

"LOOK AROUND, THE GRASS IS HIGH, THE FIELDS ARE RIPE."

THE COMMENTATOR

The Independent Student Newspaper of Yeshiva University

"IT'S THE SPRINGTIME OF MY LIFE."

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Dr. Noam Wasserman Appointed Dean of Sy Syms School of Business, Effective May 2019

By COMMENTATOR STAFF

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on March 4.

Dr. Noam Wasserman was appointed Dean of the Sy Syms School of Business, effective May 2019, President Ari Berman announced via email on Monday, March 4, 2019. Wasserman has served as a professor at Harvard Business School for 13 years and the Lemann Chair in Entrepreneurship at the University of Southern California (USC).

published by YU. Current Interim Dean Michael Strauss, who has served as Interim Dean since July 2017, will assume the position of Associate Dean, following the appointment of Dr. Wasserman.

Wasserman's research has been published in top academic journals such as Management Science and Strategic Management Journal, and national periodicals such as the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times and Forbes Magazine. His two books, published in 2012 and 2018, have both been bestsellers.

After growing up in Los Angeles, Wasserman spent a year learning at Yeshivat Sha'alvim. He then stud-



Dr. Noam Wasserman

USC MARSHALL SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

"[Dr. Wasserman's] appointment represents our commitment to growing the quality of our education, preparing our students for great success in the marketplace of tomorrow and bringing Jewish values to the world."

President Ari Berman

"Dr. Wasserman embodies the values for which Yeshiva University stands," wrote President Berman in his email. "His appointment represents our commitment to growing the quality of our education, preparing our students for great success in the marketplace of tomorrow and bringing Jewish values to the world."

The search for a new Dean of Syms began in August 2018, when a job posting for the position was

ied at the undergraduate level at the University of Pennsylvania, earning a BSE in computer science and engineering, as well as a BSECON in corporate finance and strategic management from the Wharton School at Penn in 1992. He then worked in consulting for several years, before returning to school to receive an MBA from Harvard Business School in 1999 and a PhD from Harvard University in 2002.

Wasserman was an Associate

Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, from 2003 to 2016. Since 2016, he has worked at University of Southern California (USC) Marshall School of Business, serving as Chair in Entrepreneurship and Professor of Clinical Entrepreneurship.

"Dr. Wasserman is an incredible fit who will carry forward our mission and values into the future," said Dean Michael Strauss. "The new Dean is the right person at the right time, to lead the charge. I am very honored and excited to partner with him as we navigate

the future of Sy Syms" Wasserman and his wife Chana have eight children and two grandchildren. They currently live in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Jewish Studies Rethought: Yeshiva College Announces Significant Reduction in Required Courses

By BENJAMIN KOSLOWE

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on March 14.

The Department of Jewish Studies has approved a revision to the Yeshiva College (YC) Jewish Studies requirements, effective Fall 2019. Voted upon by the Department of Jewish Studies faculty this past week after extensive discussion, the changes affect the YC Bible and Jewish History requirements.

Under the plan, Yeshiva College students will be required to take 12 credits in any area of Jewish Studies (Bible, Jewish History, Jewish Philosophy, [academic] Talmud, Hebrew literature, etc.). Among these courses, students must take one course in Jewish History, one course in a new category called "Jewish Thought and Philosophy," and one course in Bible.

Students will be able to fulfill the new requirements by taking any combination of 2- and 3-credit courses that add up to a minimum of 12 credits while

satisfying the three requirements. As the new requirements are numerically and categorically subsumed under the old requirements, current students who have already fulfilled their Jewish Studies requirements will not need to make any changes to their academic plans.

These changes mark the first major update to the Yeshiva College Jewish Studies requirements in over three years, and the first significant restructuring

Continued on Page 4

Sex Abuse Lawsuit Against YU Resurfaces With Passing of the Child Victims Act

By SHOSHY CIMENT

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on March 28.

34 former Yeshiva University High School for Boys (MTA) students are preparing to sue the university for ignoring multiple allegations of sexual abuse that occurred between the 1960s and the 1980s. The recent passing of the Child Victims Act in Albany extended the statute of limitations in New York for adults who were victims of sex abuse as kids

and made it possible for the alleged victims to press charges.

19 former students originally filed a \$380 million lawsuit against the university in July 8, 2013 in the U.S. District Court in White Plains, N.Y. but it was dismissed in 2014 after a judge ruled that the statute of limitations had expired. With the recent signing of the Child Victims Act (CVA) on Feb. 14 by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, the limitations barring the lawsuit from proceeding in 2014 are no longer

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For 84 years, The Commentator has served students and administrators as a communicative conduit; a kinetic vehicle disseminating undergraduate social, religious, and academic beliefs across the student bodies; and a reliable reflection of Yeshiva student life to the broader Jewish and American communities.

The Commentator staff claims students spanning the diverse spectrum of backgrounds and beliefs represented at Yeshiva.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Does the Child Victims Act Over-Punish Yeshiva University?

By **BENJAMIN KOSLOWE**

With the recent passing of the Child Victims Act, Yeshiva University once again stands to defend itself against accusations of mishandling sexual abuse reports for decades. Though federal judges previously dismissed the \$380 million lawsuit filed against Yeshiva University, the new law vastly extends the statute of limitations for victims of sexual abuse, retroactively imposing potential civil liability on individuals and institutions for wrongdoings that may have taken place many years ago. Dozens of former Yeshiva University High School for Boys (MTA) students are petitioning anew for the case, and will likely proceed with a lawsuit against Yeshiva University in the near future.

The Child Victims Act, which seeks to provide some degree of restitution and justice for victims whose lives may have been permanently damaged by abuse, is clearly well-intentioned. "I hope you can find a slight sense of peace and a slight sense of vindication that you did not endure this pain without reason," Governor Andrew Cuomo explained at the law's signing ceremony last month. "This is society's way of saying we are sorry," he said.

The alleged crimes that were perpetrated against MTA high school students from the 1960s through the 1990s were certainly heinous acts. Yeshiva University, like other institutions, has acknowledged the unfortunate reality that it did not take sufficient steps to protect victims when suspicions first arose decades ago. "The actions described represent heinous and inexcusable acts that are antithetical both to Torah values and to everything that Yeshiva University stands for," President Richard Joel said after The Forward's 2012 exposé. He expressed, on behalf of Yeshiva University, his "deepest, most profound apology." Indeed, it ought to be obvious to everyone that victims deserve vindication and unqualified sympathy.

Less obvious, though, are the most ethical parameters of justice, or the ideal means by which the system of law will, to the best of its ability, right past wrongs.

As is evident by the years-long struggle over the attempted lawsuit, the sought-after restitution — specifically, legally forcing Yeshiva University to pay victims millions in compensation decades after the events took place — is still an unresolved issue, and the question of its merits is still a relevant one.

Though Yeshiva University is sharing

no information about how it intends to deal with the resurfaced lawsuit, legal precedent suggests that the university will attempt to negotiate with the defendants. But enforcing even a fraction of the astronomically high \$380 million payment order could cripple Yeshiva University, an institution which already suffers from barely-stable finances.

This type of punishment is ethically questionable. Even if one grants that institutional liability is legally and morally just (a proposition that is not obvious), whence do institutions derive legal culpability if not from individuals who belong to those institutions? A legitimate case can perhaps be made for punishing an institution in the present moment for its formal, or even implicit, crime-enabling policies. In the inevitable upcoming lawsuit against Yeshiva University, however, most of the culprits are deceased, living outside of American jurisdiction or no longer in positions to defend themselves.

There may be a legitimate place for the Child Victims Act ... However, in the case at hand, suing Yeshiva University will ultimately cause more harm than good by punishing the wrong parties.

Yeshiva University has also adapted to modern societal sensibilities regarding sexual abuse. Yeshiva University has in some measure righted past wrongs by spending money, time and effort to conduct an internal investigation and take steps to prevent similar mishandling in the future. Even before The Forward's exposé, Yeshiva University instituted mandatory sexual harassment training, avenues for students to confidentially report abuse and many educational programs to promote sexual abuse awareness among Yeshiva University students, faculty, administrators and alumni. Counseling has been made available to alleged victims. It seems somewhat unfair for Yeshiva University, like other organizations in similar circumstances, to find its own internal investigation used against the institution in future litigation, effectively punishing Yeshiva University after the fact for its own attempts at taking corrective action.

Even if Yeshiva University was once an institution guilty of permitting the occurrence of sexual abuse, its administration and its policies have changed.

It seems, then, that a successful suit against Yeshiva University would not

punish direct abusers or indirect enablers, nor even call to task ongoing harmful policies. This then raises an important question: Who exactly stands to pay for the crimes of decades past?

A major financial blow to Yeshiva University will harm students, who stand to suffer from further academic and extracurricular budget cuts. Departments will likely persist in hiring freezes, while employed faculty may not see an end to petrified salaries for years to come.

As was mentioned above, the victims of sexual abuse deserve unqualified sympathy. Many of these former students loved Yeshiva University, and they were cruelly neglected in return. Every feeling person associated with Yeshiva University should care deeply about the need to right the abuse that these individuals suffered.

There may be a legitimate place for the Child Victims Act. Perhaps there are some institutions that should stand to pay for sexual abuse from decades past.

Additionally, the law may serve the positive purpose of disincentivizing institutions from allowing sexual abuse to take place. However, in the case at hand, suing Yeshiva University will ultimately cause more harm than good by punishing the wrong parties.

If punishment is due, perhaps the victims might consider pursuing individual alleged abusers rather than the institution of Yeshiva University. Indeed, the mere existence of the Child Victims Acts does not in itself force victims to pursue lawsuits against institutions, even if the law may now permit it.

If the desired goal is deterrence, current Yeshiva University administrators and offices have made clear their openness to working together with victims to brainstorm how to best prevent sexual abuse going forward. Certainly this would be a positive and productive response to derive from the horrors that took place.

At this point, the Child Victims Act has passed. Society in general, and Yeshiva University in particular, must continue to effectively pursue efforts to help past victims of sexual abuse. Surely, this can be done without imposing irreparable financial devastation on the institution.



1 Meira Motechin Honorable Mention

"I still don't really get what that means."

2 Exploding Kittens

It's like Russian Roulette, and for those of you who have never played Russian Roulette I suggest you keep it that way.

3 Rabbi Penner at Klein@9

"This *mechitzah* is too high." Couldn't agree more. I just hope that you are as quick to act on this idea as you were the last time Klein@9 came up.

4 Mueller Report

"I told you this report would tell the truth," said all the Republican pundits who have been calling this investigation "illegitimate," "fake news," "a witch hunt" and "invalid" for the last two years.

5 Coed Sephardic/International Shabbaton at Beren

No 2:30 *mincha* announcement this time? How consistently inconsistent of YU. Guess Beren is not as *kadosh* as Wilf.

6 New Signs Outside the Library

I approve of this decision, but what did Eleanor Roosevelt do to warrant her replacement?

7 AIPAC

What could be better than all the world's Israel clubs getting together to talk about the majesty of the cherry tomato? All the world's Israel clubs getting together to talk about the majesty of Key Food grapes, that's what!

7 UP 7 DOWN

BY SAMUEL GELMAN

1 "Vilna" Debacle

I wonder what's worse? Having a coed event in a church or having a coed event in the *beit midrash*?

2 Syms Students "Reading"

Like a Syms student "studying," it's amazing what they can convince people they are doing when they hold a book near their face.

3 7 Joel/7 Berman

Honestly, this was a little too harsh and uncalled for. This Sham Kelman guy has got to calm down.

4 Yeshivat Sha'alvim/Shalvim For Women Logos

Can you spot the difference? Hint, it's very *Handmaid's Tale*-esque.

5 Requirements — 2-3 years of experience working in an agency or firm

HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO GET JOB EXPERIENCE IF ALL THE ENTRY LEVEL JOBS REQUIRE JOB EXPERIENCE!?!?!?

6 Apikores April

The inevitable conclusion following *Frum* February and Modern Orthodox March.

7 Rabbi Berman MTA Yearbook

Now I see why RIETS approved of him.

LAWSUIT,
continued from Front Page

applicable. Victims of such crimes may now commence a civil lawsuit during a one-year period beginning on Aug. 14. After this window, victims have until their 55th birthday to file a lawsuit.

"We're gearing up for a fight and have nothing to lose," said Mordechai Twersky, one of the first victims to come forward with allegations via a 2012 essay in the since folded YU Beacon. "The allegations, the testimony and the depth of YU's cover-up of the crimes will be devastating and far-reaching."

