

**RACHEL BENAIM**

YU's original sex-story scandal



ARTS 16

**AREL KIRSHSTEIN***The Magicians*, like Harry Potter but with sex and drugs

ARTS 18

**MARTIN ROSENBAUM**

BlackBerry Playbook—the incredible tablet that doesn't get enough attention



SCIENCE 19

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# The COMMENTATOR

The Official Student Newspaper of Yeshiva College, Syms School of Business, and Yeshiva University • www.yucommentator.org

Volume LXXVI Issue 7

## Resurgent Masmid Still Resurgent

BY YEHUDA COHN

It took seven years since its last consecutive publications, but the Yeshiva University Masmid has returned once again. The Masmid came out annually between 1929 and the late 1980s, but it began to falter in the 1990s, appearing only inconsistently. In 2003 it was merged with the Stern yearbook, Kochaviah, and lasted in that incarnation for another year, until it ceased publication completely in 2004. Now, however, thanks to the efforts of former YC student Shaul Seidler-Feller (YC '11), the Masmid was successfully printed last year, and is on track to be published this year, as well.

Seidler-Feller decided to bring back the Masmid for a simple rea-

See *Masmid*, page 3

## A Search for Definition: *My Journey on Limmud NY 2012*

BY YAEL ROBERTS

Inter-denominational mingling is also permitted when it's not *bein hazmanim*.

On January 13, during a winter break half as short as most colleges', YU's Center for the Jewish Future (CJF) sent ten students as a delegation to Limmud NY, a pluralistic, all-ages conference in upstate New York. The CJF additionally sent students on humanitarian missions to Mexico, Nicaragua, and the Ukraine, on *chessed* missions to Israel, and on a coast-to-coast journey in the USA. These missions all contained community service and had elements of social justice, though that's not to say that those who travelled on Limmud did not play a role in social change. I found that going on Limmud, which may not have involved groundbreaking, physical work or sparked immediate social change, was incredibly important both for other Jewish denominations and for Modern Orthodoxy.

For four days, approximately 600 Jews gathered in the Catskill Mountains at the Hudson Valley Resort and Spa to attend sessions, socialize, network, and relax. A diverse group interacted at the conference: renewal rabbis, interfaith couples, and cultural Jews, post denominational Yeshivat Chovevai Torah (YCT) students and college students of varying religiosity. And for the few days of Limmud, these distinctions didn't matter. Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative all became unnecessary descriptions. During Limmud, we united around being Jewish and celebrating Judaism as a culture and religion.

The entirely volunteer-run, annual conference is in its eighth year and is part of a national Limmud movement, which hosts eight different conferences year round. Every attendee is assigned a volunteer time slot, whether to put up signs, work at the help desk, or check people in and out of the hotel. The volunteering aspect enhanced the communal feel of the conference: everyone was part of building the experience together.

Anyone can also volunteer to teach a session. Sessions began as

See *Limmud NY*, page 8

## The Threat from Within

BY GAVRIEL BROWN

Recent incidents in Bet Shemesh and Meah Shearim involving members of various Haredi sects have twisted the meaning of "religiousness." These episodes, primarily involving Ultra-Orthodox men, reveal deep-seated discriminatory tendencies and disdain for basic religious toleration. Disturbances have included: spitting on immodestly dressed women, bus segregation, disturbing protests in urban squares, and outright vandalism.

Public outcry stirred when Tanya Rosenblit of Ashdod refused to move to the back of a bus after being demanded to do so by Haredim. She has since become an icon in the fight against discrimination. In a similar event, a Haredi was arrested for harassing a 19-year-old soldier, Doron Matalon, in Jerusalem for not moving to the back of a bus. He was reported to have called her "*shiksa*" and "slut" for her refusal to move. Matalon courageously responded to the Haredi man, according to a De-

ember 29, 2011 *Jerusalem Post* article saying that she was "serving our country, which unfortunately means I am also defending you."

Discrimination on Israel's public transportation is not a new phenomenon. "Mehadrin" bus lines had officially provided segregated bus service to Ultra-Orthodox communities since the 1990s until last January when the Israeli High Court of Justice declared sex segregation unlawful and offensive. Despite the decree, many buses continue to unofficially segregate, relegating women to the back of the bus and men to the front.

Thankfully, governmental and rabbinic figures have responded to the events. Commissioner Yochanan Danino has applied a zero-tolerance policy for any sexist discrimination, which is now considered a criminal offense. In an interview with Army Radio, Chief Ashkenaz Rabbi Yonah Metzger stated, "We [the Haredim] don't have the authority to force our ideas on others. This state does not belong to the Haredi community."

See *Threat from Within*, page 7

## Schottenstein Donation to Honors Program Creates Stir

BY STEVEN LOWINGER

Recently, rumors have spread throughout the Wilf Campus that the Schottenstein family made a generous donation to Yeshiva College's Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors Program. Soon afterward, another rumor was started, namely that the University told the Honors Program that this money must be allocated for scholarship money, and was not to be used for programming. In truth, these rumors were only partially true, and led to great confusion.

Since its inception in 1999, the Honors Program's primary funding has come from capital generated by an endowment fund created by the Schottensteins. Through this resource, the Honors Program is able to hire professors and run various programming throughout the year. The most recent gift, however, was given to serve a different function. Contributions such as these are

meant to be spent quickly, and are generally consumed within one year of their receipt.

Soon after the donation was made, word of the new funds spread fast throughout the campus. Students boasted that the donation was intended to be allocated solely for Honors programming over the next two years. Plans for grandiose Honors events were discussed. Soon after, another rumor spread: that the Honors Program's new funding was being taken away, and that they would have to use the money for scholarships. Students who had already drawn up blueprints of programming to be created by this funding were flabbergasted.

However, based on actual discussions with various administrators, it seems that these rumors were no more than rumors, and originated from a misunderstanding. Apparently, when the donation was made to the University, the Honors Program was notified of the donation but not told whether the donation

See *Schottenstein Donation*, page 3

# STAFF EDITORIALS

## A Survivor Speaks Out

BY BENJAMIN ABRAMOWITZ  
*Editor-in-Chief*

In my amazing YC writing course, I pitched a story about one friend's struggle to overcome his first-year-YU depression. My professor — who is deeply involved in student life and has close relationships with many students — said it sounded unrealistic. "Is this really an interesting story?" she asked. "What's so bad about your first year at YU?"

All eleven of my classmates sprang to my defense. "Professor, you can't even imagine," exclaimed one colleague. Another contributed, "Second semester of your first year is horrible; it's the worst." And finally, "It's just, like, nothing you do is good enough and you're all alone." My professor okayed the proposal, stunned but, above all, confused.

I decided to pursue the project, and write this editorial. So many people have similarly rough experiences when they first start YU, yet the phenomenon is hardly ever documented. Many people are too embarrassed to say anything, or think they're the only ones uncomfortable here. Many fear being branded failures.

That acclimating to YU can be deeply frustrating is news to no one. It's practically assumed that by a few months in, you're dying to get out and, to guarantee expedient graduation, have already mapped out your next five semesters (you're a crazy if you want to stay longer than that). But what is it, exactly, that makes YU so unbearable?

The dual curriculum, they'll tell you. The sheer number of (late) hours for which we must be in class, as a result of the numerous hours devoted to our morning programs, is strenuous beyond compare—and that's before night seder. Actually, the intensity of our *sui generis* workload need not be re-articulated here, but the problem is far more profound—and more reparable—than our daily schedules.

Mostly, the problem is attitudinal. YU's curricula are demanding, but they become closer and closer to impossible the more we underrate the challenge. For the American Orthodox student, attending YU has grown so *de rigueur* that we cheapen the experience and the life-defining opportunity it presents. Really, though, rigorous commitment to a Modern Orthodox rubric makes quite a statement, and you cannot appreciate it if you think that anything less, or different, is worthless. What is expected of the YU student is immense, and different people will fulfill those expectations in essentially different ways.

Does anyone *not* get that? Doubtful. In our brains, all YU students probably understand that our collegiate lives are uniquely demanding. We're just used to it, people think, and there's not enough time between classes to sit around patting ourselves on the back. But the fact is that too many students are weighed down and paralyzed by the way YU advances its expectations, sapping their drive to contribute to YU life in any way. At best, such students devote 100% of their lives to classes and, time permitting, shiur. At worst, fearing falling even a little short of a nebulous Torah u-Madda poster child, they slump down in their decades-old blue Rubin chairs, finding no energy to fulfill any responsibilities at all. Such semesters fly by, dismally.

In a committed Modern Orthodox life, that so many capable community members get left behind is not an unavoidable consequence. It's a blaring wakeup call going off at a reasonable hour of the AM, as opposed to the



too-typical noontime alarms of our ostensible morning-program devotees. The system works for many students, but not enough. There is what to fix, and we can fix it.

What seems, most commonly, to bar students from pulling themselves out of their first-year ruts is that they're unsure whom to speak to. Their peers are pressuring, their rebbeim dogmatic, their Counseling Center stigmatized (sadly enough, most students would probably find that any of these is a great option for them). The first of these is the one option that we, ourselves, can make sure is always, reassuringly present. We, the students, our peers' peers, need to overhaul our campus and inter-campus dynamics. We must ensure that every student here feels comfortable: comfortable voicing his or her frustrations, and consequently empowered to love, change, and make the most of YU.

We need to be here for each other—a hackneyed phrase which I've permitted myself to use because, in our case, it isn't a metaphor. The fundamental problem plaguing the Wilf and Beren Campuses is that, physically, we aren't here enough. The Thursday-night hajj to Teaneck and the very fact that we have a Long Island shuttle are rather comical and, more than anything, disheartening. What a warped sense of college: students work like crazy with little time for one another during the week, and the second they reach a chunk of free time, they ditch the place, their community. Spending more time in their school environment constitutes torture. "School's out for the weekend," Alice Cooper seems to paraphrase via imaginary, unpunctuated "ystud." It's almost too high school-ish to bear.

Luckily, many students persevere and are immensely grateful that they did. Clubs and student organizations constitute one incredible way of finding a deeply dependable, deeply fun community here. And even without extensive extra-curricular involvement, it seems that students naturally tend to find groups of likeminded people that they'll eventually call real friends.

The problem is that it takes too long. It should not take a year or two for students to start being happy at YU (especially since that usually means they have but one more year to enjoy). Students should be blown away the second they get here by our vibrant student life, and passionately seek to be an important part of it. Usually, students first experience this sentiment just the tiniest bit too late.

Each of us can speed up the process for everyone else by simply being here. Your presence enhances everybody's experience of YU. Sure, there could be some better practical incentives to stay on campus, like more appealing Shabbat programming, but we must commit ourselves to what exists before we can earn something better. Staying in for Shabbat, attending events, joining clubs, and being a friendly, present face will give many people a reason to love their time at YU.

You might abstain from YU student life because, on some level, it's not good enough for you. But you'll find that student life becomes much better once you're part of it.

# The COMMENTATOR

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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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**1 Adele**  
The hefty, upper-class beauty got well-deserved credit for her pipes and style at the Grammy's. Takin' home six awards—that's what I call rolling in the deep.



**2 Firefighters**  
'Nough said. Everybody wishes they were one. And besides, they get to carry those sick axes around YU all the time.



**3 The Artist**  
The black-and-white, silent film wowed audiences and aficionados, raking in five academy awards including best picture. Go see it but please, don't bring your girlfriend; the awkward silences are deadly.



**4 Babies**  
Mazel Tov to Jennifer Garner and Ben Affleck on the birth of a baby boy. Mazel tov to siblings Michael and Rebecca and grandparents Bubby and Papa. Bris and Kiddush will follow davening.



**5 Santorum**  
Mitt Romney won caucuses in both Michigan and Arizona. Looks like Santorum will have to come up from behind.



**6 Lin**  
Lin-Manuel Miranda's *In The Heights* closed last month after a long and successful run. Coming from a Puerto Rican family, this cinderella story has brought wide attention from the *NY Post*, pun-masters everywhere, and Knicks fans.



**7 Apples**  
Either Granny Smiths have gotten less tart or people have gotten really into Macintoshes, 'cuz Apple's stock just hit half a trillion bucks.

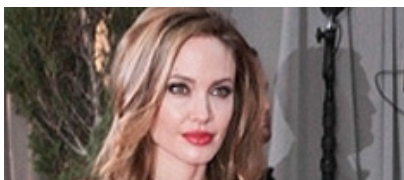
**7 UP** ⚡ **7 DOWN**



**1 Daytona 500**  
The highly anticipated annual race was shut down after a fire ravaged the limp bodies of the cars. There were hot-rods swinging everywhere, until several exploded, emitting dangerous fluids all around.



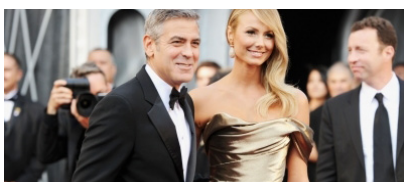
**2 Coke dealers**  
Whitney Houston has passed away. The world may never get over the loss of her amazing voice and high-end drug purchases. Perhaps The Beacon can convince them to get over it, though.



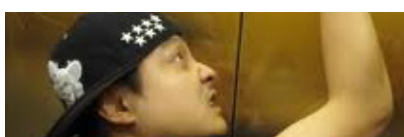
**3 Thighs**  
These unsung heroes are uncool when emaciated.



**4 Google+**  
Last month users were on the flailing social network for an average of 3.3 minutes. That might impress you, unless you knew that Facebook averaged 7.5 hours per user last month. +1 for the Zuckmeister.



**5 George Clooney**  
The Descendants stunk hard. Not his fault, eh?



**6 Up and Down**  
No, not us. We're talking YU elevators. And maybe if they actually went up and down they wouldn't be in 7 Down.



**7 Simchas**  
Congrats to Chaim Eli Sabo and Esther Lipel on their recent engagement. You two looked so happy together on *OnlySimchas!* — we were just *chalishing*. May you build a *bayis neman biyisroel bimheira biyameinu amen sela va'ed*.

# Masmid

*continued from front page...*

son, as he says, "to create a physical keepsake and record from my time at YU." Seidler-Feller explained that he had known about the Masmid from his own father's copy which he had discovered one day in the attic, and that because he has "a general tendency toward nostalgia," he decided to take on the challenge of reviving the Masmid and heading up the project.

Seidler-Feller says that he was met with positive, yet hesitant, reaction from the administration of Yeshiva. Previous attempts at publishing a yearbook had failed, he was told, because the editors had mismanaged the project, bungled the finances, and ultimately took money without delivering a product. They were willing to support him, Seidler-Feller added, as long as he would ensure that such mishandling would not occur again.

