

## 'Who Knows One'

A video search around the world for answers about God.

**Shelli Liebman Dorfman**  
Senior Writer

In April 2003, Sarah Goldfein was working at a local law firm, set to begin classes at Harvard Law School in the fall.



Sarah Goldfein

Out of the blue, she received a certified letter at her Southfield home awarding her a Jewish Future Foundation fellowship. Leery at first, not having applied for the honor and having never even heard of the organization, she soon learned the offer was legitimate and important enough to defer the start of law school.

What they proposed was simple. "They asked that I do a project that would contribute to the Jewish community in some way," Goldfein said. "The nature of the

project was left to my discretion, subject to their approval. They compensated me with a fixed stipend for the year."

The result of her project is "Who Knows One," a filmed series of interviews with scholars, philosophers, theologians and Jews of all ages and persuasions about how they see — or don't see — God. The Jewish Forum will present the film and a discussion with Goldfein during a conference Sunday, Nov. 18, at the Community House in Birmingham.

A post-screening discussion will be led by Rabbi Joe Kanofsky, a consultant with the Centre for Enhancement of Jewish Education in Toronto and former director of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation in Warsaw.

### What To Do

Goldfein's choice of a film topic came from her own experience. "I wanted to do something on Jewish belief because I felt that talk about God was largely absent from both my formal and my informal Jewish education," she said.

Goldfein is a graduate of Hillel Day

School of Metropolitan Detroit in Farmington Hills, attended Yeshivat Akiva in Southfield, spent summers at Camp Ramah, studied at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and holds philosophy and Jewish studies degrees from the University of Michigan.

"Jewish history, Jewish tradition, Jewish law, Israel, the Holocaust were all talked about, but very little was said about theology," she said. "I also taught Hebrew school for a while and God wasn't mentioned when I was on *that* side either!"

"I was struggling with my own beliefs at the time the opportunity to do a project arose, so I thought it would be a good place to focus my efforts."

She credits her father, Dr. Irving Goldfein, and her mentor at the foundation for the idea to turn her research into a video. "Both encouraged me, thinking that it would likely reach a broader audience than print or radio," she said.

Goldfein interviewed and videotaped 70 individuals throughout the United States, Canada and Israel. "Many, if not most, were scholars writing in the area," she said.

Her search for interview candidates with well-developed and diverse views included spending "a lot of time sitting on the floor of the Judaica section at Borders reading back covers and skimming a few pages of whatever books were there," she said.

Interviews included such heavy-hitters as Dr. Daniel Gordis, senior vice president of the Shalem Center Shalem Center in Israel and founding dean of the Conservative Ziegler Rabbinical School at the University of Judaism; Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, founder of the Jewish Renewal movement; Rabbi Avi Shafran, a haredi rabbi who serves as the director of public affairs for Agudath Israel of America; Alice Shalvi, first woman rector of the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem; David Wolpe, author and Conservative rabbi; Judith Plaskow, feminist theologian and professor of religious studies; and Rabbi Irving Greenberg, Orthodox rabbi, founding president of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL) and current presi-

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## The Jewish Forum Adult education

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Dr. Irving Goldfein and Mark Schluskel, both of Southfield, created the Jewish Forum (TJF) to offer innovative, stimulating and sophisticated opportunities in adult education.

The nonprofit group hosts "programs that present unique Jewish learning opportunities for adults," Goldfein said. The group's inaugural event last May was a lecture series led by Bible scholar and author Dr. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg.

Other programs, Goldfein said, will include "events that bring the community together for dialogue and debate of important and possibly controversial issues in the Jewish community and the Jewish world."

The "Who Knows One" conference on Sunday, Nov. 18, is TJF's next venture and includes viewing a film about Jewish views of God by Goldfein's daughter, Sarah.

The organization's target audience is the broader Jewish community, including Jews of all streams and ideologies.

"TJF is purposely and entirely independent of any congregation or movement, and the make-up of the steering committee reflects that," Goldfein said of members Nancy Kaplan of West Bloomfield, Barbara Klarman of Southfield, René Lichtman of West Bloomfield, Donna R. Sklar of Farmington Hills and Rebecca Starr of Troy.

Striving not to duplicate efforts of other groups and institutions, TJF already has joined forces with some of them. Congregation Beth Ahm co-spon-

sored two summer events. In February, TJF will host a symposium with Young Israel of Southfield and Young Israel of Oak Park that brings four authors of controversial works in "the search for

the truth: where Torah and secular knowledge meet."

In March, the group will co-sponsor "Jewish History Through the Lens of Sport: Present-Day Challenges to Group Identity," with the Cohn-Haddow Center for Jewish Studies at

Wayne State University.

In April, TJF's first town meeting on the subject of "Jews and Power" will be held at Temple Shir Shalom.

Also in the works is a first-ever joint

conference with WSU's Cohn-Haddow Center for Judaic Studies and the Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan.

Programming will include everything from lectures and debates to cultural events. "We are hoping and planning to take some of our programming to a broader audience, via Internet and satellite," Goldfein said.

So far, funding for TJF comes from admission charges and contributions, which don't cover costs. Once their nonprofit 501(c)(3) status is approved, they will seek more contributions, including foundation grants.

"We're not at all interested in building a large organization with much infrastructure," said Goldfein. "What we want to do is to create high-quality programs and events for interested and motivated Jews who see the value in enhancing their own Jewish knowledge and in strengthening ties in the Jewish community by sharing — and debating — ideas in an open, informed and respectful manner." □



At a May Jewish Forum event are steering committee members René Lichtman, Irving Goldfein, speaker Dr. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, Barbara Klarman and Nancy Kaplan.