Kevin Mulhearn represents the 34 petitioners, who allege multiple counts of sexual abuse and sodomy at the hands of two former MTA faculty members: Rabbi George Finkelstein, a former principal of MTA and Rabbi Macy Gordon, a former Judaic Studies teacher. Despite multiple allegations against them, neither of the men was reported by the university.

"The law was so perverse before the CVA that it actually rewarded schools for successful cover-ups of sexual abuse," remarked Mulhearn, who has represented dozens of sexual abuse victims in the past. "And in my mind, that was dangerous."

Before Mulhearn can file a suit on Aug. 14, he must obtain all the necessary information to frame the complaint and identify defendants. In a pre-action motion of disclosure, Mulhearn has requested the preservation of and access to specific items related to the case. A key part of the renewed lawsuit, Mulhearn explained, is receiving all documents and records related to YU's independent investigation of the complaints in 2013, the details of which are currently the sole property of the university.

The motion also requests to depose Rabbi Yosef Blau, the Senior Mashgiach Ruchani of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), who, on Feb. 14, admitted to knowing about at least one instance of abuse but took no action, claiming he "knew nothing would be done." In a sworn affidavit of a petitioner, Rabbi Blau was quoted as having called the complainant "not the most credible child." Rabbi Blau spoke on a panel in 2017 addressing sexual abuse in the Orthodox Community. He said at the time, "the most important problem is denial ... once we acknowledge the problem exists then we can try to deal with it."

In the original lawsuit, the petitioners alleged that administrators of Yeshiva University and MTA allowed "several known sexual predators to assume and remain in exalted positions in [MTA]'s administration and faculty." The lawsuit also pointed out that YU honored Gordon in 2002 at a RIETS dinner and accepted money for a scholarship in his name that same year.

An investigation conducted by Paul Berger of The Forward revealed that former YU President Rabbi Norman Lamm, then chancellor and rosh yeshiva of RIETS, did not report the sexual abuse to the police, despite his knowledge of the incidents.

Finkelstein now lives in Israel and is currently outside the bounds of the court's jurisdiction. Gordon died in 2017. But many of the victims are still haunted by the memories of abuse to this day.

"The souls of young students were murdered and their bodies were violated," remarked Twersky, who attempted to take his own life in 2000. "Lives have been destroyed, worlds shattered. Those victims have every right to demand compensation."

Though it is still in its preliminary stages, Mulhearn is confident about the eventual outcome of the case. "I have a hard time seeing how they can defend the indefensible," he said. "I don't think they have much of a defense."

Yeshiva University will be represented by Karen Bitar of Seyfarth Shaw LLP. Bitar and Yeshiva University's Office of Marketing and Communications did not return a request for comment.



Zysman Hall, the main building of Yeshiva University High School for Boys (MTA)

THE COMMENTATOR



Furst Hall

THE COMMENTATOR

*JEWISH STUDIES,
continued from Front Page*

of undergraduate requirements during Rabbi Ari Berman's presidency. The revision, which was passed by an overwhelming majority of the Department of Jewish Studies faculty, will be evaluated by the YC Curriculum Committee, after which it will be presented to the YC faculty as a whole for formal approval. Only after formal approval will the revision become official.

At the present time, the Hebrew language requirements remain unchanged. Since this Spring 2019 semester, as *The Commentator* recently reported, male undergraduate students have been required to take between one and three semesters of Hebrew language, depending on their track placement as determined by a YU-administered language competency examination. The Jewish Studies update also does not affect Sy Syms School of Business students, who at the present time are still required to take Hebrew language, as well as one of three docketed Jewish Studies courses (Sy Syms Contemporary Jewish Studies, YC Jewish Studies or James Striar School courses), depending on their morning program and interests.

"The formal Bible requirement is much reduced, and there is no particular course that is still required," expressed Professor Aaron Koller, the Chair of the Department of Jewish Studies. "We view this as sad but necessary, and we would like to work with the yeshiva to encourage students to increase their study of Tanakh."

Koller emphasized that there will be "an increased range of options within Jewish Studies, which should enable students to find classes that they are interested in, and should also enable faculty to teach classes that they believe are important and interesting for our students." The official voted-upon document added that students "gain immeasurably from these changes" in terms of scheduling, as "students in all morning programs can fulfill their Jewish Studies requirements without having to worry about possible conflicts with their other YC requirements and

courses in their majors."

In order to maximize course choices and scheduling flexibility, 2-credit courses of all types will be offered in the Tuesday/Thursday 1:05-2:45 slot. As in previous semesters, courses will also continue to be offered for Isaac Breuer College of Hebraic Studies (IBC) students in the Monday/Wednesday and Tuesday/Thursday 11:00-12:15 slots, as well as in the weekday 3:00, 4:30 and 6:45 slots for all interested students. Honors courses will be limited to 3-credit courses, and will be available in multiple disciplines within Jewish Studies.

Though *The Commentator* reached out to Deans and many Jewish Studies professors, as of the time of publication, most declined to comment on the recent development. One professor, who requested to not be named, expressed concern about whether there will be enough course offerings for all of the tenured Jewish Studies professors.

"The formal Bible requirement is much reduced, and there is no particular course that is still required. We view this as sad but necessary."

Professor Aaron Koller

For decades, Yeshiva College students were required to take several Bible courses, including an introductory Bible course called "Text, Context, and Tradition" in recent years, or more colloquially known as "Intro to Bible" (the course's exact title has varied over the years). The course has been taught by many different professors, recently including Professor Moshe Bernstein, Professor Shalom Carmy, Professor Yaakov Elman (who passed away last July), Professor Shalom Holtz, Professor Aaron Koller, Professor Ari Mermelstein, Rabbi Allen Schwartz and Rabbi Jeremy Wieder.

Though "Intro to Bible" will no longer be a required course, it will almost certainly continue to be offered, at least for the time being.

Koller explained that part of the thought process that led to "Intro to Bible" losing requirement status was empirical evidence that the course, though theoretically important, did not seem to be succeeding at the goal of creating sophisticated Modern Orthodox readers of Tanakh. According to Koller, this realization led to an evaluation of whether the course was in fact one that needs to be taught to every student.

Aside from "Intro to Bible," the Department of Jewish Studies is reconfiguring many of its other 2-credit courses. "This makes for educational and pedagogical challenges," figured Koller, "but will significantly ease some of the pressures on the students in the afternoons."

With a broader array of course offerings, Yeshiva College students will be able to fulfill Jewish Studies requirements with greater variety. For example, whereas students were previously required to take one survey course

— typically either "Classical Jewish History" or "Medieval Jewish History" — and one in-depth course in Jewish History, they now might avoid survey courses altogether and instead study a more specific topic in Jewish History. Like "Intro to Bible," the futures of the "Classical Jewish History" and "Medieval Jewish History" courses remain to be seen.

Additionally, the new higher amount of options will allow for students to fulfill Jewish Studies requirements with courses outside of the Jewish History or Bible departments. Such courses may include offerings in the Jewish Philosophy department, as well as electives in Jewish Studies that may be offered in various departments. Next semester, for example, visiting professor Rabbi Dr. Ari

Bergmann will be teaching a course in the discipline of academic Talmud, which will fulfill a Jewish Studies requirement.

The changes in the YC Jewish Studies requirements are the first to be announced during a wave of several such curricular brainstorming sessions that have been taking place over the past few weeks. Currently, Wilf Campus Hebrew language faculty are in the process of discussions that are expected to result in a slightly modified set of requirements for next semester. Additionally, Yeshiva College faculty have conducted several meetings to evaluate the General Studies Core Curriculum and possibly institute modifications, although this remains to be seen.

The broad pattern of curricular updates is taking place on the heels of recent experimentation with the notion of "optionality," which President Ari Berman has discussed with faculty on several occasions now, including at a meeting of Yeshiva College faculty in early February. According to several faculty members who were present at the recent meeting, the idea of "optionality" is to maximize academic options for students, in some cases by reducing requirements, to address issues such as the limited time during the day and other factors that currently, in theory, turn potential students away from Yeshiva University. Professor Koller explained that the new Jewish Studies revision was not micromanaged by the President's Office, although the changes likely are in line with the president's vision for promoting "optionality."

"Academic renewal is at the heart of every university's curriculum," wrote Provost Selma Botman. "The Jewish Studies faculty care deeply about their students, and their proposed changes to Jewish Studies requirements at YU represent a thoughtful response to their students' intellectual and educational aspirations. This highlights our faculty's ongoing concern with the quality of their curricular offerings."

This is a developing story. The Commentator will provide updates if and when further curricular changes are announced.

University Issued Seven Fire Code Violations in Past Year and a Half

By YITZCHAK CARROLL

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on March 11.

Yeshiva University has been charged with seven fire violation summonses over the past 16 months on its Beren and Wilf Campuses, The Commentator has learned. According to New York State Unified Court System (UCS) records, all seven of these charges are currently pending in Manhattan Summons Court.

The seven summonses were all issued for failing to comply with a corrective order issued by city fire marshals. Pursuant to the New York City Administrative Code, upon finding a violation of the fire code, an inspector is directed to issue a written order to correct the hazard within a reasonable time frame. Failure to comply with the written order results in the issuance of a summons.

"I left Brookdale because I felt unsafe there. It makes sense that the fire safety is not up to code."

—
Eliana Moss (SCW '19)

"As a large institutional owner we are subject to many random inspections by various city agencies," explained Chief Facilities & Administrative Officer Randy Apfelbaum. "Sometimes these result in minor violations which require the University to provide paperwork to clear. None of these minor violations compromise the safety or integrity of the University's buildings, the students, faculty or staff. The University Operations department works to address

issues that arise in a timely manner and ensures that the buildings are maintained in a safe condition."

According to copies of the summonses obtained from UCS, the university was served with four summonses for failure to comply with an order to submit satisfactory fire safety and evacuation plans for the Brookdale Residence Hall on May 14, 2018 and Nov. 16, 2017, as well as for the Schottenstein Residence Hall on April 12, 2018 and Nov. 28, 2017. Both residence halls are located on the midtown Beren Campus.

Another summons was issued on Nov. 17, 2017 for "failure to obtain a Place of Assembly

Certificate of Operation" for Zysman Hall on the Wilf Campus, whereas another summons was issued on Feb. 12, 2018 for failing to maintain a public assembly space in accordance with approved floor and seating plans in Stanton Hall. Additionally, on Feb. 15, 2018, the university received a summons for failing to maintain communication capability between the fire command station and elevators in the Schottenstein Residence Hall.

Eliana Moss (SCW '19) was not surprised. "I left Brookdale because I felt unsafe there," she said. "It makes sense that the fire safety is not up to code."

Other students were indifferent. "I know

where to go if there is a fire. I feel safe in Schottenstein," said Ahuva Wakschlag (SSSB '20).

According to the law, conviction on each such charge comes with a maximum of \$10,000 in fines and civil penalties. If the failure to correct the fire code violation was done so knowingly, the defendant is liable to a maximum of \$20,000 in fines and civil penalties on each charge, as well as a maximum of six months imprisonment. Under Article 600 of the New York Criminal Procedure Law, a corporation may be charged as a defendant in a criminal proceeding and pay any penalties resulting thereof.



Brookdale Residence Hall

THE COMMENTATOR

Recent Grads Minyan at Mt. Sinai Seeks to Establish Young Professionals Community

By YOSSI ZIMLOVER

The "Recent Grads *Minyan*" (RGM) is a new *minyan* that has been established for recent college graduates and young professionals in Washington Heights. The *minyan* met for the first time in the

Heights. "Our goal is to create a social and religious outlet that allows recent grads and young professionals to join together in a beautiful Shabbat davening, which will permeate into other religious and social events that bind us together as a welcoming, vibrant, cohesive and strong community at Mount

corner of the Heights. The new Recent Graduate *Minyan* is full of people whose enthusiasm and passion extends beyond the dairy *kiddush* of donuts and iced coffee," remarked Mira Shere ('SCW 19). In some recent weeks, the *kiddush* after *davening* has even featured meat.

"Our goal is to create a social and religious outlet that allows recent grads and young professionals to join together in a beautiful Shabbat davening..."

—
Founders of the Recent Graduates Minyan

downstairs gym of the Mt. Sinai Jewish Center with over 200 attendees on Shabbat, Feb. 23.

The RGM was founded by YU alumni Dovid Simpser (SSSB '18), Yael (Nissanoff) Simpser (SCW '18), Ilana Schiff (SSSB '17), Noam Safier (YC '17), Jake Schrier (YC '18) and University of Maryland alumnus Yosef Frenkel.

