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Women's Tennis Team Wins Conference Championship

Chana Weinberg

On Sunday, October 22nd, the women's Tennis team defeated Mount St. Mary 5-1 to claim the Skyline Conference Championship, the team's first conference championship since 1999. After being ousted in the Semi-Finals for the past three years, the Maccabees (10-1) made history by being the first women's team in Yeshiva University history to qualify for the NCAA Division III tournament.

"This year's team had that motivated edge. It seemed they each felt ownership of the team, thereby leading to success" said Coach Naomi Kaszovitz. After coaching this team for nine years, Kaszovitz said all her years of commitment were "worth it" for this moment. The student-athletes put in countless hours, practicing Sunday through Thursday to be able to compete at this high level.

Additionally, this year's team features the Skyline Conference Player of the Year, Shani Hava and Skyline All-Conference first team member Rebecca Packer. Hava was also named to the Skyline All-Conference First Team.

"These young women are the epitome of determination and tenacity and I am humbled to have been along for the ride," said Joe Bednarsh, Yeshiva

University's Athletic Director.

Bednarsh could not emphasize enough how much this championship means for the University and Jewish women's ability to play sports. Since being named head athletics director in 2005, Bednarsh has focused much of his efforts on improving the women's athletic program.

When he was promoted to head athletics director, there were only three women's sports teams at YU: tennis, basketball and fencing, none of which were NCAA level teams. With the help of administrators, Bednarsh raised women's

athletics to NCAA status and promoted four more teams to varsity status: soccer and cross-country in '07, volleyball in '08 and softball in '13.

Now Bednarsh can finally say that his program produced a Championship. But it is more than that; as he put it so eloquently, this championship proves that "Jewish women can not only compete, but excel on the court." This program has raised "role models" for young Jewish women who are looking for the opportunity to play sports at the college level "without having to compromise their observance."

"During a recent game" Adele Lerner, a senior on the tennis team, recalled "a referee, [who was] wondering if he should call off a game due to light, [so he] asked out loud to himself 'what time does the sun set today?'" Hearing this I quickly replied, "sunset was at 6:08 on Friday." Adele only knew this random tidbit about the solar cycle because she was familiar with shabbat candle lighting times. "The referee replied jokingly 'you guys would know that'."

This anecdote symbolizes how far athletics for Jewish women have come. "They know we're different, and it would be easy to assume that our differences would be a hindrance; but [this championship] proved that our differences demonstrate our character and make us stronger competitors," Lerner said.

The finals for the NCAA tournament are within May, the first night of the Jewish holiday of Shavuot. If the team were to make it there, they have no doubt that for league would continue to accommodate for them. That guarantee is something that they have earned through their excellent play and devotion to competing at the highest level available.



Aggrieved Former YU Economics Professors Seek Justice in Second Court Case

Sarah Casteel
News Editor

Unbeknownst to many Yeshiva University students and even faculty, just two years ago in 2016, two popular and well-known former professors, Dr. William Hawkins and Dr. Michael Richter, took the school to court. The court decision was made this past May 2017, and because the school has failed to take the necessary actions compelled by the court, the petitioners brought the university back to court just last month. While Richter now teaches economics at The University of London, and Hawkins now teaches economics at Yale, the two aggrieved professors continue to seek justice.

Hawkins and Richter were hired by Yeshiva University as tenure-track professors of Economics, "for an initial three year appointment commencing September 1, 2012 and terminating on August 31, 2015," according to their court petition. In 2015, the two professors, who had become quite popular amongst the students, were expecting to see the continuation of their tenure tracks. The economics department,

to which both professors belonged, had grown substantially in previous years in response to the rise of economics majors in the school. Both highly renowned and respected in the field, Richter and Hawkins were welcomed as popular additions to the economics departments in both Yeshiva and Stern College. This is why it was shocking to both the two professors, as well as many students, that the school chose to terminate their contracts.

In order to receive tenure, a professor must go through the tenure track program, which usually takes six to seven years. After three years on tenure-track, the professor in consideration must go through a review process to continue on to the second half of the track. The review process set forth in the University Faculty Handbook requires that first, the department itself must recommend the professors to be re-appointed to tenure-track. According to the professors' petition to the court, "The department unanimously recommended both

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Halakha: Is it Helping or Harming Women With Issues of Consent?

Miriam Pearl Klahr
Managing Editor

The #MeToo campaign has led thousands of women (and men) to share personal stories related to unwanted sexual advances and, far too often, abuse. In response, Mayim Bialik, an American actor and neuroscientist, wrote a controversial New York Times op-ed claiming that dressing modestly can serve as a form of self-protection against assault. This article was widely criticized as an act of victim shaming and since, Bialik has issued an apology via Twitter stating, "Let me say clearly and explicitly that I am very sorry. What you wear and how you behave does not provide any protection from assault, nor does the way you dress or act in any way make you responsible for being assaulted; you are never responsible for being assaulted."

Mayim Bialik's argument is not new to the women of Stern College, who are often taught that the halakhic guidelines of tzniut will protect them from sexual harm. Yet, the negative response to Bialik's op-ed witnessed among much of society can function as a moment of self-reflection, raising important questions regarding how

the students and alumni of Stern college, many of whom choose to dress modestly, relate to such conversations. Do they find the Jewish laws that relate to sexuality, along with the way they are being taught and the culture they promote, protective or harmful when it comes to issues of consent?

One Stern College student, who wishes to remain anonymous, seemed to agree with Bialik's stance, and commented that she does think "dressing modestly can protect women from unwanted sex." However, she did add that people who choose to dress differently than she does are "not necessarily inviting unwanted sex." She also expressed that this is not why tzniut is an important value of hers. Instead, she stressed that she believes it to be a halakha reflective of how God expects a dignified person to behave and dress.

Yael Mayer, SCW '18, strongly disagreed with the notion that tzniut protects women from sexual advances, and cited her own experience of getting

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YU: An Educational Institution

Mindy Schwartz
Editor-in-Chief



One of the most prominent issues of our day is sexual abuse and harassment. Recent allegations against Harvey Weinstein have ignited a national conversation about sexual misconduct of all kinds. The dialogue has stretched from the personal experiences of victims, to societal problems which have helped abusers continue to commit abuse. As an institution with its share of sexual abuse scandals in the recent past, such conversations are not irrelevant to Yeshiva University. In fact, it is imperative that Yeshiva University begins to take a role in these conversations, and it is a sad reality that currently, the university remains relatively silent.

One of the major issues plaguing sexual abuse reform relates to statute of limitations laws that prescribe the time limit for convicting someone after a crime has been committed. Many advocates believe that in the context of sexual abuse crimes these laws aid abusers, and prevent victims from getting their moment in court, and thus, some modicum of justice. In New York state, many advocates have specifically rallied around reforming the statute of limitations laws for child sexual abuse, which are considered some of the most restrictive in the country. A victim of child sexual abuse has just three years after turning eighteen to file a civil suit against an institution for hiring or supervising an abuser, and just one year to sue the abuser him or herself. For a criminal case, the victim has just five years after turning eighteen to press charges. In contrast, in other states that do have these statute of limitations laws, the number of years given to the victims after reaching maturity is often far greater, and in some states there are no statute of limitations on child sex abuse at all.

It is of course these very statute of limitations laws that allowed YU to dodge a \$680 million civil lawsuit filed in 2013 by 34 former Yeshiva University High School for Boys students. The lawsuit claimed that YU had deliberately ignored and covered up the sexual misconduct of two long serving educators at the high school during the 70s, 80s, and 90s.

Although the university's lawyers advanced a number of arguments for why they should not be culpable, the decision of the judge, as well as the judges in the federal appeals court, was based solely on the claimants' "failure to institute a suit for more than twenty years," meaning that their claims were denied because the statute of limitations had long since expired.

Advocates for reform in New York have proposed the Child Victims Act (CVA), a bill that would eliminate the statute of limitations on child sex abuse for all future criminal and civil cases. The bill also includes a window of opportunity provision, which would provide a one year window for lawsuits no matter when the abuse took place. Proponents of the bill argue that in child sexual abuse cases it can take decades for victims to even recognize their own abuse, let alone build up the courage to pursue their abuser in court.

A slightly altered version of the bill passed the New York State assembly this past June, but it must still make its way through considerable opposition in the state senate before it can become law. Since it was first proposed a decade ago, the CVA has languished in Albany largely because of the staunch opposition of the Catholic Church, which claims that the window of opportunity for civil suits would financially cripple the Church. The Church was already forced to pay \$1.2 million in settlements of civil cases after a similar law was passed in California in 2002.

Marci Hamilton, a legal scholar, former teacher at Cardozo law school, and outspoken reformer on issues of child abuse, including statute of limitations reform, noted that it is precisely through civil cases that one can "document an institution's negligence and the way it failed children." Without the possibility of civil suits "they won't fix their internal procedures...because they don't have to."

Some advocates for reform in the Jewish community therefore feel that YU should in some way demonstrate support for the CVA, as a sign that it has truly changed its ways and is committed to helping future victims get the justice they deserve.

Other Jewish Organizations affiliated with Yeshiva University,

such as the RCA and the OU have not taken a public stance on this law. On the other hand, Agudath Israel, the powerful umbrella organization for the Haredi community in America, has taken a public stand against the CVA, specifically because they claim the elimination of the statute of limitations on civil suits and the window of opportunity provision "could subject schools and other vital institutions to ancient claims and capricious litigation, and place their very existence in severe jeopardy." They end their statement opposing the law by saying, "We must also redouble our efforts to help those who have suffered the horrors of child abuse obtain the healing they so desperately need. However, we dare not bring down our most vital communal institutions in the process."

Nonetheless, Jewish Community Watch, a nonprofit group established to protect Jewish children from abuse and to help survivors of child sex abuse, endorses the CVA as a positive step in assuring that the law supports, not handicaps, victims. Considering not only YU's prominent position in the American Jewish landscape, but also its past wrongdoings, some advocates feel that the university should publicly support the CVA, or at the very least some version of statute of limitations reform. They believe that YU's support might also provide some validation, and perhaps comfort to victims of the abuse at YUHSB. These advocates claim that although YU has clearly mishandled such situations in the past, they can do right going forward, especially with a new administration that has not been tainted by handling the abuse either first-hand, or in court.

When The Observer asked President Berman what he thought of the proposal for YU to publicly support statute of limitations reform in cases of child sex abuse, he said that he was not familiar with the particularities of the laws in question, but that his "heart certainly goes out to any victim of any crime anywhere."

While I think that it is important to learn about these laws, I completely understand the new president's general hesitancy on the proposal. Releasing such a statement would obviously require complex moral gymnastics. While the university's lawyers did not rely on the statute of limitations to argue their case in court, there is no debating that it is why they won the case. Although a public demonstration of support for reform would be a positive step in terms of acknowledging past wrongdoing, it would certainly raise eyebrows at the very least, and more likely cries of hypocrisy. More significant, however, is the fact that YU is not a policy organization like the Agudah or the OU, and it was not made to publicly endorse specific laws or types of legal reform.

So what has YU done to move forward and improve? The university released a report after the YUHSB scandal which detailed their improved practices regarding keeping students and employees safe from sexual misconduct. A sexual harassment training session is also given (although by no means forcibly required) at first year orientation. These internal improvements are significant and should be commended, but procedural improvements are not enough.

Issues of sexual abuse are in the air now, but our university has not responded in any meaningful way to this new dialogue. It seems our university does not enter this dialogue at all for fear of stirring the dust of its scandal. While this is understandable from a strictly public relations perspective, the truth is that our university cannot

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escape these stirrings no matter what tack it takes; people have not forgotten what happened. Recent events on the national stage, including Weinstein's demise, likely mean that the memory of it will only be injected with greater urgency.

So what can YU do to enter this dialogue in a wise and honest way? It seems clear that improvements will not come from statements. But improvements can come if the university does what it was made to do: teach. While the university does not routinely enter into public policy issues, it has hosted events and speakers to discuss and raise awareness for other public policy issues, like opposing BDS or the Iran Nuclear Deal.

President Berman himself emphasized exactly such an approach
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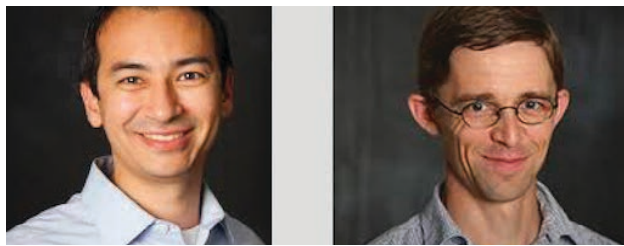
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Aggrieved Former YU Economics Professors Seek Justice in Second Court Case

Sarah Casteel
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petitioners for reappointment.” Then, the process moves to the relevant division, in which case, “In February of 2015, petitioner’s applications for reappointment were reviewed by the Executive Committee of the Division of Social Sciences. The Executive Committee also unanimously recommended both Petitioners for reappointment.”

The next step in the process is to receive approval from the deans for the relevant schools, Yeshiva College and Stern College. However, before this happened, Provost Selma Botman, along with then President Joel, determined that the professors’ contracts would be terminated. They then told Barry Eichler, Dean of Yeshiva College, to inform James Kahn, Chairman of the economics department, that the professors’ contracts would be terminated altogether due to financial strains. According to the recent petition submitted by the professors’ lawyer, Joshua Parkhurst, “By letters dated April 14, 2015, Provost Botman provided Petitioners with the sole proffered reason for denying them reappointment. Provost Botman confirmed in these letters that the denial of reappointment was not based on academic performance but rather ‘financial considerations.’ Specifically, Provost Botman advised petitioners that ‘Faculty in the Department of Economics were originally funded through partial gift income, and this funding is no longer forthcoming.’” Botman did offer in the letter, as obligated by the Faculty Handbook, to grant the professors a paid sabbatical year as their terminal year, instead of

requiring them to continue teaching at Yeshiva University. Hawkins was granted a semester-long sabbatical leave for full pay, but Richter was granted a full-year sabbatical leave for only half his salary. To both professors, this was not a satisfactory remedy.

Pursuant to the Faculty Handbook, an “aggrieved faculty member can ask a faculty review committee” to consider his or her situation. The committee in fact agreed with the professors for several reasons, and in accordance with the Handbook, the President was then responsible to implement an “appropriate remedy.” However, then President Joel claimed that he disagreed with the review committee’s determination, and that no further remedy would be implemented.

The two popular professors, who were aggrieved and without jobs that they both depended upon and had fair reason to assume were secure, decided to take the case to court. Again, Joel asserted that he followed the handbook, and that it was acceptable for him to decide that “no remedial action” was needed. Petitioners Hawkins and Richter, represented by Joshua Parkhurst, claimed that Joel violated the guidelines in the Handbook by making the decision not to take remedial action.

The court, which made its decision in May 2017, agreed with Hawkins and Richter that Joel was not authorized to determine that no remedial action was needed, and by making that decision, he violated the handbook. The court also continued by stating that the decision violated the guidelines in another way—financial considerations were not among the criteria for the third-year reappointment of tenure-track faculty. However, because the handbook “did not expressly limit third-year review of tenure-track faculty to specific criteria, [that] deviation did not constitute a breach.” Ultimately, the May 2017 court decision annulled Joel’s decision that no remedial action was necessary, and required that the school take the necessary remedial action.

