

THE COMMENTATOR

The Independent Student Newspaper of Yeshiva University

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ISSUE NO. 1

Senior VP Josh Joseph Leaving YU to Begin as EVP/COO at the OU

By JARED SCHARF

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on June 6.

Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph will be stepping down from his post as Yeshiva University's senior vice president to become executive vice president (EVP) and chief operating officer (COO) at the Orthodox Union (OU) on Sept. 1, announced President Ari Berman via email to YU faculty and staff on July 1.

As senior vice president, Joseph had the "operating responsibility for the administrative and academic aspects of the University, ensuring strategic planning and implementation of restructuring initiatives." At the OU, Joseph will be "responsible for all aspects of OU programs and operations, other than OU Kosher," according to the [OU's announcement](#).

Remarking on this new transition, Joseph told the Commentator, "While I'm leaving the Yeshiva University family that I've been a part of for the last 16 years, I'm truly excited to be heading to a place that shares deeply rooted values for Jewish community and leadership."

"We could not be more pleased," [OU President Moshe Bane](#) stated, commenting on Joseph's hire. "Rabbi Dr. Joseph is one of North America's foremost dynamic Jewish communal leaders who brings vision, leadership and a new energy to the role of chief [operating] officer. We are thrilled to have him on our team."

Joseph received *semikhah* from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and a Masters in Jewish Philosophy from Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies in 1999.

He began his 15-year career at YU in 2005 as the director of special projects for the [Center for the Jewish Future](#) (CJF); a year later, Joseph was appointed as vice president and chief of staff and began his role as senior vice president seven years later in 2013. He served under both President Emeritus Richard Joel and President Berman.

"I was immediately taken by [Joseph's] energy, ambition, his manner, and his seeming dedication. He is a very layered personality with endless facets," Joel told The Commentator about his early years with Joseph.

"We became close, and I saw in him wonderful qualities. We would often travel together on business, and I was able to be myself with him."

"I often said I could trust him with my life," Joel added. "He was the one person, who would come into my office, close the door, and say 'What the heck are you doing?'"

During those years, Joseph also worked under former vice president of YU Rabbi Kenneth Brander at CJF, developing leadership programming for students, and together with Moshe Bellows, created a series of leadership training courses. Additionally, Joseph led a program of presidential fellows, 15 recent graduates who would



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Josh Joseph will step down from his position as Senior Vice President

spend a year working and learning at YU, and Joseph would offer weekly sessions developing their skills.

"We saw Yeshiva as a movement and a university, and Josh was a key part of that evolution," said Joel. "His commitment to Torah, G-d and the Jewish people has informed him, and has positioned him to continue making a great difference, by as-

suming professional leadership at the OU, a key institution central to our flourishing."

When President Berman became YU's fifth president in the fall of 2017, Joseph worked closely with him to address issues around campus.

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YU Celebrates 89th Commencement Ceremony Virtually

By ELISHEVA KOHN

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on June 15.

The Yeshiva University community gathered online to [virtually](#) honor the graduating Class of 2020 and celebrate its 89th Commencement Ceremony on the afternoon of Sunday, June 14.

Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman opened the ceremony, which began at 1 p.m., and President Ari Berman addressed the graduates. Other speakers included Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth and Moshael Strauss, chairman of YU; unlike previous years, this year's ceremony did not have a keynote speaker. The American national anthem, followed by the Israeli national anthem, was recited by the Maccabeats. All eight [valedictorians](#) held brief speeches while photos and names of the graduating Class of 2020 appeared on the video.

The Commencement Ceremony also celebrated the first graduating class of the [Makor College](#) Experience at YU. "These seven students and their families are the trailblazers,"

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Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, Former YU President, Dies at 92

By SRULI FRUCHTER
AND YOSEF LEMEL

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on May 31.

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, former president and chancellor of Yeshiva University, passed away on Sunday, May 31. He was 92.

Born in 1927 in Brooklyn, New York, Rabbi Lamm attended Yeshiva Torah Vodaath through elementary and high school before attending Yeshiva College from 1945-1949, where he graduated summa cum laude as the class valedictorian with a bachelor's degree in chemistry. He continued to study advanced chemistry at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. During his time at Yeshiva College, Rabbi Lamm studied Talmud under the tutelage of Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

Through the insistence of Rabbi Dr. Samuel Belkin, his predecessor in the YU presidency, Rabbi Lamm ultimately pursued a rabbinic career instead of one in chemistry and was ordained by the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) in 1951.

Rabbi Lamm [joined the Yeshiva College faculty in 1959](#) as a lecturer in Jewish Philosophy and was ap-

pointed the Erna and Jakob Michael Professor of Jewish Philosophy in 1966 after earning a Ph.D. in that field of study from Rabbi Soloveitchik.

A pulpit rabbi for nearly 25 years, Rabbi Lamm served in senior rabbinic positions in New York's Congregation Beth Israel, Congregation Kodimoh in Springfield, Mass. and finally the [Jewish Center](#) on the Upper West Side of Manhattan in 1958, serving there until his appointment as YU president in 1976.

Following the retirement and subsequent pass-

"Norman Lamm was a defining force in fashioning a Torah Judaism of depth, texture and color."

— President Emeritus Richard Joel

ing of Rabbi Belkin, Rabbi Lamm was unanimously [appointed](#) president of YU by the Board of Trustees. His presidency saw a major fundraising campaign

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

In Prospect: Yeshiva Is Yours to Build

By YOSEF LEMEL

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on June 28, before Yeshiva University released a plan for Fall 2020.

Most inaugural editorials of new Commentator volumes are optimistic in nature. Generally, student journalists want to “start off the year on a good foot,” and as the semester rolls on, they start to “cynically” complain about the lack of transparency from the university administration, the lack of consultation with students about basic academic policies and other such issues they may face. This inaugural editorial will not follow that template; it will come off as bleak and cynical with a light tinge of hope. Candidness is important because, at present, there is no vision charted for the immediate future of Yeshiva University; we are living in the most uncertain of times.

There are many basic and obvious questions I, like most other students, have. When, if ever, will I be back on campus with my friends? Will I be able to live in the dormitory again? Will I ever be able to sit in the library constructing “Commie” articles until a security guard kicks me out at 2 a.m.? Will my class have an in-person commencement ceremony or will we be forced to relive another virtual celebration? Will I be able to get a job

after graduation?

These are legitimate questions that are unable to be answered at present, even by the university administration, however omniscient they seem to be. In place of knowledge is a dark chasm of uncertainty. Given this reality, it would be unwise for me to call for specific policy reforms, as this is not a time for change but a “return to normalcy.” I would, therefore, like to use this forum to comment on two recent stories we covered and how they relate to The Commentator’s responsibility as Yeshiva’s undergraduate student paper. Students recently received an email

At present, there is no vision charted for the immediate future of Yeshiva University; we are living in the most uncertain of times.

from the university provost indicating that the university’s “plan is to begin the fall semester online.” “Faculty and students who are able to be physically present,” the email read, would be able to “return to face-to-face classes” after the Sukkos break. The provost later admitted to The Commentator that the university is actually “still developing plans in consultation with medical professionals and

with city and state officials.”

Unsurprisingly, after the initial email students started to ask basic questions: Will there be an online option for students who will not be able to be “physically present?” When will the dormitories open? Will there be a decrease in tuition rates? Will the university accommodate the schedules of international students to account for varying time zones?

The Commentator inquired into the specifics of the university’s “plans.” At that point, the provost provided clarification to us. She did not, however, send a clarification to the general student body, although it was her responsibility to do so after causing much confusion. She did not explain why emails stating the unfinalized “plans” were sent out. In fact, she later sent a second email on June 18 that repeated the contradictory statement of the first. Cumulatively, this led to false rumors and an even more confused student body.

Students and faculty are wondering: Will we be back on campus in the fall or not? This is a serious question that requires a well-thought-out and thorough answer. Short, mixed messages will not help the situation. If the university has a finalized plan, we should know. If the university does not have a plan, we should know. This is a time for transparency, not ambiguity.

Another recent story we covered centered on a change in academic policy. In

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On Silencing Controversy: Why The Commentator Would Have Published Sen. Cotton’s Op-Ed

By ELISHEVA KOHN

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

“If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.”

— George Orwell

Recently, the New York Times published an [op-ed](#) by Tom Cotton, a Republican Sen. from Arkansas, calling for the military to be deployed in order to deter further nation-wide rioting and looting. The title of his piece, “Send In the Troops,” seems almost gentle compared to the potentially dangerous consequences of his suggestion to use an “overwhelming show of force” towards Americans. Cotton’s op-ed sparked a wave of outrage from [readers](#) and [Times journalists](#); its allegedly flawed editorial process ultimately led to the [resignation](#) of Editorial Page Editor James Bennet, as well as five paragraphs worth of editors’ notes to appear at the top of the original article, explaining that the piece “should not have been published” in the first place.

Did I find Cotton’s op-ed distasteful? Yes.

Would The Commentator have published his piece? Absolutely.

In fact, the very same day Cotton’s op-ed was published, The Commentator’s leadership and opinion editors were faced with a somewhat parallel dilemma as The Times. We received an opinion piece titled “The Seventh Option: A Nuanced Approach to the LGBT Debate on Campus,” which established a difference between showing “love” versus “respect” in the attitude of Orthodox Jews towards the LGBT community and calling for the formation of an LGBT club with “careful oversight” from the administration and RIETS *roshei yeshiva*. The paper’s leadership and opinion editors were aware that the article may spark controversy, however, the author’s approach is shared by lots of students at YU, many of them in the “right-wing crowd” — arguably a majority on the Wilf Campus. As a campus newspaper, we felt that it was our duty to promote an opinion shared by so many members of the YU community; thanks to this article, the overall student body is now aware of an alternate viewpoint on this matter. Perhaps you may wonder whether it is The Commentator’s duty to

promote ideas just because they represent a unique take or a majority on campus. That’s a good question, but more on that later.

As we predicted, dozens of Facebook users — most of them current or former YU students — commented on the article’s Facebook post in the harshest of terms. While the comment section consisted of numerous users who engaged in the public debate by directly addressing the arguments in the piece — on a personal note, I agreed with most, if not all, of their points — other users seized the opportunity to denounce The Commentator for publishing the piece in the first place. Many of the 40 comments were responses like “shame on the Commie for publishing this” or “I lose more faith in humanity every day from this disgrace of a magazine.”

Four days later, The Commentator published a features article presenting in-depth perspectives from nine members of the LGBT community and LGBT allies at YU. The article, titled “LGBTQ+ and Ally Student Insights on the LGBTQ+ Discussion at YU,” took many weeks to complete; the research process was detailed and the material gathered was vast.

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THE COMMENTATOR

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The Commentator is the student newspaper of Yeshiva University.

For 86 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.

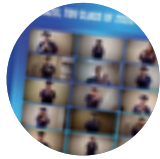
We are united by our passion for living the ideals of Torah Umadda, and a commitment to journalistic excellence.

Visit us online at
www.yucommentator.org.



1 A Midsummer Issue of the Commentator

This could only mean two things: Either a lot has happened over the last few months or there is so little going on that you might as well write another opinion article. You decide.



2 Clapping Videos

You too can hire these professional clappers for your next Zoom occasion. Claps can be customized for your specific event needs.



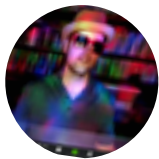
3 Profound Dating Advice from PRDAB

Rule #1: Don't wear any Torah Umadda bling until at least the third date.



4 Dean Wasserman is a Boss!

Order his newest book, "Transforming your 'Bummer Summer' Into 'Getting as Many Credits and Resume Building Opportunities as Possible Without Leaving Your Bedroom,'" today!



5 Josh Weisberg's Zoom shtick

Whether it's Yom Haatzmaut or an event about racism, there's always a proper Zoom background for the occasion.



6 The Zoom Wave Sign On/Off

It's just a short, subtle, subconscious raise and shake of the hand. It says "I see you," before you have the chance to unmute yourself, but it means the world.



7 Co-ed Torah Studies Summer Courses

Classes include "How to Be the New Rabbi and Rebbetzin in Town" (MAN 4934), "Israel: What to Know Before Making Aliyah"(JHIS 1807) and "Reminiscing About Your Summers Working at HASC" (JUD 2380)

7UP
by Zahava Fertig
NMODZ

The Official FALL 2020 PLAN 1

If they spent less time on graphics and a new logo, maybe we would have gotten "the plan" a week before...



Kahoot 2

You mean to say that after four months, *NOBODY* has come up with another game to play on Zoom?!



Home for Summer 3

Moving back into your childhood bedroom and cringing every time as you're reminded why four-year-olds should not be allowed to decorate bedrooms.



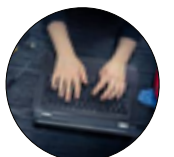
New Roommates 4

My laundry was dumped, my food was eaten and someone didn't replace the toilet paper. It's at times like these when real roommates are missed the most.



Summer Semester 5

After two months of complaining about Zoom classes, we have all put ourselves right back in the same situation. When will we learn?



Amazon Prime 6

When the only thing you could trust let you down.



Linkedin 7

Is it just me or does every comment sound like there's a hint of sarcasm? Congrats! Let's stay connected, literally can't wait to see what you do with your new unpaid summer internship, (luke)warm wishes, sitting on the edge of my seat and waiting to see where this new journey will take you.



IN PROSPECT

Continued from Page 2

sum, the date students are allowed to drop a course without a “W” being marked on their transcripts was moved to the beginning of the semester, whereas in years past that date regularly fell out after midterms.

Notwithstanding the obvious ethical problems with instituting such a radical change in academic policy when the status of next semester is uncertain, the university had not communicated this policy change to students prior to registration, which began on May 4. Instead of miscommunication, there was no communication. Students have the right to know what policies are being implemented and changed, especially when

such policies could have a major impact on their academic records. A simple email would have sufficed.

Rabbi Dr. Bernard Revel, the founding president of Yeshiva, “prophetically” expressed in the *last shiur* before his untimely passing, “My life’s work, my life is Yeshiva. And the students are Yeshiva, and Yeshiva, the students. You, and all who came before you, and those who shall come after you, are my life. Even if someone would deter you from the task I have set before you, tell him in my name that you must continue. The Yeshiva is yours to build.”

Although it is the responsibility of the administration to keep students informed, they may occasionally fail in that task. It then becomes the responsibility of students to

inform students. We, the students of Yeshiva, are Yeshiva; we must take it upon ourselves to create the ideal environment to foster intellectual growth in both religious and secular studies. Only a mature and *informed* student body would be able to create this ideal environment.

The Commentator is dedicated to providing students, faculty and even the administration with accurate information; it is our *raison d’être*. Yeshiva would be in a scary place without the vigilance of student reporters dedicated to providing this essential service. This institution faces many challenges including — but certainly not limited to — developing a *substantive mission*, financial worries, the *role of the arts*, the *physical safety of students and faculty*,

the *question of an LGBTQ club*, a *sexual-abuse lawsuit* and, of course, planning the eventual return to campus. It is now, more than ever, that timely coverage is necessary.

The Commentator has thus decided to publish its first-ever summer issue, which will be fully released in a printable PDF format in a few weeks from now. To date, we have published 30 articles in Volume 86 on a wide array of topics. Though it is longstanding “Commie” policy to officially be on recess in the summer, the nature of this year’s strange and uncertain news cycle has necessitated our continued publication. Our pledge to the student body is this: We will keep you informed at all times. We will strive to be fair and objective. We will not abdicate our responsibility to you.

ON SILENCING CONTROVERSY

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I recommend you read the article; it’s an important piece of journalism. As of publication, this features piece generated just a [single comment](#) on Facebook. The attempt to diversify our paper, unfortunately, seemed to have gone unnoticed.

Essentially, those claiming that The Times should not have published Cotton’s op-ed, and similarly, the readers who condemned The Commentator for publishing the “Seventh Option,” were disturbed by the content of the articles. New York Times readers and staff pointed to dishonest claims made by Cotton and Facebook users called out the “Seventh Option” for its questionable tone and failing to mention that a [committee](#), led by Senior Vice President Rabbi Josh Joseph, had already been formed to address LGBT-related matters on campus.

I find The Times’ statement that Cotton’s op-ed “falls short of the thoughtful approach that advances useful debate,” as well as the outrage expressed by some readers, deeply unsettling. Cotton is a Senator with [close ties to President Trump](#) who could very well appear as a presidential candidate in the near future. It is The Times’ responsibility to expose their readers to his opinions, regardless of how harsh they may seem, for they are highly relevant to the American public and can lead to public scrutiny and debate. This man is a policymaker; his op-ed is not some vague suggestion; it is a testimony of how Republican senators, and arguably, roughly half of the American people (they did, after all, elect the current president), tick. I acknowledge that Cotton’s op-ed genuinely frightened readers and Times employees; many Times journalists responded to the publication of his piece by [tweeting](#), “Running this puts Black @nytimes journalists in danger.”

However, silencing evil will not make it go away. Some argued that the op-ed should have been edited more heavily; it included inaccuracies and overstatements. Why readers would want to read a toned-down, gentler version of Cotton’s article baffles me. Times readers ought to know how extreme Cotton’s views are, and they should be properly informed of the intentions of the people who run this county. Cotton made false claims in his op-ed; that, too, is important to note, for we are now fully aware of how ill-informed

this Senator is of what is really going on in American cities. [Readers deserve to be exposed](#) to the raw, uncensored words of people in power.

Despite the potentially dangerous consequences of Cotton’s op-ed, his words were not hateful. Cotton made a careful distinction between looters and “law-abiding protesters” and argued that a “majority who seek to protest peacefully shouldn’t be confused with bands of miscreants.” His op-ed represents an attitude shared by many communities across the nation, albeit a less politically correct one.

Similarly, “The Seventh Option” was criticized for its questionable language and failing to acknowledge recent efforts by YU students to implement LGBT-friendly policies on campus and establish a club, but it did not spread hate.

Some who opposed the publication of Cotton’s op-ed maintained that the Senator could have published this piece in any other newspaper. The New York Times, they argue, is better than that; the paper’s editors ought to consider how utterly offensive Cotton’s words are. However, if The Times had refused to publish Cotton’s op-ed, and he, in turn, had published it elsewhere (perhaps a more right-wing publication), those of us who look to The Times for a high standard of journalism would have been deprived of reading “Send In the Troops.” We would not have been exposed to how certain segments of the American people view the protests that swayed the country; we would not have understood what reasoning lies behind Republican policies. In other words, we would have lacked a disturbing yet highly relevant insight into American society and its leadership.

Another compelling argument those who condemned the publication of Cotton’s op-ed presented was that The Times could have published a news article, not an op-ed, covering Cotton’s recommendation to deploy the military to deal with the nation-wide unrest. This, they argue, would expose readers to Cotton’s views while not offering a platform for him to spread questionable or inaccurate statements without reasonable pushback and fact-checking by the editors. However, why would The Times want to serve as a secondary source and cover something someone said somewhere else if they had the opportunity to present Cotton’s perspective on their own pages? The Times could (and did)

publish additional news or opinion pieces as supplementary materials to Cotton’s op-ed; they certainly have the resources to provide their readers with a nuanced, accurate understanding of the issue at hand. Similarly, the opinion section of Volume 86’s first issue contains articles advocating on behalf of the LGBT community at YU and challenging the status quo in the Orthodox community, thereby presenting contrasting perspectives to “The Seventh Option.”

Is it The Times’ responsibility to present a variety of perspectives in their opinion section? I think so. Publishing Cotton’s piece was the right decision for so many reasons, including the diversification of The Times’ opinion pages.

Prompted by this debate, a friend of mine challenged my interpretation of journalistic integrity. Would I, he asked, publish an interview with a known white nationalist, a man who self-identifies as a “racial realist,” as Tablet Magazine did [recently](#)? (The journalist who interviewed him argued that he wanted to show the world what anti-Semites and racists “sound like.”) Essentially, my friend was wondering if my “publish all evil!” mentality had a limit.

I would not have published an interview with that man. His statements spew racism and hate, and they are, quite frankly, unimportant. By contrast, Cotton’s words were extreme, but not outright hateful. “The Seventh Option” was not popular among the more “left-wing crowd” community at YU, but it was certainly not evil.

I do not want to draw a direct parallel between “Send In the Troops” and “The Seventh Option.” The former is significantly more problematic than the latter; a militarized response to the nation-wide outrage would directly endanger American lives. Cotton fails to address police brutality or the potential repercussions of deploying the military in response to rioters and looters. However, I could not ignore the fact that both authors represent what may be considered a “silent majority.” Furthermore, I could not overlook the controversial nature and scrutiny revolving around both articles.

“The Seventh Option” deserved to be promoted — I use the word promoted, not endorsed — in the pages of The Commentator because the perspective it offered is undeniably shared by many in the “right-wing crowd,” a dominant group at YU. By giving their voice a platform in the paper, The

Commentator was fulfilling its duty of informing the public on matters relating to student sentiment. I cannot speak on behalf of The Times, but I would assume that Times editors would also pride themselves in producing a paper that presents a diverse array of opinions.

Ultimately, the debates regarding The Times’ op-ed and The Commentator’s piece revolve around one question: Do we, as editors, assume responsibility towards our readers and provide them with a wide range of perspectives, or should we rely on them to explore various publications if certain viewpoints are not represented in our paper?

Arguably, in a saturated market of news and opinions, The Times may want to stand out by offering a very specific angle. Why should The Times be responsible for their readers’ intellectual honesty? Perhaps it really should be up to individual readers to properly inform themselves and actively seek out contrasting opinions on various matters. After all, the United States has become increasingly polarized; why not reflect that phenomenon in the media as well? This argument may be compelling with respect to a publication such as The New York Times, which boasts a very large readership, but it certainly would not apply on the same scale to The Commentator, a smaller paper with a niche audience.

Ideally, all YU students would be well-acquainted with people from every possible corner on campus and have an accurate understanding of student sentiment across the spectrum. Sadly, that is not the case; YU boasts a large, multi-faceted campus, and it is almost impossible to properly gain insights into every micro-community. However, as editors of a campus newspaper — with a more diverse editorial board than you would expect — we have access to a variety of perspectives. Thus, we are acutely aware of our duty towards our readers — primarily YU students, faculty and staff — to provide a paper that accurately represents all of them.

The Commentator will not shy away from controversy, but we will also not actively seek it. Some consider us *kefira*, others claim we are “the conservative paper on campus.” Either way, if you believe your perspective has been overlooked, there is a simple fix: submit your article to The Commentator.

RABBI LAMM Z"TL
Continued from Front Page

that contributed to the financial growth of Yeshiva and increased its endowment fund to over \$1 billion. Through this initiative, an over \$35 million debt was repaid to the Bowery Savings Bank of New York. Rabbi Lamm also oversaw a mass renovation of the Wilf Campus and the creation of the Sy Syms School of Business and the Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies for Women. For 25 years he served as president until 2003, after which he continued as the chancellor of YU and *rosh hayeshiva* of RIETS until his retirement in 2013.

