The Commentator

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Espaillat at Solidarity Event on Wilf Campus: 'I am with Israel'

By Elishama Marmon and Jonathan Levin

Hundreds of Yeshiva University students and Washington Heights community members attended a solidarity event with Rep. Adriano Espaillat at the Shenk Shul on Wilf Campus Tuesday.

The event, organized by Shenk Shul and YU, allowed Espaillat to show his support for Israel and the Washington Heights Jewish community and gave his constituents the opportunity to thank him for his work. Approximately 400 people attended, including Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine.

"We need to come together as a community to ensure that we show solidarity not only for Israel but for the entire Jewish community around the world that is going through a very difficult time right now," Espaillat told The Commentator. "So that's why I'm here today, one little grain of hope to make sure that hope spreads throughout the entire world."

The idea for the event was first suggested shortly before an anti-Israel rally occurred outside of Espaillat's district office Monday, with planning beginning Monday night, less than 24 hours before the event.

"You know how there was a protest

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Congressman Espaillat receiving a round of applause prior to speaking

ELISHAMA MARMON / THE COMMENTATOR

YU Students Organize 'Operation Torah Shield 3' to Help Israel

By Elishama Marmon

This article was originally published on Oct. 27

A group of Yeshiva University undergraduate students will be heading to Israel to volunteer and support any way they can, as part of a mission taking place Nov. 12 to 19.

The purpose of the mission, called "Operation Torah Shield 3" by the organizers, as outlined in the group's mission outline document, is to bring YU students to Israel in order to learn in empty *batei midrash*, support families who have lost loved ones or sent them to war, provide the IDF with needed supplies and morale and volunteer in various capacities.

The exact details of the trip are still to be determined due to the complicated nature of the situation on the ground in Israel, but the goal is to help out wherever they can. A few potential avenues for lending a hand include cleaning and restocking hospitals, helping farmers tend to their crops, creating a lively atmosphere at *simchot* [celebrations] where absences have put a damper, visiting *shiva* [mourning] houses, going to army bases to boost morale and learning Torah in currently empty *Yeshivot* whose students have been called to war.

> *YU students need to be involved in helping through maaseh [action] by going and helping on the ground, where it is most needed.*

Many students have expressed interest in going on the trip, which will cost students $500 at the time of acceptance and a commitment to raise another $500 later, and student interest is projected to be significant. Registration will close Sunday.

The trip, though announced as Operation Torah Shield 3, is actually the fourth such

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A picture from Operation Torah Shield 3, before Operation Iraqi Freedom.

RABBI REUVEN BRAND

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From the Editor's Desk

Israel at War: What We Have Done and What We Can Do

By Elishama Marmon

Over the last three weeks, since we've returned from *Sukkot* break, I've heard one line from other students dozens of times:

"What can I do to help?"

As we raise the desperate cry of "What can I do to help?" it is worth pausing to appreciate just how much we have done and just how much we continue to do.

The genuine interest in doing something, anything, to make a positive difference of some kind has been absolutely incredible to see. It's important to ask this question, and I will offer some answers to it later in this editorial. Before that, however, we should look at and appreciate what we have already accomplished. Since Oct. 7, YU, along with the broader American Jewish community, has truly risen to the challenge of the moment in an impressive way.

- We held a massive assembly discussing what's happening in Israel, attended by over 1,000 YU students and faculty members.
- The Commentator has published 30 articles by students about the situation in Israel in the last three weeks, and the Observer, YU's other student paper, has published 23.
- 85 YU student organizations released an open letter condemning Hamas terrorism and the vile notion being propagated in other universities that said atrocities are Israel's fault. Other students signed letters to Congress or specific congressional members, and students wrote letters that were handed to President Biden.
- Hundreds of YU students and many Roshei Yeshiva joined in a massive rally in midtown where Mayor Eric Adams, Governor Kathy Hochul and Attorney General Letitia James spoke. YU students have also attended, organized, and covered dozens of other rallies over the past three weeks.
- YU students organized a Global Day of Loving-Kindness, which received national attention and prompted thousands of people to respond to evil by doing good.
- YU students organized "Operation Torah Shield 3," a relief mission that will take students to Israel in two weeks to volunteer, boost morale and support Israel directly as needed.
- President Ari Berman circulated a letter to university presidents expressing support for Israel, with help from students in getting news of the letter out there. It was signed by over 100 presidents of universities and printed in the Wall Street Journal.
- Several YU students worked with the organization Soldiers Save Lives to get much-needed supplies to IDF soldiers.
- The YU Political Action Club (YUPAC), is organizing a trip to Washington DC on Nov. 29 to lobby in support of Israel.
- YU hosted Congressman Adriano Espaillat, and hundreds of members of the YU community came out to support him for how vocally he has stood up for Israel.
- We have added *Avinu Malkeinu* and chapters of *Tehillim* [Psalms] to our davening in support of Israel, and held various Torah and learning programs across both campuses.
- We held an *Azkara* [remembrance ceremony] for those who were killed in Israel.

That list, though long, is not exhaustive. YU has hosted national news media on campus, and multiple YU students, as well as President Berman, have spoken out on TV, sharing their stories and perspectives with millions of viewers. The Counseling Center has held programming to support students, the administration has worked to increase security to ensure student safety and dozens of other events have happened across campus.

As Jews living in America, we may feel that we cannot accomplish as much as our Israeli counterparts to help Israel. As we raise the desperate cry of "What can I do to help?" it is worth pausing to appreciate just how much we have done and just how much we continue to do.

However, there is, of course, more that we can do. We can continue to daven for Israel, and continue the other efforts we are involved in. Here are a few more ways in which we can support Israel and other Jews from afar:

- Contact your elected representatives and express your appreciation for their support of Israel, or, if they're less supportive, your displeasure with them. This has a real effect on the people who are elected to represent you, especially as other people are pushing them to not support Israel. A video circulated recently of Rav Schachter urging people to call their elected officials to ask or thank them for their support.
- Donate to (reliable) groups raising money for important causes, like Friends of the Israel Defense Forces (FIDF). These groups are affecting real, tangible benefits for soldiers fighting for the Jewish people and for those who need help in Israel.
- Offer support to people on other campuses. While YU students are somewhat sheltered from the antisemitism and hatred that is prevalent on other campuses, there are students there who need help and support, people to join them for protests or just a friendly ear to be there for them.
- Speak to other students about plans they are working on and how you can get involved. There are so many students planning so many things. Reach out. Find them. Help them. If you want help doing that, please contact me.
- Speak to your non-Jewish friends or neighbors about the importance of supporting the Jewish people at this time. It is more important than at any other time in recent memory that all those who stand with us do so vocally. As thousands march against us, we must remember that we have friends.
- Support a friend or family member who is having a more difficult time than you. We all know people who are having a harder time, who have lost loved ones or are struggling daily due to this war. We can each play our part by supporting them.

While this war is larger than any of us, and we cannot turn the tide ourselves, we can have a real and palpable effect. We in YU have accomplished so much over the last three weeks. We will continue to accomplish more. We will neither falter nor fail.

Am Yisrael Chai.

The author can be reached at marmon@mail.yu.edu with any feedback, questions or inquiries.

The Commentator

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For 89 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.*

Read more at yucommentator.org



1 Yeshiva University

Never been so good to be in YU. No antisemitism here!



2 Espaillat Speaks on Campus

Thank you Adriano for standing with Israel!!



3 100 Strong!

Letter for President Berman has made 100+ signatures



4 NYPD

Having all this extra security makes us feel a lot safer 👮



5 New doors on Wilf

New sets of doors at the entrance to the Mendel Gottesman Library and large golden ones in the hallway of Zysman. This will be very interesting to people who read old editions of The Commentator in the future.



6 Operation Torah Shield 4

Yes, we know it was announced as Operation Torah Shield 3. But trip #3 happened twenty years ago. Glad to correct the record.



7 Changing the clock

Everyone wants one extra hour of sleep ... and the sun setting at 4 something.

7 UP 7 DOWN

By Commentator Staff

Midterms 1

We love these weeks, don't we all?



Weather 2

The mercury is dropping, as are the leaves



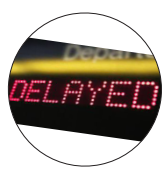
Sephardi Shabbaton Delayed a Week 3

Apparently, there wasn't enough space in the hotel



Operation Torah Shield Delayed 4

Just pushed back a week



Chag Hasmicha Delayed 5

Everything is delayed. Even this article was done past the deadline!



Rubin Elevator 6

Definitely a (break)down



Moral decency on university campuses 7

Terrorist wannabees



ESPAILLAT

Continued from Front Page

outside his office yesterday?" said Levine, referencing Monday's protest. "He's taking heat from the haters. So now tonight he feels the love."

"Folks said, 'Why didn't you have a counter-demonstration?'" said Espaillat. "And I said 'No. We're not about pitting people against each other. Let them have their day. We will have ours. And ours will be filled with friendship and love.'"

Speaking about the connection between the Jewish community of Washington Heights and the neighborhood, Espaillat told attendees, who filled up the synagogue, that just as YU and the Washington Heights community didn't abandon the neighborhood during the crack epidemic of the '90s, he wasn't going to abandon the Jewish community and would continue to stand with Israel, even in the face of attacks.

"I am with YU, I am with the Jewish community and I am with the State of Israel," said Espaillat, earning one of the dozens of rounds of applause of the evening.

"We're not about pitting people against each other. Let them have their day. We will have ours. And ours will be filled with friendship and love."

Congressman Adriano Espaillat

"There are hard times ahead, but we will get through them, and we will win this fight, and Hamas will be defeated," Espaillat added.

Other speakers included Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, who has served on the Washinton Heights community board and has a years-long relationship with Levine, and Lior Morgenshtern (SSSB '25), a dual U.S.-Israeli citizen who served in the IDF and spoke about friends and neighbors who were captured and killed by Hamas. The Star Spangled Banner, Hatikvah and Acheinu were sung by Cantor Eric Freeman, associate director of the Belz School of Music.

"Tonight was extremely important," Levine told The Commentator. "We have been rightly calling out the haters over the last three and a half weeks, and we are going to continue to do that. We have not been doing enough to lift up our friends and people who have been solid behind the Jewish community and Israel and have taken hits on the other side.

"Adriano is exactly that kind of leader. I'm so happy we came together to celebrate him. He needed this and we needed this, and personally, I feel incredibly uplifted, so to the YU community, thank you for lifting me up."

Ubers for Beren students were sponsored by Beren Campus Student Government once spots on the inter-campus shuttle filled up.

The Shenk Shul, located on Wilf Campus, rents YU's Schottenstein Center and is independent although affiliated with YU. Coordination between Espaillat and Levine's office was handled by Jon Greenfield, YU's assistant vice president for government relations.

"As our grief over the terror attacks breeds resolve, we will need to call on friends and allies to maintain support for Israel during its most difficult hour," Greenfield told The Commentator. "In this we have no greater friend than Congressmember Espaillat.

"The Congressmember is a dear friend to Yeshiva University and a staunch ally of Israel. We were proud to bring our community together and stand with him as he continues to stand up for Israel in the House of Representatives."

University Presidents Sign President Berman-led Letter Standing with Israel

By Jonathan Levin

This article was originally published online on Oct. 23

Over a dozen university presidents across the country, including Yeshiva University President Ari Berman, who organized the effort, released a letter condemning Hamas and standing with Israel Thursday.

The letter, signed by university presidents and chancellors from faith-based universities, historically black colleges and universities, and public universities on the East Coast, was sent to university presidents across the country, according to an email sent to students and faculty from the President's Office.

"We are horrified and sickened by the brutality and inhumanity of Hamas," the letter stated. "Murdering innocent civilians including babies and children, raping women and taking the elderly as hostages are not the actions of political disagreement but the actions of hate and terrorism. The basis of all universities is a pursuit of truth, and it is times like these that require moral clarity. Like the fight against ISIS, the fight against Hamas is a fight against evil.

"We ... stand with Israel," the letter continued, "with the Palestinians who suffer under Hamas' cruel rule in Gaza and with all people of moral conscience."

In addition to Berman, original signatories of the letter include the presidents of Dillard University, West Virginia University, the University of Notre Dame, Brandeis University, Baylor University and the University of Massachusetts. The presidents of the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities, the United Negro College Fund and the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities also signed on, as well as the chancellors of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU), The State University of New York (SUNY) and The City University of New York (CUNY) systems.

"The basis of all universities is a pursuit of truth, and it is times like these that require moral clarity."

Open letter from university presidents across the country



President Berman, pictured here at Yeshiva University's 2023 commencement ceremony, led a national letter from university presidents standing with Israel. YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

It is unclear whether other university presidents have signed onto the letter since its release. Yeshiva University Spokesperson Hanan Eisenman did not respond to multiple requests for comment, including to questions aimed at clarifying additional signatories.

Prior to the letter's release, multiple university presidents, including those of Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania, were criticized for making statements insufficiently condemning Hamas' atrocities and anti-Israel activity since Hamas' terrorist attacks on Oct. 7.

The letter was first reported by Axios on Tuesday, and covered in several other news outlets before YU's official announcement.

Some Yeshiva University students helped make calls to other university presidents Tuesday afternoon to ask them "to stand with Israel and against hate," according to students involved in the effort. The calls, likely regarding the letter and made from the President's Office in Belfer Hall, were not made on behalf of Berman, the students told The Commentator.

A text sent in grade chats Monday asked students to help Berman spread the letter and get additional signatures, whether by calling university presidents or spreading the letter to additional colleges.

Eisenman did not respond to an immediate request for comment about what involvement Berman has in efforts to get students to spread the letter.

Hamas, a Palestinian terrorist group, attacked Israeli communities in the Gaza envelope on Oct. 7, during the holiday of *Shimini Atzeret*, massacring over 1,300 Israeli soldiers and civilians and taking over 200 hostages.

In response, Israel declared war on the terrorist organization and launched airstrikes on Hamas assets located among civilian infrastructure in the strip, while ordering the evacuation of Gazan civilians from the north as it prepares for an extensive ground operation aimed at rescuing the hostages and destroying Hamas.

Students Attend U.N. Rally in Support of Families of Hostages

By Jonathan Levin

This article was originally published on November 3

Approximately 50 Yeshiva University students and faculty members joined hundreds of New Yorkers Oct. 24 for a rally outside of the United Nations in support of the family members of hostages held captive by Hamas who had come to speak at the U.N.

