

# THE COMMENTATOR

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## Yeshiva University's 'Newly Founded' LGBTQ Club Does Not Currently Exist; University has 'Framework' For Club

By JONATHAN LEVIN

Yeshiva University's recently announced LGBTQ club, the Kol Yisrael Areivim Club, despite having been announced by the university as having been "newly founded," "approved" and "created," does not exist yet, The Commentator has discovered.

The Kol Yisrael Areivim Club is not listed on existing university club lists obtained by The Commentator and only exists as a framework that will lead to a club, President Ari Berman and other administration members told student leaders after the announcement, according to people familiar with the discussions.

"This is a framework within which we hope to eventually form a club," Berman and other members of the administration are reported to have told student leaders.

The university also used the term "framework" in statements sent to The Commentator Saturday and Monday evenings.

Additionally, student leaders were not involved in discussions with the university related to the club and were not informed of the university's announcement in advance.

The President's Office declined to meet with The Commentator, citing time

constraints, and did not answer inquiries from The Commentator about why it announced that the club exists despite not being listed among the other 142 recognized student clubs. Similarly, the university did

*"If YU is genuine in its offer to provide these resources to the actual LGBTQ student club — not the shell of one it created — there is a path forward."*

—  
YU Pride Alliance

not answer The Commentator's inquiries regarding the club's expected timetable and its eventual operations, and instead reiterated information from its Oct. 24 press release and invited students to contact the Office of Student Life to help develop the club.

"Within this club," said university spokesperson Hanan Eisenman on Monday, echoing YU's Oct. 24 press release, "students may gather, share their experiences, host events, and support one another while benefiting from the full resources of the Yeshiva community — all within the framework of Halacha — as all other student clubs.

"Following our recent announcement of this framework," Eisenman added, "we have

been engaged in further conversations with our current students who stand to benefit significantly from this club, and we invite those interested in helping develop the operational components of the club to contact

Student Life."

Yeshiva University announced the Kol Yisrael Areivim Club, with the blessing of its senior roshei yeshiva and the chairman of its board of trustees, through a press release on Oct. 24.

Following the announcement, the YU Pride Alliance, which remains in court with the university, immediately called the club a "sham," later asserting that neither it nor its members were consulted by the university.

"The Pride Alliance and its members," stated the Alliance Friday, "were never asked (and still have not been asked) for our input or involvement."

The university said Oct. 24 that the

club "reflects input and perspectives from conversations" with LGBTQ students, and told The Commentator Saturday that it has continued these conversations since the announcement.

The Commentator has been unable to verify if any LGBTQ students were involved in conversations with the administration regarding the club. The university did not answer questions from The Commentator aimed at verifying student involvement.

Some groups called on YU to dissolve Kol Yisrael Areivim on the basis of the alleged lack of LGBTQ student involvement.

"We respectfully ask YU leadership to... dissolve the new Kol Yisrael Areivim initiative, as no LGBTQ+ students were involved in or consulted about its creation," said Yeshiva United, a group that previously gathered over 1600 signatures in support of YU's LGBTQ students.

The Pride Alliance later adopted a more conciliatory tone towards Kol Yisrael Areivim, and expressed optimism that there could be common ground.

"If YU is genuine in its offer to provide these resources to the actual LGBTQ student club — not the shell of one it created — there is a path forward," said the Alliance Friday.

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## Yeshiva University Student Councils Host Club Fairs

By RINA SHAMILOV

Yeshiva University's student councils held club fairs on both campuses this October, which were attended by hundreds of students. The Wilf Campus club fair was held Oct. 26 and the Beren Campus club fair was held Oct. 31.

Over 170 clubs applied for official club status, and the Office of Student Life (OSL) approved 142 of them, with some of the other clubs consolidating and others having their applications rejected. Over 100 clubs presented at the club fairs and more than 250 students attended.

The club fairs were intended to increase student knowledge of the different clubs and their plans for the year, OSL director Jonathan Schwab, told The Commentator.

"The club fairs at Beren and Wilf are a chance for our many student clubs to showcase their activities and plans for the year," said Schwab.

The club fairs came following a month-long hiatus while club and student council activities were frozen.

OSL had consolidated some clubs due to their subject matter having similar objectives. For instance, the Soup, Meat and Greet, and Juice for Jews clubs were told

to consolidate, and chose to name their club the Scrumptious Sustenance Society.

Other clubs were rejected, including the YU Pride Alliance.

The YU Pride Alliance, which has not been recognized as a university-sanctioned club, had representatives at both fairs and displayed QR codes for their official WhatsApp chat and gave out pride-related stickers, such as safe space stickers.

*"It was amazing to see so many clubs show up to encourage membership and explain their causes."*

—  
Avygayl Zucker, Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC) vice president of academic affairs (SCW '23)

Additionally, YU's recently announced Kol Yisrael Areivim Club, which is not listed on club lists, was not present.

The Club Fair was received positively

*Continued on Page 3*

## Yeshiva University Drops Vaccination Requirement for Daytime Visitors

By FLORA SHEMTOB

Yeshiva University has updated its visitor guidelines on both campuses to allow students to host unvaccinated daytime guests in the university's residence halls and academic buildings.

Guest restrictions have been ongoing since students returned to campus in Oct. 2020. In April 2022, the university allowed vaccinated guests on campus but still kept some restrictions in place. The new guidelines, announced on Sept. 19, make it easier for students to arrange for guests on campus.

Daytime visitors no longer need to email the Office of Resident Life but must provide the Office of Visitor Management with their name and expected time of arrival and departure. Daytime guests do not need proof of the Covid-19 vaccine if they plan to visit campus less than five times. To receive daytime passes, students must accompany their guests to the Security Office.

Students may now host overnight guests if guests present proof of the Covid-19 vaccine to the Office of Resident Life at least 48 hours prior to their arrival. To receive permission for overnight guests, students

must email housing on Beren Campus or inform their Residence Advisor on Wilf Campus.

Avi Feder, Director of Residence Life, told the Commentator that the university has "continued to consult with medical professionals and public health authorities to ensure our campus remains safe, and we have determined it is now safe to re-open our campus to visitors."

*"Yeshiva University is home, and we believe it's important to be able to share your home with friends from outside the University"*

—  
Avi Feder, director of Residence Life

He added, "To students living in our Residence Halls, Yeshiva University is home, and we believe it's important to be able to share your home with friends from outside the University."

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# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

## Why does CUNY's Leadership Pretend that Jewish Students Don't Face Discrimination on Campus?

By JONATHAN LEVIN

Would you appoint an arsonist as fire chief?

That is precisely what City College of New York (CUNY) – the city's publicly run university system with 243,000 students spread over 25 campuses – did when they hired a former employee of the Council for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) to lead an investigation into alleged antisemitism aimed at a Jewish faculty member at Kingsborough Community College. The decision was controversial due to the history of anti-Israel activity at CAIR, including accusations by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) that CAIR's senior leaders have used "inflammatory anti-Zionist rhetoric" that have "veered into antisemitic tropes."

CUNY's appointment, later reversed due to public outcry, comes during heightened public interest in the now pervasive antisemitism across the CUNY system resulting in Title VI complaints, millions of dollars in funding cut by the State Senate and City Council hearings (at which CUNY's chancellor was a no-show).

As students at Yeshiva University, where the Israeli flag flies alongside the American and where expressions of Jewish community life are taken for granted, it might be shocking to hear that a Jewish professor at the aforementioned Kingsborough Community College (not the faculty member subject to the investigation) found swastikas carved in her office and her keyboard soiled with urine.

Given that Deborah Lipstadt, the State Department envoy to combat antisemitism, was our school's featured speaker at undergraduate commencement last year, you'd be forgiven for not knowing that CUNY Law's student speaker at commencement was Nerdeen Kiswani, an extremist who has called for Israel's destruction, refused to speak with the New York Jewish Week due to it being part of the "Zionist media" and liked posts on Instagram glorifying terrorist attacks. Kiswani then used her podium at the commencement ceremony to allege that she was a victim of a "campaign of Zionist harassment."

Antisemitism on CUNY campuses

has become a significant issue, according to a July letter from the American Center for Law and Justice addressed to a senior official at the Department of Education.

"Some of the harassment on CUNY campuses has become so commonplace as to almost be normalized," stated the letter. "There have been numerous classes in which Israeli soldiers are casually described as killers, and antisemitic flyers with vulgar comments about religious Jews – incredible as it may seem, even swastikas – are regularly observed on CUNY campuses."

*If CUNY is serious about combatting antisemitism, it must act the part.*

"Attacking, denigrating, and threatening 'Zionists' has become the norm, with the crystal-clear understanding that 'Zionist' is now merely an epithet for 'Jew' the same way 'banker,' 'cabal,' 'globalist,' 'cosmopolitan,' 'Christ-killer' and numerous other such dog-whistles have been used over the centuries to target, demonize and incite against Jews."

So, when Jeffery Lax, the business department chair at Kingsborough Community College, sued CUNY for discrimination – such as purposely scheduling meetings for Friday night so that Lax, who is an Orthodox Jew, could not attend – you would think CUNY would hire someone who could be trusted to lead an investigation impartially – especially because the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission substantiated Lax's complaints. Instead, CUNY tapped Saly Abd Alla, whose past association with Hamas and supports BDS, raised Lax's ire.

"We don't want Jews here," Lax told the Daily Caller News Foundation after hearing of CUNY's choice to lead the investigation. "That's the message that it sends."

After public outcry and Abd Alla's unresponsiveness to queries from Lax whether she believed Zionists were protected under CUNY discrimination policies and whether she would be impartial, CUNY reversed course, pulling

Abd Alla from the investigation.

Allegations of hostile antisemitic activity in the CUNY system date as far back as 2012. Although CUNY claims that it takes these allegations seriously and has announced initiatives and plans to combat campus antisemitism, serious questions remain as to CUNY's leadership's commitment to combat it.

If CUNY is committed to addressing anti-Jewish racism on campus, why did they choose and then pull Abd Alla for an investigation into antisemitic activity? Why did Brooklyn College schedule a mandatory "implicit bias training" on Yom Kippur this year? And why didn't CUNY's chancellor, Félix Matos Rodríguez, bother to show up to a city council meeting to address the issue?

If Matos Rodríguez attended the nearly seven-hour-long hearing and listened to students, he would have heard stories like that of Tzvia Waronker, who attends John Jay College, and told council members of a conversation she had with another student.

"All Jews are rich," Waronker told City Council, recounting her interaction with the student. "[They] control the world, Israelis kill babies, Jewish women are greedy and are clingy," she recounted. "Then [the student] began to question my hair."

"I don't think CUNY understands what antisemitism is and how it impacts the students," Waronker added later in the meeting.

If CUNY is serious about combatting antisemitism, it must act the part. When City Council schedules a meeting to address racism in your system, its chancellor should show up. It shouldn't schedule an "implicit bias training" on Judaism's holiest day of the year and it shouldn't hire an arsonist as fire chief. New Yorkers will know when CUNY is serious about addressing anti-Jewish racism – and that is when, as Mayor Adams once said, there is "no tolerance for antisemitism." Otherwise, CUNY risks becoming an institution for the many, but not the Jew.

*The writer is a fellow at the Committee for Accuracy in Middle Eastern Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA).*

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# YU Creates New LGBTQ Club ‘Grounded in Halacha and Torah Values’

By CHAIM BOOK AND  
ELISHAMA MARMON

Yeshiva University announced the establishment of the *Kol Yisrael Areivim* Club Monday, an undergraduate student club for LGBTQ students “striving to live authentic Torah lives.”

The club was approved by the administration and senior *roshei yeshiva*, with input from LGBTQ students, and was formed due to student interest in a club in line with traditional Orthodox values. Like other undergraduate clubs, club members will be granted access to the university’s resources and will be allowed to host events, provided they remain “within the framework of Halacha.”

“We recognize that our undergraduate students, including our LGBTQ students, who choose to attend Yeshiva come with different expectations and navigate different challenges than those who choose a secular college,” stated an email sent to undergraduate students. “And as such, we have been working to formulate a Torah framework to provide our LGBTQ students with an enhanced support system that continues to facilitate their religious growth and personal life journeys.

“Today, we are announcing a new initiative to support our LGBTQ undergraduates, which includes a new student club that

presents an approved traditional Orthodox alternative to YU Pride Alliance and a commitment to strengthen our on-campus support services.”

The email was signed by YU President Ari Berman, Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Hershel

“While an adoption of this national brand is inherently unacceptable in the context of Yeshiva, we also realize the need to find additional ways to be supportive of our students that are consistent with Halacha and inspired by our values.”

University community.”

*Roshei yeshiva* Rabbis Mordechai Willig and Michael Rosensweig were also involved in the club’s formation, according to people present at an internal meeting on the matter. It is unclear who the club’s leadership consists of at this time.

The YU Pride Alliance criticized the move. “This is a desperate stunt by Yeshiva University, to distract from the growing calls from its donors, alumni, faculty, policymakers, and the business community, who have stood alongside the YU Pride Alliance, as we continue to fight for our rights,” the Alliance told *The Commentator*. “The YU sham is not a club as it was not formed by students, is not led by students, and does not have members; rather, it is a feeble attempt by YU to continue denying LGBTQ students equal treatment as full members of the YU student community.”

The university also stated in its press release that it is working on enhancing other on-campus support services for its LGBTQ students by building on existing sensitivity training, support groups, policies and educational sessions for students.

YU said it will continue its defense and appeal of a June ruling ordering it to recognize the YU Pride Alliance.

*Jonathan Levin contributed to this story.*

*“I add my blessing to this initiative and new student club, which we hope deepens our students’ commitment to the Torah and leads to harmony in our Yeshiva University community.”*

Rabbi Hershel Schachter, Rosh Yeshiva of YU

Schachter, Chairman of the board of YU Ira Mitzner and Chairman of the board of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) Lance Hirt.

According to a FAQ page released by the university, the administration chose to create its own club rather than recognize the YU Pride Alliance because the Alliance, as part of a national movement of college pride alliances, advocates for activities contrary to the Torah.

“Pride Alliance is a recognized movement in colleges throughout the country that not only fights anti-LGBTQ discrimination, a cause which we fully support, but also promotes activities that conflict with Torah laws and values.

According to the university, the new club will conform to the values of the university by utilizing Orthodox Jewish tradition and not advocating against the Torah’s teachings. Students will also be provided “with space to grow in their personal journeys, navigating the formidable challenges that they face in living a fully committed, uncompromisingly authentic halachic life within Orthodox communities.”

Rabbi Schachter gave his blessing to the club.

“I add my blessing to this initiative and new student club,” Rabbi Schachter said in a university press release, “which we hope deepens our students’ commitment to the Torah and leads to harmony in our Yeshiva

## Blood Drive Held on Wilf Campus; 85 Students Donate

By SRULI FRIEDMAN

85 Yeshiva University students donated blood at a blood drive organized by the New York Blood Center and the YU Blood Drive Club in Morg Lounge on the Wilf campus on Tuesday.

The drive, held approximately twice each semester, seeks to receive blood donations from the student body to allow for first responders and hospitals to provide transfusions in cases of life-threatening emergencies.

