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## REMEMBERING RAV MOSHE KAHN ZT”L

BY LEORA (MOSKOWITZ)  
ORENSHEIN

A few days after Rav Kahn passed away, we reached the end of Masechet Nedarim in daf yomi. When I opened my Gemara a few months ago to start the masechet [tractate], I saw that I already had notes on the first daf [page]— circles and little underlines all over the page, with a few words penciled in, squeezed between the small lines of Tosafos and the Ran, the medieval commentaries on the text. I looked at the page and wondered, “what are all these markings?” I then realized that we had learned this daf in Ne-

darim during my first semester in Rav Kahn’s shiur. The innocuous circles and underlines were all the words that, at the time, I did not yet know. Rav Kahn said we should learn every single word on the daf that we didn’t know and so, under his guidance, I had circled and underlined at least half the words on the page. I look back now, coming to the end of Nedarim, and smile. I look at all the words that had been so daunting to learn then, but of course I know now. I look back and think, where would I be in my learning today if not for his shiur. Where would I be, without the rigor and demand, yet warmth

and encouragement of Rav Kahn?

The very first Mishnah in Pirkei Avot tells us that a person should ‘stand up’ many students- ma’amid talmidim harbeh. It is often pointed out that the Mishnah doesn’t say, milamed, to ‘teach’ students, but rather ma’amid, to ‘stand’ up students. The greatest teachers do not just teach their students Torah, but they teach their students how to learn Torah on their own. They stand their students up two feet, so that they can learn independently. This is what Rav Kahn has done for his talmidot [students].

I have been overwhelmed reading reflections from so many of Rav Kahn’s talmidot telling how much they have gained from being his student, many solely attributing their ability to learn Gemara to him. Many of his talmidot who have taken those skills they have learned from him and become teachers themselves, now pillars of our communities in their own right. I feel so privileged to be part of the community of Rav Kahn’s talmidot. May we all continue to learn and teach Torah in his ways, and pass down the mesorah [tradition] to the next generation. Thank you Rav Kahn for all that you have taught us.

## A TRIBUTE TO RAV MOSHE KAHN ZT”L

BY PENINA WAGHALTER

One of the hallmarks of my time at Stern College has been stepping into the Beit Midrash at eight o’clock each morning, sitting down opposite my chavrutah [learning partner], and spending the next two hours learning Gemara. Every day we sit at the same table in the center of the Beis, situated between two large pillars, and struggle through the texts at hand. An hour later, we head down to our class-

room, log onto Zoom, and, until a couple of months ago, were greeted by Rav Moshe Kahn zt”l’s smile.

Each day in shiur [class], Rav Kahn infamously cold called on students to answer questions and explain the Gemara. There was a method to the way in which he called on us; some were “ringers”, who had proven their skills and could be counted on to answer the difficult questions no one else knew the answers to. Others were great readers

who could translate the texts very well and help move shiur along when it was lagging. Some were not yet as skilled and were called to read and translate the texts in order to improve their skills. However, it was well known that Rav Kahn called on new students more often than returning ones in order to gauge their skill levels.

My first semester in shiur, I was the only new student. This pretty much guaranteed that I was called on at

least once a shiur. There were many days, especially at the beginning, when I was frustrated and wanted a break. But Rav Kahn knew what he was doing; not only was he gauging my skill level, which is why I thought he was calling on me, but he knew that keeping me in the hot seat would force me to push myself harder in seder and develop

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# LORD, I CAN GO FOR A SNICKERS.



## EDITORIAL

BY BENJAMIN GOTTESMAN,  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Being a senior is tough. Every day, I grow closer to the inevitable moment where I conclude my educational career, a moment I had dreamed about since I was in middle school but now seems rather daunting. There are few constants along the path from six years old to twenty-three, and school is one of them. It is, thus, no surprise that all I can think about is what exactly I will do next September. For the first time in my life, I can do anything. I have always had a rather clear sense of where I would be living six months from any given moment, and now, for the first time, I truly can go anywhere. Sure, it's exciting, but it is equally, if not even more so, daunting.

It's not like the world stands still while you make this decision. The dual curriculum and fourteen-hour slugfest that is the daily life of a YU student isn't going away just because I graduate in three months. Naturally, I left my Hebrew and math requirements for my last semester, something past-Benjy is thrilled about, but present-Benjy isn't exactly loving. Running a newspaper, working an internship, and writing a thesis takes time as well. Factor in trying to keep a social life afloat, whatever modicum of exercise I convince myself to do, and the epoch of processing time required after each episode of *The Last of Us*, and we're far past the 24 hours that we have been divinely allotted.

The pressure is the worst part, though. Doesn't it feel like everyone else has it figured out?

I know that I am far from the only one who doesn't have this all sorted yet, but I got to say, sometimes that's exactly how it feels. Some people have a little angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other. I have the entire cast of *Fiddler on the Roof* perched up there, wondering why I don't yet have a six-figure job, a family of five, and affordable dental insurance.

So, yeah. I got a bad case of burnout.

Remember those Snickers commercials? I can't get them out of my head. "Mike," played by Betty White, lines up at wide receiver in a pickup football game. Predictably, he is as useful as an octogenarian who barely eclipses five feet would be in a game of two-hand touch. Suddenly, someone hands him a Snickers bar which, when eaten, turns Mike back into an athletic young man, far better equipped to navigate an opposing secondary. "Better?" his girlfriend asks. "Better," Mike asserts. The image fades, and words appear: "Snickers," the screen reads, "because you're not you when you're hungry."

I'm not saying I feel like Betty White on a football field, but I don't feel quite like myself. It feels as if life is moving too rapidly for any one person to handle. Reprieve is about as fanciful a word as "magic," "monsters," and "reasonably-priced cafeteria food." I'm not sure that I'm hungry, but I could certainly go for a Snickers.

As if a candy bar will make things slow down. Perhaps the key to a stress-free life lies somewhere in a gooey mess of

chocolate, caramel, and peanuts. Or perhaps, it's even simpler.

There's been a silver lining to all the stresses of senior year. I have found that the busier I get, the more I love the things that make me happy.

Those quiet days in the library, where all that I had to do was read and write, used to be a chore. Now they're my working definition of "tranquility." Night *seder* can sometimes be intense and difficult, but when everything is in flux, those hours of grounded certainty are *mei'ein olam haba* (comparable to Heaven). Hanging out with friends was something I used to take for granted—now it's an oasis of casual existence. Being home, with my family, on a Friday night has always been my default, yet it is nothing less than God's greatest gift.

There is so much to love. There is so much joy squeezed into the crevices of the everyday grind.

I have no clue where I'll be in six months. In the meantime, I'm going to keep working, putting my best foot forward, confident that I'll end up in the right place. More importantly, I am going to keep enjoying those magnificent, precious experiences that make life so wonderful.

I also ordered three bags of fun-sized Snickers for my apartment.

Just in case.



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## OPINIONS

BY DANIEL GANOPOLSKY,  
OPINIONS EDITOR

In August 1776, Benjamin Franklin chose a portrait of the Exodus, in which the Jewish people confronted a tyrant in order to gain their freedom, to be the national insignia of the United States. Although it was never ratified, the principles reflected in this imagery are what the Founders envisioned America ought to be. Unfortunately, today's, (big L) Liberal America has forgotten these values and opted for a new, redefined Lockean understanding of liberty. Nonetheless, we can learn from what our founders wished for us to recognize, embody, and embrace our tradition while rejecting modernity.

The Exodus from Egypt and subsequent inception of the Jewish nation has long signified the fundamental principle of liberty. Unlike other philosophies, the idea of liberty embodied in the emancipation of the Jewish people was not a portrayal of an unconditional and unrestricted sense of freedom, or even a dismantling of the fetters of slavery. Rather, it represented an opportunity to institute an appropriate form of self-governance and communal responsibility. This idea of communal responsibility and a unified ideology, as demonstrated through the Exodus, was the future that Founding Fathers, like Benjamin Franklin, envisioned for America. In contrast, today's America has become fractured by our individuality, moving away from self-governance and the initial ideology imparted to our founders through the story of the Exodus.

After the Israelites' Divine deliverance from slavery, God revealed a set of moral precepts to the Israelites at Mount Sinai so that they may govern, cultivate virtue, and build a healthy and long-lived society. Without hesitation, the newborn nation instantly responded with "*na'aseh v'nishmah*" — "we will do and we will understand (lit. hear)." They recognized the importance of these values and became unified in a national declaration of total subjugation to God's will. Through their declaration, the Jewish people implemented a system of accountability and self-government. This system fostered the awareness that actions have consequences, and that individual growth, by extension, affects the growth of the community. Communal responsibility, demonstrated through the halachic system— such as an individual's obligation to forewarn their neighbors— illustrates the unique and necessary relationship between citizens and their governing body.

Our Founding Fathers, like the Jewish nation, recognized the need for people to orient themselves with the state's values and vice versa. According to the founders, self-government broadly meant a government under the control and direction of its citizens, rather than an outside authority — a democratic republic. As Aristotle posited in *Nicomachean Ethics*, the man who is truly concerned about politics seems to devote special attention to virtue, since it is his aim to make the citizens good and law-abiding. America's pioneers, John Adams, Samuel Adams, and Benjamin Franklin all valued self-government under the auspices of a virtuous society. To them,

liberty did not mean doing as one wished, rather, it was choosing the right and honest course. Liberty meant forgoing some personal advantage for the betterment of one's neighbor and society. Early in *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville describes "a beautiful definition of liberty." Tocqueville cited a distinction between liberty as a license - "doing as one lists" - and liberty as the consequence of self-discipline and, in particular, free choice to do what is "just and good." Moreover, Abraham Lincoln, in his "Address on the Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions", credits the establishment and preservation of the American government with "the capability of people to govern themselves." The American goal was to support the fostering of virtuous individuals who would form a civic life oriented towards the common good.

In modern America, the meaning of liberty has been fundamentally reconceived. Today, liberty means to be completely free, overcoming any barriers that inhibit human expression of individuality and desire. Liberation through restriction is quite literally the opposite of today's post-modern spirit, which offers boundless pluralism and moral relativism, hawkish individuality, unlimited possibilities, and endless freedom. Many members of society aim to abolish any arbitrary social norms and religious and/or governmental institutions governing behavior, and establish wholly self-made individuals. Today's anti-culture is creating a polarized society full of tension between citizens and neighbors, trying to deconstruct each other's customs, cultures, and beliefs. The constantly evolving America

no longer has a unifying ideology to admire and respect. To change this, Americans need to bring issues of our country's identity and purpose to the forefront of political debate and daily life because, as Tocqueville argues, self-rule is the result of practice and habituation.

The Sinai experience created a unified Jewish culture that preserved the Jewish nation and the Jewish spirit against the threats of destruction, disappearance, and demoralization. The *pasuk* in *Shemot* 19:2 describes what happened right before Moshe received the Torah. The verse states "*Vayichan sham yisroel neged hahar*" (Israel encamped there in front of the mountain), Rashi comments and says, quoting the *Gemara*, "*K'ish echad b'lev echad*" - because they had one goal so it was as if they had one heart. Similarly, the United States needs to re-establish a set of ideas and principles that garner communal support and action to promote empathy, self-restraint, and responsibility, which will ultimately lead to a more cohesive and sustainable society. Despite all the challenges that plague present-day America, the fight for liberty is instilled in the very fabric of its existence. Franklin hoped that the national insignia of the Exodus would be a constant source of inspiration and encouragement for the American people. The battle for liberty requires strength and resilience and is constantly redefined as society evolves. To be "the land of the free and home of the brave" demands an unparalleled level of integrity and righteousness; as Benjamin Franklin concluded, "only a virtuous people are capable of freedom."

## WHY YOU SHOULD BOYCOTT AQUARIUMS AND ZOOS

BY EMILY GOLDBERG,  
LAYOUT EDITOR

When I was little, my family and I went to SeaWorld in California. I distinctly remember watching an orca whale show in which the audience was actively engaged. The whales leaped and jumped from the water, even splashing the audience, who clapped and laughed. As an animal lover, I too, was enthralled. I could not take my eyes off the whales.

I was naive. I was not aware of the injustice unfolding before my eyes. Once the show was over,

I, along with the rest of the audience, walked out of the stadium. We enjoyed the rest of our day in the park and, upon closing, happily went home. We got to leave, the orcas did not. Those whales, and all the other animals at SeaWorld, are trapped against their will and are suffering horrible living conditions. I am ashamed to say that I once supported the horrific actions of this institution and those like it. When you buy a ticket to an aquarium or zoo it should haunt you for the rest of your life.

Aquariums and zoos are holding animals in captivity. There is no possible way for these institutions

to replicate the natural habitats of these animals. Instead of running free in their home savannahs, lions, elephants and giraffes are trapped in cages. Instead of swimming in the expanse of the ocean, orca whales, sea lions, dolphins, sharks, and fish are stuck in tiny cement pools. Starfish and sting rays sit in an indoor enclosure so small, it might as well be a container. Instead of a forest full of trees, glaciers in Antarctica, rocky mountain tops, caves, grasslands or the desert, animals are imprisoned for the enjoyment of man.

Animals in captivity are not naturally stimulated. Although it may

seem like the animals are enjoying themselves when they are performing for an audience, this could not be more false. In his documentary, *Inside the Tanks*, Jonny Meah, a broadcaster and presenter on the radio station Heart in the United Kingdom who has also appeared in live shows on BBC, reveals that animals at Marineland in Antibes, France are visibly weary from their routines. As noted in this documentary and in others, such as *Blackfish*, the animals, despite partici-

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pating in entertainment exercises, often come to hurt themselves because of their boredom, hitting their heads on the concrete of their pools and biting the rims which results in damage to their teeth. Sometimes the animals even attack each other.

In the same documentary, Dr. Ingrid Visser, a marine biologist, highlights the unnatural conditions that these animals are experiencing. When observing dolphins in captivity she notes that when they play with a ball “it looks cute, but [it’s] not natural. How many dolphins have you ever seen out in the wild, [or] in any documentary, playing with a ball?” She also discusses how the tips of the dolphins’ beaks or snouts, otherwise known as their rostrums, are injured and bleeding because of “self mutilation” and that the concrete walls that the animals are surrounded by have “nothing for [them] to look at.” The dolphins also have lines on their heads that are the result of “unnaturally bending [their heads]...all the time” because of the vertical position they are in when interacting with their trainers. Jonny Meah notes how these observations are “so easy to miss for an untrained eye” but are “strong indications of distress within captivity.”

