

# THE COMMENTATOR

The Independent Student Newspaper of Yeshiva University

VOL. LXXXVI

TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2021

ISSUE NO. 9

## Macs Rise to Historic No. 4 In D3hoops Ranking and Extend Win Streak to 35



By YOSEF LEMEL

*This article was originally published online on March 3.*

The Yeshiva University Maccabees men's basketball team rose to the No. 4 spot in the new D3hoops.com weekly national ranking for NCAA DIII teams, which was released on Monday, March 3. This marks the first time in program history that the Macs have achieved a ranking in the top five.

The Macs won all six games of the 2021 season thus far, and extended their current win streak to 35 games, the longest active win streak in NCAA DIII basketball and the longest win streak in team history. The last loss for the Macs was a Nov. 9, 2019 matchup against Occidental College, the first game of the 2019-2020 season.

Normally ranking the top 25 teams in the NCAA DIII, D3hoops.com limited the 2020-2021 season's list to the top 15 teams due to "the smaller number of teams playing during the COVID-19 pandemic" than the average season. This season's D3hoops.com weekly poll is voted upon by an 18-person panel of "coaches, Sports Information Directors and media members from across the country" and determines the ultimate D3hoops rankings.

Joe Bednarsh, YU's director of athletics, attributed much of the team's success to the culture developed by Macs Head Coach Elliot Steinmetz over the years. "His players are unselfish and shy from personal accolades and accomplishments in favor of team success," he said. Bednarsh described the team as "a family" who "care for each other both on and off the court." He also noted the players' "extraordinarily hard" work in their practices, strength and conditioning training and scouting reports in addition to "excellent recruiting."

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The Macs have continued their win streak into 2021.

YESHIVA ATHLETICS

## YU Student Employees Begin Receiving COVID-19 Vaccine as NYS Eligibility Widens

By ARIEL KAHAN

Yeshiva University student workers — such as resident advisors (RAs), writing center tutors and dining staff — began receiving COVID-19 vaccines over the last few months.

The vaccination process involves receiving two shots three weeks apart from one another. According to a Feb. 11 email from Vice Provost for Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel, two weeks after their second shot, students with both doses of the vaccine are exempted from quarantine, even if they were directly exposed to someone with COVID-19, assuming they do not experience symptoms. However, students who are exposed to someone with COVID-19 more than 90 days after their second shot need to quarantine. Students are still required to follow standard protocol, including wearing masks, social distancing and providing negative PCR tests before returning to campus after extended breaks. They also must participate in the YU COVID-19 Monitoring Program, which requires students on campus to test twice a week.

"YU does not advise students or staff about eligibility," Nissel told The Commentator. He noted that "it is up to each individual to determine their own eligibility and if

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Student workers began receiving COVID-19 over the last few months.

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# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

## One Year Later — Reflections on the COVID-19 Pandemic

By YOSEF LEMEL

On the last Shabbos of February 2020, a friend of mine tried to convince me that, fairly soon, people would be isolated in the dark recesses of their homes, hundreds of thousands, if not millions of lives would be lost and that basic functions of society would break down due to a foreign disease known as COVID-19. I didn't believe him at the time — this particular friend, in fairness, is prone to exaggeration — but, at this point, just over a year later, I think it's probably best for me to admit I was wrong.

From September to February of last year, Yeshiva University faced many challenges including a sexual abuse case, broken elevators, a failed dining experiment and controversy over the idea of an LGBTQ club. However, little did anyone realize that the worst was yet to come.

Yeshiva University's "world of tomorrow" changed on March 3, 2020, at 2:27 p.m., perhaps forever. At the time,

Sy Syms School of Business for Men and 45% of Stern College for Women students thought similarly. In only two years, this university's student body became precipitously more skeptical about society's path. It must be noted that the second survey was taken after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, though before the tumultuous aftermath of the 2020 presidential election.

Governmental failures — both local and federal — were probably contributing factors to the rampant skepticism displayed by students. However, I believe that the effects of decreased social interaction were more damaging to the human condition than any other factor during the past year.

Humans are social creatures that thrive in groups. For an extended period of time, these social creatures were cooped up in their homes with no one but a small group of people to talk to. It is easy to see the creation of artificial social bubbles as a direct result of the pandemic and the resultant restrictions.

Zoom interactions have functioned as

display of genuine humanity awoke in me a nostalgia for the pre-COVID-19 era. Likewise, when in December of this year, The Commentator printed its first physical issue since February, it personally felt like a shift to normalcy.

The emergence of a vaccine has brought with it renewed hope for humanity. Many states have lifted restrictions to pre-pandemic levels in response to falling rates of infection. Importantly, the economy appears to be in recovery mode. Hopefully, at this rate, as I wrote in my last editorial, I am optimistic that the university will be able to hold an in-person commencement ceremony this semester. The university administration has since sent out a form to graduating seniors asking for their input on graduation; I hope they take our ideas into account.

An editorial I wrote in the fall presented the return to campus as a bleak experience. It was. Many, if not most, of the problems in that editorial are still ones that Yeshiva must deal with. I still believe, for example, that there is

*Society and human interaction must not be allowed to fully shut down again. Otherwise, I fear, this stifling of empathy will destroy the human within us.*

no one knew how much society would be altered, but there was an ominous air in the atmosphere. After hearing that SAR — a local Jewish high school — shut down that morning, students learned, from the infamous university communication sent at 2:27 p.m., that the second patient with of COVID-19 in New York had a son at Yeshiva.

I recall that day being filled with much wonder, with some students even going as far as suggesting that the university would close up shop. After it was confirmed that a student had COVID-19, reporters flocked to Yeshiva aiming to be the first ones to get the story. I remember the excitement of the day. We, a small Jewish university, seemed to be at the epicenter of an incident that would alter the course of human events.

Indeed, it has been a year of suffering and crisis; I have often heard COVID-19 being referred to as "a protracted 9/11 for this generation." In hindsight — and I genuinely hope that term can now be accurately used — of the crisis, we must take a sobering look at the health emergency and its effects. The reflections may be obvious and self-evident, but sometimes — especially in times of skepticism and adversity — self-evident truths must be presented.

Unfortunately, there has been a loss of trust in basic institutions. A survey conducted in October of the Yeshiva student body found that 62% of respondents believed the country is heading in the wrong direction, even while — at the time — there was a president in the Oval Office favored by most students. Only two years earlier, when the same question was asked, only 41% of Yeshiva College students, 24% of students in the

poor replacements for the genuineness of proper in-person socialization. I have regularly noticed more people shouting and talking over others on Zoom compared with in-person formats. It is sometimes easier to see the person on the other end of the conversation as a bunch of pixels than as a true human being.

When there is in-person human interaction, it is generally done with the accompaniment of masks covering the face, which — along with the health benefits — obviously has the effect of limiting human expression. A squint of the eyes must now be interpreted as a smile in lieu of an actual bright smile in its full glory. This might all seem minor, but it would not be surprising if there was a causal relationship between society's newfound skepticism and the limitations on socialization.

The above statements should not, of course, be interpreted as a condonation of flouting the existing rules; on the contrary, The Commentator's editorial board warned against such actions in October and we stand by our statements. However, the rulemakers — both in the university and the government — must be cognizant of the human element when formulating the rules. Society and human interaction must not be allowed to fully shut down again. Otherwise, I fear, this stifling of empathy will destroy the human within us.

Last Thursday night, I heard a throng of students singing in a *kumzitz* out of my dorm room window. While the noise kept me up late at night and my *litvish* predilections are naturally opposed to the practice of a *kumzitz*, the

a necessity for the Office of Student Life (OSL) to be more *responsive* to the needs and wants of students, both virtually and in-person. This should begin with proper *communication* between the OSL and the student body. Unfortunately, OSL is severely understaffed — a majority of its staff left in the past year. I hope the university will be able to ameliorate some of the problems associated with that office. While not the primary focus of this editorial, I mention it in the hope that it will be addressed before a crisis point is reached that would extend beyond the COVID-19 era.

To end this editorial on a more optimistic note, student life is generally better than it was in the fall semester, as there are more students residing on campus or in apartments in the Heights. Unfortunately, there have barely been any noticeable structural changes in the university's attitude towards student life as suggested in my previous editorials, and classes are still mostly held virtually. However, with more students comes social interaction and, with that, comes the retainment of humanity.

I hope the pandemic experience will cause students to reflect on the value of shared humanity. Two ideas that I've recently heard proposed to this end are holding a *chessed* day or hosting a *seudas hoda'ah*. Perhaps an implementation of both ideas would start a process that would emphasize a love for humanity's value and a recognition of what we have to be thankful for, including being privileged to attend the unique institution of Yeshiva with our lives, souls and bodies intact.

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*The Commentator is the student newspaper of Yeshiva University.*

*For 86 years, The Commentator has served students and administrators as a communicative conduit; a kinetic vehicle disseminating undergraduate social, religious and academic beliefs across the student bodies; and a reliable reflection of Yeshiva student life to the broader Jewish and American communities.*

*The Commentator staff claims students spanning the diverse spectrum of backgrounds and beliefs represented at Yeshiva.*

*We are united by our passion for living the ideals of Torah Umadda, and a commitment to journalistic excellence.*

Visit us online at  
[www.yucommentator.org](http://www.yucommentator.org).





**1 Did You Miss Me?**  
Yes, I was on a break. Didn't want to overshadow the rest of The Coronatator.



**2 The MACS are BACK and Better Than Ever!**  
35, NCAA, DIIL, #4, 81.3, .495. That's way too many letters and numbers for a non-athlete to fully compute, but if everyone else is excited, then I guess I can be too.



**3 Officially an "Unofficial StuCo Member"**  
Only took me three years to get that title and I'll wear it (and my Chanukah sweater) proudly. @BLerman



**4 Thinking About the YU Simcha Program?**  
RIETS is getting into the Adar spirit, albeit a drop too late.



**5 What Would You Do with \$5000?**  
From the creators of "Sunday's with Susan," the revamped Shevet Glaubach Career Center is ready to find you a job ... as long as you're a Syms student, a bio or compsci major AND not planning to graduate for another two years.



**6 Zoom Hack #73**  
Lift your hands to shield "a yawn" or elbow to "sneeze" into and then you can talk to your roommate during class to your heart's content.



**7 It's the Final Countdown**  
Three weeks to Pesach and six weeks until Hotel Quarantine: The Sequel.

7UP  
by Zahava Fertig  
NMODL



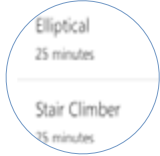
**Midterms 1**  
The time has come to reach out to the only kid in your class who took notes.



**Caf Food Inflation 2**  
\$5 corn on the cob, \$16 chicken, 50 cents for a honey packet. What's next, \$2 water bottles? Oh, wait.



**Adulting 3**  
Heart's beating, pupils widen, legs bouncing. Mouth is dry, forehead's perspiring. Pressing send on that email, *toiveling* those dishes, signing that lease, building that dresser or making that phone call; it's just too much.



**Gym Hours 4**  
When booking a workout is more confusing than the Shuttle app.



**OSL 5**  
We've really committed to this bit.



**Covid Birthdays 6**  
The only thing worse than celebrating your birthday during Covid is celebrating Covid's first birthday.



**78 Days Until Commencement 7**  
Whatever that's going to look like...

# Office of Alumni Affairs Launches First-Ever Young Alumni Council

By JARED SCHARF

The Office of Alumni Affairs established the first-ever “Young Alumni Council” in December 2020. The council is composed of YU graduates from the past seven years and is focused on creating opportunities for recent alumni to remain involved with the YU community.

According to Director of Alumni Engagement Aliza Abrams Konig, the council was created because of a noticed trend of YU alumni only staying involved in YU affairs for the seven years after their graduation. There are currently 15 alumni on the council, according to Konig. The council is also divided into six subdivisions, focusing on areas such as social events, transitioning from college life to professional life, professional networking, fundraising, career placement and Israeli alumni programming. Alumni can join the council by being recommended by current members of the council or reaching out to the council.