As explained by Parkhurst, while the judicial system is not directly able to consider the policies of a private institution in this way, the court was able to consider this case because of what is called an Article 78 proceeding. Under this section of the law, any “body or officer” can be considered, and while it is usually used to challenge various determinations made by government agencies, it can also apply to private universities. What this means is that the court can compel a university to follow its own rules, and in this case, Yeshiva University did not follow its own handbook. When President Joel ignored his responsibility, determined by the handbook, to take remedial action, Hawkins and Richter had their case.

Unfortunately, a letter from Joel, written shortly before he stepped down at the end of May, revealed that the University was essentially continuing to avoid taking remedial action. According to the letter, Joel would do three things: first, he would meet with relevant faculty bodies to clarify the handbook for any similar future situations; second, he reiterated that the professors had received a sabbatical for their terminal year (as essentially compelled by the handbook); and third, he stated that the professors would have priority consideration for any relevant job openings. However, he did not specify what openings, if any, would be coming up; and thus far, there have not been any. Thus, it is clear that proper remedial action was still not, in fact, taken.

This is why Hawkins and Richter have brought the case back to court. In the new suit, President Ari Berman was named, as he is now responsible to make the decisions and determine an appropriate remedy as Joel’s successor. The case is pending, and all readers interested in updates can stay tuned as the case unfolds. It remains to be seen if these two popular and aggrieved professors will receive the justice they deserve, and if the school will prove its dedication to upholding the policies set forth in its own Faculty Handbook.

YU Professor Dr. Holz Receives Two NIH Grants to Research Cancers and Rare Diseases

Ailin Elyasi
Staff Writer

In early August, The Doris and Ira Kurkin Professor of Biology at Stern College for Women, Dr. Marina Holz, was awarded two major NIH research grants to continue her work investigating Lymphangiomyomatosis (LAM) and Triple-Negative Breast Cancer (TNBC) treatments.

Dr. Holz focuses her research on rare and little understood diseases. For instance, LAM affects 2,000 women in the US, which leaves this disease often overlooked in the scientific community. LAM cells are abnormal tumor cells which metastasize to the lungs, kidneys, lymph nodes, blood vessels, and lymphatics and typically affect women of childbearing age. By devoting her research to LAM and other little researched disorders, Dr. Holz increases the quality of life for the women who feel overlooked by research. In the three-year clinical trial that begins this fall, Dr. Holz, along with the University of Cincinnati, will be experimenting with different drug combinations to eliminate LAM cells. The \$712,442 grant funding that the National Institute of Health’s (NIH) Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute allocated to Dr. Holz’s lab will sustain the project. The clinical trials will take place at the University of Cincinnati.

Based on pre-clinical trials, Dr. Holz demonstrated that two drugs, sirolimus and resveratrol, can in combination be effective in bringing women with LAM into remission. Currently, the Food and Drug Administration has approved sirolimus as the treatment course for LAM. Dr. Holz demonstrated that with resveratrol, a naturally occurring chemical found in the skin of grapes used to make red wine, Sirolimus could be all the more effective in treating LAM.

“I am thrilled that this grant will allow us to rapidly build upon the basic and preclinical studies that started in my lab in 2014 and led to a synergistic collaboration with our clinical partners at University of Cincinnati, and our industry partner Evolva, the provider of resveratrol,” says Holz. “This grant will allow us to make substantial progress towards validating new therapeutic options for

treatment of LAM, and will serve as a model of cross-disciplinary collaboration and rapid implementation of future clinical trials.”

Dr. Holz also received a \$501,000 grant again from the NIH to research estrogen receptor alpha’s role in TNBC. A metastatic and aggressive cancer, TNBC most affects younger people, African Americans, Hispanics, and individuals with the BRCA1 mutation.

The difficulty in treatment of TNBC rests on the fact that it lacks the usual receptors targeted by successful breast cancer treatments, leaving only aggressive chemotherapy as a treatment option. However, Dr. Holz believes that focusing her efforts on the TNBC’s noteworthy overexpression of estrogen-related receptor alpha can best illuminate better treatment methods for TNBC.

“The wealth of the generated knowledge will allow us to establish a long-term research project to identify putative cellular targets to be studied in greater detail with the goal of exploring new avenues in breast cancer research, and develop new interventions and prognostic markers of therapy response,” said Holz. “Expanding the use of tamoxifen and rapamycin, both safe and FDA-approved drugs, may clinically benefit millions of women suffering from TNBC, with the potential to reduce disease mortality.”

Dr. Holz’s interest in her work is based on two main reasons. “The scientific reason is that LAM and many types are breast cancer cells carry mutations that cause abnormal activity of Mechanistic Target of Rapamycin (mTOR), a protein that has been of interest to our lab for a long time. mTOR regulates the growth and proliferation of cells, and when abnormally active, it can cause formation of tumors.” The scientific protein link connects the research of LAM and TNBC.

Michal Auerbach, a 2017 SCW graduate and a research assistant in Dr. Holz’s lab, explains the significance of mTOR, saying “[the mTOR] pathway is the most important pathway you’ve never heard of. It’s



important for regulating the cell cycle, and synthesizes multitudes of signals, such as energy levels, cellular stress, and nutritional intake. It is this aspect that makes these diseases so hard to cure: we cannot cut out these signals altogether because we need them to live, but at the same time we have to find a way to control this type of overexpression in diseased cells”

But Dr. Holz also mentions a second reason—the personal incentive that researching treatments for breast cancer and LAM provides her, saying “both breast cancer and LAM are primarily diseases of women, which gives us a sense of mission.”

Indeed, everyone working at her lab agrees with the positive work setting she has established for SCW students and graduates, providing scientific opportunities for women. Commenting on her experience at Dr. Holz’s lab, Michal Auerbach states “I’ve been working [at Dr. Holz’s lab] since June, along with another recent graduate from Stern, Amanda Rubin. We’ve both enjoyed our experience in the lab. The reason I chose to work here is because I wanted a positive working experience, and the Holz Lab is one that fosters questioning and understanding in a supportive environment.”

An Interview With Outgoing Vice President Rabbi Kenneth Brander

Miriam Pearl Klahr & Mindy Schwartz
Managing Editor & Editor-in-Chief

Earlier this month Rabbi Kenneth Brander announced his departure from Yeshiva University, where he has served as Vice President of University and Community Life since 2013. The Observer sat down with him to discuss his twelve year long career at YU along with his new position at Ohr Torah Stone.

Miriam Pearl Klahr: What made you decide that it was time to move on in your career and leave YU?

Rabbi Brander: Nothing made me decide that, because I wasn't planning on leaving, but just the opposite. Rabbi Riskin came to me. It was just like my job at YU which I never applied for—President Joel came to Boca and said “show me around Boca.” At one point he pulled the car to the side and said “how about creating Bocas all over the world by doing this at YU?” It took a year and a half for me to agree [to come to YU]. With Rabbi Riskin it was a conversation for a little more than 6 months.

To have the opportunity to be able to work with unbelievably talented professionals and lay leaders just like I've had the opportunity to do at YU, but to do it in Israel on twenty-four different schools and twelve different campuses that have a reach in [both the] Religious Zionist of the community and the tzibur harachav [secular community] while continuing the legacy of Rabbi Riskin, coupled with having children and a grandchild who live in Israel, it was just an opportunity of a lifetime—just like this job was.

MPK: Have you turned down other job offers since you came to YU?

RB: I've been offered multiple jobs, as many people at YU are. Multiple jobs in the rabbinate, as well as in the philanthropic world, namely to run foundations that give away tens of millions of dollars a year. While they were unbelievable opportunities, working at YU is an unbelievable opportunity. Being able to be inspired by students everyday is something that I have experienced for 12 years, so I never pursued those. [But] when Rabbi Riskin knocked on the door, that was something that peaked my interest.

Mindy Schwartz: How are you balancing your transition out of YU with your regular responsibilities?

RB: Right now I have to focus on the transition to make sure that the things we're all doing now don't get lost. People will still be able to reach me, but the bottom line is that there has to be a solid and good transition.

MPK: It seems like no one is taking over your job [as Vice President of University and Community Life], but rather, that it is being split between several people. Do you think it is wise that the University is not filling this position?

RB: I think that is a conversation you're going to have to have with the president who makes those sorts of decisions.

MS: So how are your responsibilities being divided up once you leave?

RB: [Vice President] Rabbi Joseph will take over a lot. Student Life will report to him through Dr. Nissel [Dean of Students], and the student admissions team and undergraduate student finance team will report to him [as well]. Rabbi Glasser [Dean of the Center for the Jewish Future] will report directly to Rabbi Berman. I've [also] been responsible for the YU Israel—that will [now] report partially to Rabbi Berman. The legal components will report to the General Council's office, and all of the recruitment and student life [aspects] will report to Rabbi Joseph.

MPK: What do you think are your biggest accomplishments over your time at YU?

RB: I'd view [my accomplishments] in three different realms—though I don't think that the greatest things I had the opportunity to participate in [were just] one person's accomplishment, [rather] we accomplished them as colleagues working together. First, [in] the Jewish community realm. Just to give you an example, we have professionalized rabbinic placement, so we are placing rabbis and rabbinic couples in a much more sensitive and holistic way. YUTorah [also] started with the development

of the Center for the Jewish Future and now it hits hundreds of thousands of people.

The second thing I'm very proud of is the student experience. If you look at the landscape of the Orthodox Jewish community 12 years ago, no one was taking Orthodox kids on service missions, whether to Nicaragua or Thailand. We were the first ones who did that. These are all initiatives which have now become part of the genetic makeup of YU students. We don't want to take credit for every student initiative—because we don't deserve it—but I do think that we created the environment where service to people—Jews (expanding Torah Tours, starting Counterpoint Israel) and non Jews—became a conversation. I think that that's something which will be part of the conscience of YU way after I'm gone. [Third], the entire admissions piece of YU has gone through a wonderful metamorphosis. We've never turned anyone away for a lack of funds. At the same time net tuition revenue has gone up 10 millions dollars or close to that. This too was done with my colleagues in the admissions and student finance offices.

MS: Can you speak a bit about how you ran GPATS for the past few years? What was your vision?

RB: That is one of the nicest opportunities I have had at YU. Working with the women in GPATS is just inspiring, and [even though] it was floundering for a while, I think it's stronger now than it's ever been. We brought Professor Price on board [because] I found it extremely interesting that we had a women's learning program, and there weren't any women that were part of the administration or faculty—it was all run by men. [So we thought:] doesn't it make sense that GPATS should have at its epicenter a women as a role model, [Professor Price]. [We have also ensured that] GPATS is no longer an island onto itself that happens to be located at Stern College. It is now embed into the school, whether it is [through] the learning programs, the Shabbat experiences, or other things of that nature. I am in President Joel's debt for giving me this opportunity. And the women graduating [from GPATS] are doing wonderful things, whether it's Jewish community work, interns or educators in synagogues, Talmud teachers, yoatzot [halacha], academia, as well as doctors, lawyers, business people, [and] stay at home moms. [They are] not only sharing Torah but shaping Torah, and to have been part of that narrative is a privilege.

MS: You mentioned that GPATS was floundering, do you feel comfortable leaving it, and is it in a place that is sustainable into the future?

RB: I took on the fundraiser responsibilities [for GPATS] when YU was going through deep financial stress, but [since then] we've increased the donor base, we've made a [promotional] video and newsletter, and there is a small advisory council. And now it is financially stable. I have the commitment of Rabbi Berman that he'll make sure GPATS continues to thrive—you can't ask for more than that.

MPK: Is Rabbi Berman taking over the fundraising aspects [for GPATS]?

RB: [GPATS] is only a few hundred thousand dollars, [so] I imagine his fundraising responsibilities are much more than that. The YU Institutional Advancement department has a whole range of responsibilities. How [Rabbi Berman] feels he is going to do [GPATS fundraising] is something you'll have to ask him specifically.

MS: Is there someone at YU who will be the visionhead for GPATS once you move on?

RB: Rabbi Berman and I are working on that. The Provost [Dr. Botman] will be involved with [GPATS] and we are talking about someone else, but we have not finished concluding [that] ourselves. GPATS is in wonderful hands with its faculty and Professor Price. Most of the transitional components have been finalized, this the only thing that hasn't [been fully announced], but it is in good hands the way it is already.

MPK: Are there things that you wanted to accomplish at YU that you were not able to?



RB: There are always things that I think of everyday that I would have liked to do. For GPATS, what I won't accomplish in my tenure, but [what] we have started having a conversation about, is another track. Another cohort of women would study gemara in the morning, [but] instead of studying halacha [in the afternoon], they could learn Tanach in depth and do it in partnership with Revel.

MPK: After being at YU for a number of years, are there notable changes that you have seen in the university?

RB: I think that the greatest thing that has not really been told about President Joel's presidency is the fact that he left a leadership cadre for Rabbi Berman to work with that allows Rabbi Berman to move to next step. The senior leadership of YU, the VPs, they're unbelievable. Their integrity, their commitment to the values of YU, their sacrifice [is unbelievable].

MS: You mentioned [in an interview with The Observer this past summer] that you have done considerable fundraising for shabbat on the Beren campus. Do you see that sort of fundraising effort as something you've left in the framework, or will it dry up once you're gone?

RB: I view the contribution that we put together as just an impetus to allow exciting things to happen [on Shabbat] without concern about budget. So that we can have Shabbatot like [the one with] Yonina, the Nefesh b'Nefesh shabbaton, [because] there is now a chunk of money to do stuff. I want there to be free shabbatot; I want more and more people to feel that this is a place for them [on Shabbat]. [Also] Rabbi Rappaport, one of the significant Torah personalities that speaks on the LGBTQ community, will be on the Stern campus around March or so. And [this funding] is going to go forward. The people who contributed to this would be willing to contribute in the future if somebody reaches out to them and they see that there are measures and metrics of success. So there is no reason that [funding] shouldn't continue

MPK: You mentioned that Rabbi Rappaport will be at Stern for shabbat to address LGBTQ issues. How do you view YU's role in addressing LGBTQ issues which are so critical for this generation?

RB: Issues of gender in general are changing. We live in a society that says that what gender you are is up to you. So it's a whole new conversation, [and] not to have a conversation with our students on both campuses about how to deal with that [would be a disservice because] you are the future leadership of the Jewish people. You have to think about these things, [and] you should be thinking about them in an environment that that looks at things through the prism of Torah values. We have to find ways to ensure that those within the LGBTQ community that wish to be part of the Orthodox [community] feel welcomed—even if we cannot fully celebrate [their] life choices—and they [should] feel that there is a home for them. But even besides that, if we are not going to have the conversations with the group of young men and women—the [students] at YU—who will be the next leaders of our people, where else should those conversations happen if not in appropriate forums on our campus?

MS: Do you expect there to be any controversy or backlash with this kind of event?