Blood drives in Yeshiva College stretch as far back in the institution’s history as 1957, when the school received an award for donating more blood proportionately than any other college in a group of 14 competitors.

“The goal of the YU Blood Drive is to

acquire as many life-saving blood donations from YU students as possible,” Dovid Morris (YC ‘24) three-semester co-president of the YU Blood Drive Club, told *The Commentator*. “Blood donations enable individuals undergoing life-saving surgeries or suffering from severe injuries to survive. A few minutes of a YU student’s day can genuinely save a life.”

Donating blood is one of those selfless acts of kindness that we so rarely get to do,” Zach Gershkowitz (YC ‘24), YU Blood Drive Club co-president, explained to *The Commentator*. “All the more so, as a light unto the nations, through our donations we reach communities far beyond our own.”

As of yet, no blood drives have been held on Beren Campus this semester.



85 students donated blood at a blood drive on Wilf Campus.

THE COMMENTATOR

### CLUB DOES NOT EXIST Continued from Front Page

Some student leaders agreed, expressing hope that LGBTQ students and student leaders would be able to participate in moving the club forward.

“I am cautiously optimistic about this turn of events,” Yeshiva Student Union President Baruch Lerman (YC ‘23) told *The Commentator*, “and look forward to seeing how things proceed. I hope that student leaders and LGBTQ students will be involved with envisioning what this club will look like in action, in partnership with the

administration and Roshei Yeshiva.”

The Pride Alliance sued the university in April 2021. In June, a judge directed YU to recognize the group, which YU attempted to delay through attempts to obtain a court-ordered stay. After failing to obtain a stay, including from the U.S. Supreme Court, the university temporarily froze all club and student council activities, prompting the Pride Alliance to offer the university a stay, which was granted on Sept. 29.

The club freeze, which prompted Jewish

Queer Youth (JQY), an organization that supports Orthodox LGBTQ youth, to offer grants to clubs, ended on Oct. 20 with the approval of club applications. The university did not announce the end of the freeze.

Kol Yisrael Areivim was not present at the Wilf Campus club fair on Wednesday or the Beren Campus club fair on Monday. The YU Pride Alliance had representatives at both club fairs, although it is not clear if they were invited or officially allowed to attend.

On Wilf Campus, the Alliance only displayed papers with QR codes leading to the group’s Instagram page and a new WhatsApp chat for “official notifications” about their events, inviting students to follow them, and did not display a pride flag.

On Beren Campus, the Alliance added a pride flag with a Star of David from JQY and pride-related stickers.

### CLUB FAIRS Continued from Front Page

by the student body.

Avygayl Zucker, Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC) vice president of academic affairs (SCW ‘23), told *The Commentator* that she was pleased with the turnout.

“It was amazing to see so many clubs show up to encourage membership and explain

their causes. The club fair was packed with students and it’s clear to me that this is going to be a year filled with standing up and participating in what we’re passionate about; I can’t wait to be a part of it!”

Other students felt similarly.

“I went to the Wilf club fair... and it was so fun,” shared Shneur Levy (YC ‘25). “I

jumped from table to table, signing up for all the clubs. It was a great experience and I’m looking forward to the next one!”

Some administrators, such as Schwab, also felt positively about the club fair.

“On the whole, the club fairs were an incredible success,” Schwab told *The Commentator*. “There was a palpable air

of excitement in the room on both campuses, and students were clearly energized by the range and depth of the activities being planned for this semester.”

## Renovations of SBMP Classrooms in Zysman Hall Nearly Completed

By HANNAH POLLAK

Renovations of four classrooms used by the Irving I. Stone Beis Medrash Program (SBMP), located across the Fischel Beit Midrash in Zysman Hall, were mostly completed over the Chagim and the classrooms are fully in use.

Planning for the renovations began in the fall of 2021, and construction began

*“It is wonderful to see how the yeshiva continues to invest in creating the best learning spaces for our students.”*

Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Wienberg, Mashgiach Ruchani and Rabbi in the Irving I. Stone Beis Medrash Program (SBMP)

this summer, taking nearly five months. The rooms were redesigned, with the floors, ceilings and walls being renovated, as well as renovations being done in an adjacent hallway.

Randy Apfelbaum, Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer at YU, told The Commentator that these classrooms “were old and in need of a renovation,” and therefore, the university was “excited” to receive funding from a donor for a project to

significantly modernize the classrooms. The classrooms are now, he said, “bright, contemporary and attractive learning spaces.”

Zysman Hall, built in 1928, was the first building on the Wilf Campus to be built and was the original home of Yeshiva College. Today, the building hosts Yeshiva University High School for Boys (YUHSB) and some SBMP shiurim [lectures]. These shiurim — taught by Rabbis Eli Belizon, Etan Berman, Etan Schnell and Moshe Tzvi Weinberg —

are the beneficiaries of the redesigned learning spaces.

The space will also be used as a satellite Beit Midrash, Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS), told The Commentator.

A dedication ceremony will be held on Nov. 16, and information about the donor will be shared shortly before, according to Apfelbaum.

The university hired Applied Design

Interactive, an architectural firm, and Omara Construction, a contracting firm, to handle the project.

During the renovations, the university replaced the doors and walls with large panes of glass, got rid of large radiators located near the windows, modernized the rooms’ air conditioning units and replaced the blinds, which were previously unusable in some classrooms. In the adjacent hallway, the floors, sinks and ceiling were also renovated, with new light fixtures added.

The glass walls between the classrooms and the adjacent hallway will be partially frosted at a later date, Apfelbaum told The Commentator.

In addition to one fully enclosed classroom, three of the classrooms are divided by a movable wall, which existed before the renovations. These movable walls can be removed to enable the entire area to be unified.

The room was previously a Beit Midrash before most UTS shiurim moved to the Glueck Center.

Rebbeim were happy with the renovations.

“It is wonderful to see how the yeshiva continues to invest in creating the best learning spaces for our students,” Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Weinberg, who runs a shiur in one of the renovated rooms, told The Commentator. “Our newly renovated classroom is a real display of kavod hatorah and I am personally

very thankful for the opportunity to teach there.”

Students were also pleased with the work.

“I’m very happy with the new improvements. It’s really nice to be in a newly renovated room,” said Matthew Silver (YC ‘24). “One thing I am very happy about are the brand-new shades in the room, because it was previously very uncomfortable when the bright sun shined on us and the shades were broken.”



Four classrooms, used by the Irving I. Stone Beis Medrash Program (SBMP), were renovated over the summer. Work is nearly complete.

## Center for Israel Studies Hosts Presentation of Israeli Documentary-Reality Show Od Nipagesh; Cast Members Attend

By SRULI FRIEDMAN

The Yeshiva University Center for Israel Studies presented selections from Od Nipagesh, an Israeli documentary-reality series, followed by a discussion panel with two people featured on the show, at Weisberg Commons on Oct. 26.

Od Nipagesh, translated as “we shall meet again,” follows the true stories of five secular Israelis, estranged from family members who had become Haredi, as they attempt to restore their relationships with the help of a Haredi mentor. The series, it

was announced at the event, has close to two million views and was also a finalist for the Rose d’Or award in reality and factual entertainment.

“What Od Nipagesh is about is people confronting their deepest fears,” Joshua Karlip, Herbert S. and Naomi Denenberg Chair of Jewish Studies and Associate Director of the YU Center for Israel Studies, who moderated the panel, told The Commentator. “Their deepest fears, the other within, the father who’s Haredi, and somehow looking beyond the stereotypes and breaking them down and coming to accept the other, and through accepting the other, coming to deep self-love and

self-recognition in a way that they didn’t have before.”

The event, attended by about 50 under-

graduate students, included a discussion panel with Nurit Sirkis-Bank and Bella Raboy, two people featured on the show, in which students were given the opportunity to ask questions. Karen Bacon, the Mordecai D. Katz and Dr. Monique C. Katz dean for undergraduate studies, and Steven Fine, Professor of Jewish History and Director of the YU Center for Israel Studies, both gave short speeches as well.

*“What Od Nipagesh is about is people confronting their deepest fears.”*

Joshua Karlip, Herbert S. and Naomi Denenberg Associate Professor of Jewish History and Associate Director of the YU Center for Israel Studies

The event was co-sponsored by the Office of Torah and Spiritual Life as well as the Office of Student Life.

In an interview with The Commentator, Raboy and Sirkis-Bank, her Haredi mentor, shared memories about the casting and production of the show.

“I thought it was a prank call,” Raboy, who had been largely alienated from her Haredi father for over thirty years, recalled about the first time she was asked to participate. “I realized that if it doesn’t work then we’re just going to end up on square one. It’s not like I’m gonna lose something.”

“I feel that when people have certain crises in their life or something going on, it’s never just you going through this,” Raboy told the Commentator about her decision to share her story and go on the

show. “There are always other people who are going through the same thing and by talking about it or presenting it to the public

you’re kind of releasing other people from their cages. So I felt that maybe if it won’t happen to me, then it might happen to other people or it might help other people.”

Sirkis-Bank, Raboy’s Haredi mentor, who helped repair her relationship with her father, emphasized the significance of YU being the venue of this event.

“For me, YU represents an amazing direction in Judaism — that is a combination of real sourceful Judaism together with connection to the world,” Sirkis-Bank told The Commentator.

Sirkis-Bank added that she viewed YU and Od Nipagesh as having the same goal. “To find the bridge. I think Yeshiva University builds bridges in the world and our program was trying to build a bridge.”

The day following the event, Raboy and Sirkis-Bank spoke to Karlip’s undergraduate students at several of his classes and later spent Shabbat at Beren Campus.



Fifty students turned out to Yeshiva University’s hosting of Od Nipagesh

DR. NURIT SIRKIS-BANK

## YU to Take On Illinois-Wesleyan in Rematch of DIII Powerhouses

By **SAMMY INTRATORN**

Yeshiva University's men's basketball team, the YU Maccabees, will play its second game of the basketball season against the Illinois-Wesleyan Titans in Bloomington, Illinois Saturday night.

The game, part of the Sikma Hall of Fame Invitational, will be played at Illinois-Wesleyan University's Shirk Center at 9 p.m. The Titans are ranked #21 in d3hoops preseason rankings. The Maccabees did not make the top 25.

The team will fly to Chicago Thursday, YU Athletic Director Greg Fox told The Commentator. They'll spend time Thursday practicing at the Ida Crown Jewish Academy gym and sharing their experiences with the Ida Crown student body.

The Maccabees' second game of the season will be a rematch of last year's highly anticipated matchup, which YU entered with the second-longest win streak in division three basketball history — 50 straight wins.

At the time, YU was ranked #1 and Illinois-Wesleyan was ranked #4. The Maccabees lost the game 73-59, in the first-ever matchup between the teams, ending its 50-game win streak.

The Sikma Hall of Fame Invitational was created by Illinois-Wesleyan University in

2021 and consists of a yearly four-game tournament between different NCAA Division Three teams.

This year's clash is primed to look different with YU returning just two of eight players from the game — Adi Markovich (SSSB '24) and Matan Zucker (YC '23) — who, in last year's game, combined for 28 minutes and zero points off the bench. All-Americans Ryan Turell (SSSB '22) — who scored 22 points in last year's game — and Gabriel Leifer (SSSB '21), as well as starting

*"We have an almost entirely new cast of guys this season and it'll be interesting to see how quickly we can adjust to playing a challenging schedule against high quality competition."*

point guard Eitan Halpert (SSSB '22), are no longer on the team.

There'll be more familiar faces seen on the Titan's bench than the Mac's in this game as the Titans will be bringing back four players from last year's meeting. Senior Cody Mitchell — who scored 10 points in last year's game — will return along with fellow senior Lucas Heflen — 21 minutes off the bench — and juniors Ryan Sroka — sixth man with eight points — and the 6'8" Grant Hardy. However, some of the Titans'

best players in last year's matchup, such as Matthew Leritz, who scored 14 points and 25 rebounds; Peter Lambesis, who scored 13 points and 5 assists and Luke Yoder, who scored 15 points and four assists, are no longer on the team.

Fox told The Commentator that this year's game was part of an agreement made with the Titans last year.

"When I originally scheduled last year's game with coach Rose of Illinois-Wesleyan," Fox told The Commentator, "he asked if

we could turn it into a home-and-home and come back to them in 2022-23. Coach Steinmetz was all for it, and soon after he began fundraising to cover our travel expenses."

When asked by The Commentator, Fox was not optimistic that this game will become an annual rivalry.

"No, I don't believe that would be feasible," said Fox. "Ideally we would like to travel to a different location each year in which our fans and alumni in Jewish communities

across the country have the opportunity to watch us compete in person. But this requires finding the right fit as far as timing, level of competition, and accommodating our start time needs following Shabbos."

The game was scheduled early in the season due to the difference in academic schedules between the universities. Yeshiva worked with Illinois-Wesleyan to make sure the game was scheduled before the latter heads into finals in mid-December.

Fox was excited about the rematch.

"I personally like us more as the hunter instead of the hunted," he told The Commentator. "With 11 new members on the team, I don't see revenge serving as a big motivator. We have an almost entirely new cast of guys this season and it'll be interesting to see how quickly we can adjust to playing a challenging schedule against high-quality competition."

"Like always, I'll be looking for us to compete hard for 40 minutes, but to do so as a team, playing for each other and playing with sportsmanship and class. If we do those things, we'll let the chips fall where they may."

The game will be streamed by Illinois-Wesleyan and the YU athletic department will post a link to the game on its social media accounts.



Ryan Turell dribbles alongside Peter Lambesis in last year's game. Neither Turell nor Lambesis will be playing this year.

MACSLIVE

## We Asked, Y(O)U Answered: Should Clubs Be Coed?

By **FLORA SHEMTOB**

Most people would consider the clubs at YU to be one of the best parts of their college experience. It allows students to meet people they wouldn't usually meet and it allows them to try new things that they wouldn't usually try. Across both campuses, clubs are considered to be a major part of student life. The Commentator reached out to different students and asked them if they believe that clubs in YU should be coed.

**Eli Saperstein (SSSB '23)**  
**Accounting**

"Clubs should represent the interests and desires of their students. If the students of the Broadway (NYC Culture) Club would like the club to be able to operate on both campuses, it should. If the Disney Club would like to operate only on the Beren campus, it should, and Wilf can create their own Disney

Club. However, there are clubs that serve different purposes, such as the YU Republicans or the YU Democrats, where it should be in the best interest of the clubs themselves to be coed as they represent something broader than just the particular niche that the club is interested in. Each club represents a different facet and as long as a club does not fight the ability of students on another campus to form their own club I think students should be able to decide. What I do absolutely reject is the notion that a club should be forced to be non coed by another party whether it be student government or OSL for the sake of convenience. I believe an example of this would be the Chabad Club which was told they would have to combine despite serving different students."

**Racheli Jian (SCW '25)**  
**Jewish Education**

"I think that if a club can benefit from

being coed, meaning that both campuses want the club, then clubs should be coed or have the opportunity to be. Although, if people on one of the campuses aren't passionate about it or don't necessarily want it, then it shouldn't be expanded until there's a reason for it. I don't think that all clubs need to be coed."

