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# The COMMENTATOR

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## Yeshiva College Cuts Speech and Physical Education Dean's Office Reduces Academic Expenditures to Balance Budget

BY MICHAEL SILVERSTEIN  
AND GABRIEL WEINBERG

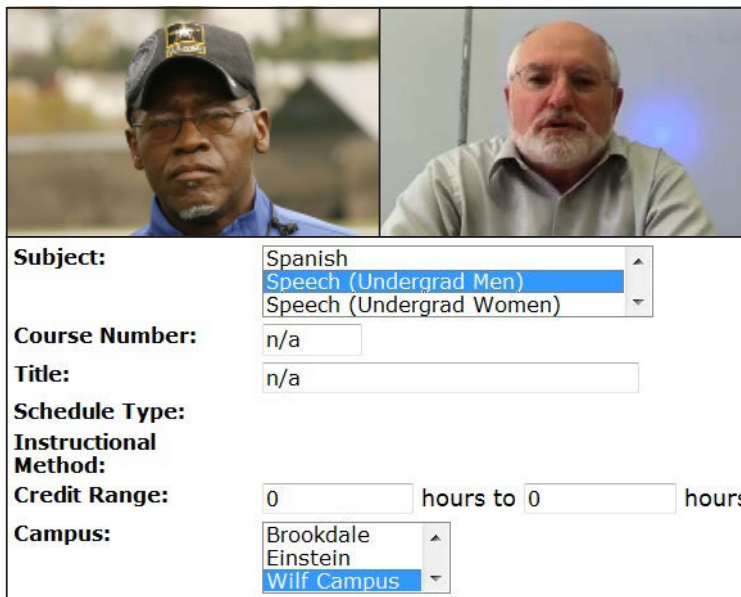
Early this past week, Yeshiva College (YC) Professor of Speech Rabbi Dr. Bernhard Rosenberg released a YouTube video calling for students and alumni of Yeshiva University to donate their money and their voices to save his "child," the Yeshiva College Speech Department. Because of numerous budget cuts, the Yeshiva College Dean's Office has made a number of cutbacks to balance the budget.

YC Dean Dr. Barry Eichler explained to *The Commentator* that the coming changes are the result of a nine-month undertaking to balance YC's budget. The Dean's Office was charged with the task of reduc-

ing the College's academic expenditures by \$2 million, a significant portion of the budget, considering that Yeshiva College's overall budget is less than \$12 million. For over half a year, the Dean's Office, working with other administrators, department chairs and faculty, reviewed how the College used its academic and non-academic personnel in order to determine how departments could utilize their personnel and resources more efficiently.

Until now, the Dean's Office avoided cutting academics when dealing with the financial constraints, by focusing on only "fringe" expenses, as described by Dean Eichler. But now there is a new reality: Department heads were told that they needed to reduce costs.

See **Department Cuts**, page 6



Rabbi Dr. Bernhard Rosenberg and Coach Stan Watson, among other beloved fixtures of Yeshiva, lost their jobs after YC terminated its Speech and Physical Education Departments.

## SYMS Deans Demonstrate Progress

BY JOSEPH JARASHOW

In a March-13 email to students, the Office of the Provost announced the promotion of Dr. Moses Pava, Director of Syms School of Business, to the position of Dean of Syms School of Business, as well as the appointment of Drs. Avi Giloni and Michael Strauss to the positions of Associate Deans, marking a new era in the business school's 15-year history.

In an interview with *The Commentator*, Dr. Pava described his vision for the business school and the steps he and his staff are taking to actualize that vision.

One of Dr. Pava's main objectives is to foster a "student-centric" environment, a pursuit which begins with securing faculty members of the highest quality. "We can't afford to have faculty here that are only good in one area, either research or teaching," says Pava. "There has to be exceptional teaching in the classroom; that is a real big priority right now..." To this end, the administration has hired a new finance professor, Abraham Ravid, as well as Charles Harary, who is teaching a course entitled "Principles of Success." Dr. Pava is also optimistic that President Joel will be teaching a new SYMS course on leadership.

Dr. Pava also hopes to improve communication between the stu-

See **Syms Progress**, page 6

## A Terrifying Applause

BY GAVRIEL BROWN

Today, my Facebook newsfeed is awash with news from Israel. Rockets, retaliations, airstrikes. My screen is cluttered with homemade videos of the paralyzed city of Ashkelon, camera shots from Israeli Air Force jets targeting Gaza, and professional films from the soldiers manning the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) Iron Dome missile system.

But in between the articles and pictures are photos of my friends

who recently finished their final training course in the IDF. They are graduating flight school, paratrooper, and Navy special warfare school. Their uniforms are a size too big, their berets a size too small. Their hair is cropped short, and an oversized rifle is slung over their shoulders. They look happy but uncertain. They are proud of their accomplishments, but apprehensive about what lies ahead.

A week ago, my Facebook was flooded with very different messages. Friends attending the AIPAC

conference posted videos of Obama and Netanyahu, Santorum and Romney. The speakers in these video snippets all discussed the possibility of military action against Iran, and each, with his own level of triumphalism, kept "all options on the table." Each remark promising a military strike on Iran was met with a round of applause and, more often than not, a standing ovation.

Yet I wonder how many people in the AIPAC conference crowd of 14,000 fully understood the magnitude of the words they so eagerly ap-

plauded. I wonder who among those 14,000 would stand up and cheer if they knew that their best friends or sons would be on the front lines of Israel's next war – the inevitable consequence of a strike on Iran.

Another war would mean tens of thousands of rockets. It would mean a shell-shocked Galilee, and a South under a constant barrage of fire from Gaza and Lebanon. It would mean thousands of injured soldiers, tens if not hundreds of dead soldiers, and

See **Terrifying Applause**, page 15

## Fall 2012 Features Month-long Break

BY SHLOMO FISCHER

Amid rampant speculation and ensuing controversy surrounding the revamped academic curriculum, it appears that the Yeshiva University facelift has only just begun. Earlier this month, the Office of the Registrar officially released the Fall 2012 academic calendar. While most of the calendar remains fundamentally similar to those of previous years, one major change will take effect

next semester. Fall vacation will extend straight from before Rosh Hashanah through the end of Sukkot, offering students a staggering four weeks of break for the holidays.

While it may be assumed that the new schedule was created by whim, the Academic Calendar Committee ensures that ample time is distributed for events, exams, and most importantly, vacations. The committee consists of a diverse group of deans and faculty members from various departments and schools in

order to ensure that the final product accommodates everyone equally. Participants include Dean Fred Sugarman, Associate Dean of YC; Dean Ethel Orlian, Associate Dean of Stern; Claire Zakheim, Academic Advisor of Syms; and Rabbi Chaim Bronstein, Administrator of RIETS. Under the leadership of recently hired Interim University Registrar Diana Benmergui, the committee has churned out semester schedules more efficiently than in previous years.

16	17	18	19	20	21
Erev Rosh Hashana ערב ראש השנה	Rosh Hashana ראש השנה	Rosh Hashana ראש השנה	Fast of Gedaliah צום גדליה Special Program Special Program Wilf Campus	UTS (MYP/SBMP/IBC /Mechinah): Last day for program changes	עשרת ימי תשובה Program Wilf Campus
23	24	25	26	27	28
Special Program Special Program Wilf Campus	עשרת ימי תשובה Program Wilf Campus	Erev Yom Kippur ערב יום כיפור	Yom Kippur יום כיפור		
30	1 October	2	3	4	5
Erev Sukkos ערב סוכות	Sukkos סוכות	Sukkos סוכות	Sukkos סוכות	Sukkos סוכות	Sukkos סוכות
7	8	9	10	11	12
Sukkos סוכות	Shmini Atzeret שמיני עצרת	Simchas Torah שמחת תורה	Travel Day		Last day to complete prior year incomplete grades
14	15	16	17	18	19

Benmergui told *The Commentator* that the committee unanimously agreed on the change, which allows students from out of town to go home for Rosh Hashanah without

having to return immediately afterwards. She noted that the Jewish calendar for the upcoming year would only yield two full academic

See **Vacation**, page 13

# STAFF EDITORIALS

## Mourning My Morning Program: How to Save YU's Moribund Judaic Studies Program

BY BENJAMIN ABRAMOWITZ,  
Editor-in-Chief

I got an email from RIETS last week. "Dear Talmid ר'נ," began the letter sent by Ms. Muñoz. Uh oh.

Indeed, my final semester of eight in the Mazer Yeshiva Program (MYP) has been marked by, shall we say, imperfect *shiur* attendance. And the RIETS administration figured me out, expressing its concern for my Talmud Torah, my growth, and the possibility of my being on partial academic probation next semester, after I graduate.

"Proper attendance" is required for "[e]xcellence in Talmud Torah and overall success as a Talmid at Yeshiva," I was informed. Makes sense, so far.

"For all of these reasons," the first hefty paragraph began to conclude, "but primarily for the sake of your Torah learning," my admonisher was keen to interject, "it is imperative that you remedy this situation immediately."

It was suggested as a possible "remedy" that I arrange to meet with one of the recently-fired "Sganei Mashgichim [sic]." Awkward. How will the next crop of MYP *bochrim* remedy their situations?

Maybe I had "switched to another program or another *shiur*," the letter tolerantly acknowledged. *Weird*, I thought. The RIETS office handles program- and *shiur*-switches, so presumably its administrators would know if I had moved into a different program or *shiur*, no nerve-racking email necessary. I thought of the wild open-fire this must indicate, of the committed *talmidim* who had actually just switched *shiurim* but were now threatened with probation by an obviously unorganized administration.

I gazed at the form letter. Rabbi Yonah Reiss' signature was underlined four times.

I should have felt bad. Bad, disappointed, reflective, repentant, stirred, motivated, something. Instead: I laughed, and remembered the last three editions of this very form letter I had received in earlier semesters. These were semesters in which I had attended *shiur* regularly, but—because of some Shiur Assistant's uncertainty about who I was, some administrative ploy to reduce the roster of a popular *shiur*, or some completely

arcane error—I earned the dreaded letter.

Each time, I was called in to the office of a RIETS administrator whose only point of reference was the notes taken by someone else, a number of years earlier, during my preliminary *shiur*-placement *bechina* (exam). "This is surprising," he would say. "Because you had a good *bechina*." Occasionally he would recommend that I enroll in easier courses.

Almost eight semesters later, I just can't take this seriously.

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As I complete my voluntary, full, fourth year at Yeshiva University, I feel pretty pensive, reflecting daily on the formative time I am grateful to have spent here. But I would not share my personal Yeshiva history with you if I did not know that, in its own way, my YU life exemplifies so many of my peers' experiences of YU, replete with internal growth and intellectual fulfillment—against a backdrop of institutional flaws requiring immediate attention.

Everyone knows YU boasts a beautiful new Glueck Center and renowned *roshei yeshiva*, but YU students today cannot help but worry that these fixtures are growing symbolic. As Talmud Torah at YU becomes, to many, less of a pursuit and more of a collegiate snag to be skillfully evaded, many students sense that the current models of YU morning programs have outlived their credibility.

To those students for whom the current models work: *kol hakavod*. Your devotion presents a moving example to all. I hope nobody reads this editorial as ignoring or belittling your efforts.

But YU's morning programs fail to provide support and enrichment to many students, who spend their days navigating the system, pulling one "move" after another. I'd approach the RIETS administration for attendance statistics, but (a) that conversation would get awkward, fast, and (b) I don't think that *shiur* attendance can come close to quantifying our quandary. It happens to be that, last year, I was privy to the Microsoft Excel Google Document shared among all Shiur Assistants: with little discrepancy from *rosh yeshiva* to *rosh yeshiva*, more than one-third of all MYP students had been absent, not more than halfway through the semester, more than 15

See **Mourning My Mornings**, page 14

## 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.

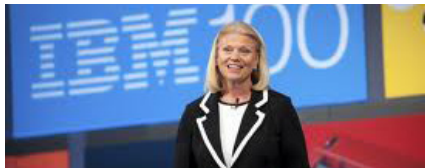


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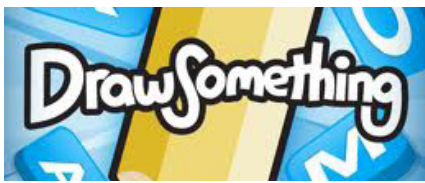
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Want to make a difference and have fun at YU?

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**1 Women**  
Looks like they're moving up in the world—if all goes well, Ginny Rometty will soon become Augusta National Golf Club's first female member. Becoming CEO of IBM: meh. Joining a golf club: breaking the glass ceiling.



**2 Drawing**  
Millions of grown men and women have gone back to the drawing board to reclaim their childhood Crayola crowns with DrawSomething, a new popular smart-phone app. Can't draw? Don't worry, neither can your friends.



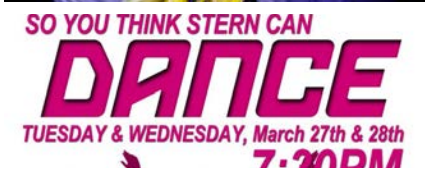
**3 Romney**  
Mitt Romney recently gained the endorsement of several congressmen while others in the GOP have encouraged Rick Santorum to step out of the race. As usual, Santorum will fizzle out the backside of this one.



**4 Apple Shareholders**  
Get ready for some fourth-quarter magic, boys. And we're not talking March Madness, we're talking Wall Street Wallabies. That's right; Apple will begin giving dividends for the first time since 1995.



**5 March**  
You lucky dog, you. Gaga turned 26 this week, just before you turned into April. How's that for a turn of phrase ;-)?



**6 Thinking**  
The terribly difficult task led to some impressive moves at this week's Stern production of *So You Think You Can Dance*. Don't worry, though, boys; they'll be performing again in Mercury Bar on Saturday night.



**7 Xenophobia**  
The racy fear brought huge laughs at the Yeshiva College Dramatics Society's spring semester comedy, *The Foreigner*. No ESL students were harmed in the production of the show.

7 UP ↕ 7 DOWN



**1 ObamaCare**  
The President's healthcare plan is under close scrutiny and in danger of being declared unconstitutional. But regardless of your opinion on the matter, face it—it's pretty cool to witness this crucial moment in U.S. history.



**2 Poetry**  
The world of writing has lost a giant with the death of Adrienne Rich. Without you, the feminist movement could not have accomplished what it has. Thank you for inspiring a generation.



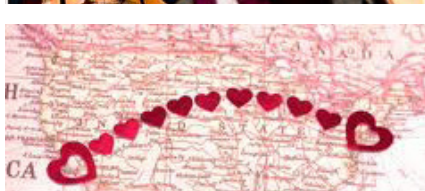
**3 Ford**  
The American car manufacturer has lagged behind its new competitor Tesla Motors, and is only now scrapping together an electric car plant in Palo Alto. Sorry Henry, the Model T is about to lose to its neighbor, the Model S.



