

SHOFAR

שוֹפָר Spring 2007

Office of Jewish Affairs, Center for Student Development, Student Affairs & Campus Life, UMass Amherst

Israel Film Series: Suspense, Vengeance, and Hope



A film series at UMass Amherst will showcase two very different films by Israeli directors—a thriller with Holocaust and sexual themes, and an inspiring documentary about Palestinian and Israeli peace activists.

Walk on Water is the most popular Israeli film ever shown in the U.S. This thriller about an Israeli intelligence agent assigned to track down an aging Nazi war criminal challenges our beliefs about sexuality, vengeance, and the morality of killing.

The international cast features Israeli star Lior Ashkenazi as Eyal, a Mossad agent who, after his wife's suicide, is given the lackluster assignment of finding and killing a former Nazi. German actor Knut Berger plays Axel Himmelman, the Nazi's gay grandson with whom Eyal develops a close friendship while posing as a tour guide, coming face to face with his own sexuality as well as his inability to shed more blood to avenge the Holocaust.

German actress Caroline Peters plays Lia Himmelman, who is living on a kibbutz to escape the abhorrent legacy of her grandfather, whom she despises. An interesting sidenote—during an interview on Israeli TV, Peters revealed that, like her character in the film, her own grandfather was a Nazi.



*If you lost your loved ones to violence...
If you spent ten years in prison...
If conflict drove you from your home...
Would you seek revenge...
or struggle for peace?*

Encounter Point tells the extraordinary story of ordinary people who have chosen peace over revenge: Palestinians and Israelis who risk everything—their social standing, their relationship to their families, and even their lives—to pursue a nonviolent end to the conflict.

The film follows a former Israeli settler, a Palestinian ex-prisoner, a bereaved Israeli mother, and a Palestinian bereaved brother as they journey to the unlikeliest places to confront hatred within their communities. It explores what drives them and other civilians to overcome anger and grief to work for peace.

(continued on next page)

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up war against nation, and neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Isaiah 2:4)

Israel Film Series (continued)

Encounter Point was produced by an international team of Israeli, Palestinian, North American and Brazilian women at Just Vision, a non-profit organization founded to support the work of grassroots peace activists on all sides of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—Jews, Muslims, and Christians who refuse to stand by as the conflict escalates.

The film features original music by Kareem Roustom, who combines classi-



cal Arabic melodies and instruments with traditional Jewish Klezmer performed by local clarinetist Ilene Stahl.

Encounter Point was an official selection of several international film festivals including Jerusalem, Dubai, and San Francisco, where it won the Audience Award for Best Documentary.

These films are presented by the Office of Jewish Affairs in conjunction with the Pioneer Valley Jewish Film Festival, www.pvjff.org.

Walk on Water is cosponsored by the Stonewall Center and UMass Hillel.

Encounter Point is cosponsored by Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace. Both films are free and open to the public.



Walk on Water

Dir. Eytan Fox
(2004, 105 minutes, English)
Saturday, March 10 at 7:30 p.m.
School of Management Auditorium

Encounter Point

Dir. Ronit Avni and Julia Bacha
(2006, 85 minutes; subtitles)
Sunday, March 11 at 7:00 p.m.
School of Management Auditorium

**“Enough of blood and tears, enough!”
—Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin**



The shofar is a hollowed-out ram's horn blown like a trumpet during the Jewish High Holy Days. Its blast calls us to return to the path of righteousness. Or as the prophet Isaiah reminds us, in a traditional reading at the height of the Yom Kippur service: “Raise your voice like a trumpet... to loose the chains of injustice... to share your food with the hungry and... clothe the naked...” (Isaiah 58:1-7). We've chosen the name *Shofar* because it symbolizes the traditional Jewish commitment to justice.



The Office of Jewish Affairs was established in April 1995 in response to a campus climate which many Jews experienced as hostile. While that situation has substantially improved in the twelve years since the office was created, our basic mission remains unchanged—to foster a safe and welcoming campus environment for Jewish and all other students, staff, and faculty, an environment that is respectful and free from discrimination of any kind.

In order to carry out this mission successfully, we must strive for a campus environment in which all students, staff, and faculty are valued and respected.

Consequently, while educating the University community about the history, culture, and religious traditions of the Jewish people, and about the enduring anti-Semitism which has nearly resulted in the annihilation of the Jewish people,

we must join with other groups to promote an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect, and to staunchly defend the dignity and human rights of all people.

We strive to accomplish these goals through a variety of educational programs, individual and institutional advocacy, and coalition-building activities.

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Monday Night in Westerbork

On October 11, 2006, UMass Amherst hosted the Western Massachusetts premiere of S. Bear Bergman's



Monday Night in Westerbork, a one-person theater piece based on the experiences of a group of Jewish inmates at the Westerbork concentration camp in the Netherlands, who staged weekly cabaret performances inside the camp in 1943-44.

