



ISSUE # 17

MARCH 2021

VIRTUAL MINI-SYMPOSIUM 2021



1 - NYPL has Patience adjusting to health protocols

This year's annual Mini-symposium was a great success with many attendees and three absorbing guest speakers. Thanks to J.B. for tech support and Stephanie for hosting the sessions. (My virtual stuffed pita lunch was better than I could imagine!) Here is a summary of the three lectures and the presentation by the Steering Committee at Yeshiva University Libraries.

"Hopping on the Virtual Reference Bandwagon: Getting Acclimated and Best Practices,"
Presented by Linda Miles



Synopsis by Nicole Buehler

The 2021 Mini-Symposium for YU Libraries staff opened with Linda Miles, Assistant Professor at Hostos Community College (CUNY), and a presentation on her institution's chat reference and remote services. Our own Yeshiva University Library chat reference is entering its 11th month of service this February. The chat service grew out of a necessity to aid students, faculty, and staff while the library building itself was closed due to the unprecedented time of COVID-19. The chat service opens a doorway to interesting and diverse research help, questions, and inquiries about our unique collections.

Linda's presentation was entitled "Hopping on the Virtual Reference Bandwagon: Getting Acclimated and Best Practices." Like YU Libraries, the implementation of their chat reference service happened when the University closed last March due to COVID-19. A term used often throughout Linda's presentation was "up-skilling," which results from librarians and students working at varying levels of comfort and expertise. It is important to understand that patrons who use the chat service come from all walks of life and may be unfamiliar with library services and technology.

With the implementation of chat services, there are new challenges of communication. Throughout the speech, Linda discussed the development of Hostos Community College chat service. One development was creating a portal to chat with a librarian that was accessible and easy to find on the homepage. Most notably, was the development of canned messages for a variety of situations. The canned messages ranged from personal messages set up by the librarian themselves, such as greetings, clarifying topic, course/professor, etc., to other types of messages covering topics such as tutoring, remote computer lab, printing, etc. Further, their chat services have Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) integrated into the chat box for librarians. The FAQs allow a librarian to quickly search within the chat box for a specific topic (very similar to our resource guides) that a student is requesting. Lastly, Hostos has integrated Zoom meetings into their chat service. If a user has a question that could be more easily

answered through a Zoom call, the librarian will suggest a meeting and then send the Zoom link to the user—all within chat.

I sent out an email to all YU Library chatters and asked for suggestions for our canned messages. There were so many ideas! We now have seven shared canned messages that vary from canvas help, offline access, alumni help, Grab & Go, and scanning requests. We also have an automatic greeting message that is sent to users if a librarian has not responded within 30 seconds: "Welcome to chat with Yeshiva University Libraries. Someone will be with you soon. Please provide your name & email in case we get disconnected."

Synopsis by Chaya Sarah (Hallie) Cantor

Back in March 2020, right before The Great Change, Linda's staff had a premonition that the campus would undergo lockdown. "Three of us came together in an ad hoc way," she explained. "There was no organized start."

They set up LibChat—half Lib Answers, half Spring Share Lib Guides. They included widgets to acclimate themselves to the system in order to orient colleagues (staff of eight), each with his or her own range of skills. During this first step—which Linda called "upskilling"—librarians and staff came in with different levels of comfort and expertise. In all, there were six tech tutors, a few students, and a burning desire to keep individuals employed in an economic downturn.

Initially, Linda found interactions frequently disjointed. As explanations depend greatly on visual cues, drawbacks became apparent: lack of gestures, eye contact or body language. Linda sometimes wondered if the patron was even still there, or if the information even went out.

Problems of remote learning, as Linda learned, also involve not only ever-changing new technologies, but inconsistent and mismatched technologies. The staff may have one set of hardware, the patron another, with different tools and interfaces. Range of wi-fi may differ, as well as accessibility.

Linda faces additional challenges at a campus where many students are the first in their families to attend higher education. Many are older; many, because of family responsibilities, juggle part-time, or even full-time, jobs with classwork. (If they are still employed!) Some even live in homeless shelters. In addition to tech support, Linda declared, "We also want to provide emotional support." It was up to the librarian or staff person to maintain a sense of normalcy and camaraderie through these hard times.

Linda has had a few home life distractions of her own (e.g., barking dog). Nevertheless, she has consistently maintained her commitment to coaching students through certain processes. The integration of Zoom into LibChat made seeing actual faces an option—as well as seeing other homes. (This was not always appreciated by some students.) Screen-sharing, even two-way, was made possible.

"Patience," said Ben Franklin, "is a virtue." Here, it is greatly needed, as chats take more time and students need to go at their own pace, not the librarian's. Linda reviews the content and goes over steps repeatedly with patrons to ensure their new skill set. Positive interactions are reinforced by "checking in" on the patrons—do they feel comfortable, confident, and capable? Do they feel ready for the next step? Linda stressed establishing a follow-up.

Customer service is crucial for alleviating the anxiety of confronting an unfamiliar screen. Through bytes and pixels, the librarian must provide the same quality service on a par with face-to-face reference. Staff must appear human and approachable. The “smile” in your language, Linda urged, enhances the screen-sharing experience.

In all, remote reference has not only broadened library staff experience but proven empowering to students at Hostos Community College. Comparing hands-on instruction with mere direction to material, Linda mentioned the Chinese proverb about giving a man to fish so that he’ll eat for a day. “Here,” she said, “we are teaching someone how to fish.” He will learn to search critically for a lifetime.

The slideshow of Linda's presentation can be viewed by clicking [HERE](#).

"Opening Up AskNYPL's Virtual Reference Services to Branch Staff," Presented by Bernard van Maarseveen



Synopsis by Yosef Cohen

This was a fascinating presentation by Bernard van Maarseveen, Reference Services Manager of the storied New York Public Library, an institution that one might think would not have to grapple too much with the mundane issues that bedevil smaller institutions—like the need to husband resources, to be on constant alert for system malfunction, to find staffing up to fielding all manner of inquiries. A customer-oriented and customer-friendly approach our presenter sees as a core requirement for the job. Limitations of service information, by contrast, make clear to users what they can and cannot expect when using the library. They won't tell you the value of your used car nor give medical advice. Monitoring web traffic, the physical movement of resources, personal data—just keeping track of everything—must consume many, many man/person hours. Bernard mentioned 1968 as the maiden year of the library's telephone reference service.

Because NYPL is a system of libraries, one of the challenges he mentioned was the need to move from centralized to distributive services: providing equality of opportunity, as it were, throughout the boroughs.

Technical issues were discussed. A good deal of his staff's time, for example, is taken up with creating and maintaining customer accounts and ensuring that the various levels of access and privilege function smoothly via their web page. I don't think he told us how many customers NYPL deals with on a daily basis, but they must be legion, with a corresponding level of complexity.

Perhaps the centerpiece of the talk was the description and analysis of the Library's Contact Us function. Statistics followed: pre-Pandemic—around 2,500 per month, and post-Pandemic—around 3,500 per month—numbers of emails received. But “The phone is still a big driver of our business—3,000 ‘queued’ per month.”

Not surprisingly, Bernard made clear the need for strategies to deal with the influx of queries, an influx that could lead on occasion to "triage" situations (a grim parallel to what is now happening in some hospitals).

Within the "Contact Us" function, chat has assumed great importance. As we all know, chat can be a very frustrating experience, characterized by a linearity of communication that greatly differs from the multiple points of contact, including body language, that we are accustomed to in face-to-face exchanges. Branch managers were solicited to find chat operators who could communicate in writing. This group was given one-hour training sessions. At first fifty staffers were interested; then another forty were added. Training focused on the technical aspects of the library chat. Transcripts were used to record how the interaction went and to review the chat for criticisms or to commend chat performance. Personnel must adept at "sussing out" what the customer wants, determining what level of research they require, and knowing how to make things clear and to the point. The transcripts also provide a fascinating glimpse into the variety of queries—“Do you have a copy of the original bill of sale of Manhattan Island?”—as well as enabling the Library to monitor the quality of assistance given. Queries could obviously range from the simple to the detailed and scholarly, but whatever the case, chats would range from ten to fifteen minutes. One of the valuable features of chat was the ability to transfer queries to personnel better able to help with them. Some staff speak Spanish and, with the help of apps like Google Translate, queries from speakers of almost any language could be handled with some degree of effectiveness. Chat, he pointed out, has the added benefit of creating "a good community vibe."

