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## **From Rocky Road to Easy Street:**



### **The Story of Leshem**

Presented by Guy Finkelstein

The revolution in accessibility of higher education in Israel to individuals with learning disabilities through extending:  
educational boundaries and the  
personal, learning, and social space.



<http://leshem.telhai.ac.il>

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- Defining the Terms: “Educational Boundaries” and “personal, learning, and social space”.
- Leshem Organization history, Mission and Activities.
- The Rights of Students with Learning Disabilities in Post-Secondary Educational Institutions, Law (2008).
- Leshem Professional Teams Draw Up the Regulations

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### **Educational Boundaries:** **Some Pointed Questions**

- To what extent are we capable of changing our expectations regarding what knowledge students are obligated to acquire?
- How flexible are the academic professional boundaries?
- What are the limits of academic freedom?
- Have we actually compared each of the educational steps we take against what we really want to accomplish and what sort of graduate they produce?
- Have we examined our teaching goals objectively and in depth?
- What must we do to continuously examine and change old definitions while at the same time maintaining high academic and professional standards? Furthermore, how can we facilitate the genuine professional, spiritual, and personal development of both the individual and the subject being taught.

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### **Personal, Academic, and Social Space**

- For instance, the diagnosis and treatment of learning disabilities, success, and feelings of belonging all help to expand the personal space.
- For instance, the provision of extended time for assignments and tests, academic counseling, special courses, technological aids, and tutors help to expand the academic space.
- For instance, increased awareness of learning disabilities, reducing their stigma, and educating teaching staffs all help to expand the social space.

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### **Leshem Organizational Mission**

To achieve equality of opportunity for adults with learning disabilities, including admission into institutions of higher learning and, at the conclusion of their studies, opportunities for gainful employment or post-graduate education. This will serve to promote personal growth and feelings of accomplishment, both of which will undoubtedly help individuals with learning disabilities integrate into all facets of society and become contributing citizens – to their benefit as well as that of their communities.

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### **Objectives of Leshem**

- To increase awareness of the special needs of adults with learning disabilities. through public campaigns.
- To promote legislation and special policies regarding learning disabilities.
- To advocate accommodations in admission requirements as well as alternative learning styles and testing formats at institutes for higher learning.
- To create support centers within the higher education system.
- To further methodologies and professional expertise in the field.
- To advance the integration of graduates with learning disabilities into the workforce.
- To constantly raise the standard of learning disability professionals. To elevate the professional status of learning disability specialists and educational diagnosticians.
- To develop a mode of diagnostic testing formulated and generally accepted by all learning disability professionals.

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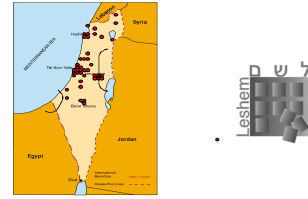
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### Geographical Distribution of Leshem Association Support Centers – 2009



Fifty-five support centers have been established in conjunction with institutions of higher learning throughout Israel. They provide continuing academic support for around 17,500 students, about 5.6% of Israel's student population.

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### **Activities and Services Provided by Support Centers**

- Preliminary counseling sessions in which a support plan is developed according to the individual needs of the student.
- On-going personal professional guidance within the support center as the need arises.
- Individual professional guidance in choosing a course of studies and course selection.
- Assistance in developing good study skills and successful learning strategies. Sessions are either individual or group.
- Assistance in on-campus orientation, mediation with campus functionaries, and referrals to counseling professionals on- or off-campus as the need arises.
- Development of effective self-advocacy in students.
- Grant accommodations in testing and other assignments.

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### **More Activities and Services Provided by Support Centers**

- Peer tutoring by student volunteers or Perach-Leshem scholarship program.
- Assistance using technological aids.
- Intensive assistance in specific subjects by teachers and teaching assistants (individual or group sessions).
- Psychological and emotional support.
- Continuous follow-up of tutees' progress and evaluation of learning interventions.
- A supportive community.
- Develop programs and tools for the integration of students with learning disabilities in higher education and promote their progress.

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**More Activities and Services Provided by Support Centers**

- Increase awareness among the teaching staff, helping develop its ability to integrate students with learning disabilities.
- Identification and diagnosis of learning disabilities.
- Counseling and support during the transition from undergraduate studies to employment or to post-graduate education, including seminars after graduation.
- Promote research in the field by making use of knowledge gathered within the support center.

