

# THE COMMENTATOR

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## Students, Allies and Activists March for LGBTQ Equality



LGBTQ activists march on the 185th St. pedestrian plaza on YU's Wilf Campus.

LEO SKIER

By SARAH BEN-NUN  
and AVI HIRSCH

A group of more than 100 YU students, alumni, LGBTQ allies and activists converged on Washington Heights on Sunday morning, Sept. 15 to march for LGBTQ equality and representation at YU.

Organizers demanded a statement from President Berman condemning homophobia on campus, approval of LGBTQ-related events on campus, the creation of a Gay-Straight Alliance Club at YU, the appointment of an administrator to ensure LGBTQ equality and an orientation session about inclusion and tolerance.

The march, which was organized by the YU College Democrats Club in conjunction with Eshel and Jewish Queer Youth (JQY) — two noted Jewish LGBTQ advocacy groups — began at Bennett Park with remarks from organizers and advocates. The group then marched to the 185th St. Pedestrian Plaza at YU's Wilf Campus, where they

gathered to chant and sing outside YU's Mendel Gottesman Library. Following the event, marchers had a pizza lunch at Lake Como sponsored by JQY.

"JQY is proud to support the courageous students at YU who are standing up for dignity, safety, and representation," said Mordechai Levovitz, a former YU student who

serves as JQY's co-founder and clinical director. "On the ten year anniversary of the historic YU Gay Panel — which JQY was honored to organize — this march is indicative of the amazing progress that has taken place among the student body. We wish the same could be

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## Kosher Pizzeria '8 Slices' Opens on Audubon Ave.

By JACOB ROSENFELD

A new kosher pizzeria called 8 Slices opened Friday, Sept. 13 on Audubon Ave. next door to the 16 Handles that opened last year. The new pizzeria is under the same owner as the frozen yogurt chain, and Shalev Katzav, general manager of the Audubon Ave. 16 Handles store and a veteran of several Israeli restaurants, is managing the pizzeria as well.

8 Slices will serve a simple menu of fresh soup, pizza and salads with reasonable prices, said Katzav, who emphasized his restaurant's strong customer service, fresh and tasty pizza and overall cleanliness. The restaurant will be open from 11 a.m. until 11 p.m. daily, except for Fridays and Saturdays, when it will close two hours before Shabbat candle lighting and open one hour after Shabbat ends.

The new pizzeria is currently under the supervision of Rabbi Aaron Mehlman of National Kosher Supervision. Katzav explained that the restaurant is in the process of obtaining certification from the Vaad of

*Continued on Page 5*

## Third Giving Day Raises \$5.7 Million Despite Steep Drop in Number of Donors

By COMMENTATOR  
STAFF

YU's third Giving Day raised over \$5.7 million from 1156 donors, exceeding its \$5 million goal even while the total number of donors fell 61% from last year's campaign. The 24-hour fundraising campaign was held on Sept. 18-19.

The number of donors this year represents a significant decline from the 3,004 donors who took part in the campaign in 2018 and the 2,700 donors who contributed to 2016's Day of Giving. Several large donations were primarily responsible for the campaign raising \$5.7 million, which surpassed 2018's \$4.5 million total, though still falling short of 2016's \$6 million.

11 people contributed over \$100,000 each to the campaign, including one anonymous \$1 million donation in its final minutes that pushed the campaign over its goal. These 11 donations totaled

*The average donation this year was approximately \$4,800, significantly higher than 2018's \$1,500 average. The top 20, 50 and 100 donors from this year raised 78, 89 and 94%, respectively, of the \$5.7 million total.*

just over \$4 million of the \$5.7 million haul. This is in contrast to last year's Giving Day, where the largest single donation was only \$200,000, and over 1,000 donors made up the campaign's final \$1 million push.

The average donation

this year was approximately \$4,800, significantly higher than 2018's \$1,500 average. The top 20, 50 and 100 donations from this year raised 78, 89 and 94%, respectively, of the \$5.7 million total.

Adam Gerdts, Vice President of Institutional Advancement explained, "Giving trends in higher education for the past several years have demonstrated that although charitable contributions are experiencing an increase in donation dollars, these dollars are coming from fewer donors." According to Gerdts, this trend may have been responsible for the decrease in overall donations compared to past years.

Gerdts added, "Last Giving Day, we had a significant push for gifts from students of \$1, \$2, or \$5." He compared that to this year's decision to "significantly engage more students as volunteers."

However, promotion of this year's campaign was smaller than in past years, with minimal branding on campus and

the absence of a major theme such as "YU Hero," which characterized 2018's Giving Day.

On the campaign's website, YU said this year's theme was "completely about scholarships" for their students. "Scholarships are YU's top priority," Gerdts said. "We promise that no qualified student will be turned away for financial reasons. We disburse more than \$46 million a year to undergraduate students to keep that promise, with 80 percent of YU students receiving scholarships, both need- and merit-based."

When asked if all donations were specifically allocated towards scholarships, Gerdts explained, "YU Giving Day is dedicated to raising scholarships for our students across all our programs. However, if a donor has a strong commitment to a particular initiative, affiliate or center at YU — such as our academic centers or

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# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

## On the Absence of Leadership at YU

By AVI HIRSCH

In mid-October of 2017, barely a month following Dr. Ari Berman's investiture as president of Yeshiva University, a bold new initiative called "YU Ideas" was launched by his new Office of the President. Its goal, in President Berman's words, was to "equip people with the knowledge they need to form educated, nuanced opinions and think more critically about some of the most important issues in the world of the future."

A month earlier, students had reacted to the new president's investiture with anticipation of the major changes that would be arriving. "I don't know what he is going to do," remarked one student, "but I feel like there is already a sense of change in the air." In his speech at the event, President Berman listed his now famous "Five Torot" as the centerpiece of his vision for YU, encompassing the values of "truth, life, humanity, compassion and redemption."

These values, according to President Berman, define the core of YU's identity. And who could possibly disagree with these principles? No reasonable person would argue that "truth" is not important, that "life" or "humanity" ought not to be valued or that we should not strive to be compassionate people. As incontrovertible as these principles were, they defined a vision that had the potential to revitalize YU and bring about a new era of value-centric leadership to guide YU's students.

Over the last two years, the student body has anxiously awaited the change that seemed inevitable as a new leader emerged for YU. Students have wondered how President Berman's sweeping pronouncement of YU's values would be implemented in practice and what changes would come as a result of YU's new mission.

But in the years since President Berman's investiture, the administration of this university has seemed disinterested in engaging with real issues plaguing the student body. In a survey of YU's undergraduate students in the spring of 2019, The Commentator found that a plurality of students was dissatisfied with the YU administration and had particularly negative views of cafeteria prices — likely not helped by the recent changes to the Dining Plan system — and the poorly functioning elevators on campus. Defensive statements from the university responding to these issues have failed to placate a frustrated student body.

Meanwhile, YU has found itself beset by controversial issues that have left the student body divided. Controversies

surrounding the Klein@9 minyan, a YU-sanctioned coed shabbaton denounced by a YU *rosh yeshiva* and, most recently, a student-led protest of YU's handling of LGBTQ issues have been met with resounding silence from the president and the university administration, leaving students without moral guidance on how to navigate these issues. A university like YU, with its supposedly value-centric mission, ought to be outspoken about how students can apply those values in their own lives.

Since his investiture, President Berman has managed to write a Letter to the Editor for the New York Times and participate in panel after panel on Jewish thought and YU's values, while paying little attention to his university's own student body. In our spring survey, we found that around half of female respondents were unable to say whether or not President Berman's job performance had been satisfactory. Since discontinuing President Richard Joel's semesterly town halls, President Berman has rarely given students an opportunity to engage with him, and his voice has been absent from the controversies that have affected the student body over the last two years.

Why has President Berman, and by extension the YU administration, stayed silent on the issues that matter most to students? Public relations are important to every institution, and YU's statements discussing critical issues seem to be meticulously crafted with the goal of preserving the university's noncontroversial public image. Appearing to support a cause with which some parents disagree runs the risk of a drop in the number of applicants the following year. Donors who disagree with YU's stated position might stop contributing to YU, which could cause further financial damage in the long term. A risk-averse approach is a savvy way to protect the institution from further financial trouble after YU's last financial crisis left it reeling. An administration that doesn't react to controversy is protected from possible backlash on either side of contentious issues — a statement that leans too far to the left leaves YU at risk of losing the support of the right-wing; too far to the right, and those on the left may well abandon it.

In avoiding these potential pitfalls, YU has lost something far more essential than donors or a large student body: its identity. There are many dangers that result from a vague and ill-defined central mission with virtually no practical relevance, but chief among them is the resultant sense that YU as an institution does not stand for anything meaningful. For all of President Berman's lofty talk of

values, those values have not led to any discernible concrete mission since his tenure began.

On a purely practical level, it might well make sense for YU to avoid being too specific in addressing student malcontent, with the ultimate goal of surviving as an institution. But YU should not exist merely to survive. President Berman himself seemed to recognize this when he spoke of our shared values driving this institution forward into its future. As a pillar of Modern Orthodox Judaism in America, we as an institution have a unique responsibility to put the values of our religion before our own self-interest not just on a conceptual plane but in reality.

Last week, as a result of the Berman administration's continued lack of action in addressing LGBTQ issues despite ongoing student pressure, discontented students organized an LGBTQ march on YU's Wilf Campus. When reached for comment prior to the march, YU's response amounted to a lukewarm statement that while the march "didn't follow the protocol for events on campus," YU had a responsibility to ensure all students "feel safe and welcome" — with no mention of the specific demands of the march or the issues students were calling on the administration to address. Days later, over 300 people joined a Facebook group pledging not to donate to YU until the university addresses its demands for LGBTQ rights.

In an interview with The Commentator a year after his investiture, President Berman summed up his threefold role as president: to articulate the "vision" of the future of YU, to form partnerships with leaders and institutions external to YU and to lead the administration of YU. In practice, the first of these has been watered down to the point where speakers at the LGBTQ march co-opted President Berman's own "Five Torot" to justify their demands and rebuke YU in the process. The administration should not be surprised that such broadly conceived values are being used to critique its own actions.

What we need now is a leader to establish and promote a value system that can guide the student body when faced with challenging situations. This moral compass might well be based on the president's beloved Torot, and will certainly incorporate the values of Torah and Madda that have guided YU for decades, so long as it has real-world implications. It's time for the administration to stand up to its constituents and take a side, for its own sake and for the sake of the student body it serves.

# 14 DOWN

THE ELEVATOR DIARIES By ELISHEVA KOHN



## 1 March 28th, 2019, 245 Lexington, 6th floor

Contrary to most 7 up / 7 down facts, the following data is perfectly accurate, according to people familiar with the matter.

## 2 April 2nd, 2019, Brookdale lobby

“Never gonna give you up, never gonna let you down” now has a whole new meaning to it, amirite, @guys in the Brookdale lounge?

## 3 April 16th, 2019, Rubin Hall, 5th floor

What was I doing in Rubin? Excellent question.

## 4 May 9th, 2019, Brookdale, 20th floor

Modern Orthodoxy in a nutshell.

## 5 May 13th, 2019, Kushner Dining Hall

Disappointed that I didn't get stuck in an elevator with President Berman so I could finally get some substantial answers. Better luck next time

## 6 May 22nd, 2019, Brookdale

Shifra Lindenberg suffers minor concussion after elevator incident. YU Facebook community suffers severe meme letdowns.

## 7 May 26th, 2019, Brookdale gym. Right treadmill

This is a sign from heaven. It's time to leave The Free Pizza Group

## 8 August 22nd, 2019, Furst Hall

But hey, at least YU has a nEW loGo!!!!

## 9 August 26th, 2019, Brookdale gym. Right treadmill

#7 still broken. Read “One Eternity Later” in Spongebob's narrator-voice.

## 10 August 28th, 2019, Brookdale lobby

I believe we have enough elevator data for a comprehensive analysis. Thoughts, @Avi?

## 11 September 1st, 2019, Brookdale lobby. Both elevators

New “Temporarily out of service” sign, who dis?

## 12 September 11th, 2019, Brookdale lobby. Left elevator

In addition to broken elevators everywhere, the WiFi went down in Stern shortly after The Commentator reported on YU's low US News college ranking. Coincidence? I THINK NOT!

## 13 September 11th, 2019, Brookdale lobby. Right elevator

Disappointed that there was no “elevator” section on the Giving Day website. \$5,782,933 probably wouldn't have sufficed anyway...

## 14 September 17th, 2019, Brookdale lobby. Right elevator

Nowhere but here.

## Letter to the Editor: Communication Breeds Community

To the Editor:

I was dismayed by recent events this past Sunday, September 15th on the Wilf Campus, in which members of the YU College Democrats held a rally and march on behalf of LGBT students. What disturbs me more than the march itself, however, is the underlying problem that I think is the cause of most, if not all, contentious occurrences at YU: lack of communication between the administration, *rebbeim* and students.

As The Commentator reported in its last issue, the march “was planned independently of the university,” and without consultation with *rebbeim* or administrators. Similarly, I can only imagine that the signs seen around campus before the march urging students to “protest” the march were similarly put up by students without consulting faculty members — seeing as I personally saw two *roshei yeshiva* (and have heard firsthand reports of one more) decry any protest and instruct their students to ignore the march. We've seen this pattern reported in these pages in the past, as well. When The Commentator reported on the “Volozhin Yeshiva” mass emails last year, it pointed out that though “YU rabbis were consulted,” the deans of both Yeshiva College and RIETS were unaware of this project to share information about classes where allegedly inappropriate material was presented.

As an institution, we seem to be bad at communicating with one another. In a way, the very institutional structure we have supports this sad reality. When there is no centralized rabbinical authority, but rather dozens of *roshei yeshiva* and *rebbeim* who themselves disagree on many issues; when RIETS and YC/Syms are legally and organizationally distinct; when students feel the administration does not care about their values, whether religiously liberal or conservative: these are signs of disunity. We tend to speak past each other, not with each other. Perhaps the first step to resolving issues that matter to us is to learn how to speak civilly and sincerely with one another.

David Tanner

## Letter to the Editor: Hakarot Hatov to SOY Minyan

Dear Editor:

I commute to YU from Teaneck, and every so often I daven shacharit in the Rubin Beit Midrash, which has a small yet ample women's section.

One morning during summer break, YU Zmanim listed a minyan in Furst Hall.

As I exited the elevator, it was apparent that this was an ad hoc minyan and therefore, no mechitzah had been set up. Undeterred, I proceeded to daven in a quiet corner a few feet away

Not even two minutes had passed when a student approached me, apologizing for the lack of a mechitzah. Another placed a chair outside the minyan classroom and opened the door so I could at least hear the shaliach tzibur, while a third dashed out to schlepp a partition from across the street.

In the end, in this makeshift shul, I sat in the VIP section with clear acoustics and enjoyed a slow-paced, pleasant tefilah!

Thank you all for your kind accommodations and for the kiddush hashem you perform every day.

Shulamis Hes  
Electronic Collections Librarian, Pollack Library

**LGBTQ MARCH,**  
*continued from Front Page*

said about the administration, which seems to have regressed to censorship, excluding queer voices from conversations about LGBTQ+ issues, and ignoring students' requests for meetings."

Though the event was organized by the YU College Democrats, the university itself did not sanction the march. "Yeshiva University strives to be a nurturing and inclusive environment for all our students, ensuring that every individual is treated with respect and dignity," President Ari Berman said in a statement, noting the university's pre-existing anti-harassment policy. Berman noted that prior to the march, he convened a team of rabbis and educators, led by Senior Vice President Josh Joseph, and tasked the panel with fostering initiatives to address matters of inclusion with respect to the YU community, including LGBTQ-related issues.

The Bennett Park rally that preceded the march featured speeches from march organizers Molly Meisels (SCW '20) and Courtney Marks (SCW '21), Founding Director of Eshel Rabbi Steven Greenberg, YU professor of English Dr. Joy Ladin, Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology student Izzie Christman-Cohen, social worker

here today, so thank you," she said. Courtney Marks followed by speaking about the importance of the cause to her own personal journey, concluding her remarks by holding up a sign proudly declaring, "I am Gay and I am YU."

"In 2014, I wrote in the Jewish Week [that those who identify as] LGBTQ who leave Orthodoxy are not going off the *derech* — there never was a *derech* for them in the first place," Spiro said at the opening of his speech. "Yeshiva University's actions of late have proven that this statement is just as true five years later."

"Part of the problem," he added, "is visibility. The administration at YU, and, more broadly speaking, the Modern Orthodox establishment, find it more convenient to pretend we don't exist. Well, we *do* exist, and today, they *will* hear us."

"By allowing evil rhetoric to be spread," Christman-Cohen added in her speech, "YU is complicit in opening to the door and welcoming dangerous mental outcomes for many of its students."

Kesser Frankiel (YC '20), who participated in the march to support a friend, considered it an unequivocal success. "I hope that YU meets some of the demands of the march. I hope they recognize the fact that there was a lot of support for this movement and that there is something that definitely needs to be done."

Organizers originally intended for the

"They won't even speak with us. They won't even grant us a voice."

Pursuant to New York City Administrative Code 10-108(g)(1), the NYPD Commissioner is directed by statute to deny a request to use an amplification device, such as a megaphone or public address system, within 500

as a student was the cognitive dissonance between the fact that I love the university but have always been a really strong ally. I feel Judaism backs me up on that, but the university didn't. I'm really proud of the student body for finally coming together to create a more inclusive and comfortable

*"I hope that YU meets some of the demands of the march. I hope they recognize the fact that there was a lot of support for this movement and that there is something that definitely needs to be done."*

Kesser Frankiel (YC '20)

feet of a school or house of worship, during such hours of operation. A YU spokesperson confirmed the university had no involvement in the permit denial.

