

# COMMENTATOR

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## YU Moves to Shut Down MTA Community Mobilizes in Support of High School

BY CHANAN HOSCHANDER AND JASON CYRULNIK

Sources within Yeshiva University are calling the decision to continue regular operations at its high school, The Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy (TMSTA), commonly referred to as MTA, "a stay of execution" rather than a commitment to maintain the status quo.

Rumors surrounding the impending shut-down of the eighty-year-old boys high school garnered Jewish communal attention when both *The New York Jewish Week* and *The Forward* published articles regarding University plans in their respective January 15th editions. Both papers reported on a trend of declining enrollment at the high school. This, coupled with alleged financial problems related to MTA, as portrayed by YU's vice president for Financial Affairs Sheldon Socol, has resulted in a questionable future for the high school.

An additional factor cited by

University administrators is space considerations on the Washington Heights campus. The high school, shares the Uptown Campus with Yeshiva College, which is currently experiencing a serious housing and classroom space crunch. Exacerbating the situation has been the inability of the University to properly accommodate the record enrollment of students at YC. Compounding this problem, University officials believe that enrollment growth at the men's college will likely continue in the foreseeable future.

These issues have given rise to two potential courses of action. The possibility that MTA may be granted financial and administrative independence from the University while retaining, to some degree, an academic affiliation with YU has been discussed. Alternatively, MTA could "merge" with another institution, what one MTA administrator termed "a fancy way of closing the school."

The identity of the institution with which MTA would merge in

this second plan, most recently believed to be Teaneck's Torah Academy of Bergen County (TABC), has been the object of much speculation. Recent developments have caused any agreement with TABC to be unlikely. In its stead, two Long Island schools are being

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## YESHIVA STUDENTS ROBBED AT GUNPOINT ON "A TRAIN"

BY AARON KLEIN

On Friday December 18th at 1:30 AM, three Yeshiva University students, Eric Levin, Edmundo Rosenberg and Pinchas Wolman, were robbed at gunpoint on the New York City subway. The students were traveling downtown on the A train when four men entered their subway car. Within seconds, one of the men pulled out a sawed-off single barrel 12-gauge shotgun and pointed it at Rosenberg's chest. That man immediately demanded wallets from all three Yeshiva students. Rosenberg and Wolman gave up their wallets, while Levin claimed that he didn't have a wallet with him.

The students were then told to stand up while another man frisked them from head to toe. Levin was frisked three times, but they didn't find his wallet, which was hidden under a baseball cap. Rosenberg explained that "Eric had his hat folded up in his hands, so when they felt something hard in the hat, they figured it was just the brim."

The four men exited the subway car at 103rd street, demanding that the students stay on the train. In all, the men stole two wallets, three sets of keys, and a used chapstick from the students. Rosenberg, Wolman, and Levin got off the train at 96rd street and

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## YESHIVA SOPHOMORE DIES IN TRAGIC SKI ACCIDENT

Joshua Lipetz, a YC pre-med sophomore died on Tuesday, January 12 from injuries he suffered in a tragic ski accident on January 10. Lipetz was skiing in Stratton, Vermont with a group of friends from YU.

Word of the tragedy spread through the YU community and Lipetz's neighborhood of Kew Gardens Hills, Queens. The funeral was held at Sinai Chapel and was officiated by Rabbi Solomon B. Shapiro. YU President Norman Lamm and many undergraduate students were in attendance.

Lipetz attended MTA High School and Yeshivat Sha'arei Mevasseret Zion in Israel before enrolling at YU.

*A tribute celebrating Josh's life will appear in The Commentator following his shloshim.*

## YC Student Senate Passes Resolution to Create Test Banks Mesorah-Busting Initiative to "Level the Playing Field" Among Students

BY ETAN MINTZ

Driven by the hopes of achieving "equity for the student body," the YC Student Senate, an advisory organization made up of eight student representatives, faculty members, and deans, recently passed an important resolution to set up a test bank for all courses in the College. This proposal marks the first time members of the three groups have come together with a realistic proposal in an attempt to solve the long-standing problem of mesorah, or the transmission of test materials from students who took a given course at some earlier point to current students. Extolling the resolution as "part of a larger initiative to make YC's academics of the highest caliber," YC Dean Norman Adler felt confident that the faculty would approve the resolution.

The proposal calls for each professor to submit to the Dean's office a copy of each final exam in each of his/her courses. At the beginning of the following term, the Dean will release to the student body copies of two recent final exams in each course from the collected exams or from other exams that the professor submits

in their stead. The exams would then be posted on the Yeshiva University web page and/or in binders in the library.

The resolution states that it aims to eliminate the unfair advantage that some students have over their peers merely because they come "blessed" with copies of old tests from friends and "older brother"-type figures which many others, particularly entering students, are unable to attain. Further, the proposal asserts, "If all students have easy access to exams previously administered, they would then have more time available to spend grappling with the substance of the course, mastering the material, and demonstrating that mastery to the professor during the exam." According to Senate estimates, somewhere in the range of 15 to 20 percent of courses currently have a "mesorah problem."

Though passed by an overwhelming majority of nine to one, the resolution has caused extensive debate. The general consensus among the Senators is that, in the long run, the measure will drastically improve academic quality at YU. Seeing the proposal as a

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**The Yeshiva University  
student body  
wishes to extend  
its heartfelt condolences  
to the Lipetz family  
on the loss of  
Yehoshua Moshe A"H.  
Josh was a valued friend  
and colleague with much  
to offer those around him.  
His untimely passing  
has saddened us all.**

**"May the Almighty comfort  
you amongst the mourners  
of Zion and Jerusalem."**

## MTA, YU, and the Tyranny of the Few

The decision to close MTA was made; the verdict was sealed and done; all that remained was for the axe to drop. The powers that be sat in secluded judgment and reached their conclusion. MTA as a YU high school was history, the only remaining question was would it go independent or merge with another school.

After word of the University's decision leaked out, heavy community pressure was brought to bear upon Rabbi Lamm and others with the predictable result – the University waffled and YU administrators found themselves with egg all over their faces. Beating a tactical retreat from an unpopular decision, the bureaucrats changed their tune, and the official story is now that the matter is "under discussion."

MTA parents and faculty are understandably incensed, for who is going to send their kid to a school that may or may not be around next year?

The future of MTA is an important issue that requires level-headed thought and serious contemplation. Decisions of this magnitude should not be made by a small group of individuals led exclusively by the University's chief financial officer. What results from such a solitary and capricious process is now painfully obvious to all as the University grapples with the public relations fiasco that it has created.

The decision making mechanism that has brought us to this absurd moment in YU history is fatally flawed. To allow one individual and his minions to dictate the course for an entire university undermines the logical and effective manner in which an institution should be run. Are the students the only people on this campus that understand that this is madness?

## College Progresses, Syms Regresses

With its successful passage of a resolution creating a test bank for Yeshiva College courses, the YC Senate has courageously begun an effort to challenge a time-honored practice of academic delinquency rooted in the very culture of this institution. *Mesorah* has been the scourge on scholastic integrity at the College for long enough. With the present resolution, equity will prevail where social adeptness once dwelled, hard work will be rewarded in the place of frantic midnight photocopying binges. The Senate is to be commended in the strongest terms for advancing this laudable, if belated, initiative. The College's faculty and administration also deserve credit for putting aside their characteristic partisanship in an effort to pursue what is clearly in the better interests of the academic community over which they preside.

We find distressing, however, the failure of the Syms School to follow the lead of its elder brother. We cannot decide whether to chortle or cringe when SSSB Assistant Dean Ira Jaskoll intones "I am not aware of a *mesorah* problem." Propagating this sort of falsehood in the face of what is an unquestionable truth of the YU academic landscape requires, to borrow Shalom Carmy's formulation, some sort of "gift at self-deception." Jaskoll's denial betrays either almost unbounded naivete or, more likely, reprehensible dissembling.

Not satisfied to distort the known facts, Jaskoll proceeds, in a trademark YU administrative maneuver, to perversely shift the blame for the "*mesorah* problem" to students. "Those students who claim *mesorah* is a problem are not working with us." Of course they aren't. Students cannot be expected to compromise their relationships with professors in a pious bid to save the administration the effort of properly discharging its duties. We will, however, lend the Syms School a helping hand by observing that one section of Professor Greenberg's Business Law course received a precise, question-to-question repeat of the previous year's final examination during the fall semester.

We have embarked on an institutional journey to academic redemption. Let the entire academic family join us.

## Of Hobgoblins and Small Minds

It never ceases to amaze; it continually boggles the mind. Yet again, machismo and stupidity are the order of the day here at YU. We can only watch in utter wonderment as pointless, mean-spirited acts are carried out by small men with smaller minds.

Case in point: The Seforim Sale is an annual student-run event that provides a convenient service to the YU student body and the broader Jewish community. The hours of labor and the thankless efforts of the sale's staff are expended solely for the benefit of those who come to enrich their minds and nourish their souls. The students do not line their pockets with the sale's proceeds; whatever profits are accrued go to charity.

Yet at every step of the way, petty roadblocks and annoyances are strewn in the path of the students by those who rule this university by fiat. One wonders what malevolence dwells in the hearts of these twisted figures that they feel the need to impede constructive student endeavors in every which way possible. Students are the reason this institution exists, but in the parallel universe inhabited by these repression-bent nihilists, the students are here exclusively to obey administrative dictates.

Another case in point: Students began to utilize the grass in the Dancier Quadrangle for their own enjoyment after years of repression during which the grass stood barren. Disobeying what they were told, the students began to play football, transforming the center of the campus into a field of laughter and joy.

Enter Facilities Management. Stakes are placed around the grass and a rope fence is erected in the dead of winter. Facilities insists that the stakes were placed to guide the snow plows and assure that they do not harm the plot of boggy mud that students began to enjoy. It would be hilarious if it was not so sad. For all the years prior no stakes were required, yet once students began to play ball, the trolls of YU come out to quash student pleasure.

Why is student enjoyment anathema to administrators on this campus? Does the sight of a smiling face cause certain individuals to gnash their teeth in frustration at the mere fact that someone is having fun or doing something meaningful?



**FROM THE  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

**ADAM MOSES**

## The Commie Responds No Need to Read this One Metaphorically

I must confess that I am thoroughly mystified by Susan Jacobs' recent column in *The Stern College Observer*. It seems to me an empty diatribe which, although admirable in its obvious emotional urgency, fails to meet the minimal threshold for coherence. If Ms. Jacobs wishes to meaningfully impugn *The Commentator*, she might consider mentioning what it is specifically that she finds so contemptible about this paper rather than simply declaring that it nefariously subverts every journalistic standard she can conjure up. After probing the depths of Ms. Jacobs' cantankerous outburst in an effort to divine some semblance of forensic integrity amid the stock phrases, I write now to acknowledge my failure. Even Derrida would blanch at this one. No amount of creative deconstructionism can salvage the merit of an argument that relies exclusively on broad inflammatory declarations to the exclusion of a single tangible example in support of its claims.

Ms. Jacobs' column is, simply put, wildly false, unpersuasive chicanery. As her allegations are unsupported by fact, Ms. Jacobs can proffer no examples to bolster them. Ms. Jacobs fantasizes that *The Commentator* has a "blatant disregard for accuracy" and "offends standards of decency held by most college newspapers." Jacobs does not bother to clarify why she thinks these things are so. She merely issues judgments and then moves on to her next round of skullduggery. Of course, her suggestions are utterly without merit (watch for the coming libel lawsuit). Every story *The Commentator* publishes is subjected to rigorous background fact checking to confirm its veracity. I defy Ms. Jacobs to prove that anything published in *The Commentator* does not meet this standard. Unless Ms. Jacobs understands "most college newspapers" to mean *The Ner Israel Rabbinical College Newsletter* or *The West Virginia Nazarene Bible College Epistle*, she is incorrect to suggest that our standards of decency are at significant variance with those of other college newspapers. While it is obvious that *The Commentator* is not a Christian Coalition pamphlet edited by Jerry Falwell, Ms. Jacobs' Bible-thumping zeal is misplaced. *The Commentator* would doubtless be thought puritanical by many sex obsessed, obscenity laced mainstream collegiate publications. *The Commentator* would not, for instance, dispatch a roving reporter to interview students about their opinion of *Viagra* use as *The Columbia Spectator* did recently. Certainly, *The Commentator* would not feature, as NYU's paper did this year, two full pages of student opinion pieces devoted to methods of sexual performance.

Jacobs' flabbergasting claim that students do not read *The Commentator* "to be informed about events in their school or the world at large" taxes credulity. This year, *The Commentator's* rededication to aggressively uncovering leads has yielded, arguably, an unprecedented number of significant stories of relevance to the University community. *The Commentator* has led the University journalistic pack, breaking every important story prior to *The Observer* and *YU Today*. Additionally, *The Commentator's* initiative this year to become the University's paper has been realized with frequent stories relating to Yeshiva graduate programs including AECOM and Cardozo. Our broader scope of coverage this year has also spawned impressive articles of Jewish communal concern and political elections features. As I recall, *The Commentator*, not other Yeshiva news organs, secured an exclusive interview with Chuck Schumer only days previous to his election to the U.S. Senate.

The most distressing element of Ms. Jacobs' disjointed rant is her unabashed objection to *The Commentator's* mission to advance the interests of students through a factually founded approach to journalism. She laments, "I don't think that everyone has a need to know." *The Commentator* understands that Yeshiva, as any university, has yet to achieve institutional perfection. A powerful voice concerned to maintain student rights is required to point out instances of abuse and assure administrative accountability. *The Commentator* is proud, not ashamed, to play this role. In the words of Bertolt Brecht, "Right is its own defense."

It is puzzling that Ms. Jacobs does not with her own publication honor the notion that a student newspaper should advocate the cause of its readers. Perhaps she is unaware of the existence of *YU Today*, the University's public relations periodical, and thus does not recognize *The Observer's* redundancy.

In her column, Ms. Jacobs curiously seeks to present a false dichotomy between publishing "scandalous events" and providing tedious, uninformative coverage. The appropriate approach, as readers of *The Commentator* will recognize, resides somewhere between Jacobs' polar extremes. *The Commentator* eschews "gossip-mongering" yet steadfastly insists on reporting news that relates to the plight of students even when it causes the administration discomfort.

Broadly, it is our view that the exercise of journalistic responsibility of necessity entails furnishing students with an honest account of the Yeshiva experience rather than a bland rehashing of public relations press releases. This is our "journalistic standard." While we recognize that unblinkingly bearing the truth is not always popular with those who would prefer not to confront it, we are patently unwilling to depart from our principled approach. Perhaps in this commitment we differ from *The Observer*. *The Commentator* insists on placing its duty to the students before currying administrative favor.

It is in the above vein that *The Commentator* has this year begun to undertake, with the support of YCSC, credible activist efforts in the behalf of student interests. Recognizing that the University was not sufficiently responsive to student safety concerns with relevance to Amsterdam Avenue, *The Commentator* organized a 250 student demonstration which successfully prodded reluctant administrators in the right policy direction. *The Commentator* also emancipated the Danciger Quadrangle from the dominance of the campus security apparatus so that students may utilize it for recreational purposes.

Ms. Jacobs concludes her column by absurdly invoking Hebrew National style "higher authority" language. Like the celebrated frankfurters, however, her claim is not quite kosher. "We are bound by a higher code of ethics," she believes. I will presume that Ms. Jacobs hopes this suggestion will pass for some sort of religious argument in condemnation of some unspecified aspect of *The Commentator's* content. But surely she must know that her words are vague and theologically meaningless. Her words may be an NCSY *d'var Torah*, but a coherent Jewish theological contention they are not. I invite Ms. Jacobs to revise and extend her remarks in this regard in order that we may better understand what she means.

And thus Ms. Jacobs concludes her frustrated tirade.

It seems Ralph Waldo Emerson anticipated Ms. Jacobs when he observed, "You will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it." While I am flattered that *The Commentator* so consumes Ms. Jacobs' attention, I am confident that her efforts would be more profitably directed to mending her own flagging experiment in journalism rather than advancing spurious claims to censure a sound product that serves students well.

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# FORUM

## OPINION

### Meet Tamir Goodman

If you haven't yet heard of Tamir Goodman, this might sound like a twisted and crafty fib. But hey! Don't be so incredulous! Anything is possible, right?

