



# Program in Jewish Studies at Rice University

Issue 7 • 2013

## From the Director

Rice's Program in Jewish Studies is welcoming the new calendar year with great anticipation. We just founded the *Jewish Studies Student Association*, the undergraduate student arm of our Program. Our students are ready to take on more responsibilities and to organize educational as well as social events connected to the program at Rice. In the spring semester 2014 our Stanford and Joan Alexander Postdoctoral Fellow, Dr. Yehuda Sharim, will teach a new class titled "Race, Nation, and Diaspora," in which he will explore how transnational communities define their sense of belonging and identity. Even before the start of the semester the class has already one of our largest student enrollments we have ever had. Finally, in January we welcome Katrina Hubbard to the Rice campus, our new Jewish Studies coordinator. Katrina's office will be in the Department of Religious Studies. We are very excited about this new hire, as Katrina will be an indispensable help for our growing Program. Welcome to Rice!



Warm regards,

*Matthias Henze*

## First Jewish Studies Course Offered in Sociology



Stanford and Joan Alexander Postdoctoral Fellow Dr. Yehuda Sharim will teach the first Jewish Studies course to be offered in the Department of Sociology this Spring. His seminar analyzes the historical development of racial categories and the ways in which communities whose identities transcend a sense of place are altered through contact with "homelands." In particular students will be examining "Black," "Latino," "Mizrahi" (Jews from Arab lands), and "Palestinian" diasporic

communities in the Middle East and North America. This exciting course will use memoir, film, and music to explore these complex issues and to foreground the intricate relationships among such concepts as "home," "homeland," "diaspora," and "exile," "hybridity," and "minorities." Students will be encouraged to participate in respectful dialogue and self-reflection while being held to the highest standards of academic rigor.

## Rice, University of Houston, Jewish Theological Seminary Collaboration a Success!

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America joined forces with the Jewish Studies Programs of Rice University and the University of Houston to produce the Jewish Women's University for a Day on Sunday, October 27. Nearly two hundred students-for-a-day assembled at the Rice campus to hear a keynote lecture by JTS professor Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky entitled, "Women of Value: Is the Bible a Patriarchal Text?" and then attended two classes of their choosing taught by a variety of professors from the three host institutions, Princeton University, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of



*Prof. Amy Kalmanofsky's keynote lecture*

Religion, the University of Virginia, and the University of Cincinnati. The campus was abuzz with Jewish learning, and participants were excited to learn about Rice's robust program in Jewish Studies.

## Mysticism Symposium Gathers International Scholars

On November 4, 2013, world-renowned scholars of Jewish mysticism from Israel, Europe, and throughout the United States met on the campus of Rice University for a two day symposium entitled: "Eternity, Epoch, and Soul: Jewish Mystical Notions of Time." This was part of an annual symposium series held by the Department of Religious Studies. It was kicked off with an inspiring public lecture on Hassidism at Congregation Beth Israel by Professor Jonathan Garb of the Hebrew University, which was co-sponsored by the Jewish Studies Program at Rice. The symposium featured cutting-edge talks on Jewish mystical concepts of time by sixteen speakers. Participants noted that it was one of the most important symposia of its kind to have occurred in several decades.



*Prof. Moshe Idel, 'Max Cooper Professor of Jewish Thought at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, gave the closing plenary address'*

# Student Reflection: Tracing My Sephardic Roots—Spain, Morocco, & Israel !

by Charles Danan '14



Charles Danan (right) with his Jewish guide in Morocco. Danan received a Desirée and Max Blankfeld Fellowship in summer 2013 to trace the remnants of Sephardic Jewry in Spain, Morocco, and Israel.

After the Second World War, the Jewish diaspora underwent a major change. The center of gravity of the Jewish world shifted from Europe to North America. At the same time the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 opened the gates for a massive immigration of Jewish refugees from Europe and the Muslim world. In a relatively short amount of time, much of the diaspora was emptied. In some places, two thousand years of independent cultural development were abandoned in favor of a new life in a Jewish state or a Western country. My father's home of Morocco was no exception. Where there were as many as a third of a million Jews in 1948, only three thousand remain today. My father left his birthplace of Marrakech in 1963, settling in Ashdod, Israel. In the early sixties, Marrakech was still home to tens of thousands of Jews, a community that had resided there since medieval times. Today there are only about two hundred living in that city of over one million people.

