

THE COMMENTATOR

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Yeshiva University Aims to Open New Dental School Within Two Years

By **SRULI FRIEDMAN**

Yeshiva University is in the “embryonic stages” of establishing a new graduate-level dental school by 2025-26, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Selma

Botman told The Commentator several weeks before the meeting. “We are in the very early stages, collecting information, estimating costs, assessing accreditation requirements. More information can follow once we have additional details.”

“Opening a dental school is a very exciting possibility for Yeshiva University and we are researching the possibility. We are in the very early stages, collecting information, estimating costs, assessing accreditation requirements. More information can follow once we have additional details.”

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Selma Botman

Botman revealed during a faculty council meeting this month.

YU has already begun the budgeting process and hired a firm to look over their pro forma budget, Botman said at the meeting. YU has also hired an interim dean with experience establishing another dental school for a two-year term, which will end if YU does not establish a dental school by its expiration.

“Opening a dental school is a very exciting possibility for Yeshiva University and

we are researching the possibility,” Botman told The Commentator several weeks before the meeting. “We are in the very early stages, collecting information, estimating costs, assessing accreditation requirements. More information can follow once we have additional details.”

During the meeting, which was open to the public and attended by The Commentator, Botman also mentioned that YU was looking for a new campus to house the dental school, along with a “revenue generating” dental clinic. “We have no space on the campuses, regrettably,” she told faculty members attending the meeting.

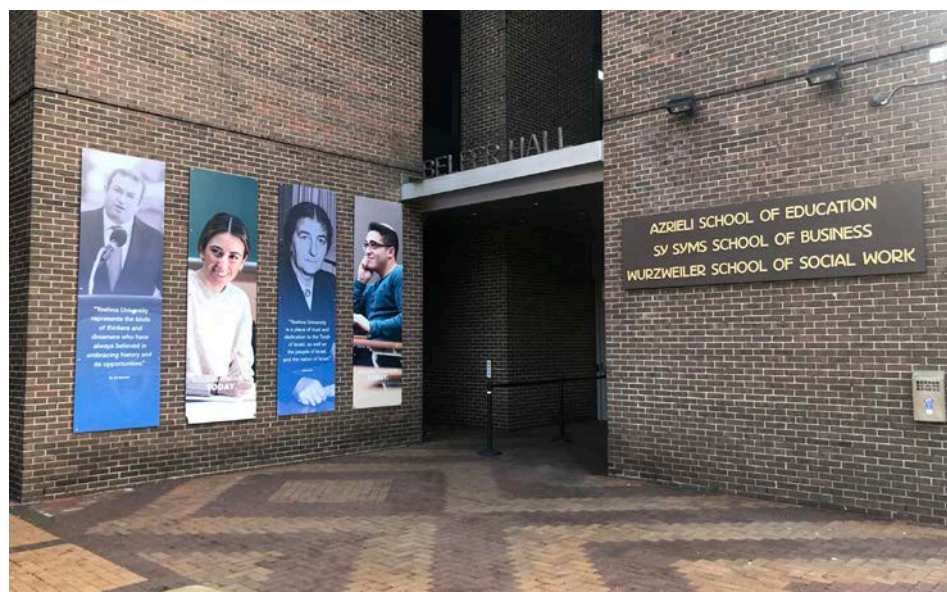
that the position is held by Dr. Edward Farkas. Farkas, former vice-dean of Touro University’s dental school, was fired by the school days before his planned Jan. 1 resignation. The university soon after filed a lawsuit against him in federal court, alleging that Farkas had downloaded thousands of files in December containing trade secrets that could help other universities establish their own dental school without notifying

Touro.

Farkas had previously served as vice-dean of Touro’s dental school since before its opening in 2016, and participated in its establishment and accreditation.

Touro’s complaint does not allege that Farkas shared any files with YU. The complaint does mention that he had announced

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Yeshiva University is in the “embryonic stages” of establishing a new graduate-level dental school by 2025-26.

THE COMMENTATOR

Rabbi Michael Taubes Appointed Interim Dean of RIETS Following Rabbi Penner's Departure

By **RIVKA BENNUN**

Rabbi Michael Taubes, current rosh yeshiva at Yeshiva University High School for Boys (YUHSB), has assumed the position of interim dean of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), The Commentator has learned. He began to serve as interim dean in early February

him much *hatzlacha* in his role as interim dean of RIETS as he facilitates the continued growth of our exceptional Yeshiva.”

Rabbi Taubes will “direct the operation of RIETS,” he told The Commentator, and he “presume[s] that the duties will be similar to those carried out by the previous Deans.” He will also continue to serve in his role as rosh yeshiva of MTA.

Rabbi Taubes was asked to serve until

“It is with genuine feelings of hakaras ha-tov towards, deeply rooted love for, and a profound sense of responsibility to our great yeshiva that I agreed to accept this role.”

Rabbi Michael Taubes

and will remain in the position until June.

Originally approached by Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) Dean Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, Rabbi Taubes was appointed interim dean by President Ari Berman and members of the RIETS board, where he has served as a rosh yeshiva, in addition to his position at YUHSB, since 2016. His appointment came following the announcement regarding outgoing RIETS Dean Rabbi Menachem Penner’s departure in December.

“Rabbi Taubes is a leader in our community and talented administrator,” Rabbi Kalinsky told The Commentator. “We wish

the end of the academic year in June, but according to Rabbi Kalinsky, it is “to be determined” what will come next.

Following Rabbi Penner’s departure, sources familiar with the discussion told The Commentator that RIETS would henceforth be governed by a senior committee of roshei yeshiva. With Rabbi Taubes appointed interim dean, it is unclear if this will still take place. When asked about this, Rabbi Kalinsky responded, “We are fortunate to have our beloved Senior Roshei Yeshiva guide our decisions.”

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Rabbi Michael Taubes has been appointed interim dean of RIETS.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Entering the Silver Age of Jewish Life in America

BY JONATHAN LEVIN

On the brown, wooden floors of my family's dining room, 13-year-old me stood, arguing with my parents.

"It can't happen here," I said, passionately, my voice echoing across the room. "America is different. It couldn't happen here."

This seemed logical to me. The United States was committed to freedom and was a safe haven for Jews for a long time; it was, in the words of Rav Moshe Feinstein and my el-

"It wouldn't happen here," I thought. "It's different here."

ementary school *rebbeim*, a "*medinah shel chessed*," a country of kindness, a place where our people were never systematically persecuted throughout our exile here.

Needless to say, my parents, one of them the child of Holocaust survivors who continued to face antisemitism after moving to Washington Heights following the War, and the other a Soviet refugee who experienced extreme antisemitic bullying as a child, didn't agree with me. They probably thought I was naive.

Yet this made sense to me. At the time, modern forms of expression of visceral anti-Jewish hate in the Western World seemed to be isolated to Europe. An avid reader of newspapers, I read about antisemitism tied to Israel's 2014 war with Hamas, which was then fresh in all of our minds. But it wasn't an American problem, right? It happened "over there," as we Americans have long referred to Europe.

It was synagogues in Germany that were firebombed, not here. We didn't need soldiers to guard us from raging mobs of antisemites armed with bats trying to smash their way into our houses of worship. "Gas the Jews" and "Death to the Jews" was a European problem, not an American problem. While there was clearly antisemitism here, it seemed to me that it was less prevalent and far less tolerated. "It wouldn't happen here," I thought. "It's different here."

Ten years have passed since that war, and now, the antisemitism we saw in Europe then has come to the United States. Antisemites have crawled out of the woodwork, and while antisemitism

"only" rose 21% in 2014, it has gone up nearly 400% since Oct. 7.

Only last week, a Holocaust survivor, one of the last precious few, was heckled at a Berkeley city council meeting devoted to discussing Holocaust remembrance.

"You are traitors to this country. You are spies for Israel," said one woman.

"F—you, Zionist pig," said another.

On Thursday, Jews leaving a Biden fundraiser only a few blocks from the Beren Campus passed through a line of people yelling obscenities of hate;

the video reminding me of Jews running through lines of Czarist troops whipping them.

"F—ing murderous k—," "f—ng die," they yelled, knowingly on camera, forcing Jewish people to pass through walls of hate to just get on their way.

These were not one-off occurrences. This behavior has been repeated across the country — in Los Angeles, Dallas, Miami, Seattle Teaneck. Nowhere Jews live is safe. Not even our Jewish bubble of the Wilf and Beren campuses. A man attempted to torch an Israeli flag by Burgers and Grill, and a window in the Schottenstein residence hall was broken by an antisemite who threw an orange through the second floor.

Hating Jews has become normalized. There is no longer any fear. Antisemites follow and harass Jews openly, and have even extended their attacks to our allies beyond the Jewish community. Some of my non-Jewish friends have told me that they too have been attacked for supporting Israel. One, a queer progressive Democrat, was called a "fascist" for supporting Israel. Another, non-Jewish as well, told me she needed to meet with a Title VI officer after facing incessant antisemitic abuse for expressing support for Israel.

It's a far cry from 2014. Seeing this outpouring of hate, its normalization, the failure of our government to prosecute offenders and the failure of the media and popular culture to deem it anathema has led me to rethink my position. Perhaps my parents were right. It can happen here, too.

In prophetic words uttered more

than a century before the Holocaust, Heinrich Heine warned that "where they burn books, they will ultimately burn people too." In my mind, a society where people openly celebrate the atrocities we saw on Oct. 7 is the same society where given the chance, the same people will burn, murder and slaughter people too. A society where people can gang up on Jews with impunity is a society that lacks the will to stamp out hate. This is not hypothetical. This is our society. Our America.

Call me cynical and pessimistic, but I don't see this trend reversing. This is the same society that when I started college was bending over backwards to eradicate even the slightest amount of other forms of racism. Yet somehow, as I close my college career, this form of racism is acceptable, and I can't help but fear for the future.

No, we aren't Europe or even Canada, where the government has now halted arms sales to Israel following a "non-binding" arms embargo passed by parliament. As much as this country is a splintering reed cane, as the ancient Assyrians called untrustworthy allies, we are fortunate and blessed that our country's government continues to support Israel, even if the Biden administration has started to show worrisome signs of wavering. We are blessed to be in a country where Congressional support for Israel is sky-high. But that doesn't mean that I live under any illusions. Not anymore. My parents were right. It *can* happen here.

We all know that this rise of antisemitism, a continuation of the antisemitism we have seen over the past few years, is unlikely to stop soon. It's too painful, so, despite all of us knowing this, we don't discuss it.

Shortly after I finished my argument with my parents all those years ago, I conceded that were they to be right, this would no longer be "the America I know." With antisemitism rising and the gale showing no signs of subsiding, I sometimes question if we were the last generation to grow up in the golden age of Jewish life and contemplate whether we are now in the silver age, belatedly asking, "Is this the America I knew?"

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The Commentator is the student newspaper of Yeshiva University.

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

Purim

2,380 years later, and we are still fighting Amalek ... and we shall be victorious!



2

Sarachek

How is Wilf turning into a summer camp an “up?” Definitely an up for Lake Como’s sales though.



3

Student government elections

“There is no success without a successor”



4

Battle of the bands

Phenomenal performances, incredible costumes, and fantastic hosts starring Benny Klein and ... what’s his name again?



5

New digital media studio opening

Why are all the training sessions during class times?



6

Belz grand opening

Farewell Furst Hall: The bells are ringing



7

Countdown to Pesach

And with that, *mashiach (bemihera)*

7 UP By Commentator Staff
7 DOWN

No totality

“The sun shall be turned into darkness.”
Just not in NYC.

1



Drop date has passed

You are stuck in your classes for the rest of the semester :)

2



Not enough people registering for things

“Deadline to register has once again been extended!!”

3



Semester is almost over and I still have 2k on my caf card

Caf babies wanted

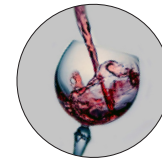
4



Drunk people on Purim

Getting drunk and making a fool out of yourself is not a mitzvah. Take a nap instead and make sure you can daven that night.

5



Cancellation of the Purim Shpiel

Yes, we understand that our brethren are fighting Amalek right now. That doesn’t mean that this wasn’t a controversial psak.

6



Gottesman library doors broken

According to multiple security guards, it cracked after a rabbi shut the door too hard following security barring him from entering due to his ID having the wrong color sticker ... seriously, what’s with YU and stickers?!

