

**DOV HONICK**  
 Arthur Phillips gets all *Inception* on you with a mind- and genre-bending mystery



ARTS 16

**ALEX PORCELAIN**  
 It's impossible to be frum and have Facebook. Unless you follow Alex's rules



SCIENCE 18

**TALIA KAUFMAN**  
 Miss Middot is back. Don't want to see her? At least have the decency to say "hi"



SCENE 19

# The COMMENTATOR

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## Mevateir on Masmidim? Full Scholarships Halved

BY JOSHUA FREUNDEL

The Yeshiva University Masmidim Honors Program, which “offers accelerated study and scholarship support to a small group of budding Torah scholars,” according to the program description, will continue to offer scholarships next year, though of considerably smaller sizes. According to Rabbi Yona Reiss, the Max and Marion Grill Dean of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) and Director of the Masmidim Program (which operates under the Mazer Yeshiva Program), future Masmidim scholarships will cover half of tuition. Up to this point, the program offered full scholarships to accepted students.

The program was designed to be a counterbalance to academic scholarships, for students who demonstrate “potential to become genuine *talmidei chachamim*.” Students receiving scholarships are required to participate in a more rigorous schedule in Torah studies, particularly Talmud, including mandatory weekly night *sedarim* and *bechinot*

See **Masmidim**, page 4

## Sex, Scandal, and the Response of Our Orthodox Institutions

BY JOSHUA FREUNDEL

I would like to connect two recent events that have shaken up the Modern Orthodox world and, closer to home, our YU community. The first is the scandal over the article that ran in the *YU Beacon*, detailing a (truthful, it now seems) premarital sexual encounter between a guy and a woman from Yeshiva Uni-

versity. In the past week, “How Do I Even Begin to Explain This” has reached an absurd level of media coverage reserved only for the kinds of scandals that have sex appeal coupled with the ability to assault what is seen as “religious regressivism.” The *Beacon* Article will likely join the Gay Panel aftermath and the Madoff scandal as the biggest institutional embarrassments in my three years at YU. The other,

lesser-known event was the issuing of a statement, signed by about one hundred Orthodox rabbis, strongly objecting to a same-sex marriage performed in a synagogue by Steve Greenberg, the self-proclaimed “gay Orthodox rabbi.” The statement declared, with force, “a union not sanctioned by Torah law is not an Orthodox marriage.”<sup>1</sup>

Aside from the obvious connection that both documents at issue re-

peat the word “sex” enough times to make Howard Stern blush, commentators on both events lobbied nearly identical criticisms about the outspoken responses. A month before the *Beacon* article came out, another article ran that detailed the thoughts of a serial killer as he remembered a murder he had committed. In the real world, Orthodox people have

See **Orthodox Response**, page 9

## YC Curriculum Revamped Amid Faculty Debate, Luders Steps Down

BY MICHAEL SILVERSTEIN

Just a few weeks ago, no faculty members were willing to speak to *The Commentator* about Yeshiva College’s new curriculum, which has been finalized after many years of quiet development.

But on Thursday, December 15, during Club Hour, Deans Frederic Sugarman, Barry Eichler, Raji Viswanathan and Rabbi Yona Reiss held a meeting with student leaders to unveil plans for the new curriculum. At this meeting, Viswanathan outlined the new curriculum, and explained the new “core courses” that will replace the current general requirements.

See **Core Curriculum**, page 4



If Benjamin Smith were not in SYMS and graduating this semester, some of his future classes in Belfer Hall would probably be part of the new YC curriculum.

## An Inside Look at The Sheik Jarrah Solidarity Movement How a human rights NGO lost its way, and its message

BY GAVRIEL BROWN

This Tuesday, Seth Morrison, a board member of the Jewish National Fund, resigned from his duties. In a letter to the *Jewish Daily Forward*, Morrison claimed that “A subsidiary of the Israeli branch of the JNF launched eviction proceedings against the Sumarin family, who live in the Silwan neighborhood of East Jerusalem.” He then revealed that the JNF has transferred properties in East Jerusalem numerous times to “Elad, a settler organization whose purpose is to ‘Judaize’ East Jerusalem.” He concluded, “I

fear that such actions endanger Israel’s future as a secure and democratic state.” Morrison, however, is not the first to protest these actions.

Seven floors of recently quarried Jerusalem stone wrapped this citadel. Metal shutters covered small windows. An iron gate was the only entrance into the compound. It was built for protection, stability and security. It was white, tall, commanding, and, well, beautiful. Above the imposing walls, the tops of newly planted eucalyptus and olive trees waved in the soft spring breeze.

Outside the walls of the bastion, the dirty beige houses were crum-

See **Sheik Jarrah**, page 13

## IBC to Award Credits for Shacharit

BY GABRIEL WEINBERG

As Isaac Breuer College (IBC) students registered for classes last week, they found that a new elective course was listed to fulfill part of their Jewish Studies curricula: “Explanation of Prayer.” Although many were surprised by this new class, it was actually announced in an email dated December 10, 2011 from Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies, with the following description: “The course will be explanatory prayer and discuss the prac-

tices, *minhagim* and structure of the prayer service, as well as the service itself.”

As of Fall 2010, IBC students are required to take 15, instead of 12, Jewish studies credits each semester, ranging from *halakha* and *hashkafa* to Bible and Talmud. With an obligatory fifteen credits, equivalent to five classes, per semester, IBC students end up taking five finals during reading week. This hurts IBC students, who have substantially less finals-preparation time than men in other morning programs.

See **IBC Credits**, page 5



Protestors at the gates of Ma'ale David.



# STAFF EDITORIALS

## Kill the Apathy Before You Can't

BY NATHANIEL JARET,  
Arts & Culture Editor

I was recently diagnosed with acute senioritis. Not the pandemic metastatic variant whose contagious qualities infect everyone who comes in contact with the carrier—I've caught the slow, debilitating, immensely personal kind that causes reclusive escapes to an inadequately heated, radiator-clanging bedroom and gradually atrophies every mental circuit in the brain, creating an intellectual near-apathy that would concern even a troglodyte reveling in the chemical process of combustion. The type I've got, instead of just effecting a three-point GPA downward spiral or the neat swapping of class time with Modern Warfare 3, has brought about a systematic disenchantment with the academy and with the value of acquiring knowledge for its own. And this frightens me.

I was recently speaking to a close friend who graduated last year, and he told me that, with the hectic demands of a full-time job, he often glances with nostalgic admiration at the intellectual fervor of Yeshiva students that occupies his Mini-Feed. "YU censored what?" "Get off your moral high horse and see some of Israel's faults!" "It had the word BRA in it?" "THAT IS A TOTAL MISREAD OF THE PASUK" "Rabbi Ethan Tucker, @YU, 8PM Tonight!" "Baruch Dayan Emet, Christopher Hitchens." "More proof that Michelle Bachman is dumber than a potato: (link to YouTube)." "The last verse in *Tehillim* 137 is a disturbing call for infanticide." *Ad infinitum*.

In my friend's own words, "I kind of miss...you know...caring."

These are my last few weeks at Yeshiva University (Class of January 2012, woot woot!), and I can't help but reflect upon the opportunities I've had here to engage some of the smartest and most nuanced people that I've ever met, whether over lunch, through vitriolic exchanges on Facebook, in *shiur*, in class, over two-dollar beers at La Casa del Mofongo (St. Nick between 182<sup>nd</sup> and 183<sup>rd</sup>—and a great happy hour, by the way) in a professor's office, or even at home. And all this tends to

come to a screeching halt upon donning the cap and robe of reality. It's hard to be involved even part-time with issues such as what it means for YU to censor or enforce a Beren dress code when you're simply not in that world anymore, when you're trying to meet the constraining demands of a job. Yes, many of us stay in school for another degree after our undergraduate years, but this second set of schooling almost always assumes a more vocational inflection, and this eventual shift necessarily reduces the diversification of our knowledge, of our debates, of our intellectual passions.

Yes, this phenomenon can be combated. Yes, we can do our best to stay involved and fiery and intellectually invested and communally active. But it's going to be much, much harder. My graduated friend, and his roommate, and most of their Upper West Side friends (he reports), are living proof of that. Come Shabbat, most of them just want to chill out and enjoy the weekend. That's not to say that intelligent conversation and intellectual exchange does not happen after you graduate. But it will decidedly remain a mere icing on your rushed, 10-minutes-before-Shabbat cake.

I'm going to be in the IDF in a few months, the place where brains go to die. And I'm terrified of reaching that point which my friend reports occurs only a few weeks after graduation, where I just don't "care" anymore. I already feel it happening. Our college years, with our meals cooked for us and our rent check being drawn on someone else's bank account, are nothing less than a precious commodity, to be milked for all they're worth. I implore you, don't let your parents shell out upwards of \$120K for an emblazoned piece of cardstock that might possibly assist you in securing gainful employment. That would be a total and obscene waste of money.

Apocalyptic punch-line: You will never have another opportunity in your lives, except maybe to a lesser extent sitting around the octogenarian bridge table as you lose a few nickels and a lemon-flavored sucking candy to a portly woman named Ethel, to sit around all day and pay for the privilege to think and learn with a slew of immensely intelligent people about a myriad of issues.

Don't blow it.

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The Commentator is the official student newspaper of Yeshiva University. For 75 years, The Commentator has served students and administrators as a communicative conduit; a kinetic vehicle disseminating undergraduate social, religious, and academic beliefs across the student bodies; and a reliable reflection of Yeshiva student life to the broader Jewish and American communities. The Commentator staff claims students spanning the diverse spectrum of backgrounds and beliefs represented at Yeshiva. We are united by our passion for living the ideals of Torah u-Maddah, and commitment to journalistic excellence.



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You'll try to fight it, but you're  
gonna be sad without  
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Email [CommieChief@yu.edu](mailto:CommieChief@yu.edu) to get some.





**1 Triple Ordering**  
It has come to our attention that some people are unaware of the various strategies of ordering food at Grandma's Pizza. Here's a tip: order three things and hope at least one gets to you. But seriously—it actually works.



**2 The Holiday Spirit**  
Don't pretend like you don't love the lights, the music, and the happy smiles you've encountered lately. And if you don't love Dominique the Donkey, you're probably not really Jewish.



**3 Holiday Sales**  
Yes, I know, we already upped the holidays, but this one aspect deserves special recognition. I don't care what holiday it is; if sweaters and cardis are 50% off, I'm there.



**4 New Girl**  
If you haven't seen it yet, you haven't seen anything. And hey, there have only been nine episodes so you can totally catch up. You'll thank us later, come reading week.



**5 Café Revolutions**  
The powers that be have removed the seven-foot *mechitzot* from the café line and replaced them with retractable belt barriers. Looks like YU is moving to the left; just wait, next thing you know they'll let girls into the Heights Lounge.



**6 Apple**  
Rumors have spread that the dominating tech company has finally decided to give dividends. Prepare to see a new, booming stock price.



**7 End of War**  
The final troops left Iraq this past week. We salute the men who fought for our freedom and honor the memories of those we lost.

7 UP ⚡ 7 DOWN



**1 Eternal Semesters**  
How much does it suck to have *three weeks* left when all the other colleges are already done? So much—that's how much.



**2 Vacation plans**  
Vacation plans—SICK. Forgot to make vacation plans—@#!



**3 Small Libraries**  
As finals quickly approach, YU libraries are starting to fill up and simply don't have enough seats. Word to the wise: don't be tempted to sit between the bookshelves on the fourth floor; fifth-floor Hassidim are known to hide there when their special spots are taken.



**4 Timeline**  
The new Facebook interface is so annoying. We finally get what our parents feel like when they see computers. Hopefully it'll grow on us, like Google's new look.



**5 Kim Jong Il**  
North Korea's first and only leader died of a heart attack this week. According to Korean media outlets, Jong Il was a serious golfer, shooting 38 under par, 25 shots better than the best round in history. Tiger—you can breathe easy now.



**6 Maccabeats**  
Nice job guys. Way to make it look nothing like last year's video.



**7 Christopher Hitchens**  
The world mourns the death of an intellectual giant. His death really makes me doubt god's existence.

# Letters & Responses

The availability of pornographic material on the Internet through a click has led many major companies in the U.S. to introduce a filter on all the computers in their offices. Whether or not this is the appropriate response to Yeshiva's students not being immune to temptation should be discussed. The process described by Rabbi Reiss of a committee including student leaders, Dr. Pelcovitz, representatives of the YU *Areivim*, some Roshei Yeshiva, and other members of the administration hardly sounds like a fiat from the Roshei Yeshiva. From the anger expressed by comments made by some of the students one would get the impression that this was a major encroachment on their freedom. Has all sense of proportion been lost?

**Rabbi Yosef Blau**  
Senior Mashgiach Ruchani  
Yeshiva University

ten overzealous, this software does not interfere with web browsing. It does the work of a scalpel rather than a hatchet.

5) *Areivim* has no official agenda regarding a university-wide filter. Our leaders have personal opinions, but this is totally irrelevant to the mission of *Areivim*. We must correct two-thirds of Abramowitz's evaluation that "no group was able to effect university policy as quickly as YU *Areivim*." We have neither effected anything nor even discussed this with the administration for over two years. The one-third that may be accurate is "quickly"—if we had effected something, perhaps two years would be relatively quick for university policy.

6) *Areivim* began to prevent pornography addiction for those who wish to avoid challenges. We have no idea why anyone would claim that *Areivim* "board members struggled with addictions to pornography." This is untrue. We choose to use this software to remove temptations. (We guess many of our members have similar motivations, but statistics are impossible to know, because reports are confidential between members and their partners.) We would like to believe that this is an honest mistake rather than an offensive *ad hominem* attack. Regardless, statements like this are the chief reason for our leadership's desire for anonymity.

7) *Areivim* has received signed endorsements from many *roshei yeshiva* encouraging YU students to join this program; a full list is available on our website. The software is developed by a for-profit company that is not affiliated with any Christian organization. When asked, one prominent Rosh Yeshiva commented, "Just as there's no problem buying a car from a Christian, there's nothing wrong with getting this service from a Christian." For those who don't feel comfortable with the privacy policy of Covenant Eyes, Google, or any other web service, it's easy to sign up with a pseudonym.

We hope that that addressed all of the concerns raised in the article. Any comments or questions are always welcome at our website, [www.yuarevim.org](http://www.yuarevim.org).

**The YU *Areivim* Team**

To the Editor:

As the organizers of YU *Areivim*, we'd like to contribute a few comments regarding the recent article "Rabbi Yona Reiss Unveils Plan for Internet Censorship: Dormitory Pornography to Be Blocked," by Benjamin Abramowitz. Given that we were not contacted for comments on the article, we respectfully ask for the opportunity to clarify a few points that were unfortunately misunderstood. (For the future, we can be contacted through our website, [yuarevim.org](http://yuarevim.org).)

1) *Areivim* has not participated in the administration's discussions regarding mandatory Internet filtering. We have no idea who started this rumor. Here's what happened: Over two years ago, we requested the administration's cooperation with our voluntary program, to raise awareness of the issue and provide a solution. We joined one meeting on this, which seemed relatively productive. But after that, we were never again invited to partake in the administration's discussions.

2) Therefore, we cannot verify whether student leadership participated in these discussions. If they did not, then we completely sympathize with Abramowitz's concerns regarding the administration's imposing unilateral restrictions on the student body. Otherwise, we would suggest that the student leadership improve their communication with the student body. We need our student representatives to respond to Abramowitz's evaluation that "by and large, students have been unaware of the actual plans, with many under the impression that 'RIETS is going to get rid of all computers on campus.'" Perhaps we need ystuds from the student council to reassure us that RIETS is not a Luddite institution.

3) *Areivim* never claimed to "constitute a representative sample of the Yeshiva student body." This is the role of the student leaders, as mentioned. We constitute a representative sample of our membership.

4) *Areivim*'s mission statement is to facilitate those who wish to join the Covenant Eyes monitoring service. All work is done by volunteers and the program is entirely voluntary. Our members' Internet activities are monitored, and each week their chosen buddies (usually friends or family members) receive an email summarizing possibly objectionable websites. Whereas filters are of-

To the Editor:

While I see no reason to respond to the personal insults of Yitzhak Bronstein, there are some important issues that he raises that (I feel) do require a response.

**A. Da'as Torah**

Homosexuality is described in the Torah as a *to'evah* (abomination). It is also one of the sins for which the Torah requires *yehareg v'al ya'avur* (one should allow oneself to be killed rather than violate this sin). It would seem quite logical that any discussion about such a religiously "charged" matter should certainly have the input of *roshei yeshiva* in terms of both *halakha* and *hashkafa*. For Orthodox Jews – for whom Torah is central – I do not understand how there could be a thought of excluding such input. Mr. Bronstein cites an example of the *rosh yeshiva* who had "never been approached by a homosexual student" yet was most vocally opposed to the gay panel. First of all, there may be perfectly valid *halakhic/hashkafic* reasons for such opposition, anyway. I

See **Letters & Responses**, page 7



# Core Curriculum

*continued from front page...*

The new curriculum replaces the current general requirement courses with core courses. As opposed to requiring students to take the classic courses, such as two humanities courses or two laboratory sciences, students will have a chance to take a wide variety of courses, within a set structure of eight categories. The titles of the eight categories of courses are: First Year Writing, First Year Seminar, Cultures over Time, Contemporary World Cultures, Interpreting the Creative, Natural World, Experimental and Quantitative Methods, and Human Behavior and Social Institutions.

Aside from the First Year Writing classes and First Year Seminar, these courses are entirely new to Yeshiva University. They will be interdisciplinary courses, created by faculty members from multiple departments. For example, Cultures over Time is currently being developed by some of the university's political scientists, historians, Jewish historians, and English department faculty. Each course category has overall objectives established, and every semester, five or six different

courses will be offered under each category. Professors ultimately get to decide exactly what to include in their syllabi, but they must work in concert with other faculty members associated with the relevant course category to ensure that the course fulfills the overall objectives of that category.

As of now, the number of Jewish Studies requirements will remain the same, at eight, although there is talk of reducing the Bible requirement to three courses from the current four. In these discussions, the Yeshiva College deans did try to engage the RIETS office, which is in charge of the Jewish studies requirements, but the RIETS office has yet to respond with suggestions or input.

Viswanathan and Eichler stressed that there were multiple benefits of these new interdisciplinary courses. For example, the overall number of credits that students will be required to take will be reduced from 53-55 credits (20 courses) to 44 credits (16 courses). This will allow students, even after taking into account their 32 Israel credits, to have the option of taking more elective courses.

Another benefit to the new system is that it allows students to ob-

tain a wide breadth of knowledge and to experience different fields of study and disciplines that they may have completely passed over in the old system. Eichler gave an excellent example to demonstrate this point. He explained that a student, who, for example, received a 5 on the AP Psychology exam and took one political science course, might never take an economics course. Under the new system, whether or not the student takes a course taught by an economics professor, some of his courses will incorporate economic theory. In this way, students will be exposed to a variety of disciplines in their first year or two in college.

Aside from the creation of six new categories of courses (which will eventually translate into 30 to 36 new courses per a semester), the new curriculum recreates the First Year Writing courses. The First Year Writing course and First Year Seminar, which will replace the current Composition and Rhetoric I and II requirements, respectively, will become three-credit courses that meet for the standard hour and fifteen minutes, for, noted Viswanathan, the professors found that the current 50-minute slots were not just enough time to teach the courses. Eichler added that this change was also a result of an audit of the writing from students of the regular composition course and the current First Year Seminar courses, which found that the writing from the First Year Seminar students was much stronger.

The new First Year Seminar (FYS), a course to be taken during your second semester on campus, will be very similar to the current second-semester Honors seminar. Although the course will be writing-intensive, an English professor will not necessarily teach it, nor does it have to be an English course. But, to ensure that whoever teaches the FYS courses is comfortable teaching and grading writing, Professor Gillian Steinberg is the head of a task force designed to help faculty members teach and grade writing.

The FYW and FYS courses, along with the other core curriculum courses, are slated to be taught by full-time professors. There will be "no more adjuncts [teaching these courses]," Viswanathan firmly stated. The FYS will be taught by writing specialists, not just by English professors.

Viswanathan and Eichler acknowledged that many of the new course categories place a particular emphasis on culture. Viswanathan noted that "this developed from internal faculty discussions" and meetings. Eichler explained that, in these meetings, the faculty asked, "Are we really doing the right thing with our students in educating them, and having them come out as well-rounded and informed students who can deal with issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?" According to Viswanathan,

the answer was no. She explained that the "faculty really felt like we are not educating our students to function in the world today."

The new courses will examine cultures that are "specifically non-Western," noted Eichler. He explained that through the study of culture, students will hopefully learn to ask questions, such as, "What is a culture?" "How do you define 'culture?'" "How is culture studied?" By studying these issues, Eichler further added, students will be able "to get an understanding of what a global society means."