As of the time of publication, the NYPD's Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Public Information did not return The Commentator's request for comment on the restriction, as well as its subsequent questions regarding why the use of sound devices was permitted for various YU-sanctioned events in the plaza.

When the marchers arrived at the plaza, they began to sing and chant in front of the library doors. A set of responsive chants was said by everyone in the audience, "We, too, are YU," "Nothing about us without us," "No more silence; no more fear! You are loved if you are queer," as well as songs such as "*Kol ha'olam kulo*," "*Acheinu*" and "*Vahavta l'reyacha*."

State Assemblyman Dan Quart (D-Manhattan), who shared a Twitter post in support of the event, was not able to attend, but stands in solidarity with YU LGBTQ students. "What these students are marching for is an important step to building a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ students at Yeshiva University," Quart said. "I fully support the young people rallying for visibility and representation and I stand in admiration of the organizers fighting to build acceptance not only for themselves, but also for the students who follow."

Jordyn Kaufman (SCW '17), a former staff member in YU's Office of the President and Office of Communications who participated in the march, commented, "As a proud alumna of Yeshiva University and also as a proud LGBTQ ally, something that I struggled with

environment for everyone."

Not all students agreed with the march organizers' tactics. "I agree that they deserve representation, and that they have every right to be able to be present on campus as a club," said one YC student who commented on the condition of anonymity. "I definitely agree with the ideas behind the march, but I do not believe that attempting to bully the university is the best way to go about it; I don't think it makes them look good, nor the university. They're people and that's what matters — that's what YU should care about."

Other students disagreed with some of the demands of the organizers. "I think that the demands of the organizers were too vague," said a YC student who commented on the condition of anonymity. "For example, one of their demands was to have the administration allow events 'involving LGBTQ+ issues and speakers.' What does that entail? Would these events normalize a behavior that is anti-*halakhic* in nature or would they be for emotional support?"

Looking back on the events of Sunday morning, the march organizers were overwhelmed by the support they witnessed from their community. "I'm at a loss for words," Meisels reflected. "The outpouring of support; the love; the allyship — the community. I felt an energy at YU today that I have never before felt. I felt a fire. I felt supported and loved and others felt the same. People came out to me, friends, family. We've started a movement and I could not be prouder."

*Yitzchak Carroll contributed to this story.*

*"Part of the problem is visibility. The administration at YU, and, more broadly speaking, the Modern Orthodox establishment, find it more convenient to pretend we don't exist. Well, we do exist, and today, they will hear us."*

Social worker and LGBTQ advocate Justin Spiro

and LGBTQ advocate Justin Spiro, alumnus and co-organizer of the 2009 YU Gay Panel Ely Winkler (YC '10), JQY Executive Director Rachael Fried (SCW '10) and Levovitz.

March organizers and supporters handed out "We, Too, Are YU" t-shirts, rainbow pride flags, pins, and signs with various LGBTQ slogans at Bennett Park before the rally. Meisels opened the series of speeches at the park outlining the goals of the march and thanking participants for joining their cause. "It takes a lot of courage just to come out

speeches to occur at a rally on YU's pedestrian plaza, which the university is charged with maintaining. However, their request for a permit to utilize sound devices at the rally was denied. "YU is trying to silence our voices and we aren't being allowed to amplify sound in front of YU," stated a since-removed Facebook post from the YU College Democrats. In a separate post that included a screenshot of an email from President Berman declining to meet with Meisels this week, the College Democrats commented,

**GIVING DAY,**  
*continued from Front Page*

institutes, museum, athletics or library — we will make sure that their funds are directed as they request."

With regard to the distribution of Giving Day's accumulated \$5.7 million, specific programs received earmarked funds; the largest amount for a YU program was raised by RIETS, with approximately \$280,000, while YC pulled in about \$30,000. SCW raised over \$165,000 — mostly from a single donation of \$100,000 — and SSSB ranked third of the undergraduate schools with only \$5,600.

Beginning Wednesday afternoon, student volunteers gathered in Weissberg Commons as they surrounded tables lined with telephones and solicited donations over the phone. Students were incentivized to volunteer in the fundraising efforts with rewards such as AirPods for 35 calls made

or a sweatshirt for 50 calls made. Shlomo Amsellem (SSSB '20), a student volunteer, shared, "I think it is a necessity for all students to give back to Yeshiva University like they have given to us. We need to support students of the present and the future."

Student volunteer Benjy Kleiner (YC '20) expressed his personal appreciation for YU. "As someone who does attend [YU] due to scholarship, I said I could give three hours or whatever amount of time just to get donations," he explained. "It was a better use of time than doing nothing and watching Netflix."

In response to YU Giving Day, Jewish Queer Youth (JQY), which was a partner in organizing the LGBTQ March on the Wilf Campus on Sept. 15, launched a campaign of their own called #JQYUGIVE. On their Facebook page they explained, "This is an opportunity to send a message to YU. In lieu of or in addition to a donation to YU, consider supporting JQYU ... an initiative to fund queer Jewish

campus resources like the YU Pride Alliance." This post came with parallel posters copying the design of YU's own Giving Day graphics by mimicking its logo and messaging.

Along the same lines, although officially unrelated to JQY, former YU employees and alumni shared their own campaign of #PledgeNotToPledge, pledging not to donate towards YU's fundraising efforts until the university meets the five demands made by LGBTQ groups and students at the Sept. 15 March. The Facebook group of the "Pledge Not to Pledge" campaign amassed over 300 members, although not all the members were happy about the movement. Several students commented that although they support the overarching agenda, it is against students' best interests and disrespectful to — ostensibly — poach funds from YU and scholarship recipients.

In 2019, YU awarded more than \$91 million in scholarships — \$46 million for undergraduate students and \$45 million for

graduate students. "Only about \$20 million of that total amount is funded through existing philanthropy," Gerds explained. "That's why philanthropic support for aid,

which allows so many promising students to attend YU, is the most fundamental way for donors to invest in their success — and ours."



Stern College for Women students call prospective donors on Giving Day.

*8 SLICES,*  
*continued from Front Page*

Riverdale and that it has added additional kosher supervision including two *mashgichim temidiim* to be in compliance with the strict *kashrut* standard required for participating in YU's Dining Card Program. Although it is not currently a participating vendor in YU's Dining Plan, according to Katzav, the restaurant is in the process of being added. Katzav and YU confirmed that 16 Handles has already been added to the Dining Card as a participating vendor and that OneCard terminals are in the process of being set up in the store.

8 Slices is the third kosher pizza store in a two block radius. Some residents have expressed concern on Facebook that so many pizza stores in the area may be an oversaturation of the market. When a photo of the new establishment was posted on YU Marketplace, a Facebook "buy and sell" group with over 8,000 members that caters to the YU community, Avi Sebbag (SSSB '17) commented, "Personally, I don't think they should be allowed to open. We have two pizza stores already, we don't need a third. All three of them won't be able to keep the

business they need to keep running and someone will lose out."

Elazar Krausz (YC '20) also expressed some concern after visiting 8 Slices. "With two kosher pizza options in the Heights already, the only thing I could imagine would set them apart is having really amazing pizza, but the slice I tried failed to meet that mark," commented Krausz. "I think the owners will have to find some unique selling point if they are to survive in an already competitive market."

*8 Slices will serve a simple menu of fresh soup, pizza and salads with reasonable prices.*

Not all students had a negative view of the new restaurant. Ezra Splaver (YC '21) found the location convenient and the pizza tasty. "It's closer to Glueck and the [Mendel Gottesman] library, so students will be more likely to go there," said Splaver. "The pizza was good — different than Lake Como and Grandma's, so maybe some students will prefer this new store."

Other students have expressed interest

in trying the new restaurant. Meir Lightman (SSSB '22) remarked, "I'm looking forward to trying the new pizza place. It will be great to see more options and variety, and it will be great to add a new high quality eatery to the Heights."

Katzav was not concerned about his

competition. "Everything in New York is for competitive people," he said. "It doesn't matter what you do, you can't eliminate them. I'm not here to cry. I'll let the students decide."

Avi Hirsch contributed to this story.



8 Slices, a new kosher pizzeria, is now open next door to 16 Handles on Audubon Ave.

YU COMMENTATOR

## YU To Open New Holocaust Center



Emil A. Fish

U.S. COMMISSION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF AMERICA'S HERITAGE ABROAD

By ILAN SASSON

Yeshiva University has founded a new Holocaust Studies and Genocide Center. The Center's main mission will be to train educators on how to properly teach the events of the Holocaust. Interdisciplinary graduate degrees and certificates, to this effect, will be issued by the newly formed Fish Center.

The Center is being named after Emil A. and Jenny Fish. "We must know the history about what happened and why, and what the implications are for today," said Emil Fish, who serves on the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad. "The Center will educate young

*The Emil A. and Jenny Fish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Yeshiva University will conduct academic research and organize public events to further the goal of improving people's knowledge of the Holocaust.*

people and adults about a singular event in history that, regrettably, too few people understand, including what conditions existed before the Nazis ascended to power, how they rose to leadership positions and why they targeted Jews."

"We thank Emil Fish for recognizing our celebrated faculty and our highly experienced staff and for partnering with our entire academic community on this significant and timely initiative," said Provost Selma Botman.

The Emil A. and Jenny Fish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Yeshiva University

will conduct academic research and organize public events to further the goal of improving people's knowledge of the Holocaust. "At a moment when Holocaust education and awareness across the globe is transitioning from a pedagogy of living testimony to one anchored in memory, the Center — established through the visionary generosity of Emil and Jenny Fish — will serve a crucial role as a leader and role model for a new generation of Holocaust scholarship and education," said President Ari Berman

# Modifications to Shuttle App Frustrate Students

By MICHELLE NAIM

Yeshiva University updated the intercampus shuttle app design for the 2019-2020 school year. The new design allows students to make a reservation — now called an “appointment” — up to several weeks in advance. The old design only allowed users to create a reservation for a seat one day before the planned trip. The changes have been released for both the desktop and mobile versions of the app.

Currently, the app is not functioning properly. At time of publication, Beren campus security personnel were still telling students to call the security desk to make a shuttle reservation. At the Wilf campus, security staff asks that students or faculty simply wait at the shuttle stop.

Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer Randy

Apfelbaum said that the current app is not new, but various modifications made to the old app make it look different. “We are working on a completely new app which will resolve all the problems of the old one,” he said. Apfelbaum hopes to have the new app up after the chagim.

The previous version of the app was known to frustrate students on many levels. According to many students, one of the most bothersome bugs was a prompt for the user to be logged out of the app every time they attempted to re-log in, even if they tried to stay logged in by checking the “keep me logged in” box.

Similar to the previous app, this year’s update sends an email confirmation to each user after a reservation has been booked. Although students may pick a specific time to reserve their seat, the email confirmation states that the reservation

is for the 12:00 am shuttle, no matter what reservation time the student actually requested.

The terminology on the app is also different from last year. First, students must “select service” to

on the app about two weeks ago, but after seeing that the app was not working, she decided to call in to the security desk to secure her seat on the shuttle. “It’s pretty confusing at first. It doesn’t seem

after she frequently used the preceding app to go to her shifts at the Seform Sale last year. “It’s a frustrating app,” she said, “It took forever to load.”

She also said that the app was so annoying that she stopped using it at some point, hoping that there was room on it if she stood by the stop and showed her ID to the security guard.

Both YU Security and Information Technology Services did not respond to questions regarding the new app.

and Gottesman Library, the repair of the hot tub in the Max Stern Athletic Center and the refurbishing of the Belfer Hall lobby with a new paint job, tiled floors and TV screens are features of improved campus facilities.

*“We are working on a completely new app which will resolve all the problems of the old one.”*

Randy Apfelbaum,  
Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer

take the shuttle from Beren to Wilf or Wilf to Beren. Then, there is a “with” option which prompts users to choose between the Beren or Wilf campus. This addition, as pointed out by Yael Nissel (SCW ‘20) is clearly redundant. “It adds an unnecessary extra step,” she remarked.

Nissel tried to book a reservation

to be fully working. Times before midnight don’t show up.” Nissel said that last year’s app was much clearer because she was able to see all the times in a smaller space, which was more convenient for her.

Chemda Weiner, a student and resident advisor, has not yet used the app this year but said that there was definitely a need for a new one

## SHUTTLE SERVICE MODULE APP

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## Straus Center Unveils New Donation and Programs

By DAVID SCHMIDT

The Zahava and Moshael Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought will be expanding with the help of a donation from its Chairmen and namesake, President Berman announced in his recent interview with the Commentator. This expansion, President Berman explained, “will provide new opportunities for our students to be enriched by our current YU faculty.”

When asked how the gift will be implemented, Dr. Stu Halpern, Senior Program Officer at the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, answered, “The Chairman’s gift, for which we are very grateful, will enable us to offer more collaborative projects with faculty and graduate students, including courses, conferences, book

projects, and a writing mentorship program. It will also enable the Center to select more Straus Scholars, undergraduates from Stern College for Women and Yeshiva College, who demonstrate high academic achievement and leadership potential, and who are committed to studying the great works of the Jewish and Western traditions.”

Elimelekh Perl (YC ‘22), a current Straus Center Scholar, said, “Being involved in this type of academic setting is a truly unique experience, and I’m really excited about the Center’s future.”

One of the first noticeable benefits of this donation is the procurement of renowned lecturer and author Dr. Dara Horn who will be visiting Beren Campus as the Distinguished Visiting Scholar at the Straus Center for

the 2019-2020 academic year. Horn will mentor Straus Center students, contribute to Straus Center publications and participate in public events on behalf of

*“Being involved in this type of academic setting is a truly unique experience, and I’m really excited about the Center’s future.”*

Elimelekh Perl (YC ‘22)

the Center, including an S. Daniel Abraham Honors Program lecture “On Jewish Literature and Belief.”

In addition, Horn will be

teaching “When Bad Things Happen to Good People: Divine Justice and Human Creativity,” also on the Beren Campus. The course explores Jewish theodicy, through its expression in the works of Sholem Aleichem, Franz Kafka and S.Y. Agnon.

Horn received her doctorate degree in comparative literature from Harvard University in 2006, studying Hebrew and Yiddish. In 2007, she was chosen by Granta as one of 20 “Best Young American Novelists.” She has published five acclaimed novels, all of which are recipients of literary prizes. In 2012, her nonfiction e-book “The Rescuer,” published by Tablet, became a Kindle bestseller.

She has previously taught courses in Jewish literature and Israeli history at Sarah Lawrence College and the City University of New York

and is frequently published in the New York Times and The Atlantic. To add to that list of impressive credentials, Horn was a Visiting Professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard, where she taught Yiddish and Hebrew literature.

“I’m so excited to be teaching at YU,” Horn said. “After teaching at secular institutions in the past, it’s an honor to teach in a place whose approach to Jewish and Western civilization is so rigorous and rare. I’m looking forward to working with Stern students and the greater YU community — not just in teaching but in learning with everyone.”

“The Straus Center is honored to welcome Dr. Horn,” said Halpern. “Her renowned eloquence both in the written and spoken word, as well as her dynamism, creativity, and humor will contribute greatly both in the classroom and beyond.”



A Straus Center event

# YU Drops to 24-year Low in U.S. News and World Report Rankings

By **YITZCHAK CARROLL** and  
**AVI HIRSCH**

Yeshiva University dropped to 97th place in this year's U.S. News and World Report ranking of colleges across the nation, which was released on Sept. 9. The rating marks a 24-year low, and a decline from the 80th place YU secured in last year's ranking report. YU is tied with six other universities in 97th place.

In the U.S. News ranking of "Best Value Schools," YU scored in 61st place, a decline from 52nd place from last year. YU tied for 285th place in the "Top Performers on Social Mobility" ranking category.

YU placed particularly low in the "Student Excellence" category, which accounts for 10 percent of the overall ranking. Among national universities, YU ranked 139th for

student excellence, a drop of 17 points from last year's 122nd. According to U.S. News, the Student Excellence ranking is based on students' standardized test scores and high school class standing.

In contrast, YU placed particularly well in "Alumni Giving," ranking 60th overall with an average alumni giving rate of just over 15 percent. This category reflects the "average percentage of living alumni with bachelor's degrees who gave to their school during 2016-2017 and 2017-2018." Alumni Giving constitutes 5 percent of the overall ranking.

The other categories that affect a school's overall ranking are "Outcomes" (35 percent), which takes into account such information as graduation rates and social mobility; "Faculty Resources" (20 percent), which includes class sizes and faculty salaries; "Expert Opinion" (20 percent), which is a 2-year weighted average of school ratings

by top academics on a scale of 1 to 5 (YU received a score of 2.8); and "Financial Resources" (10 percent), which measures a school's average per-student spending.

*YU's fall this year continues the trend from prior years.*

U.S. News & World Report has published annual college rankings since 1985. Yeshiva University consistently ranked "third tier" — no higher than 100th — in most of the first few annual reports before leaping to "first tier university" status — top 50 — in the 1997 report with a ranking of 45th best among national universities. From 1997 through 2016, YU's ranking did not vary much, from a high of 40th in 2003 and 2004 to a low of 52nd in 2008, 2010 and 2016. After falling

to 94th in 2018, YU rose last year to 80th before falling again this year.

According to the report, the median annual starting salary for a YU graduate is \$54,600. YU's acceptance rate is 60 percent, and its student-faculty ratio is 7 to 1. The university's freshman retention rate is 90 percent and its four-year graduation rate is 80 percent.