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) reveals some of the various cruelties that the orca whales at SeaWorld experience in captivity. For example, the size of the orca whale tanks at SeaWorld

do not even begin to compare to the size of the ocean that the whales are meant to be living in. At SeaWorld, orca whales are kept in tanks about “86 feet by 51 feet and are only 34 feet deep—not even twice as deep as an orca is long.” The whales are “unable to engage in virtually any natural movement...and would have to swim the circumference of the tank more than 1,900 times in a single day to approximate the distance [they] would have swum” in the wild. This is the equivalent of a human living in a bathtub for their entire life.

The SeaWorld website claims that their mission is “Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Return.” However, many of these animals are not rescues. They are captured from the wild, separated from their families, and forcibly put into enclosures for their entire lives. Then, they are bred in captivity and have their young prematurely separated from them. PETA notes that “dolphins [at SeaWorld] are being impregnated, sometimes forcefully after being drugged.” Even more so, PETA highlights how although orca whales generally stick within their pods their whole lifetime in the wild, “SeaWorld transfers orcas between facilities to regularly ‘balance’ the genetic pool of breeding and for use in performances.” PETA also illuminates how, “SeaWorld removes calves from their mothers at ages far younger than they would be separated in the wild... it is clearly distressing to these animals.” The effect that these conditions have on the animals often has extreme repercussions on the trainers, who can ex-

perience aggression and be injured by the animals, most famously when three were killed by the same SeaWorld orca in 1991, 1999, and 2010

Many people believe that zoos and aquariums are useful for the educational and research benefits that they have, as well as the opportunity they provide to treat injured animals. However, animals should not lose their freedom for the purpose of human research. Humans are quite capable of conducting research and educating the masses about these animals while allowing the animals to remain in their wild habitats. Once these animals are brought into parks, or even more so, when they are bred in the environment of these parks and don’t have to hunt for their own food, it is virtually impossible for them to readapt to the wild. If an animal is hurt and needs care, the treatment should be done as quickly as possible and the animal should be immediately returned to the wild so that they can readapt and avoid these consequences.

Moreover, these institutions distort information and are successful because most people do not know what signs to look for to see that these animals are actually facing abuse. Visser explains, “It’s even worse than a prison, because the prisoners have done something wrong. These [animals] have done nothing wrong, except for look beautiful.” When the proper research is done, one realizes that the actual motivations of these institutions are not for educational or rescue purposes, but rather financial gain. If they truly cared about the animals, they would not have captured them from the wild in the first place. These animals are not objects or entertain-

ers, and they were not created for the purpose of making these corporations wealthier. They are living creatures with souls, and they deserve to be treated with respect. If we, as the customers, keep funding the institutions who falsely claim to care about these animals, they will keep breeding and capturing them because of the monetary benefits.

If one truly wanted to learn about the beauty of these animals, one would actually go and see them in their natural habitats, where the animals belong, and where one can fully observe their grace and greatness within the beauty of the world they live in. One would not buy a ticket to an aquarium or zoo that distorts facts, abuses animals, and exposes them to horrendous and unnatural conditions. It is not the place to truly observe and learn about the complexity and magnificence of such animals and their ecosystems.

We owe it to the animals in captivity to employ means such as protest and boycotts to stop these abusive practices. To learn more about the conditions that these animals are facing, I encourage you to read *Beneath the Surface: Killer Whales, SeaWorld and the Truth behind “Blackfish”* by John Hargrove and *Death at SeaWorld: Shamu and the Darkside of Killer Whales in Captivity* by David Kirby, as well as watch the documentaries *Blackfish* and *Inside the Tanks*.

## BEING SEPHARDIC IN AN ASHKENAZI WORLD

BY ILANA AHDOUT, STAFF WRITER

When the average person thinks “Jewish,” they think matzah ball soup. Gefilte fish. Kugel. Yiddish words like *schlep*, *schmutz*, *chutzpah*. Last names that are some variation of KleinSchwartz-enBergerManSteinowitz.

These words have almost become synonymous with the word “Jew”; stereotypes for what a Jew eats, how a Jew speaks, what a Jew is. They also share one very important commonality: they’re unique to *Ashkenazim* (Jews of Central or Eastern European descent). Because when the average person thinks “Jewish,” they think Ashkenazi.

It makes sense. According to a 2020 survey, 2/3 of U.S. Jews identify as Ashkenazi. Only 3% describe themselves as Sephardic

(of Spanish or Portuguese descent) and 1% as *Mizrahi* (of Middle Eastern or North African descent). In the face of these statistics, it’s no wonder that the identity of the American Ashkenazi Jew has subsumed that of the entire race.

In America, the Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews tend to keep to themselves. They hunker down in Great Neck, Deal, Miami, where they stick to their insular communities and schools. They feel an outpour of love and support from the people surrounding them; the people like themselves.

But for those outside these communities; those who have no other options but to attend the predominantly Ashkenazi schools of their respective predominantly Ashkenazi communities, the experience is different.

They are surrounded by people who are unlike themselves, are forced to sit in halacha classes that do not apply to them, Jewish history classes that omit their legacies, minyanim that don’t follow their *nusach* (text of prayer service). Even in schools where Sephardic *minyanim* (services) and *halacha* (Jewish law) courses are available, they’re often only as an afterthought.

In such a setting, Sephardic Jews are effectively “othered.” They are made to feel as though they do not belong.

As a result, these students’ relationships with their Sephardic identities often become negative. For Rina Shamilov, a Kavkazi student at Stern College for Women, that is exactly what happened.

Shamilov, who grew up in Brooklyn, began noticing how differ-

ently Sephardic students were treated when she began Central High School. “We were never put on any posters or promotional material,” she told me.

“It made me feel like the administration did not care about their Sephardic students. It also made me shirk further away from my Sephardic identity. How could I be proud of an identity that wasn’t celebrated?”

She added, “I just wanted to feel like the administration was as proud of me as they were of my Ashkenazi counterparts.”

Shamilov is not alone in her sentiment. Plenty of Sephardic Jews in similar situations feel the same way. Their experiences being marginal-

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ized turn them away from their Sephardic identity, resulting in either resentment or indifference, and often assimilation into Ashkenazi culture. That means the loss of generations of rich, extensive heritage and history.

But that's not the case for everyone. An anonymous Kurdish Monmouth University student

who grew up in the Ashkenazi community of West Hartford, CT, says "I am very proud to be Sephardic... I hold it so dear and close to me."

She faced her fair share of non-inclusion in West Hartford, where her father couldn't say kaddish according to his nusach, and her brother was never called up to the bema (altar or platform in the synagogue) since his classmates did not like praying when he led.

Yet, she remains "in love" with her Sephardic identity and culture. When asked why, she told me it was because of the emphasis her family, who are "extremely Sephardic in their being," placed on connecting with their heritage.

"I had my role models and was showered with love by them and from them all my years," she said. "Our food is Sephardic; our dress is Sephardic. It's who we are and who we've always been proud to be."

When asked what could be done to alleviate the feelings of marginalization, both women agreed: Make us feel welcome. Celebrate us. Show us that you are proud of us. That we are not any lesser just because we are different. Talk about our halacha, our history, our culture.

After all, aren't we all Jews?

## JEWISH EPISTEMOLOGY

BY DAVID YAGUDAYEV

Faith, both in God and Judaism, has been challenged in every century and location our people have been situated. From the time the world was dominated by paganism to today's post-modern questions, fierce debates continue to rage regarding the epistemology of Judaism. Although many believe that the belief in God ultimately stems from Divinely-inspired *Emunah* (faith) and *Bitachon* (trust), the key Jewish epistemological debate remains between Rabbi Yehuda Halevi and Maimonides, two of Judaism's great Sephardic thinkers, who delve far past blind faith, into a world of nuanced complexities and complicated philosophical principles.

The first significant difference in their respective worldviews is how they view God. According to Maimonides, God is first identified as the God of all creation, and he is not specifically associated with Judaism or the Exodus. Halevi, on the other hand, believes that God is directly associated with being the God of Abraham, and that knowing the God of Creation comes from understanding his special relationship with the Jewish people.

The Maimonidian approach is philosophically oriented at first and only comes to include the Jewish people after knowing that there is a God. In the first chapter of the Rambam's *Mishnah Torah*, Maimonides states that God is a primary being (מצוי ראשון) and that everything else's existence is contingent on

God. He continues analyzing God through a purely theoretical lens, stating that since truth is something that is not contingent on anything else, so is God, as God is truth. Employing Aristotle's argument of the unmoved mover, Maimonides believes that God is the only necessary existence and sustains the whole world since there cannot be a universe without a creator.

In *The Kuzari*, Halevi articulates that to know God requires us to understand his relationship with the Jewish people first. According to Halevi, Jews have an unbroken oral tradition that they witnessed all of God's miracles during the exodus from Egypt and, soon after, the revelation at Mount Sinai. Unlike Maimonides, Halevi does not believe that one has to delve deeply into "knowing" God, but rather that one can comprehend God's existence through the retelling of, and living through, the story of the Jewish people.

However, both approaches face difficulties. It is strange that despite claiming that he knows the Exodus occurred because of the truth of the Torah, Maimonides does not use this as his source for God's existence. Instead, Maimonides adopts the Aristotelian argument of the unmoved mover, which has no indication of a particular relationship between God and the Jewish nation. He uses this argument as the foundation for his first commandment in *Sefer Hamitzvot*. Maimonides reads Exodus 20:2, "I am the

LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery," and only includes the first half of the verse, "I am the LORD your God" as his source for God's existence. However, Maimonides neglects the second half of this verse which includes God's unique and particular relationship with the Jewish people. Maimonides seems to be deemphasizing the role of miracles in Judaism as a proof for God and instead establishes a philosophical defense for his existence. Halevi's argument also contains flaws. In today's post-Talmud and post-modern age, the Jewish oral tradition is especially weak. Stories of the past, like the revelation at Mount Sinai and the miracles of the Exodus, are unlikely to be passed down with an unbroken tradition by one's father throughout the generations as Halevi states. This is a critical flaw relating to Halevi's argument.

Both the Rambam and Rabbi Yehuda Halevi had an unwavering belief in God and Judaism. Although their approaches differed, their conclusion was nonetheless identical. One can be a rationalist, like the Rambam, who believes that the nature of God could be comprehended by philosophical understanding alone. You can assert that God is one, unchanging, and without any physical attributes. Like Maimonides, you believe that the goal of religious worship was to come as close as possible to understanding God through the use of reason and intellectual pursuits. Similar-

ly, like Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, you can emphasize the emotional and intuitive aspects of religious experience. You can believe that the true knowledge of God could only be achieved through direct experience and personal encounters with the Jewish people. You can argue that Judaism is not just a matter of intellectual assent but a lived reality that involves a personal relationship with God. Whichever approach you relate to, pursue it with great fervor and passion in order to develop a closer connection with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This is only a surface level exploration of Jewish philosophy featuring the clashing ideas of Rambam and Halevi regarding the Epistemology of Judaism. I highly recommend those who are interested and seek to develop a greater understanding of Judaism and enhance their connection with Hakadosh Baruch Hu to delve deeper into Jewish Philosophy, a field rich in meaning.



## BASI LEGANI

BY JONAH JAMES, STAFF WRITER

*Yud Shvat* (the 10th of Shvat) marks the passing of the Previous Chabad Rebbe and the beginning of the Rebbe's leadership. On this auspicious day, the Rebbe would expound one section of the Previous Rebbe's 20 Chapter discourse known as *Basi Legani*. *Basi Legani* defines the overarching purpose

of creation and these teachings lie at the core of Chassidus for this generation. The Rebbe plumbed the depths of this verse from *Shir Hashirim* for 40 years, explaining how Gd inhabits earth through us claiming stewardship of His garden.

While *Basi Legani* literally translates to "I have come into my garden," the *Midrash* translates it as "I have come into my bridal cham-

ber." This bridal chamber, the Rebbe explains, refers to *Gan Eden* before the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, when the Essence of the *Shechinah* was originally revealed. It is specifically the *Shechinah* that inhabits this physical world, as *Shechinah* comes from the word "in-dwelling." Hence, Gd later instructed the Jews to build a sanctuary so He would inhabit (*Shochanti*) them, each person's body.

After the Sin of the Tree of Knowledge, the *Shechinah* departed from earth to heaven, and the sins of the next six generations caused the *Shechinah* to withdraw to the seventh level of heaven. It was only Avraham who began to draw down the *Shechinah*, starting by bringing it from the seventh heav-

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# AI WILL NOT REPLACE YOU

BY ELIYAHU SOLOMON,  
STAFF WRITER

I am almost certain that 99% of those reading this are familiar with Artificial Intelligence (AI), specifically ChatGPT. Whether it is used in the classroom, office, or for recreational use, AI promises to be the next frontier of productivity and innovation. It writes essays in seconds on the most convoluted topics and can even make broad connections within two almost completely unrelated themes. This is just the beginning of what AI can do

Of course, a lot of my recent conversations have been centered around AI, and one common theme has emerged: AI will replace our jobs, no matter what we do. Such a topic came up during chavrusa time in shiur (after we had finished all our learning, of course). The goal of our conversation was to find potential jobs that would not be stripped away due to AI, and some positions that came to mind were that of teacher/Rabbi, social workers such as therapists and psychologists, and a salesman in a marketplace like the Mahne Yehuda Shuk. While I am sure we could have thought of more if we were not engrossed in our learning, there seems to be a common thread between all these jobs: they are all interpersonal and require human contact.

This got me thinking. Are all other jobs aside from these really devoid of human interaction and intelligence? Can all our professions be taken over by a bot? While I am willing to believe that many manual labor jobs can be eventually replaced by “burger-flipping robots,” I am far more hesitant to abide by the claim that many other jobs can be replaced by AI.

The real question posed by AI is,

what is so unique about human intelligence that a computer or robot cannot replace it? If the answer is “not much”, then we may see ourselves in some serious trouble. Of course, human intelligence is hard to quantify, it involves the most complex machine known to the universe— the human brain, and even after centuries of study, it largely remains a mystery. An individual’s brain, from the time of birth, is always forming and changing, responding to outside stimuli and adapting to certain circumstances.

The goal of AI is to replicate human intelligence in order to automate certain tasks, interact and converse with humans, as well as guide us to see or think of connections or ideas we may not have put together. In chapter one of *The Book of Why: The New Science of Cause and Effect* by computer scientist Judea Pearl and writer Dana Mackenzie, the argument is made that AI has failed to live up to these lofty expectations:

What we have gotten from deep learning instead is machines with abilities—truly impressive abilities—but no intelligence. The difference is profound and lies in the absence of a model of reality. Just as they did 30 years ago, machine-learning programs (including those with deep neural networks) operate almost entirely in an associational mode. They are driven by a stream of observations in which they attempt to fit a function, in much the same way that a statistician tries to fit a line to a collection of points. Deep neural networks have added many more layers to the complexity of the fitted function but still, what drives the fitting process is raw data. They continue to improve in accuracy as more data are fitted, but they do not benefit from the “super-evolutionary speedup” that we encountered above. They end up with a brittle, special-purpose system that is inscrutable even to its programmers.