The courses that address culture are not the only core classes designed with practical intentions. Eichler explained that many of the core classes will be based around "the issues that occur in society today," such as the current banking crisis or healthcare reform. These types of curricula could be studied from an interdisciplinary perspective, and will often consist of topics that even those majoring in related subjects (such as economics and biology for the above two topics) may never address throughout their studies.

While no student will be required to take his core courses in his first year or two on campus, Academic Advising will recommend that he finish these courses in the first two years on campus. Viswanathan and Eichler said that although one could finish all of the core classes in a year, most students, partially due to their Jewish studies requirements, would require a year and a half or two full years.

While the new curriculum has many advantages, there are a few drawbacks to the new system. At the meeting on Thursday, student leaders pointed out multiple downsides to the new curriculum. Ari Gartenberg (YC '12), Co-Chair of the Honors Council, noted that pre-med students, especially those majoring in a hard science, will have a difficult time finishing all of their core requirements in the first two years, and may be required to take their core classes in their third year. Also, this may require pre-meds to stay for four years on campus, especially because students will be unable to use AP credits to exempt themselves from the core classes.

Daniel First (YC '13), Vice Chair of the Honors Council, voiced another objection, explaining that since the "electives in secondary fields will no longer satisfy core requirements, and all of the majors will be lengthened, it is hard to imagine anyone being able to pursue a serious course of study in a secondary field, even if they stay for four years." First further noted that this will have a significant effect on the academic plans of future Honors students, as many Honors students double major.

Another drawback of the new curriculum is that students will be unable to use Advanced Placement

(AP) credit or other college courses to fulfill any of these requirements. The one exception to this is that a student who has a year of hard sciences with lab and a year of math is exempt from Quantitative Methods. Still, students will be able to use AP credits to advance in their major. Further, transfer students will be unable to fulfill the core requirements with transfer credits, and would be required to take the core classes. Viswanathan did note that they will probably scale transfer students' new curriculum requirements based upon how far into college the student is.

While all of the above seems new and exciting, current students need not worry, for while the new requirements go into effect for Fall 2012, current students are "grandfathered" into the old requirements. Still, if a student wishes to take one of these new courses, he is welcome to. Further, students can fulfill some of their general requirements with some of the new-curriculum courses.

The new curriculum is certainly a major step forward for Yeshiva University. For over 75 years, the curriculum has not undergone any significant changes. This attempt to make students more prepared for life when they leave college and to expose students to a variety of disciplines and cultures is undoubtedly a lofty one. Although there were mixed responses to Thursday's presentation, a full evaluation of the new curriculum is premature, and can only be made after the curriculum is implemented and has had time to evolve. Still, from the details provided at the meeting last week, it appears that the administration and faculty members have created a product that may successfully accomplish these goals.

Faculty members, however, are not quite so sanguine. Many speculate that the new curriculum will wreak gradual dissolution of many YC departments. Departments like Philosophy, Art, Music, and Political Science already struggle to offer more than a handful of courses each semester to the very few students who major in these subjects or choose to take electives in these fields. Under the new curriculum, YC students will have even less of an incentive to take such courses, as many of them fulfill none of the new requirements.

Dr. Joseph Luders, former Chair of the Department of Political Science, has stepped down from his position in anticipation of the negative consequences the new curriculum might have on his department.

A source says that professors from many departments were unaware of the curricular developments until the meeting with student leaders. These professors are mostly the ones whose departments the new curriculum may severely weaken.

## Masmidim

*continued from front page...*

to test their progress throughout the program. The program currently consists of 29 students.

The reason for the cutback was purely financial, explained Rabbi Reiss. This is another part of the broad attempt of the university to adapt to the current economic climate. Rabbi Reiss notes, however, that "those students who initially received full scholarships will maintain those scholarships throughout their time in YU." The cutbacks have affected the university broadly, including denying tenure recently to several professors who were relatively popular among the student body.

Despite the cutbacks, Rabbi Reiss stresses that the program still has its same mission, to identify students who show excellence in Talmudic study coming into YU and encourage them to push themselves to become intellectual leaders in the Jewish community. While there is no requirement to follow the Masmidim Program with a career in the rabbinate, a fair number of Masmidim graduates go on to study for *semikha* (rabbinic ordination) at RIETS.

The cutbacks are not the only continuing changes in the Masmidim Program. There have been structural changes recently as well, specifically regarding the way the program relates to students. A current Masmid explained that these changes were directly in response to the input of current members of the program. "Starting last year, af-

ter receiving numerous complaints about some of the requirements, the *hanhala* [leadership] came up with a couple of reforms: making the *parasha bechinas* more manageable, as well as creating two tracks for *bekiyus*," he said. This student explained another reform, one "that truly shows the direction that the program needs to continue to go in: making the program more devoted to the individual growth of each of its members."

The Masmidim Honors Program has been criticized occasionally since its formation. Among the criticisms lodged is that the university should not pay for something that students would do anyway, namely study Talmud seriously, and that incentivizing them with scholarships may give the appearance of trivializing Torah study. Rabbi Reiss, however, sees this in precisely the opposite light. "There was a desire to highlight the importance that we assign to proficiency in Torah learning," he said. It seemed logical to him that "just as we have an honors program for the college, there would be an honors program for those who have demonstrated excellence in Talmudic study."

Rabbi Reiss ended on a note of encouragement for anyone who takes their Torah learning in YU seriously. "The truth is that all of our students who commit themselves to fulfill the mandate of "*vehagita bo yomam va'laylah*" [to meditate on the Torah day and night] are *masmidim*, and we are very proud of each and every one of them."



# Yeshiva College EDge Event Offers Direction for Local Public School Students



YU students met with Washington Heights public school students to discuss educational and vocational opportunities.

By JOSH KRISCH

Yeshiva University has had its share of pizza-driven stampedes, from *Semikha* celebrations to standing-room-only lectures, yet perhaps no event in recent history has drawn as diverse a crowd as did “Design Your Future: Choosing Your Career Path.” On Friday, December 16, twenty trained staff from the undergraduate community at Yeshiva University and over forty local high school students converged in our own Furst Hall to share in a presentation about careers and job prospects, complete with noted lecturers and, of course, pizza.

The student-run organization College EDge organized this event (with the help of SCWSC, YCSA and YSU) and functions regularly as the representative body of Yeshiva University to the local community. College EDge offers mentoring and tutoring in our neighborhood and

across New York City to those who are not privy to help that many of us took for granted in high school. “Our now-signature pizza lunches,” quipped founder and President Jonah Rubin (YC ’12), “accomplish one of the many indirect but important goals of College EDge: the integration of Yeshiva University with its community, bridging the gap, breaking the barrier.” Lunch followed presentations by Ms. Laurie Davis, Director of Counseling & Programming at YU’s Career Development Center, and Ms. Lolita Wood-Hill, Director of Yeshiva College Pre-Health Advisement. Undergraduate mentors then broke into discussion groups with the high school students to discuss strategies that could be used in applying these presentations to real-life scenarios. Chaim Szachtel (YC ’13), Event Coordinator for College EDge, described these group discussions as, “a time for introspection, allowing students, some for the first time,

to truly evaluate their interests and their skills, and learn about different possible jobs correlating well with their abilities.”

The day’s events centered around inspiring local high school students and offering them strategies for pursuing their goals. Wood-Hill said of the presentations, “Laurie Davis provided the students with the tools they need to think about their career options. I tried to help them understand the reality of moving forward with any goal.” Friday’s program followed last semester’s College EDge First Annual Seminar and Fair Day, which connected 77 public high school students from three boroughs with over 25 colleges and trade schools. That day’s events also included workshops on SAT preparation, financial aid, writing personal statements, tours of Yeshiva University, and a panel discussion featuring representatives from CUNY, SUNY, private, and Ivy League colleges. When not

busy with major seminars and fairs, College EDge regularly offers services to public high school students, ranging from mentorship programs to help with college essays. Lauren Sherman (SCW ’12), Vice President of College EDge, explained that, “The mentorship program maintains student-College EDge relationships throughout the year...and at the suggestion of faculty at Washington Irving High, will be expanded to other schools in the near future.”

In issue 76.5 of *The Commentator*, College EDge came under fire for what some perceived as its insensitive ad campaign. Some students went as far as to call College EDge condescending and imposing. Rubin responded to these allegations with a tongue-in-cheek editorial titled, “Underrepresented Inner-City Teens Should Not Have Opportunities,” originally published online and re-printed in this issue. Rubin wrote of the students whom College EDge impacts, “They want

to succeed academically, and they want the opportunity for a bright future. Yet they struggle with limitations many of us cannot fathom, limitations they could not prevent, limitations they do not deserve.”

College EDge attempts to bring the ample resources of Yeshiva University to those who cannot access such gifts on their own. The students that College EDge works with today may be the college graduates and leaders of tomorrow. Yeshiva University students, staff and faculty can look to College EDge with pride, as an example of how a small group of undergraduate students can apply their ample resources to effecting important change in their community.

*College EDge also strives to offer as many opportunities for YU student involvement as possible. More information can be found on their website: [www.collegeedge.us](http://www.collegeedge.us).*

## IBC Credits

*continued from front page...*

With the addition of “Explanation of Prayer,” or *Shacharit*, as a course, IBC students will have the option to join an official IBC *minyan* four days per week that will count for Jewish Studies credit.

This is not the first time that a Yeshiva University morning program has accepted *tefilah* for course credit. The Mechinah program used to have *Shacharit* as a mandatory part of its daily schedule.

IBC Student Body President Gilad Besterman explained the benefits of this new course, noting that “this is the best of both worlds. IBC guys can take *Shacharit* and create a more manageable schedule at the same time.” There are already 23 students signed up in this class, with a high cap of 75. Besterman hopes, as an added incentive, that the IBC Student Council will be able to sponsor breakfast for students who attend the class.

Adding this course to the schedule was a surprisingly quick and simple process. Besterman said that it “took only a week” to get approval from the appropriate administrators. The comparatively speedy development of this course is surprising.

Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky stressed that this is not a requirement, but a new elective in the IBC program.

The new course will have the same attendance requirements as any other IBC morning course. Additionally, there will be a short explanation of a specific part of the *tefilah* at the end of *davening*. If students miss more than the specified number of classes in a semester, they will fail the course, as in all IBC classes.

Some students are surprised by the announcement of this new course. Oliver Sax, who switched to IBC from the Mazer Yeshiva Program (MYP), explained that the email from Rabbi Kalinsky pushed him to switch back to MYP. He said, “It’s unfair for the students going to IBC expecting a growth in Torah, because now they are implementing a program that hinders that growth and they are misappropriating the value of prayer. Prayer shouldn’t be something you’re obliged to go to get an “A”—it should be between you and God.” This may be the root of a larger problem for IBC, regarding the difficulty of the coursework that many call into question.

Besterman hopes that this will change widespread perception of IBC, a program not known for its *minyan* attendance. “If students get into the hang of it [*minyan*] now, hopefully it will continue in the future.”

## Student Councils Create Innovative “Maccalympics”

By MICHAEL SILVERSTEIN

Every year around Hanukkah time, students are bombarded with emails about the various Hanukkah events around Wilf Campus, including the annual Hanukkah concert and SOY-sponsored Hanukkah *chagigah*. In addition to these annual events, the various student councils of both campuses have created another event for the season, the “Maccalympics.”

This event, which is only supposed to run for two hours, is not the classic student-run event at YU. The Maccalympics will be a carnival-like event themed around Hanukkah, with a color-war twist to it. Activities include donut decorating, latke tasting, and Wii Mario kart. To enhance the entertainment and lend a holiday-appropriate air of rivalry to the evening, the night’s activities will progress according to an established color-war agenda.

On December 26, when students walk into Weissberg Commons for the Maccalympics, each student will be assigned to a team. Then, the

Maccalympics will officially begin with an Olympic-style opening ceremony, at which point the team captains will be announced. Captains are to serve as “*roshei ruach*,” in charge of elevating and maintaining team spirit, notes Torah Activities Council (TAC) Vice President Talya Laufer (SCW ’13). Throughout the evening, students will be able to earn points for their team through a variety of competitions and activities. Just like color war.

When asked about the origins of this event, Laufer explained that the student councils wanted to create an event that would facilitate an interactive brand of fun, as opposed to the sort generated by a spectator event, hopefully creating a “community Hanukkah experience.” She points out that, last year, at the inaugural Latke-Hamentasch debate,

there was a “great vibe,” and the women’s student councils thought that they could create a similar atmosphere at an event this Hanukkah. The women of the Beren Campus student councils contacted their corresponding Wilf Campus leader, and in the end, the SCWSC, TAC, SYMSSC, YCSA, YSU and SOY/JSC all agreed to sponsor the Maccalympics.

Although all of these student councils agreed to participate in the event, one student leader reported that by early December no one had drawn a final model for the event. Throughout the month of December, the student councils refined their ideas and finalized the details of the event, which, Laufer notes, “incorporated the different visions” of the various student councils.

Asked to describe the goals of the event, Laufer explains, “My hope is that this event will not only provide students with an enjoyable Hanukkah activity, but will also highlight the vibrancy and diversity of the YU community against a unique, decidedly un-scholastic backdrop.”





# Administrators Optimistic About Seforim Sale Changes

By ADAM ROSENBERG

One of the highlights of the Yeshiva University school year is the annual Seforim Sale, a massive undertaking carried out entirely by undergraduates that grosses millions of dollars per year and donates tens of thousands to the Student Life Committees of YU. The Seforim Sale is beneficial to YU because it brings thousands of people to campus, generates thousands of dollars, and provides a selection of over 15,000 books. However, many fiscally irresponsible events from last year's sale have left people worried about its leadership.

In a November 2, 2011, *Commentator* article, "An Open Challenge to the Seforim Sale," former Seforim Sale COO Jonathan Korman (SYMS '10) described the large misuse of funds. He noted that "the board spent \$850 at Le Marais (they had two bottles of wine)" and that "that money could have been used for numerous student events, not the gratification of seven students at Le Marais." In an interview with *The Commentator*, Korman reflected on his own experiences working at the Seforim Sale, describing how the Seforim Sale is "incredible for

promoting Yeshiva University, and how the students can show the face of YU on their own." Yet, at the same time, he warned, "Day-to-day responsibilities were close to a total failure—students need to recognize that there is a lot of stress involved. Cutting corners is not the right approach."

At the November-3 Town Hall Meeting, University President Richard M. Joel addressed these issues. Joel reassured students that "this year will be different" and that through an internal audit staff, and financial management help, the university will "make sure that everything is on the up-and-up." Many students have been confused about how "this year will be different" for the YU Seforim Sale. In an interview with *The Commentator*, Sam Ulrich, this year's Seforim Sale CEO, described some of these changes, specifically what he called "oversight on several levels." For example, Ulrich explains that "Ron Nahum, Director of Finance and Administration for University Life, will be [over]seeing every financial transaction that is made; SYMS accounting professor Michael Strauss will be in charge of overseeing employee hires and internships, and the YU audit department has put together



a manual of things that need to get improved and changed." When asked what the financial aspects of this supervision would entail, Nahum responded that "there will be a review of all planned activities, participation in the coordination of logistics related to the sale, and financial updates on a monthly basis." This overseeing committee will not necessarily approve each of the Seforim Sale's expenses.

With a significantly tighter budget, the Seforim Sale has also taken measures to ensure that they only hire the best employees. The quality of employees is essential for how well the Seforim Sale runs. By add-

ing references, a resume, and an interview into the hiring process, Ulrich hopes that this stricter process will find students dedicated to ensuring the success of the sale, rather than those whose main intention is to socialize. Ulrich emphasized the important role of the employees, saying, "Every student is playing their role as an employee by filling out W4 forms [which holds back federal income tax from paychecks] and making sure we are being run as a professional business. The interview process is making sure we receive the best possible staff."

Responding to Korman's concerns that, in past years, students

have not had access to the financial records of the Seforim Sale, Ulrich said that at the end of the fiscal year, as a 501 C 3 (nonprofit organization) the Seforim Sale's 990 (tax return) is published by the IRS and that "Anyone can access the document after it has been submitted." However, according to Nahum, last year's form is not yet published, and is therefore inaccessible at the moment.

When asked about his prediction for this year's sale, Nahum was optimistic. He commented that "with the level of oversight and scrutiny that the Seforim Sale staff is currently under, their spending will be prudent and appropriate." Stressing the importance of a relationship between the Seforim Sale and Yeshiva University, Nahum also added, "The Seforim Sale is an organization that is independent from the University, so we have little say in how they conduct business. However, because there is an obvious connection to Yeshiva, we have requested and have been granted broader involvement in their business, how it is and should be conducted." With these changes, Ulrich and others are confident that they "will be able to do a good job and continue to flourish."

## Heights Lounge Winter Wonderland



250 snowflakes (and counting), made by everyone from the most skilled artisans to the crudest troglodytes, grace the Heights Lounge's now-slightly-less-exposed brick.

By YEHUDA COHN

Winter weather has reached Washington Heights, but not in the way that you would have expected. Thanks to Super-Senior Tzvi Hametz, the Heights Lounge has been decorated with hundreds of intricately patterned paper snowflakes. At last count there were over 200 snowflakes scattered along the brick walls of the lounge, and the blizzard doesn't seem to be slowing.

It all began, Hametz says, with boredom. He was looking for a diversion, and decided to cut out snowflakes and hang them in his "area," the front corner on the Lounge's upper east side, where Hametz tends to spend most of his time. Pretty soon, he said, people began to take notice. "People kept walking up the stairs and smiling." But Hametz did not want to keep all the fun to himself. Whenever people walked by, he offered them a chance to make a snowflake as well. Pretty soon, it began to snowball, and many more snowflakes found their way to the walls.

Hametz is neither an art major nor minor, and does not have much prior experience in public art installation or even simple arts and crafts. By his estimate, the last time he made a paper snowflake was "in nursery." He adds, however, "I used to work in a day camp." This may be where he acquired his skills.

Hametz claims that making paper snowflakes is simple and easy. "You just cut," he said, noting that his strategy was not all that complicated. "I don't think about it, I just make cuts."

Snowflake making has not been limited to the Yeshiva student body. Hametz was in his corner late one night when one of the workers who cleans the lounge walked by. Hametz asked him to join the fun and make a snowflake. "He just looked at me, confused," Hametz said, "and said that he didn't know how. I told him it was easy and showed him how. When he finished it, he looked at it and then turned to me and asked 'now what?' I told him to hang it up, and he looked even more confused. Once he hung it up, he stepped back and looked at it and said 'wow, this is beautiful.' Now he says 'hi' to me every day."

Student reaction to the decoration has been overwhelmingly positive. Eli Heisler (YC '12) said that "they're nice," but wondered who put them up. Adam Friedman (YC '14) thought that "they certainly liven up the place a little bit," and one YC Senior said that "it brings energy, something exciting, new to the regular day."

Not all were excited by the new décor. One visiting student said, "I personally thought it looked a little childish, and wondered how they got here." He also thought it interfered with his *mincha*, saying, "It distracted my *davening*, wondering how the guitar one was made."

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# Letters & Responses

continued from page 3...

strongly doubt that Mr. Bronstein is *halachically* or *hashkafically* qualified to make such a determination (I know that I am *not*). However, giving Mr. Bronstein the benefit of the doubt, I noted in my original letter that there are “erudite, articulate, and knowledgeable rabbis in RIETS” who could certainly address this issue. Did Mr. Bronstein try to approach anyone else? Further, if he really felt that the Rabbis were “ignorant,” there are fine experts (such as Dr. David Pelcovitz) who could certainly work with the rabbis in helping to develop an appropriate Torah response to the issue of having a “gay panel.” Mr. Bronstein’s reasoning appears to indicate a lack of interest in the Torah viewpoint and more interest in his own agenda.

## B. Support of the Israeli Government

Rabbi H. Schachter *shlita* wrote in the name of Rav Soloveitchik *zatzal* (in “*Nefesh HaRav*”) that our support for the Israeli Government is only within the framework of Torah and *mitzvot*. The entire importance of the “State” is only in terms of its being a part of the rest of the Torah and *mitzvot*. If there is any contradiction between support for the [Israeli] Government and what Hashem demands, there is no question that we do NOT support the government. The Rav himself stated (as quoted in “*Divrei HaRav*”) that “the tie of the Jewish People with the State of Israel is ONLY based upon the eternal world of Torah...” And, in “Thinking Aloud”, the Rav complained that “Zionism – religious Zionism – has replaced Torah.” As Orthodox Jews, then, it behooves us *not* to “automatically” support the Israeli government. Rather, we must always evaluate the actions of the specific government and take respond appropriately. The incidents that I originally cited are not mere speculation and deserve critical analysis – not dismissal. In particular, the conduct of the Shin Bet appears extremely disturbing when one reviews the evidence.