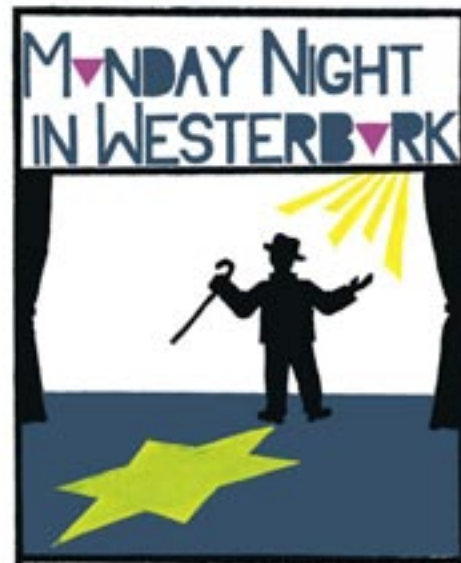
The performances helped the prisoners cope with their desperate situation and took their minds momentarily off the ever-present threat of death. Because of the camp commander's fondness for cabaret, and his preferential treatment of the performers, the performances also postponed the inevitable transfer to Auschwitz and certain death.

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Monday Night in Westerbork explores themes of identity, persecution and resistance, drawing on Bergman's experiences growing up Jewish among Holocaust survivors, visiting the concentration camps, and coming out as queer and transgender.

According to Bergman's program notes, "Camp Westerbork Theater Group, as it was known, was founded by actor, comedian, and cabaret emcee Max Ehrlich... with a performance every Monday night. The shows were performed on a proper stage, built of salvaged boards from a burned synagogue in a nearby town. Ehrlich was murdered at Auschwitz on October 1, 1944."

The performance was jointly sponsored by the Office of Jewish Affairs and the Stonewall Center, in commemoration of National Coming Out Day.



For more historical information about the Westerbork concentration camp and the cabaret, visit our web site at www.umass.edu/jewish.

"Justice, justice shalt thou pursue!" (Deuteronomy 16:20)

Undergraduate Commencement: Saturday, May 26, 2007

Helpful information for religiously observant families

The University's decision to move undergraduate commencement from Sunday to Saturday will pose some challenges for religiously observant families.

Since the decision was announced last fall, the Office of Jewish Affairs has worked with several Jewish organizations—Hillel, Chabad, and Kehillat Hillel Ha'azinu (the modern Orthodox student group)—as well as University staff who are responsible for commencement planning, to determine what accommodations could reasonably be provided to enable as many families as possible to attend this year's commencement.

On-campus lodging

Low-cost lodging in the Southwest residential area, within walking distance of all commencement venues, will be available for Friday and Saturday nights. When reserving rooms online, indicate your need to stay Saturday night (or to check out late) by writing a comment in the "Special Needs" box at the bottom of the form. Make your reservation early, to ensure that you get a room on a lower floor.

Kosher meals

Chabad House and Hillel have graciously offered to provide kosher meals on Friday evening and Saturday afternoon following the main commencement ceremony. Arrangements for these meals (including any payment that may be required) must be made in advance,

directly with the respective organization. Kosher box lunches may also be available through UMass Food Services. More details, including contact information, will be posted on our web site in the coming weeks.

If you encounter any problems reserving a room or arranging for kosher meals, please contact the Office of Jewish Affairs at 413-545-9642 or email goldbaum@admin.umass.edu. We'll do our best to help you get your needs met.

Visit the Jewish Affairs commencement web page:

www.umass.edu/jewish/commencement

Passover and Class Absence

Passover is early this year, only a week after Spring Break. The first Seder is Monday evening, April 2, and the week-long festival ends Tuesday night, April 10. If you will be away for any part of the holiday, remember to notify your instructors at least a week in advance, as required by University policy.

Absences Due to Religious

Observance. State Law requires that the University excuse any student who is unable to attend classes or participate in any examination, study, or work require-

ment because of religious observance. Students have the right to make up examinations, study, or work requirements that they miss because of religious observance without any adverse or prejudicial effects. No fees may be charged to the student for the makeup exercise. The law also provides that such makeup work may not create an unreasonable burden upon the University. Therefore, students have an obligation to inform their course instructors, in advance, of the days on which they may be absent for religious reasons. Students should inform their

course instructors in writing of the days they will be absent as early in the semester as possible and always prior to the day(s) on which they will be absent for religious reasons.

In the event of a dispute between an instructor and a student, either party may contact the department head, the Ombuds Office (545-0867), or the Office of Jewish Affairs (545-9642).



Photo courtesy of Simcha Levenberg

In Memoriam: Brad Skikne

On Sunday, October 22, 2006, UMass student Noach Bradley Skikne died in a fatal car accident while returning to Amherst from his parents' home in Middleton, Mass.

