



The Yeshiva University

OBSERVER

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245 Lexington Avenue Building Dedicated as Stanton Hall

Estie Neff

The building known as "245 Lex" on the Beren Campus will henceforth be called Stanton Hall, following the naming ceremony that took place Wednesday afternoon, December 16, in honor of Ronald P. Stanton, a generous donor and educational visionary for Yeshiva University (YU).

Stanton, founder of Transamonia Inc., gave \$100 million to YU in September 2006, establishing the Ronald P. Stanton legacy. The money would be given in installments over the next 5 to 10 years, and would go toward improving the overall quality of student life on campus and in the classroom.

At the official naming ceremony, President Richard Joel said that Stanton had refused any offers to have buildings named after him at the time he gave the gift. Recently, however, Stanton agreed to be recognized so that he could provide a legacy for his children and grandchildren.

"I feel that in this late stage of my life, in the declining years," said Stanton at the naming ceremony, "I can enjoy [these dedication of] names, which formerly I didn't do, but I'm doing it for the kids . . . who are the joy of my life."

Mr. Joel also noted how fitting it was to name the building at 245 Lexington Avenue after Stanton, as it houses the Hedi Steinberg

Library -the library Stanton built in memory of his mother 34 years ago.

The dedication took place in the main lobby of the building, after Stanton and his children cut a large red ribbon emblazoned with "Ronald P. Stanton Hall" outside the front entrance.

Mr. Joel connected the Stanton Hall dedication to Chanukah, the holiday when the Jewish people rededicated the *Beit Hamikdash* (Temple). He quoted the Talmudic opinion of *beis Hillel* that we follow, which is to start from one candle on the first night and work our way up to light eight on the last, versus *beis Shamma's* opinion, which is to start from eight and go down to one. Mr. Joel used this *halakhic* distinction to highlight the Jewish emphasis on growth, symbolized in the Chanukah menorah, and in the philanthropic actions of Mr. Stanton.

"We invest in tomorrow," said Mr. Joel. "We kindle growth."

Dean Karen Bacon noted that the building dedication was solely an act of gratitude toward Mr. Stanton's "extraordinary generosity," yet was also an opportunity to urge people to give money toward



The 245 Lexington Ave. building was dedicated as the Ronald P. Stanton Hall on December 16.

Dina Horowitz

other building dedications.

"We have lots of buildings at Yeshiva University that are known by numbers," joked Mr. Joel, asking those in attendance to think about a future building dedication, "especially if your names are not very long."

After his opening comments, Mr. Joel called up Mr. Stanton, who received a large framed picture of the entrance to Stanton Hall, along with a standing ovation from the audience -about 200 people.

Alana Hember (SCW '11), trea-

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Registration Frustration Spot-Saving Rumors Demystified

Yaelle Frohlich

During the recent Spring 2010 registration period, some parts of the Beren Campus were gripped with a familiar rumor: certain upper classmen had registered for courses they had no intention to take, or had even taken already, to save a spot for a friend with a later registration date. The plan? Once the later registration date arrived, the upper classman coordinates her dropping of the course with the lower classman's adding it. The result would be a crime against seniority registration rights.

A proportion of enraged students were under the impression that, as a result of the spot-saving, some seniors had been closed out of classes (specifically Speech Communication) required for graduation, and would hence be unable to graduate on time.

The issue of spot-saving was raised with faculty, staff and students at a Student Life Committee meeting on December 4. There, Office of the Registrar's Diana Benmergui read an email statement from Dean Ethel Orlian (who was busy with that day's registration) clarifying, from the Office of the Registrar's vantage point, what went on regarding spot-saving.

"It appears that many seniors believe that they were closed out of Speech 1010 courses because of seniors who registered for the course to hold spots for lower classmen," read part of Orlian's email. "We investigated this very carefully and, although even one

such occurrence is one too many, there were only three such cases. We lost no time in investigating this situation and spoke with each of the three students involved. Although this is an unconscionable act, it did not cause seniors to be closed out of speech. In fact, every senior who needs Speech 1010 to graduate is in one of the sections of the course."

Orlian suggested that students take speech earlier in their undergraduate program, rather than waiting until their last semester on campus. "There are at least 30 empty spots in speech this fall 2009 semester that students could have taken," wrote Orlian. "However, for various reasons, a large number of seniors waited for their final semester to take the course."

However, Orlian did acknowledge imperfections in the current online registration system. "We agree that it would be most helpful if the Banner system prevented a student from registering for a course she has already taken," stated Orlian. "When we last presented such a request to the Banner implementation team, they explained that the system is university-wide, and there are some schools in the university which do allow courses to be repeated. We will bring our request to the attention of the Banner team once again to see if they can somehow modify the program to apply restrictions only to the undergraduate colleges."

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Stern College Honors Program Celebrates 10th Anniversary

Hannah L. Golden

The S. Daniel Abraham Honors program at Stern College for Women celebrated its 10th anniversary on December 10th with over one hundred students who have joined the program. The evening was both a celebration and request for funds from its founders, donors and participants.

"The women of S. Daniel Abraham Honors program distinguish themselves as being *holkhei derakhim* [forgers of paths]," began Dean Karen Bacon, looking out at all the attendees, some dressed formally for an evening out, others having just run in from lab. "They're very intentional about the way they spend their time...I acknowledge your efforts and your transformative activities and we're very proud of you."

Yet Bacon tempered her remarks, once the audience, including YU benefactors and faculty as well as students, finished their dinners. "I do have some reservations; they started from day one,"

said Bacon seriously. "I always have been concerned that when we single out people for distinction and tell them how impressed we are, we're concerned about them being too haughty. There are some women who turned their backs on the people behind them, when they were successful. This is a risk when you single out people and tell them they're that good. If anyone in this room should fall into this trap of false *gaavah* [self-importance], to turn your back on this institution, and the benefactors of this institution, then you would have failed."

This is a trap easily avoided, according to Dr. Meredith Weiss (SCW '03), graduate of the first honors class, winner of the Anne Scheiber scholarship to Albert Einstein

School of Medicine and current YU fundraiser. "I remember looking around the classroom [of my first honors course] and thinking there was

definitely a mistake," explained Weiss with humor. "And then I got my first paper back, and then I knew that definitely did not belong there."

The Honors Program "fostered my intellectual and formative growth in college," said Weiss, encouraging those who shared the same experience. "I recognize that without their support I would not be where I am today," to donate to the university. "With power comes responsibility...please recognize what Stern had given you and please donate in whatever way you can," she appealed.

The Honors Program that Weiss promoted is dedicated to "enhancing the college experience of high achieving students," according to its mission statement. Students

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THOUGHTS OF STUDENT LEADERS

Christmukkah of the Heart?

Yaelle Frohlich, Editor-in-Chief



With a burst of candlelight, chocolate coins and menorah and mistletoe decorations sharing the window of the 35th

Street and 3rd Avenue D'Agostino store, another Hanukkah has passed. Everyone knows it, too; one of the mitzvot of Hanukkah is advertising the Hanukkah miracle—the alleged triumph of a tiny jar of pure olive oil fueling the Second Temple's menorah for eight whole days, following an unlikely Maccabee victory over the Greek army and Jewish Hellenists.

That Jews are still telling the story, lighting the lights and frying the donuts after 2,000 years is a Hanukkah miracle in its own right. At the very least, it's a modest victory for rabbinic Judaism and an irony of history; Hanukkah, one of two non-biblical holidays, is possibly the most well known Jewish holiday among Jews and non-Jews alike. Even though Hanukkah's story of origin—found in the books of Judith and Maccabees I and II—is relegated to the Apocrypha and the sages instituted its every dictum, it remains the most visible Jewish holiday in the media and popular culture.

It always interests me how Hanukkah and Christmas celebrants pull out their egalitarian caps in late November, Judaism and Christianity may proscribe belief in the other, but in New York's shop windows there does seem to be such thing as a Judeo-Christian tradition. On the Saturday evening this month that happened to be second night of Hanukkah, a friend and I walked into to the 36th Street dorm. As we stepped over the threshold, five 20-something-year-old Santa Clauses (4 guys and girl) that had been walking behind us, at seeing the lit candles through the dorm's window, good-naturedly called "Happy Hanukkah" after us.

And Jews, for their part, are far from oblivious of the Christmas season. I wouldn't be surprised if the average Orthodox American Jew has at some point watched a "Saturday Night Live" Christmas special, gotten the warm fuzzies from "Home Alone" or even stopped to take in a neon reindeer lawn decoration. It's hard to go psychologically unaffected by the culture around us.

Can we have it both ways? Can we have our OU-certified kosher Christmas fruitcake and ignore its religious affiliation too? If I go ice-skating rather than attend a T-cubed lecture and happen to get a kick out of the tinselly Rockefeller Center pine tree in the bargain, does that make me a modern-day Hellenist? Am I being loyal enough

to Judaism if I light candles that last for half an hour and refrain from adopting a Hanukkah bush, even if I get "Jingle Bells" stuck in my head as often as "Maoz Tzur"? And, if I wonder about it for too long, does it make me a thoughtful Jewish woman or simply neurotic?

I may never reach a final conclusion about the *hashkafic* (philosophic) complications of holiday season Diaspora existence, and chances are some Babylonian-Israelite psalmist somewhere is smiling about it.

Most days, however, the cognitive assimilation debate is able to idle dormant at the back of my brain. This past Friday night was a perfect example. As I lit the final eight Hanukkah candles, at least

ten *hanukkiyyot* (Hanukkah candelabras) winked back at me from across the street. I silently considered what it is we're advertising if we already know the story, if, indeed, we even live in a neighborhood of Jews with windows. I realized that perhaps part of *pirsumei nisa* (miracle advertising) is, in reality, advertising ourselves—not just the miracle of Hanukkah, but the miracle of living people who love it enough and are resistant enough to its competitors—Greek or otherwise—to celebrate it. Hopefully, despite the trees, fruitcake and holiday movies, Hanukkah celebration itself can remain *pirsumei nisa* at its brightest.

Honors Program

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can apply to the program when they either apply to the college or after their first year on campus. Criterion for admission to the Honors Program is a 90 percent high school average and minimum score of 1400 on the SAT.

Program participants are required to take seven honors courses during their time at Stern (participants cannot take their major at Sy Syms), participate in five Honors Program events per semester (which Honors Program Director Dr. Cynthia Wachtell coordinates), and write a senior thesis. The attitude of students toward the program varies; some view it as the highlight of their college career, while others consider the distinction a mere formality. Despite Weiss's speech, current students have mixed opinions on how much they owe the Honors program.

"I think there's a lot they can do, but it's a good start," stated Sarah Steinberg (SCW '10). "It's hard to do [the Honors Program] because it's within the structure of a university. Events conflict, classes are limited." Yet Steinberg clarified that she does enjoy the program, and with "a little more creativity and thinking outside the box in running these things it would enhance what we have."

Cheryl Noll (SCW '11) agreed that working honors courses into her course schedule takes some finagling, but she's happy to do it. "Honors Program classes are so much better than regular courses," she said. "The courses tend to be smaller...and it's really interesting the material." However she has had difficulties with one aspect of the program. "The only problem I have, and I've spoken with Dr. [Rabbi Ephraim] Kanarfogel about it, is that the only Judaic courses which are offered as honors are...dependent on Hebrew," said Noll. "So students who are in Mechina/Basic Jewish Studies can't take them."

Noll's opinion of the program is the same as it was when she began college as a freshman three years ago. In that time the Honors Program has not changed much. "The Honors Program Committee, Dean Bacon and I are really happy with it and we don't want to meddle with it just for the sake of meddling," explained Wachtell.

"I don't remember it changing, it was still being formed," reflected Sarah Rudolph (SCW '01). "I was only here two years. Most of the classes I wanted to take anyway were Honors." Though she does not recall exactly what she was required to do differently as an Honors student, she vividly remembered working on her Honors thesis about the Book of Genesis. "That was a major formative experience," said Rudolph, who now teaches at Drisha Institute for Jewish Education. "There are many *shiurim* [lectures] I've given that were from my thesis."

Wachtell is proud of the Honors graduates, and works to make sure that they can complete the program, even if they choose to do so in two or three years, get married or have a baby. "We've established ourselves as a destination for intelligent young observant women," emphasized Wachtell. She takes Honors students' schedules and other needs into account when formulating events each semester to make sure that it all fits into the goal of the program. "That's our vision: that these women will be leaders," she declared. "If they need networking skills, leadership skills, that they'll leave here with a bag of these skills."

Even before she was hired, Wachtell knew that the school was dedicated to making leadership possible for Jewish women. "I was contacted by Dean Bacon who had funding for this program," she recalled. "And would I be interested in this program? There was just one little problem: I was nine

Corrections/Additions:

Pg. 3—The new chair of the board of Yeshiva University is Henry Kressel (originally misspelled as "Chrisal").

Pg. 10—Andrea Efthymiou is the assistant director of the Writing Center at Stern College for Women (originally misspelled "Efthymio").

Pg. 12—The original printing of "Just Ask Your Local Orthodox Maharat" erroneously stated that SCW alumnus Gilah Kletenik is enrolled in Yeshivat Maharat. In actuality, Kletenik is not, and was never, enrolled in Yeshivat Maharat. She is a full-time fellow in GPATS (Yeshiva University's Graduate Program for women in Advanced Talmudic Study).

Pg. 23—Please note that the kashruth certifications of the establishments mentioned in "Let Them Eat Cupcakes" are not affiliated with or approved by Yeshiva University. As such, The Observer does not endorse the kashruth of these establishments. Individuals must take responsibility for conducting their own investigations and making their own decisions regarding patronage.

months pregnant, and not just pregnant, I was due...I sat very still for number of days leading up to that due date. And while in the hospital Dean Bacon called to give me the job."

Wachtell believes that her students can do it all, just as she had her baby in July and had the program running by August. "It's a testament to Stern College—they practice what they preach," reiterated Wachtell. "They are a college for women."

Wachtell sees a bright future for honors program graduates "These are incredibly high achieving women and they've achieved as we thought they would," she said. In a booklet printed by the office of alumni services, it's clear that many of the honors alumni have succeeded professionally and personally. A booklet provided at the event contained messages from previous graduates, among them teachers, MDs, PhDs, wives and mothers.

"The vast majority of students who enter the program complete the program," said Wachtell with pride. "We've always had a very high graduation rate."

"The first year of the honors program had fewer than 40 students participating, and at that point we thought it would be wonderful if someday it could be as big as 90 students," explained Wachtell at the event. "We have far surpassed that goal. We are now at 145 students and had 60 students enter the program this past fall."

"They told us we were the biggest year ever," said Chava Chaitovsky (SCW '08) (GPATS '10) with a smile, "but I think they've told

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NEWS

Registration Frustration

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Benmergui echoed Orlian's statement. "We are going to try to update our banner system to do what you want it to do," she said "...but this is something that's going to take months and months to plan."

Dean Victor Schwartz remarked that this problem is not new to Yeshiva University, nor to other institutions. He mentioned an incident a few years ago on the Wilf Campus in which one student registered for 40 credits worth of classes and then sold spots to other students. (As a consequence, the student was put on probation.) "We should have a system you can't register for those classes [that one has already taken]," said Schwartz, agreeing with Orlian and Benmergui, "but Banner has its limitations."

Benmergui elaborated on the logistical challenges of catching spot-saving. "If you went to summer school and you didn't transfer your course, I can't stop you [from registering]," said Benmergui. However, she said that biology labs are checked every day to find "discrepancies".

At the meeting, student suggestions to combat the occurrence ranged from sending out mass student emails possibly warning

of repercussions for spot-saving to changing the banner system so that once a student registers she can make no further changes to her schedule until registration period is complete.

Benmergui was skeptical of the practicality of doling out consequences. "What am I going to say—'You can't graduate?'" she asked rhetorically at the meeting, with the understanding of the Student Life Committee. "You're on financial hold? You're not."

In a later conversation with The Observer, Benmergui also dismissed the latter suggestion, saying that freezing schedule changes would be both strongly opposed by the student body and result in a tenfold increase to the volume of students coming to the Office of the Registrar for manual course registration.

Although the Offices of the Dean and Registrar try to be vigilant, students remarked that spot-savers could be carrying out their spot-saving without being noticed, especially if saving a course they have never taken. The Observer distributed an online survey to the Beren Campus student body to try to gauge students' reactions to the occurrence and figure out how much spot-saving was really go-

ing on.

Out of 112 respondents, two responded that they had saved spots for friends during spring 2010 registration (one saved English composition; the other saved speech, a Bible class and an organic chemistry lab). Three volunteered that they had saved spots for friends or had had spots saved for them in the past. 16 respondents said they had not heard of spot-saving at all. The remainder wrote that they were not involved in spot-saving during spring 2010 registration.

The overwhelming majority of respondents were opposed to spot-saving, applying to the occurrence descriptors like "unfair," "unethical," "immoral," "selfish" and even "assur" (forbidden by religious law).

"I think it is wrong, unethical, and dishonest," stated one lower senior. "There should be some sort of consequence for this action, such as dropping all the student's classes or putting a notation in their record."

A lower junior emphasized the need for fairness. "The students with more credits had to go through the same [waiting process] before and now it is their turn to get the classes they want," she ex-

plained. "When the lower classmen get older, it will be their turn."

SCW Student Council President Rachael Fried offered her thoughts on the matter. "I think that 'spot-saving' is ethically wrong when thought about in-depth," wrote Fried. "However, if one does not consider the overall picture it makes sense for a person not to think that it is a big deal. Registration is based on seniority, thereby allowing the older students to choose their classes first. When spots are saved for students in other classes and the upperclassmen are closed out because of it, it is completely overriding the system and unfair to those who should have had the spots. For someone who does not think about this, they are simply helping out a younger friend and to them it could even be considered the nice thing to do. In order for this to be stopped, we need to raise awareness of this situation. This is not a new problem in Stern College, as I have been here for a few years and having been hearing about spot-saving for a while yet no one has ever come out to say, 'This is wrong.' Until there is a rule made against this, it will continue to be a problem here."

A contingent of students also expressed sympathy with spot-savers, despite their disapproval. "It's unfair to others and should not be done," wrote one. "At the same time, the system needs correction if this is what people are motivated to do out of desperation. Clearly the registration system is not working well and does not adequately serve the needs of the student body."

A student who wrote that a spot had been saved for her in a prior semester is an example of a student who does not feel her needs are being met. "I think the bigger problem is the lack of availability

of classes," she said. "As a biology major, I was planning on taking genetics this semester but it was closed out very early on. Was I surprised? Not at all. There were only twenty spots available and a huge percentage of the Stern students are bio majors. When I spoke to the registrar about the issue and they realized there were no other available four-credit biologies I could take, they really did not have much to say other than, 'Sorry we cannot help you.'"

Seven respondents were not opposed to spot-saving. "It's a free country," wrote one. "I don't think anyone is wrong for doing it because the current system allows for it," wrote another.

Upper senior Esther Leah Schoenbrun (SCW '10) suggested practical changes that could be implemented to improve the current registration system. "There should be a waiting list for courses, like the system in the University of Maryland," said Schoenbrun, who did not save any spots. "That way, spot saving would be pointless and the issue would resolve itself. It's annoying people hold spots for others—but the screwed up registration accommodates and necessitates it."

"There should also be a more staggered registration," Schoenbrun continued. "I am a super senior and I registered at 7:15 AM on November 30 while lower seniors registered half an hour later, both before the registrar even opened! If I had had any issues registering, my class standing would've been useless as I would have been waiting idly by as lower seniors could have taken my class spots while the registrar was not even open to help out." Schoenbrun thankfully noted that she did not have any problems during this past registration period.

Revel Reaches Out, Brings Academic Jewish Studies to OZ

Yaelle Frohlich

On 6 December, Yeshiva University's Bernard Revel Graduate School of Judaic Studies joined forces with Manhattan's Congregation Ohab Zedek (OZ) to hold a Yom Iyun (day of study) about academic Jewish scholarship. The program, held at the Upper West Side synagogue, is part of a growing effort to reach out to the general Jewish community, said Revel Associate Dean Dr. Mordechai Cohen, an alumnus of Yeshiva College, RIETS and Revel. "Various Jewish communities are expressing a thirst for Jewish scholarship on the highest levels," said Cohen, "and the current Revel administration is eager to meet this demand. There are many exciting new developments in Jewish scholarship and they are quite relevant within the modern Orthodox world. Our goal is to make YU a critical resource for Jewish scholarship within the broader community."

Stu Halpern, who just completed a Revel MA in Bible, works for Revel in addition to being the Student Life Coordinator for YU's Wilf Campus. His purpose at Revel is to "create a sense of community within the Revel student body, as well as increase Revel's visibility to the outside-of-YU community," Halpern stated. Initiatives to create a Revel community have in-

cluded a "Get to Know the Faculty at Revel" event last year, as well as a lunch event for Revel PhD students on December 8, 2009.

"My goal is to help bolster a sense of togetherness among the Revel student body, as well as show others what Revel has to offer, both educationally [and] socially, and even religiously," reiterated Halpern.

Revel offers MA and PhD programs in Bible, Jewish history, Jewish philosophy and Talmudic studies.

Cohen said that a way to foster the Revel-community relationship is through ties to Revel alumni who serve as rabbinic and lay leaders in their communities.

An inherent goal of the Yom Iyun was to bolster the Jewish community's appreciation for Revel as an indispensable asset to Jewish studies. In 1991 the school faced closure. "Very few people know what Revel is," explained Cohen, who was a graduate student there at the time and was shaken by the threat of shutdown.

Cohen maintained that the school is of great import. "It's important for the Jewish community to know that a good track of their teachers can come out of the Revel school," he said. Additionally, Yom Iyun attendees were told of opportunities to audit Revel

classes.