In July, NYPL adopted Amazon Web Service, or, beguilingly, AWS (perhaps JAWS would be more appropriate for anything Amazon), allowing for two queues, one for account questions, one for e-books, and the like. This service is also known as Amazon Connect. Its real time metrics monitor how many calls are handled per shift and had they picked up the calls or missed them? Innovative's Sierra is used for keeping accounts and is staffed by four. Four others handle the general ask-it queue. NYPL also has an internal web page with links to help sheets by the name of LAIR. This guide, shared by all staff, is a FAQ maintained by a staffer and includes updates on technical aspects and news about the library.

E-books pose unique challenges, because the technology is so much in flux, with changing formats, "mergers and acquisitions," and so on. In this context, we heard about E-Library, Access 360, and Overdrive, that later became Libby (“our preferred book platform”). Libby handles the audiobooks. NYPL is attempting to integrate all these into a single interface which is very complicated. They need a fulltime

staff to keep things up-to-date and do a lot of trouble shooting. Meanwhile, they keep statistics on who is using the library and how. They are also considering whether to maintain Grab & Go services after the pandemic.

On an optimistic note, Bernard pointed out that when things get back to normal, personnel at branch libraries are expected to have updated skills, so that there would be somewhat less pressure on the central library as branch libraries offer more services than hitherto.

"Libraries and 'Open' Initiatives: Opportunities for Service Leadership," Presented by Richard Kearney



Synopsis by Chaya Sarah (Hallie) Cantor

In the third presentation of our Mini-Symposium, Richard Kearney, Electronic Resources Librarian, William Paterson University, discussed the library as a sort of brokerage firm between a clashing academia and cyberspace.

Calling “stagnant” the current status of open access, Richard pointed to budget austerity, which has severely impacted on sustainability. The mergers and acquisitions of smaller publishing companies by larger ones have resulted in an “oligopolistic structure” that has further eroded affordability, access, and equity.

Academic libraries can step in because of certain advantages:

- They already occupy a unique position by serving all disciplines and cultivating relationships with faculty.
- They are attuned to trends within the information ecosystem and usually employ staff with expertise in the related technologies, standards, policies, and practices.
- They know how to “simplify, simplify, simplify”—the OA mantra—as far as translating open access in plain language to faculty. The William Paterson University Library has pushed for

“supplemental funding” of OA journals and requested \$10,000 to offset the cost of Article Processing Charges (APCs). In addition, the Library has offered to administer the program, promote it to faculty, and help them locate journals of interest, review applications, and process payment of APC invoices.

The program was launched in Fall 2015 by campus-wide publicity, followed by the Library’s presentations at five college-level faculty meetings, and supported by a LibGuide. An evaluation “checklist” was designed for reviewing journals and publishers for transparency, integrity, and reputation. In cases where an APC exceeded funding, faculty was usually able to obtain the balance from their department or college.

In February 2017, the Library hired a Digital Initiatives Librarian to build and manage an institutional repository (IR). In early 2018, the WPSphere was launched and promoted through the Faculty Senate, Research and Scholarship Council, department meetings, and Open Access Week programming. The WPSphere includes contents indexed by Google and customized to comply with the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH).

To encourage faculty publishing in an IR, the Library drafted an institutional open access policy. Representation on the Faculty Senate enabled the Library to add this item to the charges of the Research and Scholarship Council. The Library can identify faculty concerns about OA policy and emphasize how OA policy could *empower* faculty to retain control over their scholarship.

A draft policy and accompanying FAQ have now been approved at the Council level. Currently the Library is engaged in discussions with each of the colleges to present relevant documents, answer questions, and collect additional feedback. The goal: to get as much support in place before the policy is presented to the full Senate—hopefully in Spring 2021, but with this pandemic. . . . who knows?

In addition to faculty work, the Library has welcomed input from students—graduate and honors theses, dissertations, and capstone projects. All of these will be formalized through faculty partnerships.

When, in May 2019, the New Jersey Legislature enacted a law requiring all colleges in the state to “submit a plan . . . to expand the use of open textbooks and commercial digital learning materials,” William Paterson appointed a task force co-chaired by a librarian and an instructional technologist to collect faculty input and draft a plan. The Library had already been looking at ways to support OER adoption/implementation on campus, by studying examples from neighboring campuses. Moreover, the state academic library consortium (VALE-NJ) had already become a member of the Open Textbook Network and received training.

A taskforce survey revealed that many faculty:

- Already create their own material for courses;
- Are willing to consider incorporating OER into their courses and even make their courses fully OER;
- Make extensive, though uneven, use of Library e-resources (articles much more than books);
- Show concern with quality;

- Have strong interest in receiving assistance. Modest goals include converting five courses a year to OER over five years; and building an infrastructure to support an OER adoption/production program. A new Library ad hoc committee has been formed to assist implementation. Both the Library and Instruction and Research Technology unit maintain a web presence for OER support. The Digital Initiatives Librarian has installed Pressbooks as a resource for faculty use; examples of resources created through faculty/librarian partnerships include a text produced at Rowan University. As Richard observed, the pandemic has spurred greater interest in OER. To be sure, it has become the catalyst for many things in the academic world. Marching alongside, every step of the way, is the academic library.

The slideshow of Richard's presentation can be viewed by clicking [HERE](#).

Steering Committee Update



2 - Architectural rendering of the renovated Hedi Steinberg North Wing Library

Synopsis by Marlene Schiffman

The Steering Committee consists of five working groups:

1. Outreach
2. Collections
3. Instruction
4. Facilities, and
5. Cross-functions

Outreach has established a marketing plan and is responsible for staff development and signage. They also work with a student advisory group. **Collections** is concerned with reducing duplications and implementing a collection development policy. **Instruction** is implementing the curriculum map to develop a curriculum in library skills, especially with first-year students. They have devised tutorial

videos and in-class exercises in a pilot program for English courses. **Facilities** is working to identify priorities for equipment and spaces through a survey. The HSL renovation will yield a dedicated classroom. The goal is also to implement welcoming service points. **Cross-functions** attempts to improve communications between the libraries and other campus agencies. The new -hire open house has now been transferred into a virtual event. They are also facilitating more OER resources.

The slideshow of the the steering committee update can be viewed by clicking [HERE](#).

MESSAGE FROM JULIE AUSTER, HUMAN RESOURCES



Julie Auster, Chief Human Resources Officer at YU, has been keeping us updated on the latest University protocols for health and safety during the pandemic. She has sent emails to all staff, delivering the latest information and plans for the coming months:

Pre-Passover:

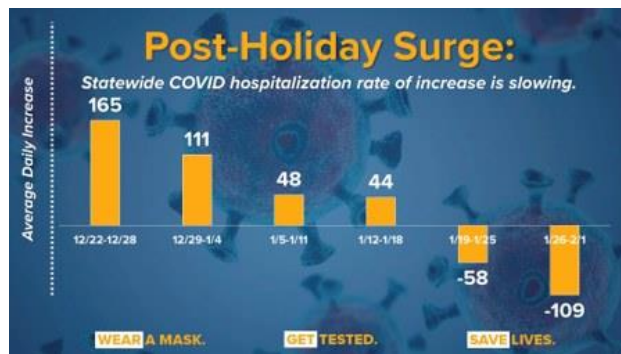
- We have encouraged undergraduates who are planning on travelling outside of NY and its contiguous states to consider leaving the residence halls by March 18th, one week before the Holiday. If they plan their departure too close to Passover, they run the risk of their trip being cancelled due to travel disruptions or the possibility of being under quarantine. If they leave by March 18th, they are more likely to be able to travel to their Passover destination without issues.
- We have already reminded the undergraduates that our campus and residence halls will be closed on **March 25 at 10AM** throughout the Holiday and told them to plan accordingly.

Post-Passover break:

- In order to accommodate undergraduates in need of travel quarantine and to ensure the safety of our campus community, **shuirim and classes from April 6th until April 11th will all be remote**. In-person classes for our undergraduate students will resume on Monday, April 12.
- University services on the undergraduate campuses, including the beit midrash, **library**, cafeteria and athletic centers, **will reopen on April 6, 2021**.

