

M. Epstein began working in the Department of Mathematical Sciences (now the School of Mathematical Sciences) of the Tel Aviv University in 1962. Until 1965 he had been an adjunct teacher then he was appointed in a regular position as a teacher and promoted to the rank of senior teacher in 1968.

As befitted his wide knowledge of mathematics, he taught in our department a large variety of courses, from calculus at all levels and linear algebra to the theory of operators on the Hilbert space and P.D.E. He was famous for his excellence in teaching and the standards he set remain valid until today. As aptly formulated by a group of students in a letter to him

"We learned from you more than mathematics. In your lectures we learned to develop intellectual curiosity in general and for mathematics in particular, we learned about the names behind the theorems, we learned to learn ...".

For many years in our university, calculus for mathematics majors was synonymous with Epstein. It is hard to estimate how many generations of mathematicians, physicists and computer scientists benefited from his devotion, talent and expertise in teaching. We have many faculty members in our school, of a wide range of age who were his students, the oldest in his sixties and the youngest in his early thirties.

Though M. Epstein retired formally in 1992 he continued teaching without any pay for more than twelve years. When asked by a colleague what prompted him to do this he replied that he feels he owed much to our school and to the university and he wanted to repay his debt. It is not clear what his debt was but certainly he repaid it with a huge interest. Obviously he bestowed on our school a very kind-hearted gift. By assuming a full load of classes or almost a full load after his retirement, he helped reduce the burden of teaching of the younger faculty members and at no cost for the department. As a small token of appreciation for his service to our school and university, the steering committee of the School of Mathematical Sciences conferred upon him in 1993 the title "senior teacher emeritus". In 2004 the school organized a party to celebrate M. Epstein's eightieth birthday. It was a very emotional event. The essence of our feelings toward him was best expressed by a member of our faculty who finished his speech with the words: "Thank you Mordechai. We truly appreciate what you are doing."

Concurrently with his teaching and administrative duties in the School of Mathematical Sciences, M. Epstein was involved in various projects initiated and managed by other units of the university which wanted to benefit from his vast experience and expertise. Thus in the early seventies he was in charge of a program of studies for junior high school teachers that operated under the umbrella of the School of Education of the university. The aim of this program was to upgrade the knowledge of mathematics of elementary school teachers so they would be able to teach the subject in junior high school.

The program to which he devoted almost thirty years of his life was the preparatory course of the university. This is an intensive one year course of studies in a selected list of subjects in which prominent are the Hebrew and the English languages and

mathematics. It is designed for two groups of students. The first group consists of new immigrants to Israel that graduated from high school in their former country but lack the knowledge of Hebrew and/or English and in some cases have to improve their mathematical education. The other group, the largest of the two, is that of "second chance" students. These are young people, usually after their military service, that have graduated from an Israeli high school but did not succeed or only partially succeeded at their nationwide maturity examination. Thus their basic academic skills must be improved before being admitted into a university. M. Epstein was the director of mathematics studies in this program. This meant that each school year he was in charge of scores of teachers and hundreds of students. Among other tasks he had to schedule, guide and supervise the teachers and to prepare the final exams that had to be, and invariantly were, approved by the Ministry of Education as equivalent to the ordinary maturity examination in mathematics. He was available at all times to teachers and students alike who asked for his advice or to the principal of the preparatory program whenever he needed his help in solving some problem related to the teaching of mathematics. And since he was generous with his time and such an experienced and wise instructor, the teachers and the students were never shy in soliciting his aid. His utter dedication to the preparatory program epitomizes best his feeling that teaching is a vocation and not only a profession.

Mordechai Epstein's passing away was a painful loss for his colleagues in the School of Mathematical Sciences and to the whole Tel Aviv University. His memory will be always cherished by those who knew him.