



"GPAs MAY BE HIGH..."

# THE COMMENTATOR

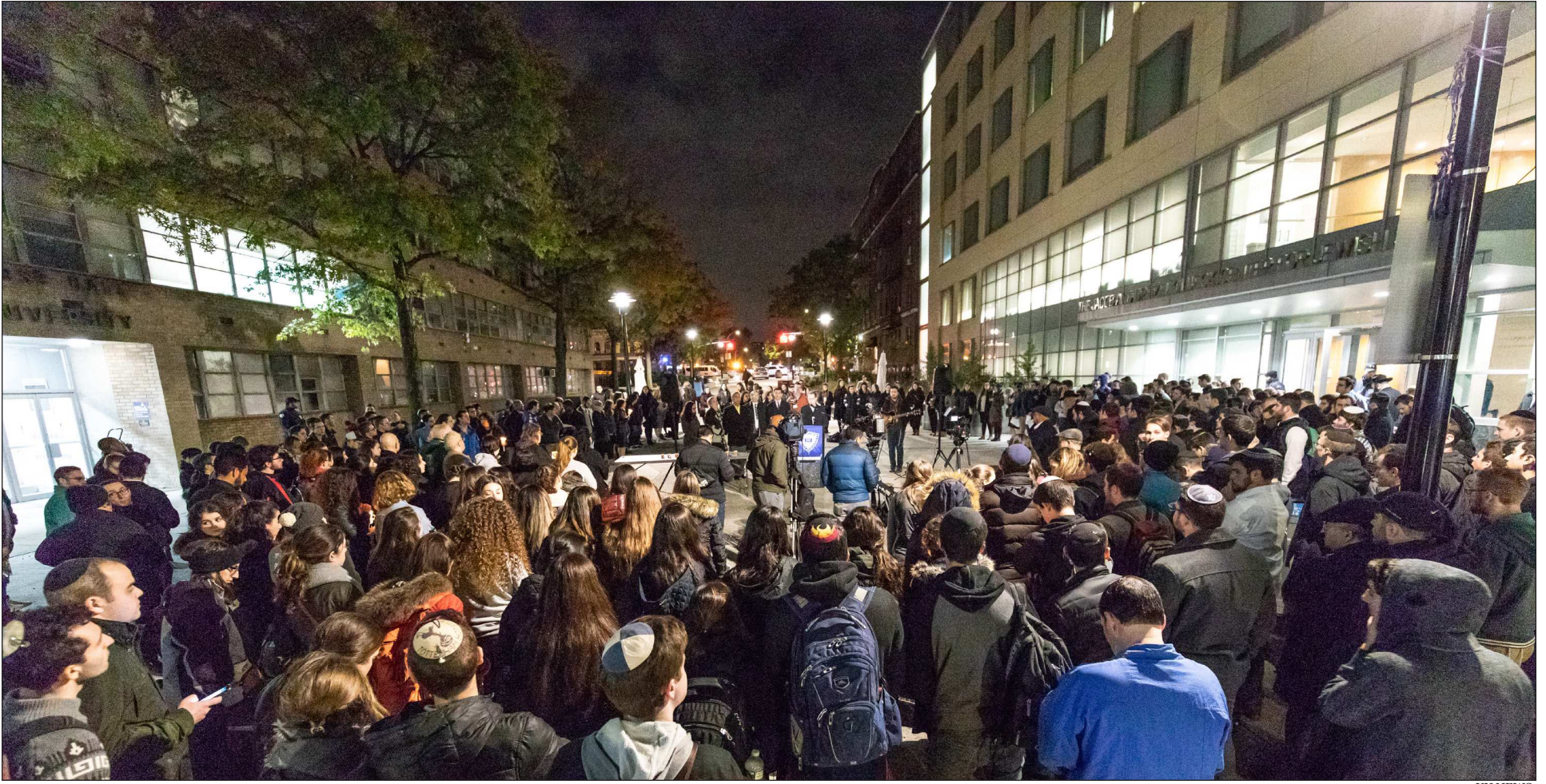
The Independent Student Newspaper of Yeshiva University

"...BUT THESE BOXES ARE HIGHER!"

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Students Gather for Vigil on the 185th Street Plaza

YU NEWS

## YU Community Hosts Vigil for Pittsburgh Massacre

By SHAI YASTRAB

On Oct. 29, the YU community held a vigil to honor those lost in the attack in the Pittsburgh synagogue massacre. The vigil was organized by the student councils, led by Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) and Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC), and was held on the 185th Street

Plaza on the Wilf Campus. The attendees formed a circle, and while the majority of the crowd was made up of students, many members of the Washington Heights community also attended. The vigil began at 9:30 p.m. with music by Tani Polansky. Polansky played for about ten minutes before YSU President Nolan Edmonson formally began the vigil. Edmonson spoke about the tragedy, talked about the importance of

having a vigil at YU and introduced President Ari Berman. Berman talked about the importance of coming together and being united in the troubling times, as well as the importance of appreciating the response across the country. Torah Activities Council (TAC) President Adina Cohen, SCWSC President Shoshana Marder and Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) President Moshe Spirn then led the group in a recitation of *Tehillim* for

the people lost in the attack. A number of the speakers from outside of the university, all introduced by Edmonson, proceeded to speak, continuing on the theme of unity. City Councilmember Mark Levine spoke about how xenophobia is still alive today everywhere, and that other peoples and cultures stand with the Jews today.

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## Median GPA at YU Over 3.6, Most Undergraduates on Dean's List

By BENJAMIN KOSLOWE

The majority of Yeshiva University undergraduates merited Dean's List last year, and the median grade point average (GPA) was greater than a 3.6, according to data provided by the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment (OIR) and confirmed by the Office of the Registrar.

The Academic Policies for both the Wilf Campus and the Beren Campus explain that "each academic year, undergraduate students who are full-time for the fall and spring semesters who have achieved an academic grade point average for the year of at least

3.500 are included on the Dean's List, which is noted with an entry on the student's transcript." In addition, "students with unresolved incomplete grades" by mid-July "are not evaluated."

of Business (Syms-Men and Syms-Women) and Yeshiva College (YC). Making the Dean's List were 484 out of 861 SCW students (56 percent), 249 out of 583 Syms-Men students (43 percent), 118 out of

*1184 [students], or 53 percent of the undergraduate population, earned cumulative GPAs of at least 3.6, indicating a median GPA slightly greater than 3.6.*

An aggregate of 2216 undergraduate students completed full fall and spring semesters in the 2017-18 academic year. These students belonged to YU's four undergraduate schools — Stern College for Women (SCW), Sy Syms School

180 Syms-Women students (66 percent) and 268 out of 592 YC students (45 percent). In total, 1119 out of 2216 students, or 50.5 percent of the undergraduate student

*Continued on Page 4*

## Responding to Tragedies and Connecting With Klal Yisrael

By RABBI MICHAEL ROSENSWEIG

*The following is an edited and abridged transcription of some informal remarks delivered by Rabbi Michael Rosensweig to his shiur on October 28, 2018. The presentation has been edited with minor revisions, but still maintains much of the oral character of the original presentation.*

*The full presentation, which includes more detailed analyses of certain passages in the Rambam (as well as other Hebrew text citations), can be found online at*

*YUTorah. A special thanks to Rabbi Rosensweig's student Avraham Wein for his work on the transcript.*

All of us are reeling from the events that took place on Shabbat in Pittsburgh — a truly horrific attack on innocent people who simply came to daven. Unfortunately, there are so many events that take place: acts of terror in the United States, acts that are directed particularly towards *acheinu Bnei Yisrael*, whether here or in *Eretz Yisrael*, to the extent that sometimes it is hard to absorb it all and

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# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

## A Pre-Law Advisor Isn't a Luxury. It's a Necessity.

By **BENJAMIN KOSLOWE**

Over 40 undergraduates from Yeshiva University are expected to apply to law schools this year. But though YU claims to offer pre-law advising, it has no qualified pre-law advisor. This state of affairs is neglectful, irresponsible and unacceptable. The deans must mend this problem immediately.

When Dina Chelst abruptly resigned as the Wilf Campus pre-law advisor last February, the Dean's Office stated that they were in the process of searching for a replacement. At the end of last semester, Lolita Wood-Hill, who had previously served as Yeshiva College's primary pre-health advisor from Fall 2010 through Spring 2018, was appointed to a newly-created Pre-Professional Advising role in which she would oversee both pre-health and pre-law advising on the Wilf Campus.

Since the time that Wood-Hill has taken on this new role, Yeshiva College has effectively had no full-time pre-health advisor.

This situation is unfair to the dozens of Yeshiva College pre-health students, whose complex medical school application process involves writing personal statements, gathering letters of recommendation and practicing for interviews. They require an advisor who can devote a significant amount of time and attention to their needs. There simply are not enough hours in the day for Wood-Hill to effectively oversee advising for both pre-health and pre-law students.

Moreover, Wood-Hill is unqualified to advise pre-law students. She has no law degree and little experience in networking with law school admissions officers or administrators. Having never worked in law, Wood-Hill is not equipped to effectively advise students regarding the pivotal LSAT exam or to guide them through the law school application process, both of which are absolutely critical components of being a pre-law advisor.

Wood-Hill's inexperience and lack of a deep understanding of the law school application process have more than theoretical implications. Already, she has misdirected pre-law students. Three weeks ago, Wood-Hill sent several emails to pre-law students urging them to bring resumes with passport-sized pictures of themselves to a Law School Admission Council (LSAC) Forum. But as explicit instructions on the event's website made clear, students were not supposed to bring any resumes to the forum. Wood-Hill's advice was thus misguided and irresponsible.

Wood-Hill's expertise is in pre-health advising. She has no credentials to be a pre-law advisor, and pre-law students have no reason to trust her guidance.

While Wood-Hill offers meetings to pre-law students and looks over their resumes, the role of reviewing pre-law students' personal statements has been tasked to someone else. At the start of the current fall semester, Dr. Betty Sugarman joined the Academic Advising team as a "Personal Statement Writing Coach" for pre-law students.

Sugarman has no official YU email address or office. She is present on campus extremely infrequently, most weeks for only one afternoon. It is unclear whether Sugarman has an official salary, is paid hourly or works by some other arrangement.

As the wife of Dean Fred Sugarman, Yeshiva College's Associate Dean for Operations and Student Affairs, Dr.

Sugarman appears to be a last resort rather than the best possible candidate for the job. Though she has a Ph.D., Dr. Sugarman's degree and work experience have nothing to do with the legal field. Like Wood-Hill, she has minimal connections with law schools.

The pre-law situation at YU's Beren Campus, which has been a matter of controversy for some time, is lacking as well. Ilana Milch, who was hired as the Stern College for Women pre-law advisor last year, also has no law degree. Several pre-law students reported to The Commentator that she, like Wood-Hill, has offered dubious advice on multiple occasions. For example, one student reported that Milch advised her to bolster her resume by "making up hobbies."

In response to the lack of pre-law advisement, many YU undergrads and recent graduates have independently hired former pre-law advisor Dina Chelst for pre-law guidance this semester, rather than using YU's free pre-law services.

A properly conducted search should have yielded a qualified

candidate in the New York area to fill the position, even if Chelst did retire in the middle of a semester. It is ultimately the responsibility of Deans Karen Bacon (the Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences) and Fred Sugarman to conduct a search once again and to find adequate pre-law advisors.

When asked recently if a search is still in effect, Dean Bacon explained that "it is certainly the plan for this year" to continue with Wood-Hill as the primary pre-law advisor and with Sugarman as Personal Statement Writing Coach. It seems that the deans have not only abandoned their search for a qualified advisor, but are content with maintaining the impractical "Pre-Professional Advising" role for the conceivable future.

In the next few weeks, dozens of YU students will apply to law schools. Many of them will be accepted and go on to become successful and influential attorneys, judges, public interest advocates and entrepreneurs, as well as possible donors to this institution. But many will be hindered by the lack of attention given by YU to their field of interest.

The abysmal state of pre-law advising at YU must be addressed. The students deserve a qualified individual with legal experience who can advise accurately and professionally. And with application deadlines around the corner, they need it now.

\*\*\*

*The undersigned pre-law students of YU affirm the messages in this editorial and likewise call on the Deans to hire a qualified pre-law advisor for the institution:*

*Avigayil Adouth*

*David Beer*

*Sarah Casteel*

*Leah Feigen*

*CJ Glicksman*

*Rachel Kaminetzky*

*Benjamin Koslowe*

*Josh Leichter*

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*Molly Meisels*

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*Naomi Montrose*

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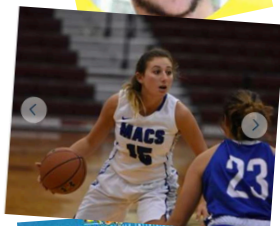
*Matthew Silkin*

*Lizzy Socolof*

*Rachel Zakharov*



**1 Akiva Clair**  
 “Honestly, I just wanted to win the Amazon gift card.”



**2 Women's Basketball?**  
 The women’s basketball team won a scrimmage on a buzzer beater! This would be really cool if people knew that there was a women’s basketball team.



**3 YCDS/SCDS Joint Production**  
 Still waiting on the joint Syms and Katz production. Maybe “Death of a Salesman” or “The Merchant of Venice”?



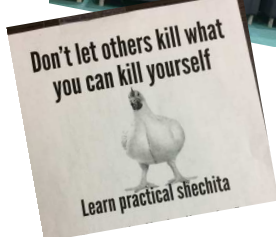
**4 Ticklish Professors**  
 How to score a paper deadline extension when you’ve tried everything else.



**5 Megyn Kelly Fired**  
 But really, who could have predicted that a former Fox News anchor was not cut out for nationally broadcasted news? See you at the #MegynKellyCanceledParty



**6 Student Court Rulings**  
 Let’s be honest, no one actually cares. Pass the Key Food grapes, please.

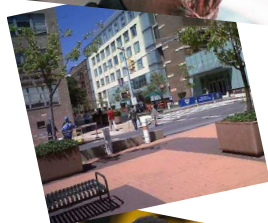


**7 Shechita Class**  
 Now this is how you market something. And they didn’t even have to advertise in the Wall Street Journal.

# 7 UP ↗ ↘ 7 DOWN



**1 Model UN**  
 You either die a hero, or live long enough to see yourself become the villain.



**2 Co-ed Uptown Shabbaton**  
 People will probably expect us to congratulate YU on this initiative, but you don’t get a shoutout for doing what’s so obviously right.



**3 Refusing to Give YU a Shoutout, But Unintentionally Giving Them a Shoutout By Acknowledging You Are Not Giving Them a Shoutout**

Man, this edition is super meta.



**4 Midterms and Midterms**  
 One of these things is a never-ending vortex of suffering, disappointment and despair, a test designed to see how things are going halfway through, a judgment on what has come so far, usually leading to hair loss, tension among friends and family and waves of anguish. The other is midterms.



**5 The November Sabbath Observers LSAT That 50% of Yeshiva College Seniors Are Taking Next Monday**

This is not a product placement ad for the LSAT. This is exactly what you want — nay, need. Just remember to practice circular sequencing, pack a candy bar and get ready to ca\$h in that day school tuition dough. SEE. YOU. AT. QUEENS. MAN.



**6 Rabbi Meir Kahane Yearbook Memorial (1991)**  
 So a terrorist dies and gets a dedication in the yearbook...



**7 Silence**  
 ...But a woman gives a 3-minute Dvar Torah at Klein@9 331 days ago and EVERYONE. LOSES. THEIR. MINDS!!

*PITTSBURGH VIGIL,  
 continued from Front Page*

Congressman Adriano Espallat spoke about the importance of both personal and spiritual faith, and how unity strengthens communities and people. State Assemblywoman Carmen De La Rosa spoke about praying for those lost in the attack. Senator-elect Robert Jackson told the crowd that even though people are shot and killed every day, being killed because of one’s ethnicity or religion is always unacceptable. City Councilmember Ydanis Rodriguez spoke about how important it is to build a society of love and invoked the long history between Dominicans and Jews.

