

NEWSLETTER



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Message from the President

December 2020

Dear Friends,

We are delighted to present to you some of the recent activities of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

The scope of the Academy's activity is extensive, complex, and varied. Much like the rest of the world, we have innovated, adapted, and fine-tuned our activities in the face of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to provide solutions for the present and examine long-term implications.

The global health crisis has served as a sobering reminder of the essential importance of international scientific cooperation. We thank you for your continued partnership and friendship, and we welcome the opportunity and privilege of striving together with our international partners to advance scholarship, scientific research, and the public understanding of science.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you my warmest season's greetings and best wishes for a happy and healthy new year.

Nili Cohen

Sincerely,

Nili Cohen
President

New Academy Members Elected

In elections held at the annual meeting of its General Assembly, in September 2020, the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities chose five new members, bringing the current total number of members to 133.

Prof. Uri Alon

Systems Biology, Weizmann Institute of Science



Prof. Simcha Emanuel

Talmud, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



Prof. Dan Miron

Hebrew Literature, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



Prof. Yair Reisner

Immunology, Weizmann Institute of Science



Prof. Anita Shapira

Jewish History, Tel Aviv University

Academy Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

In response to the global pandemic, the Academy established a Committee led by Prof. Yadin Dudai, chairperson of the Sciences Division, to advise on Israel Academy activities related to COVID-19. The committee established two Advisory Committees to deal with key long-term issues at the national level.

The Relationship Between Israel's Decision-Makers and its Academic System

The committee is aiming to clarify how Israeli decision-makers consult with the Israel Academy and the academic community at large when making national decisions during both regular times and national crises. The committee is led by Prof. Daniel Zajfman, former president of the Weizmann Institute of Science and chair of the Israel Science Foundation.

Balancing Needs and Values in Times of National Crisis

The committee is tasked with exploring how to balance needs and values in times of national crisis. It has identified four key issues: the relationship between economy and life, the constitutional aspects of restriction of individual liberties versus protection of privacy, building public confidence, and economic disparities and cultural differences. Academy member Prof. Moshe Halbertal leads the committee.

Emergency Postdoctoral Fellowships for Israeli Researchers in Israel

The Academy established an emergency program to aid outstanding Israeli postdoctoral researchers who are currently unable to embark upon or complete their research programs abroad, due to the COVID-19 crisis. Academy member Prof. Moti Segev heads the program steering committee.

Cultivating and Promoting Scientific Endeavor – Scientific Reports

The Triennial Report on the State of the Sciences in Israel Presented in Knesset



Every three years, the Academy publishes a [report](#) on the State of the Sciences in Israel. The purpose of the triennial report is to point out achievements, gaps, and challenges in Israel's academic research for the sake of advancing and reinforcing science and research in the State of Israel. The 2019 report, written by the Academy committee led by Prof. Reshef Tenne, was submitted to the Government and, in November 2020, was presented to the Knesset (Israeli parliament) for discussion by decision-makers.

Report Published on Examining the State of Holocaust Research and Teaching in Universities in Israel

A committee led by Academy member Prof. Israel Bartal published a [report](#) in 2020 that examined the state of Holocaust studies in research universities and colleges in Israel. The committee expressed concern regarding the continued existence of a vibrant academic research community in Israel of high international standing. It called for efforts to dedicate resources to the field and to foster high-level scholarly research, along with in-depth academic teaching.

Committee to Examine the Need for National Center in Israel for Cryogenic Electron Microscopy (Cryo-EM)

In May 2020, The Academy formed a committee to examine the need to establish a national center in Israel for Cryogenic Electron Microscopy (Cryo-EM) at extremely low temperatures. The establishment of such a center in Israel would allow scientists to use state of the art technologies and advanced research methods. The committee, headed by Nobel Prize laureate and Academy member Prof. Ada Yonath, unequivocally recommended that in order to ensure the competitiveness of Israeli scientists, it is essential to establish a national CRYO-EM center.

International Collaboration

United Kingdom – Royal Society



In February 2020, Academy President Prof. Nili Cohen and the then President of the Royal Society, Nobel laureate Dr. Venki Ramakrishnan, renewed the Agreement of Scientific Cooperation between The Israel Academy and the Royal Society for an additional five years.

The British Ambassador in Israel H.E. Neil Wigan, OBE, who has actively supported and cultivated scientific partnership between Israel and the UK, joined the signing ceremony that took place in Jerusalem during the opening of a bilateral conference on **Structural Biology: The Molecular Fabric of Life**.

The conference was co-chaired by Nobel laureate Dr. Richard Henderson, Prof. Nathan Nelson, Sir Venki Ramakrishnan, and Prof. Joel Sussman. Nobel laureates, Academy member Prof. Ada Yonath and Prof. Roger Kornberg were keynote speakers.