7



DENTAL SCHOOL
Continued from Front Page

his intention to resign in order to work for a competitor of Touro, unnamed in the lawsuit, which The Commentator confirmed to be YU. Touro and Farkas quickly agreed to an order that Farkas would refrain from accessing or disseminating any files that Touro alleges that he downloaded.

“Although we cannot comment specifically on pending litigation, Dr. Farkas vehemently denies the allegations against him,” Gary Snitow (SSSB ‘02), one of Farkas’s lawyers, told The Commentator. “[W]e have sought to have this matter adjudicated in *Bais Din* [Rabbinic Court], as is appropriate. To date, Touro has not agreed.”

Farkas’s attorneys have since filed motions to either dismiss the case outright or compel arbitration or mediation by a *Beit Din*. Touro has filed responses in opposition to both motions.

Touro University declined to comment on the suit or Farkas’s request to settle the case in *Beit Din*, with an outside counsel telling The Commentator that while the university wouldn’t comment, “[a]s a general rule, Touro reflects – in philosophy and action – the ethos of Torah and Halacha. Touro is certainly guided by that, now and always.”

Botman, when asked by The Commentator, did not comment on whether any additional faculty members have been hired by YU yet to work at the new graduate school.

Before being established, YU’s dental school would need to be accredited by the Committee on Dental Accreditation (CODA), a process which involves filing a report detailing the school’s “resources, curriculum, policies and operational standards” and completing an on-site review, according to CODA’s website. Applications and reports are reviewed and accreditation decisions are made during the committee’s bi-annual meetings.

Pre-dental students expressed their excitement at the news of the prospective school.

“As a Yeshiva College pre-dental student, the news of a potential YU dental school fills me with excitement,” Doron Sedaghat (YC ‘27) told The Commentator. “I am eager to further pursue my passion in a graduate program closely aligned with an undergraduate institution I deeply admire.”

RABBI TAUBES
Continued from Front Page

“I have always believed that like the *Mizbeiach* [Altar] of old and like the *Bimah* in our Shuls, it is our Beis Midrash which is – and must be – the centerpiece of our yeshiva,” Rabbi Taubes wrote in a letter to RIETS students on Feb. 16. “As such, I am committed to doing everything I can to make the Beis Midrash as successful and as strong as it can be.”

Rabbi Penner, who is now executive vice president of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), will continue in some capacity at RIETS, serving the role of dean emeritus.

“It is with genuine feelings of *hakaras ha-tov* towards, deeply rooted love for, and a profound sense of responsibility to our great yeshiva that I agreed to accept this role,” Rabbi Taubes shared with The Commentator. “I am committed to helping the yeshiva as best I can.”

YU's Joe Lieberman Center Created Without Input of Political Science Faculty

By JONATHAN LEVIN

Yeshiva University's new Joe Lieberman Center for Public Service and Advocacy, named after the late senator and announced by YU as a center to train students politically and for government and advocacy roles, was created without consultation or involvement from YU's political science department, a Commentator investigation found.

The center's creation came as a surprise, several political science faculty members told The Commentator, saying they were not approached about the center or included in the choice of director, Professor Sharon Poczter, who chairs the strategy and entrepreneurship department at the Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB). Faculty told The Commentator they needed to reach out to the administration after the official announcement to be involved.

"The political science faculty, to my knowledge, were not involved," Political Science Department Chair Joseph Luders told The Commentator. "We did not have a role in the selection of the director, nor any other part of the prior decision making processes.

"This caught me a bit by surprise," continued Luders, speaking before Lieberman passed away, "since I co-taught an American politics seminar with Senator Joe Lieberman for several years and have expertise in the Center's relevant subject matter. I also administer the Azrieli Fellowships for Women in Public and International Affairs, which are meant to promote political engagement among Stern students by supporting relevant internship experiences. Indeed, across the political science faculty, we possess significant expertise in American politics, public policy, and international affairs."

Following the university's announcement of the center, Luders approached the administration about including political science faculty in the process. According to Luders, the administrators they reached out to "enthusiastically welcomed" their involvement, putting Luders and Assistant Professor of Political Science Matthew Incantalupo on an advisory committee, where they currently serve as a "brain trust" for Poczter, according to information shared by Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Selma Botman at a faculty council meeting earlier this month.

"They really stepped up," said Botman

in response to a question from Clinical Assistant Professor Maria Zaitseva regarding political science participation in the center. "We didn't have to go and ask, 'Would you think about it?' They came to us and said, 'How can we help?' It's really beautiful," she concluded.

Center for Values and Leadership. Selection processes were completed on the day Senator Lieberman passed away, according to information YU President Ari Berman included in an opinion article published in the Hill marking his passing.

According to Poczter's statement, the

"Since the main goal of the Lieberman Center is fostering student competence and engagement in American politics, public policy, and foreign affairs, I recommended that student recipients of Center scholarships should be, at minimum, Political Science minors. This recommendation is currently under consideration."

Political Science Department Chair Joseph Luders

Poczter and a spokesperson for Yeshiva University did not answer The Commentator's questions regarding the lack of political science faculty, and their statement discussed the center and its goals. An inquiry to Botman received an automatic reply saying she was out of the office, although she has since returned.

Political science faculty's lack of inclusion in discussions for the center appears to be part of a pattern of tensions between the administration and faculty. According to a faculty council survey assessing faculty attitudes, cited in a Commentator investigation into this issue, 72% of faculty members did not believe that YU was doing a "good job" informing them of "major decisions" that "directly" affected faculty members and their students.

The Joe Lieberman Center for Public Service and Advocacy, also referred to as the Lieberman-Mitzner Center by YU, was announced at YU's 99th annual Hanukkah dinner in December. The center, founded with a \$10 million gift by the Ira Mitzner and Riva Collins families, is named after the late U.S. Senator and vice presidential candidate, who prior to his passing last week was a member of YU's board of trustees and previously taught classes at YU as a visiting professor.

The center is planning to issue scholarships of \$25,000 yearly to high school seniors accepted into the program's cohort, a model used by the Zahava and Moshael Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought and the Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein

Lieberman Center's scholarship won't compete with the other YU scholarship programs, including honors, Straus and Sacks. "Scholarship opportunities are not in competition," stated Poczter, "rather, they offer complementary pathways for students to excel, fostering an environment where all members of the University community can thrive."

At the time of The Commentator's February article about the center's announcement, YU declined to inform The Commentator on the center's programming. YU and Poczter's statement didn't address the issue either, though Poczter told The Commentator to refer to the program's website, which she said would be updated periodically.

According to the website, the program would require a political science-related internship, one honors course in a policy-related field per year, attendance at monthly workshops, a minimum GPA and a senior thesis.

The center will also have course requirements, some that will overlap with existing political science courses and others specific to the center, according to faculty familiar with the matter. Required courses will be selected by the advisory committee by the end of the semester.

Currently, scholars will not be required to major in political science, though Luders recommended that they be required to minor in the field.

"Since the main goal of the Lieberman Center is fostering student competence and

engagement in American politics, public policy, and foreign affairs," said Luders, "I recommended that student recipients of Center scholarships should be, at minimum, Political Science minors. This recommendation is currently under consideration."

The center will also hire a visiting professor, Botman shared at the council meeting, though when asked by The Commentator, Incantalupo and Luders were unaware of it.

The Commentator's inquiry to Botman, which received an automatic reply saying she was out of the office, asked why the advisory committee was unaware of this and whether the university is committed to including political science faculty in discussions about the center.

Yeshiva University did not answer The Commentator's questions, including questions posed for an article published in early February, regarding why they chose a Sy Syms School of Business professor without political experience to lead a Yeshiva College political science program. However, some faculty felt that she had the experience needed for it.

"Dr. Poczter may not be a 'political science professor,'" said Jonathan Cristol, a political science adjunct professor at Stern College for Women who expressed unfamiliarity with plans around the involvement of political science faculty with the center, "but her Ph.D. is in Business and Public Policy, she studies and writes about emerging economies, and appears to have published academic work about economic issues in a variety of different countries. She has written about public policy issues for the mainstream press as well."

For her part, Poczter told The Commentator that she was excited to work on the center.

"I am privileged to assume the role of Founding Director, entrusted with the task of recruiting talented students and facilitating co-curricular activities that will expose undergraduates to diverse avenues for making significant contributions to both the Jewish community and the broader society.

"Drawing from my experience in successfully establishing and leading a department and initiative on campus, I am eager to apply my innate passion for creating supportive environments to the Lieberman-Mitzner Center."

Though many political science faculty expressed concerns about their inclusion in the program, all faculty questioned about it were enthusiastic about it and expressed hope about being part of discussions going forward.

"I am unequivocally excited about the center," said Incantalupo. "Centers like this one are crucial to intellectual life on college campuses. They play an incredible role in bringing in scholars and practitioners, training students, supporting research, and putting on events. I am excited to be affiliated with it."

"Since the center's decision-making processes are still evolving," said Luders, "it is difficult to say how the relevant political science faculty will be integrated into the center's day-to-day operations. Going forward, we simply hope to further this venture to strengthen political engagement and effective citizenship among our students. Given the current stresses on American democracy, the goal of promoting citizen competence could not be more pressing."

As for the initial reason why political science faculty weren't consulted, Luders offered an explanation.

"Perhaps it was an oversight," said Luders. "Fortunately, it seems that things have changed."



The late Sen. Lieberman, pictured here in his 2014 lecture at YU titled "Judaism and Public Service"

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

MIT Professor Joins YU Due to School's Inaction Combating Campus Antisemitism

By NISSIM FARHY

A former computer science professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) joined Yeshiva University as a visiting faculty member last month, following his stepping down due to widespread antisemitism at the university in December.

Mauricio Karchmer, an expert in theoretical computer science and quantitative finance who taught electrical engineering, algorithms and computer science to over 700 students at MIT annually, will be teaching math for computer science at Yeshiva College (YC), along with portfolio management at the Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB) next semester.

Born in Mexico to Holocaust survivors, Karchmer pursued his master's from

Harvard and his doctorate from Hebrew University in computer science. After working as a teacher's assistant in MIT, Karchmer transitioned to finance where he specialized in portfolio design and risk management for

into a unique course offering. The goal is for "students to [be able to] teach computer science and finance to one another," Karchmer said during his inaugural fireside chat with President Ari Berman.

faculty members liked or wrote posts in celebration of the Hamas attack and the subsequent pro-Palestinian protests on campus.

Prior to her congressional testimony, Karchmer urged the president of MIT, Sally Kornbluth to speak out in support of Jewish students. "They want to hear that the institute is with them," he wrote. Karchmer told The Commentator that his initial reaction to the hearing, during which three university presidents, including Kornbluth, refused to acknowledge whether calling for the genocide of Jews violated their university policies was "bewilderment." "They had an opportunity to show leadership and they clearly let that opportunity pass."

Karchmer abruptly resigned from his job in December of 2023. "I cannot continue teaching algorithms to those who lack the most basic critical thinking skills or emotional intelligence," he told The Free Press. "Nor can I teach those who condemn my Jewish identity or my support for Israel's right to exist in peace with its neighbors."

Following his public resignation, Karchmer received numerous offers of employment from universities across Israel and the United States. However, after meeting with Yeshiva University, he chose to join their faculty, as a visiting faculty, in early February. "YU is a university rooted in everlasting Jewish religious values," he told The Commentator, "which align with humanistic values and resonate with me, even as a secular Jew."

"There are moments in time when history invites us to participate in its unfolding," Berman said. "This is such a moment, and Dr. Karchmer has shown by his voice, actions and moral clarity how to be a leader who is a world-class professor in his field and a role model to us all."

"I cannot continue teaching Algorithms to those who lack the most basic critical thinking skills or emotional intelligence. Nor can I teach those who condemn my Jewish identity or my support for Israel's right to exist in peace with its neighbors."

Mauricio Karchmer

twenty years, before returning to MIT. Now at Yeshiva University, he aims to blend his expertise in finance and computer science

In 2019, Karchmer returned to MIT, to what he called his "dream job" of teaching computer science, where his Introduction to Algorithms course was taken by over 60% of undergraduate students. However, the university's response to Hamas's attack on Oct. 7 led Karchmer to resign two months after the incident.

