for excellence in teaching and has been named repeatedly to the Associated Student Government faculty honor roll. In 2014 she received an Emily Award for her advising and service to the Women’s Residential College.

**Edna Grad**, distinguished senior lecturer in Hebrew language, is a foreign language education specialist. She speaks four modern languages and has had training in Latin and classical Greek. Among her publications are two Hebrew-teaching packages (books, workbooks, and audio-exercise recordings) for beginning- and intermediate-level college students.

**Peter Hayes**, Theodore Zev Weiss Holocaust Educational Foundation Professor, specializes in the history of the Holocaust. His principal recent publication is the anthology *How Was It Possible? A Holocaust Reader* (University of Nebraska Press, 2015). In June 2014 he became chair of the

Academic Committee at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. During the 2014–15 year he gave several talks around the country as well as the Holocaust Educational Foundation Lecture at Northwestern, “Anti-Semitism and Homophobia in Nazi Germany: Different but Related Hatreds.”

**Yael Israel-Cohen** is a postdoctoral fellow in Israel studies and a visiting assistant professor in sociology and gender studies (2014–16). She has recently published articles on adolescents’ risk of posttraumatic stress as a result of war and terrorist attacks in Israel.

**Lucille Kerr**, professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, is interested in Latin American literary and cultural studies (20th century, Boom and post-Boom; narrative fiction, theory; literature and film; *testimonio*; Jewish Latin America). Her research in Latin American Jewish studies deals with literature and film, primarily in the Southern Cone, and she regularly teaches the courses Discovering Jewish Latin America and Exploring Jewish Argentina. She coedited the volume *Teaching the Latin American Boom* (Modern Language Association, 2015).

**Jacob Lassner**, Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Professor Emeritus of Jewish Civilization, continues to teach two courses despite his retirement. A specialist in Near Eastern history, Lassner has focused his attention in recent years on Jewish-Muslim relations. He delivered the lecture “The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock” at the University of Southampton’s (England) Parkes Institute and presented “Life Cycles in Early Islam” at the plenary session of the American Oriental Society’s annual meeting. He also presented a paper of Arabic historiography at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa. He is preparing a reader on the history of the Jews in medieval Islamic lands for the University of Toronto Press.



**Phyllis Lassner**, professor of instruction in the Writing Program, gender studies, and Jewish studies, teaches courses in Holocaust representation, including Writing about Children and the Holocaust; Gender, Race, and the Holocaust; and Representing the Holocaust in Literature and Film. Her 2014 publications included “The Erotics of Auschwitz: An American Tale” in *National Narratives of the Holocaust* (University of Delaware Press), “Dramatizing Britain’s Holocaust Memory” in *Jewish Women Writers in Britain* (Wayne State University Press), “Paradoxical Polemics: John le Carré’s Responses to 9/11” in *Transatlantic Literature and Culture after 9/11* (Palgrave), and “Magical Transports and Transformations: The Lessons of Children’s Holocaust Fiction” (with Danny Cohen) in *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 33 (2).

**Shaul Mitelpunkt**, a postdoctoral fellow in Israel studies and visiting assistant professor in history (2013–15), specializes in US-Israel relations, war and society, and the politics of cultural representations. In 2014 he published “The Tank Driver Who Ran with Poodles: US Visions of Israeli Soldiers and the Cold War Liberal Consensus, 1958–79” in *Gender and History* 26 (3).

**Marcus Moseley**, associate professor of German, specializes in modern Hebrew and Yiddish literature in equal measure. He is the author of the first comprehensive history of Jewish autobiography, *Being for Myself Alone: Origins of Jewish Autobiography* (Stanford University Press, 2006).

**Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern**, Crown Family Professor of Jewish Studies and professor of Jewish history, focuses on early modern and modern Jewish history with a special emphasis on eastern Europe. His 2014 book *The Golden Age Shtetl: A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe* (Princeton University Press), which was released in paperback this year, won the Jewish Book Council’s 2014 Jewish Book Award for history (see page 5) and received

an honorable mention 2015 PROSE Award from the Association of American Publishers. Last year Petrovsky-Shtern did research in Germany and taught in Poland and Ukraine. From March to October 2015, his solo painting show was on display at the Ukrainian Museum in New York City.