Tamir Goodman is an Orthodox Jewish high school junior at Baltimore's Talmudical Academy (TA), and spends a good part of the day passionately studying Torah. He is also slated to play basketball for the University of Maryland (the Terrapins or "Terps") in the fall of 2000. It's amazing what can happen in a millennium.

I know what your thinking, so let me formulate the Talmudic logic. If, to quote the title of a Spike Lee movie, white men can't jump, then *a fortiori* (i.e. *kal v'chomer*) a Yeshiva student shouldn't be able to dribble. Think again *bachur*. Tamir Goodman can certainly dribble. In addition, he can nail NBA distance three point shots. And, oh yeah, he can also dunk like the Rebbe.

Tamir Goodman is only 17 years old and his numbers reflect a pattern of striking consistency. Tamir averages 34 points, 8 assists, and 7 rebounds a game. These numbers are incredible, given that TA

has recently upgraded their basketball schedule to play some pretty demanding local teams. Although TA doesn't play the best

Baltimore area schools, the teams they play are decidedly better than the average Yeshiva high school competition. And Tamir dominates. As a result, college basketball scouts have visited the modest environs of TA to grab a peek at this emerging anomaly - and they've been riveted.

According to NCAA rules Tamir is too young to sign an official letter of intent to play with a college basketball team. But Tamir recently made a verbal commitment to play for the University of Maryland, whose basketball team is presently ranked 4th in the nation. Maryland is also a member of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), one of the most competitive and visible college basketball divisions in the country. Maryland will shape its schedule to accommodate Tamir's Sabbath observance and plans to ask the ACC to do so as well.

Tamir stands six feet, three inches tall. His family physician, however, predicts that he'll grow another three inches. That should make him 6-foot-6, the same height as Michael Jordan.

I know what you're thinking. Comparing Tamir Goodman to Michael Jordan is to display no sense of proportion and would completely strip this author of any shred of cred-

ibility. (Tamir would actually be a welcomed addition to the now Jordan-less Chicago Bulls. Then again, so would the faculty of the Yeshiva University Philosophy Department.) But before you impetuously turn to another section of this newspaper, hear me out.

Tamir's fans in the Baltimore area have, in fact, nicknamed him the "Jewish Jordan," but the comparison alludes to more than Tamir's phenomenal ability to play. Tamir is the first Orthodox Jew to enter the national arena qua Orthodox Jew. As a result he's a highly visible athlete and has garnered the attention of fans far beyond the Baltimore Jewish community.

The Baltimore Sun can't stop running articles about Tamir. He's the subject of a full article in latest issue of Sports Illustrated and will be featured on ESPN as well. Keep in mind that Tamir is only a junior in high school. Imagine the attention he'll receive if he actually excels at the college level.

Moreover, if he hasn't already, he'll soon become a Jewish household name. Tamir will thus invariably serve as a role model to

the countless Orthodox kids who harbor hopes of playing college basketball, or to those who wish to pursue entrance into fields that have not traditionally been

occupied by Orthodox Jews.

Michael Jordan, is also wildly popular. But he is profoundly aware of the responsibilities of his mythical stature. Jordan has successfully maintained a clean cut demeanor, something that has escaped far too many athletes. He's a gentleman and universally considered to be a classy basketball player. In addition, Jordan is extremely charitable and constantly promotes local and national causes (Nike and McDougal's aside).

For example, Jordan began his retirement press conference by sending his condolences to the family of a Chicago police officer slain earlier that morning. He reminded the press corps that basketball is essentially a diversion, a form of entertainment, and that issues of greater import do in fact exist - a point not obvious to many sports fans.

Tamir Goodman can learn a lot from Michael Jordan. Tamir has the opportunity to showcase not only his remarkable gift for basketball, but his Orthodox values as well. It is, too be sure, a daunting responsibility, one that has largely been imposed upon him. But hopefully, like Michael, Tamir will appreciate his unique position and serve as a role model to both the Jewish community and beyond. Then he'll really be like Mike.

**Josh Abraham**  
**Columnist**

### The Evils of Pro Sports

While watching the climactic moment of the 1990 Super Bowl, I got down on my knees and prayed that Scott Norwood would miss the field goal and give my beloved Giants the victory. Back then winters belonged to the Rangers and summers were the domain of the Mets. But people change and so do their values. With maturity, a person no longer takes the status quo for granted; he begins to think about his finite existence and his role on this God-given earth. My thinking has changed, and because of this I see the evils inherent in being a spectator of professional sports. (I am not referring to playing sports, which promotes healthy competition and physical fitness). Although many of you are sports fans, I ask you to keep an open mind to the opinions expressed in this article.

The question is, what are we supporting when we watch and follow pro sports? Are these the values of our people or our faith? And do we want to be seen as encouraging the growth of these institutions?

We Jews have a concept of *Bitul Torah*. This injunction speaks against wasting time in the face of the magnificent body of works that one must master in order to become a sage. The idea of wasting time as sinful need not be a religious injunction, nor even a Jewish one. Time is precious, and the little time we have on this Earth must be used properly. When one is in the act of being a fan, he is not in the act of *tikkun olam* (the betterment of this world).

Ecclesiastics (*Kohelet*) speaks with great pain about the circularity of life. *Kohelet* points to the seasons as an example of this circularity. Similarly, one can be certain that nothing is more circular than the seasons of sports. When the dust settles onto the previous year's memories, play resumes yet again. True victory and supremacy is never achieved, due to pro sports' inherently ephemeral nature. Indeed, the circular aspect of sports coupled with its utter unproductiveness makes it a powerful example of "*hevel havalim*" (vanity of vanities), a recurring ordeal of senseless motions.

Some might say that sports teaches youth to strive for achievement and excellence. Please! Pro sports teaches laziness on the couch and in the classroom and the importance of sneakers over people's lives. My favorite thing is when Jews tell me that sports has been around since the Greeks. Since when do we side with the Greeks?! As I recall, sports involvement was considered a sign of assimilation in those times. Many have told me that they find sports relaxing. However, relaxation need not be totally devoid of constructiveness, of which pro sports totally is: This method of relaxation, that is, a complete nullification of brain function, is a relatively new thing. Ask your rabbis and your teachers what they used to do to relax. They'll tell you: we played ball, we read books, we listened to music. A lost culture indeed.

What boggles my mind most is the amount of money involved. I cannot say with good conscience that sports are a deserving outlet for your hard-earned money. Yes my friends, this world is filled with tragedy and sorrow, even within our



midst. Need I remind you that there are people in our community who rely on street charity to survive. PRIORITIES!!! What about salaries? In our economically driven society a salary is a sign of respect. It therefore follows, that respect in this country is bestowed upon people who's main contribution is dribbling a ball. How can we as Jews be party to such a ludicrous misappropriation of money?

And don't we know who we should emulate and call "hero?" I have never heard Michael Jordan, one of the most influential people in the world, say anything of significance. ("Just do it" doesn't count.) This man has incredible influence on this nation and its youth, yet he remains nothing but a freak exhibitionist with no evident moral backbone. Instead of using his fame as an platform for good, Michael Jordan's next great contribution will be to showcase his awkward golf skills. In short, Jordan flies like a bird and thinks like one as well. Truly a role model for Jewish youth.

Being a fan of pro sports is the epitome of passivity. Either at the game or at home, the fan is essentially a cheerleader of his or her respective team. Though he has no real role in the team (other than sponsoring them) he meticulously follows their ups and their downs, crying at the bitterness of defeat and rejoicing in the ecstasy of victory. The Fan is concerned (read: wastes his time) for his team's welfare, and is patient (read: sits around getting fat and dumb while watching others run back and forth) with them when they are not playing up to par (read: not getting paid enough).

Do you guys ever wonder what your doing? Do you ever just think about the fact that you have fallen for a marketing ploy which capitalizes on your laziness, by providing constant action in the form of visual stimulation? Let's get this straight: you are not a participant in the game, you are a cat watching someone else play with a ball of yarn, watching it go back and forth. But here's the good side: you are stimulating the economy by paying good money for the pleasure of uselessness. You're wasting precious time watching commercials subliminally telling you that you need need need, want want want. So not only do sports make you stupider, they also make you poorer. (This last point may be contended, since I am sure some *yiddin* here at YU have figured out how to make a buck off this *chazarai*.)

Let's take all that wasted time and put it to use. Let's have longer conversations; let's study an instrument; let's play more ball; let's meditate; let's study more Torah; let's read great books; let's reconquer the grass and Amsterdam Avenue; let's study the Zen art of archery, let's clean up the park, let's do something!!! But let us not fall into the hands of apathy and slothfulness. Throw off the yoke of sports and don the wings of life.

### CORRECTION:

The conclusion of Ben Sandler's column entitled "Visions and Limitations" in the previous issue of THE COMMENTATOR was inadvertently omitted. We regret whatever confusion this caused. The column appears in its entirety on THE

COMMENTATOR website

(www.yucommentator.com).

# FORUM

## LETTERS

### Journalistic Abuses Have Gone Too Far

To the Editor:

In the December 22nd edition of *The Commentator*, Aaron Klein wrote an article concerning funding to YU from the Stone Foundation. According to the quoted statements from the Stone foundation, the family will direct its resources away from institutions that "sow divisiveness among Jews," and will "provide financial support exclusively to those individuals and/or institutions whose public views encourage unity among Jews."

Klein could not be satisfied with objective reporting, so he wrote, without quotations, that the family would direct its resources "toward those more open to religious pluralism. Accordingly, Yeshiva University has been placed on the top of the Foundation's list of institutions to support." In saying this, Klein has stated that YU supports religious pluralism, this being said without one source for support. In doing so, Klein has falsely reported the views of the University, and of Rabbi Lamm. What Klein does not realize, or doesn't think important, is that "unity among Jews" is not the same as "religious pluralism."

Let me define religious pluralism for Mr. Klein. According to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, pluralism is "a theory that there are more than one or more than two kinds of ultimate reality." In a resolution entitled "Reaffirming Religious Pluralism in Israel," The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (The Synagogue Arm of the Reform Movement) called upon Israeli leaders to "extend equal recognition and support to all streams of Judaism," and to "recognize

the various expressions of Judaism." This statement was echoed in a form letter entitled "Send your message to Prime Minister Netanyahu in support of religious pluralism in Israel." Religious pluralism, or more specifically, Jewish religious pluralism, is the idea that all denominations, including Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist, are legitimate forms of Jewish expression or practice. As an Orthodox institution, supporting the concept of a Divine *Torah M'Sinai*, YU cannot subscribe to religious pluralism. Tolerance and Unity differ entirely from pluralism. To love your fellow Jew, whether he or she is on the right path or not, is a *Klal Gadol Ba'Torah*, but to admit that the wrong path is an acceptable one is in violation of everything that Orthodoxy stands for.

What Klein has done is one level below the classical journalistic "out of context quote." He has put words into people's mouths that never existed. In claiming that this institution supports religious pluralism, Klein has done a disservice to YU, Rabbi Lamm, *The Commentator*, and the students of Yeshiva University. I sincerely hope that in an effort to keep the reporting in this paper unbiased and objective, opinions will be reserved for opinion columns and editorials, and that the editors of this great forum of freedom and truth ensure that a reporter's views do not cloud the facts that he is supposed to report.

Yossi Pinsker  
YC'99

### Torah Ain't Madda

To the Editor:

I'd like to suggest a P.S. to Ben Sandler's opinion article. I agree that a year immersed entirely in Torah should not count as a full year of *Torah U'Madda* regarding a *Torah U'Madda* institution. Similarly, I suggest that a full year's studies at a "Madda" institution should not be considered "a full year of a liberal arts, *Torah U'Madda* education."

Susanne Beekman  
SCW'99

## THE COMMENTATOR

welcomes letters from its readers.

Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number.

Students should include the school in which they are enrolled and expected date of graduation.

*THE COMMENTATOR* reserves the right to edit all letters for syntax, content, and length.

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## OPINION

### Student Soap Box Awaken the Hearts of the Elderly

BY JAKE WEINTRAUB

Aging is one of the greatest causes of anxiety and heartache within a family. Individuals usually try to postpone any and all thoughts concerning the inevitable, and often dreaded fate of getting older. Reaching the "golden years" can be very frightening because the elderly may begin to require the assistance of others just to complete commonplace tasks. In the 90's, with both parents in a household working, the care of an elderly relative has become a difficult and time-consuming feat. Therefore, sending an aging family member to a nursing home has become an increasingly popular routine in the United States. Unfortunately, many elderly people in nursing homes are often lonely because their families do not take time from their busy schedule to pay them a visit.

Younger people seldom realize that it was their parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts who worked so hard to make this world a little better for us to grow up in. Their unwavering devotion to their children frequently remains unrecognized. It is the duty of the younger generation to show our appreciation for their hard work and determination. Many of the occupants of nursing homes are unhappy and neglected. They are alone, depressed and without family members to comfort and visit them. This shouldn't be the case, especially when there are so many people with time available to help the elderly and show them that they too can feel happy and worthwhile.

During the past three summers I have volunteered in a local nursing home, and the time I spent there remains the most rewarding experience of my life. I remember a day last summer, while quietly walking through the corridor of a nursing home, I was suddenly struck by a high pitched and desperate sound that I soon determined was the weeping of an elderly woman. After entering her small room and asking her what was wrong, I informed her that I would gladly lead her on a walk to get some fresh air. She didn't respond and I bent down to see her face covered in tears. I said, "I really want to make you feel better, it hurts me to see you like this." She then slowly lifted her head and told me there was nothing I could do.

I swallowed heavily and began thinking of what to do. I inquired about her family and she told me that her siblings had all

passed away and her children, nieces and nephews found themselves happy lives, and do not come to visit her. When she realized that I was willing to listen for as long as it would take, her face illuminated as she continued to tell me her life story. The frown on her face was transformed into a large, comforting smile, the tears that drowned her eyes completely disappeared and her heart seemed to pulsate with the awakened beat of happiness. She said that I was the first person in a long time to actually listen to her and she thanked me repeatedly and unnecessarily. It took much strength for me to refrain from crying. I was incredibly honored that I had made a small difference in the life of another individual.

There are thousands of elderly people out there who are depressed and lonely. They are in search of just one person to care for them, one person who will listen to their stories. By asking how they feel, putting your arm around them, or even just smiling, we can all make them feel good again. They don't deserve to be constantly upset. In addition, many residents complain that they are not treated fairly by the faculty of the nursing home. They may need to wait 20-30 minutes before being taken to the bathroom or given a drink. From the time I spent with the elderly, I have learned how to live life to its fullest and not take anything for granted. I view the world with a new-found appreciation. If the younger generation could just devote a few hours a month to visit the residents of a nursing home, it can make all the difference in the world. It will even make you feel better.

A new program is beginning at Yeshiva University called "Adopt-A-Grandparent." It entails having a "designated grandparent" to visit at the Hebrew Home and Hospital for about a half hour a week. This not only makes the elderly happy, but it gives them something to look forward to. In addition, they have so many fascinating stories to tell, and you could learn a tremendous amount from them. When you see the transformation of a depressed person to a happy glowing person, the feeling one maintains is indescribable.

I hope people will take this opportunity to help these gentle elderly people and will do a tremendous *mitzvah* by bringing happiness to these people's lives. For more information please contact Jake Weintraub at 740-5961.

## THE COMMENTATOR

is currently soliciting submissions for the Student Soap Box, a recently launched feature devoted to sharing student viewpoints with the broader University community.