- As we have done after the summer and winter intersessions, all students will be required to submit a negative COVID PCR test before returning to campus - even if they are fully vaccinated.
- **All faculty and staff will also be required to submit a negative COVID PCR test to COVID_HR@yu.edu within 3 days of April 12th** - even if they are fully vaccinated and even if they have been continuing to work on campus. We will attempt to offer PCR tests on campus prior to April 12th (but you should not solely rely on that happening) and will inform you of the sign-up details as applicable. You should feel free to take your test at your local pharmacy or testing center between April 6th and April 12th when school resumes, but we will also run a **testing site on campus on April 6 from noon to 2:00 PM in Furst Hall, second floor.** If you would like to take your test on campus, please sign up by clicking [HERE](#).
- If you take your test off campus, please be sure to submit the results to COVID_HR@YU.edu **on or prior to April 12.** If you take your test on-campus, the results will be submitted to the University by the testing organization.
- Anyone (faculty, staff or student) who has had COVID-19 within the past 90 days, and has provided documentation to COVID_HR@yu.edu, will not be required to present a negative test prior to return to campus --unless they are travelling from the non-contiguous states and are required to do so by NY State.

INFECTIONS AREN'T WHAT MATTERS



3 - Data from NY State, Feb. 2

The news about the vaccines continues to be excellent—and the public discussion of it continues to be more negative than the facts warrant. Here’s the key fact: All five vaccines with public results have eliminated COVID-19 deaths. They have also drastically reduced hospitalizations. “They’re all good trial results,” Caitlin Rivers, an epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins University, told me. “It’s great news.” “The vaccines are poised to deliver what people so desperately want: an end, however protracted, to this pandemic,” as Julia Marcus of Harvard Medical School recently wrote in *The Atlantic*. Why is the public understanding more negative than it should be? Much of the confusion revolves around the meaning of the word “effective.”

What do we care about?

In the official language of research science, a vaccine is typically considered effective only if it prevents people from coming down with any degree of illness. With a disease that's always or usually horrible, like ebola or rabies, that definition is also the most meaningful one. But it's not the most meaningful definition for most coronavirus infections.

Whether you realize it or not, you have almost certainly had a coronavirus. Coronaviruses have been circulating for decades, if not centuries, and they're often mild. The common cold can be a coronavirus. The world isn't going to eliminate coronaviruses—or this particular one, known as SARS-CoV-2--anytime soon. Yet we don't need to eliminate it for life to return to normal. We instead need to downgrade it from a deadly pandemic to a normal virus. Once that happens, adults can go back to work, and children back to school. Grandparents can nuzzle their grandchildren, and you can meet your friends at a restaurant. As Dr. Ashish Jha, the dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, told me this weekend: "I don't actually care about infections. I care about hospitalizations and deaths and long-term complications."

The data

By those measures, all five of the vaccines—from Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Novavax and Johnson & Johnson—look extremely good. Of the roughly 75,000 people who have received one of the five in a research trial, not a single person has died from COVID, and only a few people appear to have been hospitalized. None have remained hospitalized 28 days after receiving a shot.

I assume you would agree that any vaccine that transforms COVID into something much milder than a typical flu deserves to be called effective. "In terms of the severe outcomes, which is what we really care about, the news is fantastic," Dr. Aaron Richterman, an infectious-disease specialist at the University of Pennsylvania, said.

The variants

What about the highly contagious new virus variants that have emerged in Britain, Brazil and South Africa? The South African variant does appear to make the vaccines less effective at eliminating infections. Fortunately, there is no evidence yet that it increases deaths among vaccinated people. Two of the five vaccines—from Johnson & Johnson and Novavax—have reported some results from South Africa, and none of the people there who received a vaccine died of COVID. "People are still not getting serious illness. They're still not dying," Dr. Rebecca Wurtz of the University of Minnesota School of Public Health told me.... The vaccines still provide considerable protection against the variant, albeit not quite as much as against the original version. Some protection appears to be enough to turn this coronavirus into a fairly normal disease in the vast majority of cases.

"This variant is clearly making it a little tougher to get the most vigorous response that you would want to have," Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, said. "But still, for severe disease, it's looking really good."

The New York Times--February 1, 2021

REALM (REopening Archives, Libraries and Museums): TESTS 7 & 8



Tests were conducted to study the effect of cold and heat on the surface survivability of the COVID-19 virus. Four materials that were previously tested at standard office temperature (68 to 72°F; 22±2°C) will be held at a temperature of 35.6 ±3.6°F (2 ±2°C) for the “cold” test (Test 7) .2 ±3.6°F (29 ±2°C) for the “warm” test (Test 8). Test results released February 11 show that attenuation rates (reduction of viruses) in colder temperatures were significantly slower compared to the warmer and ambient (room) temperatures. Tests were done on library materials hardcover and softcover book covers, plastic protective covers, and expanded polyethylene foam used in storage and shipping. In a webinar on January 29th about the REopening Archives, Libraries and Museums Project, listeners were presented with updates, latest results, and summaries of what is known and unknown about the virus. Free resources were highlighted to facilitate local decision making. Presenters shared their strategies implemented at their institutions.

LIBRARY BOOK TALKS IN SPRING SEMESTER

Synopses by Zvi Erenyi

Library Book Talks Spring 2021

<p>25 JANUARY Monday, 7:30 PM Via Zoom</p>	<p>library.yu.edu</p> <p>Joanne Jacobson Professor Emerita of English Former Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Yeshiva College</p> <p>Every Last Breath A Memoir of Two Illnesses</p> 
<p>9 FEBRUARY Tuesday, 7:30 PM Via Zoom</p>	<p>Marcelo Saúl Braitman Adjunct Instructor in Spanish</p> <p>The Rediscovery of Doubt in the Renaissance: A discussion with Professor Braitman about his book, <i>Francisco Sánchez y el redescubrimiento de la duda en el Renacimiento</i></p> 
<p>23 FEBRUARY Tuesday, 7:30 PM Via Zoom</p>	<p>Nechama Price Director, Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies for Women and Senior Lecturer, Bible and Judaic Studies Departments, Stern College for Women</p> <p>Tribal Blueprints: Twelve Brothers and the Destiny of Israel</p> 

Marcelo Saúl Broitman on the Rediscovery of Doubt in the Renaissance



On February 9th, the Yeshiva University Libraries presented the first in their Spring 2021 series of book talks. It featured Marcelo Broitman, Adjunct Professor of Spanish, interviewed by Ronnie Perelis, Chief Rabbi Dr. Isaac Abraham and Jelena Alcalay Associate Professor of Sephardic Studies at the Bernard Revel Graduate School, about Broitman's book, *Francisco Sánchez y el redescubrimiento de la duda en el Renacimiento* [*Francisco Sánchez and the Rediscovery of Doubt in the Renaissance*] (2nd ed., Madrid, 2020). Professor Broitman was born in Argentina and studied at universities both in Buenos Aires and New York, obtaining a Ph.D. at CUNY.

Responding to a series of probing questions from Professor Perelis, he described the converso background of Sanchez's family, as well as his childhood, education, travels, and his ultimate settlement in Toulouse, where he taught medicine and philosophy and stayed until his death in 1623. Professor Broitman pointed out that Sanchez's main contribution to philosophy was his position of passionate skepticism, harkening back to the ancient Greek school of Pyrrho of Elis (4th and 3rd centuries BCE), set in opposition to the medieval dominance of dogmas and "Aristotelian" logical scholasticism.

Sánchez's definition of "science" was "perfect knowledge of a thing," but he argued that although perfect knowledge is unattainable, we should try to gain whatever knowledge we can through careful observation.

While Professor Broitman was clear that there is no indication in Sánchez's writings of any Jewish influence, it seems plausible to suppose that his family background set him apart and may have afforded him the intellectual distance to advocate for the changes in modes of thinking which marked the

Renaissance. There seem to be aspects of his thought which prefigured René Descartes among other philosophers. Even though Sanchez did not influence Baruch Spinoza's thought, both philosophers held some pantheistic views.

A recording of Marcelo Broitman's book talk can be viewed in the window below, or on YouTube by clicking [HERE](#)



Nechama Price's *Tribal Blueprints*



On February 23rd, in the second of the Spring 2021 series of Yeshiva University Libraries' book talks, Nechama Price discussed her book, *Tribal Blueprints: Twelve Brothers and the Destiny of Israel* (New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2020).