"I did not hear much from non-Jewish staff or faculty," Karchmer told The Commentator. "Not to see if my family in Israel were OK, not to offer any sympathy, and certainly not to express any concerns about what some of the student groups were doing."

Despite not usually vocalizing his Jewish identity, Hamas's attack on Oct. 7 led Karchmer to call for a public statement from MIT, as it had done on past issues such as the murder of George Floyd and the 2021 spike in anti-Asian hate crime. MIT's statement, which expressed "horror" at the "violence against civilians," failed to specifically reference Hamas or the details of the October 7th attack. Additionally, several



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY (VIMEO SCREENSHOT)

Sy Syms School of Business Dean Noam Wasserman introduces President Ari Berman (L) and Mauricio Karchmer at a fireside chat last month.

Operation Torah Shield 3 Runs Chesed Events at Yeshiva University, Donating Tzitzit and Tefillin to Soldiers

By AVRAHAM GLATTER

Operation Torah Shield (OTS), a YU student-run organization dedicated to doing *chesed* in Israel, has pursued multiple initiatives this semester, including a pamphlet aimed at students and campaigns aimed at providing funds and supplies to soldiers in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

"What we do is chesed. That's our goal. Chesed. If it's helping Klal Yisroel then we're all for it."

Bentzy Klarfeld (YC '25)

OTS, named after previous student groups that brought YU students on missions to Israel during the Gulf War, Second Intifada and Operation Iraqi Freedom, was reestablished in November to bring students on a fourth mission to Israel following the Oct. 7 massacre. Since then, in addition to a trip it ran in Israel during winter break, OTS has co-produced a pamphlet on Torah topics for YU events, ran tzitzit tying events, and conducted a fundraising campaign to raise money to purchase *tefillin* for IDF soldiers.

OTS also announced Wednesday that they will be running their third trip to Israel since Oct. 7 this summer. The trip will run

for three weeks and run from June 10 to July 4 at the Hesder Yeshiva Sderot.

YU hosted its yearly Dor L'Dor father-son learning program on the Wilf Campus on Presidents' Day. As part of the program, OTS, Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) and Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) produced a pamphlet of a collection of edited transcripts by YU *roshei yeshiva* about their perspectives on the current situation in Israel. The pamphlet was mainly edited and organized by DJ Wartelsky (YC '25) who put all the *shiurim* in a readable pamphlet for the public. During the Dor L'Dor program, every parent was given a copy and more were on sale at The Seforim Sale at YU.

OTS also ran a tzitzit tying event for students on Feb. 21, during which students tied and donated several dozen pairs of tzitzit for soldiers.

"Within recent times we have had more opportunities where *Tzahal* [the IDF] has specifically requested a lot of *begadim* [tzitzit] to be tied for the soldiers on the field," Yosef Feld (YC '25), a leading organizer of the event, told The Commentator. "So I figured I know how to tie tzitzit and it turns out many people have never had the chance to tie tzitzit." This was a "perfect opportunity" to do so, Feld told The Commentator.

The largest initiative OTS has run this semester was the campaign to raise funds to buy pairs of *tefillin* for soldiers. The campaign, called "*Nafsho Kshura Lnafsho*," was originally proposed by Rabbi Josh Friedman, founder of Israel Select Charity Fund, as part of the charity's larger campaign to raise money for 6,000 pairs of *tefillin* for soldiers

who have committed to wearing them. The campaign has raised over \$20,000, enough to purchase *tefillin* for 40 soldiers. The campaign is still ongoing. Any team that donates \$500, the equivalent of one pair of *tefillin*, will be in a raffle for a free trip to Israel.

Students involved in OTS since the Oct. 7 attacks described to The Commentator the

role that the organization plays.

"We are a hyper focused *chesed* organization," Bentzy Klarfeld (YC '25), one of the leaders of OTS, told The Commentator. "We don't look at politics, what we do is *chesed*. That's our goal. *Chesed*. If it's helping *Klal Yisroel* then we're all for it."



Students on an OTS mission in Israel during winter break helping pick oranges

OPERATION TORAH SHIELD / DJ WARTELSKY

Yeshiva University Debuts First-Ever Club Ice Hockey Team

BY GAVRIEL FACTOR

Yeshiva University students started the school's first-ever men's club ice hockey team this year, the first for the school's athletics program.

The 2023-2024 season was the first official season of the team and was something that several students have wanted to create for years, finally being created after a plan was proposed by a parent of an incoming student to YU Athletics Director Greg Fox and supported by the university. "It's significant to be able to provide more opportunities for our students, and ice hockey is a natural fit for us," Fox told *The Commentator*.

The team, led by head coach Adam Carlo and team captain Sol Feder (SSSB '26) consists of a 30-person roster. They played four scrimmages this season, with a record of 2-2, against schools such as Stevens Institute of Technology, the New Jersey Institute of Technology and The City College of New York. Next season, the team plans to play in official NCAA games with seven new players.

"A defining moment for our team occurred when we secured our first victory in only our second game," Feder shared with *The Commentator*, highlighting the team's growth throughout the season. "Observing the team's legitimization and evolution into a potential pillar of YU instills a sense of pride. This accomplishment not only signifies athletic achievement but also underscores the development of camaraderie and unity that extends beyond the ice."

Feder also explained that the team operates independently, securing its own funding through fundraising efforts by the team's

"The YU Club Ice Hockey Team is more than a sports initiative; it embodies resilience, passion, and a shared commitment to success. We humbly seek continued support from the Yeshiva University community as we strive to establish a lasting legacy in the years to come."

Sol Feder (SSSB '26), captain of YU's ice hockey team



YU's new ice hockey team

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Zevi Samet Passes 1000 Career Points with the Macs in 46 Games, Beating Turell's Record

BY YOSEF BLUTH

Zevi Samet (YC '26) passed 1000 career points in his 46th game for the YU Maccabees last season, achieving the

milestone faster than any of the 32 players in Yeshiva University history to have reached it. Ryan Turell (YC '22), a former Macs player who now plays for the Motor City Cruise previously held the record, having hit 1000 points in his 47th game.

Samet broke this record with a three-pointer scored with 13 minutes left in the first half in the Macs' game against the Manhattanville Valiants in a game that the Macs would go on to win 72-59. Samet is the only player on the current team to have surpassed the 1000-point milestone.

better," Akiva Poppers (SSSB '22), former executive producer of MacsLive, told *The Commentator*. The stats back it up as well. Samet ended his first season playing for the Macs with 558 points, the most of any rookie for YU ever. He surpassed that this year, scoring 636 points for the season.



Zevi Samet (YC '26) playing basketball

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"I'm so grateful to Hashem for allowing me to achieve this accomplishment. I am very grateful to my coaches and teammates who helped me achieve this milestone. I hope this milestone encourages EVERYONE to keep pursuing their goals."

Zevi Samet (YC '26)

"I'm so grateful to Hashem for allowing me to achieve this accomplishment," Samet said in a statement to *The Commentator*. "I am very grateful to my coaches and teammates who helped me achieve this milestone. I hope this milestone encourages EVERYONE to keep pursuing their goals."

Samet, hailing from Monsey, New York, grew up playing basketball throughout his life. He played on the Torah Academy of Bergen County (TABC) basketball team in high school before coming to YU and joining the Macs. His efforts have contributed to the Macs' success this year, making it all the way to the Skyline Conference finals before losing to Farmingdale State in the championship game.

Despite the loss, many have hope for the Macs' future. Samet "will only get

Samet's friends had praise for his accomplishments, especially how he manages to play while still spending significant time in the *beit medrash*.

"Zevi is a kind, genuine friend who works hard for what he believes in. Despite playing ball early each morning, he devotes just as much time, if not more, to learning; as he told me three *sedarim* of learning and two *sedarim* of ball," Mordechai Shmerler (YC '25) told *The Commentator*. "He embodies everything YU stands for; living Torah and being a part of the world. I am proud and excited to see how far he goes."

When asked if he had a message to give to the YU student body, Samet answered "remember, anything worth anything requires hard work!!"

If Not Me, Then Who? Tehila Bitton and *Ben-Adam*

By SARA COHEN

Punch. The sound of fighting echoes in the air. Tehila Bitton (SCW '24) stands in a black shirt and skirt, matching the bulky boxing gloves she wears. With a fierce expression of determination and persistence on her face, she is easily singled out from the mix of other women in a kickboxing class as she displays her newly acquired moves. Tehila exudes a general air of resoluteness and a take-charge kind of attitude. These are some of the qualities that make the twenty-two-year-old Uruguayan native a natural-born leader.

“Whenever there are hard times we bring more light; we do something good and actually make a difference.”

Tehila Bitton (SCW '24)

Although she was born in South America and later grew up in Great Neck, New York, Tehila has long considered Israel her home. “My connection to Israel has always been very strong,” she said as she sat in the courtyard outside her dorm building, legs outstretched. As she discussed Israel, Tehila’s love for the Jewish State and its people became visible. “Sometimes as a source of conflict, sometimes a strong source of happiness and comfort; I was always a Zionist, ‘rah-rah’ Israel type of girl.”

This is evident even at first glance. One quickly notices the silver Star of David hanging around her neck, a charm of a broken heart with Hebrew lettering, as well as a “BRING THEM HOME” pendant she has worn since the October 7 massacres.

Like many others, Tehila was shattered and devastated after the terrorist attack this past Simchat Torah that resulted in the deaths of over 1200 people and the kidnapping of over 240 civilians and soldiers. “I think it sounds dramatic, but a big chunk of my soul was left behind,” she said. In her grief, she remembered what her mother had said to her after the 2019 attack in Monsey, “Whenever there are hard times we bring more light; we do something good and actually make a difference.”

This concept inspired Tehila to create her organization *Ben-Adam*, which connects American college students with kids and teens in Israel. After participating in Operation Torah Shield (OTS) in November, a YU mission to Israel, Tehila saw a need among Israeli children. “Their dads are all off in the army,” she said. “A lot of their moms, too.” She continued, “There’s so much instability. They have no idea what tomorrow will bring.”

When Tehila returned to New York, she felt driven to take action and to create something that would foster connections between different Jews. She spoke to her father, Rabbi Yosef Bitton, rabbi of Congregation Shaare

Rachamim in Great Neck, about this issue. “One of us mentioned tutoring, and he had connections with a *yishuv* in Israel called Kida.” This led to Tehila contacting the spokesperson for the *yishuv*, Moriya Jacobs. She then sent out a Google form to different group chats, and in one night, 30-40 American students expressed interest.

The name, which in Hebrew means “between people”, encapsulates the message Tehila was trying to convey: the connection that humans have to each other. With the overarching goal of assisting Israelis with their English language skills, *Ben-Adam* provides a source of conversation and connection between individuals from two sides

of the world who have little in common, besides the fact that they are Jewish.

“There’s a really big interest and there’s a thirst for connection for Jews across the world.” However, it is more than that, especially for Israeli children. “They need 40 minutes when someone is just paying attention to you and wants to hear about you and how your week has gone, and everything else stops for 40 minutes.” That is exactly what Kammah Lichtman, a seventeen-year-old high school student from Gitit, a town in the Jordan Valley, expressed over a Zoom call. “I love it,” she said in her accented English. “It’s a nice hour in the week and stop our lives and hear about something else and I start to know more. I got a great person to talk with. It’s fun and it also helps me.”

Miriam Bluth (SCW '24) is one of the tutors for *Ben-Adam*. She meets weekly with a ten-year-old boy named Eldad Yehuda from Gitit and feels that working with *Ben-Adam* has been a most positive experience. “This has been such a meaningful and enjoyable way to connect with my fellow Jews in Israel

during this difficult time; it can be hard feeling so far away from everything going on in Israel sometimes and this definitely brings me closer.”

Balancing a rigorous academic curriculum and managing an organization can sometimes be challenging for Tehila, a Judaic Studies major and an English Literature minor. “If you sit behind me in class, you’ll see my computer and you’ll probably get a little bit freaked out.” This is due to the organizational system that Tehila created for *Ben-Adam*. She mainly works with Google Sheets, Google Forms and WhatsApp. She is in frequent contact with a network of people, primarily Tal Yehuda, the Israeli liaison for *Ben-Adam*. “I spend at least fifteen hours a week on this, but thank God it’s been so incredibly rewarding.”