“Alumni join the council to be involved in shaping the college student experience,” Konig told The Commentator. “We are happy to have more people get involved in the council, they’re welcomed to reach out to me.”

The council will provide alumni engagement and outreach efforts through events, projects, fundraisers and networking opportunities; these programs will be catered towards alumni who have graduated within seven years. Programming will also include educational components, such as seminars discussing transitioning from undergraduate to professional life, budgeting and finance decisions and “skill sets and tools” students are “not necessarily taught in school, but

need,” Konig said.

No events have taken place yet, but the council is currently planning marketing strategies and intends to run its first program by June. The council intends to run programs outside of the New York area as well.

*“I am honored to have this opportunity and I know that this council will do big things for YU.”*

Chayim Mahgerefteh (SSSB ‘20)

Council members expressed excitement about working with YU on this new endeavor. “I am excited to help connect fellow alumni with each other and with Yeshiva University by creating professional networking events,

and I also look forward to supporting current students who want insight in getting into the business world,” said Chayim Mahgerefteh (SSSB ‘20), a current member and last year’s Sy Syms School of Business student council president. “I am honored to have this op-

portunity and I know that this council will do big things for YU,” he said.

Before the announcement of the Young Alumni Council, the Office of Alumni Affairs provided various opportunities for alumni,

including YU ALUminate, a networking and job-searching platform for alumni, professional networking groups based on career, and various alumni committees based on geographic location, among other programs.

Konig said, “If people feel there is a better way for alumni to be connected and be supported, that’s what this alumni council is here for and they should share their ideas. This is a really exciting time and the current council members are really talented and dedicated members who are willing to do great things for the university based on the positive experience they had in YU.”

Abigail Grigoryan contributed to this story.



The council is composed of YU graduates from the past seven years.

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

## MACS WIN STREAK

Continued from Front Page

Likewise, Steinmetz ascribed the success to the culture built by the players. “The instilling of confidence and pride in playing Yeshiva basketball has led to our guys always believing they can be successful,” he expressed. Steinmetz stated that the three primary goals of the team, no matter the type of season, are to “get better every day, try to win every day and represent Yeshiva University and the larger Jewish community with class.”

There have been a few points in the season during which the sustainability of the Macs’ win streak seemed to be in danger. In a recent game against the University of Saint Joseph Blue Jays on March 1, the Macs were down by eight at halftime only to pull ahead and defeat the Blue Jays by a score of 71-62.

Macs Captain Gabe Leifer (SSSB ‘21) believes that credit for the team’s success can be extended beyond the current members of

the team. “It’s an amazing accomplishment, but people should recognize it’s not just the guys on the court they see that won 35 games in a row,” he told The Commentator.

“It starts from the guys last year, to the managers, to the coaches, to the people at the end of the bench clapping and getting water for the guys playing. Without each individual effort from each person, we would be nowhere near where we are now and people should remember it’s a team game not just a few players, so credit to everyone who’s part of the program,” he added.

The team is currently shooting an average of 81.3 points per game with a .495 field goal percentage while keeping their opponents at an average of 67.2 points per game and a .437 field goal percentage. The Macs currently have a high three-point field goal percentage at .407.

Ryan Turell (SSSB ‘22) is currently

leading the Macs in average points per game with 26.2 while boasting a field goal percentage of .514; he was named the Metropolitan Basketball Writers Association Divisions II-III Player of the Week on Feb. 16. Leifer leads the team in rebounds and assists with 70 and 41, respectively; this year, Leifer gained the distinction of being the fourth men’s basketball player to be placed on the D3hoops.com Team of the Week in four separate seasons. Notably, Matan Zucker (YC ‘23) has 17 offensive rebounds in the season thus far and Eitan Halpert (SSSB ‘21) has the most three pointers on the team, boasting 18.

Bednarsh stated that he is “looking forward to celebrating a national championship with the team and the larger worldwide Jewish community.” According to Bednarsh “Yeshiva now has a presence on the national stage” which helps with “recruiting, retention, alumni relations, fundraising, PR, etc.”

Bednarsh also expressed that he looks forward to “the rising tide lifting all boats and using the success of the men’s basketball team to recruit and strengthen the other 14 teams as well.”

The Macs will next face off against the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, NJ, on Monday, March 8 at 7:30 p.m., after which they will play a double-header against Manhattanville College on March 14 and 15 to cap off the regular season.

The NCAA previously announced that the annual winter DIII Tournament will not be held in 2021 due to low prospective participation in the tournament by member schools. Last year’s NCAA DIII Tournament was also canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic; the Macs’ historic 2019-20 season, and their entrance into the Sweet 16, was upset by the abrupt tournament cancellation.

## STUDENT WORKER VACCINES

Continued from Front Page

eligible, to sign up for the vaccine.”

As of publication, YU’s Human Resources Department did not respond to The Commentator’s request for an official count of student workers.

Although YU did not inform students about eligibility, some student workers learned about it on their own and scheduled their own appointments. Adam Auerbach (YC ‘22), a tutor at the Wilf Campus Writing Center, learned of his eligibility through a friend. He said, “I found out I was eligible from one of my friends who had called and spoke to the Department of Health on Feb. 3, and then I was able to schedule an

appointment for the next day, Feb. 4.”

Student workers believe getting the vaccine is important and allows them to serve in their campus roles more safely and effectively. Auerbach added, “I’m very grateful I was able to get the vaccine. It has given me some peace of mind in terms of getting COVID-19 myself, but more importantly, it has allowed me to interact with my friends and family without having to worry as much about giving them COVID-19.”

Adina Passy (SCW ‘21), an RA on the Beren Campus, believes that vaccinating student workers is an important priority, as student workers do jobs with high exposure.

“To be able to create the ideal community, we are subject to a lot of exposure, such as creating floor parties and just generally interacting with a lot of people,” she said. “That’s why I am really happy that RAs can get the vaccine.”

This news comes as YU has seen a steady decline in COVID-19 cases over the spring semester. Nine positive cases have been detected at YU since Feb. 27, according to New York State’s COVID-19 Tracker, a program that monitors COVID-19 in higher education. From Feb. 13 through Feb. 26, 18 cases were recorded, and in the two weeks prior, cases reached a record high of 28.

The expansion in eligibility reflects a larger national trend of progress with the mass-vaccination campaign. As of March 2, 15% of New Yorkers received at least one dose of the vaccine. The U.S. is currently administering 2 million shots a day, surpassing the 1.5 million goal of the Biden administration. With the approval of a third vaccine, the U.S. is on pace to have enough doses available for every adult by the end of May.



## YU Releases COVID-Safe Purim Programming for Beren and Wilf Students

By YONATAN KURZ

This article was originally published online on February 25.

Purim programming for the Wilf and Beren campuses, following COVID-19 safety protocol, will begin on Thursday, Feb. 25, the night of Purim. Yeshiva University issued a statement to Wilf students from the administration of the Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) and the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), as well as one from administrators of the Beren Campus for Beren students, regarding safety precautions for the holiday.

The Wilf letter — which was sent to undergraduate students by Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky on Feb. 18 and signed by three *roshei kollel*, two *menahalei yeshiva* of RIETS, Vice Provost for Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel and President Ari Berman — began with a commemoration of the one-year remembrance of the first case of COVID-19 on the Wilf Campus and its subsequent closing. It then declared in bold and underlined font, “We strongly encourage all talmidim to stay in Yeshiva for Purim,” in an attempt to halt any further spread of the virus. It went on to detail the guidelines that students who will be leaving campus for Purim should follow.

The Beren administration sent out a similar email discussing precautions as an accompaniment to the release of the Purim schedule; the Beren letter was signed by Nissel, Associate Dean of Torah Studies and Spiritual Life Shoshana Schechter and Assistant Dean of Students Dr. Sara Asher.

Both letters mentioned preventative measures to be obeyed, such as mask-wearing, social distancing and not attending “any Purim *mesibah* or Purim party of any type,” discouraging any option besides for eating with immediate family or apartment roommates. The letters stated that failure to adhere to such guidelines would result in an insistence from the administration to not return to campus for a full week.

Wilf students will have a dinner sponsored by the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) on Purim night, held after *Megillah*

reading to break the Ta’anis Esther fast. The dinner will be followed by “Rebbe and Talmidim Purim Torah Time,” refreshments, *divrei Torah* (words of Torah), a ping pong tournament and a Q&A session from Rabbi Herschel Schachter. This will be Rabbi Schachter’s first in-person address at a YU event since the pandemic began in March 2020.

The Wilf Campus’s Purim Day schedule includes the “Kimu V’Kiblu Kollel,” where students will have an early *shacharit* and *Megillah* reading, followed by breakfast and learning in the Harry Fischel Beit Midrash, located in Zysman Hall. After the two hours of learning, there is a “Special Hot Purim Seudah,” with free *seforim* — including works by *roshei yeshiva* Rabbis Hershel Schachter, Elchanan Adler and Daniel Stein

— and raffles offered to all participants.


“Over 100 students have already signed up for the Kimu V’Kiblu Kollel, showing their interest in our plan to engage in serious Talmud Torah for this year’s Purim,” said Dean for Men’s UTS Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky.

On the Beren Campus, scheduled events also begin Thursday night with food provided by Carlos and Gabby’s for breaking the fast, sponsored by the Torah Activities Council (TAC). For the remainder of the night, Beren students will be “celebrating with music, crafts and activities together with friends, Mrs. Penina Bernstein and Dean Shoshana Schechter,” according to an email sent by the Beren administration. There is also a planned “V’Nahafochu” theme with “costumes preferred” in the style of dress from the year 2012. The schedule for

Friday morning includes *Megillah* Reading followed by a *seudah*.

It was also announced that all shiurim would take place over Zoom on the Sunday following Purim, and all students would be required to take a COVID-19 test in Furst Hall the next day.

Some students were satisfied with the protocols and scheduling implemented by the university. “I think that YU has so far done a great job in taking precautions and making me feel safe COVID-wise,” expressed Elisheva Adouth (SCW ‘23). “In terms of Purim, I know they have done well preparing and I have confidence that they know what they are doing at this point. Multiple emails from the administration against going to larger gatherings was an amazing choice and I hope that people follow it!”



**PURIM 5781**  
*in Yeshiva!*

**PURIM NIGHT**

Delicious Break-the-Fast Dinner Sponsored by SOY (following Megilla Reading)

9:15–10:15 p.m. Rebbe & Talmidim Purim Torah Time In your Shiur Room

10:15–10:30 p.m. Late-night Refreshments

10:30–11:45 p.m. Rav Schachter Returns! Divrei Torah and Q&A

**PURIM DAY**  
KIMU V’KIBLU KOLLEL 5781


Scan to Sign Up

Vasikin Shacharis and Megilla Followed by breakfast

8:30–10:30 a.m. Seder Limud

10:30 a.m. Special Hot Purim Seuda by RSVP only!

**Free Seforim and Raffles for all who participate!**  
Additional Seuda option available for those not participating in Kimu V’Kiblu Kollel – Details TBA.



**BEREN CAMPUS**  
**PURIM 2021**

Sign-up required for all Purim programming

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25**

Megillah Reading 6:30pm

Break Fast Served in Megillah Locations After Megillah Sponsored by TAC

It's 2012 Again! with Student Council 9:00pm

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26**

Megillah Reading Starting 8:00am thru 9:15am

Seudah 11:00am

Purim programming for Wilf and Beren campuses

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**HARAV SHALOM PINCHAS**  
**WOHLGELERNTER ZT"l**

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Rabbi Wohlgelemler at podium  
Bikur Cholim Synagogue, 1938 (top)  
Rabbi Wohlgelemler with HaRav Herzog  
as delegate for Vaad Hatzalah, 1946



# Hundreds Tune Into Virtual Stomp Out the Stigma as YU Students Speak About Struggling with Mental Health

By **RAPHI SINGER**

*This article was originally published online on February 21.*

YU Active Minds held its annual Stomp Out The Stigma event over Zoom on Wednesday, Feb. 17, in which four current students publicly spoke about their struggles with mental health. The event, which attracted over 320 students, alumni, faculty and administrators, among others, sought to destigmatize mental illness within the Jewish community.