Rabbi Lamm authored 10 books — including “Torah U’Madda,” “Faith and Doubt,” “Torah Lishmah” and “A Hedge of Roses” — that primarily dealt with religious and philosophical topics; these works were in addition to the many essays he wrote for Tradition — a prominent Modern Or-

thodox journal of Jewish thought which he founded in 1958 — and other publications.

Throughout his writings and speeches, Rabbi Lamm stressed the concept of Torah Umadda, the pursuit and integration of Jewish and secular knowledge. Rabbi Lamm also spearheaded the Torah U’Madda Project in 1989, which culminated in the annual publication of the Torah U’Madda Journal. His scholarship has been cited in multiple U.S. Supreme Court cases including the landmark *Miranda v. Arizona*.

“Norman Lamm was a defining force in fashioning a Torah Judaism of depth, texture and color,” said President Emeritus Richard Joel, who directly succeeded Rabbi Lamm as president. “I proudly considered myself his student. His words and deeds will continue to inspire so many of us. He and Mrs. Lamm were role models for a generation. He cared for our people

profoundly, and leaves a legacy of wonderful family, timeless teaching, and impactful leadership.”

“Rabbi Lamm was the premier expositor of our community’s worldview. His teachings and writings anchored modern life in Torah values and taught us how we can grow from the interchange of history’s great ideas,” expressed Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, the current YU president who — like Rabbi Lamm — previously was the senior rabbi of the Jewish Center from 2000-2007. “As a visionary leader, sophisticated scholar, master orator and prolific writer, Rabbi Lamm left an indelible mark on Jewish history and was a central architect of the modern Jewish experience.”

President Berman reflected, “For my part, his loss is deeply personal, as he was a mentor and rebbe. He generously and lovingly gave me much of his precious time, sharing with me his Torah and wise counsel.

Our community has lost a legend, and we mourn the passing of our teacher and guide.”

Rabbi Lamm’s wife, Mrs. Mindy Lamm, recently passed away on April 16 at the age of 88 from COVID-19. They are survived by their three children Dr. Chaye Warburg, Dr. Joshua Lamm and Shalom Lamm, as well as 17 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren. Their fourth and youngest child, Sara Dratch, passed away in 2013.

The Rabbinical Council of America held a memorial tribute on June 2 featuring remarks by various members of Rabbi Lamm’s family, President Ari Berman, Rabbi Dr. Yossi Levine, Rabbi Herschel Schachter and Rabbi Dr. David Shatz. The tribute will be live-streamed on YouTube.

Elisheva Kohn and Elazar Abrahams contributed to this article.

Provost Botman Clarifies Misleading Email, Plans for Fall 2020 Still Pending

By SRULI FRUCHTER
AND YOSEF LEMEL

Editor’s Note: This article was originally published online on June 14.

Yeshiva University is still “developing plans” for Fall 2020 classes, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman clarified to The Commentator on Sunday, June 14. Two days earlier, Botman had emailed undergraduate students that the university’s “plan is to begin the fall semester online,” with in-person instruction resuming after Sukkot, “for all those faculty and students who are able to be physically present.”

Shortly following the email, The YU Observer reported that the plan stated by Botman was definitive. The Observer has since published a clarification. In its “Breaking Commentator News” WhatsApp chat, The Commentator sent members of the group a message summarising Botman’s Friday email, and upon receiving Botman’s clarification, updated them on the matter.

Since Botman’s Friday email, The Commentator contacted multiple university administrators regarding the announcement with specific questions as to the university’s plans for next year. Prompted by these inquiries, The Commentator received Botman’s clarification.

“We are still developing plans in consultation with medical professionals and with city and state officials,” explained Botman. “Specific and concrete plans will be announced in the coming weeks.”

The June 12 email included a survey link that asked students to list their Fall 2020 courses and select their preference for “Online” or “Face to Face” options. “We are committed to serving all of our stu-

dents and look forward to your responses to this survey by 6/26/2020,” wrote Botman. In her clarification, Botman wrote, “The responses to the survey will help us finalize our direction.”

“We are still developing plans in consultation with medical professionals and with city and state officials... Specific and concrete plans will be announced in the coming weeks.”

—
Provost Dr. Selma Botman

Some students were confused by the email’s mixed signals. “It was very negligent to send out an email misleading the student body. It’s also unacceptable that there was no follow-up email to correct the statement,” said Scott Stimler (YC ‘21). “All Dr. Botman did was raise our hopes that we would determine whether or not we would come on campus and take classes in-person or online. It’s baffling and disconcerting.”

Botman’s email was not the first instance of confusion regarding the university’s plans for the fall. Professor Benjamin Kest, who teaches Intro to Statistics on the Beren Campus, messaged his students via Canvas on June 3 that “I have just received an email from the deans that the fall semester will start online and transition to



Provost Selma Botman

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face to face instruction after the *yomim tovim* [holidays].” Kest later received a follow-up clarification that “such a possibility... is only being discussed,” which he forwarded to students.

After seeing the message from Kest, Alex Brody (SSSB ‘21), the incoming Sy Syms School of Business Student Council (SYMSSC) president remarked, “I was a little disappointed because although nothing was ever for certain, I was looking forward to returning to campus in the beginning of fall semester.”

Some had a positive reaction to the university’s plans and its efforts to communicate them. “I think YU is taking the responsible actions by only having online classes while this pandemic is going on,” expressed Natan Appel (YC ‘23), who is an incoming YU student. “I understand why there is confusion and appreciate YU’s attempts to relay over as much information as they can.”

Others, however, expressed disap-

pointment regarding the miscommunications. “I think it’s obvious that we are going to start online, but YU should wait to tell us that until they know for sure. The back and forth is very frustrating,” remarked Yehuda Bekritsky (SSSB ‘22).

Some major New York-based universities have already announced their plans for the fall semester; NYU announced plans to offer a “mixed mode” of in-person and remote classes, and Columbia University has expressed intent to return to campus in the fall. CUNY’s decision is still pending.

Elazar Abrahams contributed to this story.

Editor’s Note: This article was updated to reflect the correction issued by the Observer to its original story.

Minyanim Return to Heights at Community Shenk Shul

By SRULI FRUCHTER

Editor’s Note: This article was originally published online on June 7.

Minyanim (prayer services) returned to Washington Heights on Friday, June 5, with a 10-person capacity per service at the Shenk Shul, The Commentator learned.

Under the guidance of Shenk Shul Rabbi Matt LeVee, the shul’s safety standards

for minyanim include a strict 10-person limit, a mandatory mask-wearing policy, a shortened *tefillah* (prayer) service and a requirement for attendees to bring their own *siddur* and *chumash*. Each minyan will have a *gabbai* to enforce the size limit. At this time, the minyanim are only available for Heights residents from Wadsworth Ave to Laurel Hill.

In a statement sent to The Commentator, a YU spokesperson acknowledged

Rabbi LeVee’s efforts to safely begin minyanim, adding, “At this point YU campuses are not open.” It is unclear if or when the *batei midrash* will reopen on the Wilf or Beren campuses.

“They’re trying to get minyanim back slowly and in the safest way possible,” said Moshe Niren (SSSB ‘21), a resident of the Heights. “It’s nice to have a sense of minyan back while we all have a sense of safety.”

Nearly a week after New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo released his executive order on May 20, which allowed religious services to resume with restrictions after a few months hiatus, a Google Form titled, “YU Minyanim... if, when, and where,” began circulating among YU student and alumni WhatsApp groups. The form was for potential minyan attendees who wanted to

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JOSH JOSEPH

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“Throughout his 16-year tenure, Josh played an integral leadership role at YU, serving in a number of influential positions impacting the lives of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community at large,” President Berman wrote in the email.

In September 2019, following prior efforts to address LGBTQ issues on campus and just before a protest by LGBTQ students and allies, President Berman appointed Joseph to form and lead a team of YU faculty to address “matters of inclusion on our undergraduate college campuses, which includes LGBTQ.” Joseph assembled multiple YU faculty members and *roshai yeshiva* to create initiatives that would raise “awareness and sensitivity, [helping] students develop a thoughtful, *halakhic*, value-driven approach to their interactions with the wide spectrum of people who are members of our community.”

YU has not announced who, if anyone, will replace Joseph’s role and responsibilities on the team.

In a statement sent to The Commenta-

tor on behalf of the unofficial YU Pride Alliance, Chana Weiss (SCW ‘21), vice president of the board, said that while the Pride Alliance board has “continuously met and worked” with Joseph, “there has been little to no significant change to the status quo.”

every game he took the time to say ‘good game’ to every player and congratulate us on the win,” said Alon Jakobowitz (SSSB ‘22), a member of YU’s men’s basketball team.

“This is a bittersweet moment for me,”

“While I’m leaving the Yeshiva University family that I’ve been a part of for the last 16 years, I’m truly excited to be heading to a place that shares deeply rooted values for Jewish community and leadership.”

Senior Vice President Josh Joseph

“[The] Pride Alliance is motivated to continue working with the administration and whoever is appointed to head the committee to create lasting and impactful change for the YU LGBTQ+ community,” Weiss added.

An avid YU Macs fan, Joseph was also involved in campus life, attending many of the sports teams’ home games. “After

Joseph said to The Commentator. “I feel like I have given a lot of myself to YU over my tenure here, but it doesn’t come close to what I have gained from YU — enriched with deeper skill sets, blessed by enduring relationships and more committed than ever before to improve the Jewish world around me.”

Joseph’s colleagues and fellow admin-

istrators spoke proudly of their time together. “It has been a pleasure and an honor to work with Josh Joseph,” said Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Dr. Karen Bacon. “As a strong advocate for students and for academic standards, he brought passion and wisdom to every policy discussion. This is a mighty combination in an administrator, and I will miss his voice at the table.”

Reflecting on his tenure at YU, Joseph said, “During my time at YU, I’ve learned so much from our professional and lay leaders, engaged with our faculty and rabbis, and partnered with professionals at every level and in every area of our broad ecosystem — and I will miss them all.”

Joseph added, “Most of all, however, I will miss our students whether they are in student government or club leaders, athletes, students in my classes and lectures, or those of you who just stopped by for a cup of coffee or gave me a friendly nod in the elevator.”

President Berman is currently working with Joseph on a transition plan; at present, Joseph’s replacement, if anyone, is unknown.

VIRTUAL COMMENCEMENT

Continued from Front Page

Dr. Stephen Glicksman, founder and director of the Makor program, told The Commentator. “They are also the ones who had been waiting their whole lives for a program like ours to give them their place at YU ... this year’s entire graduating class is the one that first welcomed and embraced our guys on campus and set the bar for inclusion and acceptance at YU for many generations to come.”

A segment of the program also paid tribute to loved ones of the university’s faculty, students, staff, alumni and friends who passed away from the coronavirus or other causes. A special tribute was dedicated to Saadya Ehrenpreis, a student of

“It is still absolutely a celebration, even though I will experience it from my kitchen table.”

Sarah Ben-Nun
(SCW ‘20)

the Makor College Experience at YU, who passed away in May.

Following the Commencement Ceremony, a second, virtual and private “after-party” celebration was held for the Class of 2020, which included trivia questions and other interactive online activities.

In the weeks leading up to Commencement, the graduates — international students included — received their caps and gowns in the mail, as well as graduation viewing kits, which contained various YU swag items. In some cases, YU employees personally delivered the graduation viewing kits and garbs to students residing in the Tri-State area. Graduates were asked to submit photos and videos of themselves in their caps and gowns prior to the ceremony to be included in the virtual event.

Commenting on the graduation viewing kit she received, Sarah Ben-Nun (SCW ‘20) said, “The gesture itself of sending me a graduation kit, of acknowledging that this day should and can be celebratory ... even if it’s not in person, is touching and meaningful.”

Videos of community leaders, politicians and celebrities congratulating YU’s

Class of 2020 were posted on YU’s social media accounts in the weeks preceding Commencement. Among them were actress Mayim Bialik, filmmaker Nancy Spielberg, former basketball player Tamir Goodman, Israeli journalist Sivan Rahav Meir, human rights activist Natan Sharansky, former Senator and Vice Presidential Nominee Joseph Lieberman and others.

Senior Director of Events Aliza Berenholz Peled, in collaboration with Director of Marketing Matthew Schwartz, led the arrangements for the virtual Commencement Ceremony. “We wanted to make everyone feel part of the celebration, honor those that we lost and highlight the resilience of our graduates,” Berenholz Peled said. According to Berenholz Peled, “thousands of pieces of content” were submitted by the Class of 2020 prior to Commencement and later used for both the ceremony and the website. The photos and videos from the graduates “will live on as a virtual time capsule,” she added.

Not all members of the Class of 2020 were happy about graduating virtually. Following the announcement in early March that all in-person classes and events, including the Commencement Ceremony, would be canceled for the remainder of

the spring semester, Sarah Torgueman (SSSB ‘20) started an online petition titled “Postpone YU 2020 Commencement to the Fall,” asking the YU administration to hold a postponed in-person celebration instead of a virtual ceremony. Once the petition received over 500 signatures, Torgueman emailed the deans to tell them about the initiative, “to which they answered very nicely and compassionately,” she told The Commentator.

“There were ongoing meetings with the deans, the [student] council presidents, and yearbook staff to organize something worthwhile and they certainly did,” explained Torgueman. She hopes an in-person ceremony will eventually be held to “celebrate our accomplishments and our time here at YU.”

A YU spokesperson told The Commentator that the university is “looking into potential possibilities for an in-person graduation for our graduates sometime in the future.”

Prior to the virtual Commencement Ceremony on Sunday, a small gathering of YU students and faculty members took place at noon on Associate Dean for Torah Studies Shoshana Schechter’s front lawn in Monsey, NY, in honor of the graduates who

live in the neighborhood. Dean of Students Chaim Nissel, Senior Director of Student Life Rabbi Josh Weisberg and Schechter addressed the 10 socially-distanced graduates.

“It was a wonderful surprise, especially considering how quickly it was planned,” remarked Yehuda Goldfeder (YC ‘20), one of the graduates in attendance. “I got to march, throw up my cap and get a diploma from a dean.”

Graduating during a pandemic left some students feeling disoriented yet grateful. “I feel the emptiness of not being able to celebrate this poignant moment with the people who’ve been there all along — my family and my friends,” remarked Ben-Nun prior to Sunday’s virtual Commencement Ceremony. “At the same time, I am excited ... this period of my life is coming to an end, it is getting recognized — albeit in a much smaller way — by a lot of people and it is still absolutely a celebration, even though I will experience it from my kitchen table.”



A screenshot of the virtual Commencement Ceremony

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Yeshiva University Releases Plan For Fall 2020, In-Person Classes to Resume After Sukkot

By COMMENTATOR STAFF

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on July 1.

Yeshiva University will resume in-person classes under a “hybrid model” — a combination of virtual and in-person learning — on Oct. 19, following the holiday break, President Ari Berman announced via email to the student body on Tuesday evening, June 30. The email included a 20-page reopening [handbook](#) that outlined further details of the Fall 2020 plan.

The fall semester will begin on Aug. 26 and courses will be held online until Sukkot. Following the holiday, students can choose to return to partial in-person learning on campus or continue online classes for the remainder of the semester. Students who choose the in-person option can commute to campus or dorm in the residence halls, which will open on Oct. 12, after the Sukkot break, and “operate at reduced capacity.” The university assured that an effort will be made to arrange “housing for all full-time undergraduate students who desire it, either on or near campus.”

According to the plan, housing and meal plan fees will be prorated to the opening of on-campus living, while tuition and fees “will remain the same.” As The Commentator [previously reported](#), the university will raise tuition by more than \$1,500 for the upcoming academic year, up to a total cost of \$43,575 in tuition and \$2,900 in fees.

Upon students’ return to campus, the university will provide reusable face masks to all students, faculty and staff, who will be required to wear them in public spaces, such as classrooms, workspaces and hallways. Gloves will only be mandated for certain university staff, including medical and food service personnel. Additionally, restrooms will be regulated with capacity and accessibility limits to ensure social distancing of six feet; housekeeping teams will clean and disinfect bathrooms and classrooms “on a regular basis each day,” according to the plan.

There will be regular checks for students who plan to stay on campus for COVID-19 symptoms. Daily self-monitored responses “through the YU-approved app or other technology obtained for such purpose” will be required for students to enter buildings, under the plan. Students will also be required to undergo temperature checks at the entrance of YU buildings. Quarantine areas will be designated in the residence halls “for residential students who are ill, test positive for COVID-19 or are exposed to individuals who are positive.”

The *batei midrash* on the Beren and Wilf campuses will incorporate dividers for *chavrutot* (Torah study partners) and only be available to students and staff; other building spaces are being “reconfigured” to allow for additional “*batei midrash* space.”

Once students return to campus, the university will “encourage all students to remain on campus for Shabbat and the entire weekend,” to “minimize student travel” with small group meals being available. More specific plans are “in the works.”

Minyanim will also be regularly held in accordance with city and state regulations.

Minyanim recently returned to the Washington Heights community on June 5 in the Shenk Shul.

Various university facilities — including both campuses’ cafeterias and libraries — will open in October with “limited capacity.” The cafeterias will exclusively have a take-out service “until social distancing

(MTA) and Yeshiva University High School for Girls (Central), YU’s high schools, will be making separate announcements regarding their plans for the fall semester. The Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) will offer limited in-person courses for students enrolled in the Smicha program beginning August 26, the

“As an international student, I’m not entirely assured, especially without the necessary safeguards regarding time zone differences,” said Scott Stimler (YC ‘21), a psychology student from London, UK. “After reading the booklet, it seems that YU have definitely learned a thing or two from the previous semester. Hopefully, everything will start to upscale and fall into place.”

The plan, as mandated for submission by New York State, was crafted by YU’s Scenario Planning Task Force, a team of three dozen university officials, including Medical Director Dr. Robert van Amerongen. According to President Berman’s email, the plan is subject to change “depending upon the progression of the virus and/or applicable state and local government guidance.” President Berman also announced that community calls — a medium of communication that was [introduced early March](#) — will be held over the next few months together with students, faculty, staff and parents.

“While many of us knew more or less what the plan for the upcoming semester would be, I am glad that the administration is being more transparent with us by releasing an official statement even though much of the information is still unknown,” remarked Sara Knoll (SCW ‘21). “I am hoping the administration will send more detailed information very soon as housing payments are due on July 31,” she added.

As of the time of publication, representatives for New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the State Education Department did not respond to The Commentator’s inquiries for comment.

YU had previously teased the Fall 2020 plan to students, when Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman sent an email on June 12 saying that the university’s plan is “to begin the fall semester online,” with in-person instruction resuming after Sukkot, “for all those faculty and students who are able to be physically present.” Two days later, she clarified to The Commentator that YU was “still developing plans in consultation with medical professionals and with city and state officials,” and that “specific and concrete plans [would] be announced in the coming weeks.”

In-person classes were [first canceled](#) on March 4 on the Wilf Campus and March 5 on the Beren Campus after a Wilf student tested positive for COVID-19. Classes were held online for the [remainder of the spring semester](#) and all summer classes are operating virtually as well.

“Character is formed and developed in times of deep adversity. This is the kind of teachable moment that Yeshiva University was made for,” wrote President Berman in his email. “Our students will be able to work through the difficulties, issues and opportunities posed by our COVID-19 era with our stellar rabbis and faculty as well as their close friends and peers at Yeshiva.”

Elazar Abrahams, Yitzchak Carroll, Sruli Fruchter, Elishava Kohn and Yosef Lemel contributed to this story.

The fall semester will begin on Aug. 26 and courses will be held online until Sukkot. Following the holiday, students can choose to return to partial in-person learning on campus or continue online classes for the remainder of the semester.

rules are relaxed.” To adhere to social distancing regulations, alternate study carrels will be available in the library and only two students will be limited to large tables, while study rooms will be closed, according to the plan. Alumni and visitors will not be granted access to YU library facilities.

Elevators will be regularly cleaned and have occupancy limits and floor markings for students to properly distance. Following a year of [numerous elevator malfunctions](#) and [code violations](#), YU has done “significant work on the elevators over the past few months,” according to the handbook.

The Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy

start of the fall semester. The plans of other graduate schools — Azrieli, Revel, Ferkau, Katz, Syms and Wurzweiler — vary with some schools planning on holding classes fully online while others plan on having limited in-person options. The Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law has yet to make an announcement regarding their plans. The Makor College Experience will announce the possibility of returning to campus in “the coming weeks.”

Information specifically relevant to undergraduate international students was not specified. According to the booklet, they will receive “a separate communication” with further details.



The cover of the handbook released by YU for its Fall 2020 plans

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Wilf and Beren Housing Plans Released to Students for Fall 2020

By SRULI FRUCHTER

Wilf and Beren students can apply for restricted, on-campus housing — which will first open on Oct. 12 — for the fall semester, announced Wilf Director of University Housing and Residence Life Jonathan Schwab and Beren Acting Director of University Housing and Residence Life Becky Ciment via email on Tuesday evening, July 7.

Only single-room housing will be available on Wilf campus' Rubin, Morgenstern and Muss Residence Halls. Beren campus' Brookdale dorms can total up to three students per room, compared to the four-to-five-person maximum of recent years, and independent housing will hold up to two students per apartment; 36th Street, 35th Street and Schottenstein Residence Halls will be limited to one student per room.

All housing rates are prorated to reflect the eight-week delayed opening of housing for Fall 2020; this was based on each campus' [standard dorm prices](#). Wilf students can dorm in either Rubin or Morgenstern Halls for \$3,284 or Muss Hall for \$2,396. Beren students may dorm in 35th Street Residence hall for \$4,260 or either 36th Street, Brookdale or Schottenstein Residence Halls for \$3,284; independent housing options on 30 Park Avenue and 251 Lexington are also available for \$3,284.

Housing applications are due Friday, July 24, and students will be notified of their application status one week later on July 31. According to the email, "Because space is limited, we may not be able to accommodate all students who apply for housing." As such,

housing availability will be prioritized to first accommodate "newly enrolled students," followed by students whose permanent address is at least 50 miles from YU.

The [Fall 2020 Opening Plan](#) noted that, "every attempt will be made to arrange housing for all full-time undergraduate students who desire it, either on or near campus." University Dean of Students Chaim Nissel told The Commentator that YU is "still exploring options to expand our housing capacity."

Wilf and Beren students must apply for restricted, on-campus housing by July 24, in the hopes of returning to campus as planned on Oct. 12.

"I think Housing is handling the situation very well," said Moshe Gordon (YC '22), a Wilf resident advisor (RA) for the 2020-21 academic year. "The order of precedence for rooms seems fair and reasonable, and the prorated costs compensate for the reduced time that residents will be living on campus in the fall."

All students living on campus must also enroll in either a standard or reduced meal plan for \$1,500 and \$1,000, respectively. The standard plan offers up to 10 weekly meals while the reduced plan provides up to seven; these plans "consist exclusively of Dining Dollars."