*“Being in a place where Jews and their neighbors truly care for one another is something to cherish.”*

Max Gruber

After the speakers, eleven candles were lit to more music played by Tani Polansky to commemorate the people who lost their lives in the attack. Beren Campus Av Bayit Rabbi Yisroel Meir Rozensweig led a *mi sheberach* at the end of the vigil. After it ended the circle closed. Students thanked both the speakers and the Washington Heights community members for coming and showing solidarity.

Students who attended were deeply moved by the ceremony. Tzvi Moshe Wagman (SSSB ‘20) said that he “felt a profound sense of unity while looking around at the different types of people present.”

“The vigil was one of the most powerful experiences I have ever had,” said Max Gruber (SSSB ‘20). “Being in a place where Jews and their neighbors truly care for one another is something to cherish.”

## Wilf Student Court Deems YCSA Secretary/Treasurer Election Winner Ineligible for Office

By YOSSI ZIMLOVER

In a summary judgment issued on Thursday, Nov. 8, the Wilf Campus Student Court ruled that Moshe Nissanoff, the winner of the YCSA Secretary/Treasurer election, is ineligible for the position because Nissanoff is a sophomore and the Wilf Campus Student Government Constitution states the position must be filled by a junior or senior. The position will remain unfilled until the Spring 2019 elections.

The opinion the court was delivered by Benjamin Strachman and was joined by Benjamin Atwood, Samuel Gelman and Daniel Yellin. Dovid Schwartz, the Chief Justice of the Student Court, filed a dissenting opinion arguing that the results of the election should be sustained.

After the Fall 2018 Wilf Student Government elections were held on Oct. 17, Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) and Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA) filed a petition against the Canvassing Committee, the board of students responsible for conducting the elections, requesting the court remove Nissanoff from his position due to his apparent ineligibility.

Nissanoff was originally approved for candidacy after the Canvassing Committee confirmed with the Office of Student Life that all of the candidates that were running for positions were in the appropriate class, college or Undergraduate Torah Studies track.

*Please see the online version of this article for a link to the full summary judgment.*

# Men's Advanced Hebrew Requirement Shortened to 1 Semester

By ZACHARY GREENBERG

The advanced Hebrew track on the Wilf Campus has undergone several shifts this past semester to help improve the curriculum for students. In previous semesters, the advanced track was spread out over two courses: 1305 and 1306. Next spring, the curriculum will be changed to combine the two classes into one. Additionally, there is a brand new course being offered — 1406 — for students seeking to improve their ability to speak Hebrew in a conversational manner.

All Yeshiva College and Sy Syms School of Business students are required to take Hebrew language as undergraduates. Prior to the students' first semester, they are required to take a YU-administered placement examination to determine which Hebrew track they belong in: elementary, intermediate, upper-intermediate or advanced. Highly-advanced students are able to be exempted from Hebrew requirements if extreme proficiency in Hebrew is shown on a subsequent placement exam.

Students who are placed in the elementary track are required to complete Hebrew 1004, 1005 and 1006, which meet three times per week and span three semesters. Students placed in the intermediate track are required to complete Hebrew 1105 and 1106, which meet twice per week and span three semesters. Students placed in the upper intermediate track take Hebrew 1205 and Hebrew 1206, which meet twice per week and span two semesters. Starting next semester, the advanced track will be combined into one course, Hebrew 1305, which will be offered only in Spring semesters.

"Teaching Hebrew at YU is a particular educational challenge, because students come in with a huge range of backgrounds and skills, and rarely have those been acquired systematically," explained Jewish Studies Chair Dr. Aaron Koller. So we have a wide range of Hebrew programs to try to meet the students where they are, and continue their Hebrew progress."

*"It will serve students who will have professional and personal communication with people in Israel and especially those who make Aliyah and will need to express themselves on a high level."*

Professor Sigal Shalom

Regarding the change of combining the 1305 and 1306 courses, Koller related, "The new single-semester course obviously will not cover as much as the old 1305-1306 sequence, but in our judgment it will cover a sufficient amount for those strong students who enter with the advanced knowledge of Hebrew reflected in their placement into 1305."

Unique to this semester, an additional course, Hebrew 1406, has been created to help students who excel at grammatical Hebrew an opportunity to thrive at conversational

Hebrew. "This semester Hebrew 1406 is offered to students who have taken 1305 and wish to complete their Hebrew requirement with a practical application of what they have learned as opposed to continuing to learn the rules and patterns of Hebrew grammar in 1306," said Professor Sigal Shalom, YC's Hebrew program coordinator. "Next semester 1406 will be offered to students who have completed either 1305 or 1206 where they mastered the principles of grammar and can now apply them in writing and conversing about advanced Hebrew texts."

Students currently enrolled in Hebrew 1406 are pleased with the course. "Hebrew 1406 was an opportunity to take what I learned last semester and apply it in day-to-day conversational Hebrew," Ilan Sasson (SSSB '20) remarked. "Since the beginning of the semester, my skills and my comfort level have both improved, and I feel now that I can apply both the grammar skills and the speaking skills in unison."

"The 1406 class has been a great success because our students are motivated to learn Hebrew for different reasons — some for reading classical texts, others for having conversations with their Israeli colleagues and friends, or engaging in Israel society more broadly. The 1406 course has allowed those students who want to master Israeli Hebrew to work on those skills," Koller said.

"A class like 1406 is necessary in a world that keeps becoming more and more connected," Shalom said. "It will serve students who will have professional and personal communication with people in Israel and especially those who make Aliyah and will need to express themselves on a high level."

GPA,  
continued from Front Page

population, made the Dean's List.

Students' GPAs are computed as weighted averages based on the credit value of their courses. Grades range from A through F, with an A having a numerical value of 4.000, an A- having a numerical value of 3.667, a B+ having a numerical value of 3.333, and so on through a D-, which has a numerical value of 0.667 (an F has a numerical value of 0). According to the Academic Policies, students who "fail to achieve an average of at least 2.000 ... are placed on academic probation."

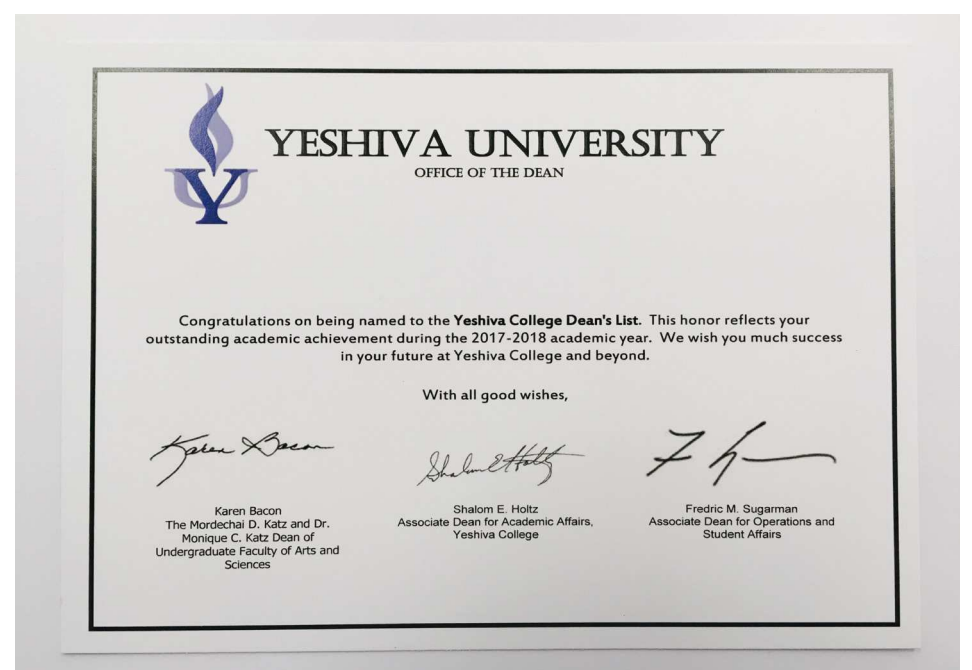
Of the 2216 students from this past academic year, 1184, or 53 percent of the undergraduate population, earned cumulative GPAs of at least 3.6, indicating a median GPA slightly greater than 3.6. A total of 711 students, or 32 percent of the undergraduate population, earned GPAs over 3.8, while 422 students, or 19 percent of the undergraduate population, earned GPAs over 3.9.

By college, SCW students overall earned the highest GPAs while Syms-Men students overall earned the lowest GPAs. In SCW, 497 students (58 percent) earned GPAs over 3.6, 320 students (37 percent) earned GPAs over 3.8, and 200 students (23 percent) earned GPAs over 3.9. In Syms-Men, 255 students (44 percent) earned GPAs over 3.6, 143 students (25 percent) earned GPAs over 3.8, and 87 students (15 percent) earned GPAs

over 3.9. In Syms-Women, 94 students (52 percent) earned GPAs over 3.6, 53 students (29 percent) earned GPAs over 3.8, and 29 students (16 percent) earned GPAs over 3.9. In YC, 338 students (57 percent) earned GPAs over 3.6, 195 students (33 percent) earned GPAs over 3.8, and 106 students (18 percent) earned GPAs over 3.9.

When presented with the above data that indicates high GPAs in YU, YU's deans posited a confluence of grade inflation and an intelligent student body. "Nationally there has been grade inflation compared to years gone by and we are not immune to this," figured Dean Karen Bacon, the Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences. "Nevertheless our high-ranking students consistently go on to success in graduate and professional schools and in their careers, so I don't feel our grades misrepresent both ability and performance."

Bacon also pointed to YU's Honors Program students, noting that "it is not all that surprising that a significant number of students have high GPAs." According to Professor Daniel Rynhold, the Director of the Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors Program, the Wilf Campus currently has 174 Yeshiva College Honors students and 86 Sy Syms Honors students. According to Professor Cynthia Wachtell, the Director of the S. Daniel Abraham Honors Program at Stern College, there are currently 172 Stern College Honors students (as of the time of publication, The Commentator was unable to confirm the number of women students



A congratulatory note from the Yeshiva College Deans, sent to 592 Yeshiva College students.

THE COMMENTATOR

in the Syms Honors Program).

Dean Michael Strauss of Sy Syms School of Business and Dean Ethel Orlian of Stern College for Women similarly attributed the high GPAs to YU's "Honors students" and "high achievers," respectively.

As Dean Bacon noted, grade inflation is indeed not unique to Yeshiva University. Several years ago, The Harvard Crimson revealed that the median grade at Harvard

College was an A-. According to The Emory Wheel, a "study of more than 400 colleges ... found that more than 40 percent of all awarded grades are As." Other studies as well indicate that grade inflation is endemic to hundreds of American colleges and universities. Even Princeton University, where grading expectation policies were instituted in Fall 2004 to curb grade inflation, had an average GPA of 3.461 this past academic year.

Archives from The Commentator indicate that GPA concerns have permeated YU dialogue in decades past. An article from 1955 describes how Yeshiva College revoked a grading expectation policy that had previously been in effect.

"We expect instructors to know how to grade," explained Dean Simeon Guterman, the Dean of Yeshiva College from 1953-1959, to The Commentator at the time. "We would like to see a proper grade distribution for the school as a whole."

## GPAs By College

	SCW	Syms-Men	Syms-Women	YC
Over 3.6	497	255	94	338
Over 3.8	320	143	53	195
Over 3.9	200	87	29	106
Total Students	861	583	180	592

## Law Review

## Unpunished Terroristic Threats

By YITZCHAK CARROLL

*The Jacob Hecht Pre-Law Society is pleased to inaugurate the first volume of the YU Undergraduate Law Review with a Commentator column on the legal and policy challenges of terroristic threat prosecutions. The purpose of the Undergraduate Law Review is to research and publish scholarly content on contemporary legal issues.*

Imagine this: a student threatens to blow up the Wilf Campus. The student shows off the weapons they intend to use to carry out the planned massacre, and even posts videos of their simulated target practice in preparation for the attack. SWAT teams pour in as students and faculty members are evacuated, and the perpetrator is, well, free to go with no criminal charges.

That's no joke; it's the law. And it's happened before, right here in New York State, on at least two prior occasions.

Two years ago, a Long Island high school janitor told a teacher to stay home because he planned to "Columbine" the school he was employed by, while showing a teacher his list of targets to be killed. Shortly thereafter, the janitor was arrested and indicted by a grand jury for the crime of Making a Terroristic Threat, a Class D felony, carrying a penalty of up to seven years in state prison. The defendant also had a stockpile of assault weapons in his house confiscated due to his arrest. But both a local judge, as well as a state appellate court, threw out the charges and returned the janitor's firearms due to the fact that the defendant's threat to blow up the school

was not "imminent." That's right — because the janitor did not specify when he planned to commit his act of terror, he could not face criminal charges. *See People v. Hulsen, 2017 NY Slip Op 04294, 150 A.D.3d 1261, 56 N.Y.S.3d 335 (App. Div.); see generally People v. Morales, 2012 NY Slip Op 8439, 20 N.Y.3d 240, 958 N.Y.S.2d 660, 982 N.E.2d 580. See also People v. Adams, 2016 NY Slip Op 26364, 54 Misc. 3d 234, 39 N.Y.S.3d 923 (Sup. Ct.)*

What's more, in 2015, a teenager in upstate New York made comments to a gathering of friends, stating her intent to "shoot up" her high school and its principal. The student was also seen recklessly taking target practice in their community that evening. Police were called, and the teen was arrested, yet the charges were once again dismissed by the court, on the basis that the girl's threat to shoot up her school did not constitute

stating that it is no defense if the individual who made the threat did not possess the capability to commit the massacre. The law was expeditiously drafted and passed by the State Legislature days following the attacks of Sept. 11, and includes language eerily similar to federal terrorism statutes. *See New York Penal Law §§ 490.05(1), 490.20; see also 18 U.S.C. §§ 2331(1), 2332(d).*

Its implications are stark and appalling. Because of the way the law is phrased, its interpretations in court have made it quite difficult for practical use by prosecutors in cases of threats to commit acts of mass harm. The application of laws works largely by following prior precedent; to wit, the foregoing two cases in which terroristic threats have gone unpunished, as the perpetrators have gotten off scot-free. The fact that a school employee who made threats to commit tragic acts at the high school in which he worked

second degree charge would be a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by up to one year in jail, and would apply to threats made to places of mass assembly in instances in which the given threat is one of reasonable credibility and causes the target of the threat to perform a lockdown or evacuation. The legislation further includes a provision that explicitly states that the charge can still be applied even if the threat was not made to its target directly.

An enhanced charge of Making a Threat of Mass Harm in the First Degree would be assessed when the defendant additionally commits an overt act in furtherance of their threat, such as creating a list of targets, preparing an attack plan or possessing the weapons necessary to carry out the massacre. The first degree charge would be a Class E felony, punishable by up to four years in prison.

Many individuals who propagate such threats are simply immature teenagers attempting to draw attention to themselves. Nevertheless, the aggregated harm caused with respect to law enforcement resources, class time and chaos is not a factor that can be simply brushed

to the wayside. And allowing individuals to get off with no consequences due to legal technicalities is unconscionable and not conducive to public safety.

In the wake of the Pittsburgh synagogue massacre and bomb threats to Jewish Community Centers, it is more evident than ever that measures must be taken to stamp out such criminal activity. Doing so must start with passing legislation to close this egregious loophole that threatens our quality of life and safety on campus.