**Elie Rekhess**, Crown Visiting Professor in Israel Studies, associate director for Israel studies, and professor of history, is interested in the political history of the Arab minority in Israel and political Islam in Israel and Gaza. In 2014 he published “The Arab Minority in Israel: Reconsidering the 1948 Paradigm” in *Israel Studies* 19 (2) and the entry “Israel” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics* (Oxford University Press). In 2014–15 he lectured at academic conferences in Israel, Europe, and the United States and was the resident director of Northwestern’s study abroad program in Israel (see page 12).

**Kenneth Seeskin**, Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Professor of Jewish Civilization and professor of philosophy and religion, works on Jewish philosophy and theology, especially the rationalist tradition that includes Maimonides, Spinoza, and Cohen. Recent publications include “Monotheism at Bay: The Gods of Maimonides and Spinoza” in *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), “A Plea for Transcendence” in *Jewish Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century* (Brill, 2014), and “Maimonides and the Idea of a Deflationary Messiah” in *Rethinking the Messianic Idea in Judaism* (Indiana University Press, 2015).

**David Shyovitz**, assistant professor of history, studies the intellectual and cultural history of the Jews of medieval Europe, with a particular emphasis on Jewish-Christian relations. His first book, *The World Made Flesh: Nature and the Body in Medieval Ashkenazic Culture*, will be published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. In 2014–15 he was a Yad Hanadiv Visiting Fellow in Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and delivered invited lectures

at Queen Mary University in London, Haifa University, Ben-Gurion University, and the Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem. His 2014–15 articles include “‘You Have Saved Me from the Judgment of Gehenna’: The Origins of the Mourner’s Kaddish in Medieval Ashkenaz” in *AJS Review* 39 (1) and “Christians and Jews in the Twelfth Century Werewolf Renaissance” in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75 (4).

**Claire Sufrin**, lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, focuses on modern Jewish thought in Europe, Israel, and the United States. In summer 2015, more than 160 adult students attended her course *Stories and Beliefs: The Complicated Partnership of Religion and Literature*, offered through the Alumnae of Northwestern continuing education program.

**Barry Scott Wimpfheimer**, associate professor of religious studies and law and director of the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies, specializes in the Talmud and Jewish law. His experience as director was reflected in “Minds and Hearts: Rethinking the ‘Division of Labor’ between Jewish Studies and Hillel on Campus,” a post he wrote for *Learning about Learning*, a blog of the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University.

**Laurie Zoloth** is a professor of religious studies at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences and of bioethics and medical humanities at the Feinberg School of Medicine. She is a Charles Deering McCormick Professor of Teaching Excellence and recipient of numerous teaching awards. She has authored or edited five books, including (with Elliot Dorff) *Jews and Genes: The Genetic Future in Jewish Thought* (Jewish Publication Society, 2015). In 2014 she was elected to life membership at Clare Hall, University of Cambridge.

## A brotherly approach to Talmud study

It is generally thought that the Talmud is best studied with a *havruta* [partner]. For Iszy, Aitan, and Yadid Hirschtritt Licht, make that two partners. The three brothers took Professor Barry Wimpfheimer’s Reading the Talmud seminar together during spring quarter.

Majors in different subjects—Iszy ’15 in political science, Aitan ’17 in Spanish and economics, and Yadid ’18 in radio/television/film—they realized that Iszy’s final quarter of college would likely be their last chance to take a course together.

“We thought about how much fun it would be to take a course as a ‘brothers class,’” Iszy said. And since they all “relished [their] Jewish education,” he said, some aspect of Judaism seemed to be the logical subject. The Talmud course built on their studies at Chicagoland Jewish High School in Deerfield and the Jewish day schools they attended in New Jersey and (after the family’s move to suburban Chicago in 2006) in Illinois.

It wasn’t surprising that the brothers attended the same university. When Iszy made his choice, he wanted to stay near home in Northbrook. For Aitan, Northwestern was the “natural choice”: “Iszy was there already. I thought it would have been strange to go to any other school.” By the time Yadid made his decision, it was almost a foregone conclusion: “I immediately would have my two best friends on campus.” Because his desired major isn’t as common as those of his brothers, it was lucky for Yadid that Northwestern offers a well-regarded film program.

Despite their togetherness, Talmud was their first shared course.

