



# LIBRARY STAFF NEWS

ISSUE # 15

SEPTEMBER 2020

## YU PLANS FOR FALL SEMESTER

by Marlene Schiffman

Though our buildings are closed, Yeshiva University Libraries continue to offer services and resources for remote teaching, learning, and research. Protocols for the return to campus have been developed in strict accordance with the City of New York, New York State, the federal government and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Librarians created six new instructional videos for an experimental “flipped classroom” for first-year writing classes. All library instruction classes after early March took place via Zoom. Preparations are underway to create library orientation videos for both campuses protocols for on-campus students, faculty, and staff on the website. They include:

- Covid testing before entrance to campus.
- Classrooms and restrooms will be cleaned and disinfected daily.
- Designated quarantine areas in the housing facilities will be available for students who test positive.
- Temperature check will be required before entering a building.
- Quarantining of returned library materials.
- Limited capacity in elevators.
- Hand hygiene stations will be provided in lieu of preferred use of soap and water.
- Face coverings to be provided for students, faculty and staff.
- Maintaining 6 feet of distance between individuals.
- Staff to work remotely, if possible, and those who come to campus will be encouraged to come on alternating days to meet social distancing requirements.
- Library study carrels will be available with limited capacity. Tables will be limited to two students per large table, and study rooms will be closed. Library will be closed to outside visitors.
- If localized outbreaks emerge, tighter restrictions and reduced staffing may need to be implemented again.

To see the full reopening plan click [HERE](#).



1 - If you have to wear a mask, make it a pretty one! Photo by Estee Lavitt.

## REALM PROJECT: [Happening Now](#)

Since May, OCLC has been testing and reporting on its REALM (Reopening Archives, Libraries and Museums) Project. They have partnered with Battelle Labs to determine how long coronavirus can remain on library materials. They determined in tests conducted until now that typical papers and fabrics found in libraries can sustain viable viruses anywhere from one to seven days, and are especially susceptible if the items are stacked or standing close together. As of September 10th, Test 5 is underway. Battelle began testing four fabrics and leather bookbindings to determine the length of time the COVID-19 virus may live on materials commonly used in archives, libraries, and museums. The items include:

- Polyolefin (upholstery)
- Polyvinylchloride “vinyl” (upholstery)
- 100% cotton (upholstery, draperies, toys)
- Nylon webbing (stanchion belts, bags, ropes)
- Leather bookbinding

The results of Test 5 are expected to be released in early October.

Implications for our libraries are in the handling of returned materials, the length of time they must be quarantined before they are circulated or shelved, and in providing a space where they can await their detoxification.



2 - Results of Test 4: Stacked vs. unstacked materials.

## GRAB & GO: HOW GOES IT?



by Tina Weiss and Sandy Moore

What an interesting period! The suggestion that the Libraries would not be open to users for months would have seemed unimaginable earlier this year. At the beginning of an ordinary academic year, the library would be a space for working cooperatively, hanging out, research and respite—the beginning of this year is different from all other years.

Ensuring safety and security while providing to the needs of our users, the library staff has been hard at work over the summer creating systems to provide access to materials considering the current challenges.

Planning and thinking through various scenarios have allowed some services to begin. Grab & Go and scan requests began in August and enable YU students, faculty and staff to obtain needed library materials for their coursework. Libraries staff have been integral in making these newly framed services

as successful as possible. Grab & Go allows YU community members to fill out a form that indicates what material they would like to borrow along with their library card information, and location (Beren or Wilf). Then the library staff finds the material and emails the user as to pick up location and times/days. The scan/digitization service is like that of Grab & Go in that a form is filled out by a YU community member to initiate the request and then the scanned material is emailed to the user. Creating and implementing these services to make library resources available in a precarious time certainly acknowledges the needs of the users. Seeing the services utilized by students, faculty and staff highlights the importance of access to relevant information. Our aim is accomplished when our collections support the needs of our users.

Orchestrating the Grab & Go is a group effort on the Wilf Campus. Staff at MGL and PL (Bernice Katz, Ursuline Destouche, and Zvi Erenyi) have worked collaboratively to get this new service up and running. On the Beren campus, Elinor Grumet and Hallie Cantor have done an exemplary job filling requests, working with patrons, and communicating with one another.

All hands have been on deck at the library with our scan and digitization requests as Rebekah Shoemake directs the effort to ensure that on-site materials can be shared with our YU users, and requests from our partner institutions are fulfilled. Guiding the on-site effort to ensure expeditious and accurate request fulfillment includes great involvement from the HSL, MGL and PL staff.