The school is also of academic importance, as Jewish scholarship burgeons. Exciting new developments in scholarship, detailed Cohen in his lecture on "Song of Songs," include the reemergence of texts found in the Cairo *genizah* (repository for old or damaged texts). Recent discoveries include the commentaries of 12th century exegete Rashbam on "Song of Songs" (published in 2008) and "Psalms," which Cohen predicted will be published soon.

Other lectures at the Yom Iyun included: Dr. Jonathan Dauber, assistant professor of Jewish mysticism, on "Kabbalistic Perspectives on the Rambam"; Dr. Ronnie Perelis, assistant professor of Sephardic studies, on "Exile and Spiritual Self-Discovery: Crypto Judaism in the New World"; Dr. Daniel Rynhold, assistant professor of modern Jewish philosophy, on "The Odd Couple: Rav Soloveitchik and Friedrich Nietzsche"; and Dean David Berger, Ruth & I. Lewis Gordon Professor of Jewish History, on "Academic Jewish Studies and Judaism."

Intellectual honesty was a prominent theme in Cohen and Dean David Berger's lectures.

Cohen, in his lecture, recalled being shocked at Artscroll's claim



Courtesy of Rabbi Richard Bieler
Dean David Berger discusses academic Jewish Studies at Congregation Ohab Zedek

NEWS

Economics, Education and the Fire Truck Dentist: Highlights from the 85th Annual YU Hanukkah Dinner

Yaelle Frohlich

America's university system must move toward a meritocracy, argued Director of the National Economic Council Dr. Lawrence H. Summers in his keynote address at Yeshiva University's 85th annual Hanukkah Dinner and Convocation on December 13. "We will not be the type of country we can be until merit determines who can go to college," said Summers, an assistant to President Barack Obama for economic policy and former president of Harvard University. "...Talent and not background."

Economic stature creates a disparity between the graduation rates of poor, middle class and rich families, Summers said, especially with tuition costs rising at universities around the country. "The dumbest rich kids are more likely to graduate from college than the smartest poor kids," stated Summers. "...That's why President Joel did something profoundly important when he froze tuition at this college."

At the Hanukkah Dinner, YU's largest annual fundraiser, the university conferred honorary degrees (Doctor of Humane Letters) on Summers and other noteworthy individuals affiliated

with YU and the Jewish community. Other honorees were: social worker and philanthropist Froma Benerofe; philanthropist Roger W. Einiger, who was involved in the beginnings of Einstein College of Medicine; Emmy and Tony Award-nominated actress, singer and playwright Tovah Feldshuh; film producer, author and philanthropist Maurice Kanbar; and Fifth Avenue Synagogue cantor Professor Joseph Malovany.

Kanbar expressed his reasons for so generously supporting education. "I think that there's nothing more important for our young people than education," he told the audience, declaring that he felt blessed to have had the means to conduct his philanthropy. "It's something nobody can take away from them."

At the dinner portion of the event, YU also recognized "bright lights" in the Jewish community: Sheri Rosenberg, director of the Program in Holocaust and Human Rights Studies and director of the Human Rights and Genocide Clinic at Cardozo Law School; Yeshiva University student Matthew Williams; Dr. Robert Grunstein, a YU alumnus who treats children from underprivileged neighborhoods



YU honorary Doctors of Humane Letters Tovah Feldshuh and Dr. Lawrence Summers with President Richard Joel at the 85th annual YU Hanukkah Dinner.

Yeshiva University

for free from a fire truck (it's large enough to house a clinic, and small enough to travel); Aviva Feuerstein, Stern College for Women student and Kressel Fellow; Jeremy Stern, RIETS student and head of the Organization for the Resolution of Agunot; longtime philanthropist

and Chair Emeriti of the Board of Trustees Morry Weiss; and the Maccabeats.

Dr. Susan Chinitz, another "bright light", serves as associate professor of clinical pediatrics at Einstein. She recognized and acted upon the need for apprehended

children to receive intensive counseling before going into foster care and, in her own time, counsels high-risk, jailed parents on how to raise their children upon release.

Over 600 people, including faculty and about 30 undergraduate students, attended the event.

Learning Tolerance, Raising Money

Hannah L. Golden

The Stern Beit Medrash was busy Thursday night, December 3, when the Yeshiva University Tolerance Club (YUTC) held the first club-sponsored Learnathon. The Learnathon was designed so that every person in attendance would be sponsored to learn from Shlomit Cohen (SCW '09, GPATS '10), on the development of tolerance in Judaism. All proceeds were given to the American Anti-Defamation League (ADL), who sent representatives to the Learnathon to introduce the organization and their work against Anti-Semitism.

The group of thirteen women who gathered to hear Cohen collected \$22 for the ADL. "We achieved our goal: we raised money for the ADL, we raised awareness of the ADL at Stern," stated Miriam Gofine (SCW '11), co-President of YUTC. "We felt that one way we could respond to anti-Semites is to support an organization dedicated to that goal."

The *shiur* (lecture) was only open to women, though the Wilf contingent of the YUTC held a men-only Learnathon at the same time. "We felt that doing a religiously themed event it was most appropriate to have it men and women separately so that everyone would feel comfortable," explained Gofine. The Wilf YUTC is still collecting the money from its sponsors, but they

expect to donate over \$100 to the ADL.

Cohen was personally chosen by Gofine to lead the *habura* (group learning). "I thought: because she's a woman, because she's really learned, because she was a leader of the Social Justice Society—she's someone a lot of people would learn from," said Gofine. Cohen, gesticulating with her source sheet, spoke intently with her audience about how Judaism approaches tolerance for sinners. "Recognize *halakhic*-dictated hatred, but [also a] continued level of compassion," Cohen, framed by the snack table, explained. The *beit midrash* (study hall), usually busy with people, was quiet as the audience listened attentively, adding ideas to Cohen's theme of tolerance in Judaism. "Essentially you're supposed to treat them [sinners] with peace and with kindness," Cohen con-

cluded.


Until now the YUTC has hosted speakers on a variety of social issues within the Jewish community. "The reason we did the *shiur* was to try to create an opportunity where

everyone in YU could participate in the Tolerance Club," clarified Gofine. "It could be a forum for participation that has not previously existed." She acknowledged,

however, that attendance was lower than expected. "The Thursday night experiment might not have been the best," she said. Overall, Gofine expressed satisfaction with


the event. "I was really happy and proud to have a Tolerance club event that was religious-themed and not just social justice," she stated.

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Revel Reaches Out, Brings Academic Jewish Studies to OZ

continued from page 3

at the beginning of its allegorical translation of "Song of Songs" that 11th century commentator Rashi's understanding of the love story *sefer* was strictly allegorical. "That's not what Rashi said," maintained Cohen, clarifying that the commentator in reality employed literal and metaphorical interpretation. "...I think they [advocates of the purely allegorical translation] are afraid of the popular culture around us."

Berger, who gave an extensive interview about academic Jewish studies to Kol HaMevaser this month, also called for truth-fostering open-mindedness when approaching new problems in scholarship. "The issue is the need to examine a range of evidence in the best way one can before reaching conclusions," said Berger, emphasizing that no sole religious outlook provides the best lens through which to view study.

Approximately 80 people attended the Yom Iyun, which was originally proposed by Ohab Zedek's Rabbi Allen Schwartz, also a Revel and RIETS alumnus. "We've already been approached by another NY-area *shul* to do something similar, and I'm guessing that others will follow," revealed Cohen. "Stay tuned."

NEWS

YU Hosts "Symposium on War" as Obama Pledges 30,000 Troops to Afghanistan in Hopes of Ending Decade-long War

Meira Weiss-Faraci

Many politicians and military experts have responded with harsh skepticism to President Barack Obama's pledge to deploy 30,000 more American troops to Afghanistan and cap the decade-long war in the next eighteen months. Due to the precedent of costly and lagging military efforts, many conclude that success in Afghanistan will continue to remain limited without the cooperation of the Afghani people and their political leaders, a reality they claim will not shift dramatically within the context of Obama's political agendas.

"The United States cares more about a stable democracy in Afghanistan than the government of Afghanistan—which is problematic," said defense policy expert Dr. Austin Long at Yeshiva University's Symposium on War on December 7. "By setting a deadline for withdrawal, Obama is just trying to sell a convincing case."

Since the declaration of Operation Enduring Freedom by the Bush administration, United States military efforts in Afghanistan have been considerably costly. Nonetheless, their successes cannot be denied. As of the president's ad-

dress to the United States Military Academy on December 1, 2009, there have been 932 US casualties and approximately \$233 billion US dollars spent on facilitating the war. However, Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan have been halted and essentially defeated, with its infamous leaders and terrorist training camps no longer functioning.

And yet, nearly ten years later, Afghanistan is far from being a peaceful country with government stability.

"The Obama administration will say that it's because of [the war in] Iraq that Afghanistan was never dealt with properly," said Long. "So they are going to do it right this time, because this is the real war—the war where we were attacked."

Supposed American neglect is not the only argument against Obama's plan. There is evidence which indicates that Afghanistan's instability is a result of inappropriate leadership coupled with Pakistan's aiding of the Taliban, both territorially and monetarily. The Afghani government figures have yet to use their authoritative positions to effect significant improvements domestically, with much of the US budget allocated toward in-

ternal growth rechanneled towards their salary paychecks instead of public policy initiatives. Additionally, it can be logically deduced that since Pakistan's main threat against India is its alliance with the Taliban, so long as the Pakistani-Indian conflict persists, so will its sheltering and financing of Taliban members.

"If we left today the Taliban would quickly take over forty percent of the country," asserted Long. "But the truth is that the same thing will probably happen when we pull out in eighteen months too, but at least we will have pulled out in time for the next election which is what the Obama administration wants."

Long, like many other political and military experts, views the deployment of 30,000 additional American troops as excessive and unnecessary to achieving stability in Afghanistan, thereby putting the president's motives and strategic goals into question all together.

"The problem can be solved easily if we invest in Afghanistan as much as we did in World War Two," said Long, "but we don't want to invest sixty percent of American GDP and have ten percent of the population in uniform. That

would be one American to three Afghani—problem solved. But we don't care enough about Afghanistan, it was a mess on September 10th and we didn't care much; because we care about Al Qaeda and dismembering it."

An additional concern of many American politicians and their constituents is the significant increase of casualties, both Afghani and American, as well as a predicted \$45 billion to finance Obama's most recent proposal.

"I just don't get the sense, at this point in time, of a comprehensive policy that says that I should vote for billions of dollars more to send our sons and daughters in harm's way in a way that we will ultimately succeed in our national security goals," said New Jersey Senator Robert Menendez, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as quoted by *The New York Times*.

"I hope I can be convinced before that vote comes. But as of right now, I'm not."

While President Obama's proposition is pending on the approval of the federal legislature, a vote has yet to be scheduled.

Applications for the 2010-2011 Honors Program Increase, Despite Drop in Enrollment

Adina Brizel

Last year, 31 high school students agreed to come to Yeshiva University if accepted, no matter which other colleges granted them admission. These students, only 15 of whom—seven men and eight women—were accepted, were applicants to YU's Early Decision program. Early Decision, which is only open to Honors Program applicants, requires that students apply and commit to attending the school (and participating in its Honors Program) prior to the regular admissions deadline. The program was initiated last year to "allow students who are committed to YU the chance to express that commitment and to be allowed to complete their college application process in the fall," according to Murray Sragow, associate director of undergraduate admissions.

This year there were 95 applicants—57 men and 38 women—who applied Early Decision. YU's decision to continue the program goes against a growing national trend at America's elite universities. Among the schools that have dropped their early decision programs are Harvard, Stanford and the University of Virginia. However, "at this point, the program [at YU] has been extremely successful," Sragow says comfortably.

While fewer students applied to YU this past year, the number of Early Decision applications tripled. In addition to knowing they are guaranteed a spot at YU, Early Decision students receive a full tuition scholarship. This scholarship waives the student's requirement to pay the annual \$31,594 tuition fee. Sragow believes that this growth will continue, based on the attendance of 32 potential students in this year's Early Decision Honors Days (at which interviews are conducted). Last year, approximately 16 people participated.

War in Brookdale: Penny Skirmishes Ensur

Sarah Snider

The war began. The residents on each floor of Stern College for Women's Brookdale Residence Hall engaged in a battle to gather the most pennies for their floor. The weapons: penny jars on every floor of Brookdale, waiting to collect the coins. The aim: to give something back to *tzedakah* (charity). The means: spare change.

The premise behind penny wars, according to Leah Speyer (SCW '11), who dreamed up the game, is that people fail to see the value of penny. Pennies used to be prized, but today there are organizations dedicated to abolishing the copper coin. The website of one such organization, Citizens for Retiring the Penny, showcases a penny revolving over the caption "Isn't it annoying?" Those students who agree could drop their unwanted change into the jug conveniently situated next to the elevators on their floor, each penny adding one point to that floor's total.

Students were also free to sabotage other floors by inserting change of larger value into the jugs of competing floors, thereby canceling out points according to the worth of the coins. For instance, five points were subtracted for every nickel, ten for every dime, and so on. "Penny Wars are what I like to call 'the solution to your penny problems,'" pronounced Speyer.

"It is a way in which you can get rid of the penny while giving *tzedakah* at the same time." It is not always easy to get people to part with their money, and Speyer hoped that penny wars would provide a fun way for people to give while having a good time and fostering a sense of friendly competition.

The money collected in Penny Wars—\$630 in total—was given to the Esther Zuroff Keren HaEzer Fund, which provides financial assistance to Stern students. This fund, overseen by Dean Zelda Braun, helps Stern students in need of food, clothing, textbooks, and other necessities.

In the beginning of the semester, Speyer approached Rachel Kraut, Director of the Office of University Housing and Residence Life (UHRL) with her fundraising idea in order to get advice as to how to best implement Penny Wars; UHRL decided to adopt this project as their own. After receiving approval from Dean Braun, the game was planned by Speyer, UHRL staff members Kraut and Shana Glasser, and the Residence Advisors (RAs) of Brookdale. The RAs voted to organize Penny Wars as their annual project to create a sense of community within the dorm. Their penny-projects included penny hunts, and a penny-jug decorating contest—whose winners re-

ceived hundreds of pennies for their floor's jug. In addition, the RAs thought up penny bombing, a night when each coin's value is multiplied by two, as part of the plan to stir up a sense of excitement and friendly competition in the penny warriors.

The 4th and 7th floor winners were announced in an email to the student body on December 17. Though motivation for this game is *tzedakah*, since "to the victors go the spoils," the floor will also get a pizza party sponsored by UHRL. Penny Wars were only fought in Brookdale this semester. However, based on their success, the program may be implemented on a larger scale throughout the Beren Campus, possibly spreading to the Wilf



Penny Wars raised \$630 for Beren Campus students in need. Dina Horowitz

Campus in the future through the Students Helping Students organization, in which Speyer is an active member.

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Don't forget your mitts and hat!**

NEWS

Elevator Breakdown Due to Flooding in 245 Lexington Avenue

Aimee Rubenstein

Elevators in the 245 Lexington building, recently renamed Stanton Hall, stopped working on Monday, December 7th due to a water valve breaking and subsequent flooding of the elevators and cafeteria. An email was sent from Associate Dean Ethel Orlian at 8:49 A.M. Monday morning alerting the student body of the incident and that the "the elevators in that building will not be operating until further notice."

Elevator life is just another part of living in a city known for its skyscrapers and tall buildings. Nevertheless, whether patient or aggressive, every student has hoped for a day without the nuisance of elevator crowding. But even crowded elevators seemed enticing as crowds of students watched on as mechanics huddled around all three elevators in a lobby decked with yellow caution tape that Monday.

"Normally, I don't check my sstud [student mass email] in the morning; I had no idea I would have to climb the stairs to get to class," said Mercedes Cohen (SCW '12). Many students were concerned for their fellow classmates who may have disabilities or health problems and were not necessarily able to use the stairs. Dassi Fant (SCW '11) was recently using crutches due to an injury and couldn't miss class. She took the service elevator, which only goes as high as the fifth floor, though her class was five more flights up. Following the flooding, stairwells reeked from the damage and had to be fanned out. "It was disgusting," says Fant,

"but everyone was very helpful."

"These things sometimes happen," explained Jeff Rosengarten, associate vice president of administrative services responsible for the management of facilities, capital and infrastructure improvements, security and safety. All buildings in Manhattan have a wood water-reservoir on their roof. However due to a "mechanical breakdown of the system," said Rosengarten, the tank was filled and unable to stop resulting in an overflow of water in the drains. Since the drains were too full, the water in the tower was pulled by gravity straight down through the elevator shafts, as they are closest to the reservoir. "Elevators don't like water," Rosengarten pointed out. Inside every elevator is a circuit board and water will produce malfunctions. Therefore, some of the circuit boards needed replacements.

However, "workers were there immediately," said Rosengarten, "...allowing the circuit boards to begin drying [that] Sunday night." Rosengarten accompanied the technicians, who progressed quickly, and one elevator was available by the first day after the incident. If a circuit was unable to dry, it was immediately replaced. And to much of the student body's relief, the two remaining elevators were available for use by the following Tuesday. At first, security guards manually operated the elevators to help students and faculty. "We rely a lot on computers nowadays, but every so often they don't work," said Rosengarten.

New Madricha Ruchanit Hopes to Change Student Body's 'New-Yorker' Attitude

Leah Avner

Naomi Levitt joins Stern College for Women as the new *Madricha Ruchanit*, a position meant for providing an outsider's guidance for the students of Stern College. Levitt's position was previously held by Shira Resnick, who joined the program at its inception in 2007. Resnick retired this past May.

While most students are aware of the *Madrichot Ruchanot*, very few are taking advantage of the program. Many first-time on-campus students will tell you that even with a semester under their belts, they are still having a hard time meeting people. Levitt will tell you the same thing. "I go to the cafeteria and introduce myself to students, but it's hard to get people to come and talk to me," Levitt admits.

Levitt, a Stern College alumna ('02) who currently works as a nurse in infertility treatment, says she always wished there was a program like the *Madrichot Ruchanot* when she attended school. "I loved school, but I'm a New Yorker," says Levitt, a native of Riverdale, NY. "I felt that school was not a community...I had the attitude of coming to school during the week and having the weekend at home." In fact, Levitt admits to spending only one Shabbat on campus during her three years as a student. "I had a 'home-life'," she says.

Now, Levitt is trying to change the attitude that so many Stern

students still share. She wants to let the students know that Stern can be a community. Associate Dean of Students Zelda Braun explains that Beren Campus professors are extremely busy and do not always have the ability to give the students the personal attention they may require, and that is just where the *Madrichot Ruchanot* come into play. The *Madrichot Ruchanot* "are educated, smart, and savvy," says Dean Braun. "They are available to communicate with the women about life concerns, and have the ability to hear and understand and foster thinking of the presented problems."

When asked why Levitt was hired so late into the semester, Dean Braun explains that Levitt was "hand-picked, two of the other *Madrichot* knew her and recommended her." After meeting with Levitt, it was clear she was the right person for the job.

"It's nice to have someone who's an outsider in ways," says Levitt. "I feel like it's cool to have someone to chat with."

While Levitt speaks with much excitement about her new role on campus, there is one message she wishes to convey to the student body. "Just tell people we're all here to listen," she says. "At the end of the day, I think most people just want to be heard. When else do you have a chance to walk into someone's office, for free, and just talk to them?"

Stanton Hall Dedication

continued from page 1

surer of the Stern College for Women Student Council, was asked to give a student's perspective of the building. She spoke of Stanton Hall's centrality on the Beren Campus as a place for classes, clubs, daily social life, and the home of America's largest women's *Beit Midrash* (study hall).

The celebration included the investiture of Professor Dr. Adam Zachary Newton as the Ronald P. Stanton Chair in Literature and the Humanities. Prof. Newton received his BA, MA, and PhD from Harvard University. He has authored four books, is working on a fifth, and has been teaching a wide range of courses in YU since 2007, such as "Aggadic Affinities: Torah and the Modern" and "Interpreting Texts: Literary Reading and Critical Practice."

At the conclusion of the ceremony, guests and students were treated to a tasty buffet in the newly named Stanton Hall lobby. Some of the treats included chocolate bars engraved with "Ronald P. Stanton" and cookies with a picture of the Stanton Hall entrance on the icing.

The new name is nice, though it may be hard to get used to. "It's a little bit different," remarked Chana Salomon (SCW '11), "but it's so much better."



Dina Horowitz

A water valve break put Stanton Hall's elevators out of commission for a day earlier this month.

10 Tevet falls on
Sunday, December 27th

Fast Begins: 5:51am
Fast Ends: 5:05pm

(chabad.org)

FEATURES

Platonic Relationships within the Orthodox Community

Estee Goldschmidt

The existence of platonic relationships is an issue that has been debated heatedly. In the Orthodox community especially, where interaction between members of the opposite genders for purposes other than marriage is strongly discouraged, it is difficult to find a place for platonic relationships.

During interviews, many students and faculty members felt uncomfortable sharing their opinions on the matter, either because they are not sure where they stand on this issue, or felt uncomfortable sharing their opinion in a public forum; the issue of platonic relationships can be extremely personal because of the *hashkafic* (philosophic) and *halakhic* (Jewish legal) boundaries that are involved.

The platonic relationship originated in the philosophy of Plato, in which love ascends from "passion for the individual to the contemplation of the universal and ideals." This theory, when applied to inter-gender relationships, translates into a close relationship between two persons, in which sexual desire does not exist, or has been suppressed.

Penina Weber is a Stern College for Women senior majoring in Judaic studies who does not believe in the existence of true platonic relationships. "There is an innate drive for physical and emotional love in all people," says Weber, "which is necessary for proper, healthy, loving marriages, and therefore child-bearing." She also says that even when friendships do exist, "there is the constant possibility of one liking the other, and then it's only a matter of time before they become physically involved, to whatever degree."