EuroScience Open Forum Trieste

In September 2020, Vice-President of the Academy, Prof. David Harel, participated virtually in an international panel at the ESOF event in Trieste, Italy. The panel, “Brain Drain-Brain Gain”, addressed the migration of highly skilled individuals and international scientific mobility prospects given the COVID-19 pandemic.

The session was the result of international cooperation, between the Institut de France – Académie des sciences, the Italian National Academy of Sciences Lincei, the Italian National Research Council, the Polish Academy of Sciences, the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, and the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

UK-Israel Women Leading Innovation: Empowering Scientific Excellence

In November 2020, Academy President Prof. Nili Cohen took part in an online event organized by The British Embassy and the British Council. The event, Empowering Scientific Excellence, is part of the series entitled UK-Israeli Women Leading Innovation—aimed at connecting future scientific leaders with prominent UK and Israeli women in the science and tech transfer sector. Prof. Cohen took part in a discussion with former Israel Academy President Prof. Ruth Arnon, and Prof. Carole Mundell, Chief Scientific Adviser at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Empowering Young Scientists

Excellence Fellowship Program for International Postdoctoral Researchers

The [Excellence Fellowship](#), which aims to attract young, top-of-the-line researchers from around the world to join Israel's research universities, was expanded this year due to a new partnership with the Council for Higher Education in Israel (CHE). The participation of international postdoctoral researchers in the program is expected to leverage international cooperation, strengthen Israel's leading research, and create fruitful professional and personal ties, contributing to future collaborative research. It offers up to twenty fellowships a year in all fields of knowledge, including the humanities and social sciences. Fellowships are approximately US \$47,000 per year for two years. Academy member Prof. Moti Segev is Chair of the program steering committee.

The Israel Young Academy

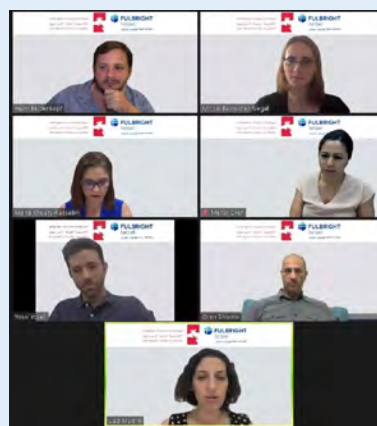
Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Israel Young Academy (IYA) mobilized to support young researchers and bring their concerns to the attention of decision-makers. In June 2020, the IYA hosted a conference with the participation of Israeli university presidents, the Head of the Council for Higher Education in Israel, Prof. Yaffa Zilbershats, Vice President of the Israel Academy, Prof. David Harel, and more than 450 Israeli post-doctoral researchers all over the world.

The IYA also held a series of seminars in collaboration with Fulbright Israel to help post-doctoral fellows to acquire skills for integrating into the world of academia and the labor market.

Recently, IYA representatives have met with the Minister of Science and Technology, Mr. Izhar Shay, and with the Minister for Higher Education, MK Mr. Ze'ev Elkin, to discuss assisting Israeli postdoctoral fellows during the pandemic.

The IYA also initiated an online series of short scientific lectures on COVID-19, accompanied by radio interviews, which were broadcast daily to thousands of listeners.

Throughout 2020, the IYA also led a number of initiatives to advance the accessibility of higher education to Arab society, with a focus on doctoral studies.



Communicating Science to the Public

Opening the Gates of the Academy: Lecture Series on Discoveries

Opening the Gates of the Academy is an annual lecture series that highlights topics at the interface of the life sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. This year's series focuses on Discoveries and addresses historical, cultural, societal, and future discoveries, as well as those of the inner world. The lecture series has attracted considerable interest among high school students and the public at large.

Conference on “Beauty”



The fifth Annual Multi-Disciplinary Conference, convened in 2020, examined the subject of Beauty from diverse perspectives and included a guest lecture by the renowned New York architect Daniel Libeskind. The Academy also mounted an exhibition entitled **The Beauty of Science**, which examined the connection between beauty and science as expressed in images from studies published by members of the Academy and the Young Academy.

In Memory - Israel Academy members

The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities mourns the loss of four world-renowned Academy Members, Israel Prize laureates, and dear friends:

Prof. Yehoshua Blau, preeminent scholar of medieval Judaeo-Arabic, past president of the Hebrew Language Academy, and Chair of the Academy’s Humanities Division in the years 1989–1995.

Prof. Gerald (Yaakov) Blidstein, illustrious scholar of Talmud, Jewish law, ethics, and philosophy.

Prof. Ruth Gavison, distinguished legal scholar and activist for justice and human rights.

Prof. Zeev Sternhell, world-renowned expert on Fascism and preeminent scholar of political thought.

In Memory - Mr. Marcel Adams

The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the Adams Fellowships Program mourns the passing of Mr. Marcel Adams of Montreal, Canada, a dear friend and benefactor of Israel’s most promising young researchers.