It did not, and the Masmid was successfully published at the end of last year with over 100 copies purchased. (Even if you did not buy a copy, copies can be found in the library.)

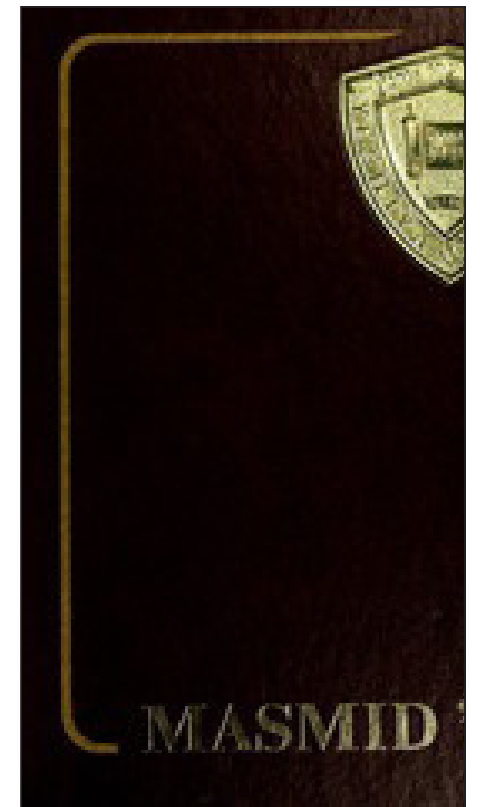
The continuation of the Masmid this year is the fulfillment of Seidler-Feller's aim to revive the longstanding tradition of the Masmid. Seidler-Feller believes that having a yearbook "allows a group of friends, classmates...to rally around a common academic, social and religious experience in a way that's fun and entertaining," and the fact that it's continuing even while he is no longer directly in control shows that he's not alone in his thinking.

Still, not everyone is as enthusiastic as Seidler-Feller. One senior graduating this year, who preferred to remain anonymous, when asked about how he felt about the Masmid responded, "honestly, I couldn't

care less." However, that viewpoint does not seem to dominate, as many others reacted positively, if not inspired enough to have taken up the project themselves.

Seidler-Feller makes it clear that while he feels that it has been set on the right path, it "really depends on the efforts of students and their initiative." He notes that "without people seriously committed to making this sort of thing happen it will simply fade away, along with so many other wonderful publications and projects undertaken by YU students over the years."

Students who do not get their pictures taken will be excluded from the Masmid.



## Schottenstein Donation

*continued from front page...*

was intended for a specific purpose or if the Program had free rein on the money. When Dr. Gabriel Cwilich, Director of the Honors Program, inquired about the details of the donation, he was informed that the donation was to be allocated toward Honors scholarships.

This addition to the scholarship fund would enable the honors program to both admit more students and be more generous with the scholarships distributed. According to Dr. Cwilich, it would not be practical for this money to be used for programming because it would involve creating programming which they would not necessarily have the funds to continue offering. Monies used for the Honors Program come from the original endowment fund provided by the Schottensteins. This guarantees that there are necessary resources to fund the programming in the future.

It seems that during this short window of uncertainty, between the time that the Honors Program was notified of the donation and the time that the nature of the donation was specified, the rumors of new funding for programming was spread. It is still unclear how the rumor was started.

According to Daniel Forman, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, over

the past few years, the board of Yeshiva has made it their top priority to raise money for scholarships. Therefore, in a conversation between President Richard Joel and Jay Schottenstein, it was mutually decided that the money would go toward the scholarship fund. The donation would make it easier for students and their families to afford Yeshiva tuition. At no point was the donation designed to fund future Honors programming.

With these new funds, Dr. Cwilich, hopes to increase the opportunities for students who did not enter Yeshiva in the Honors Program. Currently, scholarships are only given to students who apply to Yeshiva as first-year students, but not to those who transfer to Yeshiva, nor to those who decide to join the program once they have already begun their undergraduate education. These students often have trouble finishing all four years in the Honors Program, because they do not receive scholarships. This has been a one of Dr. Cwilich's major concerns. He hopes that a portion of this new donation will go towards scholarships for these students' fourth years on campus.

Over the past years, the Honors program has grown significantly. Three years ago, there were only ten students who graduated Yeshiva with honors, whereas this year there are close to thirty.

# Women in Business Initiative Program Revamped

By NANCY SHILIAN

Because it's relatively new and pretty exclusive, few Yeshiva University students have heard of the Women in Business Initiative (WIBI) program. The WIBI program was established last year to help offer female students an advantage in the male-dominated business world. The program runs each spring semester, and applications are open to all female Syms and SCW students. Just 15 students have been accepted this year.

As the WIBI program resumes for its second consecutive year, it expands its opportunities for its members. In addition to participating in panel events and a series of private lectures and presentations throughout the semester, the selected fifteen women will also have the opportunity to be paired with an outside professional to serve as their personal mentor. The female mentor assigned to each student will be involved with the specific field of

business the student is interested in. Mentors will offer an inside eye into the field, and provide the student a place at which to learn about the business.

When asked about the origin of the program, Jocelyn Coalter, Yeshiva University Director of Employer and Alumni Relations, explained that she noticed that there is a disparity between the number of male and female alumni who return as speakers to Syms. As a result, she noted, "We wanted to make sure that we were really showing the women on campus that there are places for them in the business world and to give them mentors that can help them with some challenges in the business world if they're working somewhere that may be still kind of male-dominated." She further added that "there is a smaller number of women in Syms than there are men, and we want them to feel as motivated and comfortable as possible."

Last year, involvement in the WIBI program simply meant attendance at several educational pre-

sentations throughout the semester. While this may have been a beneficial experience, last year's program did not contain the more hands-on insight into the business world that this year's program is providing. Coalter is confident that the new mentorship component will ensure that the students involved will be "getting something above and beyond what every student is already able to get." After all, while students can be taught how to interact in professional environments, actually being in the environment itself offers a whole new educational experience.

Like last year, WIBI members will attend several exclusive, mandatory events throughout the semester. The programs offer networking, professionalism, and interviewing advice, as well as counsel geared specifically toward women in the workplace. This year's events include presentations by *How to Wow* author Francis Cole Jones and acclaimed career coach Pamela Weinberg.

Sara Ladaew, a second-time par-

ticipant in the program, explained that "[last year's] WIBI program trained me to be more aware about the business world and the process leading to getting a job, such as conducting a mock interview and putting together my first official resume." She further added that, as a member of last year's program, she "was able to learn and acquire business skills outside of a classroom." With regard to the new mentorship component of this year's program, she enthusiastically declared that she "will further my horizons by being in close contact with my assigned mentor in my chosen career path."

Students interested in applying for next year's WIBI program can begin applying in October. No credit-minimum is required, al-

though students interested must be able to specify a specific business field of interest. Current members are required to reapply if interested in continuing the program.

While the opportunity to work with the mentors does not guarantee an internship, it facilitates the establishment of a foundation for experience. Students will be able to truly get a feel for the field of their interest, while also meeting individuals who can offer advice, and perhaps further opportunities, as well. The opportunities, of course, will depend on whatever the student chooses to make of them.

The WIBI program represents a valuable new way for the women of Stern and Syms to climb the competitive business ladder of New York City.

**"[The] WIBI program trained me to be more aware about the business world and the process leading to getting a job, such as conducting a mock interview and putting together my first official resume."**

## CDC Expanding Its Resources with New Employer-Student Shadowing Program

By ZACHARY DAITCH

One of the toughest things about the college experience, is the difficult decision of what to do with one's life. The Career Development Center (CDC) started a program where students, particularly in their sophomore year, are paired with employers from fields that are high on their radar screen for a future profession, to observe, take part in, and learn about the profession first hand.

The program is described in a statement from the CDC:

"This program was created to help first year on campus students gain exposure to career fields they were considering. Students were paired up with an employer in one of their top fields of interest and were able to participate in activities such having one-on-one meetings with their employer, visiting and getting a tour of their office, and observing day to day activities of the organization."

Estee Robin (SC '14), a biology major, was part of the program this year. She explained, "I'm interested in medicine so I got set up with a psychiatrist. She has her own practice so she was able to take some extra time to talk to me about her experiences through college, medical school, residency, and building her

own practice."

An advantage of the program was the "Jewish" focus. Ms. Robin elaborated "She was also able to give me a lot of helpful advice, coming from the perspective of a Jewish woman who completed the process that I'm currently pursuing, addressing the challenges and setbacks she faced along the way."

According to the CDC, the "Feedback from the student surveys has been very positive," and students have said "that they learned more about the field, about the organization they visited and that their employer was helpful and knowledgeable." In an optimistic look for continuing the program next year, "100% of employers saying they would participate in the program again."

Ultimately, it is the goal of the CDC to provide career guidance for all of the students in Yeshiva. In the words of Ms. Robin, "The program enabled me to form a more accurate perspective on what my career goal actually entails and what will be required of me further down the road to reach that goal." This accomplishes the dual goal of finding not only a profession, but also one that interests the students. It seems that through this program the CDC has taken a giant step toward giving students the proper path toward this kind of career choice.



**Students were paired up with an employer in one of their top fields of interest and were able to participate in activities such having one-on-one meetings with their employer, visiting and getting a tour of their office, and observing day to day activities of the organization.**

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# Should we be Mourning Joe Paterno?



BY DANIEL ATWOOD

We should all be mourning right now. We should all be paying tribute to the man who served as the mentor for hundreds of young adults. However, the events of the past six months have changed our perception of this man. Or at least they should have. Unfortunately, many people would rather ignore these recent events as they mourn the death of Penn State football coach Joe Paterno.

I am appalled by the tribute Joe Paterno received after his death on Sunday, January 22, 2012. ESPN and major news outlets such as CNN and *The New York Times* published long tributes to the memory of Paterno, describing him as “more than a coach” and as a “symbol of integrity in collegiate athletics.” A mass candlelight vigil was held at the Penn State campus, as dozens came to his bronze statue to weep, leave flowers, and reminisce about the icon of the Pennsylvania state college. Penn State’s president Rodney Erickson related that Paterno will be “honored...for his remarkable life and legacy” and that the university is “deeply saddened.” In light of the events of the past six months, this tribute is disturbing.

Joe Paterno, coach of the Penn State football team for 46 years, obtained more wins than any other coach in college football history. However, Paterno was seen as more than a coach to Penn State—he was seen as a father, serving as a mentor and role model not only to the football players but to everyone in the university. Paterno made it his duty to guide his players both on and off the field and made generous financial contributions to Penn State. Penn State, in return, erected a bronze statue of him in front of its football field, Beaver Stadium.

This past November, however, Paterno’s defensive coordinator, Jerry Sandusky, was arrested on over 40 counts of sexual assault. It was revealed that Paterno had been informed of Sandusky’s actions in 2002 and that Paterno had not notified the police, though he did inform

his supervisor. Paterno was criticized for not notifying the authorities and was immediately fired from his job at Penn State on November 8, 2011. Soon after, he was diagnosed with Lung Cancer and died on January 22, 2012.

Though Paterno did nothing illegal, Paterno is responsible for not taking the necessary steps to stop Sandusky. Had the police been notified in 2002, countless acts of sexual abuse could have been prevented. Some of the victims of abuse may never live normal lives, requiring numerous hours of psychotherapy, and studies show that victims of sexual abuse are at a high risk for criminal activity, depression, and suicide. It is possible that some of these boys will never live normal lives. These lives could have been salvaged had somebody had the courage to stop Sandusky.

I believe that these events and the reactions to them, or lack thereof, reflect a sad reality in the way society views sexual abuse of males by other males. Male rape is simply not considered “rape.” From the very beginning, nobody could come to accept the fact that Sandusky was raping boys.

Assistant Coach Mike McQueary testified that he witnessed Sandusky raping a ten-year-old boy. Why did McQueary not intervene? McQueary, a 36-year-old man, was certainly not afraid of a 68-year-old Sandusky. McQueary proceeded to tell Paterno, who later informed Penn State’s president, about the events. Shockingly, none of these people, all prominent and high-ranking in their fields, called the police. How is this possible? They probably thought that this was simply a slight mistake on Sandusky’s part and would probably blow over. The notion that Sandusky had raped a boy was probably incomprehensible.

In a *New York Times* opinion piece, “Secret Dread at Penn State,” Bard College professor Daniel Mendelsohn asks, “what if it had been a 10-year-old girl in the Penn State locker room that Friday night in 2002?” This question is jarring, mostly because we all know the an-

swer. McQueary definitely would have tried to stop Sandusky. At the very least, he would have called the police. Everyone understands what is happening when a girl is raped; when a boy is raped, many people, including the law, minimize what is happening. Only recently, on January 6, did President Obama officially include male rape in the legal definition of “rape.” Paterno himself stated in an interview with *The Washington Post*, “I never heard of rape and a man.” According to the US Department of Justice, 3% of American men have been raped (as opposed to 17% of women). How is it that Paterno and the American legal system have “never heard of” male rape?

I believe that it is society’s general non-acceptance of homosexuality that has caused this casual attitude toward male rape. Though homosexuality is no longer illegal, the virulent anti-gay rhetoric espoused by many religious institutions and politicians makes it seem like there is something “wrong” with homosexual behavior. This is especially true in the sports world. There are virtually no openly homosexual professional athletes in the United States. Sports is seen as masculine, while homosexuality is not, so homosexuals have no place in sports. It was inconceivable to McQueary and Paterno that their expert defensive coordinator was engaging in homosexual behavior. Male rape will never be taken seriously until we start to accept homosexuality as a reality and not as the workings of the devil or as a psychological disease, something our country has yet to fully do.

Let us not to be too quick to idolize our cultural icons and raise them on a pedestal. It is great to have positive role models, but nobody, not even Joe Paterno, is infallible. To the mourners of Joe Paterno: Just try to keep in mind what every victim of Sandusky’s sexual abuse is probably thinking as they see you on TV, weeping by the statue of your demigod. His inaction has ruined their lives.

# Students Boycott Caf over Prices

COMPILED BY ADAM ZIMLOVER AND DOV HONICK

Although cafeteria prices are often discussed and complained about by today’s generation of discontented YU students, a review of two Commentator articles from 1989, reprinted below, shows that dissatisfaction with cafeteria prices reached such high levels that students actually began to create organizations dedicated to protesting the caf’s prices, by putting up posters and satirical cartoons. Even more surprising than groups of anonymous students protesting is the fact that the Yeshiva College Student Council (YCSC) supported the protests and became involved, actually organizing and implementing a complete boycott of the caf.



## Caf Attack Causes Resignation

November 21, 1989

A secretive anti-cafeteria organization helped renew student protests against the cafeteria last week, but also compelled Senior Joseph Hyman, Chairman of the Food Services Committee to resign his post.