Tehila has circled back and enlisted Operation Torah Shield and their resources to help grow her project further. OTS board member Bentzy Klarfeld (YC '25) said, “What Tehila has done is what OTS is all about

— empowering YU students to make contributions they are uniquely suited to make to help *Am Yisrael* in *Eretz Yisrael*.”

Ben-Adam currently has almost a hundred pairs of participants and volunteers, and is only growing by the day. It is expanding from not only Israeli children but to adults as well. Tehila said that the phrase “If not me, then who?” (Pirkei Avot 1:14) has long been her mantra, something that has prompted her to enact a meaningful sort of change especially in troubled times. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks once said, “Time and again, in the wake of tragedy, the Jewish people renewed itself in a burst of creativity.”

Ben-Adam is looking for more volunteers and has options to work with kids and adults who want to learn English, as well as wounded soldiers who want to tell their stories in English. If you are interested in volunteering, please reach out to Tehila Bitton or fill out the following form: <https://forms.gle/p7Thz4XCEekDAgQQ6>



Tehila with Israeli children in Tekoa (November 2023)

TEHILA BITTON



The Ben-Adam logo

TEHILA BITTON



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Hundreds Gather Together at Active Minds' 14th Annual Stomp Out The Stigma

BY ELI NOVICK

Approximately 900 students, alumni, faculty and guests filled Lamport Auditorium on Feb. 27 for the 14th annual Stomp Out The Stigma (SOTS), advertised as “one of YU’s biggest events of the year.” Hosted by the Active Minds club, the event’s goal is to destigmatize mental illness and to encourage those who need help to seek it out by having three students take the stage and share their personal mental health journeys of struggle and perseverance.

The night began with Avraham Frohlich (YC '25), co-president of Active Minds, who reminded everyone in the crowd that “you are not alone” and then introduced YU President Ari Berman. Berman acknowledged that the past several months have been extremely difficult for the Jewish people, and therefore thanked everyone in the “room packed with courage and bravery” for coming to find “healing in an increasingly chaotic world.” “Healing ... begins with a sense of community,” he remarked, and explained that the night was an opportunity to “find words” when everyone else has found themselves speechless.

Next, Dr. Yael Muskat, director of the YU Counseling Center, spoke about the importance of the night’s programming. She shared that 30% of college students have received a mental health diagnosis, in addition to the many others who are dealing with undiagnosed struggles, which can be suffocating under all the stigma and judgment that accompanies mental illness. The importance of SOTS, therefore, is to shatter those stigmas and allow students who are struggling to feel the “solidarity, love and compassion” of their classmates.

Dr. Muskat then introduced Jeffrey Schottenstein, a philanthropist and generous benefactor of Yeshiva University. Schottenstein, who together with his wife, Ariella, founded the Jeffrey Schottenstein Program for Resilience at Ohio State University to support students struggling with mental illness, also donated light blue “Stomp Out The Stigma” sweatshirts and a book entitled “The Art of Being You,” which is about “unlocking inner greatness and discovering true joy,” to be distributed to every attendee of the event.

Schottenstein began with a question: “Do you like my new jacket?” His jacket, he explained, was a metaphor for a coverup that many of those struggling with mental illness use to hide their struggles. He explained how he struggled with depression, anxiety and OCD when he was in college. Over the years he has thankfully sought out help and has gotten a new jacket, “replacing the jacket of shame and stigma” with one that can express — not hide — everything underneath.

To begin the main part of the night, Rikki Kolodny (SCW '24), a former speaker herself, took the stage to introduce Ruchama Benhamou (SCW '24). Benhamou, who presented herself with confidence and charisma, bluntly told the crowd that it “is all an illusion.” She spoke about her “logical and rational mind” that had prevented her from noticing the “intense emotional decline” that accompanied her parents’ divorce, move to Los Angeles and transition into college. Her college years, though disguised as normal, were burdened by “the weight of [her] thoughts,” and left her without the will to eat,

sleep, get out of bed or even live. Eventually, thanks to her sister who “saw through her ruse” and informed her parents of her situation, she got the help she needed and was diagnosed with depression, anxiety and OCD. Benhamou explained that “we don’t

about the all-consuming, overwhelming fear that devoured her during this period of her life and explained to the audience (and made them repeat after her) that “eating disorders have nothing to do with food.” They’re irrational and psychological. She described her

around [them] may be struggling with things they may be concealing.”

To conclude, Yael Berger (SCW '24), co-president of Active Minds, concluded by thanking the Office of Student Life, the Counseling Center, and everyone else who made the night possible. “We host this event every year,” she shared after the fact, “to break the silence, to show the YU community that although mental illness may not be visible from an outsider’s perspective, you are seen and you are heard. We show up for our friends at Stomp Out The Stigma because no one should have to suffer alone.”

Maia Purow (SCW '25), co-president of Active Minds, reflected that “after being an audience member at Stomp Out The Stigma last year and being completely moved and impacted by the speakers, I knew I wanted to get involved in Active Minds.” She shared how grateful she is to have been able to show the student body that “they are not alone in their struggles and that you never really know what people are going through.”

Hopefully others, like Maia, have walked away from the event with the desire to “change the way we view mental health on campus.”

The Counseling Center, which co-sponsored the event, assists students struggling with mental health. Its services, complementary to students, can be accessed by contacting the office by email (counseling@yu.edu) or through its website (https://www.yu.edu/student-life/counseling).

“We show up for our friends at Stomp Out The Stigma because no one should have to suffer alone.”

Yael Berger (SCW '24)

choose the burdens we carry,” and that she learned to embrace and face her diagnoses instead of running away from them because “everywhere we go, we take ourselves with us.” Benhamou finished by challenging the crowd “to speak up. Not on a podium, not to a wide audience. To yourself.”

Next, Miriam Bluth (SCW '24), a third-time student liaison for SOTS, introduced Deena Zar (SSSB '26), who described her journey with an eating disorder and self-harm. She opened by painting the scene of her 17th birthday which she spent in the emergency room connected to IVs, malnourished and with cuts on her arms. Zar described the “diet culture” of her childhood home, which was filled with healthy eating and rampant exercise. The pressures of this environment introduced her to her new frenemy “Anna,” the name she cleverly gave her anorexia. Anna told her to stop eating and spend more time in the gym because “People will only be friends with you ... when you look smaller.” To cope with the Anna-induced pain and self-hate, Zar began cutting herself on her bedroom floor “depressingly lit by my dim closet lights.”

Deena shared a powerful poem she wrote

long recovery to where she is now, an optimist who wakes up every morning excited to “slay the day ahead of [her],” who has a healthy relationship with her parents, with Hashem and, most importantly, with herself. She shared with the crowd to remember that the goal in life is “progress, not perfection.”

Lastly, Sam Weinberg (YC '25), who was introduced by Eli Novick (YC '26), got up to share his story. Weinberg recalled how after the tragic passing of his friend Donny Morris at Meron, he, “like Barbie, started to become plagued with irrepressible thoughts of death.” Navigating his survivor’s guilt, Sam’s next several months were filled with attempts at seeking help and a breakdown that left him bedridden. Weinberg emphasized the difficulty of finding a therapist who is a good fit, and spoke about his eventual path towards finding joy, which involved both medication and the realization “that my wellbeing was something worth pursuing.” Sam lightened the mood with many witty jokes and pop cultural references, and concluded by telling the crowd that he would consider his speech a success if people walk away realizing that they are “not alone in [their] painful experiences” and that “those



Lamport Auditorium filled with students attending Active Minds' SOTS event

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FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

(September 8, 2011; Volume 77, Issue 1) — Shomer Shabbos in the Senate: An Interview with Senator Joseph Lieberman

By BENJAMIN ABRAMOWITZ

Editor's Note: With the recent passing of Senator Joseph Lieberman, a long-time friend of YU, The Commentator has reprinted the following interview with him from 2011, back when he was still in the U.S. Senate.

Senator Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) wrote six books before 2011, each almost completely political in content. In *Praise of Public Life*, for example, is his 2001 exposition of a public servant's duties, and in 2007, he and his wife, Hadassah, published *An Amazing Adventure*, their notes on the senator's 2000 Vice Presidential campaign. But his newest, seventh book, *The Gift of Rest*, while detailing many aspects of Senator Lieberman's political life, instead explores the underlying spirituality of Senator Lieberman's career, especially vis-à-vis his observance of Shabbat.

Senator Lieberman discussed his publication and other ideas in an exclusive interview with *The Commentator*. Excerpts from the conversation follow.

The Commentator: Do you have any concerns and/or hopes regarding how *The Gift of Rest* might impact people's retrospective views, especially those of non-Jews, of your work as a senator?

Senator Joseph Lieberman: I do not know what the reactions will be. I found in the first round of discussions that people who are not Jewish focus just on the "rest" component of Shabbat, rather than its religious content. I hope people will use this as a reason to put away their BlackBerries, iPads, and phones on the Sabbath, because they feel dependent on, almost trapped by them. The benefits apply to everyone, and people should see that I work harder the other six days because I know Shabbat is coming.

TC: Your anecdotes throughout the book, many of which detail your communication of Jewish precepts to non-Jewish major political figures, are heartening. I'd like to know, however, about any less positive reactions you've received, either in Connecticut or Washington, to your Jewish practice. Have any political figures ever cited your Sabbath observance as a means of questioning your commitment, or simply looked upon your observance as bizarre or even inappropriate?

SJL: I must say that I've never had a negative reaction from another political figure to my religious observance. People would be puzzled when I said, for example, I can't come to your testimony or group meeting, but I couldn't. Sometimes they'd be angry, because I was letting them down. But when I explained it was for religious reasons, and especially when they came to see over the passage of time that I was observing this consistently, those feelings went away. I've never had a negative reaction from another political figure beyond that. I've had curiosity sometimes. But really, always, respect.

There are two larger points here: (1) America is a very religious country. There is a way in which religious people, for instance religious Christians, generally speaking, have an instinctive positive reaction to religious Jews. (2) I've made a personal observation about history. I think relations between Jews and Christians are today at a unique and unprecedented level of openness, mutual

respect, and even a sense of shared future. Catholic doctrine, and the Christian evangelical movement, which feels tied to Jews by the Torah, support Israel. There have been really historic changes in Christianity since I started politics in the '70s and its relationship to Judaism.

That's not to say I'm in fantasy land – every now and then I get an anti-Semitic letter or phone call to my office, almost always unsigned. But I don't ever remember one of those relating to my level of religious observance, just that I was Jewish.

TC: In your introduction, you write that one of your main motivations for authoring *The Gift of Rest* was to "share [the Sabbath] with everyone who reads [the] book," whether Jewish or non-Jewish. I certainly understand its appeal to all different sorts of people. Orthodox Jews, however, are probably already familiar with most of the practices and concepts you discuss. I was wondering if you had in mind anything about your particular perspective on the Sabbath that you think Orthodox Jews might best take away from your book.

SJL: You are absolutely right: for Orthodox or observant Jews, what I describe as an invitation to the reader to go through Shabbat with me will not be new. Two things for those who are observant [to learn from *The Gift of Rest*]: (1) Personal stories that I tell about my journey through what we describe as Shabbatland over the course of my life, and the influences on my family. (2) The stories I tell about my combining my Shabbat observance with my public life and responsibilities.

For Orthodox Jews, this will be a familiar trip through Shabbatland, but the Orthodox reader may find some personal stories that are intriguing. But the larger point, particularly for young Orthodox Jews of your generation, is that a person can be very religiously observant and not have that come in conflict with his or her secular career goals in American society. To a degree that made me really unprecedented in Jewish history, outside of Israel, of course. I hope that will be of interest.

Also, in analyzing my religious life to write this book, I saw things that I don't usually see. Because we practice certain rituals every Shabbat, I had stopped appreciating as much as I could. For example, it's quite a religiously magnificent moment, I think, when we take the Torah out of the Aron Kodesh [Holy Ark]. Since we hold it up and walk it around the shul [synagogue], it is the recipient of great affection, respect, and awe. Trying to describe what's happening and why to non-observant Jews greatly enhanced the experience for me.

TC: Could you please reflect on the importance of politics and political awareness in Jewish life?

