

# The COMMENTATOR

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## Back in Black: Seforim Sale Yields Profit

By Avi Strauss

After years of financial instability and notorious mismanagement, the Yeshiva University Seforim Sale, America's largest sale of Jewish texts, has made a remarkable turnaround. This year's event yielded substantial profits, hopefully an indicator of better times ahead for YU and its financial solvency.

While the numbers have not been finalized yet, according to the Sale's staff, this year's estimated profits are in the \$46,000 range, but may be even higher once finalized. This stands in stark contrast to last year's \$57,000 dollar loss, and is even more significant when taking into account this year's \$104,000 decrease in revenue, down to \$732,000.

After years of deficits, the YU administration and the Seforim Sale staff took several measures to adjust the Sale's financial management and business structure. The Seforim Sale has traditionally been a strictly student-run endeavor and much of the Sale's financial woes have been attributed to student ineptitude, due to poor organization and a lack of business experience. Those past failings made considerable teamwork with Yeshiva's faculty necessary to ensure the Sale's financial stability for this year and years to come.

Spearheading this effort were student members of the Seforim Sale's management, specifically CFO Nathaniel Kukurudz (YC '16), as well as members of YU's administration and faculty, most notably Syms Professor Leonard Fuld, who served as the Chairman of the Board of Directors this past year.

The first step was to improve the student management's education. A special class was established to "study small, entrepreneurial businesses with the goal of providing advice and recommendations on how to improve overall operations, marketing, accounting and management," said Fuld, the class's creator

and instructor. Students selected to take the class were encouraged to actively participate in the Sale, although it was not mandatory. In addition to enhancing the student's technical knowledge and workplace skills, expert lecturers were brought in to address specific issues related to the running of an operation like the Seforim Sale. One of the goals of the class was meant to address the inexperience of the Sale's management.

Although enthusiastic about the



sale and sincere in their attempts to generate its success, the student management generally lacked the business knowledge necessary for running the Sale. Typically, student managers of the Sale had minimal prior experience in the field of business, mostly limited to internships. Even Kukurudz, an Economics major, whose prior experiences included serving as Advertising and Managing Editor of his high school newspaper, as well as serving as the accounting intern at last year's sale, acknowledged that his previous experiences were "starkly different" from actually managing business and financial affairs of the Seforim Sale.

Professor Fuld, who holds both a CPA and an MBA, has 33 combined years in the tax divisions of PricewaterhouseCoopers, Schlumberger Ltd and Citigroup and served as VP of Tax for NYSE international conglomerate Griffon Corporation for most of the past four years. In addition to creating and teaching the class, Professor Fuld played an integral role in the oversight of the Seforim Sale's management and its finances. Although all final decisions

see [Sale](#), p.4

## Former Maccabee Hired as New Men's Basketball Coach

By Ben Kohane

Last week, Yeshiva University announced that Elliot Steinmetz would take over as head men's basketball coach for the YU Maccabees, starting next season. As reported by the YU News blog, Steinmetz, a 2002 graduate of the Sy Syms School of Business who played on YU's basketball team for three seasons (1999-2002), will oversee all aspects of the men's basketball program, from running prac-

tices to supporting the academic success of its student-athletes off the court. Honored and excited to have the opportunity to once again be a part of Yeshiva University basketball, Steinmetz is "thrilled to be a part of the future as we move forward with the basketball program."

The hiring concluded a dedicated search that took several months and attracted more than 200 applicants. As posted on the NCAA's official hiring website, YU sought applicants who could "execute all responsibilities as a head coach in

a manner that properly reflects a commitment to excellence, integrity, success and the overall mission of Yeshiva University," and whose duties would include recruiting, program development, and organizational efforts. A 14-member advisory committee ran the search and included Yeshiva University Athletic Department directors, various alumni affiliated with basketball, and current team captain Shlomo Weissberg. The committee was chaired by Shabsi Schreier, the captain of the Maccabees from 1983-85. The committee pared down the many applicants to twelve, six, and ultimately three, who were invited for half-day interviews on campus. "Due diligence was performed on each applicant," explains Joel Mael, vice chairman of the Miami Marlins and member of the committee. YU Director of Athletics Joe Bednarsh described that some rejections were easier than others: "Having a nickname in quotes on your resume was one way to narrow the field."

The committee also looked for someone who could be a role model and who had previously demonstrated a winning track record. Steinmetz has that experience: he

see [Coach](#), p.4



**MEN'S TENNIS WINS SKYLINE CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIP, BECOMES FIRST YESHIVA TEAM TO EARN BERTH INTO NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP.** Yeshiva went into the tournament with a 13-2 overall record but lost in the first round to Skidmore College. The Maccabees beat Mount Saint Mary's College 5-1 in the championship round to earn a place in the national tournament.

# The EDITORIAL

## There is Honor in the Margins: A Reflection

The writing on my Yeshiva University I.D. has faded. The back is scratched, the edges smooth with wear. A lot has happened to this card. Many caf store meals bought, many library fines charged. A “Spring 2014” sticker from the registrar sits high above others: one for each semester, plus the summer, plus the library’s validation card. I have reserved a seat on many downtown shuttles—for literary events, obviously—using the number on the back and the picture on the front.

The smile in that picture? That is not a smile. It is one of those anxious half smiles that doesn’t reveal my cute dimples. I was terrified. I knew precisely one person in Yeshiva University and he was two years ahead of me and kind of weird. When I was a freshman sitting in front of that camera I had absolutely no idea what was going to happen. I had no idea how the subway system worked, how the college worked. I couldn’t tell my Zysmans from my Belfers.

**Gavriel Brown**  
Editor-in-Chief



I immediately gravitated to my professors. I was lucky: in my first semester, three of my courses had five students, the other three had a sum of twelve. My professors guided me to my first museum visits, steered me to delightful books. They pushed me to write and edit. They taught me to resist obvious meanings, to reject common joys

(sleeping, eating, having a basic social life), and to dissect intellectual experiences into their most elemental forms.

My professor from my writing seminar, Dr. Joanne Jacobson, opened her office to students and within fifteen minutes of talking with her, I remember feeling captivated with the English Major (check), interested in writing for The Commentator (check), and taken with the possibility of joining Teach for America after graduation (soon-to-be check).

I’m not alone. A well timed Gallup-Purdue University study of college graduates, now making its rounds on the internet and no doubt to commencement speeches near you, found that the type of institution students attended mattered less than what they experienced there. The what and who of college—not the where—has a “profound relationship to a graduate’s life and career.” Forget the Ivies. Focus on the student-faculty ratio. Those one-on-one meetings, mentorships, and extracurriculars, the study concluded, cannot only make or break a college career, but may shape our future well-being.

The poll found that graduates who recalled having a professor who cared for them as a person—not just as a student, who sowed within them a passion for learning, and who galvanized them to pursue their own passions, doubled their post-college productivity.

The poll, titled “Life in College Matters for Life After College,” asked students about the most important aspects of college. 63 percent of those surveyed agreed that they had one professor who made them excited about learning. 27 percent agreed that professors at their college cared about them as a person. 22 percent strongly agreed that a mentor encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams while only 29 percent said that what they learned in the classroom impacted their internships or jobs. 32 percent of college graduates said that completing a multi-semester project strongly impacted their college careers while 20 percent said they were extremely active in extracurriculars and organizations. Sadly, only three percent of those surveyed agree with all six statements.

This survey of 30,000 students should be surprising. The vast majority of American students ghost through college without a memorable mentor, without joining a club, or completing a thesis. But there is no doubt in my mind that those numbers would increase dramatically in a poll of soon-to-be YU grads. With our 1:6 faculty to student ratio, the vast majority of YU students form strong connections with professors and rabbis. Nearly ten percent of students participate in NCAA sports. A growing number work in labs or write theses. In a totally unscientific poll, I’ve found that nearly every student I ask at YU can point to a professor or rabbi or advisor or coach who had taken them under his or her wing.

YU is one of a shrinking class of universities that resemble the initiate liberal arts universities of the 1960s, institutions that U.C. Berkeley Chancellor Clark Kerr called communities

of “student-centered” education.

Oddly though, in a poll of college life, Gallup completely missed a crucial aspect of college life. While Gallop mentioned the importance of extracurriculars and organization, professor and mentors, it failed to ask any questions about the horizontal relationships in college—our peer-to-peer, friend-to-friend, captain-to-player, editor-to-writer, chavruta-to-chavruta, girlfriend-to-boyfriend, roommate-to-roommate relationships.

It failed to grapple with the aspect of education that John Dewey called “the mode of social life,” the ideal of communal learning which insists that learning is not simply a vertical transfer of information between teacher and student, but also a “lateral” learning experience, as Andrew Delbanco writes in *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*. Isn’t that “life in college?”

I remember the bad roommates who taught me patience, the failed romances that taught me resilience. My editor who pushed me farther, the peer with whom I clashed in debate. My chavruta who constantly sent me “seriously, where are you?” texts.

But I am worried.

I’ve written before about my worry that, in the face of far reaching budget cuts, adjuncts will replace long-term professors, professors which the Gallup poll deemed crucial to college life. I’m still worried about the cuts already in the pipeline that will harm vertical learning.

But as I leave YU, I am also concerned about a growing trend among students to stunt horizontal, lateral learning. In a recent conversation with a long-time professor at YU, I learned that, for the first time in decades, this professor had to create an anonymous online space on which students could interact—the classroom simply became too hostile for civil conversation. The professor noticed that students were afraid to speak their minds, wary of signaling an internal schism, while others detested some of their classmates’ values and comported themselves with aloof disdain.