**4 Fruity Cheese**  
No, not a panel for tolerance of queer cheeses. We mean strawberry cream cheese. Who the hell wants to mix dessert-y sweet with an onion bagel?



**5 YC Arts**  
It appears painting, drawing, drama, and speech, along with anything else artistic that's not music is going the way of the YU budget: down the tubes. Perhaps YC should consider calling itself a Liberal Art College.



**6 Long-distance Relationships**  
They suck when they're romantic. And apparently they suck when they're rabbinic, too. The Amsterdam Orthodox community just went through a messy break-up with Rabbi Aryeh Ralbag who lived in Brooklyn throughout his tenure as their spiritual leader.



**7 The new iPad**  
Even the most faithful Apple aficionados have complained about the new tablet's battery. They claim it heats up too quickly and takes too long to recharge. Apple CEO Tim Cooke had only one comment on the matter: "That's what she said."

# Letters & Responses

**To the Editor:**

Regarding "Should We Be Mourning Joe Paterno?" First of all, please read the entire Grand Jury report.

Joe Paterno not only followed up with his bosses about the '02 incident several times; he was repeatedly told that it was being taken care of, the police could not do anything, etc. He also tried to get Sandusky banned from campus and have his keys taken away from him but was told by Spanier & Curley that it was not his "place" as he was *just* the football coach!

If you should be condemning anyone, how about the mother of the boy from the police report in '98? She not only got a confession and was asked for forgiveness by Sandusky (with police listening), but did not press charges against him! She just told him to stay away from her son! Why?

If she pressed charges in '98, just think of ALL the boys that would have been spared!

The other fact that you overlooked was that, in '02, the only person who could go to the police was the witness of the crime or alleged attack. Joe was only told by McQueary that "horseplay" was going on that he didn't think was appropriate. He did not tell Joe that there was intercourse going on...and this is also coming from someone who has changed his story several times about what he saw since '02.

Gary Schultz who was head of Campus Police was notified and aware of the incident. Campus Police are the only ones who have authority on the University grounds.

Tim Curley, Gary Schultz, and Graham Spanier are all being charged with perjury—they are all above Joe Paterno. Joe was not under any investigation and was cleared of any wrongdoing.

Joe Paterno is not under trial. We are mourning a man who has given his life, literally, to Penn State.

People who know nothing about Penn State other than what you see and hear on TV need to stop crucifying a great man! You need to start crucifying the monster who perpetrated these horrible acts. This man was overlooked by friends, family, colleagues, and police. He did not walk around with a sign that said "I'm a child molester." He used his charity helping kids as a cover. Serial Killers are the same way; that's why they are hard to catch.

We can all say, in hindsight, that there were signs and red flags, but the only thing we can do about it now is make sure Sandusky pays for what he did and that we do not let anything like this happen again.

Learn something about the man

you are judging before jumping to conclusions and relying on the media to give you the "facts" as they see fit. The other thing that you need to get straight is that Joe Paterno & Jerry Sandusky were not friends. Joe has said this himself: they did not hang out together socially. The only time they were social was during football-related functions.

Joe Paterno was a man that anyone in the Penn State family knows and admires because of who he was and what he has done for the university, THON, Special Olympics, Pediatric Cancer, Liberal Arts, and so on.

**Tracey N.**  
New Jersey

**To the Editor:**

I am pleased to see the expression in *The Commentator* of a point of view that may be regarded as controversial in some quarters. I received my BA from YC in 1972, having spent four years on campus as a closeted gay student. It heartens me to see that there are courageous young men today at my alma mater who are making the gay experience at YC (whatever that may be, since I am certainly not the last one who had to conceal his sexuality on 186 St. and Amsterdam Ave.) better for today's undergraduates than it was for me. Your empathy with the victims of Mr. Sandusky is gratifying. Yes; those boys—whether gay or straight—may face a lifetime of emotional agony because of the sexual trauma they endured.

Whatever discomfort I suffered pales in comparison to a sexual rape of a ten-year old. And make no mistake: children all over continue to be exposed to the acts of predators in schools, churches, synagogues, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, etc. Every time I hear the thought, "Oh, the coach seemed so normal..." I am surprised. Athletic coaches, priests, Sunday School, grammar school, high school teachers and staff, summer camp counselors, and on and on. Why don't more people realize that pedophiles—of whatever sexual orientation—are compelled, by their drives, to seek out precisely those jobs that will allow them frequent close contact with children and juveniles? Although I may not agree with all your thoughts in your article, I vigorously applaud your discussion of issues that are still probably taboo at YC for many.

**Allen Roth**  
YC '72

See **Letters & Responses**, page 15

# President Joel Adopts Reassuring Tone During Contentious Town Hall Meeting



If you came late, somewhere around here is probably where you had to stand to be part of President Joel's ennobled audience.

By SHMUEL GOLDMAN

This past Wilf Campus town hall meeting with President Richard Joel dealt with a number of sensitive issues, many related to the financial state of the University, topics which always have the potential to be divisive and contentious. Widespread murmurs around campus leading up to the meeting were that a certain campus organization would be challenging President Joel to address the financial state of the university, rumors which were confirmed when, prior to the meeting, members of AEPi distributed packets from Moody's Investors Service detailing the downgrading of YU's credit rating from Aa3 to A2. The packet also offered a conclusion of "negative" for the financial outlook of the university. Such was the atmosphere when President Joel ascended the podium to speak to the packed crowd in the Heights Lounge.

President Joel began his remarks by wishing a farewell to Dr. Victor Schwartz, University Dean of Students, as well as announcing the appointment of Dr. Moses Pava as Dean of the SYMS School of Business, an appointment which President Joel was hopeful would assist in SYMS's continued path towards accreditation, as well as upcoming Masters, MBA, and Honors programs at SYMS. Nevertheless, President Joel emphasized, this was not a step towards further separation of YC and SYMS, but was still consistent with the overall goal of breaking down the barriers between these schools. He also briefly touched upon the fact that the University is facing a tough financial situation that necessitates readjustment and budget cuts. The floor was then opened up to questions.

YC student Burry Klein (YC '13) began with an inquiry as to the reasons behind the discrepancy between the last date to drop a class without a "W" in YC and in SYMS, which President Joel seconded, and

expressed his hope that this would soon no longer be the case. After further investigation, it seems that Mr. Klein has made contact with the President's office, and this issue will be remedied in the future.

Doron David (YC '13), then presented his concern about ensuring that YU students have adequate resources to talk to, in the face of the impending departure of a number of the Sganei Mashgiach, a question which elicited a deafening 30-second ovation from those assembled. Although President Joel expressed his regret that the state of the economy requires cuts to such a successful program, it was refreshing to note the excitement with which he presented the solution he helped develop along with Rabbis Dovid Miller, Yona Reiss, and Marc Penner, to be instituted in the coming school year. This system will consist of two or three additional Mashgichim, one for each Beit Midrash, to work more closely with both the counseling center as well as the Roshei Yeshiva, for both MYP and BMP. Additionally, a system of madrichim, made up of senior students and Kollel members, will be put in place, overseen by a Rosh Madrichim. For the IBC program, each Rebbe will have particular responsibility for a specific group of students, ensuring that each Yeshiva University student has a clear idea of who is there to help them.

Conversation then moved to analyze the effects of the new interdisciplinary system of requirements, with Boris Tuman (YC '???), a computer science major, expressing his hope that the new system will not adversely affect smaller departments by reallocating their resources towards other more general courses. President Joel noted that the new system would not reallocate departments' faculty, but would place more pressure on academic advising by decreasing the number of class sections, leading to larger classes for underutilized courses. President Joel then deferred to

Professor William Lee of the English department, who reminded the crowd that the current system has flaws as well, and affirming that the professors who are currently teaching introductory courses will remain teaching those same courses, thereby still introducing students to the faculty of that department.

Bram Glazer (YC '13), then addressed the issue that seemed to be on everyone's minds, claiming that although YU is making significant cuts to departments, the aforementioned Moody's article stated that Yeshiva University is running the largest operating deficit of any research university, and wondering how YU students can be sure that their tuition dollars are not funding inflated staff salaries. At this, President Joel became very passionate, asserting that "the University is not in dire financial states; it is in a similar state to most private universities," and that the value of a YU education is unparalleled. He directly refuted the question by emphasizing that no YU faculty is receiving the highest salaries in their field, or even being promoted, although they are most deserving. He mentioned, though, that the budget cuts are not coming from the academic part of the university. He did not deny the Moody claims, but attributed them to YU's superior rates of spending on school programs, faculty-student ratio, and rates of financial aid. However, he did say that "we have run out of money." Although the endowment and assets are still substantial, this necessitated the budget cuts, in order to balance the operating budget by July 1<sup>st</sup>. He then expressed the hope that as more people realize the value and essential nature of a YU education, resources will grow.

President Joel continued to detail the uniqueness of a YU education in response to YC sophomore Eli Shavalian's concern that the Yeshiva part of YU has been "enveloping" the University portion. President Joel expressed that YU could not



operate as "a university that happens to have a Yeshiva," and that, in accordance with the Rambam, a middle ground must be reached in YU that is neither black nor white but nuanced: "Yiddishkeit is about Technicolor." He also noted that every day, he hears the exact opposite perspective that the University is enveloping the Yeshiva, implying by this that it is impossible to please everyone.

After reassuring YU student Michael Lunzer that a task force is in place to possibly allow students to not be locked in to one morning program, President Joel mistakenly called on Glazer again. Upon realizing this, President Joel attempted to move on to another question, but Glazer persisted, asserting that President Joel himself made \$1.3 million last year, and took a \$100,000 pay raise: "Why does the rest of the school have to make cuts, but you don't?" President Joel passionately responded: "I really resent answering this question, but I will." He explained that he does not earn \$1.3 million; rather, he earns \$750,000, and has not taken a pay raise in five years. He reminded the crowd that tax forms reflect not just salary, but assets, and closed the answer with "I look forward to the day, many years from now, that you find a new president and see what you'll have to pay her."

After quickly addressing the fact that it will not be easy to overcome Dr. Schwartz's departure, as well as that of the Sganei Mashgichiach, and also expressing his regret that the University cannot justify a daily shuttle to those commuting to Einstein, President Joel closed with a short Dvar Torah emphasizing that our role as Jews is not to physically

see Hashem but to emulate him in a divine partnership. He then expressed his reliance on the entire YU student body to help him achieve this goal.

This particular town hall meeting elicited mixed responses from attendees. Tuman continued to express his concern for the fate of smaller departments, citing the fact that Stern College recently eliminated their Computer Science major for lack of interest, even though, Tuman says, it is "the highest-paying undergraduate major." One YC sophomore felt, regarding Glazer's inquiry, that "if you want to get something out of the president, don't quote his salary to him."

However, the overwhelming sentiment from those in attendance was that they were impressed with the way President Joel graciously and seamlessly handled this particularly difficult batch of questions. The transparency and honesty with which President Joel acknowledged the trying financial situation, as well as his conviction that although times might be hard now, the University is facing better days ahead, left an impression on those present. Similarly, many felt that the passion and detail with which he outlined his vision for Yeshiva University justified his joking claim that although "I am the 30<sup>th</sup> highest-paid university president in the country... I think I should probably be the 20<sup>th</sup>!" Overall, many in attendance were left with the feeling that under President Joel's watchful gaze, Yeshiva University is truly headed in the right direction.

If only the President had not denied Shimon Farber's (YC '12) request to disclose who he had picked in his NCAA bracket.

# Panel Featuring Current *Agunah* Confronts Crisis

By GAVRIEL BROWN

"Ten years ago," said Organization for the Resolution of Agunot (ORA) Director Rabbi Jeremy Stern, "a panel was organized to raise awareness for prenuptial agreements to avoid future *agunah* [married woman whose husband refuses to divorce her] situations. Two Stern students, through no fault of their own, didn't hear the panel. No one told them about the prenuptial. One of them waited two years for a *get* (bill of religious divorce). The other continues to wait for four years. That woman is Tamar Epstein."

"I wish I had been at the *Agunah* panel in my sophomore year," Tamar Epstein said. She was one of four panelists, including Rabbi Herschel Schechter, Rabbi Jeremy Stern and Dr. David Pelcovitz who spoke to an unexpectedly large crowd at Weissberg Commons on March 29. Each speaker brought a different perspective on the "Agunah Crisis." The panel was the final event in TAC's domestic violence awareness week.



Left to right: Dr. David Pelcovitz, Rabbi Jeremy Stern, Tamar Epstein, and Rabbi Herschel Schachter. Credit: YUNews.

Dr. Pelcovitz spoke of the psychological domestic violence women face when fighting for a *get*. He quoted a study commissioned by ORA revealing that one-fifth of *agunot* at some point contemplate self-harm due to the emotional stress. He also mentioned that functional

MRIs reveal that the same parts of the brain light up under emotional and physical abuse.

Dr. Pelcovitz stressed the difference between negotiation and abuse. Abuse is "an issue of control," he affirmed. "The second you use *halakha* to wring out control from the other party, you have crossed the line into abuse," he said.

Rabbi Herschel Schechter stressed prevention through prenuptial arrangements. The two-fold contract would establish a *beit din* (religious court) that both parties agree to use should divorce proceedings arise, and an agreement that would come into effect should the *beit din* find the husband to be acting improperly. The contract, enforceable under United States law, would force the husband to pay high alimony charges (\$150 every day) until a *get* is given.

Rabbi Jeremy Stern spoke of ORA's role within *agunah* proceedings. "We first try to resolve things amicably. We facilitate the *beit din* process. We open up lines of communication," he explained. He continued, "But when all these options are exhausted we will use any civilly legal, *halakhik* means of placing pressure." Rabbi Stern stressed that ORA carefully investigates "all the facts" prior to taking action. Once ORA feels that the husband has crossed a "red line," ORA will launch a campaign that may include insisting that local rabbis and community members pressure the *me'agen* (re-

calcitrant husband) to give his wife a *get*. On some occasions, such as in Tamar Epstein's case, they hold multiple public protests.

Tamar Epstein, a graduate of SCW, then got up to speak. Her speech brought some to tears. Epstein had a "perfect childhood." She had "a great education." But a week into her marriage, she knew it wouldn't work. She remained silent for two years until she finally demanded a divorce.

Her ex-husband, Aharon Friedman, has refused to grant her a *get*. Unhappy with the civil divorce proceedings regarding visitation rights for his daughter, Friedman is attempting to use the *get* as a way to force Tamar to grant him more time with his daughter. According to documents published by ORA, "Maryland courts have ruled repeatedly that it is in the best interests of their daughter for her to remain primarily with Epstein in Philadelphia." Indeed, Epstein held back tears as she said, "After five court hearings and three *batei din*, the most shocking and painful thing is Aharon Friedman's refusal to grant me a *get*."