SJL: I'm not going to do this justice. Right from the origins, particular from Har Sinai [Mount Sinai], the Jewish experience and narrative is all about taking the values of the Torah and bringing them into the world. We elevate ourselves through Halakha, but also try to elevate the world. The reality is that for much of our history, the destruction of the Temple and the defeat of the last Israeli government in the year 70, Jews have occupied positions of political importance...in countries that were not

democratic. For a long time, in this country, the religious Orthodox community was not as involved in politics as I think they should have been. It's changed in the last few decades. It's consistent with what it means to be a Torah-observant Jew, and to be a good American. Now, we have these opportunities to be involved in the larger community: (1) Here, (2) Israel – we have a Jewish state! We are an extraordinarily blessed nation because of these two realities. I think it's really important that more and more religious people throw themselves into those realities.

In the book's introduction, Senator Lieberman writes, "The Sabbath is an old but beautiful idea that, in our frantically harried and meaning-starved culture, cries out to be rediscovered and enjoyed by people of all faiths." His assertion that the Sabbath would be beneficial to Jews and non-Jews alike—no matter which day of the week it is observed—highlights his focus on some of the most basic mentalities of the Shabbat observer, so fundamental that they apply to, and might enhance, the lives of anyone. Senator Lieberman identifies numerous underlying principles and purposes of Shabbat which, as Orthodox Jews, often get lost in our comparatively greater attention to finer details. Revisiting these principles as a reader may empower, or re-empower, your Sabbath observance with new vigor.

That such basic sabbatical precepts may actually apply, even appeal, to people of all religions is encouragingly demonstrated by many of the senator's stories, in which he helps other major political figures through difficult times via religious lessons. For example, during the protracted Gore-Lieberman campaign in 2000, Senator

Lieberman and Hadassah were invited to the Gore residence to celebrate the Florida Supreme Court's ordering a recount of votes, late on a frenetic Friday afternoon. The Liebermans made it to the Gores' just before Shabbat, and sat down for dinner with Al, Tipper, and few leaders of the campaign. According to Senator Lieberman, the Gores "asked us what we normally do at home on Friday night and said they hoped we would let them experience it with us; and so we led our friends through the blessings and songs of a Shabbat dinner."

This example of spreading the joy of Shabbat is quite motivating already, but the Liebermans' presentation was even more successful; at Tipper's suggestion, the Gores decided they would turn off all of their electronics for that Sabbath, in need of a mental break from the pressures of constant campaigning. The Gores even insisted on walking the Liebermans the few miles back to their home (surrounded by Secret Service personnel) in honor of Shabbat. Other political figures to whom Senator Lieberman spread his religious thought include John McCain and Sarah Palin. The broad relevance of Shabbat to all people's lives is made powerfully clear.

Senator Lieberman believes resolutely in the power of Shabbat to strengthen one's work ethic throughout the rest of the week. He writes, "We leave Shabbat, knowing it is our responsibility to be as creative and purposeful for the next six days as God was in creating the Heaven and Earth." His book, embodying this sentiment of focus and determination, can drive readers to pursue weekday fulfillment through Shabbat observance.

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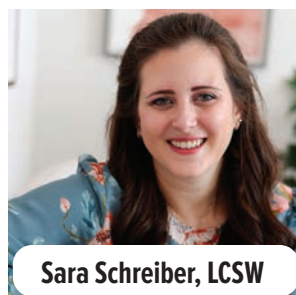
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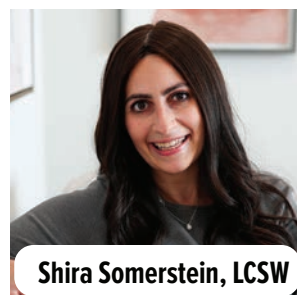
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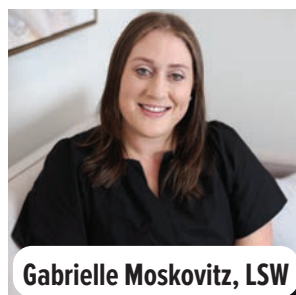
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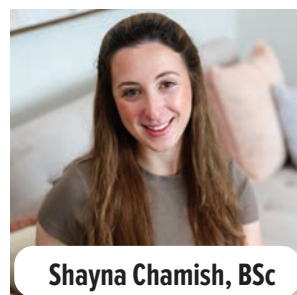
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VIEWS FROM CAMPUS



Rabbi Meir Goldwicht with students at the Purim Chagigah on Wilf Campus on March 23 YESHIVA UNIVERSITY



Rav Goldwicht, Rav Willig, and President Berman at the Wilf Purim Chagigah YESHIVA UNIVERSITY



Students with Mrs. Rachel Ciment at the Beren Purim Chagigah in Teaneck on March 21 YESHIVA UNIVERSITY



Students at the Beren Purim Chagigah on March 21 YESHIVA UNIVERSITY



"My Roommate's Fiance," comprised of Benny Klein, Avygayl Zucker, Danny Kutin, and Mati Salem performing at Battle of the Bands in Schottenstein Theater on Wilf Campus on March 26 THE COMMENTATOR



Students at a performance at Carnegie Hall, run by Discover NYC, on March 14 YESHIVA UNIVERSITY



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HOSTAGES AND MISSING FAMILIES FORUM

Math Majors Matter: The Problems with Stern's Math Department

By NAOMI ROSE

If you search “Yeshiva University undergraduate mathematics” on the internet, the first result links to the YU math department website. Under “courses,” numerous educationally intriguing options are listed, such as Elementary Number Theory and Modern Algebra. If you were to scroll down further to the section titled “About the Stern College Program,” the website says,

“Stern College for Women has a variety of programs for students interested in the mathematical sciences, which include pure and applied mathematics, industrial mathematics, and scientific programming.”

This statement is misleading. As an incoming freshman a few years ago, I had no idea how much I would have to fight just to get in-person undergraduate math courses for women.

In my senior year of high school, I really enjoyed precalculus and calculus, so I selected a mathematics major while filling out my application. However, Stern doesn't tell incoming students that they only offer the very *minimum* of math courses. The only courses that are consistently offered every semester — Excursions in Mathematics, Pre-Calculus, and Fundamentals of Calculus — do not count toward the major.

The other math courses consistently offered once a year are Calculus I, Calculus II, Multivariable Calculus, and Linear Algebra. This fulfills only four out of the 11 math courses (and two correlate courses) required to major in mathematics. Additionally, as most of these courses require prerequisites, they must be taken in the correct order and effectively planned out from your very first semester in Stern.

I did not know any of this as a freshman, and so I missed my chance to take Calculus II in the spring of my freshman year. However, there were no other options available to me and I did not want to wait an entire year to take Multivariable Calculus. I was therefore

As an incoming freshman a few years ago, I had no idea how much I would have to fight just to get in-person undergraduate math courses for women.

forced to take the available math courses out of order and had an extremely hard time grasping the material because I was missing the prerequisites.

Furthermore, this is a problem unique to Stern Mathematics — the men's campus offers these fundamental courses every semester. In order to complete a math major, Stern students must take both men's undergraduate classes and graduate courses through The Katz School of Science and Health. Each of these options presents its unique challenges.

When Stern students take undergraduate men's classes, they must attend over Zoom for religious reasons. While I understand the basis for separating campuses and classes, especially at a religious institution, it is simply unfair to demand that students put their education at risk just because the university refuses to hire teachers or provide course offerings for the women's campus.

Most of us are familiar with the educational price of classes on Zoom, where it is harder to focus and communicate. But not

only are these classes online, they aren't even geared toward online attendees at all. Rather than frontally addressing an online group, in many instances, the professors teach an in-person class to a full men's class, with a few women on Zoom trying to follow along. We are not involved in the lecture, and it is extremely hard to hear, understand, and ask questions.

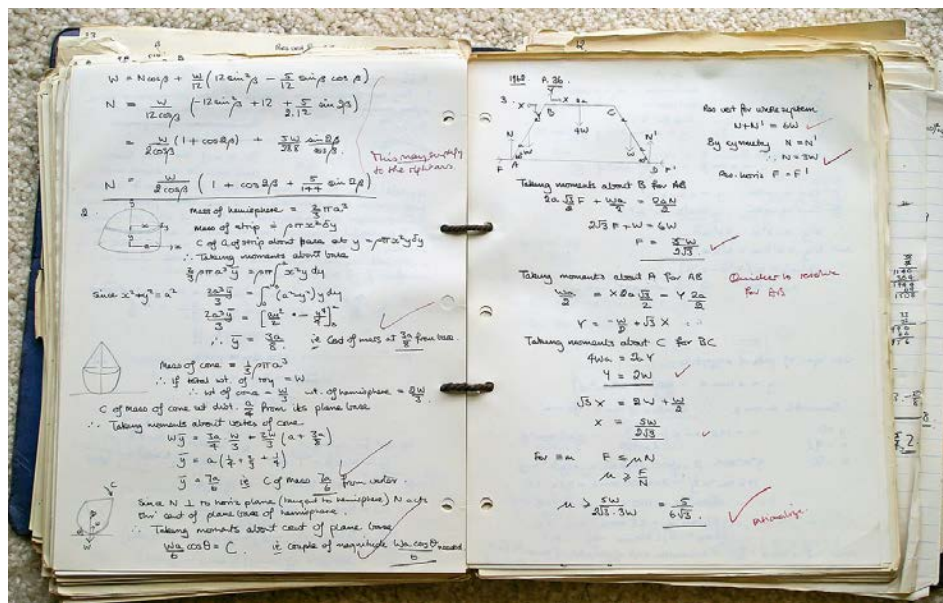
Even if this were a viable method of teaching, why are the women *always* required to zoom into the men's classes and not vice versa? Math major Shai Rahamim (SCW, Jan 2025) said, “Studying mathematics at Stern is very challenging, especially when most classes are only offered from Wilf campus through Zoom as coed classes. I believe this setup is unfair. Despite the smaller number of students we have at Stern in the math department, we still deserve the opportunity

to have classes held in our building.”

In addition to the limited Zoom options through YC, all math majors at Stern must then take advanced graduate-level classes to get an *undergraduate* degree. Many students in these classes are undergraduate students, which shows that there are enough students for regular undergraduate classes. For example, in the graduate Partial Differential Equations class this semester, there are five undergraduate students and four graduate students. Additionally, in the graduate Time Series Analysis class, there are three undergraduate students and two graduate students.

It is counterproductive to put undergraduates into graduate classes, as the professor is forced to walk the line between

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A math student's notes

SANDID / PIXABAY

Research in the Flagship Jewish University

By S. ABRAHAM RAVID

Why did I join YU? At the time, I was a tenured full professor at a major state university (Rutgers) and a visiting professor at the University of Chicago, arguably the best university in finance and economics in the country.

I joined YU because I believed, and I still believe, that the flagship Jewish university needed to shine, and I wanted to be part of the effort to move it forward. After all, an astounding 22% of Nobel laureates (as of 2022) had at least one Jewish parent, and

in my corner of the woods, about 40% of Nobel Laureates in Economics had Jewish ancestry. So, one can expect the flagship Jewish university to shine academically.

Not-for-profit universities that shine are

The research of today is the practice of tomorrow. Research professors can help your career not just immediately after you graduate, but also years down the road.

anchored by research professors who do not just teach knowledge but create it. Top research faculty are correlated with more

donations, which lead to larger endowments, a more selective student body and better student outcomes.

Perhaps I should briefly explain what research professors do. We all know that

research professors write papers. However, writing papers does not just mean sitting in an office, closing the door, and writing, although this is important too. In most fields, research involves putting a team together, gathering data and working on models. Then, after many months or sometimes years of toil, a first draft is ready. The draft is then presented at conferences and to colleagues in other universities. Some of these conferences are very competitive — and that is where research professors face their first wave of rejections. Then, when the team feels that the paper is ready for submission, they send it to a journal to be reviewed by qualified experts. In major universities, faculty are expected to publish in very competitive journals. For example, my most recently published paper, co-authored by Dr. Gabriela Coiculescu from Syms and Dr. Yud Izhakian from Baruch College, was published in a journal that accepts a mere 8% of the papers submitted. As these percentages suggest, over a career, you get many more rejections than acceptances. Even when a journal is interested in your research, they usually request revisions and changes which may take years to complete. In short, the process of shepherding a paper from inception to publication, at least in our

field, can be longer than the average marriage in the U.S. (which averages between 7 and 8 years).