Preparing E-Reserves in the absence of physical copies is a new venture this semester. With the ingenuity and creativity of library staff, we have met the needs of faculty and students by working diligently to acquire and make limited materials accessible from our physical collections in digital format. While E-Reserves are used each semester, this semester has been quite different without physical reserves. Enabling access while keeping limitations in mind, staff focused on preparing the E-Reserves while maintaining contact with faculty and sharing suggestions to best provide access to the requested material.

The library staff has shown great creativity, interest and fortitude considering the challenges of the past few months. With great hope we look forward to our complete return to campus and normal operations.

Grab & Go services are outlined [HERE](#).

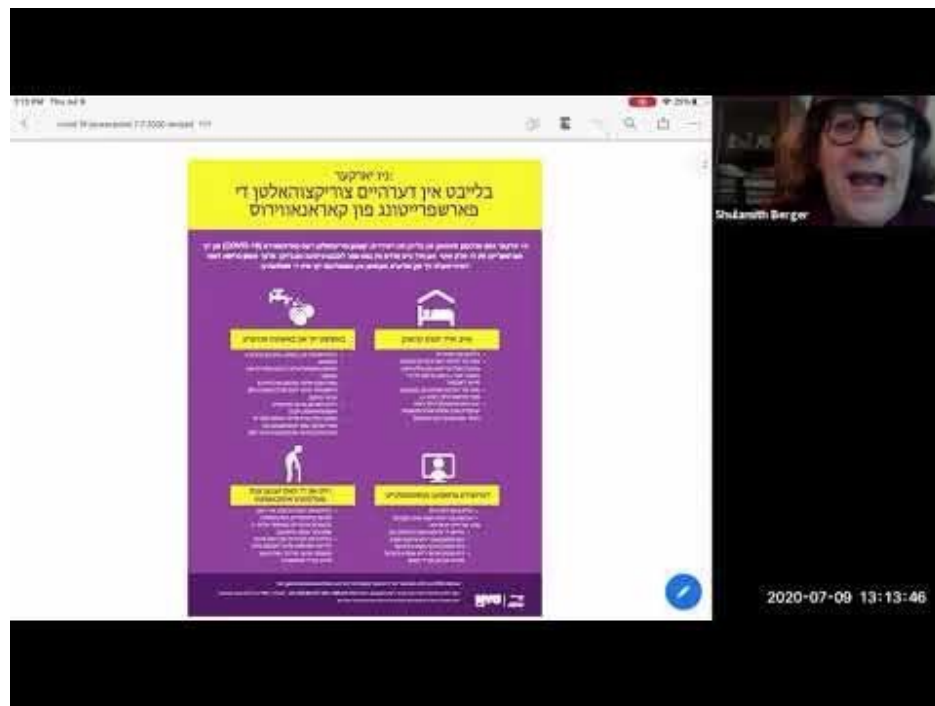
## COVID-19 AND THE LIBRARY: Special Collections

Archives staff initiated and organized a COVID-19 digital collecting project for material emanating from the Jewish community and entered a partnership with the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University to display the material. Shulamith Berger, Curator of Special Collections and Hebraica-Judaica, spoke on "Collecting on COVID-19 in the Jewish Community" with Yoel Finkelman (National Library of Israel) and Nathan Putnam (OCLC) at the Association of Jewish Libraries Digital Conference. She later spoke about it on a Yeshiva University podcast organized by Professor Steven Fine on July 9th as part of the *Crisis and Hope: YU Voices* series.

Materials that were generated in the Jewish community in response to the pandemic include ephemera such as flyers and posters, as well as online postings. Shuli has collected responsa about the wisdom of

gathering for prayer, guidelines for health and safety issued by synagogues, a poster announcing New York City free kosher meals, a notice imploring people suffering from depression due to isolation to contact a rabbi for mental health support, special prayers instituted for this pandemic, a request to supply old taleisim (prayer shawls) for use as shrouds for the Hebrew Free Burial Society experiencing an unprecedented number of burials, a photograph of men praying on the roofs of buildings. These are just a few examples of the resources generated by the Jewish community in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Archives has been enriched by Shuli's energetic and comprehensive collection of these materials.

The following is a recording of Shuli's talk that was included as part of the *Crisis and Hope: YU Voices* series:



3 - Shuli Berger discusses a Yiddish notice urging people to take precautions against coronavirus; a part of the *Crisis and Hope: YU Voices* series

## COVID-19 AND THE LIBRARY: Impressions on Returning to Campus



### A Different Kind of Return

by Hallie (Chaya Sarah) Cantor

Blowing into Stern College that August 17th—right before the Elul winds—I experienced a return that could only be called a “Librarians’ Disorientation Session.” Where to begin? Where to pick up where I left off? Where *did* I leave off?

