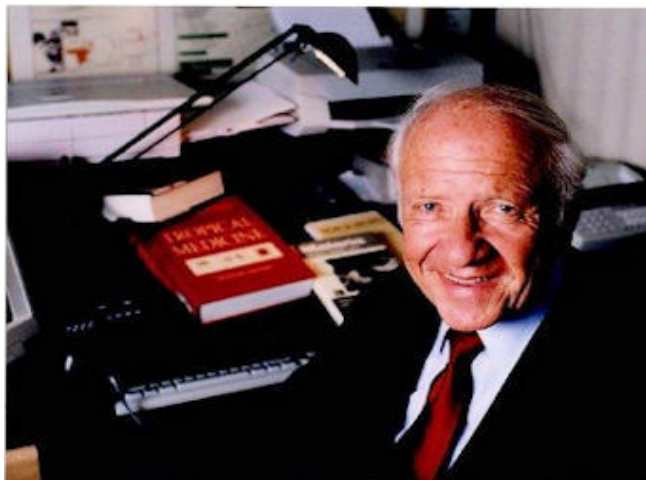


Health & science, best prescription for peace: Dr. Sanford Kuvin



Dr. Sanford Kuvin

As he surveys the stunning view of the Old City from his Jerusalem apartment, Dr. Sanford Kuvin speaks passionately about his true loves. He has many: his wife of 51 years, his children, his 10 grandchildren — and the Hebrew University.

“The Hebrew University of Jerusalem is close to my heart. I’m in love with it because it represents the best of the Jewish people: *tikkun olam* [repairing the world], sharing knowledge, all the good things you can imagine and with a *neshama* [soul],” he says.

Cambridge University-educated Dr. Kuvin is the founder of the Hebrew University’s Sanford F. Kuvin Center for the Study of Infectious and Tropical Diseases and chairman of its international board.

Founded in 1980, the Kuvin Center is also one of his

loves, as too is Israel — “the best country in the world” where he enjoys “good friends, good music and good food”, often in the apartment where he has spent much time over the past 40 years.

Dr. Kuvin is a fervent advocate of the Kuvin Center, which is part of the Institute for Medical Research Israel-Canada in the Faculty of Medicine. “It has been the main address for molecular biology in infectious tropical diseases in the region for the past four decades,” he says. “The Kuvin Center has achieved international excellence, received awards for scientific excellence and is a Hebrew University flagship of international cooperation, with more collaborative programs with its neighbors and the surrounding Arab states than anyone else in the region.”

He lists those with whom the Center has conducted research: the Palestinian Authority and countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Lebanon. Kuvin Center faculty members, he says, have published extensively in professional literature and it counts several Palestinians among its master’s and doctoral graduates.

Despite the rollercoaster nature of life in Israel, Dr. Kuvin’s optimism is intact: “I always believe this is just a snapshot we’re living through, it’s the blink of an eye in the context of the past, present and the future — and this snapshot or blink is in Israel’s favor. When the dust settles after the ‘Arab Spring’, I feel optimistic we will re-establish ourselves.

“Throughout the intifadas and wars with Lebanon, we at the Kuvin Center didn’t drop a beat with any of our collaborative projects... when I ask the Palestinian scientists working at the Center ‘what are you doing working at an Israeli institution?’, they say ‘I want to make life better for our people.’ Health and science are the best prescription for peace in the Middle East, where mosquitoes know no borders. When you get scientists together with a common goal, they forget about everything else. First science and health for all, then regional cooperation,” he says.

Looking back at his longtime involvement with medical science, Sandy Kuvin shares extraordinary stories of cooperation in public health and diplomacy. While still in his 30s, he was the first to demonstrate the use of the indirect fluorescent antibody test for malaria at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). It was a discovery that took him around the world, including to an American naval medical research facility in Egypt. He then made his first visit to Jerusalem, where he was “immediately smitten with Zionism”.

In the 1980s and '90s, Dr. Kuvin was instrumental in establishing the First Regional Cooperative Health Program ever between Israel and Egypt. The 10-year, \$10 million Vector Borne Disease program became the paradigm for successful regional cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Through Dr. Kuvin's many efforts, which include longtime lobbying of Congress and active involvement with the NIH, the Kuvin Center has received much US support, in particular government aid through the USAID program. In more recent years, it was among the first Israeli recipients of funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation when it received an \$875,000 grant in 2007 for Prof. Yosef Schlein's research — as reported recently in the *New York Times* — into the use of certain plants as a biological control against malaria-carrying mosquitoes, followed by a \$5 million grant in 2009 for Prof. Alon Warburg's research into visceral leishmaniasis in Ethiopia.

Apart from his distinguished academic record, Dr. Kuvin has been in private practice in Palm Beach, Florida for 22 years. But the moment he traded his lab coat for the black bag of the personal physician, he also turned philanthropist.

With infectious diseases like malaria killing millions, Dr. Kuvin was convinced that Hebrew University needed an infectious and tropical disease research center. To raise the necessary capital, he founded the first Palm Beach chapter of the American Friends of Hebrew University. He proved so effective at fundraising that then-Hebrew University president Avraham Harman, whom he refers to as his "mentor", beseeched him to cease and desist, lamenting that he was drawing funds away from other projects.

Kuvin regards the Kuvin Center as a jewel in the Hebrew University's crown and, moreover, as a vital fundraising asset. "Ask not what you can do for the Kuvin Center, ask what the Kuvin Center can do for you," he says in a play on the historic JFK quote.

As he ponders the Kuvin Center and its future, 81-year-old Dr. Kuvin proudly mentions his grandson, Jeremy Schreier, who this summer continued the family tradition of hands-on involvement through volunteering at the Center. Malaria laboratory head Dr. Ron Dzikowski described him as "contributing very significantly to the progress of this project."

As an Associate Governor and honorary fellow of the Hebrew University, a former visiting professor at its Faculty of Medicine and a member of the Council of Trustees of the American Friends of Hebrew University, it is Dr. Kuvin's fervent hope that the Center that bears his name will continue to collaborate with neighboring countries and further enhance the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Glancing at his clarinet and flute, propped together in a corner of the room, he concludes, "We're a player in the orchestra conducted by Hebrew U."

By Gilah Kahn-Hoffmann, September 2011