Dining services in campus cafeterias are restricted to Monday-Thursday, and a "more detailed schedule" will be available on Oct. 12. As mentioned in the Fall 2020 Opening Plan, the cafeterias will only feature

a take-out service, until "social distancing rules are relaxed."

With the housing application deadline less than three weeks away, some students feel unprepared to commit to living arrangements for the fall semester. "I appreciate that we're able to go back to campus, but I don't see how realistic it is to go back" explained Neeli Fagan (SCW '21), a student from Chicago. "The dorms are expensive, I'm not even sure who's going to be there, and about 7-9 meals a week won't sustain

someone who's out-of-town who isn't going to friends for Shabbos because of the coronavirus."

Isaac Dobin (YC '22), a student currently living in Houston, Texas where [the number of coronavirus cases are soaring](#), said that while he likes "the idea that everyone [on the Wilf campus] has their own room because we have to social distance," he expressed uncertainty as to whether students "who live out of state will even be able to come back to campus," referencing the rise in cases.

The announcement of housing arrangements came on the heels of YU's [official plan](#) for Fall 2020, which was announced to students last week on June 30, nearly four months since YU [first closed its campus](#) for Spring 2020 after a [student tested positive](#) for COVID-19.

Among the concerns shared by students,

YU has yet to announce which classes will be online and in-person after students are allowed to return to campus. "We recognize that students have many questions about fall classes," Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman told The Commentator. "We are finalizing the academic plans for the fall and plan to have more information by the end of July."

"We will be updating our FAQs and sharing more information during the community calls we will be holding later this month," Botman added.

Given the [uncertainty](#) of whether international students will be allowed to return to American campuses in the fall, some students are frustrated about their unknown status come August.

"While I don't blame YU, the uncertainty of the situation is very annoying in order to make a decision," said Elia Lej (SCW '22), a student from Brussels. "We don't know if we, international students, will be able to return to campus ... I want to make a decision on taking a semester of absence, transferring to a school where classes will meet in person, or decide to continue classes online."

Other students, however, are just grateful for the opportunity to return to campus. "I am looking forward to campus opening up in any capacity once again," said Yeshiva Student Union President Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21), who was formerly an RA. "The reason many of us went to YU was for the *chevra* (friend groups) and campus life, and I am very excited for that to return. My family is a little wary about my safety, but we trust that Schwab and the Housing Department will do a great job to make it as safe as possible."



Wilf Campus' Morgenstern Residence Hall

Course Drop Date Without a “W” Bumped Up Nearly Three Months for Fall 2020 Semester

By ELAZAR ABRAHAMS AND
YOSEF LEMEL

Editor’s Note: This article was originally published online on June 23

The Fall 2020 course drop date without a “W” has been set for Sept. 22, a date only four weeks into the semester and nearly three months earlier than in prior years.

Traditionally dated in early December, after midterms, this deadline is the last day undergraduate students can drop a class without any record on their transcript indicating their withdrawal. After that date passes, students need permission from a dean or academic adviser to drop a class, which will be marked with a “W” on their transcript.

In Fall 2019, the deadline for dropping a course without a “W” was on Dec. 2, and in Fall 2018, it was on Dec. 11, 15 weeks into the semester. The dates for the Spring 2019 and Spring 2020 semesters were April 12 and April 23, respectively. In contrast, for the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters, the deadlines fall out on Sept. 22 and Feb. 15, respectively. No major changes were made to the deadline for dropping a course with a “W.”

Although the changes are publicly available on the university’s undergraduate academic calendar, at press time students remain unnotified about the revisions via email or otherwise; registration for undergraduate students’ Fall 2020 courses began on May 4.

A committee of deans’ advisors and registrars formulated the academic calendar. Chief Enrollment Management Officer Chad Austein, a member of the committee, explained to The Commentator, “When the

academic calendar was created for the 2020-2021 academic year, we incorporated an update to the withdrawal policy and timeline to be consistent with other colleges and universities.”

Some administrators echoed this sentiment. “When I got to YU, I was surprised to find that the Withdrawal deadline was much later than anywhere else I had been,” com-

mented Dr. Noam Wasserman, dean of the Sy Syms School of Business. “There are many ways in which a late deadline disadvantages students in the long term. A modification of the timeline will benefit our students.”

difficult time.” While YU has not named an official date for returning to campus, Botman’s announcement said it would be “after the Holidays” in mid-October.

After being notified of the policy change by The Commentator, all seven student council presidents from the Wilf and Beren campuses jointly emailed Austein and various members of the administration on June

(SSSB ‘22). “If YU is attempting to be in line with other colleges, they must also allow students to add courses several weeks after the semester begins. Picking and choosing the worst policies of other universities is irreconcilable with YU’s Strategic Priority to ‘Enhance Student Success and Wellbeing — Academic, Professional and Personal.’”

“The uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic turns this from an unjust decision into a detrimental one,” Poppers added.

On June 25, Greenberg started a petition to “halt” the “changes and return the calendar’s course-dropping deadlines to be consistent with prior years.” “If YU does, in fact, need to change their calendar drop dates, then that is a conversation that should be taken with the consideration of students’ voices and not behind closed doors,” the petition read. The petition currently has over 100 signatures.

Austein addressed the possibility for this policy to be reversed. “At this time, we are evaluating the needs of our students and the uncertain nature of the upcoming semester and will keep the community informed of any revisions to this policy,” he said.

Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Dr. Karen Bacon, one of the recipients of the email from the student council presidents, told The Commentator, “I am supportive of Mr. Austein’s intention to review the policy in light of the current uncertainties and to consider revisions if appropriate.”

Editor’s Note: This article was updated to include information regarding the petition started by YSU President Zachary Greenberg on June 25

Sruli Fruchter contributed to this story

“The uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic turns this from an unjust decision into a detrimental one”

Akiva Poppers (SSSB ‘22), SOY President

menting Dr. Noam Wasserman, dean of the Sy Syms School of Business. “There are many ways in which a late deadline disadvantages students in the long term. A modification of the timeline will benefit our students.”

In his response to The Commentator’s inquiries, Austein did not address the fact that students were not notified of these changes to the academic calendar.

Students expressed concern over the timing of this change. “It is so strange for YU to complicate things when students already have no idea what to expect this coming semester,” said Elisheva Goldman (SCW ‘21). “Dropping a class without a ‘W’ is invaluable and to have that moved to a much earlier date, especially during this uncertain time, is nerve-wracking.”

“YU’s proposed plan brings us back on campus after this drop date,” said Efraim Goldstein (YC ‘23), referring to Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman’s announcement two weeks prior. “What happens when my in-person class is one I want to drop but it will stain my transcript? This decision makes school unnecessarily more difficult in an already

16 expressing concern regarding the earlier date. “This is a drastic change from previous semesters, when the deadline has been after midterms ... We request on behalf of the student body that the date be moved to after midterms,” the email read.

The student council presidents’ email reasoned that “having the option to drop a class after midterms provides students with a buffer, as it lessens the stress in test-taking and ensures that students are able to find the perfect balance between learning material relevant to their future careers and receiving grades which will help them secure a job after college.”

According to Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) President Zachary Greenberg (SSSB ‘21), after the student council presidents followed up a week later on June 23, Austein responded that the new date still gives students the first month to freely add or drop classes and students will be informed if there are any revisions to the new policy.

“YU’s decision to change the timing of the ‘drop without a W’ date is an illogical and untimely one,” said Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) President Akiva Poppers

Over 100 Students Virtually Celebrate Annual Yeshiva-Wide Seudas Preida

By JARED SCHARF

Editor’s Note: This article was originally published online on June 24

Over 100 students virtually celebrated their completion of either *masechet* (tractate) Hullin or Avodah Zarah at the annual, Yeshiva-wide Seudas Preida (closing banquet) on June 22 at 7 p.m. Over 140 participants tuned in to the program via Zoom.

Every year, the Seudas Preida is held to celebrate the *siyumim* (completion) of that year’s respective morning and night seder programs’ *masechtot*, as well as the full year of Torah learning. This year’s Seuda Preida was dedicated in memory of Saadya Ehrenpreis (Makor ‘20), who passed away from COVID-19 almost two months ago.

Max and Marion Grill Dean of RIETS Rabbi Menachem Penner began the night’s program speaking about Saadya. “[Saadya’s] name means *Saad Ka* — helper of God,” said Rabbi Penner. “[He] encouraged people with a smile, a hug and an arm around your shoulder to greet everyone who came onto the second floor in the *beis midrash* ... Saadya and the impact he had was tremendous and is far from over.” Afterward, a tribute video to Saadya was shown over Zoom, followed by a slideshow of every individual who was

making a *siyum*.

Following the slideshow, the *siyum*’s program included speeches from Associate Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) *Mashgiach* Rabbi Joshua Blass and RIETS *Rosh Yeshiva* Rabbi Hershel Schachter. “You know Hullin and Avoda Zara,” Rabbi Schachter remarked to the celebrating students, “and now Yoreh Deah will be a breeze.”

Afterward, guest-speaker Rabbi Osher Weiss, Rosh Kollel of Machon Minchas Osher L’torah V’Haraah, spoke and commented that he was “impressed by the [students’] accomplishments of completing such a large *masechta* such as Hullin, this being the third-largest [masechta].”

“The *siyum* was the perfect way to end off an incredible year of learning,” said Eytan Aryeh (YC ‘21), who was one of four students to celebrate completing Hullin and Avodah Zarah. “Having the *bonei yeshiva* (students) join together after being apart for so many months to celebrate the accomplishments of a year’s worth of growth in Torah was extremely special.”

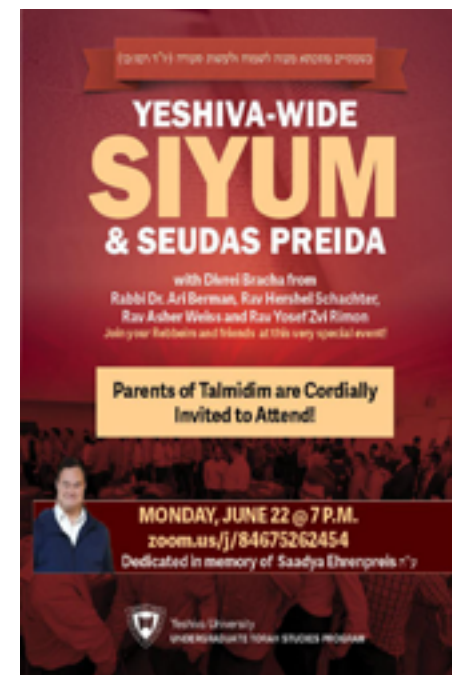
A pre-recorded video of Rabbi Zvi Rimón, Rosh Yeshiva of Lev Academic Center (JCT) was played over Zoom, followed by Aryeh reading the *hadran* — a short prayer recited

upon the completion of a *masechta* — and Joel M. Schreiber, chairman of RIETS Board of Trustees, completing the *siyum*. Michael Nassimi (YC ‘21) concluded the Seudas Preida by reading the first *mishna* of Pesachim, next year’s morning program *masechta*.

“I really appreciate how the yeshiva made such an effort to recognize and congratulate us,” reflected Moshe Gordon (YC ‘22), one of the celebrating students. “I found it very meaningful that even from afar I was able to celebrate the accomplishments of our yeshiva. In particular, I would like to thank Rabbi Etan Schnall for his efforts to engage all sorts of minor details.”

Rabbi Schnall, one of the organizers of the program, told The Commentator that this year’s Seudas Preida contained unique features, such as a pre-*siyum* party held 20 minutes before the program, in which the *siyum*-makers ate their personally-delivered, YU-sponsored meals.

“[The Seudas Preida] literally touches hundreds of our students, including the 100+ who are Misaymim, and many more — as well as their rebbeim and parents,” said Rabbi Schnall. “It celebrates the year of successful learning for all — morning, afternoon and night.”



The annual, Yeshiva-wide Seudas Preida was held over Zoom.

Moody's Downgrades YU's Credit Rating in Wake of COVID-19 Pandemic

By ELAZAR ABRAHAMS

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on June 3

Moody's Investors Service downgraded Yeshiva University's credit rating from "positive" to "stable" in their May 20th report. This report marks the first demoted rating since 2014 when the university was categorized in the subpar B3 ranking.

Moody's is the leading credit rating company that provides international financial research on both commercial and government bonds. Their evaluation was based primarily on the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent financial disruptions. While Moody's acknowledged that YU "successfully narrowed the magnitude of annual operating deficits, in line with its ongoing fiscal stabilization plan," the coronavirus outbreak imperiled many key revenue streams, such as tuition with predicted lower student enrollment for the coming year.

The lowered ranking of YU connotes a red flag to investors and funds, as the B3 rating reflects continued high-credit risk. This

rating will significantly affect YU's ability to borrow money in the future and may cause the university to pay higher interest rates on its current and future debts.

This year's report emphasized the unpre-

S&P Global, another prominent credit rating agency, revised their 2020 outlook toward many public and private universities (including YU) to "negative," recognizing "[exacerbated] pressures already facing

towards YU, citing "indication[s] of progress toward achieving a more sustainable business model" in their 2019 report.

As The Commentator previously reported, YU has already taken measures to secure its financial stability, such as raising tuition and assorted fees for next year. President Berman and other senior officials have also taken pay cuts through December, while some employees have been furloughed as a cost saving measure. Additionally, YU has launched an emergency scholarship campaign to raise funds for students in financial need. At the same time, the university refunded students' remaining caf card balances as well as 30% of this spring semester's housing charges.

Moody's predicts that YU's progress over prior years will be hindered and the university "will continue to draw down liquidity through at least fiscal 2022, if not beyond."

Vice President of Business Affairs and Chief Financial Officer Jacob Harman did not respond to The Commentator's request for comment.

"While Moody's acknowledged that YU 'successfully narrowed the magnitude of annual operating deficits, in line with its ongoing fiscal stabilization plan,' the coronavirus outbreak imperiled many key revenue streams, such as tuition with predicted lower student enrollment for the coming year."

dictability of the current situation. According to Moody's, the volatile financial market, the possibility of "downward pressure" on New York real estate prices and shrinking support from donors are substantial challenges that YU will need to overcome to boost its rating. If, however, YU suffers a "more rapid or steep decline in liquidity than currently anticipated" or cannot cut sufficient operating costs, their rating could drop lower.

colleges."

Moody's credit evaluation of YU has gradually progressed in recent years. In 2014, the largely negative report was highly critical of President Richard Joel and YU's board. In the days leading up to President Ari Berman's inauguration in 2017, YU's rating was updated to mark new stability. For the last two years, however, the investor service has provided a positive outlook

Poppers to Assume SOY Presidency, Wilf Student Court Rules

By SRULI FRUCHTER

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

Akiva Poppers (SSSB '22) will officially assume the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) presidency, following the Wilf Student Court's 3-2 decision on May 13 to overturn the Canvassing Committee's determination that Poppers was ineligible for the position.

Head of the Canvassing Committee Jacob Rosenfeld (YC '21) first told Poppers that he would not qualify for SOY president because of his current "lower junior" status on May 4, three days before the Wilf Student Government elections. Following several message exchanges with Rosenfeld and Canvassing Committee Member Jacob Shiner (SSSB '21) in which they urged him to suspend his campaign, Poppers continued his write-in campaign.

Poppers preemptively petitioned the Wilf Student Court on May 6, and after he received the highest number of write-in votes for the position in the May 7 elections, the

counsel. They argued that Poppers' current spring semester credits combined with his upcoming summer course credits would total at least 79 credits making him an "upper junior" by Fall 2020, the eligible class level for the SOY presidency.

"I would like to thank everyone who backed my campaign, both by voting and writing briefs on my behalf, as well as my Counsel and advisors," Poppers said. "I ran on a platform of representing the students of Yeshiva, and I look forward to fulfilling that promise and my Constitutional duties... I am excited to work with the other members of SOY to make your experience in Yeshiva University the best it can be."

Associate Justices Bryan Lavi (YC '21), Aryeh Burg (YC '20) and Avraham Sosnowik (YC '21) ruled in the majority of *Akiva Poppers v. Yeshiva University Canvassing Committee*. "In summary, the Court sees no distinction between Spring credits in progress and Summer credits in progress," Lavi, Burg and Sosnowik wrote in their ruling. "As long as the candidate will have the necessary credits, either filed or in progress, by the date of graduation he may assume office on



Akiva Poppers, Chief Content Officer of MacsLive, will assume the SOY presidency.

AKIVA POPPERS

"I am excited to work with the other members of SOY to make your experience in Yeshiva University the best it can be"

Akiva Poppers (SSSB '22)

Canvassing Committee ruled him unqualified for the position. Runner-up Zachary Lent (SSSB '21) was instead declared the winner of the election after receiving 178 write-in votes, only one behind Poppers' 179.

"What I feel may be forgotten in all of this is the power of a single vote, which was the difference in both the election and the Court. Never forget that you can be the difference-maker," Poppers reflected.

The court accepted to hear Poppers' case on May 8, after he won the election; Daniel Melool (YC '22) served as his official legal

graduation day... [Poppers] is eligible for the position of, and can be seated as, SOY President as per winning the majority of votes for said position in the Spring"

Chief Justice Phillip Dolitsky (YC '20) and Associate Justice Jacob Stern (YC '20) held the dissenting opinion. "The majority has committed a grievous error in its decision," wrote Dolitsky, with whom Stern joined. "It has taken the Constitution and spun it on a lathe, whirling it around until it magically appears to say, or not say, what they wish. Democracy doesn't allow for the law to be

molded by the hands of unelected judges. Democracy can only flourish if the law's integrity is maintained and upheld by its courts. That wasn't done today... Any onlooker can realize how simple this really is; petitioner [Poppers] will remain a lower Junior at the time of the 2020 Commencement, thus deeming him ineligible to become SOY President."

In a statement sent to The Commentator, the Canvassing Committee wrote, "[We] felt our decision was strongly rooted in the Constitution, and [are] disappointed in the court's decision. Chief Justice Dolitsky wrote a beautiful dissent outlining our basic argument and explaining the flaw in the Petitioner's reasoning. That said, we hope Mr. Poppers will fulfill his responsibilities dutifully."

Many student leaders have great

expectations for Poppers' presidency. "Poppers is a true leader at YU and is someone who has gone above and beyond for the students," said YSU President Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21), who won re-election on May 7. "I am very excited to work alongside him next year to improve student life on campus."

"Akiva and I have known each other for a while now," expressed outgoing SOY President Yoni Broth (SSSB '20), "and I'm sure that he's going to be a great leader as SOY President and set a great example for students next year."

Yosef Lemel contributed to this story.

YU Launches Event Series on Race in America, Affirms Solidarity with Black Community

By SHLOMIT EBBIN

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on June 30

In response to the national conversation about racism, Yeshiva University has held a number of online events and organized programming focusing on race in America and within the Jewish community. Additionally, prominent members of YU's administration have released statements standing in solidarity with the Black community and victims of injustice.

In an effort to take action, Jewish History Professors Ronnie Perelis, Steven Fine and Jess Olson have spearheaded a series of discussions titled "Crisis and Hope: YU Voices." Two panels — one featuring YU Professor of Jewish Studies Rabbi Saul Berman on "Lessons from Selma 1965, For American Jews 2020" and the other showcasing Zion80 bandleader Jon Madof on "Race and Culture in Contemporary Music" — were held over Zoom on June 11 and June 25, respectively, with plans to continue the series into the fall.

"This series and other forms of outreach and social action is the natural thing for YU to do. We are a community rooted in Torah and *mitzvot*," Perelis told The Commentator. "We are shaped by our millennial history of exile and persecution which has taught us to care for the downtrodden and the marginalized and we are a school in the heart of the most diverse and most global city in the world — New York."

On June 17, the Office of Student Life held its own discussion on race with Yaffy

Newman, a Black, Modern Orthodox woman who penned the viral article "My Black Father's Legacy." Speaking with Wilf Campus Director of University Housing and Residence Life Jonathan Schwab, Newman told the over 50 students watching that she believes introspection is the smartest way to combat racism within their own communities: "If people are able to educate themselves, look within, and then take action, the

Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. With the subject line "Standing in Solidarity," the email expressed the importance of joining in "the national outcry for justice and reforms." Citing Breonna Taylor and Ahmed Arbery as other victims of police brutality, Berman added that "Racial violence by any member of society is horrific. It is especially horrific when those perpetuating it are the very same people who took an

unattainable for all Americans."

On Juneteenth, a holiday celebrating the emancipation of slaves in America in 1865, the university again took to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to "honor the many sacrifices and contributions made by African Americans in the United States," and "join in solidarity against racism, injustice, and inequality."

Ben Atwood (RIETS '23), a graduate of Yeshiva College and current *semikhah* student, was happy to see YU's efforts but hopes there will be more down the line. "As a university student, much appreciation must be directed towards Rabbi Berman for unequivocally standing in solidarity with George Floyd and the larger Black community, but I would love to see practical steps the university will be taking to address the issues," he said.

Atwood added, "Will the university make an effort to increase accessibility for Black Jewish students? Will it bring in more Black professors, considering, as far as I know, we currently have almost zero, if any, Black professors uptown? As almost completely white schools, will RIETS or Yeshiva College create opportunities to build relationships with members of the Black community, perhaps especially its religious members?"

Still, many undergraduates expressed satisfaction with YU's programming and commitments to combating racism. Kate Weinberg (SSSB '22) said, "I think YU is taking the appropriate steps to stand with the Black community, as well as making strides to educate their students to further develop their understanding of the issues present."

"Racial violence by any member of society is horrific. It is especially horrific when those perpetuating it are the very same people who took an oath to serve and protect our communities... We join in the national outcry for justice and reforms that seek to prevent these tragic violent acts from continuing to occur."

President Ari Berman

ripples of that are unimaginable. To me, that is the most important thing that the frum community can do."