## C. “The Left”

I used the term “so-called left” to refer to the various secular leftist parties (such as Meretz) who have truly demonized the religious citizens in Israel. I specifically used that term because I recognize that there are some leftists who do *not* demonize the religious citizens. However, one has only to look at the history of the State (going back to before its founding) to see how parties such as MAPAI did their best to undermine and marginalize the religious. It is unfortunate, but this still continues in Israel. And, it is far more virulent than the “intolerance of the religious.” As an aside, *Mishpacha* Magazine had an excellent editorial pointing out that even though the “Chareidi” are actually getting, more involved in Israeli society, they are now being

attacked for that. In other words, no matter what Haredi Jews choose to do, the “so-called left” will bash them, anyway. In that light (as well as in light of the historical commemorations of the Rabin Murder which often became events at which the “religious” were condemned), it is certainly accurate to say that “the left continues to be more intolerant than we (i.e., Religious Jews) are.” The above are important issues and I do not claim to state how they should be addressed. However, they should not be ignored nor trivialized as Mr. Bronstein appears to do.

Zvi Weiss  
YC ’71, RIETS ’74

To the Editor:

I agree with Rabbi Weiss that these are important issues and in no way do I feel that they should be ignored or trivialized. I will address his three critiques in the order in which they were raised.

Yes, homosexuality is clearly a religiously charged issue. Yet, that does not mean that simply being a religious figure—or even a leading *rosh yeshiva*—entitles one to broadcast his or her views publicly as an authority on homosexuality. It should be patently obvious that the said figure needs to be acutely familiar with the issue at hand to comment, and it is immensely frustrating when rabbis speak out as authorities on issues in which they lack the necessary background to do so. (In my opinion, this occurs most frequently when rabbis decide to play the character of the political pundit, but that is a topic for another discussion.)

Weiss asks why I did not seek out the position of rabbis – well, it turns out my *rosh yeshiva* at the time was in attendance of the gay panel, which itself was moderated by the *mashgiach* of Yeshiva. I have little doubt that both of these figures had immeasurably more experience in dealing with homosexuals than the *roshei yeshiva* who decided it was their role to defend the purity of our institution by engaging in polemical denunciations of the event. But to be perfectly frank, though I sincerely do appreciate and value their guidance, even if they were not to support the gay panel, it would not have changed my mind. In that sense, I do not feel nearly as confined to blindly follow the dictates of my rabbis based on a radical notion of *Da’as Torah* as does Rabbi Weiss. He concludes his thought by accusing me of having an “agenda” and of not being interested in “the Torah viewpoint.” Perhaps nothing in Rabbi Weiss’s letters reflects his myopia than the supercilious presumption that there is such a thing as “the” Torah viewpoint on any given matter.

In regard to the question about support of the Israeli government, though Rabbi Weiss puts the word in quotes, I never suggested that we

# Underrepresented Inner-City Teens Should Not Have Opportunities

BY JONAH RUBIN

In his censure of the College EDge marketing campaign, “You Had [Insert Privilege Here], Shouldn’t Everyone?” Ezra Seligsohn authoritatively states that “everyone should have a family and community,” but doubts that “anyone is in a position to say” that all should have opportunities facilitating their receipt of a higher education. Against our collective value system, he considers it a privilege and not a right, an amenity and not a need, and maintains that opportunities for higher education should belong solely to the privileged, and no others may lay claim to them. An article entitled “Underrepresented Inner-City Teens Should Not Have Opportunities” would likely be immediately disregarded by any reader for sheer outlandishness, and yet could nonetheless serve as an appropriate heading for Seligsohn’s argument.

Among other clichés, this country was founded on the fundamental principle of equal opportunity. Equal opportunity for everyone, that is: not just for those born privileged. That’s actually the point. This same country later declared education so positively crucial, a need so fundamental, that since 1918, every state required and provided a public school education. For some perspective, consider the fact that it took close to another one hundred years for the US to offer a need as basic as universal healthcare. Education has long been recognized as the key to success, a means of acquiring a skill set or knowledge base with which to build a future, while also providing opportunities for upward mobility. This is why we, blessed with the opportunity to do so, chose to enroll here at Yeshiva University. In a country founded on equality, and in a society that places a premium on education, why are we alone privileged with a higher education? Shouldn’t everyone? It is both surprising and disappointing that this rhetorical question, like the cliché,

“automatically” support the policies of every Israeli government. As anyone who knows me (or has seen my Facebook wall) is well aware, such a claim is laughable – to say the least, I have absolutely no problem with criticizing policies of the Israeli government. If he feels that not following the Orthodox interpretation of *halakha* is a justification for such criticism, it is certainly his prerogative to do so. I was upset not because Weiss questioned the decisions of a particular government, but that he questioned his support for the enterprise of a Jewish state, suggesting that it certain circumstances it behooved us to “reconsider exactly how we relate to a Jewish state” as a whole. Moreover, of course there is



actually needs to be defended.

Seligsohn also compares College EDge to “people who view themselves as superior [and] try to ‘civilize’ their supposed inferiors.” This baseless assumption that College EDge volunteers believe they are “superior” for being “advantaged” undermines and falsely represents their efforts, intentions, and motivation. If we truly believe in equal rights for all, then recognizing when we are relatively advantaged and positioned to share our opportunities becomes our responsibility. We must be aware of any disparity if we wish to create equality. This awareness is by no means an indication of a perceived inherent superiority. In fact, the existence of College EDge proves the opposite: it is because we believe that all are equal, and we are not superior, that we strive to share our privileges with our community. It is he who believes that the privileged alone should remain privileged, and in an unequal distribution of opportunities, who is guilty of considering himself “superior.”

But even worse, Seligsohn’s proposed comparison to people “‘try[ing] to ‘civilize’ their supposed inferiors” implies that our neighbors are ‘uncivilized’, that they do not value, and therefore do not seek, a higher education, and that we, the self-appointed educated elite, have come to impose our values on an unwilling audience. The implication alone is as condescending and insulting as it is false. Our neighbors are neither living in a third-world country nor have their heads buried in the sand. A random poll at

a time for criticism, and the second government of Yitzhak Rabin may well have been one of those times. There is a clear difference, however, between disagreeing with the wisdom of the Oslo Accords and with demonizing the character of Yitzhak Rabin. Let us also leave no doubt about something else: the Shin Bet was not responsible for the murder of Yitzhak Rabin. Rabbi Weiss is only embarrassing himself by writing that “the conduct of the Shin Bet appears extremely disturbing when one reviews the evidence.” This is nothing more than the Israel version of “the CIA was behind the JFK assassination” and it is not a claim to be taken with any amount of seriousness.

George Washington High (Audubon and West 192nd Street) would reveal that its students are fully aware that college is a key to success, that job appointments are increasingly linked to higher education, and that their difficult socio-economic standing and academic background places them at a severe disadvantage. These are students whose parents could not attend college, who are balancing low-paying jobs and family responsibilities with high school, and who face real-life issues beyond the imaginations of the typical “advantaged” high school student. Despite these challenges, while some “advantaged” high schoolers relax at home or pursue extracurricular activities to boost their college resume, many of our underrepresented neighbors enroll in after-school programs (such as Young Adult Borough Centers) for academic guidance and extra help, vying for any edge on their college aspirations. They want to succeed academically, and they want the opportunity for a bright future. Yet they struggle with limitations many of us cannot fathom, limitations they could not prevent, limitations they do not deserve.

And so, in a movement to share our privileges, College EDge provides the edge they want, the edge they need, and the edge they deserve as much as we do, on their College Education. And that’s why they thank us.

Should everyone have equal opportunities for a higher education? Absolutely. And we at College EDge strive to make that happen.

Weiss concludes his letter by vying to win the contest over who is more intolerant toward whom, but it is not a competition in which I will play along. I will say one line about anti-Haredi sentiment, though. Perhaps if more than 40% of Haredi high schools taught math and English; perhaps if more than 400 of the 14,000 18-year-old Haredi males enlisted in the IDF; perhaps if more than 35% of Haredi men were employed; then, maybe, anti-Haredi feelings would drop significantly. I suppose we would have seen serious internal reforms in Haredi society for us to know for sure.

Yitzhak Bronstein  
YC ’12



# Rendezvous with Reality

## A Response to the Beacon Controversy

BY BENJAMIN ABRAMOWITZ

“Congrats on being a YU paper that doesn’t publish porn,” read the 3-AM message in my inbox, not 24 hours since the *Beacon* published “How Do I Even Begin to Explain This.” Still stunned by this and many other reactions to the emergent controversy, I hope to address and correct many misconceptions about recent events. There’s a lot to absorb here regarding YU’s goals as an institution and our own goals as its students.

I find it clear that the article, while a tad salacious, contains no obscene content. Pornography, I understand, is usually more explicit than banal euphemism and a walk home. The piece’s pointlessness strikes the reader far more than any sexual content, and the uproar created by the *Beacon* staff reflects grave narrow-mindedness.

The article received incredible publicity in its first few days, certainly something for YU to follow

closely. The anonymous love story boasts more than 1500% more hits than yubeacon.com’s second-most popular article (which happens to be a graphic, corporeal account of a serial killing. No sex, though). But this is still just a few thousand hits, many of them, no doubt, editorial page-reloads, and just about all of them YU students who by reading the story learned nothing new about their college community. Not the best thing to have lying around the web, from the perspective of a hypothetical Censorship Committee, but in the long run probably innocuous. And that’s exactly why the decision to censor was probably a major error.

On numerous levels, it is completely understandable why many people in YU would not want to be associated with the article. But perhaps we should have foreseen the hullabaloo that emerged from “censoring free speech.” By being censored, the article earned hundreds of times more publicity than it would have received otherwise—paradoxi-

cally and predictably.

Now that YU inhibits its students’ free speech (however over-dramatic and under-informed the proclamation), the *Beacon* story titillates a much broader community. *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* are but a few of the publications to which the young Stern woman’s *motzei Shabbos* (Saturday night) just became interesting. Here at YU, we might all get that we’re so much more than a university—a movement, a way of life, a yeshiva—but we’re also a regular New York City college held to regular American standards. Seemingly medieval practices of censorship will be viewed as exactly that, no matter how lofty is the religious principle constructed in defense.

For this reason, YU has taken quite a bit of flak for not just leaving the article alone no matter how uncomfortable it made them.

But wait. This wasn’t censorship—at all. The administration did not take the article down, or demand that it be taken down. As more and more informed reports emerged, we learned that the Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC),

responding to clearly demonstrated student opinion, asked the *Beacon* editorship to remove the article. By and large, the student body that the *Beacon* seeks to represent felt that the *Beacon* actually misrepresented them and so wanted the story gone. Therefore, it probably would have been unreasonable to think that any national coverage would result from the meeting, as removing the story was only acceding to the requests of the online paper’s constituents.

This is not censorship. This is not a big deal.

That’s not to say the *Beacon* editors should not have been aggravated. The editors of the *Beacon* deemed “How Do I Even Begin to Explain This” publishable, and no editor wants his or her discretion questioned. And certainly, there are many students who supported the piece and wanted it kept online. On some nominal level, I’m sure, the *Beacon* editors felt that this piece contributed something important to the lives of their readership. But student leaders are elected to act on behalf of their student body, and it was with the support of most of their constituents that SCWSC confronted the *Beacon*.

My respect for the *Beacon* staff’s collective talent is immense, and, as a student journalist, despite my fundamentally different aims, I respect their publication. But that one *Beacon* editor tipped off Fox News and

another mentioned the story to *New Voices* is downright disturbing. The apparent disregard for our own community’s reputation is unsettling. Even if neither intended to defame the university by doing this, the repercussions were obvious and easily foretold. Our name has since been slashed and smeared by prominent national voices (even though most articles have been misinformed). What’s unclear is what the *Beacon* hoped to gain from publicizing this—presumably, national coverage would only intensify widespread student sentiment against the article and its publishers. (It did.)

Additionally, the *Beacon*’s assertion to numerous news outlets that it is the only co-ed Yeshiva newspaper is patently false and self-serving. The *Commie* was co-ed before the *Beacon* existed.

The reports by *New Voices* and Fox News, among those of many other publications, recorded fancy as fact, and demonstrated poor research and speculative journalism. I can only hope that their reports of censorship on behalf of the YU administration were not fed to them by YU students, for this would represent a defamatory distortion of fact. It would also be treasonous.

These publications, among others, herald sensationalist headlines, such as, “YU Paper in Danger After

See *Rendezvous with Reality*, page 20



# On Censorship, and Not Censorship

BY ARIEL KRAKOWSKI

I am for censorship.

Before one takes offense at this heretical idea, I would like to add that everyone is for censorship. All publications, even the *Beacon*, moderate their comment sections and censor or delete offensive content. The only dispute over censorship arises over where to draw the line. The *Beacon* in general may follow standards similar to that of general liberal society, though some articles may even be more extreme than what is published in a general newspaper. On the other hand, The Torah and traditional Judaism proscribe certain content from being published, such as blasphemy[i], heresy, improper sexual content,[ii] and hatred of other Jews[iii]. These are all things the *Beacon* has published [iv], in its attempt to “create controversy” and “push the limits.”[v]

What should an Orthodox institution or students do when other students continuously publish such material? Probably nothing, if the students are publishing it on their own website unaffiliated with the

institution and without receiving university funding. However, if they become “an official publication” of the university students and receive up to \$500 a semester from them, then clearly students and the institution have the right to object to what they publish. There are many better uses their money could go to, so why should it be used to fund such offensive material? In addition, many students may not want such articles being seen as an official student voice as if they are in favor of the publication of such material.

People have a right to write articles that criticize the establishment or that suggest unusual or unpopular ideas, but there are basic principles of an organization that should be respected. If an article clearly goes against the most liberal terms of *halakha* and Orthodox belief, it should not be published in something claiming to represent an Orthodox student body. Just as there are restrictions on publishing illegal material in America, there should be restrictions on publishing *halakhically* forbidden and offensive material in a publication of a religious institution. Not everything published

has to have majority support, but the majority should at least not be offended by it.

People sin. This does not mean every sin has to be confessed in public. Many people have written articles about various sins, without any clear message, just to “acknowledge the issue” and “discuss it.” Interestingly, only certain categories of sins seem to get this treatment, specifically things that are accepted as OK or normal by general society. I’m sure there are some people in YU who have committed theft, but there haven’t been any articles written on this issue. I also doubt many of the *Beacon* articles would have been written in a time when general society had similar moral standards to Orthodox Judaism. Perhaps there are other reasons, but it seems that part of what the publication of these articles seeks to accomplish is to make the actions described in them seem OK or permissible to religious Jews also. The Talmud[vi] praises one who doesn’t reveal his private sin in public. Publicly proclaiming one’s sin can cause a Chillul HaShem, a Desecration of the Name, perhaps because it makes the Law seem

less absolute. There can be cases where certain discussions are justified, but they must be written very carefully. An article whose true purpose is to help other people should have an appropriate tone and a clear message. If it is just written to explore a situation, for literary value, or to create controversy, it does not belong in an Orthodox publication.

One thing the *Beacon* did manage to accomplish is to create an international news story out of something so small. “The *YU Beacon* was...asked whether they would be willing to come to some sort of compromise”[vii] over editing a recent article. “The editors-in-chief opted to give-up their status as a club, thus losing their funding and their YU affiliation, rather than come to a compromise.” So rather than discuss changing a few words, they chose to break with YU in a public manner that created a big “controversy” and “news story”. This story was also fueled by certain misunderstandings, misinformation and exaggerated claims. I do not think every minor internal issue in YU needs to be publicized to the entire world. The *Beacon* could have

agreed to quietly edit the article and a while later they could have parted ways with YU. Instead they chose to maximize the publicity over YU’s “censorship.” They claimed this was due to the principles of free speech, but do these “principles” of publishing offensive material really take precedence over every other value and concern? Is free speech one of the “cardinal sins” of secular society?

In the Hannukah story of Hannah’s sons, seven children gave up their life rather than sin in public. [viii] The entire story of Chanukah is about a small group of Jews, the Maccabees, standing up for the principles of their Torah and tradition and resisting the ideas and values of general society. This does not mean that all of general society is forbidden. When appropriate, “The beauty of Yefes [Greece] shall dwell in the tents of Shem”[ix]. Yet the values of Judaism must take precedence over the latest fads in Western society. Some may choose to place greater weight on Hellenistic or Western values, but they cannot expect to be

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# Orthodox Response

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committed murder, abuse of various types, and gang violence in the past year, as well as theft and fraud totaling the GDP of some small nations. Where is the public outcry over these events? Where is the disdain over the bands of Haredim beating up women and vandalizing stores in Me'ah She'arim? Instead, writes Rabbi Josh Yuter, "there has been no declaration that those guilty are not to be considered 'Orthodox.'"<sup>2</sup> The statement issued by the rabbis was about a same-sex wedding ceremony. The article that caused such discomfort in the YU student body was the one about sex, not murder.

This criticism is valid, but incorrect, and for a simple set of reasons. First, there is a basic difference between saying that a gay marriage is non-Orthodox and that a gay person is not Orthodox. The statement issued by the rabbis does not claim this second point, and that applies as well (with exceptions) to child abusers, murderers and money launderers. Violators of *halakhah*, even repeat ones, are still considered Orthodox under most conditions. And while the rabbis' statement goes on to say that "one who performs such a ceremony is not an Orthodox rabbi," this is not an attack on Rabbi Greenberg as an Orthodox Jew; it is, rather, a characterization of the positions he takes as being beyond the pale of Orthodoxy.

Second, and this cannot be stressed enough, the severe crimes mentioned before are all hugely problematic, more so than the two events that took place in the last few weeks. It goes without saying that basic human violations such as murder and child abuse are not in keeping with Orthodox values. This applies to those on the right as well as on the left. We could make a far easier argument that Haredim who terrorize groups of dissenting Jews can hardly be considered Jewish, much less Orthodox. No respectable Orthodox rabbi would deny that; it is a moral principle shared by any human with modern sensibilities. However, it is the other principles within the Orthodox Jewish worldview, the ones that are not as apparent – or occasionally contradictory – to a modern secular worldview, that need to be given a vocal defense.

There is a historical precedent to this as well. The general scholarly consensus today is that Maimonides had more than thirteen tenets of Jewish faith. Why does a young Rav Moshe, then, list what are known as the *yud-gimmel ikkarim* as being fundamental principles in his Commentary to the Mishna? Rambam lived in Muslim Spain, where it was these principles, more than any others, that would come under fire from the surrounding culture.<sup>3</sup> What the statement issued by Orthodox leaders on gay marriage shows fully, and the reaction to the *Beacon* Article shows as well, is that we need to speak out when a principle

we stand by may not be agreed upon by everyone, and is therefore far more prone to coming under assault from the general secular culture, the student body, etc. Regarding The Article, and as *Commentator* Editor-in-Chief Ben Abramowitz made clear in his editorial, what made most people uncomfortable was that a hot-button issue – in this case, an issue that is widely accepted by the secular world, contrary to our own religious values – was broached without sensitivity or a redeeming ability to foster intelligent and nuanced discussion.<sup>4</sup> (I'll put in one word about the article itself. Although it lacked the depth and nuance to foster a sensitive discussion on the topic of sex, it wasn't that graphic. Herman Wouk and Chaim Potok, Orthodox authors, have both written worse. We all could have been a little less offended by it and Anonymous would have remained, well, anonymous. But that's not the issue at play here.)

It is the need (and reticence) to speak out about those principles that come under assault that is the deeper connection between these two stories. It was surprising that more rabbis didn't sign the statement declaring the non-Orthodoxy of gay marriage; it is, after all, immutable law in mainstream Orthodoxy. It seems instead that many opted to protect their institutions, rather than run the risk of offending members of those institutions who may, perhaps, send nasty letters in response or cut ties altogether.

This is unfortunate for several reasons. If our leaders refuse to stand by the values that define us, then we begin to lose the tensile strength of the fabric of Modern Orthodoxy.

Modern Orthodoxy has always been about walking a delicate path between two worlds. That becomes impossible when the principles that serve as signposts cannot be clearly seen. In addition, by not being proactive our leaders forfeit the right to frame the principles in the proper way, or to give them the proper defense needed. Some of our values need an animated defense, especially in the year 2011, and without it will likely be misconstrued by those looking in from the outside.