Simply put, AI is good at receiving what it already has, far better than humans in most cases. AI bots in games such as chess have far outpaced the best human players on Earth and even solved complex jigsaw puzzles. Whatever the point is, AI seems to be doing pretty well when it is given all information, although there are instances where AI has put out wrong or misleading information. Even if AI would be perfect, can we really pass the torch off to AI? Humans, as previously stated, are creatures that evolve. We innovate, learn, and interact with one another in ways that AI cannot. So while AI can write music, draft essays, and generate art, it is only within the given parameters of human invention. AI cannot create a new art form, cannot break the boundaries of conventional writing, and certainly cannot have the same interactions that humans have.

In the business sphere, will AI be a replacement for those who interact with the public on a daily basis? Realistically, it could replace a basic customer service rep, but for an expertise such as marketing and advertising, which is an area heavily connected to human psychology, can we trust AI? After all, the amount of ads that have received heavy backlash proves that we humans have not fully mastered this area yet. Are we ready to hand it off to AI?

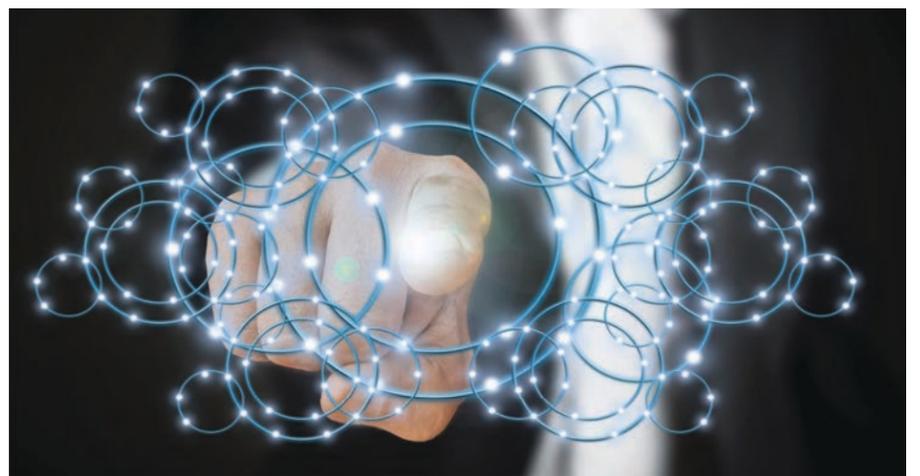
ChatGPT, is good... for an AI. The number of times I have asked

AI to write me a creative writing piece or a cover letter only to be utterly disappointed by its generic output has been too many to count. Supporters of ChatGPT would tell me that I am not implementing the right commands or that I should fine-tune it more, but none of this has worked. AI works well within its conventions, but to break those, to truly write a groundbreaking novel or write the script of an Oscar-winning movie, is just not within the bounds of AI.

This is not to suggest that AI is useless and will pass as a fad. I truly believe that AI will be implemented in many jobs and professions. This piece by Ian Bogost puts it best:

“OpenAI assumes that its work is fated to evolve into an artificial general intelligence—a machine that can do anything. Instead, we should adopt a less ambitious but more likely goal for ChatGPT and its successors: They offer an interface into the textual infinity of digitized life, an otherwise impenetrable space that few humans can use effectively in the present.”

AI can dig up information and make unknown topics to us relatively accessible. Yet the ingenuity of humans and our analytical prowess, the ability to take a concept and broaden our knowledge of it, or to take numbers and not just understand them but to apply them to a broader context, is something that only true intelligence can do.



# IN DEFENSE OF PIGEONS

BY GILA KALMAN

We’ve all heard the names. Rats with wings. Gutter birds. Feathered rats. Of course, the bird I’m talking about is New York City’s widely disdained pigeon. Despite how intelligent these birds have proven to be, New York City residents and those from surrounding areas have learned to not just ignore, but hate them. One native New Jerseyan offered her commentary on the New York Pigeon.

“Pigeons are gross and annoying,” she told me, “They are everywhere and do not care if they are in your way.” These feelings are not unjustified— she shudders as she tells me about her negative experiences with pigeons. “Pigeons and birds in general have attacked me. I don’t know why this is my luck but it contributes to the negative feelings I have about them.” It seems that she speaks for the city. Most would agree Pigeons get in the way, carry disease, and generally

don’t contribute much - or do they?

Pigeons have a long history in New York City. They were brought over to America from Europe during the 1600s and have heavily populated the area ever since. Both in the early days of their time in the U.S., and long before, pigeons had been an important source of food, entertainment and communication. They spent thousands of years occupying both menus and homes. Eventually, NYC residents

stopped raising pigeons for food and stopped needing them for company and communication. Those that escaped from captivity formed flocks and took up residence on New York City’s rooftops, sidewalks, and alleyways. Today, there are roughly four million pigeons in New York City alone, nearly half of the city’s human population.

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## BASI LEGANI

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en to the sixth. He was followed by Yitzchak, and then Yaakov, until finally Moshe brought it down back to earth at Mount Sinai, seven generations later, as “All who are seventh are beloved.” G-d returned to His garden, the bridal chamber.

In his discourse from 5712, the Rebbe explains how *korbanos* (sacrifices) represent Hashem’s plan for creation in this seventh and final generation before Moshiach.

Although *korbanos* have not been offered for millenia, we can still sacrifice our animalistic desires to Hashem today. However, before sacrificing our inner animal, it must first be checked for any blemishes. After we deem it a healthy animal, though, it must still be slaughtered. This represents using physicality solely for Gd without deriving any selfish pleasure, which allows our spiritual faculties to draw closer (*karov/korban*) to Gd. As such, our animal ascends above, just like how animals in the Holy Temple would ascend before (and higher than) *Havaya* (YKVK). From our fire that seeks transcendence, Hashem provides a fire from Himself in return.

These two fires correspond to the two fires described in *Sefer Yetzirah*. There is a flame that burns on the outside of a coal, and there is a flame that burns inside a coal, which we only see after blowing on it. Halachically, we find a parallel to this. On Shabbos, one is exempt (*patur*) from carrying an isolated flame outside a private domain, because a disconnected flame has no substantive existence. But it is forbidden (*assur*) to carry both a burning coal and its fire inside, because the fire has a foundational source it is attached to (Beitzah 39a).

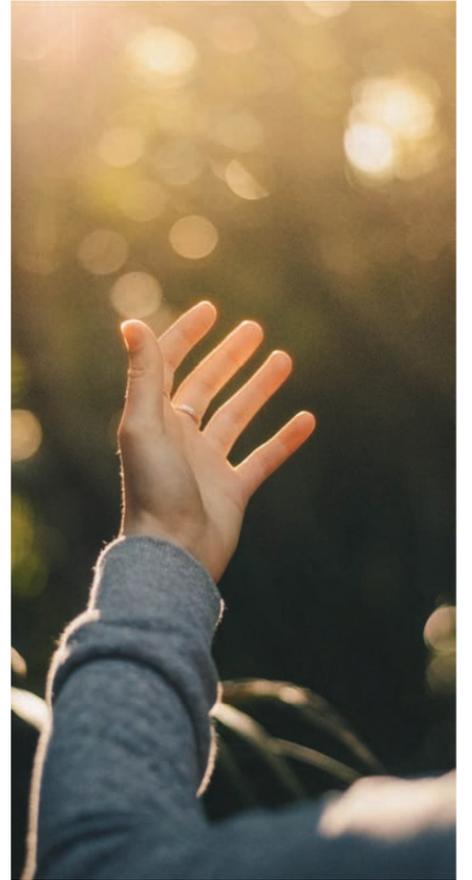
In other words, when we serve Gd with our own independent, spiritual passion, it is incomplete, like a fire disconnected from its source. We also need Gd’s perfect fire; through uniting our fire with His, our fire is rendered complete (based on the idea that He and His Life Forces are One, and He and His Causations are One; *Tikkunei Zohar*, Introduction 3b).

This ability to take our passions and sacrifice them to Hashem, the Rebbe explains, uniquely applies to *korbanos*. While other *mitzvos* may involve animals, like *tefillin*,

or *tzitzis*, donning *tefillin* affects no visible change in the *tefillin* itself. Though the body puts on the *tefillin*, the body functions only as an intermediary to access the soul. Being a spiritual entity, it makes sense that the soul should serve Hashem, but it is supra-logical that the body should be able to serve Hashem. It is only by sacrificing one’s inner animal, by bringing a *korban* from one’s self, that the body also connects to Hashem.

However, there’s a catch. Because the body comes from a loftier source than the soul (*Tanya, Iggeres Hakodesh* Epistle 20), and the *neshama* knows this, this service remains within the limits of logic. If we recognize through reason that there exists a concept above reason, then we stay connected to reason. The Rebbe asserts, then, that a truly supranational divine service is accomplished via a child-like relationship; specifically, when a child understands the reason behind his father’s commands, but still fulfills the command purely to actualize the father’s will.

Through our effort, combined with Moshe Rabbeinu who binds us with our Source, we bring a perfect *kor-*



*ban* before Hashem. We do not just transform our inner animal, but we reveal the holiness in the body itself, and thus Gd inhabits us. Rather than ascend to heaven, or even bring heaven down to earth, we reveal how the earth is in fact heaven.

## PIGEONS

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With so many pigeons and humans living so closely to each other, there are bound to be those who appreciate the bird. I spoke with fellow pigeon lover, Shaina Matveev (SCW, ‘24) who, just like me, likes to occasionally feed the local pigeons, labeling pigeons as one of New York City’s “most iconic wildlife species.” She inherited this love from her grandfather who, along with many others in the 1940s and 50s, housed pigeons on his roof in the Lower East Side. Even as a child, Shaina interacted closely with the bird, going as far as to nurse one back to health after it had injured its wing. Now, she occasionally feeds the pigeons when she has the time. She looks whimsical as she tells me, “I have always enjoyed feeding wildlife. It’s an activity that connects me to nature like no other and I especially enjoy feeding the pigeons and admiring their unique feather patterns and interesting ways they interact as I feed them.” I ask her why she thinks so many people dislike the bird. She sighs, “Pigeons are often disliked for the way they block pedestrian walkways... and for their traits as a disease-carrying vector.” She’s not wrong—pigeons are known for carrying various transmittable diseases. However, it should be noted that these diseases are rare and, when they do crop up, only affect a

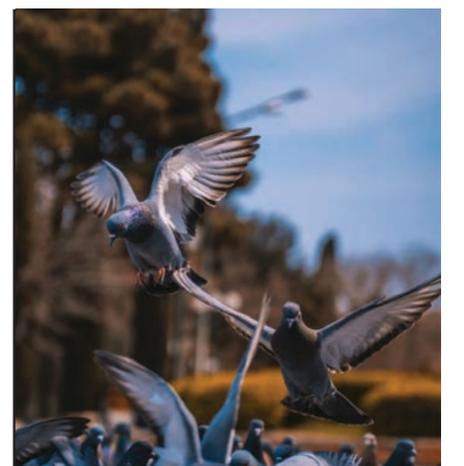
small portion of the population. So while it’s important to be cautious, it is unlikely that you will develop a disease by interacting with pigeons.

Very often it seems the only facts people seem to know about pigeons relate to which diseases they carry and how to avoid contracting them. This is unfortunate given how wonderful pigeons really are. While definitely not the smartest birds in the world, pigeons can still hold their own. Their most impressive trait is probably their location abilities; pigeons can find their way home from 1300 miles away! Apparently, they “can do this even if they’ve been transported in isolation—with no visual, olfactory, or magnetic clues—while scientists rotate their cages so they don’t know what direction they’re traveling in.” Due to this amazing ability, pigeons have been used as means of communication as far back as Ancient Greece. Genghis Khan used pigeons to communicate with both his allies and enemies. Pigeons were also used to deliver messages during both world wars. Cher Ami, a racing pigeon, aided in the rescue of 194 U.S. soldiers in 1918. This wasn’t the last time America used pigeons—during WWII we used approximately 200,000 of them! Pigeons have proven instrumental in the saving of human lives—because of their great sense of direction,

eyesight, and their amazing ability to detect ultraviolet light, they are trained to locate people lost at sea.

Aside from direction, pigeons also have incredible recognition abilities. In 1995, Japanese psychologist Shigeru Watanabe and his colleagues earned a Nobel Peace Prize for training pigeons to recognize and distinguish between the paintings of Monet and Picasso. It doesn’t stop there. Studies have shown that pigeons can differentiate between pictures of themselves versus other pigeons and between pictures of different humans. Lastly, and probably most fascinating, pigeons can identify cancer. University of California Davis trained pigeons to differentiate between benign and malignant biopsies of potential breast cancers. Once trained, these pigeons were able to identify new biopsies. On average a single pigeon had an 85% accuracy rate, and together their accuracy rose to 99%.

Clearly, pigeons are incredibly intelligent creatures and have played enormous roles in the lives of us humans. However—despite all of this—it is not, in fact, why I love them so fiercely. Those of us who hold the bird so dearly in our hearts do not just see how useful they have been to humans, we see how they are so intrinsically beautiful regardless of that fact. We see the way they flock



together as one harmonized unit for food and shelter. We see the way their iridescent colors glisten so magnificently in the sun. We see the way their feathers swell into soft billows around their bodies when the air turns to ice. Though most of all, we, ever the champions of the underdog, see the way such a magnificent bird fell so quickly from a place of adoration to the cold sewers of disdain. So we show appreciation where we can, even if it just means throwing some seed their way. If after reading this you still aren’t convinced, I urge you, the next time you pass a pigeon on the street, stop to look at it. *Really* look at it. They have far more to offer than any of us know.

# FACULTY PROFILE: ESTHER BEN-ARI

## FEATURES

BY RAQUEL LEIFER,  
FEATURES EDITOR

*Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight a YU faculty member. For the February 2023 edition, the YU Observer is highlighting Professor Esther Ben-Ari.*

**RL: Please introduce yourself.**

EBA: Hello. My name is Esther Ben-Ari. I moved from Eastern Europe to the United States as a teen. I received my bachelor's degree in mathematics from CUNY, and my master's degree from YU, completing my thesis under the guidance of Dr. Otway. I live in New Jersey with my husband and three children. I have been teaching mathematics for the past nine years in learning institutions in New York and New Jersey.

