



PROFILE: FELIX POSEN

Journey toward Jewish Identity

What began as a personal quest by Felix Posen turned into a robust educational vision, culminating in the flagship Ofakim program at TAU

 Felix Posen receiving a TAU honorary doctorate in 2006

Felix Posen has a passion – Judaism as culture. It is a passion that has fueled him for over 30 years and has led him to become one of the most prominent global figures in advancing the teaching of Judaism as a living heritage. This mission also led him to establish, together with his son, Daniel, the *Ofakim* (Horizons) Program at TAU, the only teacher training program in the world to equip teachers with the full set of tools they need to educate Israeli schoolchildren about Judaism as a culture and civilization. This year, the program is celebrating its 10th anniversary and a decade of success – with about 10,000 Israeli pupils taught by Ofakim graduates so far.

Born to an Orthodox Jewish family in pre-World War II Germany, Posen and his family escaped to England and later to America shortly after Kristallnacht in 1938. It was after graduating from university, “and discovering some ghastly details about Auschwitz from a first cousin survivor of the camp,” Felix Posen recounts, that he decided to transition from an Orthodox, observant Jew to a secular one. He subsequently embarked on a personal intellectual journey to gain knowledge and redefine his identity within a new secular, Jewish cultural framework.

Posen became acutely aware that, while the majority of Jews around the world defined themselves as secular, this large population was, for the most part, uneducated in Jewish history, philosophy, literature and culture. In addition,

academic programs teaching Judaism as culture were lacking, and discourse practically non-existent.

Broadening horizons

Posen’s success in commodities trading enabled him to embark upon pioneering philanthropic ventures to make Judaism more accessible and inclusive for the non-religious majority. He founded the Posen Foundation in the early 1980s to promote education in the new field of Jewish culture and its diversified contribution to the world through personalities ranging from Spinoza, Mendelssohn and Ahad Ha’am to Woody Allen. The Foundation exclusively funds the Ofakim Program at TAU, as well as international programs, research, fellowships, events and scholarships.

Ofakim pursues a holistic and comprehensive approach to training Jewish studies teachers in Israel. The program enables participants to explore the idea that while Jewish civilization has always included religion, it is not limited to matters of spirituality. Students are awarded tuition scholarships and living stipends, and graduate with a BA and a teaching certificate.

Ofakim has become, in ten short years, one of the most prestigious teacher training programs in Israel. It encompasses the spectrum of cultural studies relating to the Jewish experience, including art, philosophy, philology, history and Jewish literature.

Lior Sibony, Ofakim graduate, teacher and coordinator of Jewish Studies at Herzliya Hebrew Gymnasium, Tel Aviv, and at the Adelson Educational Campus in Las Vegas

“The Ofakim program shaped my personality, and emphasized the importance of Judaism as culture as a school subject, a tool for life and a very important value for ensuring the character of Israeli society and the future of the Jewish people.”



“Ofakim accepts only the top students who show both significant academic potential together with a profound desire to teach and become leading educators in Israeli high schools,” explains program head Prof. Ron Margolin. “Many of our graduates are becoming leaders within their pedagogical environments and communities.

“There can be no doubt that the idea of cultural Judaism is gaining ground in Israeli society with every class taught by an Ofakim graduate,” says Prof. Margolin.

“The care, involvement and enthusiasm shown by Felix and Jane Posen, and their son, Daniel, for Ofakim is simply extraordinary and shows a profound aware-



Daniel Posen

ness of the crucial importance education has in shaping a better and more just Israeli society,” Prof. Margolin stresses.

Recognizing Felix Posen’s vision and commitment, the University bestowed upon him in 2006 an honorary doctorate.

Felix Posen sums up his aim: “It is our hope that Ofakim will produce a cadre of teachers who will instill in the mainstream secular student a pleasurable and intellectual understanding of the immense richness of Jewish culture, history and development over two millennia. Secular students must have

the same rights and resources to learn about their culture as their religious peers.”

PROFILE: PROF. FRANÇOIS HEILBRONN

Vive la France

A passion for TAU and Israel, combined with vitality and charisma, characterizes French Friends President Prof. François Heilbronn



Prof. François Heilbronn

Since taking up the presidency of the French Friends of Tel Aviv University in 2003, Prof. François Heilbronn has left an indelible mark on one of the University’s most successful, cohesive and loyal Friends associations.

With over 1,200 members, the French Friends Association has flourished under Heilbronn’s leadership. He has brought in many young members as well as an extensive network of contacts in the academic, public and business spheres. The Association has dramatically augmented TAU’s standing in France, holding high-profile events in Paris and bringing French President François Hollande to the campus during his 2013 Israel state visit. The appearance was significant for the French-speaking community in Israel and also showcased TAU know-how and innovation to notable French business delegations.

The French Friends stand out particularly for their support of needy students at TAU – a commitment that was initiated by the longtime French Friends President, the late Hugo Ramniceanu, and reinforced by Prof. Heilbronn.

Since 2008, Prof. Heilbronn has served as Vice Chairman of the TAU Board of Governors and he also sat on the 2009 Dan David Prize Committee. For his dedication and

outstanding contribution to the University, he was given the TAU President’s Award.

Prof. Heilbronn is the Managing Partner of the consulting firm M.M. Friedrich, Heilbronn & Fiszler. He graduated from Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris in 1983 and earned an MBA at Harvard Business School. He is an associate professor in business strategy at Sciences Po Paris. Seven years ago he facilitated the establishment of an exchange program between Sciences Po and TAU.

Prof. Heilbronn has been involved in Jewish and Zionist organizations since a young age. He is a member of the Board and of the Executive Committee of the Fondation du Mémorial de la Shoah-Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine à Paris, and a member of the Central Committee and Board of Directors of the Alliance Israelite Universelle.

“The French Friends are one of the most vital and active of our friends associations, and we are lucky to have François at their helm,” said TAU President Joseph Klafter. “He is a man of action and a man of letters, as well as a passionate and committed humanist.”