Price obtained a Master of Science degree in Jewish education at Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration and a Master of Arts degree in Bible at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies. She is currently the director of the Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies for Women, from which she earned certification in 2003, and a senior lecturer of Bible and Judaic Studies at Stern College for Women, where she has taught since 2004. A graduate of Nishmat's Yo'etzet Halachah program, she serves as a yo'etzet [a resource on women's health and Jewish law] in several New Jersey communities.

Price outlined several strategies leading to an understanding of biblical narratives about the Twelve Tribes of Israel. To begin with, she argued that it is important to view biblical personalities as people rather than as abstractions and learn lessons from their stories that can be applied to our lives.

Then, we should also analyze the stories from several perspectives and realize that there is not a single way to view any biblical narrative. This is because the stories are full of ambiguities (likely by design) and are meant to impart moral lessons to us.

For example, the story of the *Akedah* [the Binding of Isaac] ends on an ambiguous note: יחדו ילכו (They went together). We are not told who went together. Was it Abraham and Isaac or just Abraham and his servants? Furthermore, the Bible does not say whether Abraham ever saw his son, Isaac, again. Price urged her listeners to select an interpretation that personally excites them.

She related that the most significant goal of her book was to discover the personality traits of each of the twelve sons of Jacob, the eponymous tribes of Israel, and to understand how their descendants often expressed similar traits. She avowed that Chazal [Jewish sages] had already adumbrated this very same point in their Midrashic commentaries on the Twelve Tribes. We observe in the biblical descriptions that the twelve were all different from each other and less than perfect. This is because God does not expect perfection from his chosen ones, which teaches us the importance of what it means to be human—to have emotions.

For example, Judah experiences several moral failures, from the sale of his brother Joseph to his consorting with Tamar, his daughter-in-law. However, he admits to his failure, repents, and later rises to offer himself in servitude instead of Rachel's son, Benjamin.

Interestingly, God seems to match each of the tribal forefather's character traits with the roles played later on by their descendants. For example, Judah exercised leadership and so, historically, did his descendants.

A recording of Nechama Price's book talk can be viewed in the window below, or on YouTube by clicking [HERE](#).



"Feelings You Wish You Did Not Have" —Joanne Jacobson



On March 2, at the third in a series of Yeshiva University Libraries' Spring Book Talks, Professor Joanne Jacobson read excerpts from her recently published *Every Last Breath: A Memoir of Two Illnesses* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020). She was then interviewed by Lauren Fitzgerald, Professor of English and Director of the Wilf Campus Writing Center. The discussion was co-sponsored by the YC English Department, the Wilf Campus Writing Center, and Pre-Professional Advising Programs.

Joanne Jacobson is Professor Emerita of English and former Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at Yeshiva College, where she taught American studies, American literature, and nonfiction writing, and also served as Director of the Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors Program. Her previous books include *Hunger Artist: A Suburban Childhood* (Huron: Bottom Dog Press, 2007).

Prof. Jacobson began by reading several passages from *Every Last Breath* which, despite her even and sober tone, effectively communicated through keen insight the emotional cascades she experienced through her mother's and then her own illness. Despite the serious, not to say life-threatening, nature of her and her mother's situations, she was able to note and record some lighter, more affirmative episodes.

She was then asked a number of penetrating questions:

What is the target audience for the book? Now that we've experienced a pandemic for an entire year, Prof. Jacobson hoped that her book "will help us to know how it feels to be a patient, to be suffering an illness and to acknowledge our bodies' fragility."

What was your process of writing like, and how did you adapt and change it as you went along? Prof. Jacobson answered that her writing attempted to capture moments she recognized as charged with emotion, as worth writing about.

Do you have any advice to prospective non-fiction writers? Prof. Jacobson stressed bravery in willingness to confront "feelings you wish you did not have." Otherwise, it would be difficult to compose interestingly and compellingly without such a confrontation.

Her interviewer, Prof. Fitzgerald, noted how the book's prose nevertheless showed rhythmic and lyrical poetic characteristics and was unafraid to use humor, including making the author herself the object of the humor, in otherwise grave situations. Prof. Jacobson attributed the lyrical quality of her writing to her attraction to music and the large part it had played in her early life. Prof. Jacobson admitted to her difficulty in writing in the first person and about someone (her mother) who did not really wish to be written about; her shame at being a patient (She thought she'd rather die than be taken out on a stretcher at rush hour and be gawked at by passersby.); and her embarrassment at having to wear a hospital gown.

A fundamental truth of her illness? The experience irrevocably changed her life. Prof. Jacobson added that contemporary culture has made subjects like illness and death uncomfortable—a trend that changed only within the last 15 years. She affirmed a need for a greater openness and realization of our bodies, and for an understanding that not every story or illness has a favorable outcome.

In that case, Prof. Jacobson was finally asked, what would she consider as closure? "To be better. But then, so much of modern illness has become a chronic affair, with each person experiencing it differently."

Interestingly, Prof. Jacobson mentioned Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), in which the author remarked on the reluctance of most Holocaust survivors to tell their stories because they felt that to create a narrative meant to abandon what was most traumatic about their experiences, i.e., these actually lacked narrative or meaning. Perhaps, said Prof. Jacobson, some things cannot be converted into a story, which by nature possesses a form.

A recording of Joanne Jacobson's book talk can be viewed in the window below, or on YouTube by clicking [HERE](#).



OPEN HAND, OPEN HEART: LIBRARY VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE

by Chaya Sarah (Hallie) Cantor



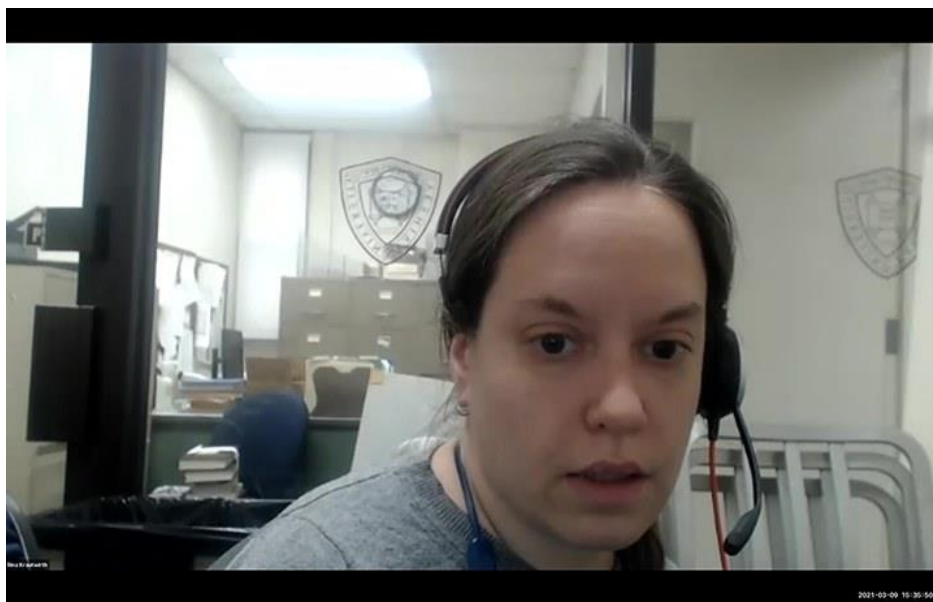
4 - Moshe Schapiro



5 - Elinor Grumet



6 - Sandy Moore



7 - Rina Krautwirth

Maker space. Community center. No wonder so many libraries are getting face lifts. But underneath all the ever-changing trends and technologies, the human heart beats on.

Virtual Library Open House—held via Zoom on Friday, March 5, for faculty, and Tuesday, March 9, for staff—introduced viewers to the delights, both present and future, of Yeshiva Universities’ libraries: Pollack, Mendel Gottesman, and Hedi Steinberg. Hosted by Moshe, MGL Reference Librarian, with technical assistance from J.B., Library Systems Administrator, and timed by Chriss, Library Administrative

Coordinator, the Virtual Library Open House made the “virtual” a deeply personal experience, highlighting recent and tentative developments, as well as the abundant resources publicly available.

