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## Editorials:

### Reopening, Rethinking, Expanding: A Time For Feminist Hope In The COVID-19 Pandemic

By Fruma Landa, Editor in  
Chief

The weeks leading up to the High Holidays are usually a time of increased religious angst for me. It is a time that once again reminds me that only three *men*, men who can be peers of mine, can nullify my vows. It is a time of physical and emotional pain, spending hours trying to peer over the *mechitza* (traditional separation between men and women in synagogue) to catch a glimpse of the Torah scrolls. It is a time of discomfort, feeling the stares of people shocked to see a woman with her *arbah minim* (four ritualistic species taken together for the Jewish holiday of Sukkot) in *shul*. As a religious feminist, these are painful times. My joy and love for the holiday season is diminished as I am reminded of how much further our communities'

inclusivity needs to progress.

Aside from the angst and the pain, there are aspects of the holidays that I look forward to all year. I find contentment knowing I will not be the only woman in *shul* on time for *Shachris* (morning prayer service), and I revel in the thought of not being alone in the women's section for *Mincha* and *Maariv* (evening and night time prayer) services. It is perhaps the only time where I can count on seeing women walking to *shul* (synagogue), in addition to the men. These dialectics — my comfort in times where women take part in the communal rituals, as well as the pain stemming from the rituals that exclude me based on my gender, are hard for me to process in tandem.

In addition to this usual Orthodox feminist cognitive dissonance, this year had an added layer of complexity. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my *shul*, like many, changed their usual High Holiday protocol to safely accommodate those who want to pray. These protocols often resulted in equating many experiences of women and men. Many

*shuls* limited *aliyot* (the calling of, traditionally, an adult male to the Torah) for men on *Simchat Torah* (a Jewish holiday celebrating the Torah), a time when men often take the expectation of getting called up to the Torah for granted. While this is a result of pandemic procedures — not a theological choice — and will God-willing not be repeated next year, it is something I found myself taking comfort in. For the first time in my life, I witnessed men being excluded from communal rituals too.

During the *hoshanot* (traditional ritual where congregants often circle around holding their *arbah minim*) service, the men, like the women in many *shuls* have been doing for years, stood in their place watching as one congregant circled the *bima* (table that the Torah is rested upon during Torah reading) in the traditional *hoshanot* service. As I sat in my seat watching the *hoshanot* service, I reflected on the past year. I felt more included into the *tzibbur* (congregation) than I had the year before. Finally, I felt included, doing what the men were doing. Yet,

while I found comfort in the shared experience, I recognized that, once again, this did not come about through an ideal situation and I found myself praying that next year this ritual will be safe to do.

Over the past few months, many more men have been forced into praying alone at home, not unlike the way women have been doing for years. Men have been learning at home too, struggling to adapt to life without their *batei midrash* (communal Torah study places). For the duration of those times, I found solace in the equality of the religious experience, while struggling with the notion that this is due to limited religious rituals, something deeply painful and life altering for men used to a communal prayer and learning environment. That is not to say this wasn't painful for me too. There are things that I lost — I missed my *makom* (place) and *seforim* (Jewish books) in the Stern *beit midrash* and had to adapt to praying alone. But, there were also things I gained — I had access to many more *shiurim* (Torah lectures) happening over Zoom — lectures that as women I did not have access to while in-person.

Currently, as places of worship and Torah study, as well as YU, reopen, men are going back to taking their place in shuls and *batei midrash*, while I watch the singular few months where I felt increased levels of inclusion and solidarity, as well as the Torah learning opportunities I gained slip through my fingers.

Living in Washington Heights is especially painful. Every spare space on the Wilf Campus has been transformed into a *beit midrash* for study or *shiur* (the Torah lecture component of the UTS program for Wilf students) and many *minyanim* (communal prayer services) are scheduled to take place. Unfortunately, I am not welcome to learn in any of the Wilf *batei midrash*, a standard not upheld on the Beren campus, where I have frequently seen men learning in the Stern *beit midrash*, nor have I been guaranteed that the *minyanim* will have *mechtizot* to accommodate women.

After months without *shuls* and *batei midrash*, men too, can finally understand a little bit of the tension and struggle women face

with wanting to take part in religious rituals but not having a place to do so. I recognize that times are tough, but more is necessary to be done to ensure the inclusion of women. Right now, as we begin to reopen our YU community, we have the chance to take our past experiences and turn it into something productive — such as including women in places of prayer and Torah study. The narrative is in our hands; we can either learn and grow from our experience, or we can return to the way life was before, forgetting to look outside ourselves, losing this chance to make a difference.

## News: Closing Of Schottenstein Residence Hall On Beren Campus For Fall 2020 Semester

By Shoshanah Marcus, News Editor

*\*The YU Observer has verified that the anonymous student is a current SCW student.*

Beren Housing notified students planning on living in the Schottenstein Residence Hall via phone

or email that the hall will not open for the Fall 2020 semester. Students were notified of this decision on Friday, October 16, only a few days before the scheduled campus reopening on [October 21](#).

The email gave students planning on living in the Schottenstein Residence Hall three options on how to proceed. The first option involves each student gathering a group of classmates and being reassigned to a room in Brookdale Residence Hall. The second option is that Beren Housing will assign roommates for each student and they will be reassigned a room in Brookdale Residence Hall. The third option is that each student will be moved to a single room in 36th Street Residence Hall. Another option stated in the email suggested to students who were planning on living in the Schottenstein Residence Hall is to join a room in any residence hall with a vacancy as long as there is mutual agreement.

Some former residents commented on the last minute nature of the decision to not open the Schottenstein Residence Hall. Zippy Spanjer, SCW '21, shared with the *YU*

*Observer*, "I'm not devastated that Schottenstein won't be opening this semester, but I do wish Housing had let me know earlier than the week of move-in."

However, some students praised Beren Housing for giving students some options as to how to proceed now that the Schottenstein Residence Hall will not be open for this semester. "The school closed the dorm just days before our move in so it was pretty surprising," commented Ariella Halstuch, SCW '22. "Nevertheless, they did a great job with allowing us to quickly choose an alternative dorm and move with our friends. I think that they handled it very well."

Many former residents feel disappointed that they will not be living in Schottenstein this semester. Eliana Felder, SCW '21, stated, "I've lived in Schottenstein for the last two years and I was disappointed to hear that they were not opening it for this semester. In a way that those who have lived there may understand, Schottenstein has become my safe space and home away from home, and now I will need

to start anew in a fresh place. I do admit that housing was very kind in dealing with the closure, and they personally called me to give me my other dorming options and make sure that there was something else I was happy with. I'll be living in IHP in 251 Lex and while I'm nervous for the change, I am also looking forward to something new."

Other former residents found the communication with Beren Housing to be lacking, and some even opted to withdraw from housing as a result. "I'm a senior here at Stern (Class of 2021) and the school was unavailable for comment through the weeks of uncertainty after moving the move-in date. They weren't able to answer phones or emails," explained an anonymous student. "The only time I heard from [Beren Housing] was when Schottenstein was announced to be closed, and that was because they called me to tell me I needed alternate housing for the coming semester. My family and I lost confidence in the reopening because we were left hanging and without answers or even a channel to ask our questions. It's unfair to

expect students to make decisions so quickly without even the courtesy of responding to their questions. I have withdrawn from housing for the semester, which wouldn't have happened if I wasn't ignored for so many weeks."

Beren Housing shared with the *YU Observer* the following statement: "After a number of cancellations for housing for the fall semester, there was a significant drop in [the] number of residents in Schottenstein Residence Hall. Of the women who remained, only a handful had chosen it as their first choice preference for housing. We reached out to those women via phone call to discuss options to move them to other buildings, and then were in touch with the small number who remained to notify them that the decision had been made to close the residence hall this semester. Students were offered the opportunity to create a group to move to Brookdale together, allow us to find them roommates in Brookdale, or to be assigned to a single in 36th Street. We hope to reopen the Schottenstein Residence Hall for the spring semester."



## Fall 2020 Reopening Updates Announced, Updates Include Delayed Campus Reopening And Frequent COVID-19 Testing

By Fruma Landa, Editor in Chief

President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman [announced](#) campus reopening updates for the Fall 2020 semester. The updated plan, sent via email on October 1, notified students that "ongoing saliva PCR" tests are now part of the protocol for anyone wishing to gain campus entry in addition to the [previously announced](#) temperature checks. This decision was made under the "guidance of" Dr. Robert van Amerongen, a recently hired medical director. Berman assured that "This additional measure will enable us to be better positioned to respond more immediately to any positive COVID-19

cases, triggering our contact tracing and quarantining protocols."

Berman also informed that the start date for undergraduate [in-person](#) classes and campus housing has been pushed off from [October 12](#) (residence halls reopening) and October 19 (start of in-person classes) to October 21 to allow time for post High Holiday testing. Students who plan on being on campus, non-housing residents included, are "required to take a PCR Nasal Swab COVID-19 test ... no earlier than Thursday, October 15, even if they have antibodies." Berman assured that deans and academic advisors in partnership with faculty are working to support students who may be moving into the dorms during midterms season.

Zachary Greenberg, YSU president, shared on behalf of the Wilf Campus student council that they "sent nearly 50 questions over to the administration and [they] will continue to do so to help the university clear up the intricacies of day-to-day life on campus which students need to know about."



Students traveling internationally or from restricted states on the NY travel advisory list who have plans on quarantining in YU's "quarantine hotel" do not need to change their plans. These students will fulfill their 14 day required quarantine in hotel rooms arranged by YU and do not need a COVID-19 test before quarantining as they "will be tested during their hotel stay" and move into the dorms when their quarantine is complete. Berman further explained that Student Life, Housing teams, faculty, staff, rabbis and the medical director "have planned a full program, including *shiurim* [lectures], mental health support, wellness and fitness programs, daily check-ins, pre-*Shabbat* [Sabbath] programs and virtual events to support students throughout."

Chemda Wiener, a Beren Campus Resident Advisor (RA), expressed to the *YU Observer* that she believes that YU is "doing what is necessary to make sure that they can actually open and make sure they can open safely."

The email outlines that *Batei Midrash* (spaces of Torah study), and the [athletic center](#), will be open for student use and

that there will be *Shabbat* programming on campus, including Thanksgiving weekend and *Shabbat Chanukah*. Events will be held throughout the semester virtually and in-person.

While Berman encourages students to stay "on campus throughout the entire semester, on *Shabbat* and during the week," Natan Pittinsky, YC '21, points out that he is "concerned that they didn't make any policies or attempts to address the main risk for YU — in the likely high levels of unmasked contact between students and their family members in local Jewish communities, which will no doubt occur every weekend for some individuals"

Greenberg expressed his thoughts on the updated reopening plan to the *YU Observer*. "... I think it's important for us as YU students to stick together, be as active as possible, whether on campus or virtual, and continue to grow academically, socially, and spiritually. Now more than ever it's imperative for us to keep in touch with one another and not let any student feel alone. I'm so happy campus is opening back up

and look forward to seeing many of you in the coming weeks in person."

As per the announcement, an updated FAQ list will be posted [here](#) and a call will be hosted "for students."

## Opinions:

More Than A Wall:  
The Injustice of  
Breonna Taylor's Case  
By: Sarah Brill, Science and  
Technology Editor

After midnight on March 13, police officers, under the execution of a search warrant, forcibly entered the apartment of Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old EMT living in Louisville Kentucky. The police entered the apartment in search for two men whom they believed were selling drugs. The drugs and dealing under investigation at the time took place 10 miles away from Breonna's house, but her house was searched due to suspicion of involvement. The man the police were looking for was a former boyfriend of Taylor's, but they were no longer romantically involved at the time of the search.

On the evening of the attack, Breonna and her

boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, had been in bed when they heard a loud banging. Walker told the police that he initially believed it was Breonna's ex-boyfriend, Jamarcus Glover, trying to forcibly enter, and when the police did enter, Walker, a licensed gun user, fired the gun in defense, hitting Sergeant Mattingly in the leg. The police responded by firing five rounds of bullets, striking Breonna in the chest. Detective Brett Hankison fired blindly into the apartment ten times. In total, 32 bullets were fired between Walker and the cops — one from Walker, 31 from the police.

What is truly spectacular and audacious about this whole ordeal is that Breonna was alive for five minutes after being shot, but was not given medical attention. Instead, the officer who was shot in the leg was given medical attention. Contrary to police protocol — that when a raid is in progress, an ambulance must be on stand-by for this very reason — the police officers raiding the apartment told the ambulance to leave before entering, and called it back moments later when the events transpired. What is even more ironic about the

whole ordeal is that Walker was forced to call 911 to order an ambulance for Taylor, who was breathing at the time, five minutes after being shot.



Former detective Brett Hankison was charged with wanton endangerment for the bullets that nearly penetrated the next door neighbor's apartment, but he was not charged for shooting and killing Breonna Taylor. A concrete drywall got more justice than an actual human. The facts have been laid out, but justice has not been served. The defense argument that one side provides is that any person in a high risk situation would have reacted the way the officers did, by firing multiple shots out of panic. But firing 31 shots? Cops should be trained to not shoot when they're in a high risk situation. Furthermore, they might say that they were entering the apartment and in doing so, it was justified. But when they were given Breonna Taylor's address, did they bother to look at

their records to see if Jamarcus Glover even lived there? Did they do any additional research at all? Or did they just assume? Why did they not announce themselves upon entering? The reality of the situation is that these police officers are just as at fault as any other human being who kills another human being. There are certain protocols that must be followed in order to enter someone's property. Based on the police report, these officers disregarded one regulation by sending away the ambulance however, why are there not more regulations in place for a search warrant?

You can run around in circles all day stating different facts about this case, and what mental state the police might have been in, but the reality is that at the end of the day police officers shot and killed an innocent woman, and justice should be served properly.

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Sources:

<https://www.nytimes.com/article/breonna-taylor-police.html>

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## The Breakdown Of Civil Debate

By Eli Saperstein and Sarah Brill

Everyone has that crazy uncle or aunt that comes over for Thanksgiving or the *Yomim Tovim* (religious holidays) who after a couple of beers, or by the time the main course rolls around, starts to express their opinions at the table while their spouse looks down trying to keep said “crazy person” from embarrassing themselves. What we don’t realize is that by many other tables, *we* would be considered the crazy person. Now we know *we* aren’t crazy, yet the people sitting around the table looking at you would vehemently disagree.

People may say that America today is divided like never before. The truth is that America has been divided on political lines that have been around for a very long time. There were rarely, if ever, opportunities to cross those lines. Today, however, is a

different story, we have access to all information like never before. Then what is the problem now? Why aren’t we able to converse and have civil conversations now that we have access to the “other” side? The answer to that is because we now have TOO much information. There is so much that is considered newsworthy.-Biden’s latest gaffe? Trump’s latest slip up? Why is this more important than spending the time learning about their policies? A key difference is that while a registered Democrat and a registered Republican might once have been friends or even business partners, nowadays political affiliation would be a point of resentment against one another.



What changed? The simple truth is that we haven’t. Politics has. Politics, something that normally was only a table topic around election time or at the emergence of the latest scandal or war, has now become constant household conversation. When coming home and being asked, “What’s new

today?” went from “My coworker’s client is having a problem,” to “I can’t believe what that senator’s aide’s spouse did,” we went from thinking about our individual worlds to investing ourselves too deeply into the world of politics.

Another issue is that the entertainment industry influences the homelife like never before. It is more pervasive and accessible than ever, and our conversations reflect that. While a short time ago we talked about apolitical shows like “F.R.I.E.N.D.S.”, politics now has infiltrated into our media with shows such as “Grey’s Anatomy” becoming politicized. This has helped social conversation move from things that would ordinarily be talked about, such as personal issues or the latest movie that came out, to things that are more divisive in nature.