RB: We'll see, [although] I don't think that would be

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An Interview With Outgoing Vice President Rabbi Kenneth Brander

Miriam Pearl Klahr & Mindy Schwartz
Managing Editor & Editor-in-Chief

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a reason not to do it. I'm sure there will be something. [Still] I think we should do it, but in a way that it is most beneficial YU students. I don't think it's our responsibility to do an event for the entire collegiate community. We had a Shabbat event on the Wilf campus with Rabbi Rappaport and it worked out really well.

MS: We are going to switch gears and talk about your new position—had you thought much about Ohr Torah Stone before Rabbi Riskin approached you?

RB: I didn't really. There was a time several years ago when Rabbi Riskin talked to me about being part of it but it was [only] a twenty minute conversation.

MPK: A lot of articles have been written about the significance of your appointment to OTS and what this means in terms of their organization and their

legitimacy. Can you comment on that point?

RB: I'm not sure I can [answer that]. Maybe you should ask that question to Rabbi Riskin. I think that OTS has legitimacy whether they appointed me or not. I mean these are super talented leaders at OTS. I'm not sure I bring the validity; I think they have validity without me. But it's nice to hear that people feel that way.

I'll have responsibilities in OTS, as any president does, to raise money. [So] it might be—and again you'd have to ask Rabbi Riskin this—that I've been involved with a community in Boca where we found ourselves able to build a community from sixty families to 600. You can't be involved in doing that without learning how to fundraise. [And] at YU I've been given the opportunity not only to fundraise, but, [because] YU is really a nexus of the Jewish world, from here I've developed relationships with rabbinic personalities and lay leaders all over the world. So in some ways I bring that knowledge to OTS.

MPK: OTS has a program where women learn the same things as their male counterparts getting Rabbanut semicha. It obviously shares certain similarities with GPATS but also significant differences—can you comment on that disparity at all?

RB: It is very exciting that they give the certificate of a heter horah, recognizing that women have achieved competency in certain areas, [and that] they take the same Rabbanut bechinas as their [male] counterparts do. I think it's a great thing. One of my jobs is [to figure out] how we can make sure that we champion opportunities [for these women] to play leadership roles in the Jewish community both in Israel and in the Diaspora and to insure that it is done in a normative Halachic way.

Fourth Annual Hackathon Asks: How Can Technology Help the World?

Mindy Schwartz
Editor-in-Chief

From Saturday night October 28th to Sunday night October 29th, Yeshiva University held its fourth annual hackathon, a “24-hour technological marathon.” Hackathons have become increasingly popular events across college campuses and the broader tech community, but because most run from Friday night to Saturday night, Orthodox Jews have typically been unable to participate in these unique opportunities. YU's hackathon is among just a handful of Shomer Shabbat-friendly events of this kind. According to co-organizer of the event Yaakov Hawk, Syms '18, YU's hackathon is particularly unique because “there is nowhere else I would be able to participate in a hackathon,” and still be able to “daven with three minyanim” and “go to morning seder shiur” at the same time.

The event was held in the Heights Lounge and open to high school and college students ages 16 to 26 at no cost. Participants were asked to make teams and, over the course of 24-hours, design an app or website, at the end of which a winning team was selected. According to organizers, around 25 teams participated in the competition, 115 students overall.

The theme of this year's hackathon was “Giving Back” and teams were tasked with creating a project that would help serve nonprofit organizations or fill some communal need. A number of teams designed programs for Chessed-orientated school clubs such as the Random Acts of Kindness Club, the Gift of Life Club, and iGive.

“This year, our goal is for young adults in the Jewish community to have a chance to give back to their community either through coding or creativity,” said co-organizer Dafna Meyers, SCW '18. “We aim to combine the technology of the 21st Century with our love for our community and show that we can use technology to make significant contributions to these organizations.”

Co-organizer Atara Huberfeld, SCW '19, described some of the projects that teams made. “Many of the teams worked on projects that would aid nonprofits in their day-to-day activities or help people connect to nonprofits to donate to them. Other projects aimed to solve problems that students face in their daily lives, like a parking app for Washington Heights, or a searchable Jastrow [Aramaic dictionary].”

Over the course of the event, participants were able to hear talks from professionals in a wide range of tech fields. These professionals were also available to mentor students and give them feedback on their projects.

At the end of the event, a panel of four judges reviewed each team's project and selected winners. The second place team designed a game app called Penny Arcade in which all advertising proceeds would go to a non-profit organization of the player's choice, while the first place

team made a program called LocalLending that allows people to easily lend items to one and other.

In fitting with the theme, the event also included a Nonprofit Fair which allowed participants to meet with representatives from nonprofit companies to learn about their organizations and potential career opportunities.

Chaya Levinson, Syms '18, who helped organize the Nonprofit Fair, told *The Observer* that its purpose was to “allow for hackers and students alike to see what non-profit organizations do to give back to the community and the world around them.” She said that this year's hackathon was specifically organized “to give students the chance to see that their coding can be utilized in a way that inspires positive change.”

“Although I am not a coder, seeing so many students coding for a cause was inspiring,” Levinson said. While the event was “just twenty-four hours” she pointed out that students were able to think of “great ideas for nonprofit innovation which will hopefully be implemented in various nonprofit organizations in order to create a positive change for the future.”

Other clubs focused on innovation also attended the event. Disrupt YU, a new club that seeks to increase entrepreneurial spirit and innovation on campus, came to table at the hackathon because, as co-president Menajem Benchimol, Syms '19, put it, “the hackathon is a place where students can showcase their innovation and coding skills.” He explained that his club wanted to reach students looking to transform their projects “into startups [or] side hustles and help them scale it.”

Avi Hirsch, YC '20, thought this year's hackathon “was a tremendous success.” He said that while he “had never participated in a hackathon before, it was easy to get involved without too much coding experience.”

He noted the difficulty of the 24-hour window for

creating a full fledged program, saying that “even in the last few hours, none of us were sure we would finish in time, but somehow we managed to complete the fully functioning app by the deadline.”

But Hirsch also emphasized the great feeling of actually completing a project, especially one made for a good cause. “The experience of being around so many fellow coders, all of whom are working to create some app or website to help others, was incredibly heartening. To [be able to] show off a useful, functioning app that I personally helped create made me proud to be one of them.”

Adina Cohen, SCW '19, echoed a similar sentiment regarding the satisfaction of completing a project. “It was extremely satisfying to walk out of the Hackathon having successfully finished our project,” she said.

Cohen's one critique was the event's “proximity to midterms.” “I am really happy that I participated,” she said, “but I am now running solely on caffeine as I try to study for my tests that I have this week.” Still, she emphasized that she “learned a ton over the course of the Hackathon,” and her team even used coding languages for their project which they had not known going into the event.

Dassi Solomon, a sophomore from Barnard who worked on same team as Cohen, told *The Observer* that she “really appreciated the opportunity” the hackathon gave her “to collaborate with friends” who she is “not in classes with on a daily basis.”

She also praised the experience of working together as a team. “At first there was a bit of a language barrier, as I am familiar with a different coding language than that of the rest of my team,” she said, “but each of us brought our different skill-sets that we were ultimately able to successfully combine to create a meaningful product.”

Like Hirsch and Cohen, Solomon was also left with a sense of accomplishment at being able to walk away from the event having completed a successful project. “The fact that we were able to teach ourselves entirely new skills and produce something to be proud of in only 24 hours is still baffling to me,” she said.

The rapid pace of the hackathon certainly makes it a unique sort of event. Huberfeld pointed out how unique it was for “students [to be] able to take a project from a concept in one team member's imagination [and turn it] into a full scale app that they presented to 100 of their peers and four judges.” For her, “watching that evolution occur in such rapid time, playing out in front of you” was “pretty wonderful.”

“[The student organizers] see this year's hackathon as a great success,” Huberfeld said, “and we are already working on what we can improve for next year.”



An Interview With New President of YU Rabbi Ari Berman

Miriam Pearl Klahr & Mindy Schwartz
Managing Editor & Editor-in-Chief

Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman was appointed the fifth president of Yeshiva University at a formal investiture ceremony this past September. Last week Rabbi Berman sat down with The Observer to discuss his new role and his vision for YU.

Mindy Schwartz: In many of your statements you have talked about YU's connection to Israel, for example by building partnership programs with Israeli universities. What would you say to people who are concerned that your focus is moving away from American Jewry?

Rabbi Berman: Actually, my focus has only been on America. Even when I talk about partnerships with Israel, [those partnerships are] for our students. [Those partnerships will] enable our students to develop the skillsets for success in their future.

It is wonderful to help Israel, but [our] question is: how are we helping our students in America. One of the ways we can do that is through our connections with Israel. Twenty or thirty years ago Israel was thought of [by American Jewry] as our poor cousins that we needed to support; there was an obligation on [American Jewry] to help Israel. But [now] Israel is no longer an obligation, it is an opportunity. We can also contribute a lot to Israel. We have a lot to add in terms of the dialogue that has developed between the Diaspora and Israel. But [what I have spoken about] is actually very much about the American Jewish community.

MS: What do you think we have to add to Israel?

RB: If we could develop a real fruitful dialogue [between the Diaspora and Israel], I think we could come [to the conversation] with different perspectives on the world and on the Jewish people. When I was in Israel over Sukkot I met with Natan Sharansky and President Rivlin and [they were both] very interested in an Israel-Diaspora dialogue and ways in which YU can [act as a] bridge between worlds, because we can speak these different languages.

Miriam Pearl Klahr: What's role do you think YU plays in defining American Jewry?

RB: YU is the educational [and] spiritual epicenter for a

global movement, and certainly for the American Jewish community. We are the ones who, through the promotion of our values, deal with [the question of] how we can apply our 3,000 year old tradition to today and to the world of tomorrow.

MS: In light of that, what conversations do you think YU must have in terms of defining Modern Orthodoxy in America?

RB: I think it starts with our values; I think it starts with us understanding what we stand for. [That is why] I started my investiture speech by outlining our values, what I called the Five Torot. This is not new, [it is just] a new distillation of the same values we have been taught by our rabbis, teachers, and parents.

To repeat quickly: Torat Emet—we believe not only that the Torah is true, of course, and the Torah was given at Sinai, but we believe in [the existence of] Truth. Torat Chayim—we apply our values to the world. Torat Adam—that God has given each and every individual certain strengths and skill, and developing those skills is holy work. Torat Chesed—we do not just develop our skills for ourselves, but we reach out to others in kindness. And finally, Torat Tzion—which is of course about not only supporting Israel and the Jewish state, but also the establishment of the Jewish State is a means to a greater end: to redeem the world. Those are our core values.

MPK: Can you speak about specific ways you see YU living by those values and influencing the American Jewish community?

RB: First of all, [I see it] in all of our schools. YU is a large project of close to 6,000 students across six campuses and we are trying to activate them with our values, which apply to all of them.

Some of our schools are not just for the Orthodox community, and that is [also] part of our work. When I went to Cardozo law school I said to [the faculty], "I want you to know that I think of your work as holy work—that you are taking students and helping them develop themselves and their strengths in order to give of themselves to society.

You would not necessarily word it this way—and I respect that you do not word it this way—but you should know that I think of it as holy work."

Second of all, we have always encouraged our graduates to be people who go out into the world. We have always promoted an active engagement in society and moving forward history.

MS: Some would say our school has been doing these things for decades. Can you give an example of how you see YU "moving forward history" under your presidency?

RB: My whole point is that this is a continuation. There will be new directions, new educational pathways, new marketplaces of students, and new disciplines, but in terms of [our] core values, we have always been doing this.

We [must] focus on these values [the Five Torot] as opposed to what synagogues we pray in, what clothes we wear, [what we wear on our heads—] a black hat, a kipa sruga, or no kipa. If you are attached to these values, if they resonate with you, if you want to be part of a project that is broadcasting [these values] and thinking about tradition and pioneering, then you want to be part of Yeshiva University. This is our broad base moving forward and this is our continuity. So [these Torot] should not be new, they are just a reformulation of terms.

MPK: Moving to education, we have heard a lot about exciting changes to STEM fields at YU. Do you have any educational visions for the Liberal Arts as well?

RB: Exciting changes in STEM are about the Liberal Arts too. As Science and Technology develop, there will be new existential questions raised. For example—like we covered in our World of Tomorrow conference [held on October 22nd]—there will be questions of what does it mean to be a human [in a time of artificial intelligence]. We will need Liberal Arts—and the wisdom of our 3,000 year old tradition—to answer these deep questions. Focusing on STEM does not detract from the Liberal Arts, it [actually] just highlights the need [for them]. [And that need] and that importance is going to be reemphasized.

On that note—this is the kind of holistic thinking that we need to bring in. We should not see these fields as separate, but think about them holistically, all together. The world is shifting and becoming increasingly interdisciplinary; we are recognizing the need for knowledge to be a more unified structure. And I am excited about the possibilities [this new way of thinking will bring].

MS: Moving from education to financial stability, YU has been slowly recovering from a deep financial crisis. How would you assess YU's finances today?

RB: Now we are definitely on a trajectory of growth. [The financial officers] have brought us to the point where we can now think about how to expand our revenue base. We are [now] going to expand to new educational pathways, new disciplines, and new marketplaces of students.

MS: Can you elaborate on those areas of expansion?

RB: [First,] in terms of new educational pathways, we are thinking about all of our schools as unified, so instead of just going [to YU] for a BA, your BA [can be] attached to a graduate degree [to] strengthen [your undergraduate degree]. So we will strengthen the pathways between our schools, strengthen our [existing graduate schools], and create more graduate degrees. We will make YU, which is typically a three year experience, into a four year experience [that includes a bachelor's and a master's]. [These programs] will [also] enable us to get new students who would not otherwise be interested in Yeshiva University. This will not only be helpful for our students by giving them market ready skills, [but it] will also obviously help [increase] Yeshiva University tuition [revenue].

[Second,] for new disciplines in Science and Technology, we need to think about ways we can grow our basic courses that everyone needs now, [in addition to] areas of expertise that people in our communities are interested in [studying] that we haven't been able to provide [until now]. We have also created a new pathway

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[for students]: to pursue a master's degree at Bar Ilan or Hebrew University in computer science. So students who would otherwise not necessarily think about [going to] Yeshiva University, will now think about [going to] Yeshiva University [because of these opportunities].



An Interview With New President of YU Rabbi Ari Berman

Miriam Pearl Klahr & Mindy Schwartz
Managing Editor & Editor-in-Chief

[Third,] we will develop new marketplaces of students. We are thinking about [recruitment] in broad terms, not just in growing our [undergraduate population] from [Jewish] day schools, but expanding [to places like] China, India, and other places that will give us a greater reach. This will [also] allow our students to have global connections when they graduate that will help them professionally. [This is also] a part of our greater project—to spread Jewish values not just inside [our] community, but around the whole world. These [foreign] students are ambassadors for the Jewish community, wherever they go.

MS: The Katz graduate program, which is made up of almost entirely foreign students from China, holds classes in the 215 Lexington Avenue building on the Beren campus. I have noticed that most students on the Beren campus do not know about the program and are often confused when they see the Katz students, and that there is no interaction between these two groups. Considering the current status quo, how do you plan on creating connections between the undergraduate and graduate communities?