Preliminary drafts may be sent to:

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## MTA—The Historical Dimension: From Tradition to Modernity

BY CHAIM SCHNEIDER

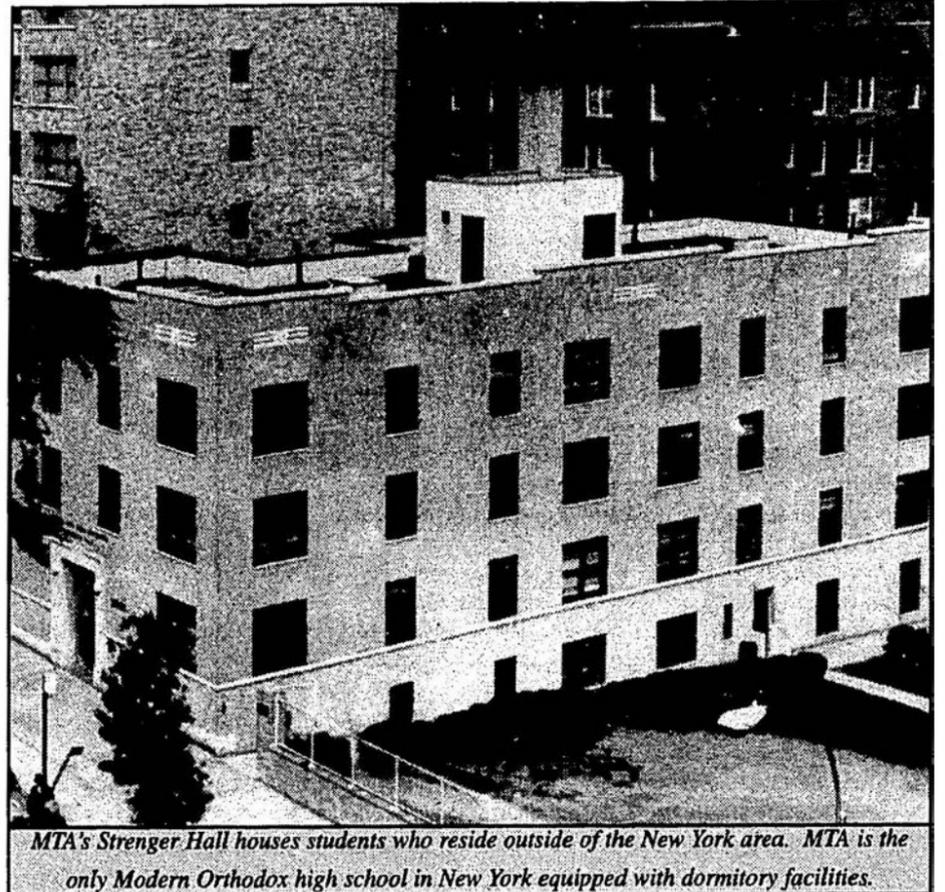
The history of MTA began nearly eighty-five years ago with the ambitious challenge of introducing an American educational system to a largely immigrant community of New York Jews. The resulting school, now known as The Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy (TMSTA), traces its roots back nearly a century to the amalgamation of two modest yeshivot on the Lower East Side. Since that time, it has served as a model for countless Yeshiva high schools in the metropolitan area. Firmly rooted in the doctrine of *Torah U'Maddah*, YUHS aimed to harmonize traditional Judaic ideals with the notion that secular scholarship was an essential factor relevant to the endurance of Orthodoxy in America.

Seeking to maintain the strict standards of yeshiva study rooted in Europe during the late-nineteenth century, the first American Yeshiva, Yeshivat Etz Chaim, was founded in 1886. It pledged two hours a day to the

study of English in addition to a full schedule of Judaic studies. Ten years later, the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) was created, pledging similarly to instruct yeshiva students in English - a novel idea at the time. Despite its seemingly liberal educational philosophy, the school gained the public support of the Agudat HaRabbanim of New York.

Although each institution faced demanding individual financial pressures, businessman David Cohen sought to merge the neighboring yeshivot. His goal was to create a unified vehicle to promote the idea of "Judaism and Americanism," an ideal sustained by his successor, Harry Fischel. This union gave rise to what is now Yeshiva University's high school for boys. Dr. Bernard Revel, head of the Rabbinical College of America, in collaboration with Dr. Solomon Hurwitz, sought to use the schools in creating the first high school in America under

*continued on page 8*



*MTA's Strenger Hall houses students who reside outside of the New York area. MTA is the only Modern Orthodox high school in New York equipped with dormitory facilities.*

## University Moves to Shut Down High School

*Continued from page 1*

considered. *The Commentator* has confirmed that one of the potential partners is the Rambam Mesivta. The other is believed to be the new boy's high school opened by Hebrew Academy of Long Beach.

A passionate plea in favor of maintaining the status quo at MTA has been issued by alumni, parents of students, and Jewish community leaders. This wide-ranging objection has sent the University cowering back from its original plans. A press release from the University announced that classes at both MTA and YU's girls high school, the Samuel H. Wang High School for Girls (Central) in Holliswood, Queens, "will be conducted next fall at all grade levels." It further stated that ninth grade students are indeed being "actively recruited and large classes are anticipated at both schools."

A letter affirming these commitments was sent to YUHS current and prospective parents. The letter was signed by representatives of all of the factions involved - MTA Principal Rabbi Michael Taubes, Samuel H. Wang Principal Mrs. Rochelle Brand, Dean of Undergraduate Jewish Studies and current University liaison to its high schools, Dr. Michael Shmidman, and chairman of the YUHS Board, Mr. Elliot Gibber.

Nonetheless, the press release did re-emphasize the continued effort to find a permanent solution to what it called "demographic trends and changing enrollment patterns." The trends to which it refers include the rise of alternate local Orthodox high schools in the suburbs where much of the affected population is now concentrated. According to the University's director of public relations, David Rosen, these new schools offer educational experiences that parallel that of MTA, and, as a result, present formidable competition to their less conveniently located rival. Rosen's point, when viewed in contrast to the University's recent press release, highlights what MTA administrators see as an ambiguous University position that is of help to no one and presents serious doubts about future plans.

MTA Principal Rabbi Taubes and General Studies Coordinator Dr. Seth Taylor see a set of erroneous facts permeating recent discussion about the issue. Both vehemently contend that attempts to pinpoint MTA as the source of these new YU frustrations overlook the truth. Taubes does admit that a comparison between enrollment figures of MTA '93 and MTA '98 might reveal a significant decline in numbers. However, he views that decline as neither surprising nor unintentional. "Those numbers reflect an overall effort to improve the standards of the high school, which has included a more rigorous and selective admissions process. This approach was encouraged by YU administrators."

Despite that decline, Taubes was quick to point out, a student body comprised of 350 boys, including a freshman class of 90 students (a 17 student improvement over last year's number), is still impressive. In fact, those figures seem to best any other Jewish high school, including those with which YU has raised merger discussions.

In addition to the explanation about the enrollment statistics, Taubes claims a lack of understanding, from a financial standpoint, concerning the high school's alleged financial

difficulties. Acknowledging that while operating under YU auspices he has never had full access to all of the financial facts, Taubes can't think of any possible reason that MTA would cost the University any money, barring a "mismanagement of funds."

Regarding MTA's academic stature, Taubes points to recent AP results, New York State Regents examination scores, and what he calls "a clearly satisfied parent and student body" to bolster his claim that MTA is very successful in its endeavors to serve the community. "Even the word on the street," explained Taubes, "points to a disciplined, positive environment [existing here]." Dr. Taylor enumerated many of these points in a letter to the editor of *The Jewish Week* entitled "Vibrant School," which, as the title implies, was aimed at presenting a side of the recent MTA saga that was almost completely ignored in the initial wave of press coverage.

MTA faculty members are utterly amazed at the timing of the negative University suggestions about their institution. "Why now?" asked one administrator, echoing the sentiment of not only fellow staff members, but students and parents alike.

In response to the published articles and the rumors, an ad was placed by parents of current students and recent MTA graduates in the January 22nd issue of *The Jewish Week*. In it, they expressed their gratitude to the school and its staff and offered their continued support for the school. Among the signatories were YU *Roshei Yeshiva* Rabbi Mayer Twersky and Rabbi Mordechai Willig, as well as other prominent members of the YU and metropolitan area Jewish communities.

Dr. Norman Lamm, the president of YU who is responsible for making the final decision, met with various Jewish community leaders and rabbis of area synagogues including Rabbis Shmuel Goldin, Fabian Schonefeld, and Heshy Billet regarding the situation. The consensus among these leaders is that MTA, through its espousal of Yeshiva University's *Torah U'Maddah* philosophy, serves a unique purpose within the Jewish community.

Some, however, deem these efforts futile. If indeed the sudden emergence of this topic is not a response to recent specific problems; but instead a culmination of University attempts to rid itself of a high school, then stopping such an effort might prove too tough a task. At a recent meeting of the MTA rabbinical staff, Shmidman mentioned that YU, as a university, may simply not wish to remain "in the high school business."

Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen, MTA *mashgiach ruchani*, pointed out the assumption of this contention—that the tie between YU and MTA runs through the University. According to him and other MTA and YU rabbis, the connection between YU and MTA has always been through the yeshiva that they both share, the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS). In fact, MTA is officially affiliated with and somewhat administered by the RIETS Board.

Accordingly, the YU claim that universities should not be in the "high school business" are irrelevant to these rabbis. Moreover, this claim conflicts with the practice of many yeshivot to operate their own high schools as preparatory

programs. As a result, these rabbis support the status quo. MTA general studies faculty, while just as vehemently opposed to a merger, seem to support a push for independence with a preservation of University academic affiliation.

Despite community efforts to save MTA, the University is believed to still be considering both the independence and merger options. The former, clearly most desirable from an MTA administrative standpoint, involves making the high school an independent affiliate of both RIETS and Yeshiva College. This would require the current YUHS Board to assume all financial responsibilities and to handle academic management of the high school. Despite reports to the contrary, it is unclear if the independent school would be permitted to remain in its present location.

Elliot Gibber, primary proponent of the independent operation initiative, expressed his plan in a meeting that he called on January 5 to discuss the issue with MTA and its staff. According to faculty members who attended the meeting, Gibber's plan seems to involve MTA remaining in its present location for the foreseeable future. It was unclear, however, what the long term implications of the plan would be.

Complicating the issue are the University's concerns about the shortage of space at the Uptown Campus for the growing ranks of the undergraduate men's program. Gibber reportedly has deemed the potential merger a failsafe option.

A confidential source has informed *The Commentator* that the independence option discussed recently is nothing new. As early as September 1995, when Gibber took control of the YUHS Board, he had disclosed his intention to separate the school from YU financially. That plan included a five-year trial period with a gradual transition toward independence. According to Gibber, such a plan was suggested, but was never in any way implemented.

Gibber informed *The Commentator* that negotiations for an independent MTA and Central to be administered by the current YUHS Board are ongoing. He explained that the YUHS Board's representatives are presently in the midst of serious discussions with University officials about the nature of an agreement regarding future independence.

Gibber described his belief that independence would lead to the severance of formal ties between MTA and the University or the Yeshiva. He expects MTA to lease space from YU and remain in its current location. He emphasized that MTA would retain "an educational affiliation with the University." The specifics of such an affiliation will include the maintenance of the status quo involving the opportunity for MTA students to take part in YU classes, *shiurim*, and special programs.

In contrast with Gibber's account, University officials have made it clear that many questions remain and that a long term solution must be reached in the near future. This sentiment was echoed by MTA's Taylor, who believes, "what we need now is a strong endorsement from the University or a solid plan for separation and independence."

A spokesman for the University declined to rule out any of the possibilities currently thought to be under discussion.

## News Analysis

BY MORDECHAI FISHMAN

With a rich history, vocal alumni, and community support, MTA would seem to be a vital part of the Yeshiva University family that deserves to be nurtured and protected. Yet its very future is now a subject of strident debate, leading many students and administrators to marvel at the ugly public spectacle unfolding in front of their eyes. They wonder why an apparently simple matter has become so muddled. Those who claim to not understand forget that nothing in YU is simple, and that there exist underlying reasons and passions that further complicate the high school's future.

Why has the high school engendered such support and strident defenders? Supporters of MTA cite numerous reasons for the continued existence of their hallowed Institution. The rich tradition and history of the school cannot be overlooked, with eighty-five years of alumni leaving their mark on the Jewish community as laymen, rabbis and educators. A sizable majority of the rabbinic and educational leadership of the Modern Orthodox Jewish world received its first grounding in the principles and *hashkafah* of *Torah U'Maddah* in the hallways of the architecturally distinctive Main Building.

The educational impact of MTA cannot be overstated, as it is doubtful that there exists a Modern Orthodox school that has not had MTA-educated teachers pass through its halls. Many of these same educators actually began their teaching careers in the MTA classrooms in which they had previously been students.

MTA is also perceived as unique in the pantheon of yeshiva high schools. The *raison d'être* of MTA is ostensibly its commitment to *Torah U'Maddah*, something MTA supporters say is simply not found with the same degree of commitment and passion anywhere else. MTA is also considered the most "right-wing" or religious of the boys high schools in New York City. Closing the school would severely narrow the options of New York parents looking for a Yeshiva high school experience for their children. They will not send their children to co-ed schools or more "black-hat" yeshivot. MTA's position at the right of the yeshiva high school spectrum fills an essential niche in religious educational system of New York.

The advantages given to MTA by its association with YU are not to be found at any other high school in the area. It is the only Modern Orthodox school with dormitory facilities, giving out-of-town parents another option to the local schools in their cities. As the only Modern Orthodox high school with a pipeline to a flourishing Belt Midrash and Yeshiva Gedolah, students at MTA are exposed to rabbis and older talmidim of a high caliber, something many parents cite as the impetus for choosing MTA. MTA students can take college classes, and while they may not be beloved by the majority of the college's teachers or students, the opportunity for a high school boy to take upper-level university courses is not to be found anywhere else.

Institutional and personal reasons exist for many of the school's defenders as well. Many MTA parents are YU rabbis or teachers and send their children to MTA at steeply discounted tuition rates that are hard to find elsewhere. Any change in the current status of the school would probably entail much faculty bloodletting. Various MTA administrators, teachers, and especially rabbis could potentially find themselves without jobs, along with the generous (as compared to other schools) University benefits that accompany YU paychecks.

Older teachers and rabbis would be devastated, for if the school closed or merged it would be doubtful they would be able to find comparable employment. And as many of the MTA educators are community or pulpit rabbis, it behooves their communities to support the school, otherwise their salary and pension burdens could potentially fall on the collective.

With all the support and apparently valid reasoning to keep the school, what is the motivation to get rid of it?

On the surface of the matter, the reasons postulated by University officials are threefold. The first is financial - MTA is officially a perennial money loser. The school's endowments notwithstanding, (and they are considerable endowments for a yeshiva high school) almost all Jewish educational institutions find themselves dealing with a shortfall between tuition receipts and outlays due to the high percentage of parents that cannot afford the prohibitive tuition costs and require financial assistance.

MTA is no different in this respect, but it has always had a rich uncle to cover the bills, namely, the central YU

## MTA: The Pros and the Cons

bureaucracy. But rich uncles, even really rich ones like YU, eventually get fed up with footing the bill for so long and wish to unburden themselves of their pesky little relatives.

The second reason given by YU spokesmen and factotums is that of space. There is a serious lack of elbow room on the uptown campus, and the high school, with its dropping enrollments and trouble-making student body (has there ever been a high school student body that didn't make trouble?) takes up a huge chunk of it.

Dean of Students Efreim Nulman has made no bones about his desire to possess the beds in Strenger Hall to make up for the shortfall in current undergraduate dorm space. Strenger could take on far more significance and value for YU as it could possibly be torn down and the site could be utilized for a new college dorm, alleviating the housing crunch for a burgeoning undergraduate population that shows no sign of growth abatement.

The wisdom on the street says that even if MTA goes independent, it is merely staving off its inevitable demise for a short while until the University kicks it off campus and repossesses the space it sorely needs.

The third factor that has been bandied about by University officials is geographic. Eighty-five years ago when MTA opened for business, Washington Heights was a thriving Jewish neighborhood and Manhattan was the home for the majority of MTA's student body. The falling enrollments waded about by YU administrators are in part due to the flight of the Jewish population to the suburbs of Long Island and Northern New Jersey. Fewer and fewer parents want their kids sitting on a bus for a couple of hours a day when there are schools that tout themselves as comparable to MTA in values and academics closer to home.

While these may be valid reasons to consider closing MTA, solutions can be found for the issues of space and finances. And while it is true that MTA's clientele for the most part live outside of the Heights, there are still three hundred-plus students who apparently think it is worth it to travel the distance to attend MTA. The real drive to shutter MTA is rooted in far deeper and intractable issues.