**Alayna Higdon (SCW '24)**  
**Psychology**

"I think it's cool that some of the clubs are coed and some of the clubs are not coed. That way, it gives everyone the opportunity to be involved in student life no matter what their comfort level is. It has a little bit of everything for everyone's taste."

**Baruch Lerman (YC '23)**  
**Biochemistry**

"YU is a diverse institution in terms of interests and the extracurricular activities

we offer should match the interests and needs of all students. There is no answer to "Should clubs at YU be coed or not" because the students at YU are not one thing and therefore could not possibly be served by just one kind of club. Each student needs to decide for themselves what kind of environment they want to be in and what activities interest them. But most importantly there is no right answer!"

**Dov Pfeiffer (YC '24)**  
**Mathematics**

"For clubs where there is sufficient interest on both campuses, and there are no halakhic concerns, like the math or poetry club, I think they generally should be mixed. It takes a lot of work to arrange clubs and events, so why not make it available to as many people as possible?"

## 'Civility Goes a Long Way': The Story of Dale Bowry

By JOSHUA SHAPIRO

Waking up in the morning can tend to be a little hectic. This is especially true for those, like myself, who often find themselves running late for the early 6:30 a.m. *shacharit* minyan at the Shenk Shul. In their efforts to expedite the lengthy five-minute "commute," students, newlyweds and those who conveniently fit into both groups can be seen impetuously speed walking across Audubon Ave., regretting that they did not bring a sweatshirt to help themselves endure the cool morning winds. As the young men (and women) arrive at the shul, they quickly flash their student IDs from afar to the security guard, expediently cut through the long line of barricades and momentarily debate whether or not they should hold open the fast-swinging doors for the person a few steps behind.

The conclusion of the services at 7:10 a.m. roughly coincides with the "changing of the guard" in the small blue security booth out front. As the students exit the Shenk Shul, the recently arrived Dale Bowry stands outside the entrance returning "good morning" greetings and fist bumps. For those who do know Dale, he has a towering stature but is nevertheless a very friendly, insightful and calm person. However, Dale's life goes far beyond the confines of his security role at YU.

Dale Bowry was born on the small Caribbean island of Nevis in 1959. At the age of four, he and his family immigrated to the United States and moved to Yonkers, NY. When reminiscing about his youth, Dale depicts the everyday bustle of the major streets and playgrounds in his neighborhood. Since his house was located at a dead end and near the parks, he regularly played sports with his friends—especially baseball. "We were right where it was happening," he recalls.

After completing high school, Dale

attended the now-defunct Elizabeth Seton Community College and graduated with a degree in liberal arts and natural sciences. Uncertain about which step to take next, he enrolled in nearby Iona College of New Rochelle before suddenly dropping out. "I didn't have the community or personal support to encourage me," Dale recollects. Fortunately, though, it did not take him long to find the community he was looking for. Soon after leaving Iona, Dale began clerking at a local sporting goods store where he enjoyed talking with his customers about baseball. In Dale's mind, a job was no longer a place solely designated for earning a living and occupying oneself. It suddenly became

*While we may think taking two minutes out of our days to speak with the workers at YU may have little impact, Dale has taught me that it truly makes a difference.*

a place where he can interact with and help others on a daily basis.

Four years ago, after years of employment at different clerk and security jobs, Dale arrived at Yeshiva University. Most often stationed at the Shenk Shul, Dale ensures that he is an "active observer," going on hourly patrols in the area and regularly checking on the parking lot across the street. While on duty, Dale enjoys reading the YU student newspapers, articles about politics and having discussions with people about the etymology of certain English words. When he needs a break, Dale prefers the less populated loading dock behind Rubin Hall where he can watch a local raccoon jump into a dumpster. Despite there being nearly no interactions with students at this station, Dale enjoys the tranquility.

After engaging with the YU community

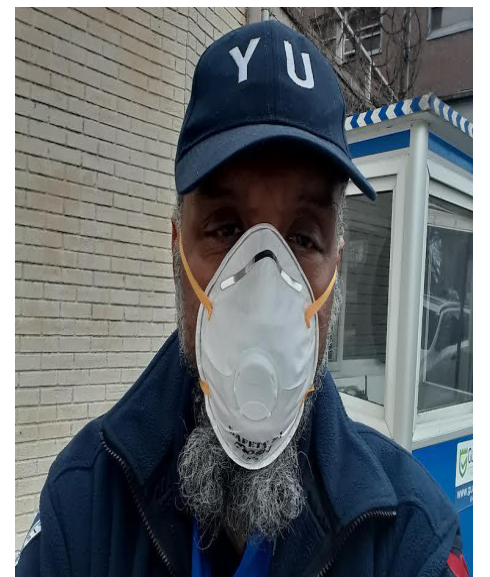
for several years, Dale is confident that Judaism has impacted his own relationship with his Christianity. He regularly finds himself inspired by a community that emphasizes the importance of the individual's connection to God and living a meaningful life. Dale particularly admires the students' high level of commitment and consistency, specifically the learning and daily prayers.

While any daily routine can at times feel monotonous, Dale finds daily meaning and satisfaction through knowing that everything is in place and secure. He also emphasizes that "civility goes a long way." While even a "hollow" expression of gratitude suffices, Dale appreciates how students at YU truly

go out of their way to say "thank you," demonstrating immense respect for him and his job. More powerful than this, though, are his daily interactions with particular people each morning. He looks forward to conversations with certain nice individuals and friendly confrontations with the mischievous people who try to enter without IDs.

However, one will not find Dale on campus anymore — even in his little booth next to the Shenk Shul. As of Sept. 22, Dale departed from his role at Yeshiva and began working at the New York State Family Court in White Plains, NY. As he reminisces about his time at YU, Dale is certain that he will miss the people most. While he is excited for his new position, Dale believes that it will be difficult to match such an outgoing community that is genuinely concerned about his well-being.

I believe I speak on behalf of everyone in thanking Dale for all that he has given to the Yeshiva University community. Dale is a true example of someone who performs his job with diligence while caring for those he is serving. While we are sad to see Dale leave, his emphasis on the importance of genuine friendliness and commitment to those around him is something we can take with us every day. As Dale remarked, "Civility goes a long way." While we may think taking two minutes out of our days to speak with the workers at YU may have little impact, Dale has taught me that it truly makes a difference. Learning the names and stories of the security guards, cafeteria workers and librarians certainly allows them to find meaning and excitement on a daily basis. What may surprise you, though, is how much it will change your life as well.



Dale Bowry

DALE BOWRY

## Trumpeldor's Army: When YU Had a Rifle Team

By YITZHAK GRAFF

The early 1970s was a period of uncertainty for the Jewish people. In Israel and around the world, Palestinian political violence directed against Israelis and Jews generally was on the rise. In America, Jews began to experience an increase in antisemitic attacks. The world economy entered a recession, and America pulled out of the Vietnam War. In this climate, many American Jews began to revisit philosophies of Jewish self-defense from generations prior. It was this era that saw the rise of the Jewish Defense League (JDL) which drew its roots from the ideas of Revisionist Zionism and applied them to life in the American diaspora.

The student body and the administration of YU were not interested in adopting an ideology as radical as the JDL's, but the core idea of Jewish community defense remained appealing to some students. Taking inspiration from the Zionist hero Joseph Trumpeldor, an early organizer of Jewish militias in Ottoman Palestine, Yeshiva College students Jay Shoulson and Jack Schachnow created the Trumpeldor Rifle Club (TRC) in the Fall of 1974. The club quickly grew in popularity such that the Yeshiva College Student Council (YCSC) appropriated \$210 (\$1,160 in 2022 dollars) for the TRC in January 1975. The TRC used the money to purchase .22 caliber long rifles from the Civilian Marksmanship Program (CMP). (The CMP was an initiative of the US Army dating back to the Spanish-American War

that sold surplus weapons at a low rate to youth gun clubs to encourage good marksmanship among young Americans to prepare them for the possibility of war. The CMP was privatized by Congress in 1996.

The TRC ran weekly outings to the Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx for club members to practice shooting. The club charged a fee of \$5 per trip to cover operational costs of transportation and using the shooting range. Commentator reporter David Gleicher, who accompanied the TRC on one of their weekly outings in March 1975, reported that almost thirty students attended

*The rifle team was included as one of Yeshiva College's official varsity sports teams in academic catalogs from 1982-1989.*

that evening. Colonel Robert Marmorstein, YU's head of security at the time, supervised the practice meet and provided training for the inexperienced attendees.

The TRC had goals beyond being a novelty experience for curious Yeshiva students. By the end of the Spring 1975 semester, they had become members of the National Rifle Association (NRA) and were eligible for intercollegiate competition. In the fall of that year, the TRC organized an informal rifle team out of its most experienced members to compete in the NRA's college rifle league. Lacking a budget to travel, the TRC's rifle team competed remotely. The NRA organized remote competitions in which each

team would shoot in their own respective ranges following the same standards of target distance and number of shots. Then each team mailed their used paper targets to the NRA's main office in Washington DC to be judged. In October 1975, the rifle team had its first remote match against UCLA and lost.

Looking to improve the rifle team's odds, some members proposed turning the Morgenstern Hall cellar into a shooting range. They felt that not having a local shooting range hampered their ability to practice effectively. A shooting range on campus would allow the team to practice more than

once a week and improve the team's skill. The idea never came to fruition, likely due to a lack of funding, but it is possible that the administration had a hand in preventing it for either practical or ideological reasons. After the Kingsbridge Armory closed in 1978, the team had to travel even farther to the US Reserve Armory in the Jamaica neighborhood of Queens.

By 1978, the TRC's rifle team had become established enough to be eligible to become an official YU sports team. Having official team status would have opened the rifle team up to increased funding, a professional coach and the ability to earn credits for playing on the team.

The exact process of getting approval as a sports team back in the 1970s and '80s is a little unclear. At the very least, the potential team needed to prove that it had a responsible coach who could safely teach the sport and that the team would be able to satisfy the credit hour requirements. In 1978, Colonel Marmorstein had agreed to act as the rifle team's coach, however, the team's first attempt to gain official status was denied. The reason for this denial is unknown, but it was likely related to the team's ability to satisfy the credit hour requirements, since they were only holding practice meets once a week.

The issue was resolved in 1981 and the administration approved the team. The rifle team was included as one of Yeshiva College's official varsity sports teams in academic catalogs from 1982-1989. In Fall 1982, YCSC appropriated another \$150 to the newly recognized team, likely to purchase more rifles.

Colonel Marmorstein retired in the summer of 1982 and was no longer able to serve as the team's coach. It's unclear who coached the team from 1982-1989. After gaining official recognition, the rifle team had a hard time maintaining the momentum of excitement from its early years in the previous decade. The time commitment of the lengthy trip to the US Reserve Armory in Jamaica to practice twice a week was probably a significant factor in causing the decline of the rifle team and its associated club. The last

*Continued on Page 8*

## The Dorons: The YU Family Band

By YOSEF ROSENFELD

If you asked people to think of musical groups that emerged from Yeshiva University, most would probably come up with Y-Studs A Cappella, The Maccabeats and maybe even StandFour. But YU has produced yet another band — its very first rock group, in fact — as recently as within the last few years, in the form of a family band called the Dorons. This four-piece rock band consists of two brothers — Yosef (vocals, guitar) and Aryeh Rosenfield (vocals, electric bass) — and their parents, Norman Rosenfield (guitar, keyboard) and Janice Kaidan (vocals, drums).

The band's founder, Aryeh, was a student at Yeshiva University between 2013 and 2017. He wasted little time choosing to major in music, declaring in just his second semester at Yeshiva College. "I assumed I'd major in history when I entered YU," Aryeh reflects, but "taking a history class and music class first semester" changed his mind. He even hosted a music radio show between 2013 and 2015 on YU's student-run radio station, WYUR, where he got the opportunity to share his comprehensive musical knowledge and eclectic taste. Aryeh also founded and played bass in the first-ever YU Rock Ensemble in 2014, which enjoyed a respectable nine-semester run. Although a rocker at heart, he also played bass for the YU Jazz Ensemble during his senior year.

The Dorons unofficially came together as a band on May 14, 2017. Aryeh was close to graduating from YU at the time and needed to perform a senior recital in order to complete the music major, so he decided to recruit his family of musicians — not formally a band at the time — to play with him for the occasion. Mom and dad (Janice

and Norman) had retired as performing musicians, previously vets of the '80s and '90s Boston alt-rock scene. Younger brother Yosef had only been playing guitar for three years. Nonetheless, the band hauled their musical instruments and equipment from their home in Providence, RI all the way to Schottenstein Theatre at 560 West 185th St. and played a daunting multi-album-themed set covering iconic releases by the Clash, the Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix. "It took a lot of *chutzpah* to replicate those artists," Norman quips.

When Aryeh finally graduated in May 2017 and his younger brother, Yosef, began his college career at Yeshiva University later

few parodies mixed into the setlist. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit the state of New York just two months later, forcing Yosef to play his last three YU concerts from home via Zoom. This included his 2020 senior recital, for which Yosef followed in his brother Aryeh's footsteps and asked his family band — who had by this time named themselves the Dorons — to back him for the performance.

Instead of playing a full set of cover songs, however, Yosef had the idea to perform almost exclusively originals — including many songs that his mother, Janice, had written and/or released 30-40 years earlier when she was in various bands with her

quite a while. "It seemed like a waste after all that preparation to not do more as a band," Norman says.

Realizing they had some writing sessions to knock out, the Dorons got to work. Three new songs ended up making the final cut on the album: a scathing pop-rock song written by Yosef called "Spare Me," a mournful ballad written by Aryeh named "Chimes of Innocence" (which Aryeh began writing back when he was a YU undergraduate) and a passionate hard rocker co-written by Janice and Yosef called "This New Poison." At long last, after spending nearly two years working on new music, the Dorons have finally finished their debut album — titled "The Doronic Verses" — which was just released on Nov. 11.

Wondering where the name "Dorons" comes from? Well, the band's evocative name is fascinatingly layered. It references the rock band the Doors as well as the bittersweet minor scale, the Dorian mode, plus it hilariously rhymes with "morons." Additionally, the word "dor" in Hebrew means "generation," which speaks to the multigenerational nature of the band.

Up next, the Dorons will be recording and performing more, if Norman has any say in the matter. "I know I won't have to twist arms too hard to do some summer performances and go back in the studio," he says with a good-natured laugh. Yosef, for one, won't need too much convincing. "The studio for me was the most meaningful part of the experience. We were all in sync, and that element of communal flow just felt euphoric," Yosef marvels. "I'm excited to do more!"

*YU has produced yet another band — its very first rock group, in fact — as recently as within the last few years, in the form of a family band called the Dorons.*

that year, it seemed to Yosef as if he was picking up right where Aryeh had left off. "It felt like the passing of a baton," Yosef remembers, with Aryeh handing off the YU Rock Ensemble to him as Yosef became the ensemble's new rhythm guitarist and lead singer. Yosef played three concerts with the YU Rock Ensemble, after which in 2019 he became the only remaining member of the group. Rather than rebuild the ensemble from virtually nothing (something he had just done the previous year), Yosef opted to continue performing but as a solo act.