First, I had to go through the bins full of periodicals. This task was particularly eerie: it was as if time had stopped in early spring. Magazine covers showed people schmoozing, touching—socializing very much not at a distance, with not a care in the world. Articles featured vacation hot spots, up-and-coming companies, or ads for conferences. And, of course, the elections.

Then, as I sorted the periodicals in chronological order, history ominously unfolded. Pandemic. Lockdown. Business closures. Bankruptcy. How to have fun under quarantine. How to wear a mask. How to homeschool your kids. How to be with your kids 24/7 and stay sane. How to Zoom. Anything online. A vaccine just around the corner. And sadly, who died. And now, the riots.



So far, the entire building is super quiet. Like a tomb, really--a reminder that things are not normal. Whenever I enter, the security desk checks my temperature and has me fill out a questionnaire. Every. Single Day. I find the new health protocols cumbersome, but . . . I follow orders.

Usually there are three of us at Hedi Steinberg. There too, it is very quiet. But the lack of distractions -- i.e. patrons at the desk, drop-in visitors--helps to keep me focused on physical work while saving later hours for some "remote" activities at home.

To be honest, I will miss working at home. It was therapeutic, allowing me respite in the afternoon and enabling me to work at peak evening hours. What a relief not to have to ride the trains, a special ordeal during the summer. I was no longer a hamster on a wheel; I realize that I had grown too complacent. Even after the campus formally reopens, I would love to continue a hybrid schedule. However, I know this is difficult during the academic year, when I must help service the desks and handle print materials.

Working remotely also gave me the flexibility to focus on personal matters. No formal vacation; nevertheless, since April I have put my free time to productive use: editing a soon-to-be published manuscript on Bukharian Jewry, journaling, learning to code, more editing, and reading a slew of books, both fun and professional. And . . . upgrading and learning new software.

I went through five pounds of coffee beans and grown to love my own cooking. (A bit too much. I have, ahem, "broadened" in other areas.) I had the apartment painted and cleared of junk. And I watched a lot of movies.

For me, these seven months will forever be viewed not only as a period of "return" but of "rebirth," where I turned a crisis into growth. However, I must acknowledge the tragedy of so many lives or livelihoods lost. This will linger long after the Elul-Tishrei season ends and the kids finally come back to school. But it has helped me gain appreciation of my health and my work at Yeshiva University.



4 - Coffee beans in action

## Coronavirus Coffee Trends During Quarantine

from an article by Syjil Ashraf in the *Daily Meal*

You are not alone, Chaya Sarah! A survey was conducted in April to see how people are having their coffee while under quarantine.

With so many cafes and restaurants closed, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many people are making food and drinks at home more often than they were before, especially coffee. Our friends at Starbucks shared the results of a recent survey done by YouGov on behalf of Nestlé. It was conducted online between April 28 and April 29 and was based on answers from 1,443 American adults. Here are some of the survey's most interesting trends in at-home coffee during coronavirus quarantine.



Half of Americans drink coffee every day. Most people enjoy homemade coffee and are making it at home. People are building up their coffee reserves, stockpiling their favorite coffees. Millennials miss coffee shop coffee more than older people who tend to make it the way they have always brewed it.

Many are perfecting their coffee-making. Coffee experimentation varies by region, with people in the Northeast being most willing to try something new. Millennials particularly love experimentation. While they often preferred cold brew, they are more likely now to drink hot coffee.



Might these survey results have implications for Starbucks after the coronavirus passes?

You can read the original Daily Meal article by clicking [HERE](#).

## Blue Jays and Bunnies

by Hindishe Lee

A drawback of working remotely is drawing the line when to stop. It's great to be able to set up my own hours (except for CHAT - which is OK!). But I usually feel compelled to answer Wufoo questions (questions the reference librarians receive by email, via the Library Ask Form) when my cell pings (or when the laptop is on & sounds), even late at night. The other downside is that in the library I don't always have to be on the computer. There are often other physical tasks --including helping students with actual physical REF books.

Now, I need to be on the computer for every aspect of library work which takes a toll on my eyes. They are often strained....