*The statute's implications are stark and appalling. Because of the way the law is phrased, its interpretations in court have made it quite difficult for practical use by prosecutors in cases of threats to commit acts of mass harm.*

the intent to intimidate a "civilian population." *See Matter of Brittany A., 2015 NY Slip Op 25014, 47 Misc. 3d 761, 5 N.Y.S.3d 678 (Fam. Ct.)*

The statute of Making a Terroristic Threat in the New York State Penal Law includes several provisions necessary to sustain the charge: a threat to commit certain heinous offenses must be made with the intent to "intimidate or coerce a civilian population," and said threat must spur a reasonable expectation of the "imminent commission" of the act. Additionally, the law includes a provision

at — yet is not criminally liable, as he did not specify when he planned to carry out his calamity — should serve as a wake-up call to students and policymakers as to the necessity to close this loophole expeditiously.

To remedy this, a bill was introduced in the past legislative session by Senator Todd Kaminsky and Assemblymember Christine Pellegrino, yet it was not even brought forth for committee consideration due to partisan politics. Their bill would have created two separate charges of Making a Threat of Mass Harm in the First and Second Degrees. The



The New York County Supreme Court building in Manhattan, as photographed in 2013.

## Bioethics in Practice



End-of-life care can be a complicated and difficult process with no easy answers.

### To Pursue Life or To Give In To Death

By LEXIE LAST

Years ago, when medical treatment was based in apothecaries, leeches and prayer, a person suffering from any major disease or injury had essentially no choice over how, when or if they would die. Medicine did not provide enough avenues of care for them to have any say. However, in today's day and age, medical innovations have increased the ways in which patients can be treated, and in many cases, avert death. Through advances such as feeding tubes and ventilators, patients now can choose how they want to be treated during their end-of-life care. However, these innovations create many issues both social and religious, as they are not guarantees towards life, but, rather, a means of sustaining any semblance of life that may be left.

In 1991, the government enacted the Federal Patient Self-Determination Act, which states that doctors must communicate with their patients a full report of their options in terms of their medical treatment and respect whatever decision the patient decides, regardless of what they personally believe. They are to express the complications, limitations and reality of a patient's care, including whether or not extended care may be futile. As a doctor, this reality brings up many ethical questions. If a patient and/or their family decide to refuse treatment, they are going against the very fabric of values that holds the

medical profession together. Doctors now have to properly balance respect for the wishes of their patient, regardless of their own beliefs, with the best avenue of treatment, while also thinking about medical limitations.

Another problem that this brings up is the reality that long-term care has a significant cost, and there is an increasing lack of resources. As more and more people choose to pursue end-of-life care, healthcare becomes gradually more and more unaffordable. Insurance prices increase and are becoming significantly more expensive, and those who need care but cannot pay for it are left with nothing. Doctors and hospitals now have to consider not only what to do for the patient, but also whether or not providing the care is even affordable.

In the realm of halakha, end-of-life care has become a very complicated and controversial topic. We are taught as Jews that life takes precedence. The pursuit of life has priority above most halakhot, and we are even given the ability to violate many halakhot when necessary. The Talmud in Yoma 85a states that even if someone is found barely alive with no hope, we must continue to do anything and everything that we can do in order to save their life. This means that regardless of restrictions or ineffectiveness, care must be provided at all costs.

On the other hand, Sefer Chasidim notes that in Kohelet 3:2, King Solomon writes, "There is a time to give birth and

a time to die." There are moments when we must recognize that we have to let a person go, that their soul is now locked in this person's body unless we recognize their time to die. This philosophy is reiterated in the Shulchan Aruch (YD 339:1, Rema). Many Jewish authorities argue that this does not justify removal of life support. However, it may mean that extreme measures such as resuscitation or intubation for a patient with no hope may be foregone.

Many halakhic authorities also say that despite the immense worth we give to life, there is no obligation for a patient to continue care if it means that they will have to suffer by enduring emotional or physical pain.

Technology has provided a choice for patients: the decision to choose life or to relinquish themselves to death. These innovations, while life-saving as they may be, provide many ethical dilemmas that we as a society have yet to solve. Both the Jewish community and the medical community are still in the process of fully understanding how to rectify the ramifications and limitations with the hope and possibility that this technology provides. At the end of the day, medical care comes down to the patient and what is best for them. This care must be taken with the utmost seriousness and respect. It must seek to look beyond consequence and find the importance of care behind the confusion.

### The Day He Called Me Kike

By SHAYNA HERSZAGE

I searched for the origin of the word.  
If this is who I am, I want to know my name,  
And what it means  
To taste, to hear, to see, to be.

When my unnamed being arrived,  
Hope trailing in the wind,  
We were announced by "O"s -  
Not the instructed "X"s  
In the image of ankles tied together,  
Wrists nailed apart,  
In the image of a prayer not our own.  
O:  
Circle, Kikel, Kikey, Kike.  
And so I was named.

With a single spoken word,  
I became a circle scrawled a century ago  
On a world of promises  
Broken by a single spoken word.  
If I am  
A ring, a curving flourish,  
The signature in the corner of an eternal painting,  
I am proud to have never marked  
Slashes over my world.

COURTESY OF THE YU POETRY CLUB

FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

Editor's Note: The Commentator has decided to reprint the following articles from when the Yeshiva College undergraduate grading system was discussed and last updated. Concerns about grade inflation, which were a major impetus for the concerns raised and the changes addressed in these articles, still ring true these decades years later.

From the Archives (October 19, 1955; Volume 21 Issue 2) — Dr. Guterman Defines College Grading Policy

By COMMENTATOR STAFF 1955-56

There is no quantitative grading policy at Yeshiva College, disclosed Dr. Simeon Guterman, dean of the College. The Dean made the statement after Morris Silverman, registrar, had informed

The Commentator that a quantitative policy was in effect.

According to the policy explained by the Registrar, September 21, an instructor is to maintain no higher than a C+ — B- (2.89) average in elementary courses and a B — B+ (3.39) average in advanced courses. If the class average does not conform to the policy, the

instructor may be questioned by the College Office and asked to explain why his subject or his class is unusual, Professor Silverman said.

Policy Revoked

The following day, September 22, Dean Guterman revealed that the quantitative policy explained by the Registrar had been revoked

in June, 1953.

Last week the Dean again discussed the official policy of the College. "We would like instructors to be aware of the best grading practices," the Dean said. "We expect instructors to know how to grade. We would like to see a proper grade distribution for the school as a whole."

Emphasizing that the official policy is very general, the Dean continued, "We do not say to the instructor that he must give so many A's, so many B's, etc. Each instructor ought to be critical and grade carefully."

From the Archives (May 12, 1987; Volume 52 Issue 8) — Grade System to be Changed

By JAY STOCHINSKY and JAY NEUSTADTER

Next year YC faculty will have seven new grades in their arsenal. At the suggestion of the Academic Standards Committee, the faculty of YC has decided to adopt the grading system currently used in Stern College, whereby pluses and minuses can be awarded along with the grades A, B, C, and D: In calculating grade point averages, a plus grade will be worth one third point more than the grade, and a minus grade, one third less. Thus, for example, a B+ will be worth 3.33, and an A-, 3.66. There will be no A+ grade.

According to Dean Norman Rosenfeld, the faculty has supported such a change for a long time, feeling that it would allow them to grade more accurately. However, the real impetus for the change was administrative rather than academic. With the opening of the Sy Syms School of Business, students of both YC and Stern College will be taking (separate) courses in the same school, and to have two separate grading systems would be both inefficient and unfair. JSS and IBC will also adopt the new system.

Dean Rosenfeld estimated that the new grading system would lower the average GPA of YC students by two-tenths of a point. Since it will not be possible to earn an A+ grade, however, the change "will hit the higher averaging students hardest," and it will be much more difficult to maintain at 4.0 average. While admitting there was some concern among the faculty about grade inflation, Dean Rosenfeld denied that this in any way motivated the change, adding that,

"many faculty members believe that the grades students get are what they deserve."

Dean Rosenfeld also expressed some reservations about the new system. He believes the old grading system might be a more accurate way of assessing a student's performance, based on mathematical reasoning which he termed "arcane." He also expressed the fear that under the new system, students will be more likely to contest grades.

According to David Feldan, a member of the YU Senate, the students are against the change in the system just as they were the last time the issue arose a number of years ago. In reality, the students' reactions are mixed. Josh Adler, a graduating senior, feels that "the truth is that it is a much more accurate grading system than that which they've had in the past and I think it'll do a lot to curb the inflated GPA's at YU."

One YC freshman concedes that the plus-minus system is correct but is bothered by the fact that it will ultimately hurt him. This idea seems to be shared by many. However, the bottom line is as Joe Hyman, a YC sophomore, put it. "In the short run it will be to the students' detriment since they are too conditioned by the old system. In the long run they will benefit vis-a-vis harder work to achieve better grades, thereby reflecting better discipline, which will reflect more accurately the students' abilities. Students will no longer be able to scrape by with a B and talk their way into an A. The time is right to make this change. YU has the attention of big companies and top graduate schools and, if we want to keep them interested, we need to prove that our grades are real."

SCHOOL BECOMES a all degrees will us that they held re no more than

Dr. Schiff, all full- will be asked to , however, this plicable to part- Three new full- chers have been new business law ce professor, and ations instructor. at faculty change on of Professor tion as chairman department, with nsibilities being ean Schiff. This the integration of tments into one, ol, renders indi- unnecessary. Pro- will continue as of the business

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for SSSB states ill "offer a com- ich will nurture iness and entre- within the frame- l and theoretical ion". Such an will only be the dedicated inistration work- and meeting the t body.

Student Organization of Yeshiva

- PRESIDENT — Nachum Barishansky
VICE PRESIDENT — Steve Siegel
TREASURER — Jeff Paley
SECRETARY — Alan Friedman

Grade System to be Changed

by Jay Stochinsky and Jay Neustadter

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continued on page 15

into a somewhat tation between residents and th of Traffic that resolved by the p

The dispute traffic officer's in school van not p pedestrian mall a driver dropped block from his ho the child's mothe change, came o With her was an with an umbrella attacking the offi arrival of four ment of Traffic assailant retreated with more residen halted and restr lar police. Depart fic officers who appeared on th pelted with br residents.

Both Mr. Ken tor of YU securit Kincaid, of the view the incident manifestation of a animosity betwe itants and Depart fic officers, and of YUs new ped Officer Kincaid c while there hav complaints by some re the new mall, it gered any signific in traffic congest that even the Department, init in its oppositior because of perceiv delays, has "me those fears hav erialized.

The consensus police officials an personnel is that t at most a periphe acrimonious enco residents and the of Traffic. While of similar even exists, they feel it with the mall and area will proceed

# Beyond Partisan Infighting: An Interview with Lehrhaus' Rabbi Shlomo Zuckier

By MICHAEL WEINER

Though it launched just two years ago, The Lehrhaus has quickly become a popular and prestigious online forum for serious and respectful Orthodox Jewish commentary and conversation about divisive issues of the day. It filled a niche in the often unsavory world of online discourse, and has unsurprisingly become very popular, now attracting 30,000 unique visitors per month. I had the pleasure to sit down with one of the Lehrhaus's founders, Rabbi Shlomo Zuckier, and talk about how this distinctive online platform emerged and where it's headed next. The following is a condensed version of our conversation.

**Bio:** Rabbi Shlomo Zuckier is a Ph.D. candidate in Ancient Judaism at Yale University, a member of Yeshiva University's Kollel Elyon and is a Lecturer at YU's Isaac Breuer College (IBC). Previously he served as Director of the Orthodox Union's Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus at Yale University. Shlomo is an alumnus of Yeshivat Har Etzion and Yeshiva University (BA, MA, Semicha), as well as of the Wexner, Tikvah and Kupietzky Kodshim Fellowships. He has lectured and taught widely across North America, and is excited to share Torah and Jewish scholarship on a broad range of issues. Shlomo serves on the Editorial Committee of Tradition, is co-editor of "Torah and Western Thought: Intellectual Portraits of Orthodoxy and Modernity" and is editing the forthcoming "Contemporary Forms and Uses of Hasidut."

**Michael Weiner:** What's your educational and religious background?

**Rabbi Shlomo Zuckier:** I attended MTA, Yeshiva College and RIETS, and also spent 3.5 years in Yeshivat Har Etzion. I am currently completing a doctorate in Ancient Judaism at Yale University, and also serving as a Fellow in the Kollel Elyon.

**MW:** Did you have any particular opportunities or experiences at YU that contributed to your founding of the Lehrhaus?

**RSZ:** I was very involved with Kol Hamevaser as an undergrad, serving as Editor-in-Chief in 2010-2011. Back then, it published seven issues a year and featured a diverse range of perspectives among those on campus, from the left to the right. Among the professors who shaped my theological and intellectual interests was Rabbi Shalom Carmy, who, aside from teaching Tanach and Jewish philosophy, was the editor of Tradition. Building on that relationship, I became the Editorial Assistant for Tradition (from 2011 to 2016) and currently serve on its editorial committee. Both of these experiences gave me a strong foundation for the work I now do with The Lehrhaus.

**MW:** How did the idea for The Lehrhaus originate and develop?

**RSZ:** The Lehrhaus evolved out of conversations I had with two good friends, Zev Eleff and Ari Lamm — who incidentally had also been involved in Kol Hamevaser when they were in YC, and who are emerging as leading rabbinic-academic powerhouses. Back in 2015, we put our heads together about how we might help shape the sorts of conversations taking place online in Jewish and Orthodox circles. We thought that there was room for an online platform that was committed to providing sophisticated analysis of Jewish sources and perspectives on current issues, with a focus on creativity, scholarship and timely matters. Among the partisan sites and those focusing on personal narrative, there seemed to be a vacuum

online for our vision of how to conduct online conversation. We decided to select and join together with six other thinkers, writers and editors who shared our vision. We started working on our project in 2016, and went live in October just over two years ago. After we launched, we were pleasantly surprised by the very positive reception. A few of our early articles went viral, and we knew that The Lehrhaus was truly filling a need for communal discourse online.

**MW:** What were the core goals of the

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—  
Rabbi Shlomo Zuckier

Lehrhaus at its inception?

**RSZ:** The goal was to publish a variety of perspectives on issues both timely and timeless. These would include reflective pieces on current controversies, textual analyses on traditional Jewish texts, thoughtful explications on the *parsha* and other genres like *halakhah* articles and poetry.

In some ways, The Lehrhaus is carrying out online the kind of innovative venture that journals of Jewish thought like Tradition did in print over a half-century ago. However, there are some differences. Our publication is younger, befitting the standard audience online, with a younger readership and editors largely in their 20s and 30s. Given that we publish at least twice a week, we can afford to have a diverse range of views and topics. Being online also makes it easier to present a range of formats, from academic articles

years ago?

**RSZ:** Since May, our editorial team has been undergoing a transition, as some editors have left following their two-year term and some new voices have joined. That said, we maintain the same vision and are still the place for Orthodox Jews to engage in important, substantive conversations online.

**MW:** How did you quickly build up your reputation such that prominent and influential people in the Orthodox world now choose to publish in your pages?

**RSZ:** We launched the site with a handful of well-written, insightful articles right before Yom Kippur in 2016, which made a splash. That was followed in quick order by Chaim Saiman's outstanding article "The Market For Gedolim," to which we published multiple responses from a wide range of Jewish thinkers. These broad-based, high-quality pieces set our reputation, and since then we have retained that sense of quality and our reputation.

**MW:** How do you decide and delineate the set of opinions and content that you want to publish? What's the process like for deciding what topics to cover and what articles to publish?

**SZ:** Some of our content is solicited by our editors, because we think that certain topics are timely, interesting or things people should know about. However, much of our

even if we know it won't be as popular.