The rally, a line of people stretching for five blocks along First Avenue, was filled with New Yorkers holding Israeli flags and large posters of the hostages kidnapped by Hamas. Rally-goers lined First Avenue for several hours, singing and chanting "bring them home," until the families left the United Nations.

At 8:00 a.m., prior to the rally, a *Shacharit* service was held at the Isaiah Wall, with Wilf and Beren students joining Ramaz students and New Yorkers. The wall was later filled with 'kidnapped' posters.

The families of eight of the more than 200 Israelis held hostage by Hamas came to the U.N., including the parents and relatives of 49-year-olds Liat Benin and Aviva Atzili; 22-year-old Idan Alexander; 19-year-old Itai Chen; 23-year-old Hersh Goldberg; 22-year-old Omar Neutra and 63-year-old Keith Shmuel Siegal and his wife, 62-year-old Aviva Siegal.

"We needed to go. There are family members in real and deep pain. The least we could do is to show up and give over our love and care. That love will hopefully strengthen those suffering."

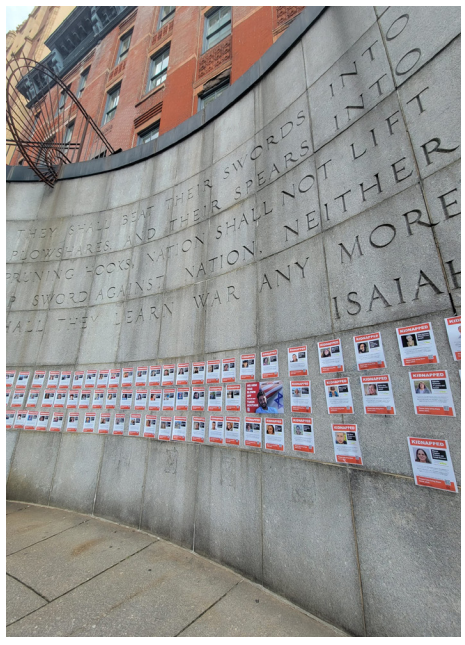
Yedidya Schechter (YC '24)

Transportation for Wilf students was reimbursed by the Office of Student Life. Beren students walked to the rally.

"The rally was a very unifying experience," said Brandon Melamed (YC '25). "Seeing how we all spanned several blocks outside of the UN building, singing and praying and chanting together felt very powerful, especially since we were there to greet the parents of some of the hostages as well."

"We needed to go," said Yedidya Schechter (YC '24). "There are family members in real and deep pain. The least we could do is to show up and give over our love and care. That love will hopefully strengthen those suffering."

A group of students traveled to Kingston, New York the following day to be *menachem avel* [comfort] Maurice Shnaider, whose sister and brother-in-law, Margit and Yosi Silverman, were among those murdered by Hamas. The Silvermans' children, Shiri and Yarden Bibas, along with their children, 4-year-old Ariel and 9-month-old Kfir, were kidnapped by Hamas.



The Isaiah wall, during the rally, filled with posters of the names of those kidnapped by Hamas. SRULI FRIEDMAN / THE COMMENTATOR

TORAH SHIELD
Continued from Front Page

trip. YU students previously went on "Operation Torah Shield" trips during the Persian Gulf War, the beginning of the Second Intifada and before Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The mission began as an idea in the minds of several YU students two weeks ago, on Oct. 13. Davi Hazan (YC '26) and Bentzy Klarfeld (YC '25), along with a group of other students across both campuses who declined to give their names, worked through processes of arranging the logistics and securing the funding and support for such an endeavor.

Various Roshei Yeshiva and YU administrators gave their support and are helping to organize the trip. The students also coordinated with alumni who had been on Operation Torah Shield 2 and 3, who encouraged them to make the trip happen and assisted with various logistical issues. The original Operation Torah Shield took place during the Persian Gulf War, in 1991.

"I remember that this was a pivotal leadership opportunity, a formative learning experience for me," Rabbi Reuven Brand (YC '03, Azreli '05, Revel '07), an attendee of the 2003 mission, told the Commentator. "That trip, with students and Rebbeim and faculty, from uptown and midtown, to be able to have that experience with that group was just amazing, a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Ultimately, after a long search and extensive discussions with a variety of organizations, Kumah, a non-profit organization administered by Yeshiva University graduate and the Hebron Jewish community Spokesperson Yishai Fleisher (YC '00, Cardozo '03), was chosen to help organize with the logistics of the mission. The students are also working on finding donors to support the trip financially, and have partnered with the Israel Heritage Foundation, which will provide some financial backing.

Hazan told the Commentator, "There's a principle in *Avodat Hashem* [service of God] that actions create realities. In addition to the importance of learning and davening, we must take action in times like these. YU students need to be involved in helping through *maaseh* [action] by going and helping on the ground, where it is most needed."

"Going to Israel in person allows students to provide assistance and makes a statement to Jews in Israel that American Jews care about them," said Rabbi Brand.

Yeshiva University and the Philos Project Hold Second Annual Nosotros Evening of Jewish-Latino Art

By Yosef Bluth

This article was originally published on Nov. 2

The YU Schneier Program for International Affairs and the Philos Project held the second annual Nosotros@YU event Oct. 18, bringing together the Washington Heights Jewish and Latino communities.

The event, designed to help foster a relationship between both communities, was held in the Weissberg Commons and drew in a crowd of around 200 people, including YU students and faculty, members of the Washington Heights community and state and local politicians.

The event included a buffet with kosher Dominican food, as well as artwork by the artists Deyvi Perez C. and Johnnatan Stubbs. Paintings exhibited depicted images of suffering from various periods in Jewish history, as well as representations of Jewish Nobel Prize winners, including Albert Einstein, Milton Friedman and Shimon Peres. However, to express the more somber atmosphere, the event didn't include a band, unlike last year.

"Nosotros is a simple reminder of our shared judeo-Latino values and the impact our friendship has had upon our culture and communities," Jesse Rojo, director of Philos Latino told the Commentator. "As a Washington Heights native, I'm proud to have had the honor to organize an event that brought together our community when our Jewish friends most needed it. Nosotros 2023 was our statement of solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people."



Attendees of Nosotros at YU displaying the flags of Israel and the Dominican Republic

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

> *"At a time of Jewish crisis, as our enemies reveal themselves, so do our friends ... An ally in a time of crisis is more than an ally, but a friend, and that's exactly what the WH Latino community has proven to be."*
>
> Yisrael Rosner (YC '25)

Speakers included Director of the Schneier Program Ronnie Perelis, Washington Heights State Assemblymember Manny De Los Santos, Director of Events and Partnerships for the Office of the Manhattan Borough President Maria de la Cruz, as well as other local community and church leaders. Many of the speeches, often made in Spanish, stressed common human experiences that affect both the Jewish and Latino communities. Speakers also expressed their support for Israel following the outbreak of war on Oct. 7.

The final speaker of the event was the artist Johnnatan Stubbs, who had put the exhibit together. He pointed out the image of the sun painted in each picture at the event depicting Jewish suffering, and declared that "there will always be hope for Israel." He ended by pointing out that Israel is a blessing to humanity. The speeches were preceded and finished off with performances of *Hatikvah* on violin.

"At a time of Jewish crisis, as our enemies reveal themselves, so do our friends," Yisrael Rosner (YC '25) told the Commentator. "On Wednesday, through food and art — two of the most universal cross-cultural connectors — something beautiful happened. At the annual Nosotros@YU event in Washington Heights, the NY Latino community and local government representatives stood in solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people. An ally in a time of crisis is more than an ally, but a friend, and that's exactly what the WH Latino community has proven to be."

YU Announces Appointment of New Counseling Center Assistant Directors

By Shoshana Fisher

Editors Note: Due to Hamas's unprovoked terrorist attack on Israel, this article, along with many other Commentator articles, was delayed in favor of prioritizing Israel coverage.

This article was originally published online on Nov. 2.

Yeshiva University announced the appointment of Didi Levy and Debra Alper as two new assistant directors of the YU counseling center earlier this Fall.

The announcement, made in September, also came with the departure of former Associate Director Martin Galla, who served in the position for 13 years. Levy will be taking the position of assistant director on Wilf campus and Alper on Beren campus.

Levy told The Commentator that the center's plans for the semester include workshops for faculty on mental health topics and the classroom, previously done last semester, as well as collaborating with the library and the athletics department to "spread the word" about mental health awareness, prevention and treatment.

Yael Muskat, dean of mental health and wellness and director of the counseling center, also shared with The Commentator plans to institute drop-in hours during stressful times of year, such as midterms, and a triage system for first-time appointments in an effort to decrease wait times. Drop-in hours have already been implemented on both campuses in wake of the current war in Israel.

The first event the center had under its new leadership was an event that brought puppies to the Beren campus in mid-September aimed at reducing stress at the start of the new semester.

"Having already worked at the [Counseling Center] for many years now, I am excited to be taking on this new role," Alper, who has already worked at the center for seven years, told The Commentator. "The students we serve are insightful, determined, and motivated to better themselves and their communities. It is a privilege to be able to continue to work with them, now in this expanded capacity."

Levy has been at the counseling center for five years both working with individual students and running the IDF veterans group prior to his promotion.

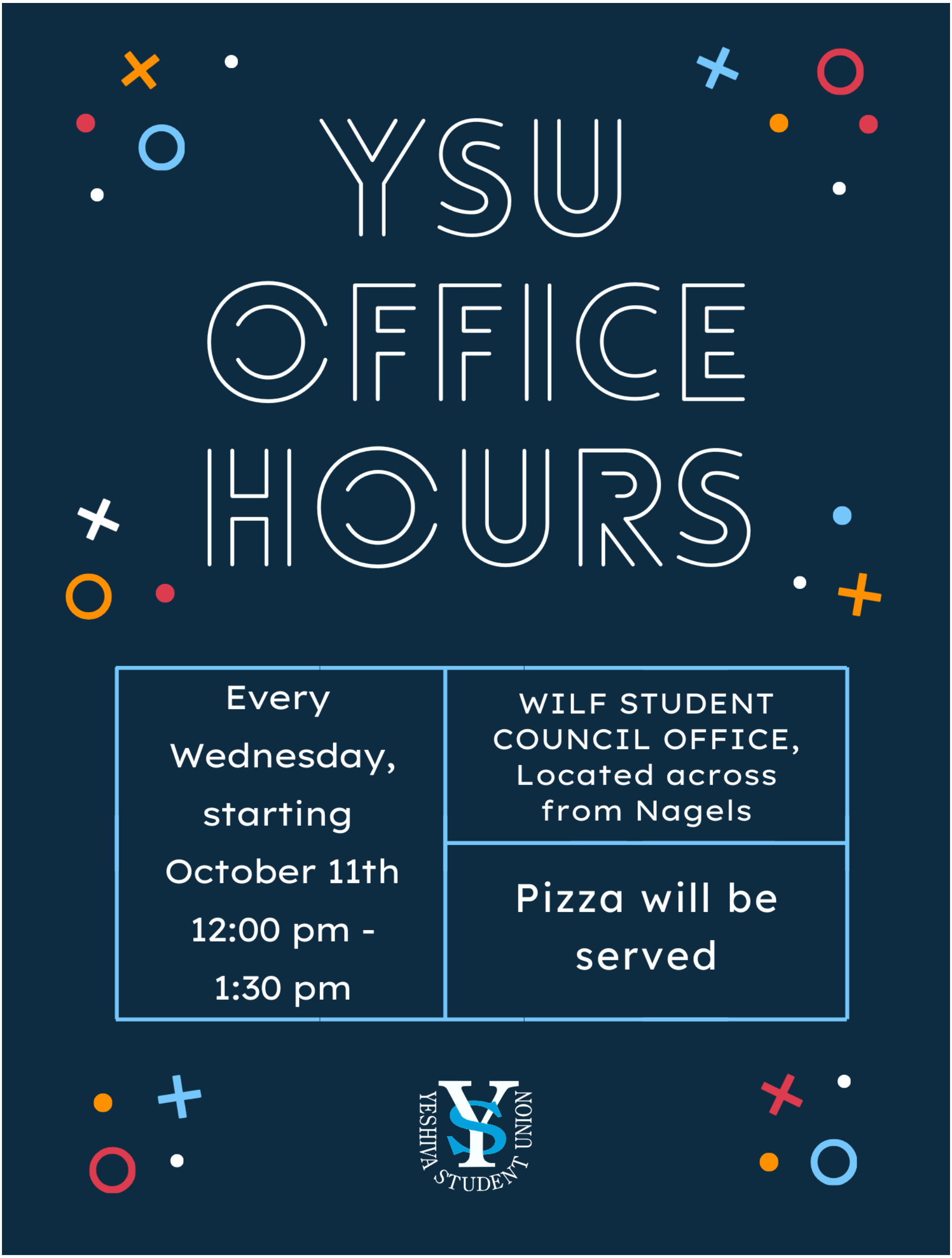
"It is a privilege to be working with college students as they move through their formative years into adulthood." Levy shared with The Commentator. "I am passionate about my work as a team member of the YU Counseling Center and I'm looking forward to a year of meaningful moments and change."

> *"It is a privilege to be working with college students as they move through their formative years into adulthood. I am passionate about my work as a team member of the YU Counseling Center and I'm looking forward to a year of meaningful moments and change."*
>
> Didi Levy, assistant director of the YU Counseling Center



The YU Counseling Center announced the appointment of two new assistant directors earlier this fall.

SRULI FRIEDMAN / THE COMMENTATOR


YSU
OFFICE
HOURS
Every Wednesday, starting October 11th 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm
WILF STUDENT COUNCIL OFFICE, Located across from Nagels
Pizza will be served
YESHIVA STUDENT UNION

Fighting Darkness with Light: How a Small Group of Students Ran a Global Day of Loving-Kindness

By Rivka Bennun

This article was originally published on Oct. 30

"It's a cute idea, but it's unrealistic." That was my initial reaction when I heard about the Global Day of Loving-Kindness (GDLK) that took place last Sunday, Oct. 22. At the time, I did not know that it was entirely run by a bunch of students our age, organized in only a matter of days and had achieved national attention and worldwide recognition by thousands of people across several continents.