Last year's ranking had marked the first improvement in YU's position after six years of downgrades. YU's fall this year continues the trend from prior years.

In other popular college ranking reports, YU's position remained relatively unchanged. On the Wall Street Journal's ranking of US colleges this year, released Sept. 4, YU rose slightly to 140th place from last year's 148th. On Kiplinger's list of "Best College Values," YU fell from 67th place in Dec. 2017 to 72nd place in July 2019.





## YUJA Expands YU's Fine Arts Publication

By SARIT PERL

Yeshiva University's Journal of Fine Arts was a small publication that flew under the radar of most of the student body. Having put out five issues in the last 10 years, with each issue averaging about 40 works, it was not nearly expansive enough to showcase the boundless creativity that YU students have to display. This semester, all of that is changing.

The Journal has undergone a makeover in nearly every facet of its existence, including its name. It is now called simply The Journal of the Arts; dropping the "Fine" from the Journal of Fine Arts has enabled the publication to expand

its scope and provide a platform for those whose creativity shines in other media. "Judaism thrives on self-expression, which is really what art is all about," remarked Aharon Nissel, one of two editors of the newly-added Performing Arts section. "If art is about self-expression, then any way that students are expressing themselves, including photography, performances, and poetry, should be [shared]."

In the past, the Journal only featured visual art and creative writing. This year, YUJA is accepting submissions of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, fine art, photography, film, music, performing arts, and design. The Journal will feature student-made works in each category, as well as written

pieces that review, critique, and explore a specific work or genre. A board of 14 students — Editors-in-Chief Rocky Pincus (SCW '20) and Elazar Krausz (YC '20) and 12 section editors — are working to publish a semi-monthly issue on-

YUJA website will also feature a blog, with contributions by its editorial staff.

The editors hope that the revamp of the Journal will bring together a community of artists at YU and validate art both as a hobby and

things that are worthy of publication, things that the public deserves to be able to see," Krausz explained. "There's a feeling within YU, and within academia as a whole, that the arts aren't as important as they used to be. It feels like society can only progress through scientific and technological advances. But all the science in the world isn't going to help us understand each other better. Empathy is born from art. And I think that's the real goal of the Journal, to validate those students who focus their efforts on making the world a little more beautiful."

*Editor's Note: The publication can be viewed and submissions made at [yeshivaarts.com](http://yeshivaarts.com).*

*This year, YUJA is accepting submissions of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, fine art, photography, film, music, performing arts, and design.*

line as well as a semiannual printed edition. The Journal has received more than 80 submissions for its first issue, which will be published this week. YUJA will be active on Facebook and Instagram, and the

a course of study. "YU's students deserve to be able to showcase their creative endeavors. Having an arts journal on campus legitimizes students' work, by sending the message that YU students are making



The Journal has received more than 80 submissions for its first issue, which will be published this week.

YUJA

## The Road to 61

By JON HUREWITZ

As Israeli citizens set out to the polls for the second time in just five months, the election resulted in another deadlock, leaving many frustrated and confused constituents. There is a general sense of unease as the national leadership in Israel is — as of the foreseeable future — undetermined.

After the first election in April, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud was tasked by President Reuven Rivlin to form a governing coalition for the twenty-first Knesset — a task which he had been able to accomplish in the past with ease. However this time, his efforts were thwarted by long-time friend turned rival, and former defense minister Avigdor Lieberman, leader of Yisrael Beiteinu, who disagreed with Netanyahu's policy which exempts yeshiva students from conscription.

After Netanyahu was unable to form a coalition within the allotted 28 days granted to him by the President, he requested a 14-day extension in which he would make one last appeal to Lieberman to join his right-wing bloc of ministers. Remaining steadfast

in his imposition of the draft law for all yeshiva students, Lieberman prevented a right-wing coalition from being formed, rendering Netanyahu powerless. As is customary, the President would grant the mandate to form a coalition to the leader of the party which had garnered the second greatest amount of votes, which in this case was Blue and White's Benny Gantz. However, a disheartened Netanyahu was reluctant to allow such a scenario and consequently pressured parliament into dissolving itself, thus triggering a second election.

As 98% of the current election results

*While the outcome of the negotiations is uncertain, what is clear is that the path to 61 will not be reached without compromise.*

have been tallied, Blue and White seems to have the upper hand with 33 seats, while Likud trails with 31. Consequently, it seems that Netanyahu's chances of forming a right-wing coalition have been further diminished. The centrist-left parties including Blue and White, Labor-Gesher and the Democratic Camp would be able to achieve 44 seats

while the right-wing parties including Likud, Yamina, Shas and United Torah Judaism would only be able to garner 55 seats in the upcoming Knesset — leaving neither side with the requisite 61 seats or more majority to form a government. The only two parties as of now not committed to either side is Yisrael Beiteinu with its 8 seats and The Joint List of Arab parties with 13 seats. Historically, the Arab parties have not recommended a Prime Minister to the President and do not join "Zionist" coalitions. This trend would be hard to buck with leaders from the Arab parties stating that they do not have a great

incentive to join Blue and White. This would leave Gantz's left wing block at only 52 seats even if Yisrael Beiteinu joined the coalition, still nine seats short of a governing majority, potentially rendering The Joint List the "kingmaker." However, due to the unlikely nature of putting such a deal together, it seems more likely that Lieberman

will be "kingmaker" in convincing the parties to work together and form a coalition. Lieberman has vowed to join a unity government made up of Blue and White and Likud, notably excluding Shas and UTJ.

Representatives from the nine parties who have won seats in the Knesset will visit President Rivlin on Sunday to recommend the candidate who should be given the mandate to form a coalition. While it is customary for the President to grant this task to the leader of the party which has garnered the most mandates — which would be Gantz — the President may freely choose to grant it to the leader of the party who he believes will be the most successful in forming the government. In 2008, for example, when Tzipi Livni was the leader of the Kadima party, which had attained the most votes, she was unable to form a coalition. The task was then transferred to Netanyahu, whose Likud party had attained the second greatest number of votes.

Consequently, there are a few directions in which the negotiations could result.

*Continued on Page 10*

THE ROAD TO 61,  
continued from Page 9

### 1 - A National Unity Government with Netanyahu

While Netanyahu had been opposed to the possibility of a national unity government during the election cycle, he recently changed his position as a result of Gantz's further lead in the vote results. In a video released on Thursday, Netanyahu expressed his initial desire to form a right-wing government. He mentioned that the election results have made such a possibility unattainable, and he, therefore, called upon Gantz to meet and to form a broad unity government with him at the helm.

Such a government existed in 1984 when Shimon Peres' Alignment party was unable to form a coalition and, consequently, entered into a unity government with Yitzchak Shamir, then leader of Likud. In that government, Peres served as the Prime Minister while Shamir was the foreign minister, swapping positions halfway through the term. How this rotating government along with

its power structure would operate in the current political situation, remains unclear.

Gantz dismissed Netanyahu's call for a unity government saying that "Blue and White, headed by me, has won the election" and "we will not be dictated to." He further stated, "I am interested in and intend to form a broad and liberal unity government, under my leadership. A government that will convey the will of the people".

### 2 - A National Unity Government without Netanyahu

Due to Gantz's unwillingness to form a government with Netanyahu, Rivlin may opt to select another member of Likud to form a coalition such as No. 2 Yuli-Yoel Edesstein Speaker of the Knesset or No. 3 Yisrael Katz, Minister of Foreign Affairs. Neither Edesstein nor Katz has expressed their desire to assume the role of Prime Minister. This has been due to fear of openly challenging Netanyahu's position. This could change if Rivlin deems a unity government the most viable option which could give other Likud members the confidence to pursue such an

endeavor if Netanyahu is unable to do so.

### 3 - A Right-wing Coalition

While Lieberman has emphatically stated that he would not be part of a government that provides an exemption to the Haredim from serving in the army, it remains possible — albeit unlikely — that Netanyahu will be able to reward Lieberman with a governmental position and convince him to return to the right-wing bloc. This is much more tenable than the alternative whereby Lieberman would join the left-wing bloc which includes the Joint List of Arab parties, as this would be counterintuitive given his support for policies such as required loyalty tests for citizenship and the swapping of territories that would cut off Palestinian citizens of Israel.

However, while a right-wing coalition might have been plausible in April, it seems that it has become more unlikely as Lieberman, in response to the results of the second election, has called for a unity government between Likud and Blue and White without the Haredi parties of Shas and UTJ.

### 4 - A Third Election

In the video released this past Thursday, Netanyahu emphatically stated that there is no reason for a third election and that Gantz should, therefore, join in a broad national unity government. Furthermore, President Rivlin's office has said that his choice in the nomination of a candidate will be motivated by the "need to prevent a third general election." However, if no coalition is formed the Knesset will be forced to dissolve itself yet again which would result in another election. Besides the economic expense of a third election — this second one had a direct cost 800 Million NIS (\$220 million) — the very existence and viability of Israel's parliamentary democracy will be called into question.

While the outcome of the negotiations is uncertain, what is clear is that the path to 61 will not be reached without compromise. The power of a state lies in its ability to resolve internal conflict and in that lies the potential for it to emerge stronger than before.



The road to the Knesset

PIXABAY

## A Phone Call With Sivan Rahav-Meir

By MICHELLE NAIM

"Yes! Shalom, shalom, how are you?" The urgency and over-friendliness in Sivan Rahav-Meir's voice made me imagine that she was standing in her kitchen pressing her telephone to her shoulder while stirring a pot of soup with a wooden spoon.

She answered my phone call Sunday evening as political debate over the Israeli elections raged. In the middle of our conversation, she told me she had to call me back. Her phone was ringing about the Israeli elections.

Ten minutes later, Rahav-Meir seemed a lot more focused. I thought that she may have put the wooden spoon down.

Both journalists, Rahav-Meir and her husband, Yedidya, moved to the US only a few weeks ago with their five children. For the 10 months they are living here, they will call the Five Towns their home as Rahav-Meir splits her time between writing and broadcasting remotely to Israel, writing for YU Torah, giving a weekly *parsha* shiur at the Beren campus and jumping around to different Jewish communities in North America for Shabbat to accomplish her *shlichut* mission through the World

Mizrachi Organization.

Unlike many *shlichut* organizations, Rahav-Meir explained, the World Mizrachi Organization does not limit its *shlichut* couples to a specific shul or school, but invites them to move around to different communities during their time living in America. Rahav-Meir and her husband are the *shlichim* for the North American area. They will visit Teaneck, Denver, Florida and California, among other locations during their stay.

As a young girl at the age of six, Rahav-Meir read any Israeli magazine or book she could get her hands on. "To talk, to read, to write, to relate to other people. That's the only thing I'm good at," she told me. She started working for Israeli TV stations and getting the opportunity to interview Knesset members, singers, politicians, Arabs, religious and non-religious Jews and virtually anyone she could talk to and get to know. She grew up in a non-observant household, but her curiosity led her to discover the "treasure" of the Torah and a religious lifestyle.

"Is this a long interview? I just want to understand the concept," she asked me.

When Rahav-Meir had the opportunity to interview Orthodox teenagers, she took it, and they

invited her to their homes for Shabbat. "I discovered Judaism out of journalism," she said. Rahav-Meir began observing Shabbat at the age of 16 or 17 and her love of reading and writing directly affected her Torah learning and observance. "To sink into the experience of reading for hours was really a miracle for me," she said about her Shabbat experience.

Her parents never became observant, but Rahav-Meir described her experience of becoming religiously observant as "part of the Zionist revolution ... The founders of the state of Israel forgot about [our] mutual heritage, especially after the Holocaust. They thought these roots are not so important because they had to build a new country. Our generation must fix, correct and add the things that we forgot on our way to Israel."

Starting her *shiurim* three years ago was also part of that process. A group of singles approached her asking for her to teach a weekly *parsha shiur*. Rahav-Meir constantly reiterated that her shiur is not from a perspective of a *rebbeitzen*, professor or even an intellectual, but from the point of view of a journalist. She learns Rashi with her students, but includes current events, news, media, and of course, her own experiences as an

American this year. The topics are not overly sophisticated, and the goal is to get people familiar with the basic concepts of the *parsha*, "Maybe because I know what it means to not know," Rahav-Meir commented about the impact her upbringing had on her teaching.

Besides for her weekly shiurim, Rahav-Meir also has a daily WhatsApp group where she posts short ideas from the *parsha* that get translated to 10 different languages by volunteers.

First and foremost, she worries about the practical and logistical move to America — her children, their schooling, the language and

taking trips on the Long Island Railroad. Her other challenge is to make the Hebrew shiur interesting and accessible to English speakers. "It is exciting to come to Stern College in the middle of the day and see students so concentrated in studying Torah ... in the middle of Manhattan. There's Macy's outside waiting, there's Starbucks, there are all the shops, all the brands, and they just sit there and study."

"The message is coming here, listening to you, not only teaching, but learning, particularly what American Jews have to say, and talking about our mutual pulse, which is the Torah."



Rahav-Meir with the heads of the World Mizrachi Organization

SIVAN RAHAV-MEIR

## Embracing YU's History of Student Protest: Part One

By Doniel Weinreich

*Editor's Note: Due to the length and breadth of this piece, The Commentator has decided to split it between two print issues. The full version can be found on The Commentator's website.*

In my three years at Yeshiva University, there has yet to be a major student protest on campus, though one is planned for next week. In my first year, when the Westboro Baptist Church was to protest on campus, I advocated a counter-protest. At the time, several people responded to me with something along the lines of "YU's just not that sort of place" or "protesting just isn't part of the culture here." This stands in contrast to many other contemporary colleges, where student protest seems to be a regular occurrence and a significant element of the culture.

Historically, though, YU is exactly that sort of place. In our institution's 133-year history, there have been many student protests, of which many were tremendously consequential. For the purposes of this article, I wish only to discuss internal protest over school matters; political protest warrants a separate treatment. Student protest at YU starts at the very beginning, before there was a Yeshiva University or even a Yeshiva College, back when there was just Yeshiva Etz Chaim (an elementary school which would merge with RIETS in 1915 and close in 1924) and Yeshiva Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan (RIETS). Student protest is what led to the creation of the college itself.

### The RIETS Strikes

At the time of its founding in 1897, RIETS catered primarily to recent European immigrants and their children. The directors of RIETS conceived of it as

a traditional European yeshiva where people would study Torah for its own sake. RIETS's founding documents attest to a mission of preparing students for the "Hebrew Orthodox Ministry," and its initial announcement promised "instruction in the language of the land," but its directors — from the older generation — deemed passable English to be sufficient. The students were not content with this. The younger generation conceived of their time at RIETS as preparation for the American rabbinate, and they realized that Yiddish-speaking, uneducated rabbis would not be able to meet the needs of the American laity. The students knew that the European model was not sustainable in this new world. In those first few years of RIETS, many students would go to secular preparatory schools in their spare time so that they could then go on to university.

The tension between the directors and the students came to a breaking point in January of 1906 when the directors prohibited all secular studies at penalty of the students' stipends. The students at RIETS responded by going on their first strike, learning in an adjacent building instead of in RIETS. They also took their cause to the local Yiddish newspapers, where they released statements and published their demands, which included a secular curriculum, leadership changes and public speaking instruction. The strike ended several weeks later when the directors installed Rabbi Moshe Zevulun (Ramaz) Margolies as president, who was sympathetic to the students' demands.

Rabbi Margolies's post, however, was largely ceremonial, and despite promises, little changed. Protest resumed again in 1908 after 15 students approached the directors demanding they keep their promise. The directors responded by revoking their stipends

— effectively expelling them on the spot. Outraged, the student body once again went on strike, pledging not to return until the directors kept their promise of instituting secular studies. This time, students went on tour to local synagogues where they explained their cause to the supportive masses. The Yiddish papers were overwhelmed with letters in support of the student strikers. The strike only ended when RIETS redefined its mission as the pursuit of "*Torah v'hokhma*"

caterer if warranted. The lockout only ended after two months when a committee was formed and the caterer posted a \$500 bond of good faith. However, the students saw little improvement in the quality or quantity of the food, and another cafeteria strike was held in December until the caterer reduced his rates.

This was but the first student struggle involving the cafeteria. In 1962, the administration failed to keep promises to give office

they perceived the food as more expensive and inferior in quality to local restaurants. On Dec. 7, 1989, YCSC held a day-long boycott of the cafeteria. The boycott immediately led to a committee meeting where prices were reduced and portions were increased.

Boycotts of the cafeteria continued in 1992, when the administration announced that the now-mandatory meal plan would rise from \$1000 to \$1300. After the administration refused to listen to student complaints, another boycott was held. YCSC organized discounts with local restaurants, and over the course of the day, a mere fifteen Yeshiva College students ate in the cafeteria. Student councils also sent out a mass mailing to parents urging them to call the dean in protest of the increase. The increase still went into effect the following year, but a student committee was able to negotiate some price decreases.

### Unlimited Cuts and the Yeshiva College Senate

Clashes with the administration in the '40s and '50s were mainly limited to referendums and editorials, with little active protest. During this period, YC's student council passed numerous resolutions against the administration on a variety of issues ranging from tuition increases to dorm curfews and extracurricular requirements. There was even a minor demonstration in March 1959, at which senior students danced on Amsterdam Ave. before taking the GREs in protest of it being a requirement to graduate with honors. But the next major demonstrations would take place in the late 1960s.