In September 2011 the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada issued a *seruv*, a letter of excommunication against Friedman. The letter detailed how the community would enforce the order of contempt. He would be refused *aliyot* (honorary participation in the Torah-reading service). He wouldn't even be allowed into synagogues. The letter was signed by Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky and Rabbi Herschel Schechter.

Since then, despite articles in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and many other publications, Friedman refuses to grant Epstein a *get*.

"My message to Aaron Friedman is that if you truly love our daughter, give her mother a *get*," Rabbi Stern said forcefully, looking into the camera that was streaming the panel live to YUTorah.org.

The panel was organized by the

newly formed *Agunah* Advocacy Club spearheaded by SCW sophomore Huvie Yagod. "I knew Tamar. She was my high school history teacher. When I learned about ORA I knew it was a credible organization. I started caring and starting learning how important it was," said Yagod. Under Yagod's leadership the club has organized many rallies and consciousness awareness events. The club recently placed a copy of the prenuptial agreement under every single dorm room at Yeshiva College and Stern College for Women. A few Sundays ago, Yagod even ended up leading an *agunah* rally in Brooklyn. "I asked myself how I got to this place. I realized it's a matter about caring enough for an issue that I would do anything in my power to change this issue," Yagod told me.

Atara Siegel, a SCW sophomore who also works for the *Agunah* Advocacy Club, said, "when *halakha* is distorted and used for abuse purposes, if we don't stand up and stay something, it's as if we are tacitly supporting it."

Meira Zack, Assistant Director of ORA and recent SCW graduate, noticed the unexpected turnout. "The difference between last year's panel and this year's panel is tremendous. Much of that has to do with Tamar's story as a SCW graduate."

While Tamar Epstein's story was moving, much of the evening was dedicated to raising communal standards for using the prenuptials. "Our communal standard must be that *gets* are given immediately after divorce," Epstein said. "Divorce brings out the worst in people," said Rabbi Stern, "so you want to sign the prenuptial now." Rabbi Stern stressed the need for the document. "Ten years ago, if every YU student signed the agreement, we wouldn't have this problem."

Rabbi Stern did admit that the *halakhic* prenuptial isn't exactly the most romantic document, "but neither is the *ketuba*; in fact, it's a divorce document." He said that if someone won't sign the contract, "do not marry them. It's a red flag... What the prenuptial says to your partner is *I love you and I care for you*."

ORA's new campaign is entitled "Friends Don't Let Friends get Married Without A Prenup." ORA distributed its "Binding Arbitration Agreement" along with a letter signed by almost all YU *roshei yeshiva* encouraging engaged couples to sign the *halakhic* prenuptial after the event.

"We hope to be out of business in ten years," said Meira Zack. "And we certainly shouldn't see any more cases of Yeshiva University alumni."

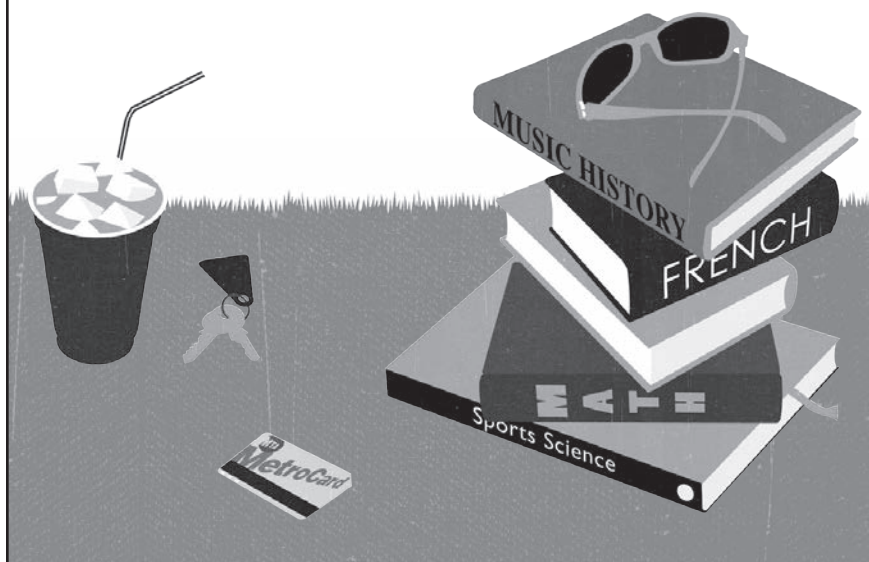
One Yeshiva University couple took the first step, after the event. With friends as *eidim*, (witnesses) they signed the *halakhic* prenuptial.

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# Syms Progress

continued from front page...

dents and the administration. “We hope that students feel free to come to me, Dr. Strauss, or Dr. Giloni. And if they have a problem let’s nip it in the bud before it gets big. Anytime a student wants to come make an appointment I’m happy to see the students and talk to the students.”

Strengthening the school’s Management Department, which, according to Dr. Pava has been “tired” of late, is another targeted goal of the new administration. A re-energized Management Department will provide students with a strong fourth option for a business major, in addition to accounting, finance, and marketing.

SYMS students have already seen marked improvements to the Management Department. “The management program has grown significantly this year and it is clear that it is going in the right direction,” says Tzvi Solomon, a junior majoring in management.

Alumni of SYMS are also encouraged by Dr. Pava’s appointment and what it means for the school’s future. “Dr. Pava’s class was very organized and disciplined. I’m sure he will be able to bring the same level of professionalism, clarity and efficiency to SYMS,” says Danny Shulman (SYMS ’11).

The announcement of the new appointments was accompanied by the announcement that SYMS is entering the final stages of the AACSB Accreditation process, a process that Dr. Pava has been involved in for several years, which he believes will yield immediate and concrete benefits. “I just got an email from a student. They are in some graduate program, and the graduate program isn’t recognizing their class that they

took at SYMS because they only recognize credits from a school that has the AACSB international accreditation.” Securing accreditation will prevent alumni from encountering these frustrating situations in the future.

Students are also extremely excited about the forthcoming accreditation and believe that it bodes well for the business school. “I am interested in a career in finance, but I decided to be an economics major in Yeshiva College, rather than a finance major in SYMS, because I was worried about the reputation of SYMS. Becoming an accredited business school should go a long way in improving the school’s reputation,” says Yosef Van Bemelen (YC ’14). Indeed.

It is important to realize that the process has not been finalized and that formal accreditation depends on successful completion of a site visit next November, when a team from the AACSB will be conducting a final evaluation. But, Dr. Pava believes with unabashed confidence that SYMS will pass this last stage with flying colors. “We’re going to make it and I don’t think it’s even going to be close,” says Pava. “We’re above their standards.”

Another initiative being spearheaded by the new administration is the Business Honors and Entrepreneurial Leadership Program which will debut this fall. With a handful of incoming students for the Fall semester, the Honors Program will offer its students special internships and senior seminars in addition to engaging courses. The program is designed for students interested in becoming “leaders and doers,” and the administration hopes to build a program of 60-70 Honors students who fit this mold. While there is no published baseline requirement for acceptance, the Honors Program is looking for candidates with “very high SAT scores and evidence of leadership potential.”

For Dr. Pava, the Honors Program is an unequivocal indicator of the positive direction in which SYMS is headed. “I think it is very important to the whole school,” says Pava. “It’s sort of a signal that we are trying to raise the academic standards... across the board.” He also believes that the introduction of the Honors Program will help “level the playing field” between SYMS and its liberal-arts counterparts, YC and SCW. “In a school where the two liberal art schools have honors programs, the business school has to have an honors program.”

The momentum and positive energy which these new initiatives have infused within SYMS make Dr. Pava confident that the business school figures prominently in the University’s future. “We feel that SYMS is tremendous potential for this University. SYMS is a big part, in my opinion, of the future of the undergraduate education at Yeshiva University.”

# The End of the Y-stud

By ZACH MAMMON

Every day, hundreds of students across Wilf Campus attend *Shacharit*, *Mincha* and *Ma’ariv minyanim* (morning, afternoon, and evening prayer services) in different locations without fail. No emails are sent out advertising the 8:10 AM Morg Beis *Shacharit* or the 7:45 AM Sephardic *Shacharit*. Everyone just knows to show up, using an easy-to-use, comprehensive website, YUZmanim.com.

Let’s do the same for the wide array of events held each and every day on both the Wilf and Beren Campuses. Tens, sometimes hundreds of times a day, exclamation points and offers for free pizza storm our inboxes in the form of “ystuds” or “ystuds” or other mass emails (or “studs”). Cheesy subject lines attempt to catch our attention, to draw us to The Event that Will Change Your Life. But despite the merciless barrage of studs it is clear that this marketing method is proving unsuccessful. Students are becoming sick of the constant emailing. Many eventually ignore their YU emails and come to despise the very idea of becoming involved on campus in any way, shape, or form. The emailing method turns potentially active students into apathetic ones, and this is reflected in the poor attendance at many YU events.

The way we receive news and information is ever changing. The studs are a thing of the past, and it’s



We at *The Commentator* concede that ystuds make you feel wonderfully popular.

time to create a new system where students can discover YU happenings that are of interest to them: YUWhatsOn.com. Much like YUZmanim, the site will detail the where, when, and what of upcoming events. The organizer of each event will be able to upload blurbs describing the event and provide the presenter’s contact information. The site will also feature a comments function, through which event attendees will be able to provide useful feedback to the organizers, the Student Councils, and the students who might consider attending similar events in the future. This function will help students and club heads alike, as students will be able to become more involved in clubs that appeal to them, and club heads will be able to foster a stronger relationship with students interested in their club.

YUWhatsOn.com cannot revitalize student life at YU all on its own. To the already-interested YU student, the site will provide a forum to search for appealing clubs and interesting events, but the apa-

thetic student can still ignore the site entirely. An unwilling student may never visit the site at all. An argument can even be made that studs should stick around to *force* event information upon the lackadaisical student. It is for this reason that the site must be appealing, creating excitement about upcoming events. If it becomes the *sole* resource for discovering happenings on campus, students will feel more compelled to check it on a regular basis. Yes, signs will still be posted throughout the lounges, but how often do students stop and internalize the details of an event posted on a flyer? We are constantly on the move, and YUWhatsOn.com will provide us with event information wherever we find ourselves.

In order to create this attractive one-stop shop for event information, I am seeking your help. The domain name is in place, and the creation of the site is now underway. To join me in this much-needed endeavor, please email me at zach.mammon@gmail.com. Thank you.

# Department Cuts

continued from front page...

Budgetary limitations have made it impossible to balance the YC budget without detracting from some of the more peripheral academic offerings of YC.

Speech has not been a requirement in Yeshiva College for years. Dean Eichler explained that SYMS students make up the majority of speech students—in fact, over the last few years, only 11-25% of students in each speech course were YC students. This led Dean Eichler to offer the Speech Department to be a part of SYMS, but they declined the offer. Syms Dean Moses Pava explained that the SYMS faculty voted to get rid of the Composition I, II, and Speech requirements, and to replace them with the YC First Year Writing seminar and a communications course that will be taught by full-time professors instead of adjuncts. To address Dr. Rosenberg’s worry that students will be “unable to communicate” without the Speech Department, Dean Eichler explained that there are resources and workshops on campus, such as the Career Development Center, to help with interviews, and professors can make themselves available to help students with preparing presen-

tations.

The Physical Education (PE) Department of YC will be closed next semester. This had to be approved by the faculty of YC because, until now, it was a requirement for a YC degree. According to Dean Eichler, this will allow YC to save \$90,000 annually. While competitive sports teams will still be in full service, PE courses will no longer be offered starting this fall. After this cut, to the chagrin or delight of many students on campus, there is no longer a PE requirement to graduate YC.

For the Theatre Arts academic programs, Dean Eichler conferred with Stern College for Women (SCW) Dean Karen Bacon, to see how Stern has financially dealt with its dramatic extra-curricular activities, such as the SCDS play. Like Stern, the YC plays will no longer be part of the Theatre Arts academic program, which is being cut. The future of YCDS is now within the non-academic budget.

The Music Department offerings have not been curtailed as a result of financial constraints, but fewer sections of “Sense of Music” will be offered because the course will not be a requirement in the new curriculum, which will go into effect next fall. Dean Eichler reassured

music majors that enough courses will exist for students to continue to major in music. There will be cut-backs, however, that will affect the architecture and studio art minors. Because fewer art courses will be offered in any given semester, students will need to plan their academic course schedule with more precision, by deciding which course they will take each semester based on a departmental schedule that will include plans for course offerings in future semesters. The details for these schedules have not been finalized as of yet.

Better course planning by the students and department will require students to take care when deciding on their minors in the Art Department. Dean Eichler quipped that consequently, students will be unable to declare an art minor in their senior year.

Dean Eichler stressed that the University is facing difficult times and the graduate and undergraduate programs need to meet budget requirements mandated by the Board of Trustees. According to Eichler, the departments cut by this wave of changes have brought the YC budget to the level required, which should avert future cuts to YC academics.



Way to go, Floor 4!

# Bnei Akiva's Existential Crisis

By GAVRIEL BROWN

In 2000, thirteen buses took hundreds of students on what has now become a ubiquitous feature of Modern Orthodox education: Mach Hach Ba'aretz. This year, there will only be five. It's not the only problem facing Bnei Akiva. In-group bickering, a lack of organizational momentum and a lack of fresh vision have created an organization as stale as the candy they distribute on Shabbat afternoons.

My memories of Bnei Akiva are for the most part, thanks to licorice and bazooka gum, rosy and sweet. I remember the long summer afternoons running around our synagogue parking lot, the comical inserts to the *Shirah* and the formal footwork of *amod dom, amod noach*. I remember when I got to hold the Israeli flag.

Yet when I began to wipe away my sugarc coated memories, a different picture emerged. The Bnei Akiva of my youth seemed juvenile and innocent. The messages pumped into our programming were monochromatic in its presentation of Israel: Religious Zionists built Israel. Israel should be a religious state. Israel was a land only for Jews. *A nation of Israel, in Israel, according to the Torah of Israel* (and never mind the Israelis who think otherwise). Oh, and I almost forgot, *Make aliyah!*

I started to remember the arguments with my parents who wanted me to go to Shabbat afternoon programming. I remember the same events week after week. The same *divrei Torah*. The same *amod dom, amod noach*.

But I wasn't alone. I spoke to many students. Some were *madrichim* (counselors) in their local *snifim* (branches). Others attended Bnei Akiva camps for 12 years. Some had only vague memories from their youth. Others had fresh memories, tens of friends and hundreds of pictures from Mach Hach. Most had amazing and life changing experiences with Bnei Akiva, whether on *shabbatonim*, trips or other programming. But behind their fondness for their experiences lies shared frustrations about the organization: a lack of organization, disjointed leadership and a boring, repeated and hollow vision.