**MW:** Lehrhaus's mission statement says that it strives to be "a *beit midrash*, a place where scholars and writers can help create and shape communal conversations." What does that goal mean to you?

**RSZ:** The original "Lehrhaus," which can be translated as "study hall" or "*beit midrash*" from the German, was founded by Franz Rosenzweig as a center for Jewish adult education in 1920. He wanted to create a space where people could study traditional Jewish texts and Judaism using a broader scope, with an eye to their meaning and application in the outside world. Most *yeshivot* and *batei midrash* have a robust culture of learning and conversation, but are less focused on dialogue with those outside its walls.

At our Lehrhaus, we build on these multiple traditions. We share Rosenzweig's goal, and publish articles not only on *Chumash* and *halakhah* but also on history, philosophy and contemporary issues. At the same time, we do publish *divrei Torah* and essays on *halakhic* or talmudic topics, and aim to be a valuable web platform for traditional *halakhic* Jews who have spent time in the *beit midrash*. We are committed to a collegial and growth-oriented discourse and to using these pursuits to build an optimal community.

**MW:** What concrete feedback have you received about how The Lehrhaus has impacted current conversations in the frum community?

**RSZ:** Most notably, following the release of the OU rabbinic panel's *teshuvah* and OU statement on women serving as clergy, The Lehrhaus ran a wide-ranging symposium of responses across the scope of Orthodoxy, taking a variety of perspectives on the issue. Allen Fagin, Executive Vice President of the OU, reflecting on this, wrote in Jewish

INTRODUCING...

The Lehrhaus

MATTERS OF INTEREST

to poems. That said, the internet is less ideal for long-form writing than print, and so our articles tend to be somewhat shorter, for better or for worse.

**MW:** Who is your intended audience?

**RSZ:** Our intended audience is those who have some familiarity with Jewish texts and communal life. In our writing, we take certain basic Jewish concepts for granted, such as not translating the words "Ashkenazi" or "Sefardi." That said, sophisticated articles about Jewish texts or Jewish history or communal issues facing Judaism and Orthodoxy are of interest to lots of people beyond the Orthodox community.

**MW:** Has the current vision of The Lehrhaus changed since its beginning two

content is unsolicited. Keeping a balanced portfolio between those poles, as well as between high-quality articles and popular pieces, helps keep our material high-grade and our readers engaged.

**MW:** How do you avoid the "clickbait temptation," and give people what they want vs. what they need?

**RSZ:** This is something we think about a lot. Clicks give feedback with regard to what people are interested in, which is very helpful for us when considering what to publish.

However, we also want to produce quality content, like poetry or a nitty-gritty analysis of a specific *halakhic* topic. Some content goes viral, and some doesn't. But we will publish material we think is high-quality,

Action that The Lehrhaus's treatment of this issue was a model for how to conduct honest, respectful discourse. Even though a number of the articles in that symposium diverged from the OU's position on this issue, they were all respectful and charitable, as all candid discourse should be.

**MW:** What's a topic that you hope to receive or solicit more articles about?

**RSZ:** We've published about this before, but it would be wonderful to expose our American readers to the interesting theological conversations taking place in Israel. We saw this with a variety of pieces on Rav Shagar last year, and are already lining up pieces on other leading Israel thinkers who deserve greater exposure here.



## Escape from Iran: The Story of William Mehrvarz

By YOSEF LEMEL

I first met William Mehrvarz at YU's Fall 2018 Orientation on Wilf Campus. He is currently studying at YU. We introduced ourselves and I was very surprised to learn that he emigrated from Iran. There is not much news about the Jews in Iran and I had many questions. To what extent are they persecuted? How many of them still live there? What is their lifestyle like? I wanted some answers, and I believed that William would have them. So I set up an interview with him scheduled for Nov. 5.

When we met, William told me that he had a surprise for me. He was not born Jewish. William Mehrvarz was born prematurely to Muslim parents in Tehran on Oct. 19, 1992, a date which coincided with that year's *Shemini Atzeret*. William jocularly told me that he was anxious to be born that day in order to celebrate the Torah. He said he has a hunch that he has Jewish ancestry because his maternal great-great grandmother's name was Tzipora, which is a Jewish name. Many Jews in the area where Tzipora lived were forced to convert during that period in history. Unfortunately, William could not locate Tzipora's tombstone in order to confirm his suspicion.

As a premature baby, William was very sick. His grandmother prayed for him every day at the Imam Reza shrine, which is the largest mosque in the world. Once William survived, his family named him after Imam Reza. "Reza" in Arabic means contentment. Ironically, William was never content with his life in Iran under an Islamic theocracy.

When he was 13, William met a Christian Armenian at summer-camp in Iran. They struck up a friendship. His Christian friend frequently read his Farsi Bible, which intrigued William. William had never been exposed to any other ideas besides those of Islam. In Iran, it is forbidden for a Muslim to read the Bible. William was not interested in the New Testament because he didn't find the narrative and characters compelling and he found Christian theology and philosophy incompatible with Islamic thought. However, because Judaism and the Old Testament have ideas pertaining to strict monotheism and rationalism that are similar to Islamic thought, Judaism resonated with William. At the time he didn't want to have a Jewish life and didn't yet connect the Old Testament to Judaism. He said that the Torah just spoke to him. William subsequently brought home his new and exciting discovery, but what he faced was a great deal of oppression and backlash from his family because they felt that he had touched something forbidden.

William's father gave him an English version of the Quran. He thought that since William had a considerable appreciation for the English language, he would read it. However, this was not the case. William wanted to study his discovery. His family made it clear to him that reading the Bible was not acceptable in their society. Apostasy is a major crime in Iran, which would warrant execution under Sharia Law.

In 2009, William was in his senior year of high school and the Iranian government was holding a presidential election. The conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad defeated the more moderate Hossein-Ali Montazeri. Many supporters of Montazeri believed that the election was a sham and thought that Ahmadinejad had tampered with the election results. Many citizens took to the streets in protest of the government. William was one of these protesters. This movement was known as the Iranian Green Revolution,

during which William himself saw people dying on the streets from the government's attacks. Once the revolution failed, William fell into depression. It was at this time that he started observing some aspects of Judaism. For example, William became a vegetarian so that he wouldn't have to eat meat not slaughtered according to *halakhi* standards. He knew the consequences of his actions. If the wrong people found out about his Jewish observance, he could have been executed the Iranian regime for apostasy.

After the Green Revolution, William moved to Kish Island, which is off the southern coast of Iran. He worked in a shipping company and attended night classes in order

calling him a "filthy Jew," among other insults. His sister-in-law had long wondered why William had been posting verses from Psalms on his social media and expressed that her suspicions were finally confirmed.

"I was very glad at that point that someone finally recognized my Judaism," said Mehrvarz, "but then the fear kicked in... the [fear of the] consequences of this secret being revealed to others, especially to my family, who are connected to the government and are religiously conservative. And there was the fear of execution. I would not lie to anyone, I would have stood on my beliefs and said that I have done this because I believe in it, and never apologize."

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*When William's Jewish identity was revealed to his wife's family, they locked the door and called his parents. Once his parents arrived, William took the opportunity to escape.*

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to finish high school. Once he graduated from high school, he attended Allameh Tabataba'i University (ATU) in Tehran where he studied French and Linguistics. One of William's great fascinations is the study of language. He believes that knowledge of various languages widens an individual's perception of the world. William's father is a lawyer, his uncle is a lawyer, and his grandfather practiced law. It therefore came as a surprise to his family when William did not choose this career path for himself.

William attended ATU for three years. At ATU he met an Iranian girl whom he fell in love with and married. She came from a deeply religious Muslim family. Like William, she harbored a secret: she was secular. William confessed to her his own secret. She was surprised but very accepting of who William decided to be. They figured that they could marry and create a private bubble for themselves in order to be free to religiously practice what they wanted. She could be secular and William could be Jewish. When they were outside of this atmosphere, they would act according to the Islamic tradition and according to societal norms.

William and his wife soon ran into multiple troubles and challenges: How could they have children? Because of the opposing views on religious lineage between the two religions, a child out of their marriage would be considered a Muslim by the Jewish community and a Jew by the Muslim community. They ended up trying to have a baby despite their concerns, but unfortunately, William's wife suffered a miscarriage that devastated both of them.

During their marriage, William became more observant of Judaism. He started lighting Shabbat candles, attending synagogue, visiting Jewish communities --he even spent a Purim in the presumed tomb of Mordechai and Esther, an experience which he described as "spiritually uplifting." He also finally found a kosher butcher shop in Iran to purchase meat. However, he remained afraid of expressing his religious views in public.

In 2016, William's wife wanted to get a divorce. William begged her to wait until after her sister's wedding. One day before William's sister-in-law's wedding, the couple was at her mother's apartment to help with the wedding preparations. William and his wife struck up an argument with each other. Suddenly, his mother-in-law and sister-in-law came into the room to see what was going on and William's wife blurted out his secret. She told those that were in the room that he was a Jew. William's sister-in-law started

language, and so William seemed to be a befitting name.

William is currently seeking asylum in the US based on religious and political persecution. His case is still pending. In the US, William underwent a Conservative conversion to Judaism which took two years to complete. He is currently working on his Orthodox conversion through the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA). William works remotely for the Center for Near East Policy Research based in Jerusalem as a translator and researcher in order to pay off rent and bills.

William says it has been extremely challenging for him to pay his rent, but that he is a persistent and hardworking man. There are also religious communities who are lending a helping hand to William. William specifically praised the Jewish community of the Lower East Side of Manhattan for the emotional, financial, and social support he has received from them. In addition, he has been warmly received by the Persian Jewish community in the Five Towns and the Jewish community in Linden, NJ. He hopes to establish a connection with the Persian Jewish community based in California when he makes a trip there in January 2019.

When he arrived in New York, William attended Columbia University for one semester and majored in human rights. Columbia was the only college in NYC that he knew of, due to Ahmadinejad's controversial visit there in 2007. Columbia ended up being too expensive for William so he had to transfer to another college for the following semester. Fortunately, Rabbi Zvi Romm from the RCA got him in contact with the Yeshiva University administration. They sat down with him and he told them his story. The administration was fascinated and gave him a substantial scholarship to YU.

"I am very thankful for the generosity and support that I have received through Yeshiva University," Mehrvarz stated. "This is a dream come true because without them I

*Continued on Page 11*



William Mehrvarz at Fall Orientation on Wilf Campus, August 2018

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

# The Insane Society: Why Mass Shootings Are No Mere Aberrations

By ARYEH SCHONBRUN

Our society continues to reel from the onslaught of the vicious assaults on our defenseless and young, from the inhumanity of arbitrary acts of murder that cannot be accounted for by any traditional means. Psychologists fail to identify practical applications of therapy and diagnosis adapted to the era of the AR-15, and lawmakers fail to act on common sense. Our situation starkly contrasts with the peace and quiet promised to us by our authorities and strikes at the heart of our nation's psyche. What has changed in us that has allowed such bloodshed and carnage to occur and reoccur, and what can be done to stop it?

In order to understand more fully the sociological context of these acts of mass slaughter, we must begin with a comprehensive examination of our society's attributes, both positive and negative. In order to do so, I request of you an open mind and a willingness for self-critique. I don't wish to blame ourselves, but we must know our shortcomings in order to fix our faults.

Bloodshed itself as a human phenomenon needs no explaining. Over the millennia, and over just the few centuries of this country, men have murdered, killed, plundered, maimed, destroyed, conquered and raped as a matter of course. The act of killing, as distant as it may now seem, does not require from us much reasoning. Humans, even upon accounting for all our progress and enlightened attributes, retain the legacy of eons of evolution. We as civilized citizens do not wish to focus on our animal-like instincts, but as we all know, they lie deeply rooted in our individual psyches, irascible and untamable in their base forms and only faintly sublimated through the labyrinthine structure of modern society. A quick glance at the third world would equally demonstrate to any observer that man was born to fight. Regardless of the serious questions surrounding our inaction as concerning the crime and poverty of our uncivilized brethren, and our apathy to their struggles, we must come to the realization

that violence, as much as we fear it, finds a place in the pantheon of human emotion. It is a force we cannot erase or transmute; it must be reckoned with seriously and through sophisticated awareness of our societal ills.

As citizens of the West, we have become accustomed to lives of relative security. Longevity, once considered a divine gift, now appears to many as a scientifically and medically-backed right. Crime, drugs, lawlessness and even poverty can be avoided, as our prosperity gospel preaches, with just faith in the law, society, God and oneself. Responsibility and goodwill, as the individual's obligation to himself, to society and to the Almighty, go hand-in-hand with the rewards of living in the modern haven of the post-industrial democracy. One need not dirty his hands in hard labor, as did his forefathers, nor need he independently pursue for himself education, occupation, family and society. He doesn't have the urge to set out for undeveloped wilderness, nor the necessity to settle for a pauper's lifestyle. With just a bit of talent, and some *mazal*, he'll surely find his place in this vast American society.

Overall, the prosperity gospel doesn't fail to bring its promised returns. Man (that is, Western Man) lives today better off than ever before in his tediously haunting history. Never before in the millennia of civilization and the eons of prehistory has man found himself in control of all the elements of nature, and with the power to indefinitely satisfy his physical needs. We cannot even begin to imagine how our forefathers fought just in order to survive, and we count our blessings for having been born to a technically-advanced society. However, as we all know, physical prowess does not make the whole of man. We lack some other basic necessities.

Spiritually, Western Man breathes his last breaths before falling into a love-deprived coma. We millennials, born to the most prosperous generation *ever*, have also entered this cruel world in its most backward and infantile stage of sociological development. We live our lives as servants to our desires, technology, jobs, identities and traumas, unable to withdraw from our worldly ties in

order to contemplate the divine, the beautiful, the eternal and significant. We surround ourselves in artificial societies, disconnected from each other, while plugging ourselves in to unstable and insecure relationships. America is as prosperous as anyone would dare dream possible, but America is falling, and failing its citizens.

In America's prosperous wonderland, we find harsh conditions of poverty, social neglect and inequitable social structure. America, the richest country in the world, also ranks high in crime, poverty and economic inequality. The America of old, of a strong middle class, of satisfied, happy industrial workers, has long gone and been replaced by elitist, bureaucratic misers, a broke and disaffected workforce and a debt crisis that has just begun to generate discomfort and disarray. Americans, overwhelmed by the increasingly cumbersome burden of indelible student debt, adding to already significant levels of credit and mortgages taken on in order to secure a modest lifestyle, have started to struggle to make ends meet, and have come to question the consequences of continued economic growth. As the average salaried American worker sees it, as the economy grows, life just goes on getting harder. As life goes on, it gets more difficult to live.

The renewed struggle for a decent wage and way of life, in contrast to the worker's relative stability and vitality of the post-war economies of the West, has introduced into Western Man a struggle against the elements that had long been thought vanquished. After the spectacular disaster of two world wars, it appeared to the West that the time for violence and struggle came to an end. Equitable allocation of natural resources and comprehensive social reforms meant to reinforce the welfare state and workers' faith in humanity came to represent not only prudent economic policy, but inspired and real social progress. Americans came to understand that true patriotism extends into the mundane existence back home, and started to deal with the inherent social ills present in their contemporary society. They fought for

the freedom of the blacks, for positive social and economic change and for comprehensive security and prosperity of all citizens, no matter race, creed or ethnicity. A common destiny and shared identity formed, bred by the brotherhood of the military and by the unity imposed on a nation when under threat, and by a general goodwill promoted by all who desired the end of needless struggle.

Today, things have changed. No longer can we rely on society or on the government, and no longer do we feel connected as we once did. We have grown apart, both physically (suburbia) and socially, and nowadays screens, devices, illness and now existential fear separate us more. The demagoguery of identity politics, bolstered by an upsurge in cheap populism, reinforces in all citizens that the collective spirit that once defined Americans exists no more. We can't even bemoan the loss of it anymore and no one can even seem to remember that things were different (and better) just a generation ago, before the politicians declared war on unity and began to divide us.

