April 25, 2021

Dear ICS members,

I am delighted to announce that Prof. Albert Zilkha of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem will become the 2020 Honorable Member of the ICS for his seminal contributions to polymer chemistry, achievements in chemistry teaching, and service as a role-model mentor of young chemists.

Prof. Albert Zilkha
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Albert Zilkha was born in 1933 in Baghdad, Iraq, studied chemistry and physics at the Hebrew University (1950-1954), received his M.Sc. degree (1954) and Ph.D. (1956, at age 23) under Prof. Max Frankel, working on "Preparation of New Polymeric Polypeptides and Polypeptides of Dicarboxylic Amino Acids." Immediately after graduation, Prof. Frankel appointed him as his assistant and coordinator of the teaching and laboratory courses of the department. In 1957 Zilkha became a Lecturer at the Hebrew University. As a knowledgeable teacher and dedicated mentor, he attracted many graduate students, and his research group quickly became one the largest in the department. In 1971 (at age 38), he became a Full Professor. He served as Head of the Organic Chemistry Department (1973-1978), was a Member of the Honorary Editorial Advisory Board of European Polymer Journal (1967-1994), served as a Lecturer at the Jerusalem College (1994-2018), and since 2004 he is Professor Emeritus.

Zilkha is known for his contributions to the synthesis of new polymers and mechanistic investigations, including anionic, electron charge transfer, living, and graft polymerizations. Some of his scientific achievements include: (1) The synthesis of new organo-tin and organo-silicon monomers and their use as leaving groups to synthesize polypeptides. (2) Modification of biopolymers’ chemical and physical properties, such as cellulose and amylose, grafted with other monomers using anionic polymerization in ammonia as a solvent. (3) The stabilization of different drugs by their attachment to biodegradable polymers. For example, he attached penicillin, aspirin, amphetamine, quinidine, and atropine to polyethylene glycols (Eur. Polym. J. 1983, 19, 1177-1183, with 325 citations); (4) The synthesis of a new class of topological polymers, with highly cited papers: “Studies on The Formation of Topological Isomers by Statistical Methods” (JACS 1976, 98, 5206), and “Synthesis of a Catenane by a Statistical Double-Stage Method” (JACS 1976, 98, 5214).

Zilkha has published over 240 papers in peer-reviewed journals, multiple patents, and three textbooks in Hebrew: "Introduction to Polymer Chemistry," 2003; "Introduction to Organometallic Chemistry", 2010; "Introduction to identification of organic compounds by spectroscopic methods", 2013.

Many of his students became professors of chemistry, including Meir Lahav, Matityahu (Mati) Friedkin, Igal Burstein, David Mirelman, Mario Bacci, Ben-Ami Feit, Michael Albeck, Yair Avni (z”), and many others who joined the chemical industry.

Details of the Honorable Member Award Ceremony will follow soon.

Congratulations to Albert for his achievements!