RB: When I lived on campus for three months and I was just walking around, I noticed that too. It is definitely one of the things which is on my mind: thinking about integration not just with [those students], but also with the whole university. We need to create a more integrated institution.

That was the theory behind the World of Tomorrow conference, to gather together the huge interdisciplinary resources of Yeshiva University. We have incredible legal minds at Cardozo, and Einstein (which is still an affiliate of YU) has super scientists. We have incredible resources. When you came into Yeshiva University as a student, I want you to not only be exposed to teachers and scholars of your major or focus, but really the whole constellation of stars that exist in this university. I think that it would help create a very exciting experience here.

MS: Coming back to YU's finances, a few years ago there were some reports about conflicts of interests in the investment's of the investment committee. Those committee members have been replaced and we have been assured that those are not issues anymore. But the University's conflict of interest policy for its investments is still not public. For people looking for reassurance, can you comment on the fact that the policy is not public?

RB: That is a very important question. [The financial officers] have worked very hard to put in place the right financial controls that assure our stability, and there is no question that we need to build our growth on a financially stable platform and a sense of trust. We need people to trust us—internally [and] externally.

This is all preceding me, [but] they did a great job of putting [this] into place so that now we can move forward [with] a strong base and platform.

MS: Right, but if we want to feel confident that nothing sketchy is going anymore, then why can't we just see the policy itself—not the actual investments, but just the commitments to honest financial dealings that the policy presumably upholds?

RB: I mean I assume that things are public, [but] I will check.

MS: I checked the conflict of interest policy of the investment committee and it is not public.

RB: Okay, so I will check.

MS: Shifting to discuss some contemporary issues—can you speak a bit about your decision to respond to Charlottesville the way that you did?

RB: After Charlottesville people were calling to ask me what statement I was going to make, like “YU is against Nazis.” I did not do that. And it is not just because that is really not a [bold] statement [to make], [but rather] because we are not a statement making institution. We are an educational institution. We teach the issues; we don't make statements about [the issues].

Our strength is bringing our enormous intellectual resources to bear on the current contemporary issues of our day. So in [the case of] Charlottesville, we were able to put out a reader in just a couple of days that dealt with the issues at the core [of this event], and not just from the

Halakhic or Jewish philosophical [perspective], but also from historical, legal, and social perspectives. We are uniquely capable of addressing these kinds of issues.

MS: Moving on to another contemporary issue—you mentioned in your Times of Israel interview that there is a greater challenge to find or create roles for female Torah scholars in the US than there is in Israel. Other than the GPATS program, how do you see YU addressing this challenge?

RB: I think they said that. What I said, if I remember correctly, is that Israel is a whole different society with a whole different structure. Just take the basic educational model. We have one primary school of higher education in our community—Yeshiva University, [while] they have hundreds of mechinot, midrashot, and different kinds of yeshivot, and a much bigger community [of Jews]. So what I meant was that there are totally different opportunities [in Israel].

Women[’s education] today is certainly one of the crucial issues [that] Yeshiva University is concerned about on many fronts. We need to educate our students to think about that, to fulfill their potential, and find the right places where they can shine.

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of opportunity
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MPK: But since there really is no existing framework in place for women, it is programs like GPATS that create frameworks.

RB: GPATS educates students. It is not the final role.

MPK: But now GPATS helps students find job opportunities. Do you have any visions for programs of that nature?

RB: We are very interested in creating the opportunities of today. These are our values. [This is] Torat Adam—that hakadosh baruch hu has given each of us special talents and we want to develop [those talents] for both our women and our men.

MS: Women who want to learn Talmud at Stern are given just a half or a third of the time to study Talmud than their male counterparts in the Mazer Yeshiva Program are given. This of course gives them an immediate handicap in their learning. How would you address this structural problem?

RB: I love that problem! If there are people expressing greater interest in Torah study I would love to figure out a way to match that [interest]. Those are the greatest problems we could possibly have. And this is what I meant with Torat Adam.

MS: This issue has been discussed in the past and one of the obstacles has been that it would require expensive restructuring of the schedule for a program that only a small percentage of Beren students would be interested in. How would you balance these concerns with the value of Torat Adam that you mentioned?

RB: I do not have specific wisdom on the nitty gritty of to how to work through the structure [so the problem could be solved]. But I would just say that the values are clear. I would be very interested in thinking about how to help our students maximize their desire and ability to study Torah on all levels. I can not think of a greater [task]. How wonderful it is to have students that are interested in [learning more]. And it is our mandate to develop [those opportunities] so [these students can develop] who they are as people.

MPK: How much time are you planning to spend on the Beren campus?

RB: We don't have strict rules, but it is very important for me to spend time on all of our campuses. Certainly [to spend time at] Beren and Wilf and, in some sense, Cardozo. It is a little harder to get out to Ferkauf and Central, and certainly harder these days get to the Gruss [Kolle] in Jerusalem. But it is definitely crucial to spend time at Beren and Wilf. I have been [at Beren] and I have been [at Beren] for shabbatonim and it has been a pleasure [to be here].

MS: What has been the most rewarding part of this job for you so far?

RB: I have been deeply touched by the number of people who are excited about YU and have told me that they are rooting for our success. I mean this on many many levels: from students who have come over to me to tell me about their sense of excitement for the future, to the amazing and touching level of support and excitement from faculty, rabbeim, and roshei yeshiva.

The overwhelming interest expressed by the outside community in what is going on at YU now [has also been] mind-boggling. Our reports show that there were over 50,000 people who were livestreaming the investiture and there was over 120,000 people who watched [the investiture] speech. They put out this little video [about the investiture] on Facebook and there was over half a million people that clicked on it. When I was in Israel people told me that there were classes where people were studying [the event] and “asking what is YU doing now?” It is incredible.

MS: Did this outpouring surprise you?

RB: It is not surprising in that I did not expect it; it is surprising because I did not think about it. [It just shows how] we have picked up an enormous amount of momentum in such a short span of time. This is a moment of opportunity for us. We need to capitalize on it, we need to grow. That is why I say we are on a trajectory of expansion and growth—we are developing, building, and putting the building blocks in place for short term growth and long term growth. And we have a lot of support for that.

MS: What has been the greatest challenge in your adjustment as the new president?

RB: There is no question that on a personal level, I just moved half of my family to America so there has been a lot adjustment there. But I have to say that it has actually felt right.

MS: On that note, how does it feel to live in America again?

RB: Coming back here from Israel has given me different perspectives on many things. I have had a whole different range of experiences [by living in Israel]. I was involved in a different kind of religious community, the Dati Leumi community. I studied at Hebrew University and Herzog College [so] even my range of higher educational experiences is different. Being in Israel changes your whole perspective on the Jewish world. So coming back I see things that I know so well, that are in my heart and soul, but I see them a little differently.

MPK: What have you learned about YU that has surprised you since you came back?

RB: One of the areas that is very different than [it was] when I was a student here is the student life outside of academics. Student life has grown to be much more robust and students are more involved in clubs and activities. This place is more vibrant and dynamic; it seems more alive than I remember it.

MPK: Is there anything else you want to the student body to know?

RB: Just to summarize [what I have been saying], YU has a grand purpose. Our grand purpose is for our students to leave Yeshiva University on a mission to not just transform themselves but transform the Jewish world and the broader society. [So] we have global impact. We are thinking big we are thinking broad. And we have great momentum. It's an exciting time for Yeshiva University and we look forward to continued growth.

Beren Housing Overflowing

Miriam Pearl Klahr
Managing Editor

In early August, Beren campus students usually receive an email with their residence assignment. However, this year many students received a slightly different email titled “Your Tentative Housing Assignment.” This email listed each student’s housing placement and then explained that housing on the Beren Campus is at full capacity this year. It continued to describe that there are still open rooms in Schottenstein Residence Hall and that students could change their request to Schottenstein for a discounted rate of \$8,300 for the year, instead of the usual price of \$9,000. The email also added that if not enough people offer to switch, housing would be forced to move some students to Schottenstein, the email concluded with the assurance that final housing placements would be sent out by August 15th. However, students did not receive these emails until August 18th.

In an email conversation with The Observer, Beren housing explained that Universities across the country face the challenge of accommodating students’ housing requests. On the Beren Campus, students have five options for housing. The cheapest option is Brookdale Residence Hall, a building consisting of large rooms that can house four or five students. Students can also request a Brookdale Deluxe room which includes a kitchen, and is slightly more expensive. Alternatively, students can live in 36th Street or Schottenstein, which are slightly more expensive buildings that offer primarily single residence rooms. Finally, 35th Street is the most expensive option, offering students full-fledged apartments. All first-year students are placed in Brookdale and in the past, it has been the guaranteed option for all students. But rising juniors were required to list Brookdale as one of their housing options in the Spring of 2017 in case the other buildings would be full.

This year however, fewer students than usual requested to live in Schottenstein. Additionally, there are 65 more women in Beren Campus’s university housing than last year. Many of these are first year students, leaving less space in Brookdale for upperclassmen. Housing denied that the Admissions Department accepted more students than the Beren Campus has housing for, claiming instead this increase in enrollment only required housing to utilize its residence halls to their full capacity. But moving students to Schottenstein was only part of the solution. Certain areas in Brookdale, such as The Observer’s office, lounges, and study halls, were converted into dorm rooms. Some of them even had bunk beds inserted, something Brookdale residents were never warned about as being a possible option. Similarly, students were not informed about the multiple changes to Brookdale’s amenities before they arrived on campus, and those assigned to sleep in bunk beds, only learned of this fact upon entering their dorm rooms. The number of RAs and GAs is also unchanged this year, despite the increased number of students in housing.



One first year student, who wishes to remain anonymous, described that she was surprised to find two bunk beds in her room which now houses six women as oppose to the usual four or five. Unlike some of her fellow students that were moved to Schottenstein, she was not offered any sort of compensation for this change in housing. Yet, she has grown used to the bunk beds and says she now appreciates that her room “definitely has more space than other dorm rooms I have seen.”

A junior who also wishes to remain anonymous, voiced a less positive experience. She was tentatively placed in Brookdale but her final placement was Schottenstein. She was furious since she had not listed Schottenstein as an option or volunteered to switch, and called housing after they did not respond to her email. After speaking to them she felt that they didn’t care at all and says, “I’m not happy [in Schottenstein] at all and should have more than a \$700 discount.” She also added that she doesn’t think it is fair to grant students the opportunity to list three different housing options and then fail to honor any of them.

Shoshana Trombka, a junior who was placed in Schottenstein despite not listing it as one of her options for housing, echoed the sentiment. She found it upsetting to originally think she had a say regarding where she would live, and then have housing dismiss her request. Moreover, she found her placement particularly upsetting because she never received a tentative housing email that warned her about the possibility of her ending up in Schottenstein. However, Trombka also said she understood

that “housing was in a bind and had to fill the empty rooms in Schottenstein somehow.” Shoshana also reports ultimately being happy in Schottenstein. While she finds the building a little removed from the rest of the Beren campus, housing was accommodating in terms of placing her on a floor with many friends and she is enjoying living with them. She also appreciates the local shuttle service that she finds herself using far more frequently now that she is less centrally located.

Housing would not comment regarding the cost of the renovations to create the extra dorm rooms. They also would not answer how many students were placed in Schottenstein despite not requesting it. However, they did stress how they are constantly at work to make housing more enjoyable for students. This year they have added parsha themed snacks to the variety of snacks already offered throughout Shabbat. They are also working on running larger scale building programs, the first of which already took place at Schottenstein featuring an ice cream truck and caricature artist. Finally, housing was open over chol hamoed Sukkot, a new initiative that many students appreciated.

Many have voiced concern over how housing will accommodate the additional influx of students that come for the second semester after spending another partial gap year in Israel. But housing says it will not be an issue, and is already at work emailing students who may be graduating in January to ensure that the Beren campus will be ready to provide the necessary housing spaces.

Midterm Cancelled After Copy of Exam Stolen

Kira Paley
Opinions Editor

A Judaic Studies midterm exam, scheduled for November 1st, was cancelled after it was found out that a student had stolen a copy of the exam. The course, Basic Jewish Concepts: Prayer, with Rabbi Lawrence Hajioff, has 40 students enrolled in it.

Rabbi Hajioff left the midterms in an unlocked drawer in his office, and was informed via email that a student had entered his office and taken a test prior to the scheduled time for the exam. After informing the class that he had been made aware that a student had cheated by stealing an exam, Rabbi Hajioff wrote four questions on the board for the students to answer on paper, in lieu of the prepared written exam. The final exam will now count for a larger percentage of the grade for the course.

Students enrolled in the course expressed frustration about the incident. “Rabbi Hajioff puts in the effort to create genuine relationships with his students,” said Ailin Elyasi, SCW ‘20, who is in the class. “Having taken three classes with him already, I have never seen him so upset or disappointed. [This] new class and the test took a lot of effort, and this instance clearly tarnished a certain trust he had with his students.”

Other students were upset by the incident because now the final exam will count for 70% of students’ final grades for the course.

Though it is not fully clear how Rabbi Hajioff found out that the test had been stolen, students report that another student in class emailed him last night to tell him. The administration has been informed about the incident.

“He worked really hard on creating this whole new curriculum over the summer and his tests are always easy if you study,” said another student enrolled in the course. “He literally tells us what’s on the test with a recorded video, so there [was] really no point in stealing the test.”

The administration has recently expressed concern over cheating in the undergraduate community and committed to increasing stringency on policing cheating and plagiarism. Deans of Yeshiva College met with students this past October to discuss specific policy and attitude changes. In light of these new events, and numerous complaints from Stern students of cheating in countless classes on the Beren campus, perhaps it is time for a similar meeting to take place at Stern College.



Halakha: Is it Helping or Harming Women With Issues of Consent?

Miriam Pearl Klahr
Managing Editor



continued from page 1

cat calls regardless of how she is dressed. She also considers the tzniut education she received at a Bais Yaakov elementary school to be a damaging philosophy, and a form of victim shaming. She and her friends were taught that their bodies should be hidden to protect themselves from men and their inevitable reaction to the female body. She attributes the hunched posture of many of her classmates to be a product of such thinking. Mayer, however, was never comfortable with this school of thought, and to this day, would love to discover an unapologetic explanation for tzniut that does not make women feel shameful. She has not yet found one, and though she does believe that this framework has given her an overall sense of modesty and professionalism, her motivation to follow the specific guidelines is rooted exclusively in the fact that they are halakha.

Recent Stern College alumna Nahal Talasazan, SCW '18, echoed Mayer's sentiment, explaining that she was never taught a satisfying explanation as to why tzniut is important, or how the actual halakhot developed. She thinks this is especially unbelievable because women's religiosity is often judged on the basis of how they dress. One answer that people have offered her is that the purpose of tzniut is to protect men from thinking about women inappropriately. Talasazan finds this explanation especially irresponsible in relation to issues of consent since it places all the onus on the woman and none on the man. She also believes that this mode of teaching often causes men to equate women with sex or sinful acts. Instead, she wishes that Jewish men were exposed to a positive conversation about how sexuality is natural and beautiful when used in the right way, helping them relate to women in a healthier manner. She therefore hopes to see a change in this sort of education for both sexes.