My plan is to wait--if possible--til after Sukkot to return to campus. My impression is that NYC has become more volatile recently, with an increase in reported violence over the past few months, often near many of the train stations I use. Working remotely also has a big plus of saving all that money on train fare. My laptop is stationed right by a window with trees where I can see blue jays, cardinals and sparrows hopping about among the branches. Sometimes a bunny or ground hog also makes its appearance. On the minus side, I am using an old laptop which someone kindly gave me, that has no camera or mike, and that has made Zoom problematic. I lost remote connection with the library computer about 2 months ago, due to the laptop's gradual aging. The only real downside to that is not having access to Virtua. This house has no WiFi, but my kind neighbor gave me her WiFi password. That necessitates me to set up the laptop right by the window to catch the signal. The problem is that the laptop needs to be elevated so I am very uncomfortable sitting on a high chair that does not fit close enough to the computer. I have to switch between sitting somewhat contorted or standing. Both ways are very tiring. The good point--at least I move around often & get circulation! I did miss the first day of school at SCW. Every summer, I miss seeing the girls and the professors and look forward to 245 Lex coming to life again. I missed that....

Now that I am assigned to teach a class, I am forced to buy the technology allowing me to utilize Zoom in its entirety, which I plan to take out from some of the government stimulus money I received. The idea of teaching remotely for the first time is a bit nerve-wracking but at the same time very exciting. It all feels so weird. I am ok with continuing to work remotely but it does feel bizarre continuously

communicating with disembodied words, voices and images. Almost like a seance! As they say in Hebrew:

שיש מה זה (That's how it goes!)

## LEAH ADLER A"H MEMORIAL BOOK

by Zvi Erenyi

Following the untimely and tragic passing of our mentor, colleague and friend, Mrs. Leah Adler zt"l, who had directed and built the Gottesman Library for decades, YU Library staff collaborated in assembling a booklet of tributes, recollections and appreciations which was distributed at a gathering in her memory held in the Library building on the Wilf Campus in June 2019. Several faculty, family and colleagues, including YU President, Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, spoke on that occasion, elaborating both her professional achievements and unique personal qualities. Afterwards, a committee formed of her colleagues decided to collect all these presentations and to solicit additional contributions from Leah's family, faculty, colleagues and friends in order to produce a book in her memory. The initial work of compilation has just about concluded and the material gathered is now being shaped into book form by Professor Richard White, former YU faculty member. Once this is done, the editorial committee will review the manuscript, revise it where needed, and send it to the printers, to be published under the aegis of the Library. The book will be distributed free of charge to those who attended the memorial gathering and to Judaica libraries in the U.S. and abroad.



5 - Leah Adler A"H

## CONDOLENCES

We mark the passing this summer of the father of Rina Krautwirth, the mother of Rachel Berliner, the mother of Marlene Austin-Francis, and the father of Shulamis Hes. May their memories be for a blessing and may their children and their families all be granted comfort. In memory of her dad, Dr. Bernard Lichstein, Shulamis's family established a campaign to raise funds for United Hatzalah (a free, volunteer-based emergency medical services (EMS) organization based in Jerusalem).



6 - Hatzalah EMTs respond to a medical emergency.

## YESHIVA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES ANNUAL REPORT



[www.yu.edu/libraries](http://www.yu.edu/libraries) | ANNUAL REPORT

The Gottesman Library was privileged to receive books on Jewish art from the private library of Prof. Vivian B. Mann (1943-2019), Professor Emerita of Jewish Art and Visual Culture at The Jewish Theological Seminary, and, for many years, the Morris and Eva Feld Chair of Judaica at The Jewish Museum. One of the world's foremost experts on the history of Jewish Art, Prof. Mann was a founder of *Images: A Journal in Jewish Art and Visual Culture*, an elected member of the American Academy for Jewish Research, and a prolific author. She championed the "visual turn" in Jewish Studies, and encouraged countless scholars and students.\*

The Library was fortunate to receive a substantial gift of books from the legacy of Ms. Cecile Lowz"l in late 2019.\*\* She survived the Holocaust along with her parents and together they made their way to the US, where they settled on the Upper West Side near Columbia University. Ms. Low found employment at the Belgian Consulate and at commercial outfits where her mastery of several European languages proved highly useful. She was also a talented translator, editor and poet, as well as being musically gifted.

Her spacious apartment was filled to the brim with books, videos and musical recordings, which left only a modest place for the necessities of living. These objects of her collecting passions were testimony to her myriad interests. To mention just two: she was intensely involved with the Esperanto movement. Her library included hundreds of books in Esperanto from all over the world. Many of these were scarce, if not outright rare titles. She enjoyed reading literary works in many languages and was curious about the structure and meaning of words. To aid her exploration, she collected and used hundreds of dictionaries of dozens of languages, well known and obscure ones. Shuli and Zvi had the great privilege and pleasure of exploring her immense library over several visits to her apartment. It was an experience neither of them will easily forget. Transporting the books selected was a laborious task, and Moshe provided invaluable help in this respect.

