

Valued Above Rubies

Women and Men of Valor Win
MOMENT'S Community Service Awards

Education

"The Jewish community must prepare its best people to become its educational leaders, whether men or women," says Rabbi **David Silber**. "Since women lacked the opportunities to pursue the requisite studies for a career in education, I founded the Drisha Institute to fill the gap."

The Drisha Institute for Jewish Education, which opened ten years ago, enables women of all Jewish denominations and levels of learning to study biblical and rabbinic texts intensively and at an advanced level, full time or part time. Classes are held at the West Side Institutional Synagogue in Manhattan. Most of Drisha's students are in college or are college graduates; most of the faculty are professors at nearby universities, including Yeshiva University, Touro College and New York University.

Drisha teaches traditional texts using innovative methods. With the goal of cultivating future Jewish educators, classes emphasize *how* one should study Jewish texts. A semester's curriculum is usually centered on a major halachic theme, for example labor relations or the laws of mourning. In addition, there are weekly seminars dealing with methodologies used to study the diverse genres of Jewish literature, as well as instructions on how to utilize research aids and bibliographical tools.

DAVID SILBER



Opening Traditional Texts to Women

Non-observant women find relevant to their lives courses such as Problems in Jewish Ethics, which discusses Jewish approaches to such ethical questions as abortion, euthanasia and suicide. Also popular is a Talmud class covering the eighth chapter of *Sanhedin*, which deals with questions of justifiable homicide and other issues concerning the relative importance of human life.

Each year, ten women who are considering a career in Jewish education receive a full scholarship and a \$7,500 stipend for a year of full-time study at Drisha. The school also offers a six-week Summer Institute for short-term, intensive study. In 1987, Silber started a program for gifted high school students. "It became clear to me that if the most gifted young women were to be persuaded to pursue careers in education, they had to be infused with a love of learning at a young age," says Silber. The five-week high school program encourages a passion for inquiry and develops tools to analyze texts.

But Silber still felt that there were women his institute wasn't reaching. So he inaugurated a Teacher Enrichment Program, which is still in the pilot phase. Aimed at both women and men who are already in the teaching profession, the TEP is an in-service program. Drisha instructors visit Jewish schools of all denominations and expose teachers to creative approaches to biblical and rabbinic texts.

"Through honest and open inquiry Rabbi Silber challenges us to become thinking Jews and to pass on our insights to others," says a Drisha student. "His classes stress that the Jewish family and the Jewish people can prosper only when each of us helps to reaffirm and renew our tradition."

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PART I

Thanks to a multitude of community heroines and heroes, Jewish culture is thriving in grass-roots America. A lively picture of local Jewish activism has emerged from letters and supporting materials nominating 163 candidates for MOMENT'S Community Service Awards.

The judges were deluged with outstanding nominations; for example, the Camp Ramah director who had so touched the lives of young people that 17 former campers—college students, rabbinical students, psychologists, teachers—were separately inspired to write nominations describing how he was instrumental in nurturing their Jewish identities. Jewish theater companies nominated their directors; former students nominated scholars who had most inspired them. Congregations sent copies of services developed by their rabbis that brought them closer to Judaism. Judges learned of individuals who worked to save their community's synagogue from being destroyed and read the course plans of educators who found creative ways to teach about the Holocaust. Samples of Jewish crafts, slides of sculptures and paintings and sheets of calligraphy arrived in large parcels. The judges studied the biographies of men and women who volunteered their time to bridging the gap between blacks and Jews, between the handicapped and the physically able, between American Jews and people of all faiths throughout the world in need of food, clothing, and shelter.

Who are MOMENT'S winners? They are unsung heroes and world-famous scholars. They are community organizers and national organizations. They make *shabbos* for Jews with AIDS and create homes for the handicapped. They are care-givers and fundraisers. They are 14 men and women and three organizations whose achievements fall into seven categories of contribution to

the Jewish community. Each has followed his or her Jewish principles to create a better, more beautiful, safer, more peaceful and caring world. Each has done this in a Jewish way, in a way that inspired others to make a similar contribution. MOMENT applauds their originality and dedication and offers their stories as an inspiration to the Jewish community.

"We asked ourselves why had we agreed to take on another responsibility," wrote three of the judges. "But an entirely different mood set in as we began to read the 23 sets of nominations and supporting materials that had arrived in an ominously large crate. We began to feel grateful for the opportunity to read about the achievements and dreams of these people. In fact, we became exhilarated by the news of creativity, devotion and concern alive in Jewish communities near and far. Each of us was moved by the descriptions of people making extraordinarily good use of their God-given gifts to teach, empower and care for other Jews." Most of the judges expressed regret at having to eliminate outstanding candidates. In this issue of MOMENT we introduce the winners of the Volunteer Service, Social Service, Scholarship and Education awards. In the next issue we will write about the winners of the Religion, Literature and the Arts and Charitable Fundraising awards.