For years students had been demanding that the administration allow unlimited unexcused absences — or "cuts" — from class,

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*In our institution's 133-year history, there have been many student protests, of which many were tremendously consequential.*

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(Torah and wisdom) and the training of modern rabbis. Committees were established to create curricula and standards, and Rabbi Bernard Levinthal was installed as president. The directors even agreed to pay students back-stipends for the period of the strike. The students had won. RIETS would continue to develop its secular curriculum and Bernard Levinthal would eventually be succeeded by Rabbi Dr. Bernard Revel, who would push forward the creation of a Yeshiva College.

### Cafeteria Boycotts

The YU Commentator was founded in 1935, and in 1938, it first recorded a student demonstration. The cafeteria caterer from the previous year was greatly disliked by the student body. As the school year began, both the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) and the Yeshiva College Student Council (YCSC) passed a resolution demanding his removal. Negotiations with the caterer stalled as the students boycotted the cafeteria until an oversight committee was formed that would have the power to remove the

rooms to the student councils and the yearbook in the newly dedicated Furst Hall. The administration also would not allow YCSC to install vending machines as they had in other buildings, which was a key source of their revenue. In response, the students boycotted the cafeteria for lunch on Nov. 28, 1962. The night before the boycott, student council representatives went around campus distributing letters and putting up posters explaining the cause and requesting cooperation. According to the YCSC president, the boycott was "98% effective."

Issues with the cafeterias continued in 1989, the first year of the YU Dining Club, which was started due to student action. The previous year, student councils had conducted surveys and questionnaires, and a petition at Stern for a meal plan was signed by half the student body. However, when students arrived in the fall, they discovered that cafeteria prices had risen tremendously. Students were upset with the declining balance nature of the plan (identical to how the meal plan worked until this year), as well as the fact that

*Continued on Page 12*



MTA students and faculty protest against the school's potential closure.

*STUDENT PROTESTS,  
continued from Page 11*

an idea 89% of students supported, according to a Student Curriculum Evaluation Committee survey at the time. Administration and faculty pointed fingers at each other for lack of instantiation. In the fall of 1967, students started demanding more student input on these sorts of policy matters. Some articles in *The Commentator* at the time even made allusions to student boycotts that were happening at other colleges, though a boycott was not explicitly threatened at YU.

On Dec. 14, 1967, YCSC held a massive open meeting in Lamport Auditorium attended by nearly 600 students. At the meeting, 496 students voted to support YCSC if they decided to strike. Coverage of the meeting appeared in *The Commentator* alongside coverage of the recently established University Senate at Fordham University, with YU students suggesting it be imitated. The Senate at Fordham was composed of administrators, faculty representatives and student representatives; they would create policies and report directly to the president.

In this case, striking proved unnecessary at first. In a faculty committee meeting that included student leaders, held two weeks later, the faculty voted to allow unlimited cuts for juniors and seniors. The proposal was to go before a full faculty meeting on Jan. 10. However, at that faculty meeting, no action was taken to implement the unlimited cuts plan. The next afternoon, the student council met. Despite the YCSC president's reluctance to strike throughout the

ordeal — considering it a “last resort” — the council voted to stage a boycott of classes on the first day of the spring semester. “That last resort has been reached,” remarked the president. It was only under threat of this strike that another faculty meeting was called for Jan. 22, at which the unlimited cuts policy was finally officially approved.

Although unlimited cuts were finally implemented, calls for student involvement in policy decisions — particularly in the form of a University Senate — did not die down. At the end of the year, a joint committee of faculty, administrators and students was announced to discuss the future of the unlimited cuts policy, as well as other academic matters. However, in a meeting one week later, YCSC rejected a proposal for such a “Senate” to only serve in an advisory capacity and demanded that students have a voice in a real policy-making body.

As the 1968 school year began, there was no Senate in place. Newspaper editorials attest to student fury at this delay. It was perceived by the students as standard procedure for the administration to form ad-hoc committees and string students along until issues died down. Students again began discussing recent boycotts at other colleges as a possible solution for themselves.

After being brought up at Student Council meetings, the Senate steering committee met for the first time on Nov. 26. Negotiations dragged on as the faculty and students on the committee disputed the breadth of the prospective Senate's power and the proper level of student representation on faculty committees. After four months of tedious

negotiations, the YC Senate was approved in March. At no point was there ever a concrete threat of student strike over the Senate, but the prospect, as well as the happenings at other universities, loomed large over this saga. It was only due to the students' persistence and their previous activism that this monumental power shift occurred.

#### **Stern Struggles For A New Building**

During this same period in the late '60s, the hardly decade-old Stern College for Women (SCW) was having its own student struggles. The early years of SCW were plagued by inadequate facilities. For the first decade of SCW, students were housed in midtown hotels, and the only classroom facility was a small building on the corner of 35th St. and Lexington Ave. Promises were made regarding new buildings in Fall 1964, and at the beginning of the school year in 1965, a new building (now Brookdale Hall) was acquired for use as both classrooms and a dormitory. The lot adjacent to Stern (now Stanton Hall, located at 245 Lexington Ave.) was eventually bought, and in Nov. 1966, a large state grant was given; construction was scheduled to begin in five weeks. However, as the end of the school year arrived six months later, construction had still not begun, and the lot remained empty.

On May 9, 1967, approximately 250 students gathered at the empty lot, and the Stern College Student Council (SCSC) held a faux groundbreaking ceremony in protest of the delays. Students were particularly frustrated by the lack of communication regarding the delays, as well as the sentiment that the administration was indifferent

towards SCW. Two new buildings had recently been built on YU's uptown campus, and Stern students were starting to accuse the administration of treating SCW like a “step-daughter” rather than a “legitimate daughter.” Student leaders spoke about the necessity of the protest and then took their shovels and broke ground, accompanied by dancing and singing. The protest ceremony was covered on CBS Evening News.

Another year passed and SCW enrollment swelled to 1000 students, all of whom were still cramped in the same tiny building originally built for 100. No progress had been made. This started to change in Oct. 1968, when SCW's student newspaper *The Observer* printed a special edition. After constant delays, student leaders had decided to take matters into their own hands and build a park on the still-empty plot of land. In addition to serving as a protest of the delays, students and faculty reckoned that creating a park would improve student life and the aesthetic quality of the campus; students lamented the unpleasant and dirty “barnyard” appearance of the empty lot next to their school. The special issue included detailed plans for the park by a real architect and explanations of the various subcommittees involved. This seems to have been a real plan, not an inflated bluff.

The plan got the administrators' attention. They promised construction bidding would close in December, and accordingly, the park plan was called off. But after more delays, bids weren't opened until Jan. 20, and all were declined, as the costs exceeded the estimate that was made years previously. Furious over these developments, student leaders decided their only

recourse was a strike, which was approved unanimously at a massive meeting of over 400 students in Koch Auditorium. Leaders planned a detailed schedule with constant pickets in front of the Stern building, a “learn-in,” and even provisions and entertainment.

Under threat of this major strike, student leaders were called to a meeting directly with President Belkin. President Belkin communicated to the students a plan to reduce the cost of the building, and he guaranteed them that construction would begin within two months. The strike was called off. The students had won. Bids were finalized, and ground was finally broken on March 26, 1969.

Facilities struggles resurged at SCW in 1991. Still confined to just Brookdale Hall and the main building at 245 Lexington Ave., Stern was running out of space. Bunk beds had recently been introduced in the dorms, and students reported an extreme shortage of living and studying space, as well as subpar maintenance. These frustrations were exacerbated by the recent completion of a pool complex uptown. Students once again alleged they were being treated as second-class citizens. 400 students signed a petition to the administration but received no response. Student outcry eventually led to the formation of Stern's Student Life Committee (SLC) to improve conditions at SCW. The SLC was able to make some progress, including acquiring new phones, obtaining access to athletic facilities and commissioning a *beit midrash*. In 1999, a new petition over delays in the renovation of new buildings would garner 400 signatures.



Students protest the secularization of the college in 1970.

## Law Review

## Protecting Our Most Vulnerable

By YITZCHAK CARROLL

Few of us would argue against the notion that society has a moral imperative to protect those among us with developmental disabilities. But case law holdings do not always jive with popular consensus, and the protection of vulnerable populations is no exception. Recent appellate decisions have handcuffed those tasked with protecting individuals with special needs, while turning a blind eye to legislatively-enacted statutes meant to safeguard society's most vulnerable.

The New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs (herein "Justice Center") was established by statute in 2013. The Justice Center is charged with, inter alia, investigating and prosecuting cases of abuse and neglect of individuals with developmental disabilities. See *N.Y. Executive Law § 550, et. seq.* To this end, the Justice Center is statutorily mandated to employ a Special Prosecutor and Inspector General to oversee a team of attorneys with prosecutorial jurisdiction throughout New York State, including warrant applications and grand jury presentation. See *e.g. N.Y. Executive Law § 552(2)(a)(i); see also N.Y. Criminal Procedure Law § 1.20(32)*. The organic statutes governing the Justice Center make it lucid that investigative and prosecutorial duties are at the heart of the agency's mission.

To this end, the Justice Center retains concurrent jurisdiction along with local county-based district attorneys in prosecutions involving the abuse of individuals with special needs. *Id.* While the organic statute directs the Justice Center to furnish assistance to local district attorneys as requested, and moreover, the statute orders the Justice Center to notify the local district attorney's office of warrant applications, it specifically enumerates that failure to confer with the local district attorney's office regarding a search warrant is not grounds for suppression of the resulting evidence. See *e.g. N.Y. Executive Law § 552(2)(b)*. Additionally, the statute governing the prosecutorial bounds of the Justice Center directs its personnel to confer with the local district attorney "as to the time and place" of a felony-level court session or grand jury presentation, while noting that in such a case, Justice Center personnel stand in for the local district attorney and may exercise all the power granted thereof. See *e.g. N.Y. Executive Law § 552(c)*.

But New York courts have not always concurred. Recent appellate decisions have severely restricted the prosecutorial authority of the Justice Center, ignoring the organic statute's prescriptions while turning a blind eye to the legislative intent behind the law. Instead of allowing the Justice Center's

prosecutors to do their jobs, appellate courts have held that local district attorneys must micromanage the Justice Center's prosecutorial decisions at every stage and have the ability to intercede at will. Whereas statutes make it clear that the Justice Center's prosecutorial powers are analogous with those of local district attorneys, case law has held otherwise. See *N.Y. Criminal Procedure Law § 1.20(32)*.

To date, the New York Court

Justice Center's Special Prosecutor. *Id. at 1087; see also People ex rel. Wogan v. Rafferty, 208 N.Y. 451; see generally People v. Gilmour, 98 N.Y.2d 126.* Citing a prior precedent that while a locally-elected, county-based district attorney can delegate prosecutorial duties, the district attorney themselves must oversee prosecutions and hold the final say in all decisions pertaining therewith, the dissent held that the Justice Center may not prosecute

involve the local district attorney of jurisdiction in such matters. See *People v. Theodore, 59 Misc. 3d 525.* In *Theodore*, a local court held that the county district attorney need not be involved in micromanaging Justice Center prosecutions for such a prosecution to be permissible constitutionally. *Id. at 528.*

However, this past summer, the Albany-based Third Appellate Department turned the Justice

Justice Center to be subordinate to local district attorneys, while holding that the Justice Center may only bring a prosecution when it has obtained written consent from the local district attorney, who has furthermore also agreed to oversee the Justice Center's prosecution. *Id. at 6.* The court's reasoning in *Hodgdon* was also used as precedent in two other appeals before the Third Appellate Division to dismiss other similar indictments secured by the Justice Center. See *People v. Hope, 101 N.Y.S.3d 918; People v. Viviani, 101 N.Y.S.3d 919.*

The Third Appellate Department's recent decisions are undoubtedly a cause for concern and a serious impediment to vulnerable persons abuse prosecutions going forward. Notwithstanding the clear intent of the statute to make such prosecutions easier — not harder — to bring, the precedent established of handcuffing prosecutors and restricting their ability to pursue otherwise-sound cases is deeply misguided and worthy of reconsideration. Our moral obligation to protect the most vulnerable among us demands no less.

*Recent appellate decisions have handcuffed those tasked with protecting individuals with special needs, while turning a blind eye to legislatively-enacted statutes meant to safeguard society's most vulnerable.*

of Appeals has only rendered one decision with regard to the Justice Center's prosecutorial powers. See *People v. Davidson, 27 N.Y.3d 1083.* In its majority opinion, the Court wrote "there is no indication from the statute that the special prosecutor's powers are limited" by the statutory provision directing the Justice Center to coordinate with the local district attorney regarding the time and place of court sessions. *Id. at 1029.* However, the minority dissent in *Davidson* raised constitutional concerns regarding unelected prosecutors and the potential transfer of autonomy from district attorneys to an official in the executive branch; to wit, the

a case "unilaterally" without the consent and oversight of the local district attorney in the county of jurisdiction. See *Id. at 1036; see also People v. Soddano, 86 N.Y.2d 727; see generally Schumer v. Holtzman, 60 N.Y.2d 46.*

The Court of Appeals' jurisprudence on this matter has been complied with on the part of the Justice Center to a degree above and beyond the required standard set forth in *Davidson*. Indeed, prosecutions undertaken by Justice Center attorneys, with little hands-on involvement from local district attorneys, have withstood muster in court, though the Justice Center has made conscientious efforts to

Center's prosecutorial jurisdiction on its head in a mind-boggling decision, severely restricting the agency's autonomy. Instead of following the precedent set forth by the highest court in the state, the Appellate Division sided with the dissent in *Davidson* on a *People's* appeal. See *e.g. People v. Hodgdon, 2019 N.Y. App. Div. LEXIS 5598.* The Appellate Division held that it was unconstitutional for the Legislature to grant prosecutorial powers to a bureaucratic agency led by a non-elected gubernatorial appointee. Moreover, in *Hodgdon*, the court inferred from the verbiage of the organic statute that the Legislature presupposed the



The precedent established of handcuffing prosecutors and restricting their ability to pursue otherwise-sound cases is deeply misguided and worthy of reconsideration.



WISHES THE STUDENTS OF YU A *SHANA TOVA U'METUKA*  
FULL OF PRIDE AND *NACHAS* FOR YOURSELF AND EACH OTHER.

WE CONGRATULATE THE  
**YU PRIDE ALLIANCE**

ON A SUCCESSFUL  
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# Department Highlights: SCW Political Science

By **ELISHEVA KOHN and YOSHI ZIMLOVER**

*The Commentator is pleased to introduce a new column that highlights happenings in different YU Academic departments. Our first piece highlights the Stern College for Women (SCW) Political Science department. We analyzed data, spoke to the Department Chair, a Professor, an alumnae and current students to gain a better insight into the department.*

*We would love to hear from you which department we should highlight next and if you have a more creative name for the column. Go to [bit.ly/DepartmentHighlights](http://bit.ly/DepartmentHighlights) to let us know!*

## Department Overview with Dr. Joseph Luders



Dr. Joseph Luders

*Dr. Luders is the Chair of the Political Science Departments at Stern College for Women and Yeshiva College and David and Ruth Gottesman Associate Professor of Political Science.*

### What is the relationship between the YC and SCW political science departments?

The SCW and YC political departments are simultaneously independent and interdependent. Both departments share the same curricular requirements and they often share faculty ... In short, we do our best to create opportunities for collaboration across campuses to offer a wide array of exciting courses. As chair of both departments, I seek to promote both coherence and cohesion between the two campuses. Depending on the leadership of the respective political science societies, students may have additional opportunities to participate in a number of joint events.

### What are some exciting developments students can look forward to?

Students sometimes ask for there to be more offerings in Political Science, but, in fact, there are actually more course offerings now than ever before. When I started at Stern College some years ago, there were semesters with only six or seven courses. Now, we offer ten or more Political Science or cross-listed courses, which allow students to learn about a wide variety of topics from Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction to the US Presidency or Latin

American Politics.

### How is the department assisting students in terms of internships and career opportunities?

We provide active encouragement to seek out some of the amazing opportunities in New York, Washington DC, or Israel. On the Political Science website under Resources, there is actually a long list of internship opportunities that interested students should check out ...

... To help defray the costs of these internships, I obtained grant funding from the Azrieli Foundation to provide fellowships for Women in Public and International Affairs ... I also oversee the fellowship funding for public service internships provided by the Silber family. Both fellowships (Azrieli and Silber) are not limited to political science majors but go to any student pursuing an eligible internship.

Faculty members routinely write letters of reference for our graduates and I am pleased to report that Political Science graduates have done extraordinarily well in getting placed in the top graduate and professional programs, including at Harvard, Penn, Columbia, and NYU, just to name a few. Since I am at the center of a vast network of former students, I often put current students in touch with successful alumnae to provide them with crucial information on their career paths, and simply to inspire them ... this is a great strength of our program — you belong to a community that supports and cultivates your personal development and professional success.

### What is your vision for YU's Political Science Department?

Political Science as a discipline asks what I regard as some of the most urgent questions of the day. We need to understand the forces that are intensifying partisan political polarization. This is deeply important because our democracy rests upon certain shared values, norms, and a degree of social cohesion, yet all of these elements have been increasingly stressed in the US as well as across Europe. The threat of backsliding away from democracy is real and needs serious, thoughtful consideration and action.

... My vision is that the department continues to grow and foster this sort of engagement. Students, like everyone else, are busy and it's difficult to care about politics, but it is my hope that students find Political Science courses to be personally meaningful and relevant, and that they might inspire students to be more thoughtful critics and active participants in the decisions that will determine where the country is ultimately headed.

### Anything else you would like to share?

... Students often assume that Political Science is just for people who are pre-law, but this really is a misconception. This discipline

provides access to many more opportunities in business, management, consulting, research, risk analysis, public policy, education, journalism, advocacy, the non-profit sector, countless careers in government, and on and on. Rather than seeing Political Science as narrowly limited to law or government, students should know that there are vastly more careers out there for which this training is an excellent match...