Hyman resigned after a satirical flyer on cafeteria prices appeared on dormitory bulletin boards and stairwells... The flyer asks in bold letters, “Hey Jo, how much was that salad?” “Jo” then answers, “Only \$9.95, but I also got a free one ounce drink!” The flyer ends, “Signed ROTEC, Rest Of The Eaters Club.”

ROTEC produced three other sarcastic portrayals of the caf last week, surreptitiously distributing the flyers around campus during the early morning hours...

Hyman, who says he has been dealing with student anger over cafeteria prices since the beginning of the year, called ROTEC’s first flyer “The last straw.”

“Criticism to my face I can take, but having my name up on the wall, that’s not something I want to deal with. I want to deal with issues, not politics.”

ROTEC claims its flyer was directed solely against the cafeteria, and that the name “Jo” was chosen arbitrarily...

## Boycott Breeds Negotiation

December 22, 1989

A YCSC-sponsored boycott

brought cafeteria service to a standstill on Thursday, December 7. Throughout the day, protesting students stationed at the cafeteria entrances appealed to would-be customers not to patronize the cafeteria. The boycott was honored by almost all members of the YU community, leaving the Furman Dining Hall empty of customers for all three meals.

To prepare the student body, YCSC sold hundreds of “Boycott Survival Kits” containing deli sandwiches from Bernstein’s on the night before the boycott. Other activities to publicize the boycott consisted of placing large signs in the lobbies of the Residence Halls and writing “BOYCOTT” in red ink across the cafeteria’s publicity posters that are posted in the dormitories...

The boycott was implemented to call attention to student concerns about the cafeteria. [YCSC] outlined the four major demands that are being sought: to lower the prices, to examine the Food Service’s books, and to insure that a meal plan will not be mandatory next year.

Most students feel the boycott was a resounding success in that though it demonstrated concretely their dissatisfaction with the cafeteria [sic]. Many were also impressed with the student unity displayed during the Boycott.

Students hope that the success of the boycott will convince the Administration to make concessions on prices and portion sizes.

# Point & Counterpoint

INTRODUCTION BY DANIEL WINCHESTER

Initially signed into law by President Roosevelt in 1935 as part of the "New Deal," the US Social Security program is the largest government program in the world and the single greatest expenditure in the US federal budget. Funded primarily through payroll taxes on current workers, the program itself encompasses several social welfare and social insurance programs, including retirement, disability, and survivor insurance. The program, however, faces a crisis. As it stands now, Social Security operates with a "pay-as-you-go" system, meaning that the present generation of workers pays for the benefits of earlier generations (current retirees). As more baby boomers retire and as people begin to live longer, the number of beneficiaries will grow, and the retiree/income-earner ratio will increase, draining the system of its available funds. The Social Security "Trust Fund" is expected to run dry sometime in the next three decades without legislative action.

Do we reform the system to ensure that the program remains solvent through the projected rough period in two or three decades?

OR

Do we privatize the program, taking responsibility for Social Security out of the hand of government?

On the one hand, privatizing the program will leave retirement security in the hands of individuals themselves, placing the onus of responsibility upon individuals to save until retirement. On the other hand, a government program is costly and, as we have seen, can be shortsighted. Let the debate begin!

## The Case for Reforming Social Security

BY AKIVA BERGER

As we well know, Social Security is one of the prime fiscal dangers facing America today, as the threat of unfunded liabilities continues to grow and threaten the program's solvency. Comprising 20.8% of the federal budget, more than any other expenditure, this entitlement program must be reformed to curb the exploding deficits it now faces. This year, for the first time since 1983, Social Security ran a budget deficit—almost \$50 billion! Basically, the program now pays out more in benefits than it collects in payroll taxes. Projected deficits for future years are even scarier, as the baby boomer generation retires en masse and average lifespan continues to climb. Clearly, there are structural problems with the entire program, ones that must be addressed in the near future.

Social Security was originally instituted during the New Deal as a program in which workers would contribute taxes over the course of their lifetimes in exchange for a guaranteed payout during retirement. The widespread belief is that the government merely holds your money in an escrow account until you reach 65. However, this is not the case, proven by the fact that the Social Security trust fund can be routinely raided to fund other government pet projects. In reality, the government essentially transfers money from workers to retirees, writing current workers an IOU for sometime in the future. This has led to considerable problems as the ratio of workers to retirees has declined in the last fifty years from 16:1 to 3:1. Further, while average life expectancy has risen from 67 to 77 since 1935, retirement age has only increased by a mere two years. A program originally intended to subsidize the last few years of people's lives has now become a free handout spanning 15-20 years. Even in the long term, the average person just breaks even with Social Security; his only guarantee is that his money will keep up with the rate of inflation through the annual "cost-of-living" adjustments (COLA).

A better plan would be for the government to help people help themselves, empowering each individual to make his own investment decisions. Payroll taxes will be directed to private investment firms contracted by the government to the lowest bidder. These firms, unlike most in the public sector, would actually have incentives to cut costs and run their operations efficiently in order to in-

crease profit margin. To insure against losses, the government will promise a baseline % return, paid for by the money collected from the bidding firms. Similar to how a defined-contribution retirement plan operates, employers match an employee's contribution. Aside from guaranteeing against losses, the government's minimal role would be to step in and help an employee choose from a number of investment options, depending on the level of risk he or she is willing to undertake. These options include stocks, bonds, mutual funds, CDs, commodities, and annuities. Poorer individuals would still contribute their payroll taxes to their own private investment funds, but the government would contribute something as well to bolster the retirement account just for those neediest among us.

As it stands now, Social Security is not mean-tested; the result is the rich getting a pittance for their retirement, one which few people of that class can truly live on anyway. Now, it is true that Social Security keeps 20 million Americans over age 65 out of poverty. So if we want Social Security to simply be a massive wealth re-distribution system to support the poor, that's fine, but then we have to call it what it is. It is not a bona fide retirement plan for all Americans, rather a safety net for the destitute. Political figures today speak of the "shrinking middle class" while proceeding to vilify those productive individuals who actually succeeded in accumulating wealth over their lifetimes. Rarely mentioned is the inconvenient truth that one of the largest contributors to growing income inequality is the percentage of entitlements going to people who do not need them. In 1979, 54% of all transfer payments went to the poorest fifth of Americans. In 2007, the lowest quintile only received 36% of those transfer payments, indicating that as a nation we are wasting money on those who need it

See [Reforming Social Security](#), page 8

## The Case against Privatizing Social Security

BY AARON KOR

Though it has been on the backburner of national political debate in recent years, Social Security reform is still a divisive issue between the right and the left. Generally speaking, liberals propose repairing the current system within the existing framework, while conservatives want to privatize it, which would enable opting out of the current pay-as-you-go system and investing in individual pension-like accounts such as 401Ks. However, while the right likes to adorn its privatization plan with grandiose notions of "individual freedom" and "personal responsibility," a privatized

social security system is a terrible idea that, if implemented, would immediately devastate the economy and cause future financial calamity.

In 2010, Social Security finally went into the red, with benefit expenditures exceeding its payroll tax revenues by \$49 billion. Baby boomers retiring, increasing life expectancy, high unemployment, and early retirement have all contributed to Social Security's rising deficit spending, which will stabilize at an estimated \$350 billion annually by 2030. Without reforming the program, almost all of the money needed to supplement the remaining shortfall would most likely come from borrowing an estimated \$2 trillion - with a small amount of revenue possibly generated from some higher taxes - until the year 2036; after that, more borrowing would have to occur. The result: massive debt, which will crush the economy due to sky high interest rates.

Given this background, it's easy to foresee the immediate economic trouble to which privatizing Social Security would lead. With a large percentage of would-be payroll taxes diverted into private accounts, there would be less funds available than before to finance Social Security for current beneficiaries. And since the number of beneficiaries will

increase in the near to mid-term, the government would have to borrow approximately \$1 to \$2 trillion, which would immediately cause more debt and a weaker economy.

Now, conservatives acknowledge that debt would be incurred by transitioning Social Security into a privatized system. However, they respond that, in the end, the economic growth that would be stimulated through the accounts would dwarf any debt incurred from the transition. Well, that's all fine and good if you presuppose that private accounts would indeed be so prosperous. I beg to differ. Though private accounts would offer more bang for the buck, as savings could be invested in non-government securities like the stock market, which promises higher potential rates of return, with the beauty comes the beast. You can be sure that if Social Security is privatized, private accounts would wipe out millions of people's life savings, causing economic devastation. The reason is threefold:

Firstly, savings invested in the stock market are at the mercy of the market's extreme volatility. Do we really think it's a good idea for millions of elderly people to invest their life savings in the market? Have we learned nothing from the market crash in 2008 that depleted people's entire savings within hours? But even without that scale of catastrophe, the stock market is still, by nature, too capricious a force with which to gamble retirees' savings.

But even if the market were less fickle and more predictable, the odds are very much against most people investing well - partially due to unscrupulous stock brokers, but mainly due to people's lack of investment knowledge. Most investors would have no clue what they're doing, and would consequently lose huge percentages of their savings. Indeed, crooked brokers and ignorant investing is what occurred in the United Kingdom when their social security system was privatized. The outcome was so devastating that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development reported, "What looked like a very good idea from a financial perspective in cutting costs has put pensioner poverty...back on the agenda".

Finally, the administrative fees for maintaining private accounts would significantly offset any high returns. This is why brokerage houses, banks, and mutual funds support privatizing Social Security so passionately. Austin Goolsbee, a renowned Chicago University economist, has estimated that the fees for maintaining these accounts could near \$1

See [Privatizing Social Security](#), page 15





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## Threat from Within

*continued from front page...*

Haredi extremism is not only taking place on public transportation. In Bet Shemesh, a group of radical Haredim, the “Sikrikim,” has been protesting the opening of the Orot Girls School, a *dati leumi* institution. Deplorably, they have decided to express their discontent with the school’s “immodest” dress code by spitting on young girls. Naama Margolese, a 7-year old American “olah” has become a national icon since a news report showed that she was too afraid to walk the 300 meters from the school to her home. Haredim continue to shout “*Tistalku mikan*” (“get out of here”) at women and prohibit women from walking on certain sidewalks.

The Sikrikim infamously go by “the Meah Shearim Mafia,” as well. Because of their actions, Meah Shearim has become a dangerous place even for the average modern Orthodox individual. On Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron every year, the Sikrikim chant hatred during the national sirens against the Zionist Israeli government. Most especially, they have forced Manny’s Book Shop in Meah Shearim to stop selling Zionist books. Sikrikim have reportedly raided and sacked the store for allowing tourists to walk into the store with immodest dress.

Despite the noise in the news that many Haredim are making, most Haredim support the State of Israel and keep their religious observance to themselves. It is only a small group of Haredim that demand women to sit at the back of a bus.

The silence of the moderate Haredim, however, is encouraging a bad reputation for religiosity. For many secular Israelis, religion

is an irrational and, ironically, an unethical way of life. This results from the public behavior of the most outspoken religious Jews, namely, Haredim. Protests against Zionism, Tzahal, and women are comparable to the rhetoric of Israel’s adversaries. In areas like Meah Shearim, where many residents despise Israel for religious purposes, Haredim are even seen supporting the destruction of Israel and the formation of a Palestinian state in its place.

The Haredi protests climaxed when a rally was held in Shabbat Square on a Saturday night, comparing Zionism to Nazism. This false claim was officially the standpoint of the United Nations from 1975 until 1993 when the United States forced the international body to reject the resolution. The notorious Neturei Karta sect of Hasidim has also fervently called Zionism a modernized form of Nazism.

The Rally at Shabbat Square, however, was much more dramatized than any other “Zionism=Nazism” rally. Attendants wore yellow Stars of David with the “Jude” insignia over their clothes to demonstrate that religious Judaism is being annihilated just as the Nazis tried to eliminate the Jews. Some people dressed in blue-striped concentration camp clothes and stood behind bars. One particular boy posed with his hands in the air, referencing to the famous picture of a young boy in the ghetto surrendering to Nazi soldiers. Rabbi Aharon Leib Steinman, a prominent figure in the Haredi community, supported this rally. He said that secular Jews are the “*erev rav*” (mixed multitude of non-Jews) who hate the real Jews (Haredim).

Is this what being a religious Jew means? Only 70 years after the Holocaust, men claim-



ing to be *frum* promote hatred against Jews who do not conform to Ultra-Orthodox life. It is a disgrace on their part to their own cause. These “religious” Haredim ought to stare in a mirror and ask which type of Jew hates other Jews: the secularists or themselves. Until then, they mock the 6 million Jews who were murdered for being Jewish.

These anti-Jew rallies have been occurring simultaneously with “price tag” attacks in Judea and Samaria. A recent attack on the Ephraim military base by right-wing residents of the West Bank shocked the Israeli nation. It was clear that many Israelis are vehemently opposed to a Palestinian state in the West Bank. When Israeli citizens attacked the military base, however, politics turned into the birth of a civil war between reactionary Jews and the rest of society.

It is unclear when, or if, the conflict with conservative extremism will cease in Israel. Haredim are merely bringing their own com-

**Is this what being a religious Jew means? Only 70 years after the Holocaust, men claiming to be “*frum*” promote hatred against Jews who do not conform to Ultra-Orthodox life.**

plaints to fruition; through anti-Israel and anti-secular rallies, the Haredim influence secular Jews to hate the Ultra-Orthodox and religious community. Additionally, “price tag” extremists who terrorize Palestinians and the IDF are simply helping the Palestinian cause. Israel wants peace with the Palestinians, but young West Bank reactionaries uphold the peace with their forceful actions. Hopefully both groups will realize their faults before it is too late.

# Limmud NY

continued from front page...

early as eight in the morning starting with traditional Shacharit and more exploratory prayer options like yoga. Sessions ran until past midnight, and the day often culminated in dance parties, karaoke, or concerts by bands like Stereo Sinai, whose lyrics are entirely biblical. ("We steal lyrics from God," the band boasts.)

Sessions delved into topics from radical Jewish art to Jewish food to singularity from a Jewish perspective. One session on the Jewish body in art by Marc Epstein, a professor at Vassar College, explored topics from Jesus to Chagall and the difference between *chochmah* and *binah* in representations of the Jewish brain. Epstein showed slides of depictions of the four sons, with the *rashah* portrayed as a muscled Jew, and the *chacham* portrayed as effeminate, with smooth skin. He then showed photographs of Oreet Ashery's character Marcus Fisher, a traditionally garbed Hassid. It was not until Epstein showed a photograph of Ashery portraying herself as Fisher and revealing one of her breasts that it became apparent that Fisher was Ashery's alter-ego. Epstein's interest in the dissolution of Jewish gender boundaries in the modern age culminated in a discussion of the cross-dressing represented by traditional *Chassidish* garb.