Yosef's first solo YU performance was a Maroon 5 and Panic! At The Disco tribute concert, where he went through the artists' discographies and played one song from each album. At his next concert, Yosef played his own songs — mostly originals, with a

husband, Norman. It was this senior recital that prompted the Dorons to take a bunch of these songs that they had already rehearsed, record them professionally in a studio, and finally launch an album project — something Aryeh had been pushing the band to do for



The Dorons

YOSEF ROSENFELD

## The Unspoken Feminine Centrality of Simchas Torah

By HANNAH POLLAK

While Simchas Torah is not a *chag* that can be traced back to the Biblical era and not even to the times of the Gemara, we do know that sometime during the period of the *Rishonim*, when the yearly cycle of reading the Torah was already widespread, a massive communal *siyum* was held in honor of the Torah's completion. This *siyum* consisted of two main customs: the *hakafos* (circling the *bimah* seven times while singing and dancing with the *Sifrei Torah*) and the *minhag* to give every man (and in some communities even children) an *aliyah* to the Torah. In modern times, with the rise of feminism and egalitarianism in the world, the *minhagim* of this day have become problematic for many. For technical *halachic* reasons and out of respect for *mesorah* (tradition), women do not actively participate in these *minhagim*. The passive feminine role on Simchas Torah elicited different responses from the Orthodox community. Some were indifferent to the trends storming the world and carried on with the normal traditions. Others went to the other extreme and pushed for *hakafos* for women; some even gave women *aliyos*. Many have found a middle ground and established Simchas Torah as a special day of learning for women. I would like to argue that regardless of anyone's personal practice, Simchas Torah is a day both men and women can connect to because of Torah itself.

There is a Brisker tradition that reveals the essence of what Simchas Torah is, which is a message we can all be inspired by

regardless of gender, *hashkafa* or practices on Simchas Torah. Before I present the idea I need to give credit to those who taught me and shared the sources with me. Firstly, my seminary teacher and mentor, Mrs. Leah Hershman. Some ideas were also inspired by a *shiur* I heard from Rabbi Reuven Brand, *rosh kollel* of the YU Kollel in Chicago. In any case, this message has my input — I do not know if they would agree with everything that I write.

*Every Jew, regardless of their gender, social status or intellectual capability has a chelek b'Elokei Yisrael, and thus every single one of us has a chelek in Torah.*

The idea I would like to present begins with an anomaly in *Hilchos Birkas HaTorah*. It is well known that the *Beis Yosef* *paskens* based on the Sma"g that women recite *Birkas HaTorah* because they're obligated to learn the laws that are relevant to them, such as Kashrus and Niddah (he also quotes other *Rishonim* who offer different reasons for such an obligation). The Halacha dictates that while men have to learn Torah for the sake of learning, women only have to learn for practical reasons. They have to learn Halacha to know how to observe it. In general, the rule is that there's no *bracha* on the *hechsher mitzvah* (preparation of a *mitzvah*), but only on the *g'mar mitzvah* (fulfillment of the *mitzvah* itself). For example, we only say a *bracha* when we eat the matzah and not when we bake it. If so, why would the *Shulchan Aruch* (echoing

what he had *paskened* in the *Beis Yosef*) legislate that women say *Birkas HaTorah*, if, as the *Magen Avraham* explains there, they learn in order to know how to observe other *mitzvos*, and the learning itself is only a *hechsher mitzvah*?

We could argue, says the *Beis Halevi*, forgetting the rationale of the *Shulchan Aruch*, that Talmud Torah is like any other time-bound *mitzvah* for women. While they are not obligated to fulfill them, they are

still welcome to do so. Similarly, a woman is permitted to voluntarily perform the *mitzvah* of Talmud Torah as she would do with any other *mitzvah* from which she is exempt (see *Shu"t Beis Halevi* I, ch. 6).

The problem seems resolved. However, the *Beis Halevi* only explains the Ashkenazi practice. Ashkenazi women, following Rabbeinu Tam and subsequently the Rem"ah, consistently recite *brachos* for *mitzvos* they voluntarily fulfill. However, Sefardic women, following the Rambam and the *Shulchan Aruch*, don't recite *brachos* for these types of *mitzvos* (see *Orach Chaim* 589). If that is the case, even though we are allowed to take upon ourselves the *mitzvah* of Talmud Torah (since according to how the *Beis Halevi* understands the Sma"g there's nothing intrinsically negative with learning practical Halacha), one

still needs to understand why the *Shulchan Aruch* himself would say that women recite *Birkas HaTorah*, if for every other *mitzvah* from which they are exempt, he *paskens* that women don't say a *bracha*.

This issue is resolved by R. Chaim Soloveitchik (Rav Chaim of Brisk), the *Beis Halevi*'s son. As quoted by his son, R. Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik (The Brisker Rav), R. Chaim Soloveitchik says that the *Birkas HaTorah* is not a blessing on the obligation of learning Torah, but rather on Torah as an object itself. In Brisker parlance, he says that *Birkas HaTorah* is not a *din* on the *mitzvah*, but on the *cheftza* of Torah itself. And thus, since Torah as an object belongs equally to men and women, women are in fact obligated in *Birkas HaTorah* (see *Chiddushei Maran HaRiz Halevi al HaRambam, Hilchos Brachos* 11:16).

However, Rav Chaim's terminology is quite cryptic. What is the object of Torah? Having gone through the first three generations of the Soloveitchik-Brisker *mesorah*, comes Rav Chaim's grandson and student, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. The Rav referred quite explicitly to what he believed and felt was the "object of Torah." According to the Rav, the Torah and the *Shechina* (the divine presence) are metaphorically daughter and mother, respectively. In a way, he explains, "God, the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, in this case disguised as Mother *Shekhina*, never separated Herself from Her daughter; veiled in humble anonymity, She accompanies

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## After a Two-Year Hiatus, Torah Tours Has Returned

By RAMI LEVIN

The Aaron and Blanche Schreiber Torah Tours program at Yeshiva University gives undergraduate men and women the chance to strengthen the holiday experience of 24 smaller Jewish communities across North America. Although Torah Tours hasn't occurred for the past two years due to the pandemic, this year it returned in full force. When I received an email in my inbox to participate, I, along with 100 of my peers, jumped at the opportunity.

While I was excited to find out my own assignment, I had some reservations, because this was my first time doing Torah Tours, and I had chosen to go in completely blind. I didn't request a specific community, nor a friend to travel with. When I got my sheet, it was a surprise — I

got assigned to Beth Israel Congregation in Miami Beach.

I also got to meet the other member of my group, Shai Vadnai (YC '23), whom I had never met before. Over Yom Tov,

ing the congregants of Beth Israel.

Members of the program in other groups also enjoyed their experience. Yedidya Schechter (YC '24), who was assigned to Memphis, shared this enjoy-

ment. It “was incredibly special to have the opportunity to be in an out-of-town extremely hospitable community with a great *chevra*,” he wrote to me about his experience in Memphis, adding that he appreciated the ability to “enhance others' Yom Tov by noticeably adding *simcha* and Torah to all those around us,” particularly through helping the community with the traditional dancing.

Learning about the diversity of Jewish communities was a sentiment others shared. “It was an amazing opportunity to get to be a part of a community different from my own and be able to join in their Simchat Torah traditions and celebrations!” Avyayl Zucker (SCW '24) related about her experience in Albany.

Overall, Torah Tours was an absolute blast, and I, as well as others, am looking forward to future opportunities to help out in a meaningful way.

*Although Torah Tours hasn't occurred for the past two years due to the pandemic, this year it returned in full force.*

as we were introducing ourselves to our hosts, he and I would also learn more about each other.

My worries about the intensity of the volunteering assignment proved to be unfounded. My time in Miami was nothing short of a vacation, with beautiful weather, delicious food and enthusiastic Jews. The community, as it turned out, was vibrant. Shai and I were there to keep up the energy mid-*hakafot*, but we were never alone in singing. We were support-

ment. It “was incredibly special to have the opportunity to be in an out-of-town extremely hospitable community with a great *chevra*,” he wrote to me about his experience in Memphis, adding that he appreciated the ability to “enhance others' Yom Tov by noticeably adding *simcha* and Torah to all those around us,” particularly through helping the community with the traditional dancing.

For others, it was a learning experience. “Getting to see a whole new commu-

### RIFLE CLUB

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members of the team graduated in 1990, and by 1991, the yearbook was already making fun of the fading rifle team with a satirical photo in the student clubs section.

The students who started the club were engaging with issues that are beginning to resurface in the Jewish community today. With antisemitism on the rise again, the idea of training with firearms for self-defense is gaining popularity in the Jewish community. Although the Trumpeldor Rifle Club didn't make a significant impact on YU's historical memory, it is interesting to reflect on

the ways in which the youth of yesteryear responded to an atmosphere of danger that parallels the Jewish community's experience today.

*The sources of this article were gleaned from contemporary editions of The Commentator, the Masmid yearbook and Yeshiva College course catalogs. I want to thank Deena Schwimmer for her assistance in locating the course catalogs for me.*



The rifle team in Masmid 1985

MASPID PHOTOGRAPHER

### SIMCHAS TORAH

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Her daughter princess, the Torah... Can one meet the Mother *Shekhina* alone without having a date with Her daughter? And thus, according to the Rav, learning Torah is “A Rendezvous with Mother *Shekhina*” (see “Family Redeemed, Torah and *Shekhina*” p. 176). According to the Rav, Torah as an object is the veil or the cover that hides or embodies G-d Himself. Some will say that they can find Hashem and be close to Him outside of the *daled amos* of Halacha. For Jews, argues the Rav, this is impossible. The only way to find G-d is via the Torah, Her daughter. One has to exert one's intellect to understand Torah and then break one's nature to observe its laws. However, on the flip side, what's the point of dating the daughter and not her Mother? What's

the point of learning Torah because it's exciting and stimulating and keeping every single detail of Halacha if it does not lead the individual to a deeper and more intimate connection with the *Shechina* Herself? As R. Moshe Weinberger often asks, what's the point of learning Torah without thinking of or cleaving to the *Nosen HaTorah*? The *cheftza* of Torah is the Torah as a medium that brings us closer to Hashem.

Having explained why women are obligated in *Birkas Hatorah* and what the object of Torah is according to the Brisker tradition, let us complete the *hakafa*. We began by saying that Simchas Torah's *minhagim* are only male-active. However, once we consider that Simchas Torah might essentially be a day of connection with Torah as

a *cheftza* and not as a *mitzvah*, the day is equally relevant to men and women. Every Jew, regardless of their gender, social status or intellectual capability has a *chelek b'Elokei Yisrael*, and thus every single one of us has a *chelek* in Torah, because as we know: “Torah, Yisrael and the Holy One Blessed Be He are one.”

Let's not get trapped in the *minhagim*, in the physical manifestations of the essential nature of the day. The customs are exciting, but they are not empty rites. I don't think it's coincidental that *Minhagei Yisrael* are called “*Toras Imecha*” (the Torah of your mother) based on a *passuk* in Mishlei. The more informal customs come to remind us that the entirety of Torah, the fixed system of Halacha and the seemingly “cold” analytical

learning are ultimately about finding the *Shechina* and basking in Her presence. I believe that the *minhagim* of Simchas Torah express this idea on a meta level. And thus, with this awareness one realizes that it's not necessarily about actively participating in them, it's about transcending the boundaries of cognition for at least one day to realize how important it is to emotionally attach to the Torah as a veil to the *Shechina* Herself. Getting an *aliyah* or dancing with the *Sefer Torah* is secondary. Via the preservation of our *minhagim* — the *Toras Imecha*, the Mother *Shechina* is found. That is the essential core of the day.

## Unpack With YUPAC: No Longer Playing Defense

By TZIVIA DEITSCH

Even I, with a severely limited knowledge of basketball, know “Kyrie.” Kyrie Irving is an NBA and Brooklyn superstar. My sister wears his #11 jersey to school, I regularly hear talk about his performance in the last game and I know all about his bromance with Kevin Durant. Now, I hear about his since-deleted tweet supporting an antisemitic documentary spreading lies about Jews. Kyrie publicly supported a film that denies the Holocaust, calls all Jews racists and says they were the perpetrators of slavery. Adding insult to injury, Irving tweeted this with antisemitism on the rise and instigated by Ye's (formerly known as Kanye West) antisemitic statements.

Kyrie initially defended his comment by saying, “Did I hurt anybody? Did I harm

anybody?” But what he obviously didn't know is that yes, he did hurt somebody, and yes, he did harm somebody. As Jews in the 21st century, we are all too familiar with our favorite point guard, favorite rapper or favorite company displaying antisemitism, further propelling hate crimes directed at Jews in America.

A group of Jews sitting court-side at the Nets game against the Indiana Pacers on Oct. 31 came wearing “Fight Antisemitism” T-shirts. The next day, amid fury and confusion about an All-Star I once respected, I saw the articles about this group of fans fighting antisemitism at the game; and in every article, they were called just that — fans. This, to me, highlights the way we Jews can influence society. We have become accustomed to our role models turning their backs on us, but we still show up and still go to the game. But when is it too much? When can

we no longer separate the artist from his art?

Different groups have successfully created movements resisting their problematic treatment. The Black Lives Matter movement, the Me Too movement and others do not tolerate abuses of the groups for which they stand up. So why, as Jews, do we tolerate it? Why do I still see teenage Jewish boys repping their Yeezy's in the street?

Now, I have a confession — I am a slow writer. I wonder, however, if that benefited me in this circumstance. The morning I wrote this article, I saw a post by the Brooklyn Nets, discussing the \$500,000 that Kyrie Irving pledged to organizations that work to stop hatred of all types. Then I saw that the Nets had suspended Irving over his comments, and later, that Irving had apologized for what he had said. When I read those pieces of news, I thought, “Okay, let's rewrite this article: Kyrie has nothing against

the Jews, and everyone is happy.” However, that thought didn't last long. Rather, this backlash showed me the power that we have by using our voices. Too often, we let things slide; we defend our haters, and we listen to their music. Jews, I believe, have found a significant outlet to cause a change — by making ourselves heard and protesting our mistreatment. We can sit at the game, make eye contact with Kyrie Irving and run commercials during Sunday football and thus fight antisemitism. We did not choose the route of victimization, but we can choose how we stand up for ourselves. As Jews, we are constantly on the defense and constantly under attack. So by understanding both the artist and his art, we can use our power to make noise and make a change. We understand and internalize that we need to show up — for ourselves, for our religion and for our identity.



# Unpack With YUPAC: UN Passes Resolution Ordering Israel to Destroy its Nuclear Weapons

By RACHELLE WINOKUR

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has declared that Israel must destroy all its nuclear weapons.