**RL: How long have you worked at YU?**

EBA: 6 years

**RL: What do you like most about working at YU?**

EBA: Since my graduate degree is from YU, I feel very close to the YU community—sometimes it feels more like an extended family, which is great! I consider it a very important center for the American Jewish community, and I am glad to play my part in it.

**RL: What made you passionate about your field?**

EBA: Since my childhood I have always enjoyed mathematics and its logical elegance. It was, and still remains a fair, honest, and competent attempt at truth. I, therefore, have a great respect for the subject.

**RL: Is there anything interesting you are currently working on?**

EBA: Currently, I'm trying to learn about  $C^*$  algebras. This concerns a mathematical representation for some aspects of quantum theory.

**RL: Do you have any advice for students interested in a career in your field?**

EBA: Mathematics requires a lot of personal input. It has many fields where a person may find what is suitable according to their character, such as the variety of areas of applied and theoretical mathematics.

**RL: What makes your field special?**

EBA: Mathematics helps develop careful, rational thinking and independent breadth of thought. It also has a subtle, yet strong, commitment to the objective search for truth. It is important that some subjects remain committed to teaching these skills in our generation.

**RL: If you could bring in any guest lecturer, alive or deceased, who would it be, and what would they speak about?**

EBA: I find Sir Isaac Newton to be a really fascinating personality. In some sense, he was able to

encompass in his discoveries, various aspects of science and philosophy. For example, as a Noahide, he analyzed the dimensions of the Tabernacle and brought forth foundations of Calculus.

**RL: What is one thing you want students to know about you?**

EBA: I want my students to know that I aim to show them the beauty of mathematics, the beauty of logic, and the beauty of truth. I hope that they find a way to apply these concepts in their future endeavors.

**RL: Is there a particular book you would recommend that everyone read?**

EBA: From Jewish literature, I would recommend Rabbi Shimon Refoel Hirsch's "19 Letters" with the original translation into English. For general knowledge, I would recommend the Thornton Wilder play, "Our Town."

# CLUB PROFILE: GENETICS CLUB

BY RAQUEL LEIFER,  
FEATURES EDITOR

*Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight one club available to the YU undergraduate community. For the February 2023 edition, the YU Observer is highlighting the Genetics Club.*

**Club Name:** Genetics Club

**Heads:** Gavriella Jutan and Emily Shamah

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

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

The Genetics Club at Stern's goal is to educate and expose students to genetic related topics including: Jewish genetic diseases, screen-

ing for genetic diseases, and non-profit organizations dedicated to specific genetic diseases.

**Why is this club important?:**

This club is important because as Jewish men and women, we must be as educated as much possible in the field of genetics. Unfortunately, there are many genetic diseases that are prevalent in Jewish communities. The more we learn about them, the more we can avoid them and learn how to deal with them. It is also important to stay informed about the genetic advancements taking place in our society to also help us approach genetic diseases.

**What inspired you to get involved in/start the club?**

We feel it is critical to educate

ourselves and others as much as possible about the field of genetics because our genes are what makes us, us. There is so much to learn as the smallest microscopic event can affect our lives on a massive scale. The field is constantly changing with new and critical discoveries and observations and it is important to educate those around us as these revelations have real-world implications.

**What are some things your club has done in the past?:**

In past years we have had a JScreen screening. Last year we screened 270 YU students!

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

Right now we are performing a

toy drive, collecting toys for children's hospitals with the Women In Health Club. The JScreen events are coming up in February and March at both Beren and Wilf campuses, where we will be offering subsidized testing for all YU students. We are also hoping to bring in genetic counselors and other people in the genetics field to speak to the students about the importance of learning about our genetics.

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

Join our group chat! Reach out to one of us! We would love to hear from you. Sign up to get tested when JScreen comes to campus this semester!

TRIBUTE TO RAV  
KAHN  
FROM PAGE 1

my skills faster and further than I would have had he let me slack off.

I recall one particular day in shiur, where he asked me to explain a Rashba, one of the great medieval commentaries on the Talmud. I rambled on incorrectly for several minutes while Rav Kahn watched me, asking follow up questions un-

til I finally said that I simply had no idea what the correct answer was. At that point, much to my surprise, Rav Kahn smiled and said "That's right!" and called on someone else (one of the ringers) to take over. I left shiur very confused about the interaction; I didn't understand why he hadn't cut me off the moment I started to say the incorrect answer. Eventually I realized that he was intentionally teaching me something in that moment: he was instilling within me the ability to realize that I was wrong, and not to pretend

to know more than I actually did.

Rav Kahn taught at Stern every single day for nearly forty years. He taught with an unparalleled gentleness and patience. He taught with unwavering commitment and rigor. Most of all, he taught with the utmost humility. Rav Kahn did not have an agenda; he did not intend to revolutionize generations of women. And yet, this is exactly what he did.

Nearly every woman who learns

Gemara today was a student of his, and if they weren't, they learned from a student of his. Thousands of women around the world are mourning the loss of Rav Kahn from this world. In mourning Rav Kahn's passing, I am sad that I lost my Rebbe, sad for the world of Torah, and sad that my younger sister will never be able to learn from him. I have high hopes for what his students will continue to do for the world of Torah, and I personally feel a charge to continue to live on his legacy.

# MARXISM AND MOUNTAIN MUSIC: A GLIMPSE INTO THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF 1930S YESHIVA COLLEGE

BY YITZHAK GRAFF

The political discourse of the undergraduate students at Yeshiva University has shifted over time as new issues arise and older issues fade away. In this article, I attempt to look at the earliest records of political discourse and try to use the fragmented material to construct a picture of the issues that Yeshiva College students were worried about, and the solutions they offered. The almost 90 year distance makes it difficult for us to connect to the issues that motivated the students to speak out. Nevertheless, delving into the human aspect of political discourse for so long ago can be very meaningful.

It would be easy to date the start of political discourse at Yeshiva College with the creation of the Commentator in March 1935, since the paper forum encouraged extensive written discourse. However, political discourse existed in formal settings on campus prior to this. The debate society's first recorded debate was in December 1930 against City College, though they likely existed for a few months before this. Later, in December 1933, some students formed the International Relations Club, which brought in speakers to talk about global political issues. They focused on giving a balanced perspective, and invited speakers spanning the entire political spectrum, from a supporter of Mussolini to a hardline socialist.

The creation of the Commentator was a significant development in the political discourse of Yeshiva College. Not only was its existence as a forum for political discussion significant, but the very process of its creation was also a political statement. The founding editor of the Commentator, Moses Feuerstein, deliberately worked to create a student newspaper that operated independently of the school's administration. Feuerstein had contacts at the Spectator, Columbia's student newspaper, who would help him to organize a student strike and pressure the Yeshiva College administration (should they take any action to silence the student press). Previously in 1932, the Spectator had fought and won the struggle for free speech against the Colum-

bia University administration.

The Columbia free-speech movement was associated with a broader increase of student activism during this era. Specifically, the National Student League, a communist aligned group and the Student League for Industrial Democracy, a socialist group. These two groups, the NSL and SLID, merged into the American Student Union in 1935. The National Student League was active in organizing the Columbia free-speech strikes.

Although Feuerstein felt that he would have to take extreme action against the administration, he was active in moderating his positions so as not to upset the administration. Nevertheless, some of the Commentator staff's socialist interests peaked through some of the early issues. In the April 8th issue of 1935, Feuerstein published an editorial in which he expressed sympathy with the national student peace strike of 1935, which was organized by the NSL and the SLID. He doesn't explicitly say it, but the Yeshiva College students were likely on Pesach vacation at the time, which prevented him from organizing some kind of demonstration of solidarity.

Feuerstein was not deterred from participating in the national peace movement. He successfully organized a peace rally on November 13th, 1935. Working together with the YCSC president, Morris Dembowitz, they were able to get the administration and the student governments of all the colleges together to hold the peace rally on a Monday afternoon. The students saw their peace activism as a way to protect themselves from getting drafted into a purposeless war, and viewed war as means for the wealthy to enrich themselves off of government contracts for war machines. Moses Feuerstein decried the presence of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and adamantly denied any glory in war. David Petegorsky, representing the SOY, called out the wealth concentrating effects of war, stating, "we should declare war as making the world safe for plutocracy."

While peace activism was developing in 1935, several students

worked on organizing a chapter of Hapoel Hamizrachi. The founding chairman was Bernard Lander, though Moses Feuerstein and other Commentator staff were heavily involved in the club. Hapoel Hamizrachi was a socialist religious Zionist political party. On February 27th, 1936, Hapoel Hamizrachi brought in Shlomo Zalman Shragai to talk about his work in developing Torah V'Avodah (Torah and Labor) in mandatory Palestine. In response to this lecture, the Commentator published an editorial titled "Sinai and Capitalism" in support of Shragai's ideology.

Adding to the growing political activism scene at Yeshiva College, Moses Feuerstein formed the Yeshiva College chapter of the American Student Union in May 1936, right before he graduated. During his short time in charge, Feuerstein advocated for an end to military activity and the abolishment of the ROTC, as well as the need for racial equality and an end to Jim Crow policy. Feuerstein's chapter of the ASU did not continue after Feuerstein graduated.

The 1936 presidential election alerted the Yeshiva College students to the possibility of fascism arising in America. Popular pundits like the antisemitic radio host Charles Coughlin became worrisome for the Yeshiva men. Coughlin's backing of the Republican candidate, Alf Landon, specifically seemed like a real threat to the security of the Jewish community in the United States. They responded to these stresses with satire. Columnist Eleazar Goldman wrote a satirical piece about the figure heads of the conservative movement of the 1936 election in the October 28th issue of the Commentator. Charles Coughlin; the antisemitic radio host, Alf Landon; the Republican presidential candidate, and William R. Heart; the owner of a politically conservative media empire, were all ridiculed for their political messaging. Goldman emphasized Coughlin's conspiracy theories, Landon's hypocritical criticism of every action of the Roosevelt administration, and Heart's willingness to report on any rumor as if it were fact. The editorials of the October 28th issue and the November 4th issue balanced an optimistic satirical perspective of the election with an appreciation of the stakes at hand. The editorials confidently predicted the loss of the Republican party while recognizing the threat

the party posed to the Roosevelt administration's social programs.

As 1937 progressed, the Commentator began to become more conscious of the threat that fascism posed to the global Jewish community. The Commentator published a news article in February 1937, about the discrimination that Polish Jewish students were facing at the University of Warsaw. The administration and faculty were turning a blind eye to violence and intimidation that Polish nationalist student organizations were inflicting upon their Jewish peers. By this time, Hitler's antisemitic policies were well known to the student body, so an article like this was likely published to spread awareness about the growing level of global antisemitism. In April 1937 Yeshiva College organized another peace rally, but it had a significantly different tone from the first peace rally in 1935. This rally was less interested in the domestic implications of militarization, and more interested in looking for ways to quell the growing tensions in Europe, which could involve some amounts of military intervention. This perspective was much less hardline anti-war than two years earlier.

The more established leftist American Student Union, also began to shift away from anti-war peace activism as Nazi Germany became more aggressively expansionist. This shift made membership to the ASU more palatable for Yeshiva College students, who were looking for ways to combat the spread of fascism. An anonymous letter to the editor, advocating for a chapter of the ASU to be formed at Yeshiva, was printed in the January 5th, 1938 issue of the Commentator. The anonymous author stated that the ASU was, "vigorously opposed to fascistic tendencies and racial discriminations in America." He continued noting, "these issues are certainly worthy of the lively interest of Yeshiva students."

The anonymous supporter of the ASU was not without opposition. Irving Dlugacz, a member of the debate team, replied in the next issue with full force. Dlugacz was

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## MARXISM AND MOUNTAIN MUSIC

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a staunch follower of Leon Trotsky, which, in short, meant that he opposed Stalin's seizure of power in the Soviet Union and failure to institute democracy. Trotsky argued for an idea of continuous proletarian revolution and strongly opposed any actions that maintained the power of the ruling class. Accordingly, Dlugacz accused the ASU of being Stalinists who supported the imperialist democratic countries engaging in war for the purpose of enriching their ruling classes. Dlugacz's alternative to directly fighting against aggressively expansionist fascist countries, was to encourage the proletariats of those countries to engage in an internationalist socialist revolution which would quell their desire for war. Though the leftist in-fighting certainly did not help efforts to reestablish a Yeshiva College chapter of the ASU, broader concerns about socialism's ability to combat antisemitism were more likely to blame.

In the same issue as Irving Dlugacz's fiery refutation of the anon-

ymous student's proposal to join the ASU, Commentator columnist Gershon Appel wrote about the response of national student organizations in the United States to the spread of fascism and rising antisemitism. Appel argued the socialist ASU and the more liberal National Student Federation of America were completely ignoring the deteriorating situation of Jewish students in Poland. Public universities in Poland were effectively encouraging the segregation of Jewish students by preventing them from sitting on the benches in their classrooms. Appel's brand of skepticism of non-Jewish organizations' ability to defend the Jewish community likely increased with the event of Kristallnacht.

Following the news of the horrors of the Kristallnacht pogroms, the Agudath HaRabbonim (Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada) proclaimed Monday, November 28th, 1938, as a day of fasting and prayer for the Jewish community of America. At Yeshiva College, the day ended in a two hour ceremony held in the Lamport Auditorium that included prayers and speeches from prom-

inent leaders in the Orthodox Jewish community. Rabbi Dr. Bernard Revel was reported to have broken out in tears several times during his emotionally charged speech, as he described the horrific events of Germany's recent pogrom. Though the news of Kristallnacht was likely jarring to many, it probably didn't cause many Yeshiva College students to change their perspectives of the issues at hand. In January 1939, the Commentator published an editorial praising the ASU for its growth and continued opposition to the spread of fascism.

The students who were more skeptical of the socialism's ability to defend the Jews eventually prevailed in campus discourse as the United States became more involved in the war. Jacob Goldman's October 1939 column, following the Nazi-Soviet partition of Poland, was reflective of this trend. Goldman argued that the Polish Jews would fare worse under Soviet rule, since they outlawed most forms of organized

religion. Little did he know that the Nazi regime would do so much more than pogroms and ghettos.

In some ways the world of the Yeshiva College men of the 1930s parallels our own. The financial crisis and the rise of right-wing bigoted populism feels all too familiar. We may be tempted to excuse their strong opposition to candidates like Alf Landon, since if he were president during World War II, the United States may have had a less forceful opposition to Nazi Germany. The Yeshiva College men were just as blind as to what would happen farther down the line as we are today. Opposition to Landon was not done out of some foresight about how he would fight World War II, rather the students of Yeshiva College recognized that he associated himself with antisemites and conspiracy theorists, and chose to avoid him with the information that was available to them at that time.