Increasingly, I see a complete bifurcation of the college along ideological lines, one half denying that the other exists. Both sides promulgating definitions of “in” and “out.”

I go to large events on campus—student dinners or charity events, shiurim or clubs—and it seems as though I attend two different universities. Half attend a sichat mussar and half attend a Maccabees game and never the twain shall meet.

A growing number of students believe that “Centrist” Orthodoxy ironically means pretending that no one exists on the left. They dismiss their classmates, for some reason or another, as treif or kofrim or, heaven forbid, “liberal.” Liberal students, at the same time, are fond of chastising the right for living in an echo chamber of MYP by day and night seder by, well, night, with no other reality penetrating the bubble.

We all have roughly the same YU I.D. cards. We were all nervous on that first day, anxiously anticipating the next few years here. We’ve all accumulated our fair share of nicks and scratches. And let’s face it; few of us use the shuttle for academic purposes.

We are, ultimately, members of the same academic and spiritual community. Soon enough, we’ll be part of the same alumni community. We all benefit from this “student-centered” education. We have to engage in ideas, not ideologies, dispute arguments, not people. “The exclusion of an opinion is not a refutation of it,” Leon Wieseltier, the great Jewish essayist, recently wrote. “There is honor in the mainstream and there is honor in the margins.”

When we cut off our classmates from the conversation, when we are afraid of expressing ideas lest others label us whatever, we are making our world smaller. We are robbing ourselves of our own education.

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The Commentator is the official student newspaper of Yeshiva University. For 78 years, The Commentator has served students and administrators as a communicative conduit; a kinetic vehicle disseminating undergraduate social, religious, and academic beliefs across the student bodies; and a reliable reflection of Yeshiva student life to the broader Jewish and American communities. The Commentator staff claims students spanning the diverse spectrum of backgrounds and beliefs represented at Yeshiva. We are united by our passion for living the ideals of Torah u-Maddah, and commitment to journalistic excellence.

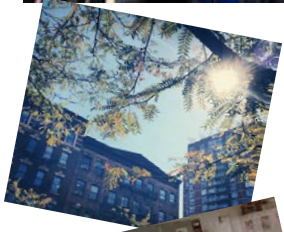


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## 1 Commencement

It could mean beginning, it could mean end, but in this situation the universal understanding is “relief from undergrad obligations” congratulations to the grads, and we hope you pick up *The Commentator* even when you leave.



## 2 Sunshine

After a winter that would make eskimos shudder, we’ve finally received a quantum of solar solace. Something tells me this is going to come back to bite us some time in late June...

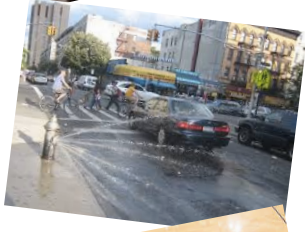


## 3 All those dinners

Senior, Sport, YCDS, Poli Sci, and all other random clubs that no one knows about had their dinners, and it looked like they were excellent based on Facebook pictures.

## 4 Summer Classes/June Zman

A full roster of classes and even a mixed Judaics class. Scandalous!



## 5 Fire Hydrant Sprinklers

Snapple Fact: These pop-up water coolers are actually opened by the Fire Department. We hope you don’t get caught off-guard.



## 6 NBA Playoffs

A wonderful alternative to studying during this time of year, but don’t forget to start some TV series that you missed this semester.



## 7 Vacation

Time to head out to your “out-of-town” location that is significantly more beautiful than the Heights. Enjoy!

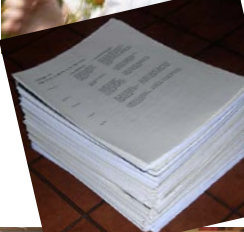
7 UP

7 DOWN



## 1 Allergies

Scientists are telling us that they are going to be particularly bad this year, thanks again to the Polar Vortex. The trees sneeze pollen, we sneeze incessantly...



## 2 Never ending graduate school classes

All of those in the BA/MA programs know how even though the semester ended two weeks ago, they’re still going to class. No fun in the sun.



## 3 Papers due after finals

More time for writing is nice, but not when it comes at the expense of our vacation. Get it done before break!

## 4 Make Up Labs - It’s just too much.

We probably shouldn’t have missed our family reunion, but we were going to be disowned by our family - and now we’re doing assignments into May.

## 5 Caf options more limited by the day

We know that many of Stern and YC students have emptied their proverbial pockets to purchase stockpiles of toilet paper and marshmallow fluff, but what about the rest of us? For future reference, buying out begins right before pesach.

## 6 Theses

First question: why did you start it? Second question: will you ever finish it? Final question: was it ever worth it? Either way, getting that Honors “H” on your diploma may just never have been worth it.

## 7 Life after College

Now that you’ve got a diploma, it’s time to start waving around that uber-expensive piece of paper in prospective employers’ faces. It’s a merciless job market though, so don’t let a few weeks (months?) of shamelessly stuffing your mug with cheetos while playing Nintendo in your pajamas get you down. Hey, there’s always grad school.



MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

# YU Receives Another Middle States Warning

By Yitzchak Schultz

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), part of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, is an organization that confers accreditation status to degree-granting institutions in various states in the Mid-Atlantic region. The MSCHE charter contains a list of 14 standards of accreditation, to which all affiliated schools must adhere. Should a school be found non-compliant with one or more of these standards, the MSCHE may revoke the school’s status as an accredited establishment.

Yeshiva University has been an accredited institution affiliated with the MSCHE since 1948. In 2012, the University submitted a self-reviewed assessment of their academic standards. Subsequently, an on-site visiting team from the MSCHE presented a report on November 15, 2012, which was drafted in order “to warn the institution that its accreditation may be in jeopardy because of insufficient evidence that the institution is currently in compliance with Standard 10 (Faculty) and Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning).”

The two standards that Yeshiva University was found to be non-compliant with are Standards 10 and 14. The MSCHE’s website states that the aforementioned “standards” monitor the following criteria:

Standard 10 (Faculty Assessment)

The institution’s instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

Standard 14 (Student Learning Assessment)

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution’s students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.

In a follow-up report in November 21, 2013, the MSCHE claimed that while the University had taken actions in order to meet Standard 10, the University had yet to provide evidence of compliance with Standard 14. In the most recent report published by the MSCHE on March 6, 2014, the commission reminded the University that a warning remains in place due to a demonstrated underperformance in student learning assessment. Further evaluation is needed in order for the MSCHE to rescind its warning.

While the administration remained unavailable for comment regarding this year’s warning by the MSCHE, President Richard Joel made a statement during the 2012-2013 academic year: “Last spring (Spring 2012), following the preliminary report of the Middle States site evaluation team, we began addressing these issues.” Though President Joel’s statement is optimistic, the University has since then failed to comply with Standard 14 of the MSCHE.

Is the University at risk of losing its accreditation status? Practically speaking, the MSCHE has a time frame of 24 months in order to take action against a school that has been given a warning. As Yeshiva University received their first warning on November of 2012, any action that may be taken by the commission will have to occur before or by November of this year. Whereas any due cause taken by the MSCHE will directly affect students in YC/SCW, Azrieli, and Revel, students in Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB) can rest easy; SSSB is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. Though undergraduates at SSSB are accredited by the MSCHE as well, in order to gain accreditation by a business-specific agency, SSSB had to demonstrate that they complied with standards similar to those of the MSCHE. Since SSSB took steps in order to meet these criteria before the MSCHE released a warning for Yeshiva University, they had a “head start” on meeting the required standards.

Though the MSCHE does not make known the timing of their next report, it is reasonable to believe that the commission will do so at some point either over the summer or in the beginning of the next academic year.

Standards 1-7 Institutional Context	Standard 1 Mission and Goals	Standard 2 Planning & Resource Allocation	Standard 3 Institutional Resources	Standard 4 Leadership & Governance
Standards 8-14 Educational Effectiveness	Standard 5 Administration	Standard 6 Integrity	Standard 7 Institutional Assessment	Standard 8 Student Admissions & Retention
	Standard 9 Student Support Services	Standard 10 Faculty	Standard 11 Educational Offerings	Standard 12 General Education
		Standard 13 Related Educational Activities	Standard 14 Assessment of Student Learning	



## Sale, Continued

sions were deferred to the Sale's staff, Professor Fuld was responsible for establishing broad policies and objectives for the Seforim Sale, supporting and reviewing the performance of its senior staff and approving the year's annual budget. Perhaps most importantly, Fuld was responsible to the stakeholders (YU) for the Seforim Sale's performance, specifically YU's loan that kept the Seforim Sale's doors open, and ensuring the availability of adequate financial resources, given the management's unfavorable history.

Naturally, the student management team was against the notion of substantial administrative oversight and initially saw it as a nuisance. Yet, Fuld noted: "The students were always respectful and open for discussion. I doubt they were thrilled having a faculty member suddenly appear on the scene to provide guidance and input in what they considered to be their own sandbox, but I am certain they understood that we were all working toward the same goals, and at the end of the day, they recognized that the steps we took were made for the good of the Seforim Sale." Ultimately, Kukurudz reflected positively on supervision: "Indeed, we are grateful for the experience that Professor Fuld brought with him and the advice and changes he helped institute. As well, we are extremely grateful for the great restraint he showed, and for his understanding that the Sale's



managers have the final say. As you can see, this relationship led to great results."