“We’ve always enjoyed talking with one another about national news, but taking a

course together was a new way of sharing,” Iszy said. “Material from the course would spill into out-of-class interactions. At meals with friends or our parents, we shared in conversations and jokes about false witnesses, rabbinic scholars, and the phrase *quid pro quo*.”

“We spent a lot of time discussing the content outside of class,” Yadid agreed. “We would often joke around about some of the more ridiculous premises in the Talmudic text, like the one where the possibility of superhuman vision or flying must be ruled out in a legal decision.”

Iszy and Yadid took to studying at Iszy’s apartment on mornings before class, with Iszy preparing breakfast. Aitan, usually inclined to study alone, embraced more togetherness as the quarter progressed. For three straight days he and Iszy worked alongside one another on their final papers, staying in the library until 2 in the morning. “While our topics were different—his paper focused on the treatment of Jewish sects in the Talmud and I focused on the place of Jesus in rabbinic literature—we would pause to check up on one another, bounce ideas off each other, present our progress to one another, and eat!” Aitan said.

Aitan even admitted to some sibling competitiveness: “It made me nervous if my brothers participated in class discussions and I did not; I felt like I was lagging behind them. I drove myself to participate actively and to work carefully on assignments not just for my grade but to demonstrate my academic potential to my brothers.”

There was no need for concern; all three Lichts did extremely well in the course. As he prepared for Commencement, Iszy, who’s now pursuing a career in public policy research, said that his last quarter of college was his best because of how much he was around his brothers.



### How is Talmud study different in university than in Jewish day school?

Barry Wimpfheimer allows that it was unusual to have three siblings in his Talmud course. What the associate professor of religious studies and law and director of the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies finds more interesting, though, is to compare how students study the Talmud in Jewish day school with how he teaches it in a university setting.

“The course assumes that most students received some background in reading the Talmud within a Jewish learning context,” said Wimpfheimer. “I’ve long been interested in the differences between how the Talmud is studied in confessional settings in the Jewish community and how it is studied as an academic subject in universities.”

Iszy Licht believes he and his brothers were excellent subjects for Wimpfheimer’s comparative study because “we had the same high school curriculum.”



Brothers Yadid, Iszy, and Aitan Licht

“At Chicagoland Jewish High School (CJHS),” Yadid explained, “we would study a certain *sugiyah* [section] of Talmud in depth, working in *havruta* [pairs] to translate the original Hebrew/Aramaic text, after which we would review the text as a class. Often we would relate the topics to our own lives and our own Judaism. For instance, following my senior class trip to Israel, we studied texts relating to the land, its holiness, and the importance of *aliyah* [visiting or settling in Israel], and we talked in class about our unique relationship with Israel.”

“I was surprised at how different Talmud study was at Northwestern,” Yadid continued. “We covered much more material and spent much more time exploring the historical contexts of the Talmud—its redaction, its manuscripts, its overall development through time. Before, I believed that the Talmud functioned to document the laws and discussion of the rabbis and was completed at a concrete date years in the past.”

Wimpfheimer’s class, however, presented the Talmud “not only as a book of law but also as a text that documents the many ways in which Jews have engaged with their faith and lifestyle for millennia,” Yadid said. Also, Wimpfheimer introduced modern Talmudic scholarship. “That Talmudic study is a field within academia is something we’d never discussed at CJHS,” Yadid said. “At Northwestern we saw how the Talmud is a dynamic document that changed with different redactors and varying manuscripts, each representing unique perspectives on the text and the relation between *halacha* [law] and Judaism.”

The class also gave Aitan a new appreciation of the Talmud’s role over time and continued relevance.

“This course helped us to realize that ‘ancient’ and ‘outdated’ are not synonymous,” he said. “The Talmud continues to act as the foremost basis for modern Jewish practice. As we studied the subtleties surrounding the composition, history, and rhetoric of the Talmud in a rigorous academic setting, we gained a new mode of grasping the text that underlies current Jewish life.”

Yadid has concluded that the different approaches of high school and university Talmud study are equally important: “The religious, personal engagement with the text that we employed at CJHS is as vital as the critical, analytic study of the Talmud that was introduced at Northwestern.”

