



# Religious Studies at UNO

October 2007

## 2007 Goldstein Lecturer to be Natan Sharansky

Natan Sharansky will be the guest lecturer for the 2007 Shirley and Leonard Goldstein Lecture on Human Rights at 7:00 p.m. Wednesday, 14 November, 2007. The lecture will be held in the Ballroom of the Milo Bail Student Center on the University of Nebraska at Omaha campus.



The public is welcome to attend the lecture at no charge.

Natan Sharansky is an internationally renowned human rights activist, political leader, and author. He is the chairman of the Shalem Center's Institute for Strategic Studies as well as a distinguished fellow.

During the Cold War, Sharansky worked with Andre Sakharov, and was one of the most prominent Jewish dissidents in the Soviet Union. He was a founding member and spokesman of the Helsinki Monitoring Group, which reported on Soviet compliance with international agreements. His fight for freedom during nine years of imprisonment by the Soviet police state was a milestone in the global struggle for human rights. It was in Russia that Shirley Goldstein became acquainted with Sharansky. She was influential in his getting a passport to leave Russia and immigrate to Israel.

He was a spokesman of the Jewish and Refusnik Movement in Moscow, was a former president of the Zionist Forum, a contributing editor to the "Jerusalem Report," a member of the Board of Peace Watch and served chairman of the Yisrael Ba'aliya Party. From 1996 to 2005, Sharansky served in the Israeli Knesset, and was, successively, Minister of Industry and

Trade, Minister of the Interior, Minister of Housing and Construction, and Minister for Jerusalem and for Diaspora Affairs. In May 2005, after resigning from Prime Minister Sharon's government in opposition to the government's disengagement policy, Sharansky joined The Shalem Center as a distinguished fellow. He currently serves as chairman of the new Institute for Strategic Studies.

Launched in 2006, the Institute for Strategic Studies is dedicated to exploring the regional and global challenges facing Israel and the West including the advancement of freedom and democracy in the Middle East; a re-examination of international law in the light of new forms of warfare and terrorism; the establishment of a credible deterrent against guerilla and terror organizations and the states that sponsor them; planning for the likely impact of political and social change on the future map of the Middle East; the meaning of "stability" in a time of changing strategic realities; the appropriate response to weapons of mass destruction; the question of how Israel's Arab citizens can most effectively integrate into a Jewish state; and the strengthening of Israel's relations with the United States.

Sharansky has published two award-winning books, *Fear No Evil* (1988) and *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror* (2004).

Born in Russia, he graduated from the Institute of Physics, Moscow, with a degree in mathematics. He was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by the United States Congress.

Sharansky and his wife, Avital, reside in Jerusalem with their two daughters.

## Two graduate in August

Brent Crampton and Naomi Kangas both graduated with a religious studies major at the 10 August commencement this year.

# Batchelder Conference November 8-10 at UNO

Scholars from around the world will present the latest research on excavations at Bethsaida, an ancient city located near the north coast of the Sea of Galilee in Israel, next month at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO).

The ninth annual Batchelder Biblical Archaeology Conference is Nov. 8-10 at the William H. and Dorothy Thompson Alumni Center on the UNO campus.

Bethsaida was the capital city of the forgotten biblical kingdom of Geshur. It is one of the most frequently mentioned towns in the New Testament and the purported place where Jesus performed several miracles.

Dr. James K. Hoffmeier of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School will deliver the keynote address at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 8. Hoffmeier, professor of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern History and Archaeology, will present "The Wilderness Traditions and Archaeological Evidence of the Exodus from Egypt."

Dr. Hoffmeier, who was born in Egypt and lived there until turning 16, returns often for research and excavation. From 1975 to 1977 he worked with the Akhenaten Temple Project in Luxor. He served from 1980 to 1999 as professor of Archaeology and Old Testament at Wheaton College, and was chairman of Wheaton's Department of Biblical, Theological, Religious and Archaeological Studies from 1992 to 1998. From 1996 to 1999 he was also director of the Wheaton Archaeology Program.