Sources within the administration indicate that the topmost levels of this university do not want to be in the high school business. MTA is seen as a hindrance - from its faculty and students to its board, led by the chairman, Elliot Gibber. And while Gibber is perceived as well meaning and resourceful, the time and effort expended on the high schools grate on the central bureaucracy. Striving to achieve academic excellence has become the theme song of YU from top down, and collegiate academics, the thinking goes, do not include high schools.

The movement to change the status quo regarding the high schools began long ago and only now is the swell beginning to peak. As early as the summer of 1997, Rabbi David Eliach, the former principal of Yeshiva of Flatbush and one of the most respected educators in New York, was called in as a consultant to see what could be done for MTA. Rabbi Eliach is also the consultant who gave a clean bill of academic health to Torah Academy of Bergen County and reported back to Rabbi Lamm that it was a viable candidate for merger consideration. (TABC would love to merge with MTA - the

## News Analysis

bride price would be a new building and a good chunk of MTA's endowments.) Eliach's proposal to severely cut down the size of MTA and make it a far more selective school was dismissed as being unrealistic and not cost-effective.

Unfortunately, the bottom line for MTA hinges not upon practical concrete considerations or actual problems that can be confronted and rectified. Like most things in YU, the crux of the matter hinges upon the intangibles - the personal, the political, and the religious.

Right or wrong, the man seen as the driving force behind the move to dump the high school is YU's chief financial officer, Sheldon Socol. After thirty some-odd years of in-house fighting and maneuvering, it would be an understatement to say that Socol has made his fair share of institutional enemies. Anything he supports or proposes will automatically be met with knee-jerk opposition from various segments of the University because Sheldon is for it. The rabbeim in the beit midrash have a special place in hell reserved for Socol because they perceive him as being anti-religious. They see the issue of MTA's closing as a religious one, with Socol playing the role of the heathen attempting to breach the walls of the holy city.

Socol has not gone on the record to explain his reasoning, but administration sources speculate that the high schools do not fit into Socol's grand vision of where he would like YU to go and in what direction he feels the University should be moving. The opportunity to disengage himself from the high school's perceived right-wing leanings probably figures prominently in Socol's calculations as well.

So what does the future hold for MTA? Whatever happens, it is a safe bet to say things will never be the same again and MTA as we currently know it is finished. What will take its place? That still remains to be seen.

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## Visiting CEOs to Teach Course

BY DOVID MENCHEL

For the fifth straight year, the Syms School will offer a unique course in which corporate leaders from many fields address students. "Contemporary Problems in Business," part of the Doris and Ira Kukin Entrepreneurial Seminar, is once again being taught to SSSB students this semester as a three credit course meeting on Friday mornings.

The format of the class consists of a presentation by the visiting business leader followed by a discussion session in which students present questions of interest. The business leaders, who are mostly CEOs or presidents of corporations, are free to speak about whatever they choose. They generally speak about their specific industry and the problems found in it as well as broader issues regarding the business world at large.

Dr. Lawrence Bellman, assistant professor of marketing and management, coordinates the course and serves as the primary instructor to the thirty-five students who have enrolled in this business elective.

Harold Nierenberg, Dean of SSSB, believes the primary goal of the course is to allow students the opportunity to gain and learn from the experiences of accomplished individuals at the top of their fields. Corporate leaders from a broad cross section of industries, and even one in a government position, were intentionally chosen to give students beneficial exposure to many areas in the business world. All nine speakers are unified by the entrepreneurial instincts that enabled them to reach the top.

Another important benefit that Nierenberg stressed is the exposure this

course affords YU to leaders in the business world. It is hoped that the SSSB students will be able to present a positive impression of their education and business acumen.

To enhance the professional atmosphere in the course, students are required to attend in business dress. This exposure should help future applicants coming from SSSB as they apply for jobs in the business arena.

Dr. Bellman believes that it is even possible for students taking the course to make a connection with a CEO which could lead to a future job. One of the CEOs, representing Electronic Boutique, is actually distributing applications for jobs and internships offered through his company.

This year's inaugural speaker is George Munoz, CEO of Overseas Private Investment, whose office was mentioned by President Clinton in his State of the Union Address. Other speakers include Michael Goldstein, CEO of Toys 'R' Us, Marcy Syms, President of the Syms Corporation, and Russ Berrie who is CEO of Russ Berrie and Co.

Yeshiva University has been a trailblazer in offering courses taught by leading scholars in specific fields. Last year, Yeshiva College offered an honors literature course in which six leading modern authors visited and taught the class for one or two sessions each.

The student body has responded enthusiastically to this course. Elijah Kaplan, a junior in SSSB, exclaimed, "I love Sy Syms! They always get us the best courses." David Neiss, President of SSSB, said, "This course really offers a unique opportunity for students to learn about many issues within the business world. Students should take full advantage of such opportunities presented to them."

## 1999 YC Arts Festival

BY COMMENTATOR STAFF

The much anticipated Yeshiva University Arts Fair will begin on Sunday, February 7, with a two week celebration of the artistic abilities and accomplishments of the YU student body. The fair will be a showcase like no other in Yeshiva history, featuring original music, poetry, literature, painting, sculpture, dramatics and more.

The fair will open on Sunday at 7 PM with a monumental live concert in Weissberg Commons. Unlike past Yeshiva concerts, this will be the first YU sanctioned pop music show, starring YU students. If you're expecting another Chanuka concert, you're in for a big surprise; for one, there will be only mixed seating. Just four floors below the seforim sale, YU will be rocking to modern secular tunes. Featured performer David Rappaport promises a disco-tech surprise.

This extravaganza will be followed by a night of poetry at 8 PM in the Furst Hall Writing Center. Even if you're not a fan of poetry, you are guaranteed to become one after listening to these stirring, dramatic readings. Yishai Fleisher and Josh Abrams promise to bring out the true emotions of the written word through their inspirational recitals.

Wednesday will begin the long awaited and much discussed dramatics presentation in Weissberg Common at 8 PM. It will feature a musical number by Mordechai Levovitz (who knows what he'll do next?), followed by dramatic readings from classic scripts performed by some of YU's budding thespians. Shalom Bersson, chairman of this

production, promises a performance that nobody will forget.

Sunday at 7 PM in the library there will be a guided tour of the new additions to the YU museum - original artworks by the students of YU and Stern. The sculptures, paintings and other visual arts will be explained by the artists, and there will be an informative, *halakhic* lecture by Rabbi Shalom Carmy explaining the place of art in Judaism. If you cannot participate in the tour, the artwork will be available for viewing throughout the fair in the YU museum.

On the following night, there will be a classical music and jazz ensemble in Schottenstein Hall at 8 PM. The Arts Fair will proudly present the talented virtuosos Jake Solomon and Joe Zilefsky.

Wednesday at 8 PM in the Writing Center will be the last formal presentation, featuring short story readings from the many writers of Yeshiva University. It is sure to be an intriguing and entertaining evening.

On Thursday, the entire Yeshiva is invited to a gala dessert beginning at 8 PM in Weissberg Commons. In order to celebrate the conclusion of the fair, there will be presentations from the many artistic clubs and organizations; there will even be an awards ceremony for the fair's outstanding participants. The evening will be hosted by David "Saboo Marie" Rappaport, and will feature a video presentation highlighting the events of the past two weeks.

All the events are free and, of course, will include light refreshments. Everyone is encouraged to attend and celebrate the artistic abilities and accomplishments of our fellow students. See you there.

## MTA—The Historical Dimension: From Tradition to Modernity

*Continued from page 6*

Jewish auspices.

The Talmudical Academy (TA) opened its doors to approximately 20 students on September 3, 1916, with yeshiva classes given from 9:00 a.m. through 3:00 in the afternoon, followed by secular subjects until 7:00 p.m. By June of 1919, the New York State Board of Regents had chartered it as a fully accredited four-year high school. Academic success soon followed, as the choice consortium of teachers whom Revel assembled provided limitless opportunities for TA students.

Impressive academic quality, as evidenced by a passing rate of 95 percent of TA graduates on their Regents examinations, allowed the student body to double to nearly 400 individuals between 1921 and 1923. The overwhelming popularity of the institution was backed by the introduction of an additional Judaic Studies program. RIETS succeeded in blending the fiscally beleaguered Mizrahi Teachers Institute's Hebrew studies program with the school's pre-existing Talmud program. In addition, the honor society Segulah, The Elchanite (which eventually became the school's yearbook), and the Academy News were established in the 1920s and 1930s.

Because of this tremendous growth, Dr. Revel proposed a plan to establish a four-year college to the Yeshiva's Board of Directors in 1923 in order to alleviate the sense of discontinuity that fell the shoulders of TA graduates. Wasting little time, the fantasy soon evolved into reality, as intense fundraising efforts proved enormously successful. Selecting its current home in Washington Heights as the future site of TA, the grandiose plans for the campus were partially fulfilled, under the stewardship of Harry Fischel, with the completion of the eclectically designed Main Building, the first building of the proposed Yeshiva campus to be constructed.

However, the economic distress that dominated America in the 1930s proved disastrous for Yeshiva University and Revel's lofty ambitions. Increased competition from new secondary Jewish day schools halved enrollment to just over 200 by 1932. Additionally, many contributors reneged on pledges, forcing the yeshiva to defer payments to faculty members for months at a time. In fact, it was not until the Second World War that Yeshiva managed to pay all of the salaries it had owed for more than a decade.

But the worst obstacles hindering TA's survival were still to come. With the premature death of Dr. Revel in 1940, a power struggle erupted between the Agudat Ha-Rabbanim and the Board of Directors over who would gain control over the institution. Eventually, Dr. Samuel Belkin, a scholarly disciple of Dr. Revel, was chosen to pave the way for academic success through expansion at Yeshiva. Meanwhile, a five-year attack by the New York State Board of Regents sought to mandate a curriculum for all New York yeshivot similar to the public school system. It would have required that mornings be dedicated to secular studies; in effect, an attempt to obliterate yeshiva day school education as a whole.

In an offensive against all New York yeshivot with agendas similar to TA's trailblazing path, the Board of Regents resolved to close TA and 25 area yeshivot based on a legal technicality implying that all schools teach secular courses during the same hours as they were taught at public schools. While the New York Jewish community joined forces in battle, they achieved little aside from temporary reprieve. The Board of Regents allowed the yeshivot to remain open until a sound compromise could be reached; however, the granting of concessions by the Board of Regents was few and

far between.

Masterful legalese allowed the yeshivot to disprove - and even embarrass - the Board of Regents, while countering additional assertions by the Board that the yeshivot in fact promoted, rather than constrained, American ideals. Nevertheless, since no sound resolution was reached by June of 1943, the yeshivot simply outlasted the Board of Regents. After five years of senseless negotiation, the denouement only resulted in cosmetic changes for TA and the 25 other established New York yeshivot.

Rapid expansion for TA marked the 1940s and 1950s. The Brooklyn Talmudical Academy recruited 48 students in 1945, while the Central Yeshiva High School for Girls opened in 1948 and the Yeshiva University High School for Girls arose 11 years later. This created a unified Yeshiva assemblage of immense proportions. Evolution on campus brought about significant changes for students, from the founding of a club period in 1951 to the establishment of vast library resources and the development of a guidance department to inform students about college and career opportunities.

With a total enrollment of 1,717 at the four institutions in 1968, and with 20 to 30 percent of all applicants rejected each year, this collective was at its peak, though a decline was inevitable. Enrollment dropped almost 30 percent during the next eight years, with the Brooklyn branches suffering the most. As competition among Yeshiva high schools increased, the Manhattan Talmudical Academy exemplified Orthodoxy's shift to the right with respect to the eventual evaporation of the Hebrew department, which comprised less than four percent of the student body by 1976. Moreover, the rising wages of public school teachers made it harder for the Yeshiva

University High Schools to pay competitive salaries, and the quality of educators steadily declined.

Despite such problems, the creation of a busing service throughout the region eased the recruitment process. Additionally, the establishment of an Early Admissions program allowed the remaining Yeshiva University High Schools (after the Brooklyn Talmudical Academy and the Manhattan Girls school were closed due to steep declines in enrollment) to preserve tuition revenues while reducing the strain of the secular studies division. Also, the establishment of the Joseph S. and Caroline Gruss Life Monument Fund allotted funds to pay teachers' salaries, purchase computers, and provide other useful teaching equipment. The success of the Early Admissions program (the consequence of which was an increase in the size of the student body), as well as unwavering recruiting efforts throughout New Jersey and Brooklyn, reversed the decline of the 1970s. The result was a successful turnaround dominated by a more conservative, Americanized student body with an intense connection to the principles of *Torah U'Maddah*.

The evolution of MTA from its modest beginnings is representative of the evolution of the metropolitan Jewish community over the course of the past century. The historical link forged between MTA and Yeshiva University has developed into a continuum of Jewish education. Grounded in firm *halakhic* ideals, MTA remains true to its principles by providing the most comprehensive education, both yeshiva and high school, available today.

Research for this article came partially from the publication "Between Tradition and Modernity, A History of the Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy," by Dr. Seth Taylor, published by YU in honor of the 75th anniversary of MTA.

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# ARTS & CULTURE

## Halakha Vs. Art

### An Old Concept, A New Approach

BY MORDECHAI LEVOVITZ

Confrontation between secular culture and *halakhic* values is an inevitable ramification of Modern Orthodox Judaism. The very notion of *Torah U'Madda*, while being somewhat ambiguous concerning subtle nuances, undoubtedly describes some kind of reconciliation between the wisdom's of society and the study of Torah. Certainly, an integral part of the *halakhic* process is the adaptation of timeless *halakhic* ideals to the mundane realities of life. This is why it is both surprising and disconcerting that I would have to defend a forum that allows Yeshiva University students to write about how they, as *halakhic* individuals face modern culture. I always thought that this was the idea behind an Arts and Culture section in a YU newspaper.

How can we write about going to plays, movies, concerts and clubs while ignoring the fact that we are *halakha*-abiding critics? This is not an apologetic section. We don't supply movie reviews for *niebach*, the few sinners in YU that can't help themselves from attending the Hell that is the cinema. This art section is for everyone in YU; we are proud of culture and are excited to be able to present it to the student body. We want to share our experiences encountering culture with other YU students. As Jews, part of the experience of encountering the outside world always involves a *halakhic* analysis. *Halakha* and learning are not merely morning classes peripheral to everyday life; they imbue in us a methodology with which we approach everything. There can be no facet of life in that *halakha* does not involve itself with. It would be a crime for a Yeshiva University newspaper culture section not to deal with how *halakha* tackles the artistic world. In this light, I introduce the *Halakha vs. Art* column.

Every so often, students, instead of reviewing whether they enjoyed a particular movie/play/book etc., will review the *Halakhic/Hashkafic* issues that these parts of culture raise. What makes this different from any other *halakhic* paper that you may find in *Hamevaser* or *Tradition*, is that besides a student-laymen presenting his or her *halakhic* and artistic research, he or she will then be forced to clearly articulate his or her opinion on the matter. **Note that these are the opinion of the layman author and not in any way a *psak* or an authoritative *halakhic* ruling.** This will re-ignite the art of personal opinion. It will encourage the rethinking of *halakhic* issues that for some reason have seemingly reached an intellectually harmful status quo. This campus should once

again be alive with vibrant opposing positions and debate. Students coming from the arch-liberal left and the black-hatted right, will be able to tackle the *halakhic* problems that come up with artistic issues such as nude sculptures at the Met, religious art at the Cloisters, women singing on Broadway, and of course romantic scenes in the movies.

Sadly, some think that the need for a *posek* disposes of the need for individual *halakhic* opinions. They could not be more wrong. If they were correct, how could we ever decide which *posek* to follow? Even for the most difficult *halakhic* decisions it is really the layman who makes the final decision. For example, if *chas v'shalom* one is faced with the grueling decision of organ donation, he knows that if he looks for a *posek* using the letter T in the phone book he'll get one answer and if he uses the letter B he'll get another. So who is really making the decision?

Even having one rabbi for everything doesn't obviate the need for a personal opinion. It would be ridiculous to think that a layman has the power to make a lofty *halakhic* judgment like deciding which *rav*, from which shul, from which community, from which sect of Judaism should be his one *posek*, but can't make his own decision regarding whether he can open soda bottles on *shabbat* or listen to a woman sing at a show.