Kukurudz, along with CEO Gedalia Romanoff and COOs Shalom Zharnest and Talya Lent, was responsible for instituting major changes to the standard operations of the sale, based on suggestions from Professor Fuld and their developing ability for creating a successful business. Several important steps were taken this year in an all out effort to decrease costs and increase profit margins. These efforts were complicated by the desire to not jeopardize the hallmarks of the Seforim Sale, most notably its bargains on a wide variety of popular seforim. As part of maintaining this delicate balance, profit margins on seforim were increased by just a few percentage points, minimally affecting individual consumers yet yielding positive results in the Sale's aggregate revenues.

With assistance from the YU Procurement Office, leasing contracts for shelves and tables for the

Sale were renegotiated. The management of the Sale also arranged to switch credit card providers to get better deals on transfers.

The most volatile issue in regards to cost cutting was certainly student rewards for working the Sale. The reward benefits are given in the form of book credits and the students are considered volunteers. These credits offer ample motivation for students to take time to serve as the ground force, enabling the Sale to run effectively, while keeping to the spirit of the Sale, easy access to Jewish literature and texts for the masses. However, maintaining such volunteer benefits posed a serious threat to the Sale's financial solvency and had to be revised.

Sale management devoted considerable time to work out this problem without offending the competing interests. In the end, they reduced the overall workforce, adjusted work hours to match customer volume, and cut standard rewards by 22%. The senior management also volunteered a 30% cut to their own rewards. These reductions resulted in a 40% decrease in overall compensation expenses.

Other steps were taken to ensure properly managed expenses, including making book credits to the volunteers available in installments, limiting student volunteers to one-third of their respective book credits at the beginning of each week of the Sale. This helped to counter the practice of students claiming credits at the beginning of the Sale and then abandoning their posts.

When asked to assess the success of this year's Seforim Sale, Professor Fuld proudly replied, "I view this year's Sale as a remarkable success. Aside from fulfilling the expected goals, the final financial results of this year's Sale were a real home-run that all the participants, students, and faculty can be most proud of, especially in light of the two huge snowstorms that took place during the limited three-week run of the Seforim Sale."

Sharing similar sentiments, Kukurudz said, "The Sale, and all it represents, has always been extremely valuable to this university. Now, however, it is also financially valuable." He fervently attributed that success entirely to the student volunteers: "I can't underscore that enough. Their dedication and commitment is truly amazing. I am lucky to be able to work with such a team."

With high hopes for the future, Kukurudz remarked: "The work is not over. A profitable Sale is good for the school, its students, our customers, and the community we serve. We don't want them to lose out on our service. This success ensures that we will be here for many more years to come."

## Coach, Continued

"has served with distinction as head coach of the varsity basketball team at North Shore Hebrew Academy High School and of the gold medal-winning United States 18 and Under Boys Basketball Team for the Maccabiah Games in Israel." Steinmetz also coached the varsity team at Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, in addition to running JV Elite, Inc., an intense summer basketball training program for talented Jewish basketball players, for over five years. Steinmetz has coached plenty of high-level players, including Princeton forward Spencer Weisz, the current Ivy League Rookie of the Year.

After announcing the hiring, Schreiber declared, "It has been a privilege to chair this esteemed and dedicated committee. I am confident that Coach Steinmetz will build upon

Coach Johnny Halpert's extraordinary legacy and take our team to the next level."

On a similar vein, Weissberg (YC '14) said that "being a member of the selection committee was an incredible learning experience for me. I was exposed to successful professionals and an honest committee open to ideas from all. I think Coach Steinmetz was the right decision and has all the tools to continue the legacy built by Coach Halpert."

Indeed, Steinmetz takes over the position from Coach Johnny Halpert, legend and mainstay of the basketball program for over forty years. Amassing over 400 wins and honored by YU in May 2012 with a court-naming ceremony in the Melvin Furst Gymnasium, Halpert stepped down earlier this year, as The Commentator reported, when he learned his contract would not be

renewed following "a request from the President that he retire following the 2013-2014 season."

Bednarsh acknowledges the importance of this transitional period. "We can't ignore history, but Coach Steinmetz must ultimately take over the reins into the future [and] continue to build this program into the pride of the Jewish people."

Returning for a third year to the Maccabees, guard Yosef Rosenthal is "excited, as Coach Steinmetz seems to be motivated and really care. I hope he can bring good things to our team." Fans like sophomore Eliyahu Brand echoed similar thoughts: "I am happy with the hiring, and I am eager to see how next season will develop."

## MEET YOUR NEW STUDENT COUNCIL LEADERSHIP

### NATAN SZEGEDI - PRESIDENT, YSU

Commentator Staff: What is your major/minor? Planned year of graduation? Plans after YU?

Natan Szegedi: I'm majoring in Business Management (Human Resources track) and minoring in accounting. If all goes well, I will be graduating in May '15. My immediate plan after YU is to find a job somewhere in business. In the long run, I'm hoping to go to law school and work in business law.

CS: What is your most important, specific, goal as president of your respective council?

NS: As President of YSU, I think it is essential that we foster a seamless and fast system that allows our clubs to create the events they plan. I see facilitating this system as one of my primary responsibilities.

Second, I want to make sure that miscommunication with regards to changes in campus life or any other issue does not happen between the administration and the student body. YSU will make large efforts to make sure that students are always clear on the facts, should anything come up next year.

CS: What specific challenges do you see yourself facing moving forward?

NS: With the restructured YSU Board, it will definitely take some time for everyone to understand and be comfortable with their newly created positions. Personally, I must make sure that every Board member is fulfilling his assigned responsibilities and is comfortable doing so.

CS: How will budget cuts affect your respective council's funds?

NS: Since Student Council funds are raised from the student activity fees as part of tuition, we are not expecting any significant cuts to our budget. Regardless, being fiscally responsible will always be one of our top priorities.

CS: What are you most worried about as president of your respective council?

NS: That YSU will fail to be-

come the entity students are comfortable approaching whenever they want to share their concerns or issues.

CS: What are you most excited about as president of your respective council?

NS: I'm eager to see the materialization of the many ideas I have already heard from other students. Many of them had tremendous merit and would serve the student body well.

CS: Questions, comments, thoughts? Favorite ice cream? Lactose intolerant?

NS: Great question! To my knowledge I'm not allergic to anything, thank G-d. Except maybe to ineffective government.

### SHAI BERMAN - PRESIDENT, YCSA

Commentator Staff: What is your major/minor? Planned year of graduation? Plans after YU?

Shai Berman: I am majoring in history and minoring in economics. Upon graduation, I hope to attend law school and get semicha as well.

CS: What is your most important, specific, goal as president of your respective council?

SB: My primary goal as president of YCSA will be to gather information from students regarding their classes and bring that input to the administration. To accomplish this, I hope to hold monthly open-door meetings where students can bring any grievances or suggestions regarding their classes and meet with the Dean's office on a consistent basis.

CS: What specific challenges do you see yourself facing moving forward?

SB: I must work very hard to try to establish a good relationship with the Dean's office. I truly believe that Deans and students working together can help to deliver the best possible undergraduate academic experience.

CS: How will budget cuts affect

your respective council's funds?

SB: Luckily, our funds will not be affected by the budget cuts. Our funding comes directly from students' activities fees. Unless enrollment drops dramatically, student government will continue to provide the same continually improving rich extra-curricular experience it has in the past.

### LEO KORMAN, PRESIDENT, SSSBSC

Commentator Staff: What is your major/minor? Planned year of graduation? Plans after YU?

Leo Korman: Major: Finance. Expected Graduation May 2015

CS: What is your most important, specific, goal as president of your respective council?

LK: My biggest goal is to create a better social environment within the Syms business school. In the past there have been very few social events catered to the students of Syms. I hope to change that and create events targeted to those students.

CS: What specific challenges do you see yourself facing moving forward?

LK: I think the biggest challenge I will face is the student body itself. It will take a lot of work and marketing to get students to come out to our events, especially the newly implemented social events.

CS: How will budget cuts affect your respective council's funds?

LK: Although most of university is cutting back and saving money, Syms Student Council will not be. Student council's budget comes from the actives fee paid by students that is part of tuition. That being said Syms Student Council still must be responsible with how it uses its funds.

CS: What are you most excited about as president of your respective council?

LK: I am most excited for a chance to work hand in hand with the student body to create a better campus life and educational experience.

Event Recap

# “The Rebbe and the Rav” Event Draws Hundreds

By Raphy Sassieni

On April 29, the Chabad Club of YU hosted an event showcasing the special relationship between Rav Soloveitchik zt”l and the Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l. The event, entitled “Living the Legacy of the Rebbe and the Rav,” was held in Yeshiva University’s Lamport Auditorium and attended by over 700 people from all over the New York and New Jersey area. The featured speakers of the event included Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, the Mashpia of YU, Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter, professor of Jewish History and Jewish Thought, Rabbi Zevulun Charlop, the dean emeritus of RIETS, Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, the personal secretary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l for over 40 years, and Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Jacobson, one of the most sought-after speakers in the Jewish world for his expertise in Chabad Chassidus. The emcee of the event was Dr. Lawrence Schiffman, Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education.