*See the bibliography for my sources and further reading on the subject. <https://lazymasmid.blogspot.com/2023/02/marxism-and-mountain-music-bibliography.html>*

## GET OUT OF TOWN!

BY NANCY ALEXANDER

I am from Richmond, VA, a classic "out of town" community. We have to stick together, pool resources, and collaborate in order to keep our little world of Jewish life afloat. Coming to Yeshiva University has been an incredible and eye opening experience. Who knew there could be so many Jews in one place that you need tens of high schools to accommodate them all? Apparently you have to **get into** highschool? I've certainly been enjoying this broader and richer community, as well as all the resources and opportunities that it has to offer, but I can't pretend I don't miss my little oasis of Southern Jewry at home.

Soon after my arrival at Stern, I discovered the MafTEACH Fellowship. It is the brain-child of Rabbi Yehuda Chanales, and runs under the auspices of the new YU Chinuch Incubator. MafTEACH is an opportunity for students considering or, as Rabbi Chanales put it, "those considering considering," Jewish education to learn more about the field. Groups are paired with different communities across America (Atlanta, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Seattle, and more) and spend long weekends there throughout the year. Students spend time in the schools on Friday meeting with teachers,

students, administrators, and even do a little bit of teaching. Shabbat is spent in the community and students are provided opportunities to inspire with *shiurim* (classes) and programming throughout.

I was excited about the prospect of exploring a new and different Jewish community and have enjoyed spending *Shabbatot* in Atlanta, GA. This has offered me a much needed escape from the unfamiliar landscape of New York.

Our first debrief session was a few weeks ago. After having such a positive experience, I was excited to hear from my peers and find out about the communities they had visited. The participants of this program are fairly representative of the broader YU student body in that the majority of them are from the New York/New Jersey area. Of course I know that there is a difference between "in-town" and "out of town," but I had always experienced that dichotomy from the "out-of-town" perspective. It was fascinating to hear my peers who had never been exposed to out-of-town communities reflect on their experiences.

There was a general consensus that the teacher/student relationships in these communities are



qualitatively different from those in "in-town" schools. Ora Hochberg, who visits Fuchs Mizrachi in Cleveland, explained, "I grew up in Teaneck, so I am used to the experience of a large Jewish community. In Cleveland, it is a totally different ballgame. The students see their teachers at *Shul*, at the ice cream store, and on a Shabbos afternoon. In this type of community, the teachers become so much more than just the adults who teach them Torah within the walls of a classroom. The teachers become role models and mentors for living a Torah life." She is absolutely right. I can't believe I needed a girl from New Jersey to explain to me what

makes my community so special.

When Ora told me her impression of Cleveland I was a bit confused. "Isn't that what every school is like?" I asked. And her answer was a resounding "No." In communities which lack the resources which are commonplace "in-town", community members are forced to inhabit many different roles. Consequently, they get to see one another in various different settings, as Ora described. Perhaps in a larger community your understanding of your

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fellow Jew is more fragmented. This is the *hatazala* guy, this is the *mashgiach*. People become limited to the roles which you see them fill, but they rarely become more than that. In an “out-of-town” community, we are privileged to experience one another within the broader context of our lives, as opposed to in isolated roles.

To see a person of the sum of their composite parts and to understand all of the different components and layers of their identity makes for a richer and deeper understanding of that person. I want to encourage all of you to get out of town. Literally, come for shabbos! But also metaphorically. It doesn't require a trip to Cleveland or Atlanta to view people as more than the minute aspects which we have been exposed to, but if it is not built into the structure of your community it may require conscious effort. I challenge you to

find out more about the people you interact with, whether it's fellow students, coworkers, or someone at your *shul*. Do a little digging, challenge yourself to see beyond your limited interactions with them and engage the layered and deep person who stands in front of you.

Ultimately we must turn the “out of town” perspective back on ourselves. This is really the goal of the MafTEACH Fellowship. Rabbi Chanale told me, “Many young people assume that they can only

succeed if they are like teacher X or work in school Y.” When you see people through such a narrow lense you may come to limit yourself as well. To broaden your perspective, focus on engaging a whole person; allowing them to surprise you will allow you to do the same inwardly. You may be surprised at the person you can become when you are no longer limited by your own self-perception.

# INTERVIEW WITH YUNMUN XXXIII SECRETARY GENERAL

BY AARON SHAYKEVICH,  
MANAGING EDITOR

On February 5-7, 2023, Yeshiva University hosted its 33rd annual model UN conference (YUNMUN). The YU Observer is highlighting Eitana Schick, the Secretary General of YUNMUN XXXIII.

## Can you tell us a bit about your background and how you became involved in YUNMUN?

I'm from West Hempstead, NY, and am currently a senior at Stern studying psychology. I went to Central for high school and Harova for seminary; this year was my sixth and final YUNMUN. I got inspired to try out for my high school's delegation because of my sister, who had been on the team before me and was actually Secretary General a few years ago. I joined my sophomore year and from my first conference it became one of my favorite parts of high school!

## How do you see YUNMUN evolving and growing in the future?

YUNMUN is such a unique experience

because it brings together students from around the world. In the past, students from Canada, Israel, South Africa, Brazil, and all over the US have participated. Hopefully, as YUNMUN continues to develop, students from other schools and countries will be able to join as well!

## What advice do you have for individuals who are interested in pursuing leadership roles in YUNMUN or other similar events?

It's easy to get involved! Leadership positions might seem impossible if you're not on any teams or clubs, but it's all about taking that first step and joining.

## Can you share the funniest experience you've had as Secretary General?

Hmm that's a hard one, there are so many to choose from. Let's just say it involved water guns, a crib, and some rubber ducks. I'll leave it at that.

## Can you describe a particularly memorable moment from

## your time as Secretary General of YUNMUN?

Definitely giving my opening and closing speeches. It's still crazy to me that I spoke in front of so many people! And it's especially meaningful because I remember being a delegate in high school and listening to the Secretary General's speech, thinking that they were the coolest person ever, and now I was lucky enough to hold that position.

## What has been your proudest moment as Secretary General?

It might sound funny, but my proudest moment is probably when it ended. I, along with so many other people, put in months of hard work to make the conference the success that it was, and when I banged my gavel to symbolize the end of the conference, I was really able to take a step back and think “Wow. We did it.”

## Have you had any interesting



## interactions with delegates, members of the YUNMUN staff, or YU faculty, that you would like to share?

My favorite interaction was one I had with a former camper. She came over to me and started talking about how much she loved the conference, how incredible YUNMUN was, etc. She said that she never thought it was something she would have been able to do, but when I told her about it in camp she got inspired to try out. It really meant a lot to me that I was able to pass on my love for YUNMUN to a current high school student.

## Anything else you can share?

Everyone should get involved in YUNMUN! Best three days ever

# FUSION BREAKTHROUGH?

## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

BY ADIN BLUMOFÉ

Net energy positive fusion is currently being heralded as one of the most significant discoveries of the century. However, expectations need to be tempered—but only slightly. Typically, when atoms interact, it usually involves the outermost electrons. The outer electrons are redistributed, resulting in both atoms possessing lower internal energies. However, fusion

is different, as it concerns the nuclei of the atoms. When protons get close enough to one another, the Strong Force—a type of interaction between subatomic particles—takes over, and the protons bond, changing the element and releasing a tremendous amount of energy. Consequently, scientists have long theorized how to exploit this phenomenon to produce virtually unlimited clean energy.

Humanity has yet to enjoy the potential benefits because of one major hurdle: efficiently inducing fu-

sion. Fusion only transpires when protons get close enough that the Strong Force takes over. Yet, while a proton is approaching the nucleus, it is being repulsed with exponentially greater strength due to both particles being positively charged. As anyone who has ever tried to hold the positively charged magnetic poles of two magnets together would know, it is beyond strenuous. For protons to overcome that same force, it requires imbuing the particles with enough energy to push past repulsion. Until now, scientists have been able

to run fusion reactions without using more power than they get out of the system. The only exception to this was in the 1950s, but the means were not practical for serving as a power source. The American army set off a fission nuclear bomb to get enough energy to trigger a fusion reaction creating an even larger bomb. Needless to say, no sustainable energy plan can ever involve the

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words “step one involves setting off a nuclear bomb.” What is revolutionary nowadays is that scientists at the National Ignition Facility at California’s Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory produced a fusion reaction in a controlled manner that required less energy than was input.

However extraordinary the development is, it still only serves as little more than a proof of concept than anything else. Science still has many technical obstacles that need to be overcome before this technology can change the world. The first hurdle is improving the efficiency of fusion. A recent experiment only gave 1.5 times as much energy as was required to trigger the reaction. In absolute terms, it provided 300000 kJ, which is around enough to boil two kettles for tea.

Another problem is finding enough source material. The laboratory produces fusion by fusing

deuterium with tritium. Deuterium is found in Heavy Water; Heavy Water constitutes 1/1000 of all water, so it is a non-issue. Tritium, however, is much more complex. Currently, the main supply of the substance is distributed in the world’s nuclear weapons and only measures around 25 kg if all of it is collected. Fusion for one reactor is estimated to consume 1 kg annually. Tritium is produced via fission, meaning most viable fusion plans will require a fission reaction next to it. There will need to be city-sized power stations to produce the energy for any major metropolis. As there is not enough space inside a city, transmission on the scale of hundreds of miles will be necessary. Each of these technological obstacles must be dealt with before mass implementation.

Factoring in all the challeng-

es, we should consider unlimited fusion power as something now about fifty years away. The Biden administration recently committed millions to develop the technology as part of the green transition. According to Bloomberg, Biden’s administration said they want nuclear fusion by 2032, but that is impossible. If America goes carbon neutral in the next few decades, it will be from sources other than fusion.

Despite all the future work necessary to make fusion a viable power source, it is still worth looking towards the long term because the results will be defining moments in human civilization. Energy is the capacity to do work. The industrial revolution fundamentally was a human multiplier. We learned how to leverage the energy in coal and oil to do the labor of many multiples of people. Full-scale nuclear fusion will provide access to

near-infinite energy. Infinite energy means infinite possibilities.. Any project that is theoretically possible but not practically feasible because of energy costs can be implemented. Carbon capture can be a realistic response to climate change, instead of the trick and pony show the laws of thermodynamics currently make it. Desalinization can proliferate clean water. Metals can be smelted for practically free. There would need to be a base cost to maintain the infrastructure, but the ratio between dollars spent to kiloJoules produced would be virtually zero. If fusion were to come to pass, countries with this technology would price out all others. The secondary and tertiary effects are endless; the world will never be the same.

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# THE ONCE CLEAR WATER-INTAKE THEORY BECOMES MURKY WITH NEW RESEARCH FINDING

BY YOSEF SCHER, SCIENCE  
AND TECHNOLOGY EDITOR

It’s common knowledge that people must drink water to survive. Drinking water has numerous benefits, including stabilizing a person’s normal body temperature, lubricating joints, protecting tissues and vital organs, and expelling waste through sweating and urinating. For many people, one common concern is whether they are drinking enough water. For years, scientists have argued that a person should drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water over a day. However, a recent study published in *Science*, has proven that theory is not ideal for everyone.

By performing a large-scale study that accounted for various distinguishable variables such as age, location, climate, and body size, Yosuke Yamada and his team discovered that the amount of water an individual needs depends on many factors. Yamada, a physiologist at the National Institute of Biomedical Innovation, Health, and Nutrition in Japan, used deuterium, a stable

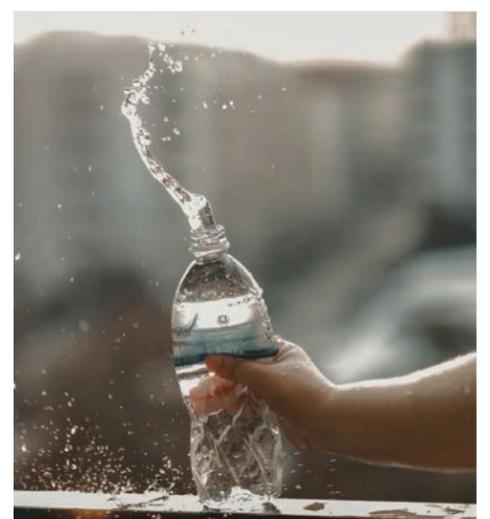
isotope of water, to track where water flowed throughout a person’s body. While they would have ideally liked to see where all of a person’s water intake was traveling to, that was not a feasible task, as more than half of a person’s water intake comes from the food they consume. Yamada and his team of researchers analyzed the results of the water turnover, the replacement of body water lost in a given period of time, from over five thousand people living in twenty-three countries, ranging from eight days to ninety-six years old. They discovered that the “turnover of water in a person’s body varies widely depending on the individual’s physical and environmental factors.” While the obvious factors, such as the outside temperature and amount of shelter a person could obtain, did not surprise the researchers, the team was intrigued to find that “men ages 20 to 30 and women ages 20 to 55 had the highest water turnover.” Even within this range, the data revealed that water turnover varied significantly depending on “humidity, altitude, latitude, and physiological factors, such as whether a person

was athletic.” Yamada and his team disproved the recommended eight 8-ounce glasses of water over a day theory by showing that some people may need more or less water, depending on the factors affecting their current situation. In their study, the “low end of water turnover averaged 1 to 1.5 liters a day and the high end averaged around 6 liters a day.” While water turnover does not determine the amount of water a person needs to drink, obtaining the proper body water turnover leads to improved body water homeostasis—a necessary network of physiological controls that maintain stable water levels in the body.

Interestingly, the researchers found that people who live in lower human development (LDI) countries, i.e., countries that do not have adequate access to resources, had a much higher water turnover. While that, unfortunately, may not seem unexpected, the researchers were surprised that this was still the case even after they “adjusted for climate, body size, sex and

other factors.” Although there has not been a definitive reason posed to answer this anomaly, Yamada believes that “frequent use of indoor climate control in ... wealthier countries” may help explain it.

With more than two billion people lacking access to safe drinking water and the number projected to grow in the future, Yamada is optimistic that his research “will help the people of the world fight against dehydration in the face of water shortages.”



# PROCRASTINATING MAY LEAD TO REAL HEALTH CONCERNS

BY ROCHEL LEAH ITZKOW-ITZ

How often do people procrastinate? Procrastinating is a persistent, serious, habit, and one must be aware of its negative consequences on human health. People who procrastinate delay critical tasks even though it can eventually hurt them. The individual gets immediate relief when they push off a chore, but it is only temporary. Procrastination becomes a serious problem once it becomes a habit. Having unmanageable emotions and time blindness can significantly worsen the phenomenon.