Human Interactions

First stop, Hedi Steinberg Library (on the Beren campus). Elinor, in her role as Reference and Instruction Librarian, described the most satisfying part of her job: teaching library classes, which are based on consultation with the instructor and tailored to address the particular research paper or class assignment. This past year, instead of being invited into the classroom to give bibliographic instruction, librarians have, of course, been conducting this virtually, along with one-on-one chats and Zoom interviews with patrons. Nevertheless, none of this sudden change has deterred any interactions. Since the pandemic began, in fact, over 862 questions have been fielded via chat.

Elinor described the “personal librarian program” whereby a student gets matched with a librarian who shares a similar interest. Follow-up is conducted over the academic year. It’s a way, Elinor said, of saying, “Hi, I’m your personal librarian. Contact me.” Initially geared toward Honors students, the program now reaches out to first-year students.

For the past three years, the YU Libraries have sponsored a Library Research Award. Every undergraduate is eligible to submit a research paper written for a course in the past year. The prize—judged by a panel of seven librarians—is \$250 and a framed certificate. So far, the winning essays have been in political science, public health, and psychology.

Referring to the library home page, Elinor introduced viewers to some essential library services. While Hedi Steinberg shares with other YU libraries access to over 1 million print volumes, as well as DVDs, e-books, journals, and e-journals, Elinor pointed out HSL’s superb collection of children’s fiction, both Judaica and general, which serves the Education Department (and a lot of parents!).

Whatever item YU does not own can be obtained via Interlibrary Loan, from almost any library in the country, even some abroad. Under the current pandemic, many students have taken advantage of the Grab & Go service, whereby materials are checked out to the patron and left in the lobby for pick-up.

The next speaker, Shulamis--Pollack Electronic Resources and Reference Librarian—discussed another public service, the Library Book Talks. Originally launched at the SOY Seforim Sale with guest Professor Jeffrey Gurock, the Book Talks have grown to at least three per semester and have hosted speakers on a variety of topics—this past year alone, children’s literature, philosophy, and a personal memoir—and have reached people in living rooms across the U.S. and Israel.

In addition, Shulamis pointed out the variety of databases now available on the library website—over 300—giving access to information on all subjects with the click of a mouse. One example was AncestryLibrary, which can bring up census data from 1790, oral histories, and photos. As a demo, Shulamis was able to bring up the record of the boat passage to the U.S of her husband’s parents. Other databases like The Foundation Directory are useful for those seeking grants.

How to keep all your research in one place? Enter RefWorks, a bibliographic management tool that can store sources discovered in the cloud without clogging up laptop memory. Shulamis showed how to filter (and simplify) a search through YUFind, which locates articles, books, encyclopedia entries, and e-books available in YU.

The merely bored or homebound can find plenty to do in YU's *COVID-19 Resource Guide*, which offers everything from the latest health bulletins to concerts, online courses, and old movies. The COVID-19 page—researched and posted by Wendy, Public Services and Outreach Librarian—proved to be virtual chicken soup, providing education and entertainment during the dreary days of the lockdown.

Treasure Trove

Want a podcast of your *Navi* teacher? Go to the Yeshiva Academic Institutional Repository (YAIR). YAIR was described by Stephanie, Electronic Reserves and Scholarly Communication Librarian, as “an online collection—a treasure-trove—of academic works created by faculty and staff with the goal of elevating the status of YU in the academic world.”

Stephanie has devoted countless hours expanding YAIR. Asking “What can YAIR do for me and YU?” she displayed the listings of journal articles, recordings, and chapters, all intended “to showcase intellectual output” and provide a permanent URL where YU work can be shared freely and globally. Users from abroad have requested that YU theses and dissertations be made public. They can be found in YAIR.

Examples of YAIR content include *Commentator* back issues, *Crisis and Hope: YU Voices* (interfaith dialog), and YU student publications. There is also purely creative, as well as scholarly work—i.e., art and fiction. Collaborative efforts list all contributors, each with their own link. An example of YAIR's scope is an archived interview between Professor Jill Katz and blogger Nachliel Selavan on the value of studying archaeology. Stephanie showed samples of two student publications born digital during the pandemic. The Office of Admissions has chosen YU's women's science journal, *Women in Science*, to market science programs to potential students. All these are found on YAIR.

In addition to YAIR, Stephanie has had her hand in library subject guides (LibGuides), and the *Catalog of University Authors*, which annually lists all the recent publications and contributions of YU faculty and staff. As keeper of the cyber-keys in Electronic Reserves, Stephanie posts readings for courses. Faculty can fill out a form to have their materials uploaded to an eReserves page.

How to make “cents” of all these shared materials? Sandy, Pollack Head Librarian, discussed the emergence of open educational resources (OER) initiatives, where e-textbooks and other materials in the public domain take the place of expensive print textbooks. Through OER, faculty can freely “retain, revise, remix, reuse, and redistribute content,” without strain on the students' wallets or the library budget.

In addition, OER enables faculty to curate resources in different ways. Under the YU Alternatives Project now getting underway, faculty will work with our librarians to design courses with low or no cost for texts. Students will obtain podcasts, articles—anything—without having to pay upfront. “This places power in faculty hands,” Sandy said.

OER are not always free. However, they have made textbooks far more affordable. This past year has been a bonus for e-books, and during COVID, requests for e-textbooks grew. Because many

publishers continue to refuse sale to libraries, OER provide an outlet for instructors and students in need of a cost-effective way to obtain learning materials.

The library, then, is greatly helping faculty meet their teaching objectives.

Open End

While institutions everywhere have already undergone massive changes, the pandemic has clearly accelerated the need for remote and high-tech resources. Nevertheless, the physical library remains crucial for an academic community. What is being done to accommodate human bodies?

Back to Hedi Steinberg.

Rina, Reference and Instruction Librarian, discussed plans for HSL renovations. They include:

- Dedicated classroom (for library instruction).
- Increased study space.
- Added seating area.
- Computer flat screens (for collaborative work).
- Aesthetic re-designs.

Regardless of delays caused by COVID-19, preparations are under way. The initial weeding project, now going on, is updating the collections and creating more study and collaborative space. Faculty is being kept in the loop through consultations on what materials to discard.

Rina displayed the architect's rendering of "HSL of the Future:" ultramodern chairs and desks, prominent reference desk, and shelves spaciouly arranged, with well-lighted desks ranged against large windows. The goal, she explained, is "to enhance the library functionally, as well as aesthetically." Briefly mentioned were possible additions to Pollack/Gottesman: 3D printing, digital media labs, and video conference rooms.

Whatever the changes, physical and virtual, nothing can ever replace the library's "helping hand" to faculty, students, and anyone else in need of human support.

A recording of the Library Virtual Open House for staff can be viewed in the window below, or on YouTube by clicking [HERE](#):



COVID-19 UPDATE IN NEW YORK STATE

by Marlene Schiffman



Over the past few months, Gov. Cuomo's office has been issuing daily reports of the progress in the fight against the coronavirus. As New York State began rolling out its vaccine program, demand was clearly outstripping supply. It was hard for eligible New Yorkers to get an appointment. With an increased supply from the federal government and the opening of mass vaccination sites, the pace of vaccinations began to pick up, and hospitalizations came down.

On Feb. 23, Governor Cuomo allowed that stadiums and arenas with a capacity of 10,000 or more could reopen with limited spectators. Venues and events had to follow State guidelines, like capacity limitations, testing requirements, mandatory face coverings, and social distancing.

The CDC announced that those who have been fully vaccinated (two doses + two weeks), if exposed, do not have to quarantine.

By February 26, indoor dining in New York City expanded to 35 percent capacity, in alignment with New Jersey's 35 percent limit. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine was approved by the FDA at the end of February. Along with the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, it decreases transmission and is also successful against variants. Dr. Fauci said all three vaccines are "safe and effective," and a person should get which ever one he can. Beginning April 2, event, arts and entertainment venues will be allowed to reopen at 33 percent capacity, up to 100 people indoors and up to 200 people outdoors. However, if all attendees present proof of a negative test prior to entry, capacity can increase up to 150 people indoors and up to 500 people outdoors. Social distancing and face coverings will still be required. The data has shown that restaurants can operate safely and in accordance with strict protocols at 50 percent capacity, and they were allowed to implement this capacity as of March 19. Now weddings will be permitted in venues restricted to 50% capacity, with no more than 150 attendees. Finally the death toll is declining. Starting March 17, most vaccination sites will be able to vaccinate any eligible New Yorker, no matter the category. Pharmacies will be limited to individuals over the age of 60 and teachers, in line with federal policy.