The event was originally scheduled to take place on February 3rd; however, after a massive snow storm disrupted transportation throughout

secretary, was sent on many missions to various places. Several of these missions, Rabbi Krinsky told the crowd of 700, were to visit Rav Soloveitchik in Boston. Being in the first class at Maimonides School in Boston founded by Rav Soloveitchik, Rabbi Krinsky had a close relationship with the Rav. Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter showed a brief film of his father, Rabbi Herschel Schacter zt”l, recounting the experience of joining Rav Soloveitchik at one of the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s farbrengens in 770. In the video, Rabbi Herschel Schacter described his amazement when walking into the Beis Medrash at 770. He retold that when the Rebbe walked in (not until the Rav arrived), the thousands of chassidim parted to let the Rebbe pass through. Once the Rebbe got to his seat, he did not sit down until the Rav was sitting comfortably in his own seat a short distance away. Rabbi Herschel Schacter said that the Rav had originally planned to stay at the farbrengen for only about an hour, but ended up staying for over three hours. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Jacobson also spoke about this special encounter between the Rav and the Rebbe. He described the atmosphere

# YU Commemorates Yom HaShoah With Diverse Program

By Shuey Mirkin

This week, the student body of Yeshiva gathered together to sing, dance, and celebrate Yom Ha’atzmaut. It was a time of happiness and hope. But last week, we came together for a very different sort of commemoration. The mood was somber in Lamport as we gathered to remember one of the darkest points in our history. Organized by SHEM (Student Holocaust Education Movement), the theme of the night was “Continuing the Conversation.” Throughout the evening, speakers emphasized how our generation is the link between the old and the new. Soon, there will be no survivors. We are the “bridge” generation; the ones who are responsible for keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive when there are no more survivors.

Stern College Junior Michal Kupchik, standing in front of six students holding signs that read “Jew,” began the evening by saying that “there are no words to describe how I feel that my children will never know a survivor, but this reality is impending. We are destined to repeat it if we forget.” The catchphrase so familiar to us, seen on so many Facebook pages and news sites on Yom Hashoah, is “Never Forget.” But the perennial challenge is how exactly to elevate that phrase to more than just words. How exactly do we ensure that our children and our children’s children and beyond can understand, relate to, and mourn the Holocaust?

In his remarks, Ambassador Ido Aharoni recounted his conversation with Elie Wiesel: “I’m not concerned with how people will remember the Holocaust five to ten years from now. I’m thinking about how they will remember it 500 to 1,000 years in the future—that’s how far ahead we should be thinking. What will become of “Never Forget?” Currently the Consul General of Israel in New York, Ambassador Aharoni stressed that as much as it is our generation’s responsibility to bear witness to what happened, it is even more so our responsibility and our duty to pass that witnessing along to our children and grandchildren. Aharoni spoke of Colonel David “Mickey” Marcus, a Jewish American soldier who liberated the camps and later fought and died for the fledgling state of Israel. On his tombstone at West Point, it says: “Colonel David Marcus—A Soldier For All Humanity.” Marcus’s firsthand

experience of the Holocaust spurred him to actually do something about it and to fight for a Jewish homeland. We too, said Aharoni, must think about what each and every one of us can do personally to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive in the world. It is not only our job to make sure we don’t forget. It is our job to make sure no one forgets.

This point hit home hard when Mrs. Pola Jasphy spoke. Introduced by her grandson and president of SHEM, David Jasphy, Mrs. Jasphy recalled her story as a survivor. For a few short minutes, the Holocaust was made real. We were challenged to try as hard as we could to put ourselves in her shoes. Mrs. Jasphy described watching as a little girl when soldiers raided her home. She went through her experiences of seeing family and



friends murdered and gone missing, and hiding and living on the run for years, not knowing if the next day may have been her last. “They said because I wasn’t in the concentration camps, I was one of the lucky ones,” she said. “So you tell me how lucky I was.” There is no way for us to know that visceral, wrenching pain, fear, and emotion that only survivors can know. But somehow, to reinforce the evening’s message, we must try to carry on that legacy.

Vice President of SHEM Hadassa Holzapfel (SCW ‘15) continued the momentum by telling us about her childhood in Dusseldorf, Germany, and what it’s like to grow up in the shadow of the Holocaust, after so many years. “Germany is and always will be my home, but it’s still hard to be Jewish in Germany 70 years later,” Hadassa said.

We then watched “These Are Our Words,” a mini documentary produced by SHEM, featuring YU students and faculty sharing their reflections and thoughts on the Holocaust and on the importance of keeping the memory alive. In the video, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks mentioned the idea of creating a Seder for Yom Hashoah, similar to the Pesach Seder to create that symbolism so necessary to remember what was.

The evening closed with the lighting of six candles in memory of the six million, each representing a different aspect of the Holocaust. Mrs. Jasphy and David’s brother Yale lit one, to represent the bridge between the survivors and ourselves. President Joel lit a candle to represent our attempts to rebuild the Torah world after the Holocaust. Professor Hill Krishnan of NYU lit the third candle, representing the righteous gentiles of the world. To show Jewish strength and our efforts to make “Never Again” a reality, students who had served in the IDF lit the fourth. The SHEM board lit the fifth candle, showing our commitment to keeping Holocaust education at the front of our minds. Chana Schwartz, younger sister of SHEM Vice President Naomi, lit the sixth candle, symbolizing the children that were lost in the Holocaust, and the need for the younger generation to pass on its history and legacy. The evening left us humbled and inspired, wondering how we will do our part to continue this most vital of conversations.

the area, Danny Fordham, the YU Chabad Club president, decided to postpone it to another night later in the semester. Fordham was able to find a date when all of the high-profile speakers could still attend. Ironically, the news of the rescheduled event broke just days after a parody rap video of the Rebbe and the Rav was shown at the YU Purim shepil.

The speakers touched upon many of their personal experiences and encounters with both the Rav and the Rebbe. Two of the experiences that stood out the most were those of Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky and of Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter. Rabbi Krinsky, being the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s personal

in the room—of two Torah giants surrounded by thousands of chassidim—yet it seemed as though the Rebbe was speaking directly to the Rav.

All of the speakers knew of the special relationship between the Rebbe and the Rav firsthand. They said that while many people deny that the two gedolei hador ever had any relationship, the Rav and the Rebbe had a very unique connection. Even though the Rav and the Rebbe did not speak on a regular basis, the quality of the relationship is what made it so special.

To hear the actual event and to see the video, visit [yutorah.org](http://yutorah.org) and search “The Rebbe and the Rav.”

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK:

## YU's Brand of Diversity

By Josh Hanau

The comedian's opening joke at Senior Dinner was hardly surprising—"Wow, what a diverse crew you guys have here at Yeshiva!"

Orthodox Jews on other college campuses often make judgments about YU students, whom they perceive as "Shtetl Jews," afraid to venture outside of their safe and comfortable bubble. Countless high school students have told me that they would never consider going to YU because they want to "broaden their perspectives." "I don't want four more years of Jewish day school," they say. "I want to see what else is out there."

As far as undergraduate liberal arts institutions go, we are undoubtedly perceived of as a place that misses out on the vast richness offered by diversity—the wonderful opportunities afforded by having people of different backgrounds gather in a common space, challenging each other with their own unique perspectives, their own personal outlooks. In some ways, this critique of YU is valid: With regards to the backgrounds of our students, we are, undoubtedly, one of the most homogenous undergraduate populations in America. A large percentage of us grew up in the same smattering of Modern Orthodox enclaves that exist in a handful of metropolitan areas throughout the United States. The result, it should seem, would be a population that is monolithic in its beliefs and perspectives.

Yet, that is not what one finds here at YU.

Sure, many of us ask similar types of questions, like: how can I best manage being part of the Modern world while still maintaining my Judaism? And sure, some of us share similar philosophical concerns, like: Which model of morality do I subscribe to, the divine, or the man-made? Does such a distinction even exist? The similarities, however, end at these basic questions.

I have spoken to many students over my four years at YU, and I have heard far more answers than questions. As the old saying goes, "for every two Jews, there are three opinions." By serving as Opinions Editor of *The Commentator*, I was especially privy to these opinions.

One of the reasons for this diversity is the unique curriculum that exists here. We simultaneously immerse ourselves in a humanistic understanding of the world, centered around empiricism and rationality, and a godly understanding of the world, centered around concepts like meaning and faith. Rather than dismissing traditional Jewish ideas that did not make it into the mainstream Western educational canon, we take tradition seriously, vigorously searching for the wisdom contained within. Our existence is suspended between Athens and Jerusalem, with each of us landing somewhere in between.

At YU, I have taken classes taught by atheists and classes taught by deeply religious Jews. Some faculty members, of any persuasion, try to proselytize their students, either explicitly or implicitly. Others try to discuss things that might challenge other viewpoints with an impressive combination of sensitivity and balance. In other words, the faculty and course offerings at YU are anything but "narrow." In fact, I think that YU is one of the best places to "broaden one's perspective" in a way that is responsibly nuanced.

Once, after discussing Karl Marx's proclamation that religion is "the opiate of the people," one of my professors went on a Richard Dawkins like rant, before concluding that the existence of organized religion is a tragedy, the principal cause of war and suffering worldwide. Yet, across the street, students were poring over their Talmuds, reading phrases like "Talmidei Chachamim Marbim Shalom ba'Olam," that the existence of Torah scholars results in the proliferation of peace.

Some in the Beit Midrash have embraced the value of maintaining traditional Orthodox halakha at all costs, refusing to deviate from the mesorah, even if it seems to conflict with other values they hold dear. Others have modified their worldviews so that the conflict no longer exists; there are those who think the western worldview is flawed, those who deny that Judaism has a monopoly on truth, and those who deny Judaism outright.

There are dedicated Democrats on campus, eager to square off against their right leaning peers on issues like government borrowing and spending, foreign policy, and same-sex marriage. Some students spend their winter breaks building houses for financially struggling individuals in South Carolina or building libraries for undereducated rural youth in Nicaragua. Others spend their break learning in Yeshivot, ranging from the progressive Yeshivat Chovevei Torah in Riverdale to the staunchly traditional Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Some students spend their Thursday nights in nightclubs; others spend their Thursday nights eating chulent and singing hymns about G-d. Right wing students were angered when Jeremy Ben-Ami—the founder of J-Street—was given a podium at a YU event; a student told me that "people like Jeremy Ben-Ami are among the biggest threats facing the State of Israel." Left wingers, on the other hand, were infuriated when Likud MK Tzipi Hotovely—who publicly voices her opposition to the Two State Solution—was invited to speak at YU, with one student telling me that "her vision," not Ben-Ami's, "would be a suicidal one for Israel to pursue."