## Board of Trustees rejects student BDS resolution

On February 10, 2015, the student group NU Divest introduced a resolution before Northwestern’s Associated Student Government Senate asking the University to instruct its investment office to divest from stock holdings in six corporations—Boeing, Caterpillar, Elbit Systems, G4S, Hewlett-Packard, and Lockheed Martin—that allegedly violate Palestinians’ human rights. Eight days later the ASG Senate held a public forum that was attended by 400 people and streamed online.

The deliberations consisted of alternating speeches for and against the resolution. Those promoting the resolution framed the issue as a matter of human rights and connected the plight of Palestinians with that of underprivileged minorities more broadly. Those opposing the resolution positioned themselves as advocating for peace and a two-state solution; they also noted the resolution’s connection with the broader boycotts/divestment/sanctions (BDS) movement, which includes some extremist voices that encroach on the boundary between anti-Israel speech and anti-Semitism. The NU Divest campaign, which promoted the resolution, was a project of Students for Justice in Palestine at Northwestern. Pro-Israel students came together under the banner of the Northwestern Coalition for Peace.

After five hours of discussion the resolution passed, 24 to 22, with three abstentions. The resolution is not binding on the University but does reflect the sympathies of some Northwestern undergraduates. At its June meeting the University’s Board of Trustees’ Investments Committee considered the student government resolution and rejected it. Northwestern is not changing its investment policy.



## The Public Health and Society in Israel program: Reflections on study abroad

In spring quarter 2015, six Northwestern undergraduates embarked on a special journey into the multifaceted cultural and historical setting of Israel. Through Northwestern's International Program Development's (IPD's) Public Health and Society in Israel program, they were introduced to the unique, complex medical and cultural landscapes of Israel, both through classwork at the top-tier Tel Aviv University and hands-on experiences and site visits throughout the country.

The classes focused on health in an Israeli context, from understanding the role of public health in managing disaster situations to servicing the specific health needs of Israel's diverse ethnic and religious communities. In addition, the program aimed to provide the students with a greater understanding of the history on which the Israeli state and Israeli and Palestinian identities were founded.

Elie Rekhess, Crown Visiting Professor in Israel Studies, associate director for Israel studies, and professor of history, served as director of the program and taught one of the courses.

The students had many opportunities to experience and participate in the daily life of Israel, seeing firsthand how history and identity were and still are being built. They visited historical cities and sites like Jaffa and Mount Masada, explored Arab and Bedouin communities, went shopping in local souks, learned to read Hebrew and Arabic, and participated in an emergency disaster-response drill.

Four of the participants reflect on their Israel experiences here. For more reflections, see the "NU in Israel" page (<http://sites.northwestern.edu/ipd-israel>) on IPD's website.



### Jing Lee '17

Majors: social policy, economics  
Minor: global health studies

“Being in Israel challenged me a lot personally and helped me to identify where my strengths and weaknesses lie. Israeli culture and Israelis' perspectives on various issues were very refreshing and eye-opening for me; I think I've developed a much more critical mindset as a result and am now much more willing to participate in certain situations that, prior to study abroad, I would have been more likely to avoid.”

“Even though it wasn't always easy or pleasant, I think I've come out of it much more enlightened about myself and the world around me.”

“There is no other place where religion, politics, economics, public health, and so many other seemingly disparate facets of society are so closely intertwined. Even though I left with more questions than I came with, my experience in Israel has given me a much more informed perspective on the conflict in the Middle East and changed the way I think about many issues back home and in my own community.”





## Ariella Hoffman- Peterson '16

Majors: science in human culture,  
anthropology

“The public health aspect has been vital to my decision that the field of public health is where I want to begin my career, because now I have an understanding of what topics within the field intrigue me. I also feel I made connections I can foster and capitalize on in the future.”

“I have been to Israel a few times before, but I felt like I had new and different experiences on this trip. It was a unique but balanced perspective of Israel.”

## Alli Divine '16

Majors: international studies,  
political science

“I really loved living in Tel Aviv and having the freedom to explore the really accessible city.”



## Jessica Hoffen '17

Major: psychology  
Minor: global health studies

“Getting to study public health in a region with all the complexities and conflict of a place like Israel has meant that we learned a lot more about culture and psychology and how political situations impact the lives of individuals than we could have learned anywhere else. People in Israel are always willing to talk, which added to the richness of the program; just listening to the cab driver was an interesting sociological message. Additionally, the country's size made it really easy to see lots of places. We were able to travel around and see a detailed picture of the country.”