With the upcoming election, the fusion of differing ideas and perspectives bundled into one group seemed almost impossible. The difference between the example given about business partners and YU students is that at YU, we share one common thing: we are all Jewish. So why can’t we all come

together and mix different political thoughts and have a civilized conversation? Well, we can. The Civil Debates at YU [WhatsApp](#) group chat serves as a platform for all YU students, no matter if they are Republican or Democrat, to come together and have civilized, productive and political conversations.

## Why I Choose the Window Seat

By Yair Shavrick, Opinion Editor

I absolutely love flying — the awaited excitement, the thrust of the engines, the snacks, and the overall cabin environment. I've always found flying to be an experience which serves not only as a transportation device, but also as a journey. I tend to meet the most interesting people coming from the most diverse walks of life when I fly. Aside from the beautiful conversation that is provided throughout the trip, there is a sense of togetherness. How many times have you completely trusted a stranger to watch your belongings in direct disagreement with the airport loudspeaker saying not to? How many times

have you heard clapping and cheering for a mere landing of an airplane? All of these culminate to a feeling so warm and comforting. This actually alleviates some of the anxiety accompanied with travel; we can be comforted by the knowledge that there is an entire flight of people experiencing very similar feelings and accommodations as ourselves.

A large question that always resides in my mind before my flight is the choice of seat. Nobody wants the middle seat because access to the bathroom is compromised, and most likely someone will commandeer one of your arm rests. The aisle seat is typically the wisest choice. As aisle access is unregulated, you are the first to get snacks, and can exit the plane quickly if you so desire.

We are left with the window seat. Most choose this seat to lean on the wall for an easier sleep. Children choose it to look out the window — and so do I. The sight of our society's buildings and world geography perplexes me every time I gaze on it from thousands of feet above. I am moved

mentally and emotionally when the realization hits me that I'm a small speck in this world.



That last sentence may have come across as deep and profound, but as an optimist, it is a claim with which I absolutely despise and disagree. It is true that we humans are limited to the physical size that our bodies will allow us to grow — but our minds are so much more than the flesh and bones in which they are contained. We can express ideas, culture, talent, art, emotions, power, love, and so much more. Why limit ourselves to concrete jungles of physicality and finite identities? Why don't we try to soar like airplanes as high as we can go? If a metal contraption can fly 37,000 feet in the air, why can't we go even higher with our ideas and creativity?

Is taking the window seat childish? Maybe. I would understand the bathroom- and snack-prioritizing people's claim to the aisle

seat being the better choice, but to me, the seat is much more than a mere physical space. So look down from your imaginary (or real if you're on a flight, too) airplane and see how far you can go beyond the foundations of society. Be a pioneer. Be bold. To quote the song "[From a Window Seat](#)" by Dawes, "So I reached down for my notebook to see what impressions could be spun, but it's just buildings and a million swimming pools."

## Are We Seriously Going To Stigmatize This?

By Anonymous

*The YU Observer has verified that the anonymous writer of this article is a current YU undergraduate student.*

In August, I thought I had coronavirus. As any responsible person would, I got tested and, while I waited for my results, I alerted my peers — people I had seen at *Shabbat* (Sabbath) services, people I had gone on socially distanced walks with, and anyone else I could remember being in contact with.

The responses were mixed. While some of the responses were positive, such as "Hope the test is negative! Feel better!", others were not nearly so supportive. I received reprimanding messages of "Maybe you should be careful" and "Serves you right" almost as often as messages of compassion.

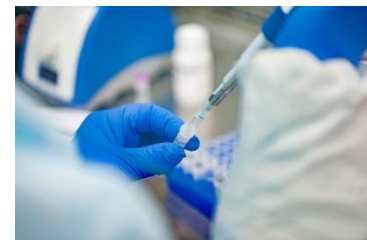
In the past, "Serves you right" would not have been a typical response to being sick. But as countless headlines remind us each day, we are living in "unprecedented times."

When a person says they have coronavirus, a stigmatized image manifests. Rather than the person being a victim who caught a virus, the person becomes a criminal in the eyes of others: people assume they refuse to wear a mask, social distance, wash their hands, or follow CDC guidelines. Thus, coronavirus is viewed as the punishment God serves to those who "deserve" it for such transgressions.

It seems we have forgotten that coronavirus is, in fact, a highly contagious virus, and not a divine punishment like *tzaraas* (biblical leprosy). Coronavirus does not spread as a spiritual disease or a judgment, but

like an illness — one that does not care how cautious you are. Stigmatizing and judging victims of coronavirus is not necessary or productive.

If we have learned anything from the past several months, it is that anyone can get coronavirus, even if we social distance and we wear masks and we take all the precautions we can. As more and more people have tested positive, from praised celebrities to personal loved ones, the contagious quality of the virus has become a more tangible reality. When the world is suffering in a global pandemic, being ravaged by a highly contagious virus that, thus far, has no cure, it should not be a surprise that everyone, even the most cautious people, can get coronavirus.



In fact, stigmatizing coronavirus actually risks increasing the spread. According to medical anthropologist [Mitchell Weiss](#) of the Swiss Tropical and Public Health

Institute, the immense stigmas placed on coronavirus victims have led not to people necessarily being more careful, but more to avoid getting tested. If a person gets tested, a positive diagnosis can have social repercussions; if a person does not get tested, they can pretend they do not have the potential to spread the virus, and they do not have to face the social repercussions of coronavirus stigma. In terms of public health, it is inarguably more effective to get tests whenever necessary than it is to pretend the problem is not happening. When a simple test or precaution comes with social stigma, no one wants to get tested and take that risk.

It is important to remember that coronavirus is not a reflection of one's character or hygiene. It is a virus that has spread all over the world, and sometimes people catch it, no matter how cautious and disinfected they are. Moving forward, we must remember that coronavirus is a physical disease, that it is not necessarily the "fault" of the victim, and that stigma is counteractive to the efforts we are all making to flatten the curve.

Thank goodness, I did not have coronavirus in the end. But would you still respect me if I did?

## COVID-19: Is Mashiach Coming?

By Tova Wax

Throughout history, the Jewish people have struggled, been persecuted and slaughtered, but have always found a way to persevere, survive, and flourish. There are no shortages of opinions as to why the Jewish plight has generally been to face some sort of hardship, many of those opinions explaining the suffering to be a punishment, cleansing, or purification for the Jewish people's lack of adherence to God's law. Each time the Jews have gone through a period of suffering, there have been renewed outcries for God's help and His redemption from all the pain.

Messianism, a belief that a messiah is coming to save the world, is a common thread shared by many religions. Looking forward to a messiah *generally* involves a belief in living a God-fearing life, including observance and adherence

to His tenets and laws, continued repentance to Him, and improvement in one's life.

Looking forward to a messiah is something generally celebrated by religious groups, who seek any possible heralding of the imminent messianic redemption era, namely, world events. Within Judaism, there's a general idea that the Messiah can come in one of two ways, the easy or hard way. The "easy coming" will happen when Jews all over the world unite and adhere to God's Torah; they essentially will be at such a high standard of purity that no further repentance will be needed. God will send the Messiah to redeem the Jews and the world, followed by a proverbial "peace on earth." The "hard coming" will happen if Jews are at such a low level in which there is no unity, and no adherence to the Torah. The rest of the world, too, will be one of overall greed, selfishness, and lack of morality — it just can't get any worse. God will have no choice but to take serious action to save the Jews and the world from themselves. It seems, with the current state of the world, that we are in the pre-messianic era via the "hard way,"

suffering great birth pangs as described in the *Gemara* (Talmud) [Sanhedrin 98](#), where our world seems to be deteriorating in so many ways — flourishing materialism, disillusionment with the government, riots, mobs, and even violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought even more havoc onto the world with ever-rising death tolls, economic crises, and so much more. Is it any wonder that some believe that the Messiah is arriving any second now? Many renowned Rabbis certainly agree that the pandemic and its terrible personal and global effects are key factors in regards to the coming redemption, and are urging Jews to repent and obey God and the Torah now more than ever. As hard as things are now, they can still be turned around. There can be an end to all suffering in the world. If the Jewish people repent and turn back toward godliness, perhaps the Messiah will come faster, ending all current suffering, preventing new suffering, and bringing true unity to Jews and all people of the world. Perhaps if everyone realizes that it is only God who can save us all from further pain of any manner,

we can take the actions necessary to actualize this redemption!

## Riots within Brooklyn and the Jewish Community

By: Abigail Grigoryan, Staff Writer

On October 4, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced the immediate shut down of restaurants and other nonessential businesses in New York City's coronavirus hotspots. Most of the targeted zip codes were parts of Williamsburg, Bedford Stuyvesant, Brighton Beach, Crown Heights, Marine Park, Mill Basin, Kensington, Windsor Terrace, Rego Park, Fresh Meadows, Hillcrest, and Jamaica (Bklyn). In addition to closing restaurants and nonessential businesses, both public and private schools have shut down. The shutdowns have affected more than half a million residents. In addition to the shutdowns, the state announced police will be issuing tickets for failure to wear masks in those areas. Mass gatherings will face a \$15,000 fine as well. Those who do not wear

masks can face a fine of up to \$1,000.



The latest surge in COVID-19 cases were announced just days before the city's return to indoor dining back on September 30. Indoor dining had been delayed since July, and the new cases troubled restaurant owners that there would be another shutdown. There has been so much miscommunication between the city and state levels of government; while Mayor de Blasio expected these new restrictions to go into effect immediately, Gov. Cuomo accepted the school's closure as part of de Blasio's plan but then suspended the plan to restrict indoor and outdoor dining by ZIP code, before declaring it part of his policy. Once again, New Yorkers saw the dispute between the governor and the mayor battling over their separate powers and with both legislators taking opposing views on several issues.



Following the recent shutdown on Wednesday, October 8, members of New York City's Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community protested Borough Park, Brooklyn, in response to the new coronavirus restrictions. Many of the protesters were not only not wearing masks and social distancing, but were burning masks. While all eyes are currently on the Jewish community of Brooklyn, it is safe to say that those in Borough Park do not represent the majority, as almost all communities are working together to stop the spread. Actions are being taken by neighborhoods and many synagogues to implement social distancing guidelines for outdoor services. There has been a lot of backlash on social media due to the protests. Neighboring populations have taken it upon themselves to shout slurs and antisemitic comments to many on the streets of Flatbush which is unacceptable and repulsive behavior. The actions of Ultra-Orthodox community jeopardizes the image and safety of other Jews in Brooklyn because while we may be different in observance, the outcomes of attacks will be the same.

Back in March, New York City was the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic and has suffered nearly [24,000 deaths](#). Since then, the city has maintained low infection rates but the new surge of cases happened after the school systems, as well as indoor dining, reopened. Although there were no specific cases within the school system, the COVID-19 cases were spreading within the hot spots. Mayor de Blasio announced that the shutdowns could last two to four weeks, depending on the development in combating the spread of the virus. With the recent cases, the plan of the shutdowns will possibly remain in effect for at least 14 days until average infection rates fall below 3% for seven consecutive days. However, in a more drastic scenario, the shutdowns could also stay in force for as long as 28 days. While this has been a difficult change, as a community we once again need to come together to follow guidelines and stop the spread of COVID-19. As members of a larger community, we must understand the implications of our actions on our fellow citizens and members. Within Judaism this is stressed as having

religious importance, namely *Kiddush Hashem* (representing the Jewish community and God in a respectable manner). Having this responsibility means we are all accountable, and should work together to stay strong in attempts to defeat this virus.

## [A Biblical Murder and the Zealots' 2020 Battlecry](#)

By Mili Chizhik, News Editor

After his humiliating failure to bring a suitable sacrificial offering, Cain felt enmity towards his younger brother Abel, the one who was able to bring a suitable, as well as accepted offering. As a result of his distress, he killed Abel in the field. When asked by God where Abel can be found, Cain famously [said](#), "I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?" God punished Cain for the rest of eternity for his sins of murdering his brother and ignoring God's words. It is hard to be able to connect many biblical stories to life in the 21st century, however, despite the seemingly antiquated stories that originate in the bible, this story — in the Torah reading of Genesis read



two weeks ago — is ageless, and history repeats itself time and time again.

On October 5, New York City officials announced new policies to restrict public activity and the spread of COVID-19 in [nine](#) hotspots throughout the city, seven of which have large Jewish communities. Officials mandated remote learning for schools in these zip codes and limited public gatherings to ten people.



In response to this crackdown, hundreds of observant and religious Jews fled to the streets of Borough Park to protest. They declared that these new policies were antisemitic and were infringing on their freedom of religion. Many believe that these policies are only targeting Jews and are being unfair and prejudiced toward these Jewish communities. In addition to their mask-burning demonstration during protests, protesters chased down reporters and attacked their fellow Jews.

Heshy Tischler, an Orthodox activist who lives in Borough Park, Brooklyn was one of the major instigators of these protests. He spread words of agitation during these protests as well as through Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp. For example, on one of [@shtickydude's](#) (Tischler's twitter account) [posts](#), he compared the requirement of wearing masks to the yellow star of David with the word “*Jude*” (German for “Jew”) that the Nazis forced Jews to wear during the holocaust. He also [said](#) that the NYC officials have “perpetuated the old Nazi trope that Jews spread disease.”

Jacob Kornbluh, an Ultra-Orthodox Jew who tried to spread information on COVID-19 safety guidelines, was [violently assaulted](#) on October 7 by the protestors for being an “informant” on the Orthodox community's activities to the authorities and journalists. The perpetrators yelled, “[min darf eim hargenen](#)” ([We need to kill him](#)). Tischler posted a [video](#) threatening Kornbluh and his actions, thus leading to his assault. Kornbluh [said](#) he was “hit in the head, and kicked at by an angry crowd of hundreds of community members of the Boro[ugh]

Park protest — while yelling at me “Nazi” and “Hitler” —after Heshy Tischler recognized me and ordered the crowd to chase me down the street.” He later [announced](#) that he would be filing charges against Tischler, who was [arrested](#) on October 11.

Berish Gertz, another Ultra-Orthodox man, recorded videos of the protests, and then the protesters then called him a “snitch” and beat him, leaving him [critically injured](#). After not being responsive, first responders [transported](#) him to Maimonides Hospital in Borough Park. Berish's brother, Mordy Getz, also [received](#) death threats in response to his advocating for COVID-19 health safety guidelines in the spring.

It's quite apparent that the crackdown on Jews in these areas is intentional but solely based on the increasing number of positive COVID-19 cases and the usual large public gatherings that occur within these communities. While some may believe that these policies are antisemitic and politicize mask-wearing, these same people deny the fact that their actions are causing spikes of COVID-19 and that wearing masks is

needed to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2 particles, in addition to physically distancing from others.

Many in these communities have claimed that there is herd immunity because of the large percentage of those who already had COVID-19 earlier in the pandemic and assume that it has all passed. The misinformation and conflicting sources of health information have led many to disregard the need for masks and social distancing, leading to a higher number of new cases in these areas. Also, many do not understand that the presence of antibodies is not foolproof prevention to COVID-19 and that these antibodies can wear off with time, leading to reinfection of the disease.

Rather than deny the data and science, these communities must follow the guidelines set by the health officials to prevent further transmission of the virus and help save lives. The only way to encourage these changes is by having the [rabbis](#) of these communities encourage them.

People must stop feigning ignorance of the

consequences of their actions and acknowledge the community's dangerous behaviors. Denying that this virus is present does not affect its potency, and denying that these regulations will help people will only be damaging in the future. It will cause more cases and more deaths. It will also elongate the spreading to be in a consistent cycle of increasing and decreasing cases for months, if not years, on end. The transgression of the law of *Chillul Hashem* (desecration of God's name) is written all over these protests and disregarding authorities' regulations.

One would think that we, the Jewish people, have progressed past the times of Cain and Abel, and we would listen to the higher authorities. Instead, many harbor so much hate towards their fellow Jews that they unflinchingly attack innocent people and spread damaging and life-threatening misinformation. Many bite the hands that feed them (hands being the experts, while feeding is their attempt to help the health crisis), thus further violating both the "*Dina de-Malkhuta Dina*" (law of following the law of the land) and the law of

*Ahavat Yisrael* (loving your fellow Israelites).