On December 14, 2020, New York ICU nurse Sandra Lindsay made history as the first American to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. The vial of the first vaccine used is now headed to the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.

When will things return to normal? No one can give an exact date, but it looks as though the light at the end of the tunnel is a visible glimmer.



ESTHER LIVE

by Marlene Schiffman



This conversation, *Esther Live*, moderated by Aryeh Grossman of Koren Publishers, intended to derive new lessons from an old classic, Megillat Esther. The February 14th event, co-sponsored by Maggid/Koren Publishers and Yeshiva University Libraries, was live streamed on FaceBook and YouTube. It featured two new books that deal with the themes of Esther published by Maggid Books, One guest was Dr. Erica Brown, Scholar-in Residence for the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, who recently released *Esther: Power, Fate and Fragility in Exile*, a National Jewish Book Award finalist. The editor of *Esther in America*, Rabbi Dr. Stuart Halpern, Senior Advisor to the Provost and Senior

Program Officer at the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University, also discussed aspects of the book of Esther from his recent research. These two books complement the work of Aaron Koller, Professor of Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University whose book, *Esther in Ancient Jewish Thought*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2014.

Erica Brown started by describing her book as not a line-by-line commentary but a thematic approach, contextualized in the larger setting of Tanakh (Hebrew Bible). It includes a wealth of rabbinic sources, pre-modern sources, and modern scholarship. Dr. Brown extracted universal messages, especially for Diaspora living, alternate endings—since the book ends on a happy note but with three enigmatic sentences. Our endings might be more jaded since slivers of success and happiness occur in exile, but those are often eclipsed later by periods of oppression and persecution as the cycle of history continues.

Dr. Halpern described the book he edited as a presentation of the idea that, “As long as there has been an America, Esther has been in America.” His book aims to show that the Bible has always inspired Americans: America respects biblical ideas, and that these ideas have always shaped American consciousness. The story of Esther was re-envisioned by leaders in American history to encapsulate their particular challenges. Roger Williams, a 17th century theologian, saw an argument for religious liberty. The colonists, in the decade before the Revolution, saw themselves as ancient Israel resisting the oppressive taxes and policies of the English government. King George III was an embodiment of Ahashverosh who was influenced by the advice of a manipulative Prime Minister, Lord North, who acted like Haman. In the fight against slavery and the case for women’s rights at a major convention in 1853, Sojourner Truth quoted Esther, while assuming the mantle of Esther, in a speech to a large crowd that had been disrupted by hostile protesters. A pastor from Chicago had a meeting with Lincoln in 1862 on the eve of the Emancipation Proclamation and told him that issuing the Proclamation was his “Esther moment,” the time in one’s life when his unique position of authority afforded him the opportunity to take the step that would make all the difference. The book of Esther also demonstrates the fragility of exile. In 1825, Mordecai Manuel Noah tried to organize Grand Island in upstate New York as a homeland for Jews and Native Americans. Called Ararat, Noah launched an initiative for persecuted Jews of Europe and Native Americans, who were seen as the Ten Lost Tribes, to build a community of safety, a new Zion, in America. This attempt failed, and was ultimately judged as ridiculous and crazy. Later in life, Noah had given up on Ararat, but he said in 1848, 100 years before the Zionist state, Maybe this should be built in the Land of Israel? The tension of fragility in exile unites the Jews of Shushan and the Jews seeking a homeland in America.

What can we take from this book in 2021, Aryeh Grossman asked? Dr. Halpern stated that the absence of God’s miraculous intervention in our lives is so readily apparent. Salvation rests on the courageous actions of human beings. We must take moral actions that demonstrate loyalty, kindness to our people, and self-sacrifice for the sake of helping others. As always, we must combat antisemitism that has come up lately in conspiracy theories and in the context of the coronavirus. Esther reminds us that Judaism must be worn proudly on one’s sleeve. Jews bring their own unique traditions and cultures to the larger public sphere. This should make Jews proud for it has positively contributed to the world at large.

Esther helps us understand how a biblical story can impact a nation and Jewish self-identity no matter where you are, said Dr. Brown. With Vashti and Esther, we see how one person’s actions can affect an entire empire. Vashti’s insurrection was publicized so that it had an impact on every home. We are feeling helpless in a world beyond our control—COVID, politics, racial protests—all show that one

person makes a difference. COVID brings out the importance of the individual because we all have the responsibility to distance from each other. This is a lesson writ large in the book of Esther. As Jews, we must stand for social justice and truth in the world. As the early abolitionists used Esther, so must we echo them.

The book of Esther also makes us reflect upon government inefficiencies, bureaucracies, messages and communications, and the postal system. A modern perspective on the harem sees young women taken from their homes, forced to live in the palace, and kept from a productive life. It's reminiscent of the #metoo movement and the way in which sexual excess demonstrates the imbalance of power that damages lives and families. Those are a few of the modern issues that come up in thinking about the book of Esther this year.

Esther and Mordecai achieved greatness for their people by achieving greatness for the government by strengthening justice, fiscal responsibility, living by the law of the government, and demonstrating that a close community has responsibility as citizens of a country, citizens of a Jewish polity, and citizens of the world. This applies in these times of pandemic as well. We need strong leadership to encourage the embracing of this behavior.

Dr. Halpern added that Jews in positions of power are navigating how Jewish to be. How confident are we being "dignified in difference," as was said by Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l? Can we be dignified while sticking out? Judaism must be worn proudly, positively, and contribute to the world at large.

In the larger context of the Bible, Dr. Brown pointed out that all our heroes have crucial watershed moments—Moses, Daniel, Esther, Mordechai, and Joseph. In Genesis 45, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, but first must tell all the Egyptians to leave the room: he has a bifurcated life when he comes to tell the truth about his past. Nevertheless, when the Egyptians hear about it, there are no repercussions. His family was welcomed and given choice lands. Are there repercussions by admitting Jewishness? No, there is actually a sense of respect, a curiosity about it. But the characters are always negotiating a tightrope of identity. Esther carried the spiritual weight of the people. In the Diaspora, what are we concealing? We can't embrace that wholeness unless our identity is whole.

Dr. Halpern agreed that, yes, America respects biblical ideas that have long inspired the American project. The Mayflower was seen as the journey of the Israelites across the Reed Sea. Many presidents from Washington to Lincoln to contemporary presidents have compared themselves to Moses. Biden cited the Bible in his inaugural address, a long presidential tradition. America still strives to be a "new Israel." The stories of Esther and the Exodus from Egypt are so in the air in public consciousness in a way that is impactful and inspiring.

In summary, Dr. Brown made three points: 1. One of the themes of Esther is the idea that one person can have an enormous impact. 2. In the book of Esther there is a balance of silence and speech. The very carefully placed words in Esther emphasize that each speech is significant. We see the value of when to be quiet and when to speak in a leadership capacity. 3. With the diminished Purim festivities this year, we must remember that when we can celebrate, we *must* celebrate. Be in that moment and take advantage of it.

Dr. Halpern brought up a detail at the end of the story—the mention of taxes. He said that it signifies an unfinished story. We have to write the ending ourselves. The rabbis posited that there was a child of

Esther and Ahashverosh who enabled the building of the Second Temple. We have to write the ending ourselves in courageous actions on behalf of our people. Our ancient ideas have spoken to contemporary moments as we wrestle with Esther being incorporated even into pop culture. We have the ability to complete this story, particularly as exilic Jews, modelled after Mordechai and Esther; we have the ability to bring the redemption in our days.

A recording of *Esther Live* can be viewed on YouTube by clicking [HERE](#).

GOT BENTSH AMERIKA

An Invitation from Wendy Kosakoff



8 - Irving Berlin, 1888-1989

Many of you know that my son, Josh, was in the Yiddish version of *Fiddler on the Roof* for several months. Members of the cast came together to create a version of "God Bless America" (composed by Irving Berlin, a Jewish immigrant from Russia. "God Bless America" was first performed in 1938.) in Yiddish which they circulated on Presidential Inauguration day. My son wound up in a key spot just over Joel Grey's head in the final grid—I thought I'd share [📺](#):

<https://nytf.org/fiddler-on-the-roof/>

[NOTE: video plays after an email address is entered in the form]

Enjoy!