Spearheaded by Uriel Sussman (YC '25), who was quickly joined by several other enthusiastic students from YU and other universities, the initiative aimed to promote worldwide acts of *chesed* in the wake of the atrocities recently perpetrated by Hamas and the war that has since ensued.

So what actually went into running the Global Day of Loving-Kindness, and how did it begin?

Sussman originally pitched the idea to his friends a little over a week before, thinking there should be some type of response to the Global Day of Jihad, which had been called for Friday, Oct. 13 by former Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal.

"The Day of Jihad ... instilled a lot of fear in people, and the world was a worse place because of it," said Ruben Prawer (YC '25), one of GDLK's organizers. Prawer recalled President Berman's speech at the university rally held in Lamport Auditorium on Oct. 10, where Berman had quoted Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous statement from a speech delivered in 1957: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

The motivation to run a day solely dedicated to loving-kindness, Prawer explained, stemmed from this idea. "In response to hate and evil in the world," said Prawer, "You have a responsibility to infuse light into the world." In light of this, and in response to the Day of Jihad, Sussman wanted "a day focused on *chesed* and *ahava* and making the world a better place," Prawer told The Commentator.

The goals of the day were manifold, including global recognition of the day, specific activities planned throughout the day and smaller interactions between people.

On a global scale, the group wanted their project to achieve international recognition, hoping to reach as far into the world as possible. "While there was a strong sense of optimism and ambition, especially led by Uriel," Prawer said, "There were quite a few people who doubted how much we could pull off in such a short amount of time." Nevertheless, students worked tirelessly the entire previous school week to successfully run GDLK.

The students created a WhatsApp chat for anyone interested in helping, which was joined by over 350 people, and the work began. Participants were encouraged to reach out to whomever they knew, with the goal of spreading awareness of the effort to as many communities as possible. Eytan Israel and Avi Balsam, undergraduate students at Yale University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and friends of Sussman's, as well as computer science student Amanda Poupko (SCW '24), designed a website, which Prawer noted was an impressive feat given their short deadline.

> *"We wanted to rally together all the people who were on the side of life, and love, and kindness."*
>
> Ruben Prawer (YC '25)

Once the website was up and running, business student Rivka Marcus (SSSB '24) was tasked with ensuring that GDLK had a strong social media presence, creating and running accounts on Instagram and Twitter, and using multiple hashtags such as #CombattingJihadWithAhavah and #FightingHateWithLove. Shai Kohn (YC '25) was in charge of the graphic design team, which helped create flyers in multiple languages as well as all sorts of other infographics designed to encourage kindness and love with one another.

While all this was taking place online, students also began to reach out to as many shuls, schools and other organizations as they could think of. They reached far and wide — Prawer recalled receiving messages from his friends who were sitting in the office space they received in Glueck, saying things like, "I just got off the phone with the head of Young Israel."

Besides for the broader global recognition, a second goal of the day was to encourage people to do acts of charity they wouldn't normally do, such as raising money for various organizations, volunteering at a local food bank, donating blood and handing out food in the streets. Throughout the day, GDLK ran all sorts of programming on campus and in Washington Heights, including packaging candy bags for students to give their friends, bringing donuts to the local police station to thank them for the recent increase in security and for everything they do and handing out food to those in need in the local Heights community.

Finally, on the most minute scale, the third goal of GDLK was to promote kind interactions with one another, encouraging people to compliment each other, hold open the door for one another, smile at strangers and to just be nicer to the people around them. These, said Prawer, are "acts of love and kindness on a smaller level" which can also have a profound effect on the broader world.

As for the long-term effects of GDLK, Prawer explained that the students hope it will make people more mindful of how they treat others going forward.

"We wanted to rally together all the people who were on the side of life, and love, and kindness," Prawer said. "When it comes to any value that you emphasize and you have a day devoted to that value, it's obviously not just about that day."

"I think it'd be great if this was Israel's response to every day of Jihad or call for violence," Sussman told The Commentator, "To show the world that what we want is to build a kinder, better world."



The Global Day of Loving-Kindness took place last Sunday, Oct. 22.

GLOBAL DAY OF LOVING-KINDNESS

Broken Busses, Blackouts and Achdus: The Unforgettable Adventures of the Beren Camp Shabbaton

By Chloe Baker

Editors Note: Due to Hamas's unprovoked terrorist attack on Israel, this article, along with many other Commentator articles, was delayed in favor of prioritizing Israel coverage.

Shortly before Rosh Hashana, students from the Beren campus made their way to the Poconos for the annual camp Shabbaton. A break from the city was much needed, and what better place to spend it than Camp Dora Golding?

Excitement and enthusiasm filled the street in front of 245 Lexington while students eagerly boarded buses ready for the weekend. However, the excitement soon dwindled after the first bus arrived and crashed into scaffolding, leaving it with a broken window. While a replacement bus was on the way, the second bus ran into issues.

"The bus had no air conditioning, and midway through the drive we had to stop because of a problem with the engine," Leah Gurock (SCW '26) told The Commentator.

> *"I don't think I've ever been to a Shabbaton where people have overcome more obstacles and still found the strength and spirit to make it into something that incredible."*
>
> Hayley Goldberg (SCW '26)

Some students chose to exit the bus and wait by the side of the highway because it was too hot inside. "Girls began to feel nauseous and dehydrated," said Gurock. Half an hour later, another bus arrived, and the students safely made their way up to camp.

As if the issues with bussing weren't enough, as soon as students reached camp, they were faced with the unfortunate reality that Camp Dora Golding and its surrounding areas were hit with a power outage. The air conditioning, lights and in some bunks, running water, were all unavailable and offline.

The only place to cool off was outside due to the stuffiness in all indoor buildings. Although the generators kicked in, they were not enough to power the air conditioning or running water. The owner of the camp had been in touch with the local power company, and was told there was a possibility that the electricity would be back by Friday night; however, that was not the case. All the issues

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SHABBATON
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left some administrators feeling guilty.



A student shabbaton to Camp Dora Golding, despite blackouts and bus breakdowns, was a success.

RICHARD RINGLE / UNSPLASH

"I feel terrible that I put my students and staff through less than optimal conditions. I wasn't aware of the extent of it until I got up to camp," said Associate Dean of Torah Studies and Spiritual Life Shoshana Schechter.

Despite the bumpy start, as soon as Shabbos came in, there was a sudden notable shift in everyone's energy. The kabbalat Shabbat songs filled the air, lifting everyone's spirits. Inspiring divrei Torah were shared at the meal followed by an incredible staff panel. The formal panel lasted over an hour and immediately after, the panelists (Graduate Program for Advanced TalmudTanach Studies (GPATS) Director Nechama Price, Professor Shaina Trapedo, Professor Danielle Bloom, and Assistant Dean of Students Sara Asher) were surrounded by students who had follow-up questions.

Outside of the dining room, students were seen hanging out on bunk porches, by the track, or on many of the grassy fields, enjoying all the beauty that camp has to offer, even in the dark. "I really enjoyed being in the bunk setting." said Bina Goldman (SCW '26), "I was mainly with friends from seminary but also with girls I didn't know so well. We were able to get to know each other over Shabbos which was really nice."

The night concluded with learning and a kumzitz in the dining room that went on until after two in the morning.

Despite the issues that plagued the Shabbaton, the majority of students reacted to the Shabbaton positively, expressing gratitude to the staff and students involved in organizing it, and there was a high level of participation.

"I don't think I've ever been to a Shabbaton where people have overcome more obstacles and still found the strength and spirit to make it into something that incredible," said Hayley Goldberg (SCW '26).

"I think this past weekend set a new standard for excellence when it comes to participation," said Jonathan Schwab, head of the Office of Student Life. "I think attendance was strong in the simple and most obvious sense: The rooms felt packed for nearly every part of Shabbat. But even more importantly, the attendance was strong in terms of students participating and being involved in so much throughout Shabbat."

FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

(February 13, 1991; Volume 55, Issue 8) — "400 Fly in Face of Danger"

By Martin Goldberg

Editor's Note: With the current war in Israel and the announcement of "Operation Torah Shield 3" (actually the fourth such trip), The Commentator has republished an article about the original Operation Torah Shield.

Saddam Hussein probably never realized that by threatening to annihilate Israel he would serve as the catalyst for a dramatic pilgrimage to the Jewish state. Organized by Yeshiva University students in less than a week, Operation Torah Shield sent over 400 people to Israel on a mission which captured world-wide media attention and a sea of praise from Israeli citizens.

The story of Operation Torah Shield began in the living room of an anonymous philanthropist, who was becoming increasingly disgruntled with TV programs depicting hundreds of Jews leaving Israel. The threat of war was growing by the day, but the donor decided that he would personally charter an El Al Jumbo Jet and transport Yeshiva University students to Israel. A planeload of Yeshiva students and Rebbeim arriving in Israel on the infamous date of January 15th was what was needed to counteract Israel's sinking morale, he decided. By Monday, January 7th, rumors of fifty dollar round trip tickets to Israel were sweeping through the college dormitories. Pandemonium erupted on Tuesday morning in the middle of final exams as these reports gained credibility.

YCSC Vice President David Borowich took charge of the project with many others playing integral roles. The project was dubbed Operation Torah Shield after it was decided that as part of the trip, students would be asked to learn for a week in an Israeli Yeshiva.

Student leaders began to sell tickets Tuesday night, booking the entire plane within a few hours. Hundreds more clamored onto waiting lists as word spread of the trip throughout the New York area.

Nevertheless, the project almost collapsed. For the trip to occur, the philanthropist needed to channel his money to El Al Airlines through a non-profit organization, an arrangement which would create a tax deductible transaction. This vital link proved to be the most elusive component of the operation.

At first, Rabbi Herschel Reichman offered to transfer the funds through the non-profit Torah Study Fund which he administers. However, questions of liability arose. Hebrew Institute of Riverdale briefly entered the scene and agreed to sponsor the flight. According to Andrew Goldsmith, an assistant coordinator of the project, the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale was also forced to drop sponsorship, because of insurance difficulties and legal concerns.

Yeshiva University itself declined to sponsor the project. Goldsmith explains that the "...University had an incredible amount to lose if there was a lawsuit and they [YU administration] realized that; you are talking about auctioning off Belfer Hall to pay for lawsuit damages. Obviously, this is a worst case scenario, but it was a possibility."

According to student organizers of the trip, Yeshiva University was very supportive throughout the entire operation, providing valuable assistance. Dr. Lamm greeted the students upon their arrival at Ben Gurion airport, and Vice President Dr. Israel Miller, other administrators, Roshei Yeshiva and faculty were on the flight.

But, according to Goldsmith, for a half hour period on Friday, January 11th, the trip was actually canceled. That afternoon, the donor contacted American Friends of Yeshivat Ateret Cohanim, a charitable organization, that agreed to sponsor the flight, saving the operation from failure.

To inform all passengers of the dangers involved in the flight and to disarm potential liability suits, the project's organizers distributed waivers explicitly stating the dangers associated with the trip. The "... U.S. State Department has issued a travel advisory urging people to stay away from the middle east, including the State of Israel," the waiver warned.

Despite the chaotic atmosphere brought on by phones constantly ringing, final exams, and news from the Persian Gulf, student leaders assembled the operation paying careful attention to details. They secured health and bomb insurance for the flight's passengers and contacted YU's liaisons in Israel to arrange for gas mask distribution.

As war grew imminent, Operation Torah Shield received more than 200 cancellations, to the benefit of those confined to waiting lists. In the end, over a quarter of the passengers on Flight 012 were unaffiliated with YU.

Organizers charged $50 for YU students, and $100 for those outside the YU community. YU Rebbeim flew for free.

Thousands of dollars secured from the ticket sales paid for the distribution of over one hundred boxes of clothing for Russian Jews in Israel and for transportation costs accrued in ferrying the flight's passengers to the Kotel, the Plaza Hotel and the Knesset among other destinations. According to Borowich, the remaining $5000 will join charity funds; one such fund is designated to help victims of Iraqi Scud attacks.

Operation Torah Shield received television and newsprint coverage around the world. Reported in the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, USA Today, ABC News and numerous other television networks and newspapers, the story reached millions of people.

Landing in Ben Gurion Airport, the El Al passengers were greeted by a host of reporters, cameras, and Israeli dignitaries including Deputy Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Many Yeshiva University students appeared on Israeli television and were later recognized in the streets, restaurants, and taxi cabs of Israel.

Azi Cutter, a YC Junior, feels that when he and hundreds of other Jews began dancing on the airport tarmac with the Israeli flag flapping in the distance, a tremendous Kiddush Hashem occurred. Cutter said that the flight had a profound impact on Israel's morale. Many participants said Israelis stopped them in the street to say "Kol Hakavod".

Cutter, articulating many students' views, claims the positive media coverage and the reaction of the Israelis he met has raised his school spirit and compelled him to realize that YU plays a significant role in the world Jewish community. Says Cutter, "I was proud to say in Israel that I go to YU."



400 Fly in Face of Danger

by Martin Goldberg

Saddam Hussein probably never realized that by threatening to annihilate Israel, he would serve as the catalyst for a dramatic pilgrimage to the Jewish State. Organized by Yeshiva University students in less than a week, Operation Torah Shield sent over 400 people to Israel on a mission which captured world-wide media attention and a sea of praise from Israeli citizens.