The Gottesman Library received a substantial gift of books, periodical issues and research material from the library of Professor Israel J. Katz, through the intervention of Rabbi Dr. Herbert Dobrinsky, YU Vice President and expert on Sephardi studies. These were concentrated in the area of Jewish ethnomusicology, Professor Katz's specialty.

Professor Katz received his Ph. D. from UCLA in 1967 and taught at McGill, Columbia, and the University of California, Santa Cruz and Davis. He conducted extensive research into Sephardi folk literature and ethnomusicology and this was certainly reflected in the material he chose to donate to the Gottesman Library. His gift was particularly welcome as the Library was thus able to substantially strengthen its holdings in music history and liturgical music.

The Zoltan Erenyi Fund made generous donations in memory of Leah Adler, A"H. Representative examples: maps of Lodz and the Lodz ghetto prepared during WWII; novellae by Rabbi Moshe Greenwald, the "Arugat ha-Bosem." Fifteen late 20th - and early 21st -century manuscripts (in twenty-seven volumes) with exquisite calligraphy and illumination by multiple artists were presented by Jack Belz and now reside in the Rare Book Room. The gift included funds for exhibition vitrines for the manuscripts. Ron Rubin donated an important group of early American newspapers with Judaic content.

In anticipation of the Hedi Steinberg Library renovation with a grant from the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) and earmarked by New York Assembly Member Nily Rozic, Head Librarian Edith Lubetski and Director of University Libraries Paul Glassman worked with the Whalen Berez Group

and architect Hila Stern to create a final design. Librarians were very busy over the summer deaccessioning volumes and packing them into boxes to be shipped to foreign destinations including Jewish communities in Tanzania and the Philippines, the Council on Foreign Relations, and Better World Books. They also had to take books off reserve and reshelve them in Circ. And they weeded the Hebrew periodicals. Everything is getting shifted around in this monumental undertaking.

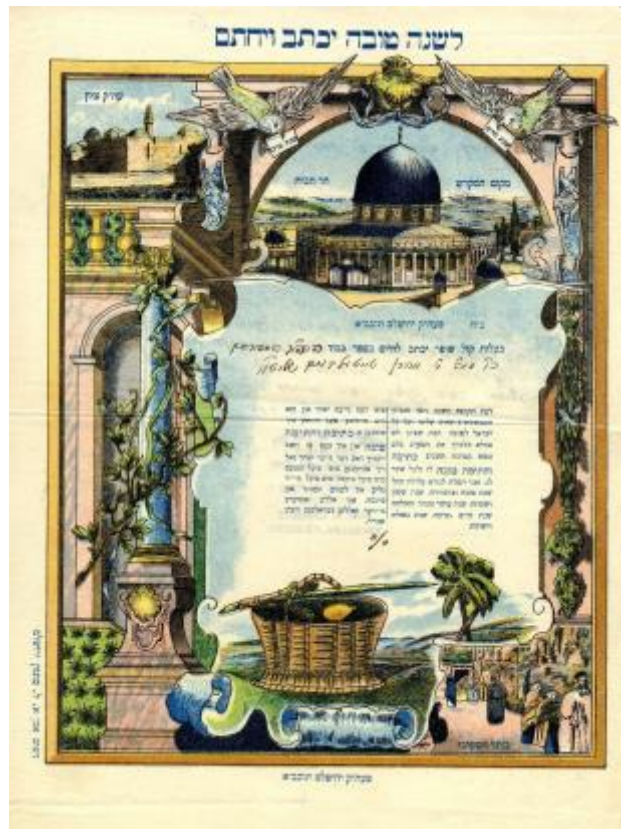
A new portal for [Digital Special Collections](#) was launched. Archivist Deena Schwimmer and Archives Associate Sara Saiger achieved migration of collections from Islandora, massive data input, and addition of new collections such as Yeshiva University historic photographs. Archivist Deena Schwimmer wrote several blogposts on noteworthy content within the updated site.

- From an obituary by Prof. Jonathan D. Sarna in *H-Judaic*, May 7, 2019.

\*\* The short biographies of Ms. Cecile Low z"l and Prof. Katz were submitted by Shuli Berger & Zvi Erenyi.

## ASSESSMENT OF ARCHIVES

by Deena Schwimmer



7 - Rosh Hashanah card from Jerusalem, 1920s, in the University Archives

In August, a professional assessment of the Libraries' Archives program was conducted by experts through [DHPSNY](#), the Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York, which provides planning and education services to institutions holding historical records and library research materials in New York State.