One 2014 study found that about 20-25% percent of all adults are chronic procrastinators. They are at the point where procrastination becomes ingrained into their lifestyle. However, studies on procrastination are challenging to conduct. Instructing participants to procrastinate and wait to see if they get a health issue is simply unfeasible. Some studies try to circumvent this by using self-reporting at single points to see if their health deteriorated. However, self-report is not helpful as it is difficult to determine a clear causal link between variables.

In 2015, Dr. Fuschia Sirois, a behavioral scientist at Durham University in England, explored that procrastination

may hurt one's cardiac health. She believes that, "It's that kind of big splash that's going to get attention. I am hoping that it will raise awareness of the physical health consequences of procrastination." He explains that researchers are trying to use time-management tools to teach procrastinators how to procrastinate less. However, it does not work best because poor time management skills are not the only cause of procrastination. Sirois also held a trial that included different mindfulness classes. After the sessions, the researchers found a decrease in procrastination. He explains, "a little self-compassion may snap people out of their spiral."

Procrastination is even connected to physical issues, not just psychological ones. For example, since chronic procrastinators are typically stressed, they tend to delay doctor appointments and treatments which ultimately can have a negative effect on their health. Dr. Fred Johansson, a clinical psychologist at Sophiahemmet University in Stockholm, conducted a study on procrastination using a sample including thousands of college students. Johansson's study tracked the students' health by observing them for over nine months. This made it easier to analyze consistent data from their participants. Dr. Johansson and his team noticed that the students who were real procrastinators had worse health over time than the non-procrastinating students in the

control group. They were more depressed, sleep-deprived, and anxious than the other students. Overall, his team discovered that procrastination is strongly linked to adverse health concerns such as anxiety, depression, stress, poor sleep quality, physical inactivity, loneliness, and even economic difficulties. When one procrastinates, it can significantly worsen their health. For a long time, scientists were not concerned about the health consequences of regular procrastination. However, Johansson's study opened their eyes to something more serious. Another psychologist, Dr. Alexander Rozentel, explained this study by stating that "people who score higher on procrastination to begin with are at greater risk of developing physical and psychological problems later on."

Overall, this study was observational, not experimental, so the team cannot conclusively determine procrastination as the sole cause of health issues. However, many psychologists are performing more research to determine the scientific connection. As Sirois explains, "And though procrastination alone may not cause disease, one extra factor can tip the scales."

Dr. Joseph Ferrari, a psychologist at DePaul University in Chicago, has been analyzing procrastination patterns for years. His experiment in 2001 tried to debunk

the misconception that procrastinators "work better under pressure". He concluded that procrastinators, in reality, perform worse under pressure and tend to make more mistakes. Ferrari also argues that procrastinators are not as lazy as others tend to believe; they simply have a challenging time being busy with the right things. He adds that procrastination is a behavioral pattern, insinuating that the pattern can be changed for the better.

There are straightforward tips that could help people with mild procrastination. One piece of advice is to put away your phone and turn off its ringer while trying to finish work. Others who are chronic procrastinators sometimes improve from cognitive behavioral therapy. This therapy helps the individual decipher his/her thoughts in order to change his/her procrastinating behavior. Some also believe that learning about self-forgiveness in mindfulness training will help chronic procrastinators who are hard on themselves for procrastinating.

Those who are mindful of the frequency and intensity of their procrastination can become a healthier version of themselves. One can move away from potential adverse effects on their health and instead cherish a more productive and meaningful lifestyle. If you suffer from procrastination, remember you are not alone, and procrastinating is a manageable behavior.

# THE DANGERS OF BEING A FIREFIGHTER

BY ETTY WESCHLER

My childhood best friend's father was a firefighter. I had always looked up to him as I thought saving people from fires was the coolest job in the world. Today, I still believe that it is one of the most impressive jobs, as firefighters put themselves in physical, emotional, and genotoxic danger to help others. In addition to their susceptibility to burns, heat exhaustion, and mental health disorders, exposure to smoke, toxins and carcinogens can pose negative effects on the health of firefighters.

Approximately 1,080,800 firefighters are employed in the US alone, 11.8% of which are female and 88.2% male. Considering this, it makes sense

that most firefighter based research is focused on males. However, that leaves the health of female firefighters "critically understudied" (Jung *et al.*, 2021). It is crucial to have research and studies done on both male and female firefighters, as they have distinct genotoxic risks, such as reproductive hazards. Despite there being very few studies focused on female firefighters, a genotoxic association was found while studying the prevalence of miscarriages in female firefighters vs non-firefighters. Comparing the miscarriage statistics of female firefighters to those of US female nurses, the prevalence of miscarriages in female firefighters were 2.33-fold. It was found that this genotoxic hazard was associated with occupational exposures such as per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFASs), which are present in fire

extinguishers (Liew *et al.*, 2020) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), which are produced during the combustion of wood or other materials (Jung *et al.*, 2021).

Another study analyzed the semen quality of male firefighters vs non-firefighters and found that the semen of firefighters was of lesser quality than that of the general population in a variety of aspects such as sperm count, motility, and volume. This genotoxic hazard was associated with occupational exposures such as a variety of chemicals and heat intensities. It was also found that increased hand washing, showering after shifts and use of breathing apparatuses showed a positive correlation in semen quality of firefighters, while increased fire exposure showed a negative correlation

with sperm concentration, volume, total sperm count and semen quality (Engelsman *et al.*, 2021).

According to the CDC and The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, cancer is one of the leading causes of death among firefighters. A study done over a 34-year stretch, consisting of 100,000 career firefighters in Florida, analyzed the cancer risks that accompany the profession. Within the study they were able to identify 3760 male-linked primary cancers and 168 female linked primary cancers. It was deduced that female career firefighters are at a great risk of thyroid cancer, brain cancer, and possibly melanoma. More research

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is necessary to verify the cancer risks of female firefighters as there were only approximately 5,000 females in this study, and female firefighter focused research is limited. On the other hand, since there were a great quantity of males participating in this study as well as an abundance of prior male firefighter focused research, researchers were able to conclude that male firefighters are at a great risk of melanoma, prostate cancer, testicular cancer, thyroid cancer and late-stage colon cancer. Additionally, they found that there was an even greater risk for the majority of these cancers in male firefighters under 50 years old (Lee *et al.*, 2020).

One of the main causes of cancer in firefighters is their occupational exposure to PAHs. These chemicals arise from combustion and are classified as toxic, mutagenic and carcinogenic. Benzo[a]pyrene is a major PAH that emanates from incomplete combustion of organic matter. Since it is regularly found in our everyday lives, such as from burning wood or grilling food, it is used to determine the degree of carcinogenicity and Toxic Equivalency Factor (TEF) of other PAHs. Recent studies have discovered other PAHs that are of greater toxicity than Benzo[a]pyrene such as 7,12-dimethylbenz[a]anthracene (DMBA) and 3-methylcholanthrene (3-MCA). DMBA arises from diesel exhaust and tobacco smoke, and it hangs around in surrounding air for a long time, extending one's exposure to it. In addition, DMBA is extremely toxic as its TEF is 2-fold that of Benzo[a]pyrene. Moreover, 3-MCA arises from burning organic compounds at high temperatures and its TEF is 5.7-fold that of Benzo[a]pyrene (Stec *et al.*, 2018).

Since PAHs have a dermal absorption of 20%, and are a leading cause of cancer in firefighters, a study was done to analyze the frequency of different kinds of PAHs found on firefighter related surfaces. Examination of wipe samples taken from skin, clothing, self-containing breathing apparatus (SCBA), fire engines, bodyguards and gas samples allowed for the identification of where different kinds of PAHs could be found. Benzo[a]pyrene was identified on all surfaces, DMBA was seen on clothing, fire engines and bodyguards but not on skin and 3-MCA was seen on skin, self-containing breathing apparatus (SCBA), fire engines and bodyguards. Based on their findings and a cancer risk factor of 1 in 100,000, they concluded that as many as 350 firefighters can develop cancer from PAHs found on clothing, 250 from that found on fire engine bodyguards, 210 from that found on fire engines and 25 from that found on firefighters hands. However, the risk identified from gas sampling was too insignificant to conclude anything (Stec *et al.*, 2018).

In a study, to evaluate the exposure of firefighters to PAHs, researchers analyzed PAH metabolite levels present in urine and PAH levels present in dermal wipes as well as personal air samples. They also evaluate urinary mutagenicity with the Ames assay using Salmonella strain TA98 (Atlas *et al.*, 1985). Samples were taken before and after the 27 male firefighters were exposed to combustion emissions and a group of 18 fire service office workers were used as controls. They concluded that after being exposed to combustion, the firefighters urinary PAH metabo-

lite levels increased on average by 2.9 to 5.3-fold. In addition, urinary mutagenicity increased on average by 4.3-fold. Frequent and continuous exposure to such dangerous chemicals is the leading cause for cancer amongst firefighters (Keir *et al.*, 2017). Another study evaluating PAH levels analyzed a group of 53 individuals who were training to be firefighters. Utilization of the Comet assay in addition to the previous techniques mentioned helped with the assessment of the genotoxic effect related to PAH exposure. Using the Comet assay they found that after participating in training that included dermal exposure to PAHs, DNA strand break levels had escalated. Failure to repair such DNA breaks may lead to cancer formation (Andersen *et al.*, 2018).

Before entering a potentially hazardous situation, firefighters must put on their personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE protects the firefighter from fire as well as chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high yield explosives (CBRNE) hazards. However, studies show that the PPE that firefighters wear can be contaminated with a variety of hazardous substances, one of which is PAHs. One study found elevated PAH metabolite levels in urine samples, and concluded that it was due to the accumulation of PAHs on the firefighters' PPE (Jalilian *et al.*, 2019). Another study grouped the participants into units of 12 firefighters who worked in pairs while on call. For each pair of firefighters, one of their hoods was laundered while the other was not. Lower PAH levels were found in routinely laundered hoods compared to non laundered hoods. They then laundered unlaundered exposed hoods with unlaundered heavily exposed hoods

and unexposed hoods that were brand new. PAHs were then seen on some of the unexposed brand new hoods, showing cross contamination and ineffective laundering practices (Mayer *et al.*, 2019). From this it was proven that current laundering practices of PPE do not completely remove chemicals, causing long term exposure past on site exposures. In addition, When PPE is taken off, contaminants can be transferred to one's skin or go into the surrounding air to be inhaled, which can pose additional danger to the individual (Banks *et al.*, 2021).

In conclusion, considering all the risks that firefighters take upon themselves including physical and emotional dangers, it is absolutely necessary for fire departments to implement safety and precautionary measures to prevent additional risks. Such measures include implementing sanitary practices post on site exposure, such as continuously washing one's hands, showering, changing one's garments and cleaning surfaces. In addition, creating more effective and protective SCBAs and PPE to limit inhalation and dermal exposure of toxins is necessary. Lastly, more effective laundering practices is imperative. Such laundering practices may include but are not limited to separating PPE by job assignment and potential contamination and laundering PPE separately from other clothing to prevent further exposure. It is necessary to do more research on the genotoxicity of being a firefighter, especially in terms of females so that we can gain a better understanding of the various risks of this profession.

# PREMARITAL EMBRYOS: A HALACHIC INSIGHT

BY MIRA POSTELNEK

Infertility is a taboo subject, something often addressed in hushed tones and sympathetic whispers. It's a topic "not discussed" or considered "rude" to mention in a public setting. All too common, this mentality only perpetuates shame and secrecy surrounding this extremely prevalent and devastating reality. According to studies conducted in 2022, approximately 6% of women face infertility, and 12% of women have complications carrying a pregnancy full-term. In the United States alone, roughly 1 in 5 women are unable to conceive naturally, even after a full year of trying – the medical definition of infertility.

Infertility is a complex medical topic and can vary from patient to patient, in both minor and major ways. Since it is such a complex topic, there have been multiple halachic papers written discussing the matter and answering questions of struggling couples. The most common treatments for infertility are Intrauterine insemination (IUI) and In vitro fertilization (IVF). These procedures involve the artificial insemination of a man's sperm into a woman's uterus directly, or in a petri dish, respectively.

The subjects of IVF and IUI are broad, multifaceted topics with endless possibilities for discussion and debate regarding ethical and

halachic matters. One such question was posed to Rabbi Elan Segelman's halachic discourse "Premarital Embryo Creation." The case was as follows: shortly prior to engagement, Chaya was diagnosed with cervical cancer, and the couple decided to wait to perform the necessary hysterectomy until after their wedding. They intended to first create an embryo and eventually transfer the embryo to a surrogate. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, however, their wedding was postponed, but the scheduled date for the embryo creation was maintained and rapidly approaching. Since it was necessary to remove Chaya's genetic material prior to chemotherapy

and the hysterectomy, she asked (PUAH) if she and her groom were still allowed to medically create an embryo together prior to their marriage. There are three main halachic issues that PUAH had to deal with in order to answer this question. First, determine if a hysterectomy is halachically permissible at all. Second, the method of sperm procurement, and lastly, the premarital embryo creation itself.

Prior to delving into the halachic background and considerations, we must first understand the medical background necessary for this

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## PREMARITAL EMBRYOS FROM PAGE 14

case study. The fallopian tubes connect the vaginal canal to the uterus, where fetal development occurs. The CDC reports that each year “13,000 new cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed and about 4,000 women die of this cancer.” Depending on the location of the cervical cancer, a hysterectomy might be necessary. A hysterectomy is a surgical procedure to remove the womb (uterus), resulting in the patient being unable to carry a pregnancy after the operation. The discussion of castration is brought up in Leviticus regarding animals. In Gemara Shabbos, it is discussed that castration applies to human sterilization as well. However, regarding saving a life (*pikuach nefesh*), the Sages (*Chazal*) teach us that we are obligated to preserve life, even if we must violate a Torah prohibition (except for the three cardinal sins). Therefore, halacha would fully allow and obligate Chaya to get the hysterectomy since her life is in danger, regardless of the operation causing infertility. The next subject to understand is fertility preservation. A newborn female is born with millions of oocytes (eggs) in her ovaries, and this number is significantly reduced to 300,000 by the time she reaches puberty. Unlike men, who are constantly reproducing sperm, women are born with all the oocytes they will ever have. This

is why in 2018, the American Society of Reproductive Medicine recommended that single women in their mid-thirties freeze their eggs to “prevent the consequences of their biological clock’s inevitable fertility decline.” Then, when a woman is married, she can unfreeze her eggs, fertilize them with her husband’s sperm, and create embryos to be implanted into her uterus via IVF. This procedure is also common in cancer patients, referred to as oncofertility. An unmarried woman undergoing the procedure of egg retrieval, has her oocytes immediately cryopreserved (stored at very low temperatures). According to Dr. Eli Ryback and many other fertility professionals, “embryo cryopreservation remains roughly 15% more efficient than egg freezing.”