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The Commentator Archives

THE COMMENTATOR

Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies

at Yeshiva University

Class Schedule for Spring 2024

MONDAY

2:50 p.m.
Richard Hidary
Hebraism & Hellenism: Greco-Roman Culture & the Rabbis

Shalom Holtz
Prayer in the Hebrew Bible

4:50 p.m.
Ephraim Kanarfogel
Topics in the History of Halakhah

Shira Weiss
Philosophy of Biblical Narrative

6:50 p.m.
Ephraim Kanarfogel
Readings in Medieval Talmudic Commentaries and Halakhic Compendia

TUESDAY

2:50 p.m.
Jonathan Dauber
Introduction to Hasidic Thought

Joseph Angel
Second Temple Jewish Literature

4:50 p.m.
Jeffrey Gurock
American Jewish History II

Naomi Grunhaus
Post-Enlightenment Exegesis

6:50 p.m.
Mordechai Cohen
Faith & Doubt: The Book of Job Through the Ages

Josh Karlip
Rabbis in the Land of Atheism: Rabbinic Thought and Writing in the Soviet Union

WEDNESDAY

2:50 p.m.
Tamra Wright
Survey of Modern & Contemporary Jewish Philosophy

Aaron Koller
Northwest Semitic Inscriptions & the Bible

4:50 p.m.
David Berger
Maimonidean Controversy & the Issue of Secular Learning

Jeffrey Gurock
American Jews and Judaism Between the Two Wars

6:50 p.m.
Josh Zimmerman
Destruction of European Jewry, 1933–1945

Steve Fine
Samaritans and Jews: From the Bible to Modern Israel

THURSDAY

2:50 p.m.
Jonathan Dauber
Secrecy in Jewish Thought

Jess Olson
German-Jewish Intellectual History

4:50 p.m.
Ari Mermelstein
Introduction to Biblical Studies

Daniel Rynhold
Philosophy of Gersonides

Please check our website for any updates at www.yu.edu/revel/courses.
For information please contact Rona Steinerman, Revel Program Director at steinerm@yu.edu

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Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies

RISE UP
The Campaign for 613

Thoughts and Prayers Are Not Enough

By Tehila Bitton

This article was originally published on Oct. 22

While rockets keep raining down on our beloved Israel, over 200 Jews are still held captive by Hamas and Israelis our age are enlisted and gearing up to go to war — what should be our response here in Yeshiva University?

"These are not ordinary circumstances - we must not be satisfied with sending only thoughts and prayers."

Since the horrible massacre on Oct. 7, our hearts and minds have been solely with Israel.

We are all checking up on our friends and family there, keeping them in our thoughts and prayers, and trying to be there for them. At YU, we have focused on grieving together, on more communal prayers (Tehillim gatherings, and new opportunities to pray with a minyan on Beren), a day of fasting, learning initiatives and more.

But although we are with Israel with our thoughts and *tefillot*, there is so much more that we can and must do. This is a time for action — a time for each of us to step up and fight for the Jewish people. The fact that we are in a Jewish university cultivating Jewish leaders should prompt us even more — whether it's to support the war efforts in Israel or to fight antisemitism in our backyard here in America, this is time to mobilize and activate our student body.

As one of the largest Modern Orthodox Zionist institutions in North America, we should be one of the most prominent outlets of support to Israel right now. Our country is at war, our people are fighting and we are not exempt. Over 350,000 individuals are currently risking their lives for the very survival of our nation. These are not ordinary circumstances — we must not be satisfied with sending only thoughts and prayers.

I write here now to ask us all to "rise up" proudly as YU students and mobilize to help.

How?

While we might be far away and many of us do not have the resources to donate at significant levels, there are still many areas for activism.

Communal Drives:

There are many supplies needed in Israel and our people get a morale boost when they get support from abroad and know that we are with them. A group of YU students, including myself, have been working with Soldiers Save Lives, an organization that has direct knowledge of needs on the ground and a concrete way to get our supplies to IDF soldiers. We're currently running a supply drive, and every YU student can contribute to support our soldiers in a practical manner. This is the only official supply drive happening at YU. Imagine Rubin Hall filled with duffel bags and supplies packed by YU students, heartfelt letters being written and our communities standing together in this hands-on show of support.

Fighting the Media Narrative:

The battle that the Jewish people are facing right now has multiple fronts, and one of the most critical ones is the war for public opinion. We all know how quickly world media turns against Israel and how many lies can spread blood-libels around the globe. There have been multiple efforts to strengthen Israel's narrative in the media. Imagine what a YU-student run center could look like that partners with these efforts and that allows us all to fight for Israel's narratives.

Providing Support to Fellow Jewish Students across U.S. campuses:

Many Jewish students across the country right now are feeling besieged and attacked by various campus communities and environments that are at best indifferent to Jewish life, and at worst antisemitic and pro-Hamas. Jewish students at universities can use our support. Imagine offering to bring a large influx of YU students to another university — while obviously taking proper security measures — to support them at a pro-Israel rally or vigil. Imagine communicating with student leaders on other campuses and setting up direct lines of communications so that we can offer concrete support.

These are just some ideas — there is so much to do. Our people are fighting multiple battles and they need our time, our talents and our efforts.

I urge us all, the "leaders of tomorrow," to stand up today. In addition to praying and studying Tora, we cannot ignore the additional ways for us to provide direct concrete support to Israel. Many of us have attended rallies, written letters, gotten on phone calls and devoted precious time and energy to this crucial cause. But there is still more we can do.

The gravity of Israel's current situation should prompt us to ask ourselves: How are we going to use our talents, abilities and capacity to contribute to this fight?

As President Berman said, we are all being called to duty. It is time to act.

You can reach the author at tbitton@mail.yu.edu



Bins full of supplies donated by students for IDF soldiers on Beren Campus RIVKA BENNUN

Making a Difference in Israel: The View from a Student in Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim

By Ruti Frohlich

This article was originally published on Oct. 30

As a seminary student in Israel during this war, there are both no words and too many to express. What has transpired is harrowing, yet there has been light in all the darkness. To sum up those experiences on paper is impossible. But I do want to try.

On Friday night, Oct. 6, Simchat Torah was beginning. Hearts beaming with joy, my friends and I watched as the *hakafot* began. *Sifrei* Torah held high in the air, songs of *Hallel* sung proudly in the streets, children running around with candy in their hands; the feeling of pure happiness was evident. We went back to our seminary, Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim (MMY), and slept that night, anticipating an uplifting and beautiful day ahead.



A sign in Jerusalem says "If my nation is not for me, who is for me?" RUTI FROHLICH

But that didn't come to be.

I was woken up in the morning by sirens. Hearing rockets exploding in the air, my friends and I ran to the bomb shelter, confused and nervous. What was going on? Throughout the day, we ran into the bomb shelter eight times. News of war began to spread, but no one knew the truth. We were just seminary girls without phones; what could we know?

As the day went on, the *av* and *eim bayit* of my seminary spoke to us about the situation, giving us guidance and information. But once the day ended, the girls who were only observing one day of the *chag* turned their phones on. That's when we began to hear what was really occurring.

When I heard the news of the thousands murdered, kidnapped and wounded, I felt nauseous, disgusted and anxious. The more we heard, the more confused we became. Why was this all happening? How could other human beings commit such horrific acts? What will the fate of the soldiers and those kidnapped be? Who is going to make it out alive?

Throughout that night and the following day (my second day of *chag*), many staff members visited us, giving us instruction and support (as well as lunch and dinner). We were suffering, but we were not suffering alone. We were terrified, but we had people to hold our hands.

"As seminary girls, no, we are not soldiers, and we are not influencers, but we can still make a difference."

As the following days materialized, every girl in my seminary stepped up to the plate. We ran carnivals and playgroups for the children in the neighborhood, babysat for families, cooked and cleaned homes, packed supplies for soldiers, wrote letters to soldiers, made baked goods for soldiers, made tzitzit for the soldiers, donated blood and more. And every day since Oct. 8, we have not stopped. We will not stop. During this tragedy for the Jewish people, there is an endless amount of good we can do. As seminary girls, no, we are not soldiers, and we are not influencers, but we can still make a difference.

Not only does this apply to the girls in my seminary, but every Israeli stood up and continues to stand. Walking around my neighborhood of Baka in Yerushalayim, the *makolets* and bakeries have been donating to the soldiers and displaced families. Israelis all over the world have been flocking back to Israel to protect the country they love. There have been hundreds of blood drives, food and supplies drives, Tehillim initiatives and so much more during only a few weeks. To see how Medinat Yisrael has united is so beautiful, and it moves me to tears.

This leads me to wonder, though, why do we put aside our differences and unite only in the face of tragedy and immediate danger? It is uplifting to see the unity of the Jewish people during this time, but why only now? Why do we only realize what's missing when so much is gone? We are one nation with one heart and soul. If we suffer together, we must rejoice together.

Every moment of the day, my thoughts turn to the soldiers: boys and girls my age hugging their parents as they go to fight. Fathers leaving their children and wives behind. Teachers and *rabbeim* fighting so their students can have a future in this country. Every one of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers are heroes. I dedicate each ounce of my learning and *tefillah* to them and the thousands wounded, murdered and kidnapped.

Many people asked me why I am staying in Israel right now, as many girls and boys my age have left. I have thought a lot about my answer. We are in a war, and life is not easy. There have been moments when I felt I was living in a nightmare, just waiting to wake up.

But the more I think about this question, the more secure I am in my answer, which is two-fold: First of all, I love this country.

Continued on Page 12

The Source of Jewish Pride

By Yaira Katz

I was recently asked a question: "Why are you proud to be a Jew?"

I would like to preface by pointing out that this question makes a large assumption: that I am indeed proud to be a Jew! The wording of this question is a testament to a near universal feeling among Jews: that Judaism is worth being proud of.

I often read about Americans who use their freedoms to pronounce that they are *not* proud to be Americans. So why is it so rare to hear someone proclaim that they are *not* proud to be Jewish?

Being Jewish is not usually a choice. Only a few of us get to say that we freely decided to dedicate ourselves to being part of the Jewish people. Why is it worth being proud of Judaism if you are just born into it?

On January 5, 2020, Bari Weiss gave a speech explaining why she is proud to be a Jew at the ADL's "No Hate, No Fear" march against antisemitism. In the speech, Weiss emphasized that her Jewish pride is not drawn from the outside forces of Jew-hatred, but from the conduct and resilience of Jews who came before her. She cited a number of biblical sources for that pride, including Abraham, Ruth and Esther.

Abraham noticed that the world was overrun with depravity. Instead of treating others with contempt, he welcomed them into his home. At the first signs of a quarrel, he went to great lengths to ensure peace. Abraham treated others with respect, and advocated for the lives of his family and strangers, even when they may not have deserved it. By doing this, Abraham set a precedent for how his descendants, the Jewish people, should act.

I am proud to be a Jew because it does not just mean what *I am, but* how *I am.*

Ruth saw how fleeting life is in this world, and came to understand the higher value of the spirit. She came to fully embrace Hashem, His truth and His people. She did not anchor herself to her past, but lived openly and advanced toward growth and positive change. These attitudes were communicated to future generations, and produced some of the most righteous leaders the world has seen. She did this because she was a Jew.

Esther grew up in a country that hated her for being born as she was. She did not reject the leaders of that country, but came to marry one (the king). She did not use her position to indulge herself, and leave her Jewish identity behind, as she could easily have done. Instead, she exposed her Judaism at risk of her life to save her kin all over the empire. She did not let her country's treatment of her people influence the way she treated them. She did not plan a riot, an assassination or anything of the sort, despite counting down the days until the empire that crowned her would attempt to massacre her people — the Jewish people — under the king's decree. She behaved as her ancestors, Abraham and Ruth, did before her. She trusted in Hashem, rallied by her people and stood for what was right. She did not destroy the system, but worked to improve it for everyone, bringing it to a straighter path. She did this because she was a Jew.

Jewish pride is rooted in our history, but it does not end there. If we are only our past, what are we now? Yes, I am proud to be a Jew. I am proud of Abraham, of Ruth, of Esther. But I am also proud of myself.

I am proud to be a Jew because it does not just mean *what* I am, but *how* I am.

I am a Jew. I build my life the way it should have been yesterday. Evil and malice are not a part of me. The past does not cause me to rescind my pride, but increase it; I use it to refine the future.

Like my ancestors before me, I take note of the ways of the world, of how people treat each other, of how I have been treated, and I take it to heart. I call upon Hashem, and I allow Hashem to call upon me. I do not let the past fossilize in the annals of history, but I actively pursue the past into the future.

Judaism is a living breathing thing, as alive as I am today. It does not lie stagnant, and neither do I. Where there is wrong, I will fight, not to destroy it, but to right it. To keep moving forward, building a better world for everyone — a world that comes closer to G-d.

I am not only proud to be a Jew.

I am a Jew because I have a living source of pride.



Yale student Netanel Crispe wearing an Israeli flag and tefillin, surrounded by Hamas supporters. SAHAR TARTAK

University Students Have Lost Their Morality

By Elishama Marmon

This article was originally published on Oct. 28

Basic morality seems to have gone from the world — or at least the university campus.

In the aftermath of the horrific and awful attacks on Oct. 7, *Shmini Atzeres*, the response of most people was to express shock and outrage at the atrocities committed by Hamas. According to an SSRS poll conducted for CNN, only four percent of respondents feel no sympathy for the Israeli people, and only eight percent think that the Israeli military response was not at all justified. When combined with strong statements — such as world leaders standing unquestioningly with Israel, President Biden's powerfully pro-Israel speech and subsequent trip to Israel and the general push from nearly the whole world to stand with Israel — the response from the world at large has been about as supportive as anyone could have asked for.

Enter the modern elite American university, the home of the future leaders of society. Within days of Hamas's attack, a large number of campus organizations from various universities across the country issued statements blaming the massacre of Israeli citizens and foreign nationals on Israel. To quote the open letter signed by over 30 Harvard organizations, "We ... hold the Israeli regime entirely responsible for all unfolding violence." And the trend continued: Large numbers of clubs from various universities issued similar statements. Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) groups from around the country issued statements to the effect of this quote from Lehman College's SJP: "Long live the resistance, long live the move to a liberated Palestine, and long live our Marty[r]s." (sic) The CCNY SJP praised "Palestinian resistance fighters" who "are justifiably prompted in their attacks," and while mourning lost life "hold the Israeli regime entirely responsible." The national SJP referred to it as "a historic win" and said, "This is what it means to Free Palestine." That is a direct quote.

This insanity among students does not arise in a vacuum; these students have learned from their teachers. Faculty from Northwestern's Asian American studies program released a statement defending Hamas, denying the atrocities that Hamas committed had occurred, and decrying comparisons between Hamas and ISIS. Over 130 (at the time of writing) NYU faculty members signed a statement in "solidarity with our students, at an urgent moment of U.S.-backed state violence against a colonized, dispossessed and brutalized population." CUNY faculty did the same, as did many others.

"The level of antisemitism and hatred of the State of Israel present on college campuses, extended to the point of people justifying atrocities perpetrated by a terrorist organization, cannot be forgotten."

It's no wonder that the students in these institutions have followed in the footsteps of their educators. The development of students who support terrorism is, apparently, a feature rather than a bug.