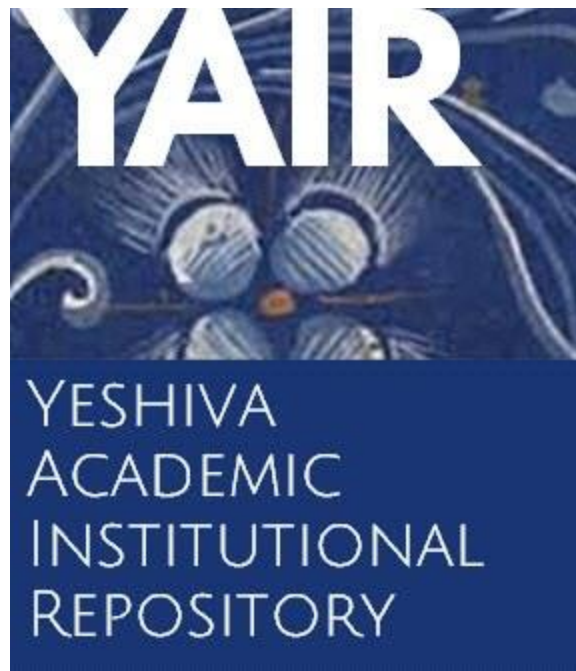
DHPSNY's Archival Needs Assessment, one of four types of planning services offered, consists of a comprehensive evaluation in the areas of policies and administration, collections care and storage, building and facilities operations, and environmental conditions. In applying for an assessment, the Archives sought to obtain outside evaluation of its program and expert guidance for its advancement. Notification that the Archives had been awarded an assessment was received in May, by which time they were being conducted virtually versus on-site due to COVID-19.

After submitting a detailed pre-assessment questionnaire, Archives staff met with an assessor for a 3+ hour virtual session to discuss the Archives program. Director of University Libraries Paul Glassman attended a portion of the meeting, as did a member of the University's Facilities team, who provided important information on aspects of the physical building and environmental conditions.

Some positive feedback was received at the session, in particular with regards to the Archives' digitization program. A full report with recommendations will be received in the coming months.

## [YU ACADEMIC REPOSITORY \(YAIR\): \*Kavod\* under Covid](#) (🔗)

by [Stephanie Gross](#)



One of the most amazing, if not unexpected, turns of fate ironically began to occur right after Covid lockdown began. Scholars from across the world began requesting access to theses and dissertations that were findable either through Google or YULIS. These requests would have been even more welcome had we all been on campus, close to the collections, scanners, etc. But persevere we did! Hao

Zeng batch uploaded honors theses and dissertations that had been digitized by ProQuest. The Master's theses are cataloged (now at the editing stage) and some were scanned on a case by case basis. The most requested theses are the Revel Master's theses. These are brought from the basement as requested and scanned.

But to gain a clearer understanding of the short but spectacular two years of the new repository, let me just backtrack a bit.

YAIR came into being as a brainchild of Library Director Paul Glassman. The repository was included in the first and second strategic plans for several reasons. The primary one was to ensure a digital venue through which faculty (and students) could showcase their intellectual work with Open-Access (OA) status. All contributors were requested to sign a release form guaranteeing copyright protection under Creative Commons licenses. The principle stakeholders were thought to be faculty who would be desirous of having work associated with YU and at the same time freely available to a global audience. However, it soon became evident that many faculty had reservations, either due to publisher restrictions or the bother of furnishing document files. It then fell to the students to make the repository a living organism of student creativity, intellect, and academic prestige.

As Scholarly Communication librarian, I attended several webinars sponsored by bepress Digital Commons. I heard testimonials not only from librarians, but from students and faculty, on the effectiveness of having work housed and accessible on a university platform. I decided to follow their lead, and in short order, began a retrospective scanning and uploading of student publications. One publication (okay, it's my favorite example) is [Women in Science](#). While examining the print copies, I was struck by "YU Office of Admissions" on the back cover of most of them. This was adequate proof that student journals of quality were deemed a lucrative investment that would promote YU, the science program and its students. Encouraged by this find, I reached out to faculty advisors, student editors, and others for ideas of which publications to include. The recent [YAIR Update](#) lists titles of such finds.

With the "return" of students to classes, even more exciting developments have come about. A *Commentator* correspondent, and president of the YC government, Zachary Greenberg, contacted me for an hour-long interview about the recent digitization of student newspapers on YAIR (click [HERE](#) for Zachary Greenberg's article in *The Commentator*). And, as if that wasn't good enough news, he inquired about the possibility/suitability of sharing student government documents, including student court trial decisions and student government election results.