Our institutions need to speak out not just about the broadest values that define who we are; it is even more important that they make known specific policies, as well as the reasons behind them. The root of the *Beacon* article scandal can be traced to one such failure. This farce of a *shanda* should have been over months before it started, when the editors of the *Beacon* applied to become an official YU publication. The *Beacon* has stated its goal to be an "uncensored" news source, an open forum for students to get articles published without boundaries. Yeshiva University clearly disagrees with that statement, and fairly so when it comes to the broaching of certain issues in certain ways (re-



gardless of what anyone believes about this article). And yet the student body never heard them say that. At the time the YU administration received the *Beacon's* application it should have formulated a clear set of policies about what was and what was not acceptable material for a YU publication. In fact, as reliable sources have reported, the administration did have a set of policies. But it was unable to articulate those policies to either the student body or the editors of the *Beacon*. The subsequent actions taken under the purview of the university were therefore seen as the senseless censorings of a backwards establishment.

Granted, we now know it was the student government that asked for the article to be taken down, but that doesn't change the reality of what could have been done differently. If the administration had made its policies clear, the article likely wouldn't have made it to the publishing stage, and the reaction would have been far less volatile.

We can fairly say that many people have contributed to tarnish YU's name far beyond what it deserves. The blogosphere has handled this story with its usual amount of class, which is none, and several students have contributed to the sensationalism of the scandal and may have even first contacted the media, worsening the blow to YU. Those actions are reprehensible. But the fact remains that the administration of Yeshiva University needs to act professionally despite what others might do, which means that it needs to establish clear policies and guidelines and make those policies known in advance. And to do that would require YU to stand by and defend its principles, which it has become loath to do.

These policies, and many of these principles, do not have to be ironclad, nor overly restrictive. A certain degree of flexibility and inclusiveness is absolutely required. If the administration made rules that were set in stone, it would run into the same types of problems that it faced by doing nothing; there would

be outcries of censorship and an overly restrictive mindset. The policies need to be well thought out, and that process should involve input from the whole student body. But there needs to be a basic structure in place to work around, or we will end up with different opinions flung out in far-off quadrants, unable to find a point to start from.

At a recent event, Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveitchik argued for the need to

define and defend the principles that define us as Modern Orthodox Jews. I hope we can see those principles being defined and defended in the future. I hope, for the sake of this great institution, we can see sensible and dynamic policies put in place and clearly and openly articulated so we can all avoid the terrible fallout from another bombshell that could have been sidestepped with relative ease.

[1] Link: <http://www.algemeiner.com/2011/12/05/100-orthodox-rabbis-issue-same-sex-marriage-declaration/>

[2] Link: <http://joshiyuter.com/2011/12/06/judaism/the-selective-sanctimony-of-orthodox-judaism/>

[3] For this argument in a simple, lucid form, see Professor Haym Soloveitchik in his "Two Notes on the *Commentary of the Torah* of R. Yehuda he-Hasid" in Michael A. Shmidman, ed., *Turim: Studies in Jewish History and Literature – Presented to Dr. Bernard Lander*, New York: Touro College Press, 2008, 2:241-251.

[4] <http://www.yucommentator.org/2011/12/rendezvous-with-reality-a-response-to-the-beacon-controversy-2/>

## Censorship

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supported as an official publication of Orthodox students.

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[i] Shemos 22:27. While the capital crime of blasphemy may be restricted to a specific formula, the general prohibition is more broad. See Melachim II ch.18 and Yishayahu ch.36 where the kings' officers tear their clothes when they hear Rabshakeh compare the G-d of the Jews to the gods of other nations. Even though this was not the technical formula of blasphemy it was still enough for them to tear their clothes. (See commentaries there, Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 60a and Mo'ed Katan 26a).

[ii] The general prohibition of looking at or turning after forbidden content is recited daily in the Shema (Bamidbar 15:39). This verse is part of the reason why this parsha was chosen to be recited. See Brachos 12b.

For the specific prohibition, see Rambam Sefer haMitzvos Prohibition #47, Mishnah Torah Hilchos Avodah Zara 2:3, Hilchos Teshuva 4:4.

[iii] Besides the prohibition of hating another Jew, there are also other related prohibitions, such as *loshon hara*, *motzi shem ra*, and *andona'as d'varim*. See Vayikra

19:16-18, 25:17 (and Baba Metzia 58b). See Rambam Hilchos De'os, ch. 7, etc.

[iv] There have been many examples of this material besides the most recent issue. For example, there was an article which "put God on trial" in honor of Rosh haShana. Another recent article was a virulent rant against Hasidim and Hassidism. Previously there was an article that portrayed porn stars positively. There have been numerous articles in the "heresy" category.

[v] While the editor recently stated that "Nothing we do at the *Beacon* is intended to create controversy." <<http://yubeacon.com/2011/12/opinions/the-explanation>>, previously she had said "We are not trying to create controversy or push the limits with every article", i.e. only with some articles. <<http://curiousjew.blogspot.com/2011/01/yu-beacon.html>>

In addition, does anyone think it is just by chance that the *Beacon* managed to get so many articles on such topics? Let's just say I haven't seen them recruiting people to write about right-of-center topics.

[vi] Yoma 86b based on Tehillim 32:1.

[vii] <<http://yubeacon.com/2011/12/features/a-message-from-student-council/>>

[viii] See II Maccabees where the sin is eating pork and Gittin 57b where it is idolatry.

[ix] See Bereishis 9:27 and Megillah and Yoma 9b.



# Remembering Christopher Hitchens



Christopher Hitchens, 1949-2011.

BY YITZHAK BRONSTEIN

Considering the plethora of obituaries written for Christopher Hitchens in the last number of days by people for more qualified than I, I am hesitant to add my two cents to the mix. Nonetheless, I think it may be beneficial to attempt to write such an article from my perspective as a Yeshiva College student, dealing exclusively with the issues pertinent to our community.

A prolific author and journalist, Hitchens was one of the most

visible public intellectuals of our generation. Above all else, perhaps the view with which he is most associated is his categorical rejection of religion. His 2007 book, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, became an instant hit and took only three weeks to reach the number one spot on *The New York Times* bestseller list. As the title would imply, the book is one long brutal attack on religion, with some criticisms carrying more legitimacy than others. His critiques of Judaism are particularly unforgiving, and I have no doubt that many YU students would find his understandings of certain Jewish practices to be severely misinformed and thus harshly misrepresented in the book.

Yet, I think we would be remiss were we not to appreciate the value in engaging with the work itself, or in watching the countless hours of debates on YouTube between Hitchens and various defenders of religion. Debating against opponents ranging from Shmuley Boteach to Tony Blair, Hitchens argued with an energy, sharpness and sophistication that separated him from anyone courageous enough to challenge him. (The one time I was privileged

to watch him debate in person was an exhilarating experience.) Whatever one thinks of the positions that Hitchens took, it is undeniable that he was both a brilliant rhetorician and writer, and it is essential that the criticisms raised by Hitchens not be ignored but confronted. After all, a good orator is not one with whom we agree but one who forces us to question and rethink, and Hitchens is invaluable in this regard.

Regarding the content of his message itself, one complaint of mine is that much of the criticism heaped onto religion should instead be refocused as an attack on fundamentalism. There is religion that is non-fundamentalist and there is fundamentalism outside the realm of religion, and the real danger to humanity stems from fundamentalism. Belief in God or adhering to a religion does not preclude one from being morally upright or progressive, and in many cases it can be conducive towards acting in such a manner. His attacks should have been more finely focused on the dangers posed by fundamentalists who categorically reject the notion of reconsidering their core beliefs while adopting retrogressive world

views. By focusing his message on the enterprise of religion itself, the reaction of many religionists was simply to dismiss his criticisms entirely. Still, I think much of his criticism of contemporary religion is indeed valid and I would encourage YU students to gain exposure to his views.

His Israel record is particularly troubling. Hitchens described himself as an anti-Zionist, and rejected the notion that the Jewish people should have their own nation-state in the land of Israel. This position of his is the one which I find most troubling, considering that Hitchens was perhaps the most recognizable advocate for the national rights of small peoples, especially for the rights of the Kurds to have an independent state in Kurdistan. He was consistently a fierce critic of Israeli policy as well. However, though he was of the opinion that Israel was born in sin, he maintained that once Israel was accepted into the community of nations it has the right to remain. These positions need not indicate that he was an enemy of the Jewish state: Hitchens was one of the most damning critics of Israel's enemies, be it Hamas, Hezbollah, or

Iran. At a time when the crew of the infamous flotilla to Gaza was being hailed by many as a humanitarian mission, he adamantly refused to refer to its members as merely "activists" and instead exposed their links to Islamist organizations. Moreover, he had been one of the most vocal political commentators writing and speaking about the need to prevent Iran from attaining nuclear weapons, calling for American military intervention against Iran's nuclear facilities if necessary.

Hitchens spoke out forcefully against anti-Semitism, penning it as the "godfather of racism and the gateway to tyranny and fascism and war." He went further: "It is to be regarded not as the enemy of the Jewish people alone, but as the common enemy of humanity and of civilization, and has to be fought against very tenaciously for that reason, most especially in its current most virulent form of Islamic Jihad." His Daniel Pearl memorial lecture, in which he declares the lines above, is a must-watch YouTube video on the topic of anti-Semitism. An obituary written for Hitchens by David Frum

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## Internet Filtration at YU

BY NATHAN HYMAN

An article in the previous issue of *The Commentator* addressed administrative efforts to block student access to pornography. The author wrote, "student reactions to news of impending filtration have been pointed," and he justified this assertion with numerous quotes from angry students. However, it seems that the author and the students he quoted have failed to make a critical evaluation of the administration's decision.

The article could have argued that pornography is not a widespread problem, and thus does not deserve the administration's attention. Presumably, this argument was not made because it is simply not true. In one nationally representative poll, 77 percent of Americans said they viewed pornography at least once in a 30-day period. Pornography is a multi-billion dollar industry and comprises over 10 percent of the Internet.<sup>1</sup> The Jewish community in general, and YU in particular, is not immune to its influence. Indeed, the article describes how YU Arevim, a group of students struggling with pornography addiction, brought the issue to the administration's attention. If further confirmation of the scope of the problem is necessary, one may consult any *shul* rabbi or mental health professional. They can surely provide first-hand knowledge of marriages destroyed and relationships wrecked because of pornography addiction.

The article also could have argued that viewing pornography is not a serious *halakhic* violation and that pornography addiction does not incur serious spiritual harm. I suppose this argument was not made because it is ludicrous. It is obvious that pornography is *halakhically* prohibited and inimical to Torah values.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the article implicitly acknowledges that pornography addiction is both a serious problem, and a violation of *halakhah*. So what ostensibly substantive arguments remain to be made against YU filtering the Internet? The article contains several, but each demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the issue and an estrangement from basic Torah values.

The first argument is implicit in the title, "*Rabbi Yona Reiss Unveils Plan for Internet Censorship*." Censorship is certainly distasteful to many students, but it is completely irrelevant to the issue at hand. Even if YU students would have the right to free and full access to information, it is a mistake to refer to Internet filtering as censorship. Issues involving censorship have arisen previously between students and the administration, and *The Commentator* has served as a forum to discuss the issues. Each time, the dispute has revolved around what students perceived as efforts to limit their freedom of expression, intellectual development, or access to controversial speakers. None of these is a valid justification on the basis of which one may protest YU's plans



to filter Internet access. Pornography is crude and obscene content that lacks any justifiable intellectual value. The article misuses the word 'censorship,' and cheapens its value for the students genuinely concerned about its implication in other contexts.

Another student in the article argues, "Rather than confronting and addressing the very troubling core issues underlying the fact that so much pornography is watched in the dorms, this seems to be a way for the institution to sweep a disturbing phenomenon under rug." This is puzzling. It's true that addressing the core issues is important, but that does not create an argument *against* filtering. Addressing the underlying causes is not mutually exclusive to addressing the proximate cause of pornography's easy availability. When someone carelessly crashes their car and injures himself, is the paramedic's first response to offer a lecture about the importance of safe driving? No, he first treats the person's injuries. The lecture can wait until later. The same principle applies to the problem of pornography.

However, there is a more seri-

ous problem with the arguments made by the author and the students he quotes: their fundamental and perhaps deliberate ignorance of the basic Torah principles that inform the administration's decision in this matter. One student argues, "The University's decision is a gross encroachment on students' personal lives, an authoritarian disregard for student rights, and yet another example of the absurd influence the *roshei yeshiva* have on University policy."<sup>3</sup> Ironically, the public intrusion on students' private sexual practices is itself a lewd and tasteless action – unfit for a university's administration." This student does not assert that pornography is not harmful, *halakhically* prohibited, or spiritually destructive. Instead, he appeals to his "right" to engage in such behavior, and condemns any attempt to inhibit him as "authoritarian" and an "encroachment on students' personal lives." While this view may, regrettably, be a common one among certain YU students, it is based on a misunderstanding. Indeed, a student who wishes to indulge in pornography remains free to do so by any other means. However,

the University provides Internet access as a service, not an entitlement, and any student who benefits from that service does so under the conditions and limitations determined by the administration. One may argue that those limitations are unreasonable, but that has absolutely no bearing on the argument that an Internet filter is an imposition on "students' personal lives." It most certainly is not, and any righteous indignation to the contrary is both mistaken and entirely inappropriate.

Yet filtering is more than just within the rights of the administration. It is obligatory. This obligation stems from the basic principle of *arvus*, the responsibility to facilitate the *halakhic* observance of fellow Jews. This binding principle is what led YU Arevim to approach the administration, and it is what motivates the administration's efforts to install a filter. Yet instead of commending them for acting on their responsibility to save others from prohibited and self-destructive behavior, the article misrepresents their aims and condemns them. We read that "Students are stunned, perhaps most of all, that their peers, mired in the maximally personal tension of a pornography addiction, demanded help from the administration." Perhaps if these students were less ignorant of the basic *halakhic* responsibility of *arvus*, they would not be as stunned.

Granted, one could posit that Internet filtering is a slippery slope that will lead to imposition of *hal-*

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# Sheik Jarrah

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bling, the eucalyptus trees shriveled and dry. Black water tanks perched themselves perilously on their roofs. These ramshackle houses contrasted starkly with the fortress.

This was *Ma'ale David*, a settlement complex situated in the heart of Palestinian East Jerusalem. East Jerusalem is the doorstep to the heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

On this Friday afternoon, hundreds of Jewish and Arab students, construction workers, intellectuals, and journalists stood at the gates of *Ma'ale David*. They had gathered to protest this settlement complex, built in the middle of Ras Al' Amud, a neighborhood of 12,000 Palestinians, for 8 Jewish families.

As the Jewish families looked on from atop the walls, waving flags and throwing water down onto the protesters, megaphones from protesters led chants in Hebrew, Arabic, and English that resonated off the building. They shouted "From Sheikh Jarrah to Bil'in, free, free Palestine!" a reference to the Palestinian town of Bil'in where weekly protests are held against the West Bank Barrier Fence. Chants of "*Midinat Mishtara*" or "Police State" were directed at Israeli security personnel, which the Israeli Government provides at an estimated cost of over 20,000 Shekels a year per person in West Bank Settlements.

As the protests grew, riot police were called in to maintain order. An Israeli protester began shouting at a police officer and had to be calmed by fellow protesters. The protesters then decided to sit in front of the driveway before the gate of the compound to prevent Jewish settlers from entering or exiting the compound. Suddenly, police began pulling protesters off of the road. Police officers punched, grabbed and even tazed non-violent protesters. Tensions burst into a fury of shouts and pushes.

The Sheik Jarrah Solidarity Movement was founded by Israeli and Palestinian activists in 2009 after police evicted four Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem. The Palestinian families were former refugees who fled to the neighborhood after Israel's War of Independence. After arriving in the Jordanian ruled East Jerusalem, they exchanged their United Nations refugee cards for the right to build houses on vacant lots or to occupy abandoned houses in the Sheik Jarrah neighborhood.

After Israel captured East Jerusalem in 1967, Jewish organizations claimed ownership of the houses based on Ottoman deeds dating as far back as the 1800's. The Palestinian families were not allowed to claim ownership of lost properties in Israel, despite being backed by the same Ottoman land deeds. Indeed, Israel's "Absentee Properties Law"



The Sheik Jarrah Solidarity Movement (SJSJM) holds weekly demonstrations protesting the discriminatory Absentee Property Law and rallying in solidarity with Palestinian families facing eviction.

strips Palestinians of their rights to pre-1948 property deeds while Jews can claim lost property in court.

Only when Jewish developers aligned with the settler movement began a large-scale effort to claim legal ownership of many houses in East Jerusalem did protests begin. All told, 200 claims were made by the developers, which, if given, would require the eviction of more than 400 men, women and children. In Sheik Jarrah, 27 families are fighting for the right to stay in their homes.

The Sheik Jarrah Solidarity Movement (SJSJM) holds weekly demonstrations protesting the discriminatory Absentee Property Law and rallying in solidarity with Palestinian families facing eviction. Each Friday afternoon, protesters rendezvous in one of the only public parks in East Jerusalem, and then begin a march towards settler houses, many of which have been made into strongholds using razor-wire, fences, and guard-dogs. A drumline's cadence, along with leaders using megaphones, directs the signholding protesters. The posters read "Settlements=Obstacle to Peace," "Jerusalem won't be Hebron" and "Housing is a Human Right."

Over 200 protesters arrive every week, including novelist David Grossman and Rabbi Richard Jacobs, poised to become the next president of the Union for Reform Judaism. In addition, a number of kippot and skirts can be found joining in at the protests.

In this hotbed of controversy, tensions can easily mount. The Ras Al' Amud protests saw the first use of police violence against non-violent protesters in the Solidarity movement's history. Police brutality caused 15 injuries, five of which required medical assistance. A video from another protest in 2010 shows a fistfight between an unarmed activist and an M-16 wielding settler. At one point the settler pointed the gun at the activist and other bystanders.

While the organization was originally founded to protest the unfair treatment of Palestinians in Sheik Jarrah, they have now expanded their actions throughout the "Holy Basin," the hills around the Temple

Mount, and beyond. They now operate in the Sheik Jarrah neighborhood and others around East Jerusalem, such as Ras Al' Amud and Silwan. They monitored events in East Jerusalem on *Yom Yerushalaim*, Jerusalem Day, and filmed Israeli and American students during a midnight march through the Arab and Christian quarter of the Old City. During the festivities of the day, SJSJM filmed racial slurs shouted by hundreds of *yeshiva* students who had gathered in front of a mosque in Sheik Jarrah.

Widening its scope of operations has come hand-in-hand with widening its politics. Originally, the organization's mission was to combat house evictions and monitor settlers within the neighborhood of Sheik Jarrah. Now it has become an umbrella organization for many actions opposing settler activity, house eviction, fence building, and checkpointing, in addition to those supporting Palestinian independence efforts.

On September 17, Israeli and Palestinian women demonstrated together on either side of the Qalandia Checkpoint near Ramallah. In mid-July, SJSJM teamed up with a group called Anarchists Against the Wall to hold a march in solidarity with the Palestinian bid for statehood in the United Nations. Almost 3,000 people marched from the Jaffa gate to the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. Most recently, SJSJM helped organize "Palestinian freedom rides" in which Palestinians tried to cross Israeli checkpoints on Israeli busses.

SJSJM also protested the eviction of Jewish and Arab families in Beit Shean who could not pay rent to Amidar, Israel's National Housing Company. The families, who were thrown out into the street, joined hundreds of residents of Beit Shean and megaphone wielding activists from SJSJM to protest the evictions. Similar actions were held in Ramleh and Lod. In Jaffa, SJSJM protested the eviction of Tzipora and Yisrael Steinling from their home.

What unites these protests is what SJSJM sees as national and social mechanisms that place one group over another. They claim only "solidarity" can cut through

ethnic, nationalistic, and class differences. They hope to break ideological and bureaucratic systems in order to change the reality in Israel. From their humble beginnings as a grassroots organization, SJSJM has its sights set on becoming a national force.

However, with this increased presence in East Jerusalem and beyond, the movement, it seems, has lost its humble roots. It has ceased to be about protesting that which most sensible people can agree upon, namely, the unfair and discriminatory use of Ottoman deeds to evict Palestinians. It has now become a national organization that sponsors huge marches in solidarity with the creation of a Palestinian state and protests at checkpoints and buses. Its message is now one that loudly proclaims "Israel is apartheid state, free Palestine, end occupation."

Videos from demonstrations clearly show the virulent anti-Israel rhetoric that has come to typify the movement. Posters proclaiming "solidarity against fascism" and "solidarity against apartheid" are de rigueur. One set of protesters held up signs reading "President Obama, Stop giving money and weapons to the Israeli Zionist Terrorist State," while another read, "The international community must hold Israel accountable for their crimes against humanity."

For the people who gather in Sheik Jarrah, the unfair yet technically legal treatment of twenty families in East Jerusalem has become an excuse to denounce, vilify and discredit Israel.