So yes, many YU students come from similar backgrounds. Nevertheless, they are still given plenty of opportunities to broaden their perspectives in a unique way. The constant dialectic on campus creates the perfect conditions and culture for the development of a nuanced and thorough worldview, mindful of past, present and future. The sarcastic quip made by the comedian at Senior Dinner was hardly a joke; it was a profoundly true statement.

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## Honesty vs. Positivity: An Intellectual Battle

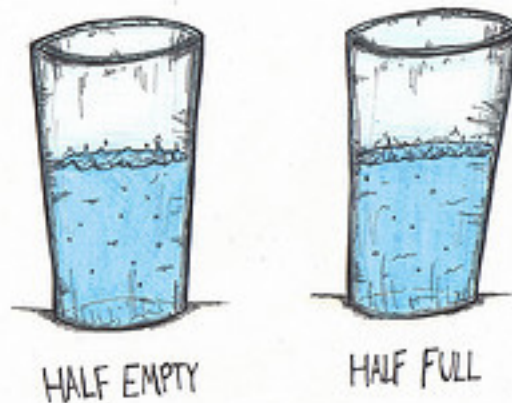
By Josh Nagel

"Every time you get rejected from something, you're actually getting redirected to something better." My mood immediately perked up the first time I read this quote. It is a comforting thought, especially when I do not get something I want. It fills me with hope that maybe it's for the better. As the old Jewish adage from the Talmud goes, Gam Zu L'tova, this too is for the best. For a while, I too adopted the perspective of everything is for the best. While this perspective is comforting, it is not always helpful.

However, life experience and honest reflection forced me to reconsider if I truly believed that this was really true. Is everything really for the best? I can think of many examples where I did not end up "better," or at least better the way I define the word. Sure, I will never know what would have happened in that alternative timeline, but I cannot honestly ignore the possibility that my life could have been better than the way it actually turned out. Critical thinkers do not just accept what has been presented. So too, I, as a critical thinker, cannot accept "Gam Zu L'tova" at face value. I must assess, evaluate, and consider alternatives based on logic and reasoning above my initial emotional reactions.

On the other hand, sometimes it is better to go with the simple approach—everything is simply for the best, no questions asked. To critically assess everything sacrifices the enjoyable simplicity of life. Sometimes we just want to watch a movie to enjoy it, not to analyze it. Or we are in a bad mood and simple quotations, like the one above, lift our spirits. Being positive is a constructive value for psychological health, peer interactions, and success. How can I balance my desire to be an honest, critical thinker with my being a positive person? To be a critic is to point out the flaws; to be positive is to ignore them and focus on the good. Should I be a critic or a positivist?

The ideal is to be both. The perfect person would keep track of all the good and bad points, make a pros and cons list, and come up with an overall judgment based on every aspect. This person might annoy friends at the movies—they probably just want to enjoy the movie, not to analyze it. But then "haters will be haters;" we are trying to be critical humans here. Critical analysis is vital to the human experience.



Unfortunately, humans are not always like that. We cannot keep track of and evaluate every single detail. Additionally we tend to focus on the negative when we make judgments. But focusing on the negative is not being truly honest either. Just as nothing is perfect, so too nothing is void of any redeeming qualities. Part of being a critical thinker is to also notice positive elements.

A potential starting point to balance these two values is to at least be cognizant of this dilemma. Cognizance of this dilemma provides us with an invaluable rule-of-thumb for resolving this tension. For those times when we would tend to just accept things and not try to analyze them, we should focus more on the value of honesty and critical thinking. And for those times when we tend to critique, it may be worthwhile to force ourselves to focus on the positive elements too. We should always try to take an approach against our natural inclinations.

The challenge is to stay positive while being realistic. "I am not a pessimist; I am just a realist," my friends tell me. If we are critical thinkers, optimism and realism don't need to be mutually exclusive. Humans are nuanced enough to incorporate both of these values. So when we read uplifting snippets, like the quotation above, we can allow its optimism to influence our well-being, while at the same time taking note of its exceptions. We should do this every time we evaluate things, from the mundane movie to important political opinions.

Your first opportunity is to evaluate this article.

## The Vitality of Student Research

By Daniel Atwood

Research and academic inquiry are the backbone of a university. To dispel one common misconception, research does not just mean pouring chemicals into beakers or looking through a microscope; research is done in all academic fields, including the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and Jewish Studies. One amazing aspect about Yeshiva College is the opportunity for undergraduate students to be involved in hands-on research with tenured faculty members, many of whom are esteemed researchers in their respective fields. Research has defined the YU experience for countless students, including myself.

About a year and a half ago, during my 3rd semester at YU, I decided I wanted to do research in the field of psychology, which I am majoring in. I had enjoyed the topics touched upon in many of the classes and wanted to explore some of these areas deeper, in addition to the fact that I wanted experience in case I decide to do graduate work in psychology. I emailed Dr. Jenny Isaacs, a professor of mine, and applied to work in her lab. After being accepted to the lab I began to help out with numerous projects and eventually took on the role of project manager in an experimental study. I recently submitted a proposal to work on a study of my own with Dr. Isaacs for my Honors thesis.

I tell you this not to publicize my own accomplishments, but rather to demonstrate the great opportunities in research that I have been afforded at YU. In a large university, and especially in a state school with 40,000 plus students, it would be very difficult for a 3rd semester student to be accepted to work directly with a tenured professor. Even once a student is accepted, he or she would spend most of his or her time reporting to graduate students or TA's. The fact that I am able to work intimately with a tenured professor who is a well-regarded researcher in her field should not be understated. Additionally, YU's administration has hired many professors who are eager to involve students in research and provides students with accessibility and some financial opportunities to do academic research.

One reason I enjoy being a research assistant so much is that I have come to know a small area of psychology very well. I have become intimate with my field not through reading a textbook, but rather by scouring through countless peer-reviewed journals and scholarly articles. I am confident that I can hold a conversation about my field with renowned researchers. In fact, many students in both my lab and in other labs have written Honors theses, attended and presented at conferences, and even co-authored articles in peer-reviewed journals.

Furthermore, the analytical and critical thinking skills that I am developing through involvement in research will be crucial in whatever I pursue in the future. I apply both the technical information I am learning and the broader ways of thinking to a variety of classes, activities, and life situations. At almost every interview I have gone to, for a wide range of jobs and programs, some of which have nothing to do with my field of study, the interviewer was impressed with my involvement in research. Academic inquiry makes us think in new and critical ways that

intellectually stimulate the mind. This opportunity is available to any student at YU with the proper work ethic who seeks it out, and I strongly encourage each student to strongly consider getting involved in the research of his or her field of study.

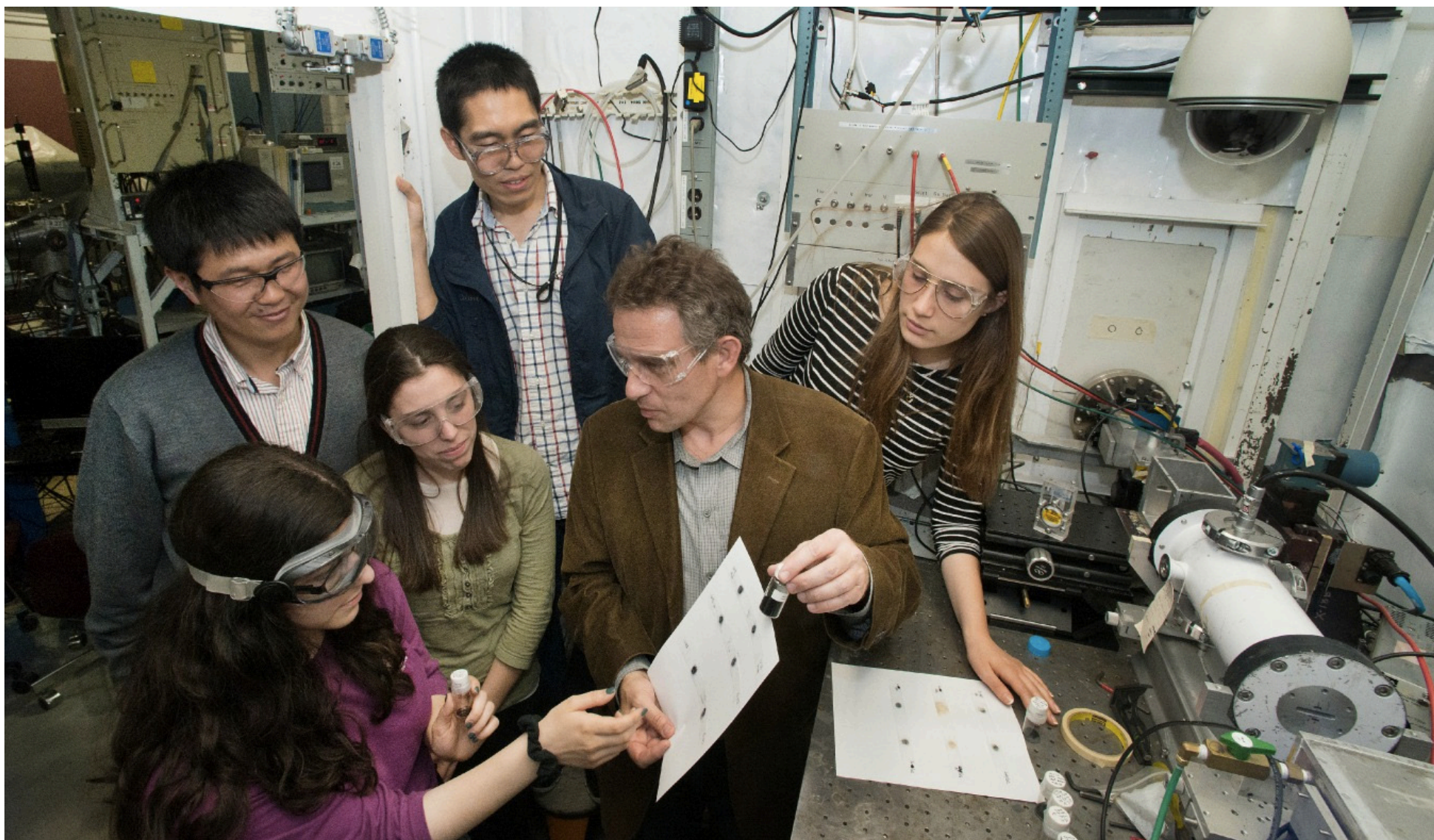
I know that my experience is not unique. Throughout the years, hundreds of YU students have taken their undergraduate education to a higher level through research. During the school year, this research is mostly volunteer work. We do it for the intrinsic value, as well as for gaining crucial skills and experience necessary for graduate school or the workplace.