Chana Scholl, an SCW senior majoring in psychology, agrees with Weber. "I am very doubtful that cross-gender platonic relationships exist at all," she says, "and if they do, I think it's only possible to maintain a platonic relationship for a limited time frame or if both parties only see each other sporadically."

Other students not only think that platonic relationships exist, but that they should be sought-after goal. "With interactions with human beings, diversity is the key to life," says Ilana Hostyk, a junior at SCW. "If I would never limit my friendship with someone based on religion, race or sexual preference, why would I limit it based on gender? It is completely possible to have a platonic relationship, and I believe they are essential for having a complete life."

Some students do not take a definitive stand and believe that platonic relationships can exist for some people some of the time. Yishai Barkhordari is a senior at

Yeshiva College, majoring in psychology and sociology. He believes that the extent of platonic relationships depends on the boundaries. "As long as individuals can exercise control and maintain certain boundaries, it is possible [to maintain platonic relationships]," he maintains. "Many people may have more difficulty—to the point of being impossible—while some may find it easy."

Abby Vishniavsky is a junior at SCW, majoring in biology. She agrees that platonic relationships can exist, yet she sharpens the boundaries. "The [platonic] relationship has a status of its own," Vishniavsky explains. "There are more boundaries and more distance than with a friend of the same gender. There are just certain things I may discuss with my friends that are girls that I would never discuss with a guy friend."

Abby notes difficulty when a platonic relationship transforms to become romantic. "It is sometimes easier to skip the transition and just meet someone with the intentions of a romantic relationship, skipping the necessity for a platonic friendship," she says.

Miriam Gofine is a junior majoring in psychology. "I don't know whether they [platonic relationships] exist," she says, "because I'm not sure if the term refers to thoughts or a friendship that never involves a long-term crush."

The attitude towards platonic relationships on campus seems to be diverse among students and faculty. "It is an open atmosphere where each individual can choose their own mode of socialization," says Vishniavsky.

SCW Mashgiach Ruchani Rabbi Dovid Cohen does not believe platonic relationships should be pursued. "I am not an advocate of platonic relationships if there is no *tachlitic* [goal-oriented] purpose," says Rabbi Cohen. "They can raise potential pitfalls and distractions for those involved."

Scholl thinks that the general environment in SCW and YC encourages platonic relationships. "It seems to me that the YU administration believes in cross-gender platonic relationships due to their consistent encouragement of coed activities," she says, "since the intermingling is obviously not all marriage oriented."

Whether one was brought up in surroundings that encouraged platonic relationships, such as coed schools and summer camps, influences opinions on platonic relationships. Scholl attended an all-girls Beis Yaakov school. To her, the idea of platonic relationships was extremely foreign. "I just remember feeling totally shocked the first time I went to the Stern cafeteria and saw a boy sitting there eating," she remembers. "I actually did a double-take."

Vishniavsky comes from a very different background. "Because I went to a coed school," she says, "I learned that cordiality and distanced friendships between opposite genders are perfectly valid."

Barkhordari's experience falls somewhere between Scholl and Vishniavsky's. "I grew up with a balance of traditional and modern values," he says. "On the one hand, I had been encouraged to wear a kippah and tzitit, make brachot and daven every day as a child. On the other hand, I had also been encouraged to socialize with girls and cultivate both friendships and relationships as a teenager. However, when I was in high school, I learned and explored my religiosity. Consequently, I made strong efforts not to maintain cross-gender relationships when I was in yeshiva, and focus on my studies as well as my life path."

Ultimately, each person decides for him or herself what their comfort level is in terms of interacting with members of the opposite gender. Weber thinks that platonic relationships should be kept to a minimum. "Coming into dating/marriage without negative experiences with the opposite gender, physical or even just emotional," opines Weber, "allows both spouses to enter this crucial time and relationship with clean innocence, excitement, and optimism, open and happy to learn about

the other and give of him/herself to the other, without fear of being emotionally or physically abused, G-d forbid, as may have happened in the past."

Scholl agrees with Weber and expresses her frustration. "It can be difficult to be a student at YU and not believe in platonic relationships," says Scholl, "because so much is coed. Since I've been at Stern my perception on the issue has evolved to some extent, however I still feel varying degrees of guilt organizing a coed Shabbaton or attending a coed lobbying trip, and I wish that there was a way for both communities, the platonic relationship believers and disbelievers, to experience the full range of opportunities and experiences at YU without having to compromise their beliefs."

Miriam Gofine doesn't like to analyze the issue endlessly. "I don't think it matters whether platonic friendships are real or not—at the end of the day, I can enjoy my friendships with guys without thinking about it too much," says Gofine.

The difference in opinions within the Stern College community about the issue of platonic relationships speaks volumes about its controversiality and complexity, making the issue a hotbed of discussion among Stern College students.



Must all male-female friendships lead to something more?

The Observer

FEATURES

"Trembling Before G-d" with TAC

Simi Lampert

This is not the first Yeshiva University newspaper article to be written about homosexuality within the Orthodox Jewish community. Harking back to at least 2003, the Torah approach to "the gay question" has been discussed as it relates to American politics, art, National Coming Out Day and even the movie "Borat." Ever since the first article written by an anonymous gay Yeshiva College student was published in "Kol Hamevaser"—and answered with a flood of replies, including another anonymous piece, numerous letters to the editor and pages of online comments—there has been a cry for an official Yeshiva University response to homosexuality within its student body. Perhaps it is for this reason that Stern College for Women's student-run Torah Activities Council (TAC) recently decided to screen the movie "Trembling Before G-d" at their Marvelous TAC Videos (MTV) night. Introducing the screening was Rabbi Dr. Aharon Fried, a professor of psychology at Stern, who held a question-answer session following the thought-provoking film.

"Trembling Before G-d" is a documentary by Sandi Simcha DuBowski that was released in 2001 and portrays a selection of Jewish men and women who identify themselves as both Orthodox and gay. Some of them are openly gay, while others remain "in the closet." All of them struggle to reconcile their sexual proclivity with their religious identity.

The aim of the film, according to Fried, and the purpose of showing it in a YU venue, is to "appeal to reason and allow for an open discussion of ideas." If the true purpose of the film is simply to humanize the issue by putting a face to the abstract debate, then it certainly succeeds. The audience cannot help but feel the pain of each person depicted.

The crowd of Stern and YC students who gathered to watch this screening responded with compassion, and, where appropriate, appreciation for the fleeting moments of humor. One philosophy major at Stern who attended the event spoke about her feelings afterward. "This movie really opened my eyes to a small but important section of our Jewish community, and what they have to deal with on a daily basis," she said.

"The issue of homosexuality is not of some individuals, but ours," Fried emphasized to the viewers. "They are ours."

Acknowledging all this, we must also be aware, according to Fried, that the film does have its "agendas." The creators of the film would like its audience to believe that homosexuality is immutable and definitively not a choice but

an inborn trait.

Many figures in the Orthodox Jewish community have a similar problem with the one-sided angle of the exposition. In a response posted on the "Trembling Before G-d" website, Rabbi Avi Shafran stated that the "picture is both incomplete and distorted" as it "thoroughly portrays the challenges faced by its subjects; it simply does not allow Judaism to make its case."

Many critics point as well to the editing and cutting that went into making the film. Not only were certain people chosen to appear, perhaps for reasons such as having experienced particularly harsh reactions to their homosexuality from rabbinical or psychological authorities, it has also been suggested that the responses from the featured Orthodox rabbis were unfairly pruned. The movie calls for empathy yet, according to one rabbi who appeared in the movie, Rabbi Aharon Feldman, the final cut "makes us appear to be narrow and bigoted" instead of highlighting the compassion exhibited by many Orthodox rabbis. Absent is any mention of Orthodox outreach to homosexuals, such as the organization JONAH which, according to its website, "seeks to reunify families, to heal the wounds surrounding homosexuality, and to provide hope."

These are not the only limitations of the documentary. In an interview conducted on Wilf campus with an anonymous gay student who also attended the Thursday event, the YC student said that he believes the film "needs to be updated." Although it was released just eight years ago, it was in production for a full six years before that. This student, who for the sake of this article will be identified as "X," believes that the movie is slightly out of touch. "For the time that it came out, it was a pivotal stepping stone," he said, as it satisfied the need to portray the "emotional perspective"; but now time has passed. It is "upsetting that it's the only thing that exists" now, according to X, and we now need to deal with the fact that homosexual acts are very clearly "an *aveira* [sin]," X said. "It's in the Torah."

"Trembling Before G-d" does not claim to present a *halakhic* (Jewish legal) position on the question of homosexual acts. Nevertheless, "it alludes to flexibility within the Jewish Code," said Fried in his introduction, "and that is more debatable" than is implied. One of the individuals depicted in the film has drawn more censure than others: Rabbi Steven Greenberg, the man championed as "the first gay Orthodox rabbi," who does not apologize for what many see as his blatant disregard for one of the

613 mitzvot.

Rabbi Greenberg is a YU and RIETS alumnus who is also openly gay and lives with his longtime partner. He has written a book as well as numerous articles on the topic of Orthodox Jewry and homosexuality. He strongly believes that *halakha* should, and will, "reconfigure" itself to accept homosexuality. In an interview with The Observer, he discussed the way *halakha* rose to meet innovations such as electricity and new understandings of the nature of a deaf-mute, and compared that to the idea of homosexuality. "[There is an] inevitability that people, and Orthodox rabbis, will recognize that this is a non-pathological minority variation of human sexuality," said Rabbi Greenberg. "As that becomes clearer and clearer, *halakha* can respond to that. It may be ten years away, but it will happen."

Rabbi Greenberg's ideas of the changing nature of *halakha*, including amending outright prohibitions from the Torah, have caused many to question whether he can legitimately be considered Orthodox. "When people say I'm not Orthodox," Rabbi Greenberg explained, "I say, 'I understand why you might say that, let's have a conversation, let's see where we end up.'" At the very least, he said, "we must shape sexual ethics with the reality of gay and lesbian people and their lives."

The film is one that opens a Pandora's box of controversial debates and ideas. It is perhaps for this reason that, although it originally intended to sponsor the event, Yeshiva College's Student Organization of Yeshiva, one of the largest student-run groups on the Wilf Campus, backed out once it became aware of the content of the MTV film. Flyers advertising the film were taken down, and the bus from the Wilf Campus to the Beren Campus was canceled and later had to be arranged by TAC. In an email interview, Jason Jacobs, the president of SOY, discussed SOY's official stance. "I felt very strongly that I should rethink being involved with this," wrote Jacobs. "I felt that this was inappropriate for obvious reasons but more importantly I felt that this issue has gone out of control in YU (or at least on the Wilf Campus)." One of these "obvious reasons" was what Jacobs referred to as the "highly inappropriate" image on the flyers, copied from the film's cover, which depicts two Jewish men embracing.

X said in response to SOY's decision to pull its support that, while it was "upsetting because they made a promise and backed out, which was unprofessional," he understood the reason completely.

"Specifically at Wilf Campus

there has been so much discussion—in terms of articles, and [the upcoming] panel—it has become overkill," X opined. "They're beating the subject to death." Right now, says X, what the YU community needs is for its *roshei yeshiva* (yeshiva heads) and president to "come out with a public statement. Until that happens, the Orthodox community is just going to keep having these back and forth arguments."

However, X says that while the intolerance on campus could be "a lot worse, it is definitely still a problem." X feels that university leaders need to declare: "Be supportive."

The anonymous author of "The Gay Question," an article about being a gay YC student published in The Commentator's November issue, wrote that more needs to be done on campus to raise student awareness "that regular, *frum* kids in our community really struggle with this issue and have nowhere to turn."

There are those who think that the recent amount of public discussion regarding this topic is not a positive development. "What are we accomplishing?" asked one Stern undergraduate majoring in political science. "The more we talk about an issue that opposes

halakha, the less *assur* [forbidden] it seems. The shock value dies out. People become less upset that others are acting solely on desires, which starts a vicious cycle of legitimizing the actions." She thinks that "Trembling Before G-d," though it helps people understand the struggle of Orthodox gays and lesbians, is also dangerous. "[We could then] lose sight of what we need to sympathize with, and end up forgetting the practical problems" that arise when approaching homosexuality from the framework of Jewish law, she says.

The latest development on the YU homosexuality dialogue scene is the announcement of a forthcoming panel discussion, to be moderated by Rabbi Yosef Blau, Mashgiach Ruchani at Yeshiva College, entitled "Being Gay in the Orthodox World." The panel, organized by the YU Tolerance Club and the Wurzeiler School of Social Work, will host gay undergraduates and recent graduates of Yeshiva University. The event, advertised as "an open discussion," will take place at the Wilf Campus on Tuesday, December 22, at 8:00 pm.



Elizabeth Penn (left) and Chana Gila Levy made it to the final round of the National Intercollegiate Women's Fencing Association (NIWFA) Christmas Invitational this month in New Jersey. Penn placed sixth out of 42 and received a medal. Levy placed ninth.

FEATURES

Substance Dependency: No Outsider to Any Group

Alexa Rosenberg

Shame. Despair. Denial. Isolation. From the pews of the synagogues, and the aisles of the kosher supermarkets, from every walk and way of life, comes a group whose existence is rarely recognized: a group of Jews struggling with addiction. While the secular community freely acknowledges the presence of addiction, with practically every magazine containing at least one celebrity tale of rehab, in the Jewish community it is seldom, if ever, discussed. This moratorium makes it even more difficult for Jewish addicts to come forward and seek treatment. However, while many communities remain ignorant of the problem, the past forty years have seen hope rise for those suffering from addiction, and for their families.

In 1978, the UJA Federation of New York Task Force on Alcoholism decided to hold a weekend retreat for recovering addicts and their family members. On this retreat, Jewish ideas were mixed with the more typical recovery philosophy. From this weekend came the Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others, or JACS. Now a part of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, this program provides support for addicts in all

stages of addiction and recovery. Volunteers and staff members are available to meet with anyone in need, on the phone or in person, and recovery meetings take place nationwide, as well as in Australia, Brazil, Canada and Israel. The JACS also offers events centered around Judaism, like a "clean and sober Seder and Purim," providing a safe environment for recovering addicts to celebrate holidays in which alcohol traditionally plays a large part. While many of this program's services are set up to directly benefit Jewish addicts and their families, some of these services also benefit the community as a whole. For example, the JACS offers training for Rabbis and educators in awareness and prevention of addiction.

This training combats the widely spread ignorance of Jewish addiction. The all too prevalent myth, that Jews don't become alcoholics or drug addicts, is dangerous to Jewish communities, many of which contain at least one addict who is simply too ashamed to come forward.

Many reasons are given as to why Jews are supposedly unaffected by addiction. They range from religious to scientific, from compelling to ludicrous. Some sci-

entists discuss a genetic immunity to addiction found in some Jews, while others speak about early exposure to alcohol in religious ceremonies. However, these reasons, valid or not, allow communities to turn their backs on the problem.

Dr. Chaim Nissel, director of the Yeshiva University Counseling Center, stated in a phone interview that addiction is not limited to non-Jews. "Alcoholism exists in all religious and social groups, including the Orthodox group, including our students," he says. No community should consider themselves immune to addiction. "The Counseling Center [at Yeshiva University] has treatment and referral options for students who feel that they have a problem with drugs or alcohol," says Dr. Nissel. "The Counseling Center is also available to speak with students (individually or in groups) about safety concerns and more generally about these issues."

It is true that a lower percentage of Jewish addicts are reported, as compared to non-Jewish cases. However, it is possible that the shame attached to addiction prevents many from seeking help. According to the American Association of Medical Colleges: "Nearly 4 million Americans a year receive

treatment for substance abuse and addiction. Almost 20 million more need treatment and do not seek it."

Addictions do not just appear out of thin air. "Substance abuse generally starts as experimentation—no one starts using and plans on becoming addicted," explains Dr. Nissel. And while experimentation may be the beginning, for some that exploration will take them down pathways they never planned to travel. As an addiction takes hold, the results can be catastrophic. Over a period of time an addiction can destroy relationships, sidetrack careers and take a heavy physical toll.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, "[a]ddiction is a chronic disease." And, just like many diseases, untreated it can be fatal. Genetics and environment are factors in addiction, just as they are in cardiovascular disease and type II diabetes. While personal responsibility for life choices cannot be dismissed, these factors illustrate a more complex picture of addiction than is at first presented. As in many other diseases, treatments and change of lifestyle is required. And just as a patient suffering from diabetes needs the support of family and friends, so

too does a patient suffering from addiction.

There are many reasons people avoid seeking treatment for an addiction. Some addicts feel that their families and friends will shun them if their addiction is discovered. Some, particularly in Orthodox circles, are worried that their marriage prospects will be adversely affected. Other Jewish addicts hesitate to join groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous because their meetings are typically held in churches. While programs like JACS, which involve Jewish tradition with treatment, have helped Jewish addicts to come forward and seek help, many barriers still remain between an addict and his quest for treatment. These barriers can seem insurmountable when faced alone. Family, friends and community members play an important part in the recovery process.

If you struggle with substance use, or you know someone that is struggling, contact the Counseling Center for help. The Counseling Center on the Beren Campus can be reached at 917-326-4942 or at counseling@yu.edu.

From Austria to the Churchill Society: A Profile of Professor Manfred Weidhorn

Suzanne Mazel

A look beyond the classroom shows a whole life to be discovered.

Look beyond the classroom setting to the person teaching the class. Who do you see? Just another professor, or a person? While sitting in English class with Dr. Manfred Weidhorn, it's easy to get lost in the literature and forget the figure, but doing so would be missing out on the opportunity to learn about an incredibly fascinating life.

Born in Vienna, Austria, Dr. Weidhorn left at age seven in March of 1938, after Germany's annexation of Austria, the Anschluss. He traveled with his mother through Belgium, France, Spain and Cuba on the way to America.

It's "difficult to remember my thoughts and feelings at the time," says Weidhorn, as he was so young at the time. He does recall, however, that he "worried about things."

One story Dr. Weidhorn does remember involved "a lot of drama" between his mother and her sister, having to do with taking along his mother's parents. "There was only so much room in the truck and the decision was made not to take the grandparents along," he recalls.

His mother and her sister went separate ways when his aunt trav-

eled with her husband's family and arrived in America at a different time. Later, once in America, "they did not talk to each other for a while because the grandparents remained in Belgium and were taken away to Auschwitz," recounts Weidhorn.

Dr. Weidhorn arrived in America in November 1941, a month before the attack on Pearl Harbor. He lived in Manhattan's Lower East Side before settling in Boro Park. He and his late wife then moved to Fair Lawn, NJ, where they raised two sons. Dr. Weidhorn currently resides there.

Drawn to the field of English "by process of elimination... because I'm not too good with other languages," Dr. Weidhorn received his undergraduate degree and doctorate at Columbia University, with a master's degree from Wisconsin. Before obtaining the master's degree, Dr. Weidhorn spent time stationed in Germany with a peacetime army. His Ph.D. is in the field of seventeenth century non-dramatic English literature, a genre including Milton, John Donne and Francis Bacon.

After completing his formal education, Dr. Weidhorn spent an academic year at the University of Alabama as an English instructor,

which led him to two discoveries: "I love teaching and that the South is different from Brooklyn," he laughs.

Teaching, he feels, is a "great career."

"It's wonderful to live the life of the mind," elaborates Dr. Weidhorn. "To be paid for doing what you would do anyway...is a blessing."

Dr. Weidhorn then spent the next three years at Brooklyn College, followed by the "long haul" at Yeshiva: from 1963 to the present.

About those nearly 47 years spent at Yeshiva, Dr. Weidhorn says some positive aspects about the institution are its "small size and stimulating students," but is quick to point out there have been some "lumps" along the way.

One such lump involved attempting to unionize the faculty at Yeshiva. The administration vowed to fight all the way to the Supreme Court. The faculty lost in the Supreme Court by one vote, a 5-4 decision, in 1980. "It's not notorious; it's called the Yeshiva case," says Dr. Weidhorn. "But people in academia speak of the Yeshiva case because it shut down unionization at all private colleges."

During his career, Dr. Weidhorn has authored several books and

articles. Dr. Weidhorn wrote four books on Winston Churchill, which he supposes has "something psychologically to do with fleeing Hitler."

Dr. Weidhorn recalls being on a ferry boat, still with his grandparents, reading and translating the newspaper for his grandfather. When the name Churchill came up, he remembers his grandfather saying, "Churchill is a great man."

Decades later, while searching for something to write about, the name popped into his head. Dr. Weidhorn said that Churchill "saved western civilization, or saved [him]" and he was "repaying the favor by writing about him."

Following those writings, the Churchill Society gave Dr. Weidhorn an award for excellence in Churchill studies at an upper-crust banquet. As everyone applauded him "vehemently," a thought crossed his mind. "Wow, I've come a long way from fleeing Hitler," he remembers thinking.

He also researched the impact Galileo had on world history and concluded that Galileo remains the "most influential human being who ever lived." Dr. Weidhorn self-published a book to that effect, titled "The Person of the Millennium."

One piece of advice Dr. Weidhorn would impart to students? "If you really feel sure of something you should really not give up," he states, drawing on personal experience. "I wrote an essay which was turned down by 27 different publications and then got accepted. If you feel confident about what you've done, you mustn't give up."

Even in your
stress,
don't forget
to thank
your
Shabbat
waitress!

