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YU Community Challenges Revel Decision

by Michael Eisenberg

Part 2 in a series with *The Observer*

Citing economic difficulty and poor enrollment, the Office of the Executive Vice President released a policy paper outlining its program for the proposed restructuring of the Bernard Revel Graduate School (BRGS). According to the statement, this action was authorized by the Yeshiva University Board of Trustees, "reflecting its fiduciary responsibility" to the institution. The December 12 announcement, although expected, elicited strong reactions from students. In addition, faculty members expressed frustration at their exclusion from the decision making process.

The University's statement explains that "the new courses will be offered in Jewish Thought, a discipline known in Israeli institutions of higher education as 'Machshevet Yisrael'." Revel currently offers courses in Bible, Jewish History, Jewish Philosophy, Semitic Languages, Talmudic Studies and other disciplines. Whereas Revel now awards Masters' and Doctorate degrees, the new BRGS track in Jewish Thought will issue only a certificate upon conclusion of the courses.

The following is an itemized description of the factors that contributed to the administration's decision and the ensuing controversy.

YU Finances

According to figures furnished by Vice President for Business Affairs Dr. Sheldon Socol, YU's annual operating expenses total 280 million dollars; as of November, the University's deficit was 6.6 million dollars. Albert Einstein College of Medicine's share of that 280 million amounts to 220 million and the Manhattan campuses (undergraduate and graduate) utilize the remaining 60 million. Both AECOM and the Manhattan campuses carry a 2.5% deficit - \$5 million for AECOM and \$1.6 million for the Manhattan campuses - after subsidies have been allocated.

Revel's Finances

In the Comparative Schedule of Current Fund Revenues and Expenditures for BRGS dated July 10, 1991 (there are negligible discrepancies between July's figures and November's figures), the University places Revel's total expenditures at \$971,566 and its deficit at \$581,225. Dr. Socol confirmed that the Board of Trustees was advised that Revel's deficit is in excess of \$500,000. A breakdown of those figures reveals that although these expenditures are calculated using accepted accounting procedures which distribute campus costs among various branches of the institution, the adjustments in Revel's program will not necessarily constitute actual savings.

Of the \$971,566 in total expenditures, \$438,296 are direct expenditures composed for the most part of salaries and fringe benefits. Disregarding the allocation of salaries for the faculty of the new BRGS, this \$438,296 would indeed be a savings.

\$43,759 in expenditures is attributed to BRGS for its use of the University libraries. However, BRGS receives little if any extra assistance or benefits not already provided for other students on campus.

The Comparative Schedule notes that Revel spends \$350,718 on student services, institutional support, operation and maintenance. These expenditures account for heating, security, registration, and general upkeep of the campus. By restructuring BRGS, the administration will see minimal savings, significantly less than the \$350,718 presented.

These expenditures attributed to Revel, will, upon BRGS' closing, be footed by other branches of YU.

BRGS' revenues total \$409,713. However, in arriving at a correct accounting of funds, \$138,793 for student loans and YU sponsored scholarships must be subtracted from the revenue total.

Taking into account the information stated above, there exists a discrepancy of approximately \$350,000 between the sum presented to the Board and the actual savings. The disparity is attributable to different methods of calculating indirect costs. Socol, responding to the discrepancy stated, "If you want the facts on the correct figures you come here (my office)."

In keeping the name BRGS and not closing Revel down altogether, YU will be able to use \$161,984 in restricted funds. These restricted funds, specifically endowed to Revel, may be used for BRGS and not for any other arm of YU.

Faculty Costs

If the University chooses to discharge some or all of its tenured faculty, resulting savings will not be felt for some time, because of the obligation to pay tenured faculty for a year after their separation from the University. The Faculty Handbook states, "A tenured faculty member who suffers a non-discriminatory discontinuance of his tenured position shall be considered to be on leave with pay for one year from termination of the position..." At present, four of Revel's eight faculty members are tenured. If, however, YU keeps these professors, the savings will be restricted to the salaries of the part-time faculty.

Adding to the confusion, two of these faculty members hold University contracts, meaning that the closing of Revel will not automatically terminate their positions. The University would have to place them in one of the other Jewish Studies divisions and consequently garner no savings on their contracts by restructuring Revel.