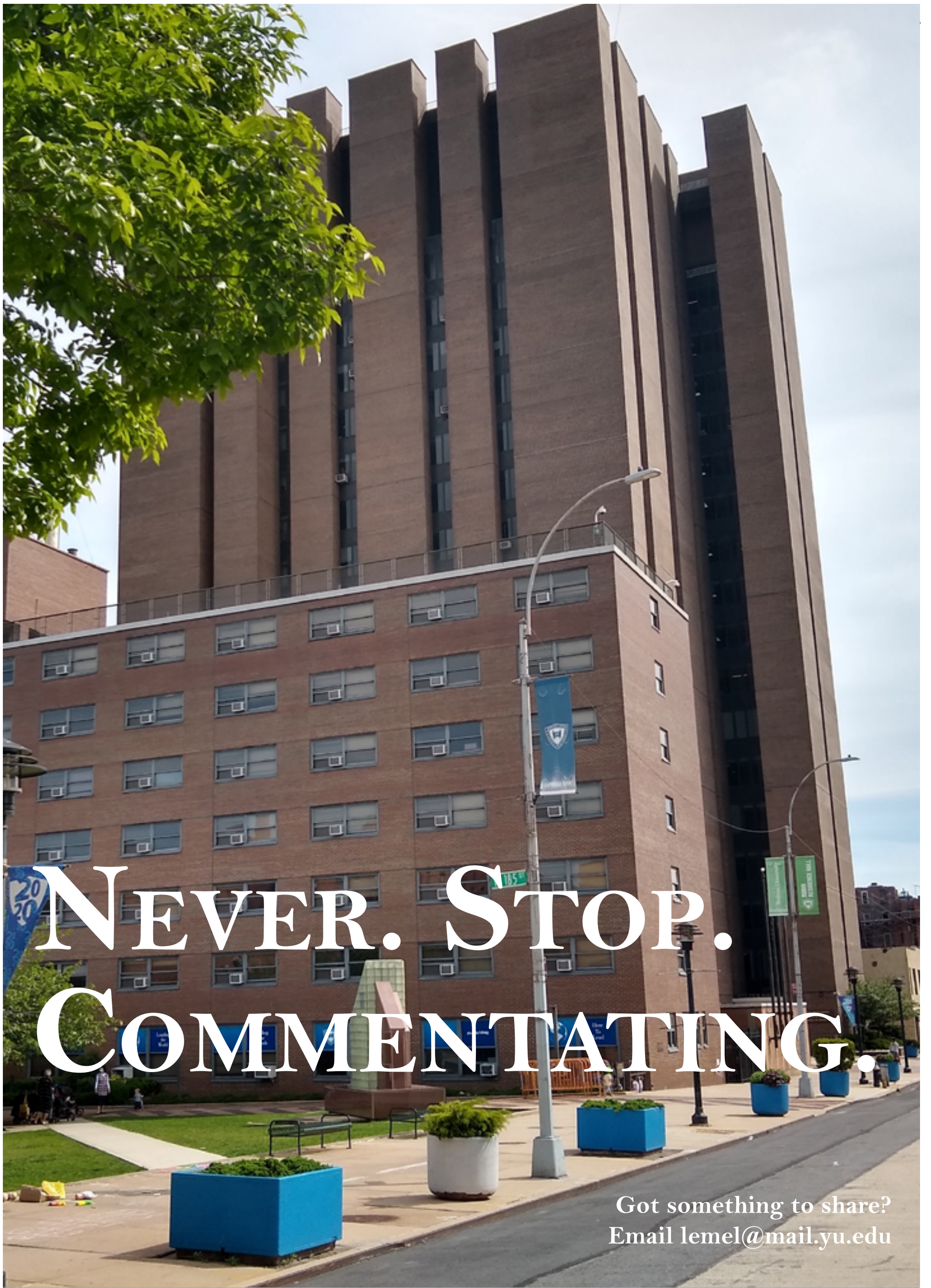
The experiences shared at the event strongly resonated with some students. "I thought Yaffy brought a perspective and a voice that so many YU students need to hear," said Avigail Winokur (SCW '22). "Her story is reflective of how our community needs to do so much better and be more inclusive and accepting of all types of Jews, not just the ones we're used to seeing."

These initiatives emerged following a June 5 email from YU President Ari Berman in response to the May 25 murder of George

oath to serve and protect our communities."

Echoing these actions, YU's official social media channels posted a statement from Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman. "The murder of George Floyd is a tragic reminder that the sacred American commitment to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is maddeningly out of reach for our fellow citizens of color," said Botman. "Let us mourn the injustices enabled by racism across our nation while we commit ourselves to the righteous struggle for social justice, grounded in an abiding respect for difference and a humbling recognition that this effort remains as yet

A few of the YU event posters and statements regarding race.



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Got something to share?
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YU Community Rises to Occasion Amid COVID-19 Crisis

By YOSHI ZIMLOVER

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on June 2.

Numerous members of the extended YU community have gone above and beyond in the midst of the chaos from the coronavirus pandemic. Students, alumni and administrators have participated in a variety of initiatives to support healthcare workers and to help all those in need.

In March, YCSA (Yeshiva College Student Association) President Leib Wiener (YC '20) orchestrated the delivery of 60 boxes of food items to P.S. 132 Juan Pablo Duarte, to help support the local Washington Heights community. Wiener said he reached out to four public schools when it was rumored that they were going to be closing and asked if they could use any food donations. P.S. 132 responded in the affirmative.

Wiener worked with the Office of Student Life, Director of Dining Services Sam Chasan and Director of Government Relations Jon Greenfield to organize the effort. Greenfield connected with State Assemblywoman Carmen De La Rosa and local community leader Domingo Estevez to complete the coordination. In a separate instance, Chasan, alongside the YU Food Services team, also arranged the donation of a dozen boxes of perishables to the MET Council for distribution to families in need, according to a Facebook post.

Another student-led endeavor to assist the Washington Heights community (and beyond) was initiated by the START! Science chapter at YU. Self-described as the "biggest club on campus," START! offers "weekly supplemental science lessons" to 11 classes across four elementary schools in the Heights, according to Aline Halpern (SCW '20) and Maxwell Charlat (YC '20), the program heads. 22 YU students serve as classroom leaders with 320 additional volunteers who visit the classrooms at least twice per semester.

Shortly after the schools closed, START! produced two resources to continue teaching their students at home. Under regular circumstances, classroom leaders volunteer in the same classroom throughout their tenure. To continue maintaining this relationship to even in a distanced world, each of the classroom leaders created a personalized science experiment video for their respective fourth-

YU alumnus Dave Weinberg (YC '05) was involved in coordinating a larger-scale operation to deliver kosher food to healthcare workers. Journalist Bethany Mandel created [Kosher19](#) and partnered with Weinberg and Dani Klein from YeahThatsKosher.com to raise upwards of \$84,000 (at the time of publication) and deliver over 10,000 kosher meals to nearly 200 hospitals around the

Akiva Kra, Shimi Kaufman and Shneur Agronin, a group of three 11th grade students at MTA, Yeshiva University High School for Boys, organized an effort to gather and distribute messages for the elderly. They recognized that many seniors in old-age homes may be particularly lonely during this time and estimate that they've collected and distributed around 100 letters in the two weeks since beginning the program. They encourage anyone to send "messages, pictures or videos" to MTACoronaCards@gmail.com and noted that "if someone sends one letter, it can make over 500 people's day."

YU's graduate schools have also launched various programs during the pandemic that utilized their respective skills and abilities. Speech-Language Pathology students of the Katz School of Health and Science have been staffing a clinic offering [free telehealth speech therapy](#) to "Yeshiva University faculty, students, staff and all persons in need residing in New York." The Wurzweiler School of Social Work hosted numerous "Care Café" events via Facebook Live, including yoga sessions and parenting workshops, "to help those in need manage direct and indirect responses to trauma during this global pandemic," according to [YU News](#). They also reported that Cardozo School of Law students and alumni have engaged in pro-bono work to support small businesses impacted by coronavirus.

The examples listed above are merely a glimpse into all the acts of kindness that have been (and are still being) performed by those in the YU community. This piece is a far cry from a comprehensive overview of all the actions undertaken, and no negative inferences should be reached from the exclusion of any initiatives.

Numerous members of the extended YU community have gone above and beyond in the midst of the chaos from the coronavirus pandemic. Students, alumni and administrators have participated in a variety of initiatives to support healthcare workers and to help all those in need.

grade classrooms. After that, the classroom leaders have created weekly videos that are sent to all of the students.

START! also partnered with Bundle, a child-care service that is currently offering individualized lessons in various subjects, including science and engineering, to children via video-conference. Halpern and Charlat stated that over 60 members of START! signed-up to teach lessons on Bundle and fill a gap in volunteers. They noted that "START! has been able [to] thrive during this difficult time because of the amazing team of classroom leaders and volunteers who care about spreading kindness and are deeply committed to the Club's mission of providing a world-class education to all."

A further example of undergraduate kindness was demonstrated by TAC (Torah Activities Council) Vice President of Chessed Atara Levine (SCW '20). Levine helped publicize an Arts & Crafts drive for hospitalized children and quarantined families organized by Chai Lifeline. Donations can be given through an [Amazon wish-list](#) or by mailing new supplies to the Chai Lifeline office at 151 W 30th St, New York, NY 10001. TAC also raised money to deliver pizza to a medical team at Mercy Medical Center.

country.

The campaign has also simultaneously sustained struggling kosher restaurants and Weinberg said that "dozens of local kosher restaurants won't have to close thanks to Kosher19's quick-thinking efforts to support their businesses." Weinberg, whose experiences at YU included serving as a graphic design for The Commentator, stated that students can "join the effort by clicking 'donate' on our site then 'fundraise' to join the Yeshiva University team." He also encouraged students to share Kosher19's posts on social media and "give a buck or ten to the cause."

In other measures to assist healthcare employees, YU donated 148 goggles and 400 masks to Mt. Sinai Hospital with an additional 48 goggles coming from Central, Yeshiva University High School for Girls, according to a Facebook post. The post thanked the Facilities and Food Services team, SCW Biology Department Laboratory Specialist Tatyana Kievsky, Dean of Science Management and Clinical Professor of Physics Dr. Edward Berliner and Ruth Fried, the Chairperson of the Science Department at Central, "for meeting this challenge with grace and courage."



Members of the YU community have risen to the occasion to provide help to those in need in the COVID-19 crisis.

CellyForward Challenge

By ZACHARY GREENBERG

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

In order to raise awareness for mental health during COVID-19, two YU students and a professional ice hockey player have partnered together and created a social media campaign featuring athletes from across the globe called the “Celly Forward Challenge.” Eli Jonah Karls (SSSB '22), creator of *The Daily Wiz*, and graphic designer Ari Solomon (SSSB '22) established the initiative alongside professional ice hockey player Joe Veleno, a prospect of the Detroit Red Wings currently playing for the Grand Rapids Griffins in the American Hockey League.

The CellyForward Challenge has participating athletes and celebrities post videos on Instagram explaining the importance of the CellyForward Challenge, encouraging donations to mental health organizations and spreading awareness on mental illness. These figures capitalize on their fame to spread their message to wide-ranging audiences. Each athlete offers a prize of their choice to one random user who meets the qualifications; in order to qualify for a prize, a fan must first follow the CellyForward Challenge page on Instagram, like the video post for which contest they want to enter, tag three friends in the comments, repost the video of the athlete or influencer's giveaway on their story and tag @cellyforward-challenge. It is free to enter, but donations are recommended and can be made through the CellyForward Challenge website.

The initial planning for the

challenge began nearly a month and a half prior to its launch during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Co-founders Karls and Solomon, who are also *chavrusas* (learning partners) in Rabbi Yehuda Willig's *shiur*, were no strangers to social media marketing before creating CellyForward. Karls has experience with social media content creation from his

of the coronavirus took a big toll on me and I couldn't stop thinking about all the people who suffered losses and then just faded away into the background as the next person got sick. Eli, Joe and I wanted to do something using our combined skills and platforms to help the world on a broader scale so we used our passion for helping others to put our ideas into action.”

Some examples of the prizes being offered are a signed hockey stick by Kirby Dach of the Chicago Blackhawks (the third overall pick of the NHL 2019 draft), a gift card towards Akil Thomas of the L.A. Kings' personal apparel company and a signed baseball from minor league pitching prospect Alex Katz, in addition to a gift card to his custom cleats company.

The NHL featured the Cellyforward Challenge on its official website on May 26.

Eli Jonah Karls said he thinks the challenge is important because he “realized communities are mostly focusing on the problems of today with all of the death and illness, but... are forgetting about the long-term damage of tomorrow.” According to Karls, “the mental and psychological damages caused by COVID-19 are only beginning and we need to fight with the same ferocity as we are using against the physical virus.”

In addition to spreading awareness, the challenge encourages donations to organizations that help battle mental health such as Mental Health America, The National Alliance On Mental Illness, Anxiety and Depression Association of America and OHEL Children's Home and Family Services.

“A ‘celly’ is short for ‘celebration’ and is used to describe an athlete's celebration after scoring a goal. However, it's more than that. It's a moment of euphoric intensity, infused with joy and excitement as a result of succeeding in a long and hard-fought battle with every ounce of strength that you have,” said Veleno, who scored 11 goals with the AHL's Grand Rapids Griffins this season. “Right now, we are in the first period of our battle. We have a long way to go until we defeat the virus, but we will keep fighting and moving forward towards a better tomorrow until the final buzzer when we will be able to ‘celly’ together as we can declare complete victory after recovering from the damage caused by COVID-19.”

“Eli, Joe and I wanted to do something using our combined skills and platforms to help the world on a broader scale so we used our passion for helping others to put our ideas into action.”

Ari Solomon (SSSB '22)

series *The Daily Wiz* which first released a video on Jan. 28, 2020. Solomon has experience in sports graphic designing, social media and working on projects for numerous professional athletes. Karls and the 20-year-old hockey star Veleno first met in high school in Montreal, Canada. Since then, Karls remained close friends with Veleno and has given him guidance in bolstering his social media platform.

In describing the origins of the CellyForward Challenge, Solomon said, “Watching my community and friends suffering from the emotional and psychological effects

Solomon handled the graphics for each luminary and created the website while Karls managed the Instagram page and video production with his filmmaker Fabeeha K. Lodhi. Veleno reached out to hundreds of public personalities to recruit athletes for the launch of the challenge. After many hours of discussion and planning, often reaching 3 a.m., the CellyForward Challenge was introduced with half a dozen athletes posting their challenge videos. There are currently 14 athletes featured on the page with more expected to participate in the near future.

The CellyForward Challenge has reached over 40,000 Instagram users since its inception. Some of the top athletes involved are Nick Suzuki of the Montreal Canadiens, Aidan Dudas of the L.A. Kings and Cody Glass of the Las Vegas Golden Knights. Additional famous personalities and social media influencers who are involved are Jesse Pollock from the Candian Sports Channel The Sports Network, Canadian Tennis Star Charlotte Robillard-Millette, YouTube Hockey Spoofer On the Bench and Canadian National Athlete and Hockey Trainer Pavel Barber.



THE COMMENTATOR

The Celly Forward Challenge

MINYANIM

Continued from Page 5

be notified about when and how *minyanim* would return.

On June 4, an email notified those who signed the form that *minyanim* would begin that day; however, they were later told that the *minyanim* were delayed. The following day, another email invited those who filled out the form to join the “WH Minyanim” WhatsApp group for “information regarding *minyan* on the YU side of the heights.” The first-round of *minyanim* became available for *shacharis* (morning services) at 7 a.m. on June 5, as the New

“It's nice to have a sense of minyan back while we all have a sense of safety”

Moshe Niren (SSSB '21)

York State COVID-19 death toll continued to drop.

Some Heights residents are excited about the return of *minyanim*, but still expressed safety concerns. “I'm looking

forward to *minyanim* happening again. It's been a while and I really miss the experience of being in a community while *davening*,” said Liam Aron (YC '20), another Heights resident. “I am concerned, though, because it's very easy to cross lines when it comes to safety. If people go back to normal too quickly, that can be dangerous. The implications of it are a bit nerve-racking. However, I totally understand those who do in a safe way and am not saying if it's right or wrong.”

Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky first emailed students in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 13 that, under the guidance of Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Hershel Schachter, there would no longer be *minyanim* on YU's campuses and *batei midrash* would be closed. Since then, community leaders have banned *minyanim* and warned against presumptuously returning to prayer at the risk of endangering oneself and society.

The day following Gov. Cuomo's May announcement, 25 Long Island rabbis emailed community members that, in accordance with the Orthodox Union and Rabbinical Council of America, they would continue to postpone *minyanim* gatherings for 14 additional days. The email explained that the circumstances still warranted concern for *pikuach nefesh* (a potentially life



Minyanim at the Shenk Shul are under the direction of Rabbi Matt LeVee

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

threatening situation).

On June 6, Gov. Cuomo announced that once a New York region enters Phase II of the state's reopening plan, its places of worship can reopen with 25% occupancy and with social distancing. While the rest of the state is already entering Phase II, New

York City — which houses YU's campuses — will only begin Phase I on Monday, June 8; NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio hopes the city will enter Phase II in early July.

We Asked, Y(O)U Answered

LGBTQ+ and Ally Student Insights on the LGBTQ+ Discussion at YU

By **TEMMI LATTIN**

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

Editor's Note: The Commentator's "We Asked, Y(O)U Answered" column provides students with a forum to express their opinions and/or experiences regarding various aspects of student life. While The Commentator generally does not publish anonymous pieces, due to the sensitive nature of this piece, we have decided to publish these anonymously. The author of this piece has confirmed that all respondents are current YU student.

With the Wilf Campus [vote](#) to not pass the proposed Amendment Six, which would have added an anti-discrimination policy to the Wilf Campus Constitution, and renewed [discourse](#) surrounding Yeshiva University's options to answer the [efforts](#) of undergraduate students to obtain approval for an official LGBTQ club, this topic has been brought back to the forefront of student's minds yet again. The Commentator reached out to LGBTQ students and allies at YU to provide their insights on the amendment vote and the recent articles written surrounding this topic. Students were asked to share their identity, how they felt about the vote outcome and if they were surprised, what their thoughts were about the larger context with regards to the attempts to establish an LGBTQ club, and what message they want to tell YU undergraduate students and/or the YU administration. The responses of nine students are provided below.

Orthodox Jew and Happily Queer (SCW '20)
Major: English

"For a long time, I told myself that any YU-related problems were institutional. I liked the thought of a bold, educated student body collectively and successfully modernizing a change-resistant administration. The rejection of Amendment Six has forced me to confront the reality: that most students can't see past what affects them directly. That, of course, is why the new cafeteria plan caused an uproar, while peer-to-peer support regarding LGBTQ+ spaces on campus is still ridiculously lacking.

"Students accuse the LGBTQ+ population at YU of being too loud. I don't see loud. I see tough. I see a group of passionate students who are learning to fight for themselves, since — apparently — most of the remaining student body is willing to stand by in deafening silence.

"A recent Commentator article suggested that the YU Alliance is inappropriate because it has a 'certain sexual light,' more than other YU clubs. Please, tell me what exactly about the YU Alliance screams SEX? Is it the Chanukka party they hosted? The *shuirim* they want to have? If you want to condemn sexual activity that is prohibited by Torah law, why don't you police the Confessions page, where mentions of heterosexual intimacy run rampant? Write an article about how the Seforim Sale is a dangerous gateway to the transgression of *negiah*? We are not the ones yelling about queer sex — it is the 'concerned' individuals who continually strip queer students of our privacy and humanity with these discussions.

"The same article suggests that queer

students have 'given up' their Judaism because it's too hard to reconcile with queerness. Believe it or not, reconciliation isn't the hard part. Many of us have managed it and remain committed to Judaism. The hard part is trying to live side by side with fellow Jews who reject us. What queer Jews have to give up all too often is not their Judaism, but their place in the wider Jewish community, because many such spaces are not safe for Jews who are queer. And that is not our fault, but yours, with your condescending claims about 'the difference between love and respect.' If you can't respect me, I don't want your love.

"And to the students in YU who have gone even further into the closet because of this horrific incident and the articles surrounding it, you are not alone. I promise you, we are here and we support you."

A Queer Education Major at Stern College

"The fact that the majority of students voted against Amendment Six — and, in doing so, actively perpetuated campus-wide discrimination — is frustrating and demoralizing. As Jewish people, minorities ourselves, we benefit from anti-discrimination policies on a regular basis. Where is the empathy for others who will be — and are — similarly subject to prejudice and hate? If this is the direction of campus culture, I worry for current and future students."

Ally, He/him (YC '21)
Major: Psychology

"While I never expected the amendment to reach the 65% threshold necessary to pass, I was quite shocked at just how many students were comfortable with protecting their 'right to discriminate.' The hateful rhetoric circulating in WhatsApp groups prior to the vote was particularly disturbing to watch unfold, and I don't understand how a population of students supposedly committed to Torah values can twist those values into justifying such hate, bullying and discrimination. Furthermore, to have certain people tell me they voted against the amendment because of 'redundancies between Title IX and this amendment' or because it 'limits

already limited student government power' is so intellectually dishonest, if not covering up for homophobia. Title IX is meant to protect students from discrimination, but YU has failed to enforce it in regards to LGBTQ students. The description of the Yeshiva Student Union (YSU), a branch of the Wilf student government, states that 'YSU board aims to serve all groups within Yeshiva University fairly.' However, the student government has not sought to treat LGBTQ students fairly. Their responsibility is not to the *rosh yeshiva* who people have been claiming will leave if an LGBTQ club is instituted, or to the outside pressures of the administration.

Their responsibility is to the students, and they have woefully failed in that so far. Yet the student body wants such students to be discriminated against which is empowering the student government to do so, which is frightening and sad to witness.

"The YU Alliance club isn't about *halakha*, it isn't about the *roshei yeshiva*. It's about protecting the emotional wellbeing of LGBTQ students at YU, and helping them to feel safe and fit in. The opposition to it is only succeeding in sending a message that students either don't care about these students' wellbeing or that they don't want them to fit in and feel safe at YU. I hope that in the future, students, administrators and *roshei yeshiva* can all recognize that preventing the establishment of a club is directly damaging to LGBTQ students, and they can prioritize *pikuach nefesh*, equality and empathy over discrimination."

Ally, She/her (SCW '20)
Major: Jewish Education

"I was honestly horrified to hear the results of the Amendment Six vote. I understand the desire to preserve *halakha*. I also understand that this is a matter of *pikuach nefesh*. Multiple [studies](#) in the United States and abroad have shown 'disproportionately high rates of suicidal behavior among LGBT adolescents and young adults.' All of my religious friends who have come out to me revealed that they struggled with depression and suicidal thoughts. How could you not, in a community that literally believes you have no place there? In a community that wishes you didn't exist? That's what this vote showed me. It showed me that 60% of the Wilf student population wishes that religious LGBT students did not exist on 'their' campus. That more than half of the people you pass in the caf or sit next to in the library don't believe their peers should be allowed to have a safe haven of a loving community, which is crucial for their mental health. Rather, they should remain underground or insolation, hidden — out of sight and out of mind. That is scary and sad, because it puts lives at risk. This club is not about promoting the violation of breaking *halakha*. This club is about one of the strongest principles of *halakha* — the sanctity of life, *pikuach nefesh*. It makes me wonder; if before people voted, did they consider 'will this action bring myself, and those struggling, and this campus, closer to God, or further from God?' To me, it, unfortunately, seems they chose the latter."

Member of the LGBTQ Community, She/her (SCW '21)
Major: Psychology

Member of the LGBTQ Community, She/her (SCW '21)

Major: Psychology

"Thinking about the amendment vote, it feels like a piece of me died. The part of me that hoped and dreamed and cared about acceptance is no longer a part of me; instead I feel hardened and old. It was difficult for me to get out of bed the days surrounding the elections and I lost all motivation to get my schoolwork done. I ended up binge-watching Netflix shows, something that I rarely do, so that I didn't need to think about how unwanted I am. I am really involved on campus and I often think of YU as my home; this



LGBTQ students respond to recent events at Yeshiva University.