It is one thing to question certain actions of the state of Israel. In fact, Israel is proud to be a democratic state where non-violent protests are protected under law, unlike some states in the Middle East. It is another to be malicious and malignant in the name of "solidarity."

I will not be surprised if the SJSJM's goals fail to stop the eviction of the Palestinian families. They themselves have lost sight of their goals. They have tried to become the next "Peace Now," when all they have managed to do is engender anger and spite for their cause by aligning themselves with the anti-Israel and anti-Zionist camp.

They have failed to garner the support of the people who really matter, the citizens of Jerusalem, because they have become too extreme. They have also failed to recognize that strongly anti-Israel rhetoric serves only to embattle both sides.

Solving the issue in East Jerusalem, and in the West Bank in general, will require compromise and concessions, compliance and cooperation. The vehement vocabulary, fierce claims, and overzealous protesting of the SJSJM will only serve to polarize this already intractable issue that has become the forefront of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## Internet Filtration

continued from page 10...

*akhah* in ways distasteful to certain students. After all, what's to stop the administration from demanding that students go to *minyan*, keep certain standards of *kashrus*, or the like? Even if these are valid arguments, it's worth reiterating that the administration is not seeking to impose anything. They are not demanding records of student Internet usage, nor are they imposing punitive measures on students who view pornography. They are simply living up to *their* responsibly not to actively enable violation of Torah law. It should be obvious and unambiguous that this is a good thing.

One could argue that this touches on the broader issue that YU is both a university and a *yeshiva*. While that is true, I think it is irrelevant to the issue at hand. In distinguishing between university and *yeshiva*, one loses sight of the fact that YU students, and the administration making decisions that affect them, are bound by the principles and dictates of the Torah.<sup>4</sup> From the perspective of a secular student at any other college, the arguments expressed in the article could be valid. Such a student could accuse the administration of violating student rights and indulging in "censorship." But we are not just college students; we are Jews, and our decisions are shaped by the Torah and its values. This remains immutably true however one conceptualizes the nature of this institution. And on this issue, the *halakhah* is unambiguous. Viewing pornography is prohibited and spiritually harmful, and anyone who can facilitate observance of the prohibition has a responsibility and an obligation to do so.

Thus, appealing to "censorship" or questioning whether the administration is acting within its rights is profoundly wrong. No one in YU has a right to demand that others facilitate their violation of the Torah. Would we complain that YU denies students the "right" to eat *treif* food because all Cafeteria food is kosher? The Internet filter is no different.

[1] Pamela Paul. *Pornified: How Pornography is Transforming Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families*. Times Books, New York, 2005. 13.

[2] Basic sources are *Numbers* 15:39, *Gem. Brachot* 61a, *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch Even ha-Ezer* 21.

[3] This student seems to have overlooked the fact that Dr. David Pelcovitz and student leaders also participated in Rabbi Reiss' committee, as well as the fact that Marc Milstein, the University President of Information Technology, was also consulted.

[4] See Rav Soloveitchik, quoted in R. Rakefet's *The Rav: The World of R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik Vol. 2*, pg. 230, that the *Yeshiva* should function "without synthesis and compromise."



# The Gems of Gemination

By YAIR SHAHAK

Whether you call it Shabbat, Shabbos, Shubbis, or Sabbath (more on that last one in upcoming columns), chances are you spell it with two b's. Why? Why is it that certain words, such as Sabbath, tefillah, tallit, siddur, Yom Kippur and Hanukkah are normally written the way they have been written here, with a doubled letter? The answer to this is a broad linguistic phenomenon that occurs across hundreds of languages, known as gemination.

Gemination, simply stated in linguistic terms, is the doubling of a consonant. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Griphook the Goblin says that the objects in the Lestranges' vault have a "gemino" spell placed upon them, causing the objects to multiply. In Latin, "gemino" (which comes from geminus) is an adjective meaning "twin"—the plural is "gemini"—out of which we derive the English word "gemination." (As it happens, nearly all of the spells and many of the names in Rowling's popular heptalogy come from Latin and Greek. A notable exception is Avada Kedavra—the Killing Curse—which possibly originates from Aramaic אבדא כדברא, meaning "I destroy as I speak".)

In order to better understand the concept of gemination as it pertains to Hebrew, let's first give some general and much-needed background information:

Words in the Hebrew language are composed mainly of consonants and vowels (including half-vowels—more on that later). Consonants can be any letter of the alphabet; vowels are the little dots and lines that tell us whether to add the sound of a, i, e, o, u, etc to a particular consonant. Together, consonants and vowels create syllables, which in turn create words.

If a consonant does not have a vowel associated with it, two vertical dots known as a שווא נח (silent or quiescent sh'va) are placed underneath it, indicating that the consonant stands alone. For example, מְלַמֵּד and שְׁלֵקָה both have two vertical dots underneath the respective second consonant to indicate that the sound is not "la" or "li" or "loo", etc., but rather, just "l".

By convention, we do not ordinarily place these two dots under a vowelless consonant which concludes a word. However, what the dots represent—i.e. that the consonant has no vowel associated with it—also holds true at the end of words. To clarify, the words שְׁלוֹם and קָלָב can be written שְׁלוֹם and קָלָב, respectively (and would still sound the same); we just don't do it.

Slightly complicating matters is the fact that the aforementioned two vertical dots can actually indicate a half-vowel associated with a given consonant, known as a שווא נע (mobile sh'va). For now, suffice it to say that a שווא underneath the first letter of the word is נע, i.e., representing a



Our little defense against the dark arts wiz wouldn't know a mobile sh'va from a quiescent sh'va if you carved them into his forehead.

half-vowel, pronounced by most of us as a quick "eh" or "ih", as in מְלַמֵּד or שְׁמַע.

And now we arrive at gemination.

In Hebrew, this notion of doubling a consonant is expressed by a particular dot in a letter, known as a דגש חזק. To illustrate, the primary difference between ימים and יָמִים is that the latter has three מ's in it—the first מ, the one implied by the dot in this מ, and the last מ—while the former only has two. (The former means "days" and the latter means "oceans" or "seas".) The first word, then, is read יָמִים – מִים and the second is read יָמִים – מִים, with a שווא נח underneath the first מ. When pronouncing the word as one unit and not as two separate ones (yam, mim) we find that the מ sound is slightly prolonged, indicating the two מ's actu-

ally present. Think of an enthusiastic person exclaiming "Amazing!" and note how the "m" in that word quite often is stretched out. Similarly, if you listen to a Muslim saying "Allahu Akbar", you will hear the "l" of "Allahu" stretched out momentarily. Once again, this is gemination at work; whatever letter has the dot should sound as if there were another identical letter next to it.

There are several reasons as to why gemination takes place. Often, it is there to compensate for a previous, identical letter that went missing. For example, the word מְגִלָּה has a דגש חזק in the lamed, because the root of that word is ג.ל.ל, and the dot in the ל tells you that there is another, unseen ל within the word. Other examples include תְּפִלִּין and תְּפִלָּה (root is פ.ל.ל), סְפִיָּה (ס.כ.כ.), תְּקִיָּה (ת.ק.ק.) and תְּקִיָּה (ת.ק.ק.).

(If you have read *La Petit Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, you can liken this image to that of the first image drawn by the narrator: a picture which looks like a hat but is actually a boa constrictor that swallows an elephant whole; it is as if the unwritten letter is swallowed by the following letter, and rests in the belly of the swallowing letter in the form of a דגש. If you did not understand any of this, that's okay; I still recommend you read *La Petit Prince*.)

Not always, though, is the missing letter the same as the one with the דגש חזק. Frequently, it is a completely different letter that gets **assimilated** into the dotted letter, i.e., the sound of the dropped letter becomes the same as the sound of the following—now dotted—letter. The letter נ, in particular, is susceptible to assimilation when it has no vowel associated with it. Words like הַצָּלָה, "the act of saving" and הַפְּלָה, "miscarriage", have a דגש חזק in the צ and פ, respectively, because the first root-letter of each of those words is נ.

This process of assimilation and consequent gemination is found in English, as well. Take the word "fallible" and negate it. "Infallible", great. Now take the word "legal" and negate it. "Illegal," right? What about the antonym of regular? Is it "irregular"? The words that we know, "illegal" and "irregular," are merely English equivalents of a דגש

חזק, assimilating the "n" of the prefix "in-" into the following letter, thereby doubling it. There is also a concept of partial assimilation, where the letter "n" changes to another letter, most often an "m", i.e., "immeasurable" becoming "immeasurable."

(Note: there are many factors that decide whether or not a letter will be assimilated into the next. For example, there are different classes of English prefixes, each of which behaves differently: irregular becomes irregular, but unreal does not become unreal.)

Sometimes, the opposite holds true, and a letter undergoes *degemination*, meaning the removal of a דגש from a letter. Let's take the Hebrew word בַּת, meaning daughter. The plural of the word is בָּנוֹת, indicating that there should be a נ somewhere in בַּת. However, there is nothing in the ת that indicates as such. Why is that?

To answer, we need to turn to Arabic.

In Arabic, the word for "girl" or "daughter" is بِنْت ("bint"). It is, as you may have guessed, related to Hebrew "בת," but how? The answer lies in degemination, the removal of a דגש חזק from a letter. The Hebrew form should have been similar to its Arabic counterpart, but the former favored the assimilation of the נ into the following ת, resulting first in a structure such as "בת," and followed by a degemination resulting in the word we know – בת. This same phenomenon can be observed in the aforementioned words הַצָּיִם (whose שווא is ח.צ.צ.) and הַקָּיִם (whose שווא is ח.ק.ק.). The singular forms should be הַצֵּי and הַקֵּי, but Hebrew's reluctance to have a דגש in final, vowelless consonants renders the actual forms הַצֵּי and הַקֵּי, respectively.

(The reason for the vowel-change is due to a process called "compensatory lengthening", whereby the loss of the דגש is "compensated" by a short vowel's changing into a long vowel. Also, incidentally, the reason for the "i" vowel changing into an "a" vowel is due to a separate phenomenon known as Philippi's Law, which states that under certain circumstances "i" will change to "a" in closed, stressed syllables. The same phenomenon can be seen in the word גַּת, meaning "wine-press" as compared to גַּתִּי, "my wine-press".)

On a food-related note (another Jewish holiday is coming up, after all), the Hebrew word "הודו," meaning "give thanks" is not related to the word "הודו," meaning "India." In the latter, the דגש חזק in the ד is there to compensate for—you guessed it—a dropped נ, indicating the full name of the country, India. And this is how gemination can be life-saving, particularly if you are a turkey – תרנגול-הודו in Hebrew.

Hapy Hanukah! (Just doesn't look the same, does it?)

*Yair Shahak is Instructor of Hebrew at Yeshiva University.*

## Why Should You Look for a Summer Internship?

By JOCELYN COULTER,  
YU Career Development Center

As the temperature drops and finals approach, you may think it is too early to start thinking about an internship for the summer. You may also be thinking that you might not even need an internship for the summer. You have your summer camp position lined up. You are only a sophomore. You're already a junior. You aren't a business major. Maybe you haven't even declared your major yet. You don't know what kind of career you want.

All of these are, in fact, great reasons to secure a summer internship, and the time to start looking is now. Summer internships are the perfect opportunity for you to explore potential careers, gain valuable job experience, build up your resume, and learn about yourself. They are also critical in the eyes of future employers and graduate schools. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employer's 2010 Student Survey, "New graduates who took part in an internship program are more likely to have received a job



If you're lucky, your internship will make you very, very good at Gchat.

offer than their peers who decided to forgo the experience...Survey results show the median accepted salary offer for seniors with an internship was \$45,301—nearly 31 percent higher than the \$34,601 median accepted salary offer to non-intern seniors." In a tough economy where there are many more applicants than jobs, prior experience through internships is essentially a requirement for landing that first job out of college.

How do you start looking for a summer internship? First, visit the YU Career Development Center to have your resume reviewed and to discuss career paths that might be of

interest to you. Also gain familiarity with YU CareerLink, the CDC's job posting board where employers post jobs and internships. Over 150 spring and summer internship opportunities are currently listed, with more added every day. You can also start looking at several outside resources posted on the CDC website. Most importantly, network! Talk to friends, relatives, shul members, faculty, previous employers, and anyone else you know. Become familiar with social networking sites such as LinkedIn. Networking is the number one way that students find opportunities. For techniques on how to network, visit the CDC.



## A Jazz Gem in Harlem

By GAVRIEL BROWN

The 25-minute walk to 555 Edgecombe Ave took me to the southern edge of Washington Heights. At 3:30 PM, the winter afternoon sun hung low in the sky. I soon found myself in the lobby of a stately apartment building overlooking the Harlem River with no clue what apartment button to press. Never mind, two minutes later a trio of tourists bumbled into the lobby. They had better directions than I, and we climbed two stories to apartment 3F.

Inside the small apartment, a sizable crowd had gathered on the hodgepodge of folding chairs and couches in the living room and along the hallway. In the middle of the living room, a large Christmas tree decorated with neon blue lights saturated the room in aqua. Beside the sizable tree stood an upright piano. The walls were covered in pamphlets of famous Jazz singers who made the pilgrimage to 3F to perform at the home of Marjorie Eliot.

For 30 years, Marjorie Eliot has lived in this apartment. Since 1991, rain or shine or family tragedy, Marjorie Eliot has held a Jazz performance in her home every Sunday at 4 PM. Indeed, much of her life seems like a string of tragedies. In 1992, her son Phil, at only 32 years old, died of kidney problems. His death, on a Sunday, was the impetus for beginning a concert series held in her home. In 2006, her son Michael, 47, died of meningitis. In 2011, Marjorie Eliot made headlines when her son Shaun, who suffered from mental illness, went missing for 33 days, only to turn up in a

mental hospital.

However, Marjorie Eliot has not let misfortune faze her. Eliot, a talented and award-winning jazz musician, playwright, and actress continues to perform weekly in her apartment.

On this cold Sunday, the diverse crowd of European and Asian tourists, hipsters, retirees, young professionals, and smattering of college students chatted quietly. The topic of conversation was how everyone had found out about this hidden gem in Harlem. "From a guide book to New York," I overhear the tourist tell his neighbor. "From friends," the woman next to me said. "I learned about it from the New York Magazine," I admit to her, feeling less authentic.

A few minutes past four o'clock, the crowd, who by this time had filled up every empty seat, quieted down. Marjorie Eliot emerged from a back room dressed in an elegant white dress. Her ebony face, wild white hair and dark eyes gave her an enigmatic mystique as she seemed to glide down the hallway to the living room. She sat down at the piano and began a slow ballad, which quickened to a run as she rapidly descended and ascended the scales. After a few minutes of playing, she concluded the first of what would be many tunes of the evening with a thunderous applause.

As she began to play the next tune, out came her son Rudel Drears, also an accomplished musician and singer, in white pants and a white vest. He sang "Go Tell it on the Mountain," an African American Spiritual song. The riff soon caught the crowd as the audience clapped and sang the refrain "Go, tell it on the mountain / Over the hills and

everywhere / Go, tell it on the mountain / That Jesus Christ is born." Christmas songs were the theme of the late afternoon concert. Songs included "Sound of Christmas," "A Charlie Brown Christmas," and "The Christmas Song."

After Marjorie and Rudel's soulful tune, Saxophonist Sedric Shukroon joined in. Shukroon immediately fell into rhythm on his alto sax. Throughout the afternoon he switched between sax, flute, and clarinet and was masterful at all three.

Outside musicians, Shukroon tells me, flock to the apartment concerts because the atmosphere's energy is positive, the audience always receptive and the gigs fun. "There's no pressure here, we just have a great time." The musicians enjoy playing freely, without thinking about their careers. Here they can improvise and experiment with new concepts. Shukroon has been a regular performer at Marjorie's for a few years and is paid "well" for his time.

Halfway through the concert, an intermission allows people to stretch their legs. Marjorie serves apple juice and cookies. Another woman collects donations, which help pay for the artists; "No pressure," she says, "donate what you can."

After everyone quiets down, Marjorie, Rudel, and Sedric are joined by veteran bassist Bob Cunningham for another hour of Jazz. They move freely from free jazz improvisations to soloist breaks. Sedric throws in a few popular quotes as the tunes proceed. At some point the band sings happy birthday to one of Marjorie's friends, and the crowd, at that point standing room only, joins in gleefully.

The uplifting and soulful concert ends with a huge round of applause. Marjorie kisses all who leave, many of whom, I learn from the conversations, have attended regularly for years.

Anyone who loves Jazz, an adventure, or just a free concert should make the trip to apartment 3F. But there is no need to hurry; Marjorie Eliot plans on hosting the concerts forever.

*Marjorie Eliot's parlor, 555 Edgecombe, apartment 3F, opens at 3:30 every Sunday.*



Marjorie Eliot holds concerts in her home every Sunday.

## Always Home

*A Soldier's Quest to Tell Every Israeli's Story*

By TAMAR SHMARYAHU

The Britain-native IDF (Israel Defense Forces) heavy machine gunner reservist, Sergeant Benjamin Anthony, stood in front of the Yeshiva University audience cool, stern, and steadfast. His message was clear: if the Jewish people wait any longer, amidst disunity and the international community's persistent attack on our very legitimacy and self-determination, it is as though we await defeat of our beloved Jewish state.

Sergeant Benjamin Anthony, founder of the organization "Our Soldiers Speak", travels to college campuses, high schools, synagogues and even US reserves' trainees' bases. Anthony founded the organization in 2006 out of the recognized need to express what precisely happens in the IDF in light of negative media bias and negative sentiment on so many North American college campuses.

To illustrate this negativity, Anthony began by showing a clip from his lecture at Hampshire college in Amherst, MA last semester. Attendees numbered 250, and most of them were anti-Israel. The clip is marked by a young woman standing up declaring that she is a descendant of Holocaust survivors, exclaiming, "never again for anybody," falsely equating the extermination of Eastern European Jews during the Holocaust to Palestinian suffering, with whistles in the background "free free Palestine!" Anthony highlighted that these reactions are the trend, not the exception. To visualize how real this threat is Anthony shared that, on college campuses, he is regularly falsely accused of raping Palestinians and being a Nazi.

The mass emigration of Jews from Europe in light of a real anti-Semitism, Anthony relates, is as real as the terrorist threat the Jewish people in Israel face. To be a member of the IDF is "suddenly recognizing what it is like to be the last line of defense between you and the Jewish people." The idle response of the Jewish community is even more of a threat than the threat itself, Anthony argues, and it is collective inactivity that should require further investigation.

Anthony also believes that we, as the Jewish people, must fundamentally realize that we are better off because of Israel and it is because of her that there should be "unconditional debt of gratitude".

The Jewish threat is just as real as the enemy's threat, though, Anthony emphasized. Although audiences will tell Anthony that his lectures are "preaching to the choir" and Anthony commends these Israel student activists, there is much work still to be done to mobilize other stu-

dents into changing the Israel sentiment on these college campuses. "Within that so-called choir is the key to victory."

In conclusion, Anthony offered a comprehensive solution to this existential problem. Firstly, recognition must come into place and a determination to win or else we could follow the dreadful example of the Jews of Europe. Anthony, a native of Leeds, England, grew up in a community of 24,000 Jews which is now a dim 4,500.

Secondly, real dialogue must begin amongst the various denominations of Diaspora Jewry. We must streamline the narrative of Israel, for it is a unifying factor despite the differences.

Thirdly, we must mobilize the youth and get them excited and passionate about Israel. Israel education must be implemented in Jewish day schools, starting with a suggested 'Israel History' course.

Fourthly, we must ascertain the allocation of funds from pro-Israel benefactors and ensure its end location is, in fact, favorable. Too many times, anti-Israel sentiment will be taught by one of ours, a Jewish professor. "We are the financial architects of our own demise. The benefactors will redirect funds if you call them."

Lastly, the final point made by Anthony is that we all have a duty and responsibility and an obligation to apply our talents to maintaining Israel's existence.

Anthony challenged the audience to "consider for a moment that your grandparents, great-grandparents yearned for Israel when it was riddled with malaria and disease, didn't we still yearn for her?" The Land and the Jewish people are inextricably tied: this cannot be denied. Anthony urged the audience to not dismiss this notion, but rather believe in it fervently.

Anthony concludes on a fearful but empowering note. There have been constant Jewish massacres throughout history. We, as a people, always run away the moment we perceive danger. Nevertheless, in Israel, we are not running away from the danger. We confront it. The Sergeant recited an impassioned and applicable verse from Deuteronomy 20:1, stating that when the Jewish people go out to battle with an enemy far more numerous than they, we should not fear because God is with us.

For as Golda Meir once stated, "We in Israel, we have a secret weapon. We have nowhere else to go."