Conference activities continue Friday, Nov. 9 and Saturday, Nov. 10 at the Alumni Center with 14 scholars from around the world presenting research and discoveries detailing Biblical archeology on those two days.

"The Lost Tomb of Jesus," produced by James Cameron for The Discovery Channel, will be shown at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 9. Dr. James Tabor and Dr. Dan Bahat will lead the discussion afterward.

Dr. Tabor is professor and chair of the [Department of Religious Studies](#) at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He is featured in "The Lost Tomb of Jesus." Dr. Tabor's four published books are *Things Unutterable*, *A Noble Death*, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* and *The Jesus Dynasty: A New Historical Investigation of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity*.

Dr. Bahat, who lectures at the University of Toronto, has excavated at numerous sites in Jerusalem and throughout Israel. Books he has written or co-authored include *Atlas of Biblical Jerusalem*, *Jerusalem: Stone and Spirit*, *Israel 2000 Years* and Carta's *Historical Atlas of Jerusalem*.

"It is exciting to have such well-known and highly regarded scholars converging in Omaha to present their research," said Rami Arav, director of the Bethsaida Excavations Project at UNO.

In 1991, the Consortium of the Bethsaida Excavations Project (CBEP) was formed and has been housed at UNO since its inception. Its mission is to excavate the ancient city of Bethsaida, research the data discernible from the remains and disseminate the conclusions to both academic and popular audiences.

All events during the three-day conference are open to the public. Admission to the day sessions is free.

However, there is a fee for the two keynote addresses. UNO students who show their IDs can attend the events at no charge. To register for the conference, or for more information and a complete schedule of events, contact Steve Reynolds, Bethsaida Excavations Project coordinator at 402-554-3108.

For more information about the Bethsaida Excavations Project, visit the Web at <http://www.unomaha.edu/bethsaida/>

## Global Studies Conference well attended

The Global Studies Conference, held 4-6 October tripled in size this year, drawing paper presenters from around the globe on issues as diverse as globalization, political injustice, ethics, justice and conflict and a variety of religious issues.

**Dr. Rory Conces** was program chair for the conference. He also chaired the session on Ethics, Justice, and Conflict, and Ethics and Religion in a Modern World.

**Dr. Paul Williams** served on the steering committee of the conference and gave a paper entitled "Healing and Disease Among the Mongo."

**Dr. Nicolae Roddy**, a UNO religious studies graduate who is now on the Theology faculty at Creighton University, chaired a session on Christianity and Islam in the Modern World.

## New Faculty join Religious Studies

The religious studies program welcomed two new faculty members for the fall 2007 academic year.



Dr. Bridget Blomfield (shown in India with Lakshmi) joins the faculty as a assistant professor of Islamic Studies. She teaches Introduction to World Religions and courses related to Islam. She has also been named to the faculty of Women's Studies.

Blomfield holds a Ph.D. in Religious Studies and Women's Studies from Claremont Graduate University. She obtained her masters degree from Pacifica Graduate Institute in Counseling Psychology where she studied the work of Carl Jung.

She taught Psychology at the University of Alaska prior to obtaining her Ph.D. Her interest in Sufism led her to study Islam. For the past five years she has taught Religion, Middle Eastern Studies and Islamic Studies at the University of Redlands, San Jose State University and Long Island University. During the 2006-2007 school year, she taught Islamic Studies in New York, Turkey and India as she traveled with twelve American college students.

She is currently writing an ethnography called *The Language of Tears: Shi'a Muslim Women and Their Religious Rituals*.

Her passions include African dance, Puccini operas and absolute quiet.

**Brady DeSanti**, a 2002 UNO graduate with a major in religious studies and a minor in Native American Studies has also joined the faculty this fall. After leaving UNO he entered the University of Kansas to study U.S. History and indigenous Peoples and Religious Studies. He currently is A.B.D. for his Ph.D.