## Faculty Interview with Dr. Chuck Freilich, adjunct professor at Stern College for Women



Dr. Chuck Freilich

BELFER CENTER FOR SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

*Dr. Freilich is a senior fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard's Kennedy School. He has previously served as a deputy national security adviser in Israel.*

### How does the experience in YU differ from that in Harvard? Do students respond differently to your lectures on the Middle East?

For me the big difference, which makes teaching at YU so rewarding, is the students' deep emotional attachment to the issues, to what's happening in the Middle East and how it affects the US and Israel. Many have just come back from their year in Israel and its impact on them is very clear. They are thirsty for further knowledge.

### Tell us about the career paths you've chosen in the past.

I spent the first half of my career, over 20 years, in Israel's defense establishment, as an analyst and as a deputy national security advisor in my last position. For the last 14 years I have been an academic, spending most of the time in Israel, teaching in the US one semester each year. While in government, I loved being in the midst of things, the action, the constant challenge and adrenaline. As an academic, I have had the opportunity to address many of the same issues, going into far greater depth. It is a different, but equally rewarding challenge for me.

### Any advice for students who are interested in the field?

Go with your passion. Weigh carefully the primary career paths in the field, whether in academia,

the think tank world, or government. For the first two, a PhD is basically a prerequisite. For government, a Masters, preferably before starting one's career, but if not early on while working.

### What is the most exciting research project you have ever worked on?

That is a tough one, there were lots. But if I have to pick one, it is the book I published last year, "Israeli National Security: a New Strategy for an Era of Change". This was probably my life's work. Having spent so many years in Israel's defense establishment, I have long felt the need for such a book, which critics say is the most comprehensive ever written on the topic. More importantly, it is the first public proposal for an Israeli national security strategy since the state was founded. I hope it will make an important contribution to Israeli national security discourse.

## Alumnae Interview with Mouchka Darmon Heller (SCW '11)

*Mouchka Darmon Heller is a SCW Political Science graduate from Paris, France. She has worked in many political science related positions and also taught a course in Business Negotiations at the Sy Syms School of Business in Spring 2019.*

### Tell us a little about yourself and your YU experience.

I came to YU from Paris at 17, straight from high school, with \$50, half a duffel bag, no family, not even a clue what 50 E. vs. 50 W. was. Adapting to YU's unique universe was of course tough at first, but I also still feel deeply grateful for the environment it provided. I chose my professors carefully, and they turned out to be true mentors, who would put in the time to correct my grammatical errors and discuss internship options. I even had a professor once notice how particularly blue I felt and told Dean Braun who got me a ticket to

eventually took me to the newly created corporate data team. Data, at the time, was not a sexy term by any means. Yet, I was intrigued by the possibilities, for both business and society, in data collection and analysis, so I partnered with the Chief Data Officer to create the company's first data division from scratch. My interest in data, combined with my background led me to eventually accept a role as Canadian Trade Commissioner of Infrastructure in New York, a new industry for me with a lot of similar themes around use of technology for social benefit, international relations, and systemic change. I moved on to the World Economic Forum in October 2018 because I became so passionate about my work in infrastructure that I wanted the opportunity to take it to a global scale.

### Do you feel like your career has given you the opportunity to apply the knowledge you learned in your political science courses?

I have had the rare opportunity to directly apply my academic training to my career. I was one of the few political science majors at YU who were not looking to become lawyers or work in Jewish non-profits. Instead, I viewed political science as the study of the larger mechanisms of power and influence in a given society. It made my academic interests a bit more malleable, inclusive of classes in economics, anthropology, history and languages, among others and a personal view on my field that helped motivate me to strive for excellence. My coursework at YU and at Georgetown taught me a methodology for design thinking, trained me in a series of soft skills, and gave me knowledge of core drivers of our modern society that I still use in my career.

### Was there anyone at YU who was involved in helping you secure your career?

When I was at YU, I was an avid visitor of the career center, where I built foundational skills such as

*"I came to YU from Paris at 17, straight from high school, with \$50, half a duffel bag, no family..."*

Mouchka Darmon Heller (SCW '11)

Paris to go see my family for Purim — a joy I still remember. With time, I became heavily involved on campus, and YU became a true home.

### Tell us about your career path and about the work you've done.

After graduating from YU, I joined Georgetown's School of Foreign Service where I specialized in multilateral negotiations. My Master's took me to The Economist's advertising team, where I leveraged my political science training to design new business development strategies, which

resume writing and interviewing. However, career advisors can't be anyone's entire job search. My professors helped me understand who I was as a student and a professional and gave me precious information about the reality of different fields. My peers talked me through their internships, job search processes and, perhaps most importantly, failures and surprises. Last but not least, the NY ecosystem is a haven of opportunities and gave me my first professional experiences and networking opportunities.

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POLI SCI DEPT.,  
continued from Page 15

### Can you share any advice for political science students who would like to pursue a career in your field?

Find your own pathway to excellence and don't compromise once you get on it. We tend to select traditional careers because ambiguity is terrifying, but no fish can climb trees. If you have selected political science, take some time to understand why, where your interests truly lie, and what are your greatest strengths and shortcomings. This is actually a difficult field to navigate, with tough competition and world-shattering issues, so you need to be sure of yourself if you are to engage with it. Think about what will challenge you, force you to grow and leverage the best part of yourself. If it won't make you happy now, make sure it will make you better so you can be happy for longer later. Don't compromise on the opportunities you select for yourself and choose the thing that continues to feel right, in your gut, regardless of how others feel. Once that is done, be the absolute best you can be, and start planning for what's next.

### What was your experience teaching at YU like?

Sy Syms gave me a level of trust and freedom that I am deeply grateful for in designing and leading my class. I found it to be an empowering environment, even as being an adjunct professor can be a little lonely because you have less opportunity to engage your colleagues. I think I lucked out with my class, and got an incredible group of students that went along with my experimental style with gusto, helping me make learning a crucial skill also fun.

### If you could teach any course you'd like, what would it be titled?

Surviving in the real world. It would walk students through understanding key institutions and basic professional skills, teach them how to navigate through the first requests they will get after school from writing a memo to managing upwards, and it would include components like setting up a 401(k) and paying off student debt.

### What book should every political science student be reading right now?

"Hillbilly Elegy" by J.D. Vance. The next presidential election is around the corner, and we have already forgotten all the great decisions we made and realizations we had in 2016. Instead, we have continued to become more divided and further polarized our society. This book came out then and I thought it was a gift of a window into the world of a disenfranchised population we, privileged urbanites, often ignore. I think this kind of book is a reminder of the broader mechanisms that shape our world, beyond the echo chambers we build for ourselves. To be a political scientist is to be able to detach

from your own universe at times so you can actually see the rest of the world. We need more political scientists these days.

### Anything else you'd like to share?

Political science is a field of value to every student, regardless of professional aspirations. For better or worse, we are all actors in this occidental world, and therefore responsible for everything we see around us, accountable for the change we want to see. Know what your world is made of, understand your institutions, and contribute meaningfully and deliberately.

### Student Spotlights with Noa Eliach (SCW '20) and Rachel Rosenberg (SCW '20)

Noa and Rachel are current SCW students majoring in Political Science.

#### Noa Eliach



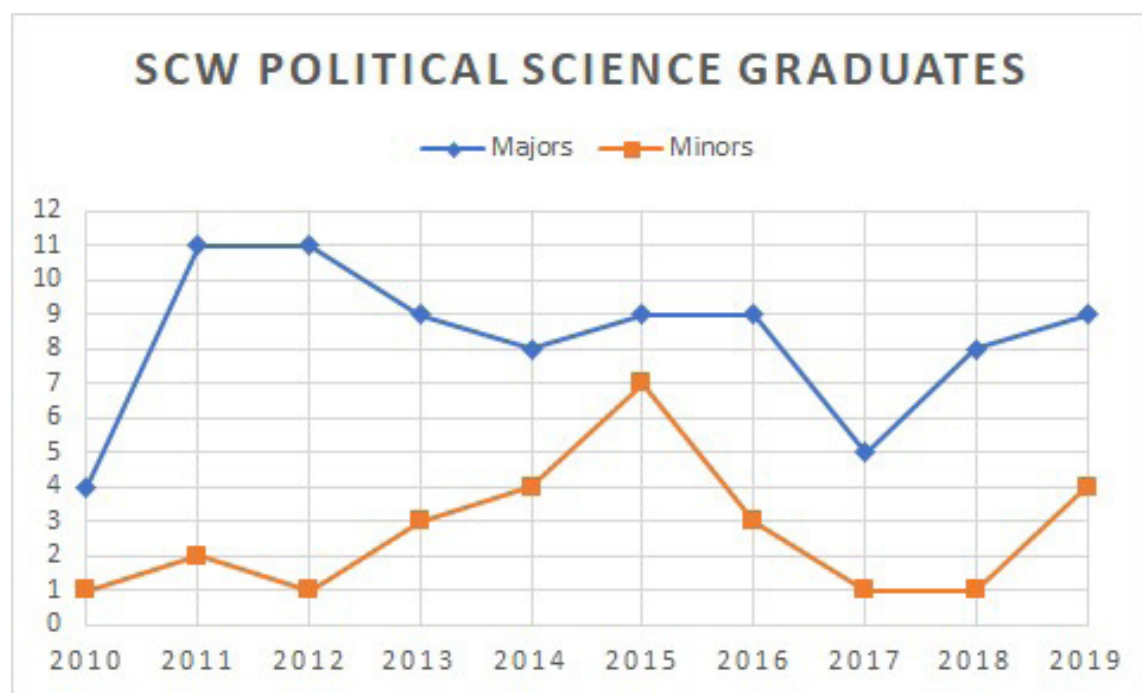
Noa Eliach

### Tell us about your summer experience.

This summer I interned at the Beth Din of America which serves as the preeminent rabbinical court which adjudicates all matters relating to financial disputes, *gittin*, and questions of Jewish statutes. As an intern I sat in on cases, mediation, arbitration, and a *chalitza*. Additionally, I answered the phones, did some filing, typed up *hazmanas* (subpoenas), and *seiruv*s (orders of contempt) and worked on the Beth Din's new blog called JewishPrudence (check it out!).

### What was the most interesting part of working for the Beit Din? Any lessons you'd like to share?

Over all my 6 weeks at the Beit Din were extremely interesting and thought provoking. The cases that I sat in on were intricate and most of the time not clear cut. It was fascinating to watch the *dayanim* delve into a case and all issues pertaining to it, in order to reach a mutual *halakhic* understanding and issue a *psak*. However, the most striking thing I witnessed this summer was a *Halitza*; the ceremony done in order to break the *zika*, connection, between a childless sister in law with her brother in law. This ceremony is grounded in *Yevamot* and it is one that is both rare and extremely detail oriented. First the brother in law does *hatarat nedarim* in case he had been coerced into giving the *chalitza*. Next, a *kinyan hagba* is done between the *dayanim* and the brother in law in



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which the brother in law acquires the special *chalitza* shoe. He then ties the shoe up his leg at which point the sister in law unties the shoe, removes it from her brother in laws foot, and then throws it. After that the two face each other and they exchange words found in the *p'sukim*, and then the sister in law spits towards her brother in law but not at him. Witnessing the *chalitza* was really a once in a lifetime experience that both astounded me and made me proud to see the strength of halacha — and how it permeates time.

### Have any specific courses at Stern prepared you for the position?

One course in particular that really gave me a background knowledge in so many of the monetary cases that came up, was Rabbi Saul Bermans' Jewish Business Ethics class — I recommend everyone take that course. In Rabbi Bermans class we learnt about issues relating to competition, *g'neivat daat*, product defectiveness, contracts and all sort of various issues that most certainly came up on a daily basis at the Beit Din.

### Anything else you'd like to share?

Something that I really enjoyed throughout my time at the Beit Din was seeing the intersection of Halacha and secular law. It is really interesting to see where Halacha and law line up exactly, and where the two differ. Additionally it was amazing to be apart of such a professional and well run organization that is truly shaping our community today.

#### Rachel Rosenberg



Rachel Rosenberg

### Tell us about your internship experience.

I work at the Manhattan District Attorney's Office in Trial Bureau 60. My Bureau prosecutes anything from misdemeanors to felonies, it just depends on the prosecutor and how long they have been working. I have worked for more senior members of the team on some of the bigger cases, like homicides or stabbings, and other days I work on petty theft or physical altercations. My roles consist of listening to inmate's phone calls, preparing discovery (aka papers you need to turn over to the defense before trial), watching videos from supposed crime scenes and trying to ID defendants and victims at or near the sight. Every day I get new projects and sometimes I spend my day in court, which is always a bonus.

### What is the most interesting part of working for the DA? Any lessons you'd like to share?

The cases I work on have been extremely interesting, but one of the most interesting parts of my internship, that I did not expect, is the office environment. I have interned at many private law practices, and in some courts, however I find the work environment at the DA's office extremely unique and enjoyable. The ADA's all give advice on the best way to try a case or show up to watch their co-workers in court. They take notes, and give feedback, or pop into each others offices to just talk things through. There are many emails that circulate about after work hang-outs or Bureau vs. Bureau softball games. I hope for myself to work in a legal environment that can maintain such a level of cordiality and friendship when I am an attorney.

### Did YU help you get the position?

I learned about this position from YU's pre-law society, specifically the president Yitzchak Carroll. I'd highly recommend joining the group chat if you're looking for any good pre-law advice or work opportunities.

### What's it like balancing school and work? Any tips?

It's been a huge adjustment from being in school for full days to squeezing school into two days and working the other days, but I have made my (kind of crazy) schedule work! I use my lunch break to study and am encouraged to get my work done efficiently when I have any bit of free time. I would recommend only taking on an internship that you are really passionate about because otherwise your schedule will just become overwhelming and draining.

### Anything else you'd like to share?

I would highly recommend any student looking into internships to pursue any opportunity that interests them. I thought a position at the DA's office was a long shot. I am used to using YU or familial connections to get positions, but I took the long shot and am so happy I did. When I got an email about a second interview, I was so shocked. I've never tried to apply for something where I didn't have any connection, but getting this position has propelled me to look into other opportunities that might seem difficult to attain for my next semester internship. Don't get lost in the narrow world we find ourselves in of interning for our parents' friends or friends parents, find what your passionate about and go for it!



## FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

*Editor's Note: In light of recent events, The Commentator has chosen to republish several articles relating to the student protests of 1970 against the secularization of Yeshiva University and Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's controversial Chag Hasemicha shiur on the matter.*

## From the Archives (April 15, 1970; Volume 35 Issue 13) — Rav Responds to Secularization; Sympathizes with Student Rally

By **ANDREW GELLER**

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik has called on the Yeshiva administration to reverse the trend toward secularization upon which it has embarked. His address, delivered during the celebration of *Chag Hasemicha* on April 12, was seen by many as one of the most significant in Yeshiva's eighty-five year history.

The Rav defined three specific problems which he fears may soon face the undergraduate divisions if Yeshiva College remains a secular institution. He cannot believe that a non-sectarian school will be able to enforce religious observance in its dormitories. He fears that a rebellious student may soon challenge the college's requirement of attendance in a religious division, a requirement no longer compatible with Yeshiva's secular status.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's greatest fears concern Dr. Belkin's successor. The Rav pointed out that the religious ideology which is the backbone of Yeshiva today is due to a great extent to President Belkin. But since all men are mortal, he said, Dr. Belkin's position will inevitably be filled by another, whose competence will not be as great as Dr. Belkin's. Rabbi Soloveitchik emphasized that the administration cannot allow the character of the entire university to depend upon one man, but that it must be a concrete and legal part of the University's constitution.

### Reaction

Reaction to Rabbi Soloveitchik's speech was immediate and varied. Dr. Belkin was visibly upset by both the tone and the content of the Rav's remarks. At several points during the Rav's speech he interjected denials to accusations made against the YU administration, but the Rav insisted that he be allowed to speak freely.

One member of the Board of Trustees charged that the Rav had chosen a bad time and place for his remarks. Moreover, since the Rav has done little to aid YU's fundraising efforts, in was not in his province to criticize the way Yeshiva obtains its money. Even some *rebbeim* in the *yeshiva* expressed their belief that Rabbi Soloveitchik had not grasped the financial implications of the situation.

Student reaction was overwhelmingly

favorable. Some felt that his complete rejection of present Yeshiva policy made Dr. Belkin's position untenable and would ultimately force the latter's resignation. Others were of the opinion that Rabbi Soloveitchik's personal praise of Dr. Belkin was completely sincere and his threat to leave YU was sufficiently vague so as to allow Dr. Belkin room to maneuver without resigning his position.

### The Issue

The issue of secularization has burned fitfully among the student body throughout most of this year. However, the issuance of new catalogues representing JSS and EMC as non-sectarian institutions aroused the resentment of many students who felt the administration was dealing deceitfully not only with Albany, but with its own students as well.

On April 8, four *semikha* students presented Dr. Belkin with a list of six demands which they termed "imperative." They asked that:

1) The corporate structure of YU be changed so that RIETS (both undergraduate and graduate), YC, EMC, JSS, Stern and TIW be established as a separate corporation independent of the other divisions of the University.

2) This new corporation be given as assets classroom, dormitory, and library buildings currently used by it as well as an equitable share of the endowment.

3) All new catalogues issued under the pressure of the present charters be immediately withdrawn and new ones stating conspicuously the requirements for a double program be issued as soon as possible and forwarded to Albany.