Independent thought is integral to a *halakhic* life and certainly essential in concepts like *Torah U'Madda*. To claim that students don't have the right to approach culture by independently researching *halakhic* material and forming their own opinions, is to question the very ideal of *Torah U'Madda* and hence the very validity of Yeshiva University.

This new column will hopefully set the tone for the Arts and Culture section. It will strengthen us. There will be no subject matter that this section won't be able to take on and review from both an artistic and *halakhic* point of view. We will no longer be apologetic concerning the fact that we are Jews critiquing art. This strength will raise both the interest factor and the caliber of our articles. Due to a higher caliber section some changes will occur. There will be less fluff and more provocation. This is not and will never be *Yeshiva Today*. The days when we would give a positive review to a Yeshiva production simply because it's a Yeshiva production are over. Furthermore, no one, and that includes the *rabbeim*, is beyond reproach! Welcome to a new age of *Commentator* Arts and Culture; you may disagree, you may even be offended...but hey, grow up, you're in college now!

### A New York Experience

BY ZOHAR AZOLAY

When I first came to New York, three years ago, I decided to explore everything in the city that was new to me. I started with a visit to the regular tourist attractions, walking in the streets and enjoying the breathtaking skyline. The "apple" was big and tasty, so I contacted the NYC Tourist Information Office and got a booklet filled with all the official events taking place in the city from film festivals in the park to the spectacular parades throughout the year. The information was free, the events were free and they even included maps and guidelines helping to plan and enjoy it all. However, speaking to the average YU/Stern student one may think that there is nothing more to this city than Dougie's (as if it's a tourist attraction that mustn't be missed) and that except for the movies, Broadway shows and museums, this city is either expensive, boring or dangerous. I am dead serious!

Expensive? Maybe. If shopping on Fifth Avenue is what you are into, you might find it slightly hard to raise enough money for a pair of shoes. But New York has lots of things to offer even to "starving students" like ourselves. In a brochure entitled "Pressing the Right Buttons," I was amazed to find discount tickets to institutions such as the City Opera and Ballet (both \$10 for orchestra seats), museums (every Tuesday they are free) and many others. I found department stores that sell designer clothing at half price (Century 21 at 22 Cortland St. is one of them) and nice supermarkets to shop at. I also found that a trip to the beach with the L.I.R.R. is not that expensive (Jones Beach and Fire Island are very interesting... You will never look at beaches the same way again).

Boring? I doubt it. No other city in the world has to offer so many things to do and so many rich cultural experiences. New York offers activities of all types and for all age groups. This city lives! There is more in this city than what some of you may think; feel fortunate for living in such a city. For those who got sick of the Dougie's and a movie routine, here are some things to do when you have some time to kill. It's all affordable.

Jekyll & Hyde, for example, is a very unique restaurant (Warning: the food is not kosher); but calling it only a restaurant would be a crime. The four levels of this restaurant/ bar/ social club are designed with themes from horror movies: a library, an old temple, laboratory and a torture chamber. The extremely entertaining experience inside is well worth the one-hour line outside. The skeleton is going to ask you how the food is while the eyes in the paintings on the wall are going to follow you around. Even just to get to the bathroom you'll have to find the secret passage (hint: try to push the book shelves). In addition, there are live performances in which a mad professor brings Frankenstein back to life. Diners are

'killed,' blood is everywhere, but is it the creature who escaped that does the killing or is it the mad professor himself? Spooky. The place is located at 6th Ave, between 57th and 58th St. (For info Call 1-800-992 HYDE).

Surprisingly, museums, too, have more to offer than just paintings and exhibitions. You can catch a late night 3-D Imax laser show, playing to the music of Metallica or Pink Floyd in (you'll never guess)... the Museum of Natural History (!) The show was originally held in the planetarium, which is going under major renovations, and therefore, it moved temporarily to the Imax theatre until the planetarium reopens (apparently in the year 2000). You might ask what hard rock has to do with museums, but then again it's art as well, isn't it?

The Rocky Horror Picture Show is an interactive movie/show/party in which live actors as well as the audience are an integral part of the experience while the movie plays on the screen. The "Rocky Horror phenomenon" began sometime in the seventies and it seems that it has been only growing since - every big city has a screening of "Rocky". In New York, there are screenings twice a week (Fridays and Saturdays at midnight) at the Village East Theater located on 2nd Ave. at 12th St. Don't forget to bring with you a roll of toilet paper, some rice, toasted bread, water guns, newspapers, and an umbrella (you'll understand when you are there). It's a lot of fun and even if you didn't bring the spirit of excitement with you, just being there will help you get into the right mood. However, this is not recommended for pregnant women, people with weak hearts, or those who are closed-minded.

And for those of you whose adrenaline doesn't let them sit in one place, I'll recommend one of the many dance clubs in which one could easily take a glance at a drag queen exchanging beauty tips with the girlfriend of the gay guy that lives across the street from the East Village weirdo that looks as if he had just come from a Star Trek production. Indeed, there is no one moment of rest in this city that never sleeps. Looking in the right places, though, is the key here. *The New York Times*, *Time Out New York* and *The Village Voice* can be a start, and as a service to you, fellow students, *The Commentator* is generous enough to publish articles like this. We will try to keep you updated.

Regarding the dangerous part, I couldn't have said that my New York experience was complete until I got mugged, this past week. The fact is, that being in this city and not having a gun stuck in your face is like going to Egypt and missing the pyramids, or not having an apple strudel in Vienna; can you imagine being to Amsterdam and not visiting one of the many 'coffee shops'? This is part of living here, part of our lives as New Yorkers. If one is cautious, I'm sure he/she will survive even the most unpleasant events to check off their own New York experience.

# FILM REVIEW

## "A Thin Red Line"



BY YAIR OPPENHEIM

*Starring Sean Penn, Adrien Brody, Ben Chaplin,  
Nick Nolte and Woody Harrelson*

There is a man who hasn't directed a movie in twenty years, and any actor familiar with his work is dying to have a spot in his films. His name is not George Lucas, but Terrence Malick. Mr Malick is well aware of this, yet it is this very self-conscious grandstanding effort that makes *The Thin Red Line* the success that it is. Before discussing the film, one issue should be addressed: *Saving Private Ryan* it is not. If one doesn't accept that upon viewing, it shouldn't pose a problem.

The film, though a lengthy three hours, gives surprisingly little emphasis to its plot. An Army rifle company is brought in to capture a key airfield in the Guadalcanal region of the Pacific. The men are assigned to charge up a hill and decimate the enemy. This seemingly insignificant mission plays a role in the United States' victory over the Japanese. What happens to the region of Guadalcanal, as portrayed by Terrence Malick, has no significance at all; it is merely used as a backdrop, not to tell an even greater story, but to express a deep, soulful thought. In other words, nothing happens in the film per se.

Yet, through perfect characterizations, a meaningful understanding is achieved amongst the characters and hopefully the audience, as these actors shed typical Hollywood cliches or simply take these hackneyed situations that have faced cinematic soldiers, and place them in their proper context.

The beginning of the film places the audience on an island, and from there shapes its message. Adrien Brody, though not exactly the main character, is the focus of this idea through the film. In his tour of duty, he searches for an answer: Why is man dual natured? Why does he seek peace, yet make war? The thoughts presented in the film are accompanied by gorgeous cinematography. The film's cinematographer, John Toll, won Academy awards for his work in *"Braveheart"* and *"Legends of the Fall,"* and does a superb job in capturing the feel of a foreign environment that can be as poisonous as it is pleasurable. It gives the film a timeless quality, so the film can remain a contemporary view of war as long as war exists.

As this theme hangs over the film, another is introduced. The tagline of the film best presents it: Every man fights his own war. One of the characters in the film explains how each soldier must hang on to some image or memory, and make it an island for himself in order to survive. That's what keeps the men alive.

This concept is shown over every character, and in uncanny detail that should only prove Malick's brilliance as the film's director and writer (the film was adapted off a James Jones novel of the same name). The majority of the actors speak in soliloquy, one of the many artistic merits that may alienate the audience. Malick used this approach in his last film, *"Days of Heaven."* It is through this that we bounce from one character to the other, and see how many opposing viewpoints of morality in a war can both be right.

These characters are detailed to as near a human degree as possible for fiction. There are not simply cowards or jokers or psychos like in *Saving Private Ryan*; these people are not two-dimensional caricatures that make up any military unit in the timeless Hollywood epoch. Here we see people that keep losing friends and can't react to it emotionally (an excellent performance by Sean Penn), leaders who relieve commanders of duty, not because they get burnt out and try to save the lives of soldiers, but because they break the unity of the group; they halt progress (seen in an Oscar-worthy performance by Nick Nolte). These characters

# Fact, Not Opinion

BY DAVID RAPPAPORT

I believe in the evil satanic lord of rock and roll while Madonna worships the *Kabbalah* (rejoice Lubavitch! definitely a sign of the Messiah) and Adam Yauch is a Buddhist. Crazier things have happened and I'm dying to know why Tupac Shakur seems to keep on releasing albums and movies even though he's dead. Whomever wanted him dead should have hooked him up with Courtney Love, but that's none of my business.

I'm happy I have no younger sisters because then I would know too much about boy groups who are quite handy when it comes to dancing with chairs while it rains in indoor studios. "He's pointing at me!!!!" cried the 7 year old girl. Suddenly Hootie & the Blowfish sound amazing to me. I wonder why Phish didn't release a tour album called "Why don't all you suckers get over the fact that Jerry's Dead?" I also wonder why someone felt the need to release a compilation of songs and called it "NOW." Have the record companies lost all hope? Is there no nostalgia whatsoever? Or have we just caught up with ourselves? I am waiting for some true genius to finally open a swing dancing, yoga, and smoothie hangout next to Barnard College. They could call it Swoga and then maybe the trend would finally be over.

If radio didn't exist then record companies wouldn't know who to bribe. Radio loves bands with the initials Limp Bizkit and Korn. Bands that play together stay together and unfortunately that's the case with Hanson. I wonder where I can buy a 10th Jimi Hendrix Greatest Hits package. John Lennon should turn over in his grave because Sean Lennon seems to write a hell of a lot more like his old woman. Lots of credit to Paul McCartney's kids who have enough sense to stay the hell out of the music industry. How can Paul Simon watch his son with a straight face? How come I can't buy a toilet seat that John Lennon once sat on? I really laugh when I see those kids who walk around campus with phat pants, baseball hats sideways, various corporate logos and a gait that would make Eddie Murphy wet his pants. Don't ever change kids! I wonder how much Adidas would pay me if I started dressing like an idiot too?

Anyway, I'd like to announce that I am running for supreme evil dictator of Yeshiva University. My opposition is Jeffrey Socol and I hope you'll make the right decision. If you'd like to contribute to my campaign please do not send money care of this publication but send it to me at home. My address is 495 W. 186th Apartment 5x, NYC 10033.

Every semester certain things touch us in not so special places. Not all of them are Bill Clinton. Not all of them appreciate my brand of humour. Not all of them spell "humour" the way I do. I'd like to publicly state that any inflammatory remarks that were made in my letter (in defense of Levovitz) towards any

actual people were not written by me, but by a certain little birdie whose initials are unknown to me. The only institution or person I meant to attack was the school and its amazing sense of what is right and wrong. Maybe it's the millennium thing but Judaism is starting to resemble Taoism in more ways than one.

I'm holding two contests. First, whoever appears to be the most religious and penitential by the end of the semester wins the opportunity to have charity given in his name by me to the first homeless person I see.

The second contest is for someone whose last name does not rhyme with Rosen to get my rock trivia question right: What other Beach Boys' song sounds a lot like "I know there's an Answer"? Here's the top 15 of 1998. Last month's answer was sloppy.

### Artist/Compilation

### Album Title

### Record Label

- 1 Nuggets  
Original Artyfacts  
Rhino
- 2 Unknown Mystery 60's Group  
self-titled  
Distortion
- 3 Herschel Savage & the American Flag  
self titled  
Rockathon
- 4 Pulp  
This Is Hardcore  
Sire
- 5 The Creation  
Biff Bang Pow  
Retroactive
- 6 Gillian Welch  
Hell Among The Yearlings  
Almo
- 7 Belle & Sebastian  
The Boy With The Arab Strap  
Matador
- 8 Cornelius  
Fantasma  
Matador
- 9 Air  
Moon Safari  
Caroline
- 10 Lucinda Williams  
Car Wheels On A Gravel Road  
Mercury
- 11 Neutral Milk Hotel  
In The Aeroplane Over The Sea  
Merge
- 12 Mercury Rev  
Deserter's Songs  
Gee Street
- 13 Burger/Ink  
Las Vegas  
Matador
- 14 REM  
Up  
Warner
- 15 David Garza  
This Euphoria  
Lava/Atlantic

obviously express familiar emotions, but in this film, which will most likely be the only truly poetic war film ever made, we are privy to the characters motivations that make him feel the way he does.

This innovation of the war film strikes as an instant classic. Every other war film loses characterization by forcefully meandering through a plot. Here, the director sheds these "inhibitions" and lets characters shine. An example of this type of direction in conjunction with the grasping of hope is best exemplified in one scene: One of the characters gets a letter from his wife, which says she is leaving him. This very soldier who volunteered for a dangerous reconnaissance mission can't get a hold of himself emotionally. A few scenes later, a commander looks for volunteers. We glimpse his face. He doesn't join the group.

Moviegoers who pass these key scenes, which form a patchwork of the human mind will write off the film as empty and unfulfilling. Hopefully, people who spend the time to enjoy mindbending films - films like the classics that Stanley Kubrick made, will grasp the thought-provoking brilliance that is *"The Thin Red Line."*

**C O U N T E R P O I N T**

## Halakha Vs. Art

DO YOU HEAR THE WOMEN SING? The *Kol Isha* Myth

BY MORDECHAI LEVOVITZ

All it takes is one trip to Times Square to corroborate the stereotype that Jews love musicals. Inevitably, you will see boys with Yarmulkes (traditional Jewish skullcaps) in the audiences of "Phantom of the Opera." A short woman wearing a long dress, readjusting her wig while yelling at her six matching children, somehow always seems to be on line at the box-office for "Beauty and the Beast." You may even see a group of bearded Hassidim on line at T.K.T.S. hoping to get last minute discount tickets for "The Sound of Music."

Last month, when the Student Activity Club reserved one hundred seats for a January production of "Les Miserables," an unprecedented amount of students expressed interest in purchasing tickets. Consequently, the club reserved forty more seats, but even that did not satisfy the great demand. All one hundred and forty tickets sold in less than a week, leaving, at times, almost a

fifty-person waiting list! Upon speaking to the president of the club, he informed me that most of the students who did not want tickets had told him they weren't interested because they had already seen 'Le Miz'. It follows that a large percent of YC has seen or is about to see the musical, "Les Miserables."

This being the case, it is safe to say that large amounts of orthodox Jews do not seem to have any qualms about going to musical productions. This holds true even in cases where the musicals involve female vocalists. In all four musicals mentioned above female characters have large singing parts. Yet, the fact that audiences eventually will be subjected to female characters belting out passionate solos is not enough to deter these Orthodox men (including the majority of YC boys) from attending the theater.

This is why, while vacationing in Miami Beach, it came as quite a shock to me when many of the Stern women at a Saturday night Karaoke party at the Days Inn refused to sing. They insisted that it would be a violation of the prohibition of *Kol Isha* for them to sing in front of men. It seemed that almost all of the ladies refusing to sing agreed that it would be *halakhically* wrong for a Jewish man to be there listening to women singing. At first I was a little insulted, being that they were insinuating that I was a transgressor, being there that Saturday night. However, after looking around noticing all the other *frum* guys there (from black-hatted Brooklyn *bochurim* to *kipah srugah* Bnei Akiva Zionists - even a few Hassidic couples!) sitting there listening to some of the bolder women belting out familiar melodies, I realized that either I or these very confident Stern women were missing something. The only thing certain was that there must be major confusion or controversy regarding this *halakhic* issue.