Deep involvement in research takes time—more time than possible during the busy academic year. This is why many students stay during the summer for the opportunity to have two or three months to dedicate to full-time research. The summer is also a time many students, busy during the year, use to make some spending money. In the summer, living expenses are not provided in the same way that they are during the year. There is no meal plan, and housing is sparse. Unfortunately, many students simply are neither able nor willing to go an entire summer without making any money. Finally, it is well known that paid internships look exponentially better on a resume than unpaid internships. Fortunately, YU used to provide a stipend to each professor involved in research on campus to allot to students of theirs involved in full time summer research. This funding was pulled this year in the latest round of budgetary cuts.

I do not envy those involved in making these budgetary decisions. I realize that they are often caught between a rock and a hard place. I believe, however, that student summer research is an area that should not have been slashed. This cut will definitely lower the number of students able to commit to a summer of research, which would either also lower the number of students involved in research during the year or create a situation where students involved in research will never be able to make the most of their experience. It is likely that the number of Honors theses and student publications in academic journals, many of which have contributed to YU's esteemed reputation in the academic world, will also decrease. Candidates for professorship will feel like they are not able to do what they went into academia to do—teach students and train future academic leaders—and may thus send their résumés elsewhere.

This is all in addition to the fact that I believe that there is something inherently unethical about the unpaid internship—a student working 40 hours a week for no money. NYU and Columbia recently put out guidelines severely restricting and discouraging unpaid internships, and I would like to see YU follow suit. For all these reasons, I believe that recent financial cuts that totally remove funding from students involved in summer research should be reconsidered.

I am proud to be among the ranks that continue to be inspired through profound involvement in academic research and inquiry, and I hope that students coming after me will also be afforded this opportunity.





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# Schrodinger's Man

By Oren Herschander

“The elevator is incredibly full today,” Pino thinks to himself as he enters the shared uplifting chaos. He stands in a dark and unforgiving chamber, which has commonly been called an elevator because of its talent to literally elevate its occupants above the rest of society.

Sneering at the potential metaphorical significance of their forced mode of transportation, a group of four interchangeable businessmen sluggishly make room for Pino.

Immediately, several spaced out eyes accidentally discharge deadly stares in Pino’s direction. Everyone, for one brief and insignificant moment, is temporally attacking his every activity. “They all must be judging me for something,” he assumes.

In an effort of self preservation, Pino looks to his feet to discover blue loafers instead of his usual dark black dress shoes. His involuntary faux pas of wearing the wrong shoes—clearly a lazy and careless blunder—will prove, in the fullness of time, to lead to his eventual expulsion from reality.

“Do I even own blue shoes,” he tries to remember. “Nobody else owns blue shoes.” According to his managers, people obviously dress their toes in only black dress shoes. That’s what is expected. Currently his left blue shoe is painfully crushed by three—certain in their shoeness—black dress shoes.

“How could I be so careless,” Pino thinks as he loses his footing, just barely preventing a devastating collision with a few businessmen named Erwin collectively—the Fourth of whom happens to be a superior member at Pino’s firm.

“Be careful,” commands Erwin over the soundless closing of the cold steel doors.

“Don’t yell,” instructs Another Erwin inversely.

Ignoring the hubbub growing in the lift, Pino begins to panic over his stupidity. “The Boss has fired people for less,” he aggressively says to himself as the metal prism rises into the clouds limited to the thirty-fifth floor. “What if Erwin reports me for my inadequacies,” he nervously mumbles.

A Third Erwin asks Another Erwin, “Who said that?” The First Erwin shrugs and responds to his fellow man of industry, “I didn’t say anything, Erwin.”

In the corner, a Fourth Erwin—whose elbow is comfortably wedged into Pino’s shoulder blade—is moderately confused. “How does Erwin know who I am,” the Fourth Erwin asks himself.

“Who said that,” yells The First Erwin. “Not me,” thinks Erwin Second through Fourth.

Despite the brewing commotion, Pino imagines jumping off the thirty-fifth floor in favor of his possible professional termination. He is so trapped in internal panic that he doesn’t even notice the triple Erwin exodus, on the thirty-fifth floor.

If Pino had been more active, perhaps he wouldn’t have to suffer from his potential fate.

“Maybe I should ask Mr. Erwin for advice,” he contemplates. “No, my request will be seen as an act of defiance. Who am I to speak out? If I speak, I will be fired for sure.” He remains silent.

With the once crowded elevator relatively empty, The Fourth Erwin looks at his own blue loafers and begins to panic. “What color are my shoes?” he silently whimpers. “How could I be so clueless? The Boss fired lowercase erwin for less just last week.”

With only one flight left till his destination, Fourth Erwin quickly calculates how long a descent from the thirty-fifth floor would personally take. “Will I land on my feet,” he wonders. “Maybe I can use a subordinate to break my fall.”

The riders continue to panic as the elevator makes its way elsewhere. “I still haven’t come up with a solution to my shoe situation,” Pino sadly meows to himself. “I might be late already” (even though his watch and phone were recently stolen by multiple Erwins on floors nineteen and thirty five collectively).

“Look past your feet, Pino,” says a mysterious voice.

“Did you say that, sir?” Pino hesitantly asks Erwin, hoping that his blue misstep will remain hidden.

“No,” cries the voice again, “Erwin cannot speak in his current state.”

Completely oblivious to the unfamiliar voice, Fourth Erwin remains in his previous panic, utterly unaware that his entire body has turned into a luminous shade of Locksberry Blue – named after a portly educator at the University of California Santa Barbara.

“I’ll die if I lose my job,” he murmurs incoherently.

Pino observes Erwin’s dread. Slow streams of shimmering sweat drip down the manager’s forehead.

“He looks so helpless,” Pino thinks as he begins to question why he listens to this man’s vaporous words in the first place. He looks down at his blue shoes and wonders, “Am I any different?”

“I’m beginning to see your point, sir,” responds Pino to the void.

“You see and I see, even though I do not have eyes,” The voice softly replies.

This confuses Pino because looking back he has always had eyes and yet in the moment, behind his back, Erwin silently and quite literally melts into a fearful pool of Blue Locksberry jelly.

A loud elevator BING wrenches Pino from the depths of his mind.

“Time to move on,” guides the voice.

The elevator door slowly opens into complete and unforgiving blackness. Peering into the nothingness below, Pino is hesitant. He glances at his feet, a brilliant blue light fighting the darkness below.

“Is this my floor?” he stammers, peering down into the endless abyss.

“How bizarre... is it a trick?”

There is no answer to his question.

“Hello,” he screams.

No reply.

“How frustrating! This is what I get for speaking out!”

“Please come back, sir.”

Still unsure, he takes a step back into the safety of his box. Unfortunately—due to a pair of traction-less, blue loafers—a slippery puddle of Erwin responsively hurls Pino outwardly into oblivion.

## Vagrant

Sockets sunken, belt loops broken.  
Face unshaven, deep breaths oaken.

His holed shoes shuffle now and then.  
How strange to wear a toothless grin.  
He warns us of the end of men  
And begs us to repent our sin.

Trundler towering, travelers glowering.  
Batty shouts send children cowering.

Train, next train, a life constrained  
By fortune doled in senseless sport,  
Though he doesn’t seem so deeply pained  
To play the jester in our shallow court.

Feed the meter, jangling peters  
Out he goes, off he teeters.