Now that the medical background is understood, let’s delve into the halachic debate and decisions surrounding this case. Chaya wants to take advantage of the benefits of frozen embryos versus frozen oocytes and wants to know if it’s halachically permissible.

One major halachic issue to address is procuring the sperm for fertilization. Typically, when a couple is undergoing fertility treatment, they use what’s called a collection condom. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein states that couples undergoing fertility treatment must use a collec-

tion condom. He also mentions the possibility of alternatively utilizing “coitus interruptus.” Unfortunately, in this case study, a collection condom would be impossible since the procedure is occurring prior to marriage. The only route available would be masturbation, which is very controversial according to halacha. Rabbi Waldenburg addressed this conundrum and ruled that when no other option is available, masturbation is permitted for fertility purposes. Another consideration for embryo creation surrounds the concept of *Niddah*. *Niddah* is defined as “a woman who has menstruated and not completed the purification process afterwards.” This halacha is first cited in Vayikra 18:19, which states: “וְאֵלֶּיֶשָׁה וְבָנִיתָ טְמֵאָתָהּ לֹא תִקְרַב לְגִלּוֹת עֲרוּתָהּ” meaning, “Do not come near a woman during her menstrual period of impurity to uncover her nakedness.” An unmarried woman is considered perpetually in *Niddah*, from the time she begins menstruation until she completes the purification process prior to marriage. The Sages teach that a child born during this period of impurity (*Niddah*) is called a *Ben Niddah*. However, according to Rabbeinu Peretz, a child conceived from a woman in *Niddah* would not be a *Ben Niddah* if the direct function of

intercourse was not performed. Based on this understanding and following Rabbinic discourses, the majority halachic opinion maintains that conception during *Niddah* is permitted. Therefore, a medically conceived child would not be considered a *Ben Niddah*, since medical conception violated no *Niddah* Laws being there was no sexual act between the couple during this process. Since single women do not immerse in the Mikvah, Chaya is allowed to proceed with her scheduled egg retrieval prior to marriage with no concern of conceiving a “*Ben Niddah*.”

Upon thorough analysis and debate, the final halachic conclusion was that Chaya and her fiancé could proceed with premarital embryo creation in a halachic manner. This is, of course, a complex and specific scenario, but as mentioned initially, this is a common issue that is being addressed by thousands around us daily. PUAH receives 400+ calls a day, and there are 10,300+ fertility cases supervised by PUAH alone. Understanding and awareness are of the utmost importance in order to support our community and fellow Jews.

## STABILITY AI

### BUSINESS

BY ELI LEVI,  
BUSINESS EDITOR

As AI has come into the zeitgeist, more and more people have jumped on large language models like ChatGPT. Yet, Stability AI is one of the larger and more brilliant companies in the space. Founded by Emad Mostaque, Stability AI, with a recent investment from Jim O’Shaughnessy, is ready to bring AI to the masses. AI can be compared to the internet with most of the tech behemoths using closed-source code available only to them as opposed to the open-source of GitHub or Adobe. Similarly, AI has closed-source companies

like OpenAI and open-source like Stability AI. Since Stability open-sourced all of its models, they monetize by personalizing and training its large data models to solve specific use cases for more clients than they know what to do with.

One example of how Stability AI will change the future is through the entertainment medium. Recently Logan Bartlett, a VC at Redpoint Ventures, interviewed Mostaque on his podcast and they discussed the intersection of artificial intelligence and entertainment. During the interview, Mostaque discussed his vision for the future of entertainment and media, in which AI can produce customized movies on

demand for individual users based on their preferences and inputs. According to Mostaque, the end state of entertainment and media is one in which AI will play a central role in creating and distributing content. Gone will be the days of scrolling through endless libraries of movies and TV shows, trying to find something that suits your mood.

“In a year or two we’ll be generating movies in real-time,” said Mostaque. Based on the AI models he has created and the work he has already done with different film producers, Mostaque sees his prediction coming true. Similar to when Marc Andreessen wrote his

now infamous blog post “Why Software is Eating the World,” AI will automate away almost everything and complete tasks better than humans. The very nature of AI is that it only gets better. It might take time for AI to train to be as good of a director as a Tarantino or a Scorsese, but once it gets there, it will only become better than them. AI is the future, get ready.

The current headline for AI is “AI beats chess master” whereas an alternative headline could be “AI makes all chess masters better” By democratizing access to AI Stability hopes to show that AI is not here to take away jobs but rather improve and bring all of humanity up another level.

## TICKETMASTER’S CONTROVERSY

BY ELIYAHU SOLOMON

Of the many changes to our lives during the pandemic, one common lifestyle change was the temporary halt on live events, including sporting events, concerts, and plays. Following the gradual lifting

of pandemic restrictions, ticket sales have increased as has demand, particularly for concerts.

Live sports are played in nearly every major US and Canadian city on a nightly basis. They have, at the very least, tens of events per

season, per team.. Concerts are far more limited. Artists do not regularly perform and, when they do, can obviously only perform in one city at a time, rarely staying for more than one week. The stoppage of concerts during the pandemic has led a number of major artists

to announce tours, and due to the popularity of these artists, tickets were, and continue to be, hard to come by and expensive.

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# WHAT IS TENCENT DOING?

BY ELI LEVI,  
BUSINESS EDITOR

Tencent, a Chinese tech conglomerate, owns its super app WeChat, which has one of the most monthly active users, at more than one billion. WeChat combines payments, messaging in all forms, and services into one super-app. Unlike many American companies that monetize using ad revenue, Tencent has a different approach. It invests in companies it believes will do well, and then promotes them using WeChat. When the company they invest in does well, Tencent makes money. Pinduoduo is one recent example of a company that Tencent invested in and then promoted on its platform. Tencent currently owns

16.5% of Pinduoduo which was only created in 2015. Today, Pinduoduo has a market cap of over \$160 billion. Partnering with Tencent early on was one of the main factors in Pinduoduo's growth.

This method is a much more effective way of investing due to the concept of incentive alignment. Both Pinduoduo and Tencent's incentives are aligned, in the sense that both want Pinduoduo to grow at the fastest rate possible. Additionally, Tencent is also uniquely positioned to be in control of a version of the metaverse, should such a thing ever come to exist. Instead of having to cross between different apps and different usernames and passwords for varying

services, everything would be centralized and integrated into one super-app. To this end, Tencent owns 40%, the largest stake, of Epic Games, the creator of Fortnite and the Unreal Engine, which allows anyone to create high-scale graphics for video games. This gives Tencent a real shot at being at the center of the metaverse with the key piece being integration. By giving out the Unreal Engine for free, Epic Games, and by extension Tencent, are making all video games through the same engine and thus fully able to integrate with all of their other apps and offerings. The fact that the engine is free makes it the default for any creator or company to use. Beyond Epic Games, Tencent has

the by far the largest footprint in the videogame industry (even if the Activision Blizzard deal goes through), owning Riot Games, which makes League of Legends and PUBG Mobile in addition to many other titles. There are only a few companies that can even have a shot at creating a fully integrated super app and Tencent is one of them. This is primarily due to their already existing super app WeChat, which already has payments, social media, and messaging in addition to their expansion and ubiquity in gaming which comes from their numerous acquisitions and the nature of the Unreal Engine.

## TICKETMASTER FROM PAGE 15

One artist, in particular, has shaken up the music industry due to her extensive popularity and adoring fans. That person is, of course, Taylor Swift. Swift, who in 2015 nearly singlehandedly changed how Apple Music pays its artists and in 2021 spearheaded an effort to control her own music, once again found herself in the spotlight when she announced her "Eras Tour" following the release of her album *Midnights*.

On November 15, 2022, tickets went on sale for 1.5 million fans who had received a verified code from Ticketmaster, indicating that they were real and not bots. What followed could more or less be described as chaos as millions of people stormed the Ticketmaster website, including millions of bot accounts and fans who did not have early access codes. This caused countless glitches, including fans receiving error messages or sales not being completed, among a host of other issues. As a result, many fans left empty-handed, only to see those same tickets pop up on resale markets for nearly ten times the initial price. Enraged Swift fans (colloquially known as "Swifties") flooded social media with upset tweets and TikToks showing their displeasure with Ticketmaster. Taylor Swift also voiced her extreme displeasure with the situation and politicians soon jumped on the bandwagon calling for an investigation into Ticketmaster and LiveNation (the company that owns Ticket-

master) for violating antitrust and cornering the ticketing market.

In the early '80s, the main way to purchase tickets was through ticket vendor companies. These vendors would set up contracts with stadiums, theaters, and music halls, and control all aspects of ticketing, making their profit solely off of that. What once was a cost for arenas now became a source of profit for them as instead of losing money on the ticketing business, it was instead sent out to these other companies. Ticketmaster, one of these companies, made the decision to move to Los Angeles from Phoenix in order to get closer to a larger source of entertainment. At that time, Ticketron was the primary ticket vendor for Southern California, but thanks to a Ticketmaster innovation, they soon easily took over many of the contracts owned by Ticketron. This innovation was the creation of service fees. While Ticketmaster chose to take a cut of the proceeds of tickets, these tacked-on service fees helped regain the cost of lost revenue. It also gave an incentive for arenas to switch to Ticketmaster as they would get a more significant cut of ticket sales while those who would face the brunt of the cost would be the fans of sports teams, concertgoers, and play enthusiasts.

In 2010, Ticketmaster merged with Live Nation, an operator of concert venues, to form Live Nation Entertainment, bringing together the largest concert venue operator with the largest ticketing platform. Despite this, the Department of Justice's antitrust division cleared the merger with a consent decree, forcing Ticketmaster to diverge some of its holdings to

its primary competitors such as AEG. Even so, this has not prevented Ticketmaster from controlling over 70% of the ticketing market for live events and over 80% for concerts. What this essentially means is that if an artist wants to perform at a certain venue, there is almost a complete certainty that if it is a large venue then it is run through Ticketmaster and Live Nation. There are relatively fewer options, especially for the higher-end artists who receive a lot of demand and require higher capacity venues across the country,

While this is not considered a monopoly, running a business that engages in anti-competitive behavior, is what Ticketmaster has been accused of. One example of shutting out the competition is in the case of the Barclays Center in Brooklyn, which moved from Ticketmaster to SeatGeek as its primary ticket broker. Less than 2 years later, the Barclays Center switched back to Ticketmaster, with some suggesting that this was due to Ticketmaster withholding events from SeatGeek as a backlash against them. Ticketmaster was also accused of violating the DOJ's consent decree, yet has avoided complete government intervention.

On Tuesday, January 24, 2023, the US Senate judiciary committee held a hearing with Ticketmaster and some of their other competitors, including SeatGeek and Jam Productions who testified against what they perceived as a violation of antitrust laws by Ticketmaster. The committee was largely unified, crossing party lines, in calling out Tick-

etmaster, and some senators even had lines referencing Taylor Swift songs throughout their testimonies. The message, however, was clear: Ticketmaster is in clear violation of antitrust laws and something must be done to reign them in. While Ticketmaster attempted to refute this conclusion, claiming that they are only in charge of around 5% of concert venues, the reality of a bipartisan effort to cut back on Ticketmaster's hold over the ticketing industry may come to fruition in the near future.

However, antitrust is a tricky and complex field to navigate, both in Congress and in the courts. Despite the Biden administration's efforts to strengthen antitrust enforcement, many laws on the books currently go unenforced, with antitrust claims falling to their lowest points since the mid-90s. Such laws may be brought up by either side of the political spectrum to stop potential new legislation in its tracks, claiming that enforcement should be left to the court system. In contrast, others would argue that this is proof that more laws are needed as the current system is not working. For the fans, however, the current system is one of frustration, overpricing, and stress, as costs to see their favorite artists or sports teams in person have skyrocketed and companies such as Ticketmaster do not seem to be going away any time soon.

# YU OBSERVER STAFF PICKS: FAVORITE SHOWS, MOVIES, BOOKS, AND SONGS

## ARTS & CULTURE

BY YU OBSERVER STAFF

Name	Observer Position	Media Form	Title and Author/Artist	Watch, read, listen to this when you:
Benjy Gottesman	Editor-in-Chief	Book	Book of Mercy by Leonard Cohen	Are feeling pensive
Daniel Ganopolsky	Opinions Editor	Book	Straus, Spinoza & Sinai	Start to question what your Bubby told you to be true
Eli Levi	Business Editor	Book	American Pastoral by Philip Roth	Want to learn about the most visceral and defining story of America across the 70s
Elisheva Hirsch	Arts & Culture Editor	Song	Walk by Griff	Need some positive encouragement
Atara Bachrach	Opinions Editor and Website Manager	TV Show	Limitless	Want something intellectually and emotionally stimulating, but fun and adventurous. It's a journey to watch :)
Joshua Feigin	Business Editor	Book	The Silent Patient	Are in the mood for a psychological thriller
Racheli Jian	Layout Editor	TV Show	Derry Girls	Want to see a chaotic show that will make you laugh
David Yagudayev	Sci-Tech Editor	Music	ReallySlowMotionMusic - Event Horizon	Are looking for some phenomenal instrumental music that is very uplifting
Rivka Shavelson	Opinions Editor	TV Series	The Twilight Zone	Want to think
Emily Goldberg	Layout Editor and Social Media Manager	Book	Mindhunter	Want a fascinating read about the process of criminal profiling by a former FBI agent.
Shayna Kahane	Arts & Culture Editor	TV Show	Gilmore Girls	Are happy, sad, angry, excited and berthing in between. In conclusion... always
Rachel Gilinski	Features Editor	TV Show	The Good Place	Want to laugh but also be confronted with what it means to be a good person
Raquel Leifer	Features Editor	Book	The Choice by Dr. Edith Eva Eger	Want an inspirational memoir by a Holocaust survivor about resilience and the importance of choices that we make
Amalya Teitelbaum	Business Editor	Book	The Secret History by Donna Tartt	Are in the mood to solve a mystery and be enthralled by dark twists
Belina Milhem Jena	Layout Editor	TV Show	The Other Two	Want to watch a comedy about a dysfunctional family chasing their dream in NYC
Rina Shamilov	Arts & Culture Editor	Book	Middlemarch by George Elliot	Need to stay on top of your required readings but also vibe with weird Victorian power dynamics
Aaron Shaykevich	Managing Editor	Book	The Fountainhead	Are going against the grain
Yosef Scher	Science and Technology Editor	TV Show	MacGyver (1985 version)	Need to take a break from the pre-med grind

## YU WORLD CUP 2023

BY DAVID YAGUDA-YEV, SCIENCE EDITOR

Last December, the FIFA World Cup in Qatar took Yeshiva University by storm. During games, YU Wilf students packed Rubin Hall Lounge to watch the game unfold. World cup games were displayed all over campus—whether at eateries like Grandma's Pizza or Burgers and Grill—or within YU buildings, games were constantly streamed during the November-December month of World-Cup action.

