

# The Batsheva de Rothschild Foundation



**T**he time was 1958. Israel was ten years old, but the day-to-day struggle for survival left the new State little money for scientific research (now the backbone of its vigorous high-tech economy). Profs. Ephraim Katzir and Alex Keynan went to visit Batsheva de Rothschild, whose own aliyah to Israel had been followed by an active involvement in its welfare and culture. She listened to their analyses and then, with characteristic energy and intelligence, set up the B. de Rothschild Foundation for the Advancement of Science in Israel (incorporated in the USA). She has personally headed the Foundation and its associated Israel-based "Fund" (founded in 1965), ever since, keeping it true to its goal: to fund what is needed, what others, as yet, cannot.

**... "A place where you see things happening, always intelligently, and often quite quickly..."**

In the early 1960s that meant applied and agricultural research. In the early 1970s, after the government's newly established Offices of the Chief Scientist began funding that, the Foundation switched to funding basic research. Recognizing the dangers of Israel's potential scientific isolation and the difficulty of sending Israelis abroad for training, the Foundation began their immensely successful series of Batsheva Seminars. These brought 8-10 world experts to Israel to help explore and start new advanced scientific fields together with their Israeli counterparts. Several such seminars were (and still are) held each year.

Anxious to unleash the creativity of Israel's young scientists, who were often confined to working on problems defined by their laboratories, the Foundation began issuing special Grants for Young Scientists. As Malka Keynan, a personal friend of Batsheva's and the Fund's long-time Administrator, recalls: "Within a few years, many of those young investigators became major scientific figures and served as reviewers for our next rounds of applicants!"

Much of the credit for the scientific direction of the Foundation goes to its exceptionally broad Panel of Advisors, who can analyze problems and opportunities from all angles. The first Chairman of the Panel, now headed by Prof. Natan Sharon, was Prof. Katzir. Keeping their finger on the pulse of Israeli science, the Panel has the unique ability to act on-the-spot, adding and dropping programs at will. Thus, they were able to shift support from young scientists to Russian immigrant scientists far in advance of Israel's more ponderous establishment.

Most recently, the Foundation has begun emphasizing "Frontiers of Science," using its seminars to promote Israeli interest in (and funding of) the Human Genome Project, synchrotron radiation and evolution research. Many of these topics have gone on to be funded by the Israel Academy, Israel Science Foundation or FIRST.

As the Batsheva de Rothschild Foundation celebrates its 40th anniversary, Malka Keynan still admires the Foundation as "a place where you see things happening, always intelligently, and often quite quickly. It's been wonderful!"