"The message is almost always lost," said one student. "Our efforts are concentrated on getting kids under the umbrella of Bnei Akiva, but once they are there, leaders don't have enough energy to create meaningful programming." A veteran *Mazkir* from the New York area said, "it's the perfect tradeoff, we schlep these students out to synagogue and pump them full of candy while parents get to sleep." These are "glorified youth groups" some students said. Many students used the word "bribing" to describe the

recruiting methods of Bnei Akiva.

Of course, some of the larger cities have achieved a critical mass of young participants. Relationships with parents and synagogue leaders are exceptional and leadership training is superb. Teaneck, Cleveland, Chicago and parts of Los Angeles seemed to have outstanding *snifim*. But among smaller *snifim*, in Maryland, Pennsylvania, parts of New Jersey and Connecticut, a different story emerges.

One student spoke of Bnei Akiva as "forcing itself into small communities with established Shabbat programming" and "failing to connect with the community and failing to see eye-to-eye with parents." Others spoke of a lack of leadership training for the staff members, who feel overworked and underappreciated. All of these reasons factored into a number of failed or failing "outpost" *snifim* throughout North America.

The most troubling pattern to emerge from speaking to leaders is an endemic lack of organization. "Programs are put together last minute, and it shows," said a leader who had been in Bnei Akiva "for as long as he could remember." He continued, "it's not a lack of passion, it's a lack of commitment." Leaders are taxed with school, dating and other extra-curricular commitments and often put Bnei Akiva on the backburner. Those who prioritize Bnei Akiva high up on their to-do lists must often pick up the slack from less-committed leaders, creating frustrations and factions between those who "do" and those who "don't."

It is thus no wonder that people associate Bnei Akiva with simplistic programming. Its leaders have little time to develop meaningful and refined programs. They are forced to rely on pre-packaged programs and take inspiration from programming in the past. However, some use past programming not out of lack of time or creativity but because "that's the way we did things, and that's the way we're gonna do things in the future," a *Mazkir* told me.

An organization-wide skepticism regarding new ideas and disinterest in hearing dissenting views means that the organization has remained static, if it hasn't regressed towards insignificance, and it shows (the fact that all the students interviewed for this article wished to remain anonymous is quite a telling feature of the organization). Recruitment is down for programming geared toward older kids, many chapters are smaller

religious Zionist community. This shift in *modus operandi* meant that Bnei Akiva would no longer be the one described in Yehuda Avner's *The Prime Ministers* – an organization that brought him to Palestine in 1947 and taught him to fight, dig trenches, drain marshes and establish *kibbutzim*. Over time, the organization became diluted and its message became

Chashmonaim." One student went so far as to call Bnei Akiva a "propaganda machine for Israel."

In some sleepaway camps, the only educational component is "a clip of Ben Gurion announcing the establishment of the state, [shown to us] on the first night of camp." While this may not represent all Bnei Akiva camps, there seem to be a common theme throughout; a simplistic message is favored over a rich commitment to Israel, its diverse people and its diverse challenges. An articulation of responsibility to *Am Yisrael*, an NYU student told me, "included going to the army, and that's about it."

Bnei Akiva has reached a turning point. It can no longer sustain itself as an organization "pushing *aliyah* without tact." It can no longer stay relevant when it fails to have frank discussions about what Israel really is—not some romanticized, diasporic, religious Zionist vision. It can't sustain itself if under the cute blue-and-white shoelace shirts bubble the closeted frustrations of overworked, unrepresented, underdeveloped and underappreciated leaders.

Bnei Akiva is already suffering from historically low numbers on programs, in camps, and in some local Shabbat activities. Its national board needs to listen to voices advocating change. It needs a fresh vision.

An organization that advocates *aliyah* without inculcating a deep, nuanced and complex relationship with the State will ultimately lead to disenchanting and disillusioned citizens. For the students who eventually make *aliyah*, the "truth" about Israel being a real country with real problems and real bureaucracy will come out. Most importantly, an organization unwilling to listen to fresh ideas and if necessary, to make radical change, will eventually run out of momentum.

Is there a place for a Zionist education for young 21<sup>st</sup>-century Jews? There is. And from the sampling of students I spoke with, the consensus seemed to be that there was no time *more* important for Zionist education. But the response can't be childish messages. It can't be last-minute programming. Our times require Zionists to be thoughtful and well informed, open-minded and ideological. A new message of *Torah* and *Avodah* must be ready to face the new challenges facing Israel.



than they were ten years ago, and trips and *shabbatonim* suffer from a lack of reliable and consistent funding. It no longer runs solidarity missions to Israel. Its Torah V'Avodah Institute (TVI) is almost virtually unknown, even among Bnei Akiva's elite members.

Room for improvement in terms of organization is a feature of every institution. What Bnei Akiva faces is a much more sinister and creeping issue. It is an issue that requires honesty and open dialogue where no one is afraid to speak out. It's going to be a difficult conversation.

Bnei Akiva faces an existential crisis. It is a crisis 30 years in the making. In the 1980s, Bnei Akiva shifted its emphasis from a socialist message emphasizing Garin Aliya to *kibbutzim* to a more apolitical organization geared toward the entire

less relevant as Israel's identity and challenges changed.

Its educational component suffered and continues to suffer tremendously. Its North American branch has become an organization associated more with catering to middle school children in communities and young teenagers in sleepaway camps than to a cadre of young, talented and ideologically driven youth of the organization's yesteryears.

Possibly the most pernicious and widespread consequence of this shift is a decrease in the quality of its educational component. One student said "At [Camp] Moshava it was overkill; just *aliyah, aliyah, aliyah*." Another student who had attended Camp Moshava every year he could said, "the message I got was that Israel is wonderful and come live in Efrat. Come live in

# Talmud: At What Expense?

BY NATHAN DENICOFF

I came to YU in the Fall of 2011 this semester to continue my Jewish education, fully expecting a comprehensive treatment of the Jewish studies I had taken throughout my high school and Israel years. On the Talmud front, YU has been exemplary, challenging me with analytical and high-level *shiurim*. My *Nach* courses, as part of my bible requirement, have been enlightening and deep as well. But there is a gaping hole in the YC Jewish Studies curriculum that has me feeling shortchanged in my continued Jewish education: a total lack of *Chumash parshanut* courses.

The lack of *Chumash* courses in YC is peculiar, especially considering the value that our university as a whole seems to give to *Chumash* as a discipline. The women at Stern College have a healthy choice of sixteen *Chumash* courses this semester, and the students enrolled in the Isaac Breuer College of Jewish Studies have the option to take advanced *parshanut* classes. Yet not a single *Chumash* with *Rishonim* class has been offered in the Yeshiva College Bible department since Spring 2008, when Professor Moshe Bernstein taught a *parshanut* class on *Bamidbar*. While the department does offer courses titled “Biblical Midrashim” and “Literary Approaches to the Bible,” neither is geared exclusively toward *Chumash* let alone *parshanut*. Of course, it would make sense for our university to compensate for the lack of advanced *Chumash* options in YC by offering such courses in all of its various Yeshiva programs. But, save for IBC, they are conspicuously absent from these programs as well. The Mechina Program is geared towards those who did not receive an extensive prior Jewish education, and its courses are more basic. The Stone Beit Midrash Program focuses on Talmud and offers courses on other topics, but none on *Chumash*. The Mazer Yeshiva Program, the most populated Jewish Studies program at Yeshiva College, focuses exclusively on Talmud.

The Jewish people have a long and storied tradition of studying *Chumash*. Indeed, our *Rishonim* thought it worthwhile to write extensive commentaries on the *Chumash* to explain *pshat*, the basic intended meaning of the verse. Is it less worthwhile for us to delve into this analysis? *Chumash* can be highly analytical and contribute to a person’s ethical and spiritual growth. The curriculum at Stern College reflects this value; why doesn’t the curriculum at Yeshiva College?

One possible explanation for this notable omission is that the women at Stern are not required to take Talmud. Only a few Talmud courses are offered at Stern each semester,

and Bible classes, among others, fill the void. At Yeshiva, on the other hand, the heavy emphasis is on Talmud. Even the programs that offer a much broader curriculum, namely the Mechina Program and IBC, require up to four semesters of Talmud study. SBMP focuses mainly on Talmud, and MYP focuses on Talmud to the exclusion of all else.

The emphasis on Talmud at Yeshiva is quite logical. Jewish Law is an outgrowth of the history of Talmudic thought and interpretation. Students planning on becoming rabbis have to have a firm grasp on Jewish Law, which entails understanding the Talmud and the development of *Halachah*. The Yeshiva Program in particular is excellent preparation for those interested in pursuing *Semicha*. The rabbinate, however, is an all-male institution. The women of Stern are not being trained for positions in the rabbinate. While Talmud may be an extremely valuable tool for appreciating the depth of Jewish Law and issuing decisive legal rulings, it is less vital for actually learning what the law is. Stern does offer numerous courses in practical Jewish Law, but the emphasis is on the bookends – the Written Torah and practical *Halachah* – and not on the Talmud in the middle. Perhaps Stern College students should be encouraged to take more courses in Talmud, but that does not explain why Yeshiva students not enrolled in IBC are not even given the opportunity to study *Chumash* with *Rishonim*.

The lack of *Chumash* classes is not unique to Yeshiva College. Most *yeshivot* in the world focus mainly on Talmud, devoting morning, afternoon, and night *sedarim* to Talmud study. *Talmidim* at these *yeshivot* may spend a marginal amount of time studying *Tanach*, *Mussar*, *Machshava*, and *Halachah*, but Talmud is the focus. Maimonides famously writes in the Laws of Talmud Torah 1:11 that one should divide his Torah learning into thirds – a third for scripture, a third for *Mishnah*, and a third for *Gemara*. It would thus seem that most *yeshivot*, along with Yeshiva University, ap-

pear to be directly disobeying the explicit directive of the Rambam. Why might this be the case? The medieval Talmudic commentator Rabbeinu Tam writes that *Gemara* encapsulates all three elements the Rambam included in his directive regarding Torah study. According to Rabbeinu Tam, once a person has a basic understanding of scripture and *Mishnah*, he should devote his entire learning to the study of *Gemara*, as the *Gemara* expands and provides the Biblical and logical sources for the opinions in the *Mishnah*.

There is a tremendous irony, however, in Rabbeinu Tam’s comment. The section of *Gemara* on which Rabbeinu Tam comments is actually an Israeli polemic against the Jews in Babylonia. After taking a number of humorous jabs at the Babylonian Jews, the Talmud on Sanhedrin 24a concludes that the Hebrew word for Babylonia, “Bavel,” can be understood as “Bilula BaMikra, Bilula BaMishna, Bilula BaTalmud” – confused in Torah, Mishna, and Talmud. They are confused because they don’t take the time to master the first two subjects before proceeding to Talmud. Are we just as confused as the Jews in Bavel? Have we not set aside enough time for the study of Mishna and scripture? Have we lost something by focusing almost exclusively on Talmud?

Despite the historical widespread focus on Talmud at the “classical” European-style *yeshiva*, there is precedent for *Chumash* study at *yeshiva* as well. The students at the Volozhin *Yeshiva*, one of the most prestigious of the European *yeshivot*, had a *Chumash seder* every morning with their *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rav Naftali Zvi, the Netziv. The Netziv’s son, Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, wrote passionately about his father’s commitment to analytical *Chumash* study, as recorded by Henry A. Soslund and Stefi Weisbur in their 2002 article in *Judaism*:

The results of his efforts were that so very many Volozhin alumni who distinguished themselves in various professions entered the world at large, taking with them so

much Torah learning and fine moral qualities as a result of their learning *Chumash* with no less fervor than they learned their lessons in Talmud

Our Yeshiva is steeped in the Talmudic tradition of Brisk and Volozhin, but the tradition of intense *Chumash* study along the same principles has disappeared. If the Netziv walked into our *Beit Midrash* and observed the state of *Chumash* study, I am sure he would strongly disapprove.

As Bar-Ilan observed, alumni of the distinguished Volozhin Yeshiva entered the world with “fine moral qualities” and a tremendous amount of Torah knowledge as a result of those daily sessions with their *Rosh Yeshiva*, the Netziv. Rabbi Yaakov Bieler, my Rabbi and teacher, comments that the Torah “more frequently overtly grapples with more spiritual matters than does *Gemara*.” While one can approach *Chumash* from a purely intellectual standpoint, Rabbi Bieler believes that the spiritual and moral issues are much harder to avoid when studying *Chumash*. By giving *Chumash* study short shrift at YC, we are missing out on the valuable moral lessons that *Chumash* has to offer.

Some people may object that *Chumash* can be “fluffy,” not conducive to rigorous academic analysis. This is a seriously misguided notion. In high school, I took two years of advanced *Chumash* study with a student of Nechama Lebowitz, and it was one of the best Judaic Studies courses I have ever taken. My teacher’s approach was similar to the “Brisker Derech” for Talmud. We would delve into the biblical commentaries and search for the fundamental differences between them. The class was as analytical as my Talmud class, and I definitely gained more in terms of Jewish ethics and spirituality from my *Chumash* class. Yeshiva College should emulate this model of *Chumash* study and not discount the opportunities it offers for intense analysis and spiritual growth.

I discussed the issue with our Yeshiva’s *Mashgiach Ruchani* (spiritual counselor), Rabbi Yosef

Blau, and he acknowledged the lack of analytical *parshanut* classes on *Chumash*. He informed me that YU was aware of the problem and was considering offering *Chumash chugim* (informal classes) during night *sefer*. I am excited about this possibility, but I sincerely hope that this is only the first step. Informal *chugim*, by nature, are not as rigorous as formal classes.

Most people would probably agree that *Chumash* study is important, but there is still an issue of conflicting priorities. Bible professors Jeremy Wieder and Moshe Bernstein both explained to me that one of the goals of the Bible department is to expose the students to new areas of Bible study, which is reflected in the course selection and requirements. As most students have already taken *parshanut* courses in high school, the emphasis is on *Nevi'im Acharonim* and *Ketuvim*, or on alternative approaches to Bible beyond *parshanut*. However, this does not justify the complete lack of *parshanut* courses in the Bible department, which still offers plenty of courses in *Nevi'im Rishonim*.

YU can begin to effect change by offering more *Chumash parshanut* in the Bible department. Students looking to fulfill their fourth Bible requirement could take one of these courses. This would also be beneficial to those pursuing Jewish Studies majors or minors who are looking to take more *Chumash* with *Rishonim* courses.

The next step would be to adjust the nature of the Yeshiva Program. Right now, students in the Yeshiva Program are only required to study Talmud. We could allow students to take a number of electives in other topics, such as *Chumash*, *Machshava*, *Mussar*, and *Halachah*. This would produce a much more well-rounded Torah scholar and human being.