However, papers are only a part of what members of the research community are expected to do. Someone has to review all these papers for the journals. Since the beginning of 2024 alone, I have reviewed five papers (and a sixth is waiting). Each review takes an average of a day to complete. I have also reviewed submissions for a major conference and organized a session for our most competitive conference. This takes time as well. Through all of this, including attending conferences, refereeing, and relating your own work to existing wisdom, you need to also read cutting-edge research by others. This keeps you on your toes and makes you part of the effort to move the field forward.

Research professors look forward to breaks — breaks are when they can catch up with the work that they had put aside during the time they had dedicated to teaching.

This description explains why research professors are paid well in most universities — they need to gain skills and have the stamina to compete, persevere and succeed in such a cut-throat environment. This is true, particularly in fields such as medicine, computer science and finance, where faculty can also take better-paying positions in the industry. Then the research process itself requires access to expensive labs and databases.

Why should students care about all of this? First, a university, as opposed to an online certificate or an apprenticeship program, should expand your horizons. As YU famously puts it, Torah Umadda.

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A core group of research faculty is what makes a university a university and this is particularly important for the flagship Jewish university at this time in the history of the Jewish people

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

The Risks of Sports Betting in America

By Mo Berlin

In recent years, the landscape of sports betting in the United States has undergone a significant change. With 38 states having now legalized sports gambling, placing bets has never been easier. Six years ago, one would need to travel to Las Vegas to place a sports bet. Nowadays, such a rigorous task

The accessibility of mobile sports gambling has reached such a dangerous point that you can be sitting at the dinner table, gambling your life away on meaningless sporting events, and no one at that same table will have any clue that you're doing it.

can be achieved from the comfort of one's home. Apps like FanDuel, Draft Kings and Bet MGM have revolutionized the industry, allowing gamblers to wager on any details within a game, from outcomes to individual player performances. This is something that can be done at any time of day, making it simple and easy to place a bet spontaneously.

The accessibility of mobile sports gambling has reached such a dangerous point that you can be sitting at the dinner table, gambling your life away on meaningless sporting events, and no one at that same table will have any clue that you're doing it. What started as a hassle to bet on sports has become an overlooked and dangerously accessible activity to anyone willing to participate.

Dr. Timothy Fong, a professor of psychiatry at UCLA and co-director of the

university's Gambling Studies Program, explains the quick addiction that even the average person can fall into. "Winning triggers a pleasurable response in the brain, a reward that's hard-wired into our DNA. Yet, the pursuit of this feeling can lead to catastrophic outcomes, including bankruptcy, divorce, and even suicide." According to the National Association of Addiction Professionals, gambling has the highest rate

of suicide among all other addictions, at a staggering 20%.

The convenience of mobile betting has led to a surge in gambling addiction, as evidenced by a 91% increase in calls to a gambling helpline in 2022, the first full year when mobile sports betting was legalized in most states.

The magnitude of sports betting is shown by the staggering 68 million Americans who wagered on this year's Super Bowl. This was a 35% increase in betting participation from the previous year. This year, an estimated \$23.1 billion was bet on the Super Bowl, a significant leap from last year's \$16 billion.

An alarming trend is the addiction to sports gambling among young adults — people like every one of us studying at YU. A 2023 report from Rutgers University revealed that a third of bettors aged 18 to 24

gambled exclusively online. The report also highlighted that younger men, those aged from 18 to 44, are most susceptible to high-risk problems gambling, with 20% being in the 18 to 24 age group.

According to Responsiblegambling.org, the risk is heightened among sports gamblers aged 18 to 20. Younger people are more prone to chase losses and bet beyond their means, a significant concern when talking about addiction and the pursuit of always wanting more. The implications are severe,

with potential impacts on mental health, including increases in depression, anxiety, and suicidality.

As sports betting continues to grow, so does the urgency for awareness and intervention to prevent the potential of gambling addictions. The story of sports gambling in America is a tale of technology's double-edged sword. While it provides unprecedented access and convenience, it also poses a significant risk that demands attention and action.



Sports betting revenue generated nearly \$11 Billion in 2023 alone.

DOUGH4872 / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

STERN MATH

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a course that is too easy for the graduate students or too difficult for the undergrads, thereby harming both of their learning. Furthermore, many of these classes are in Washington Heights on Thursday evenings or Friday mornings. I personally had to drop my Thursday evening class because it was impossible for me to make it to the Heights on time, as my Beren class finished fifteen minutes before the math class started. I currently commute to the Heights every Friday, which makes making Shabbos plans extremely inconvenient.

Only three professors at YU teach in-person math major classes at Beren. Although we had a new professor last semester who was respected by all students, the university insisted that he only teach on the men's campus this semester. (This is not to say that the YC math major is issue-free either. I have heard similar concerns about the program on Wilf as well.)

I personally know students who switched their majors because they couldn't finish them at Stern. It is not because of low enrollment that Stern refuses to hire professors. The numbers are there initially, yet the university's refusal to hire professors for women causes enrollment to decrease. In 2018, there were 18 enrolled math majors. We have now decreased to 10, and I know several sophomores who are considering changing their majors. The university perpetuates a vicious cycle; they don't provide courses because they perceive low student interest, but students are disinterested because there are so few course offerings. This has caused enrollment in the major to dwindle over time.

We have to fight for our courses here. Yeshiva University does not offer interesting math electives that would prepare us for careers or graduate school, nor do they offer basic courses required for graduation.

Thankfully, my class was able to successfully arrange for three of the required math classes to be given in person, yet I am still required to take graduate classes and men's Zoom classes to finish my major. A math major at Stern who prefers to remain anonymous has said, "I have already had to Zoom into Wilf classes and take graduate courses to fulfill my basic major requirements. It is a fight with the administration to get classes offered and another fight to have them offered in person. Stern is causing students who would pursue math to turn to other majors, and in some cases other colleges." Unfortunately, this is an experience that is not uncommon for math majors at Stern.

If Stern doesn't offer the necessary courses to finish the major, no matter how small enrollment is, then they simply should not pretend to offer the major. It causes a lot of unnecessary stress to students who discover halfway into their studies that they cannot complete them at Stern. Stern simply cannot have students enroll in a major and then refuse to supply the resources necessary for its completion. At the very *least*, they must offer the minimum number of courses to allow students to complete their majors without going to extreme ends such as attending men's courses virtually or enrolling in graduate courses with Katz. They can only offer these courses if they hire an adequate number of professors to teach them.

I want to make it clear that I am not writing this article to criticize Stern as a whole. I have had wonderful experiences at Stern during my past three years here. It is incredible that a college community exists exclusively for young Jewish women. However, I am writing this article to raise awareness about weaknesses in their math department. Why is the women's math program so bad? Shouldn't Stern, a college designed exclusively for young, professional Jewish women, encourage this major? The Stern math department, and overall STEM department, must improve.

RESEARCH

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As a practical matter, high-level visible research leads to larger donations, higher university rankings and greater recognition. It is no coincidence that the highest-ranked universities, Harvard, Yale, Stanford and Princeton (all ranked in the top five nationally), have the highest endowments (The University of Texas system has a large endowment too, but it serves a quarter of a million students). In our own corner of the woods, our affiliated medical school, Einstein, has just received a billion-dollar donation. Imagine what a billion dollars could do for the rest of YU.

For the individual student, research professors matter for a simple reason. The research of today is the practice of tomorrow. Research professors can help your career not just immediately after you graduate, but also years down the road. The world is full of examples of cutting-edge science that became world-changing practice, such as mRNA technology.

In my field, there are quite a few examples as well, with perhaps the most striking one being the famous Black-Scholes option pricing model. Its author, Myron Scholes, and Robert Merton, who did similar work (incidentally, both have Jewish ancestry), received Nobel prizes (Prof. Black had unfortunately died young and did not receive the prize). The Black-Scholes mathematical model was only known to research faculty in the 1970s, yet by the 1980s it revolutionized the world of finance.

If you are curious about your professor's work, you can consult numerous online sources — we all have bios on the university's website, and you can visit sites such as Google Scholar which counts papers and impact. For social sciences, SSRN.com lists working papers by faculty and their downloads.

Of course, there is room for all types of

instruction in a university. There are professors who come from industry or practice and can best explain current practices in the field. This is important in numerous fields, including business and medicine. There are teaching faculty who may be very knowledgeable and can deliver incredible classes, however, a core group of research faculty is what makes a university a university and this is particularly important for the flagship Jewish university at this time in the history of the Jewish people.

Professor S. Abraham Ravid is the Sy Syms Professor of Finance at the Sy Syms School of Business and Co-chair of the YU Faculty Council. He is a prolific researcher and has published over 50 journal articles, receiving research awards and having his research covered by national and international media. Before teaching at YU, he has taught at Rutgers, the University of Chicago, NYU, Cornell, Yale, UCLA, Wharton, Columbia and the University of Haifa.

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



The Pacific Nation Key to China's Taiwan Plans

By JONATHAN LEVIN

In March 2023, then-President of the Federated States of Micronesia, David Panuelo, sent a letter to the FSM's Congress. The contents of the letter, which were soon leaked to the press, were damning, outlining years of efforts by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to interfere in the country's affairs and move away from the United States towards Beijing.

"We are witnessing political warfare in our country," said Panuelo, detailing years of Chinese interference in the country, including high-level pressure campaigns, bribery and investment in critical infrastructure. "Over the course of my administration, the scope has increased, as has the depth, as has the gravity," he noted.

What Panuelo, who was once viewed as a pro-Beijing leader, said, confirms what American policy analysts have been saying for years: China has been increasing its stake in the Pacific as part of its ever-increasing rivalry with the United States, and Micronesia, a key U.S. ally, is a casualty of China's ambitions.

Once content with "biding its time," Chinese policy under Xi Jinping has expanded far beyond China's borders, including towards Micronesia, once viewed as on China's "periphery." In public, China acts like a benefactor and friend of the nation, pouring millions into the impoverished country, including funding projects that could give China control over critical infrastructure, including some with strategic implications.

In public, Chinese officials tell the people of the FSM (through the country's sole paper) that China is an "old friend" and that PRC aid is focused on "coaching one to fish rather than giving one fish."

However, in private, China acts less kindly. Chinese ships, in the guise of research, gather intelligence in FSM waters. Chinese

U.S. national security, and according to one expert, provide the U.S. a "power-projection superhighway running through the heart of the North Pacific into Asia."

China is committed to changing that. If China is to achieve "reunification" with Taiwan, which it seeks to complete by 2049, it knows it will likely need to deal with the

bear resentment of the decades of nuclear testing in the region.

Belatedly, realizing that they have been late to the game, policymakers have begun to pay more attention to the FSM. The Biden administration has begun holding high-level meetings in Washington with Pacific Islands leaders, including that of the FSM. Congress members have taken trips to the Pacific for briefings, and overall, the U.S. has begun to pay more attention to the region. The recent renewal of the Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the FSM has been touted as a major win for the U.S., even though it took Congress half a year to renew the agreement, giving China room to exploit gridlock and putting U.S. security interests in Asia at risk.

The United States' recent steps towards increasing engagement with the FSM is a tremendous step forward towards improving our relationship with a key allied nation. But it's not enough. To combat PRC inroads in the country, developments so critical to PRC aspirations in Taiwan, the United States needs a sea change in our approach to the strategically located nation. We need to have difficult conversations with our Micronesian partners who think they can play off great power competition for their own benefit, and we need to focus, as the Chinese claim they are, to "coach" the Micronesian people to fish, instead of continuing to pour hundreds of millions into the country without prioritizing the growth of the Micronesian economy. As tensions continue to rise in the Indo-Pacific, we must invest in building up the FSM and making it stronger.

"The FSM has a key role to play in either the prevention of such a conflict or participation in allowing it to occur."

Former President of the Federated States of Micronesia, David Panuelo

officials hand envelopes filled with cash and secret smartphones to Micronesian officials. Secession movements receive Chinese support. Micronesian officials are pressured to take pro-Beijing actions, and Chinese diplomats try to tell lower-ranking FSM officials to bypass their higher-ups.

Much of this was not known until Panuelo spoke up. Micronesia, for reasons rooted in its cultural tradition, likes to practice what is called a "tradition of darkness," or *tiahk en rotorot*. This, along with decades of U.S. indifference to the nation, has allowed China to make inroads into the nation.