Nechama Lowey, SCW '20, shared her experiences of how the way tzniut is taught and spoken about can "oversexualize everything," leading to a lack of control in Orthodox circles, and problematic assumptions in relation to consent. She explained that because there is such a strong rhetoric that women dress modestly to

prevent males from objectifying them, whenever women dress differently it is assumed that they are inviting men to sexualize them. One student shared personal stories of being flirted with, and touched in ways she doesn't like because "it is assumed that if I'm not adhering to laws of modesty it's a free for all."

Educator and Stern alumna Erica Brown shared her perspective with *The Observer*, focusing on perceived barriers for women to speak up in situations of harassment or abuse: "what makes it hard for women to come forward or protect themselves are community norms, fear of mesira, lashon ha-ra and the fact that communal entities are often so protective of authority..." She added that while she "thinks an understanding of halakha is always beneficial," she does not believe that this will change the problem. "Do I think teaching more women more about these laws that "skirt" the real issues of gender sexual tensions will minimize problems? I don't think so."

Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt, a professor of journalism at Stern College and Stern alumna publicly weighed in on this issue with a *Forward* article. While she disagrees with the idea that dressing modestly protects women from sexual harm, she does think that observing the laws of yichud, though they were not originally intended for this purpose, can serve as a "powerful tool to cope with the realities of a Weinstein world." Multiple Stern College students also cited shmirat negiya as a halakhic boundary that helps individuals navigate issues of consent.

One student who wishes to remain anonymous explained that "consent issues often come up at the beginning of a relationship, when communicating is hard. With shmirat negiya, at that point, touch is not an option." She also added that the temptation to touch grows stronger with time as the couple grows closer, so even if they eventually decide to touch, they do so only at a stage when they have already developed strong and effective communication. Another anonymous student commented that a positive benefit that has come out of her desire to adhere to shmirat negiya is that whenever she and her boyfriend do decide to touch, they always ask each if it's okay to since the assumption is that they usually don't.

Therefore everything "feels very consensual and safe even though we have never had an actual conversation about consent." Another student who also wishes to remain anonymous added that in a shmirat negiya relationship neither partner "feels entitled to anything sexual. If one partner says no, the other will stop, because in a certain way this act is already off limits and something they both don't want to be doing on some level."

However, other students reflected on how their experiences with shmirat negiya have been less helpful regarding issues of consent. Many commented that since Orthodox institutions assume their students are adhering by these laws, they are never taught sex-ed and have no real guidance about safe sexual behavior, or how to have conversations about consent. Many high schools in today's secular society recognize that teaching abstinence is ineffective and irresponsible since there will inevitably be students who will continue to have sex. Similarly, many Stern students believe that teaching the halakhot of shmirat negiya and yichud, with the assumption that students will never be sexually active, is an irresponsible way of avoiding the difficult but important conversations that prepare students for the reality they may face.

Another anonymous student remarked that because of the taboo that surrounds not adhering to the laws of shmirat negiya, students often don't share sexual experiences that made them feel uncomfortable with their friends, from fear that someone may judge, or think less highly of them.

This might prevent them from clarifying what is and isn't normal, or from having the emotional support often necessary to report acts of abuse. Finally, a student shared a common phrase she has heard, along the lines of "if a woman isn't shomer she is probably okay with partying and hooking up." She concluded that this stereotype is not only false, but also very dangerous because it is predicated on the belief that a woman's religious observance, and not her words, dictate whether or not she is comfortable with various activities.

Dr. Yael Muskat, director of the Yeshiva University Counseling Center shared her perspective that "conversations about the halakhot of modesty and yichud and conversations about sexual harassment are very important, but from a mental health perspective, they should be two separate conversations." She explained that statements which link keeping or not keeping certain halakhot to sexual assault "inherently place partial blame on the victim even if that is not the intention." She added that this "can add stigma and pain to the already vulnerable victim, which is especially problematic because a frequent response to sexual harassment is self-blame." She concluded by saying that "Anyone who has been impacted by sexual assault or sexual harassment should be encouraged to seek support from friends and professionals and to report the incident. We at the Counseling Center are trained to help students dealing with these issues and can be reached at 646-592-4210."

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#MeToo, Me Three, Me Four...

Talya Hyman
Staff Writer

In an age where information spreads at lightning-fast speeds, two words and five letters was all it took for a movement of global proportions to dominate social media and spark a long-awaited conversation. As a result of the Harvey Weinstein sexual assault allegations, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted to her followers: “Me too. Suggested by a friend: ‘If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too.’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.” She then asked, “If you have been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.”

Facebook and Twitter feeds soon became haunted with the seemingly terse and simple #MeToo. For the brave women who posted the hashtag, however, it represented everything but simplicity and ease. Outsiders, for the first time, were allowed insight into the personal and painful recounts of both sexual assault and sexual harassment. This hashtag campaign is revolutionary because it not only built a platform for victims and survivors to share their stories, but it is also helping to end the stigma and shame surrounding what they have endured. The prevalence of sexual harassment and assault was neglected and overlooked only a few weeks ago. Today, the voices of millions echo the same truth: the anonymity has been going on for far too long, and the time has come to take a stand in support of other women.



With now over 12 million Facebook posts using the hashtag, the severity and prominence of the issue has arrived at the forefront. Yael Itskowitz, Syms ‘20, shared, “It’s a good conversation starter. Anyone who has never experienced anything like this, or been involved in such a situation, wouldn’t be talking about it, so it’s good awareness.” Although a social media campaign may not immediately put an end to sexual abuse, the movement has given victims the power of visibility.

The #MeToo campaign has been met with a wide variety of reactions. While the campaign’s purpose is to be a source of empowerment for women, others found issue

with it, believing that the campaign’s intent of being a voice for victims of both sexual harassment and sexual assault is offensive. These individuals have said that there is a large difference between harassment and assault, so much so that they should not be categorized together or equalized. Others, however, believe that this was a necessary step for awareness. Itskowitz commented, “You have to start somewhere to draw a line. We want all these terrible things to stop. Everyday on the street if a man thinks it’s okay to call out to a girl because she’s pretty, that is just going to lead him to further objectifying women and making more bad decisions.”

Aviva Shooman, SCW ‘20, echoed Itskowitz’s sentiment. She explained, “It comes from the same root of women being disrespected. Being disrespected physically or being disrespected emotionally are both concerning, and come from the same root of this general disrespect.” A common theme then emerges from beyond the 12 million-too-many stories: those individuals who take advantage of women source their actions in the warped mindset that a woman’s value is for purely physical pleasure. At the most basic level, conversation is necessary to inspire any sort of change. So, let’s begin the conversation here. Women should never be reduced to, or defined by how they may appear physically; Women are strong, resilient, and above all, powerful.

Many women at Stern College believe that their learning environment, and the people they are surrounded by provide them with the tools necessary to advance as strong-minded and powerful individuals. As an institution, Stern encourages its hardworking and ambitious students to explore their potential, thrive, and make their voices heard. Itskowitz is of the opinion that “Stern provides a very positive environment for Jewish women to feel empowered, and to contribute to the work force. I’m in Sy Syms and a lot of times they stress the importance of putting yourself out there while keeping your strong Jewish values. Stern is a really good environment to be in

 **Alyssa Milano** 
@Alyssa_Milano Follow

If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.

Me too.

Suggested by a friend: "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."

for female empowerment.” To allow Stern to continue to be a safe place for women, a conducive environment to do so must exist. Shooman said about the Stern environment, “I feel safe. It’s a community where we all have one thing that connects us all, that we are all Jewish women studying together, wanting to be professionals.”

It is necessary to be mindful, however, that there may be Stern students who don’t believe that their school is a safe place where they can share their opinions freely and openly. To these students Itskowitz advises, “You should know that you have a support system, even if you don’t feel like you do. People want to genuinely help; other students, faculty, and the counseling center are here for you.” It is ultimately up to the student body to ensure that Stern remains the safe and empowering place for women’s advancement that so many believe it to be.

With visibility comes knowledge, and with knowledge comes action, and eventually, change. But to embark on a journey of change, it is important not to become complacent. As the #MeToos fade from glaring headlines on news feeds and become the hashtags of yesterday, remember the jarring reality that so many women have experienced varying degrees of sexual mistreatment. These women live with what happened to them everyday, but this should not be the norm. Shooman expressed, “Every human should have more respect for each other; Woman to woman, man to woman, man to man, everybody.” Allow for universal respect to be the next viral movement, chain reaction, and change in the world. It all begins with #YouToo.

Letter from the Sy Syms President’s Desk

Yael Saban

As human beings and as Jews, we often consider the legacies that others have left before us and the legacy we ourselves want to leave behind. However, we rarely question *why* we feel this need to impart a legacy wherever we are. Is this concept of leaving behind a “legacy” and in end in of itself, or is there a greater purpose to it?

We can look at this idea of a legacy in two ways. On the one hand, it can all be about having great impacts on those around us and the community we are a part of. On the other hand, leaving a legacy can be seen as a selfish act, where our personal growth and feeling of self-fulfillment are the main purpose. Is one way ultimately better than the other? Does one motivation for leaving a legacy produce more lasting effects than the other?

Within Judaism, we see the complexity of leaving “legacies” through the idea of *chesed*, kindness. True *chesed* entails the giving of oneself to help another without regard to compensation. Within the books of the Torah, we are bookended by acts of *chesed*, with God clothing Adam and Eve and ending when God buries Moshe Rabbeinu—two different, yet impactful, forms of *chesed*, kindness.

These acts of *chesed* were rooted in God’s pure love for Adam, Eve and Moshe, as were many other acts of *chesed* within Tanach. *Chesed* is a daily requirement and it is most evidently manifested in the act of giving. It implies attitudes integral to the person’s character, inseparable from one’s inner nature, and spans the whole range of virtues which operate in any type of relationship or setting one is in.

We can see from God’s example that these acts of kindness should be done out of pure love, rather than for personal growth or being recognized by the greater community. If we spend all of our time focusing on who our acts of kindness are for, we may miss the ultimate point. The reason why we choose to do these acts should be because it comes from a place of simply wanting to do what we think is right. It should come from a place of wanting to have an impact, for personal and communal reasons, but that only gets us so far.

When we want to do great things that we hope will have lasting impacts, we must also acknowledge the lack of control we have over our own legacies. Wanting to be able to say we have left a “legacy” cannot be the be the ultimate goal. We can try our best to leave this legacy, but the truth is that whether or not our acts create lasting change—and so a real legacy—is dependent on the people that surround us and the people that will come after us. It depends on how much you care to do and care to give, but also how much they choose to receive.

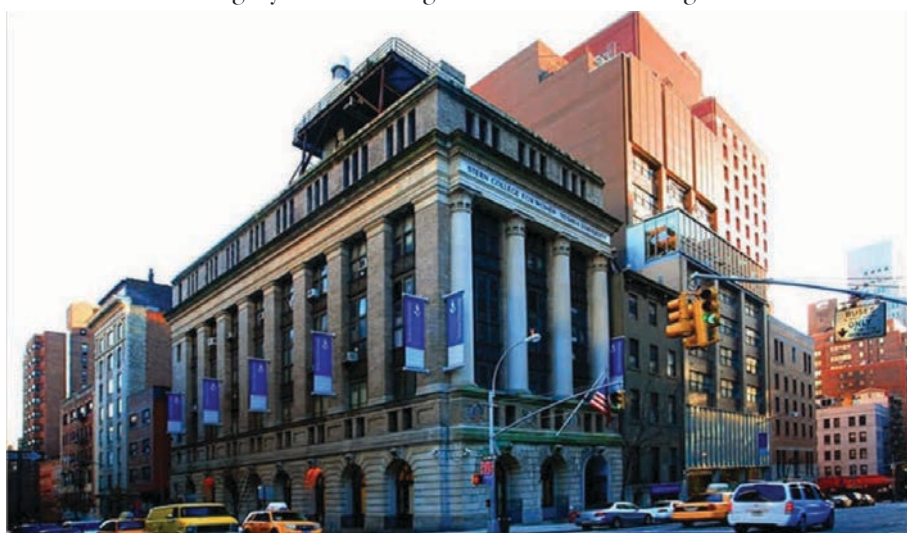
So, if we cannot know who will follow us, then how can we try our best to make an impact? How can do the most to ensure that the effects of our change will last even when we have moved on? The best way we can have an influence and impact on those around us, and ultimately leave a legacy is through these acts of kindness, these acts of goodness for the complete sake of doing good because we want to and because we care.

For the last two years, a question that has constantly run through my mind is, “what will I do at Yeshiva University that will allow me to leave my mark?” Not until this year, after adjusting to the title of President of Sy Syms on the Beren campus, have I realized that I had been approaching the idea of leaving my mark all wrong. There is no one challenge that I

can choose to tackle just so that my name will be remembered. If the challenges I choose to pursue are not inherently acts of goodness and are not meaningful to the student body, there will be no benefit for myself or for those around me. Individuals within Yeshiva University on both the Beren and Wilf campus have exemplified this idea through their genuine care for YU, taking their desire to help the greater community, and ultimately leaving a legacy, with students following in their footsteps for a long time to come.

Tuvie Miller, despite pushback, created the first women’s Beit Midrash on the Wilf campus in the YU library. Noam Safier and Rachel Rolnick changed what used to be the Chanukah concert to a more cost-friendly, student centered event, now known as Chanukahfest. Dena Katz challenged the status quo and got tampons on the Wilf campus in the women’s bathrooms. The Shabbat Enhancement Committee getting a minyan started on the Beren Campus every shabbat that is not a co-ed one. These are just a glimpse of the work students have done because they decided to just do; their actions had lasting impact because they were focused, not on themselves, but on how they could do good and help students. They put in the effort and they saw results, and that personal effort is what moves us forward.

Through the acts *chesed* these individuals embody this concept of leaving a legacy. When they saw the need for change, they all took it upon themselves to just do it. If there is one thing I plan on taking with me throughout my last year in Yeshiva University, it is keep going pursuing the changes I believe in because I care and to keep moving forward because I know that the acts I choose to do have the potential to have an effect for good. And if I choose to act out of true *chesed* and am guided by the needs of those around me, then they may just leave a mark—a legacy—in the future too.



Goldberg Family Hosts Annual Thanksgiving Dinner for Out-of-Town Students

Leah Klahr
Features Editor

For most students, Thanksgiving weekend is a long-awaited highlight of the fall semester. Thanksgiving not only provides students with a welcomed vacation, but it is also a special time for students to celebrate the holiday together with family. Yet, for a large number of Stern students whose families live outside of New York, or the United States, Thanksgiving weekend can be a source of anxiety and homesickness. Realizing this struggle for many out-of-town students, Professor Scott Goldberg, vice provost at YU and associate professor at Azrieli Graduate School, has been welcoming students to his home in Passaic for a number of years to spend Thanksgiving dinner together with his family.

Racheli Schuraytz, SCW '20, shared with The Observer, "As an out-of-towner from Los Angeles, flying home for Thanksgiving was never an option for me. Growing up, Thanksgiving was always about family. The thought of having to celebrate Thanksgiving without a family was one of the hardest moments of my first year on campus. But the Goldberg family gave me (and many other students!) not one, not two, but three years

of Thanksgiving dinners. And each time they were so welcoming and relaxed. It felt just like home, complete with the family feel and delicious pumpkin pie!"