The program began with words from President Ari Berman, who spoke about the importance of hosting events like Stomp Out the Stigma. “It’s only as a community that we can validate and strengthen each other, and grow together,” Berman said.

Following Berman’s speech, four student-speakers — Hannah Adler (SCW ‘23), Max Engel (YC ‘21), Zippy Spanjer (SCW ‘21) and Elisheva Zahtz (SCW ‘21) — were introduced and subsequently spoke about their individual struggles with mental illness. The event concluded with representatives from Active Minds at YU thanking participants for their time and encouraging the community to continue talking about mental illness.

Adler spoke about her cerebral palsy and how it affected her relationship with mental health throughout childhood, high school and college. She specifically grappled with her own self-image and the isolation, anxiety and depression that came with it. “I was, and still am to a certain extent, so afraid of being vulnerable and authentic in social situations that I never let myself explore relationships

with people I now wish could be in my life,” she told attendees.

In concluding her portion, Adler reflected on where she is today. “I’m now mature enough to see that I have the power to go beyond those moments of self-doubt and that I’m only a victim to myself if I let the old me dictate the type of life I’m going to live,” she said. “I’ve found that the new and authentic version of Hannah is one that I can be truly proud of.”

I didn’t know why,” Spanjer said. As she got older, Spanjer struggled with depression, anxiety and passive suicidal ideation. After making some progress, Spanjer experienced panic attacks and more ups and downs, leading her to be put on suicide watch in Fall 2019. Then, she started to get better. “I finally felt like I had some solid ground under my feet, and now we’re up to now,” Spanjer reflected to the audience.

Spanjer explained that while she’s made

*“You are not alone. None of us are.”*

—  
Zippy Spanjer (SCW ‘21)

Engel was the second speaker, and he shared his struggles with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). He talked about the different types of OCD he dealt with, such as intrusive-thought OCD in his *tefillah* (prayer) and religious living, as well as relationship OCD with his high school girlfriend.

Through working with his medication and finding the right therapist, Engel was able to better control his OCD from interfering with his life. “Today, I struggle with some of the symptoms I started with, but I’m able to deal with them much better and function normally,” shared Engel, discussing the progress he made in his journey with mental health. “That doesn’t mean that I don’t have bad days ... OCD, as well as most mental disorders, are constant works in progress.”

Next, attendees heard from Spanjer, who began by reciting a poem she wrote when she was suicidal in 2019. She told the audience that her genetic ADHD led her to suffer from a young age. “I was in pain all the time, and

progress, she still has “good days and bad days,” and she emphasized the importance of seeking help. “I’m here to tell you my story, not because I want you to feel sorry for me or to be impressed by what I’ve overcome,” she said to attendees. “You are not alone. None of us are.”

The final speaker was Zahtz, a senior who opened up about her general anxiety disorder and depression from a young age, as well as her complex post-traumatic stress disorder after being sexually assaulted during her gap year in Israel. Throughout her talk, Zahtz emphasized that she constantly felt at fault for things that happened in her life, especially after her assault. “Sexual assault was never something I would have expected to happen to me,” she told the audience over Zoom. “I thought it was my fault for not telling him ‘no’ more clearly, for somehow inviting him to act in the way he did because maybe I had agreed and I didn’t even realize it.” She added, “I didn’t think it was assault

because I thought it was my fault, and that’s how it works, right?”

Zahtz stressed the importance of talking about sexual assault in the Orthodox community, which she said happens more often than people realize. Her speech continued by recounting her continued struggle with depression and anxiety before finally finding the right therapist. “I learned to channel my anxiety and my anger and my depression into something productive, to seek out help and to learn when my mental health was trying to get my attention.” Zahtz ended with words of encouragement for the audience, “You are loved and valued, and we are here for you.”

Active Minds aims to destigmatize mental illness in the YU community, and through events like Stomp Out the Stigma, they have gathered hundreds of students and faculty every year to promote conversations within the Jewish community. Past speakers have included students who spoke about depression, and even abuse, with one Stern student opening up about entering an abusive marriage and her subsequent journey afterward. While it began in its early years with a few students meeting in classrooms in Furst Hall, Stomp out the Stigma has grown to become a widely popular event held every year.

After the program, Aaron Purow, head of Active Minds at YU, told The Commentator, “At the event, individuals get up and share a glimpse of their mental health experiences, allowing for people within the YU and greater Jewish community to recognize that mental health imperfections are a normal part of life and are meant to be treated with compassion and love.”





# The Avatar Has Returned... to the Wilf Campus

By AKIVA LEVY

Historians debate the most important event in recent decades. The end of the Cold War? The invention of the computer? The mass production of cars? It's a contentious discussion. According to a new group of YU students, however, everything changed when the fire nation attacked.

Launched just a few months ago in fall 2020, the Avatar: The Last Airbender Club has become one of the most noteworthy

*What's awesome is seeing almost every guy get involved in some way.*

groups on campus. The brainchild of Aharon Zazulia (SSSB '21), Ben Spanjer (YC '22) and Itai Savin (YC '22), the club honors the popular Nickelodeon cartoon — affectionately known as “ATLA” — that ran from 2005 through 2008. “This club was a long time in the making,” said Zazulia. “I applied for it a few years ago but it didn't come into fruition until last fall.” As many students rush from class to class, the ATLA club takes a moment to appreciate the child within us all.

Avatar: The Last Airbender introduced viewers to the adventures of Aang, Katara and Sokka, a powerful trio of children that live in a world where people have “bending” powers and can control the elements of water, earth, fire and air. The series tracked Aang's quest to master all four elements

and save the world. Along the way, they meet characters like the heroic and comedic Toph and legendary antihero Zuko. All three seasons, along with the sequel show, The Legend of Korra, were added to Netflix in May of last year. This newfound ease of access to a treasured childhood classic surely influenced the creation of the YU club.

The ATLA club is devoted to remembering and appreciating the greatness of this show. The men-only club's most active space is its Whatsapp chat. Comprised of 42 YU students, the group thread features Avatar memes and active discussions and debates on an almost daily basis. “What's awesome is seeing almost every guy get involved in some way, whether that be a meme, a comment on a particular episode they might be watching, or starting a conversation about something that happened in the show,” Spanjer told The Commentator. Indeed, the messages vary from a trip down memory lane where students will reminisce about a favorite scene, to someone pointing out a hidden easter egg, to complex discourse about how the central four elements are featured in Jewish thought.

It's one of the club's aspects Zazulia feels the most proud of. “Where else would you be able to have a Rosh Hashana *d'var Torah* about Avatar: The Last Airbender, or a conversation that included the characters Aang or Zuko [along with] words like *'hava amina,' 'chap,'* and *'keshet.'* I love it!”

Last semester, the club hosted an in-person watch party and trivia contest in Belfer Hall. “We watched the first two episodes of the show to kick things off, and then played

an incredible Kahoot game made by our very own Ben,” described Zazulia. Attendees left the event with a goodie bag: inspired by the character Iroh's love of tea, a variety of tea bag flavors were distributed. The night allowed club members to gather together in celebration of their passion.

What is it about this “children's program” that still speaks to college students in their 20s? Well, the series is ranked as the 11th best TV show of all time on IMDb and won multiple Emmys, but there must

be something more. Zazulia aptly described the joy of the club, saying the ATLA group is “able to couch important and serious ideas like love, friendship, loss, revenge, growth and more in a ‘kids' show.” It's true. Viewers can vouch that there is beauty in the messages expressed in each episode. The world of four elements constructs a model where many types of people can relate and grow. The way it speaks to the child within us all is almost cathartic.



NICKELODEON

ATLA might be the hottest new club on campus.

## Department Spotlight: Strategy and Entrepreneurship

By ALIZA LEICHTER

*This article was originally published online on March 2.*

The department formerly known as “business management” currently awaits approval from New York State to have the name changed to “strategy and entrepreneurship,” according to Professor Sharon Poczter, who was hired in Fall 2017 to chair the department at Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB). Poczter formerly lectured in the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University; her research has been published in Bloomberg, Fox News, The Wall Street Journal and in

the book “Lean In” by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg.

Under Poczter's leadership, the strategy and entrepreneurship department has been completely revamped with the hiring of new professors and removal of several courses, including “Managing Business in a Global Environment,” which Poczter claims was too broad and vestigial for students. Poczter maintains that it was necessary to shift the focus of the major because baseline courses focusing on management are not applicable to understanding competitiveness, a necessary skill for identifying the weaknesses of a business's strategy. These changes reflect an awareness that undergraduate students are rarely hired as managers upon their entrance to the workplace.

Within the total overhaul of the major, a

*“In the past few years, under Professor Poczter, the Strategy and Entrepreneurship Department has created an extraordinary breadth of course choices, allowing students to build strong Entrepreneurship skills.”*

Professor Mark Finkel

foundational course titled, “Principles of Strategy,” was added. Other strategy offerings include the summer elective, “International Business Strategy,” which introduces the frameworks to implement in the context of global competition and “Turnaround Business Strategy”; the latter course addresses how to stabilize a company whose financial performance indicates failure in the near future. These courses provide answers to the fundamental questions of why some businesses are successful while others fail and how to foster company growth.

In a course called “Angel Finance and Venture Capital,” students have the opportunity to transport strategy and entrepreneurship concepts from the classroom to the professional world by working as student venture interns. This two-semester series is taught by YU alumni Moshe Bellows (YC '90, 'W'08) and Bruce Taragin (YC '89). The first semester is a general overview of Angel Finance and Venture Capital, which refers to an investment model where high-net worth individuals provide financial backing for small businesses in exchange for equity in the company. In the second-semester, students source and work for startups in Maccabee Ventures, a \$10 million early-stage technology fund.

The entrepreneurship side of the department offers the foundational course, “Principles of Entrepreneurship,” as well

as electives such as “Startup Strategy” and “Megatrends,” an exploration of artificial intelligence, blockchain and cryptocurrency. “Ideation” is an elective offered in the summer that deals with the blueprint for formulating good business ideas and contrasting them to unsuccessful ones.

“Innovation Lab,” a course focused on entrepreneurship, is another opportunity for students to gain hands-on experience. The lab opened in May 2019 after YU received a grant from New York State to provide a physical space for Israeli startups on campus. Dr. Maria Blekher, the founding director of YU Innovation Lab, recruited the participating companies and worked with Poczter to create a course in which students spend the semester working directly with companies.

According to Blekher, “YU Innovation Lab was established with a vision to create a borderless NYC-based ecosystem that bridges the gap between the U.S. market and Israeli technology via a unique model, which is a business accelerator within the academic setting.”

Commenting on how the opportunities within the Lab expand YU's scope, Blekher remarked that, “Today, the Lab amplifies the synergy between YU community talent (students, faculty, advisers, alumni, industry



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Prof. Sharon Poczter has revitalized the Strategy and Entrepreneurship Department.

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# Linda Stone: The Exit Interview

By BARUCH LERMAN AND ELAZAR ABRAHAMS

Ms. Linda Stone has worked at Yeshiva University for the last 15 years, the majority of them spent as director of student events. If you've ever attended an Office of Student Life-run activity, there's a good chance Stone had something to do with it. From Super Bowl parties to Chanukah concerts, chesed trips to movie nights, she's overseen all of it.