FEATURES

The Evolution of Women's Prayer Groups

Chani Markel

In recent years, women's prayer groups have become prevalent throughout the Jewish community, yet still remain a controversial topic of debate. The issues revolving around women's prayer groups are rooted in the *halakhot* (Jewish laws) regarding a woman's mitzvah of *tefillah* (prayer). Although both men and women are included in the mitzvah of daily prayer, their obligations differ in nature. Unlike men, women are not obligated in *tefillah betzibur*, communal prayer. Ten women are therefore *halakhically* unable to constitute a *minyan*, a quorum of at least ten people. Certain prayers classified as *devarim she'bi'qedusha* such as *kaddish*, *qedusha*, *barkhu* and the *yud gimmel midot* (13 attributes) require that there be a *minyan* present.

Due to this vital difference between men and women's obligation in prayer, men typically take on a more active role in Orthodox prayer services. Some women feel isolated by the *mehitza* (divider between men and women's seating sections) in traditional *minyanim* and do not like being passive bystanders, so to speak, in communal prayer. These women feel that the way to achieve their goal of having more meaningful prayer is to *daven* (pray) in a place where they have the opportunity to take on an active role.

Women's prayer groups were initiated by women who wanted to maximize their participation in communal prayer, yet wanted to stay within the strict framework of *halakha*. These groups are made up solely of women, who conduct the prayer service on their own. The first women's prayer group, or women's *tefillah* group, began in the late 1960s in New York City's Lincoln Square Synagogue, with the approval of Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, the congregation's founding rabbi and spiritual leader at the time. Women danced with the Torah on *Simhat Torah* and came up to the *bima* (prayer podium) for *aliyot*. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, monthly women's prayer groups were initiated in various communities such as Baltimore, Riverdale and Washington Heights. Similar groups have been taking place internationally in Israel, Canada, England and Australia. Today, most women's prayer groups are affiliated with the Women's Tefillah Network, an organization started in 2000 to provide resources, support and education about women's prayer services. In 2000, there were 33 women's *tefillah* groups in the United States and over fifty other groups world-wide.

Initially, most groups met monthly on Shabbat or on Rosh Hodesh (the first of the Hebrew month) in people's homes. In these prayer groups, women lead all aspects of the *tefillah* service,

including reading the Torah, but leave out the parts of davening that require a *minyan*, as per the advisement of *halakhic* authorities such as Rabbi Moshe Feinstein. One must make the important distinction that these groups are not called women's *minyanim*, but rather are labeled "women's prayer groups" to demonstrate that according to *halakha* women are unable to constitute a *minyan*. Women's prayer groups also give women an opportunity to celebrate life-cycle events—such as a bat mitzvah ceremony, *simhat bat* (the birth of a baby girl) or *aufruf*, when a woman is called to the Torah for an *aliyah* before her wedding—in a communal setting.

Although women's prayer groups began over thirty years ago, it is still a heated topic in contemporary Orthodoxy. The most lenient position was suggested by Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren in 1975, stating that ten women may carry out a full prayer service, including all of the texts which require a *minyan*. He argued that although women are not obligated in *mitzvah aseh shehazman gramma*, time-bound mitzvot, they may perform them voluntarily. This is because of the basic principle of "*peturot ve'oseh*"—one who is exempt from a mitzvah can still perform the ritual. The question then would be whether women may recite the blessings along with the rituals that require a *minyan*. Rabbi Goren said that he relied on Rabbenu Tam (12th century France), who opined that one may say a *brakha* (blessing) on a mitzvah that one is not commanded to fulfill. This is a minority opinion, and, interestingly enough, was even partially retracted by Rabbi Goren himself. In 1989, he wrote a clarification of his responsum, stating that what he wrote was never meant to be taken as *halakha l'ma'aseh*, or practical *halakha*. Instead, he said that it is clear that women cannot form *minyanim* for prayer and therefore cannot perform rituals requiring a *minyan*. As of today, there are no known *halakhic poskim* (authorities) who allow women to say *devarim she'bi'qedusha* at women's prayer services.

Another school of thought states the other extreme, suggesting that women's prayer services are completely against *halakha* and are sociologically problematic as well. Most opposition arose during the developing years of women's prayer groups. This position was adopted by five *roshei yeshiva* (yeshiva heads) from Yeshiva University's Rabbi Issac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS): Rabbi Nissan Lipa Alpert, Rabbi Abba Bronspigel, Rabbi Mordechai Willig, Rabbi Yehuda Parness and Rabbi Hershel Schachter, who wrote a responsum in 1985, addressed

to Rabbinical Council of America President Rabbi Louis Bernstein. They, as well as others such as the Va'ad HaRabonim of Queens and Rabbi J. David Bleich, hold the position that women's prayer groups are a violation of *halakha*.

In his online *shiurim* (yutorah.org) devoted to topics in women and *halakha*, Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet Rothkoff, rosh yeshiva and professor at Yeshiva University's Gruss Kollel Elyon in Jerusalem, discussed the position of Rabbi Hershel Schachter in Rabbi Schachter's *sefer* (religious book), "*Ikvei Hatzon*." Rabbi Schachter explained that when women go to *shul*, they answer *kaddish*, *kedusha*, and *birkat haTorah* blessings. When the mitzvah is fulfilled by a man and women hear his *brakhot*, she can be part of that mitzvah even though she's not obligated. However, women davening in a prayer group are not fulfilling the mitzvot in their complete form. Additionally, according to Rabbi Schachter, women's prayer groups contribute to a split in prayer communities and go against the spirit of the verse "*Berov am hadrat Melekh*"—"In the multitude of the people is the King's glory."

From an ideological viewpoint, Rabbi Schachter also said that such services are a *ziuf* (misrepresentation) of the Torah. Rabbi Rothkoff explained, "He states that there's another reason why I'm [Rav Schachter is] opposed to the prayer groups. What are the women trying to say? We're exactly like men...And this is not so...men and women are not exactly the same...their responsibilities are different."

Another argument of the text is that having women's prayer groups will lead to women not obeying *halakha* communally in other ways in the future, known as the "slippery slope" argument. Rabbi Rakaffet elaborated to explain the claim's prediction: "Before you know it, the entire sanctity of the synagogue will be destroyed... [this consideration] cannot be dismissed...what began as a minor innovation has totally changed the focus of the traditional *shul* as we know it."

Another reason given in the responsum of the five RIETS Rabbis for the prohibition of women's prayer groups is that these women's services are a departure from normative Jewish tradition and follow the ways of the gentiles. They also believe that women's prayer groups are a direct violation of "*kol kevoda bat melekh penima*" ("all the glory of the king's daughter is within [the palace].") These prayer groups, according to these five, are not *tzenuah* (modest) because they make women the center of attention.

Rabbi Schachter's view is by no means universal and has attracted



The Observer
Women are not required—or halakhically able—to make up a *minyan*, but some may prefer attending all-women's prayer groups to the traditional synagogue experience.

a lot of controversy. Many of the points stated in the responsum are not *halakhic* issues, but rather are sociological or ideological concerns that are not clear-cut.

A third viewpoint believes that women's services may be permitted if carried out with the proper motivations and are done within the parameters of *halakha* (by omitting *devarim she'bi'qedusha*).

These approaches are outlined extensively in the article "Women's Prayer Services—Theory and Practice" by Rabbi Aryeh A. and Rabbi Dov I. Frimer, published in "Tradition Magazine" in 1998. The article brings to the forefront various *halakhic* approaches to women's prayer groups by different *poskim* throughout the late 20th century. According to Frimer, the perspective that woman's prayer groups can be held within the confines of *halakha* are held by major *poskim*, such as Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Avraham Elkana Shapiro. However, while *poskim* may not view women's prayer groups as *halakhically* problematic, some have major sociological and public policy concerns.

"The Rav," Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, similarly agreed that although women's prayer groups can be performed properly within the framework of *halakha*, he felt hesitant about allowing them as a general practice. He believed that these prayer groups deviated from normative *halakhic* practice and

feared that they could be implemented by women for the wrong reasons. That said, the Rav refused to sign the responsum of the five RIETS *roshei yeshiva*. He also supported the establishment of a women's *tefillah* group in the Maimonides School in Brookline, MA because he was less concerned about women's prayer groups in an educational setting. The Rav allowed for the reading of the Torah at women's prayer groups, providing that no blessings of the Torah are recited, and all *devarim she'bi'qedusha* were omitted.

Rabbi Moshe Kahn, a member of the Judaic studies faculty at Stern College for Women, said in an interview with "The Observer" that when discussing women's prayer groups the first issue to consider is whether there is anything *halakhically* problematic occurring. Assuming that the prayer services strictly follow *halakha*, Rabbi Kahn asserts, "if it can add to [women's] davening or spirituality, who am I to say that they are wrong?" He emphasized that one should not trivialize women's motives and as long as there are no *halakhic* issues, women should do what is most meaningful to them in their prayer groups.

When discussing the "slippery slope argument," addressed in the responsum of the five RIETS *roshei yeshiva*, Rabbi Kahn claimed that this is not necessarily an issue if women's prayer groups are prop-

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OPINIONS

A Different Type of Jewish Communal Issue

Rachael Goldberg

On the morning of Sunday, December 6, I watched more than 400 people—adults and students, parents and children, young and old—fill the DRS High School *Beit Midrash* in Woodmere, NY. Both the first and second floors of the *Beit Midrash* overflowed with attendees who came eager to participate in a discussion about a pressing issue facing the Jewish community. The urgent issue was not anti-Semitism or Israeli politics or Jewish federations; rather, hundreds of people came together to talk about *tefillah* (prayer).

The Jewish people often focus on community issues such as *kashruth* and *tzedakah* (charity), which are of undeniably crucial importance in our religion. While doing so, however, we frequently neglect the place of prayer in our relationship with G-d. With our thumbs texting, our minds wandering, and one foot out the door before we finish saying *Aleinu*, it is no surprise that we need a symposium on the topic of *tefillah*. We are distracted and detached. Perhaps this problem is not only due to the advent of technological toys, but also to a lack of understanding of our prayers and of their powerful nature. Thankfully, the Orthodox Union, in conjunction with Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future, addressed this oft-neglected, yet beautiful component of Judaism, by inviting three well-known rabbis to share their honest reflections and suggestions on the topic.

Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, of the Aish Kodesh Synagogue in Woodmere, began on a note of encouragement. "The very fact that a person prays at all demonstrates his trust in Hashem, in the Creator," said Rabbi Weinberger. Instead of berating the Jewish community, Rabbi Weinberger provided confidence and optimism. It seems that growth in the area of prayer might require a boost in self-confidence. "Believing in G-d isn't enough," Rabbi Weinberger continued. "We have to believe in our own exist-

tence—that at every moment our *neshamah* [soul] is praying to G-d... longing for the Creator without any interruption at all."

As Rabbi Weinberger elaborated on the nature and importance of prayer, I understood that perhaps neglecting *tefillah* is a result of underestimating its power. It is quite disheartening that, in a synagogue that I attended recently for Shabbat, the rabbi requested quiet from the congregation more than five times in one service and experienced numerous disruptions during the congregants' late arrivals. When I told this story to one *tefillah* symposium attendee, she nodded her head in agreement and informed me that, for a while, she stopped attending *shul* (synagogue) altogether, because she found it too distracting.

While it is wonderful that we still pray at all, Rabbi Weinberger continued, there must be something missing in our *emunah* (faith) in G-d if our prayer is so distracted. Until we truly realize that we are capable of communicating with our Creator, we will not be able to pray. "Daven to G-d in your own language," Rabbi Weinberger declared fervently from the lectern. "Make every moment a dialogue with G-d." As long as we view prayer as a burdensome, boring, meaningless and rote ritual, we cannot repair our relationship with G-d.

Each Rabbi presented a different perspective on this idea. After Rabbi Weinberger, Rabbi Mayer Twersky, a rosh yeshiva (yeshiva head) of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) at Yeshiva University, approached the stage and discussed the anomalous nature of prayer, noting that we seem to approach G-d with a laundry list of requests.

Rabbi Twersky emphasized the need for prayer in submission and reminded the audience that all our needs are dependent on G-d alone and that our *tefillah* should be urgent regardless of what we perceive as an emergency. "Kavannah

(proper intention and concentration) isn't an optional aspect of prayer," Rabbi Twersky said. "It's crucial, and it's almost impossible to have without proper preparation and meditation. Without *hakhana* (preparation), prayer is guaranteed to be a losing battle." Although we sometimes approach prayer with a "come late, leave early" attitude, prayer cannot be "coasted through," Rabbi Twersky explained. "We need to have an understanding that G-d is right there and [that] we are standing in front of the King of Kings."

Designating adequate time for prayer is difficult when one's schedule is packed, and I am sure that many college students are engaged in an ongoing war with their alarm clock. Immersing oneself in prayer is difficult in a state of severe sleep deprivation.

The final speaker, Rabbi Eli Mansour of Congregation Bet Yaakov of Brooklyn, introduced the concept of prayer as a device not only to request new things, but to sustain the already existent blessings in one's life and to sustain one's own existence. "The Jewish people as a people have survived through prayer," Rabbi Mansour said.

Listening to three insightful presentations on prayer and witnessing the passion and commitment demonstrated by such strong attendance to a Sunday morning symposium, I felt renewed, and encouraged. I came away from the lectures eager to embrace and promote the attitude that *tefillah* is an opportunity—it is the Jewish people's most powerful tool on an individual and collective level. It is not burdensome, but rather is empowering.

As young adults, we are in a unique position to implement good *tefillah* habits. *Tefillah* is one of the outlets available for coping with the anxieties in life and maintaining a relationship with G-d. Furthermore, as young adults, we can establish meaningful *tefillah* as part of our routines and carry it over into our adult lives.

A Question of Pre-Med at Stern

Hadassa Klerman

I am a pre-med student at Stern College for Women. With that statement alone, I have associated myself with a certain large group of young women here. I have taken many of my classes, attended numerous pre-med events, and vied for research positions and Honors project mentors with these same young women. Together, we have assembled lists of extracurricular activities and interests, combed the hospitals of New York City for suitable volunteering and shadowing positions, and researched Albert Einstein College of Medicine's admission requirements. Many of us have also seriously pondered the question of work-family balance and the anticipated challenges of medical school and marriage and of residency and responsibilities to a family. For me, the question has given rise to many late-night conversations, tossing and turning in bed, and a nagging uncertainty regarding whether pursuing a medical career is the "right" thing to do.

While my response is arguably extreme and owes much to my family's predilection for meticulous advance planning and decision-making and to my own tendency to worry and wish to work out everything for the rest of my life, many Stern students do seriously consider the impact of medical training on their personal lives and the possibility of conflict with marriage and a family. Yet it was not until recently that I become more aware of another, equally pressing, potential conflict presented by medical training and residency. To understand that issue, we will require another statement of self-categorization and self-identification.

I am Shabbat observant. With that statement, I associate myself with a large number of Stern students. Together, we mark the entrance of Shabbat with candles lit 18 minutes before sundown. We abstain from *melakha* (activity forbidden on Shabbat), honor Shabbat with special clothing and food, and associate this day with *menuha* (rest) and greater *kedusha* (holiness). We learn *hilkhoth* (laws of) Shabbat to keep Shabbat properly, and we take seriously the many additional mitzvot that pertain to Shabbat, to the extent that we shudder if we accidentally turn on a light by leaning against the light switch. *Shmirath* Shabbat (Shabbat observance) is a badge of honor. I am proud to be *shomer* Shabbat (Shabbat observant) and would be horrified to compromise regarding this observance.

However, if one is not careful, residency may ask just that. Medical residents are assigned to shifts throughout the week, and Saturdays are no exception. *Frum* (religiously observant) residents

expect, in most cases (except for those who receive those rare *shomer* Shabbat residency slots), to work on Saturday like any other day and perform all tasks generally associated with a shift, be it Saturday or Tuesday. However, most contemporary *halakhic* (Jewish legal) authorities would not allow their congregants to perform the full range of activities that residents generally perform. Although *halakha* allows one to violate the laws of Shabbat to perform medicine, such permission is limited to life threatening or potentially life threatening situations and only allows for the minimum amount of *melakha* necessary to be done. This quite clearly brings a medical resident in conflict with his or her assigned tasks. Any resident expected to evaluate a patient and record information in the patient's chart might be allowed to question the patient about symptoms, but would not be allowed to record the information, since the writing is not necessary per se for healing the patient. Similarly, a surgeon or anesthesiologist assigned to an elective procedure on Saturday would be in trouble, since *halakha* does not permit the transgression of the laws of Shabbat for nonessential or elective procedures. Additionally, the *halakhic* definition of nonessential does not always agree with modern medicine's criteria for elective procedures. These are just some of the problems that come up during the shift itself. A resident assigned to a Saturday shift cannot generally drive back from the hospital, even if driving to the hospital is permitted as an action necessary for treating the patient.

What emerges is that when a resident is assigned to a Saturday shift, as will undoubtedly arise many times during a typical three year residency, he or she will only be permitted by *halakha* to perform some of the actions expected of him or her by the hospital team. If the resident's personal *halakhic* authority rules that certain actions are not permitted, the resident is prohibited from doing those actions, no matter the ire that he or she will incite in his or her colleagues by refusing to fulfill all assigned responsibilities. (Residents are generally advised to inform their fellow doctors and nurses in advance of their Shabbat observance in order to work out some system that ensures the performance of nonessential tasks, such as recording information in patient charts.) To keep Shabbat under such circumstances requires a relationship with a rabbi or *posek* (*halakhic* authority). It also requires substantial *halakhic* knowledge to evaluate any given situation that may arise, recog-

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letters to the editor to
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OPINIONS

Women of Valor: Remembering the Oppressed

Ilana Hostyk

"A Woman of Strength, who can find? Her worth is far beyond pearls"

Every Friday night, Orthodox men traditionally serenade their wives with the hymn *Aishet Chayel*. Believed to have been originally composed by the patriarch Abraham and then placed into poetic verse by King Solomon, this hymn can be interpreted on an allegorical level as referring to Shabbat, or, on a literal level, as singing the praises of the woman of the household. Although I have always heard it in my home, as my father sings it to my mother, I have also observed the omission of the prayer in homes with single occupants. At first, this made complete sense to me, as the content of the song is that of a husband praising his wife. I started to omit it from my own Friday nights, since a song regaling a wife has no relevance to my life at this point. However, if *Aishet Chayel* is a song sung by a husband to a wife, I wondered, why do we sing *Aishet Chayel* on Friday nights at Stern College for Women, and should we continue to do so?

"She seeks wool and linen, and works with willing hands,

She is like a ship laden with merchandise, bringing her food from afar"

Soon after I began to omit the hymn, I began to feel that something was missing from my Friday night. Bothered by this sense of unease, I set out to re-analyze the text that had been so familiar to me as a child. After a close, careful reading, I concluded that *Aishet Chayel* is not simply a song of a husband to a wife, as a simple overview might imply. Rather, this ode is a song of praise for all

women—everywhere—married, single, or somewhere in between. It is a song that celebrates the wonder and potential of the female person. *Aishet Chayel* represents a view of women other than simple sexual or housebound objects. *Aishet Chayel* beautifully professes the extreme importance of women and their contributions to society.

Aishet Chayel. A woman of valor. Each poetic line highlights the strength and influence of strong, empowered women. The verses extol virtues such as independence, taking initiative, altruism, strength, and dignity. With this in mind, *Aishet Chayel* would be much more relevant at Stern College and elsewhere if the recitation of this song was dedicated to the sufferings of women worldwide.

We have accomplished so much in terms of gender equality, but we have so much more to achieve. Some statistics to consider:

*More than 4 million women a year experience a serious assault by an intimate partner (The American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence).

*Violence against women occurs in twenty percent of dating (The American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence).

*Jewish women tend to stay in abusive relationships two to three times longer than those in the general population. Non-Jewish women remain in abusive relationships for three to five years, while Jewish women stay for seven to thirteen years (Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse).

*Domestic abuse occurs in Jewish families at about the same rate as in the general community (Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse).

*21 percent of South African women have been raped by the age of fifteen (United Nations Report).

*An estimated 5,000 honor killings occur each year (United Nations Population Fund).

*About 3 million women and girls worldwide are "enslaved in the sex trade" (Nicolas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky*).

*Female Circumcision is rampant on our planet: "Approximately every ten seconds, a girl somewhere in the world is pinned down. Her legs are pulled apart, and a local woman with no medical training pulls out a knife or razor blade and slices off some or all of the girl's genitals. Three million are cut annually. Why? The aim is to minimize a women's sexual pleasure and hence make her less likely to be promiscuous" (Nicolas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky*).

There are many more abuses taking place against women throughout the world, such as bride burnings, treatment of *agunot* (women whose husbands refuse to grant them a Jewish divorce), acid attack, prohibition against women's education...The list, unfortunately, is long. Women are still treated as lower class citizens in many parts of the world and are seen as sex objects in many modern states. It may be hard to see it sometimes, but many parts of the world are still far from the point of realization, as Christopher Buckley once elegantly suggested, that women might have something to contribute to civilization other than their reproductive organs.

"She considers a field and buys it; from her earning she plants a vineyard

She girds herself with strength, and braces her arms for her

tasks."

The following question arises, however: what will formally recognizing these problems at the Shabbat table accomplish? To me, the answer is clear: by dedicating *Aishet Chayel* to women in crisis, we would be taking an important step towards acknowledging an obligation to remember these women. They show us how far we have come and how far we have yet to go. We are still not free from the constraints of a sexist society, but it is meaningless for us to demand freedom for ourselves without demanding freedom for women worldwide. Additionally, the impact of the power of our prayer to *Hashem* every Friday night should be taken into account. Especially at Stern College for Women, we should join our voices and hearts together for the millions of women worldwide who need our help and compassion.