Given the premise that Orthodox Judaism requires the recognition of the prominence and centrality of *halakha*, traditional Jewish law, it would be puzzling if in fact 'listening to a woman's singing voice' is a transgression of Jewish law, and nonetheless, a significant percentage of the Orthodox world blithely ignores this injunction. If there is an accepted prohibition, what explains the sociological phenomenon allowing so many Orthodox males to seemingly ignore this mandate? Is it probable that while it is in fact unequivocally forbidden, many *halakha*-abiding Jews are just simply unaware or ignorant of this specific law? If so, why then in a pedagogical situation such as here in Yeshiva, would students not have been taught that such behavior violates the Jewish code of law? Is it possible that so many *halakhic* Jews acknowledge that going to a musical is *assur* (proscribed) yet sinfully choose to go anyhow? I would like to be able to give the Orthodox community the benefit of the doubt. Even if it turns out that most of the rabbinic figures in YU would not officially give a *heter* to attend a musical, the mere fact that a majority of YC students and Modern Orthodox Jewish men would and do attend musical theater tells us something - that the accepted *halakhic* ruling of this campus and the Modern Orthodox world, is that even if it is a sin for a man to listen to a female vocalist, for some reason the transgression would not be applicable in a theatrical setting such as a Broadway-type musical. In order to make such a lofty judgment, it would first be incumbent upon me to fully research the status of *Kol Isha*, "the voice of a woman," vis-à-vis *halakha*, and its logical application to

modern-day situations.

**The Source**

In *halakhic* literature the subject of a woman's voice and its ramifications is first mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud (*Berachot* 24a). The discussion is about the circumstances in which it is prohibited for a man to recite the "*Shema*" prayer. The Talmud rules that it is prohibited for a man to recite the prayer of "*Shema*" while listening to the voice of a woman. *Reshonim* (early commentaries on the Talmud) explain this ruling to apply only to the singing voice. The Talmud explains the reason for this ruling to be that the voice of a woman (singing) is considered to be an "*ervah*," meaning "nakedness." A woman's singing voice is comparable to her naked body parts; both, if exposed, can cause improper thoughts for a man. This is based on the verse in one of the later and non-*halakhic* books of the Bible, Song of Songs (2:14), which reads "For sweet is your voice and your countenance is comely."

Most *Reshonim* see the recognition of the sexually provocative quality of the female voice as leading to dual *halakhic* ramifications, consequently, the issue of hearing a woman's voice is brought down in two separate laws in the *Shulchan Aruch*, the Code of Jewish Law. The first law (*Even Ha-Ezer* 21:1) states, that since the female voice may cause sexual arousal, *halakhic* considerations of feminine modesty dictate that a woman should not sing in the company of men. By the same token a man may not listen to the voice of a female vocalist. The second law (*Orah Hayyim* 75:3) states, that since a female voice is described as *ervah* (nakedness), a male may not read the "*Shema*," study Torah, or recite any other blessing when the song of a woman, even that of his wife, is audible to him. He may not engage in these activities in the presence of other exposed body parts considered in this category of *ervah*.

Note that there are several subtle differences between the formulations of the two laws. In the first law the *Shulchan Aruch* states that it is forbidden to hear the voice of an *ervah* not nec-

"In today's day and age, the idea that women should be muzzled in any manner in front of men is insulting and dishonorable."

essarily because the voices of all women are considered *ervah*. In fact, the commentary *Beit Shmuel* interprets "voice of an *ervah*, as voice of a woman 'with whom it would be forbidden to sleep with.'" This is a conception of the word *ervah* which is independent and separate from our original notions.

In the second law, the reason a man can not recite the "*Shema*" while exposed to a woman's singing voice is because a woman's singing voice is inherently an *ervah*. This definition of *ervah* coincides with the original understanding of *ervah* as expressed in the Talmud. The differentiation between the two laws may be vital in understanding the nuances and practical ramifications of these *halakhic* prohibitions when they manifest themselves into our modern situation. There are three distinctly different ways of approaching the issue, and I will come back to this point later upon explaining the third and final approach.

**The First Approach**

When the Talmud says "*KOL B'ISHAH ERVAH*" (The voice of a woman is an *ervah*), it is prohibiting a man from listening to a female vocalist solely because of the inherent title of *ervah* assigned to a woman's voice forever. Similarly, in the *Shulchan Aruch*, the reason why a man may not hear a woman sing is because her voice is an *ervah*. This is a blanket prohibition; for those that take this approach hold that something is an *ervah* only if it holds an ontological quality of sexual impropriety. Idealistically it is and always will be something that should be covered or hidden.

Therefore, in a moral sense, a woman's song would always be considered an act of seduction and thus dirty and unethical. The ethical ideals learned through the prohibition of the female song would be unaffected by the norms of society. For even if sociologically it would not be particularly provocative for a woman to sing in front of men, this only means that society has denigrated to the level where libidinous and lascivious acts once shunned upon are now taken as the casual norm. Certainly *halakha* does not change its attitude toward immoral behavior just because one lives in an immoral society.

The only thing that may possibly change in an immoral society where it is normal to hear women sing, is the second law con-

cerning the recitation of "*Shema*." According to this approach, the man reciting the prayer is guilty if he is distracted, regardless of the inherent evils attributed to the woman's voice. In the same vein, if the man is not distracted by the voice, even though it may indeed be ontologically lascivious and improper, the man may recite "*Shema*." According to this approach, there is a discussion as to the limited contingencies in which it may be permissible to listen to the singing of women:

1. The *Hatan Sofer*, a nineteenth-century rabbi, permits men to listen to the singing of mixed choral groups (*Hatan Sofer, Orah Hayyim, Avodat Ha-Yom, Sha'ar Taharat Yadayim*, no. 14). This leniency is based upon the Talmudic principle "Two voices cannot be heard," i.e., when two vocal sounds are heard simultaneously neither sound is clearly audible. Hence, when women and men sing together the sound that is perceived is not the voice of a woman but an entirely different auditory perception.

2. The *Maharam Schick* (*Even Ha-Ezer* no. 53), a commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch* states that sexual desires are aroused by the vocal stimuli only when accompanied by visual stimuli, based on the Talmud in *Sanhedrin* 45a and *Sotah* 8a. Many other commentators add that a female vocalist is only forbidden when the listener sees or knows who the singer is. These leniencies would allow a man to listen to a woman's voice on the radio, but only if he is sure that he is not acquainted with her and he doesn't know how she looks.

3. Rabbi Y.M. Toledano (*Teshuva Yam Ha-Gadol* no. 29) differentiates between listening to a live vocalist on the radio and listening to a recording of a female voice. He claims only a recorded voice is a truly disembodied voice, and as such, he forbids listening to a live female vocalist on the radio while permitting listening to the same song if it was recorded.

4. Concerning a microphone, I found no authority that explicitly permits its usage. The closest I found to someone permitting listening to a woman through a microphone is Rabbi Aryeh Yehuda Ha-Kohen. In his work *Shaarei Torah* vol. 8 no. 73, he argues that just as there are no restrictions regarding hair that has been severed from the body, there are no restrictions involving a disembodied voice. This leaves the status of microphone in question, however, the overwhelming majority would seem to hold that since you see the performer live, you would not be able to listen to her sing.

The idea that seeing the woman makes a difference leads us into the realm of what is sexually provocative. The subjective nature of attraction is the basis for the second approach. Thus the second approach is very much connected to the first; in a sense they overlap. Some *poskim* seem to hold a delicate balance between the first and second approaches, for now, however, I will present the two approaches separately.

**The Second Approach**

The second approach is similar to the first one insofar as basing the prohibition on female vocalists on the fact that a female's singing voice is an *ervah*, but it differs from the stringent definition of *ervah* first presented. This approach examines the subjective nature of sexuality, and thus demands that the label *ervah* be subject to distinctions in the type of singing. It asks, what is it if not some subjective psychological distinction that separates a vehement phrase from a passionate song? If the Talmud already makes the distinction between speech and song, why can't the same distinction be made between sexual singing and singing that is not conducive to sexual arousal? This approach points out the distinct language of the *Shulchan Aruch*, which explains the prohibition to be

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# ARTS & CULTURE

## The Kol Isha Myth Continued from page 12

against listening to the voice of an *ervah*. The *Shulchan Aruch* is reminding us that only a voice that constitutes the sexual requirements of *ervah* is prohibited. This interpretation is found in the *Perisha*, a commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch*. Consequently, according to this approach, if the female singing is not in any way sexual in nature, it may not constitute an *ervah*, and hence, would not be subject to laws concerning female vocalists.

I have found many authoritative rabbinical scholars who seem to be making distinctions between sexual and non-sexual singing. The question is how far can we go along this line of thought. One can expand the definition of sexual singing to that of any emotional love song or restrict it to only an extremely seductive one-on-one serenade. This is not to say that merely because we do not know where to draw the line there is a flaw in the logic to this approach. To reject a conceptual approach simply because we do not know where to draw the line would surely be nonsensical (unfortunately, we see this all too often among rabbinic figures). I am merely warning to proceed with caution while practically applying the *halakha* using this approach. It is wisest not to stray far from the limited contingencies in which rabbis influenced by this train of thought allowed women to sing in front of men. However, we should still try to logically adapt these contingencies to modern-day sociological situations.

1. Rabbi Weinberg, in his book, *Sereidei Eish* II, no. 8, argues that listening to women singing sacred songs is permissible because the singing of a woman is only forbidden when the listener derives 'pleasure' from the song; when no pleasure is derived from the sound of the voice there is no cause to anticipate erotic stimulation.

2. Rabbi Yafe Schlesinger finds grounds to permit men to listen to a woman sing provided it is for a very short amount of time. This is based on a Talmudic ruling that brief physical contact with women is not prohibited because there is no reason to fear the arousal of sexual desire.

3. The *S'dei Chemed* (*Klalim, Ma'arekhet Ha-Kuf*, no. 42) permits men to listen to women singing hymns of praise to God, crooning over a baby to sleep, and lamentations for the dead. This is because it may be assumed that they do not seek to derive 'pleasure' from the female voice in such circumstances.

Unfortunately, since the Reform and Conservative movements have adopted extreme leftist takes on this kind of approach, regarding this and many other *halakhic* issues, even where this approach is not applicable, Orthodox rabbinic figures have been very wary before openly adopting an approach like this. This does not mean that in fact this isn't the correct approach; it just means that you would be hard pressed to find a contemporary Orthodox rabbi using this line of thinking to allow yeshiva boys to go see "Le Miz."

However, this approach does assist us as an addendum to the *heterim* of the first approach. If we solve the problem of *ervah* by the fact that the voice is projected through a microphone (much like the *ervah* aspect of a married woman's hair is lost when the hair is not attached to the woman's scalp) the problem of seeing or knowing the woman that one is hearing (mentioned in the first approach) seems to be addressing a more subjective notion than

that of the strict *halakhic* category of *ervah*. This problem may be the offshoot of *ervah* known as *Tzniut* or *Pritzut* laws; these prohibitions are in nature sociological and subjective. For example, the *Mishna Berura* prohibits women from donning red clothing, for in that time it would be considered sexually provocative and thus improper. The same type of prohibition would apply to exposing a woman's fingers if in fact society deemed it proper for a woman to cover her fingers in public. Consequently, due to the non-controversial subjectivity to these types of mandates, if a microphone would obviate the problem of *ervah*, the second approach would get rid of the *tzniut* problems of seeing the woman's face, at least in most cases in our early 21st-century western society. Thus, a combination of the first two approaches creates a strong case for a *heter* or leniency regarding the *issur* of *Kol Isha*, at least where a microphone is used, which includes most musicals and karaoke.

### The Third Approach

This approach differs in the analysis of the original *halakha*. It changes the focus to the law concerning when a Jewish man is allowed to recite the "Shema" prayer. If we recall the original Talmud citation, we realize that the discussion of the Talmud is really focused on "Shema." The only reason the Talmud stated that the voice of a woman is an *ervah*, is to tell us why a man may not recite the prayer while hearing her voice. The idea that the voice of a woman is *ervah* is inextricably connected to the law prohibiting the prayer. We are reintroduced to this notion once more when we read the *Shulchan Aruch*. We are constantly reminded that the reason he may not recite "Shema" is because he is being exposed to an *ervah*. *Ervah* is the threshold, the specific amount of deterrence needed to prohibit man from saying the "Shema." If the distraction is in of itself not proper or modest, however, for some reason it does not reach the status of *ervah*, a man can still recite "Shema" while exposed to the distraction.

The *Ramah*, a commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch*, adds that if it is "ragil" or "regular" for the man to hear the sound of a woman's voice; then it would not be considered *ervah*. Notice the *Ramah's* formulation. He does not say that if it is regular for a man to hear a woman's song he then can recite the "Shema"; instead, the *Remah* introduces us to much bolder terminology. He points out that the voice of this female vocalist would not even be considered an *ervah* if 'regular' enough. The question now arises, what does it take to consider a woman's voice regular enough to be considered not an *ervah*? What is the practical definition of "ragil"?

Some allude to *ragil* as teaching us that as long as the voice is not singing, it is not an *ervah*. However, this interpretation is implausible, for the only *issur* in the *Gemara* is concerning the song of a woman. Also, the *heter* of *ragil* as explained by the *Orech HaShulchan*, and

originally the *Mordechai* (both cited in the next paragraph), applies not only to *kol*, voice, but onto all *ervah's* (such as hair, body parts, and the like), so *ragil* could not possibly mean just 'not sung,' it must mean something else. This is not to say that the *heter* of talking can't also be deduced from *ragil*, but it would be wrong to think that it is the definition of *ragil* in that context. We must find the *halakhic* definition of "ragil."

To find these answers one has only to examine another law pertaining to the recitations of "Shema." On the same page in the Talmud, and in the *Shulchan Aruch*, we learn that exposed hair can also be considered an *ervah* and can consequently cause a situation in that it prohibits you from saying "Shema." However, in the *halakhic* compilations of Rabbi Yechiel M. Epstein (*Orech HaShulchan, Orech Hayyim* 75), he argues that even though he thinks society has become more corrupt, the fact that it has become normal for married women to go into public without their heads covered means that uncovered hair is no longer considered *ervah*. One could then recite "Shema" in front of a woman who doesn't cover her hair. He then quotes the *Mordechai*, an early commentary on

the Talmud, saying that an *ervah* that has become *ragil* is no longer considered an *ervah*. We see from the Rabbi Epstein that "ragil" just means whatever is normal for women to do in that generation.

In our day and age, when you cannot watch the news without hearing women singing on the commercials or go to a movie with out hearing women singing on the soundtracks, I think it is non-controversial to say that today hearing the voice of a singing woman is totally *ragil*, i.e. an accepted casual norm of society. Continuing this train of *halakhic* thinking, it follows that the voice of a woman singing is not an *ervah*. Consequently, today one would be able to recite the "Shema" while listening to a woman's singing voice. Now that we have ruled out one law as being non-applicable, it is puzzling what to do with the first law prohibiting men to listen to female vocalists.

If a woman's singing voice is not an *ervah* because it is considered *ragil*, it would seem intuitive that there be no separate prohibition against listening to a woman sing. (For after all, we've proven that a woman's voice is not an *ervah*.) However, if this were the case, why then would the *Remah* not add in the leniency of *ragil* when commenting on the first law that prohibits female vocalists? Why does Rabbi Epstein only talk about how *ragil* is not an *ervah* in his discussion about "Shema" while he totally ignores it when discussing whether a woman is allowed to sing or uncover hair in front of men?

The answer to these questions is in the unique nature of the first law regarding female vocalists. As I explained when I first introduced the two laws, they are formulated differently. While the second law concerning "Shema" explicitly relies upon the fact that a woman's voice constitutes an *ervah*, the first law only states that a man should not listen to the voice of an *ervah*. *Ervah* here, according to some commentaries, refers to those people that you

are not allowed to sleep with. This law does not have to depend upon if the voice of a woman constitutes an *ervah* or not. In fact, if we examine this first law in full context it seems we are just dealing with issues of *Tzniut* (feminine modesty). Something can be immodest with out being considered *ervah*. This is why the leniency of *ragil* was not included in the literature concerning the first law. *Ragil* is a special leniency to make certain things that are categorized as *ervah* not *ervah* anymore. The specific prohibition against men listening to female vocalists is not solely because a woman's voice is an *ervah*; it is also a matter of basic modesty. Basic modesty laws are not abrogated by the special leniency law of *ragil*.