Today, each and every individual must strike forth for his or her self, and redeem themselves from the tedium of today's post-capitalistic economic toil. If one finds a job that pays enough to satisfy his material needs, he has been elected by the market to succeed; if not, he has been predestined to a life of stress, fear and humiliation. American workers, in response to an increasingly unproductive way of life and unnecessary economic hardship, have distanced themselves from unions, thereby giving up their basic rights to demand their worth in salary and have grown disaffected, despaired of any progress of their interests and increasingly anxious regarding their future. Pensions have fallen significantly over the past few decades (thanks to ineffective bargaining power), salaries stagnate, benefits are cut, government handouts reduced, costs have risen and morale has flatlined. This sorry state of affairs exposes the reality of the average American citizen, and, to be sure, he feels it.

For the American worker, the inability to fend for himself, the outright subjugation of his economic viability to little-known and poorly understood market trends and the tremendous sterility with which one must navigate the unforgiving job market don't lose their significance on his psyche. The not-knowing, the inability to rely on one's stable employment and on one's ability to weather the storms that reality delivers, the feeling of aloofness, the insidious loneliness and utter dependence on and subjugation to forces not in one's control all contribute to the feelings of fear, alienation and paranoia that define an average citizen today. The worker, satisfied easily at the prospect of making a meager living, unable to demand any more of his bosses, must rely on the grace of god, i.e. the market, for his sustenance. Society, as we repeatedly witness, will offer him no respite nor grace. Society, in gross abundance of narcissistic entitlement has turned away from the lowly employee and has forsaken him to fate. With callous apathy, society looks on as Americans suffer in silence, unable to make ends meet and without just intervention. The middle-class withers away from lack of investment, and society pays no heed.

Many suffer from physical, mental and spiritual isolation, regarding themselves as unwanted by society's exacting measurements of productive and beneficial. Some try to get help, but some eventually find themselves addicted not only to their phones,



**"Diversity is a big thing here.  
We even have one guy who likes his job!"**

RANDY GLASBERGEN

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*ESCAPE FROM IRAN,*  
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would never have received a formal Jewish education. I would love to give back to the community.”

“The rabbis compare Torah to water. For me, once I was thrown into the sea of Torah I was so happy and content that I could swim into this vast ocean in order to learn and grow and love. And I want to learn *gemara* and Torah so I can grow and serve *Hashem* in order to give back to the world that has given me a lot.”

When asked about the state of the Jewish community in Iran, William stated that they

are given a certain amount of religious freedom. Jews are allowed to attend synagogues, eat kosher food, and observe Shabbat. The children are not forced to attend school on Shabbat. However, Zionism is strictly prohibited by the Iranian government. Jews are not allowed to express any support for the Jewish state. William said that the Iranian government actively seeks the destruction of Israel and display doomsday clocks in anticipation of Israel’s destruction.

William plans on eventually making aliyah, though he also is taking into consideration his financial situation. When asked what policy the United States should pursue when dealing with Iran, William answered, “The United States needs to protect the State of Israel. It is my concern that Iran

is conducting certain activities in order to harm the Jewish state. Therefore, I am for any policy that reduces the chances of Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon or to harm to the state of Israel in any capacity.”

William said that he holds the First Amendment of the Constitution in high regard. “I am a true believer in religious freedom,” he said. “I am a speaker for the Jewish National Fund (JNF). I speak on human rights issues and religious freedom. So that is a value for me and I would love to see everyone in this country expressing themselves peacefully, as long as it’s not contradicting someone else’s rights. Freedom of speech is not tolerated in Iran. All media is controlled by the government and there is no opposition. Everything that people hear

is in praise of the Ayatollah and the current regime.”

William is currently majoring in Political Science with the hopes of attending law school in the future. It seems that he will continue his family’s background in law after all. He is still deciding on what type of law he wishes to practice.

After speaking to William, I started wondering if I would have made the same decisions had I been put in his situation. He was prepared to die in Iran *al kiddush Hashem*, in sanctification of God’s name, and was prepared to go the extra mile in order to observe his religion. Fortunately, we are able to learn many lessons from his life story.

## The Great and Powerful 24 Hour Show

By ELANA LUBAN

As the pre-play hecticness reached a crescendo — people finding their seats, the lights only minutes from dimming — a figure wearing all black rushed out from backstage into my aisle. Being the obnoxious reporter that I am, I smiled, introduced myself and asked David Levene (YC ‘20) — who I discovered, about three quarters into the production, was none other than Oz himself — if he had any pre-play words to offer. “What can I say ... The last 24 hours have been extremely, *extremely* hectic,” he said smiling. “But this has been an amazing chance to do something with a lot of my friends, be a part of something — something different.”

The production, presented by Stern College Dramatics Society (SCDS) and Yeshiva College Dramatics Society (YCDS) on the night of Sunday, October 28, truly proved unique, one of the reasons being that it allowed the participation of both Stern’s and YC’s dramatic societies.

As someone who grew up participating in and attending Bais Yaakov plays, I was sorely disappointed to find that YU still splits the sexes when it comes to theater. In the community from which I hail, and many others similar to it, each production involves women trying to lower their voices and donning loose trousers in an effort to depict male characters. Meanwhile, male dramatic societies must search for scripts

that have little to no female roles. I assumed all of YU’s productions were destined to follow a similar pattern, but it turns out that, although major productions cannot be co-ed, staged readings can be. This is why the announcement of “The Wizard of Oz” piqued my curiosity. I knew this show was going to be different, and I was eager to see how it would balance YU’s strict rules with its own flavor and creativity.

movements like a shadow.

“I really enjoyed bringing ‘Jewish’ comedic aspects into our performance,” said Broder. “Where but at Yeshiva University would we be able to use these kinds of jokes? It’s worth having co-ed plays just for that alone.”

What else sets this play apart from other shows put on by YCDS and SDSC? Well, nearly everything. While most staged read-

*“It was like magic watching the whole thing come together... it was so incredible to see how perfectly everyone was cast and how perfectly things fell into place.”*

Chana Weiss (SC, ‘21)

Instead of avoiding the awkward *halakhic* limitations that come with a YU production, the dramatic societies embraced them to their advantage. One of the aspects of the show that made it so humorous (there were many) was its self-awareness. Not only were there several *shomer negiah* jokes scattered throughout, but arguably the most iconic moment of the play was when Dorothy, played by Brielle Broder (SC ‘20), mouthed the lyrics to the iconic “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” while Matthew Shilat (YC ‘21), a YCDS board member and one of the directors of the show, stood behind her in black, singing the song while echoing her

ings, also co-ed, usually take place in regular rooms and incorporate minimal props and sets, “The Wizard of Oz” went all the way. It almost had the feel of a major, once-per-semester show: all the necessary props, intricate, albeit whimsical scenery, incredibly imaginative and colorful costumes (the kind you’d never get a chance to use unless your script incorporates munchkins) — and it filled nearly every seat in the Schottenstein Theater, a phenomenon typical of full-fledged productions.

The most obvious difference, however, remains the short amount of time allotted for casting and rehearsal: 24 hours.

When asked about the beginning of the process and how the production came together, nearly everyone used the word “hectic.” Yaacov Siev (YC ‘20), the show’s lighting technician, said, “As the hours wore on throughout Sunday, things slowed down a bit and the caffeine started wearing off. But as the performance grew closer, and people replenished their coffee cups, that energy and excitement came back in force.” Describing the process, he mentioned that while the Schottenstein Theater remains largely unused for most of the year, “during the 24 Hour Show, every single floor was abuzz with people working. Making the backdrops for the set on one floor, gathering props and costumes on others, rehearsing downstairs in the basement; there was life and energy on every single level.”

“It was like magic watching the whole thing come together,” said Chana Weiss (SC ‘21), an SCDS board member. “At the first read-through and then again at the costume-fitting, it was so incredible to see how perfectly everyone was cast and how perfectly things fell into place.”

For the first show of its kind put together by the boards of both dramatic societies, the “semi-professional product of 24 hours of preparation” — as the promotional flyer described it — was more than a success; it was unique, self-aware and proof that YCDS’s and SCDS’s creative capabilities far exceed our expectations.



The Wizard of Oz bestows gifts upon Dorothy and her fellow Oz-seekers.

## What Are Students Saying About Shabbos @ Wilf?

By PHILLIP NAGLER

In a recent Commentator article, my friend and classmate Brian Chernigoff reflected on his *Simchat Torah* experience and shared some of his thoughts about the Shabbos community on the Wilf Campus. At the end of his article, he stated, "I hope that people will submit additional articles discussing their point of view on this matter." I decided to take Brian's advice by writing this article, which will reflect on my own Shabbos experiences uptown, as well other students' experiences.

Personally, I am a very big fan of the Shabbos community uptown and would encourage students to stay in more often for Shabbos. My favorite part of Shabbos here is that it provides me with the opportunity to meet and talk to people that I wouldn't normally see during the week. In the caf, I like to sit next to new faces, or with friends from my yeshiva in Israel or high school that I rarely see during the week. I have met many of my closest friends in YU by staying in for Shabbos.

When I recently asked other students what they particularly enjoy about Shabbos, I noticed that many of them referenced a common theme of friendship and camaraderie. Matthew Silkin (YC '19) said: "What really makes Shabbos on campus for me are the other people who are here. I have friends on campus, and Shabbos is one of the only times that I can really relax with them without stressing about classes or work or,

well, really anything." Ely Bloch (SSSB '21) shared a similar sentiment: "I particularly enjoy the ability to hang out with the people I constantly pass in the halls or dorms and don't get a chance to chill with, or even get the chance to say anything more than 'hey.' There is no rush on Shabbos and that creates the ability to form a community even if just for Shabbos, and that makes Shabbos here (and the week) much better!"

Another aspect of Shabbos on campus that I appreciate is the choice of *minyanim* available. I'll usually start off my Shabbos with the harmonious and impactful *kabbalat Shabbat* in Klein. Irwin Leventer (YC '19) thinks that this minyan is "a beautiful way for students to come together and be spiritually expressive through music." For students who like a slightly quicker minyan, the Rubin minyan is available to them as well. Conversely, students who enjoy a

"yeshiva style" minyan have the option of Glueck.

One of the unique programming opportunities on Shabbos are the shiurim given by different Roshei Yeshiva who stay in each week on campus. Yitzzy Laster (YC '20) described them as "an opportunity to hear *rebbe'im* speak about topics in *hashkafa* and *machshava* that wouldn't normally be discussed in a daily *iyun shiur*. The Friday night *tisch* is an especially good time for this." Most of the students who I spoke with stated they enjoy the content of the *shiurim* given on Shabbos. Other students, such as Josh Leichter (YC '21), "feel there should be more accessible *shiurim* geared towards IBC students who may not find the current *shiurim* engaging."

Regarding the Caf, I received a mixture of responses from students. Yehuda Rosenfeld (SSSB '20) told me he thinks that "the Caf is

nice when there is a big crowd." One anonymous student told me that "Caf food needs improvement." Another anonymous student said that though "Friday night food is gross, the food at lunch is pretty good." While I personally would not describe the food as gross, I would agree that the meal at lunch is a lot better than the one at night. With that said, nobody is "starving" on Shabbos and I think that most students would agree that the food in the caf is not a major deterrent from staying in for Shabbos.

Overall, Shabbos on the Wilf Campus seems to be a positive experience for many students. It is a time where people feel they can relax and hang out with friends. The *minyanim* and *shiurim* create an atmosphere that allows many students to feel spiritually connected to Shabbos. If you have yet to stay in for Shabbos on campus, I'd highly encourage you to do so.



Corner of Amsterdam Avenue and 186th Street opposite MTA, Wilf Campus

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

*THE INSANE SOCIETY,*  
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but also to a myriad of drugs, meant to compensate for their mental anguish. Some get treatment, but treatment has never been known to provide sustenance. Their pain remains real, materially and spiritually piercing, but no one arrives to help them out.

And so, the average American suffers in silence, robbed not only of the fruit of his labor, but of the natural relationships that contribute to his sense of belonging, identity and self-value. Bereft of a society that cares for its weak, its downtrodden and its dejected, the American turns away and recuses himself, to the blinding screens and artificial constructs of his disturbing reality. In disbelief and frustration, humbled and sad, he suffers alone, unable even to commiserate with his fellow rejects.

Society, as I have demonstrated, doesn't give a hoot. She shows a lack of compassion unequalled to in the Western world, an internalized xenophobia that alienates all who wish to contribute and become part of a collective vision, a shared identity. Society, robbed of her humanity, fails to unite men together and ceases to exist. Society, as we have come to expect, cannot last much longer: she will fall apart spectacularly.

When society disintegrates, as a result of lack of economic and social investment in her upkeep, anarchy reigns supreme, and average citizens become targets of arbitrary acts of violence. The fabric of society, as a uniting, organizing force for good, cannot function without ample support. Upon the gutting of the common identity of the nation and her social capital in favor of irrational, cruel and cold egotism, society fails and disappears.

When a cold-hearted killer approaches his victims, he cannot empathize with them. They are nothing to him. If he were to see them as living, beautiful beings, he would not dare harm them. When an attacker prepares

himself, he cannot allow himself to see the good and the humanity in his victims, else he would surely commit himself to repentance and forego his evil intent. However, when society does not offer him the option of seeing men as men, when we may only regard human personnel as an economic "resource" (i.e. "human capital"), she dehumanizes the character of the strangers in his life, and he fails to empathize with his compatriots. The privatization and individuation of society, taken to such an extreme, must surely give way to cruel, baseless violence, and I fail to feel surprised when time and again such tragedies occur. The same society responsible for her failure to care for her weak and struggling, her subjugated and impoverished, who casually dismisses claims of justice and humanity as "irresponsible" or "unscientific," will surely find herself reeling from such self-inflicted violence. A human, once degraded, becomes a threat, even more so with an AR-15.

I do not wish to excuse the actions of the sociopaths who decided to commit these horrendous acts of utter violence, but I do want to point out our mistake when assigning blame. We tend to blame the authorities, politicians, gun-makers, god, etc., but we shy away from blaming ourselves. If we are society, we, then, are to blame. If we yet retain some say in the direction of our politics, we must act to save this country. However, it will take more than a ban on assault weapons, or increased mental health funding. In order to make a difference, we need to stand up for justice, demand change and progress, equity and equality and continue to pray for salvation.

"Rabbi Chanina, the Deputy High Priest, says: Pray for the welfare of the government, since without reverence for of it, man would swallow his fellow alive." (Avot 3:2)



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## Why We Need Chabad on Campus

By AVIV YARIMI

How is Yeshiva University different from other universities? Is it just that we have a pretty rigorous dual-curriculum, divided campuses, and salmon Thursdays? Or is there more? Obviously, there is an assortment of differences we can find between YU and other colleges; I am sure any given student on Wilf or Beren Campus can provide a fairly lengthy list of these clear-cut disparities. YU is intrinsically unique — hence its almost completely Jewish population. But one difference shines brightly and blares loudly; yet is still not given as much attention as it deserves: a lack of Chabad presence on campus. My question is: why does this difference exist?

I'm aware. I'm aware that we attend a Jewish university and one might be skeptical as to whether there is an actual need for a Chabad on campus. To respond to this fairly legitimate concern, it is necessary to identify the function of a typical "Chabad on Campus." For one, it is meant to serve as a religious venue for Jews who want to preserve their observance and *yiddishkeit*. Not everyone on secular campuses chooses to go to the Hillel. Chabad also famously serves the purpose of being a haven for less affiliated Jews. Ultimately, it is a place where Jewish people, of all different religious backgrounds, can physically congregate and spiritually commune.