"She sees that her business goes well; her lamp does not go out at night

She reaches out her palm to the poor, and extends her hand to the needy"

Within the Jewish community (from a societal view, not a *halakhic* (Jewish legal) one), women are still not treated equally. The *agunah* crisis is a prominent example of this inequality. If husbands really meant what they stated in *Aishet Chayel* every week, then women would not be abused within the Jewish community at the rate that they are. Less severely, the lack of women in Jewish leadership positions—for example, Young Israel's policy against women being presidents of a synagogue—represents this inequality.

Empathy is our first step to making progress, and standing up

as the strong women that we are at Stern College is the next. Negate the next misogynist comment that you hear—whether from your father, professor, friend or rabbi or even from a woman who spouts the hatred. Reject untrue stereotypes, and look at the value of true and consistent gender equality. If we care on an individual level, perhaps we can motivate ourselves enough to help effect concrete change—in the United States' foreign budget on women issues, for example.

"She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the law of kindness is on her tongue."

After revising my view of this timeless poem and thinking through the implications of this new understanding, I think that *Aishet Chayel* at Stern and elsewhere should be dedicated to women around the world who still suffer from inequality. Equality is founded on respect and awareness, and *Aishet Chayel* is a hymn that commands both for women. Every Jewish family should take a moment before singing *Aishet Chayel* to think about some of the issues facing women and to concentrate throughout the prayer to ask *Hashem* to help women in crisis and to help us help them.

"Give her the reward she has earned; let her deeds bring her praise in the gates."

Author's Note: For further reading on the state of contemporary women and for suggestions on what you can do to help, I strongly recommend Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's book, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*.

Tolerating the Tolerance Club

Tovah Silbermann

When I first arrived at Stern College for Women this fall, I was extremely excited to get involved on campus and become an active participant in the various extracurricular activities that Stern has to offer. Every time I went to a speech about why Stern is the right school for me, a young Modern Orthodox Jewish *maideleh*, I heard the same lines about how there is so much to take advantage of on campus and how in a regular college—due to Sabbath and holiday restraints—it would be extremely difficult for me to get as involved in the myriad of activities offered there as it would be in Stern. I agreed with this valid point, and, before I knew it, I found myself standing in Koch Auditorium surrounded by dozens of tables promoting various different activities and clubs. I

received a booklet detailing all of the different clubs on campus and was surprised to note that it was nearly the size of the Stern College course catalog.

As I walked around the room, I signed up for every club that interested me. I am currently signed up as a member of C.A.K.E (basically a group for people who like every aspect of food), the Stern College Dramatics Society, The History Club, the Quidditch Team, the Art History Club, the Active Minds Club, the Young Democrats AND the Young Republican Clubs, the Chabad Club, and many more. One specific club that caught my eye as I perused the club fair was the Yeshiva University Tolerance Club. This club sounded fascinating. According to their mission statement, the YUTC "has been established to recognize diversity

and promote tolerance within the YU community. [It] aims to create an atmosphere free from discrimination and harassment based on age, ancestry, citizenship, color, disability, ethnic origin, family status, gender identity, level of literacy, marital status, place of origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or any other personal characteristics."

When I read their mission state-

ment, the first thing that ran through my mind was how appropriate it is that a Jewish college should promote tolerance and attempt to abolish harassment and discrimination. If there is one na-

tion, religion or social group that has continuously suffered over the millennia of history due to ignorance and intolerance, it is the Jews. Unbeknownst to the young

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The Tolerance Club's "Exclusivity and Tolerance" panel.

Avi Kopstick

ARTS AND CULTURE

Knock on Woods

Rivkah Rogawski

At the Stern College Dramatics Society's annual musical this December, the audience traveled to a dangerous, dark and magical place. The forests of "Into the Woods" are a place where childhood fairytales take on a dark yet sparkling luster. With music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and book by James Lapine, the musical weaves together the stories of "Cinderella," "Little Red Riding Hood," "Rapunzel," "Sleeping Beauty," and "Jack and the Beanstalk" to create an intricate plot that explores the mature, adult aspects of each fairytale. Classic characters such as Jack and Cinderella emerge from the flat pages of storybooks to assume round personalities full of quirks and foibles. The Stern College production, directed by Tiferet Weiss and produced by Shira Sragow, stayed true to the spirit of the Sondheim original, presenting the musical in its full, two-act form. Although the production was at times variable in quality, the actresses entertained and charmed

the woods to sell their cow, Milky White. Cinderella (Chaya Kessler) is abused by her stepmother (Tova Greenbaum) and stepsisters (Lauren Burstein and Liat Tretin), and she defiantly wishes to go to the prince's ball. She flees to her mother's grave in the woods, to cry over her misfortune.

The rest of the staggeringly complex plot takes place in the woods, as the individual stories intertwine and overlap. During the Baker's quest for the ingredients to end his curse he encounters and influences the panoply of characters. He buys Milky White from Jack for six magic beans that grow into the legendary beanstalk, which Jack later climbs to plunder the Giant's land. Rapunzel (Metuka Hechtman) has the hair as yellow as corn. Cinderella, fleeing from the ball, provides the golden slippers, and Little Red Riding Hood relinquishes her red cape after a sexually charged consumption by the Wolf (Deenie Wasserman).

While the end of the first act



The full cast of "Into the Woods".

Dina Horowitz



Dina Horowitz

lauren Tussler as "Mysterious Man" in SCDS's production of "Into the Woods".

the audience with their unique interpretations of this musical theater classic.

The musical opens with a vibrant prologue, courtesy of the narrator (the enchanting Lauren Tessler), which introduces the characters and their stories while building around them the themes of longing and desire that inform the play overall. The Baker, the main protagonist (Rachel Nemzer), longs to build a family with his better half, the Baker's Wife (Rebecca Grazi). After an obnoxious Little Red Riding Hood (Laura Mintzer) buys some of their baked goods to take to her Granny (Shifra Zack), the evil, humpbacked Witch (Rachel Stark), arrives and informs him that she has placed a curse on his family tree. In order to end this curse, he must go into the woods and find the hair as yellow as corn, the shoe of purest gold, the cow as white as milk, and the cape as red as blood. The simpleton Jack (Marissa Newman) lives in poverty with his overbearing mother (Karen Steinberger) who sends him into

finds the characters happily singing "Ever After", the second act unravels their happiness. The dead Giant's wife has descended the beanstalk to avenge her husband, and she wreaks havoc on the characters' magical land. The Baker's Wife, Rapunzel, Jack's mother, and even the narrator are all killed, leaving survivors to pick up the pieces and hope for a better life.

"Into the Woods" is focused on giving the fairy tales deeper messages and manifesting popular characters with complex and symbolic personalities. The SCDS production succeeded in expressing this aspect of the musical and in tracking the characters' maturation over the course of the play. The skillful Nemzer and the radiant, dark-eyed Grazi beautifully expressed the maturation of the Baker's multifaceted relationship with his wife. Mitzner's portrayal of Little Red Riding Hood's coming of age through being "eaten" by the Wolf is similarly detailed, and played to sickly sweet perfection. A beautiful and boyish Jack, Newman

was vacantly childish to the point of exasperation while showing the loneliness and longing inherent in the character. Both Rapunzel's Prince, Dena Shayne, and Cinderella's Prince, played by Wasserman, provided comic relief while deepening the "Prince Charming" persona to that of a lustful conqueror chiefly interested in the quest to get a princess. Tessler, as both the Narrator and the Mysterious Old Man, changed between the two characters with remarkable skill and infused both roles with true dramatic talent. Stark's Witch emerged as a many-sided character, moving alternately from an obsessive mother to Rapunzel to a cackling, self-absorbed hag.

As is often the case in SCDS productions, the actresses playing the minor characters maximized their roles and added a level of comic intricacy to their peers' solid performances. Watching Zack, an elfin Granny, gambol about the stage in a floral print nightgown and thick knitted socks was sheer hilarious pleasure. The Machiavellian steward, played by Shifra Elasz, was clearly plotting some clever political coups while not obsequiously serving his master, Cinderella's Prince. As Jack's mother, Steinberger transformed herself into a shrewish *yiddisher mama* constantly worrying about either money or her simpleton son. Cinderella's drunkard father and stepmother, played by Bassy Klyman and Greenbaum, were beautifully ridiculous as they tottered about stage ineffectually. As their daughters Florinda and Lucinda, Tretin and Burstein brought positive dramatic energy to roles that they seemed to be thoroughly enjoying. Shira Freedman was an eerily sylvan Cinderella's Mother, softly singing to her daughter from beyond the grave and providing her with ball gown and slippers.

The set was both whimsical and appropriate to the production's darker overtones. Thick green and brown mesh created an upper leaf carpet above a forest of curving trees. The props were similarly clever, with Cinderella's birds built out of painted water bottles and Milky White made out of a white canvas stretched on a rolling frame. If this otherwise lovely production had one fairly gaping hole, it was the music. Sondheim's songs are difficult at best, and the actresses' challenges were compounded by malfunctioning

equipment. Although some songs - in particular "No One is Alone", sung by Cinderella and the Baker's Wife - were lovely gems, most of the musical performances ranged from good to decent to slightly painful. However, as is always the case with SCDS, the audience willingly forgave their actresses any mistakes, and emerged from the theater with rave reviews after an evening of enchantment.



Alisa Ungar-Sargon

The Choral Ensemble (pictured) and Chamber Ensemble performed this month at the SCW Department of Music Winter Musicale. Both ensembles were under the direction of Marcia Young (seated).

From left: Shira Friedman, Nurita Abramowitz (HIDDEN), Rebecca Grazi, Chaya Kessler, Tzipporah Kanal, Deborah Wiseman, Tzippi King, Dina Lustiger, Deenie Wasserman

ARTS AND CULTURE

On-Site Lights



Brookdale Residence Hall lit up like a menorah this Hanukkah.

Anna Socher

Anna Socher

At 7 PM on December 15, on 34th Street between Park and Madison, the Beren Campus's Brookdale Residence Hall lit up—like a menorah. The residents of Brookdale whose rooms face 34th St. were requested to turn their lights on and off accordingly so that the

whole building would light up in the shape of a menorah. On the top floors, women were given red curtains to hang up so to give the menorah the effect of being "lit." The resulting effect was spectacular, truly giving the building a menorah-like quality to it.

The "lighting of Brookdale" is an excellent example of site-specific art, a late 20th century movement of artwork created for one specific space. The red curtains on the top floors make the menorah what it is, but taken out of context they would be useless. Only in this instance are they considered useful and artistic, rather than simple pieces of red cloth. Almost all holiday decoration is site-specific art, such as the Macy's Christmas windows and their accompanying "Believe" sign.

Every Stern woman knows these icons of the holiday months. The windows are sweet though overdone, and the sign is pretty—even if it does leave the viewer wondering what exactly it is that should be believed (Santa Claus? Jesus? Equality?). However, they would be preposterous in any other setting, and only make sense at this one time of year in this specific setting.

As winter solstice approaches, these other holidays of light bombard the passer-by, and Stern College for Women obviously did not want to be excluded from the fun of large public displays of holiday spirit. Stern students sang Hanuk-

kah songs and danced in the street while reveling in the glory of the Brookdale menorah. One woman whipped out a much-appreciated guitar. People passing by looked on in varying stages of confusion and amusement. Some stopped to ask what all the fuss was about while others just turned around and walked in the other direction so as not to get tangled in the mess of singing, dancing students. One couldn't help thinking that this was the Stern College version of caroling.

While Brookdale is ablaze in white and red, however, there is another building within sight with a slightly different color scheme. As all residents of Manhattan know, the lights at the top of the Empire State Building turn different colors to match the time of year. For the entire holiday of Hanukkah, it lights up in bright blue and white. (While there is nothing particular

about these colors that historically connotes Hanukkah, today they are the colors of the Jewish state, Yeshiva University, and practically every Jewish organization for the past 61 years. As such, they have become almost synonymous with the Jewish people.)

To be sure, the lighting of Brookdale was a fun, community-building experience for the first- and second-year students who inhabit it. And while the whole ordeal seemed very "seminary"-appropriate for the women living in Brookdale, most of whom are back from a one-year study abroad program—the event was also fun. As a university we should continue to have events that build a sense of community and belonging, but an effort needs to be made to increase awareness of the cultural and artistic significance of what we are doing.

Of Tragedies Great and Small

Michal Schick

The Yeshiva College Dramatic Society (YCDS) performed a theatrical adaptation of John Steinbeck's classic novel "Of Mice and Men" from December 5th through 10th. The creative team, led by director Lin Snider in her eighth dramatic endeavor with YCDS, deftly developed the dusty, heartrending atmosphere of Steinbeck's novel onto the stage of the Schottenstein Theater. A simple story of simple men, "Of Mice and Men" recounts the tragic tale of George (Aryeh Wasserman) and Lenny (Danny Hoffman), two laborers struggling to make their way in the height of the Great Depression. Already unique for traveling and working as a team in a landscape of solitary men, the two are further distinguished by the fact that the stoic George serves as protector to the gentle and slow-minded yet dangerously strong Lenny. When the pair arrives at their next farm job (on a clever and gradually developed set designed by David Mikofsky), a grim chain of events is set in motion that culminates in a bleak climax reflective of the human tragedy so abundant in this time period.

This is weighty material, and though the heaviness and difficulty of Steinbeck's work was evident throughout the production, the YCDS actors tackled the challenge admirably and with great enthusiasm. A musician (David Mikofsky) narrated the play, overseeing the

action from a rocking chair and providing verbal and musical interludes to enhance both plot and atmosphere. Mikofsky served as a figure that was both ordinary and almost mythic, watching the tragedy unfold. Most impressively, he performed almost all of the show's music, utilizing a guitar, a harmonica and two banjos to subtly set the scenes.

Other characters were realized to great effect through highly physical performances. Candy (Ariel Meiri) limped pitifully back and forth across the stage, and, hunching further and further into his baggy flannel shirt, almost seemed to shrink as his losses grow. Likewise, the black hunchback Crooks (Daniel Kaiserman) seemed to endure constant pain, feebly rubbing his back with trembling hands and evoking an intensely realistic portrayal of suffering. In a marked contrast, Slim (Yehudah Safier), rangy and respected, towered over these infirm like Uncle Sam's favorite nephew. Safier balanced Slim's pretty-boy tendencies with his responsibility and leadership quite skillfully, turning contrast into quiet coexistence. The rest of the supporting cast was strong as well. Avi Wollman managed two roles, a mustache and a painful task reminiscent of "Old Yeller" with appropriate slickness and drive. Roy Hilf portrayed Curley, the play's main antagonist, with an enjoyable swagger, while David Shinefeld's Whit rounded out the

cast as a Depression-era everyman.

As the two principal characters, both Wasserman and Hoffman shone. Wasserman animated George with a rigid form, employing sharp, economical movements that somehow gave the character a fitting sense of motion. His face was largely closed, as though George had learned to choke off any genuine expression as he battles with the world, and he only allowed himself to physically relax at the point where tragedy became inevitable. As Lenny, Hoffman was exceptionally effective, contrasting Wasserman in virtually every way. Where George was closed off, Lenny was wide-eyed and dreamy; where George was tense and directed, Lenny was ambling, aimless and touchingly vulnerable. Hoffman's mannerisms, tics and shuffling step all embodied a picture of bewildered innocence in a land of crushing reality. One of the particularly powerful scenes occurred when Lenny paced in a loft, struggling to understand the heavy movements of the world around him.

The production was not without its snags, but no production can boast such a claim. Not every set piece was entirely convincing, and several actors failed to match their line delivery to the strength of their non-verbal acting. This, perhaps in part due to the difficulty of the northwestern accents adopted by many of the cast, unfortunately



Aryeh Wasserman (left) and Danny Hoffman played the leading roles of George and Lenny, respectively, in YCDS's production "Of Mice and Men".

diffused the intensity of several key scenes. In fact, as a whole, the cast was strongest when joined in a collective silence. Quiet glances and expressive body language transformed a scene in which a gunshot is anticipated from potentially dull silence to an excruciating experience of high tension and uneasy camaraderie. In her notes for the playbill, director Lin Snider mentions "the inability of most of the men in the play to acknowledge or express their real hopes and feelings." If some of

her actors experience similar difficulties, there is no doubting their ability to emote through action.

On a visual level, "Of Mice and Men" was something of a mixed bag. The characters set each scene themselves—a structural necessity for the Schottenstein Theater—but, while slightly distracting, it did suggest that the characters are in fact constructing their own tragedy. The character of Curley's wife (described by Steinbeck as "not a person" but "a symbol")

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ARTS AND CULTURE

It's all about "Glee"

Alisa Ungar-Sargon

When the pilot of "Glee" premiered as an extended teaser last May, it generated extreme amounts of admiration for the show-stopping musical numbers and clever satirical humor. The TV show continued in September with 12 more episodes, chronicling the rehearsals and performances of McKinley High's Glee Club and their show choir competitors.

As the latest phenomenon, the people who watched it - and there are few who haven't seen at least one episode - were divided between those who were obsessed and those who just didn't get it. What made this unprecedented show so huge is the combination of its accessibility and the fact that it's like watching American Idol greatest hits with a Broadway caliber. The characters' thought narrations give insights into their often misled motivations, after which they get up and belt out covers of famous songs that are a perfect blend of homage and originality.

The show manages to both make fun of itself and the genre it represents, while simultaneously taking itself so seriously that it almost ceases to be a spoof. While this has been done before (e.g. the unfortunately short-lived TV show "Arrested Development" and last year's cheerleader flick "Fired Up!"), "Glee" does not leave the technique to work on its own but rather complements it by using music as an entirely separate aspect of the show. Every part of the show works on its terms, yet manages to come together cohesively. The comedic style is fresh and unexpected; there is a continuing display of talent; and the characters, despite being based on stereotypes, have complex personalities.

Though it took a couple of epi-

sodes to develop some of the characters and their idiosyncrasies, the final effect became a ragtag group of outsiders to which anyone can relate. However trite this effect may be, the characters themselves each have distinct personalities that merely reference their clichéd predecessors.

For example, Rachel (Lea Michele) is the talented one, who also happens to be smart, pretty, and friendless, the latter in thanks to her ambitious nature. What set Rachel apart from characters similar to her (see: Amber Von Tussle) are her desire to belong and her journey to becoming a team player. And of course the little quips that describe her on the way to her epiphanies, such as how she "manages to dress like a grandmother and a toddler at the same time," don't hurt.

The one responsible for the aforesaid quote, Kurt (Chris Colfer), is the token queen on the show and could easily be played up for snarky wit and not much substance. Yet his orientation is not objectified in the least; the soprano voice and status of fashion guru meld seamlessly with the sensitivity and insight.

The show took its time deciding which characters would play the comedic idiots, eventually deciding on main cute guy Finn (Cory Monteith) and blonde cheerleader Brittany (Heather Morris). Finn, the football hero/lead vocalist, still manages to be complex despite his idiocy. He values his mother and his (alleged) unborn child and wants to make them both proud by securing his future, which in one case requires him to express his feelings to Rachel for ulterior motives. Brittany's personality, on the other hand, is based entirely on her lack of self-awareness - in other words, her utter stupidity to

allow for maximum joke effect. At times her one-liners did not measure up to actual comedy ("Take what away?"), but other comments had such stellar timing that they gave new meaning to being a dumb blonde (a well-placed response to dating habits that stated hers and another cheerleader's multifaceted involvement).

Unfortunately, much of the anticipation for the show was sustained by a guessing game of whether or not the week would yield a good episode. The more impressive episodes were often enough to keep viewers hooked, but the number of disappointing episodes - including the first two that came in September months after the teaser - is what keep this show from really taking flight.

Another disappointment came in the lack of performances given by Vocal Adrenaline, the competing school whose jaw-dropping dance moves were the first sneak peek offered on iTunes. The show delivered just one other routine by them, after which they were treated like a looming threat to be considered in coming seasons. With all the gratuitous singing going on - though they stayed away from plot advancement through music, there was plenty of emoting - it's hard to imagine that they couldn't slip in at least two more routines from the highly entertaining troupe.

All in all, the TV show lives up to its name and gleefully delivers the goods with more than a few winks and nods. Thanks to the format, the finale actually lived up to expectations, presenting a mini-review of all the songs they had covered over the season. This kind of closure is only part of the satisfaction that "Glee" ensures. With the phenomenal cover art going on, there is no doubt as to its continuing for seasons to come.

The Odd Verser

Anna Nimus

Since first coming to college (a depressing number of years ago), a poor untutored soul come to reap the benefit of a university education, I've learned all kinds of useful information. I've learned, for instance, that just about everything in this world comes in cycles. There's the carbon cycle, the water cycle, the lunar cycle, there's something kind of complicated called the Krebs cycle. There are lots of cycles out there.

I don't mean to brag, but in the course of some amateur anthropological investigations here at the University, I have managed to uncover yet another natural cycle that has not, to my knowledge, been identified before. I call it the "Knowledge Cycle." My findings are presented below, along with a helpful flow chart.

Helpful Flow Chart

I → II → III → I

The Knowledge Cycle

I

A new semester at its start: I face it with a hopeful heart!

A brand new year! A fresh frontier! I feel like a pioneer!

I'll do my homework, not come late, take part in every class debate!

Lectures, readings, lectures, texts! I'll master them in all respects!

My notes will be compact, exact. The envy of my class, in fact!

I'll lend them out with cool noblesse. Good riddance, Angst! I'll miss you, Stress!

My eyes are clear. My back is straight. My mind is like an empty slate!

I'll fill it up with knowledge true. I feel young! I feel new!

Like morning dew! By glow of dawn! In springtime, on a new-mown lawn!...

II

One more week till finals start: I face the clock with pounding heart.

Is Reading Week already here? Whatever happened to the year?

And when'd it ever get so late? I somehow must avert my fate!

Coffee, textbook, coffee, notes! Cram the brain with crucial quotes!