Samuel Klein, a student at YCT, in his session on Gauguin's Song of Songs, also threw gender boundaries into question. He showed Gauguin's *The Lovers*, a painting of Gauguin with his arm around a lover during his sexual escapades in Tahiti. In the painting, it is unclear whether Gauguin's lover is a woman or a man.

Another boundary that dissolved at Limmud was the boundary around the definition of words. In Jake Goodman's session on queer risings in the bible, he attempted to expand the word queer to be not only a ho-

mosexual term, but as a term related to expression of the awkward and strange within.

In both Klein and Goodman's sessions they provided alternative translations to those of Artscroll. Reading these translations opened my mind to different possibilities and interpretations beyond the traditional ones I had always embraced. Limmud was almost like a composite of multiple translations of Judaism, a space where multiple perspectives on the religion were embraced and accepted.

Speaking to Daniel Silverstein, a student in his first year at YCT while on the conference, I began to realize how strong the urge is for us to be accepting, undivided and unified as an *Am Ehad*. At a booth at a fair on Sunday, Chovevei was handing out a press release, of which the first words were "Open Orthodox." I explained to Daniel my frustrations with any adjectives describing "Orthodoxy." I believe that Orthodoxy should encompass openness and modernity. The student said he'd go even further, saying he didn't consider himself "Orthodox." There's nothing orthodox about me, he explained to me. I'm a *halakhic*, God-fearing Jew. Why define myself as Orthodox?

At the time, this argument seemed interesting and valid. Why define ourselves? The entire conference left me feeling very much undefined. Age boundaries, denominational boundaries, and boundaries regarding sexual orientation all dissolved. Your occupation or institutional association didn't matter in the context of communal Jewish growth and learning. Everyone was on a search to learn and to explore outside of his or her traditional boxes and labels. Yet returning from the conference, I began to realize the importance of the search for definition.

"It all started at Limmud," said Paul Berger, a journalist for *The Jewish Daily Forward* in his presen-



tation on George Washington's letter to the Jews of Newport. Berger, covering Limmud UK last year for *The Forward*, first became intrigued by the letter when listening to Jonathan Sarna's lecture on the topic. When Berger asked Sarna where the physical letter was, Sarna didn't know. So began Berger's intense and lengthy search for the letter, during which he was thrown into controversy surrounding ownership of the document. When he finally managed to see the letter, he was only allowed to view it briefly.

Berger's search is not the only search that started at Limmud. Many questions, searches and quests begin at Limmud. Limmud was only the beginning of a conversation. Limmud was the opening of boxes, the breaking down of boundaries, the beginning of questions, and the search for answers to things I've always wondered about. Limmud wasn't about redefinition, because prior to redefinition or definition at all, we need foundations. Definition cannot come without questions, search cannot come without previous destruction. Ultimately, what instigates us to ask and redefine are troubling experiences, places and spaces where our identity is thrown into question. Limmud is one such space, and as Samuel Klein explained in his description of his search for faith, struggling is okay. Struggling is necessary. It was while driving down Highway 1 in California listening to Metallica's *Nothing Else Matters* that Klein broke down in tears, realizing that no matter how much he desired to be as devout as possible, he wasn't where he

**Many questions, searches and quests begin at Limmud. Limmud was only the beginning of a conversation. Limmud was the opening of boxes, the breaking down of boundaries, the beginning of questions, and the search for answers to things I've always wondered about.**

wanted to be.

Yet with the conference's end came the feeling of slowly falling back into reality without the space or time for genuine struggle. In the short period of four days, these complete strangers had become my makeshift community. In less than a week, I felt a kinship and closeness with many of the participants, as if they were an extended family. Yet as our bus pulled away from the hotel, I had to accept the reality. The reality is that we as Jews are not united, but divided. The reality is that Modern Orthodox Jews had been the minity at the conference. The only more right wing orthodox participants had been Shmuley Boteach and Shmuel Skaist, neither of whom were necessarily emblematic of what those parts of Orthodoxy stand for.

Before attending the conference, the student delegation was told that they were representing Modern Orthodoxy. As such, we were asked that all of our activities and anything we said should be within the realm of Modern Orthodoxy. Therefore, we weren't allowed to attend Shira Chadasha-style *minyanim* or any egalitarian *minyanim*. Yet as one of the *roshei yeshiva* who met with us said, there's a difference between action and belief. As religious Jews we have few if no mandated beliefs. It's our actions that count.

How then, are we supposed to represent Modern Orthodoxy with our beliefs? I asked this question at our initial meeting: please define Modern Orthodoxy, I asked the *rosh yeshiva*, so that I can best represent it.

Yet Modern Orthodoxy is inherently undefined. The modern world is one of flux and change, and the Orthodox world is not any less stagnant than modernity. How are we supposed to represent Modern Orthodoxy when no one can truly define it? How are we supposed to send missions when we have no mission? I think Limmud was instrumental not in answering this question, as this question has no straightforward answer, but in grap-

pling with this question and raising new, relevant questions.

By conversing with Jewish people from so many different walks of life, I felt that I could begin to understand what Modern Orthodoxy was about. At YU, I often feel like a minority. Yet on Limmud, I felt like a majority, on a quest with the rest of the delegation and with the rest of the participants towards self-actualization and self-definition on both an individual and communal level.

In Samuel Klein's source sheet on Gauguin's Song of Songs, he included an excerpt from James Kugel's *The Great Poems of the Bible*. And perhaps James Kugel says it best:

Aren't we all, in the end, citizens of the same republic, fish in one great sea? Indeed, if the camera could pull back far enough, was it not the way on a still larger scale? 'All those who yearn for the LORD' were sometimes happy—unmatchably happy—but sometimes left wondering, left wandering dreamily about the city, free to go anywhere but chained to one purpose with absolutely no alternative . . . being nothing but a human being.

The search for God and purpose is not an easy one. Because despite the beliefs, doubts or voices which may permeate our minds, ultimately we are chained to one purpose. It is this that distinguishes Modern Orthodoxy from other denominations. We allow flux and change, we allow the voices within us to enter the conversation. We engage in dialogue with the other. But ultimately, we believe our purpose as human beings is in a resolute goal, a commitment to halachah, a defined system. We are all Jewish; we are all fish in one great sea; we are all human. Yet we are also all different. We have different purposes, different questions, different struggles. And these struggles are what ultimately define us.

## Reforming Social Security

continued from page 6...

the least.

It has come time to drop the façade of an effective government-run retirement savings program, and to put the worker in control of his own future. In addition to being a more efficient and less costly operation, privatized Social Security would allow the average citizen to feel as though he alone is responsible for bringing his retirement goals to fruition. A replacement of the victimhood mentality, one which breeds a culture of dependency, is the only way to wean us Americans off of our beloved entitlements that are taking us down the road of fiscal disaster. Drastically reforming the oldest, most entrenched entitlement program is a good place to start.





# Saving a Torah?

By GAVRIEL BROWN

On a joyous day in July 2010, friends and family gathered in the quiet library of my home to fill in the final letters of a remarkable Torah scroll. The strong hand of the sofer wrote each concluding letter as individuals touched the end of the quill. Our rabbi signed. The headmaster of our day school signed. Dozens of our friends participated in the ritual. My brother, who was celebrating his Bar Mitzvah at the time, immersed himself in the mikvah in order to write his letter without the guidance of the sofer. He finished the lamed, the final letter in the scroll.

Torah machozeret al achsania shelah, "The Torah returns to its natural home," was embroidered in sky blue on the cover, a quote from Talmud Bava Metzia. Indeed, this Torah, for the first time in decades, was returning to a home.

Its journey took it from a small town in Poland to the concentration camp of Majdanek, where, according to the charming sofer, it was given to a priest and buried in a cemetery outside of Majdanek. The Torah was then dug up, damaged but fixable. (The story was told to us months before the dedication ceremony and validated by a letter and numerous phone conversations).

The Torah, with old parchment but handsome new atzei chaim (supporting poles) and a beautiful new cover, was then escorted to the shul. A parade of people, complete with a police escort, danced and sang for half a mile. In shul, my parents, with tears in their eyes, spoke of the significance of the moment.

Bubbie, my great-grandmother, a survivor of Majdanek, danced with us, making the story an ultimate tikkun—reparation. From the atrocities my grandparents witnessed in Holocaust Europe to the Jewish lives they built in the United States, the story of the Torah scroll seemed like the last peace in a cosmic puzzle, a series of divine coincidences that had led up to that special day.

The sofer, Rabbi Menachem Youlus, was the director of the Save A Torah Foundation. The foundation was dedicated to rescuing and restoring Torah scrolls that were hidden, lost or stolen during the Holocaust or other traumatic events in modern Jewish history.

When not running his bookshop in Wheaton, Maryland, Rabbi Youlus, a self-described "Jewish Indiana Jones," was travelling around Eastern Europe bribing priests and townspeople and smuggling Torah scrolls out in suitcases with false bottoms. He was a man of a thousand adventurous stories.

He told us of Torah scrolls he found under the floorboards of barracks in the Bergen Belsen concentration camp. He recounted finding two Torahs in a metal body bag in a cemetery around Auschwitz concentration camp using a metal detector. He related the story of running a Torah out of a "severely bombed building" in Mosul, Iraq, with the help of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne division. Youlus told of being fined in Russia, beaten in Germany, and thrown in jail in Ukraine trying to save the Torahs.

Almost all the Torahs Youlus finds are damaged, burned, and missing panels. With the help of his brother-in-law and a

team of sofrim, Youlus removes years of dirt and mold—even cigarette burns and knife marks—from Nazi desecration. After patching them up, Youlus tries to find their original owners, but more often than not, he sells them to Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox synagogues throughout North America. He wants to give them a "good home," to congregations that would care, use, and love the Torahs.

For our family, rededicating a Torah with such close ties to our great-grandparents' lives was a once in a lifetime opportunity. The miraculous story of the Torah dovetailed with our grandparents' miraculous story of survival. It seemed too good to be true.

It was too good to be true.

A few months later, investigative journalists Jeff Lunden and Martha Wexler published a full-length article in Washington Post Magazine questioning Youlus' stories. Lunden, who witnessed a Torah's rededication ceremony in his parents' synagogue in 2008, thought something in Youlus' stories didn't match up.

Youlus claimed he found the Torah on eBay and then went to Germany to track the Torah down. After being beaten by police, Youlus said, he found the man selling the Torah: an Auschwitz prison guard. The guard wanted to be paid in gold. The Torah, Youlus asserted, was found in the very same village in Hungary where the donor's family was from.

After a year and a half of investigative reporting, Lunden and Wexler published their report challenging Youlus' claims. A Holocaust historian questioned his account of finding a Torah under the floorboards in the barracks in Bergen Belsen; the barracks had been burned down by British troops in 1945 to stop the spread of Typhus. When asked about the findings, Youlus said he couldn't remember if it was Bergen Belsen or another concentration camp. In fact, when questioned, Youlus continuously pleaded forgetfulness. When asked for the name of a priest from whom Youlus bought the lost panels of a Torah found in Auschwitz, Youlus couldn't remember the name. Lunden uncovered records indicating that the last priest who survived Auschwitz died in 2004.

When asked for receipts of transactions, Youlus claimed he could only pay cash. Wexler wrote, "In a 3-hour interview, Youlus is unable to provide a single name, date, place, photograph or document to back up the Auschwitz stories or any of the others." Youlus couldn't even produce travel documents proving he traveled to Eastern Europe.

Spurred by the Washington Post article, the United States Postal Inspection Service began a federal investigation into Youlus' business and foundation. They uncovered definitive proof that Youlus' swashbuckling stories of adventure were nothing but lies; Youlus' passport had but two stamps since 2005, both from Ben Gurion International Airport. Youlus had never been to Europe.

They also disclosed a paper trail of monetary fraud. Of the \$1.2 million collected by the Save-a-Torah Foundation since 2004, \$340,000 was diverted into his own personal bank account.

The stories of bribing priests and digging in graveyards were lies. The cigarette burns and knife marks weren't Nazi defilement but mishandling and misuse by shady antiques

dealers.

In all likelihood, Youlus acquired old Torahs from foreclosed synagogues, eBay and other more lucrative means. He then fabricated a story to match a donor's familial Holocaust story and sold the Torahs, some for as little as \$12,000, others for more than \$36,000.

A few months ago, Youlus was charged with mail and wire fraud. Manhattan U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara told The Washington Post, "He chose poorly in allegedly exploiting an excruciating chapter in Jewish and international history to perpetrate a brazen fraud that played on the heartstrings of the people for whom the painful memories of that period will never die."

Faced with overwhelming evidence, Youlus recently plead guilty for forging stories and peddling money from the foundation for his own personal use.

A statement on the Save A Torah Foundation Website reads, "We have been saddened to learn over the last several months that we at Save A Torah, and our donors and friends, were misled by an individual whom we trusted. We believe that the step that Rabbi Youlus took by accepting responsibility for his actions is an important step in putting this unfortunate episode behind us."

For our family, it will be hard to put this episode "behind us." Youlus has desecrated our collective memory. He exploited the story of my great-grandparents' suffering to manipulate our family into "rededicating a Torah," a Torah which, for all we know, could have been stolen. He had crafted an audacious story to tug at our heartstrings, and it worked.

How could we be so gullible? Was our desire to redeem a chapter so dark in our family's history enough to trust an individual peddling stories that were so obviously fabricated? Or was it the trust we placed in Rabbi Youlus, a man who lead such a selfless life of mitzvot that he had placed himself in hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt?

As a family we have discussed rededicating the Torah in light of this guilty plea, and also discuss the possibility of returning the Torah should we find it was stolen. We are all dumbfounded at Youlus' duplicity. A rabbi with training from Ner Yisroel, with a bookstore, used his respect within the community for personal gain. If a man who told us when signing the last letters of the Torah, "You have to have kavanna [intention] that you're writing for the sake of Hashem," committed a chillul Hashem on such a grand scale, whom can we trust?

If the consequences of Rabbi Youlus' actions lead people to mistrust educators and charity organizers, then the price of his actions will be more than the ink and parchment of his Torah scrolls.

For me, our Torah represented the everlasting continuation of our people from the cemeteries of Europe to the living communities throughout the world. To learn that the story of our Torah was a hoax is an abuse of this sacred tradition.

A sofer is much more than a calligrapher, and a Torah is much more than calligraphy. Before writing a letter in a Torah scroll, a sofer must immerse himself in a mikvah. Each letter must be pure and true.