The presence of those diverse religious backgrounds is where there is a similarity between YU and other universities.

YU's student body is more diverse than



### Chabad on campus

one may think. It's easy to ignore the various *hashkofot* that pervade the atmospheres of the Beren and Wilf campuses and simply categorize all students under a brand name of "Modern Orthodoxy." But YU is, in fact, fairly diverse. A few glances around campus is enough to realize that this claim is evidently true. And if for some reason diversity is not immediately apparent, then a few discussions with any given number of people would support this overlooked reality. It's all there: religious right, left, center,

observant, non-observant, strongly affiliated, weakly affiliated. Oh, and did I mention, some *Chabadnikim*?

"Chabad on Campus" at YU would address several foundational issues that linger in the environment. It would facilitate a sense of community and Shabbat life, which would partially eliminate the almost self-fulfilling prophecy of "a weak Shabbat life due to a low number of students who stay in."

It would allow for easy access to a common meeting place, where people would be

able to enjoy weekday hangouts, Shabbat meals, *shiurim*, speakers, *chassidus* and all the great things that Chabad has to offer the Jewish people. While YU claims to provide all these activities and experiences on Shabbat, quite frankly, it does not do so very often. 'Chabad on Campus' has a strong reputation for successfully carrying out these community-building events. Furthermore,

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*RESPONDING TO TRAGEDY,  
continued from Front Page*

it becomes very challenging to not become inured or desensitized due to the frequency or ubiquity of the events. That is part of the protective equipment that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* implanted in man, namely that man is very resilient and sometimes that resiliency can express itself in being desensitized, and therefore insensitive, to the really horrific things that happen around us.

But, part of our mission is to try, as much as possible, to cultivate a perspective and orientation towards the sanctity of life and especially towards *Klal Yisrael* where *kol Yisrael areivin zeh lazeh* (all of Israel are responsible for each other), and, unfortunately, we are tasked with challenges frequently. *Klal Yisrael* has been a target so many times throughout history, and even in our lifetimes. It promotes in us, for protective reasons, a very hard exterior that makes it difficult sometimes for us to feel and to be sensitive to what happens. You have to work very hard in order to overcome that.

The Rambam, in *Hilkhos Ta'aniyot*, explains that when things happen to the nation, we need to cry out, and certainly to engage in a very serious way. The Rambam speaks about physical catastrophes, but all the more so when we are discussing an attack on *tzelem Elokim*, human lives, that we have to cry out to God. You don't just slough off whatever happened to the people who perpetrated it or to coincidence. You also don't try to trivialize what happened by projecting all sorts of explanations that you can't know are true, or in some cases are clearly not true; rather, what you do is try to perform introspection on your deeds. As the Rav used to say, a normative response is to try to use catastrophe or tragedy as a trigger or stimulus to reassess, introspect and recommit to the values that are important and that define us as a people.

The Rambam later describes reacting to

heinous crimes by saying that they were a terrible thing, an irrational lone wolf or a movement that is outlying in terms of the general culture. While these are certainly valid, they still remain the easy way out. They absolve us from taking constructive action and looking deeper into the assumptions of society and the ripples of things that can inflame people who are insane or filled with hatred. Both of these things can be true and are not mutually exclusive. It is clear that the Rambam means that we should see the terrible, tragic and horrific things that happen, assess them in light of our values and see whether or not they can also be a catalyst for us to be more sensitive and even more committed to the values that contravene the events that take place.

Rambam's language indicates to us that being a *ben Avraham Avinu* is the opposite of being a *ben Sedom* or a member of *Amaleik*. It requires that we never just say, "that is a terrible thing that happened," but to always promote for ourselves, as difficult as it is, a sense of really being shaken by the tragedy. That is, again, very difficult, as you have event after event and you can't live in a perpetual state of feeling embattled and in a state of depression. But, in some way, it is important to find an appropriate perspective. You are supposed to feel, when someone else is affected, that an entire world is gone.

It is really a very challenging thing to be a *ben Avraham Avinu*. Avraham figured out, even in the case of Lot, how to treat him as a brother despite everything. He jumped into action, took empathy, and turned it into sympathy, compassion and action. He really went to war for Lot. It is an art to be able to feel and do that constructively in many situations.

We have been spending the year learning *Bava Kama*. One of the things that

should already be abundantly clear, and even self-evident, is that *dinei nezikin* (the laws of damages) aren't just an interesting, intellectually-fascinating way of governing society in an effective, and legally and intellectually-impressive, manner. It really is about distancing ourselves from *nezikin*, and the sacrifices we make even in our own jurisdiction and autonomy for the sake of other members of *Klal Yisrael*. And we do this not out of a sense of pure sacrifice, but out of a sense of common destiny and being a *mamlechet kohanim ve-goy kadosh* (a kingdom of priests and a holy nation). It is clear that the responsibility and obligation to protect others is part of the foundation of *nezikin*.

The truth is, it is hard to know what to do in these situations. We usually don't know the people and it is somewhat distant. There is a sensitivity and art to knowing how to help as well. In the days that come we will find out if there is some way of being helpful and constructive.

Even beyond that, the bigger issues in society are things we also need to address in the small part of our community. This has to do with the use of heated language. There are of course outlying, irrational, dangerous people

in the world. There always have been, and likely always will be. But there is also no question that at a time when people use rhetoric in a very irrespon-

sible and crude way, and they inflame passions for political gain or it just becomes part of the partisan contest, a lot of it is just very inappropriate and unsettling. We should be strongly offended by, opposed to and really careful in our own world to combat that as well. We should be strongly offended by the crude use of language, as well as improper or heated language that is used to manipulate people. Moreover, we should be extremely offended by the cynical use of codewords

and terminology in order to trigger people, who don't need much of a trigger, to do terrible things.

We are right now living in a period where this issue is a big problem. Social media and the internet, which are supposedly democratizing mechanisms, have been demonstrated to be very dangerous. Though they obviously can be very helpful and constructive, their algorithms ultimately don't promote mutual respect and an exchange of opinions. They cynically discern what your orientations are, and they use that information to add a lot of hyperbole and trigger words in the content they present to you. They suck you in deeper and can radicalize you. More and more has this become an apparent danger in the world and in society.

The *halakhic* system is very serious about proper speech. The looseness of terminology and the crudeness of language in our society is completely antithetical to *halakhic* culture. It is another one of those areas where we need to become more insular, but we also need to become a counter-force in the world and in society. Crude or simply manipulative use of language to inflame people's fears and manipulate them into political positions — a behavior common to all sides of the debate — is something that we need to be very careful about in our own community. In addition, we need to be an exemplar for the rest of society, because the situation is eroding rapidly. So many headlines in the newspapers reflected that just this last week.

We need to recommit to being *bonei Avraham Avinu*, the father of all nations, who had an impact especially on *Bnei Yisrael*, but also on society. Avraham's cosmopolitan impact was a crucial part of his persona.

So, even as we grieve and absorb another significant blow, it is important that we start to think about how it first starts with our own conduct and behavior internally. We must sanctify *Hashem's* name and be a good example for others, fostering and changing the marketplace of ideas around us.

*You are supposed to feel, when someone else is affected, that an entire world is gone.*



SOY President Moshe Spirn speaking at YU's vigil for the Pittsburgh victims.

## Torah Umadda — Let's Define Torah First

By NOAM BELTRAN

Yeshiva University describes itself as an educational and spiritual epicenter that focuses on bettering the Jewish community and broader society in the service of G-d. This approach encapsulates Yeshiva's championed adage, *Torah Umadda*. The Torah aspect reflects YU's desire to be "rooted in Jewish thought and tradition," while the *madda* represents its goal to be an institution for higher learning engaged with secular academia and culture.

This dichotomy, however, has always been difficult to navigate for Yeshiva's Modern Orthodox students. YU teeters the tightrope of Jewish culture: a foot in the Yeshiva world, with towering Torah giants absorbed in classical Yeshiva texts, and another foot, perhaps, a smaller one, in the realm of secular culture, education and academia that challenges even the best of worldly scholarship. The question in this article is where an academic, secular approach to classical Torah literature rests in the *Torah Umadda* equation, if at all.

Proponents of a primarily academic approach to Torah Judaism consider the notion that there is one, linear, unfolding tradition of *halakhah* and Torah Judaism to be a myth. Furthermore, the idea that the methodology used for learning today has been passed down in exact form is inconsistent with the narrative of history. Proponents argue that Orthodoxy incorrectly approaches the Torah as meta-historical, namely, that it transcends history and is not subject to the external and internal forces that shape a tradition. In this traditional approach, the Orthodox world rejects the modern tools (known in the academic world as the "historical-critical approach") that were unavailable in the pre-modern period.

Proponents suggest that the advantage of an academic approach is that it unveils a more dynamic manifestation of the Torah. Here are some examples from the past that demonstrate a model for this dynamic Torah study: in the Middle Ages there existed a contentious debate whether the Talmud should be the core of a Jewish education. In the 16th century, the Maharal of Prague advocated analysis of the Bible in Hebrew as the primary focus of study. Examples such as these allow the student of Judaism to consider alternative perspectives of learning and thus, enrich one's understanding of his own history, culture and tradition. Advocates argue that the way to attain the richest Torah learning experience is to combine the yeshivish and historical-critical approaches. They accuse the yeshivish world of ignoring the academic approach because of its fear that it may taint the Jewish youth's love and centrality of *halakhic* Torah and tradition.

However legitimate the academic, or

"modernist" approach to Judaism may be, it necessarily misses something central and precious to being Jewish: what Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik called "experiential Judaism," which is borne through the experience of learning in the *beit midrash*. The Rav posits that there are both intellectual and experiential aspects of the Jewish ex-

Torah is designed to be a deeply religious experience that necessitates a strong sense of tradition and thus has a significant emotional component. This approach is what Yeshiva University's great leader, Rav Soloveitchik meant when he said: "When I enter the Yeshiva ... I am at home because I am grounded in the world of eternity."

human culture, and thus, improving G-d's world?

The question still remains: what role does an academic approach to Judaism play in establishing a "lived Jewish" experience and is that approach essential in fulfilling Dr. Revel's mission for YU? The unique mandate of Yeshiva University is that the Torah, in the

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*However legitimate the academic, or "modernist" approach to Judaism may be, it necessarily misses something central and precious to being Jewish: what Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik called "experiential Judaism."*

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perience. The experiential aspect theorizes that Judaism is, in part, an experiential tradition that must be communicated through experience. These events are transmitted through tradition in an emotive and mimetic fashion. An academic approach may provide enlightening analysis, sharpening intellectual Judaism in the classroom, but does it generate the experiential Judaism or "lived Judaism" developed in the *beit midrash* (David Shatz, "The Rav and Torah u-Madda")?

Additionally, the mandate of Yeshiva University's more global fundamental principles must be considered. In 1940, after the death of Dr. Bernard Revel, Yeshiva College's first President, The Commentator echoed YU's goal: "An organic unity of our Jewish religious heritage with modern secular culture." I assume the modern secular culture described here encapsulates secular academics, but Jewish religious heritage is left undefined and is far more difficult to infer from this mission statement.

classical sense, encapsulates all elements of the *madda*. It should not be that the *madda*, the "science [and] worldly knowledge," as described by former YU president Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, (1976-2003), pervades the Torah.

At what point does the Jewish student pursuing a Ph.D. in Talmud at Yeshiva University become indistinguishable from the non-Jewish student pursuing the same area of study at say, Princeton University? Is the intellectual engagement with Torah the same as the engagement with French literature? My claim is that the student who "lives" Judaism both intellectually and emotionally is different than the one who studies the Talmud through the historical-critical prism. The intellectual misses out on the experiential, almost timeless lived Judaism present in both *Yeshivas Knesses Yisrael* (Slabodka Yeshiva) in the late 19th century and Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary in the 21st century. Yes, Judaism has a real history, but does Rav Soloveitchik's experiential Judaism transcend the academic, or is the academic narrative part of experiential Judaism? This is the question for the Modern Orthodox student.

If the academic approach is important, in what capacity does it need to be infused with the classical Yeshivish approach? Does it infiltrate the Torah element in *Torah Umadda* or does it find its place as an ancillary role in the *madda* — a synergy that allows for a complex understanding of the traditional Torah *weltanschauung*?

This question has no simple answer, but I challenge every YU student to consider this dilemma. The role given to the academic approach may turn out to be an individual decision. Rabbi Lamm noted that *Torah Umadda* does not imply coequality: "Torah remains the unchallenged and preeminent center." He posited further, "*Torah Umadda* could only be viable if it imposes strict limits on freedom of thought in areas that may challenge fundamental Jewish beliefs." Thus, the quandary ensues: can we establish a resilient commitment to Torah so that *madda* is not seen as a threat, or are these two pursuits mutually exclusive?



Students experience Torah in the *beit midrash*

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

My contention is that the academic approach diminishes the experiential aspect of Judaism, especially when it is the Jewish student's primary exposure to Torah. The effects of the solely academic approach are compounded by the ever-growing dichotomy between the emotional and logical self that challenges Jewish youth in the modern milieu. The academic approach certainly doesn't offer the "lived" tradition of Judaism. This is not to say that every Jew who engages Torah with modern tools of analysis will temper his *yiddishkeit*, however, Talmud

The Torah u-Madda Journal, described on YUTorah.com as "an annual publication on issues of the intersection of Torah and modernity," defines YU's academic goal as the exploration of "the complex relationship between Torah, the humanities, and the natural and social sciences." Once again, the encapsulation of Torah is not well defined. Does this "complex relationship" simply amount to a universal understanding of *Imitation Dei*, which demands that man master the earth through creative expression, revealing the divine in all branches of

have had the experience of being welcomed into the "homey", warm environment that the Chabad *shaliach* and *shlucha* provide. Whether it be for those who are religiously

"Chabad on Campus" would also foster a positive, spiritual and enriching co-ed environment. Instead of merely relying on occasional YU-wide coed events, a Chabad

infamously complex and enigmatic problem of Shabbat life at YU.

And to reiterate: we are not as homogeneous as the naked eye might observe. Yes, many of us may wear kippot and skirts on a daily basis. Yes, more of us, proportionately speaking, are more observant than the average of a number of Jewish populations on other college campuses. Yes, many of us went to yeshiva or seminary.

But, no, we are not all of the same *hashkafah*. The context of Yeshiva University allows for the opportunity to enhance the Jewish *achdut* in Yeshiva University, which can eventually affect other areas of America and even the world.

affiliated or for those who seek to be more so, Chabad and its inclusive and engaging spirit provide a religious experience in an amiable, accepting and loving way.

would give students the opportunity to interact with their downtown and uptown counterparts, especially on Shabbat. This, of course, would be part of the solution for the

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*Ultimately, [Chabad] is a place where Jewish people, of all different religious backgrounds, can physically congregate and spiritually commune.*

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CHABAD ON CAMPUS,  
continued from Page 13

Chabad will provide the physical infrastructure and catalyze the social dynamic necessary for a strong social experience at Yeshiva University. It would encourage more people to create profound, interpersonal relationships and would serve as an ideal location for those seeking to hang out and play board games before or after their Shabbat nap. Having a few games set out in Morgenstern lounge does not compare to the having an established place of gathering.

I would venture to say that many of us have visited other college campuses and



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## The Oakland Raiders Should Tank the Season

By **MAYER FINK**

The Oakland Raiders are a complete and total mess right now. There is just no way around it. The Raiders only have one win so far, and they traded away key players at the start of the season and prior to the trade deadline. It's hard to pinpoint the main catalyst for the collapse of this Raiders' season, but, for me, the deciding factor came into play a week before the regular season began.