The organizers explained that they wanted to create a warm, centralized community for the recent graduate and young professional demographic in Washington

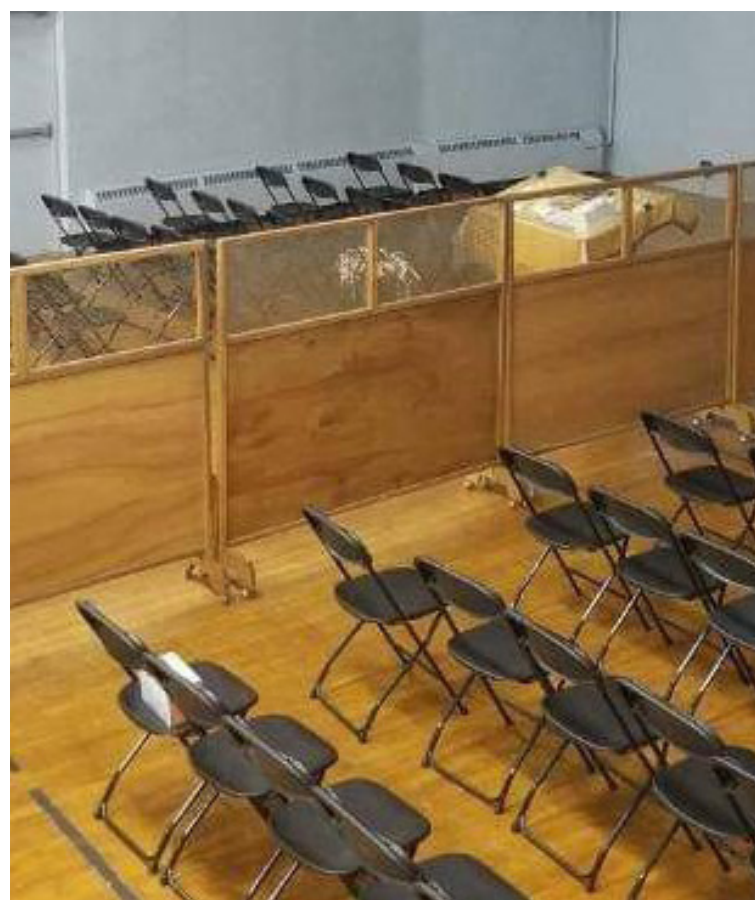
Sinai," the founding members told The Commentator.

After their vision was formulated, they approached the leaders of Mt. Sinai, "who were more than happy to work with us to make this vision a reality," they stated. The organizers expressed their appreciation towards the Mt. Sinai board and Yehuda Krupka, the President of Mt. Sinai, for successfully creating the *minyan*.

"This past Shabbos united people of varying schedules, professions and interests from every

David Yedlin (Syms '17) expressed his thanks to the founders and explained that they have "not only created that community feel with the *minyan*, but the davening itself boasts great *chazanim* and an emphasis on no talking during prayers to create an inspiring davening!"

One can learn more about the *minyan* by joining the Facebook group "Mt. Sinai Jewish Center Recent Grad *Minyan* (RGM)."



The minyan set up for davening at Mt. Sinai Jewish Center

THE COMMENTATOR

YU Students Attend Washington Heights Vigil for Victims of Christchurch Mosque Shootings

By YITZCHAK CARROLL

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on March 17.

On Sunday, March 17, a contingent of around 10-15 Yeshiva University students attended a vigil in Washington Heights for the victims of Friday's shootings at the Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Center in Christchurch, New Zealand. Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) Senior *Mashgiach Ruchani* Rabbi Yosef Blau addressed the crowd at the event, which was held in Bennett Park.

The vigil was coordinated by U.S. Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D-Manhattan). Molly Meisels (SCW '20) arranged for a delegation of YU students to attend.

"The vigil was an amazing show of solidarity and support for New Zealand," said Sara Verschleisser (SCW '21). "The diversity and unity

of the event meant the delegation of students blended in, and the message against Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, bigotry and hatred was moving."

a cowardly terrorist opened fire on them, an act of barbarism exposing humanity at its worst. The Yeshiva University community across the world stands in solidarity with

"The diversity and unity of the event meant the delegation of students blended in, and the message against Islamophobia, anti-semitism, bigotry and hatred was moving."

Sara Verschleisser (SCW '21)

"It was with grief-stricken incomprehension that we learned of the cold-blooded murder of 50 people at the Masjid Al Noor and Linwood Islamic Centre in New Zealand," said President Ari Berman in a prepared statement, citing a verse from the Book of Job. "As over a hundred of our Muslim cousins gathered in their mosques for prayer, an act of faith that represents humanity at its best,

all people of conscience against Islamophobia, and bigotry and hatred of any kind. May the families of the fallen find comfort and strength in the days to come."

The attacks during a Friday prayer service in Christchurch, New Zealand killed 50 and injured another 50 individuals, prompting local synagogues in New Zealand to close for Shabbat.



Senior Mashgiach Ruchani Rabbi Yosef Blau addresses the vigil.

OFFICE OF U.S. REP. ADRIANO ESPAILLAT

JScreen Administers Subsidized Genetic Testing on Beren, Wilf Campus to Follow

By DAVID SCHMIDT

Three hundred YU students participated in heavily subsidized genetic testing administered by JScreen, an organization that tests for genetic diseases in the Jewish community, on the Beren Campus on Feb. 28. Two hundred fifty additional tests will be available for students on the Wilf Campus on April 8.

The screenings were organized by the Genetics Club and the Medical Ethics Society and marks the first time since Spring 2016 that JScreen has tested at YU.

According to their website, the Emory University based "JScreen" tests for over 220 genetic diseases found in Jewish genes. Their genetic screening includes a follow-up consultation that explains the results of the screening to each participant. This will allow an individual to prevent genetic diseases that

affect significant parts of the Jewish community deep inside their DNA. 43 percent of Ashkenazi Jews are carriers for some genetic disease, and 80 percent of babies with genetic

interest. The screening cost \$36, discounted from the normal website price of \$149, which is already lowered by donors from an original \$999.

"By getting screened, you are being an advocate for your own health and for your future family's health, and those are acts of someone commendable."

Talia Kupferman (SCW '20)

diseases are born to parents with no known family history of that disease. These genetic diseases now foreseeable and preventable with tests that JScreen, and others, provide.

The testing on Beren Campus originally had a limit of 250 tests, but JScreen generously added 50 more tests after a flood of

"No one, man or woman, should feel that they can't come to this screening event due to the possibility of being judged or stigmatized. By getting screened, you are being an advocate for your own health and for your future family's health, and those are acts of someone commendable," wrote Talia

Kupferman (SCW '20), one of the organizers of the event, when asked about concerns of stigma surrounding being screened.

"My high school offered genetic testing but I did not participate simply because of the high price. By subsidizing the cost, the Genetics Club made it financially possible for this test to happen for me," said Sarah Schatz (SCW '21) regarding her participation in the event.

David Kirsch (YC '21), who is planning on attending the Wilf event, said, "I think it is important for anyone who one day hopes to start a family to ensure that it's a healthy one, and this is one of the first steps to accomplish that goal."

To register for the event, go to JScreen.org and select "YU/Stern" as the reason you heard about JScreen. The event code to submit is "WILF19." The kits will be available for pickup at the event location.



JScreen
Genetic testing just got easy

Zachary Greenberg: Violent Liberal Activist or Prospective Resident Advisor?

By **ELI FRISHMAN**

On Feb. 24, Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21) was finishing up his Resident Advisor (RA) application. Unlike previous years, the 2019 RA application required prospective applicants to make a video of themselves describing their qualifications for the job. Greenberg finished his video and uploaded it to YouTube that night. As expected, the video didn't garner very many views.

On *Motzei Shabbos*, March 2, Greenberg opened up his phone to find 20 email notifications informing him of comments that people had made on his video. Aside from his immediate family and those responsible for hiring RAs, no one else was aware that Greenberg had uploaded the video to YouTube. Upon viewing the comments, Greenberg was shocked

Trump called Hayden Williams on stage and used the occasion to call on law enforcement to protect First Amendment rights of conservatives. Trump commented, "Ladies and gentlemen, he [Hayden Williams] took a hard punch in the face for all of us; remember that. He took a hard punch for all of us and we can never allow that to happen."

On March 1, the University of California police department reported that they had caught Hayden's attacker, Zachary Greenberg, a 28-year-old software engineer from Oakland. Although not a student at Berkeley, Greenberg was at the university's library on the day of the attack. For Greenberg, the arrest follows a long list of altercations with conservative groups, which resulted — on many occasions — in restraining orders being filed against him. Greenberg has pleaded not guilty to the charges at Berkeley.

commi scum!!!" Another viewer, however, had a much more positive reaction to the mistake, calling the YU Zachary Greenberg a "Sweet Heart."

Jonathan Greenberg (YC '20), a current RA who bears no familial relation to either of the Zachary Greenbergs, but is, however, a close friend to the YU Zach Greenberg, commented, "Knowing Zach, I'm not surprised in the slightest to hear about the story. These crazy stories always seem to happen to him. I

can, however, say this: the only trait those two men have in common is their name. The Zachary Greenberg I know wouldn't hurt a fly."

Greenberg is known to be active in political life on campus, participating in events such as The Great Debate between the Democrats and Republicans on campus. One student, Daniel Elfenbein (YC '20), jokingly remarked that he would "have to think twice about going to a political event with Greenberg in attendance."

When questioned on whether Zachary Greenberg's chances of becoming an RA increased, Head RA Noah Hazan responded, "The whole thing was pretty hilarious but I don't think it negatively or positively affected Zach's chances of becoming an RA."

For good or bad, a lot of people are now familiar with the name Zachary Greenberg. As a potential RA, however, his future floor-mates might just have the wrong first impression.

After running a few Google searches, Greenberg was horrified to find out that he himself — or someone with an identical name — was the perpetrator.

to find comments identifying him as a "puncher" and a "terrorist." A particular comment mentioned a punching-attack occurring at the University of Berkeley. After running a few Google searches, Greenberg was horrified to find out that he himself — or someone with an identical name — was the perpetrator.

On Feb. 19, a video was released of a man attacking Hayden Williams, a pro-Trump activist who was manning a table for a conservative campus recruiting organization called Turning Point USA at the University of Berkeley. The event, which was filmed on Hayden's cell phone camera, quickly went viral.

In his speech at the 2019 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), President

While in its first week online, the YU Zachary Greenberg's video had only a handful of views. By March 7, the video had over 1,000. This surge in viewership was a result of people trying to find the video of the Berkeley assault but instead chanced upon a video of YU's Zachary Greenberg describing why he would be an ideal candidate for the RA job.

Although most people commenting on the video were aware of the confusion immediately after clicking the play button, some still thought that YU's Zachary Greenberg was, in fact, the Punching Zachary Greenberg.

One viewer, who apparently did not make the distinction between the two men, commented, "Take off that mask, I know it's you



A shared name between these two individuals caused much confusion for many Youtube viewers.

THE COMMENTATOR

Remembering Haya Gordin: War Hero, Devoted Librarian, Quintessential Bubbe

By **ELLIOT HELLER**

I can still hear her voice now. The 88-year old woman greets us with the smile and energy of a young woman as we walk into my rabbi's apartment for Shabbos lunch. "Shabbat Shalom!" she says in her thick Israeli accent.

"My name is *Haya*. I live in the building across the street. I worked in the Yeshiva University *sifriyah* (library) for 35 years. Washington Heights is the best neighborhood in all of New York!"

A small crowd forms around her, newcomers and regulars alike, enamored by this sweet and energetic old woman who reminds us all of our own bubbes.

We sit at the table and begin the meal. When it's time for introductions (or sometimes even earlier, for those lucky enough to be sitting near her), she tells her best story — the best story of anyone present — with that same excitement. "I served in *Etzel* when I

In her old age, Haya wasn't great with names and faces, and so I and several others had the privilege of "meeting" her — and hearing the story — several times. It never got old.

was a teenager. I lived in Palestine. I fought in *Milchamat Hakamat HaMedinah* (the Israeli War of Independence). I was 16-years-old, and I would deliver jars of jam to the Israeli soldiers in *keleh Akko*" (Acre prison).

"On top of the jam," she continues, was "*homer nefetz*. How do you say in English?" "*Dynamite*," the rabbi answers.

"Yes, dynamite. And I would bring these packages every day. And then one day, boom! they blew up the prison and all the Israeli

prisoners escaped." (My rabbi would often point out that by her own admission, we had a "Palestinian terrorist" with us at the Shabbos table.)

In her old age, Haya wasn't great with

names and faces, and so I and several others had the privilege of "meeting" her — and hearing the story — several times. It never got old.

The meal continues. If someone mentions *Tu BiShvat*, we are treated to — no, led in — a chorus of "*HaShkeidiah Porachat*." It was one of several Israeli favorites of hers which she would conduct. Her favorite song, though, was "*Chanaleh*," an ode to my rabbi's daughter featuring just the single lyric and *a la la la la la*, sung to the tune of "Jingle Bells."