A self-proclaimed "proud Brooklynite," Stone spent her undergraduate years at Brooklyn College and then received a Master's in organizational leadership from Mercy College. Before landing at YU, she worked for a grant program at Mercy College and various administrative positions at private schools.

Stone stepped down from her role at the beginning of March. As for what's next, she isn't sure herself. "A lot of people have been asking me that," she says. For now, she plans to take a sabbatical of sorts: a few months off to reflect on her more than 30 years in education.

The Commentator had the chance to sit down with Stone for an exclusive exit interview.

**Hi Linda, thanks for making time to answer a few questions. You always tell us you've been at YU since "prehistoric times." And 15 years is a pretty long time. How does it feel to be leaving after so long?**

I have to say, this decision was very very hard for me and I changed my mind a couple of times. I really feel that I've been so fortunate to be part of the YU community all these years. Leaving was very tough for me. But I think for personal and professional reasons it's the right time for me to be leaving. You know I've said this to other people: I think sometimes it's easy to stay where you feel safe, where things are easy. But I think it's also important sometimes to push yourself, to challenge yourself. That's what's behind this decision. I have been really blessed to be a part of this university. Not only for great colleagues who I've gotten to know over the years, but most importantly because of the students. The students are everything. You guys are what make YU tick. You challenge me — sometimes you frustrate me — but I learn from you. Working with the students has given me so much joy over the years.

**Speaking of joy from working with the students, what's your favorite project, event, or really anything you've been a part of at YU over the years?**

Over the years I've been able to participate in some service learning projects, and those are the ones that really meant the most to me. I traveled to Thailand a couple

years ago on a YU service mission where we studied and met with people working on the human trafficking issue there. I also went to Houston where we did recovery after the hurricane there. I worked with a group that did aluminum siding as part of a Habitat for Humanity project. I also worked on Midnight Run, where we gave food and clothing to homeless people. That's really personally where my heart is, and to work with students who wanted to be a part of those kinds of efforts was the most rewarding for me.

Additionally, a little over a year ago, I was part of a group of students and other members of the YU community who joined together in a rally in support of LGBT rights. That's something I'm very very happy to see the university moving forward with in a positive way. I'm very encouraged by that, and proud of what I was able to do within the bureaucracy of the administration. And I want to thank [Vice Provost] Chaim Nissel for his efforts in addressing this very important student issue.

**Nice. Looking forward, how do you plan on spending your sabbatical? Lots of free time...**

That's a very good question. I'm probably

going to do some fun things that I never had time — or allowed myself to have the time — to do. I want to read, I want to get back to doing some hiking. Maybe I'll binge watch some crazy TV drama or whatever. I'm not really sure. Again, I've been working for over 30 years and I've never given myself a chance to just do what I want. That whole experience is going to be new for me.

Also, if I could just take a little part of this discussion — there's so many people I want to say "thank you" to. But I really want to say how much I have appreciated my partnership with Rabbi Josh Weisberg. He and I have really dealt with so many challenges and so many successes over the years. He's a great person to have as a partner in crime. Thank you Rabbi Josh for always being there.

**On the personal side, we heard you recently had a grandchild?**

Yes! I am blessed to have three grandchildren, actually. I have two boys, ages five and seven, and now a little girl named Penny who is four months old.

**You also have pets?**

I have a somewhat crazy lovable dog named Vermont. She's 85 pounds. We adopted her from an animal adoption event

when we visited Vermont a few years ago. She's grown up to be a bit of a handful but she really is a wonderful part of our family. **Okay, back to YU. There used to be two separate offices of student life. One for Beren and one for Wilf. You were part of the transition to merge them into the unified Office of Student Life we know today. What was that like?**

This goes back many many many years. There used to be much more of a distinction between the two campuses about how student activities and student affairs were run. And then in 2011, there was a little bit of a redesign and we came together under one Office of Student Life, which I really think has been a wonderful plus. We have a team at both campuses but now really think of ourselves as advocating for and helping the entire student community, not one criteria for the men and another for the women. We do things jointly and I think that's why our team has been so successful. We see the bigger picture and often collaborate on both co-ed or campus specific events. But the whole idea is that we bring together all the strengths that each of us have to offer to put together things that work for all of our students.

**What parting message do you have for students, perhaps those just beginning their time at YU? How can they make the most of these years?**

I would say that while I absolutely appreciate the pressure that our students are under to be successful academically, I think being in college is the time where you get to explore. Take classes you never thought you would take. Maybe try to engage with groups of students you didn't know before you got to YU. It's really an opportunity to stretch and to learn. You're bound to have disappointments, but through disappointments and challenges we learn about ourselves. I would encourage our students to take chances and to think as broadly as they can. Don't be hard on yourselves. Respect the journey. It's not always where you wind up, it's how you get there.

**Did you always know you wanted to go into education and a student life-type role?**

My undergraduate degree was in the social sciences. I grew up during the '70s, which was a very pivotal time for the country. I was very much influenced by things that were happening then. You know, the women's movement, the civil rights movement. That's always been sort of ingrained in me ... to stand up for those who are underrepresented.

Also, my father was a survivor of the Holocaust. I realized we need to stick



Linda Stone has left Yeshiva University after 15 years.

LINDA STONE

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## DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT

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experts) and outstanding entrepreneurs, to make a positive impact on the NY ecosystem and beyond."

Depending on the area of interest, it can be beneficial to pair strategy and entrepreneurship with an additional SSSB major. For those more interested in entrepreneurship, marketing provides an understanding of how to best promote a product or service to consumers. For students embarking on the venture capital route, a finance major provides insight into the process of acquiring funds. For students with any interest within the business umbrella, it is fundamental to understand the strategy that determines why some businesses succeed and others fail.

Tamar Segal (SSSB '21) paired her strategy and entrepreneurship major with a marketing minor, a decision that enables her to pursue various career paths. "I switched my major from biology to strategy and entrepreneurship, with a minor in marketing, after discovering that the opportunities available in Syms would allow me to combine my interest in healthcare with the field of business," Segal explained.

There are a variety of career options available to strategy and entrepreneurship majors, including management consulting and business development. Poczter explains that "Management consulting is a fruitful avenue for Strategy and Entrepreneurship

students as they are essentially 'physicians for companies,' identifying and diagnosing problems within companies as well problem-solving solutions. This is congruent with the coursework in the department which enables students to understand whether and why a company's strategy is successful or not, now and in the future."

According to Poczter, "The goal for the department is to continue to grow the course offerings to prepare students for the job market, with courses that echo the important changes in the business environment." In fact, Poczter helped institute a new course for the Spring 2021 semester, titled, "The Business of Biotech," which aims to interpret

the changes happening to companies worldwide as a result of the pandemic. The course is taught by Herman Weiss, Practitioner in Residence in the Katz School of Science and Health.

Director of the SSSB Executive MBA Program, Mark Finkel, remarked, "In the past few years, under Professor Poczter, the Strategy and Entrepreneurship Department has created an extraordinary breadth of course choices, allowing students to build strong Entrepreneurship skills. As a result, students often find previously unconsidered career paths or new dimensions to an existing career path."



# Behind Digital Dov

By ZACHARY GREENBERG AND GILAD MENASHE

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic separating people from each other physically, Dov Katz, under the guise of “Digital Dov,” has found a way to bring friends, families and communities across the world together more so than ever before. Digital Dov is a Zoom entertainer who has hosted hundreds of virtual get-togethers including four for the students of Yeshiva University, including Let’s Make a Deal in April 2020, Family Feud in September, an October game of Weakest Link and most recently, the Price is Right in December.

Katz grew up in Marine Park, Brooklyn, where he attended the Orthodox elementary school *Toras Emes* and its affiliate school, *Kamenetz*, for high school at the edge of Borough Park. At age 13, Dov discovered his passion for music and had a special interest in playing guitar. As his skills progressed, he began to perform live on many NCSY Shabbatons. Following high school, he went to Mercaz HaTorah for his year-in-Israel and then attended Yeshiva University.

At YU, Dov was a member of an engagement party band called “The Y’s Guys” that regularly performed in the Morgenstern Lounge on the Wilf Campus. His band grew incredibly popular and reached a record of doing 20 engagements in a single month! Dov’s music career really took off at the YU Purim Chagiga during his senior year. Neshama Orchestra, a popular wedding band based in New York, was performing and Dov was invited to sit in with them for the Chagigah. The next day, they invited him to join the band and perform at weddings with them.

The Commentator had the opportunity to sit down with Katz for a conversation about launching a new career path doing Zoom entertainment in the middle of a global pandemic.

**Hey Dov! Thanks so much for joining us! To start off, can you tell us a bit about your professional career**

**after YU?**

I’d love to! After college, I started off working in IT for Colgate, the toothbrush company. Eventually, I transitioned over to work full-time in music which I’ve been doing for the past 25 years. I think it’s the greatest job in the world, sharing *s’machot* with others. With my bands Krohma, OnKore and Sozo Live, I’m in the 2nd generation of *s’machot* managing the music at weddings for kids’ parents’ weddings I have played at.

It’s a hard business but to me, it’s the most gratifying career since I get to bring joy to people. I always say my career is the personification of “If you love what you do, you never have to work a day in your life.”

**What led you to start Digital Dov?**

I was scheduled to perform at The Young Israel of New Rochelle Purim party which got canceled due to COVID. The synagogue called me notifying me that many congregants were in quarantine and that the event needed to be canceled. I felt awful that they needed to be stuck at home and I was determined to do something special for them. I planned a Zoom event for them with a bunch of games to participate in.

Following the Megillah reading, I logged onto Zoom, and to my shock, there were over 500 people watching. It was unlike anything I’ve ever seen before. The event went incredibly well; we did a virtual costume contest and played trivia games. It was amazing to see that people were actually enjoying themselves remotely all from the comfort and safety of their own homes. I’ve never done anything like that before.

So officially, on March 8, 2020 Digital Dov was born. Two days following the event, I woke up to an explosion of text messages because the world was basically ending. Everything was shutting down due to COVID. That day I got a call from a school called Yavneh telling me that a 6th-grade class was in quarantine, so I did an event for them. Then I got the call from SAR who had the majority of their school in quarantine, so I did an event for them as well. Then I got the call from a random parent asking me to do something for her son and his friends. Then

someone from Memphis called me to do a bar mitzvah game night since his party got canceled. I got multiple calls from shuls to organize events for their members. The list just goes on and on, it was crazy to me how fast the word was spreading and how people across all demographics were reaching out to me to host an event.

Some events had thousands of students. I was even invited to organize a game show for a family that normally got together for “Bubby’s Yahrzeit” but needed to do something fun virtually. The family really enjoyed it because they got to celebrate Bubby’s life, have fun while doing so and most importantly, be together in a safe manner. The most astounding part about it all was to see how society, in a matter of days, was able to adjust to the circumstances and still be able to figure out how to celebrate together.

An important note to mention is that my growth was all organic. I did absolutely no advertising, word just spread like wildfire starting from that first virtual event I did for the Young Israel of New Rochelle. In the beginning, it was very frightening because I went from being booked for many music events to none at all basically overnight. But at the same token Digital Dov came about because I actually had the time for it. I never set out for this journey, but I thank God that it happened.

**Wow, that’s awesome! So, what goes into planning one of your virtual events?**

A lot of work. For every 45-minute event, there needs to be three or four hours of preparation, from knowing the honoree, preparing media and more. Sometimes I need an assistant and have to ask my family members to help. I’ve spent hundreds of hours on Wikipedia and I’ve learned so much trivia and ridiculous tidbits about the world.

**What are the biggest challenges in running Digital Dov?**

The biggest challenge is balancing a lot at once for just one of my games. A lot of technology is being monitored while simultaneously engaging people and delivering entertainment at the same time.

I want to be funny and entertain people, but at the same token not offend anyone. I learned what you could and could not say, who I could engage with and who to leave alone.

Additionally, many people have trouble with technology and I need to teach them how to navigate it. Working with people from all sorts of demographics requires a lot of patience.