Stacked with fact on top of fact, like a backpack overpacked.

The weight of them begins to press.... Good evening, Angst! I missed you, Stress!

I've crammed for many hours straight. My mind is like a scribbled slate.

I feel faint. I'm sleep-deprived. The middle of the night's arrived

And left again: I carry on; take a break at break of dawn...

III

The last exam about to start, I face the desk with empty heart.

Distantly, I seem to hear a din of voices in my ear:

A chorus of facts, my mental freight, is bursting out. I make them wait.

Question, answer, question, skip. Start to flip, then get a grip.

Carefully extract each fact, till the mind is all unpacked,

Time is up. I'm done, I guess... See you, Angst! Till next time, Stress!

I feel my bursting head deflate. My mind is like an empty slate.

The facts have done their job and left. In some strange way I feel bereft.

Have any of them lingered on? But no—it seems they all have gone.

Anna Nimus writes the odd verse from time to time, between learning all kinds of useful information and spewing it forth again into test booklets.

Of Tragedies Great and Small

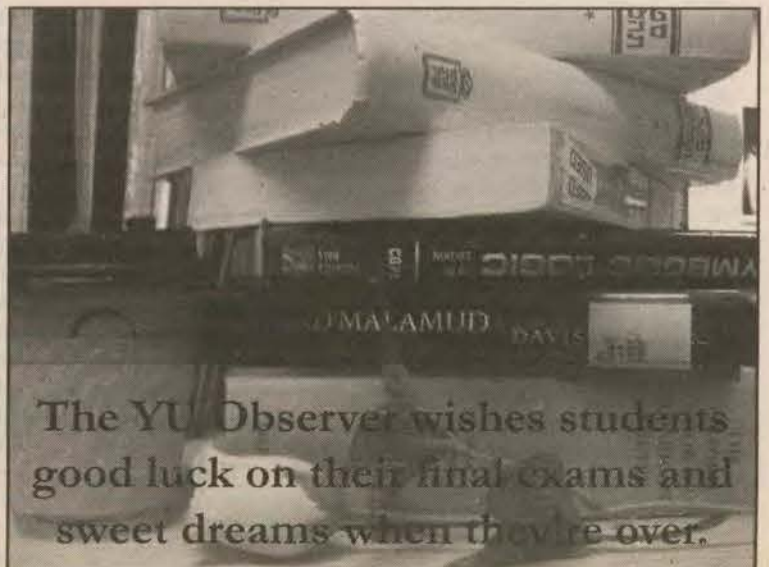
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was depicted offstage, suggested by narration, shadows and responsive dialogue. The effect was good, though it unfortunately fails for areas of the audience able to see into the doors behind which Curley's wife was meant to be standing. The other technical aspects of the show worked seamlessly, with particular respect to the lighting (designed by Rabbi Dr. John Krug and engineered by Rafi Skier), which was subtle and well orchestrated throughout. Particularly chilling was the searing yellow

spotlight focused on George and Lenny in the play's final moments. Somehow both highlighting and limning the two in shadow, the image was at once beautiful and chilling, serving as a visual punch that forced the audience to internalize Steinbeck's tragedy.

In the best of times, "Of Mice and Men" is not an easy play to watch; I would imagine it is even more difficult to stage. The human suffering and decline of innocence that so characterize the Great Depression are all but palpable characters

of their own in Steinbeck's work. It is much to their credit that the cast and crew of the Yeshiva College Dramatic Society never once shy from the ugliness and intensity of their material, even if they are not always quite equal to it. Despite its imperfections, "Of Mice and Men" benefited from the creative contributions of all involved, and is, ultimately, a theatrical experience of great power—one that will crystallize George, Lenny and the rest in the memories of its audience for a long time to come.



ISRAEL

New Group on Michigan Campus: Connecting American Students to the State of Israel Through Business

Chana Scholl

Eitan Ingall, a participant of the David Project Campus Fellows Seminar '09, is a cofounder and director of TAMID Israel Investment Group, a new and innovative initiative to foster long term, mutually beneficial relationships between American university students and the State of Israel by connecting them with the Israeli business world.

The Observer: Who are you, what is TAMID, and why did you start it?

Eitan Ingall: I am a senior at the University of Michigan pursuing a double major in political science and organizational studies, with a pathway focus in political economy.

Basically, I started out as a freshman like all other freshmen entering from Jewish day schools, where you hear about this clichéd fear that the second you step foot on a college campus everyone is out to get you and you think that you have to [so to speak] go to college and defend Israel. Looking back, I do not know if that is the case, but in any event, when I came I got involved with one of the Israel organizations on campus called Israel IDEA: Israel Initiative for Dialogue, Education, and Advocacy, which was great; we had some big speakers like Daniel Pipes and Brett Stevens, who is a writer for the Wall Street Journal, and I eventually went on to lead the organization.

But one night, me and my best friend, Sasha Gribov, the chair of the other Israel organization on campus were sitting in our dorm talking and we were asking ourselves "what are we doing, are we really being effective?" and that's when we came up with the idea for TAMID.

There are so many ways for students in other disciplines to learn about Israel, if they're interested in Political Science or History they can always go to a speech about the 'History of the Middle East' or go to a speech about the 'Political Situation in the Gulf', but there are so many students in business schools all over who aren't interested in going to speeches about politics or history, they're interested in business. So we realized that we needed to engage business-minded students with the business side of Israel in order to reach that demographic. And that's how it started two years ago.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned throughout this process is that your vision at the beginning rarely ends up being what actually happens. We initially thought that we would just have students invest in Israeli businesses and make money but for various reasons that posed too big a challenge. So

we listened to the criticism and feedback we were hearing and tinkered with our plan until we came up with this three-phase program focused on Israeli Business and Entrepreneurship. In it, first the participants learn something in the education segment, then they apply it in the portfolio management and business application segment, and then they immerse themselves in the culture in the Israel internship segment.

So in the first phase the students learn from Israeli and American business managers, traders, venture capitalists and start up executives, as well as business school professors. In the second phase students manage a small investment fund, giving them hands on experience with Israeli markets in which they must research and analyze investment opportunities, consult with Israeli investment houses and prepare quarterly portfolio reports. In this second phase, students also work on small consulting projects for Israeli startups. Right now we are working with software companies. In the third phase the students have a three-month experience interning in Israel's banking, private equity, venture capital, high tech or consulting sectors.

The fellowship experience serves as the pinnacle of the program. In this final phase, students take everything they have learned about business and the Israeli business landscape and have the opportunity to immerse themselves in a full time work experience with an Israeli company. Our mission is to align the professional aspirations of students with the Israeli economic landscape in an effort to ultimately cultivate a network of young American business leaders who have an enduring and substantial relationship with the State of Israel.

The Observer: Is TAMID aimed only at Jewish business students?

EI: No, we are not trying to be a Jewish group. One of the founding members of the board wasn't Jewish; of the 27 students currently enrolled in the Bet Class (the second class to participate in the program), two aren't Jewish. They have their own reasons to be involved; the non-Jewish founding board member was interested in fertilizer! Israel is the place to go for creative agricultural solutions, so he got involved with TAMID.

The Observer: Lots of companies and countries have business

relationships with Israel and that doesn't necessarily translate to positive relations with Israel politically. Do you think that the exposure to Israel that TAMID provides is going to manifest in a different perception of Israel on the part of the participants? In other words, is this going to manifest in something larger than just business?

EI: It's a good question...Look,



Eitan Ingall, co-founder and director of TAMID Israel Investment Group.

Sasha and I have spoken a lot about how every country has to have added value to the world community, or at least those that endure. A huge part of Israel's identity, its "added value" if you will, comes from innovation. Per capita it's one of the most innovative countries in the world, right up there with the USA and Finland. It has 72 companies on the NASDAQ, which is more than all the countries in Europe combined...

On one side of the equation are American students who are smart and interested and have the time, and on the other hand there are Israeli companies that are small and just getting started, and need the legwork. This sets a stage for a mutually beneficial partnership. In the long run what matters is that these students have some connection with Israel on a practical level. They realize that they can find incredible innovation there and can make money there.

One of the unintended consequences, certainly an unintended consequence that we want, may be that it changes their perceptions of Israel on a larger level, but that may be beyond our scope. The intended goal is to cultivate business

minded leaders who have a deep connection with Israel's business landscape.

However, I will say that, in more of the political realm, Netanyahu's always talking about encouraging economic stability, an "economic peace," as he calls it, for the Palestinians, and if there was a company in the West Bank that wanted to work with us we most certainly be interested in collaboration.

The Observer: So you said that every Jewish freshman entering a non-Jewish university has this fear instilled in them of having to go to college and defend Israel, but in your experience, what is it that differs between those students who do take action, and those who do not? Why do you think that you have taken initiative?

EI: I think that I had the best Jewish day school education in the world. I went to the Charles E. Smith Jewish day school in Rockville, Maryland, and every kid that comes out takes on leadership, takes initiative because of the values they instill in us from day one: *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), pluralism, respect for every religious denomination—but not at the expense of the religious kids, which I consider myself a part of—Zionism, which we were encouraged to ask questions about and try to understand, and they also encouraged innovation and pursuing our own interests ambitiously.

They excelled at something which I think the Jewish community in general has completely failed at. We have all of these folks who sit in their ivory towers and decide the Jewish Federation agenda for another five years, but they completely neglect to talk to the people they're creating these agendas for, to tap into the feelings of the youth. We live in an era of open source technology, of user-generated ideas. Look at Wikipedia, for example, or Firefox—all these programs with user-generated content. The Jewish Leadership needs to start putting its ear to the ground and listening to what our generation wants and needs to establish a strong future for the Jewish people.

When we started TAMID, we created a loose, malleable framework through which students can be interested in something and we will adapt to accommodate it; we don't tell people what to do. My day school worked with us, it

didn't dictate to us—it gave us the freedom to pursue our interests within a certain framework.

The Observer: What do you think is the largest challenge facing the pro-Israel community today?

EI: That's a big question. First, I would challenge you to give me a definition of what that means. No one knows what it means to be pro-Israel today...the Jewish community is so fragmented. You have the Jews who have the "arbah kanfot [four corners] mentality" and think that Israel should never compromise its borders, you have those who might be called the "civic nationalists" who allow for making land concessions in pursuit of peace and in order to maintain Israel's Jewish majority, and you have "one-staters" who think everyone should just live together in peace. And they all think that they're being pro-Israel. Each one of these "pro-Israel" communities has its own largest challenge, its own largest issue.

The challenge, for me at least, is defining what Zionism means. I think that the concept has been hijacked so that people think it has a static meaning, when in actuality it is a dynamic concept that is constantly adapting through time. Someone once told me, "Zionism is not static, it is not just one thing, this or that; it is something meant to be struggled with". I think that's one of the smartest things anyone ever said to me. You can't define it, you can't say, "This is what it is," you have to struggle with it. I feel so lucky to live in an age with Medinat Yisrael [the State of Israel] and cannot imagine what the world would be like without it, let alone my life as a Jew. It is now, however, up to our generation to create and define a vision for Zionism now that we have a State of our own. Now that we have this platform for a collective Jewish voice, how do we use it to secure the future of the Jewish people and be an *Or LaGoyim*, light unto the nations?

Furthermore, I see it as my duty, as a Jew living outside of Israel, to help create a platform through which other young Jews living outside of Israel can think through their relationship with Israel, what it means for them, for their people, and how they want to engage it for the rest of their lives.

The Observer: What can Yeshiva University do to help? Do you see any kind of future role for YU in the service of TAMID?

EI: We feel very strongly that we shouldn't expand until we've got it right. Right now we're in our second run of the first stage of the program, and the difference between the first educational seminar program and the second one is like night and day. Now we're mov-

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ISRAEL

Lobbying for YUPAC

Hannah Robinow

Early in the morning of Wednesday, December 2, over 140 men and women from Yeshiva University woke up and boarded a bus bound for Capitol Hill. They were all participants in a trip organized by the Yeshiva University Political Action Committee (YUPAC), supported by the President's Office, the Rabbi Arthur Schneier Center for International Affairs and the David Project, an educational organization that supports Israel advocacy. This group was then combined with its counterpart from George Washington University, Acting Politically for Israel. Once they were in Washington D.C., the group of over 200 college students heard speeches about lobbying for Israel from David Gillette, the Deputy Director of Policy and Government Affairs for AIPAC, who spoke about effective ways to lobby. Senator Joseph Lieberman (I, CT), the chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee thanked the group for attending in such large numbers. President Richard Joel also addressed the group to thank them for being advocates for Israel.

After these speeches, the students dispersed throughout the various Congressional offices on Capitol Hill to talk to the Senators and Representatives from their respective states about several pieces of legislation that were scheduled for a vote in the ensuing weeks of the final session of Congress for 2009. According to statistics generated by Acting Politically for Israel, the student lobbyists met with lawmakers from more than 35 states in 52 separate meetings.

Alison Silver is the co-president of YUPAC, along with Jonathan Mael. She felt that the large group of students that came helped teach "Yeshiva students the political system and showed them that they can impact the political process."

They lobbied for three bills: The Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act of 2009, known as S. 2799, the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act of 2009, identified as H.R. 2194 in the House and S. 908 in the Senate. These bills give President Obama extra leverage to use against the Iranian regime over its attempts to expand its uranium refinement capacity and acquire a nuclear bomb. Since Iran imports 40% of its refined petroleum, this would have a drastic effect on the Iranian economy by making it more expensive for the Iranian government to import the refined petroleum: it needs to run its cars and trucks.

The bill S. 2799 helps back up American diplomatic efforts by

toughening sanctions on Iran by requiring President Obama to enact penalties on companies who either ship refined petroleum to Iran or assist them with refining their own petroleum. In addition to requiring the president to impose sanctions on companies that ship refined petroleum to Iran or help the Iranian government augment its refining capacity, the bill also bans such companies from receiving U.S. government contracts. The bill also stipulates that companies who provide Iran with technology that helps the regime restrict free speech and the flow of information also be banned receiving U.S. government contracts, as well as requires the president to report every six months on developments in Iran's energy sector, and determine if these activities qualify for sanctions.

The Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act of 2009, known in the House as H.R. 2194 and Senate as S. 908, restricts the Iranian government's ability to refine petroleum products and/or import them from outside sources. H.R. 2194 enables President Obama to impose sanctions on any company that furnishes refined petroleum to Iran or provides them with the means of shipping or financing refined petroleum imports. In addition, any entity that does so is barred from conducting business in the United States, and may have its assets in the United States frozen. The legislation also encourages the President to impose sanctions on the Central Bank of Iran, along with any other institution that supports proliferation activities and/or terrorist groups.

This was Lea Speyer's (SC '11) first time lobbying on Capitol Hill,

but she felt glad to have the opportunity to spend time in Washington to discuss these important issues with her elected representatives. "I had a great experience at my Senator's office [Sen. George LeMieux, (R, FL)]," said Speyer. "This trip helped me understand... by taking the time to speak to my Congressman, it makes a world of difference whether or not he will pursue something I think is important."

Overall, Speyer says she especially enjoyed the speakers AIPAC arranged as a supplement to the lobbying work the students did on Capitol Hill. "I loved that AIPAC organized for Sen. Lieberman and Rep. Eric Cantor (R, VA) to come speak to us, and President Joel," she added. "As a student, it feels incredible to know that the school is behind you by having the president of the school there right alongside you."

The one-day lobbying mission concluded with a speech by Rep. Cantor, the House Minority Whip, which was held for all the students in a conference room in one of the House office buildings. He spoke to the group about his firm pro-Israel stance and the need to pass strong sanctions against Iran. At the conclusion of Cantor's speech, the Y.U. student lobbyists returned to campus via the same buses that transported them to Capitol Hill that morning. Thanks to their vigorous efforts to lobby for the sake of Israel, the men and women of Yeshiva University were able to return to their dorms content with the knowledge that their dialogue with their elected officials helped persuade them to push the IRPSA for a vote in Congress.

Connecting American Students to the State of Israel Through Business

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ing on to our first time running the second phase of the program, and we're sure the same rule will hold true. Basically we feel that we have to run through a few iterations of this program to get all the bugs out before we expand. We have set up benchmarks and metrics, we know what success looks like and we know what failure looks like, and we want to do this properly.

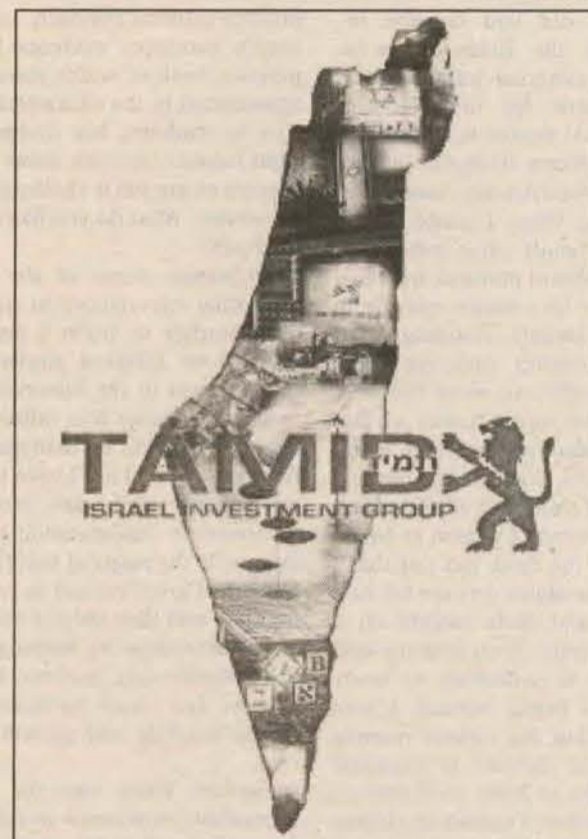
We think that YU would be a perfect place to send the program, we hope and we believe that there's a community there that would be receptive to it. Anyone in YU interested in TAMID should get in touch with us, so we'll develop

a working relationship that we'll be able to capitalize on later when we're ready to create new TAMID chapters on other campuses.

We've had a very positive response to TAMID so far. Just this year ten or so universities have made unsolicited contact with us; we just feel that we have to prove the concept first before we think about moving forward.

The Observer: Thank you so much for speaking with The Observer. Best of luck with TAMID and everything else.

For further information see www.tamidgroup.org, or email Eitan at eitan.ingall@tamidgroup.org.



TAMID Israel Investment Group seeks to connect students with Israeli businesses.



On 2 December, 140 YU students learned about lobbying for Israel as part of the 2009 YUPAC delegation to Washington, D.C.

Courtesy of Jonathan Mael

SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Interview: Israeli-American Lactation Consultant, Dr. Ilana R. Azulay Chertok, PhD, MSN, IBCLC

Yaelle Frohlich

Dr. Chertok is an associate professor at West Virginia University's School of Nursing (WVU SON). She has been invited to speak about her research at conferences and meetings around the world and have published much of my research in professional, peer-reviewed journals. At the 2009 International Lactation Consultant Association Conference, she presented her and her colleagues' research on the effect of early breastfeeding on neonatal glucose levels of term infants born to women with gestational diabetes.

Observer: What is your educational background, and how and why did you become involved in the fields of lactation and maternal-infant health?

Dr. Chertok: My first Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree is in International Relations from the University of Pennsylvania. Soon after graduating Penn, I made Aliyah with my family after experiencing a wonderful prenatal and birth experience by a nurse-midwife in Chicago. Largely resulting from the relationship with my midwife, I decided to enter the field of maternal-infant health so that I might also nurture and guide new parents. I studied to become a certified childbirth educator and lactation support person in Israel. I enjoyed the field, but felt that I wanted the ability to care for new mothers and their infants on a higher practice level and decided to return to university to study nursing. I began nursing school in Israel, but for various reasons returned to the USA to complete my studies at Rush University in Chicago, where I earned my degree of a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) with honors and became a Registered Nurse (RN). My program of study was excellent; it challenged me and inspired me to venture into the world of maternal-infant health research. I also received education, training, and supervision in lactation consulting and then passed the lactation consulting boards, thereby becoming an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC).

Upon returning to Israel, I decided to pursue my growing passion in maternal-infant health research on a graduate level and was accepted at Beersheva's Ben-Gurion University to study in the PhD program in the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health...I aspired to continue along the path of research and scholarship in the field of nursing and epidemiology/public health, so I applied and was accepted to pursue a postdoctoral research fellowship at the University of Washington's School of Nursing (UW SON), one of the

top nursing schools, through a training grant sponsored by the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR)...During my first two years as a faculty member at WVU SON, I earned a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) in the field of Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) so that I would have a higher level of clinical practice, thereby enriching my research potential and experience.

Observer: What are some of the challenges of your job?

Dr. Chertok: The greatest challenge of my job is juggling the many different roles I play as a teacher, researcher, and lactation consultant. I believe that clinical practice informs research, and research produces evidence-based practice, both of which should be transmitted in the educational forum to students, but finding the right balance between those three aspects of my job is challenging.

Observer: What do you like about your job?

Dr. Chertok: Some of the most rewarding experiences in my job as a teacher is when I perceive that I have inspired students to take interest in the material I am teaching, whether it is culture and health, research, or maternal-infant health. I feel like I have served my purpose well when students demonstrate understanding and interest in the material that I teach. I also feel great reward in helping mothers and their infants succeed at breastfeeding. By helping with the breastfeeding process, I have a sense that I have facilitated the family bonding and growth process.

Observer: What was the most memorable experience or interaction you have had as a lactation consultant?