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**Extent of Annual Financial Support:  
Around \$6,700,000**

| Organization                                     | Contribution |
|--|--------------|
| The Council for Higher Education                 | \$1,000,000  |
| The institutions for Post-Secondary Education    | \$3,000,000  |
| Various contributors (The Gross Fund and others) | \$150,000    |
| The Perech Tutorial Project                      | \$900,000    |
| Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor           | \$150,000    |
| Ministry of Education                            | \$250,000    |
| Ministry of Defense                              | \$250,000    |
| Various governmental joint projects              | \$1,000,000  |

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**The Rights of Students with Learning Disabilities in Post-Secondary Educational Institutions, Law (2008) Was Passed by the Knesset on April 1, 2008 and Came into Force January 2009**

2. (A) A candidate with learning disabilities is eligible for accommodations during the admission process to a post-secondary educational institution, pursuant to the provisions of this law; in this matter, "admission process" – includes testing and assignments having the objective of evaluation and screening of candidates for admission to post-secondary institutions carried out by an external operative and used during the institution's application process.

(B) A student with learning disabilities is eligible for accommodations within the framework of his studies in the post-secondary educational institution in which he is studying, pursuant to the provisions of this law.

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**Definition of Learning Disabilities**  
**According to the Knesset 2008**

“Learning Disability” – a disability that affects the cognitive processes and is manifest by significant non-age-consistent impediments to the acquisition and application of skills of attention and concentration; language; reading; writing; conceptualization, organizational ability; as well as mathematical, social, and emotional capabilities; and excludes learning disabilities that result from one or more of the following: a sensory, motor skill, mental, or emotional handicap, or one resulting from external conditions such as environmental, cultural, or social-economic deficiencies.

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**Provisions Regarding the Integration**  
**of Individuals with Learning**  
**Disabilities**

4. (A) The Minister [of Education], in consultation with the Council for Higher Education, together with the Minister of Industry, Trade, and Labor, the Commissioner [of Equal Rights for People with Disabilities], and organizations concerned with advancing the rights of individuals with learning disabilities, and with the authorization of the [Knesset] Education Committee, will establish provisions regarding the integration of individuals with learning disabilities in institutions of post-secondary education.

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**Provisions for Integration of Students**  
**with Learning Disabilities**

- 4.(G) The provisions according to this section will govern, *inter alia*, the following matters, taking into consideration the type of learning disability:
- (1) Accommodations for candidates and students with learning disabilities;
  - (2) Support activities for students with learning disabilities;
  - (3) Support centers for students with learning disabilities at each post-secondary educational institution (heretofore, support center);
  - (4) Each post-secondary educational institution will establish its regulations and publicize them so that it will be possible to implement the provisions of this law in that institution;

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**Provisions for Integration of Students with Learning Disabilities**

- (5) The nature of the diagnostic testing that will be recognized for the purpose of granting accommodations according to this law;
- (6) The type of professional that will be certified according to Section 3(B) (heretofore, the certified professional);
- (7) Procedures for appeal according to Section 3(G), including the authority empowered to consider the appeal.

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**Section 6(A) (4) Certified Diagnostician:**  
**A person eligible to receive certification as a recognized diagnostician from the Minister who has received training in the field of learning disabilities and is one of the following:**

- A certified psychologist
- An individual holding a degree in learning disabilities.
- For diagnoses of attention deficit: a neurologist, psychiatrist, pediatric psychiatrist, pediatric and adolescent psychiatrist, or pediatrician with three years experience in the field of child development.

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**Certified Diagnostician**

- For diagnoses of dysgraphia: an occupational therapist holding a degree in occupational therapy.
- For diagnoses of disturbances in auditory processing or speech: a speech or language therapist holding an appropriate degree.
- Any holder of a degree, including in medicine, occupational therapy, or language disorders from an academic institution or a recognized institution of higher learning in Israel or abroad, on the condition that the Minister recognizes the degree as appropriate training for the purpose of certification as a diagnostician in the specific field of the diagnosis as will be determined.

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**Requirements established by the Minister according to the provisions of Section 6.(B) of the law.**

Section 6.(B)1. The Minister [of Education], after consultation with the Minister of Health, will establish requirements regarding training, including internships, continuing education courses, and certification examinations regarding certification of learning disabilities diagnosticians, and may establish different requirements for holders of other academic degrees or those having other qualifications, including the number of hours of training or continuing education courses required and their content, as well as the type of certification examination required, and is entitled to establish requirements as aforesaid for only some of those trained in the field.