*Learn more about Sergeant Benjamin Anthony's organization, "Our Soldiers Speak," at [www.oursoldierspeak.org](http://www.oursoldierspeak.org) or by emailing [inquiries@oursoldierspeak.org](mailto:inquiries@oursoldierspeak.org).*

## Featured Fiction: A Slice of Living

By MOSHE AZIZOLLAHOFF

She looked at the slice of pizza, all slick with grease, shimmering, mirage-like, and watched as it seemed to begin to writhe terribly on the plate. This couldn't be happening again. Two years ago, as of this past Tuesday, marked the end of her stay at the Serenity House. She was past this, she had to be.

She remembered the hug Dr. Paterson had given her and the final

pat on the back while her father had stood there holding her grey nylon suitcase waiting to walk her to the car. Dr. Paterson had looked her in the eyes and told her smile had begun to touch them again. One final goodbye and she walked out.

But now, looking across the table at Sam, and down at her cooling yet still somehow crisp-looking pizza, had her crinkling up her nose, trying not to gag from the smell of the food. How had this crept up on her again? Sam wasn't like Eric had

been. Sam laughed easily and often. He gave quarters to old men that were ahead of him in line and were short eight cents. He would grab her hand and squeeze when that smile wandered away from her eyes.

The little worms that had eaten away at her body all those years ago, that she'd spent months plucking out of her mind, had somehow wriggled their way back in.

No. This wasn't Eric.

She picked up the slice and took a bite.





The Chelsea Market is hosting Artists and Fleas through December 31.

## Artists and Fleas: Williamsburg Art Scene Pops Up in Chelsea

BY YAEL ROBERTS

This isn't your grandmother's flea market. Head into the depths of Chelsea, where small cafés spill out onto the streets, where old brownstones mingle with flashy skyscrapers, where the High Line towers above 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and where the blue of the Hudson flashes in the space between the buildings. Here, the streets widen, the crowds are sparse, and a certain peace and quiet permeates Manhattan.

At 15<sup>th</sup> Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue sits Chelsea Market, an indoor food haven with bakeries, coffee shops, and the occasional pop-up market. This December, Artists and Fleas, an art market usually housed in a warehouse in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, is popping up in the midst of Chelsea, showcasing various independent designers and artists for the holiday season. "Brooklyn's best are coming to Manhattan," advertises the promotional poster. And this ever-changing market with new vendors being added regularly is a far cry from the holiday markets at Bryant Park, Union Square or Columbus Circle.

The market is alive with a profusion of colors, goods, fabrics, and artwork; however, I was surprised at the small number of vendors (only about 30). Apparently their normal warehouse in Brooklyn is the same size, but more jam-packed. At the entrance to the Chelsea location, there is a display of huge wooden signs declaring "DRUGS" and "STOP," parts of a carousel, and an informational poster promoting the market. Nearby, a few vendors sell t-shirts for \$25-30 with deals if you buy more than one. One t-shirt artist, GoLLY, sells t-shirts made from old vintage shirts from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. GoLLY's art studio, based in the Lower East Side, cuts up designs from vintage t-shirts. Characters from Superman to Curious George are then sewn onto modern, colorful t-shirts. "Yes, we can customize the Princess Leah cocktail dress," the vendor tells me, pointing to the Star Wars-themed dress on a mannequin. "This is like pottery shards and arrowheads," he exclaims, marveling over the fact that Curious George is

now vintage enough to be a novelty.

Another t-shirt artist, Simeon Lynn, is a screen printer who bikes around Manhattan and Brooklyn and takes photographs which he then color separates in Photoshop and screen-prints onto t-shirts. The images are of bridges, skylines, and crowds, printed on light, colorful fabric. He also creates canvases of the various scenes around the city thrust together in a Cubist-like fashion.

Yet another t-shirt artist, Jason Laurits, juxtaposes bizarre imagery together and prints it on shirts. A canary plays a trumpet, or a donkey grins while wearing hipster glasses. His company is called PASTE, speaking to the collage-like nature of his art.

Sharing a studio with Simeon Lynn is Bryan Close, a photographer who not only photographs places around Manhattan and Brooklyn, but creates his own beautiful wooden frames for his work. One of Close's photographs is of a mural of a gray and black portrait of a girl, near Bowery and Spring Streets, outside the apartment building of renowned photographer Louis K. Meisel. Close's company is called The Light Dynamic, and he's currently collaborating with writer Heather Jacks on a forthcoming book called *The Noise Beneath the Apple*, which explores buskers and street performers in New York City through photography and text.

Also at the market are jewelry makers, such as Astali, who creates hand-crafted jewelry from bullet cases and beaver teeth. The vendor jokes with me that "no one was harmed in the making of this jewelry," referring to the bullet cases. Stern Design Works, another vendor, captures small railroad model animals in glass and makes them into necklaces. Jenny Topolski, an artist and designer, collects dead bees she picks up from a local bee farmer and freezes them in glass, which she then makes into necklaces. She also has a series of murder mystery jewelry, with images of criminals captured in earrings or jewelry, and small knives or other weapons dangling from the earrings. Her "suicidal writers bookmarks" are what you might envision: small pendants framing images of writers like Vir-

ginia Wolf or Ernest Hemingway.

Other booths display both jewelry and fine art, like hélène pé's, an artist who has created a world of small, quirky creatures that she paints on jewelry, on greeting cards which read "I love you more than New York," on canvases, and on sheet music. When asked about why she uses sheet music, she explains in a heavy French accent that it's sometimes hard to paint straight onto white paper. Her unique style of delicate cartoony creatures painted onto waltz sheet music gives her art an attractive flair.

Another interesting vendor, Evolving Habitat, sells antlers, which they explicitly state are not hunted, but rather salvaged from deer after they shed. They also sell clothing, flowers in handmade vases, and small environments of succulents and cacti resting on greenery.

As you wander throughout the vendors selling everything from clothing to jewelry to fine art, eccentric music plays lightly in the background. All of the artists and vendors are eager to engage visitors and explain their processes. This is one flea market which is less cliché and commercial than most, proving that even jewelry and t-shirts can explore the boundary between arts and crafts. Many of the artists have Etsy stores and are highly successful, resulting in overpriced products. But the market is a great opportunity if not to buy holiday gifts, to converse and network with a group of interesting, successful artists creating unique work. The market's website brags that they "never quite offer the same experience twice." And with such an interesting hodgepodge of artists, designers, and collectors, it's believable.

*The Artists and Fleas pop up market in Chelsea is open through December 31, 10:30-7:30. The market is closed December 25, 15<sup>th</sup> Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The Williamsburg market is open year round Saturday and Sunday, 10:00-7:00, 70 North 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Brooklyn. Admission is free. More information on vendors and the market is available at [artistsandfleas.com](http://artistsandfleas.com).*

## Cultural Calendar: DECEMBER

BY ARTS AND CULTURE STAFF

*A Dangerous Method* is in theaters now. This film explores the men who paved the deepest and darkest highways into man's psyche. The film tells the story of Karl Jung, the psychoanalyst who broke away from his mentor Sigmund Freud over his dalliance with a former patient, now an aspiring psychoanalyst herself. Featuring Michael Fassbender as Karl Jung, Viggo Mortensen as Sigmund Freud, and Keira Knightley as Sabrina Spielheim, the patient. *Playing at Landmark Sunshine Cinema and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.*

The alternative country, hairmetal, psych, prog rock of *My Morning Jacket* meets the lush country rock of *Band of Horses* at Madison Square Garden. My Morning Jacket is on tour promoting their latest album *Circuital*, their most recent since their *Evil Urges* of 2008, regarded by *Rolling Stone* as one of the top 50 albums of the year. *December 14, 7:30. Madison Square Garden, \$35-\$55.50.*

The oldest, best-preserved, parchment scroll of The Ten Commandments is on view as part of *Dead Sea Scrolls: Life and Faith in Biblical Times*. The Ten Commandments are only on display for two weeks so hurry over before January 2. See The Dead Sea Scrolls, a stone from the Western Wall, and 50 other artifacts from the ancient near east as part of the ongoing exhibit. *Through April 15, Discovery Times Square, \$25*

*Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, a sequel to the Sherlock Holmes movie of 2009, hits theaters this coming Friday. Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law return for round two, starring as Holmes and Watson, respectively. An intellectual mystery and adventure, pitting the duo against their famed nemesis, Professor Moriarty. *December 16, area theaters.*

*Eyebeam* in Chelsea will hold their Winter 2011 **open studios**. Eyebeam is a center for artistic research that overlaps with technology and science. Come to watch their fellows and residents at work. Explore the studios, or take part in an hourly guided tour. *December 16 and 17 from 3:00-6PM, Eyebeam Art and Technology Center, Free.*

Catch *Standing on Ceremony: The Gay Marriage Plays* in its final week. The performance is a series of short plays by award winning authors exploring the ideas of same sex marriage, equality, and the all consuming power of love. A portion of sales goes to organizations promoting gay marriage. *Closing December 18, Minetta Lane Theater, \$25-125.*

*Close Up Space* opens next week, starring David Hyde Pierce as a struggling book editor. With a cast

of assistants and interns who exacerbate his problems, Pierce must confront family issues and relationships on and off the page. A witty and funny play about communication. *December 19, Manhattan Theater Club, \$80.*

**Old and the New: Mark Podwal's Textiles for the Altneuschul** is an exhibition of textiles created by Mark Podwal for Prague's Altneuschul, built in 1270 and still in use. Along with the textiles the exhibit showcases the artist's earlier graphic works. A celebration of the exhibit will take place at the YU Museum. The exhibit remains open through January 15. *December 19, 6:30, YU Museum, free.*

*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, the film adaptation of Stieg Laerson's bestselling novel, chronicles one reporter's investigation of a girl's disappearance some 30 years earlier, aided by the hacker-goth Lisbeth Salander. Expect dark things. *December 21, Area theaters.*

This Channukah, **The Shondes**, a political punk-rock klezmer Brooklyn-based band play as part of **Hanuka Rock**, a concert celebrating the radical voices of Jewish punk. Yiddish Princess and Schmeckel join The Shondes in concert. Co-presented by JFREJ (Jews for Racial and Economic Justice). *December 21, 8:00, Southpaw, \$10.*

**The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo** soundtrack CD is set to be released later this month. The CD is a collaboration between Trent Raznor of the Nine Inch Nails and Atticus Ross. The dark and brooding score is led by the lead single "Immigrant Song," a cover featuring Karen O of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. The duo previously worked together on the Academy Award-winning soundtrack for *The Social Network*. *December 27, Amazon.com, \$17.11*

Catch **Real/Surreal** at the Whitney Museum before it closes. The exhibit highlights the tension between the real and the surreal in twentieth-century art, drawing on the museum's permanent collection of fine art. Through a wide range of media, the exhibit explores the difference between the concrete and the imaginative. *Closes February 12, The Whitney Museum of American Art, \$12-\$18.*

Catch **Gogol Bordello** live at Terminal 5 this New Year's Eve. Coming off 2010's Latin-inflected Trans-Continental Hustle, this ragtag group of Roma, Russian, American and Israeli musicians brings down the house with their punk rock world music, each time, every time. *December 31, Terminal 5, \$35.*

For all you history and political science buffs, go see Meryl Streep take on the role of Margaret Thatcher in **The Iron Lady**. Adopting the received English accent and iron disposition, Streep seems well on her way to another Oscar with this one. *December 30, area theaters.*



# Vote for Independence!

## YCDS's Production of 1776

By Rachel Renz

Oftentimes, history perfects its makers to the extent that they lose their humanness, weakness, humor, or emotion. We are generally presented with two-dimensional figures portrayed as stoic individuals who simply make a contribution to society and then exit the world's grand stage. The musical production *1776* fights this perfected notion of historical personalities, humanizing its characters through humor and emotion, through depictions of both public and private life. This play speaks with a self-awareness about its own authenticity, as Benjamin Franklin remarks to John Adams, "Don't worry, John, the history books will clean it up." The brilliance of *1776* is its ability to glorify America's Founding Fathers precisely by proving their vulnerability and relatable personalities.

In *1776*, Congress is at a dangerous standstill in their eventual decision to vote for an official break from the British Empire and to compose a Declaration stating the facts and hopes of new American independence. Because of a complex relationship between the colonists and their British counterparts, Congress has decided that a vote for independence could only be a unanimous one. Yet the simple reality that declaring independence is a vote of treason and can warrant their hanging is enough to dissuade many senators. Yet John Adams, a man whose greatest flaw and strength is his stubbornness, insists that national independence from Britain is the only thing to do, and so he, in his own war of independence against the majority he works with, fights a winning battle for nationhood.

This year's Yeshiva College Dramatics Society (YCDS) fall production was an adaptation of the Broadway musical *1776*, a retelling of this nation's founding and the writing of its Declaration of Independence. Directed by YC Professor of Drama Lin Snider and stage-managed by Arye Fohrman (YC '12), YCDS did it complete justice, filling the theater with laughter, song, and sincerity. The cast unfortunately had to make use of extremely limited performance space, yet they used every bit of it: stage, aisles and all. With convincing costumes and some rather amusing accents, the actors made history come to life. Even the more minor aspects of costuming were seen to, such as having proper colonial shoes with a strap-on buckle in place, completing the pre-nationhood "look" of the eighteenth century.

Although most of the singers were strong and the songs were certainly in tune, a number of voices

did not meet the register necessary to truly leave an impression; in particular, "The Lees of Old Virginia" was a bit weak. However, Adams' performance "Is Anybody There?" resonated as a touching, on-tune, vocal number full of sincerity and emphasis. I had the privilege to speak with the star of this number and the lead of the play, and to find out about the intricacies of the characters,

goals. He's a difficult character. He has uncertainty, yet underneath this lies a deep sense of confidence." Yet the exigencies of portraying a character quite unlike oneself can be a challenge. This challenge in relating to one's character is something with which each actor must grapple.

wanted to believe in the defense I was giving," said Meiri.

Another challenge the entire cast had to grapple with was the paucity of actresses to portray the female roles of Abigail Adams and Martha Jefferson. Abigail Adams is particularly difficult to compensate for, as she serves the important role of putting her husband

John in his place through her knowing

acters which some might see as less important, such as the courier who appears throughout the play, delivering George Washington's dispatches from the revolutionary battlefield. However, the courier, played by freshman Moshe Wigder, provides a crucial dimension to the play's historical narrative. As Wigder explains, "He provides a different angle for the play. The play is mainly centered around the debate in Congress, yet it is the courier who has contact with the actual war and sees the struggles people are going through."

Wigder also explores the reason behind his character's anonymity, explaining that it is not a sign of unimportance, but rather an indication of the courier's embodiment of a different "constituency." "The courier is not given a name because he represents a certain part of the people—all the kids out there fighting, the lower class." This is made clear in the courier's solo number, "Mama." Wigder, who sang a powerful rendition of this song, explained the song's purpose and its relevance to the courier role's purpose: "In this song, the courier transforms into Willie, a young soldier who dies right off the battlefield green. This song relates what a soldier would see on the battlefield, and urges the parents to come search for their dying children. It portrays whole families that were sacrificed because of this war." Thanks to characters and songs like the courier and "Mama," a true sense of the historical climate during the signing of the Declaration is successfully communicated to the audience.

Each role truly adds something, not only to the content, but also to an actor's repertoire. Some seasoned, others freshly initiated, the cast of *1776* came to form a sense of "camaraderie" as Meiri notes. From first-time college actor Daniel Rosenberg who portrays the similarly "first-time" senator, Dr. Lyman Hall, from Georgia, to Tani Isaac, a fourth-time YCDS performer who plays a similarly experienced and wise Benjamin Franklin, each actor and his respective character melt together to form cohesive presentations and a unified cast.

In particular, the cast's opening number, "Sit Down, John," is a first look at the unity of the cast and the smooth cooperation of the entire crew, ironically juxtaposed to the animosity central to the song's very theme. Through the fragility of the members of Congress's relationships with one another, any audience member could see the YCDS cast unify in a common goal to make *1776* the brilliant production it was meant to be. They truly have lived up to their country's goal of "*E Pluribus Unum*," "Out of many, one."

the production process, and acting as a whole.

Ariel Meiri (YC '12), a super senior majoring in biology, was cast in the starring role of John Adams, the "obnoxious and disliked" congressman from Boston who motivates Congress to create and sign the Declaration. Having seen the 1972 film production of this musical "a million times," Adams has been "a dream role" of Meiri's for quite some time. Meiri explains, "John has motivations and

Unlike Adams, Meiri is easygoing, calm, and likable. "Even if you're playing a villain, you will read so as to better understand your character and his motivations. In 'The Andersonville Trial' (last year's YCDS production), I studied the issues." Meiri had been cast as a defense lawyer for a Confederate soldier being charged with war crimes. "I

letters and loving criticisms, as well as providing a virtual companion for Adams when Congress has abandoned him. Despite her absence, her messages were clearly envisioned and conveyed, by having John read aloud the original letters of Abigail.

Meiri comments, "Every character is there for a reason; each has his motivations behind his decisions and actions." This holds true as much for Adams as for char-



1776 made Schottenstein cool again.



# Music Meets Fiction

Josh Ritter, Steve Earle, Wes Stace LIVE at NYPL

By NETANYA BUSHEWSKY

Folk music seekers and bookworms alike wriggled in their seats for the closing night event from LIVE at the New York Public Library. Josh Ritter, author of *Bright Passages*, Wes Stace, author of *Charles Jessold, Considered as a Murderer* and Steve Earle, author of *I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive*, discussed their latest best-reviewed novels of the year. Primarily known as folk and rock musicians, all three artists took the leap from notes to novels, hoping the trust developed between a musician and his audience could transfer to a new medium.

For the past six years, LIVE has organized a space for conversations with famous musicians, actors and writers to encourage creativity and foster inspiration. This allowed the three musicians to speak freely on stage and interview one another about their personal journeys from musicians to authors. It was apparent that Ritter and Earle, newer novelists, were less confident in reading passages than was Wes Stace, who had written three novels previously.

Unlike many other authors, the three artists agreed that their lyrical background allowed them to bring a musical element to fiction. Wes Stace noted, "Songwriting is an apprenticeship for writing. I used to try to make songs as literary as they can be. Now I make novels as musical as possible." Frank Earle, previously nominated for 16 Grammys and a student of Townes Van Zandt and Rodney Crowell, always viewed music as "literature you could hear

in your car."

With all three writers relating to fiction as extended lyrics, it makes sense that all their novels were inspired by songs. Ritter's first novel, *Passage Ways*, was based off a song he wrote about a man who receives notes from an angel. His fictional novel depicts the life of Henry Bright, a soldier in WWI who returns from the war with an angel. On a whim he and his combat unit flee to France and take refuge in a Church. Ritter joked, "This is not a Steven Spielberg movie," while Wes Stace interjected, "Not yet."

Likewise, Stace based his first novel off the lyrics, "I was found by the richest man in the world / Oh yeah, who bought me up as a girl" from his song "Mrs. Fortune." He added, "I worked on this line and turned it into a story over the next seven years." His latest novel, *Charles Jessold, Considered as a Murderer*, is a comedic story of a wealthy but uneducated critic of classical music pre-WWII, which was inspired not by a song, but by a genre of music.

Steve Earle's novel and album, *I'll Never Make it Out of This World Alive*, were both inspired by Hank Williams's last song released before his death with the same title. His novel takes place in San Antonio, 1963, where Doc Ebersole, the protagonist, follows Hank Williams through Texas and performs abortions on prostitutes. The passage Earle read concluded with his singing in country twang, "No matter how I struggle and strive / I'll never get out of this world alive."

However, there are significant differences that come with being a

writer compared to being a musician. Steve Earle recalled, "Most songs are written in a day. My book took eight years. Typing is hard!" Wes Stace added, "A blank page with songwriting is never that scary. With novels, blank pages on computer screens are absolutely terrifying." Contrary to Stace and Earle, Ritter originally wrote his book in two months at 1000 words a day. "I was used to the rhythm of putting out records," said Ritter. However, he quickly realized the finished product was far from a rough draft. "I read it again afterwards and realized it was awful and rewrote it. From songwriting I learned every word [is] important."

Being a musician first, Earle is well aware that book critics might dismiss his novels as publicity stunts, recalling how his first book of short stories, *Dog House Roses*, received a poor review from *The New York Times*. Earle's survival method against negative reviews is simple—"I stopped reading reviews. There is no reason for any artist to adjust their art." Regarding music criticism, Wes agreed, "I don't care about music criticism, because I'll never change the way I sing, but reading criticism on my books is different. I like when people take time to review; it's kind of nice." Ritter adds, "Some people don't get it, some will." He continues, "My job as an artist is to do what I feel I should. A record might not go in a direction people will like, but that's my job."