Qatar's controversial World Cup featured all types of sporting tropes, from underdog victories to tense games with penalty shootouts. It was also likely Ronaldo, Messi, Neymar and Modric's final WorldCcup, as the

legendary players age and finish off their illustrious careers in football, which made it especially special to watch as all aimed to win their first title representing their countries.

As the tournament progressed from the group to the knockout stages, seasoned football spectators, international students supporting their country, and those who never watched the game huddled around the small TV in Rubin Hall's lounge to watch the action unfold.

After finishing BMP shiur at 12:55pm, I would rush to the Caf to get lunch and head upstairs to watch a small portion of the games in the lounge. Most games were charged, and the room often became silent and strained when games went to extra time and sub-

sequently penalty shootout. A few friends and I watched in awe as Croatia beat Japan on penalties and later beat the behemoth Brazil, ending Neymar's dream. We were consequently shocked when Morocco beat Spain and Portugal with amazing poise and world-class defensive plays.

In the end, Lionel Messi and Argentina won the title against France's Kylian Mbappe, in incredible fashion. After losing the final in 2014 to Germany, Messi came back eight years later determined to give it his all for the last time. The game was the craziest and most emotional I, and many other YU students, have witnessed, featuring the battle between the rising young star Mbappe against the legendary Messi.

The nostalgia surrounding the "little boy from Rosario, Argentina" and his trials and tribulations with the Argentinian National Team, losing the 2014 World-Cup Final, 2015 Copa-America Final, 2016 Copa-America Final, the 2018 World Cup, and at one point quitting the National Team, laid the stage for possibly the greatest character development of a player in World Cup history. The game did not disappoint, featuring a two point deficit equalizer by Mbappe in the second half and two goals in Extra Time, which led to penalties. Despite all the pressure, Messi and Co. remained composed and won the title for their country, its first World Cup win since Maradona captained

# MY TOP 10 FILMS OF 2022

BY ANDREW WARREN,  
STAFF WRITER

This was an interesting year for movies. Some of the films that critics and journalists predicted would be Oscar frontrunners, such as *Empire of Light*, *Bardo*, *Amsterdam*, and **Blonde**, landed with a thud. Prestige dramas like *Armageddon Time*, *She Said*, *The Whale*, and *White Noise* came and went without leaving a mark. Ironically, the crowd-pleasing hits that no one thought could ever contend in the award circuits, are leading the race. *Top Gun* was supposed to be just another summer blockbuster, something to satisfy our *Mission Impossible* appetites. *Everything Everywhere All at Once* was merely Daniels's follow-up to *Swiss Army Man*, a movie about a farting corpse. *Elvis* (which I still haven't seen) is a garish, over-the-top biopic narrated by Tom Hanks in a fat suit. All three will probably be nominated for best picture. How does this happen?

I don't know if I can explain it, but I am certainly happy about it. I've noticed that the Oscar winners of the past decade haven't had the staying power that previous winners held. Nobody talks about *Nomadland*, *Coda*, *Shape of Water*, or *The Artist* anymore. Take a look at the best-picture nominees of the 90s. Most of those movies are still watched and loved today. If we can get back to that point, where auteurs don't see "being entertaining" as an ancillary benefit but rather as a primary goal, then maybe non-superhero movies will get some more attention.

With that diatribe out of the way, let's talk about my top 10. I saw 35 movies this year, most of them in theaters. My top 10 are the movies I found myself engaged by, emotionally invested in, and left thoroughly entertained. I liked some of them for their filmmaking, others for their humor and story, and a few because they made me scream and cry.

Also, I don't want people to think I didn't see *Tar*. I did see *Tar*. I didn't like it.

**10. The Menu:** A group of wealthy individuals heads out to a private island to enjoy an expensive meal at a very exclusive restaurant, but the head chef has other plans. *The Menu* is a thriller/comedy that had me wincing and laughing in the same scene. It's a very tight,

original screenplay that satirizes the "eat the rich" mentality while really being about artists and their creations. It's also fun to see Anya Taylor Joy filling an Emma Stone kind of part.

**9. The Whale:** Growing up, I never watched *The Mummy*, but I did watch *Furry Vengeance*... a lot. I am so happy to see that Brendan Fraiser is back. The movie is about a 600-pound man named Charlie, who only has a week to live and tries to spend it getting to know his daughter Ellie, played by Sadie Sink. This movie brought me to tears and I love how complicated these characters are. The movie doesn't tell the audience how to feel about any of the characters and I respect that.

**8. Speak No Evil:** This one is my obligatory foreign film inclusion to let readers know that I am more cultured than they are. In all seriousness, *Speak No Evil* is the scariest movie I've seen all year. It's about a very polite Danish family that spends a weekend at a rude Dutch family's house. If you're one of those people who is constantly making sacrifices to avoid conflict, you need to see this movie. This is a very effective cautionary tale that will leave a lasting impression.

**7. The Banshees of Inisherin:** I didn't walk out of *Banshees* thinking it was top 10, but I did walk out thinking about it, and I haven't stopped since. The story is about a man whose best friend decides to end their friendship out of nowhere. It's written by the acclaimed playwright and filmmaker Martin McDonagh who's known for his very dark comedic sensibilities. Anytime one goes from high school to Israel to college to post-grad, they lose some friends, and this movie nails that experience. The movie also has a lot to say about how we should spend our time. Should we all be striving to become great at something or is the most important thing in life to just be a kind person? I highly recommend this movie.

**6. X:** Sometimes you see a movie and it's everything you wanted it to be. That happened to me twice this year, and the first one of those to make it on this list is *X*. The premise was intriguing as was the cast, headlined by Brittany Snow. I saw this in a theater and the whole audience had a great time. We were screaming and laughing and enjoying the ride. Ti

West, the director, elevates pretty shlocky material with some skillful camerawork. Everything Mia Goth does in this movie is amazing.

**5. Glass Onion:** I already reviewed this movie for *The Observer* here. I'm not going to say a lot about the movie in this piece, but I do want to state my appreciation for the effort Rian Johnson, the writer-director, puts into innovating the whodunnit formula.

**4. The Batman:** Another movie I previously reviewed here, *The Batman* is a three-hour crime epic that dares to take itself seriously. When it feels like every movie today needs to be meta or jokey, *The Batman* isn't. I love this take on the Batman character and am excited to see what Matt Reeves does next.

**3. Bullet Train:** One of my favorite directors is Guy Ritchie, who became famous by writing and directing overly complicated British crime comedies, filled with witty dialogue and a lot of twists and turns, with a dozen interesting characters all connected in some way. A Guy Ritchie movie was supposed to be released this year, but it got delayed due to world events. However, *Bullet Train* filled that absence. It is my favorite comedy of the year. Brad Pitt has excellent comedic timing and I'm happy he's getting to show it off at this point in his career. Bryan Tyree Henry and Aaron Tyler Johnson have really good chemistry as the bickering assassin duo. It's not the smartest movie in the world and it certainly doesn't have anything substantial to say, but it put a smile on my face the entire time.

**2. Everything Everywhere all at Once:** The best multiverse movie of the year, *EEAAO* is about a woman named Evelyn, who must tap into alternate versions of herself to harness their abilities to defeat an interdimensional power. This movie is very impressive. The budget is tiny compared to Marvel films but it looks better than all the ones they released this year. It has a very complicated premise but still managed to reach various demographics. Any person, regardless of age or gender, can find something to relate to in this movie. If you want a fun action movie, this movie has the most creative fight scenes I've seen

in a while. If you want a familial drama, the mother-daughter relationship will break your heart and then put it back together. There is nothing wasted in this movie. Every actor uses their fullest acting abilities. I've seen it twice and the rock with googly eyes character made me cry both times. That earns this movie a spot on this list.

**1. Top Gun Maverick:** Yeah. This one is everyone's favorite. A perfect movie that will be remembered in the same way *Jaws* or *Terminator 2* is remembered. It features a charming and magnetic Tom Cruise, Miles Teller as the frustrated but sympathetic pilot who wants to live his life free of Cruise's character's influence, Glenn Powell, as the perfect love-to-hate-him jerk, Jon Hamm as the guy who says no but eventually says yes, and Jennifer Connelly who does the best job, maybe ever, as Cruise's love interest. There are breathtaking fighter jet set pieces, which are much easier to follow than in the original. The core emotional story between Maverick and Rooster, the child of Maverick's former wingman, brought me to tears. I haven't seen a third act this perfect since *The Matrix*. Everyone who worked on this movie was so passionate about it and it shows in every frame. It is perfect.

**Honorable Mention- Babylon:** I wish this movie was better. Damien Chazelle, the director, previously made *Whiplash*, which I think is perfect, and *La La Land*, which was also incredible. This movie is the epitome of a mixed bag. Some sequences are hysterical and deftly edited and then others just feel like rip-offs of better movies, especially *Boogie Nights*. The movie also had contempt for its characters, which undercuts the sentimentality of the ending. But at the same time, the first 90 minutes are perfect. I'm writing this article on a deadline and maybe in a week I'll have a clearer feeling, but as of now, a "just missed" spot on the list seems fair.



YU WORLD CUP 2023  
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Argentina to glory in 1986. Although European football

is not the most popular sport in America, and most YU students have never watched a game in their life, this World Cup attracted many spectators, and cre-

ated moments I would have never thought to witness on campus.

With America quickly developing the MLS, and hosting the World Cup

in 2026 in a joint-bid with Mexico and Canada, there is no doubt that future YU students will be even more consumed with the World-Cup action. In the meantime, Rubin Hall prepares for March Madness.

## KNOCK AT THE CABIN REVIEW

BY ANDREW WARREN,  
STAFF WRITER

*See it or skip it: Make a choice*

Knock at the Cabin is the newest film by M Night Shyamalan. It's about a same sex couple with an adopted daughter who are spending a vacation at a secluded cabin. Their time together is scarily interrupted by four strangers who break into their home and force them to make a horrible choice. The strangers are led by Leonard, a sensitive and caring giant of a man who feels terribly about what he has to do but is still ruthlessly committed to his cause.

The film takes place almost entirely in one location, besides for a few flashbacks. Movies with that kind of limitation include *Reservoir Dogs*, *Saw*, and *12 Angry Men*. The characters are stuck in one location because of a situation and they can't leave until that situation is resolved. The robbers can't leave the warehouse until they figure out who's the

undercover cop. The hostages can't leave the bathroom until they cut off their own legs. The jurors can't leave the court until they deliver a verdict.

Now the situation never stays entirely the same throughout the film. It changes, not major shifts but slight ones. The robbers have kidnapped a cop and are planning on interrogating him. The hostages in the bathroom find more clues. Juror number 8 has to convince the 11 other jurors with 11 different arguments.' Knock at the Cabin fails to shift the situation after the first 15 minutes. I don't want to give away too many details, because I think the central debate is very interesting and shouldn't have been spoiled by the trailers. From the beginning, the audience is made aware of the main conflict, the players on both sides, their beliefs, and what will happen if certain decisions are made. The status quo hardly changes in significant ways for the entire film. Even

if a character did change in some way, it was so highly telegraphed from the first twenty minutes that it never feels like the person changed.

The movie's premise hinges very much on doubt. There is a threat and the protagonists don't know if the threat is real or imagined. Neither does the audience and that doubt is supposed to maintain a sense of suspense. Personally, the movie did a terrible job maintaining that ambiguity and I found it to be very clear as to the status of the threat. As a result, I wasn't particularly as invested in the outcome.

The acting is, for the most part, good. Except for Dave Bautista in the role of Leonard. He is fantastic. This is the best role that I have ever seen him in.<sup>1</sup> Bautista conveys so much guilt through his facial expressions and body language. His body is so powerful but Bautista plays as powerless to his responsibilities and it's all so believable and real. I'm not the first to say this but he really is the best wrestler-turned actor. I haven't seen Blade Runner 2049

I also want to shout out Kristen Cui who plays Wen, the daughter of the gay couple. She's only 9 years old and this is her first film. The wrong kid in this role could have sunk the whole movie but she is very endearing and hits all the emotional beats.

Knock at the Cabin is a perfect plane movie. It's not a bad movie. You're not going to feel like you wasted your time, but you're probably not going to recommend it to a friend either. Rating 5/10

If the trailer interested you, but you don't want to see it in a theater, there are two movies I really think you'd like: *Frailty*: Two kids whose father has religious vision and asks for their help killing demons impersonating human beings. *Circle* (2015): 50 people wake up in a room and must vote on who should be killed until only one person remains.

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CLASS OF 2023

## UNDERGRADUATE COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY CHECKLIST

Graduating This Year? Mazel Tov!

Be sure to complete all the items below to participate in your Commencement Ceremony.

### STEP 1

Consult with your academic advisor or program director to be sure that all of your graduation requirements have been met.

Visit [yu.edu/academic-advising](https://yu.edu/academic-advising) to schedule.

### STEP 2

Degrees are awarded in September, January and May. Contact your campus Registrar to determine if you are eligible to attend Commencement.

Visit [yu.edu/registrar/graduation](https://yu.edu/registrar/graduation) for additional information.

### STEP 3

Apply for Graduation by your degree's deadline:

**February 28th**  
(May Degrees)

**March 1st**  
(September Degrees)

The Application for Graduation–Undergraduate Degree can be found here: [yu.edu/registrar/forms](https://yu.edu/registrar/forms)

**NOTE:** If you miss this deadline your name will not be included in the Commencement Program.

*Be sure to RSVP on the application to Commencement and give your accurate height and weight so your gown fits just right!*

### STEP 4

Pay your graduation/diploma fee of \$150 to the Office of Student Finance.

### STEP 5

Cap and Gown Distribution Events will be held on each campus a few weeks before the ceremony.

Come with friends; have your picture taken in the photo booth to be featured at Commencement!

*If you cannot pick up your attire at a distribution event you may pick it up from the Office of Student Life starting the day after the event.*

*No attire will be distributed at Commencement.*

### STEP 6

Each graduate will receive **6 guest tickets**. If you would like to request additional tickets, a form will be live in the coming weeks.

### QUESTIONS?

Visit [yu.edu/commencement](https://yu.edu/commencement) for updates closer to the ceremony, or email [commencement@yu.edu](mailto:commencement@yu.edu)

## WE ARE EXCITED TO CELEBRATE WITH YOU!

[YU.EDU/COMMENCEMENT](https://yu.edu/commencement)