Of course, change would present logistical issues. Decisions would have to be made regarding the length, frequency, and amount of elective courses. A good starting point would be to allow students to take an elective of their choice once a week for 45 minutes each semester. The Yeshiva Program would also have to find lecturers for these courses. Perhaps each *Rosh Yeshiva* could teach an elective in his non-Talmudic area of expertise. Well-qualified instructors from outside the Yeshiva Program could perhaps be brought in as well.

After having many conversations with my peers, I get the sense that I am not the only one with such concerns. I look around the *Beit Midrash* during morning *sefer*, and I see a number of people spending some time learning things other than Talmud. The support for change seems to be there from the student side. It is time for the Yeshiva Program to step up to the plate.



The Jacob and Dreizel Glueck Center for Talmud Study.



# A Dangerous But Necessary Method



By Yael Roberts

At the opening of *A Dangerous Method*, Sabina Spielrein convulses behind a carriage window, squirming, shrieking, laughing, her long hair in disarray, her expression tortured, as horses pull her to a mental hospital to be treated by Carl Jung. Years later, as a carriage draws her down a road away from Jung, she sits elegantly, her hair in place, the tears in her eyes barely ruining her impassive expression. In between these two carriage rides, Spielrein transforms from a crazed patient to a doctor of psychology. She cultivates relationships with Carl Jung (Michael Fassbender) and Sigmund Freud (Viggo Mortensen) and emerges apparently healthy.

Keira Knightley's performance as Sabina is incredible: while Jung psychoanalyzes her, she twitches, grabs at her face, and stutters; her eyes bug out and she shakes madly. Her lingering Russian accent flows in and out of her speech patterns. Her intensity is captivating and catchy. Fassbender, an emerging star, plays Jung, managing to feign a semblance of outward calm amidst inner turmoil. Their relationship is staged beautifully. While seemingly emotionless from Jung's perspective, by the movie's end, he clutches at Spielrein, sobbing like a child.

*A Dangerous Method*, directed by David Cronenberg, explores the historical relationships between Spielrein, Jung, and Freud. Set in Switzerland and Vienna in the early twentieth century, and based on a true story, the film delves into the early beginnings of Freudian psychology, the interpersonal relationships between patient and doctor and between student and mentor, and the dissolution of the professional into the sexual.

Yet the film itself is not explicitly sexual. Jung and Freud debate the use of euphemisms at Freud's dinner table. Freud believes that sexuality should never be disguised, because people will be just as angry when they find out what he really means.

So why should he not be direct from the get-go? Jung, on the other hand, believes that being overtly sexual is not the best method, even if sexuality is implicit. As Jung asks Spielrein when he agrees to advise her for her doctoral thesis, "Shall we say that this time next Tuesday, I'll start gently ripping you to shreds?"

While Freud continues to assert that he believes everything leads back to sexuality, Jung becomes increasingly frustrated with Freud's fixation on the erotic. Jung is equally interested in other areas of psychology, particularly in what he calls the catalytic exteriorization phenomenon, a strange bodily ability to feel or sense the future. His interest in a predictable future is also seen in Sabina, who believes an angel, a voice in her head, tells her what people are about to say before they speak. The film itself uses foreshadowing, cluing the viewer into future events. While performing a psychological test for Jung, his wife Emma (Sarah Gadon) removes her wedding ring and it hits the desk loudly, as the viewer realizes they will soon struggle with their marriage.

The film's underlying premise is that every relationship is both evolving and devolving, that all ideas and people walk a two-way street. The definition of present extends both to the past and the future. And the relationship between anyone is two-way, complex, and filled with strife and conflict. The language in the film also demonstrates a dual meaning: many homophones are used throughout. Everything has a layer of meaning beyond the sexual, as Jung, with his insistence on the metaphysical, emerges superior to Freud as the movie's hero. Emma interprets "Jung" as "young" in the psychological test. And when Jung tells Emma he's losing his patience, he means both "patience" and "patients," feeling as if he's already loosing Sabina to a pit of insanity into which he can't follow her.

But follow he does. Slowly Jung himself realizes that little differentiates a doctor from his patients. Professors in suits walk through the

hospital amidst the patients, screaming with insanity. The doctors purport normalcy, yet what divides them from their patients seems only to be a false assertion of sanity. Belief in being able to divide between us as normal, and them as abnormal and insane, is an imaginary ideal.

The cinematography enforces a different divide: that between mind and brain. The filming is crisp and clear, showing shades of whites and pastels with the occasional blacks and grays. The camera glosses over landscapes, houses, and carriages bumping down cobblestone streets. In this black and white landscape, all seems safe and well. Yet this is only what our visual brains observe. Behind the lace fabric, the silent houses, the bookshelves neatly organized by authors, the pastel blue ocean water, exists the world of the mind. And this world is far from sane. In this realm, the distinctions between patient and doctor, between wife and mistress, between mentor and student, all dissolve. Everyone is crazed, as Jung tells Spielrein later in the movie, "I have some kind of illness."

At the movie's end, Jung confides in Sabina that he keeps having an "apocalyptic dream." In his recurring dream, terrible waters flood all of Europe, sweeping up bloodied corpses. Soon the waters themselves turn to blood, "the blood of Europe." Four years after Jung's conversation with Spielrein, World War I breaks out.

Jung's prophetic words are most relevant not historically, but universally. The movie spends its entire time visually on calming, pleasing scenes. Yet all the characters are tormented. Their futures are all apocalyptic, and their present lives foreshadow war. Although the future brings wreckage, the viewer realizes that blood, catastrophe, and violence have been mostly absent visually. And that's because generally, in the world we live in, they are absent. The real catastrophe and cataclysmic wars we experience are in our minds. We all have some kind of illness, some fixation, multiple

selves fighting one another other within us. Behind the closed doors of our minds, we all keep secrets about who we are, what we practice, and what divides us, until our deaths.

"How sweet it must be to die," whispers Freud to Jung, passed out on the floor in the midst of a conference. Freud's defines the death urge as *Todestrieb*, as opposing sexual desire. Spielrein picks up on Freud's fascination with death, proposing a differing view to Freud's in her thesis. She believes that sex is connected to death, as sex is about self-destruction, or losing and destroying oneself in the other. Sex is both a creative and a destructive force, able to destroy and create both past and future through present actions. There is a fine line between the destructive and creative marks we make; the stamps we leave behind are both violent and affectionate. Ink marks, a sign of writing or creativity, weave in and out of the opening and closing credits, similarly shaped to the violent mark Spielrein slashes on Jung's right cheekbone.

Spielrein is destructive: she has been admitted as a patient to Jung's office because of her sadomasochistic tendencies, stemming from her father beating her as a young child. But a film that on the surface seems to be about sadomasochism is deeply about pain generally as a path to pleasure, about issues like life, death, and their intrinsic relationship to the sexual.

While on a ship to America, Jung confides in Freud that he's been having a dream about a ghost that refuses to die. As they attempt to decipher the dream, Freud muses that these ghosts are their ideas and theories. Freud's prophetic words about his own theories refusing to die apply to all ideas. Our minds are forever spinning; eternally haunted by ghosts of our ideas, of relationships we've severed, of the dual meaning behind each word we utter, they continue to operate long after our death. Yet the ideas in our mind are invisible, unless we're pragmatic and put them down on paper to

exist after we pass, unless we take chances in pursuit of dreams.

As Freud puts it, "Experiences like this, however painful, are necessary and inevitable. Without them, how can we know life?" And as Jung asserts in the movie's last seconds, "Sometimes you have to do something unforgivable just to be able to go on living."

Living is not about repression. As Otto Gross (Vincent Cassel), both a patient and a doctor, commands Jung, "Never repress anything." Although Otto speaks sexually, his meaning is dual. Otto emerges as a sort of physical manifestation of Jung's conscience. Otto, an almost imaginary concept, speaks about ideas just as much as sexuality. Although dangerous, it is sometimes necessary to not disguise ideas, to be genuine about feelings, to be real about intellect. Sometimes it's important to divorce the brain from the heart; as Spielrein tells Jung, "I have to work in the direction my instinct tells my intelligence." For Spielrein, even her intellectual work is about following what her heart tells her mind. The path that seems irrational and stems from pure emotions is sometimes the necessary course to take.

Psychoanalysis of oneself or another, sex as a form of healing, and the unabashed pursuit of ideas, are dangerous methods towards self-discovery, but are at times necessary. These uncontrolled, unscientific methods might lead to pain or madness. Yet sometimes madness or error is necessary to arrive at sanity and clarity. Sabina, a Jew, believes that "perfection can only be arrived at for what is conventionally thought of as sin." Sometimes, we have to do something unforgivable, even sin, just to continue living with the ideas and ghosts in our minds.

*A Dangerous Method* is now playing at East Village Cinema, 22 East 12<sup>th</sup> Street, and came out on DVD March 27. The movie is rated R for sexual content and brief language.



## Enlightened Expressions: Tuning Out

By NETANYA BUSHEWSKY

*This article is the first in a new column, "Enlightened Expressions," about the author's thoughts and impressions of New York City and its expressive, artistic culture.*

How does one say this without sounding overly personal and slightly uncomfortable—well, one just says it: New York is a lonely place. Now this isn't news, and as much as we'd like to admit we're unaffected, that fact is, we are. The fast pace, need to succeed, oversaturated start-up mentality does take a toll. Is there a way to avoid the neon lights shouting, "If you don't get famous now, you will get forgotten"? The answer is yes, which took me by surprise.

This past week I lost my iPod, which of course, I thought was a fatal calamity. As a result of not having an iPod, I've had to walk without a personal soundtrack, which means running on the treadmill no longer feels like I'm conquering a small city in South America and walking down 35<sup>th</sup> Street at four in the afternoon accompanied by Mumford and Sons no longer feels like the end of a Grey's Anatomy episode. It has, however, forced me to listen to the conversations around me and interact more than ever, allowing me to fully grasp the concept that listening to an iPod means that every time I "plug in," I "tune out." Now this seems obvious, but the truth is, how often do we choose to overpower real time conversations with music?

Just this past Sunday I was studying for my Hebrew midterm in Whole Foods (not as pretentious as it sounds). Only an hour after I sat down, a short man in his 20s sat next to me; his arms were riddled with dark tattoos, and a black eye patch took over the left side of his face. For about five minutes he sat there silently eating his sandwich, until a woman in her early 30s carrying a tray of sushi joined our table. After a moment of hesitation he pointed to her meal and asked, "What are you eating?" To which she gave the obvious response, "Sushi." He gawked in annoyance and tried again, "Ya, but what kind of sushi?" "Oh, yellow tail, salmon and tuna." This must have been an impressive answer since he responded, "Wow, a whole trio," paused, and then pointed to his own meal, "Roast beef." She responded, "Cool."

Now I can imagine why an exchange like this would deter even the most courageous from ever starting a conversation again. But what this gentleman was really trying to do was break the pertinacious New York barrier—or simply put, break

the ice. Despite the potential fear of rejection, the conversation continued, and out of the haphazard, awkwardness grew an informative and real connection—well about as real as it gets in less than 10 minutes. Somewhere along the line I was pulled in at the mention of Canada, and suddenly three separate individuals turned an isolated environment into a communal table.

After both individuals left, you'd think the conversation would stop, but it didn't. Sitting to my right was a middle-aged Israeli man speaking Hebrew on the phone. After an inner debate as to whether starting up a conversation is actually "creepy," I asked where he was from. After 10 minutes of talking to him, I found out he's lived in New York for 25 years, he's been divorced for seven, and he's remarried to the blond woman across from him whom he referred to as "this *shiksa*." To which she responded, "I am so not a *shiksa*, I'm just an *Ashkenazi* Jew with blond hair." It was only a matter of minutes before he was suggesting a *shidduch* and giving me advice on how to memorize Hebrew conjunctions.

After leaving the café and walking down Union Square Park, I overheard a 39-year-old woman vent to her male friend about her difficulties in getting picked up on J-Date. Her friend, a more successful J-Date client, currently juggling seven different women, ensured her that it was not her Christian beliefs that pushed them away. Rather, her Aryan features would attract Jewish men as long as she made her user name "Shiksa-who-loves-falafel." The least I could do was suggest looking for Reform converts, but they weren't *sh tark* enough for her standards.

Through each overheard conversation I became increasingly aware that my New York experience, which at one time had felt unabashedly isolated, could suddenly turn into a live network of constant connections. None of the conversations lead to a Facebook request or a Tweet, none of them turned into business deals (minus the Israeli *shidduch*) or persuasive arguments, because we weren't networking, we were connecting—with no other ulterior motive than to stop feeling alone in the most individualistic and isolating city in the world.

Believe it or not, I even managed to walk all the way home without feeling the need to fill up the "dead time" with music, because in reality the time we spend between places "unplugged" is the most "alive time" we have all day.

## Cultural Calendar: March and April

By COMMENTATOR ARTS & CULTURE

*Some Nights*, Fun.'s second studio album, was released February 21, following 2009's *Aim and Ignite*. The indie-pop New York City based band leaped to fame when Glee covered their hit single, "We are Young," featuring Janelle Monáe. The song quickly reached number one on iTunes. In the title track "Some Nights," Nate Ruess sings "I was never one to believe the hype." For this album, believe the hype—the upbeat, almost bubbly music, combated with sombre lyrics is worth a listen. [Ournameisfun.com](http://Ournameisfun.com), \$9.99. *The band went on tour March 23, and will be on the road through June 17.*



Jonathan Safran Foer's latest is a remake of an old classic. *The New American Haggadah*, published March 5, is his collaborative project with Nathan Englander and other writers such as Lemony Snicket in retelling the Passover story. The illustrations by Oded Ezer are entirely based on the text, and illuminate the words themselves. In case you missed the recent film *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, this book should bring the Passover themes louder and closer to home. [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com), \$17.86.