Josh Ritter, a young Denis Quaid look-alike, is most recognized for his soothing voice and intricate song lyrics, which earned



Ritter, Earle, and Stace dazzled hordes with their broad artistic talents.

him the title of "100 Greatest Living Songwriters" by *Paste Magazine* in 2006. Despite Ritter's musical fame over the last couple of years, he's surprisingly humble. When asked how he began novel writing, he recalled growing up in Idaho, "A place where there was nothing going on but throwing rocks at rocks and reading." Ritter tends to speak in metaphors and similes, comparing songs to "novels on grains of rice," and comparing his childhood self to "water with no bucket, a shape with no form." Ritter found new freedom in novel writing separate from lyrics, exclaiming, "I can write as long as I want. I don't have to rhyme!"

Steve Earle, a classic looking rock musician, showcasing a long ponytail and beard, dropped out of school after eighth grade, and began performing at 20 years old. He recalled the first time he wrote prose in 1994, "I began by writing in my journal, because my sponsor told me to. Somewhere in between I had writers block for four to five years." He also gives credit to computers, which according to Earle, "Made it possible for me to write anything longer than a song."

Wes Stace's British accent and gestural manner oozed confidence easily mistaken for pretention. He took seven years to write his first book, and gave encouragement

to the other two writers who still seemed self-conscious. "It's about confidence. When I got my second book it was massively easier." He joked, "I wrote three novels with two fingers," referring to his slow typing method.

Putting books aside, when it comes to singing, all three musicians forgot their nervousness and exuded a confident energy only experienced folk and rock singers are capable of. Josh Ritter performed two exceptionally story-like songs, "Sir Galahad" and "Folk Blood Bath." Wes Stace sang, "There is a Starbucks Where the Starbucks Used to Be," and Steve Earle played, "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid." The tension that came with reading fiction eased, and the entire audience relaxed as new life filled each artist. All three musicians brought out their guitars and jammed, quickly reminding themselves that above being writers they are first performers, a role they hope to uphold for many years to come.

The new spring schedule starts on Thurs, Jan. 19, and past conversations, including this one, can be viewed at [www.nypl.org/live](http://www.nypl.org/live). Past conversation include Elizabeth Gilbert, Diane Keaton, Lou Reed and Jay-Z.

## The Bard Arthur and the Liar Phillips

By DOV HONICK

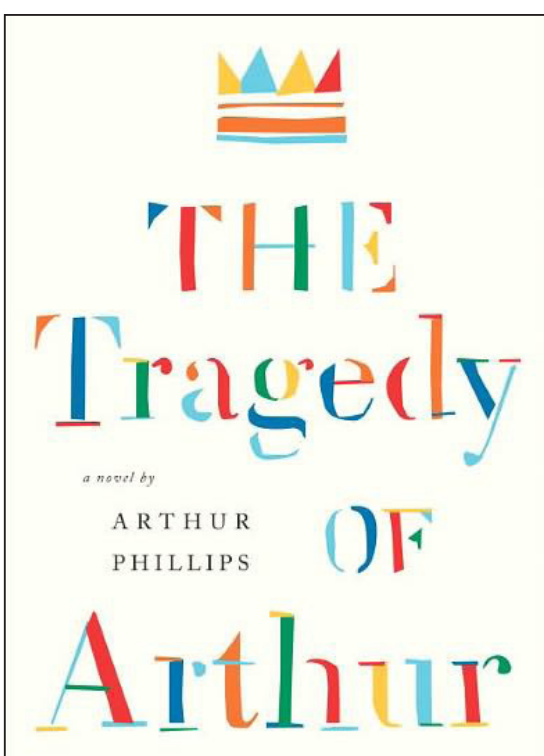
Something weird happened to me this summer. I read the *Tragedy of Arthur*, the fifth offering by novelist Arthur Phillips. It's a play; no, an introduction to a play; no, a faux memoir, except that's not entirely accurate either. Whatever it is, it's hard to pin down. Either way, the basic premise of the book is that Arthur Phillips is given a long-lost Shakespearean play by his father, Arthur Phillips Sr. Random House is publishing it, and given his role in bringing the play to light, Arthur Jr. has been contracted to write the introduction and annotations. So far so clear. I also took the time to read James Shapiro's academic treatise, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare*. That's not really the weird thing; what's weird is that as I was arguing the Shakespeare authorship question with a staunch Oxfordian, I found myself quoting from rather absurd arguments in the *Tragedy of Arthur*, mistaking them for the content of Shapiro's book. For me, someone who'd like to think he understands historical

method, quoting a novel in this fashion is a disorienting, almost upsetting experience. *The Tragedy of Arthur* is a book that totally rewrites reality, and that I quoted it as history shows that *The Tragedy of Arthur* has done its job, and in grand fashion.

Reading *The Tragedy of Arthur* as a novel is tricky, as all of the characters are real people, allegedly. Ultimately I know that the book I am holding in my hands is a novel—if the dust jacket didn't say it, I would be less confident—but Arthur The Protagonist shares quite a few characteristics with Phillips The Author. Of course the protagonist is Phillips The Author (possibly, perhaps probably, fictionalized), having written the same books, gone to the same schools, and lived in the same places. His father's name is Arthur too. And by the time you're done reading *The Tragedy of Arthur*, you have absolutely no idea which Arthur is the most tragic. It could be any one of the four; it's a veritable "Inception" of Arthurs (and don't try looking him up on Wikipedia, the story you get there is sparse and roughly the same as his author biography for the novel).

Away to some important plot elements. We are told early on that Arthur, the protagonist, had a rather irregular relationship with his father. Arthur, his father, a talented but luckless forger, has spent much of his life in jail. That's not to say that his father is in any way a bad kind of guy; his intention is never to cause anyone harm. Just his bad luck, I suppose, that his forgeries also often involve trespassing and counterfeiting and military draft notices. All he really wants from his forgeries is "to add to the world's store of precious possibility." It's Arthur Sr.'s obsession with the marvelous that makes him attempt to instill a love for Shakespeare in his kids, Arthur Jr. and his twin sister Dana. Dana seems to enjoy it, Arthur decidedly doesn't; cue daddy issues. One play that is of particular importance is *The Most Excellent and Tragical Historie of Arthur, King of Britain*, a curious play that has never before been seen by anyone other than Arthur Sr. and his children. He apparently got it from his grandfather who acted in its only staging. Dana takes to it something fierce, reading and re-reading

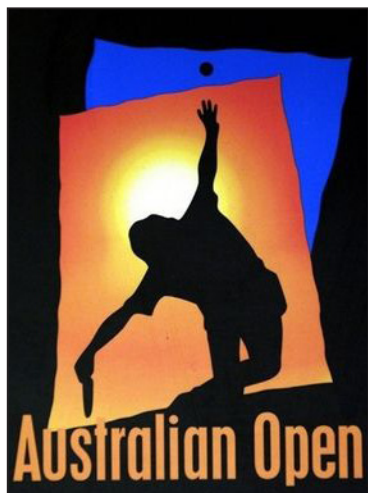
See *Bard Arthur*, page 17



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# Tennis Down Under



Victory is sweet.

By Don Cantor

It's that time of year again. When the snow begins to fall, awesome music is playing in the stores, Jews are lighting their *chanukiyot*, and it's 80 degrees in Melbourne, Australia as they are preparing for the first Grand Slam tennis event of 2012.

The Australian open first took place in 1905, and is the only Grand Slam tennis event held in the southern hemisphere. It is currently held each year in Melbourne Park during the last two weeks of January.

This year, 99 of the top 100 ranked men are competing in the tournament, as well as 98 of the top 100 women. This year will be the

100<sup>th</sup> men's singles tournament at the Australian Open, and it promises to be exciting. Although Novak Djokovic has everything going for him heading into the tournament, Roger Federer, currently ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> and one of the greatest Grand Slam competitors in tennis history, is coming off of a win in London that may give him an extra boost in the tournament as well.

Novak Djokovic (Serbia), currently the top rated men's player in the world, won the men's Australian Open in 2011, and has won three of the past four major tennis tournaments, being ousted in the semifinals of the French Open. Needless to say, he's on a roll. Kim Clijsters (Belgium) won the women's Australia

lian open in 2011, and is currently ranked 13<sup>th</sup> behind USA's Serena Williams. Top-ranked Caroline Wozniacki lost in the semifinals to China's Li Na, who is currently ranked 5<sup>th</sup>.

Once again, there are no women from the United States ranked in the top ten, although a good showing from Serena Williams (12<sup>th</sup>) may enable her to break in. USA's Mardy Fish (8<sup>th</sup>) remains the only men's player from our country ranked in the top ten. Let's see if he can get something done.

On the women's side, top ranked Caroline Wozniacki is hungry for her first Grand Slam title, but looks to be challenged by seasoned veteran, Maria Sharapova (4<sup>th</sup>).

# Bard Arthur

continued from page 16...

it, learning it by heart, and never wasting an opportunity to quote it to Arthur Jr., who is learning to quite despise Shakespeare's "bullying, noxious presence" by now.

We're now a few decades in. Arthur Jr. is a successful novelist and Arthur Sr. is serving a prison term for forgery. Knowing he's soon to expire, Arthur Sr. decides to let his son in on an important secret: the book he long ago bequeathed to Dana is a forgery. Senior had made it from an actual first edition quarto that he found in an estate in England. It is Arthur Jr.'s task to use his literary connections to see the original published. Random House (Arthur's publisher both in the novel and in real life) buys the rights to the play, and given Arthur's role in bringing the play to light, requests that he write the introduction.

Arthur, knowing his father's history, has the play subjected to a battery of authentication tests, conducted by many of the world's leading Shakespearean scholars, some named, some unnamed. Shapiro himself makes an appearance as the unnamed but readily identifiable "Brooklyn-born Ivy league Bardman." As it turns out, Arthur cannot keep his skeletons in the closet and no number of expert authentications can erase his doubt that this is in fact his father's (whose history of forgery is quite extensive) last and greatest play. Ultimately though, a contract with Random House forces Arthur to write the introduction despite his protests. What we get, then, is a 250-page introduction, which becomes Arthur Jr.'s cathar-

sis. Arthur gives us the memoir because "the truth of the play requires understanding the truth of [his] life," an odd statement coming from an author who explicitly tells us that his memoir is unreliable (of course, we don't know if this is Arthur the Narrator or Phillips the Author speaking). The memoir certainly does achieve a certain verisimilitude, with included photos and letters, written on Random House letterhead, though, ironically perhaps, these could have all been forged by the meta-Phillips.

In his own review of *The Tragedy of Arthur*, James Shapiro tells the story of his contact with Phillips. It turns out that Phillips emailed Shapiro to meet and consult on "some arcane Shakespeare matters." When he showed up at Shapiro's Columbia office, Phillips had with him what by all appearances was an authentic cover from an original quarto of a hitherto unseen Shakespearean tragedy. It seems Phillips was seeking Shapiro's help in forging a play, the very same play that is included at the end of the novel/introduction. They spent the next several months working to root out any language that wouldn't sound Shakespearean, and by the time they were done, what was left, and what we see, is a play that could very well have been written by Shakespeare. *The Tragedy of Arthur* accomplishes something bold and quite ingenious. With its nebulous lines between fiction and reality, the book attempts and succeeds in showing us just how possible it is to recreate Shakespeare and rewrite history. Had Shapiro not divulged this story in his review, I might have been fooled.

## Letters and Responses

### The Final Letter

To the Editor,

I was deeply disturbed to read of plans to censor the University's internet servers. Besides being utterly impractical, such efforts fail to serve the best interests of our students and community.

"Pornography" is a completely ambiguous standard – one that even the United States Supreme Court struggled to conclusively define. Is "pornography" full nudity or partial nudity? And is nudity "pornographic" *per se* or does it depend on the context? For example, what about a nude cadaver or photos of stripped victims? Does nudity encompass only actual humans or even human portrayals, like the nude "David" sculpture or a nude drawing of angels? And where does the line end - how about individuals who are clothed, but "immodestly" so (depending on how you define *that* term)? And how about even modestly dressed individuals behaving "immodestly"? Indeed, Justice Potter Stewart notably said of pornography: "I know it when I see it." Good luck finding a filter for that.

And therein lies the problem. Jewish life is one of personal responsibility and choice. Deciding what is wrong to look at and exercising self-control—like any other aspect of Jewish observance—is a

personal decision, based on one's upbringing, personal struggles and beliefs. True religious practice stems from conviction and, at that, persuasion—not compulsion. If we want to train students to live as Jews in the modern world, we need to stop treating them like infants. It's time for us to recognize that college students are mature adults living in a real world who will eventually (and can even presently) enter a world with servers filtered only by their conscience.

Moreover, it is high time for our community to start pushing back against an increasingly fundamentalist brand of Orthodoxy's encroachment upon its flagship institution. A brand that believes that censorship and control are acceptable means for dealing with (or evading) real world problems. We cannot allow our community's children and future rabbis, who attend Yeshiva, to get that message. One student, quoted in the article, summed it up perfectly: "This is not addiction to pornography. This is addiction to authority." Indeed it is. And, in a Modern Orthodox community, it cannot stand.

Yigal M. Gross, esq.  
YC '06 BRGS '07

## Hitchens

continued from page 10...

recounted a story in which Hitchens was invited to a meal at the Palm Beach's Everglades Club, which was infamous for its rejection of Jews. When the waiter came to ask Hitchens for his order, he caused a scene by demanding that he be given the kosher menu. Such was his *modus operandi*, never to shy away from confrontation with those whom he deemed wrong.

In my mind, though there is plenty on which we disagree, Christopher Hitchens stands out as a voice of moral clarity in a world lacking many other such figures. When it came to issues on which we saw eye-to-eye, I enjoyed having the weight of his articulation on my side; on issues on which we disagreed, he expressed his views in such a manner that it pushed me to further explore and convincingly defend my own position. More than ever, at a time when many in the West are willing to adopt radical interpretations of post-colonialism, doubt the contributions of their own society to the world, and capitulate to threats from Islamists, his determination to speak up in defense of Western civilization is of great importance. There was no one better suited to take down the likes of a Noam Chomsky or a George Galloway than Christopher Hitchens, and his absence will most surely be felt.

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## Re-Thinking Facebook

BY ALEX PORCELAIN

You probably have Facebook. I'm not basing my prediction on any data collected from formal research on how college students spend their time. I'm not assuming you have Facebook after looking at library computers and taking a cursory glimpse at what YU students really do during reading week (though I may be guilty of such accusations). And I certainly am not stereotyping *Commentator* readers as the kinds of YU students who regularly use Facebook. The only reason I can confidently guess you probably have Facebook is because two-thirds of all Americans do. 200 million people. That's two thirds of the country's entire population, including those too young to use a computer and those too old to try and learn. Imagine how many Americans in their late teens and early twenties have accounts. Factor in the other 600 million users worldwide, and you've got yourself a mighty dominant website.

Most YU students understand what the big Facebook fuss is all about. It's simple to see how powerful and useful it can be. You can easily keep in touch with friends from high school, schmooze with your NCSYers, catch up with long-lost cousins and find out more about that guy you met on the bus in Israel one time. You can run a successful event for your club without having to extend hundreds of personal invitations, network to get your dream summer job and add some major momentum to fundraising efforts (yes, I'll sponsor you in the marathon again). Furthermore, once Facebook became more widespread amongst people in the *frum* world, it was amazing to see how friends used Facebook to share their *smachot* with those who were unable to attend, shared thought-provoking articles and mustered together *tehillim* groups to *daven* for the sick. Over time, much of that "if you're on Facebook you're probably not *frum*" stigma has been dissolved. Yet, there is still much to be said for abstaining from the uber-modern social media tool which we can all live without.

For those who are sensitive to such things, having a Facebook account can put a user in many compromising situations. Considering the various opinions afloat regard-

See Facebook, page 19

# Guide to Buying and Selling Your Textbooks

BY ARIEL KRAKOWSKI

As the semester comes to an end, students must figure out what to do with their old textbooks and where to buy new ones. As CEO, cashier and porter at NYtextbooks, I have some experience in this area, so I figured I would write a guide to buying and selling textbooks for students.

### Buying Textbooks

Textbook prices are ridiculously high. This is a case of capitalism not functioning correctly, a common issue in academia. Normally, if a merchant charges prices which are too high, people will buy from the competition instead. On the other hand, textbooks are chosen by a professor who gets the book for free, while the student is forced to buy whatever is assigned. However, if you buy books intelligently, it can end up not being too expensive. There are many options for buying books besides going straight to a bookstore (if they still exist) or even Amazon:

#### Another Student

If you can buy from students at your college, that's probably the best option. You get the book right away without any shipping costs, and you can sometimes get free notes and tips too. I once had a classifieds site to help facilitate such exchanges.

#### Buy it Used Online

You should almost never rent a book, since they cost almost as much as used books, and then you won't be able to resell it at the end. Don't just go straight to Amazon.com to buy a book either. To get the best price, use a price comparison search. The best ones are probably CampusBooks.com and DirectTextbooks.com. I also put up a book search at NYtextbooks.com. You just enter the ISBN or title of the book you want, and the search engine finds the best price available on the internet. (Whatever site you use receives a small commission from the bookstore for your purchase.)

#### International Edition Books

The book publishers charge American students a much higher price than what they charge the international students. American companies like charging Americans more for things like drugs, textbooks and luxury goods. The rest of the world simply isn't as willing to overpay. However, American students can buy international editions of textbooks online on sites like TextbooksRus.com or the slightly more reliable AbeBooks.com. They are much cheaper than the regular edition, and although "not authorized for sale in the USA," there doesn't seem to be anything illegal about buying them. [i] Lately, however, the publishers have tried to make the international editions different than the US editions. [ii] The text itself is usually pretty much the same, but if you are assigned homework from the book, it can become an issue. In theory, you can photocopy the questions

from another student's textbook, or even download a copy online, but that obviously runs into legal issues. If you decide to go international, you will need to remember to order the textbook well in advance, since they normally ship from places like Singapore or China. International editions are harder to re-sell, since it goes against Amazon's and Half.com's terms. However, you can sell them to another student or on TextbooksRus.com.

#### eBooks

These are normally not worth the cost. Companies that sell eBooks often charge more than the cost of a used textbook, but only let you use it for 180 days. Eventually, they may add more interactive features to these eBooks so that they become a better option than lugging around dried trees. In fact, maybe eBooks will replace schools altogether... but we'll stick to the present for now.

#### Selling Textbooks

Besides buying textbooks for next semester, you need to figure out what to do with your old ones. In most cases, you probably won't look at the textbooks very much in the future, so you should sell them quickly before they depreciate in value. The textbook publishers try to come out with new editions every few years to keep sales high. The new editions normally have a couple of minor "improvements" [iii] and different or re-ordered questions. Once the new edition comes out, the prices of the old ones drop dramatically so don't delay selling your books. These are the places you can sell your textbooks:

#### Another Student

Again, this is the simplest option if you can do it. You avoid paying fees to any site, and you don't need to bother shipping the book anywhere. You can post an ad on college classifieds site, or put up a sign in the classroom that will have the same course that you took. Then you meet the buyer, exchange the book for cash, and there are no fees involved.

#### Amazon or Half.com

If you cannot find another student, this is normally the second-most profitable option. You enter the ISBN and condition of your book and it gets listed on the site. Amazon is the most popular site for buying books, so it is probably your best bet. However, Half.com has slightly lower fees, so it might be worthwhile to sell popular books on it. Both sites charge 15% of the purchase price, but they also have additional fees. [iv]

After the book sells, you need to ship it to the buyer within a couple days. Normally, the cheapest way to do this is with media mail. Both Half and Amazon let you buy shipping labels through their site, which is the most convenient option. A single book normally costs between \$2.41 and \$3.64 to ship, depending on its weight. You then print out a shipping label, stick it on a padded

envelope, and mail the book away. If you sell a book for \$30 online, you should end up with about \$23 from Amazon, and \$25 from Half.com, after shipping and envelope costs. [v]

#### Buyback Sites

Another option is to sell your book to a buyback site. This is rarely worthwhile, since they normally pay significantly less than if you sell it directly to a purchaser, and you need to ship it somewhere. There are occasions where they pay a decent amount, so it is always worthwhile to check. As with buying books, you can compare buyback prices with a price comparison search, such as on DirectTextbooks.com, or NYtextbooks.com. Amazon Buyback occasionally offers a decent amount of Amazon credit for a book, so that can be a good option if you will anyways be buying from Amazon in the future. In general, the buyback sites will only pay off you if the book is in very good condition.