**When not running his bookshop in Wheaton, Maryland, Rabbi Youlus, a self-described "Jewish Indiana Jones," was travelling around Eastern Europe bribing priests and townspeople and smuggling Torah scrolls out in suitcases with false bottoms. He was a man of a thousand adventurous stories.**



# To Voice or Not to Voice

By YAIR SHAHAK

Many of us go through our Hebrew education in high school and perhaps college hearing about the group of letters known as *begeckefet* (ב, ג, ד, ה, ו, ז, ח, ט) and how they stand out from the rest of the alphabet. Most of us know either intuitively or from actual study that the letter “ב” can be pronounced two ways. If it is written as בּ it has the equivalent sound of the English letter “B”. However, if it is written as ב, without a dot, it has the sound value of “V”. The same goes for פ and פּ: the former sounds like the letter P and the latter sounds like F. The Hebrew letter כ, too, is relatively straightforward: with a dot it’s pronounced like the letter K and without a dot it results in the gurgling sound synonymous with Jewry worldwide and the basis for the renowned “Chaim-Mordechai Brecher” phone prank (if you don’t know what I’m talking about, Google is your friend). That sound is usually transliterated as either “ch” or “kh”, the latter of which is technically more correct and the one we will use here.

Things start to get interesting when we turn our attention to the remaining three *begeckefet* letters. If you are like most people, you follow one of two paths: either you pronounce ה the same as ת (in other words, equivalent to the letter T), or you pronounce it the same as שׁ (i.e., the letter S). The question therefore begs to be asked: if you are of the former camp, why do both ה and ת exist? And if you belong to the latter, why does ה exist at all if the letter שׁ represents the same exact sound?!

It gets even more confusing when we look at the remaining two letters: what is the difference between ג and גּ? Between ד and דּ? Were they always pronounced the same way?

Let’s shelve the *begeckefet* discussion for a moment and ask a seemingly unrelated question: if we were to show a picture of the letter S to native English speakers and ask them what sound that letter makes, what would the response be? Most likely, we would be answered with “ssssssss.” However, this is not always the case. In words like “rags”, “abs”, and “windows” the letter S sounds like a Z. Why do we pronounce “eggs” like “eggz” and not pronounce “checks” like “chekz”? What do words like “bags,” “cabs,” “bands” and “strands” have that words like “backs,” “caps,” “pants,” and “rants” do not?

The key to the questions above is found in our vocal chords, a membrane positioned across the larynx. There are consonants which employ the vocal chords, aptly called “voiced” consonants, and there are those which do not, called “voiceless” or “unvoiced” consonants. There are also several mechanisms by which to express sound through



the vocal chords. Two of these mechanisms are called “fricatives” and “plosives”. A “fricative” is a consonant whose sound is produced by a constant flow of air, which produces friction in the vocal tract (hence the name “fricative”). For example, the letters F and V are pronounced by pursing the lips and creating a narrow channel through which air can escape. You can see this for yourself if you look in a mirror and pronounce the sound of the letter (i.e. “ffffff...” or “vvvvvvv...”).

On the contrary, plosive consonants are formed by closing the vocal tract thereby blocking off all air and then immediately releasing it, in a forceful explosion (hence the name “plosive”). These consonants are such that once they are pronounced, the consonantal sound is over. For example, the letter B is a plosive; the moment that you pronounce each B in the sentence “Barry Bonds batted the ball,” the B sound is over and all that is left is the vowel sound following it. This holds true for ג, ד, פ, פּ, and ת – or in other words, the remaining *begeckefet* letters; if those letters have a dot in them, we pronounce them as plosives and the consonantal sound is over as soon as it is uttered. (Incidentally, this dot is called a *דגש קל*; it changes the quality of the sound of the aforementioned six letters (from an “f” to a “p”, from a “v” to a “b”, etc). This dot should not be confused with a *דגש חזק* that changes the quantity of the letter or in other words, geminates it, as last issue’s column explained.)

This brings us back to ג and ד. Were ד and דּ always pronounced the same? The answer, which may be obvious at this point, is that they were not. Originally, a ד (without a dot) was not pronounced like a D but rather, like the “th” sound in words such as “this,” “then,” “the,” “other,” and “mother.” While this may seem strange to some, recall the *מגלה* in Berakhot 13B which states the following:

תניא סומכוס אומר: כל המאריך באחד מאריכין לו ימיו ושנותיו. אמר ר' אהא ב"ר יעקב ובדלת.

Symmachus says: Whoever prolongs the word “אֶחָד” (meaning “one”) [in the Shema] has his days and years prolonged. R’ Aha bar Yaakov says: [This refers to prolonging] the letter “dalet.”

Now, if we are to pronounce a ד like the letter D, how would it be possible to lengthen it? Due to lack of knowledge, some people may say “ehad-d-d-d...” or “ehad-Uh” (emphasizing the ד), both of which are categorically wrong. The reason for not being able to be “מאריך באחד” is that it’s physiologically impossible. Since the D sound is plosive, the moment you utter that sound it is over. However, if we were to pronounce the letter the way it was originally pronounced, we would have no problem saying “thhhhh-hhh...” (as in “this”) as this sound is fricative—not plosive—and exhibits continuous airflow. (Disclaimer: the author is not a poseq and neither recommends nor discourages starting to habitually pronounce the word דָּהָר in a “historically correct” manner.)

The letter ה, on the other hand, was historically pronounced like “th” as in “thin,” “thimble,” and “washcloth”, and like the first sound of the Greek letter Theta (known to Math and Science students as θ) and the Icelandic letter þ (pronounced “thorn”). In other words, just like the sound of an S but with a lisp. English preserves this consonant in many transliterations from Hebrew. The standard English translation for שַׁבָּת is Sabbath (not Shabbat), Ruth for רוּת, Judith for יהודית, Lilit for לילית, and so on. Note that in each of these words, the ה is without a dot, in other words representing the sound of “thin.”

As for ג, there is general consensus that in most Hebrew dialects it was historically pronounced as a hard G, as in the words “good” or “goat.” Yemenite Jews, in what may be there only historical mistake concerning Hebrew pronunciation, pronounce a ג like a J (as in “jail” and “George”), due to Arabic influence which has a corresponding letter to Hebrew Gimmel pronounced in most regions as “Jiim.” However, as stated above, the original pronunciation of ג was, in all likelihood, equivalent to the sound of a hard G. What, then, was the sound of ג, without the dot?

Here is where it all comes together: if you pronounce the sound of the letter F continuously (in other words, “ffffff...”) and then, while doing so, start humming at the same time, what sound do you end up

with? If you did this correctly, you should end up with the sound of the letter V. Similarly, if you pronounce “th” as in “thin” continuously (“thhhhhhhhh...”, like “ssssssss...” but with a lisp) and after a moment start humming simultaneously once again, you should end up with the “this” sound. And for the grand finale, if you pronounce the sound of the letter כ continuously (in private, so as to not make others think that you are choking) and then start activating your vocal chords simultaneously, you will end up with a throaty sound that is related to the French pronunciation of the letter R and the Modern Israeli pronunciation of the letter ר. This was probably the original sound of ג (without the dot), commonly transliterated as “gh”. Words of non-English origin like “Baghdad” and “Afghanistan” contain this sound.

*Qabbalah*, *gematriot*, and theological ramifications aside, then, the sounds of ב, ג, and ד are nothing more than the voiced counterparts of ת, פ, and כ, respectively. The same holds true with regards to the plosive versions of the aforementioned letters. You can repeat the experiment outlined just above with the plosive sounds and you will notice that, similarly, the sounds of the letters B, G, and D (בּ, גּ, דּ) are simply the respective sounds of the letters P, K, and T (פּ, כּ, תּ) plus the concurrent activation of your vocal chords: בּ and פּ (B and P) are voiced and voiceless counterparts, as are גּ and כּ (G and K), and דּ and תּ (D and T).

This physio-linguistic phenomenon of the interplay between voiced and voiceless consonants and how they change sounds around them within the word affects hundreds of languages. This is why the letter S in words like “tags” and “labs” sounds like a Z while the S in “tacks” and “laps” sounds like an ordinary S: the former words have a voiced consonant (G and B, respectively) immediately preceding the S, which changes it into its voiced counterpart, the letter Z, while the latter words have a voiceless consonant (K and P, respectively) immediately preceding the S, which keeps its sound voiceless. Note that the word “strands” is not pronounced “ztrandz” or “ztrands”, but “strandz” – the S only changes when there is a voiced consonant (in this case,

the letter D) or a vowel immediately preceding it, as in the words “potatoes” and “rays”. (Accordingly, this is why a native Icelandic speaker may pronounce the English word “phrases” so that it rhymes with “braces” and not “grazes,” as the Z sound does not frequently occur in Icelandic since 1973.)

Conversely, words like “baked” and “faked” have the opposite effect. The voiced consonant in them, D, sounds like its voiceless counterpart (T) because it follows a similarly unvoiced consonant (K), resulting in a pronunciation of “Baykt” and “Faykt.” The D in a word such as “blessed” can sound two different ways. In its verb form, the word is monosyllabic and sounds like “Blest”, because the D follows an voiceless consonant, S. As an adjective, however, the word is usually disyllabic (made of two syllables) and sounds like “Bles-id,” so the D remains voiced because it is immediately preceded by a vowel, not a voiceless consonant.

Another example which directly affects a *halakha* is found in the Shema. We are strongly cautioned to pronounce the ז of the words זָכָרוּ and זָכַרְתָּם. Why were *halakhists* careful to single these particular words out? The phonological answer is that if you are mouthing the Shema and not using your voice (in other words, not activating your vocal chords), there is no way for one to actually pronounce a Z sound, only its unvoiced counterpart (an S) and thus, one would render the aforementioned words זָשָׁכָרוּ and זָשָׁכַרְתָּם, which wrongly connote the deed of performing the mitzvot on condition of reward.

This voiced-unvoiced interplay comes into play quite frequently in בניין התפעל in the Hebrew language. Simply stated, roots that are placed within this framework have a ת before the first letter of the root: for example, הִתְלַבֵּשׁ (“He dressed himself.”) For reasons beyond the scope of this article, roots that have a שׁ or ס as the first root-letter, such as שָׁפַר or סָפַר cause a change in the word order so that instead of הִתְסַפֵּר and הִתְשַׁפֵּר we get הִסְתַּפֵּר and הִשְׁתַּפֵּר, respectively. However, when the first letter of the root is a ז, such as in זָכַר or זָכַרְתָּ, not only is the “ת” of בניין התפעל placed after the first root-letter (potentially resulting in “הִזְתַּכַּרְתָּ” and “הִזְתַּכַּרְתָּ”, respectively) but it also changes into a ד (with the final result of “הִדְתַּכַּרְתָּ” and “הִדְתַּכַּרְתָּ”, respectively). In other words, because the שׁ or the ס changed into its voiced counterpart (the letter ז), the ת also changes into its own voiced counterpart, a ד.

This phenomenon of T changing to a D appears in countless languages, not least of which is Sindarin, one of the many languages created by the revered philologist and author J.R.R. Tolkien. For example,

See **To Voice**, page 11

# To Voice Censorship is Soo Two Decades Ago

continued from page 10...

the word for father is “adar” even though the stem of the word is ATA, implying a T to D (voiceless->voiced) shift.

So why did the pronunciation of some *begedkefet* letters change? It’s hard to say. A possible reason for the changes was the emigration of Hebrew-speaking Jews into European countries whose respective local language did not include some of these sounds. For example, Germanic languages—with the exception of Icelandic and ironically, English—did not preserve the “thin” sound. German and Polish, in particular, may have had a strong effect on the Hebrew pronunciation of the incoming Jews. It’s not difficult to imagine a sound like “thin” becoming simplified overtime—in part, from regional dialectical influence—to the sound of the letter S, hence the formation of words like “Shabbos.”

Curiously, many if not all of the original *begedkefet* sounds can be attested in Modern Greek. We all know the first four letters of the Greek alphabet to be “Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta,” but if you were to ask modern-day Greeks to start reciting their alphabet, you would most likely hear “Alpha, Veta, Ghamma, Thelta”, where the “th” in “Thelta” would sound like “this.” Similarly, the Icelandic word for “mother” is *Móðir* (pronounced roughly the same as its English equivalent). Note the letter that is used to represent the “this” sound and its similarity to the lowercase delta in the Greek alphabet (δ). (The Icelandic letter’s name is called “Eth”, with the “th” pronounced as “this”.)

Even in modern-day English, dialects can play a role in the pronunciation of voiceless and voiced consonants. For example, in America, one would bathe a baby (“this”) while in Britain one would bath (“thin”) the baby. And so quite often the question remains, pending one’s current location: to voice or not to voice?

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[1] The question could then be asked: why does  $\psi$  sound just like  $\phi$ , to which the answer is more complex and is beyond the scope of this article.

Recommended Further Reading:

Dovid Katz, *The Phonology of Ashkenazic*, in: Lewis Glinert (ed.), *Hebrew in Ashkenaz. A Language in Exile*, Oxford-New York 1993

Ladefoged, Peter; Maddieson, Ian, *The Sounds of the World’s Languages*. Oxford: Blackwell (1996)

Solopova, Elizabeth (2009), *Languages, Myths and History: An Introduction to the Linguistic and Literary Background of J.R.R. Tolkien’s Fiction*, New York City: North Landing Books

BY RACHEL DELIA BENAİM

Though notorious for being the decade that bore the best Macs basketball team in decades (until today!), the 90s at YU had more depth than just jocks and sports. YU faced existential questions similar to those that students and the institution as a whole face today: censorship, literary sex scandals, and the age-old question of yeshiva or university.

In an article published October 27, 1993, *The Commentator*’s Alex Bailey reported that the YCSC’s literary journal, *Kol*, was confiscated and even extracted from student’s personal mailboxes due to “sexually explicit references” for the first time in, at that time, *Kol*’s “thirty years of intermittent production.” This act of censorship led Dr. William Lee of the English Department and Rosh Yeshiva Rav Kahn to engage in an extensive debate in *The Commentator* spanning approximately six weeks.

Only the copies still in the editors’ hands survived the purge. There is one “public” copy left in the YU archives, but, like any archival materials, this copy can be viewed by appointment only, and with the supervision of a librarian.

There were two articles in question: “Smiling John” by Howard Katz, and “Ruminations of an ex-Boyfriend, or: The Night God Called,” written anonymously.

Some students were quite upset by the sexually explicit and linguistically crude articles, both religiously and emotionally, and some of those took their grievances to then University President Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm. The story goes that they showed him the passages they found most offensive, and he immediately agreed with their dismay and disgust. Although the reports do not explicitly state it, it seems that he himself authorized a group of students to seize the piles of the publication that were still available around campus. With or without President Lamm’s authorization, all the copies that had been available to students immediately disappeared.