When Cain was asked about where his brother was, God knew the real answer. Now, what will you answer when God asks you where your fellow citizens — whose health progressively declined due to the viral coup that overthrew their lungs while their bodies become depleted of oxygen and the necessary components of life — are? All of which could potentially have been avoided with a mask and self-isolation.

## My Brother Is Running for Office

By Yosef Rosenfield,  
Features Editor

This Tuesday, November 3, my brother, Aryeh Rosenfield (YC '17), will be running as an [Independent for Rhode Island House of Representatives in District 4](#). He decided to run for office simply because this position would otherwise likely be filled by an unopposed incumbent, so his candidacy would therefore make the election a little more democratic. My brother's policies are few and simple — in a

[video](#) he shared on his Facebook page on June 28 announcing his bid for State Representative, he stated: “I am a staunch believer in individual rights and free markets.” He counted on being able to collect at least 50 signatures from friends and acquaintances in the Providence Jewish community in order to have his name listed on the ballot.

Nothing seemed religiously controversial to me about a well-educated, politically informed Orthodox Jew participating in an election. In fact, my brother went through the same process in 2018, collecting enough signatures to join the race for RI General Assembly with support from many rabbis and other Jews in the district. He even received 12% of the vote, despite living in a deep blue state and having no campaign. But to my surprise, my family’s efforts to collect signatures this time around were met with visible hesitation and, in some cases, refusal. I was puzzled by such reluctance to help a member of the community and fellow Jew when the downsides were essentially non-existent.

My befuddlement only increased when I learned of one person’s reasons for refusing to offer his signature. This member of my Jewish community (whose identity is unknown to me) felt that it is not proper for Orthodox Jews to occupy political positions. He stated further that he personally did not support my brother’s political views and consequently declined my father’s request to sign the form. Frankly, I was shocked to hear about this reaction. Firstly, I had a hard time believing that someone in Providence, RI, a city full of very open-minded people in terms of their [hashkafa](#) (religious outlook), would have a problem with a Jew running for office. This person appeared especially out of place, considering how many well-respected rabbis and leaders of the Providence Jewish community had happily signed my brother’s candidacy form this year and in 2018. As for this person’s political differences, I still found no reason for him to withhold his signature. My brother already stands less of a chance at winning this year than in 2018 given the expected greater turnout for the presidential election (assuring more Democratic

voters and therefore a smaller percentage of Independent voters). Furthermore, signing the paper was of course neither a vote for Aryeh Rosenfield nor an endorsement of his policies, but only a small step toward putting his name on the ballot come November.

As appalled as I was, my brother took even greater issue with this person’s perspective. “Saying that Jews shouldn’t be in office is pretty much as antisemitic as it gets,” he pointed out. To be honest, I hadn’t thought of it that way, but when put in those terms this individual’s viewpoint really does carry undertones of prejudice. Contemplating this issue reminded me of a similarly jarring reaction to my brother’s candidacy two years ago. A mutual friend of ours had accused my brother of being homophobic, claiming that the real reason he was running against Rebecca Kislak was that he wanted to remove the married lesbian — who coincidentally is also Jewish — from office. Beyond contradicting my brother’s socio-politically libertarian attitude, this theory ignored the fact that my brother had to file paperwork to confirm his

candidacy long before Kislak won the primary. There was no way for him to know that he would be running against her in the general election. Yet that didn't stop this person from comparing the two Jewish candidates' levels of religious observance and assuming that my Orthodox brother was somehow trying to condemn Kislak's homosexuality by joining the election.

Thankfully, Providence as a whole is an extremely welcoming and accepting place, and the above examples of disapproval are rare exceptions to the Jewish community's overwhelming kindness and support. They do, however, raise the concern that not only within fragmented neighborhoods but also among closely connected religious communities, politics can and often does bring out the worst in people. Furthermore, these cases reveal an underlying disunity that is present even in some of the most cohesive Jewish circles. I guess I was just hoping we could do better.

## The Need for YU Faculty Integrity Standards

By Zachary Greenberg

Academic integrity is something that the Sy Syms School of Business administration has stressed a lot recently. Many of the recent emails sent by the Deans continuously state the importance and value of having integrity, both in terms of morality and even more so as Jews. The emails only emphasize that such values should be incumbent on students. However, this expectation of academic integrity should not just be on the students, but should be applied to the faculty as well.

The final exam for a Quantitative Statistics course offered in the spring was graded mostly on two long answer questions which were, as one student in the class described, "absolutely unanswerable from everything that he taught." He went on to say, "the questions were random nonsense and not mathematically correct." That very student even went to the professor afterwards for an explanation as to how to solve the problems, and it was clear that there were no correct solutions. The

final was open notes, yet no one in the class got over a 90% and no one got the answers correct. Grades were based entirely on how well the professor thought "your gibberish" was close to what he was thinking.

In a summer course with the same Quant Professor, the midterm was scheduled for Monday, June 13. The Professor, though, continued teaching all the way through Friday, June 10. Despite the course's difficulty, he gave students only ONE full day of studying (excluding Sabbath). Not even considering the complexity of the course, it is ridiculous to expect students with one day to properly prepare half a semester's worth of content. The professor should have ended teaching a day or two earlier, or made the midterm on Wednesday, June 15 to give students ample time to prepare.

The administration made a push to have more assignments throughout the semester, arguing it would make it easier for the students to know what they should focus on come exam time. A brilliant idea, but what is the point if the professors don't give the graded assignments back

before the exam? One BIMA faculty member assigned a midterm project, but didn't give the grade back until after Finals, leaving students completely in the dark as to what their grade range would be until they received their letter grade. It's absurd to hold students accountable to submitting homework and exams on time, but not have any sort of accountability on faculty for giving grades back on time.

Additionally, multiple students have reported one specific marketing professor who would refuse to meet with them. The professor went as far as telling one student they were not allowed to send a follow up email after his declining to meet with them.

This isn't just a problem in Syms. In YC, one history professor refused to let students use the restroom during class. A student related how that professor expected the class to read over 50 pages of reading for each lesson on extremely boring and sexually vulgar articles. Furthermore, there were no laptops allowed in the class except when a student had an accommodation, and even still, he made sure to

make the student feel bad for using it. The class started out with nearly 20 students, but by the last day to add a class date just two weeks later, that number had dropped to six.

There are, however, a large share of the faculty who do show great integrity in their teaching styles, and should be commended and made known to the rest of the faculty. One entrepreneurship professor reviews each exam four times in order to find ways to give students more points. He even started mid-semester feedback surveys long before it was implemented across the board.

Even so, there are still too many professors who lack the academic integrity standards that are demanded of the students. Just like students are held to a high academic integrity standard, so should the professors. Don't you think so?

## Features:

[Yeshiva University's Jewish COVID Archive](#)

By Adina Bruce, Website Manager

The term "unprecedented" is used so much to describe our current reality created by the Covid-19 pandemic that it has almost become a joke. Despite the overused nature of this term, academic institutions around the world, including Yeshiva University's Library, have been grappling with how to respond when living through "unprecedented" times that will likely be included in history books. Mid-March through April, the world was coming to terms with the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic was not going to go away any time soon, and the realization that the future was going to look very different than previously imagined.

In response to this realization, academic institutions around the world began documenting in real-time the responses to and effects of the pandemic. Jewish institutions and departments such as [the National Library of Israel](#), [the Houston Jewish History Archive at Rice University](#), [YIVO Institute for Jewish Research](#), and the Yeshiva University Archives also took part in this work. Each institute is archiving from a different



perspective but all are looking to capture the moment by examining specifically the response of the Jewish community. The National Library of Israel is focusing specifically on Jewish communities in Europe, while YIVO is focussed on gathering first hand testimonials. The YU Archives is focusing on the North American Jewish Community response. The YU Archives along with other university departments such as the Hebrew Theological College and the Houston Jewish History Archive at Rice University are additionally collaborating to provide material for the online “American Jewish Life” archive, an archive documenting American Jewish life during the pandemic as part of the larger “Pandemic Religion: A Digital Archive,” which is archiving general religious life during the pandemic.

The Yeshiva University Library is already familiar with the process of gathering material for archives, due to the Archives & Special Collections department, which aims to “hold organizational and institutional records and private papers relating to

modern Jewish history and culture in the United States and abroad.” Realizing the unique position they were in to be able to collect material as it was being produced, the YU Archive Team began collecting material for the “Jewish Covid Archive” some time in late March, and inviting crowd sourced material in late April.



The value of narrowing the scope of the archive to specifically the Jewish community is “that this epidemic would affect the Jewish community in particular areas that would distinguish it from the public at large in social and *halachic* (Jewish legislative) realms,” explained Shulamith Berger, Curator of Special Collections and Hebraica-Judaica to the *YU Observer*. The hope is that these gathered materials will be used by scholars and researchers in the future, who are looking to study the pandemic and its effects. In a statement to the *YU Observer*, David Selis, Leon Charney Fellow at the YU center

for Israel Studies and volunteer for the project explained, “It’s impossible to determine what future scholars will want so we have to use our best judgement and often try to capture as much as possible.” However there is a limit to how much can be collected. “We need enough but not too much ... 50-100 shul closure emails [are needed] for a good sample but we don’t need every weekly shul email for example. It’s a matter of archivist judgement,” continued Selis. The majority of the material has been collected digitally, with staff archivists browsing the internet and social media, and subscribing to community email lists. Material is also gathered via crowdsourcing, with submissions sent to the email address: [jewishcovidarchive@gmail.com](mailto:jewishcovidarchive@gmail.com).

Creating an almost exclusively digital archive is a new experience for the YU Archive Team, providing them with an opportunity to learn and grow. “[T]here is a kind of paradigm shift required to become as comfortable with a purely digital collection, especially such a large one. For example, digital file names are much



more important than physical folder labels, which we're used to browsing through." said Archivist Deena Schwimmer to the *YU Observer*. "There are also many tools that facilitate management of digital collections, which we're learning about. So in addition to being a collection of historic importance, this project is also raising our digital collecting skills to a new level." Specific issues associated with such a collection include copyright laws that apply to social media posts, and questions of how this medium should be recorded. Furthermore the digital format of the materials means that it has been more challenging to collect material from communities that have less interactions online.

Examples of materials collected are varied in topic, tone and source: From early on in the pandemic, there is an advertisement from the "Hebrew Free Burial Association" calling for donations of *taleisim* (prayer shawls). Targeting Yiddish speaking residents of New York, there are posters from the New York City government outlining social distancing measures.

*Piskei Teshuvot* (Responsum) of Rav Hershel Schachter have been published, addressing the myriad of *halachic* issues that have come up as a result of the pandemic. A more lighthearted example includes a Minecraft model of the Wilf Campus and Gottesman Library created by current student Betzalel Shapiro. On his work being included he commented to the *YU Observer*, "I think it's pretty cool for this part of my little early-quarantine project to be recognized in this way, even though I built the campus 'for the meme of it,' it ended up being something I was proud of and put a lot of time into. The library was easily my favorite build and I honestly think it turned out the best, so I'm glad to see it included in the archive."

While the start of the pandemic is clear to most people, when it will end is sure to be more foggy. As explained to the *YU Observer* by Sara Seiger, archives associate, "Maybe there will be a point at which Jewish life goes back to normal as we knew it, or maybe there will be a point at which it becomes clear some changes are

here to stay and we have a new normal."

As this new normal continues, the Jewish Covid Archive offers us an opportunity not often given to those who live through history; a way to write our story as it is happening. "I think ... during a prolonged crisis, there isn't time to fully examine your emotional response to what's happening. I think we will all have a lot of processing - and grieving - to do once we are able to do it. This is one way to keep all of our stories safe until then," commented Saiger. When asked what YU students could do to assist the project Saiger was clear: "Keep sending us material!" Examples of materials that could be sent include, "pictures of a socially distanced minyan for example, or have notices or guidelines issued by a school, camp, or shul, or covid related memes. If students would like to write about their experiences during covid, they are welcome to submit those as well; it would be helpful for the student to note if the archive is welcome to make their writings public," specified Berger.

The Jewish Covid Archive project speaks to a very

human need to prepare for the future and hope that our lives will be remembered. Rarely do we experience periods where we can be certain that the events we are living through will be included in the history books. With this certainty comes the responsibility of preserving our present for that future. As expressed by Professor Steven Fine in his conversation "Crisis and Hope: YU Voices" with Berger on the project, "The richer this is, the richer our understanding of ourselves will be in the coming generations."

### Club Feature: Alexander Hamilton Society

By Bina Davidson on behalf  
of Features Staff

*Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight one club available to the YU undergraduate community. For the October issue, the YU Observer is highlighting "The Alexander Hamilton Society."*

**Club Name:** Alexander Hamilton Society

**Heads:** Noam Josse, Yael Evgi, Joseph Stern, Ely

Bloch, David Lifschitz,  
David Rubin, Judah  
Fortgang

**Relevant Campus(es):**

Both the Beren and the Wilf campus

**What is your club's mission statement?:**

The Alexander Hamilton Society is a non-partisan, not-for-profit, national organization that seeks to identify, educate, and launch young men and women into foreign policy and national security careers imbued with the Hamiltonian perspective of strong and principled American leadership in global affairs.

**Why is this club important?:**

In a time of divisive partisanship it is important to create professional avenues for dialogue between opposing sides and AHS provides such a forum for foreign policy discussions.

**What was your pull to get involved in/start the club?:**

"As a Political Science student, there are certain opportunities and events on our campus which are helpful and exciting, but the AHS society is aiming to bring even more. The Society's mission is not only to help educate students of political science on foreign policy and contemporary political issues but also to help bring career

opportunities and networking to the table. I'm so excited to be representing this club for the Beren Campus and to bring exciting events for us this semester" -Yael Evgi

**What are some things your club has done in the past? (If the club is not new):**

The club is new! But maybe by the time the *Observer* writes about us we will have had our event with Professor Jonathan Cristol of YU and Kenneth Pollack (former CIA analyst) about the Israel-UAE Deal.

**What are some plans you have for this semester/future semesters?:**

We plan to have discussion groups, a reading group and bring in interesting speakers.



**What is your favorite OSL-provided food for club events?:**

Definitely chop-chop. AHS provides us with money for food, so hopefully we can have lots of chop chop.

**With COVID, how is your club adjusting?:**

We will be having our speaker events and discussions over zoom instead of in person.

**What is your advice to someone looking to get involved on campus?:**

Come to our Events! Join our Whatsapp group chat <https://chat.whatsapp.com/J0gInz2df3F05d7gK7s5Bw>

*Are you a YU undergraduate club head interested in seeing your club featured in a future edition? Email us at [theyuobserver@gmail.com](mailto:theyuobserver@gmail.com) with your club name and the names of the club heads!*

**YU Faculty Profile:**

**Lisa Chalik**

By Bina Davison on behalf of Features Staff

*Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight a YU faculty member. For the October edition, the YU Observer is highlighting Professor Lisa Chalik.*

**Name:** Lisa Chalik

**Department:** Psychology  
**Educational**

**Background/Qualifications:** I got my BA in Psychology from Rutgers in 2009, and my PhD in Psychology from NYU in 2016

**Hometown:** Cherry Hill, NJ

**How long have you worked at YU?:** This is my third year.

**What got you passionate about your field?:** I was always interested in understanding how people think. I took AP Psych in high school and loved it, so I decided to study Psychology in college.

Then I just never stopped. **What do you like about working at YU?:** I love being able to support and interact with all of the phenomenal students at Stern, both in the classroom and out of it. I'm consistently amazed by the insight, intellect, and academic motivation of the students in the Stern community, and I consider it to be a huge honor to be able to play some role in these women's academic lives.