As explained earlier, modesty laws, when not backed by some Biblical or Rabbinical notion of *ervah*, are inherently subjective to time, place and culture. One would be hard pressed to argue that in the nineties, a female vocalist is somehow immodest or disrespectful as compared to a male vocalist. This is the dawn of the twenty-first century and we are basking in the wake of the feminist movement. In today's day and age, the idea that women should be muzzled in any manner in front of men is insulting and dishonorable. Anyone today who thinks that the sound of a woman's singing voice is in any way especially sexually provocative must be severely out of touch with Western reality (or experiencing clinical sexual repression). It would be more un-*tzniut* to stand in the way of equality and social justice. Consequently, according to the third approach, almost every type of women's singing today would not be considered an *ervah* even without a microphone, because a woman singing in public is considered *ragil*. Furthermore, because it is no longer sexually provocative (from a sociological viewpoint), there is no *Tzniut* problem with hearing a woman sing. Certainly, according to this approach there is no problem with going to a musical (even to a London production without microphones), and no problem with *frum* women singing karaoke in front of men. (Note that this last line of thinking would not apply to the prohibition of uncovering the hair of a married woman, since that prohibition is derived separately from a specific biblical mandate concerning *Sotah* which has no bearing to time or social predicament).

In my humble and non-authoritative opinion, it seems as though the third approach both makes the most sense and fits best with the wording of the *Gemara, Shulchan Aruch* and the *Ramah*. Those who disagree with the third approach would have to formulate a strong argument as to why *Kol Isha* would still be considered an *ervah*. This will inevitably lead to hairsplitting (being *docheh*) within the words of the *Orech-HaShulchan* and *Ramah* - two of the most authoritative *poskim* the world has known. Thus, it seems most probable that the notion that there is some *Kol Isha* problem with a woman singing in front of men is nothing more than a *halakhic* myth! Jewish males should have no problem going to musicals and Jewish females should have no problem singing in front of men. Even if you take the first, and more stringent approach, in cases where a woman sings non-provocatively through a microphone there would be a strong case for a *heter*, as explained, for a Jewish man to listen to her. It would surely be a shame to miss out on the rich theatrical culture and the vast opportunities of equality simply because you are confused or unresearched regarding the nature of this prohibition. So what's your opinion?

"Anyone today who thinks that the sound of a woman's voice is in any way sexually provocative must be severely out of touch with Western reality (or experiencing clinical sexual repression)."

## Shotgun on the "A Train"

*Continued from page 1*

dial 911 from a pay phone. A patrol car responded immediately, and took the students to 103rd street where the scene was "frozen" - all persons within a half-mile radius fitting the description given by Rosenberg were held for identification.

Rosenberg recognized one of the men being held, and both Levin and Wolman agreed that he was among the men who had robbed them. The identified man had a loaded shotgun and Wolman's wallet in his coat. The other three assailants managed to escape and may still have Rosenberg's wallet.

The students were taken to police headquarters and were interviewed for about one half-hour. They were driven back to Yeshiva University at 3 AM. Wolman and Levin both testified before a Grand Jury. "They paid us six bucks to do it, too," exclaimed an excited Wolman. Rosenberg, who was called to testify and may still be subpoenaed, refused to talk in court. He said, "I was scared to testify because of an

article I read in *Reader's Digest* about criminals who come back and kill the witnesses." The man who was apprehended has been charged with three counts of armed robbery and may face up to thirty years in prison if convicted.

Don Summers, Chief of Security at Yeshiva University, suggested that the subway system should only be used during peak hours. He referred to the YU Crime Prevention Manual, which further states, "When the train arrives, use the middle car where the conductor is assigned or a car where there is a Police Officer or a large number of people. Stay behind an exit door so you can leave the car quickly if the need arises...If you are confronted by a person with a weapon, do not resist unless you are left with no other choice."

When asked by this reporter why he was going downtown at 1:30 in the morning, Wolman responded, "Um...we heard they needed three more guys for a minyan downtown at 2 AM."

## Test Bank

*Continued from page 1*

"stronger impetus for teachers to change their exams from semester to semester," Senate chairman Jeff Kohn noted that test banks are commonplace in other high level institutions such as Columbia University. Kohn emphasized that the Senate works for the students assuring that the proposal has the full backing of the Student Council. Similarly, Michael Ausubel, the principal student Senator behind the proposal, argued that the resolution would benefit the entire student body. Admitting that no single resolution could change the students' "cultural attitude towards mesorah" or the faculty violators, Ausubel nonetheless "hopes to see students working harder and gaining more from their education."

Dean Adler asserted his readiness to pass such a proposal as well. However, Adler shifted much of the blame to the students. Referring to mesorah as a "pervasive cultural tradition," he felt, "anything that increases the student involvement through more individual learning is to the good." He noted, though, "The issue is of the students' responsibility" and that only a small percentage of the faculty actually repeat tests. He went on to further contend, "mesorah undermines a student's education," and reproved those who utilize mesorah instead of studying on their own as being responsible for "doing damage to a Jewish religious education and the way that we are perceived."

Rabbi Shalom Carmy, who favors the proposal, explained, "The purpose of finals is not to trick students. Therefore, I believe it's legitimate of students to have some idea of the format of tests." He further argued, "Whether or not one holds what I hold, the fact is that copies of exams circulate and it requires some gift at self-deception to believe that they don't."

The Sy Syms Deans, on the other hand, are vehemently opposed to such a resolution, barring their school from any participation in the program. Associate Dean Ira Jaskoll feels the proposal fails to address the problem. Asserting that it should be an individual professor's decision what he wants to release, Jaskoll remarked, "If the students feel mesorah is the problem, they should go after that and have Student Council print it." Noting different teachers' styles, he said, "Some teachers want to give out their exams and do so. Others share the format of the exam with their students. But the teachers should not be forced to give out their exams." Jaskoll claims, "Impressing on the

teachers to not give old tests, that which we at Syms already try to do would be more prudent means."

Jaskoll further asserts that at Syms, administrators are not aware of a "mesorah problem." Agreeing that exams should not be repeated, Jaskoll, however, claims that the Deans at Syms have never been given any specific information on professors repeating tests. "If we were told that this is a problem and given specific names of teachers, we will look into it and speak individually to the teachers," assured Jaskoll, "but those students who claim mesorah is a problem are not working with us. No one will divulge which courses they claim to be mesorah."

Likewise, Dean Harold Nierenberg believes the proposal is not a good idea. Admitting that he is aware that certain students have mesorah, he remarked that students should not have tests before they are administered. He believes giving out more tests is a bad idea. Instead, he constantly encourages faculty to change tests from year to year.

Making clear that the "Senate is not doing this to undermine those teachers who have been lax in creating challenging exams," Ausubel explained, "The Senate tried to come up with the most feasible plan, not cumbersome, not overly bureaucratic. No one is aiming to point fingers but rather to create an environment where all students can thrive."

Student opinion was split. As Avi Kuznicki remarked, "I think it will level the playing field. Also, not that I want to study less, but I will feel more confident in my studying knowing the teachers' style of the test." Others disagree with the proposal because they do not feel the proposal will solve the problem. Though not at the vote, Senator Shaya Stern said he would have voted against the proposal, "because the professors that are giving the same exams will do so anyway for they are aware that their exams are currently circulating." Still other students believe, "most people do in fact get a hold of the mesorah so the resolution is effectively unnecessary," as Ronny Sulimanoff remarked.

Whatever the results of the faculty meeting, Chairman Kohn asserted, "The students have the capabilities and will go forward with the test banks themselves even if the faculty does not approve of the resolution."

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## "Campus Improvements" Mystify Students and Administration Alike

BY COMMENTATOR STAFF

The goal of the obtrusive construction scaffolding at Yeshiva University's Furst Hall, along 185th Street at the University's Uptown Campus, remains unclear. The Department of Facilities Management, which oversees campus renovation and construction, offered no explanation about the current work. Upon a *Commentator* request for comment, Facilities Management referred all inquiries to the Department of Public Relations (YUPR). David Rosen, Director of YUPR stated, "I have no information about this matter," leaving students to wonder about the scaffolding and its purpose.

The Furst Hall construction project seems to have the potential to significantly alter the building's complexion. Students point to the erection of scaffolding along the entire front side of the building for more than two months as evidence that serious renovations are on the way.

Other students, however, turn away from the hype, giving the construction project little potential for significant contribution to the campus. They need point no farther than recent construction activity on the campus that has proved to be neither particularly well thought out nor expedient. Recent renovation endeavors includes the ongoing two-year effort to revamp the Belfer and Furst Hall elevator systems. This project has caused excessive wait time for floor transportation in both buildings, as well as extreme overcrowding of the elevator cars.

YUPR officials admit that they have "no idea" what the ultimate goal of the construction is. They claim that they are sure there is some purpose to the project. They believe that purpose to be aimed at improving either aesthetically or practically the Uptown Campus, but the specifics of the effort have not yet been divulged by Facilities Management, which is the only department that would be able to reveal such information.

Facilities Management representatives repeatedly offered "no comment," and reiterated the fact that announcements on such matters come only from Public Relations. YUPR spokesmen have emphasized to *The Commentator* that they would like to have the information regarding the Furst Hall construction. However, they have not been contacted by Facilities Management. They admit that, at this time, they have no more information than the student body.

Noise from the construction project has yet to prove a significant problem for the hundreds of students who attend classes in rooms that border the scaffolding. Nonetheless, students and administrators alike still wish to know the purpose of the scaffolding. "Every time I pass by Furst Hall," one student remarked, "I am reminded of the bureaucracy that permeates every aspect of this institution. It's been two months, and I still don't have the first clue as to what they are hoping to build. Can't they get their act together?"

The lack of information relevant to the construction project, as well as recent building collapses in the New York City area, have fueled student speculation that the Furst Hall building somehow poses a danger to students and that the scaffolding is part of a necessary repair effort.

Serving an immediate role, the scaffolding has provided shelter to students coming to and leaving from Furst Hall during recent winter storms. In fact, some believe that this temporary roofing during the December and January storms is the "only benefit that

they will receive from the annoying project." Either way, no official announcement is expected in the near future, begging the question from the student body and uninformed administrative officials "why not?"

An additional recent undertaking of note has been the stringing of two thin strands of rope on metal stakes around the Danciger Quadrangle grass in front of Rubin Hall. The quad has recently been a point of contention between the administration and students, with the students wishing to utilize the grass for the enjoyment of the student body, playing football games and the like, while the administration continues to attempt to restrict the usage of the only open space on the Uptown Campus. Students were quick to decry the fencing of the grass as yet another shameless attempt by factions within the University to stifle student life on campus.

Unofficial sources within the administration told *The Commentator* that the reason given by Facilities Management for the new stakes on the grass, is to be able to guide the snow plows clearing the sidewalk and prevent damage to the lawn. *The Commentator* was further told that the stakes would remain for the duration of the snow season. Dror Barber, President of YCSC called such reasoning "patently ludicrous." "If the reason they are placing metal poles on our grass is to guide the plows, why are they on all four sides of the quad when the plows only operate on one side? And why does that necessitate stringing them with rope denying any access to the lawn whatsoever?" Barber and other student leaders are incensed, and predict that actions will be taken to remedy the situation.

## SOY Seforim Sale to Proceed as Scheduled Despite Administrative Hindrances

BY COMMENTATOR STAFF

After many months of hard work by the brains and brawn of the operation, the Student Organization of Yeshiva's annual Seforim (book) Sale promises to be the greatest ever. Despite this year's rendition of the usual administrative hindrances and obstacles, preparations for the sale have progressed rather smoothly. The sale is scheduled to run from February 7<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup>.

The SOY Seforim Sale has long been regarded as a YU student tradition and in the past decade has become known as a major service to the Jewish community at large.

The sale, which in past years has attracted over 11,000 people, provides one of the most abundant selections of Judaic texts and Jewish literature under one roof. All selections are offered at steeply discounted prices. Thousands of books in English and Hebrew on Jewish law, Jewish history, Bible, Jewish philosophy, Tannaic and Amorai literature, reference and translations, as well as the latest in Hasidic music and Judaica software are all available in the otherwise nearly unused room 502 in Belfer Hall.

Thousands of dollars netted by SOY from the sale are divided among various

charitable organizations, extending the *mitzvah of harbotzas Torah* (dissemination of Torah) to one of *tzedakah* (charity).

This year, the SOY Seforim Sale is using one computer program, written from scratch by a group of students, which is specifically geared towards the needs of the sale. Technical advances should allow this Seforim Sale to run more smoothly than in the past.

Computer Science majors Ben Sandler and Mendy Berkowitz began programming last July by consulting many past Seforim Sale staffers. After weeks of brainstorming, programming, and usability testing, Sandler and Berkowitz put together their own software package. It has proved effective and easy to use. According to Berkowitz, who is also the President of the YU Computer Science Club, "a major accomplishment like this is totally impossible without the efforts of everyone involved with the programming."

The Sale is being run by SOY VP for Business Chaim Loike and Amichai Erdfarb. They are assisted by Jeff Weiss, the computer team, Seforim Sale veteran Ephraim Shapiro, and many others. These students have contributed hundreds of hours to ordering, indexing, *schlepping*, labeling, and arranging.



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## Honors Program Planning Underway: Honors Committee Developing Program Structure

BY YEHUDA BURNS

The Annual YU Chanukah Dinner served as a dramatic backdrop for Rabbi Lamm's formal announcement of the new Schottenstein Honors Program. Rhetoric aside, however, the real chore of working out a detailed program has just begun. To create a program that is both academically and experientially excellent, a formal Honors Committee comprised of students, faculty and administrators has been assembled.

Dean Normal Adler, at the committee's inaugural meeting, stressed that "this is a critical moment in the life of YC and its commitment to developing the life of the mind within the context of 'Torah True' Judaism."

The significance of the moment was not lost on the committee, which viewed its task within the context of the historical development of the College. "Our job here is to devise a truly excellent program, for excellent students and faculty," added Dr. Louis Feldman, the committee's chairman. "This is an opportunity to do something great for Yeshiva University."

YU President, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm envisions an honors program with two components. First, it would provide an opportunity for the "best and brightest" students to go through an enhanced educational program. Additionally, it would allow students who excel in specific areas to take clusters of enhanced courses in areas of interest.

These broad principles form the backbone of the honors program whose mission is to increase academic excellence at YC. It is thought that the establishment of a formal honors program allowing students outside the program to participate in a variety of honors experiences will result in a truly excellent educational experience for all YC students.

In formally devising the program, many issues, both fundamental and peripheral, have arisen. Two central avenues of discussion concern the overall structure and educational philosophy of the program, as well as the technical questions arising from the creation of individual honors courses. As outlined in a mission statement from Dean Adler, one component of the program would be co-curricular and cultural experiences which exploit the diversity of the New York area. These experiences would include special seminars, trips, and the already popular Dean's Table discussion groups.

More important, though, are the proposed plans for structuring the program's curricular requirements. As per Rabbi Lamm's conception, the program would have two distinct elements. There would necessarily be a distinct "honors-only" experience open only to students formally accepted into the honors program. Such a series of courses would provide a common intellectual experience that is uniquely "honors" by nature. Concurrent to these courses would be an element that allows for students not enrolled in the full honors program to take honors level course work in their own areas of interest.

The "working version" of the honors program incorporates these elements into a formal structure. To make the program plausible, a series of honors-only courses would replace a portion of the current YC distribution requirement. The program would thus have a sense of coherence as opposed to a "cafeteria style" program in which students pick and choose courses with no thematic relation to one another. The precise nature of these courses,

though, is a source of serious debate among faculty.

A special sub-committee on honors structure devised a plan in which an honors "core" would play this critical role. Such a core, as originally devised by Professor Joanne Jacobson, would include a series of interdisciplinary courses emphasizing the key elements of scholarship which span the boundaries of various academic disciplines. In addition, the core would likely include a Composition and Literature sequence similar to the highly successful Honors English Seminar currently required of Distinguished Scholars.

In contrast to the "core" approach, some professors, including Associate Dean Michael Hecht and Dr. Moshe Bernstein, prefer a more traditional honors-only sequence. Rather than creating new, more progressive courses which stress the commonality of scholarship across disciplinary lines, the idea is to modify existing introductory courses by incorporating distinctly honors elements such as increased writing requirements and independent scholarship.