Dr. Chertok: I enjoy my lactation consulting encounters and have had many interesting experiences in the different cultural, community, and hospital settings where I have worked. An example of one of my most memorable interactions as a lactation consultant is when I was working at Soroka University Medical Center in Beersheva. Soroka is the primary hospital in the Negev with over 1,000 births a month. Due to lack of space, women may find themselves temporarily placed on a bed in the hallway of the postpartum ward until a bed in one of the rooms becomes available following patient discharge. On one occasion, as I walked through the unit, I noticed a new mother, a Russian immigrant (*olah hadasha*), lying in a bed in the hallway looking helpless as her infant daughter wailed nearby in the cot. The father stood nearby looking nearly as helpless. I suggested that the infant might

want to nurse, to which they replied that the new mother did not feel comfortable nursing in the hallway. I quickly retrieved a large sheet from the supply closet and demonstrated how the father can serve as a privacy wall, holding up the sheet around his wife's bed. They agreed to try, whereby I assisted the new mother in getting her daughter latched. When the nursing session ended, I was enthralled to see the new parents smiling as they held their calm and content daughter.

Observer: What are the major similarities/differences in the lactation consulting profession and in lactation research between these two countries?

Dr. Chertok: There are similarities and differences between the USA and Israel with regards to breastfeeding. First, there are differences between sub-cultures and locations within each of the countries, so statements made here are generalizations. In general, breastfeeding initiation rates in Israel are higher than the average initiation rates in the USA, although that varies according to multiple factors including ethnic/cultural background, socioeconomic status, immigrant status, and location. I have also found that orthodox and traditional women place religious value on breastfeeding, as Jewish tradition highly values breastfeeding. Additionally, there is a national maternity policy in Israel, affording women time to be home with their infants for the first few months, thereby facilitating the breastfeeding relationship. Yet, women in the USA have greater access to certain breastfeeding resources than in Israel, although again, that depends on location in both countries. In the Negev, there are very few certified lactation consultants, no lactation clinics to date, and limited access to breastfeeding accessories such as hospital grade pumps (which are important for the breastfeeding mother returning to work). Similarly in West Virginia, women have limited access to those same resources. Meanwhile, in other regions of both countries there is greater access to those resources and to professionals. In both countries there are different levels of professional trained lactation support, with the IBCLC (certified lactation consultants) being accepted to practice in both countries.

Observer: Where is your favorite place that you have worked?

Dr. Chertok: My favorite place to work was in Seattle, Washington, where I was a full-time researcher in the field of lactation as well as a part-time lactation consultant in a downtown hospital. I found Seattle

to be a breastfeeding-friendly city. On my first day in Seattle, I walked to the nearby grocery store to stock up our kitchen and saw a woman pushing her cart carrying her baby in a sling. I smiled at the woman and she smiled back. As I got a closer look, I realized that she was not only pushing the grocery cart and holding her baby, but also breastfeeding in the process. That was maternal multitasking!

Observer: Would you recommend lactation consulting as a profession? Why or why not?

Dr. Chertok: I would recommend the field of lactation consulting to women who have a strong interest in helping families and have pa-



Courtesy of Dr. Ilana R. Azulay Chertok
Dr. Ilana R. Azulay Chertok is a professor and lactation consultant based in America and Israel.

tiency. Breastfeeding often involves more than a mother and her infant, but rather a broader context of the family. I have found that depending on the culture, when I teach

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Invention and Innovation: The Beginning of PolyAspirin

Faige Seligman

Once again, Stern College for Women's Chemistry Club has brought in a distinguished and fascinating speaker. Dr. Kathryn Uhrich, Professor and Dean of Math and Physical Sciences at Rutgers University, visited Stern on December 8 to speak about her unique scientific experiences. Dr. Uhrich is known for inventing PolyAspirin, a clever new drug that meshes the ideas of biodegradability, bioavailability, and minimal waste with organic chemistry to yield an incredible new product.

PolyAspirin, in a nutshell, is the polymer form of aspirin; aspirin consists of acetylsalicylic acid monomers while PolyAspirin is a polymer, or long chain, of salicylic acid. As a polymer, its properties differ somewhat from the monomer version, and these differences can be exploited to human advantage. PolyAspirin can be used to make biodegradable, safe, edible food wraps that retard bacterial growth, since it is antiseptic; it can be used to coat metal medical devices that must be placed in the human body; it can be used in surgical sutures, cardiac stents, localized pain relief, and myriads more applications—PolyAspirin may truly be the drug of the future, with uses in fields ranging from food safety to surgery and beyond.

During her talk, Dr. Uhrich went over the history of aspirin, beginning with people long ago, such

as Hippocrates, who used extracts of willow to ease pain, headaches, and fevers. Scientists now know that the substance responsible for these pain-relieving properties in the willow was salicin, a compound that can be easily made into acetylsalicylic acid, also known as aspirin. Dr. Uhrich relayed to the gathered budding and veteran scientists how she had come up with the idea of PolyAspirin: she had been teaching an organic chemistry lecture and had been explaining to her students how acetylsalicylic acid is made, when she experienced a flash of inspiration. She thought, why not join the salicylic acid together in a chain, instead of just adding the acetyl group? She then went back to her lab and began what would become one of her biggest and most successful projects with her undergraduates and graduate students. Dr. Uhrich also went on to found one of several companies, Polymerix Corporation, which sold the new drug, as she felt that it was the role of companies, rather than universities, to market and sell drugs.

As new ideas and inventions in science often do, PolyAspirin has opened up a whole new way of looking at drug synthesis. Thanks to Dr. Uhrich's flash of insight and consequent hard work, entire vistas now exist wherein one can think of all sorts of polymeric drugs with major advantages to human health and well-being.

SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Changing the World, One Baby at a Time: Lactation Consultants and the Work They Do

Yaelle Frohlich

Sore nipples, low milk supply, fussy infant, thrush—these are just a few of the many challenges that cause some mothers to prematurely give up breastfeeding their babies. What many mothers—and individuals interested in the helping professions—might not know is that there is an entire professional field equipped and devoted to helping solve nursing difficulties.

The certified professionals who make mums and babies their career are called International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC), numbering over 19,000 worldwide. In hospitals, private practices, breastfeeding clinics, health centers and even home visits, IBCLCs help mothers solve breastfeeding problems to feed their babies the natural, antibody-rich maternal food that lowers babies' risk of ear and respiratory infections, diarrhea, diabetes, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), autoimmune diseases like asthma and allergies and other diseases. Equally, if not more, noteworthy is that breastfeeding drastically reduces the risk of breast cancer in both the mother and the breastfed daughter when she reaches adulthood.

The requirements for becoming a lactation consultant include education about human lactation and breastfeeding and a minimum number of supervised clinical hours providing lactation support. After completing the hours of education and clinical experience, one may apply to take the certification exam of IBCLC (The International Board of Lactation Consultant Ex-

aminers).

Why become a lactation consultant? As one IBCLC at the 2009 annual ILCA Conference articulated, "The most rewarding thing is it's usually a win-win profession. We're helping healthy things happen."

IBCLC's website (www.IBCLC.org) lists three pathways through which to become a lactation consultant: graduating from an academically accredited human lactation and breastfeeding program, by already being involved in the health field or by completing a pre-approved lactation education plan. The number of clinical and education hours required varies depending on which pathway one pursues—for example, those who become IBCLCs through already being involved in the health field are required to complete 1,000 clinical hours before sitting the IBCLC exam, while those who graduate from an accredited program in human lactation are only required to complete 300. ILCA (International Lactation Consultant Association, www.ilca.org) is the member organization of IBCLC and comprises 4,766 members.

The first IBCLC exam was administered in July 1985 in Washington, D.C. and Melbourne, Australia. It was "the first health organization to be international from the beginning," says Linda Smith, a founding member of ILCA and author of the first IBCLC exams, with pride.

There are multiple pathways to certification because lactation consultants come from diverse educational and professional backgrounds. They are doctors, nurses, teachers, speech thera-

pists, dieticians, nutritionists, dental hygienists and even engineers, among other professions. Some, including many of IBCLC and ILCA's founders, got their start as leaders at La Leche League, a breastfeeding and childrearing support group for mothers with chapters around the world.

However, one need not be a mother to become a lactation consultant. Aviva Kleinman, 29, a New York University Hospital nurse, is one such example. In July, Kleinman was planning to take the IBCLC exam in the foreseeable future. "On our unit I'm a mother baby nurse and it [breastfeeding] is a big part of what we do," says Kleinman, who completed an accelerated 12-month nursing degree program at Columbia University, where midwives teach women's health. "...It's very empowering to be with women and to learn from them on such a grand scale [at the ILCA conference], and breastfeeding itself is empowering to women."

Even though the overwhelming majority of lactation consultants are women, there is also a contingent of men in the field. Major Tom Johnston, a 38-year-old father of seven, is one of 39 active duty midwives in the United States Armed Forces, serving soldiers and their families. He became a certified lactation consultant in 2002.

The easygoing, down-to-earth major is passionate about his service to the country—"I'm nowhere near retirement," he says, "I'll serve as long as I can"—and about the importance of his work. "A mother baby nurse who can't [help patients] breastfeed is like an ICU

nurse who can't take a blood pressure," states Johnston.

The U.S. army has a program that sends recruits back to school to complete their college degrees. Johnston originally wanted a degree in history, but his commander had other plans: a B.A. in nursing (leading to Johnston's being stationed in the women's ward of the hospital), followed by an M.A. in midwifery. Now Johnston is glad for where he ended up. "As a midwife, I get to help couples turn into families and I really enjoy that role," he says, describing the moving emotional responses of new parents. "...As a midwife, I live to see that happen."

Johnston says his main frustration as an IBCLC is combating half-heartedness in some clients' attempts to succeed at breastfeeding. "I tried to breastfeed in the hospital but he didn't really take it, so I gave him a bottle" is a common excuse Johnston hears. "But I tell them, 'Well, how long did it take him to walk—more than a day or two?'" Johnston says. "Walking or potty training aren't processes that are okay to fail at [but] breastfeeding is seen as a developmental process that's okay to fail."

Johnston does not feel that his gender negatively impacts the quality of care he is able to provide as a lactation consultant. "It's the same way I can take care of someone who's had an appendix removed and I still have an appendix," he rationalizes. "Can you imagine if nurses had to experience what patients experience?"

Additionally, Johnston believes strongly that the father has a crucial role in breastfeeding families.

"The more little boys see their fathers breastfeeding with mothers," hypothesizes Johnston, "they'll think, 'That's not just mom's job.' They'll act differently as a result...I think that we need to work toward changing opinions toward fathers. They're not extra; they're integral... Everyone has one father."

Ruthy Wilson, a pediatric nurse practitioner at Cape Canaveral Hospital east of Orlando, got her start at La Leche League meetings. "I grew up in a culture of breastfeeding mothers and aunts," she says. One family member breastfed her first two children, and, when the third was one born with congenital heart defect, was helped by women who were lactation consultants.

Wilson was active in earning her hospital "baby friendly" status, which includes, among other steps, ceasing to receive and distribute free formula samples from formula companies to mothers.

"We ended up changing birth practice," says Wilson proudly of the 1991-2000 accomplishment. For example, no formula is given out at discharge from the hospital, there is free follow-up and support for the mother in the community and babies now go skin to skin with their mothers within 30 minutes following birth—a practice that, among other benefits, stabilizes baby's heart and breathing rates and blood sugar, as well as positively affects breastfeeding and bonding. "From the hospital's standpoint it was marketing, for us it was following the mothers and babies and helping them be as successful as they could be," says Wilson.

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Science Book Shorts

A Beautiful Read: "The Ten Most Beautiful Experiments"

Helen Ayala Unger

The most temperamental piece of laboratory equipment will always be the human brain," concludes this month's featured science read, "The Ten Most Beautiful Experiments," by celebrated *New York Times* science contributor George Johnson. This book, as the title suggests, highlights those classic experiments that have historically influenced the scientific community. The book includes experiments from the fields of biology, chemistry, physics, and psychology. Among these experiments are Isaac Newton's *Experimentum Crucis*, Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier's discovery of oxygen, and Ivan Pavlov's famed classical conditioning model.

The intent of the book is to celebrate the traditional approach

to science through detailing the basic experiments that have laid the foundation for modern scientific thinking. To Johnson, this is "beauty in the classic sense—the simplicity of the apparatus, like the logical simplicity of the analysis, seems as pure and inevitable as the lines of a Greek statue" (xii). The author accomplishes his task with remarkable ease, explaining all factors leading up to the experiments, their trials and errors, as well as both their immediate and long-term effects on scientific thought.

In addition to illuminating the actual experiments for the reader, Johnson manages to characterize each scientist as a distinct, unique persona. Using concise but vivid language, the author describes the

rivalries, heartaches, and personal convictions of each scientist. The reader feels connected to both the experimenter and his work. Reading "The Ten Most Beautiful Experiments" gives the reader a sense of closeness to the scientific ideal and an intimate look into the lives and struggles of scientists who, through their work, changed the way that the modern world thinks about nature. It is that personal view that makes "The Ten Most Beautiful Experiments" itself a truly beautiful read.

Helen Unger is a freshman at SCW from Cleveland, OH. She is planning a major in either biology or chemistry and enjoys calibrating calorimeters and rewriting the rules of solubility. Go Cavs!

Interview with Dr. Chertok

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and guide a new mother, I am also educating the grandmother, father, sister, and other family members who influence the mother and her infant feeding practices. Patience is required as it often takes time for the maternal-infant dyad to learn and master the breastfeeding relationship. But, when success is achieved, the feeling of having helped a new mother and her infant in this important process is very rewarding.

Observer: What is your personal background? Do you have children? Did you breastfeed them, and, if so, for how long?

Dr. Chertok: I am 39 years old and married to Dr. Shlomo Chertok, who has a PhD in Jewish Thought and is an experienced Jewish Studies educator. I must give credit to my husband who was supportive of my decision to pursue my edu-

cational paths, which often meant relocating and actively sharing in childcare. Shlomo and I have 4 wonderful children, Netanel (17 ½, starting at Yeshivat Petach Tikva), Tuvia (16, entering 12th grade at Yeshivat Hesder Yeruham's B'levav Shalem), Avigail (11, entering 6th grade in Yeruham), and Yedidia (8, entering 3rd grade in Yeruham). I breastfed all of my children: exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and continued partial breastfeeding for about 2 years. We have lived in different places. In Israel we lived in Alon Shvut while my husband learned at Yeshivat Har Etzion ("Gush"), Beersheva where we completed our PhDs, and Yeruham, where our home is located, and in various cities in the USA. We have been enjoying the adventure and learning experience we share through our journey together.

SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Changing the World, One Baby at a Time: Lactation Consultants and the Work They Do

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For some families, the support is absolutely critical. For four years, Wilson helped work to keep healthy one particular mother who developed post-partum psychosis following the birth of her third child.

Because the field is relatively new and, like other health sectors, developing, being a lactation consultant is often about innovation. At the 2009 ILCA Conference, Kay Hoover gave a lecture called "When There is No Research," in which she discussed creative techniques to solve breastfeeding issues regarding baby positioning, dealing with nursing-challenging baby frenulums and other issues.

Some companies, such as Cathy Carothers and Kendall Cox's non-profit EveryMother (everymother.org), provide training and resources for lactation consultants and health professionals to educate them how to be the best breastfeeding specialists they can be.

Author and founding ILCA member Judith Lauwers, whose educational background is in high school English education, believes that the lactation con-

sulting field is heading in a more health profession-oriented direction "If I were just getting out of high school, or going into college and I were interested in this field, the advice I would give would be to look at some sort of health field in your preparation," says Lauwers. "Whether that means becoming a nurse or dietician, I don't know. But because of where the field is going, I've been recommending people in this position that they look at nursing or dietetics."

Lauwers analyzes the merits of the lactation consultant profession. "It's a very rewarding profession," she says. "Either they [lactation consultants] have had a bad experience with breastfeeding and want to make sure that other mothers don't, or they enjoyed it so much that they want to share it with others. It is a very nurturing profession. As long as women keep having babies and breastfeeding, there will be a market for employment."

However, says Lauwers, the field is changing from its early days. In future, predicts Lauwers, "there will be a challenge for anyone not

in the health profession to get jobs. However, some hospitals may be cutting back on nursing staff to provide that help to mums."

Liz Brooks, a lawyer turned lactation consultant serves as secretary of ILCA. She too got her start at La Leche League. 19 years ago, when she gave birth to her first child, she knew so little about the setup of the group that she didn't bring her baby to her first meeting. "I started being a mother, then a counselor, and then the next best thing out there was IBCLC," she says of her journey.

Brooks runs a private lactation consulting practice. "It allowed me greater flexibility and control over my time," she says of her decision to go private practice. She also speaks about business and legal issues that affect breastfeeding practices.

But no matter where lactation consultants are based, they seem to exhibit an inextinguishable passion for providing their mother-baby care. Wilson sums it up: "There are so many people... changing the world, one baby at a time."

It's Elementary: Mercury

Juliet Meir

Mercury is a curious element, named after the Roman god Mercury, who was known for speed and mobility and is also associated with the planet Mercury. Because the root of the word "mercury" comes from "hydrargyrum," the Greek term for liquid silver, mercury's atomic symbol is Hg. Its atomic number is 80 and it is the only element that is a liquid metal at room temperature. The chief mercury ore, or mineral source, is cinnabar (HgS), a rare natural component of the earth. Mercury is extracted from cinnabar by heating it in a current of air and condensing the vapors.

Mercury has a long and varied history. The Chinese and Hindus knew of it long ago, and it has been found in Egyptian tombs as old as 1500 BCE. The ancient Greeks used mercury in ointments, and the Romans used it in cosmetics. During the popular years of alchemy, mercury was thought to be the source of all metals on the periodic table. Later, in the mid 18th to 19th century, mercury- in the form of mercuric nitrate- was used to "carrot" felt hats, a process whose vapors and solutions are highly poisonous. As a result, many people who bought these hats exhibited symptoms of insomnia, dementia, hallucinations, and emotional lability.

Mercury has several other harmful effects. It is a potent

poison when absorbed through unbroken skin, the respiratory tract, and the gastrointestinal tract. Methyl mercury, produced mainly by industries, is a dangerous environmental pollutant. Unfortunately, it is now found widely in lakes and streams.

However, mercury also has beneficial uses. In the 16th century, it was used as a treatment for syphilis and in the early 20th century as a laxative pill to get rid of parasitic worms in young children. Nowadays, it is used in barometers to measure atmospheric pressure. It is also found in advertising signs, fluorescent lamps, and street lamps. In the field of modern health care, mercury appears as a dental amalgam used to fill teeth.

When combined with different element, mercury has varying functions. For example, mercury (II) chloride (Hg₂Cl₂), or calomel, is used as an antiseptic for bacteria, whereas mercuric sulfide (HgS) forms a red paint pigment called vermilion. Mercuric oxide (HgO) is an important component of mercury batteries, and mercury fulminate (Hg(ONC)₂) is used in explosives.

Mercury is just one of 115 presently known elements. And, yet, mercury, with its wide range of applications, clearly has a personality all its own.

Did you know?

The world's tallest snowman was built in Bethel, Maine in 2008. It stood 122'1"

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STYLE

Shtark at Heart: How the Frumshani Goes Searching For Love

Talia Kaufman

Often, those of us within the Modern Orthodox world pride ourselves on our superior level of *frumkeit* (religiosity). We happily label ourselves by where we spent our year(s) after our high school graduation, the crowd to which we belong, but, most importantly, the way we dress. Many may feel their holy *hashkafa* (religious outlook) puts them levels above the immoral fashion industry that outfits the *goyim* and WASP wannabes. However, many of us are actually more prey to fashion conformity and labeling than are our friends whose last names fail to end in "shwartz," "berg" or "stein."

Often, when one arrives for their first year on a college campus, one begins to search for their new identity and social group. Freshmen often join the Greek System, a campus club, or attend weekend parties to find their new life-long friends. However, the majority of Stern College for Women students have never actually set foot on campus as freshmen. And being that university community is so secular college, we look for other ways in which we can identify ourselves.

Welcome to Stern College Orientation: Where there is no need for nametags, for you are categorized with our infamous one-over. Upon arrival to this great institution, students on the Beren Campus divide themselves not by interests or personalities but by outfits.

This *mehitza* (division) between social groups provides more purposes than assisting in the decision whether to shop for Kiki Riki's leotards in Brooklyn or Seven Jeans in Bloomingdale's; it provides guidelines in the search for love as well. But among the socially frustrated females that make up our student body, courtship can be quite challenging and, as we are not in the season of shopping, one might ask, "How does one become the perfect mate?"

We have become a bit of a Yeshivish University these days with the super *mahmir* (religiously strict) being super in demand. And the *crème-de-la-frum* has found a way to state their and religiosity level by their choice of apparel. The display of right-wing religiosity is as much a mating-call as an excessive display of skin is for women on the opposite side of the religious spectrum.

These *frumshaniestas* seem to ask themselves one question when choosing an outfit: "Would my *bashert* [destined one] want me to wear it?" Their hair is coiffed to evoke a preview of their dream *sheitel* (wig) and clothing is made up of an abun-

dance of thick, confining material: sweaters, tights and long, long black skirts that seems to age the wearer an average of ten to twenty years.

Outfit choice seems to leave as much room for individuality as their choice of major. However, perhaps it may be best to use those Jewish Studies classes to look up the source for your mandatory uber-unflattering duty-length skirts or even the sleeves past the elbows. You may find that the *halakha* (Jewish law) is not quite as well defined as the mindset of those who follow it. Or perhaps those training in the therapies can use that therapy knowledge to look into their *neshamot* (souls) and discover why exactly they feel the need to surrender to such conformity?

Why does being so ostentatiously *tzanuah* (modest) at a wedding that the shine from your satin dress can blind through the *mehitza* make you the most pious potential wife? One *frumshaniesta* admits her frustration with the Survival-of-the-Frumest mentality. "I wish I could wear more comfortable or cute things like Uggs, bubble skirts or patterned tights," she says, "but I can't because that would not be considered *tzanuah*. Boys...they are all looking for a drop-dead gorgeous *aidel maidel knaidel*."