**How has COVID/Zoom affected the way your**

**classes function?:** It has definitely been a challenge, but I'm doing my best. Right now, one of my classes is fully asynchronous, one is fully synchronous, and one is a mix. Each one has gotten both positive and negative reviews from students, so it's hard to know how to best accommodate everyone. I hope that we can get back into the classroom as soon as possible!

**If you could bring in any guest lecturer, alive or deceased, who would it be, and what would they speak about?:** Ruth Bader Ginsburg. We owe her a huge debt of gratitude for everything she has done for women in this country, and her recent death was a blow to us all. I'd love to have heard her talk both about her own path through the justice system, as well as her vision for the future of women in America.

**Do you have any advice for students interested in a career in your field?:** Build relationships with your professors! These are the people who can provide tons of guidance (and recommendation letters) as you navigate the job market and/or the graduate school application process, and the earlier you create relationships with

them, the better they will be able to help you out in the long run.

**What is one thing you want students to know about you?:** My door (or at least right now, my metaphorical Zoom door) is always open, whether you have taken one of my classes or not. Some possible topics of conversation include psychology, graduate school, academic life, baking, travel, Harry Potter, and cute animals. *Is there a YU professor you admire who you would like to see highlighted in future editions? Email us at [theyuobserver@gmail.com](mailto:theyuobserver@gmail.com)*

## Daf Yomi At Beren: Why We Translate Terms in the *YU Observer*

By Shayna Herszage,  
Managing Editor

When I edit articles for the *YU Observer*, I often find myself having to advocate for translations of Judaic or Hebrew terms. Writers and readers alike ask: why translate Judaic and Hebrew expressions in an independent newspaper of an Orthodox Jewish institution such as Yeshiva University? Should we not

already expect that readers are familiar with such terms?

This question is answered in a recent page in the *daf yomi* (daily Talmud page study) cycle. In [Tractate Eruvin 53a](#), the Talmud discusses the decline of Torah knowledge over time. At one point, the Talmud states:

רבינא אָמַר: בְּנֵי יְהוּדָה דְּגָלוּ  
מִסְפָּתָא, נִתְקַיְמָה תוֹרַתוֹ בְּיָדָם.  
בְּנֵי גְלִיל דְּלֹא גָלוּ מִסְפָּתָא, לֹא  
נִתְקַיְמָה תוֹרַתוֹ בְּיָדָם

“**Ravina** said: With regard to **the people of Judea, who would publicly disclose the tractate** to be studied in the coming term so that everyone could prepare and study it in advance, **their Torah knowledge endured for them;** with regard to **the people of the Galilee, who would not disclose the tractate** to be studied in the coming term, **their Torah knowledge did not endure for them.**”

The Talmud explains that if the tractate was disclosed beforehand and the people had time to prepare the tractate, they could better understand the classes and transmit the knowledge to others. However, if the tractate had not been previously disclosed, the people ended

up not following or fully appreciating the lessons imparted during the classes, and the information was soon lost.



This passage connects to one of the reasons we translate Judaic and Hebrew phrases. Many *YU Observer* readers do not come equipped with knowledge of terms such as “*tzniut*” (modesty), “*Shabbos*” (Sabbath) or “*Gemara*” (Talmud). Due to a number of factors, including religious background and community, people do not always have the exposure to information necessary to “prepare” themselves — much like the Judean and Galilean people of the Talmud. Given this consideration, we make a point of defining potentially unfamiliar terms upon their first mention in any given article. After all, if these terms are not defined from the outset, how can we expect someone to gain enough of an understanding to care about the article’s message? Once someone is

denied the means to understand a statement, as the Talmud teaches us, the message will be lost. With the assumption that journalism is meant to facilitate the spread of information and ideas, it is our obligation to make sure that those ideas are clearly delineated.

Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that the *YU Observer* serves the greater Yeshiva University community, which includes far more than Modern Orthodox Jews with day school upbringings. We write and publish for the YU students, alumni and faculty — both Orthodox and not Orthodox, those somewhere in between, and those who are not Jewish at all. We write and publish for the *frum* (religious) from birth, *baalei teshuva* (those who became observant later in life), those who were raised observant and no longer identify as such, and those who never were observant. We write and publish for the family members, friends, and many others who care about what happens in the Jewish community and the YU community in particular. Our audience is not universally familiar with certain Judaic and

Hebrew terms, so leaving those terms undefined leaves part of our readership out of the discussion.

Considering the diversity of the community we live in, why should ideas and information be kept exclusive to only a select few? If we refuse to allow a large portion of our community to understand the ideas being conveyed because we refuse to acknowledge those who come from different backgrounds, we become like the people of the Galilee and consequently fail to communicate the ideas and information that we wish to share.

### [Substitute Canvassing Committee President Appoints Substitute And Just A Few Hours Later Changes His Decision](#)

By Amalya Teitelbaum

At the beginning of the High Holiday break, an email was sent out by the Student Court of the Wilf Campus to Wilf students regarding Jonathan Malek's petition against Baruch Lerman submitted on September 29, 2020.

“Gabriel is a student from my school, Yeshiva College ... Jonathan is a student in Syms and not Yeshiva College.” This was the quote stated by Mr. Baruch Lerman through a Whatsapp Chat that began the development of the case of Jonathan Malek vs Baruch Lerman. However, there was a complex chain of events that lead up to the quote and the occurrences surrounding it.

The background of the case was the simple act of SOY President Akiva Poppers appointing Baruch Lerman (Respondent) in his place on the Canvassing Committee in compliance with Article X Section 1(3) of the Wilf Constitution which states, “The Presidents of YSU, YCSA, SYMSSC, and SOY, shall each serve as a member of the Canvassing Committee, or may appoint another student from their respective councils to represent them on the Canvassing Committee and assist in matters deemed necessary by the Chairman of the Canvassing Committee.”

The next step in the chain of events leading to the case was Mr. Lerman's decision to then step down



from the Canvassing Committee on September 27. Since the Wilf Campus Student Government (WCSG) requires that anyone leaving the Canvassing Committee appoint a replacement, Mr. Lerman appointed Jonathan Malek (Petitioner) in his stead on September 29.



Just a few hours later on September 29, Mr. Lerman “corrected” his initial decision by appointing Gabriel Goralnick as opposed to Mr. Malek, claiming that since Malek was a Sy Syms School of Business student, the original appointment was “null.” Jonathan Malek asked the court to decide if Mr Lerman (Respondent) was within his rights to remove him from the Canvassing Committee and appoint another student in his stead. This brings us to the opening of the court case.

Mr. Lerman's argument stating that his initial appointing of the Petitioner was null is based on part of Article X Section 1(3) as

well, “If one of the aforementioned officials shall run for any WCSG position, or shall be involved in any other conflict of interest, he shall be required to appoint another student from his school to serve on the Canvassing Committee in his place.” Mr. Lerman understood the word “official” as himself and the word “school” as either the two Wilf Campus undergraduate study programs, Yeshiva College (YC) or Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB). Meaning that someone from YC can only appoint someone from YC and someone from Syms could only appoint someone from Syms. Based on the fact that Mr. Lerman is a student at YC and Mr. Malek is a student at Syms, he retracted his original appointment and named Mr. Gabriel Goralnick (YC student) to take his place.

Mr. Malek (Petitioner) argued that the Respondent did not have the power as merely a presidential replacement to appoint someone in his stead. The court rejected that argument based on Article X Section 1(3) which states that *officials* running for any other WCSG or another conflict of interest to appoint another student

from his school to serve on the Canvassing Committee. Since it uses the language of officials and not presidents it indicates that the President’s appointee has the power to appoint someone from his school in his stead and that it is required. So not only was Mr. Lerman within his right to appoint a replacement, he was obligated to.

The [Court](#) then dealt with two questions after affirming that the Respondent was obligated to appoint a replacement to the Canvassing Committee. The first was whether the Petitioner was enrolled in the same “school” as Respondent. The second concerned if Petitioner was ever able to hold the position on the Canvassing Committee. This Court answers both of these questions in the negative.

On October 7, the student court issued a decision regarding the case of Jonathan Malek v. Baruch Lerman. The court ruled in favor of Mr. Lerman (Respondent) stating that not only was Lerman in his right to appoint someone but that Mr. Malek (Petitioner) never held the position seeing as the



petitioner and respondent are from separate schools. Being a student enrolled in YC, Mr. Gabriel Goralnick is the legitimate replacement of Respondent.

## Crisis and Hope Event: Voices Through the Ages

By Matthew Shilat

One voice calls out and everyone in the room responds in unison: “*HaShem melekh, HaShem malakh, HaShem yimlokh l’olam va’ed*” (The Lord is King, the Lord was King, the Lord will be King forever and ever). Between *Rosh Hodesh* (the first of the month of the Jewish month) *Elul* and *Yom Kippur*, in commemoration of the second [40-day period Moses spent on Mount Sinai](#), *Sephardim* (Jews originating from communities located in the Iberian Peninsula) recite [Selihot](#) (penitential prayer service) in song from *Ben Adam* to *Shomer Yisrael* (one prayer in the *Selihot* service to another). In Nehemiah 8:9, Nehemiah says to the Jews returning from exile, “This day is holy to the Lord, your God. Do not mourn or

weep,” and Sephardim therefore joyously sing the praise of *HaShem* (God) and fervently request forgiveness for their sins. Before the holiday break, YU held an online event that investigated Sephardic *Selihot* (the *Selihot* prayer as traditionally prayed by *Sephardim*) as a gateway into further understanding Sephardic melodies.

The event was titled “Crisis and Hope: YU Voices Sephardic Melodies for the High Holidays: *Selihot*”. I had heard of this event from my “Jews of Medieval Spain” class with Professor Ronnie Perelis as well as my “Sephardic Liturgical Music” course with Rabbi Moshe Tessone, director of the Sephardic Programs at Yeshiva University. These two experts on Sephardic history led the event. Professor Perelis initiated dialogue by asking Rabbi Tessone questions on the development of Sephardic tunes and their cantillation style. Rabbi Tessone then elaborated on the history of Sephardic *hazzanut* (cantorial performance), breaking it down into different subgroups and discussing the variations in *maqam* (Arabic melodic mode or scale) used for different times of the year. For example, one *maqam* would be used to inspire

feelings of *teshuva* (repentance), whereas a different, more joyous *maqam* would be used during times of celebration.

Rabbi Tessone divided Sephardic *hazzanut* into categories based on cantillation style. These categories were Judeo-Arabic/Oriental (Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, Persian, etc.), Judeo-Spanish (Turkish, Greek, Balkan), North African, Western/Occidental Sephardic (Spanish-Portuguese), and Yemenite. While many tunes overlap among these styles, the differences in cantillation distinguish between these communities’ musical traditions. Rabbi Tessone further spoke about how the melodies of all these communities were influenced by the surrounding popular music. For instance, Syrian tunes typically sound Arabic, though around the High Holidays they take on a more Spanish sound that has been preserved since the [Expulsion of Jews from Spain](#). Likewise, Moroccan liturgy sounds more Berber, Spanish-Portuguese more European — and he even mentioned a Syrian congregation in Brooklyn that at one point used the tune for [“Take Me](#)

[Out to the Ball Game](#)” after a Mets victory.

Something stood out to me when Rabbi Tessone discussed the development of different cantillations, or *te'amim* (notes). He quoted Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, who, in his 20th century Jewish liturgical research, pointed out that all the varying cantillation styles share certain characteristics and even a common origin in the Babylonian style. Having been instructed in the Iraqi *te'amim* style myself, I found this idea personally inspiring. I later asked Professor Perelis why he chose to specifically look into Sephardic *Selihot* for this event. He responded:

“Our series has tackled challenging issues since we began [Crisis and Hope](#) ... in June — [covering] race, civil rights, C[OVID-19], [the] Holocaust and [g]enocide — and it was important for us to also create a space for joy and light. The *[S]elihot* are a testament to the power of the spirit over adversity and of faith over cynicism. Rabbi Tessone is a fantastic guide to the rich and complex history of this precious living musical tradition. It was an honor to have him join us a few days before *Yom Kippur* and share the stirring

melodies and powerful words of the *[S]elihot*. The musical variation Rabbi Tessone highlighted points to the creativity, diversity and aesthetic power of the wider Sephardic diaspora.”

Learning about the development of Sephardic liturgical music helped me feel more connected to this tradition that I am so proud to carry. I keep telling my Ashkenazi friends that they should experience a Sephardic *Selihot* service sometime — and that is exactly what Professor Perelis suggested at the conclusion of this event. The *Selihot* experience is filled with traditional, enthralling songs that span across the centuries. Not only are the tunes enjoyable but joining in with these voices through the ages allows us to become a part of something bigger than ourselves.

## Sci & Tech:

[I'm your Venus, I'm your Fire: Now a Source for Life?](#)

Sara Muharremi, Staff Writer

Some of us may know Venus from [Bananarama's](#) song, or from the commercial for the Gillette

razor. However, Venus is also the second planet from the sun, named after the Roman goddess of love and beauty, and is known for being the hottest and brightest planet in our solar system. Moreover, there have recently been new discoveries and theories made regarding possible signs of life.

If you've been keeping up with my [other YU Observer](#) articles about [life on Mars](#), you'd know that I'm an avid Groupon peruser, but with all these planets popping up with life, I'm going to run out of money buying land on planets.

Venus is commonly known as Earth's “hotter twin” — literally. Venus' size, mass and proximity to Earth is very similar to our own planet, however its thick atmosphere — which is mainly made up of carbon dioxide — can trap heat from the sun making its surface as hot as 880 degrees Fahrenheit! These extremely high temperatures have made it hard for spacecraft to be able to land for extended periods of time for fear of overheating any electronics.

Higher in its atmosphere, however, Venus contains

clouds with droplets of sulfuric acid. In the clouds the temperatures are far less extreme and scientists think they may have detected signs of phosphine gas, a flammable foul-smelling gas that “[can](#) only be made by life — whether human or microbe” in the atmosphere. Ironically this gas is also extremely dangerous and kills anything that relies on oxygen — such as humans or microbes.



“[Life](#) is the only thing that will put energy into making molecules ... [o]therwise, in the universe, chemistry only happens with it’s energetically favorable,” says Clara Sousa-Silva a research scientist at MIT, in a comment to the National Geographic, who spent many years in graduate school researching whether or not phosphine could be a legitimate extraterrestrial biosignature.

So how could this indicate a sign of life? There are forms of life that don’t require oxygen for survival — called anaerobic organisms. An example of an anaerobic organism would be anaerobic bacteria and the theory is that they could be living within Venus’ clouds and producing the phosphine gas. The clouds have a much cooler temperature in comparison to the planet’s surface, and contain basic components of life within them such as sunlight, water, and organic molecules. This offers an ideal environment for microbes to metabolize and live; despite the sulfuric acid drops.

Using Earth as a comparison, we have seen microbes survive and thrive in extreme environments such as volcanic fields or in cloud particles. According to National Geographic, “[c](#)louds are ephemeral on Earth, so it’s unlikely that they support permanent ecosystems, but on Venus, cloudy days are in the forecast for millions or even billions of years.”

Similar to Mars, Venus has also been thought to have once had a liquid water ocean. However, a

significant rise in greenhouse gases on the planet over the last billion years has made the planet into what it is today. But who’s to say that some microbes didn’t mutate or move up to the clouds to thrive and survive?

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## Variolation and Mitigation: How Mask Wearing Might Lessen COVID-19 Severity

By Sara Verschleiser, Science and Technology editor

Since the fight against COVID-19 began, masking has been a point of contention throughout the United States. Due to the politicization of masking, the science supporting its necessity and efficacy has been ignored, misrepresented, and misunderstood. This has led to a mishandling of the COVID threat, and much greater losses than may have occurred if

scientific evidence was respected.