You have to remember, every show is a performance. Each time my heart-rate goes up like on a run and I had to learn to pace myself.

**Question from your fanbase: How did you come up with the nickname “Digital Dov?”**

My daughter came up with it while trying to come up with a name that people will understand that I’m a virtual entertainer. For some odd reason, when I tell people my stage name they hear “Bill” instead of “Dov”

**Any funny stories from your experience as Digital Dov?**

I did a surprise 70th birthday party and when the birthday girl came up on the screen,

she screamed, and then the camera just fell. We all thought she had a heart attack. It ended up being that the surprise scared her like crazy so she left the room.

Another classic incident that surprisingly happens a lot, is the mute button conundrum: where people think they’re muted, but really they’re not. People might be arguing about the silliest things not realizing they’re unmuted! On the flip side, one time, a CEO of a tech company addressed his people for five minutes while he was muted and no one could stop him.

**We gotta ask, how do YU Digital Dov events compare to non-YU events?**

Different. First of all, the YU students want to be there and have a good time. Everyone is looking to one-up their friends and they come to win. YU is a competitive, bright bunch. In trivia contests, it’s clear who’s in the Star Wars, sports, science/geography group, and who has six different football fantasy teams. It’s a great mix of people who are clearly very smart and educated. I really enjoy working with you guys.

**Does being an alumnus make doing YU shows more special?**

Over my career, I have performed at many YU events. I’ve been involved in graduating thousands of YU students at commencement and performed at the Chanukah dinner, which are the highlights of my year. Virtually, I’ve been involved at many events at YU including commencement, student events and departmental games.

I have a lot of *hakarot hatov* for the positive effect the university has had on my life. I was introduced to my wife during my time as a student and I made many lifelong friends. Being at YU was one of the best experiences of my life.

**What’s your favorite part about your shows?**

I get paid to spread joy and happiness to other people while sitting in my basement wearing sweatpants and flip-flops. This is a true blessing in my life. Seeing and learning about the world, especially the Jewish community, is another perk. There are small incredible communities all over the world that I have been exposed to for the first time. I’m always working with customers and clients making sure they get the experience they want. The miracle of it is that it is happening during a tough time for the world as a whole.

What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with COVID-19 right now and is bored at home?

I always ask people, what have you done over COVID? People answer that they have done things they used to never do like organizing their closet, playing the ukulele or learning to cook. If you’re having a rough time, don’t spend time on social media watching other people doing fun things. DO SOMETHING YOURSELF. Don’t try to live through other people. Do not use your time sitting and watching social media or Netflix. Instead, do something productive/something that’s healthy for you. I started running over COVID; I used to be able to run for 20 seconds, now I can do 45 minutes. You have to do things you’ve always wanted to do. You might excel at things you never knew you were good at.



DOV KATZ

Dov Katz created the Digital Dov persona to entertain Jewish communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

LINDA STONE

Continued from Page 9

together and support each other through life and tragedies. That’s always been a part of me. I think all of this sort of led me into education and where I am today.

**How has your Jewish identity informed your experience at YU?**

That’s a great question. I didn’t grow up

in an Orthodox environment. I’m actually a Reform Jew. But being part of YU is in and of itself an education in the values that make me even more proud to be a Jew. And certainly being in the company of so many rabbis over the years, I’ve had many teachers. Students have also taught me the blessings of

Judaism. That’s just one of the many things I’ve gained here.

**Last question. What’s something most people don’t know about YU?**

Some people on the outside might think that our student body is so homogenous. That’s so not true. There are students that

are so unique and such individuals and think so many different ways about every issue you can think of. So while there is a commonality, everyone brings their own perspective to the university and that’s what makes it the place that it is today. We are all different in our own unique god-given ways.



## Be Consistent — Remove Governor Cuomo From Our Campus

By PHILLIP DOLITSKY

This article was originally published online on March 3.

Two years ago, Robert Kraft found himself facing two misdemeanor charges of solicitation, charges that were later dropped. Yeshiva University's administration promptly removed images of him from around the Wilf Campus. Whether the decision to do so was prudent or not remains a matter of opinion, one that I believe has legitimate arguments on either side. What is clear, however, is that by removing Kraft's images from campus, the administration had entered into the murky waters of moral censorship. If the bar the administration set for removing images from campus was placed at two misdemeanor charges that were eventually dropped, one wonders why Governor Cuomo's face is still on display throughout the Wilf Campus.

Governor Cuomo finds himself in the midst of two horrible, distinct types of accusations. First is the governor's deadly policy of forcing nursing homes in New York to accept COVID-19 patients. The Empire Center, which blew the whistle on Cuomo in June, claims that Cuomo's policy caused "several hundred and possibly more than 1,000 resident deaths," exacerbating an already bad situation at NY nursing homes. Recently, it was discovered that the governor and his task force deliberately covered up the deaths in the nursing homes, prompting several federal investigations.

This is all bad enough. But it gets worse.

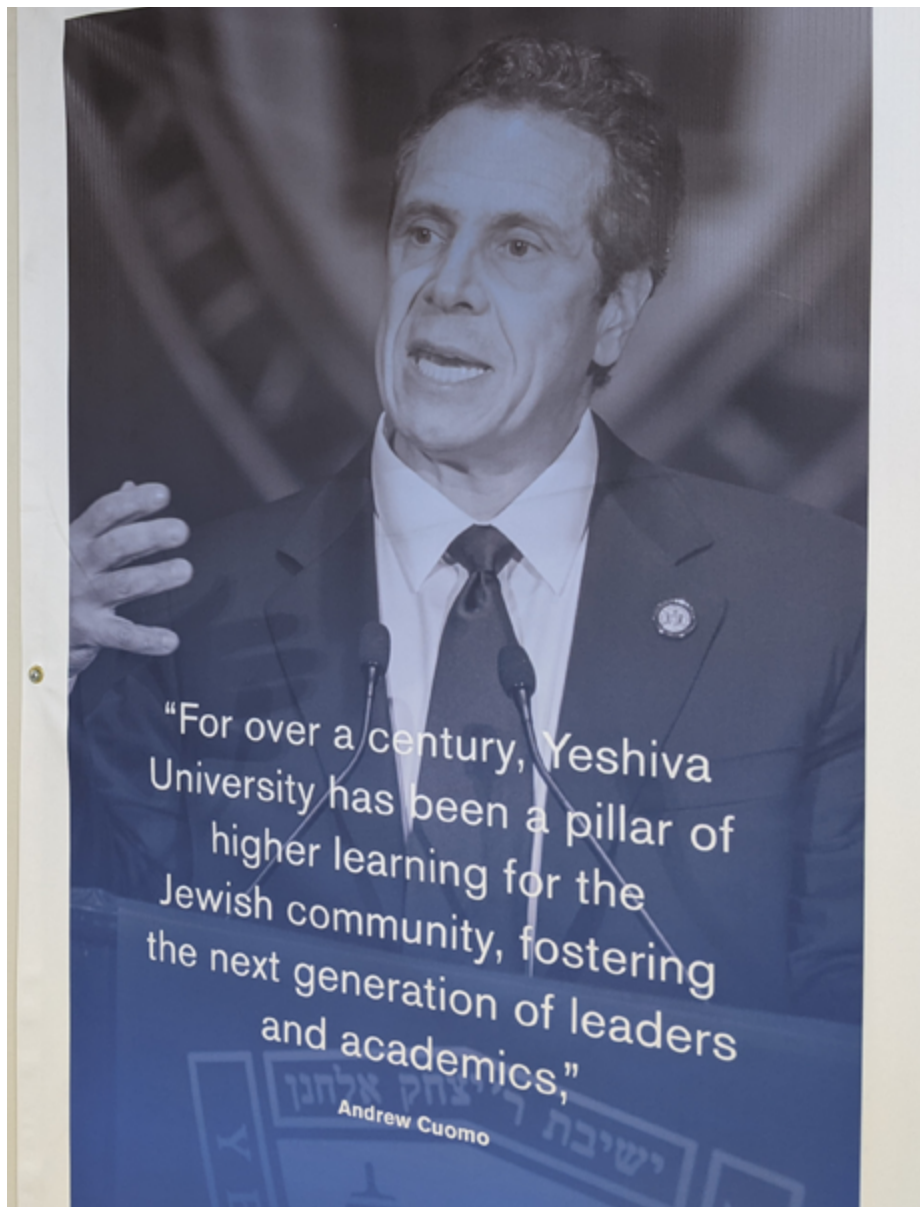
In the past few weeks, the governor has been accused of three separate instances of sexual harassment and misconduct. Of course, an accusation is not a guilty verdict, and the governor should have his day in court to plead his innocence. Yet, the

accusations seem quite credible, an investigation by the New York Attorney General is underway and there has been a bipartisan call for the governor to resign. All the while, Governor Cuomo's image still decks our halls.

*To retain any sense of credibility and to retain even a speck of consistency, the administration should move swiftly and promptly to remove the now-disgraced governor's photo from our campus.*

I am a vocal opponent of "cancel culture" and censorship. But I'm an even bigger proponent of consistency. When YU entered into the censorship business, it established itself as a moral arbiter and decided that we ought not to glance at Robert Kraft while walking down Amsterdam Avenue. To retain any sense of credibility and to retain even a speck of consistency, the administration should move swiftly and promptly to remove the now-disgraced governor's photo from our campus. If accusations of such severity — covering up the deaths of thousands of New Yorkers and sexual misconduct — don't warrant the same treatment that Kraft received, perhaps it is the self-proclaimed moral arbiters in the administration who need investigating.

Phillip Dolitsky (YC '20) is currently a master's student at the School of International Service at American University.



Picture of Governor Cuomo in Furst Hall

NAFTALI SHAVELSON

## TAMID: Always Stronger

By YONI MAYER

It's easy these past few semesters to feel as if we've gotten the short end of the stick and have had to endure a really tough educational experience. Regrettably, we must face this unquestionable fact: Through no fault of our school or our teachers, our education during the pandemic has been subpar. I don't think you'll find anyone who would say that they genuinely learned more while on Zoom than they would have in an actual classroom. This dialed-down version of a college experience has bled into all aspects of the overall situation and will undoubtedly affect our retention of and enthusiasm for the information we've "learned." The classes, clubs, and athletic and social departments have all taken a hit and have failed to offer the preparation for the real world that college is supposed to impart. Incredibly, though, some clubs have emerged from the experience even stronger — notably TAMID.

TAMID is an international organization with chapters at dozens of colleges including YU that "educates students about the business world through the lens of the Israeli economy," according to its website, through various facets including education, consulting Israeli companies, participating in an investment fund program and an eight-week fellowship program to Israel.

This past semester, TAMID has been able to provide an accurate representation of a future workspace environment, perhaps more aptly than ever before. TAMID has long touted itself as the club that provides its

participants with the best out-of-classroom education available. As a club member myself, I wholeheartedly believe this description to be accurate.

Last semester, after a rigorous and highly competitive interview process, I was accepted to the prestigious club and began the education portion of the TAMID experience. TAMID board members ran me through introductory terms, phrases and business concepts. We were encouraged to ask questions on anything that was presented to us, and we always received intelligent answers. We were also tasked with completing a case study for a company in part of TAMID's national case study competition. In normal years, the process is pretty representative of a typical firm's consulting presentation. The members of the project would meet up together in a coffee shop or common workplace and brainstorm together on how to gather data and present their findings to the firm. From what I've heard, this is also how the previous TAMID semesters would operate.

However, this year, as with everything else in the world, TAMID was hit with the curveball that was, and unfortunately still is, the pandemic. Along with all other classes, clubs and committees, they had to recalibrate

*I believe TAMID was fulfilling their promise to their members in a near prophetic fashion: to prepare us better than ever before for what our future workplace environment might look like.*

their normal semester proceedings. For the most part, the meat and potatoes of a TAMID semester remained the same. As mentioned before, first year participants were simultaneously educated by a student member of

TAMID with essential business terms and concepts, as well as tasked, in partnership with our assigned groups, with analyzing company and marketplace information and presenting a case study for a firm.