Enrollment

The administration steadfastly maintains that the costs Revel incurs are not commensurate with the amount of students it serves. Revel has awarded sixty-six MA degrees and six PhD's in the last five years. Revel's classes contain an average of 6.7 students and approximately forty students are FTE's (Full Time Equivalency). However, Dr. Haym Soloveitchik, a professor at Revel, contends that these statistics are irrelevant. "They don't count students who are writing their

theses or doing research on them. The thesis is the main intellectual endeavor of the graduate student, not the classes." He added that 6.7 students is the appropriate number of students for a graduate school class and that all graduate programs have roughly the same per class average. Additionally, enrollment at Revel exceeded the projected figures.

Fund Raising Attempts

The Commentator has learned that at a meeting of the YC Board of Directors on Monday December 16, Dr. Socol stated that the actual savings from the restructuring of Revel is between \$250,000 and \$350,000. At that meeting the Board pressed Dr. Lamm and Dr. Socol on the matter and the administrators asserted that the restructuring was motivated by financial concerns.

After the initial notification of the closing, BRGS faculty were granted a one week period to raise funds or establish the possibility that funds could be raised to keep Revel afloat. Intensive efforts broke down and the restructuring was announced. The Commentator has learned that on Monday December 16, two offers were presented to Dr. Lamm and were rejected. First, a Rabbi from a local synagogue offered to raise \$250,000, approximately enough to sustain Revel for one year. Dr. Lamm turned it down.

The Commentator has also learned of an offer presented by Mr. Joel Stern of Chicago, a financial consultant and philanthropist. Mr. Stern, who in the past has donated \$1,000,000 to the University of Chicago, has on a number of occasions been asked to join the Revel Board of Directors. On Monday, Mr. Stern spoke with Rabbi Herbert Dobrinsky, Vice President for University Affairs, and outlined the following three point plan: 1) Stern would establish a Board of Directors (BRGS currently lacks such a Board) that would give strong assurances of raising \$100,000 a year for Revel. 2) He would set up a business and financial plan to make the school financially sound. 3) In the interim, Stern would spend as much time as necessary to fund-raise and close the budget gap. Rabbi Dobrinsky communicated the plan to the President, but Dr. Lamm retorted that in no way would they accept anything less than a signed guarantee for \$300,000 a year for five years. Faculty members had communicated to The Commentator that Dr. Lamm had told them at a meeting the previous Tuesday that whatever the deficit is, it would be sufficient if they were to raise \$130,000.

The Students

The university statement reads, "All degree students currently enrolled in these programs will be encouraged to complete their course work and degree requirements by June, 1992." It is unclear how many students could complete their requirements by June and the matter is still under review. However, most, if not all of the BA/MA students cannot finish by June. For any student unable to finish, the University offers to make "every

reasonable effort to assist them to attain their degrees... Students will be aided in their efforts to transfer credits to other institutions and the exploration of individual instruction will be undertaken." However, many students have expressed concern that any program outside of YU will lack the religious framework necessary for Orthodox students to pursue their academic endeavors. Dr. Soloveitchik pointed out that YU students have better textual skills than students at other programs such as NYU and Columbia. A student requesting anonymity stated that he will go to Israel next year because there is no longer any reason for him to pursue his education here.

Faculty

The faculty has also mobilized against the decision to restructure Revel. In addition to numerous meetings and fund raising efforts, the Executive Committee of the Jewish Studies Division of Yeshiva University has called a meeting for Thursday December 19, to discuss plans. In a draft statement obtained by The Commentator, the Committee expresses its distress over the announcement. They plan to propose: "1) That no further steps now be taken towards the dissolution of BRGS. 2) That any decision as to the future of BRGS be put off for one year. 3) That a special commission be constituted by the President for the express purpose of attempting to preserve BRGS within the context of sound fiscal planning. That commission should consist of faculty, administration, and members of the Executive Committee of the Board."

Another concern expressed by both faculty members and outsiders is the potential impact of the move on Jewish education in America. Dean of BRGS Dr. Leo Landman, fears the disastrous effect BRGS' closing will have on women's Jewish education past the undergraduate level and on Jewish education in general.