“There is a great deal of tragedy in this region, and you feel it everywhere you go—from the ‘live in the moment’ way Israelis interact to the memorials and the damaged buildings. However, the vitality of the society is also noteworthy, and because of this I was able to learn in three months more than I ever have about the impact of conflict and the psychology of perseverance. This place is unlike any other in the sheer amount of history that exists in every tree and every building, and in the willingness with which people will discuss this history with visitors. The experiences I had in this region will likely continue to impact my interactions with the world for the remainder of my life.”

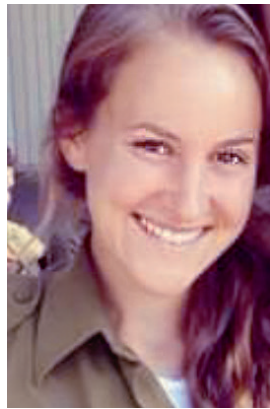


## Acclimating to life in Israel: Notes from an alum

Tamar Kane, a Jewish studies minor, graduated from the School of Education and Social Policy in 2013 in human development and psychological services. She has since moved to Israel and is currently serving as a fitness instructor in the Israeli army. We asked her to reflect on her time in Israel.

### Has your Jewish studies training been helpful in your acclimation to Israeli culture?

My Jewish studies training has certainly helped me. My Hebrew level was already fairly high when I arrived here, which was tremendously helpful in terms of communicating with people, feeling like I fit in, and finding a good job in the army. The whole country runs on a Jewish schedule, from shops closing on Friday afternoon to all bakeries selling jelly donuts before Chanukah. I was already familiar with so many aspects of Israeli society that acclimating was very natural.



### Has anything surprised you about life in Israel based on impressions you had before your move?

I don't know that I'd say there are things that surprised me based on previous impressions I had. I was fairly well acquainted with the country. Within the army, though, I have met people from all strata of Israeli society. On previous visits I was not given this opportunity to become so intimately involved with different Israelis, especially young ones. Their experiences and upbringing have hardened some of them.

### Could you share some of your impressions of contemporary Israeli society?

When I think of contemporary Israelis, the concepts of *lefargen* and *frayer* stand out to me. *Lefargen* means to cheer someone on wholeheartedly, to fully praise them with no personal agenda whatsoever. Israelis do not hesitate to *lefargen*, even if they barely know you. A stranger on the train won't hesitate to ask for your life story and will *lefargen* you without thought. Along with this word comes to mind another, *frayer*. A *frayer* is basically someone people take advantage of. If you're too nice, always volunteering for a task no one wants, you are a *frayer*. As a lone soldier I often get called a *frayer*! "Why would you move from New York to this place?" Immediately followed by "*Kol hakavod* [bravo] for doing this; you're amazing. *Ein al haaretz* [Nothing tops Israel]."

Israelis, if anything, are brutally honest. It is all about finding the balance between not being a *frayer* while being helpful, and learning to do your best while still *lefargen*-ing others!

Another thing I've seen is that Israelis have an uncanny ability to bounce back from trauma. They live their daily lives as normally as possible, but they are always aware of the possibility of conflict. During last summer's Operation Protective Edge, I witnessed soldiers lose close friends, commanders, and loved ones. The entire

country sat glued to their screens, frantically scanning each list of fallen soldiers for familiar names. We attended their funerals, shocked and wracked with grief. Yet life continued, and so did the Israelis. I was amazed by their resilience and strength.

On a lighter note, Israelis know how to eat well! Shakshuka, fresh hummus, falafel, tahini, olives, cheeses—food is a part of everything! There is literally no event, no matter how small, devoid of plates of Bamba and Bissli [snack food brands]. Food is very much part of their culture of communal sharing and doing things together.

### Strair wins department award

The 2015 Jill Stacey Harris Prize in Jewish Studies has been awarded to Katherine Strair (economics '15) for her essay "I. L. Peretz's Socialist 'Impression' of the Shtetl." Written for Professor Marcus Moseley's Introduction to Yiddish Culture: Images of the Shtetl course, Strair's essay examines Peretz's *Impressions of a Journey through the Tomaszow Region in the Year 1890*, raising intriguing and important questions about Yiddish culture. The Jill Stacey Harris Prize has been awarded annually since 1991 for the best undergraduate essay in Jewish studies.