But formal statements in support of terrorism are, in the modern world, relatively tame. Campuses erupted in massive protests explicitly supporting Hamas, with violence breaking out on many. UW Madison students chanted "Glory to the martyrs!" "The martyrs," in this case, is a reference to the 3,000 terrorists who murdered 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals ranging from innocent children in their beds to participants in a music festival. At Cooper Union, Jewish students had to be locked in the library as a pro-Palestinian mob pounded on the doors. Dozens of other institutions have had massive protests in support of Hamas. Tens of thousands of students at the most elite institutions in the West have stood up loudly for the explicit purpose of supporting terrorism. Some of these students are truly antisemitic. Some are merely so disconnected from reality and focused on combating exaggerated evils that they learned about last semester that they can completely miss a true atrocity happening in front of their eyes.

(A warning that the websites linked in the next two sentences contain incredibly disturbing content.) The people being cheered on and supported by the moral idiots who hope to be leaders of industry, politics and the intellectual world are those who raped, mutilated, burned, beheaded, brutalized, executed and tortured young women, children and babies. There are currently at least 200 Israelis who are captives in Gaza, including small children and babies. It must be made clear that those who today march in support of Hamas and denounce Israel are marching in support of *that*.

The absolute immorality of Hamas must be called out. Immorality must be met with absolute moral clarity. It must be explicitly stated by every decent person, as YU's student organizations and president have done, along with many others. The level of antisemitism and hatred of the State of Israel present on college campuses, extended to the point of people justifying atrocities perpetrated by a terrorist organization, cannot be forgotten. These institutions are full of people who do not understand the difference between good and evil. These people cannot be looked to for moral guidance after the full depth of their immorality has been laid so bare for us all to see.

The writer is a fellow at the Committee for Accuracy in Middle Eastern Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA).



Pro-Palestinian supporters in Washington DC TED EYTAN / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

On Keeping a Journal

By Rivka Krause

It started when I was eighteen with a rather simple sentence: "On the plane for my year in Israel." I penned that sentence in a sprawled handwriting, and then left the rest of the page blank. A rough start, but now, two years later, journaling is an integral part of my day.

Prior to keeping my first serious journal, I, like most people, had dabbled in keeping one. It was always on one list of resolutions or another, but never really stuck as a habit. But once I had committed to writing a page a day during the first months of my year in Israel, I found that I couldn't stop. At some point, I started bringing my journal with me everywhere and wrote down little bits of overheard conversation and silly observations. At that point, people began to ask what I write and why. What's the point of keeping a private journal if I never plan to share it?

I never felt that I had a compelling answer to that question until I read Joan Didion's essay "On Keeping a Notebook" in my creative writing class, in which she writes:

"I think we are well advised to keep on nodding terms with the people we used to be, whether we find them attractive company or not. Otherwise they turn up unannounced and surprise us, come hammering on the mind's door at 4 a.m. of a bad night and demand to know who deserted them, who betrayed them, who is going to make amends. We forget all too soon the things we thought we could never forget. We forget the loves and the betrayals alike, forget what we whispered and what we screamed, forget who we were."

When I journal, I remember the little pieces of myself that I would otherwise forget. The little bits of my life that I cannot hold onto, but that I can revisit.

When I journal, I remember the little pieces of myself that I would otherwise forget. The little bits of my life that I cannot hold onto, but that I can revisit. Our lives are so full of moments and memories that we inevitably lose "the things we thought we could never forget." Returning to my journals lends texture to the hazy past. It's been only two years since my year in Israel, yet I don't remember the details of that year. I remember the big things, but not the little details or what I was feeling for most of the time. But with a journal, I can return to the thoughts that troubled me, the questions I obsessed over, and the new joys I experienced.

Journals have an additional advantage in their total privacy. In modern life, the detritus of our pasts are almost inescapable. Phone camera rolls, Facebook pages and our search history all give insight into who we were, but they lack the quality of total privacy. When I write in a notebook, aware that no one else will read it, I am forced into complete honesty. In order for the journal to be worthwhile, I must come to its pages without delusions of the life I want others to see. I *keep* a journal, and equally, it keeps me because it is the grand repository of my life. I have been keeping a journal for two years now and I am surprised by the things that I have forgotten. I wonder what it will be like to read my current journals twenty years from now. Our lives are short, and our memories are frail, but by writing our thoughts down we give ourselves the ability to revisit memories that would have otherwise faded away.



Two years of journaling RIVKA KRAUSE

What Makes a Home?

By Rebecca Guzman

I've never visited my parents' hometown. Though they met in New York, my mother and father lived a mere fifteen minutes away from each other in Minsk, Belarus. I often wonder about the hundreds of ways their paths could have crossed. Were they ever in the same bakery at the same time? Did they study at the same library, learn to drive on the same streets?

But this is a place I can only imagine, though I've seen images on computer screens and in grainy black-and-white photographs. My parents have never taken my brother and me there. I've never even been to Europe. "There's nothing left for us," my mother would say whenever I asked her about potentially visiting Minsk. "Why?" was my father's common refrain. As a little girl, this refusal bugged me, mainly because I was insatiably curious and wanted to see as much of this vast world as I could. But as I grew up, and as my family turned towards Orthodox Judaism, I found it easy to understand their refusal and difficult to accept it.

"Begin's words have shown me is that a homeland is a foundation. It is a place from which people emerge, and regardless of whether they return, the homeland has served its purpose."

I know that the place I romanticized as a young girl was not an idyll for my parents. I know that the fields they played in as children have been stained with Jewish blood, that high school was one interminable boxing match for my father, that my mother's coming of age was tainted by the very accident of her ethnicity. I know that Judaism was a hazy, indefinite idea for their assimilated generation, and that America and Israel — lands of freedom — were two impossible dreams thought of in those precious seconds before sleep. But I also know that my great-grandmother spoke in hushed whispers on the phone with her friends, penciling the dates for the High Holidays into her notebook. I know that my mother and father associated springtime with the strange cracker hidden in a pillowcase in the kitchen ceiling, only to be eaten in the dead of night. I know that despite all of this, Torah and Judaism eventually became a reality for my family, and our return would not have been possible if not for the homeland they left behind.

As part of the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, I am privileged to be in a reading group titled "The Writings of Menachem Begin," led by Ms. Sarah Wapner. I came in rather unfamiliar with Begin's written works, and I did not expect the lyricism and content of his prose to resonate so personally with me. I also did not expect to find something that I had been unwittingly looking for. When asked if he would ever return to his birthplace of Brisk, Begin answered: "No. No. I will not allow myself to go back to Brisk. Yet Brisk will always follow me and be with me." In his 1972 speech, "We Were All Born in Jerusalem," delivered in Israel at a ceremony for the martyred Jews of Brisk, Begin evokes powerful memories of the Belarusian city that shaped him. He remembers the voice of the butcher's son as he sang the special Rosh Hashanah prayer, writing, "Until today I hear his voice in this prayer, or the prayer in his voice."

This is one small line in what is a larger and profoundly incredible speech, but it is this line which strikes me. Contained in this one sentence is, in my opinion, the relationship between memory and spirituality, between the upbringing of one's past and the religious experience of their present. For example, my family looks at Judaism differently because of the glasses we wear: my father's weekly walks to Shabbat services bear a greater significance than those of someone raised in a country with religious freedom; my mother's headscarf is a symbol of privilege as well as duty; my Jewish education is a miracle that would have been unfathomable to my great-grandparents. Our histories reveal themselves as our futures unfold. *Until today I hear his voice in this prayer, or the prayer in his voice.*

Begin's words have shown me that a homeland is a foundation. It is a place from which people emerge, and regardless of whether they return, the homeland has served its purpose. Maybe my parents will never go back to Belarus. Or, maybe, in a safer time, we will all go there together. Either way, in the words of Menachem Begin, Belarus will always follow us and be with us.



Forest in Minsk, Belarus VIKTORIYA VENK / UNSPLASH

MAKING A DIFFERENCE
Continued from Page 10

Correction — I love *my* country. Should I leave my country when things get hard? Should I abandon my brothers and sisters here who are suffering? Additionally, I am in my shana bet year, something which was not planned or guaranteed. I had an unequivocal path — one year of seminary, and then YU. But once I came to seminary, everything changed, including my plans. Only a slight percentage of girls across the board stay a second year, and I happened to be one of them. Why? Hashem must have put me here, at this particular time, for a reason.

I am taking it day by day. If I feel that I need to leave, then so be it. Sometimes, the best thing to do is to go. But for right now, my answer stands.

Be'ezrat Hashem, this war will be over soon. *Be'ezrat Hashem*, the murder of thousands of our brothers and sisters will end. And *Be'ezrat Hashem*, we will be united, not through tragedy, but through *geulah*. Together, we will witness the glory of the *Beit HaMikdash* and stand hand in hand, crying not tears of heartbreak but tears of joy.

The writer is currently spending her second gap year in Israel at Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim as part of the S. Daniel Abraham Israel Program

Why I Spent Yom Kippur in Solitude

By Nadav Heller

Editor's Note: Due to Hamas's unprovoked terrorist attack on Israel, this article, along with many other Commentator articles, was delayed in favor of prioritizing Israel coverage.

This year, for the first time in memory, I spent Yom Kippur alone. I did not go to shul, I did not hear the classic tunes, I did not spend the day engaged in prayerful introspection and I did not dance with friends and family at the end of the fast. I read my book out loud to a silent room, prayed a subdued *ma'ariv* and broke my fast on chocolate milk in a plastic cup.

I work as a manager at a group home for adults with developmental disabilities and spend approximately every other Shabbat in Brooklyn caring for people who struggle to care for themselves. I usually enjoy Shabbat at the home. The residents are funny, my manager is great and I get to do a lot of reading. But it can sometimes get lonely. Most of my coworkers are both non-Jewish and non-native English speakers, and the cultural divide is considerable. It can be hard to make Shabbat feel like Shabbat when I'm one of two Jewish staff members on shift.

This Yom Kippur was no different. I spent the venerated "Day of Judgment" performing wheelchair transfers and monitoring nap schedules. Over the course of day, I often heard a voice in my head urging me to steal away to a quiet room for a few hours to introspect, but each time I thought of the verse in Mishlei: "One who removes his ear from hearing Torah, his prayer is also an abomination." If my prayers come at the price of neglecting others or shirking my responsibilities, they are unwanted, abominable. I know that this is true. Religious life doesn't always carry us to zeniths of ecstatic fulfillment. It often drags us through the doldrums of sleepy-eyed routine. I told myself that my *Seder Ha'avodah* (labor schedule) this year was not in the Temple, but printed and pasted to the living room whiteboard. I tried to believe it. And yet, I couldn't help but long for the sweaty, teary swaying of a communal *ne'ilah*.

"On Yom Kippur, I have often felt like a member of God's glorious army, passionately proclaiming "God is the Lord!" in seven thunderous waves. But this year I felt like a wisp."

The most difficult part was praying aloud. The residents in my home do not regularly attend shul and may never have heard the Yom Kippur tunes before. If I don't sing to them, who will? I butchered the *nusach* from memory, only recalling the tune halfway through a paragraph, and then losing it again. I involuntarily changed keys at rousing moments. My voice pinged up and down the stairs, eventually swallowed up by the couches and walls as if it never existed — like a fading flower, a passing shade, a dissipating cloud, a blowing wind, flying dust and a fleeting dream. In return for my efforts I received silent stares and the occasional vocalic outburst. I can't know whether they preferred me silent, or if they even noticed me at all. Never have I felt more like a *kol demama daka*.

On Yom Kippur, I have often felt like a member of God's glorious army, passionately proclaiming "God is the Lord!" in seven thunderous waves. But this year I felt like a wisp. Praying alone, I had to contend with my own fragility. Are my prayers really so ephemeral? Is my voice really as insignificant as it felt? Can I live with it if the answer is yes?

Sometimes, I get so used to serving God as part of a community that I forget how to do it on my own. At YU, there's always someone making a midnight *ma'ariv minyan*, staying up late to review yesterday's Torah lecture or asking you to give a last-minute *chaburah*. Many of us never have to ask what it means to be religious without those things. In one of my classes, the lecturer went around the room and asked each student whether their service of God was primarily intrinsic or extrinsic. I held my breath as the first ten students in a row answered "extrinsic." When all your friends are Jewish and your Caf card only buys kosher food, religious practice can become comfortable and eventually devolve into numb routine.

Sometimes I wonder whether that describes me as well. Can I still stand by my values even if I quite literally stand alone? While singing *mussaf* in the living room of my group home, I got my answer. As great as communal Judaism is, it is not what makes me religious. I make that decision every day as an individual. I don't *daven* on Yom Kippur because that's what's expected of me, or because all the cool kids are doing it, but because I personally crave closeness to divinity.

I absolutely intend to spend next Yom Kippur in a shul, singing along with everyone else. I love the Yom Kippur service. But I'll carry with me the knowledge that I could say the same prayers to the same God anywhere, even in solitude.



Chocolate milk in a plastic cup BIANCA VAN DIJK / PIXABAY

Far from the Gautalaman Rooftop

By Avraham Frohlich

Editor's Note: Due to Hamas's unprovoked terrorist attack on Israel, this article, along with many other Commentator articles, was delayed in favor of prioritizing Israel coverage.

This summer, I joined a group of 30 YU students heading to Guatemala and El Salvador organized by Rabbi Daniel Coleman, then-assistant director of career advising at the Shevet Glaubach Center for Career Strategy and Professional Development. We went to visit the people there, Jews and non-Jews, with the aim of providing some measure of aid and goodwill.

Early on in the trip, I found myself in a small tin-roofed house, bending low and close to an elderly man sitting near a dirt floor. We were in a village in Guatemala, a few students huddled together beneath the scarred ceiling of a makeshift shelter. In a quiet and unassuming voice, barely audible over the harsh rain outside, the old man spoke about his life. He told us how he had raised children in this place, struggled and survived for them, and learned, through his struggle, deep and lasting faith.

Through their perseverance, commitment, friendship and love, the people of El Salvador and Guatemala showed me the best of humanity.



The author teaching a child how to play guitar SHLOMOTZION RUBIN

As I stood there, captivated by what the man had to say, I suddenly became self-conscious. I had ostensibly come on this trip to give, but what could I possibly give this man in the few minutes we had together? He had lived a long and varied life. His words carried a wisdom that I, in my youth, couldn't hope to return. I started to feel then that whatever I could offer, the people we would meet would give me much more. Throughout the trip, in ways big and small, this proved to be true. Through their perseverance, commitment, friendship and love, the people of El Salvador and Guatemala showed me the best of humanity.