*Death of a Salesman* opened March 12. The Broadway show is a new production of an age old play about family, death, and the American dream. The play is directed by Mike Nichols and stars Academy Award winning Philip Seymour Hoffman. Based on Arthur Miller's script, the production attempts to stay true to the play's original 1949 set and design. And *The Village Voice* calls it "a picture—refracted, distorted, personalized—of a specific time with painful parallels to ours." *Through June 2, Ethel Barrymore Theatre, 243 West 47th Street New York, NY 10036, \$99.45.*

The famed anonymous, feminist activist group, **The Guerilla Girls**, will be performing at The Brooklyn Museum. They'll be presenting their work throughout the years in fighting discrimination against women in the art world. The Girls will also perform activities from their latest book, *The Guerrilla Girls' Art Museum Activity Book*, which they will be signing after the show. But don't expect to discover their identities; the Girls will be dressed as gorillas. *March 29, 7PM, The Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway Brooklyn, New York 11238, \$12.*

**The Second Annual Brooklyn Springtime Guitar Show** is your place to buy, sell, and trade anything guitar or guitar related, from picks to sheet music. Enjoy bowling, food, and drink. *April 1, 11AM, All ages, 21+ after 6PM, Brooklyn Bowl, 61 Wythe Avenue Brooklyn, NY 11211, Free.*

**The Magnetic Fields** have been playing their synthpop tunes since 1991, and with the release of the three part album *69 Love Songs* in 1999, the band achieved acclaim. For *69 Love Songs*, they collaborated with Daniel Handler, also known as Lemony Snicket. Now they join in concert with **DeVotchKa**, the Russian, steampunk band renowned for their production of the *Little Miss Sunshine* soundtrack. Pre-concert recommended tracks: "I Think I Need a New Heart" and "Andrew in Drag" (Magnetic Fields); "How it Ends" and "Queen of the Surface Streets" (DeVotchKa). *April 3 and April 4, 7PM, The Beacon Theatre, 2124 Broadway New York, NY 10023, \$35-40.*

You might remember **The Used** from your high school music days. The band that categorizes themselves as "Gross Pop" returns to the states for an acoustic show and signing at Vintage Vinyl in New Jersey. The emo-hardcore rock band formed over ten years ago, overcoming homelessness substance addiction to create music. They go on tour this spring to promote their fifth album, *Vulnerable*, which lead singer Bert McCrackin dedicates to "The Outcasts, The Misfits, The Misunderstood, and the ones who have always dared to be themselves." Pre-concert recommended tracks: "All That I've Got," "I Caught Fire," and "I Come Alive." *Wednesday, April 4, 7PM, Vintage Vinyl Records, 51 Lafayette Rd. Fords, NJ, 08863, \$13.99*

Be sure to also check out **Wednesday Night Slam Open Mike** where the most talented slam poets from across the city (and world) gather to ignite the stage with impassioned words. Prepare to leave inspired, if you can bear leaving at all. *April 11, 9 PM, Nuyorican Poets Cafe, 236 E 3rd St, New York, NY 10009, \$7.*

**Hit So Hard**, a documentary about the openly lesbian Patty Schemel, explores her drug addiction leading to her near suicide. Schemel was the drummer of the alternative rock band Hole in the mid 90s, during the height of grunge music. The film traces her upbringing in Seattle to her rise to fame on the cover of *Rolling Stone* and her friendship with Kurt Cobain. The film is unapologetic in its approach and holds nothing back. It's bound to hit you hard. *April 13, Cinema Village, 22 East 12th Street, New York, NY 10003, \$8.*

Curious to hear a less familiar point of view? The Nuyorican Poets Cafe presents **From Memoir to Reportage and Back Again**, where contemporary Gazan poets will immerse the audience into Gaza's history of occupation, blockade and war. Poets include Fatenah al Ghorrah, author of five poetry books including, *The Sea is Still Behind Us*; Adania Shibli, co-editor of "Narrating Gaza," an online forum; and Soumaya Al Sousi, author of four collective poetry books, most recently, *Idea, Void, White*. You've never heard it like this before. *April 25, 7 PM Nuyorican Poets Cafe, 236 E 3rd St, New York, NY 10009, \$10-\$15.*

They advertise themselves as a "legendary hotel," "Shakespeare's fallen hero" and a "film noir shadow of suspense." And if you have yet to see **Sleep No More**, it's about time you did. Or should we say experience. This interactive play is like a make-your-own-plot novel, allowing the viewer to explore an old hotel and follow their own plot line. Performances last as long as you choose. Everyone emerges with a different story. *Through April 28. Must be 16 or older to enter; McKittrick Hotel, 530 West 27th Street New York, NY 10001, \$75.*

Cindy Sherman, recognized as one contemporary art's greatest photographers, uses herself as a model in all of her work. From clowns to history portraits, Sherman disguises herself repeatedly, drawing on her drawers full of wigs, makeup, and fake noses. More than 170 photographs will be on display from Sherman's work since the 1970s. Lectures and gallery talks will be held throughout April. *Through June 11, 11 West 53 Street New York, NY 10019, \$14.*

The recently kashered **Bravo Pizza** gave J2 a run for its money. With the new "Jerusalem Cafe" shoved to 36th between 5th and 5th, Bravo, at 37th and Broadway, is emerging as Broadway's premier kosher pizza restaurant. Serving a wide assortment of beer and pizza, it's so good, it still tastes treif. Be prepared, though, because this isn't cheap pizza. *Open 10AM-11PM daily. Bravo Pizza, 1369 Broadway New York, NY 10018. Starting at \$4.25 per slice.*

**Keith Haring: 1978-1982** is now showing at The Brooklyn Museum. The exhibit includes videos, collages, subway drawings, sketchbooks, news clippings and never before seen artwork from Haring's time in New York City. And don't miss the collages he created from cutting up his own writing. Haring's graphic and often political work is simplistic, yet powerful and iconic. *Through July 8, The Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway Brooklyn, New York 11238, \$8.*



# 'Zionism Has Always Been a Surname': A Review of the 2012 AIPAC and J Street Conferences



The joint conference featured prominent political personalities.

By CHESKY KOPEL

A new spring ritual has taken form for American Jews concerned with Israel activism. The AIPAC Policy Conference, already an annual mainstay in the American Zionist establishment for 53 years, is attracting larger and larger groups of delegates to DC each year. These delegates gather from around the country to address the importance of strengthening the "U.S.-Israel relationship." AIPAC's self-proclaimed rival, J Street, has just completed its third annual conference in the nation's capital, aimed at fostering a network of supporters to advance its "Pro-Israel, Pro-Peace" agenda. This division of the Israel lobby into two separate camps proves to be a comfortable accommodation for the increasingly polarized spectrum of American Jewish views regarding both the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the potential nuclear threat from Iran.

An added dimension of this division, however, is that the conferences faithful of both organizations now assemble each year for a sort of color war. Not only does each group aim to advance its own agenda, but it takes swipes at that of the other group. Of course, this is more of a reality for J Street, which remains, in its youth, a small and ineffective opposition lobby that struggles to find its legitimacy with attacks on AIPAC. The establishment body AIPAC, however, has achieved a legendary position of power and influence in United States policy,

reflective of the general success of American Jewry, and serving as an endless quarry of fodder for anti-Zionist thinkers and conspiracy theorists. To AIPAC, J Street is beyond the pale of "pro-Israel," more critical of Israel's actions than of its enemies. To J Street, AIPAC represents an old American perception of pro-Israel, ignorant of the beliefs and sentiments of both the younger generation of American Jews and of the majority of Israelis.

The physical realities of the conferences demonstrate the organizations' power differential quite well: this year's AIPAC conference gathered 13,000 delegates, over 1,000 of whom were students, and included visits from more than half of Congress, addresses from President Obama, Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Peres, minority leaders from both houses of Congress, and leading Republican presidential candidates. The conference operation was a logistical masterpiece, with organizational finesse and visual productions that speak to the lobby group's undeniable importance.

The J Street conference, in contrast, gathered only 2,500 delegates, 650 of whom were students, with nary an American government official in sight. The conference operation was messy, reminiscent of a small-scale synagogue gathering, and with a bizarre and extensive hodgepodge of participating organizations – the New Israel Fund, Peace Now, Rabbis for Human Rights, B'Tselem, Givat Haviva, *Tikkun Magazine*, and many more – not all of whom even share similar



political stances.

It is therefore with good reason that J Street classifies itself as a "movement" and not a lobby. Its conference seemed at times to be a summit of somewhat like-minded organizations, uniting under the banner of a group that has its own particular party-line and a lobby group to advance it.

A much more important distinction between the conferences was the demographics of the presenters at each. An elementary understanding of each organization's purpose is more than enough to account for this distinction. AIPAC, whose essential goal is to be a Washington advocate for the positions of the elected Israeli government, featured mainly American politicians among its speakers, as if to tell the delegates and the world: just look – the American government already overwhelmingly supports the decisions of the Israeli government!

J Street, whose essential goal is to be a Washington advocate for the positions of the American Jewish population as regards Israel, featured mainly Israeli speakers at its conference, as if to tell its delegates and the world: Israelis themselves want *us*, the American Jews, to use the unique power of citizen lobbying in order to urge Washington to pressure Israel toward a two-state peace agreement with the Palestinians! (I shared this observation and analysis with the national president of J Street's college campus body, and he confirmed it.)

This difference in perspective has wide-reaching effects on the image of Israel that emerges at the respective conferences. For delegates of AIPAC, Israel is a hazy, amorphous idea, a distant reality that supports Jewish values, democratic government, and the rule of law, which shares interests with the United States and has legitimate and far-reaching security concerns. Thousands of Zionists attending the conference learn to see Israel through the lens of American leaders – a "strategic ally," a place of

some ideological and emotional value, a sheet of foreign financial aid figures, and a basis for promises of military action.

Delegates of J Street, however, learned to see Israel as a living and breathing reality, a Jewish reality, with troubling complexities and too many flaws for comfort. They heard from intellectuals and authors like Amos Oz, social protest leaders like Stav Shaffir, women's rights advocates like Anat Hoffman, and left-wing Israeli politicians like Ehud Olmert, Amram Mitzna, and Avishay Braverman. They were presented with a uniquely Jewish imperative for peace, ranging from Oz's secular, pluralistic Judaism to Hoffman's "Women of the Wall" religious-feminist movement to Rabbi Donniel Hartman's Orthodox presentation of "aspirational Judaism" and its relationship with "aspirational Zionism." They were told that, sure, Israel has great security concerns, but that the threats posed by its current policies to its Jewish values are of greater consequence and greater urgency. Ultimately, it was added, these threats will compromise Israel's security even more drastically.

In these different perspectives lays the flaw of each lobby group's repertoire, a deep transgression of omission. AIPAC presents what Israel is on paper, and what the concept of Israel looked like in 1948 (with, of course, a great deal of accolades for the small nation's startup miracles and high-tech achievements), but says nothing of the real status of Arabs in Israeli society, of the women who are made to ride in the back of buses in Haredi communities, of the socioeconomic gaps in Israel now being the second-largest in the western world (perhaps because the United States has the largest), of the recent slew of anti-democratic legislation in the Knesset (aimed at weakening NGOs and human rights groups' ability to operate within the country), of Prime Minister Netanyahu's concerted attempts this week to assert his administra-

tion's control over the future of the Channel 2 news network, and of the threat to Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state posed by the basic reality of millions of disenfranchised Palestinians living under Israeli military authority.

J Street presents what is supposedly a liberal Zionist ideal, and a genuine effort to save the soul of Israel. Its narrative seems, however, to include no room to blame anyone but the Likud-led coalition for Israel's misfortune. No recognition of rocket fire from Gaza on Israeli civilians. No examination of the factors that led the last serious round of peace talks to devolve into a murderous Palestinian intifada. Little acknowledgment of the role of today's Palestinian Authority intransigence in stalling the negotiation process. (Robert Danin, former head of Quartet Envoy Tony Blair's mission in Jerusalem, and current senior fellow in the Council on Foreign Relations, shared at the AIPAC Policy Conference that, in his personal experience, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has no coherent peace negotiation policy at all, but just employs tactics variously to ensure that at the end of each day, he remains in power, and Israel remains demonized). Little acknowledgment of Prime Minister Netanyahu's great success of bringing home captured soldier Gilad Shalit, whose plight had for five years been at the forefront of the Israeli collective mindset, and whose safe return was undoubtedly among the most momentous occasions in modern Israeli history.

Some of these realities did emerge at the conference's breakout sessions. The various guest speakers – intellectuals, journalists, and generals – conducted informational lessons that at times acknowledged the history of Palestinian terror, PA intransigence, and the role of Netanyahu in the Gilad Shalit deal. But the plenaries, with the great big statements of J Street policy, were some-

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## Judaism.StackExchange.com and Embracing Online Torah Communities

BY ALEX PORCELAIN

The events that take place on February 29<sup>th</sup> of any given year are more difficult to wipe from one's memory than the happenings of some other ordinary day. But it was more than a remarkable calendar date that made February 29<sup>th</sup>'s lunchtime meeting showcasing Judaism.StackExchange.com as memorable and enlightening as it turned out. A delicious lunch from Golan Heights never hurts either. Co-sponsored by SOY, the illustrious YU Computer Science Club and StackExchange.com, the event was organized to raise awareness about the idea-sharing website and pique YU students' interest in getting involved with the site.

Judaism.StackExchange is a sub-site of the larger StackExchange.com, a website and network dedicated to bringing experts, hobbyists and the curious web-surfers together in open dialogue on a variety of topics. Each subject area has its own separate site where it hosts a community of users who come together to pose questions, share innovative solutions and ponder contemporary issues relating to their topic. StackExchange currently has well over half a million users on its eighty five "Q&A" sites with topics ranging from poker to Japanese language and culture to Android enthusiasts. Think of StackExchange as the place where the vast and expert information of Wikipedia meets Facebook's regular human interaction. Like in Wikipedia, StackExchange allows anyone to contribute content, but they also have a feature which encourages users to vote on the questions and answers posted, allowing people identify the top users and most popular content. The voting system also encourages people to give accurate and interesting answers, since it gives them points. That's right; users get points when other people vote on the content they contribute. While this kind of point system seems to echo the *mitzvah* notes we used to get in kindergarten, it certainly encourages users

to contribute accurate information while motivating them to build credentials within the community.

The Judaism.StackExchange sub-site targets itself to "those who base their lives on Jewish law and tradition and anyone interested in learning more" and features questions on topics of *hashkafa*, *halacha*, Jewish history, *lamdus*, *parsha*, and *divrei Torah* galore. A cursory glance at some of the questions asked and the ensuing dialogue hints at just how rich and useful the content of such a website can prove to be. Look around for long enough and you'll gain a sense of how powerful this kind of tool can be for a committed Jew living in the digital age, and how important it is to embrace the depth and breadth it can offer to both our learning and practice. On Judaism.StackExchange, educated *baal habatim*, *yeshiva bachurim*, aspiring *ba'alei teshuva* and even *rabbanim* come together in serious Torah discussions that model the rigorous thoughts and multi-level interactions that accompany what we are familiar with doing in the *bet midrash*. Some threads end up as a *shakla v'tarya*, while others more closely emulate *shaaylot uteshuvot*. A few will make you laugh or sigh in despair. Sure, you can find most of this content scattered throughout the internet on largely outdated blogs, abandoned listserv forums or d'var Torah websites, but there are few other conduits for the kind of virtual bet midrash Judaism.StackExchange offers to its users.