UNSPLASH

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LGBTQ+ STUDENT INSIGHTS,
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was a cruel reminder that this is not a space that values someone like me. Something I do often is tell myself that I belong, that I have a place in Orthodox circles; it may be naive but it is much easier than facing the hate. The results of the elections was a reality check that I didn't want to face.

"On top of all that, the recent article, 'The Seventh Option: A Nuanced Approach to the LGBT Debate on Campus,' encourages YU to show unconditional love to queer students but not acceptance or respect. If you are not going to respect or accept me, why in heaven's name do you think I want your love? What is love going to do? Is it going to stop my community from forcing me out? Do you think your love is going to convince me to stay? Your love is not unconditional; it is literally built on conditions, and I cannot understand why you think I would listen to your conditions if you don't show me basic acceptance. I don't think people realize how painful it is to treat my existence as a sin when I am someone who values Torah and *halakha* and I don't know what I'm doing that's different from a straight person. Orthodoxy is my home, yet I now need to face the fact that I am not welcome. All I can say is I'm glad that we are not on campus right now because I don't think I can face people knowing that a significant number of my peers are in favor of discriminating against me."

Gay (YC '20)

Major: Biology

"Fear. Anger. Confusion. Frustration. Isolation. These are all just some of the emotions I felt as my phone slipped out of my hands when the results of the current YU election came in around midnight of May 8. As a gay student in YC on the cusp of graduation, I thought I would be able to follow through with one of my favorite life mottos that my grandfather always makes us chant as we would leave a campsite: 'Always leave something better than when you found it.'

"When I first arrived at YU several years ago I was terrified, I was behind most of my friends who had just spent a year in Israel and who already had a newly established friend group, I still wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my life and I was still struggling with my sexuality. The first couple of months were some of my worst; I developed severe depression, refusing to leave my dorm room and wondering if a jump from the third floor of Rubin would be enough to end it. Then I did the unthinkable, I came out to my roommate. I still remember the second Shabbos in February, having one of our typical deep Friday night conversations, and when we approached the topic of *shidduchim* I felt a knot grow in my chest, growing in weight and size, suffocating me, yelling at me to not say a word, to protect myself from the harm and retribution that would, of course, immediately follow. Then, without fully realizing it, I whispered to him from across the room that I was gay, and life went on.

"From that moment forward I learned to not be as scared of opening up to people about this aspect of my life to the point where most of my friends are aware and accepting of my orientation. This all culminated this year when my friend asked for my help in drawing up a charter to help YU become more inclusive for LGBT students. This was one of the brightest days of my life, working with the students and administration to help make YU a better place for all. Unfortunately, this didn't pan out as intended, but I thought that groundwork is there, there are students

who care, there are administrators who care, there is hope for a brighter tomorrow.

"That all came crashing down on May 8, after a member of the Canvassing Committee weaponized an anti-discrimination clause to spread homophobia, and after a student council president backed this weaponization and others took the original message further by drafting an amendment that would make others feel safe and protected into an end-all doomsday scenario. And no one said a word. No administrator took a stand to denounce the blatant hatred, the Canvassing Committee did not care about the action of one of their own.

"So how do I feel? Why would I tell an

"What queer Jews have to give up all too often is not their Judaism, but their place in the wider Jewish community, because many such spaces are not safe for Jews who are queer."

A Queer English Major at Stern College

institution how I feel when they clearly do not care?

"To my fellow YU students, you don't get to let us be loved by the Jewish community but forbid us to find love on our own, that is not your choice. I am someone who lives and breathes the many shades of grey that surround us, that are the backbone of our day to day lives, understanding that the world is full of compromises. But telling someone that they do not deserve happiness, to find love, to have a family, to grow old with someone, saying that they are forbidden from having the same happiness as everyone else so you, a straight cisgender person, can feel better about yourself is nothing more than a pat on the back as you step on the backs of the same LGBT students you claim to love. To have a relationship that thrives and could blossom into a beautiful family tree takes time, commitment, communication and compromise. But no one should have to compromise whose arms they find that love and happiness in."

A Halakhically Committed Jew Who is an Ally (SCW '21)

Major: Biology

"I think the situation at hand as a result of the vote is disheartening. It is obvious that the amendment was rejected because it had the potential to punish those who discriminate against people who identify as part of the LGBTQ community. While I understand that there are *halakhic* issues with the sexual acts of homosexuality, voting 'yes' to Amendment Six doesn't condone the sexual behavior, nor does it pave the way for it to be condoned. The Anti-Discrimination Amendment policy advocates for the Wilf Campus' student government to be a place where all people feel welcome regardless of 'race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, etc.'

"It pains me tremendously to see people who are gay rejected from the community that they so badly want to be accepted into and be a part of because of who they love. I wonder what those students who voted 'no' would do if their son, daughter, brother or sister came out to them as gay? Would they exclude and reject their relatives from the family out of religious zealotry? I'm not sure. I don't think the *halakhic* details are taught to 'flipped out' yeshiva students who have been taught (or pressured to think for fear of not being 'frum') include that gay people

do not have a place in the Jewish community. The gay people who I know in the YU community are committed to Torah and are more learned than I am as a straight female. They struggle with their love of *Halakhic* Judaism and being gay and it's painful for me to see my friends and others struggle with this constantly. I completely understand YU's fear of pushing the envelope, and I think we should remain an institution that values *halakha* wholeheartedly, but I think we need to empathize with each other in a less narrow-minded way, and voting 'yes' to Amendment Six would have made YU a more welcoming place in a *halakhically* upheld way."

Bisexual, He/they (SCW '20)

Major: English

"As an outgoing student, I'm very worried about what the rejection of Amendment Six means for the future LGBTQ students of YU. It signals to me a shift in the mindset of the student body from a tacit, silent disapproval of people like us to a more outspoken one. I will do all I can as an alumnus to help the students still there and those who have not yet been to campus, and I implore everyone who cares about the wellbeing, mental and physical, of their LGBTQ friends to do as much as possible, even without Amendment Six, to let the voice of acceptance and progress drown out the already blaring one of disapproval.

"There's a lot of posturing I see from people on and off campus — especially in Commentator think pieces, and nearly exclusively from the side against having a Gay-Straight Alliance — that treats LGBTQ YU students as ideas, mere concepts to toy around with as the writer gazes at their own navel and postures about 'hating the sin and loving the sinner' and other such platitudes. I happen to be a human being, thank you very much, one with feelings, experiences, and thoughts. I'm not an abstract concept, a corporeal entity for you to acknowledge only when you need to flex your intellect as a cudgel against accepting other people wholeheartedly, and I would appreciate being treated like the real person I am."

Member of YU Alliance Board, Gay (YC '20)

Major: Political Science

"To say I am disappointed would not be entirely accurate. After three years on campus, I should not have expected anything else, yet somehow my optimism held out hope. Maybe it would barely scrape by, or more likely, it would be closely defeated. Yeshiva University has established in numbers that which was already widely known; YU is a community which favors discrimination over equality.

"What the amendment vote has not changed is the drive for LGBTQ equality at YU. The movement will not, and cannot be stopped, no matter how many amendment referendums fail. The opinion of non-LGBTQ YU students is completely irrelevant, both to me personally and to the movement for LGBTQ equality. The goal of this movement

is to achieve in concrete terms complete equality and freedom for LGBTQ students at YU. That goal will be achieved, eventually, with or without consent from non-LGBTQ students. Their consent (and hopefully someday, their enthusiasm) can only make the process easier for everyone.

"Pride means relieving yourself of concern over the judgments of others who do not understand you. Pride means knowing that you are worthy of respect, even when it isn't given, and demanding equality, even if it comes without respect.

"Conditioned equality is not equality at all. No one at YU has the right to control private behavior and the LGBTQ liberation movement at YU is not obliged to condemn anyone, especially not fellow LGBTQ students. The kind of scrutiny and censorship proposed in the various articles is not applied to any other YU organization, and it's obvious why."

Member of the YU Alliance Board, Queer (SCW '21)

Major: Education

"I do not feel safe in YU, now more than ever — and I've had my fair share of homophobia at this institution. I've sat through classes where professors have asked students in my class to debate whether or not LGBTQ Jews/myself should be 'allowed' in the Orthodox community. And as horrifying as that was to have to sit through that, what happened with Amendment Six was worse. 426 students voted in favor of discrimination. It is too horrific to even comprehend. And then, on top of that, to have to sit and read through discussions people are having about me and my personal life, making me feel like an 'other' or a 'problem,' is something no one should have to go through.

"To those on the Wilf Campus, please take a minute to try to understand what you have done when you voted against the anti-discrimination clause. You have made someone, who already does not feel safe or loved, feel sick to their stomach, anxious, afraid, alone, drowning, dehumanized, and hopeless. You have personally damaged someone's mental health when you voted against that amendment and when you casually expressed your opinion on someone else's life. And that person who you hurt could be someone who is very close to you.

"But you'll never know if you have hurt your sibling, your classmate, or your friend, will you? I know you would never want to hurt someone you care about. So please, think about those who you have just hurt. Think about it and make a change. Because change starts with you.

"And to the students in YU who have gone even further into the closet because of this horrific incident and the articles surrounding it, you are not alone. I promise you, we are here and we support you. There is nothing wrong with you. We love you so very much and you will make it through this. There were so many people who mourned the outcome of the Wilf Election, allies and LGBTQ individuals alike. You are valid in your feelings and you are not alone. Do you hear me? You are not alone."

Chana Weiss contributed to this story.

FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

Editor's Note: In the wake of Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm's recent passing, *The Commentator* has published accounts of reactions to the deaths of past leaders of Yeshiva.

(November 13, 1941; Volume 7 Issue 4) — Dov Ber Revel

By JULIUS ROSENTHAL AND THE
COMMENTATOR GOVERNING BOARD OF
1941-42

With the approach of Dr. Revel's Yahrzeit, the wound of grief and sorrow which we, his disciples, felt when he passed away is once

again torn open. All of the pain which that great tragedy brought with it returns in its terrible intensity.

We miss Dr. Revel. We miss his consuming devotion, his intellectual genius, his wide vision and fatherly love and guidance. The amazing role which he played in all of American Jewish life becomes increasingly

apparent with the passing of time.

Yet despite this loss we go on. We go on because above all our grief is the realization that "The righteous are called living even in death." And Dr. Bernard Revel is living: living in his accomplishments, living in the building where the very stones and mortar sing his glory praises, but most of all living in

the men whom he created. We, his students, go on, staggered by shock and sorrow, but happy in the knowledge that in living Torah-true lived we are holding aloft that flaming torch of the spirit which was the essence of the man — Dov Ber Revel.

(May 5, 1976; Volume 41 Issue 12) — Rav Delivers Belkin's Eulogy, Analyzes the True Individual

By RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK

The following are excerpts of the eulogy delivered by Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik at Dr. Belkin's funeral, April 20, 1976 in Lamport Auditorium. The excerpts were selected from a WYUR recording of the Rav's remarks at the discretion of the Editors. All errors in transcription and selection are those of the Editors. A full transcript will soon be available from the Alumni Office.

There are two books, the open book and the *Sefer Hachasum*. The two books are concerned with two different questions, the *Sefer Hagalul*, the public book, the open book asks a very simple question. What did this particular individual do? What did he accomplish for society? What are his accomplishments? The private book, the *Sefer Hachasum*, asks a very different question. It doesn't ask what did man do for society; it asks, who was he; not his accomplishments, but who was the individual himself?

The private book of Dr. Belkin remained a *Sefer Hachasum*, a sealed mysterious book. The first question of the private book is, "Who was he?", not what did he accomplish; who was he? I don't know ... I would like to use a certain verse from *Sefer D'varim*, Deuteronomy, in order to portray Dr. Belkin. It is a verse consisting of five words, but I believe those five words tell the story of Dr. Belkin.

We just read those four, ... five words in the *haggada*; "Arami ova'aid avi vayered mitzra'ima." I will interpret it in accordance with the ibn Ezra. A straying, wandering restless Aramean was my father and he went down to Egypt. Let me paraphrase this *pasuk*. A restless Lithuanian yeshiva *talmid*, student, who was my friend, Dr. Belkin. He also dreamt. He also became a visionary. Whenever I entered his room unannounced (I didn't do it frequently) I used to find him dreaming. I simply saw the dream in his eyes. His gaze used to be fixed on something far: it was something unknown, to me at least.

Now the question is, what did he dream about? He was an *arami ova'aid*, a restless Lithuanian. What did he dream about? He dreamt of a generation of young American Jews who combined the good components of both an excellent secular and Torah education. Let me tell you, Dr. Belkin's standards of *lamdus*, of halachic scholarship were very high. I repeat, he dreamt of a generation of young American Jews who would combine both an excellent Torah education with the capability of participating in the scientifically

oriented and technologically minded complex American economy.

However, Dr. Belkin, the restless spirit, the *arami ova'aid*, the restless nomad, had another dream. And this second dream was bolder, more daring than the first dream. This was his original dream. No one shared his opinion, not even people who were very close to him ... He wanted to show the Jewish, as well as the non-Jewish community that the Orthodox Jew is as capable of establishing scientific, educational institutions as the non-Jew or the secular Jew is.

He told me once, when he presented the plan of a medical school under the auspices of the Yeshiva, to an internationally known Jewish abdominal surgeon, that the latter became so indignant that he said the whole project is not only impractical, but arrogant as well. And perhaps he was right, the sur-

We promise thee that Yeshiva will be guarded by us and it will continue to be a great center of Torah. Your name will never be forgotten.

geon. It was arrogant. Well let me tell you, the restless Yeshiva student of Lithuania was indeed ... tough, tough and arrogant. However, his arrogance was translated into reality. And isn't a Jew an arrogant person, defying for thousands of years the whole world? And isn't little Israel an arrogant nation, defying the united nations of the world? ... Who was he? Answer number one: He was a restless, arrogant, impudent student from Lithuania. He dreamt of moons and suns, of heaven and earth.

Let me give you the second answer. The arrogant dreamer, the restless Yeshiva *bochur*, the *arami ova'aid*, was a great teacher, a *rosh yeshiva* ... I spent my life in teaching, I know teachers. He was a magnificent teacher. He was, perhaps, the teacher par excellence ... His disciples were the best trained boys in the yeshiva...

He always moved in a straight line. He knew neither of angles nor of curves nor of corners. His thinking was two-dimensional. His code, so to say, his coat of arms. His *lamdus*, the symbol of his *lamdus* was the geometric plane. He did not engage in so-called analysis of depth. He had no trust in the thin abstractions of three dimensional thinking. But whatever he said, it was logical, it was plain, it was understandable...

He is responsible for the fact, only he, that Yeshivas Rav Yitzchak Elchanan, now, as of today, is a great center of Torah, and that as far as the attainment of *lamdus*, good, real genuine scholarship is concerned it is the best place in the United States. You don't have

to believe me, just take a look at the young *roshei yeshivas* who sit right over there to my right. They were trained right here. They are the finest *roshei yeshivas* any institution, here or in Israel, any institution, now, at present or a hundred years ago...

Answer number two to the question who was he. He was a restless dreamer, who was an excellent teacher and who was in love with Torah. He had a romance with Torah.

Dr. Belkin was a charming person. He radiated, I'll use the Biblical expression for it, *Chaine*. *Chaine* is charm. The restless teacher, the lover of Torah, like Joseph of old, again, attracted people. He was, indeed, charming. He enchanted them with his magnetic personality even those who disagreed with him, and quite often I disagreed with him, quite often. Even those who disagreed with him succumbed to his powerful charm.

The charisma Dr. Belkin possessed was precipitated by two basic virtues. Virtue number one, let me use the Biblical expression for it, he was a *baal chesed*, he was a man of lovingkindness. He was a kind person. And let me say his kindness was not due to character weakness. Sometimes people are kind because they are weak, or character softness. Sometimes people are kind because they are soft. Dr. Belkin was not a weak person. He was tough, I said before, and firm. He was a man who exercised power and he liked power. He practiced what the Talmud calls *gemilus chasadim bimamono ubigufo*. Kindness as far as money is concerned and kindness as far as physical efforts are concerned. If there was a person who was not appreciated by his own friends, this was Dr. Belkin. He was the most unappreciated restless dreamer, an excellent teacher and kind person. The most unappreciated in the world...

... I'll tell you something. He was, and this will come as a surprise to many of you in the hall, he was a saintly person. He possessed saintliness. I don't say holiness, I say saintliness. Kindness alone does not generate or precipitate charismatic *chaine*, unless it is tightly knit with saintliness. And Dr. Belkin was a saintly person. And I understand if you ask me in what manner, in what respect, did he manifest saintliness, I'll tell you. He felt it in four respects.

First, he was a *sonah betza*, he hated gain. You know the Biblical expression *sonah betza*, to hate gain, to hate profit, to hate money. The saintly person is a *sonah betza*.

And, Dr. Belkin while he knew the importance of money as far as the institution was concerned, he had no concept of, he had no desire for money as far as he himself was concerned ... He died a poor man. He died a poor man because he was a saintly man. He was a saintly man because he was a great man, and he died a great man. He simply was a *sonah betza* who raised so much money, who was a wizard, a wizard as a fund solicitor...

Dr. Belkin was a saintly person for a different reason. Dr. Belkin lived a simple life. It's very hard to find people nowadays who are satisfied with a simple life, plain simple life. Dr. Belkin lived a simple life because he was a simple man. A great man, but a simple man... There was a streak of asceticism in him, a streak of *prisha min hachayim*. He lived not to enjoy life, because he hardly enjoyed it, but to create, to serve and to sacrifice and to die on the altar of Torah. He had saintliness. He could live a life stripped of all manner of frills and petty, petty enjoyments. He hated the formalities. I know that some people misinterpreted, misunderstood it. He hated the formalities and the protocol and the public etiquette even though from time to time he had to go through it. But he never enjoyed it...

Dr. Belkin was a saintly man for a third reason. He had, what shall I say? I'll use the Hebrew term, a *lashon nikiah*, a dignified speech. Judaism has always emphasized the significance of the word. The latter, if uttered with dignity and sanctity may create a world. The latter, the word uttered with vulgarity, may destroy a world. Dr. Belkin's speech was clean and dignified. I've never heard him malign anybody, ANYBODY, or make some derogatory remarks about people. Enemies, who indeed wanted to destroy him, physically and spiritually, he never said a bad word about them.

He was also a saintly person in his relationship to *Yisroel*. Dr. Belkin knew how to accept suffering; he suffered with dignity. Dr. Belkin knew, as I said, to suffer, how to meet crisis and how to confront disaster. He never complained. He never asked any questions. He never engaged in self-righteous monologues. *Vayidom Aharon*, and Aaron said nothing. A great man, a saintly man says nothing. He was silent, Dr. Belkin. A saintly man must possess the heroic quality of being mute at a time when one is ready to talk...

... We prayed for miracles. Apparently we were unworthy of a miracle, it happened. We ask just, we bid you farewell. *Lech Lishalom, visanuach bikaitz hayamim kechol chai*. We promise thee that Yeshiva will be guarded by us and it will continue to be a great center of Torah. Your name will never be forgotten.

(April 28, 1993; Volume 58 Issue 12) — “Only the Rav Could be Maspid the Rav”

By RABBI DR. NORMAN LAMM

This selection is an excerpt from Rabbi Lamm's hesped delivered at Sunday's azkara.

"Sar V'Gadol nafal hayom b'yisroel- sar hatorah v'gadol Yisrael"

Surely, such a prince and such a giant, who became a legend in his own lifetime, deserves an appropriate eulogy.

I therefore begin with a confession. I feel uncomfortable and totally inadequate in the role of a maspid for my rebbe, the Rav. Only one person could possibly have done justice to this task, and that is — the Rav himself; everyone and anyone else remains a maspid shelo kihalacha ... Nevertheless, we owe it to him to try our best. And so I ask you — and his — forgiveness at the very outset.

His genius was recognized while he was still in the crib. At age 6, his father had hired a melamed to come to the house to teach him ... At the age of ten, he presented his father with his written chidushei torah. His father was so impressed that he showed them to his father, Rav Chaim Brisker, who was so impressed that he sent it to his dayan, Rav Simcha Zelig. And, of course, he prophesied greatness for his precocious grandson.

The Rav's development continued unimpeded and fulfilled and exceeded the hopes of father and grandfather...

His most characteristic form of analysis in his philosophic essays and oral discourses was the setting up of topological conflicts, of theoretical antithesis: Adam I and Adam II; Ish ha-Halakha and Ish ha-Elohim; the covenant of fate and the covenant of destiny; majesty and humility... And ultimately, conflict and dissonance make for alienation and loneliness.

He saw not wholeness but conflict, chaos, and confrontation in the very warp and woof of life. Man was constantly beset by a torn soul and a shattered spirit, by painful paradoxes, bedeviled by dualities and each day was forced to make choices, often fateful ones, in the confrontation of savage contraries, of the jarring clash of claims and counterclaims in both conception and conduct.

Permit me to relate a story that I have told elsewhere as well. It was my second year in his shiur, and I was intimidated and in awe of him as was every other talmid — that is, almost everyone else. There was one student, the youngest and one of the brightest who was clearly the least frightened or awed. The Rav had been developing one line of thought for two or three weeks, when this talmid casually said, “but Rebbe, the *Chidushei HaRan* says such and such which contradicts your whole *svara*.” The Rav was stunned, held his head in his hands for three agonizingly long minutes while all of us were silent, then pulled a sheaf of papers from his breast pocket, crossed out page after page, said that we should forget everything that he had said, and announced that the shiur was over and that he would see us the next day.

I learned two things from this remarkable episode. First, we were overwhelmed by his astounding intellectual honesty. With his mind, he could easily have wormed out of the situation, manipulated a text here and a thought there, maybe insulted the *chutzpidik*

talmid, and rescued his theory and ego. But the Rav did nothing of the sort! He taught by example the overarching goal of all talmud Torah as the search for Truth. *Bakashat ha-Emet* was of the essence of his activity in Torah, and we witnessed it in action. He encouraged independent thinking by his pupils as a way to ensure his own search for the truth of Torah. The Rav was authoritative but not authoritarian. No *mussar shmues* could have so successfully inculcated in us respect for the truth at all costs.

The second lesson came with the anti-climax to the story. The very next day, it was a Wednesday, the Rav walked into class with a broad, happy grin on his face, held out his copy of the *Chidushei HaRan*, and said to

forth new and exciting words. He combined preparation and openness, determination and freedom, the fixed and the fluid. What a master pedagogue!