4) Salaries of the religious faculties be raised to at least parity with those of the college faculty.

5) Faculty councils of the respective religious divisions be empowered to set definitive policy with respect to admissions, curriculum and degree and *semicha* requirements.

6) The Belfer Graduate School and its buildings should be totally shut down on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*.

The students, banding together under the banner "Concerned Students' Coalition," pointed out that the \$300,000 in Bundy

funds which the undergraduate divisions would lose if they remained sectarian was an insignificant sum compared to YU's multi-million dollar budget.

According to the Coalition's leaders, the six demands were negotiable. They indicated that they might be satisfied with a return to the situation before 1967, the year in which RIETS was separated from the University.

### Picket

As no positive response to their demands was forthcoming from Dr. Belkin's office, the students decided to picket the *Chag Hasemicha* on Sunday, April 12. This decision was supported by some of the rabbinic faculty and by Rabbi Soloveitchik himself.

At a student meeting on Thursday, April 9, some students expressed the opinion that picketing alone, even with the threat of bad publicity, might not be enough to force a restructuring of the entire University. They believed that only occupation of the college buildings could bring about the changes they had demanded.

The picketing action itself, however, did not receive the support of the entire student body. A declaration of support was signed by the presidents and presidents-elect of JSS and SOY, the president-elect of YCSC, the president of Stern College student council, and the editors of the *Observer*, the *Hamevaser* and *Hamashkif*. Conspicuous by their absence were the signatures of the president of YCSC and the editor of *The Commentator*. Later, Robert Sacknovitz of JSS and president-elect Robert Weiss of YCSC claimed that their signatures were added to the declaration of support without their explicit consent.

The lack of popular enthusiasm was also evident to an extent when the actual event took place on Sunday. Only 25 Stern girls took part, and of the 200 YC students who marched in front of Furst Hall and the main building, the majority were from RIETS and JSS; few if any were from EMC. Not one member of the YCSC executive council was present.

Even Rabbi Soloveitchik declined in the end to back the pickets. In his speech on Sunday he claimed that he had put a stop to the picketing, and only upon being informed that students were indeed marching, at that

very moment did he declare his wholehearted support for "those fine young people" and their demands.

A number of students declined to join the coalition of essentially right-wing students, some of whom had previously been involved in protests not approved of by the general student body. Some who did march did so because of the influence of the Rav's speech, not because they supported all of the Coalition's demands.

### Publicity

Many of the pickets had opposed publicizing the affair through the news media, fearing *chilul Hashem*. Nonetheless, the leaders of the Coalition insisted upon obtaining a demonstration permit and requesting a police contingent, moves designed to attract publicity.

Among the administration as well there was some confusion. It was Rabbi Israel Miller, the Assistant to the President, who arranged for WYUR coverage of Rabbi Soloveitchik's speech, apparently in the mistaken belief that the Rav's speech would mollify rather than inflame student opinion.

The most crucial credibility gap is the one which seems to exist between the executive officers of the administration and the rest of the University. Rabbi Soloveitchik made it quite clear that he no longer believes the public relations office or Yeshiva's attorneys. He is not at all impressed by the machination of the "snobs" at Einstein, Belfer, Ferkauf and Wurzweiler and is convinced that we can get along without these graduate schools.

Some doubt if even Dr. Belkin is truly aware of the implications of Yeshiva's drive toward secularization. Or it may be that he indeed understands the situation, and that he allows it to continue is the greatest tragedy of all.

In either case, until the various segments of the University reestablish trust in one another, there can be no fruitful negotiations within the University. If there are no meaningful discussions, then those issues which face YU in this crisis may never be properly resolved. And if that happens, there may no longer be a Yeshiva.

Sidney  
Shutz . . .

# The Commentator

Official Undergraduate Newspaper of Yeshiva College

Don't Trust  
Your Lawyer

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# Rav Responds to Secularization; Sympathizes with Student Rally

FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

## From the Archives (April 15, 1970; Volume 35 Issue 13) — The Rav's Speech

By **BERNARD FIRESTONE and  
THE COMMENTATOR GOVERNING  
BOARD OF 1969-70**

Rav Soloveitchik's speech on Sunday in which he expressed concern over YU's direction delineated the fears of much of the student body. The possibility of widespread secularization at the College is one which frightens anyone concerned with the survival of this unique institution.

Our fear is that this noble speech which intended to unite the YU community for an attack on its problems, might in the end contribute to a needless polarization. Until now the differences in the secularization fight have been pragmatic ones, between those who say we need Albany's money to survive and those who feel that we can survive without it. The effect of the speech might well be to elevate this pragmatic argument into an ideological one. Let us be more explicit.

Throughout his talk, Rav Soloveitchik lavished extensive praise on Dr. Belkin. Yet his concluding remark indicated that if YU were to continue its present policy he would feel forced to resign. The extension

of what he was saying, as understood by most people was the following: Dr. Belkin's current policy, if continued, will become so inimical to the Rav's conception of a Yeshiva University that he would leave the institution that propagates it.

The Rav was trying to articulate an exceedingly difficult position, that is, he wished to undercut a university policy without undercutting the administrator who guides that policy. Though he tried to lay blame on others, the majority feeling was that the chief victim of the attack was Dr. Belkin, with some expressing the feeling that as much could have been accomplished in a private address to the Board of Trustees.

And thus the tragic polarization. The Rav intended to criticize a policy, not a man, but many have identified the two so closely that they've chosen to construe his speech as an attack on both.

This is the turmoil in which we currently stand. The underlying attempt of the Rav's speech was to unify YU for an attack on its problems. We hope that it is this that results from his speech, and not increased polarization of a community already too divided.

## From the Archives (May 27, 1970; Volume 35 Issue 14) — Letter to the Editor

By **HERVEY BENNET, LOUIS  
SCHAPIRO, DAVID SEINFELD,  
STEVE SINGER and LEO BEER**

The Concerned Student's Coalition, by its very name, attempted to monopolize concern over the recent "secularization issue." Nevertheless, there are many students at Yeshiva who are just as interested in our university maintaining its unique character, yet feel that the actions of the coalition are causing irreparable damage to the university.

One cannot question the motives of some of the people who are actively participating in the coalition's activities. They are voicing a legitimate fear that YU may become more "University" than "Yeshiva." Yet, unfortunately, our institution cannot exist today without government funds. This, as we all know, has sparked the particular chain of events that has led to the present crisis. Needless to say, it is naive to think that only the Bundy money is involved. The name of Yeshiva has been smeared throughout many Jewish communities in the country. People who have never seen YU and alumni who are only

acquainted with half-facts began sending telegrams and vicious letters attacking Dr. Belkin. Many Jewish communities were represented at the Chag Hasemicha and several of the fund-raisers present were left with a bad taste in their mouths at the site of Yeshiva students picketing.

Yeshiva is already beginning to feel the financial pinch, and if the university will reach the point where it will no longer be solvent, tremors will be sent throughout the entire American Jewish community. YU is the foundation of the structure of Orthodox Judaism in the United States. Therefore, our main concern should be to maintain the Yeshiva character of our school, and we should voice our opinions to that effect. However, in light of the unique position of our Yeshiva in Orthodox Jewish life, we must never risk the demise of the university.

We deplore the involvement of the individuals far-removed from the Yeshiva scene in the present crisis. We deplore the vociferous attacks upon Dr. Belkin's integrity, and we hope that he will find strength to continue to serve Yeshiva as diligently as he has in the past.



Rav Soloveitchik speaks at Chag Hasemicha.

B. SPIVAK

## Flashbacks



"Exclusive Huddle?"

November 4, 1936; Volume 2 Issue 4

## Alyssa Milano Just Taught us a Valuable Lesson

By DANIEL MELOOL

Last Sunday, left-leaning actress Alyssa Milano sent out a tweet with an article from CNN. The article's headline read, "Republicans move to nix primaries in show of support for Trump." Outraged at this attempt to deny Republican voters a chance to voice their opinions in the primaries, Milano tweeted, "Trump has primary challengers, but his party is cancelling primaries to deprive their voters a chance of unseating him. Republicans are so into suppressing voters they don't want REPUBLICANS voting". The article notes that "party leaders in South Carolina, Nevada and Arizona have all expressed support for nixing their presidential primaries and are expected to make it official over the coming weeks." At first glance, Alyssa Milano seems to be condemning the Republican Party's unethical attempt to take away peoples' right to vote. Who would not be outraged if any party took away the chance for their voters to exercise their right to vote?

There is just one problem. The same article that Milano tweeted out mentions that nixing primaries for an incumbent president is standard practice for both parties. The article notes, "it is not unprecedented for state Republicans or Democrats to decide

without finishing it.

Reading only the headline or the part of an article that confirms a bias is sadly common among many people. Back in 2014, the Washington Post ran an article about a study conducted by the Media Insight Project, an

just how bad the division has become. The survey showed that 47% of liberal Democrats said that if a friend supported President Trump, this would "put a strain" on their friendship, while 13% of conservatives said the same. The same survey found that 68% of Democrats said it was stressful and frustrating to talk with people who have differing views on President Trump, and 52% of Republicans agreed. In a time with such immense divisions, it is too easy to read a headline or one part of an article that confirms our outrage or bias without examining the details further.

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*In a time with such immense divisions, it is too easy to read a headline or one part of an article that confirms our outrage or bias without examining the details further.*

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not to hold a presidential primary when an incumbent is running essentially uncontested. In South Carolina, a key early primary state, Republicans decided to nix their presidential primaries in 1984 and 2004, when Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush were up for their second terms; while state Democrats skipped their contests in 1996 and 2012, with Bill Clinton and Barack Obama running for reelection, respectively." It is clear that Milano either did not read the article at all, or she only read the beginning

initiative of the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the American Press Institute, which showed that "overall, 41 percent of Americans report that they watched, read, or heard any in-depth news stories, beyond the headlines in the last week." That means that almost six in every ten Americans do not read past the headlines. Evidently, Milano is not an outlier at all.

It is easy in these divided political times to make the same mistake that she did. A Pew Research survey from 2017 demonstrates

Alyssa Milano is not the first person to make this mistake, and she certainly will not be the last. Hopefully, Milano, and for that matter all of us, will learn from her mistake and read past the headline of every story we encounter. Hopefully, we will read every detail of the story, not just the details that confirm our biases. Doing this will not heal the political divide overnight, but it will be a great first step to restoring the unity that America needs to be a beacon of liberty and justice for all.

## I Am a Woman and I Wear Tzitzit: Here's Why

By ANONYMOUS

*Editor's Note: Although generally we do not publish anonymous pieces, we have decided to publish this piece anonymously for reasons the author outlines.*

One of my most vivid childhood memories is my teacher describing the beauty and preciousness of *mitzvot*, comparing them to diamonds and urging us to collect as many as we could. I remember feeling such excitement at the time and motivation to run and gather them all. Over time, this enthusiasm, of course, subsided and evolved into a more complex and nuanced understanding of *mitzvot* and Torah, but the underlying message of the celebration of doing *mitzvot* remained with me and still rings true.

Growing up as a girl in the Orthodox Jewish community, however, this message was slightly amended: yes, all *mitzvot* are special and cherished, but not all are meant for women. As is clear from the Gemara and is brought down by all the later *halakhic* works, there's a clear distinction between a woman's and man's obligation with regards to certain *mitzvot*, namely time-bound *mitzvot* that one is obligated to actively perform.

But, as many know, it's not as simple as that. Many of these time-bound *mitzvot* are performed by women — hearing the shofar and eating in a sukkah — and then some aren't — like *tzitzit*. (Sephardic women have different customs of performing time-bound *mitzvot*.)

The Torah given purpose for the *mitzvah* of wearing *tzitzit*, is to remind the wearer of Hashem's commandments and to further encourage them to perform them (Numbers 15:38). The ultimate ruling brought down by the rabbis is that it's considered a time-bound commandment, and therefore women aren't obligated in it. Traditionally, it was uncommon, if not unheard of, for women to take this practice upon themselves as a *mitzvah reshut* (a voluntary and permitted practice). The *halakhic* sources on the topic of women and *tzitzit* are voluminous and diverse, but many rulings including those of the Rambam, Shulchan Aruch, and Rav Moshe Feinstein state, with different qualifications, that women can choose to do this *mitzvah* if they wish.

As a woman who deeply values going above the letter of the law and chooses to do many

*mitzvot* that I am not obligated in, I also wear *tzitzit*. To avoid any potential issues with *kli gever*, the prohibition of women wearing men's clothes, my *tzitzit* are made out of a woman's garment. In addition to being careful about *tzniut*, one of the special things about wearing *tzitzit* is the opportunity to don a garment with religious significance that isn't directly connected to modesty and covering up. The option of engaging in a *mitzvah* so connected to my body, but not to my body's sexualization, is meaningful and helps me further my personal connection to Judaism and Hashem.

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*In a community where we celebrate and encourage women to perform mitzvot which they aren't obligated in, those who feel that wearing tzitzit is something that will help them grow religiously should not be dissuaded from doing so.*

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One of the issues brought up about women wearing *tzitzit* is that of *yuhara*, or arrogance related to taking on religious practices with a sense of self-image. For me, *tzitzit* is exactly the opposite. I wear them under my clothing, tucked in and almost nobody knows about them, making this *mitzvah* completely between me and Hashem. I also chose to write this article anonymously, not because I am embarrassed about wearing them — on the contrary, I am quite proud of them — but to keep this *mitzvah* on a personal level and to steer clear of *yuhara*.

In a community where we celebrate and encourage women to perform *mitzvot* which they aren't obligated in, those who feel that wearing *tzitzit* is something that will help them grow religiously should not be dissuaded from doing so. To me, donning *tzitzit* every day represents rushing to collect those diamonds in the morning. I begin my day with a renewed excitement and a tangible, wearable reminder of opportunities I have to perform as many *mitzvot* as possible. humanity.



**"To avoid any potential issues with *kli gever*, the prohibition of women wearing men's clothes, my *tzitzit* are made out of a woman's garment."**

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



March co-organizer Molly Meisels addresses the crowd gathered for the LGBTQ rally at Bennett Park.

THE COMMENTATOR

## Walking The Walk of Empathy

By DONIEL WEINREICH

“I have nothing but empathy.” It’s a common refrain. It seems almost reflexive of all but the most reactionary. But is it genuine? Or is it a mantra for personal exculpation, like Seinfeld’s “not that there’s anything wrong with that”?

Surely empathy requires more than just hackneyed platitudes. People can write think-pieces about how the LGBTQ community deserves sympathy and sensitivity, but where are they when the community needs them?

You might legitimately think that certain halachic issues at play are intractable. This is a non-offensive and coherent position. This might lead you to conclude that “sometimes all we can do is sit down and cry together” — a disputable, but sensitive conclusion. But where were you on Sunday, when the LGBTQ community was crying?

Assuming one isn’t being disingenuous with their calls for empathy, this deficiency is curable. You can start by listening. I can’t speak for the LGBTQ community, but I’ve been listening to them for years. If you listened, you might stop either pretending or being under the delusion that any of the

dominant issues are halachic. You might have heard social worker Justin Spiro on Sunday when he said “In all my years working with LGBTQ individuals from Orthodox backgrounds, few have left Orthodoxy or experienced thoughts of suicide due to two verses in Vayikra. People are leaving — spiritually and emotionally — because of how they are treated by the Orthodox community... What halacha prohibits support groups and safe spaces from forming on campus? What halacha prohibits closeted individuals from making life-saving connections with others like them?”

Had you been there on Sunday, you would have noticed that at no point did any speakers make demands to change halacha — at most, they asked people to seriously struggle with the halachic questions. The demands were for visibility. The demands were to end the silence. The gay community wants us to acknowledge their actual existence, and to stop talking about them as an “abstract idea” or “as if they’re not there”. Had you been there, you would see the absurdity of responding by immediately pivoting to halachic hermeneutics.

If you listened to the now numerous accounts by gay people in YU or the Orthodox community, including the famous 2009

panel, you would understand why their demands are so important. You would understand, as Justin Spiro put it on Sunday, that “Being LGBTQ is not primarily about a *taivah* — it’s not about wanting sex. It’s an experiential process of growing up feeling different, other than, less than, questioning everything about yourself.” If you understood, you would stop talking about “sexual proclivities” or making crude analogies to other proscriptions and predilections.

Are you really empathetic to that experience? Have you tried to understand it? As they hold back tears and give stirring accounts of suicidal thoughts, fear of rejection, desperate prayers, hurting loved ones and shattering future expectations, as gay people struggle to explain the torturous process of coming to terms with who they are, they almost always point to the same dominant issues. The silence. The loneliness. The shame. The fear. The feeling of being fundamentally broken and having nowhere to turn. All reinforced by the passive marginalization, as their existence and presence as part of the community goes unacknowledged.

This is why they need a space. This is why they need a forum. This is why they need to be acknowledged. Silence has always been the biggest complaint. Silence kills.

The absence of homophobia is not the same as the presence of acceptance. You can recite your mantras of empathy and sensitivity. But have you actively made efforts to ensure the queer people in your community feel safe? Have you demanded your institutions grant them the bare minimum for safety and security? Have you made it clear to your peers — some of whom may be in the closet — that their sexual orientation cannot possibly have a deleterious impact on your relationship? Is it known that you unconditionally accept LGBTQ people for who they are? Do you?

I have no claim to the stories of LGBTQ Jews, and I cannot speak for them. I can only listen to them and amplify their voices. Because I have nothing but empathy. I have nothing but compassion. And as Rabbi Steven Greenberg said on Sunday, “Compassion requires us not only to care but to stand up in real ways.” Silence and complacency are unacceptable. This is why I listen. This is why I act. This is why I stand up.