The main difference this year was that this entire process was virtual. Our team meetings and group projects were entirely over Zoom. I had to undertake the seemingly difficult task of working efficiently and cooperatively with other project members whom I had never met. On top of that, the guidelines and responsibilities for the project were exactly the same as those of years past. The project lengths and presentations were no shorter, and the judging was no easier.

Although this may seem unfair, I believe TAMID was fulfilling their promise to their members in a near prophetic fashion: to prepare us better than ever before for what our future workplace environment might look like. Companies have already stated that, going forward, Zoom and other online video conferencing services may be an integral part of their corporate cultures. Employees may work half the week in the office and the other half at home via Zoom. Other companies have even begun to hire employees without ever having met them in person, and those employees have held their jobs for almost a year now. What may have been an absolutely ridiculous idea quite recently is now our very real, present and long-term future; relationships between employer and employee, project manager

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TAMID Group Logo

TAMID GROUP



# A Single Life Review: Finding Other, Finding Self

By NAFTALI SHAVELSON

*"Makpid al kala k'chumra. Ha b'lo ha lo sagi. Shaagas Aryeh, Reb Boruch Ber. Rashi, Tosafos, Maharsha."* These are just a few of the Talmudic names and phrases that appear in Daniel Ross Goodman's "A Single Life," the KTAV-published debut novel from the YU and JTS alumnus. There are quite a few of these expressions; in fact, the above terms are found on just one page of the first chapter (!) along with another half-dozen Yiddishisms and bits of yeshiva slang, italicized and meticulously footnoted in case the reader needs a little extra help.

This makes sense: "A Single Life" tells the story of Eli Newman, Talmud scholar extraordinaire and biracial Jew, who, after eight years of *shidduchim*, *shadchanim* and trying to find his *bashert*, just can't seem to make it past the second date. Through close, third-person narration, we're privy to Eli's thoughts, generally presented in Mishnaic Hebrew and Babylonian Aramaic, as he navigates what he sees as a deeply cold and inhospitable world.

*Where the book truly shines is the myriad windows it offers us into Eli's whirlwind mind.*

While studying at Yeshivas Chelkas Yaakov in Baltimore, Eli reluctantly agrees to go out with his roommate's sister Rena, a seminary girl-turned-librarian who had "enrolled in public school" and "gone off the *derech*." The idea of dating someone who doesn't share his commitment to Judaism shocks him, but he agrees to try it since he hasn't had much luck with "frum girls" anyway. They never say it, but his race puts off every single one of them. The first couple of dates go wonderfully, and Eli is beside himself — never before had he gotten this far! On their third date, though, things begin to unravel, and the two realize through a dramatic turn of events that their vastly different lifestyles and expectations are simply not compatible in the long term.

Years later, Eli leaves Chelkas Yaakov with no college degree or marketable skills other than teaching Talmud. He takes a job as a rebbi at the New England Hebrew High School, a Modern Orthodox Yeshiva high school in West Hartford, Connecticut. He marvels at clean hallways, smartboards and wheelchair accessibility, and is "perplexed ... to no end" by a sign reading "please use the restroom that is most consistent with your gender identity." Most surprising, though, is the co-ed environment; "not since his days as a callow middle-schooler ... had members of the opposite sex been a part of his everyday world." One such member specifically

catches his eye, "the brilliant, blue-eyed English teacher" Emma Yates. She makes him nervous and he tries to avoid her, but he notices something — she's looking at him, too.

Thus begins the central saga of "A Single Life." Eli and Emma connect on Facebook

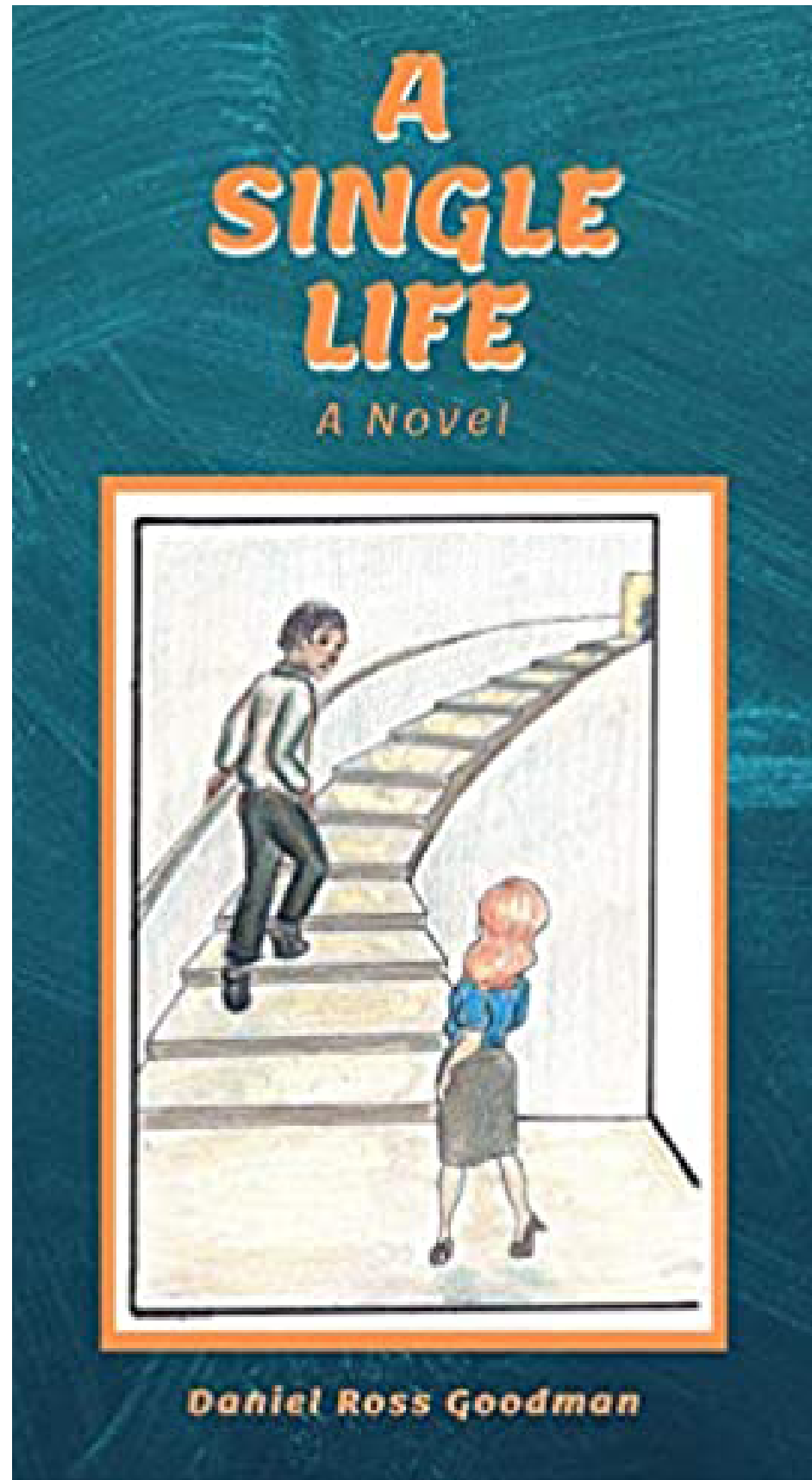
and begin to speak. Talking leads to dating, but it remains virtual and hidden. Emma, after all, is a gentile, and Eli is an Orthodox Jew. He knows what he's doing is forbidden, but no one has ever appreciated him like this. He can't stop. Through dozens of strikingly lucid and charmingly personal

internal monologues, Eli tries to understand what he's feeling and what to do about it. His religious conscience howls at him (mostly through Talmudic formulations) to cut off this strawberry blonde-lapsed Catholic, but he loves the feeling of being with her too much to listen. He's had a taste of being "the man of a woman's dreams" and isn't about to throw something like that away.

It's only at the very end of the book that he makes a decision about the life he wants to live. "A Single Life," though, is less about the decision than about the journey towards it. Through Eli's story, Goodman explores love, life and growing up, race, intolerance and discrimination. He asks often uncomfortable questions about prejudice in the Yeshiva world, and about resentment and suspicion in America as a whole. He paints a portrait of a young man, and lets us live or relive moments beautiful and tragic with our hardy yet deeply fallible protagonist.

Goodman's writing is simple and matter-of-fact. He pens sharp, snappy dialogue but is occasionally held back by generic characterizations and setting descriptions and overly stilted narration. Where the book truly shines, though, is the myriad windows it offers us into Eli's whirlwind mind. As the novel goes on, I feel like Goodman actually becomes more comfortable with his main character. Eli's monologues get better and better, turning into richly introspective reveries that dart between gravity and humor to convey the complexity of his contemplations. My favorite one sees him lose hope in his relationship after Emma takes too long to respond to his Facebook message. He thinks about trying online dating, and tries to come up with a screen name. "Hmm... Yak Nehaz... no... too Persian... Kim Lei Bidrabaminei... no, too Korean... Boutros Boutros Ghali... no... it's hopeless."

This hysterical salvo, by the way, is not footnoted. *HaMevin Yavin*. For many readers, it will remain elusive, save for the Boutros Boutros bit. In a way, though, I think that consistent inconsistency, that uncertainty about audience and place, speaks to the meaning of the book as a whole. The footnotes are a metaphor for Eli himself, straddling two worlds, not quite sure what they're meant to be. Rather than direct translations, many are sanitized and generalized — to appeal to a mass market, they have to sacrifice a bit of their character. Similarly, Eli is a man who inhabits many groups, who lives many lives. His struggle is to balance them all without letting any of them die, to embrace his past and his faith while still making room for himself. Maybe, Daniel Ross Goodman hints to us with a wink and an Aramaic aphorism, it's a struggle shared by all of us as well.



"A Single Life"

KTAV PUBLISHING HOUSE

TAMID

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and consultant and even friend and friend may all start and be sustained with video conferencing.

With this in my mind, I wasn't deprived at all by my first semester of TAMID being virtual. I don't feel that due to my case study project and group meetings all being behind a computer screen that I may be underprepared for a career in consulting or some other job in the business world. In fact, the exact opposite is true. Ironically, I am perhaps more prepared than TAMID members who were part of the club in normally functioning years. Those members are

only familiar with working in-person, at a coffee shop or in a public setting, and with working through problems face-to-face with their peers. Those TAMID alumni who have even begun careers in consulting may now see their jobs as a downgrade from what they envisioned. Perhaps they were enlivened by their experience in TAMID at YU and were eagerly anticipating future careers in consulting because of what they experienced, only to be disheartened by the current state and trajectory of the modern workplace. They may now feel that they don't have the proper tools to work entirely virtually with

a team on complex problems.

TAMID members this year may be the most fortunate; we have had to live through the first phase of the new video conferencing world. Due to our virtual introduction to the consulting space and the minutiae of planning, coordinating, and presenting case studies over the internet with people we have never met, we won't see the future of remote work as odd or out of place. By adapting to the reality of the world as-is and not regressing to how we would have liked it to be, TAMID has prepared its participants for their future careers. I feel confident now

in my ability to develop a creative and successful project with people I've never met. As much as we may want the workplace of the future to be a carbon copy of the workplace we remember from not too long ago, this sadly is not the case. TAMID took advantage of the situation and proceeded full steam ahead with what they do best: preparing undergraduate students for the most accurate and thorough impression possible of their future workplace environments and professional careers.