Above all, the Rav was a man of independence. He was a true heir of his great-grandfather, R. Hayyim Volozhiner, who held that in talmud Torah one must go after the truth no matter who stands in your way; respect no person and accept no authority but your own healthy reason. So, the Rav was his own man, and often went against the grain of accepted truths and conventional opinion. Once, after a particular original shiur, a stranger who was not used to such unusual independent creativity, asked him, “But Rabbi Soloveitchik, what is your

seriously, not as an inconsequential academic flirtation or a superficial cultural ornamentation, or as a way of impressing benighted and naive American Jewish students who did not know better. There is no doubt where his priorities lay — obviously, in Torah — but he did not regard Mada as a BeDi'eved or a de facto compromise. The Rav Believed that the great thinkers of mankind had truths to teach to all of us, truths which were not necessarily invalid or unimportant because they derived from non-sacred sources. Moreover, the language of philosophy was for him the way that the ideas and ideals of Torah can best be communicated to cultured people, it is Torah expressed universally; and he held as well that his philosophic studies helped him enormously in the formulation of halakhic ideas.

The Rav had no use for the currently popular transcendent parochialism that considers whole areas of human knowledge and creativity as outside the pale. We must guard, therefore, against any revisionism, any attempts to misinterpret the Rav's work in both worlds — akin to the distortion that has been perpetrated on ideas of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch. The Rav was not a lamdan who happened to have and use a smattering of general culture and he was certainly not a philosopher who happened to be a talmid chacham. He was who he was, and he was not a simple man. We must accept him on his terms, as a highly complicated, profound, and broad-minded personality, and we must be thankful for him. Certain burgeoning revisionism may well attempt to disguise and distort the Rav's uniqueness by trivializing one or the other aspect of his rich personality and work, but they must be confronted at once...

But the most important to us — his students and their students and thousands who came under his or his students' influence — is what he meant to us as our Rebbe.

Despite the austere majesty and the irrepressible dynamism of his shiurim, and despite the fear of coming to a class of the Rav unprepared, we intuitively knew that we had a friend — a father, an older brother — in him. We invited him to our weddings, and later to our children's weddings and he came. We consulted him on our personal as well as rabbinic problems and he listened and advised. We presented our sh'eilot and he taught us “*et ha-derech asher yelchu bam.*”

He exerted a powerful emotional pull on his students. I know so many, each of whom secretly (and sometimes not so secretly) knows that he was the Rav's favorite disciple! Who knows? — perhaps all were, and then again, perhaps none was. He so profoundly affected the lives of so many of us — in the thousands — and yet remains somewhat remote, because hardly a one fully encompasses all of his diverse areas of expertise, let alone the acuity of his intellect. Those who were his talmidim in halakha generally were not fully informed or sensitive to his *machshava*, and those who considered themselves his disciples in philosophy hardly appreciated his *geonut* in halakha. So, he had many students, and no students ... But cannot the same be said of the Rambam — some of whose students followed his halakha, and some his philosophy, and very few, if any at all, both?

Attending his class, I always felt, was like being present at the moment of creation, like witnessing the act of ma'aseh bereishit in all its raw and primordial drama, as conceptual galaxies emerged from the chaos of kushiyot, as mountains collided and separated ... as finally, a clear and pellucid light shone upon us, bringing forth new and exciting words.

the talmid, “Here — now read it correctly!” The Rav had been right all along.

What we learned was a secret of his greatness and success as a teacher, namely, his attention to preparation. He always thought that there was a vast difference between his formal *drashot* and his shiurim in class. The former were finished, polished, conceptually and erratically complete products, a joy to behold, each of them a marvel of architectural. The shiurim he gave in class were of an altogether different genre. They were dynamic and stormy, as formulated ideas, experimenting with a variety of *sevarot*, testing, advocating and discarding, proving and disproving, as he brought us into his circle of creativity and forced us to think as he thinks, and thus learning his methodology in practice. A shiur by the Rav was always a no-holds-barred contest, a halakhic free-for-all, and open-ended process instead of a predetermined lecture.

Well, this incident proved otherwise. The Rav actually pulled out of his breast pocket his hand-written notes for this shiur! We were confounded: It was all prepared in advance! Yet his greatness was that, on the one hand, he prepared assiduously for every shiur, leaving as little as possible to chance. On the other hand, despite this careful preparation, the shiur indeed was open-ended because he listened carefully to any serious challenge by even the youngest of his students and was ready to concede and error. And all through this, so successful was he in engaging us in the act of creation, that we never realized that he had thought it all out ahead of time! Attending his class, I always felt, was like being present at the moment of creation, like witnessing the act of ma'aseh bereishit in all its raw and primordial drama, as conceptual galaxies emerged from the chaos of *kushiyot*, as mountains collided and separated ... as finally, a clear and pellucid light shone upon us, bringing

source?” He answered, “a clear and logical mind...”

He was an independent thinker not only in his Halakha and his philosophy but also in his communal leadership. He had great respect for some of his peers — eminent Rabbanim and Roshei Yeshivot of the generation — but he did not allow that respect to intimidate him ... He was not afraid to be in the minority, and refused to be cowed by pressure of the majority. He was horrified by extremism and overzealousness as well as superficiality and phoniness in communal policy-making almost as much as he contemptuously dismissed them in “learning.” And if he sometimes seemed to waver in setting policy or rendering a decision in communal matters, it was because he saw all sides of an argument and was loathe to offend or hurt even ideological opponents.

Thus, for instance, almost alone contemporary gedolei torah, he viewed the emergence of the State of Israel as a divine chesed; he saw its appearance as opening a new chapter in Jewish history, one in which we enter the world stage once again. He was not afraid — despite the opinions of the majority of Roshei Yeshiva and his own distinguished family members — to identify with the goals and aspirations of religious Zionism.

Perhaps the most significant area where he diverged from other gedolim and followed an independent way was with regard to *limudei chol*, to Torah U'Mada. The Rav was an intellectual colossus astride the various continents of human intellectual achievement and all forms of Jewish thought. Culturally and psychologically, as well as intellectually, this made him a loner amongst the halakhic authorities of this century. How many gedolim in the world, after all, have read Greek philosophy in Greek and the Vatican's document on the Jews in Latin? A Ph.D. from the University of Berlin in mathematics and especially philosophy, he took these disciplined

In Memoriam of Rabbi Lamm



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Editor's Note: To honor the memory of Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, The Commentator reached out to prominent members of the Yeshiva University community to share their personal reflections of Rabbi Lamm's life and work. Yehi Zichro Baruch.

Rabbi Yosef Blau

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm hired me to become *mashgiach* at Yeshiva one year after assuming the presidency of Yeshiva University and RIETS. I will focus my recollections on his critical role in saving and expanding Yeshiva.

Rabbi Lamm was the first American-born leader and graduate of Yeshiva to become its president. He inherited an institution on the verge of bankruptcy and whose rabbinical leadership was European. Though his rabbinical experience had not required significant fundraising, Rabbi Lamm quickly learned a new skill and enabled Yeshiva to survive.

Balancing the Yeshiva and the University was an ongoing challenge. Rabbi Dr. Lamm was a Talmudic scholar who had the respect of the *roshei yeshiva* and guided the yeshiva through the transition after the Rav stopped teaching. He turned the slogan "Torah Umadda" into a coherent philosophy with a number of modalities.

At the same time he was able to give direction to the university, including its secular graduate schools. The pressures of the job were endless and criticism came from both the right and the left. The term "Centrist Orthodoxy," which he introduced, reflected his personal commitment to the golden mean of the Rambam. As an outstanding orator and writer, Rabbi Lamm's unique skill set, which was critical to his success as a pulpit rabbi, had to be translated to his role as Yeshiva president. Rabbi Lamm played a historic role in the resurgence of Orthodoxy in America and the world. Without his efforts Yeshiva might not exist today and Orthodox Judaism would not enjoy the respect and prominence he helped it achieve.

Rabbi Shalom Carmy

"Tell me, Shalom, how long have we known each other?" So began my last serious conversation with Rabbi Lamm. And I told him that long before we met, he had sent me a note about something I had written in a student newspaper, ending with an expression of interest in my future as a thinker and writer. At the time he served at a prominent synagogue and taught in what today is IBC on Monday mornings. I was a teenager without any YU connections. Although he then had no official position at YU, he took on the responsibility of identifying and encouraging young talent.

Rabbi Lamm excelled in many different areas. Had he done nothing else, he would still have been a leading Orthodox intellectual force. He once defined the educational ideal as a person at home in traditional Jewish learning, academic Jewish research, humanistic study and the natural sciences. He was thinking of the Rav but could have been describing his own enormous breadth of interest and curiosity. Thanks to his range of reading and mastery of spoken and written language, he succeeded more than almost anyone else, in communicating serious ideas to varied audiences, from the *beit midrash* and intellectual circles to lay people and individuals somewhat at a distance from intense religious life. Add to this a pleasing personality, an elegant, civilized manner of speech and the ability to inspire like-minded individuals to seek and follow his leadership.

A skeptic like me may wonder whether this was too good to be true. I suspect that those of us who interacted with Rabbi Lamm only intellectually, or rabbinically, or administratively, will have difficulty grasping the multiple talents and accomplishments of the man. And in that division of eulogistic responsibility, I see myself consigned to the intellectual-philosophical box. It may take a great deal of research and review to properly assess and to celebrate this extraordinary combination of talent and hard work over a long and adventurous lifetime. All the same, the obligation of eulogy cannot be deferred and we who benefited from his works and labors must shoulder the responsibility.

B'nei Torah, and especially those who study and teach at our Yeshiva, are grateful for Rabbi Lamm's willingness to bear the burden of the YU Presidency and leadership of the Yeshiva. At best this work is back-breaking, often heart-breaking and, for a person who knows the pleasures and fulfillment of learning Torah or even the enjoyment of other studies, it can be deadly dull. In the good years, Rabbi Lamm once told me, over 60% of his time was consumed in fundraising; when I repeated this comment to someone in the know, I was told that 60% was an underestimate and the president was probably sparing

"[Rabbi Lamm] once defined the educational ideal as a person at home in traditional Jewish learning, academic Jewish research, humanistic study and the natural sciences. He was thinking of the Rav but could have been describing his own enormous breadth of interest and curiosity."

Rabbi Shalom Carmy

my feelings. From occasions when he assigned me to converse with potential non-Orthodox donors I "[Rabbi Lamm] once defined the educational ideal as a person at home in traditional Jewish learning, academic Jewish research, humanistic study and the natural sciences. He was thinking of the Rav but could have been describing his own enormous breadth of interest and curiosity."

could infer how much patience, charm and sheer expenditure of time it took to gain support from people who had their own ideas about education, religion and life, or those who didn't have such ideas. Can you imagine a major *talmid hakham*, a creative mind, eager to leave his imprint on the institution he loved, to found journals like *Tradition*, organize the Orthodox Forum, build a religious-intellectual edifice, discovering that school on the brink of bankruptcy? Can you imagine the five years of unrelenting pressure during which vision and initiative were subordinated to stubborn perseverance and endless solicitation?

There will, I hope, be other opportunities to discuss Rabbi Lamm's legacy as a thinker and *lamdan* and shaper of opinion. In speaking to you, to the *talmidim*, most of whom did not experience him during his 27 years as President, who did not enjoy his *shiur kelali* and are not aware of the subtle skills that enabled him, together with Rabbi Charlop, to navigate the Yeshiva in the 1980s when it became clear that the Rav's days were numbered, I want to go back to the beginning. Despite, or perhaps because, Rabbi Lamm had a healthy estimation of his gifts and his mission, he was a team player. Though he could easily and honestly have blamed others for bad decisions and outcomes, he chose not to do so. For a man saddled with the burdens of running a large, complicated school, with unrelenting demands on his time, he was remarkably accessible to students. He continued to keep his eye open for young talent. We are his beneficiaries beyond what many of us can imagine.

Yehi Zichro Baruch

Rabbi Carmy is an assistant professor of Jewish philosophy and Bible at Yeshiva University. He was the editor of Tradition, a journal founded by Rabbi Lamm.



Rabbi Berman and Rabbi Lamm

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Rabbi Saul Berman

Rabbi Norman Lamm, Z"l, was the most successful leader of integrated American Orthodoxy in the second half of the 20th century. In that period, most Orthodox Jewish leaders were devoted to the successful transplantation of European Orthodoxy to the United States, sustaining the generally separatist character and authoritarian Jewish communal characteristics of their Orthodox forbearers in Europe.

Rabbi Lamm set out to form an Orthodoxy for American Jewry which would have a distinctive set of values, more consistent with the character of American democratic society, in which this new Jewish Orthodox community could flourish with total integrity to halakha.

There were four fundamental values, which I believe Rabbi Lamm viewed as essential Jewish values, which he consciously and systematically attempted to implant in The Jewish Center, as its rabbi, and in Yeshiva University, as its third president, and in the Modern Orthodox community, as its leading spokesman.

1. Tolerance: Rabbi Lamm viewed tolerance of all Jews, including the varied denominations, as an essential manifestation of the Torah mandate to love all Jews. He therefore viewed individual and institutional collaboration with all other Jews as spiritually vital and practically essential endeavors.

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In Memoriam of Rabbi Lamm

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2. Persuasion: In contrast to the authoritarian orientation of some rabbinic leaders in the Orthodox community, Rabbi Lamm believed that Torah was persuasive when presented appropriately and that therefore, the approach to all Jews in matters of belief and halakha and public policy, was to explain how and why the position of Torah was the best that could be adopted. He never expected everyone to be persuaded, but he knew that people would respect the position that was argued intelligently and respectfully.

3. Meaning: From the time that Rabbi Lamm wrote "Hedge of Roses," through his later writings, his engagement with the ideas of Torah Umaddah was based on his belief that Torah provided a level of spiritual and ethical meaning to the life of the individual and to the character of a society, in the spirit of Maimonides and of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and the long tradition of study and teaching of *Ta'amei Hamitzvot* (the reasons of the commandments).

4. Moderation: Rabbi Lamm's insistence on the use of the term "Centrist" rather than "Modern" as the best adjective to describe his kind of Orthodoxy, was not just a public relations step. It was a manifestation of his deep conviction that the Jewish philosophical teaching of the Golden Mean, truly meant the need to avoid extremes of left and right in thought as in action. He held that even extremes in spirituality and observance were suspect as divisive, and therefore destructive to Klal Yisrael.

I believe that Rabbi Lamm impacted deeply on the integrated Orthodox community of the United States. Through his mastery of Jewish thought, his depth of halakhic knowledge and his elegance of written and oral expression, he succeeded to a substantial degree in embedding these values in his beloved synagogue and university, and in the broad Modern Orthodox community.



Richard Joel and Rabbi Lamm

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Richard M. Joel

I was privileged and intimidated to be the successor to Rabbi Lamm as YU's president. He was one of the defining giants in the blossoming of Torah Umadda, Modern Orthodoxy. In so many ways, Yeshiva University defined Dr. Lamm, and Dr. Lamm came to define Yeshiva University.

For those of us growing through adolescence in the '60s and early '70s, Rabbi Lamm's voice was clear, majestic and profound at encapsulating what we aspired to as serious Jews in the modern world. He spoke and taught with elegance and eloquence. Though a modest and private man, he had a forceful presence. He and his wife [Mindy](#) modeled a Jewish couple, appearing both warm and regal. And the Lamm children, younger con-

"Rabbi Lamm's voice was clear, majestic and profound at encapsulating what we aspired to as serious Jews in the modern world. He spoke and taught with elegance and eloquence."

—
President Emeritus Richard Joel

temporaries of mine, were all warm, outgoing and unaffected. In the family that was YU, they sat at the head of the table.

Dr. Lamm served as president for 27 years: years of growth, change and challenge. Think of America or Israel from 1975 through 2002. Dr. Lamm shepherded YU through consequential societal changes, social and religious challenges and financial stresses. YU added a law school, many new programs, explosive growth in *shana b'arets* programs (fueled by YU), and so much more. Thousands of alumni received an education and a lifelong community on his watch. I was elected president in December of 2002. He supported my candidacy, even though I was not the model he expected. During the interregnum, when I would spend three days a week on campus, he oriented me in many ways. I joined his cabinet meetings; we would have lunch once a week, and I think he was checking me out (properly). When he became chancellor, he would attend all my cabinet meetings, welcomed me in every way, and would have lunch with me in his office weekly or biweekly. He made it clear he would offer any advice I asked of him, on the condition that I felt free to not accept it.

We had delightful times together. We spoke of Torah, academic issues, Jewish life issues, hopes and fears, and family dynamics. (Mrs. Lamm reached out to my wife Esther and they built a lovely relationship.) I trusted him completely, and he let me know him. In the last several years, our contacts were fewer. We loved when the Lamms would join us for celebratory dinners at our home, at our annual Rosh Yeshiva dinners, or, preciously, just the four of us. I always wanted him to know how much he meant to me and YU, and how much of what we did during my tenure was based on his hopes. His legacy is monumental — one of the giants of Jewish thought in the last 60 years. His scholarship championed our commitment to the Maimonidean ideal. He helped fashion a principled Orthodoxy of complexity, nuance and beauty, and made the education of "synthesis" we offered into a sustainable lifestyle. Of his many teachings, I so much identify him with his work *The Royal Reach*. He refers to David Hamelech, who, in Tehillim 27, had as his one wish that he could "dwell in the house of the Lord." Indeed? David was presumptuous enough to aspire to dwell with G-d? Talmudists argue the issue. David could have wished for triumph over his enemies, for honor and glory. But he dared to transcend normative aspirations, for he displayed a Royal Reach, daring for greatness, as befits a king.

President Lamm believed it was our challenge, as *b'nei Torah*, to reach high, to dream big dreams, to dare to dream as David dreamt. He deeply believed in the capacity of Jews to aspire to greatness. But not the greatness of fame or fortune; the true greatness of meaning and goodness, and closeness to G-d. He taught us to reach for a values-driven life, informed by Torah values. He knew that our Jewish story, our Torah, sacred wisdom, sense of history and destiny, and *d'veykus* to *Hashem*, enriched by Western knowledge, arts and science, was the Royal Reach that could help us build a better world. He will continue to inform our lives.

Tehei Zichro Baruch

Richard M. Joel is the president emeritus and Bravmann Family University Professor at Yeshiva University. He succeeded Dr. Lamm to the Yeshiva presidency in 2003 and served in that position until 2017.

Pearl Berger

There was an inherent dignity to Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, Z"l. He had a majesty of spirit and bearing, an aura of *kevod harav* somewhat reminiscent of European rabbis of old. Yet he was approachable and exuded warmth in his personal interactions. Notwithstanding his countless concerns and responsibilities as president of Yeshiva University, there was not a single instance that I can recall during my 35 year tenure at Yeshiva when he failed to respond to an inquiry or return a phone call.

A visitor to the presidential suite of offices at a university would not be surprised to find the president ensconced in a book-lined study. In the case of Rabbi Lamm, however, the suite was more like a mini-library, where several rooms housed shelves filled with *seforim* and books. Indeed, at one time a member of the library staff spent several days at the president's suite to help organize Dr. Lamm's "office library," so much had it grown. And these volumes were not for show, as evidenced by his many publications and by the rich content of his speeches and lectures. Torah and scholarship remained constants in

"A visitor to the presidential suite of offices at a university would not be surprised to find the president ensconced in a book-lined study. In the case of Rabbi Lamm, however, the suite was more like a mini-library, where several rooms housed shelves filled with seforim and books"

—
Pearl Berger

Rabbi Lamm's life, while he worked to achieve academic excellence and financial stability for the yeshiva and the university.

My most significant and most currently relevant interaction with Rabbi Lamm was in the creation of *Derashot Shedarashti*, the digital publication of his sermons, delivered during the rabbinical career that preceded his presidency of YU. His practice was to record the full texts of his sermons, primarily in typewritten form, and most of the sermons had formal titles. He saved these texts and after a few decades had passed, he approached me about the possibility of transferring them to CDROM. (Remember those?) We agreed instead to create a web publication.

Rabbi Lamm presented the Library with the files of his sermons, and he gave us free reign to proceed with the project. The files are currently preserved in the Rare Book Room at the Mendel Gottesman Library. When I asked him if he was concerned about his sermons being used without attribution, Rabbi Lamm thought for a moment and then responded without hesitation. He had no problem with letting people use them. That was the intention after all! As Rabbi Lamm wrote at the conclusion of his article discussing shiurim and sermons, "The end of both is and should be identical—*le'hagdil Torah u-le'haadirah*. (See "[Notes of an Unrepentant Darshan](#)") Judging by the many hundreds of hits per week soon after the website was launched, Rabbi Lamm's sermons were very much in demand. In fact, to this day, even after publication of the *Derashot Ledorot* book series and other volumes based on the website, people are still searching the Lamm Sermons website.

It was a privilege to have led Yeshiva University's Libraries during Dr. Lamm's presidency and to have enjoyed his confidence.

Yehi zichro baruch.

Pearl Berger is the Benjamin Gottesman Librarian and Dean of Libraries, Retired.

My Three Graduations: Coronavirus Silverlinings

By YEHUDA GOLDFEDER

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on June 18

Graduation is an important part of the college experience. It provides closure, an opportunity to reflect and a chance to say goodbye. I'd been looking forward to my ceremony since arriving at Yeshiva University, and when the coronavirus pandemic hit and resulted in the prospect of a traditional graduation being canceled, I was devastated. When it was officially announced in March that the commencement was not going to be in person due to a ban on large gatherings, it seemed unlikely that I would be able to get a satisfying feeling of closure to my college years, especially because many of my closest friends lived so far away.

I was very vocal about the need to have a satisfying ceremony to provide that closure and as a result of my advocacy, I was added to a committee consisting of a fine group of student leaders. We had two meetings over Zoom, but I was unsure how successful the endeavor was. We were assured that the commencement would be more than just a Zoom session, which is how the award

ceremony was conducted a month prior to graduation. Still, going into the week leading up to graduation, I did not have the highest of hopes that my time at YU, a very special time in my life, would have a satisfying conclusion. I found that I was very wrong.

In fact, I was fortunate to have not one but three graduation ceremonies. The first was a complete surprise. My family members, spearheaded by my cousin, got together and

gowns and many relatives who couldn't make it called in to say hi, including my brother in Israel, even though it was 3 a.m. for him. Feeling comforted that I would at least have this wonderful graduation, I no longer pinned all my hopes on the YU graduation.

But that wasn't all. On this past *Motzei Shabbos*, the night before graduation, I was informed of an impromptu gradua-

tion ceremony being planned by Associate Dean for Torah Studies Shoshana Shechter, Dean of Students Chaim Nissel and Senior Director of Student Life Josh Weisberg for all graduates in the Monsey area. They realized that there is a high concentration of YU students and faculty in their neighborhood,

which prompted an opportunity for a small, socially-distant gathering. We had a front lawn celebration with 10 graduates, and I got to march, throw my cap in the air, celebrate with friends, as well as receive a celebratory fake diploma from a dean. It was a uniquely touching experience and I give my warmest thanks to all those who planned it and made it possible.