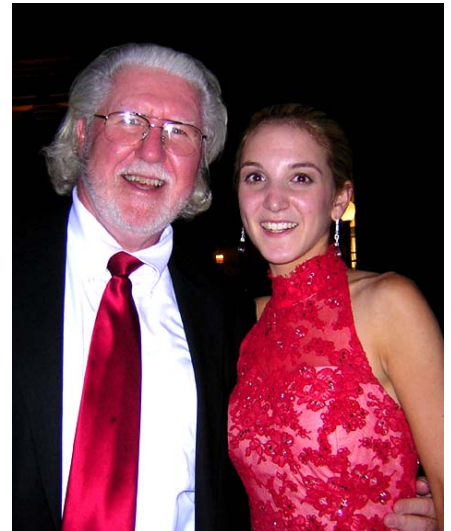
He is teaching two Introduction to Native American Studies classes this fall. He will teach religious studies classes in the spring

## Faculty Notes

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**Bill Blizek** attended the wedding of Elyse Sara in Saratoga Springs, New York, in early October.

Elyse was the very first intern for the Journal of Religion and Film. She spent one summer here at UNO while she was a film student at the University of Southern California.



Elyse now owns, with her husband, her own production company, Eyeopener Productions. They live in New York City, where she also works as a production assistant for a popular television show.

**Rory Conces'** latest publications are "The Role of the Hyperintellectual in Civil Society Building and Democratization in the Balkans," which has been published in the September issue of *Studies in East European Thought*, and "Tarifa's Exposition of the Kanun: Something for Sociologists and Philosophers Alike," which has been published in the inaugural issue of *Sociological Analysis*. He also gave a lecture on the current situation in Bosnia and Kosovo at the latest meeting of REASON held at the W. Dale Clark Library.

**Bill Blizek** published a paper in *An Anthology of Philosophical Studies* published by the Athens Institute for Education and Research in Athens. The paper is entitled: "Moral Philosophy and Religious Ethics."

## Scholarship donations welcome

Donations are welcome for any of the religious studies scholarships. Donations may be made out to the University of Nebraska Foundation, 8712 West Dodge Road, Suite 101, Omaha, NE 68114 with the name of the scholarship (Ron Burke Scholarship Fund or Dale Stover Scholarship Fund) written in the memo line.

# Changing Minds Book and 2008 World Congress Presentation on Agenda for Dr. Michele Desmarais

Dr. Michele Desmarais will be presenting at the World Congress on Psychology and Spirituality in January 2008, at which time her new book, *Changing Minds: Mind, Consciousness and Identity in Patañjali's Yoga-sūtra and Cognitive Neuroscience* will be launched. It is being published by Motilal Banarsidass.

The Congress will be 5-8 January in Delhi, India. Her presentation at the Congress will be "Enhancing Change: Classical Yoga and Neuroplasticity."

It focuses on topic of the foundation for Classical Yoga, Patañjali's Yoga-sūtra, which contains a category of practices termed



abhyāsa-vairāgya (repeated practice and detachment). Such practices may enhance neuroplasticity, the brain's natural ability to change. Indeed, cultivation and elimination are two processes shared in common by Yoga practice and brain function. Desmarais, who joined the UNO Religious Studies Faculty in Fall 2002, teaches courses on Buddhism, Hinduism, Mysticism and Introduction to World Religions at UNO.

Desmarais' specialty is Sanskrit and Indian thought. Her graduate research focused on aspects of mind and consciousness in Hindu and Buddhist texts, and she was the recipient of a national doctoral fellowship for her research on philosophy of mind in Patañjali's Yoga-sūtras.

She was born and raised in Vancouver, British Columbia and is Dakotah-Métis-Canadian. She has a BA in psychology from Simon Fraser University, an MA in Religious Studies from the University of British Columbia, and a PhD in Asian Studies also from U.B.C.



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