Haya passed away this past December. None of us knew it, but she had been battling cancer for a couple of years. Her ability to stay

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Beren Spirit Week Brings Joy to Students

By CHAYA GREEN

Just as the Beren Campus' halls and classrooms were filling up with excitement from the start of Adar, the Torah Activities Council (TAC), Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC) and SYMS Student Council decided to increase that palpable joy with Beren Spirit Week. With themes of gratitude and entertainment sprinkled throughout, the Beren Spirit Week proved itself to be an uplifting and exciting way to create a community on campus.

Beren Spirit Week began on Feb. 18 with free hot chocolate in the lobby of 245, which undoubtedly warmed up each and every student. The theme for that day was the appreciation of student employees wherein pictures of dozens of student employees were hung up in the center of the 245 lobby next to the hot chocolate. There were pens hanging down next to each person's picture, name and job description wherein students and teachers alike had the ability to write why they appreciated those pictured. Many passersby announced that this was a phenomenal way to create a feeling of gratitude amongst the peers.

On Tuesday, there were free hamantaschens in the lobby of 245 in the spirit of Adar, and an appreciation board for the facilities staff and security guards. This

particular appreciation board truly created an awareness amongst the students for those who keep the Beren Campus running.

The highlight of this day, however, was the first ever talent show run by SCWSC's student council. There was an overflowing room of 150-200 students supporting their friends' performances and genuinely having an enjoyable night. There were acts such as ballroom dancing, martial arts, singing the alphabet backward, piano compositions and more. There were three prizes being offered and a tie for third at the end of the show. The first place prize of \$150 went to Talia Kupferman for a Broadway song performance; the second place prize of \$75 went to Gabrielah Baruch for a singing performance; and the tie for third place of \$50 went to Nicole Rothenberg and Eliana Moss for synchronized swimming, and to Rebecca Robin for an opera performance.

Throughout the night, there was trivia for swag and amazing remarks by judges. Many students mentioned that while they were planning on leaving after their friends' acts, they were having such an enjoyable time that they stayed until the end of the show. Chana Waintraub, a current sophomore at Stern, said that "the talent show was such a positive and fun way to showcase the talent that our peers have. This event was the first time I felt a true sense of community

on campus."

After a remarkable talent show, student council left with hopes for a bigger and better one for the upcoming year due to the enthusiastic and supportive atmosphere it created on campus in honor of Spirit Week.

In continuation of this week, everybody was encouraged to wear white and blue on Wednesday to send our spirit straight to our Jewish home. The Counseling Center was also handing out cupcakes in the lobby of 245 to sweeten up everybody's day. Photos of faculty of the Beren Campus hung high

on the Appreciation Board. Later that night, there was a delicious sushi making event filled with fresh ingredients and amazing music, putting everyone in a good mood and leaving them satisfied with tasty food.

On the last day of Spirit Week, an ice cream truck drove on over for everyone who was wearing YU swag, including the bracelets that were being given out in the lobby of 245. There were lines down the block for the fantastic flavors that Cones Ice Cream had to offer! Students representing the school with YU swag had the chance to

enter a contest for a \$40 gift card for Amazon by posting a picture of themselves in their swag and tagging the Office of Student Life. The athletes and international students were hung on the Appreciation Board for this last day in honor of all of the amazing culture and talent they bring to campus.

Throughout the week, there was a picture challenge online for #YUgotspirit. Each participant had to post a tagged picture and comment why they were proud to be a part of Yeshiva University for their chance to win AirPods, a Target gift card or a Dunkin' Donuts gift card. The winners are yet to be announced, extending that excitement of Spirit Week into the oncoming ones.

Noa Eliach, a current junior at Stern, commented that "specifically with the social media campaign, it really felt nice to see people's pride to be a part of this university, and how that pride continued to spread throughout media to inspire others to feel a part of the broader YU community."

Every single aspect of Spirit Week, down to the bracelets and as big as the talent show, generated a feeling of connection from one student to another, and created an atmosphere of excitement and community that was unforgettable. Students are already looking forward to the next Spirit Week on Beren Campus!



SCWSC President Shoshana Marder and VP of Clubs Racheli Moskowitz preparing for Beren Spirit Week

STERN COLLEGE FOR WOMEN
STUDENT COUNCIL (SCWSC)

Common Tendencies of the NFL Draft

By MAYER FINK

It may be fun to look in hindsight at previous National Football League (NFL) drafts. Some might laugh at seemingly reasonable draft choices that turned out for the worse, and impressed at how some teams were able to develop into championship contenders from a single draft. One can also be impressed at how some players fell to the late rounds only to mature into all-pro talents. The last couple of draft classes gave us some talented players who have made a substantial impact on the NFL. I wish to present here a few points that stood to me from each of the last few draft classes.

As stated earlier, there have been many cases of a team having a great draft class that turned them from having an abysmal performance into a Super Bowl contender. A recent example of this was the New Orleans Saints in 2017. The Saints hit a roadblock in the Drew Brees era from 2014-2017 when they consistently failed to make the playoffs in addition to being at the bottom of their division each season. In the season following the 2017 draft class, the Saints had a 12-4 record and were at the top of their division. This year, the same players who were drafted in 2017 nearly brought the Saints to the Super Bowl. For the Saints, the 2017 draft class is expected to continue their exemplary performance.

The most notable case of a team turning around the fortune of their franchise is the 1974 Pittsburgh Steelers. Being a constant last place team and an unknown franchise before 1974, the Steelers drafted four future Hall-of-Famers which launched the most powerful football dynasty of the decade,

with them obtaining four super rings in a six-year span. A point I wish to establish here is that a draft can give hope and change to any team, no matter how poorly they did in the previous season.

A second point I would like to emphasize is that there is much to learn regarding quarterback picks from previous drafts. Many were skeptical to draft Patrick Mahomes because he didn't play in a pro-style offense in college but instead played an air-raid style that is very passing friendly and creates bloated statistics. This did not stop Andy Reid and the Kansas City Chiefs from taking a second look at him. They saw his ability to make any throw on the field and his adaptability to the complex Reid offense style. Mahomes recently won the NFL Most Valuable Player award and seems to have much potential to continue his success in the years to come.

In the 2012 draft, many teams passed on Russell Wilson because he looked too small to be a pro quarterback; they thought his size would affect his playing ability. However, the Seattle Seahawks saw someone who had the mobility and football I.Q. to dominate the game. Russell Wilson helped the Seahawks win their only super bowl in franchise history in the 2013-14 season and has been one of the top quarterbacks since joining the league.

Arguably the most famous example of a great quarterback being overlooked in the early rounds of the draft was Tom Brady, who was drafted in the sixth round of the 2000 draft class. Many teams passed on him for reasons such as his lack of mobility, his inability to throw under pressure and his lack of arm strength. No one saw his work ethic and his heart. Brady knew how great he could be, and he proved just that with six Super Bowl rings.

The bottom line is that many teams have a lot of bias when looking at quarterbacks. Teams prefer their quarterbacks to look and play a certain way; they want them to fit a specific mold. In my opinion, they must rid themselves of their biases and judge quarterbacks on the video footage of games to see how they actually perform.

My third point is that teams should ideally draft players based on need and not want. Many teams will draft skill positions — colloquially known as highlight-reel positions — like receivers or pass rushers. To put the value of these positions into perspective, the average team will have 65-85 offensive plays in a game, a good receiver will catch 8-10 passes a game and a running back will touch the ball 20-25 times a game. Simply put, at best receivers only affect 20 percent of plays while quarterbacks and offensive lineman affect every play on offense. Pass rushers can only affect obvious passing downs while the offense generally won't show their hand and make pass-rushers ineffective on most plays. To summarize, I believe that teams shouldn't draft receivers or pass on rushers early in the draft. Finally, a team must draft defensive players early in the draft. Most defensive players affect every single play when they are on the field. The priorities in drafting should be to land a franchise quarterback, protect him with a good offensive line and draft defensive players. The teams that are most successful in the NFL more or less follow this formula.

My final point is that the scouting combine and pro-day are not valid methods for a team to evaluate a prospect. During the NFL Scouting Combine of 2017, many viewers were blown off their seat when they saw John Ross run the 40-yard dash in 4.22 seconds, a finishing time which broke the previous

record. Many draft experts immediately declared him to be a top receiver in the draft class. The Cincinnati Bengals drafted him as the 9th pick in the draft, with the expectation of greatness from him. This past season Ross had only 210 receiving yards; a receiver drafted in the first round is expected to post 1,000 yards in a season. After two years in the league, it is clear that John Ross hasn't been worthy of the number nine pick and was a draft bust. The Bengals have been trying to trade him in the off-season.

In 2007, scouts journeyed to Louisiana State University to watch a pro-day of a hopeful quarterback prospect. Many draft analysts were astonished at the skills the prospective quarterback showed that day. This prospect was Jamarus Russell. Russell is currently regarded as one of the biggest draft busts in NFL history. Subsequent to the draft, Russell had a terrible run with the Oakland Raiders; in three seasons in Oakland, he started in just 25 out of 48 games and won only 7 of them.

Many prospects suddenly gain value after performing well in a combine or a pro-day. If the NFL was boiled down to players running drills and dodging cones, then those events would be a good forecast for the futures of prospective players, which, of course, is not the case.

We have a lot to look forward to in the upcoming 2019 draft. We all can be more aware of the draft process and the repercussions of certain draft choices. We should be aware that a good draft choice can potentially turn around a franchise. In addition, there is no exact science to evaluating quarterbacks. Furthermore, teams are more likely to have better records when they draft positions that affect the game more than highlight-reel positions like a receiver. Finally, the combine and pro-day shouldn't be taken too seriously.



Haya (center), sporting a Trump wig on Purim

HAYA GORDIN,
continued from Page 7

positive and maintain that same youthful energy is now even more inspiring.

At the memorial service for her, held in Rubin Shul, I learned much more about her inspiring journey. I learned how, after

making *aliyah* from Poland at the age of three, she always considered Israel her home, even after moving to America for her marriage and making her life here. I learned of her passion and devotion to her job as a librarian.

“There was no such thing as ‘tomorrow,’ for Haya,” Rabbi Baruch Simon related. “It didn’t matter if it was 12:00 midnight and

you needed a book — she would go to the basement right then and find it for you.”

Here in YU, there are many reasons to complain. I was no stranger to them. Now a fresh graduate, as I reflect on the things I disliked and what I did — and could have done better — to improve them. I encourage you to continue complaining, both in the form of “Quality Memes” and actual

efforts to effect change. But when things don’t go your way, I hope that people like Haya can inspire you to find the positive in the situation. If you can keep a fraction of the positivity that Haya displayed despite enduring the most difficult of circumstances, then your experience here will be better off. And the world will be just a little brighter.

‘The Lightning Thief’ Musical Strikes Theaters and Hearts Around the Country: An Interview with Ryan Knowles

By ELI AZIZOLLAHOFF

Editor’s Note: This article was originally published online on March 28.

For Ryan Knowles, horsing around isn’t just fun and games. It is quite literally his job. Knowles plays Chiron, a centaur and mentor, in “The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical.”

The show, based off of the book of the same name by Rick Riordan, follows the young Percy as he discovers that the Greek gods are real and Poseidon, god of the sea, is his estranged father. When Percy is framed for stealing Zeus’ lightning bolt and his mother is kidnapped to the Underworld, he and his friends must travel across North America to save his mother and clear his name.

Aside from putting his best hoof forward as Percy’s beloved teacher, Knowles is also the man behind the mask of Hades, Poseidon, Medusa, Kurt Cobain and many more characters throughout the show.

“There are a lot of characters that I play and a lot of quick changes,” said Knowles. “That’s part of what’s so fun — that I get to handle so many distinct characters in one single show. When do you get to do that?”

The two characters that took the most care and attention to fully form, said Knowles, were Chiron, the centaur, and Medusa, the mythical female monster who turns men to stone with her gaze. In order to get in touch with his equestrian side, Knowles spent time on YouTube watching videos of actual horses and dressage.

To turn into Medusa, Knowles worked closely with the show’s choreographer, Patrick McCollum. “He created an idea for Medusa’s movements that kind of bring

forward the physical aspects of who Medusa really is so that was fun. Just think lots of snakes, you know. She would move like she were a skin bag full of snakes, like a female version of Oogie Boogie from [The Nightmare Before Christmas].”

To Knowles, though, the magic of this

“People love the story because Percy’s journey is like anybody’s.”