Howard Katz’s story “Smiling John” created both a groundskeeper, the voice of most of the story, and the title character, a suicidal, wheelchair-bound man who tells stories-within-the-story of his sexual conquests and wants the groundskeeper to help him commit suicide. His dialogue includes curses and purely sexual content, not to be confused with intimacy, love, or anything else. Creating such a character required curses and an amoral attitude toward sex.

**Rav Kahn responded with an unabashed, strong, two page spread article entitled “Yeshiva, Yes...” A major claim asserts that “YU is not a Siamese twin with two heads and one heart: YU was a yeshiva first and, after the advent of the college, continues to be a yeshiva foremost... YU may have many populations, but it has only one Torah... only one halakha.”**

That issue of *Kol* also included the less racy, but still *halakhically* disheartening “Ruminations of an Ex-Boyfriend or: The Night God Called,” “a first-person prose piece in which the speaker, evidently a YC student, has been dating a girl named Rebecca and waiting to have sex. Feeling ashamed, she calls to cry on his shoulder after having had sex with someone who now won’t even talk to her. The speaker, Neil, is angry rather than sympathetic and ends up including the experience in a literature term paper he’s writing. Rebecca, we assume, is in school at SCW, though



that’s not absolutely certain; the piece opens with his friends heading down to see young women on a Thursday night. Clearly the author felt he was taking chances because the piece is written anonymously.

In retrospect, “Ruminations” could perhaps be seen as more problematic than the short story because of its autobiographical premise and because it points to violation of *halakha* by a girl who’s most likely from SCW and, at the very least, in the realm of thought of a YC student.

At the root of the scandal, what upset the students in Fall ‘93? What upset President Lamm, Rabbi Kahn, and Dr. Lee, all of whom reportedly responded with passion?

In response to the scandal, Dr. Lee came out with an extensive article entitled “Yeshiva, Yes, University, Yes” (December 1993). He believes that YU is a unique place in that while “Torah values may not change...Torah U’ madda does because Madda does.” As such, “Is there such a thing as a Yeshiva University?” he asks. “Yes, but not without controversy and contradiction.” He understands “some objections to *Kol* which deserve to be taken seriously.” Yet he also maintains that “freedom of thought, inquiry, study, speech, and writing weigh in heavily; they help take the measure of a true university.” Dr. Lee points out that “Torah and Madda, yeshiva and university inevitably clash at times because the assumptions behind them fundamentally differ,” but YU exists to work within those boundaries and reconcile the two.

In the following week’s *Commentator*, Rav Kahn responded with an unabashed, strong, two-page-spread article entitled “Yeshiva, Yes...” A major claim asserts that “YU is not a Siamese twin with two heads and one heart: YU was a yeshiva first and, after the advent of the college, continues to be a yeshiva foremost...YU may have many populations, but it has only one Torah...only one *halakha*.”

But more than the issue of Yeshiva versus University, students and faculty alike were upset by the YU community’s favorite subject, no doubt: censorship in light of potentially explicit content.

In terms of censorship, *Kol*, arguably, could be censored because it was funded by YCSC. *The Commentator* report in ‘93 echoes recent statements made by the student councils, “Since YCSC pays for the printing and production of

‘Kol’...they [asked] to remove the journals that they felt were improper.” Thus, because the councils funded the publications, they could be censored. Many letters to the editor published between October and November of ‘93 all mentioned the issue of freedom of speech and censorship. Some students were opposed to the “*divrei cheisheik*” and wished to suppress “*nivul peh*,” while other students such as Editor-in-Chief of *Kol*, Joel Haber, believed that this was “absolutely an act of censorship.”

Yeshiva student Hillel Weiner suggested a root for the problem that called for the need of censorship to begin with: a lack of communication between the administration and students. “What we need,” he proposed “is a more active association between the college and the yeshiva,” said Weiner in his letter to the editor on October 27, 1993.

Just like the *Kol* articles, 2011’s favorite “Anonymous” described a *halakhically* forbidden sexual encounter, though there is, in comparison to 1993, almost no crude language or explicit sexual context (unless you count the word “bra,” and for some reason no one ever does). Like “Ruminations,” the author of “How Do I Even Begin to Explain This” was anonymous and described an encounter that was, presumably, autobiographical in nature. What really hit home in both articles was the fact that they both alluded to SCW—and the allusions were in no way subtle.

Many alumni who were enrolled in YU during Fall 1993 immediately recalled the *Kol* event, when last semester’s *Beacon* scandal reached their ears. “I emailed a classmate of mine and said, hey *deja vu*, didn’t this already happen when we were in YU?” said Rabbi Uri Goldstein (YC ‘96).

Every generation thinks that it is unique—that they are the ones discovering the world and making new waves—when the truth of the matter is that everything has been done. We are no different. Surrounding the *Beacon* scandal, there was buzz about how “nothing like this ever happens at YU.” However, we are not the first ones to finally “break out” of the confines of a “yeshiva” university. History repeats itself and there’s a lot we can learn from perusing Commie archives. May we always work to ensure we are progressing intellectually and religiously, and dealing with our conflicts in informed, productive manners.

# The Man at the Crossroads: Diego Rivera's Murals for MoMA

By Yael Roberts

The past few years have thrown America into economic turmoil. The stock market crash of 2008, the housing crisis, and the lack of jobs have placed America in a place of financial instability. The difficulty the country is experiencing now has often been compared to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Perhaps then it is appropriate that the murals Diego Rivera painted in 1931 for the Museum of Modern Art are currently on display at the MoMa, eighty years later. Eighty years ago, the MoMA commissioned Rivera to create five murals about Mexican history just six weeks before the show's opening. The show was wildly popular, and MoMA then asked Rivera to create three more frescos of New York scenes, creating an odd juxtaposition of an immigrant's past history and his current views of New York.

Rivera was a Mexican born artist and a member of the Mexican Communist Party. His homage to the Communists can often be seen in the symbolism in his artwork; his wife, Frida Kahlo, had an affair with Trotsky. Rivera's partnership with Kahlo was tortured: they married; they divorced; they remarried. Twenty years his junior, Kahlo is one of the most famous female artists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and is renowned for her self-portraits. She killed herself in 1954, writing a final note in her diary, "I hope the exit is joyful — and I hope never to return — Frida." Kahlo's and Rivera's strange connection is perhaps best summed up in Frida's *Diego and I*, a self-portrait in which she paints him on her forehead.

Kahlo once said, "I cannot speak of Diego as my husband because that term, when applied to him, is an absurdity. He never has been, nor will he ever be, anybody's husband." The severed connection between Rivera and Kahlo is exemplified in the space of the exhibition: the viewer walks through Rivera's exhibition knowing that Frida's self portraits are displayed in the upper galleries of the museum. The walls of the museum and time separate the couple's art. Although Kahlo makes appearances in photographs in Rivera's exhibition and although her influence is seen in the murals, her spirit and artwork are disconnected from Rivera.

Yet Rivera's art itself is interesting in its own right. Images like *Indian Warrior* draw on the Spanish conquest of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and the isolation of the warrior. In this fresco, an Aztec warrior clothed in a jaguar costume with demonic, bloodshot eyes stabs an armored conquistador with a stone knife. The white hand of the conquistador contrasts with the maroon, dark legs of legs of other warriors, highlighting the racial tension between the

Indians and Spaniards. The theme of self-disguise permeates Rivera's work; he often depicts himself in his murals and uses himself as a model, but he cloaks himself in other costumes and other skins. In many ways, Rivera is on a conquest as an artist with a thesis and mission with which he attempts to pierce his audience, the others with different colored skin and different backgrounds. Sometimes he embraces these others; sometimes he shuns them.

Rivera's depictions of women vary between empowering them and showing them as subservient. The many different women depicted throughout the murals may attest to Rivera's various affairs and his disloyalty to Kahlo. In *The Rivals*, he paints a fiesta, where suitors stare at women adorned in bright colors. The eyes are missing from the figures, and two men stare at each other, almost as if Rivera is staring at himself and contemplating his own image in relation to the hoards of women.

In *The Uprising*, some men have fallen in strife, while a woman is the focal point of the painting, taking charge even while holding a child. The men and women are clothed in modern garb, suggesting a contemporary resurgence of the age-old conflict between workers and their superiors. Behind the woman's head, a fist is raised in strike in the background. Yet in *Market Scene*, the female submits, and a woman and child offer fruit and fish to a Mexican conqueror.

The alliance between man and woman is torn and tattered, but the alliance between man and machine is very much alive. Rivera described New York as "a truly industrial country such as I had originally envisioned as the ideal place for modern mural art." And in *Electric Power*, industrial workers gripping construction tools are placed against the New York skyline. The figures' faces turn away, laboring heavily to create an ideal and imagined city with the worker at its center. *Pneumatic Drilling* furthers the theme of drilling towards an ideal. In what I find to be Rivera's most poetic mural, six men labor into the earth, their backs highlighted by an almost divine light. An entirely black figure in the background seems to either

command the entire enterprise or throw his hands up in despair. Yet even this figure seems out of control, surrendering to a higher power allowing him and the others to continue their difficult labor. A similar silhouette to this figure stands on one of the skyscrapers, overlooking the entire procedure. Rivera seems to have placed himself as the rotund, manual labor in the foreground, as the darkened shadow in the background, and as the silhouette that objectively views the entire scene. It is Rivera's richness of perspective that allowed him to view New York in so many different lights, creating murals that depict New York in ways no one else had previously conceived.

Rivera's eye continued to pick up on the industrialization of America and its decline with the economic crash in the 1930s. While living on the edge of Central Park with Kahlo, he embarked on sketching excursions throughout the city to paint *Frozen Assets*, a foreigner's perspective on the Great Depression. In the multi-layer building in the foreground, everyone is alone except two well dressed women who converse. Interestingly, the buildings in the background are a composite of recently completed skyscrapers such as the Daily News Building, the McGraw Hill Building and the Rockefeller Center complex, all designed by architect Raymond Hood. Rivera's awe for these massive skyscrapers is literally contrasted with the loneliness and economic depravity he feels as one of New York's citizens.

All of the murals are coated in a light fine dust that makes them sparkle, in what appears to be the dust and grime of the city. The portable frescos were backed with cement and steel, which allowed them to be removed from the wall. But they were still difficult to transport, some weighing close to a thousand pounds. An x-ray of one of the murals is also displayed, showing where its backing used to be. The backs of the murals are sometimes exposed through holes in the exhibition walls, revealing the cement and mortar. Rivera murals aren't just industrial in imagery but in construct. As Rivera told *The New York Herald* in 1933, "I am a worker. I am

painting for my class—the working class."

The sketch that delves into the issues of the workingman, *Man at the Crossroads*, Rivera submitted for a mural for the lobby of the RCA building of the Rockefeller Center. Although Picasso and Matisse were also asked to submit designs, Matisse declined, Picasso never responded, and so Rivera took charge. The mural was never completed for the RCA building of the Rockefeller center. Rockefeller confronted Rivera after discovering that Rivera had painted an image of Vladimir Lenin in the mural as well as an image of the Baptist, prohibition-supporting Rockefeller Jr. at a nightclub. Rockefeller then wrote to Rivera in 1933:

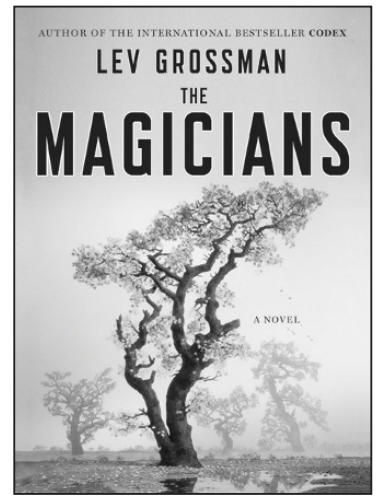
The piece is beautifully painted, but it seems to me that [Lenin's] portrait, appearing in this mural, might seriously offend a great many people. If it were in a private house it would be one thing, but this mural is in a public building and the situation is therefore quite different. As much as I dislike to do so, I am afraid we must ask you to substitute the face of some unknown man where Lenin's face now appears.

Yet Rivera refused to remove Lenin from the image despite Rockefeller's request. The mural was covered up, Rivera was paid and then dismissed, yet protests and demonstrations by workers and artists about the covering up of the mural arose until the mural was cut out of the wall.

In many ways, Rivera is the man at the crossroads, cut out from society for his differences and artistic stubbornness. Much as he often models figures in his murals after himself, the man at the crossroad is Rivera himself, caught between American and Mexican culture, between staying true to the commissioner's desires and expressing himself as an artist, between staying faithful to his wife and engaging in adulterous affairs. His murals view New York through the eyes of a foreigner, and Mexican culture and history through the eyes of a New Yorker. This dialectic of perspective makes Rivera's murals accessible to every viewer, because the man at the crossroads is everyman, constantly at a crossroads between two decisions or two conflicting identities.



Diego Rivera: Murals for The Museum of Modern Art is on display at MoMA through May 14. Admission is \$14 for students, and the museum is free on Friday nights from 4PM—8PM. Noteworthy exhibitions openings later in February are Cindy Sherman and Print/Out.



## The Magicians: Harry Potter with Sex and Drugs

By Arel Kirshstein

Ever wondered why Harry Potter remained a virgin throughout high school? Or at least why Rowling barely discussed her characters' sex lives? I mean, please, did Rowling really expect us to believe that the entire Wizarding Community was so gosh-darn moral? In *The Magicians*, Lev Grossman disenchant the universe Rowling created for us and replaces it with his own where drugs and sex are prevalent. This world is a dark one where magic isn't produced with a wand and a flick of the wrist, but with arduous studying and hours of work. In this world the characters are hauntingly real, with problems and quirks like our own, but amplified by magic. It is a compelling story about a high school graduate's search for happiness, and his inability to find it even after attending his own personal Hogwarts.

This book was written for us college students who, growing up reading *Harry Potter* and *Narnia*, often pretended knitting needles were magic wands, and jumping on broomsticks, hoped they would fly. The novel's style is simple and sweet, avoiding the purposeful confusion prevalent in other postmodern literature. However, I don't mean to suggest that the style lacks sophistication. Its simplicity is a direct nod to young adult fantasy literature. The book's adult themes, though, preclude its consideration as just another young adult novel. Instead, we might think of it as a young adult novel for adults who miss the genre and want to see it grow and develop with more thoughtful additions.