Micronesia is an attractive target for China. Spread out across hundreds of islands in the North-West Pacific, it controls a territory the size of the continental U.S.. Treaties with the FSM guarantee the nation's security and allow the United States to move troops throughout the nation, which are key to the

United States. Chinese interference in the FSM is key to China's strategy to prevent the U.S. from interfering.

"The FSM has a key role to play in either the prevention of such a conflict or participation in allowing it to occur," said Panuelo.

China's campaign of political warfare in the FSM has been enabled by the United States taking its relationship with the FSM for granted and ignoring the country. For decades, policymakers have ignored the country, along with the rest of the Pacific. U.S. aid – which outnumbers Chinese contributions nearly 6-1, has not built the FSM into a strong, self-sufficient country. Islands remain isolated, and many have been depopulated by U.S.-bound immigrants looking for better economic opportunities. The FSM's most populous state, Chuuk, has lost nearly 1/3 of its population to outward migration, and many other Micronesians



Secretary of State Anthony Blinken speaking to the press together with (left to right) Marshall Islands Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Jack Ading, Palua President Surangel Whipps, Jr., and Federated States of Micronesia President Wedley Simina, ahead of a meeting at the State Department in Washington in September.

CHUCK KENNEDY / U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Got something to share?
Email editor@yucommentator.org



NEVER. STOP.
COMMENTATING.

Film Forum Runs Japanese Horror Festival

By SAM WEINBERG

On the outskirts of Greenwich Village on Houston Street in lower Manhattan, fans of Japanese horror, a genre affectionately dubbed “J-Horror,” got to watch some of their favorites shown at the iconic Film Forum theater. In a program co-presented with the Japan Foundation, the Film Forum’s horror festival had two dozen films spanning nearly a century of Japanese film, going from the silent experimental “A Page of Madness” from 1926 all the way through “Dark Water,” which was released in the 21st century. Many of the films, some of which classics while others little seen, were projected from 35mm film prints, which added a tremendous amount to the unique experience; watching older films projected at the Film Forum is always a wonderful opportunity, but the Japanese festival in particular made for a particularly exciting experience.

The programming expertly switched between medieval narratives and contemporary stories, with many of the films infusing ideas from both. Some films, notably “Onibaba,” had been inspired by traditional modes of Japanese entertainment, like *kabuki* theater. Yet, perhaps more notably, the themes of post-nuclear horrors and tensions found great expression in many of the movies screened. The original Godzilla film from 1954, entitled “Gojira,” remains a personal favorite of mine and a prime example of this theme: many later *kaiju* (monster) movies

have been inspired by its mechanic thrills, but Ishirō Honda’s original is both deeply thrilling and deeply moving, and it’s hard not to be taken aback by the emotional turmoil at the film’s center. (The recent “Godzilla Minus One” accomplishes similar goals as well, albeit not to the same heights.)

Another exciting element of the festival

"Many American filmmakers and studios have produced legendary horror movies as well, but the Film Forum's Japanese slate showcased the uniqueness of their thematic and aesthetic sensibilities."

and J-Horror as a whole is the greatness of many of the filmmakers who tried their hand at the subgenre. With the fitting exception of Ozu, many of the greatest Japanese filmmakers of all time have, in one way or another, contributed to the history of the genre, or at least made films adjacent to it. The legendary Akira Kurosawa, widely regarded as the greatest Japanese filmmaker ever, had his “Macbeth” adaptation, titled “Throne of Blood,” screened four times at the festival. (Whether or not it’s a horror movie in the classical sense is up for debate, but it certainly features elements of a classic ghost story.) Kenji Mizoguchi, whose most well-regarded films are all set in medieval Japan, directed the violent and unsettling “Ugetsu,” and Masaki Kobayashi, who is most well-known for his “Harakiri” and a 9.5-hour magnum opus “The Human Condition” (9.5

hours well-spent, truth be told), directed “Kwaidan,” an anthology film which has a title that literally means “ghost story.”

If serious horror films from the greatest of filmmakers aren’t your speed, some of the festival’s films gleefully bask in the genre’s more ridiculous tropes. Famously, “House,” which played at the festival as well,

his serial killer thriller “Cure” and ghost story for the internet age with “Pulse.” Even more important for J-Horror in the West were the two Hideo Nakata pictures that screened at the festival: “Ringu,” which opened with an introduction from Samuel Jamier, the executive director of the New York Asian Film Festival, was a treat to see on the big screen, (in large part because of the Film Forum providing a press pass to this Commentator writer,) and the aforementioned “Dark Water” is widely influential as well. Both films were soon adapted into English-language remakes, highlighting the exposure of the genre in America and beyond. “Ringu” in particular is a thrilling watch in theaters: the silence of its horror is incredibly evocative, and it’s a film ripe with absolutely haunting imagery.

When introducing “Ringu,” Jamier spoke about the proximity of the dead to the living in Japanese culture; the distances between both the alive and the deceased and the traditional modes of supernatural storytelling and its modern counterpart in film are not too far. It is with this duality that many of the films shown are in dialogue, and many Westerners are able to better appreciate the differing understandings of dying and the dead as they are portrayed in the series. Many American filmmakers and studios have produced legendary horror movies as well, but the Film Forum’s Japanese slate showcased the uniqueness of their thematic and aesthetic sensibilities.

is an absolutely glorious piece of insanity: a brief look at the trailer is all you need to get a feeling for its unique tone. The controversial Takashi Miike had his two most well-received films at the festival, “Audition” and “Ichi the Killer,” movies that are more known today for their extraordinary violence and extreme amounts of gore. And if you like your *kaiju* films less thoughtful and moving than “Gojira,” Honda’s “Mothra” played at the festival, too. That movie, about fairies kidnapped by an exploitative businessman and the massive feminine moth that comes to save them, doesn’t exactly have the same post-nuclear fears wrapped up in it.

Lastly, a handful of the contemporary classics that played were instrumental in bringing J-Horror to new fans at the turn of the century. Kiyoshi Kurosawa made two of the great installments in the genre with



The Film Forum Theater in February

David Foster Wallace's Enduring Impact

BY LIEV MARKOVICH

When “Infinite Jest” by David Foster Wallace was published on February 1, 1996, it created a buzz that is almost impossible for novels to create nowadays, especially a nonlinear, 1000+ page opus teeming with multiple-page endnotes and constantly directing the reader to his/her dictionary with words like “carbuncle,” “pistanthrophobia,” and “crepuscular.” “Infinite Jest” has remained popular ever since, selling over 44,000 copies in its first year of publication and going on to sell over one million copies since its release.

At the time, Wallace became somewhat of a household name, embarking on a ten-city book tour (part of which is chronicled in David Lipsky’s “Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself,” which was adapted into the feature film “The End of the Tour,” starring Jason Segal as Wallace) and ending up on the cover of Time Magazine. He was heralded as a savior of American literature, who, along with a few other authors (Jonathan Franzen is a name that comes to mind), was willing to tackle the big issues, such as loneliness, depression, drug use and unchecked consumerism, that plagued contemporary America.

Unfortunately, he was not the savior of American literature, and his life and career trajectory did not follow the simple upward pattern that was expected. Wallace did not only write about contemporary American struggles, but was plagued by them himself. He was an incredibly self-conscious figure, never quite comfortable with the fame and expectation that “Infinite Jest” heaped

upon him, and for most of his post-“Infinite Jest” adult life he lived in the suburbs of Bloomington, Illinois, doing mainly non-fiction and journalistic work and teaching at Illinois State University. Throughout his life, he battled manic depression, and in 2008 he committed suicide. He never published

“If there is one message you could take away from Wallace’s oeuvre, it is this: You are smarter than you think you are, and you have the ability to make choices that make your life mean something— if you pay proper attention.”

another novel following “Infinite Jest,” but left behind bits and pieces of a manuscript that would become the posthumous novel “The Pale King.”

In the years following his suicide, Wallace has become quite the controversial figure in literary circles. It seems that every few months his name is trending on Twitter, with many seeing him as a model of toxic masculinity: The straight, white, upper-middle-class male whose massive ego led him to write a long, useless, overcomplicated work for which he received mass adulation, yet remained personally unsatisfied. There are also those who unrequitedly admire Wallace, who have christened him “Saint Dave,” the man who could not handle our decaying culture and died for America’s sins. The truth about Wallace is probably somewhere between these two extremes. What both sides of the debate seem to ignore is his actual work. Unfortunately, as often happens when an artist commits suicide, his final act has defined him, and attention has shifted from

Wallace the author to Wallace the person, with much focus being placed on the granular details of his personal life. However, as is true for many writers, it can be intellectually fruitful to place Wallace’s life in the context of his literary work and vice versa. Such an approach will hopefully uncover aspects of

his personality and literary goals, as well as demonstrate why his work remains impactful and is worth reading.

Before diving into “Infinite Jest,” some context regarding Wallace’s background and milieu is necessary. Born in Champaign Urbana, Illinois, in 1962 to two professor parents (philosophy and English), he was shaped by a nascent culture of mass media as a member of the first generation with access to 24/7 TV programming. In his biography, “Every Love Story is a Ghost Story” by DT Max, Max recounts how Wallace would sometimes watch TV for ten straight hours, yet as an incredibly gifted person would still achieve good grades and play competitive junior tennis at a high level (in addition to fiction and journalism, Wallace is one of the best sports writers out there; his compendium of tennis writing, published as “String Theory: David Foster Wallace on Tennis” is worth a read). As he entered young adulthood, he became entrenched in weed culture, calling himself an “incredible pothead.” In his college years at Amherst, he grew more interested in literature, enamored by post-modern writers like Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo. His first novel, “The Broom of the System,” was published in 1987 and received a Whiting Award, putting Wallace on the map as an up-and-coming novelist. However, around this time he began to struggle mightily with addiction and depression, eventually landing him in rehab at a halfway house in Boston. The house was filled with working-class addicts who came from different backgrounds than the college-educated Wallace, yet clearly had similar internal struggles, leading Wallace to the conclusion that his problems were not confined to his milieu, but were American problems that needed to be further investigated.