When The Observer asked Professor Goldberg what led him and his wife to begin the tradition of sharing their Thanksgiving dinner with YU students, Goldberg explained, "During our years as students at the University of Chicago and Boston University, we appreciated the opportunity to dine in the homes of professors and university administrators for Thanksgiving. We want YU students to have the same opportunity to enjoy the holiday with a family and a home-cooked meal. We also enjoy meeting so many students from around the U.S. and the world—they all enhance our Thanksgiving table and create lasting memories for our family."

Goldberg continued to describe the Thanksgiving feast, "We enjoy freshly made rolls, a freshly carved roasted turkey, amazing side dishes, and a plethora of deserts. The conversation often includes discussions of Thanksgiving memories, and for many years, at least one student is attending their first Thanksgiving meal ever.

Students leave with "doggie bags" so they can take a bit of the yummy taste of Thanksgiving home with them to their dorms or apartments." Goldberg added that his family looks forward to the dinner each year, and his kids "ask about it regularly."

For some students, their connection with the Goldberg family, created at the Thanksgiving dinner, extends beyond one evening each year. Rebecca Garber, who graduated Stern in 2017, explained that she felt so welcomed by the Goldbergs that she continued visiting them throughout her time at Stern. Garber told The Observer, "Sometimes it can be difficult being away from your family on Shabbos or other times during the year. Therefore, finding a home away from home is so crucial. Whether that means leaving Stern or just being around people who love you, having that "place" can completely change your college experience. The Goldberg's home definitely became one of those places for me, and I am so grateful to them for that." Though Garber has graduated Stern, she looks forward to attending the Goldberg's Thanksgiving dinner this year, and bringing her out-of-town friends from Temple medical school along with her.

Regarding the Goldberg's Thanksgiving dinner, Garber added, "It is so nice knowing that I don't have to go all the way home to Atlanta to be able to go to a place that feels like home. The entire Goldberg family is so welcoming and truly a pleasure to be around. Plus, there is absolutely no way to even begin to describe the plethora of delicious food that Mrs. Goldberg makes. Every year I know what to expect, but still find myself blown away by the amount of time and energy that is put into making this a special experience."

Similarly, Schuraytz added, "My first Thanksgiving at the Goldbergs was so special that I went back every single year, and even stayed for Shabbat last time."

While the Goldberg's home in Passaic is a beloved Thanksgiving destination, Talia Molotsky, Coordinator of Student Life at the Beren Campus shared that this year, Stern students will also have the option to have Thanksgiving dinner on campus. The Rosenzweig campus couple will be hosting a Thanksgiving dinner for Stern students in their home on 35th Street. Mrs. Rosenzweig told The Observer, "As long as we're here, all students have a place at our table. No one at Stern should feel they have no place to go. The more the merrier!"



Cardozo Law School Marks 25 Years of The Innocence Project

Leah Klahr
Features Editor

In 1992, Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld, students at Yeshiva University's Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School, founded the Innocence Project. In the 1980s, as they worked on the case of Marion Coakley, a man who was wrongly convicted of rape and robbery, Scheck and Neufeld realized the far-reaching implications of using DNA testing to either incarcerate or exonerate people who were convicted of crimes. "If DNA technology could prove people guilty of crimes, it could also prove that people who had been wrongfully convicted were innocent," Scheck and Neufeld wrote on their project's website. Thus, they began the Innocence Project with the mission to "free the staggering number of innocent people who remain incarcerated, and to bring reform to the system responsible for their unjust imprisonment."

The project began with a small team of lawyers, volunteers, and students at Cardozo Law School, who took on groundbreaking legal cases and used DNA testing to free people who were wrongly convicted. These people were convicted either due to eyewitness misidentification, misapplication of forensic science, false confessions, incentivized witnesses, government misconduct, and inadequate defense. At the time, there were no U.S. laws supporting the right to access post-conviction DNA testing. Therefore, each exoneration case often included much legal work, as lawyers struggled to pass legal hurdles that limited post-conviction DNA access. As a result, the Innocence Project has caused important legal reforms, ensuring access to post-conviction DNA testing and evidence retention. Moreover, the Innocence Project also advocates for laws compensating people who were

wrongly incarcerated.

As of 2017, the Innocence Project has exonerated 351 people through DNA technology; in 151 cases it has also identified alternative perpetrators through DNA testing. The Innocence Project's website features the stories of innocent people who were recently exonerated, often after years of living in prison. One blatant trend that the Innocence Project has called attention to, and continues to fight against, is the reality that the majority of wrongly incarcerated individuals in the U.S. are part of minority groups. Stephen Saloom, Innocence Project Policy Director explained, "Wrongful convictions are caused by both systemic flaws in our criminal justice and by external variables, including subtle factors that subconsciously affect who we perceive as guilty or innocent, and how people conduct investigations." Saloom explained, "These human factors mean race has an impact in our courts." For example, one of the leading causes of wrongful convictions is eyewitness misidentification; in more than half of the misidentification cases addressed by the Innocence Project, the witness and wrongfully convicted perpetrator have been of different races. According to information released in 2010, 172 of 254 wrongfully convicted people were either black or Latino.

Tzivya Beck, a Stern graduate who hopes to pursue a career in law expressed the importance of the Innocence Project to The Observer. "Knowing that there is an organization like this, which is committed to preventing injustices within criminal justice system, gives me more confidence in the justice system as a whole. In many cases, racism and discrimination play a big role in these

injustices as well, which makes the Innocence Project even important in exonerating those against whom the justice system had been biased," Beck stated. "In a country that is continuing to heal from centuries of slavery, remnants of these injustices within the justice system itself need to be rectified. I am thankful that the Innocence Project plays a part in this important social justice initiative," she concluded.

Adding another perspective, Professor Adina Levine, who teaches a course in Comparative American and Talmudic Law at Stern explained, "The findings from the Innocence Project raise interesting questions that should make us question the efficacy of our legal system. For example, the Innocence Project's research calls into doubt the reliability of eyewitness testimony and brings up the issue of false confessions, as many of the wrongful convictions were based on faulty eyewitness or false confessions – themes that have a direct analog in Talmudic law," an issue she discusses in her class.

In 2004, the Innocence Project became a non-profit organization, though it continues its close ties to the Cardozo Law School. According to its website, in just two decades, the Innocence Project has "helped restore liberty to hundreds of innocent people and reformed almost as many laws and judicial practices, protecting millions more." On the celebration of the Innocence Project's 25th year, founder Barry Scheck stated, "What makes the Innocence Project so effective is that it taps into something on a very spiritual level. It is this whole struggle that our clients and their families engage in, which is to overcome injustice."

A Review of One of Us: Chassidic Life Revealed

Netah Osona

On October 20th, documentarians Rachel Grady and Heidi Ewing released their Netflix original *One of Us*, a piercing glimpse into the insular world of Chassidic Jewry through the eyes of three young adults who are trying to break free. All connected with varying degrees to the Satmar sect, Etty Ausch, Ari Herszkowitz, and Luzer Twersky give us a chilling and heartbreaking peek into the hardships and struggles they faced while leaving their respective communities behind. “Nobody leaves unless they’re willing to pay the price,” said Chani Getter, a counselor who works for Footsteps, an organization that provides support to people who left or want to leave an ultra-Orthodox community. “And the price for freedom is really high,” she said. “The community is your family,” she continued. “If you’re sick, someone will show up, take care of your kids... You’re never alone. There’s so much help, and there’s a huge appeal to always being helped. You lose all that when you leave.” In the documentary, Grady and Ewing successfully contextualize what that price is and how painful and difficult it is to pay.

Etty is a mother of seven who becomes a target of harassment for seeking a divorce from her abusive husband. She is also in the midst of a custody battle in which her own parents, siblings, and friends are testifying against her. Luzer is an actor in his early thirties who has already left the community, and lives a bi-coastal life in Los Angeles and New York. Pursuing his dreams meant having to cut off ties with his wife and children. Ari is a brooding 18-year-old who suffered sexual abuse as a child, and also struggles with drug addiction. Asking the metaphysical and esoteric questions about the existence of God, he comes to the conclusion that “[he] was living a lie”, and decides to choose a different path.

Each story is revealed slowly, with the subjects often hidden by shadows, or only visible in the blurry reflection of a subway window; this is a suitable technique to showcase a group of people hiding in plain sight – noticeable, yet very mysterious. Their stories are unfolded through sensitive camerawork, alternating between being up close and personal to the subjects at one

moment, and then keeping their distance the next. Etty’s face is the only one that remains hidden up until she’s ready to expose herself to everyone around her, portrayed in a piercing visualization of her removing her wig for the first time: a difficult, yet cathartic transformation from invisible victim to resilient survivor. Through such delicate camerawork, Grady and Ewing beautifully capture this sense of alienation and loneliness all three subjects feel as they struggle to find themselves, and reconcile their upbringing into a new, balanced identity.

As a Jew watching this film, it’s a normal reaction to instinctively get defensive. It’s hard to hear certain major flaws in a system that is rooted in a religion filled with so much beauty and truth. However, the purpose of a documentary is to bring to light a certain injustice, so naturally, bias will emerge. It exposes the extremes of groupthink from the point of view of the victims. The film concentrates on the individual, while only briefly mentioning aspects of the broader Chassidic community, which as a viewer, is an important distinction to realize and understand. There are many beauties and values that the Satmar community has, and that Chassidic culture has as a whole. Based on what I’ve witnessed and learned from watching this film and reading about Chassidic culture, the general hashkafa is based on doing the same things that the community’s ancestors have done, which can come off as very extreme behavior. The community values tradition in a way that’s almost admirable, but at the same time, intense and not subject to any modification. It’s a value that stems from not wanting to waver from their heritage and culture, and a mindset that is based on strict replications of what their ancestors did, from the language they speak to the way they dress, to the way they encounter the outside world. They present themselves in a very discernable way because remaining isolated is how they believe they will uphold their traditions and never lose the core values of their respective Chassidic sects. So what’s clear—and implicit in the film’s title—is that there are tough lines drawn around what it means to be “us”, and what it means to be “other”, and that crossing that line has extreme repercussions.



It’s very important to note that Etty, Ari, and Luzer didn’t leave the community hating Judaism. They had their struggles with the way the community raised them, and the film does a great job in telling us their stories and accurately presenting the tragic circumstances the subjects had to endure as a result of living in a community that treated them in such a negative way. But what the documentary also succeeds in doing is showing that they still very much hold onto the core values of Judaism and cherish them deeply. Etty begins attending services at a Renewal synagogue. Ari finds himself back in the community to attend a Jewish wedding. Luzer spends a Shabbat meal with his fellow Footsteps members. They all embrace this beautiful Jewish communal feeling and yearn for it every day. Even though they physically left their respective communities behind, they didn’t leave the religion behind with it.

Don’t just sit and watch!

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How To Stop Cheating at Stern

Anonymous

It starts with questions: were the students looking for the test, or rummaging for a marker? Was it the professor's fault for not locking the drawer? Does any blame fall on the witnesses? What about the people who were just sent the test? And if you knew that the midterm was being sent around, would you put yourself at a disadvantage by not looking at it?

Cheating is not so simple; I have been mulling over these questions since the morning when Rabbi Lawrence Hajioff announced that his Basic Jewish Concepts: Prayer midterm had been compromised. The night before, students were milling around classroom 418 in the 245 Lexington Avenue building, when they came across the copies of the very midterm being given to them the next day, in an unlocked drawer. Pictures were sent around that night, and several students were given copies of the test. One anonymous student attests that the test was sent to her, though she is not enrolled in the course. Someone emailed Rabbi Hajioff about the compromised exam, and he threw all the exams in the trash in front of the class on the test day. Instead of the intended midterm, students were given four short answer questions to answer that day. The rest of the grade for that class rests on the final.



The blame can be placed on anyone involved. But at the end of the day, Stern has to be a place that has a reputation of righteousness. As Rabbi Hajioff commented, "Yeshiva University is a religious school. This doesn't just mean that keeping shabbat, and studying Jewish texts [are] part of the curriculum. A higher standard of ethics and behavior has to be part of who we are; if not us, then who?" In regards to cheating, the right balance means having both responsible policies to make cheating a difficult prospect and an atmosphere of morality to appeal to students.

Consider a lock on a the front door of a house. The lock works because it provides just enough hinderance that most people would avoid putting in the effort to break the lock and rob the house. However, the existence of the lock does not make stealing impossible, it just gives people time to stop and think about the morality of their actions. Both the mechanisms of hinderance and the morality of this institution must be maximized to stop cheating at this school.

Sarah Poborets, Syms '19, walked out of Hajioff's midterm classroom unsurprised after the cancelled midterm, admitting, "It has happened to me in the past. I have been in classes [in which students] have cheated." Students openly admit to cheating all the time. If nothing else, this incident definitively proved that there are different levels of cheating. Looking over someone's shoulder for an answer counts as cheating, but is perhaps a lesser form of cheating than taking out a phone during an exam, which is perhaps a lesser form than going into a professor's private drawer for the midterm. But I have seen all of these things occur at Stern College.

Some perspective: cheating at other colleges has been treated more severely than at Stern. At Ryerson University in 2008, a student created a Facebook group to discuss engineering questions that were meant to be

done individually, and was charged with 147 counts of student misconduct. Most people would probably call that "sharing" at Stern. And although administrators have been attempting to combat cheating with full force, better mechanisms need to be implemented. Specifically, students should be more spread out, proctors should pay more attention, and professors should take care to create original questions.

It may start with the questions, but it ends with one undeniable truth: individuals create the community. If you want Stern to be a utopian community of sorts, a miraculous place where people are nice and ethical, you as the individual have to be nice and ethical. By breaking the weak metaphorical lock into a house of cheating, you destroy the illusion of a utopia—even if the illusion is weak. To live in a decent community, you as the individual must be decent.

Reflecting on the situation, Rabbi Hajioff said "Trust is also a weird thing, it can take a while to build, but can be broken in a moment. When I discovered that my midterm exam had been stolen and shared among students, I wasn't angry, I was upset. The worst part was the trust I thought I had built with all the students had been broken by a few selfish people." Let Stern College for Women be a "Nowhere But Here" institution in terms of values. Let Stern deserve that title as a place of dignity and righteousness. "Nowhere But Here" should indicate decency, which can only occur if the students too say no to cheating and encourage their friends to say no to cheating. Be the individual who creates the utopian community. There are only so many rules that the administration can implement. At the end of the day, the student body decides whether the school has academic integrity or not. I hope the administration places a tighter lock on the door of cheating, but I also hope students realize the importance of reputation and values.

Renewing Our Appreciation for Hebrew

Efrat Malachi

Hebrew: a language so beautiful and ancient, yet so misunderstood and arduous for students to master. For some, Hebrew is not a real challenge, either because they grew up with it or they have picked up the many rules and tricks of the language from their occasional trips to Israel and dinners at Israeli restaurants. For others, it is the most taxing and stressful subject in school. At least that's how it has been perceived by a majority of students in Jewish day schools throughout the years. Despite the numerous tanach/parsha classes that Jewish day school students are obligated to take, which should improve their Hebrew reading comprehension skills, each year the willingness and success of students to learn Hebrew decreases exponentially.