Faculty contributions have seen an uptick from the Bernard Revel school since the appointment of the new Dean. Professor Daniel Rynhold. And, watch this space! Beginning Spring 2021, all YU dissertations will be posted by yours truly in a collaboration with all five graduate schools and UMI/ProQuest.

## YU GRADUATE WINS ABEL PRIZE IN MATHEMATICS

by Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

Sometimes I find that it gives me strength—especially during these remarkably trying times—to hear stories that remind us of our purpose and mission in this world. Such a story was announced last week

when we learned that Professor Hillel Furstenberg was awarded the Abel Prize, which is the mathematics equivalent of a Nobel Prize.



8 - Hillel Furstenberg. Photo Courtesy of Yosef Adest, Wikimedia Commons

Professor Furstenberg escaped from Nazi Germany after Kristallnacht to settle in New York where he studied in our high school and in Yeshiva College. He was recognized early as a math prodigy, studying in math college courses when he was in high school, and in our math graduate program when he was in college. At the time of his college graduation, he simultaneously earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in math. He then continued his studies at Princeton, taught at MIT and made Aliyah to continue his illustrious career at Hebrew University and Ben-Gurion University.

I met Professor Furstenberg in Israel at the start of my tenure as president for I sought his advice about our plans of growing Math and Science at YU. He deeply impressed me with his sterling character, genuine humility and deep intelligence. In our conversation, he organically interwove sources and insights from the math and literary fields with citations from biblical, talmudic and rabbinic passages. His profound connection to Israel and the Jewish people were self-evident. I walked away deeply inspired from our encounter.

Yesterday, I spoke with him to congratulate him on this latest achievement. He shared with me some of his feelings about YU, as the educational institution to which he owes much of his life's success. He spoke about studying under Professor Jekuthiel Ginsburg, the chair of the YC Math Department as well as his time sitting in Rabbi Soloveitchik's shiur.

As YU strengthens our STEM offerings, Professor Furstenberg remains a stellar example of what a Yeshiva University education can provide. His experience at YU not only led to his great future academic and professional success but also helped lay the foundation of Jewish values on which he has based his life.

Professor Furstenberg is an embodiment of the unique synthesis that is the hallmark of our community and is a walking Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of the name of God). His impact on the world through his enormous contributions to his field and his exemplary character is a reflection of our sacred mission.

Today our collective focus is on the health and safety of our community and society. This is what is needed at this moment of urgency. Our hearts break in thinking of the human consequences of this virus. As we endeavor to care for all those affected by the disease, we draw comfort in the knowledge



that our students will be the leaders of tomorrow who embody our values of kindness and giving, seek to sanctify the name of God and better the world around us. They give us joy today and confidence in our future.

As we begin the month of Nissan, the month of miracles, we pray to Hashem, [God] that he heals this wounded world and gives us the strength and wisdom to fulfill His mission for us.

Wishing you safety and peace.

Ari Berman

## LIBRARY BOOK TALK: Prof. Aaron Koller

by Marlene Schiffman



9 - Marc Chagall's *The Sacrifice of Isaac*

On September 14 at 12 PM, Dr. Aaron Koller who teaches Near Eastern studies in the Robert M. Beren Department of Jewish Studies presented a talk on his new book, *Unbinding Isaac: The Significance of the Akedah for Modern Jewish Thought*. Tina Weiss served as moderator.

The talk was a wide-ranging discussion of the neo-Kantian philosophers,\* Rav Soloveitchik, whose books reflected their philosophy, and the Akedah (sacrifice of Isaac) itself. A theme of the presentation was the evolving thought of Rav Soloveitchik over some five decades on issues such as the nature of objectivity and subjectivity (neo-Kantianism), anthropomorphism of God, the charismatic personality whose subjective truth coincides with God's truth, and the nature of the religious personality who is submissive to God and willingly makes a sacrifice. Dr. Koller pointed out that the Rav's understanding of the bilateral covenant between God and Abraham, while it binds the two together, does not account for the presence of Isaac in the story.

The Bible states that as they were headed up the mountain to the place where Isaac was to be sacrificed, "They walked together." When Isaac asked, "Where is the sheep for the sacrifice?" the Targum explains that Abraham told him that if there is no lamb, you, Isaac, will be that lamb. Still "they walked together...with whole hearts." Since Isaac was apparently an adult when this incident occurred,

how could Abraham, one hundred years older, have physically overpowered him? It then becomes obvious that Isaac was cooperating with the plan.