We all hear and have hopefully understood the warnings of how a *ben torah* must act when it comes to the internet. And as enabled YU *talmidim* and students, I'd venture to guess we have largely learned how to avoid the major pitfalls of the internet and how to embrace the *harbatzas torah* technology has to offer. As such, we have listened to countless YUTorah *shiurim* and integrated that rarely used Tehillim App to our handheld devices. We can look up the *z'manim* in a moment's notice, and can put together *mareh mekomos* for an entire shiur in under an hour. Despite all this, I'm

BY MARTIN ROSENBAUM

Have you ever been to the gym, lifting weights, when suddenly, no more music! Suddenly the cable connection to your music player had either fallen out of your ear or been yanked out by one of your strokes. Do you not just dream of having the freedom of movement even when listening to music? Let's leave the gym exercise setting and talk about wearing an audio headset in the rain without worrying about damaging them. Sounds like a challenging set of practical problems that we live with but would really like to see resolved, especially with just one product. The good news is that with the debut of the Philips Bluetooth Headset SBH6000, Philips has done just that.

The Bluetooth Headset SBH6000 headset fits comfortably and steadily into your ears. It comes with different-sized ear buds for different-sized ear canals. It charges through the commonly used micro-USB. Charging time is roughly 60 minutes and provides you with enough power for at least a couple of hours.

The Bluetooth Headset SBH6000 sound quality is outstanding. The ear contour used to keep them stable was created specifically with athletes in mind. This does not exclude other users, but it makes this headset a hard-to-beat choice for a runner and an ideal choice

for any other customer. The photo might make them look a little awkward, but once on, they are barely noticeable.

Business men have products specifically engineered and manufactured to fit their specific needs (e.g. BlackBerry). The same type of products exist for athletic people. This headset falls into that category. Pairing up the device with your Bluetooth-enabled phone and/or music player was very easy. They are made out of durable material which allows you to sweat and not worry about damaging any of the electronic components. This headset combines the pleasure you would expect from a high-end non-wireless headset with the ability to move freely.

As more and more people switch to smart phones as the platform of choice for personal and recreational activities, the number of people ditching the ordinary MP3 player is increasing. This headset finds itself perfectly positioned to benefit from this consumer electronic trend to maximize the functionality of their smart phones, including listening to music and audio books. The Bluetooth link enables users to securely use the Smartphone while exercising (as would have been done with ordinary music player). The headset is ergonomically well laid out with

## Bluetooth Head Set: The Key to Enjoying Flexibility



function buttons such as answer/drop call, play/stop, skip forward/backward and volume up/down. They are well situated and easy to use.

The Bluetooth Headset SBH6000's wind- and noise-cancelling functions are also well designed and very effective in that operation. The ambient-noise-cancellation made telephoning, even when running, much less of a challenge with no background wind noise audible to the person on the other end of the line. This headset quickly becomes your ultimate running companion.

The Philips headset costs \$50 (Amazon). At first glance that sounds like a lot of money for such a basic product. Frankly, this is not a basic product. This is a high quality headset for people on the go as well as sports-intensive people. If you compare its price to non-wireless headsets of similar sound quality, believe it or not, the prices come pretty close. This headset enables you to enjoy and get a quality boost for mobile music and smart phone telephony.

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8	2	93	<b>Lifnei 'Iver and your maybe-Jewish co-worker</b>
votes	answers	views	<a href="#">halacha</a> <a href="#">safek</a> <a href="#">lifnei-iver</a> <a href="#">bein-adam-lachavero</a> 1h ago Community ♦ 1
3	1	19	<b>Is it better to have one minyan of 40 people or 4 minyonim of ten each?</b>

Judaism.stackexchange.com hosts forums on a variety of Jewish topics.

not sure if we have fully embraced the interconnectivity and interaction the internet can provide the Torah observant community. And I'm not talking about Lakewood *hock* travelling at light speed via VoslzNeias.com or TheYeshivaWorld.com. Orthodox Jews have mastered that kind of information exchange on the internet. We have not, however, embraced the use of internet to help Jews from all walks of life connect in sharing Torah ideas, quickly get

answers to important questions and benefit from the multitude of perspectives others have to offer on any given conundrum. You can find published *divrei Torah* online, but little Torah related content that is more casual. If the world has become so heavily reliant on social media type platforms for the exchange of mundane information, and we are all using the internet anyway (even if just "for email" or "only for school"), isn't it time we begin participating

in healthy online communities of Torah? We have so much to gain from using websites like Judaism.StackExchange.com. I'm not suggesting we stop asking *rebbeim* our questions or avoid classical *bet midrash* learning. But I think we have a lot to gain from the question and answer style Torah learning that Judaism.StackExchange.com offers, and probably have much to give back to the community.

# The Ultimate Solution to a Common Point of Stress

By MARTIN ROSENBAUM

Are you tired of running out of battery when you most need it? Has it dawned on you that there needs to be a better way of keeping your accessories charged than dragging along all your different chargers wherever you go? I assume we are in agreement that making sure before going on a trip that your full array of chargers is on board is nerve-racking. Avoiding it would significantly simplify our private and business travel. Let me further raise the ante by asking if you would like to do away with having to search for a power outlet wherever you may be – particularly in airport departure lounges?

Hells yes! Believe it or not, I think that I may have found a solution that resolves all these issues.

Its code name is Powerstick. Do not get scared, it is nothing other than a simple USB storage

drive with an unexpected perk to it. In addition to allowing you to store your documents like on any ordinary USB drive, it contains a re-chargeable power source which draws its electrical power from any computer's USB socket and then the charged Powerstick can be used to charge other devices. The Powerstick's energy level is easy to read thanks to its power gauge. It holds the charge for over two weeks and has the capability to provide a sufficient amount of power to keep devices such as a BlackBerry, an iPhone, and many other devices running for enough time to finish what you were in the middle of doing. (A single Powerstick session was able to half charge the battery of a BlackBerry).

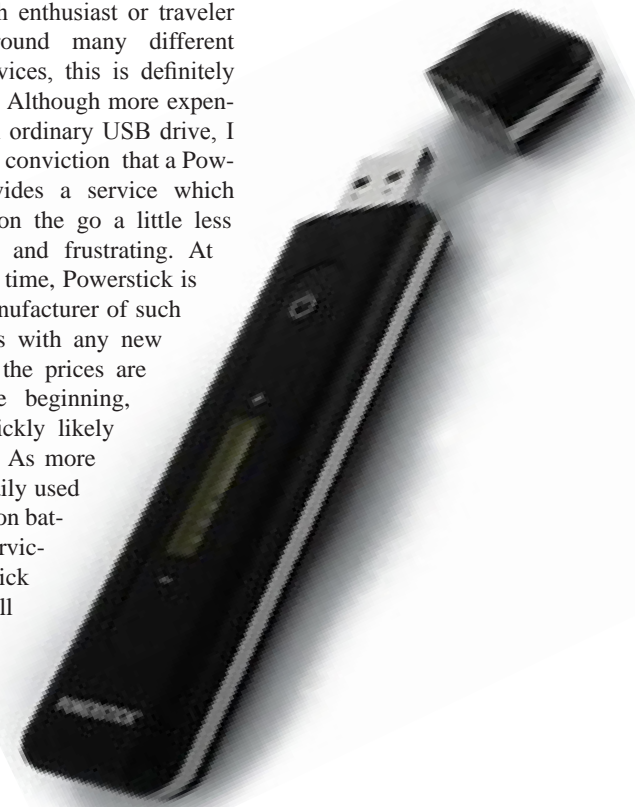
Light, small, and easy to use, the USB Powerstick provides a great deal of service by combining two simple functionalities that we use on a daily basis. It is probably slightly larger than any other memory stick

you're carrying around in your pocket, perhaps making it easier to find in a messy briefcase.

With the increasing difficulty of finding electric outlets wherever you may need it coupled with the wide range of different devices used on a daily basis, the Powerstick finds itself in a unique position suddenly becoming invaluable. Although the Powerstick comes with connectors to the most common accessory devices, you should check that every one of your "little companions" is covered in the Powerstick connector kit. Aside from backing up your data, it backs up your ability to work, talk and enjoy. For many of us, this recharge backup capability is intuitively invaluable.

Powerstick drives are available with 2, 4, or 8 GB of memory and can be purchased at [www.powerstick.com](http://www.powerstick.com). Whether you purchase it is entirely dependent on how much you value the services it provides.

For any tech enthusiast or traveler carrying around many different types of devices, this is definitely the solution. Although more expensive than an ordinary USB drive, I can say with conviction that a Powerstick provides a service which makes life on the go a little less complicated and frustrating. At this point in time, Powerstick is the only manufacturer of such products. As with any new technology, the prices are high in the beginning, but will quickly likely fall. As more and more daily used devices run on batteries, the services a Powerstick provides will become more indispensable.



## Zionism

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thing else entirely. The throngs of delegates were told only how crucial a two-state solution is for Israeli security and values (which it is), how much of an obstacle the settlements pose to such a solution (which some certainly do), and how terribly the Likud administration has abused the democratic system in Israel (which, arguably, it has). But there was no room for nuance concerning these subjects, and no room for right-of-center Israeli voices – another legitimate segment of the Jewish reality in Israel.

J Street also prides itself on the political-historical narrative offered by American Jewish voices such as J Street president Jeremy Ben-Ami, provocative journalist and author Peter Beinart, and historian, author, and *oleh* Gershom Gorenberg (the latter two are Orthodox). All three of these men have recently written books arguing against Israeli settlement policy and advocating for a new form of pro-Israel mentality based on the liberal Zionist aspirations of the younger generation of American Jews. Beinart in particular aroused a firestorm recently when he published an op-ed in *The New York Times*, in anticipation of the release of his book, which enjoined American Jews to boycott the West Bank settlements in order to save Israel (somehow assuming that afflicting the livelihood of private settlers, whom he maintains are not necessarily themselves guilty, will influence Israeli policy). It is worthwhile to note that references to this position at the J Street Conference received mixed responses from the delegates.

J Street's claim is that the posi-

tions of these three innovators represent the authentic voice of American Jewry, and its young generation in particular. In response, Bret Stephens wrote three weeks ago in *The Wall Street Journal*, "...one wonders why organizations more in tune with those 'real' views rarely seem to find much of a base." Stephens' claim is hardly compelling when considered in light of J Street's short history and its attempt to compete with an old, entrenched establishment like AIPAC. Only several years down the line, in light of the success or failure of J Street to expand and thrive at that point, can Stephens' contention be realistically assessed.

At AIPAC's conference, there was only the threat from Iran, and little time or interest to address any other Israeli concerns. Hardly a word was said about the status of the Palestinians or the historic social developments that transpired in Israel since last year's conference. Where survival in the face of an enormous enemy is concerned, all other causes are allowed to fall by the wayside. For this reason, Bibi, who has concerned himself so diligently and loudly with stopping Iran, received a welcome from the AIPAC 13,000 far warmer than he would ever receive anywhere in his own country, where the people's conscience grasps far more than one singular Israeli issue.

At J Street's conference, however, Iran was considered mostly a diversion created by the Likud machine to avoid action on Israel's real pressing problems—peace with its neighbors, Palestinian autonomy, and social reform. Sure, Iran is a real and serious threat, the J Street speakers said, but it is a threat shared by the whole world. Israel has its own

problems to deal with first. Also, they added, survival is worth very little when it comes at the expense of national values.

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On the opening night of the J Street Conference, Amos Oz delivered a stunning plea for two-state peace. In doing so, he acknowledged differences of opinion concerning Israel's future. "Zionism has always been a surname," he said, "not a first name. No one person was ever allowed to claim Zionism for himself." This point was well taken, and the vast divide between the different Zionist camps in Israel and America perhaps illustrates it quite well. (Indeed, Oz later went on to conclude, "J Street, where have you been all my adult life? I needed you!" For him, the arrival of this new lobby group not only formed an American Jewish base for his ideology, but it also complemented the Zionist spectrum, enabling it to represent more points of view.)

Still, the color war presentations of AIPAC's and J Street's conferences reflect this attitude quite poorly. It is true that the two organizations help complete the spectrum of politics within American Jewish activism for Israel. And it is entirely legitimate for any one Israel group to pursue only its agenda and leave other aspects of Israel aside. Nonetheless, the insistence of each group on considering only the support for its own agenda in a vacuum, ignoring any and all contravening evidence, leaves behind a sense of lifeless, unproductive dialogue – not entirely unlike the twenty-first century incarnation of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

## Vacation

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days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which led to the concern that many students would not return in the interim.

There is one caveat, however. In order to maintain accreditation, Yeshiva University must hold classes 15 times a semester for each day of the week, excluding orientation. In order not to impede on winter vacation, the university will be holding classes on Sunday, September 23, thereby keeping to the 15-Sunday minimum. Though the calendar is subject to change, this is currently the only day of classes between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Fearing a shoddy turnout, the school will be hosting special programming during the week of Aseret Yemei Teshuva to encourage attendance.

In addition, Orientation will be starting a week earlier than last year and will extend from Wednesday, August 22 through Sunday, August 26. Dean Sugarman commented that starting Orientation on a weekday affords the opportunity for a more genuine orientation, noting that in previous years, when orientation began on Sunday, a "check in, pack out" move was commonplace. The "Orientation Shabbat" is an experi-

ment the school will employ this coming semester in an effort to ease the transition into campus living for first-time-on-campus students while allowing them to bond with fellow members of their incoming class.

Response to this plan has been overwhelmingly positive, according to members of the Academic Calendar Committee. While faculty approval was necessary to bring the idea into fruition, the new schedule has garnered widespread support from the student body as well. Sam Cohen (YC '13) suggested that the vacation allows students to "catch up and maybe even get ahead" in more demanding courses. Cohen added that the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur gives students sufficient flexibility to complete assignments in a timely manner while simultaneously enabling them to celebrate the holidays properly.

David Goldrich (YC '15) was pleased with the revisions, but hopes the committee will consider tweaking the university's relatively short January vacation in the near future. "Ideally, I would take the bare minimum for travel days and *chagim* and use those extra days to extend winter break. This is an improvement, but not necessarily the improvement I would choose."



The extra-long vacation will provide much-needed extra time to do this.

# Mourning My Mornings

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times. (And yes, each Shiur Assistant can access every MYP student's attendance record.) Poor attendance, however, is the symptom, not the problem.

The problem: Does YU hold its *shiurim* to any standards of educational or organizational rigor? Does YU monitor its *shiurim*, or in any way seek to determine whether a *shiur* is accomplishing what it's supposed to? Does YU have any idea whether MYP and SBMP students are **enjoying** *shiur*? It seems that once a *shiur* exists, anything goes—its *rosh yeshiva* is free to do as he pleases. (Whether it is fair to award Yeshiva College credit for such an experience is beyond the scope of this editorial.)

*Shiur is just...different*, many will say with ardor and uncertainty. Something to do with learning from who your *rebbe* is, how he conducts himself, and not just from what he teaches. I hope that every student who truly feels he is getting such a multi-tiered education from his *rosh yeshiva* while internalizing his Torah continues to feel that way. Frequently, though, students are lost in the emergent confusion. Students get turned off while *shiur* goes on and on.

