

Preface for the first "John Bahcall Colloquium", Tel Aviv University, Dec. 31, 2006

When I first met John, I did not know how the sun shines. I was a 24 year old graduate student from Israel, visiting IAS on a pleasant Friday morning in 1987 and being introduced to Freeman Dyson by Michelle Sage. Freeman said: "Oh, you are from Israel; do you know John Bahcall?". "No", I said. "Well, you must meet him. He likes Israelies. In fact, he is married to one..." Freeman called John's office. Fortunately, John was just about to go to lunch, so I had lunch with him. I gave him my CV which included eleven publications. He looked at it and said: "how did you hear about us?" I said "I just finished my PhD thesis in Plasma Physics, and Marshall Rosenbluth, whom I met on a recent visit to Israel, recommended that I visit IAS as a potential place for a postdoc position." John said: "I see. I know Marshall very well. Could you take a vacation from your obligatory military service and visit us for a month?" I later found out that in the meantime John called Marshall to ask about me. He also called Yuval Ne'eman, the most influential Israeli scientist at the time. Yuval called my PhD advisor and asked about me. After a month-long visit to IAS, John invited me to his office. On the blackboard next to his chair, was a sketch and the phrase: "Dad, I love you!!!". Signed "Orli". "I have three children, and Orli is the youngest", he explained. "Anyway, we would like to offer you a five-year position", he said. I was thrilled, but did not really believe it. "But", John added quietly, "under one condition. That you switch to work in Astrophysics".

I do not think that I would have taken today such a risk on hiring a five-year postdoc without any experience in astrophysics. John was a unique risk-taker, and I must tell you: with many more papers on my CV, the Astronomy department at Harvard is grateful for his willingness many years ago to take a risk on me.

As far as I am concerned, John was the most influential matchmaker in my life. He

introduced me to Astrophysics with which I had the longest-lasting love relationship in my life. I met my wife only later. She says that according to Jewish tradition, a matchmaker who arranges for three long-lasting relationships, is privileged to have a place in heaven. I know of many more than three successful matches that John arranged. There is no doubt in my mind that John has a honorable place in heaven now.