Unfortunately, teachers have been failing at instilling an interest and appreciation for the holiest language, the tongue of God that goes back to the beginning of time, within their students. Students are apathetic to this fact and have no desire to learn a language that seems irrelevant and outdated in relation to their lives. Who really is at fault here? Is it the teachers? The school? The curriculum? Or is it the students themselves? Whom does the responsibility fall upon and is there really something we can do to shift the attitude of an entire generation? At Yeshiva University, we pride ourselves in Torah U'Madah, which is the idea of recognizing and appreciating the value of the arts and sciences and their relationship to Torah studies. Our goal is to apply our Torah learning and its timeless wisdom to all worldly matters for the sake of improving and bettering the future of mankind.

One of the mandatory courses at Stern College is Hebrew. This is intended as an opportunity to both build our skills and focus on our identity. We are Jews with a unifying moral and ethical code, history, homeland, and language. It is therefore fundamental that we continue teaching, learning and loving this complicated and undying language. Sadly, though, the Hebrew department here at Stern has been noted by students as unfriendly and unobliging to its diverse student body. Chana, SCW '20, relates that "the department doesn't understand that students can't intuitively grasp the language

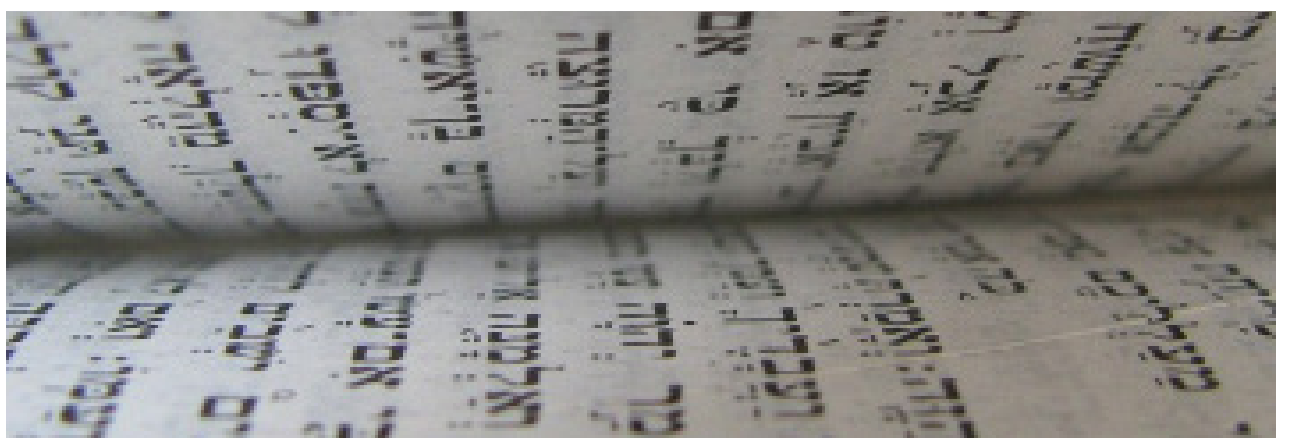
because they don't hear it on a day to day basis. They have to start from the bottom up with patience and empathy towards the student body and their knowledge." This issue stems from the faculty's misapprehension of what the students walk in knowing and the unfitting expectations set for them.

One of the ways that we can resolve the issue is by adjusting the angle at which teachers view their students. Acknowledging that they come from different places and vary in their ways of thinking will help teachers mold their lessons based on how each individual student learns and thinks. Therefore, teachers should focus on their students strengths and the things that they do as well as to give them the key to success in learning—confidence. Confidence will reinforce their willpower to start again when they don't get an answer right on a test or immediately comprehend a sentence that is thrown at them during class. This will facilitate students' understanding and absorption of the material.

On the other hand, some are quite satisfied and positive with their Hebrew language learning experience. Menucha, SCW '20 states, "our class utilizes our prior knowledge to learn about grammar rules and language use, and it is also expanding our vocabulary." Alexandra '19 also has a positive view of the Hebrew department. "I've learned everything but

Hebrew in my twelve years in the Yeshiva day school system. When I got to Stern, they placed me into the right level class. It's a lot of work but I'm starting to grasp the language. I really feel that the tracking system is highly effective, even if it means I have to take more Hebrew classes than I would have liked."

All in all, it is both the teachers' and students' responsibilities to create a mutual agreement in building a brighter future through the understanding of the darker parts of our past. Educating the next generation to respect and treasure their rich history and heritage starts with the today's teachers and with us, the students of tomorrow. We need to go the extra mile in regards to sparking our love and commitment to our people, past, and partnership with God. By learning and teaching Hebrew, we are proudly declaring and expressing the authenticity of our identity. We are revealing the secret to our immortality—the Torah. And even though modern-day Hebrew is a watered-down version of *lashon hakodesh*, the original Hebrew that was spoken in the ancient world, we still try to keep it as alive and dynamic as possible since its revival thousands of years later. There are no guarantees for perfection, but at least we can be sure of our efforts and that we are trying to move in the right direction. Hopefully we will continue to do so and see the fruits of our labor in the near future.



Hobby Lobby and Religious Freedom

Nolan Edmonson & The College Republicans



“Congress shall make no law **respecting an establishment of religion**, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” Thus begins the first amendment to our nation’s constitution--drafted in 1789 and ratified two years later. The notion that in a free society, government has no business meddling in the affairs of religion or establishing a state religion seems so obvious that a First Amendment seems almost superfluous. Of course, in today’s society it is almost a given that the government has no right to tell one how to practice their religion and that the making of laws that inhibit one’s free exercise of religion it is overreaching. But the framers recognized a necessity for this amendment. For James Madison--the author of the First Amendment--ensuring that citizens had the ability to worship whomever and however they pleased, not only forbade government from ever being able to establish a national religion, but (and perhaps more importantly) guaranteed that man would be allowed “the full and equal rights of his conscience” without infringement from the government.

But what exactly constitutes a breach of the “free exercise” clause has not always been simple. Supreme Court battles have been waged over this question for decades. Most simply understood, any act by the government which impedes your ability to act in accordance with your religion--and subsequently your conscious, is a clear and undeniable breach of your right to exercise freely. On what grounds then did the Supreme Court rule in 2012, that the right to “” extended to companies as well? Answering this question requires understanding its history.

In 2012 Hobby Lobby sued then Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius on the grounds that a portion of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (colloquially known as Obamacare or ACA) violated the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) and the free exercise clause of the First Amendment. Under the ACA, employment based group health care plans had to provide certain types of preventative care including FDA approved birth control. David and Barbara Green (the owners of Hobby Lobby) argued that requiring them to provide health plans that covered contraceptives was against their religious belief and sought an injunction to prevent the tax penalty that would be levied against them were they not to provide the health plan. The first question that comes to mind of course is: why does it matter if the owner of a company is religiously opposed to the provisions of the bill? So long as the company is for profit and not a religious institution, it should provide this coverage for its employees regardless of its owners religious persuasion. That question incorrectly assumes that the violated laws in

question do not recognize companies as having the same right as individuals with respect to religious freedom.

Substantial Burden

The court ruled in a 5-4 decision that Congress intended for RFRA to be read as applying to corporations, seeing as they constitute a group of individuals who are using the company to achieve a desired end. Justice Samuel Alito wrote the majority opinion in which he stated, “we reject HHS’s (Health and Human Service’s) argument that the owners of the companies forfeited all RFRA protection when they decided to organize their businesses as corporations rather than sole proprietorships or general partnerships.” (It should be noted that ACA does not place the same burden or requirement upon non-profit religious organizations). Justice Alito goes on to say that RFRA clearly did not discriminate against men or women who decided to run their for profit companies in a manner required by their religious beliefs. This understanding of the law protected companies like Hobby Lobby from being subjected to abide by governmental policies that are diametrically opposed to religious practice. However another question must be explored. Mainly, did Hobby Lobby have a legitimate claim that they should be exempt from the above mentioned tax penalty?

The plaintiffs argued that along with being protected under RFRA, the penalty incurred from refusing to provide coverage placed a “substantial burden” on them which was not the least restrictive method of satisfying the government’s interest. What exactly does “substantial burden” mean? According to the RFRA, the government must make an accommodation if it places a substantial burden on a person’s ability to practice their faith. RFRA is clear however, that only in instances when the government has a compelling interest to place substantial burden on a person’s religious practice may it do so. For instance, if the religion of Nolanism required its adherents to never pay taxes, the government has a compelling enough interest (because they are given the responsibility to lay and collect taxes) to place substantial burden on Nolanists’ ability to practice their religious sacrament of tax evasion. This burden might come in the form of a fine, or perhaps a law with the wording “all citizens are required to pay taxes regardless of their religious affiliation and failure to do so results in imprisonment up to 30 days.” The court would recognize this substantial burden to be a valid one because of the government’s compelling interest. In the case of Hobby Lobby though, the court did not consider the provision of birth control access to be a compelling

enough interest of the government to enforce a substantial burden on the religious practice of Hobby Lobby by fining them for not providing the coverage.

Understanding of the substantial burden the ACA placed on Hobby Lobby--and subsequently how that burden violated its right to free exercise--- is essential to understanding why many conservatives are wary of government requiring institutions to provide coverage for abortion. While the court agreed that its reading of RFRA did not and could not exempt companies from providing other provisions enumerated in ACA, it sharply rejected a thinking which placed a responsibility on a company to violate its sincerely held religious beliefs.

Preserving Liberty; Pursuing Justice

It is our firm belief that individuals should not be coerced by government to provide for a service that is at odds with their religious beliefs. People should have the ability to freely practice their religion without fear of reprisal, a principle we have held as true since our nation’s inception. Furthermore it is not the responsibility of religious institutions or any private institution to provide birth control, though that is slightly beyond the scope of this issue. At the heart of the issues lies the question: should religious institutions be required to provide birth control to its employees? It is clear that so long as we give institutions (dedicated to religious adherence) the same status as people with regard to their religious practice, we can never condone any type of governmental coercion that pigeonholes people into choosing between suffering a significant burden or breaking a religious law.

Feeling free to exercise your religious beliefs, and not being penalized for doing so, is at the heart of our democracy. The ability to exercise conscience with out requital from government is essential to any civilization of free people, and it must be our cause to protect that ability and in doing so, preserve our democracy.

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What I've Learned from Jewish Whatsapp Groups

Sarah Casteel
News Editor

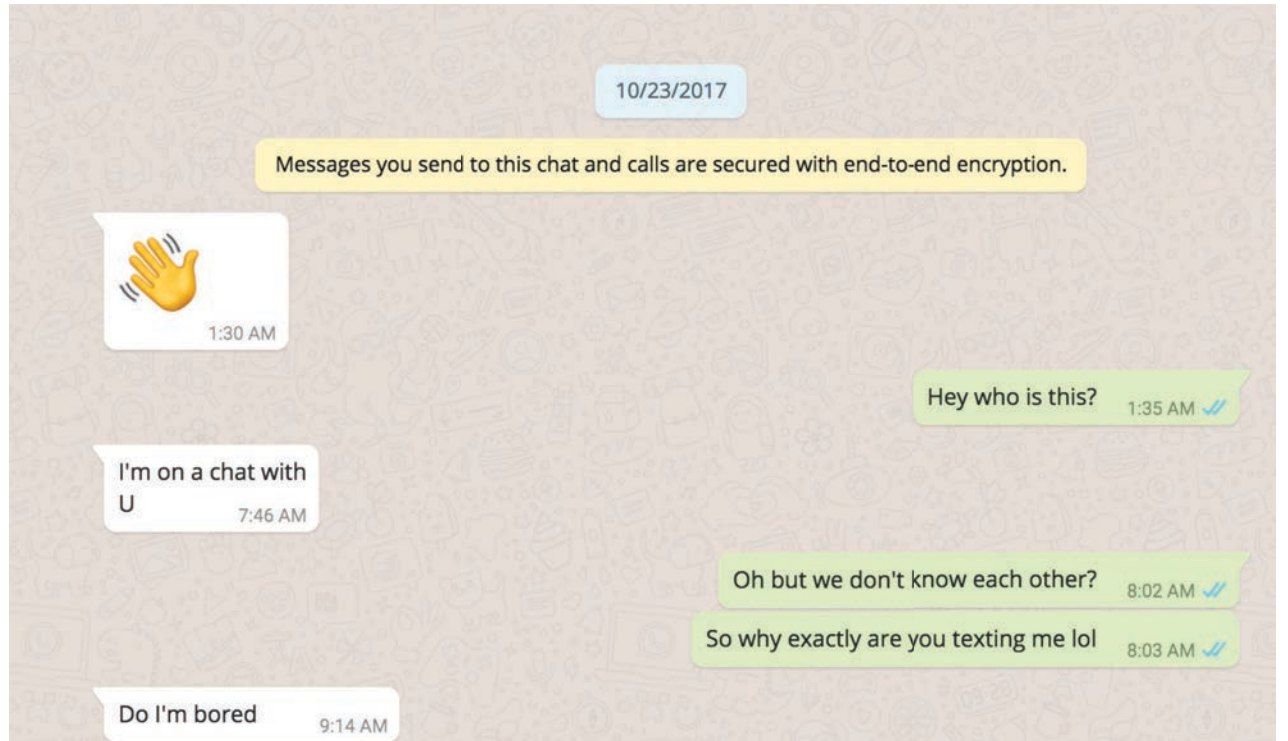
Starting this past year, various Whatsapp groups geared specifically toward Orthodox Jews in the Tri-State area have been created. Just since May, I have joined about 15 “rides groups,” which give primarily frum people the opportunity to offer and request rides to and from particular areas. Especially for people like me who live in Manhattan, the groups seem to be super convenient, with options such as “Baltimore Rides”, “Monsey Rides”, and even “Upstate Rides”. I wanted to be part of these groups just in case I might ever need a ride somewhere that is less-than-convenient to get to on public transportation. I figured that most of the time I would be ignoring the messages, and would mute the notifications unless I had requested a ride. While these groups were still a relatively new phenomenon, I was surprised to see that, toward the beginning of the school year, people started posting invite links within these rides groups to join various “shidduch” groups. I am personally not dating right now, and am not looking to find a shidduch through a Whatsapp group. But, I decided to do an experiment, and watch how social media--specifically Whatsapp--affects the shidduch system. Unfortunately, what I learned from being in both the rides groups and the shidduch groups is pretty disappointing and frankly, disturbing.

Before talking about the shidduch groups, which by definition and practical application have a lot of possible issues, I first have to bring up the troublesome reality I have experienced from the rides groups. You might think, “What could go wrong with a group allowing Jews to hitch rides to a wedding in Brooklyn?” I thought the same thing, until I started receiving private messages from people in the group. Since I have starting joining the rides groups in May, I have gotten unsolicited messages from random men in the groups at least ten times. They have messaged me things from “hey” with no context (as if I’m supposed to just know who they are), to “hey hottie.” In order to figure out exactly why I was receiving a personal message from a stranger, I decided to do a little research before reporting the person to the administrator of the group.