Echoing these sentiments, the Educators Council of America passed a resolution this Monday stating, "As an organization of principals and agency heads, we are already confronted by a dangerous shortage of teachers with advanced Jewish education, and we state that if this plan is executed, it will have a disastrous effect on our efforts to remedy the situation."

In a further indication of Revel's impact on Jewish education, the Revel faculty compiled a list of YU Jewish Studies faculty that are BRGS graduates. They concluded that 44% are BRGS graduates. It is unclear whether the new program of Jewish Thought will fill that void.

The University statement claims that the "reorganized BRGS will be a meaningful center for higher Jewish learning and will attract an even larger student body." Dr. Soloveitchik disputed this. "Students work for a degree. They put in hours of research and writing for a degree. Nobody is going to work for a certificate."

The Commentator made numerous attempts to speak with Dr. Lamm on the subject but was unsuccessful.

Editor's Note

Puzzled. Devastated. Angry. Confused. Nervous.

Students and faculty at Yeshiva University and the Jewish community at large experienced these emotions upon hearing the news: Yeshiva University is actually going to close its Graduate School of Jewish Studies.

The Commentator's primary responsibility is to report the facts. We did that by breaking the story in our last issue, and with an analysis on the front page of this special issue.

However, The Commentator also serves as a forum for ideas and opinions of the Yeshiva University family. It is our hope that these pages will accurately express the concerns of those who fear this "restructuring": the 1,112 students who signed the petition on page 4; the graduate students whose words can only begin to portray the burning emotions in their hearts; leaders in Jewish education who fear that the last trickle of Orthodox educators is being cut off. We hope that their voices will be heard by members of the administration responsible for this frightening action, as well as University Trustees.

If you have similar sentiments, please send a note to Dr. Lamm. It is important that he comprehends the lack of support for this course of action.

"The possible termination of tenured faculty appointments on the grounds of reorganization of a single school has sent a chill through the entire faculty. We are certain that both current and prospective faculty members at the university would view such a compromise of tenured appointments as a grave precedent, throwing into question the integrity of all the University's commitments to the security of faculty members."

- Draft Statement, Executive Committee of the Jewish Studies Division of Yeshiva University.

"The doctoral program at Revel is one of Yeshiva University's jewels, and it should be treasured. There is a strong need for Yeshiva University to provide adequate financial support for graduate students."

- Middle States Report

הסתדרות המורים באמריקה



Educators Council of America

A Fellowship of Orthodox Jewish Educators
Suite 419, 500 West 185th Street, New York, NY 10033
(212) 960-5266

On December 12, 1991, the executive committee of the Educators Council of America passed the following resolution unanimously:

The ECA expresses its profound shock at the news that Yeshiva University plans to close its graduate school of Jewish studies, one of the largest and finest of such schools in America, and the only one devoted to training Orthodox Jewish scholars, college professors and teachers. As an organization of agency heads, we are already confronted by a dangerous shortage of teachers with advanced Jewish education, and we state with full conviction that if this plan is executed, it will have a disastrous effect on our efforts to remedy this situation.

We call upon the administration of Yeshiva University to recognize its obligation to the Jewish community and immediately abandon this short-sighted plan. We are certain that the Jewish community will respond generously to a fund-raising drive for this school, if they are told what is at stake.

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Reflections of A Max Stern Scholar

by Uri Cohen

Almost five years ago, I was awarded the Max Stern Scholarship. It was a tremendous honor. It meant that Yeshiva University had singled me out as someone with the potential for Jewish leadership, and was prepared to help me toward that end with financial assistance and "an enriched course of study" (according to the scholarship pamphlet).

Had I not been so naive, I might have asked: where are all the courses in Jewish leadership training? Now that I had expressed a strong desire to enter Chinukh, how was I to use my college career preparing for it? There is no Department of Education or Jewish Education at Yeshiva College, and practically no Jewish studies courses exist beyond those few required of every MYP student. Where are all the opportunities for "exceptionally gifted students with a commitment to Jewish studies"?

The painful answer: there simply are none.