Wendy

GOOD NEWS FROM ISRAEL



9 - Timely Purim costumes

"Dose 1" and "Dose 2"

Vaccines for everyone over 16. Israel is the first country to offer vaccines to any citizen over the age of 16. It aims to vaccinate 90% of the over-50s within two weeks. Nearly two million Israelis (20% of the population) have now received two doses of the Pfizer vaccine with just 0.066% re-infections. **Good Phase 2 results of COVID-19 treatment.** Allocetra from Israel's Enlivex Therapeutics has cured the majority of the 37 seriously and critically ill COVID-19 patients in its Phase 1b and 2 trials. 33 patients were discharged from the hospital an average of under 6 days after treatment.

Inhaled treatment. EXO-CD24, an experimental inhaled medication developed at Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center, cured all 30 moderate-to-severe cases in a Phase I clinical trial.

Developed over the past six months at the hospital, EXOCD24 stops the "cytokine storm" in which the immune system goes out of control and starts attacking healthy cells. (Israel 21c, Feb. 10)

Data released Feb. 14, showed 94% fewer symptomatic virous cases and 92% fewer cases of serious illness among those vaccinated. It was based on a study of 1,200,000 people, half of whom had received the Pfizer vaccine, and half who did not. The study showed that the vaccine was equally effective among

people 70 and older as among younger participants. The vaccines were even more effective 14 days after the second dose. In total, Israel has administered more than 6.3 million doses. **Limiting contagion.** *The Times of Israel* (Feb. 10) reported the conclusions of an Israeli study on the contagiousness of COVID. It showed that vaccinated people become far less of a COVID transmission risk even before receiving their second dose. When people tested COVID positive, their viral loads were 4 times lower if they had been vaccinated. This first-of-its-kind research is a "game-changer" in pursuit of herd immunity,

A TALMUDIC TALE

By Bernard M. Lichstein, Ph.D. (Shulamis Hes' father)



10 - Dr. Lichstein's Talmud

During the '60s and the beginning of the '70s, I was employed by Allied Chemical Corporation as a Senior Research Chemist. One year, around 1970, the company decided to award anyone whose name appeared on a patent as an inventor, with \$50 worth of books, preferably scientific ones. That year, three patents were issued with my name listed as the sole inventor or one of the inventors. Mom suggested, since the total value of the award was \$150, a sizeable sum in those days, to opt for a large size *SHAS*--the acronym for the six orders of the Babylonian Talmud. The *SHAS* is customarily printed in 20 volumes, each of which is called a *Gemara*.

I told the awards committee that I didn't want three different books or sets of books each worth \$50. Instead, I wanted one book called the Babylonian Talmud which happens to come in 20 volumes. At first they demurred, since they deemed scientific books more appropriate for scientific inventors. They relented after I challenged them: "Is this award for me or the company's image?" I further told them that scientific books are outdated as soon as they are printed, whereas the Talmud is never out of date. I added that if they agreed to order the books, they should go to the book dealer that I would recommend since their book distributor would not stock it, and certainly not for the low price of \$150. Sure enough, the person responsible for ordering the books called a week later to ask for the

name of my bookseller, since indeed their distributor didn't have the Talmud or know where to get it. I referred them to Levine's book store on the Lower East Side of New York.

Several months passed after which the company librarian, Peg Shields, called to announce, "Bernie, they just came in." Momentarily not knowing to what she was referring, I asked, "What came in?" She replied, "The books you ordered. I have three heavy cartons sitting on the floor next to my desk. But I opened one of them and there's a problem. They put the book covers on backward." "No, that's OK," I explained, "since the Hebrew/Aramaic in which they are printed is read right to left." Peg replied, "Bernie, if I don't know right from left, I won't know up from down. When we emboss your name in gold on each volume, I might have them do it upside down by mistake." "No problem," I said. "I will come to the library and put a piece of tape with my name on each volume, so no error will be made."

A few minutes later I was sitting on the library floor affixing my name to each volume. Just that day, the woman who collected the hardcover scientific journals for binding was in the library. It turns out that she also did the embossing. Peg pointed me out to her. The bindery representative bent over and exclaimed, "Oh, I see you got a set of *Gemaras!*" When I explained what I was doing, she said, "You don't need to do that. I'll know where to put your name. But if you are getting *Gemaras*, why not print your name in Hebrew?" I replied, "If you have the font, I have the name." I wrote my name in Hebrew for her, and she carted the *Gemaras* away for embossing.

Peg called once more toward the end of the year when the company customarily gave out patent awards. "Bernie, I was thinking that when the CEO and Director of Research give the awards, they will never understand about the 20 volumes. Take seventeen volumes home and leave three volumes here for the awards ceremony. Three patents, three volumes!" I agreed and took home the seventeen. By then, all of the volumes had been embossed in gold with my Hebrew name.

The award ceremonies were held just before end of the year. The presenting officer thanked the inventors for their inventions and technical contributions to Allied Chemical. This was reiterated in a letter that accompanied my three volumes which ended with "and we wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

And that, dear children, is how I got a set of *Gemaras* from Allied Chemical Corporation.

LIBRARY SHORTS

by Marlene Schiffman



11 - Protect against cyber thieves

Everyone is advised to complete the annual **Security Awareness Training** course on Inside Track by May 31. It will help to protect the University as well as home computers from phishing, malware, and social engineering attacks promulgated by cyber thieves. The **migration of our integrated library system** to secure servers occurred on January 6. It caused an interruption of work on Virtua and, once Virtua was operative, staff had to reset their preferred personal settings. Wendy has produced a new video for **Spring 2021 Orientation**. You can view it on YouTube by clicking [HERE](#). Some services were curtailed as a result of the **snow storms** that hit the Northeast in February. The one on Feb 1-2 did not affect many of us who have been working online since last year although at least one Zoom conference was cancelled due to the loss of power in the Boston area. Distribution of COVID vaccines was disrupted. Food services and the Bais Medrash remained open. A lighter snowfall fell on February 7 with Winter Wonderland results. On February 18 the libraries closed due to a snowstorm producing dangerous traveling conditions.



12 - Feb. 1-2 blizzard. Window pane. Photo by M. Schiffman



13 - Feb. 7 storm. Sunset after the storm. Photo by Dahlia Jacob

The annual **Employee Recognition Ceremony**, sponsored by Human Resources, was held online Tuesday, March 2, from 3-4 PM. University Libraries honorees are: Zvi Erenyi, 50 Years of Service; Marlene Schiffman, 30 Years of Service; Alice Weiss, 20 Years of Service; and Chriss Dalen, for 15 Years of Service. Mazel tov to all the honorees! A special interview with Alice Weiss, who is retiring, is published at the end of this newsletter.

EAST retention commitments. Eastern Academic Scholars' Trust is a program that tags individual records for a commitment to retain these materials for a period of 10 years. YU participation ensures that any item so marked must be readily available for interlibrary loan. The network also is useful to Acquisitions librarians who can view the bibliographic records of other institutions and ascertain what those libraries are committed to retain. The goal is to create a list of print shared resources among libraries in a region. EAST operates on the east coast while other programs cover other US regions. Recently Metadata Services embarked on a project to ascertain whether or not EAST had matched the correct OCLC records to the holdings in the YU libraries. In many cases, the algorithm did not detect the correct records.

Catalog updates. Since COVID 19 attacked us, we have been fighting back by using our time to update the catalog. We have found inconsistencies in Hebrew romanizations, duplicate subject headings caused by different codes, and obsolete forms and outdated names. Our staff has been fixing these headings so that our catalog is more up-to-date and more correct. We also fix errors in Virtua, typos and heading inconsistencies whenever we see them. These typos are in both English and Hebrew. We have also done some merges of duplicate records that we come across quite often. We could never have done this if we were operating as usual since we never had the time to pay attention to these details.

The **Editorial Committee** for the Leah Adler ז"ל Memorial Book, Zvi, Marlene, Shuli, Shulamis, and Moshe, apportioned the contributions for proofreading and made some stylistic decisions. Another editorial meeting will soon be held to finalize the layout. The volume will include proceedings of the memorial held at Gottesman Library and other eulogies, including from family members, and Divre Torah & scholarly contributions in Hebrew and English dedicated to Leah ז"ל.