During the first week we visited a school called Safe Passage, intended for underprivileged children in Guatemala City. The school, founded by one woman in 1999, originally served 46 children. Incredibly, the school now provides over 500 children and 100 parents with education and social services.

When I first entered the school, I felt completely foreign. So much separated me from the school kids. We didn't share a language, history, or cultural identity. But as soon as we began interacting, everything changed. Somehow, with a fist bump or balloon animal, there was no gap anymore, no language barrier separating us. What had stood between us now brought us together; our differences encouraged curiosity and exchange.

As the trip went on, I found this feeling of kinship and community wherever we went. A STEM fair at a public school in El Salvador became a meeting of cultures, at various points fading into demonstrations of traditional and popular music and dance. A soccer match put us in contest with and introduced us to the Jewish community of El Salvador, who embraced us as brothers and sisters. At Cassa Jackson, a recovery center for malnourished children, Baby Shark, of all things, broke through the linguistic divide. Even strangers we met on the street or in some remote village greeted us with warmth and friendship.

As a Jew, I found it especially meaningful to experience Jewish life in El Salvador and Guatemala. In many ways, these visits were among the most surprising of the trip for me. Having spent much of my life in a so-called bubble, I had little idea of just how vibrant and impressive these communities are. While each community exhibited a unique character, they all displayed a strong communal bond and a deep and active connection to their Judaism. Some of the most inspiring community members were those who had converted to Judaism, many of whom had to leave their homes and families in order to pursue their faith.

Before leaving Guatemala, our group visited the town of Antigua. For nearly 200 years, the city served as the seat of Spanish power in Central America (and conveniently enough for us, currently has a Chabad). Partly due to its historical significance, the city contains much distinctive architecture, with towering cathedrals and low bell towers punctuating the landscape. At nightfall, a few of us went up on a rooftop overlooking the town. From up there, the city was a scattering of street lights. Above us, the silhouettes of three volcanoes could be seen, their figures dark and almost hidden in the night.

An American doctor visiting the region accompanied us onto that roof. She told me that she now comes often to Guatemala, after an inspiring trip nearly two decades prior. She told me that after this trip, my life would never be the same.

A War Without the Urim Vetumim

By Avraham Walkenfeld

The Yale coat of arms bears the Hebrew words *Urim Vetumim*, set inside books (ironically missing the point of the Urim Vetumim), and their official motto is *Lux et Veritas*, or "Light and Truth" in Latin. The subtle insinuation that Yale is actually the Seat of Knowledge within this world and the conduit of all things known is perhaps a tad bit arrogant and conceited.

Interestingly, we say in Kinna 36:

Can Shinar (Babylon) and Pasros (Egypt) compare with you, despite their greatness, and can their worthless deities be compared to your *Urim Vetumim*?

Thus, on *Tisha B'av*, we actually mourn the very comparison between the worthless deities of the world and the power of the *Urim Vetumim*. Interestingly our focus is upon this comparison rather than the actual loss of the *Urim Vetumim*. The composer of this *Kinna*, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, dreamt his entire life about emigrating to *Eretz Yisroel*, and his life was tragically cut short through achieving this illustrious goal.

The *passuk* in Exodus 28:30 explains the *Urim Vetumim*:

Inside the breast-piece of decision you shall place the *Urim* and *Tumim*, so that they are over Aaron's heart when he comes before the Lord. Thus Aaron shall carry the instrument of decision for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord at all times.

Rashi explains that it was an inscription of God's special name which illuminated letters to provide answers that were always true.

The *passuk* in Numbers 27:21 states:

But he shall present himself to Eleazar the priest, who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the *Urim* before the Lord. By such instruction, they shall go out and by such instruction they shall come in, he and all the Israelite [militia], and the whole community."

Rashi comments that this was specifically used for war.

The *Urim Vetumim* is discussed at length in *Masechet* Yoma 73a. It was consulted through the high riest and specifically for matters of warfare, especially regarding specific military maneuvers and their successes. Even though the decree of a prophet can be retracted, a decree from the *Urim Vetumim* cannot be. It is called the *Urim Vetumim* as *Urim* is based on the word light, and it illuminates words, and *Tumim* means complete and it completes its words. A Gemara in Sotah 48b tells us that from the time the First Temple was destroyed the *Urim Vetumim* were lost and will be found upon the arrival of the Messiah.

We are now living through a time in which our brothers and sisters are at war and in mortal peril. We do not have the Urim Vetumim *to guide us.*

We are now living through a time in which our brothers and sisters are at war and in mortal peril. We do not have the *Urim Vetumim* to guide us. We cannot receive direct military strategy through Divine means. For this we weep, "Cry in a bitter voice to your Rock about your breach and your distress" (Kinna 41).

The Midrash *Vayikra Rabba* tells us that the commandment of *Arbah Minim* is a form of prayer that *Hakodosh Baruch Hu* will not be able to refuse and will guarantee the Israelites' ultimate victory over nations of the world. Rabbi Yitzchak applied the *passukim* to the years in which there is no king, no prophet, no priest and no *Urim Vetumim*. And all they have is prayer alone. The Midrash concludes with the prayer of King David in front of *Hakodush Boruch Hu*, "Master of the World, do not spurn their prayers.

When we have no *Urim Vetumim*, we have something far greater: We have prayer! The *Arba Minim* that we shook only a few weeks ago is a form of prayer. These prayers will ultimately ensure our victory.

Whilst the *Urim Vetumim* is an aspect or an element of the connection that we had to the Divine, the connection stems from our eternal covenant with God, as God promised in the *Tochecha* (Leviticus 26:44) that we will always stay connected.

Yet, even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them, annulling My covenant with them: for I am ה' their God.

Hashem will be our God, and we will be His nation. We uphold our aspect of the connection through Torah and *tefilla*. The Torah, which we so recently celebrated, during the bloodiest day for *Klal Yisroel* since the Holocaust, is immutable and infinite! Unlike the *Urim Vetumim*, "*Lo Bashamayim Hi*" — it is not in Heaven.

During *leining* on Simchas Torah, we read about the mourning period for Moshe *Rabbeinu*. The Gemara in Temurah 16a writes that thousands of *halachos* were forgotten during this period. They asked Yehoshua Bin Nun to determine the Halachot for them, but he responded "Torah *Lo Bashamyim Hi*." They asked Shmuel and he responded that a prophet cannot add to the Torah. They asked Pinchas and he responded like Yehoshua and they asked Eliezer and he responded like Shmuel. The *Meforshim* explain that Yehoshua and Pinchas, as a king and priest, had a right to ask the *Urim Vetumim*, so they responded "Torah *Lo Bashamyim Hi*." Shmuel and Eliezer were asked as prophets, so they responded they were unable to add to the Torah.

However, Rabbi Abbahu responded to a similar *Baraita* that Othniel ben Kenaz, was able to establish the lost Torah through *pilpul*. The fact that the Torah is not in heaven makes it even more powerful than the *Urim Vetumim* which is! *Eitz Chaim Hi LaMachizim Bach*.

Alas, we are a nation at war stricken with grief. We cannot consult the *Urim Vetumim* right now. Yet, our integral and immutable connection to the *Ribono Shel Olam* is here just the same — through our Torah and our *tefilla*! This will surely save us!

The *Kinna* mourns the comparison that the Egyptians and Babylonians made to their deities, because the *Urim Vetumim* showcases an aspect of our connection with the divine, and without the *Urim Vetumim*, the nations of the world and the scholars at Yale, ignore and spurn us as they take it for themselves. They can attack our children without condemnation and incite blood libels against us. But they can never shake our faith, or destroy our connection with *Hakodush Baruch Hu* — that is immutable and infinite.

Kinna 36 concludes:

"All idolatrous kingdoms shall pass on and disappear,

While your firm power is forever; your leaders for all generations.

Your God desired you for his residence,

And fortunate is the man who chooses and draws near and dwells in your courtyards.

Fortunate is he who waits and arrives and witnesses

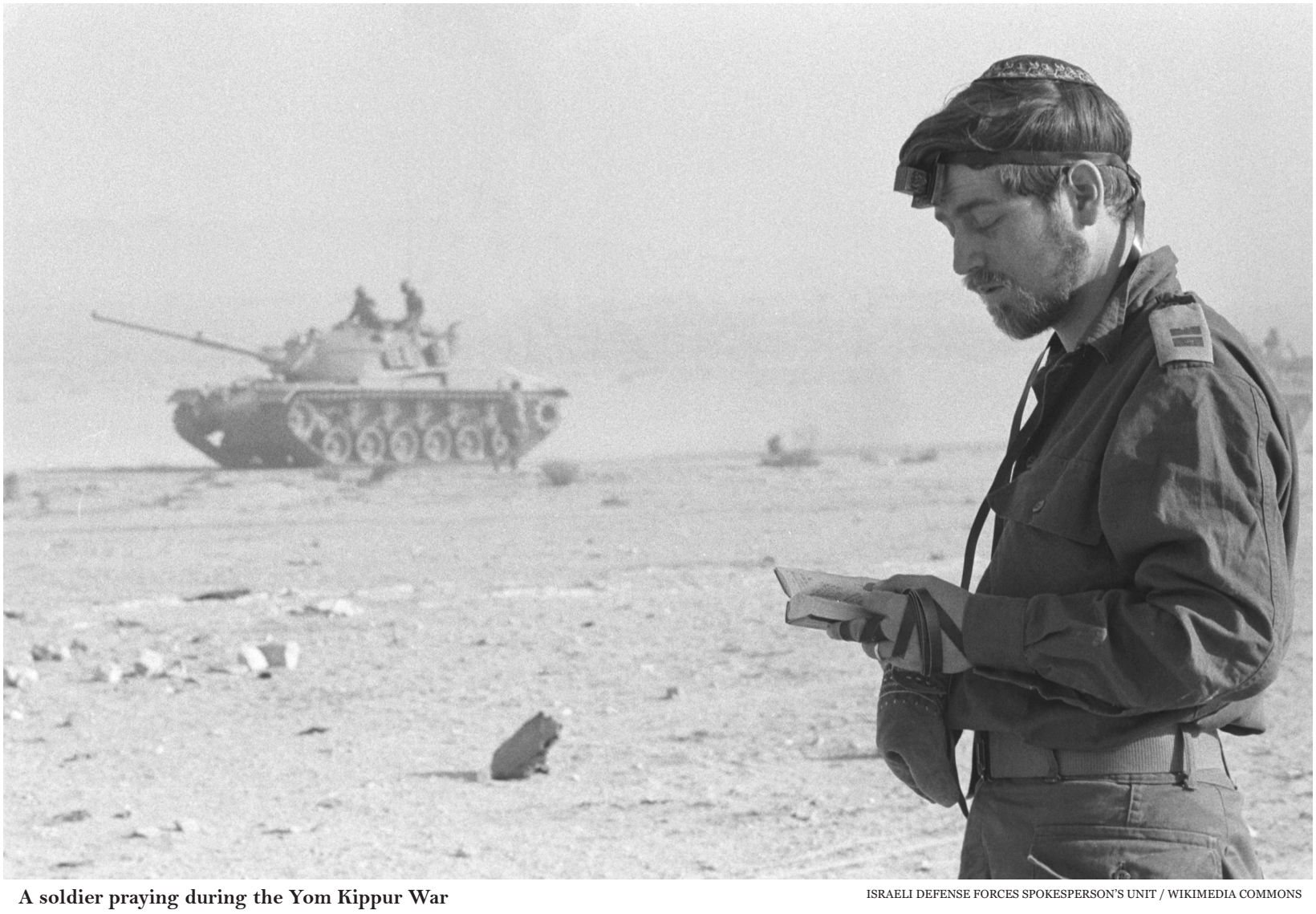
The rising of your light when your dawn bursts forth over him.

To behold the goodness of your chosen ones,

And exalt in your joy when you [referring to Tzion] return

To the youthfulness of early times."

Ribbono Shel Olam — answer our *tefilos*, let your light shine forth, grant us a swift and decisive victory, do not let more innocent blood be spilled, let the souls who have perished find shelter under the cover of your divine wings, avenge their blood and let us exalt in your joy when we return to Tzion to the youthfulness of early times, *b'm'heira b'yamainu*.



A soldier praying during the Yom Kippur War

ISRAELI DEFENSE FORCES SPOKESPERSON'S UNIT / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS


Got something to share?
Email editor@yucommentator.org
NEVER. STOP.
COMMENTATING.

Rising Interest Rates and Your College Budget's New Challenge

By Moshe Crane

Attention, fellow YU students! While you're busy juggling assignments and trying to stretch that student budget, there's an important financial storm brewing that you should be aware of: rising interest rates. In this article, I'll break down the fundamentals of interest rates, explore why they are on the upswing and examine how these higher rates affect your everyday purchases in the caf. But fear not, for I'll also discuss how you, as a savvy consumer, can protect yourself from the adverse effects of high-interest rates.

Before we dive into the repercussions of rising interest rates, let's establish a basic understanding of what interest rates are. Essentially, an interest rate is the cost of borrowing money or the return on investment for lending money. These rates are set by central banks, influenced by economic conditions, and can be either fixed or variable. The banks don't have complete autonomy. When inflation rises faster than the Federal Reserve (also known as the "Fed") wants, which can be exacerbated by low-interest rates, the Fed raises the rates to slow down the economy's hastened growth. When the rates get too high, slowing down the economy, the Fed lowers the rates to increase activity. Your coffee, Golan and *seforim* payments are all impacted by these rates, which can fluctuate and have significant implications for your financial well-being.



Rising interest rates

MARKUS SPISKE / UNSPLASH

The Fed has raised interest rates over the past few years because the rate of inflation is growing too fast for the American consumer to handle. The interest rate has been raised to 5.5% so far, the highest it has been in 22 years. The Fed's goal is to stabilize our economy from uncontrollable growth by slowing rampant cash inflow. Meaning, the prices of goods are increasing unsustainably because our economy has too much cash inflow.

As YU students, you might be wondering how this affects your daily life. Well, raising interest rates slows down our economy, leading to a slower increase or in extreme cases an outright decrease in cost for consumer goods. When interest rates climb, businesses may pay more to borrow money to finance their operations, which can lead to higher production costs. While it is true that increases in interest rates therefore lead to an increase in prices, the increase is generally smaller and more stable than one resulting from high inflation. This means that everything from your morning muffin from Nagel's to your sushi from the caf can steadily go up in price, but the interest rate-related increase in price is preferable to the alternative, an inflation-related increase.