In a similar vein, the sort of *shiur* or Torah-study experience students seek often evolves over the course their time at YU. What tantalized the bright-eyed freshman often grows, to the acclimated upperclassman, stale.

Between our undergraduate schools, the Student Academic Affairs Committee, and the Honors Program, we often complete as many as three evaluations for each of our undergraduate courses; why do we fill out zero for our *shiurim*? Torah *lishmah*, the unimpeachable excellence of a YU *rosh yeshiva*, any Torah is good Torah—these are the lame answers proffered to conceal our community's cowardice. We must critically assess our Talmud Torah. Only then can we determine what, precisely, breeds student disinterest, and then work to remedy the situation.

We would not take seriously a course without a syllabus, a course with no projected direction, a course that failed to outline what would be studied and taught on each and every day of class. Yet when Yeshiva College Jewish Studies major Tuvia Tendler ('13) sent a thoughtful email to multiple *roshei yeshiva*, requesting guidance in his search for "a *shiur* with rigorous pedagogic organization and structure...a *shiur* that would be able to produce beforehand a schedule of planned lectures with descriptive titles and associated sources," just one *rosh yeshiva* responded: negative. No MYP *shiur* fits the bill, the *rosh yeshiva* felt.

I need not rearticulate many of the problems plaguing MYP *shi-*

*urim*; my editorial predecessors have evaluated the issue comprehensively (see Tani Cohn's 2008 Opinions piece, "A Critical Look at MYP," and Simeon Botwinick's 2011 editorial, "Whom Are We Calling *Rosh Yeshiva*?"). Students are frustrated by the minimal diversity of *darkhei limmud* (Torah-study methodologies); certain *roshei yeshiva*'s largely inaccessible modes of communication and organization; and the near-inability to decide between various *shiurim* (due to unapparent differences) unless you've attended a yeshiva that labels but one or two of them acceptable.

In the world of YU *shiurim*, you're in the know or you're hopelessly lost. Many students in each of these categories experience deep dissatisfaction. Such students demonstrate three typical modes of response.

The first is sticking it out. Obviously, many frustrated students continue to attend *shiur*, paying attention or otherwise. They'll graduate knowing they were less bummy than many of their peers, fulfilling their technical responsibilities to just show up. In many cases, that's enough to win the Talmud Award.

The second is not going. The right *shiur* and the right *chavrusa* will go a long way in rendering your attendance irrelevant to your grade. (Again, you must be in the know.) It rhymes, but the time-honored mantra sticks because of how scarily literal it can be: "MYP, sleep till 3."

The third is IBC.

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That was oddly dramatic. In the context of Talmud Torah, it seems that merely mentioning the *seder*-less morning program necessarily flirts with indolence and blasphemy.

Seriously, though, YU's Isaac Breuer College (IBC) boasts many first-rate Jewish educators, thinkers, and leaders, and many of its students are voracious Jewish learners who work diligently and daily to maximize their IBC experiences. This is incontrovertible.

But it's also true that switching to IBC from MYP or SBMP is, by and large, viewed by students, *roshei yeshiva*, and administrators as throwing in the towel, relinquishing hope for serious Talmud Torah in college. I have never taken an IBC class, but I believe it is common knowledge that, every semester, many students switch in to IBC because they need a break. And it's strikingly bizarre that students can elect to take three or four classes in Talmud, Bible, Jewish History and Jewish Philosophy *because they need a break*.

IBC should offer courses in the aforementioned crucial areas of Jewish studies that challenge, stimulate, and enlighten any Jewish day school graduate. Unfortunately, many students seeking advanced studies in any of these areas find themselves forced to endure a MYP *shiur* they don't enjoy because they cannot find IBC courses that will both interest

and educate them.

IBC should represent a central component of YU's institutional soul. For instance, with Yeshiva College currently offering a total of two Jewish Philosophy courses, one would think that IBC could provide a valuable outlet for students craving this crucial, under-explored subject. But widespread perception of the IBC student as an unserious YC-Bible-credit glutton makes the prospective switch a decision that could destroy a *masmid*'s hard-earned reputation.

Last year, an administrative initiative paired Semikha students with IBC students, hoping that the former's religious zeal would recover the latter's dormant potential to live a substantive Torah life. Some IBC participants report extreme condescension on behalf of their assigned Semikha mentors, describing the experience as uncomfortable and infantilizing. IBC students are apparently presumed appropriate projects for religious mentors, an unsettling assumption that calls into question the very goals of IBC.

How is the YU school that offers the most undergraduate courses in Judaic studies not the pride and joy of the university? Why should YU's most serious learners not want to be part of what could be an incredible program? Why are MYP students not permitted to take one or two IBC courses every semester (an issue raised at Wilf Campus' last Town Hall Meeting)? Students should be allowed to enroll in such important courses regardless of their selected morning programs, especially considering how many students are turned off by the hours and hours spent in MYP or SBMP *seder*.

YU, by and large, does not appropriate its proudest resources to the IBC faculty. Maybe one or two IBC courses each year will boast a big-name YU professor or rabbi but, in general, the message propounded is that the only way to be a *frum*, Torah-learning Jew worthy of top *rebbeim* and educators is to learn *gemara* for as many hours a day as you can possibly handle.

YU students should be able to take advantage of opportunities for many different types of Torah learning, always at the most advanced level they can appreciate. Many of them are instead locked in to programs belying their interests, their drive, and their potential—the worst part being, perhaps,

that they have no better option.

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For so many MYP students, MYP is simply not the answer. There are two crucial ways to fix it. One is to fix it, itself: new, dynamic, relatable *roshei yeshiva*, adhering to standardized expectations for pedagogy, could attract and energize many disenchanted *talmidim*. Careful record-keeping, alongside responsible recognition of, and respect for, the challenges facing the YU student, will invigorate student faith in the MYP administration. Haphazard threats of probation, and patronizing, dogmatic academic directives—cue quadruplet underlines—are out of the question.

Most of these are enormous changes. These might be overhauling changes. And they frame an important mentality that should guide and expedite YU's development. Within an institution struggling perpetually to define its place in the Jewish and broader communities, these steps must be taken if YU expects to attract the wide spectrum of potential members and supporters it needs to keep us alive.

The other way to fix MYP is to fix IBC. Present stereotypes are shameful, and a stronger IBC program is the right answer for many

MYP students who keep switching *shiurim* but never find one they like, or whose negative experiences have kept them apathetically registered for the same *shiur* from which they're gaining closer and closer to nothing.

No morning program should be a joke. A program of Torah study offered less than rigorously or in a manner inappropriate for its students will grow quickly irrelevant—to its students and, consequently, to the world.

President Joel regularly notes that YU would not be the singular institution that it is without a top-tier, traditional *beit midrash* at its heart. I'm going to qualify the point. YU cannot be the special place it's supposed to be if at its heart it doesn't have *batei midrash*: filled with students pursuing Talmud Torah in ways that are meaningful and motivating to them. And YU itself should illuminate the diverse multiplicity of modes and topics of Talmud Torah, so that students may *find* their Judaic passions—here—and enthusiastically pursue them.

Maybe then we'll be able to take MYP's threats seriously.

Or maybe, then, we won't need to be threatened.



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## A Poor Excuse to Miss Night Seder

*YU Does Drama? How One Bochur Woke Up and Smelled the Talent*

BY AKIVA BERGER

Talent. For me, this loaded noun has evolved over time. When I was in yeshiva, I thought that the word referred only to those individuals who could properly *taitch* up a Rashba. Yeah, you could be the sweetest guy in the world, but if you weren't able to explain a *stira* in the Rambam you just weren't "talented." When I got to YU, the scope of the word expanded just a bit, just enough to include those pre-med guys who consistently nailed every chem problem and breezed through the grueling orgo tests. I meandered my way through two years at YU never realizing that I had severely boxed in the word "talent," confining it to the 4 *amot* of the *beit midrash* and the dim lectures halls of Belfer.

This all changed last semester. When my friend dragged me to the YCDS play "1776," I figured this was just going to be another poor excuse for me to miss *night seder*. Little did I know that it would change my whole outlook on my YU experience, and perhaps even on life in general. As I watched the faces

I see around every day seamlessly morph into entirely new characters on stage, when I was emotionally swooped up by the sensational tale surrounding America's founding document, I knew I had undergone my own personal awakening. I finally realized that there is a whole world of "talent" out there, one that lays, both literally and figuratively, just a small walk from the Glueck building. One of the main characters in the play even sat right near me at *shacharit* every morning, but of course I never knew. This semester, I made sure to buy tickets to the play for opening night, and again saw a spectacular production which had me chuckling virtually the entire time. I only wished someone would have opened my eyes two years earlier...

I guess I have YCDS to thank for this discovery, but the lesson goes far beyond the Schottenstein Theater. We go about our daily lives here at YU, interacting with pretty much the same people we always do, walking by the same multitudes of nameless faces we always have. While this may be a problem, it is not easily solvable in the short term, as people naturally gravitate to those

who are most like them. However, the larger issue at hand is the implicit judging and critique taking place between different segments of the YU student body. The stereotypes are entrenched, the battle lines drawn, and nary a day goes by that doesn't include at least one offhand comment or wary glance. As was the case with me, students are so often unable to celebrate aptitude and achievement outside their own chosen pursuits and interests. Whether it is athletics, drama, music, fine arts, writing, comedy, or something else, the areas in which people can excel and genuinely stand out truly do span almost all facets of life. Even if we ourselves do not have the same level of passion for these so-called "extracurricular" activities, it is imperative that they be celebrated and deemed just as valuable as any other accomplishment. Not everyone will *shteig* away, and not everyone will attain academic excellence. It is our job to help people find the proper outlets in which to express their talents, not only granting them self-fulfillment but maybe even enriching our own lives as well.

## Terrifying Applause

*continued from front page...*

possible abductions. It would mean hundreds of civilian or unintended casualties on both sides.

It would mean a country forced to fight on multiple fronts and a country that would be forced to grieve.

Is this not reason enough to save what appears to be an insatiable appetite for war until after all diplomatic means are exhausted? The hawkishness with which politicians approach Iran and the eagerness with which American Jewish crowds swallowed up their words is distressing. War should never be given a round of applause.

No one would be cheering if all other options were exhausted and Israel were forced to attack Iran's nuclear reactors. We would be keeping our televisions on over Shabbat and gathering in Synagogues in prayer. How so many people could continue to unabashedly applaud a military option with so many potentially horrific outcomes baffles my



Israeli friends and should baffle all of us as well.

As I sift through the online pictures of my friends' graduation ceremonies, I can't help but sense a pit in my stomach. I think about Kyle, my old chavruta (study partner), manning the Israel-Lebanon fence, as he inevitably will in the next

three years with the paratroopers. I re-watch the videos of Grad rockets falling into Ashkelon and Beer-Shevah. No country is ever ready for a war, especially not a country as small and as interconnected as Israel. We should pray for peace, not cheer for war.

## Letters & Responses

*continued from page 3...*

Dear Editor,

As the father of a Yeshiva University graduate and a frequent student at the Kollel Yom Rishon, please permit me to enter the conversation surrounding your cover story on Limmud NY 2012 in your March 21st edition. I, too, was there at that conference. And I'm sorry to say that your writer missed the controversy over the opening keynote in which Limmud's president went public with her story of how an observant daughter of an observant rabbi made her break with Orthodoxy. Ruminating on her first Limmud sessions years back, she was electrified by a Shabbat prayer service with guitars and drums. That was it. Now, in a veritable 'come to Jesus moment' an hour before candlelighting she proclaimed to the assembly of 600, "I no longer call myself Orthodox! I am Post-Denominational!"

One young person near me asked those around her, "Is she telling us not to be religious?" Hmm. I wondered if Yeshiva University should be funding students who come here if they're publicly encouraged to eat forbidden fruit. Would the non-Orthodox in the room have tolerated her had she said, instead, "I no longer call myself Reform?"

The larger question was and still is: Is Limmud's mission to convert us to Post Denominationalism? Is this the new cool? But what does it mean? If I skip those prayer services that breach what for generations my ancestors held sacred, must I wear a scarlet A for Anti-Post-Denominationalist and repent?

The president said she was sorry when I raised these issues with her two days later in a private chat, but her apology to me was besides the point. If I had hoped or expected that her closing night remarks would have led to a lively and meaningful discussion with everyone who heard her earlier, I was disappointed. She could have fostered a 'Limmud moment' of real encounter. But she declined, and I, for one, might have let it rest in peace but for your paper's piece and this vow now: I shall not return 'til Limmud tells us what it's up to.

Shlomo Gewirtz  
New York, NY

To the Editor:

I am a graduate from YC and hold the institution in high esteem. I had always looked upon YC as the light in a dark world with non-Orthodox streams on one side and the chareidi stream on the other. The Alumni Office is proving me wrong.

The issue: The YU Alumni Facebook account is posting pictures of toddlers with the names of the chil-

dren and their parents, accessible to anybody with a Facebook account. Unfortunately, Alumni Office recalcitrance is fomenting an issue that has a simple resolution. Cease printing the family names.

On March 4 of this year, I sent a polite email to the Alumni Office stating that its Toddler Tuesday Campaign puts Jewish children at risk when they post submitted pictures with the full names of the parents. I further mentioned that child advocacy groups warn against this practice, as does the NYC Dept. of Education and youth organizations, like the Scouts.

Barbara Birch, Senior Director of Alumni Affairs and Annual Giving, and Ilana Feiglin, Director of Alumni Affairs, responded that they do take safety seriously. However, Alumni Office policy has not changed and the YU Alumni Facebook continues to post full family names of the parents with the toddler pictures.

When I posted this warning to the Alumni Facebook page, my postings were censored and a complaint was filed with Facebook, thereby disabling my Facebook account. The question now becomes: Has Yeshiva University joined the Jewish religious right, where censorship is the norm?

A senior director one of Yeshiva's departments did contact me. His first words were whether I was abused and if I wished to speak to someone. How crude and unprofessional for someone representing the yeshiva. He then rationalized that parents gave their permission, so it's OK to post their children's pictures and family names of the parents even if it is accessible to all. He further stated that he believes that family names are no longer used. Not so; they are. He also told me that I was being censored because I posted under a pseudonym. Of course, I did so only after YU Alumni censored my posts and had my Facebook account disabled. Most shockingly was his reasoning that other universities have a similar program. So instead of being a leader, YU is to be a follower. I also wonder if the other universities engage in censorship & in having Facebook accounts disabled.

The issue remains. Are the parents aware that their children's pictures & ID's are accessible with a simple 'Google search'? Has the Alumni Office considered the possible liability on the part of YU? The Alumni Office Toddler Tuesday puts the Yeshiva at risk. Yet the Alumni Office stubbornly continues identifying the toddlers with a last name.

And all I am asking is that the Alumni Facebook cease printing the family names of the children and their parents.

Aaron Kinsberg  
YC '69

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