On Sept. 1, 2018, the Raiders traded away their all-pro defensive end and transcending talent Khalil Mack to the Chicago Bears for two first-round draft picks from 2019 and 2020. It's understandable to want to make a trade when the offer in return is two first-round draft choices, especially since they weren't making progress on Mack's contract negotiations. That being said, Oakland hasn't had a defender who can change the game and be as dominant as Mack in decades. This was a major blow, and it made a big statement that the Raiders aren't interested in winning this year.

The situation only got worse when the

losses started piling in, starting out 0-3 and entering the bye week at 1-5. During the bye week, they exchanged their number one, albeit struggling, wide receiver Amari Cooper to the Dallas Cowboys for another first round pick in the upcoming draft. The Raiders were shopping almost anyone on their roster before the Oct. 30 trade deadline. From their terrible start and many big trades, it's clear the team is looking to end the season with the worst record in their division and, maybe, the NFL. There are even rumors that the players are starting to turn on their head coach Jon Gruden.

With all that being said, the Raiders actively trying to tank makes sense for them right now. While the fans and players may not like it, at the end of the day, it must happen. Think of this as a major surgery; it's messy, it's painful and people don't always want to do it, but it must be done.

Let's backtrack to last season when the Raiders already knew they wanted to fire Jack Del Rio after an underachieving season. The front office already knew they wanted to bring back Jon Gruden, who has been out of the league for ten years doing color

commentary for ESPN on Monday night football. Gruden was the last successful head coach in Oakland, so it makes sense they would want him back. They signed Gruden to an expensive \$10 million per year for 10 years. The key here is the 10 years, as it shows that the front office is willing to be patient with Gruden. Gruden won't be expected to win a Super Bowl this year or even the next. They are looking towards the future, hoping for a win in the latter years of that long contract. The early years of the contract will be ugly, but this is an investment the Raiders should and are taking.

picks to work within the upcoming draft, and two for the 2020 draft. Even though the Raiders aren't known for drafting, it would be a surprise to see even them miss on three first rounders. In the 2013 NFL draft, the Vikings had three first round picks, and, while they whiffed on two of them, they landed a lockdown pro-bowl corner in Xavier Rhodes. Even the Cleveland Browns, who are notorious for bad drafting, were able to land promising (for now) players like Myles Garrett, David Njoku, and Jabrill Peppers.

The big fear in Oakland is that Jon Gruden is an outdated coach living in the

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*The team is looking to end the season with the worst record in their division and maybe the NFL.*

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The Raiders are also going to attempt to go against the grain with the current state of the NFL. The current trend in the NFL is to turn over your teams coaching staff very frequently. If the head coach and general manager/owner can't find success after two or three years, they are expected to be fired. The Raiders are willing to run the risk of having a few miserable seasons to start if it means greater success in the long run.

While tanking is frowned upon in sports in the NFL, we have seen NFL teams go from cellar dwellers to championship contenders in one or two draft classes. The most memorable trade in NFL history was when the Dallas Cowboys sent their star running back Herschel Walker to the Minnesota Vikings for numerous draft picks. Many people at the time thought the Cowboys got robbed. However, the aftermath showed that, while Herschel Walker ended up doing very little in his few years in Minnesota, the Dallas Cowboys ended up drafting their way to a dynasty and three Super Bowl wins with big draft picks like Hall of Famer Emmitt Smith.

The Raiders could see the same success. With these new draft picks, the Raiders have the ability to become one of the better squads in the NFL. They will have three first round

past. The other fear is that Derek Carr is not capable of being a franchise quarterback. If either situation ends up being the truth, then these moves will look terrible down the line. The key will be patience. We will only know if the suffering is worth it in a few years from now. Derek Carr was an MVP candidate until he got injured in 2016. If Carr gets a better roster around him, there's no reason the Raiders can't be a great team again. Gruden is the ultimate x-factor. If he can be the offensive wizard that he was back at the turn of the century, then the Raiders will see much success. If he's an outdated coach, then this will be an ugly ending, and the owner may have to buy out ten years of his contract just to get rid of him.

I honestly want to see the Raiders be good again. While I'm not personally a fan, Raiders supporters, whether in Oakland or Vegas, deserve to see a winning team. As for the rest of us well, the Raiders are entrenched in NFL history, and they used to be the villains of the NFL. The NFL can use another villain like the Raiders again, allowing the country to take a break from hating the Patriots. However, in order to do so, they will have to suffer for the next few years.



Oakland Raiders

## “Manifest:” Season 1 Review

By **SAMUEL GELMAN (HOUSTON, TEXAS)**

From the trailer of “Manifest,” it is clear that NBC was trying to sell the show as a mix of “This Is Us” and “Lost,” a combination of the emotional and the mysterious, and who could blame them? “Lost” is still considered one of the most successful television shows of all time, and “This is Us” just celebrated its second consecutive Emmy nomination for Outstanding Drama Series. Now, I don't watch “This is Us,” but, if “Manifest” is anything like it, then the Emmys are even more out of tune with TV than we thought.

Manifest tells the story of a group of passengers on Flight 828 from Jamaica to NYC. After some intense turbulence, the flight lands safely at its destination, seemingly right on time. However, when the passengers get off the plane, they are informed that they have been missing and presumed dead for the last five years.

So who is on the plane? First up, Ben (Josh Dallas of “Once Upon a Time”) and his sick son Cal (Jack Messina), who took a later flight from Jamaica after their original one was overbooked. Grace (Athena Karkanis of “Zoo”), Ben's wife and Cal's mother, Olive (Luna Blaise), Cal's twin sister and Ben's daughter, and parents/grandparents (Geraldine Leer and Malachy Cleary) take an earlier flight that lands in its regular scheduled time period. Joining Ben on the flight is his sister Michaela (Melissa Roxburgh of “Valor”), a police officer who, at the time of the flight, was debating marrying her longtime boyfriend, Jared (J.R. Ramirez of Jessica Jones). The only other person of interest on the

flight is Saanvi Bahl (Parveen Kaur), a medical researcher looking into cell generation — but, like the first few episodes of the show, we can ignore her for now.

Once the mystery of the plane's “disappearance” is set up, the first episode goes into overdrive catching us up on what transpired over the last five years. Ben missed most of Olive's childhood and his mother passed away; Michaela's boyfriend moved on, marrying her best friend in her absence. It's not all bad, though. Saanvi's research that she “left behind” was a major success, and could present a possible cure for Cal's leukemia.

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*What made “Lost” so good was its ability to use flashbacks as a way to show and grow character. “Manifest” should follow its example and let the past speak for itself.*

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This all happens very fast, basically over the first 15 minutes of the pilot, making everything feel rushed. These reunions and realizations should have been the emotional punch of the first few episodes, but instead are quickly shoved aside for sprinkles of mystery and a focus on a different yet seemingly irrelevant passenger every week that reminds me more of a CBS procedural than a character-driven mystery. It's not surprising that the show took this route early on,

though. “Manifest” showed many of its cards too early in the pilot, forcing it to kill time for the next three episodes, lest it run out of content before the end of its 16 episode season order. The writers try to sneak in some moments here and there, but they usually land flat and don't fit with the plot pacing. Case in point: The first emotional moment we see between Ben and Olive is ruined because it occurs too long after the flight landed. This should have happened much earlier in the plot timeline, and it reflects the poor pacing of the show.

The writers also consistency violate the sacred law of creative writing: show, don't tell. The show has too much exposition, relying on the word instead of the image. Don't tell the audience that Olive is a mess and going to therapy; show them a scene where she messed up. Don't tell the audience that Michaela and Lourdes (Victoria Luz Cartagena) were best friends; show, through flashbacks, how they spent their time together. What made “Lost” so good was its ability to use flashbacks (and flashforwards) as a way to show and grow character. “Manifest” should follow its example and let the past speak for itself, but use its twist — the fact that the “past” means very different things to those that were on the plane vs. those that were not — to separate itself from its big brother.

That is not to say that “Manifest” never uses flashbacks. Half of episode five is dedicated to what happened to characters, such as Grace and Jared, while the plane was missing. However, like the pilot, they breeze through major

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## Everybody Talks Too Much

By DAHLIA LAURY

We humans are a unique species, set apart from all other mammals on this earth. What is the main distinction, you may ask? Some say it is our superior intelligence, our ability to talk, or the fact that we have opposable thumbs (monkeys don't actually count). I believe what truly sets us apart is our ability to communicate. We absolutely love to talk: about ourselves, our dreams, our lives and what is important to us. Another thing we love to talk about, more than anything else, is other people, and their dreams, hopes, and lives.

I believe that part of our human nature is our need to communicate with others. So much so that sometimes, when we have nothing interesting enough to say about ourselves, we choose to talk about other people and their problems and successes, in order to bond. This aspect of our craving to communicate is quite ridiculous. The fact that we are so boring and uninteresting that we feel the need to speak about others is just sad. This is something everyone is guilty of — no matter how much one may deny it.

As Jews, we have a concept of *hilchot lashon hara*, laws pertaining to speaking about other people, which are ingrained in our minds from a young age. But if speaking badly about someone is what qualifies as *lashon hara*, what if I am just telling an interesting story about a random person you don't even know? Sorry to burst your bubble, but that does not make it an acceptable topic of conversation; it still falls into the category of *lashon hara*. We talk, we converse, and we don't really think about talking about others; because it is public knowledge, or the person won't care if people know something about

them. Sorry, but no. Being social and having relationships should not be based on people not in the relationship!

In addition to our love of talking about other people, we tend to speak about how we get offended. By offended, I am referring to one taking a simple statement from a third party as a personal attack on his or her own beliefs and rights.

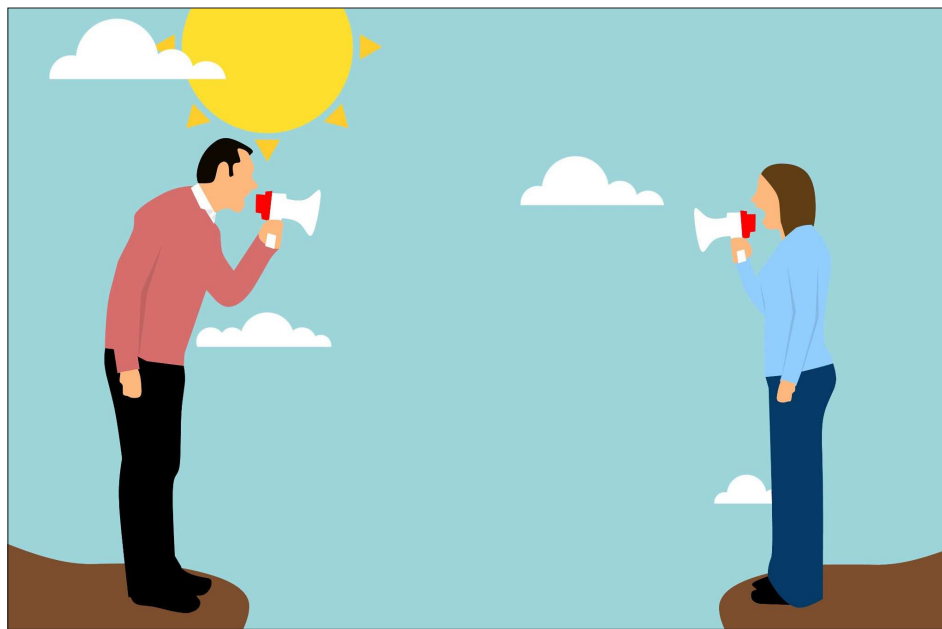
In fact, we speak so much about our problems with society and things other people have said to us; I have come to the conclusion that people actually like to be offended. We want someone to anger us, maybe because, once again, we are looking for something to talk about. Everything is a competition in this regard — who has more of a right to be offended by something someone wrote on the internet? Especially when that statement was *obviously* directed at a

singular person to make them feel bad about themselves?

This mentality is detrimental to society as a whole as well as the individual. News flash: the world is not out to get you and everything is not always about you.

How we get offended shows how strong or weak our pride really can be. An easy example of the fragile ego of man is with politics. No matter what you think or what you believe and however many facts you have to prove your opinion, there will always be people who do not agree with you. Every person has their own beliefs and opinions, with facts to back themselves up as well. When two people have a conversation it is then possible that from the very start, neither are listening to a word the other person is saying; they are only hearing themselves. This conversation ends when two people offended and upset because they didn't convince someone else that they were right. They attacked with their own ideas and were defensive of them as well.

We love hearing ourselves speak, but often don't give half a heart when it comes to hearing someone who disagrees with us. Next time someone says something that you may not agree with, try to see it — not as a personal attack — but rather as their own opinion which may not be the same as yours. We should be better by recognizing our own self-worth as well as the worth of those around us. This is not easy by any stretch of the imagination, but it is necessary. There is so much hate and anger in our world and we, as individuals, decide if we join the hate, or create a healthy and happy environment for us and everyone around us. We have been given an incredible power to speak and think. There are already enough people in the world that abuse that power, so why should we become one of them?



People arguing

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MANIFEST,  
continued from Page 18

moments too quickly, leaving me worried that they will run out of compelling material too soon. This episode also focused on things we already knew from the exposition dump in the pilot, which makes most of the episode feel repetitive, as nothing new

is added to the drama. When returning to a past where the ending is already known, "Manifest" must make the trip worth it for the audience and show us something new. We were not there to see what we already knew, which makes me question why they took us there in the first place.

There are some signs of promise, though. Episodes four and five focus more on the

family drama, and the episodes work much better because of it. Ben and Grace repairing their marriage after five years "apart" is particularly heart wrenching, as is the relationship between Cal and his now former twin sister. However, "Manifest" will need more of that if it wants to make up for the lousy writing — can someone please stop writing lines for Ben and Michaela's

mother that sound like she is quoting inspirational cat posters and give her things that actual humans say? — poor pacing, lack of noteworthy performances — does anyone else feel like Josh Dallas is both yelling and whispering simultaneously whenever he speaks? — and formulaic episode structures that plague its takeoff. Let's hope the landing is more smooth.



Manifest tells the story of a group of passengers on Flight 828 from Jamaica to NYC. When the passengers get off the plane, they are informed that they have been missing for the last five years.

NBC

# A Young Man's Quest to Find the Duality of Man in the Backdrop of Vietnam

By JOSH LEICHTER

*Editor's Note: The article below contains spoilers for the film "Full Metal Jacket."*

One of the most contentious periods in the history of the United States is the Vietnam War, a long conflict forever immortalized in films. This period in history led to the creation of classics such as Francis Ford Coppola's classic, "Apocalypse Now," Oliver Stone's controversial anti-war film, "Platoon," as well as the more lighthearted take on the subject seen through the eyes of the legendary Robin Williams in "Good Morning Vietnam." All three of these films were nominated for a combined nine Oscars between the years 1980 and 1988, with "Platoon" taking home the award for Best Picture and Best Director.

In an 11-year period beginning in 1978 and ending in 1989, Hollywood produced 23 different movies on the Vietnam War, and one that goes down in the pantheon of cinematic achievement has got to be Stanley Kubrick's "Full Metal Jacket." Released hot off the heels and one year after "Platoon" in

1987, "Full Metal Jacket" was snubbed at the Oscars with a single nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay. I am not here to debate whether or not this is a crime against humanity (which I feel it is); however, it should be noted that the lack of awards and prestige in no way diminishes the quality and legacy of the film, which serves as a testament to the experiences of soldiers in Vietnam.