Ryan Knowles

show isn’t simply in the slew of characters and quick changes, the cast and crew that he admires so much, or even the theatre magic of bringing a minotaur to life and calling upon the ocean when confined to a very dry stage. To Mr. Knowles, what truly makes “The Lightning Thief” so remarkable is the fan-base that supports it; the “Half-Bloods,” as they have dubbed themselves.

The inception of this show could very easily be a daunting task; it involves adapting the book by Rick Riordan that millions of people grew up reading and love ferociously; a task that many say the recent “Harry Potter” based show, “The Cursed Child,” failed at, despite its theatrical success. To make matters more intimidating, previous adaptations of the novel, notably the 2010 film starring Logan Lerman, received criticism for veering away from the heart of the book and its characters.

Knowles remarked that the cast and crew are well aware of these expectations and that the musical’s script adheres to the original plot and spirit of the book. He added that

the format of a musical, which uses songs to focus on certain moments and emotions, allows for a whole new facet of the story to come to life, giving the audience the chance to resonate with Percy’s feelings of being an outcast.

“Like Sally says in the beginning, ‘normal is a myth,’ and what makes you different makes you strong. That’s really the message of the show.”

Fans of the book series seem to have embraced the show wholeheartedly, devoting as much care and enthusiasm to the musical as they have to the books. Knowles spoke with reverence about a Twitter campaign that allowed fans from different cities to buy tickets for their fellow Half-Bloods who couldn’t afford them, giving them the opportunity to see the show when the tour came to their respective towns.

“It just shows exactly what kind of community of fans is out there, so that’s been an

incredible thing to witness as we go through from town to town.” Knowles mentioned how wonderful it felt to arrive to a theater full of kids wearing Camp Half-Blood paraphernalia; many fans have almost seamlessly adapted their love for the books to a love for the stage production.

To Knowles, the audiences’ intense connection and resonance with the show is what is most remarkable about the experience. It is what he believes has made the musical such a hit. Beyond that, in Knowles’ view, “The Lightning Thief” succeeds because of the universality of the story.

“People love the story because Percy’s journey is like anybody’s,” said Knowles. “And everybody can relate.”

“The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical” played at the Beacon Theater from March 28-31.



Ryan Knowles as Medusa in “The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical”

JEREMY DANIEL

Fleeing the Fourth Reich: Why The British Want to Leave Europe and Why They Cannot

By ARYEH SCHONBRUN

Many youths in the United Kingdom have lived the last few years dreading the EU Brexit deadline. They fear that their unlimited access to Europe's cultural, political and economic centers (and, of course, skiing and the beaches) will be cut off just when they need it most. Today's economic conditions make Central Europe (Germany especially) vital to the success of millennial job-seekers, and a hard Brexit may mean a death knell for the hopes and desires of the youngsters looking for a normal life in today's post-capitalist economy. The British middle class has been expropriated and neglected, pierced and tortured consistently by austerity measures and stagnant wages on account of the wondrously destructive reforms put into place by the Iron Maiden, Prime Minister Thatcher, and her Conservative/Labour descendants. Immigration from Eastern Europe and beyond has made it extra difficult to claim a fair wage (there's too much competition), and I surely identify with the younger generation's sorrow at the prospect of not having Europe as an escape. It will hurt, but England is under attack.

Europe, i.e. France and Germany but mostly Germany, has made great inroads into the English market. They have re-nationalized Britain's trains, co-opted British culture, dampened British nationalism and, most importantly, constructed a European market that out-competes England's traditionally dominant economy. Britain, unlike the small peripheral economies of Eastern (Poland, Hungary, Baltic states, etc.) and Southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, Southern Italy and Greece), remains an integral partner of the European common marketplace. However, Britain has recently suffered years of economic stagnation. A close friend of the U.S., she was damaged greatly by the 2008 recession, lost many talented youth to continental Europe and took on many unskilled immigrants from inside the Eurozone. She has handed over her industrial might to mainland France and Germany (a top-exporter) and to the developing world, and as a result suffers from a continuous income imbalance relative to the EU. She currently (2017) registers a 70 B GBP deficit with the EU and, relative to her small size and limited industrial abilities (no more colonies), has increasingly become worried of economic warfare.

When Greece capsized ten years ago, she was threatened and forced into an inequitable economic arrangement by Germany's Angela Merkel. Instead of recording growth and extricating itself from its mounting debt, she has had to make painful cuts to its public services and has subsequently lost its ability to maintain a working middle class. Spain (but not Catalonia), Portugal and Italy suffered similar fates as Greece and, as a result, were refused entrance into the developed world's major economy. Instead of gaining access to the large resources afforded by the industrialized center, Europe's periphery has stagnated. The youth of Spain, Portugal and Italy routinely travel to Germany and France in search of an affordable life, scattering their country's talent and contributing to the disintegration of Europe's middle class. Europe's periphery, instead of finding a welcoming home in the European community, became Central Europe's local colony (the EU actively *encourages* intra-European commerce). Instead of opening doors and strengthening democracy in a notoriously volatile region of our world, many countries

became overburdened by a monopolized monetary system orchestrated by German-backed heads of the European Central Bank and, as a result, have been colonized by the neo-fascist post-capitalist dictatorship of post-modern Europe (headed by a unified Germany).

cousins. They have suffered the embarrassment of their American descendant's irrationality, and remain decidedly paranoid (quite justly!) of European cooperation. They did not cave to the impulse of a common currency, opting for at least the illusion of monetary independence, nor did they allow

or innocently relied on American support, but Trump's presidency exposes their hopes as false promises. The U.S. (except for New York/New England) has turned its back on England and has chosen instead the bureaucratic neo-liberal corruption of the European establishment. They do this not only knowing that they throw the British people into the abyss of economic solitude, but also as a way of challenging their long-time rival on the Atlantic sea-routes. Europe's underdeveloped periphery, while poor and fragile, represents a great opportunity for global investment, and the large, stable economies of central Europe a new market for American goods. Instead of aiding England in her struggle for independence from the European dictatorship, the U.S. betrays her to the currents of her isolation, alone and alienated.

Britain reminds me of Israel. Israelis enjoy their proximity to Europe but they have become increasingly frightened of Western-backed peace treaties, European influence and the superficial, materialistic culture that has come with the neo-liberal reforms of the past generation. Speaking with a Palestinian laborer, I asked him where he thinks Tel Aviv went wrong. He promptly responded, "Tel Aviv is American, that's why it's crazy." He took offence at the ostentatious way that modern Israelis objectify women ("We don't have those billboards in Nablus!"), and, of course, the LGBT culture that even Israeli Arabs do not identify with. Jews have seen how the West has devoured its inhabitants and colonized far-off lands and they too want out. Our settlers climbed the heights of the West Bank in search of refuge from the crises of neo-liberal society and not, as Europe wants you to believe, in search of *lebensraum*, but all to little avail. We continue to sink in the sludge of Western corruption, eagerly awaiting our salvation.

As a citizen of Israel, I reach out my arm in solidarity to the people of the U.K. I propose a truce between our peoples. We, too, feel what it means to be left out of Europe. We, too, feel wary of overburdening European totalitarianism, and we both need mutual help. I wish you much luck in your future dealings as I pray for our continued survival.

Workers of the World Unite!

Israelis enjoy their proximity to Europe but they have become increasingly frightened of Western-backed peace treaties, European influence and the superficial, materialistic culture that has come with the neo-liberal reforms of the past generation.

While the German middle class has also suffered from the recession a decade ago, the bureaucratic upper classes of Europe have reaped massive rewards from the arrangements. Greece, which had experienced years of economic revival, falls apart as I write, unable to serve the most basic needs of its *own* citizens, let alone the millions of migrants who travelled through and disrupted its society in 2015-16. Life in Greece has become desperate for the millions of now-poor families, with rates of depression rising and many families unwilling to have children. All this due to Germany's self-righteous insistence on the Greeks "paying their debts." Germany destroyed Greece's economy and society during WWII, depopulating whole cities such as Salonika in its mad attempt at exterminating the Jews, but today we hear more about pension benefits of public workers and the "irresponsible" actions of Greece's middle class!

Upon witnessing the ransacking of entire countries, Britain has observed that she might be next. She has not yet capitulated to Europe as Scandinavia did, and as such remains an enemy of European domination. Her population gasps for the last breaths of pan-European idealism but finds itself increasingly placed outside of the continental discourse. British families have suffered slightly more from the neo-liberal doctrines of Mdm. Thatcher than their counterparts in France (Gilets Jaune!) and Germany (where worker's rights still abound), and thus see themselves as inferior to their continental

for truly open borders (the Schengen Treaty does not apply to the U.K. and Ireland). However, they have suffered greatly from European speculative interests based on the euphoria of continental consolidation, unequal immigration and recently deep alienation from the neo-fascism rising in the East. They fear their innate connection to Europe's sphere of influence, yet they cannot find a way out.

The British population's answer to the neo-liberal tendencies of the EU appeared to fly in the face of establishment Europe. Even the top bureaucrats found themselves quite surprised by the ambivalence of the U.K. to membership in their idealized community. Why should a country's populace feel so alienated by the cold intellectualism of the continental establishment? Why should the British people so hate their fellow legal immigrants? But the markets were not fooled. Economics continued on as before and the financial world lived to see another day. To think that a global system could fail as a result of a few percentage points in either direction seems sheer lunacy to any observant eye, though it did make a big stir in the world's headlines. The European establishment may make it seem like they really care what Britain does when, in fact, they don't.

To be sure, there is no place for England to run. If she indeed exits the European Union, she will be left to fend for herself against the super-competitive economies of mainland Europe. Some of the older voters may have either inflated their country's significance,



UK and EU Flags

FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

Editor's Note: As the original editor's note below indicates, the speech by Rabbi Soloveitchik has been reprinted in The Commentator before. Twenty-five years after its first reprinting, The Commentator is happy to present this important essay once again.

From the Archives (March 22, 1994; Volume 59 Issue 11) — “The Idea of a Yeshiva University”

By **RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK**

The following essay is an edited transcript of the second part of a drasha delivered by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l on April 12, 1970 at a S'micha luncheon held at Yeshiva University. The first part of the drasha was an exposition on the revelation to Moses after the Golden Calf, and the third part was devoted to the Rav's misgivings and fears regarding decisions taken by Yeshiva's Administration in response to various crises they were facing at the time. The second part of the drasha is a vigorous presentation of the role of Yeshiva University in American Jewish life. Minor changes of style and syntax have been incorporated into the text in order to facilitate the reader's understanding. However, the basic oral presentation and style has been retained. This essay was transcribed by a young Musmach of RIETS and verified for accuracy by a number of prominent Mechanchim.

Yeshiva University is an institution which has been opposed and challenged for a long, long time. This opposition is a result of the uniqueness it has in its singular contribution to American Jewish Life. You will ask me, in what does this uniqueness express itself? The uniqueness is an idea; if you wish, it is faith; if you wish, it consists of an adventure. What is it? The three words, “It is possible” which is the motto of Yeshiva. What is possible? To be a Jew, a loyal committed Jew, living a Jewish life, to be a *talmid chacham* a scholar, a Jew committed to *Torah she-be'al peh*, and *Torah she-bichtav*, a Jew committed to the past, present and future of Jewish history, a Jew committed to the eschatological vision of *acharit ha-yamim* and, at the same time, to be a member of modern society, a useful member trained in all skills, able to live in the midst of modern society, not to retreat, but to take pride in the singularity and uniqueness of Judaism. It is that idea that the Yeshiva has proclaimed in three words, “It is possible,” and it is to that motto that we especially cling now.

I have been a teacher at Yeshiva for twenty-nine years. Next May, I will complete my twenty-ninth year as a teacher here. The Yeshiva has accomplished something which is unknown in Jewish annals since the Golden Era in Spain; namely, the combination of a *talmid chacham* with an academician, a person trained scientifically in all the technological skills. I lived many years in Germany and you probably have heard about the revolution which R. Samson Raphael Hirsch precipitated there (he was followed by R. Azriel Hildersheimer zt"l) and it was a very interesting accomplishment. However, the accomplishment consisted of combining academic training with piety. I had a professor at the University of Berlin, Oigen Mitvoch, who was an *ehrlicher yid*. He used to come on Tish'ah B'av to the Oriental Seminal at the University of Berlin (and Berlin was not New York) in sneakers! Yes, in Germany I witnessed the combination of merger of academic modern training with piety, with legal observance.