With many of these ladies, their way of dress is a 24/7 commitment. Literally. There's a reason that a sign in the Brookdale Hall fitness room warns against the hazards of exercising in long skirts. Ladies are lifting the heavy weights of their thick skirts to work off their seminary pounds. Some are even sleeping in their *frum-garb*. However, perhaps *Mashiah* (the messiah), if he arrives in the middle of the night, will be impressed by the pleated pajamas. Maybe there is a special place in *Olam Haba* (the World to Come) for girls who have traded the sweatpants of their brother's high school's hockey team for sleepwear that matches their *bubby's* (grandmother's).

But some ladies may be taking on what seems like a *mahmir humra* for different reasons than one might think. "In my home, I do not have a bathroom attached to my room and I would feel uncomfortable if my stepfather saw me in my pajama pants," explains one *frumshaniesta*. "Now skirts are what is comfortable for me."

However, the reaction fashion to this extreme method of dress is every bit as subtle. Some young women make their opposition heard with female empowering fashion statements. They outfit themselves in tank tops cut so low that you can see into their *neshama*, yet also follow in the *frummy's* footsteps with a *mahmir* an-

ti-pants stance. Instead they turn to leggings, so now truly no one is wearing any pants. They certainly use dress as a form of expression, but what exactly are they trying to say? However, those who are trying to disassociate with the tribe must note that it doesn't take a very strong sense of Jew-dar to pick out a post-adolescent rebellious *bas Torah* (Jewish daughter) on the streets of the city.

There are some men who strongly support a movement towards wardrobe freedom, regardless of societal or *halakhic* (Jewish legal) implications. One ladies man of the YU library advises, "Girls should be wearing pants, mini skirts; anything they can get their hands on. Whatever makes them more comfortable. Dressing modestly may be *halakha* but there are a lot of *halakhot* that no one follows. These *frummies* are all about an image, they just want to get married. Normal people wear pants and don't look like trash, a lot of these skirts are more revealing anyways. But the guys are just as full of it as the girls. Everybody takes it off behind closed doors."

However, there are as many opinions on the situation as on Torah Study programs at YC. "I will admit, I'm not a perfect Jew, I have trouble keeping *shmirat negiya* [the prohibition of touching someone of the opposite gender] and other mitzvot," admits one student leader. "But I like girls who dress *tzanuah*. It adds a little mystery. It's a turn-on. But the *frummy* look, not so much. It doesn't breed any individuality."

However there are many high-and-holy up in the Heights who feel differently about the situation. Perhaps it is because they live closer geographically to *Shamayim* (Heaven) than us stuck in the *pritzut* (mundane distractions) of Midtown, that the *bahurim* (eligible bachelors) of Yeshiva College believe that any girl with pure insides must cover every inch of her outsides.

Often, these gentlemen, fresh off The Bet (*shana bet*, that is) have mindsets as stiff as their black pants. Often, gentlemen look to the way a girl dresses before even taking the time to get to know a girl. Granted, your manner of dress can express a lot about both a person's personality and *hashkafa*. But there are so many other ways to see the true character of an individual that go much deeper than a once-over ever could.

Noah Botwinick, a *shtark* (visibly devout) young student, defends this mindset. "I think that *frum* and *tzniut* are the same thing," he states. "It's all about sending a message. It's the same thing with guys and denim; you can't go to work in jeans. It's about the meaning that our culture has given it;



Talia Kaufman

Stern studnets have taken to wearing their resumes.

having dignity as a Jew."

Another YP *bahur* agrees; when asked about his opinion on argyle sweaters he perks up. "Ooh, that's really *shtark*," he exclaims.

Although many have grown to resent this approach, Aaron, a Yeshivat Shaalvim alumnus, sheds light on why it's widespread. "In yeshiva they tell you that good girls dress a certain way and those who do not are not acceptable," he explains. "That simply isn't true. There are plenty of girls who aren't '*frummies*,' with much better character. The reality will come through no matter how she dresses. And when it comes down to it guys are animals and only want the same thing no matter what they wear on their heads."

One learned Stern student agrees. "Maybe I don't cover my knees," she states. "So what? I can out-learn almost any guy in YU when it comes to *gemara* (Talmud). How dare anyone judge me on my skirts? I don't want a guy with such a superficial view of religion anyway."

On YU Connects, Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future-run online dating service that subscribers hope will be the beginning of their journey to OnlySimchas, the *bahurim* are asked if they would like a lady who wears pants. Why must that be the focus? What if she makes an effort to resist the temptations of evil speech, *lashon hara*? Is genuinely excited for the coming of *Mashiah*? Is *mahmir* on

the Shabbat selection laws of *borer*? is friendly to the environment and recycles?

Aren't we supposed to judge our fellow person like we judge ourselves? Unfortunately, many relinquished their once valued set of male-female social skills somewhere between Hanukkah and Pesach vacations of *shana aleph*—the set that would require one to sufficiently consider the opposite sex as one's fellow. How do you honestly think that you would measure up if you were judged by some of today's standards?

All library girl jokes aside, peeking at a dolled-up Stern girl over their biology notes is, unfortunately, the only casual co-ed interaction some boys are getting. And sadly, they wouldn't be able to chat her up at Nagel Bagel even if they wanted to. And that is perhaps a reason that they will rely on her outfit, not her attributes or feminine charms, to tell them everything they need to know.

However, this superficial method of *bashert* hunting can often become very confusing. For example, wearing a sweatshirt representing a camp, high school or Israel program can serve many purposes—it can inform others of an institution where you developed your religious beliefs, and can extend an invitation to a game of Jewish Geography. Sweatshirts can also send a message, such as "I am casual, carefree and do not put a ridicu-

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STYLE

A Cut of Fabulous: How I Found My Dream Stylist

Dassi Fant

Every girl knows that rush of excitement when entering a hair salon. She is immediately greeted with a powerful whiff of both environmentally and Hollywood friendly styling products, the violent roar of the hair dryers, and a sea of chic women and the men who love them, strategically adorned in head-to-toe black. Immediately, she feels like a poser, knowing that she washed her hair this morning with some no-name, dolphin-killing chemical concoction bought at the corner drug store. Well aware that her peasant-inspired outfit is a dead-giveaway for her out-of-state zip code, still she struts inside with her chin held high, and marches forward to her stylist's chair. She will demand in a voice that quakes ever so slightly that she would like to trade in her little-girl curls for a look that synthesizes Katie Holmes' sophistication with Rihanna's edge. The stylist nods and smiles, thanking his lucky scissors for an opportunity to showcase his creative talent.

Ok, perhaps that is not all too familiar for everyone. Not every girl gets the Rapunzel-inspired epiphany to shear her beloved locks. However, every girl does have some sort of "haier" story, perhaps before some school picture or the start of summer camp, when her stylist interprets the just-a-trim request for creative license to go all Puck from Glee on her.

How do we find our Hair *Bashert*? That dream stylist in whom you can confide your straightening

addiction, who will transform your 'do for every wedding, bar mitzvah and VIP soiree to which you RSVP? This search can be especially difficult for us "out-of-towners" who have declared Stern College for Women our new home, abandoning our hairstylists back at home. The jungle of New York hair salons, brimming with stylists who are as harsh as they are expensive, can be quite daunting and, sometimes, downright frightening. Each salon on Madison and Park Avenue is bigger and more posh than the next, and each stylist speaks in a hair-based vernacular that gets further and further away from the English language as we know it. So what is a small town gal with split ends and limp strands ever to do on this jungle island known as Manhattan?

My adventure began and ended in the SoHo. The uber trendy little neighborhood is a girl's best friend while simultaneously being her wallet's worst enemy. This home to many of New York's most fabulous is where I found my dream stylist. His name is Matt Fugate, stylist extraordinaire of the Sam Brocato Salon, Seattle's finest trained stylist with the passion and scissors to prove it. Now I knew it was love at first appointment with Matt when he took step one in professionalism: he sat down with me and discussed what I'd like to call a plan of action.

Like any good stylist captain about to embark on mission impossible, he assessed the current situation (my hopelessly overgrown hair), asked me about my

usual hair care regiment (or lack thereof due to impossibly long schedules), and exchanged ideas about the upcoming cut (more like he enlightened me and I listened, hoping he didn't see through my cosmetic ignorance). So there I was, sitting in one of SoHo's most exclusive salons, faced with a most pressing decision. Do I dramatically flee the scene in fear of the unknown or do I swallow my pride and put my most obvious feminine asset in the hands of a man? To be fair, his locks were far silkier and more luxurious than my own (how many guys can pull off invisible highlights?) and he did have a way with that blow-dryer, which is a story in and of itself.

Let's get back to Matt. I first met Matt while interning at a fashion show in a ghetto-fabulous fur store. After poking much fun at the ostentatious, hideous, and obscene fur coats (we're talking red and blue checkered mink and bright pink angora—I wouldn't lie), Matt and I became fast friends. We bonded over our shared disgust of Valentino knock-offs and love of Gossip Girl Blake Lively's 'do (his own personal masterpiece). He began to work his magic and I sat there in awe; his confident stance, cunning hands, and discerning eyes evoked images of a Michelangelo with hairspray, carefully sculpting my mane to perfection.

Before we were able to finish our gab-session, the cut was done. He then applied the salon's signature brand product and whipped out his god-sent blow dryer. He skillfully pulled, twirled, and flipped

my semi-dry locks into perfectly natural yet coif curls cascading down my back. My hair glistened in the sunlight that smiled through the windows. I knew then that his antidote about women making up excuses to spend a night out on the town simply to showcase their Matt masterpiece wasn't stemming from cockiness; it was the truth. I cursed my upcoming biology test and unfinished assignments. I got up from the chair, tossing my commercial-worthy tresses as I splurged on a bottle of the miracle serum.

After that magical twirl in Matt's

chair, I had a bigger dilemma than the lack of skills to able to duplicate Matt's tour de force. With the admirers of my new look, should I share my new friend or keep the Brocato salon my stylish little secret? I have decided to take the high road and highlight his brilliance for all of you—the ladies lost without the woman who has styled her hair for her bat mitzvah and the girls in desperate need of a boost to both their frazzled roots and plunging self-esteem. So I have graciously gifted you with the legend of a magical salon and a priceless tip: ask for Matt.

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Please send comments and
letters to the editor to

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Shtark at Heart: How the *Frumshani* Goes Searching For Love

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lous amount of time into grooming myself," or simply, "I'm chilly but not cold enough to put on a coat." Or the current trend of black tights, especially when paired with conservative-looking flats, may be confused with the seriously *shtark* "sridai eish" *hashkafa*. Similarly, a black hat can even be as authentic as "fauxmer" *negiah*.

Many females often grow confused about how to become the perfect Nice Jewish Girl. One such lady tells of going on a *shidduch* (arranged) date in a denim skirt and being rejected for being "too *frum*." Her date the next week informed her that denim was "not *frum* enough."

This confused, narrow-minded cultural phenomenon "is an unhealthy development that is the result of our closed environment," theorizes one Yeshiva University junior. "The majority of Yeshiva

University students are somewhat observant and therefore minute details are highlighted to create divisions between the different groups. People are simply wearing their resumes."

We may never know the true reason behind the trend, however maybe it's time to quit making statements and start asking questions. Is there a way to break the *mehitzot* between the sects? How did we regress to the level of sexual tension that we experienced at *bar mitzvah* parties? What kind of message are we sending to the world? Does the world even care, or simply the *shadchanim* (matchmakers)? Did our forefathers shun any potential foremothers who wore denim robes to the well? What exactly does *frum* mean, anyhow? Perhaps we should all ponder a few of these inquiries before the next time we are tempted to ask whether "she wears pants."

Tizku l'mitzvoth!



Dassi and her hair bashert, Matt.

Dassi Fant

THE OBSERVER

The Evolution of Women's Prayer Groups

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erly explained. "If we could never change from tradition, there would never be a Sarah Schenirer," says Rabbi Kahn, mentioning the founder of the Beis Yaakov schools, responsible for bringing education to Orthodox Jewish women en masse. He emphasizes that if Orthodox Judaism had stagnated, women would not have their own Torah institutions and would not be as knowledgeable as they are today. Rabbi Kahn believes that today's women's prayer groups have become much more of a political issue than a *halakhic* one, and urges people to judge the situation fairly.

Currently, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Rabbi Avraham Weiss and Rabbi Saul Berman are the leaders in promoting the *halakhic* validity of women's prayer groups. In one of the first books devoted to women's prayer groups, "Women and Prayer—a Halachik Analysis of Women's Prayer Groups" by Rabbi Avraham Weiss, the *halakhic* ramifications of women's prayer groups are dealt with at length, as well as an extensive discussion on women's Torah study and fulfillment of mitzvot. Some issues addressed in regard to women's prayer services are *kavod tzibbur* (honor of the congregation), the incomplete fulfillment of a mitzvah and forming a new *minhag* (custom).

Ms. Judy Landau, head of the Teaneck Women's Tefillah in Teaneck, NJ, emphasizes that abiding by *halakha* is of fundamental importance and priority to the Teaneck women's prayer group. The Teaneck Women's Tefillah started 28 years ago, meeting once a month on Shabbat in different people's homes. Currently, it congregates at least four times a year on Simhat Torah, Purim night for the *megillah* (Esther) reading, Shavuot night for a learning program, and *Tisha B'Av* for the reading of *Eicha* (Lamentations), as well as for at least three or four bat mitzvahs a year. In its early years it sparked controversy in the Teaneck community. "[But] Recently the issue is very quiet in Teaneck," said Landau. "It used to create a lot of positive and negative excitement when it first started...a lot of people have the attitude 'If Bubbie didn't do it, we don't do it.' I don't agree...we should do what is *halakhically* acceptable."

Ms. Landau described the spiritual importance of having women's prayer groups, "[For women] it is the difference between being able to come out to bat, versus being in the stands and being a spectator," she said.

Gila Yarmush, a sophomore at Stern College for Women, agrees.

"If that is what they feel makes them closer to G-d, then I think it is great for them to read Torah," she said. "Modern Orthodox Judaism must come up with a better acceptance of women's roles, because it is an issue not properly addressed in high schools and *midrashot* [seminaries]...communities everywhere." Yarmush opined that Orthodoxy must further discuss the role of women in Judaism and delineate women's involvement.

Meira Lerner, another sophomore, emphasized that for her, spirituality was also a key factor in her decision to attend a women's prayer group in her community. "Before I began participating in *tefillat nashim* [women's prayer], I went to shul reluctantly," she said. "I did not play an active role in the prayers or know what was going on behind the *mehitza*. *Tefillat nashim* gave me a greater understanding and appreciation for both the *halakhic* and spiritual aspects of *tefillah*...Before spending a year in Israel, I am ashamed to say I got to shul almost every weekend long after Torah reading. Because of this, *tefillat nashim* was extremely beneficial. Not only did I learn the parsha in depth, but I arrived at *tefillah* before it started."

Although she no longer attends a women's prayer group on a regular basis, Lerner attributed her experiences there to her greater appreciation of *tefillah* as a whole. "Presently, I no longer feel a need to participate in *tefillat nashim*," she said. "I am perfectly happy going to minyan on time and fulfilling my obligations to pray in more optimal circumstances."

Other students interviewed were ambivalent about the issue, while some strongly felt that there was no need for women's prayer groups at all. Many were firm in their belief that women should be happy with their unique role in Judaism, without the constant need for change.

Women's prayer services are a fascinating, complex and controversial issue in Orthodoxy today. As the position of women in Judaism is further discussed, perhaps more insight will be elucidated as to future trends in the existence of women's prayer groups. With an increase in the number of high level Torah institutions for women, questions regarding women and *Halacha* are finally becoming more paramount to contemporary Orthodoxy. Fifty years from now, will women's prayer groups be more widely accepted or merely a distant part of our history? Only time will tell.

Tolerating the Tolerance Club

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naive "first year on campus" me, I had just signed myself up for the most controversial club on campus.

Apparently tolerance is intolerable at Yeshiva University. When my newly acquired Stern acquaintances asked where I was going on the third Tuesday night of every month, I naively told them the truth, "To the Tolerance Club meeting." Almost nine out of ten times, people responded in surprise, "Isn't that the gay club?" In one particular conversation, in which an acquaintance asked me about the Tolerance Club, I responded by reciting their mission statement verbatim. The girl replied, "I like the idea of tolerance, but I don't know how I feel about tolerating gays." Putting the debate currently raging through YU about homosexuality aside, this statement infuriated me. She basically said, "I'm tolerant, except when I'm not." This attitude is exactly why there is so much hatred and intolerance in the world today. It is easy to accept people who are like us. The very word tolerance indicates a need to extend one's realm of acceptance to others who are different from oneself. This is done through learning about and understanding other cultures aside from one's own. I am literally shocked by the amount of op-

position the Tolerance Club has received, and I would like to issue the following disclaimer.

I am straight. I am a member of the Tolerance Club. I am sure that there are members of the Tolerance Club who are gay. It may surprise readers to find out that we did not sit in a circle and announce our sexual preference at the club's first meeting. Not once has there been an event that encourages homosexuality on campus. We do not organize a pride parade every semester, nor are we here and queer (so get over it). We have heard heartbreaking and fascinating stories from refugees who traveled across Ethiopia by foot in order to achieve their dreams of reaching the Holy Land of Israel. We fed the homeless of New York City in the early morning, and we organized a Learnathon to raise money for the Anti Defamation League, an organization that is specifically geared towards fighting anti-Semitism and other forms of baseless hatred.

I am not asking you to join the Tolerance Club. Rather, all I ask is that we work together to eliminate the stigma that YUTC has unfairly been assigned over the past year and accept the club for what it is—a valid organization. To put it simply, I ask that you tolerate us.

Stern College Honors Program Celebrates 10th Anniversary

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that to every class in the last ten years."

The anniversary celebration gave students, graduates and current participants a chance to reflect on their involvement with the program. Sarah Bedder (SCW '07), the only woman to attend with her child in tow, remarked on how the Honors program has changed her. "It helped with my with research skills," she said thoughtfully. "The senior project was all the different steps to do, I'd never done a research project before...I felt like my project turned out really well, even though in the beginning I didn't know what I was going to do." Her thesis in sociology studied the relationship between dress codes and fitting in.

Asked if she wished the same for her daughter, Bedder replied: "I hope that she pursues her dream... that she makes a difference in the world."

The author is a member of the Honors Program.

A Question of Pre-Med at Stern

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nize the issues involved, and know what is permitted to do (and how), since the *posek* cannot accompany the resident on his or her shift. Additionally, a resident requires a good deal of ingenuity to deal with whatever may come up as well as significant internal strength to selectively perform tasks on the job in keeping with *halakha*. A Saturday shift at the hospital thus becomes a test of the fortitude and commitment of a *shomer* Shabbat Jew.

I am reminded of the dilemma encountered by many Jews who immigrated to America in the early 20th century. They, too, were confronted by the conflict of keeping their jobs and *shmirath* Shabbat. After struggling to find a job to provide food for their families, many were told that if they did not show up to work on Saturday, they would lose their job. The unfortunately low levels of *shmirath* Shabbat at that time bear testimony to the magnitude of the challenge and the strength required to withstand it, a strength that perhaps the majority of Jews at that time did not have. The facts do not speak poorly of those Jews as much as they speak to the magnitude of the test that they faced. As

I anticipate residency, that thought fills me with trepidation.

Although I knew that doctors sometimes work on Shabbat and that the practice of medicine is permissible on Shabbat when necessary to save a life, I did not really consider the difficulties posed by the collision of *shmirath* Shabbat with medical training. After all, my father often reminds me that we allow Jews to become doctors even if by doing so we guarantee transgression of some *melakhoth* of Shabbat. (In such a case, the term "transgression" is misleading, since *halakha* actually demands that a person violate even biblical commandments relating to Shabbat if a Jew's life is in danger). I was more focused on the detrimental effect on a family caused by leaving in the middle of Shabbat to go work in the hospital than on the issues involved with training on Shabbat. I had definitely never questioned the permissibility of residency on Shabbat, although I had already come to the conclusion that a *shomer* Shabbat residency was preferable—if not for the *halakhic* concerns, then for the family concerns.

I now lay awake at night, tossing and turning and questioning

myself. I wonder not just about whether the demands of residency will compromise my capacity as a wife and mother, but whether they will challenge my commitment to Shabbat and to Torah Judaism. I think that every Stern student—and every Jew, man or woman—who wishes to pursue a career in medicine needs to seriously question whether she wishes to accept this challenge and, more importantly, whether she feels strong enough to withstand the test. If the answer is no, yet she still chooses medicine, she is compromising her commitment to Judaism and is threatening her membership in the group of *shomer* Shabbat Stern students. Although I empathize with those who find observing Shabbat difficult, it is certainly not an honor to belong to that other group of Jews—those who did not stand up to the formidable test of *shmirath* Shabbat in early 20th century America. Along with meeting pre-med course requirements, logging hours at the hospital, and participating in countless extracurricular activities, pre-med students at Stern should add Shabbat commitment during medical school training to their list of things to do.



“BEING GAY IN THE ORTHODOX WORLD:

A conversation with members of the YU community”

A panel of four undergraduate and recently graduated YU students featuring a dialogue about the lived experiences of being gay in the Jewish Orthodox World their struggles and their triumphs.

DATE: TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22

LOCATION: FURST RM 501.

TIME: 8:00 PM

Buses leave from Beren to Wilf at 7:00pm

Co-organized by Wurzweiler School of Social Work and YUTC
Sponsored by SCWSC, YSU and Wurzweiler