Based off of a short story titled "The Short-Timers" and borrowing its name from the type of bullet most commonly used by soldiers at the time, Kubrick takes us, through the eyes of Private Joker, from a basic training camp to the front lines of the infamous Tet Offensive, ending with the bloody standoff in the Battle of Hue. Fans of the film will arguably recognize the boot camp sequences and often repeat the many famous lines delivered by R. Lee Ermeley, who played Gunnery Sergeant Hartman, a tough-talking drill instructor tasked with whipping the new recruits into shape before shipping them out to fight in "Nam." While many films have tried to replicate the rapid-fire monologues and verbal abuse of the recruits, none have ever come close to his

achievement. One can't help but notice how true to life Ermeley's performance of Sergeant Hartman was in his ability to rattle off the lines and give orders like an actual drill sergeant would, more so than an actor could, even with proper training. This prompted me to do some more research into his history, and it came as no surprise that he himself

to get out. It's a hardball world, son. We've gotta keep our heads until this peace craze blows over."

This sense of Americana and identity is the most common theme of the film. Whether through pop culture references such as John Wayne, Gomer Pyle and the Mickey Mouse March or through all of the characters hav-

*"Full Metal Jacket" serves as not only a war film about Vietnam but also as a character study about people; both those that have been stripped of what makes them themselves as well as those that struggle to remain human despite those that want them to become the ideal faceless soldiers.*

fought in Vietnam and was a real-life drill instructor, thus bringing something entirely unique to the role. The character who receives the brunt of Hartman's verbal ridicule is overweight Private Pyle, (nicknamed after Gomer Pyle of the famous television program of the 1960s, "Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C"). After months of making mistakes and being abused by his fellow recruits and drill sergeant, Private Pyle suffers a mental breakdown leading to his murder of Hartman and then taking his own life, ending what is seen as the prologue to the actual film taking place in Vietnam.

After a transition in location, we find Private Joker as a military journalist covering the various offensives and events of the war. In one scene, Joker is sent to photograph a burial site of Vietnamese civilians killed by the Viet Cong where a colonel stops him and asks him about a contradiction on his uniform. Joker is wearing a peace symbol and writes "Born to Kill" on his helmet, confusing the colonel. When Joker gives a more philosophical answer regarding the "duality of man," the colonel responds with the following line: "Son, all I've ever asked of my marines is that they obey my orders as they would the word of God. We are here to help the Vietnamese because inside every gook there is an American trying

ing nicknames and never being referred to by their actual birth names, we see the true struggle of what Joker refers to as the "duality of man." This clash of either maintaining who the soldier is prior to joining the army is in constant clash with the country's desire to turn them into machines spouting off the highlights of American culture and doing what they are told, no questions asked. These men are slowly being taught not what they are on the inside, rather what they are as citizens of the country, which is essentially John Wayne, Mickey Mouse and Coca-Cola. This reference, "duality of man," is the phrase that can be used to describe their identity crisis, as they have to choose to either be a cog in the machine and surrender to their duty towards their country or keep on fighting and holding on to what makes them unique in the world. We see people in boot camp no older than 18, 19 and 20 years old turned into what Sergeant Hartman refers to as weapons, or in more crude terms, he tells them they are not even "Human Beings" removing all sense of self and personality that they have, turning them into the cogs of the machine.

To sum up, "Full Metal Jacket" serves as not only a war film about Vietnam but also as a character study about people; both those that have been stripped of what makes them themselves as well as those that struggle to remain human despite those that want them to become the ideal faceless soldiers. Like many of Kubrick's films, "Full Metal Jacket" was misunderstood by the Oscars, who refused to grant it more nominations. Yet, don't let that deter you from seeing this classic film.



"Full Metal Jacket" Movie Poster

## Thank You, America, for My Religious Freedom

By BARAK HAGLER

As my father and I drove into my shul's parking lot on Friday afternoon, I noticed something different. The space in front of the shul, which was usually empty, now housed two parked police cars with their lights on. An unfortunate consequence of the horrific killing of eleven Jewish souls that had occurred in Pittsburgh less than a week prior. I pointed this out to my father, noting that our shul, like many others, had responded with necessary increased security measures. He solemnly acknowledged this change, and then shared with me a relevant post he had seen online. The post posed the following question: "If you need an armed guard to protect your freedom of religion, do you really have freedom of religion?"

Startled by the candor of the question and its implications, I let it settle into my head and pondered the challenge. After a few moments' thought, however, I realized something. While provocative, the question presupposed a fundamental misunderstanding of what freedom of religion means. Just because I need physical protection to exercise my freedom of religion, that does not mean it is lacking.

I think most people would agree that the United States of America is a free country. It was founded on ideas of individual liberty, and its people enjoy a plethora of rights, including the unique First Amendment. And yet, the country spends billions of dollars on our defense force and has an incredibly vast army. Does this mean that we are not a free country? Are the liberties of Americans restricted because of our sophisticated and expensive military? Certainly not! So then,

why do we have such a large army? The answer, of course, is simple. We have an army to ensure that we, as a country, remain independent. Our defensive forces exist to rebuff any outside powers that may try to invade and compel our country to act in accordance

shuls does not mean that we are any less free to practice our religion than if we did not need these extra precautions. Freedom of religion does not mean that there is no one who would like to stop us from practicing our faith. Freedom of religion means that

*Just because I need physical protection to exercise my freedom of religion, that does not mean it is lacking.*

with how this foreign power would prefer we behave. However, our freedom remains the same. If there was no threat from outside forces and a military was not required, we as Americans would enjoy the same freedoms that we do under the current state of existence where an army is necessary.

Freedom of religion is not any different. The fact that we may require increased security and armed guards in and around our

there is no higher body (in our case, the American government) that can force us to stop practicing our religion. We may have armed guards and police cars, but as long as it is within our legal rights to practice Judaism, then our freedom of religion is not compromised or reduced in any way.

*Continued on Page 21*

## Tzniut Shaming is Body Shaming Too

By SHOSHY CIMENT

21st century Judaism has developed interesting ways to determine the religious status of its female constituents.

“Does she wear pants?”

“Is that a wig or her real hair?”

“Does she cover her knees?”

Our religious classification system has come far from our early days as a mostly homogenous and fledgling tribe. But today, the litmus test for a woman’s true *frumkeit* remains surface level at best, never making it past the quick check for choker-tight shells and mid-calf length skirts — or, God forbid — a lack thereof. What’s worse, Judaism’s obsession with female modesty pits Jewish women against one another and promulgates a negative culture of body shaming.

The idea behind classic body shaming is simple: At its essence, it involves highlighting

and criticizing someone’s physical flaws. The result is a person made to feel self-conscious and ashamed about his or her body.

With *tzniut* shaming, a similar phenomenon is at play. Jews — mostly women — are judged based on a standard. It isn’t a classic standard of beauty, but rather a standard of religiosity. If the archetypal American bombshell is a size 0 with delicate limbs, the ideal Jewish woman dons a *sheitel* and a black, A-line skirt. And the longer and darker the skirt, the more religious and closer to God she is.

That’s not to say that the women who choose to represent themselves in such a way are at fault. In any culture, modesty is an important and personal value and no one should be chastised for covering up more.

The problem arises when that model becomes the expectation, the bottom line for all Jewish women. In other words, if she wears this, she is doing something right. Everyone

else is wrong and therefore subject for discussion. *Tzniut* is a multifaceted and highly debated topic. There is no perfect formula for how to dress, though some would like to believe there is. And even if there was, women who dress differently should not be chided for doing so, even if they fall outside the realm of classic *tzniut*.

Though Jewish law outlines basic standards for dress, it also prohibits the shaming and embarrassing of another Jew. *Tzniut*-shamers hide behind the impenetrable shield of *halakhah*, what many seem to view as an all-encompassing rationalizer. The words of the sages are used as artillery; they are an excuse for insensitive and disparaging comments about how to dress.

To be sure, standards of modesty are ever-evolving. Whereas pants and denim used to be widely accepted for women in many Jewish circles, a shift to the right has characterized vast areas of modern Judaism,

even within YU’s own bubble of orthodoxy.

The laws governing a Jewish women’s dress are meant to preserve her modesty. Berating women who fall outside of mainstream standards of modesty is more than counterproductive. It is bullying; religious shaming in its purest sense. It typifies the opposite of the values that Judaism seeks to uphold — respect and love for our neighbors.

Now more than ever, a tolerance and love for those that are different from us is crucial. Behind the dresses and wigs, we are all praying to the same God.

*Tzniut* is complicated. It’s just about as personal as you can get when it comes to *halakhah*. And in an era that has become increasingly dangerous for women of all religions, we might all do well to shift the conversation away from women’s bodies. To the outside world, we are all a unit, skirt-clad or not.



Modesty Rules in Meah She'arim

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM,  
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Truthfully, it goes even further than that. Having an army does not only not reduce our freedom as a nation, it enhances it. The fact that the government and the people are willing to spend so much on a defense force goes to show the importance of our independence. We are willing to spend billions upon billions of dollars to ensure our safety and our ability to live freely.

So too by freedom of religion. The American government could theoretically have responded to the tragic shooting by putting the onus of increased security solely on the shul’s themselves. Instead, however, police forces around the nation increased patrols to help provide the increased security. It’s not that a police presence shows a lack of religious freedom. Even if the publicly funded security does not last forever, that cities across the nation responded with an increased police presence expresses just how important freedom of religion is in this country!

With this in mind, I think it is appropriate to express a sense of *hakaras hatov* to the United States of America. It is the greatest country for Jews in the history of the world, outside of Israel. The fact that we have this level of freedom to practice our religion here is unbelievable and should not be taken for granted. After the horrible events of that Shabbos, so much of the country came together in solidarity with the Jewish people. The leadership of the nation expressed their greatest condolences for the Pittsburgh community and the greater Jewish community and put forth promises to combat anti-Semitism. While our eyes need to constantly be turned eastward towards Israel, for that is where the future of people the Jewish people is and always will be, it would be an injustice to forget how kind America has been to us. And with that I say, thank you, America, for my religious freedom.



The First Amendment in the Bill of Rights

# Twitter Should Not Have Banned Michael Knowles

By LILLY GELMAN

On November 4, Michael Knowles, a conservative political commentator and host of The Daily Wire podcast *The Michael Knowles Show*, announced that Twitter suspended an account because of a joke relating to the midterm elections.

The tweet, posted on the afternoon of November 2, read “Remember, Democrats: Don’t forget to vote on Wednesday, November 7! #Resist #Retweet” Twitter claimed that Knowles’s account “violated the Twitter Rules” and that his account would be unlocked once he removed the “Tweets that violate [their] rules.”



After criticism from conservatives that Twitter did not similarly suspend the accounts of liberal Twitter users who posted an almost identical joke, they began buckling down on their standards, booting those users from the platform as well.

As Emily Zonaiti wrote in the Daily Wire “by banning Knowles for making a joke, Twitter was declaring comedy, as a whole, off-limits.” The specifics of the tweet had harmful potential, not the account itself. Comedic political commentators on both sides of the political spectrum use Twitter as



MICHAEL KNOWLES INSTAGRAM

While Twitter’s response shows an apologetic attempt at political neutrality, booting Knowles and other users from Twitter demonstrates an overreaction to political comedy.

The tweet, in my opinion, was dangerous. Misinformation regarding the polls is far from rare; The New York Times reported six types of misinformation including rumors that Immigration and Customs Enforcement were arresting voters at the polls — a ploy meant to frighten Latino voters out of showing up. Others reported false announcements leaked from Russian social media accounts that voters could submit ballots online, by text, or through email.

Maybe we need to have more faith in ourselves and other voters and assume that people will immediately recognize November 7 as the day *after* polling. Voting, however, is too vital for assumptions. Knowles’s tweet, along with the many others that jokingly reminded the tweeter’s opposing party of the wrong polling date, have legitimate potential to prevent voters from showing up on November 6, putting their chance to vote at risk. And for that reason, those tweets should have been removed.

But Knowles’s accounts should not have been suspended.

one of their many platforms for engaging their audiences, and, in most cases, there is no harm in that.

In his talk at Yeshiva University last year titled “Why the Right is Funnier than the Left These Days,” Knowles explained that liberals and leftists are less funny than conservatives on the right because “comedy is aggressive; snowflakes are too fragile these days to handle it.” Twitter, in this case, proved him right; his joke struck them as offensive, and instead of removing the single tweet they shut down his whole account.

Knowles’s tweet was funny, and, as a comedic political commentator, the nature of this tweet on his account where he posts about politics with bits of comedy sprinkled in, shouldn’t have caused such an extreme reaction. Whoever screens tweets for inappropriate content should have smirked or giggled at this joke before taking it down, sending Knowles a digital pat on the back with the explanation as to why Twitter removed his post.

As of Tuesday, November 6, Knowles is #free, and hopefully, people knew to show up to the polls.



Michael Knowles

# Best Buy: A Beacon of Hope in the Dark Retail World

By AVI LEKOWSKY

As Amazon and other online-based retailers grow to dominate the retail industry, it seems like every time you turned on the news, another company is going bankrupt or closing stores. There is, however, one light in the otherwise pitch-black retail tunnel: Best Buy.

In 1966, Richard Schulze and James Wheeler opened Sound of Music - an audio equipment store - in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The duo was successful from the get-go, and began expanding throughout the region. In 1983 they renamed themselves "Best Buy,"

and began selling - among other things - VCRs and home appliances. This turned out to be a great pivot for Schulze and Wheeler; by 1993, they'd recorded \$1.6 billion in sales, an increase of over \$650 million!

As the Great Recession hit, one of Best Buy's biggest competitors, Circuit City, closed. While at first glance, this seemed like an amazing opportunity for Best Buy to capture market share, it was actually just the first competitor of theirs to be affected by the lack of liquidity in the market. As a result, consumers began shopping at other places such as Costco and Amazon, where prices were cheaper, and in the case of Amazon, more convenient. This change

in shopping venue was also due to what is known in the retail industry as "showrooming." Showrooming is when customers would go to a store, check out the merchandise, browse the aisles, and talk to associates, and

stores. Lastly, Best Buy cut costs wherever they could, closing unsuccessful stores and improving warehouse efficiency.

As of 2017, the "Renew Blue" plan was deemed complete. Best Buy's stock has in-

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*As of 2017, the "Renew Blue" plan was deemed complete. Best Buy's stock has increased 330% since its lowest point during the Recession, same-store sales growth have started to go up from the previous years' again, and their revenue from e-commerce is improving annually.*

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Best Buy is well-positioned to be there for us when our chargers break.

then proceed to order the items they want online at a cheaper price.

By 2009, Best Buy's fortunes began to turn sour, and in 2012, they brought in a new CEO, Hubert Joly. Joly had no experience in retail before joining Best Buy - his last position was as CEO of a hospitality company - but this was exactly what Best Buy was looking for. They knew they needed someone different - someone with leadership skills who knew how to focus on the customer experience, which was a critical aspect of their turnaround plan.

In 2012, "Renew Blue" was announced. This plan implemented the concept of price-matching - if you found a lower price anywhere, Best Buy would match it. They also revamped their employee training tools (which gave employees a better understanding of the products they were selling) and improved the Geek Squad experience, placing small stations for major vendors such as Apple, Samsung, and Windows in their

increased 330% since its lowest point during the Recession, same store sales growth have started to go up from the previous years' again, and their revenue from e-commerce is improving annually.

Now they have started a new plan; "Building the New Blue." This aims to help Best Buy stay on a path of growth and assist them in surviving and thriving in the new age of retail. They are in the process of expanding their smarthome offerings, the Geek Squad program is now offering customers assistance on devices they might not have even purchased at Best Buy, and they are even offering in-home service to assist customers.

Best Buy's "Renew Blue" changed the retail industry, and it seems like "Building the New Blue" will do the same. With the future of retail starting to look a little less bleak, it looks like Best Buy is well-positioned to be there for us when our chargers break.

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Thank you to the prominent leaders of the YU Community who visited us and addressed our staff & campers this summer - Your presence added so much to our program.

*We are proud to be your partner and are honored to work together with Yeshiva University in serving our community.*



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