This migration was unprecedented. Two millennia of generations passed down a tradition specific to one region of the world, and then all of that history was seemingly surrendered in a handful of decades. Last spring I began wondering how this migration might threaten Jewish Moroccan culture. My two month journey took me across Spain, Morocco, and Israel. Beginning in Barcelona and ending in Jerusalem, I traced the roughly chronological migration of my ancestors through the Iberian Peninsula, across the Strait of Gibraltar to Morocco, and over the Mediterranean to the shores of Israel. I looked at the preservation of history in museums, monuments and abandoned Jewish quarters, the practices in active synagogues, shrines, and cemeteries, and most importantly, the current opinions of Jews and non-Jews towards Moroccan Jewry and its past.

From Barcelona, I travelled through Catalonia, then made my way to Madrid and Toledo, the heart of modern Spain where the Edict of Expulsion was issued in 1492, but also where modern Spanish Judaism began anew. Afterward I trekked south to the Andalusian cities of Granada, Cordoba, and Seville, where Sephardic life and intellectual culture truly blossomed at the beginning of the second millennium. I happened to arrive in Cordoba in the midst of the 12th International Sephardi Music Festival. There I attended a Sephardi cooking class and listened to Andalusian Jewish music fill the air where it had been silenced for over 700 years. Next I moved further south, across the Strait of Gibraltar to Morocco, taking the same route many Jews and Muslims took to flee the armies of the Catholic Kings. I made my way to Fez, a stronghold of medieval Moroccan Judaism and the home of my family name. There I met a young man who identified himself, at age 24, as the youngest Jew living in the entire city. He invited me to tour the old Jewish quarter with him. He took me to the Jewish cemetery and we searched for Danan, my family name. We found that the most respected rabbis and leaders of Fez were, in fact, almost all Danans. Their gravestones

read that they were descendants of one of Judaism's most revered thinkers, Moses Maimonides of Cordoba. There had been family rumors about being related to Maimonides, but it was incredibly to see the truth actually carved in stone. We completed the family history tour at the Ibn Danan synagogue, a house of prayer that was dedicated to my ancestors over 300 years ago, and recently restored with the aid of UNESCO. It was vindicating and moving to trace my family history to both Spain and such important leaders.



The Ibn Danan Synagogue

After a lengthy stay in Fez, I took a bus to Marrakech, a city filled with the stories passed down from my father and his family. I prayed in my father's old synagogue, tracked down his old street, and took in the sounds and smells of a city which—in some ways—has refused to change in the 50 years since he left.

From Marrakech I flew to Israel, home to over one million Moroccan Jews and their descendants. There I spoke extensively with family and new friends, shedding light on the meaning of Morocco to Israel's Moroccan community. I gained new insight from the vivid stories of my father's older siblings and also had numerous chance encounters with Israel's young descendants of Moroccan Jews. Finally, I concluded in Jerusalem, the holy city where Moroccan Jewish history first began.

## The Program in Jewish Studies:

Matthias Henze, director  
*Watt J. & Lilly G. Jackson Professor of Biblical Studies*

Shira L. Lander, undergraduate advisor  
*Anna Smith Fine Senior Lecturer of Jewish Studies*

Yehuda Sharim  
*Stanford and Joan Alexander Postdoctoral Fellow*

Meghann Schlaff, program coordinator  
*Assistant to the Dean*

## Jewish Studies Advisory Board:

Max Blankfeld, chair !  
David Barish, Ph.D. !  
Debbie Diamond !  
Melvin A. Dow !  
Dr. Michael Ozer !  
Joe Pryzant !  
Kelly Reynolds !  
Judge Lee H. Rosenthal !  
Martin A. Sosland !  
Tracy Friedman Stein !

To support Jewish Studies at Rice, please contact Jeanette Zey at 713-348-4669 or [jzey@rice.edu](mailto:jzey@rice.edu).



Rice University Jewish Studies Program  
MS-340 P.O. Box 1892  
Houston, Texas 77251-1892  
[jewishstudies@rice.edu](mailto:jewishstudies@rice.edu)

Visit our website!  
[jewishstudies.rice.edu](http://jewishstudies.rice.edu)