

UCSD Physicist George Feher Receives Honorary Doctorate Degree from Hebrew University

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UCSD PHYSICIST GEORGE FEHER RECEIVES HONORARY DOCTORATE DEGREE FROM HEBREW UNIVERSITY

George Feher, professor emeritus of physics at the University of California, San Diego, has been awarded a Doctor Philosophiae Honoris Causa degree from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The degree, conferred Monday during annual convocation ceremonies, was recommended by Hebrew University's Senate to recognize Feher's contributions to the fields of physics, chemistry and biology.

"Your various scientific achievements have tied together distinct scientific disciplines, thus enabling interdisciplinary scientific research," officials with Hebrew University said to Feher in announcing the award.

Feher's work, for which he was honored, has allowed researchers to better understand the primary structure of the photosynthetic apparatus. Photosynthesis, the process by which light is converted into chemical energy, is a vital chemical reaction in the biological world; life derives all its energy from this process.

In particular, Feher's research focused on understanding the complex nature of membrane protein structures called reaction centers, the sites where the primary events of photosynthesis occur.

In the reaction centers, packets of light called photons are captured by molecules of chlorophyll. When these molecules are excited by light, they release electrons which are shuttled through a series of electron acceptor molecules. These processes create a charge separate across the membrane which the organism uses to synthesize adenosine triphosphate (ATP), a high-energy compound.

Feher, a native of Czechoslovakia, received his Bachelor of Science degree in engineering physics from UC Berkeley, followed by a M.S. degree in electrical engineering and a Ph.D. in physics.

After completing his graduate work, Feher joined the staff of Bell Telephone Laboratories in Murray Hill, N.J. where he worked as a research physicist for six years. His academic career began at Columbia University in 1956 as a visiting associate professor. In 1960, Feher joined the faculty of UCSD as a physics professor.

Feher, elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1975 and the American Academy of Sciences in 1977, is the recipient of the American Physical Society Prize in 1960, the 1976 Oliver E. Buckley Solid State Physics Prize and the 1982 American Physical Society Biophysics Prize.

In 1992, Feher was presented the Rumford Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences which recognizes "the most important discovery in heat or light made on any part of the continent of America or in any of the American islands." He also was chosen that year to be the first recipient of the Electron Paramagnetic

Resonance (EPR) Society's annual award. The award was based on his "outstanding and continual contributions" made in the field of physics and biophysics.

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