Now, let's discuss how you can be proactive in mitigating the negative effects of high-interest rates. Remember that one of the reasons interest rates rise is to combat the inflation caused by the excessive spending of the American public. By managing your finances responsibly, you can help avoid the wrath of the Fed. Keep a budget, save money, and use credit wisely to minimize your reliance on borrowing. The more financially responsible you are, the less impact rising interest rates will have on your daily life.

The interest rate has been raised to 5.5% so far, the highest it have been in 22 years.

In a world where economic dynamics constantly evolve, it's crucial for college students to stay informed and prepared for the financial challenges they may face. Rising interest rates can have a direct impact on the cost of even the cafeteria, but by understanding their origins and taking proactive steps to manage personal finances, you can navigate these changes more effectively. Remember that, and with the right information and prudent financial choices, you can safeguard your financial well-being and steer clear of the pitfalls of high-interest rates. Skipping out on that Dunkin run pre-*seder* may be just the fix you can perform to help contribute to a more manageable economy steering clear of inflation.

Riding the Rate Roller Coaster: Is the Fed's Next Stop a Full Halt?

By Yehuda Schwartz

A simple run to the grocery store leaves us all too familiar with the rising costs of inflation. As the leaves change colors this autumn, seemingly, so does the economic climate. Many are aware that raising interest rates are a primary avenue that the Federal Reserve, or the Fed, uses to tame inflation. But the mechanics of this move can be somewhat of a black box. How does it all work?

In the intricate world of economics, the Federal Reserve wields a powerful wand known as the federal funds rate. The federal funds rate is the interest rate at which banks and credit unions lend reserve balances to other depository institutions overnight. By adjusting this rate, the Fed sets the cost of borrowing money, influencing overall economic activity. However, raising rates doesn't just combat inflation. It has a wide-ranging effect on the economy in a number of ways. As rates rise, it disincentivizes people from taking out loans and investing in the economy. This is a crucial step in slowing down the economy and preventing 'overheating'.

The general give-and-take of inflation and interest can be explained via example. One, if not the most, affected sectors from the rising interest rates is the real estate industry. Real Estate is a particularly loan-heavy sector since buyers and investors often finance their purchases of these tangible, high-value assets through loans. When interest rates rise, the cost of borrowing also increases. Many in the housing industry are calling on the Fed to stop raising rates as "mortgage rates have reached their highest level in more than two decades" according to data from Freddie Mac. The burden is further evidenced by the sharp decline in mortgage applications, which have plummeted to their lowest levels since 1996, according to the MBA.

The good news, however, is that the Fed seems to be listening. At its last FOMC (The Federal Open Market Committee) meeting last month, the Fed paused its interest rate hikes for just the second time this year. Many experts in the industry expect one more raise this year followed by pauses or even cuts.

When this bubble bursts, the fallout isn't just numbers on a spreadsheet, it's families thrown into financial turmoil, and an economy thrown in the gutter.

This, however, begs the question: "Is the Fed stopping its rate hikes too early?" While continuing to raise interest rates would upset many and hurt the economy in the short term, there just simply doesn't seem to be enough evidence to stop the rate hikes. Employment and inflation are still too high and continue to rise. In such a scenario, classic economic theory dictates a further tightening of monetary policy via raising interest rates to prevent overheating.

But why should we care if the economy overheats?

If interest rates are cut too early and the economy overheats, it can lead to bankruptcies, large job losses, wage cuts, and an overall weak economy. Just take a look at the years leading up to the "Great Recession" in 2008. Due to a housing market bubble, risky lending practices, and the widespread securitization of subprime mortgages, the economy overheated and led to the worst recession since the Great Depression. A premature halt in raising interest rates could saturate the market with cheap credit and lead to reckless investments, thus creating an economic "bubble." When this bubble bursts, the fallout isn't just numbers on a spreadsheet, it's families thrown into financial turmoil, and an economy thrown in the gutter. Simply put, if the Fed cuts rates too early, there's a good chance that they won't be able to fix it until it's too late.

So, what's the best path forward? In the months ahead, as the Fed potentially draws the curtain on its era of rate hikes, the decision will undoubtedly be debated. As we ride this interest rates roller coaster with its dizzying highs and lows, the decisions made at the next juncture will be critical. The next FOMC meeting is right around the corner from October 31st-November 1st. I encourage you to pay attention. The choices of today will shape the economic landscape of tomorrow.



The interest rate roller coaster has a real impact on your wallet and the economy

MARKUS SPISKE / UNSPLASH

Taxes for Students: Navigating the Maze of Deductions, Credits, and Dependencies

By Jacob Rosinsky

In 1789, Benjamin Franklin wrote to French scientist Jean-Baptiste Le Roy that, “In this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes.” While the adage held true then, it's worth noting that Franklin's words have gained recognition for its remarkable foresight, considering the significant expansion of the U.S. tax burden since those early days. Following the Revolutionary War, the predominant form of taxation was the excise tax, levied on specific goods or services, often referred to as "sin taxes" because they aimed to discourage consumption of certain products, including tobacco, alcohol and gambling. These are also sometimes called ‘hidden taxes,’ since they generally are not known to the consumer, yet are still passed onto the public in the form of higher prices for goods. Excise tax still exists today; for instance, the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 included, among many other things, an excise tax on corporate stock buybacks and made a permanent increase in the excise tax on coal.

The tax that most people think of in regard to their personal tax obligation is income tax, and was only made legal in 1913 when congress ratified the 16th amendment. Prior to 1913, attempts by Congress to issue a federal income tax had all been struck down as unconstitutional or repealed for various other reasons. Over 100 years since income taxes were introduced, the modern tax landscape encompasses a broader spectrum, including not just individual, but also, corporate income taxes, payroll taxes, consumption taxes and property taxes. Looking at the historical progression of taxation, we can see that understanding taxes is not only a practical necessity but also a financial opportunity. This is particularly relevant for students and individuals who may be encountering income tax liability or the prospect of refunds for the first time through part-time or summer jobs.

But despite their inevitability and opportunity potential, taxes remain an enigma to many students.

To fulfill one's federal income tax responsibility, which is incumbent on any U.S. citizen earning over $600, one must file a Form 1040, the US Individual Income Tax Return Form. This can generally be filled out with information from various sources, among them the W-2 form one gets from their employer at the end of the year. It should be noted that one might have a state income liability too. People can prepare and file this by themselves, or alternatively, use online tax preparation software, such as H&R Block or TurboTax, or hire a tax preparer or CPA to file for them. Individuals earning under $73,000 can file for free online with IRS Free File, accessed on the IRS webpage.

Despite their inevitability and opportunity potential, taxes remain an enigma to many students

Irrespective of one's chosen tax filing method, understanding the fundamental principles behind tax calculations can be highly advantageous. This is especially true for students, as their tax situations are generally uncomplicated and more straightforward than they will be in other stages of life. Thus, it's an ideal time to acquire a solid grasp of these fundamentals.

Before one even begins to prepare to file their income tax return, one should determine their dependency status. For students, one should speak about this with their parents. Generally, one can be claimed as a dependent for tax purposes only until they turn 19 and provide less than half their own support. However, for full time students, the dependency age limit extends to 24. Whether or not one is a dependent may have a significant impact on what they, and/or their parents, can claim as deductions and credits, which impacts the ultimate tax liability. Being a non-dependent from parents may allow students to receive more tax benefits, but this may come at the cost of benefits to their parents.

One difference between filing as a dependent or a non-dependent is the standard deduction that most US taxpayers are entitled to just for being alive. In 2023, the non-dependent standard deduction is $13,850. This number is adjusted for inflation so it most likely will go up this coming year. This means that as long as one is independent of their parents, they should be able to make $13,850 before they have to pay anything in federal income tax. For dependent children, however, this is reduced to $1,250 or their earned income plus $400, whichever is greater, as long as it doesn’t go above the regular standard deduction.

This doesn’t matter much if one has a lot of earned income, like wages or salary, but if someone has a lot of unearned income, which generally comes from dividends and capital gains from investments, this may be a factor.

As an alternative to the standard deduction one can take an itemized deduction, which are deductions such as state income tax deductions, mortgage interest deduction, medical and dental expenses and deductions for charitable donations. The itemized items are then added up, and if they are greater than the standard deduction one can elect to take them instead. However, one living an average student’s lifestyle is likely to be a lot better off taking the standard deduction. One’s dependency status does not impact one’s ability to claim an itemized deduction. It should be noted that this deduction is not a credit, the difference between the two being that a deduction reduces one’s tax base, or how much income gets taxed, and a credit reduces one’s tax bill directly.

In addition to the standard deduction there are other tax credits that students can look into, and is generally applicable to many student’s parents or students paying for tuition. One of these is American Opportunity Tax Credit. This credit is available to students who are in their first four years of college and can give one a credit of up to $2,500, up to $1,000 of which may be refundable. This means that this will reduce the taxes one owes by up to $2,500, and then, if one’s tax liability is already less than that, they can get up to $1,000 from the government in excess of whatever may have been withheld from one’s paycheck. It should be noted though, that this begins to phase out if one’s income is above $80,000 and is totally inapplicable by the time one’s income is $90,000. While most students are probably not making this much, this credit is available to those who claim students as a dependent. As such, if one’s parents are making over the income limit, for married couples filing jointly the credit begins to phase out when making $160,000 and is completely eliminated when making $180,000. This may be a factor in determining whether one should file as a dependent or independent from their parents.

Another helpful credit is the Lifetime Learning Credit. This credit is worth up to $2,000, although none is refundable. Like the American Opportunity Credit, this can also be claimed by those who claim a student as a dependent, but also begins to phase out at $80,000 and is completely eliminated by the time one reaches $90,000 in income. These numbers are doubled for married couples filing jointly. It should be noted one cannot take both the Lifetime Learning Credit and the American Opportunity Credit in the same year.

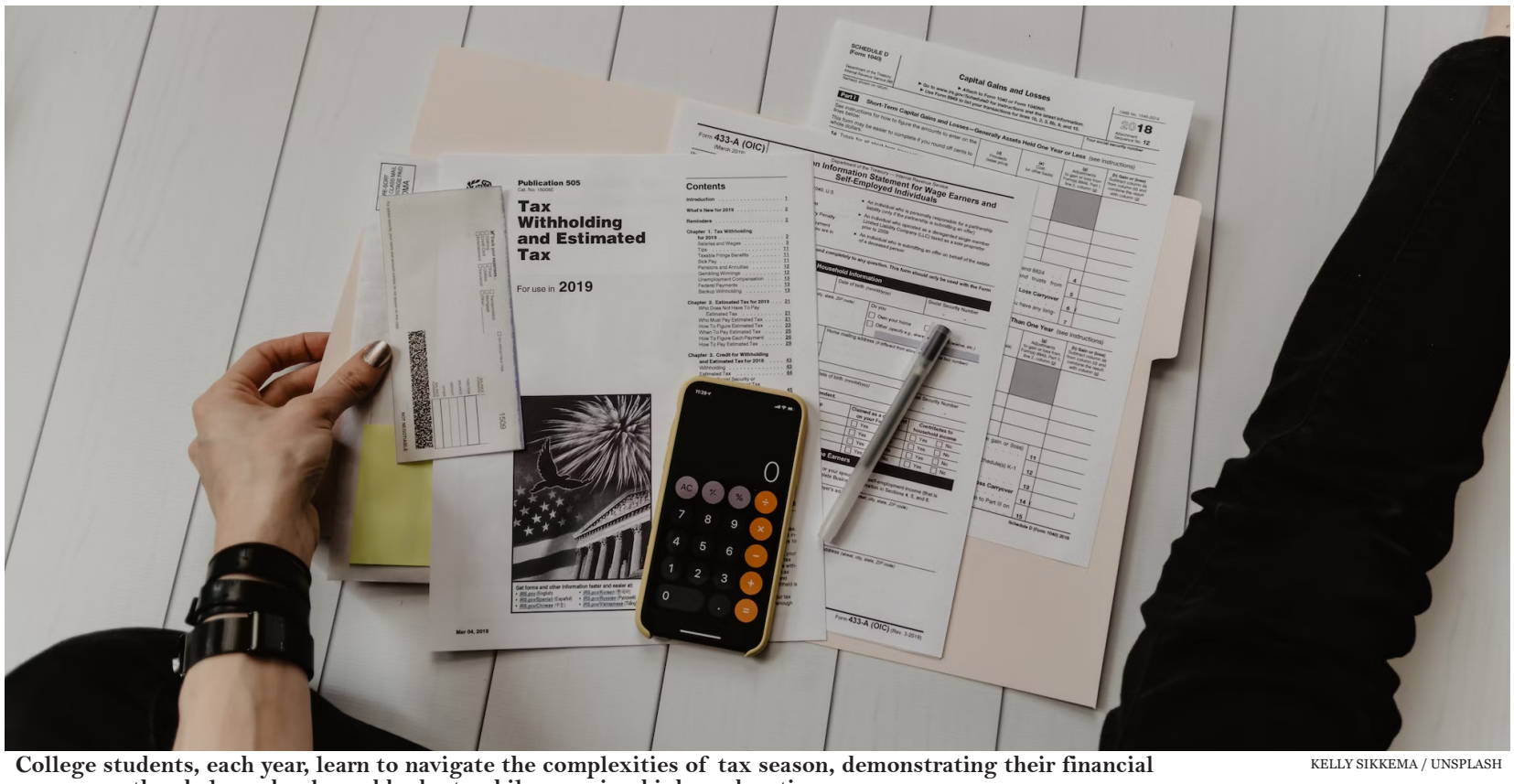
To be eligible for these credits, one first must access their 1098-T to know what their education expenses are. At YU, this personalized form can be found here. Once one gets their 1098-T they have to fill out Form 8863 to receive the Lifetime Learning Credit or the American Opportunity Credit.

One’s education expenses can be further leveraged for state taxes. In New York, one can utilize education expenses to get a credit of up to $400 or a deduction of up to $10,000, which is $2,000 more than the basic standard deduction in New York. One can get these by filing out Form IT-272 and submit it with their return.