On Friday, Oct. 28, UNGA's First Committee passed a resolution 152-5 calling for Israel to dispose of its alleged nuclear weapons and place its nuclear sites under the purview of the International Atomic Energy Agency. (Israel is widely considered to be a nuclear power despite having never acknowledged that it is, taking the approach of "nuclear ambiguity.") This resolution, submitted by Egypt, was sponsored by the Palestinian Authority (PA), an observer state in the UN, and 19 other countries, most of whom are located in the Middle East and North Africa. Observer states, such as the PA and the Holy See, are able to participate in UN meetings but with limitations, and lack the ability to vote or propose resolutions.

Ironically, Iran wasn't targeted in this resolution, despite rapidly progressing its nuclear energy program — considered by the international community to be a secret nuclear arms program — and stockpiling massive amounts of nuclear material.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has adopted seven resolutions to address Iran's nuclear program, however, only one is in effect today: a resolution easing sanctions on Iran passed after the Iran Deal (JCPOA) was agreed to. While both the UNSC and the UNGA are subsidiaries of the UN, the UNGA's First Committee deals with international disarmament and security, yet the UNGA has no resolutions condemning Iran for nuclear weapons and requiring their surrender. Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful energy purposes, although international efforts to broker deals with Iran to minimize its nuclear power would seem to indicate that the international community believes otherwise.

Iran is currently under the global eye for its brutality in crushing protests by its

citizens in response to the death of a young woman while in the custody of their "morality police." Historically, Iran has been seen as a bad actor on the global stage, yet when it comes to the UNGA, Iran's actions are ignored.

Israel and Iran have long been at odds over many conflicting issues, mainly Israel's right to exist. When the UN turns a blind eye

*"When the UN turns a blind eye to the true nature of Iran's nuclear actions — namely, attempting to create nuclear weapons with which to threaten Israel and the rest of the world — it is implicitly endorsing them."*

to the true nature of Iran's nuclear actions — namely, attempting to create nuclear weapons with which to threaten Israel and the rest of the world — it is implicitly endorsing them. Israel's alleged arsenal can be best described as defensive. Israel is known for innovating protective measures for its citizens because it is constantly on the brink of being attacked simply for existing. By passing this resolution directly targeting Israel, the UN is making a clear statement on its indifference to those who seek to create weapons of mass destruction and threaten others with them. The UN is making a statement on its position on Israel's right to protect itself: That it doesn't have one.

Israeli Deputy Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN's Conference on Disarmament, Michal Maayan, commented on how this resolution is what Israel's opponents aim to use to delegitimize and destabilize the country.

"Some actors in the region claim that a

comprehensive security architecture can be initiated in the Middle East with direct engagement with Israel," said Maayan. "Without recognition of Israel's right to exist within safe and secure borders, without reducing regional tension and the building of the necessary trust and confidence among regional states ... This position is untenable."

Israel, one of nine countries to possess nuclear weapons, is being singled out, despite never confirming the existence of weapons. The other eight countries confirmed to possess nuclear weapons (the United States, Russia, France, China, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India and North Korea) haven't been targeted. Do these countries pose less of a threat than a country whose primary goal is defense? This resolution intentionally ignores Iran's illicit activities and its undeclared nuclear actions in Syria. The difference between these countries? Israel is actively defending itself from the very countries proposing and supporting this resolution.

Incidentally, Israel is the only Middle Eastern country and one of a handful of UN member states that isn't part of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear

Weapons Treaty (NPT). The NPT is an international treaty that is aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, promoting cooperation, and complete disarmament of nuclear weapons. It is interesting to note that Iran is a signatory of this very treaty they seem to be violating. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has stated that Iran refuses to answer questions about the origins of uranium particles in its environments, which furthers the suspicion that Iran is engaging in illicit nuclear activities.

The UN's actions in choosing to call out Israel for unconfirmed actions while actively choosing to ignore Iran's true intentions regarding their nuclear energy are deplorable. If Middle Eastern countries want to create a peaceful region, choosing to target Israel will not bring that to fruition. Israel deserves to be treated equally and not be scrutinized for unconfirmed possession of nuclear weapons when countries like Iran have clear evidence of undisclosed nuclear energy and aren't being targeted. When developing a plan to create peace in the Middle East, the actions taken cannot be solely against Israel. Other countries must also be held accountable for their actions.



The United Nations Office in Geneva

MATHIAS REDING

# Unpack With YUPAC: Anti-Israel Activism on College Campuses

By AVRAHAM FROHLICH

A recent Anti-Defamation League report provided an overview of anti-Israel activism that occurred on college campuses throughout the 2021-2022 year. While some of the 359 reported incidents could be characterized as good faith criticism of Israel and its policies, many included overtones, and in some cases outright expressions, of antisemitism.

The report begins by noting eleven cases of vandalism that took place on college campuses. In December 2021, students wrote "Free Palestina You genocidal racist" on the Hillel building at the University of Oregon. Another incident of vandalism was the application of red handprints outside the Hillel at the University of Michigan. These instances seem to be attempts to "implicate Hillel, or possibly the campus Jewish community as a whole, in the bloodshed allegedly perpetrated by Israel."

Ten instances of harassment were also reported throughout the year. In April 2022, residents of a Jewish fraternity at Rutgers were harassed by a group of people waving Palestinian flags. In July of 2021, following a request from a pro-Israel student for his

fellow classmates to "promote anti-Israel materials on a separate chat unrelated to academics," the students sent him texts such as "zionist killer," and "you do not deserve to be at CUNY."

Students often held those who identified as Jewish or Zionist responsible for Israel's alleged human rights violations. On at least three occasions, groups stated that "Zionism or Zionists should not be allowed on campus or should be shunned from the campus community." This exclusion was brought to an extreme when, in February of this year, two students were forced out of a sexual assault survivor support group because they had Zionist views.

*"American universities collectively held 143 anti-Israel events this past year."*

American universities collectively held 143 anti-Israel events this past year. The report goes out of its way to stress again that some events were simply "mainstream criticism of Israeli policies." Many, however, included "the antisemitic denial of the Jewish right to self-determination in the Land of

Israel," "classic antisemitic ideas" and "support for violence."

In a lecture titled "Zionism as Racism and Racial Discrimination," Professor Noura Erakat of Rutgers University suggested that Zionism is a "bedfellow" to Nazism, repeatedly opposed Israel's right to exist and approved of military action to end Israel's existence. While they later distanced themselves from the event, the lecture was supported by the university's diversity, equity and inclusion office.

Not to be outdone, many universities hosted the popular Palestinian rights activist, author and journalist Mohammed El-Kurd. Much of El-Kurd's criticism of Israel in the past has involved intense anti-Israel rhetoric. In May 2021, he tweeted that Zionists have an "unquenchable thirst for Palestinian blood," while writing in a book that "they [Israelis] harvest organs of the martyred [Palestinians]." He has also denied the historical connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel, calling such a claim a "fictional indigeneity."

The phrase "resistance by any means necessary" remained popular on college campuses this past year. According to the report, "A notable segment of anti-Israel activists and professors expressed support

for armed confrontation with Israel." Some even promoted violence against Israeli civilians. On many campuses, students disseminated images of a rifle-totting Leila Khaled, a terrorist and noted member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a U.S. State Department-designated terrorist organization.

Throughout the year, colleges passed thirteen BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) resolutions this past year. One such resolution at Princeton University nearly passed in a referendum given over to all of the students. Such staggering anti-Israel sentiment in an elite university such as Princeton should be very troubling for those of us who support the state of Israel.

Perhaps most indicative of students' anti-Israel leaning were the 165 anti-Israel activities staged by campus groups, ranging from protests to the distribution of anti-Israel fliers to attempts to disrupt or block pro-Israel speakers. On some campuses — including at the University of Michigan, Boston University and Harvard University — students erected "apartheid walls" to protest the Israeli security barriers that run through the West Bank.

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## Unpack With YUPAC: American Midterm Elections From a Pro-Israel Perspective

By **SAM WEINBERG**

As a midterm enters the rearview mirror and a new political landscape is shaping up to only further the bitter partisan rhetoric the United States has seen in the last few years, one thing that is clear is that considerable bipartisan support for Israel remains in the halls of Congress.

While cultural and campus conversation has shifted more toward anti-Zionist positions, with many venturing into full-on antisemitic territory, AIPAC-endorsed candidates still make up a majority of elected officials in positions of federal power. Out of the 365 candidates the organization has placed its support behind, over 300 were victorious in their races, proving that, as AIPAC likes to say, “being pro-Israel is both good policy and good politics.”

The slim majorities in both halls of Congress make it difficult for any single member of Congress to step out of line with their party and its goals. While anti-Israel resolutions have never had an easy path in Congress, it will become much more difficult with the even more intense gridlock in Washington following the midterms. In particular, progressive movements will likely see more backlash to any sort of agenda they would try to establish. Slightly added power to the Republican party, the party more homogenous in its support for pro-Israel legislation, add to this difficulty.

AIPAC started getting involved in individual races for the first time this year and

focused on some races in particular. In the Maryland primary, AIPAC gave a sizable portion of their donations to candidate Glenn Ivey as he went up against J-Street-backed Donna Edwards. The New York Times had referred to that race as a proxy fight about the prominence of pro-Israel legislators in the Democratic establishment. Ivey was able to overcome an initial double-digit deficit to take a slight lead by early June, and once AIPAC’s involvement became more significant, Ivey ended up winning by 16%. In the general election, Ivey beat his Republican challenger by nearly 80 percent, cementing a strong pro-Israel voice on the left wing of Congress.

Another big win for AIPAC-backed candidates in the Democratic wing is the victory of Abigail Spanberger. A former CIA worker who flipped a seat that had been Republican for decades in 2018, Spanberger has become one of the most vocal pro-Israel voices in Congress. She spoke at the AIPAC policy conference in 2020, and her voice is amplified



The relationship between the US and Israel remains strong

CHRISTIAN DORN

further as a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. She beat Yesli Vega in the general election by barely four percent of the vote.

Not everything went well for the pro-Israel lobby in Washington. The general election race that AIPAC was most involved in was between Summer Lee and Mike Doyle, battling in Pennsylvania’s 12th District. Lee, who would be considered a new member of “The Squad,” was under much pressure from the pro-Israel population for tweeting out in May 2021, “When I hear American pols use the refrain ‘Israel has the right to defend itself’ in response to undeniable atrocities on a marginalized pop, I can’t help but think of how the west has always justified indiscriminate & disproportionate force & power on weakened & marginalized ppl.”

The equation of Israel’s right to defend itself and “undeniable atrocities” naturally didn’t sit well with many, and AIPAC got heavily involved. The race was a microcosm of the progressive wing of the Democratic party’s intense rhetoric against AIPAC and Israel as a whole. The voice of the movement, Senator Bernie Sanders, described the battle between progressives and AIPAC as a “war” to the New York Times. Lee ended up winning her race by a sizable margin, despite AIPAC spending a large portion on her rival.

Virginia also voted out one of the most pro-Israel Democrats in Congress, Elaine Luria. Luria, who is outspoken about the need to fund the Iron Dome and is herself a veteran of the Navy, lost a heated battle with Republican Jen Kiggans. Luria was one of the most vocal pro-Israel Democrats

in Congress and was wont to call out her colleagues for their anti-Zionist rhetoric dipping into antisemitism.

On a more positive note for Jewish values finding representatives in positions of power, Josh Shapiro, a vocal Conservative Jew, defeated Doug Mastriano for the governor’s race in Pennsylvania. Shapiro, who is kashrut observant, is one of the proudest Jews in American politics, and his campaign featured ads of him eating Shabbat dinner with his family. His opponent had faced significant controversy for business ties with vocal antisemites, including the owner of the social network Gab, where the shooter from the Tree of Life massacre posted his manifesto.

In terms of his relationship with Israel, Shapiro has been vocal against the BDS movement. As an anti-BDS bill found its footing in Pennsylvania’s House, Shapiro called the movement a “real threat ... foster[ing] lies about Israel which in turn undermines Israel’s security.” He concluded by saying “support for Israel should be a bipartisan issue.”

With overall support for Israel still high in the halls of Congress, and this election having been a net gain for the pro-Israel cause, Israel should continue to be a bipartisan issue for some time to come.

## Unpack With YUPAC: Breaking Down the Israeli Election Results

By **SAM WEINBERG**

Israel is looking to move forward from a recent period of political instability following its fifth election in three years, whose results led to a major victory for the right wing. As final ballots were tallied, Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud party had 32 seats in the 120-seat Israeli parliament, the Knesset. His coalition stands to have 65 or more seats, well more than enough to certify a governing majority and the ability to pass policies that reflect the right-wing viewpoint.

Behind Netanyahu, affectionately known as Bibi, is the current prime minister Yair Lapid and the centrist Yesh Atid Party, com-

*“A major victory for Bibi cements his status as Israel’s dominant political force”*

ing in with twenty-four seats. Lapid conceded quickly and instructed his staff to begin the procession of power. Following Lapid came the rising Religious Zionist Party at 14 seats, led by former Yamina Knesset members Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir.

Ben-Gvir is a former follower of the Kach party, which was led by the highly

controversial Meir Kahane before it became barred from running in the late-1980s. He is viewed as a rising star on the most right-wing ends of the Israeli political spectrum and is involved in deeply polarizing narratives. As the results came in and the Lapid government came to an end, Ben-Gvir tweeted, “It’s time to put order here. It’s time for a landlord.” He has expressed a strong desire to take over the Public Security Ministry, which is in charge of the police. The Religious Zionist Party gained eight seats, the largest gain by any party.

Bibi, the longest-serving prime minister in the nation’s history, was ousted just last year following Lapid and Naftali Bennet’s, former leader of Yamina, formation of a rotation government. The ousting came following various legal troubles and continuing political instability. Yet it became evident that a government focused purely on the removal of Bibi was unstable and doomed to collapse. Following the formation of what was the most diverse government in Israeli history, with newfound representation for Arab parties, ideological inconsistencies led to stagnancies and eventually unstable leadership. Bibi now retakes office still facing legal challenges, including corruption and fraud charges. He remains the most dominant figure in modern Israeli politics who gains equal measures of praise and critique for his tough-line stance on Palestinians and strong grasp on leadership.

Other parties in the new government

include the Shas and United Torah Judaism parties, combining for eighteen seats and making for a sizable portion of the new coalition. Some of their demands as a part of the new government are the cancellation of recent reforms to the system of certification of kosher food and reversing recent changes in the nation’s approach to conversions. They will also pursue legal protections for the Charedi population, including assurance that students in the yeshivas won’t need to draft as well as increased funding for their schools.

While the United States maintained its status as Israel’s greatest ally during the Obama years, it was no secret there was tension between the American president and Bibi. Whether it be pursuing more contact with Palestinian leadership or the deeply impactful Iran deal, Obama and Bibi were evidently not the closest of friends. Bibi’s relationship with President Donald Trump was much warmer, especially following Trump’s decision to officially proclaim Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The relationship between the two men was brought even closer following numerous instances of Trump standing up for Israel on the international stage in the United Nations and American recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. It remains to be seen what the relationship between Bibi and Biden will look like, although overall both countries are hoping to continue a longstanding and fruitful relationship.