Sometimes, the messages are very blunt and contain photos of graphic content. And sometimes, there are messages that are less harassing, but still creepy. So as not to provide anything too disturbing, here is one of the less graphic conversations:

(Random number that I do not recognize): Waving hand symbol
Me: Hey, who is this?
Him: I’m on a chat with u
Me: Oh but we don’t know each other? So exactly why are you texting me? Lol
Him: I’m bored

While the rides group admins do not encourage this kind of private messaging, and in fact specifically prohibit any personal conversations in the group chats, this problem is



something that I have experienced from members of groups such as Monsey, Brooklyn and Baltimore Rides. These people either remove themselves from the group or are removed by an admin not too long after these encounters, but the damage has already been done. I assume that these people simply scroll through the profile pictures of all of the members of the groups in order to find girls to message, and so I am definitely not the only woman to be messaged or harassed. Fortunately (or not), this kind of experience does not particularly faze me, perhaps because I went to a coed public school where I had this kind of experience on text and in person many a time. But considering the variety of people who are members of these groups, I am sad to think that other people may be suffering from more damaging effects.

My conclusion about Jewish rides Whatsapp groups is that, while they could theoretically be convenient, both the constant notifications and the consequence of receiving solicitations from random strangers--supposedly frum guys from communities where I am trying to travel--render membership in these groups not worth it. Some people in the groups could theoretically be trolls who somehow made it into the group, but I have also found some of my mysterious harassers on Facebook and seen that we have mutual friends. Either way, why would I take the chance that the person who is giving me a ride is one of these creeps or predators? The group itself isn’t useful to me now that I know the risks associated even within a supposedly frum group. Unfortunately, staying both mentally and perhaps physically safe means membership in Jewish rides groups isn’t an option for me.

On the Jewish rides groups, people sometimes post invite links to Jewish shidduch groups. For example, I

joined groups called “Modern Yeshivish 28 and Under” and “Stern Touro Ner Shidduchim.” Shidduch Line is an organization which just started three months ago, and oversees Whatsapp groups for many specific types of people, primarily separated by hashkafa and age range. The organization has official rules which require a person to go through a Shidduch Line Shadchan (whose number is posted in the group) to inquire about anybody whose resume and pictures have been posted. However, yet again, I have been receiving unsolicited messages.

Twice within a couple of days, not only did I receive very strange and inappropriate pictures, but was called repeatedly, and was sent nude pictures from members of these two shidduch groups. Again, I reported the people and they were removed from the groups, but it was too late.

Here is another conversation that happened just a couple weeks ago:

Him (again, random unknown number): Hot profile pic
Me: Who are you?
Him: Where are you from? On a group with you.
Me: What group? Who are you?
Him: Shidduch chat
Me: Interesting. Pretty sure you’re not supposed to message people individually.
Him: Ok I hear. What are you into?

Immediately following that message from him, I received a nude photo.

Once, after reporting one of these harassers to an admin, I was told that I should delete my Whatsapp profile picture. He said that once people didn’t know I was a girl, and couldn’t see my “attractive” picture, I wouldn’t be harassed anymore.

I never knew that trying to get a ride to a friend’s wedding in Monsey or sending my shidduch resume to a group of frum Jews would lead me to get harassed by strangers and unwillingly receive nude photos. Unfortunately, I think the message we can learn is that while it seems smart to utilize social media for sharing rides and shidduch resumes, there are major risks that need to be considered as well. It seems that the Jewish community is as equally susceptible to online predators as anywhere else, and we need to be vigilant when participating in these online groups, if not avoiding them completely.

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Institutionalizing Kindness: Have We Forgotten Our Own Homes?

Ailin Elyasi
Staff Writer

I was at an initiation meeting for DOROT, a volunteer organization focused on helping the elderly, when I received a haunting call from my brother: “Adasjoon (my family’s sephardic name for grandmother) was admitted to the hospital last night. The doctors drained fluid out of her lungs. I guess that cough she had was worse than we thought. Do not worry; she’s completely fine, but she opted to stay a few more nights in the hospital.”

She opted to stay a few more nights on the hard hospital bed? Why would she do that when she could instead sleep at home? Then came the daunting thought: she wanted to stay at the hospital. Doctors, nurses, other patients, and of course all her visiting family pay so much attention to her when she is at a medical facility. Since my grandfather died, she has lived alone. Although my family—especially my mother—talks to her, sees her, visits her, and invites her, it must be lonely to sleep in an apartment with no one



at your side, to wake up with nowhere in particular to be, and to fill the days with arts and crafts when you once had the responsibility of raising six kids.

I believe that this exact worry began DOROT. The founders wanted to institutionalize and therefore regulate kindness to the elderly, enhancing our grandparents lives with human compassion, just as our grandparents have enhanced our lives. DOROT cares about older generations and their emotional wellbeing. It is a beautiful institution and a beautiful cause.

But what about my own grandmother? I was at a meeting to care for other people’s grandparents, when my own grandmother probably needed the most attention of all. I saw her on Shabbat, I took her to ice cream about a month ago, I call her about once every two weeks, but days are long. Longer than just a few activities every once in awhile—she needs more attention than that. Don’t we all?

A spoof of the attention that all grandparents need was featured on the Jewish Chronicle about an app developed by the American Friends of the Hebrew University (AFHU) called “Would it kill you to call?” In the video, a Jewish grandmother says she invented an app that checks how often a person calls his or her grandmother, and is programmed to send a reminder every two weeks. It rings true. Every grandmother wants a bit of appreciation for her years of helping her grandchildren grow. We need to give our grandparents that.

My family comes from a small town in Iran, where generations of families would live in the same house. My father lived a block away from his parents. The family ate most meals together, and a family member always took care of the elderly. My poor grandmother must have experienced quite the culture shock moving to the United States. With all the institutional kindness that the US possesses, the culture has forgotten personal kindness. As her granddaughter volunteers to visit the homes of other elderly, there is no one visiting her. How many people volunteer for Yachad knowing a neighbor or family member who could use the attention? How many people volunteer for Project Sunshine knowing a friend or family member in the hospital? It all seems backwards to me.

DOROT is still a wonderful institution, and a worthy focus for any volunteer’s kindness. But I do not want to get so caught up worrying about other people’s elders that I forget about my own. I have decided not to participate in DOROT. Instead, I will volunteer that time to my own grandmother as the tradition in my family has been throughout generations. Non-for-profit kindness institutions are wonderful for ensuring that compassion and kindness exist in the world. However, before there were institutions, there were just kind people, investing their time into doing kind acts. Let’s bring kindness back home.

Forget About Your Resume

Kira Paley
Opinions Editor

In the flood of “y-stud” and “s-stud” listserv emails that YU students receive, numerous contain the phrase “looks good on a resume”. This tactic was invented to convince students to join certain clubs or societies because of the promise that one day it could impress graduate school admissions officers or employers. And it works: at a school where many students regard their college educations as a means to an end, the end being a successful career, students often participate in extracurricular activities that align with their professional aspirations.

Exhibit A: the Club Fair. Although fortunately there are a plethora of clubs and activities that are not easily identifiable as matching up with a specific career, countless tables are devoted to students promoting clubs that are “pre”-something: pre-med, pre-law, pre-this therapy, pre-that therapy, pre-nursing, etc. This career-centered attitude that manifests itself in extracurricular activities is not necessarily a negative thing, as these groups plan informative events about entering their respective fields, like alumnae panels, speakers, and graduate school info-sessions.

And then there are the clubs whose “resume value” is perhaps not as obvious, but still extremely evident. Take, for example, the numerous extracurriculars that are geared towards the pre-health students. Project TEACH, Project START, Project Sunshine, the Medical Ethics Society (MES). These clubs all do incredible things; the education, recreation, and forum for discussion that is exhibited by these activities have infinite value, for the students and patients they help. Similarly, for MES, the value lies in the countless events that are planned and the knowledge and thought that they inspire and provide.

However, despite the productivity of these sessions, and the easy marketability and potential appeal to grad schools of, say, a pre-law student who is president of the pre-law society or a pre-med student who is president of MES, it leaves little room for personal expression and creativity. I learned the hard way that there are only a limited number of extracurricular activities a student can devote herself to with the heavy workload of a dual curriculum. Of course, there are students who are passionate about law, medical ethics, or whatever the themes of the clubs they lead might be. But this is misleading.

As a pre-med student, during my first year I was privy to the career-centered nature of how students choose their extracurriculars, and opted to participate in clubs I was told would look good on my resume. I quickly found though,

that though I have an interest in health, I was not enjoying the time I had committed to these activities. And since I had chosen to be a part of these clubs so quickly, I had missed out on the opportunity to explore extracurriculars that perhaps were not directly related to pre-med, but still were things I was interested in.

Fortunately since then, I have found my niche in certain extracurriculars and devoted my time to those. And I too perhaps am guilty of using “It looks great on a resume!” to encourage students to participate in a club I am part of. But I encourage all students, no matter what your major or career interests are, to pursue activities that you are truly interested in and not ones that might impress higher-ups down the road. I am of course no job recruiter or graduate school admissions officer, but the value of being able

to passionately devote time to a cause about which you actually care is greater than half-heartedly spending time doing something that you think you should be involved in. At the end of the day, and fortunately, students at our university care about their futures and their professional lives. So for the rest of my time at YU, I’ll have to put up with seeing the word “resume” in my s-stud subject lines. Due to the nature of our school, using this as a means to attract students to clubs and events is ultimately effective. But as you join clubs and attend events, think not about how you will pitch it to future employers. Technically, any activity’s description can be spun to reflect the requirements of the position for which you are applying. Think instead about how college is a time in your life where you can spend time doing things you actually enjoy.



YU: An Educational Institution

Mindy Schwartz
Editor-in-Chief

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to dealing with complex contemporary issues. In explaining his decision after Charlottesville to release the reader exploring the event from different disciplines as opposed to merely releasing a statement of condemnation, President Berman said, “We are not a statement making institution, we are an educational institution, we teach the issues. Our strength is in bringing our enormous intellectual resources to bear on the current contemporary issues of our day.”

So the university should treat this issue as it has treated other complex issues like it and “teach the issues.” As an educational institution this is our responsibility, and as President Berman said himself, it is our unique “strength.”

So how can we enter the dialogue on sexual misconduct in a productive way and truly “teach the issues?” Perhaps a symposium with legal scholars and advocates on statute of limitations reform for child sex abuse and other sexual misconduct may be a good way to educate students. Even if the university would like to, understandably, distance itself for statutes of limitations reform, it could still educate on general issues of sexual misconduct. Hosting an event with Jewish Community Watch, which has held events across North America, to raise awareness among the student body could be a good way to start. Tradition, the journal of the RCA, just released a new issue on sexual abuse in the Orthodox



community—a round table with the authors of some of the articles featured in the issue could be another productive way to begin an educational dialogue. The RCA provided RIETS and GPATS students with copies of the journal. Maybe YU could supplement additional copies for the student body and discussion groups could be organized.

While students can, and should, take initiative and request events on this important issue, the university should not wait for students to take initiative on an issue as critical as this. The university administration should lead the way and start this dialogue. Whatever route the university would choose to take to start that dialogue, sexual misconduct is certainly just the sort of issue on which YU’s “enormous intellectual resources” could, in some way, be brought “to bear.”

YU certainly has made mistakes in the past, but I want to emphasize that I do not bring up these mistakes

to rehash old sins or further embarrass this institution. While some may accuse me of trying to weigh down the new administration at a time of great momentum, arguing that it is better to leave this issue, and all issues relating to it, in the past, I believe that the we can longer deny that the past is still with us—of course it still affects the victims, but it also still affects the mentality of this university.

It is therefore precisely at this moment of increased momentum that these issues must be addressed with the honesty and openness that this “world of tomorrow” requires of us. I bring these issues up because I love this university, consider it a religious and intellectual home, and want it to live up to its true “strength.” I bring up these issues because it is time for the past to stop hindering us from having open and fruitful conversations about how we can do better in the present.

Confessions of a Student

Irwin Leventer
Staff Writer

I do it. I have for years now, I still do, and I am most certain that I will continue to. People explain to me that I should not be wasting my time. Part of me wants to listen to them, but most of me wants to continue with what I am used to. It may end up hurting me, or at least not getting me where I aim to be, yet I insist on being obdurate and unchanging.

The reason I read my textbooks, while it may not be the most productive thing to do as far as my GPA is concerned, is that I am enthralled by this world and I want to know all that I can about it. My textbooks are filled with thousands of lines of intrigue. Already written and waiting to be discovered are what we know of the ways of the world, body, mind, our fellow humans, and on and on. All of it is already released and ready for the binge-watch of the century on a quiet library floor.

All of this excitement is bound up with a catch. The downside of spending so much time bingeing on textbook reading is that I am left with no time to focus

on what actually counts when it comes to succeeding in my classes: memorizing test banks. No matter how much textbook reading I do, no matter how many diagrams I draw or problems I solve, I can’t possibly remember all of what I’m imbibing with the same fidelity as someone with a condensed list of the necessary facts. They have the unfailing filter, while come test-study time, I must search through thousands of chocolate bars without much of an inkling as to what the golden ticket might look like. But oh, how that chocolate is sweet!

There needs to be a change in how our knowledge is tested. No one can be blamed for using old tests to study when it makes study time to test taking time a ratio of one, especially when textbook reading cannot even remotely compete with such efficiency. But the first step to a solution, as every truly diligent student will drink to, is the making of new tests! Tests that aren’t reprints from 2014 with the date changed to match today. It may come as

a surprise, but most students aren’t thrown off by this date change and can successfully recall the necessary answers from the bank in spite of it.

But this alone is unhelpful. The second and even more important step is that the new tests, once they are made, should be catered to vibrantly reflect the knowledge that can only have been acquired from someone who worked hard on the readings and problems assigned. If the tests were already made this way, then this whole problem would not exist, as the students who cared about the class would far outperform the test-bankers, and reading the textbook would actually be worthwhile for doing well.

These changes have not been made, and until they are made, I would like to share some thoughts to help your curiosity and love of knowledge take you through those textbook pages and class readings. My uncle told me recently that I should be grateful for what I have, the ability to study all day, because someday that won’t be a possibility. I took this very much to heart. We are surrounded with such goodness in that we can sit in comfortable chairs, in warm, quiet rooms, not hungry or thirsty, not sick or poor or wanting of anything, and learn about the world. Try to realize that whatever text you have in front of you, whatever words you are reading, it may be that you will never encounter them again. They may never have the chance to affect you if you don’t let them now.

While we wait for the reward to actually come from test grades, for now, let us bask in the reward of learning for its own sake. Teddy Roosevelt makes this point nicely: “Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.” We students are in the Eden of work worth doing. It is important to, from time to time, take a deep, juicy breath and reify that fact. Write it out, hang it on your wall, make it your mantra, you do you. Take this opportunity and suck it dry, for if you delay it will wither of its own accord. Read, learn, think, ask, get excited about our world. And so we go.



Share your observations, write for The Observer

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