## The Problem of Amalek Revisited

By AVI HOFFMAN

I can trace the origin of my serious religious investigations to the question of Amalek. Since then, I've thought about many other areas of Jewish religion and personal spirituality. These exercises in soul-searching have led to many profound conversations and personal insights, and they ultimately derive from a single question: Why should I want to be Jewish? It's a question I'm still exploring, and I don't think I'll ever reach a single, static conclusion. It's possible, though, that the exploration, the give-and-take and the back-and-forth is the answer itself — a Jew is a being, self-conscious and historically-aware, who wrestles with difficult questions and doesn't accept simple and easy answers.

My struggle with the question of Amalek, however, is one that hasn't led to any satisfactory conclusions. If morality is to be understood as the responsibility to pursue the welfare of other sentient beings, then there could be no more basic ethical statement than "do not harm innocent people." And yet, the Torah instructs us in no uncertain terms to "blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (*Devarim* 25:19). Of course it's not a wanton slaughter; we are told that Amalek "attacked you on the way, when you were faint and weary, and struck down all who lagged behind you..." (ibid. 25:18). Nevertheless, the idea of purging the descendants of a nation that once attacked our ancestors, as Saul carried out to near completion in I *Shmuel* 15, seems not merely distasteful, but morally repugnant.

Let's not mince words or discuss this abstractly. It's the 11th century BCE and you pull on your armor after sharpening your spear (cf. I *Shmuel* 17:5-7). Along with thousands of fellow soldiers, you march towards Chavilah and enter the city (cf. I *Shmuel* 15:7). Panic immediately ensues — battle cries and screams sound all around you as the city streets get coated in layer upon layer of blood. Upon walking through the threshold of a house you hear a man yell for his wife to run upstairs and protect their child. As he turns to face you, a stray arrow from an open window pierces through his right eye and he drops like a marionette whose strings have been cut. Walking upstairs, you find a woman curled up on the floor, sobbing uncontrollably and clutching a baby against her bosom. "Please," she begs you, "kill me if you must, just don't hurt my child."

In that moment, what would you do? If commitment to and fulfillment of the *mitzvos* in the Torah is an integral part of Jewish identity, then in that moment you have a split second to answer the question "do I want to be Jewish?" and a lifetime to live with the moral, spiritual and psychological repercussions of that decision.

I genuinely don't know what my answer would be. My ethical sensibilities are shocked that I could even hesitate to answer that I would save the woman and her child, and my religious commitments are profoundly confused. If I were a prophet and given direct communication from God to kill that woman and her child, the best I can currently come up with is that, like the woman in front of me, I would curl up on the floor and start crying, begging God to kill me instead of making me go through with that action.

Thankfully, this is no longer a realistic question. Given the many geographical shifts among cultures and peoples through the intervening millennia, Amalek no longer exists as an independent national or cultural entity, and the *mitzvah* to destroy them exists only in the realm of national memory. Nevertheless, the thought experiment and the lessons we take from it are important.

Some have suggested that the lesson we ought to learn is that Amalek represents evil, and we have an obligation to eradicate evil. This is certainly an admirable goal and lesson, although one might question what it could do to the human psyche to imagine a sobbing woman's infant child as necessarily and intrinsically evil.

however, the idea of murdering the worst anti-Semite's innocent child is completely unacceptable.

There are other approaches that cannot even be offered the veneer of admirability or historical legitimacy. These approaches argue that the Amalekite descendants deserve to be eradicated, either out of vengeance for

*The fact that I feel a tension in this area, the fact that I feel a deep and visceral pity for the innocents on the receiving end of the genocidal sword, means that I have a responsibility to seek out those people in my world, people we are NOT obligated to eradicate, who are facing that kind of persecution and speak up and help them in any way I can.*

Others, understandably insular and nationalistic, have suggested that we view Amalek as a cautionary tale of the ever-present realities of anti-Semitism. History has borne this out; the number of countries where Jews have lived in significant numbers and didn't encounter moderate to extreme levels of xenophobia and bigotry could be counted on a single hand. Even there,

what their ancestors did to the *B'nei Yisrael* (cf. *Shemos* 17:8-13) or because of a nihilistic, amoral appeal to Divine Command Theory. *Devarim* 24:16 tells us that "parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents; only for their own crimes may persons be put to death," and the moment we throw up our arms and say "it's only moral if God said



John Everett Millais' "Victory O Lord," depicting the Moshe, Aharon and Chur at the battle against Amalek.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

so" is the moment we deny our God-given ability to reason ethically.

I'd like to suggest a new approach, one that represents my current thinking on this very difficult problem. The fact that we intuitively feel this tension is a good thing. The Torah was not given to robots, but to feeling, loving, empathizing human beings. The fact that I feel a tension in this area, the fact that I feel a deep and visceral pity for the innocents on the receiving end of the genocidal sword, means that I have a responsibility to seek out those people in my world, people we are NOT obligated to eradicate, who are facing that kind of persecution and speak up and help them in any way I can.

According to Genocide Watch, there are over a dozen genocide emergencies happening around the world as I write this article. To give the briefest of overviews; Kurds, Christians, Druze, Shi'a Muslims, Alawites and Yazidis are being targeted in Syria. There have been arbitrary killings, rape, torture and the recruitment of child soldiers in Yemen. And Boko Haram has vowed to destroy every Christian school in Nigeria.

One of the more publicized genocide emergencies is currently happening in China, where the Chinese government has systematically restricted the religious, cultural and social practices of Uighurs and other Turkic minorities in Xinjiang. In March of 2020, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute published a report which identified 83 international and Chinese companies that allegedly benefit from the use of forced Uighur labor. Their list included Amazon, Apple, Calvin Klein, Gap, Google, H&M, L.L. Bean, Lacoste, Microsoft, Nike, Nintendo, Ralph Lauren, Sony, Victoria's Secret and Zara. This is a spiritual and ethical disaster.

What should we do about it? First, we must educate ourselves; we can't do anything if we don't know what's going on. Read articles and listen to eyewitness testimonies. Follow Uighur activism pages on social media. Join the YU Stands with Uighurs WhatsApp group and attend their events.

Second, we must talk about it; we should never underestimate the power of even a single voice, let alone a collective one. Post about these issues on social media. Discuss it at the Shabbos table. Ask your friends if they know about what's going on and bring it up in class.

Third, we must lobby our politicians, boycott complicit companies and make these issues felt by the force of our votes and our wallets. Contact your favorite companies and ask why they're supporting an active genocide. Call your representatives and ask what they've been doing about it. Support companies that are engaging in ethical practices and lobby for politicians who put anti-genocide activism on the agenda. If we do these things then we might make a difference or we might not, but we certainly won't have to look our grandchildren in the eye and tell them that we heard about this genocide but did nothing about it.

I don't think for a second that this article solves the problem of the question of Amalek. After having meditated on the subject and written this article, I still don't know what I would have done in the 11th century BCE. Thankfully, though, I'm not called upon to answer for what I would have done then. I'm called upon to answer for what I'll do in the world of my own day.

I don't know if my response will be sufficient, and I don't know if it will make any difference. But that doesn't matter. What matters is that I try.



## “Illuminating Jewish Thought”: The Title Says it All

By AKIVA LEVY

At some point in a thoughtful Jew's life, they are likely to encounter fundamental questions about *emunah* and Hashem. While there are many helpful *seforim* that help answer these questions, there are not many *seforim* in English that present an in-depth analysis of a variety of views. Rabbi Netanel Wiederblank's new *sefer*, “Illuminating Jewish Thought, Volume 1: Faith, Philosophy, and Knowledge of God,” addresses that very encounter.

This *sefer*'s 798 pages feature deep, analytical looks at some of the fundamentals of *machshava*. The *sefer* is made up of four parts: Introducing Machshava, Aggada, Belief in God and Knowing God. Each section clearly explains the basics of the topic and takes a structured approach on how to understand the subject. The chapters are packed with dense information that expertly gives the reader a clearer understanding of important ideas in Judaism. It is not an easy read, but it is made to be available to all Jews who want a stronger understanding of *machshava*. This is the first volume (the second volume was published in 2018) in what will be a trilogy of insightful *seforim* by Rabbi Wiederblank. Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman is the series editor.

*In a conversation with Rabbi Wiederblank, he noted that he wrote this book with the intention of making it available to Jews of various backgrounds; all the reader needs is a thirst for understanding.*

As described by Rabbi Mordechai Willig in a *haskamah* at the beginning of the book, Rabbi Wiederblank is a “rising star” among the Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) *rebbeim*. Rabbi Wiederblank is a *maggid shiur* in the UTS Mazer School of Talmudic Studies and gives *shiurim* to members of the Kollel and Kollel Elyon.

In a conversation with Rabbi Wiederblank, he noted that he wrote this book with the intention of making it available to Jews of various backgrounds; all the reader needs is a thirst for understanding. It is not merely a *sefer* to read and acquire knowledge but a guided tapestry for every Jew to grow closer to Hashem. The goal of the *sefer* is not only to discover the truth about Hashem but to build a relationship with Him and His world.

Aligning with Yeshiva University's mission, the book offers a chance for horizontal growth. It is clear that many prominent *rebbeim* and scholars might specialize in one topic but still have a good understanding of general *gemara*, *halakha* and *machshava*. As was even the case with Rabbi Wiederblank, most students at YU spend most of their time learning *gemara* and *halakha*, if anything, and, despite taking a required “Jewish Thought and Philosophy” class, do not find much time to get a good grasp on *machshava*. Now all students have an accessible approach to an important topic in Torah study.

There were YU students who were fortunate enough to collaborate with Rabbi Wiederblank in writing and research. A handful of students were involved in the process from the start up until the *sefer* was

published. This included researching specific topics and copy editing. Rabbi Wiederblank considers this an integral part of the building of his *sefer* and offered for any interested students to reach out to him to potentially assist in the publication of the third volume or any other projects he may be working on.

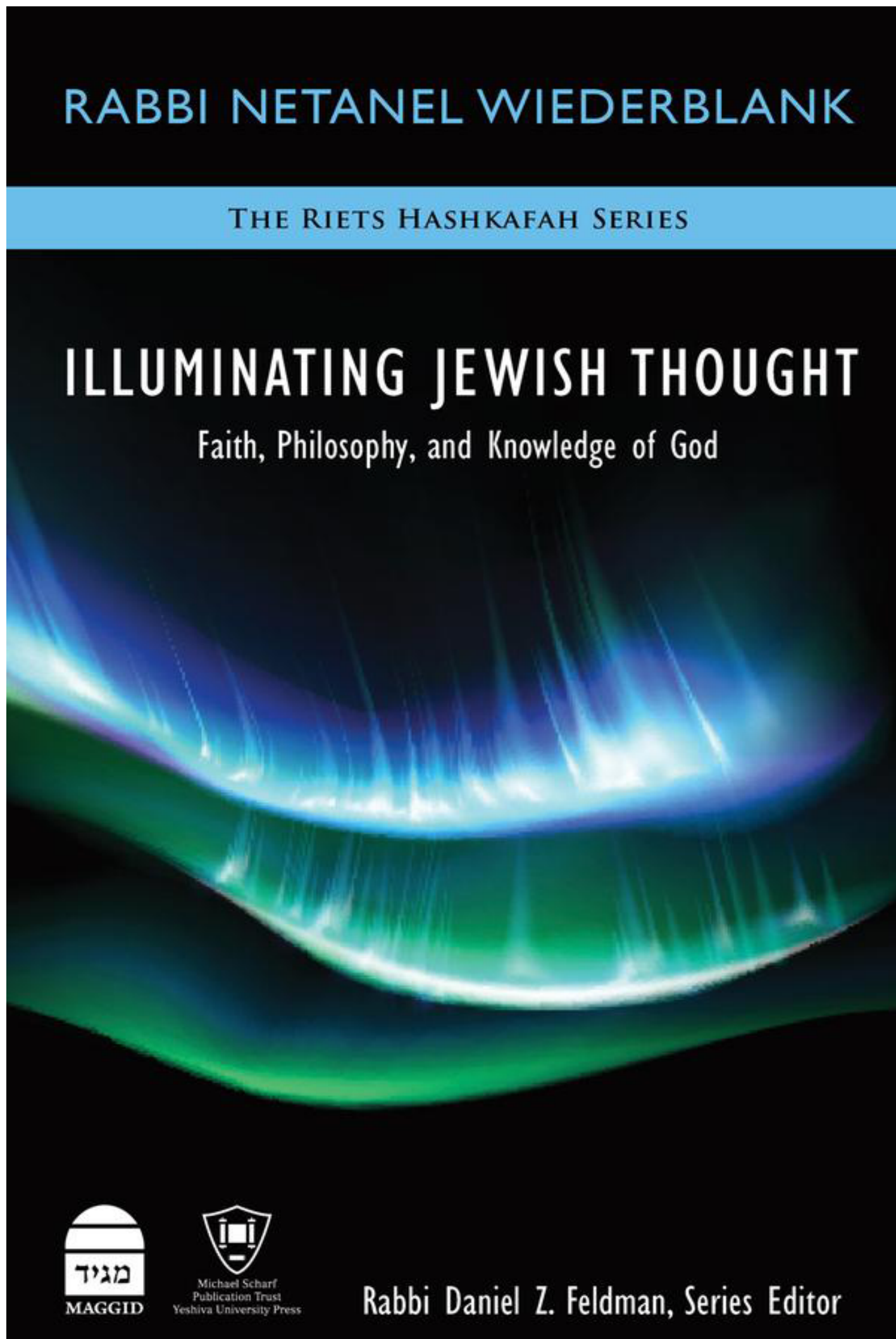
I got the chance to ask Rabbi Wiederblank which section of this *sefer* was the most inspiring for him to research and write about. He said that he was able to discover a lot