Assuming this coalition remains stable and there are no unforeseen governmental collapses, the next election will likely be in November of 2025, four years after this year’s election. The new Knesset was sworn in on November 15.



With the results of the most recent Israeli election, Bibi Netanyahu has reclaimed the office of Prime Minister

STERN/U.S. EMBASSY  
JERUSALEM/ROMAN KUBANSKIY

## An Actual Plea for Campus Unity in the New Year

By NATAN EHRENREICH

On Sept. 20, over 65 undergraduate faculty members from Yeshiva College, Stern College, and Sy Syms School of Business penned an open letter in this newspaper regarding the ongoing conflict between YU and the Pride Alliance. They wrote to “proclaim [their] support for the LGBTQ+ students of the colleges,” and they appropriately achieved that goal, though I had several issues with the letter’s rhetoric. I had drafted a response to be published, but it then came to my attention that a separate, significantly more extreme letter would be released in the coming days. That piece was published on Oct. 2, and I invite you all to read it here, so that you might see for yourself the flagrant hypocrisy it represents.

The letter’s main strategy is to casually threaten YU students that their future prospects, academically and professionally, might be harmed if they dare to deviate from secular orthodoxy and remain dedicated to their faith. The letter consists of a form of blackmail that seeks to employ unfalsifiable speculation as a cudgel to scare students into submission, while handing companies and graduate programs the very ammunition to discriminate against YU graduates that the authors purport to oppose. They also manage to slander their own students as bigots, and, to top it all off, they title their piece “A Plea for Campus Unity in the New Year.”

It is once again worth noting that Yeshiva University did not initiate the legal battle we find ourselves in the midst of. It was the Pride Alliance that sought to have this conflict resolved through the public docket of the New York court system. Curiously, though, both faculty letters criticize

YU’s “public litigation” tactics, as if *defending* your constitutional rights in a court of law is a move of aggression. I am reminded of the words of the late Supreme Court Justice (and friend of YU) Antonin Scalia regarding the 2000 Bush v. Gore case:

“It was Al Gore who made it a judicial question. It was he who brought it into the... courts. We didn’t go looking for trouble. It was he who said ‘I want this to be decided by the courts.’ What are we supposed to say, ‘Oh, not important enough?’”

*...Unity will never be achieved as long as those who have honest disagreements are labeled as bigots. Unity requires a commitment to pluralism, where populations who disagree with one another are at least free to live their own lives as they see fit and build institutions that reflect their values.*

Scalia’s words ring true here. YU has the right to defend itself when its religious autonomy is threatened in a court of law. Any suggestion otherwise is a radical departure from the due process and religious liberty Jews have enjoyed from this country’s inception, as I pointed out in National Review in June.

That the faculty members seek to undermine religious liberty is of less consequence, though, than their implication that their own students are bigots. The Sept. 20 letter identifies the undergraduate programs at YU with “political forces of extreme homophobia and intolerance that should have no place at our university,” and the more recent letter insinuates that YU students do not “value equality.” I honestly find it shocking that professors at this university, who have undoubtedly wit-

nessed thousands of deeply religious acts from their students and have seen firsthand the time and energy they pour into religious formation, identify *homophobia* and *bigotry* as the preeminent motivation of these students. Furthermore, they do so while noting that they are speaking up either in support of their students’ well-being or as a plea for unity. Is smearing those who disagree with you unifying?

The authors of the more recent letter claim that it is their “sincere belief that [YU’s] actions have the potential to harm

last-ditch effort to maximize the pressure on YU before the courts once and for all rule in the university’s favor.

Those seeking to change YU’s internal religious environment have repeatedly shrouded their demands with appeals to “unity,” “tolerance” or “honest conversation.” At the same time, though, they publicly compare those who disagree with them to Southern segregationists, suggest that YU students are bigots and seem to increasingly resort to strategies that seek to silence dissent from their narrative. This is sheer hypocrisy, and we all know it. Many are justly afraid, though, of the attacks they might find themselves the victims of if they publicly note the obvious. I encourage the manifestly present silent majority of YU students who support religious liberty to speak out. When the court rules in your favor in a few weeks or months, you will be proud that you stood up for yourselves against what has evolved into a mob-like group of individuals willing to pull any trick to label you as a bigot.

Finally, I want to return to the title of the faculty members’ letter, “A Plea for Campus Unity in the New Year,” and make that same request of these professors and others who agree with them. I promise you, unity will *never* be achieved as long as those who have honest disagreements are labeled as bigots. Unity requires a commitment to pluralism, where populations who disagree with one another are at least free to live their own lives as they see fit and build institutions that reflect their values. Assaulting these institutions is not unifying — it is divisive. And it is emblematic of a group of people who, though they speak of tolerance, seem to prefer that their disagreeing peers are simply beaten into submission.

### CAMPUS ANTI-SEMITISM Continued from Page 9

At the University of Michigan, students protested the Birthright program, which organizes a free trip to Israel for young Jews, writing on social media that “birthright is propaganda that manipulates Jewish heritage and identity into support for the Israeli apartheid state.” Cleveland State University’s Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights student group hosted a rally in which the anti-Israel activist Abbas Hamideh spoke, informing students that the “European invaders of Palestine are not Semitic.”

College anti-Israel organizations were often behind these events and have strong footings on college campuses throughout the United States. Among these are Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), CUNY for Palestine and Harvard Out of Occupied Palestine (HOOP). SJP alone has 206 chapters in the United States and has added 25 chapters this past year. These chapters, some of which support violence against Israel and target Zionist students and groups, have accounted for 25 anti-Israel incidents this year. The also popular JVP considers Zionism to be a form of “Jewish supremacy,” and regularly advocates for the complete elimination of a Jewish connection to the land of Israel. According to its website, JVP currently has 200,000 supporters on its email list and 10,000 individual donors.

Taken as a whole, the above-mentioned incidents indicate the prevalence of anti-Israel activity on college campuses throughout the U.S. This reality causes many students to hide their connection to Israel while in college and makes others “feel targeted and unsafe.” At

Yeshiva, we are often reminded of the popular anti-Israel feelings that pervade American college campuses (see above). However, the notion of a college atmosphere that is permeated with anti-Israel (and often antisemitic) sentiment may seem a distant

reality. Nevertheless, the above is a pertinent reminder of our obligation to promote a shared and balanced narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



A mock “apartheid wall” erected on campus by students at Harvard during Israeli Apartheid Week 2022.

HARVARD PSC

## What Joe Biden Gets Wrong About Unity

By SRULI FRIEDMAN

President Joe Biden was swept into office in January of 2021, promising to bring unity to a fractured nation and restore trust in America's badly shaken institutions. Two years later, it's safe to say that he has utterly failed in his task. Biden's personal approval has plummeted around 10% since he took office, with his disapproval surging somewhere in the neighborhood of 16%. Additionally, Americans' trust in their government remains low, with the vast majority saying that political divisions have worsened since the start of 2021. It is clear that despite this administration's promises, the disease of partisanship continues to fester in the American body politic.

Conscious of this fact, the president delivered a speech on September 1 in which he attempted to underline the underlying causes of our division. Flanked by guards, standing in front of an Independence Hall illuminated in an eerie blood red, President Biden excoriated Trump and his cabal of "MAGA Republicans" as those who pose an imminent and potentially lethal threat to the "very foundations of our Republic," who see the rioters of January 6th as "patriots," who are "determined to take the country backward." He exhorted the American people to unite against this dire threat to democracy. However, in truth, this speech highlights the flaws at the core of Joe Biden's path to achieving unity, and the causes which predestined it to failure.

For one, there is the ambiguity of who exactly comprises this group of MAGA Republicans. Biden began his discourse by reassuring the audience that they do not include the overwhelming majority of the party, although they "dominate" and "drive"

it. Yet he never clearly articulates who they are. He claims they "disrespect the constitution" and "promote authoritarian leaders." Assuming most of those whom Biden is labeling would vociferously deny this claim and perhaps even accuse him of the same charges, how can this in any way be a descriptive definition?

*It is clear that despite this administration's promises, the disease of partisanship continues to fester in the American body politic.*

The president made use of traditional progressive rhetoric, accusing these MAGA Republicans of attempting to turn the clock backward "to an America where there is no right to choose, no right to privacy, no right to contraception, no right to marry who you love," but ventured further, labeling these same people as "a threat... to the very soul of this country." With this seemingly intentional juxtaposition, is it any wonder that those who disagree with Biden on social or political issues will interpret the speech as leveled against them? That they will assume that Biden views them and their values as exerting an evil, corrosive influence on the country? It is simply not possible for Americans to unite around a man who appears to lump them in with foes of democracy.

Another problem Biden's strategy suffers from, which was exemplified in that speech, is his willful blindness to extremists and kooks on his side of the aisle, while focusing exclusively on the extremist wing of his political opposition. It's simple for Biden to focus rhetoric on the January 6th riot and its instigators. He can shift the blame for all political violence onto the side of the right. This can conveniently serve to help him rally his base as a defender of democracy.

However, this same tactic will make him appear to regular Republicans as nothing but a defender of demagoguery. We all remember the weeks of rioting and looting which rocked America in the summer of 2020, spearheaded by leftist groups such as BLM and Antifa. These acts of blatant criminality, often committed in broad daylight,

cost Americans an estimated \$1–2 billion of property damage and resulted in several deaths. If the president believes political violence to be solely a tool of the radical right, he is sorely mistaken. So how are conservatives supposed to react when he paints violence and intimidation as exclusively the outgrowth of his opponents' political movement? How can one be a unifying figure if he reserves his criticism for the opposite side of the political spectrum?

It's not just about violence. Although many Democrats today cast aspersions on Republicans for undermining public faith in election integrity through unsubstantiated claims of foul play, the truth is many Democratic voters flirted with similar ideas just a few short years ago. According to a 2018 Marist poll, only 49% of Democrats, compared to 91% of Republicans, trusted the last midterm election to be conducted fairly. Today the numbers have flipped, with 78% of Democrats saying they generally trust elections as opposed to just 33% of Republicans. In 2019 Reuters found that a whopping 84% of Democratic voters either strongly or somewhat agreed with the false claim that "Trump or someone from his campaign worked with Russia to influence

the 2016 elections," a narrative widely promulgated by mainstream Democratic voices.

For a leader to unite a people, it is necessary for him or her to shift the focus aside from contentious issues and divisive topics and onto the shared values which bridge the political chasm. What made the president's failure predictable is his inability to do just that, opting instead to attack vague groups of political opponents as fomenting conspiratorial plots to overthrow the government and harboring values antithetical to American ideals.

In retrospect, this should not seem as surprising as it seems to many people. Joe Biden has been a professional partisan for over half a century and expecting him to heal America's excessive partisanship is about as silly as expecting the mafia to aid in the fight against organized crime. Politics just isn't a unifying business. Partisans left and right only stand to profit by encouraging divisiveness while simultaneously professing aspirations to unify the country as a cheap means of getting moral high ground.

So how can America achieve true unity, which goes further than hollow slogans spewed out in divisive speeches? It seems to me civility and decency can only be restored through the efforts of individuals. Citizens agreeing to disagree on certain issues, not elevating politics to a status of supreme importance, and simply ignoring politicians when they inevitably get sucked into petty squabbles on Capitol Hill are all small ways we can try to heal the divisiveness that is so prevalent today. We must realize that unity is in the hands of those who truly want it. Us, not the government.

## Liberalism Reassessed: A Response

By NADAV HELLER

When I first read Rabbi Rafi Eis's article on Yeshiva University's battle with liberalism, I was left disappointed and dissatisfied. His unfairly acerbic rhetoric is unrepresentative of my and my peers' feelings on the matter, and in many ways runs contrary to them. This article aims to provide an alternative, more welcoming perspective that is grounded in modern sensitivity and traditional meticulousness, without compromising on either. Below, I address some of my grievances with Rabbi Eis's presentation and suggest a vision of my own.

To start, I am bothered by Rabbi Eis's implication that progressive Jewry is driven by heinous and subversive motives, a

for so harshly decrying his ideological adversaries. However, name-calling and grandstanding will not help Jewry achieve

*As modern Orthodox Jews, we recognize that the world can sensitize us to broader swathes of human experience.*

sentiment as offensive as it is monumentally uncharitable. He cites the prophet Jeremiah, who courageously took a stand against the perpetrators of rampant immorality and non-discretionary infidelity. (I suppose that's meant to refer to me.) With such framing, it's hard to blame him

syncretic harmony. I might suggest that instead of negating liberalism as a "dangerous attitude" discouraged by God, liberally-minded and traditionally-minded Jews can work together to find common ground. Following in the footsteps of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, we must identify "components of a shared moral and spiritual vision, upon elements of both a common fate and common destiny," and "strive for understanding and respect." (Jewish Action 46:37-39, Fall 1986) Is there a way to carve room for progressivism into one of the seventy facets of our Torah? We, as a community and as individuals, must be open to answering "yes" if we are to have any hope of creating dialogue and change.

In a similar vein, I feel that co-opting the Rav in a regressive crusade to alienate our Jewish brothers, sisters and others is shameful and defamatory. Rabbi Eis correctly points to the Rav's fear of secularization in YU; I've heard legends about his ferocious exchanges with Dr. Revel about the creation of Belfer Hall. I believe, however, that this is a misunderstanding of what liberal values at Yeshiva University stand for. In my experience, liberalism at YU isn't animated by a crusade for unfettered liberty, but by an overwhelm-

ing sensitivity to people and their needs. This is a human issue, not a political one. This theme overtly emerges when we discuss LGBTQ representation on campus. The name "Pride Alliance" seems to give many the misapprehension that meetings are festive mockeries of Chazal where they juggle rainbow cotton candy and flaunt halacha. To my understanding, this is not the case. The YU Pride Alliance is not interested in secularization or controverting Torah values. They are concerned for the happiness, health and acceptance of their constituents. To this end, the Rav and his students (my rabbis and mentors) went to great lengths to create a sanctuary for the many stripes of Jew found on our vibrant campus. The Rav recognizes the necessity of this kind of social support in Halakhic Morality (page 162):

"Love emerges when the individual begins to notice a new truth — shocking but at the same time comforting and encouraging. I am not alone, I am not forlorn, I am not barren."

To my understanding, this is the ethos of the YU Pride Alliance. It aims to provide a place where fraternal "love bursts forth from within the recesses of a frightened and perplexed soul, a love draped in gratitude to the thou, to the fellow who has joined me on my torturous path." It aims to provide an oasis of respite to those who are all too often confronted by negative and oppositional attitudes in our community. The Rav was a complex thinker and enigmatic figure, and many disagree



Rubin Hall

## A Yeshiva As Much As A University

By YONI MAYER

Yeshiva University's reputation has been denigrated by the media. If one were to read popular publications reporting on our university from the past few months, it would be hard not to feel shame and contempt. Our university has been painted as a villain; it has been portrayed as an institution that looks to deride and discriminate against its students. Furthermore, the Supreme Court is deliberating on the very essence of our University: whether or not our Yeshiva can be classified as a religious institution. In this piece, I wish to counterbalance this misguided narrative. I hope to put some good faith back into our university and illustrate how the Yeshiva and University exist as one.