None, that is, except for Revel. It is to the enormous credit of Deans Hecht and Landman that they allowed me to enter the BA/MA program despite my lack of prerequisites. They realized that someone with the motivation and potential for Jewish studies should be given the chance to develop and grow in Jewish scholarship on the highest levels. Revel was the logical realization of my having received the Max Stern Scholarship. It was - at the risk of sounding corny - a dream come true.

Since then, I have gained not only a knowledge of my field (Medieval Jewish History), but an appreciation for Jewish scholarship in general and the tools for scholarly research and critical thinking in any area. In the meantime, at least twenty Max Stern Scholars (among others) have followed me into the BA/MA program. This is no coincidence; rather, the existence of the Revel option is the only way to justify and follow up on the claims of the Max Stern Scholarship. Parenthetically, it is manifestly clear from the Statement of Revel's lobotomy that the mysterious figure(s) behind it are completely oblivious to this critical connection.

There is a deeper issue in the importance of Revel to YU students in general, and Max Stern Scholars in

particular. Our Undergraduate Catalog states that "Max Stern Scholars are chosen on the basis of...demonstrated commitment to the unique undergraduate educational philosophy of Yeshiva University-Torah U'Madda."

In his introduction to the Torah U'Madda Brochure, Rabbi Dr. Lamm elaborates, "We hope that somehow in the hearts and minds of our students the interaction between Torah and Madda will create a personality capable of making a creative contribution and thus carry on this great and important tradition." Given that hope, one would naturally expect that a plethora of courses reflecting and incorporating the synthesis of Torah and Madda is offered at YU - at the very least, to Max Stern Scholars.

But it is no secret that there is no synthesis at Yeshiva College. Just pick up the Torah U'Madda Brochure and compare it with the current YC course listing. You'll discover that there is a grand total of two teachers giving "Torah U'Madda courses" this semester. Hardly a plethora.

If there is any center of Torah U'Madda at YU, it is in Revel. Every single Revel course involves Jewish scholarship, the application of modern methods to traditional texts. In fact, Revel is the only Modern Orthodox bastion of critical thinking. In that sense, Revel is, as one administrator confided to me the other day, "the heart of what the institution is about." Without Revel, the Torah U'Madda slogan would be a farce, a philosophy on paper. This is why the lobotomy of Revel as we know it - or even the BA/MA option - would be digging the grave of Modern Orthodoxy. It would effectively destroy "this great and important tradition" of Torah U'Madda at YU and certainly any chances of creating such a personality. At the very least, it would render the Max Stern Scholarship meaningless, a cruel joke to lure "exceptionally gifted students with a commitment to Jewish studies" into an educational dead end.

It is ironic that the same people who bewail the "shift to the right" among the Modern Orthodox are themselves bringing it about by sounding the death knell for Orthodox Jewish scholarship.

Letter to Dr. Lamm

Dear Dr. Lamm,

In his statement of the goals for the newly incorporated Yeshiva College, Dr. Revel proclaimed that "The Yeshiva College aims to make real the true yeshiva ideal, the development of a select body of young men who in the rabbinate or Jewish scholarship, in teaching or in social service, or in whatsoever field of work shall be the standard bearers of true Jewish life, the moral and spiritual leaders of their communities, because they have carried with them from Yeshiva and its college the ideals of scholarship, spirituality and service."

Your administration's proposal to close the Bernard Revel Graduate School, the university's institute of advanced Judaic Studies, forces us to reconsider

whether academic Judaic Studies helps imbue the Yeshiva student with the "ideals of scholarship, spirituality and service" Dr. Revel envisioned. Does Judaic scholarship catalyze or disrupt the reaction of intellect and spirit occurring in the mind of the committed Yeshiva student who struggles to formulate a world-view incorporating both Torah and secular knowledge?

Over the years at Yeshiva, many have argued against academic Jewish studies on the grounds that they lead to heresy. One may begin by studying Jewish history but one winds up questioning the authority of the Masorah and denying the Mosaic authorship of the Torah. This supposed "danger" constitutes scant reason for the elimination of Revel. If anything, the

Opinion:

Academic Suicide

by Jeffrey Saks



Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm,
President of Yeshiva University:
Facing serious opposition from all sides



Dr. Sheldon Socol,
Vice-President of Business Affairs:
Focused on finance



Rabbi Dr. Leo Landman,
Dean of Revel Graduate School:
Not consulted

Dr. Norman Lamm, president of our yeshiva, writes of YU founder Dr. Bernard Revel that he

personified the educational possibilities implicit in the philosophy he would name Torah U'Madda. . . despite opposition from various quarters, Revel was determined - and indeed successful in making his Yeshiva not only a bastion of traditional Torah learning. . . but also a home for the serious study of Judische Wissenschaft (academic Judaic studies).