At this point, the whole covenant is at stake. Either Abraham will kill Isaac and put an end to the promise that he would be the father of a multitude through Isaac, or, if he did not follow through, then he will have broken the covenant by his disobedience. The solution to this tension is Abraham's certainty that God will not allow the sacrifice to continue. He is right; God backs down. Now Abraham, with the upper hand, declares that God must now promise to forgive the transgressions of his descendants forever.

This narrative was certainly a new and refreshing way to view the Akedah on the eve of Rosh Hashanah when we read the biblical story. The story ends with the sacrifice of a ram instead of Isaac and the symbolic blowing of the ram's horn every Rosh Hashanah.

May this year's blowing of the shofar, the ram's horn, bring freedom, renewal, and a sweet new year.

\*Neo Kantianism was the dominant philosophical movement in Germany from roughly 1870 to the First World War. Rav Soloveitchik was principally influenced by Hermann Cohen at Marburg University about whom he wrote his dissertation in 1930.



10 - Professor Aaron Koller discusses his book *Unbinding Isaac*. Recorded Sept. 14, 2020

## TEAMS ROLLS OUT NEW PHONE SYSTEM

by J.B. Holderness

During the week of July 6th, our phone system was transitioned from the Cisco 7900 series Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) telephones to the Microsoft Teams software system. It has been about 9 years since those of us (in the Gottesman Library uptown) last changed phone systems from the traditional analog phones that required Verizon service lines into the basement and then split to each individual office. Of course, we had phones before computers. When additional jacks for computer networking were added to each room over 30 years ago, the internet speeds would have been too slow to consider audio or video, plus phone calls over the internet hadn't been conceived. Then in the past decade, it became increasingly common for internet companies to start providing telephone calling as a service. This is why cable companies (Spectrum, Cablevision) offer a "triple-play" service of TV, Internet, and phone to your home, all using their existing cable network. In the office, we replaced our older analog phones with Cisco phones that use the same internet service as our PC network.



Now, the trend is toward even less usage of hardwired phones in favor of consolidating all communications through a cell phone. In addition to being cost effective to migrate to a software-based system like Microsoft Teams, it also unifies the mixture of older analog phones (on the Beren campus) with the newer Cisco IP phones (on the Wilf campus). The Teams phone system allows each staff member to choose any device they want to become their "desk phone." The Teams software can run on Windows 7, Windows 10, Mac, Android Phones, iPhones, and various tablets.

Upon logging in with your personal email and password, the phone number previously assigned to your desk phone is now assigned to your Teams account. For those staff members who interact with members of the community, there are shared "pool" phone numbers that ring simultaneously on multiple Teams accounts, until one staff member answers the call. If you have the Teams app installed on both your laptop and your smartphone, it will ring simultaneously on both, allowing you to pick up the call from either one. When someone leaves you a voicemail, an email alert is sent to your Outlook account, along with the attached audio file and a text transcription of the message.

To help staff fully understand the features of the new Teams phone system, Paul Sebben, from ITS, led a series of online training sessions. You can view one of the recorded sessions (from August 5th) by clicking [HERE](#).

Toward the end of the year, we will be receiving a few new hardwired Teams phones to use at the Circulation and Reserve desks in Gottesman, Pollack and Hedi Steinberg Libraries to replace the Cisco IP phones (They can only make outgoing calls right now.).



11 - The Microsoft staff in 1978: the original "Teams?"

## ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE FROM JERUSALEM

by Rabbi Mayer Horowitz



This year, the Jewish people and the entire world have undergone a very trying time. It seems like just yesterday that we prayed on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur for a year of Peace and good health. To our regret, it would seem that we have taken good health as a given. Heaven has shown us that man is a fragile being. This year, in the prayer in which we acknowledge God's control of the future, we will better understand the phrase 'to be saved from plague' and hopefully will say it with much greater fervor than we did in the past.

In our daily prayers, we mention that in one moment God elevates the downtrodden and lowers the haughty. Today, there is no one who doubts this when they see how the entire world has changed so drastically. Too many of us have suffered and/or felt the suffering of others, both in a physical and an economic sense.

Here in Israel although things have been rough, we have had a relatively low percentage of deaths related to the Corona plague, but it has affected everyone's daily life to the point where we are unsure of how to deal with day-to-day problems, with our families, and with our own aspirations.

May we merit internal happiness for ourselves, *true joy* from our families, complete with all that we need and desire, in a year of tranquility for Jews the world over.

Rabbi Mayer Horowitz, Bostoner Rebbe

Jerusalem

Rosh Hashana 5781 , 2020



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