To be clear, I am not taking a position on YU's current legal proceedings. I merely seek to demonstrate that even though Yeshiva University is not coded as a "religious institution," Judaism and its culture, spirit, lifestyle and beliefs are interwoven into every fiber of this university. The media outlets are commenting primarily on the negative qualities which are borne through Yeshiva University's decisions to conduct itself in line with Jewish law and are remiss to mention all the positives that this ordinance engenders.

YU advertises itself as the "world's premier Jewish institution for higher education," but there is a tacit aspect to this jargon that Yeshiva University employs to attract its students. There are the visible aspects of the dual curriculum, high-level Torah learning, and the constant presence of the top rebbeim in the world, which make YU a de facto "Jewish" university. However, these elements do not properly illustrate the undergraduate culture and experience on campus. There is more than just the utilitarian Judaism that Yeshiva University provides; Judaism is interwoven through everything that we do.

There is an acute sense of kinship and shared purpose amongst the student body. Whereas in other universities, you might connect with other students in your major or extracurricular activities, in Yeshiva University there is an underlying bond between all the students: we are all Jewish. We all relate and connect to the Jewish people. This may be expressed in different ways; some students express their religiosity more than others, some students are ardent Zionists and others have never been to Israel, some students become leaders in their

Jewish communities while others are passive about their Jewish identity. However, one thing is undeniably clear: every student identifies as a Jew. When news befalls the Jewish people, whether good or bad, this becomes the talk of the university. When our star basketball player garners media attention, it is the fact that he is Jewish that headlines

secular colleges, Yeshiva University provides the much-needed ease of being a Jewish college student in the United States. There is no threat of BDS or anti-semitism within YU. It's easier to breathe knowing that we're safe from that kind of harm. Secondly, the university's Jewish identity narrates the undergraduate tenure in a ubiquitous way.

*We are a Jewish institution not because of the Jewish curriculum or the way that we are (or are not) filed publicly, but because Judaism is interwoven through every single aspect of this school.*

all the articles. When Israel is under threat, the topic of conversation turns to our Jewish homeland. There is a shared narrative between us: we are all Jewish, whether we're proud of it or not, and this binds us all in ways a secular university would be incapable of. We are all brothers-in-arms, and we have an immediate connection regardless of our course of study. There is a shared language, culture and experience that breaks down the typical college wall of social exclusivity and places each student on an equal playing field. Socializing is easy if the ice has already been broken.

For those who grew up in the Modern Orthodox world, there is a peculiar sense of homecoming. Yeshiva University is a campus that teleports you back in time, to all the transformative experiences you've had in your life. After years of losing touch, you take an economics class and find yourself sitting next to the person you played intramural basketball with back in sleepaway camp. Your summer program coordinator's little brother is asking you for help with an essay in your English class. Your next-door neighbor's close family friend is now tutoring you for an exam. It's not an unfamiliar experience for anyone in the Jewish community; Jewish geography is a game we all play when we meet another Jew. However, there is no place where it's easier, no place it feels more natural and normal than at Yeshiva University. And in an odd way, it's comforting; college isn't a grand venture into independence but a return to the community to which you've always belonged. Yes, you'll make new friends and have normal college experiences, but you'll also find comfort in the familiarity of people you've known your whole life.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, a Jew can exist fully as a Jew. This takes on two meanings. Firstly, as compared to the pugnacious nature of the student body at

Judaism is ingrained in the infrastructure of this university. It reminds me of Israel, where streets are named after biblical figures, public buses display "Chag Sameach" on their LED indicators and anyone you'd pass by in the streets would know how to respond to a friendly "Shabbat Shalom." Israel is home to the Jewish people because you can't take one step without being reminded of your Judaism in some way. It's the same at Yeshiva University — Judaism is felt in everything that we do and is accessible throughout the day. If you need to go to a minyan, you have dozens of options. The cafeteria is completely kosher. There is high-level learning at every point in the day in the Beit Midrash. Shabbat is hosted on campus, not by a Hillel or Chabad, but by the university itself. These are fundamental aspects of Jewish life that flow through the veins of the institution. However, even the more esoteric parts of being a Jew exist on

campus. There are *sichot mussar* throughout the week, *chagigas* during the chagim, and great Jewish figures who come to lecture. There are *mezuzahs* on every door and signs reminding you to say *Asher Yatzar* outside certain bathrooms. The style of conversation is Jewish, the humor is Jewish, and the spirit is Jewish.

Yeshiva University may not have filed itself properly as a religious institution, and that was a mistake for which YU is suffering the consequences. But to claim that our school, our Yeshiva, is not a Jewish institution is misguided. Our university would lose its identity and soul if it were to no longer identify with Judaism. We are a Jewish institution not because of the Jewish curriculum or the way that we are (or are not) filed publicly, but because Judaism is interwoven through every single aspect of this school.

No one is fundamentally questioning whether or not Yeshiva University is a religious institution; the Supreme Court proceeding is dealing with technical legal issues, but no one could deny our school's Jewish identity. It is not a Yeshiva separate from a University in which each half focuses on its own respective goals. It isn't a place that teaches secular subjects and also happens to teach Jewish subjects. Rather, they could not exist without the other. Judaism illustrates and outlines everything that we do at this school. It presides over our daily interactions and influences our classroom discussions. It is the life path to which this institution subscribes. It is a Yeshiva just as much as it is a university.



Yeshiva University students celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

### LIBERALISM

Continued from Page 12

about his true intentions and positions on a litany of issues — the topic at hand is no exception. But I shudder to imagine that he would approve of weaponizing his person to displace and delegitimize members of our community. Sensitivity to real, painful human experience is not a contrived liberal value. It is the application of inef-fable divine imperatives to a contemporary context. The fact that our sensitivity may have been prodded along by the secular world need not trouble us. As modern Orthodox Jews, we recognize that the world can sensitize us to broader swathes of human experience.

Thirdly, I am off-put by Rabbi Eis's vague and pejorative use of the word "liberalism", as if it encompasses the entirety of political opinions more prospective than his own in its derogatory ambit. Liberalism and its adherents are diverse in opinion and conviction. When one is crusading against a nameless, faceless group of anti-

Torah marauders, it is easy to discount the validity of their perspective. I would again encourage us to embrace complexity and seek mutual understanding. In this regard, we once again ought to take our cues from Rav Soloveichik:

"To love another, I must first evaluate him in virtuous light and see him as worthy of that love... therefore, the commandment to love incorporates, first of all, the duty to form a positive assessment of the thou and to value him... this honor, however, must flow from a profound recognition that in the innermost recesses of human existence, the I is not superior to the thou. Each and every person represents a small world whose value is expressed in his uniqueness and separateness, and it is impossible to prefer one individual's existence over another's." (Halakhic Morality, page 166)

To both me and the Rav, this is a crucial prerequisite to productive discussion.

With this, we arrive at the broader, more pernicious insinuation evinced by Rabbi Eis's article: that support for gay

people is synonymous with support for unbridled sexual liberty. Rabbi Eis provides a borderline parodic and sensationally expansive interpretation of the Torah's prohibition on gay sex to include injunctions regarding communal loyalty, Masoretic fealty and Jewish continuity. From his article, it seems as if it's impossible to simultaneously validate LGBTQ experiences and maintain uncompromising allegiance to halacha. As if by virtue of one's homosexuality, or (God forbid!) their acceptance of such, they immediately shapeshift into antinomian gremlins of prurient predisposition. As if there is no place in Avraham's tent for weary travelers seeking hospitality. From what I understand the Torah's directive prohibits gay intercourse, but in no way abrogates the all-too-real mandates of "ואהבת לרעך כמוך, לא תונו איש את עמיתו," or "ואהבתם את הגר."

I propose instead a flavor of Orthodox Judaism where our concern for another Jew's private behavior does not outweigh our love for him, where our cognizance of the severity of our own words and actions

is more visceral than our disgust at his imagined behavior. I propose an Orthodoxy where people of polychromatic orientations can feel comfortable knowing that they don't have to choose between their communal and personal identities. Where LGBTQ individuals don't have to leave Orthodoxy to find the acceptance that the broader halachic community falls short of providing.

This Orthodoxy means giving voices to those with whom we disagree — whatever their predilections may be — and providing safe spaces for them to be heard. These conversations are uncomfortable, especially for the assiduously traditional among us, but the discomfort is yet another reminder of their salient necessity.

Vitriol is not a substitute for sensitivity and erudition. Exclusionary discrimination is not a valid theology. Only through open dialogue and mutual sensitivity can we come together to form a more cohesive Klal Yisrael. We deserve better, we can do better and we should demand better.

## Hishtadlut: A Secure Approach

By AVI POLOTSKY

For millennia, the Jewish people have been the targets of all different forms of persecution. Whether it be the heinous crimes of the Holocaust, beatings on streets or institutional discrimination, Jews have endured it all. Personally, I have been called the classic derogatory terms for Jews and was even once accused of being an Edomite and an imposter of Judaism. Experiences like these have shaken me and made me fearful of publicly expressing my integral Jewish identity. Still, they are not enough to prevent me from wearing my kippah or untucking my tzitzit, for I refuse to be ashamed of my Judaism.

Sadly, though, this is sometimes not enough. In recent years, antisemitism has become somewhat of a regular occurrence, especially in New York City. According to the Anti-Defamation League, in 2021, there were 416 instances of assault, harassment or vandalism against Jews in New York alone. I have seen videos of Jewish passersby being assaulted, leaving me wondering whether a similar instance could also happen to me. Although I cannot change someone's will to physically harm me, I can control how I respond. While thankfully nothing physically threatening has happened to me yet, in such a case, the responsibility ultimately lies with me to ensure my own safety. Certainly, the police and other security resources should be on task to prevent violence, but as the recipient of a potential attack, I will always be the first line of defense.

This topic, though, runs much deeper than stories I read about online and my

own experiences. Growing up in a family of Russian descent, I am used to hearing courageous stories about my family members standing up to persecution in the Russian Empire and the USSR. I remember my mom telling me how my grandfather protected his family from an armed burglar. The intruder was a neighbor who had a dispute with my grandfather, and he broke into my mother's

*The security here at Wilf is outstanding, but at the end of the day, the onus lies on each individual to protect themselves.*

apartment with a knife, seeking revenge. My grandfather bravely repelled the attacker, and the next day he confronted the man verbally, scaring him away from my mother's family for good. While I am lucky to have grown up in a safer and more hospitable society, stories like these have instilled in me the value of protection.

This mindset closely resembles the Jewish concept of *hishtadlut*, or putting in effort toward our endeavors. While Jews trust God to care for us, we simultaneously do our best to ensure our desired outcomes. Although many speak of *hishtadlut* in the context of *parnassah*, or earning a living, it is just as relevant to conversations revolving around ensuring our safety.

A few years ago, after experiencing a verbal antisemitic incident, I realized that it was time for me to engage in my own *hishtadlut*. The possibility of a confrontation becoming a physical assault was all too real, and I needed to prepare myself. I learned how to box, trained myself in other fighting techniques,

started to lift weights and began to carry a bottle of pepper spray. Of course, these efforts do not fully ensure my safety, but I consider it my duty to do anything I can to best protect myself and those around me.

As a YU student, I am incredibly grateful to our Wilf security for creating a safe environment for everyone. Unfortunately, though, as we have seen, events of harass-

ment and assault against students have occurred on and near our campus. While incidents are rare, they are certainly not impossible. That being said, it is a good idea for YU students to do their part in protecting themselves.

This isn't to say that one should strengthen themselves in order to seek out confrontation. I did not train myself to fight with the expectation of engaging in conflict. On the contrary, my abilities serve as a last-resort option for defense if I am unable to de-escalate a situation. In fact, presenting a strong and composed demeanor is in itself a powerful deterrent. Feeling assured that you can protect yourself is discernible to antagonists wishing to prey on those whom they deem weak. Moreover, these efforts not only help with personal security but can also transform nagging feelings of apprehension and paranoia into an outlook of confidence and control. Truthfully, I hope I never have to implement my combat training and would actually consider it a success if I make it

through the rest of my life never having to engage with anyone physically. Regardless, I will not feel that my efforts have been wasted.

YU students should keep the idea of *hishtadlut* in mind when it comes to personal security. Hashem gifted us with life, and we are tasked to utilize that gift as best as we can. Developing our capabilities to ensure our safety is a massive part of that responsibility. The security here at Wilf is outstanding, but at the end of the day, the onus lies on each individual to protect themselves. While, *b'ezrat Hashem*, no one should have to experience such confrontations, engaging in our *hishtadlut* can only help us going forward.



Boxing Gloves

ARASH HASHEMI

## The Never-Ending Text Message Pile-Up

By HANNAH MAMET

If you forgot your phone at home, would you go all the way back to retrieve it? Of course you would! Now, if you forgot your wallet at home, would you go all the way back to retrieve it? Possibly. In other words, while we can survive without our wallets, we cannot survive without our phones.

Much research has been devoted to the current generation's increasing dependency on phones. Arlene Harris, an entrepreneur in telecommunications, powerfully stated in a recent article that "there are more mobile phones in use today than there are people,

but measuring quantity alone trivializes the importance of the mobile phone to those who rely on it." Put differently, while the sheer number of phones in this world is remarkable, what is even more striking is the level

*There are ways to manage the constant cell phone notifications while still being fully active in our lives.*

of impact these devices have.

Phones are used for almost everything and have essentially become extensions of our bodies. They tell us when to wake up and when to go to sleep, remind us of our

doctor's appointments, deposit checks and provide us with endless forms of entertainment. Mobile phones have also revolutionized many aspects of society. Health apps have brought medical care to places that

were previously unreachable, and navigation apps have allowed us to travel farther, more safely and efficiently than ever before. The cellphone revolution has even played a role in judicial decisions. In an article by Sarah Jeong, she discusses how in the 2014 Supreme Court Case *Riley v. California*, Chief Justice John Roberts identified phones as an integral part of human existence, a decision that has already impacted numerous areas of legislation.

It is therefore no surprise that this dependency on phones leads to an endless list of unread messages. In Joanna Stern's article "Sorry I Missed Your Text: Messaging is the New Email," she states that "messaging apps are no longer a place just for close friends and family; they're now also where we sync with class parents, business contacts and every expected attendee of the coming family reunion." While in the past companies and organizations spammed our email addresses, they now often reach us via text. Stern attributes this to "everyone want[ing] to meet us where we're the most engaged and responsive." Even YU falls into this category. While in the past, announcements about events might have been limited to emails, there are now numerous group chats for all different purposes including Judaic events, clubs, speakers and more.

Nearly every time I pick up my phone, I

find myself lost in a sea of WhatsApp messages from random group chats. I sometimes feel that if I am off my phone for any significant period of time, I then need to spend a similar amount of time catching up on my unread messages. The sheer amount of announcements and club group chats prevent one from finding the more important messages from friends and family.