Torah U'Madda, p.34

The founding of the appropriately named Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies marked Revel's success.

Gershom Scholem (*The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, "The Science of Judaism - then and Now", p.304-313) distinguishes two approaches to Wissenschaft, which he defines as a manner of "understanding our character and our history."

The first was epitomized by Moritz Stensneider, the great nineteenth century scholar, who pointed to his vast library of Judaica and declared: "We have only one task left: to give the remains of Judaism a decent burial." The second believes that Judische Wissenschaft is the study of a vibrant, living organism -- one which mandates academic study as a means of being properly understood as both rich and evolving.

It is fitting that those who go to the

Beit Midrash also learn the order of the generations and the events that have occurred. . . For this knowledge helps one to understand the words of the Torah which have related to us [historical matters]. . . in the eyes of anyone not versed in the ancient chronicles all these things are like a dream with no interpretation. . . All such knowledge will ennoble the heart of Man and lift him above the thoughts of the mass daydreaming of fools.

Naftali Weisel, *Divrei Shalom Ve-Emet*, 1782.

Ours may be the first generation of students studying a Judaism which understands itself.

Torah U' Madda, be it synthesis or integration, is most fully achieved within Revel. As its eponym envisioned, Revel is an environment which sustains an Orthodox Wissenschaft which we can take pride in both academically and spiritually. It serves as a complement to the world of the Beit Midrash, enhancing the study of Torah with disciplines beyond Halacha and Gemara.

Dr. Lamm is of the opinion that we must meet our critics from both the right and the left with respect, but never with apologetics. Our critics on the right accuse Torah U'Madda (and, implicitly, Revel) of being bittul zman (waste of time) at best and apikorsut (heresy) at worst. Are we prepared to admit that Bible, History, and Philosophy are not disciplines for a good yeshiva boy? Are we willing to say that yirat shamayim (fear of heaven) and scholarship are mutually exclusive?

Our critics on the left accuse us of a

lack of academic seriousness. Are we prepared to agree, even tacitly? Are we to ignore, and make no effort to emulate, the achievements of world-renowned scholars such as David Berger, Louis Feldman, Arthur Hyman, Haym Soloveitchik, and Sid Leiman? Have we forgotten that the Rav himself saw fit to associate his name with Revel, and that his colossally important contributions to Jewish thought were transmitted there to generations of Orthodox Jews?

Perhaps most importantly, are we prepared to commit suicide in a field that we, as the only Orthodox Jewish university, are singularly suited to address? Are we prepared to leave the future of Wissenschaft to our critics on the left, or to secular universities? Is it not chillingly paradoxical that the only Orthodox Jewish university in history will not be granting graduate degrees in Jewish Studies?!

Yes, budget cuts must be made throughout the university, even within Revel. However, we will fail our responsibilities as a Torah institution if we do not offer any post-graduate Limudei Kodesh for women, or if we decimate the center of academic Judaic Studies in the Orthodox world. Any form of adulterated, non-degree "think tank" cannot hope to produce the next generation of Torah-true scholars.

The elimination of Revel would be a tragic surrender to both right and left. The Bernard Revel Graduate School symbolizes and actualizes the mission and dream of Yeshiva University - it is, to synthesize two of Dr. Lamm's book titles, *Torah U'Madda Lishma*.

challenge to our faith and vision of religious truth posed by critical scholarship should cause us to intensify our efforts to grapple with the issues raised by scholarly methodology. As so eloquently phrased by Eliezer Berkowitz, "If any branch of human knowledge poses problems to religion, then out of religious zeal for the truth and for the truthfulness of religion itself, religion must take such problems seriously. . . Without a knowledge of their premises, methods and conclusions by the believing Jewish scholar, a comprehensive world-view of Judaism cannot be formulated."