However, what the Yeshiva did is something else. The Yeshiva was more ambitious

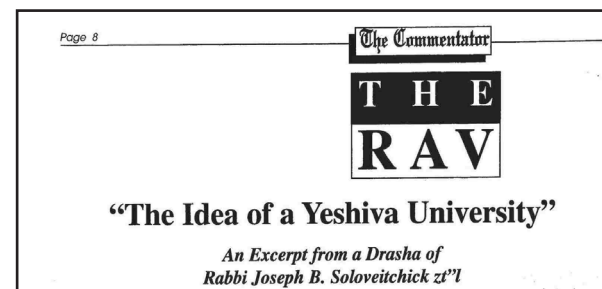
and more bold. It had proclaimed the higher goal, the combination of academic modern training with *lomdus*, with rigorous scholarship at the highest level. The alumnus of the Yeshiva, whether he is a rabbi or a merchant, a lawyer or a doctor, is a *talmid chacham* in the sense (and I am very careful and cautious about my statement) that he is interested in *Kezos* or a *Rambam*, in a *Hiddushei Rabbenu Hayyim Halevi*. He has the curiosity. The sign of a scholar is not so much the amount of knowledge he has, but the inquisitiveness, the curiosity, the quest, the interest, the commitment. I saw many scholars with almost unlimited erudition but I have always doubted their scholarship; they were similar to that the Ramban called, *chamor nosay seforim* — a donkey loaded with lots of books. The real criterion of a scholar is commitment, curiosity, inquisitiveness, a restlessness in exploration, steady questing — and that is exactly what all *musmachei ha-Yeshiva* have. I can testify that the level of the *shiurim* delivered at the Yeshiva reached great heights which no other Yeshiva delivered here in America, or in *Eretz Yisroel* attained. There are boys in our institution who are committed to Torah, *bekol libam u-vechol nafsham*, with a fire and a passion which is unmatched in the history of yeshivas. When I see sometimes, I am reminded of Bialik's *Ha-Masmid*. They are bright and sharp, and their precision and skill are simply admirable. I can tell you that I sit up studying days and nights sometimes. Many a time my son finds me asleep over the Gemara and it is late in the evening — Why? It is not so much my diligence, but I am afraid of my pupils. If I come into the class unprepared, they will tear me apart, and it happens quite often. At the same time, as far as modern education is concerned, they are academically well trained on par with any boys from Harvard, Yale, or Columbia. And, in addition to scholarship and knowledge, they have a sense of commitment to *Klal Yisrael*, the likes of which is hard to find.

When I came to Boston thirty years ago, I found six young men who were Sabbath observers. The rest did not observe the Sabbath, or observed it also on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday because they were octogenarians. I must tell you that three of those young men are now my brothers-in-law. Now, Boston which was called an *ir ha-nidahas* as far as Orthodoxy was concerned is today a stronghold of Orthodox living and questing. In my shul, at Maimonides, the average age of the worshipers is twenty-one! I am the oldest, the oldest in years. I mention Boston simply because I live there, but you will find the same is true in New York, which is a much larger city as well. The fact that thousands of young men and women not only live Jewish lives, but think in Torah categories and talk the language of the Torah, and are committed to our tradition, is due directly or indirectly to our yeshiva. Could I ever have dreamt twenty-five years ago that a bunch of boys from our yeshiva and other yeshivot would occupy the quarters of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in New York, the *sanctum sanctorum* of Reform Jewry and make demands boldly and proudly! You will see those “priests” of the *sanctum sanctorum* giving in to those young boys -- and the same thing is happening in Boston. All this is due directly or indirectly to our Yeshiva. It is

responsible for the renaissance of Orthodoxy, and I am not exaggerating. For the Yeshiva is not just an institution or a school; it is a movement, an idea, a challenge, it is a faith and an assurance that Torah can blossom and flourish in the Western hemisphere, close to the skyscrapers of New York. The Torah can be cultivated, taught and propagated in all societies and eras, no matter how powerful the opposition, and no matter how unfriendly the circumstances may be.

If *chas v'shalom*, the Yeshiva will close, not only will we lose a great institution that has changed the face of American Jewry from the top to the bottom, but we will lose an idea, a vision, and a faith. Orthodoxy itself will be lost! Many schools and high schools will close their doors for the simple reason that there will be no inspiration for them to continue. The Yeshiva is the loadstar which our boys and girls of the third, fourth, and fifth generations will follow. If *chas v'shalom*, disaster will strike and the Yeshiva will cease to exist, then Orthodoxy will be destroyed. Yes, you will have Orthodox groups, “sects” as Dr. Belkin calls them, here and there, but we are not for sectarian Orthodoxy. We want Orthodoxy to be a popular movement, to infiltrate and penetrate the American Jewish society. We want it to carry the torch of our tradition, of our Torah, proudly and boldly. This type of Orthodoxy will be lost if the Yeshiva will close its portals.

Cynics may poke fun, but, thank God, the American Jew is not a cynic. He is a dreamer, and he is questing for something. The search quite often brings the young man or woman to Yeshiva or Stern College. Let me take this opportunity to tell Mr. [Max] Stern that his



The Commentator Archives

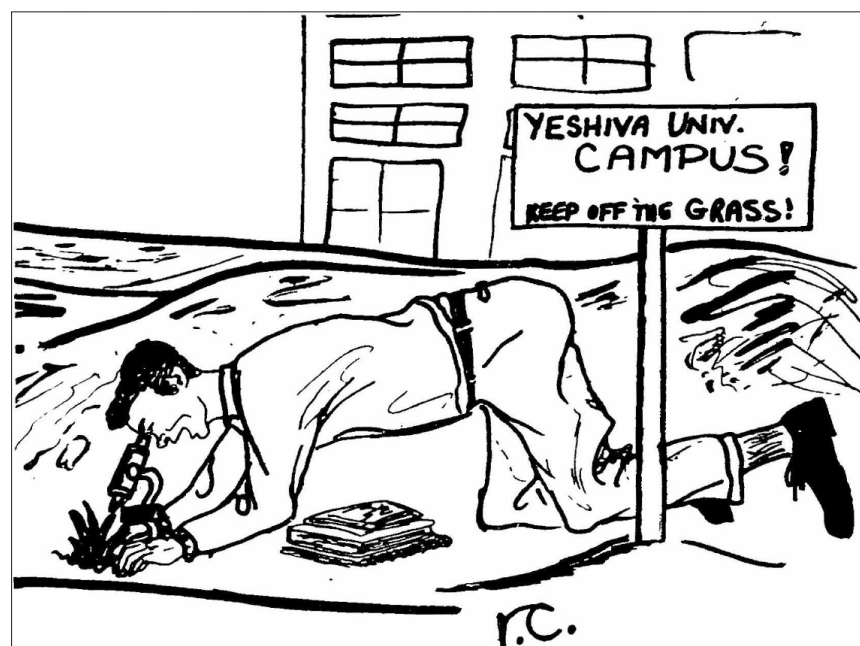
THE COMMENTATOR

contribution to American Jewish education and history is unique and singular, for such an institution as Stern College was unknown throughout the ages, and it saved and saves thousands of girls who come from all parts of the United States. I do not say that Yeshiva is perfect, who is perfect and what is perfect? Only God is perfect. However, its impact on American Jewish Life is stupendous...

Let us understand that the Yeshiva finds itself at the Crossroads of Jewish America. It reflects the entire, colorful spectrum of the American Jewish community. The boys and girls come from hasidic homes, from working class families, from the homes of professionals, from alienated and assimilated circles. Some come from the homes of *kana'im* while others come from the homes of *goyim gemurim* and happened to attend a youth conclave [Torah Leadership Seminar] sponsored by the Yeshiva. We do not appreciate how much these youth conclaves sponsored by the Yeshiva have accomplished.

In short, if you want to be acquainted with the heterogeneous American Jewish community, come by the Yeshiva and you will find representation from every nook and corner... The Yeshiva is not only a *makom Torah* where *lomdim* are trained, it is also an *ir miklat*, a refuge haven where young men and women find the *Ribono Shel Olam*.

Flashbacks



“YESHIVA UNIV. CAMPUS!”
“KEEP OFF THE GRASS!”

November 13, 1957; Volume 23 Issue 3

YU Profiles

The Making of a President: The Story of Nolan Edmonson

By YOSEF LEMEL and MICHAEL WEINER

Growing up in Montclair, New Jersey, Nolan Edmonson (YC '19) would not have been your typical candidate for future president of the Yeshiva Student Union (YSU). Born to lifelong Southern Baptists and raised in a devout Christian home, he had never even heard of Yeshiva University in the early years of his life. The Commentator recently sat down with Nolan in order to hear his story and how he came to his current position in life.

Though born in New Jersey, both sides of Nolan's family had deep roots in North Carolina. His mother's family had been there "since the Revolutionary War," Nolan noted, and he has ancestors who were slaves in the state as well.

Religion, however, was a constant in the family. The Edmonsons had always been committed Southern Baptists. Going to church every Sunday was what you did, and reading the Bible was a normal part of life. That all changed with Nolan.

As a child, Nolan was curious about everything, including religion. He attended Montclair public schools from kindergarten to sixth grade, and regularly interacted with Jewish friends from school. Early exposure to Jewish practices included show-and-tell displays of Jewish holidays and personal encounter with Jewish ritual. One such significant experience was at the age of eight, when Nolan was invited to a friend's house on the first night of Chanukah. "I was somehow drawn to the story of Chanukah," said Edmonson. "Something about the idea of a group of downtrodden people being redeemed through their own deeds and through a supernatural power resonated with me. I think that was one aspect of the Jewish story that stuck with me."

This exposure to Judaism piqued Nolan's interest, and, by age eleven, he was reading any book he could find on the topic to better understand the religion.

Nolan later attended St. Benedict's Prep, a Catholic high school in Newark, New Jersey. At St. Benedict's, Nolan was enamored by the priests who taught there for their dedication to the monastic life, which entails giving up certain worldly pleasures and living a life of chasteness. He was also inspired by the Catholic social teaching, a major element of the school's religious curriculum, which emphasizes loving one's fellow man and caring deeply about the suffering of others. The headmaster of the school, Father Edwin Leahy, taught and volunteered in segregated towns in Alabama in the 1960s to protest the injustices there. Even though Leahy is white, he felt that it was his responsibility to help out in any way he could, an example which had a profound impact on Nolan's outlook on life.

Some of those religious values instilled in Nolan through his school and family have stayed with him to this day. The importance of a moral compass — a strongly emphasized aspect of Edmonson's upbringing — "has definitely shaped who I am today and continues to shape who I am," Edmonson remarked.

Despite the admiration he held for his Catholic teachers, Nolan still had a certain fascination with Judaism. At the age of 13, he decided that he should experience Judaism firsthand at a synagogue, and through a professional connection of his mother, was invited by a messianic Jew to attend his congregation. Nolan felt comfortable in that

synagogue, as it incorporated Christian elements into the standard service. Inspired by that positive experience, Nolan began attending an after-service Hebrew school in the synagogue that taught the Hebrew alphabet and Hebrew prayers. Nolan held an edge over the other kids in the Hebrew school, as he had already taught himself the Hebrew language at the age of ten.

Deepening his engagement with Judaism, at age 14, Nolan was invited by an Orthodox family — who were clients of his mother — to stay at their house for Shabbos on a

Livingston who I became really close with," said Edmonson. "I had a bunch of people in my corner."

After converting, Nolan generally found the Jewish community to be supportive and accepting of him. However, he occasionally faced unsolicited remarks in certain communities. Once, on *Simchat Torah*, a *gabbai* in a synagogue was giving out *aliyot* and asked Nolan — who was dressed like everyone else — "are you Jewish?" Other times, he has simply been approached by strangers after *davening* and asked, "what's your story?"

Nolan decided to live openly as a Jew in his Catholic high school. This meant wearing a kippah and observing Jewish rituals.

regular basis, and attended the Synagogue of the Suburban Torah Center (SSTC) of Livingston, New Jersey. Subsequently, he fell in with an Orthodox Jewish crowd and lived a "typical Modern Orthodox lifestyle," aside from his education. He stayed with the same family for Shabbat nearly every week during his high school years and beyond.

Rabbi Mordechai Feuerstein, the rabbi of the SSTC at the time, and his wife were two impactful figures on Nolan's life. According to Nolan, Rabbi Feuerstein is a prime example of a community leader who is also "quite the Torah scholar." Rebbetzin Feuerstein, who was battling cancer at the time, proved to be a great source of inspiration to Nolan, who saw her as a "religious figure who — despite the unfortunate cards she was dealt — saw herself as someone with a lesson to teach."

Nolan decided to live openly as a Jew in his Catholic high school. This meant wearing a kippah and observing Jewish rituals. His classmates never gave him a second look because they assumed he was actually Jewish. Nolan found his classmates to be very accepting of who he was.