The feeling of having to catch up on messages or seeing many emails can be very overwhelming and stressful. However, there are ways to manage the constant cell phone notifications while still being fully active in our lives. To better separate work and family, Stern suggests relegating certain messages to your business email address, which allows you to preserve your messaging apps as almost exclusively personal. Additionally, if you are not interested in a business contacting you altogether, do not hesitate to exit the chat or unsubscribe. As Stern points out, "we can't be engaged and responsive if we can't sort the important from the unimportant." Similarly, if you are rarely going to read any of the messages from a group chat, perhaps think again before joining. Finally, to limit the long list of texts, you can set aside certain times during the day to catch up or ensure that you answer all of them before you go to sleep.

Since we live in an era that is so dependent on technology, it is of the utmost importance for us to actively determine what role our phones play in our lives. Confronting the never-ending text message pile-up that many of us have can certainly be daunting. However, by setting aside time for responding, separating the important from the unimportant and not hesitating to exit chats, we move away from a constant state of stress to one of undivided attention on the most important things in life.



WhatsApp notifications

MEDIUM.COM

## Gentlemen Prefer the Blondes on Screen — ‘Blonde’ Review

By SAM WEINBERG

It’s been a long time coming for *Blonde*. Director and writer Andrew Dominik’s latest film, released by Netflix, has a production history going back to the beginning of the previous decade. An adaptation of Joyce Carol Oates’ fictionalized biographical novel of the same name, *Blonde* has been released to much fanfare and heated debate.

A sizable amount of the criticism *Blonde* has received is linked to its weakness in being an adequate biopic for Marilyn Monroe. If the film wanted to do her and her life story justice, these critics say, the film should give us a holistic view of that life. It is limiting to not include the joys of her friendships, the progress of her social justice, or her genuine intellectual development in equal measure to her life’s low points. However, Dominik’s script is one of tortuously consistent suffering; *Blonde* is a Monroe film completely uninterested in any moment of happiness or joy in her life.

However, I do not think this should be a point of contention. Rather, in watching *Blonde*, the emerging question is not whether Dominik’s film works as the definitive narrative of Monroe’s life. It does not. Rather, the question is whether *Blonde* can take its own thesis, that femininity is often thrown aside, disrespected and taken advantage of (with Monroe as an embodiment of femininity itself), and craft a story that is adequately able to convey the relationship between Marilyn’s suffering and the experience of womanhood in general. As I will argue, the film itself may be guilty of the very crimes it accuses society of.

This is not to say that the prior criticism, that the film is degrading and avoids Monroe’s happiness in err, is invalid or should be tossed aside as a misread of the film. Dominik’s screenplay, as well as the Joyce Carol Oates novel it is based on, narrows the experience down, whether that experience is specifically the personal story of Monroe or the dynamic general existence of general femininity. When critics call out the film for glorifying female suffering, they

allude to this basic theory. Dominik tries to reduce a complex existence to its lowest moments, believing that those moments are definitive of the feminine experience as a whole. In a recent interview with *Sight and Sound*, Dominik said about his iconic character, “She killed herself. Now, to me, that’s the most important thing. It’s not the rest.

*Blonde is a worthwhile watch, no doubt, but often for reasons beyond the filmmaker’s intent.*

It’s not the moments of strength.” Indeed the film’s focus coincides with its director’s narrative priority.

And yet, one struggles to reduce the film to its key thematic fault. In terms of raw creativity, primarily the stunning work by director of photography Chayse Irvin, *Blonde* is constantly jaw-dropping. Switches from color to black-and-white, rampant adjustments in its aspect ratio; Irvin has loaded the film with aesthetic choices much bolder than most. Some of the frames are stark, brutal compositions that aggressively convey the violence of the film’s world.

The fact that the filmmaking is hardly realistic is, of course, not an issue in itself. *Blonde* is a movie about movies, a movie star in particular. It would be only natural to create a film whose aesthetic is deeply removed from reality or realism as well. And while celebrity is not the most important (and certainly not the most interesting or original) theme the film grapples with, the interplay between who is Marilyn Monroe and who is Norma Jean Baker (her birth name and non-Hollywood personality) certainly is at the thematic forefront. A deeply engrossed Ana De Armas is fantastic with the iconic elements of Monroe, and yet moments of her native Cuban accent shine through. While watching, one comes to believe this is part of the point, a perhaps self-referential moment toward that exact interplay between screen persona and real-life personality. Monroe is told in the film that she is meant to be seen. Only through viewing herself outside of herself does she find Hollywood success. Does de Armas intentionally communicate

this to us about her own experience through that breaking of her voice?

The removal of Monroe from Norma Jean highlights our collective worship of the former and neglect of the latter. One gets the sense that the men in her life, serving as different checkpoints in her life, have the same experience. The playwright, un-

while reading his letters while he remains off-screen. Dominik can’t help but focus his efforts on Norma Jean’s relationship with Marilyn as opposed to Norma’s personal dynamics. (Although an exception is to be made regarding her moving scenes with her mother as she grows into adulthood.)

*Blonde* is a worthwhile watch, no doubt, but often for reasons beyond the filmmaker’s intent. The filmmaking is stellar and expressive, while de Armas is captivating as the lead. Where it becomes fascinating is in the disconnect between the filmmaker and his film, where the film’s insistence on her suffering and degradation meets a filmmaker obsessed with furthering that suffering and degradation. Dominik has attempted to make a film that shows how Marilyn Monroe suffered, was preyed upon and beaten down, a person whose suicide “is the most important thing.” The baseball player, the playwright, the president and the director are all archetypes of suppressing Norma Jean Baker into a bruised and torn Marilyn Monroe. Whether we, too, are guilty of the same crime remains unresolved.



Marilyn Monroe sketch

PIXABAY

## Starbucks’s New Strategy Plan

By SHOSHANAH GHANOONI

Starbucks has unveiled a reinvention plan, meant to promote efficiency as well as address the way consumers behave in Starbucks cafes post-COVID. Starbucks, founded in 1971, set out on a mission to

*Starbucks has unveiled a reinvention plan, meant to promote efficiency as well as address the way consumers behave in Starbucks cafes post-COVID.*

create quality coffee and later on, a “third place” where people could escape to from both their work and home lives as a place to relax.

Starbucks will not be compromising

on these values. In May of 2022, Chief Marketing Officer Brady Brewer announced that the company was on a mission to create a digital third space. Brewer stated that this is a new way for consumers to be connected to Starbucks. Starbucks cafes prominently display art from each cafe’s locale; Starbucks aims to use non-fungible tokens (NFTs) as a new art form in the digital world connecting consumers to the brand, regardless of whether or not they step foot into the store (via the use of drive-throughs or food ordering services).

NFT owners would be allowed extra perks and they would be used to bring Starbucks to life in the digital world. Starbucks has also done an overhaul on its app, creating a more reliable experience.

This digital third space falls in line with Starbucks’ plan to modernize the company and make it more efficient as people have started using the drive-throughs as opposed to going in-store to buy their drinks due to COVID-19. Some plans going forward include building new drive-through capabilities at most Starbucks locations, as well

as modernizing equipment that will allow employees to handle complex orders quickly.

The faster Starbucks drinks are prepared, the more customers the store can accommodate, which will drive up profit margins

as people will no longer have to wait as long to receive their drinks. New machinery will allow Starbucks to meet its consumers’ demands now and in the future.



PIXABAY

# Recession Who? Inflation Numbers Matched Only by Revenue Increases of Luxury Brands

By **KOBY ROSINSKY**

It's no secret that the US economy is not doing well right now. Between Jan. and July of 2022, the price of eggs has risen by over 50%, the price of bread by over 10% and the price of butter by almost 25%. There is no doubt that this level of inflation is hitting the average consumer very hard. So it might come as a surprise that LVMH, the world's largest luxury holding company, which owns brands such as Louis Vuitton, Dior, Fendi and Celine, reported a 28% increase in revenue and a 23% increase in net income in its 2022 half-year financial statements over the first half 2021. LVMH's primary competitor, Kering, which owns Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent and Bottega Veneta, also reported massive gains. Kering's revenue and net income for the first half of 2022 were 23% greater and 34% greater, respectively, than the first half of 2021.

Technically, we are not yet in a recession. In the US, a recession must be declared by the National Bureau of Economic Research, and they have so far refrained from doing so. However, we are definitely seeing a lot of common signs. US GDP has fallen for two consecutive quarters, often considered a sign of recession, the major stock indexes are down and inflation is close to 10%. Bringing this all into account it is safe to say that even if we're not technically in a recession, we should definitely be seeing recessionary spending patterns. So why are luxury brands doing so well?

It has long been seen that the luxury segment does not quite behave the way one would expect it to during a recession. Most people assume that when the economy takes a nosedive, luxury goods will be the first to feel it, as consumers shy away from making large purchases to try to save money or purchase less ostentatious products to avoid appearing tasteless. While the average consumer might shy away from expensive purchases during a recession, the luxury industry does not service the average

consumer. According to Milton Pedraza, the CEO of Luxury Institute, which does marketing research and business management, the luxury industry owes 70% of its sales to the wealthiest 20% of its customers. This means the majority of luxury goods are sold to people who are least likely to be

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hit hard by inflation. Bear in mind that this is not the wealthiest 20% of all consumers but the wealthiest 20% of consumers who are already in the market for luxury goods. The assumption that consumers are more likely to purchase more subtle and understated products, has also been shown to be false. After the 2008 recession the Journal of Consumer Psychology published a paper showing that when comparing the pre-recession designs of Louis Vuitton and Gucci to their counterparts during the recession, the products actually got more obviously branded and ostentatious. Not only that, but the study also showed that their products got more expensive during the 2008 recession, which is something that most companies try to avoid when the average consumer is trying to save money.

The trend of luxury goods doing well is seen not just with clothes and leather goods but also with other products. Diageo, which owns several alcoholic beverage companies, including Don Julio and Casamigos, reported that its luxury beverages portfolio grew 31% for the year ending in June 22, a very impressive amount given that their overall growth across all segments was just 14%.

How has this trend shown in the American retail scene? In the upscale retail market, Nordstrom reported an increase in revenue of 11% for the quarter that ended July 2022 over the quarter that ended July 2021. Walmart, on the other hand, reported an increase in revenue of 8% for the quarter

that ended July 2022 over the quarter that ended July 2021 and Target reported an increase in revenue of just 3% for the quarter that ended in July 2022 over the quarter ended July 2021. Budget-friendly retailer Dollar General reported an increase in revenue of around 9% for the quarter ending

July 2022 over the quarter ending July 2021. It is notable that of these four companies the ones that performed the best are the most budget-friendly, where people shop to save money, and the most expensive, where people who don't have to worry about saving money shop.

We saw that both LVMH and Kering had incredible growth, but how has that growth been reflected in their stock? That might be a bit of a surprise as well. LVMH's stock is down 24% since the beginning of the year (as of the beginning of September 2022) and Kering's stock is down around 30% from the beginning of the year (as of the beginning of September 2022). Target, which reported very disappointing growth, is down just 29%, from the beginning of the year (as of the beginning of September 2022), a decrease greater than LVMH but

less than Kering. Walmart however is down just 7% from the beginning of the year (as of the beginning of September 2022). This is a very interesting phenomenon to note: despite stellar growth, luxury brands have not performed particularly well in the stock market. This was not just in LVMH and Kering; Hermes, Prada, Burberry, Tapestry (which owns Coach, Kate Spade and Stuart Weitzman) and Capri (which owns Versace, Jimmy Choo and Michael Kors) all have lower stock prices now than at the beginning of the year. This is despite the fact that all these companies have reported an increase in revenue. Nordstrom stock also fell, down 26% from the beginning of the year (as of the beginning of September 2022). In fact, out of all the companies mentioned in this article, the only one to have gained in stock price since the beginning of the year is Dollar General, with a modest gain of around 3% (as of the beginning of September 2022).

While it might be that luxury brands are generally shielded from inflation from a revenue perspective, this does not seem to translate into an increase in stock price. On a practical note, this means that they might not be the hedge against inflation one would expect from companies whose revenues grow at aggressive rates despite the economy crashing down around them.



Luxury storefront

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## A Revolution In Sports Data

By **JOSHUA POMERANTZ**

Year after year, Paul Tudor Jones, founder of hedge fund the Tudor Investment Corporation (TIC) — specializing in systematic investment approaches — somehow was never able to come up with a systematic approach when it came to choosing the fantasy football team that would provide him with the wins he needed. His success in business never seemed to translate to his passion of managing a fantasy sports team. Now, Jones decided, it would be the time to finally do something about his losing fantasy football teams, and maybe even make a business out of it. His son, Jack Jones, is a co-founder

of the company with his father, and even delayed his studies at NYU Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where he was pursuing his Master's in Data Science because of the potential benefits of playing an integral part in a company like this. That is ultimately how SumerSports was born.

The name that they came up with, SumerSports, stems from the word Sumer — the ancient Mesopotamian culture known to have the first people to use numbers to analyze different systems. Jones himself was inspired by this mentality because just like when it comes to business, he tries to use numbers over "dumb luck." Similarly, when it comes to choosing a fantasy team or even for NFL owners and managers choosing players, they should utilize numbers more often as well. Managers have been operating teams without focusing on skills for too long, and Jones thought there would be some method that would reshape the structure and perhaps pave the way for more competitive approaches to team building.

The question remains: how practical is this company for the established leaders in professional sports, such as the NFL? Just because it may work for a fantasy football team, doesn't mean that will translate into success for NFL managers. Still, it happens to be that even before this new company officially took off, they had already been working with two NFL teams. The main

objective of SumerSports is to focus on the individualized player-tracking data together with the risks and benefits of paying them a certain salary, and seeing how it fits into the team's needs and salary cap. The way Jones looks at his portfolio in the stock market is how he believes NFL owners and managers

who were chosen by the coaching staff, etc. The list is so layered that it is very difficult for most to put the time and energy into tracking it all. Additionally, there are many offensive and defensive players on the field at the same time. The focus of SumerSports is to combat these issues by using special

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need to look at their teams. Just like how there's a certain limitation on capital, so too, these NFL teams need to deal with a salary cap, which happened to have been \$208.2 million in 2022.

Although it can be interesting to make a connection between analyzing stocks and analyzing football players, the correlation may not be as strong and simple as it seems. For instance, when it comes to NFL football, not only does one look at the player's individual stats and injury history, but there's also always a reason why the player performed at a certain level, but it's usually not because of the player himself. For instance, take a wide receiver: First, there's the quarterback who throws him the ball, but before the quarterback throws the ball, the quarterback is being protected by offensive linemen who may have been conditioned well by trainers

granular data that will magnify the field and behind-the-scenes activity into the smallest bits and pieces that they can possibly come up with. It will require each second of play action to see the different moves that are being run, and not only on a surface level who is providing for the successes and failures of the team, but also who is contributing to these plays even when it may not be so easy to tell.

SumerSports decided to partner up with a whole group of talented individuals, consisting of investment analysts, software engineers, sports analysts and data scientists to contribute their knowledge of data, sports, technology and analytics. They are optimistic that this project can possibly revolutionize the way we think about sports analytics in general, as well as increase job prospects for the industry in the future.



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