2020 Catalog of University Authors. This spring we would again like to include faculty and staff members who, over the past year (i.e., March 2020 through February 2021), have published books, textbooks, significant journal articles, or exhibition catalogs or produced or presented works in art, music, or other forms in the creative arena. Library staff—Nicole, Paul, Rebecca, Marlene Schiffman, Stephanie, Ella, and Avrom--have been preparing the catalog which will detail all publications and creative works. The celebration of University Authors will take place in May.

We wish a speedy recovery to **Marion Weekes** of Pollack Library after recent surgery.

The 2021 YU **Student Library Research Award** is designed to recognize outstanding library research conducted by an undergraduate student at Yeshiva University in support of a paper assignment.

- The winner of the Award will be presented with a check for \$250 and a framed certificate.
- This award is sponsored by the Yeshiva University Libraries.

- The application deadline is Monday, April 12, 2021 at 11:59 pm.

The reorganization of **Jewish Studies at Yeshiva College** (YC) has taken effect as of Spring Semester. The Robert M. Beren Department of Jewish Studies has been dissolved, *The Commentator* reported on January 31. Before its dissolution, the Jewish Studies Department was the largest department at YC. Faculty who were previously in the YC Jewish Studies Department have been moved into three separate departments, depending on their disciplinary backgrounds: Jewish Philosophy professors are now in the Philosophy Department and Jewish History professors are housed in the History Department; other Jewish Studies faculty have been moved into the newly-formed Department of Bible, Hebrew, and Near Eastern Studies.

When asked why the changes have occurred, University Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman told *The Commentator* that “It is not uncommon, in higher education, for faculty members to move from one department to another in order to align more closely with colleagues who share a common disciplinary focus.” She explained that the restructuring occurred so that professors of Jewish Philosophy and Jewish History are placed in departments in which their “training and research methodologies align with their new colleagues.”

The restructuring will not result in any curricular or requirement changes for students. “Students will continue to study with accomplished and dedicated professors and all courses are being preserved,” assured Botman.

CONDOLENCES



Condolences to Wendy Kosakoff on the loss of her husband, David Kohane, February 27, after a long illness.

EXTRAORDINARY KINDNESS & REFINEMENT: ALICE WEISS RETIRING

By Hallie (Chaya Sarah) Cantor



You can't retire from being awesome.

That's how the e-card begins. But given the outpour of accolades, it's obvious: you can't retire from being Alice Weiss.

The lovely lady who ruled Hedi Steinberg Library's circulation desk was belatedly honored by Yeshiva University for 20 years' service (it is actually 21 years). While for other honorees this ceremony marked a continuum, for Alice this ceremony marks a poignant twist: she is leaving YU as of this spring.

Alice was beloved by staff, patrons, and faculty alike for, among many things, her "warmth, *frumkeit* [piety] and worldliness" (Stephanie Gross); "poise and sincerity" (Paul Glassman); "patience, courtesy and caring" (Hindishe Lee), and "sweet voice and happy mood" (Bernice Katz).

Her character and persona were best summed up by supervisor Edith Lubetski: "Your dedication to your work is most commendable. I could always rely on you to accomplish every assignment meticulously with great care and concern for the success of the project. . . . You will be sorely missed."

As someone who worked at her side from Day One, I was a frequent recipient of Alice's "very large heart," which ranged from a listening ear to financial aid. Each day she brought in the *New York Post*, eagerly shared by others, and photocopied *New York Times* crosswords for patrons. Equally conversant in Torah thought and the latest Netflix, Alice displayed a Flatbush blend of Orthodox refinement and Western sophistication.

I conducted a "60-second interview" where Alice, who over the past year had worked remotely, reflects on her years at Hedi Steinberg, her impressions, and her future.

Thoughts on leaving?

My leaving is bittersweet. After 21 years here, I'm leaving behind my "library family" – the loveliest group of people.

Working at the library has been the most wonderful experience. I love the academic environment, especially a Jewish institution. I have the best of both worlds.

What have you gained professionally?

When I walked in here, in 2000, I was basically computer literate. I really became more tech-savvy with PC's, and with customer service, helping students. I had never done anything like that before. Over the years I learned to become more patient, going the extra mile to help.

I learned about the cataloging systems—Dewey, LC—and the inner working of how a book, once acquired, arrives on the shelf. I felt a sense of accomplishment working with professionals and helping people find materials.

Memorable moments?

I remember students running in, yelling, "The taxi's waiting outside. Quick, can you recommend three good books to read?"

Even things extraneous to the library came to my attention. Once a student came to me distraught. "I have a wedding tomorrow night," she said. "I need a good dressmaker." I happened to know a Russian dressmaker in Boro Park and made the contact.

Students felt comfortable asking us for help. They may feel intimidated coming to a library for the first time. I've always felt it important to create a friendly, welcoming environment where library staff is approachable."

Plans after retirement?

I look forward to more time to see my children, grandchildren—whom I haven't seen in over a year. I'll enjoy just having that freedom.

I might, down the road, find some part-time work at a local library, or even volunteer. I'll see where the road takes me.

Final thoughts?

Parting is sweet sorrow. Where did 21 years go?

I started in 2000, literally 21 years ago. I've been through happy times, sad times, times I will never forget. It was a privilege to work here and have a team leader like Mrs. Lubetski. She brought cohesion to all the cogs and wheels, running everything smoothly. Library functions simply came together. In all, it was a professional, gracious environment.

I appreciate my wonderful colleagues. I will never have a team like this again. They've been amazing. I will never be able to sever the connection totally. Maybe I'll come visit or volunteer.

Alice's good-bye card can be accessed here:

<https://www.groupgreeting.com/sign/7e03c64b6dc9123>

Like i was saying, the circus is just one of my careers. The real money comes from frosted flakes



THE *OED* DISCOVERS AMERICAN ENGLISH

by Marlene Schiffman



14 - "Jewish penicillin"

Just wanted to list a few new words to add to your vocabulary. Some words we have heard lately and are probably getting tired of hearing: pandemic, pivoting, virtual conference, fake news, Zooming, COVID testing, masking, social distancing, viral mutations, epidemiologists, impeachment, "I have a bridge to sell you," teams, superspreader event, viral meme. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists "new" words it has discovered in recent articles in English for the year 2020. I was surprised to find many of Yiddish origin. We at YU are probably familiar with some of these, but here are a few of the OED's picks of new words:

- Away message—An email message that the person is unavailable
- Awesome—Impressive, excellent
- Bagel (verb)—To beat an opponent by a score of 6 games to love in a set
- Bialy—A chewy bread roll having a circular indentation filled with finely chopped onion
- Bocher—A yeshiva boy
- Chrain—Ground horseradish mixture, served with gefillte fish (How many years has gefillte fish been in the OED? without chrain?)
- Chutspadik—Impudent, impertinent
- Drone—Small remote-controlled device
- Farbrengen—Hasidic gathering with food and discussion of Hasidic teachings
- Glatt kosher—Strictly kosher to a higher standard
- Jew-fro—A frizzy, bushy hairstyle
- Jewish mother—Overprotective and interfering mom
- Jewish penicillin—Humorous name for chicken soup
- Jewish quarter—Section of town that is predominantly Jewish
- Jewish question—Debate about the appropriate status, rights, and treatment of Jewish people within a nation state or in society. (Used to be a Library of Congress Subject heading, replaced by "Antisemitism.")
- Kvetching—Complaining or criticizing
- Onboarding—The action or process of integrating a new employee into an organization, team, etc.
- Safe space—A place or environment in which people, esp. those belonging to a marginalized group, can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or physical harm
- Shticky—Gimmicky, contrived
- Unterfirer—A person who leads or accompanies the bride or groom at a Jewish wedding

- Kvell—To speak enthusiastically, especially out of pride or admiration.
- Taxi yellow—Color, used especially in New York (Remember taxis in Britain are not yellow.)
- To make Shabbat—To prepare for Shabbat (and don't forget to say "Shabbat shalom" on Friday as you leave work)
- WIP --Work in progress
- Yekke --Jewish people of German origin (You know this one if you live in Washington Heights.)

And some "new" expressions:

A chicken in every pot, Chicken of the Sea, electronic waste, father of the bride, fried rice, put a fox in charge of the henhouse, sink one's teeth into, on board, bodega. If you know these words already, then it's probably because you live in New York. Remember, the OED is primarily speaking from a British viewpoint. Alternately, the OED is behind the times. At least they are trying to catch up.



15 - Taxi yellow

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!







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