It seems that Brad died the way he lived—with a generosity of spirit and a selflessness that would not allow him to ignore anyone in need. Trained as an EMT, he stopped along the way to give first aid to the victims of a head-on collision, even though it was late and he must have been tired. But Brad was a *mensch*.

Evidently he was placed on this earth to do good deeds; and that's what he did, right up to the time of his untimely death.

Brad was only 22, a senior who would have graduated this spring. He was beloved by his many friends and greatly respected by his mentor at Chabad House, Rabbi Simcha Levenberg. He will be sorely missed.

May Brad's memory be a blessing to his friends and family, and to all those whose lives he touched.

Pulitzer Prize-Winning Playwright Tony Kushner

"Some playwrights want to change the world. Some want to revolutionize theater. Tony Kushner is that rarity of rarities: a writer who has the promise to do both." —*The New York Times*

The celebrated author of *Angels in America*—a landmark play about the politics of AIDS, for which Kushner won a Pulitzer Prize—and the screenplay for *Munich*, Tony Kushner is one of America's cultural icons, and its conscience.

Kushner will speak at UMass Amherst on October 9, 2007 as the featured Rand Lecture, in collaboration with the theater department, Stonewall Center, and the Office of Jewish Affairs.

Watch our website for more information about this extraordinary event.

In Conversation with Tony Kushner
Tuesday, October 9, 2007
Rand Theater



Photo courtesy of Roy Zipstein

Freedom Seder to Celebrate Multicultural Unity

Every spring for the past nine years, a group of Jewish, African American, and other UMass students have come together to organize the annual Multicultural Freedom Seder, a joyous celebration of our yearning for freedom and unity.



The Freedom Seder is adapted from the Seder that Jewish families attend on the first nights of Passover, a week-long festival commemorating the redemption of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt. The themes of Passover—liberation from slavery, freedom, exile, and diaspora—resonate with the historical experience of many peoples. The Freedom Seder commemorates the experience of all peoples who have been enslaved or exiled and prays for the liberation of those who are not yet free.

The Freedom Seder also recalls the historic Black/Jewish alliance of the Civil Rights Movement. In the accompanying photo, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Rev. Ralph Abernathy, and Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath (president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations) march together in the 1964 March on Washington.

Like the Passover Seder, the Freedom Seder incorporates various ritual foods, readings and songs to help us remember or learn about the experience of slavery and exile.

Building on the traditional Exodus story, the Freedom Seder also recalls the history of African American slavery and the experience of other oppressed peoples, through the voices of activists, poets, and singers as diverse as M. L. King, Jr., W.E.B. Du Bois, Anne Frank, Elie Wiesel, Maya Angelou, Bob Marley, Mos Def, and Wu Tang Clan.

Just as the Passover Seder centers around a festive meal, so too does the Freedom Seder culminate in a buffet dinner, with foods chosen by the student organizers to represent their diverse cul-



tures. It is a delicious way to learn about each other's history and traditions while affirming our common humanity.

If you would like to help organize or attend this year's Freedom Seder, please call the Office of Jewish Affairs at (413) 545-9642 or check online for more information: www.umass.edu/jewish.

Freedom Seder
Wednesday, April 18
More information online at
www.umass.edu/jewish

**“If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
If I am only for myself, what am I?
If not now, when?”**

—Rabbi Hillel (Pirkei Avot 1:14)

The Memory of the Holocaust and the Israeli-Arab conflict



Israeli historian Idith Zertal will speak about Israel's collective memory of the Holocaust and how that memory has shaped Israel's perception, handling, and justification of the conflict with the Palestinians and the Arab world.

Zertal is currently a professor of contemporary history at the Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Basel, Switzerland.

Among her many publications are *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* and *From Catastrophe to Power, Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel*.

Professor Zertal's lecture is sponsored by the department of Judaic & Near Eastern Studies and the Office of Jewish Affairs. It is free and open to the public.

The Memory of the Holocaust and the Israeli-Arab Conflict
Tuesday, March 13 at 4:30 p.m.
Herter 601



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Jewish Affairs Web Site: New Design, More Resources, Easier Navigation



The Jewish Affairs web site has been completely overhauled, with a more professional layout, simpler navigation, and more online resources and graphics.

Highlights include: a comprehensive listing of Jewish religious, cultural, and academic resources; and a chronological index of our educational, cultural, and dialogue programs since 1995, with links that make it easy to learn more about the speakers, films, and organizations we've brought to campus.

A subject index makes it easy to locate information regarding:

- Judaism and interfaith relations
- Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust
- Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict
- Black/Jewish and interethnic relations
- Diversity in the Jewish community

Visit us online at:
www.umass.edu/jewish