While there is a lot more to filing taxes than what’s discussed here, and no one’s taxes can be accurately described with a one-size-fits-all article, these tips should provide you with the basics needed to get started on your taxes this coming year. No matter how you choose to file, I hope this can help build your understanding of the unique benefits one can get as a student filing taxes and help smooth out the process.

The author does not provide tax, legal or accounting advice. This material has been prepared for informational purposes only, and is not intended to provide, and should not be relied on for, tax, legal or accounting advice. You should consult your own tax, legal and accounting advisors before engaging in any transaction.

Thanks to Dr. Leonard Fuld for assistance in writing this article.



College students, each year, learn to navigate the complexities of tax season, demonstrating their financial acumen as they balance books and budgets while pursuing higher education.

KELLY SIKKEMA / UNSPLASH

Modern TV Gets a New Look: "The Bear" Season Two Review

By Liev Markovich

"The Bear," created by Christopher Storrer and streaming on FX and Hulu, does not resemble most serious television that has premiered in the twenty years since "The Sopranos." In the 21st century, television operates, for the most part, as the medium of seedy lifestyles and criminal antiheroes, of Don Draper and Walter White. It often seems that any highly acclaimed show must demonstrate a lack of morality, its artistic function to allow regular Americans, for an hour a week, to drop all normative ethical judgements and merely get lost in a (usually) brilliantly crafted and seductive narrative. However, "The Bear" subverts these conventions. There is no violent crime, it does not examine the lives of the super rich, and no one cheats on their spouse. When I think of "The Bear," the terms that come to mind are service, sacrifice and family. Now, the show is not overtly, purposely saccharine à la "Ted Lasso." It contains its fair share of pessimism, anxiety and shoddy ethical judgment. Yet "The Bear" always returns to a stable, *moral* base that resembles a shimmering glass of water in the relentlessly cynical desert that is the modern TV landscape.

For those uninitiated, "The Bear" follows world class chef Carmen (Carmy) Berzatto (Jeremy Allen White, who audiences will be seeing a lot more of in the future), and the staff of Chicago restaurant "The Beef" as they attempt to keep the restaurant alive following its owner, Carmy's brother Mike's, suicide. Season one focused on recovery, with the characters, especially Carmy, merely trying to keep the restaurant afloat financially and to stay afloat emotionally. However, the final episode's revelation that Mike left hundreds of wads of cash in the restaurant's tomato paste cans as a final gift provides an opportunity for renewal — to transform "The Beef" into a Michelin star restaurant, to "let it rip," as Mike instructs Carmy in a posthumous letter. In Season Two, the show undergoes a considerable tonal shift and often leaves the claustrophobic kitchen confines that defined Season One, quite literally giving the character's more space to breathe. The showrunner's even go international– to Denmark, pastry capital of Europe– a shocking development considering their clear proclivity for Chicago, of which there are so many establishing shots it could be considered the show's main character.

"The Bear" always returns to a stable, moral base that resembles a shimmering glass of water in the relentlessly cynical desert that is the modern TV landscape.

Besides experimenting with new settings, "The Bear" also makes Carmy, who dominated almost every frame in season one, take a back seat in season two. The show takes on an anthology-feel, with each character getting a greater chance to shine. Head chef Sydney (the outstanding, deadpan Ayo Edebiri, who is another rising star audiences will be seeing a lot more of), baker Marcus (Lionel Boyce), and deadbeat Richie (Ebon Moss-Bachrach) each get a standalone episode. Carmy's sister Sugar (Abby Elliot) joins the restaurant staff and struggles to cope with the added stress of her pregnancy. Tina (Lizo Colón-Zayas), a former line cook, grows into her own as a serious chef and leader. We get to see more of Jon Bernthal as Carmy's late brother Mike and meet the wider Berzatto family, including Jamie Lee Curtis as the family's neurotic, cry-bully matriarch, in a brilliant and anxiety-inducing flashback episode. At points, this new approach feels ponderous, and season two's first five episodes often left me itching for the plot to move forward and yearning for season one's constant intensity. However, the final five episodes are all masterpieces, perfectly melding the old with the new, the intense with the soft and tender.

Episode 7, "Forks," is the most inspiring of these latter episodes and most exemplary of "The Bear's" morality. It focuses on middle-aged, old-school loser Richie, who lives in the past and feels left behind as the restaurant he has worked at his entire adult life undergoes a radical change. Carmy, attempting to get Richie with the program, sends him to scrub forks at a world class restaurant in order to learn how service works at a place where "every day is the freaking super bowl." While grumpy and indifferent initially, Richie eventually buys in. He learns how wearing a suit to work demonstrates respect for yourself and the people around you. He experiences how edifying properly peeling a mushroom could be, and how giving everything you have for another's dining experience can be cleansing and transcendent. He recognizes that a life of world class service, where every second counts, is difficult and stressful, but it *means* something.

Richie's transformation illustrates the central lesson "The Bear" wants to teach its audience. Watching the show, I would often get annoyed at the beautiful, yet seemingly endless establishing shots of Chicago, restaurant food and kitchen items that the showrunners insist on showing us. But what these shots do is establish in the audience a real, repeated connection to the show's environment, inculcating the sensibility to texture and detail that world class chefs possess. "The Bear" wants you to feel how a perfectly sharpened knife, a well-shaped pan, an embroidered smock and a beautifully made omelet can give life purpose, sustain family, and show that you *care* about the world and people around you.

Now, such meticulous attention to detail could go overboard, and managing the balance between care and neurotic obsession is Carmy's biggest struggle. Yet, for much of season two he works to let go of his incessant drive, to at least occasionally shift into a lower gear. He is no longer in the middle of every scene, yelling and controlling the room. In fact, he shares the spotlight with others, including his new girlfriend Claire (Molly Gordon of "Booksmart" fame). Receding to the background is growth for Carmy, and he is often actually happy on screen, something that rarely happened during season one.

Unfortunately for Carmy, he does still have to build and run a restaurant, and extremely well at that, considering the financial pressure heaped on him from his shady but caring benefactor Uncle Cicero. "It is all you… you gotta live this and nothing else," Cicero tells Carmy in the season's penultimate episode, and Carmy takes the message to heart. In season two's final episode (**spoiler alert**, for those who have not watched the show), on the new resturant's opening day, Carmy cracks under pressure, reverting to his old, controlling ways, and eventually gets stuck inside the walk-in fridge, succumbing to his many demons while in there. However, the rest of the staff, especially Richie and Sydney — the latter demonstrating her mettle after a season filled with self-doubt — step up and make the night a success without Carmy. In the process of his breakdown, Carmy alienates Sydney, Richie, Claire, and the rest of the restaurant's staff. When the rescue team comes to break him out of the fridge, he is all alone, and both figuratively and literally sees the light. But "The Bear" leaves us asking: Will this low point spur him on to create lasting growth or will he once again revert to his old ways?

The fact that we are left with this question demonstrates "The Bear's" uniqueness. The characters and plot points are not unchanging, destined to remain in a toxic loop like HBO's recent smash hit "Succession." "The Bear's" world is real and embodied, and the characters are equally capable of demonstrating deep joy and sadness, compassion and rancor. "Succession" might be the show that contemporary, fractured America wants, but "The Bear" is the show it needs. While "Succession's" Roy family frays and breaks apart at the first sign of conflict, "The Bear's" extended restaurant family stays strong amid stress and fighting, brought together by their deep love of food, service and each other. The show's most emotionally cathartic scenes always center around family dinner, whether that dinner is beautifully harmonious or ends with a car driven through the house. I sincerely hope that "The Bear" heralds a new age of artistically serious television, one where entertainment and morality coexist.



DANIEL HOOPER / UNSPLASH

"The Bear" wants you to feel how a perfectly sharpened knife, a well-shaped pan, an embroidered smock and a beautifully made omelet can give life substance, sustain family, and show that you care about the world and those around you.

A Trip to the 61st New York Film Festival

By Sam Weinberg

The New York Film Festival — the most prestigious film festival of the region and, perhaps, the country as a whole — ran its 61st iteration from Sept. 29 until Oct. 15 this year. While New York is rarely a launching ground for entirely unseen films, the festival often gives a critical boost to films and filmmakers that had debuted in festivals earlier in the year. This year's offerings included premieres from the Cannes, Venice and Telluride festivals, providing the grounds for a large American showcase for films that are bound to be major awards contenders in the next few months.

The biggest winner of the festival circuit, which began with Venice at the end of August, is Yorgos Lanthimos' "Poor Things," starring and produced by the widely acclaimed Emma Stone. The film follows Bella Baxter, a back-from-the-dead, Frankenstein-esque woman learning about herself and her world in a most unique coming-of-age story. Lanthimos is a filmmaker who was widely acclaimed, if not a bit underrated, before his excellent 2018 offering "The Favourite," released to a showering of praise and ten Academy Award nominations. Five years apparently have not caused Lanthimos' films to lose their riotous edge, as "Poor Things" has been described as "daringly outrageous" and its director's "finest movie so far, a strange, gorgeous-looking picture." As the awards race stands right now, this film, in all of its shocking glory, perhaps will be "Oppenheimer" and "Killers of the Flower Moon's" biggest competition for awards in the coming months.

A handful of other acclaimed films hoped to get a leg up in cultural discourse through their premieres at the festival. "Priscilla," "May December," "Anatomy of a Fall" and "All of Us Strangers" each played to ecstatic crowds as they made their way to the East Coast. "Anatomy of a Fall" particularly seems primed for a boost in film circles in the coming weeks, as the Palme D'Or winner, Cannes' biggest honor, is getting a boost in screenings following a stellar performance in its initially limited release. The film, which follows a woman accused of her husband's murder, is director Justine Treit's fourth and easily most acclaimed film. I was left underwhelmed by her previous film, 2019's "Sibyl," but "Anatomy of a Fall" is a major turn-around in my view, led by an exhilarating screenplay and an unbelievable center performance by Sandra Hüller.

The most renowned film festival on the East Coast showcased a bunch of must-see new movies.

Bradley Cooper's Leonard Bernstein biopic, "Maestro," had an extraordinary night when it premiered toward the beginning of the festival. Netflix, which is distributing the film, likely erred by premiering this deeply New York-centric movie in Venice, where the reaction was more muted than hoped. A few weeks later, when it played at the David Geffen Hall in Lincoln Center (a Bernstein staple), the response shifted from mild to rapturous, as critics raced to throw superlatives in its direction. Some called the film, which is directed, written by and stars Cooper, his "masterwork, elevating him both as a filmmaker and as an actor, to a new stratosphere," while others specifically noted Carey Mulligan, who plays Bernstein's wife, Felicia, as "magnificent." A handful of writers were taken aback by "Maestro's" shifts toward an "impressionist portrait" of its subject; it will certainly be interesting to see how this film plays in the public sphere in comparison to "A Star is Born," Cooper's first film, a fantastic debut which became a mainstream cultural sensation.

The festival was filled with many big films that I couldn't get tickets to. Thankfully, I did, in fact, get to see some of the movies playing, and the films I saw displayed tremendous quality. The biggest player I got to see was "The Zone of Interest," director Jonathan Glazer's unique and horrific vision of domestic Nazi life. The Höss family, whose patriarch Rudolph was in charge of operations at Auschwitz, lives as tranquilly as possible in a setting in which the background is detailed by sights and sounds of genocide. The harrowing and thematically unsettling film is made more effective by Glazer's ability to make the audience feel enough proximity to its central family as to recognize their warped humanity, but also distant enough to retain a chilly sense of overt evil. "The Zone of Interest" is not a film that simply tells you that evil and inhumanity exist faraway, at a safe distance from our modern, open society. Rather, it is a film that is actively aware of its discomforting qualities and is in constant conversation with the audience about their ability to be complacent toward suffering in their own experiences and worlds. Zone is an evidently major work and a mighty return for the British filmmaker, although certainly not for the faint of heart.

Even less for the faint of heart is "Green Border," the Polish film from Agnieszka Holland, who herself has made unquestionably effective Holocaust films during her long career. "Green Border" is not one of them, but, as Holland explained in a Q&A at the showing, it is a movie abundantly sensitive toward the plight of oppressed people. The film primarily follows a family of Syrian refugees who try to sneak into the EU to take refuge with a family member in Sweden but, tragically, are thrown into a brutal back-and-forth between the Belarusian and Polish border that gives the film its name. If "The Zone of Interest" was shocking in its mundanity, "Green Border" gets its emotional heft by brutally presenting deeply upsetting images. Its depiction of horrific crimes on the border has earned condemnation from the Polish government, whose justice minister, Zbigniew Ziobro, likened the film to Nazi propaganda. (At the time of his comments, he had not seen it. This being the case, it is unclear why he felt he could comment on the movie.)

Poland was not the only foreign country with films screening at the festival. France's Oscar submission, "The Taste of Things," is a lovely yet somewhat hollow celebration of food and love. A handful of Japanese offerings, "Evil Does Not Exist" and "Perfect Days," further cemented the reputation of their directors, the emergent Ryusuke Hamaguchi and the generational master Wim Wenders, respectively. Finland's most popular filmmaker, Aki Kaurismäki, has hit new levels of acclaim with "Fallen Leaves," while Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan showed his Cannes award winner "About Dry Grasses." (I was seated for the latter on October 9 but was too distracted by the horrific events of two days prior to focus for almost any of its 197-minute runtime.)

The best movie I saw at the festival, and the most low-key of any mentioned thus far, was "All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt." The debut from photographer-poet Raven Jackson (whom I gleefully met before the screening), "All Dirt Roads" first entered my radar after its Sundance premiere months ago. (In truth, its mouthful of a title stood out to me more than anything else.) It is a movie that rebukes the need for narrative or even characterization, finding thematic weight through its profound non-linear meditation on black identity in the South and almost unfathomably moving cinematography. The film's fluidity bodes well for its examination of life's ever-shifting yet eternal nature. "Wanna know a secret?" a character asks another. "Nothing begins or ends." Indeed, "All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt," through the boldest of filmic methods, allows raw life to shift and spin for what may be days, years, or generations. NYFF specifically doesn't have awards because they say the honor is in being selected; while All "Dirt Roads Taste of Salt" would be my winner for the festival's best, I'm incredibly happy to have had the opportunity to see all these works from master filmmakers in an environment of people equally passionate as I am.



A crowd of people gathers outside the entrance of Alice Tully Hall SAM WEINBERG



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