According to Dr. Bernstein, the educational novelty of such "core" courses is not sufficiently important to allow them to supplant traditional courses which focus more on the substantive content of the individual subjects. As one faculty member noted, "It would be a shame to produce a genuine intellectual who has never actually read a work from Plato."

Aside from the honors-only courses, additional elements will comprise the greater honors program. A certain number of "honors electives" chosen from the school's current and planned offering of honors courses would be used to complete this requirement. Additionally, aside from the remaining YC distribution requirements, students enrolled in the honors program would fulfill honors requirements within the major. The major requirements may lead to the development of a Senior Thesis project which would also stem from a new mentoring program.

The unique design of the program allows it to also fulfill the second half of Rabbi Lamm's initial vision. Besides the specialized honors program, it allows for other students throughout the College to choose from the variety of honors electives and take them outside the context of an honors program. Additionally, by participating in the cultural and educational seminars that a formal honors program would provide, students would be able to reap the full benefit of a high-level educational program.

Beyond the structural elements that characterize the program and its correlates, faculty and administration are working to ensure that the honors courses exist only on the highest level. All courses proposed for honors designation would have to be approved by both the faculty Curriculum Committee and the Honors Committee. As part of the approval process, a detailed syllabus describing the uniquely honors elements of the course would accompany a full *curriculum vitae*, submitted by the proposed teacher. This would ensure that the courses were truly more than just "advanced courses" and that the professors seeking to teach them are qualified for such a position.

Dean Adler has proposed an additional approval step. He suggested the formation of an external advisory review board comprised of scholars from outside the University. Aside from providing assurances and further suggestions for honors

courses, the advisory board would provide two distinct, additional benefits. First, by exposing the honors program to outside scholars, it would enhance the academic reputation of YC. Besides that, it would provide excellent networking opportunities for students who would work with the advisors.

In describing what an honors course would look like, the committee has made numerous suggestions which could be incorporated in the creation of new courses. A common element to any honors course would be an emphasis on developing writing and critical analysis skills through the curriculum. Intensive writing assignments and a research project seem likely to accomplish this objective. Other additions include the use of more difficult conceptual problems in developing subject matter. The possibility of some honors courses running for a fourth hour every week is also an option under consideration. Additionally, any course that combines these characteristics with a unique, and often engaging, teaching method would be considered for an honors course.

While the program seems headed towards fruition, several questions remain. Most important is the issue of permeability, that is, will students have the ability to enter the honors program at any time past their first semester on campus? Conversely, what would happen if someone chose to leave the honors program? This issue is particularly sensitive since a powerful student objection to any honors program has been the fear of the creation of an elitist student upper-class. With a permeable program, every student could take part in at

least some part of the honors program.

Additionally, what the relationship between the existing Distinguished Scholars Program and the new Honors Program be? Would there be any financial incentives offered to students choosing the honors track and would those students receiving academic scholarships be required and/or automatically qualified to enter the honors program? These questions must first be answered before any program can be completed.

Interestingly, the composition of the Honors Committee which is formulating the structure for the new program is unique. Dr. Feldman, in chairing the committee, insisted, above all, that everyone has a say in the deliberations. The policy drew numerous visitors not officially on the committee including both faculty and students. Uri Goldstein, a senior who sits on the committee, noted that "by giving the students a true voice, they certainly give us the impression that they want us to *want* to be honors students, not just *say* that we want to."

Finally, before any program could be formally adopted, it would face a vote of faculty approval. The Honors Committee is under particular pressure in this respect since faculty acceptance is obviously critical for the success of the honors program. The committee set for itself March 15 as the date by which they expect to present the faculty with a fully developed honors program. Once approved, the program could be formally implemented for next semester and the administrative duties of hiring new faculty and devising courses could commence in earnest.

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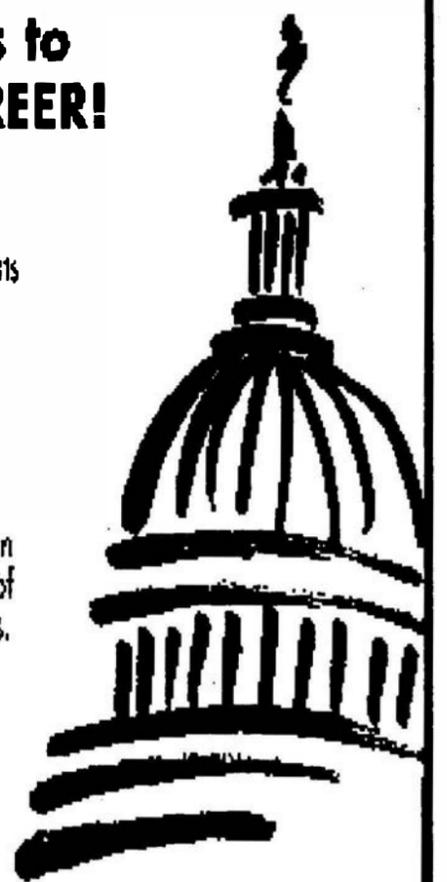
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14 2:00 PM until 10:00 PM	15 8:00 PM until 11:00 PM <small>President's Day</small>	16 8:00 PM until 11:00 PM	17 8:00 PM until 11:00 PM <small>*NCSY Discount Night</small>	18 8:00 PM until 11:00 PM	19	20 7:30 PM until 11:30 PM
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# Yeshiva Sports

# Go Macs!

## Volleyball Season Underway Team Looking to Improve Record

BY GREG SAMUELS

Yeshiva University's men's volleyball team opened their season on Tuesday, January 26, 1999, at home against the NJCU Gothic Knights, bringing volleyball fervor and excitement to the campus. The one hundred or so spectators were not disappointed, as the two teams provided some exciting high-flying action, replete with spikes and kills galore.

It was the first of eight home matches for the Macs this season, and while they showed potential to be an exciting competitive team later in the season, they weren't quite ready for the caliber of opponent that they faced. As Stan Watson, Assistant Director of Athletics put it, "It was a tough team to face in their first match. They [NJCU] are one of the tougher teams on the schedule." The Gothic Knights were a team that had chemistry and experience; the sort of team that the Macs hope to play like later in the year.

As far as his view on the Macs' chances for the rest of the season, Stan was very optimistic. "This year, our team has some good size, and many players have shown potential. The Macs should be competitive later in the season." Macs players are quite confident of their abilities. As Andrew Harrari, team co-captain put it, "This looks like the best team of players ever assembled since beach gods Karch Kiraly and Sinjin Smith." Harrari went on to explain the similarities between his play and that of his hero Karch Kiraly.

This exciting team has reason to be confident thanks to the addition of new coach Robert Pichardo, along with the return of star player Russel Kimlagarov and the enthusiasm of setter Steve Martinek. Pichardo was brought to Yeshiva thanks to Director of Athletics Dr. Richard Zernick, who knew Pichardo from his playing days at City College. Pichardo has spent time as the head coach at various colleges and institutions, including Cooper Union, Monroe

College, Clinton High School, the Dominican Republic Junior National Men's team, and the Junior Olympic Girl's team here in New York City. All in all, he has sixteen years of coaching experience, and Yeshiva University is lucky to have him. He is setting realistically attainable goals for this year's team that he is confident that they are capable of meeting. "This year," he said, "we hope to attain a winning percentage of .500 or better." He inherits a team that last year finished a disappointing 3-16.

The other non-player addition to the team is manager Zev Rosenberg. His work with team equipment and the inspiration that he has provided ranks him amongst the great managers in Yeshiva University. He is genuinely proud of to be a part of this great Macs team, saying, "Our team has the cleanest jockstraps in the entire conference." While that was more information than we needed to know, it is a testament to his devotion.

The key players to watch on the floor this year are co-captains Andrew Harrari and Russel Kimlagarov, along with outspoken floor leader Steve Martinek. They are the clear leaders of a young team. As he showed early on in the first match, Russel is the team's best player. His spikes are menacing and he knows how to play defense. He clearly leads with his play. As Coach Pichardo put it, "Offensively, he manipulates the ball the way that he wants to, but he couldn't have done it without Steve Martinek." Martinek is the team's best setter, and one of its better diggers. He is by and large the loudest and most vocal member of the team on the floor.

Starters for this year's team include Steve Martinek, Andrew Harrari, Russel Kimlagarov, and Alex Shakhmurov. As the season goes on, this team will gel together and learn how to play with one another. It is unclear what sort of record this team will finish with, but one thing is for certain - they will be exciting and fun to watch.

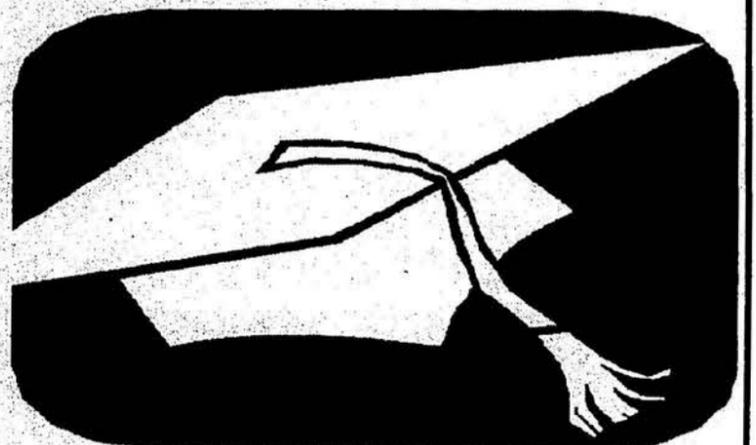
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## The Search For Permanent Academic VP Assumes Urgency

BY MICHAEL ZAIDEL

Yeshiva University is in the process of searching for a permanent Academic Vice President, an important post whose occupant is the chief academic officer for the entire University. The position has been vacant since the former Academic Vice President Bill Schwartz left last year to return to teaching after five years of service.

The Academic Vice President's role is an extensive one. The Academic Vice President oversees the activities and responsibilities of the deans of all Yeshiva University undergraduate and graduate schools. Associate Dean of Yeshiva College, Dr. Joyce Jesionowski sees the Academic Vice President as "one of the most critical positions in any university."

When the position became vacant, Dr. Sheldon Gelman, Dean of the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, was engaged as the interim academic vice president. Many Yeshiva University faculty members have viewed Gelman as a capable candidate for permanent appointment to this position. Nevertheless, a search committee has been formed to consider all available options. Dr. Jeffrey Gurock, Assistant to the President, is the search committee chair.

The committee consists of about a dozen members including administrators, faculty, members of the board of trustees, and students. Gurock sees it as crucial that an academic vice president be chosen relatively soon because of the impending Middle States accreditation review. Since all issues of accreditation go through the academic vice president, he or she will be very important throughout this process. Every ten years

all accredited universities in a certain region go through the Middle States accreditation review. All schools in Yeshiva University, undergraduate and graduate alike, will go through this evaluation of academic standards. The accreditation review will take place during the Fall 1999 semester, making the hiring of a permanent academic vice president a pressing one.

A national search firm engaged by the University has produced a number of candidates for the Academic VP post. Michael Ausubel, a Yeshiva College senior and member of the search committee, has met with two of the candidates. He and another student representative, Shaindy Kahn, the president of Stern College for Women's Student Council (SCWSC), interviewed these candidates. After reviewing the candidates' curricula vitae, they discussed with them issues they felt were important to YU students. The students questioned them about "tenure for professors, the honors program, scholarship among faculty, and the current and future status of the Israel program." YU's president, Dr. Norman Lamm, will make the ultimate decision about the hiring of the Academic VP. Nonetheless, recommendations from students, administrators, and faculty will play a large role.

Gurock feels that the qualities of import that determine the status of an individual's candidacy would be his or her administrative experience, capacity as an academician, and plans for the future of the University. Dr. Norman Adler, Dean of YC and member of the search committee, adds that since there are "many fine candidates for the position one of them will undoubtedly carry on the fine tradition of this institution."

## New Students Enjoy Smooth Transition to YU Life

BY ZEV STUB

Entering Yeshiva University students have encountered few problems in the transition to their studies on campus this semester. According to Dr. Efrem Nulman, Dean of Students, all check-in and housing procedures went smoothly because the number of departing students was close to that of the incoming freshmen and transfers. "With the number that graduated and the number that came in, we pretty much have the same amount of people in the dorms." A total of 78 new students entered the residence halls, although Dr. Nulman clarified that this number doesn't take into account the commuting students. The precise enrollment numbers were unavailable at press time.

As for the students themselves, most of the newcomers had only good things to say (although some seemed like they were avoiding the expression of their qualms). Tzvi Landsman, a transfer student from Columbia University, expressed relief at being "put with a senior in a nice dorm in Rubin," and said that he liked the personal attention that his small classes afforded. He was, however, concerned that his classes were "on a more elementary level" than the engineering courses he took while at Columbia.

Recent Kerem B'Yavneh alumnus and new Sy Syms School of Business student Gabe

Seghi is most enthusiastic about the classmates he has met thus far. "I'm with serious guys, on a good floor," he says. He had a bit of trouble adjusting to his classes, though, noting that "the learning in Eretz Yisroel is different from that of YU." But he does think that the diversity of the YU student body and a general "change of pace" will generate a positive experience in his learning and pursuit of a marketing degree.

An Israel returnee, Ozer Katz, reported that "everything is fine." The Mevaseret Zion alumnus also found Muss suitable for his humble needs, and was pleased with the check-in process. When asked to elaborate upon that sentiment, the accounting major added, "the elevator thing is really annoying."

Michael Waren, who transferred from The Rabbinical College of America in Morristown, NJ, found the dorms "very nice, except for my broken bed." A new resident of Muss, he was happy with the classes for which he registered.

With the new semester underway, it is important to remember that starting at a new school can often be overwhelming. Dr. Nulman wants new students to know that his office is always open for those who need help with their transition to Yeshiva University. "For us, each new semester is an exciting start," exclaimed Nulman. "It's always wonderful to welcome new students, and I hope they are happy here."



Students carted off to Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in the wake of viral outbreak on campus.

## Outbreak: Viral Epidemic Hits

BY AARON KLEIN

On Tuesday December 22, approximately 25 students paid visits to the health services center on the first floor of Rubin Hall complaining of upset stomachs, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, and fever. The University doctor, an employee of Beth Israel Health Services, proceeded to inform the New York Department of Health of a possible epidemic.

Although only 25 students went to the campus doctor, the actual number of students afflicted with these symptoms is estimated to be around one hundred. Hatzolah, the on-campus ambulance corps, transported five students to Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital. The hospital subsequently alerted the N.Y. Department of Health, and two epidemiologists, Dr. Amy Fine and Dr. Jim Miller, were assigned to the case.

Speculation spread that the outbreak was caused by food poisoning. The Health Department officials interviewed some of the students, but a common food source could not be found. A group of students ate together at Deli Kasbah, and all fell ill within a few hours. Other students claimed that they got sick from eating at Time Out. Still others have implicated fish served in the YU cafeteria.

Benjamin Rosenberg ate at Deli Kasbah on Tuesday and a few hours later started to complain of diarrhea and vomiting. The

next day he was found unconscious on the bathroom floor and taken to Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital where he was given intravenous fluids for dehydration. His brother, Edmundo, also ate at Kasbah and became sick. Edmundo said, "I threw up seven times... I was sick for a few days and it completely disrupted the taking of my finals."

Steven Weiss was among the students who ate at Time Out and started to vomit a few hours later. He was sick for three days with a low-grade fever and upset stomach. Lionel Abitbol had the fish in the cafeteria and began to vomit almost immediately. He said, "So many people on my floor (7th floor Rubin) were sick. Everyone was throwing up all over the place, it was a pretty disgusting scene... I had to take a final later that day, and I left every few minutes to vomit."

Students in all Residence Halls were affected. The Department of Health ruled it a viral outbreak and claimed that it was not caused by food poisoning. Viral outbreaks are easily spread in nursing homes and dormitories because of the close contact of a group of people living in an isolated environment.

Many students still assert that their sickness was caused by something they ate. The Department of Health will not be investigating further. Paul Skzlarski, a spokesman for Beth Israel Health Services said, "It was just a coincidence that it happened to everyone at the same time."

**THE COMMENTATOR**  
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