Nolan's parents were quite surprised by his dramatic religious transformation. While initially they were concerned about their son's rejection of Christian doctrine and faith, after much deliberation, they came to accept Nolan's decision. They understood that Nolan's life was his own to lead, and the path of Judaism was the path he chose for himself. Additionally, their religious faith led them to view Nolan's choice to convert as the will of God, and a reflection of divine providence. Finally, they saw that the Jewish friends that Nolan was hanging out with — who were primarily from Kushner and SSTC — were well-mannered and had a positive influence on him.

At age 16, Nolan made the decision to fully go through with the conversion. After consulting his family and rabbis, it was decided that he would undergo the conversion when he turned 18 — the age where he would legally be able to make the decision to convert for himself. On June 2, 2014, the day after graduating high school, Nolan Edmonson officially converted to Judaism. Nolan explains that he took on the Jewish name of Noam Akiva, partly because it fit with his secular name of Nolan Alexander, and partly because of the reverence he held for the Talmudic sage Rabbi Akiva, who became a Torah scholar relatively late in his life.

Compared to most other converts — and especially converts of color — Nolan's conversion process was smooth and seamless. He believes that this was a result of having a "fantastic support system." "I had a family who loved me, and I had a community which was really behind me, and I had this family in

Nolan believes that while the Orthodox community as a whole does a "decent job" of accept converts of color, there are still instances of individuals in the Orthodox community whose prejudice against African Americans causes them to negatively stereotype converts of color.

After high school, Nolan attended the Aish Geshet program in Israel for two years, which further strengthened his love of Jewish life and learning.

From there, after considering a number of different colleges, Nolan decided to attend Yeshiva University. At YU, in addition to his academic studies, Nolan immediately joined a number of extracurricular clubs and student groups, including the

Fencing Team, The Commentator and the College Republicans, of which he was the vice president. In his junior year, he was approached by then-YSU President Zach Stermann (YC '18) and was encouraged to join the Canvassing Committee, which oversees student government elections.

On Purim of that year, Dovid Simpson (SSSB '18), who was the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) President at the time, saw that Nolan cared about improving student life on campus and encouraged him to run for the YSU presidency, which Nolan ultimately did. He was motivated to run by a "desire to positively impact all aspects of student life."

Looking back at his tenure as YSU president, Nolan is proud of a number of accomplishments, chief among them being the recent coed Shabbaton. Though there were lots of obstacles to overcome, Nolan was determined to make it happen, and believes that it went a long way towards "normalizing the relationship between the two campuses."

Looking ahead, Nolan is unsure what the future holds for him. Graduating this year, he is considering a career in law, and possibly politics. Either way, he is certain that he wants his occupation to be in the service of others, living out the values that his parents instilled in him during his formative years.

Navigating a difficult transition into a completely new world, Nolan has found his place and emerged as a leader in the YU community, and is optimistic that all of his life experience up to this point will prepare him for a bright future.



Nolan Edmonson

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

The Exodus Movement

By **RACHEL ZAKHAROV**

There's a lot of buzz in the media surrounding the new Exodus movement. On March 1, 2019, at CPAC (the Conservative Political Action Conference), there was a press release debuting the movement (formerly called Jexodus) where they were described as Jewish Millennials "tired of living in bondage to leftist politics." The main belief of the Exodus movement is that today's Democratic Party has built itself on anti-American, anti-Semitic and hypocritical thoughts; the main hypocrisy coming from Jewish Democrats. The press release points to open displays of anti-Israel legislation and political rhetoric against Jews coming from the Democratic Party. With Elizabeth Pipko appointed as the Exodus movement's spokesperson, the movement is determined to sway Jews to dissociate from the Democratic Party. The movement is based on the Exodus of Jews from Egypt; a historical event in Jewish history. "We left Egypt and now we're leaving the Democratic Party," Pipko explained.

The people of this movement feel a need to take action now because the underlying anti-Semitism from Democratic elected officials has never been higher. Representatives Ilhan Omar (D-MN) and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) both openly spoke out against Israel, and instead of being condemned for their statements, they received protection from their political party. Rep. Ilhan Omar claimed, "Israel has hypnotized the world." Tlaib has called out Israel advocates, accusing them of dual loyalties when Republicans proposed legislation against Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS). She is known to be one of the only members in Congress who openly supports BDS and is against the existence of Israel.

The first and maybe even the only public figure on the left to denounce Ilhan Omar's anti-Semitic statements was the freshman

Jewish Rep. Max Rose (NY-11). He wrote on Twitter, "Congresswoman Omar's statements are deeply hurtful to Jews, including myself." Few, if any, Democrat elected officials followed in his footsteps.

The fact that there aren't a greater number of voices condemning Ilhan Omar's statement and that the majority of Jewish constituents on the left have let Omar's comments slip through the cracks is unacceptable. While Omar did apologize for her statements, her apology was merely a means to make peace, and therefore is not enough.

Some say this movement has the potential to harm the bipartisan relationship between America and Israel. Steny Hoyer, (MD-5) the Democratic House majority leader, explained, "Exploiting anti-Semitism for partisan advantage is dangerous and wrong." He added, "It is misleading on the facts, destructive to the critical bipartisan support that Israel has always enjoyed and that has been so important to its security and success, and a risk to the unity of our country." Obviously, the intent of the movement is not aimed at unraveling the bipartisan relationship between America and Israel. The aim is to misalign from the anti-Semitic and anti-Israel rhetoric surrounding the Democratic party.

Where does your allegiance lie? To America or Israel? This choice is a dilemma that involves a difficult compromise for most Jews who care about their Jewish ideals and identity and the future State of Israel.

The Exodus movement isn't inherently against the Democratic Party's ideals, it is against the anti-Semitic and anti-Israel rhetoric that particular members of the Democratic Party have expressed. Jews have dealt with adversity and hate for centuries, and today is no different. To stand behind these spokespeople would be doing the Jewish people a disservice.



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Elizabeth Pipko, model and figurehead of the Exodus movement

NEW YORK TIMES

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BUILDING TOMORROW, **TODAY**

James Bond: My 14-Year-Old Versus 19-Year-Old Self

By ELISHEVA KOHN

I was scrolling through Netflix earlier this month when I noticed that nearly every James Bond movie had appeared in the “recently added” section. Having watched most of the 26 films, from “Dr. No” (1962) to “Spectre” (2015), an achievement I am quite proud of, I was excited about the prospect of rewatching the iconic 007 series. When I was 14-years-old, James Bond (especially Sean Connery’s portrayal), was a character I quoted frequently, a hero whose charm and talent I admired. James Bond taught me everything I needed to know about dueling, negotiating and being the cleverest person in the room.

Yet when I started rewatching the very films I have held so dearly since high school, something unexpected happened. The protagonist’s actions and words left me disoriented. The sheer sexualization of women made me upset. Every “Bond girl,” every female character in the films, contributed nothing whatsoever to the stories. Every interaction between Bond and a woman was either flirtatious or downright abusive. Women merely functioned as objects to seduce and please dominant male characters. They are never truly part of the adventure. Female characters are irrelevant to the plot — they don’t make any quote-worthy statements or influential decisions.

I really cared about James Bond. So when I was unable to identify with any of the women portrayed in the films, it bothered me.

In “Diamonds are Forever,” Bond wraps a bikini top around a woman’s neck, strangling her. In “Thunderball,” he blackmails a nurse into joining him in the sauna. Whether they are “Bond girls” or less celebrated insignificant characters, women are beaten, abused and played with.

First introduced by cartoonist Alison Bechdel in 1985, the Bechdel test measures female representation in fiction. In her cartoon strip called “The Rule,” Bechdel describes two women conversing with each other. One woman remarks to the other that she refuses to watch films which do not portray two women who talk to each other about something other than men. After coming to the conclusion that no such film exists, they give up and return home. The test gained popularity and has been used to measure different types of media. The website bechdeltest.com allows users to rate movies based on these three requirements. Needless to say, almost all Bond movies failed, miserably.

I had never felt personally attacked by a Bond film before. But as a 19-year-old, I could not ignore what I was watching. I have always been one of those people who forgave crude or controversial jokes in old movies or shows. I always argued that context matters. And this mantra applied to all sorts of productions from “back then.” Yes, that joke was distasteful, but we can’t expect anything better from, say, a 90s show. Doesn’t political correctness limit humor and excitement? Choosing to ignore hurtful statements or questionable actions was an active choice I made for the sake of entertainment.

I really cared about James Bond. So when I was unable to identify with any of

the women portrayed in the films, it bothered me. Why didn’t any of the female characters have admirable characteristics, sharp minds or skill? They were all useless to the extent that I was unable to pay attention to the rest of the plot.

Then I started questioning. Had I not been aware that the portrayal of women in James Bond films was problematic? Did my 14-year-old self not care? How could I possibly etch James Bond in my memory as a positive experience?

In other words, what changed? Was it the #MeToo movement? Am I simply more mature today?

To be honest, I am not entirely sure. However, I have come to the realization that films with characters such as 007 have an enormous impact on people. When I was 14, I made a clear differentiation between fiction and reality. However, I have encountered people with mentalities that reveal where they learned how to treat women. Perhaps my 19-year-old self is simply painfully aware that James Bond’s behavior is not limited to fictional, arrogant spies.

How do we reconcile our appreciation for art with its toxic elements? Here I am referring specifically to old movies. Fortunately, many recent action movies, such as “Wonder

Woman” or “Black Panther,” portray extraordinary female characters. How do we preserve James Bond culture while also ensuring that everyone is aware of just how problematic the films are?

Rewatching the Bond films through a new lens was a powerful experience. Does this mean I will stop watching James Bond? I am hesitant to give a definite answer. One thing, however, is clear. If anyone near me says something along the lines of “Run along now dear, man talk,” (“Goldfinger,” 1964), I will put some of James Bond’s creative techniques to good use.



Sean Connery as James Bond

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

It's Time to Do Something About the Beren Elevators

By CHANA WEINBERG

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on March 19.

After the softball team had to carry all the game equipment down from the eleventh floor of 245 Lexington, I decided it was time to write something. The elevators on the Beren Campus, specifically in 245 Lexington, are not working. More than one thousand students, faculty and staff must choose between forcing themselves onto one — or, if you are lucky, two — capacity-filled elevators, or huffing and puffing up steep flights of stairs in order to get to class. I'm confident that I speak for more than myself when I say this situation must change and change soon.

For those who do not understand what effect the lack of elevators has, let me take a moment to describe it. Hordes of people push and shove into the one, or maybe two, elevators between classes. The maintenance staff must carry full garbage bags down the steps or

leave the bins full to smell up the upper floors. Professors and rabbis are taking the stairs. Everyone is late for class. Students and teachers alike grumble about how Facilities is doing nothing. Besides the students and teachers who must walk as many as ten flights of stairs to class, there are also those who physically cannot walk up the

order a new part to be delivered and installed tomorrow?

Obviously, things are not so easy. I do not believe that my school is out to get me; this is not a satire article where I theorize about conspiracies that YU wants us to get more exercise. It is likely harder than it looks to fix decades-old elevators, and I truly believe

been broken since winter break. Or maybe the bathrooms that barely flush. Or maybe the glitchy Caf Card system. You catch my drift, I am sure.

"It is crazy that you have to leave almost half an hour extra to get to class on time. Either do that or push and shove to get in the elevator," said Aviva Landau (SCW '21).

when I had my broken foot." There would have certainly been an issue there.

Reena Wasserstein (SCW '20) put the situation into a clear perspective. "When you provide a service, there is an expectation that it works. The elevators not working make the students feel like their convenience is an afterthought."

Fellow classmates, it is time to take this matter into our own hands. Please, send emails to YU Facilities Services — you can email yuoperations@yu.edu or call 212.340.7460 — at least so we can pressure those with the power to fix this situation and help set up short-term solutions for this issue. I am not a mechanic, but I can suggest that we put up signs saying that only the people who cannot walk should take the elevator. Maybe ask for YU Facilities Services to please do something that shows that they are at least trying to fix the situation. I hope when I get to the building after Purim this will no longer be an issue. But if it is, I know we are a powerful student body who can compel those in charge to make the necessary changes.

"Teachers lose time to teach and students lose time to learn with the elevators like this. It is good this didn't happen last semester when I had my broken foot."

—
Dr. Deena Rabinovich

stairs; how are they managing?

Our school cannot function properly when the simple amenities are not working.

According to a casual conversation I had with the elevator mechanics, one elevator is missing a part and the other two have "mechanical issues." I don't want to make it sound so simple but — why don't we get a good mechanic and

the school is working hard to fix them. But now it has been two weeks and it is time we saw some improvement.