--Jonah Wilkof

## Congratulations to the Winners of the 2014 English Department Writing Contests!

### Poetry

“Vagrant” by Jonah Wilkof

Honorable mention: “Like Father, Like Son” by Daniel Klein

### Short Story

“Schrodinger’s man” by Oren Herschander

Honorable mention: “Roosters, Hegemony, and Meaning” by Joshua Halpern

Honorable mention: “Hade’s Dominion: First Grade” by Shimon Lieblig

### Creative Non-Fiction Essay

“Swords into Ploughshares” by Jonah Wilkof

Honorable mention: “Rest in Peace, Atticus Finch” by Yitzchak Honick

### Essay on Literature

“The Heart of my Birthplace was Sublimely Theirs” by Gavriel Brown

“Moment-by-Moment: A Review of Strand’s Blizzard of One” by Jonah Wilkof

“Speigelmaus” by Adam Zimlover

### Essay for general, well educated audience

“What Makes a Charter School Great” by Gavriel Brown

“My Lai Massacre” by Alex Kahgan

## Summer Fun in New York City

Josh Nagel

*You're in The Big Apple for the summer. The City that Never Sleeps. The expectations are high, but you can't figure out what to do with your free time. Who wants to dish out \$47 to go to the top of the Empire State Building with a hundred tourists? Instead, use this guide as a starting point to explore parts of the city that are cheaper and less crowded than the tourist traps. It's no Stefan's list of New York's hottest clubs, but it's better than nothing. If anything looks interesting, search for more information online.*

### CULTURAL THEATER

*If you want to see something on Broadway, Student Rush is the way to go. Broadway's most popular shows offer cheap tickets (usually around \$30) on the day of the performance, either on a first-come first-serve basis when the box office opens, or as a lottery two hours before the show. Check with the box office to find out more. If you're interested in Shakespeare, you've chosen the right city. Shakespeare in the Park presents professional adaptations of Britain's famous playwright's work casted with talented Tony actors. If you like things heimish, check out Shakespeare in the Parking Lot on the Lower East Side, where performances of Twelfth Night or Othello might need to stop for a few minutes to allow parked cars to leave. Speaking of moving around during a show, Shakespeare on the Run (New York Classical Theater) forces you to physically follow the plot.*

### OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

*Summer in the city can get humid, but don't let that discourage you from going outside. It seems like you freeze most of the year anyway. Groupon and TimeOut New York magazine offer discounts to bike rentals in Central Park, while many of the city parks have free exercise classes. From early morning yoga in Bryant Park to kayaking at Brooklyn Bridge Park, free activities can keep you active all summer long. Check out the websites of Bryant Park, Hudson River Park, and Brooklyn Bridge Park for details on their weekly outdoor activities.*

### FREE CONCERTS AND MOVIES

*With the "three weeks" starting only in mid-July, you'll have a month and a half to catch all the free concerts and movies before the mourning period. Start your weeks with "HBO's Summer Film Festival" on Monday nights in Bryant Park, continue with "Riverflicks for Grownups" at Hudson River Park on Wednesday nights, and SyFy Movies at Brooklyn Bridge Park on Thursday nights. Then, wake up super early on Friday mornings for either GMA's Concert Series in Central Park or The Today Show's Concert at Rockefeller Center. Don't forget to tell your friends to look for you on TV before you go back to sleep. In general, you should get to these things two hours early if you want good seats. If you want to listen to your favorite Broadway tunes live, head to Bryant Park during your lunch break on Thursdays for "Broadway in the Park".*

### MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES

*Head to Discovery Times Square if you haven't seen the amazing The Art of the Brick exhibit made entirely of Lego Bricks or, if you're a Marvel fan, for the Avenger's exhibit. Indoor Extreme Sports, Long Island City is a complex only fifteen minutes from Times Square where you can play indoor paintball or run around in their scary Zombie Laser Tag maze. The Museum Mile Festival on the evening of June 10th shuts down 5th avenue to cars and opens the museums of the Upper East Side for free.*

Here are some website to check out:

[www.studentrush.org](http://www.studentrush.org)

<http://www.timeout.com/newyork>

<http://pulsd.com/new-york>

<http://m.nycgo.com/touch/home#home>

Have a fun summer!

## Noah: Literary Fiction of Biblical Proportions

Yechiel Schwab

Flood epics litter Ancient literature, describing in various fashions G-d's destruction and reconstruction of the world. Much like the story recorded in our Bible, these accounts often involve G-d choosing one man to survive the apocalypse and a few careful changes to ensure the new world necessitates no further destruction. These stories focus on the flood itself and G-d's role in changing, perhaps even recreating, the world. Darren Aronofsky's latest film, Noah, although it involves the story of a flood, would not directly fall into this genre of flood epics. In accordance with its title, the movie revolves around the character Noah. While the flood occupies a large place in furthering the film's plot, the film conveys its themes and messages through the exploration of its title character.

The movie's Biblical grounding created a storm (pun intended) of controversy. Many religious Christian groups have strongly denounced the movie for its inaccuracies. Although much of Noah follows the text of the Bible, either closely or often imaginatively, at times it clearly strays from the text, rendering it Biblical fiction—a movie based on the Biblical narrative of Noah but not entirely accurate to this narrative. The movie succeeds greatly in both the Biblical realm and the fictional, offering new perspectives on the Bible (despite its liberties with the text, the movie sheds light on the simple meaning of the story and its characters) and creating a thought-provoking and moving piece of fiction.

The overall plot of the movie remains similar to our Noah story. G-d wishes to destroy the world, so he commands Noah to build an ark and save the animals. True to form, the Torah remains terse about the details of this story, allowing Aronofsky the opportunity to fill these details by creating an engrossing story with complex characters. Aronofsky and his co-writer Ari Handel attempted to tie most of these embellishments to Biblical roots, sometimes mimicking a tactic Midrashim employ (Aronofsky enjoys calling his film a Midrash), using characters or plots mentioned elsewhere to fill the holes of his story. The most jarring element the film introduces comes in the form of giant rock monsters called "the Watchers." Though they may seem wholly fictional, the Torah mentions "Nephilim" (Genesis 6:8) who roamed the land before the flood, remaining vague about any further details regarding these creatures. Aronofsky reimagines these creatures as merciful angels descended from the heavens to help the humans. Like G-d, they too become disappointed in the conduct of humans, causing their mercy to fade. They represent a thematic foil to the themes of mercy and justice carried throughout the film.

Noah builds his ark with the help of these "Watchers" angering the society around him. This society, led by the villain Tubal-Cain, lives up to its infamy, performing many immoral and often gory acts of violence to humans and animals. Aronofsky's Noah passionately believes in environmentalism and the respectful way we must interact with the plants and animals around us. The villainous society

betrays far more than Noah's environmentalist beliefs, committing sins greater than simply the misuse of land or plants. Here Aronofsky invokes pacifist themes and gut-churning shots of animal cruelty. Despite this seeming black-and-white conflict between the evil Tubal-Cain and the righteous Noah, the movie creates characters and conflicts whose subtlety and complexity will lead the viewer to question this dichotomy.

Aronofsky achieves this goal using the Rambam's view on prophecy, which believes visions from G-d arrive in the form of dreams. In Noah's case, these dreams remain un-descriptive and require Noah to fill in the blanks. This concept lends the movie its great moral and religious depth. Tubal-Cain and Noah, the leaders of their generation, both seek religious insight in a world where G-d remains silent. G-d speaks cryptically to Noah and he attempts to understand this message, while Tubal-Cain seeks to uncover the meaning of G-d's silence. Both characters strive to interpret these messages and fulfill their perceived will of G-d, struggles which are almost too relatable from a religious perspective.

The movie portrays many different shades of religious life. The overhead scenes of animals entering the ark leave the viewer breathless, evoking awe-inspiring and majestic beauty. The film also portrays the more difficult and lonely aspects of religious life through Noah's struggle as the sole bearer of G-d's prophecy. The movie details the loss and hardships Noah and his family must encounter watching humanity crumble around them while they alone

### THE MOVIE USES ITS BIBLICAL ROOTS TO CREATE AND EXPLORE DEEP RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS AND COMPLEX CHARACTERS.

survive. The exploration of this aspect of the flood forms the basis for a large portion of the movie's plot and themes.

When reading the story of Noah in the Torah, readers often perceive this facet of Noah's life involving the relationship he and his family developed with the surrounding peoples differently and more simply, sometimes overlooking it entirely. The movie succeeds in shining a new light on this Biblical story—opening readers' eyes to previously unseen complexities and tensions within the story, thereby granting new depth and meaning to the narrative. The film's greatest contribution though, lies in its qualities as a stand-alone piece of literature. Though it leaves some questions unresolved and a world that we do not fully understand, the movie uses its Biblical roots to create and explore deep religious questions and complex characters. Due to its Biblical ties, the viewer may find many scenes discomfiting because they question assumptions the viewer may hold. But literature's strength lies in its ability to question our previous understandings and shed new light on the world and the people around us, and Noah succeeds profoundly in these categories.

## Jewish Werewolves in the Tri-State Area?

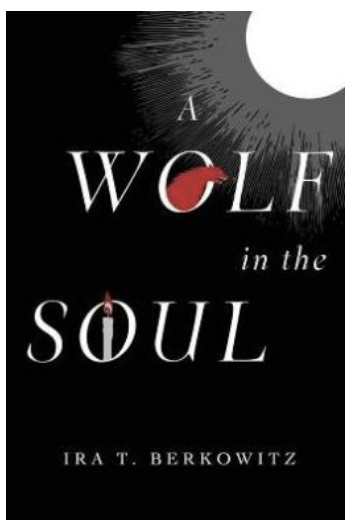
By Joshua Skootsky

A Wolf in the Soul  
Ira T. Berkowitz  
Leviathan Press  
460 pages  
\$19.99

Writing for audiences perhaps more familiar with werewolves from Harry Potter or Twilight, Ira T. Berkowitz takes up the pen of magical realism to tell the story of a modern Orthodox Jew, Greg Samtag. Greg, a mindful adolescent, navigates his transition from communal expectations to adulthood and, perhaps, a fraught independence. Members of the modern Orthodox community will recognize in Greg—perhaps through our friends if not in ourselves—the pressures of prestigious colleges, along with the temptations of a minimalist religious life. The same people who might discuss the state of the Orthodox Jewish community, throwing around idealized, ideological terms like “social Orthodoxy” or “Orthopraxy,” can benefit from a book that offers a refreshingly real look into the life of a typological Orthodox Jew. And then there are werewolves.