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 **Professional Teams Draw Up the Regulations**

Leshem recruited volunteers from over fifty professions to work in three teams in keeping with the structure of the law.

**Team 1:** Accommodations in the admission process, modifications in teaching methods and testing, the establishment and operation of support centers. This team was divided into four subgroups:

- A. Accommodations during the admissions process.
- B. Support centers and support activities.
- C. Alternative testing methods and modifications in academic assignments, including the accommodation request process and the appeals process.
- D. Procedures for increasing awareness among the academic teaching staff and administration regarding integration of students with learning disabilities.

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**Professional Teams Draw Up the Regulations**

**Team 2:** Established what diagnostic testing is appropriate for adults with learning disabilities as well as training requirements for certified diagnosticians, including provisions covering the transition period.

**Team 3:** Established a mechanism for oversight and implementation of the law.

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**Support Centers and Support for Students with Learning Disabilities**

This subgroup dealt with:

- The goals of support centers
- Professional ethics
- The place of the support center within the structure of the academic institution.
- Physical location and publicizing services offered
- Time schedule for approaching a center
- Support center activities
- Services provided to students
- Professionals available at a support center, including their professions

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**Accommodations during the Admission Process**

This subgroup dealt with:

1. Establishment of an exceptions committee which will examine admissions requirements according to the following:
  - Formal admissions requirements of the institution
  - Personal interviews
  - Diagnostic testing:  
Didactic/psychological/medical/  
interdisciplinary/occupational
  - Life experience: recommendations/portfolio
  - Grades received in preparatory courses
  - Alternative methods of evaluation

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**Additional Accommodations during the Admissions Process**

2. Integration of adults with learning disabilities in post-secondary institutions.
3. Granting accommodations to adults with learning disabilities
4. Accommodations in standardized testing given by external operatives
5. Publication of standardized tests
6. Courses for diagnosticians
7. Types of accommodations
8. General provisions
9. The necessity of receiving data regarding grades received by students granted accommodations for research purposes

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### **Accommodations in Testing Methods and Other Academic Assignments**

This subgroup dealt with

1. Accommodations in testing and academic assignments so that students with learning disabilities are able to submit them in such a way that despite their disabilities they have the same opportunity as other students to demonstrate their academic accomplishments.  
Some recommended accommodations:
  - Substitution of required courses at the discretion of the academic department; that is, substituting a required course with a different one that achieves the same objectives.
  - Alternative institutional policies regarding course requirements outside the students' major.
  - Extending the time period allowed for fulfilling the requirements for a degree or certificate, including accommodations by the finance division, if such exists.

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### **Testing Accommodations and Their Implementation**

- Extension of examination time limits by at least 25%.
- Disregard of spelling mistakes in Hebrew and English.
- Increased text size of written examinations.
- Allowing a student to read his test answers out loud at a later date to the person grading the test.
- Allowing a student to bring a longer list of formulas into a test.
- Recitation of test questions to a student by a neutral party or the use of technological aids.
- Allowing the use of an electronic Hebrew-English dictionary instead of printed one.
- Allowing the use of a calculator during tests.
- Exemption from studying English.

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
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### **Testing Accommodations and Their Implementation**

- Dictation of answers to a neutral party or recording the answers.
- Changing the test format; for example, from multiple choice to essay (or the opposite). Allowing a student to submit a paper instead of taking a test.
- Oral examinations.
- Allowing the student to take the test in a separate and quiet room.
- Accommodations in physical and ergonomic conditions.
- Granting a longer time period between tests.
- Extending the time period for submitting assignments or writing papers.

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### **Recognized Diagnostic Testing for Adults and Diagnostician Certification**

2. The subgroup members agreed on the following premises :
- Diagnostic testing should be carried out by several experts.
  - There should be common discourse and cooperation between the various professionals.
  - Diagnosis of adults requires special training.
  - Training should include diagnostic testing and treatment.
  - There should be a comprehensive training model.
  - There should be ethical responsibility.
  - Institutions must ready themselves to be able to provide certification training.
  - The didactic, psychological, medical, and para-medical fields are all important to this field.

Thank You for Your Attention