more behind the Rambam's complex *weltanschauung* and personality. Rambam is often considered to be a dry, gritty intellectual, but he had a fiery and emotional passion for Torah, and philosophy helped develop that. In particular, it is stirring and provocative how Rambam wrote about *Ahavas* and *Yiras Hashem*.

There is no recommendation that I can give that can represent Rabbi Wiederblank's *sefer* more than the beautiful *haskamot*

written for him. The front of this edition features letters from Rabbi Willig, Rabbi Schachter and Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky. It is from the broad, stable shoulders of these *gedolim* that Rabbi Wiederblank presents his *sefer*, and that is recommendation enough.

The size and depth of the *sefer* can be frightening and intimidating, but if you have a serious thirst for connection and clarity, this is the *sefer* for you.



“Illuminating Jewish Thought” from Maggid Books

MAGGID



## FinMeme's Fight Against Society

By MAX ASH

Picture this: The year is 2035. You've just commenced your search for an appropriate investment management fund to entrust with your life savings. After consulting with your mentors Bart P. Fuchs IV (@ThisGuyFuchz) and @ParikPatelCFA, you emerge with a plan. You have a meeting scheduled tomorrow with @KarlSmithCFA, a former intern who has recently been promoted to Portfolio Manager at a certain fund called @LitCapital. @LitCapital, or Litquidity, is a part of a new wave of firms that don't give much thought to their Assets Under Management (AUM). Rather, what Karl emphasizes to you is their Followers Under Management (FUM). The strategy confounds you, until you realize that Litquidity has a social media presence larger than the national debt. Known as the original Finance Meme account on Instagram, their popularity rose dramatically at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. It's at that point that you take into account their competitors; OTC traders such as @Arbitrage\_Andy have been fighting for your capital ever since you cashed out on those \$BUZZ YOLO options your wife threatened to leave you over. Their investment strategies are all the same; "Either we take you to the moon, or you get mooned." The only delta these firms care about is the airline and EV/EBITDAC is their valuation multiple of choice. American Psycho is their favorite movie and "Leveraged 3X" is their middle name. The sole differentiator between firms, however unsettling it may be, is their FUM.

While this situation is definitely possible,

it is all theoretical. But it does spark the question: Can, and does, social media have an impact on the financial markets?

A few years ago, this would not have even been discussed as a possibility. Enter Elon Musk. The founder of Tesla, who has always been vocal on Twitter, began to make mention of certain securities on the platform. He actually started with his own; in August of 2018, Musk tweeted that he had funding secured to take Tesla private at \$420, causing the automaker's stock price to spike. Unsurprisingly, the SEC filed a lawsuit a month later against Musk, alleging that Elon shouldn't be allowed to run a public company ever again. Even after this, Musk has tweeted fearlessly about Shopify and Etsy, both times causing their respective share prices to rise. More recently, Musk got in on the GameStop short-squeeze drama, and then Dogecoin, sending the crypto currency soaring.

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*The only delta these firms care about is the airline and EV/EBITDAC is their valuation multiple of choice.*

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While inconclusive, the evidence that Musk's Twitter actions have had some impact on the market is fairly reasonable and understandable. Retail traders regularly call out the CEO on the platform, requesting that he tweet about a specific security in the hope that the post will send it "to the moon."

Finance memes, or "fin-memes", have slowly made themselves known on Instagram over the past year-and-a-half. With Litquidity leading the charge, these accounts' endless barrage of satirical workplace memes have kept burnt-out analysts and associates entertained throughout the

duration of the pandemic. The phrase "pls fix," already an industry staple, was introduced to college students, "hardos", if I may, hoping to break into the financial industry. Satirical fin-meme merchandise has been selling out across online retailers, with mainstream buyers rocking Lehman Brothers Risk Management sweaters as if they headed up the department themselves. In a tribute to the Wolf of Wall Street, a surprising number of teenagers have apparently been to the Second Annual Stratton Oakmont Malibu Blowout in 1991.

While the finance meme industry has seen explosive growth over the past year, the spotlight was really shone for the first time on social media's supposed influence on the markets during the GameStop short-squeeze phenomenon back in January. All of a sudden, these memes, which were normally aimed at workplace humor, were now

sending these securities "to the moon." The futuristic man standing next to a market chart with the word "stonks" became the rallying icon of the group of Redditors attempting to hijack Wall Street.

The hype eventually spilled over to Twitter, where an excited army of retail investors, spurred on by their r/WSB success, began to egg on celebrities on Twitter to mention certain "stonks" in their tweets. \$AMC, \$GME and \$NOK became trending symbols on Twitter as the Reddit boys utilized Twitter to appeal to the mainstream public to get in on the hype and drive prices

even higher through buying. Through a combination of the short-squeeze phenomenon and the massive trading volume brought on by the masses, prices of \$GME and \$AMC, among others, soared briefly, hitting highs that would have been unthinkable in normal times.

But what effect, if any, does social media have on the markets? According to a study done by professors and faculty at West Virginia University, social media does, in fact, have a profound impact on the markets. Focusing on Twitter, their findings suggested that posts on the platform were a reliable predictor of market and security movements for the following day. This was based on the discovery that these posts contained sentiment which proved to be an accurate indicator of market performance. The leader of the study, Alexander Kurov, Fred T. Tattersall Research Chair and Professor of Finance in the John Chambers College of Business and Economics, said, "Our results show, however, that Twitter sentiment contains relevant information not yet reflected in stock prices."

So back to reality; Dr. Parik Patel is not your investment advisor and Bart Fuchs is not your managing director (or, at least, not yet.) You're probably going to end up putting your money into a mutual fund and not touch it until you take your premature retirement after the artificial intelligence takeover forces you out of your job. That being said, one thing is certain: fin-memes will be telling you to "buy the f-- dip" for years to come.



Social media may have an impact on "going to the moon."

PIXABAY



## A Tale of Coin and Community

By BEN SPANJER

The many successful IPOs in 2018 brought Bitcoin recently catching headline after headline and having recently hit an all-time high of \$58,000, various other cryptocurrencies have been dragged into the forefront of the public's attention by their older growth-spurring cousin. Among these cryptocurrencies, Dogecoin was the subject of a recent investor craze that swept the internet. Cryptocurrency analytic group ICO Analytics found that Dogecoin was the most discussed cryptocurrency on Twitter in February of 2021. With catchphrases like "Doge to the moon!" leading the coin's charge onto the front stage of the internet, it is important to ask: What sets Dogecoin apart from other crypto currencies?

Having been conceived in the meme nebula of Reddit and the Twitterverse, a Shiba Inu dog affectionately dubbed "Doge" became a widespread meme that evolved into a cryptocurrency created on Dec. 9, 2013 by Jackson Palmer and Billy Markus. The details of the coin were released on Github, a popular internet forum in a post titled "Doge - very currency - many coin - wow - v1.1 Released." Dogecoin works like most other cryptocurrencies. It has a "limited" number of coins (100 billion), it can be mined by solving blockchains (complex math problems that make up all transactions that is Dogecoin and when solved, pay out

a small amount of Dogecoin to the solver), and most importantly, it's spendable.

What sets Dogecoin apart from all other forms of cryptocurrencies is its quick-witted, wide-reaching and animated community. The Dogecoin community, mainly consisting of small individual investors, interacts through forums such as Reddit, and partakes

star Kevin Jonas, billionaire Elon Musk, rappers Lil Yachty and Snoop Dogg, "Tiger King" star Carole Baskin and "Kiss" frontman Gene Simmons. Elon Musk has without a doubt been the most vocal supporter of the coin, having tweeted "Doge might be my fav cryptocurrency. It's pretty cool." and "Dogecoin is the people's crypto." This loud

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in all kinds of different projects that could only be accomplished through collective effort. Not only has the Dogecoin community recently raised enough money to send a physical representation of a Dogecoin to the Moon, they have done much more. From NASCAR sponsorships and sending the Jamaican bobsled team to the Olympics, to building wells in Kenya through a fund called "Doge4Water" and mobilizing a fund under the moniker "Doge4Kids," which donated to the charity "4 Paws For Ability," an organization that provides children with much-needed service animals, the Dogecoin community has impressive levels of coordination and altruism.

Dogecoin's recent spike in value was caused partially by a number of famous personas lending their public support for the coin. The list of supporters includes pop

support for the coin had a significant effect on its popularity and therefore its price over the past few months.

Free celebrity endorsements aren't the only way the Dogecoin community has been getting the word out about the "people's crypto." Over the past couple of months, billboards sponsored by members of the community have been popping up around the country, famously appearing in Times Square as well as along highways in several states including Texas, Florida and California. While billboards have drawn some criticism from the Dogecoin community as having less reach and being less cost-effective than targeted ads on social media, the sensationalism and tangibility these billboards provide garners a feeling of realness that modern advertising lacks.

But ultimately, is Dogecoin really fairly

valued? The answer is complicated. One issue associated with Dogecoin is that over half of all available Dogecoin is owned by just twenty people. In order for a currency to be usable by everybody effectively it has to be less concentrated in its ownership; these twenty Dogecoin holders certainly pose a roadblock to the crypto's future. Additionally, a lack of oversight by the SEC for cryptocurrencies degrades faith in investment in the coin.

Another potential problem for the coin is that it was initially created as a joke, and as a result, faith in the value of Dogecoin as a legitimate asset is questionable. This results in a very volatile market price for Dogecoin with huge swings both up and down in value. But, even with these challenges, Dogecoin succeeded in making a name for itself in the world of cryptocurrency. It reached market value thresholds thought impossible for it to achieve. Its decentralized, incredibly secure and easy-to-use nature gives it all the traits and potential value of any other cryptocurrency.

At the end of the day, the value of Dogecoin is largely in the eye of the beholder. However, if the Dogecoin community continues to keep up its hard work in an attempt to get the coin recognized on the world stage as a respectable investment, and continue working together toward the greater goal of creating a cryptocurrency that is truly for the people, perhaps one day Dogecoin's value will go to the moon.



A Shiba Inu dog, on which the artwork of Dogecoin is based

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