Enough with my personal experience. All this led up to the virtual graduation that YU planned for all graduates, regardless of location. Despite my initial doubts, I was blown away by what YU provided under the circumstances. The ceremony was truly amazing, proving to be both personal and meaningful, and the afterparty was also a lot of fun. It was great to see, at least virtually, friends and peers celebrating our success together for one last time.

Sure, 2020 has been and will continue to be a challenging year, but we can also try to see the silver linings. Commencement may not have been in Madison Square Garden, but it was something amazing and unforgettable. As I say goodbye to my time at YU, to the great friends I've made along the way, I am thankful that I was able to have a commencement, special in its own way. I hope we can all stay in touch.

Commencement may not have been in Madison Square Garden, but it was something amazing and unforgettable. As I say goodbye to my time at YU, to the great friends I've made along the way, I am thankful that I was able to have a commencement, special in its own way.

planned a surprise party for me — socially-distant of course. My parents told me I had a package outside, so I followed them out. I was met with blaring music and shouts of Mazal Tov as I was thrown into a cap and gown and marched around my front lawn. Several people were dressed in makeshift

tion ceremony being planned by Associate Dean for Torah Studies Shoshana Shechter, Dean of Students Chaim Nissel and Senior Director of Student Life Josh Weisberg for all graduates in the Monsey area. They realized that there is a high concentration of YU students and faculty in their neighborhood,

A Language Ignored for So Long Finally Heard

By JOSH LEICHTER

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

One of the most iconic and well-known phrases in all of American political thought comes from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Over the past two weeks, a question I can't help but ask is: To whom are these truths self-evident? If these truths that Thomas Jefferson asserted were so self-evident, George Floyd would have gone home on May 25 and would not have been senselessly murdered by a police officer. Jefferson was no prophet, but for the past 244 years, America has been sold the lie that our society is one that is equal and just. If this were the case, there would be no need to continue to march for the rights of African Americans. If this was truly fact, as we are often told by socially ignorant politicians on both sides of the political spectrum of our government, why was Ahmaud Arbery murdered on the streets of Georgia?

The obvious answer is that we have been well aware that the fight for the basic civil rights of people of color has been going on for centuries, and despite the freedoms that Abraham Lincoln laid out with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, the job was far from complete. Following the declaration, African Americans were emancipated and freed from the bondage of slavery, yet they were never integrated into society. Had Lincoln not been assassinated, perhaps

history would have played out differently. Yet, largely left to their own devices, the Southern States never did their part, nor did any president for nearly 100 years. There was and has continued to be unequal treatment of minorities throughout this country, and at some point, enough has to be enough.

47 years ago, Martin Luther King Jr. stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial and shared his dream of a nation that was equal and ceased to judge based on skin color, yet we are here now, and the dream is still a dream. The progress we have made is far from enough for us to resume the slumber. If the dream were to at long last be a reality, there would no longer be murders driven by racism, and there would be no need to remind people that black lives matter because it would finally be as self-evident as Jefferson claimed from the moment he put ink to paper to ring in the ears of all future citizens of this country.

When it comes to this subject, we should not and cannot allow ourselves to fall into the traps that come with the partisan politics of today's day and age. These are people's lives that are being fought for; it is the prevention of further death and suffering in a community already subjected to failing school systems and forgotten public programs. The fact that there is even a need for debate about how to

solve this issue should be mind-boggling to any open-minded individual. After all, this is not something that deserves to be bogged down in parliamentary disputes or shelved by politicians who shrug with indifference. These are not numbers of the coming year's budgetary allocations nor are they simply homicide statistics; they are real people with names and families like all of us. To do anything less than putting forth policies that provide helpful solutions to the issue

would be spitting in the eye of the grieving families of the deceased.

This is not to say that murder will cease to exist; yet when those who are doing the killing are the very same individuals that took an oath to serve and protect their communities, it is necessary to call for changes to be made in a rational and sensible way. At the same time, the groups of rioters — whose sole contribution to the protests is by bringing violence and property damage to various communities — ought to be denounced wholeheartedly for poisoning the sea of change with their selfishness. To juxtapose their actions with those of the peaceful protesters would be doing a disservice to the true meaning of the movement and causes us to lose focus on the issues that warrant our attention. These are issues our government has ignored for far too long. To continue on this path can only lead to further tragedy. And haven't we seen far too much of that lately?

After all, this is not something that deserves to be bogged down in parliamentary disputes or shelved by politicians who shrug with indifference. These are not numbers of the coming year's budgetary allocations nor are they simply homicide statistics, they are real people with names and families like all of us.



A Black Lives Matter protest

WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

Coronavirus vs. Student Justices: An Appreciation of Wilf Campus Student Court

By DAVID TANNER

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on May 18

As this most unusual of semesters comes to a close, I follow outgoing Commentator Editor-in-Chief Avi Hirsch's lead of [looking retrospectively](#) at the past academic year. But instead of examining the Yeshiva University administration, I'd like to focus on a subject perhaps less exciting, but no less significant: the Wilf Campus Student Court.

The first time I ever heard of the Student Court came in the form of an email from Chief Justice Phil Dolitsky this past January. The case revolved around the vacancy of the [Yeshiva Student Union \(YSU\) presidency](#), but more interesting to me was the newfound knowledge that we even *had* a student court to begin with. As it was my first semester at YU, I had little knowledge of the Wilf Student Government structure, and I naively thought that any dispute or need for clarification of the Wilf Student Constitution was dealt with by the YU administration. How wrong I was.

In that first decision of the 2019-2020 academic year, the chief justice and his colleagues displayed their *modus operandi* for the year to come. Though the court recognized that the question was moot, seeing as the legal challenge to Zach Greenberg's ascension to the YSU presidency had been removed, it took the case as an opportunity to highlight the inadequacies of the Wilf Student Constitution. Rather than simply reject the petition due to the accepted suggestion of mootness, the court's justices

highlighted the legal flaws inherent in the student government's governing document, thereby galvanizing student leaders to revise the constitution, which [passed](#) in the recent election.

The bulk of the remaining caseload for the student court this semester consisted of sometimes contentious electoral questions, starting with the challenge of attempting to pass an early constitutional amendment that would lower the required number of signatures for student government candidates. I saw this as my chance to play a role in the judicial process and submitted a brief to the court based on my reading of the constitution. Though my claim was ultimately overruled with the court's unanimous decision that the early passage of an amend-

get tough, the tough do indeed get going." This, to me, showed the student court in its full glory: justice with empathy, pertinacity with encouragement.

Some have criticized the student court's "unchecked power," but every legislative branch needs a judiciary counterpart, every constitution an unquestionable interpreter. The constitution ensures that justices may use their office with discretion by providing guidelines for the removal of any justice and requiring a new court to be selected each academic year, as seen in Article XI, Sections 1(4) and 1(3), respectively. The court, therefore, remains an independent yet accountable institution, one which the leaders of the student government revitalize each year as Wilf Campus' undergraduate

both occasions. But in spite of the dissension, the court maintained its poise and civility throughout. In the chief justice's recent [dissent](#) (the first of this academic year), he, joined by Justice Stern, withheld no punches, calling the majority opinion a "grievous error" and bringing to mind the scathing tone of late U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonin Scalia (invoked by name in the first sentence of the dissent). However, the (as-of-yet) sole dissent of this year's student court teaches a lesson no number of unanimous opinions could, one we would be prudent to take with us: Disagreement need not engender disrespect. I've often admired Android's motto: "Be together, not the same," and a crucial aspect of "being together" is treating differences of opinion with respect, civility and decorum.

The Wilf Student Court has modeled dependability in a time of instability and good humor in a time when disagreements over key issues divide and sometimes polarize the student body. I thank Chief Justice Phillip Dolitsky, Associate Justices Jacob Stern, Bryan Lavi, Avraham Sosnowik, Aryeh Burg, and Justice Pro Tempore Jacob Friedman for showing the student body that disagreement need not result in hostility. With their conduct, they have echoed the words of wisdom in Mishlei 8:20 by "lead[ing men] in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice."

The Wilf Student Court has modeled dependability in a time of instability and good humor in a time when disagreements over key issues divide and sometimes polarize the student body.

ment was unconstitutional, I felt satisfied knowing that Chief Justice Dolitsky and his colleagues had spent time considering the arguments for and against, analyzing the constitution, and arriving at a ruling based on democratic principles. The court also bolstered my spirits when, in inimitable fashion, Chief Justice Dolitsky concluded, "We recognize these times [of off-campus elections due to COVID-19] are unique and challenging. But the Yeshiva University community is a strong community. Over the past few weeks, it has shown that when the going

student body's sole judiciary authority.

Unfortunately, the remaining cases before the student court, both those it declined to hear and those it ruled on, took a more divisive turn, focusing largely on the eligibility of students for student government candidacy. What remained constant, however, was the court's calm, steady leadership in times of turmoil. The last two cases brought an unexpected twist: Instead of the unanimity the court enjoyed in its previous decisions, these resulted in 3-2 splits with Chief Justice Dolitsky in the minority on



The Sixth Option: A Response to Michael Broyde

BY DONIEL WEINREICH

I am in no way remotely qualified to dispute Prof. Broyde on matters of law, nor do I intend to. However, much of Broyde's [analysis](#) hinges on assumptions about Yeshiva University's history, mission and culture, as well as the reality on the ground today. As a current YU student directly involved in the push for an LGBTQ club, as well as an [amateur YU historian](#), I feel very comfortable questioning his understanding in these areas.

Broyde would have you believe that the current conflict over an LGBTQ club at YU is the result of changing demographics of YU students. With admissions no longer limited to the strictly Orthodox and yeshiva-oriented, an influx of bare-headed, Sabbath-violating students have infiltrated and are trying to bring their secular agenda to undermine the religious character of the institution.

This characterization is dubious in two ways. First, historically, it is not so simple to claim there are a greater number of non-observant students than there were previously. Broyde claims that there are now "a greater variety of programs for both men and women that are not classical text study." I can only assume — at least when it comes to the men — that he is referring to the Isaac Breuer College (IBC) and the James Striar School (JSS), the two morning programs that are based in academic Judaic classes rather than traditional *beis medrash* learning. IBC, however, evolved from the Teacher Institute, which has existed since even before Yeshiva College, and while the program has changed significantly over the past century, it was always an alternative to learning in the traditional yeshiva and was perceived as less religious. JSS was started as the Jewish Studies Program (JSP) back in 1956, years before YU's charter was secularized. But this didn't stop students from [being worried](#) that "the introduction of irreligious boys on campus will take away from the Yeshiva atmosphere," according to The Commentator at the time.

It's also difficult to argue that religious observance has waned. Dr. Haym Soloveitchik [recalls](#) that in the early '60s, hardly any students attended *minyan*, and the *beis medrash* was empty at night. Or let's look more recently to 1989 — back when the

LGBTQ clubs that existed in Einstein and Cardozo were unimaginable in undergrad — when there was major controversy over the widespread lack of Shabbat observance in the dormitory.

Broyde claims that YU's undergraduate schools "employed tight admission standards that selected only students who were deeply interested in an Orthodox life and lifestyle in a gender-separated institution." This doesn't seem to jibe with the reality that as far back as 1972, a [Commentator survey](#) of 502 students (about half the student body) indicated that 53% wanted Yeshiva College to become coed. The same survey indicated that 13% of students did not consider themselves observant Jews. Similar surveys did not have more encouraging results. A 1960 [survey](#) by two sociology students indicated that 8% of RIETS did not consider themselves Orthodox, 46% participated in mixed dances and 18.5% would "go further than kissing a girl." The numbers in the Teachers Institute were about double, and 45% of them said they either violated the Sabbath, ate non-kosher food or shaved with a razor.

Contrast this with the data from the most recent [Commentator survey](#), where only 5% of students said they mostly do not observe

that the complaint with the New York City Commission on Human Rights is "coordinated and not coincidental, as is noted in many places."

I'm not sure where this is noted (Broyde neglects to specify in his 26 footnotes), but as the one who submitted the initial complaint in February and spoke to the investigator afterward, I can assure him that this was done on my initiative and was coordinated with no one other than the six other LGBTQ and allied students who make up the board of the YU Alliance. I can further assure him that I meet any standard for "traditionally Orthodox," and no one who knows me would dispute my commitment to Modern Orthodox ideals.

What Broyde seems to not understand is that the push for an LGBTQ club has arisen from firmly within the Modern Orthodox community. His frequent insinuations that tightening enrollment policies could counteract the demand are nonsensical. This movement is being pushed by graduates of yeshiva high schools and yeshivas/seminaries in Israel. Many of the advocates spend large parts of their free time learning Torah and attend *minyan* diligently. Of course, not all fit into these categories, but no superficial

on campus for all students, of all sexual orientations and gender identities, to feel respected, visible, and represented.

Conversation is at the heart of our community, in order to foster awareness and sensitivity to the unique experiences of being a LGBTQ+ person in YU and the Orthodox community, and to advocate for their unconditional tolerance and acceptance...

Where do they ask YU to recognize same-sex relations as consistent with Jewish law? What about this mission constitutes conduct inconsistent with Jewish law? Are supportive spaces for the vulnerable *assur*? Or is it sensitivity and communal acceptance of individuals that are proscribed?

I know Broyde doesn't believe this to be the case. His own short [essay](#) on the topic says otherwise, as does the [Statement of Principles](#) he cites.

In fact, based on Broyde's essay, I would think he would be in complete agreement with the Alliance's mission. He writes "Homosexual individuals within our community regularly experience anguish, suppression, and depression, sometimes to the extent of self-endangerment. These cases deserve our empathy and understanding, albeit not to the point of any compromise in our commitment to halacha and our belief in free will." Regarding communal toleration and acceptance, he says, "Even as *halacha* clearly labels the act a sin, Judaism does not seek to label the actors as evildoers whom we must shun. The halachic tradition has a longstanding policy of diverse attitudes to transgressors, and only in the most rare of circumstances does it mandate excluding people from the community, especially for wrongdoing that does not explicitly harm others."

You might think Broyde believes that nonetheless, public identity and expression as LGBTQ constitutes some sort of breach. But this is not the case either. He notes, "*Halacha* condemns homosexual acts, but the phenomenon of 'Orthodox homosexuals' does not represent a major threat to the integrity of our community. Ultimately, we are afraid that disproportionate condemnation of this phenomenon gives unproductive focus to a red herring, leading to inappropriate responses to individual struggles and distracting us from the central problems truly plaguing our community."

I agree, and I fear both Broyde and YU have fallen into this trap.

Neither Broyde nor any YU administrator has adequately justified how the LGBTQ club students have been advocating for is in opposition to any of YU's principles. What about the club is so threatening that YU should seriously consider relocating, radically restructuring, or even closing? What is the "emotional appeal" of YU's president becoming a "prisoner of conscience" over this? Is refusal to provide recognition or support for LGBTQ constituents such a fundamental principle of Modern Orthodoxy? Is the past Broyde describes where LGBTQ students "stayed deeply in the closet, either due to their own choices or due to communal pressure (or both)" an ideal to which we aspire?

I understand that many are uncomfortable with the fact that this issue is now subject to secular legal action. The community of LGBTQ students and allies at YU is too. This was a last resort. It only arrived after years of being strung along and lied to by an obstinate administration. After hours of meetings with administrators "behind the scenes" to discuss how to do this in a way agreeable to everyone. After following all the rules and

There's nothing wrong according to Jewish law with a club for the expression and support of LGBTQ students. No part of YU's mission or values mean that LGBTQ students must continue to live in shame, fear or silence.

halacha, while 22% identified as Yeshivish.

None of these examples are to nitpick details of Broyde's narrative or to make grand claims about a shift in the religious orientation of YU students. Quite the opposite. An analysis of that would require much more rigor than a newspaper article could provide. It should merely be noted that simplistic historical narratives are almost always much more complicated at best, if not outright inaccurate.

The far bigger issue with Broyde's characterization of the situation is how he understands the present. Broyde seems to indicate that the movement for an LGBTQ club at YU is being brought about by students who are "not traditionally Orthodox" and who are a "bad fit for the religious mission of the undergraduate college." He further claims

winning will be effective in eliminating LGBTQ students and advocates.

Likewise, the idea that raising "the threshold of student signatures needed to form a social club to such a high number so as to reduce the likelihood of such a club being able to be formed" would have no effect. This semester, when the YU Alliance applied for club status, it submitted triple the necessary number of signatures, and more could have been acquired if necessary. A further [petition](#) by the Jewish Activism Club received 57 signatures just from student leaders.

As Broyde notes, the Modern Orthodox community has become much more sympathetic to the LGBTQ community in recent years. Few can even write about the issue without paying lip-service to how [empathetic](#) they are, though our author has managed. While very few deny the existence of certain practical prohibitions, they are no longer seen as obstacles to communal acceptance of LGBTQ people or their social support. The Modern Orthodox community has become further acquainted with the LGBTQ experience and have realized how intensely vulnerable LGBTQ Jews — especially adolescents and young adults — are and how imperative their expression and social support is to alleviating this.

Which brings us to the assumption underlying Broyde's entire analysis and all of his suggested responses: that an LGBTQ club must be ideologically opposed by a Modern Orthodox institution.

But why?

Broyde asserts that "Yeshiva simply cannot view same-sex relations as consistent with Jewish law as it understands it." But who ever asked them to? Broyde implies that "allow[ing] such clubs to open" would "permit students to conduct themselves in a manner not consistent with Jewish law." But how?

The YU Alliance's mission statement states:

The Yeshiva University Alliance is a group of undergraduate YU students hoping to provide a supportive space



THE YU ALLIANCE

The Seventh Option: A Nuanced Approach to the LGBT Debate on Campus

By YEHUDA DOV REISS

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

The Commentator recently published an [article](#) by Rabbi Michael Broyde, explaining five legal strategies Yeshiva University could employ to avoid allowing an undergraduate LGBT club. In response, Doniel Weinreich (YC '20) wrote about a "sixth option," claiming that an LGBT club, and in particular, the Pride Alliance, would not undermine YU's core values and in fact would further them, and urged YU to ratify the club. Rabbi Broyde clarified that for the sake of the article's main purpose, he took for granted YU's current stance — right or wrong — that an LGBT club would be inconsistent with its values and would not be allowed.

After reading both articles, one gets the impression that these are the only six options (or really two options: full acceptance of the club or full rejection); I think that a significant portion of the student body feels that is not the case. We acknowledge the needs of the LGBT community emphasized by Weinreich while also fearing that allowing the club as it is presently contemplated would not be the right approach for navigating the *halakhic* nuances involved (this will be elaborated on shortly). As such, we feel that YU must look to a seventh option: innovative solutions that will best navigate this tension (which will also be elaborated upon shortly).

In his article, Weinreich argues that the Torah's value of humanity would warrant complete acceptance of LGBT members of the Jewish community and that this does not necessitate a communal condonation of sin. While it is true that the Torah mandates love and — to a certain extent — respect towards all, and it is also true that having such attitudes towards LGBT members of our community do not necessitate condonation of sin if executed properly, I found the phrasing and proposed execution of his thesis dangerously ambiguous. He fails to explicitly condemn forbidden relationships or acknowledge any practical limits of acceptance of these relationships, and instead merely asserts that he doesn't seek to reconcile same-sex relations with Jewish law. Given the social reality that LGBT activism and clubs generally imply such relationships, he seems to imply that we can successfully embrace and respect all aspects of the lives of LGBT individuals, including any sinful activities, while somehow still condemning the sin. This becomes evident multiple times throughout the article, where Weinreich had the perfect opportunity to express something along the lines of "The Pride Alliance condemns same-sex relations and solely addresses the emotional and social issues facing Orthodox Jews struggling with sexual orientation or gender identity." Instead he says:

Broyde asserts that "Yeshiva simply cannot view same-sex relations as consistent with Jewish law as it understands it." But who ever asked them to? Broyde implies that "allow[ing] such clubs to open" would "permit students to conduct themselves in a manner not consistent with Jewish law." But how?

The YU Alliance's mission statement states: "The Yeshiva University Alliance is a group of undergraduate YU students hoping to provide a supportive space on campus for all students, of all sexual orientations and gender identities, to feel respected, visible, and represented. Conversation is at the heart of our community, in order to foster awareness and sensitivity to the unique experiences of being a LGBTQ+ person in YU and the Orthodox community, and to advocate for their unconditional tolerance and acceptance..."

Where do they ask YU to recognize same-sex relations as consistent with Jewish law? What about this mission constitutes conduct inconsistent with Jewish law? Are supportive spaces for the vulnerable *assur*? Or is it sensitivity and communal acceptance of individuals that are proscribed?

Weinreich's only statements against same-sex relations are in the realm of theory: We acknowledge Jewish law forbids this, and we're not advocating to change that.

However, this being the sole defense against a societal reality where LGBT advocates demand total acceptance, one gets at least the vague impression that the Pride Alliance demands complete acceptance even where people aren't following Torah law, even if they believe in the theory of the law. While some may argue that it is unfair to ask proponents of an LGBT club to explicitly disassociate the club from sinful activity since other co-ed clubs are not asked to explicitly disassociate themselves from the promotion of premarital relations, this is not a valid comparison; unlike other clubs, there is a strong societal context surrounding LGBT clubs in general that clearly puts it in a certain sexual light, unless otherwise clarified.

If this is indeed what Weinreich was proposing, then the thesis is simply contradictory. To show acceptance of sin while simultaneously condemning it is superficial and insincere. *Halakha* mandates complete condemnation of sin, not only on a theoretical level, but a practical one, as well.

We can — and very likely must — show our unconditional love for every member of the community and respect where they are coming from while remaining firm in our refusal to show respect for their sins.

To properly understand this point, I would like to return once more to the broader issues at hand. It is true that mainstream Orthodox theology does not look down upon people with sinful desires, and being homosexual or struggling with gender identity should not be a reason for stigmatization. However, a community's attitude towards homosexual or transgender people who act on their desires is not as straightforward. Weinreich cites Rabbi Broyde as pointing out that

Even as *Halakha* clearly labels the act a sin, Judaism does not seek to label the actors as evildoers whom we must shun. The halakhic tradition has a longstanding policy of diverse attitudes to transgressors, and only in the most rare of circumstances does it mandate excluding people from the community, especially for wrongdoing that does not explicitly harm others.

This may be true, but it has always been up to the rabbinic leaders' assessment of the individual situation to determine the correct approach. Even if the rabbinic leaders of our community ultimately decide that communal exclusion is not necessary or effective, to completely destigmatize active sinners may be seen as practically condoning them,

a step which I doubt our leaders would deem appropriate. Furthermore, even to the extent that we might include them in our communities, it would seem to be clear that we **cannot show acceptance** of their sins in any form. Thus, while ambiguous in Weinreich's article, we cannot as an Orthodox community attend the weddings of or wish *Mazel Tov* to a same-sex couple. The practical parameters of avoiding signs of acceptance are so extensive that, practically speaking, they must be stigmatized to an extent.