"It feels like we don't even go to a school because everything is falling apart," said one student who was upset with the elevator issue. This student could also be referencing the escalators in the 215 Lexington building which have

"It is super annoying. We are like sardines in a dish when we are inside of the elevator," said Liel Silverstone (SCW '19).

"Teachers lose time to teach and students lose time to learn with the elevators like this," said Dr. Deena Rabinovich, director of the Legacy Heritage Foundation program and Bible professor at SCW. "It is good this didn't happen last semester



Elevators in 245 Lexington have been working sporadically for two weeks.

Chabad: A Judaism of Love and Pride

By YOSEF WILDES

The annual YU Chabad Shabbaton in Crown Heights held on March 1st drew 70 YU students and 30 Chabad *shluchim*. After an incredible experience at last year's Crown Heights Shabbaton, I was super excited to join again. I stayed at a wonderful family, ate fantastic food and most importantly, enjoyed some nice *l'chaims*! I instantly bonded with both the YU and Chabad guys, feeling a connection simply because we are all part of one family, the Jewish people.

The feeling at the Shabbaton was one of joy and spiritual energy. I could see how members of this community not only practiced but breathed Judaism. My experiences with Chabad have shown me strong Jewish leaders who spread their light with power and devotion in all parts of the globe. This is demonstrated by the thousands of Chabad Houses all around the world, even in places that we may find difficult to pronounce. The moment Chabad learns that there are even a few Jews in a certain part of the world, they immediately go there and set up shop. In fact, during this past winter-break when my family and I were vacationing in the Bahamas, it was only due to Chabad that there we had a place to pray and eat. The sacrifice and kindness Chabad does on behalf of the Jewish community is unfathomable.

What breeds this sense of commitment, which leads people to devote their whole lives for the Jewish people? In my opinion, it is the sense of pride and love for Judaism and the Jewish people that cuts deep into the hearts of Chabad. For the Chabad com-

munity, Torah and Judaism are treasures meant to be shared with all of Jewry. To Chabad followers, the precious teachings of the Torah can be compared to fire, possessing the capacity to light up the darkness, lift the low hearted and bring the Messiah. Given their appreciation for Torah and love for all Jews, it becomes obvious why so many members of the Chabad community sacrifice themselves for both Torah and the Jewish people.

Saying that we 'changed lives' does not accurately describe what we went there to do, nor does it properly depict the amazing things we accomplished.

Why, for example, if someone sees a movie that he loves, does he wish to share the film with his lover? This is simply because he loves both the movie and his lover. It is only due to a love of another that one will desire to share and give to another. To me, this describes the Chabad community. They are so proud and in love with their

Judaism that they wish to share this love with those they care about. This is precisely what I experienced at the YU Crown Heights Shabbaton, a community of people whose religious commitment comes from a place of love and pride.

Before the Shabbaton, I was asked to say a few words at Shabbat lunch. I told a story which took place in Israel one Friday afternoon. There were hundreds of cars held up in traffic. As Shabbat was approaching, approximately one hundred Shabbat observant Israeli's left their cars on the side of the road and began walking to the nearest Jewish community. The community responded with open arms, taking all the wandering Jews into their homes, giving up their food, beds and otherwise private Shabbat to help others.

Over the duration of Shabbat, every one of these otherwise homeless Jews was not only given a place to sleep but even food to eat. After sharing this story, I spoke about how relevant this was to the Chabad community. The Chabad community not only accepts, but loves all Jews, so many of which are

willing to make enormous personal sacrifices by traveling across the world to establish new Jewish communities. It is the sense of pride and love towards both Judaism and the Jewish community that propels Chabad to be such a powerful force for the Jewish people.

I continued my talk and transitioned from speaking about the Chabad community to the general Jewish community and how lucky we are to be Jews. After sharing this point, I banged on the *shtender* and started up the song "*Gishmak to be a Jew*," which means "it is pleasurable to be a Jew." As soon as the melody drifted from my mouth, the room exploded in song and dance! We danced for over 20 minutes, singing again and again, *how pleasurable it is to be a Jew*. How appropriate this song was in Crown Heights at this Shabbaton, at this special weekend highlighting the pride and love we all have for simply being a Jew.

After experiencing this YU Crown Heights Shabbaton, I was overwhelmed by the joy and pride embedded in this community. I was reminded of all the good Chabad does in the world and became inspired to give more of myself to other Jews, out of this same sense of love. I look forward to further developing this sense of pride and love for the Jewish community, seeing the Jewish people not only as a nation but ultimately, as a family.



770 Eastern Parkway, the center of the Chabad-Lubavitch community in Crown Heights and around the world



The evidence shows that marijuana is a relatively safe, profitable and helpful drug.

PIXABAY

America, Up in Smoke

By JACOB STONE

Marijuana is a gateway drug. Multiple studies have confirmed that individuals who use marijuana have a higher incidence of usage of other illicit drugs over the course of their lives. Many opponents of marijuana legalization have used this correlation as justification for the continued criminalization of marijuana — if it leads people to use other, more dangerous drugs, why legalize it at all?

Alcohol is also a gateway drug. Multiple studies have confirmed this too, and those same studies show that nicotine also falls under the same category. Even caffeine usage has been found to correlate with the risk of use of hard drugs like cocaine. People who like drugs tend to try other drugs, and marijuana is no exception.

Yet, caffeine, alcohol and tobacco can be bought at any store nationwide. Societally, we seem to be comfortable with the legalization of drugs that can lead to other bad behaviors provided those drugs themselves are not overly harmful or addictive. Marijuana fits that bill and should, therefore, be legalized recreationally on both the state and federal level.

The current criminalization of marijuana costs the federal government \$7.7 billion per year, according to one petition signed by over 300 economists, including three Nobel laureates. In addition to the cost of enforcing criminalization, the report predicted that if it were to be taxed similarly to alcohol and nicotine, marijuana legalization would create an additional \$6 billion in tax revenue. And that's just on the federal level — California, which legalized marijuana in 2018, raked in \$345 million in tax revenue from its first year of legal pot sales, and that number is only expected to grow as the marijuana industry develops. By market standards, that's enough to buy every Californian their own joint.

Marijuana decriminalization isn't just about the profits. Records of arrests on federal and state levels repeatedly show that

although the incidence of usage is roughly similar for whites and minorities, minorities are imprisoned for possession of marijuana at a vastly higher rate. In New York City, 86 percent of arrests for marijuana possession of the fifth degree — between twenty-five grams and two ounces, normal for a heavy recreational user — were of people of color, while only 9 percent were of whites. The war on drugs has turned into a nightmare for minorities, and legalization could end unnecessary police antagonism in minority communities.

Legalization could even prevent people from turning to more dangerous drugs. Opioids, the most pressing drug problem in America today, were responsible for 40 thousand overdoses in 2017. A 2018 study of opioid prescription rates in states that legalized marijuana and had open dispensaries showed that prescriptions of opioids through Medicare dropped by 16 percent, a staggering reduction in the supply of addictive and dangerous substances to the population.

Critics argue that evidence has shown an increase in road accidents in states that have legalized marijuana. But this correlation isn't a reason to criminalize the drug. Marijuana is new in the public eye, and much of the public remains uneducated on issues related to marijuana use. Many users wrongly believe that it is safe to drive under the influence of marijuana, and educational programs could be implemented to help the public understand that marijuana impairs driving ability, just like alcohol does.

The evidence shows that marijuana is a relatively safe, profitable and helpful drug. At this point, it's universally supported among Democratic 2020 hopefuls, and over 60 percent of Americans are in favor of legalization. There are almost as many pot smokers nationwide as cigarette smokers — it's time for our laws to reflect that.

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The Astrophysics of Faith

By RACHEL ROSENBERG

In our solar system we find Earth, in all its marvel, not at the center of its own orbit. No matter how vast and self-sufficient Earth may be, it can only function with something else, the Sun, at the epicenter of its spin. It is an interesting image to conjure, the Earth existing on its own. Without the sun there would be no day and night, no bright beams to make the flowers blossom and no warmth from above to kiss your skin on a hot summer day...

After spending four weeks last summer as an advisor on TJJ, I returned home with a pain inside me. There was this little piece of me that was unsettled as my summer had come to a close — I felt as though I had unfinished business with my teens. Going into the summer I felt well prepared for the task that lay ahead of me. Growing up, I had many unaffiliated or less religious friends, and the daunting task of making myself relevant and even interesting to secular high school kids was far less intimidating to me than some of my friends. Yet, as the summer progressed, I felt bombarded by issues that were too large for me to handle. Each time I taught a *chaburah* — learning group — or spoke with a teen, I felt as though I had pulled back a layer of a very bitter onion, slowly exposing thoughts I never knew existed.

From the outside, the teens seemed extremely invested in their Jewish future. Most were convinced that they would marry Jewish and that their grandchildren would never celebrate Christmas, yet having a Hanukkah bush was on the table and dating a few non-Jews here and there was no cause for concern. I was dumbfounded by their inability to see the correlation between their present decisions and the lasting impact

those decisions might have on their future and that of their progeny.

In my home, my parents made it abundantly clear that dating non-Jews would create a habit that inevitably could lead to intermarriage, and that Christian traditions, no matter how secularized they had been, were not allowed in our home. These rules created a sense of adherence to Jewish tradition that is unparalleled by many of the families my teens came from, but why was this so? My family was not religious my whole life. I did not spend each day striving to keep the most *halakhot* I possibly could, yet the significance of immersion in Jewish tradition was always prevalent in my life.

The thought never occurred to them that they had to dig deeper into their cultural Judaism if they wanted to find meaning in the “motions.”

What I came to realize the more I spoke to my NCSYers was that what they were fighting so hard to hold onto in this modern world were their traditions. Against all modern thought, which demands complete immersion in secular culture and the erosion of “separatist” traditions, these kids see the beauty and value in remaining true to Jewish tradition. Yet there is still a disconnect. If those 37 teens were a sample of secular, American Jewry, where is the 79 percent intermarriage rate coming from? It couldn't be the 90 percent of these teens who said they would absolutely marry Jewish!

Unfortunately, it can. Generation Z Jews that are growing up in the 21st century believe in Jewish culture. They love eating *matzoh* ball soup on Passover and dipping their apples in honey on *Rosh Hashanah*.

They value going to synagogue on the high holidays and they love wearing a star of david necklace around their necks. What these kids lack is not pride. They lack the sun to their Earth. They lack something that they find so significant; something that their entire world is forced to revolve around in order to function properly. They lack G-d.

When asked to rate their values as a Jewish person, my teens rated “being moral” and “Jewish pride” at the very top of the list, while “learning Torah” and “keeping kosher” were deemed insignificant. Without G-d at the epicenter of every decision you make as a Jewish person, without the Torah guiding your life and *halakhah* dictating permissible

and improper actions, the Jewish religion is one of superficiality. Of course, it is nice to spend holidays with family and go to Jewish summer camp, but what are you doing it for if not for G-d?

When speaking to my group about their values list, I posed the question to them: “If Jewish pride is at the top of your list, but keeping kosher, praying and learning Torah are at the bottom, what are you so proud of?” The thought never occurred to them that they had to dig deeper into their cultural Judaism if they wanted to find meaning in the “motions.”

Somewhere along the way, secular Jewry has lost sight of the very being that our religion should revolve around. I am not referring to various denominations' core beliefs, but rather the practical reality that many

Jewish people are only marginally involved in their religion. Faith is placed in the institutions and individuals that allow religious practices. Rabbis, Jewish organizations and synagogues are a focal point in “being Jewish” or “being involved,” yet they come at the expense of the true focal point. G-d, who is and should always remain at the very center of our orbit, can rarely be discussed or contemplated despite one's involvement in their synagogue or leadership position in Jewish life. The Earth without a sun would cease to exist in mere moments, and Judaism without G-d is unfortunately headed in that direction. If our Judaism amounts to nothing more than a cultural phenomenon, then why not intermarry or grow the tradition to include other religions as well? Why not add and change the Torah to fit how the world is today?

This summer I learned a tremendous amount about almost forty new teens — what foods they like, what shows entertain them, how they practice their Judaism — but I learned the most about my own faith. I would encourage anyone planning on spending this coming summer on any program with Jewish teens, religious or not, to give yourself the space and time to consider these things before you are thrown into the whirlwind of these programs. Summer is a time away from the strict confines of Jewish education and parental views, and it may be the first time any of these teens have to opportunity to discuss these larger religious issues. It's a dangerous game to play, putting your beliefs out in the open to be shot down by religiously cynical and relatively agnostic teens, but it's a powerful exercise in faith. Day in and day out I asked myself why I did it at all, and on the days when I couldn't come up with the answer, at least I knew where to forward the questions to.



NCSY summer programs send teens to Israel to explore their religious identity.

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