Grossman does a fantastic job with the beginning of this story, setting the dark and nearly absurd tone that will carry the rest of the novel. Main character Quentin is a genius, applying to Ivy League schools. He arrives to a Yale interview with his two best friends, Julia and James, only to discover the interviewer's death. One of the paramedics who comes to pick up the body hands him a book titled *The Magicians* and sends him on his way. A piece

See *The Magicians*, page 14

# Meet The Groggers

BY DANIEL WINCHESTER

The burden of burgeoning celebrity and the challenge to maintain novelty can stifle the growth of even the most levelheaded performance artists. But perhaps it's the outright zaniness of the up-and-coming Queens, NY band The Groggers that keeps them well above the fray and poised for a run at Jewish musical greatness. Unconventional, confrontational, and loaded with musical talent, The Groggers bring something unprecedented to the Jewish music scene: genuinely entertaining, unrelenting subversive rock.

To say that The Groggers are the loudest noisemakers in contemporary Jewish punk rock would be misleading; they are the *only* noisemakers in contemporary Jewish punk rock. Fronted by lead singer L.E. Doug Staiman and lead guitarist Ari Friedman, The Groggers represent a new strand of Jewish music that has its unorthodox roots in the tradition of bands such as Green Day and Avenged Sevenfold. Prominent electric power chords power just about every song forward, and Staiman's vocals are uncomplicated, clean, and blunt. The result is shocking, but undeniably refreshing.

I had the opportunity to sit down with Staiman and Friedman at a small bagel place in Queens to reflect on their accomplishments and to learn about their lives and music. I knew I was in for an entertaining afternoon when Friedman, upon seeing his band mate enter the restaurant slightly disheveled, quipped, "You'll have to excuse him. He's a little *groggy*." Self-deprecating and clever (though probably rehearsed): check. I probably wouldn't have gotten that from Shwekey.

The Groggers got their start in a most unusual place – The now-extinct YU Battle of the Bands. Friedman, who spent two and a half years as a Yeshiva undergraduate, witnessed Staiman singing for another band at the time. "He (Staiman) was all stage presence...he was also terrible, but very entertaining," said Friedman. Staiman managed to catch Friedman's eye, and they later bonded over their shared appreciation for rock music in a Yeshiva world that lacked that edge. At the Battle of the Bands, Friedman would always bring "the most shocking music to YU, straight up rock and roll" and Staiman would jump around the stage like a maniac, shouting "Come on! Come on!" when the sound equipment frequently malfunctioned. Their unhinged, rock-centric presence marked a stark contrast to the other performers at the BOTB. "The YU Battle of the Bands," remarked Friedman, "were just so stale, so NCSYish." They were later reintro-



duced at Queens College through a mutual friend, and, after a brief stint as the classic-rock cover band "Steel Eagle," they became The Groggers. That year, they returned to YU Battle of the Bands, determined more than ever to one-up the bland acoustic showcase in the Schottenstein Cultural Center. They won.

Many Jews, Yeshiva University students in particular, were probably introduced to The Groggers only a couple months ago. In the aftermath of the now-infamous *Beacon* controversy, Staiman composed a song titled "Anonymous Girl," an ironic acoustic ballad written from the point of view of the male in the article "How Do I Even Begin to Explain This." In the song, the male addresses a naïve but curious Stern girl, offering his sage wisdom on the finer points of Orthodox Jewish promiscuity. The song begins, "Anonymous girl from Stern/ You've got a lot to learn/ And I can teach you if you let me." The real genius of the song, however, comes at the end of the chorus, when Staiman unexpectedly croons, "But baby please... don't send this to *The Beacon*." This lyric hilariously lampoons the efforts of Anonymous to publicize her misdeeds to *The Beacon*, exposing the absurdity of the whole affair – the taboo, the article, and the reaction.

The song, which Staiman wrote in less than two hours, was easy ammo for The Groggers, who can't wrap their head around the controversy behind the *Beacon* article. "I just didn't understand the whole controversy," said Friedman. "I still don't get it. To this day, I still don't get it. I went to YU. I know that Stern girls aren't all *Stern girls*." Staiman added, "I read the article and I was like that is...an article. I wasn't going to start nitpicking *Beacon* articles."

But despite this easy material, The Groggers have skillfully turned some pretty heavy issues in the Jewish world into comic gold as well, successfully satirizing everything from the *Agunah* issue to the *Shidduch* scene. The title track of their first album *There's No I in Cherem* perfectly captures the essence of

their humor – biting but profound, critical but lighthearted – though Staiman, who does most of the writing, doesn't always realize how deep he can be. "The album title is just funny," said Friedman. "And Doug had no idea why it was so deep and profound. It means you're not alone. It's not always about the individual, whether it's a person or a whole sect. There's a whole team to think about. There's a lot of in-group-out-group sort of thing between Jews, and it's terrible...It's not your good deeds, it's *our* good deeds. It's not your bad deeds. It's our bad deeds."

Their breakout hit, "GET," which put The Groggers on the map in 2010, addresses one of the more serious issues in the Jewish world today, that of *Agunot* (women whose husbands refuse to give them a Jewish bill of divorce). The chorus, "You gotta get get get/ Give her a get/ Cause she don't love you no mo," brutally hits the issue on the head. But lest you think that the song was written with the intent to effect change in the world, think again. "At the time I write the song, I did not have friends who were *agunas*," noted Staiman. "I wrote the song in 15 minutes while I was playing for a camp with Aryeh Kuntsler, and the song just from start to finish just happened." In fact, while the The Groggers' written material may often seem constructive, the intent is usually just to write good satire with the support of great music. "Rarely does Doug intentionally try to do something positive," quips Friedman. "Yeah," responds Staiman, "I usually try to anger as many people as possible."

And anger he does. At one acoustic show on the Upper West Side last year, a mother rushed her two daughters out of the hall due to what she later claimed was "the graphic nature of the song." Quick on his feet, Staiman decided to interpolate some improvised lyrics into the song, wishing the woman a good riddance and asking the men at the door not to give her a refund. "That incident was oddly gratifying," said Staiman. "I was probably a little harsh, but the crowd loved it." More recently, The Groggers were uncer-

emoniously told to leave the annual YU Seformim Sale at which they were asked to play, again due to the thinly veiled innuendo of the music. According to a long note on Staiman's Facebook page, framed humorously as a scholarly retrospective, "Scholars have speculated that back in 2012, the religious standards of appropriation did not include publicly singing about sexual intercourse on Friday night or resorting to alcoholism for breakfast to celebrate a fallen Hasidic leader."

The truth is, The Groggers walk the tightrope between clever satire and offensive mockery with expert balance. They have tried to let the occasional absurdity of modern Jewish life speak for itself. "One Last Shatnez," a brilliant tune about a man who just can't kick his addiction to *shatnez* (the prohibition of wearing wool and linen together), and "Don't Play Ball (on Shabbos)," an acoustic "folk song" in which Staiman hilariously affects a stereotypical Brooklyn accent, were both inspired by Staiman's experiences from yeshiva, where he encountered some rabbis who may have had their priorities mixed up. "When I was in Jewish day school," Staiman recounted, "we had a Rabbi from a very *Yeshivish* background. And we were all much more modern, and a lot of us were secular. And he was like, 'there's an epidemic going on in our community, and I don't know if you guys are involved in such activities...but there's ball playing going on Shabbos.'" One can only imagine the dramatic pause before the shocking revelation. What did Staiman want to tell the rabbi upon hearing this? "You know there are kids doing drugs and hooking up with their girlfriends. I just did a line of blow in the bathroom!"

The sharpness of their satire is a product of The Groggers' backgrounds. Having gone to Jewish day schools and yeshivas, they are "insiders" in the Orthodox Jewish world, which gives them perspective and license. Friedman, who grew up in Springfield, Mass., went to Chofetz Chaim and MTA for high school and to YU and Queens as an undergraduate. Staiman moved

around a lot as a child, but he spent time at the Talmudical Academy of Baltimore for day school and later studied at Yeshivas Ner Yaakov in Israel. They currently live in Queens, NY where there is certainly no shortage of Jewish life.

Their proximity to the Jewish community and their appreciation (or distaste) for the trappings of modern Jewish life shine through in songs such as "Shidduch Hits the Fan" and "Upper West Side Story," two songs that deal with everyone's favorite dinner table topic – the *shidduch* scene. But though Friedman and Staiman have both dated before ("not each other," they assured me), they don't consider themselves part of the "scene." "I'm not in the shidduch scene at all," said Staiman. "You have to be a half-descent human being to have your resume sent to other half descent human beings. We don't qualify. Some stuff in those songs comes from personal experiences, and some stuff is sensationalized. But we can make fun of it because it's funny."

"Upper West Side Story" does a particularly witty job identifying and satirizing the norms and conventions of the Upper West Side singles scene. In the music video, Staiman plays a newly initiated West-sider who, along with his posse, challenges a group of greased-up suits to a fight in order to win over a girl. One tactic taken by the ring-leader of the enemy gang is to pull out a copy of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, a commentary on West-siders' insuppressible need to impress. The chorus, "I wanna move to the Upper West Side/ And find a pretty girl and never make her my bride," turns the punk-style love song on its head by tactfully inserting the word "never," insinuating that the West Side scene may not be as wholesome as some other young Jewish singles scenes.

Though their music is decidedly Jewish, The Groggers' style and substance is worlds apart from anything currently existent in the Jewish music world, which contributes to their success and gives them the

See **The Groggers**, page 16

# Sexy Tzitzit?

By NETANYA BUSHEWSKY

You're at a rock concert jumping up and down, pumping your fists, and chanting incantations towards the stage. The band in return sets a solid beat, strums guitar cords, and belts out music with unabashed sincerity. Now add *kippot* on sweaty heads, *tzitzit* slapping against thighs, High School Yeshiva boys, and married couples, and you get a Jewish rock concert. Continue to add heart pounding percussions, Middle Eastern rhythm, a little Latin, and you get the Sephardi Music Festival.

On December 22, 2011, the Moshav Band, SoulFarm and Describe performed at the Highline Ballroom as one of many events to take place during the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Sephardi Music Festival (SMF). Hosted by the music recording company Shemspeed, Pioneers for a Cure and Madmimi, SMF aimed to showcase the vibrant and diverse cultures of Spain, North Africa, Yemen, the Middle East and Central Asia, while steering away from the Ashkenazi constructs of *Klezmer*, gefilte fish and Shweky.

Each night a different style of Sephardi music was featured, starting with psychedelic Hasidic rock (Pharaoh's Daughter), Spanish and Ladino flamenco (Dan, Aviva and Drory Yehoshua), Morocco and Middle Eastern poetry (ASEFA), religious infused hip-hop (Describe), classic Mizrahi (Miki Gavriellov) and Balkan blues (Oudblues). Dan and Aviva, international New York-based musicians, infused flamenco and folk to showcase what many



Erez Safar, producer of the 7th Annual Sephardic Music Festival

would consider classic Sephardic music. Haale, an Iranian musician from the Bronx, sang music filled with trance-like rhythms, a Sephardic interpretation inspired by Persian mysticism and American psychedelics. Thrown into the mix was the release of the Shtetl Channuka single featuring Y-Love and Sarah Aroeste, and the highly anticipated Israeli hip-hop CD, Shalom Haters, both recorded by the Brooklyn based producer, Diwon (Erez Safar).

The Sephardic Story Slam on December 27, the festival's closing event, though not musically infused, possibly showcased the mission of the festival most accurately: Educating and creating diversity and common ground amongst the participants. Instead of using music, the Sephardic story slam accomplished the goal of the festival through story telling—the more embarrassing, funny or heartbreaking, the better.

Since man has communicated through language, oral stories have had the power to hold traditions together, diffuse wars, and encourage creativity. It's a form of self-expression that leaves no room for insincerity, and opens up the speak-

er to be as vulnerable as possible, whether she is speaking to a friend or a room full of people.

The festival facilitated this self-expression by inviting nine actors, poets, writers and comedians to share their personal stories on topics ranging from dating gone wrong to Saudi Arabian proms to Chabad conspiracy theories. The night took place in the Triad Theatre on 72<sup>nd</sup> between Columbus Ave and Broadway, on top of a Turkish restaurant so small you wouldn't notice it unless you were looking for it. Inside the theatre, merlot paint and baroque gold detailing covered the walls, a small black stage sat upfront, and a group of 50 people created intimacy without crowding.

It was the first story slam to be incorporated since the festival came to fruition seven years ago, a night inspired by stories told during the filming of the festival's promotional video. Ofra Isenberg from Comedy Central hosted the event, filling in the blanks between performances with her own comedic retelling of Jewish life in Alberta, Canada. The featured poet, Vanessa Hidery, accomplished author and slam poet seen on the HBO show Deaf Poetry Jam, spoke about her mix of Russian, Jewish, Ashkanazi and Syrian ancestry and how it complicates dating. Both of her poems were excerpts from her two one-woman plays, "Emancipation of a Sassy Jewish Princess" and

"Culture Bandit."

One of the most interesting stories was by Sonya Loya, a New Mexican Jew, who spoke about converting to Judaism before discovering her parents were both Crypto Jews, who became "conversos" during the Spanish Inquisition. Dina Plouche, a Tunisian from Brooklyn, told one of the more humorous stories extracted from her one-woman play "Multiple-Plouchinalities." She recalled how every engagement was like a Saudi Arabian prom from the 80s, how "every moustache hair equaled a child," and how an event with 300 Sephardim was considered an intimate affair.

On the stranger side, an Ashkenazi comedian, Michelle Slonim, complained about her "Jewish frat boy douche bag" (JFBDB) dating experiences and belted "Friday" by Rebecca Black. In the end, the winner of the Sephardic storytelling "Slampion" was Ilya Chodesh, seen in his spoken word show "Birthright Monologues," a character who could have easily fit into "The Big Bang Theory." In six minutes he confessed how he gave up the Internet during his university years to prevent himself from staying up at night searching conspiracy theories and True Crimes Reports online.

Caving into his need for WiFi he conned the local Chabad into giving him their password (Jewish123) in exchange for wrapping *teffilin*, referred to by Ilya as "the black leather bondage strap."

When the night finished, it was clear that the box labeled "Sephardic upbringing" had been shoved open to encompass a wide array of interpretations. The stories highlighted unique Sephardic upbringings geared to a less religious audience. No two stories were the same, and at the end of the show, audience members were encouraged to return the following year with their own stories. Though there was room for improvement in the storytelling talent, it still remained the perfect ending to a music festival geared to redefining what Sephardi really means, while strengthening the vivid colors and rhythms Sephardi culture is known for.

If rhythmic melodies, traditional love poems, folk tales, and modern electro beats call your name, or if you have a Sephardic story worth sharing, than you won't want to miss the festival next Channuka; just beware if you want to dance, you'll have to bring your own *mehitza*—not that anyone will stop you if you don't.

## The Magicians

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of paper, essentially a much thinner version of Hagrid, escapes the pages of the book and Quentin chases it into an alleyway where he is magically transported to Brakebills school of magic and tested to determine his worth.