Until you do, your armchair calls for empathy ring hollow.

## From the YCSA President's Desk: Who Is In and Who Is Out?

By **LEIB WIENER**

In a *shiur* entitled “Who Is In and Who Is Out,” Rabbi Norman Lamm recounts a newspaper article in which a prominent chassidic rabbi stated that, according to his criteria, there are only one million people in the world who can be considered Jews. Upon reading this, Rabbi Lamm approached this rabbi and asked him, “What about me and my family? Are we in or are we out? Do we belong in your one million Jews?” The rabbi responded, “Rabbi Lamm, you ask a good question.” Rabbi Lamm promptly excused himself from the conversation.

As a former president of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Lamm was understandably unsettled by this interaction. YU is an institution

that resists narrowly defining Jewishness. It allows for and fosters dissimilarity in *hashkafot*, ideologies, and religious subgroups on both the Beren and Wilf campuses. Along with these differences that exist within the university and its

be trite in their constant recounting. I reiterate them now because I strongly believe there is no better time to remind ourselves of what YU stands for. This is a significant moment for the YU community. The LGBTQ #WeTooAreYU march

to reflect on ourselves or to deflect that judgment onto others? Should we draw lines to the exclusion of other Jews? Can we find a way to strengthen our own values, while still being empathetic to those of others?

it is possible to empathize with others and to simultaneously disagree with them. As an institution, it is possible to operate within the framework of *halacha* and simultaneously wrestle with deep and uncomfortable questions.

I choose to wrestle with these issues. To move past lines. I encourage every student, educator and administrator in Yeshiva University to think about these questions. As our days of judgment and awe move closer, as our perspective threatens to narrow, we have an opportunity to come together as a united Jewish people. It would be a tragedy to see that moment slip away.

*Leib Wiener is a Senior at Yeshiva College and the president of the Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA).*

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*It is easy to find fault in others, to call people “kofrim,” to scornfully refer to someone as “too charedi” or as “off the derech.” It takes a deep level of wisdom to search internally instead.*

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community, there exists a predominant goal — fostering harmony between secular life and Torah values, and ideally maintaining harmony with one another.

I am not claiming to be presenting a novel account of Yeshiva University’s values; on the contrary, these principles have come to

will take place on September 15. YU’s third Giving Day will take place three days after. We are in the month of Elul, a period of heavy reflection, recalibration and rededication to our beliefs and values. We must address questions Rabbi Lamm was forced to grapple with: Are we utilizing Elul

It is easy to find fault in others, to call people “kofrim,” to scornfully refer to someone as “too charedi” or as “off the derech.” It takes a deep level of wisdom to search internally instead. And an even deeper level to seek an understanding of those same people we are tempted to judge. As individuals,



Leib Wiener is the president of YCSA.

THE COMMENTATOR

## On Halakha and LGBT: A Response To Professor Koller

By **BRIAN CHERNIGOFF**

Recently, the American people commemorated the horrific events of Sept. 11, 2001. The attack on the World Trade Center was not only a physical attack on the American people, but an assault on our system of values. It was an attempt to weaken our spirit and surrender to the tyranny of Islamic terrorism.

Of course, one of our most dear values is freedom of speech: the idea that every citizen of this country has the right to freely express his or her ideas, thoughts and opinions without the fear of being penalized. We

as well, being American Jews, hold on dearly to this value.

However, we are not simply Americans — we are also Orthodox Jews. While there are many different takes on the idea of *Torah U'Madda*, at the most basic level it involves the utilization of our Torah values as a guiding light to study and explore the wisdom of the world. While we certainly hold the value of free speech dearly, it cannot remain unchecked by the Torah’s own system of values.

It is in this spirit that I was deeply perturbed by an article recently published by the YU Observer, “On Halakha And LGBT,” by Dr. Aaron Koller, chair of the Robert M. Beren Department of Jewish Studies

at Yeshiva College and professor of Near Eastern and Jewish Studies. For those who have not read his article, I encourage you to do so before proceeding to read this article. Since Koller quotes a number of rabbinic statements to bolster his position, I wanted to take the time to explicate how and why these sources do not actually lead to the conclusion that he reaches.

I will not summarize or paraphrase the words of Koller. I do not want my readers to think that I am embellishing or overdramatizing Koller’s position. Instead, I will quote the concluding sentences of his essay directly:

So, in short: In a clash between humanity

and *halakha*, opt for humanity, and have enough faith in *halakha* that the problem will be solved. And if somehow the conflict remains intractable, I would rather suffer for being a good person than sacrifice someone else’s life on the altar of my religiosity.

With these concluding lines, Koller makes his position clear. In a clash between the explicit will of God as expressed in the Torah and his own modern sensitivities to human feelings, he chooses the latter. A cursory read of Koller’s article would suggest that he has rabbinic support for his position of rejecting explicit verses in the Torah in the

*Continued on Page 22*

*RESPONSE TO KOLLER,  
continued from Page 21*

face of compassion and sympathy for his fellow. I hope to demonstrate the complete lack of evidence for such a position.

A number of passages that Koller cites demonstrate that in the face of ethical considerations, the rabbis chose to interpret Biblical verses that are ambiguous in their precise meaning or application in a more humane or sensitive fashion (*Sukkah* 32a, *Sanhedrin* 45a, *Shabbat* 64b). In these passages, there is no explicit Biblical verse that the rabbis are uprooting based on their own sensibilities. Rather, they are interpreting and applying Biblical verses based on their own sensibilities. Another passage Koller quotes demonstrates that the rabbis would not enact a rabbinic decree if they thought it was societally unviable (*Avodah Zarah* 36a). This in no way suggests that it is OK to discard explicit Biblical verses.

Koller additionally cites the well-known dictum of “the Torah was not given to ministering angels.” According to *Masoret Ha’Shas* (*Berakhot* 25b), this dictum is employed four times in the Talmud. The

first time is during a discussion of a law that is purely rabbinic (*Berakhot* 25b). The next two times are regarding laws that are physically impossible to keep (*Yoma* 30a and *Kiddushin* 54a). It is not physically impossible for one man to abstain from

sanctity. Therefore, the stones were only sanctified after the Temple’s construction was complete (*Me’ilah* 14b). None of these four sources indicate that it is permitted to discard explicit Biblical verses when they fly in the face of our sensibilities.

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*Given Orthodox Jewish understandings of the Bible as the word of God and the commandments of the Torah as eternal, it is hard to argue that Koller’s position falls within the accepted theological boundaries of Orthodox Judaism.*

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sleeping with another man. While it might be very difficult for him to abstain from homosexuality, it is not physically impossible for him to do so. The final time is an explication of why the stones used in the Temple’s construction were only sanctified after the construction was complete and not afterwards. The reason given is that since “the Torah was not given to angels,” we are concerned that a construction worker may get tired while working and rest on one of the Temple’s stones, thus desecrating its

While my writing gives the impression that I am taking a hard stance against the LGBT movement, I also want to express the importance of sensitivity to this issue, albeit not at all in the same way that Koller utilizes it. If a person is wholeheartedly committed to the Torah, yet feels a sense of estrangement from the Orthodox community due to his sexual proclivities, I have nothing but empathy for him. If someone is struggling with determining how he, as a celibate, will be able to fit into the broader Jewish

community with its heavy emphasis on the family unit, I have nothing but empathy for him. It is only those who brazenly and wantonly disregard explicit Biblical verses whom I have no empathy for.

Given Orthodox Jewish understandings of the Bible as the word of God and the commandments of the Torah as eternal, it is hard to argue that Koller’s position falls within the accepted theological boundaries of Orthodox Judaism. It is very simple: Orthodox Jews choose to listen to explicit Biblical verses, while non-Orthodox Jews choose not to. Koller writes that he chooses not to. In rejecting an explicit Biblical verse, Koller stands opposed to the most basic beliefs of Orthodox Judaism. It behooves the administration of Yeshiva University to ask themselves if it is appropriate to have someone with such blatantly anti-*halakhic* beliefs as head, or even part of, its Jewish Studies department.



## Cosmopolitans — The Only Loyal Citizens?

By ELISHEVA KOHN

This past Labor Day, I attended my first ever professional baseball game. As I secretly made fun of all those lunatics for cheering on the sun — it had simply shown itself after a particularly rainy morning — I observed the dedication and excitement of thousands of spectators with envy. These people felt American. They sang their national anthem with pride and ate their chicken nuggets with expertise. If only I could say the same about myself.

I didn't always feel this way. Growing up bilingual, I never thought twice about my dual U.S./Austrian citizenship or the unique cultural experience I was raised in. My upbringing in Austria made it easier for me to relate to new cultures and ideas. I regarded my ability to integrate into unfamiliar social situations as an asset.

Once I left home, however, I was promptly challenged by people trying to get to the bottom of my national loyalty. "When are you making aliyah?" — a question I was confronted with on a daily basis during my gap year in Israel — evolved into "are you planning on staying in America forever?" when I moved to New York for college. Questions such as: which language I prefer, which culture I relate to more, where I want to raise my future family, which national anthem I sang best, constantly reminded me that I had to choose. These thoughts frightened me; in fact, I felt guilty for being so indecisive about questions that seemed fundamental.

When Kwame Anthony Appiah, an NYU Professor of Law and Philosophy, first mentioned cosmopolitanism, a concept that revolves around all human beings belonging to a single, global community with shared responsibilities, in his guest lecture at Stern, I welcomed the overwhelming feeling of validation. Since then, I have spent countless hours reading and thinking about the subject.

Appiah shared with us a comical yet concerning photo of two men wearing t-shirts with the statement "I'd rather be Russian than a Democrat" imprinted on them. As these men surely know, the United States has a complicated relationship with Russia. They are placing partisanship, or their alliance with the Republican Party, above fundamental American values. When a country is so divided that identifying as liberal or conservative matters more than simply being American, I wonder what that says about our concept of citizenship. Is there value to pledging allegiance to a country if growing polarization causes citizens to feel alienated from each other? "I'd rather be a Russian than a Democrat" is the ultimate anti-cosmopolitan statement. It proves that extreme party affiliation blinds people from realizing their responsibility towards their fellow citizens. Affective polarization is increasing everywhere and global issues are becoming more urgent every day. It's time we move past our traditional understanding of citizenship and embrace an expansion of the term citizen unless we want to watch petty conflicts within — and between — political parties delay efficient solutions to pressing global issues.

Our level of exposure to people who are fundamentally different from us is extraordinary. As I walk down 34th St., I encounter people of various ethnic and religious backgrounds. My Twitter feed informs me of catastrophes that are taking place in far-away countries. I have access to data relating to poverty, terrorism, climate change and drug use around the world. I sang "*allez les*



**"I am proposing that we expand our commitments as loyal citizens to simply include more people, namely, all those with whom we share the planet, not just those who look and speak like us."**

PXHERE

*bleus*" when the French football team won the world cup and sighed in relief when the young boys who were trapped in a cave in Thailand were rescued. In short, I can relate to my fellow citizens of the world; I can empathize with their troubles and also with their joy and success.

While interpretations of the term "cosmopolitan" differ, I would like to suggest that our generation is more cosmopolitan than ever before, simply because we are aware of the global issues that face humanity. Without having actively chosen to do so, we are connected with people from all around the world via social media. Issues that have hitherto been of national nature are now global.

Theresa May once said that "if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere." I strongly disagree.

The former Prime Minister clearly regards cosmopolitanism as a threat to nationalism and patriotism. She would consider the term cosmopolitan a paradox — a citizen ought to belong to a country, not the cosmos, or the universe. Nationalism brought us this far. The United States or Israel would not exist without it, and for that, I am grateful. I am not suggesting that we abandon nationalism. I am proposing that we expand our commitments as loyal citizens to simply include more people, namely, all those with whom we share the planet, not just those who look and speak like us.

So, should we all identify as citizens of the world? Perhaps, but that is not necessary. Cosmopolitanism allows for people of different cultures to live in harmony because it introduces the idea that our moral responsibility is not limited to our own communities.

My mother likes to say "*chessed* begins at home." I agree with her. If we can have a strong impact within our own community, we should focus on that before pursuing to change the world. However, that should not cause us to lose sight of the greater context. Tackling polarization, taking all opinions into consideration regardless of party affiliation, exploring foreign cultures, getting involved in global initiatives — there are endless opportunities for us to invoke our inner cosmopolitan. Needless to say, I no longer feel guilty for not being able to give definite responses to complex questions relating to my identity. For now, I'll focus on being loyal to humanity.

## “The Lion King”: Live-Action Remakes and Disney’s “Circle of Life”

By SARIT PERL

Why would anyone pay to see a movie they’ve already seen?

Considering Disney has pulled in \$7 billion in box office revenues from nine “live-action reimaginings” of animated classics, it seems that plenty of people have found a good reason. Whether it’s the nostalgia for the Disney magic of our childhood, introducing the next generation to family favorites, or simply a burning curiosity to see, compare and contrast, millions have flocked to cinemas worldwide to watch these remakes, despite them often receiving mixed or overwhelmingly negative reviews. As an avid Disney fan, I have allowed myself to be swept along in this phenomenon, and I have found that in general, my reaction to most, if not all, of these movies has been roughly the same: I was dazzled by the visuals, thrilled with the updated characters and plot, ambivalent about the casting and thoroughly disappointed with the music and vocals.

Which is why, with its strong, stunning vocals and hyper-realistic visuals that are a frame-for-frame replication of the scene from the original 1994 film, the very first notes and iconic opening shot of “The Lion King” filled me with excitement and hope. “Circle of Life” is easily the best scene in the movie — but it’s also the first scene, which unfortunately means the rest of the film is inevitably disappointing.

Disney’s other movies may have benefited from live-action updates; in stories centered around humans, even humans that have been transformed into animals or objects, a “real-people” version brings the characters and the messages closer to home. But in the case of “The Lion King,” more real means less human, and therefore far less compelling. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the computer-generated images from which the entire film is composed have absolutely zero real-life foundation. We call it live-action, but it’s just as much animation

as the original was — the only difference is traditional versus digital art. The images were created from scratch without incorporating any live footage. For whatever reason, Disney chose not to put its cast in CGI suits and layer animalistic features over their faces — a technique that proved incredibly effective in the update of “Beauty and the Beast” — and it cost them dearly. The animals were missing the anthropomorphism that brought them to life in the animated film, and their expressionless faces are out of sync with the actors’ dynamic voice-over performances.

*“The Lion King” is an incoherent collage of scenes that copycat (pun intended) the original film, but lack its spirit.*

Hans Zimmer, Elton John and Tim Rice’s iconic score was given new life by new and returning vocalists — most notably “Can You Feel the Love Tonight,” which features soaring new harmonies and Beyoncé’s signature riffs. However, the soundtrack stands better on its own; the animation, which just

couldn’t quite synchronize voice and mouth (muzzle? snout?) during musical numbers made the entire score feel detached, as if it were dubbed over an existing track.

Equally disappointing were the modifications to the script that drastically changed the atmosphere of the film, making it far more sinister and far less entertaining. Slippery sarcasm and clever puns, silkily delivered by Jeremy Irons in the original, made Scar a captivating and entertaining character who reveled in the theatrics of his villainous plans. Scar’s 2019 incarnation, voiced by Chiwetel Ejiofor, lacks any sense of humor or self-awareness, and is reduced to a one-dimensional, overdramatic stock villain. Timon and Pumbaa deliver some much-needed humor, but even they felt like ghosts of the charmingly over-the-top characters given to us by Nathan Lane and Ernie Sabella. The hyenas are no longer hilarious henchmen — Shenzi, once a wisecracking and sassy sidekick, is now a terrifying presence in her own right, without an ounce of humor in her cackle. The iconic trio never even appear on screen together, and the remaining two provide maybe two comedic moments throughout the entire film.

I have long defended Disney’s decision to pour their time, money, and creativity into reinventing their beloved classics for 21st century audiences. I loved the idea of giving

the Beast a tragic backstory and making Belle an embattled advocate for education. I was thrilled with the decision to make Jasmine’s desire for independence political as well as personal. And of course, as a costume design enthusiast, I couldn’t wait to see the exquisite designs that brought to life the iconic wardrobes of all of Disney’s characters. However, after seeing this latest installment in a series of remakes, I am forced to accept the truth about them. “The Lion King” is an incoherent collage of scenes that copycat (pun intended) the original film but lacks its spirit, yet still making millions at the box office thanks to loyal fans and a big-name cast. I realized that the new additions that had drawn me in were not the catalysts for remaking these movies, but afterthoughts added to “refurbish” old material whose continued use would guarantee ticket sales. Disney Studios was once the forerunner in creative entertainment; it is now practically the *only* runner, having bought out all of its competitors, and seems to function more like any other corporate machine than a company determined to “entertain, inform and inspire people around the globe through the power of unparalleled storytelling,” with new material or otherwise. Mufasa’s wise words encourage Simba to reclaim his identity and return to his roots, and Disney would do well to heed them: *Remember who you are.*



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## The NFL Needs To Change Its Overtime Rules

By MAYER FINK

In the AFC Championship game this past January, the New England Patriots played against the Kansas City Chiefs. The Patriots won the coin toss, marched down the field, scored a touchdown to end the game and left the Chiefs league-leading offense on the sideline without a chance to retaliate.

This left fans outraged, many demanding that the NFL take a hard look at the overtime rules. The current rules state that a team can win on their opening drive of overtime if they score a touchdown. Anything short of that result allows the other team a chance to score.