Masks have been clearly found to lower SARS-CoV-2 transmission rates, especially as COVID-19 often arises as an asymptomatic disease that can be passed without one's knowledge of their own illness. Much of the anti-mask movement surrounds current research, which shows that masks protect others much more than oneself. While this is only a part of the heavily politicized movement, it is a weighted factor. To many, the sacrifice of wearing a mask is too big a concession in order to keep others safe. Recent theories, however, including that of two University of California researchers, suggest that masks could be keeping the mask wearer safe as well-by creating a form of variolation.

Dr. Monica Gandhi and Dr. George W. Rutherford published an article on their theory in the New England Journal of Medicine, titled "[Facial Masking for Covid-19 — Potential for “Variolation” as We Await a Vaccine.](#)" Their theory surrounds the concept of viral dosage. Since the 1930s, researchers have been

studying the connection between the amount of viral inoculum received and the severity of the host's disease. This research is grounded in the LD50, or the dose at which a virus is lethal for 50% of exposed hosts. As SARS-CoV-2 and many other viruses directly interact with the immune system, high doses of the virus can overwhelm the system's defenses before it can start to fight back. Because the host loses its immune defenses, the severity of the disease can increase. This viral theory has already been shown to hold true for SARS-CoV-2 in experiments with Syrian hamster models. If, on the other hand, the viral dosage is low, the host can still become infected but is much more likely to be asymptomatic, as their immune system has more time to respond to the virus before becoming overwhelmed.

According to Dr. Gandhi and Dr. Rutherford's theory, masks may function as a method for lowering the viral dosage. Universal masking, therefore, won't only lower the total number of cases, but also lower the number of severe cases. Preliminary analysis of population-wide masking

has noted an increase in the percentage of infections which are asymptomatic. As Gandhi and Rutherford's article references, asymptomatic rates in mid-July were only 40% of cases according to the CDC, but in settings with universal masking, this has risen to 80% of cases. Countries with universal masking have also fared better in terms of rates of severe illness and deaths, suggesting more asymptomatic infections. Mimicked mask-wearing in the Syrian hamster studies also saw fewer infections overall and more asymptomatic cases.

Gandhi and Rutherford compare the use of masks to variolation. Variolation was an early version of [smallpox](#) inoculation where people were purposely infected with small amounts of the smallpox, in order to prevent people from later developing a more severe infection and dying. While people still got sick, variolation succeeded in lowering smallpox mortality from 30% of those infected to 1-2%.

The goal, of course is not just to lower the toll of a virus but to eliminate it. However, in the meantime,

masks used as variolation may be an effective tool to lower the rates of severe disease and increase population-wide immunity at the same time.

Reinfection, as of research in early September, appears to be rare and less severe, suggesting that allowing asymptomatic infections may be beneficial for the population's herd response.

However, more research into the idea of using masks as variolation must be done. Gandhi and Rutherford outline the concerns that must be settled before masks as variolation can really be proposed as a public health tactic. Further studies on the rates of asymptomatic infection in areas with population-wide masking vs. those with low masking must be carried out. The immunity of previously infected individuals and how these individuals and the general community respond to further infections must be researched as well.

Many researchers do caution against placing too much weight in this theory before it's more supported, especially from a public health outlook. [Letters to the Editor](#) addressing

Gandhi and Rutherford's article point out the danger in using the term 'variolation,' due to its association with risk, and the large difference between the smallpox and SARS-CoV-2 viruses. These researchers caution against relying on this theory until the idea is more researched, and until there is more evidence to suggest that SARS-CoV-2 can be controlled in this way.

Because so much is still unknown about the long term effects of infection, masks as variolation isn't yet a viable option for a public health COVID-19 response. However, the available research and the medical support for this theory already provides an excellent reason to keep masking. It also suggests an additional reason, besides better treatments, for the decline in rates of hospitalizations and deaths that is being seen in many mask wearing populations, even with an increase in cases.

Wearing a mask doesn't hurt; it only helps. As the weather gets cold again, and people are forced indoors, please remember to wear a mask, be COVID safe, and protect both

yourself and those around you.

## The Leaves Are Changing

By Sarah Brill, Science and Technology Editor

My mom tells me stories every autumn about when she was younger and would drive up the Taconic Parkway with my grandfather and grandmother. They would drive up just to see the leaves change. My mom always describes it as the Catskills looking like they were on fire with color. Growing up in Colorado, we didn't get many trees, except pine, but when I moved out to the East Coast, the thing I looked forward to the most was the fall and the changing leaves.

I attended my first year of college in upstate New York, home to these changing leaves. At that school, I took a global change biology course, which dove into the many implications of human impact on the Earth. One of the experiments my professor was working on and gathering data about was the changing leaf colors. Each year, he



would have students document when the leaves would change and how vibrant they would appear. He measured vibrancy based on the photograph we would take. Our class examined data and pictures from as far as five years back, noting that every year the leaves would change later with less vibrancy than the previous. I noted this change as well. When the leaves did turn, the color was more muted than the pictures I had seen from past years, and even from years further back. Not to be a broken record, but my professor suspected, and I suspect as well, that these changes are being caused by climate change.

It doesn't take a scientist to reason that plants love the warm weather. However, it is not typical to see a plant grow in the desert areas of the Earth, nor the tundra-like ones. That is because these places, comparable to an alien planet, do not, and cannot sustain life that is not made for that environment. Now consider humans. Humans are creating an artificial environment that cannot sustain plant life. We are slowly creating our own tundra or desert. With our planet slowly warming, the plants will first "enjoy" the

extra sunlight and shed their leaves later on in the year. But, as temperatures progressively get warmer, the life cycle of the tree could cease to exist. Soon trees will not be able to withstand the increased temperature and will die out, until only a desert planet exists.



With regard to the color of trees, the observation that tree color in the fall season is more muted is backed up with the science of tree leaves. Trees use the lack of nitrogen to maintain the red color in the fall, but "[in](#) a future high nitrogen world, trees will be less stressed, and as a result, perhaps less red too." Some environmental factors, including acidity of soil, could disrupt this change. However, it seems the latter is already taking place.

Leaves play an integral part in our atmosphere. Not only do they provide oxygen but they also reflect light from the atmosphere, which drives the climate of the planet. The [Yale Environmental](#)

[Review](#) quoting research led by Dr. Christopher Doughty, an assistant professor in ecoinformatics at Northern Arizona University, stated, "warmer temperatures may actually make leaves darker in color so that they reflect less light. Leaves are entering into a dangerous feedback cycle, where warm temperatures force plants to build less reflective leaves that then trap heat and warm the world even more." So not only can warm temperatures affect the leaves themselves, but the leaves can affect the atmospheric temperature due to these warm conditions.

It cannot be stressed enough that our planet is reacting to our actions. If we do not take strong actions, including limiting our pollution emission from both power plants and vehicles alike, our Earth will no longer be able to support us. This is a crisis, and it cannot be stressed enough that actions must be taken to ensure our future!

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## Scylla Scanner: Spotted In A Crowd

By Adina Strong

People react to panic in two different ways: there are those who view it as an inhibitor, and others who view it as an opportunity to do something creative. In response to the anxiety, fear, and hysteria caused by COVID-19, scientists around the globe are soaring to new heights to create machinery and gadgets aimed at improving the lives of those suffering from the virus, as well as to protect and enrich the lives of those who are fortunate enough to have not been infected.

One of the most fascinating and new inventions is the Thermal Scanner released by Scylla, an engineering company based in Armenia. The concept of thermal imaging was first introduced in 1929 by Kálmán Tihanyi, a Hungarian physicist who

used an infrared-sensitive electronic television camera for aircraft defense. While invisible to the naked eye, thermal cameras can detect and capture different levels of infrared light and translate that information to a temperature value. Since we humans transfer heat through infrared radiation, these thermal cameras are able to capture our own internal temperature.

Based on this old design, CEO and founder of Scylla, Albert Stepanyan and his team of engineers, invented a body temperature detector (BDT) to help the world function with the “new normal” introduced by COVID-19. Education sites, hospitals, government buildings, airports and more will have to find new and efficient ways to adhere to COVID-19 regulations in order to ensure safety during the pandemic. The BDT works by recognizing someone with a high temperature amongst a large crowd through the use of thermal imaging cameras and artificial intelligence. Additionally, the BDT can identify people who are not wearing masks. This technology can be extremely useful in busy work places, crowded

public areas and the like. This technology can also save time and space, thereby increasing productivity, efficiency, comfort and the safety of professionals who will no longer have to be stopped and scanned upon entering the worksite. The Scylla Thermal Scanner has the same appearance and multiple target screening capabilities as regular security cameras found in these common areas, but have the additional ability of detecting temperature.



While this technology seems extremely promising, given its potential to “[slow](#) the spread ... [and] operate ... business as usual,” many potential problems may arise. Implementation of this technology may prove to be difficult; the cost and installation fee for this software on this grand of a scale won’t be cheap. Additionally, problems can arise when individuals don’t authorize the scan performance. Most importantly, this BDT can’t actually stop the real

problem at hand: the virus. A high temperature is only one of many factors pointing to COVID-19 infection and many infected people can slip through the cracks. All things considered, however, if this is the new normal, Scylla is taking the right steps to ensuring smooth sailing.

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## Pink Pineapples and the Mad, Misunderstood World of GMOs

By Jacob Leichter, Staff Writer

After a 16-year wait, the Del Monte Fresh Produce company has finally announced the commercial release of their Pinkglow pineapple. The “Jewel of the Jungle,” as the company refers to it, is touted as being sweeter and less acidic than its yellow-fleshed cousin. According to Del Monte, the Pinkglow gets its unique color from the addition of [lycopene](#), a naturally occurring pigment most commonly found in red produce, like tomatoes. That makes this new fruit a genetically modified organism (GMO), a term that strikes fear in the hearts of health-conscious eaters everywhere. Does this mean that the Pinkglow pineapple is unsafe? On the contrary. In a 2016 review of the “extra sweet pink flesh pineapple,” the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) concluded that it is “[as safe](#) and nutritious as its conventional counterparts.”

Such a conclusion has been made time and again

regarding GMOs, yet much of the public is wary of the term, preferring to consume “non-GMO” foodstuffs. Why then is genetic modification, or bioengineering, so stigmatized?

Part of the animosity towards GMOs may have to do with how the term comes across. Hearing “genetic modification” may evoke images of mad scientists in dark laboratories, tinkering with chemicals, and introducing dangerous substances into the unsuspecting public’s diet. In reality, the genetic modification of crops has been a pastime of humanity for millennia, with many popular fruits and vegetables being the result of selective breeding to produce cultivars with the most desirable qualities. Take, for example, the banana; the wild version is much smaller and riddled with large seeds compared to the tastier one found in grocery stores worldwide.

Selective breeding, while a more natural means of achieving the creation of more favorable crops, takes a much longer time. To speed up this process, modifications can be made in labs to achieve similar results by directly altering genes or introducing new

traits in crops and animals. For crops, most GMO products are used as animal feed. Some of the changes made to produce meant for human consumption, according to the FDA, lead to anything from “[insect](#) resistance or drought tolerance” to “higher crop yields” to “better nutrition,” producing plentiful, nutritious crops in more adverse conditions. In animals, a recent example is the AquAdvantage Salmon, a bioengineered version of the Atlantic salmon announced in 2015. This fish is designed to grow quicker and to thrive better in land-based, rather than offshore, environments, thereby reducing farming and transportation costs. All in all, GMOs allow for more sustainable and cost-effective crop and animal production, enabling more people from various socioeconomic classes around the globe to access healthy and diverse foods.

The potential benefits of GMOs are all well and good, but that leaves the most important questions; are they safe for human consumption and are there any negative long-term effects from eating these bioengineering products? The [FDA](#) has determined that “GMO foods are as

healthful and safe to eat as their non-GMO counterparts” for humans, while “GMO plants fed to farm animals are as safe as non-GMO animal food.” These findings were echoed by a Harvard University meta-review of 20 years’ worth of literature into the safety of GMOs, concluding that they “[exhibit](#) no toxicity, in one generation or across many” and that GMOs “as a class are no more likely to be harmful than traditionally bred and grown food sources.”

That said, hopefully some of the stigma surrounding GMOs has been allayed. And for those fruit enthusiasts looking for a novel experience, Del Monte’s photogenic pastel pink fleshed Pinkglow can be enjoyed for a price of \$49 per pineapple, available for purchase on the product’s website.

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## The Neuroscience Of Evil: A Theory

By Shayna Herszage,  
Managing Editor

The word ‘evil’ is often thrown around in conversation. An irritating teacher is called evil, a particularly annoying peer from growing up is called evil, classroom morality discussions deal in the binary of ‘good versus evil.’

But what is evil? Am I evil? Are you evil?



These are some of the questions criminal psychologist Julia Shaw examines in her book “Evil: The Science Behind Humanity’s Dark Side.” In the book, Shaw dissects and explores what the term “evil” really means, what causes evil, and who is — or is not — evil.

In the first chapter, “Your Inner Sadist: The Neuroscience of Evil,” Shaw explains a theory of the neurological basis for evil in humanity. This theory was created by Martin Reimann and Philip Zimbardo — the latter of whom is well known for his famous Stanford Prison Study. In their theory, evil follows a pathway that generates three factors which contribute to perceived evil in humans.

The first part of the pathway is based in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, also known as the vmPFC. The prefrontal cortex is one of the most advanced aspects of the human brain, and it specializes in complex behaviors such as planning for future events. Decreased activity in the vmPFC has been linked with aggressive behavior and poor decision-making. Additionally, this

decreased activity leads to deindividuation, in which a person ceases to see themselves as an individual, and instead they view themselves as an anonymous member of a larger group. As such, they do not feel that they should be held personally accountable for their behavior.



The second part of the pathway is heightened activity in the amygdala, which is a center of emotion. The heightened activity leads to increased feelings of anger and fear, which may lead to dehumanizing others for the purpose of self-defense from a perceived threat.

The third part of the pathway is the brainstem, reacting to the messages it receives from the vmPFC and the amygdala. The messages cause the brain stem to send messages to the central nervous system (CNS) which trigger a fight-or-flight response in the individual. When these responses are triggered regularly in social settings

with no real threat, these signals are often expressed as antisocial behavior such as avoiding others and starting fights.

There is not a clear way to prevent or identify evil, as Shaw explains in the book. Rather, the capacity for “evil” exists in all of us — the ability to forget that we are responsible for our actions, the tendency to dehumanize others, the moments of fight-or-flight responses where they are not necessary — and it is our responsibility to keep ourselves in check before we mistreat those around us.

## Business:

### Interview With Associate Dean Michael Strauss

By Eli Saperstein on behalf of the YU Observer

Michael Strauss is the associate dean of the Sy Syms School of Business as well as a clinical professor of strategy and entrepreneurship, entrepreneur-in-residence and director of The Rennert Entrepreneurial Institute. From 2017-2019, he served as the interim dean and from 2011-2017



as the associate dean at the Sy Syms School of Business. Before joining Yeshiva University, Dean Strauss was involved in many different industries, from being the chairman of Sherwood Consulting Group, Inc., a management advisory firm dedicated to steering emerging growth companies, to serving as CEO of multiple companies, delivering expertise in turn-around management. Dean Strauss' industry expertise was forged during his twelve years at American Express which he departed as one of only three executive vice presidents of the Travel Related Services Division. Prior to American Express, he served in several financial and management capacities at American Airlines, the Bank of New York and CitiGroup. He has a BBA from The City College of New York and an MBA from Baruch College, City University of New York. Dean Strauss was born and raised in Israel and is fluent in both Hebrew and German.

I had the honor and opportunity to interview Associate Dean Strauss about his past experiences, talk about current and upcoming initiatives at YU, as well as hearing the

advice he has for the current students.

***YU Observer:* What was your background before you came to YU and what led you to want to stay?**

**Associate Dean Michael Strauss:** I came to America from Israel at the age of fourteen with my parents who had left from Germany before the war. From the day I arrived in NY, I had to work in order to support myself and my parents who were extremely poor. I could not afford to go to Yeshiva University at the time, so I went to City College where I received my undergraduate degree, and then to Baruch at night, to get my MBA. My first two jobs were in industrial engineering, a good field, but one which I did not enjoy. After two years I got a job at CitiBank, in the operations department where I learned some programming, and from there I went to Bank of NY where I got into sales: selling the bank's services to its corporate clients. I enjoyed the financial services industry, and was attracted by an ad in the NY Times, (in those days, companies advertised for open positions in the newspapers), looking for an assistant treasurer at

American Express. I applied and was hired. I worked at AmEx for twelve years heading the Gold Card Division, their Canadian Subsidiary in Toronto, the U.S. Marketing business, and the U.S. Travel Division, eventually becoming an executive vice president.

After 12 years at AMEX, and the broad exposure that I received to run different businesses there, I decided to become more entrepreneurial, and over a period of several years worked with different investors, who acquired companies in need of "fixing," as CEO. My mandate was to do whatever it takes to position or reposition the company for substantial growth. The investors strategy was to sell the companies that they acquired within a reasonable amount of time, of course, for more than they paid for them. We would invest in these companies, turn them around and sell them for a profit. I learned that the basic principles of any business are the same no matter what the industry is, the end goal is usually the same, offer the best product or service to the customer, while maximizing profitability, at least in the for-profit

world. This was my approach when I was asked to join YU to help revitalize the business school.

My first experience with Yeshiva University was when a professor from YU, whom I met, asked me to speak to his class about my experiences in business. I gave the presentation, and as I opened the floor to questions, I marveled at how respectful, inquisitive, and polite the students were. After the presentation, several students came over to ask questions; we stayed in touch. I came back again and again to the school and eventually was asked to develop my own course called, "Turnaround Business Strategy". In 2011 I was offered the position of dean, to help in revitalizing the school.

**O: What was it like switching from the corporate world, where you were the chairman of Sherwood Consulting Group, and served as CEO of multiple companies, to Yeshiva University, and what made you decide that you can settle down at YU?**

**S:** As I said before, business is business except that the environment of Yeshiva University which is a very Jewish

environment was a new and very enticing experience for me. At American Express there were very few Jews in upper management. I cannot speak for the entire company or other companies, but the corporate world was at that time a very secular environment. Many Jews felt that to be successful they needed to become entrepreneurs and start companies on their own. They wanted to be able to make their own decisions and be their own bosses; many became very successful.

I came to YU because I wanted to give back, after many successful years in the corporate world. That gave me a bit of freedom to voice my opinion and make some changes that I felt would benefit the school. I forged a very close relationship with the students, one of appreciation and respect. Respect for each other was key to having a positive and productive relationship.

**O: What led you to become so interested in entrepreneurship and business management?**

**S:** It was a necessity. When we first got off the boat from Israel and got to our apartment, my parents

had no jobs, no money, and no food. I went out at 14 looking for a job. I saw a grocery store on our block and with my few words of English asked for a job there; I was promptly rejected, so I waited outside the store and would help those who needed — particularly the elderly by carrying their bags back to their homes for which they would tip me.

After deciding to leave engineering and becoming successful at a management position at American Express, I decided that private equity had the most potential for myself with my background in turning businesses around.

**O: This year has been incredibly chaotic for everyone, and based on your experience in "turnaround management", what does it mean for the future of companies as we know them? Will this new world of virtual business become the norm, and will it be good for companies and their employees or worse?**

**S:** These are definitely very tough times for many businesses. The businesses that will thrive, and are thriving, and growing, are those that are creative, flexible and willing and

able to change and adapt. The companies that can adapt, re-imagine themselves, will not only survive but become stronger and better. The others that cannot, may disappear. IBM, one of the world's largest computer and technology companies, recently announced that they are moving towards more cloud-based services. They have been around for a hundred years and decided that they needed to reinvent themselves in order to survive. That shows adaptability and persistence as opposed to stagnation. The worst thing for a company is to stagnate. Employees are very much the same. They too need to adapt, accept change, and show flexibility.

One of the things that I am extremely proud of is YU's response to the pandemic and how quickly it adopted and changed. In March, we were one of the first to shut down and reopen with a whole new method of teaching. Teaching online has its challenges and there were of course some hiccups as we went from face to face to online learning, but we pulled through. Over the summer, there were many training sessions for the teachers on how to teach more effectively in an online

environment, and how to engage students in the virtual classroom. We are doing our best with the resources at hand, but for the most part this semester is not being plagued by nearly as many issues as we had in the spring, and overall, while not ideal, this semester is extremely productive given the circumstances.

**O: As a FTOC (First time on campus) student, the first time I met you was during the Sy Syms orientation where you shared that "If anyone has any ideas regarding an invention, please contact me." What inventions have you helped create?**

**S:** When I first joined YU, many students, knowing my entrepreneurial background, asked me if I can help them take their business idea and assist them in creating a path to launching the business. I saw many ideas. Some were very good and some were not so good. This led to my becoming the Entrepreneur in Residence. I helped many students in drafting a business plan, identifying sources of funds, introducing them to patent lawyers, manufacturing facilities, and more.

There have been many great ideas that I have seen since becoming "Entrepreneur in Residence." Two unique ideas that became businesses were relatively simple ideas for which there was a market and demand. Remember that Apple, which has been dominating the smartphone industry, is a relative newcomer to the scene. How did they do it? It used to be the Blackberry which everyone used, particularly businesses. Where is Blackberry today?

The two ideas that I am going to talk about are relevant to everyone now that winter is coming. One was a student who came up to me with a few pages of diagrams describing how she created a sweatshirt that turns into a handbag. She told me how she would go running around campus and she didn't want to have to stop by her dorm every time before class to drop off the sweatshirt, and that she wasn't comfortable tying the sweatshirt around her waist or carrying it around. So, she created a sweatshirt that, by pulling a few strings, became a handbag that she could carry on her shoulders. She manufactured it and sold a bunch. As with many other

business ideas that became small businesses, she abandoned it when she graduated from Syms.

Another idea that was actually very successful came from a student who had come to me with the following problem. He lived in the Bronx and worked downtown in the financial district. He had to take the elevated subway to work. On very cold days, he wore a very heavy coat. He did not like it but could not find a light very warm coat. After much research he decided to make his own, very warm but light coat. At first, I did not think he could do it, but eventually the idea got off the ground, and today the company is very successful, called “Norwegian Wool.”

**O: How do you feel about the Syms online program and are there any advantages now that everything is online and how can students best take advantage of them?**

I believe that the online program is a success; is it ideal? No. We have put a lot of work in restructuring the curriculum and training the professors on how to deal with the challenges of online learning. How to make sure that students are more engaged and more attentive. I speak to

students every day, and the feedback so far is very positive.

There are advantages to some to work from home, and there are disadvantages to others. It depends on several factors, the privacy that one has, bandwidth availability, technology, and more flexibility. There is no question that all of us miss the interaction with others.

**O: Going forward what will Syms look like? Will the online portion be a permanent edition?**

Not likely. Once we get past the pandemic, we may offer some online courses, but the hope is to get back to face to face learning. Efforts are being put towards improving online learning while at the same time creating the smoothest transition back to on-campus learning as soon as possible.

**O: What problems are you seeing with the online program, and what advice can you give to students on how to deal with virtual learning?**

None of this is ideal as I have mentioned before. In an online environment, students are usually at home, competing with other family members’ needs for laptops,

bandwidth, and privacy. We are attempting to do everything on our end to provide the students the best education that we can, given the circumstances. I am pleased to let you know that we have received a tremendous amount of positive feedback from the faculty, the students as well as the parents for the job that we are doing. I myself am extremely proud of all the hard work our faculty and students are putting in to make this semester a success; let’s keep it up!

**O: What questions do you wish students would ask you about your experiences that you never get to share/that you feel they would benefit from?**

**S:** My relationship with the students is a very open one, there is nothing I haven’t talked about nor anything I wouldn’t feel comfortable sharing with them. My advice to all the students is to ask and ask and ask again. I keep my door open, (pre pandemic), and enjoy occasionally “ambushing” students to ask how things are going and to ask them how things can be improved. I like to have the relationship be less formal, more of one akin to a grandfather and

grandson as opposed to dean and student. In most universities, students do not know who the dean is. They only get the opportunity to meet the dean, when they are expelled. Not at YU, all the deans, academic advisors and faculty are accessible to the students, and know most, if not all of them in person. We are one family.....

### SSSB Club Profile: Networking Club

By Nathan Hakakian on behalf of the Business Staff

*Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight one SSSB club available to the YU undergraduate community. For the October issue, the YU Observer is highlighting "Networking Club."*

**Club Name:** Networking Club

**Heads:** Ariel Schneider, Leora Strauss, and Bracha Teigman

**Relevant Campus(es):** Wilf and Beren

**What is your club's mission statement?:** Give students the knowledge and opportunity to get their dream job.

**Why is this club important?:** Our club is important for people who don't know what their next

step is in finding a job. They might be in the early stages or even the very end. We provide students with the proper connections to get them to the next level whether through connections or our events.

**What was your pull to get involved in/start the club?:** I (Ariel Schneider) went to the first event in the spring semester of 2019. Sammy Katz, former president of the Networking Club, was enthusiastic about the club's future success. I personally wanted to get to know him more and learn more from him so I joined the club as a way to learn from him. I realized that not only Sammy was a key part of my growth but the Networking Club [was] as well. I wanted to continue to grow what Sammy started and so far we had a lot of success this year!

**What are some things your club has done in the past?:** We joined together with the finance and real estate clubs to have amazing events. Both had the opportunity to do formal and informal networking. When we went online, we had an amazing event hosting Adam Neuman and David Stanton and joined, once again, with the finance

club, for another amazing finance networking event.

**What are some plans you have for this semester/future semesters?:**

We plan on leading a [r]esume workshop that will give students the opportunity to work on their resume with professionals in the workplace. No matter where their resume is at, we will provide someone who can critique and improve their resumes.

**What is your favorite OSL-provided food for club events?:**

I am a personal fan of pizza! If I had a choice, I would bring pizza to every event! But people enjoy chop chop better so I usually go with that

**With COVID, how is your club adjusting?:** We adjusted pretty well! In fact this gave us the opportunity to get people we normally could not. We had people from LA speaking at our events this past semester! We obviously could not do that in person.

**What is your advice to someone looking to get involved on campus?:** I would first suggest to join the general board. You get a more inside scoop of what events we plan on making and how you can contribute. Other than that, come to our events and



make sure to ask many questions!

**Anything else to say about your club:** If you want to join the club, use this [link](#)!

*Are you a YU undergraduate club head interested in seeing your club featured in a future edition? Email us at [theyuobserver@gmail.com](mailto:theyuobserver@gmail.com) with your club name and the names of the club heads!*

## Climate Change: Fashionably Cautious

By Rachel Doretsky, Staff Writer

When examining current events, climate change is amongst the most polarizing topics. Climate change deeply affects a multitude of industries, particularly the fashion industry. With an increased pressure coming from both regulators and consumers, the fashion industry must find a way to trend closer to emitting greenhouse gases.

According to McKinsey's research, the sector was responsible for 2.1 billion metric tons of greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions in 2018, accounting for 4% of the global total. To put that

into perspective, the fashion industry contributes around the same quantity of GHGs annually as the entire economies of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom combined. The goal set for the fashion sector is to reduce their emissions by 1 billion metric tons; due to COVID-19 however, emissions are expected to double by 2030. In order to reach this goal of decreasing GHG emissions, the industry should be implementing more abatement actions and decarbonization efforts. Sources estimate that emissions can be reduced by 60% through initiatives such as energy-efficient adjustments and a switch to renewable energy. Furthermore, 18% of GHGs emitted can be stopped by brands improving their operations. Even more encouraging, 21% can be saved through changes in consumer behavior. Overall, these efforts can transform the fashion landscape.



There are three key areas for potential industry

improvement. The first is cutting emissions from upstream operations through switching to energy efficient methods and a transition from fossil fuels to renewable-energy sources. By implementing these changes, 1 billion metric tons of GHG can be reduced by 2030. The second area involves reducing brand's emissions produced by operations, altering their material make up, incorporating the use of recycled fiber, relying more heavily on the use of sustainable transport, re-creating their packaging, decarbonizing their retail operations, minimizing returns, and reducing overproduction which would make a huge difference. Lastly, encouraging viable proactive consumer behavior. This would entail an increase in promoting garment rental, resale, repair, refurbishment, and most easily implemented, washing and drying clothing less or in a more environmentally conscious way. In addition, an increase in recycling old clothing would reduce the amount of landfill waste generated. Having the industry switch to a model based on closed-loop recycling (re-creating a product back into itself by

recycling) will make a large positive impact.

There are a number of companies that are leading the way in sustainability. A few of them include Patagonia, Levi's, H&M Conscious, Eileen Fisher, Everlane, and more. Patagonia has two different approaches to combating this issue. They use sustainable materials in their outerwear, as well as help customers fix their clothing rather than buying new garments. Patagonia abides by fair-trade rules and closely monitors its supply chain to ensure it's safe for the environment, workers and buyers. Their goal is to find solutions to environmental issues without harming the world. Their products are so durable and therefore customers are encouraged to recycle old Patagonia gear and purchase items second hand. As for the Denim Department, it's notorious for requiring very large amounts of water to make one pair of jeans, but Levi's new initiative uses up to 96% less water than usual. Levi's is devoted to sustainability from their design to the manufacturing process and is working towards 100% sustainably sourced cotton and even recycling old

jeans into home insulation.

Another familiar brand is H&M who is drifting from its fast fashion roots via their Conscious Collection. This line of clothing is made of materials like organic cotton and recycled polyester. The brand hopes to minimize its environmental footprint by using eco-friendly fabrics and more sustainable ways of production. Similar to Patagonia, customers are encouraged to recycle unwanted garments at H&M stores and in return receive a discount on future purchases. The overall H&M brand is determined to use only sustainably sourced materials by 2030.

Eileen Fisher's design and manufacturing process is like H&M in the sense that it's built to be as sustainable and eco-friendly as possible, from their inputs to the way they treat their workers who make the clothing. The company avoids transporting products via airplanes and uses innovative methods to limit fabric waste. Eileen Fisher follows the trend of buying back used garments to recycle into new items

or even turn into artwork if it can't be resold.

Lastly but not least is Everlane. They combine sustainability with transparency by communicating with customers a clear breakdown of the cost of each garment and showing the sites where their clothes are made. The company forms tight relationships with factory owners to make sure the employees and production methods meet Everlane's high ethical standards. Most recently, Everlane released a line of clothing composed of recycled plastic bottles and other reused materials.

The possible key efforts should be pursued by policy makers, companies themselves, and investors. Governments and regulators should push for sustainable practices along with more conscious buying habits. Incentivizing entities to implement decarbonization methods that have high abatement potential is another way to effect change. Brands are constantly trying to appear more socially responsible to encourage people to buy from them and invest in their company. Patagonia, Levi's, Eilen Fisher, and

Everlane are among the most proactive companies within the fashion industry. As for investors, they can make an impact by supporting plans for decarbonization, emission transparency, and innovation efforts centered around sustainability among the companies in their investing portfolio.

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## Diversifying Approaches to Biodiversity

By Rachel Doretsky, Staff Writer

Biodiversity loss is a concern among consumers and is gaining more traction during COVID-19. To put it simply, biodiversity is the variety of all life forms here on earth. It provides us with food, energy, breathable air, fresh water, soil, and climate regulation. After considering all this, it's shocking that biodiversity is declining at a faster rate than ever before in human history. One million species, about 20% of estimated total species, face the threat of extinction. The fashion industry is a large contributor to the growth of this problem. Supply chains are directly correlated with soil degradation, conversion of natural ecosystems, and waterway pollution. This article will discuss the fashion industry's major contributors to biodiversity loss, how brands can strategically minimize that loss, and what companies can do to spearhead the industry's biodiversity efforts.

Almost all of the negative impacts come from three stages in the value chain: raw-material production, the actual garment manufacturing, and disposal of items. The five most notable contributors

within these stages of the value chain are: cotton cultivation, wood-based natural fibers/man-made cellulose fibers (MMCFs), fabric dyeing and treatment, microplastics, and waste. Cotton is both the most commonly used and most desired fabric globally. Growing cotton uses more pesticides and insecticides than any other crop, as well as a colossal amount of water, approximately using 713 gallons of water to make one T-shirt. Over 150 million trees are cut down per year in order to produce MMCFs and 30% may be sourced from endangered forests. In addition to tree logging, MMCFs contribute to water and soil pollution due to the chemicals used in these processes and lead to habitat loss and further endangering species. In terms of fabric dyeing and treatment, this part of the value chain contributes to about 25% of industrial water pollution. Of the 1,900 chemicals used to do so, 165 are classified by the European Union as hazardous to the health or the environment. Also, half a million tons of microplastics, plastic pieces less than five millimeters long end up in oceans annually. About 35% of the main

microplastics in the world's oceans stem from the washing of synthetic fabrics. If companies were to change the textiles used to make clothing this number would decrease dramatically. In terms of garment disposal, only 12% is recycled. Almost 73% of textile waste is burned and then sent to a landfill which contributes to habitat loss (between 30 and 300 species can be lost due to the development of one landfill).

Fortunately, there are ways to solve these problems. The first way is for companies to more widely use innovative processes and materials. For example, implementing less harmful agricultural techniques to produce cotton, MMCs, and synthetic materials as well as investing in textile innovation will help to reduce biodiversity loss. Of course, textile innovation is expensive, but with economies of scale and a real desire to become more socially responsible, it can be done.



Second, water pollution is rampant. The dyeing of fabrics is a large contributor. In many developing countries, they don't have the resources to track the chemicals they use or ways to measure the damage they're causing. In leading countries, enough regulations aren't put into place; there are technologies that can be used to fix this problem, such as Netherlands-based DyeCoo's waterless dyeing technology. It saves 32 million liters of water and 160 tons of processing chemicals a year. While this is a well established and proven solution, it's pain point is its price. Governments and suppliers need to work with brands to finance and invest in innovative solutions that will decrease water pollution in a sustainable way.

Third, consumer education and empowerment can have a large positive impact. A few ways consumers can take part in the movement to decrease biodiversity loss are: washing clothes in cold water, filtering microfibers, using water efficient washing machines, and garment recycling, resale, and repurposing. Consumers

can actually have a very large impact on this matter. To put it in perspective, using a piece of clothing for nine extra months can reduce its associated CO2 emissions by 27%, its water use by 33%, and its waste by 22%. According to Forbes, businesses such as H&M Conscious, Patagonia, Everlane, Rothy's, Levi's, and more are fashion brands leading the way in sustainability.

The fourth way, and arguably the most powerful way, is to simply stop overproducing clothing. Overproduction is currently measured at 20%. Manufacturers recycle only 75% of pre consumer garment waste. The left over 25% mainly ends up in landfills or is burned without ever having been worn, though some of it is donated.

Biodiversity is a matter of interest for consumers and companies alike. At the end of the day, all of the technology and strategic plans for reducing GHG emissions and biodiversity loss mean nothing without bold leadership. Companies need to start valuing managing biodiversity like they do value creation; they should collaborate with suppliers as well as other companies

in the industry which can help scale innovation as well as the impact it will have. Also, while the fashion industry is very large, it is interconnected with other industries such as agricultural, livestock, and chemical industries. Teaming up with multiple industries will make a sizable difference.

Lastly, they should work with policy makers and support tighter regulations to help make sustainability a shared responsibility.

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## SOS: Save Our Strand

By Shayna Herszage,  
Managing Editor

As an avid reader, one of my favorite spaces in Manhattan is [The Strand Bookstore](#) located at Broadway and East 12th St. The bookstore features three floors of standard new and used books for purchase as well as a floor of rare books. In a concrete city that is always busy, The Strand is a breath of fresh, book-scented air.

Unfortunately, this oasis, which boasts 18 miles of books, is now in danger of closing its doors after 93 years. On Friday, October 23, Nancy Bass-Wyden, The Strand's third-generation owner, posted a [plea](#) on Twitter asking for people to support the iconic bookstore.

According to Bass-Wyden, The Strand's revenue has been down nearly 70% since 2019, largely due to COVID-19. The coronavirus pandemic has primarily caused losses due to two factors. Firstly, the loss of tourism in New York and the reduction of in-person interactions have caused the usual flood of in-person customers to cease. Secondly, The

Strand is known for holding many in-person events — which have all been brought to a stop in the face of the pandemic. These two factors have rendered the store nearly empty and, as a result, lacking its typical source of revenue.

At the beginning of the pandemic, The Strand was sustained through paycheck protection funds, or PPPs. Additionally, many staff members were laid off due to the financial hit of the initial onset of the pandemic. These precautions helped The Strand to stay open during the first several months of the pandemic. In fact, The Strand even opened up a [second location](#) over the summer on the Upper West Side.



Overall, many were shocked and dismayed by Bass-Wyden's Twitter statement, considering last year's controversial [decision](#) to give the flagship building landmark status, this year's new location, and the bookstore's general



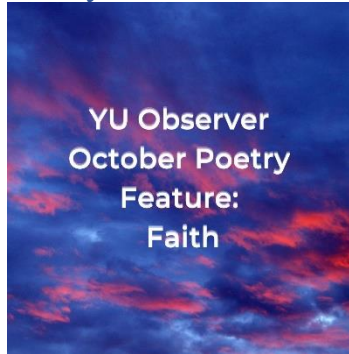
popularity over the past several decades.

Bass-Wyden [expressed](#) that, after 93 years and three generations of The Strand existing in New York, she hopes that this will not be the bookstore's downfall. "We've survived just about everything for 93 years. The Great Depression, two world wars, big box bookstores, ebooks and online behemoths. We are the last of the 48 bookstores still standing from 4th Avenue's famous Book Row."

In her [Twitter posts](#), Bass-Wyden stated that the way to help save The Strand is to purchase books from its online and physical stores. Despite the financial difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, enough support from the global community can hopefully keep The Strand's doors open.

## Arts & Culture:

*YU Observer* October Poetry Feature: Faith



### Bridges

By Yair Shavrick, Opinion Editor

*Each month, the YU Observer sends a call to YU students for poetry submissions following a specific theme. This month, the theme was 'Faith', and we are featuring Yair Shavrick's piece, 'Bridges.' Other submissions of honorable mention have been published as well.*

I dreamt I was a road  
Weaving all around an  
island.  
Not a perfect road  
Yet at a glance, complete.  
Used like any other road,  
A transportation device  
To be used and then  
forgotten.  
From the ground which I  
lay  
I could see another land,

Abundant in the  
pleasantries  
To which I deeply desire.  
There is only one way  
I could own this paradise,  
But somehow it isn't  
Reliant on my volition.  
I plead with my creator,  
Build me to the better land.  
The answer pierces my  
heart-  
A dagger of false truths.

### **"Bridges are for broken roads"**

This rips through the tears  
Of which my dry eyes  
weep,  
To accept such a poisonous  
complacency  
Would be a disservice to  
myself.  
So I build my own  
beautiful bridge  
Basking in its glorious  
structure,  
Which reaches out to the  
beauty  
I've painstakingly longed  
for.  
I look back to my original  
road  
Potholes and broken lines  
Riddled with gravel and  
wear.  
My happiness now ever-  
abundant  
From my journey so  
crucial  
To my success and beauty.  
I turn to my creator  
A smug smile on my face,  
And I notice Her smiling  
back.

My bridge is appreciated  
and used  
Only because I want it to  
be;  
For no one but myself.  
The sweetest words dance  
Off my lips in complete  
euphoria  
To the one I despised  
And relied on most.

*“Bridges aren’t for broken  
roads; they’re for the ones  
who dream”*

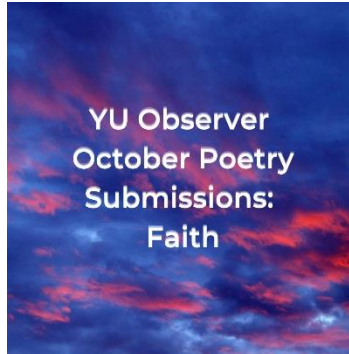
*Do you want to see your  
writing published? The  
theme for November’s  
poetry submissions is  
“Transition.” Send all  
submissions to  
[theyuobserver@gmail.com](mailto:theyuobserver@gmail.com)  
by November 15.*

### ***YU Observer October Poetry Submissions: Faith***

By Amalya Teitelbaum,  
Anonymous Stern Student,  
HaKohein, & Sophia  
Baradarian

*Each month, the YU  
Observer sends a call to  
YU students for poetry  
submissions following a  
specific theme. This month,  
the theme was ‘Faith’, and  
we are featuring Yair*

*Shavrick’s piece,  
‘Bridges’. However, the  
poems below are other  
submissions of honorable  
mention.*



### ***I Am 8 Years Old*** By Amalya Teitelbaum

I am 8 years old  
Normality is bliss  
Blonde pigtailed, pink  
dresses, friendship  
necklaces  
Bubbles drifting lazily  
through the sky  
From the whispers of our  
lips  
Born to live which we  
truly were  
I am 13 years old  
Transitions galore  
First entering the building,  
tiptoeing on the high  
school floors  
Light-headed on my feet  
Blurry vision flicking from  
my lashes  
And yet still born to live  
I am 16 years old  
Something is wrong  
Vertigo, shaking,  
collapsing on floors

Mothers concerning eyes,  
fathers raised brows  
Was I born wrong?  
18 years old  
white.  
From the walls to the bed,  
to the blaze blocking my  
sight  
Trading blonde pigtailed for  
a smooth crown  
Pink dresses for hospital  
gowns  
I have a clear necklace,  
one that goes through my  
neck  
Born to survive which I  
truly wasn’t  
I am 20 years old  
Motionless, lying in my  
bed  
I think  
Feeling nothing hearing  
nothing  
My sight remains  
A beautiful blessing yet a  
horrific curse  
For I see my little sisters  
tears but I can do nothing  
but scream in my head  
Born to die.  
21 years old  
I met my best friend today  
A little girl adorned with a  
white paper gown and  
blonde pigtailed  
How long they will remain  
is unrevealed  
Sitting close, arm to arm  
eye to eye  
  
Telling her how she will  
not just survive but live  
Eye to eye, my smile  
birthing hers  
Born to make smiles, born  
to give light

Born to tell my story

## Faith

By Anonymous Stern Student

Faith.

This word isn't just a word.

Rather a connotation.

Connoting many a thing-

A look heavenward.

An innate recognition.

The sacrifice of one's reason to that that is unproven.

All "positive".

It also connotes other things -

The continuation of racism.

The continued power of the patriarchy and the subjugation of women.

The molestation of othered groups by society.

Maybe it's not positive after all.

## écrasez l'infâme

By HaKohein, Staff Writer

I used to worship at your feet of gold,  
clinging to their comforting, inspiring glean,  
trusting that you cared for my prayer,  
even though you never responded.

Your kisses were empty of accompanying words.

Your oracle refused to speak. You were comfortable.

Well now your temple goes up in flames and your priest has decried you as a false god.

A woman dressed in pallid gold, whose feet are weak and legs wobbly now that she is alone, at her altar, with nobody to call her beautiful.

## Lamentations

By Sophia Baradaran, Staff Writer

You and I both watched it unfold perhaps lives ago.  
Ageless stone carved delicately, and limned in strokes of gleaming gold, *serene*.  
Virginal vales lulled once by muted notes of mirth, where moistened earth bore olives to pepper twilight turf.  
Tables laden with hyssop, curling carob pods colored cocoa, crates of curcumin adjoining cumin, barrels brimming with grapes plucked from parturient vine.

Men who thought themselves

gods, descending as wolves on the fold, seeking to raze, to cut for sport.  
The eyes of sleeper and sinner alike, glances gelid, waxed deadly still.  
For in depthless slumber, there is no scorching of flesh, *slice* of fattened marrow, nor *crack* of whitened bone.  
No infant tossed to rippling flames nor dashed against the rock.  
No bloodletting sands nor retribution wrought upon tar-stained soul.

I stand here with you, both of us beholden by blows neither felt nor heard, but beholden, *even so*.  
With lashes bathed in brine, harkening to the waning wails of gilded stones our mothers of old once stroked.  
Stones that glisten somberly, *even still* astride a blackened hill.

*Do you want to see your writing published? The theme for November's*

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## The Ever-Changing World of Tabletop Games: The Problem with D&D

Elisheva Zahtz, Features  
Editor

When I say “tabletop game,” I’m sure many of you will think of a board game, or perhaps a card game. But there is much more to tabletop gaming, including the genre of roleplaying games, which are exactly what they sound like — everyone steps outside of themselves to mix improv and make-believe with the game itself, taking on the part of a character to explore possibilities and scenarios that are otherwise impossible. Of those games, I’m sure the title of “Dungeons and Dragons” (D&D) would strike an association for many of us. Whether it’s being portrayed in the context of the recent show “Stranger Things”, or through an actual-play podcast, D&D and other roleplaying games have become more

widespread and recognized than ever before.

But while “Dungeons and Dragons” is perhaps the most well-known of the tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs), it is not the end-all-be-all of the genre in any way. There are a number of problems that have come to light in recent years that have pushed many of the game’s fans away in search of other games. For example, racially-bound traits, including lower intelligence for many of the races that are POC-coded, and the fact that one of the main developers on the staff at Wizards of the Coast (the makers of D&D), Mike Mearls, has covered up for known abusers. To make up for this difference, and for the difficulty in D&D and the lack of representation, people have come up with the perfect solution: making their own games.



Recently, I took my first steps into this world with writing and developing my own game. It dabbles in

the murder-mystery genre, something traditionally hard to make into a game, but something which I wanted to attempt. Terrified, as I consider myself not nearly on the level of a “developer,” I put months into researching and exploring other systems and games, looking at how games like “Genesys”, “BOLT”, “Quest”, and other TTRPGs explore the issues of the Game Master (GM/DM) who runs the game, and the rules systems. As with many industries, the tabletop community is rife with marginalized populations (LGBTQ+ players, POC, or even people who don’t want a Christianized understanding of mythology and other pantheons), and these are all important aspects to consider when making a game. The point of TTRPGs is to be inclusive and fun, but it’s hard to have fun when you’re a Jewish player and you’re listening to the GM explain how the greedy goblins are attacking your village, or an Asian player seeing how your culture has been butchered to create a samurai class that focuses exclusively on honor mechanics.

To avoid that, I made my game entirely separate from the idea of set characters, and moved into the realm of basic, plain characters. Other developers have made all the races equal in their games, or made games inherently aimed at providing a place for LGBTQ+ players and encouraging creative storytelling. Not everyone is comfortable with action-heavy blood-and-guts games, and not everyone is comfortable with story-heavy acting games. Developers pick up on these issues, using the games they find flaws in and creating solutions and alternative methods of play that are comfortable and safe for the players who might otherwise be uncomfortable. There are games like “Masks”, where you play as a group of teenage superheroes looking to find their identity and their place in a world full of full-fledged heroes, or like “BOLT”, where experience is gained through your character’s personal goals and the accomplishment of those goals. These games move away from the tactical side of D&D and allow for the exploration of situations and experiences that are personal and subjective, creating rich narratives and

explosive combats where players have to confront pieces of themselves. These games often encourage the use of safety mechanics (mentioned above) like Lines and Veils, where you can set limits and ensure that triggering topics are avoided or handled with care.