Fantasy novels, firmly planted within realistic communal worlds, can explore and examine serious topics that otherwise lie beneath the surface, without contrived reflective stances on everyday experience. Like in the Korean film, *The Face Reader* (Han Jae-rim, 2013), our story focuses less on the details of fantasy and more on its very real psychological and social effects, which touch on nearly universal themes of acceptance, family, and belonging. We hear from a wide variety of perspectives, from the scientific to Kabbalistic, without any single explanation or world view handed down by authorities providing easy answers to either Greg’s or our own questions.

Along with the fantasy’s genre’s inherent exploratory benefits, Berkowitz uses its entertainment value to keep his character examinations intriguing, prompting a loose comparison to Hesse’s *Der Steppenwolf*. The stories contain a rare combination of autobiographical and psychological exposition and development, and feature similar narrative arcs. We follow the main character as his animalistic, distinctly wolf-like nature lives in conflict with his better angels. Much like Hesse, who was influenced by Eastern philosophy, Berkowitz focuses both on inner conflict and also the possibilities of transcendence and wholeness that lie on the other side of a turbulent and rolling river, forded only at length and wholeheartedly. This is not a story of an idealized “Ba’al Teshuva” type that has been popular within Orthodox circles since the 1970s, but rather a kind of fictional expansion on aspects of the “famous” fourth footnote to Rav Soloveitchik’s *Halakhic Man*: an individual passing through a long, winding path of uncertainty, trouble, and loneliness before finding inner peace. Wisely, *A Wolf in the Soul* emphasizes these authentic, essential aspects of personality development while making them much more interesting through the use of werewolves. The perhaps magical, perhaps spiritual forces at play are skillfully told in



such a way that does not chafe against the very real world populated by subway stops, pizza, and credit cards.

The book also offers an implicit critique of modern Orthodox Jews and their communities, which is not terribly difficult—people who live their lives aimed at two targets rarely hit both squarely. The attempts at both spiritual and material success without clear prioritization are well captured in this book, along with the many, wryly familiar foibles and contradictions. “Prep schools for people who have two sets of dishes,” Greg reflects on his high school, which we might recognize as any Tri-State area “yeshiva” high school, often gearing the entire experience towards rigorous preparation for a prestigious college, while also attempting to instill a mastery of the Talmud, the essential - at times impenetrable - text central to Jewish religious life.

Prestigious colleges remain the focus of these adolescent lives, where even in Israel, Greg’s yeshiva’s study partners are quickly identified by the institutions from which they would have graduated. Columbia University, in particular, manages to dominate the initial sections of the book more thoroughly than Harvard casts a shadow over Eric Segal’s *The Class*, a particularly impressive feat. I suspect that this is intentional, just like Greg’s abysmal study habits and apparent aversion to setting foot in the Butler library. What was the (thankfully for readers, highly condensed) college fuss all about, during those high school years? What was the point of it all? Caught up in other people’s visions, Greg’s initial lack of direction illustrates how people can be pushed into situations without inner drive to pursue the attendant possibilities. How he “grows up,” displays the agency to choose his own goals, and how he pursues them form a basic narrative arc that fits the bildungsroman genre, as we see a young person receive the education and formative experiences that they needed to draw out their true inner potential.

Greg’s sudden flashes of insight into things outside of himself and into reflections of himself must be consciously channeled inward during the final, and most rewarding, chapters of the book. This most significant character development has less to do with transformation into a wolf and more with the choices that Greg makes. Greg is a reluctant hero, born into material success, but poor in emotional stability or depth, and only rogue biology or poorly understood mysticism prompts him to better ground himself in self-knowledge. This pushes him out of a comfortable cocoon whose sickly embrace threatens to smother him. We follow the honest and convincing, at times emotionally self-destructive, paths taken by Greg, learning from the foibles of other characters, who too reflect the confusion of real people caught between impulses and ideals, both legitimate and contradictory. In the end, we see the full arc of a psychological journey, and along the way enjoy some running with wolves.

## The Promise of Youth

By Joshua Tranen

The Opposite of Loneliness: Essays and Stories Hardcover  
Marina Keegan  
Scribner Press  
240 pages  
\$23.00

Marina Keegan’s *The Opposite of Loneliness* was never supposed to be published—not, at least, in the form I read it. A few weeks back, I was roaming around the aisles of Barnes & Noble when I came across Keegan’s book. The book’s cover, a picture of Marina in a yellow peacoat with the title superimposed over it, caught my attention. Was the picture on the cover a picture of the author? How was she already published? She was so young.

And she was young. Marina Keegan’s book was posthumously published this past month, almost two years after a tragic car accident took her life only five days after her graduation from Yale. But in Keegan’s case, youth was not—and is not—a measure of talent. In her years at Yale, Keegan landed coveted internships at the *New Yorker* and *The Paris Review*, published articles in the *New York Times*, wrote for the *Yale Daily News*, researched for preeminent literary scholar and critic Harold Bloom, served as President of the Yale College Democrats, and organized Occupy Wall Street protests. Two months after her death, Keegan’s musical, *Independents*, showcased at The New York International Fringe Festival, where it garnered a *New York Times* Critics’ Pick. She had a job at *The New Yorker* waiting for her after graduation. She was only twenty-two.

*The Opposite of Loneliness*, a collection of Keegan’s short stories and essays compiled by her friends and family, is testament to Keegan’s strength and command as a writer. In her introduction to the book, Anne Fadiman, a non-fiction writer and one of Keegan’s professors at Yale, writes, “Marina was twenty-one and sounded twenty-one: a brainy twenty-one, a twenty-one who knew her way around the English language, a twenty-one who understood that there were few better subjects than being young and uncertain and starry-eyed and frustrated and hopeful.” And it’s true—many of the characters in Keegan’s fiction are college students or young adults juggling competing relationships and demands, fostering career dreams that are exciting yet ultimately untenable, second-guessing their life-altering decisions, and then learning to live with the decisions they finally do make.

In “Cold Pastoral,” Claire, a college student, navigates the implications of ambiguous relationships when her lover (“we were involved, of course, but not associated”) suddenly dies. The story follows Claire as she examines what her unlabeled relationship really meant and copes with the realization that her lover may not have loved her back. “Winter Break” explores conflicting loyalties and relationships as a young woman visits home from college, returning to a boyfriend she left behind and a family on the verge of dissolution.

Although many of her characters are young, Keegan also had the ability to capture what it means to age, the actions people will take to feel young again, and how people interact with their ever-present pasts. In “Reading Aloud,” Anna, an aging senior, routinely undresses as she reads to Sam, a blind man with whom she has been matched with in the “Visually Impaired Assistance Program”: “She read him an advertisement for car insurance and unbuttoned her sweater. She read him a credit card receipt and rolled down her stockings.” And in “Hail, Full

of Grace,” a middle aged woman returns to her hometown with her newly adopted daughter, where she must face old lovers and an emotionally complex past.

Keegan’s fiction is excellently crafted. Her characters have emotional depth, her narratives are evenly paced, and her sentences are beautifully constructed. But personally, I was drawn to her non-fiction.

Maybe it’s because I also harbor dreams of interning at the *Paris Review* and *The New Yorker*, of one day becoming an accomplished writer. Keegan’s book—and the writing of this article—marked the end of a two year span I like to call my “writer’s funk”: a period of time where, as much as I tried, I couldn’t write. I constantly found myself with the spark of an idea I wanted to write about—the pattern of water on a building left wet from a recent rain, the hot breath of the subway as it rushes towards the platform—but when I sat down to write, I couldn’t form the sentences. And it was Keegan’s essays, her own determination to follow and fight and believe in her dreams, that compelled me to review her book—and try to write again.

In “Even Artichokes Have Doubts,” Keegan investigates a problem that really irks her: why are 25% of Yale graduates taking jobs in finance and consulting? Interviewing her fellow graduating seniors, she identifies the root of what truly worries her: “What bothers me is this idea of validating, of rationalization. The notion that some of us (regardless of what we tell ourselves) are doing this because we’re not sure what else to do and it’s easy to apply to and it will pay us decently and it will make us feel like we’re still successful.” But Keegan is not advocating for a bohemian, starving artist approach. She just wants her friends to do the things they love in life and chase after what they care about: “I want to volunteer with Joe’s non-profit and eat at Annie’s restaurant and send my kids to schools Jeff has reformed... Maybe I’m ignorant and idealistic but I just feel like that can’t possibly be true. I feel like we know that. I feel like we can do something really cool to this world. And I fear—at twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five—we might forget.”

And in the title essay, written for the *Yale Daily News* only several weeks before her death, Keegan writes, “What we have to remember is that we can still do anything. We can change our minds. We can start over. Get a post-bac or try writing for the first time. The notion that it’s too late to do anything is comical. It’s hilarious. We’re graduating from college. We’re so young. We can’t, we MUST not lose this sense of possibility because in the end, it’s all we have.”

Keegan’s writings force her readers to re-evaluate what they want from their lives, to ask themselves if they can do more, if they can be more. She was idealistic and passionate and fully expected the same from her peers. She wrote with zeal about the future, about the accomplishments that our generation, and future generations, will achieve. In the incessant droning of publications about the horrible economy, job market, and global affairs, Keegan’s voice is one of hope for the future.

And maybe that’s why I wrote this review: because I believe in a sort of ethics of reading, and I think that Keegan’s essays commanded me to write. Because I’m also young, and—to use Keegan’s own lines of poetry—I was forced to ask:

“Do you want to leave soon?

No, I want enough time to be in love with everything...

And I cry because everything is so beautiful and so short.”

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