#### Campus Buyback

This is the most convenient option, if it is offered on your campus. Be careful not to get ripped off though. NYtextbooks pays 60-70% of the book's used selling price on Amazon. After accounting for Amazon's fees, other costs, and unsold books, this leaves a small but reasonable profit margin. Wherever you sell your book, it is worth checking to make sure you are getting at least half of the book's minimum listed price Amazon. The exceptions are international edition books, books in poor condition, or books with a low sales rank, since those may not sell at all.

At the end of the day (or semester), textbooks don't have to be so expensive. You can buy them used

for cheap and then sell them before the next semester for a little less.

The internet has connected textbook buyers and sellers and has helped lower costs for students. Perhaps in the near future, it will help lower costs for all of education.

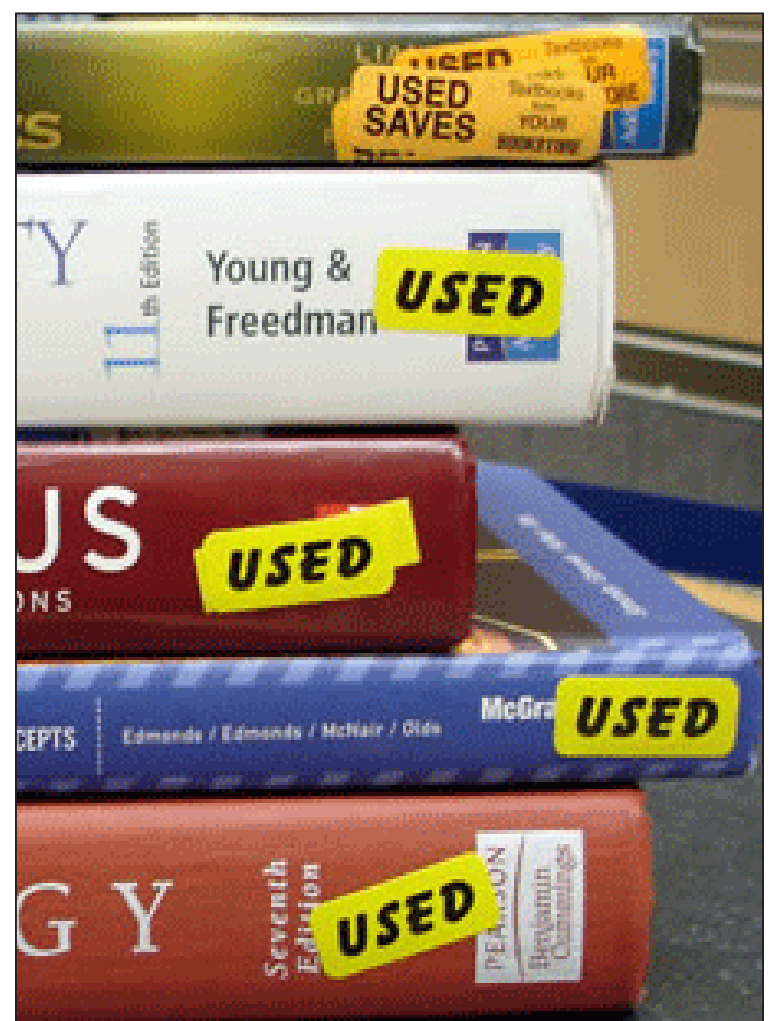
[i] See <http://supreme.justia.com/us/523/135/> where the Supreme Court said one can import shampoo sold cheaply internationally. However, in 2010, the Supreme Court was split about importing watches, possibly because they were manufactured overseas: <http://www.dailyfinance.com/2010/12/13/supreme-court-rules-against-consumers-in-costco-vs-omega/> Consult your local lawyer for more information.

[ii] Rumor has it they'll soon be doing the same thing for drugs sold to Canada.

[iii] Many subjects do not really change in a few years, so the publishers just introduce random changes to make students get the newer edition. However, if a professor and class agreed to just use the old book, it would save students a significant amount of money.

[iv] These are the actual fees for each site: Both sites charge 15% of the purchase, but Amazon also charges an additional flat-rate of \$2.30 for every book sold through their site. Meanwhile Half secretly takes part of the shipping commission, so you only get \$2.64 or \$3.07 as a shipping credit, depending on whether its soft or hard-cover. However, Half does lower the overall fee slightly for books over \$50.

[v] Estimate given for a 2-pound hardcover book and a \$1.33 envelope.





# Miss Middot: Re-education on Transportation

By TALIA KAUFMAN

Hey y'all, Miss Middot here. It's been quite a while, but I'm back. If you don't know who I am, then you are probably a sophomore or real-live freshman. Or maybe you have been living under a rock without Internet, a newsstand or friends for the past year. I suggest you Google me; perhaps you will learn a thing about how to make some of those friends you're in need of. For those of you that have been waiting for instructions on how to properly conduct yourselves, you probably have issues beyond anything these articles can assist you with. But for the rest of y'all, welcome to your etiquette on everything etiquette in Yeshiva University. We've covered quite a bit in our past columns from no one caring about your Facebook statuses to you not caring which ladies wear pants to gentlemen wearing pants throughout the courtship process. But before I graduate there are a few topics that must be addressed. There are so many all-too-common behaviors that have become commonly acceptable at YC and Stern. We have glossed over a few mean misdemeanors, which have evolved into the elephant in the room. And I hope that if you learn one thing from these columns it is to never ignore an elephant.

## Holy Shidduch Shuttle

The Shuttle: Back in the days before the infamous piece of alleged writing began spilling its blueberry smoothies all over every authentic



Left to right: woman, elevator buttons, recycling bins.

publication based in the New York area and sneaking its way into every conversation, the shuttle was the most stigmatized aspect of our University. How many of your secular college friends have innocently inquired about it, "Is it true that you school has a carpool so that the guys and girls will meet?" Probably more than the number of shuttles available on Friday.

The shuttle may not be our version of the Love Boat, but it's something else altogether: a breeding ground for rude. Sorry if that offended anyone. But if it did then that means that you are rude, so you most likely offend people on a

very regular basis. So here are a few rules to make the shuttle service a bit more civilized.

## Magic Words

Please say please and thank you to your security guards. They are not your parents. Probably not, at least. And I hope no one speaks to their parents in the manner in which the guards are often treated. No one is entitled to any seat on any shuttle. I don't care if you have a meeting so far uptown it's in Canada. Get over yourself and get in line; it's not the guard's fault the spots are filled up. There's probably some *l'chaim* in the Rubin Shul or something, *baruch Hashem* So please be re-

spectful to those who keep you safe. They truly care about you. Who else takes such great interest in your first initial?

## Schtick Hock Don't Stop

Just as the need for manners does not turn off in the universe of the shuttle, neither do ears. Even if your mom cares about your romantic rendezvous in the Heights Lounge, nobody else does. I don't care if you have the hearing of a bubby, and the social courtesy of an ape. You shouldn't be speaking on the phone in the shuttle. Everyone can hear you. And they are all listening. And judging you. Ever wonder why the drivers adjust the volume so that the shuttle is only a large amount of illegal substance away from a rave? It's because they don't care about what you and your bros are doing once they get to Midtown. Neither does anybody else.

There are so many metaphors I could choose to begin the elevator portion of this article. I could write about how quickly the ceiling becomes a floor or how our elevators are the one thing that truly brings us together here are YU. Perhaps a little too much togetherness. But whatever I write will just be a segue to say that so many YU-skies and Sternzies seems to drop along with the elevators. A few rules for you rough riders:

## Stepping Out

Please let passengers exit before you enter. I don't care if you have to get to a secret penthouse of Brookdale. Letting others out of any space before entering is simply practical.

This innovative advice can be applied on Subways, shuttles, revolving doors, even rooms.

## Walk It Out

We've all been unfashionably late because the elevator seemed to have been mysteriously switched to Shabbat mode. Well Nancy Drew, this is no mystery at all. People are just lazy. Unless you have some sort of medical condition other than laziness, please think twice before pressing the up button. Don't take an elevator for two floors or fewer. If it's a peak hour make that three. How will you get to class, you ask. There is actually a revolutionary alternative to the elevator. It's called the stairs. Stairs are a fun way to get to where you need to go and go green. It's also a great way to take your gluteus to the maximus. See you on one floor up, hot stuff.

## Season's Greetings

We have all played pretend that we didn't know the people we know just well enough. But contrary to popular belief, this actually creates a more awkward situation that acknowledging the presence of your peer. So please, if you know your elevator buddy, please make eye contact, smile maybe even a offer a friendly greeting.

That's all for now. Oh and even if you skimmed this entire thing please remember to never ignore an elephant. It's just rude.

Shalom y'all!

Miss Middot

# Facebook

continued from page 19...

ing wireless internet filters, some readers may be shocked to hear that many people have legitimate religious concerns when it comes to using Facebook. Whether or not you personally have ever second-guessed your presence on Facebook, there is certainly reason to think more carefully about the social media tool which is taking over our society. This is not preaching, this is reporting. Ignore the *hashkafa* of what Facebook does to relationships. Torah-true Facebook users confront the all-too-common challenges of being shown pictures that do not adhere to *tzniut* standards, wasting valuable time, *bittul Torah* and other generally inappropriate content. However, it's nearly impossible to avoid using the internet altogether nowadays, and once you've learned how to use the internet appropriately you can put in some additional effort to make your Facebook experience *kosher*. That's the common argument for Facebook nowadays. Block those who post inappropriate content. Limit the time you spend on the site each day. Don't share other private information. Avoid *lashon harah*. Watch whom you talk to. The bottom line

for those with *halakhik* concerns is if you act intelligently, using Facebook can and should be no different than using email. As such, the stigma has shifted to something more along the lines of "if you're on Facebook, you probably waste a lot of time." Touché.

If you're not (yet) on Facebook, you have probably sat through many conversations in which a friend gives you a thousand reasons why it's time to get an account. And if you're smart and have got things under control, you've probably got nothing to lose by joining. Worst case scenario, make an account and access it only when you need to contact someone specific. Yet, even if having a Facebook account

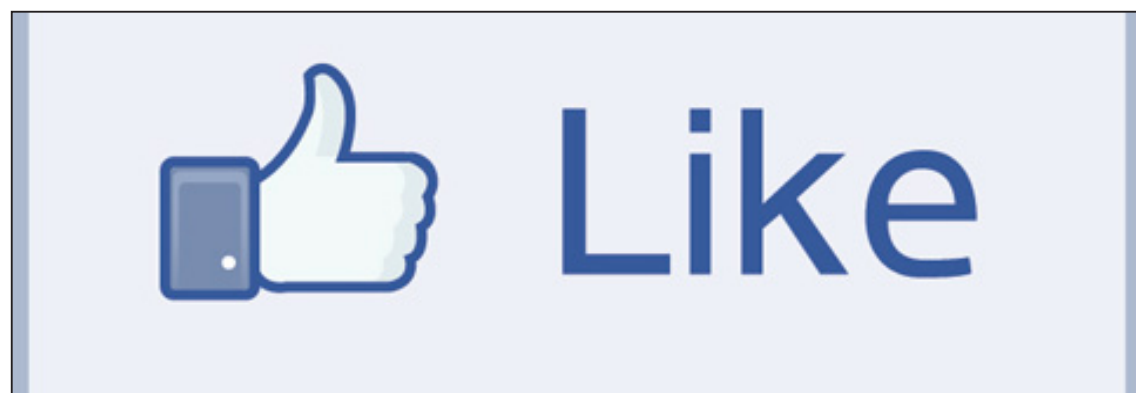
won't compromise my ability to be a *halakhik*, God-fearing Jew, the "why bother?" argument still stands strong. Shouldn't we be happy with the face-to-face relationships we've built and maintained? Why do we need the enhancements Facebook provides? Maybe if a friend or relative is far away, reality suggests we should wait until we see them next to talk to them. Or pick up the phone. Heck, there was no comparable option ten years ago. Thirty years ago parents were lucky if they heard from their child spending a year in Israel once a month. Today, I wonder how any eighteen-year-olds blessed with the privilege of retreating for a full year and enshrouding themselves in study and introspec-

tion can truly "grow up" and "find themselves" (clichés we all strive for) without taking some reasonable break from the world of Facebook. Ignoring what every friend has done in the past twelve hours is probably a good thing. Draw the relevant parallels.

Facebook connects us, but maybe a little too much. Each day I pass someone in a hallway or in Nagel's whom I don't yet know, but have seen them in friend's pictures on Facebook. That's not normal. In a given week I can easily know more about what's going on in the life of my dorm neighbor from last year than I do about my own grandfather's. It's kind of sad, and at the very least a bit distorted.

At this point, Facebook has become so useful in productive social endeavors and important to living a happy, social life it is hard to suggest that anyone abstain from creating an account or delete their existing one. It is, however, important to continually remind ourselves what it's there for. Use it to connect to those close in sentiment but all too far in person. Use it to participate in useful and interesting groups. Use it to ask favors, recommend funny articles and share witty status updates. Just remember that though we may be refined people, we are not impervious to the traps of inappropriate content, *lashon harah* and wasting loads and loads of time. I'm no zealot, not here to judge. But after five years of being on Facebook, it's time to begin thinking more carefully about why I'm there and what goes on there. I don't think it's unfair to make time for reassessing institutions and ensuring that they're helping us become the best people possible and not taking away from our ability to live as productive individuals.

Recently I heard about a *chavrusa's* engagement from a status update. Saddened I did not receive a phone call, I hit "Like". It's the least I can do.





# Rendezvous with Reality

continued from page 8...

Acknowledging Existence of Sex,” and “Laughably Mild Sex Story Torments the Very Soul of Yeshiva University.” Many of these articles are crass and occasionally somewhat funny, but almost all of them miss the point. As former *Observer* Editor-in-Chief Olivia Friedman notes in recent blog posts, YU student publications have frequently discussed sex—among Jews, even unmarried ones—explicitly.<sup>1</sup> Far more explicitly than the “fumbling, the pain, the pleasure” of affected *Beacon* fame. But Friedman and others dealt with these topics deftly and sensitively. Their writing stimulated discussion that was reasoned and productive.

The *Beacon* piece, on the other hand, was unimaginatively written that its very publication seemed flip-pant, and promotes no such conversation. As Friedman says,<sup>2</sup>

“If you are going to make the editorial decision to inflame most of the student body—who choose to attend this university because of the fact that it’s Yeshiva University and there are theoretically certain standards that accompany that name—then you better make sure it’s worth it. Was this really worth it? Was this one essay about a girl sleeping with a guy and then feeling bad about it so important? Did it really help anyone who was in this position? And if so, what exactly did it help them with? What was the message behind this story?”

YU students eagerly engage with issues that outsiders might assume we consider taboo. But most of us understand that engaging with an

issue doesn’t mean just mentioning or shouting the relevant terms. We all know thoughtful reflection when we see it.

If the *Beacon* article purports to grapple with big issues, we must conclude that it falls desperately short. The title indicates that Anonymous seeks “to explain” something, that she is struggling with a conflict so great that her powers of expression are handicapped. Yet the author’s emotional tension earns just a quasi-profound clause or two, probably intended to give the piece a self-reflective stamp. With two non-descript references to her “pest of a conscience” and one to the “walk of shame” (a YU cliché), the article lacks depth by any legitimate standards.

While we’ve all read seemingly immature and vacuous journalism before, we haven’t read it about sex in the Orthodox community. If you’re going to try to take on a heated, personal, and sensitive topic, such emptiness won’t fly.

The *Beacon* controversy is no Ethan Tucker-gate or Gay Panel. Those are instances of YU’s censoring events that could have or did (respectively) stimulate important, mature dialogue about some of the Jewish world’s central tensions. Anonymous’s article, on the contrary, contributes nothing to any valuable conversation, neither about sex, YU, nor Modern Orthodox social life (and it was not censored by the administration!).

So, does that really make it terrible? Not every piece of student literary output is worth bragging about; indeed, there are a number of student productions that many of

us would prefer for no one, YU student or judgmental outsider, to see. That doesn’t mean they should be deleted.

Sometimes, the student voice is disconcerting. No getting around that.

But “How Do I Even Begin to Explain This” was worse than literally meritless. Aside from being filled with sentences so prosaic that many are confident that the author made up the account—“definitely a dude,” many believe—the piece broached a topic that has a right way and wrong way to be dealt with. A work of comparable quality about something more mundane would have disappointed readers, but would not have been taken down. For the hot topics necessarily come with a heightened need to write, discuss, and grapple with the subjects intelligently. The audience is more sensitive and the stakes are higher. You must be careful.

“How Do I Even Begin to Explain This” wasn’t careful. The narrative could have been thought-provoking, but it wasn’t. It fell flat. Students were embarrassed by it. Granted, we can’t expect a double coincidence of wants: the rare young Stern woman who is having sex *and* eager to talk about it, odds are, won’t *also* dazzle us with razor-sharp literary nuance. But the piece could still have been made publishable through editorial work and communication.

In the event that the story is a true account, I hope that its publication brought the author comfort. But this brouhaha charges the *Beacon* to refine its editorial standards and discretion.

*Beacon* editors, highlighting

pieces of positive feedback they have received, claim that the article, for many, stimulated solid discussion. I have no doubts about this. Just about anything will speak to *somebody*. But the number of positive responses does not negate the overwhelming number of negative ones. With more work, “How Do I Even Begin to Explain This” could have stimulated positive discussion amongst much more people, without as much negative feedback and desecration of our reputation.

The saddest part of all this is that the piece had enormous potential. Were the *Beacon* staff to work with its writers (if via anonymous email) to flesh out and refine their writing, then “How Do I Even Begin to Explain This” could have yielded the conversation, empathy, and understanding that Anonymous probably sought. Anonymous should only be praised for her brave submission. But the *Beacon* is to be blamed for publishing it as is.

That doesn’t mean that the piece *had* to be taken down. Certainly, no matter how much people detested it, the piece could have stayed online (it is back up), and those who dislike it could have tried to forget about it; the internet has lots of stuff we don’t like. But enough students were bothered by it to justify its removal.

The *Beacon* should have anticipated the deeply negative reactions to the article. A newspaper continuously sparring with aspersions of “controversy for the sake of controversy” cannot just publish anything and everything. And leaking the uncontroversial story to national media organizations should offend the sensibilities of responsible Ye-

shiva students. Nobody can reasonably blame Anonymous or the YU administration, but Yeshiva students have made it clear that the *Beacon* needs to clean up its act.

To be sure, YU struggles with issues of censorship, and we need to push for the conversations that universities are supposed to foster. But taking down “How Do I Even Begin to Explain This” is not censoring free speech. It’s something much more comprehensible: censoring bad speech.

As I close in on 2,000 words, I’m going to pull a *Beacon* and tack on some ending lines that might misrepresent my entire work:

This is not a big deal (okay, this did come up earlier). Even if enough people were bothered by “How Do I Even Begin to Explain This” to legitimize its removal, the article was fairly harmless. Also fairly harmless is a Student Council request to remove one article from an online newspaper it funds. Considering the fundamental insignificance of most of this past week’s events, no one can justify the uproar.

*Benjamin Abramowitz is a Yeshiva College super-senior majoring in English and neuroscience. He is Editor-in-Chief of The Commentator.*

*Thanks to Nathaniel Jaret for his constructive criticism.*

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[1] Friedman, Olivia. <http://curiousjew.blogspot.com/2011/12/yu-beacon-piece-on-sexuality.html>

[2] <http://curiousjew.blogspot.com/2011/12/my-feelings-take-precedence-over-your.html>

## Dorm Gourmet: Crantastic Quinoant It Salad

BY CHEF ELAINA KAUFMAN

Quinoa is not a grain. How do we know this? Because even the Ashkiest families like the Kaufmans are totally able to eat it on Pesach. Quinoa became super trendy several years back when we realized that it was versatile enough to be a hearty side dish or totally capable rice substitute in sushi. Its unique texture, low-maintenance cooking process and high protein content has helped it become a trendy rice replacement at Shabbat meals. Now you don’t need a Shabbat or Yom Tov meal or even a kitchen to make your favorite member of the *chenopodioideae* family in your dorm room.



### Ingredients

- 1 cup quinoa
- 3 cups water
- 2 tablespoons Dijonnaise mustard
- ¼ tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- ½ tablespoon olive oil
- Handful of Craisins
- A few chives chopped into small pieces
- Salt and pepper
- A microwave safe container with a lid

### Microwaved Quinoa:

1. Rinse quinoa
2. Combine with two cups water (covered) and cook in the microwave for 8 minutes
3. Let cool
4. Add one cup of water to the quinoa cook for 2 more minutes (covered)
5. Let cool
6. Cook for two minutes uncovered in the microwave

### Quinoa salad:

1. In a small bowl, combine mustard, vinegar and oil – mix well
2. Pour dressing over quinoa
3. Add Craisins and chives
4. Salt and pepper to taste