### Jewish studies minors, class of 2015

Jonathan Gordon  
Nina Orwitz  
Ethan Ritz



## GRADUATE EDUCATION



### New JD-PhD named assistant professor

Congratulations to Alyssa Henning, who defended her dissertation, “Experiments in Judaism: Jewish Sources, Ethics, and Research with Human Subjects,” and received her JD-PhD in religious studies in summer 2015. She has accepted a position as visiting assistant professor in the Department of Religion at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.

### University of Chicago, Northwestern hold second joint seminar

Jewish studies graduate students from the University of Chicago and Northwestern held the second annual *Havruta*, “Ways of Knowing: The Bible in Jewish Thought,” on May 17, 2015, at the University of Chicago. Graduate students from both institutions led discussions on texts, and the University of Chicago’s Paul Mendes-Flohr gave the keynote address. This event, which Northwestern hosted in 2014, has helped to create a closer relationship between the two schools.

## POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

The Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, a partnership between the Crown Family Center, Tel Aviv University, and the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago, brings in two postdoctoral scholars each year as visiting assistant professors at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences. The 2014–15 fellows were Yael Israel-Cohen and Shaul Mitelpunkt.

**Yael Israel-Cohen** submitted three papers for review in 2014–15. The first looks at protective and risk factors associated with traumatic stress among Israeli adults during the 2014 Israel-Gaza war, and the second focuses on Israeli youth in Ashkelon and the relationship between their well-being before the 2014 missile attacks and levels of traumatic stress three months after the attacks. The third paper focuses on the relationship between the Ashkelon students’ subjective well-being and their academic achievement.



She is also the lead researcher on a collaborative project with Israel Sci-Tech School Network (ORT) and the College of Management Academic Studies in Rishon Lezion that focuses on aspects of Israeli adolescents’ well-being, academic achievement, and traumatic stress after three years of exposure to missiles.

Israel-Cohen taught Contemporary Jewish Identity: A Comparative Perspective between Israel and the United States at Northwestern in 2014–15, as well as Women in Traditional Religious Movements: Israeli Orthodox Feminist Activism in a Comparative Perspective. She presented her research findings on traumatic stress and well-being among Israeli adolescent and adult populations at three conferences and gave invited talks at Northwestern and in the community.

**Shaul Mitelpunkt** taught three classes at Northwestern in 2014–15: Israeli Military and Society in Comparative Perspective (seminar), Culture and Politics in the History of US-Israeli Relations (lecture), and Film and Politics in Israeli History (seminar).



His article “The Tank Driver Who Ran with Poodles: US Visions of Israeli Soldiers and the Cold War Liberal Consensus, 1958–79” was published in November 2014 in a special issue of *Gender and History*. He also completed his book manuscript “Liberals, Israel, and War: The Cultural Politics of US-Israeli Relations and the Rediscovery of American Empire, 1958–1986,” currently under review.

In fall 2014 Mitelpunkt coordinated a panel of faculty from the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Northwestern on film and politics in Israeli history. He presented a paper there on the politics of Americanization in the 1960s Israeli film industry. At a Crown Family Center colloquium, he presented his work on American understandings of Israeli soldiers, and at a meeting of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations in Arlington, Virginia, he presented his paper “Operation Exodus and the battle for Cinematic Authorship in 1960s Israel.”

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for Jewish and Israel Studies**

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## Coming soon!

Next spring Northwestern University will offer the first-ever massive open online course (MOOC) on the Talmud. The Talmud: A Methodological Introduction is open to students of all backgrounds, regardless of expertise in Talmud study. Beginners will find it an accessible entrée; those with more experience will gain access to academic methods and historical information that will supplement their study. The MOOC will be taught by Professor Barry Wimpfheimer. For more information: [coursera.org/northwestern](https://coursera.org/northwestern).

## Consider a gift to Jewish and Israel studies at Northwestern

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- Go to [www.giving.northwestern.edu/nu/wcas](http://www.giving.northwestern.edu/nu/wcas), click on “View additional gift designations,” and select Jewish Studies Program from the drop-down menu.
- Phone 800-222-5603 or 847-491-4591.
- Send your check, payable to Northwestern University, to Office of Alumni Relations and Development, Northwestern University, 1201 Davis Street, Evanston, Illinois 60208. Be sure to indicate that your donation is for the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies.