

THE COMMENTATOR

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Benny Friedman performs at the Chanukah concert. See article on Page 4.

THE COMMENTATOR

Numerous Elevator Malfunctions Trouble Students, Faculty

By YITZCHAK CARROLL and ELISHEVA KOHN

At least four elevator malfunctions occurred over the week of Jan. 27-30 on both the Beren and Wilf Campuses, affecting numerous students and faculty members and disrupting class schedules. In at least one incident, 911 was called and the FDNY responded to physically break university staff out of a broken elevator.

At approximately 9 a.m. Thursday morning, four Beren students, one faculty member and a maintenance worker were stuck in an elevator on the seventh floor of Stanton Hall for a few minutes before elevator personnel forcefully pried open the door and rescued them. An hour and a half later, a large group of Beren students, as well as a faculty member, were taking the elevator from the tenth floor to the lobby of Stanton Hall when it abruptly stopped on the seventh floor. They were rescued by elevator personnel after approximately five minutes.

At the time, two out of the three elevators in Stanton Hall were already broken, leaving students with no other choice but to take the third,

faulty elevator. "It reflects poorly on the institution," shared a frustrated professor who started class 15 minutes late because of the Stanton Hall elevator

"Any other institution would have started on this month's ago. Why the university still hasn't done anything is frankly baffling."

Matthew Silkin (YC '20)

malfunctions. "Professors and students can't get to class on time because the elevators are so crappy. It's a *schande* on the university." He suggested that students "do a one-day walkout" to urge the university to properly take care of elevator-related issues on campus.

"It was a pretty inconvenient experience, but thank God I'm appreciative of the maintenance crew that helped us out," shared Talya Hyman (SCW '20), one of the students who was stuck in

the elevator during the second incident on Thursday.

Earlier in the week, The Commentator learned that Men's Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) Dean Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky and UTS Academic Adviser Rabbi Willie Balk were rescued by New York City firefighters from a Glueck elevator. The rescue occurred on the sixth floor of the Jacob and Dreizel Glueck Center for Jewish Studies a little after 5 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 27, and was confirmed by a number of faculty bystanders. According to a comment from Rabbi Balk on his Facebook post about the incident, the rabbis were freed from the elevator after 25 minutes. Rabbis Kalinsky and Balk both confirmed the incident to The Commentator but did not comment further.

These incidents follow the FDNY's rescue of seven students from a malfunctioning elevator in Morgenstern Residence Hall on Thursday, Jan. 23, as The Commentator previously reported. Following that incident, Randy Apfelbaum, Chief Facilities & Administrative Officer at YU,

Continued on Page 4

Men's Basketball Receives National Recognition as Win Streak Hits 15

By CHANA WEINBERG

For the first time in program history, the men's basketball team received national recognition as the 24th best team in Division III basketball. The D3hoops.com Top 25 is voted on by a panel of 25 coaches, sports information directors and journalists from across the country and is updated weekly.

"The ranking, besides being reflective of all the hard work over the past years, is a statement that this team that was always number one to the Jewish community," said YU Athletics Director Joe Bednarsh. "[YU] is a small school with stringent academic requirements and many religious restrictions, yet they excel on the national stage."

Also garnering regional and national attention, senior forward Gabriel Leifer (SSSB '21) was named the Metropolitan Basketball Writers Association Division II-III player of the week, the first athlete in program history to get this recognition. For the second time this season, Leifer was named to the D3hoops.com Team of the Week. Leifer also surpassed the 1,000 career points mark; he now ranks 28th in the history

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To We or Not to We

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Students' Safety and Security Must Be YU's Top Priority

By **THE COMMENTATOR**
EDITORIAL BOARD

A university's chief responsibility is to ensure the safety and security of its students and staff on campus at all times. Sadly, however, a cursory review of recent incidents shows that Yeshiva University has failed to live up to this obligation time and again.

From elevator free-falls to entrapments requiring rescues to December's break-in on the Beren Campus, student safety and security has clearly been lacking across the board. Every student feels the brunt of dysfunctional and unsafe elevators, and many Beren residents were rightfully confused and shaken up following last month's break-in to the Schottenstein Residence Hall. The lack of transparency that the university has displayed toward its students throughout these incidents has only exacerbated these problems.

It would appear government agencies concur as well, judging by the litany of serious fire and elevator code violations the university has been issued in the past few years. From major safety violations and defective elevator equipment to inoperative fire communication systems, YU has been hit with tens of thousands of dollars in fines by the city for safety violations.

This state of affairs is unacceptable and must be fixed now. The safety of students and staff is on the line.

national media outlets as opposed to official university correspondence. It is difficult to believe that the university first learned that fires were set in the dormitory through the FDNY's news release. A more plausible explanation was that the administration felt that there was simply no need to be fully transparent with YU's students and community.

This is not the first time communication on matters of safety and security has been an issue. YU's insufficient response to the multiple swastikas etched into the YU-owned Laurel Hill Terrace apartments and a nearby tree on the Wilf Campus demonstrated that notifying students about critical safety and security issues has long been an afterthought for the administration. Students more than not often learn about serious security incidents from their peers rather than from the university itself. If YU is truly concerned with students being unduly alarmed by such matters, it would be especially prudent for YU to engage in honest and forthright communication rather than apologies after the fact. Attempts to downplay serious security incidents while hoping they won't be noticed by students are counterproductive, serving only to sow further distrust within the student body towards an administration that apparently views transparency as merely an afterthought.

Likewise, with respect to campus elevators, rather than acknowledge the dangerous state of disrepair they are in,

campus can solutions be promulgated and safety bolstered. Safety and security are not mere luxuries — they are imperatives. Concrete steps can and must be taken to protect our student body from harm and ensure their safety and security in and out of the classroom and residence halls. YU should take a lesson from past mishaps that attempts to downplay and brush over issues are not conducive to student safety.

The university must also learn from its past failures across multiple realms to ensure that the mistakes of the past do not repeat themselves. New York law mandates public and private universities alike to hold at least three fire drills each academic year, including at least one between Sept. 1 and Dec. 1. Additionally, colleges with dormitories are required to hold at least one additional drill after sunset but before sunrise to ensure students are prepared for situations such as the Schottenstein scare. Meanwhile, public and private high schools alike are required to hold at least a dozen drills, including four simulated lock-downs. Not only must these drills be held, but perhaps it would be prudent for the university to go above the letter of the law and ensure that lock-down drills are held as well.

It's an open secret that the university's elevators are well beyond their life expectancy. An elevator technician from Schindler, the elevator maintenance company YU contracts with, was recently overheard commenting that the university's elevators should have been replaced 15 to 20 years ago, but were not due to cost-savings efforts. The technician added that the expense of maintaining the old elevators — coupled with the tens of thousands of dollars in fines the university has been issued — has exceeded the cost of replacing the aging elevators to begin with.

Not only have students been traumatized by "free-falls" — a dangerous situation that has occurred numerous times over the past few months — but malfunctioning elevators have been so hazardous in recent weeks that 911 has been called multiple times and FDNY firefighters have been summoned to respond and rescue trapped students. With numerous elevators out of service and countless accidents waiting to happen, it is clear that steps must be taken to fix this broken system and ensure the safety of students and staff alike.

The time for finger-pointing and mismatched explanations was yesterday, and the time for action is now. It would be tragic to let these moments pass without developing a comprehensive plan to ensure that the safety and security woes of yesterday never happen again. Our YU community deserves no less.

Attempts to downplay serious security incidents while hoping they won't be noticed by students are counterproductive, serving only to sow further distrust within the student body towards an administration that apparently views transparency as merely an afterthought.

That starts with acknowledging the problem. Take last month's midnight break-in to Schottenstein, for instance. Not only did many students not even recognize the sound of the dormitory fire alarm, but a significant number of residents had no idea how to react. Students were left in the dark, and communication efforts were an utter failure. However, rather than take responsibility for the lackluster response to the incident, the university instead attempted to brush the matter over and made a bad situation worse. Indeed, the university did not address the full extent of the incident until long after the FDNY issued a press release to the media, which was picked up by national news outlets. Students and their parents complained that they had found out about the break-in from

the university has instead elected to take a "thoughts and prayers" approach, offering nothing but lip service as firefighters are called for elevator rescue after elevator rescue. Moreover, in response to prior Commentator investigations into YU's myriad fire, building and elevator code violations, the university offered lackluster responses to explain their rap sheet of summonses, claiming that they are "minor," inevitable and "typically for non-safety issues" when several citations have been issued for "immediately hazardous" conditions including failure to fix non-functional safety equipment and defective fire communication infrastructure. Will it take a calamity for the university to learn its lesson?

Only once the university takes responsibility for the dangerous situation on

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The Commentator is the student newspaper of Yeshiva University.

For 85 years, The Commentator has served students and administrators as a communicative conduit; a kinetic vehicle disseminating undergraduate social, religious and academic beliefs across the student bodies; and a reliable reflection of Yeshiva student life to the broader Jewish and American communities.

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

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

Views expressed in The Commentator are those of its writers and do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial board or the student body, faculty, and administration of Yeshiva University.

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1 Finally winning something on Stay To Play

\$700 worth of Shabbat @ Beren tickets finally paid off!!!!



2 Being a "lackey of The Commentator"

The best compliment we received since Rabbi Penner blamed us for the Rabbi Klapper controversy. <3



3 Minor surgeries in dorm rooms

Bio majors aren't so bad after all.



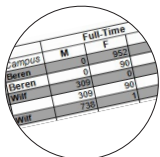
4 Michlalah and MMY joint reunion shabbaton

YU has a diVeRsE sTuDeNt bOdY #thesiymwasAMAZINGthough!!!



5 Daniel Melool

Congratulations on winning the raffle!



6 That one female student who enrolled in YC

The true "Deal of the Century." Massive shkoiach to this unknown legend. She was registered for YP, of course.



7 Editors stuck in Elevators (getting coffee)

Sounds like a Netflix special but ok.

7 UP by Elisheva Kohn
NMODL

YSU Presidency Controversy

Greenberg is #notmyRA but absolutely #mypresident



Spring Semester just started

Professors are still hopeful that we'll do the 73 page reading. Ahhh, the naïveté.



Meghan and Harry

Sounds like Meghan got some advice from the guys who stay in honors just long enough to collect their scholarship money before packing their bags and shipping out without writing their thesis.



Duane Reade ran out of anti-virus face masks

According to a frantic pedestrian on 34th who was yelling something about coronavirus. #yolo.



The new Shuttle App

The WeWork of YU?



The Super Bowl

Nobody cares who won. At least the Patriots didn't make it. #SmashedTheKraft



Editors stuck in elevators

A Commentator editor (me) and an Observer editor got stuck in the same elevator a few hours apart on the same day last week. Coincidence? I THINK NOT! #freejournalists



BASKETBALL,
continued from Front Page

of the program. Simcha Halpert (SSSB '20) continues to move up the list in career points as he is now in third place on the all-time top scorer list with 1,599 points.

Speaking on the D3Hoops.com podcast "Hoopsville" on Jan. 26, Men's Basketball Head Coach Elliot Steinmetz addressed the potential outside pressure on his student-athletes because of their popularity with the worldwide religious Jewish community.

"When we started this thing pressure is kind of what we want," he said. "Everyone was saying that after a couple of winning years 'Hey now everyone will expect you to win,' but that's the point. That's what we are here to do. We are trying to compete, we are trying to win games. We are trying to get the guys in shape to beat some darn good teams."

This pressure has been building for a number of years now as the Macs have reached the Skyline Conference Championship in both '18 and '19 and According to MacsLive beat reporter Akiva Poppers, the '19-'20 team has a talent and cohesion that raises them to the next level.

"The chemistry and selflessness of this team makes it different than those from years passed," commented Poppers. "It's one thing to have five extremely talented players on the court at one time; it's another to have five who are both incredibly gifted and are willing to put the team's success over their own"

This attitude is reflected in the numbers as well. Leifer sets the selfless tone, averaging 6.5 assists per game, ranking him tenth in the DIII. The team's field goal percentage (52%) is second in the league, possibly indicating that they are more efficient with their shots, willing to make another pass to find the greatest shot on the court.

Competing for the first time after their national recognition, the Macs defeated Sarah Lawrence College in a gripping contest by a score of 74-72 as Leifer, who scored 23 points and grabbed 14 rebounds, drained a three-point shot in the final seconds. The defense followed with a tremendous game-ending stop to hold the Mac's lead. Sophomore guard Ryan Turell (SSSB '22) was also a huge contributor, scoring 35 points, including two clutch free-throws as the time ran out.

This team is not unfamiliar with making history as the Macs shattered the program's record for the best start to a season since joining the NCAA in 1965. They are 15-1 overall and 8-0 in conference play since their season opener loss against Occidental College. The program record for consecutive wins is 17, a record set last year by the 2018-2019 Macs.



Gabriel Leifer

YU Chanukah Concert Sells Out

By SRULI FRUCHTER

Over 1,000 people attended the “GMF Capital and Yeshiva University Chanukah Concert,” held in the Lamport Auditorium on the Wilf Campus, on Dec. 23. According to Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) President Ariel Sacknovitz, approximately 750 of the attendees were YU undergraduate students. The sold-out event featured performers Mordechai Shapiro, Benny Friedman and the Freilach Band.

Moshe Stuart (YC ‘21) and Zak Benarroch (SSSB ‘20) began the event singing the national anthems of the United States and Israel, respectively, which were followed by President Ari Berman’s opening remarks. Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB) Dean Noam Wasserman then introduced his father, Dr. Emanuel Wasserman (YC ‘61), who came on stage to celebrate his completion of *Masechet Niddah*. Afterwards, Dean Wasserman returned to address the audience before his *Siyum HaShas*. Upon his completion, audience members danced with him around the stage before welcoming the main performers.

Friedman opened the show with selections from his albums. Shapiro appeared shortly after, performing some of his own hits, including “*B’Yachad*”. The two singers

also performed a few songs and mashups together, before the concert came to a close at around 9:15 p.m.

“As I was at the registration stand, watching students come in,” Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) President Yoni Broth (SSSB ‘20) said in the midst of the performance, “it was really impressive. I didn’t expect this many [students] to show up, and everyone seemed to be enjoying the concert.”

Students from both Wilf and Beren campuses expressed a similar sentiment.

“I love the concert. I think it’s so cool that YU can get all the different elements of the student body together,” exclaimed Moshe Gordon (YC ‘22). “*Siyum HaShas*, incredible dancing and singing — it’s beautiful.”

The event cost roughly \$60,000 — more than twice the cost of last year’s “Chanukahfest” — and tickets for the approximately 750 undergraduate students who attended the concert were free. Student attendance at the concert was less than the over 800 and nearly 1,000 students present at the first and second Chanukahfests in 2015 and 2016, respectively. The Commentator was unable to ascertain how many students were at the third and fourth Chanukahfests in Dec. 2017 and 2018.

“I was shocked that [YU] had this [concert]. I never knew they had this before,” Chevi Pittinsky (SSSB ‘20) shared during

the concert. “It’s very fun, and my friends and I are really enjoying.”

Seating for the event was divided into four sections. Women were seated on the lower left-hand side of the auditorium, men’s seating was on the lower right-hand side and the lower middle section and the balcony sat men and women.

I love the concert. I think it’s so cool that YU can get all the different elements of the student body together. Siyum HaShas, incredible dancing and singing — it’s beautiful.”

—
Moshe Gordon (YC ‘22)

Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA) President Leib Weiner (YC ‘20) observed, “The women’s seating had been full the entire time, the general seating has been generally full the entire time, and the men’s seating was full through the *Siyum HaShas*, and around 7:50 p.m. it became about half the size.” Night seder begins nightly at 8:00

p.m. in the Glueck Beit Midrash.

“The concert was really fun with a lot of energy. The singers were incredible, and I had an amazing time,” Michal Ladenheim (SCW ‘20) said. “A co-ed event was really nice.”

Following the event, students were invited to the Furman Dining Hall for donuts, latkes and drinks. Other post-concert activities included options for men-only, women-only and co-ed *Leilei Iyun*, which went from 9:30 p.m. until 11:00 p.m.

“It was a tremendous night that captured almost everything important about YU in a single event,” Dean Wasserman reflected. “The *achdus* that is possible when everyone comes together pursuing a unifying goal, the joy of Chanukah plus Torah, the *ruach* on both YU undergrad campuses, and so much more.”

“Tonight’s Chanukah celebration is a spectacular expression of our values, bringing together our student body with great joy and *ruach*,” President Berman shared. “It is a personal pleasure and privilege to serve in a university where we not only study together — we dance together. Congratulations to our student leaders for organizing this amazing event. It was a true *Kiddush Hashem*.”

Recently, The Commentator reported that Yeshiva University was issued dozens of building code violations and tens of thousands in fines, primarily based

on elevator-related issues on both campuses. The university was also issued a number of fire code summonses in recent years, including for an inoperative fire command communication system in an elevator.

As of the time of publication, the university did not respond to The Commentator’s repeated requests for comment.

Avi Hirsch contributed to this story.

ELEVATOR MALFUNCTIONS,
continued from Front Page

apologized for the malfunction in a statement to The Commentator.

Throughout the week, elevators in many buildings on YU’s Wilf and Beren Campuses broke or malfunctioned. On Monday night, one student was rescued from an elevator in the Mendel Gottesman Library on the Wilf Campus after he called security when the doors failed to open. At one point on Tuesday afternoon, the sixteen-story Belfer

Hall reportedly was left with no operating elevators after all three of its elevators were broken or being repaired. An email to Wilf Campus students and faculty on Wednesday evening from YU Operations informed students that all Belfer elevators were back in service. Beren students have reportedly not received any emails regarding the elevator incidents from YU’s administration over the last week, despite the numerous malfunctions that have occurred on the Beren Campus.

“It shouldn’t take multiple incidents of people getting stuck on elevators for

someone to realize that we should probably just gut the whole infrastructure and repair everything,” said Matthew Silkin (YC ‘20). “Any other institution would have started on this months ago. Why the university still hasn’t done anything is frankly baffling.”

A number of other hazardous elevator incidents have occurred recently, including a concussion incurred by Shifra Lindenberg (SSSB ‘21) after a Brookdale elevator allegedly went into a “free-fall” last May. In November, a Stanton Hall elevator reportedly fell three floors before stopping abruptly with a student inside.

News Briefs

By YOSSI ZIMLOVER

Fitness Center Upgrades on Wilf Campus

The Sy Syms Fitness Center on the Wilf Campus was renovated and furnished with new equipment over the course of winter break. The old equipment was moved to a room within the Lucile and Sidney Burdick Lounge in the Morgenstern Residence Hall basement to serve as a secondary fitness center for students who live in Morgenstern.

Director of Athletics Joe Bednarsh stated that “as part of our continuing efforts to improve the facilities and services we offer to the student body, we are very pleased that we were able to renovate what was an aging fitness center.” Bednarsh described the new equipment as “top of the line” and thanked YU Facilities and Housekeeping, as well as Associate Director of Athletics Gregory Fox, for their work in the upgrade. He added that he is hoping to now turn his attention to the five fitness centers on the Beren Campus.

The Sy Syms Fitness Center is located on the first floor of the Max Stern Athletic Center and features a variety of fitness machines including stationary bicycles, weights and treadmills.

Zev Lowy (SSSB ‘22) noted that the machines are “new and sleek and there are a lot more of them.” He also said that the center “is also much cleaner and it feels better to be there.”

Jonathan Schwab, the Wilf Campus Director of University Housing and Residence Life (UHRL), credited Wilf UHRL Assistant Director Natan Bienstock with the idea of forming a new fitness center in Morg with the old equipment.

50 Students Attend Inaugural Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning Club Event

The Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) and Machine Learning Club, formed in the fall, held its first event at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 29 on the Wilf Campus. Aryeh Klein (YC ‘20) and Moshe Weinreb (YC ‘20), the co-presidents of the club, presented about the aforementioned topics and held a demonstration that showed an example of the technologies’ capabilities.

Approximately 50 students attended the event, double the 25 that Klein and Weinreb had expected. “We were all excited and surprised by the large turnout,” commented Weinreb. “Having visible evidence of a strong interest from the student body has validated our efforts so far, and we are looking forward to more teaching events where we delve a little deeper into the fundamentals of Machine Learning throughout the rest of the semester.”

The demo showed code that used machine learning to “classify handwritten numbers into their digital counterpart,” according to Klein. He explained that they wanted to “show people what the data science track is”

and give people an opportunity to taste the “cool stuff,” that students only get to near the end of the major. He added that they wanted to “fill a void” for those in the other tracks at YC and for SCW Computer Science students who don’t have the opportunity to take classes in these areas.

Data Science is one of the three tracks the YC Computer Science department offers and focuses on A.I. and machine learning, along with natural language processing and data management, visualization, and cleaning. The club is operating independently from the department.

New Intercampus Shuttle App

The new intercampus shuttle appointment website has recently been completed and is currently in a beta testing stage, according to Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer Randy Apfelbaum.

In September, Apfelbaum told the Commentator, “we are working on a completely new app which will resolve all the problems of the old one,” and had hoped to have the new one completed by the chagim.

Students had long been frustrated with the booking system for the intercampus shuttle due to its slow loading time and its requirement that students log off before logging back in every time they wished to book an intercampus shuttle.

The new app features an updated design and the log-in credentials are now the same ones that students use to log in to their

printing and OneCard accounts. Previously, students were required to create a unique account for booking intercampus shuttles.

Rabbi Russ Shulkes Hired for Institutional Advancement Position at RIETS

Rabbi Russ Shulkes was appointed as Associate Dean and Associate Vice President of Institutional Advancement at the Rabbi Issac Elchanan Theological Seminary (REITS) in Dec. 2019.

Previously, he served as the Executive Director of Hillels of Georgia, which oversaw over 24 campuses in the state, including Emory University and the University of Georgia. According to his LinkedIn profile, Rabbi Shulkes graduated from Yeshiva University in 2003 with a B.A. in Philosophy.

Rabbi Shulkes told the Atlanta Jewish Times that “if my work with Hillel was focused on identity, I’m really looking forward to working on ideology” in his new position at YU. The same article stated that by his count, “he has at least 14 familial ties to the institution, from his wife, to his brother and sister and more.”

Rabbi Shulkes is not the first YU administrator to have experience at Hillel. Before coming to YU, former President Richard Joel served as President and International Director of Hillel from 1989 to 2003.

Rabbi Shulkes was unable to be reached for comment.

Rachel Kraut steps down as Beren Director of Housing and Residence Life

By ELISHEVA KOHN

Rachel Kraut has stepped down as Director of University Housing and Residence Life (UHRL) on the Beren Campus in order to spend more time with her family. She had been working at YU for nearly two decades before officially leaving the university on Jan. 17.

Becky Ciment, formerly Assistant Director of University Housing and Residence Life on the Beren Campus, has been named acting director while the university searches for a permanent replacement. Becca Stein remains in her position as assistant director while Dean Chaim Nissel, current Dean of Students and former Director of University Housing on the Wilf Campus, will be supporting Ciment and Stein in managing the UHRL

department on the Beren Campus. Ciment remarked that she is looking forward to “building upon Rachel’s legacy of creating a home away from home in all of our residence halls.”

According to a Beren resident advisor (RA), Kraut announced that she will be stepping down at an RA Chanukah party. The overall student body has not been informed about recent changes in the UHRL department.

“I am passionate about building community outside of the classroom. It has been a true pleasure to be part of the YU family,” said Kraut. She began working at YU in July 2000, when Brookdale and Schottenstein were the only residence halls on the Beren Campus. Additionally, the Counseling Center, the Office of Disability Services and the Package Center

had not been established at the time. “YU made a commitment to improving the student experience and began to provide these services,” explained Kraut. “It was an exciting time to be working at the university. Being here through 9/11, Superstorm Sandy and many

the new Housing Portal, which allowed students to form groups of roommates and select rooms for the upcoming academic year, and the Schottenstein Kitchen, a large communal kitchen in Schottenstein Residence Hall that opened Nov. 20.

support.”

She is also proud of the relationships she has formed with students over the years. Rachel Green (SSSB ‘20) has been working under Kraut for three semesters as an RA and found Kraut to have “truly cared that everyone enjoyed their housing experience and time on the Beren Campus.” Green added that “she will truly be missed but we are all excited for her as she moves into the next stage of her life.”

“I try not to live my life with regret and I do not want to reflect on these years and be saddened by what I missed at home,” said Kraut. As for her plans in the near future, Kraut is looking forward to spending time with her family, reading books and working on jigsaw puzzles and knitting projects.

“It has been a true pleasure to be part of the YU family.”

Rachel Kraut, former Beren Director of University Housing and Residence

other New York City experiences definitely helped shape my professional career and my personal life,” added Kraut.

The UHRL department on the Beren Campus implemented major initiatives in 2019, such as

Looking back, Kraut is especially grateful for her almost all-female team at YU. “It is empowering to see many smart and well-rounded women in leadership positions from all facets of the university who I can rely on for advice and



Brookdale Residence Hall

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Seven Students Rescued From Broken Morgenstern Elevator

By ELISHEVA KOHN

Seven Yeshiva University students were briefly trapped in an elevator in the Morgenstern Residence Hall on the Wilf Campus at approximately 5:40 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 23. The New York City Fire Department (FDNY) arrived 15 minutes later and successfully freed them from the broken elevator.

According to a student who was in touch with The Commentator during the incident, the students trapped inside the elevator immediately pressed the emergency communication button when the elevator got stuck on the fourth floor of the dormitory building. The car door had opened when it reached the fourth floor, but the hoistway door — the door connecting the elevator car to the floor — remained closed. YU Security responded to

the students’ emergency call and informed them that the FDNY was on their way. Students remained calm in the elevator while they waited for the FDNY.

Personnel from FDNY Tower Ladder Company 45 arrived approximately 15 minutes after

to The Commentator that the “FDNY assessed the situation and determined the safest way for the students to exit the elevator. This included asking the students to wait in the elevator until the power to the elevator car was properly shut off.”

The New York City Fire Department (FDNY) arrived 15 minutes later and successfully freed them from the broken elevator.

the students called YU Security. Firefighters forcefully pried open the door and told students to remain inside the elevator while they turned off the electricity. Otherwise, students were told, the elevator might “drop.”

Randy Apfelbaum, Chief Facilities & Administrative Officer at YU, explained in a statement

“It was a pretty scary experience; it was the first time I’ve ever gotten stuck in an elevator,” said Bryan Lavi (YC ‘21), one of the students who was trapped in the elevator. “The scariest part, I think, was the thought that maybe the elevator would drop at any second, but thankfully that did not happen and we got out safe.”

“It was stressful, mostly because I was in a rush, but thankfully there was a fast response. The fire department was very efficient and got us all out of the elevator quickly,” remarked Michael Gerber (YC ‘22), another student who was rescued from the elevator. “While it was inconvenient, it was all with good company.”

This incident follows a series of elevator-related issues on both the Beren and Wilf Campuses. On May 22, 2019, Shifra Lindenberg (SSSB ‘21) suffered a minor concussion after experiencing an elevator free-fall in the Brookdale Residence Hall. On Nov. 12, 2019, an elevator on the Beren Campus fell three floors with a student inside. The student inside pressed the emergency communication button, but there was no response.

Recently, The Commentator reported that YU was issued dozens of building code violations, mostly

based on elevator-related issues on both campuses. The university was also issued a number of fire code summonses in recent years, including for an inoperative fire command communication system in an elevator. Broken elevators have been frustrating students and university staff on a near-daily basis, preventing them from getting to class on time, inconveniencing individuals carrying luggage or heavy items and posing a major challenge to people with disabilities.

“The elevator contractor has been called to assess what happened and will put the elevator back in service when they have determined it is safe to do so,” said Apfelbaum. “We apologize for the event, as well as for any inconvenience as we work to ensure the safety of our students.”

Sacknovitz to Step Down as YSU President

By YOSEF LEMEL

Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) President Ariel Sacknovitz (SSSB '20) is stepping down from his position at the end of the fall semester, The Commentator has learned. Sacknovitz will leave his post open with four months left in his term, which expires in May. It is currently unclear who will replace him as president of YSU, if anyone.

Sacknovitz explained that upon completing his academic requirements he will no longer be a full-time student in January. According to Sacknovitz, after stepping down at the end of the current semester, he "will continue working with OSL and helping out until a smooth transition plan is made." Sacknovitz is currently unsure as to whether he will be a part-time student in the spring semester.

It is currently unclear who will replace [Sacknovitz] as president of YSU, if anyone.

The Wilf Student Constitution in Article II, Section 2(5), as amended last fall, states, "If the YSU President is permanently unable to perform his duties or is removed from office before or on March 1, the YSU Vice President of Clubs shall succeed to the YSU Presidency." The current YSU Vice President of Clubs is Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21).

Greenberg is currently the resident advisor for the seventh floor of Rubin Hall. Resident advisors are restricted from serving as members of the General Assembly — a body that includes the YSU President — as per Article II, Section 10(1) of the Wilf Student Constitution. The Constitution does not specify whether these restrictions apply to an interim position.

According to Greenberg, the Office of Student Life (OSL) is considering appointing him as interim president followed by elections for the vacant presidency. "[Student Life Coordinator] Avi Schwartz and [Director of University Housing and Residence Life] Jonathan Schwab have recently spoken to me about assuming the position," said Greenberg.

"I don't want to be the YSU president now. I just want to do what's best for the student body," Greenberg expressed. "Hopefully, we'll get a new permanent one quickly and efficiently."

"The Student Court will decide how to move forward regarding a new YSU President," said Director of Student Events Linda Stone. As of the time of publication, Stone did not respond to The Commentator's inquiries as to whether Greenberg will assume the position of interim YSU president at the beginning of the spring semester.

Phillip Dolitsky (YC '20), the chief justice of the Wilf Student Court, expressed interest in resolving the constitutional vagueness regarding the line of succession in this situation. "It is something that we ought to deal with. In order to deal with it, however, there has to be a formal filing to the Court," said Dolitsky.



Ariel Sacknovitz

ARIEL SACKNOVITZ

The case is expected to be filed by the Canvassing Committee — a student committee that deals with student elections — at the start of the spring 2019 semester, according to Jacob Rosenfeld (YC '21), chair of the Canvassing Committee. "We simply can't take a new case until the new semester begins for obvious technical and logistical reasons. We're forced to respond within a certain time period if we're taking the case and there's no way

that's happening in the next few days during finals," stated Dolitsky.

Reflecting on his experience as YSU president, Sacknovitz expressed, "I think that changing the focus from just one group of students to all different types was a key accomplishment. That manifested itself in the Chanukah Concert where we were able to have so many different types of students all together in the same place."

Sacknovitz hopes that the

student councils will continue to meet the needs of every segment of the student body. "I think that also includes the yeshiva, which I think has been forgotten over the years," he said.

Sacknovitz said that Aryeh Burg (YC '20) — a justice on the Student Court — would be "a great replacement" for him. As of the time of publication, Burg has not made a decision as to whether he would run in a prospective election.

YCSA and SOY Petition Student Court Over YSU Presidency Vacancy

By SRULI FRUCHTER

The Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA) and Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) submitted a petition to the Wilf Student Court against the Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) on Jan. 26, concerning the presidential vacancy, after former YSU President Ariel Sacknovitz (SSSB '20) stepped down following the fall 2019 semester. The court will hear the case to determine if the Wilf Student Constitution allows current YSU Vice President of Clubs Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21) to fill the role as YSU President, despite serving as a Rubin Hall resident adviser.

While Article II, Section 2(5) of the Constitution would entitle Greenberg to succeed the YSU presidency in a case like this, Article II, Section 10(1) disallows him from being a member of the General Assembly because of his position as a resident adviser. This is the crux of what the court will be ruling on.

The case of *YCSA and SOY v. YSU* will not be a public trial. Chief Justice of the Wilf Student Court Philip Dolitsky emailed students that the court will instead "be accepting briefs from any person who wishes to bring arguments to the attention of the Court regarding the case." When asked for further clarification on the reason and Constitutional basis for this decision, Dolitsky did not

respond. Student Court Justice Aryeh Burg (YC '20) shared, "I don't love that it is not a public trial, but I do understand that it is a time-sensitive trial and issue for a lot of parties involved."

Burg recused himself from the trial because, before stepping down, Sacknovitz said Burg would be a "great replacement" as YSU President. Burg clarified, "I have absolutely no intention of running [for YSU President in the future]."

"It is very important to us on student council that we maintain the laws set forth by the constitution."

SOY President Yoni Broth (SSSB '20)

Elimelekh Perl (YC '22) is representing Greenberg and submitted a brief to the student court in defense of him being YSU President. "I argued that in the case of succession, eligibility requirements typically necessary for election to the YSU Presidency and a seat on the General Assembly are subject to exception," Perl explained. "The Constitution explicitly says that the VP of Clubs can be a junior, but succeeds the President — even though a Presidential-elect must be a senior. Similarly, Zach's position as an RA, which would prevent him from

being elected President, is not a problem in the case of succession."

Greenberg contested the trial being held at all, reasoning that "it will take weeks to find a new president, weeks for [the new president] to get the hang of it, and by that time, the year will nearly be over."

Student council leaders, however, felt that a trial was necessary. "It is very important to us on student council that we maintain the laws set forth by the constitution," SOY

[we] did not see a need to force a case upon Zach."

The court's decision on this case is expected to either elect Greenberg as YSU President or hold a new election. "I think they are going to put it to an election," Burg shared.

If Greenberg is offered the position to become YSU President, he will need to resign from his position as a resident adviser. "If Zachary is allowed to serve and chooses to take the position, he would need to resign as an RA," Director of Wilf Housing and Residence Life Jonathan Schwab stated. "Both the Constitution and the RA position description clearly state that a student cannot be YSU President and be an RA."

It is currently unclear when the court will release a decision, although the initial email sent to students explained that it would be announced via email.

"Zach approached me about becoming Vice President [on] Sunday morning," Jared Benjamin (YC '21) told the Commentator. "He told me that he put a lot of thought into his decision to ask me to take on the role of Vice President." This promotion was contingent upon Greenberg receiving approval to serve as YSU President by the court.

"I've been on the student council for two years, and I know how the system works," Greenberg shared. "I feel that I am best suited to represent YSU and the student body during this difficult time."

President Yoni Broth (SSSB '20) explained. "Zach being an RA and the YSU President at the same time [is] clearly against the constitution." Both Broth and YCSA President Leib Wiener (YC '20) filed the petition to the student court.

Chair of the Canvassing Committee Jacob Rosenfeld (YC '21) had previously said that the Canvassing Committee would be filing for this case, but they eventually decided against it. "The Canvassing Committee declined to file because we viewed the status quo as a good option," Rosenfeld said, "and

Student Court Dismisses Case, Affirms Greenberg as YSU President

By AVI HIRSCH

On Wednesday, Jan. 29, the Wilf Student Court ruled that Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) Vice President of Clubs Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21) will assume the role of YSU President, "effective immediately."

The ruling dismissed the Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA) and Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY)'s petition to remove Greenberg as YSU president, finding that the case was moot following Greenberg's resignation as Resident Advisor (RA). The opinion in the case of YCSA and SOY v. YSU was delivered by Chief Justice Phillip Dolitsky (YC '20) on behalf of a unanimous court and was sent in an email to undergraduate students of Yeshiva College and Sy Syms School of Business for Men shortly after 6 p.m. Wednesday evening.

According to the ruling, the petition issued by YCSA and SOY had argued that "emergency elections" should be held immediately, as Greenberg was ineligible to serve as YSU president due to his status as an RA. However, a "Suggestion for Mootness," submitted to the

court by Elimelekh Perl (YC '22), Greenberg's legal counsel, claimed that "on January 28th, 2020, Mr. Greenberg submitted a letter of

step up and continue to be a voice for the students and for making a sacrifice which I know must have been extremely difficult."

mootness, the ruling itself lambasted a "bigger issue than a contested presidency; a poorly designed and outdated Constitution." Not

"The first step would be having the Office of Student Life update the current document with the most recent amendments and then creating an Amendments Committee who will hold a constitutional amendments convention and then propose amendments. Those amendments will then be voted on in the next election."

"The court is right," added Broth about the flaws that the court found in the constitution. "There are a lot of ambiguities in the constitution ... it is our responsibility as a student body to construct a better written document. I hope that our students step up and propose amendments, or group and write a better document that is found binding in (student) court. Leib [Weiner] and I are in discussion about how we can help facilitate this now, but it is a need for our campus."

"I think Zach will do a great job," said former YSU President Ariel Sacknovitz (YC '20), who stepped down from his role after the Fall 2019 semester. "He has been involved for a long time and this can be his opportunity to shine."

The ruling dismissed the Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA) and Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY)'s petition to remove Greenberg as YSU president, finding that the case was moot following Greenberg's resignation as Resident Advisor (RA).

resignation to the Director of University Housing & Residence Life at the Wilf Campus," and thus argued that "the case be dismissed with Respondent assuming the position of YSU President." The petitioners declined to respond, and the court therefore dismissed the petitioners' claim, affirming Greenberg's position as YSU president.

"[W]e made the decision to sue in order to move the situation forward and either somehow make Zach officially YSU president or for there to be emergency elections," said YCSA President Leib Weiner, explaining his decision to submit the petition to the court. "Ultimately, Zach chose to give up being an RA to be YSU president. I commend him for deciding to

"I am thrilled to be working with Zach this semester," said SOY President Yoni Broth (SSSB '20) regarding Zach's appointment as YSU president. "He is a great addition to the team, and brings a lot of passion and energy to student council. I look forward to seeing how he will help the students as the official President of YSU."

Upon being confirmed as YSU president, Greenberg appointed Jared Benjamin (YC '21) to take over for him as YSU VP of Clubs. "Jared is a highly regarded student in our school," said Greenberg about his decision, "and I am confident he can prove to be helpful both in assisting me in running YSU and helping us organize Club Fair."

Although the court's decision dismissed the case due to its

only is there "no updated version of the Constitution anywhere to be found," argued the court, but even the outdated constitution contains numerous ambiguities and contradictions that "have helped contribute to this mess." The court therefore called on "the Student Body and its elected leaders to update and revise the Constitution through the amendment process."

"I think the decision was fair," commented Greenberg, "and the court has done a great job at going about such a difficult case ... The biggest takeaway of the case is definitely that the Constitution needs to be updated; there are a lot of missing amendments that need to be added."

"The constitution definitely needs to be fixed," said Weiner.



Zachary Greenberg has assumed the role of YSU president after having resigned as RA.

University Explains Burglary, Arson Attempt and Aftermath in Schottenstein Dorms

By YITZCHAK CARROLL and
ELISHEVA KOHN

Yeshiva University Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer Randy Apfelbaum contended that proper protocols were followed during and following the Dec. 20 burglary and arson incident that took place in the downtown-based Schottenstein Residence Hall in a series of responses to inquiries from The Commentator.

Citing safety concerns, Apfelbaum did not address how many guards were stationed in Schottenstein at the time of the incident, or if paid off-duty NYPD officers contracted by YU were on campus at the time. He similarly did not address whether YU security guards, who are contracted employees of Securitas, a privately-owned security company, are permitted to use physical force when necessary.

According to Apfelbaum, the intruder, whom police identified as Peter Weyand, initially “asked to come in,” but was denied entrance by a security guard. “Recognizing that he posed a potential threat, she immediately called 911,” Apfelbaum said.

“Once the intruder broke the glass on the door and entered the building the intruder was visible to the security guard,” Apfelbaum said. “The guard called for backup and they quickly contained the intruder in the lounge with no other exit — video that is circulating on social media only shows a portion of the incident and does not provide the full context of the incident,” he added.

Apfelbaum said YU Security “followed the established protocols exactly as prescribed, which is why the situation was handled so well and quickly,” noting that the university is “constantly reviewing and updating our approach to security” in the wake of the Jersey City shooting earlier in the month. Apfelbaum did not address The Commentator’s inquiries regarding whether there are plans to have more armed guards

on campus, or whether there are discussions concerning arming guards with less lethal weapons, such as pepper spray.

Securitas did not respond to The Commentator’s questions regarding the incident and protocols for security guards in such situations, including the use of physical force.

Following the break-in, Weyand reportedly set several small fires in the dorm lobby using matches left out in the open. According to court documents, the blazes damaged a computer, a desk and toilet paper rolls. “The fire was small but the heat did activate the sprinklers and was contained to the immediate area,” Apfelbaum said, adding that the fire is still under investigation. “There was limited damage to the lounge.”

According to Apfelbaum, the fires were extinguished by the dorm’s sprinkler system, which is triggered by heat. The FDNY’s press release stated that firefighters “[brought] the incident under control,” which “is FDNY terminology for ensuring an operation has ended and the area is now safe for life and property,” FDNY Deputy Commissioner for Public Information Frank Dwyer told The Commentator. Apfelbaum said that waters that flooded the newly-opened Schottenstein communal kitchen were from sprinklers in other areas of the lobby, as opposed to the kitchen’s own sprinklers.

Security guards told students to stay in their rooms and away from the lobby via the dorm’s intercom system, according to Apfelbaum. The NYPD was the first agency to respond, followed by the FDNY. Apfelbaum did not address why resident advisers were not notified of the incident immediately following the break-in.

Apfelbaum said that since “the fire was small and localized,” students were directed to return to and remain in their dorm rooms. “At no time did it pose any danger to the students or the building,” Apfelbaum said regarding the fire.

Dwyer noted that “evacuating a location is not always the best response based on construction and available fire suppression systems. Often, sheltering in place is the best response while FDNY members respond and operate. In this case, there were no civilian injuries, which is great news.”

Under New York law, universities are required to hold at least three fire drills each year, including one between Sept. 1 and Dec. 1, and an additional drill between sunset and sunrise for students who dorm. Meanwhile, elementary, middle and high schools are required to hold a minimum of a dozen drills, including eight evacuation and four lock-down drills to prepare students for both fires and active shooter situations. According to Apfelbaum, fire drills are held every three months on the Beren Campus, most recently on Oct. 16.

Since the incident, numerous students have spoken up about their discontent with the way YU communicated with the student body while details were unclear. While Apfelbaum claimed that a security announcement was sent out to Beren students, faculty and staff via email on Friday at 10 a.m. — prior to The Commentator’s initial report on the incident — students reported having only received it at approximately 11:25 a.m., after the article was published. The discrepancy has not been resolved.

Neither the break-in nor the fact that the intruder had set small fires was acknowledged by the Friday morning email; it merely informed Beren students that an “incident” had taken place at Schottenstein Hall. Apfelbaum emphasized that the ongoing investigation prompted YU Security to not “create unnecessary alarm” among the students. Apfelbaum did not respond to The Commentator’s inquiry as to why Wilf students were not informed of the incident at that point.

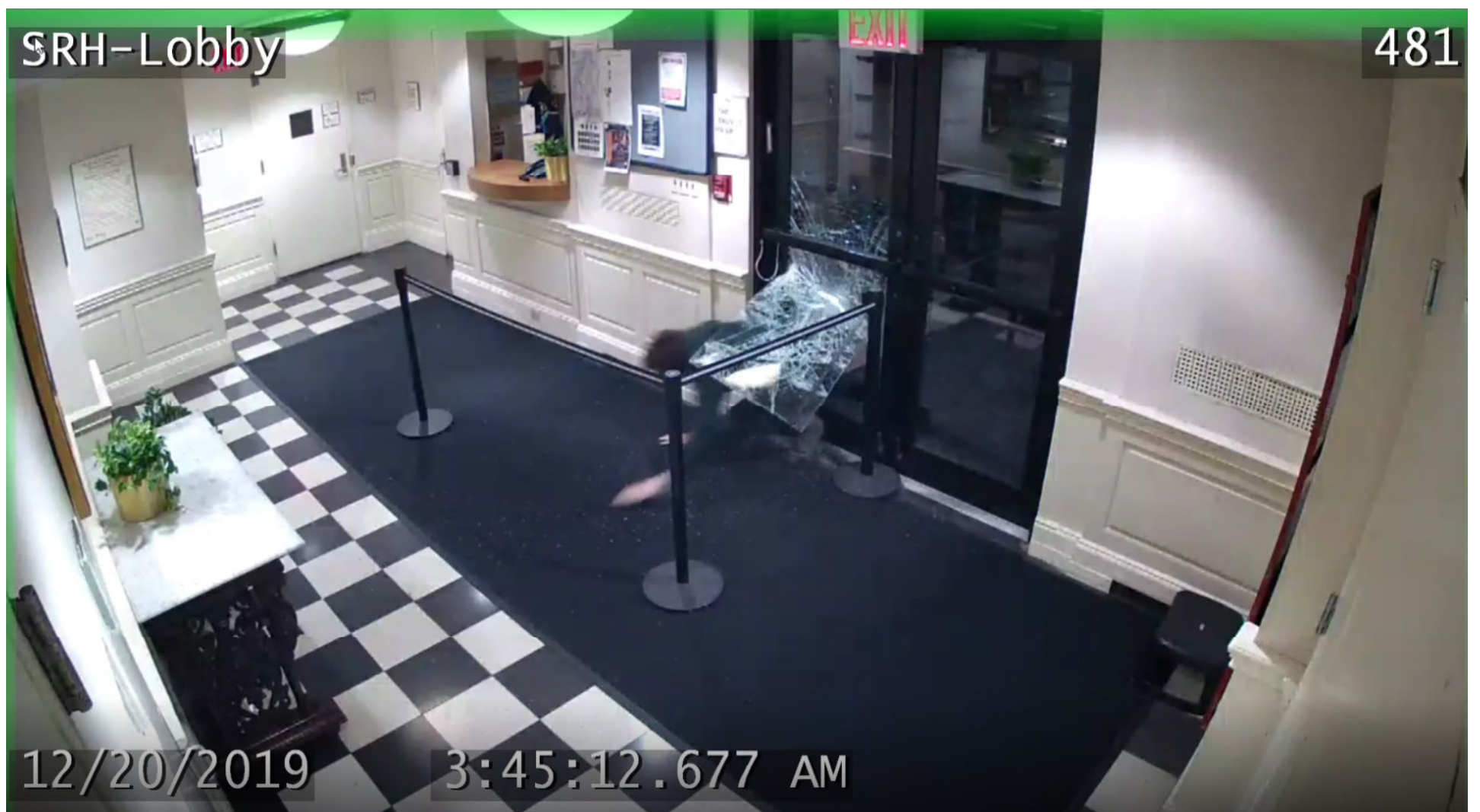
Given that the break-in occurred hours before Shabbat, the university was limited

in its ability to “comment and respond accordingly to inquiries from the media in a timely manner,” according to Apfelbaum. Once Shabbat ended, parents and members of the broader YU community received a security email alert at approximately 7:40 p.m., informing them that the incident “was not a hate crime and the intruder is being charged with arson along with breaking and entering. There is no current threat to our campuses.”

A Beren resident advisor, who wished to remain anonymous, shared with The Commentator that a conference call was arranged for RAs, graduate advisors and other representatives of University Housing on Dec. 21, the Saturday evening following the press coverage of the incident by various major media outlets, including The New York Times, New York Post and CNN. RAs and GAs were advised on how to address the situation and deal with students who were concerned about their safety. The RA who shared these details with The Commentator remarked that “the press kind of forced YU’s hand.” Many students and their parents were upset that YU Security had only reached out to them after major media outlets had covered the incident.

When asked if students have reason to worry about similar events recurring in the future, Apfelbaum noted that YU recently contracted with a third-party consultant to review safety and security measures on all of its campuses. “We have been taking steps to implement a variety of enhancements to physical and operational security and communications protocols on all our campuses, and will continue to do so,” he said.

In response to The Commentator’s inquiry of whether a town hall will be held to address the incident as some students have requested, Apfelbaum said, “Our University Housing Administration and our Counseling Center team are available to speak with any student that has concerns.”



Footage released by FDNY shows the intruder breaking through the glass door of Schottenstein Residence Hall.

In Memoriam: Kobe Bryant

By DANIEL MELOOL

Last Sunday, the world was shocked to learn of the passing of NBA legend Kobe Bryant. Bryant was traveling in a helicopter to a youth basketball game when it suddenly crashed, killing him, his 13-year-old daughter, Gianna and seven other people. The helicopter Bryant was in originally took off from John Wayne Airport located in Orange County, California and was expected to land near Mamba Sports Academy, a sports facility that was owned by Bryant, located in Newbury Park, California. Bryant was supposed to coach a basketball game that his daughter was supposed to play in.

Word regarding Bryant's untimely demise spread quickly. As soon as the unfortunate news reached Staples Center during a dress rehearsal for the Grammy Awards, the workers in the arena quickly moved Bryant's rafter jerseys side by side and covered the other retired jerseys with curtains. Soon, the legend's number 8 and number 24 stood juxtaposed.

Following the news of this tragic accident, the NBA decided to postpone the Laker's next game on Tuesday against the Clippers, out of respect for Bryant. On Monday, the league released a statement: "The National Basketball Association game between the Los Angeles Lakers and the LA Clippers scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 28 at Staples Center has been postponed. The decision was

made out of respect for the Lakers organization, which is deeply grieving the tragic loss of Lakers legend Kobe Bryant, his daughter Gianna and seven other people in a helicopter crash on Sunday."

Many in the basketball world gave statements proclaiming their condolences. NBA commissioner, Adam Silver, said in a statement, "The NBA family is devastated by the tragic passing of Kobe Bryant and his daughter, Gianna... We send our heartfelt

condolences to the Lakers organization and basketball fans around the world."

Bryant's former teammate Shaquille O'Neal tweeted the Sunday of the tragedy, "There's no words to express the pain I'm going through with this tragedy of losing my niece Gigi & my brother @kobebryant I love u and u will be missed. My condolences goes out to the Bryant family and the families of the other passengers on board. IM SICK RIGHT NOW."

From young athletes wearing his jersey on the court to students who toss their scrap paper in the trash while yelling "KOBE," both of whom attempt to emulate him, the "Black Mamba" has left a lasting mark in the hearts of many.

condolences to his wife Vanessa, and their family, the Lakers organization and the entire sports world." Hall of Famer, Michael Jordan said, "I am in shock over the tragic news of Kobe's and Gianna's passing. Words can't describe the pain I'm feeling. I loved Kobe — he was like a little brother to me. We used to talk often, and I will miss those conversations very much. He was a fierce competitor, one of the greats of the game and a creative force. Kobe was also an amazing dad who loved his family deeply — and took great pride in his daughter's love for the game of basketball. Yvette joins me in sending my deepest condolences to Vanessa,

Students at Yeshiva University also felt sorrow at Bryant's passing. Los Angeles native, Ben Goldstein (SSSB, '22) told The Commentator, "Kobe was a piece of every LA kid's childhood. There was nothing like putting on your number 24 jersey and watching Kobe be Kobe. A piece of Los Angeles died on Sunday and nothing can replace that."

Bryant was born in Philadelphia in 1978. He achieved great success, winning many national awards as a senior at Lower Merion High School, located in Ardmore, Pennsylvania. He then decided to skip college and join the NBA straight out of high school. In the 1996 NBA Draft, he was selected 13th

overall by the Charlotte Hornets, but was immediately traded to the Los Angeles Lakers, his favorite team growing up.

Bryant leaves behind an amazing career. In 1997, he became the youngest player to win the slam dunk competition at the age of 18. He then led the Lakers to three straight NBA championships from 2000 to 2002. On Jan. 22, 2005, he scored a career-high 81 points against the Toronto Raptors, the second-most points ever scored in a single game, behind only Wilt Chamberlain's historic 100 point game in 1962. During the 2006 NBA season, Bryant became the first player since Wilt Chamberlain in 1964 to score 45 or more points in four consecutive games. He went on to lead the league in scoring that season as well as the next. Bryant then led the Lakers to back-to-back championships in 2009 and 2010, winning NBA Finals MVP both times.

The passing of one of the greatest players to play basketball will not be forgotten. Bryant's 20 seasons were all an action-packed showcase of his ability to dominate the game. He will always be a paradigm for aspiring basketball players and cheering fans. From young athletes wearing his jersey on the court to students who toss their scrap paper in the trash while yelling "KOBE," and all others who hope to emulate his athletic gifts, the "Black Mamba" has left a lasting mark in the hearts of many. May his legacy live on.



A mural of Kobe Bryant looming large

The Obesity Epidemic: Trends and Reactions

By AVIGAIL GOLDBERGER

Many people — college students surely well-represented among them — are familiar with the feeling of pinching what they perceive to be an extra roll of fat around the waist and wondering where it came from. Shapes, weights and body types have no bearing on a person's beauty and worth, even though they unfortunately influence that same person's self-image and self-confidence in unfairly significant ways. The rising concern of the obesity epidemic, however, steps away from the realm of judgments or personal criticisms and moves into the conversation of an objective health crisis. William Dietz, the former Director of the Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity in the National Center for Chronic Diseases Prevention and Health Promotion at the CDC, commented back in a 2002 Web MD article, "The American public still views obesity as a cosmetic problem. The challenge is to get the public to recognize that this is a health problem and it's one that they can do something about." This problem holds just as true today as ever before.

Obesity is clinically defined according to body mass index (BMI), a value obtained by dividing one's weight (in kilograms) by the square of one's height (in meters). A person with a BMI of 25-29.9 is considered to be overweight, while obesity is characterized by

a BMI equal to or greater than 30. According to a 2017 CDC data brief, obesity rates in the U.S. in 2015-16 hovered around 39.8% among

a comparable and significant trend toward elevation since the obesity epidemic was first identified in the late 1990s. An alarming 2019 re-

health concern? For those who insist that obesity is more than a simple cosmetic problem, what catastrophic consequences do

certain associated cancers, and other negative health outcomes. In 2002, James O. Hill, then Director of the Center for Human Nutrition at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, addressed this concern. He voiced the fear that dealing with the consequences of the surge in obesity-related diabetes alone "will break the bank of our healthcare system." In other words, Hill and other like-minded professionals worry that the obesity epidemic will segue into a drastic increase of disease that our current healthcare system will not be able to handle — both in financial terms and in terms of our technical treatment capacities.

Between 2005 and 2010 alone, annual adult obesity healthcare expenses nationwide spiked by 48.7%, reaching a staggering \$315.8 billion. If the recent trajectory continues unabated, there will be too many people needing too many treatments and not enough resources to provide the care they need. People may feel personally wounded or criticized when told they are obese, as the issue is closely tied to body image and is therefore sensitive by nature. Nonetheless, while it is important to always maintain respect and consideration, fear of offending people's sensitivities must be held at lesser importance than the need to save people's lives and health. According to Dietz, "The focus needs to be on environmental

The obesity epidemic may seem overwhelming, but there are practical measures that can be instituted at community-wide and even national levels to combat its reach.

adults age 20 and up, exceeding the 18.5% recorded among children between the ages of 2 and 19. While the prevalence of obesity is and has long been undoubtedly greater among adults as compared to children, the prevalence among both age groups has demonstrated

port published by Zachary J. Ward and colleagues in the New England Journal of Medicine predicts that within the next 10 years, obesity rates may spike to nearly 50% of the adult American populace.

Why, though, has obesity risen to the spotlight as a major public

they foresee on the horizon, and why can't the issue be tackled on an individual, case-by-case basis? With the steady climb in obesity rates, the medical community has observed accompanying climbs in related conditions such as Type 2 diabetes, coronary artery disease,



Two uneaten burgers at a fast-food restaurant

PIXABAY

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A Vessel of Unification

By MITCH GOULSON

With my scarlet notebook clenched tightly by my bicep against my right rib cage, I have just finished my climb up approximately 100 interweaving steps to the top of Vessel. A \$200 million structure that acts as the sculptural centerpiece of the Hudson Yards Public Square, Vessel is a complex 80 landing, 154 staircase, 2,500 step creation enveloped in copper-clad steel created by British designer Thomas Heatherwick. I am perfectly centered within the Hudson Yards Public Square, which, according to the New York Times' Michael Kimmelman, is "the largest mixed-use private real estate venture in American history."

The temperature is 33 degrees. Due to the moderate-to-high gusts of wind howling through the air, the wind chill is 25 degrees. The open skies above me are aesthetically pleasing, but my fingers quiver as I begin to regret not bringing a pair of gloves. Unmelted snow lies at the foot of the railing, which I attempt to indent with the roughest point of my Blundstone boots as I approach the edge. With my finger pressed against the middle of my Moleskine glasses to prevent them from falling to their doom, I poke

my head over the bronze barrier and am stunned. My perspective atop this "giant shawarma" shaped formation grants me a sublime view of Midtown, the Empire State Building, and the Hudson River.

To my right is Midtown. A monstrous skyscraper impedes my line-of-sight; I follow its outline up with my finger, noting how

Vessel is a vehicle for unification in an increasingly divided society.

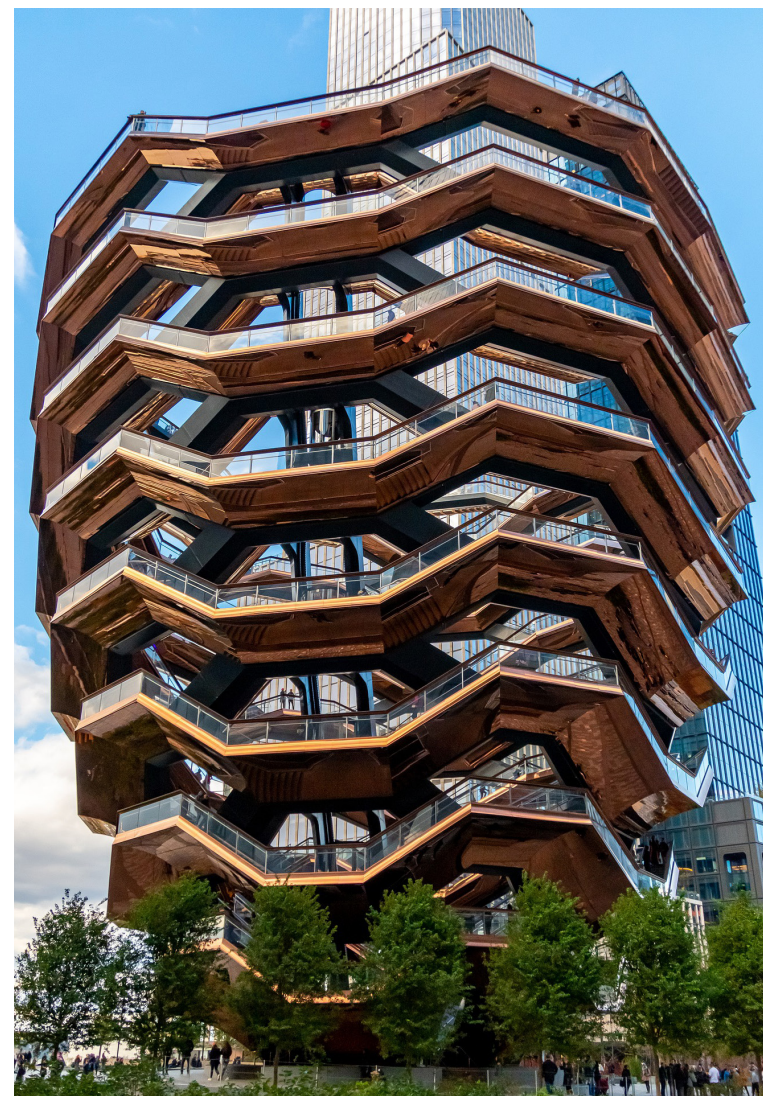
it gets progressively smaller as I get closer to its top. The building thickens as I follow it all the way back down and make out the name of the building, the Equinox, where I can see people staring back at me from the inside, mocking me. Out loud, I count the floors from the bottom, "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8" — and see on the 8th floor, an outdoor pool which in all likelihood will not be used for several months due to the wintry New York weather. On the 9th floor is a gym with four stationary bikes against the window, all in use by tenants who are pushing their bodies to unknown maximums.

To my left, opposing the

Equinox skyscraper, resides another tower, smaller than the first. A fully symmetrical building, both sides jut inward every several floors. It is an Ohm Rentals apartment building with an enormous advertisement that piques my attention. The boring pun it employs, "There's No Place Like Ohm," makes me shiver, not from the weather, rather in disgust. To avoid paying the advertisement more attention, I turn 90 degrees to my left, to face the inside of Vessel.

The complexity of Vessel is mesmerizing from this perspective; shining, hexagon-shaped structures form collectively to create a honeycomb-like formation that mimics in intricacy the double-helix structure of DNA. My sweeping view allows me to see almost all of the 154 staircases and eager tourists trekking up and down its steps. Directly across from my position is a middle-aged man bending over backward, spine curved over the railing, attempting to capture the perfect selfie. I spot two young boys racing up the stairs, one hopping over two steps at a time — both parties anticipating victory, I can feel their excitement accumulating as they speed through each staircase.

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Vessel

PIXABAY

Bioethics in Practice

What's More Deadly: The Vaccine or Anti Vaxxers?

By Yael Laks

About a year ago, I was in shul waiting for *minyan* to begin when a woman began speaking to me. After a few minutes of casual conversation, she started crying and complained that the measles vaccine had ruined her son's life. She claimed that the vaccine had made her son decline both cognitively and physically. At the time, it felt strange blaming the mechanism used to help prevent the disease as the cause of the disease. However, I couldn't see myself convincing this woman of my gut feeling because I hadn't yet researched vaccines and their backgrounds. Before I go into more details of this story, let me give some background on vaccines in general.

Vaccines are not ordinary medications that treat a disease once the patient has been exposed to it. Rather, they are a preventative medication that trains the body's immune system before getting in contact with the disease itself. While many mistakenly label vaccines as "deadly," when looking at the world today, it is obvious that they are decreasing and even obliterating the risk of deadly diseases such as polio, tetanus, rubella and chickenpox. This plays into the concept of herd immunity, namely, that people are indirectly protected from diseases as a result of most of the population already being immune through inoculation. Vaccines generally go through many years of testing with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and, once approved, go through close monitoring with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other federal agencies in order to ensure they are potent, pure and sterile.

There are several different types of ways vaccines are created and applied. In one method, the virus is killed and then injected into the body. Using this method, there is no risk for the reproduction of the virus or the causation of disease. This type of vaccine can, therefore, be administered to those with

weaker immune systems, although the person may need multiple doses to ensure immunity. Another type of vaccine uses attenuated live viruses, which are functional because they still induce memory B cells that prevent future infection, even though they don't reproduce as much as live viruses. This type of vaccine is strong, and therefore only a few doses are enough to achieve complete immunity. Its

In contrast, "anti-vaxxers" — as they are colloquially referred to as — invoke their right to individual autonomy, which would be compromised by forced inoculation to attend school. Others claim that by not vaccinating children, herd immunity won't be achieved, putting children with weak immune systems in danger. These children no longer feel safe to go to the one normal, consistent activity in their

prestigious peer-reviewed British medical journal — by Andrew Wakefield that correlated the increase in cases of autism with the measles vaccination. He included false data, wrong correlations and had a small sample size. It is surprising this study even got published. Regardless of the fact that this article was eventually retracted, the rumors and ideas it spread continue on.

family immediately jumped to the conclusion that the vaccine was not effective, and in fact detrimental. It is indeed horrible that this family is going through this situation, and the feeling of a need to blame something is justified. However, it is hard to find truth in this woman's claim.

First, due to the fact that a very weak form of the virus was administered in this particular case, it cannot be that the vaccine caused the measles to manifest itself. It would be difficult to say that this vaccine was a fluke while passing all the requirements and countless checkings of the FDA, NIH and CDC. Additionally, the mother mentioned that her son started feeling sick before he took the vaccine. Perhaps he already started showing symptoms of measles and the vaccine made no difference; since it is just a preventative drug, it doesn't alleviate conditions once the disease is in the system.

In *halakhic* terms, this question can get complicated. Indeed, there are some Haredi and Hasidic rabbis who ban vaccines in their communities, and some individuals do not inoculate their children accordingly. Originally, the measles outbreak centered in locales predominantly occupied by Haredi Jews like Williamsburg, Borough Park and Monsey. This situation has undoubtedly created a *chillul Hashem* (desecration of God's name).

Vaccines are one of the crowning achievements of modern medicine. They have nearly eradicated deadly diseases throughout the U.S. and the world. While they may be wrong in the scientific realm, anti-vaxxers may have a point by thinking their autonomy and liberties are being trodden upon by being forced to vaccinate. However, I disagree with their position due to the fact that multiple diseases that can be eradicated through vaccines — such as measles, mumps and cholera — are reemerging. Notwithstanding, my hope is that anti-vaxxers will eventually come to realize the scientific truth and change their adverse attitude to common-sense policy.

Originally, the measles outbreak centered in locales predominantly occupied by Haredi Jews like Williamsburg, Borough Park and Monsey. This situation has undoubtedly created a chillul Hashem.

downside is that those with weak immune systems can't receive the vaccine. This dilemma strikes at the core of most ethical issues regarding vaccination.

Some religious communities and schools of philosophy claim that their beliefs conflict with the administration of vaccinations and disagree with mandates for inoculation released by schools. Some schools only allow those who have received specific vaccines to attend, in order to ensure the safety and comfort of students with compromised immune systems.

lives — school. Until recently, there had not been much buzz regarding the anti-vaxxers versus pro-vaxxers. However, a major outbreak of measles recently occurred in the U.S., centering in Haredi Jewish communities. According to the CDC, over a thousand cases of measles were confirmed, the largest outbreak of cases since the disease was declared eliminated over 20 years ago.

A major contribution to the questioning of the effectiveness of vaccines comes from an article published in *The Lancet* — a

Despite the absurdity of the article, it was strong enough to leave a strong impression on the lady crying to me in *shul*. With the above information about vaccines, I was able to better understand her story retroactively. Although her son went to a top-tier school that required vaccines, her family comes from a religious community that strongly opposes vaccines. Her son started to feel sick and, as a result of fear of being kicked out of the school, immediately got the vaccine. A few days later he was diagnosed with measles. The



A vaccine

PIXABAY

THE OBESITY EPIDEMIC, continued from Page 10

and policy solutions rather than individual behavior change. Because it's changes in the environment that caused this problem and it's changes in the environment that will solve it." Experts in his camp feel that if we deal with cases of obesity on the small-scale, individual level, treating the obesity-related health outcomes as they arise, the battle will already be lost. The only effective stance to take is to work preventatively on the macroscopic level.

Almost everyone, laypeople included, would agree that diet and exercise are the twin pillars that contribute to the maintenance of healthy weight. But the issue is

more complex than a matter of whether individuals are theoretically aware of what choices *should* be made. This complexity is underscored by the socioeconomic and ethnic trends that characterize the distribution patterns of the obesity epidemic. On the most basic level, the CDC has observed that men and women with college degrees are less likely than their lesser-educated counterparts to be obese. It is critical to note that education and income are closely linked; individuals who come from backgrounds of poverty may struggle to afford or obtain college educations, and those with limited education may struggle to secure higher-paying employment. Certain minority ethnic groups also demonstrate greater obesity rates. For example, African American and

Mexican American women seem to be at greater risk. Culture, economic class and community structure may influence these ethnic patterns.

Knowledge of appropriate health behaviors is evidently only a piece of the larger battle. Those with limited economic resources will inevitably opt for cheaper food options, which tend to be higher in fat and sugar. These individuals also may seek low-rent housing and therefore tend to congregate in neighborhoods with lower community safety standards; children in such neighborhoods may not be allowed to play outside as much as they would be in safer areas, leading to reduced physical activity that creates bad habits during their formative years. Life circumstances play a significant

role in guiding lifestyle choices and should not be underestimated.

The obesity epidemic may seem overwhelming, but there are practical measures that can be instituted at community-wide and even national levels to combat its reach. CDC recommendations include efforts such as early childhood education to establish healthy behaviors or the creation of what they call "healthy community food environments" by providing economic incentives for businesses to make healthy changes. At the end of the day, it will always come down to the individuals to make the right choices — but it is society's responsibility and in society's best interest to facilitate the best arena for these choices.

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Muslim Delegation Participates in Interfaith Dialogue at YU

By MICHELLE NAIM

An interfaith dialogue was held at Yeshiva University in conjunction with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) on Dec. 2, 2019, on the theme of “Tradition and Modernity: Religious Identity and Civic Engagement in the United States.” The event was organized by Rabbi Dr. Stuart Halpern, Senior Advisor to the Provost, and Dr. Ari Gordon, the Director of U.S. Muslim-Jewish Relations for the AJC.

The meeting brought American Muslim religious leaders and Modern Orthodox institutions together. “The Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council (MJAC) is one of the AJC’s signature domestic initiatives, taking our relationships beyond dialogue to advocacy and action on issues of mutual concern, on domestic policy issues, in a bipartisan manner,” Dr. Ari Gordon, the AJC’s Director of Muslim-Jewish Relations, said. The focus of the meeting was to learn how each faith can continue to retain their identity within the context of the modern world.

The 12-person Muslim delegation was spearheaded by Imam Mohamed Magid, Executive Imam of All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) Center. His four-branch mosque community is based in Sterling, Virginia and serves 25,000 Muslims in Washington, DC.

Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Dr. Karen Bacon, Dean of the Sy Syms School of Business Dr. Noam Wasserman, Dean of the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration Dr. Rona Novick and Dean of the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies Dr. David Berger.

(Jewish religious court) from rabbis at YU and specific Jewish laws related to the court system. The delegations also discussed how to conduct themselves in an interest-driven economy according to their respective religious guidelines.

Other topics of conversation included the benefits of co-edu-

but most Orthodox and Modern Orthodox institutions stay out of the fold. This meeting was seen by him as an opportunity to change that. “It is important to connect Modern Orthodox Jews and American Muslims, because we navigate many of the same challenges that arise in nurturing religious commitments alongside broader civic and cultural life,” Gordon said.

“I was impressed with how diverse the Muslim group was. I guess, I should not have been, considering how far-flung Islam has spread,” said Dr. Jill Katz, Clinical Assistant Professor of Archeology at Stern College, who attended the event. “Nevertheless, the diversity of the group made an impression — they or their parents came from Afghanistan, Africa, America, Pakistan, etc.” According to Katz, the parameters of discussion were established before the meeting began and no points of conflict arose.

According to Dr. Ronnie Perelis, an associate professor at the Bernard Revel Graduate School, the event “was one of respect, curiosity, great conversations, questions, answers, listening and learning. He explained that his classes often discuss the history of the Jews in Spain. “A central feature of that history is the ways that Jews, Muslims and Christians lived together, learned from each other — and despite real tensions and conflict — managed to create a dazzling culture.”

Gordon expressed interest in holding more interfaith discussions. “We hope that the visit to two flagship institutions of Modern Orthodox Judaism will inspire other Orthodox schools and synagogues to engage further with American Muslims, and that likewise, American Muslim communities will see Orthodox Jews as more approachable dialogue partners to learn from and about,” said Gordon.

As of the time of publication, Imam Magid could not be reached for comment.

Many Jews and Muslims are joining in conversation together in America, but most Orthodox and Modern Orthodox institutions stay out of the fold. This meeting was an opportunity to change that.

The day began at Yeshiva University with a tour of the Glueck Beit Midrash where the Muslim and Jewish delegations watched students learn and engage in Torah texts with Roshei Yeshiva. They also heard a presentation made by Special Advisor to the President of Yeshiva University Rabbi Ari Lamm about the future direction of YU.

Various members of YU’s administration attended the interfaith event, including President Ari Berman, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman, Dean of

President Berman welcomed the Muslim delegates. “One of the core values of Yeshiva University is the role faith can and should play in contributing positively to the broader society,” said Berman. “Our conversation with Imam Magid and his fellow Islamic American leaders on the opportunities our respective traditions can and should play in the betterment of mankind is inspiring for all involved, and we look forward to building a brighter future together.”

Muslim participants heard about the Beit Din of America

cation settings while maintaining traditional religious values, how to address religious doubt amongst students and vaping.

After visiting YU, the Muslim participants made their way to SAR High School, where they met with founding principal Rabbi Naftali Harcsztark, administrators, teachers and students. The purpose of the visit was to highlight the school’s unique approach to bringing together Jewish and religious values and American culture.

According to Gordon, many Jews and Muslims are joining in conversation together in America,



President Ari Berman and Imam Mohamed Magid

YU NEWS

A VESSEL OF UNIFICATION,
continued from Page 10

Behind several glowing hexagons is a seven-story luxury shopping center where I can see luxury stores such as Lululemon, Neiman Marcus, Louis Vitton and Sephora, as well as more economical stores such as Zara and H&M. The variety of stores offered within the mall is a calculated strategy to appeal to as many people as possible, not to a single demographic.

I see the top of the Empire State Building as I cast my eyes farther up. The iconic edifice’s 1,454-foot peak is almost ten times taller than Vessel. As its neon-yellow lights get close to the tower’s sharp spire, they are replaced with subsequent

bright red, white and blue hues, sparking a sense of patriotism within me. Although the Empire State Building is dazzling, it is a hazy image due to smoke emerging from a chimney on the mall’s roof.

Turning around, I gaze straight ahead at a panoramic view of the Hudson River, which begins and ends with the presence of the aforementioned skyscrapers on each side. The Hudson draws a line between New York City and Jersey City. Vivid images of *Sully* — the 2017 movie starring Tom Hanks about the plane that made an emergency landing in the Hudson — flood my mind. These thoughts increase steadily as I watch vehicles traverse along and above the vast turquoise water.

Two jet boats, one blue and the

other white, enter from my right and race across the Hudson until the latter pulls off to its right, admitting defeat. A black-and-yellow helicopter lands on an overhang by the end of the river. A fishing boat passes by, its expanse thronged with partygoers and decorated for the holiday season, lime-green lights at its bottom and pineapple-yellow lights through the middle of its hull.

My eyes still glued to the Hudson’s transparent surface, I wonder why it is named “The Hudson River.” According to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, native tribes originally named the Hudson *Mahicantuck*, or “river that flows two ways.” This name “highlights the fact that this

waterway is more than a river — it is a tidal estuary, an arm of the sea where salty sea water meets fresh water running off the land.” As England tried to justify its takeover of the region in the 17th century, the government named it “Hudson” after Henry Hudson, who captained a Dutch ship up the river in 1609.

Finally, I pull away from the railing to glance at the people around me. I can hear a woman behind me speaking French, a Persian family speaking Farsi and three Orthodox Jews to my right speaking Hebrew. The coalescence of these cultures highlights Heatherwick’s point of “bringing people together” and gives evidence of the “melting pot” which exemplifies the diversity of New York City.

Thomas Heatherwick described the concept for his Vessel as something “participatory.” “The idea was that everybody would just come in and climb it, be able to propose marriage up here, or run up and down, do whatever they want,” Heatherwick says. He asks rhetorically, “Could you make something amazing that people can touch and use, instead of things they just look at and clap their hands and admire?” Heatherwick’s criteria included ensuring that his masterpiece would be something that *everyone* could enjoy; in considering tourists’ enjoyment, the variety of stores offered, and the diversity of the site’s attendees, Heatherwick accomplishes this task. Vessel is a vehicle for unification in an increasingly divided society.

FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

Editor's Note: Over the past year, there have been multiple occurrences of elevator malfunctions at Yeshiva University. Additionally, the university has been fined tens of thousands of dollars over a three year period, primarily in regard to elevator-related issues on the Wilf and Beren Campuses. As shown in the following archive, students have indeed been facing elevator-related issues for decades. In most cases, the university administration failed to respond to student complaints.

From the Archives (March 25, 1971; Volume 36 Issue 10) — Ups and Downs

By **ANDREW GELLER and THE COMMENTATOR GOVERNING BOARD OF 1970-1**

Strange! We wonder why the library was constructed in such a way that elevator operations are integrally connected with the front door mechanism. This must be the case, for when the elevators broke in mid-afternoon some days ago the library closed down. Using this same logic, the college should call off classes in the main building, where

the elevator never works, in Furst Hall should the elevators fail, and forbid dorm life in Rubin and Morg during frequent elevator stoppages.

We thank Dr. Duker, the Dean, et. al. for their benevolent concern for our health in forbidding us to walk up the library stairs. And we guarantee that so little studying is done in the elevators that their breakage would not affect study habits elsewhere in the library. So please, to whom it may concern, enough of this asininity — keep the library open.

Editor's Note: The following piece is an excerpt from a larger story on facilities mismanagement at YU.

From the Archives (April 7, 1992; Volume 57 Issue 10) — Special Editorial: Facilities MisManagement

By **JAY BAILEY and THE COMMENTATOR GOVERNING BOARD OF 1991-2**

The decision to discuss an individual's behavior is one that requires a great deal of thought. Our purpose is neither to poke fun, nor to malign. The issue we discuss below relates to the efficiency and atmosphere of every aspect of Yeshiva University.

The appearance of this article is prompted by a strong contention, frequently voiced by students, faculty, employees, and administration. Before proceeding with this objective, the editorial board consulted with a rabbinic authority as per halachic considerations.

March 5, 1992:

Approximately twenty students carrying a letter to Executive Vice President Egon Brenner, along with two Commentator reporters, entered the elevators of Belfer Hall heading for the twelfth floor. Near the tenth floor, the elevators went dead and began descending back towards the ground floor. The three elevators servicing Belfer Hall opened in the lobby and one of the reporters standing at the front of the elevator bank asked, "What happened?" [Jeffrey] Socol retorted, "Electrical failure. The elevators

broke." Revel student Robert Klapper, who was in the lobby during the episode, informed the Commentator reporter that he had seen Socol turn off the elevators. The reporter approached Socol and asked to see the electrical report regarding the elevators when it came in. Socol responded, "Shut the hell up." The reporter said, "Excuse me?" Socol repeated, "Shut the hell up." Students began heading for the staircase, intending to climb the twelve flights but Socol locked the door to the stairwell before they could reach it. He sent a security guard to shut down the freight elevator as well. Finally, Dean of Students Efrem Nulman pulled Socol aside to inquire what he was doing.

Forty-five minutes later, after students found a staircase to climb the twelve flights and had finished presenting their letter to Brenner's office, one Revel student asked Socol why he had turned the elevators off. Socol responded, "We don't have to let you go upstairs if we don't want to."

Twelve Trapped in Belfer Elevator on First Day of Semester

BY **JONATHAN MINKOVE**

On Monday, January 24th, the first day of the new semester, YC/IBC student Dov Pickholtz intended to arrive early to class. Sometimes plans do not go as expected, and on this day Dov's well intended attempt at punctuality was stalled. At 2:45 Pickholtz, proud that he would be fifteen minutes early to class, entered the middle elevator in Belfer Hall along with eleven other students. But then the unthinkable happened - between floors 1 and 2 the elevator came to a sudden halt. The students called security from the elevator phone and were told that a technician was on the way.

surprisingly almost everyone kept their cool. Pickholtz tried to pull a Bruce Willis by opening the elevator doors with his bare hands. Much to his surprise the doors easily opened. He peered down and saw the technicians working, and they hollered up to him to immediately shut the doors. While the elderly lady continued to periodically hit the call button, most people were cracking jokes and even planning a reunion for themselves. The brunt of many of these jokes was none other than SSSB/JSS Sophomore, Simon Landsberg. Simon was the last to enter the elevator as the doors were about to close. Because of this he became the scapegoat on the trip. "People were jokingly calling me the cause because I was the last to enter" said

The Commentator archives

THE COMMENTATOR

From the Archives (February 21, 2000; Volume 65 Issue 7) — Twelve Trapped in Belfer Elevator on First Day of Semester

By **JONATHAN MINKOVE**

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Pickholtz explained, "We were all relaxed and cracking jokes. Ten minutes had passed, we buzzed again and they told us that we will be out in 2-5 minutes. A small, elderly lady was not so relaxed and she continued to press the call button every couple of minutes."

As those packed within the enclosure awaited rescue, occupants with cell phones made quick use of them. A vice president of fundraising, who happened to be on the elevator, called Jeff Socol's office to make sure he was aware of the situation and to see how long it would take for the rescue operation. One student used his cell phone simply to say hello to his father before casually mentioning that he was calling from a stalled elevator.

Another ten minutes had passed, but surprisingly almost everyone kept their cool. Pickholtz tried to pull a Bruce Willis by opening the elevator doors with his bare hands. Much to his surprise the doors easily opened. He peered

down and saw the technicians working, and they hollered up to him to immediately shut the doors. While the elderly lady continued to periodically hit the call button, most people were cracking jokes and even planning a reunion for themselves. The brunt of many of these jokes was none other than SSSB/JSS Sophomore, Simon Landsberg. Simon was the last to enter the elevator as the doors were about to close. Because of this, he became the scapegoat on the trip. "People were jokingly calling me the cause because I was the last to enter," said Landsberg. "I laughed at these cracks but I felt guilty afterward because of my past history with elevators." Simon was referring to an elevator stoppage that he endured at the 181st Street train station for an hour and a quarter.

This time, Landsberg and the rest of the elevator passengers would have a significantly shorter bonding period. After forty-five minutes, the elevator began moving again and returned to the first floor. The group quickly celebrated and everyone took the stairs to complete the journey that had begun at 2:45.

Security and Facilities Management were as usual unavailable for comment, but Pickholtz assures us that "It was no one's fault; just a funny thing that happened."

Makor: A Source of Inspiration for YU

By JARED SCHARF

Yeshiva University's 89th commencement exercise will feature a new graduating class: the Makor College Experience Program.

As Dr. Stephen Glicksman (YC '91, Ferkauf '97), Director of Innovation at Makor Disability Services, put it in an interview with *The Commentator*, "The goal of the Makor College Experience is to provide individuals with Intellectual Disability [ID] the opportunity to be part of the YU community while gaining skills and exploring opportunities as they transition to lives of independence."

Although the program was only inaugurated in 2017, the idea was conceived by Glicksman almost three decades earlier when Glicksman was an undergraduate student at Yeshiva University. While pursuing a doctorate from Yeshiva University's Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology, Glicksman began working for The Women's League Community Residences, an Orthodox service founded in 1978 for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. The service was later rebranded to affirm its service to men as well, and labeled "Makor" (Hebrew for "source") to convey that the service is a source to the community.

"I began my own experience at YU as an undergraduate student in 1986 and haven't really left. For a long time, I wanted to bridge those two worlds (my Boro Park world and my YU world), and I thought the idea of Makor partnering with YU to provide a college experience program for people with intellectual disability was a perfect fit," reflected Glicksman.

Glicksman stated that one of the factors that limits the aspirations of individuals with intellectual

disabilities is "the idea that people with ID don't go to college. 'College is where you are supposed to explore your identity and have worlds open to you. That's what we're here for: to open those worlds,'" he said.

The idea of the Makor program, according to Glicksman, was not simply to open a college experience program, but to open one at YU as it is the premier Modern Orthodox institution. "YU is so much more than just a University. For many people, it is the next phase in one's Jewish growth. To open that opportunity for people who, prior to Makor, were excluded — that was the dream," remarked Glicksman.

After he began to work for Makor full time in 2015, Glicksman approached the executive director, Jeanne Warman with the idea of

instructor, Rabbi Uri Feintuch. Rabbi Feintuch (RIETS '05), was previously working at the School for Children with Hidden Intelligence when Glicksman asked him to help start the Makor College Experience. Rabbi Feintuch immediately left his home in Lakewood and moved into a friend's apartment in Teaneck, New Jersey before buying a house in Washington Heights, and then settling with his family in Chestnut Ridge, New York.

Reflecting on the first year of the program, Rabbi Feintuch said, "That was a wild year. I wasn't asked to do this, but I felt that it was a needed, essential step to foster the unity and needed framework and backbone for the guys to be together as a solid group for the program to begin."

after the conclusion of the program. Students explore different job opportunities or possibilities, as well as learn how to behave professionally and maintain professional relationships. Glicksman listed two values imparted to students in vocational exploration courses. First, having an interest in a career is as significant of a factor as "making money." Second, the student's career aspirations should be their own aspirations — not their parent's projection or an unrealistic dream job.

During the course of the program, the students explore different career interests and learn about different professions by visiting various job sites, including PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Barclays, as well as a suspender

all the programs for people with intellectual disabilities they visited, the Makor program "was the first they saw that didn't smack of 'tokenism.'"

When inquired as to what YU students can do to help Makor, Glicksman said that more help is needed for night staff at the Makor house. Additionally, students should let the faculty of Makor know if one of their students is doing anything inappropriate. "Chesed can really be a double-edged sword," he said. "It's no chesed to allow people with disabilities to behave on campus in ways that would get them in trouble in the outside world, and it's no chesed to tolerate behaviors once that will get our guys excluded in the future. If you feel one of our guys might need a refresher on a specific social skill, let us know."

Commenting on his experience in the Makor program, Yehoshua Fineberg (Makor '20) said, "I love all the Bochrin and all the *rebbeim*. I love Makor because it gives everyone the opportunity to be a part of YU whether you have a disab[ility] or not and I get to be a part of all the Heights events, even though it can be hard because we don't get the ystud emails."

Regarding a Makor program for the Beren Campus, Glicksman said, "We would love to open up a women's program at Stern. The main sticking point is housing. If you find me someone who can sponsor two apartments in midtown Manhattan, I would open up a women's program tomorrow."

Discussing his overall impression of the program so far, Glicksman reflected, "Having this program is a dream come true, both for me personally and for our participants, and we have been totally and warmly embraced by just about every facet of campus."

"I love Makor because it gives everyone the opportunity to be a part of YU."

— Yehoshua Fineberg (Makor '20)

partnering with YU for a special needs college experience; Warman's agreement was contingent on a blessing from the Novominsker Rebbe. Once the Rebbe agreed, Glicksman approached longtime friend Rabbi Menachem Penner, Max and Marion Grill Dean of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, who, according to Glicksman "really helped us get to the ears of the right people and present this idea to the university." After the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) approved the idea, the program began in 2017, only two years after Glicksman had approached Warman.

Like other students in YU, Makor students begin their day with morning *seider*. The students learn on the right side of the second floor of Glueck with their morning *seider*

After morning *seider*, the students go to their general studies classes which consist of three categories: liberal arts, life skills, and vocational exploration, that, according to Glicksman, "are really just aimed [at] having our students exposed to ideas and topics they might not have come across in the past."

Liberal arts classes include subjects such as poetry and zoology, as well as First-Year Writing (FYWR), "because everyone at Yeshiva College takes FYWR," as Glicksman stated. Life skills classes consist of courses such as "having conversations," "joining a group," "making friends," as well as classes in mindfulness or dealing with emotions.

The vocational exploration in the Makor program aims to prepare students for the workforce

factory in the Brooklyn Navy Yards, and not-for-profit firms, such as the Claims Conference, tech companies, as well as meeting with Makor's vocational coordinator.

The curriculum, however, is only one aspect of the goals of the program's goals; the campus life is another area in which the program aims to cater to its students. Like other students in YU, Makor students walk around campus freely and participate in clubs, including Chassidus and Sushi, the Baking Club, and the Woodworking Club. They can even assume leadership positions in clubs; Makor students are on the boards of Music Verse and the Improv Club.

According to Glicksman, when representatives from the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities visited the Makor program at YU, they told him that of



Students of the Makor program

Reflections on Professor Robert Gedaliah: A Public Speaking Professor Like None Other

By **ELLIOT HELLER**

“Ba doo ba ba doo ba, ba ba doo ba ba doo da.” Never could I imagine that these words would be spoken by a professor in a post-graduate class. Yet there I sat, hearing Professor Gedaliah excitedly utter them while demonstrating how to properly gesture while speaking publicly. The gibberish served as mere filler words, but for Professor Gedaliah, nothing was trivial — every part of a speech and lesson mattered. This entertaining bit kept the class engaged, as he always did — from his “yo!” when greeting a student or hailing a taxi, to his blunt yet constructive and creative criticism.

Robert Gedaliah passed away at the age of 74 in December, following an extended battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife, Rande, his brother and sister-in-law and

two nephews. Several decades ago, the Gedaliahs founded “Speaking for Results,” an organization that trained corporate and religious leaders in public speaking. Professor Gedaliah was also a member of the public speaking organization *Toastmasters*, as well as of the National Speakers Association. In 2017, that organization’s New York chapter created the Gedaliah Award in the couple’s honor, recognizing members who display “outstanding support and care” to members of the community.

Professor Gedaliah started teaching public speaking in RIETS in 2011, and continued until the Fall 2019 semester, when his cancer returned. (It is exemplary of his great selflessness that while he spoke frequently of his wife’s struggles with Parkinson’s disease, he never mentioned his own years-long battle with cancer.)

“The thing he would say over

and over in class was ‘Just talk to us. Get rid of the speechy voice and just have a conversation with the audience,’” recalled Rabbi Benny Krohn, Gedaliah’s co-teacher for two and a half years. “What he was telling us was that the key to success as a speaker was to be authen-

He had a way about him that drew you in and made you want to hear what he had to say.

tic and real with your audience. Show who you really are and what really matters to you. And if you do that then you’ll share something meaningful with your audience and maybe more importantly you’ll learn to share your authentic self with the people in your life who really matter.”

“Robert was one of the most

exuberant people I ever met,” said Professor Mike Landrum, whom Professor Gedaliah recruited to RIETS. “Everything with Robert was full voice and full body commitment. His commitment to his students was hard to match.”

I fondly remember Professor Gedaliah’s penchant for getting to know his students on a personal level. He passed out a paper at the beginning of the semester and asked us to write our birthdays and brief biographical information. One morning, he was making a stop at Dunkin’ Donuts before class, and sent the class a text asking if we wanted anything. He treated us all to lunch at the end of the semester. Rabbi Krohn recalled that he would send him a text every Friday wishing him a good shabbos.

After the semester, Professor Gedaliah texted me asking if I could help him enter his students’ birthday information into his cell phone, offering to treat me to lunch. After

we ate and I helped him with the phone, we stayed and schmoozed for over an hour. I wasn’t planning on doing that, but he had a way about him that drew you in and made you want to hear what he had to say, because you could tell that it was coming from a place of experience and deep authenticity.

It is my hope that these memories inspire students to appreciate their teachers, to try and learn more than just what is needed to get a good grade. Because when all is said and done, those stories and moments and pieces of wisdom will be what we remember most.

Rande Gedaliah suffers from Parkinson’s disease. Donations to the Robert and Rande Gedaliah Fund to help the family pay for medical and funeral expenses can be made at [gofundme.com/f/gedaliah](https://www.gofundme.com/f/gedaliah).



Gedaliah speaking at a Toastmasters event in 2016

GEDALIAH YOUTUBE PAGE

No, I Don’t Know My Major, And That’s OK.

By **SRULI FRUCHTER**

When I first told my friend from Brandeis University that I was majoring in English, his quirked eyebrow and dubious eyes felt unwarranted. True, I had not even been on Yeshiva University’s campus for two weeks, nor had I completed even four classes of my single English Literature course, *The Monstrous*, but how could I not know my major?

Since that time, a short four months ago, I have unofficially changed my major multiple times, juggling the possibilities of Political Science, History, Philosophy or even a shaped major. I recall nights spent incessantly scrolling through the department descriptions on YU’s website in order to calm my anxious mind. It seemed like the only alternative to definitively deciding which area of study to

pursue was to aimlessly wander through my semesters like an infant in a library.

I have come to the realization that entrusting my fledgling college self with the responsibility of declaring my major would be an egregious error. After all, according to a 2017 study by the National Center for Educational Statistics, about one-third of stu-

I have come to the realization that entrusting my fledgling college self with the responsibility of declaring my major would be an egregious error.

dents in a bachelor’s degree program will change their major at least one time, so why must I act with haste? Nevertheless, the existence of that silly, pestering notion still troubles me. I believe I was not alone in adopting that self-induced strain; other students at YU have

seemed to align themselves with that expectation.

Rubin Hall’s elevator has fostered countless small-talk conversations between myself and other students, and in nearly every interaction, I faced the question, “So, what are you majoring in?” In the times where I have expressed uncertainty or indecision, I was often met with sympathetic nods or

concerned gazes, despite the other student acknowledging my status as a first-time-on-campus sophomore. I also recall discussions in the Furman Dining Hall where other students and I encountered that same question. During those times, curious expressions awaited

my tongue to bang like a gavel with a conclusively declared major, but no such thing happened.

I am not claiming that that question *per se* is a faulty one, rather I am suggesting that acting as if we stand on the train tracks of our life while our rumbling future charges towards us is senselessly stressful and offers no palpable benefit. YU’s very own Career Center has debunked the fallacy that students must choose their major during their first semester in college. They explain that “Many students remain undecided their first year of college and ... [enroll] in different courses to see what they find compelling.” This is a route I personally find to be comforting and sustainable, and I imagine other students would, too.

While I acknowledge that spending a year in Yeshivat Orayta has fulfilled my would-be freshman year in college, I am not discouraged by that “loss” of a year.

Meeting with Yeshiva College’s academic advisors has shown me that, while still fulfilling CORE requirements, I can develop a palette of diverse areas of study, sampled from courses in various departments.

Time stands on our side. While I admit that pre-med or other four-year major students may fall under tighter time constraints, I still contend that declaring a major should not be a recklessly hasty decision. Arriving at campus for the first time with a “sophomore” standing is daunting, and it often feels like the future is lurking in my dorm room, waiting to surprise me. Under that auspice, however, impulsivity would dominate my life. I have come to learn that the short-term satisfaction of declaring a major is not worth the trade-off of jeopardizing my college education and professional aspirations. As I venture into my second semester at YU, I still do not know my major, and that is OK.

Why YU Should Reconsider YUNMUN

By DANIEL MELOOL

Next week, Yeshiva University will host the 30th session of YUNMUN (Yeshiva University National Model United Nations). The university's website describes YUNMUN as "a student-run simulation of the workings of the real United Nations that gives students an opportunity to experience and learn about the complex landscape of international diplomacy." High school students from all over the country will participate in this event, and YU students will serve as staff members to ensure that the event is run properly. Although there are national Model UN competitions held every year in New York and other locations, these events usually occur over Shabbat, or other Jewish holidays. Therefore, YU hosts its own Model UN competition.

However, despite its educational merits and value, I believe that Yeshiva University and the students who attend YUNMUN should reconsider their participation in this event, which is a simulation of an organization that stands directly against the interests and existence of the state of Israel.

It is evident that support for the state of Israel is one of the core values of this institution and its students. There are countless

examples, such as the playing of Israel's national anthem — Hatikvah — before every sports game held on campus, and other significant campus events like the recent Chanukah concert, and the prominent placement of Israeli flags on campus, among others. When The Commentator commissioned a poll about the political leanings of the YU student body in October of 2018, it found that 74 percent of students consider

Myanmar, the U.S. (for its embargo on Cuba) and two against Crimea. UN Watch also found that from 2006 through 2016, the UN Human Rights Council adopted 135 resolutions criticizing countries, of which 68 were directed against Israel. From 2012 through 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted 97 resolutions criticizing countries, with 83 of those resolutions being against Israel. UN Watch also notes how

year condemning Israel, despite the fact that no other country has ever received condemnation. The International Labour Organization (ILO), which was established to improve working conditions, produces one country-specific report condemning Israel at its annual conference.

It is important to realize that the United Nations' horrendous treatment of Israel is not a new phenomenon. The British histo-

Assembly passed resolution 3379, which condemned Zionism as a form of racism. To add insult to injury, the Israeli delegate, Chaim Herzog, pointed out that the vote had taken place on the 37th anniversary of Kristallnacht. Although the resolution was revoked sixteen years later, it should have never been passed.

The point here is not to say that Israel is impervious to criticism, or that any criticism of Israel is necessarily anti-Semitic. However, the suggestion that the only democracy in the Middle-East is worthy of more condemnation than the repressive dictatorships in Venezuela or North Korea is preposterous.

It should be noted that YUNMUN is not affiliated with the actual United Nations, and neither the university nor the students who attend YUNMUN support the UN's hostility towards Israel. However, by attending an event that is supposed to be a simulation of the UN, YU and its students should consider if they are emulating an organization that stands counter to one of their bedrock beliefs. This should not serve as a discouragement to the students who are attending YUNMUN, but rather as a call to consider if participation in this event legitimizes the extreme, dangerous anti-Israel bias that is so rampant in the UN.

By attending an event that is supposed to be a simulation of the UN, YU and its students should consider if they are emulating an organization that stands counter to one of their bedrock beliefs.

Israel to be a "very" or "extremely" important issue to them.

It is also no secret that the United Nations has an odious history of being extremely unfavorable towards the state of Israel. UN Watch, a Geneva-based non-governmental organization (NGO) that "monitors the performance of the UN by the yardstick of its own charter," has found some staggering statistics regarding the UN's treatment of Israel. In the 74th session of the UN General Assembly (2019-2020) there were 25 resolutions adopted, and 18 of them were critical of Israel. The other 7 were critical of Iran, Syria,

every year, of the approximately 10 resolutions adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), all of them are directed against Israel. The only time UNESCO passed a resolution against another country was in 2013, against Syria.

UN Watch also shows that even bodies of the UN that are supposed to deal with matters unrelated to global disputes manage to pass resolutions condemning only Israel. The UN World Health Assembly, which meets for one week every year to adopt resolutions regarding global health issues, manages to pass a resolution every

year. In his book "A History Of The Jews" how President Idi Amin of Uganda sent a cable to the UN Secretary-General on Sept. 12, 1972, applauding the Holocaust. In that same cable, he also proposed to erect a statue of Adolf Hitler in Uganda, as there had not been one erected in Germany. Despite this, or as Johnson suspects, because of it, he was well received by the General Assembly. He then received a standing ovation before his speech denouncing the "Zionist-American conspiracy" and called for the expulsion of Israel from the UN and its extinction. On Nov. 10, 1975, the UN General



Wasting Food, Wasting Lives

By MOSHE GORDON

Imagine you went on a festive shopping spree and bought all the ingredients to bake a cake. Then you spent a few hours mixing and baking that decadent cake. You put a lot of effort into carefully calligraphing a colorful happy birthday message onto the icing. And then you dumped it in the trash. Facedown. All mixed up with coffee grinds and wrappers. That's what I have to do every Shabbat in the Furman Dining Hall.

My job on the Shabbat waitstaff is a mostly pleasant experience. Setting tables and preparing food is rewarding work, even if no one in the cafeteria notices or appreciates my efforts. However, I do not enjoy cleaning up. After everyone leaves the dining hall I have to throw out all the uneaten food, and things can get a little sad. Trashing nearly untouched plates of chicken, vegetables and desserts seems unnecessary and wasteful.

An article published by the National Aquarium in Baltimore reported that 40% of American-produced food goes to waste. This staggering figure is very disturbing. Do we at YU throw out 40% of our food, just as the rest of America does? Perhaps this is one practice we don't want to participate in. If

there is such a surplus of food being wasted in America, why is it not used to feed starving children all over the world today?

Admittedly, this wastefulness is hardly YU's fault. Under the New York City Health Code (§81.07, L) "food that has been served to the public shall not be re-served". This applies to "charitable organizations' kitchens" as well (§81.01). Per these regulations, there is no way to reuse any of the food served on Shabbat. Good intentions notwithstanding, any deviation from this law could cause serious liability issues for YU, threatening an already uncertain financial future.

weekday meals. Occasionally, when I ask students if they would prefer to save the meal for later, I receive responses along the lines of, "it will be cold," "I'll just buy more when I'm hungry" and "It's not a waste to throw away something useless."

The indifference, I think, is a mistake. I feel that the most important point here is to *feel* the problem. It really bothers me that most people don't give a second thought to the wasted food. Supposing the food truly had no further use, students should still be cognizant and expressive of the uneven distribution of resources on our planet. In the words of the Talmud, "one must

that discomfort, I am convinced that we would seek, discover and implement solutions.

And solutions are available. While discussing this issue with a friend of mine, he suggested that students be provided with recyclable to-go containers so they can pack up the food they purchased and did not eat. This bypasses all government regulations and does not raise any liability concerns for YU. The only obstruction to this solution is galvanizing the Office of Student Life into paying for these containers. Why isn't this happening? When will we rouse ourselves from indifference?

When leveling these accusations, I do not intend to belittle our student body. My regard for my fellow students, and YU generally, is very high. So high, in fact, that I truly believe change is possible. As Yadin Teitz, a former editor of the opinions section of The Commentator put it, "It seems to me that being simultaneously an outspoken knocker and an ardent defender of YU...all stems from a strong overarching interest and loving concern for the well being of this place." My complaints are not frustrated venting — they are hopeful calls for improvement.

40% of American-produced food goes to waste. This staggering figure is very disturbing. Do we at YU throw out 40% of our food, just as the rest of America does?

Nevertheless, the problem of wasted food remains. What are we doing to fix this?

In conversation with fellow students, I have found that the most prevalent attitude is indifference. Despite the incessant complaints about insufficient caf card funds, I often observe students discarding significant quantities of food at

bear the burden *with* his friend" (Avot 6:6). It does not suffice to assist, one has to empathize; and I would argue that in a sense the empathy is more important.

Even if there is little or nothing we can do to help undernourished children, we should at least feel a twinge of discomfort throwing out huge amounts of food. If we felt



The Furman Dining Hall on the Wilf Campus

THE COMMENTATOR

'It's a Wonderful Life:' George Bailey and the Struggle of Finals

By EVAN EDELSTEIN

In the midst of reading week and finals, it might feel like success is contingent on a letter grade. A semester-long struggle to take notes, keep up with lectures and do homework comes down to watering eyes falling over a laptop keyboard. During reading week, success is judged by productivity and ability.

The consequences of not thinking positively about the worth of one's own life is captured in the film "It's a Wonderful Life."

It is in this chamber that the grueling beast of anxiety stalks, and it is during this time that I wonder why I'm not outside in the snow, but rather watching it through the cold windows. This atmosphere contributes to the student body feeling more stressed and anxious.

Many students find themselves struggling with a lack of self-esteem during this time. The consequences of not thinking positively about the worth of one's own life are captured in the film "It's a Wonderful Life" (1946). Although the movie is technically a "Christmas film," by watching it without a religious lens, we can find a healthy and important message about self-worth — a message worth tuning in to.

"It's a Wonderful Life" — though suffering from outdated portrayals

of its minority and female characters — should be watched because it empowers us to think about the positive contributions we have made over our lives, bolsters our self-worth and hopefully helps keep that creeping monster of anxiety at bay. The film centers around George Bailey, a generous and caring citizen of Bedford Falls, CT. When poverty strikes him and his town, he wants to take

his own life to provide for them. But George is interrupted by an angel named Clarence who shows George how important he has been to the existence of his town and the prosperity of his family. Clarence brings George back to reality, and armed with his newfound sense of self-worth, George steps away from the edge of the bridge.

George's resolve to stand his ground and uphold *tzedeq u'mishpat*, righteousness and justice, even if it means sacrificing his own opportunities, is inspirational. Clarence's trust in God is a model for divine devotion that should resonate with all of us. For me, the most significant message of the film is that everyone has value, even if it's not always obvious what that value is. Although perhaps not as extreme as George's suicidal

thoughts, during finals we might also fall into the trap of negative self-worth. The stress of tests, papers and projects weighs down on us and might lead us to think we aren't smart or good enough.

But it shouldn't take an angel to see your own self-worth; if you want to know how valuable you are, just ask the people around you, and in return, remember to tell your friends and loved ones how much they matter to you, especially during finals. Try and maximize your interaction with people so that you remember how much you mean to each other. Take study breaks with others, maybe even watch a movie. Make mealtimes a chance to hang out. Cut back on the time spent subjected to the fourth floor's oppressive silence, treating yourself to some "social studying." Take a cue from George Bailey and spare a moment to appreciate the things that really matter in life. While you may think every second of studying is critical, taking some time to invest in yourself will lead to a happier you. During finals, a time defined by pass and fail, we would be wise to heed Clarence's parting advice to George: "No man is a failure who has friends."



Theatrical release poster

RKO PICTURES

Rescuing the World Zionist Organization

By NAFTALI SHAVELSON

In March, Peter Beinart wrote an article in The Guardian titled “Debunking the myth that anti-Zionism is antisemitic.” Now, he wants a seat in the World Zionist Congress.

Every five years, the WZO holds elections to determine the fate of almost \$1 billion dollars to be spent on projects in Israel and the Diaspora. In practice, each body of elected representatives, therefore, allocates around \$5 billion over the course of its term. For decades, this went smoothly. Various Jewish groups assembled slates and elected representatives to reflect their visions for Israel, focusing on matters important to them like Jewish education or religious pluralism. While they disagreed on nuances, members from Yitzhak Navon to Nathan Sharansky broadly agreed on fundamental Zionist principles such as Jewish determinism and a unified Jerusalem.

The WZO’s platform is expressed in the

Jerusalem Program, a charter of sorts for the organization that outlines the concepts it holds dear. Its main value is “the centrality of the State of Israel and Jerusalem, its capital, in the life of the nation.” It also advocates for “strengthening Israel as a Jewish, Zionist and democratic state” and “ensuring the future and the distinctiveness of the Jewish people by furthering Jewish, Hebrew and Zionist education.” Finally, it calls for “settling the country as an expression of practical Zionism.”

It’s easy to take for granted that anyone running for a seat in the premier worldwide Zionist organization would support these principles. However, in this election cycle, several candidates who oppose them have thrown their hats into the ring. *Hatikvah*, a longtime marginal left-wing slate in the Congress with only a handful of seats, announced a swath of new candidates in an effort to broaden its appeal for 2020. Among them are Jeremy Ben-Ami, president of the liberal Middle East advocacy group J Street,

and members of PeaceNow, a group that calls for the elimination of Jewish residence in Judea and Samaria.

The *Hatikvah* candidate with the strongest name recognition, though, is undeniably Peter Beinart. A frequent contributor to publications like The Forward and media

and need only be 18 years old and Jewish residents of the United States. The cost to vote is \$7.50, but only \$5 for those 25 and under.

For the hundreds of Yeshiva University students who live in the tri-state area, and for others who live in solidly red or blue states,

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outlets like CNN, he is well-known across the Jewish world and is sure to be the slate’s biggest draw. Unfortunately, he also has a history of defamation of the State of Israel and apologetics for anti-Semites. Before the most recent British election, he wrote regarding Jeremy Corbyn’s anti-Semitism that “If Corbyn weren’t passionate about Palestinian rights, he wouldn’t be under this much attack.” He is, of course, free to express his opinions, but they should not find a home in the WZO.

For the first time, the World Zionist Organization is under threat of takeover by people who want to cut Jerusalem in half and bankrupt families in Gush Etzion. Fortunately, *you* can do something about it. From January 21 through March 11, the WZO will hold its 38th elections. Americans can vote through the American Zionist Movement’s website (zionistelection.org)

this is a far more consequential vote than your ballot for president in November. Here, your vote can make a real difference, and since it’s online, it’s the easiest one you’ll ever cast. In the last AZM elections, only 56,000 American Jews voted. If the YU student body does their part, they can be a significant voice for real Zionist values.

Now you know who not to vote for, but which group should you support? Because Jews can never agree on anything, there are a total of 13 slates running in the elections. The *Orthodox Israel Coalition - Mizrahi and the Zionist Organization of America Coalition* are great options that share YU’s vision of a strong, democratic and proudly Jewish Israel. YU is affiliated with the former. Ultimately, though, the choice is yours! Do your research and choose the slate that best reflects your Zionism and the Israel of tomorrow you’re most excited to see.

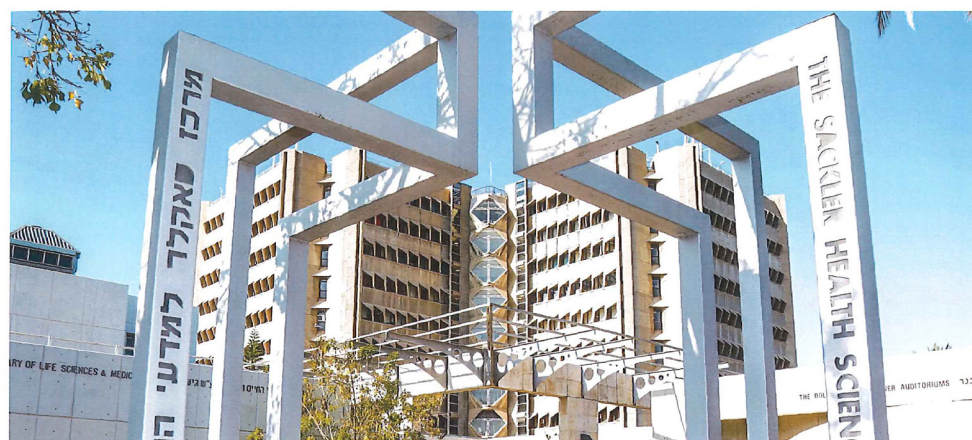


The World Zionist Organization headquarters in Jerusalem

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



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From the Sy Syms Student Council President's Desk

By MIRIAM SCHLOSS

For those of you that know me, it's easy to imagine that my interest in school involvement didn't start in college. In high school, I liked to be involved in various programs and loved that I got to be in as many groups as I was. Though my involvement sometimes ended with me taking on a leadership role, it always started with the goal of involvement.

In my last year of high school, I got involved in the Senior Dinner. Most of that event is a blur for me at this point, but there is one moment that stands out. There was a moment of indecision, where something needed to happen but there was no one with the certainty to make the call. After awkwardly not knowing what to do, it was a relief to see the executive director of the school walk into the room. She immediately asked me why the "thing-that-needed-to-be-done" hadn't happened yet, and I told her that I didn't think I had the authority to do it.

Her response: "You don't need authority. You just need leadership."

Her response is one that I have written in my list of quotes and think about often. It was one of the first times I had put leadership in a framework that was separated from authority. From my perspective at the time, I had experience with leadership. I held multiple roles where I directed a team, implemented events or took care of administrative tasks on behalf of a larger group. I did those things because someone gave me permission to fill that role. To be comfortable in that kind of position, I needed to be given the authority to make

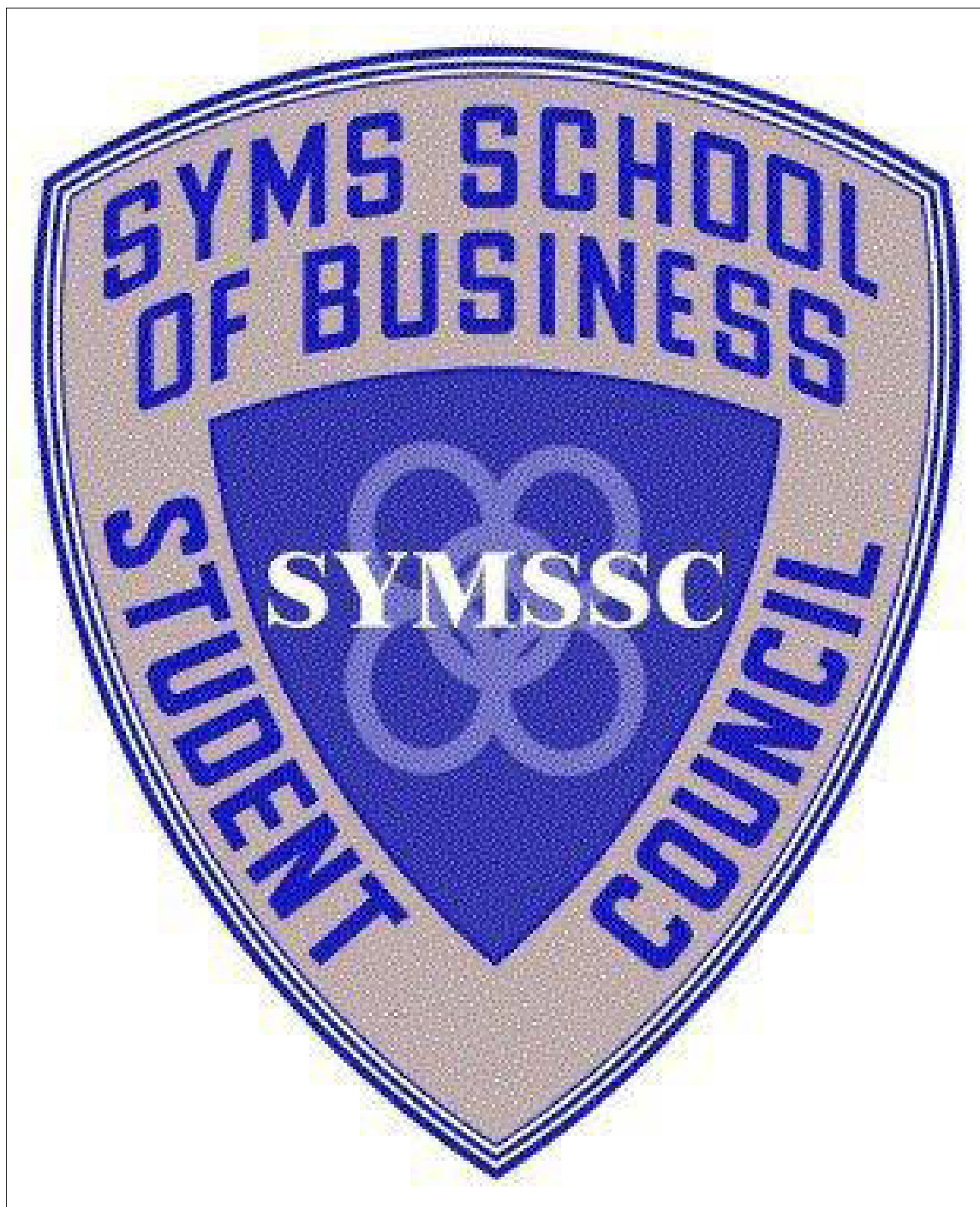
decisions on behalf of others.

I have since come to think of leadership differently because I now recognize that you don't need authority to be a leader. Leaders make the decision that something needs to be done and then they make it happen. It's not a role that someone can give you, it's a role that you decide to step into.

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The more involved I am in school programming, the more I encounter people stepping into those kinds of roles. Sometimes it's someone who takes on being a club head for a club that would otherwise not exist. Sometimes it's someone who brings a *chessed* project to campus in reaction to larger world events. Sometimes it's someone who wants to start an initiative that will bring our campus community together. Regardless of the project or initiative, it's the people who act as leaders that are the ones making an impact.

I invite you to lead. I invite you to take initiative to fill a need on campus. There are things that need to be done and student councils have the resources to help make them happen. But if you think that only appointed students can bring your ideas to life, you're wrong. To make them happen, you don't need authority, you just need leadership.



Syms Student Council Logo

Review: Koren's Bold New Modern Orthodox Tanakh Commentary

By DR. AARON KOLLER

The publication of the gorgeous first volume of "The Koren Tanakh of the Land of Israel" is cause for celebration and reflection. The first installment is The Susan and Roger Hertog Edition of Exodus, and gratitude is due to the Hertogs and to Koren for this project, which clearly reflects years of work and large investments of capital and time. Reminiscent of the *Olam ha-Tanakh* series published in Israel by Davidson-Ittai more than 25 years ago, the Koren Land of Israel Tanakh contains hundreds of beautiful images that really do illuminate the text, and dozens of short articles by way of commentary, usually signed (with initials) by one of the contributors to the volume listed in the back.

Readers of the volume will learn how many fields of contemporary scholarship can help us understand the book of *Shemot* better. Essays draw on research in Egyptology and ancient Near Eastern studies, archaeology and the languages of

the ancient world and the natural world of the Bible. The series is explicitly Orthodox, and the introduction to the series (pp. xii-xvii) asserts that it "assumes the Divine authorship of the Torah, rejecting theories of multiple authorship which disregard its fundamental unity."

The volume does not, then, engage with this aspect of biblical scholarship, but it is otherwise deeply enlightening on how modern research and knowledge can enhance the study of Torah. Scenes of Philistine altars, Egyptian gold, and cuneiform tablets make regular appearances, allowing the reader to visualize the text, as do reconstructions of the vessels and vestments from the *mishkan* (some from a partnership with The Temple Institute in Jerusalem). The discussions of the story of Moshe's birth in light of Sargon's birth story, the structure of the Ten Commandments in light of Hittite treaties and the layout of the *mishkan* in light of Ramesses' battle tent at Kadesh pull no punches in their engagement with the wide range

of available data and analysis. In each case, the reader is treated not only to new information, but to the results and benefits of this new information. The differences between the birth stories of Moses and Sargon are highlighted, the theological meaning of the structure of the Ten Commandments is elaborated, and so on. Thus, all this learning is seen to be quite centrally important in our understanding of Torah.

The historicity of the Exodus is asserted, but not vigorously defended. The date of the Exodus, set by many modern scholars in the thirteenth century BCE (the time of Ramesses II or his son Merenptah), is explicitly avoided (p. 69: "there is no way to know the exact time period of the Israelites' slavery and redemption"), although the thirteenth century is given as the earliest possible time, because of the mention of the city of Pi-Ra'ameses, named for the king, in Exodus 1:11. This discussion is quickly followed by "tefillin in archaeology" and "tefillin in halakha" (p. 72), drawing on findings from the Judean

Desert 2000 years ago. Thus, the book chooses not to argue about questions of historicity, instead taking it for granted and focusing on matters that can be discussed with more data.

The intellectual and religious profile of the book seems to reflect something of an Israeli sensibility. Professor Adam Ferziger has recently documented the gulf separating the Modern Orthodox community of North America from the Religious Zionist community of Israel when it comes to biblical scholarship, despite the profound similarities between the communities otherwise. In North America, mainstream Modern Orthodox institutions publish symposia on Tanakh where the question of archaeology is never raised, much less advocated. In an interview published in the Orthodox Union's quarterly magazine *Jewish Action*, Rabbi Nosson Scherman, the general editor of ArtScroll, was asked, "Did you ever consult with Bible scholars, historians, or archaeologists regarding the translation of Tanach?" And his answer was

short and to the point: "No, we avoid that completely." What is remarkable is that ArtScroll's publications on Tanakh are mainstream in many North American Modern Orthodox communities, indicating that this repudiation of all of modern knowledge about Tanakh does not offend broadly. In Israel, on the other hand, engagement with the historical, political and geographic realities relevant to biblical history is commonplace, and of course, the academy is the home of the scholars who study these fields. Thus, biblical archaeology is something of a national pastime in Israel, while it continues to be ignored by broad swaths of the Orthodox community in North America.

From my perspective, this is depressing, as Modern Orthodoxy has always said that it takes the best of the general world and incorporates it into a Jewish framework. In the case of Tanakh, however, contemporary Modern Orthodoxy mostly ignores what the rest of the

Continued on Page 22

KOREN CHUMASH,
Continued from Page 21

world is doing — to our own detriment in understanding Torah. But of course, the lines between the North American and Israeli communities are fluid, and Koren — based in Israel but with a growing publishing presence in North America — is Commercial Exhibit A right now. One can hope that the publication of the Land of Israel Tanakh will help to increase the flow of ideas from Israel to here, and help bring the North American Orthodox study of Tanakh to the levels it has reached in the Israeli community.

Because there is no running commentary in the volume, the reader will not find anything here about some of the problems raised by the text to a modern reader. When the text reports that there were 600,000 adult men traveling from Egypt (12:37), implying a total population in the millions, the commentary has nothing to say, although in the volume introduction, the editor writes somewhat enigmatically, “Certain idiomatic elements of biblical language, such as numbers, cannot be read literally” (xvi). The troubling and enigmatic episode of the *hatan damim* elicits no comment at all, nor does the

depiction of God sitting on a throne above Mt. Sinai as Moses and the elders feast. This volume can only complement other commentaries, then, and the student will still have to have the *Mikraot Gedolot* (ideally at mg.alhatorah.org) and the JPS Torah Commentary open as well.

Two last notes about the center of the Land of Israel Tanakh — the biblical text itself. First, the text is, of course, the eclectic text of Tanakh produced by committee for Koren decades ago. This is unfortunate, but not tragically so. I wish Koren would strike a deal to utilize Breuer’s reconstruction of the Aleppo Codex, but perhaps this is just wishful thinking.

Second, the English translation is a new one, by Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, and is part of a translation project of the entire Tanakh undertaken by Rabbi Sacks to be published by Koren. Rabbi Sacks is an immensely talented individual, and one of our community’s leading lights. In translating, he has made some interesting choices. For example, he sometimes resorts to paraphrasing rather than translating directly. Rather than a stilted “He looked here and (t)here, and saw that there was no person, so he struck down the Egyptian” at 2:12, Rabbi Sacks turns the first two clauses

into subordinate clauses: “Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian.” Exodus 21:31, literally, “If it gores a son or it gores a daughter, the same law shall be applied to it,” is rendered, “This rule also applies if the ox gores a minor son or daughter.” (Incidentally, this verse is clearly a repudiation of the principle reflected in Laws of Hammurabi §230, in a slightly different context: “If it kill the son of the owner, the son of that builder shall be put to death. This is not noted in the commentary here.) My own preference is for a more literal translation, allowing the target language to reflect the structure of the source language to allow the Hebrew to shine through, but this is a millennia-old debate about translation and the boldness of the formulations here can be admired.

There are times that the notes and essays disagree with the translation, and the notes and essays are almost always correct. For example, *tannin* is translated as “snake,” although Dr. Zohar Amar’s note on the page explains that it is likely a crocodile. Pharaoh’s heart, which is *kaved* in Hebrew, is said to be “unyielding” in the translation, but the essay on p. 41 by Dr. Racheli Shalomi-Hen elaborates on the Egyptian notion of a “heavy heart” as an indication that the person

will be condemned in the after-life, which suggests that the literal meaning of *kaved* would have been preferable here. The pavement under God’s throne is said to be “sapphire” in the translation, although Dr. Yigal Bloch explains in the note that the Hebrew word *sappir* was the stunning lapis lazuli.

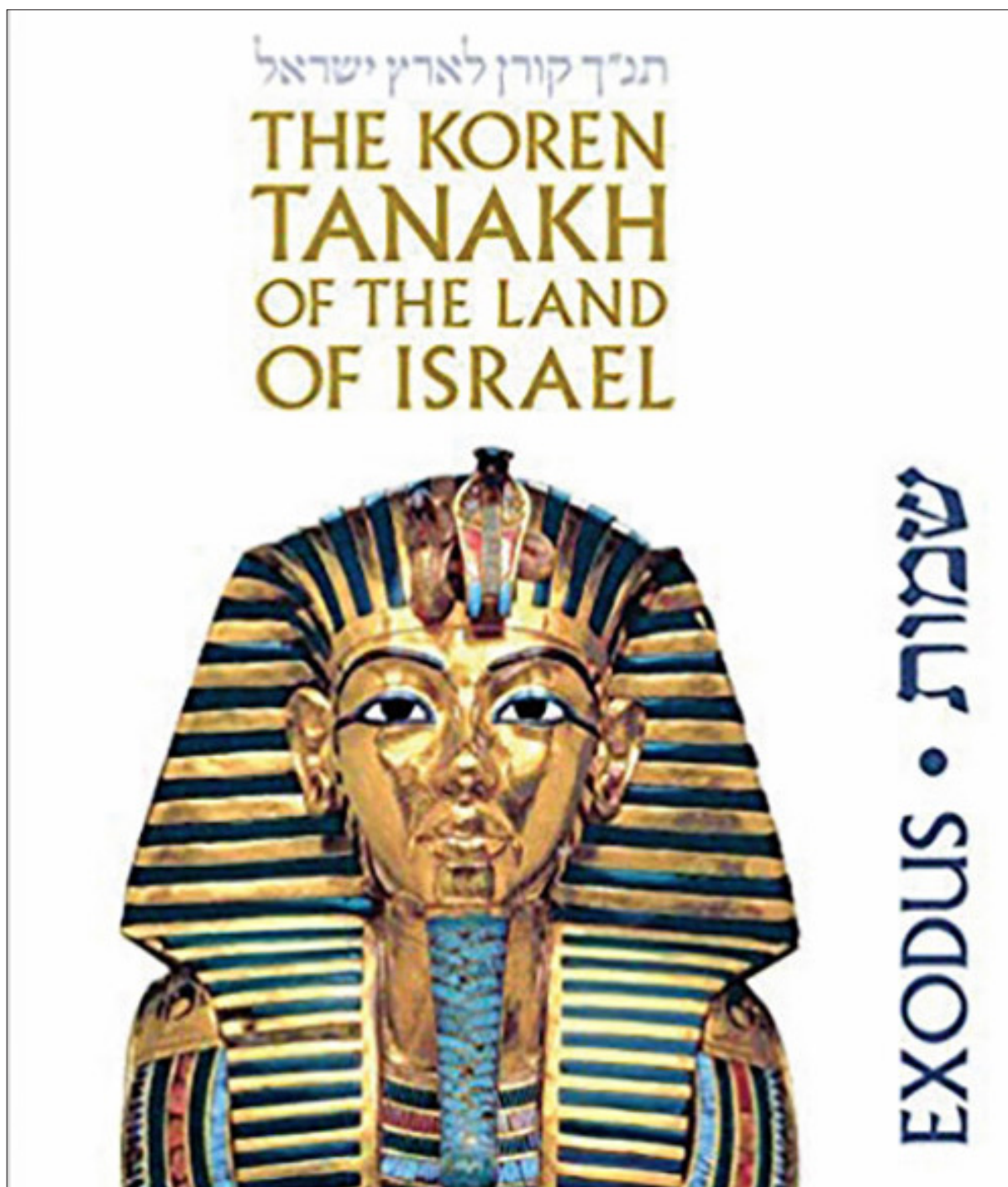
In other cases, the translation is simply not accurate. This may be true for 1:18, where we read that Shifra and Puaah are “midwives of the Hebrews,” although the Hebrew (with the definite article on the word “midwives”) leaves little room for doubt that they are “Hebrew midwives” (although see Shadal). The translation is certainly wrong at 15:6, where it has, “Your right hand, Lord, is majestic in power. Your right hand, Lord, shatters the enemy.” Scholars since Rashbam have noted that the adjective “majestic” must take “Lord” as its subject, since it is masculine, not feminine (as “hand” is), and that the poetry is what is today called “staircase parallelism” (first identified by Rashbam in his commentary on this verse), and so the translation ought to be: “Your right hand — O Lord, majestic in power — your right hand shatters the enemy!”

This reader is curious about how this volume portends, or does not portend, what we will find in

future volumes. For example, not all books of the Bible are as photogenic as Exodus is, so the aesthetic magic of this volume may be harder to replicate. Further, what are the theological positions that will be taken outside of the Torah itself? Will the Isaiah volume assert single authorship for that book, against the scholarly consensus which holds the book to be the product of multiple *nevi'im*? In this case, many Religious Zionist writers have followed the scholarly view, as none of the traditional principles of faith are violated, assuming that the veracity of prophecy is not being questioned.

In sum, Koren is to be applauded for the vision that led to this book and wished well for the completion of the rest of the series. It is a monumental undertaking, with the potential to profoundly affect the way Tanakh is studied in Modern Orthodox homes and institutions in North America. If this series serves to blur the current chasm between Israeli and American approaches to Tanakh study, it will be an everlasting credit to the project.

Dr. Koller is a professor of Near Eastern Studies and the Chair of the Robert M. Beren Department of Jewish Studies at Yeshiva College.



Readers of the volume will learn how many fields of contemporary scholarship can help us understand the book of Shemot better.

Huawei's Catch-22

By SARAH TORQUEMAN

On January 24th, the U.S. Commerce Department's plan to further limit trade with Chinese tech giant Huawei (pronounced Wah-Way) was thwarted with the Pentagon opposing the ruling. At first glance, the headline seems confusing and conflicting as the Pentagon had been fighting tooth and nail to try to limit Huawei's presence in the U.S. — viewing the company as a potential national security threat. Furthermore, in August, President Trump had declared “We're not doing business with Huawei.” Why the sudden contradictory stance?

Founded by a former Chinese army officer in 1987, Huawei has become one of the world's largest players in the telecommunications market, occupying a significant presence in China and EMEA (Europe, Middle East, Africa, Asia-Pacific) regions. In addition to being a smartphone producer and competitor to Apple and Samsung, Huawei has also created a worldwide cellular empire. Many U.S. companies had relied on their cell towers until 2012, where a U.S. panel feared that the Chinese government was using Huawei's technology as a possible way to spy inside the U.S. Since the panel, many U.S. companies such as Verizon and AT&T succumbed to U.S. pressure and severed ties with the company.

Despite the U.S. blacklisting, Huawei has still seen significant growth, growing 18% from 2018 to 2019 and reporting \$122 billion in annual revenue. Responsible for a significant portion of growth, has been the release of their latest smartphone, the Mate

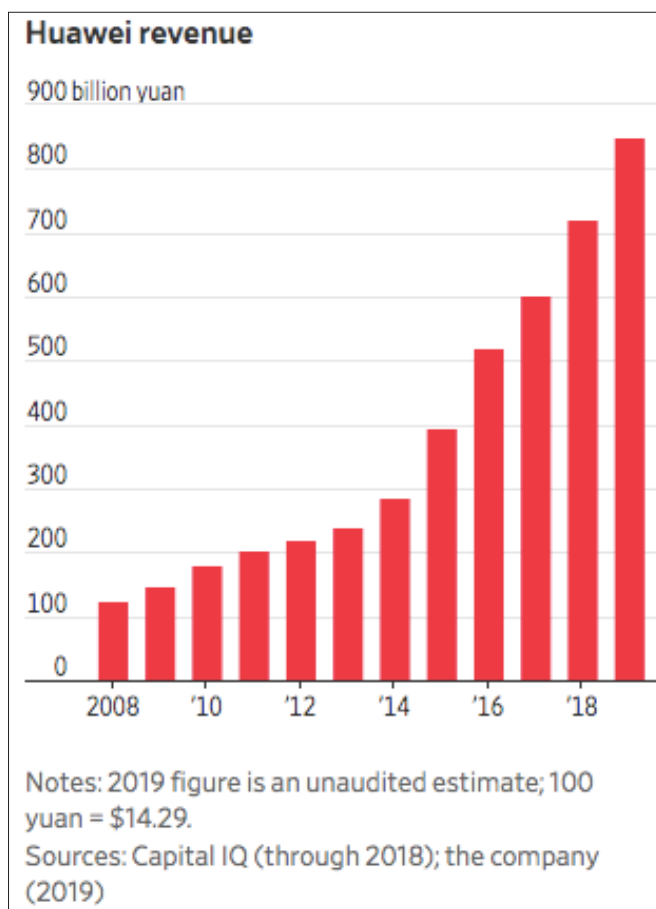
30. Paired with its quest to become the first and largest producer of 5G network components and devices, Huawei was in great need of cell phone chips. In the past, they had relied heavily on U.S. companies such as Intel Corp. and Qualcomm Inc. Instead, Huawei has turned to both Dutch chipmaker NXP Semiconductors and to Chinese power amplifier producer HiSilicon as the main suppliers for the Mate 30. These products and producers are cheaper than their American equivalents. Additionally, Huawei has also looked at non-U.S. markets such as the U.K. and Germany to expand. Both countries have also shown interest in allowing Huawei to operate within their respective countries.

Huawei's ability to rapidly grow despite an intense U.S. ban shows not only their global influence but also their ability to rapidly shift from U.S. dependence. In an interview conducted by the WSJ, Huawei Founder and CEO Ren Zhengfei stated, “We can survive without the U.S.” John Suffolk, Huawei's top cybersecurity official, also added, “All of our 5G is now America-free.” Some of this optimism can be attributed to Huawei's new operating system, Harmony which will soon become a platform compatible with smartwatches, televisions, and computers.

While the Pentagon's main objective has and always will be the nation's safety, a significant loss in revenue from the Huawei ban could lead to the U.S. being unable to fund their various defense programs including cybersecurity. Pentagon officials have also reasoned that Huawei will find ways to receive chips and other equipment regardless of the U.S. ban. Better it be the U.S. profiting, as

opposed to rival countries or China itself. Pressured by the Pentagon, the Commerce Department decided to pull-back from signing a proposal that would have limited sales with Huawei. The standing agreement allows U.S. companies to sell chips and electronic goods to Huawei under the condition that the products are made with less than 25% of non-U.S. materials. The proposal, however, would have shaved down the percentage of the non-American material to 10%. Although this may seem advantageous from the U.S.' perspective, as many American products are created using Chinese products, many U.S. manufacturers would be left in a very precarious situation.

In many ways, Huawei is the ultimate litmus test in the U.S.—China trade tensions. Although the Trump administration has remained firm on their demands, limiting Chinese trade could severely backfire. China, through Huawei's success, has left the U.S. in an economic headlock. Huawei holds the keys to success for the telecommunication, manufacturer, and software



industries, as they have billions of customers both domestically and internationally. For the foreseeable future, with its innovative and dynamic business model, Huawei is positioned for continuous growth.

To We or Not to We

By YAAKOV METZ

“If you bring us in for 10 locations, we will create 200,000 jobs over the next 10 years. And it can go bigger and bigger, we won't just bring you jobs, we'll bring a place to live, we'll bring education, and this is important, we'll bring corporate America.” Adam Newman, the co-founder of WeWork, charismatically portrayed his business at the US Conference of Mayors, not as a company that rents out office space, but as an idea that far surpasses the concrete and steel beams on which it is built. Starry-eyed and swimming in cash, investors doted on Newman as he sold them a \$50 billion dream.

That dream turned nightmare is now valued at only around \$12 billion. The story of WeWork's rapid growth and even faster decline does not start with Adam Newman, rather it begins in a college dorm room in the late 1970s with a man by the name of Masayoshi Son. Originally from southern Japan, Son moved to the U.S. at 16 and later attended UC Berkeley.

In an interview with Bloomberg TV, Son spoke about his lofty aspirations to become a millionaire in college. He said he began asking his friends what he could do to make \$10,000 a month with only five minutes a day. “My friends said you are crazy it is impossible there is nothing like that. Do you want

to sell drugs? So, I said, ‘No no, I don't want to do that.’ So, what is the most efficient use of my time? It's [an] invention. So, I set [an] alarm clock [for] 5 minutes. Tick tick tick, come! Invention, come!” And come it did. Son invented a handheld translation computer with the help of his professors and eventually sold it for \$1.7 million to Sharp Corporation.

With this newfound sum of cash, Son headed back to Japan and founded a company called Softbank. Originally, Softbank sold software but became famous for its early investments in technology. When the dot-com boom hit in the late 1990s, Softbank's investments paid off in spades. “My personal net worth was increasing \$10 billion per week... For 3 days I became richer than Bill Gates. 6 months after that our share price went down 99%. So, we almost went bankrupt,” Son remarked about his early business career.

After losing around \$70 billion and the status of the richest man in the world, Son attempted a comeback through a series of high-risk investments in technology. Through talks with Steve Jobs, he was able to become the sole distributor of iPhones in Japan. Son was then able to pair this licensing deal with his high-risk investments in the Japanese cell phone market to once again become a player in the global economy.

Being the risk addicted investor

he was, Son raised a venture capital fund to invest in technology startups that are deemed to possess high growth potential. In order to raise money, he traveled to Saudi Arabia and eventually met with the Crown Prince, Muhammed Bin Salman. In an interview with Bloomberg, David Rubenstein said, “You went in, and in one hour you convinced him [Prince Muhammed] to invest \$45 billion.” Son quickly corrected, “No, no, it's not true. 45 minutes, \$45 billion. 1 billion dollars per minute.”

Starry-eyed and swimming in cash, investors doted on Newman as he sold them a \$50 billion dream.

In 2017, with money from Prince Muhammed, Apple, Qualcomm, Larry Ellison, and Softbank, Son created a \$100 billion venture capital fund known as the Vision Fund.

Big venture capital funds at the time managed one to a few billion dollars, and a fund of this magnitude was an anomaly. In fact, in 2018 all US venture capital funds combined raised \$55.5 billion which is nearly half of the \$100 billion Vision Fund. With this monetary advantage, the vision fund began investing in technology companies at times 30-fold of what a typical venture capital fund would invest. Although it may seem like Son was throwing money into the wind, there was actually

a legitimate strategy being implemented. By investing large sums of cash, these companies would gain an advantage against competition. There would be a greater ability to hire better workers, to operate for longer at a greater loss than competing companies which would not be able to contend simply due to a relative lack of resources. The advent of the Vision Fund spurred other investors to adopt this aggressive strategy on a global scale in fear of losing on investments they already had.

In response to the competition among start-ups began as to which company could grow the fastest and the biggest with the most amount of money. Son would offer companies more than they could have ever hoped for, and all they had to do was have some unhinged and intrepid plan to explode in size in as little time as possible.

Son's ideal candidate for this new form of investing was none other than Adam Newman. Within just a few months after the creation of the Vision Fund, Son began investing in WeWork, with investments totaling \$10.65 billion. Nearly all the money WeWork raised was from the Vision Fund.

WeWork is just one of the many technology start-up companies that were being handed absurd amounts of money. This large influx of cash within the past 3 years has altered the power balance between companies and investors. Historically, it was generally understood that those who had money were also those who had power. Investors could go to companies and not only ask for equity, but also for control. Present-day, investors are competing among themselves to invest in companies that can demand less equity, but more importantly most or full control. Adam Newman raised enough money to achieve a nearly \$50 billion evaluation while retaining nearly entire control of the company. Many scholars and economists speculate that the devaluation of WeWork from \$47 billion to estimates ranging from \$12 billion to as little as \$3 billion will mark a shift of power away from startups back to investors.

Whether the Vision Fund will make money on WeWork is unclear, but it is likely to make money overall. Masayoshi Son is not waiting around to find out. After dumping \$80 billion of the \$100 billion in less than three years of operation, SoftBank announced a Vision Fund 2 in July that will be even larger than the first.



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