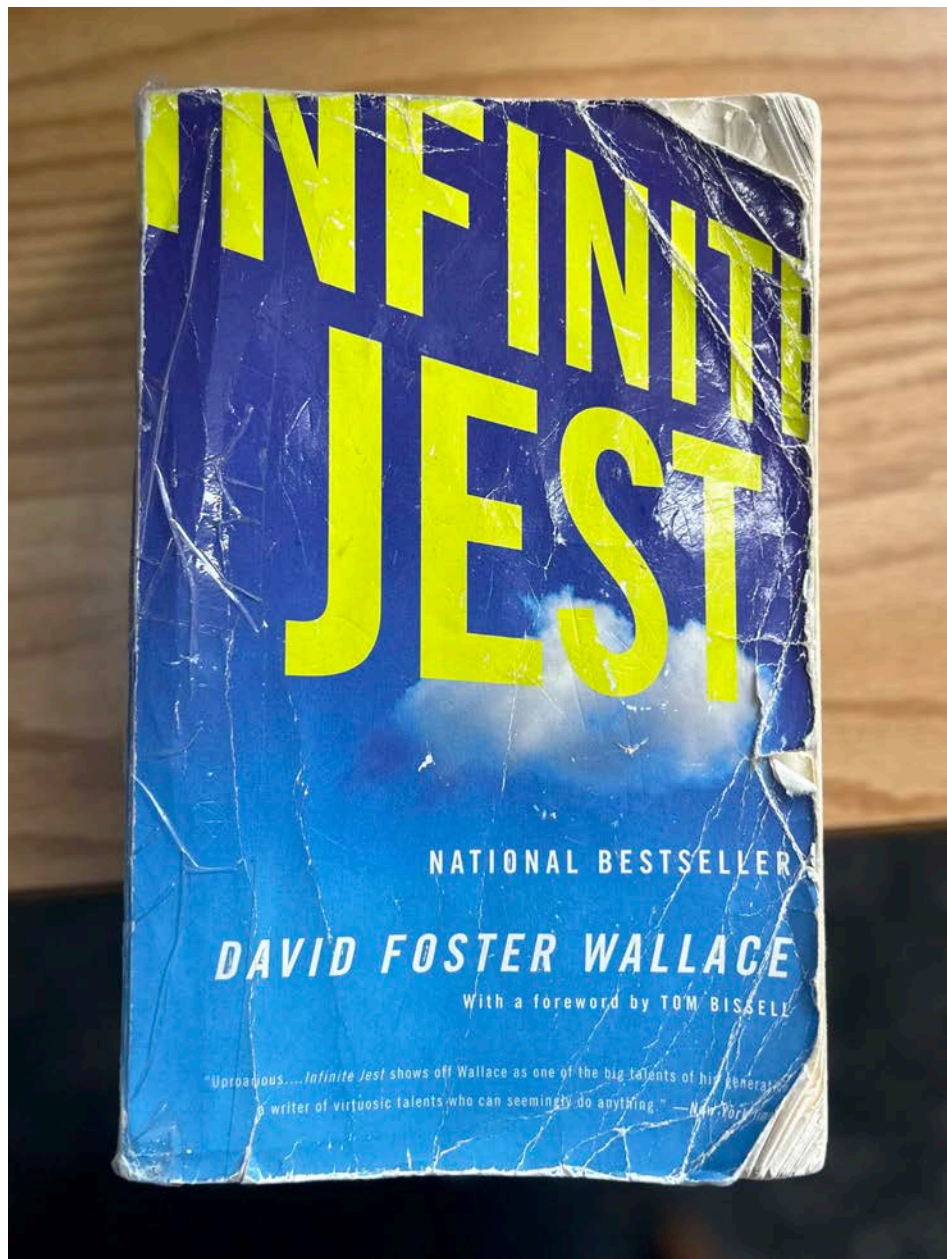
It was this halfway house experience that provided the foundations for “Infinite Jest,” whose two main plot threads follow the daily travails of addicts at Ennet Drug and Alcohol Recovery House in Enfield, Boston, and the talented, brilliant, and obsessive teenagers — many of whom have their own drug problems — at Enfield Tennis Academy right across the road. Wallace, being a person who struggled with addiction and depression, was deeply concerned with the holes we have inside us: what causes them and what we fill them with. He was especially concerned with the insidious effects of mass media and entertainment, and wanted to juxtapose America’s entertainment obsession with drug/alcohol addiction as merely different points on the same appetitive spectrum. This point is embodied in the main plot device in “Infinite Jest,” which is a television cartridge called “The Entertainment” that is so seductive that it puts its viewers into a death-inducing stupor. The book’s diverging, discursive structure, filled with endnotes, is meant to reflect the overwhelming world of the information age, where stimuli constantly bombard us and it is unclear what is actually important and what deserves our attention. For this reason, some critics

have called “Infinite Jest” the first book of the Internet Age.

To me, Wallace is trying to challenge the reader to look past the Pynchonesque pyrotechnics and see that “Infinite Jest” is really about a bunch of sad, empty people desperately trying to find meaning and connection and something to hold onto in a lonesome world. Hal Incandenza, the novel’s main character, is a teenage genius and a prodigious tennis player, destined for the pros, yet “hasn’t had a bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion since he was tiny” and is incredibly lonely and addicted to marijuana. The other main character is Don Gately, a recovering drug addict and resident staffer at Ennet House, from whose perspective the novel often diverges in order to dive deeply into the psychology of addicts and the mechanics of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is in these passages, where Wallace illustrates deeply empathetic portraits of addiction and extols the unexpected wisdom of AA, that the novel becomes profound.

However, much of the novel consists of brilliantly written, fun, but often ultimately empty asides. Wallace’s literary talent shines, making “Infinite Jest” immensely re-readable; I often find myself opening to any random page and getting lost in the prose, the exquisite detail and the constantly shifting, unique authorial voice. Overall, Wallace does a great job diagnosing our cultural sickness, both in the book’s structure and substance, but fails to offer a clear solution to this preeminent dilemma of our time. He himself seems to get lost in the book’s seemingly never ending pages, and there is no straightforward redemption for the characters, no obvious way for them to be fully human in an alienating world. Hal achieves fullness of internal personality, but to do so he must lose his ability to communicate. Gately is shot protecting halfway house members from intruders and endures his horrifically painful wounds without breaking his sobriety, but he fades away, and we are left unsure as to where his future lies. The “plot,” if we can even call it that, never gets resolved, as the novel’s various fragments never get pieced together. Perhaps this is an honest portrayal: there are no clean, simple resolutions in life, and every seeming step forward requires a sacrifice, a corresponding step back.

Wallace himself, though proud of his work, was frustrated about his inability to be truly sincere. In an essay written a few months after “Infinite Jest’s” publication, titled “Joseph Frank’s Dostoevsky,” he complains about the lack of moral clarity in contemporary works of art — how they have to hide their moral message in fancy literary tricks and asides as opposed to being brave and upfront like the 19th century Russians he admired: “So, for me anyway, what makes Dostoevsky invaluable is that he possessed a passion, conviction, and engagement with deep moral issues that we, here, today, cannot or do not allow ourselves ... [W]e — under our own nihilist spell — seem to require of our writers an ironic distance from deep convictions or desperate questions.” His newfound dedication to sincerity is on clear display in his 2006 coronation speech to Kenyon College, titled “This Is Water,” which is what he is most well known for in contemporary times. His seemingly simple message — that careful attention allows one to transcend their natural, negative thought patterns and is the secret to enduring even the most frustrating experiences with grace and dignity — resonates deeply with almost everyone I know who has listened to the speech. Only it is clear that the audience



Finishing “Infinite Jest” proved to me that I am a better reader than I thought I was, and paved the way for more projects involving long, difficult texts.

LIEV MARKOVICH

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An Interview with Adam Segal

By RIKKI ZAGELBAUM

There are several staple items one might expect to find in a Jewish home. A menorah, perhaps. A shelf of Hebrew books. A shiny set of Shabbat candles next to a colorful painting of the Western Wall. The Segal's house, one of many in Bergenfield, New Jersey, has all of these things. But nestled in the space between a row of books and family albums lies something wholly unfamiliar to the average Jewish home — an Oscar.

It belongs (temporarily) to Adam J. Segal, the Segal father and founder/president of The 2050 Group, a public relations firm specializing in film and entertainment. A member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences and a well-respected figure in his field, Segal has worked on advertising campaigns across various media formats, including print, television, radio, and podcasts. Today, his main focus is movies, managing film releases, world premieres, streaming debuts, and award campaigns, often for documentaries and short films.

While visiting his home, I entered Segal's office, a film lover's dream decorated with past honors and projects. Hanging beside a 2009 PR 40 Under 40 award are posters for "Colette (2018)," "The Queen of Basketball (2021)," and "The Last Repair Shop (2023)," which won Best Short Documentary at the Academy Awards ceremony earlier this month. Directed by Ben Proudfoot and Kris Bowers, the film takes viewers into a musical instrument repair shop in Los Angeles, where four technicians work to restore broken instruments in one of the few U.S. districts providing musical equipment for students, free of charge. Providing an intimate glimpse into a corner of the globe that would otherwise have gone unseen, it is a prime example of the sort of impactful work Segal is drawn to.

"I've worked on films that deal with environmental issues, human rights issues, international issues, and domestic issues, like civil rights," he explained, the evidence written on his walls. His selection criteria are specific: the work must hold intrinsic value and have something positive to offer its audience. For Segal, the business of movie promotion is not just an income but an opportunity to start conversations and impart meaningful change across diverse audiences. In addition to aligning with issues he cares about, "they [the films] absolutely have to resonate with my beliefs," he told me, "whether that's politically, culturally,

or religiously."

In case the yarmulka fails to give it away, Segal is a fully observant Orthodox Jew — a rarity in the film industry. This presents unique challenges, particularly around major Jewish holidays and the Sabbath. "A lot of

they recognize the success and integrity he brings to his projects. "I live a life that's different, but I find that a lot of people respect that," he noted.

However, Segal feels that his commitment to his beliefs and support for Israel

"The best type of work is one that you can feel proud of. Having a meaningful impact and leaving something positive for people to connect to — that's what matters."

Adam Segal

movies open on Friday," he explained, "and when Friday night is the big opening night, and Saturday is the big second day, I miss all that." However, he finds that colleagues respect his religious identity, especially once

does occasionally put him at odds with others in the industry, particularly concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Never were these feelings more prominent than at the Academy Awards ceremony, on the eve of

March 10th. While the night was celebratory, as Segal grinned ear to ear beside "The Last Repair Shop" directors, Oscar in hand, it was difficult to ignore the anti-Israel imagery and sentiments, both on the red carpet and on the big stage. Segal himself, at the request of Adi Alexander, father of the 20-year-old American hostage Edan Alexander, wore a yellow ribbon in honor of the hostages currently being held inside Gaza.

Despite the challenges, Segal is undeterred. In a time when the lines between entertainment and activism often blur, he stands out as a person who understands the stakes, who knows that a well-told story can change minds, influence policy, and even alter the course of history. "That's the primary goal," he affirmed. "The best type of work is one that you can feel proud of. Having a meaningful impact and leaving something positive for people to connect to — that's what matters."



Segal (center) at the 2024 Vanity Fair Oscar Party with Ben Proudfoot (right) and Kris Bowers (left)

ADAM SEGAL

WALLACE

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in "This is Water" was not the graduating students, or the adults in the crowd, or even America as a whole, but Wallace himself. The speech is littered with lines such as "I am not the wise old fish" and "Please don't think that I'm giving you moral advice." These are the small hints of subversion and little ties of self-doubt that occur when a congenital skeptic tries to convince himself of the "capital 't' Truth" about how to live a good life. Wallace is drawing out an ideal that he could never quite reach.

Despite "This is Water" being his best-known work, Wallace was a novelist at heart, and he was desperate to express the worldview found in "This is Water" in the written word. He wanted to write a novel about boredom, the deepest evil of the entertainment age, the thing that the modern world constantly seeks to purge itself of. Perhaps this forgotten thing, boredom, could

be liberating. The novel, never finished by Wallace, but posthumously published as "The Pale King" in 2011, revolves around the daily life and tedium of IRS agents in Peoria, Illinois in 1985. It contains a few finished sections, one of which was recently published independently as a strange, hauntingly beautiful novella titled "Something to Do With Paying Attention." "Something to Do With Paying Attention" is probably the closest Wallace came to his goal of writing "morally passionate, passionately moral" fiction. The prose, while still containing the linguistic flourishes that make reading Wallace so compelling (delights include "wastoid" and "obetrolling"), is precise and straightforward. As the preface, by publisher Sarah McNally, states, "Calm and poise replace the pyrotechnics of 'Infinite Jest' and other early works." The novella is a highly unconventional conversion tale, as a self-described "wastoid" who has sleepily wandered through life accidentally enters an accounting class and is inspired to embrace

the profession by a substitute professor who touts accounting as a truly heroic endeavor: "Gentlemen, welcome to the world of reality— there is no audience. No one to applaud, to admire. No one to see you. Do you understand? Here is the truth — actual heroism receives no ovation, entertains no one. No one queues up to see it. No one is interested ... True heroism is you, alone, in a designated work space. True heroism is minutes, hours, weeks, year upon year of the quiet, precise, judicious exercise of probity and care— with no one there to see and cheer." It is a brilliant and moving piece of fiction that feels more true to Wallace's essence than "This is Water" and is the first thing I suggest to anyone who is interested in reading his work.

In a way, Wallace's earlier works, especially "Infinite Jest," demonstrate the value of careful, quiet attention, even if they are not directly preaching it. To read "Infinite Jest," you have to sit in a room alone, quietly, with a dictionary at hand, paying close attention.

Reading his work could be a transformational and liberating experience; finishing "Infinite Jest" proved to me that I am a better reader than I thought I was, and paved the way for more projects involving long, difficult texts. If there is one message you could take away from Wallace's oeuvre, it is this: You are smarter than you think you are, and you have the ability to make choices that make your life mean something — if you pay proper attention. Wallace's own struggles with distraction, addiction, and depression make his work more impactful. He was not writing from an ivory tower, telling his readers to be more like him. Rather, he was trying to cure both his readers and himself, to find connection and solace through writing. While he was not able to overcome his own demons, Wallace's message continues to resonate in an ever-more distracting and overwhelming world.



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