



On June 3, 2007

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem awarded
The Samuel Rothberg Prize for Jewish Education to

Michael Bahat

Distinguished and highly versatile educator and teacher Michael Bahat, who teaches Bible and Israel studies to children, youth and adults in the Upper Galilee, has made an indelible impression on generations of pupils and teachers in the development towns, kibbutzim and moshavim. In his educational vision and activities, he successfully combines traditional Judaism and the aspiration to make society a better place with a renewed examination of the many Jewish sources, while also merging his love of Bible with outstanding teaching skills and genuine love for his students.

Michael Bahat, who was born in Russian-ruled Latvia in 1915, was educated in a traditional *cheder* and at Hebrew school, later joining the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement where he took on various educational roles. He was in Siberia during World War Two, but reached Riga by war's end and then moved to Poland where he worked in education with refugee survivors in Europe. In 1948, during the height of the War of Independence, he immigrated to Israel on the illegal immigrant ship "Ein Davar" and joined Kibbutz Kfar Blum. From the outset, his educational work in the country was marked by his adherence to traditional Jewish values and authentic sources, a daring position that drew antagonism from the Kibbutz Movement of which he was a member. In 1949 Michael Bahat was enlisted to help in the absorption of North African immigrant youth. He went on to have a profound influence on education in the Galilee, as teacher and principal of Kfar Blum's school and as principal of the "Metzudot" state school in Kiryat Shemona. He likewise taught Bible and Jewish values in the Danziger comprehensive high school in Kiryat Shemona for many years, initiated enrichment courses for teachers of Jewish subjects and in 1977 he was the driving force behind the establishment of the Jewish-Zionist Education Center in the Galilee Panhandle. Michael Bahat remains active in Jewish education in his local area.

Michael Bahat belongs to that brand of extraordinary educationalists who are utterly devoted to the Jewish-Zionist vision. Indeed, he epitomizes the image of an educational pioneer both in spirit and action, striving to bridge the gap between the traditions of past generations and the spirit of new ones. He is especially talented in teaching boys and girls who came to Israel during the major immigration waves of the twentieth century — from North Africa in the 1950s and 1960s and from the former Soviet Union in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Michael Bahat's public roles include his membership of the Shenhar Commission: A People and the World which proposed new ways to integrate traditional Jewish values into the State educational system; his untiring efforts to reinstate the President's Circle for teaching Jewish sources and which became a nationwide project under his influence; and his ongoing involvement in educational affairs, notably through his writings on education and the teaching of tradition.

In appreciation of his unique contribution to educating young and old in the North of Israel and of his profound dedication to Jewish education and tradition, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem names Michael Bahat its Samuel Rothberg Prize Laureate for 2007.

The Samuel Rothberg Prize for Jewish Education is awarded annually for outstanding service to Jewish education. The prize was established by the Hebrew University in 1975 in honor of the 65th birthday of the Chairman of the Board of Governors and in deep appreciation of his dynamic leadership and dedicated service to the University, the State of Israel and the Jewish people.