We see from the offset that Quentin is very passive and has little control of his life. He goes with the flow, letting life bring all of its wonders to him, only to decide he isn't happy with them and needs more. In this way Quentin is a believably human character, and heavily contrasted to Harry Potter. Harry Potter is a more Romantic character, actively pursuing his goals and trying to better his world, while Quentin, and the rest of the characters in *The Magicians* for that matter, aren't really driven to save the world. The characters' primary goal is to avoid the boredom that comes with having everything handed to them. This ironically leads them to the traumatic events later in the novel.

Very explicit references throughout the book not only invite the comparison to *Harry Potter*, but also encourage it. This book is chock-full of allusions. Even the cover art is an allusion to *The Wood between the Worlds* from *The Magician's Nephew*. The characters themselves are also very aware of the genre they're written into. They reference *Harry*

*Potter* many times as well as Tolkien. This awareness absurdly contextualizes the book. What's possibly more amazing is how casually these comments are made. The characters' attitudes towards the genre, and by extension their own lives in their own fantasy world, are frivolous and naïve. Despite the fact that they are messing with forces they clearly don't understand, they remain resolutely casual even in the direst of straits, in contrast with much of the genre.

Though Grossman's characters' attitudes are more flippant towards magic in the beginning of the book, we see that as events unfold, they become more and more disillusioned. Yet they cannot let go of their magic, because it's what provided them their happiness for so long. And so an internal contradiction develops between their disillusionment and their fear of leaving a world that, though dark, still made them happy. We directly witness Quentin's own internal contradiction play out in the final chapters of this book.

So what makes this book so compelling? Is it the disillusionment of the most popular English fantasy novels? Is it the interaction between very real humans and very real magic? Or is it the addition of sex and drugs to an otherwise Hogwarts-esque environment? I suppose you'll have to read it and determine what does it for you.

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## Privatizing Social Security

*continued from page 6...*

trillion - money that could have otherwise gone to beneficiaries under the current social security system. Again citing the U.K. example, managerial fees have offset returns from private accounts by an average of 43% since 1988, according to a Twentieth Century Foundation report. Either way, millions of people losing their savings would result in massive government bailouts, more debt, and a broken economy.

A separate dilemma that would arise with privatization would be how to maintain current and future Social Security benefits for impoverished retirees, the disabled and survivors of workers who died on the job. Social Security is not just for retirees; in 2005, for instance, over one third of Social Security recipients were non-retirees. The fact is that if Social Security is privatized, there will be insufficient funds to support benefits for non-retirees and the poor. When this happens, we would suddenly find ourselves spiraling down that all too familiar cycle: borrowing, debt, and a bad economy.

But I would like to argue that the debate about Social Security reform is really a non-starter. Unlike other political controversies, such as healthcare or unemployment, Social Security is fairly simple to fix.

But don't take my word for it. Paul Krugman, a New York Times Op-Ed columnist, wrote, "There is a long-run financing problem. But it's a problem of modest size." Robert L. Clark, an economist at North Carolina State University, remarked, "You either raise taxes or you cut benefits. There are lots of ways to do both." And, more specifically, economist Alice Rivlin stated, "Fixing Social Security is a relatively easy technical problem. It will take some combination of several much-discussed marginal changes: raising the retirement age gradually in the future (and then indexing it to longevity), raising the cap on the payroll tax, fixing the cost of living adjustment, and modifying the indexing of initial benefits so they grow more slowly for more affluent people."

In 2011, 56 million people received Social Security. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Social Security keeps nearly 13 million elderly people and around 1 million children out of poverty. From both an economic and practical point of view, privatizing Social Security is too great a risk to take with people's life savings and the stability of our economy. We must fix Social Security so it can continue to support the millions of people relying on it.

## The Most Incredible Tablet That Gets the Least Attention

BY MARTIN ROSENBAUM

Soon after Apple came out with their iPad 1 tablet, much hype and anticipation was made around the Playbook tablet manufactured by RIM, most notorious for their incredibly handy cell phone devices. For some reason, as RIM came out with their playbook tablet, the technological community immediately compared it to the iPad and dismissed it. The iPad is the iPad and the Playbook is the Playbook.

Although they might seem similar in form and function, they differ greatly in many ways. The Playbook is the ultimate tablet device for anyone searching to expand upon their already enjoyable experience on the Blackberry. Its Bluetooth link to the Blackberry turns your Playbook into a large, comfortable platform, in order to do whatever you wanted to do on your Blackberry in a more relaxed and comfortable way. The connection is extremely easy and really does not require any special skills.

The major complaint, which was made all over the news, that the Playbook lacked an internalized email application, is simply overdone. Yes, it is a mistake and



The BlackBerry PlayBook can be purchased on amazon.com for as low as \$227

a lack which should be and will be corrected. But the real question is whether it prevents users in any way from doing what they want to do? The answer to this question is no, for the simple reason that having to use the Bluetooth connection to your Blackberry actually makes things easier. Your email accounts and contacts are already present and there is no need to re-program an additional app. And yes, we hope that RIM will shortly integrate a native email program which will actually make the task described above quick, simple and allow non-Blackberry users to take full advantage of the tablet.

Its amazingly clear screen can be linked to a larger monitor or HDTV

through its micro HDMI port. The HDMI port along with its full support for Adobe Flash, Word, Excel and PowerPoint make presenting and editing effortless. Its front camera can even serve in a video conference. Its HDMI port sets the Playbook ahead in that it can serve as a portable media station both for work-style presentation and leisure activities. With the overwhelming growth of companies such as Netflix, the need for media stations is growing. The Playbook can even become your permanent source of films and music for your home cinema system. Its streaming capabilities are impressive and comparable

See **Playbook Tablet**, page 16

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# The Future of Education II – A New Curriculum

By ARIEL KRAKOWSKI

In a previous article, I discussed how interactive technology can be used to move beyond the lecture system of education that has been dominant for so long. In this article I will discuss what material should actually be taught. I think the educational syllabi in many subjects should be changed to reflect the changing nature of knowledge. In addition, the educational curriculum should be changed to teach new skills that are relevant to the “information age”.

The development of computers and the internet has changed the way people can access information and therefore changes the nature of the material people will need to learn. When knowledge was stored in books, perhaps it made sense to require people to memorize large amounts of information. However, since knowledge is now available at the touch of a smartphone (or even through speech), people can have easy access to the information they need without having to spend years memorizing information. This information can obviously be much vast-er and more accurate than anything they could have memorized. This does not mean that people will not need to learn anything and can just become an instant expert in any field by Googling any issue they have (try fixing your car’s transmission based on an eHow guide.)

An expert will need a solid understanding of the principles of his field and practice in applying them so that he can correctly draw on database of information to solve a specific issue. This is what students need to learn instead of memorizing thousands of little details. Perhaps a student training to become a doctor

no longer needs to memorize every inch of anatomy. The curriculum of many fields still remains focused on the same material as it did a few decades ago, but it may be time to revise it in light of modern technologies.

Computers can do much more than just provide access to relevant information. Any problem that can be solved with clearly-defined steps can be programmed so that a computer can solve it. This fact also needs to be taken into account when designing a syllabus. Many areas of education involve students learning to mechanically implement set procedures and formulas to solve problems. This is particularly true in math-related areas such as mathematics itself, the sciences and parts of business and economics. These mechanical processes can all be solved by a computer, so why pretend that these technologies do not exist? Human computers were once necessary, but they have since been supplanted.

Instead of focusing on being the computer, students should learn how to do the things computers cannot. They should learn how to use the computer tools and learn how to take real-life problems and convert them into a form that computers can solve. Computers are still quite poor at solving general real-life problems on unaided by humans, and this is an important skill people will need. Even as computer programs improve, there is always an area where computers cannot solve problems, and people will be needed to work on them.\* Instead of teaching methods that are no longer needed, the focus of education should be on the areas that are beyond the reach of computers.

This does not mean students should not learn any principles of

a subject that a computer can solve. Students training to be an expert in a field should learn the basic principles of it so they can fully understand the material and be able to apply it in cases where a specific program does not exist. But it is not necessary for students to memorize a large number of mechanical methods for solving specific problems (without understanding them) when they will anyways just use computers to solve such problems. Plugging something in to a formula or in to a computer involve about the same amount of understanding, just one way is a million times faster. So perhaps it is not necessary for high-school students to learn all those formulas and methods. Sorry. Students should either understand a subject, know how to apply it, or learn what computers cannot solve, but there is no reason to treat them like mechanical computers themselves.

New technologies should cause more changes than just modifying the focus of specific subjects. The curriculum of subjects itself should be changed to meet the needs of the times. Besides learning subject-specific computer skills, students need to learn general computer-skills that will allow them to use computers effectively in many different areas. There are many computer skills that many people do not know well, from the most basic (such as typing) to the more advanced (programming). Since these skills are extremely useful, they should take precedence in an educational curriculum over less important subjects.

Typing is obviously one of the most common and useful skills of modern times. People almost never write things by hand anymore, but instead type almost everything. Yet many elementary schools still focus on teaching cursive in 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>

grade! While this was never very useful, nowadays it is completely pointless since no one writes in cursive. Many people never learn how to touch-type correctly and instead use the hunt-and-peck method to type throughout their life (I’m currently using a modified pecking method to type this myself). This is probably one of the most basic things that kids should learn when they are younger. There are also simple related topics people should learn, such as keyboard shortcuts and the purpose of certain keys, e.g. the “home” key. (I’ll teach that right now: It lets you go to the beginning of a line without having to press the arrow key 20 times. You’re welcome.) These skills are very basic, but learning them can probably save people hundreds of thousands of hours over the course of their lifetime.

Typing is a simple example of the most basic skills people need, but there are many other areas people need to learn, such as greater proficiency in using operating systems and common computer programs. For example, many people do not know how to perform common tasks in Word or Excel (such as managing styles or creating graphs), despite their common practical use. There are also certain higher-level skills that are very important. For example, while there is a huge amount of information easily available on the internet, it is not always easy to quickly find the information a person needs. There are skills and techniques people can learn to improve their ability to construct and filter searches, and to organize and index information they encounter. Google and other services cannot automatically find the best result for the exact thing a person is looking for, so people need to learn the skill

of good searching and organizing.

Currently, high-schools force students to learn many difficult subjects in the math-logic realm, such as trigonometry and geometry, which they may never use. Yet there is a basic logic-based skill that would be of more interest and relevance to all: programming. Instead of learning so many details of math, students could learn programming, which can be used to do math and much more. While many people will not have any interest in programming full-time, most people will get some benefit from learning the basics of programming. This will enable them to do many tasks in the modern age, such as creating simple apps or websites, using macros in Excel, performing simple manipulations of text, or writing simple scripts for various scientific or business applications. Programming can be considered one of the basic skills that people should know in modern times.

Some may fear that adding these computer subjects to the curriculum may cause other subjects to be de-emphasized. In some cases, it may be possible to use more effective educational methods so students can learn both the old and the new subjects. However, people may need to choose which subjects have priority. Perhaps subjects should be empirically evaluated for what actual benefits they provide for the students. Studies have shown that most students do not actually improve their critical thinking skills over the course of the time in college. In a struggling economic climate and with extremely high prices for tuition, perhaps it may be time for the curriculum to focus on practical skills that students will actually use throughout their life.

## The Groggers

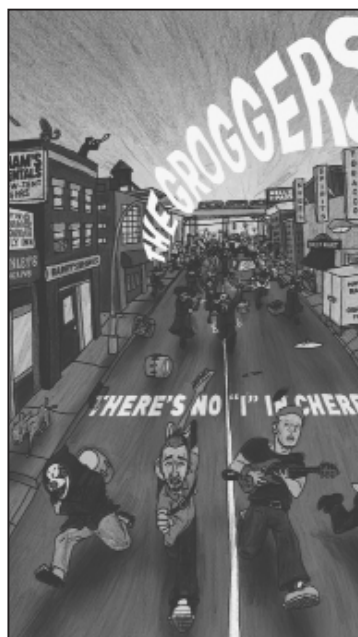
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drive to continue to create and perform. “I think that if the Jewish music scene was different, we wouldn’t be doing this now,” said Friedman. “Jewish music is very cookie-cutter, very gray.” Yet the Groggers understand that they are fighting somewhat of an uphill battle. In a world where the Maccabeats’ “Candlelight” video receives over 7 million views to the paltry 35,000 for “GET,” the Groggers must carve out a loyal niche for themselves in order to succeed.

The Groggers are currently working on a second album, which will debut some time later this year. “It’s going to be a more mature album for us with a bit more of a universal appeal,” wrote Staiman in a follow-up email. “Our goal is to maintain our identity as a band but begin to cater to a larger audience in the process.” They recently

released the first single (“Jewcan Sam: A Nose Job Love Song”) for their upcoming album. The music video, which the band filmed in Miami, features Staiman having actual plastic surgery performed on his nose. The band proudly announces that the video marks “the first time in history that a band underwent plastic surgery for the sole purpose of a music video.” They have received overwhelmingly positive reviews for their work, and continue to churn out an impressive array of music.

In the meantime, Staiman and Friedman are enjoying the ride of their newfound celebrity. “It’s very surreal. We definitely appreciate it and are grateful for all the people that have been so supportive and make a point of approaching us and telling us in person. We knew what we were getting ourselves into when we started playing music, and we’re really thankful that people have



connected to it.” They would like to do a college tour after they get the new album in order. Just don’t expect them at the next Seforim Sale.

## Playbook Tablet

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to that of a PC.

After having addressed the more “Book” aspect of this device, but still mentioned some perks of its “Play” facet, let us focus briefly on its battery life, operating system and web surfing capabilities. All connections activated, the battery lasted roughly 9 hours, an ample amount of time. The interface from QNX (purchased by RIM) is very smooth. No bugs were encountered, even while many tasks were running at the same time. Multitasking between the various opened tasks happened to be much simpler and more amusing than with the Samsung Galaxy Tab or the iPad 2. The type of processor used allowed for many large applications to run simultaneously without any issues. As for the web browsing, the Playbook offers you an incomparable experience; believe it or not, it is more enjoyable

than being on a PC. The device supports all web site plug-ins and does not come up with any blank spots (as many other tablets do!).

The Playbook is in essence a successful effort by RIM, which already masters the business realm with its famous BlackBerry, to enter and combine the main technological efforts of daily life. The Playbook has two aspects to it: the “Play” to relax and the “Book” to be more serious. The Playbook goes beyond being “perfect for the enterprise environment”<sup>1</sup> — it combines and facilitates the most tense times of the day with the most détente ones. It is small and light enough to carry all over, but large enough to accomplish any task you wish with the stroke of a finger. The special pricing offered by RIM (all models at \$299 ) and the much anticipated release of the Playbook OS 2.0 enhance the Playbook’s appeal.