While this rule seems specific, it should be mentioned that the original rule of overtime was sudden death. Any score of any kind would end the game. The common result of this rule would be the winner of the coin toss receiving the ball first and kicking a field goal (ending the game). This happened in the 2009 NFC Championship game, where the Saints won the coin toss and never gave the ball to the Vikings, as they kicked a field goal to send themselves to the Super Bowl.

This result prompted the league to change their overtime rules, and by the 2011 playoffs, the NFL overtime rules as we know them were put into effect. If the 2009 NFC

Championship game could prompt such a rule change, it may be that the past AFC Championship game will prompt a similar change.

It’s understandable why the NFL is stubborn to change. The NFL shouldn’t adjust every time the fans get annoyed with the league, as there would be no stability as a league. It’s also worth mentioning that the NFL has multiple issues as a league that they probably prioritize over such a minor rule change like overtime. (The entire off-season the league had to hear about the missed call in the NFC championship game that cost the Saints a trip to the Super Bowl. The NFL also has to deal with a looming lockout with the players union and the league at odds over the players’ salary. As always, the NFL has to deal with concussions and CTE.)

Still, as this rule continues, more games will continue to be decided unfairly. It would be valuable to change the overtime structure now instead of keeping an overtime structure that has clear problems.

How should the NFL change their overtime rule? To start, the league has to factor

in both the fairness of the format and the entertainment the format provides the fans. While a league like the MLB may have the fairest form of overtime, with each team getting an equal opportunity to score, it is clear that the MLB has the most boring form of overtime. Baseball fans leave as the game progresses, unlike other major league sports. The NHL has the most exciting overtime, as it reverts to sudden death and incorporates a shootout system to end games that drag on for too long. The NHL has taken much

*Still, as this rule continues, more games will continue to be decided unfairly. It would be valuable to change the overtime structure now instead of keeping an overtime structure that has clear problems.*

criticism for the shootout since the game is being decided with a completely different aspect of playing (imagine the NFL deciding games with a field goal kicking contest). With this complaint, the NHL drops the shootout in the playoffs and just plays sudden death overtime until a winner is determined. The

NFL also aspired to a sudden death overtime system, but unlike hockey, the team that starts with the ball has an overwhelmingly unfair advantage.

The most viable form of overtime the NFL can imitate is the College Football overtime. In College Football, the teams rotate possessions (think of innings, where one team gets the ball, then the opposing team). Regardless of whether the team that gets the ball first scores, the opposing team gets a chance to respond. The big problem with college’s overtime is that the teams start their possessions on the defense’s 25-yard line, which basically guarantees at least a field goal.

The NFL should change their overtime to something in between college and the format they have now. Each team should get possession, like in college overtime. They should start their possession outside of scoring range, either at midfield or their own 35-yard line. If the team with the ball first doesn’t score, they should play on with sudden death.

Whether these suggestions will help the sport is yet to be determined. The bottom line is that the current format is problematic and it needs to change.



# I Work, You Work, WeWork

By **NATHAN HAKAKIAN**

The hottest real estate start-up of 2018, We Company—the parent company of WeWork—has taken the globe by storm. Founded in New York in 2010 by Israeli entrepreneur Adam Neumann, the company now has investors preparing for what could be one of the largest Initial Public Offerings (IPO) of the year. However, after initially looking to list their shares on the NYSE in late September for \$27 a share, WeWork has decided to delay their IPO. Why would a company that was so hell-bent on expediting its IPO process suddenly have cold feet?

WeWork has garnered much interest from outsiders with their aggressive business model, which can be broken down into three simple steps: lease large spaces, transform and renovate them and rent them out to individuals and companies at a higher price. Because WeWork has a diverse group of tenants, they provide a number of renting options, ranging from a single office space to an entire property. Larger companies also have access to a service called Powered by We, in which companies can custom design the look of their office buildings. As of 2018, WeWork managed 35 million square feet in 528 locations across 29 countries.

Despite their intriguing business model,

many doubts surround WeWork. For starters, they have a severe debt problem. In 2018, they brought in \$1.8 billion in total revenue, compared to \$3.5 billion in total expenses. Recently, many startups that have turned public have been unprofitable. In 2018, Uber, Lyft and Pinterest all went

of 2018, down to only 80%. This can be problematic, as it takes about 18 months to find a new tenant. To minimize these losses, WeWork must focus on a more established clientele, as opposed to catering towards technology start-ups, whose volatile nature fails to secure long-term rent commitments.

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*WeWork has yet to turn a profit despite receiving \$4 billion worth of funding as of January 2019.*

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public but lost \$1.8 billion, \$911.3 million, and \$63 million, respectively. Large amounts of debt will often bring down a company's stock price, but there are certain metrics that can foreshadow growth despite a lack of profit. One of the strongest examples is a company's ability to continuously reduce annual operating losses while increasing revenues, something that Uber, Lyft, and Pinterest have all managed to do; however, WeWork's expenses keep amassing, owing \$47 billion dollars in lease obligations alone.

Additionally, WeWork has an occupancy issue. When leasing office spaces in the United States, WeWork commits to an average of 15 years, while renting out the renovated space for an average of only 15 months. To make matters worse, WeWork's occupancy rate fell 4% in the last quarter

Investors are also skeptical about the company's sustainability. With a business model that simply allots large cash balances to leases and construction, WeWork's success can easily be replicated. One main competitor, Knotel, has recently been valued at \$1 billion and is quickly looking to expand internationally. While WeWork's rapid expansion has allowed it to become the industry leader, it is only a matter of time before that status is put to the test.

But the most concerning factor of all is profitability. WeWork has yet to turn a profit despite receiving \$4 billion worth of funding as of January 2019. These funds have come from respected parties such as Jefferies, JP Morgan, and SoftBank. We Work did not release any details about their financials until August, when they filled an S1, a

financial statement issued to the public by the company prior to its listing. This listing revealed the grave extent of WeWork's losses and sent investors scratching their heads for answers. Analysts are struggling to find an appropriate valuation method, let alone an accurate price, given WeWork's updated financials. When comparing We to Swiss-based rival IWG PLC, We's valuation is ten times higher, despite having similar occupancy rates. Investors became more anxious when Neumann sold \$740 million worth of stocks tied to the We Company. Due to these factors, We Work's evaluation dropped from \$47 billion to \$20 billion on what would have been the eve of their IPO. After many investors voiced their concerns, WeWork announced that it would delay its public offering until late 2019.

For We to succeed, they must implement modifications to their business plan to maximize profits by reducing expenses. To diversify themselves amongst their competitors, We can capitalize on their acquisition of Managed by Q—a platform that assists tenants in hiring workspace services—to create a more comprehensive leasing platform. In the coming months, We hopes to turn into the Wall Street darling that so many financial analysts fell in love with.



WeWork has decided to delay their IPO.

## A Real Tesla Competitor

By NOAM GERSHOV

In June 2012, Elon Musk's Tesla released its first fully electric vehicle for the common driver — the Model S. Almost immediately, it became a global sensation, topping monthly rankings in Norway and Denmark. Global Model S sales surpassed 250,000 units with the U.S. as its leading market, and was the top-selling plug-in electric car worldwide in 2015 and 2016. This past year, *Motor Trend*, a car enthusiast magazine, named the 2013 Tesla Model S the ultimate car of the year over its 70-year history.

To say the least, the Tesla Model S has been very successful, partly due to the lack of quality competition. Established car manufacturers, such as Chevrolet, and start-ups, such as Rivian, have surely tried to make a dent in the electric vehicle market, but Tesla still remains on top.

Nevertheless, the market has room for more options, so companies continue to challenge the gold standard that Tesla has set. The latest challenger is Porsche, a German automobile manufacturer specializing in high-performance sports cars. At a flashy convention in early September 2019, Porsche presented its first fully-electric sports car

to the public, the Taycan Turbo S. Having established that Tesla is very successful, it is logical to compare new vehicles to the Model S.

The following comparison will involve the top version of each electric car, namely the Tesla Model S Performance and the Porsche Taycan Turbo S. Additionally, the two most important categories to consider when assessing electric vehicles is the range and battery life.

The Tesla Model S Performance costs \$105,990. A full battery gives the Model S a 345-mile range and goes from 0 to 60 in 2.4 seconds. It has a top speed of 163 miles per hour and is unique in that it contains the self-driving feature known as autopilot. In comparison, the Porsche Taycan Turbo S costs \$185,000 — clearly a much steeper price. A fully charged battery will give the Turbo S a 280-mile range, and it accelerates from zero to 60 in 2.8 seconds. Lastly, the Turbo S has a top speed of 161 miles per hour.

Sheer number-crunching clearly gives the win to Tesla, but numbers do not always reveal the whole story. The Model S is cheaper, has a longer range, accelerates faster, hits a higher top speed, and has autopilot. However, these statistics do not account for charging capabilities, the second crucial

category to consider in electric vehicles.

The Taycan charges very quickly at 270kW, compared to Tesla's 200kW, meaning that 80% of the Taycan's battery will charge in 20 minutes, which is extremely useful if someone runs out of battery and needs a quick boost. However, this information is useless if a charging station does not exist. Tesla, on the other hand, has a vast supercharger network spanning roads,

and metal and has three screens displaying information in lieu of buttons and gadgets, unlike Tesla's minimalistic interior with only one big screen. Lastly, the Model S is bigger, with a more spacious second row and trunk.

In summation, for the everyday driver, the Tesla Model S probably has the advantage, with the longer range, cheaper price tag, supercharger network, and autopilot capabilities, a lifesaver when stuck in traffic.

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*Established car manufacturers, such as Chevrolet, and start-ups, such as Rivian, have surely tried to make a dent in the electric vehicle market, but Tesla still remains on top.*

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highways, rest stops and malls, so the driver never has to worry about running out of battery. In fact, Tesla generously offered to allow other companies to use its superchargers, but Porsche decided not to take advantage. Therefore, although the Taycan charges faster, the Model S takes the lead with the network.

Putting aside range and charging, both cars look very sleek and arrow dynamic on the outside. Like any Porsche, the interior of the Taycan is made of high-quality leather

However, for people who really care about feeling the road and racing, Porsche will almost certainly drive better, though it may never beat Tesla off the line. Regardless of which camp one falls in, the emergence of a real Tesla competitor is exciting. The electric car market has room for more than one premium sedan, and competition is great, as better products are delivered for cheaper prices, and the consumer always wins.



An exciting race to witness

## A Week in Review

By EITAN LAVIAN

### Top Stories:

**Saudi Arabia Oil Facilities:** At around 3 a.m. on Saturday September 11, Saudi Arabia's oil facilities were attacked by around 20 drone missiles. Iran-allied Houthi rebels claimed responsibility for this attack, however, U.S. officials had intelligence that showed Iran was behind everything. The attack led to the loss of nearly 6% of global oil output which sent crude oil prices soaring. The attack not only disrupted a third of oil production but caused a temporary scare for the Aramco IPO and disrupting the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman's plan to bring economic diversification to his country. Saudi Arabia's energy minister recently noted that the country would restore more of its oil output and return to normal production levels by the end of September.

**Federal Reserve and Interest Rates:** The Federal Reserve, the main banking and fiscal agent of the United States government, cut its benchmark interest rate by a quarter percentage point — ranging between 1.75% and 2%. This marked the second time in two months that there was a cut to cushion the economy against a global slowdown in response to the US-China trade war. Bank officials were left split over the decision, however, chairman Jerome Powell, stated that he was open to additional interest rate cuts. Rates are usually lowered to stimulate economic growth — lower financing cost encourages borrowing and investing. In the case of too much growth, the Fed can raise interest rates in order to slow inflation and return growth to normal levels.

**GM Employees Go on Strike:** The United Auto Workers called for nearly 46,000 full time GM workers to walk off the job on Monday. The strike is in motion because negotiations for a four-year labor agreement hit a standstill. GM is being pressured into keeping idled plants opened, increase pay and benefits for less-senior workers and provide more job security for temporary workers. Auto industry analysts estimated that the strike could cost GM between \$50 million and \$100 million daily. Negotiations resumed on September 17, however no negotiations have been made, continuing the longest nationwide strike on GM ever since the 1970s.

**AT&T May Sell DirecTV:** After acquiring DirecTV in 2015 for \$49 billion, AT&T is now considering parting ways with the TV provider. The decision comes after Elliot Management, an investment management firm, disclosed a \$3.2 billion stake in AT&T. The firm criticized AT&T CEO Randall Stephenson's acquisition strategy and pushed for strategic changes. Elliot Management believes that as time goes on more people will continue to drop their TV connections, adding to the satellite service's struggles. Stephenson used big takeovers to add properties such as HBO, Warner Bros and DirecTV to compete against companies like Netflix and Comcast, however, these deals left the company with more than \$160 billion in net debt. Now, if they are looking to listen, AT&T can either choose to spin off DirecTV, making it a separate public company, or have it merge with Dish Network, a satellite TV rival.

## An Interview With Dean Wasserman

By ELI FRISHMAN and  
EITAN LAVIAN

Appointed as Dean of the Sy Syms School of Business in May 2019, Dr. Noam Wasserman brings an impressive academic and business background to the school accounting for over half of all male undergraduate students. On Sept. 4, the business editors of The Commentator were privileged to sit down with Dr. Wasserman.

Originally from Los Angeles, Dr. Wasserman attended YULA for high school followed by a year at Yeshivat Shaalvim in Israel. Although he had initially intended to enter college following his senior year, the high school's *Rosh Yeshiva* persuaded him otherwise. Dr. Wasserman credits his year in Yeshiva for instilling within him an appreciation for doing things correctly rather than quickly.

An early tech enthusiast, Dr. Wasserman recounts that when he would get bored in high school class he would "be daydreaming about programming." His interest in technology took him to the University of Pennsylvania to study engineering. Penn's strong philosophy of dual degrees encouraged Dr. Wasserman to pursue an area of study to complement engineering, and he graduated with degrees from both the engineering and business schools there.

Upon graduating, Dr. Wasserman began working for American Management Systems, a firm that re-engineered business processes and then implemented the systems needed to fix them. Dr. Wasserman then went on to found the Groupware Practice, one of the earliest online collaboration services businesses.

After growing the Groupware Practice to 19 employees in three years, Dr. Wasserman decided to return to school and enter the MBA program at Harvard University while working in venture capital during the summers. Although Dr. Wasserman originally planned to either continue to work in venture capital or to found again, his "professors were *mashpia* on [him] to consider academia as a full-time career" — pursuing a Ph.D. in an area of business that academics hadn't tackled rigorously yet: startups.

According to Dr. Wasserman, "Since academics had not experienced startups firsthand, they did not even know what questions were fundamental to ask. They assumed that startups were just smaller versions of Fortune 500 companies. Also, since startups are private companies, there was no data, so even if they did know what questions to ask they couldn't go and answer them." Dr. Wasserman credits his experiences with founding and in venture capital for enabling him to "see that there were recurring decisions startups were facing that had real implications for whether a team is going to blow up, whether growth is going to happen, and even whether a founder is going to get fired as CEO." Dr. Wasserman decided to make startups his domain "and change

the trajectory of their growth and success."

For the next twenty years, Dr. Wasserman researched startups and collected data on 20,000 founders, becoming a professor at Harvard Business School and founding his own course titled the Founder's Dilemmas — and publishing a best-selling book by the same name. An opportunity in his hometown at the University of Southern California opened where Dr. Wasserman was able to found a center around his research. His decision to return to LA was largely influenced by his ability to perform daily acts of *kibbud av vi eim*, relishing the opportunities to have dinner with his parents and accompanying his father to *minyán* every day.

Although Dr. Wasserman was able to raise over \$8 million for the center and grow it to a dozen people in its first year, it was the "prospect of having a dean-level impact on the most important Jewish University in the country" that brought him to YU.

Dr. Wasserman's initial experiences at YU have been incredibly productive. Dr. Wasserman has hosted roundtables and "meet the dean" chats at both campuses, taught two teaching workshops to the Sy Syms faculty, created bootcamps with business leaders and *Roshei Yeshiva* from RIETS, and has made plans to add new graduate programs and continuing education bootcamps. He's enjoyed shiurim by various Judaic Studies faculty members, and learns Daf Yomi each day.

Additionally, Dr. Wasserman has taken steps to bolster the Syms Honors program, which unlike the YC and Stern Honors programs, has not been endowed. Together with a number of honors students, Dr. Wasserman created a three-page wishlist and secured funding

commitments from two multi-year donors. With the funding secured, Dr. Wasserman hopes to increase the number of honors classes by at least 40 percent next semester and have various offsite activities, the first of which will be Sept. 24 hosted at WeWork Corporate Headquarters.

Impressed with the faculty, staff, and students at YU, Dr. Wasserman is however dismayed about hearing instances of academic-integrity violations committed by a handful of students. According to him, on a practical level such cases create perceptions that cause "problems for YU students getting jobs or accepted into graduate school" and on a philosophical level "imperiling all of *Klal Yisroel* by causing an absolute *Chillul Hashem*." Dr. Wasserman considers punishments such as failing a class as a result of an academic violation to be both a critical part of that student's educational experience and to be a far lighter punishment compared to having these issues confront them in their business careers, where the consequences will be far more drastic.

A strong proponent of students pursuing dual degrees, Dr. Wasserman encourages students to take the necessary time and acquire skills that could increase their overall value to companies. According to Dr. Wasserman, "If it takes students an extra year to do things right, building the foundation for a meaningful career that will last for decades, that is an investment that students should be willing to make. I saw the power of that personally, having spent 5 years in college after gaining the insight from Yeshiva about building a great foundation rather than rushing through that stage of life."



Dr. Wasserman brings bold initiatives to Sy Syms.

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