Developers of indie TTRPGs put their hearts and souls into their games to create systems and models of play that are safe and comfortable, and also fun and interesting. With the addition of Safety Tools and new awareness of the problems present in many of the big-name games, creators have come together to create and build a new community away from *D&D*. One of the newer systems on its way to release is “BOLT”, which was recently fully funded on Kickstarter. “BOLT” is a tabletop game that revolves around quick combat and the understanding that people will want to create rules and settings to fit into the world designed to encourage individual creations and additions to the game. Unlike most other tabletop games, this encouragement enables the publication of content using the engine without

threatening agreements, and utilizes a combat system that’s fast-paced and streamlined. The game aims to create a personal sense of accomplishment as the character’s progress through the adventure. The creator, Ajey Pandey, spoke to me about why he chose to create a new game rather than “homebrewing” (creating rules and modifications to the game that aren’t official) and what’s so special about the game:

**Elisheva Zahtz: The world of tabletop games has expanded into platforms and systems far beyond the scope of D&D. Why do you think that is?**

**Ajey Pandey:** Since “D&D” was released, there have been games made outside the “D&D” space. Back in the 70s and 80s, there was “GURPS”, and by the 90s, there were a bunch of non-“D&D” games, like “Vampire: The Masquerade, Cyberpunk 2020”, and “Shadowrun”.

Really, the difference now, post-2010 or so, is that there are games that try to reach beyond snotty cishet white dudes. Games like “Masks” and “Monsterhearts” started to open the space to games by



and for a broader set of people, which is bringing in a huge new set of people that would otherwise get turned away from the nastier elements of “D&D”. I mean, there have always been marginalized folks TTRPGs, but now there are *way* more spaces that aren’t actively hostile to, say, women, or queer folks, or people of color in TTRPGs, and that’s leading to a flourishing of new approaches to role-playing.

**EZ: What inspired the production of your own game/system as opposed to “homebrewing” or modding another game?**

**AP:** For me, I started writing “BOLT” because I was frustrated with homebrewing in this other “toolbox game” [a game designed to be a blank template where the players can create their own setting and adventures] called “Genesys”. Don’t get me wrong, “Genesys” is a great game, but it was hamstrung at every point by management running on venture-capital logic. If I wanted to make my own setting, I would get stuck in a predatory licensing “agreement,” which I didn’t want to deal with — and then the writing team got laid off.

So I wrote “BOLT” to be a game everyone *else* could homebrew or modify. When I started writing “BOLT”, there weren’t really many good options for writing a combat-heavy RPG if you didn’t want to make “D&D” content. There was “Fate”, which isn’t my taste, and “GURPS” and “Genesys”, which both had their own problems. So I just made my own system so that people didn’t have to put up with the problems I had.

**EZ: What about tabletop games inspires you to create? Why do you play these games?**

**AP:** Writing tabletop games is a fun exercise because you’re not writing stories — you’re writing the framework within which *other* people tell stories. It’s writing something like “The Silmarillion” and then hearing back how other people took that book and wrote “Lord of the Rings” out of the “laws of physics” you wrote.

And I play TTRPGs because it’s frankly the best way to make characters and stories that speak to me, short of writing a novel. Like, take “Star Wars”: it’s a *struggle*

to be an Asian Star Wars fan, because the franchise rarely treats its Asian characters well. But if I’m running a tabletop game in “Star Wars”, I can take creative liberties with the source material. I can populate the galaxy with Space Desi characters I relate with, and tell stories I relate with.

**EZ: If you could change anything about the TTRPG community, and the gaming industry, what would you change? Do you think this would change how people feel about/view tabletop games?**

**AP:** I would take every abuser in the industry, and everyone who defends or covers for abusers in the industry, and throw them all into the sun.

That’s Mike Mearls, Zak S, Gary Gygax, Chris Perkins, Jeremy Crawford, Adam Koebel, DungeonDining, Swords & Flowers, there’s a pile, and I don’t even know most of them!

There’s a *lot* of toxicity in the industry, and I’ve seen it burn people out of RPGs. Cutting out the worst abusers in the industry (and — importantly — not giving them money and

influence for their work) won't address all of these problems, but it'll go a *long* way towards making the industry more open to marginalized voices.

## Broadway Blackout Continues

By Sarah Brill, Science and Technology Editor

For all of us lucky enough to experience it, Broadway holds a special place in our hearts. Not only is it the place where, for two hours and thirty minutes, anyone from any walk of life can disappear to a world of make-believe, but it is also the center for all those who work in the performing arts industry in Manhattan.

According to a recent [CNBC](#) article, Broadway's decision to remain dark until 2021 cost Manhattan millions of tourist dollars. The theatre industry, pandemic aside, has been touch-and-go over the past few years with Netflix and other entertainment markets dominating the minds of the youth. It has been a concern that with this rise in TV and movie entertainment that the theatre industry would soon cease to exist, but between 2018 and 2019,

Broadway racked in its highest grossing season at \$1.83 billion in revenue. This year's season totalled in \$300 million of pre-paid tickets ranging from May 2019 until May 2020. Unfortunately, the \$300 million is only credited to the tickets already paid for, not the ones bought in the theatres or around New York City itself, so it can be assumed that if Broadway hadn't shut down, the revenue would rival that of last year's.



This year was a severe setback for Broadway, not just because it went dark, but because youth and teenagers went from going to Broadway shows and becoming immersed in that world, to becoming absorbed in the television. Now, not not only are children regressing into the electronic entertainment capital, but they will likely not be interested in live theatre once it comes back. On the bright side, producers have come up with various strategies to keep these people attuned to the Broadway world.

Some musicals, including "Beetlejuice", have gone as far as creating a TikTok account. Other musicals such as "Hamilton" and "Diana" released their live recordings on [Disney+](#) and Netflix, respectively, to remind the world that live theatre is incomparable when it comes to televised entertainment. But it isn't just the viewers of the Broadway shows missing out, it is also the actors and actresses themselves.

Many of Broadway's shows reached their closing date within, and past, the COVID-19 quarantine date, costing many actors their last chance to perform in their shows. These shows included "Beetlejuice", Disney's "Frozen", and "Hangman". "The Actors' Equity Association, the labor union that represents around 51,000 stage actors and managers in the live theatrical performance industry," estimated "more than 1,100 actors and managers lost work on Broadway during the pandemic." According to [CNBC](#), Broadway hasn't experienced this kind of financial uncertainty since the attack on the Twin Towers. Unlike 2001, however, where Broadway actors and actresses

returned to the stage two days after the attack, this pandemic seems to be taking a long-lasting toll on both the performers and the industry financially.

It is unclear how these setbacks could affect the 2021-2022 season, but it is the hope that Broadway, when it returns to normal, will come back stronger than ever.

## Patrick Melrose: A Review

By Sarah Brill, Science and Technology Editor

*Trigger and Content Warning: This article contains content with mention of sexual and substance abuse and suicide.*

“Patrick Melrose”, a mini series that aired in 2018, depicts the life of a privileged and abusive drug user named Patrick Melrose. “Patrick Melrose” is a limited series based on the acclaimed novels by Edward St. Aubyn. The story takes place from Patrick’s childhood in the 1980s, through his middle-aged years in the early 2000s. Each episode takes place in a specific year. Writer David Nicholls brilliantly

depicted the piece in a chronological succession of events showing the mental regression to progression of the protagonist through the series. Patrick, played by the outstanding actor Benedict Cumberbatch, starts the series off as a struggling addict. Many times he attempted to give up his addiction, but has failed.

Throughout the first episode, we are introduced to the dead dad of Patrick, David Melrose, (played by Hugo Weaving) who, as we would find out, has a complicated relationship with Patrick. Later, the viewer learns that David had an intimate abusive relationship with Patrick, leading to his drug abuse. This episode concludes with him almost committing suicide leading to the slightly sober seasons to follow.

The episodes to follow take place in the ritzy lifestyle that Patrick Melrose leads. Being from a wealthy family, he is granted privileges to attend balls and even spend summers in his father’s old house in the South of France. Unfortunately, while the audience believes that Patrick quit his addiction to drugs, they

soon find out that he has taken on substance abuse in the presence of his children.



His substance abuse throughout the series is in retaliation to the sexually abusive memory of his father. This fluctuation from abuse to withdrawal to sobriety back to abuse couldn’t have been pulled off without the brilliance of Benedict Cumberbatch’s acting.

Cumberbatch portrays this character with elegance and poise. Cumberbatch really made the character who he was. Every eye movement or gesture was intentional and elevated the character to another level. It is really unsurprising, to say the least, that Cumberbatch was able to pull off such a mentally tasking character, having taken on characters

such as Sherlock Holmes in BBC's "Sherlock" (2010) and Khan in "Star Trek into Darkness" (2013). He also stated once, in a 2014 Reddit interview, that the character he would most like to play would be Patrick Melrose, so it is far from surprising that he was ready to take on this character with the gusto that he did.

This show moves through tragedy, addiction, abuse, and love with ease. Being able to tackle all the elements of a truly brilliant TV show, "Patrick Melrose" remains a beautiful piece of underrecognized theatrical art that longs to be watched.

*Please note that this TV show contains more substance abuse than mentioned above as well as a pattern of suicidal themes throughout.*

## Stratford Upon Zoom: The Shakespeare Club's Production of "The Tempest"

By Shayna Herszage,  
Managing Editor

In seventh grade, I performed Shakespeare on stage for the first time. With a floppy green hat on

my head and tights worn under bright green pants, my thirteen-year-old self was exposed to the centuries-old art of reciting William Shakespeare's classic scripts and engaging in stage combat when necessary.

Almost nine years have passed since that experience. I wonder what my thirteen-year-old self would say if she saw my most recent Shakespearean performance.

On October 25, the Yeshiva University Shakespeare Club held its first event: an online reading of "The Tempest", which took place over Zoom and was live-streamed on YouTube.

While I have seen plenty of reimagined Shakespeare performances on stage, not to mention reimagined novel and film adaptations (including the iconic "Taming of the Shrew" adaptation "10 Things I Hate About You"), producing a Shakespearean play over Zoom was an experience I never expected to have. While there were difficulties with adjusting classic theatre to the new format, Zoom brought some unexpected benefits as well.

One of the biggest issues we expected as the cast planned for the performance was losing the onstage movement and blocking. Theatre is such a physically demanding experience, especially in a show such as "The Tempest" which often relies on physical comedy. Director Sarit Perl and I worried about losing important aspects of the play along with losing the physical on-stage presence of comedic characters such as Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban. However, the cast dealt with losing physical space and stage presence with grace. For example, Rivka Shapiro conveyed the role of Ariel using props (such as swimming goggles), makeup effects, and virtual backgrounds, whereas Kesser Frankiel stepped into the role of the drunken Stephano with a slurring accent.



Another problem that arose was one everyone has become intimately familiar with during the COVID-19 pandemic: technical difficulties. Less than an hour before the show, Perl,

“stage manager” Elazar Krausz, and I experienced difficulties getting the show to live-stream on YouTube. As the cast members joined the Zoom call, they joined in our struggle to make sense of the buttons and logins. With about ten minutes to spare until “curtain,” we managed to get the live-stream operation up and running.

Despite the many difficulties, there were some features of the Zoom Shakespeare experience that I felt fortunate to have. For example, we no longer needed to worry about the locations of the actors. While many of the cast members were based in New York, that was not the case for every person involved. Some actors, such as Talya Stehley (who played the roles of Francisco, Boatswain, Ceres, and Spirit), auditioned in their home cities and, by the time of the performance, had moved to new locations such as the campus dorms. Meanwhile, others, such as Julia Polster (who played Ferdinand), performed their roles several states away from New York. In a typical, physically staged Shakespeare production, such actors would not have been able to be a part of

the show due to location. However, virtual Shakespeare granted access to those living further away.

We also enjoyed being able to communicate with one another during the show. While scenes went on, our Zoom chat was highly active. We complimented each other on voices, motions, and makeup. We signaled that someone was too quiet or too loud. We shared new revelations about the text. Having a form of constant communication allowed us to feel connected, despite being far away from one another.

Overall, Shakespeare on Zoom was not the disaster I would have thought it would be pre-COVID. We had challenges and obstacles to face, but is that not true of any theatrical production? During the pandemic, we have all learned to accept that some things are imperfect. But producing “The Tempest” online has taught me that some things are perfect in their imperfections.

I would like to think that my green-clad thirteen-year-old self would be proud — and that The Bard would be as well.

## As A Written Leaf: Fried Green Tomatoes

By Elyanna Saperstein, Staff Writer

“Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe”

By: Fannie Flagg

Genre: Fiction

Total score: 7/10

Book in five words: 1930s

Southern small town tale.

If you Love: Small town politics, family dynamics, heartwarming tale — this is the book for you.

If you Hate:

Straightforward

chronology, plot-driven as opposed to character-driven plots — this is the book for you.

Where to begin? 1929, where the first chapter of the book begins? Or 1985, where the second chapter opens? In the opening ten pages, we hear narration from over four people — which ends up being *not confusing at all*. However, once you get past the first 140 pages (of this roughly 400-page book), you’ll be delightfully surprised.

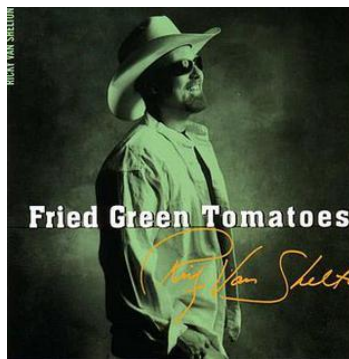
Enter the world of 1930s rural Alabama and a 1980s urban nursing home. The book follows the Threadgoode family and their surrounding friends, families, and



acquaintances as they weather the good, the bad, love, hate, and all-around adventure that life has to give. It also follows 1980s Evelyn Couch as she meets an elderly Ninny Threadgoode and finds herself through Ninny's tales of old Whistle Stop, Alabama. With racism, the Great Depression, love affairs, vendettas and even murder — “Fried Green Tomatoes” has it all. The writing is descriptive yet succinct, the characters are multi-dimensional (most of them at least), and they will worm their way into your heart.

However, the author jumps in-between narrators and times in the most annoying way possible. Now this may have been to build suspense or atmosphere, but the only thing it succeeds in doing is jar the reader from what might have otherwise been a small absorption into the narrative into the frustrating space of reading a book you're no longer invested in. Now, this is not to say that time-and-narration-jumping is not a very useful tool to surprise the reader or create a sense of suspense or general vibe. However, it only works when employed properly — when the reader is introduced,

invested, and maybe even has a mental cup of coffee with the characters. If you time-and-character-jump while introducing your characters in the way Fannie Flagg does, all you can ensure are half finished books everywhere (unless some intrepid soul can swim through the swampy struggle of the first couple of chapters.)



With all that said, this book made me believe in kindness again. The Threadgoodes fed those who could not afford it with dignity, battled against abusive spouses, and bailed poor miscreants out of jail. What stands out about them, however, is not just the kindness; while kindness is good, very rarely is it interesting. As Tolstoy famously [said](#): “All happy families are alike, but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” The Threadgoodes, with their endless compassion for the underdog, regardless of race or class, are incredibly

inspirational without being preachy. Even so, their kindness doesn't preclude them from hijinks and antics of the best kind. They stand with each other against the wrongs of the time (for the most part), but still send local drunks to the preacher's house and organize secret clubs.

It would be remiss to not mention the perspective of race in this book. When authors write characters that they bear little relation to, they ought to do a significant amount of research. Ideally, the author writes not just with compassion overall, but also with the sensitivity that can never measure up to the lived experience. The book was written in the 1980s by a white lady, and as compassionate as she may have been — the limit of perspective shows. Main characters like Idgie and Ruth act as white heroes in their standing up for their Black cooks and customers. Fannie Flagg's attention to the narrative and depth of her Black characters may have excused her from her constant “othering” of them in the 1980s; however, it doesn't (and shouldn't) quite pass today.

Overall, the book is an excellent relic of its time; it will make you feel warm, gooey nostalgia for a time that always seems so dreary.

Agree? Disagree? Have something to say? Books to suggest? Reach out to me on Facebook: Elyanna Saperstein.



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