In Torah U'Madda you emphasize the minimal significance, rather than the danger of Judaic scholarship, as the cause for your objection to identifying the end goal of Torah U'Madda with the development of a Wissenschaft das Judentums.

"Undoubtedly, academic Jewish Studies make a significant contribution - all the pious objections to academic Judaica notwithstanding - but to intensify this as the glorious end-product of the encounter between Torah and Western

culture is an instance of the proverbial mountain bringing forth a mouse."

Granted that Yeshiva's educational philosophy aims for greater heights than academic scholarship. It demands that each student formulate a personal world-view through an integration of Torah and secular knowledge. However, we must proceed with caution. How are we to know when we operate within the bounds of acceptable theology and when we do not? To reverse the critique of the pious, it is not theology that must supervise scholarship but rather scholarship which must deepen and guide our theology.

As phrased eloquently by Rabbi Shalom Carmy, the alternative to competent scholarship is not pristine theological reflection. It is rather the kind of bad scholarship or pseudo-scholarship that muddies the waters of any theological endeavor it feeds. For our own community to refrain from scholarly pursuits would thus tend to undermine serious theological study.

Allow me to return to your *Torah U'Madda* to illustrate my point. Along with the new classical Maimonidean

rationalist and Hirschian cultural models of Torah U'Madda you present HaRav Kook's mystical model based upon the unity of the sacred and profane, an inclusionary model based upon Rav Chaim Volozhin's Nefesh HaChaim, and a Chasidic model based upon Avoda B'gashmiut, what you term Madda as worship. Each of these ideas may spark the interest of a different reader, each reader responding to the idea he finds existentially appealing. However, in order to legitimately adopt one as a basis of a theology and world-view, the reader must understand the philosophical assumptions and make sure of the epistemological grounding of each idea within the masorah. Only good scholarship can assure the continued flow of legitimate ideas to the members of our community.

To return to Dr. Revel's ideals of "scholarship, spirituality and service," quite clearly the Revel school endeavors both scholarship and spirituality in Yeshiva's students. But what of service? Although I cannot generalize beyond my own experience, my knowledge of

scholarship plays a major role in enabling me to function capably and confidently as an endeavor with both the affiliated and unaffiliated.

In sum, the Revel Graduate School constitutes a major rung on the ladder to personal shleimut and community service that students of Yeshiva attempt to climb. May I remind you, Dr. Lamm, of your words regarding excellence in education in your Investive Address: "If I mention it here it is not so much to persuade you that we are excellent, but to remind myself that the search for excellence lays a moral obligation upon me and my administration that we must never cease from pursuing it." If Yeshiva University contains room for a medical school, law school and social work school, can we not find the few extra dollars necessary to maintain a graduate school which emphasizes the ideals of the University and its drive for educational excellence?

Kenneth Waxman
YC '88
RIETS '91
BRGS '92

Dear Dr. Lamm:

We, the students of Yeshiva University, were distressed to hear about the imminent closing of BRGS and would like to plead the case for it to remain open. Closing the school would severely hurt the eighty-three students currently taking courses at Revel, as well as the thirty-seven students on leaves of absence, most of whom cannot possibly finish their work before June.

More importantly, Revel represents the best of all that Yeshiva stands for. Surely, an institution that prides itself on Torah U'Madda must have a place for its students to integrate Jewish studies with the best ideas of modern scholarship. Must we force students who follow our ideology to turn elsewhere for the realization of their goals?

Revel's importance extends beyond the degrees it offers. It allows women who do not have the possibility of learning for Semicha to continue their Jewish education. It allows Semicha students to broaden their vision beyond Gemara. Finally, it reflects the values that make our institution unique. Any substantive program lacking the quality of Revel professors and the incentive of degrees cannot possibly meet these needs.

We therefore request that you reconsider your decision.

[The following text is a dense collection of handwritten signatures and names, organized into several columns. The names are written in various styles of cursive and include many surnames such as Steinberg, Goldstein, and Silverman. Some names are accompanied by dates or initials. The signatures are arranged in a grid-like fashion across the page, with some larger, more prominent signatures interspersed among the smaller ones.]