What we can do is accept their struggles and desires, and offer unconditional love. Love is different from acceptance in that we can show zero respect or tolerance for one's behavior — it may at times even be painful — while simultaneously caring for that person as a fellow Jew and wanting that they should be happy, successful and overcome their inclinations towards any inappropriate behaviors. We can — and very likely must — show our unconditional love for every member of the community and respect where they are coming from while remaining firm in our refusal to show respect for their sins, analogous to a loving family with a member who has left the fold.

There are many great crises facing Modern Orthodoxy today, but one of the greatest is self-doubt. Some have been led to believe that living a fully committed Orthodox life just isn't feasible anymore; we have to make a compromise here and there. This has happened many times before in our history, and each time it ultimately leads to a complete turn away from Orthodoxy. We believe the Torah is immutable and must be fully upheld in every generation. After reading Weinreich's piece, one gets the vague impression that members of the Pride Alliance have given up. They want to be fully Orthodox Jews, but they believe that in the area of Torah-prohibited sexuality — while they acknowledge it's wrong — it's just too difficult for them. Whether or not this is ever made explicit in the activities of the Pride Alliance is not entirely relevant. The mere fact that they leave their conduct open to this interpretation is reason enough why the Pride Alliance is inconsistent with the core values of Yeshiva. We must unambiguously affirm our commitment to not only believing in, but practicing all of the *mitzvos*, and cannot be seen to condone anything less.

Thus, something like the Pride Alliance, with the proper nuance, is indeed feasible; there is a Seventh Option. With careful oversight, the administration could fashion a club where the goals and expectations are unambiguously understood, where the struggles and well-being of each individual are clearly supported while sin is clearly condemned. This can be accomplished by appointing a trusted committee of organizers, supervisors and moderators, perhaps consisting of faculty, and with oversight from RIETS *roshei yeshiva*. Additionally, we can do more to inform the whole student body about the difference between love and respect, and show every individual that they are members of our nation's

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Zysman Hall on the Wilf Campus

Reflections on the Elections from a Disheartened Member of the Canvassing Committee

By CJ GLICKSMAN

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on June 13

I hope that I do not sound too caustic or abrasive, but I write this out of anger and frustration. My three years at Yeshiva University have been the most valuable years of my life. I have learned a lot and grown tremendously. This institution has given me more than I can put into words. However, in just one week, I've grown terribly disheartened by what I've seen happening "on campus."

Election season seems to have truly brought out the worst in people. I'm a member of the Canvassing Committee. I was behind the scenes, watching dozens of Student Court lawsuits filed both against and by candidates, each more contentious than the last. I saw dirty campaigning and anonymously authored ballot suggestions claiming to speak for the yeshiva. I saw textbook cyber-bullying, with some candidates receiving aggressive, unsolicited phone

calls and texts from unknown numbers, saying things like "I did not vote for you," or "You are not my president." I was put over the edge, however, when I heard an undergraduate student say, in jest, that he "wishes death" upon a particular member of the undergraduate community because of a proposed amendment to the Wilf Student Constitution supporting anti-discrimination.

parsha about the severity of *onaat d'varim*, verbal harassment, and we read in the weekly *parsha* only two weeks ago the unambiguous phrase, "*v'ahavta l'reyacha kamocha*," love your neighbor like yourself. How could someone in good conscience defend the unjust and hurtful treatment of others on any grounds?

The importance of condemning poor

discriminatory person, because I don't believe this to be true, nor do I think it would be productive to try and change anyone's mind on how they voted. However, I sincerely hope, and believe, that there isn't anyone on our campus who can honestly attempt to religiously justify discriminating based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity. If I am wrong, our community is truly headed to a dark place.

I am only able to speak for myself, but I urge any student who agrees that we cannot tolerate spiteful rhetoric or hurtful actions to please make your voice heard. I don't tolerate discrimination of any kind. I don't tolerate bullying. I don't tolerate "wishing death" upon any member of the YU community in order to make my friends laugh. Unfortunately, the message that the Wilf Campus student body has been sending in recent weeks has been quite the opposite. Please, if you agree with me, say something. Let people know that this is not who we are as a yeshiva, university, or community.

What has become of the undergraduate body of Wilf Campus? Is this Lord of the Flies? Do we condone bad-mouthing? Outright bullying? Using public platforms to defame our peers and arrogantly tout our self-righteous behavior under the guise of religious zealotry?

What has become of the undergraduate body of Wilf Campus? Is this *Lord of the Flies*? Do we condone bad-mouthing? Outright bullying? Using public platforms to defame our peers and arrogantly tout our self-righteous behavior under the guise of religious zealotry? We read in this week's

treatment of others is also directly relevant to our attitude towards discrimination. As a community, we should be uncontroversially and unequivocally opposed to discriminatory words or actions of any nature. This should not be construed as implying that by voting no to Amendment Six one is, de-facto, a

What Should Have Been: On Graduating During Coronavirus

By ELAZAR KRAUSZ

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on June 13

It was the final session of my playwriting class with Professor Blatner and — as I had the previous few weeks — I sat by my desk in my childhood bedroom and stared at the grid of rectangular video feeds that now constitute a classroom. There's a certain intimacy to sharing your creative work that had, over the semester, turned this disparate group of classmates into friends. Now, as the minutes of our final class ticked away, I had to say goodbye.

Goodbyes are not the same over Zoom. Like all my classes this semester, when my playwriting class came to a close, there were

no "bro hugs," there was no "see you around" — only internet lag, squinting at pixelated figures and the abrupt jolt back into solitude that accompanies the "leave meeting" button. Over the Zoom chat, a friend messaged me, "I think I'm going to cry."

For many, the coronavirus pandemic and the accompanying cancellation of in-person classes are a strange intermission to their college experience. They await the return to campus, the return to normalcy. For me and the rest of the class of 2020, though, it is not a disruption but an unceremonious termination. Our entire college experience, three or four of the most formative years of our lives, have come to an end over video-conference. Goodbyes are never easy, but they shouldn't be this hard.

The coronavirus pandemic has ravaged

the world. It has uprooted the economy and taken the lives of countless innocent victims. It is easy to try to minimize our disappoint-

staring into the camera and tossing my cap into my parents' ceiling, in front of the only white wall I could find. These are the particu-

"For me and the rest of the class of 2020, though, it is not a disruption but an unceremonious termination. Our entire college experience, three or four of the most formative years of our lives, have come to an end over videoconference. Goodbyes are never easy, but they shouldn't be this hard."

ment by putting our own situations into a wider perspective. After all, how bad is a Zoom graduation when people are dying all around us? But as attractive as that outlook may be, it isn't fair to our own experience. We deserve to acknowledge that, quite frankly, graduating from college in the midst of a global pandemic sucks.

I'm over 1,500 miles away from most of the friends I made during my three years at YU, and I have no idea when I'll see them again. I have a vacant Heights apartment full of clothing, books, and furniture, and I don't know how I'll retrieve my belongings before my lease is up. I'm graduating with no real plans for the future, into an economy that's ground to a halt, where job prospects seem slimmer than ever. Instead of throwing my cap into the air at Madison Square Garden, I'll get to watch a video clip of me awkwardly

lars of my situation, but the experience is a shared one. The class of 2020 is not getting the send-off it deserves.

My mother works as a therapist, and she tells me that a lot of her clients are feeling a similar sense of loss right now. "There's a lot of grief," she says, "from canceled graduations to weddings, people are mourning the loss of what was supposed to be." So I'll fight the impulse to end this piece on a happy note, because this isn't a happy time for anyone. The class of 2020 has worked incredibly hard to finish our undergraduate education, devoting years of our lives to our studies. We deserve to be able to acknowledge our losses without feeling selfish or tone-deaf, and recognize that we don't have to be okay with the way our senior year has turned out. Right now, we deserve to be able to mourn.



PIXABAY

SEVENTH OPTION
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family, such as through the vehicles of *sichos mussar*, Yeshiva-wide events and other forms of clear and direct communication. We

can, with a little effort, innovation and attention to nuance, resolve this crisis once and for all and satisfy every reasonable individual.

We just have to choose the Seventh Option.

Letters To the Editor

A Clarification

By MICHAEL J. BROYDE

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on May 12, before the publication of "The Sixth Option: A Response to Michael Broyde."

To the Editor,

In light of some of the feedback I have received on my most recent article, "The Ghosts Have Become Alive," I would like to provide a clarification:

Over the years, the leadership of Yeshiva University has made it clear that they viewed the formation of an LGBTQ student group or club of the type sought now as incompatible with YU's core mission. My article was premised on that view, as it is the position of YU's leadership. **Whether this view is correct is a different conversation which I did not have in this article and which I am not having now.** Furthermore, from my perspective, YU is free to reconsider its view. The article aimed to provide a legal analysis of YU's various options given the pending case mentioned in the article. I had no intent to discuss what YU's religious agenda should be.

Of course, I very much empathize with and do not wish to minimize the pain felt by the LGBTQ members of YU (and in general), both as a community and as individuals. I have been and continue to be a staunch defender of civil rights for the LGBTQ community for 30 years (you can see this in my article in Jewish Action from 1993 entitled "Bullets that Kill on the Rebound: Discrimination Against Homosexuals and Orthodox Public Policy" which advocated extending civil rights protections to the LGBTQ community, and the [response](#) to it by Rabbis Marc Angel, Hillel Goldberg and Pinchas Stolper, as well as the 2019 [blog post](#) linked to in this article). My more thorough analysis of the relevant halakhic issues can be found [here](#).

The article aimed to provide a legal analysis of YU's various options given the pending case mentioned in the article. I had no intent to discuss what YU's religious agenda should be.

But this was not the focus of the article. The focus of the article was YU's legal structure.

Michael J. Broyde

Enough with the Status Quo — A Response to "The Seventh Option"

By NATAN PITTINSKY

Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on June 24

To the Editor,

There exists a major issue at Yeshiva University in the rhetoric and actions surrounding the creation of an LGBTQ club. While many will make some statement declaring empathy for the struggles of LGBTQ individuals, that nominal declaration is constantly undermined by the actions of the administration and the obstinance of the student body to entertain the idea of implementing a club. Administrators may pay lip service to be empathetic, yet are unwilling to take any action which actually supports and protects the LGBTQ community at YU. Individuals may claim to "listen" to LGBTQ students, yet are not willing to provide them with a platform from which to speak.

In the last few years, student leaders worked tirelessly to meet the administration's conditions and desires for an LGBTQ club, only to have their requests denied and rejected. Gestures made by administrators to hold meetings appear empty when ultimately nothing results from them. President Berman even [said in December of 2018](#) that the decision about such issues should be left up to the students, yet when a few weeks later [student leaders](#) were in the process of approving a Gay-Straight Alliance club the administration took the decision out of their hands and rejected it. This year, there was a student-led initiative to put up [safe-space stickers](#) in the counseling center, a necessary space for LGBTQ students to feel comfortable and safe while discussing issues relating to their mental health and identity, yet even that was denied. Meetings between YU Pride Alliance leaders and [roshei yeshiva](#) this year have been ineffective, and in one case, students were even presented offensive ideas about how conversion therapy can work for some individuals, rather than a genuine discussion as to in what form a club could exist. The trend and message are clear: Decision-makers at YU have demonstrated that they are either unwilling or unable to truly hear the pain of their LGBTQ students.

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Shallow Understanding from People of Good Will

By MICAH PAVA

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Recently, The Commentator published an opinions piece, titled "A Language Ignored for So Long Finally Heard," in which its author, speaking about the fight for racial equality, writes "when it comes to this subject we should not and cannot allow ourselves to fall into the traps that come with the partisan politics of today's day and age." Although I am hesitant to pick out the words of a single student at our university for criticism, given that this is the only article The Commentator has published on the wave of anti-racist activism currently taking place in this country and the world over, I feel it is necessary to dispute several assertions made in this article.

Although it is convenient to say that partisan politics is irrelevant when making the call for "rational and sensible" change, I find it difficult to avoid the fact that white supremacy in America exists at a systemic level and any call for change — whether it be for specific police reforms, a more generalized defunding or even wholesale abolition of the police force — must be enacted through legislation driven by political will. It is readily apparent that many politicians are incapable of providing any meaningful change; one such example that quickly comes to my mind is President Donald Trump, who has publicly [promoted police brutality](#) and [encouraged the use of lethal force](#) in response to recent looting. Although I risk "falling into the trap of partisan politics," I would argue that a necessary step towards a more just society would be to engage in political activism and vote with one's conscience in November, if one is truly committed to an anti-racist agenda.

"A Language Ignored" concludes with the statement that "the groups of rioters — whose sole contribution to the protests is by bringing violence and property damage to various communities — ought to be denounced wholeheartedly for poisoning the sea of change with their selfishness." It may be easy for those of us sitting in a position of privilege to condemn the violent riots we see on the news while still making calls for some nebulous notion of change and posting our black squares on Instagram in an empty gesture of solidarity that verges on self-parody, but it is possible that many of the conversations and actions currently taking place would not be happening without the sense of urgency created by forms of disobedience that are less than civil. At the same time, one should acknowledge that the [aggressive actions of a militarized police force](#) are an important contributing factor to recent [escalations in violence](#) and the increasingly blurry distinction between protest and riot. Regardless, in condemning violent reactions to a system of oppression, one propagates a narrative that downplays the gravity of the black community's grievances and ignores the fact that far more is at stake than property destroyed. This is not an endorsement of violence; however, I encourage my fellow students to reflect upon their own commitments to nonviolence and recognize that these commitments are often suspended when the safety of one's own body is compromised.

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In conclusion, I turn to the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Although he wrote this statement in a larger discussion about nonviolent forms of direct action, his words nonetheless address the problem inherent in the kinds of judgment made in "A Language Unheard" and challenges the prerogative of outside observers to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable forms of outrage:

"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection."

[Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#), April 16, 1963.

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A significant portion of the student body on the Wilf Campus also seems to hold similar beliefs, given the [messages](#) that were spread in WhatsApp groups prior to the spring elections, in addition to the [results](#) of the Amendment Six vote itself. This was further demonstrated by a recent article in The Commentator by Yehuda Dov Reiss called “The Seventh Option: A Nuanced Approach to the LGBT Debate on Campus.” Despite it attempting to directly respond to ideas presented by Doniel Weinreich in his article, “The Sixth Option: A Response to Michael Broyde,” Reiss’ article still fails to actually address the issues at play and

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instead uses straw man arguments, in addition to false assertions and homophobic notions, to strongly oppose the institution of the YU Pride Alliance as currently called for.

Reiss’ article falls into the same trap which Weinreich notes that Broyde and the YU administration fell into, where they assume that the YU Pride Alliance would be an inherent violation of *halakha* without legitimately explaining how that is the case. Reiss demonstrates this with two instances of straw man arguments, stating that “Weinreich argues that the Torah’s value of humanity would warrant complete acceptance of LGBT members of the Jewish community and that this does not necessitate a communal condonation of sin” and then later stating that Weinreich “fails to explicitly condemn forbidden relationships... and instead merely asserts that he doesn’t seek to reconcile same-sex relations with Jewish law.” What Weinreich actually said is that “Neither Broyde nor any YU administrator has adequately justified how the LGBTQ club students have been advocating for is in opposition to any of YU’s principles.” Likewise, in Weinreich’s article, there is no mention of “seek(ing) to reconcile same-sex relations with Jewish law,” because he instead asserts that an LGBTQ club is *not* a violation of Jewish law. Reiss misses this important shift from not reconciling the *halakha*, to the *halakha* not being relevant to an LGBTQ club. He mistakenly applies his own views about how to deal with LGBTQ individuals relative to *halakha*, rather than addressing how those ideas apply to the club specifically. As such, Reiss continues a trend of simply assuming that the existence of the YU Pride Alliance would constitute a violation of Jewish law without adequately explaining why that would be the case.

Reiss’ article further misinterprets the purpose and nature of the YU Pride Alliance with statements like, “given the social reality that LGBT activism and clubs generally imply such relationships” and “one gets at

least the vague impression that the Pride Alliance demands complete acceptance even where people aren’t following Torah law, even if they believe in the theory of the law.” These claims about the club are simply not true. Does YU vet every student to make sure they are carefully following every *halakha*? It is true that the club is asking for total acceptance of LGBTQ individuals, but that has nothing to do with their choices. LGBTQ activism is about acceptance and equality of a persecuted individual so that they don’t have to live thinking that they are alone, secretly in suffering. But it seems to those critical of the YU Pride Alliance that LGBTQ identity is just about a single action. In reality, the club is about recognition of LGBTQ individuals as equal people, which is a Torah value, considering the extreme suicide risk

LGBTQ individuals are subject to when they are not seen as equals, do not feel like they fit in or are actively discriminated against. There is significant [research](#) that outlines this suicide risk and its causes, as well as further [data](#) which actually establishes how such risks are significantly lower in schools that implemented a Gay-Straight Alliance club compared to those that did not. This further establishes the implementation of an LGBTQ club as an issue that has to do with saving lives, which the author is failing to recognize.

Reiss then attempts to justify the conflation between the YU Pride Alliance and unrelated actions. He declares that “there is a strong societal context surrounding LGBT clubs in general that clearly puts it in a certain sexual light, unless otherwise clarified” to support his claim that an LGBTQ club would need to explicitly “condemn same-sex relations.” Having been involved in such activism during my time at YU, and after reading the YU Pride Alliance’s [mission statement](#) and Weinreich’s article, I can attest that the context around such clubs is a safe space where allies and LGBTQ individuals can get together for support in a space free of fear of homophobia and discrimination. There isn’t a “societal” stigma of LGBTQ clubs being rampant with or even connected to sexual behavior; this is just the stigma opponents of the YU Pride Alliance are inaccurately trying to apply to such clubs. This doesn’t amount to a reality, unless the author would go so far as to suggest that LGBTQ individuals shouldn’t be halakhically allowed to meet publicly in a group with individuals of the same sex. To treat LGBTQ individuals differently, because of a fallacious “strong societal context” the author associates with the club, would be a double standard and, frankly, homophobic. This seems to go against the author’s own point that “being homosexual or struggling with gender identity should not be a reason

for stigmatization,” yet this is what he is doing with this double standard.

Reiss goes on to make a very problematic statement about love. He says “Love is different from acceptance in that we can show zero respect or tolerance for one’s behavior... while simultaneously caring for that person as a fellow Jew and wanting that they should be happy, successful and overcome their inclinations towards any inappropriate behaviors. We can... show our unconditional love for every member of the community and respect where they are coming from while remaining firm in our refusal to show respect for their sins.” There is a huge issue here, as Reiss nominally calls for unconditional love while describing conditional love. If one — who cannot relate to the struggles of the LGBTQ community — is showing zero respect or tolerance for an individual’s behavior, they are not unconditionally loving that individual. Reiss’ definition of unconditional love does not recognize the struggles of LGBTQ individuals, but actually minimizes and disregards their experiences in a way that does not engender feelings of love but rather of persecution. To apply this notion of “unconditional” love would in actuality be loving what the individual “should be” or who the person is, independent of those actions; in other words, it would be to only love the individual contingent upon certain realities being met, which is the epitome of conditional love.

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In regards to his proposed “seventh option,” the author demonstrates a lack of understanding of what has been going on around campus. He posits that “With careful oversight, the administration could fashion a club where the goals and expectations are unambiguously understood ... This can be accomplished by appointing a trusted committee of organizers, supervisors and moderators, perhaps consisting of faculty, and with oversight from RIETS *roshei yeshiva*.” It’s incredibly ironic that the author mentioned a committee comprised of faculty members with oversight by *roshei yeshiva*, because such a committee was actually [formed](#) in September of this past year. However, the committee failed to meet in good faith with the LGBTQ community at YU all year and did not come up with any proposed solutions or actions for the community. Rather, all that they seem to have done was meet with student council presidents before their [abstention](#) regarding the vote for the LGBTQ club in the spring semester. It would be great if they were engaging in good faith discussions, but by meddling in student affairs without even having any members of the LGBTQ community present, the committee is clearly not familiar with the adage “nothing about us, without us.”

Furthermore, while Reiss neglects to specifically outline what “goals and

expectations” would need to be understood for his version of an LGBTQ club, it would appear based on his article that the specific expectations he would necessitate would fail to accomplish the goals of LGBTQ students and club advocates. The YU Pride Alliance wants to create “a supportive space on campus for all students, of all sexual orientations and gender identities, to feel respected, visible, and represented.” If an LGBTQ club comes with a specific condemnation of behavior that is not attached to any other club, then it is no longer a supportive or safe space. Discriminating against such students and extending love absent of “respect or tolerance for one’s behavior” or with “respect where they are coming from while remaining firm in our refusal to show respect for their sins” will not serve to support LGBTQ students’ emotional wellbeing or help them to fit in within YU, but will likely only ostracize them further. Reiss’ solution does not address or solve the goals of the YU Pride Alliance in any meaningful way and is another example of a failure by opponents of the YU Pride Alliance to hear what LGBTQ students need and are asking for.

In summation, there are a number of clear problems with the “Seventh Option,” despite it purporting to be a “nuanced approach.” This includes the author advocating for conditional love for LGBTQ individuals, promoting a fallacious homophobic “societal context” about LGBTQ clubs having any-

thing to do with sexual relations and calling for a seemingly novel committee to address all these issues which, in reality, was already formed and miserably failed. However, the main issue with this article, and with the actions of the administration and *roshei yeshiva*, is a failure to hear the outcries of pain and suffering by our fellow students at YU. When the issues are honestly engaged in, and we pay attention to what the LGBTQ community at YU is advocating for, one can understand that the YU Pride Alliance is not antithetical to *halakha*, rather a necessary space and forum for students which does not currently exist. What they are asking for is not unreasonable and begins to address the deep suffering of LGBTQ students at YU and within the Jewish community. The YU Pride Alliance helps those basic human needs to be met and has the ability to save lives and help students feel safe on campus. Enough with any “option” that doesn’t begin and end with such a club being established. Enough with pointless meetings and broken promises. It’s time for human decency, equality, compassion and for students’ psychological well-being to be recognized.

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doing things the “right way” [repeatedly](#), only to be rebuked or ignored. Eventually, dejected students have been forced to conclude that the administration is not acting in good faith, and that the only way change will come about is through compulsion. The

advocates have always been amenable to *p’shara* [compromise]; it is the administration who has forced us to turn to *din* [justice].

If, nonetheless, the legal predicament YU faces still disturbs you, I propose you advocate that YU take a sixth option that Broyde does not consider: recognize that the demands of the students do not conflict with YU’s mission and enthusiastically yield

to them. There’s nothing wrong according to Jewish law with a club for the expression and support of LGBTQ students. No part of YU’s mission or values mean that LGBTQ students must continue to live in shame, fear or silence. If there are stakeholders at YU who do not currently realize this, invest your efforts into convincing them rather than conceiving of complex legal and practical

strategies to enable continuing to marginalize and victimize LGBTQ Jews.

The Rav’s fears remain unrealized 50 years later. The ghosts are still dead.